# Sowing the seeds of change?

Twaweza introspection on the Public Agency pilot

# Contents

## A. Executive Summary

Twaweza East Africa piloted an approach to catalyze public agency at the sub-national level in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, with the education sector as an entry point, and the issue of teacher and pupil absenteeism as the problem in focus. The pilots took place in 2016-17; the design as well as degree of implementation, including the M&E components, across the three countries varied considerably. In Tanzania the actual implementation began only in November 2017; Kenya implemented in the course of one school term in 2017, and Uganda in the course of two school terms (2016-17). There is no evidence to suggest that the adopted approaches contributed to any observable change in teacher or pupil absenteeism. With the relatively short implementation period, this is not surprising. There are, however, valuable lessons about engaging local partners and galvanizing local action which Twaweza can adopt in the design of the new strategy. The core lessons are elaborated in the last section of the report, but summarized briefly below:

1) There is potential and energy around generating and using local data; this was noted in the Kenya PA schools which engaged with and used the data collected; and in the energy in the Uganda community meetings when "community report cards" were created and presented for discussion.

2) However, Twaweza's approach is not well suited to be the primary organizing / galvanizing force at community level. The model, build for standardized and tightly controlled Uwezo data collection, is not appropriate for local action.

3) Nevertheless, there is a great opportunity to incorporate the lessons from PA into our Uwezo data-generation machinery. For example, we can experiment with numerous available technological models of connecting young people – Uwezo volunteers – who are passionate and energized around a particular issue.

4) Twaweza could also explore a different, meaningful partnership model with selected few organizations that have the local presence, but could benefit from and use persuasive data, evidence, communications, and learning. These would be learning-oriented and supportive partnerships, such as are promoted through the Learning Collaborative (TAI).

5) Should Twaweza focus on the *problems* we believe are important to be addressed (solved), or on the kind of *processes* (participatory action) to solve a range of issues? This point goes to the core of Twaweza communications and engagement, and merits careful consideration for the next strategic period.

## B. Introduction

Twaweza East Africa piloted an approach to catalyze public agency at the sub-national level in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, with the education sector as an entry point. The pilot took place from late 2016 and to improve learning – but the pathways to this long-term outcome can be many. This particular model seeks to increase the spaces of engagement, broaden and deepen conversations between citizens and government with the aim of increasing citizen participation, improving transparency and accountability, and enabling responsiveness from local authorities.

Through intense local multi-actor consultations in all three countries, we arrived at a common issue – that of teacher absenteeism. In Kenya, pupil absenteeism was added as well. The issues intersect both the education and governance domains, and they are visible and pressing at the community, district/county and national levels. They have the potential to galvanize various actors around it, and are correlated with improved learning outcomes for children. We want to bring about a change in teacher absenteeism by enhancing spaces and processes in which citizens and authorities jointly shape decisions for the future of their schools and communities.

The "Public Agency" pilot was developed using a common framework and approach across the three countries. A description of that process, and related organizational learning, can be found here https://www.twaweza.org/go/pa-insights-three-countries. But while it has a common framework, a defining feature of the Public Agency approach is the contextualization of the common principles; each country (and sub-national contexts within) present unique challenges and opportunities.

First, the main idea in the pilot, and the design in each country are outlined. The following sections of this document are a critical reflection on a series of questions related to this pilot:

1) Idea vs Reality: What we set out to implement and what was actually implemented?
2) What results do we observe? What do we learn about effect pathways?
3) Internal capacities: what do we learn about our own effectiveness?
4) What can Twaweza do with this idea, these findings, in the future?

## The Idea

In early 2016 we started with an idea, a conversation, which morphed into a number of intense deliberations about how does Twaweza conceptualize and address **citizen agency**. It is in the center of our Theory of Change, yet how are we actively pursuing it? We work in two domains – education and open government – but does public agency cut across, or does it belong in any single one of them? And how about scale – we have always wanted to avoid boutique-projects, but starting something new and different for us, what scale is appropriate, and how do we think even at this early stage beyond the pilot, so that we test an approach that has real-life applicability?

The exploration and design of the pilot took about 6 months, and it involved exploratory visits as well as "deep dives" in ten districts each in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We involved the whole organization in this exercise by utilizing our annual Immersion exercise tailored to the exploration of this public agency pilot. We were guided by the following parameters:

1. Find an issue which can be "traced" through the entire system – i.e. it's relevant directly in schools, but also important at ward and district, and also has resonance nationally.
2. It must have a citizen voice component. This will likely be focused at the community level, but can also include district, and national. Look whether the various levels can reinforce each other.
3. It must be an issue for which there is possibility of change – is it already a topic of debate, concern, or implementation?
4. Look for the opportunities within the system where the issue can be tackled: the more windows of opportunity up and down the levels, the better.
5. Be specific about what would change look like. Changing policies, budgets? Changing attitudes, norms, and behaviors? Whose behavior? Include actors from community, ward, district and national levels in this analysis.
6. Explore with a range of actors what would be the incentives to change, and what might be barriers to change. Include actors from community, ward, district and national levels in this analysis.

In mid-2016 we deliberated together and settled on **teacher (and pupil) absenteeism** as the issue of focus.

## The Design

Table 1 outlines the main intervention components; details per country follow below. The design was to run the pilots for one school term, then use internal reflections to assess and tweak, and repeat for another school term in the same year. The logic was that just one school term might not be enough to pick up early signs of engagement.

**Table 1: Public Agency design in a nutshell**

|  | Tanzania | Kenya | Uganda |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Districts** | Ilemela & Mvomero<br>20 schools per district | Baringo & Kilifi (Counties)<br>18 schools per county | Moyo & Kabale |
| **Focus issue** | Teacher absenteeism (from school and class) | Teacher & pupil absenteeism (from school and class) | Teacher absenteeism (from school and class) |
| **Main intervention components** | An independent verification of teachers presence through classroom spot-checks, with local civil society and parents, combined with administrative data, will allow for selection of "most present" teacher in each participating ward. The selected teachers will be recognized publicly locally, at district level, and nationally. | An independent verification of teachers and pupil presence through classroom spot-checks, with local volunteers and parents representatives, combined with administrative data, will allow for selection of "most present" teacher and 'best performing school in pupil attendance'' in each participating ward. The selected teachers and school will be recognized publicly locally, at school, ward and county levels. | An independent verification of teacher presence through household visits (and checking of children's workbooks) and school spot-checks will allow for selection of "most present" teacher in each participating ward. The selected teachers will be awarded at the community. |

As the contextual factors differ across the three countries, each country program was encouraged to tailor the pilot accordingly.

