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Filmmakers confront Uganda's industry truths

Business. At the Filmmakers Mix and Mingle, networking met hard reality as actors and producers unpacked the business, the gaps, and the uncomfortable truths shaping Uganda's film industry.

BY ANDREW KAGGWA

On Saturday, April 18, filmmakers, actors, producers, and industry enthusiasts gathered for the latest edition of the Filmmakers Mix and Mingle, an event that continues to position itself as a networking hub and mirror reflecting the realities of Uganda's film industry.

Dubbed the Actors & Producers Edition, the gathering blended connection, learning, and uncomfortable honesty in equal measure.

From the outset, the event created space for collaboration. In small circles and side conversations, creatives exchanged contacts, pitched ideas, and explored potential partnerships. For many in attendance, this was more than casual networking; it was about finding the right people to build sustainable creative teams in an industry where collaboration often determines success.

But beyond the handshakes and introductions, the day quickly turned into a series of critical reflections on the state of the industry.

Panel discussions tackled pressing issues ranging from intellectual property rights to branding, packaging, and distribution. Representatives from the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) offered insights into regulatory frameworks, while sessions like the live recording of The Front Row Podcast added an unfiltered, conversational layer to the day's programming.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the gap between talent and business.

"The talent is only 20 per cent of what is needed. The other percentage is the business," talent manager and industry professional Dorothy Nabunjo told participants. "As a talent, you are a brand, we need to sell you... You are you when you're home inside your gate. As an actress, the moment you step out of that gate, you are a star."

Her remarks struck at a core challenge many creatives face: the need to think beyond craft and embrace the realities of positioning, visibility, and long-term career strategy. Nabunjo urged actors to interrogate their own journeys, posing questions that lingered long after her session ended: "Am I a business? How is my business doing? Who do I need to work with to grow this business?"

That idea of self-marketing was echoed by actor Mark Agume, who challenged the room to rethink ambition within a local context.

"If you asked any actor in this room what their dream is, it's like the standard is winning an Oscar; it's the same even when you go to Kenya, South Africa or the UK," he said. "As a Ugandan, you have to ask yourself, if everyone is trying to win the same Oscar, what am I doing? Make sure you let someone new know that you are an actor every day. You can't stop marketing yourself."

Yet even as conversations leaned into growth and opportunity, there was a sober acknowledgement of systemic shortcomings.

Shakif Nekambuza of Play It Loud, pointed to one of the industry's most persistent problems: poor marketing and distribution.

"Most of the time, the films are not marketed well or are rushed to the consumer," he

THE MAIN POINT

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noted. "We have many films that are ready for the screen, but how many of these actually have a release date?"

His remarks highlighted a disconnect between production and audience engagement, suggesting that even well-made films risk fading into obscurity without structured release strategies and sustained promotion.

Language and authenticity also surfaced as points of tension. While local storytelling remains a cornerstone of Ugandan cinema, participants acknowledged the influence of global consumption habits. The example of *Squid Game*, widely watched in English despite being a Korean production, underscored the delicate balance between staying authentic and reaching wider audiences.

But it was the final session that left the strongest impression.

What began as a lively, almost combative exchange during the live recording of The Front Row Podcast quickly evolved into a candid confrontation between actors and producers. Beneath the humour and debate, deeper issues surfaced: allegations of sexual exploitation, non-payment, and exploitative contracts. The room, once buzzing with optimism, shifted into a space of reckoning.

These were not new issues, but hearing them articulated openly, in a room filled with both emerging and established industry players, gave them renewed urgency. It became clear that while the industry is growing, it is also grappling with foundational challenges that cannot be ignored.

In many ways, the Filmmakers Mix and Mingle lived up to its promise. It was not just a place to connect, but a forum where the industry could confront itself, its ambitions, its gaps, and its contradictions.

Douglas Benda Kasule, a film publicist and one of the brains behind the Filmmakers Mix and Mingle, noted that these sessions are meant to foster connection and networking within the industry and other stakeholders such as the legal fraternity, banking, insurance, and other sectors that could be useful to the industry as a whole.

As attendees filtered out at the end of the day, conversations lingered. Some spoke of new collaborations, others of hard lessons learned. But for many, one thing was certain beyond the lights, cameras, and applause, the real work of building Uganda's film industry is only just beginning.