

Akoroko

Website: www.akoroko.com

Email: info@akoroko.com

Twitter: www.twitter.com/akorokoafrika

Instagram: www.instagram.com/akorokofilm/

AKOROKO LLC

For about 100 years, when the term cinema is used around the world, it's most often in reference, more or less consciously, to a single cinema, which for more than half a century has been created, produced, industrialized, programmed and then shown on the world's screens: Euro-American cinema. The images this cinema offers systematically exclude the African experience in all its variety, which may seem paradoxical since this brand of cinema has long dominated the theater screens of every major African city.

And as a result, African cinema has historically been marginalized, and believed to be inaccessible: the discourse, the films, and the markets built around it which subsequently suffer.

Any country that has a strong creative economy exhibits strong national economic trends. Africa as a region is full of creativity, and the filmmaking landscape is one of the richest and most diverse areas, with the potential to transform stereotypes and economies and cement identity in communities.

“Normalizing” conversations around African cinema with the same kind of rabid cineastic appreciation that underpins North American, European, and Asian cinema especially, is essential to both its critical appreciation and accessibility.

Change is on the way, as rapid economic and social change across the African continent makes the region increasingly impossible to ignore. Media conglomerates including Disney, Google, Netflix, Amazon, Facebook, and more have all ramped up investment in Africa.

Perfectly positioned and timed to take advantage of this ideological shift, Akoroko LLC was established on May 30, 2022 under California state laws. Headed by Tambay A. Obenson, the media company is prepared to address key areas of appreciation and accessibility via a multi-pronged platform with a curatorial approach that will, at official launch, include journalism, film streaming, consultation, cataloging, and cultivating new talent.

Longer term: the addition of a film financing and production arm; and an umbrella institute that will house an African film archival unit and a film festival.

Crucial to meeting its short term goals is a pre-seed fundraising effort that will seek to raise approximately \$75-\$150K, allowing for the accelerated progression of Akoroko components already in service or in development.

The funds will serve to cover operating costs over five to six months, in order to best position the platform to then seek seed funding at the end of that term.

A breakdown of how the money will be allocated is at the end of this document.

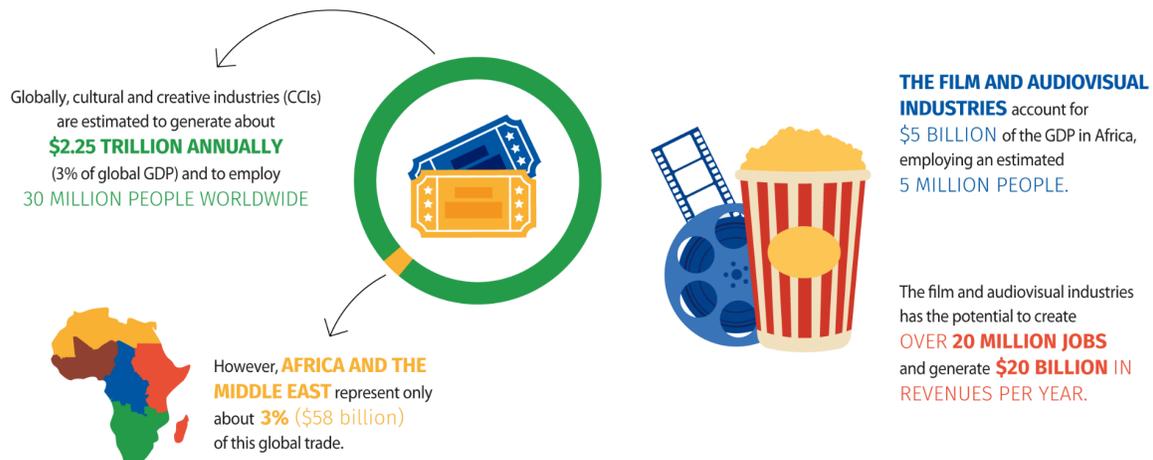
AKOROKO'S MARKET

African film: A Booming Industry

"We believe that Africa is one of the major creative centres for great storytelling that resonates around the world. We strongly believe that Africa has a wealth of untold stories." Dorothy Ghattuba, head of Netflix's African originals. [Netflix Reiterates Commitment to Give Voices to African Storytellers](#), November 2020.

