

# Twaweza Management Response Letter

As a response to the report “Evaluation Twaweza: Tanzania, 2009-2014” by Policy Research International, and Project Services International.

22 May 2015

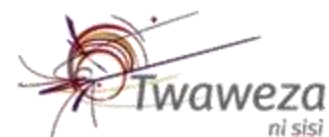
We have read with great interest the final report of the external evaluation of Twaweza Tanzania, as commissioned by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), and carried out by Policy Research International (PRI).

The overall objective of the evaluation was to provide a comprehensive summary and aggregation of Twaweza’s Tanzania-based activities over the 2009-2014 period, as well as to establish, on a sample basis, the links (substantiated by evidence) between the activities and (a) stated organization’s objectives, and (b) other observed changes in the relevant sectors/domains. The purpose was for Twaweza and its development partners to reflect on the achievements and lessons learned from the first implementation period, and to contribute to the thinking and planning for the strategic period starting in 2015.

Below we shortly mention a highlight of the findings that have been particularly useful for our future direction and planning, followed by challenges and recommendations. For those with little time but a keen interest in all the findings and recommendations, we refer to the Executive Summary and sections F (conclusions) and G (recommendations) of the full report.

## ***Highlight Findings on Organizational Structures, Processes & Systems***

1. Twaweza’s governance structures have served it well to ensure legal and statutory compliance and to establish responsibilities, practices, and processes.
2. Twaweza’s policies, procedures, and workflows are fully documented, computerized and functioning. There are appropriate systems for the management and control of activities, comprehensive program and project management, and a Monitoring and Evaluation system.
3. Twaweza's financial management systems and processes, including the procurement processes, carefully steward funds and ensure value for money. Overall, the sub-granting and output-based contracts are producing value for money.
4. Twaweza has developed and implemented management structures, processes, and systems that are sound and largely meet the needs of the organization.
5. The organizational culture reflects an ethos of transparency. Management controls include a strong focus on cost-control, prevention of corrupt practices and achieving results. Managers are cognizant of these factors in their programming.



### ***Highlight Findings on Programmatic Achievements***

1. The Sauti za Wananchi initiative is a new and economically efficient use of a nationally representative mobile phone survey method for opinion polling, producing numerous briefs targeting policy makers and the media, on issues of national importance.
2. The education-focused randomized controlled trial “KiuFunza” or “Thirst to Learn” has generated new evidence on initiatives that improve learning outcomes in basic education; these are already starting to have an effect on government policies.
3. The annual Uwezo learning assessments are the largest national assessment of basic literacy and numeracy in Africa. The outputs provided the high quality evidence required to persuade the public and policy-makers that enrolment does not equal learning.
4. Media-based partnerships have forged innovative ways to influence the media landscape; an estimated 25-30% of Tanzanian citizens have been reached with Twaweza core messages and values. An example is the televised show MiniBuzz, which features ordinary citizens debating issues of national importance.
5. Twaweza has forged innovative partnerships with “fast moving goods (FMG)” partners, such as the printing of 40 million school exercise books with the Uwezo test.
6. There are multiple outputs under Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation (LME). The majority of the activities capture well questions of quality, distribution, reach and coverage for many initiatives. They provide the necessary support for its management of partnerships and contracts. A selected few have gone further to measure short-term effects of the initiatives.
7. The multiple outputs focused on education and learning, combined, made a direct and major contribution to shifts in perception and policy about education in Tanzania. They have influenced the actions of Tanzania’s Ministry of Education, they contributed directly to four out of nine education initiatives within the government’s “Big Results Now” priority areas, and it is anticipated that they will contribute to improved payments of capitation grants to schools.
8. Strategic engagement activities have contributed to the increased climate of greater accountability of government. For example, Twaweza’s influence can be traced to Tanzania’s first and second Open Government Partnership (OGP) Plans, to the government’s Big Results Now initiative, and to the tabling of the Access to Information bill in parliament.

### ***Highlight findings on key challenges and recommendations***

In addition to noting the achievements, the evaluation also outlined some **key challenges** which we faced during the implementing period, and **recommendations** for going forward. We discuss these in six core areas and reflect on them below, briefly noting our response. Some have already led to adjustments, for others we are looking into adjustments in the short to medium term, and a few where we part ways with the evaluation.

