



# Twaweza Immersion Information

## May 19-24, 2013

### Central Kenya

#### 1. The Immersion Experience

Twaweza's work is based on the belief that the people who ultimately make change happen in their lives are people themselves. In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania our sense is that citizen action, public pressure and public debate may be more effective drivers of change than expert or policy driven technocratic reforms. Our slogan is "Twaweza – Nisisi!"

If we say "Twaweza – Ni sisi!" we need to ask then "who are we and who is us?" If our aim is to build on what ordinary citizens are already doing, we need to be "tuned in"—we need to listen and see how people are living, how they communicate and express their aspirations. That's where the idea of the 'immersion' comes in. Immersions can enable staff—accustomed to working in the capital cities, and in offices with project plans, budgets, indicators and PR communications— to come face to face with the realities their activities are supposed to address and the people whose lives are supposed to change. It is not a research exercise; it is a "deep dive" into one particular location. The purpose is not to engineer data, but to give us an insight into a slice of a reality different from our own (yet which we aim to affect through our work). It is ultimately to inform our own thinking.

The approach we have used for three years involves staff from Twaweza and the partner organization spending three nights and three days with a previously identified host family, sleeping in their homes, eating with them, working in the fields, collecting water. Staff members simply participate in the families' daily lives unencumbered by normal professional roles and hierarchies, asking the families to provide a small 'window' for us into their lives. This type of participation offers a chance to scrutinize our individual and professional assumptions about development and the lives of ordinary citizens: a chance to *listen* to the people's perspectives and see the coping mechanisms they employ to ensure their survival and their quality of life. In our experience so far, families responded with great generosity, curiosity and dignity.

Briefing and de-briefing is an important part of the success. In preparation, many staff members ask what they *should* be doing in the village, what they should be delivering/providing/teaching. Making sure that people are encouraged to leave their roles as 'planners/providers/advisors' behind is key to the learning and to the value to the organization. Sharing stories, challenging assumptions and recording experiences makes up a central part of the de-briefing sessions.

The intention is not to leave inputs or promises behind with the host families. The logistics of setting up the immersion therefore involve careful and sensitive planning, and explaining to potential host families that we (the visitors) are there to learn from them, and that they (host families) should not make any changes to their lives when they host us, as that would defeat the purpose of the exercise.



In 2009, Twaweza undertook the annual immersion exercise with the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) in Tanzania. In 2010, Twaweza and Uwezo staff stayed with host families in four districts across Kenya. In 2012 it was held in Njombe, Tanzania. This year, we are going to three districts in Central Kenya: Nyeri North, Imenti North, and Laikipia East.

## 2. Immersion Objectives

Twaweza has the following objectives for doing an immersion:

First, at *the individual level*: the immersion aims to enable each of us as individuals to:

- Encounter the lives of our host families in holistic ways i.e. through physical experiences, senses and feelings, as well as through our intellects and theories
- Challenge our assumptions, wherever possible, about ordinary citizens' lives
- Identify one issue that is important before setting off, to explore that issue while in the field, and to find a way to represent that issue back to the organization afterwards.

Second, at *the organizational level*: to enable us as an organization to develop a set of reference points to guide, inform and enrich our work and our learning throughout the year to come. This set of reference points can emerge in the reflections and subsequent work on outputs and be in the shape of shared experiences, stories and images. For us, an annual immersion thus acts as a kind of milestone, a set of vivid memories about how we developed as an organisation.

Third, at *the level of our theory of change*: to enable us as an organization to scrutinize our assumptions about change. Twaweza bases much of its work on the premise that information plays a central role in 'nudging' people to act to change their lives and that information flows through five key channels or networks (religious organisations, TV and radio, mobile telephony, consumer goods networks and teachers organisations). Are we right in making such assumptions about information? What other channels are important to people? How does information support/constrain agency?

These assumptions can be explored in contextualized, specific ways through an immersion. We do not expect consensus to develop in the de-briefings and we would like to welcome and document tensions and differences. In addition, we would like to find ways to express such tensions and differences in the outputs from the immersion, in order to foster organizational learning.

