KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY DR. EZEKIEL MUTUA (MBS) CEO KENYA FILM CLASSIFICATION BOARD AT THE NIGERIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM SUMMIT AT THE ALLIANCE FRANCAISE DE LAGOS/MICHAEL ADENUGA CENTRE, IKOYI ON 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2019

BRIDGING THE GAP: The Challenges and Future of Film Business and Production Collaborations Between Countries in Africa.

It is my great pleasure at having been invited to deliver the keynote address at the esteemed Nigerian International Film Summit.

It is indeed a great honor to have Kenya recognized as the Country of Honor at this year's edition of the summit.

Allow me to start by conveying greetings and well wishes from Kenyans who regard this nation like their twin on the other side of the continent.

Coming to Lagos for me is just like waking up to another side of Kenya. There is a big virtual Nigerian presence in Kenya, courtesy of the Nollywood film industry that has made a big impact that keeps growing and taking deeper root.

All the top five national television channels air Naija movies otherwise known as AfroSinema throughout the day.

So entrenched and influential is the consumption of Naija films in Kenya that it is now fashionable for some top entertainment celebrities to speak with a Nigerian accent, complete with mannerisms imitated from the Naija movies.

One of the top radio morning show hosts in Nairobi is a Kenyan who brands himself with a Nigerian identity, 'Oga Obinna'.

Many Kenyans believe he is from Lagos by the way he has perfected the accent. Another prime time TV comedy host named 'Dr Ofweneke' dresses, talks and acts like a Nigerian.

The point I am trying to express is that the power of film is big enough to melt the challenges facing the film industry that we are gathered here to address.

Collaboration is already happening in the industry even without mutual formal policies. Before I delve into my presentation I would like to touch on something that was once said by Nigerian

President Olusegun Obasanjo. Speaking in Kenya a few years ago, he said that God lived in Nigeria but frequently visited Kenya.

Now, going by the developments we have achieved at home, he may want to change that because it is now obvious that God resides in Nairobi and maybe visits Lagos occasionally.

I have been asked to speak on **BRIDGING THE GAP**: The Challenges and Future of Film Business and Production Collaborations Between Countries in Africa. Rather than focus on the Challenges, I decided to look at it as Opportunities for the future of film business in Africa.

Wherever a challenge stands out, the reverse side of overcoming it is an opportunity. Africa has its fair share of challenges and they are well known and common. What we rarely hear about are the opportunities that abound behind the challenges.

Allow me to expound on just three points that could capture some of the main challenges that affect the film industry in Africa and collaborations among nations and which, if ironed out, will open up wide areas of opportunities:

1. New Technologies
2. Lack of coherent and harmonious Policies
3. Lack of Political Will in easing movement of goods and people across borders

New Technologies:

While the space-age global technological developments are a positive for every sector of national development, they at the same time pose challenges for regulatory agencies in the creative sector that are charged with licencing, rating and classifying content.

The Internet has spurred unlimited growth of the digital media platforms in a limitless sea of opportunities in the marketing, selling and content development and exchange fronts.

However, the Internet is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. The regulator can deliver on its mandate and also go out to promote film stakeholders to profit from their content, but the digital media enabled by the Internet is an inviting platform for defying and flouting regulation.

This is not in any way to suggest that freedom of expression should be curtailed, but it is a call for regulators to turn around the challenges into opportunities.

Regulatory agencies' key mandate of classifying film and other creative material, in order to protect children against harmful content and to promote the local culture and national values, is challenged by the unfettered expanse of the Internet that pours out unregulated content for all, including children.

Child Online Safety is a major issue in an era where governments would want to promote digital literacy hence access of digital devices by children. This, however, presents inherent risks such

as online bullying, pedophilia and other cyber enabled crimes and calls for diligence and more robust efforts towards child safety.

The reverse side of this is for the regulators to take up the challenge and turn it into opportunities by using the Internet to grow the film and other creative industries for the benefit of the stakeholders.

The Over-The-Top (OTT) channels that deliver content via the Internet instead of through the cable and broadcast service providers is a cheaper way to market content to an international audience, that should be supported and encouraged for our stakeholders.

Video on Demand (VOD) is rapidly catching on in the world and now in Africa, allowing subscribers to view programming in real time or to download content and view at their convenience.

Netflix that is among the leading VOD worldwide, Nigeria's own Iroko TV, Kenya's Viusasa and others that are developing content in the Continent, point to a widening sea of opportunities that Africa should exploit.

With such opportunities poised to benefit the African stakeholders, the regulators will easily be motivated to promote the development for their stakeholders rather than be inclined towards censoring.

In Kenya, the KFCB has delved into practical areas of supporting stakeholders to produce clean content through an aggressive campaign and helping rural creative to produce their own content that reflects local cultures.

The campaign for growing the film industry for stakeholders has been catching on more than the old suspicion by critics that the regulator exists to censure.

Lack of Coherent Policies:

One other big challenge that has hampered the effort by the film industry and the regulators to collaborate across African borders is disharmony in both regulation and distribution of content.

If collaboration is to succeed, like-minded industry players in the continent will have to push for harmonization of regulation and how it governs distribution of content.

In Nigeria, the regulatory agency still exists as a censorship authority. In Kenya, we have changed the policy and acquired the backing of law to evolve into a classification authority, with a wide mandate that includes rating, classification, licencing and promotion of content in conformity with our culture and national values.

The regulation covers a wider field to also include music, stage plays, media advertising and all creative content meant for the public arena.

Distribution of creative content in Kenya is not restricted provided it has been rated and classified by the regulator.

Without blowing our own trumpet, allow me to pitch the Kenya standard as a case study to borrow from by other African regulators who would want to see their sectors become vibrant and supportive of the stakeholders.

