

CO-PRODUCTION

Making the right partnerships

Broadcasters are still hungry for big-hitting documentaries that can stand out in the schedules, but factual production can be an expensive business and many high-end series would simply not be made without a creative approach to funding. Andy Fry looks at the latest trends in factual co-production

CO-PRODUCTION continues to play a crucial role in factual film-making. Specialist factual events can help define a channel's brand, but to make them happen, the financial burden usually needs to be shared out between three or four well-resourced partners.

At the high-end of factual film-making, this risk-sharing "is because producers are looking to innovate," according to BBC Worldwide's director of factual Mark Reynolds. "They want to keep delivering landmark programmes and it's the job of companies like BBC Worldwide to help them put together the finance they need."

A case in point is *Africa*, a sumptuous six-part natural history series which has just aired to great acclaim on BBC One. "Africa involved the BBC, BBC Worldwide (BBCWW), Discovery, France TV and CCTV-9," Reynolds says. "In that case, BBCWW sat down with the BBC Natural History Unit to work out a detailed funding plan for the series."

Working out how to finance the show is only one part

of the puzzle for execs like Reynolds. "One of the biggest challenges is making sure all the partners get what they want. For example, France 2 doesn't have a weekly slot for this kind of show. So it ran a 90-minute special. Afterwards France 5 ran the full *Africa* six-parter."

This tailoring of requirements has become a bigger issue in recent years because broadcasters increasingly want

"We regularly meet up on the eve of MIP to talk business. Getting the likes of ZDFE, FRTV, NHK and National Geographic together is a way of preparing everyone for new developments in the sector"

Nikolas Huelbusch

Africa, aired to great acclaim on BBC One

