

Deadline extended for Focus Africa First

NEW YORK: Focus Features is accepting entries for its second Africa First Program. The deadline has been extended till Monday, 17 August 2009. The program plans to award five emerging filmmakers with US\$10,000 in financing.



The initiative, with funds for emerging filmmakers of African nationality and residence, offers eligible and participating filmmakers an award of US\$10,000 in financing for pre-production, production, and/or post-production on their narrative short film made in Africa and tapping into the continents film industry resources.

Launched in 2008, Africa First awarded US\$10,000 apiece to five winning filmmakers; Edouard Bamporiki (Rwanda), Jenna Bass (South Africa), Jan-Hendrik Beetge (South Africa), Dyana Gaye (Senegal), and Wanuri Kahiu (Kenya). Their short films are, respectively, "Long Coat", a drama about a young Hutu coming to terms with Rwanda's and his own family's past; "The Tunnel", a 1980s-set story centering around a 10-year-old girl's quest; "The Abyss Boys", a thriller about an illegal trade in a small fishing town; the public transportation musical N'Dar [Saint Louis Blues]; and "Pumzi" [Breath], a futuristic sci-fi tale.

Africa First will be supervised by producer Kisha Imani Cameron, whose Completion Films company has a first-look and consulting deal with Focus, and who co-ordinates Africa First submissions and evaluations with Focus director of production Matthew Plouffe. In addition to on-site work in Africa, the winning filmmakers of Africa First also participate in a New York City weekend of one-on-one workshop discussions with members of the program's international advisory board of experts in African cinema and Focus executives including Schamus and president of production John Lyons, covering topics such as international distribution and the economics of studio financing; and with Cameron and Plouffe.

Offering practical support in addition to the fiscal backing, the reconvening Africa First board members are Mahen Bonetti, founder and executive director of the African Film Festival; journalist and documentary filmmaker Jihan El-Tahiri; June Givanni, who for four years programmed the Toronto International Film Festival's Planet Africa series; Clarence Hamilton, script editor and head of production at NFVF; Pedro Pimenta, producer and manager of training programs throughout South Africa; and Keith Shiri, founder/director of the Africa at the Pictures film festival in the UK.

Five filmmakers will each be awarded US\$10,000. Those selected will retain copyright and the distribution rights to their

completed shorts, with the exception of North American rights, which Focus will retain, as well as the right of first negotiation to productions derived from the shorts, such as a feature-length expansion. The announcement of the selections will be made on or about 1 October 2009.

In May, when the 2009 submission period was announced, Focus CEO James Schamus said, "Last year's Africa First experience was a gift to all of us at Focus - a journey of discovery that led us to great new talents in cinema. This year's Africa First initiative will once again do just that."

Cameron added, "From start to finish, last year's program was extraordinary, and I'm thrilled that Focus is making it happen for us again. I look forward to meeting another group of promising African filmmakers whom Africa First is supporting."

To download the application form, go to www.filminfocus.com/africafirst.

Focus Features and Focus Features International (FFI) comprise a singular global company, that aims to produce, acquire, finance, sell, and distribute original films from emerging and established filmmakers. The company operates as Focus Features domestically, and as Focus Features International overseas.

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