

## Local Film 'Baxu and the Giants' Seeks Support, Stars

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by Martha Mukaiwa



**The story of Namibia's rhino poaching is a tale often told in black and white. There are villains, there are victims and there are the activists loudly lamenting our rhinos' imminent extinction.**

In screenwriters Girley Jazama ('100 Bucks', 'The White Line', 'Underneath The Sky') and Florian Schott's ('Katutura', 'Everything Happens for a Reason') upcoming short film 'Baxu and the Giants' (2019), the oft told story gets a little a nuance, some humanity and a spark of wonder.

Commissioned by the Land, Environment and Development unit (Lead) of the Legal Assistance Centre and produced by MaMoKoBo Video and Research in collaboration with GIZ, Save the Rhino Trust and the Namibia Film Commission, the film aims to sensitise Namibians and particularly teens on the issue of poaching.

"'Baxu and the Giants' is a story of how rhino poaching triggers social change in a village in Damaraland, seen through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl. In touch with nature and tradition but toughened by life in poverty, Baxu lives with her street smart older brother Khata and their alcoholic grandmother," says Jazama, who expounds on the arrival of strange men, suspicious behaviour in the village and in Baxu's own home as well as the little girl's ability to commune with the giants of the savannah, the majestic rhinos who talk to her in her dreams.

"Through this storytelling device, which spans the time between the age of hunters and gatherers to the present day, the

film aims to reach an audience worldwide, and for audiences to understand some of the underlying social issues in rural Namibia that can lead to poaching.”

Currently seeking financial or in-kind support as well as actors able to speak both Khoekhoegowab and English for various roles including that of Baxu, the film-makers are set to begin shooting in February and envision an August 2019 premiere.

While auditions are already underway, Schott, who will be directing the film, aims to cast the net as wide as possible.

“We had a few rounds of casting calls and have had more than 20 girls audition for Baxu so far,” he says. “We have a few suitable candidates but are still looking further in order to find the perfect person to portray Baxu. Baxu should be young enough to keep a certain innocence to her.

She is a kind soul and optimistic spirit, but at the same time she needs to be tough and strong.”

Hoping to highlight the role we all have to play in wildlife conservation and the potential for locals to be crucial agents of change, the film aims to inspire young Namibians in particular.

“The movie is primarily targeted at teenagers, and we hope that it will encourage them to get interested in conservation,” says Jazama.

“When this is inculcated at an early age, the interest is carried lifelong, and there is a good possibility that some of those children will get involved in conservation when they grow up.”

A movie for Namibians featuring a young heroine whose name is short for !Khubaxu, which means 'I come from the soil', 'Baxu and the Giants' is an educational conservation film framed by a compelling narrative written by two of the city's most exciting film-makers.

“I always felt that poaching is often seen as a black and white issue,” says Schott.

“Poachers are usually seen as the bad guys, seldom there is talk about the social and economic reasons and the lack of perspectives for young men in the villages that can lead to poaching.

“I look forward to telling the story from a different perspective, while also highlighting the very serious issue of poaching in Namibia.”

Auditions for Baxu (female, age six to 10), Khata (male, age 16 to 19), Neighbour (male, skinny, age 40 to 50) and Ouma (female age 50 to 70) will take place at Macedonia Parish (also known as Ephesians Church) in Katutura on Monday, 21 January, from 14h00 to 19h00. All actors must be able to speak Khoekhoegowab and English. If you are interested in supporting the film financially or in kind, email [baxuandthegiants@gmail.com](mailto:baxuandthegiants@gmail.com).

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