

# Opening up the African exhibition space

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Africa offers a significant growth opportunity for exhibition organisers: one that has already been spotted by international exhibition players, with over 50% of the events in South Africa, 60% in Nigeria and over 70% in Kenya already run by international companies.



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Despite the challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa, these economies have been attracting international investment interest, said Carol Weaving, chairperson of the Association of African Exhibition Organisers (AAXO) and MD of Thebe Reed Exhibitions in South Africa.

“The exhibition industry has seen significant growth over the past 10 years with many International organisers setting their sights on African exhibition industry as a new frontier for growth.”

Weaving was speaking at the presentation of the Grant Thornton Report on the *Economic Impact of the Exhibition Industry* in Gauteng, South Africa.

She said that South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya are all markets at the early stages of development that are ready for the picking. Nigeria, in particular, has considerable potential for growth. “While Nigeria is risky, the investment will come from South African exhibition organisers, and it is already an attractive market for international exhibition organising companies.”

What is constraining this market and the other two, is a lack of venues. South Africa has six venues offering 120 000m<sup>2</sup>; in Nigeria, three totalling 40 000m<sup>2</sup>; and in Kenya, only two offering a total of 10 000m<sup>2</sup>.

“This lack of venues is a key barrier to growth and without scale the risk to enter these markets is too great,” Weaving added.

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That is why, AAXO urges the African convention bureaus and governments to work with them to find a solution to the venue capacity crisis on the continent. “The association can work with the convention bureaus and department of tourism to build an exhibition community which will have a phenomenal economic impact on their respective countries.”

The importance of exhibitions and their contribution to a country cannot be underestimated, she says. The Grant Thornton Report on the *Economic Impact of the Exhibition Industry in South Africa*, found that exhibitions add R66.5 billion to the country’s GDP, contributing R3 billion to national taxes and 135 100 sustainable/created jobs.

In 2015 of the five million visitors to exhibitions in South Africa, tourists accounted for one million. The industry contributed R23 billion to the tourism sector and sustained 47 000 jobs. The direct impact to the tourism sector is R7.6 billion.

The exhibition industry’s impact on tourism is huge, says Weaving. “That is why we have to ensure that business understands the importance of exhibitions.”

## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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