#### **1. On the Theory of Change:**

- 1a) Despite Twaweza's success in reaching large numbers of people with development messages, little "measurable citizen action" has been generated, and none has been measured as translated into improvements in the service delivery and related development goals. Twaweza has acknowledged in its own Pivot Note that much remains to be done to achieve its full potential. The evaluation finds that a suitable groundwork has been established and assets have been built which can be used effectively for future programming.
- 1b) Such improvements require substantial new attention to the theory and the logic models of Twaweza’s programming in the new strategy, the specificity of its goals, setting new and more appropriate targets and indicators of progress, and benchmarks.
- 1c) Specifically, this includes setting up behavioral and other markers of change which clearly define the kinds of progress Twaweza intends to help bring about. These could be monitored to provide

feedback and for developing a deeper understanding of the responses by key actors and stakeholders.

**Twaweza response:** Many of the challenges highlighted by the evaluation revolved around our original Theory of Change, the specificity of the goals and metrics, and the feasibility of achieving impact against those. We take much of it to heart; formulating a Theory of Change that has Citizen Agency at its core is no small feat and it will likely take us a few more rounds of thinking and trying before we are happy. As the evaluation team pointed out, we began in earnest the process of re-examining our theory of change and the assumptions which underpin it in 2013, with the Evaluator's meeting, followed by the Pivot Note, and a strategic retreat in early 2014. These three key events shaped 2014 for us – a year in which we chose to pare down some of our intense activities (e.g., a reduced sample size for Uwezo assessment), in order to focus on learning (through a number of small-scale experiments) and on developing our new strategy. Further details on this can be found in our 2014 Annual Report.

We ought to add two notes here. First, we continue to maintain that citizen agency (as measured by citizens actively accessing information, taking part in public debates, reaching out to authorities, etc.) is a means to improved service delivery (in public service provision), as well as an end in itself. Therefore, we would want to measure our contribution towards both sets of outcomes. Second, the evaluation was conducted half-way through the original 10-year period, and we have always expected that meaningful large-scale change would take a long time. Therefore, we were most keen to see changes in intermediate outcomes which, we do take the point, needed to be articulated more sharply in our original strategy. On the other hand, we are not surprised to not (yet) detect changes in long-term outcomes.

Nevertheless, we do agree that our theory of change and core approach merit further scrutiny and revision – after all, charging ahead in the wrong direction won't bring the transformations we seek. As a result of this process, which began before the external evaluation, but the importance and focus of which the evaluation reinforced, the new strategy tackles many of these issues head-on. For instance, we have assessed our strengths and focused on two domains where we can make the greatest contribution: basic education and open government. We have adopted a problem-driven approach to thinking through much more specifically about what issues we want to address in the chosen domains, identifying key strategic (i.e., collaborative) partners as well as boundary (i.e., target) partners, and being specific about the kinds of change – including behavioral change – we want to promote and detect. We have specified hypotheses and key metrics on an annual basis to allow for more frequent check on progress; we have instituted a more reflective mid-year review for internal feedback, and have revised operational unit-based benchmarks.

**2) On Operations:** Improve operational systems as noted and complete the integration of Uwezo. Use opportunities provided by process improvements, increased clarity and goal specifications, to reduce bottlenecks and to reprioritize staff time and activities, in order to have more space for synergies between the activities, and improve the quality and timeliness of outputs.

**Twaweza response:** This is an excellent recommendation. As we begin 2015, Uwezo has been fully integrated within Twaweza: we now have one strategy, one annual plan, and a unified budget.

Building on the increased specification of outcomes and metrics in our new strategy, our annual plan now reflects the synergistic nature of how the functional units contribute to common goals: the plan is not organized around units, but around problem-and-success statements. In most statements, multiple units share responsibility for achieving the desired outcome. While this emphasizes the joint ownership of goals and the collaborative nature of the work between units, it may also take

some time before the organization as a whole is able to manage the workload in this new way. To allow us to focus on the substance and reduce bottlenecks, we have revised and re-stated core policies (programmatic, financial, human resources), and continue to improve on our management and financial systems. For example, we have instituted a system of greater financial delegation at the level of Directors, to avoid bottlenecks of authorization of limited funds. Also, we continue to integrate our key processes and workflows (such as contracting, procurement, and payments) into our cloud-based system, both freeing us from paper-based trails and allowing for a greater accessibility to information (on contract, approvals, obligations, spending, etc.) and the frequent review and use of this information for management purposes.

