**TOWARDS A POLICY AND STRATEGIES FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE**

**INTRODUCTION**

The initiative to produce a document outlining a vision for the contemporary South African theatre sector arises from Kuns Onbeperk, the holding company for – amongst others – the ABSA Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK) in Oudsthoorn, and its desire to employ its networks, access to expertise and resources beyond its traditional base, and in the service of the larger arts (and in this particular case, theatre) community.

In association with the South African chapter of Arterial Network, ASSITEJ, PANSA and strategic theatre individuals, Kuns Onbeperk hosted two theatre indabas, one in Cape Town and another in Johannesburg, each with a limited number of participants in order to interrogate the state of the theatre industry as rigorously as possible.

A range of recommendations emerged from these indabas based on swot analyses undertaken at both, and this document builds on those recommendations as well as other recommendations that have been made in the past, particularly on the 2005 study and recommendations undertaken by the Performing Arts Network of South Africa (PANSA), *Towards an Understanding of the South African Theatre Industry*.

The aim of this document is to serve as a basis for extensive consultation among the widest possible range of stakeholders in the theatre community, in order to generate sufficient consensus to move forward in the interests of South African theatre, its practitioners and all those who make (at least some of) their livelihoods from the sector.

While it is recognized that government at all levels – national, provincial and local – are responsible for devising and implementing policies affecting the arts, Civil Society is also a key driver and implementer of strategies that serve its interests. Whatever mechanism emerges out of this process to drive the agree proposals, will need to engage with government, the private sector and other macro players such as the National Arts Council and Lottery, but it is intended that such a mechanism will also engage with and mobilise the theatre community itself to take ownership of and to engage in collaborative partnerships to secure the best outcomes, with or without the participation of the state.

**CURRENT POLICY INFORMING THE THEATRE SECTOR**

1. **White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage**

The policy governing the performing arts – and theatre in particular - is contained in the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage adopted by Cabinet in August 1996.

Some of the principal ideas were:

* the performing arts companies attached to the former performing arts councils were to become independent over a three year period and diversify their funding sources
* the performing arts infrastructure would be freed up to become “receiving houses” available for rent
* national government would reduce expenditure on the performing arts infrastructure with provincial and local government picking up the major costs
* the funding cut from the performing arts councils would be channelled to independent theatre-makers and other art forms via the National Arts Council

The White Paper is a product of its time, a time of limited funding for the Department of Arts and Culture. In 1996, when the White Paper was adopted, the budget for the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology was R535m, shared between the two legs, with Arts and Culture being allocated less than 50% (or a maximum R270 million). Today, 16 years later, the budget for the stand-alone Department of Arts and Culture is about ten times that amount - R2, 68 billion.

Even in 2005/6, the total allocation to the six subsidised theatres was R97,7 million while just seven years later, for the financial year 2012/13, it has just about doubled to R190,6 million.

In 1996, the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund had not been established and it has become the single most important source of new funding for the arts. In the last financial year (ending 31 March 2012), R495 million was available for distribution to arts, culture and heritage projects.

The key conclusion is that there is significantly more funding available for arts and culture activities in contemporary South Africa than was the case 18 years ago, which provides a different context for policy formulation with regard to the arts generally, and theatre in particular.

1. **Mzansi Golden Economy**

The Department of Arts and Culture held consultative forums with the arts community in 2012 around its vision of the Mzansi Golden Economy, essentially a programme through which the arts and culture sector would contribute to government’s New Growth Path goal of creating 5 million jobs over 10 years. This programme emphasizes a creative industries approach linked to tourism, identified as a priority economic activity that would create more jobs.

We generally employ the British definition of the creative industries as

“those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.”

However, theatre is hardly mentioned in the Mzansi Golden Economy document with craft, music, publishing, film and even clothing and mineral beneficiation receiving greater emphasis. This is similar to the shift in government policy in the 1990s from the human rights based approach of the 1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage which emphasized the principles of “access to all” to a creative industries approach – the 1997 Cultural Industries Growth Strategy - that favoured craft, music, publishing and film.

Ironically, given that the aims of the Mzansi Golden Economy are essentially around job-creation, the theatre sector is labour-intensive, providing jobs for actors, directors, designers, stage managers, etc, but unlike books, CDs, DVDs and pieces of craft, plays cannot be easily exported around the country or internationally. They require greater funding than what a market-driven approach – which is what the creative industries are about – can deliver.

While there are some proposals in the Mzansi Golden Economy programme that can be of use to the theatre sector e.g. artist-in-residency programmes at schools, companies that promote local and international tours, events that celebrate creativity, the creative industries model is one that prejudices theatre.

The starting point of this policy approach is “job creation” rather than the best interests of the arts and culture sector generally or of theatre in particular. The challenge for theatre practitioners then is either to articulate their interests in terms of this approach, or to engage in a separate initiative to advance their sector.

The one-size-fits-all creative industries approach does not recognize differences between sectors e.g. the differences between contemporary music and theatre, and deal with them accordingly. Neither does it recognize differences within particular disciplines e.g. orchestral music that requires a large orchestra and so creates jobs, but is dependent on subsidy versus pop music sustained in the market place. Similarly, in the theatre, musicals and stand-up comedy are commercially viable practices while drama is less so.

**TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH TO THEATRE POLICY**

Rather than a job creation imperative, it is proposed that a starting point for the development of and support for the theatre sector be “who are we making theatre for?” This is not simply a question of audience development and of identifying and developing new local, national and international markets for South African theatre, as important as that is; this is more fundamentally a question about the right of all South Africans to have access to theatre that speaks or responds to their conditions.

South Africa has a population of more than 50 million. It is a country increasingly divided according to economic well-being with 20% of the population earning 70% of the national income and the poorest 20% earning 7% of the national income. More than 25% of economically active people are unemployed. Of those who have jobs, 60% earn R2500 or less per month. Nearly 50% of the country’s population live on less than the poverty measure of $2 per day.

