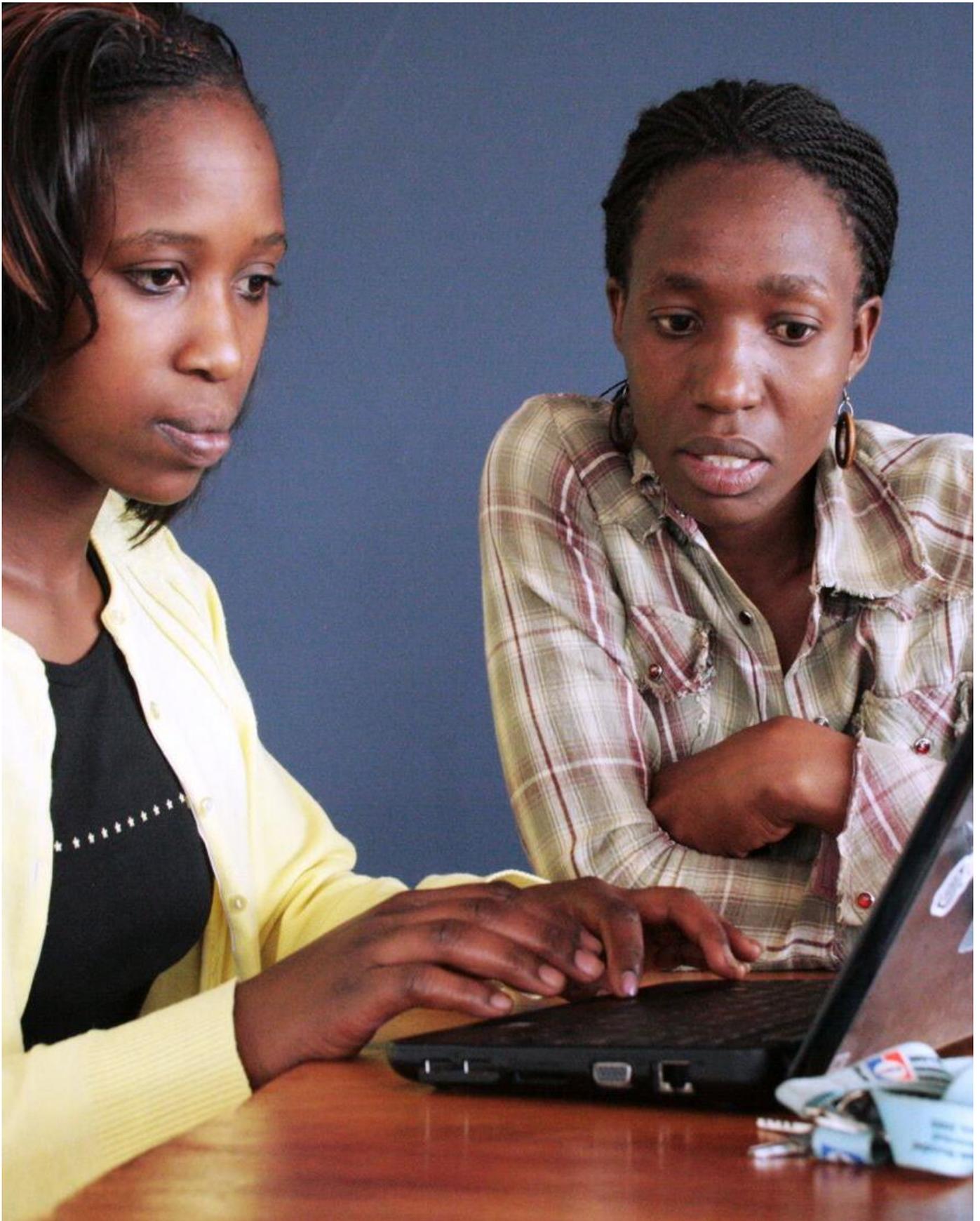


A missed opportunity:

The (un)availability of information on government websites



Introduction and methodology

An increasing number of Tanzanian citizens are able to access the internet. Over 5% of the population had access by the end of 2016, equivalent to around 3 million people. For many in this group, an online search is increasingly the first action they take when looking for information. Moreover, the internet offers an unparalleled opportunity to governments and others to make a wide range of information – and potentially other services – available to the public.

In many ways Tanzania has been a leading country in open government. A wide range of budget information has been available for many years, though often in difficult-to-use formats and inconsistent across years, and official public audit reports have been routinely published for over a decade. More recently, the government's open data portal (opendata.go.tz) has made public over 150 different datasets on education, health and water services, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Act and Access to Information Act promise to give citizens new opportunities to access useful information from government. Further, the e-Government Agency has worked to harmonise and improve the government's use of information technology, for example by encouraging adoption of dot-go-dot-tz email address and website domains. And yet, the quality and quantity of information available from government websites has been inconsistent and sporadic.

