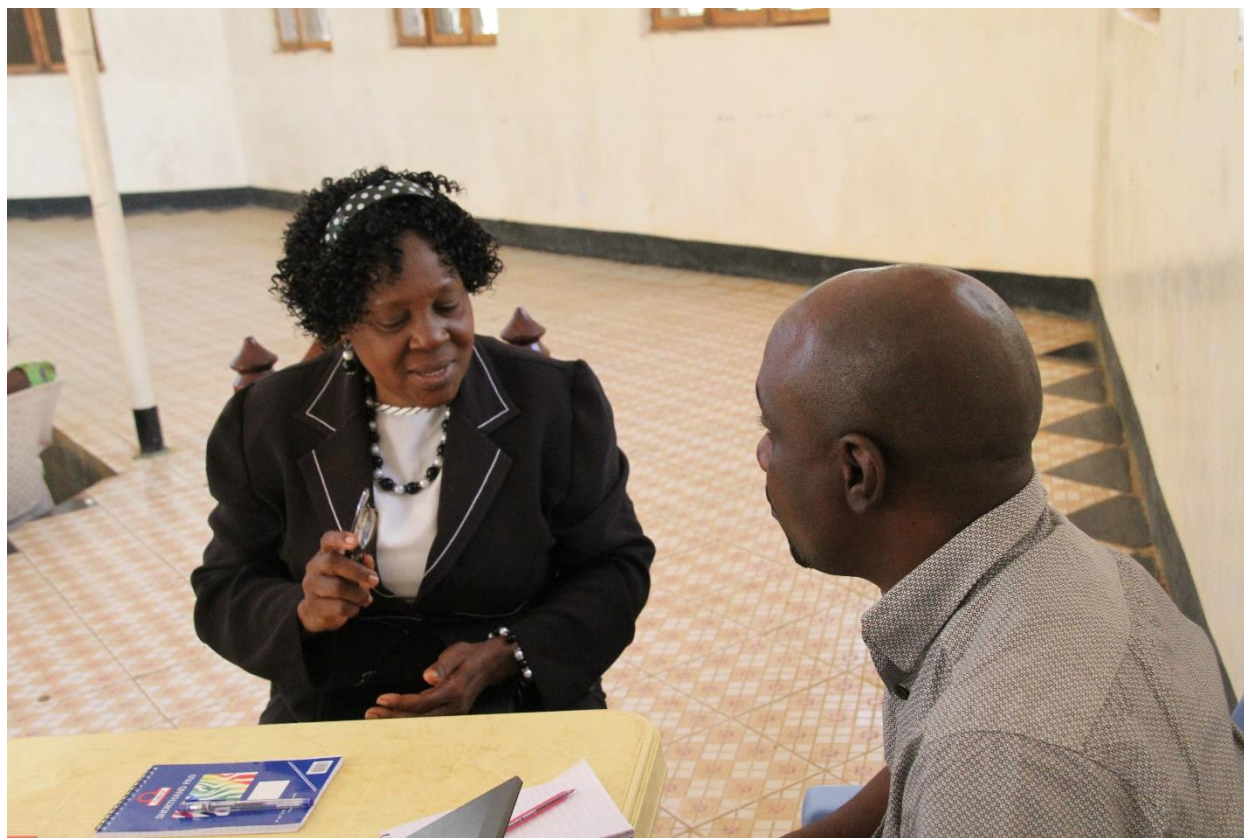# *Listening to critical friends*:

Feedback about Twaweza in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda

Background and purpose of the exercise

Twaweza means "we can make it happen" in Swahili. We work on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa's largest annual citizen assessment to assess children's learning levels in the 3 countries, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative mobile phone survey (currently in Tanzania and Kenya). We undertake effective public engagement through powerful media partnerships to reach large numbers of citizens, we engage directly with high-level government authorities to insert evidence into policy debates, and we play a global leadership role in initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.

Every year, we conduct an internal review of our progress and accomplishments against annual goals. In 2016, we also wished to include feedback from selected informed individuals outside Twaweza (critical friends) on their view of our progress and direction, and reflection on our successes and areas of improvement. We commissioned respected independent consultants to conduct in-depth interviews with a range of officials, opinion leaders and policy makers in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, with the aim of generating frank and constructive feedback on our work. We will use this feedback to reflect on our practice and inform future planning.

