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Kenya's Kibera kid savours stardom



By **Tomi Oladipo**
BBC, Nairobi

A new film set in Africa's largest slum Kibera - often associated with poverty and crime - hopes to shatter its negative stereotypes.

Kibera lies just outside the heart of the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, and is home to more than 1m people.

The densely populated slum is a collection of squalid mud huts, corrugated iron shacks and shelters covered with plastic sheeting, with no sewage pipes, no roads, no water, no toilets, in fact, with no services of any kind.

But the makers of the 12-minute film, *Kibera Kid*, believe there is more to the slum than the stories of suffering and gloom that too often make it into the news.

The internationally acclaimed film tells the story of a 12-year-old orphaned boy Otieno and is shot entirely in the slum, starring local actors.

Following a botched robbery, Otieno is forced to choose between saving an innocent man's life and his gang called the Razors, the only family he knows.

Fourteen-year-old Ignatius Juma, who plays Otieno, has taken to his new-found stardom with ease.

"I am very happy because I am the first person from Kibera to succeed in acting," he says.

"For me it is easy because I also act in school... Now, I am used to being treated like a star."

The film has awakened his dreams of making it big as an



" I am very happy because I am the first person from Kibera to succeed in acting "

Ignatius Juma

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international film star.

Unless, he says, he succeeds in his first ambition to become Kenya's president.

'Wrong image'

Kibera Kid is the second film from Hot Sun Films, a community-based charitable trust, and is currently showing at film festivals around the world.

The trust aims to give slum residents an opportunity to tell their stories to the world using local knowledge and resources, including volunteers, to produce low-budget films.



There are plans to turn the short film into a feature length movie

Nathan Collett, an independent US filmmaker who is the group's co-ordinator, says the project has been received with a lot of enthusiasm from Kibera residents.

"They give us their ideas, and we see how we can make it happen," he says.

"We're not interested in giving people money; we are imparting knowledge and giving them an opportunity to do it themselves."

Hot Sun Films was inspired by and borrows its name from Kenya's informal jua kali industry.

In Kiswahili jua kali means hot sun and refers to crafts people who make their merchandise on the streets, rather than in a factory setting.

However, Kibera Kid has fallen wide of its intention for some at home.

"Some people have been complaining that we are taking the wrong image abroad that Kenya is very poor," says Godfrey Ojiambo, one of the film's producers.

"But the truth is that Kibera exists and it is a slum."

“ Don't say that I don't have a talent, so because I'm in Kibera I can't do anything ”

However, he said that by focusing on one person's story the film becomes a tale of hope - and it also empowers Kibera residents to develop solutions to the problems they are facing.

Ignatius Juma

He also expressed the hope that the film would inspire other Kenyans to get involved in efforts to improve the quality of life in Kibera.

And Ignatius says there is an important lesson Kibera residents can take away from the film.

"Always work hard," he says.

"Don't say that I don't have a talent, so because I'm in Kibera I can't do anything.

"I'm also from Kibera, I didn't know that I would ever act. When the chance comes, you should try to use it to succeed."

As the success of Kibera Kid proves, even those living in poverty cannot be held back from stardom and there are now plans to produce a full-length version of the film.

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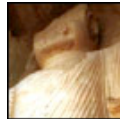
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