



# For free or fees?

## Tanzanians' experiences and preferences on schooling

### 1. Introduction

The provision of quality education has high returns both for individuals and for economic growth<sup>1</sup>. Recognizing these benefits, governments in many low- and middle-income countries have made improving education a core focus of their development strategies.

This includes Tanzania, and education has been a key priority for the fifth phase government. The government allocated TZS 2.1 trillion to the sector for the 2017/2018 financial year compared to 1.7 trillion in 2015/2016<sup>2</sup>

Much of the government's effort has focused on expanding access to basic education by eliminating tuition fees and parental

contributions for pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary school. However, compliance with the Fee-Free Basic Education Policy, established by Circular 5 in December 2015, remains imperfect. In recent months, President John Pombe Magufuli has reaffirmed the government's commitment to fee-free schooling, warning education officials that he will hold them accountable if they do not successfully enforce the policy<sup>3</sup>.

The government has also acknowledged the importance of improving education quality in the face of rising student enrolment. The latest of the government's reform efforts focuses on improving numeracy for students in Grade 2,

- 1 Hanushek, Eric A. and Woessmann, Ludger, The Role of Education Quality for Economic Growth (February 1, 2007). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4122. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=960379>
- 2 [http://www.mof.go.tz/mofdocs/budget/Citizens%20Budget/CITIZENS%20BUDGET%202017\\_18%20%20%20%20%20\(Eng\\_Final\).pdf](http://www.mof.go.tz/mofdocs/budget/Citizens%20Budget/CITIZENS%20BUDGET%202017_18%20%20%20%20%20(Eng_Final).pdf)
- 3 <https://dailynews.co.tz/index.php/home-news/55438-jpm-spits-fire-on-school-charges>

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Sauti za Wananchi



bolstering the government's school quality assurance system, improving student retention and increasing the transition rate of girls to secondary school.

This brief presents findings on citizens' views on these and related matters of education policy. Would parents prefer to pay, if that led to higher quality? How much are parents involved in their children's education? And how well do they understand the performance of their local schools?

Data from this brief come from Twaweza's flagship *Sauti za Wananchi* survey. *Sauti za Wananchi* is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone survey. It is representative for Mainland Tanzania. Information on the overall methodology is available at [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti). For this brief, data were collected from 1,786 respondents from the second *Sauti za Wananchi* panel. This was the 23rd round of calls to this panel, conducted between 25 September and 15 October 2017.

This round was conducted in partnership with the Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) Tanzania Country Research Team.<sup>4</sup>

The key findings are:

- 9 out of 10 households in Tanzania with children in school send them to public schools.
- 9 out of 10 citizens would prefer to pay fees for education with higher standards over free, low-quality education.
- 9 out of 10 citizens would prefer a government program that trains and supports teachers over one that distributes free school uniforms.
- 85% of parents met with their child's teacher at least once in the past year, an increase compared to 2016.
- The majority of parents (53%) have contributed money, materials and/or labour for school construction in the past year.
- Parents are often unclear about how well their local primary school is performing.
- More than half of parents say they contribute to school management by disciplining their children.
- Only 1 out of 20 parents consider school fees as a factor when choosing secondary schools.

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4 RISE is a large-scale, multi-country research programme that seeks to understand how school systems in the developing world can overcome the learning crisis and deliver better learning for all. Twaweza is an institutional partner and member of the RISE Tanzania Research Project's consortium.

## 2. Eight facts about public education in Tanzania

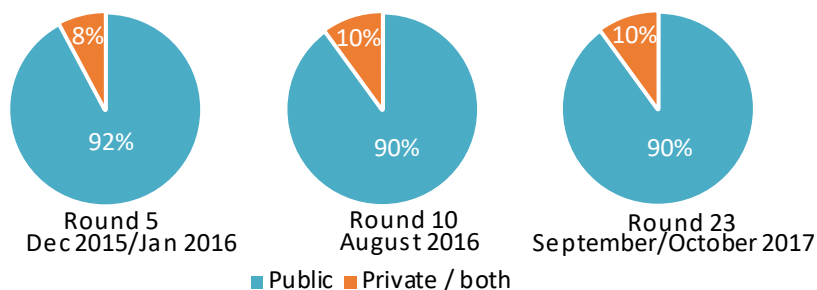
### Fact 1: Most children in Tanzania attend public schools

The public sector dominates the education landscape in Tanzania. Nine out of ten households (90%) report that their children exclusively attend public schools.

