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Unpacking Twaweza's Theory of Social Change: Citizen Agency, Information, Accountability, and Basic Services

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UNPACKING TWAWEZA'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE: CITIZEN AGENCY, INFORMATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND BASIC SERVICES

CRITICAL ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

by
Ethan Miller,
Ash Hartwell, &
Gretchen Rossman
Submitted to Twaweza, September 16, 2010

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to define the key concepts – and links between them – of Twaweza's Theory of Social Change. These are the notions of citizen-driven change, citizen agency, information, monitoring and accountability, and basic services. The analysis shows ambiguities and, at times, conflicting working definitions in Twaweza's use of these terms in its major public documents. We then integrate relevant scholarship to elaborate these central ideas and to pose questions that Twaweza may engage with in the spirit of its claims to be a "learning organization."

UNPACKING THE CIRCLES OF AGENCY, INFORMATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND BASIC SERVICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

UNPACKING TWAWEZA'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE: CITIZEN AGENCY, INFORMATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND BASIC SERVICES

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to raise useful, critical questions and offer practical conceptual elaborations in order to strengthen Twaweza's work around four key areas that animate the organization's mission: citizen agency, access to information, monitoring and accountability, and the improvement of basic services in East Africa. This is not intended to be a comprehensive literature review on these broad and far-ranging concepts; such work is beyond the scope of this study and, in many cases, has already been done.[1] Our task, instead, has been to engage with Twaweza's ideas, drawing on relevant academic and practitioner literature to generate fresh perspectives on the organization's work that we hope will be useful in its learning process. This paper is also not intended to offer specific policy or strategy suggestions to Twaweza. We seek to raise questions, identify issues and and challenges, and offer concepts and ideas that might be useful. We leave to Twaweza the work of translating these offerings into changes in strategy, approach, and framing. We offer this work in the spirit of Twaweza's intention to "reflect on practice and develop cultures of learning."[2]

We began our research by identifying the key elements of Twaweza's model of change, listening to the key questions that the organization is asking about itself and its work, and then seeking those places in the literature of academics and reflective development practitioners where these elements and questions have been researched, debated, and further developed. In our investigation—spanning a wide spectrum of fields including development practice and theory, anthropology, economics, political science, communication and information theory, and cognitive science—we have sought to open ourselves to new questions and perspectives as they arise. This has facilitated both a process of unpacking complexities from the key elements of Twaweza's work and of developing new questions that might inform and transform that work. We hope that Twaweza's staff will find this report to be helpfully challenging and challengingly helpful.

One challenge we have faced in our engagement with this research is that Twaweza is a moving target. Quite appropriately for an organization dedicated to fostering "a culture of learning and self-critique," Twaweza's key documents articulating its approach to change have changed significantly over the course of this project. "Which Twaweza are we engaging with?" is a question that we have continually asked. Our choice has been to engage with all of organizational documents and media materials to which we have access,[3] allowing our

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1   See, for example, the following literature reviews: on **citizenship:** Jones and Gaventa 2002; on **agency and empowerment:** Samman and Santos 2009; on a**ccess to information**: McCreadie and Rice 1999a, McCreadie and Rice 1999b; on **accountability:** Newell and Bellour 2002; O'Neil, Floresti and Hudson 2007; and on **accountability, voice, and service delivery:** Goetz and Gaventa 2001.

2   Twaweza. "Our Work," www.twaweza.org, accessed 8/5/10).

3   We very much recognize the limitations of such an approach, since it does not engage Twaweza in terms of the

questions to emerge from this broad view of evolving concepts and recognizing that Twaweza is not a static, fixed entity, but an organization engaged in a process of learning and development.   In a number of cases, we have seen Twaweza make important shifts from earlier articulations of ideas toward more nuanced and critically-considered perspectives.   We try, in this report, to acknowledge these developments and to build on them.

The paper begins with an overview and general analysis of Twaewza's framework for change.   We offer this overview as a way to be clear about our starting point and our assumptions, so that readers can better understand the critical approach that we take in later sections.   Following this "big picture" sketch, we engage directly with the four key dimensions of Twaweza's work—citizen agency, access to information, monitoring and accountability, and the improvement of basic services—and with the linkages between them.   In each section, we provide an overview of Twaweza's current approach to the concept, discuss critical issues and debates raised by the relevant literatures, and then offer questions for Twaweza—sparked by these debates—that we believe can be useful in its organizational learning and development.

II. TWAWEZA'S FRAMEWORK

Twaweza is a Swahili word that means "we can make it happen." This is the spirit that Twaweza the organization—working in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya 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"[4]—seeks to bring to its project of large-scale citizen engagement.   The organization has a mission that is founded on three core goals, all aimed at achieving impact among millions of people and across the whole geographical span of East Africa: first, to increase peoples' abilities to "access, generate and broker information"; second, to enhance and catalyze "citizen agency" as both an end in itself and as a means to achieve the other two goals; and third, to enable the improvement of basic services—primarily healthcare, water, and basic education—through citizen monitoring and action for accountability.   These goals are linked together by Twaweza's "theory of change" which, in a number of documents that have been published on the organization's website, outlines ways in which Twaweza understands processes of change and its role in catalyzing them.

A. TWO THEORIES OF CHANGE

Before exploring the theory of change, however, it is important to recognize that there are two distinct levels of theory at play.   On one hand, we have Twaweza's theory about how *citizen-driven change* happens; that is, an idea about how "ordinary people" make change through interconnected processes relating to information, citizen agency, monitoring and accountability.   It is this theory that animates Twaweza's choices in regard to areas of focus and how those areas are understood and linked together.   On the other hand, we have Twaweza's theory of *how it as an organization* makes change.   This is notably distinct from the first theory, utilizing vocabulary of concepts such as brokering, leveraging, and partnerships, and an "ecoystem of change."[5] It is this theory that informs Twaweza's strategic decisions regarding how it will engage with its areas of focus and their interrelationships.   We note this distinction at the outset because we believe that it may be an important and challenging source of tension for the organization in implementing its goals.   The two theories may together embody many of the difficulties to be found in attempting to straddle the "two worlds" of "the domain of everyday life"[6] and the domain of international donor-driven development.

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actual work happening "on the ground."   We have done our best, in the absence of such direct connection with the organization's work, with the materials and resources at our disposal.

4   Twaweza website, http://www.twaweza.org/. Accessed 8/5/10.
5   Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p.2.
6   Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p2.

B. ECOSYSTEMS OF CHANGE

Twaweza describes its overall approach as that of cultivating "ecosystems of change" and describes their use of this phrase like this: "Ecosystems and ecology are metaphors for the dynamic interconnectedness of people, resources, structures and institutions, and the networks, niches, flows and pathways of information and communication."[7] Viewing social processes in such terms, Twaweza explicitly frames the four key domains of citizen agency, information, monitoring and accountability, and improvement of basic services— and, presumably, the linkages between them—as having nonlinear relationships. These domains do not necessarily lead one to the other in a simple chain of connection, "nor are the links between them necessarily causal."[8] Rather these links are "iterative, synergistic and dependent on frequent feedback loops at small (local) and at large (regional/provincial and national) scales."[9] The goal of Twaweza's interventions in its key areas of focus are to help generate "a continually, reinforcing buzz"[10] that can enable many people, in many different ways, to act to improve their lives. While it is not within the scope of this paper to engage the concept of "ecosystem of change" directly and thoroughly, we do believe it is important to make a few brief comments about it.

First, while important, innovative, and potentially powerful, Twaweza's use of both the ecosystem metaphor and notions drawn from complex adaptive systems theory (feedback, synergy, networks, complexity, and non-linearity) need to be further developed. "Ecosystem of change" is currently used in a way that simply indicates the field of work to be complex and networked, suggests that causal connections between Twaweza's dimensions of focus and its hoped-for outcomes are difficult to trace, supports a strategy of linking actors together in some form of network, and indicates a strategy that involves working with large-scale players "that reach at least two million people."[11]

We are concerned that this current articulation of "ecosystem of change" does not adequately address crucial questions such as the specific nature of the complexity being engaged, the methods that will be used for tracing impact in a complexity context, the specific nature and forms of the networks and linkages that are to be built, and the choices involved in this work.[12] The apparent link that Twaweza makes between "ecosystem" and scale is also under-developed; why, we wish to ask, would an ecosystem approach necessarily lead to a choice to only engage "large-scale" actors?[13] A related and more general concern is that notions of feedback, non-linearity, and complexity—when not defined clearly and utilized carefully—can appear as substitutes for substantive reflection and strategy allowing an organization to make claims about impact and causality that—because they are "complex and non-linear"—are difficult to substantiate in practice. We do not mean to suggest that Twaweza utilizes these concepts to side-step responsibility for measuring or tracing social impact; rather, we flag this area as a realm where the organization might benefit (both in terms of its public presentation and its actual practice) from clarifying terms and concepts.

A second concern in regard to the "ecosystem of change" concept is in regard to its place in Twaweza's theories of change. We believe that the ecosystem concept is the key link between Twaweza's theory of citizen-driven change and its theory of organizational intervention (discussed above). This is implied in Twaweza's descriptions of its work, but needs to be made explicit. What is the relationship between a citizen-driven model of change and a model of "ecosystem" intervention that focuses on engaging big

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7   Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p2.
8   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010.
9   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010.
10 Twaweza. "Twaweza Criteria for Program Partnerships/Initiatives". p1.
11 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p8.
12 For a general presentation of some of the dimensions and nuances of an "ecosystems approach," see Bloom and Dees 2008.
13 There is much in ecosystem theory that suggests a more nuanced and multi-scale approach. See, for example: Holyoak, Liebold and Holt 2005; Paulson and Gezon 2005.

players? How is the concept of "ecosystem of change" used to justify, in the name of citizen-driven change, social interventions that take place primarily in collaboration with large-scale partners that are not necessarily citizen-controlled or community-based organizations? There may, indeed, be good reasons why Twaweza makes such choices, but these deliberations should be self-conscious and public.   What are the possible political tensions that might be buried in the use of the ecosystem model to describe these strategic choices? What are other possible ecosystem-based approaches that might be taken and why has Twaweza made these particular choices and not others? What are the trade-offs and dangers that Twaweza recognizes in taking its specific approach? Addressing such questions, we propose, is very much in the spirit of Twaweza's values and mission.

We will not explore these ideas further in this paper, though we encourage Twaweza to charge future collaborating researchers with this task.   In the pages to follow, we will simply examine each key dimension of Twaweza's theory of citizen-driven change and the links between them, engaging relevant literature, raising questions, and offering ideas.

C. CITIZEN-DRIVEN CHANGE

The primary task of this paper is to explore Twaweza's theory of "citizen-driven change," and it is this exploration which will structure the paper, and to this theory that we now turn.[14] Twaweza's three organizational goals as outlined above are understood by the organization to be fully interconnected "social processes."[15] In Twaweza's model of "citizen-driven change,"[16] access to information—in the form of information about rights, laws and entitlements, information about conditions in other places, and stories of "ordinary people making a difference"[17]—enables citizens to understand their options, imagine new possibilities and to take action to change their situations. Such citizen action, for Twaweza, is precisely what is needed in order for basic service provision in East Africa to be significantly improved: "Twaweza has been established on the basis that more than top-down reform is needed—we need citizen involvement and oversight."[18] This is a circular process in which "we therefore see citizen agency, better services, improved resource management and accountability as mutually reinforcing."[19] Figure 1 shows a basic representation of this change model.
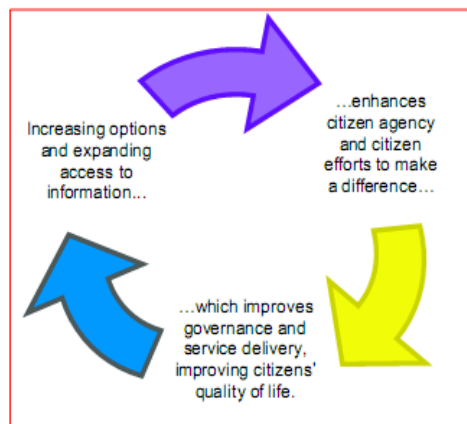
Figure 1. Twaweza's Model of Change.
Source: http://Twaweza.org

This three-part model does not, however, fully reflect the dimensions of Twaweza's approach.   A fourth element must be introduced to complete the model: citizen monitoring and action for accountability.   It is this dimension on which Twaweza places particular emphasis as a vehicle through which citizen agency effectively improves basic service provision.   "This initiative," states Twaweza, "will focus on enabling citizens to monitor funds, services, practice and outcomes at both community and national levels."[20] This monitoring is at once a source of information, an expression of agency, and a vehicle for "exercising voice" in

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14 Other issues, including some of those raised by Twaweza's strategic organizational approach, will be addressed as they arise in the context of unpacking this core "citizen-driven change" theory.
15 Twaweza. ""Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p.2.
16 Twaweza Kenya Facebook page, http://www.facebook.com/pages/TWAWEZA-KENYA/168569261600. Accessed 8/5/10.
17 Twaweza. ""Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p.3.
18 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p.2.
19 Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.2.
20 Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.9.

improving services.[21] While it is not at all the only expression of citizen agency recognized by Twaweza, it is certainly a central one.   Figure 2 shows a more elaborated representation of Twaweza's citizen-driven change model that includes this monitoring and accountability element.
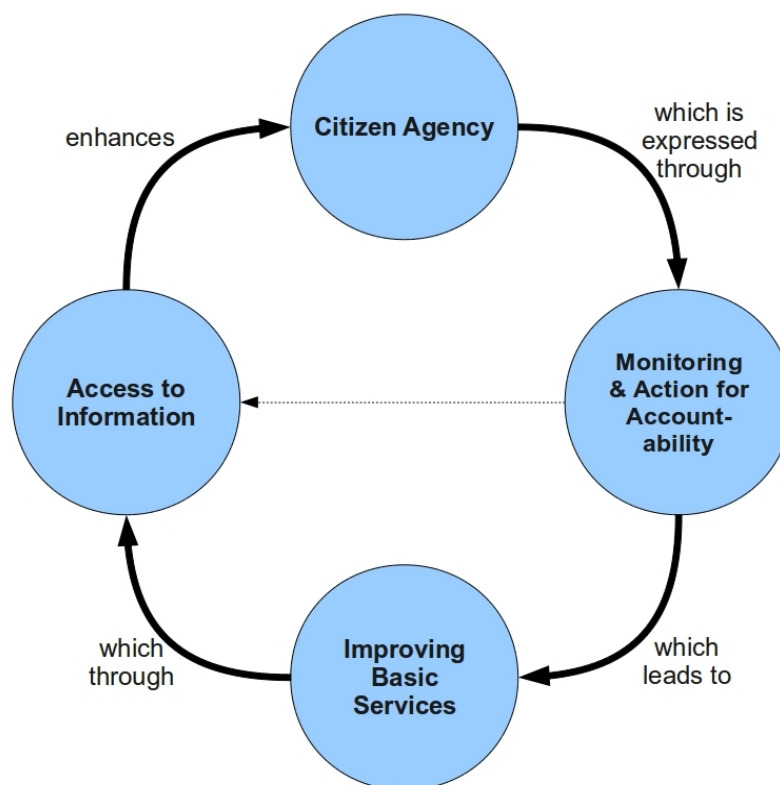
Figure 2: Twaweza's Model of Citizen-Driven Change, Elaborated

Looking at this version of the model, we can see that, while there are four distinct yet interconnected domains of action that can be explored and further understood, there are also four areas of "linkage" that form the crucial connections between each domain. These linkages are a set of assertions that hold the model together and can be summarized in a simple form as follows:

- Access to information enhances citizen agency.
- Citizen agency is effectively expressed, in part, through monitoring and action for accountability.
- Monitoring and accountability action leads to improved basic services.
- Improved basic services, through access to information (and other mechanisms) supports and enhances citizen agency.

