Twaweza Staff Immersion
Mwanga Region-Tanzania
May 2017
Immersion at Twaweza

• Every year, all Twaweza staff from the 3 East African countries come together in one country to live among those whose lives we seek to influence through our work.

• Immersion at Twaweza is based on the belief that there is no better way to learn and understand than to participate.
  • We experience day to day lives of the regular citizens
  • We seek to connect with both (local) government and other local authorities

• Immersion is not a research exercise; it is a “deep dive” into one particular location.
  • The purpose is not to generate hard data, but to give us an insight into a slice of a reality which we aim to affect through our work.
  • It is ultimately to challenge and inform our own thinking.
How is it done?

• Twaweza identifies the location for immersion, including the following criteria:
  • Rural (or peri-urban) area
  • diverse economic activities
  • different religions
  • accessibility.

• After the location selection, we contract a district partner in the selected area (normally our own Uwezo district partners) to identify local families that will be willing to host (a pair of) us for 4 days and 3 nights.

• The families get briefed on the purpose of our visit: to participate in their daily life, to learn what things are important in their context. We emphasize that we’re not bringing any particular project or funding

• The families are not paid to host us, however
  - We offer the households to keep some of the amenities we bring with us, such as mosquito nets, solar lamps, and water treatment tablets
  - We also offer a token of a small payment at the end of our stay, to defray costs
In 2017: Where and Who?

- 2017 Immersion was held in Mwanga district which is located in Northern Tanzania (close to Moshi / Kilimanjaro)
- 28 families (26 host families and 2 reserve families) were identified and briefed by our Uwezo district partners who are familiar with the area and the families.
- The families were engaged in various economic activities such as agriculture, livestock keeping, small business, fishing and formal employment (e.g. teachers)
- The 2017 Immersion had 51 participants: 49 staff members from Twaweza Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda office and 2 journalists (Mwananchi and The Citizen newspapers)
Our Methodology

• In immersion we are defamiliarising ourselves with what we currently know in order to see things differently.

• 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 unexpected events, new and different conversations.

• The key is, to the extent possible, just go with the flow.

“take a group of people that are used to talking about development while sitting in offices behind computers, going to meetings at ministries, writing reports and worrying about indicators, and give each some mosquito repellent, a sleeping bag, and directions to a household deep in rural East Africa. Importantly, you do not arm them with any questionnaires, tools, focus group discussion guides or similar baggage but the instructions that consist of: hang out, observe, participate, converse and just be. In other words we tell them to not investigate but learn”
# Our Methodology in more detail

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>How to do it</th>
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<tr>
<td>Observing and</td>
<td>- The art of saying nothing: simply watching what is going on, without intervening or changing the situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>listening</td>
<td>- Observing small spontaneous interactions and social encounters tells volumes about relationships, structures, etc.</td>
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<td>Participating</td>
<td>- One observes and listens more actively by taking part physically in what people are doing. Immersion participants typically play soccer with kids, listen to the radio with others, help with house chores, lend a hand on the farm, help fetch water, etc.</td>
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<td>Talking</td>
<td>- 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</td>
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<td>- One of the best ways is to (gently) keep asking “why”?</td>
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<td>Visual approaches</td>
<td>- Most common is taking photos. Always ask for permission to take photos; avoid photography on the first day, before you and your hosts are familiar and comfortable with each other and your mission.</td>
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<td>Journaling</td>
<td>- In a quiet moment, write down observations, conversations; describe how you feel and interact, what you are experiencing. Use free flow; this is not a report, it’s your personal journal.</td>
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<td>- Do not “interview” people – i.e., do not pull out notebooks and scribble while you talk. Just be part of the conversation, and reflect later.</td>
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Main areas of interest

With immersion we expect our staff to be open minded and free to explore issues that will come up during their stay. As a broad guide, we suggest to pay attention to a few core areas that are significant to Twaweza’s work.

