

“I don’t know where to ask, and if I ask, I wouldn’t get it.”

Citizen perceptions of access to basic government information in Uganda

**Key findings:**

- Ugandans profess to be interested in local government information, particularly on expenditures on local services (47%) and availability of local jobs (14%). They also say that the best way to receive this information would be via radio (63%) or via community meetings (25%).
- On the other hand, the majority of Ugandans would not be able to find basic government information today: over 85% could not find information on education, agriculture or local budgets; 36% say they could find information on local construction plans. By far the most common reason given for not finding this information was simply not knowing where to look or who to ask (45%).
- Less than half Ugandans believe they currently have influence over local government decisions (45%) or over local services (39%).
- Similarly, less than half believe that local governments (34%) and services (42%) are currently transparent.



About Twaweza

Twaweza means “we can make it happen” in Swahili. Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a world respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa’s largest annual citizen assessment to assess children’s learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa’s first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.

Methodology

In Quarter 3 2016, Twaweza East Africa commissioned a research company in Uganda to gather feedback on a number of our areas of work, through a nationally representative “omnibus” survey¹. The survey consists of face to face interviews with randomly selected respondents, aged 18 or over, using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through smart phones. A sample size of 2252 respondents was achieved with a margin of error +/- 2% at 95% confidence interval. This sample was distributed evenly based on the estimated population size, and is also representative of the rural/urban clustering.

In this brief, we summarize the findings on items related to access to information, focusing on interest and demand from citizens, and citizen perceptions of the transparency of local services and local government.

¹ <http://researchworldint.net/>

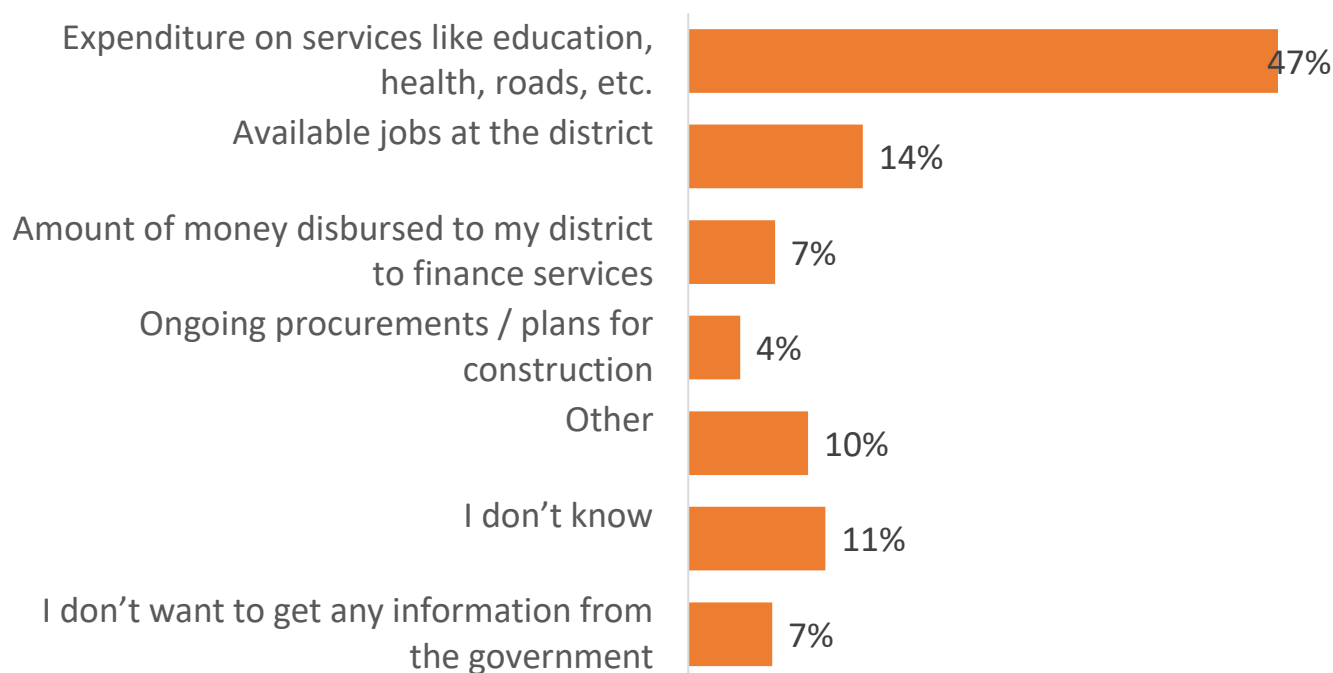


Fact 1: Ugandan citizens want to know about government spending on public services, through radio and community meetings

