



Can the TV makeover format of edutainment lead to widespread changes in farmer behaviour and influence innovation systems? Shamba Shape Up in Kenya



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ABSTRACT

Edutainment, the combination of education with entertainment through various media such as television, radio, mobile phone applications and games, is increasingly being used as an approach to stimulate innovation and increase agricultural productivity amongst smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. Shamba Shape Up, a widely publicised makeover reality TV programme, is an example of edutainment that has received considerable attention, and airs in three countries in East Africa where it is estimated to be watched by millions of viewers.

There is no published academic research on the influence of makeover television formats on innovation systems and processes in smallholder agriculture. Using an Agricultural Innovation Systems approach, this paper explores how makeover edutainment is influencing smallholder farmer innovation systems together with the effect this is having on smallholder farms. In the absence of previous research, it articulates a Theory of Change which draws on research traditions from mass communication, agricultural extension and innovation systems.

Data came from two large scale quantitative (n = 9885 and n = 1572) surveys and in-depth participatory qualitative research comprising focus group discussions, participatory budgets, agricultural timelines, case studies and key information interviews in Kenya. An estimated 430,000 farmers in the study area were benefiting from their interaction with the programme through increased income and / or a range of related social benefits including food security, improving household health, diversification of livelihood choices, paying school fees for children and increasing their community standing / social capital.

Participatory research showed SSU enhanced an already rich communication environment and strengthened existing processes of innovation. It helped set the agenda for discussions within farming communities about opportunities for improving smallholder farms, while also giving specific ideas, information and knowledge, all in the context of featured farm families carefully selected so that a wide range of viewers would identify with them and their challenges.

Broadcasts motivated and inspired farmers to improve their own farms through a range of influences including entertainment, strong empathy with the featured host farm families, the way ideas emerged through interaction with credible experts, and importantly through stimulating widespread discussion and interaction amongst and between farmers and communities of experts on agricultural problems, solutions and opportunities. The fact that local extension workers also watched the programmes further enhanced the influence on local innovation systems.

The findings indicate that well designed makeover edutainment can strongly influence agricultural innovation processes and systems resulting in impact on the agricultural production and behaviours of large numbers of smallholder farmers.

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1. Introduction

Smallholder farming has been given renewed focus on a global scale (APP, 2010; FAO, 2014; WFP, 2011), with donors, NGOs and private foundations moving their focus to small scale farming as a way to combat poverty and food security and to meet the development goal of eradicating poverty and hunger. Initiatives such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the Africa Progress Panel, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and African Smallholder Farmers Group (ASFG) see small scale farms as central to agricultural growth and poverty reduction. Despite the acknowledged importance of smallholder farming questions remain regarding the future viability and productivity of small farms (Collier and Dercon, 2014) and in sub-Saharan Africa agricultural production still lags behind population growth.

Policy makers, NGOs, government ministries and research institutions are using a range of different approaches to stimulate increased productivity and incomes. One of these is edutainment, an approach that mixes education with entertainment through various media (e.g. television, radio, mobile phone applications and games) in an attempt to influence the knowledge, perceptions and behaviour of specific audiences. While edutainment has been shown to be successful in a wide range of public health, health promotion (from HIV/AIDS education to promotion of breast feeding and vaccination) and other public policy settings (Dway et al., 2016; Flora et al., 2014; Forster et al., 2016; Jana et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2012) there is little published research on its use and impact in agriculture.

Alongside the increased focus on small scale farming from a policy level there has been a concerted effort to better understand how change occurs in smallholder farming systems and what stimulates change. These efforts can be broadly understood within the framework of agricultural innovation systems thinking. This paper seeks to explore how a novel form of edutainment is influencing smallholder farmer innovation systems and the effect this is having on the farm.

The educational-reality television programme Shamba Shape Up (SSU) aims to encourage change by imparting critical agricultural technical knowledge, awareness and skills to viewers on a large scale and to diverse audiences. SSU is a new departure in edutainment agricultural programming, bringing a 'makeover' format of reality television into the context of smallholder farmers and farming. It is very different from conventional farm broadcasting but also to more commonly used forms of edutainment such as soaps, and is estimated to have millions of viewers across three countries in East Africa. Each weekly instalment involves a visit to a farm (Shamba) by well-known presenters where current problems facing a host smallholder household are discussed and then addressed practically with the help of experts. Direct linkages between watching SSU and behaviour change that enables a farmer to improve productivity have not yet been proven. Within this context, this paper sets out to answer two main questions; what is the effect of SSU in Kenya specifically as an example of the makeover form of edutainment? And how is it influencing smallholder innovation systems?