- 3) On Budget-vs-Expenditure:** Twaweza has consistently underspent its proposed budget. Careful disbursement of committed funds against outputs is good and it accounts for about one third of Twaweza's under-spending variance. Still, Twaweza should look for ways to improve its budgeting systems moving forward, while maintaining the care with which funds are managed.

**Twaweza:** This recommendation did not come as a surprise. And we agree. As noted partially in the responses above, we have taken to heart the recommendation to have better and more frequent insight into – and oversight of – our obligations, payments, budget vs. expenditure calculations, and other key financial information. At the same time, we are narrowing the gap between budget and expenditure: in 2014, organization-wide expenditure was 76%, which is the highest point on an improving trend (across the first strategic period). We have still some ways to go – but the trend is encouraging, and with a number of new mechanisms and policies in place as articulated in our Annual Plan 2015, we expect to see further improvement in the next years.

- 4) On Going to Scale:** Twaweza has often stated that it avoids "all boutique programs", which it defines as activities at a small scale. But small scale pilots are a proven way to take forward thoughtful and innovative ideas and initiatives. Experimentation is often best done on smaller scale, and should only be scaled up with adequate evidence. Twaweza has demonstrated its capacity to support innovative interventions from concept, to pilots, through their testing, and then to broader applications.

**Twaweza response:** We agree, indeed we are heartened by the evaluator's assessment of our capacity to conduct meaningful experiments; the prime example is our KiuFunza randomized control trial. On the other hand, we take the evaluator's recommendation not to instruct us to undertake more KiuFunza-like trials, but instead to conduct multiple small-scale field-based experiments which help to determine the shape and direction of an intervention. Here, the term "experiments" is used loosely to describe both quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method exercises which – through testing different variations of an intervention, or exploring the feasibility of an approach, or examining the effect of an initiative – contribute useful evidence to guide implementation. We would like to do more of this; in our 2015 annual plan there are already a few instances of such testing; for example, a qualitative field-based experiment to take place in 6 schools, testing different meaningful but low-resource approaches of involving parents in school decision-making. Recognizing the added value of this kind of testing, we aim to build more of such mechanisms into our regular work.

We also take the evaluation recommendation not to instruct us to undertake small scale activities that hold no potential to be useful at scale. In fact, Twaweza's reference to "boutique projects" was a critique of the mushrooming small and fancy experiments (sometimes called "experimentitis") with little practical value for the nation's problems. Starting small has always been our preference, but only if there is potential for scaling to national.

- 5) On Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation:** Although LME activities and results have always been stated priorities for Twaweza, there have been multiple challenges in translating this commitment into practice, beyond monitoring. This was in part due to the early focus on “lean” operations, and a simultaneous high demand for monitoring the wide portfolio of activities. External evaluations have focused on large-scale population-based change, missing opportunities to capture significant change at a more focused scale (e.g., among key actors). Twaweza ought to increase internal evaluative capacity, and review a range of alternative evaluation methods and adopt those that meet Twaweza’s needs and circumstances; build the organizational skills and confidence to select and apply appropriate methods for learning, and consider Outcome Mapping (OM) and other complexity-oriented approaches in this regard.

**Twaweza response:** We agree with a number of observations here. For instance, we are expanding our LME “toolbox” through the adoption of Outcome Mapping in 2015. Currently we are piloting the OM approach in a few relevant work areas: our open government strand targeting key high-level offices in Tanzania, and the education strand, targeting core education administrators in districts in Tanzania and Uganda. This year is a pilot year for OM; with coaching from a professional training institute, we will assess towards the end of the year what we have learned and how to make best use of it in the future.

