



SUB-NATIONAL CONVERSATIONS AND VIEWS ON EDUCATION IN KENYA

A FORMATIVE STUDY IN TEN DISTRICTS

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Based on original fieldwork and report by
Fieldmasters Africa Limited, conducted on behalf
of Twaweza.



Executive summary



Uwezo, an independent monitoring mechanism, has over the last five years demonstrated that while millions of children attend primary school in Kenya, the learning outcomes continue to be very low. Uwezo data between 2009 and 2015 shows no evidence of progress over time in the proportions of children who complete the Standard 2 level numeracy and literacy tests. In the 2014 Uwezo assessment, 39% of children aged 7-13 years passed the tests. Similar pass rates were recorded in the three previous rounds: 40% in 2011, 37% in 2012 and 41% in 2013. The sixth and latest round of Uwezo assessment results confirmed there is still no significant improvement in learning outcomes as the findings revealed that only 30% of children in Class 3 (end of lower primary) can do Class 2 work and that on average, only 10% of children in Kenyan primary schools are completing Class 8 without having acquired the basic competencies expected of a child completing Class 2.

In an effort to better understand the “production of education” in districts and schools, Twaweza commissioned a qualitative study to explore the state of debate and communication about education in general, and learning outcomes in particular, among district-level decision makers in ten selected districts in Kenya. The overall purpose of the study was to generate formative insights to enlighten Twaweza’s future communication and engagement initiatives, and inform the design of initiatives geared at improving learning outcomes for primary-school children.

The districts were purposively selected, and within each district, a number of key actors were interviewed from the County, District, community and school levels. The insights gathered are illustrative, and not intended to be representative of Kenya overall. The discussions with key actors centered on different themes, such as general perceptions on the quality of education, financial inputs and resource mobilization, options to provide support to teachers as well as support to pupils, the link between school inputs and learning outcomes, and engagement with Uwezo materials and results.

Highlights of the findings of this qualitative exercise include:

- The quality of education is mainly measured through the children’s performance in the national examinations, namely the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). There is minimal awareness of and reference to learning outcomes. Consequently there is little attention paid to the actual acquisition of the requisite skills and knowledge by the children in school. But this is understandable because Kenya’s education system is dominated by examination-oriented teaching, where passing examinations is the only benchmark for

performance as there is no internal system of monitoring learning achievements through various levels within the education cycle.

- Kenya's education system is focused on systematically covering the curriculum and preparing the learners for national examinations (in grade 8). There is very little attention and resources allocated to assess learning at the early levels of schooling, even though early learning forms the foundation for further educational attainment.
- Research has shown that heavy investment in inputs per se doesn't guarantee better learning outcomes, and yet stakeholders cite the lack of or inadequacy of the resources pumped into the education system by the government as the main reason for low learning outcomes.
- Most stakeholders also believe that poverty, type of livelihoods (economic activities) and several cultural practices among communities are the main reasons for low learning outcomes.
- There is lack of ownership on the role of improving children's learning outcomes by key players in the education sector. Across the board, stakeholders shift responsibility and finger-point: there is very little appreciation of their own role in improving learning and the status of education in general.
- Much of the discussion around teachers revolved around the staffing levels (despite improving teacher/pupil ratio), motivation and support.
- The introduction of free education received mixed reviews. On one hand it has improved enrolment and resourcing for schools, yet it is blamed for having caused strain on management and making parents further removed from the education of their children. Stakeholders perceive the entire responsibility of child care and upbringing is now placed on already struggling teachers.
- Planning and budgeting in the education system remains a highly centralized function at the national level with no evidence of input from sub-national officials. When it comes to utilization of the Free Primary Education (FPE) funds, all districts covered in the study reported that they spent the funds strictly as per the procedures (with a few noting that occasionally they have diverted funds to cater for emergencies).
- Regarding Uwezo, it is evident that most of the stakeholders are aware of the Uwezo assessment reports. However, engagement with the reports is low and there is inadequate understanding of the intent and as well as its methods. Some stakeholders view the report as

There is much work to do overall, and it will require collaboration of a variety of stakeholders: national and sub-national government, civil society, teachers and head teachers. For Twaweza in particular, a few meaningful future steps emerge. In addition to advocating nationally for sufficient and well managed resources, this study also shows that our future engagement strategies on education at the sub-national levels should focus on shaping the attitudes of key stakeholders about what constitutes quality education. In particular, our engagement strategies ought to:

- Galvanize stakeholders around the question of learning outcomes beyond the pass rates in final national examinations, and encourage inquiry into what actually improves learning outcomes.
- Study more closely districts and schools which are implementing practices that differ from the norm, and follow these over time to examine whether different management practices can be associated with improved learning outcomes.
- Continue to challenge some of the "old truths" which are not supported by evidence. For instance, the focus on inputs as directly linked to improving learning outcomes persists, despite ample research showing that simply increasing inputs does not improve learning outcomes.
- Thoughtfully widen the discussion on what each teacher and parent can contribute to improving learning outcomes in their circumstances. This is because, despite their clearly critical role, the frosty relationship between teachers and parents represent the weakest link in the education landscape.
- Involve various stakeholders (e.g. county and district officials, journalists) in the independent assessment processes to provide a first-hand experience about children's actual learning competencies, and to encourage a wider national debate on the subject. There is need for Twaweza to more deliberately work towards demystifying the Uwezo assessment to allay fears that the assessment is a fault-finder against teachers and manage expectations on the aims, objectives and implications of the findings.
- Tap into the various spaces and forums for periodic discussions about education at the national but also district levels, and make use of the national and local media to discuss education results as well as independent

data. For Twaweza to best spur discussions and debate amongst key players and raise awareness of learning outcomes, there is need to first build the capacities of the contact persons on the ground to be able to represent the organisation and Uwezo adequately and accurately.

- Draw on international evidence of what has been shown to improve learning outcomes (and what hasn't), and translate and communicate that evidence clearly and compellingly to inform debate on where resources ought to be focused nationally and locally within Kenya to improve learning.
- Provide district based (and where appropriate and feasible even ward based) simplified Uwezo (and other) assessment reports, and encourage and enable various stakeholders to understand and engage with the data. Disseminate Uwezo results and materials more pro-actively using a multifaceted approach to cater to the needs and preferences of different target audiences.



1.0 Background and context: Kenya



The Kenya education context has been rapidly changing since 2002, when the government of Kenya first implemented the free primary education policy. This saw the numbers of children enrolled in primary schools increase drastically. Besides the numbers, it also witnessed increased enrolment in public primary schools of overage children and adults, who for varied reasons, had not been able either to enrol, or had previously dropped out of school. Indeed this is the time the late Kimani Maruge, who holds the World's Guinness record of being the oldest person ever enrolled in primary school, joined school on January 12, 2004 aged 84 years.

The rise was sharp and continued over the years. Primary school enrolment rose from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.5 million children in 2006, with Net Enrolment Rate increasing from 77 percent in 2002 to 86 percent in 2006.¹ These figures rose further to 9.95 million children by 2014 with Net Enrolment Rate rising to 88.2 percent. As this was happening, the government and other stakeholders in education were excited with the positive trend and challenged at the same time. Excited because this was a dash towards the achievement of the MDG two and most stakeholders were justifiably pleased with the response from the communities to the government's incentive. But challenged because this rapid filling up of classrooms was putting enormous pressure on the resources available in those institutions.

So the government, parents, donors, civil society groups and the private sector actors focussed their energies to narrowing the resource gap that was straining the education system and threatening to unravel the benefits of the FPE policy. Over the years, the government has, in collaboration with parents, and other stakeholders, employed more teachers, established more schools, expanded infrastructure in existing schools and supplied more text books. This has seen great improvement in pupil/teacher ratio nationally from over 60/1 in 2003, to the current 31/1. Similarly, the pupil/text book ratio has improved over the years and there are fewer children without classrooms across the country.

In addition to investing in infrastructure, Kenya has seen numerous education reforms in the past years. There are three key issues which have dominated the reform discourse: (1) the abolishment of ranking of schools which has since been reintroduced; (2) the perception of the role and accountability of teachers particularly given frequent strikes and disputes, and (3) curriculum reforms. These form an important context for the current study, and are briefly outlined below.

