

# BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

## The Current State of Cinema in the Indian Ocean Islands

Insights and Assessment from the 2014, 2015 and 2016  
Film Bazar Forums.



Avec la contribution financière de l'Union Européenne et le concours du Groupe des États ACP



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## Introduction

Since their creation, the festivals CIFF (Comoros), RFC (Madagascar), Île Courts (Mauritius) and FIFAI (Réunion) have been leading the debate around the ways to develop regional cinema in the Indian Ocean. This document is the result of an ongoing, 10-year-old conversation, much of which took place between 2014-2016 at the three Film Bazar Forums which were consecutively held in Mauritius, Réunion and the Comoros in the framework of the project l'Archipel des Cinémas (An Archipelago of Cinemas), beneficiary of the program ACP Culture + which is financed by the European Union and supported by the ACP Group of States.

## Foreword

### Background and Context

In the southwestern part of the Indian Ocean, cinematic production is well-established in Madagascar, is budding in the Comoros and has remained at an embryonic stage for many years in Réunion. In Mauritius, it started with sporadic attempts at making home movies in the 1950s.

Films first appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first screenings of French films in the Indian Ocean islands date back to 1896.

The first shootings on these islands date back to the 1930s, with André Albany's film about the volcano in Réunion for the 1931 colonial exhibition, and with Philippe Raberojo's "Rasamala Maritioral" in Madagascar in 1937. In the years after, the great majority of films were shot by foreign directors (for example, "The Mermaid of the Mississippi" by François Truffaut, filmed in Réunion in the 1960s).

Madagascar has a rich and unique film history that was born in the midst of colonial politics. The first film, "Rasamala Maritioral," was the work of missionaries in the 1930s. An unproductive period followed the independence, gained in 1960, but the art underwent a revival in the mid 70s with the socialist-communist wave.

Malagasy filmmakers were the first to receive proper training. The socialist-communist wave of the 1970s allowed Ignace Solo Randrasana, Benoît Ramampy and Raymond Rajaonarivelo to attend film school in Russia. The aim was to make propaganda films.

The first Réunionese filmmakers emerged in the 1980s, led by Jim Damour, Sandro Agénor, Madeleine Beauséjour and Aliocha, who made the first feature-length film, "Le Moutardier."

In Mauritius, the Mauritius Film Development Corporation (MFDC) was created in 1986 as the public body in charge of the development of the film industry. However, because of its lack of organizational structuring and stability, it was never able to meet the needs of local film professionals. In 2005, the MFDC published a kit on the local film heritage. They were Roger Long Piew's films. This body sporadically organized a few training courses and small festivals in an attempt to nurture local filmmaking. Another of its aims has been to facilitate the process for foreign directors to obtain permits to shoot on the island.

In the 1980s, diasporic filmmakers who had been trained abroad, such as Rada Jaganathen, returned to the country to start making films here.

In the 1990s, Réunion launched a movement for film training. It put the fundamentals in place, first in photography and then in cinema, in the town of Le Port, at the association Village Titan and the Institut de l'Image de l'Océan Indien/Indian Ocean Image Institute (at the initiative of Alain Gili and Alain Séraphine).

Réunion already had a film library, hosted by the réunionese centre for cultural activities, which no longer exists today.

In the southwestern Indian Ocean, and especially in Madagascar, the 1990s were a barren period, one lacking in creative dynamism, for cinema. Cinema halls were closed and often transformed into places of worship (like on the mainland African continent). The filmmaking sector was substantially weakened, and this wasn't helped by the exodus of young people who would come to constitute the diaspora. International financial assistance directed towards the cinemas of the so-called "Global South" also dwindled.

In the 2000s, diasporic filmmakers returned to the country to revive filmmaking through the implementation of festivals. The following were successively launched:

2003: Festival International du Film d'Afrique et des Îles/International Festival for African and Island Films (a follow-up to the meetings around cinema from Africa and the islands, initiated in 1993, with a chapter in the Mayotte village of Tsararano in 1996), in Port in Réunion.

2005: Les Rencontres du Film Court (RFC)/Meeting Around Short Films, in Madagascar

2007: Île Courts – Festival international de court-métrage de Maurice/Île Courts – International Short Film Festival of Mauritius

2011: Comoros International Film Festival (CIFF)

In 2001, a regional film commission (ADCAM) was established in Réunion: it later became the Agence Film Réunion (Film Réunion Bureau). It served as model for the other overseas French departments. This bureau is jointly managed by professionals and Région Réunion and is tied to the Economic Office.

