

Strengthening Operations Management in Zimbabwean Film Industry

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of operations management in film industry and examines how operations management affects the processes of filmmaking that leads to the production of good quality films. The study also seeks to find effective methods of strengthening operations management in the Zimbabwean film industry. An intensive review of literatures was conducted to assess the processes of production and distribution of films, and it was observed that there is a need to improve the operations management of film industry in Zimbabwe. Most companies are operating without operations managers, thus resulting in poor quality productions and services.

Keywords

Operations management, film industry, quality production, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Film portrays a mirror to human society with the elements of reality; therefore, it has become a medium for every country to share their history, culture, stories and future predictions. Compared to other forms of arts, film has become popular due to its dynamic images and story-telling style through the movement of frames and the sound that has a power to emotionally connect with viewers. Because of its features, film has become a significant universal art within human culture, which is highly popular as it connects people from different territories through multiple broadcasting platforms such as satellite, Internet Protocol (IP) and Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD). Furthermore, it has proven to be the most influential instrument to disseminate information - a vehicle for culture, education, leisure and propaganda than other forms of media.

In this 21st Century, there is a stiff competition in any professional field due to the globalization of markets (Goldsmith and O'Regan, 2005), hence it is crucial to stay ahead by standardizing the product and constantly satisfying customers. Film is a product that is tangible and a service that entertains and educate people about art and culture, and imagination. In Zimbabwe, there is only one television channel that broadcasts all the television programmes, which means that there is less market and limited growth for indigenous films. The Zimbabwe television (ZTV), which is a national broadcasting television, has not moved to digitalization yet, which has been limiting some companies from producing quality films because their digital gadgets are not compatible with analogue system that ZTV is still using. Since late 90s when Zimbabwe witnessed the production of films like Neria (1992), Flame (1994) and Everyone's Child (1996), the nation has not been actively participating in the film industry. Exceptional filmmakers like Marlon Murape - who produced Tariro (2004), and Joe Njangu - who produced The Gentlemen (2014) and Escape (2016) have been

struggling but are still trying to keep the industry alive by working in small crews and using digital video to cut the costs (Mboti, 2016).

The high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe has forced fresh graduates to become filmmakers despite their inexperience as they are trying to survive and make a living out of filmmaking. Many are failing to make good quality films due to the lack of better operations management and the current economic situation of Zimbabwe. Most filmmakers make their films on a tight budget and opt to work with a skeleton crew, as they cannot afford to employ specialist in every department. The situation is bad as most Zimbabwean film companies rely on regular laptops for editing, yet most of them are failing to break-even after being forced to sell their DVDs at \$1 for two, which is the same price as the black market. Films like Vharazipi and Lobola are great examples of DVDs sold at black market. The issue of piracy is one of the major challenges that Zimbabwean film industry is facing (Rwafa, 2012), however the government has done little to 'burn' DVDs sold on black market. Furthermore, most of Zimbabwe's big screen cinema theatres, such as Rainbow and Ster Kinekor, have been turned into church halls and boutiques, so there is only a little hope that these theatres can provide a solution to the issues of distribution and exhibition of films in order to curb piracy problems (Meya, 2014). It is important to find ways of strengthening the production processes, for instance creating more rightful distribution channels of films, in order to reach to the audiences without the involvement of scammers. Therefore, there is a great need to develop a national distribution pipeline in order to promote local films and find measures that avoid much piracy.

Given the nature of imaginative art in film and the impact it has in transforming a society, the Zimbabwean film industry has to establish and maintain a distinguishable image to be recognized both locally and internationally. The film industry needs to make films that are similar in quality to international productions in order to promote local productions and attract audience. The research conducted by scholars, like Rwafa (2012), on Zollywood, Zimbavision and Zimbowood showed that filmmakers are failing to produce films that are competitive enough to enter global market. Furthermore, Riber (2001) noted that Zimbabwe today is mostly producing either advertisements or short films. If this trend continues, the film industry is likely to shut down because it will be difficult to sustain the film industry and it will be difficult for filmmakers to win the confidence of the majority of potential Zimbabwean viewers or followers of the African films. Hence, the question of how to improve operations in Zimbabwean film industry that is artistically relevant, sustainable and globally competitive will still remain if its operations are not improved to resolve the current problems.