The share of households with a child in private school remained constant at 10% between August 2016 and September 2017. While nine out of ten households currently do not have any children in private school, over half (52%) indicated that they would send their child to private school rather than public school if both types of school were free.

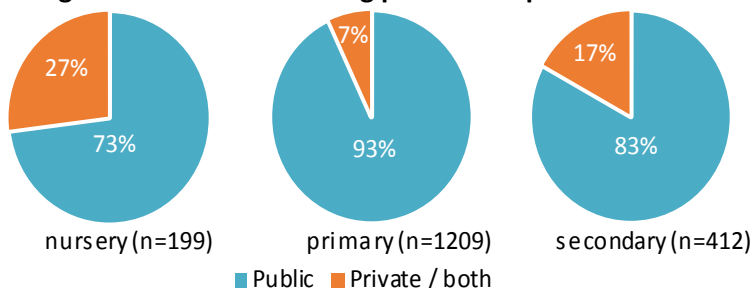
A higher proportion of parents send their children to private nursery schools (27%) and secondary schools (17%) than primary schools (7%),

**Figure 1: Children attending private and public schools<sup>5</sup>**



**Sources of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 5 (Dec 2016-Jan 2017; n=1,179), Round 10 (Aug 2016; n=1,457) and Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017; n=1,396)

**Figure 2: Children attending private and public schools?<sup>6</sup>**



**Sources of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017); Base: households with at least one child in that school type

### Fact 2: Most citizens would prefer to pay for quality

Nine out of ten (87%) citizens indicate that they would prefer to pay school fees for higher education quality, rather than have free but low quality schooling. Compared with findings

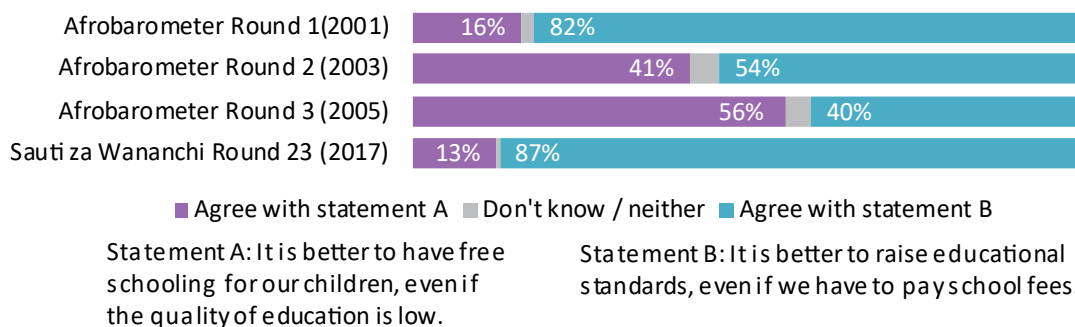
5 “Private / both” includes any household with one or more children attending a private school.

6 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

from Afrobarometer surveys<sup>7</sup> in 2001-2005, citizens' views on fees have changed; previously the majority were in favour of fee-free access.

It is important to note that these survey questions do not define higher educational quality or state exactly what price citizens would have to pay. However, the answer does suggest that many citizens are concerned about the current quality of education and are willing to pay for better.