With these crucial linkages in mind—each of which needs to be further explored—we can offer a further elaborated visual version of Twaweza's model of citizen-driven change (Figure 3).

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21 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?", p.5.
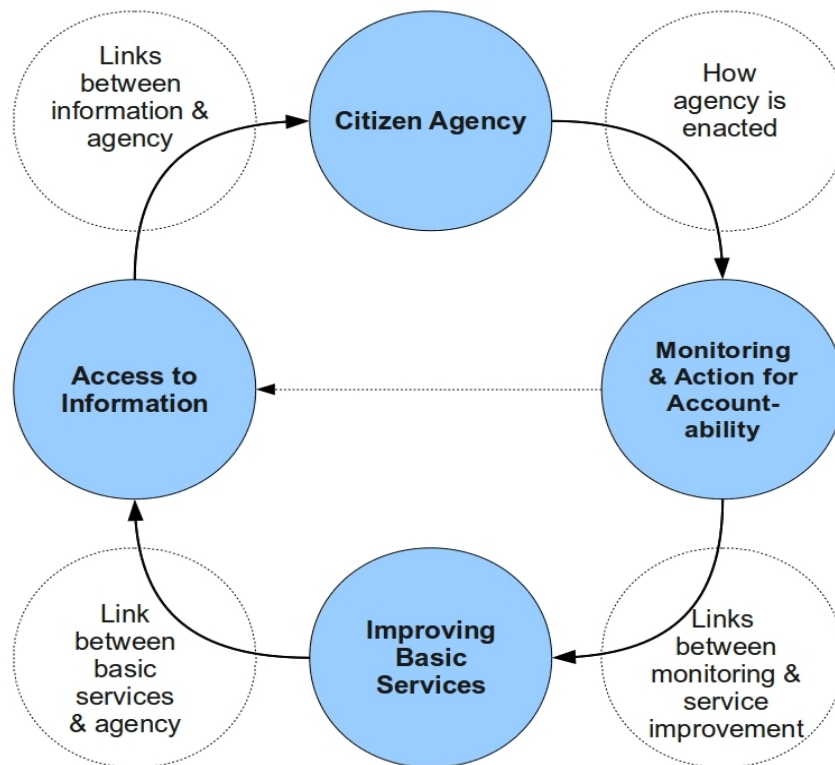
Figure 3: Eight Dimensions of Twaweza's Citizen-Driven Change Model

Twaweza's circular model of change presents challenges to us as sympathetic critics that we believe may also present challenges to Twaweza in its work.   Looking at the four key dimensions of change, we are tempted to ask which of these is the "primary goal" of the organization? Viewing "access to information" and "monitoring and action for accountability" as means to ends (since neither seems to stand alone as a goal of social change), we then wonder: Is Twaweza seeking, fundamentally, to improve citizen agency? Is Twaweza seeking, above all else, to improve basic services? We suspect—particularly because of the circularity of the model and the adoption of a non-linear discourse about change—that the organization would resist having to make such a choice between priorities.   Yet what trade-offs might be necessary in the absence of a central focus? As we shall see later in this paper, a thorough strategic examination of pathways to increasing citizen agency in East Africa may or may not lead to information-based monitoring interventions that target basic services.   Similarly, such an examination of basic service provision may not lead to interventions that were focused solely on information-activated citizen agency.   We recognize, then, that the circular model—and perhaps the ecosystem concept to which it is linked—may involve certain strategic choices that have the potential to simultaneously spread the effects of Twaweza's work widely (across a broad spectrum of spheres, recognizing some key interconnections) and also *dampen* these effects in any given sphere due to the diffused focus.   In other words, Twaweza can only do so much.   Choosing to work on all four spheres at once simply means that the organization cannot focus on the broad spectrum of interventions that might be necessary to maximize transformative potential in any one sphere.

As writers, this challenge is reflected in the question of "where to begin"? While much of Twaweza's literature appears to begin with access to information as a focus, we also find citizen agency to be a central theme.   Though conflicting interpretations can be made, we are inclined to read many of the organization's texts as placing citizen agency at the center.   One of Twaweza's core statements, expressed in a number of documents, is the vision that "ordinary citizens can become the drivers of their own development and act as

co-creators of democracy."[22] Citizen agency appears as both the goal of development and the most effective means by which it can be achieved.   We will begin, therefore, with an exploration of citizen agency.

D. KEY QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL CHANGE

- Does Twaweza have a primary goal in terms of social change – between enhancing citizen agency and improving basic services? If not, how will it handle strategic and programmatic trade-offs in pursuing both goals?

- What processes will effectively work through the tensions between a focus on local citizen-driven change and a programmatic strategy directed at ecosystem change?

- How will the ecosystem concept be measured?

III. CITIZEN AGENCY

A. CITIZENS AND CITIZENSHIP: AGENTS OF CHANGE

Who are the agents of change for Twaweza? Citizens.   Ordinary citizens.   "Twaweza's core aim is...to build on what ordinary citizens are already doing and expand the space for everyday citizen action."[23] Citizens— and, by association, concepts of citizenship—hold a prominent place in Twaweza's story about how change happens, who makes it happen, and how it can be supported by donors and NGOs.   But who, exactly, are these "ordinary citizens"? What does it mean to invoke the concepts of "citizen" and "citizenship" in naming social change agents? The terms may often appear to be self-evident or simple, implying a consensus about their definition.   "Citizen" and "citizenship," as Jones and Gaventa point out, "have often come to offer to everybody what they would like to understand them to mean."[24] Yet, below the surface, these words are in fact highly loaded, contested, and heavy with power-laden meaning.   They reflect important assumptions and assertions about the nature of power, rights, identity, community, and social change.   It is crucial, therefore, that we unpack some of the ways in which Twaweza uses these concepts, investigate key questions that arise and explore pathways by which the organization might further clarify its "theory of citizenship." We begin, then, a key question:

> *What are "citizenship" and "agency" for Twaweza and how are these conceptions positioned in relationship to a broader field of scholarship on notions and practices of citizenship?*

Twaweza's concept of citizenship is not made explicit as such in its public documents.   Indeed, on the surface "citizen" often appears to be used simply as a synonym of "people," a term for "men, women and young people" who do things.[25] This is a common use of the term, as Jones and Gaventa point out, and is also often associated with "the act of any person taking part in public affairs."[26] Yet like many apparently simple terms, there is much more going on beneath the surface.   Twaweza does have a more specific notion of citizenship that can be found as a set of implicit suggestions made through the various attributes and activities associated with "ordinary citizens" throughout the organization's literature.   Here, we find a definition of citizenship that is centered on rights-bearing individuals, entitled to government-provided basic

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22 Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.1.
23 Twaweza. "More Than a Thousand Miles.: Reflections on a Field Trip In the Lake Zone, Tanzania, October 2009."
    Pre-Publication Draft. p.2.
24 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 2.
25 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
26 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 2.

services, who are creative, active and, given the right contexts and resources, can exercise their agency to advocate for themselves.

Concepts of citizenship can be categorized by at least three sets of distinctions: theoretical concepts versus "lived" concepts; citizenship as status versus citizenship as practice; and vertical versus horizontal conceptions of citizenship. The distinction between theoretical and lived concepts is, perhaps, most primary and names the difference between academic theorizations and policy definitions of citizenship on one hand, and, on the other, the ways in which people and communities understand and experience citizenship on a day-to-day basis. The latter can only be understood in context, talking with people directly about their use of the words "citizen" and "citizenship" and the ways in which they mobilize (or not) these concepts in daily life.[27] The former can be understood in terms of "schools" of thought that have, in many cases, informed and been operationalized through various political structures and development strategies.

Jones and Gaventa identify three primary traditions in this regard.[28] In *liberal thought*, citizenship is understood as a status, defined by the possession of rights granted by the state. As rights-holders in this tradition, "individual citizens act 'rationally' to advance their own interests."[29] The exercise of rights is "seen as the choice of citizens"[30] and, to the extent that these choices are limited by resources and opportunities, government and other institutions can act to level the field upon which these choices and actions play out.

In *communitarian thought*, citizenship is understood primarily as a form of belonging, an identity built in and through virtuous, "civic" participation in a community. It is this community (a village, an ethnic or religious group, a political group or a nation) which forms the context for the exercise of citizenship, provides its validation, and is itself constituted by it. Finally, in *civic republican thought*, notions of self-interested, rights-bearing individuals and community belonging are linked together into a concept of citizenship as a "common civic identity, shaped by a common public culture" in which participation in deliberative democracy is essential.

In regard to these traditions of thought, Twaweza's literature tends to articulate a conception of citizenship that appears most in line with liberal thought. First, it is clear that citizens, for Twaweza, are people who have *rights*.[31] Citizenship is defined, at least in part, by a relationship of entitlement to government-provided resources and basic services. It is this conception that allows Twaweza to talk about citizens "holding government to account."[32] Citizenship is also, importantly, represented in Twaweza's work as being primarily about *individuals*. While the importance of group connection and community is clearly acknowledged,[33] Twaweza's examples of citizen agency are predominately about individual people obtaining (and, in recent documents, generating) information, taking action and making (or not making) changes. The examples of

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27 This approach is taken in Eyben and Ladbury 2006.

28 Isin and Wood (1999, 7) note that these three traditions "map out the terrain rather uneasily because many scholars do not exactly fit into these categories." Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper, we believe—with Jones and Gaventa—that this schema can usefully help to orient us in a complex and potentially confusing terrain of scholarship.

29 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 3.

30 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 3.

31 Though Twaweza's approach is not explicitly positioned in the realm of development discourse known as "rights-based development," its implicit assumptions about citizenship do seem to link it to such discourses. These connections will be discussed further, below.

32 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2. This notion is also reflected in Twaweza's description of its work with partners: "Twaweza partners will seek to help citizens reclaim government and animate public institutions, and over time develop a new, more responsive 'compact' between citizens and the state" ("Theory of Change and Approach," p.4).

33 See, for example, "More Than a Thousand Miles" where it is acknowledged that Twaweza "must also understand the bonds that tie people together that may simultaneously enhance and constrain action." (p.10).

social innovation described in "More than a Thousand Miles,"[34] the story of Asha and Juma in the "Theory of Change and Approach,"[35] and the rational calculating citizen agent presented in "Unpacking the Theory of Change"[36] are all examples of the kinds of "individual citizen stories" that figure prominently in Twaweza's discussions. Citizens are seen to receive information, to process information, to decide to act, and to effect change as individuals, as "citizen leaders" who "may be teachers, local entrepreneurs, or members of a faith community or informal savings association."[37] Community is present, but as a *context,* an *object,* and perhaps a *"nudge"* for individual agency and action.[38]

Positioning Twaweza in this regard does not fully capture, however, the organization's articulation of citizenship. This is where the other two distinctions—and their synthesis—are useful. Lister identifies *citizenship as status* and *citizenship as active practice* as two conceptions which, though sometimes seen as exclusive, many contemporary theorists of citizenship have sought to link together. As a status, citizenship is about the rights granted to individuals (or, in more rare cases, groups) by the state. As an active practice, citizenship is about taking action to "fulfill the potential of that status."[39] If "citizenship as status" can be linked to many discourses of liberal thought, this is where Twaweza parts ways with this tradition. For Twaweza, clearly, citizens are more (and, the organization believes, should be treated as more) than passive rights-bearing consumers of government provision or donor aid. As one Twaweza staff person stated in a reflection on the nine villages tour, "It's hardly as if the *wananchi* are sitting around waiting for us to do things for them."[40] When Twaweza invokes the word "citizen," it might mean *rational calculating individual*, but it also means *active, innovative, participating individual*. Citizens are active agents of their own lives, "resourceful, inventive and sometime ingenious."[41] Just as livelihoods must be (and are) secured by creative action, so must rights be (and *sometimes* are) secured by acts of participatory citizenship on the part of "ordinary people."

And what about the relationship between citizens and the state? Eyben and Ladbury's distinction between vertical and horizontal notions of citizenship may be helpful here. *Vertical citizenship* is focused on the relationship between the citizen and the state, as in most discourses built on "rights" or "entitlements." *Horizontal citizenship*, on the other hand, is about the relationship between citizens and their communities, as in communitarian understandings that emphasize belonging, connection, and acts of civic virtue. In this latter form, "the concept of citizenships [relates] to rights and responsibilities [that people have] as members of families and communities."[42] For Twaweza, with its emphasis on government-provided basic services as the object of citizen agency, citizenship tends to remain in the domain of the vertical. There *are* some key moments where the organization's literature acknowledges the sense in which peoples' agency extends beyond citizen-state (including local state) relations, but these tend either to be framed in reference to *people* and not *citizens* (as in "millions of ordinary people are simply getting on with their lives")[43] or (more rarely and subtly)

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34 Twaweza. "More Than a Thousand Miles." p.8.
35 Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.4.
36 Twaweza. "Unpacking the Theory of Change." p.1.
37 Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.3.
38 See Twaweza's hypothesis that "action is more likely if citizens perceive others/peers taking action." (Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010. p.4).
39 Lister 1997, 41.
40 Twaweza. "More Than a Thousand Miles.: Reflections on a Field Trip In the Lake Zone, Tanzania, October 2009." Pre-Publication Draft. p.10. This use of the term *wananchi* raises an interesting set of questions for our investigation regarding the use of language. We understand the Swahili term *wananchi* to translate literally as "child of the land or country" and signify something roughly akin to "ordinary citizen" (Scotton 1965). We also understand the term to have a long and specific political history in Tanzania, with connotations that are beyond the scope of our research to tease out. We are thus unable to engage Twaweza's use of the term directly—sticking instead with analysis of the English term "citizen"—and simply encourage Twaweza to examine their notion of *wananchi* in light of the analysis presented here in order to find potentially useful learning insights.
41 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.1.
42 Eyben and Ladbury 2007, 9.
43 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.1.

in the context of discussing how citizens connect with each other to ask powerful people for things.[44]

With this examination of Twaweza's current concepts of "citizen" and "citizenship" in mind, we will now turn to a more substantial exploration of key issues and questions that arise within various literatures engaging these concepts.

