

MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT INTERNATIONAL TZ

SWAHILIWOOD: ENTERTAINING SOLUTIONS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

FEBRUARY 11, 2019 ARUSHA

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Executive Summary

The web-series project commenced on August 14, 2018. During August and September, MFDI consulted with EAC experts on the achievements and challenges of regional integration in preparation for a one-week script development workshop for a pilot season of an entertaining web series focusing on EAC integration from a youth perspective.

The script design workshop took place at the Cultural Arts Center of Tumaini University, Makumira October 1-5, 2018 and was attended by accomplished writers/filmmakers from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

Introduction and Background

MFDI have been producing and distributing edutainment Swahili films, television and radio programs in Tanzania since 2005 including the TV series, *Siri ya Mtungi*, feature films *Tunu*, *Fatuma* and *Bahasha* and radio dramas *Wahapahapa* and *Kumekucha*.

MFDI operates the Swahiliwood YouTube channel, a Swahili content channel with presently over 325,000 subscribers that currently (over the past month) receives more than 50,000 views and 420 new subscribers every day. The majority of Swahiliwood subscribers and users are young audiences (aged 18-34 years) living within the EAC and access the channel using mobile phones.

The pilot season of the web series, entitled THE ACADEMY consists of six episodes ranging from between 6 to 9 minutes in duration.

Objectives of the Project

The objectives of this project are to produce a popular Swahili drama (pilot web series) that provides entertaining solutions to East African integration.

The goals are:

- 1) To reach young audiences across EAC member states
- 2) To engage young audiences around the issues raised in this pilot series, including:
 - a. Appreciating strengths and weaknesses within our community
 - b. Working together to achieve common goals
 - c. Encouraging youth to take the lead in defining why it is important to be East African
- 3) To measure how many are being reached
- 4) To understand how they are responding
- 5) To find sponsors for the next season of this program that provides solutions to regional integration on an entertaining platform

Did you collaborate with any other organizations?

The program is a co-production between MFDI-Tanzania and the Cultural Arts Centre (CAC) of Tumaini University, Makumira Campus in Usa River.

Report of the Project Activities:

October 15, 2018 – February 13, 2019

The interim financial and narrative reports through script development were approved and funds for the subsequent Production, Distribution and Evaluation Phases of the project were received on November 16th, 2018.

There are three primary objectives remaining in the project, namely:

Objective #1: Produce the pilot season of web series

Objective #2: Distribute the pilot season

Objective #3: Monitoring and impact evaluation of the intervention

Objective #1: Produce the pilot season of web series

The final Swahili shooting scripts were ready for production on November 9th.

Pre-production activities commenced on November 5th and included submitting applications for filming permits, finalizing locations, auditions and casting, crewing the production, arranging transport, accommodation and catering needs, securing production equipment, props and wardrobes and preparing the shooting schedule and budget to the shooting script requirements.

Filming commenced on the morning of Monday November 19th and the principle photography was completed on the night of Saturday November 24th.

The entire cast and production crew were young East Africans from Tanzania and Kenya.

Editing and post production including music re-recordings and mastering, picture editing, titles/motion graphics, color correction, final sound mix, authoring for and uploading to YouTube were completed on February 1, 2019.

Objective #2: Distribute the pilot season

All six episodes of the web series (entitled THE ACADEMY) were uploaded on the Swahiliwood YouTube channel on the evening of Saturday February 9th, 2019.

Objective #3: Monitoring and impact evaluation

At the time of presenting this report, youtube analytics were available for only the first three days that was available to the public. The activity was generated organically without any marketing or promotion.

During the first three days:

- The web series accumulated over 6500 views
- The first episode exceeded the channels typical views by over 120% and watch time by over 113%
- All six episodes have over 90% positive rating (likes vs dislikes) with episode #4 enjoying 100% positive rating
- 90% of the audience was from within the EAC and in the 18- 34 age group
- The series has accumulated 41 comments

We are pleased that the initial response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive and is proving to be very appealing to our target East African youth audience aged 18-34.

Outreach of the project (in Numbers)

The production phase of the project involved more than 30 young East Africans. All of the cast and production crew were from Tanzania and Kenya. More than 200 students from Makumira University participated in the filming of the final episode where the cast performed the new youthful rendition of the East African Community anthem.

In the first three days of the release, the web series has had over 6500 views.

Describe the Communication interventions

Pre-production and production was implemented over a period of four weeks. The process was documented with both still photographs (attached separately) and behind the scenes video footage.

A short promo on the workshop process has been prepared and will be used for advocacy, promotion and marketing purposes.

Describe the M & E intervention implemented

The web-series is being monitored with YouTube analytics. Quantitative (views and engagement) and qualitative (comments and conversations) are being recorded in real time.

MFDI will promote and market the series to encourage views and engagement. Engagers will prompt discussion and debate around integration issues addressed in the program.

The initial response to the series (after three days since its release) is encouraging. We are reaching our target audience. 100 percent of the East African audience are youth aged between 18-34 and 90% of them are accessing the content with mobile phones. Viewership is brisk and the responses are overwhelmingly positive.