"Increasingly we are seeing innovation begin in Africa, and then spread throughout the world. This momentum will only increase as 300 million people come online in Africa over the next five years. Many of them are young, creative and entrepreneurial, and they're ready to drive new innovation and opportunity across the region." Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet. [Our \\$1 billion investment in Africa's digital transformation](#), December 2021.

AFRICAN FILM: A BOOMING INDUSTRY



The UNESCO report, "[The African Film Industry: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth](#)," released on 5 October 2021, reflects the vitality of African cinema, driven by digital technologies.

The widespread use of new technologies, the affordability of digital film equipment, and the rise of online platforms are enabling a new generation of African filmmakers to emerge. Akoroko aims to serve as a bridge between film industries on the African continent and the West.

However, challenges persist, and the economic potential of the film and audiovisual sectors remains largely untapped, with the film industry continuing to be structurally underfunded, underdeveloped and undervalued.

Although recent years have seen fundamental change. Productive forces have shifted, and the technical, financial and institutional infrastructures that organize film production are in the midst of a deep transformation.

According to the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI), the industry generates \$5 billion in annual revenue out of a potential \$20+ billion. And media companies in the West are beginning to realize that potential. See: [Why the Streamers Are \(Finally\) Investing in Africa](#) (The Hollywood Reporter, Jan 2022).

A residual effect is that local producers, financiers, and distributors are upping their investments in original content in order to compete. See: [MultiChoice's Showmax invests in African content for growth](#) (Reuters, Apr 2021).

Additionally, there has been an increase in the introduction of initiatives structured to tap into the talent pool of emerging African film professionals. For example, in April 2021, the prominent Swiss festival at Locarno announced that it had expanded its prestigious Industry Academy Program to Africa. And in January 2022, the USC School of Cinematic Arts and Netflix (under a Grow Creative Africa initiative), announced a partnership.

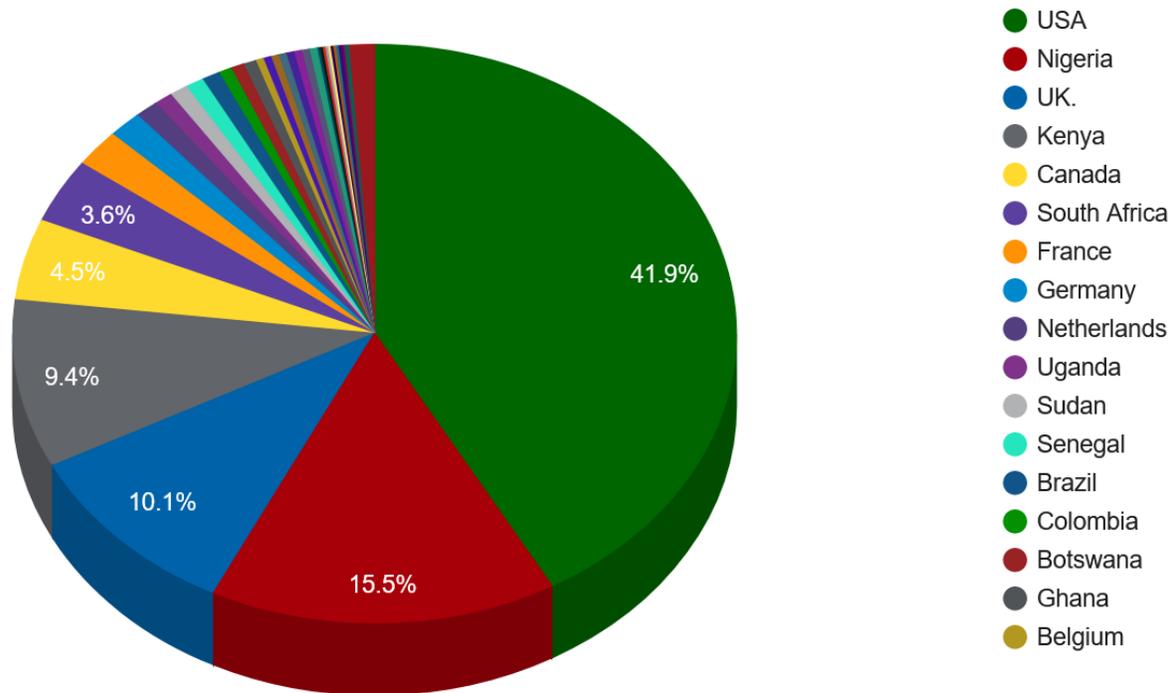
Both programs (and several others) are aimed at training the next generation of film professionals in key markets across Africa.

