



Addis Ababa, 30 May 2014 (WIC) - As the Ethiopian film industry grows, Ethiopian Film Initiative (EFI) founder (and Swedish filmmaker) Ragnhild Ek says there is also a rise in the number of female filmmakers in the African country.

She refers in part to the carefully selected group of young Ethiopian filmmakers that are each year brought to the Cannes Film Festival by the International Emerging Film Talent Association, the EFI and now the Better World Film Festival, to help promote global relationships and an increased knowledge of the international film market.

In its previous two years running, the selected members were predominantly men, as are the popular Ethiopian directors working today including Haile Gerima, Theodros Teshome and Zeresenay Berhane Mehari, whose film garnered an Executive Producer credit from Angelina Jolie. This year, the selectees were comprised of four women and one man in its group.

Ek said, "There were between 30-40 applicants, the majority being women - and their applications were all very good. The word has spread, and we are pleased with this turn of events."

Adanech Admassu is the most experienced of the group, boasting an impressive CV of commercials and documentaries – with one film, *Stolen Childhood*, already earning her the One World Media Prize in London. The director came to Cannes (while seven months pregnant) with a drive and focus to give Ethiopian films a wider audience.

"We are only just starting to reach out to an international market since our local market is very strong," said Admassu. "Most of my films are documentaries, so here I am pitching a docu-drama about female genital mutilation, and the extraordinary life of the Maasai woman Hellen Nkuraiya, It will be shot in Kenya, and I am looking to collaborate with other international filmmakers."

Hermon Hailey is also one of Ethiopia's merging female film writer and directors, with two critically and commercially successful films to her name. Her third film tells the story of a taxi

driver in the country's capitol, Addis Ababa, who finds himself in love with a prostitute, forcing him to make difficult life decisions.

"I have set up my own company so this project is entirely my own. And though my first film screened to local audiences within the US, I know that this film requires a certain level of production value to target a larger international demographic. I don't want to just be a local filmmaker," said Hailey.

Her wishes are not unlike those of the other group members, Hiwot Admasu Getaneh, Yamrot Nigussie, whose trip to Cannes marks the first time she left her home country, and Daniel Negatu, who also realises that in order to produce a topical film for global audiences, a certain level of production value is required, something that Negatu says "is not up to standards in Ethiopia."

"One thing Ethiopia has going for it is audience dedication – they prefer to watch local stories," said Nagatu. "But if you want to branch out to wider audiences, then production quality needs to be improved upon. It's happening, it's just much slower than other countries."

Admasu Getaneh sought financial support for her film through an Ethiopian-Swiss co-production deal, allowing her to shoot in both countries and increase its production value to a higher standard. "My film is about a 13-year-old girl who questions her sexuality, something that is not regularly accepted in Ethiopia. Since being here, I have received lots of interest. The energy is incredible – I am very excited."

Producer and advisor Moira Griffin reiterates that Ethiopia's interest in cinema as a whole is rising at an increased rate. "The cinema has grown immensely in the last five years – helping to make room for merging directors and increase the quality of the more established filmmakers. And since this year's applicants were mainly women – it shows an overall commitment to the advancement of Ethiopia's – and Africa's – filmmaking community."

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