

Has Uwezo influenced key actors in 2013 ?

Evidence from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.



Key Findings

- Uwezo is coordinated by the help from more than **20,000 citizen volunteers** in 362 districts across East Africa, assessing more than 100,000 households and 274,335 children annually.
- Uwezo has provided **evidence** that most children are not acquiring basic reading skills while in school. Children are going to school, but they are simply **not learning** enough.
- On a sample basis¹, according to our records for 2013, Uwezo has been **cited** at least 25 times in the media (both print and broadcast) in Tanzania, 47 times in Kenya, and 46 times in Uganda.
- Results of this study suggest Uwezo has promoted an important **debate** on education within East African governments, academic institutions, educationalists, and the civil society.
- Respondents **appreciate** the results of the assessments, and Uwezo's role in highlighting the crisis in education. However, most also reported not knowing what could be done to improve the situation.

This report was written by the Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at Twaweza, based on original research conducted for Twaweza by Anil Khamis (Kenya), Eke Mwaipopo (Tanzania), and Christopher Mugiumu (Uganda).

¹ Twaweza monitors the media through agreements with private sector providers. This information is supplemented by content seen / heard by staff. However we are constantly alerted to missing press coverage so the numbers provided here and in future briefs should be taken as an indication not a final complete figure.



Introduction

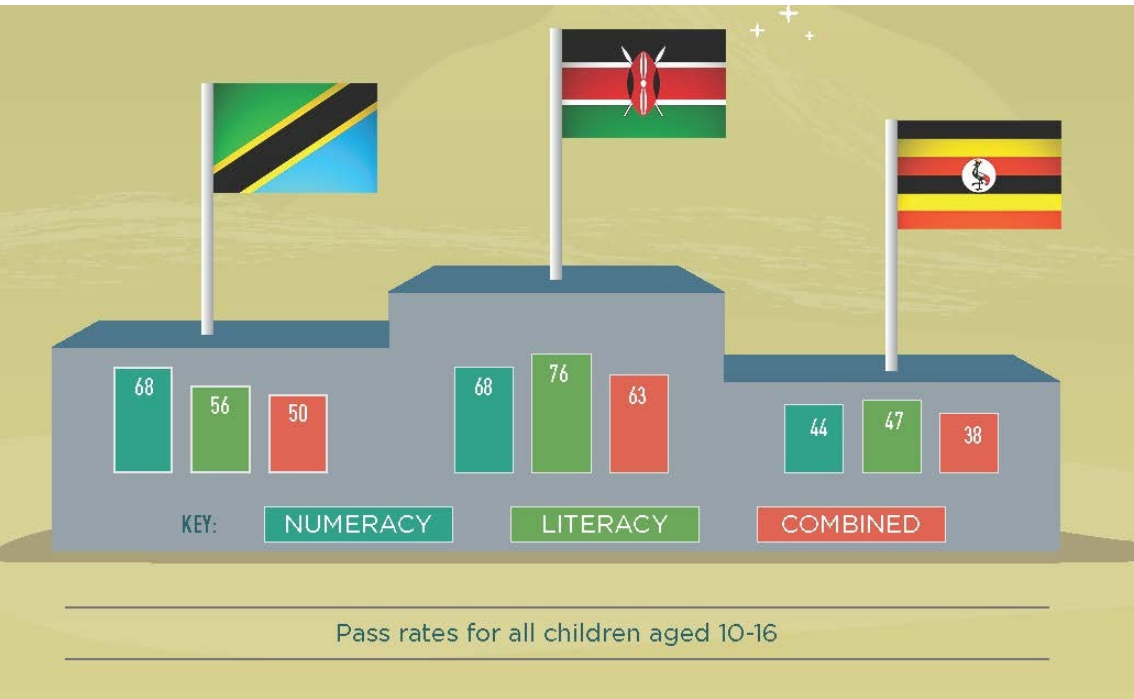
This brief summarizes the findings from the qualitative assessment of the resonance and use of the Uwezo data and publications in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, which was carried out from November 2013 to January 2014.

What is Uwezo?