1. Does Citizenship Have a Value System?

While the term "citizen" might seem at first glance to be a neutral, descriptive term, a number of scholars have argued that it carries with it an implicit system of values.[45] To speak of citizens and citizenship is to invoke a long history of defining what these words mean, whom they apply to, and what is expected or demanded of those who come under their domain. Beginning with Aristotle's definition of a citizen as "he who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state,"[46] we can see that the concept of citizenship is immediately bound up with issues of identity (who gets to be a citizen? who decides?), power (who can take part? who is excluded?), and, commonly (though, as we have seen, not exclusively), a link to the state. In this way, usages of "citizen" and "citizenship" come packaged with specific politics and values, often in the form of rankings:

> The various normative judgments associated with the discourse of citizenship all rest on
> a positive evaluation of one particular way of life, and a correspondingly negative
> evaluation of the many ways of life that depart, in one way or another, from its central
> organizing principles.[47]

These "normative judgments" may include specific notions of participation, decision-making, responsibility, entitlement, inclusion and exclusion, individuality and community, and forms of social communication and organization. Citizenship implies, for example, a very specific notion of the state and of structures of legitimate governance. As Hyden identifies, citizenship discourses can sometimes imply that "there is only one way to good governance and it is by accepting the basic features of a Western liberal democracy... free and fair elections, respect for rule of law, an independent judiciary, a well-functioning state machinery, and a vibrant civil society."[48]   Such discourses also assume a basic level of trust between "citizens" and "the state"[49] which, for significant groups in East Africa (youth in Kenya), may not exist.[50]

Other crucial questions can be raised about the normative nature of citizenship as well: To what extent does calling someone a "citizen" draw them into a certain set of expectations about how they should or should not behave, what they are and are not responsible for, and what possibilities and limits should be placed on their exercise of power and agency?[51] Might the implicit judgments carried with some notions of citizenship work

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44 See for example, in "Theory of Change and Approach," the statement that "citizen action in practice requires leadership and is made possible by organizing" (p3). Here "organizing" is a vague stand-in for the complex constitution of collective power—sustained by horizontal citizenship—that may be required to make substantial change.

45 Hindess 2002; Eyben and Ladbury 2007.

46 Quoted in Hindess 2002.

47 Hindess 2002, 129.

48   Hyden 2006, 18.

49   Coleman 1999.

50   A large scale post-election youth assessment carried out in Kenya last year found that a high proportion of out-of-school youth had very low trust or confidence in local or national government. See 'Youth Assessment: We Matter'. UNICEF/Kenya (2010).

51 These questions refer to the process that Althusser calls "interpellation" in which the call or designation of a subject by a power-wielding authority brings that subject into being (so to speak) as a subject *of* their designation (Althusser 1971). To call someone a "citizen" is not simply an act of innocent naming; it is, rather, to call them into the domain of citizenship with all of the normative baggage that this domain entails. Suddenly, a person becomes a citizen-

to devalue forms of action and agency that do not fit into its definitions of respectable public participation? When, for example, might implicit definitions of "civic virtue"[52] associated with citizenship close doors to other important ways in which popular agency might be expressed?[53] Or when, for example, might forms of horizontal citizenship be eclipsed by, or valued less than, forms of vertical citizenship?[54] Does such a dynamic work to reinforce racial, gender, and class divisions when questions of power, capability, and access might influence who is (or is not) able to exercise vertical citizenship?

Another set of related concerns has been raised in regard to the relationship between discourses of citizenship and the politics of neoliberal development policy. At a time in which governments are facing continual pressure to conform to economic models dictated by international financial institutions—key players in what Hindess calls the "supra-national governmental regime[55] -- some observers fear that discourses of citizenship may become complicit in supporting the erosion of state autonomy and responsibility. As Fowler and Biekart write, "when interpreted and articulated by neo-liberal political elites, the term 'citizenship' effectively legitimizes the unburdening of a government's duties towards its polity."[56] Furthermore, an emphasis on practices and public forums for citizenship and citizen participation, circumscribed within a representative framework offering little substantive citizen power, may also sometimes serve as a strategy to generate popular acceptance for externally-imposed policy.[57] Might it be the case that democracy, enacted through the participation of "good citizens" in "good governance" is "the most effective means of ensuring that the people will 'own', or at least that they not actively resist, the package of political and economic reforms which their governments are required to implement"?[58]

These above concerns, among others, are important reasons why some advocates of democratic development have turned to using other terms in discussions of bottom-up social change. Bullain, for example, distinguishes between "civic" and "citizen". The "citizen" is a particular manifestation of civic identity, one that is linked primarily to the nation state structure of the Northern/Western world.[59] The civic domain is broader, referring to "that identity which is connected to the political community and reflects the persons' place and role in it."[60] This is not simply about relationships with the state[61]; "civic action also relates to the

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subject, subjected to a relationship with the state, with power, with responsibility, with a political community. The issue is to notice the potential political and ideological effects of such a naming.

52 There is a hint of this bias in Twaweza's literature: the statement, for example, that "ways in which citizens can engage government by contributing to progressive action and holding government to account will be encouraged; whereas organizations that employ an uninformed criticism approach or promote partisan political activity will be eschewed" ("Theory of Change and Approach", p5). Who shall decide what, exactly, and "uninformed criticism approach" shall be?

53 See, for example, Hossain's (2009) report on "rude accountability" which describes forms of popular action aimed at holding service delivery agents accountable for improving access and provision. These actions "work through shame and embarrassment, pressures to maintain reputation and status, and the threat of violence" (3)—dimensions of agency that may not be validated in many frameworks of "citizenship" yet may be, nonetheless, important and sometimes effective forms of social change.

54 "Formal governance tends to have restrictive notions of the public sphere that neglects the desires and effects of the impoverished to create culture, sociality, and solidarity" (Hecht & Simone 1994, 16).

55 Hindess 2002, 137.

56 Fowler and Biekart 2008, 4.

57 An illustrative case of the problem of development rhetoric on state-citizen participation, which bears little relationship to authentic participation, is the PRSP process in Tanzania. See Braethen (2006).

58 Hindess 2005, 137.

59 This is another important concern related to this critique of citizenship's values: to what extent are concepts of citizenship sometimes complicit in importing or reinforcing Western/Northern (neo)colonial values and political structures while eclipsing or undermining value structures that are more indigenous to East Africa? (Nyamnjoh 2004).

60 Bullain 2008, 2.

61 For example, civic engagement with religion in East Africa, be it church, mosque, or temple, is a powerful alternative modality to engagement with the state.

political community the persons see themselves as belonging to, which may not be the nation state."[62] Hence "civic-driven change" seeks in some sense to side-step normative issues of citizenship by placing agency in a broader domain and discourse of the political.[63]

2. Dimensions and Conundrums of Citizenship: Further Considerations

The normative nature of discourses of citizenship has been further unpacked by critical political theorists and development scholars along a number of lines. We offer here some brief summaries of key questions and issues that may be of relevance to Twaweza's work:

- ***Where Does Citizenship Come From?*** One key question in scholarship about citizenship is that of its origins and legitimation. Who grants or generates citizenship? As a "status," liberal thought would ascribe the power to grant citizenship to the nation-state. Yet this status is not, for many people and communities, automatic. Rather, citizenship for those who have been excluded from the status of "rights-bearing individuals" is often a product of political struggle. This recognition has led some theorists to reformulate citizenship as a political identity apart from—and sometimes even existing in opposition to—the state; citizenship, in this frame, can be understood as a practice of agency that constitutes and secures its rights through collective action.[64] As Phillips states, "citizenship must be an active condition of struggling to make rights real."[65] Hence a concern with utilizing a conception of citizenship that appears to tie citizen agency and rights to a system of state-granted entitlements (as Twaweza may sometimes do in its emphasis on basic services) is that this discourse could function to reinforce a sense that ultimate power and legitimacy lies in the state rather than in the democratic struggles of people—in citizen agency.

- ***Is Citizenship About Individuals?*** We have seen that Twaweza's conception of citizenship appears to focus on the individual, on "the citizen." Important questions have been raised, however, in regard to the effects of such a perspective. First, we have the issue of cultural conceptions of collective and community-based agency being erased or delegitimated by individualistic approached to citizenship. As Nyamnjoh points out, "in Africa the history of contact with Western ideas of modernity is marked by a crusade to substitute cultures that emphasized interdependence between the individual and his/her community with neoliberal notions of individual autonomy."[66] Second is the issue of individual citizenship being both impractical and ineffective in a context in which people lack access to resources and political power: "a critical look beneath the rhetoric of rights appears to point to the fact that being an individual in the liberal democratic sense of the word is both a process and a luxury that few can afford in reality."[67] We will explore some of these issues further in the section on agency below.

- ***Who's In, Who's Out? Citizenship as Exclusion***. As Fowler and Biekart have pointed out, "citizenship is far from a universal identity shared by all people."[68] Indeed, from its very origins the concept of citizenship has referred specifically to some people and *not others*. Contemporary notions and practices of citizenship exclude a number of groups from the sphere of civic legitimacy:

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62 Bullain 2008, 2.
63 This is not to suggest that the concept of "civic" does not itself come with baggage. Indeed, there are substantial discussion within the literature on civic-driven change about ways in which "civic" carries normative weight (See, for example, Dagnino 2008 and Fowler and Biekhart 2008b).
64 Nyamu-Musembi 2002; Jones and Gaventa 2002; Mamdani 1990.
65 Phillips 1991, quoted in Nyamu-Musembi 2002, 17.
66 Nyamnjoh 2004, 35.
67 Nyamnjoh 2004, 34.
68 Fowler and Biekart 2008, 8.

migrants and refugees (who make up a significant portion of East Africa's population)[69] who do not have formal citizenship recognition in their countries of residence; those excluded from full citizenship rights by law (e.g., gays & lesbians in many countries, blacks under apartheid, women in some countries); those whose culture & capabilities don't match those "required" of a citizen , either by law or by social expectation (this includes political, media, and alphabetic literacy; mobility and communicative capability; and knowledge of citizenship as a notion)[70]; and finally, those who cannot or do not meet the "obligations" of being a citizen, and therefore are excluded from its "rights" (those unable to pay taxes, those accused of crimes, etc.). Given such exclusions, how can a strategy of social change built on a discourse of citizenship avoid generating an exclusionary politics?[71]

Having addressed the "citizen" half of "citizen agency," we turn now to the second half. When Twaweza seeks to enhance citizen agency, what is it, exactly, that the organization seeks to enhance? What is agency for Twaweza? How does this relate with ways in which agency has been conceptualized in scholarly literature about the subject? What are some insights and questions that can be gleaned from this literature to inform, strengthen, and transform Twaweza's work?

B. AGENCY

As we have noted, Twaweza's conceptualization of "citizen" and "citizenship" are more implicit than overt in the organization's literature. Hence, when Twaweza speaks of "citizen agency" it is most often foregrounding a conception of *agency* while the question of "who acts" is left somewhat in the background. Agency, for Twaweza, is defined in at least two somewhat distinct yet overlapping ways. First, and most commonly, agency is framed in terms of access to, generation and use of, and communication of information. In this sense, agency is seen as the ability of agents to "turn information into knowledge for making meaning...to monitor their situations...to express themselves in private and public spheres and...to initiate and co-cordinate actions to make a difference."[72] Twaweza elaborates this view through the identification of four dimensions of agency all of which are "related to the idea of 'uptake' of information":[73]

- ***Coming to know/understand*** refers to peoples' work of "making meaning" out of the information to which they have access.

- ***Being able to monitor*** is about the ability to know government policies and commitments, track government activities, compare one's situation with that of others, compare present and past, and to share these comparisons with others.

- ***Expressing/voicing/communication*** refers to "the ability to participate in decision-making,

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69 According to Human Rights First, nearly a third of Africa's three million refugees are hosted by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Source: http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/intl_refugees/regions/africa/east_africa.htm

70 "In America, as elsewhere, the citizenship and consumer sovereignty, promised to all, can in reality be afforded only to the degree and by those who manage to harness the limited economic, cultural and social opportunities that translate into reality legal and political rights or abstract ideas of the autonomous individual" (Nyamnjoh 2004, 34).

71 A final dimension to the exclusionary danger of citizenship is the bigger picture of its function on a global scale. As Hindess observes, "perhaps the most disturbing effect of...the division of humanity into the populations of particular states...is that each state is expected to look after its own citizens and to be correspondingly less concerned about the condition of those who appear to belong elsewhere" (2002, 130). Might a discourse of citizenship, then (rather than, for example, people), feed an international structure of identity that undermines the possibility of solidarity and mutual responsibility?

72 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2. Earlier on the same page, this is expressed in a similar way, in which citizen agency is understood as "the ability of men, women and young people to get better information more quickly, cheaply and reliably; monitor and discuss what's going on; speak out; and act to make a difference."

73 Twaweza. ""Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.5.

through having the communicative and discursive resources to make oneself understood."

- ***Taking action/making a difference*** is about "co-coordinating a sequence of actions using various tools and resources...to achieve a particular purpose which involves a change from the current situation."

The final dimension of this four-fold conception forms the core of Twaweza's second notion of agency, one that is much broader and does not necessarily hinge on information as a central focus. Here, Twaweza "sees agency as about people's ability to bring about change themselves, through individual and collective actions."[74] This conception, less prominent yet powerful nonetheless, plays out throughout Twaweza's literature as a force that continually pushes the focus on access to information and the improvement of basic services to its limits. This is the conception of agency that requires Twaweza to add to its list of foci, along with "basic education, health care [and] clean water" the broad possibility that people will want to work on "other areas that might be meaningful to them."[75]

This does, indeed, present a kind of tension within Twaweza's work. While on one hand the organization asserts that "our approach is to trigger agency, and we do not have targets for what we trigger,"[76] it is also the case that the first (and more prominent) definition of agency—along with a clear targeted focus on the areas of education, health and water—are specific enough to raise questions that they might, in fact, be "targets." It is this tension, along with the overall importance of enabling a further elaboration of Twaweza's concepts of agency, that calls for an examination of the concept in more depth.

1. What Is Agency?

In its simplest sense, agency has often been defined as something akin to "the ability of people to make choices." In neoclassical economics, this definition has been elaborated as the "individual rational calculating agent"[77] and has had profound influence on theories of social change, development, and the constitution of livelihoods.[78] It is a version of this conception of agency that appears to be at work in Twaweza's "Unpacking the Theory of Change" document. Here, we have a "citizen that makes a rational decision on how to allocate her time." The calculations made by this citizen are presented as individual processes—perhaps influenced by "peer pressure or the ability to collaborate with others"—but ultimately about individual choice nonetheless.[79]

The notion of agency as a property or action of the rational calculating agent has led to a strong distinction between agency and structure throughout the scholarly literature. If agency is the freedom of individual actors to make choices, then structure is the institutional and social context that constrains and limits these choices.[80] In this binary framework, a heated debate arises "about whether change is brought about or constrained by forces beyond peoples' control (social structures such as class, religion) or through individual and collective action (agency)."[81] While the distinction may be useful in teasing out various forces and issues

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74 This is the conception that is reflected also in Twaweza's assertion that "ordinary citizens can become drivers of their own development and act as co-creators of democracy" ("Theory of Change and Approach," p.1).

75 Twaweza. ""Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.

76 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.7.

77 See, for example, Becker 1981.

78 Boettke 1998.

79 Twaweza. "Unpacking the Theory of Change." p1. This rational calculating agent is quite different, however, from some of the notions of agency suggested in Twaweza's "More Than a Thousand Miles Report." Here, we find a sense that individuals are embedded in social and relational contexts and that their actions and choices are both constrained and enabled by "the bonds that tie people together." (Twaweza. "More Than a Thousand Miles.: Reflections on a Field Trip In the Lake Zone, Tanzania, October 2009." Pre-Publication Draft. p.10).