**The core objective in Kenya** was to generate data at the classroom and school level on teacher and pupil presence, building on the new structures of student representatives in each classroom, as well as the "Board of management" (BOM) involving parents in each school. The micro-data was to be used immediately by the teachers and head teachers, and also to generate discussion within the BOM and at the community level; it was hypothesized that these discussions would yield localized solutions to address absenteeism. The key components of the intervention are:

a) <u>Collecting data and evidence.</u> Pupils maintain a simple daily record of pupil and teacher attendance. The school's president receives the weekly records from every class and table these in the school parliament. The Husika Champion Teacher, who has been nominated by colleagues, to compiles the data through a smart phone, analyzes and posts results (on e-platform and at school).

b) <u>Monitoring and spot checks.</u> The head teacher coordinates the initiative, conducts spot checks, and presents data to the Board of Management. The Husika Monitor conducts spot checks in a sample of classrooms and validate the school data.

c) <u>Convening discussions on the data.</u> Teachers will convene class parents' meeting to discuss learning hours. Parents receive information about lesson attendance by teachers and from their children and their representatives. They are held accountable for daily attendance of their children, but also expected to hold teachers to account for the quantity of teaching. At community level, the Area Chief or assistant chief receives a monthly brief from the Husika Monitor and

includes this as agenda for the public monthly barazas. S/he will attend the awarding ceremony at the school, and help in presenting the awards and reporting the community on actions taken. At sub-county level, the Husika Sub-county coordinator will aggregate the schools' data. S/he will present this to the Sub-county education officials, as well as the Sub-county Commissioner and call them to action to increase learning hours.

d) <u>Coordination and management.</u> The Husika County Coordinator (Twaweza Partner) monitors and reports but also conduct spot checks. They will convene conversations at the county level, through the County Education Board, which will include in their meeting updates on the data from both the County Education and TSC Directors. They will deliberate actions, as well as participate in the rewards.

**The core objective in Uganda** was to independently monitor the presence of teachers through examining pupils' mathematics exercise books at home, as well as conducting a simple learning assessment of the children. These two datasets were to be correlated, and the ensuing results and insights used for communication purposes (among teachers, head teachers, parents), as well as for publicly recognizing the teachers whose pupils appear to have performed best. The key components of the intervention are:

1) <u>Conduct scaled-down Uwezo assessments.</u> A brief Uwezo assessment on learning outcomes is carried out. Parents, local leaders (e.g. politicians) at district and Sub County will join volunteers to test children on reading up to story level and do numeracy up to division and use the generated data to produce a village report card.

2) <u>Monitoring teacher presence in schools via multiple channels.</u> Parents of the sampled households are expected to ask their children two questions and record the data: a) was the Math teacher at school and b) did you learn Math today? Volunteers visit the sampled households every last week of the month to collect the parents' monthly records as well as engage in one-on-conversations around children's learning and the parents' involvement. Once a month the volunteers conduct spot checks in the selected schools. They will also a) visit the school head and check if the Math Teacher is at school. b) visit the classrooms and observe if the school/classroom time table is followed i.e. they will confirm if the subjects being taught are according to the time table. c) In addition they will record the frequency of visit by district inspectors/CCTs/DEOs to the target schools per month.

3) <u>Convening meetings and having conversations.</u> Community level dialogues on children's learning and teacher absenteeism will be convened, using the village report cards combined with the spot check monitoring and information collected by parents as the basis for the discussion. They then organize awareness creation and award events which involve the PTA, parents, UNATU and DEO. The partner also supports volunteers to convene community meetings to discuss teacher absenteeism, their experiences and ways to address this.

4) <u>Public rewards and recognition:</u> A key incentive and motivation for the teachers is that well-performing teachers, head teachers and schools that demonstrate commitment to their work (in spite of the challenging conditions of service) will be profiled and rewarded. The options include public recognition, certificates, plaques, and being hosted on radio talk-shows.

5) <u>Using the media to amplify the voices on teacher absenteeism.</u> A "Fix-my-school" talk show and radio programme will be implemented in Moyo and Kabale. Citizens/parents will be given a platform to call in to share their concerns/experiences/observations about schools. Our volunteers and partners will share their findings from spot-checks.

**The core objective in Tanzania** was to demonstrate that teachers and head teachers, parents, community leaders and ward-level education authorities can be galvanized around the specific issue of teacher presence (or lack thereof). This was to be achieved through independent monitoring of teacher presence,

and demonstrated in the vested and active participation of the key actors in the cooperation to generate the data, and use of the data to recognize high-performing teachers. We theorized that the potential for recognition from community, peers, but also district-level education officials would motivate teachers to perform better. The key components of the intervention are:

    a) <u>Conduct Uwezo na jamii</u> (Uwezo assessment in the community). Coordinating with community leaders, a simplified version of the Uwezo assessment is conducted during a village meeting. The anonymous results are tallied in a poster and used as basis for discussion about learning outcomes, linking it to pupil and teacher presence in the classroom. This event also introduces the community monitoring of teachers over the next school term, as well as the public recognition for best performing teachers.

    b) <u>Community monitoring of teacher presence in classrooms</u>. These spot-checks are conducted by the Uwezo volunteers, seeking to involve the School Management Committee members as well. Spot checks take place twice per month for every school. The independent spot-checks are combined with school administrative data; the Head Teachers will be consulted as well. The results must be credible.

    c) <u>Public recognition of high performers</u>. This is coordinated by the District partner organization, enlisting the Ward Education Officers and the District Education Officers. If possible, involve them in the earlier community meetings as well. Awards are given out once per quarter (school term).

    d) <u>Generate local media coverage of the issue</u>, particularly around the awards ceremonies, for motivation purposes. In addition to local media, announce the winners at community meetings; create notices with winning teachers and head teachers on the District offices noticeboards.

    e) <u>Amplify the interest and motivation by engaging national-level actors</u>. Announce the competition and the winners in national media; link with the corresponding MPs for possible recognition; link with parliamentary education committee to introduce the approach and results, for deliberation in the committee.

**In terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning,** the three country pilots had a similar design, including:

    1) An internal assessment or baseline, conducted by the volunteers and the district implementing partners, covering all participating schools and communities

    2) A light-touch but frequent monitoring, gathering feedback from the implementing partners in the field in order to make adjustments

    3) An independent baseline and follow-up in a selection of schools and communities, for additional insight and evaluation of possible short-term effects

The three independent baselines yielded interesting insights, summarized below.

