

Mr and Ms Kibera Turns 20: Where Fashion Meets Protest in Nairobi's Slum

Published on 22 Aug 2025 | By IFI Correspondent



Mr and Ms Kibera Pageant Turns 20: Beauty, Protest and Resilience on Nairobi's Stage

Nairobi, Kenya – Just a stone's throw from Kenya's largest informal settlement, a young woman walked the catwalk in a white dress, splattered with fake blood and tape across her lips reading: "Stop, silence, gender-based violence." It was a powerful reminder that the annual Mr and Ms Kibera pageant is far more than a beauty contest — it is a platform for protest, expression, and resilience.

Now in its **20th year**, the pageant drew hundreds of spectators eager to see contestants balance glamour with activism. Participants spoke out against **gender-based violence**, police brutality, and youth marginalisation, turning the runway into a stage for social justice.

Contestants' bold statements — from tank tops reading "Stop killing us" to speeches on freedom of expression — reflected the frustrations of Kenya's young generation. The event comes after a wave of anti-government protests in June and July, which left 65 people dead, and amid growing concerns from activists who have labelled gender-based violence in Kenya as a "femicide crisis."

Founded by **Ben Ooko** in 2004, the pageant has become a lifeline for youth in Kibera, where poverty, crime, and lack of basic services remain daily challenges. Ooko says the contest teaches self-expression, confidence, and leadership:

"We are looking at young people who can stand up and speak for the challenges of other young people."

The pageant has transformed lives. **Kepha Ngito**, crowned the first Mr Kibera two decades ago, went on to become a development consultant. **Pauline Akiniyi**, a 2016 contestant, later founded a women's shelter in the settlement.

This year's crown went to **21-year-old nursing student Rozelda Kim**, who called the victory "a microphone to speak louder." She hopes to use her new platform to change perceptions of Kibera and inspire her community.

As Ngito reflects, the contest is about redefining beauty:

"We want to show the world that we have our own definition of beauty — and that definition is resilience."