This brief looks at the availability of key information and functions on a selection of key government websites. Specifically, the websites of forty-one (41) government ministries, departments, and public agencies were reviewed in December 2016, looking for nine types of tools and information:

- Search facility
- Budget data for the ministry / department / agency itself
- Tenders
- Financial reports
- Narrative reports
- Details of the Minister / Head of institution
- Contact details for the ministry / department / agency
- Feedback mechanism
- Social media

The information and functions sought on each site are presented in the table below, along with details of the scoring system. Higher priority information is weighted with higher scores, and lower priority information and tools are accorded lower scores.

It is important to note that this assessment does not consider any additional features of the reviewed websites – whether they offer services direct to users, for example, or provide access to potentially useful data. This is because doing so would make comparisons between websites more difficult, or even impossible, where different institutions have very different functions. Further, this assessment does not make any judgement on the attractiveness or user-friendliness of the websites, as the focus here is on content rather than appearance or utility.

	Feature / Info	Questions	Scores: Max = 60
Key documents	Budgets	Is any budget of the Ministry / department / agency available on the website? What language(s) is it in? How many clicks are needed to find this from the homepage? What year does it relate to (most recent)? Is it downloadable? In what format?	Max = 10 4 if available 1 for each language (Swahili and English) 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 if relates to 2014-15 or more recent 2 if downloadable
	Tenders	Are any tender documents of the Ministry / department / agency available on the website? What language(s) is it in? How many clicks are needed to find this from the homepage? When does it date from (most recent)? Is it downloadable? In what format?	Max = 10 4 if available 1 for each language (Swahili and English) 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 if relates to 2014-15 or more recent 2 if downloadable
	Financial Reports	Are any financial reports of the Ministry / department / agency available on the website? What language(s) is it in? How many clicks are needed to find this the from the homepage? When does it date from (most recent)? Is it downloadable? In what format?	Max = 10 4 if available 1 for each language (Swahili and English) 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 if relates to 2014-15 or more recent 2 if downloadable
	Narrative Reports	Are any narrative reports of the Ministry / department / agency available on the website? What language(s) is it in? How many clicks are needed to find this the from the homepage? When does it date from (most recent)? Is it downloadable? In what format?	Max = 10 4 if available 1 for each language (Swahili and English) 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 if relates to 2014-15 or more recent 2 if downloadable
	Social Media	Does the institution have a Facebook and/or Twitter account? When were the latest posts posted? Is the account linked directed from the website homepage?	Max = 6 For each of Facebook and Twitter: 1 for having an account 1 for posting in past 7 days 1 for direct link from homepage
Other information and functions	Search	Is there a search bar available anywhere on the website? Is it on the homepage? Does it work?	Max = 5 5 = search bar on homepage, and works 4 = search bar elsewhere on site, works 0 = no search function / not working
	Contacts	Are contact details available? How many clicks are needed to find this from the homepage?	Max = 4 1 if available 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 for each type of contact (up to max of 2)
	Feedback mechanism	Is there a feedback form available? How many clicks are needed to find this from the homepage? Are submissions acknowledged?	Max = 3 1 if available 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer 1 if acknowledged
	Minister / Head	Is the name of the relevant Minister / Head of Agency available? How many clicks are needed to find this from the homepage?	Max = 2 1 if available 1 if accessible in two clicks or fewer

Findings

Budgets, tenders and reports

13 of the 41 institutions whose websites were included in the assessment made any of their own budget information available on the website. In five of these cases, the information was three or more years out of date. In many cases, such as the Ministry of Water and Irrigation and the Planning Commission, the only budget data available was in the form of budget speeches, which provide a limited amount of data alongside narrative explanations of the institution's achievements and plans.

