

Selecting Partners at Twaweza

A. Background

In the new 2015-2018 strategy, Twaweza has taken a different, more strategic and focused approach to partnerships. Partners can be described in two distinct ways:

1. **'Project Partners'** that implement own work driven by their own mission and in line with a specific Twaweza problem area. The idea is to construct a win-win approach whereby the partners' own interests and areas of work as well as Twaweza's are incorporated into project strategy and implementation. This tends to be specific time-bound work that addresses a particular problem area or success.
2. **'Key Partners'** that 'give wings' or provide greater reach to multiple areas of Twaweza's work. These tend to be media platforms and their work falls under multiple problem areas. The agreements tend to be long-term, covering a year or longer. They contribute to a range of Twaweza successes and generally tend to extend the reach of core evidence, ideas or stories that Twaweza has curated. These tend to be more instrumental, making use of existing platforms with strong reach and/or strong effects among their audiences and enriching these platforms with Twaweza content. These partnerships also allow us to rapidly respond to events as the contracts will include some in-built flexibility to cover emerging topics.
3. **'Research and Evaluation Partners'** are always internationally renowned institutions (not individuals), ideally with missions and goals aligned to Twaweza, that evaluate or research parts of Twaweza's core hypotheses in the Theory of Change.

B. Criteria for partnerships

Before engaging with partners, they are assessed on the following criteria:

Project Partnerships

Goal focused

We review partners' work based on their objectives and areas of interest. Where there is a strong overlap with Twaweza's specific successes, we approach partners with our ideas and objectives. We tend to have a broad idea of the type of initiative that we would like to implement but the idea is to keep this fairly open in order to ensure alignment with the partner's goals. We then work to construct partnerships and initiatives that are based on the original idea, and effectively and powerfully contribute towards the shared goals of Twaweza and the respective partner.

Contextual analysis and relevance

Initiatives make sense and go far when they are informed by a sharp analysis of the context, and constructed to respond to a critical opportunity for making a difference. We pay close attention to the quality of contextual analysis for both the problem, and response. In many cases, some of this contextual analysis is provided by Twaweza but we look to partners to enhance and improve our initial ideas based on their own reading.

Citizen agency focused

Our approach directly fosters citizen agency, or plays an essential function in another actor contributing to citizen agency. By citizen agency we mean one or more of the following: citizens a) becoming informed, b) monitoring policy and practice, c) voicing/speaking out in 'public', d) acting to make a change. Twaweza does not really have direct links with large groups of organized citizens, so our focus is to search for partners that are well grounded in communities or have links to a specific constituency e.g. young people.

(Powerful) Innovation, Creativity, Imagination

We are in the imagination business. Twaweza critiques ‘business as usual’ and we put a premium on great ideas and innovative approaches. The point is not something new for its own sake, but rather something (different) that has the power to fire the public imagination, connect, inspire, make things happen. Here we recognize the value of (thoughtful, considered) risk-taking, to try things out that are promising but may not always work. An important part of this conception is the notion that creative, strategic people make things happen.

Basis of partnership

Twaweza recognizes that asking people to line up behind our idea is not likely to yield results; instead we will seek to create ‘win-win’ partnerships where each partner finds it in *their interest* to be in the partnership and gain something from it. In this conception, each partner’s contribution is in accordance with its *comparative advantage*.

A focus on impact

Too many initiatives begin with vaguely outlined objectives that are not easily or effectively assessed for success. In choosing project partners Twaweza will look for evidence of previous impact, where available, and will gauge the partner’s genuine interest in and appetite for making change happen.

Value for Money

The expected impact has to be worth the money invested, it should bring ‘bang for the buck.’ We need to consider if this money could be spent better and buy more impact if used differently. The cost of expected results should be comparable to other things we support. In valuing we consider: number of people reached, frequency and duration; face to face or indirect; likelihood that considerable number of citizens are informed, take up information, speak out, act, and bring change.