Respondents were asked to spontaneously say what kind of government information they are interested in; nearly one half (47%) stated expenditure of public services as their top interest (Figure 1). Second most sought-after information was on available jobs.

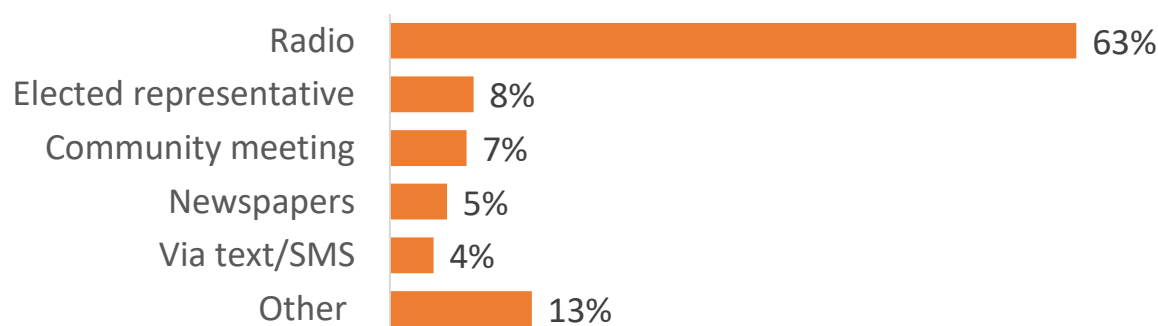
There were just a few differences in the type of information desired among demographic groups. The interest in available jobs at the district was higher among urban respondents (20%) as compared to rural respondents (12%). The interest in expenditure on services, however, was reversed: 51% of rural respondents were interested in this, as compared to 38% of urban respondents.

Figure 1: Main type of information respondents would like to receive from the government authorities in own district (unprompted; n=2252)



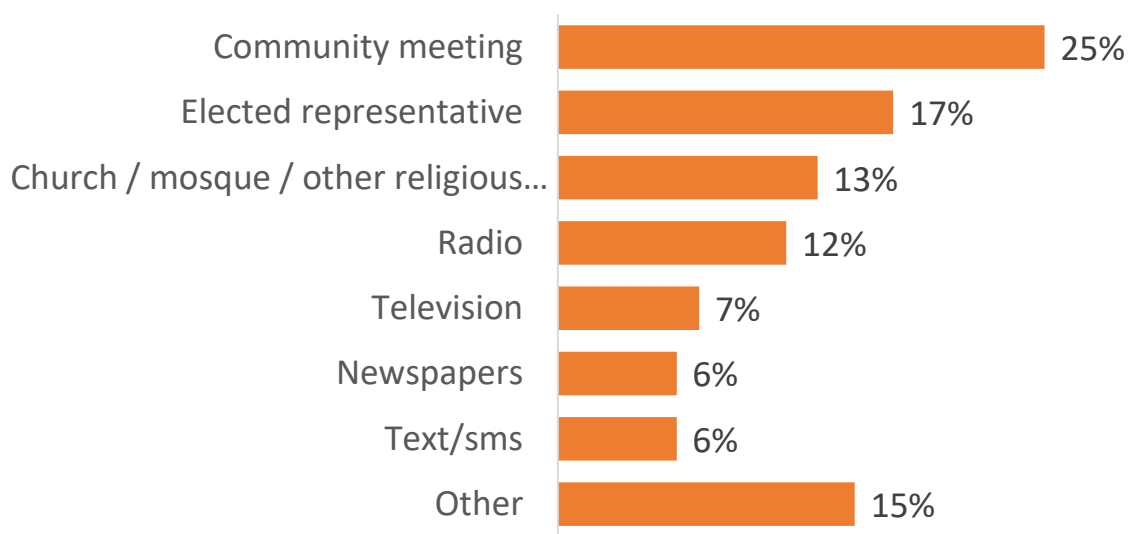
In terms of medium of how to receive information, the first choice across the board was the radio; however, a higher proportion of rural respondents preferred the radio (69%) as compared to urban (46%). Urban respondents also rated newspapers higher as a first choice (12%) as compared to rural respondents (2%).