Through major technological and operational transformation, film industry has been growing and competing as one of the major business industry where most governments are interested to invest. In countries like Nigeria, film industry has become one of the most viable industry with a turnover of over millions of dollars which creates millions of jobs. Film industry generates both direct and indirect employment. Direct employment includes pre-production units such as casting companies, equipment hiring from companies, prop suppliers, manufacturing companies, and post-production companies responsible for editing, marketing and distributing the film (Joffe and Jacklin, 2003). Indirect employment includes supporting industries, such as transport and infrastructure for building cinema theaters. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Zimbabwe and therefore there is a need for Zimbabwean film industry to change on how it operate its film production.

In any film organization, it is important for operations management team to produce films that entertain and continuously captivate the audience. Operation management is chiefly concerned with planning and supervising the processes of production and provision of services. The management team ensures that inputs are successfully transformed into outputs in an efficient and effective manner. The operations management is directly responsible for producing and providing services to consumers (Bozarth and Handfield, 2006). Hence, it is important to find ways of strengthening operations management in the Zimbabwean film industry to produce quality films that are highly competitive in global market, which results in increased revenue and employment opportunities.

This study seeks to find ways of improving the operations management in the Zimbabwean film industry from production till marketing and distribution of film products to establish itself as a viable film industry that produces quality films and attracts more viewers. The objectives of the study are: (i) to investigate the role and significance of operations management in film companies; (ii) to examine the process of filmmaking and explore the role of crew in relation with operations management; and (iii) to suggest ways of enhancing operations management in film companies.

2. Literature review

Film involves capturing and recording both images and audio in a camera, and is a powerful medium to communicate ideas (Nelmes, 2003). Allen and Smith (1997) furthers this notion by stating that image serves as photographic proof that something really exists in films. Therefore, the goal of these films is to persuade viewers with tangible evidence using image and audio that one can relate too easily. Most films try to deliver what the society is in need of; hence, they make use of realistic pictures that seem to associate with what can interest the human mind. This instills a sense of a believability in the mind of the spectator, which can influence the behavior or attitude of people.

Film is a powerful medium to communicate ideas and bind people together. The production of films round the world by different filmmakers helps to: (i) connect people from different continents; (ii) showcase diverse cultures and traditions; and (iii) allow viewers from different countries to experience and see the other part of the world through their own lenses. Documentary is a very good example of a film genre that is usually used to provide different communities with local and international news, wildlife, nature, culture, travel, etc.

Ever since the inception of film, there has been a global competition in the industry. Hollywood movies have been dominating the global film market for bringing in more money, whereas Indian film industry (Bollywood) has been recently nominated for being the prime industry for highest profit margins (Jones and Toma, 2017). In order to compete effectively in a global market, there must be an operations management strategy to maintain the mission of the company and its overall corporate strategy. Operations management is essential in the film industry to produce better films that are more appreciated by the audience who can choose to watch Hollywood or Bollywood films instead of local production. The concepts of efficiency and effectiveness revolve around operations management, which requires a strong leadership.

2.1 Operations Management in Film Industry

Operations is defined as a system that produces goods and services (Adam and Ebert, 1994). Operations management ensures management of system quality and efficiency according to the time schedule, supply chain and capacity (Heizer and Render, 2011). Pannerselvam (2004) further explains that operations and supply chains are intrinsically linked as their facilities and activities are involved in producing and supplying products or services. In film industry, the sequence of the value chain begins with the scriptwriter who develops the content or the scripts that goes through sequence of film production processes and finally develops into a film that is received by the customer as a service from either cinema theatres or television channels.

The key objective of operations management is to manage systems or processes that produce products and deliver services, therefore it requires input from all departments in the organization to be successful (Kumar and Suresh, 2009). The operations management team are responsible for making decisions during the production processes ensuring that the products or services produced are according to specifications required (Pannerselvam, 2004). The operations management team ensures the processing of resources and add value during the transformation process within the given time frame (Joseph, 2004). The team is also responsible to develop and implement policies for the company.

The operations manager is responsible for managing the daily operations of a film company, and ensuring that all the involved personnel has work plans that are derived from the schedule prepared by the operations management team. The schedule is a plan for all the activities that will be done within a set time frame, which makes it easy for the operations management team to track and measure staff performance. The operations manager is also responsible for coordinating all resources, from material, equipment to financial resources. The manager must prepare the entire budget and source adequate funds for the production of the film.