Theatre does not take place in a vacuum but rather within a society that, in our case, reflects a diverse reality of a relatively small world that is sophisticated, resourced, educated and with disposable income to form a market for creative industries and on the other hand a much larger world characterized by poverty, poor education, lack of access to infrastructure and no disposable income beyond that which is needed simply to survive.

A creative industries approach (where “the market” is the key sustaining force) to theatre would exclude the overwhelming majority of the country’s population from access to theatre, in the same way that they were excluded during the apartheid era. A human rights approach – the premise of the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage – would seek to make theatre accessible to all people in the country, irrespective of whether they had the means to purchase tickets or not. The latter approach would require greater government and other public agency support e.g. from the lottery, while the creative industries approach would rely primarily on the market and on private sector companies intent on reaching, or consolidating their brands within, particular markets.

The theatre sector – as with many other arts sectors – is characterized by three broad areas of practice:

1. theatre for its own sake, generally created less out of an understanding of “what the market wants” and more because of what the creator – the writer/director wants to explore, or say. Such theatre is generally supported by an agency such as the National Arts Council or a festival or theatre.
2. theatre instrumentalised for a socially-good end e.g. theatre to educate communities about health issues. Such theatre is generally supported by government departments responsible for social welfare, health, etc, international aid agencies or the Corporate Social Investment budgets of private sector companies and
3. theatre for economic profit i.e. where government subsidies are not pursued or where theatre is not presented in a “not-for-profit” paradigm, but rather one of the key intentions is to generate profit for the producers e.g. stand-up comedy and large scale musicals. These forms are generally supported by the marketing budgets of private sector companies and/or by the markets they generate, with initial investment made by the producers themselves.

In South Africa, with its large population and great inequities, all three of these areas of practice are valid. Policy – and resultant strategies and funding – needs to take cognizance of this and be multi-layered, nuanced and complex in order to ensure that all enjoy the fundamental human right to participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts (Article 27: Universal Declaration of Human Rights). There is sufficient funding available in contemporary South Africa to make this right more of a reality than is currently the case.

**SWOT ANALYSIS**

In seeking to make specific recommendations for future strategies to grow the theatre sector, it is necessary to undertake an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats pertaining to the sector currently. Here follows key strengths and opportunities, weaknesses and threats with a fuller list appended hereto.

**Strengths**

1. Excellent infrastructure to create and distribute theatre (university, public and private theatres and festivals) exists.
2. Excellent training institutions produce quality actors and theatre-makers.
3. There is funding for theatre (festivals, theatres, private sector, funding agencies, the lottery, private patrons, etc)

**Weaknesses**

1. Government policy that regards publicly-funded theatres as “receiving houses” and does not make significant funding available for theatres to produce, commission or purchase work.
2. Available funding is made available without coordination and vision for how the theatre industry could develop and what it needs so that such funding is not maximized.
3. Work in the sector is ad hoc with few companies and opportunities for actors to hone their skills on an ongoing basis.

**Opportunities**

1. Renewed international interest in South African theatre e.g. Edinburgh festival create potential markets for local theatre.
2. The growth of the economy means that new local markets with disposable income are being developed.

**Threats**

1. Polarisation on racial and class lines limit co-operation within and the potential impact of the theatre community.
2. Censorship in various forms and political correctness limit freedom of creative expression.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Against the broader analysis of the industry – its state, its challenges and its possibilities - it is recommended that the following policies to promote a vibrant and sustainable theatre industry be pursued by national government in association with provincial government and relevant funding agencies:

**1. Professional theatre companies**

**1.1 Types of companies**

There are at least three kinds of companies:

1. Companies with full-time, professional practitioners employed on at least year-long contracts
2. Companies with 1 to 3 employees (administrators/artists) who employ artists on an ad hoc, project-by-project basis as funding becomes available.
3. Companies that exist in name, with the members of such companies employed in other contexts, and who organise projects, employ practitioners or come together for regular seasons on an ad hoc basis as funding becomes available.

It is recommended that, by 2015, there be at least fifteen (15) professional, mainstream theatre companies, with an average of 8 members (including an administrator/producer), for a total of 120 professionals on at least year-long contracts.

**1.2 Mandates of companies**

Companies are – as far as possible – to integrate

1. youth and experience
2. cultural diversity i.e. different languages, cultural backgrounds, etc
3. genders

Companies will be required to deliver a minimum of three productions per year, plus one children’s production or one production aimed at a youth market (16-25).

In addition to mainstream productions (international plays, local classics and contemporary work), these companies will also be required to undertake productions that speak to the social conditions of people in the region who are generally marginalised and live below or just above the poverty line, with an emphasis on both content and aesthetics.

**1.3 Distribution of companies**

Each province will have at least one full-time company. If there are not sufficient members to comprise a company in a province, a company located in another province may be relocated to that province to help build capacity. Such a company will be provided with guaranteed medium-term funding e.g. three years, in order to have sufficient time to achieve a permanent, skilled, professional company based in that province.

* 1. **Categories of company funding**

There will be three-tier funding for companies of national significance, and they will be selected according to a set of publicly-transparent criteria.

Tier One: Companies will be awarded a core subsidy of R2,5m for a 3-year period.

Tier Two: Companies will be awarded a core subsidy of R1,75m for a 2-year period.

Tier Three: Companies will be awarded a core subsidy of R1m for one year.

Other companies will receive project-by-project funding to help them to build a track record.

The object is to encourage the pursuit and maintenance of excellence, with those companies that have excellent track records being awarded sound funding, while other companies will have their potential recognized so that they too may eventually be awarded funding on another tier.

## 1.5 Criteria for selection

It is recommended that the following criteria with their respective weightings i.e. some criteria are more important than others, be used to select companies for subsidy, and to determine the status of such companies where different amounts of subsidy are available per genre.