Openness to Learning

With our core partners we will seek, wherever possible, to foster a culture and practice of learning. This means a willingness to be open and transparent, an intellectual curiosity to learn, confidence to not be afraid of saying we messed up, and a commitment to documenting and sharing lessons.

Media Partnerships

Reaches scale/strategic

The approach is able to go ‘nationwide’. The numbers involved will vary based on target group and goal, but reach is a critical pillar for assessing media partners.

Open to new ideas

In many cases, particularly with our focus on data journalism for example, we are looking for media platforms that are willing to try something different. Incorporating evidence into regular programming, trying innovative mechanisms to solicit audience feedback and an openness to creative formats are just some of the aspects we consider under this criteria.

Engaged audiences

We are particularly interested in media platforms that have a strong track record in soliciting engagement from their audiences whether in the form of call ins to radio stations or social media conversation or anything else. The key is to identify platforms which already have audiences that are active and interested in particular topics or issues.

Citizen-centric

Too often, media talk shows and other media content are focused on experts – their views, their voices. Particular preference will be given to those media platforms that emphasize the engagement of citizens or go the extra mile to incorporate citizens into their programs.

(Powerful) Innovation, Creativity, Imagination

People have choices in what media content to consume. Therefore we place a premium on innovation in format or content and are willing to get behind newer, more experimental media partners that have approaches that we believe have the potential to create a stir or buzz. The point is not something new for its own sake, but rather something (different) that has the power to fire the public imagination, connect, inspire, make things happen. Here we recognize the value of (thoughtful, considered) risk-taking, to try things out that are promising but may not always work

Value for Money

For all Twaweza work and partnerships, value for money is a critical criteria. We avoid paying market rate advertising costs, seeking instead to try to influence existing content or leverage our strengths to create value propositions for media partners. In this way we avoid some of the exorbitant costs associated with placing content on media platforms.

Evaluation Partnerships

Significant piloting and testing

Before embarking on research/evaluation we require solid proof of concept for both the intervention as well as the measurement before setting up a rigorous study.

A commitment to collaboration

Collaboration between evaluators and implementers is essential, starting at the stage of designing initiatives and interventions, while preserving the independence of the research.

Sharing widely and being open to scrutiny

We emphasize publicly sharing of all work, not only regarding final results but also about the design and implementation of studies. We believe it is important to share stories of both successes and failures, and particularly in the case of the latter, to examine openly what contributed to the failure, and the lessons learned from that.

Method mix

We prefer a deliberate mix of methods, where form (method) follows purpose (research question), requiring a high level of rigour from qualitative as well as quantitative approaches.

Limited overhead costs

As Twaweza is a not for profit entity with limited resources, Evaluation Partners are requested to absorb overhead entirely or partly. As per Twaweza policies, overhead costs for Evaluation Partners is capped at 15% of the total contract.

C. Organizational assessment

As part of due diligence for large (> USD 50,000) and long term (> 1 year) new partnerships, the following aspects are considered before a partner is selected.

1. Credibility of the organization,
2. Quality of the governance of the organization,
3. Quality of the leadership/management of the organization,
4. Adequacy of administration policies and whether they are implemented correctly,
5. Adequacy of financial policies and whether they are implemented correctly,
6. Adequacy of planning and reporting systems and whether the system functions as intended.

D. Contracting and advancing funds

All our partner contracts are outputs based. Once a partner is identified, a contract is drawn and outputs required from the partner are clearly priced and reflected into contracts. Payments are made in accordance to Twaweza Finance and Administration Regulations and before a payment is made by Twaweza, being an output based organization, an assessment on the value of the partner deliverables is made and score given. E.g. if the score is 87%, only 87% of the full payment is given.

Advance payments are discouraged. However, in recognition of the costs of implementing the types of projects that Twaweza seeks to or in the case of media partners, the constrained resource environments in which media operate, after careful assessment limited contractual advance payments can be provided for both project and media partners. Typically partnership agreements include multiple installments with a final payment at completion of the agreement. First installments can constitute an advance ranging from 5% for new partners to up to 50% in special circumstances and with trusted Twaweza partners with a good track record.