Methods

This cross-sectional review employed qualitative approach to data collection, processing, analysis and report production. With support from Twaweza, lists of individuals and their respective organisations or professional practice and their contacts was generated in each country. Priority was allocated to organizations which are the "target" of Twaweza activities (e.g. Ministry of Education, parliamentary committees, prominent media personages etc.), and care was taken to balance respondents in their known sentiments toward Twaweza. In other words, we wanted people who have a critical opinion of our work, not only those who are favorable. The overall themes of the interviews were

- Awareness of Twaweza and overall positioning of Twaweza among civil society, and vis-à-vis the government
- Awareness, use and effects of Uwezo independent data on learning outcomes
- Awareness, relevance and use of other education-related work conducted by Twaweza
- Awareness and opinion of Twaweza's work in the open government domain
- Suggestions for shaping Twaweza in the future

The interview quota was set at a minimum of 15 completed interviews per country (20 interviews were desired; in Uganda, only 14 were achieved). Interviews were conducted between June and September 2016; many respondents needed to be contacted repeatedly and in some cases, especially with high profile respondents, access was very limited. The exercise was therefore brought to a close after 3 months. The categories of completed interviews, by country, are shown in Table 1 below.

	Number interviews completed		
Category	Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda
Government: Education	1	6	1
Government: Other	4	1	0
Parliament	0	0	1
Media	4	2	3
Civil Society	5	4	7
Academic	1	1	1
Teacher union	0	1	1
Total	15	15	14

The variation in the composition of respondents across the three countries is important to keep in mind while reading the results. For example, while in all three countries there was a comparable number of respondents from the media, and civil society, there were many more governmental respondents in Kenya as compared to Tanzania and Uganda. In this summary report we draw some overarching findings across the three countries, however, to access the full country reports please email info@twaweza.org

Results and Insights

(A) Awareness of Twaweza overall, positioning Twaweza vis-à-vis government, and among civil society

1. For many respondents in Kenya and Uganda, the brand name Uwezo was more familiar than Twaweza. This makes sense, since the Uwezo learning assessment and the associated reports have been the most public components of Twaweza's work in these two countries.

2. In Tanzania, Sauti za Wananchi was well-known to respondents, on par with Uwezo. Most respondents were also aware of the Mkikimkiki national-level debates that Twaweza organized in the context of 2015 elections.

3. In all three countries, Twaweza is associated with research, rigor, and evidence, but also technological and methodological innovations. The latter can raise questions on the validity of results, although most respondents trust Twaweza and look up to it as a credible source of data. The regular periodicity of Uwezo results and the consistency of the message, combined also with poor results on national examinations, have shifted the focus away from discussions on Uwezo methodology and to the results themselves.

4. In all three countries respondents also commended Twaweza's injection of data and research into the media space, adding to the quality of public debate; this was noted the strongest in Tanzania. Likely this is due to Sauti being in its third year in Tanzania (as compared to its first year in Kenya, and not yet started in Uganda).

   "Your research work [be it SzW or Uwezo] also helps us in the media to determine what we call 'areas of focus'." – (Media, Tanzania)

   "*The findings from Twaweza when they conduct research are often disputed, but let's face it, the public now are anxious to hear what are they (Twaweza) going to say next, it has become an important and credible source of information for the media and the general public.*" – (Media, Tanzania)

5. In Tanzania, majority of respondents felt Twaweza is unique in its role as a civil society organization (CSO), bringing clear value-add to civil society work (mostly in reference to Sauti za Wananchi and Uwezo), although this praise did not stop the respondents from also critiquing certain components of Twaweza's programs. In particular the sampling methodology of Sauti was commented on, and the concept of "pay for performance" for teachers as tested through KiuFunza.

6. Tanzanian civil society organisations respondents stated that Twaweza needs to work more in collaboration with other CSOs, rather than forging a lone path. This was also echoed by at least one government respondent, who suggested that civil society overall ought to collaborate more effectively.

   *"Twaweza needs to collaborate and work with TANGO, FemAct Coalition, TENMET or Policy Forum more than it does now and secure other agenda specific collaboration with Civil Society Organisations on the ground." - (*Civil Society, Tanzania*)*

7. What came as a welcome surprise for Tanzania was the appreciation of some Government respondents about the value of Twaweza vis-à-vis their own work, as exemplified by the quote below.

> *"I must admit that Twaweza's output has been like a "key" [benchmark] to the government regarding data"* - (Government, Tanzania)

8. In Kenya, a tension was noted about Twaweza as one between having an authoritative independent voice particularly in the area of education (and rising in the area of open government through Sauti za Wananchi), and becoming more connected to the formal (Government) sectors, also in order to demonstrate better the impact of Twaweza's work.

