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Human Rights

Posted: Thurs., Jul. 14, 2005, 7:06pm PT

Living Rights

(Docu -- Netherlands)

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A Radio Netherlands Television, EO Television presentation of a Foundation Dovana Films production. Produced by Duco **Tellegen**. Co-producers, Aad van Ierland, Arjan Lock. Directed, written by Duco **Tellegen**.

By [RONNIE SCHEIB](#)

A fascinating ethical and sociological study of children's rights, Duco **Tellegen**'s three-part docu conveys resonant portraits of individuals locked in integral relationships to their surroundings. Shot in Super16, pic stands as a testament to the power of celluloid, each child's experience inseparable from its background, be it Maasai villages, Kyoto cityscapes, or pastoral woods near Chernobyl. Given its educational triptych format, this subtle, rich docu may

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be too ambivalent in its message to unspool beyond
fests and cable.

The three segments comprising "Rights" (half of a projected six-part series), each prefaced by a different quotation from the 1989 UNICEF position paper on children's issues, differ as sharply in stylistic presentation as they do in subject and geography.

In "Yoshi," a teenager with Asperger's Syndrome (an autism-related disorder) who has recently been transferred from regular high school to a special school, directly addresses the camera, welcoming it as a confidant in his battle to be re-categorized as "normal." Excessively logical, Yoshi fantasizes detailed scientific procedures that will cure mental illness and restore him to the ranks of the ordinary.

The schoolrooms and corridors of visibly dysfunctional kids contrast vividly in Peter Brugman's lensing, with the sweep and serenity of Kyoto vistas and the love and acceptance Yoshi finds in long discussions with his mother at home.

The contradictions inherent in "Toti" are even more dramatic, visually as well as sociologically. When Toti ran away from her Maasai home at age 11 to avoid being sold in marriage in exchange for needed cattle, her twin sister was married off in her stead. Toti took refuge in a boarding school, getting the education she and her sibling both craved.

When the gentle, remarkably poised 14-year-old revisits the family she has not seen in three years, lenser Danny Elsen contrasts the dull, functional beiges and grays of the stone school with the lush greens and browns of the Kenyan countryside, a motif reprised in the juxtaposition of Toti's dark green school uniform against the villagers' gorgeously colorful tribal costumes.



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Film's final cultural dilemma finds Lena living with a foster mother in a Belarus town near Chernobyl. Lena, diagnosed with a possible brain tumor, has been offered adoption by an Italian couple. Now she must decide between the woman who took her in when her own mother abandoned her and the greater affluence from the new couple that promises medical treatment for her condition.

As lenser Peter Brugman's camera follows Lena around the small village of Ghoiniki, it becomes evident from classroom lessons on how to read a Geiger counter to the smattering of doting parents watching offspring perform in the now-oversized school auditorium that nature has reclaimed the land around Chernobyl, the remaining villagers reverting to a more primitive, interconnected lifestyle.

Camera (color, Super16-to-35mm), Peter Brugman, Danny Elsen; editor, Luce van de Weg; sound (Dolby), Vladimir Golovnitski. Reviewed at Human Rights Watch Film Festival, New York, June 20, 2005. Running time: 88 MIN. (Japanese, Maasai, Russian dialogue)

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3	Batman Begins	\$15.2	8	Madagascar	\$6.5
4	Dark Water	\$14.3	9	Rebound	\$4.7
5	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	\$12.2	10	Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith	\$4.0

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