For any business to succeed, it requires strong operations management to ensure that the company meets the established business objectives. Similar to most businesses, film companies require operations manager, production analyst for the script, production manager, schedule coordinator for all the activities in the process of filmmaking and distribution manager for post-production process whereby the film is marketed, distributed and screened to viewers. In order to achieve this, the operations management has to coordinate with other designers and technicians involved in the production of a film. This can be easily accomplished if the operations management is flexible in

accommodating ideas from subordinates who are well familiar with the development going on in their lines of specialty.

The secret for an everlasting competitive advantage lies in processes. There are several processes involved in the production of film, from the pre-production to post-production until the distribution and screening of film. Operations management complements all film activities hence there is a need for intensive research on continual development of films to meet customer demands. It is the responsibility of the production manager to secure enough market in industry. Therefore, it is vital in film industry for the operations management to do a research first on the audience preferences and try to incorporate the findings to produce what interest the viewers in order to attract and increase their audiences and sales (Napoli, 2003). They are further responsible for presenting the findings to stakeholders and higher management and advice on how to make a successful film production. This means that targeting the desired market segment is also the task of operations management team. The team is also responsible for liaising with investors and making treaties with different companies.

Operations management team also work as public relations officers as they have to liaise and coordinate with employees from different departments and other team members. The team assembles the work of entire film technicians and designers, ensures that all the skills have been blended to produce a good quality film, and oversee its release for public viewing through correct distribution channels. It is the function of the operations management to identify and utilize the best labor, resources and technology. The human resource manager employs people with appropriate skills in order to produce a quality product and improve the productivity and profitability of a company. Operations manager must be aware of new equipment and technology and arrange trainings for those who are mostly involved with handling equipment (Hermann and McChesney, 1997).

Operations and sales intertwine in a business (Joseph, 1996), and like any other business film production is also affected by the quality of operations. The efficient and effective operations management is essential for quality film product which will increase the sales and revenue. Considering the advancement in technology and spread of globalization, the operations management currently being practiced in the Zimbabwean film industry is poor and it needs to be improved and strengthened to meet the global standard. Every individual role such as camera work, editing, directing and producing, requires operations manager who is responsible for the quality outcome. This will empower the film crew with knowledge on operations management to work as a team and integrate their individual designs, experiences and skills to produce a good quality film and attract more viewers.

3. Methodology

An intensive review of literature was conducted to investigate the processes of production and distribution of films. Secondary sources, such as books, journals, and websites were used to collect the required information on film production processes and operations management. The collected information was analyzed to investigate the challenges being faced by the Zimbabwean film industry and to understand the ways of improving current operations management in the film industry.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Film Production and Operations Management

In filmmaking, every personnel are significant despite their role as they all strive to unite their skills to come up with one distinguished final product. Hence, co-ordination, planning and organizing is essential when working together as a team. Working together successfully as a team needs understanding of operational management by all the members involved in the pre-production, production and post-production to understand their own role and to understand and respect the roles of others as well (Pannerselvam, 2004). This is precisely why operations management is fundamental to lead or oversee every role in filmmaking as it involves collaboration among the various designers, dissemination of information and cooperative decision making when producing a film. For instance, a video editor has to consult the director of the film if it is necessary to add some frightening sounds on a scene where an actor is shown alone in a dark forest frightened by the environment he is in. This clearly shows how the decision of the editor is going to affect the function of the director as well as that of a script writer and the camera person who has captured the scene, which consequently was selected by the location manager.

Films undergo a process, which always starts with a story or script writing. Once the scriptwriter puts the story down on paper, a collaborative effort coordinated by the operations manager goes into a filmmaking. The team includes the director, actors, cinematographer, make-up artists, visual effects specialists, and many more. A successful film project requires integrating all the skills and techniques together. For the film industry to grow, the film companies need to produce a quality films and it is the responsibility of the operations manager to evaluate the scripts and purchase high quality scripts. Then the director takes over and brings his mindset by casting the actors, and building a team that will be involved in the process of filmmaking. Figure 1 presents the process of filmmaking and the role of operations manager.