Artistic merit 20 points

Track record/sustainability/longevity 15 points

Impact on the local industry/discipline 15 points

Redressing of historical imbalances 15 points

Organisational structures and management 15 points

Repertoire and productivity 10 points

Remuneration and working conditions of artists 10 points

**Total 100 points**

In the initial phases, the above criteria are to apply less to the company (that might not have a track record yet) and more to the individuals who comprise the company.

## 1.6 Phased implementation

1. That all theatre companies that have received “NAC company funding” be invited to apply.

2. That other companies be invited to apply for such funding, and that an additional list of companies – not exceeding 10 – be given company funding from 2014.

3. That all companies be invited by 30 September 2013 to apply for subsidy in accordance with the above categories.

4. That the NAC – together with representatives from the theatre community – evaluates each company, both on paper and in terms of their work, and decides on funding for 15 companies by 31 December 2013.

5. That legal agreements be negotiated between the NAC and companies from 1 Jan-31 March 2014.

6. That these companies will receive their core subsidies from 1 April 2014.

**1.7 Housing of companies**

It is recommended that these subsidised companies of be housed in infrastructure which forms part of an official, national circuit of venues.

**1.8 Career paths for actors**

With these professional companies as the pinnacles of employment for performing artists, it is necessary to map a possible career path for a theatre practitioner.

The following generic career path is recommended:

* 1. training at an accredited institution
  2. membership of a student company (1-2 years) attached to training institutions (such companies would practice for the “real” world, but within safe, supportive conditions)
  3. after student companies, practitioners would audition for, and participate in youth companies in the various disciplines, for 18-30 year-olds
  4. they could then progress to any one of a range of professional companies operating in their discipline, or form part of a new company which would vie with existing companies for recognition

Individual creative practitioners such as composers, writers, choreographers, directors, etc, could follow similar career paths, by being attached to, or integrated into such companies.

They could also be given residencies with a company, educational institution, theatre or festival for periods of time in which they could create and/or help others to create.

**1.9 Student companies**

These would generally be attached to institutions. As many training institutions as possible should have post-graduate student companies. Alternatively, various institutions in a province should combine resources to support one student company that draws on graduates from their respective institutions. These would also be the training ground for young arts managers and administrators.

**1.10 Youth companies**

Ideally, each of the larger provinces should have a youth theatre company.

## 1.11 Individual, national assets

There are individuals who have achieved great distinction as directors, writers, designers, etc, but who – with the decline in funding at theatres, and with few companies in place – are generally out of work, and struggle to make a decent living in the field they know best i.e. theatre.

These individuals should be considered “national assets”. It is recommended that a database be compiled of individual theatre-makers who have achieved such distinction (with very competitive criteria and rigorous selection processes), and that they are supported with monthly stipends for one to three year periods. They would then be available to work with the various professional companies and other entities including schools and community groups to share their expertise and knowledge.

# 1.13 Performing arts infrastructure

It is recommended

1. that a national circuit of theatre venues be created – at least one per province – over a five-year period. This national circuit would largely comprise existing theatres or multi-functional arts spaces that could host professional theatre productions
2. that, first, the capacity be identified and/or developed to manage this infrastructure effectively and efficiently, and that the leadership of each venue with less than five years experience, be linked with an experienced mentor to guide, advise and even hold him/her accountable
3. that national government – in the same way that it subsidises six theatres currently – subsidises the core infrastructure and staffing of at least one theatre in every province where a nationally-subsidised theatre does not currently exist
4. that all nationally-subsidised theatres be given the following mandate:
   1. to stage excellent local and international work through a combination of rentals and buying or commissioning or producing work
   2. to use a smaller theatre exclusively for the development of local theatre work and to provide new entrants into the industry with a subsidized space to test their works
   3. to house a theatre company of national significance
   4. to serve as the coordinating and developmental point for a local circuit of venues in the metropolitan area in which they are located and to play a supportive role to these venues and
   5. to provide support, training and assistance with programming in the “national circuit” venues in two provinces linked to that subsidised infrastructure e.g. State Theatre linked to North West and Limpopo, ARTSCAPE linked to Eastern Cape, PACOFS linked to Northern Cape, Playhouse linked to Mpumalanga
5. that each venue on the national circuit be given an adequate production budget annually to commission, purchase, co-produce or produce work, particularly theatre productions
6. that each venue on the national circuit have adequate marketing and publicity capacity and strategies, monitored centrally, to ensure the development and sustenance of markets

There are many existing venues that may be eligible for “national circuit” status. Such venues will be invited to apply and motivate for such status, and concomitant resources.

Criteria to be used when selecting national circuit venues would include the following:

* 1. the capacity of the venue to stage professional theatre productions
  2. the capacity of the venue to host a company of national significance on its premises i.e. rehearsal, office and performance spaces and administrative infrastructure
  3. the track record of the venue in hosting productions
  4. the capacity, demographics, skills and experience of the management and staff
  5. the track record of the venue in securing funds from provincial, local government, private sector and other sources
  6. the ability of the venue to provide effective and cost-effective marketing and technical services
  7. the state of the equipment (sound, stage, lifts, etc) in the venue
  8. the cost-effectiveness of maintaining the venue
  9. the proximity and accessibility of the venue to local audiences
  10. the willingness and/or capacity of the venue in providing services and development assistance beyond its immediate confines
  11. issues of safety: both structural and equipment and with regard to crime
  12. the proximity or availability of comfortable but inexpensive accommodation for touring groups

Not all venues on the national circuit will be the same. Some will be large, multi-venue infrastructure with technical, stage services and design departments. Others will be single, conventional theatre spaces while still others will be multi-functional arts centres. There will be three grades of infrastructure, and their roles will determine their level of national subsidy:

Grade A: Large-scale performing arts venues (primarily former pacs)

Grade B: Venues which are part of the national circuit and which host companies of national significance.

Grade C: Venues that are recognized within the industry to be important theatres because of their contributions to the industry, whether they are part of the national circuit or not

It is strongly recommended that national circuit venues meet every six months to plan and coordinate activities.