1. **There is great defensiveness from within the education system to discuss teacher absenteeism as an issue.** Across the board, teachers as well as Head Teachers (and often also District-level officials) insist that absenteeism is not a problem. This is contrast with data: Service Delivery Indicators (World Bank) and also our own Uwezo data show high levels (30% and higher) of teacher absenteeism. In many cases, pupil absenteeism is brought up as a contrast and a "much bigger" problem. The position is that teachers are either present, or absent with a valid reason (there are interesting nuances across the countries in what people consider to be valid reasons). Some of that defensiveness has a real basis: teachers and head teachers often do work in very difficult conditions and environments. Often their basic needs are not met: food, housing, water, regular salaries. On the other hand, it was pointed out that in comparison to other people (even other civil servants), teachers have it better: at the very

least they have a civil service job, and the hardships endured by others in the community are often perceived to be greater.

2. **Across the board, there is a sense that the education system itself has failed its teachers, and teachers are overall demotivated**. Overall there is little appetite for accountability, particularly given the hardships (real and perceived) as discussed above. In this context, a very clear message was that simply more monitoring (or other kinds of punitive approaches) will do nothing to change the behavior of a demotivated teacher.

3. **Even though the system is seen to be failing its teachers, almost paradoxically the various actors cooperate to keep the status quo going** – the system may be failing, but it's still better than having no system at all (and presumably no job). Relationships within the system seem to rest on a web of complicity, not a sense of responsibility or accountability. So teachers cover for each other, head teachers cover for their teachers, all produce data to show that there is no real problem. Since everyone cooperates this way, there is little appetite for exposing anyone or any component.

4. **In the eyes of many teachers and head teachers, parents and communities have reneged on their responsibilities to send children to school, to follow up, to pay fees when required, to contribute food, etc.** Their absence is particularly felt in areas where pupil absenteeism is high. Conversations with parents as part of this fieldwork do confirm that in many cases they indeed do not feel is their responsibility or their place to act vis-à-vis the schools. If they do want to act, they really don't know what to do (beyond the actions that are already in their parental sphere, such as giving children breakfast before school). We don't yet know enough about what would truly motivate them to participate more.

5. **At the very local level, it does seem to be all about relationships and respect**: teachers and head teachers don't expect that the education system will be overhauled, but they do expect their neighbors and fellow community members to demonstrate appreciation for their role, and offer support, when needed.

6. The possibility of **where to begin to bring about change** in the above "dysfunctional equilibrium" was explored across the three countries as well.
   a. In Tanzania, there was discussion around the "seeds of change." In essence, not asking for behavioral overhauls, but identifying and encouraging (nudging) various actors to do what they are already doing, but a bit more, and a bit better. Also, it was felt that recognition (and respect) for the effort teacher and head teachers make was very important as well, above and beyond any material rewards.
   b. In Uganda, there were interesting concrete examples as to what was seen to work in the past and suggestions to revive these practices. Among the top were providing meals to teachers at school, having the head teacher fetch the salaries from distant district centers to avoid teachers taking days off to travel (though teachers were less fond of this as it could mean delays or even missing salaries), and providing housing for teachers – if a teacher lives nearby, attendance improves. This last point on housing was unanimously noted across the three countries.
   c. Kenya research focused a lot on contrasting pupil with teacher absenteeism, focusing on whether one or the other is perceived to be the biggest issue. The main insight is that it's important to not finger point to one actor when many are implicated, and to start where there

is a felt need: if people respond better to the issue of pupil absenteeism, then that could be the entry point (though not the end point).

d. In all countries, there was expressed desire for "joint" action at community level. On the other hand, it is unclear how much of this is talk, reflecting an ideal which people hold in their mind, and how much is real enthusiasm and willingness to take part. E.g. in Tanzania, the terms "cooperation" and "collaboration" were used repeatedly, and yet no one could give an example of what it looks like, or how to do it.

## C. Critical Reflections

### (1) Idea vs Reality: What we set out to implement and what was actually implemented

Kenya

1) The pilot ran for 10 weeks (one term). The original design envisaged at least two school terms to give the initiative a chance to be established, and to allow for adjusting the design as needed after the first term. In reality, there was little appetite to continue the pilot after the first 10 week term. The internal evaluation noted that at least one full school year would be needed to understand fully whether the initiative has potential or not.

2) Data collection: The class monitor (for grades 4-7), using a Twaweza designed booklet, took a record of daily pupil and teacher attendance. For pupil attendance, this involved recording the number of pupils (by gender) who were present and absent in each day. For teacher attendance, the class monitor maintained a daily lesson-by-lesson record of teacher lesson attendance, indicating whether, for each lesson, the teacher was on-time, late or absent. Second, the data were then forwarded to the Husika teacher who compiled the records on a weekly basis and shared the trends with fellow teachers including the head teacher besides sending the data using a device on to a KoBoCollect online platform. There were a number of external challenges. For example, the exercise was interrupted in 6 schools in Tiaty sub-county due to insecurity. In other places, despite an initial training, some teachers were unable to use the device after being left on their own, while others faced challenges related to internet connectivity.

3) The initiative was heavily focused in schools, and although planned, little or no community engagement took place. Similarly the engagement at the county level largely did not take place, i.e., links with the County Education Board, County Education and TSC Directors. The awards component also was not implemented.

Uganda
1) The pilot ran between November 2016 and June 2017. It was an exercise heavily focused on quantitative data collection. Overall, 60 enumeration areas, 57 schools and 2,100 households were visited. In total, 4,187 children were assessed in literacy and numeracy with 1671 from Kabale and 2516 from Moyo district. In June 2017 follow-up was conducted to assess teacher attendance from interviews with head teachers and classroom observations in the 57 schools surveyed in the two districts. Measurements were made in the same months from pupils' exercise books in their homes. In total 1,821 pupils' exercise books were observed to check whether their teachers of math and English were present on the day of assessment, whether they taught, whether they gave any written exercise, marked it and gave written feedback to pupils on their work.
2) Local community partners (Uwezo partners) were engaged to visit schools and conduct meetings between parents, leaders and teachers, with the purpose of discussing pupil and teacher absenteeism and ways to improve attendance. During those discussions resolutions were adopted, and actions defined to be taken with the purpose of motivating teachers, parents and pupils to improve attendance. Follow up on those actions is unclear.
3) Local media was engaged to some degree, with several radio talk shows focusing on the question of absenteeism.
4) The award / public recognition of best performing teachers (or schools) was not implemented.