**Figure 3: Free education with lower quality versus paid education with higher standards**

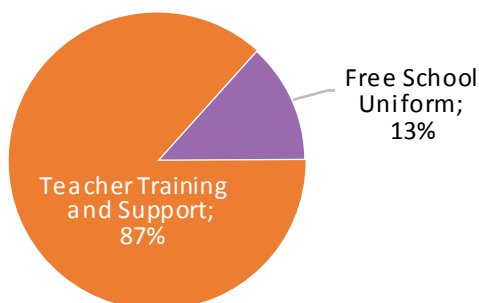


**Sources of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017; n=1,786) and *Afrobarometer* surveys Round 1 (2001; n=2,198), Round 2 (2003; n=1,223) and Round 3 (2005; n=1,304)

### Fact 3: 9 out of 10 citizens prioritise teacher training over free uniform

When asked whether they would prefer a government programme that provides children with free school uniforms or one that would provide teachers with additional training and support, nine out of ten citizens (87%) choose the teacher support and training programme. This provides additional support for the idea that citizens prefer initiatives that they think will boost educational quality over those that make schooling less expensive.

**Figure 4: Would you prefer a government programme that provides free school uniform so you do not have to pay for them any more, or to train and support teachers to teach better in the classroom?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017; n=1,786)

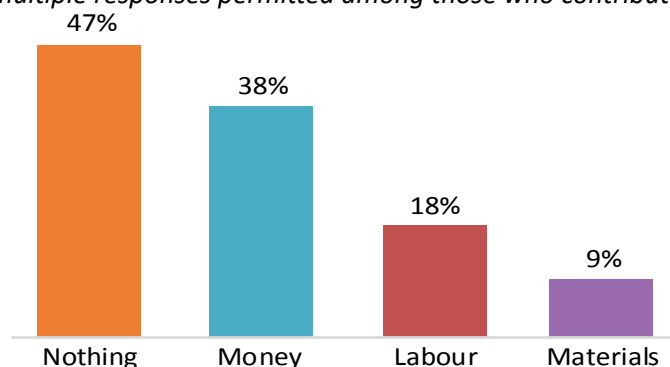
<sup>7</sup> See Afrobarometer.org

#### Fact 4: Half of parents contributed to school construction in the past year

More than half of parents of children in primary school report having contributed to school construction in the past year. Four out of ten (38%) report contributing money, while one out of ten (9%) contributed materials. Two out of ten (18%) contributed labour during the construction process.

**Figure 5: What did you or anyone in your household contribute to school construction this year?**

*(multiple responses permitted among those who contributed)*



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017);  
Base: households with at least one child in primary school (n=1,209)

Parents also make other financial contributions to their child's education. Almost all households with a child in primary school (99%) purchased materials for their child or children's schooling over the past year. The most common items households reported spending money on are stationery (98%), uniforms (75%), school bags (26%) and books (15%).

**Figure 6: Which items have you or anyone in your household bought for your child's schooling this year?**

*(multiple responses permitted)*

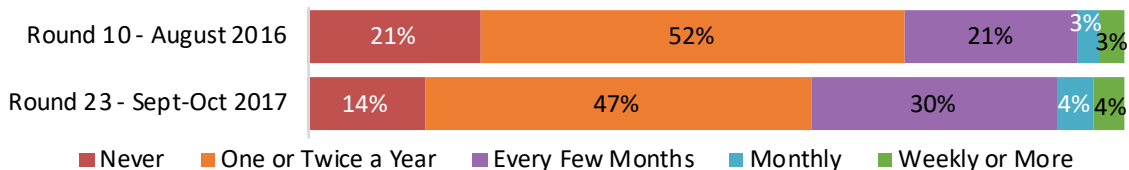


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017);  
Base: households with at least one child in primary school (n=1,209)

#### Fact 5: 7 out of 8 parents met the teacher once or twice in the past year

Seven out of eight parents of children in primary school (85%) report having met with their child's teacher at least once or twice over the past year – and approximately the same number (86%) report that they visited their child's school at least once over the same period (not shown in charts). The frequency of parent-teacher meetings increased from 2016 to 2017.