## Funding

There is funding for arts and culture. The major problems are

1. to access it timeously
2. for approved funding to be transferred in time for the project
3. for funding to be made available in medium-term cycles as opposed to project-by-project funding

It is recommended that

1. there be one form for all funding agencies in the country, with agencies requiring specific questions having such a section on the form
2. all agencies be required to make decisions about applications within three months of the closing date for applications
3. approved funding is transferred to projects within a maximum of 21 days after such funding is approved, and that tranche funding is transferred within a maximum of 21 days of tranche-releasing reports being received
4. major funding agencies align their deadline and approval dates so that applicants may learn of funding decisions as early as possible
5. once a the industry agrees on a theatre plan, that the industry meets with major funders collectively to discuss who will fund what for the next five years
6. a mechanism be established for theatre makers to lodge complaints about funding agencies, and that this mechanism urges/takes corrective action
7. **Festivals**

Festivals have become important sources of funding for theatre, and are probably the most important catalysts for new work. The also provide income for artists and develop markets for them. Festivals can be even more effective in achieving the above, and the broader vision outlined in this document, if

1. there was greater co-ordination among them
2. there was more co-operation between them and theatres in ensuring that theatre works have a life beyond the festivals
3. some of these festivals were better managed
4. the timing of the festivals was better arranged so that a festival circuit could provide ongoing/continuous work for local and international groups
5. there were mechanisms to select and reward the best festival works with tours and/or seasons at venues on the national circuit afterwards
6. there were incentives for international travel for the best works e.g. if some of these festivals had exchange links with international festivals

It is recommended that

* 1. existing festivals be encouraged to form a National Festival Coordination Committee to share ideas, to help to train managers of festivals in less resourced provinces, and to coordinate a national festival circuit which would liaise with, and relate to the national venue circuit
  2. new annual festivals be encouraged and located in provinces where such festivals do not exist e.g. a Children’s Theatre Festival in KwaZulu Natal, a Southern African Theatre Festival in Limpopo, a Youth Theatre Festival in Kimberley, a community theatre festival in North West, etc.
  3. a national theatre festival that rotates every year to a different province, and where the best works of all the festivals and theatres are staged, along with master classes and discussions for theatre practitioners, and a parallel performing arts market

**5. Human resource development and capacity building**

Even more important than the need for funding, is the need for effective, visionary and highly skilled arts managers. We urgently require a combination of short-term courses to provide basic admin skills as in-service training for arts practitioners, longer term courses to produce at least theoretically-trained arts managers, opportunities for individuals to be mentored, and an influx of skills to manage existing institutions, NGOs and the implementation of policy.

The following are recommendations in this regard:

* 1. that, to begin with, a major tertiary institution in each of Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape, offers part-time courses in arts administration, arts marketing, etc
  2. that such institutions work towards developing undergraduate and post-graduate courses in arts administration with some specialising in marketing, touring and policy, so that eventually there is at least one tertiary institution in each province that offers arts administration certificates, diplomas, degrees and post-graduate degrees
  3. that in the immediate future, the NAC makes available 5-10 bursaries annually for individuals around the country to acquire MBAs, with an agreement that they would work in an arts management position for at least three years after acquiring such an education
  4. that twenty to thirty of the country’s top arts administrators, theatre and festival managers be identified, and be paid to mentor individuals (who are also paid) over the course of at least 1-3 years, with funding for this purpose being made available by the relevant funding agency
  5. that 25-30 of the country’s top directors and writers be paid to mentor new writers so that over a period of five years, we develop 50-75 new South African writers.

## 6. Administration, management and marketing of professional companies, individuals and productions

Performing artists and companies want to spend as little time as possible dealing with fundraising, report-writing, administration, organising tours, doing publicity and marketing, etc. The current conditions however, demand a high level of administration from individuals and companies who would rather be creating, rehearsing, performing and touring.

It is strongly recommended that

1. entrepreneurial companies be created/encouraged that provide administration, financial services, marketing, management and touring services to professional companies and individuals to oversee their affairs.

Initially, it is recommended that such companies – a critical mass in each province – receive declining subsidies over three years to establish themselves, develop a client base, to become self-sustaining in the long term.

1. independent publicity, marketing, financial services, arts admin, etc companies and individuals form consortiums to take on such work, while maintaining an independent client base at the same time.
2. the notion of “clustering” be encouraged with pilot projects in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, with companies and individual artists working collectively with administrators, marketers and producers to do all that is necessary to give life to new works, and to give such works legs
3. annually, theatre publicists, marketers and marketing departments of theatres meet for three days to share expertise, document successful case studies, reflect on new challenges, learn from international experience, and chart collective strategies to improve theatre marketing
4. similarly, a cadre of theatre producers be developed and that they meet annually to share expertise, document successful case studies, reflect on challenges, etc in the course of fulfilling the following mandate: to tour local, excellent works nationally and abroad on a regular basis in order to earn foreign income for our practitioners, since the world, rather than South Africa, should be regarded as our market. In this regard, it is recommended that
   * 1. South African artists produce some of the classics in English e.g. Chekov, Beckett, etc, and tour these to English-speaking communities in other emerging economies i.e. with our exchange rate, it would be more financially attractive to such countries to have excellent productions from South Africa than from Britain
     2. we develop an international touring circuit for South African works to major festivals and venues around the world e.g. SA has a stand every year at the Cannes Film Festival; we can have a theatre venue at Edinburgh (given its current focus on South African work) as well as festivals in Asia, Latin America, Africa, etc every year too
     3. develop an expatriate circuit that includes Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand for contemporary South African performing arts works

**7. Remuneration and working conditions for theatre makers**

The current situation in which funding is in decline and work generally scarce for artists, makes performing arts practitioners very vulnerable to exploitation. On the other hand, theatre managements are hard pressed to maintain financially viable institutions.