Tanzania
1) Implementation did not properly start until end November 2017, so it is too early to assess fidelity to the design. The likely reasons for the delay are discussed in the "Internal capacities" section.


Monitoring & Evaluation
1) The independent baselines were done in all three countries after the design was already set, and in the case of Kenya, after the materials were developed and printed and the implementation already began. This meant that baseline findings were not incorporated into the Kenya project. On the other hand, the Kenya team spent considerable time visiting the implementing schools and conducting internal tracking and monitoring.
2) Kenya team conducted an "internal" evaluation: a consultant was engaged to analyse the data that had been collected through the Husika initiative, as well as to travel to implementing schools and discuss with a range of stakeholders. The ensuing report produced valuable insights, and the results are discussed in the "What results do we observe?" section below.
3) However, the "internal" Kenya evaluation had not been part of the original M&E design, and it therefore covered a significant portion of the same ground as the designed baseline-endline evaluation was intended to cover. The endline independent evaluation was therefore tailored to pick up on components the internal evaluation either did not cover, or unearthed and had not managed to explore further. In retrospect, this was positive for the learning curve, although likely used up considerably more resources. At the time of writing, the report from the independent endline was not yet available.
4) The delay in design and implementation in Tanzania did allow for baseline findings to be thoroughly discussed, and, as a result, some of the design and approach was changed. For example, pupil absenteeism was added as a "balancing" factor to avoid singling out teachers as the "culprits." As

implementation has begun end of November 2017, it is too early to say whether the monitoring components will be executed as planned, and whether they will be helpful in adjusting the initiative along the way.

5) In Uganda, the independent baseline was disconnected from the implementation plan, and also came late, after the design had been largely set. Internal monitoring / tracking of activities took place during the pilot (reporting of various meetings, etc.). A follow-up exercise was conducted in June to collect data on teacher and pupil presence, report available in December 2017. The independent follow-up has not yet been implemented as of this writing.

6) Although the M&E plans were designed uniformly across the three countries, the various measurements were implemented very differently in Kenya and Uganda (with the exception of the independent baselines, which did follow a similar approach and similar, though tailored, issues to explore). In both Kenya and Uganda, most of the measurement effort was subsumed into the implementation. This was positive for getting it done and the implementing teams being vested in the measurement. On the other hand, with minimal links with LME the measurement suffered various design issues. For example, the pre- and post-questionnaires in Kenya changed the type and wording of question between the two rounds, making many of the comparisons impossible.

## (2) Internal capacities: what do we learn about our own effectiveness?

1) Particularly in Tanzania, we continue to be an organization driven by Units and Unit responsibilities and workplans. It is difficult to really pull together across Units, as ownership is demarcated according to budget lines (which are held by Units). Tanzania implementation did not properly start until November 2017. Reasons for delay are many, but likely inter-unit dynamics did not function well. As PA built on the Uwezo network (implementing local partners, and volunteers), the Uwezo unit likely assumed it would "own" and manage the initiative. However, the PA was in many ways designed very differently from the usual Uwezo approach, and two other units – primarily the Public & Policy Engagement, but also Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation – had significant roles to play, which might have been perceived as undercutting the Uwezo mandate.

2) In Kenya and Uganda this was less of a problem, perhaps for two main reasons: the teams overall are much smaller (about half Tanzania size), and the Uwezo/Education teams dominate. In both Kenya and Uganda, it was Uwezo teams that had taken PA under their leadership, thereby being able to galvanize the rest of the organization (other Units) into cooperation and action.

3) In Kenya and Uganda, the teams engaged with pilot intensively, including numerous travels to the participating schools and communities to monitor progress, discuss challenges, and motivate stakeholders. The down side of this effort was that it demanded disproportionately large amounts of time from colleagues from all different units, therefore likely making this level of engagement unsustainable.

4) The M&E activities were generally disconnected from the implementation, although they were initially planned together and meant to connect throughout the pilot.

## (3) What results do we observe in Kenya?
To date, the results from the Kenya pilot are most extensive, discussed below.

## 3.1 Data on presence / absence of teachers and pupils & perception of the issues

1) **Teacher attendance in schools appears to be quite high (around 90%); although classroom attendance is lower;** the observed attendance is in line with other, comparable studies.
    a. In Baringo county, 93% of teachers were present in school at baseline, and 87% were present at the endline.
    b. In addition to presence in school, presence in classroom is a critical measure; Kenyan Service Delivery Indicators (World Bank) reports that on average, 40% of teachers on any given day are absent from the classroom. According to the Husika class monitors, on average 30% of teachers in Husika schools either did not arrive on time or were not present in the classroom at all. The weeks (in the 10 week period) where classroom attendance was lowest (40-50% of teachers were not in classrooms) coincided with approved seminars given to math and language teachers by another project (Tusome). There were no other clear trends in either increasing or decreasing classroom attendance.
    c. In Kilifi county, 89% of teachers were present in school at basline, and 93% were present at the endline. In terms of classroom presence, 80% of teachers on average were present in the classroom and on time. Similarly to Baringo county, the weeks with low attendance coincided with the Tusome maths and language trainings.
2) **Perception of teacher absenteeism as a problem is very low to begin with; still, perceived improvements are reported over time.** In Baringo county at both baseline and endline, large majority (75% or more) of head teachers and teachers did not consider teacher absenteeism to be an issue. In Kilifi, 85% or more of head teachers and teachers did not consider teacher absenteeism to be an issue.
    a. This is not surprising, given that attendance at school is indeed quite high (as per data above), and when teachers are absent, it is deemed for an "accepted and approved" reason. Even so, when asked whether teacher presence had improved or not over the pilot period, the majority of head teachers and teachers in Baringo (68% or more) stated that presence had in fact improved. In Kilifi, 88% of head teachers and 63% if teachers stated that presence had improved.
    b. There is more variation in parental perceptions of teacher absenteeism. Although majority (60% or more) do not consider it a problem, the remainder consider it either a small or large problem. In the spirit of reporting improvements, 60% of parents in both counties reported that teacher presence had increased during the pilot period. Community leaders in both counties similarly considered teacher absenteeism to not be a large problem. At endline these stakeholders Baringo reported that teacher presence had improved over the pilot period, while in Kilifi about half reported an improvement and another half reported that attendance had in fact decreased. The reasons for this discrepancy are not clear.
    c. Overall, it is likely that courtesy bias is influencing the responses on perception: respondents knew that the project aimed at increasing teacher attendance, so answers are possibly skewed positively in this direction.
3) **Pupil attendance appears to be high already, and there is little variation in the reported attendance.**
    a. The baseline in Baringo county estimated that close to 90% of pupils were present in class. The Husika monitoring of pupil attendance was marked over 90% for the 10 weeks of the pilot. There was little variation between schools and across the weeks.

b. The baseline in Kilifi county estimated that 79% of pupils were present in class. The Husika monitoring recorded 85% pupil attendance, somewhat higher than the baseline. There was some variation both between schools and across the weeks of the pilot. For instance, the disruption in learning during weeks 6 to 9 was estimated to be due to inter-school games (sports), which were held during this period across the different sub-counties. Respondents in Kilifi noted that boys do not attend schools during specific weeks because of availability of (manual) jobs which are often seasonal.