80 Luttrell et al. 2009; Peris et al 2009.

81 Lutrell et al. 2009, 9; Cleaver 2007, 226.

at work in thinking strategically about social change, freedom, and power, this either/or framework has been identified by some as a hindrance to meaningful analysis and understanding. On one hand, theories that focus on "agency as decision-making" tend to sidestep or underplay the importance of the equity and power issues that affect people's abilities to make choices in the first place.[82] These theories may sometimes also advocate for an overly-optimistic notion of the transformative effects of the exercise of individual agency.[83] On the other hand, theories that focus on structural determinants and constraints tend to place power beyond the reach of ordinary people and risk diminishing a sense that substantive change is possible without total revolution.[84]

In response to this conundrum, many contemporary theorists of agency have sought to develop conceptions that allow for a non-dualistic understanding of how human action—at both individual and collective levels—is shaped and influenced by a broad range of factors including choice, freedom, power, institutional structure, culture, social location, habit, and affect/emotion, among others. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theories of agency and Amartya Sen's "capabilities approach" are two prominent examples of such projects. Bandura suggests that human agency operates within a system of "triadic reciprocal causation" in which human behavior, cognitive and emotional factors, and external events in the environment "all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally."[85] In this approach, it is understood that agency and structure are interrelated; that "people are producers as well as products of social systems."[86] For Sen, agency is conceptualized as one component of a broader set of considerations called "capabilities" and questions of the relationship between structure and agency are addressed within the context of an analysis of "what people are effectively able to do and to be."[87]

The capability approach maintains what might be thought of as a "traditional" focus on agency as a process of conscious choice.[88] For Sen, agency is "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important."[89] Values and goals, and the choice to pursue them, are central to this conception: "agency is an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices"[90] and "agency cannot be defined except in relation to goals."[91] What sets this approach apart from earlier concepts of the individual calculating agent, however, is that this goal-seeking agency is not understood in isolation. Agency is one interdependent component, rather, of a much broader framework. The term "capabilities" is intended to capture some of this multidimensionality, describing not only what people choose based on a set of goals (agency), but also how these choices are affected by their access to individual and collective resources (which broadly include things such as well-being, community, a sense of self-efficacy, information and knowledge, material resources, and more).[92]

Beyond this deeply contextualized approach, two important implications of Sen's conception of agency as the freedom to pursue goals are that, first, these goals can be defined only by agents themselves (Sen has

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82 As Cleaver (2007, 226) writes, "agency...does not exist in a vacuum but is exercised in a social world in which structure shapes the opportunities and resources available to individuals, in which appropriate ways of being and behaving are not simply a matter of individual choice."
83 Cleaver notes that Giddens (1984) and Long (2001) are particularly good examples of such a "largely optimistic" approach (Cleaver 2007, 226).
84 Gibson-Graham 2006.
85 Bandura 1999, 23.
86 Bandura 1999, 24.
87 Robeyns 2005, 94. See also Bronfenbrenner 1979.
88 As Robeyns points out, Sen's framework is "clearly a theory within the liberal school of thought in political philosophy, albeit arguably of a critical strand" (2005, 95).
89 Sen 1985, 206.
90 Samman and Santos 2009, 3.
91 Alkire 2008, 459.
92 Robeyns 2005; Kabeer 1999; Crocker 2008

vehemently resisted the development of a standard "list" of capability goals[93]), and second, these goals need not be centered upon the well-being of the individual agents. The capability approach, notes Clark, has a notion of agency which "recognizes that individuals often have values and goals...that transcend and sometimes even conflict with personal well-being."[94] This is directly relevant to Twaweza's challenge, identified above, of sorting through the tension between, on one hand, a notion of agency that contains specific means (information access and use) and aims (improving basic services) and, on the other, a more Sen-like notion that remains fundamentally open to the exercise of freedom that people with true agency will engage in.

The capability approach, for all of its merits, does not exhaust the field of thought in the realm of agency. Indeed, a number of scholars have elaborated on important perspectives and dimensions of the concept that are often missing from much of the capability literature, particularly due to its extensive (and perhaps excessive) focus on human rationality and its operations in human goal-oriented choice. There are at least three key issues raised in this regard. First, as Cleaver points out, "agency is not simply comprised of reflexive action, but strongly constituted through non-reflexive practice."[95] Agents choose, but their choices are affected by non-rational and often unconscious patterns, tendencies and dispositions—what Bordieu calls "habitus."[96]

Second, the domain of choice available to agents is importantly shaped by what might be called "the social production of desire"—that is, the processes by which agents come to *want* (and to believe that they *should* want) certain things and not others.[97] In a broad sense, considering this dimension of agency means recognizing various forms of social power at work—often more subtle than an analysis of structures and institutions would allow us to acknowledge—that form the very conditions of possibility for agency. Kabeer's study on the measurement of women's empowerment makes this dimension explicit: in cases where women appear to have social choices that are likely to increase their well-being, yet choose otherwise, a notion of agency needs to take into account ways in which these women have "internalized their social status as persons of lesser value."[98] Agency, in other words, cannot simply be reduced to choices that are constrained or enabled by various conditions and contexts. Questions must also be asked about the processes and relationship which give rise to certain sets of choices (and not others) in the first place. We will return to this issue below in the discussion of goals and achievements.

A final and related dimension to agency is the question of the formation of agents themselves. We touched upon this issue in our earlier discussion of citizenship, yet it is worth re-stating in this context as well. The rational (and non-rational) choices of agents are made possible not only by the conditions in which they find themselves, but also by the social processes which generate the agents themselves *as agents*. Agrawal prefers to use the term "subjects" over the term "agents" precisely for this reason. Following Foucault, he understands that agents do not come into the world pre-formed, like atoms ready to assemble with other agents; rather, agents are shaped by—subjected to and therefore "subjects of"—social processes that make them (even as they themselves participate in this making through active choices and resistances).[99] Just as certain forms of society-state relationships seem to generate "the citizen" as a particular subject, so does the social and cultural context in which people find themselves shape their subjectivity as "agents." The individualized rational

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93 Robeyns 2005, 106.
94 Clark 2006. See also Crocker 2008, 5.
95 Cleaver 2007, 226.
96 Bordieu 1977. See also Greener (2002) for in-depth discussion of non-reflexive dimensions of agency.
97 For an elaboration of this notion in another domain—that of the "history of sexuality"—see Foucault 1978.
98 Note that, while extremely useful, this notion of "internalized oppression" can also be quite dangerous when an observer claims to know the extent to which another person has fallen under a spell of "false consciousness." The conceit of the observer is critical to be aware of here; to what extent might women in Kabeer's case sometimes be quite aware of the dynamics of power involved, yet make choices nonetheless—for many reasons—that appear to be based on an internalization of "lesser status"?
99 Agrawal 2005.

choice model of agency is, for example, a very culturally specific notion and is produced through various means—including (but far from limited to) academic and development practitioner discourses about "what agency is."[100]

It is instructive here to look at Nyamnjoh's notion of "domesticated agency," developed through a study of notions and practices of personhood in Botswana.[101] In contrast to Western liberal notions of agents as autonomous individuals, Naymnjoh argues that traditionally throughout Bostwana (and, he also contends, Africa as a whole), "agency...has meaning only as domesticated agency, by which is meant agency that stresses negotiation, interconnectedness and harmony between individual interests and community expectations."[102] The individual does not realize freedom through expressions of autonomy and independence, but rather in and through expressions of interconnection with others. "Achievement is devoid of meaning if not pursued within, as part of, and on behalf of a group of people who recognize the achievement."[103] The point here is not to substantiate a claim that such a notion of agency is pervasive across all corners of the African continent. It is, rather, to offer an example of a conception of agency (which very well *may* be found in many parts of East Africa as well) that differs substantially in its cultural content from that of the Western norm. Such an example requires us to raise the question, when engaging with the cultivation of citizen agency, of what kind of culturally-specific conceptions of subjectivity and personhood are being advocated? Is something very particular disguised by a discourse that appears to be universal?

Concluding our general discussion we can see that a number of key lessons emerge from an engagement with the complexity of contemporary thinking on agency. These include notions that:

- agency and structure are inseparable

- agency is always contextual and relational

- agency is multidimensional

- agency is partly about choice, but it also involves non-reflexive dimensions

- agency is shaped by, and exercised in the context of, complex power relationships and processes of social formation, including the formation of desire and subjects.

It is beyond the scope of this project to offer a thorough evaluation of the many perspectives on agency found in the scholarly literature or to develop an elaborate synthesis of these perspectives. In the elaboration that follows, we will explore some elements of these perspectives that we believe can be useful to Twaweza's self-reflection and learning process, focusing in particular on an explication of the numerous dimensions of agency identified in the literature, the constraints and enabling conditions that agents may face, and issues of the effectiveness of agency in making change.

100Morris et al. 2001.
101Nyamnjoh 2004.
102 Nyamnjoh 2004, 38.
103 Nyamnjoh 2004, 39. It is important to note here Nyamnjoh's qualification (and defense) of this conceptualization: "This worldview may be contested, but it is widely shared, and deserves to be taken seriously in scholarly analyses, without necessarily implying submission to an unproblematic, romantic or timeless notion of a consensual Africa pregnant with primordial possibilities and untested communalisms. Instead of giving it an opportunity (even if only) to prove itself (wrong), this worldview has tended to be caricatured, trivialized or dismissed offhand, with the implication that it is inherently incompatible with the promotion of individual rights and democracy. Yet the closer one looks, the further away from reality this assumption seems" (2004, 39).

2. The Many Dimensions of Agency

Agency cannot be understood generically. Because it is about the exercise of human freedom, its manifestations are as diverse and complex as such freedom allows. Samman and Santos, in their review of concepts and indicators of agency, identify a number of dimensions in which agency can be understood and analyzed. These distinctions, we believe, can be helpful to Twaweza in clarifying its domains of work, the specific dimensions in which enhanced citizen agency is encouraged, and in examining how these dimensions might (or might not) connect with and mutually-support each other. As Alkire writes, "any one 'global' measure of agency will obscure the informative variations."[104] The dimensions of these variations are:

- ***Spheres***. These are "societal structures in which people are embedded, which can give rise to, shape and or constrain the exercise of agency"[105] and include such areas as states (local and national governments), markets (in many forms), households, communities, religious organizations, tribes, and families. Agency formed in relation to and exercised in the context of these spheres may look very different in each, and the expression or realization of agency across spheres may depend on numerous factors including (but not limited to) access to knowledge and communication resources; a sense of rights and of self-efficacy; access to the social resources necessary to cross spheres or to various mediating power-brokers who can cross these spheres as proxies; and the ability to allocate time and existing resources to such purposes.[106]

- ***Domains.*** These refer to the kinds of tasks to which agency is applied,[107] including such things as obtaining goods and services, sustaining health or addressing illness, pursuing education, communicating with others, advocating for improved services or government accountability, building community, resolving (or generating) disputes, cultivating friendships, managing daily family relationships, courting potential mates, and raising children. As should be clear, domains are not restricted to any particular sphere; rather, they are cross-cutting practical activities that may involve numerous different forms of engagement across multiple spheres.[108] As with the dimension of spheres, however, it is not clear that the exercise of agency in one domain translates to agency across others: "even though an advance in agency in one dimension may enhance agency in others, this is not always the case."[109]

- ***Forms.*** In multiple spheres and across multiple domains, agency can also take a number of different forms. Bandura distinguishes three[110]: *direct personal agency* is individual agency manifest as action by that individual. This is often the form of agency that is assumed in various rational choice models. *Proxy agency* is quite different: "in this socially mediated mode of agency, people try to get those who wield influence and power to act on their behalf to get what they want."[111] *Collective action* is a form of agency in which people are acting together to seek collectively-desired (or at least collectively

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104 Alkire 2009, 465.
105 Samman and Santos 2009, 6.
106 As Samman and Santos summarize, "there may be cultural, spiritual, political dimensions to the question of why one would exercise 'agency' in one sphere and not the other" (2009, 6).
107 "Agency and empowerment can be described and measured with respect to different domains of life...[it is] experienced with respect to different tasks" (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, 5)
108 Obtaining clean water, for example, may involve negotiating spheres of government service provision, community resource use policies and practices, market relations (in the case of privatized water systems), and household divisions of labor.
109 Samman and Santos offer an example here: "a woman may be very empowered as a mother but excluded from the labor force by social conventions" (2009, 7). They go on to note that empirical evidence supports the view that "different aspects of women's reported empowerment...tend to be poorly correlated" (7).
110 Bandura 1999.
111 Bandura 1999, 34.

constituted) outcomes.[112] These forms are substantively different, involving very different kinds of actors, relating in very different ways, and involving distinct relations of power and influence. Work to trigger these various forms of agency—Twaweza's goal—would need to be crafted very differently depending on the form.

- **_Levels_** (or **_scales_**). These refer to the geographical and scalar dimensions of agency. Here we see that agency can be enacted on scales from the local to the (ostensibly) global,[113] or from the "micro" to the "macro."[114] This is a dimension with which Twaweza seems particularly concerned, raising questions in its literature about "the role of proximity vs. distance in the exercise of agency" and "the kinds of communicative resources needed for less proximal agency to be exercised."[115] Samman and Santos claim, in this regard, that "the set of skills required for the exercise of agency at each level seems to be somehow different, though some skills may be transferable."[116]

- **_Modes of Power_**. This, the final dimension we will discuss, refers to the ways in which the power wielded by agents to accomplish their goals is used, or rather, the forms that the power relationships of agency take. Numerous authors have adopted and adapted Rowland's framework[117] for conceptualizing these modes as the exercise of _power over_ ("the ability to coerce and influence...actions and thoughts"[118]), _power to_ ("the capacity to act, to organizing and to change,"[119] to "create new possibilities"[120]), _power with_ ("power from collective action"[121]), and _power from within_ ("enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance"[122]). As with the other dimensions, each of these modes of power carries along with it important contingencies and consequences. Agency will not work through all of these modes in every sphere and domain, in every form, or on every level. Agents may be constrained in their use of some modes and enabled in their use of others, and these conditions will greatly influence how agency can be "triggered" and, when it is, what that can and will look like.

In general, it is clear that researchers are skeptical of any generalized claims that the exercise of agency in one sphere, domain, form, level or mode of power can be read as an indicator that agency can or will be exercised in another dimension. Because each dimension is shot through with difference, signifying profound divides and disjunctions between different realms of "everyday life," the "assumption that as a person becomes more empowered to act in one [dimension] this will feed over into another" is problematic. As Alkire contends, "scrutiny of the evidence has called into question such general assumptions."[123] It does not appear that

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112 Though collective action does present a substantial challenge to the notion of "goal-seeking," since it is not always clear that a given collective action instance can be said to involve a true consensus among actors. Indeed, the most extreme instance of collective agency as a form of non-rational, non-choice is--in some cases, at least--the mob action or the mass riot.

113 We must be careful in our use of the notion of "global scale," since it can be quite illusory. As Gibson-Graham (2002, 32) has pointed out, all action at the "global" level takes place in some specific local place. In this sense, the global is not a "scale" as much as it is a particular way of articulating local actions together—often via multi-local institutions with access to vast resources—to generate forms of influence (agency) that extend across numerous localities and (in many cases) through numerous spheres.

114 Samman and Santos 2009, 6.

115 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010. p.4

116 Samman and Santos 2009, 8. "At the individual level people may need to be self-confident, self-determined, to know what they want, and to direct their actions towards that goal. At a collective level, individuals must surmount the collective action problem, attain consensus, and take on a role either as a leader or follower" (8).