9. Government respondents in Kenya noted positively the change in early sharing of information / reports with the government (particularly Ministry of Education) before going public. Twaweza has acted on the feedback that Government actors in particular are very sensitive to be given priority in seeing the results and the chance to digest them before public release.

10. Several Kenyan civil society organisation respondents noted appreciation that Twaweza works with partners 'collegially' rather than in a domineering way.

11. In Uganda, a number of civil society organization respondents described positively the working relationship with Twaweza (though it ought to be noted that in some of the cases, Twaweza had engaged a CSO partner in a partnership which included financial contribution from Twaweza to the partner organization).

> *"Twaweza is an enabler; most other organizations often times other than partnering want to control, direct and patronize. With Twaweza, if you have an idea they are interested in, they are willing to support you to take lead in that idea, which makes them less transactional and more transformative. The enabling part is preceded by training before they put the campaign down there, they first test the ground in terms of assessment. I think they anchor most of their programming on the learning part of it."* - (*Civil Society*, Uganda*)*

12. In Uganda respondents also commented on the innovativeness of Twaweza's media work; this makes sense, as our program in Uganda (as comparison to Kenya and Tanzania) has invested most in pushing the boundary of using the media, music and arts scenes as platforms for engaging young people in questions of governance.

> *"Twaweza has done unique things like getting musicians, youths and celebrities involved in politics to promote messages on good governance"* - (Media, Uganda.)

13. Government respondents in Uganda had mixed views, in that one commended Twaweza for staying away from "activism and shouting," while the other thought Twaweza used the media too much to make its point, rather than working directly with the government.

(B) Relevance and use of Uwezo independent data on learning outcomes

There is a high degree of awareness of Uwezo reports and moreover, an appreciation of the Uwezo approach and the focus it brought to the outcomes produced by the education system. Respondents described various effect of Uwezo on government as well as on other civil society actors. For the most part, these effects centered around Uwezo exposing the crisis in learning outcomes in a credible, consistent and relevant manner. In Kenya in particular, the commentaries were stronger about Uwezo being part of shifting the accountability of the education system from inputs to outcomes.

> *"I have used the reports when discussing [with] media, and quoted them in my [own] reports."* - (Civil Society, Tanzania)

"This is what pulled us in: based on concrete evidence it (Uwezo Annual Reports) showed us you can push children from level to level but without grasping the basic concepts. Previously it was left to Examinations (KNEC) to tell us how we are doing." – (Civil Society, Kenya)

"With a more creative approach and method of entering homes in an interactive manner, Uwezo got people to ask: 'Are Our Children Learning?" - (Civil Society, Kenya)

"What is really very important about Uwezo is that they began with a focus on outcomes, and this was taken even more seriously when Tusome came along. This focus on achievement and outcome was not something we had considered before. It supported us to approach our work as an iterative process to determining outcomes – we keep looking, reviewing, and improving – as opposed to schooling and therefore the implied learning is obvious, but untested, until the end of basic education." - (Government, Kenya)

"We ourselves have not been in the field to see the outcomes of our work – the work we do here in curriculum development. We expect these things to happen: we develop the curriculum and… it is implemented. …Uwezo engaged us – they nagged us – we were invited to meetings and forums. Even when we didn't go, they kept inviting us. We had to engage." - (Government, Kenya)

"*One thing I think where they have done very well that has created an impact is in the Education sector with their Uwezo reports. There are common references to those reports even by government departments making their findings credible, trusted."* - (Government, Kenya)

"Many actors in the education sector would quote data sometimes which is generated outside our own community, perhaps by international bodies. There is always a perception that these reports have an outsider view, but Uwezo reports reflect information that is generated from our communities in the field, and they [Twaweza] go through a rigorous process to produce a report." - (*Civil Society, Uganda)

(C) Awareness and relevance of other Twaweza education-focused work

1. Although dominated by the Uwezo assessments, Twaweza's education work around the curriculum is also stirring conversations and contributing to debate in Kenya and Tanzania.

   "We are a curriculum centre; Uwezo began to support and shape our thinking. We engaged Uwezo in various forums, including on curriculum development. Uwezo took the Ministry (of Education) through the 2014 report separately, and clarified issues. [Twaweza] was pro-active; if it was up to us, we would not have engaged them." - (Government, Kenya)

2. Respondents in Uganda were not aware of other education work conducted by Twaweza in Uganda; not surprising, therefore, that a critique levelled at Twaweza was that we focus on telling the same "negative" story of learning outcomes, but do not contribute to the search for solutions. Given that our What Works in Education program is designed to do precisely that, a good question remains how to strengthen this particularly in Uganda.

