



**fak'
ugesi**

**AFRICAN DIGITAL
INNOVATION
FESTIVAL**

**Braamfontein
30 Aug to 8 Sept 2019**

Fak'ugesi Arcade: Futures and Networking 2019 Report and Outcomes

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1. Introduction to Fak'ugesi Arcade

Fak'ugesi Arcade is a branch of The Fak'ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival, which has a focus on game development locally and internationally. It aims to promote, sustain and grow the game development community within South Africa and Africa.

In 2019 Fak'ugesi Arcade hosted various workshops, talks, networking events and curated an arcade. All these events promoted game development and games which originate from the Global South, the SADC Region and South Africa.

Fak'ugesi Arcade worked closely with the Wits Digital Arts Department from the University of the Witwatersrand to curate, produce and manage the events this year.

2. The Futures and Networking Event 2019

During the Fak'ugesi Festival in 2019, Fak'ugesi Arcade hosted the second Futures and Networking Event. The format of the event hosted a panel that was followed by an open discussion from the participants of the event. The panel and open discussion were centered around the status of the game development industry and community, regionally and locally.

The event included a recap of last year's Futures and Networking Event and discussion around what had changed since then, what had not, and what they would like to see in the future in the regional and local game development industry. It was hosted and moderated by Benjamin Myres - the co-founder of the South African game development company, Nyamakop.

This report was documented by Andrea Hayes, edited and finalised by Dr. Tegan Bristow and Lisa Pasha. The report provides a summary of the panel discussion, and the open discussion with participants. It outlines the conclusions drawn from both discussions about the game development industry regionally and locally. It additionally acts as a starting point for the various communities and companies that participated in the conversation to make a difference in the Johannesburg game design industry.

3. The Panel Discussion - Detailed Report

The panel discussion acted as the first half of the Futures and Networking Event and invited three key members of the game development industry to engage in a conversation about its past, current and potential future state.

Panelists

- Liphho Moeti (South Africa)
- Eyram Tawia (Ghana)
- Mars Maasai (Kenya)
- The panel was moderated by Benjamin Myres (South Africa)

Liphho Moeti is the Deputy Festival Director for Playtopia and previously worked for Free Lives (Broforce, Gorn and Genital Jousting). She has also spoken at festivals such as A MAZE./ Berlin, Nordic Game Jam and the Game Developers of Color.

Eyram Tawia is CEO and co-founder of Leti Arts, an interactive digital studio that creates Afrocentric mobile games and comics. Tawia is a frequent speaker at tech conferences and has had stints at the Game Developers Conference and the US-Africa Business Leaders Summit. He studied at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology in Kumasi, Ghana and at the Meltwater Foundation, where he was a Software Teaching Fellow.

Mars Maasai is co-author of HEVA's Creative Industry Ease of Doing Business Reports: Stimulating Kenya's Esports and Gaming Industry. Maasai is the Insights Manager at HEVA Fund, East Africa's first creative economy catalyst. He brings experience in research and analysis to HEVA's policy development and ecosystem building work with public and private sector, international partners, practitioners and investees.

Ben Myres is co-founder and creative director of Johannesburg-based games studio, Nyamakop. In 2018 they released 'Semblance', which became the first African developed game to be released on a Nintendo console. Ben was previously programme manager of A MAZE. / Johannesburg, and co-curated, Africade, the first gallery exhibition to focus solely on African games. He has been included on Mail and Guardian's 'Top 200 Young South Africans', Design Indaba's 'Emerging Creatives', and Forbes Africa's '30 under 30' lists for his work.



Topic 1: Changes in the Southern African Game Development Industry

Ben Myres began the discussion by asking panelists to consider changes they have seen in game development.

Eyram Tawia

Tawia indicated that the industry, as well as the consumer market, has changed significantly over the past decade. During the 1990's, the video game industry targeted the middle-class and required consumers to have access to either a home console or a computer in order to play video games. It was only during the late 2000's that video games became more accessible, particularly in Africa, due to cell phones, more specifically, the iPhone. Tawia said that the iPhone was a big contributor to allowing people to have access to mobile games, which pushed the sales of video games in Africa significantly.

Further stating that the other significant contributor to the popularity of video games being played in Africa were Facebook games that people could access for free on a browser or on their cell phones.

As time went on in the industry, Tawia suggested, it saw more and more Flash-based games being produced that were following popular trends within the consumer market at the time. These Flash-based games typically had the same mechanics and general themes around them. An example of this would be the video game Farmville.

During the 2000's, the African game development scene saw a hand-full of start up companies come to life, including companies like Leti Arts (Ghana), Kiro Games (Cameroon) and Kuluya (Nigeria) to name a few. Tawia said that, unfortunately, as time went on, some of these companies struggled financially and some had to close down due to lack of funding.