Uwezo is an initiative seeking to improve literacy and numeracy in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. UWEZO focuses on raising awareness on the quality of education, and through a citizen-driven approach enable parents, students and local communities to use their awareness to stimulate policy changes that can contribute to improving education in East Africa. While primary education enrolment in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania has proven impressive in terms of numbers, Uwezo has sought to shift attention from these inputs to the learning outcomes – the actual quality of the education in the region. Uwezo is the largest independent East African assessment of basic skills and currently the only assessment on education conducted in the household instead of school level.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to assess the resonance and use of the Uwezo data and publications in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The work was carried out by independent consultants in each of the three countries. The primary methods were in-depth interviews with selected key actors at national-level as well as a number of key actors at sub-national (district) level. These included government representatives, teachers, civil society organizations, academics, and media representatives. The total numbers of interviewed key informants were as follows: 9 in Kenya, 16 in Tanzania, and 24 in Uganda. The consultants reviewed relevant background information, carried out the interviews and transcribed them, and synthesized the results into country-level reports. The full reports are available from Twaweza (contact info@twaweza.org).





Kenya

In Kenya, there is convincing evidence that Uwezo's findings are informing public debate: for instance, Uwezo findings are mentioned more than 25 in the NESSP Report (August 2013), which is a seminal policy level document. Uwezo findings and their implications are also considerably covered by the media, as evidenced by the numerous citations in print and broadcasts; respondents also referred to learning about the Uwezo findings through the media. However, the report finds that this presence of Uwezo has not come without difficulty and recrimination nor is it inclusive of all the stakeholders equally.

In particular, the constituency that has remained aloof or disengaged is the teachers. The following quote, from new head of Kenya National Union of Teachers, refers to Uwezo, and illustrates this point: "Whoever advised the Cabinet secretary to listen to busybodies such as these NGOs has misadvised him because they are only giving him wrong information and destroying the reputation of teachers as they are portraying them as incompetent," (<http://nation.co.ke/news/-/1950946/2105478/-/format/xhtml/-/vg0s2kz/-/index.html>, dated 9 December 2013) Other critiques of Uwezo include questions of the legitimacy in having an NGO conduct work that is perfectly possible for the ministries to conduct themselves. As another respondent (from a development NGO) commented "teachers now know that their teaching performance has been made open to show how effective or ineffective they are." Perhaps a future strategy could increasingly be more inclusive to involving teachers themselves.

It was also noted that while the Uwezo voice is strongly heard in its constituency, it is not a primary source of reference for policy makers for whom governmental and inter-governmental frameworks, particularly those promoted by the World Bank, are virtually germane to policy engagement and development (KNEC and SACMEQ studies and reports were noted). Furthermore, a number of respondents noted that Uwezo could be more "sensitive" to policy makers' needs: not simply treating them as recipients of their information, but engaging in a dialogue and development process.

Examples of how Uwezo results have been announced directly via the media rather than a prior briefing with the Ministry of Education was cited repeatedly.

While this is a valid observation, it should also be noted that the strength of Uwezo comes precisely from its independent status and any future re-alignment of Uwezo as a government partner needs to thoroughly assess the advantages and risks of such a position.

Uwezo has contributed to moving the education policy discourse from the exclusive sphere of academics and policy makers, to being widely discussed and criticized in the public space. The criticism Uwezo is receiving in Kenya, while ought to be taken seriously, also indicates that it has managed to stimulate public as well as policy debate on the quality of education. Finally, many respondents expressed the desire to think beyond the measurement of learning outcomes, to articulating “what works” in improving basic learning. Uwezo will need to articulate what space it wants to occupy: remain an independent mirror, providing the outside verification of the education outcomes, or get much more involved in the search for solutions.

Tanzania

Tanzanian respondents reported that Uwezo has had a significant impact on policy makers. For example, one respondent noted that the Uwezo assessment findings have contributed to dialogue among education stakeholders on the quality of education: “Uwezo is a catalyst stimulating debate in order to bring about change.” As a result, one respondent said, the Tanzanian government has started to compile its own assessment tools, inspired by the Uwezo methodology (in part to “prove whether the Uwezo results are correct”). Furthermore, the government has initiated a program for improving the capacity of teachers through the Student Teachers Enrichment Programme (STEP). Uwezo influence could be seen in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) creation of the Standard II assessments and additional training of teachers specifically for Standard I and II as part of Big Result Now (BRN) initiative. The data provided by Uwezo has also reached the academia: a respondent from this group noted that due to Uwezo, educational planners are shifting away from researching inputs, and furthermore, “...our students use Uwezo data for education analysis and problem solving.”





