

# AI Series

In the fifth instalment of a six-part series on the disruption within the creative industries occasioned by Artificial Intelligence (AI), **Bamuraki Musinguzi** looks at how AI has impacted the film industry.

**M**att Bish, the director/producer at Bish Films Limited, talks of the film industry in Uganda “gradually adjusting to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in productions. He further notes that “small steps” are being taken.

“[...] but there’s a long way to go before AI becomes a mainstream tool in Ugandan filmmaking,” he concludes.

In its 2024 Creative Economy Outlook report, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) advises against the dragging of it.

“Digitalisation reduces costs in creative industries through efficiency and can improve their revenues through product and process innovation, wider reach to audiences and new business models,” UNCTAD notes in the report, adding, “Developing countries can use these opportunities to enhance the competitiveness of their creative industries and further integrate them into regional and global value chains,” the report states.

While AI has a track record in the film industry of, as UNCTAD discloses, generating anything from scripts, journalistic text, music, images, captions, animations, and virtual reality content, Cindy Evelyn Magara, Ugandan filmmaker and film production consultant at Nyati Motion Pictures, tells *Weekend Monitor* that the input in Uganda is “not yet quantifiable.”

Magara, who is also a lecturer in film and literature at Makerere University, adds that you can count off the fingers of one hand studios that “have AI assistants in writing and production.”

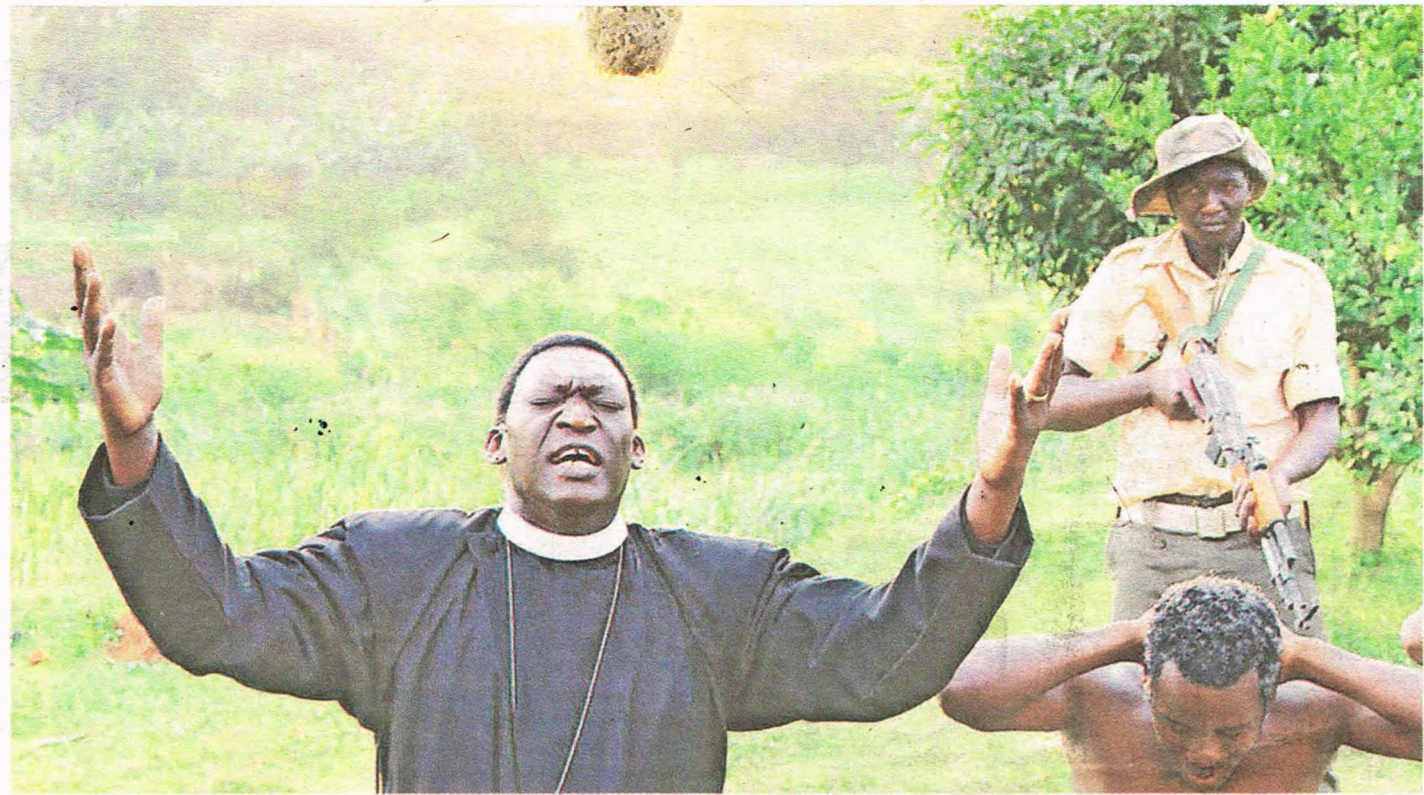
Bish takes up one of those five fingers. In his film, *Janani The Last Stand*, AI, he tells *Weekend Monitor*, “played a crucial role in creating scenes that would have been impossible to capture on camera.” He also used AI-powered tools to help with “editing, sound design, and visual effects.”

In its report, UNCTAD says AI “can help create and analyse screenplays, streamline pre-production processes, analyse data and audience preferences, and create more realistic special effects.” The workflow process can also be improved, with machine learning tools arranging “video clips, making it more straightforward for editors to find specific camera angles and dialogue scenes.” Elsewhere, the algorithms “assist in restoring old prints by eliminating dirt and scratches and correcting warp and flicker issues.”

### Upsides

Bart Kakooza, a Ugandan documentary filmmaker, television producer and journalist, concurs, noting that “the benefits are very minimal because the Ugandan players use basic AI.” Yet AI can help in both upstream and downstream processes.

“The role of Artificial Intelligence in the pre-production stage has been especially notable. Hollywood companies are gradually adopting Artificial Intelligence tools to analyse financial, script, audience data and ultimately influence studios’ commissioning decisions,”



A scene from the movie *Janani The Last Stand* cast. Matt Bish, the director/producer at Bish Films Limited, says AI was used in the making of the film. PHOTO/FILE

# Hold on to your seats as AI changes film industry

UNCTAD says in its 2024 report.

“These tools combine machine learning techniques, natural language processing, data mining and big data, and principles from risk analysis within the context of the filmed entertainment business. For example, an Artificial Intelligence platform processes film screenplays as inputs and generates analytics about features of the screenplay, commercial viability and a final recommendation to green-light or reject,” it adds.

It’s not just what is obvious to the naked eye like increasing the resolution of images and videos but also intangibles such as analytics around the emotions by scene or a character’s likeability, AI can positively intervene in all those processes. The UNCTAD report adds that the creative economy uses techniques that enhance content to add visual special effects, a type of enhanced animation. Movies can combine physics models with algorithms to create three-dimensional animations. Head-mounted cameras and facial tracking markers can transform actors’ faces into characters.

The report further notes that compressing data, including audio and video, improves quality and user experience. Furthermore, several creative activities demand increasing the quality and quantity of visual content, more immersive experiences, and greater interactivity, all for increased user numbers. Compressing data, notably video, is necessary to reconcile this demand with available network capacity.

“The benefits of AI in filmmaking are numerous,” Bish starts, adding, “For one, it gives filmmakers more control over their projects, allowing them to experiment with new ideas and approaches. AI also levels the playing field, enabling small productions to produce high-quality content that rivals bigger-budget films. With AI, filmmakers can generate environments, create realistic action sequences, and speed up the editing process, making it an indispen-



### Job security.

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– Matt Bish, the director/producer at Bish Films Limited.

### Using AI.

AI churns out what has been input. As I earlier said, the producer would own the Apps that are used to produce the films. Logically, the film should belong to the production company and not the platform that facilitates the production.

– Cindy Evelyn Magara, Ugandan filmmaker and film production consultant at Nyati Motion Pictures.

sible tool in modern filmmaking.”

### Downsides

Yet AI is not without drawbacks. UNCTAD says in its 2024 report that AI can threaten movie industry workers who see their jobs at risk of disappearing. “Hollywood writers initiated a strike in May 2023, expressing concerns about Artificial Intelligence-generated scripts that potentially displaced many writers. These professionals were concerned that studios might begin creating scripts using Artificial Intelligence, reducing the need for most writers. Furthermore, writers wanted to guaran-

tee that their previous works, such as screenplays and scripts, would not be used to train Artificial Intelligence systems.”

Bish agrees, noting that “if not managed carefully, AI could displace certain jobs, particularly in editing and visual effects.” He, however, offers a caveat, noting that “the key is to ensure that AI is used as a tool to augment human creativity, rather than replace it.” By embracing AI as a partner, he adds, “filmmakers can unlock new possibilities while minimising the risks.”

According to Stanford University, in the past few years, AI technology has crossed a threshold with the capability to make people look and sound like other people. A “deepfake” is fabricated hyper-realistic digital media, including video, image, and audio content. Not only has this technology created confusion, scepticism, and the spread of misinformation, deepfakes also pose a threat to privacy and security.

With the ability to convincingly impersonate anyone, cybercriminals can orchestrate phishing scams or identity theft operations with alarming precision. In a recent incident, cybercriminals posed as a company’s chief financial officer and other colleagues in a Zoom meeting. The elaborate scam led to the loss of \$25 million (Shs92 billion), the university adds.

“I don’t think there are Apps available to Ugandans to identify deepfake films. Such Apps are very expensive. I am not sure ordinary people would afford the subscription costs,” Magara says when asked what tools are available for Ugandans to identify deepfake films.

### Future prospects

As to whether Ugandans have been prepared to tell the difference between a film produced by a human and one by AI, Magara replied: “I am not sure. Generally, we are interested in the story. Knowledge of the technical aspects that may give away AI is still limited among the spectators.”

Magara contends that over-dependence on AI for productions will kill human creativity. “It definitely will. Just look at people who use Google maps and soon their brain stops concentrating on the physical features of the place. You know Google will tell you when to turn. Consequently, you become a for-eigner in your home. It is probable, over time, human beings will lack the creative basics. Again, this is subject to the extent of reliance on AI.”

Asked who owns the copyright in cases where a film has entirely been generated by AI, Magara replies: “The production company does. You will be using tools you paid for, for example. You will still have some input. You select the theme, colour, characters and names, among others. There is still creativity from the filmmaker. You must input something like a concept before a film is populated for you. I am talking about extreme cases.”

She adds: “I am listening a lot to AI music. Whenever I am doing it, I am grateful to the writer. Of course, someone puts the lyrics, the genre and the voice they want to duplicate. Well, the thought of my diction here is problematic. Duplication is the most problematic of all. And it should answer you. AI reduces authenticity; and increases quantity. The choice is ours to make.”

On whether there are mechanisms in the film industry to protect the Intellectual Property Rights of its members in relation to AI, Magara says: “I think there should be. AI churns out what has been input. As I earlier said, the producer would own the Apps that are used to produce the films. Logically, the film should belong to the production company and not the platform that facilitates the production.”

Next weekend, we will bring down the curtain on the series by looking at how governments and multi-national bodies are developing policies and strategies to regulate AI use.