As the “Africa is booming” narrative travels, it’s likely that other similar training initiatives will be introduced as a new kind of “scramble for Africa ” kicks into high gear.

With its proposed multi-pronged approach, Akoroko aims to respond to an anticipated expansion of the film and television sector on the African continent, facilitating global connectivity between African film professionals and the world, for which it is uniquely positioned, owned and operated by experienced film industry professionals in the United States, Europe, and Africa.

While a goal is to become a global platform, those three regions will be Akoroko’s primary target markets. Over time, the expectation is that the numbers will fluctuate, and eventually settle into some semblance of parity.

Currently, a mapping of traffic to the Akoroko website (Akoroko.com), and followers of the Akoroko social account looks like this: 46.4% North America; 33.8% Africa; 15.9% Europe.



While a goal is to become a global platform, those three regions will be Akoroko's primary target markets. Over time, the expectation is that the numbers will fluctuate, and eventually settle into some semblance of parity.

Longer term, a goal is to be a globally accessible platform, as well as a necessary and influential tool for African filmmakers, and audiences interested in African cinema all over the world.

PROBLEMS

Coverage

Lack of local and international coverage of African cinema (including criticism, conversation, analysis, contextualization, and more). African film and television critics are largely underrepresented in the international marketplace; even when it comes to criticism of African films. This isn't because African critics do not exist. They simply aren't platformed, outside of a few who have taken it upon themselves to create platforms of their own. But even then, they are marginalized.

Of the total number of critics approved by the world's most accessible review aggregator, RottenTomatoes.com, less than 1 percent are African, including those based in countries outside of the continent.

Accessibility

"This looks great. Where can I watch it?"

"I had no idea about this."

A feature of Akoroko's Twitter stream is a daily recommendation of a contemporary African film. Based on engagement, most of the titles are foreign to followers in Akoroko's primary markets, even on the African continent. And the above questions are common responses. There's clearly a disconnect. Interested/curious audiences are not being reached. Hence, films aren't seen, resulting in the unfounded belief that there isn't a sizable enough viewership for African cinema, or that African films don't travel.

New entrants into the African market continue to disprove these theories. For example, [according to Netflix](#), in 2021, on average, for every view of its South African Originals in South Africa, there were 26 other views of the same title outside S. Africa, implying that there's interest in South African titles outside the country, wherever Netflix is available.

The below chart demonstrates this. South African heist film "Silverton Siege" held its own among English-language titles worldwide during the week of its premiere.