Figure 2: Respondents' preferred way of receiving information from government: first choice (n=1852)



The second choice of medium provides more insight and greater variation – with community meeting coming up on top (28% for rural, 16% for urban respondents), followed by elected representatives and religious gathering. Overall, urban respondents seem to have a wider range of choices of preferred first and second medium, but the rankings remained similar as to rural respondents. The radio dominated as the main choice for rural respondents, followed by community meetings.

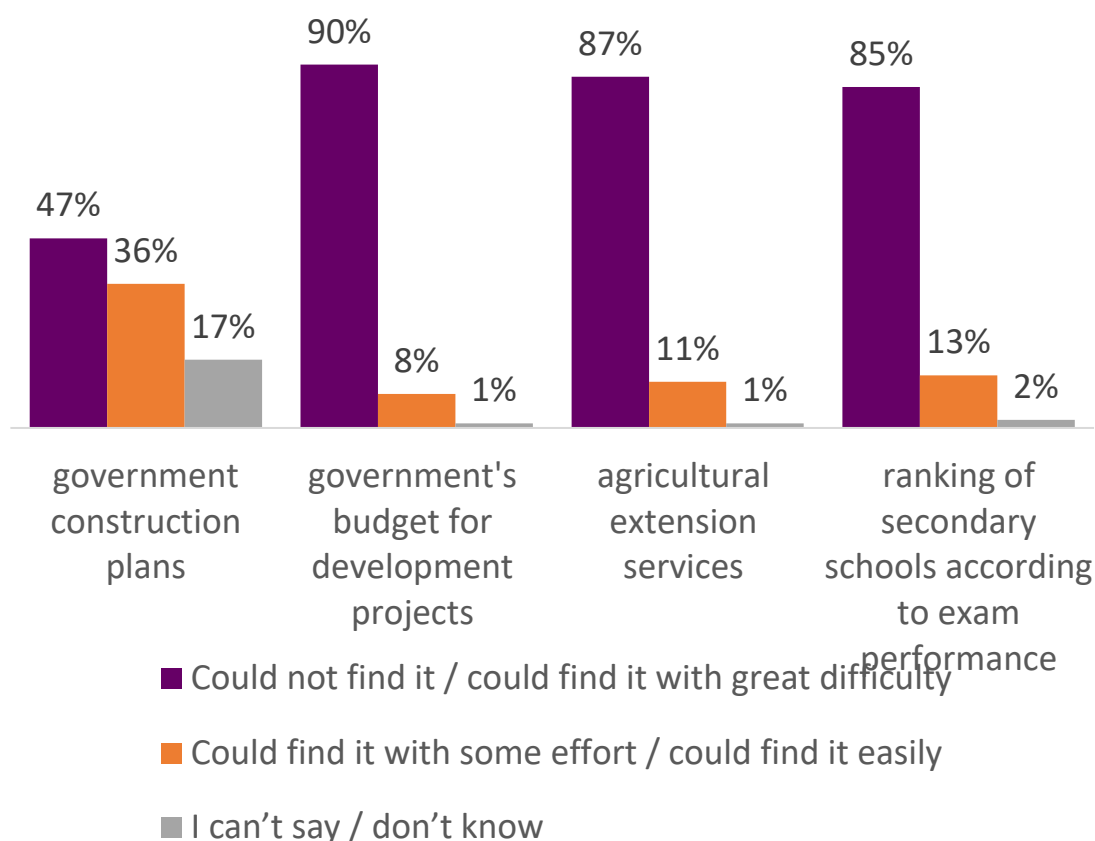
Figure 3: Respondents' preferred way of receiving information from government: second choice (n=1852)



