

How Hip-Hop Parliament is Giving Youth IN SLUMS of Kenyan a Voice

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How Hip-Hop Parliament is Giving Youth IN SLUMS of Kenyan a Voice by Brian Ngugi, Nairobi, Kenya.

A quiet revolution is taking place in Kenyan slums. Driven by need to bring about social change, various youth in slums within Nairobi, the capital city, have coalesced under the banner, Hip-Hop parliament.

Kenyan slums or ghettos are commonly a haven of social problems ranging from poverty, unemployment, insecurity, to disease and poor housing. It's also in these slums where the effects of the economic burden of the runaway inflation in Kenya, are being felt most. Some of these effects include escalating costs of food and basic commodities. Despite these facts, most government policies, being intrinsically national, are ineffective in improving the squalor, that slum dwellers find themselves in. With these challenges in mind, the Hip-Hop parliament is seeking to publicize the problems of this very poor and vulnerable, with an aim to alleviate or eradicate them altogether.

It has borrowed its modus operandi from the Kenyan parliament whereby each slum has a representative, elected by its constituents. He (she) then takes over the role of articulating his (her) constituent's agenda, when the parliament convenes. However, unlike most Kenyan politicians, these unique members of parliament identify with social and economic deprivation on a first hand basis having dwelt in these slums most or all their lives and hence their genuine desire for change.

Already, the parliament's community advocacy and organizing efforts are lending credibility to community based solutions to regular and simply intractable slum problems. It's also opening up space for the slum dwellers, their activists and other parties interested in promoting social and economic justice.

Earlier this year, during the post election crisis, the Hip-Hop parliament facilitated a retreat where "MP's" from these ghettos held a stop-the-violence themed workshop. Products from this workshop included works of art such as drama; poetry and rap songs all laced with messages of peace and directed at their youth peers. (It's notable that unemployed youth formed majority of the perpetrators of the recently witnessed post election violence). A peace petition was also signed and presented to former UN Chief Kofi Anan, who mediated the peace deal that gave

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birth to the current grand-coalition government.

This distinctive parliament is also doing an enviable job of updating slum dwellers on various governmental initiatives and policy deliberations that have a direct and immediate effect on them. Critics might dismiss these youth's initiative as insignificant, but all the same this is a critical step towards empowering and giving youth in slums a voice.