¹UNESCO national early childhood Development policy Framework 2006

(1) The ranking of candidates and schools based on the performance in national examinations, which had been a permanent feature in Kenya for decades, was abolished in 2014. At the time, the primary reason given was to curb widespread examination cheating. Because national examinations in Kenya are such high stakes for teachers – they are linked to promotions – many teachers helped children to cheat their way to high grades. The ranking method was also seen as a leading cause of unethical routine by some schools where bright candidates are registered in different streams from the rest to maintain top slots in the national list². The opponents of the ban on the other hand argued that the government was merely covering up its systemic failures and that it was going against tradition.³ This debate continued until in August 2016 Kenyan lawmakers approved an amendment that lifts the ban on listing of schools and candidates by order of performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations. In this version of the law, performance of schools in activities outside the classroom shall be measured and ranked, according to (??). To date, this new amendment has not yet been fully implemented.

(2) There is ongoing tension between Kenyan teachers and the Kenyan government. Disputes over pay have led to several strikes, while numerous independent studies show that there are high levels of teacher absenteeism in public schools. Addressing the lack of accountability, the Teachers Service Commission of Kenya (TSC) has developed Teacher Management Framework which includes tools to track teacher attendance in school and classrooms, as well as and performance contracts for head teachers. As expected, this has been a thorny issue with teachers registering their displeasure primarily through the teachers unions, and mistrust between the TSC and the teachers has persisted.⁴

(3) Kenya is in the process of overhauling the 8-4-4 system of education (started in 1985) and also reviewing the curriculum. The proposed curriculum will seek to replace the 8-4-4 system with the 2-6-3-3, arguing that these reforms will provide every Kenyan learner with world class standards in the skills and knowledge which they need in order to thrive in the 21st century⁵.

The reforms and efforts outlined above have not yet answered the core question of whether Kenyan children are achieving the goal of schooling, even as we celebrate the great numbers of those attending school. This is the reason for which the Uwezo initiative of Twaweza has been implemented over the last 6 years.

Background & Context: Twaweza, learning outcomes, new strategies

Twaweza, which means “we can make it happen” in Swahili, is a civil-society organization working on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Uwezo at Twaweza (Uwezo meaning “capability” in Kiswahili) is a multi-year initiative that aims to improve competencies in literacy and numeracy among children in the three East African countries. The program was designed to achieve three related goals:

- Independently establish actual levels of children’s learning (basic literacy and numeracy)
- Actively share the evidence on learning outcomes with key policy makers, media and other players to spur and sustain a public and policy debate.
- Actively share the evidence with parents and other citizens to spur practical local action that could improve education outcomes

² <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Govt-abolishes-students-and-schools-ranking-on-exam-performance/1056-2538402-kmnje/index.html>

³ Rono K. (2015) *Pros and Cons of Ranking Schools in Kenya National Examinations*

⁴ Elimu yetu coalition 2014, ANCEFA. Teacher-led Accountability Approaches Enhancing Teacher Accountability in Kenya

⁵ GoK Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) 2016

Independent external evaluations of Uwezo ⁶ have highlighted three salient results. First, Uwezo appears to have had a significant effect on shifting the policy and public dialogue from refusing to acknowledge a learning crisis to a broad agreement on this issue, and a search for policy and program solutions which could help to improve learning outcomes. Linked to this is a second result, suggesting that Uwezo has played an influential role in shifting the national focus from the status of learning inputs as measures of the success of the education system (i.e. number of teachers, books, desks, etc.), to the learning outcomes – i.e., the attainment of at least basic learning competencies. The third result is about where change has not yet happened: although Uwezo hypothesized that action to improve schooling would be taken by parents and communities, this has by and large not been observed.

What is Uwezo?

Uwezo is a citizen-led assessment of learning outcomes; it has been carried out on a national scale in Kenya every year since 2011; the sample is drawn so that it is representative of each district included in the sample.

In 2015, the assessment was conducted in 157 out of 158 districts in Kenya, covering a random sample of 4,649 Enumeration Areas and 69,183 households and reaching 130,653 children. During the assessment, Uwezo volunteers go house-to-house to administer tests of basic numeracy and literacy (in both English and Swahili) to children between the ages of 7 and 16. These tests, which reflect Grade 2 (the second year of primary school) level learning objectives, were designed in accordance with Kenya's national curriculum and vetted by relevant authorities.

Immediately after administering the tests, Uwezo volunteers present parents with their children's results together with materials outlining strategies to improve their children's learning. Volunteers also collect data from the main public primary school serving each enumeration area. Assessment results are then tallied to establish national and sub-national indicators of learning capabilities, and form the basis of a communication and engagement strategy to reach policymakers, the media, and the wider public.

Moreover, the numerous years of releasing Uwezo data have not (yet) led to improvements in the schooling system, or indeed in learning outcomes. Perhaps this is not surprising. A policy dialogue, and even a change of policy at the national level, does not necessarily change how the education system is run, how schools are managed; indeed, we know that Kenya generally has commendable policies on paper, but their implementation is very weak. Moreover, in a country where many parents struggle with literacy themselves, and where the normative system places even teachers and head teachers in a realm inaccessible to ordinary citizens, it is little surprise that individual parents have not actively demanded the improvement of the education system.

As a result, Uwezo at Twaweza intends to bring its communication and engagement strategies from the national to the sub-national, and from the household into the wider community. There are more opportunities and spaces for authorities and citizens (and civil society) to interface in districts, wards, and schools. These spaces are certainly influenced and to a degree dictated by national policies, but room remains to manoeuvre and promote pro-learning strategies locally. Moreover,

while citizens individually may not feel able to demand better from the system, available research suggests that if they are organized and equipped with clear, relevant information on how the system works, and what to expect and demand from it, they are able to interface productively with local authorities⁷.

Twaweza is planning to design strategies to promote the engagement and response (and perhaps even collaboration) of citizens and local authorities. Prior to the design, however, we commissioned in late 2015 a qualitative study to explore the state of debate and communication about education in general, and learning outcomes in particular, among district-level decision makers in selected districts in Kenya.

This study is therefore relevant to Twaweza's implementation going forward, as well as a formative study to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders within districts on how education is managed and produced.

⁶ R4D, for Hewlett: <http://www.hewlett.org/sites/default/files/R4D%20-%20Bringing%20Learning%20to%20Light%20-%20June%202015.pdf> ; Liberman, Posner and Tsai (2014) http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2228900 ; Carlitz and Lipovsek <http://www.twaweza.org/go/lpt-synthesis>

⁷ For example: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/effectiveness-review-chukua-hatua-tanzania-303755>

2.0 The purpose of the study



This overall purpose of the study was to generate formative insights to inform Twaweza’s future communication and engagement initiatives by exploring the state and level of discussion/ buzz (debate/communication) about education among selected key actors in a sample of 10 Uwezo selected districts.

The study explored the level of Buzz across the following districts; Baringo North, Gatundu, Kakamega East, Kuria East, Marsabit, Mbeere, Mwala, Teso South, Kilifi North and Trans Nzoia West. The interviews were conducted amongst key players in the education sector, including; Ministry of Education representatives in both National and county governments e.g. The County Directors of Education (CDE), County Executive Committee in charge, Chair Person County Education Board, TSC Director The Sub-county Education officers, District Quality Assurance Officers, Zonal/Area Education Officers, head teachers, Opinion Leaders, Journalists and Twaweza District Communication Coordination Persons (DCCPs).

The box bellow examines the key questions of the study.

Study questions

- To what extent does the education agenda feature in key decision making processes in the selected districts?
- To what extent do key education players understand and use the concept of learning outcomes?
- How and when do policy actors support making learning outcomes a policy priority?
- How do education stakeholders in the districts understand their role and support in improving literacy and numeracy learning outcomes? What is currently [being] done to improve learning?
- What resources/expenditure are allocated in improving education and learning outcomes specifically?
- What challenges and barriers do stakeholders face in advocating or promoting a learning outcomes agenda?
- What are the key sources of information among key education stakeholders and influencers in the selected districts?
- To what extent are key education players aware of, and how much do they understand the Uwezo learning assessment?

