



Press Release | For Immediate Release

Top district in East Africa for learning outcomes is Mbeya Urban in Tanzania, but overall Kenya outperforms Tanzania and Uganda Assessment reveals wide disparities within and between countries

13 May 2015, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Nairobi: Many children across East Africa are not learning basic literacy and numeracy skills. Only two out of ten pupils (20%) in the third year of primary school can read and do basic mathematics at Standard (or Grade) 2 level. By the time they reach the last year of primary school, one out of four East African children (24%) still have not acquired these skills.

These findings were released by Uwezo, a program of Twaweza, in a report entitled *Are our children learning? Literacy and numeracy across East Africa*. Data on learning outcomes, school conditions and households were collected in 2013 in every district across the region through citizen-led household-based assessments. Learning outcomes are assessed among children aged 6 to 16 through tests set at Standard (or Grade) 2 level.

When considering all children aged 10 to 16, whether in or out of school, results are also poor. In Kenya 64% passed both one literacy and a numeracy test, in Tanzania 48% and in Uganda 36%. This means that, even in Kenya, the best performing country, less than 7 out of 10 of all children (aged 10-16) have mastered Grade 2 literacy and numeracy skills.

The best performing district in East Africa is Mbeya Urban in Tanzania. However the rest of the top ten is populated by Kenyan districts, which dominate the upper ranks. Tanzanian districts tend to fall in the middle ranks and Uganda districts are consistently ranked near the bottom. The best performing Ugandan district is ranked 82 in the region. Seven out of the bottom ten places are taken up by Ugandan districts.

Wealth also appears to influence learning outcomes: in all three countries, there are large gaps between different wealth groups.

- In Kenya, seven out of ten pupils aged 10 to 16 (70%) in non-poor households, and four out of ten pupils (44%) in ultra poor households passed one literacy and numeracy test
- In Tanzania, just under six out of ten pupils aged 10 to 16 (55%) in non-poor households, and four out of ten pupils (39%) in ultra poor households passed one literacy and numeracy test
- In Uganda, four out of ten pupils aged 10 to 16 (42%) in non-poor households, and two out of ten pupils (24%) in ultra poor households passed one literacy and numeracy test

Despite the larger disparities in Kenya, ultra poor households in the country still, on average, perform better than non-poor households in Uganda.

The report also shows that learning outcomes have stagnated since Uwezo began collecting data in 2009/2010. East African children continue to face a crisis in the education system with no significant changes in learning outcomes over the last four years (up to 2013). Enrollment trends are similarly unmoving but have been high since the introduction of universal primary education in the three countries.

Uwezo metrics are used to assess progress against the Education for All goals. These goals were agreed with a 15-year timeframe in 2000 and cover both access to and quality of education. Overall, there are no significant changes in any of the metrics used to assess the goals in the four years that Uwezo data have been collected. However, enrolment is high with all three countries having over 90% enrolment rates. Similarly gender parity has been achieved in the three countries in terms of access and quality. There are no marked differences in access to schooling between boys and girls. Sadly boys and girls perform equally poorly in terms of learning outcomes. However these are national averages and so conceal geographical variation. Similarly, they do not consider any gender differences in primary school completion or secondary school enrolment.

The three East African countries remain a long way from “recognized and measureable learning outcomes [being] achieved by all.” However, children do seem to be learning general knowledge or life skills: in all three countries, by the fourth round of data collection (2013), at least nine out of ten children could answer the bonus general knowledge question.

Dr John Mugo, Director of Data and Voice at Twaweza observed *“The large disparities between and within countries, particularly along socio-economic lines, suggest that the region may be becoming more divided. In addition the lack of meaningful improvements in learning outcomes over the three rounds of Uwezo assessments point to a lack of strong action to tackle our education crisis.”*

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza, added *“The progress made to increase access and gender parity is to be commended. However we must ensure that the national figures do not hide local variations. Although this does not mean we need to abandon or ignore access issues, these data clearly show that the core focus for East African education over the coming years should be about quality and ensuring that children are in school and learning.”*

Uwezo assessed more than 325,000 children aged 6 – 16 in just under 150,000 households in 366 districts in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In addition data were collected from over 10,000 public primary schools.

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The full report, including samples of the tests used, is available at www.twaweza.org

About Uwezo

Uwezo, meaning ‘capability’ in Kiswahili, is housed in and managed by Twaweza. Uwezo conducts an annual learning assessment of children aged 6 to 16 in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The data collected are representative to district level due to the large sample size. Uwezo aims to spark national and local debate on learning outcomes to galvanise change.

About Twaweza

Twaweza means “we can make it happen” in Swahili. Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a world respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation.