

Nairobi Half Life with Tosh Gitonga

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Nairobi Half Life is a film about a young man going to the city to follow his dream and instead ends up in crime. The film was [submitted for an Oscar award](#). Tosh Gitonga, director of the film, speaks to us about Kenya's growing film industry and what the submission means. [video]



Tosh Gitonga

■ *How does it feel for the film to be submitted for an Oscar award?*

Tosh Gitonga: It is an amazing feeling. I am still on a high.

■ *What does this mean to Kenya's film industry?*

Gitonga: It means that Kenya is recognised as a formidable film industry and exposes us well to the world. It can only be good for us.

■ *What challenges did you face while making the film?*

Gitonga: Budget constraints are always a problem. You don't have enough funds to execute what you want to. Also for this film it was difficult shooting in the real locations but we managed.

■ *What is the objective of the film?*

Gitonga: To tell a simple Kenyan story of life as it is. We choose what we want to get out of it.

■ *How many actors are in the film and how did you select them?*

Gitonga: There are over 50 actor. I personally casted, together with Kamau Wa Ndungu, all the speaking roles

■ *How long did it take to produce the film?*

Gitonga: Three weeks of pre-production and four weeks of filming.

■ *What were some of the highs and lows of directing the movie?*

Gitonga: Having to do so much in such a short time and also when we didn't have our way. Maybe a location we wanted was not available. Or we couldn't shoot a scene the way we wanted because of hazards and so on. But we connected and blended so well that it was a joy making the film. There was satisfaction everyday when we wrapped.

■ *Was there a time you felt you wanted to give up?*

Gitonga: Never! I am not that kind of person - quitting does not even come close to my thoughts.

❑ ***Assuming you had another chance to redo the film, what would you change?***

Gitonga: It's a difficult question. One thing about filming is that you always grow. If I did *Nairobi Half Life* again, it is a different time. Things cannot be the same.

❑ ***You were mentored by renowned director Tom Tykwer. What did you learn from him that you used in directing the film?***

Gitonga: Focus, hardwork, defining every little detail and how to be a better leader by leading by example.

❑ ***The film depicts a storyline of most people around the world who chase after the "American dream". In the film, Mwas is chasing the "Nairobi dream". What makes coming to Nairobi a unique experience? Does the same reflect in other urban cities?***

Gitonga: I have met a South African, Nigerian who have watched the film and the related to it. So I would say yes it does reflect other urban cities. Mwas coming to Nairobi is not unique. That's not what the story is about. It is about a journey to find oneself.

❑ ***The actors speak a lot of sheng (a Swahili-based slang originating in Nairobi), what is this meant to portray?***

Gitonga: It is simply the language spoken by the characters they are portraying. The film had to be as authentic as it could be.

❑ ***Which is your favourite part of the movie?***

Gitonga: I love everything! The whole film is a part of me!

❑ ***It is every film makers dream to have his/her film nominated and win an Oscar Award. Assuming the film is nominated and wins an award, what next for you?***

Gitonga: I will be right here striving to make more and more films.

❑ ***Are you working on any other films?***

Gitonga: Yes. Still early stages.

❑ ***Joseph Wairimu, one of the actors in the film won the Best Actor award at the [Durban International Film Festival](#). What does this mean for actors in Kenya?***

Gitonga: It's a boost and a motivation. They can endeavour to look far and beyond their own limits. Open up a

❑ ***What challenges face film directors, producers and actors in Kenya?***

Gitonga: Systems and a formula to grow the industry. At the moment we all work as individuals. We need to come together as one because that is the way we can accomplish more.

❑ ***Looking back on the experience of directing this film, what lessons have you learnt?***

Gitonga: To balance leadership and direction. I am a better person and I have been exposed to the helm of it and shown how. I can only now be better.

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Carole Kimutai is a writer and editor based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is currently an MA student in New Media at the University of Leicester, UK. Follow her on Twitter at @CaroleKimutai.

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