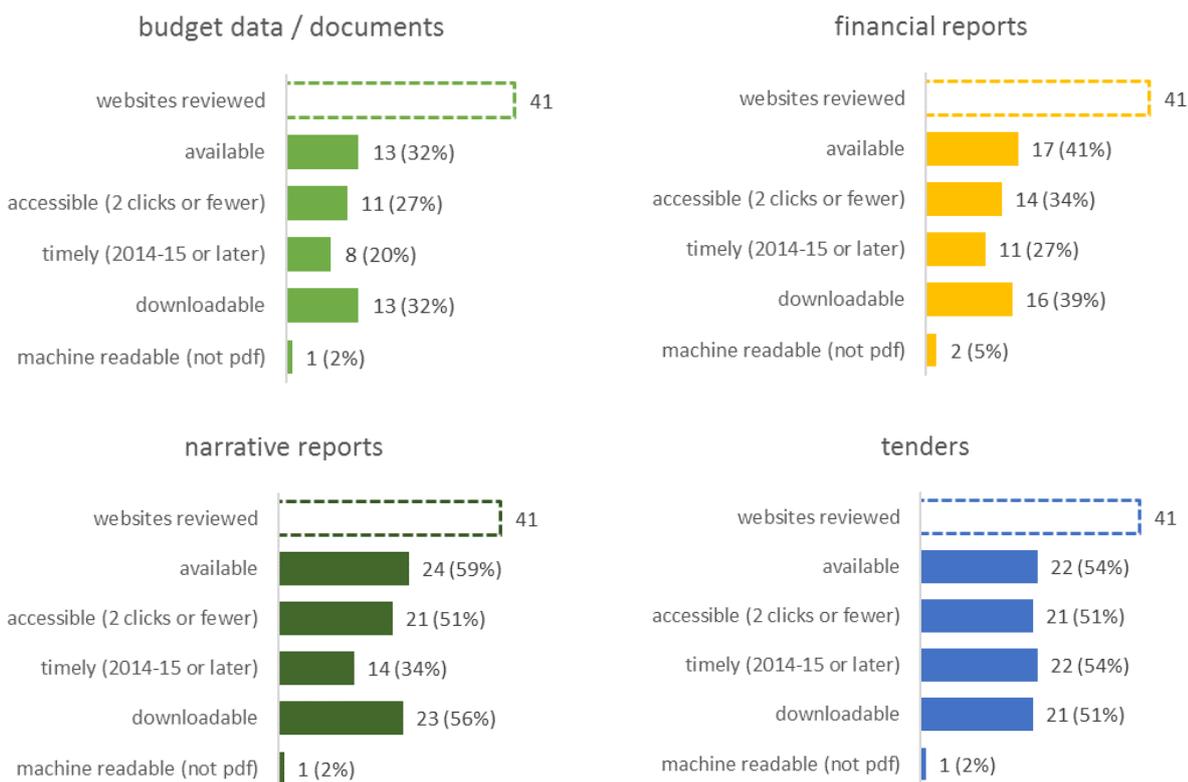
17 out of 41 institutions published a financial report of some kind. In most cases, this was in the form of a budget speech that referred back to a limited selection of expenditure figures for a previous period, though the data included was often incomplete or represented estimates of expenditure rather than actual figures.

Slightly more (24 out of 41) published some form of narrative report about the activities of the institution. In some cases, this again refers to budget speeches, while some institutions such as the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) and National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) published a wide range of reports on their activities.

Just over half the websites reviewed had posted some tender documents in the past three years. In almost all cases, however, these documents were posted sporadically rather than in a systematic and timely manner.

Across all these types of information / documents, technical issues caused problems in a large number of cases. Documents were listed in many cases on a "downloads" page, for example, but clicking on the link revealed an error such as a broken link or missing document.

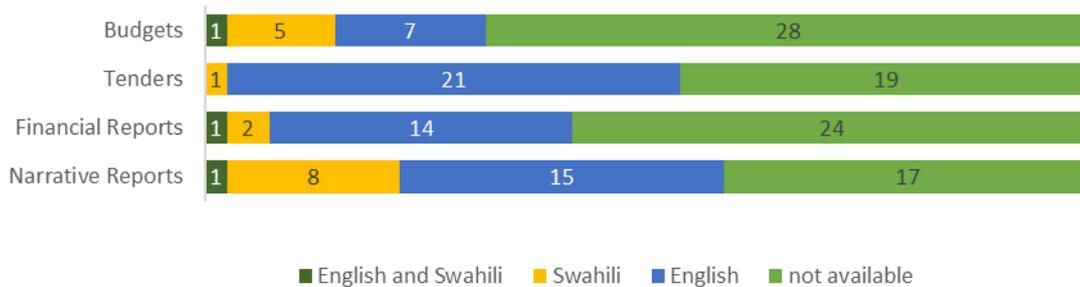
Just 1 out of 41 institutions posted their budget data in a format that would allow easy computerised analysis (i.e. not as a pdf). Two published financial reports / expenditure data in this way, including the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA), which was the only institution to publish any of these types of data in a spreadsheet format – specifically as a csv file.



Language

The majority of published documents in the above categories were published in English (60 out of 76), while 19 were available in Swahili. Just two institutions published documents in both languages: the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (in two categories) and the Planning Commission.