## 3. Immersion 2013 Theme

The following theme is suggested for 2013: "I think I can..." ...in relation to making positive change happen. In other words, it's about exploring the concept of citizen agency – a concept we at Twaweza talk about, but are perhaps not quite sure how it plays out in communities we are meant to be reaching. We are interested in both what triggers citizen action, as well as how it manifests itself.

- What triggers citizens to become engaged in addressing a particular issue? Do the networks that we have identified as important actually have a role in spurring citizen action? In particular, does media (radio, TV, print) feature in people's conversations as a prompt to action? Do religious leaders? How



about teachers or other community leaders? Is it perhaps something else entirely; for example, do people only (re)act when there is a real or perceived crisis?

- And on the other hand, what does that action look like? We have on purpose left the theme wide to capture the possibilities that people envision for themselves more broadly. The level of generality or specificity of information gathered we will leave to each immersion participant – go with what is interesting and comfortable. It might be about how people interact with service providers to get something done, or solve a problem related to services. This could be in our “usual” sectors (education, health, water), but it could also be wider, and relate to other structures/authority (e.g., community leaders, police, etc.). Or something different – like organizing a space for young people to get together, or setting up a micro-business, or....
- Where feasible, we would like to focus on young people: how do they interact with service providers? What kind of “citizen action” do they engage in? How do they make their voice heard? What helps them in speaking up/out? What are the big issues for them, and how to they address problems when they arise?

#### 4. Program outline

Activity	Date	Time
Arrive Nairobi	19 May	Around 1pm
Depart to Nanyuki (from airport, and office), organized coach	19 May	Around 2pm
Briefing session in Nanyuki, staying at Sportsman Arms 1 night	19 May	5-8pm (including dinner)
Check out, depart to host communities via local transportation	20 May	8-9am (after breakfast)
Time with host families; sleep 3 nights	20-21-22 May	All day
Return to Nanyuki via local transportation (Sportsman Arms)	23 May	Plan to arrive in Nanyuki by lunchtime
De-brief session (1 night at Sportsman Arms)	23-24 May	Through lunch on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Depart to Nairobi, organized coach	24 May	After lunch (approx. 2-3 pm)
Depart home	24 May	Schedule late evening flights (around 10pm)

#### 5. Immersion Methodology

##### Methodology for village visits



In this field trip/immersion we are *defamiliarising* ourselves with what we currently know in order to see things differently. The concept of immersion means letting one's preconceptions go and entering as far as possible into the life-worlds and perceptions of the villagers. To do this, it is valuable to suspend one's judgments temporarily. This does not mean letting go of a focus for our learning. It is about 'seeing' and 'listening' without preconceptions. We keep our theories and our questions in the back of our minds while we are in the villages so that we keep ourselves open to surprise and things we might not have seen, had we had them foremost in our minds.

The key is to 'be with people' to put ourselves in their shoes as far as possible. This means that is better not to ask many questions, as people may simply tell you what they think you want to know. Observing and listening are key, but below are other approaches you can try as well, in order of importance.

*Observing and listening:* This means simply watching quietly what is going on, without intervening or changing the situation as much as possible. Often it is by observing the small spontaneous interactions and social encounters that you suddenly gain insight into the ways in which people see things and what things mean to people. You might observe an interaction between a husband and wife, and suddenly understand something different about power. Or you might observe people listening to the radio and then discussing what they heard afterwards. Then you might overhear them referring to the issue the following day. Or you might observe an informal interaction between the village chairman and villagers, and suddenly understand something different about agency. In such interactions, it is useful to try to remember the setting that the interaction or event took place in, who else was present, what the activity was, what resources people were using to communicate or make things happen (objects, tools, technologies, language, literacy). Remember even something like a pen and paper can be seen as a technology for producing literate communication, a phone is another.

In these examples you didn't ask lots of questions or trigger the discussion: you watched and waited. Sometimes you might ask 'why'? Later, or the next day, after thinking about what happened you might want to go back and ask people why they said or did something. Try and remember the exact words people used, afterwards you can write these words down in your notebook as quotes.