117 Rowland 1997.

118 Luttrell et al 2009, 9.

119 Luttrell et al 2009, 9.

120 Samman and Santos 2009, 8.

121 Luttrell et al 2009, 9.

122 Samman and Santos 2009, 8.

123 Alkire 2009, 466.

research on this topic has advanced sufficiently to offer a global analysis of which dimensions are likely to link to or "spill over" into others in terms of the exercise of agency; indeed, such an analysis may be impossible outside of the specific details of an on-the-ground case. This evaluation work must be done, we conclude, "in the field," in direct conversation with—and perhaps through experimentation in collaboration with—people who are exercising agency in various forms.

People exercise agency...

In many...
SPHERES

•State
•Market
•Community
•Household

In many...
DOMAINS

•Obtaining goods
•Obtaining services
•Accessing information
•Communicating
•Creating culture
•Building community
•Fighting for rights
•Changing policy
•Etc.

In multiple...
FORMS

•Direct
•Proxy
•Collective

At multiple...
LEVELS

•Micro
•Meso
•Macro

To achieve multiple...
GOALS

Influenced by multiple enabling or disabling...
CONDITIONS

•Assets
•Capabilities
•Affective resources
•Cultural resources
•Social relations of power & identity
•Institutional structures & capacities

Using or confronting multiple...
MODES of POWER

•Power-Over
•Power-To
•Power-With
•Power-Within

Figure 4. An illustration of agency's many dimensions.

3. Making Agency Work: Constraints and Enabling Factors

Having outlined some of the complex dimensions of agency, we turn now to exploring some of the key ways in which the expression and exercise of agency is constrained and enabled. This is crucial, for no effort to enhance citizen agency can succeed if it does not take careful notice of these elements. We identify five categories of factors within the literature: assets (resources), capabilities (knowledge and power), affect/emotion, habit/routine, opportunity structure, and responsibility. We shall examine each in turn.

Assets, or **resources**, are perhaps the most obvious constraints or enabling factors in the exercise of agency. Indeed, as Cleaver describes, "individuals effect action by deploying various sorts of resources."[124] Resources include material assets, but also "the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice."[125] These resources may be *individual assets*, such as land, housing, livestock, knowledge, tools

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124 Cleaver 2009, 131.
125 Kabeer 1999, 437.

or financial wealth, or they may be *collective assets* that include shared material goods, common pool resources, collective confidence, and social resource such as "voice, organization, representation and identity."[126] It is both the form and the distribution of these resources--in the specific contexts which people are faced with-- that makes the difference. In terms of *form*, the resources to which people have access must match the requirements of the sphere, domain, form and level at which they wish to act. In terms of *distribution*, people must have adequate access to these resources and inequity in such access is bound to significantly hinder or prevent the exercise of agency.[127]

Affect and emotion are equally as critical to the exercise of agency and, while they can be considered a type of resource, deserve separate treatment. Here we refer to the *senses* or *feelings* that people have about themselves, their world, and the possibilities for effective action. As Bandura describes, "unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce changes by one's actions."[128] At least four key dimensions of this sense of power are identified in the literature.[129]

- **Sense of right.** In order to act people must have a "sense of the right to do so."[130] This may be a sense of right granted formally by the state, a sense of right based on a community's shared values, or a sense of internal moral right.

- **Sense of capability.** Effective action requires people to have "a sense of the capabilities to participate effectively." To be clear, this is a separate issue from that of actual capabilities; one may have capability but be unable to activate it because of a sense or feeling that this capability is lacking. Bandura notes the importance of this dimension: "Among the mechanisms through which human agency is exercised, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy."[131] This sense of capacity, Cleaver points out, is significantly influenced by "wider macrosocial patterns of ethnicity, class and gender."[132]

- **Sense of efficacy.** Here we are dealing not with a sense of one's own internal capacities, but rather with a sense of how *effective* this capacity might be in achieving a particular goal. Agency is activated by a sense that what we seek to influence can, in fact, be influenced. Political agency is activated, similarly, by "a sense that such participation will have an impact upon political processes."[133] Beliefs about how change happens and the responsiveness of institutions to citizen action are key factors.

- **Sense of possibility.** This affective dimension is importantly distinct from a sense of efficacy. If an agent does not feel that a given action, transformation, or goal is *possible*, then a senses of right, capability or of efficacy may be rendered moot. In this dimension, we confront the effects of what Gaventa calls "invisible power": the myriad ways in which the exercise of power can "shape the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation" by determining what appears appropriate to discuss, imagine, act upon, or articulate.[134]

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126 Samman and Santos 2009, 3.
127 Cleaver 2009.
128 Bandura 1999, 28.
129 Note that these dimensions form a hierarchy by which "sense of efficacy" requires the "sense of right and capability" and the sense of possibility depends on the three prior "senses."
130 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 23, citing Seidman 1999 and Lister 1997.
131 Bandura 1999, 28.
132 Cleaver 2009, 137.
133 Jones and Gaventa 2002, 23.
134 Gaventa 2006.

Habit and routine are dimensions of daily practice that are not often discussed in development literature dealing with issues of agency. However, as Cleaver points out, "there has been an overemphasis on the role of reflexive action and deliberative strategizing in people's agency, and a relative neglect of the impact of routinized practices and unconscious motivations."[135] On one hand, this factor in the realization of agency is about the simple and mundane ways in which daily actions become ingrained, habitualized and thus difficult to engage as locations of potential conscious and transformative action. On the other hand, this habitual momentum is bound up with the operations of power. As Greener writes:

> Agents, through structural, habitual or informational constraints, may be severely restricted in their range of possible actions, but be unaware of this as their actions have become so ingrained in practice that they are considered normal, and a lack of opportunity is not only the most likely outcome, but also the 'common sense' one.[136]

This is a factor that Twaweza may want to consider thoroughly, since the transformation of information (as we shall discuss in the following section) into meaningful and potentially activating knowledge may be profoundly influenced (specifically, limited or closed off) by these processes of habit and routine.

Opportunity structure is a term used by Ibrahim and Alkire, Samman and Santos and others to refer to the broad array of social, political and economic contexts that shape the opportunities agents have to make choices, act and to have those actions make a difference.[137] Resources, positive emotion and a rupture in habit are often not enough: "even when individuals have a pro-active attitude, they may be constrained by the institutional environment in which they operate in such a way that they may not be able to transform their choices into the desired outcomes."[138] Opportunity structure can be understood in terms of four broad (and significantly overlapping) categories:

- ***Identity factors***. In contexts in which human identities are linked to social hierarchies that mediate peoples' access to resources and power, identity factors are crucial in constraining or enabling (depending on one's identity and the context in which one seeks to act) agency. As Cleaver writes, "inequitable social relations ensure that some individuals, by virtue of their class, gender, ethnicity, and so on, are better placed than others to deploy resources, to shape rules, and to exercise power and rights."[139] It is this reality that makes generalizations about what may or may not enhance "citizen agency" nearly impossible. As numerous researchers have shown, identities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age (etc) matter in shaping the spheres, domains, forms, and levels on which agency can be exercised by a given individual or group.[140] Efforts to trigger "citizen agency" in general may, in this context, lead to triggering only the agency of those people who already have increased access to resources and power via the privileges that certain identities (among other factors discussed in this section) incur.

- ***Institutional factors.*** Institutions (which include racism, sexism, and classism, among other "institutions") crucially shape the contexts in which agency is exercised as well.[141] A few distinctions

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135 Cleaver 2009, 137.
136 Greener 2002, 696.
137 Ibrahim and Alkire 2007; Samman and Santos 2009; Naryan 2005.
138 Samman and Santos 2009, 4.
139 Cleaver 2009, 131.
140 Kabeer 1999; Litrell et al. 2009. Cleaver takes this analysis one step farther in asking critical questions about the use of facile categories such as "women," "the poor" and "youth." These categories, as important as they may be for refining an even more generalized notion of generic "agency," can themselves hide significant differences. "The question of how such generalize categories of people might exercise agency is generally sidestepped" (Cleaver 2001, 38).
141 Samman and Santos describe this factor as such: "access to information, the degree of inclusion and participation

are important. First, we have both formal and informal institutions. *Formal institutions*, such as governments, laws, contracts, and organizations are the overt public structures within which (and sometimes against which) people often engage when seeking to achieve certain kinds of public goals in their exercise of agency. *Informal institutions* are more difficult to name and identify, though their operation is equally important in the shaping of the conditions for agency.[142] These include numerous relations and (often) tacit agreements about how people should behave, relate, reciprocate, and advocate for their needs in the context of social networks and complex webs of identity and power.

On the formal side, another important distinction is between the structures of *institutional participation and response* and institutional capacity. Institutional participation and response names ways in which a given organization (government, NGO, church or mosque, community group) are structured to facilitate (or not) participation by those who are affected by their operations and the ways in which these institutions respond to the needs, aspirations and demands of stakeholders. *Institutional capacity*, on the other hand, is about the extent to which a given institution is actually capable of addressing a given set of needs or concerns--regardless of its structures of participation and response. This is an important difference, since a key question in thinking about and advocating for citizen-driven change in contexts of intense resource scarcity (such as rural East Africa) is whether citizen agency can—*even if it is able to move institutions to desire change*—actually have impact. Advocating for better schools, for example, may be hindered by a lack of institutional accountability; but it may just as well be hindered by an inability of the accountable institutions to actually solve the problem even if they desire to do so.

- **Cultural factors.** "Because they are relational," write Samman and Santos, "agency and empowerment are highly cultural concepts, related to the system of norms, values and beliefs of a society."[143] Some of these dimensions were explored earlier in our discussion of cultural notions of agency. Here, however, we wish to highlight a few specific cultural elements that are important to consider in mapping the complexities of agency.

  Social location, or "social placement," refers to the specific ways in which people are embedded in their cultural communities. This includes the many relations of expectation, reciprocity and responsibility that call for particular kinds of behavior and action.[144] As Cleaver writes, "the imperatives of social location may cause people to choose not to exercise rights for fear of damaging their social and livelihood networks."[145]

  Social perceptions are bound up in these networks, constituting ways in which people within a particular community view and understand (and thus influence the self-perception of) a particular member; thus, "an individual's ability to exercise agency in claiming rights is partly defined by others and their

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in economic life, the degree of accountability of the public sector and the capacity of local organization" (2009, 3).

142   Cleaver (2001, 40) points out that "there is a tendency in the development literature to recognize the importance of social and 'informal' institutions but nevertheless to concentrate on the analysis of 'formal' institutions."

143   Samman and Santos 2009, 9.

144   Challenging the individualism that is often implicit or explicit in social science approaches to understanding agency, Ballet et al. suggest that we see "the person as embedded in a network of social relationships that determine a set of rights and obligations" (Ballet et al. 2007, 185). They suggest, then, that a conception of agency must take responsibility seriously: "a person is a subject whose substantive 'richness' includes major awareness of personal responsible for his/her own actions, but also of being aware ex-ante of responsibility towards others and the community for the choices made. This can even be at the expense of her personal freedom. In real life, especially in traditional societies, freedom often depends on first satisfying one's own personal obligations towards others. It is this capability of first fulfilling one's obligations that subsequently generates the capability of choosing what one wants rather than vice versa" (187).

145   Cleaver 2009, 128.

perception of the individual as worthy of citizenship."[146]

Tradition and etiquette also plays an important role in the exercise of agency. Lange describes this in the Tanzanian context: "villagers claim that, although they may have voted their leaders into power, they find it extremely difficult to hold them to account. One reason is local traditions and etiquette, which in many areas of Tanzania keep lower status people from criticizing higher status people in public."[147]

Finally, *cosmology*—cultural beliefs about the nature of life and reality, including religious beliefs—is crucial: "cosmologies matter in the formation of subjectivities and in the shaping of the relationship between individuals, collective action, and social hierarchies."[148] This includes, as Mwaura discusses in an article about the linkages between spirituality, faith and civic-driven change, religious beliefs which—in part—"determine civic arrangements within and between societies."[149]

- **Broader social and political contexts.** This is a kind of catch-all category, but is mean to refer to the ways in which specific forms and instances of agency are influenced by processes, dynamics and histories that exceed the immediate social, political and economic situations in which actors find themselves. Structures of global economic governance that shape national and local policy, dynamics of economic growth and decline, technological development and dissemination, and ongoing manifestations of the legacies of colonialism are all examples of such factors. While often seemingly beyond the control of individual or collective direct action, these processes must be taken into account in conceptualizing how, when, where, why and for what agency is exercised. Placing strategic interventions in these broader contexts can serve to make visible potential tensions, challenges or possibilities.

  Mamdani's analysis of the citizen-subject relationship in African politics is a case in point.[150] His concern is that much contemporary work on democratization and development in African states fails to fully grapple with the ways in which late colonial forms of governance and power have shaped— and continue to shape—the politics of citizen-state relations throughout the continent. To develop successful strategies for democratization in contemporary African nations (particularly, but not exclusively in regions formerly under British rule), Mamdani argues, we must understand the particular political strategy of colonial control known as "indirect rule," or what Mamdani calls "decentralized despotism,"and the many complex ways in which that strategy has influenced the contemporary political formation of African governance structures. To take Mamdani's analysis seriously requires that we acknowledge ways in which no amount of citizen advocacy for improved provision of services will lead to democratization without an accompanying strategy for both the democratic transformation of the *structures of governance* and of the *identities and subjectivities of people themselves*. In the context of Mamdani's analysis, we must ask how strategies of improved information and communication, and, more generally, strategies of increased civic participation will be articulated with strategies of ongoing work to overcome the legacies of the bifurcated state: strategies that link the rural and urban, the local and central, and develop political structures, cultures and spaces of democratic participation and representation at all levels of governance.

4. What Can Agents Succeed in Doing? The Question of Goals and Achievements

To speak only of constraints and enabling factors for agency would avoid what is perhaps the stickiest issue in any effort to conceptualize or to actualize the power of people and communities. If agency is significantly

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146 Cleaver 2009, 137.
147 Lange 2008, 1139.
148 Cleaver 2009, 134.
149 Mwaura 2008.
150 Mamdani 1996.

about seeking to achieve a particular set of visions and goals for the good life, then we must ask some challenging questions about how--and by whom--these aspirations are developed. Given the complex configuration of constraints faced by any particular group of "ordinary citizens," what visions actually materialize as goals worth struggling for? In her approach to agency, Kabeer "considers not just an individual's ability to choose to act, but how much power they have to make strategic decisions that shape their lives."[151] She distinguishes, therefore, between *first-order choices*, "decisions fundamental to the shape of a person's life," and *second-order choices*, "choices that affect life's quality but to not constitute its defining parameters."[152]

It is also critical to ask questions about how agency is expressed in the pursuit of goals. Particularly a context in which people are constrained from making first-order choices, should we always expect agency to look like public advocacy, monitoring, action for accountability or the demand for improved service provision? To what extent do the constraints and conditions placed on agency by myriad factors discussed above lead not to struggle and transformation, but to an active choice—an exercise of agency—to *not* engage in public advocacy? As Cleaver outlines, "daily livelihood imperatives, unequal command of resources, and placement within social networks of emotional relations may push the exercise of agency toward social harmony and conflict avoidance, rather than toward effective resistance or explicit renegotiation of rights."[153] We need, perhaps, to heed Cleaver's call to "think beyond the assumption that agency equates to empowering action."[154]

As noted above, arguing for a conception of citizenship that ties agency and rights to a system of state-granted entitlements may well suggest that the state is the ultimate power, rather than citizens as they seek to improve their daily lives.

