

KiuFunza – thirst to learn – education policy intervention 2013/14
Keynote speech by COSTECH Representative at the launch event.
National Museum, Dar es Salaam. 23 January, 2013.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great privilege that I stand here before you on behalf of the Director General of Costech, Dr. Hassan Mshinda to address you on this important seminar organized by Twaweza.

We must begin by commending Twaweza on all the good work it has done in the short time it has been in existence. As a citizen-centered initiative, focusing on large-scale change Twaweza has to date, provided relevant and timely research and analysis that has served to help the policy making machinery in Tanzania. We are encouraged and challenged when we see Twaweza continue to endeavor to remain relevant in the context of a challenging global environment as evidenced by this upcoming research using randomized evaluation methods: KiuFunza

Ladies and gentlemen, We believe that the battle against poverty in Tanzania can be won, but it will take patience, careful thinking and a willingness to learn from evidence. This evidence should come from practical lessons based on sound research. However, we believe that the research agenda should move away from the conventional large cross sectional survey work – and move towards building from smaller case studies, grounded in scientific rigour. In this, we believe that we can borrow from our counterparts working in the health field who work more in undertaking experimental research. What we mean by experimental research is to test randomized controlled interventions. We want to move away from purely descriptive work and build more from evidence, looking at interventions and testing what works and what does not work.

Tanzania is operating in an environment of scarce resources and choices have to be weighed. This means asking the fundamental question: why fund one intervention and not another? This is particularly significant in the education sector where there are numerous interventions yet the performance of education in the country remains poor.

In answering this question, impact evaluations become pertinent. Impact measures the counterfactual which is, what would happen in the absence of your intervention/program/project. In looking at the ‘counterfactual’ a comparison group is used which could be receiving a different intervention or none to measure/compare against your intervention. This differs from the traditional Before vs After assessments which we argue does not give enough evidence of impact.

We at COSTECH believe this to be the critical missing link in discussing poverty reduction. In undertaking experimental research and more specifically randomized evaluations, we believe this will offer transformative potential for poor people anywhere, and serve as a vital guide to policy makers, philanthropists, activists and anyone else who cares about reducing poverty in Tanzania.

This experimentation can be further grounded by the use of systematic reviews to critically examine the impacts of interventions as well as to ensure that we are undertaking relevant and timely research. Systematic reviews will provide rigorous evaluations that will help guide decisions and will assist policy makers to look into the horizon and be one step ahead in decision making.

What we ultimately want to see is decisions at the national level being informed by evidence. This is the heart of what COSTECH strives to do... to enhance the capacity for evidence-informed/based decision among policy makers and other stakeholders. To this end, we see an urgent need for creative experimentation in the fight against poverty. This has not being done enough in Tanzania; if at all.

That being said, the current randomized evaluation intervention in education by Twaweza does indeed present opportunities for such creative experimentation. We hope that there is continued future collaboration and cooperation between Twaweza and COSTECH, understanding that we are all ultimately working towards the same goal.

WE believe that COSTECH and organizations such as Twaweza have complementary roles – so should strive to collaborate more and work closely to share and disseminate research information and data. COSTECH, as part of the government will play a facilitative and collaborative role in ensuring research reaches those making decisions in Tanzania. On behalf of COSTECH, I would like to express sincere appreciation to Twaweza for the invaluable contribution this organisation is making to promote economic and social growth and development in Tanzania and further commend Twaweza for spearheading the use of randomized evaluations in Tanzania.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.