Twaweza Staff Immersion

Central Kenya

May 2013

What is immersion?

- **Opportunity for Twaweza staff:**
  - To experience the lives and realities that our work is supposed to address
  - To be "tuned in" –what issues matter and how people communicate about them, what brings about change in their lives, and by what mechanisms
  - To test the relevance of our organizational theory of change in a "real life" setting
- It is not an "intervention" and it is not a "research project"

How do we do it?

- With help from an organization with local presence, we approach a selection of non-urban families and ask them to host (a pair of) us for 4 days and 3 nights.

- We brief the families on the purpose (to participate in their daily life, to learn what things are important in their context)

- Families are not paid to host us, however:

  - We offer the households to keep the mosquito nets, solar lamps, and water treatment we bring with us.

  - We offer a token small payment at the end of our stay, to defray costs

2013: where and who

- North-central Kenya
  - Imenti North, Laikipia East, Nyeri North districts
- Host families were identified and briefed by Uwezo Kenya
- In total, we were 44 participants. Most were from Twaweza, but few joined us from partner Well Told Story (Kenya) and one from Hivos (Netherlands).

Methodology
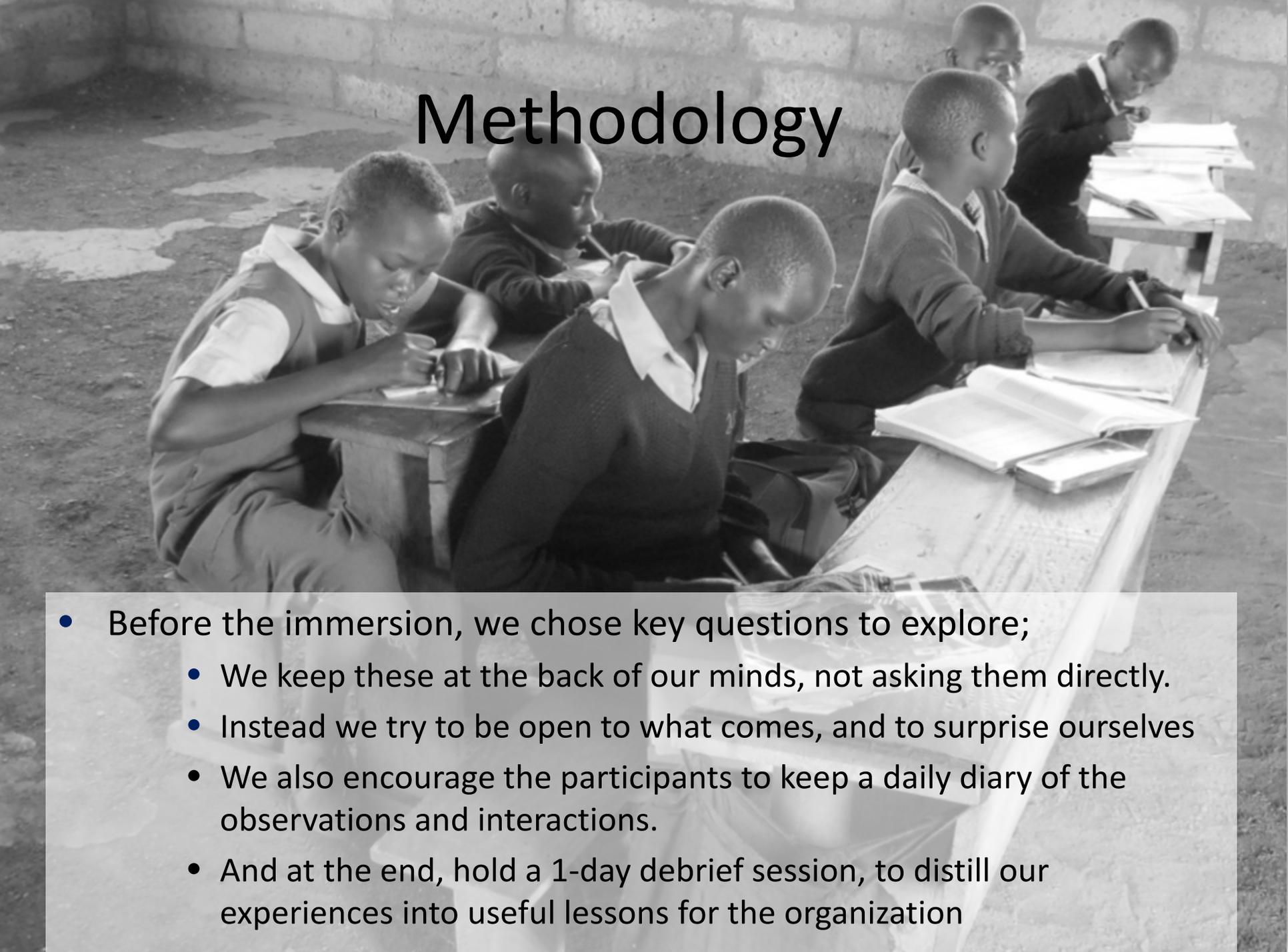
- Before the immersion, we chose key questions to explore;
  - We keep these at the back of our minds, not asking them directly.
  - Instead we try to be open to what comes, and to surprise ourselves
  - We also encourage the participants to keep a daily diary of the observations and interactions.
  - And at the end, hold a 1-day debrief session, to distill our experiences into useful lessons for the organization