Harmonization of policies governing the industry stand to bear benefits as those realized through other aspects of regional integration.

Open markets that offer opportunities to stakeholders to freely reach the close to one billion African people, promotion of common values that are for the good of society and the nation and supporting stakeholders to have access to the global audience.

Lack of Political Will:

Africa being a diverse land of over 50 nations and hundreds of different peoples and languages has political shades that vary from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, from the Cape to Cairo.

Indeed, it has been argued variously by political scientists that we hinder each other more than we are hindered by other continents, thereby denying ourselves the sharing of opportunities that exist next door to one another.

If Africa shared its resources and did business together, it could sustain itself without the outside world, according to Africa Business magazine in a past article on Africa rising.

It could have been with such an aspiration in mind that Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta, during his inauguration for a second term as President in 2017, opened up the country for all Africans to apply for visas at the port of entry rather than before travelling.

He welcomed Africans from elsewhere to do business with Kenya as he called for pulling down of   barriers.
This is not the case in many African countries. To travel to some nations, one has to apply for a visa 14 days in advance, and even then, acquisition is not guaranteed.

Such political attitudes only hinder collaboration in many industries, film being one. Few countries have policies to govern how foreigners can take in production of creative content or for broadcasting.

Yet, just snippets of African producers and actors who have been welcomed outside their borders to make content stand out as proof of what big opportunities lie in such policies.

Nigerian movie stars are popular in Kenya; some even more celebrated than Kenya's own. You may not know how popular Nollywood star Genevieve Nnaji has been for years and more so now, after she directed and starred in Netflix's first Nigerian original movie 'Lionheart'.

Desmond Elliot, another household name in Kenya has many children named after him since he acted alongside some Kenyan actors in a production that aired on a national television channel.

A Nigerian film, 'Chief Daddy', a recent addition to Netflix, has become a runaway success in Kenya since it was launched in March. Kenyans are proud of our only Oscar award winner,

Lupita Nyongo, who has become a national symbol in film. We need more of Patience Ozokwor, Rita Dominic, Omotola Jalade, Ghanaians Yvonne Nelson, Majid Michels, Van Vockers in our African films.

This can only be made to thrive freely in political environments that embrace one another as Africans to collaborate in the film and other industries devoid of the sense of unhealthy competition that hinders us.

Working together to achieve harmony and a healthy collaboration will give the African industry unlimited benefits as opposed to working separately. It will replace challenge with opportunity.

And finally, allow me to mention the utmost importance of using the African film industry to tell the African story, as opposed to have it told by foreigners.

Foreign movie directors have for ages created stereotypes that have become defining factors of the way Africa is depicted in film.

Poverty, under-development, famine, illiteracy, conflict and other low end stereotypes have been common stereotype labels by European and American directors.

This will only change if Africa fully takes the production of its own story in own hands. The stories of our great cultures, beautiful people, big ceremonies and festivals, rich foods and our great land that is replete with untold stories that define us as Africans.

Challenges cease to exist and melt into opportunities when we take our destiny in film in our own hands.

I wish to note that as the white collar jobs space continues to narrow down, the Creative Industry is one of the next frontiers for job creation and an attractive alternative to the growing numbers of unemployed among our youths in the continent of Africa. Creating an enabling environment for them to exercise their skills is an endless opportunity waiting to be exploited.

The Creative Industry is among the largest contributors of income to the global economy. African should position itself to rise to the level of the best by taking advantage of the digital age that allows the continent players limitless opportunities to the market.

The theme of this presentation could fit well with American writer Thomas Friedman's book, The World is Flat, in which he explores the 'Ten forces that flattened the world'.

By a 'flat' world, the writer means that some factors occur that equalize or put on the same slate all spheres of the globe. The streak of his argument that runs through all chapters is that some global forces, or occurrences, that have developed in different eras, have forced the world to converge and work in unison on many levels.

The biggest milestone is the Internet that has brought the digital age to the whole world.

For Instance, Friedman argues in his acclaimed work that countries that adopt free international trade policies and open up borders for free trade with others excel more economically than those that fail to collaborate in international business, the latter often lagging behind with their locked-up economies.

This argument can apply to the film business in Africa and elsewhere, and could hold the key to unlocking the 'Challenges and future of film business and production collaborations between countries in Africa'.

Nations ought to realize that opening up markets mutually and freeing up the environment for the film industry is beneficial both ways.

All stakeholders in this inter-continental summit should challenge themselves to examine the influences shaping business and competition in a technology-fueled global environment, if they hope to push for a call to action for their governments, businesses and other entities to actualize policies that can help the film industry in Africa to remain competitive.

If the film industry is to be stirred to full potential, there is need for African countries to put policies in place to create the right environment for their companies and entrepreneurs to succeed in the converged world.

In making such initiatives, the countries must be brutally honest with themselves in determining their place in the world market if they are to adapt and survive among the best.

I ask stakeholders in this summit to be ready to become brutally honest with ourselves if we are to come up with working solutions that can position the African film industry at par with the leading in the global stage.

Being brutally honest means being ready to pull all stops in our national frameworks to adopt policies that will promote the industry by removing all hurdles that hinder it from expanding and freely collaborating with other nations on a business level.

Let me conclude by quoting Thomas Friedman in his book The World is Flat when referring to the survival tactics of the African people, "Every morning when a gazelle wakes up in the African plains, it knows it has to run faster than the fastest lion if it has to survive and when the lion wakes up in the Savannah, it knows it has to run faster than the fastest gazelle if it has to avoid starving."

If we do not run first enough to escape being overrun by pressures of global trends where only the strongest in the industry survive, we will either be eaten up or starve.

The Creative Industry is anchored on great hope, if we can only cite the potential of being among the largest contributors of income to the global economy.

Thank You Ladies and Gentlemen