

## **POVERTY DIGNIFIED: Hope in the Slums of Kibera**

The back of the shirts they designed for themselves read two words in very bold letters -- **POVERTY DIGNIFIED**. The actions that followed that morning when they put on these shirts backed up this simple yet powerful statement. When they woke up on this humid morning in February, they knew this was the first day of something very significant. They were going to start cleaning up and lighting up their home -- *the largest slum in Africa*. It is estimated that between 750,000 and 1 million people live within the one square mile border of the Kibera slum. When walking through the village of tin and plywood huts, there is trash and filth everywhere you look. You can't escape the stench of the trash that radiates through the air under the hot Kenyan sun. Children play amongst the garbage that piles up on the dusty streets and lines the river beds that weave throughout the poorly constructed network of homes. When the sun goes down, another set of harsh realities set in when complete darkness surrounds you. You see, there is no electricity for the masses that live in the slum. This results in there being no access to **clean** light. The only source of light for the residents of the Kibera slum is kerosene which results in an open flame in a small enclosed room that over time leads to severe vision and respiratory impairments -- not to mention the high potential for home fires and burns. Between the trash and the darkness, the outlook can become very bleak for the residents of Africa's largest slum.



In March 2012, the outlook for some of the residents of the Kibera slum started to look a little brighter when an unplanned partnership between two nonprofits started to grow. This is when a team from New Vision Renewable Energy, a Christian community development organization based out of Philippi, West Virginia, was introduced to a young Kenyan leader, Erick Simba, who founded a nonprofit: the Kibera Youth Initiative for Community Development. The team from New Vision had

traveled to Kenya to expand their work in bringing light to the 1.3 billion people in the world who live

without access to electricity. The New Vision Portable Solar Power Pack & Light kit would be introduced into communities all over Kenya. The New Vision light kit consists of 3 LED light strips producing enough light to fill an entire room, a small but powerful lithium polymer battery and a 10-watt solar panel. The light was designed by John Prusa, New Vision's own Mad Scientist and it is assembled in the USA. It provides clean light to a family for 8 hours and also has the capability to charge a mobile phone.



Erick Simba grew up in the Kibera slum. He knows all too well the reality of growing up amongst the trash and without access to electricity. Erick was able to work his way out of the slum and grasped the opportunity to do whatever he set his mind to accomplish. When the opportunity came, he made his choice. He rented an apartment on the outskirts of the slum. When he stands on his front porch, he has a clear view of the entire area of the slum. Erick decided that he was going to devote his life to reaching other slum kids. And that is exactly what he is doing. He has

started transforming a small area of the slum with the help of young people who reside within its border. They have started a greenhouse where they are growing organic food and educating young people about the process at the same time. The greenhouse was built after they cleaned up a field of trash. The group has also built a large bathroom and shower house as facilities like this are not available to many of the residents of the slum. The young people of the Kibera Youth Initiative maintain these facilities to help ensure a sanitary condition for their fellow residents. This group also runs a camp for the children of Kibera. Their goal is give these kids an exciting week at camp but also to help them believe that they are capable of achieving great things in their life, too.



When these two groups met it was obvious to everyone that this was the beginning of a great partnership. New Vision Renewable Energy committed to being part of lighting up Africa's largest slum and supported Erick's community development efforts. They also committed to helping the young Kenyan leader in his efforts to clean up the slum. In an environment where residents of the slum survive on .75 cents a day, the opportunity to purchase a light was not likely. However, that did not mean a

different type of currency was not possible. Trash would become the currency. Erick's dreams became a reality

New Vision Renewable Energy made the decision that week in Kenya to make the Kibera Youth Initiative for Community Development the beneficiary of the movement that they started to bring light to those living in darkness. **Party In The Dark** is a movement that started in 2012 to help raise both awareness and resources for the 1.3 billion people in the world who live in complete darkness every night because they don't have access to light. On Earth Day 2012, there were 67 parties hosted all over the world to kick off this movement of light. Each party committed to spend one hour in complete darkness. This is an act of solidarity as well as a reality check for what it's like to live in darkness. Each partygoer brought a minimum of \$10 to the party and learned about the issue of light through a short video before the hour of darkness. The result of these parties is that people from all over the world came together to bring light to the residents of the Kibera slum.

On February 21st, 2013 residents from the Kibera slum carried out the mantra that they wore on their backs. They DIGNIFIED POVERTY. Twenty families gathered in the area of Kibera where Erick does his work and picked up 1,000 bags of trash. They expanded the clean area of the slum. In exchange for trash, each one of these families received a New Vision Portable Solar Power Pack & Light. That night, the kerosene flame stayed unlit and was replaced by a light that had the capability of not only lighting up a small table, but now lit up their entire home. They now breathe clean air at night, their children now study longer because of light, families spend more time together and these families earned their light in a dignified way that also helped to clean up their village.



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### Changing the World One Party at a Time

1.3 billion people in the world live without access to light. Living without light has real health, safety, economic and literacy consequences in the lives of a quarter of the earth's population. Join others all over the world to raise awareness and funding that will bring light to the darkness — just by having a party! For more information, go to [www.nvre.org/pitd](http://www.nvre.org/pitd) or call 937-469-1048.

For more information on New Vision, please contact Pamela O'Brien, Director of Business Development and Communications at [pobrien@nvre.org](mailto:pobrien@nvre.org). For more photos and updates on the Kibera Youth Initiative for Community Development, please visit our Facebook page at New Vision Renewable Energy or [www.nvre.org](http://www.nvre.org).

*Photos courtesy of the Erick Simba, Kibera Youth Initiative for Community Development.*