Achievements during the project implementation period

THE ACADEMY is a story that is embodied in regional integration. It is a story set on a university campus where 6 students, representing the six member states find themselves working together to achieve a regionally oriented goal.

The seven principle characters (including the Academy Principal) were cast from a pool of celebrated Tanzanian comedians from Dar es Salaam and accomplished performers (professional dancers and musicians) based in Arusha.

a. Communication objectives

The web series is produced in Swahili as a unifying language for the region and subtitled in English making it accessible to those within the community who are not fluent in Swahili.

- The program is a light hearted entertaining romantic comedy that
 - o celebrates diversity
 - o demonstrates mobility
 - o models problem solving through unity
 - o shows how youth from the region can define principles of regional integration

b. Desired audience response

Initial reactions from our target audience is encouraging. The program is popular (getting above channel average views) and appealing (90%+ positive responses/likes) and generating comments and conversations.

c. Key messages

Themes touched upon in the program includes, how working together makes us better, how to celebrate small victories and provide a glimpse of the future driven by youth.

d. Obstacles and Barriers

Some challenges confronted in the pilot series includes: how political and national divisions can impact on integration (love across borders) and how cultural stereotypes can influence our perceptions of our neighbors.

e. Call to action

The program presents integration as attractive and appealing and youth driven. The program ends with our team of youth metaphorically re-defining the East African Community through music and dance.

To what extent the outcomes of the project match the objectives of the original proposal?

While we faced some delays, the series was successfully produced and launched within the budget provided by the project. What remains is the monitoring and evaluation of the intervention now that it is available to target audiences. We want to demonstrate that this pilot effort is an effective intervention worthy of scaling up. We want to see more seasons THE ACADEMY produced and distributed that will explore different aspects of regional integration from youth perspectives in an entertaining format attractive to young audiences within the community.

Project's lasting impact and sustainability

OUTPUTS: Detail all Planned and actual activities carried out during the reporting period and the actual outputs. Explain any deviation between the planned and actual activities and

propose follow-up actions.				
Description of activities planned for the reporting period	Output targets		Level of achievement (achieved/planned) in per cent	Explanation (s) / Performance / Remarks
	Planned	Achieved		
Finalize the script		✓	100	The one week period initially allocated for script development proved to be inadequate. The process of script development continued on a virtual basis (through emails) with writers from the region following the workshop.
Pre-production		✓	100	Pre production included submitting applications for filming permits, finalizing locations, auditions and casting, crewing the production, transport, accommodation and catering requirement, securing production equipment, props and wardrobes and preparing the shooting schedule and budget to the shooting

				script requirements.
Production		✓	100	Production was successfully completed as per the budget during a 6-day period.
Distribution		✓	5	Distribution commenced only three days ago.
Monitoring and Evaluation		✓	5	While youtube analytics for the first 3 days of the release are encouraging, it will take at least a month or two before we have enough data to understand how the program is performing across the region.

Describe the Lesson Learnt during the Implementation of the Project

Casting and crewing were not as inclusive as we had hoped. We wanted to have the high profile comedian in one of the leading roles, but were not able to secure her participation due her financial expectations.

Likewise we intended to have three Kenyans on the production crew, but one could not afford to participate with the budget we had and a second was not able to participate because of delays in our shooting schedule.

Due to delays in completing the scripts, we were delayed in submitting applications for filming permits and charged a penalty required for expediting our filming permit.

What are some of the Challenges encountered during the Project Implementation

Describe problems / obstacles that were encountered during the reporting period and what was done to overcome them.

1a. Obstacle: When regional cast (from Uganda) and crew (from Kenya) were not able to participate due to budget constraints and scheduling delays,

1b. Solution: We cast and crewed experienced professionals from Dar es Salaam.

What are the Recommendations from the Project? (relevant to integration)

1. It would be ideal for a mass media intervention like this, designed to appeal to audiences from across the region, to have creative involvement and representation from all member states. The process should involve creatives from all member states in the processes of script writing, production (crews) and national representation on the screen (celebrities from all countries in leading roles). While this will involve significantly more resources, it will go a long way in terms of encouraging creative integration and being more attractive to audiences across the region.

1. Next Quarter Work Plan and Budget as per the agreement

Planned Activities	Objectives	Output	Budget Line (extract from the agreed budget)	Responsible
Promotion and Distribution	Engaging primarily social media influences to increase viewership and engagement for the web series	Promotional event at Makumira with invited guests comprised primarily of new and social media influencers to meet and mingle with the cast and selected crew to promote the web series	TSh 500,000	MFDI

Monitoring and Evaluation		On going monitoring and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data gathered, using youtube analytics		MFDI
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Conclusion and Way Forward

All of the tangible elements of the project are completed. What remains is a promotional event to push viewership with the resources remaining the budget. Thereafter MFDI will be monitoring and evaluating audience responses to the program and preparing a final impact evaluation report.

We will seek sponsors to develop the next season of the series based on the measured impact of the pilot series.