4) **However, pupil attendance is perceived as a problem, and these perceptions vary over time:** it is reported as a significant problem at baseline, but at follow-up a large number of respondents states that the problem has decreased; in other words, attendance has improved. It is difficult to know the precise reasons for this, but it is likely that courtesy bias has played a significant role here: respondents know that the project aimed at increasing pupil attendance, so answers are possibly skewed positively in this direction. This holds true for teachers, head teachers as well as community leaders – those who presumably have an interest in the project having been perceived as a success. Interestingly, it does not hold for parents.

   a. Although pupil presence appears to have been stable over the 10 week period, teachers reported perception of it as a problem changed over time. In Baringo, 71% of teachers at baseline considered it a problem, as compared to 58% of teachers at follow-up. The numbers for Kilifi county are 94% at baseline and 71% at follow-up. When asked whether attendance had increased or decreased over the 10 week period, 76% of teachers in Baringo reported that attendance, in their opinion, had increased. In Kilifi, 65% of teachers thought attendance had increased. Similarly, 50% of Baringo head teachers at follow-up estimated that pupil attendance "had increased" during the pilot phase, as did 65% of head teachers in Kilifi.

   b. Local leaders in Baringo county considered pupil absenteeism to be a problem at baseline: 100% of them marked it as a small or great problem (with 0% marking it as not a problem). At follow-up, the leaders thought attendance had improved: 71% estimated it had increased (improved) over the pilot period. In Kilifi, 94% of local leaders considered pupil attendance to be a problem at baseline; at follow-up, 78% estimated it had increased.

   c. Parents, however, did not share the view of the teachers or the local leaders. While 100% of Baringo parents at baseline stated that pupil absenteeism was a problem either to a small or great extent, 56% of parents and endline actually thought that pupil attendance had decreased over the pilot period. A further 36% thought it hadn't changed, and 8% thought it had increased. In Kilifi, 94% of parents considered pupil attendance was a problem, and 48% thought attendance had in fact decreased over the pilot period; 39% thought it had increased, and 18% thought it remained the same.

## 3.2 Reported causes of absence

5) **Estimated causes of pupil absence are common across the two districts, and they fall into two categories: lack of core school inputs, and blaming of the parents.** In the first category, lack of food (hunger) and water are the top two main factors responsible for pupil school absence and the most affected are children from poor families, particularly boys (who are more likely to participate in child labour in difficult economic situations). It should be noted that the Husika pilot initiative was implemented at the time when both Kilifi and Baringo counties were facing prolonged drought. In the second category and in both counties, school-based respondents noted that a number of parents are "ignorant" about the importance of education, have negative attitude towards education and do not want to take the responsibility of taking their children to school. Parents, apparently, were not asked as to the causes of pupil absence.

6) **Estimated causes of teacher absence are also common across the two districts, and they are largely considered "reasonable and acceptable".** Responses show that teachers are often not in school or not teaching mainly because of sickness, participation in authorized (official) functions (in and out of school) and the need to attend to personal (family) affairs. Listed official functions include Tusome program, sports/games, and attending training courses among others. Personal affairs include attending to their children's education affairs, going for salaries, and death in the family among others.

7) **Teacher presence appears to be correlated with pupil presence.** We conducted simple regressions between these variables to test the relationship. Graphs are available on request. Interestingly, the association is stronger in Baringo county than in Kilifi. This can be observed by the clustering of the data, and also by the $R^2$ (r-squared) statistics: in Baringo, between 22% and 29% of the pupil absenteeism can be attributed to teacher absenteeism; in Kilifi, the proportion is 9-10%.

## 3.3 Was Husika a success?

**Based on the above data, we cannot claim that the Husika pilot contributed to changes in presence of teachers or pupils.** However, during endline discussions, important process-related factors emerged which **suggest *the potential*** for a granular monitoring approach such as Husika to contribute to core outcomes of interest. We hypothesise three categories of schools.

| Category | Kilifi | Baringo |
|---|---|---|
| Successful processes | 8 | 6 |
| Some successful processes | 7 | 4 |
| Little or no processes | 3 | 8 |

1) The first category are schools where Husika was associated with successful processes: strong connections within the school, characterised by frequent meetings between the Husika teachers, the head teacher, class teachers and class MPs. It appears that in these schools, data collected through Husika was used and found useful. In some schools, the head teachers promised to continue with the initiative for the rest of the year. They had locally adopted the Husika pupil and teacher attendance register and promised to extend it to more classes for local monitoring. In another school, the Husika initiative had engineered the development of an absenteeism policy, stipulating behaviour of teachers and parents in supporting pupil attendance. Still, there was a school where the class MPs were granted

the legitimacy to go for teachers from the staff room whenever they were delayed. In a number of schools, teachers resolved to wait outside the class when the bell went, and demanded that the teacher whose lesson just ended walks out in order to avoid being marked as late. We speculate that these schools had an active Husika teacher who had receptive colleagues in the staffroom. The Husika teachers were energized and went beyond the prescription of duty to make other teachers understand and own Husika. They brought the head teacher on board and empowered the MPs in their role. Most importantly, we think that the head teachers in these schools understood and expressed open support for Husika. Despite such success, we still sensed some level of anxiety among teachers regarding the motive behind Husika, especially the aspect of onward data transmission. We cannot rule out that some teachers might have simply obliged because they thought Husika was a Teacher Services Commission initiative.