3.0 Methods

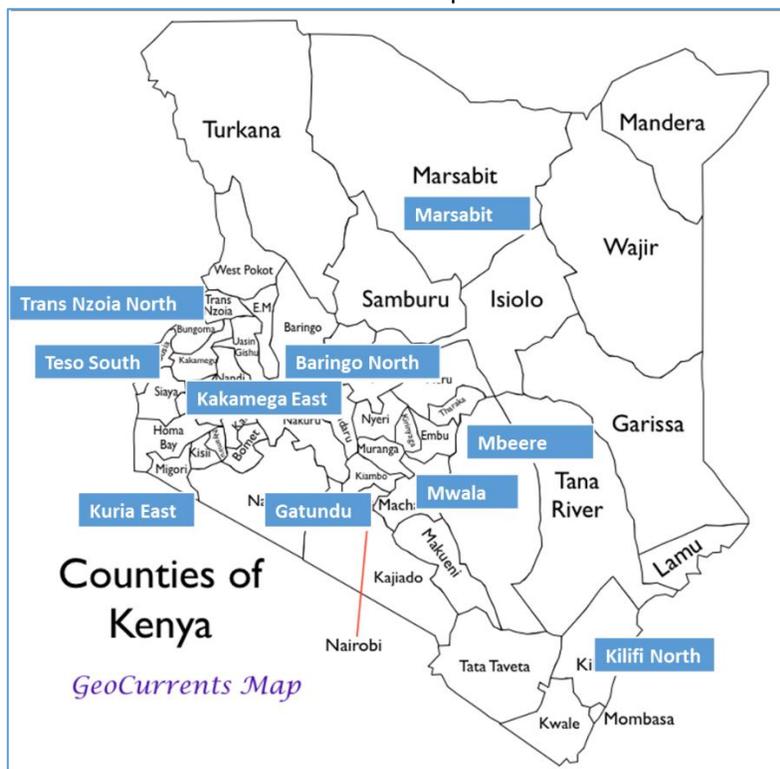


3.1 Sample selection

While Twaweza works across the country, this study was conducted in 10 districts purposively selected by Uwezo on the basis of several criteria. First was the strength of the Uwezo implementing partner. In every district, Uwezo works through a local civil society organization for the purposes of collecting the assessment data and communicating the results. The selected partners have been working with Uwezo for multiple years, and have been rated as successful in fulfilling the terms of the engagement, both in the tasks related to the research and in related communication activities. Districts with District Contact Communication Persons (DCCPs) were particularly given priority.

These Included: Baringo North, Gatundu, Kakamega East, Kuria East, Marsabit, Mbeere, Mwala, Teso South, Kilifi North and Trans Nzoia.

The approximate location of the districts is shown on the map below.



3.2 Choice of respondents

The interviews were conducted amongst key players in the education sector, including; Head Teachers, Journalists, Ministry of Education representatives from both National (based in the County and District) and County governments e.g. The County Directors of Education (CDE), County Executive Committee Chairpersons in

charge of Education, Chair Persons County Education Board, TSC Directors, The Sub-county Education officers, District Quality Assurance Officers, Zonal/Area Education Officers, Opinion Leaders, journalists and Twaweza District Communication Coordination Persons (DCCPs).

3.3 Data collection

The field work was conducted between the month of December 2015 and January 2016. The consultant was tasked to conduct between 80-100 in-depth interviews. However, due to the December holidays, many targeted respondents were not available in office. Also, there was no option of interviewing other officials available in the office (out of the recommended list of respondents). In the end, the consultant was able to conduct a total of 81 interviews as listed below;

The study employed face-to-face semi structured interviews. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. They were conducted in mostly in English but with occasional use of Kiswahili. All interview proceedings except six were audio recorded. This allowed preservation of participants' words and retrieval of information during data processing and report writing. In the cases where the participants did not consent to audio recording, field-notes were taken by the researchers.

The discussion covered 6 key sections namely:

- Overview of education in the 10 Sub Counties/Districts
- Information Sources on Education
- Awareness and access to learning assessment reports
- Key roles in improving learning outcomes
- Education Agenda and Public Debate among various key players
- Education sector power mapping

3.4 Data Analysis

The method used was thematic analysis. The process followed three main steps, outlined below.

Step One: Preparation and organisation of data

Preparation and organisation of data for analysis involved listening to each audio taped interview, followed by verbatim transcription conducted by trained research assistants under close supervision lead researchers.

Step Two: Creation of themes

Creation of themes was first informed by the study questions and objectives; thereafter, data was approached inductively. An inductive approach allowed unanticipated themes to emerge from the dataset and to determine whether the deductively derived themes were well supported by the data from the field. The inductive phase involved reading the transcripts repeatedly. Themes were created in collaboration with the Twaweza team.

Step Three: Coding, presentation, and interpretation

After creation of themes, transcripts were re-read and colour coding used to identify text and extracts that spoke to the various themes. The interpretation was carried out by re-reading the data and connecting themes and extracts to ensure that there was clarity in meaning and explanations. Data are presented in a simple and straightforward fashion with rich descriptions supported by representative 'verbatim' quotations from the interview transcripts.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This research was guided by national and international ethical regulations and professional codes of conduct to ensure protection of the research subject and to protect the integrity of the study. Research permissions were obtained from responsible authorities. Prior to conducting the interviews and discussion, informed consent was obtained from all participants, consent was further sought to allow for audio recording of the interview proceedings. Data and sources have been treated confidentially and data securely stored for access only by the team members.

4.0 Emerging Themes and highlights of the results



4.1 Emerging themes

During data analysis several distinct themes emerged which lent a coherent framework to the results. The themes are broadly related to the original research questions which were by design very open. One of the key questions for example was "How education stakeholders describe the status of education in their district? Under this question, several themes emerged including; the perceptions on the status of education in the district compared to the whole country, some of the challenges and barriers to improvement of education, suggestions to improve education and who bears the responsibility to improve education standards. The second broad question was that of understanding of learning outcomes as a key aspect of schooling among stakeholders which then led to the emergence of several sub-themes such as Knowledge of learning outcomes and a key function of schooling, stakeholders perceived roles in improving learning outcomes, challenges of improving learning outcomes and the respondents also mentioned some initiatives (past and current) geared towards improving learning outcomes in the various districts. Another key theme was regarding stakeholders awareness and knowledge of the Uwezo

Annual Learning assessment which also led to the emergence of several themes; General perceptions of the report? What state holders like and dislike about the report/ how stakeholders may wish to be engaged in the production and disseminations of the findings.

In this manner, the main findings were grouped according to eight themes, which give considerable insight into priorities in education, and how education is produced and managed in each of the districts. The last theme focuses purposefully on the awareness and engagement with Uwezo, this being part of our baseline to understand how much of a presence Uwezo data and insights already have in the minds of the key district decision makers. The eight themes are:

1. Description of the status of education in the districts, and understanding of learning outcomes as a key function of education
2. Focus on school inputs, including financial inputs and resource mobilization, as linked to learning outcomes
3. Providing extra support for learners
4. Focus on teachers: recruitment, training and supervision, as well as teaching processes and practices
5. Focus on the communities: socio-economic activities and livelihoods, parental and community involvement in education
6. Focus on government policies and education leadership structure
7. Sources of key information, how information travels in the districts, and how much is education discussed
8. Engagement with the Uwezo assessment and results

4.2 Highlights of the results

Using qualitative methodological approach, this study examined the contextual factors that inform and shape the discourse about education at district level in Kenya, focusing on communication discourse among key actors within the districts, and the extent to which learning outcomes are prioritized in education policy decision making within districts. Furthermore, it examined the challenges and barriers associated with understanding, promoting and prioritizing learning outcomes as an important education agenda. Qualitative data was collected from 81 respondents drawn from amongst The County Directors of Education (CDE), County Executive Committee Chairpersons in charge of Education, Chair Persons County Education Board, Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Directors, Sub-county Education officers, District Quality Assurance Officers, Zonal/Area Education Officers, Opinion Leaders, Journalists and Twaweza District Communication Coordination Persons (DCCPs).

