

Executive summary

Makutano Junction is a popular television drama set in a fictitious Kenyan village, shown on prime time in Kenya and Uganda. It successfully mixes entertainment and education. Series 7 is currently being shot.

MJ is an extremely well run programme which represents very good value for money. Its purpose is to “enhance poor people’s livelihoods through access to, and use of, research information through an educational television drama”.

Audience research suggests that the issues covered by the show have a strong impact on its target audience.

The media context is changing rapidly in Kenya, with a significant growth taking place in ownership of television sets which is making television viewing much more common in urban and rural areas. This makes television an increasingly important medium for reaching peri-urban and rural people.

Although MJ is competing against some long established entertainment-based soaps, it is very popular with viewers. The latest audience research also indicates that MJ has the highest rating for “story” compared to other television dramas.

MJ has covered a wide range of issues including HIV/AIDS, TB, mental health, rape, abortion, corruption, domestic violence, land rights, seed soaking, health committees, silage, family planning, child abuse, female genital mutilation and school infrastructure committees. The audience research has demonstrated that the audience benefits most from very specific and practical information rather than general messaging which is available from other sources. However, the extent to which MJ is able to contribute to actual changes in behaviour is difficult to establish.

The series has been praised by its research partners for dealing with difficult and challenging subjects sensitively. Programme content comes mainly from dialogue with the research partners and other information providers. This collaboration works extremely well, and all research partners noted that their capacity for use of media for communication has been enhanced through interaction with MJ. There is also potential for the research partners to make much greater use of MJ in their communications work, and MJ could be scaled up by establishing partnerships with research organisations in a number of African countries, not just Kenya.

One of the goals of MJ has been to build capacity within the local television industry, and a large team of Kenyans and Ugandans has now been trained in a range of jobs. A significant proportion of the crew is female. Training continues as the project evolves. A number of UK mentors have worked with the Kenyans and Ugandans.

Makutano Junction has a strong gender focus both in the composition of key messages and in the casting of strong female characters. MJ has been instrumental in using characters, both men and women, to put across messages to the public which successfully challenge gender stereotypes.

The interactive element of MJ is highly innovative and ambitious. After each show, viewers can text requesting an information leaflet which focuses on the main theme of that particular programme. The leaflet which takes the form of a comic strip is posted to them. Viewers can also text in specific questions which the portal managers pass on to experts to answer. The experts' answers are monitored by the team.

The project is being increasingly successful in raising funds from donors. Since commercial revenues will not provide sufficient income to fund the series in the future, until the economics of broadcasting in Africa change, it will remain dependent on donor funding for the foreseeable future.

We recommend that plans are drawn up for a new phase 3 of the project which would involve rolling out the show to a number of African countries including Zambia and Ghana. In order to achieve this, MJ will need a fully developed marketing and communications strategy. We would encourage DFID CRD to fund phase 3 of the project.