We also agree with the overall observation that making the link between monitoring and higher-order evaluations has not been easy. Indeed, Twaweza’s evaluation strategy has gone through several transformations which are worth noting: in early stages (2009/10), a single external entity was sourced and engaged to conduct an overall evaluation of Twaweza. After about a year both parties decided to part ways; from Twaweza’s perspective, it was clear that the kind of methodological mix and expertise in variety of areas were not found in a single entity. As a result, a “jigsaw” approach to evaluation was adopted: that is, engaging with a number of entities with specialized interests and skills to examine a portion of the organizational theory of change, or a particular hypothesis. Some of these yielded significant insights for the organization as well as for the wider accountability field (see for example Lieberman et al<sup>1</sup> for a peer-reviewed publication, and an influential development blog From Poverty to Power<sup>2</sup> for a multi-entry discussion on Twaweza). However, as they examined a “slice” of Twaweza, there was not a comprehensive evaluation picture which could be constructed from the different slices. As a result, we are now designing a new evaluation strategy: one which combines the “umbrella” assessment similar to the Sida-spearheaded evaluation discussed herein (internally to be done annually; externally perhaps every other year), together with evaluation “deep dives” into particularly interesting or poignant questions and hypotheses.

- 6) On Choice of Sectors:** Review the goals for health and water. The evaluation found no evidence to support the Twaweza proposal to drop all commitment to health and water as goals. There is an opportunity to utilize capacities that have been developed, together with efforts to increase its depth of knowledge and by improved networking with additional partners.

**Twaweza response:** We are heartened that the evaluation team believes Twaweza can contribute meaningfully to the health and water sectors. To be clear, we are not dropping all of our commitments in these sectors; what we are doing, however, is capitalizing on our strengths and focusing our energies. After five and more years of attempting to meaningfully address the

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<sup>1</sup> “Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya,” Evan Lieberman, Daniel Posner and Lily Tsai. *World Development* (v60, August 2014), pp. 69-38.

<sup>2</sup> <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/last-word-to-twaweza-varja-lipovsek-and-rakesh-rajani-on-how-to-keep-the-ambition-and-complexity-be-less-fuzzy-and-get-more-traction/>

education, water and health sectors, as well as the sector-spanning concepts of open government, we have learned to be ambitious and focused at the same time. The problems we want to tackle, the changes we want to promote are both deep-reaching within the education sector, as well as wide-reaching in terms of touching upon a variety of sectors through the lens of open government. The first years of Twaweza, including this evaluation, have shown that in our case, we do not lack ambition; rather, we can benefit from better specification, articulation, depth. At the same time, we take it to heart that our thinking ought not to be boiled down to linear diagrams and stiff tables, and that we utilize the capacities we have already developed in various areas. But this expansion comes not from having fingers in too many pies, rather from examining problems from a variety of perspectives, looking for synergies, being open to learning both from our own work and external evidence capitalizing on our strengths and reinforcing our networks. As an illustration, our Sauti za Wananchi platform is a formidable tool to collect data on a variety of topics related to basic services – very much also in the water and health sectors – yet the focus, for us, is not on the sectoral knowledge it generates but on the independent monitoring of government services, and high-quality representative polling of public opinion on the same. Through this, we have already strengthened partnerships with other entities – from the World Bank, to sister CSOs, to a few Ministries themselves.

In addition to articulating sharp recommendations for Twaweza, the evaluation also had recommendations for the Twaweza donors. We reproduce the top three points here:

1. Recognize that no other similar organization exists in the country that can replace Twaweza's work towards improvements in public policy; openness and transparency in government; and in education.
2. Continue support for Twaweza's efforts to improve and sustain public policy coverage and change, and to find ways of influencing engagement by civic society and the government towards still unattained development goals. Each donor will have its own budgetary and programmatic issues to consider, but based on the informal feedback, four out of five major donor partners expressed their intention to continue support.
3. Commit to supporting the successful programmes allowing for sufficient support for continued experiments and improved learning by Twaweza and by local partners.

Finally, we wish to thank the evaluation team for their efforts in this endeavor. The evaluation team landed in the perfect storm of Twaweza transitioning from the first strategic phase to the second one, searching for a new executive director, and writing a new strategy and a new annual plan. We apologize if it was not always possible to accommodate the team in the quiet and *Zen* setting one would wish for such an exercise. But the positive flipside is that the hundreds of questions coming our way from the evaluators did help us reflect, and exactly at the right moment. Thanks also to the colleagues at Sida, for their substantive support that kept us going, and also for financial support to the evaluation exercise. Many thanks also go to the DFID Tanzania office, The Accountability Program in Tanzania, and the Twaweza Advisory Board: your contributions have been extremely meaningful. It is indeed wonderful to have such dedicated partners.

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