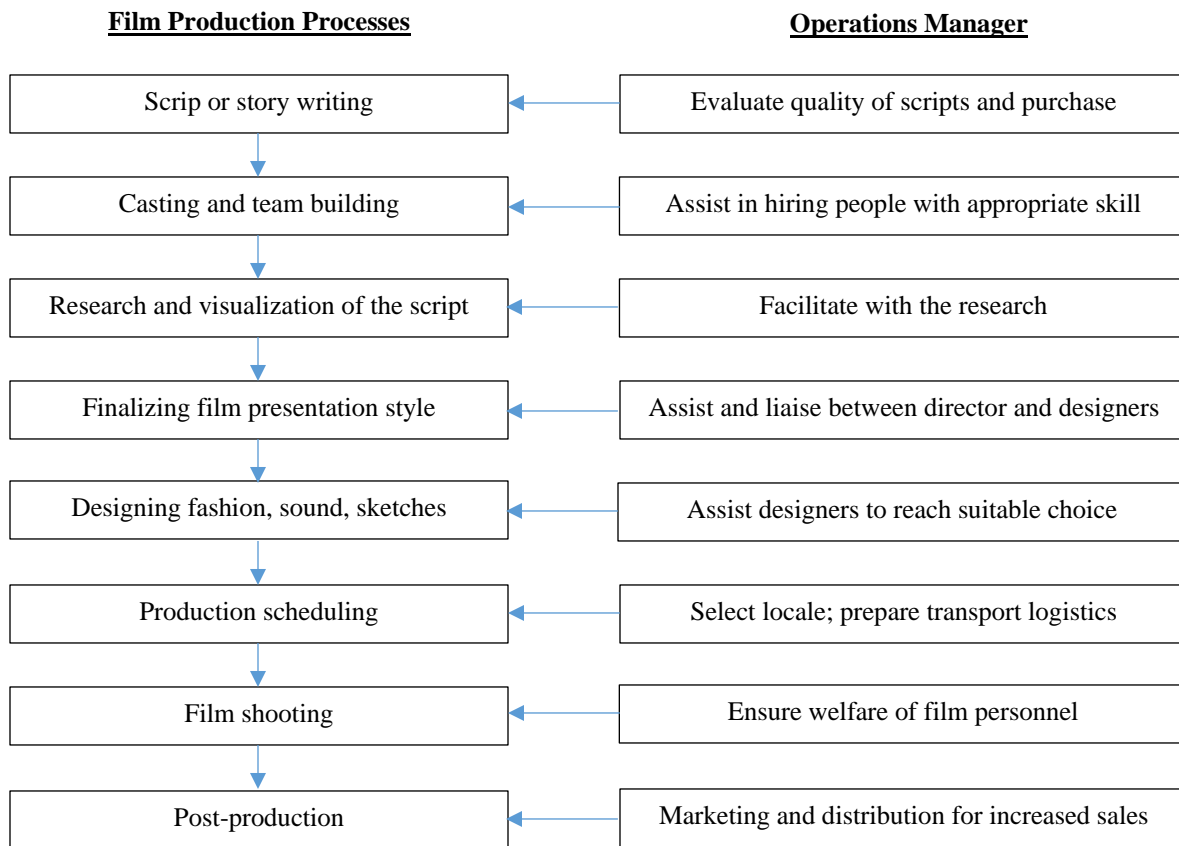


Figure 1. Filmmaking process and role of operations manager

The most comprehensive process of filmmaking can be borrowed from theatre designing process which is articulated comprehensively by Carver (2012). After the casting and hiring of designers and technicians, the next step is to try and visualize the script. The very first step for all personnel involved in filmmaking process is to read the script and research on the socio-political and historical context. According to Carver (2012), the designers have to carefully read the script and formulate the ideas about how to bring the film to life visually. The film director, producer, operations manager, designers and technicians meet at a preliminary conference to discuss the style of the production. This is a crucial moment as the operation manager assist and liaise between the director and the designers on the presentation style. Since all parties have read the script, they exchange ideas and are at par to negotiate the visual concepts for the film production and the needs of actors.

After agreeing with the presentation style of the film, designers do an in-depth research on how best they can visualize the script and integrate their skills in the making of the film. For instance, the costume designer has to research on the latest fashion if they are to dress a modern young person who will inspire or stand as a role model for the young people in the society. The operations manager has to oversee that the dresses chosen by the designer contributes in unfolding the story of the character in that dresses will not only inspire the young people but influence them to dress accordingly

to their role model which will increase sales of the film and of that fashion brand. Hence, the operations management assist the designers in their choices of suitable designs.