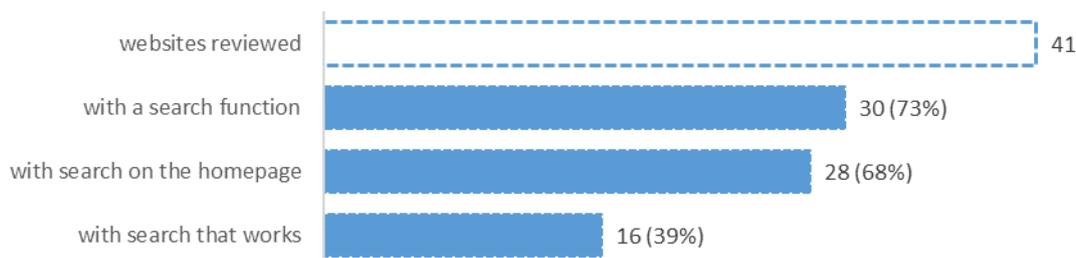
Language of key data / documents



Search facility

Of the 41 websites reviewed, 30 (73%) had a search bar, almost all on the site's homepage. However, in close to half of these cases (14 out of 30), the search tools did not work in practice, delivering a mix of blank pages and error pages, and in some cases, crashing the users' browser. In total, just 16 out of 41 (39%) websites had a functional search facility.

Search functions



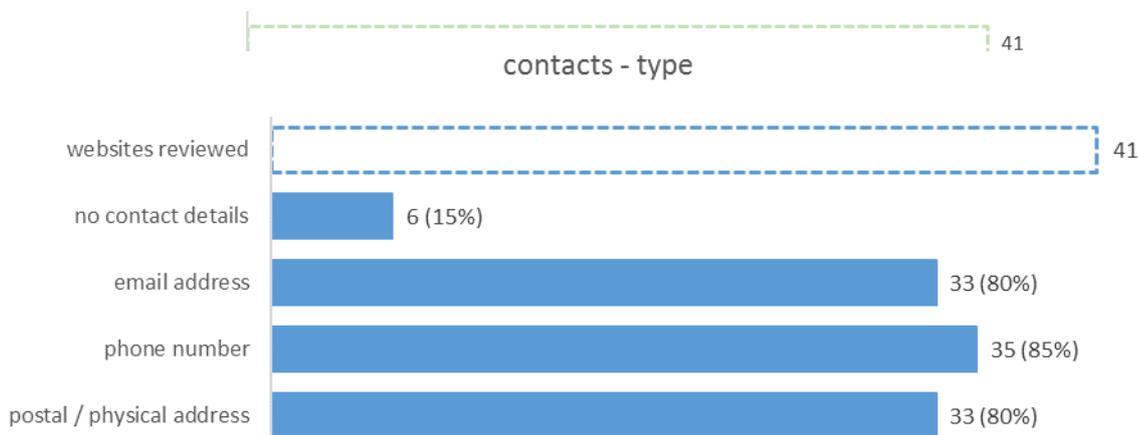
Contact details

For just over half the institutions (22 out of 41), the name of the Minister or Head of institution was mentioned.

Most institutions (35 out of 41) posted contact details on their site, including email addresses (33 cases), phone numbers (38) and postal or physical addresses (33).

24 institutions had a feedback form or other feedback mechanism on their website. In six cases, sub missions using these forms received a response of some kind – a email response or ticket number.

