Who listens to the voices of citizens? 
Use of Sauti za Wananchi evidence by key public figures

- Sauti za Wananchi (SzW) is the first **nationally representative** mobile phone data collection survey in East Africa.
- Twaweza released **10 briefs** based on SzW data to date; a new brief is being released every month through a public launch event.
- SzW findings have been **cited** frequently in print media, in television and radio broadcasts, and in social media.
- The simple **format** of the briefs as well as their **timeliness** and focus on “hot” issues was commended by a number of respondents.
- Results of this study suggest SzW data has **influenced** public and political debates.

**Introduction**

Sauti za Wananchi, or Voices of Citizens, is a longitudinal panel survey, collecting information among a nationally representative sample of mainland Tanzanian through the use of mobile phones. Implemented by the Uwazi unit of Twaweza, Sauti za Wananchi’s primary objective is to liberate and package data to better inform public discussion and improve the link between citizens and policymakers.
Twawza produces a monthly brief presenting recently collected data on various topical issues, primarily aiming to improve the quality of information and level of debate among key actors who have a significant influence on public wellbeing (all briefs can be found online www.twaweza.org/sauti).

These key actors include Members of Parliament, media editors, journalists, civil society leaders, academics, and development partners. The briefs primarily target these actors, although their format can make them accessible to a wider public, as they are short, and include illustrations and graphs (it should be noted that the briefs are not designed for a low-literacy audience). This report summarizes the results of a recent qualitative study, which examined whether the primary objective of Sauti za Wananchi is being met.

Methodology
The study relied on in-depth interviews with a number of key public figures selected by Twaweza. We endeavored to include respondents who would be neutral in their perception of Twaweza (although it should be noted the selection was not random). An independent consultant was engaged from December 2013 to January 2014 to carry out the study. This included review of key background documents, development of an interview guide and a list of key informants, and conducting the interviews and analyzing the findings. In total, 16 individuals were interviewed including government officials, members of parliament, media personalities, NGO and CSO education partners and scholars from academia. The full report and interview guidelines can be accessed by contacting Twaweza (info@twaweza.org).

Main findings
Do respondents recall the briefs?
Two briefs released in 2013 were recalled very well: the brief on the Mobile Phone Sim Card Tax, and the brief on the Form Four Examination Results; the latter particularly among respondents from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. All respondents recalled having seen at least one brief before the interview.

Does the format work for the target audience?
All respondents liked the presentation of the briefs: short, with visuals, and concise text. No specific recommendations were made as to changes in language, layout, or formatting. A few respondents noted that for the briefs to have a wider appeal, the Swahili language would have to be simplified (although, as noted above, the briefs are not targeting citizens with low literacy levels).
How are Sauti za Wananchi briefs used?
The study found that the information in the briefs is perceived as useful for policy-makers, as it provides a representative overview of the public opinions while the debated issues still are hot. In a sense, SzW briefs help to keep the politician’s feet to the fire; in the words of one academic scholar, Uwazi is “informing the public about a social problem or any other disturbing situation”.

Furthermore, a Member of Parliament stated that he always tries to get hold of the latest brief, and that the information provided in the briefs enables him to “formulate concrete arguments.” In other conversations with politicians (outside this research), some MPs have even expressed the interest of including their own questions into the SzW rounds.

All the respondents at the MoEVT had heard about the brief on the Form 4 results but interestingly, several of them did not think the briefs were significantly discussed among colleagues. They ascribed this to the fact that colleagues primarily use data from the Ministry’s own Basic Education Statistics Tanzania (BEST) publications, which are also publicly available. One informant at the Ministry expressed that the low level of engagement with the briefs may simply be due to a too narrow distribution.

An insightful example of how the access to recent data can have influence at policy level was recalled by respondents regarding the Mobile Phone Sim Card Tax that was deliberated upon in Parliament in June 2013. Sauti za Wananchi revealed that the new tax was equivalent to a whole week’s monetary value of airtime among the lowest social groups. The tax would clearly be of significant influence on people’s lives, yet more than half of all Tanzanians did not know about the tax at all. As expected, there was no citizen support for the tax as 83% disagreed with the proposition. Several of the informants at the ministry level, academic scholars, media experts and CSO/NGO partners recalled the brief on this topic, and according to a respondent at the CSO level the brief “stimulated debate until the government gave a statement towards revising the Sim tax”

Sauti data contributes to shaping arguments in other arenas as well. The briefs are reportedly used by hosts who prepare and lead TV and radio discussion programs, and according to the media experts interviewed, guests on the shows that refer to the data briefs make stronger presentations than those who rely on their own judgments and arguments. Another media expert reported that “the quality of the data is highly appreciated by the public and government officials as well,” and that the briefs have earned a reputation as reliable sources of information. Furthermore, it was noted that that the briefs are relevant because they are published when “the issues are still hot;” the appreciation for the timeliness was also echoed by respondents from the academia, MPs and CSOs alike.
1 Twaweza monitors the media through agreements with a private sector provider, and supplements these records by content seen / heard by staff. According to these records for 2013, SzW findings were cited 47 times (across print and broadcast media). 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. Electronic media in particular is problematic to monitor in Tanzania because of a lack of fixed broadcast schedules. Monitoring is conducted by manually listening to or watching different radio and TV stations. Given limited resources and the vast numbers of media outlets in Tanzania, it is almost impossible to fully track media coverage accurately.