Fact 2: Ugandan citizens don't know where to find government information

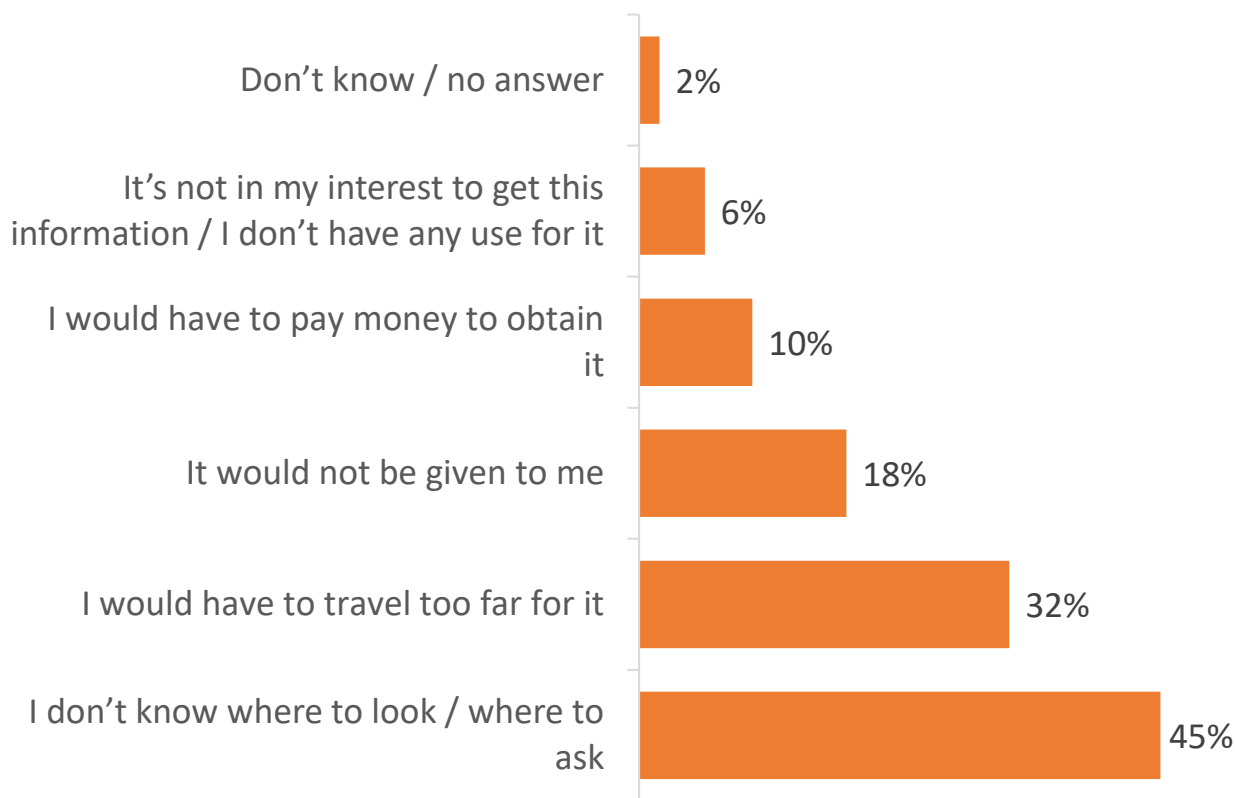
We asked about how easy or difficult it would be to locate basic government information. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that it would be very difficult or impossible to find the information (Figure 4). Men, respondents in Kampala (except information about agricultural extension services), and older citizens (except secondary school rankings) are more likely to think they can find public information than women, respondents outside Kampala and young people.