When designers have come up with their own concepts such as sound, rough sketches that they have developed, they discuss further with the directors and other senior managers in the presence of the operations manager. Usually the discussion is on the symbols, objects, colors and other materials or techniques that will be included in the making of the film. After all has been agreed on, the operations manager spearhead the drafting of a schedule which will be used in the shooting of the film and present the budget.

Before the shooting of the film the operations manager ensures that all the logistics have been put in place. For instance, selecting and preparing of locale for shooting, ensuring that the transport logistics are in order and that all the necessary arrangements for the shooting are in place. The welfare of film personnel should be taken care of during the shooting. It should be ensured that all the available skills and techniques have been considered during the production process of the film. During the post-production process, operations manager ensures that the film as both the product and service has been marketed and distributed, and the company has made a profit.

It is beneficial for the company if operations management keep strong relationships with talented artists, designers and other employees for a long successful productions. This will enable operations manager to motivate and nurture a reliable, creative and dedicated staff who will be working towards producing quality film, which will eventually help win audience and establish the company.

4.2 Challenges of the Zimbabwean Film Industry

The Zimbabwean film industry is failing to produce quality films due to the lack of proper operations management. Some of the challenges that are being faced by the Zimbabwean film industry include: (i) lack of funds to hire operations management team resulting in very few film companies having operations managers; (ii) lack of adequate research on film content resulting in poor scripts and production; (iii) lack of experts because workforce trained on film area have migrated to neighboring countries seeking greener pastures; (iv) limited domestic market; (v) limited access to distribution and exhibition channels resulting films being easily available in black-markets; (vi) outdated policy and lack of fixed standards in operations; and (vii) lack of funds to purchase latest technologies.

The filmmakers are always operating in new conditions (Deuze, 2007) to adapt with the growth and technological advancement. The arrival of the 'new media' on internet, like YouTube, has weakened the old traditional business model which used to generate revenue from other industries through advertising their products or services. Films were a cheaper way used by many companies as a platform where they advertise their products and services in the most comprehensive manner. However, these companies now have a direct access to customers as they can digitally make their advertisements themselves and then use internet as a convenient and inexpensive medium to play the adverts. In addition, the companies have also managed to take advantage of designing and developing their own websites where they can directly communicate with consumers about the latest products and services they offer. So, the film industry is losing its advertisement business, which has made the film industry vulnerable as they are no longer considered viable as an advertising agent as they used to be before the arrival of digitalization and internet. In the other hand, film companies require to pay fees for the utilization of locale as the tourism industry impose fee for their facilities to be utilized for shooting.

The viewers have become conditioned to a variety of choices available from the internet, which has posed challenges for experts of film industry regarding their recognition and wages they deserve for the content. Hollywood has successfully transitioned to internet and has made it convenient for viewers to access films excessively at cheaper prices to download than DVD prices of local films produced in Zimbabwe. Lack of exposure with Hollywood filmmakers has overshadowed most Zimbabwean filmmakers to build the film industry and make it competitive with other established industries like Bollywood and Nollywood. Most viewers in Zimbabwe prefer to watch movie superstars from America, India and other established countries, which has made the film industry more vulnerable.

4.3 Effective ways of improving operations management

Operations management is the heart of the organization, and if managed well it smoothens the function of all other departments. Conversely, if the operations management fails to understand and interpret the script, visualize the kind

of required props, evaluate and approve appropriate designs and locale, all departments will suffer and the film industry will be negatively affected. For the successful management of operations in the film industry, the operations management team must equip themselves with updated information on film business and have exceptional interpersonal skills. Their job is to communicate and coordinate all activities and create a positive culture where teamwork is the core value. At times, the operations management help resolve disputes or disagreements among employees and also cooperate in high-level decision making with the top management executives, such as the executive producer and the managing director. They are responsible for managing, purchasing and supplying of products, budgeting, controlling costs, and keeping the organization on track financially. The management of the supply chain and other resources helps minimize costs of production. They examine business forecasts and map strategic means of maximizing quality production using efficient methods in the process of making a film. Furthermore, they continually improve the operations to provide sustainability in the film industry.

The current operations management in the Zimbabwe film industry is poor, thus it is essential to improve its operations management in order to attract local and international audience. Table 1 highlights the areas and potential ways of strengthening operations management in the Zimbabwean film industry.