*Participating (and using trial and error):* In this approach, you observe and listen more actively by taking part physically in what people are doing. Play soccer with kids; listen to the radio with people. Work with people as they fish, and as they load the fish you may do something wrong and wait for them to correct you. Then they will explain to you why they do something in a particular way. Or you might be carrying firewood and you need to ask for advice on how to bundle the wood. You may want to bring out the newspaper you have bought and leave them lying around. See what people do with them and what they say about them.

Again, you would try to note the objects, tools, technologies, language and literacy they are using. Afterwards you can write some notes in your notebook about these things.

*Talking:* In talking, it is important not to ask pre-planned questions, but to rather explore, asking a chain of questions or around a theme to learn about people's lives. If you follow the 'why' question, you can get quite far towards deep cultural understandings. You may also want to try and go further in talking. Without being rude, try not to accept what is said at face value, but ask for concrete examples of what the person is saying. So, if someone tells you that they can now take part in discussions about where a



new school is to be built, ask them where and when such a discussion took place, who was present etc. You may also want to try to get some group discussions going, but don't set these up specifically. Rather just to try to draw others in, and ask their opinions or views.

The key here is not so much the asking, but the listening and taking note of what is said and done, especially the words being used and the language in which the statements are being made. Try to remember direct quotes here, and then you can write them down later exactly as they were said. When you reflect afterwards, write notes in your notebook about differing opinions and how people expressed them. (But don't take notes while talking with or listening to people.)

*Visual approaches:* It can be helpful to draw diagrams and maps of what you are observing. It may be useful right from the beginning to draw your own map of the village, of the household, and to do a family tree of your host family. However, make sure not to assume a familiar 'researcher' or 'advisor' identity that keeps you busy and prevents you from experiencing, observing and listening.

Some of us will find it useful and appropriate to take photos, some of us will not want to. So use your own judgments but avoid carrying suspicious cameras. Don't attempt to take photos before you and your hosts are familiar and comfortable with each other and your mission. Ask permission to take any photos of people, or even better: ask people which photos they would like you to take to show your colleagues. The same would apply to taking notes or recording. It's important not to be seen to be 'doing research'. It's very important to document experiences, but don't do it in public view. Taking pictures during conversations should be kept minimum and not interfere with the conversations and interactions (unless it is actively suggested by the hosts themselves).

You have about 3 days in the villages. It's up to you as to how you organize your time. But we suggest that you do different things each day. You will need to play it by ear and work out what feels comfortable and appropriate. Make sure that you spend time with and observe different members of your host family, activities in the village and any facilities that the village might have. Bear in mind the focus areas: what motivates/spurs citizen action, and what shape does that action take?

With your hosts, go out to the fields, lake or pastures with family members, taking part in the daily chores, contributing to the work and taking part in the social life of the households. This may mean working in the field, fetching water or wood, washing or cooking.

## 6. Practical Information for Participants

### Materials for Participants

1. Description of tasks (outline at learning session or per email)
2. Telephone List (at briefing)

### List of what to bring

1. torch, match box
2. personal toiletries (soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, tissues etc) + any medication you may need
3. comfortable, appropriate clothes (nothing showing shoulders and knees)



4. warm sleeping clothes
5. good walking shoes
6. a warm sweater + jacket
7. plastic bags (both for protecting important items against rain and for personal waste disposal)
8. sun screen
9. camera
10. plastic sandals / flip flops (for bathing and washing)
11. optional: a small mirror
12. optional: a bedsheet (note you will be provided with a sleeping bag)

#### **Twaweza will provide**

1. a notebook and pen
2. newspapers to read and share in the village
3. water bottle and water guard
4. first aid kits
5. insect repellent
6. toilet paper
7. sleeping bag and mat (mat to be left with host family)
8. mosquito net and string (to be left with host family)
9. solar lamp (to be left with host family)
10. money and small gift to be left with host family

#### **What to avoid**

- bringing valuables that are not essential for your stay
- expensive jewelry, heavy makeup and perfume
- inappropriate clothes (showing knees and shoulders, both for women and men)
- taking special foods or drinks into the house of your hosts
- giving children money or inappropriate gifts
- taking photos without consent