Figure 4: How easy or difficult would it be to find out the following information about your own district (varied n, range 2252 to 839)



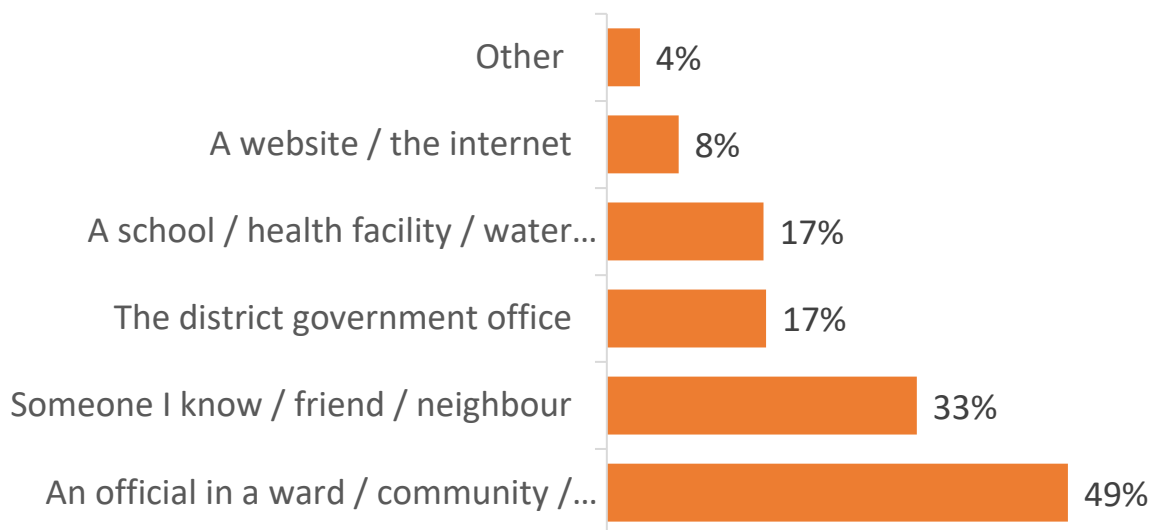
As Figure 5 below shows, nearly half of the respondents simply don't know where to look, or who to ask. This was by far the most common answer in the Northern region, much more so than in other regions. There were no difference between men and women on the above. More respondents from Kampala said they would "have to travel to far" as compared to other regions.

Figure 5: Main reason for why it would be difficult (or impossible) to get the information (n=1062)



And among those who said they could find the information with some effort or easily, we asked about sources (Figure 6). The first source cited was a local official, second was a friend or neighbour.

Figure 6: Main source of information among respondents who believed they could find the information (n=1870)