It is recommended

1. that clear, reasonable guidelines for the remuneration of performing arts practitioners be created, and that they be reviewed annually between representative artist bodies and unions, theatre managements and major funding bodies (the latter having the responsibility of funding companies that conform to agreed industry remuneration guidelines)
2. that as a matter of urgency, a medical aid scheme be researched and developed for performing arts practitioners, taking cognisance of the nature of the current conditions, the desired conditions and the itinerant nature of current work
3. that as a matter of urgency, a performing arts provident fund or pension scheme be researched and developed, taking cognisance of the nature of the current conditions, the desired conditions and the itinerant nature of current work
4. that labour desks be established in each of the nine provinces, but in the three major provinces to begin with, to which all contracts are to be referred by artists and/or managers to ensure that these comply with South African labour legislation
5. that workshops be held for managers and practitioners around the country, to brief them regularly on current labour legislation, the rights of artists, and any changes to these and
6. that in the interim, and as a matter of urgency, a “labour ombudsman” be appointed to investigate, arbitrate and generally monitor the contracting, remuneration and working conditions of performing artists
7. that a relationship be established with UNESCO’s Observatory on the Status of the Artist in order to work towards maximum compliance with its Recommendation on the Rights and Status of the Artist
8. that the practice of paying half-fees for rehearsals be abolished at all publicly-funded theatres, in companies and projects funded by national, public funding agencies and that promoters and producers using publicly-funded facilities, be required to pay full fees for rehearsals
9. that a union be encouraged, but that it be held accountable by its members for delivery

**8. Research, information and documentation**

It is recommended that

1. there be regional, monthly “knock and drops” – or inserts in existing “knock and drops” providing publicity on forthcoming productions
2. a monthly theatre journal be produced to encourage documentation and critical discourse within the industry
3. a national, comprehensive theatre website be created and maintained with all information and statistics relevant to the industry
4. an annual Theatre Directory be published with details of theatres, producers, marketing companies, funding agencies, etc
5. the theatre industry, with the NAC, decides on particular areas requiring research each year, and that the NAC makes available bursaries for post-graduate students or academics to pursue this research
6. an annual conference on theatre be held, either nationally, or along similar themes in each province
7. a South African theatre museum and archive be established, which, among other things, will house material on every production produced each year

## 9. Incentives

We do not have a national system of incentives for our artists to encourage them to continue to work in the industry, and to strive to ever-greater levels of creative and technical excellence. It is recommended that such incentives be devised and implemented on an annual basis. These could include:

1. the best companies e.g. selected at national festivals, winning funds to undertake a national tour of the major theatres
2. the best companies and/or productions winning opportunities to travel to international festivals
3. top practitioners being awarded opportunities for international exchange programmes
4. top practitioners winning opportunities to work in residence in the country’s major theatres or institutions
5. annually, a three-week tour being undertaken with the country’s brightest new directing and writing talents to other parts of the world to be exposed to their work
6. working with the current awards systems to make them more meaningful, more prestigious, and more enhancing of the winners’ careers, and creating new awards where warranted
7. an annual anthology of the country’s ten best scripts, with selection for this anthology – published by the NAC – guaranteeing a writer R30 000 towards writing her/his next play

**10. Coordination and governance**

There are different organizations representing different constituencies within the theatre industry, but there is no overarching body that can represent the sector as a whole to government, business, etc.

Accordingly, it is recommended that a theatre industry representative organization – eg. South African Theatre Industry Association (SATIA) – be established.

The role and functions of SATIA will include the following:

1. formulating regulations to govern different aspects of the industry
2. establishing dispute-resolution mechanisms
3. monitoring the development and growth of the industry to ensure that all structures – theatre companies, theatres, festivals, producers, etc – are functioning optimally
4. providing advice and information
5. facilitating international exchanges
6. setting and driving an agenda to achieve substantive transformation within the industry
7. commissioning research, gathering and disseminating data, building databases, etc
8. coordinating the production of relevant publications
9. representing the interests of the industry in policy and related matters
10. developing and updating a national register of theatre industry professionals

The structure of SATIA may include various subcommittees e.g. festivals, national theatre circuit, transformation, status and rights of artists, education and training, etc to ensure that all the primary areas of the industry are being dealt with and monitored.

Key stakeholders i.e. national organizations representing different sectors, within the industry will elect representatives to the governing board of SATIA who will serve for a period of three years. Where some sectors are not organized into a national association, SATIA will facilitate a meeting of representatives from this sector to elect representatives to the Board.

**POSSIBLE FEATURES FOR THE INDUSTRY BY 2015**

**1. Companies**

15 professional, subsidized, mainstream, integrated theatre companies nationally, with at least one in each of Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape, two in the Free State, three in KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape and four in the Western Cape and Gauteng, employing 150-200 theatre makers on a full-time basis, with at least 50% of the total theatre-makers and company managers being black Africans.

**2. National circuit of venues**

At least one professionally-managed venue per province, each with a production budget to produce work, with tours by companies to each venue, and with some companies being housed in these venues as their base.

A national co-ordinating mechanism will facilitate planning and sharing between members of this circuit.

**3. National circuit of festivals**

Each month, there would be a major festival that includes theatre in a different part of the country, so that companies and independent theatre makers may travel the country with a work from festival to festival.

An annual theatre festival in a different province each year, celebrating the best works of the previous year.

Annual school play festivals in each province with the best works participating in a national school play festival, with professional actors paid to work with schools in producing such plays.

**4. Human resources and capacity**

All national circuit venues will be functioning optimally, with at least 50% of them under the leadership of black African managers, and all of them producing unqualified financial statements.

At least 30 independent (not attached to theatres) producers nationally, with two in each of Mpumulanga, North West, Northern Cape and Limpopo, four in Free State, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal and five in Western Cape and Gauteng with at least 50% of these being black African producers.

At least twenty independent marketing and publicity companies nationally, one in each of Mpumalanga, North West, Northern Cape and Limpopo, two in Free State, three in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal, and four in each of Gauteng and Western Cape, again, with at least 50% of them being owned by black Africans.