2) The next category is a class of schools where Husika may have been implemented through some successful processes, although it is not easy to trace any utilization of the data generated at the school level. These are schools where there might have been some feedback meetings, albeit infrequent, between the Husika teacher and his/her colleagues and the class MPs. It is possible that the Husika teachers in these schools were not convinced about the initiative and therefore lacked passion. They did not provide adequate leadership even to the class MPs who were generally timid. It is also possible that the Husika teacher was optimistic but they were met by hesitant colleagues who in some cases thought Husika was a way of victimising them and hence they were forced into collaboration. These schools were also characterised by anxiety among teachers regarding the intension of Husika. There were structural issues in these schools as well: for instance, the Husika teachers despite learning how to use the device were unable to effectively use them once they were left on their own. Or they attempted to remit the data but faced connectivity challenges. Also, it is possible that the class MPs did not get the watches (as incentives) on time or they received them but they got damaged. All in all, attempts were not made to correct these structural issues. Despite this, these category of schools were optimistic about Husika and expressed willingness to continue with it.

3) The third category are schools where Husika was launched but remained invisible. In these schools, very little or no feedback meetings took place between the Husika teacher and his/her colleagues and the class MPs. In some, the existing environment was already too complex for Husika to thrive. For instance, in one school, we noticed that most teachers had stayed in the schools for long and had no interest in new innovations. In another school, the head teacher was new and was grappling with recreating teamwork following years of mismanagement. Yet in another school, we noted a clear tension between parents and teachers related to the declining school performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. Teachers might have been opposed to the fundamental principle of pupils monitoring them, and didn't understand why one hand-picked teacher should claim power over them. The head teachers did not know much about Husika work and/or were disinterested. The class MPs did not completely understand their duties and in some cases they were caught in the mix of a complex school environment. As a result, Husika became a data-forwarding instrument with no impact felt at the school. In fact, in some of the schools, the Husika teachers stopped sending data to Twaweza.

**While the majority of the respondents generally claimed that the Husika initiative helped foster school-community discussions on teacher and pupil attendance, there is little evidence of this.** Generally, Husika remained largely in schools, and even in schools where the initiative was successful, there were no clear and visible connections that were created between school-community, and between parents or community leaders.

1) We could not trace evidence that pupils discussed with parents about Husika. Nevertheless, parents vividly recall the September 2016 briefing meetings, which as mentioned, challenged them to send

their children to school. When asked what they recommended for Husika going forward, majority of the parents called for Husika to provide school feeding programs and help develop school infrastructure, which we take as an indication that they were not fully aware of the initiative's objectives. In addition, there was no evidence that the evidence generated in schools was discussed in parent-teacher association meetings or in local barazas (even though education is part of the issues discussed in local barazas). Nevertheless, some local leaders were occasionally briefed about the initiative by the Husika Monitors.

2) Why did the initiative generally fail to foster school-community connections? In some schools, the initiative was caught up in an already complex school-community relationship characterized by perennial differences within schools (BOM and the teachers) and between schools and the community (parents). In some communities, parents generally feel disempowered to monitor teachers, given the latter's stature in society. In such complex environment, involving local communities to address an emotive issue like teacher absence can be difficult.

3) The lack of success in fostering school-community discussions could also be due to structural issues. First, a lot of investment was done at the school level (teacher nominated and trained, head teacher trained, teacher motivated with a phone, pupils motivated with a wrist watch etc.). However, very little investment happened at the village level beyond the September 2016 meeting. For instance, it is only the Chief who was supposed to receive the data and discuss it in local barazas. Second, the Husika Monitors were supposed to do spot checks in schools, to monitor the process and collect the evidence and share it with the local leader (mostly the Chief). In some places, this worked very well and in fact there is evidence of meetings between the Husika Monitor and the local leaders. In other places, this did not work as Husika Monitors failed in their role. It is possible that they simply did not visit the schools as required while at the same time did not meet the local leaders as there was no information to report.

## 3.4 What more can we learn from the successful Husika schools?

In a difficult setting with many competing priorities and many risks of failure, why do some schools manage to succeed, and what can we learn from these success stories? The independent evaluation followed up with a sub-set of six schools (three per county) which were considered to be "successful" as per the criteria described above.

All of the six schools operate in poor, remote environments, with quite poor school infrastructure, including buildings in dire need of repair and lack of desks and supplies. Two issues were brought up repeatedly as having a significant effect on pupil absenteeism, and respondents distinguished them by gender: boys were said to be absent due to hunger, while girls were absent due to menstruation and unavailability of pads. Other projects which had been implemented in these schools and had been viewed as successful corresponded to these issues: feeding programs, and provision of sanitary pads for girls. In fact, Husika was recommended to focus on similar issues, which were seen to be of higher importance and linked more directly to attendance. A few other observations about what took place in the successful schools:

1) Husika was said to start – or at least assist – conversations between parents, teachers and head teachers on pupil absenteeism (less so on teacher absenteeism). The issue had not, previously, been brought into focus in the same way before.

2) Class MPs were empowered to collect the data, and their reports were taken seriously by the teachers and head teachers. In some cases, the MPs were empowered to even seek out the teachers in the common room when he or she was running late for class.

3) The watches given to MPs as incentives seemed to have worked well; however, teachers complained about having to do extra work without any incentives or recognition. Important to note here that the award/recognition for best performing teacher (school) was not implemented.

In sum, as challenging as it may be to write this, it appears that in the "successful" schools it was likely not Husika at all which drove the success. Instead, these were schools which, in a set of difficult circumstances, remained characterized by a range of positive factors – e.g. there were already the kind of relationships which allowed for the MPs to be empowered and respected, etc. In these school environments, parts of Husika seem to have been absorbed into the functioning of the school, and perhaps brought some benefits. But this is far from Husika actually driving the change.

# (4) What results do we observe in Uganda?

## 4.1 Data on presence / absence of teachers and pupils & perception of the issues

1) **According to various measures, teacher attendance is quite high, although the perception among stakeholders is that absenteeism is a problem in their community. There was no improvement between the two fieldwork rounds.** Teacher attendance was measured through spot-checks at schools, but also through household visits, whereby the children were asked whether their teacher was present the day before, and whether he or she taught, gave exercises, and marked books.
   a. As measured through interviews with children in households, most teachers (over 90%) were present at school the previous day. There was more variation when asked whether the teacher taught: 80% or so of pupils reported that the maths teacher taught in class the previous day. The proportion was over 90% for English teachers.
   b. According to head teachers during spot-checks, teacher attendance was recorded as worse at follow-up as compared to baseline. At baseline, 7% of teachers were reported absent from school, while 19% were absent at follow-up.
   c. Three quarters of all respondents perceived teacher absenteeism to be a problem in their community, with variation between the two districts: 90% in Moyo, and 55% in Kabale.
   d. Main reasons given for absent teachers were late salaries, sickness, alcohol problems, and engaging in other businesses.