contact details



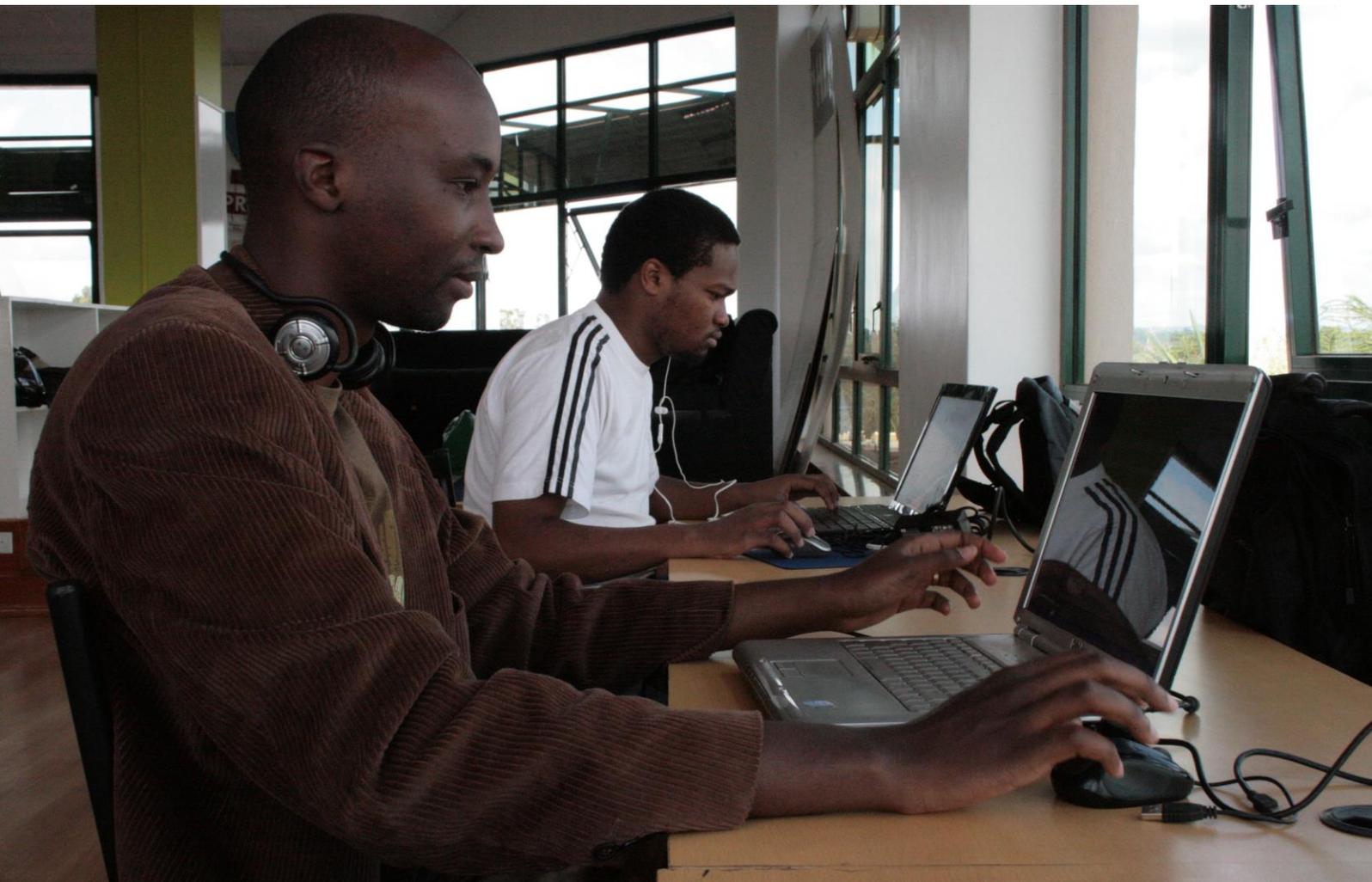
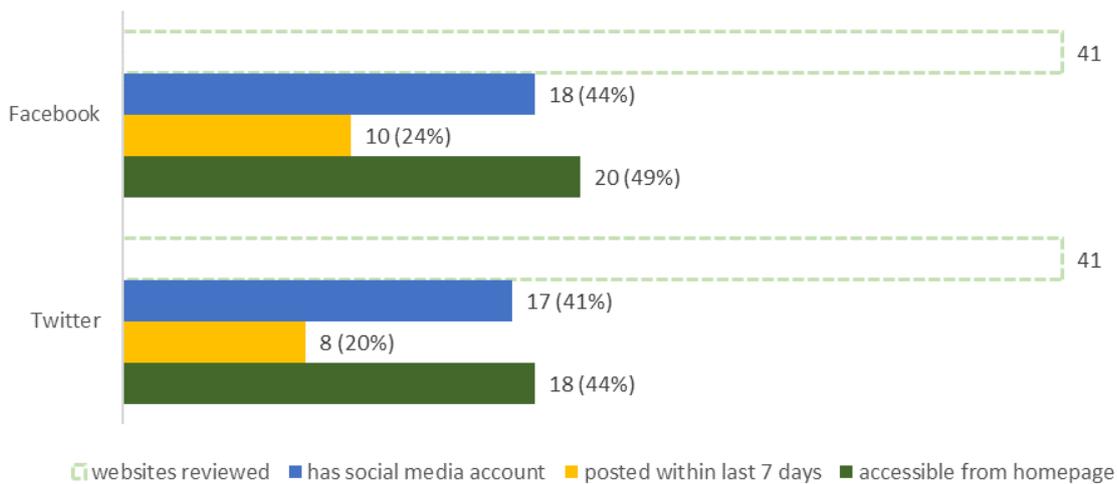
Social media accounts

A little under half the institutions reviewed (18 out of 41) had a visible Facebook account, though just a quarter (10) had posted anything on this account in the past seven days.