Table 1. Strengthening operations management in the Zimbabwean film industry

Areas	Ways of strengthening operations management
Research	There is a need to conduct research on target audience, which will enable the filmmakers to evaluate and select the right script or content that can attract the audience. Research is also required to stay abreast of technological advances and learn about new processes being implemented in the international platform.
Technology	Film companies must purchase equipment and use latest technologies to run the processes smoothly and improve the quality. There is an urgent need to use digital video camera that captures and record better quality audio-video.
Professionals	Film companies must seek semi-professionals from film institutions who are less expensive and willing to learn more in different operations of the film making processes. These young professionals understand and have a zeal for new technology, thus there will be new experiments and innovations.
Partnership and Market	The film industry must plan to establish new broadcasting services that will provide additional choices for the filmmakers to distribute their products. The Zimbabwean film industry needs to explore new global partners, new markets, and audience for the industry to grow. There is a need for the film industry to move from street market and try online marketing. The operations management team should explore methods of selling films online or open websites where customers can subscribe to watch or download films online.
Trainings and Exhibits	The operations management team should arrange trainings for employees working at different units of film production. Training will enable employees to learn from experts and interact with them; it will also provide hands-on experience to employees which will enrich their knowledge on their specific field of work. The filmmakers and employees should also be allowed to participate and present in conferences, which will provide a platform to generate new ideas and innovations. The industry will stay focused as these conferences create competition to produce quality films.

Policy	<p>Regulatory laws plays a significant role in the distribution of artistic and technological work. The government must place a policy to reduce the distribution of films on street markets.</p> <p>The operations managers from all film companies in the country should meet and set up a committee to draft a film policy which will benefit all the stakeholders, improve the quality, and help in the growth of the industry.</p>
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The operations manager has a responsibility of monitoring and analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of the whole film production system, and must re-strategize and find new ways of improvement if the production system is found to be poor. The operations managers, as leaders, should be able to set clear goals and have a long term plans or strategies for a successful film industry. For smooth running of the operations management in the film industry, the operations manager must: (i) have a good experience in the industry; (ii) be able to perform a variety of tasks; (iii) be familiar with concepts, practices and procedures of variety of fields; (iv) rely on experience and judgement to plan and accomplish goals; (v) lead and direct the work of others; (vi) plan and control change; (vii) manage quality assurance programmes; (viii) conduct research on new technologies and alternative methods to increase the efficiency; (ix) set and review budgets and manage cost; (x) oversee inventory, distribution of goods, and facility layout; and (xi) be creative and able to connect with international filmmakers. It is the responsibility of operations managers in Zimbabwean film industry to draft a national film policy, which will drive the industry to greater heights of development. The role of operations management is pivotal for the success and growth of the film industry in Zimbabwe.

5. Conclusion

Film is a powerful mean of the world recreation and an artistic work that should be seriously considered in Zimbabwe. Film genres, such as documentary, have become a teaching tool in academic institutes to deliver information to students on history, science and other disciplines. It is a service that entertains and educate, which frames how other countries perceive the country. The Zimbabwean film industry is lacking proper operations management, which is resulting in poor quality products and hence the industry is losing its audience. The film industry needs to strengthen operations management in order to create a viable film industry and compete with international film companies. This will also create employment and positively contribute to the economy of Zimbabwe. If the nation focuses on adapting operations management of international standards and uses new technology and moves into digitalization, then the Zimbabwean film industry will run smoothly and be able to secure itself a place in this global world.

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Biography

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Fortunate Tatenda Mauyakufa is a young researcher and also a filmmaker, who attained her honours degree from Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. While studying in Zimbabwe, she took the initiative on rising an awareness to different communities about children in probation institutes. She further directed and produced a documentary on Blue Hills, which is one of the largest probation institutes in Zimbabwe. In 2011, she worked as a temporary teacher before eventually enrolled for her honours degree. She was an assistant facilitator of theatre and arts for the new curriculum, which the ministry of Primary and Secondary schools had introduced, under Pfumvudza Media Company. Currently, she is a regular contributor at Women Arts Festival and a member of Zimbabwean theatre. Her aim is to acquire more knowledge on film production and be involved in the global media industry. During her leisure time she watches documentaries, play tennis and go to church. She aims to pursue doctoral degree and use film as a global medium that disseminate educative information.