



Africans for Africa Network set to change African narrative

Johannesburg South Africa: The just-launched *Africans for Africa Network* aims to change the prevailing narrative of Africa, from one driven by Western media to one that reflects the inherent strengths and empowerment of the continent, across a variety of different, African-centred platforms.

The *Africans for Africa Network* is the brainchild of Vanessa Perumal, a Johannesburg-based champion of citizen and media activism and founder of the *JT Comms African Media Resource Centre of Excellence*. Perumal is working in partnership with international relations strategist, Beth Arendse and youth and economic development expert, Nomsa Mazwai along with a number of other global African networks, including Mali's renowned *FestivalauDesert*.

With this innovative movement being spearheaded through the JT Comms African Media Resource Centre of Excellence, the aim of *Africans for Africa Network* is to engage in a *series of dialogues*, set up exchanges between artists on the continent, create new markets for Africa's cultural content and products and take ownership of the space in which Africa's voice is expressed through music and culture in international arenas. The intervention of thought leaders in the cultural industries will play a key role in the movement.

"I am amazed by the groundswell of support this initiative has generated across Africa - from global A List musicians, to journalists and social entrepreneurs across the cultural industries," comments Perumal. "This is indicative of the will of ordinary Africans to set the agenda for change on the continent and drive the production of authentic content which frames Africa in a positive light.

"Africa already has a framework of treaties and agreements that facilitate this type of dialogue across the continent," adds Arendse. "What we sometimes lack is coordination in civil society to generate the substance the activation of these vehicles depends on. I believe the Africans for Africa Network will be instrumental in providing content and programming for such instruments as the African Charter for Cultural Renaissance and a myriad of bilateral activations in Africa."

A partnership with Mali's famed ***Festival of the Desert***, now exiled due to instability in the region, was the catalyst to realise the need for a pan African network which can facilitate the types of dialogues which need to be held among Africans to drive common agendas for growth, change and development.

This partnership has anchored the inauguration of the **Africans for Africa Network**, with Perumal, Arendse and Mazwai meeting with the Festival of the Desert's executive team in Paris in July for a strategic planning session. Arising out of this, a number of Africans for Africa Network's first programmes will include exchanges with artists from the ***Sahel region in North Africa***, with South African musicians and artists.

Africans for Africa Network's youth coordinator, social entrepreneur and SAMA award-winning performer, Nomsa Mazwai believes that the initiative will provide a vehicle for both youth and economic development in the cultural industries.

"We must recognise that the strength of the world's economy is shifting to the south, with emerging economies like Brazil and India joining the economies of China to drive global economic agendas. The future markets for the cultural industries are in Africa, and we need to position ourselves as Africans to take ownership of this space and empower ourselves economically in it."

Manny Ansar, Director of the Festival of the Desert agrees.

"Our Festival, although quite small, is in the top three festivals in Africa. This shows how powerful creative platforms are in shaping the both the human rights and citizen activism agendas in Africa. Converting these platforms to sustainable markets for Africa's creative voices which cross Africa and the world is the key challenge we must address as a matter of urgency. The Africans for Africa Network provides this impetus."

Formally announcing the ***Africans for Africa Network's*** agenda this week, Perumal outlined a programme which includes using cultural dialogue as a way of changing the African narrative through partnerships with continental projects on global stages.

Africans for Africa Network will focus on an annual pan African Dialogue, the first of which is targeted to take place in ***Timbuktu in Mali*** alongside the projected return of the Festival of the Desert to its home in Mali in 2014. The Dialogue will feature thought leaders from Africa and the developing world, representing economic, social, media and youth tracks within the context of the cultural industries. Africans For Africa Network will also host a Global Concert for Peace, featuring A-List African and international artists, performing for an international audience.

Ongoing exchanges, topic specific dialogues and the creation of platforms for African artists within and outside the continent will take place throughout the year. This will be effected through a network of partnerships with various groups and organisations.

Phase one of the Africans for Africa Network's programme is to be anchored by Mali's Festival of the Desert's global call to action to anchor the banned and exiled Festival through varying interventions. These include securing performance spaces in existing festivals, assisting with profiling the efforts of the global call to action and supporting the Timbuktu return home concert which is expected to take place in January 2014.

The first of the Africans for Africa Network's pan African exchanges will be hosted by the ***Emthonjeni Arts Residency programme***, based in Hamburg in the Eastern Cape. A group of musicians from the Sahel region in North Africa will spend a week at the Emthonjeni facility with local South African musicians (3 – 16 December 2013). The collaboration will include workshops, co-productions, performances, empowerment of young artists and an inaugural dialogue for young Africans, which will be podcast to several regions of the continent.

"Africans for Africa Network is a bold initiative but one that is long overdue," concludes Perumal. "However, we are positive that it can play a role in radically changing the African narrative."

Should you wish to support the Africans for Africa network and be part of a movement for changing the African narrative and for media interviews with the organisers and more information please contact media@jtcomms.co.za (011) 788 7632 or **Festival au Desert** admin@festival-au-desert.org

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