2) **According to school-based measures, pupil attendance is around 80%, although the perception among stakeholders is that it is a significant problem in their community. There was no change between the two fieldwork rounds.** Pupil attendance was also measured at household visits, whereby the children were asked whether they attended school the day of the school-based assessment.
   a. On average, 24% of pupils were not in class at the time of the baseline visit. There was a considerable difference between grades: in Standard 1, up to 34% of pupils were absent, while the proportion was 11% at Standard 7. A possible interpretation is that students who

remain in school through Standard 7 are vested in taking the Primary School Leaving Exam, and therefore more likely to attend class.

b. At follow-up, on average 16% of pupils were absent. This was driven by change in Kabale, which went from 23% absence to 10% absence (while Moyo remained similar, at 25% and 21% baseline to follow up).

c. When interviewed at home, 27% of children in Moyo district reported not to have attended school the on the day of the school-based assessment; the proportion was 25% in Kabale district.

d. Overall, 87% of community stakeholders (parents, teachers, leaders) perceived that pupil absenteeism is a problem in their community.

e. Main reasons given for pupil absenteeism were engaging in farm work, sickness, and a range of factors loosely interpreted as "not valuing education" (e.g. "laziness of parents, "negligence," etc.).

3) **Parents overwhelmingly report that lack of parental engagement in schools is a problem in their community.**

a. The data did not differentiate between asking about their own behaviour vs. perceived behaviour of other parents, but generally, 76% of all parents stated that "lack of parental engagement in school" is a problem in their community. The main reason for this given was being poor, and linked to this, simply not having time due to being engaged with income-generating activities. This was followed by perceptions of "not valuing" education (e.g. "negligent" parents, having a "negative attitude" towards education, etc.).
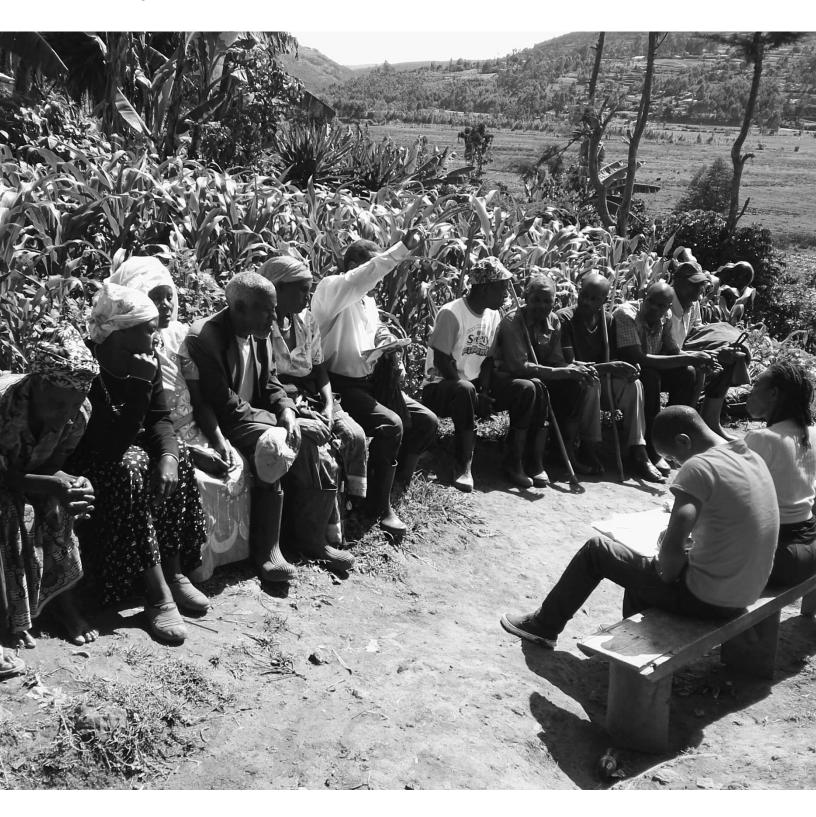

## 4.2 Uganda community engagement

1) In Both Moyo and Kabale districts, local civil society organizations well-known to Uwezo were engaged as main implementing partners. They were tasked with a range of sensitization and dialogue activities in the selected communities, revolving around improving both pupil and teacher presence in schools. At the time of the writing, the granular field reports have not been synthesized fully, however, highlights of the implementation are noted below.

a. Numerous community meetings were held in both counties, drawing together teachers, head teachers, local government representatives (from various levels) and parents. There were lively discussions about learning, based on Uwezo data: poster-size community report cards were created and prompted lively discussion. The point was made in explicitly linking learning achievement to teacher and pupil absenteeism.

b. In Moyo, there were instances of various authority figures making commitments for future action, however the phrasings of these were not specific enough to allow for follow-up.

c. In Kabale, the recording of actions was more detailed, and included for example training of 270 School Management Committee members on their role / duty to regularly monitor teachers' attendance in schools. Also, the civil society partner organization was invited to join the District Monitoring Committee, which follows up on schools having issues with teacher absenteeism (as well as other issues).

d. There was at least one radio talk show (in Kabale) featuring the District Speaker, who discussed the importance of teacher presence in schools as key for learning outcomes, calling on head teachers and parents to be more active in monitoring teacher presence.

## 4.3 Was the Uganda Public Agency pilot a success?

It should be noted that this section is based on information available at the time of writing. This includes raw field reports of the implementing partners, and a draft internal assessment of the data collected.