At least 120 plays entered into a national playwrighting competition, with at least 50% of them being from black African writers, and half of these being women.

At least three institutions with arts administration graduate and post-graduate courses and at least one with a “cultural entrepreneurs” course.

**5. Incentives**

A South African venue at a major festival in Europe, Australia and Canada/USA, Africa, Latin America and Asia each year to host the best South African works at these festivals.

The best works at theatres and festivals, are subsidized to tour the national circuit of venues and the national circuit of festivals.

**6. Rights and status of artists**

Agreed minimum wages for different categories of theatre-makers nationally.

A national medical aid scheme and provident fund scheme for all registered theatre-makers.

Free legal advice and representation for theatre-makers in contractual disputes.

A home for retired actors/theatre makers.

**7. Audiences/markets**

Contemporary theatre playing to a national average of 65%.

**8. Information and publicity**

National “what’s on” type publication produced weekly as an insert in a national newspaper e.g. Mail and Guardian/Sunday Times.

National Theatre Journal produced monthly promoting critical discourse.

**CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that we have incredible expertise, resources, infrastructure, networks, experience within the country’s theatre sector, that if combined, would make a major contribution to meeting some of the country’s challenges, but also to the sustainability and growth of the theatre sector itself. Some things can be done with the help of government, but there is much that can be done as civil society if we have the vision, the courage and the desire to cross old boundaries and to work collectively, giving and taking, at times, being comfortable with grey rather than black and white.

**APPENDIX: SWOT ANALYSIS ARISING OUT OF FORUMS IN JOHANNESBURG AND CAPE TOWN**

**Strengths**

***Diversity/Depth of creativity/talent store***: Diversity in our country allows for a wide range of ‘stories to tell’. This is supported by an existing talent base in directors and actors with a potential talent store in other areas.

***Arts Entrepreneurship/Free market***: The Free Market system that is currently in place allows for opportunities to create, low barriers to entry, innovation and incentives for those who work hard, ability to bypass bureaucracy in some areas and an elevation of those who display an entrepreneurial spirit

***Flexibility***: The industry has learned to adapt and react quickly to changes and obstacles and there is a flexible approach to extending runs of successful productions

***Quality***: Pockets of quality work occur, although these appear to be cyclical and not consistent

***Professional structure***: The sector already has significant structure around the profession of the performing arts. This includes the organically development freelance-agency system as well as those specified below and leads to reasonable productivity in the creative arts sector

***Festivals***: The festivals and festival circuits allow for the development of new work. To a lesser extent creative competitions add to this. They also provide a space for industry and social cohesion as well as a space for good management teams to be built

***Theatres***: These provide a space for the producing of professional work albeit sometimes determined by ‘gate keepers’ (CT). They provide a space for good management teams to be built and can successfully be used for developing new audiences

***Networks***: Current networks are effective is distributing information and encouraging collaboration. Also a strong driver of skills development and coordination of development of the sector

***Links to other Media***: Other media (TV, Film) and current cross-pollination allow wider employment opportunities for creative practitioners.

***Commercial Mainstream***: Commercial theatre (musicals, comedy) meets with relative economic success

***Job creation***: The industry allows for significant ad-hoc job creation (livelihood), esp. through festivals and corporate work

***Funding and government policy***: Relationships with current public funders and government are generally improving and new sources of funding (and varieties of income streams) are becoming available. There are a small number of very supportive funders/sponsors. Mzanzi Golden Economy recognizes basic education and audience development as an important strategic area for growth

***Sponsorship***: Arts sponsorship is relatively cheap money (Return on Investment) and sponsors receive good value for their sponsorship

***Community involvement***: Some communities are very supportive of local work and audiences are hungry for work of quality or that is relevant

***Affordability***: It is still relatively affordable to go to the theatre

***Curriculum and Arts Education***: The current curriculum encourages theatre going with Arts retained in curriculum (grades R-9) and annual compulsory exposure to live performance. The subject is also growing at FET level

***Excellence in Higher and tertiary education***: Magnet schools, higher education and tertiary institutions display an excellence in certain areas of training (particularly performance-related)

***Informal structures***: Strong informal institutions with history of successful delivery and with experts with many years of experience (“assets”) exist as well as students placed informally in professional productions provide growth and connection between education and professional industry

***Pool of teachers***: Big pool of experience in teaching, development across sectors – formal/informal, festivals, institutions, companies, organisations, Sibikwa, Market Lab, Magnet etc. – allows for a source of possible best practice models and ability to implement educational strategies

***Existing unit standards***: These exist and can be used to develop arts education training outcomes

***Arts as a tool***: Arts and arts education is successfully used for developing personal efficacy, capacity and social cohesion

***Theatre Criticism***: Platforms and critics do exist and are relatively supportive and understand their responsibility towards building the industry. This is particularly true in the Afrikaans sector where critics are informed and all forms of media are used to promote the sector. There is a strong tradition of good, and well regarded, journalists. Festival criticism and media are significantly strong

***Archiving and Academics***: There is a strong history of archiving in SA (NELM, National Museums, etc) and academics still write articles on theatre. The University of Stellenbosch has recently launched an online theatre archive and a current Theatre Journal exists

***Awards***: There are current awards in place which are generally respected. They provide acknowledgement, marketing leverage (encourage new audiences to see the award winners) resource opportunities (cash prizes) to the performing arts practitioners.

***Competitions***: The competitions that exist allow for growth, quality control and recognition of the industry

**Weaknesses**

***Limited Development Spaces and Funding***: Limited opportunities and established venues focused on the creation of new work (excluding Festivals) or post tertiary ‘incubators’ with opportunities and resources to explore.

***Limited production funding***: Unlike other industries, ‘Start-up capital’ for theatre is generally unavailable, except in limited amounts from the National Arts Council which requires practitioners to operate in a non-profit manner.