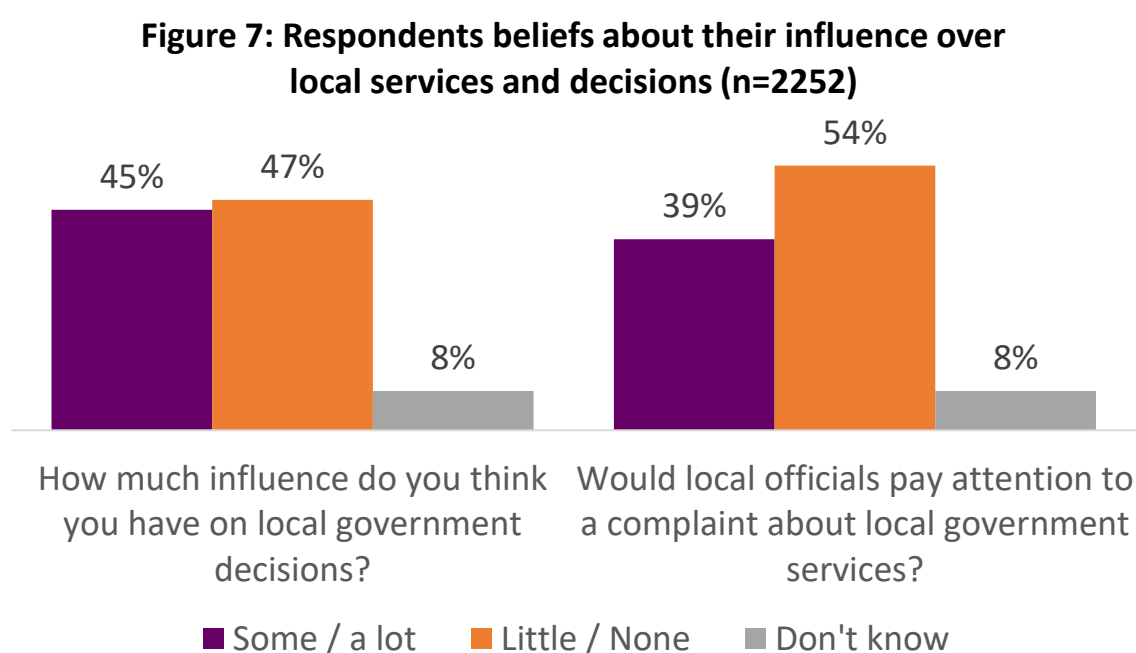


There was no difference between men and women. In Kampala, 30% of respondents would get their information from the internet, while less than 5% of respondents from the other regions chose this option. Also, more respondents from Kampala would get the information from “a friend or neighbour” as compared to other regions, while respondents from other regions would mostly get the information from an official in the ward, community or village.

Fact 3: Many Ugandans do not believe they have influence over local decisions, nor that they would be listened to by local officials

We asked about respondents’ belief in their own influence over local services and decisions (Figure 7). About half of Ugandan citizens think they have little or no influence.

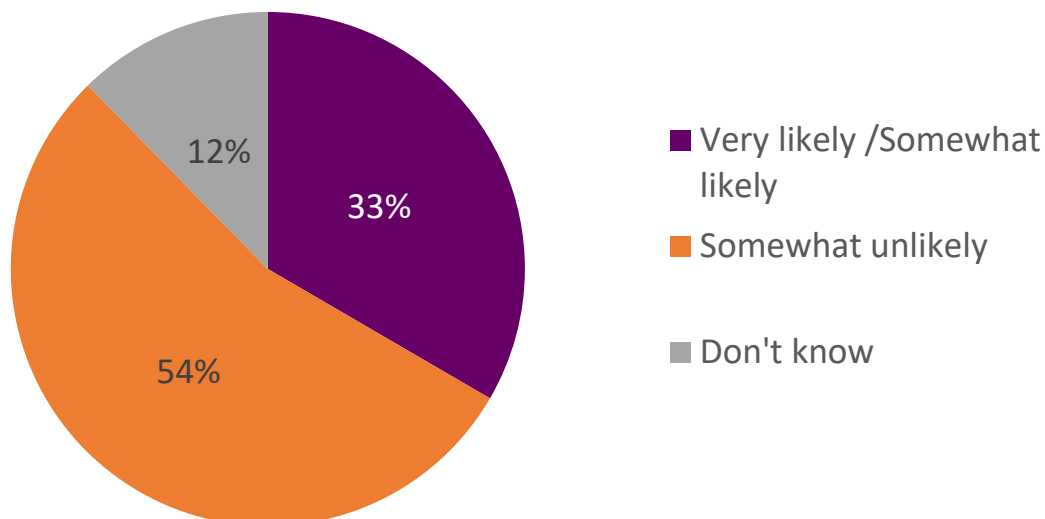
There were no differences between men and women or age groups, but respondents in Kampala were by far more likely to believe they would get “none or very little attention” to a complaint on local services as compared to respondents from other regions. Respondents from the Central and Northern regions were more likely to report having some or a lot of influence as compared to other regions. There was a general trend of people in older age brackets perceiving themselves as having more influence as compared to younger respondents.



But respondents did feel that public forums could increase their influence over local government: the majority felt that their influence on local government would rise if they raised their issue at a church, mosque or other religious setting (65%), on media such as radio or television (64%), and at a bimeza or similar public debate forum (57%; data not shown).

Respondents were asked to reflect on whether there would be punishment to citizens in their community for reporting corruption in the government sector (Figure 8). A third (33%) believed that the citizens would be punished; this belief was strongest among respondents from the Eastern region.