Take-away messages from the study:

- Education in the sampled regions is faced with a lot of challenges. However, there is a lot of optimism given many positive changes that have taken place in the education sector such as Free Primary Education (FPE) and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) funding that have helped turn around some schools. When it comes to resource allocation and budgeting a big chunk is taken up by infrastructure as opposed to the improvement of learning outcomes.
- Education is considered important and there is a lot of discussion around education matters. However, the discussions seem to focus mainly on national examinations performance, teacher motivation/remuneration and infrastructural improvements but very little discussion exists on learning outcomes as a key component of education. Much of the discussion also tend to happen around key events such as the release of KCPE result and during teachers strikes.
- When thinking about why education was not improving, three main factors were given as rationale: (1) high poverty levels (2) the “local culture” and (3) lack of resources. Expanding on local culture, respondents often described what they termed “customs” (e.g. the “pastoralist way of life,” or the “customs of coastal communities in Kilifi” etc.), which are seen to be at odds with education norms and results. Often, the blame was specifically pointed at parents, usually noting that “parents do not value education and do not involve themselves in the education of their children.”

- In terms of resources, respondents from all district (and from various tiers in the system) reported a universal lack of adequate resources to finance education, despite following the budgeting rules. The central government is the main source of education funding under the FPE, and through the CDF which is usually channeled through Members of Parliament. A few Districts also get support from the County governments, NGOs and FBOs - but these tend to be ad-hoc donations, usually linked to limited inputs (such as building a number of classrooms or buying desks).
- There are roles within the system that appear to be nearly incapacitated due to lack of resources, such as the school inspection units which is functionally non-existent in most of the Districts. Respondents observed that there is poor distribution of Education officials and education budget at the district level was very small, and that it was released inconsistently and sporadically.
- In terms of what could be done to improve education outcomes, many respondents focused on school inputs (more classrooms, desks, books, chalk). Thus, the performance of the education system in the participating districts was frequently measured with respect to the level of school infrastructure, such as having an adequate number of classrooms and desks, as well as availability teaching and learning materials.
- Three other areas were discussed in terms of improving learning outcomes: employing more teachers, support to teachers, and support to learners. Many respondents noted that teachers need more support, including improving teaching skills but also support from parents and some form of recognition for good performers.
- Despite there being very comprehensive structures of education management there is very little synergy such that, the closer an officer is to the 'ground', the less involved they are in the planning and policymaking. This appears to create some sort of lethargy in the implementation and misreporting of the situation in the ground to just satisfy obligatory requirements.
- The key source of information on education matters is the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education, and TSC that have officials up to the sub county levels. This is also the most trusted source of information as information shared through the Ministry is said to be accurate and verifiable. However, a look at how information flows shows that the information is largely one way and top-down and there are few channels for feedback or input from the lower tiers up the ladder. Additionally some officers complain of lack of clarity in their reporting lines. For example Area Education officers report to two Officers at the district level namely The Deputy Director of Education (MoE) on matters education in general and to County TSC Director on teachers and staffing issues.
- Regarding Uwezo, it is clear from the results of this study that although the majority of respondents seemed aware of the Uwezo assessment reports, we do not seem to have done enough engagement activities around these reports. The majority of respondents acknowledged having received or seen the Uwezo materials, but they did not seem to have internalized their contents. Among some stakeholders, there is also a negative perception on the report. The dissemination ways for Uwezo assessment reports are relatively passive and not actively engaging for the key stakeholders and the general public at large, plus we need to do more in explaining what the report is all about and what it seeks to achieve.

The above key-take away messages were drawn from rich qualitative data. To illustrate each theme further, excerpts and illustrations of these data, grouped by theme, can be found in Annex 1. Full transcripts are available upon request at info@twaweza.org.

Annex1: Excerpts and illustrations of qualitative data, grouped by theme



Theme 1: Description of the status of education in the Districts, and understanding of learning outcomes as a key function of education

Highlight 1.1: Stakeholders in Trans Nzoia West, Mwala and Teso South were of the view that the general state of education in their district was good. On the other hand, their counterparts in other districts like Kakamega North, Kuria East, Gatundu and Baringo said their education standards were low but they were experiencing steady improvement. Stakeholders from Mbeere, Marsabit and Kilifi North said out rightly that their standards were low compared to other districts in the country.

“Our education status is poor, we have been marginalized for many years and in fact we have no facilities in terms of pre-primary education and also secondary and higher education. This community is more or less behind because of the marginalization from the colonial times” (Marsabit)

“We could say that in Mwala we are not doing very badly if we were to compare ourselves with other sub counties.” (Mwala)

Highlight 1.2: Across board, stakeholders described the state of education in their Districts mainly based on the District’s performance in the National exams such as KCPE and KCSE. Most look at the number of children

“We cannot say the state of education in this district is very bad, the situation is somewhere in the middle. A long time ago the performance in national exams was very good but it has gone down slightly.” (Gatundu)

“As a county we have had very steady growth in education, for the primary section enrolment of students has but the performance in KCPE has not been rising very good so I can say our standard remains poor” (Baringo North)

“Kilifi County has good schools, it has good teachers, but when it comes to the performance in the national exams, Kilifi County is at the bottom so I think our standards are very low” (Kilifi North)

getting the pass mark to move from primary to secondary and use this to rate the status.

Highlight 1.3: Many stakeholders mentioned improved infrastructure and increased enrolment and school attendance levels as indicators for improvement in education status. Only stakeholders from Trans Nzoia mentioned close collaboration among key stakeholders in the district and the cosmopolitan (multiple ethnicities) nature of the District to be fostering positive competition and enabling education to be run professionally.

“There has been a good improvement in our status of education from the years 2011 to date, there has been improvements in infrastructure, enrolment, transition retention in our institutions”
(Baringo North)

“Our status has not improved because enrolment in class 1, 2 and 3 is quite high but when you go to upper classes especially after middle upper the number goes down”
(Kuria East)

Highlight 1.4: Free primary ducation (FPE) funds and the Constituency Development Funds (CDF) and county government funding were often mentioned as key positive drivers of education standards, because they had supported school enrolment, purchase of books, improvement of infrastructure (e.g. building and renovating class rooms, provision of water tanks etc).

“Our education status is improving, because free primary education funds are being sent directly to the schools which assist the school to purchase the number of text books and saved parents from the burden they were shouldering before”
(Marsabit)

‘You know the government really tried when they introduced free primary and free day secondary funding. Every child’s vote head there is a certain amount for books, desks etc”
(Kakamega East)

‘Infrastructure have been improved due to the CDF and the county government who have come up with some class rooms’-
(Kuria East)

Highlight 1.5: Some stakeholders reported having taken some action to improve education standards in their districts such as convening meetings and forums to discuss education and performance in national examinations in particular.

“Last year I mobilized some members who sponsor churches, majority of them are AIC, Catholic and Full Gospel. Because of the trends had been going down. We formed a small committee and after some discussion on the factors that were contributing to poor performance we resolved them to start working together with the education office and other education stakeholders to address the issues”
(Baringo North)

“As head teachers, we meet together every year to evaluate our performance in KCPE if somebody is doing well, we ask how they have done it and what practices we can copy to ensure were are all improving”
(Marsabit)

Highlight 1.6: Across board, there is very limited understanding of learning outcomes as a key function of schooling. Just as is the case with description of education status, stakeholders only equate learning outcomes pass rates in national examinations and transition rates rather than learning outcomes.

"I can generally say that the state of education here is low. When I say low it is percentage-wise. I think over 70% of the people here are still below form four level of education and the transition rates keep on decreasing from kindergarten to standard one and from primary school to secondary school, and then from secondary school to University" (Kilifi North)

"I would say Machakos is not performing optimally to its expected standard. The academic standing is below average but we have quite a number of good schools which also don't give us optimum results as expected in KCSE and KCPE" (Mwala)

Highlight 1.7: Even when it comes to resource allocation, budgeting and expenditure in the education sector, learning outcomes still is not viewed it is accurate meaning. As such, even when education officials at the higher levels use the terminology, still most talk about performance in exams. The ideals do not trickle down to the school level as priorities change at this level because of different stages of development and even more urgent needs.

