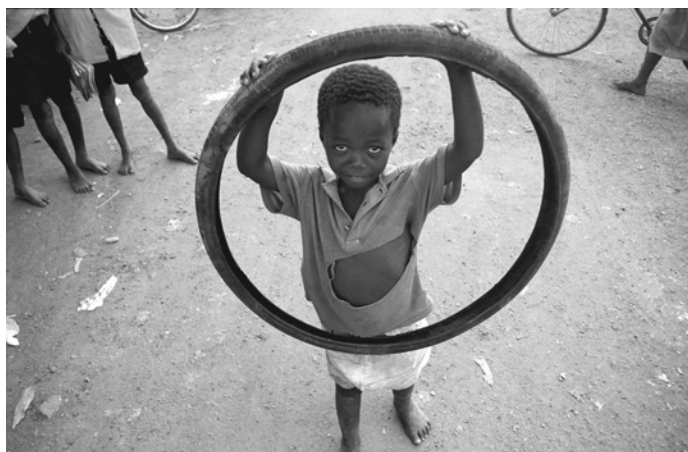




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ABC AFRICA

A film by Abbas Kiarostami

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2001
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

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CREDITS

Director.....**Abbas Kiarostami**
Cameraman.....**Seifollah Samadian**
Editor.....**Abbas Kiarostami**
Assistant Editors.....**Mohamad Razdasht**
Sahand Samadian
Sound.....**M. Reza Delpak**
Project Coordinator.....**Ramin Rafirasme**

In collaboration with IFAD

Iran, 2001

In English and Farsi with English subtitles

Running Time: 84 minutes

Color Dolby SR Aspect Ratio: 1:66

SYNOPSIS

A documentary shot on digital video about the ravages of AIDS and civil war in Uganda, may seem at first like a radical departure for the director of *Taste of Cherry* and *The Wind Will Carry Us*. But one of the most remarkable things about **ABC Africa** is the way that Iran's most celebrated auteur makes such unlikely material very much his own.

Invited by the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development to shoot a documentary about Uganda's orphans, Kiarostami and his cameraman Seifollah Samadian traveled around the country scouting locations, using mini-DV cameras to make visual notes. In true Kiarostami style, these jottings become the movie itself: an impressionistic, deceptively simple record of a visit, a journey, and a people struggling to survive. **ABC Africa** is full of echoes of his previous films: the hypnotic tracking shots from car windows, the dirt-road villages, and especially the emphasis on the resilience and resourcefulness of children. Out of a population of 22 million, Uganda has 2 million people infected with HIV, 2 million already dead, and 1.6 million orphans.

Over the course of his ten-day visit, Kiarostami comes across many heart-breaking sights. His cameras capture and caress the faces of a thousand children, all orphans, whose parents have died of AIDS. It records tears and laughter, music and silence, life and death. It attests to Africa's sunny resilience to so much suffering and disease.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in Teheran on June 22, 1940, Abbas Kiarostami showed an early talent for drawing. He took part in a graphic art competition and received a scholarship. At the age of 18, he left home.

From 1960 to 1968, he designed the title sequences for feature films, including that of *Gheyshar* by M. Kimiai. While holding down a bureaucratic job in a police station, he attended lectures at the Fine Arts School. In 1969, with a friend, he founded the cinema department of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Very soon, the department became one of Iran's most prestigious studios. Among others who worked there were A. Naderi, B. Beyzao, D. Mehrjui, E. Forozesh, D. Panahi and Sobrah Sh. Salesso.

From 1970, Abbas Kiarostami made several short films and features. His favorite subjects until 1991 were children. He prefers working with non-professional actors and on location. His work is recognizable for its Chekhovian humor and poetry. He has been a member of the jury of several festivals: Locarno in 1990, Cannes in 1993, Venice in 1995, San Sebastian in 1996...he won the Golden Palm at Cannes in 1997 for *Taste of Cherry* and, at Venice in 1999, he was awarded the Special Jury Prize for *The Wind Will Carry Us*.

On December 13, 1997, he received the UNESCO Fellini-Medal.

FILMOGRAPHY

SHORT FILMS AND SHORT FEATURES

- 1970 Bread and Alley (Nan va koutcheh)
- 1972 Breaktime (Zang e tafrih)
- 1973 The Experience (Tadjrobeh)
- 1975 Two Solutions for One Problem (Dow rahe hal baraye yek massaleh)
- 1975 So Can I (Man ham mitonam)
- 1976 The Wedding Suit (Lebassi baraye arossi)
- 1976 The Colors (Rang ha)
- 1978 Solution (Rah hal yek)
- 1979 First Case, Second Case (Ghazieh shekle aval, Ghazieh shekle douwom)
- 1980 Dental Hygiene (Behdasht Dandan)
- 1981 Regularly or Irregularly (Betartib va bedone tartib)
- 1982 The Chorus (Hamsarayan)
- 1983 Fellow Citizen (Hamshahri)