However, Tawia suggested that funding is not the issue that is facing the game development industry in Africa today. He suggests that game developers need to become aware of how to run a successful business with a solid team that has a variety of skills.

Tawia said that today, there are more than forty game development companies within the African continent. These companies might be small and more independent than other AAA companies overseas, but it takes time to build up a company from scratch.

He suggests that it can take over ten years to become a big name in the game development industry internationally, and that a lot of new game development companies need to have patience when releasing and creating video games.

Tawia suggested that collaborative work with other companies that are successful in Africa (like MTN, for example) could be key to unlocking potential business and funding opportunities.

Topic 2: Important Information for Investors in the African Industry

The next question that was posed by Benjamin to the panelists, particular to Mars Maasai, asked the panelists what are important elements for an investor to know when providing funding to a game development company?

Mars Maasai

Maasai has more of a focus on ESports rather than game development. He believes that the promise of funding can be detrimental to game development companies. He went on to explain that game developers, especially those who have created a new company and are relatively new to the scene itself, are married to the idea of grants. He suggested that funding can sometimes create a “safe space” for developers. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as having a strong sense of income is a positive thing for those who obtain a grant or some kind of funding, but it seems to have created an attitude within developers that funding is the be all and end all of developing games.

Maasai further explained that finances are a challenge, not only for the game developers in the industry, but also for those who give out the grants and funding. As a member of the HEVA, Mars said that it can be tricky to figure out how to give out grants and investments to developers because there tends to be a lack of structure and business-knowledge in developers and their companies.



Massai suggested that developers need to learn to create business proposals for the game that they want to obtain funding for. In their proposals, developers need to segment their needs as a company or group of developers and the possible outcomes that they are able to produce from the funding that they obtain.

Limpho Moeti

Suggested that a lot of game developers in Africa do not know what their needs are or would be because game developers are focused on the skills required for developing and not so much on the business side of the industry.

Eyram Tawia

Suggested that there needs to be some innovation around the way funding is obtained and given out to developers within Africa. He asked the question, “How do we blend business and the creativity that comes with game development?”.

Mars Maasai

Responded to Tawia by saying that some funding organisations create an incubation program for developers so that they can support smaller game development businesses for a single product to see how they perform, the outcomes of their incubation and the results of selling their product before they will give long-term investments to the game developers.

Topic 3: The Importance of African Content in Video Games

The next question posed by Benjamin to the panelists, in particular to Liphho Moeti.

Liphho Moeti

Responded saying that developers who want to make video games that have African content within them need to start thinking of innovative ways to represent Africa and its cultural elements which turn those elements into fantasy. Fantasy is a great way to captivate video game consumers, both within the continent and internationally so that they can make the content relevant to their own lives.

Moeti continued to say that the African market is treated as a type of niche that developers need to work around but, in actuality, this market is massive. Developers need to ask themselves, what kind of games do consumers who watched the Black Panther movie want to play? How do developers captivate that audience and create video game content that was as successful as the movie?



Another reason as to why African content is important within video games, according to Moeti, is to challenge the stereotypes that already exist within media that uses African content as a driving force. There are many damaging, stereotypical roles within currently existing video games and other media that need to be challenged by developers to bring about realistic and powerful characters and stories from Africa and its culture.

Moeti went on to say that there is an idea or conception, especially in western audiences, that if something is from Africa then it is inherently not as good as something from the West. This is also something that developers from Africa need to challenge, and they can do so by creating powerful, African content within their video games.

There is a need to make video games that are marketed to Africans but are also palatable to western audiences. Whilst this might be tricky for developers to achieve, it is not impossible and requires a lot more research in marketing within video games from Africa.

Summary of Panel Discussion:

1. More collaborative work between game developers and established South African companies (like MTN, Asus etc.) to create business opportunities for game developers in what is still a new and growing industry.
2. There is lack of understanding throughout the African game development community as to how to run a successful game development company and how to create proposals that allow these companies to obtain financing and/or funding.
3. Game developers in Africa do not know what their business needs are or would be, currently game developers are rather focused on the skills growth for developing.
4. Game developers need to start thinking of innovative ways to represent Africa and its cultural and creative contributions in order to challenge African stereotypes and the idea that if something is from Africa it is inherently not as good as something from the West.
5. There needs to be more research into the target audience for games within the African continent. Both in genre and content. Developers need to create video games that are marketed to Africans, but are also palleted to western audiences.

4. Open Discussion - Detailed Report

After the panel discussion, the participants were able to ask the panelists questions and engage in an open conversation about the game development community within Africa.



Question 1: What Advice Would You Give To Your Younger Self?

