



Press Release
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Most Tanzanians support an Access to Information law And they want officials to be punished if they don't provide the information requested

15 June 2015, Dar es Salaam: A large majority of citizens (84%) support the passage of an access to information law. Furthermore, eight out of ten citizens think that information held by public authorities should be accessible to ordinary citizens (77%). They also think that access to this information would reduce or prevent corruption and other wrongdoing by public officials (80%).

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *In the public eye: Citizens' views on access to information*. The brief is based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The findings are based on data collected from 1,330 respondents across Mainland Tanzania (Zanzibar is not covered in these results) in March and April 2015.

Citizens are in favour of having a clause in the access to information law that makes public officials who do not comply with the law punishable by law. Almost half (47%) list this as the most important feature of the law. One out of five (21%) say that the most important aspect of the law is to compel public authorities to publish information. There is similar support for the protection of whistleblowers (18%).

Fee free access to information is not so important— just one out of ten (10%) say that not paying fees is the most important feature of the law. Also, the time taken to respond to information requests is named by one out of twenty people (5%) as the most important aspect of access to information legislation.

Significantly, citizens report that when they do seek information from public service providers in particular, it is generally provided. Almost half of citizens had requested information from a water supplier during their last visit (44%); and 95% of those requests were fulfilled. Similarly at school, 43% report having asked for information and 84% of these received it. Public health facilities also do well but have lower numbers of requests: 19% of citizens had asked for information and 84% of these requests were responded to.

However, local government (street or village office) and political parties are less responsive. At local government level, officials responded to 76% of citizens who requested information. And political parties only responded to 39% of information requests.

Citizens have a wide range of expectations of how fast they will get answers to their information requests. One out of ten citizens (12%) believe they will get the information they seek immediately and the same number believe they will never receive it. The rest are evenly split – citizens think it will take anywhere from one week to more than three months to get the information they asked for.

While whistleblower protection seems to be a low priority, six out of ten citizens (62%) say that they would be very likely to report wrongdoing if they saw it. One in ten said that it was unlikely that they would report any wrongdoing (11%), and - when asked why – 37% of these people (or, 4% of the total population) reported that it was “dangerous”.

Elvis Mushi, Coordinator of *Sauti za Wananchi* commented on the findings “*Citizens are very supportive of an access to information law. But they also have specific and clear requirements of this law, most particularly in terms of accountability.*”

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza, added “*This data clearly shows substantial support for a law on access to information that requires public officials to provide information when it is requested. Encouragingly, the data also show that, contrary to popular perception, public service providers do provide information when asked for it. Interestingly, it is the political parties that are more closed. An Access to Information Bill was recently tabled in parliament suggesting that the government is responding to the citizens’ desire for easier access to information. It is up to citizens to shape the Bill into one that guarantees their constitutional right to information.*”

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For more information:

Risha Chande

Senior Communications Advisor, Twaweza

e: rchande@twaweza.org | t: (+255) (0) 656 657 559

Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org, or www.twaweza.org/sauti
- 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 globally respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa’s largest annual citizen assessment to assess children’s learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa’s first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership
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