   "That's a million dollar question, is there anything they can do to make sure that this situation improves? Or for the next ten years they will still be raising the red flag and saying the situation is bad, the situation is bad, so I think that's one of the greatest challenges they have on table, and they need to work on it." - (Civil Society, Uganda)

3. The majority of respondents in Tanzania were familiar with Twaweza's KiuFunza pay-for-performance experiment. And while all those familiar with KiuFunza supported the idea of finding out what factors drive and improve learning, nearly all of them also expressed reservations (or straight disapproval) of the idea of pay-for-performance for teachers. (Notably, however, none of the disapproval included comments related to evidence of whether the approach is effective or not.)

   "Personally, I do not agree with the idea of giving teachers cash incentives. Let us think of something else that will make our teachers more capable or better equipped with time and tools to deliver the required learning – any incentive than just cash is welcome. In such an arrangement, those teachers that do not get cash become demoralized" – (Civil Society, Tanzania)

(D) Awareness of Twawezas' work in open government

1. Work in this domain has been the strongest in Tanzania: Sauti za Wananchi platform is in its third consecutive year and Twaweza is prominently engaged as a CSO partner in the Open Government Partnership. In 2015 in particular, we published the results of a controversial political opinion poll before the elections, and we also implemented highly-visible national-level political party debates in the context of the 2015 elections (Mkikimkiki).

2. A handful of respondents were familiar with the Open Government Partnership in Tanzania, and all of these linked it directly to Twaweza. The role was furthermore personified – first by the Twaweza founder, and subsequently by the current Executive Director.

3. Regarding Sauti overall, respondents raised issues which the opinion poll has faced since the start: questions about sample size and methodology, particularly interviewing respondents over the phone, as well as handing out mobile phones at the start of the panel "lifetime."

4. Specifically related to the controversial 2015 election poll, respondents were divided whether the poll was credible or not. Those that deemed it credible noted that it reflected the eventual election results. Those that did not deem it credible again expressed reservations about the sample and methodology.

5. The political debates garnered praise from nearly all respondents, particularly the participatory component was noted as innovative (though there was a comment that failing to get all parties to participate could be perceived as having a partisan agenda). A number of respondents suggested that public debates should be extended beyond the election time to stimulate a dialogue between citizens and government on core issues.

> *"The debates were a very good way of dissecting policies and election manifestos of different political parties but also such debates can be used to influence government (outside election circles) to improve on service delivery and address election promises" - (*Media*, Tanzania)*

> *"[The innovation was] the use of social media to increase public participation in a talk show, [where] previously no talk show used that level of interactivity with their audience. Another dimension that social media brought is the fact that people could comment directly and that we could stream the debate live; I recommend media in Tanzania that hosts or produce talk shows to copy the idea" - (*Media*, Tanzania)*

6. In Kenya, the inroads made by Twaweza in the governance sphere are starting to be noticed.
> *"We are not yet engaged with Sauti za Wananchi. We have here a major media department who would be naturally looking to Sauti. The concept is good: to engage and get information from the public; to hear their voices." -* (Government*, Kenya)*

7. In Uganda, a number of respondents were aware of our work in the media, particularly targeting young people; while this was applauded for being innovative, there was limited feedback on it being an effective way to push the governance agenda. When respondents made a link between Twaweza and governance it was predominantly within the education realm.

8. Respondents in Uganda also questioned whether in the Ugandan setting the "traditional" programs based on advocacy would actually amount to any significant change.
> *"I think many people have reached a state where they have given up because when you try to interact … people say "what can we change, things have been like this and they will continue to be like this." People seem to have lost interest in governance issues." - (*Civil Society, Uganda*)*

Suggestions for Twaweza

All participants were asked for open-ended recommendations for Twaweza in the future, and the responses were as varied as the respondents themselves. The suggestions which were echoed several times are noted below:

1. A diversified and improved way of presenting our information – both Uwezo and Sauti. This was particularly strongly noted in Kenya and in relation to (nascent) Sauti communications.
2. A call from civil society organizations in the three countries to work more in coalitions, partnering more with other civil society.
3. A call from government respondents in the three countries to work more closely with the government actors – both in dissemination and communication, as well as in technical aspects of improvement of the education sector.
4. Expanding Uwezo to capture learning outcomes beyond the basics of early grade learning; this was particularly strongly noted in Uganda. Both Uganda and Tanzania respondents also suggested a stronger link between research findings and implementation or "action."
5. Ensuring our findings and communication do not remain at central (national) level; respondents in Uganda and Tanzania recommended Twaweza takes greater efforts to be present sub-nationally.
6. Clarifying and defending further our research methods – including sampling and data collection methodologies.
7. Maintaining and defending our neutrality. This was noted in Tanzania in context of our work around the 2015 elections, but also in Kenya, where the focus was more on transparency of Twaweza's funding and therefore a possible invisible agenda.

Conclusions and Reflections

Summarizing the reflections on Twaweza's effects or contributions, gathered across the three countries, suggests that:

- Twaweza plays a unique role in each of the three countries, most notably in the education sector with the contribution of solid and consistent evidence on learning outcomes (Uwezo)
- Twaweza is perceived overall as a credible organization, producing credible data and findings
- The consistency and focus of the Uwezo results can be linked directly to a shift in national dialogue – both public and policy – around learning outcomes; in Kenya this was linked most strongly also to a shift in accountability of the education sector (being responsible for outcomes, not just inputs or processes)
- Sauti za Wananchi is significantly enriching public debate via the media; this is most pronounced in Tanzania, and nascent in Kenya. Questions remain about the Sauti methodology, and further and consistent explanations would be useful in adding to credibility of the results.
- In Tanzania, KiuFunza is appreciated as a search for solutions on what works to improve learning, but its central hypothesis of pay-for-performance is deeply contested
- Twaweza's other education work (e.g. on curriculum reform) is beginning to be noticed, particularly among government partners.
- In Tanzania, Twaweza is strongly associated with open government work (particularly the Open Government Partnership); however, its involvement in political debates and political polling has contributed to speculations about its neutrality. Suggestions were made to take efforts to demonstrate non-partisanship.
- Open government work was not prominent in Kenya; in Uganda it was commended in context of innovative use of media to engage young people in governance issues.

Taking the main findings together with the main suggestions raises some interesting points for reflection. For instance, not conforming to usual definitions of what civil society is and does has been baked into Twaweza's DNA since its inception, perhaps best illustrated by several balancing acts. One, between being an implementing organization and a think tank; second, between independent monitoring of government performance yet partnering with government actors for improving service delivery; and third, being civil society but often hesitant to jump into coalitions with other civil society organizations.

Not surprisingly, then, much of the commentary received in these independent reviews, particularly when it came to suggestions, centered around calling for Twaweza to choose between the dichotomies it seems to embody. The question is, would it beneficial to Twaweza's mandate (its theory of change, its mission and vision) to do so? The answer to this is likely not a simple yes-or-no. The biggest value Twaweza can get from these independent reviews is not necessarily a clear directive of what to do or not do, but a series of meaty questions with which to engage in order to chart its forward path.

1. What would closer, better collaboration with government look like, without losing the status of an independent observer, thinker? Specifically, what are the concessions Twaweza can make (e.g. adjusting our communication strategy to share findings first with government, before going public with them), while remaining uncompromising in the messages themselves?
2. What would better, more strategic collaboration with civil society look like, while retaining the flexibility to distance ourselves if the direction taken is not consistent with our values?

3. Twaweza is built and staffed by strong, credible individuals, which forge strong and credible ties with other organizations; this was noted as important particularly in relation to government. The presence of trustworthy personalities was noted across the three countries. But for sustained impact, the organization ought to move from individual ties, which are a great starting point, to institutional ties. Can Twaweza develop a strategy for this?
4. Yes, Twaweza is unique in many ways, but it is by no means the only game in town. Does Twaweza understand its own value and position vis-à-vis other agencies (think tanks, research agencies, advocacy agencies, etc.)? Is there a particular space it wishes to occupy prominently, and does it have a strategy for achieving this?

The above list is compelling, but it's also instrumental. What underlies these questions is a thread picked up by several respondents about what, in its core, is Twaweza. As one Tanzanian respondent noted "*It is not clear to other CSOs what Twaweza wants to achieve; it seems like a whole shopping basket of issues to me.*" Halfway through the current strategy, it is a perfect time to do some concrete soul-searching and, as noted by a Kenyan respondent, to define an *organizing architecture of desired impact* in education and open government, and to align its functions, strategies and products accordingly.