"The only consideration in place when allocating FPE is always enrolment, the number of children and some of the basic things they need such as text books, desks and other equipment. At this point the issue of learning outcomes don't feature" (Mbeere)

"Directly I may not say there is no policy to consider learning outcomes in budgeting. There work of learning outcomes was always left to quality assurance board which now is called assessment board and this board is too lean to even have people in charge of such a big thing like learning outcomes. So for that case, we can say that the learning outcome improvement doesn't have a direct vote heads as yet but there are some few items which are being put in place" (Kilifi North)

Highlight 2.3: None of the stakeholders is ready to take blame for the low learning outcomes and most shift blame to others. For example, most Head teachers say parents and even pupils have the biggest role while other key players singled out teachers as having the biggest role in proving learning outcomes. Opinion leaders highlighted the role of government. There is however unanimity that each stakeholder has a role to play in the end in fixing the problem of low learning outcomes.

"To improve learning outcomes here in Teso, we should work with head teachers, teachers, the chiefs, sub-chief and me as a village elder. We should get youths who can move around and educate the citizen who is in the community, the DC, DEO and other educationists, I think we will achieve their goal at a faster rate" (Teso South)

"Learning outcomes can be improved by involving all the stakeholders, the parents, the children themselves, the teachers, okay, if you involve all these parties and engage them in education or in the performance of the children, see where they are, where they want to be set targets, compare them with other areas, I think learning outcomes will definitely improve" (Marsabit)

Theme 2: Focus on school inputs, including financial inputs and resource mobilisation, as linked to learning outcomes

Highlight 2.1: A link was consistently made between the low level of inputs and low levels of learning outcomes. Most stakeholders say, school infrastructure (classrooms, desks, books and teaching materials) plays a crucial role. In many cases, the challenges posed by poor physical infrastructure were evidently huge across all districts that were covered in this study.

Highlight 2.2: Free Primary Education (FPE) fund is aimed at increasing access to school. However, most stakeholders were concerned that the amounts allocated was inadequate to match the increased enrolment which it had triggered therefore further straining the resources. Further, they also said the disbursement is often delayed hence making schools go for months without basic learning materials. Parents are therefore often expected to supplement.

“One of the things that have really promoted learning here is physical infrastructure, in Machakos, we really don't get extreme cases of lack of classrooms or desks, nobody sits down I believe in Machakos except maybe when they are in primary lower classes one, two, three, nursery” (Mwala)

“There is a lot of support political good will and support like you would go and find CDF most of the schools have been constructed by use of CDF funds and the infrastructure has been put up using CDF funds and it is working very well to improve learning outcomes so we would say there is political goodwill that is really working well” (Kakamega East).

Highlight 2.3: Stakeholders also linked poor transport and harsh climate to low learning outcomes. In Kuria East and Baringo North where weather conditions are said to be too harsh for learning as there are either too hot or flooding during the rains often disrupt attendance by both teachers and pupils. In some areas such as Marsabit, Mbeere and Kuria East, it was said there were too few schools making children walk long distances to and from schools therefore encourage absenteeism among both teachers and parents and affects learning.

“One of the key issues contributing to low learning outcomes is insufficient or inadequate funding, the FPE amount is very small some schools cannot acquire adequate equipment for learning. There is good effort by the government to supply learning materials like text books more particularly in primary schools through Tusome program but the ratio has not been met, we are expecting that the ratio (book per student) should be one to one but in some schools there are two to one and three to one” (Kuria East)

“Free primary education has played a role but looking at the demands, I've actually seen it not to have been that free as we expect it to be because what the government does on its part does not meet the requirement of these children to receive free primary education so it has made at least parents to come in and actually see themselves how they can chip in” (Teso south)

Highlight 2.4: Parents are routinely asked to contribute towards meals, extracurricular activities and employment of additional teachers which are seen as essential for the functioning of the school, but getting parents to do this has also been a tall order for head teachers due to poverty and their attitudes.

"In Mbeere South there are some areas, the lower side you will find that there is this activity money we are paying is causing a lot of problems. Children are supposed to pay KES 200 for activity fees and where the parents have got more than 5 children, this means that they are supposed to pay more than KES 1000. After that you will find that in those areas there are no teachers. The parents have to employ PTA teachers. This means that the parents are paying a lot of money in order to get good results" (Mbeere)

"We ask the parents to pay money but most do not want to. I believe the parents have the role to avail the child in school in time but also to make sure the child is well fed, because we are not feeding the children in our schools and a hungry child may not grasp all the items needed very well. The parent also should assist in the discipline of the child, participate in putting up of infrastructure of the school and to participate in the management of the school" (Kilifi North)

Highlight 2.5: Apart from the main source of education funding which is FPE, there are various accounts of private donations mainly through the CDF which is usually channeled through Members of Parliament, support from the County governments, NGOs and FBOs - but these tend to be ad-hoc donations. These donations are mostly given directly to schools for bursary, purchase of desks, building classrooms, and to run school feeding programmes.

"Yes and again as I said under the Government there is CDF that is to subsidize, Governor Okoth Obado has also come up with a way of paying fees, to children who have done well and cannot afford school fees, the program is called Governors scholarship for children four per ward and everything is paid for you" (Kuria East)

"CDF has come on board and it has helped many schools. It has dispersed the funds to all the schools I believe so that one helps in mainly infrastructure. So generally infrastructure is not very bad. The government has also chipped in helping to build strong storage for these laptops". (Mwala)

"During droughts also, having the children in the school is a problem because they are hungry. They need to eat food and the World Food program has been supporting us a lot by giving us lunch. You will find that there other children at home who would also want to eat." (Marsabit)

"Another NGO that has helped us is World Food Program. You know there are some schools whereby feeding is continuous now if that one can be introduced in all schools, that one can keep pupils in school because in some areas there are pockets of poverty and hunger sometimes keeps pupils away from schools" (Mwala)

"World vision They have assisted in drilling water for some schools and they also buy food for some families, they are playing the key role in those security risky areas and by the way that has been one hinderance, insecurity and particularly in the lower lands along the borders of Pokots and Tugens, Njemps and Pokot" (Baringo North)

Theme 3: Providing extra support for learners

Highlight 3.1: When asked about how learners themselves could be supported, school feeding programs to alleviate the burden of hunger and poverty for children from poor households was often mentioned as common in almost all the districts visited. While most were initiatives by teachers and parents, there is evidence that several NGOs, FBOs and government arms have also supported these initiatives especially in the Arid and Semi-arid areas.

“Another thing that has helped is World Food Program. You know there are some schools whereby feeding is continuous now if that one can be introduced in all schools, that one can keep pupils in school because” (Mwala)

Highlight 3.2: While the Kenya government policy outlaws remedial and extra classes, across board several stakeholders revealed that this has been one of the measures they have employed (albeit secretly) to help pupils prepare and pass examinations. This is especially at the class 7 and 8 levels of education. Only one head teacher talked about how else he had made the schools child friendly.

“We have ensured that we organize remedial lessons and then make up lessons worked with the teachers through motivating them and ensured that we improve from where we were in the last year from 2013 I think to 2014 we increased by 41 mean score” (Marsabit)

Highlight 3.3: A few stakeholders also reported the existence of groups that come together to assist children from poor backgrounds.

“I want to say we have made our school to be child friendly. That is where children’s rights are respected, they can also have the freedom of discussing with teachers and vice versa. We have made them free that in case they need any assistance, they just consult teachers and also parents are brought on board to support the education of their children either by following up their performance and discussing with them. So we are trying to make our school in a manner that the child should not feel like missing to come for learning” (TransNzoia West)

“ The Tusomeshe Watoto Kakamega County which is a forum on face book, we have another one called Kabras I have forgotten the full name but we have such forums. They always contribute money...we have about five forums but I can’t remember all the names and they are on the social media. They always put their number there so people could contribute some money and pay fee for the children who are unable to raise money for fee up to form four, when they complete form four they sponsor some of them up to the university” (Kakamega East)

Theme 4: Focus on teachers: recruitment, training and supervision as well as teaching processes and practices

Highlight 4.1: County and District-level stakeholders often drew a link between low learning outcomes and the weaknesses around teacher recruitment, training and supervision processes. They say unlike in the past when teaching was a 'calling, it was now just like 'any other job that helps one make money' so most people ended up being teachers by default therefore poor teacher attitudes. They blamed what they call the 'localization of teachers', - where teachers work within their home areas or in one school for a long time, contributed to teachers forming negative attitudes towards specific pupils (because of the pupils family backgrounds) affecting teacher-pupil relationship and eventually learning.