C. KEY QUESTIONS ON AGENCY

➢ How will Twaweza navigate the tension of the claim to support an unconstrained expression of citizen agency and, on the other hand, to support specific forms of information, monitoring and accountability that focus on basic (public) services?

➢ To what extent do Twaweza's assertions about the power of citizen-driven change underestimate the real barriers faced by citizens to making meaningful transformation?

➢ In Twaweza's discourse about agency and citizenship, who is excluded? Where is the espoused commitment to "the most marginalized"?

➢ Does agency inhere in the individual? Is it something individuals "possess"? Or is it an energy that is expressed through collective action?

➢ How will citizen agency be clearly defined and measured without careful stipulation of what is meant by the concept?

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151 Kabeer 1999, cited in Cleaver 2009, 133.
152 Kabeer 1999, cited in Cleaver 2009, 133.
153 Cleaver 2009, 138.
154 Cleaver 2009, 129.

IV. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

A. ACCESS TO WHAT? DEFINING INFORMATION

To begin an exploration of concepts and practices of accessing and generating information, we must begin by understanding the various ways in which Twaweza defines information itself and how this definition is positioned in relationship to other understandings. In the organization's earlier literature, the concept of information was left essentially undefined. Used frequently as a central organizing concept, its definition(s) remained implicit, emerging more from examples given than from a direct discussion of definition. Thus, we see *general* reference to "making information public" (what *is* it that is being made public?), "translating and popularizing information" (what *is* it that will be popularized?), and "broad access to information" (broad access to *what*?) and *specific* reference to land ownership data, budgets, government policy, data sets, and research studies.[155] Are we to conclude that Twaweza means, by "information," public data about financial and legal structures? Or is it the case, instead, that Twaweza is focused specifically on information that contains *content* about "rights, responsibilities and entitlements"[156]? If this is so, then we may still be unclear on what exactly this "information" *is*. Thus, the framing question for this section is:

> ➢ **What is meant by "information" in Twaweza's theory of social change and what theoretical notions might inform a working understanding of this construct?**

In more recent literature, however, the notion of information has been further elaborated. While we are still unable to find a definition (content, information, and knowledge all appear to be used somewhat interchangeably), we do find more detail regarding Twaweza's understandings of its nature. It appears that information is not, for Twaweza, a single, unified thing; rather, it is important to distinguish between "different types of information."[157] These include:

- Information about outcomes ("including comparisons").

- Information "around processes (including information that triggers the imagination)"

- Information "that raises peer pressure (shaming)"

- Information "that enables coordination (everybody that is concerned about health should wear his hair in a pony tail)"[158]

Our concern with these distinctions, particularly in light of the literature which we shall subsequently review, is that while important and useful, they are not actually distinct "types" of information; they are, rather,

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155 To be fair, "traditional folklore" appears once in the literature, but in a strange context: opposed to content that would be disseminated through "traditional media," folklore is "typically held by public bodies and NGOs" (Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.8.). This is either an editing mistake, a loaded statement (implying that tradition in East Africa has effectively died and become the domain of government agencies and museum-keepers), or a misnomer about the nature of "traditional folklore." Regardless, it is the only reference to such forms of knowledge in Twaweza's literature and does not appear to play a central role in any of the organization's expressed goals or work foci. The example of information in the "Asha and Juma" story seems more representative: "HakiElimu sent an envelope full of information about the government education plan, what it was meant to achieve, the amount of money that was to reach schools, and how everyone had a right to be involved through the local school committee." (Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.4.).

156 Twaweza. Purpose, Goals and Objectives." p.3.

157 Twaweza. "Unpacking the Theory of Change." p.2.

158 All quotes in this bulleted section are from Twaweza. "Unpacking the Theory of Change." p.2.

different *subjects, goals, or effects* which information (of a number of various types) might contribute to or address. And this is not a trivial difference.[159] When Twaweza asks evaluators to investigate "under what conditions/circumstances is there uptake of information by citizens," clarity regarding the nature of this "information" will be crucial. What, exactly, are researchers looking for? What, exactly, are citizens "uptaking" and which kinds of uptake are Twaweza seeking to support? It may be useful here to turn to an exploration of some ways in which information is conceptualized by information science scholars and others.

1. Concepts of Information

Defining "information" is, to say the least, quite challenging. We can illustrate this challenge by beginning with Parker's definition of information as "the pattern of organization of matter and energy."[160] From this viewpoint, the only thing in the universe that does not contain information is total entropy; that alone is pattern-free."[161] Bates distinguishes, among others, two important and interrelated types of information within this vast (and potentially confusing) definition: "neural-cultural information," or information that is "encoded in the brain and nervous system,"[162] and "exosomatic information," or "information stored externally to the body of animals."[163] Neural-cultural information includes:

- *Experienced information.* (Life experience that is embodied--literally--by being "encoded in neural pathways of the brain")

- *Enacted information* ("when an animal enacts information, it acts in the world, utilizing whatever capabilities and experience it can from its neural stores.")

- *Expressed information* ("the pattern of organization of communicatory scents, calls, gestures, and ultimately, human spoken language used to communicate among members of a species and between species")[164]

Exosomatic information includes:

- *Embedded information* ("that enduring information created or altered by the actions of animals and people in the world")

- *Recorded information* ("communicatory or memorial information preserved in a durable medium")[165]

These categories can allow us to see both the complexities of the concept of information and also the myriad manifestations that information may take at any given time and in any given social process. When speaking of the "access to information," are we referring to peoples' access to certain experiences? To embodied

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159   As Menou (1995b) states, concepts of information "relate to both processes and material states which are closely inter-related and may often come to play in any situation. That they are inextricably interwoven is no excuse for not pursuing their differentiation and definition, even if the latter are only tentative and temporary. Remaining alert about what type of information one is dealing with at any stage appears to be a basic requirement for effective reasoning." Agre also points out that "The problem with 'information' is that it levels the distinctions among disparate categories of communicative actions and artifacts" (1995, 227).

160   Parker 1974, quoted in Bates 2006, 1033. Bates elaborates: "Information is the pattern of organization of the matter of rocks, of the earth, of plants, of animal bodies, or of brain matter. Information is also the pattern of organization of the energy of my speech as it moves the air, or of the earth as it moves in an earthquake" (Ibid).

161   Bates 2006, 1033.

162   Bates 2006, 1038.

163   Bates 2006, 1039.

164   All quotes in this bulleted list from Bates 2006, 1038-9.

165   Bates 2006, 1039.

practices and the knowledge that they build and require? To spaces for communication with each other (by many means, including speaking, dancing, singing, and writing)? To experiences of durable material constructions? To concrete representations and recordings of experience and knowledge (such as papers, data sets, pictures and charts)? To a combination of some (but not all) of these?

Shifting from this big-picture view, we can narrow our focus to look more specifically at ways of categorizing information as it is (perhaps) more commonly understood: specifically, as a combination of expressed and recorded information. In this regard, McReadie and Rice's comprehensive literature review on cross-disciplinary conceptions of information is quite helpful.[166] They distinguish four primary notions of information:

Information as commodity/resource is perhaps the most common understanding of information, particularly in mainstream political and media discourses. In this conception, information is a *thing*, "something that can be produced, purchased, replicated, distributed, sold, traded, manipulated, passed along, controlled"[167] and, we would add, *taken-up* or *accessed*. Menou calls this conception "information-as-object."[168] It is this notion that we see most consistently in Twaweza's literature—a sense that information is a thing, or a bundle of things, which people can create, access, transform, pass along, and then (hopefully) do things with. These things, most often, are understood to be bundles of *facts*, objective statements about the nature of current economic, political, or social reality. We will return to this notion of "information as facts" further below.

Information as data in the environment links us with some of the broader conceptions of neural-cultural and embedded (exosomatic) information presented above. In this understanding, information is data that is "available for interaction with human information processing capabilities."[169] This includes "objects, artifacts, sounds, smells, visual and tactile phenomena, activities, events of the phenomena of nature."[170] Information here is the broad complex of sensory data that people and communities pull into their worlds of experience. This is, in a sense, a notion of information that is consistent with "the domain of everyday life."[171] Not only does it validate a wide array of ways in which people navigate their realities, but it also raises important questions about the kinds of information that are and are not recognized as such. Menou notes the tendency to "equate information with formal information products and services" and the ways in which such an equation can deny the legitimacy of other crucial forms.[172] He concludes, quite usefully, that "when formal information sources, especially information systems and services are not used, it does not mean that people live without information, but simply that they rely on other channels."[173]

Information as a representation of knowledge is a way of thinking about information as a guide to, or a "pointer to" varieties of knowledge. Information, in this conception (or, perhaps, more accurately) *form*, offers a kind of index, a card-catalog or database that facilitates access to the "actual" information or knowledge that is being sought.[174] This is the kind of information that would assist people to know where or how to find other information, to "know who knows what."[175] It is perhaps within the purview of this

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166   McReadie and Rice 1999a; McReadie and Rice 1999b.
167   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 47.
168   Menou 1995a, 464.
169   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 46.
170   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 46.
171   Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
172   Menou 1995a, 465.
173   Menou 1995a, 465. McReadie and Rice (1995a, 48) also note that this conception of information "requires, then, a shift from considering access as an act of answering questions and retrieving facts, to a process of resolving problematic situations and reducing equivocality."
174   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 48.
175   Borgatti and Cross 2003, 432.

conception that Twaweza might locate its work of "brokering information."[176] Here, of course, we confront key questions—which will be discussed further below—about the nature of the information that is brokered, its form, its accessibility, its production, and the power relationships embedded in all of these dimensions.

Information as part of the communication process, finally, is a substantial move away from information-as-object to a more process-oriented approach. In this conception, information is understood to be "part of human behavior in the process of moving through space/time to make sense of one's world."[177] Instead of assuming (explicitly or implicitly) that the transmission of information is also the transmission of meaning and knowledge, an understanding of information as part of a communication process "assumes meanings are in people, not in words"[178] and recognizes that it is the social and political context in which information is produced, communicated, interpreted and utilized that gives it substance and purpose. Information does not act, nor does it transform: "knowledge is what users do with data rather than what data do to users."[179]

This conception of information calls us to examine the question of the relationship between data, information, and knowledge. While the three are often confused or conflated, maintaining a distinction may be important. According to Meadow and Yuan, "*data* usually means a set of symbols with little or no meaning to a recipient. *Information* is a set of symbols that does have meaning or significance to their recipient. *Knowledge* is the accumulation and integration of information received and processed by a recipient."[180] Information, then, may be understood as data that appears meaningful; knowledge is the integration of this meaningful data into the actual, living context of people. This is similar to a distinction that Twaweza makes in at least one document, articulating a concern with "the way in which information turns into knowledge for meaning making" and asserting that "if information is to become knowledge, people must do the work: they must be able to compare, contrast, connect and converse if this transformation is to take place."[181] Servaes and Malikhao write along these same lines that "meaning is not something that is delivered to people; people create or interpret it themselves. If knowledge is to be effectively employed by people, it needs to be interpreted and evaluated by those it is designed to help."[182]

The crucial distinction here is that information only becomes knowledge (and thus only becomes *useful*) when it is transformed by real people, in real contexts, into *meaning*. Knowledge, then, can be understood as "information given meaning and integrated with other contents of understanding."[183] Information is, quite literally, *in-formation*, not formed until it is made into meaning by a user.   Key question then, for those interested in the transformative potential of information and knowledge, include: when and how does information become knowledge? How do different kinds of information become knowledges differently? Do some kinds of information lend themselves to transformative knowledge better than others? We will turn now, however, to a related issue--that of the "politics of information."

2. Neutral Facts? The Question of Power and the Production of Information

The notion that information is *not* meaning has a dangerous side. To the extent that meaning is associated with all things subjective, political, laden with or shaped by relations of power and inequity—and, conversely, things without "inherent" meaning are seen as objective, and neutral—then "information" may be understood as "value-free" data, a raw material that gains its political content only through use. "The concept of

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176 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010. p.9.
177 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 48.
178 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 47.
179 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 48.
180 Meadow and Yuan 1997, 701.
181 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.5.
182 Servaes and Malikhao 2007, 28. Freire (2006, 79) similary writes that "liberating education consists of acts of cognition, not transferrals of information."
183 Bates 2006, 1042.

information," notes Agre, "carries a certain connotation of neutrality."[184] This is a dangerous view, since it disguises the many ways in which information is shaped by and constitutive of power relationships. As Dervin asserts, social relations of power are involved in "the naming, designing and maintaining of every aspect and nuance (apparent or hidden, of recent design or lost in antiquity) of the collection, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of whatever that system (and the society in which it is embedded) calls information."[185]

We identify a number of dimensions in which power relations play a significant role in the creation, transmission and use of information:

Production of information. In its neutral guise as a set of objective facts, information can appear either as a natural phenomenon (a product without a producer) or as a product of a value-free production process— one of researching "the facts." The question of who—and to what end—is actually generating information is hidden by such notions, and thus the question of how, exactly, information comes to be shaped by social relationships of power is obscured. As numerous social scientists—particularly from a feminist standpoint— have pointed out, even data (the supposed bastion of objectivity and neutrality) has a politics. Choices (and non-choices) about how it is conceptualized, measured, collected, aggregated and transformed into meaningful information can be profoundly influenced by the social positioning of those who are generating data.[186] This may be particularly true when data and information are generated by—or even in relation to— large and powerful institutions such as governments and corporations. As Onwumechili and M'Bayo point out, public (government controlled or owned) channels of media and private channels in Africa have very different interests and operate in very different power configurations, thus generating different kinds of information with different effects.[187]

In the production and dissemination of information, then, we must ask: "what prevents long-established patterns of power from being reproduced? Who speaks, and who is heard?"[188] For Twaweza, the question is about who makes the information that is being accessed, brokered and communicated? Is this information production part of a power-aware process of "participatory media" such as that described by Jones and Gaventa?[189] Are "ordinary citizens" themselves making media and sharing it? Which ordinary citizens get to produce and disseminate information and which do not? What patterns of exclusion and marginalization might play out in the production of the information with which Twaweza deals?[190] Are professionals and development organizations producing information, rather, "on behalf" of ordinary citizens? Who decides,

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184   Agre 1995, 225.
185   Dervin 1994, 372.
186   See, for example, Gillespie and Leffler 1987; Kelly 1994; Mountz et al. 2003.
187   Onwumechili and M'Bayo 1995, 54. Koningsveld (1984), cited by Schedler et al, takes this notion a step further and critiques "the common association of public information with enlightenment, modernization and emancipation," suggesting that public information should instead be understood as a disciplinary effort that accommodates bodies and brains to the exigencies of productive and administrative processes and estranges them from their own needs and capacities for the solutions to problems" (Schedler et al 1998, 449). Schedler et al., however, critique this perspective as "a gross overestimation of the role played by public information" (449).
188   Gaventa 2002, 7
189   Jones and Gaventa 2002, 22-23.
190   The case of the Daladala television show may be a useful place to begin asking such questions. Two red flags appear in an article about the project in the Daily News. First: "on her part, Bi Kiroboto commented, 'Everyone wants to talk about what is affecting him or her. Some people are quite bitter at times. Others use abusive language...But the programme is edited before being aired," Bibi Kiroboto explained. Who edits? Second: "a representative from the Information Department (Maelezo), Mr Abraham Nyantori, commended the move of giving chance to the voiceless in the country, promising full government support...Mr Nyantori said his office will monitor the programme and point out any shortcomings that need to be addressed." Should we be concerned when a government information office "points our shortcomings?" This is not a disinterested party, and nor is it "ordinary citizens." (Daily News reporter, "TBC Plans Reality Talk Show." June 16, 2010).

really, what content is made and distributed?