1) It doesn't appear that the Public Agency pilot contributed to any changes in actual pupil attendance or teacher attendance, as measured through the various methods.
2) It is a fair question whether the methods of data collection were best suited to the issue at hand. For example, it is not clear that it was necessary to conduct the Uwezo assessment of children's learning levels in such a large sample of households, since these were not expected to change over the course of the pilot.
3) The approach of assessing teacher presence through the two methods used in this pilot gives results quite different to other, independent studies, raising questions about the validity of these methods. In this pilot, teacher presence was measured through reports of the head-teacher, as well as by examining the school books of children, and asking children to report on teacher presence. Both of these approaches give quite high measures – around 80% teacher presence (and in many cases higher than that). This is in line with our Uwezo assessment which in 2015 found overall 82.4% of teachers present at school during the announced visit. Ideally, teacher presence would be measured through un-announced spot-checks, and would differentiate between presence at school and presence in the classroom. This was done through Service Delivery Indicators for Uganda (World Bank) in which it was observed that only 40% of classrooms during un-announced spot-checks had a teacher present (i.e., the absence from classroom rate was 60%; though it should be noted that the SDI data is from 2013).
4) Perhaps linked to the low variability of the data, as noted above, the rewards component of the pilot was not implemented – i.e., no teacher or school were recognized and rewarded as high performers. There was, therefore, no "culmination" to the efforts.
5) Is there indication that the *processes* implemented under this project contributed to a different kind of conversation about teacher and pupil absenteeism? There are two processes to single out as potential.
   a. First one is the community engagement through local data – i.e., through the community report card, which seemed to have generated considerable energy and debate. It is unclear whether that energy was productively channelled into any actions taken, as these have not yet been followed up. However, there are numerous examples from other, similar projects in Uganda in which this approach was linked to significant improvement in hard-to-change outcomes (e.g. Bjorkman and Svensson studies on health; Barr on education outcomes).
   b. Second is the willingness of high-ranking public officials to speak about an issue on local media. We know that in Uganda, local radio is a powerful means of reaching large numbers of people, and there is also other, experimental evidence suggesting that information transmitted through radio can indeed drive behaviour change (Reinikka and Svensson in Uganda; Palluck in Benin). It is therefore possible (though not yet captured) whether the discussion on teacher absenteeism on the radio can be linked to actions taken.
6) In sum, we cannot say, based on the available information, that the Uganda Public Agency pilot was a success. The measurement exercises undertaken would appear to be more onerous than insightful. There is potential in two processes – approaches – to bring the issue of absenteeism to the forefront

and perhaps contribute to positive action; however, there is for the time being insufficient data and insights to make that case.

1) **There is potential and energy around generating and using local data.** We saw this in the Husika schools which engaged with and used the data collected; we also saw it in the energy in the Uganda community meetings when "community report cards" were created and presented for discussion. Similarly it was observed in a different innovation we had tried in 2016: termed "beyond basics," we conducted Uwezo tests at grade 5 level with grades 5 and 6 in schools, aggregated the data on the spot and presented the results for discussion to the teachers and head teacher. The discussions generated were more engaging, pro-active and lively than most other local conversations in which we present pre-analyzed, statistically sound, nicely packaged data. In many ways this is not news: participatory research in action (PRA) has been around for decades, so the good thing is there is a lot of material and experiences to learn from, should we choose to consider this model.

2) **However, Twaweza is not well suited to be the primary organizing / galvanizing force at community level**, at least not through the PA approach, where we chose the core idea, the design, approach, all the materials, etc., and rely on our local-level partners to implement. This model is built on our Uwezo experience, where the aim of the exercise is to generate high-quality, credible data. In Uwezo, a top-down command-and-control approach makes sense: sampling procedures have to be followed, tests must be administered uniformly, etc. However, the PA idea was fundamentally different from the start, attempting to integrate into and navigate the political economy of a school, its relationships with the community as well as relationships within the education system (in terms of reporting on key process data). Twaweza's sphere of influence is in many ways too weak to pull this off: we do not call the shots within the education system, nor are we grounded sufficiently to navigate the local dynamics. Moreover, to implement such an initiative at least moderately well (in Kenya) it required too much energy and time from the entire staff body, including multiple trips to the participating schools. In UG we defaulted to what we knew what to do (household learning assessments, and community meetings); in TZ we didn't manage to get off the ground for an entire year. What, then, is our role?

3) **First, there is a great opportunity to incorporate the lessons from PA into our Uwezo data-generation machinery.** Uwezo should and will remain a statistically solid, representative data generation exercise. However, within it, there is plenty of room for adaptation and experimentation, with the purpose of seeding action and generating lessons, not scaled up and replicated uniformly across Uwezo. For example, we can experiment with numerous available technological models of connecting young people – Uwezo volunteers – who are passionate and energized around a particular issue. We can also experiment with building a few different partnerships with local partner organizations, those which already have their own agenda for organizing locally. For these partnerships we would need to loosen the reins: empower, not control partners, and accompany them particularly through the learning / reflection angle.

4) **Second, we could partner with selected few organizations that have the local presence, but could benefit from and use persuasive data, evidence, communications, and learning.** In Tanzania and Uganda we know organizations – we have partnered with them before – which are very grounded and active locally (e.g., Restless Development, Tamasha). We could again establish meaningful partnerships – as we sought to do in the earlier iteration of Twaweza – with the difference that we would be going for deep engagement, not rapid scale; that the partnerships would be built on common desired outcomes but with a lot less control by Twaweza on the processes. We ought to build the kind of learning-oriented and supportive partnership that we want for ourselves (from our donors, for instance). There are by now many models and lessons available on how to do start such a process, and we are also well-positioned within the Learning Collaborative (tied to TAI) to further this approach.

5) One of the internal discussions we have had – and must continue to have into the next strategic period – is the rationale or driving force of this kind of engagement. For the Public Agency pilot, we took great pains to find an issue that would fit our organizational priorities and would have resonance in each country nationally as well as locally. We believed that with teacher (and pupil) absenteeism we had found the "sweet spot" – but we learned through implementation that in many settings, it was not at all a top concern. **So do we focus on the problems / issues to be addressed (solved), or on the kind of processes (participatory action) to solve a range of issues?** There is plenty of international evidence to support the critical importance of teacher presence and contact hours as directly linked to learning outcomes – so we can rest on that evidence. And if the issue is not currently "felt" as pressing among community stakeholders, we can take heart that there are numerous issues which at some point in time were not felt to be important and yet history confirmed their critical value. Women's voting rights could be considered such an issue, or anti-discrimination laws. The other side of the argument is that we (and our partners) are trying to stimulate communities into action, so surely it makes sense to pick an issue that resonates, where there is energy already – otherwise we are pushing too much against the grain. And in this case, how do we square addressing issues about which we may know very little, or which may, in some cases, not resonate with our organizational values?

6) **This point goes to the core of Twaweza communications and engagement, and this could be a great time to examine our approach.** On the one hand, as civic space closes around us, we may want to stand our ground more firmly, fight the good fight. On the other hand, there is much to learn about how to communicate difficult, potentially contentious issues in a way that speaks and resonates with majority of population. Fortunately there are many examples – e.g. how the tide turned in the US in just a decade from staunch opposition to same-sex marriage to majority in favour. Many factors contributed to this, but one core component seems to be the tone and nuance in the campaigning: it became about values that most citizens could identify with – family, love, caring for one another, etc. (rather than the polarizing anti-discrimination rhetoric).