FEATURE FILMS

- 1974 The Traveler (Mossafer)
- 1974 The Report (Guozarech)
- 1984 First Graders (Avali ha)
- 1987 Where Is My Friend's Home (Kaneh-ye doust kojast?)
- 1990 Homework (Mashgh e shab)
- 1990 Close-up (Nema-ye Nazdik)
- 1992 And Life Goes On (Zendegi edamÈ d, rad)
- 1994 Through the Olive Trees (Zir e Darakhtan e zeyton)
- 1997 Taste of Cherry (Tamíe Guilass), **WINNER PALME d'OR, CANNES 1997**
- 1999 The Wind Will Carry Us (Bad mara khahad bord)
Special Jury Prize, Venice 1999

INTERVIEW WITH ABBAS KIAROSTAMI

How did you get the idea to make a film about this subject? Did you have any previous experience of Africa?

IFAD came up with the idea for the film. If you ask them why they chose me, you'll probably find that it was because I've been working with and for children for over twenty years. To tell the truth, I had no experience of Africa, just what I'd seen in the press and on TV. I must confess those preconceptions were completely demolished by what I saw. You have to bear in mind that I only visited Uganda and, even then, only a part of the country. Talking about a whole continent when you have seen so little of it would be to underestimate all the different aspects of a continent as rich and multicultural as Africa. But the experience of Uganda showed me that I knew next to nothing about this part of the world. It's a beautiful country in terms of nature and people, who, despite terrible poverty, possess enormous inner wealth.

What was your approach to the shoot? Did it require much preparation and what kind of difficulties did you encounter?

Filming was very spontaneous. Our camera always preceded us by a few steps and even when things were prepared in advance, reality constantly overtook fiction. With this kind of shoot, it's people's regards that can be problematic, an excessive interest in the camera, for example. But in this instance, it was precisely what we needed. No one interfered with our work. Everyone was friendly and amicable, courteous and natural at the same time.

How can you film the pain? What limits do you set yourself in this context?

I have always believed that the image of suffering must be shown without being transferred onto the viewer. If there is a limit, it's not for me to decide where it is. The camera is a faithful and fair observer, which in any case bears witness to the pain seen or experienced.

In your opinion, how is a filmmaker's approach different to that of a journalist?

I would say that the filmmaker could allow himself to have a direct, honest and constant relationship with the public. Artistic creation is supposed to be a long-term process, a dialogue with the audience over a number of films. On the other hand, a journalist's job and their reports are often based on impressive, or even sensational, news stories. And sensations rarely outlast the story. The audience's reaction may be very extreme but is often only short-term. Art is art and journalism is journalism.

Why did you decide to shoot this film on digital video? How did it change your method of working?

Seven or eight years ago, I used a Hi-8 camera like most people use a pen. I took visual notes. The improvement in the quality of digital systems has made my job much easier. As IFAD's fax confirms, it all began as an invitation to come and have a look round. But we took our pens with us. To begin with, we didn't think these visual notes would be enough to make a film. But that's pretty well what happened. I have always thought that the "sketch" contains something more than the finished product. Using these cameras gives the filmmaker a lot of surprises through every stage of the process: shooting, editing, post-production...I'm just a novice in this field. I have only just begun discovering the wealth of possibilities that this new technology offers.

What have you learnt from this experience? Will you persist on this road?

Working on DV opens up a realm of possibilities that are amazingly suited to my style of working. I have often used non-professional actors on my films. They are obviously more comfortable in front of a small camera. So, there are less technicians on locations and it is easier for the director and his "actors" to communicate. The crew and all their complicated and cumbersome equipment disappear as if by magic. It's a wonderful sense of freedom. I don't think I'll go back to 35mm.

ABOUT IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development)

Founded in 1977, the International Fund for Agricultural Development is a specialized agency of the United Nations with 161 member states. Its establishment was one of the main outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference organized in response to the food crises of the early 1970's that primarily affected the Sahelian countries of Africa. IFAD's aim is to combat hunger and poverty in the rural areas of developing countries. Its programs are aimed primarily at small producers, landless farmers, nomadic pastoralists and poor women in rural regions.

Since its creation, IFAD has financed nearly 500 projects in 111 countries, committing over \$6 billion, to which must be added the contributions of recipient countries (nearly \$6.5 billion) and of donor countries and multilateral agencies (\$5.5 billion). These projects have assisted approximately 200 million people in poor, rural areas. According to IFAD, 3 billion people across the world have to survive on \$2 a day or less. 1.3 billion live in the most abject poverty with resources of less than \$1 a day. This figure will continue to rise and is expected to reach 2 billion in 2015 if the international community does not act.

Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's poorest people live in rural areas. Some 2 billion people have no electricity and 1.5 billion have no access to drinking water. 130 million children receive no formal education.