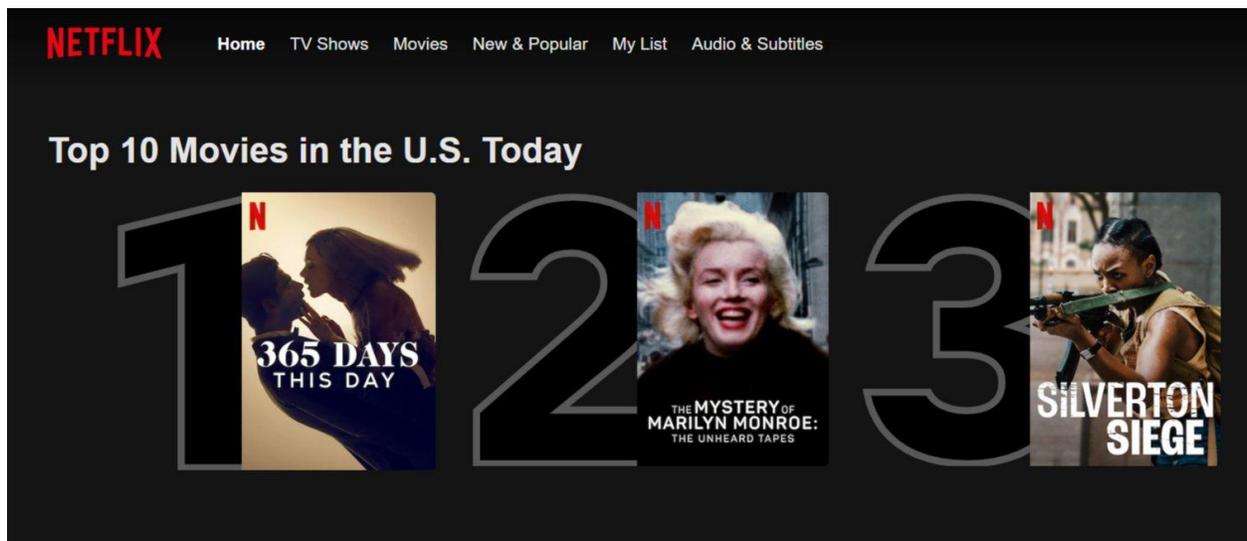


MUBI founder and CEO Efe Çakarel founded MUBI after he discovered that he couldn't watch "In the Mood for Love" in a café in Tokyo.

Currently, no one can stream Mauritanian auteur Med Hondo’s masterwork “West Indies” anywhere. Contemporary African films like “Saloum” (Senegal) which was a critical darling and fan favorite on the international festival circuit in 2021/2022, was overlooked by distributors for almost a year before it was acquired by niche streamer Shudder, which means access to the film will be very limited.

Indeed access to African films beyond high profile European and American-backed titles, is very limited; at best, confounding. Every year, a basket of films by African filmmakers tour the international film festival circuit — including prominent stops at Toronto, Venice, Berlin, Locarno, and Sundance — and the majority are ignored by distributors, especially in the United States, currently Akoroko’s largest market, where an underserved audience exists.

Again, as one example, not only did “Silverton Siege” perform well globally, its performance was surprisingly strong in the United States, ranking as high as third on Netflix’s list of top 10 movies during its premiere week.



SOLUTIONS

Coverage

The Akoroko platform will include a journalism component that will provide bold, robust, consistent coverage from African writers primarily, in film criticism, conversation, and analysis — in written and podcast format — unlike any platform that currently exists.

Nurturing, platforming and promoting African film journalists is vital to its success.

Additionally, Akoroko will maintain an up-to-date database of African feature films in development, with the status of each project listed. Once a film is officially released in the United States, it will be removed from the database. This will help us track every unreleased feature project at every stage of development: scripting, financing, pre-production, production, post-production, festival play, etc.

Based on conversations with curators, programmers, and producers around the world, a comprehensive and/or curated database would be extremely valuable to the work that they do.

Accessibility

A one-stop streaming service accessible globally (rights-permitting per film).

Even though American, European, and Asian Imports continue to dominate local theaters across Africa, there are African films released locally, but don't travel. Local distributors like Nigeria's FilmOne releases about half a dozen films a year that perform well in the region, but historically, rarely leave the continent, and in some cases, their respective countries of origin.

Globally-accessible streamers like Amazon and Netflix are starting to appreciate this reality and are exploiting it. However, these films receive virtually no marketing once they are on the streamer. The burden lies almost entirely on the filmmakers, lest their films get lost in a world awash with content.

Additionally, there are independent American distributors (Armtattan for example) with libraries that include African films that remain mostly unseen, if only because these smaller companies lack the resources to make their films widely accessible, especially necessary marketing power, traveling from one city or country to another, one film at a time, often screening in small, makeshift theaters.

Non-profit American distributors like California Newsreel and Women Make Movies each hold significant libraries of classic African films, but primarily serve academic institutions.

