

African women should be at the core of the narrative - Danai Gurira

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Last week playwright, activist, and actress Danai Gurira, joined by actress and comedian Yvonne Orji and journalist Lola Ogunnaike, had a conversation at Bloomberg's Africa Business Media Innovators Conference in Cape Town. Gurira expressed her enthusiasm for the creative potential in Africa: "we are in labour and we are trying to get these babies born."



Lola Ogunnaike, Yvonne Orji and Danai Gurira in Cape Town. Source: Supplied.

During her address, Gurira, known for her roles in films like *Black Panther* and TV series *The Walking Dead*, emphasised the significance of Africans creating and telling their own stories.

Historical challenge

"There is no reason why African women are not at the core of the narrative," said Gurira.

The playwright acknowledged the historical challenges of securing funding for these creative ventures, which she herself has gone through.

Gurira said when she wanted to make her award-winning Broadway play *Eclipsed*, her friends contributed money to help

her travel to Liberia to do research on the war. Although there are funds that can help up and coming filmmakers and playwrights, she said a lot of them only give creators funding after the work has been done.



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"When I went to buy a plane ticket [to Liberia] with the little money I had, I said what the hell am I doing? I should get a job and audition, but the drive was there, and I felt connected to those women," she said.

Gurira said authentic African stories have been left untold and are usually written and produced from the white male gaze. As a Zimbabwean American woman, she has hardly seen any stories that have been platformed about Black women in Zimbabwe whereas we can easily find content on people such as Cecil John Rhodes.

"There is always opposition because there is very little precedent we have. In my play *The Convert*, I wanted to tell the story of me. What happened to a 16-year-old girl of my look in Rhodesia, what is her story? The history books tell me nothing unless it's about Cecil John Rhodes and missionaries. This outraged me," she said.

"It did not make sense to me that I did not see stories around all the African women I grew up around. I didn't see narratives that are told from our perspective. I was seeing Western writers write about Africa in a very general and very unauthentic, with a White person being the lead in Africa."

Creative boom

Orji who is known for her role as Molly in hit show *Insecure*, said Africa's success will come from being recognised as a key market.

"Hollywood determines if something is successful by the Chinese market because they have the numbers. They will ask if it is a hit in America, London and China. We have to figure out how to get Africa as a continent to be one of those markers," said Orji.



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Gurira says you have to know the rules to know how to break them, markets such as South Korea and India have broken that mould.

"Your superpower is your authenticity, your superpower is doing something they have never seen and to do it so excellently and so humanly that there is no argument that it has to be seen and celebrated. Otherwise you are going to mimic the west to the West and honestly it's not going to come out that great. Once we learn the skills and once we tell [our stories] with ferocity and fearless authenticity there is reason we should not fly," she said.

Concludes Orji: "South Korea and India did not try to get the Western gaze, they started at home. Be successful here at home."

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SiMag, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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