***No Testing process***: Limited opportunities and circuits for testing and growing work are available (e.g. UK Regional to West End model). The established circuit that exists is too small and there is inadequate funding for touring.

***Inconsistent production***: Production of work is not consistent leading to maintenance of quality in the industry rather than growth. Quality thus also becomes cyclical or episodic and limits the development of a ‘career path’. ‘Festivalization’ also leads to a lack of technical support time for quality work as well as a segmentation of the life cycles of theatre works between multiple short runs

***Limited catering for young audiences***: Programming for young audiences at theatres is generally of a poor standard and lacks variety

***Few Arts Administrators and administration skills***: Lack of current pool and development of quality arts administrators, managers and entrepreneurs. Current practitioners have limited skills to manage themselves as businesses. There is a lack of education in arts marketing

***Lack of Access and Transparency***: There is a lack of access to established venues (CT) and transparency of requirements for access leads to perception of ‘gate-keepers’ and structural inequality. Opportunities not equally accessible to all, and it is difficult to break into the system without a track record. Even Festivals, which do allow spaces for development of new work don’t encourage new participants. Still a perception of dominant White Director theatre environment (Western Cape) with mainstream structure attitudes not alleviating this.

***Poor spatial distribution of infrastructure***: Lack of well dispersed and maintained infrastructure catering for theatre needs

***Weak information dissemination***: Weak information distribution to all and sharing of databases for the greater good as well as a lack of coordinated information sharing leading to uncoordinated distribution of work. (This could be a result of too much unfocussed information, rather than no, or too little, information)

***In-effective funding flow and cycles***: Lack of current effective finance flow into production (through all of the income generation models – audience, donors, sponsorship) does not allow for continuity. Funding cycles are short term and don’t allow for adequate planning or longer lifespan of productions.

***Sponsorship demands***: Sponsors increasingly want ‘national reach’ limiting sponsorship for local product

***Poor structural policy frameworks***: Current policy and structural environment does not lead to vibrant growth development (see “cultural institution/receiving houses” policy). There is a fear of bureaucracy and an attitude of ‘application not worthwhile’ (this includes the funding bureaucracy)

***Little Industry Knowledge transfer and internships***: There is a lack of knowledge filtering systems and coordinated internships for young theatre makers (through both weak information distribution as well as a lack of mentorship and apathy of skilled practitioners in coming forward).

***Skills gap in creative disciplines***: There is a lack of skills in creative disciplines of writing, lighting and sound and few writing course for playwrights.

***Dramaturge support***: Limited dramaturgical support for development of quality work

***Poor Funder knowledge of industry***: Some Funders understanding of the freelance system and knowledge of the industry is limited or non-existent and there remains little collaboration between funders to improve this. Additionally there is a lack of buy-in or understanding of strategy to coordinate the growth of the sector

***Few industry standards***: Industry standards and recommendation are not widely available making it difficult to budget and work equitably and effectively.

***Industry Fragmentation***: Fragmentation exists within the sector at multiple levels (e.g. between national theatre traditions, language, etc but down to the distinction between ‘mainstream’ and ‘community’ venues within metros, etc).

***Regional and organizational competition and fragmentation***: Poor partnerships between existing platforms (e.g. PANSA/CAWUSA/SAGA) have led to limited national coordination. There is a lack of a formal overarching structure (who is speaking to Government on behalf of the Industry? Who is coordinating strategies to develop, transform, promote, incentivise, protect the industry).

***Lack of Community involvement***: Some communities are not supportive of local work and are dis-connected from the arts

***Diversity***: Diversity, as much as this is a potential asset in strengths, also leads to a fragmented market and audience ‘split’

***Poor artist support***: Once a career is established, there is limited support for basic functions needed to maintain this – from continued education to medical aid, etc

***Poor external arts valuation***: Arts is not valued highly as a product in itself or for the value it can add to education of social cohesion, either historically or currently

***Transport infrastructure***: Poor public transport infrastructure does not allow for the development of new audiences, or in fact access by current potential audiences

***Lack and cost of media support***: General media support for the arts is poor, with limited platforms available across the spectrum of media for exposure (esp. radio/television and English language media). Theatre critics are not rigorous enough and poorly trained (particularly English critics not informed on the canon of theatre) and there is reliance by industry on expensive traditional forms and portals for marketing. National Arts Festival has poor Fringe criticism and plays are critiqued at one festival and are then not covered again as a matter of some newspapers’ policy

***Weak international networks and distribution support***: International touring structures and supporting networks are limited and underdeveloped

***Archiving and Academics***: There is no culture of archiving and resources to do so properly are limited. In particular, academic writing is relatively absent. Many plays are not written and therefore we do not have records. We do not build heroes from the past.

***Awards***: There is no national awards system. No standardized criteria leading to subjective decision making process. There are limited opportunities for awards in indigenous African languages (playwrights and performers) and current awards systems only cater for ‘professional’ industry and ‘community’ theatre is not recognized.

***Lack of research and synthesis of data***: No objective evaluation of industry as a whole/ marketing and in particular integration of research and reports for young audiences non-existent. No synthesis of resources – e.g. funding reports, monitoring and evaluation, best practices, etc

***Industry independence***: There is a collapse of all creative industries into one sector by external stakeholders e.g. government, resulting in the performing arts not being able to differentiate itself, or being expected to operate in the same way as literature or visual arts when the economies of scale, and value chain for each, are quite different.

***Arts education and Qualifications***: There is a generally poor management level of utilization of resources in this area. Funding for arts bursaries as well as arts educational product is limited. There is a lack of qualified assessors and access to them for accreditation and there is a lack of understanding from both CATHSETA and the Department of Education to the environment and deep skills required for arts education. There is poor implementation of curriculum due to a lack of training of teachers (in-service not working, pre-service insufficient). Lack of compatibility exists between qualifications with gaps in terms of early childhood development and aspects of higher education (e.g. writing, arts management, theatre for young audiences, arts criticism, dramaturgy etc.)