In Mauritius, the Mauritius Film Development Corporation, created in 1986, organized multiple short training courses: the Varan workshops, François Leroy's courses at the Charles Baudelaire Centre (which is now the French Cultural Institute) which helped train many local professionals. A few short film festivals were also set up, and films were screened in collaboration with embassies, helping foster local interest in cinema.

In the Seychelles, Sinésésel was an association founded in 2008 by Mira Savy in collaboration with the Festival Kreol. It is no longer active.

An observation that can be gleaned from this regional history is that festivals have acted as telltale sign for the lack of professional resources in this sector when they should have merely been platforms for diffusion.

For a decade now, we have been witnessing an increasing desire and effort for collaboration between the festivals of the Indian Ocean. Everything started with the realization that amount of films produced in the region remains very low, even as there existed festivals to promote them. This is how the Film Bazar Forum was born as a platform to exchange knowledge gained from experience as well as reflect on how to (re)structure the professional field.

# The Current State of Cinema in the Indian Ocean Islands

Revolving around the trio of training, creation and distribution, the three years of roundtable discussions of the Film Bazar Forum and the ten years of cooperation between the four film festivals of our region have yielded the following insights:

## Training

In Réunion, film training facilities were set up in the town of Port in the mid-1990s, at the initiative of the association Village Titan. This was soon followed by the setting up of the Institut de l'image de l'océan Indien (ILOI)/Indian Ocean Image Institute and the art school École supérieure d'Art de la Réunion. Arrangements for film education also started to be made by the the French National Education and the socio-educational sector.

The other islands (Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros) face the same difficulties in training filmmakers: there is still no opportunity for training in these places. For around a decade, festivals have thus been trying to address this shortcoming by offering short-term training which helps foster interest and dynamism in cinema, but its impact remains limited because of the duration. In the Comoros, it should be noted that it is mainly members of the diaspora, who have been trained abroad, who are involved in filmmaking.

## Creation

Overall, efforts have been made in Mauritius and Réunion to develop the film industry, mostly because these two places encourage foreign filmmakers to use the islands as shooting locations. However, cinema is an art that must also be developed locally, or else it runs the risk of getting disconnected from the issues of local citizens, letting foreigners "represent," even "define," who we are.

This said, one barrier seems to have been overcome in Réunion, where the development of local cinema has started to be taken seriously, what with the increase in financial assistance and launching of initiatives like writing residencies for both fiction and documentaries. There nevertheless still exist discrepancies between metropolitan policy and the realities of the territory.

In Mauritius, the association Porteurs d'Images has been driving and supporting the production of short films in the framework of the Île Courts Festival since 2007. Between 2005 and 2006, the Mauritius Film Development Corporation created a support fund, today nonexistent, for local film. For some years now, a Film Rebate Scheme has been available in Mauritius to both foreigners and local citizens. However, this program does not support short films. Moreover, it invites applications only for projects with production costs that are often too high for aspiring Mauritian directors. A few well-experienced filmmakers manage to complete their feature-length film projects, but young filmmakers find themselves trapped between a lack of financial support from the state and very tough international competition.

In the Comoros, a burgeoning film industry is still looking for support systems from public bodies and the private sector. The CIFF (a festival which lends dynamism to the field) seems to be following the Mauritian example in terms of chaperoning and supporting the projects of young filmmakers. Production remains sporadic and poorly supported on the regional and international levels.

In Madagascar, film production received a little bit of support from the Office du Cinéma Malagasy (Omasi/Malagasy Cinema Bureau, via a poorly-endowed fund, Asa Sary. Filmmakers receive support from the resources of festivals (RFC) or the DOC OI (of Doc Monde) program in Tamatave for documentaries. Other filmmakers are self-funded or create pools of collective funding among themselves. Few are able to reach the international level, due to a lack of sufficient funds to work in good conditions.

### **Distribution and Diffusion**

On this matter, we observe two states of affairs which, while different, lead to the same outcome:

- on the one hand, Mauritius and Réunion possess commercial movie theatres but are very hesitant to screen local films (even when the latter have been met with a good deal of success from the public);
- on the other hand, Madagascar and the Comoros no longer have movie theatres and have very few locales for screenings.

Our islands have few film distributors, with the exception of a historic and independent distributor in Réunion, Ohana Cinéma. An African distributor is based on the west coast of Mauritius, but he specializes in TV serials for the African market. These distributors remain quite uninterested in local and regional productions. In Madagascar and the Comoros, this essential link in the chain of the cinema industry barely exists.

