

The launch of the African Festival Network (AFRIFESTNET) took place at the British Council in Accra, Ghana from 19-21 April with 37 festivals from 18 countries in attendance. The idea for such a network first surfaced at a seminar hosted by the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) and Arterial Network in July 2010, with the vision "to build the independent sustainability and to promote African arts festivals as key platforms to nurture, celebrate and project excellent and emerging African artists nationally, regionally and internationally."

By the end of the launch event, AFRIFESTNET had 155 registered members representing festivals and events in theatre, music, dance, film, heritage, literature, visual arts and multidisciplinary events from all five regions. Countries represented at the launch of the African Festival Network included Morocco (North Africa); Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Togo, (West Africa); Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon (Central Africa); Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda (East Africa) and Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Southern Africa).

The launch included keynote addresses by Korkor Amarteifio, Chairperson of Arterial Network and Kathrin Deventer, CEO of the European Festival Association (which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year and which expressed a desire to work as a potential partner of AFRIFESTNET); a panel discussion on the economic and social impacts of festivals with case studies from Morocco, Swaziland, Togo, South Africa, Malawi and Ghana; roundtables on fundraising and sustainability strategies for festivals; the use of social media in marketing festivals; building and consolidating festival circuits and training festival managers as well as workshops in which delegates proposed various actions for AFRIFESTNET to implement to improve festivals on the African continent.

Ms Akua Dansua, the Minister of Tourism in Ghana, attended one of the sessions and congratulated the delegates on the launch of AFRIFESTNET and its potential contribution to development in Africa. Delegates adopted a founding resolution and a Constitution to legalize the African Festival Network and elected an 8-person Steering Committee to lead the organization over the next two years.

The Steering Committee members are:

President: Kwesi Owuso – Environmental Film Festival of Africa (Ghana)

Vice-President: Fidelis Duker – Abuja International Film Festival (Nigeria)

Treasurer: Tony Lankester – National Arts Festival (South Africa)

Regional representatives:

North Africa: Brahim El Mazned – Timitar Festival (Morocco)

Central Africa : Luc Yatchokeu – Le Kolatier "Africa Music's Market" (Cameroon)

Western Africa: Daba Sarr Rokhaya - Africa Fête (Senegal)

Eastern Africa: Farah Nurani – Samosa Festival (Kenya)

Southern Africa : Musola Cathrine Kaseketi – Shungu Namutitima International Film Festival of Zambia (SHUNAFFoZ)