A similar number (17 out of 41) had a Twitter account, and just 8 had posted anything on this account in the previous seven days.

Two institutions – the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Human Settlements Development and the Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority (EWURA) – had “links” to Facebook pages and Twitter accounts on their websites that did not connect to anything on Facebook or Twitter.

social media accounts



League table of government institutions' websites

Using the scoring system presented in the introduction to this brief, the forty-one institutions whose websites were assessed have been compiled into a "league table".

The top place goes to the Public Sector Pension Fund (PSPF), which scored 53 out of a possible 60.

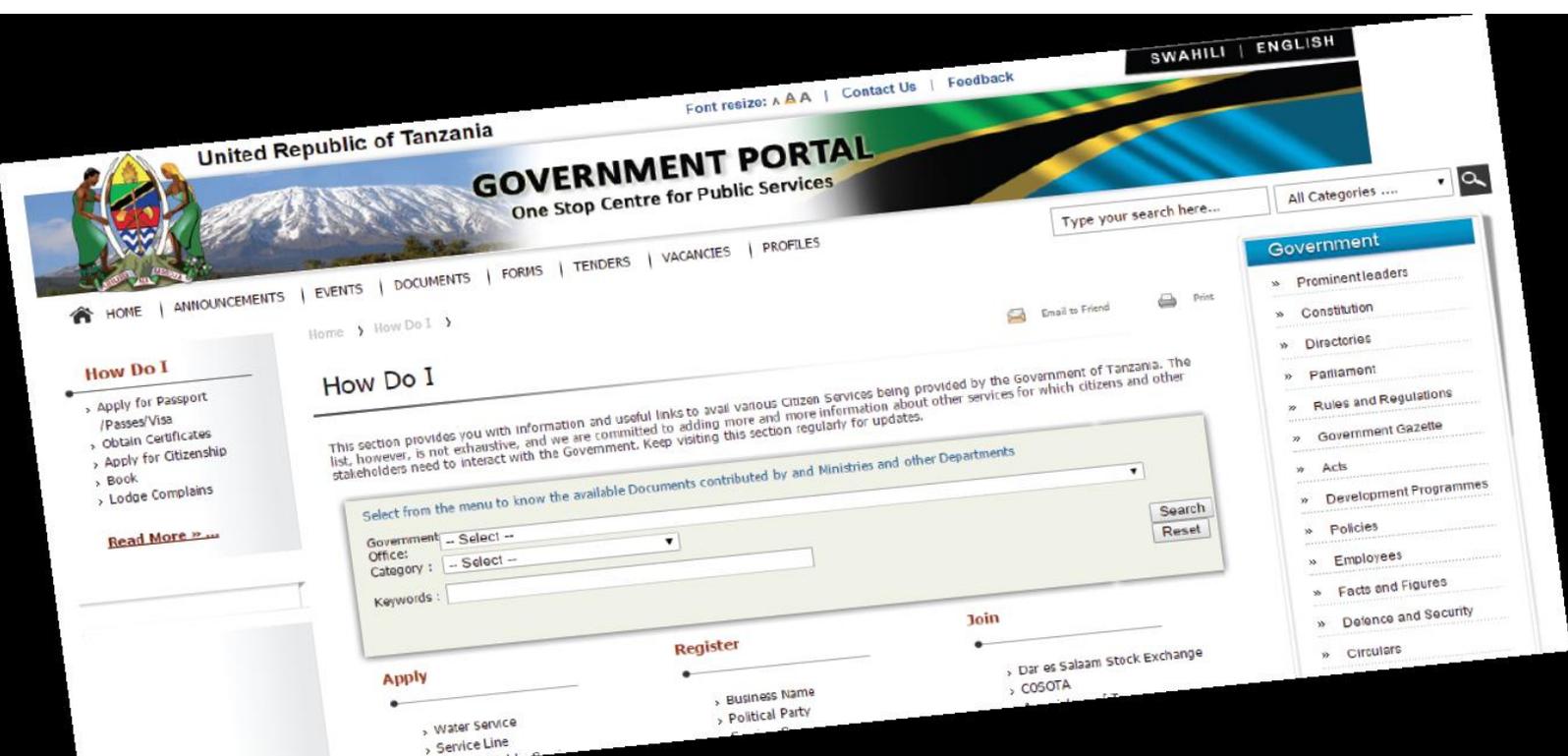
Five other institutions also scored highly, namely the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) (50 out of 60), the Surface and Marine Transport Regulatory Authority (SUMATRA) (50 out of 60), the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) (49 out of 60), the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (47 out of 60) and the Tanzania Ports Authority (TPA) (47 out of 60).

