



Press Release | 24 April 2018

7 out of 10 citizens strongly support media freedoms, 9 out of 10 support the right to criticize leaders and the majority of citizens actively seek government information

24 April 2018, Kampala: Ugandans express strong support for media freedom: 6 out of 10 think media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control (64%); 7 out of 10 think that radio and television stations should be free to produce their own news programs (68%); and a similar number (72%) think that the news media should investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.

A substantial majority of 9 out of 10 citizens also express support for their right to criticize the President for making bad decisions and not listening to advice (85%), the government for bad decisions (87%), and their MP for being lazy and not caring about constituents (89%). A large majority believe that criticism is constructive, helping government to correct mistakes (78%) and making the country stronger (72%).

Additionally citizens have an active culture of seeking information, at least from some government institutions. In the past three months, the majority of citizens have sought information from public health facilities (87%), public schools (79%), and village or Local Council I offices (62%). A significant minority also demand information from water suppliers (31%), government offices (27%) and political parties (23%). It should be noted, however, that most of these requests are for information about services, rather than more sensitive information about staffing, budgets and other resources.

Furthermore most Ugandans believe in their right to government information – three out of four say it should only be restricted for national security reasons (71%). Ugandans also have faith in government institutions' responsiveness, more than 4 out of 10 believe that if they ask they will get the following information: district development plans and budgets from their local authority (41%), details of how to report wrongdoing in government (48%), and how much capitation grant their school had received (50%).

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *Frankly Speaking: Ugandans' opinions and experiences of information and the media*. The brief is based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The findings are based on data collected from 1,980 respondents across Uganda in November 2017.

However, the reality often does not match citizens' democratic aspirations. Most citizens do feel free to criticize leaders and institutions closer to them such as Local Council V Chairs (56%), their MP (59%), their Local Council III Chair (64%) and their village or street chairs (68%). But citizens are unsure about criticizing national leaders including the President (44%), the Vice President (45%) and the Prime Minister (46%).

And although citizens support media freedom and seek government information, they have very low levels of trust in all sources of information – from the media or that provided by government officials and leaders. No information source is trusted completely by the majority of Ugandans, from Local Council I Chairs (45% completely trust their information), the President (34%), or MPs from the ruling

party (26%) or the opposition (22%), to radio (48%), public meetings (39%), people they know well (34%), or social media (12%).

Furthermore, almost all citizens are unaware of laws that govern their information and communication rights including the Uganda Communications Act (2013) (3%), the Computer Misuse Act (3%) and the Access to Information Act (2005) and its regulations (1%).

Similarly, few citizens are aware of government platforms to proactively provide information to citizens and to seek their feedback including their experiences and opinions. Very few have ever heard of *Barazas* (community-based forums) (6%), the budget information website (4%) or the Ask Your Government platform (3%). Nonetheless 1 out of 50 citizens (3%) say they have participated in the local forums (*Barazas*).

However, it is encouraging to note that citizens are well documented and identifiable in government systems: 90% have national ID cards, 66% have voter ID cards, 56% have birth certificates while far fewer have passports (4%) and driving licenses (5%). There are fairly small variations between demographic groups and no clear patterns that advantage specific groups.

Marie Nyanzi, Sauti za Wananchi Officer at Twaweza, said *“On the positive side there is a fairly active culture of citizens seeking information from government offices and institutions, and of government responding to those requests. Citizens also support free expression for the media and themselves and see healthy debate and different opinions as constructive, providing support for government. On the other hand, citizens express low trust for all information they might receive publicly, are not confident of their own personal freedom to criticize and are less likely to seek sensitive information around resources.”*

Dr Mary Goretti Nakabugo Country Lead in Uganda for Twaweza, said: *“Citizens’ opinions on access to information and free expression present a challenging outlook for citizen agency. With low levels of trust and the feeling that they are not free to express themselves fully, citizens cannot be expected to participate actively in government processes and projects. However there is some cause for optimism in terms of Barazas where millions have been reached by this government feedback and sharing platform. And similarly, the prevalence of identification documents means that citizens are ‘visible’ in the system. Documenting citizens is a first and critical step in ensuring their participation and in delivering better services.”*

---- Ends ----

For more information:

Martha Chemutai, e: mchemutai@twaweza.org | t: 0782 405 210

Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org / www.twaweza.org/sauti
- 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 globally 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. Follow us at Twaweza Uganda (Facebook), @TwawezaUganda (Twitter), Twaweza East Africa (Instagram)