



Press Release

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Citizens do not feel that they have influence over Government Most citizens go around official channels to get things done

2 September 2014, Dar es Salaam: Seven out of ten citizens (70%) report that they think that have no say in what Government does. At the same time seven out of ten citizens (71%) think voting is the only way they have influence over Government. At core these reflect the same sentiment – aside from the choices they make during elections - citizens do not feel that they influence government decision-making or activity. Citizens appear to place little trust in formal institutions or local government officials in addressing their issues: nine out of ten report that they have not interacted with their MP in the last year and half (47%) report not to have interacted with their street or village chairman to raise issues. In general formal political institutions seem to play minimal roles in people's lives. Only one out of seven citizens (16%) are members of any political party.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *Citizens making things happen: are citizens active and can they hold government to account?* The brief is based on data from Twaweza's *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative mobile phone survey that interviews households across Mainland Tanzania.

Despite the apparently low levels of interaction with formal channels, 6 out of 10 citizens (58%) report that they observed joint or collective complaints to officials in their community in the last 12 months (some of these may be reports of the same complaint). These complaints are normally organized to seek improvement in a public facility at the local level. The most common issues are teacher absenteeism and access to clean and safe water.

When it comes to raising issues within the community, *Sauti za Wananchi* found that people are fairly vocal about problems they face. Eight out of ten citizens (84%) raise their issues in groups which they belong to, three out of ten have called in to a radio station (32%) or complained to a friend (31%). However, citizens are much less likely to walk out of a discussion (only 9% reported to have done so in the past year), attend a demonstration or protest (8%), refuse to pay tax (6%) or use force to achieve a political cause (1%).

Community groups generally play a significant role in people's lives with seven out of ten Tanzanians belonging to one. Religious groups are most popular: one out of three citizens (36%) belong to one and three out of ten (30%) participate in at least half of the meetings. The second most common type are savings and loans groups, of which two out of ten citizens (22%) are members, most of whom (20% of citizens in total) attend at least half of the groups' meetings.

Community solidarity appears to be high: almost all citizens (98%) believe that if an unforeseen incident, such as house fire, occurred, their community would get together to help. In contrast, when asked whether they trust people generally, nine out of ten people (87%) felt that you had to be very careful with others.

Seven out of ten citizens (68%) also directly contribute to constructing or maintaining public facilities. Of these most (88%) contribute money while the rest (12%) contribute time. This is in stark contrast to apparently low levels of tax collection but shows that citizens are in one way or another contributing to the running of government. However these collections are not well regulated. In addition, insufficient transparency and checks and balances mean contributions may not be collected fairly or used productively. In fact, four out of ten of those (39%) who contributed to local facilities say they were forced to do so, eroding public trust.

Citizens also strongly feel that they can rely on themselves to get things done. Seven out of ten citizens (70%) respond positively to statements about their own ability to overcome challenges, find solutions to their problems and accomplish their own goals.

Rakesh Rajani, Head of Twaweza, commented on the findings. *“Tanzanians are active members of community groups and undertake collective action to complain to officials in their community. They also feel that they are able to tackle obstacles and make things happen in their own lives but express feelings of powerlessness when it comes to their influence over government. Thus far citizens have shied away from the more emphatic and vocal forms of citizen agency such as tax refusal, protests or walk outs. However significant service delivery challenges remain in all major sectors. If the Government does not become more responsive to this softer engagement, we may see citizens become more aggressive in the future.”*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org, or www.twaweza.org/sauti
- Twaweza is a ten year citizen-centered initiative, focusing on large-scale change in East Africa. Twaweza believes that lasting change requires bottom-up action, and seeks to foster conditions and expand opportunities through which millions of people can get information and make change happen in their own communities directly and by holding government to account.
- You can follow Twaweza’s work

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