This year the core areas were

*access to information, education and citizen agency*

We asked staff to have these issues at the back of their minds since the main purpose of the activity was not to teach or even to investigate rather to listen, absorb, and learn. Therefore even with having our own areas of interest, we intended on letting the host family lead, decide what they wanted to show us and who they wanted us to meet.
Staff expectations before Immersion

- I want to learn how families network with formal and informal authorities.
- I want to relive a village life and reflect back on my village living and now to establish has anything changed.
- Learning about similarities and difference of livelihoods in East Africa.
- Learn about the Tanzanian culture and share the difference.
- I want to try new food and experience new culture.
- I want to explore and have fun.
- I want to feel, experience and live the adventure.
- I want to feel the Magufuli effect on people’s lives especially in Education and local authority.
- I want to understand the main issues and challenges people face and how do they manage.
- How little children are cared for and parental roles in the homes.
- What are people expectations from the new government.
Our experiences and observations in the host communities
Main observation areas:

1. Information
   a) What is the source of Information in the communities?
   b) What is the use of the Information acquired?
2. Citizens Agency: How do people interact with government on a daily basis
3. Education: Knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on education in their districts.
Information:

• The main source of their Information

Majority of the host families access information via Radio, Television, newspapers, Telephones, Religious leaders, Community and family members (word of mouth), community meetings, Village leaders etc

• How do they use the acquired Information

Different families uses information based on their individual interest and socio-economic status for instance village leaders seemed to be more proactive users of the information for creating awareness to the citizens on certain matters. Other uses information for action taking (individual or collective) this was demonstrated during the TIN registration where majority participated.

Information has also been seen as a tool to steer discussions and sometimes to scrutinize for example villagers were concern about the government response towards their priorities in service delivery “improving education system is much more important than building flyover roads”

However there has been instances where information is been mis-used, for instance the village leaders have became extra careful in information sharing. “We are required to use force for some information to be shared” said one of the community member. It has also been observed that the villagers are at the mercy of their leaders, they will not act upon information rather they wait until elections time to vote.
Citizen Agency

The communities is looking at the government to play its roles, the accountability and responsibility is more at the individual level rather than community level for example people work hard for their own benefits. There is some aspect of fear in exercising agency (risk) where by the villagers refers to a case where a pastor was detained by police while demanding accountability.

The aspect of fear has also been observed from the village leaders themselves, it seemed like they do not have power/authority to question top authority when things are not going as planned. Leaders and the villagers will meet during the community meetings to discuss issues around the community but there won’t be further action taken.

There is an existence of various community groups such as the community consultative committees, the community mobilization groups (women groups), religious groups etc and both groups have not evidently seen to drive any major community changes.
The community finds successful learning is just a matter of luck, this leads to low parental involvement as it mostly stops at taking the children to school. Majority of the communities don’t know the way forward after their children failing the exams especially standard seven exam as a result the children ends up becoming bodaboda drivers, house wives etc. Such outcomes makes some of the communities (mostly parents) to question the relevance of taking their children to school, their views on schooling is that the education system only beats students into becoming submissive and fearful.

There was some aspect of inequality that was also observed particularly on distribution of resources as well as genders roles. Community thinks the government favors more urban schools in comparison to rural schools, on gender roles issues it was observed that at least mothers have demonstrated to be more engaged into their children education in comparison to the fathers.
As mentioned in the 4th slide, we were accompanied by 2 journalists whom we asked to document the experience and share it with the public. As a result, 4 articles were created and published in newspapers (2 articles in Mwananchi newspaper and 2 in The Citizen newspaper) and another 2 articles were posted in the blog.

Articles posted in the blog can be accessed in the links below:

1) http://kilimanjaroyetu.blogspot.com/2017/09/makala-niliyoyaonawilaya-ya-mwanga.html#.Wb_aFdQjHIV

Conclusion:

Immersion is a learning activity which we get to learn things that through our daily schedule would be not likely to understand. Through this activity, we observed and gather insights on education, access to information and citizen agency that might be useful into informing our mid-year review and/or our strategic reflection and planning for the following year. Usually the gathered insight serves as one of our best reality check into our striving plans.

As an organization, we also believe that it’s the individual moments, insights, small discoveries each one of us carries forward that are the biggest gain to the organization: we are a group of people who value taking time out, experiencing and questioning. This is what ultimately makes us better at our work.

Lastly the most important thing we take from Immersion is the team bonding. This is the only activity in the organization that brings all Twaweza staff (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda) together. Apart from learning, we also have fun and refresh as a team.
Pictures