Terms of the debate.   For those with restricted abilities to access information due to various forms of social exclusion, "not only can it be difficult to gain access to relevant information, but such information may not exist at all because others who are likely to be oblivious to issues of import to [these groups] set the agenda and select what is to be reported on, debated, discussed, researched or questioned."[191] Power is exercised in the realm of information through the ability of some groups, institutions, or individuals to frame the very languages and vocabularies in which information is coded. Information about "rights, laws and entitlements,"[192] for example, may contain within it a normative framing that validates the terms in which it speaks—validates citizens as subjects of a particular form of paternal state, as consumers of certain state-provided resources, as entitled to various services, as responsible for certain kinds of behaviors in relation to the state. To be more specific, Twaweza appears to have decided that the information that is most important to enhancing citizen agency is information about government policies and entitlements. This means that other possible forms of information have not been chosen as priority areas—information about social movements, popular struggles, non-state forms of cooperative service provision, examples and stories of people taking collective action outside the purview of the state and its "rights and responsibilities" (to name a few examples). We do not point this out to place a specific value judgment on Twaweza's notions of citizenship, but simply to point out that the terms by which information is presented contain specific sets of values and are the manifestations of power relationships. Not everyone has the power to decide what these terms are.

Frameworks of meaning. Here we engage with a much broader issue, related to but exceeding that of setting the terms of a debate—that is, the power to "establish the framework for the very notion of what information can mean"[193] This may also be understood as the "worldview" within which the terms of information are generated and made sensible.[194] As Stuart Hall writes, "Larger historical shifts, questions of political process and formation...issues of social and political power, of social structure and economic relations [are] simply absent not by chance, but because they [are] *theoretically outside the frame of reference.*" Again, we can ask the question of who is able to establish these frameworks? Who is able to challenge them? Whose questions, issues and struggles remain outside the frame of what is considered meaningful, sensible and intelligible?

Form and content. With the "terms of the debate" and worldview decided, power is also exercised in decisions about the form that information takes (to use Twaweza's language, the "verbal, written, visual, embodied, audio and so on" manifestations of information)[195] and the content of that information (what is included, what is left out). Form and content may be derived within the specific frames of discourse and power of those who make decisions about them, and may thus contain and reproduce certain assumptions and exclusions. Written information, for example, excludes those who are non-literate. Information presented in English excludes those who do not speak the language. Information that requires an understanding of basic statistics excludes those who have not had access to such education. Twaweza gets at this dimension in noting that available information in East Africa is often "static, inert and authoritarian" and does not "lend itself to 'uptake'."[196] Related here, too, are questions about the kinds of content that are included or not included: is content relevant to womens' realities? To the realities of youth? To the realities of landless people and migrants? Who makes these decisions?

Interpretations. Information must, of course, be interpreted in order for it to become useful and to be used

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191   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 68.
192   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.8.
193   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 46.
194   Huotari & Chatman 2001
195   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.8.
196   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.8.

for meaningful action. Some of this work may be attempted through decisions about terms, form and content, yet ultimately the work of interpretation can only be done by the users of information themselves. This work of interpretation, however, is not always an inherent skill. The question arises, then, about who has access to the tools of interpretation. Who is able to read a graph? To interpret a public budget? To interpret the meaning of a particular law or regulation? Who is able to acquire knowledge—the complex of experience, information and wisdom—that would facilitate interpretation? Who is able to access other "relevant interpretations held by a society, group or organization?"[197]

Access. Finally, then, we have the question of information access. Power relations are at play, clearly, in questions about the actual, physical access to specific kinds of information. Barriers of class, race, ethnicity, gender, mobility and age (among others) can hinder access to both information and to the resources and technologies required to access it. Hafkin and Taggart, for example, in their study of gender and information technologies in developing countries, concluded that "a series of factors, including literacy and education, language, time, cost, geographical location of facilities, social and cultural norms, and women's computer and information search and dissemination skills constrain women's access to information technology."[198] These and other forms of exclusions are well-documented.[199]

Looking at these six dimensions in terms of their manifestations in the realms of data, information and knowledge can generate an analytical framework that makes apparent many of the specific ways in which social relations of power can manifest in the information process. Table 1 below presents key questions which can be asked about each dimension.

	Data	Information	Knowledge
Production	Who generates data? Who measures?	Who produces information from available data?	Who generates patterns of information that can be transformed into socially-valid knowledge?
Terms of Debate	How are the forms and techniques of data collection and measurement created and implemented? What is measured and why? What is *not* measured and why?	How are the terms created that frame data into meaningful clusters of information? What languages are used? What terms are *not* used and why?	How do the terms of knowledge systems get framed? Into what terms of knowledge must various forms of information be assimilated?
Frameworks of Meaning	What regimes of "truth" allow certain data (and not others) to appear real, reasonable, accurate, and valid?	What frameworks of meaning are used to make sense out of data? How are meanings embedded in the ways that information is presented or framed?	What regimes of knowledge are operating in a given context? How do these shape what kinds of information is intelligible or not?
Form & Content	What specific forms do data take? How are they presented and described?	What specific forms does information take? How is the content decided and	How is knowledge stored, shared, presented? What kinds of knowledge are

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197 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 46.
198 Hafkin and Taggart 2001, 2.
199 Jorge 2002; Cukier et al. 2002; Rathgaber and Adera 2000.

		why?	encouraged or discouraged?
Interpretations	How are data interpreted and by whom? What interpretations are excluded from consideration?	How is information interpreted? What kinds of interpretations are encouraged and discouraged?	How are different kinds of knowledge interpreted by others? What are the effects of these interpretations?
Access	Who is able to access data and the means to generate it?	Who is able to access information?	Who has access to what kinds of knowledge?

Table 1: Operations of Power in Data, Information & Knowledge

B. INFORMATION ACCESS

We turn our discussion now to the question of information access. While we recognize that Twaweza has made efforts in recent documents to shift from an exclusive focus on "access to information" (as exhibited in earlier documents)[200] to one on "generating and accessing information,"[201] is it still clear that the question of access is central (though not exclusive) to the organization's focus.[202] We can begin, then, by asking: how does Twaweza conceptualize access to information? When the organization writes about "access to and availability of information," what does it mean?

We can find clues in this regard by looking to Twaweza's "specific (intermediate) objectives" in regard to information access.[203] The concept means, generally, that "more ordinary citizens are able to access information about their rights, responsibilities and entitlements related to basic services, public resources, governance and other issues of interest to them." Here it is clear that the focus in on increased access for "ordinary citizens" as opposed to just for elites. Access itself is specified by at least three goals:

- *Understandable and widespread information.* "Available information is popularized and disseminated widely."

- *Diverse sources, content and vehicles.* "Sources and content of information are more diverse, as are vehicles for transmitting information, especially at local levels."

- *Opportunities to Communicate.* "Citizens have more opportunity to generate and disseminate information and views, including through use of new technologies."

In digging further into issues of information access, Twaweza notes that its specific areas of focus "are premised on ideas about "what language is best used; what communicative mode is most appropriate (verbal, written, visual, embodied, audio and so on); what technologies are best used for communication; and so

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200 See, for example, "Theory of Change and Approach" in which the generation of information is not substantially present as an objective. Instead, it is clear that "emphasis will be placed on making information transparent" (p.7).
201 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010. p.14.
202 In its "Concept Note," for example, Twaweza describes "better access and generate information" as a goal on the first page, yet the substantive section on "information" later in the paper only focuses on "access to and availability of information" (p.8). Such observations aside, it is also clear that we have been charged by Twaweza, via our contract, to focus this paper on the question of "access to information."
203 Twaweza. "Purpose, Goals and Objectives." p.3.

on."[204] While the list includes some crucial elements—which we will discuss further in this paper—the "and so on" indicates that Twaweza's work of elaborating what it means by "access to information" is not yet done. What other dimensions of information access must be taken into account?

1. Information for What? Concepts of Access

McReadie and Rice's literature review is again instructive. They identify six ways in which "access to information" can be conceptualized. While these frameworks are not mutually exclusive, they are often linked to very different notions of "information" (discussed earlier) and have very different implications for how a project of increasing information access might be understood and implemented.

Access to knowledge. As McReadie and Rice point out, "the most common understanding of access to information can be categorized as access to knowledge and its representations."[205] Access is about the ability to connect with meaningful information that will add to or transform the information-seeker's body of understanding. This often refers to obtaining printed documents (with either words or images), citations to printed documents, data sets or representations of data sets—"representations of knowledge and, when put to use, potential building blocks for new knowledge."[206] Such a conception "usually assumes that a message can be sent and received as intended by the sender and that that message, or the knowledge gained from it, might influence decisions made."[207] Information and knowledge are often confused or conflated, then, as if the act of accessing information automatically translated into the acquisition of usable knowledge. We see this idea as implicit in many of Twaweza's current formulations in which "access to information" appears to be linked immediately with the ability of citizens to use that information for meaningful action. The question of how (and if) information is transformed into useful knowledge must be addressed prior to any discussion about that knowledge as a catalyst or support for citizen action.

Access to communication. Linked with a notion of information as a part of the larger communication process, access is understood here to mean the ability of people to participate—through the production, interpretation, and use of information—in social networks of communication. "Such access," write McReadie and Rice in the language of library science, "relies on a view of relevance that is determined not by matching query statements with bibliographic references, but by matching the applicability of what is ascertained to the everyday life of the individual."[208] Information becomes, in this sense, a *relational* concept—only meaningful and useful in a web of social relationships. The relevant question in this conception of access is not so much about how much data one can obtain about a given topic (as in "access to knowledge" above), but rather about the kinds of communicative channels, tools, and opportunities a person or group of people have access to. We will discuss the notion of communication further, below.

Access to participation. Access to information in this framework is understood as a *means* through which participation in social and political life can be enabled. As McReadie and Rice write, "democratic society is built on an assumption of an informed citizenry who can gain access to information. Implicit in the idea of access to information is that it leads to access to certain rights and lack of access to information can preclude access to those rights. Information is thus requisite to the right of participation in the political process."[209] An informed public, what Milner calls a public with "civic literacy," makes for a more participative public and for a more robust democratic society.[210] Twaweza shares this perspective quite strongly: information is

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204 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." July 26, 2010. p.8.
205 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 49.
206 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 49.
207 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 49.
208 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 53.
209 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 56.
210 Milner 2002.

understood as an essential tool for citizenship.[211]

Access to goods or commodities. Information access is often conceptualized as an economic issue, one that connects directly to questions about how people achieve and maintain livelihoods, interface with markets, and buy and sell goods and services. "Access to information can influence or redistribute income, wealth or status."[212] In this framework, information itself is seen as a commodity and information access is understood to have both benefits and costs in the economic equation. This conception of access is often utilized in international development discourses about "information poor" and "information rich" countries and serves as a basis for advocating increased investment in information technology infrastructure in the name of economic growth.[213]

Access to control. In this framework, access to information is associated with—or even understood as—the exercise and maintenance of power and control. This conceptualization was, in effect, discussed above in our review of the operations of power within the production, dissemination and use of information. McReadie and Rice summarize this effectively: "access to control over which cultural, social or political issues to air or what questions to raise carries with it the potential for bias in favor of those with privileged access over those seeking to gain access, those outside the publicly accepted frame of reference or constructions of logic."[214] Access as control carries with it a sense that information can be a tool for either oppression or liberation; the struggle for information access can be seen as a process of seeking increased control over one's life and conditions of livelihood.

Access to technology. This conceptualization of access to information is a kind of misnomer. While each of the other forms of access can be framed in terms of the question, "access *for* what?" (knowledge, participation, communication, economic development, control), this notion of access confuses means with ends. Technology may be understood as a means to accessing information, but it is not itself a conceptualization of *what is being accessed and why*. Access to technology is also sometimes seen as the equivalent to information access, as if the two notions were interchangeable. "It is a common, but mistaken, assumption that access to technology equals access to information," write McReadie and Rice, "although it may be true that access to information is enhanced, speeded, broadened or integrated through technology, technology is not sufficient to provide access on its own."[215] Furthermore, it must be noted that access to a system of technology does not always translate to access to information at all; indeed, one can use a system and not find what one is seeking.[216]

2. Information Access as a Process

These above notions of information access are focused on the object of that access. For McReadie and Rice, however, access to information must be understood as much more than a simple act of accessing information for a purpose. Information access is not a single phenomenon but rather is an *active process*. Access to information is the process of *information-seeking*.[217] As such, it can be understood to have four primary phases,

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211 See Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach." p.1.
212 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 55.
213 Thompson and Walsham 2010.
214 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 55.
215 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 51.
216 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 52. This is not to dismiss, however, the important issues and considerations that do exist in the links between technology and information access and production. These issues will be addressed in the following section.
217 McReadie and Rice (1999a, 57) also note that "the very term, information seeking process, reveals an assumption of an intentional, rational, directed search for information on the part of an individual or organization." This beckons us back to our earlier discussions of the limits of rational agency. Such limits may also, then, place limits on information seeking and access.

or moments: the context in which information-seekers operate; the problems or situations that are to be addressed; the strategies implemented in the process of seeking information; and the use of (or non-use of) the information acquired. **Context** "includes all the precursors to information seeking such as the social, political, economic, educational and experiential context" of individuals, families, communities and larger populations.[218] **Situations (or problems)** refer to "the particular set of circumstances from which a need for information arises, along with the awareness, however unclear, that information may be useful in addressing the situation."[219] **Strategies** "represent the dynamic process of addressing the situation" of information need "and include both planned and unplanned actions, directions, interactions or discoveries."[220] **Outcomes (or uses)** "include retrieval and actual use or consumption of information, as well as evaluation and possible redefinition and reiteration of the process."[221] An understanding of these phases might lead Twaweza to ask such questions as:

- Does the context in which people are living facilitate and enable access to and use of (specific forms of) information?

- How are problems formulated, understood, and experienced and how do these problems lend themselves (or not) to information-based solutions?

- What kinds of information might be useful to the problem as it is formulated? What kinds of information seeking strategies are possible? Which information seeking strategies are likely (or not) to be successful in acquiring useful information, in a useful form?

- Once information is acquired, how is it used? How is it interpreted, transformed into something meaningful, and utilized in the service of addressing the formulated problem?

3. Influences and Constraints on Information Access and Use

With this information-seeking framework in hand, we are able to turn to the question of what kinds of specific influences and constraints may influence the process at these various stages. Table 2 offers a graphical summary of these ideas in the form of a blank "worksheet" that can be filled-in appropriately in a given context of operation. We will summarize the dimensions of this chart only briefly, since many of them have been addressed in various ways already in this paper.