***“Community” development***: Continued perspective of “black”/community/development theatre practitioners always being seen to be in need of development

**Threats**

***Censorship and Artistic Freedom***: Political correctness and perceived/ real blockages to artistic freedom as well as lack of understanding of the arts leading to intolerance and political censorship/interference

***Apathy and fatigue***: Industry and Funders commitment to change for improvement and understanding and fatigue of those writing and receiving proposals

***Bureaucracy, government and corporate politics***: Slow bureaucratic turnover and dysfunction between government departments will cause delays in funding, strategic growth and partnership development. Political appointees making decisions about the sector. Changes in corporate personnel often leading to a change in corporate marketing strategy.

***Continued short term funding cycles and lack of budgets***: Will exacerbate the lack of ability to plan and establish longer term programme life cycles and circuits.

***Mismanagement of funds***: Excessive amounts being spent on once-off productions and not being aligned with current artistic and educational needs

***Increasing costs and competition***: Rising festival costs and general economic downturn will put pressure on creation. Additionally limited disposable income and increasing choice of competing products will put pressure on sales.

***Brand marketing***: Businesses supporting brand marketing rather than creative development and where a particular corporate brand is too closely associated with an event, a new corporate sponsor may be reluctant to take it over or be associated once the original sponsorship ends

***Sponsorship of success***: Sponsors support successful projects, providing little opportunity for start-up or struggling projects

***Poor quality of work or project delivery***: Will drive downturn in interest and an increase in ‘theatre as a boring space’ as well as alienate current and future sponsors

***Absence of industry-related research***: There is limited research being done into various aspects of the industry e.g. economic impact, “transformation”, actual career paths of drama graduates, understanding theatre markets, etc so that strategies – such as they are – are not premised on detailed information, but anecdotal “evidence”

***Imported culture***: Will put pressure on the desire for audiences to consume our own stories as well as lowers the media space given to criticism of our local work.

***Continued maintenance trajectory***: Continued episodic engagement with learning and working will lead to maintenance rather than growth of the skills and quality

***Risk***: Statutory non-compliance increases risk especially amongst the independent producers

***Industry and social divisiveness***: Culture of division in South Africa could exacerbate the current weaknesses e.g. white/black; English/Afrikaans; “community”/CBD or “professional”; rural/urban, etc

***Crime***: Crime will push audiences further away from attendance

***Transport infrastructure***: Poor current and implemented future transport systems will lower the ability to attract new audiences

***Lack of common social spaces***: And a desire to occupy common spaces

***The market needs***: ‘Arts for art’s sake’ and a limited understanding of the market and what it wants will alienate current and new audiences. Also feeding audience’s only commercial product will slow down innovation and creativity. There are different markets; these are not sufficiently understood or differentiated.

***Market-related policies:*** Policy that emphasizes “creative industries” and box office income will shape production and programming, serving an elite, rather than theatre-makers “speaking truth to power” or telling stories that are worthy for their own sake.

***Dysfunctional Arts education***: Continued dysfunction of arts education (in crisis and transition) as well as focus on numeracy, literacy and sciences will force arts and culture out of the system and prevent new audience development as well as value of the arts in social growth.

***Fear of sharing information and resources***: The assumption that this is a zero sum gain and the real and perceived positions that the industry is ‘fighting over the same pool of money’ leading to a lack of cooperation between stakeholders – ‘scarcity thinking’. Also industry competitiveness will not allow sharing of resources and knowledge (mentoring).

***Development funding***: Threat of ‘development’ funding falling between identified funding strategies

***Critics***: Theatre critics are increasingly becoming diverted, they have to multi-task thus not enough focus. There are few good training institutions or opportunities and a continued ‘juniorisation’ of staff who write – lack of experience, skill, knowledge

***Media space***: Less and less space in media, particularly in English print media

***Archiving lack of appeal***: Museums and theatre archives are not always seen as politically sexy or touristy enough, and ‘academic approach’ will alienate

***Award controversy***: Award ceremonies could be very controversial and alienate sponsors. Additionally awards events are expensive and deliver lower ‘return on investment’

***Balanced development***: Political challenge of “black”/community/development theatre practitioners always being seen to be in need of development on the one hand and on the other hand, the need to develop work and practitioners, irrespective of colour

**Opportunities**

***Cooperation***: Era of cooperation, particularly among Festivals and Managements – sharing of research, knowledge and experience

***Continued flexibility***: Can-do attitude and creative flexibility

***New partners***: Potential funding/partnerships that hasn’t been explored, particularly in non-Arts related funders, as well as opportunities for different sectors to engage with each other

***Corporate need***: Corporates need to find new strategies to getting their brands out.

***Touring***: Both on a local and international level

***New Audiences***: Segmenting, identifying and retaining new target audiences. In particular new ideas on arts distribution and new models for audience engagement (particularly lower-income audiences)

***Recruit champions***: From inside and outside the arts industry

***Professionalisation of the industry***: Build a structure from community/grass roots level to regional, national and international level including identified outputs such as a national theatre conference, national education in the arts conference and national theatre festival (best of the best).

***Pool of expertise***: There is a pool of hungry graduates entering the industry annually as well as well as a pool of experienced practitioners available for mentoring should the right mechanism be identified.

***Curriculum***: The curriculum is there and theatre makers should be empowered to understand it as well unit standards developed to train artists to deliver curriculum and to be artists-in-residence

***Cross-pollination cross-cultural***: Can create vibrant and exciting new ways of delivering arts education

***New Media***: As expose and marketing platforms

***Personality driven criticism***: Weekly reviews, in particular on television and radio, presented by personalities will stimulate debate and discourse on theatre criticism in general.

***Community media platforms***: Community radios and television could be much more being involved

***Training opportunities***: There are more ad hoc training opportunities to be explored, especially in the discipline of theatre criticism, with for example workshops in universities being presented to not only to the students but other role players