

Date
March 26, 2024

How Edutainment Is A Powerful Tool in the Fight for Gender Equality



In This Image

Behind the scene of an edutainment film the 'The Lucky Specials' (Global Innovation Fund)

This blog is co-authored by IPA's Victoria Isika and Karla Petersen, and Laetitia Eichinger from the [Global Innovation Fund \(GIF\)](#). This piece is also posted on the [GIF blog](#).

Innovations for Poverty Action's (IPA) recent '[Best Bets](#)' Report identifies new development interventions with great transformative potential that require additional research and policy investments to achieve impact at scale. IPA singles out edutainment interventions for their strong evidence of impact and potential to scale. Entertainment mediums like film, television, and radio not only have the power to influence societies and cultures, but also to bring about widespread behavioral change by positively engaging people on critical issues. With its

potential to cost-effectively reach an audience of millions at scale, 'edutainment' can also play an important role in shifting gender attitudes and norms.

In the Best Bets report, IPA identifies various promising edutainment interventions to change gender attitudes and reduce violence against women (VAW). An intervention in rural Uganda, evaluated by IPA and researchers, showed to significantly and cost-effectively reduce VAW, encourage reporting of VAW to local authorities, and diminish the fear of social sanctions against speaking out. The report also cites the MTV Shuga randomized evaluation in Nigeria, which showed that those exposed to the TV series were twice as likely to get tested for HIV. Researchers also found that MTV Shuga yielded significant improvements in HIV knowledge and attitudes, reduced risky sexual behavior and contributed to decreased incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among women.

Based on the existing evidence, mass media can shift gender norms through the two key channels. First, social messages presented through storytelling and dramatization in mass-media allow for a potential behavior shift. This can happen through audiences identifying with characters that represent aspects of their own lives, which makes messaging more powerful. Second, watching the lives of fictional characters can change the audience's expectations about how other people should behave, thus creating environments that are less accepting of strict gender roles or violence against women and girls.

The Global Innovation Fund (GIF) seeks to invest precisely in those interventions that have the greatest impact potential but require more investments to scale. Accordingly, we are already supporting several innovators pioneering impactful interventions in the edutainment space. The MTV Staying Alive Foundation (SAF), for instance, are on a mission to drive social change among youth, particularly with regards to gender-based issues, through their multi-award-winning television drama series, MTV Shuga.

Based on formative research, the series reflects the lives of the youth seeking to engage and highlight behavioral choices that encourage youth empowerment. GIF supported MTV SAF to expand their MTV Shuga campaign across Nigeria by adopting more storylines focused on gender and on reducing violence against women and girls, and by building up local production capacity to create local, gender-transformative content beyond the MTV Shuga campaign.

Impact(Ed) International, another GIF grantee, is a non-profit on a mission to provide life skills for young people, and to improve girls' self-efficacy, agency, and educational aspirations through mentorship, community mobilisation, and its Emmy award-winning animated life skills series for young people, 'My Better World'.

The series follows six African teens as they navigate the complex challenges of school, family, and friendship. Episode themes include early marriage, female genital mutilation, and sexual harassment. Skills and attitudes such as communication, negotiation, and resilience are also addressed.

So far, Impact(Ed)'s programs have reached over 300,000 school children in Kenya.

Community screenings of 'My Better World' raised parental aspirations for their children and after twelve months, children were 42% less likely to be out of school. With the help of GIF's \$2 million grant, Impact(Ed) seeks to integrate their model into government policy implementation in Kenya.

IPA's Best Bets report identifies the under-utilization of edutainment interventions and underscores the need to broaden evidence-backed edutainment program partnerships. GIF, through their support of MTV SAF and Impact(Ed) International, is playing a crucial role in bridging this gap. IPA and researchers in Tanzania are currently collaborating to develop a methodology for early-stage testing of edutainment content to predict its potential for generating lasting change once scaled. By helping to expand the research base on these innovations, we also hope to encourage the future expansion of this high-impact intervention space.