Mars Maasai

Maasai wished that he had a stronger idea as to what it means to invest in projects, what it means to market, various legislation issues that he has currently tackled, administration duties etc. He did not expect funding and investing to be this difficult. If he could tell his younger self anything, it would be to not give up and never expect things to go smoothly.

Eyram Tawia

Tawia reflected on his development history and said that he would tell his younger self that it is going to be hard but he should always remain passionate. Tawia also said that his younger self should look at what works for Africa in terms of his video games' content and do more research into the African consumer market for video games.

Limpho Moeti

Moeti said that she would tell her younger that the important thing is not to make things for yourself but to get involved in community creation. She said that she would tell her younger self that it would not be easy and that her younger self needs to find out what the game development industry needs and how she can fit into it.

Question 2: What Does the Industry Need?

Limpho Moeti

Moeti suggested that she thinks that the industry needs a solid, sustainable community so that developers can support one another. Right now, there are pockets of communities, but some are more exclusive than others.

There also needs to be some kind of support and guidance when it comes to the financial needs of the developers and their companies. Moeti's statement left participants wondering if there is some kind of organization that would be willing to give advice or support when it comes to business and finances for game developers.

Moeti also urged developers to not be scared of the idea of "selling out". In other words, developers should take on deals with sponsors and investors without feeling ashamed of not creating financial success by themselves for themselves.

Eyram Tawia

Suggested that the developers in the industry need to stop being so competitive with one another - this creates a toxic industry where everyone fights for themselves. There needs to be more collaborative work within the industry, between developers. Developers need to cooperate with one another and not compete.

Tawia added that there needs to be a focus more towards the artists within the industry and that being able to program and code is not the totality of making video games.

There needs to be more training for artists who are curious about the industry and not so much gatekeeping to get started on making video games.

Mars Maasai

Suggested that developers need to realize that creating video games in the African continent is a lot cheaper than on most other continents and that the way in which video games are developed here is very different than internationally.

From this point, Maasai suggested that perhaps standardizing the costs for video games development across the continent would be a good idea. This would mean that developers from different countries within Africa can collaborate easier when it comes to finances and business transactions between African game development countries.

Standardized costs would also mean that more African investors would be willing to invest in different companies from different places across Africa.

Question 3: In The Next 10 Years, What Do You Hope to See in the The African Game Development Industry?

Limpho Moeti

She hopes to see more sustainable and bigger game development companies across the continent, similar to the big AAA companies that operate internationally. She said that she hopes that there will be more international and local recognition of what African game creators do and the games that they make.

Moeti also hopes to see governments become better at supporting the industry and understanding the infrastructure of industry and its needs in order to grow.

Eyram Tawia

Replied saying that he hopes that there will be more schools, primary, secondary and tertiary, teaching game design and development across the continent. He said that he hopes that with this education, more people will become involved within the industry - both creatively/artistically and from the technical/programming side.

Mars Maasai

Hopes to see more money being funded into the African game development industry and its developers. He hopes that these companies and the industry are able to find more financial sustainability so that their businesses are able to grow and release more African products into the video game market.

Masaai hopes to see more specialization within video game roles - both from a financial perspective and from a developers/creators perspective. He hopes that more people who are interested in business, finances and law start to practise within the video game realm and that developers / creators start to specialize in specific development roles (such as technical artists, for example).

Maasai also hopes for some kind of foundation to arise for developers of video games - a foundation that helps developers network and sustain their businesses. Whilst there are small pockets of these foundation, they rely heavily on governments' participation and support, which can be risky and unsustainable.

Summary of Open Discussion:

Panelists were asked: What does the industry need?

1. The industry needs a sustainable community, to support each other and growth for the industry.
2. Guidance when in financing, business development and market readiness.
3. Developers in the industry need to stop being so competitive with one another - this creates a toxic industry.
4. Focus needs to be brought to getting creative artists involved in the industry - more focus on arts (design, script, animation, sound) rather than programming.
5. Standardizing the costs for African developers to create games might make investors willing to invest in different companies from different places across Africa.

In the next ten years, the panelists hope to see the following within the game development industry:

More sustainable and bigger game development companies across the continent.

More international and local recognition of what African game creators do and the games that they make.

See governments become better at supporting the industry and understanding the infrastructure of the industry and its needs in order to grow.

More education in and around video game development across the continent.

More funding for the industry from big organizations.

More companies in the industry being able to find financial sustainability so that their businesses are able to grow.

Greater specialization within video game development roles - both within the business and the practical side of creating video games.

The creation of a foundation that helps developers network and sustain their businesses.

5. Recap of The Futures and Networking Event 2018



What has Changed from the 2018 Futures and Networking Event?

After a quick recap of the highlights from the previous year's event, Ben Myres asked the participants in an open discussion: what they think has changed in the industry since last year.