At the other end of the table, three institutions scored less than 10 out of 60: the Tanzania Investment Centre (TIC) (7 out of 60), the Police (7 out of 60) and the Immigration Services Department (8 out of 60).

Further, two Ministries had no functioning website at the time of data collection: the Ministry of Finance and Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA). In both cases, the institutions do have websites, but the sites were unavailable to reviewers, suffering from severe technical problems at the time.

We also wanted to know how our own website (twaweza.or.tz) rates; after all, if we are pushing for openness of information from the government, we ought to follow our own advice. Our site achieved a score of 52, which would put us second in the table. We fell short as our key documents were only available in English and because our site lacks a specific feedback mechanism.

	budget data (10)	tenders (10)	financial reports (10)	narrative reports (10)	social media (6)	search (5)	contacts (4)	feedback (3)	Minister details (2)	total (60)
Twaweza	9	9	9	9	5	5	4	0	2	52

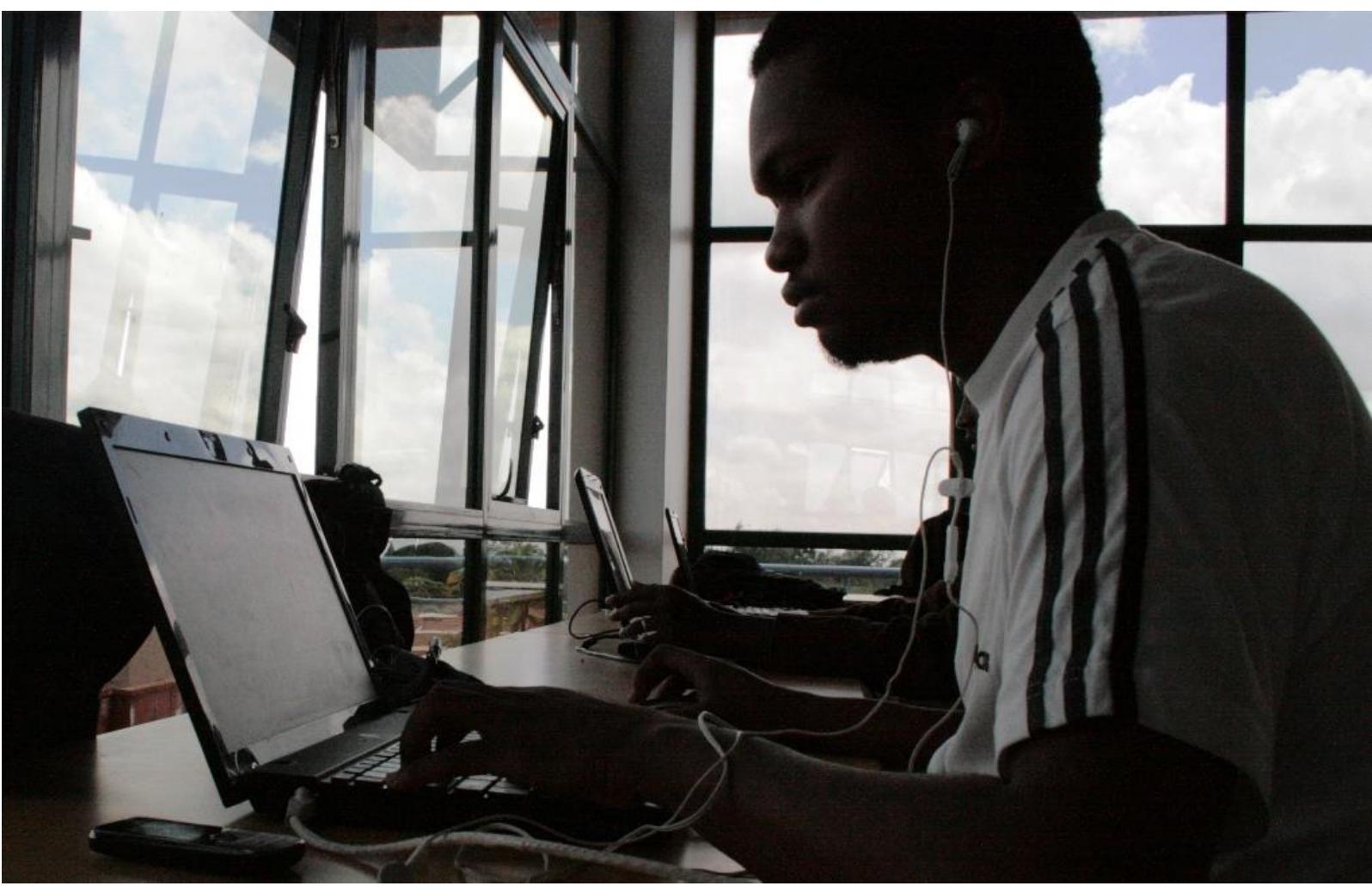


League Table

	budget data (10)	tenders (10)	financial reports (10)	narrative reports (10)	social media (6)	search (5)	contacts (4)	feedback (3)	Minister details (2)	total (60)
Public Service Pensions Fund	9	9	9	9	5	5	4	2	1	53
National Social Security Fund	8	9	8	8	4	4	4	3	2	50
Surface Marine Transport Regulatory Authority	8	8	8	8	4	5	4	3	2	50
Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority	8	9	8	8	5	5	4	0	2	49
Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries	9	9	10	10	0	5	4	0	0	47
Tanzania Ports Authority	8	9	8	8	0	5	4	3	2	47
Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority	0	9	9	9	2	5	4	2	2	42
Roads Fund Board	8	9	9	9	0	5	0	0	2	42
Parliament of Tanzania (Bunge)	0	9	9	9	6	0	4	2	2	41
Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Human Settlements Develop..	0	9	9	9	2	0	4	2	2	37
President's Office Planning Commission	10	0	9	9	0	5	4	0	0	37
Ministry of Water and Irrigation	9	9	0	0	4	5	4	2	2	35
Tanzania Electric Supply Company Limited	0	9	9	0	6	5	4	0	2	35
Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology	0	7	7	7	4	0	4	0	2	31
Tanzania Revenue Authority	0	9	9	0	6	0	4	2	0	30
The Judiciary	8	0	0	9	4	0	4	1	0	26

	budget data (10)	tenders (10)	financial reports (10)	narrative reports (10)	social media (6)	search (5)	contacts (4)	feedback (3)	Minister details (2)	total (60)
E-Government Agency	0	9	0	8	0	0	4	3	1	25
Higher Education Students' Loans Board	0	0	8	8	0	5	4	0	0	25
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	8	0	0	0	4	5	4	2	2	25
Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications	9	0	0	8	2	0	4	2	0	25
Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau	0	0	5	8	0	5	4	2	0	24
The National Examinations Council of Tanzania	0	9	0	9	0	0	4	2	0	24
The United Republic of Tanzania President's Office	0	9	0	9	0	0	3	0	2	23