"In terms of training. Teachers training right from the initial, in fact if I was asked as a country or as society who is the best people to be admitted to be teachers? Teachers should not be every Tom, Dick and Harry or every person who has not found something to do. In teachers training even the grade should be high. If I was given the authority I would say we should vet people who want to become teachers, who have a passion for the job" (Kilifi)

Highlight 4.2: There are a number stakeholders who linked low learning outcomes to existing teacher capacity and skills. Indeed there exists opportunities for 'in service training' professional improvement for teachers in the system. For example, the teachers Service commission reportedly gives teachers the opportunity to go for further education and even sponsors science teachers to attend a government programme Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary School Education (SMASSE), we also have the 'Tusome' initiative which is said to be improving teachers skills. NGOs such as World Vision, Plan Kenya and AgaKhan Foundations hold refresher courses and workshops with teachers to improve on their teaching skills.

"I can give you a case of the union.....here is a case where we are training teachers on SMASSE....you know SMASSE? 'The strengthening teaching on mathematics and sciences' has been used to improve the teachers skills for sometime and those who embrace it aet better" (Mbeere)

"The Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity that is designed to improve Maths, English and Kiswahili reading outcomes among learners has taken off very well and we are hopeful it will improve a great deal if sustained. The program is currently investing in building capacities of teachers in teaching these subjects" (Kilifi)

Highlight 4.3: Poor supervision and quality assurance by officers and the head teachers in public schools is also often blamed for low learning outcomes. It was reported across most districts that, low number of teacher supervisors per District and inadequate facilitation for quality assurance staff makes it practically impossible to even move around schools to ensure learning is taking place.

"In schools the head teacher should be strict to the teachers to ensure that they carry out their duties without fail and the teachers should attend their classes especially the lower classes teachers. They should give these pupils story books and they should coach the pupils so closely by reading together with these pupils page by page especially in mathematics. This will improve the levels of education in this area" (Teso)

"There's a problem here because in our sub-county we have seven zones and in these zones we are supposed to have the TAC tutor and the zones that are having the TAC tutors are 3 out of 7 zones. This means that we have not been getting information in the way we have been getting before. The staffs who are employed by the ministry and TSC are not enough. At times we have to go to the offices. Other times we get messages through the texts and sometimes the information reaches us when it is too late" (Mbeere)

“Yes, I am supposed to be having five quality assurance and standards officers in my office, two deputies and others in charge of A, B, C and then in zones I should have five, one in all of those zones but now I am one and doing work for ten people so it becomes difficult, then on top of that I also do administrative issues when the DEO is not there, so limited personnel, resources, we don’t have an official vehicle, you have to move on boda-boda so when it is raining or the weather is adverse you cannot move because of the resources” (Kakamega East)

Highlight 4.4: Across board, stakeholders strongly believe that while there are many stakeholders whose efforts are required in improving learning outcomes the teachers have the most critical role.

“When it comes to improving learning outcomes, all the stakeholders do have a role but the teacher is the main stakeholder and of course the people who are making the curricular because it should be a curricular that can help the students and the policy makers at the higher levels, people who are providing the funds so that all this can be done and of course the parents they need to be educated so that they appreciate what is being done and they can also be more supportive to these people during the time they will be with the children in their houses” (Mwala)

“The person responsible for learning is the teacher. This is the leader of learning. If we get it right with the teacher then we would start moving. So I put teachers as number one. Then there is the head teacher, then the school management committee. The parent can come before the school management committee” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 4.5: Across the Districts, the problem of teacher shortage is a common one with varying levels across the country. The current teacher pupil ratio, was estimated to be between 1:80 and 1:120 pupils. Additionally, lack of teachers (especially female teachers) in hardship areas was also mentioned as a problem as often teachers avoided working in these areas, leaving the schools understaffed but also making it difficult for female pupils to be adequately guided by predominantly male teachers.

“You know we have a problem with our staffing. Like in the schools where we are normally we supplement. Parents are also supplementing to get teachers. They are employing PTA teachers to serve and supplement the shortages and therefore these people who are supplementing are also helping as much” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 4.6: But teacher shortage is not just compounded by the bulge in enrolment numbers, political and community interference in head teachers’ appointments was also said to have contributed to poor management. Stakeholders mentioned cases where some communities had rejected teachers just because they were not from the local community and retaining non-performing. A few also mentioned cases of ‘politically correct’ teachers holding office way past retirement age but also engaging in political activities at the detriment of the schools.

“Politicians play a big role like for example you find a head master of a school is like someone in the union and then an MP has given him a post to be the chairman of CDF, the chairman of Uwezo fund. But the regulation is very clear. If you do anything outside teaching, you must get permission from the employer.... the director and he told me that it is now politics. That person is doing a good job to the community. He is a leader and we have voted for him to be chairman” (Kuria East)

block to learning outcomes who are often put in charge of the lower classes something that again leads to children having poor foundation which in turn affects children even in the higher grades.

“Because you know the foundation in the lower classes is not very well manned, we tend to prioritize the higher classes which are almost doing KCPE such as class six, seven and eight. If we give a good foundation to children in the lower classes, children will become independent thinkers. They are able to think, they are able to comprehend, they are able to understand. Then they can do very well in exams even if they don’t get a lot of push at class eight. If the foundation is very poor and children carry on to class four, five when they are not able to read and write well, or to communicate well, how do they understand? So I think we should deal with the foundation firmly so that children can be able to get a good starting point of learning” (Kilifi North)

“In public schools we have understaffing where we have more children who are brought in primary school and the staffing levels are a bit limited and where we have some good staffing levels, you will find that a good number of the staff...people who are working are slightly above 55 years and therefore they are retired in the minds so delivery becomes a bit of a problem we put them in charge of the lower classes” (Trans Nzoia West)

Highlight 4.8: Most stakeholders are aware of the need to motivate teachers. However, most feel it is something that should be done by the government through the teachers Service Commission. There is a strong feeling for instance that, the constant disagreement between government and teachers over pay and regular teachers strikes were having a negative impact on learning outcomes. Though teachers attend school, some may not be motivated enough to teach, due to the unmet demands by the government. Head teachers expressed teacher’s insecurities and concerns with regards to the teaching career with most seeing it as a pre-occupation rather than a career.

“What hinders learning is lack of teacher motivation measures by the government. Government should come up with ways to ensure that teachers feel valued and respected rather than people who are just suffering all the time” (Teso south)

“Maybe another teachers who have no positive attitude towards their work in the pretence that they are not well paid by TSC or that they are not well motivated by the parents but to me it is not a serious issue” (Kuria East)

“I realized that when teachers are motivated there is good work out of them, good relations teacher-pupil, teacher-administration, teacher-parent, and there is that total harmony and where there is that total harmony the performance of that particular school will go up” (Marsabit)

Highlight 4.9: A number of district-level and county level respondents described non-monetary incentives as a way to keep teachers motivated and engaged. Many respondents praised the teacher’s efforts overall, noting that teachers are dedicated to their work in very difficult circumstances, and said motivating them could be as simple as just improving their working conditions, paying them on time, maintaining a manageable ratio with students, providing them with enough teaching materials, recognising and encouraging them publicly rather than being critical.

“Here we motivate teachers by calling the parents and then asking the parents to contribute something for taking them for tour, they provide the funds willingly and the teachers they are taken outside at one time to Moyale, we went to Ethiopia for 2-3 days and then the teachers are back, they are fresh and they will provide good support” (Marsabit)

“You just need to look at teachers welfare. If they could have staff houses, they could be paid on time and given sufficient teaching materials, I think their Morale will be high” (Mwala)

Theme 5: Focus on communities: socio-economic activities and livelihoods, parental and community involvement in education

Highlight 5.1: A strong link was often drawn between the livelihoods, economic activities in an area and the status of education as well as learning outcomes. Some activities such as Public transport motorcycle sector commonly known as ‘Boda-Boda’ which was said to be common in Gatundu, Kuria East and Kakamega East. Then there in farming and trade in the *Khat* in Mbeere, brewing of illicit alcohol ‘Busaa’ in Kakamega East and Teso South, Sugarcane farming in Kakamega East, Sugarcane/Tobacco farming in Kuria East, Sand harvesting in Mwala Quarries in Gatundu among others. In Trans Nzoia, there are claims that Agricultural Development Cooperation (ADC) farms using children to plant and harvest as cheap labour. As for Kilifi North, being on the coast line and endowed with sandy beaches, young boys and girls view tourists as a quick way to succeed in life. In communities in Baringo and Marsabit, school attendance is also affected by the nomadic lifestyles whenever the families move in search of pasture for their livestock, absenteeism becomes inevitable.