On the other hand, several respondents from the MoEVT voiced doubts about the Uwezo methodology, in particular, the insistence of Uwezo to test children at home and not in schools. One respondent noted that because there is no assurances that the children tested actually do attend school, and because the assessment is conducted by volunteers, this “makes us doubt the accuracy of the results.” Interestingly, most respondents from the MoEVT also called for closer collaboration between Uwezo and the government, both on the assessment itself, and on “search for solutions.”

The media experts interviewed agreed that the general debate on education in Tanzania has progressed to a more reflective level, where the focus on education inputs has been replaced with a quality-concerned mindset. Uwezo evidence was seen as a significant contribution to this shift. One respondent suggested there should be more focused campaigns and further integration of

printed media with TV and radio for wider dissemination. Interestingly, the defensiveness of the government did not go unnoticed by the media respondent: “they [MoEVT] disapprove the results for a number of methodological reasons. However, there is no evidence from the government to prove otherwise.”

A representative from a local CSO stated “without Uwezo, we would be thinking all is going well in our schools.” Another CSO respondent noted that the focus on learning outcomes has also reached teachers, as evidenced in minutes from teacher meetings where the respondent observed a growing tendency on focusing on quality of the teaching rather than logistical issues. Furthermore, it was noted for at least some parents, the results of the assessment prompted them to think more about what could be done at household level in order to address the problem of poor learning outcomes.

On the other hand, several respondents noted that while Uwezo has been successful at reaching politicians and the media, there is limited success in reaching parents and citizens, including those who were part of the assessment. Recommendations included a more focused dissemination at sub-national levels, as well as more concentrated media campaigns, using a variety of media platforms.

Uwezo has “highlighted the crisis” in education, as one informant expressed. Interestingly, respondents from different backgrounds expressed that since Uwezo has provided the information on education quality, they were expecting “change to come along.”

Uganda

Uwezo findings seemed to have made a considerable impression on many respondents, particularly those at national level. In the words of one respondent from the Ministry of Education, there was “shock and disbelief” when they first heard the Uwezo results – i.e., they couldn’t believe that learning levels were so poor.

A respondent who is a Member of Parliament also commented that the Uwezo results helped to focus the discussion in education, as illustrated in this quote: “...*we are spending money and other resources only to get children who cannot even write their names. So it struck me that [through Uwezo] we are getting to the core of what learning should deliver.*” Several MP respondents linked the Uwezo findings to the establishment of the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Quality Education (PFQE). Furthermore, one of the respondents from the Ministry indicated that Uwezo contributed to MOES starting a project to support teachers in improving their pedagogical skills and teaching literacy.

When asked about the role of Uwezo in the education sector in Uganda, most respondents from the national level recognized the quality of the independent research of Uwezo. Yet, despite the appreciation of the independency, there were numerous calls for Uwezo to go beyond assessing outcomes, and engaging in a variety of other approaches, including education policy analysis, and reform of education law in Uganda.

While it appears clear that Uwezo does reach a wide spectrum of key actors at national level, critiques were voiced in regards to Uwezo communications in general. One respondent noted that although many stakeholders were invited to the launch of the previous report very few attended, and that Uwezo had not gone beyond the initial “fire” caused in the headlines by the release of the findings. A national-level media expert observed that a communication campaign (to disseminate Uwezo results) in his opinion was neither long enough nor intense enough to spark debate or action by the targeted general audience. Another media-based respondent suggested improving links with rural and locally-based media, since most of the general population – and the worse learning outcomes – tend to be in rural areas.

Several respondents who were based at district-level positions had suggestion for improving dissemination at sub-national levels, as illustrated by this quote: “*Uwezo should make effort to disseminate information at LC5 and LC3 levels as these two constitute the lowest policy making bodies and implementing organs of government.*” Another respondent noted that “*accessing Uwezo information by some stakeholders remains a challenge because in most cases information is disseminated to head teachers leaving out classroom teachers and parents.*”

Respondents from the MOES as well as MPs would prefer if Uwezo would disseminate its findings first through “appropriate institutional” channels, before going public. However, it has to be noted that in large part the strength of Uwezo lies precisely in its independence from the national institutions.