Participants responded saying:

→ The industry/community of developers have become more open to sharing both their game ideas as well as their skills to the community.

→ Not much has changed - there is still a need for frequent game development related events to happen that are more accessible.

→ More developers are becoming less and less interested in the Make Games SA community because of its exclusiveness.

→ It also seems that The Goethe Institute has become a lot more proactive in the industry as they are hosting more game development related events and partnering with organizations like the Fak'ugesi Festival to invite new people into the community.

→ Having said that, one participant raised the point that there are still not a lot of game development related events occurring in the Johannesburg space, and even when there are, we are seeing less and less students turn up to these events.

→ There was an inquiry into why we are losing more students in game development-related events. The participants recognized that there seems to be a lot of student apathy, particularly from Wits students, when it comes to game-related events.

The participants asked where this apathy could stem from:

- Is it a marketing problem? Do organizations that host game development events need to advertise more?
- Is it a matter of students being overworked and not being able to put time into these events?
- Is it a content issue? Are students not interested in what events have to offer?
- Is it a matter of students not being able to find work in the field once they graduate so going to these events feels pointless to them?

Tawia added to the conversation, saying that the community in Ghana experiences the same sort of problems as South Africa, specifically the Johannesburg community. He said that the reason why a lot of students do not turn up to events in Ghana is because the game development events content is catered towards professional/experienced developers. A lot of the time, students are merely there to try and find a job, not to learn from or absorb any skill sharing content.

Participants asked one another how the industry could go about changing this attitude of students and the fact that not much has changed from the previous year's event.

What is needed, particularly in Johannesburg, is a group of community developers whose sole purpose is to drive the community to grow, become sustainable and focus on the needs of the community. This group of community developers can work with organizations such as the Fak'ugesi Festival and the Goethe Institute to help with research into student apathy, organizing networking events, game jams and other game development related opportunities.



One Focused Goal for a Community Development Group

Benjamin then asked the participants and the panelists to name one particular goal that they would like to see a community development group focus on for the game development community in Johannesburg. The participants responded with the following:

1. Encourage the community to share and play one another's games - play testing and giving feedback is important for developers to improve their games. It might improve the quality of video games that are created in South Africa.
2. Work with lecturers from various institutes to cater and push game development events to students. Work with lecturers and senior students to create content that junior students would enjoy and want to participate in.
3. Help the lecturers manage the students' expectations of the industry and educate them on the state of the industry as it is now. Help grow the confidence of students, their willingness to learn and the work that they are making.
4. Expose the students to professionals within the industry - both international and local professionals to help them understand how they fit into the industry and the potential jobs that they could get after graduating.
5. Encourage all members of the game development community to create more games - the bad games are just as important as the good games because they allow for learning and growth.

Summary of 2018 Outcomes:

The participants were asked what they thought had changed in the industry since last year:

1. Not much has changed - there is still a need for frequent game development related events to happen that are more accessible.
2. Less and less students are participating in game development related events in the industry.

3. The Johannesburg game development scene needs a group of community developers whose sole purpose is to drive the community to grow and focus on the needs of the community.

The participants were then asked what they would want this community development group to focus on:

1. Encourage the community to share and play one another's games.
2. Work with lecturers from various institutes to cater for and push game development events to students.
3. Help the lecturers manage the students' expectations of the industry and educate them on the state of the industry as it is now.
4. Expose the students to professionals within the industry - both international and local professionals.
5. Encourage all members of the game development community to create more games.

The following points were highlighted from The Futures and Networking Event that occurred in 2018. The participants in the 2018 event wanted to see more of the following:

1. Collaboration between game developers and creatives from other sectors.
2. More interaction with students (primary, secondary and tertiary) to get them involved in game development.
3. Fostering diversity in the community (invite more women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ folk into the community).
4. More game-focused events (including events like game jams, networking opportunities and play testing events).
5. Regular community meet ups that are not in inaccessible areas to people with transport issues.
6. The participants wanted the game development community to stop being exclusive and stop not sharing skills, game ideas and business strategies.

For the full report of the 2018 event on the Fak'ugesi Festival website.

6. Conclusion

Whilst there is still a lot of work that needs to happen within the local and regional game development industry, the Futures and Networking Event proved to be a good meeting point for developers to discuss the problems and opportunities that they face in the industry.

Throughout the event, the developers were able to network with both local and regional developers in order to start forming connections within the SADC Region.

In order to communicate with the local game developers, feel free to join the discord server, created by Benjamin Myres:

<https://discord.gg/Zrh8dNH>

Special Thanks to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit for supporting the Futures and Networking Event, hosted by Fak'ugesi Arcade during the Fak'ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival.



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