**Figure 7: In the past year, how often have you met with your child's or children's teacher?**



**Sources of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, households with at least one child in primary school – Round 10 (Aug 2016; n=1,391) and Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017; n=1,209)

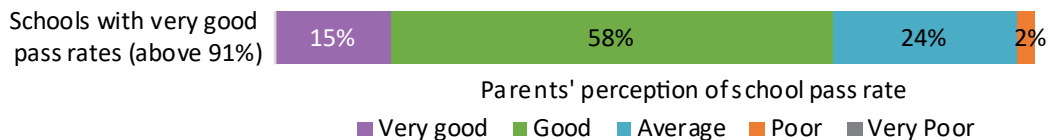
### Fact 6: Parents are often unclear about how their local primary school is performing

Rural parents of children in primary school have poor knowledge of their local school's performance, a finding that suggests that information barriers persist despite recent government initiatives to disseminate Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) /Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) pass rates.

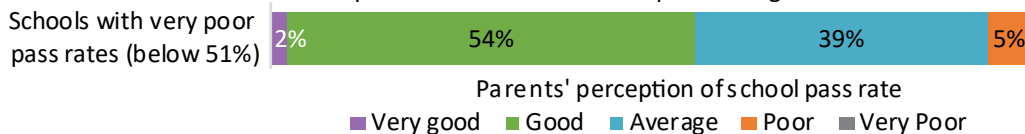
In particular, there is a large mismatch between parents' perceptions of performance on the PSLE and actual performance<sup>8</sup>: where the local primary school had a very poor pass rate (below 51% of pupils), most parents (56%) think their school's performance is either *good* or *very good*. Only 6% of these parents rate the school's performance as *poor* or *very poor*. Similarly, on the other end of the performance spectrum, where the local primary school has a very good pass rate (above 91%), only 15% of parents think the school's performance is *very good*, while a quarter (26%) judge it as either *average* or *poor*.

**Figure 8: Parents' Perception of Local Student PSLE Performance vs. Actual Performance**

In schools with very good exam results (pass rate above 91%), how well do parents think the school is performing?



In schools with very bad exam results (pass rate below 51%), how well do parents think the school is performing?



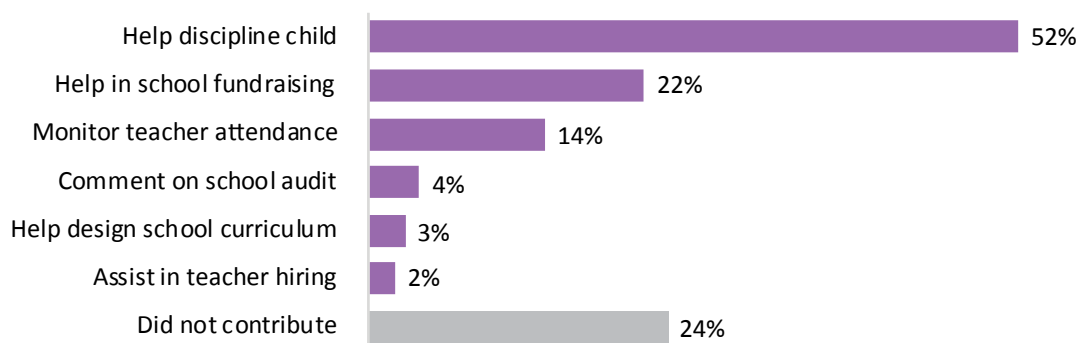
**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017); Base: rural households with at least one child in primary school (n=503)

<sup>8</sup> Households were asked to characterize the performance of the public primary school attended by the majority of children in their village.

## Fact 7: Parents' biggest contribution to school management is discipline

The most common way that households with children in primary school contribute to school management is through disciplining their children (52%). Parents also contribute by assisting with raising funds (22%) or monitoring teacher attendance (14%). One in four households with children in primary school (24%) do not assist in school management at all.