There exists a certain interest in TV productions, but complications around copyright payments in certain places like the Comoros and Madagascar constitute an obstacle. This often leads to drawn-out negotiations and deadlocks. Given that most regional TV channels rely on limited financial, technical and human resources, the importance of local productions remains a sensitive issue when it comes to respecting the copyright of filmmakers.

Only Réunion Première, and to a lesser extent Mayotte Première, have policies that support local cinematographic creation. Canal+ is under the obligation to invest in the ROM region via Canal Overseas. In other countries, Canal+ exists only as a content provider, but not as a distributor in its own right. In the 2000s, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) solicited programs from independent producers – with certain specified requirements – and also bought local films.

TV channels, like every other distribution channel, are not to be overlooked, and we must look further ahead, geographically-speaking, by starting to sell our films to foreign channels. We would face tough competition in this enterprise, however. We must note that few international channels buy African content.

A first observation is that it is imperative to (re)structure the three main axes of the field (training, production, distribution).

# Training

## Observations

### **Public policies differ by country**

- in the process of development in countries like Madagascar and the Comoros
- fairly well-established: France with the effort of both the state and the territory and in Mauritius via Porteurs d'Images

### **Professional contexts differ by country**

**Teaching and training facilities differ by availability and quality** from country to country, with limited means and poor prospects for long-term sustainability:

- associations and festivals for Mauritius, Madagascar and the Comoros,
- a developing private sector in Réunion
- very few enduring facilities (ILOI in Réunion)

### **Limited or unsuitable resources for creating trainers** (no courses for new trainers)

- limited resources in countries with a film history: Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion
- on-and-off availability of resources in all the islands that are detached from the local cultural realities (norms, literature...)

**Tools to spot budding talents** (older filmmakers tend to make themselves inaccessible to younger ones), how to find young people with a talent for film? A debate should be led around this.

- emerging professional associations with limited means
- one-time training courses by festivals with limited impact

### **Other factors that impede development:**

- the absence of film criticism
- the absence or weakness of collective organizations which have project ideas
- the private sector (producers) is more interested in training people for technical skills than artistic creation. Poor interprofessional dynamic (eg: exchange of visiting professionals) between the islands.
- difficult to track the career progress of young filmmakers
- a general lack of understanding of the professional and cultural context as well as the procedures to support young talents
- lack of a catalogue that comprehensively catalogues all available resources
- difficult to find or create appropriate workspaces (such as universities, except for the University of Mauritius and, to a lesser extent, that of the Comoros)
- barriers to regional and international mobility
- no efficient cultural policies and public bodies at the state level

## Recommendations

Promote public policies that support professional film training

Promote the teaching of film theory (film criticism and culture) and technique in their own right

Support initiatives for film education, whether they are designed for young people or the general public

Set in place a program for film education in the official school curriculum

Encourage the hiring of trainers from the Indian Ocean region who are more intimately acquainted with regional social realities

Acknowledge and support the activities of festivals in their goals of educating people about cinema and helping develop the cinema industries of the Indian Ocean

Important to develop resource centres (like film archives) for all audiences

# Production

## Observations

The level of coproduction is very low in the region. Production is mainly limited to each territory.

- production of short fiction films, documentaries and animations, but few feature-length films
- most film projects suffer from a glaring lack of support and funding when it comes to production. Production is the weak link in the chain, given that there are few people with project ideas and they are often poorly trained, hence their vulnerable position
- some training courses revolving around production have been organized, but they are too often copied on the French model
- production companies tend to focus on a single director/ auteur, even a single film. Few or none are dedicated to production in the broader sense and open to all kinds of projects, notably collaborative ones. Coproduction remains difficult to implement because the protection legislation, rules, conditions, expectations and tariffs of each territory are extremely different: it is difficult to harmonize them within a single project.
- there exist few gathering places in the region that might foster coproduction. Professionals meet mainly during festivals (RFC in Madagascar, Île Courts in Maurice, CIFF in the Comoros, FIFAI in Réunion) or during scriptwriting workshops, notably that of DOC OI in Tamatave (Madagascar) dedicated to documentaries. This is why the Film Bazar Forum, from 2014 to 2016, has tried to address this shortcoming by convening different stakeholders of the development of the film industry of the Indian Ocean in a structured and regular manner
- few funds are dedicated to and available for local production and regional coproduction:
  - A support fund exists for the overseas department of Réunion, but it is poorly adapted for coproducing projects with the other islands. There exists a well-developed Film Bureau to host and support foreign films being shot locally;
  - The Film Rebate Scheme of the Board of Investment (BOI) exists in Mauritius, but it is more targeted at foreign productions (with production costs of at least \$100,000);
    - The Fonds de soutien privé/The Private Support Fund (Vima/Festival RFC) exists in Madagascar. It is a fund and shooting office of the state's Film Bureau.