“We have child labour coming especially from Kwanza, we have companies which use children during their processes, that is where we have a lot of firms, large firms and during particular times we find them even going with their tractors picking school children” (Trans Nzoia West)

Highlight 5.2: Across board, there are cultural practices that are considered to be working at cross purposes with education. Cultural practices such as the circumcision of boys and Female Genital Mutilation practice was also said to be a major contributor to high absenteeism, high dropout rate especially in places such Kuria East, Baringo and Marsabit. In some places, cattle rustling, early marriages contribute to the detriment of education.

“To my observation I think one, there is these cultures that some communities embraces that is the culture of early marriages and most of the affected people are girls and there is this culture that parents think that only boys should go to school and girls get married which is not going to benefit the community so most of the girls are taken to school for an end result of getting married or maybe being termed as wastage of resources” (Teso South)

“We have beading and moranism. This is where the morans put on beads they are already saying that this is my wife and the girl and the girl already knows that she can be married any time. Early pregnancies are also there. So these are some of the things that also hinder learning” (Marsabit)

‘Once a girl gets circumcised or FGM is performed on her. She is ready for marriage. It also disadvantages boys because once boys get cut...they are also ready for marriage and they have become men so they can go raid the neighbours and bring back the animals. And nobody can stop them from this because they are now men’-(Kuria East)

Highlight 5.3: Insecurity in some of the districts have also greatly hampered the delivery and access to education. For most communities in Baringo and Kuria for example that practice cattle rustling, regular spates of attacks and clan conflicts have not only reduced interest in education but also made children lack consistency for fear of their safety and also because of destruction of the school infrastructure.

“In Baringo south and Baringo north, we’ve got the issue of insecurity, you find that kids have been displaced and some schools have been closed down, whenever the people who invade the schools come, they vandalize the schools and burn books, and sometimes they live in classrooms and destroy books. The children who have been displaced do not go and learn whenever they go to, they go to seek shelter and when they stay let’s say for a year the parents make some make shift classes and you will find students learning under a tree and that is a challenge to education because if you learn under a tree you will not concentrate” (Baringo)

Highlight 5.4: There are other social activities that hinder the development of education and improvement of learning as well. In Teso South, funeral fundraisings famously referred to as ‘Disco Matanga’ where children attend music parties overnight is said to be major reason for absenteeism, school drop-out and early pregnancies. In Mwala, local movie halls where children pay a small fee to watch a movie or play video games are said to contribute to absenteeism in schools in addition to teenage pregnancies and other forms of indiscipline in students. In **Kakamega North** there is the ‘Isukuti Drum Dance’ and gambling often referred to ‘Kamari’ that has contributed to school absenteeism and drop out.

“Also this issue of Isukuti, the traditional dance which is so common here. Some also indulge in gambling (Kamari)” (Kakamega North)

Highlight 5.6: Parental involvement in education was said to be generally poor across all the districts and this was said to have been triggered by the free primary education. While the advent of FPE was viewed as a boost for the education sector, it is also said to have some negative effects. Majority of the respondents expressed concerns that the role of parents in a child’s education has not been felt much since the introduction of FPE across all the districts. Parents were reported have abdicated their role to teachers and government and expected the government to provide everything, they don’t attend school meetings, do not help or ensure children do their homework and do not want to provide basic needs.

‘Parents are now telling us that education is the business of the government because it’s free’.
(Marsabit)

‘Here parental obligation is very minimal. You tell a child to buy an exercise book, some parents will say they will wait for the FPE and FPE is disbursed only once’.
(Kakamega)

‘The side of parents since this free primary education was brought, whenever you request for any participation so that we can do development or progress in the school they say that now the Government is there’
(Kuria East)

'Some don't even know how to support their children in school. So to some I am seeing in the community in which I serve its like education is something that they do not value, It is like the government is forcing them to go to school but if they were given the option of either going to school or not going they would choose the latter'.- (Trans Nzoia West)

'Yes, when you call for a meeting, mothers will come, fathers don't show up, and ladies don't ask much, they don't question a lot so you find that affects the learning'- (Trans Nzoia)

"Parents have delegated their role to the government. Since the government said it is Free Primary Education, they washed their hands from education matters. They expect that the government will do everything, including following up on progress" (Mbeere)

Highlight 5.7: Similarly, community involvement, understanding and appreciation of the value of education in improving life is also said to be generally low across most districts. This very low involvement is attributed mainly to low literacy levels, poor understanding of the value of education, poverty and lack of role models.

"What I can say is earlier on when the parents used to contribute towards education they felt the need for education because they felt this is our money and we want our children to learn and be able to perform so that we can make use of our money but when FPE came on board the parents thought that they don't have a role in education so the role is for the Government and the teacher so they left everything to teachers and Ministry of education and because of that the children don't see the need of learning because there is nobody forcing them to learn at home and you see now they feel that because it is free primary education the parents let the children go to school and so we don't give any other bother" (Gatundu)

"I am seeing in the community in which I serve its like education is something that they do not value. It is like the government is forcing them to go to school but if they were given the option of either going to school or not going, I believe many would have chosen not to go. I think the reason why they bring the children to school as my observation is just so that they get enough time to go about their activities. It is like they find caretakers who can take care of their children while they are doing other businesses. So that is one thing I have seen about them, they don't value" (Trans Nzoia West)

"The other one is lack of role models, we have very rich people around here who are not educated so they became the local role models of our children so they don't value education. They look at these people and the only thing they think about is other economic activities that can earn them money like business, I have some cases of pupils missing school and going to work in quarries, like around that place there is a quarry so you find boys running from school to go and work there and maybe earn something little they don't have a vision of how education will help

Theme 6: Focus on government policies and education leadership structure

Highlight 6.1: Stakeholders at the local level (especially lower than the districts) also decried the existence of some government policies that were hindering the delivery of quality education, making management difficult but also contributing to low learning outcomes. Those mentioned were the ban on remedial teaching, ban on corporal punishment and forcing children to repeat classes.

“And again you see the removal of corporal punishments was probably not thought well because most children feel that after all even if we do what, even if there are rules and they are included in the regulations in school they think that because I will not be punished even if I perform poorly nobody will ask me after all the teacher may ask me but will not do anything to me, it is only asking and the parents thought that they will not be ready to ask their children. It is only well off parents that are able to follow the performance of their children but taking note that majority of the children are in those areas where the parents are not well up. And they are poor so they thought that even if they don’t perform there is no problem” (Gatundu)

“I was called to this office and was given a stern warning never to conduct evening classes anymore. I went back and told my teachers, let us stop this immediately. At the end of the day, it is the children who will suffer. But the government doesn’t want to understand this” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 6.2: The education sector has witnessed many changes in terms of structures which creates confusion and conflicts not only delivery of work but in reporting lines for its officers .

“Sometimes you may not define our very role definite role it’s just a mixture of so much but work has to continue. Presently I would say, this transition has cost some disconnect in the systems and I think it’s a national phenomenon because now when TSC came and took over, we now belong to TSC, and I think the TSC approach was not very friendly it’s like there a tag of war between the TSC and the ministry ON who we should report to we are used to reporting to the Dos who support us on matters such as if I want to rush to a school the DO would provide fuel so the TSC is not doing it yet they want us to belong to them, there was that kind of tag of war trying to pull us apart and finally of course TSC “ (Mbeere)

Theme 7: Sources of key information, how information travels in the Districts and how much education is discussed

Highlight 7.1: Across board, the stakeholders say that education is very important among the communities and often forms a great part of public discussions. However, the discussion of often only related inputs and performance in national examinations. It is therefore no wonder that most of the discussions only intensify around annual events such as the release of national examination results such as KCPE and KCSE when stakeholders review performances and draw strategies for the next national exams. Learning outcomes as a function of education doesn’t feature.