Figure 8: Proportion of respondents who believe a citizen in their community would be punished by the government after reporting on corruption (n=2252)



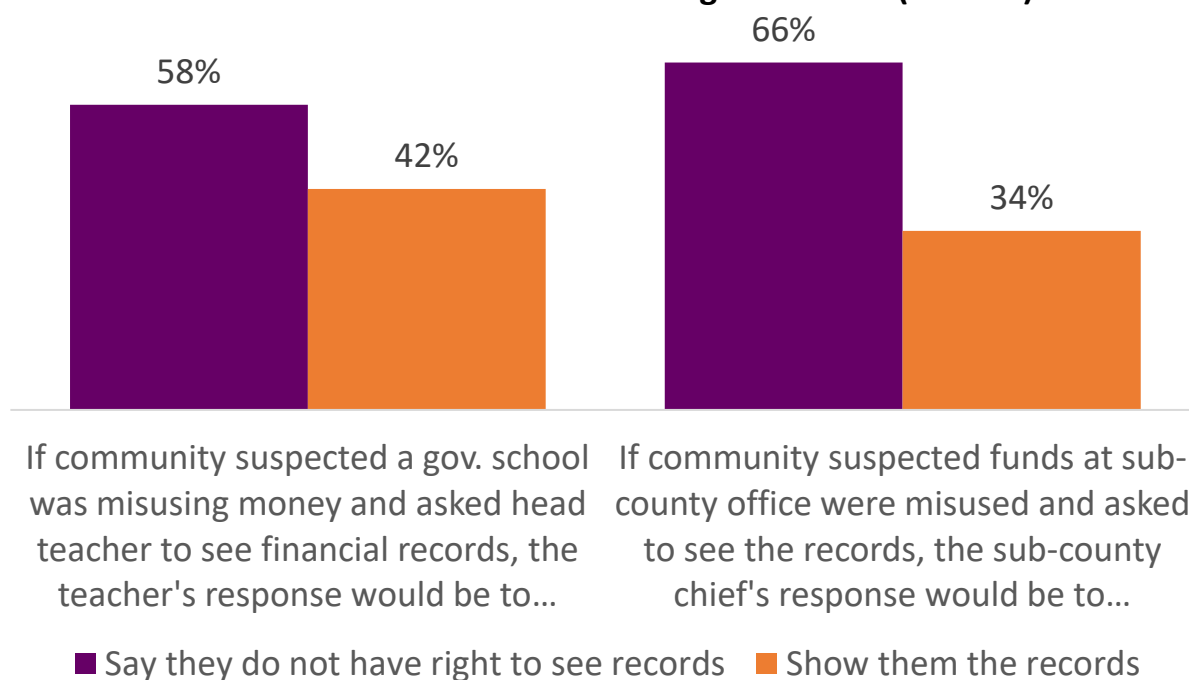
Fact 4: More than half of Ugandans do not believe local government services and government offices are transparent

We presented two hypothetical situations relating to government transparency and accountability at local level (Figure 9). First was a scenario where the community suspected that funds at a local government school were being misused, and community members inquire as to the financial records of the school. More than half (58%) of respondents believed that a head teacher would deny the community members the right to see the school's financial records. There was surprising uniformity in the answer across gender, age groups and regions.

Second question was about the community suspecting that funds at the sub-county were being misused, and asking the sub-county chief to see the records. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents believed they would not be allowed to see the records. Again there was no real variation between genders, regions and age groups.



Figure 9: Respondents beliefs about accessibility of financial records of local services and local government (n=2252)



Conclusions

Ugandan citizens say they are interested in basic government information, but also that they would not know where or how to get it. It would be good to explore more the actual need and use for the information (one thing is to claim interest, another to actively use it), but provided there is a real need, the results in this study suggest an initiative of informing citizens as to the whereabouts of this information might be useful. Concurrently, local governments and public services need to be willing to release this information. According to this study, less than half Ugandans believe that if they asked, such information would be forthcoming. It would therefore be important to test this belief – and Twaweza could usefully do so through the “mystery shopper” approach that has been applied in Tanzania and Kenya, with interesting results (mostly confirming citizen’s hunch that information is not readily available).