## Recommendations

Encourage the emergence of production companies with a global strategy which aim to develop a profitable business, take on regional coproduction projects, create a catalogue of Indian Ocean films which have the potential to be exported, with the condition of first endorsing young talents and promoting high-quality projects.

Encourage the development of a distribution network of regional films. Raise awareness among production companies about distribution, especially as a means of investing into new projects. Promote the emergence of at least one distribution structure focusing on regional works.

Put in place a catalogue of regional works (website, PDF catalogue, brochure, etc). Promote the construction of thriving movie theatres (or other locales for screenings) in the region's countries. Encourage the screening of these regional works in the area; increase their visibility.

Encourage distributors of the region to coproduce and distribute local films. Ensure that the films are sold at a decent price. Try to have some slots reserved for local films.

Work for the creation of a support fund in each country which is open to coproductions with other countries of the region.

Work for the creation of a regional support fund for film production and distribution (for example, in the framework of the IOC).

Encourage the designing of training courses about film production in keeping with regional cultural issues and themes. Work on the setting up of curricula in keeping with the production already taking place in existing structures.

Encourage local banks to provide financial assistance to the treasuries of production companies, or even invest in specific film projects.

# Distribution

## Observations

Distribution is one source of funding (linked to production) to make new films and increase the films' visibility. It is one of the most important links in the filmmaking chain. This link is comprised of distributors, operators, exporters and buyers whose sellers or renters are the producers and distributors.

## Distribution and the Local Public

In the Indian Ocean territories – Madagascar, the Comoros, Réunion and Mauritius – the public is mainly exposed to commercial cinema like Hollywood and Bollywood blockbusters. The distribution and diffusion of a different type of cinema, notably that of the Indian Ocean, remains difficult and marginalized. And yet, these films depict social realities unique to the region and allow for the creation of spaces for dialogue around regional issues.

### Movie Theatres

On this matter, we can observe two different states of affairs which nevertheless have the same outcome:

- on the one hand, Mauritius and Réunion have commercial movie theatres.
- on the other hand, Madagascar and the Comoros no longer have movie theatres and have very few spaces where screenings are possible.

We must highlight the importance of theatre releases, given that:

- they greatly increase the commercial / financial success of the films
- they grant more visibility and prestige to the films
- they allow for an ideal viewing environment for the audience

### Television

Sales to local TV channels in the Comoros, in Madagascar and in Mauritius becomes problematic when met with these bodies' lack of resources and their policy concerning copyright. Local and national TV channels often have an opposite vision of how things should be. They consider diffusion to be a form of marketing for local filmmakers. They are also uninterested in making efforts to look for private funding (through advertising) which would allow them to finance programs.

Moreover, any deals struck with these channels are often abruptly terminated when the political parties in power in the government change.

### DVDs

DVD media makes sales possible in stores.

Conventional sale spots: bookstores and supermarkets. However, revenues from these sales are slight because of the reality of piracy (which constitutes an informal economic sector in itself) and the popularity of online video-watching, like everywhere else in the world.

The DVDs produced up to now have mainly been sold to a niche comprised of the educated elite which consider them as items to be gifted or collected.

### **Alternative Distribution Channels**

In the Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius, there exists a strong, visible and tolerated market for pirated DVDs. Being cheaper, they are bought by a very large public, oftentimes one with limited purchasing power. This distribution channel also gives us access to audiences who might not necessarily have access to the conventional cultural circuit in which festivals find themselves.

Street television or small, informal movie halls exist in the Comoros and Madagascar to make up for the lack of proper movie theatres. They are very popular and bring together onlookers and regulars of all kinds. They primarily screen blockbusters and commercial American, European and Asian films.

### **The Internet**

Official streaming websites like Netflix are alternative distribution/ diffusion channels that are growing exponentially worldwide, including in the Indian Ocean. Socioeconomic differences within a single population obviously play a role in differential levels of Internet access.