**Figure 9: Please indicate all of the ways in which you or others in your household contribute to school management**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017);  
Base: households with at least one child in primary school (n=1,209)

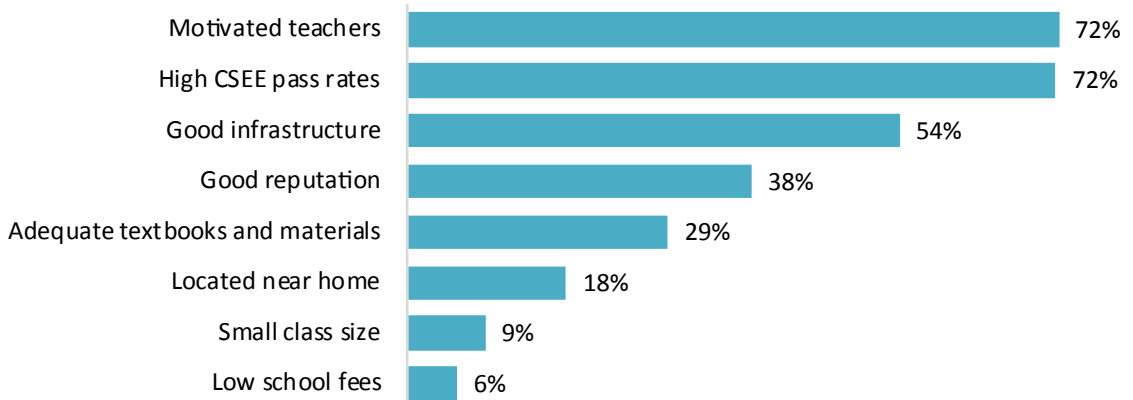
Despite this, the majority of parents (52%) see themselves as bearing the primary responsibility for ensuring their children are learning. This is followed closely by teachers: 46% of parents say teachers are more responsible. Almost no parents name education managers, elected officials or other government officials as responsible for children learning (not shown in charts).

## Fact 8: Only 1 out of 20 parents consider school fees as a factor when choosing secondary schools

Parents of children in primary school are most likely to identify high Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (CSEE) pass rates (72%) and motivated teachers (72%) as among the top three qualities they value in a prospective secondary school for their child. The next most important attributes for households are good infrastructure (54%) and a good reputation (38%).

One out of twenty parents (6%) cite low school fees as a key consideration for their choice of secondary school and less than four out of twenty (18%) highly value the school's proximity to their home. This suggests that parents are more concerned with the quality of secondary education their child receives than with fees or the school's distance from their home.

**Figure 10: What are the three most important attributes for your choice of secondary school?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey, Round 23 (Sep-Oct 2017);  
Base: households with at least one child in primary school (n=1,209)

### 3. Conclusion

Parents have spoken unequivocally; they have strong preferences for a focus on the quality of education over the price. This may be due to the expansions in access to school that have accompanied the abolition of fees or because they see an emerging challenge. In either case, policy-makers would do well to take into account these preferences when devising education policy.

Parents are continuing to make contributions to education in the area of construction; although these data were collected before the recent re-emphasis on voluntary contributions being made to district authorities not directly to schools<sup>9</sup>. And there has also been an increase in the number of citizens reporting that they met with their child or children's teacher once or twice in the past year. Perhaps parents are starting to (re-)engage with public schools.

However there are still substantial local information gaps. Although the information alone will not necessarily prompt parents to become more involved in school issues, it may help to bring schools closer to communities. Recent Twaweza research<sup>10</sup> has found that when parents are given information, can participate in decisions and are welcomed in school spaces and processes, they feel more connected to their children's education and are more willing and likely to take action to support the school. And recent global literature points to parental involvement as an integral strand of school leadership which is a critical part of making sure children learn in school<sup>11</sup>.

Perhaps by heeding the voices of the parents and supporting them to reconnect with school issues, Tanzania can make even better progress in ensuring all children access their right to quality education.

9 <https://www.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/home-news/55438-jpm-spits-fire-on-school-charges>

10 Not yet published

11 World Development Report 2018 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>