And while more foreign-friendly curated streaming platforms like Criterion and MUBI exist, and both do carry some African titles — MUBI has been especially aggressive in its recent acquisitions — they are typically high profile names. Other titles tend to be scattered across several platforms, making them difficult to locate for those interested in seeing them.

Jahmil X.T. Qubeka is a perfect case study: four feature films in eight years, all premiering at TIFF to little coverage, although what reviews were written were overwhelmingly positive. But each film received minor distributor interest, and Qubeka effectively handed his films over for a pittance to ad-supported streaming platforms including Crackle and Tubi — services more interested in quantity and creating long-term revenue streams, and less about exposure for each film in a targeted, well-contextualized marketing effort. This means limited awareness and availability of each film.

The bottomline is that the films are out there.

A single streaming platform that will eventually house 50-70% of all African titles in circulation, classic to contemporary, would make it exponentially easier to market and access African films anywhere in the world. Undoubtedly, such a subscription platform would be meeting a need that exists for many, as well as for those who don't yet realize that they want it.

PRODUCT

Near term

A globally accessible multi-pronged platform for African cinema that will include: subscription streaming with a curated component; journalism (criticism, analysis, conversations, podcast); cataloging (an up-to-date database of feature films in development on the continent); and training (labs).

Long term

The eventual addition of Akoroko Films — a film financing and production arm of Akoroko LLC; original films (and television series) made by Africans, telling stories about Africans, distributed globally.

And Akoroko Institute — A foundation dedicated to the “discovery,” preservation, restoration, and exhibition of *lost* African cinema. See “Sudan’s Forgotten Films” as just one indication of how necessary this is (<https://youtu.be/NUPIYMjC4FY>).

MARKET SIZE

Global appetite for African film and television content is unknown if only because the economic potential of the film and audiovisual sectors remains largely untapped, with the African film industry overall continuing to be structurally underfunded, underdeveloped and undervalued.

From a 2021 UNESCO study: according to the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI), the industry generates \$5 billion in annual revenue out of a potential \$20 billion.

At Akoroko, we're more optimistic.

A key factor in the industry's potential as we see it: in Sub-Saharan Africa, internet use is the lowest of any region in the world, broadband coverage is significantly lower than global averages, and high data costs have proved a barrier to adoption, according to the World Bank.

On a continent of 1.2 billion people, more than 60% are without broadband access due to either lack of service, or existing service is unaffordable.

In time, with efforts to further democratize access to broadband internet on the continent by companies like Google, Facebook, and Tesla, we believe Africa will see tremendous growth in the film and television sector, as more of the population gets online. Demand for content (especially locally-created) should only increase.

And that's just in Africa.

As a globally accessible platform, Akoroko is targeting a global video streaming market projected to reach \$972 billion by 2030, according to a [May 2022 report](#) by Market Research Future.

Google Equiano: Internet giant bets big on Africa with latest megaproject

By Tom Page, CNN

Updated 3:50 AM EDT, Mon August 8, 2022



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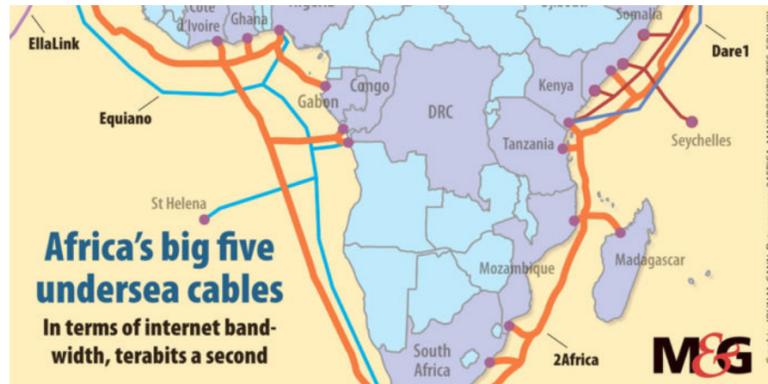
courtesy Desert Pearl Photography/Paratus

Google Equiano is a subsea internet cable running from Portugal to South Africa, with 20 times the bandwidth of the previous cable serving the west coast of Africa. It has the potential to increase internet speeds five-fold in some countries and reduce data costs, according to research commissioned by Google.

← →

Inside Facebook's big bet on Africa

Matthew Du Plessis | 25 May 2020 | Mail & Guardian



Last week Facebook unveiled its 2Africa undersea cable project, which will circle the continent, connecting it to Europe and the Middle East. When it is operational in 2023 it will increase bandwidth to the continent by a massive 180 terabits per second.

COMPETITION

MUBI and Criterion Channel are Akoroko's primary competitors. Both have successfully combined curated streaming of foreign titles (including a few African films) with journalism components.

Although, Akoroko's ambition in African film criticism, conversation, analysis, cataloging, and exhibition, is unmatched, and perfectly timed, as rapid economic and social change across the continent, "is becoming hard to ignore," according to a [March 2020 special report](#) by The Economist. And they're certainly not alone with that view.

When Akoroko LLC founder Tambay Obenson launched the popular Black film and television platform Shadow and Act in 2009, critical appreciation for Black American cinema was mostly confined to the halls of academia. Shadow and Act played a significant role in mainstreaming that appreciation. The same can be said about critical appreciation for African cinema today. And what Shadow and Act did for Black American cinema, Akoroko will do (and more) for African cinema.

TRACTION

Industry interest in Akoroko has already led to the development of potential partnerships with reputable industry professionals and organizations on all three continents (which can't be shared publicly at this time), as founder Tambay A. Obenson's expertise in the space has been sought, and his shift to African cinema exclusively has excited many for whom a bridge has been elusive.

Additionally, via the Twitter accounts of both Akoroko and Tambay (where we've so far most engaged with our target markets), African films and television series, as well as African writers and directors, are being exposed to audiences entirely unfamiliar with them. They are curated feeds, highlighting contemporary African feature films daily, serving as a tease to the eventual streaming service, while also providing an education via short documentaries, contextual essays written by African writers, analysis, original reporting, and more.

The response has been tremendous. The Akoroko Twitter account alone has doubled its follower count each of the three months it's been active.



Prismic Reality
@eluborode



Replying to [@TambayObenson](#)

Yours is a 'meeting of minds' - gonna catch on quick; it's pretty valuable...onwards and upwards! 💪

11:57 AM · Aug 12, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone



Olivia Biffot
@oliviabiffot



Replying to [@TambayObenson](#)

Bravo !! You're a trailblazer 🔥

6:44 PM · Aug 12, 2022 · Twitter Web App

Followers are diverse and global — journalists, curators, programmers, filmmakers, producers, artists, and more, including blue-check luminaries like Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)

chief Cameron Bailey, African American multi-hyphenate, multidisciplinary artist Saul Williams, and Zimbabwean author and scholar Zoé Samudzi.

TEAM

Tambay A. Obenson

Born in Nigeria, and spreading his formative years across three countries — Nigeria, Cameroon, and the United States where he's currently based — film journalist Tambay Obenson has been a thought leader and one of the most respected voices in the global Black cinema critic space for many years.

It's a journey that began with his previous platform Shadow & Act (which he founded in 2009 and sold to Blavity in 2017), and continued on Indiewire where he covered this space from 2018 - 2022, and is now building a new platform called Akoroko that will be dedicated to this vision.



Nijla1 ✓
@nijla1

I miss the old days of Shadow & Act. It was a hub of black film criticism, indie film community, & dialogue. thankful I got to be a part of it. I loved interviewing filmmakers abt craft & writing thoughtful essays & reviews of films. Thanks [@TambayObenson](#) for creating that space

9:18 AM · Sep 16, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Tambay co-founded the joint venture Shadow and Act Films LLC in 2010, a film financing and production initiative which focused on backing artistically-inspired, culturally relevant films by black filmmakers, via an annual competition that provided production funds to filmmakers with winning screenplays.

Tambay also co-founded and curated the renowned New Voices in Black Cinema Film Festival, which ran for nine years, taking place annually at BAMCinemathek in Brooklyn, NY.

He's been invited to speak at academic institutions, including Yale University, moderate and participate in numerous panel discussions, lend his expertise as a consultant, and mentor up-and-coming film professionals.

During the course of 15 years, Tambay has become a trusted and influential voice in cinema of Africa and its global diaspora, as a trailblazer, as well as a dependable source for both audiences and industry professionals.



Aaron Stewart-Ahn ✓
@somebadideas



Tambay's one of best people I ever followed on here and his twitter & new site [@akorokoafrika](#) are essential film follows



Tambay Obenson ✓ @TambayObenson · Jun 3

This, I did not know. Lifted from >> "Haile Gerima on the Need for African Filmmakers to Reflect on a Continent That 'Lost Its Mind' [okayafrica.com/haile-gerima-s...](#)

[Show this thread](#)

Farima Kone Kito

Originally from Burkina Faso, Farima grew up in Dakar, Senegal — a designated global hub for modern and contemporary arts on the African continent — where she was exposed to and developed a strong passion for the visual arts, fashion, and African cinema.

Specifically influenced by her experience as a Black and Muslim immigrant, with a background in African and African American Studies, Media Studies, and the Performing Arts, Farima has successfully combined and funneled her collective experiences into work as a curator with a keen eye, and culture critic, whose reflections are often filtered through concepts of identity reconstruction in a post-colonial West African context.

A member of the African Film Festival, Inc. (AFF) team, and its flagship program, the prestigious New York African Film Festival (NYAFF), Farima joined Akoroko in July 2022 as a project manager, working with Tambay Obenson in developing and implementing the company's various business strategies.

She is currently based in New York City.

CROWDFUNDING

So far, Akoroko has been almost an entirely one-man operation. For the platform to be successful, I need help. One key lesson I learned from my years running Shadow and Act is that I can't do this alone, and I'm humble enough to know where my strengths and weaknesses lie.

The funds raised will serve to cover operating costs over five to six months, in order to best position Akoroko to seek seed funding that will carry it forward.

Amount

Seeking \$75K-150K to cover operating expenses through the end of 2023, to implement strategies that will put Akoroko in a position to raise seed funding.

Allocation

Key staff (fulltime and parttime): Tambay A. Obenson, Farima Kone Kito

Journalism: writers (criticism, interviews, analyses, essays, firsthand reporting), and podcast team support for audio and video (one episode a month).

Technical: platform hosting, front and backend technical support (freelance contractor).

Legal: An attorney to draft and look over necessary contracts and other legal documents, as well as advise on legal matters whenever necessary.

Publicity: an experienced publicist for brand messaging, identifying branding opportunities and lead publicity efforts.

Financing: Fundraising manager responsible for overseeing all financing opportunities.

Travel: Film festival and market coverage, which also provide networking opportunities, on-the-ground intel gathering in key markets: Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya.

A rudimentary breakdown:

Monthly Budget: September 2022 - February 2023		
Service	Monthly	Total
Writer Compensation (one story a day, Monday through Friday - all original writing)	\$ 6,000.00	\$36,000
Podcast episode production (one episode a month for 6 months)	\$ 1,500.00	\$9,000
Legal	\$ 3,000.00	\$18,000
Staff compensation (one full-time; one part-time)	\$ 7,500.00	\$45,000
I.T. professional for tech needs (backend and frontend)	\$ 1,500.00	\$9,000
Fundraising Specialist	\$ 1,800.00	\$10,800
Publicist (branding, marketing realization)	\$ 2,000.00	\$12,000
Travel for Festival, Conference, Market (Sundance, FESPACO, PAFF, Berlin, Rotterdam — all early 2023)**		\$10,000
** There are ways to navigate these spaces virtually. Ideally, we would attend in person for a complete experience, which better accomodates networking opportunities		
Total	\$23,300	\$149,800

Africa as a region is overflowing with creativity, and its untapped filmmaking landscape is one of the richest and most diverse areas in the world. It has the potential to disrupt stereotypes and economies, while cementing identity within communities.

This is the environment that is Akoroko's entry point. Please join us at www.gofundme.com/f/akoroko-african-cinema.