

Global Social Change Film Festival, Bali, Indonesia

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Open Spaces

Speculations on Openings, Closings, and Thresholds in International Public Media

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Post written by [Patricia Zimmermann](#), professor of cinema, photography and media arts at Ithaca College and codirector of the [Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival](#)

Agriculture and Cinema?

What do agricultural economics and cinema have in common?

Stumped?

Two words.

Cynthia Phillips.

And five more... the [Global Social Change Film Festival](#) (GSCFF) slated to unspool in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia April 13-17, 2011.

For Cynthia Phillips, the founding director of this new festival, the challenges of food security, world hunger, poverty, and sustainable futures lead directly and logically to film and media for social change.

A New Film Festival in Indonesia

The Global Social Change Film Festival and Institute focuses not on film markets, deals, auteurs, landing big movie stars, discoveries of the next breakthrough genius, or launching the next new wave.

“We’re about creating spaces for dialogue around these films,” explains Phillips. “We want to connect filmmakers and activists for community building.”

To this end, the festival plans to convene filmmakers, activists, and audiences for meaningful discussion in Bali, an island renowned for its embrace of the arts, slower pace, and open culture. With only 8 feature films screened in open air venues over 4 days, the festival is making a strong statement that extended dialogue matters.



Phillips hopes that filmmakers will explore how to build audiences beyond festivals by linking with activist groups. And she hopes that activists will learn more about the possibilities of a range of media.

In an international media landscape crammed with film festivals in nearly every city on almost every theme imaginable, the GSCFF possesses an impressive clarity of vision by answering real needs. According to Phillips, the festival focuses on “addressing the needs of filmmakers to become more effective at outreach, and addressing how activists can become better storytellers.”

It’s a large mandate—but scalable. For Phillips, one word keeps everything in focus: outreach.

From Economics to Outreach

Phillips sports an unusual background for a film festival director.

After getting her PhD in agricultural economics from Michigan State University, she pulled together a team to record a convening by the USAID on hunger and poverty in Africa. That led to a stint in Singapore working in international marketing for American Express. And, now, she’s a high profile, high energy strategic planning consultant for a range of high end clients like One Degree Media, 2020 Fund, and others via her C. A. Phillips Company.

Along the way, she did some programming for the Sedona International Film Festival in Arizona around sustainability issues and locally sourced food.

That experience ignited her interest in solving a key unresolved problem lurking underneath the utopian, user-generated, all-tools-are-accessible-everyone-can-do everything, Web 2.0 media ecosystem: how do we build audiences for beautiful, well-produced social change films?

Staying on Point

The Global Social Change Film Festival seems to be unpacking that gnarly audience and outreach question in innovative ways. It’s honoring the nongovernmental social media group Engage Media in Jakarta, Indonesia with a special innovator award. It’s giving a special activist award to the Women and Children Crisis Center of Tonga. And it is honoring Indonesian filmmaker and social activist Nia Dinata.

During the day, the Institute part of the festival will offer a range of pointed workshops on pressing, unresolved, but necessary topics like Commercially Viable Social Change Filmmaking and Distribution, Hybrid Models of Distribution, and Film, Audience Building and Social Action and Environmental Film.

Challenges and Dialogues

However, challenges lurk despite this clarity of vision, marketing savvy, and ability to

pull in partners like the Global Fund for Women, Global Girl Media, and First People's Worldwide. All films need to pass through the government review board for approval, a time-consuming process but one that GSCFF respects as part of the media regulatory environment in Indonesia. It's also hard to pull together resources in a tough economy for a first-time film festival.

Drilling down into details like how to get different activists from around the Southeast Asian region to Ubud for workshops, the endlessly optimistic and undaunted Phillips observes "People are always asking me why start a film festival festival in this tough economy? "

Her answer is simple: "I tell them we need to create a space for dialogue about social change media and activism and outreach."