“Yes, when exams come out, that is the most crucial issue to be discussed. We compare how different schools have performed and we put up our strategies or maybe if a certain zone did very well they tell us what they did to get the good results. There are some schools this year which came to my school to benchmark, and see exactly what we were doing that we always top the others” (Kilifi North)

“We discuss how the performance is in our sub county and we compare school A and school B, like why, maybe this one has gone down, this is below average and how can we improve so even as head teachers and came to the conclusion that we should be having joint sub district tests for grey classes class six to eight” (Kuria East)

Highlight 7.2: There appears to be a lot of meetings up and down the system, both to extract and transmit information. But it remains unclear how information is really used other than for reporting purposes. Very few examples were gleaned of information actually being a tool, for example for reallocating resources, supporting under-served areas, or even general decision making. The information flow also appears to be mostly one way and top-down mainly through circulars, memos, newsletters are used to convey government policies and invite teachers in meetings. There are some reports on increasing use of mobile technology and social media such as WhatsApp.

“Of course things to do with policy or official matters like communication from the ministry headquarters come through the county education office, or issues to do with for example funding of the curriculum, free primary, free secondary education, term dates, new policies that have come up” (Kakamega East)

“One of my sources of information is the field officers, which we call the quality assurance office, the Director of education office, the TSC Director, then the reference to the national document like the national reports, like the other day they gave transition reports where Kilifi was said to be having much repetition at the form two level. So the national education reports are also some of the sources of information” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 7.3: Currently, local media plays very minimal role in covering and informing the masses on education and most of the current limited coverage is mainly linked to events. The journalists interviewed admitted that they needed to do more do more in covering education matters yet they also lacked capacity to do exactly that.

“We only cover education mostly if there is a launch, or some kind of function, we get to know about that from the education office here. Sometimes they ask for coverage. Also there some of these functions we will know about because the governor or a senior person is attending. Then there is the community. Sometimes a parent will stop you and tell you “you know this and that is happening in school”.” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 7.4: There are many formal spaces that currently bring together stakeholders in the education sector from time to time especially the education days which take place at the County, Sub-count and in a few cases ward levels.

“During education days we try to have a wide range of participation. Basically it belongs to the teachers, the parents, the students but we also call the Board of Managements. We call sponsors and NGOs who support education and the ministry of education and other ministries and departments that are close to education” (Kilifi North)

“Yes it starts from down there upwards and then we also have forums with particular schools like when we have BoMs like for the national schools and extra county, somebody from CEDs office is supposed to attend and for the county and sub-county schools that’s the people who attend that meeting are the DEOs they represent the office. So they get now the views of the stakeholders at that particular level on what they have found. Then that information is disseminated again to the higher level” (Trans Nzoia East)

Theme 8: Awareness of Twaweza and engagement with Uwezo

Highlight 8.1: Awareness of Uwezo learning assessment is varied across different groups. Awareness was highest among the head teachers and education officials but lowest among the local administration such as chiefs. A few journalists also recall having covered the launch events but didn’t have much thought about the reports. There are however a few stakeholders who still struggle to distinguish between Uwezo assessment and the Kenya Government Uwezo Fund.

“I know about the Uwezo reports. They are much talked about, in the media, by everybody and they compare the learning achievements against what is expected in class 3 or class 2 particularly on literacy and numeracy. I have read those reports since 2010 when they had the concerns about the levels of attainments. It is a way of giving feedback to the stakeholders. I also think that the comparison across East Africa is also important. There are those who consume the reports and there are even those who use the reports for academic purposes. Those who are doing research, they obtain this as a source of information. I believe now it is an authority on learning attainments” (Kilifi North)

Highlight 8.2: Even for those who know about Uwezo reports there is little indication that they have engaged with the content. Many believe it could be useful for them but the dissemination of the findings have not been well structured to make it reach as many people and in a language they would find accessible.

“I have read about Uwezo on the internet, I have heard it mentioned in the newspapers, I have attended forums where Uwezo has been mentioned for having done research in some areas of the country and have come up with damning reports of how class 6 pupils are not able to do class 2 work. Well, how it’s done I may not be able to answer that bit but what I know is that this Uwezo is a research group” (Kakamega East)

“Yes I have seen them in the director’s office here but I don’t know much about it. I even shared it with one of my colleagues who is the director county assurance and I talked to him about it and he was telling me there was something about Uwezo he also said that he doesn’t know much about Uwezo” (Trans Nzoia West)

Highlight 8.3: The perceptions on the Uwezo report are also as varied, to the ministry officials it an 'eye opener', for teachers it is a true reflection of the learning situation on the ground but just falls short of 'laying the blame on them' for issues they don't have control of. In addition stakeholders feel the time between the assessment and release of finding is long, the report is not context specific and does not provide recommendation. Some just think the report leans more on exposing negative things in the education sector.

"I think it is an important report because we also used part of the Uwezo report to look at where we are compared to the other counties, and it was very sad to note that in last year's report the last sub county in the entire county was Tiati, so it helped and there are some very important helpful information that can help to look at where we are in comparison with the entire nation and mother counties" (Baringo North)

"I think the findings to some extent reflect the real situation because even World Vision also carried out an assessment on literacy levels in the ECDE classes and it also reflects that. One good thing with World Vision is that they fully involved me in the data collection and data analysis and data implementation and assimilation" (Kuria East)

'I find the report was not friendly to teaching fraternity I found it was based on...my personal opinion I found it was only based on fault finding'(Kilifi North)

"I think were not well researched, I can say they were kind of outrageous, they were reporting matters not like some of us know on the ground and they tended to be very negative, you know a good report should be balanced it should be both negative and positive, (Teso South)

Highlight 8.4: Most stakeholders also struggle to understand how Uwezo is carried out. Most stakeholders want to be involve more in the planning and conduct of the assessment in order to create ownership of the findings.

'It is only this year they went further and asked me for authority to go and carry out the assessment. They haven't tabulated to me how they have carried out the assessment, how they have analyzed their results, how they have drawn their conclusion and given out their summaries.' (Kuria East)

"The report was categorically talking about children not being able to read, but again children come from different schools. We do not know where those children were gotten from. These were children who were being sampled. So we cannot say that we can thrash the report. When we look at the report, it has some strengths. What we are recommending is that they add in more people so that they can assist in dispensing some materials when they want to do some more research" (Kilifi North)

Highlight 8.5: Stakeholders desires deeper analysis of the Uwezo results to provide insights to the lowest levels which is the school. Others also want immediate feedback of the assessment to enable teachers address the needs/issues even before the assessment results

“The report should start from a narrow point of comparing schools, giving feedback per school, broadening that to the county level then later to the national level”. (Kakamega East)

“When they come to my school to do the assessment, I don’t know how much it can be possible if they come and say we have done the assessment and these are the areas of weaknesses we have identified. This will give me room to improve so it will add value to my school” (Trans Nzoia West)

Highlight 13.6: There are also concerns on how the report is disseminated. Most stakeholders feel the current dissemination strategy makes the report not reach as many people as it should and does not take into consideration the existing networks and authorities in the districts. Suggestions were also made to have the report translated into Kiswahili for readers who may not be very comfortable with English language.

“The reports should be shared in forums. They can identify the schools that are doing poorly in a given district and they have a forum there with these people. They sit and talk to the community, the teachers about these reports. They can also go to the schools where they are doing well, talk to them, motivate them, encourage them, and congratulate them. These are places that they should be able to go plus any other forum that has some prevalence in education, they should be able to make use of them and dispense these outcomes” (Kilifi North)

“All stakeholders need to get that [Uwezo] report, I don’t even know whether the teachers know about it. If I as the quality assurance doesn’t have that report how do you expect a teacher who doesn’t even know anything about it, the head teachers of these learning institutions should know that, the education office should know that, KNUT and KUPETT who are the key defenders of teachers even when they are doing wrong should know that and then the higher authorities” (Kakamega East)

“from the setting of the grass root level I think it can be well shared in barazas and it can also be well shared through the media, media that is voiced or read, most of the people depend on radio, there can be a thirty minute program in the radio where it can be explained exhaustively I think it can also have some impact.(Trans Nzoia West)