What do we actually do?

- As the immersion is not a research exercise, the main methodology is to, well, immerse. By this, we mean:

| Method	How to do it
Observing and listening	The art of saying nothing
Asking questions	Ask without being directive; ask a lot of "why"; but in low key manner, talk to all kinds of people
Participating as much as possible without being a nuisance	Go ahead and join in. This year, we picked coffee, worked in the fields, fetched water, peeled potatoes, milked cows, drank tea with visitors, just hung out and much more
Visiting selected services & groups in community	Talk to those in key institutions and networks. We visited schools, health centers, religious groups, women's co-ops, water points, pubs, small shops and more

The questions in the back of our mind
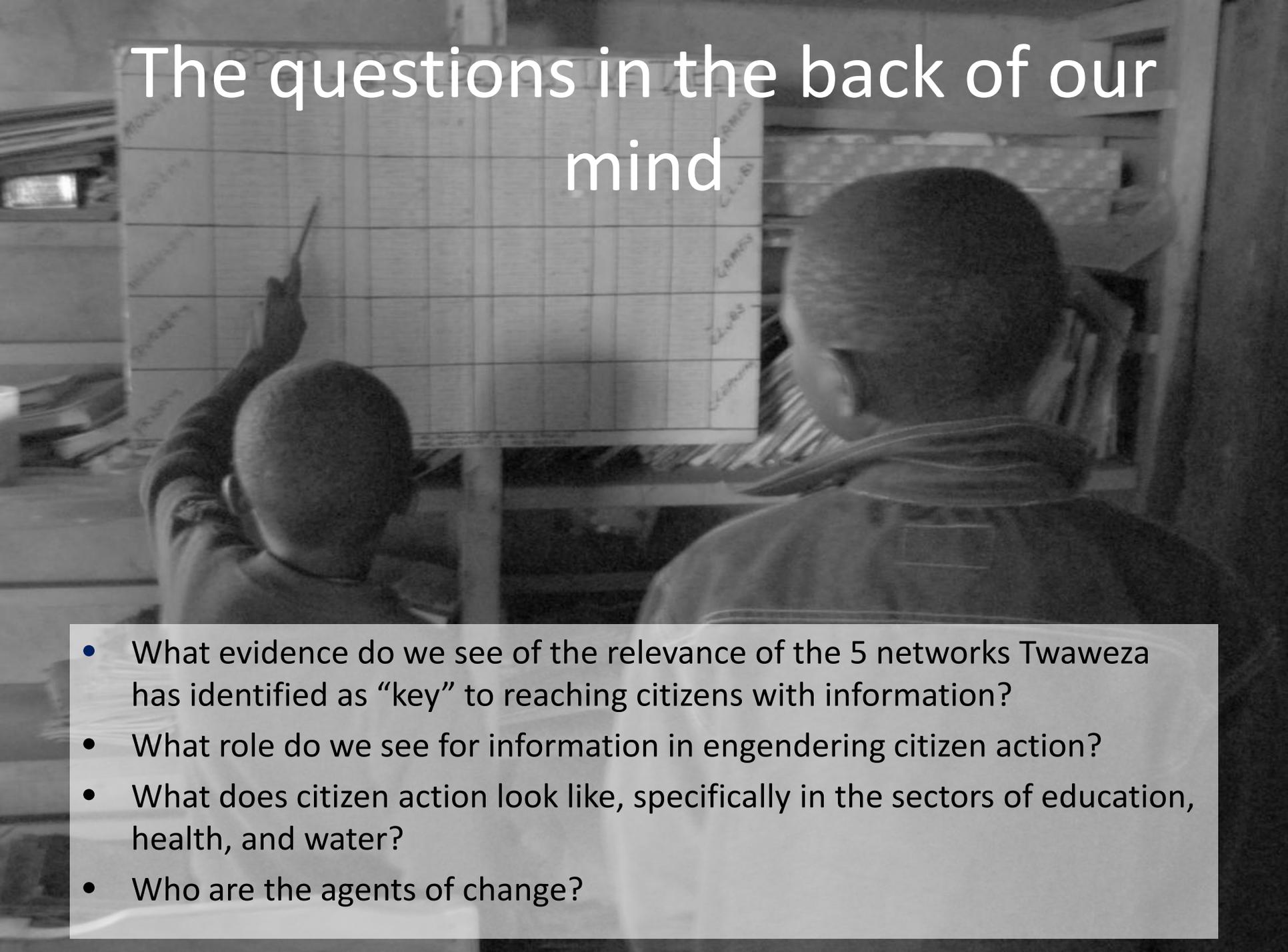
- What evidence do we see of the relevance of the 5 networks Twaweza has identified as "key" to reaching citizens with information?
- What role do we see for information in engendering citizen action?
- What does citizen action look like, specifically in the sectors of education, health, and water?
- Who are the agents of change?

What did we observe

What we observed: Mass media

- Radio and TV seemed to be very present in people's daily lives (and TV appeared to be equally as widespread as radio).

  - Importantly, people also discussed the information received

- Access to media was widespread, but not uniform (in some cases, women had considerably less access than men)

- Families did not appear to regularly buy print media, but when it was available, everyone engaged with it and over a number of days
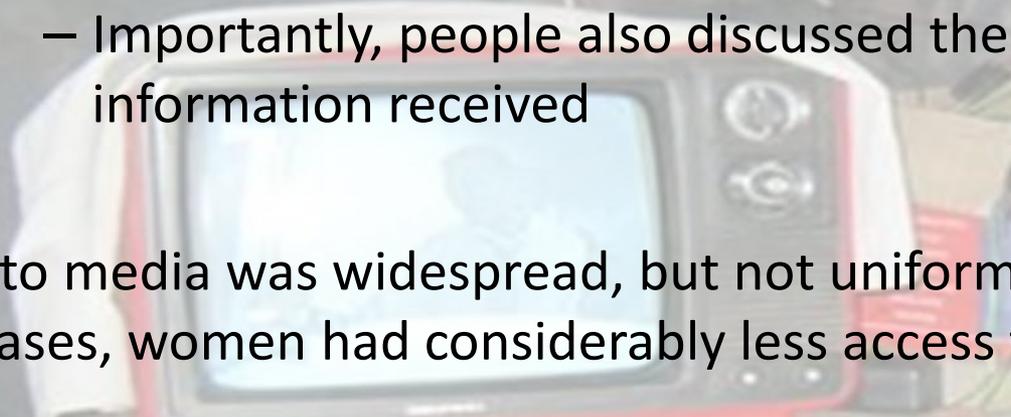
What we observed: Fast-moving consumer goods

- Little shops were pervasive everywhere

…however, most basic goods (oil, flour, sugar, etc.) got re-packaged into smaller quantities, and re-sold in non-descript plastic bags – challenging the notion that messages could effectively be spread on packages

What we observed: Mobile telephones

- All households visited contained at least one (often multiple) mobile phones

- Mobile phones clearly amplified people's ability to connect, meet, and organize

- There was a range of reactions to unsolicited text messages: some people deleted them quickly; others seemed to value getting them

- There is a (slow but steady) increase in availability of smart phones, which allow for greater interactivity and engagement
  - potentially a real boost to how information can be delivered
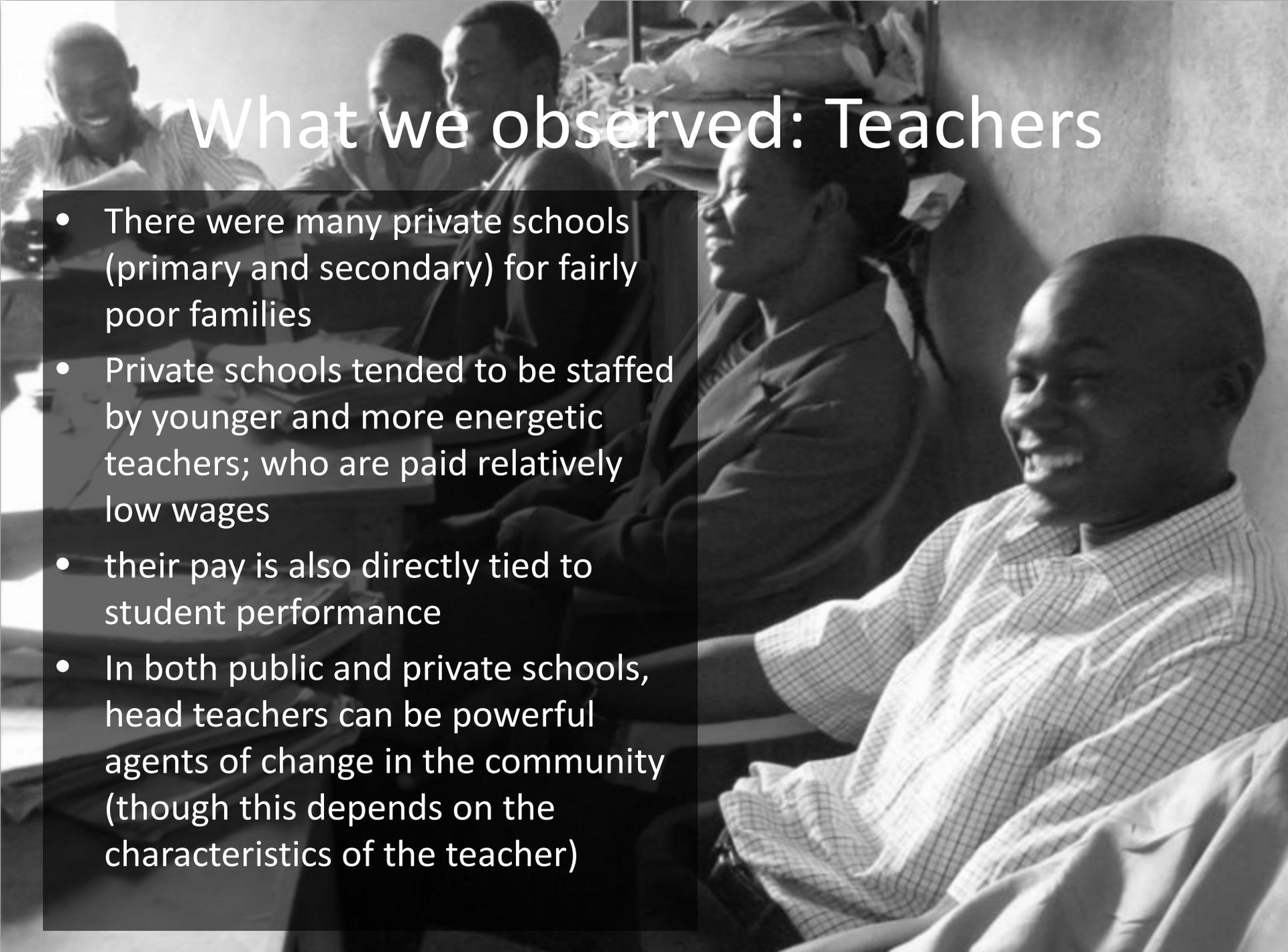
What we observed: Teachers

- There were many private schools (primary and secondary) for fairly poor families

- Private schools tended to be staffed by younger and more energetic teachers; who are paid relatively low wages

- their pay is also directly tied to student performance

- In both public and private schools, head teachers can be powerful agents of change in the community (though this depends on the characteristics of the teacher)

What we observed: Religious networks

- Religious networks were ubiquitous and powerful – they exert significant influence over people's opinions, social interactions, and time
- They seemed to be particularly important for women
- They can contribute significantly to improved service provision in a community (e.g., running schools, clinics, etc.)
- More than other networks, religious institutions are a double-edged sword: they unite people, but they can create divisions between the different denominations; they spur people to action around a particular issue, or they may promote a passive "god will provide" attitude

What we observed: New networks?

- Established local government and administrative structures
  - Clearly, they are influential. The question is, does Twaweza want to engage with them directly?
- Popular culture:
  - Music and film, sports events and personalities
  - Effective way to reaching young people - even in the most remote areas, young people knew the popular music and sports figures
- Women's groups and cooperatives:
  - Very pervasive networks, and key for reaching women
- Possible new vehicles for spreading information:
  - Barber shops, salons
  - Dubbed DVDs
  - Community theatre

How will these observations influence our work?
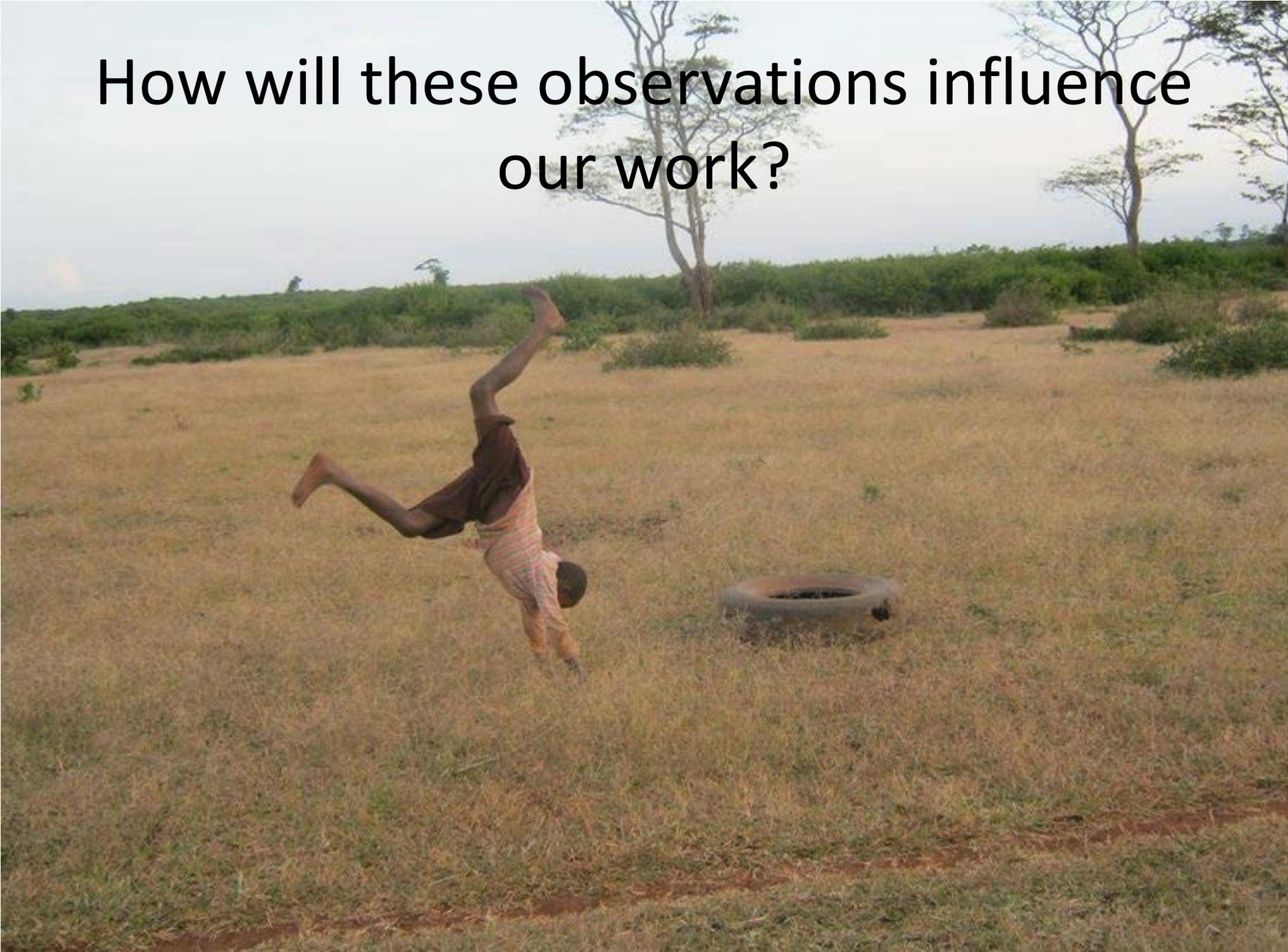
Need a better understanding of the role of information in motivating citizen action