2. Developing a theory of change for Shamba Shape Up

Theory of Change (ToC) represents a long evolution of the evaluation process that is meant not only to understand or predict outcomes, but also to understand the deeper meanings and reasons as to the 'whys' and 'hows' of specific actors, actions or interventions. With its theoretical roots based in the 'logical' model approach, ToC differs from the 'classic' model by the way in which it deals with assumptions (Batchelor and Goodman, 2012). Increasing understanding of assumptions results in a more reflective process of understanding individual, communal and cultural values, norms, processes and ideological perspectives or philosophies (Vogel, 2012; Guijt and Retolaza, 2011).

To develop a ToC for SSU as a basis for researching its effect, we

drew upon three main bodies of literature: mass media and society, extension and advisory services and innovation systems in smallholder agriculture. The fundamental question which the ToC sought to address is whether a link can reasonably be expected between the broadcasting and viewing of SSU, and changes in farmer behaviour, smallholder productivity and farm family incomes.

2.1. Mass media and society

Most research on the influence of broadcast mass media on farmers and the agriculture sector has been based on the assumption that the role of mass media is to make useful information available to a mass audience. Further, it has assumed that programme makers, or those experts advising them, know what information farmers (and other viewers) need and what changes are desirable, whether for individual farmers (e.g. more efficient use of expensive inputs) or for society at large (e.g. reduced pesticide residues on food products sold in local markets). While information dissemination is an important capability and function of mass media, their role in society goes far beyond that (McQuail, 2010) including agenda setting, stimulating discussion and challenging audience perceptions. The full range of roles can be expected to be at work in effective broadcasting to support agricultural innovation.

Farmers rely heavily on information gathering through often complex social networks (fellow farmers, family, extension agents, input suppliers and markets) (Manfre and Nordehn, 2013; Muhammad and Garforth, 1999). However additional media for information communication are ever increasing and expanding (radio, print, mobile phones, television and the Internet) (Manfre and Nordehn, 2013). Manfre and Nordehn found that information dissemination via different types of ICT was most popular and information was most likely to be used when a combination of human and technology-based communication is featured (Manfre and Nordehn, 2013, p. 7). It is possible that specific socio-economic factors may have considerable weight or influence on the actual use of information to make changes at farm level, such as education levels, skills training, physical infrastructure and communication organisation (Lio and Liu, 2006).

Manfre and Nordehn (2013) also found that farmers believe information to be useful and credible when: it is presented by perceived experts, it is provided by individuals within their own social network, they have actually witnessed the impact, and they are able to test the quality of the information themselves (p. 5). Anderson and Feder (2004) found that while appropriate information may be being transferred, uptake and adoption also relies upon and is determined not only by local availability of inputs, technology and services but by a farmer's perception of risk and potential profitability (cf. Lio and Liu, 2006).

Television's use as edutainment has a long history in the telenovela dramas originating in Mexico in the 1970s, a format that has spread to many other countries (Tufté, 2005), in which social issues are portrayed and explored in dramatic but realistic 'everyday' settings. A strong body of theory has developed, based on robust evaluation, on how such dramas can influence audiences at emotional, cognitive and behavioural levels (Bandura 1977; Cody et al., 2004). More recent reality television formats involve the audience directly, with audience members telling their stories to a national audience and interacting with experts or celebrities in activities which entertain the audience while enabling them to explore possible implications for their own situation (Burger, 2012). Obregon and Tufté's (2014) review of research on Edutainment acknowledges that it is 'a highly successful communication strategy that has achieved global recognition as a useful and effective approach to tackling contemporary development challenges' which had its origins in agricultural extension services. However the studies covered in their review focus on soap opera formats, and makeovers are not mentioned. A literature search on the impact of makeover television programmes more broadly yielded no results which highlights the importance of this study.

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