### **Festivals**

In each of these territories, festivals are one of the highlights of local/ regional cinema, creating spaces for its valorization. These festivals lay out strategies to make culture more democratically available to all kinds of audiences, notably young ones.

## **International Distribution and Diffusion**

### **Movie Theatres**

International theatrical releases of films made in the Indian Ocean remains minimal and limited to arthouse cinema halls.

### **Television**

Foreign television represents an indispensable distribution channel, but it remains very difficult to penetrate. Indeed, it is becoming less and less financially possible to do so.

### **DVDs**

The sale of DVDs abroad is a possible venture, but it remains quasi nonexistent.

### **The Internet**

The Internet also represents a distribution channel, but it hasn't been explored in a concrete manner yet.

## **Festivals**

Regional productions tend to be mostly short films and these circulate well in international film festivals.

The selection of Indian Ocean films for international festivals is an acknowledgement of their quality and grants them an added value.

The prizes won at these festivals also contribute to this.

Diffusion in festivals also allows the films to reach wider audiences.

## **Recommendations**

Develop audiences for local and regional films by having them screened in theatres, during festivals, on local TV channels and via film education initiatives.

Develop ways to distribute these films internationally, notably in festivals, on streaming platforms as well as through traditional channels, in order to heighten their visibility and valorize them.

Make it possible for distribution to fund further film production through the imposition of taxes on audiovisual cultural products (especially foreign ones).

Keep making efforts to convince existing commercial movie theatres of the untapped potential in screening local films.

Use community networks to set in place alternative screening locales.

Explore the new diffusion channels represented by the Internet and digital tools.

Think about alternative solutions that are more in line with local consumption habits (for example, by using alternative channels like the Nigerian marketeers of Nollywood).

Think about ways to ensure that copyright issues are respected, all while keeping local realities in mind.

Create a comprehensive catalogue of all Indian Ocean films which would collectively give them more international visibility.

Think about how to create a distribution organization linking together all the Indian Ocean islands.

# Charter for Collaboration between Festivals of the Indian Ocean Islands

## CHARTER FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE FILM FESTIVALS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

### Introduction

This charter inscribes itself into the conclusions for cooperation established between festivals through the Film Bazar Forum and supported by the program ACP Cultures + in the framework of the project L'Archipel des Cinémas (An Archipelago of Cinemas).

The signatory festivals of the charter

- ÎLE COURTS-FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU COURT MÉTRAGE DE MAURICE/ ÎLE COURTS – INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL OF MAURITIUS (PORTEURS D'IMAGES / Mauritius)
- RENCONTRES DU FILM COURT/ MEETING AROUND SHORT FILMS (RFC / Madagascar)
- COMOROS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (CIFF / Comoros)
- FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM D'AFRIQUE ET DES ÎLES/ INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FOR AFRICAN AND ISLAND FILMS (FIFAI / Réunion)

Herein referred to as signatory parties

This charter's signatory parties, constituting an "ad hoc committee," commit themselves to respect the following rules:

- They need to possess the professional qualifications and usage rights required by their countries' legislation.
- They need to subscribe to the insurances necessary for the protection of individuals and the operation of venues where events pertaining to their activities take place.
- They must remunerate artists and film professionals who participate or collaborate in their events as per the existing labour laws in their countries.
- They must pay authors' rights fees in line with the existing legislation in their countries. The aforementioned festivals commit themselves to respecting authors' rights for works which they screen by remunerating the directors (screening rights), or, in the absence of resources for remuneration, inviting these directors to their festivals.

### Goals

- Artistic Development

The signatory parties commit themselves to promoting the production, marketing and circulation of films from each member state as well as collaborative projects. They support the development and diffusion of films from the Indian Ocean region as well as other films which are relevant to the region's countries.

- Exchange

The signatory parties commit themselves to creating opportunities for exchanges and interaction between film professionals from the different member states, all for an overarching goal of mutual enrichment.

- Mutualisation

The signatory parties will encourage the mutualisation of organizational and communications experience (festival magazines, informational newsletters, press relations...).

- Representation

The signatory parties will work for their collective representation vis-à-vis different local and foreign institutions that are relevant to their work and area.

### Means

The signatory parties will pursue the aforementioned goals using all the means at their disposal, especially the following:

- Regular meetings between members and relevant individuals and organizations depending on the topics covered.
- The designation of one or more representatives/ task officers.
- The search for funding from regional, national and international institutions.
- The use of communications tools common to all the parties, or those of individual festivals.