



TRADE & INDUSTRIAL POLICY STRATEGIES

BLACK INDUSTRIALISTS CASE STUDIES

Pambili Media

August 2022

The Black Industrialists Policy aims to increase the participation of black South Africans in operational management, rather than just financial ownership, of enterprises in key sectors and value chains. The programme was launched in 2015 by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, supported by the Industrial Development Corporation and the National Empowerment Fund.

The Black Industrialists Conference in August 2022 examined the impact of the Black Industrialists Programme and explored support measures to boost entry of black-owned businesses and producers into the mainstream economy. It also showcased the work of black industrialists. As an input into the conference, TIPS prepared nine case studies on black industrialists. Renee Grawitzky conducted the research and interviews, and TIPS provided the industry context and looked at the broader developmental objectives.

This case study profiles Pambili Media, a film production company. Other companies profiled are: CapeBio Technologies; Easy Farm; Equal ELM Trading; Flat-Foot Engineering; Ikusasa Green; Microfinish; PepsiCo ESOP; and Sindane Mining Ventures. Copies of the case studies are [available here](#).

Pambili Media: film production company

Pambili Media is a film production company as well as a creative agency. It has produced a number of award-winning films, including *Kalushi: The Story of Solomon Mahlangu* (2016), and *Silverton Siege* (2021). Its core mission is to present the history, struggle and victories of the people of South Africa and the continent as a whole. In the process, it creates films that generate hundreds of jobs and earn foreign exchange through international distribution, including on Netflix. In addition to its own production, the company rents out equipment and provides production services.

Pambili Media mobilises funding from both the public and private sector for its productions. The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic), the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the Department of Arts and Culture are key supporters for the industry in South Africa. Among others, the dtic funded *Kalushi*. The National Film and Video Foundation, which is supported by the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, helped finance *Silverton Siege*. The dtic has also supported Pambili Media in establishing its facilities rental company with funding through the National Industrial Participation Programme.

Mandla Dube started Pambili Media in 2000, drawing on his long experience of film work in the United States in the 1990s. Dube was born in Mabopane but his parents sent him to Atlanta, Georgia, when he was 16, at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle. While there he attended Clark Atlanta University – the same university as American film director Spike Lee – who inspired him as Lee sought to tell authentic stories about African Americans. Dube, in turn, is also driven by the desire to tell stories about both black South Africans and Africans in the diaspora. This passion goes back to the age of six or seven when his parents put him in front of a television, “that unlocked my tongue”.

Following the release of Nelson Mandela, Dube decided to return home. But he found it hard to break into the South African film industry, which at that time was small and closed, so he returned to the US to study at the American Film Institute in Hollywood. After he graduated, he was able to work on major productions such as *The Italian Job* and *Men in Black 2*. His first professional film was with Spike Lee in *Drop Squad*. Although he has written, produced and directed films, he sees himself first and foremost as a cinematographer.

Ultimately, Dube returned to South Africa and taught film studies at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Tshwane University of Technology before founding Pambili Media. He is committed to mentoring and teaching emerging black filmmakers. He was instrumental in starting the independent black film makers’ collective. Still, he notes that it remains difficult for black entrepreneurs to penetrate the film value chain, especially the production side.

Dube appreciates the understanding at the dtic and the IDC “of the role that the film industry can play in contributing towards the economic development through the creation of much needed jobs amongst young people and the inflow of foreign exchange from international studios that have operations in the country. Global players such as Netflix, Warner Bros and Universal currently have studios in the country and they also benefit from rebates provided by the dtic which encourages them to remain and use local talent.”

He notes that delays in getting the rebates could reverse some of these gains. He still underscores the potential of the industry as a job creator, noting that “we could employ anything between 300-500 people for a period of six months to even beyond a year, depending on how big the project is”. Dube argues that the government has a central role to play in building the film industry, which contributes directly to economic development as well as deepening local culture, supporting tourism, and strengthening social cohesion.

In this context, the industry strategy that the dtic drives increasingly aims to fund, not only individual films, but also black-owned production houses with the requisite skills, equipment and distribution networks. The promotion of the film industry underscores the importance of culture and creative work for industrial policies to meet today’s needs. Producers in this sector have a twofold role. On the one hand, in modern economies, they have become a powerhouse that provides employment on a large scale; generates a significant share of the GDP; improves design across the economy, which has become critical for competitiveness; and supports tourism. On the other hand, building social and cultural capital and strong knowledge networks is a prerequisite for sustained economic development. That is especially important as a foundation for inclusive industrialisation in highly unequal and diverse societies like South Africa.

Trade & Industrial Policies Strategies (TIPS) is an independent, non-profit, economic research institution established in 1996 to support economic policy development. TIPS undertakes quantitative and qualitative research, project management, dialogue facilitation, capacity building and knowledge sharing. Its areas of focus are: industrial policy, trade and regional integration, sustainable growth, and a just transition to a sustainable inclusive economy.

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