

# Gauteng moves to make province film friendly

The Gauteng Film Partnership (GFP) and the Gauteng Film Commission (GFC) are looking at practical steps that can be taken to make Gauteng more film friendly and to leverage off the "can do" attitude of the Gauteng film industry and the diverse range of locations available.

GFP, a consultative forum facilitated by the GFC and comprising expertise and resources from key film and industry-related organisations and communities, aims to collectively work at elevating the profile of the audio-visual industry in Gauteng and ensure integrated growth of the industry.

Established in June this year, the 11 nominated members from the industry see the GFP as an advisory forum or think tank.

Commenting on the Partnership, Bobby Amm, executive officer of the Commercial Producers Association (CPA) of

South Africa, says it is "a very important step in bringing the industry and the Commission closer together, thereby creating a better understanding and awareness of the specific needs of the sector and maximising all opportunities for growth and success in the film industry."

The initial meetings have served to develop the direction and role of the GFP, as well as providing for an intensive information gathering phase, to enable all members to be conversant with the GFC's activities and objectives. "This will avoid duplication of work," comments Jacques Stoltz, senior manager: Marketing at the GFC. "It is essential that everyone understands what the Commission does, what its mission is and the programmes we undertake, such as support of development of local content, so that the Partnership can focus on industry issues and look to providing its substantial

knowledge and expertise in areas that benefit the industry in the province."

"There is a perceived gap between the industry and Commissions as a whole," comments Amm, adding that the perception is that Commissions tend to do their own thing, without really connecting with the industry.

"It's important that the GFP does not get bogged down by all the industry issues, but rather identify a few strategic projects with a view to showing meaningful progress at the next Film Indaba."

John Stodel, of Scipio Entertainment Group, sees the GFP as an interface between the industry and GFC on common areas of concern. "The internal workings of the GFC should not be of concern to the GFP - but rather we should focus on those identified problems in the industry."

He added that the GFC should



**INDUSTRY FOCUSED -**  
Terry Tselane

strive to create the necessary conditions where both the GFC's and industry interests are served.

An example of this is the active role that the GFC is taking in working with municipalities and local authorities regarding escalating tariff fees, and has also completed a review of current film permit practices with a view to streamlining the issuance of film permits.

Referring to the film friendly

initiative, Terry Tselane, CEO of the GFC, says both the industry and the Commission have to actively show how film is indeed everyone's business. "We need to raise awareness of the role of film in developing both the economic and social fabric of our province. The Deloitte report, termed Project Gullywood, clearly shows the importance of film to the Gauteng economy, with film in Gauteng contributing more than R2.5bn per annum to the province. Gauteng is the creative heart of the South African film industry - we also account for the bulk of TV production in the country while an estimated 48% of all commercials filmed in South Africa are shot in Gauteng.

"It is through initiatives such as the formation of the GFP, and working actively with such an august body that we intend to raise awareness of film's contribution to our province, and the roles to be played by the industry, the legislature and local authorities, and the public in working together to promote Gauteng as the most film friendly location in South Africa, and indeed Africa." 🌍

# Spanish / SA co-prod

Believed to be the first Spanish/South Africa co-production, the feature-length documentary *Tapologo* is set to resonate globally with its focus on a group of HIV-infected South African women who are dealing with their own reality in a way that impacts positively on their impoverished, Aids-ridden community.

The women, many of whom are former sex workers in the Freedom Park squatter camp (just outside Rustenburg), have created a home-based caregiver network called *Tapologo*, whereby they provide care for Aids victims. In so doing they turn squalor and degradation into dignity and hope.

It's ironic that the film should have been conceived by two Spanish women, sisters Sally and Gabriela Gutierrez Dewar. Not so ironic though when you consider that they were both members of the former European Anti-apartheid Movement and have been tapped into the South African situation since the 1980s.

Says Gabriela Gutierrez Dewar: "I had been to South Africa during the apartheid era and became a lifelong friend



**SIGNIFICANT STORY-** Gabriela and Sally Gutierrez Dewar

of Bishop Kevin Dowling of the Catholic Dioceses of Rustenburg, who participates in *Tapologo*. Kevin questions the official Catholic dogma about the use of condoms in the context of the HIV/Aids pandemic."

In 2005 Dowling, who knew that the Gutierrez Dewar sisters were involved in gender issues, invited them to come and see *Tapologo*. They realised that this was a story that had to be told and set about gaining the women's trust. Says Sally: "We met with the women and spent many hours with them. It was important that they understood that we weren't out to make a sensationalist or

patronising film - *Tapologo* is about regaining human dignity and empowering women. It is our belief that the *Tapologo* story is not only important to South Africa, but to the rest of the world."

*Tapologo*, while focusing on the caregiver network, reveals the dire situation in Freedom Park, where women are driven by poverty and desperation to become sex workers and get infected with HIV in the process.

The sisters realised that they needed a South African co-producer to ensure that the story would be told and understood in the correct way.

In 2006, at a film festival in Tenerife, they met Zivia Desai and documentary filmmaker Rehad Desai of Uhuru.

Says Rehad Desai: "Gabriela and Sally had identified Uhuru as a company that has done work in Aids programmes and approached us to co-produce. We thought *Tapologo* was a very strong project and gave advice on what we thought the core of the story was. Zivia and I were adamant that the film have a positive message as nobody wants to see films that speak to HIV-infected people as victims who have no agency. As directors of the Tri-Continental Film Festival, Zivia and I look for films about people who act on their reality in whatever way they can so that we can all learn lessons."

In order for the Gutierrez Dewar sisters to receive funding from the Spanish Ministry of Culture, a co-production agreement (in the absence of an official Spain / South Africa Co-production Treaty) had to be signed. This was facilitated by the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF).

The sisters returned to *Tapologo* three times during filming. Says Sally, "*Tapologo* not only gives out anti-retroviral drugs but also provides jobs and self-respect and has helped reduce

the stigma of Aids. The *Tapologo* women are now so respected in Freedom Park that they were able to act as mediators in the xenophobic attacks that swept through South Africa in May."

Gabriela notes that the film has just screened in Spain and received an amazing response. "For us this is better than any award. We are now receiving e-mails of support from all over the world. We recently attended the Durban International Film Festival's screening of the film in Kwamashu, where it generated an incredibly positive response."

In terms of South African distribution, Desai is waiting to see if a feature documentary slot becomes available on public broadcaster SABC. If not, the broadcaster will screen a 52-minute version which is currently being cut in Spain. "I think the film has tremendous outreach potential. There are lots of NGOs and home-based care projects that should see this film, and there is a recognised link between these and Aids prevention programmes. This documentary should be used as an educational tool to show what can be done to fight Aids."

*Tapologo* will be screened in Pretoria and Durban as part of the Tri Continental Film Festival in September. 🌍