- Information may only take real shape (have resonance), become a useful (useable) tool once it is shared, debated, vetted through meaningful social relationships
- Most instances of change featured a specific person, a "champion" that made it happen
- Info needs to be accompanied with specific, concrete actions

Who are agents of change

- In some cases, the Twaweza "usual suspects": head teachers, religious leaders
- Sometimes it is the local administration structures, and the wazees ("wise" people)
  - Though these groups can also be resistant to change
- Sometimes, it is individuals who take it upon themselves to have active roles in the
- community (outside the above structures)
  - Twaweza likes to call them positive "outliers"
  - Women's groups (and their leaders) featured prominently
- Young people did not, by and large, feature as agents of change, with the possible exception of young teachers.

…change in what area or sector?

- Related to the 3 sectors relevant to Twaweza, we saw :
  - Significant engagement with the **education** system: from attending meetings, to collecting money in the community to hire extra teachers, to taking children out of under-performing schools and placing them in better (often private) ones
  - Significant engagement with **water** provision, such as collecting funds to maintain/repair water points and pumps
  - On the other hand, we didn't observe much direct engagement with the **health** sector
- Economic pressure ("livelihood issues") seems to drive much of the change: people are very resourceful and inventive in increasing their income
  - There was also a stated link between education and better income: many families spoke about investing in education because it means better income in the future

Insights for our implementation strategy:

- Re-evaluate the networks we focus on
  - Change tactics regarding fast-moving consumer goods?
  - Explore popular culture as well as established authority structures as new networks
- Consider working intensively with a (small) group of change agents (positive outliers) in the communities
  - Could be selected Uwezo volunteers; could be self-identified active citizens; could be leaders of women's groups…
- Make information interactive: through mobile telephones, games & prizes, community theatre, etc.
- Try with renewed effort to get traction with religious organizations
  - Being careful to not be seen as partisan to any one denomination

Insights for our concepts and measurement:

- Experiment much more with delivery mechanisms and products:
  - Test ideas and products, **get feedback from users/citizens**, be iterative, nimble, pilot at small scale before going big
- Define citizen agency more sharply
  - And measure it
- Sharpen our causal narratives:
  - Which network --> which audience --> what specific action?

The proof of the pudding?

- How will we know whether this immersion has been meaningful for the organization? We commit to:
  - incorporating the lessons learned in our work, and to document and track this through our internal systems
  - publicizing our experiences and thoughts in blogs and articles, inviting further reflection
  - revisiting the key messages a year from now (May 2014), and assessing whether
    - We had taken them on board
    - We learned anything new as a result
  - And if the answer to the above is even partly a Yes, we commit to going on immersion again in 2014 and keep learning

Immersion 2013 participants, the smiles are an indicator of the thirst for learning