

Written by Ernest Kanjo
Saturday, 30 March 2013 19:17 -



*Before the new movement which has accentuated the progress in the Cameroonian film sector, sporadic, but frantic moves to position the industry were made in the diaspora. Even when such moves were not totally fruitful, a couple of Cameroonian film makers living abroad have stayed afloat and kept the activity of producing movies alive. Perhaps, because of ever-busy schedules often meant to comply with meeting living needs, Cameroonian film makers abroad hardly find enough time to get in an organized setting and do industry business. That does not however mean they do not have much to offer in terms of contributing to the development of their country's film industry. Rather, they have shown enormous concern and willingness to share in this growth. One of such Cameroonian film makers living abroad is Fred Kenyati. Based in South Africa, Kenyati virtually lives all moments of the film industry in Cameroon and follows up on happenings as though he was back home. Kenyati who is co-producer of *Troubled Kingdom*, a movie he travelled all the way home to shoot, is also co-initiator of the Cam Movies Merit Awards, CMMA, a move that seeks to reward excellence and encourage hard work within the industry. Recent developments in CFI have prompted the young entertainment promoter to opine on the role of the diaspora in the day-to-day running and policy building of the industry. In a chat with TIPTOPSTARS Editor, Kenyati, amongst other things assesses the situation of Cameroonian film making in the diaspora. He spoke to Ernest Kanjo on the line to Cairo where he has been on a UN mission for the past couple of months. Excerpts!*

Ernest Kanjo (EK): Fred Kenyati, welcome to TIPTOPSTARS once again, how are you today?

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Fred Kenyati (FK): I'm good, Ernest. And you?

EK: I can't complain, God is alive! You recently, via facebook, launched a debate on the involvement of the diaspora in CFI affairs, what prompted this?

FK: After reading some recent interviews on TIPTOPSTARS about the film industry in Cameroon and from what some of the guest stars said, I told myself, it were good the diaspora got involved in the structuralizing process currently going on. The diaspora has been exposed to several film cultures, be it Hollywood, Bollywood and what have you. With such exposure our inputs can be vital in development solid bylaws and a befitting production code.

EK: You sound as though the diaspora is sidelined from CFI...

FK: Well to the best of my knowledge, the diaspora is sideline from activities of CFI. There have not been any efforts, which I know of, from the out-gone and now defunct caretaker committee to utilize the knowledge and expertise of the diaspora in building a solid film industry in Cameroon.

EK: Granted the diaspora has to be given that chance, how exactly do you want this involvement to happen?

FK: The diaspora film makers need to be co-opted to take active part both in the day-to-day activities and contributing financially to the running of the body. Being part of CFI, the diaspora can also play an advisory role and as well be a vital component in the drafting of production code for the industry. In addition, some film makers living abroad can be elected into office to ensure that the production code also applies to and is respected by film makers in the diaspora.

EK: What has the diaspora done so far to merit a place comfortable place in the CFI bus?

FK: The diaspora has done quite much. Many Cameroonian film makers living abroad have travelled home and shot movies and in the process have paid fees to artists accordingly. There has been an exciting wave of initiatives in South Africa, The USA and Europe to recognize, reward and promote film makers. These initiatives have gone a long way to exposure of our industry and the people who make it tick.

EK: It is generally said that the diaspora is not organized, so how would you want to participate in an already organized CFI?

FK: The diaspora is not organized because they do not adhere to any production code. There are no regulations regarding their productions. As soon as there is a production code that sanctions activities that give CFI a bad name, the diaspora will be organized. If there is also some form of CFI representation abroad that serves as watchdog for quality survey and respect for production laws, diaspora film makers will come to terms.

EK: How would you assess film activities carried out by Cameroonians in the diaspora?

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FK: We have the resources in the diaspora to be able to good movies. Unfortunately, some films done here are way below standard. This might be cause by limited choice of cast as a result of the busy nature of some potentially good actors. Also, there is the likelihood that the absence of unity among Cameroonian film makers abroad is detrimental to creativity and productivity. Cameroonian movies produced in the diaspora hardly reach their final destination that is Cameroon. Most people would testify that they have hardly watched a Cameroonian movie shot and produced abroad from the diaspora. The few that got to Cameroon which I know of are Berlin Icon, China Wahala and Rage.

EK: An example of the kind of concrete support the diasopora can give back home would be providing CFI with up-to-date film equipment from where producers could tap. Are you envisaging something like that, and how soon?

FK: Well, some stakeholders have contacted me lately to verify in which sector in the industry they could invest. I was quick to point out equipment and training. I’m sure these stakeholders are busy planning something. Updates regarding investment in this regards will be yours as time unfolds. Also, we at Cam Movies have been struggling to engage some investors to join us and put up a solid and real production house in Cameroon, equipped with cameras, lights, make-up kits, reflectors, costumes, effects, etc. We are pretty sure that in the days ahead Cam Movies will start putting these equipment together, beginning with the most relevant.

EK: That's some good news there Fred...

FK: Definitely it is, Ernest!

EK: We want to thank you for this chat, hope to be with you again soonest.

FK: Thanks Ernest and keep the good work.