Ministry of Information, Youth, Culture, Arts and Sport	0	0	0	8	6	0	4	2	2	22
Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gende..	9	0	0	0	4	0	4	2	2	21
Tanzania Telecommunications Company Limited	0	9	0	0	6	0	4	0	2	21
Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Corporation	0	9	0	0	0	0	4	3	2	18
Medical Stores Department	0	0	0	8	6	0	4	0	0	18
Business Registrations and Licensing Agency	0	9	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	17
National Bureau of Statistics	0	0	9	0	3	0	4	1	0	17
National Electoral Commission	0	0	0	8	2	0	4	2	0	16
Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation	0	9	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	15

	budget data (10)	tenders (10)	financial reports (10)	narrative reports (10)	social media (6)	search (5)	contacts (4)	feedback (3)	Minister details (2)	total (60)
Parastatal Pensions Fund	0	9	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	13
Tanzania Posts Corporation	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	2	1	12
National Audit Office of Tanzania	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	2	0	11
President's Official Website	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	2	11
Immigration Services Department	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	2	8
Police Force Tanzania	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Tanzania Investment Center	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	7
Ministry of Finance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tanzania National Parks	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a



Conclusions

A few of the institutions reviewed here have started to take good advantage of the opportunities for transparency presented by the internet. However, the overall situation can be characterised as highly sporadic posting, with a lot of missing documents and information, and with many websites undermined by fundamental technical problems.

A search facility is a basic feature of almost any website, and yet just 16 out of the 41 websites reviewed here had a search facility that actually worked. Similarly, almost all the sites were characterised by broken links and missing documents.

Some sites—such as those of PSPF and EWURA—have long lists of reports and other documents in a complete record dating back several years. But this systematic and thorough approach is very much the exception rather than the rule. Far more common is to find reports for some years to be missing, for some listed reports to be unavailable in practice, or for there to be no apparent intention to publish any such information online.

As a result, it would be very difficult or in some cases impossible for a visitor to most of these websites to gather meaningful information about how their government is spending taxpayers' money. With over three million Tanzanians now online, for many institutions this is a significant opportunity missed.