Access to and use of information can be, according to the framework synthesized by McReadie and Rice from a wide variety of sources in the information science literature, influenced and/or constrained by physical, cognitive, affective, economic, social or political factors, as well as by the processes they refer to as "mediation":[222]

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218 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 58.
219 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 59. See also Wersig 1979 and Belkin 1980. This notion of the "problem" or "situation" may also be usefully understood in the context of Freire's "problem-posing concept of education" (2006, 81).
220 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 59.
221 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 60.
222 McReadie and Rice 1999a, 62. Another, and somewhat similar framework is offered by Menou that suggests seven attributes that contribute toward an individual or group's ability to use information effectively for action, all of which may be linked with dimensions of agency discussed earlier in this paper (Menou 1995b, 485): the r*eadiness or willingness* of the person or group to act; the *propensity* of the person or group to make changes in their behavior; the *capabilities* of the person or group to actualize the actions to which they might aspire; the factor of *appropriation*, or "the sense of ownership of means and ends" (Menou 1995b, 485); "*gestuality*," or access to experiences or stories of others taking action who can be followed or copied;"*mediacy*," media literacy, the "understanding of, and ability to use modern media"; and "objectification of institutions," or a certain kind of trust in the ability of institutions to respond to the "effective use of modern information" (Menou 1995b, 486). Drawing on Sen's capabilities

- **Physical** factors include *geography* (urban/rural and core/periphery divides in terms of access to information sources, technology and service, as well as ways in which geography is linked with other factors such as poverty and culture); *environment* (both generally, in terms of ecological factors, and more specifically in terms of ways in which a physical space "determines what is visually or audibly accessible and what is hidden")[223]; and *display* (how information is physically presented so as to be accessible or not to a given audience in a given context).

- **Cognitive** factors include an *understanding and awareness* in regard to the information-seeking process and the information that is encountered (including a sense of how information can be obtained, interpreted and used); *facility and skill* in seeking information and in utilizing it effectively (including crucial factors of information and alphabetic literacy); *matching* refers to the match between a user's expectations, needs and abilities and the source of information.

- **Affective**, or emotional, factors include the *attitudes* that information-seekers have toward both the seeking process and the information itself (belief in its existence, accuracy and usefulness, in their abilities to find and understand it, and their feelings toward the activities and locations in and through which it must be accessed); the *motivation* that information-seekers have (or do not have) to do what is necessary to obtain a given set of information (influences, for example, by their sense of that information's credibility and usefulness); and *confidence and comfort* experienced by the information-seeker when they plan or implement the work of accessing information.

- **Economic** factors include the *benefits and costs* of the information seeking process for the information-seeker (real, anticipated or imagined); the *value* that the information-seeker ascribes to a given set of information (measured financially or otherwise); and the economic *resources* required to access a given source of information (from purchasing and maintaining technology to the broader issues of wealth and poverty effects).

- **Social** factors include *cultural norms* around who should or should not seek information and what they should or should not do with it (as well as which forms of information are acceptable to access and use); *class, race and gender* factors that shape "the type of information to which one has access" as well as contribute to other factors listed here (affective and economic, for example); *education* levels that determine one's ability (and confidence) to access and use information in various forms; membership in *social networks* which shape one's access (or lack thereof) to information; and the levels and kinds of *life experience* that an information-seeker brings to the process.
- **Political** factors include (as discussed extensively above) issues of power, control, equity and participation in numerous dimensions of information access, as well as its production and use.

- Finally, the factor of **mediation** refers to various ways in which "our natural individual abilities to create, transmit, receive and process visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile messages are extended, expanded or enhanced technologically by media or...by human intermediaries."[224] Mediation can *intensify* information access constraints through numerous hurdles created by

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framework can yield further results in terms of generating a list of elements which must be present for information to be transformed into action. Understood as a "good" that is valued by its "functioning," information can be said to require three groups of "conversion factors" to translate its materiality into something that can capacitate action: "*personal conversion factors* (metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, intelligence)...*social conversion factors* (e/g/ public policies, social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations)...and *environmental conversion factors* (e.g. climate, geographical location)" (Robeyns 2005, 99).

223   McReadie and Rice 1999a, 61.
224 McReadie and Rice 1999b, 85.

technologies and all of the skills, resources and forms of knowledge necessary to navigate them, and it can *compensate* for various access limitations by "spanning boundaries of time and space, or overcoming physical, social, cognitive or other constraints."[225]

	Context	Situation/ Problem	Strategies	Outcomes/ Action
Physical ∞ Geography & demography ∞ Environment ∞ Space ∞ Display				
Cognitive ∞ Understanding & awareness ∞ Facility/Skill ∞ Matching				
Affective ∞ Attitude ∞ Motivation ∞ Confidence & comfort				
Economic ∞ Benefits & costs ∞ Value ∞ Resources				
Social ∞ Cultural norms ∞ Class, race, gender ∞ Education ∞ Networks ∞ Experience				
Political ∞ Power & control ∞ Equity ∞ Participation				
Mediation ∞ Intensification ∞ Compensation				

Table 2: Influences and Constraints on Access to Information (adapted from McReadie and Rice 1999b, 92).

C. INFORMATION OR COMMUNICATION?

Before moving on to the question of linkages between access to information and citizen agency and action, we wish to briefly explore an important conceptual and discursive difference that we have encountered in the

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225   McReadie and Rice 1999b, 86.

literature, namely a distinction between an information-oriented approach to development and a communication-oriented approach. Twaweza might benefit, we believe, from positioning itself more clearly in relation to this debate. On one hand, we see organizations such a Twaweza focusing on "access to information" and building their discussions of social change and knowledge around various formulations of "information" as a concept and transformative resource. On the other hand, we find a substantial literature-- particularly in the emerging realm of development discourse known as "civic-driven change"—that is critical of the information-centered approach and opts for one based in a discourse of "communication" instead. Bieckmann offers a useful summary of a commonly-made distinction:

> Providing information is a one-way and top-down process. Communication, on the other hand, means that power will be shared. Communication enables citizens to take part in decision-making processes. Communication is also a crucial aspect in the translation of civic involvement into collective action for change. Instead of vertical flows of information, communication is about horizontal exchange and dialogue. Communication connects people and the hundreds of small CDC initiatives that take place at the local level, for example through the use of ICT but also through the active involvement of 'communicators': one of the roles NGOs can play.[226]

The distinction between information as a top-down process and communication as (potentially) horizontal is made within information theory as well. Dervin writes, for example, that "information is defined as that which instructs and so despite efforts to the contrary, information systems are designed as transmission systems, not participation systems."[227] This focus on participation is a key component of an alternative to the information-access-centered approach. "A different approach," write Fowler and Biekart, "would recognize the roots of communication in access, sharing and participation—a horizontal dialogue with two-way exchange—rather than a unidirectional process to fill a person's 'knowledge bank' in uncritical ways."[228] Gumucio-Dagron summarizes: "leave access behind and adopt process."[229]

Twaweza is, admittedly, difficult to position clearly in this debate. On one hand, the organization overtly focuses its discourse on "access to information" and its partners appear to be primarily engaged in offering information to people rather than facilitating communication between them.[230] On the other hand, Twaweza's discourse of "enhancing citizen agency" by "expanding the channels and the circuits through which information is accessed and generated [and] multiplying the means and modes of communication of such information"[231] appears to be somewhat more in line with the communicative approach advanced by the civic-driven change advocates.[232] How does Twaweza position itself in this discussion? Is there a tension, within Twaweza, between a desire to focus on citizen agency (which might lead to a focus on communication) and a desire to focus on large-scale mass media work (which lends itself nicely to concepts of information access)?

LINK I: DOES ACCESS TO INFORMATION LEAD TO

226 Bieckmann 2008, 7, citing Alfonso Gumucio Dagron.
227 Dervin 1994, 380.
228 Fowler and Biekart 2008, 4.
229 Gumucio-Dagron 2003, 6.
230 We are thinking here of Daladala TV, Uwezo, ShujaazFM and the Makutano Junction project. Daraja appears to be somewhat of an exception up to this point. http://www.twaweza.org/index.php?c=41
231 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
232 We are somewhat confused in regard to Twaweza's choice to use the term "citizen-driven change" rather than "civic-driven change." We are aware that Rakesh Rajani participated for a brief time in the civic-driven change initiative hosted by the International Institute of Social Studies and others, and that he was replaced in this participation by Gumucio-Dagron (whose writings appear to be specifically critical about an "information access" approach). Is there a specific political difference (or tension) between Twaweza's CDC and that of the civic-driven change initiative? We cannot speculate, but simply raise the question.

ENHANCED CITIZEN AGENCY?

> "Some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects."[233]

We have arrived (finally) at our first linkage in Twaweza's circles of change model—that between increased information and enhanced citizen agency. Twaweza's claim is essentially this: "while information alone is not sufficient, it is a vital and necessary driver for change."[234] Implied here is the apparently straightforward assertion that information can (in part) lead to social action and change. Our discussion of information and information access above should make it sufficiently clear that the question of citizens obtaining useful information in the first place is tremendously complex and riddled with variables that might easily lead to outcomes involving little or no actual *functional* access to the types of information Twaweza views as important. Our discussion, likewise, of citizen agency should make it clear that citizen action—even if it is actualized—can be constrained from leading to actually-transformative effects.[235] Assuming that the numerous constraints to both effective citizen agency and information access and the production of citizen knowledge can be overcome (and setting the question of how Twaweza will address these issues aside), we can now ask whether, and under what conditions—having obtained access to information—citizens might be empowered and inspired to take transformative action.

The lack of access to information has been clearly identified as a problem that constrains citizen agency and action by numerous observers. Ngwainmbi, for example, writes that, "in the wake of rapid ideological and infrastructural change all over the world today, many rural people do not get adequate information from the mass media and, therefore, cannot take advantage of available technology to change their environment. Individual problems that could be resolved or prevented through shared information remain undetected and unresolved."[236] The connection between information access and a robust democratic polity has also been noted. As Francis and James write, "the ballot box is only part of the wider institutional context: democracy also presupposes access to information, transparent procedures of government and an effective media."[237] Steiner similarly notes that "a critical level of information on local government affairs among the population is necessary to ensure meaningful participation."[238] Information appears to be an important ingredient in citizen participation and democracy; yet does this mean that access to information leads to increased citizen agency and to democratic transformation? An ingredient to the soup does not necessarily cause the soup to come into being.

The relationship between information (and media) and change has been widely explored in the development literature. A number of scholars trace this research back to Daniel Lerner's 1958 study on communication and development in the Middle East which "viewed development and communication as 'a set of interdependent processes though which 'traditional' social structure is transformed into a 'modern' social structure'."[239] In this "causal approach,"[240] development practitioners understood that peoples' "behaviors and attitudes must be changed or modified so as to pave way for their transformation to 'modern' individuals" and that the communication of information and ideas about the modern world could effect this change.[241]

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233 Berelson 1948, quoted in Nwosu 1995, 36.
234 Twaweza. "Situation Analysis." p.9.
235 To add an example: Francis and James (2003) show that in rural Uganda, citizens who become aware of entitlements through increased access to information may be constrained from meaningful democratic participation for other reasons including scarcity of overall resources, decisional constraints placed on federal funding sources, local political hierarchies, personal access to resources, etc.
236 Ngwainmbi 1995, 3. See also Steiner 2008.
237 Francis and James 2003, 326.
238 Steiner 2008, 37.
239 Nwosu 1995, quoting Rhodes 1970.
240 Mowlana and Wilson 1990.
241 Nwosu 1995, 13.

Servaes and Malikhao summarize the continuing power of these ideas:

> In the one-and-a-half decades after Lerner's influential 1958 study...communication researchers assumed that the introduction of media and certain types of educational, political and economic information into a social system could transform individuals and societies from traditional to modern. Conceived as having fairly direct and powerful effects on Third World audiences, the media were seen as magic multipliers, able to accelerate and magnify the benefits of development.[242]

This causal approach is closely related to the communication theory known as the "transmission model," which conceptualizes "communication as a more or less undisturbed transmission of messages from source to receiver."[243] Such an approach—which might be called, in Freirian terms—a "banking" approach to knowledge[244] -- "emphasizes one-way vertical communication in which true communication is prohibited."[245] This is a process which Twaweza is explicitly seeking to avoid in its description of how its "access to information" work should be implemented. "The concept of access to information can equate with the vaccination idea in modernization theories, which prescribes injections of information for the 'information poor'. People are not blank slates on which information can write its purposes and cause 'behavior change'."[246] In considering the ways (explored earlier) in which Twaweza's conception of citizenship is quite convergent with dominant ideas about the "modern individual," along with the sense in which the communication of information is seen as a "trigger" of agency, we are left to wonder if Twaweza has fully escaped the domain of this transmission theory. Indeed, the commonly-used notion of "uptake"[247] of information appears to confirm a transmission-style theory, as if information was a "thing" to be installed into the recipient for later use. Figure 5 illustrates, albeit in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, how Twaweza's comic about water pump loans for farmers could be (though does not necessarily need to be) read as a version of the transmission/modernization (and privatization) approach to development communication.

Another approach to the relationship between development and information has been called the "diffusion model." In this conception, based on the assumption that "communication by itself can generate development regardless of socio-economic and political conditions," information spreads and causes

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242   Servaes and Malikhao 2007, 12, quoting Fair 1989.
243   Schedler et al. 1998, 450-451.
244   Freire 2006.
245   Mowlana and Wilson 1990, 74.
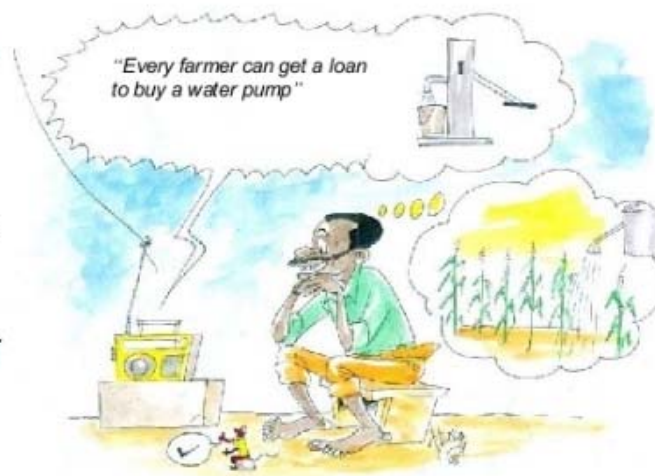246   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.8.
247   See, for example, Twaweza, "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.5.

Figure 5: A "Transmission Model" Reading of Twaweza's Cartoon (adapted from Twaweza, "Situation Analysis" cover image).

change as people adopt new ideas.[248] While still based on a model of communication as the movement of a message, fundamentally unmodified, from sender to receiver and on the idea that ideas would change people's behaviors, the diffusion model paid more attention to the ways in which information—particularly via mass media—can be moved through society via channels of social communication. The "two step flow" concept, which suggested that "the flow of information in the first step was from source to opinion leaders and in the second step from opinion leaders to their followers" (Mowlana and Wilson 1990, 58) was essentially a recognition that mass media could effectively inject information into a society, but that personal relations were the key to this information actually having persuasive (and thus behavior-changing) effects. Hence, communication-for-development theory went from believing in simply the magical multiplier effects of information transmission to "magical multipliers of information diffusion."[249] How different, Twaweza might ask itself, is this diffusion model from the notion of "generating buzz"?[250]

How do transmission models of communication for development hold up to empirical scrutiny? Robust evidence is scarce, in part due to the challenge of tracing causal connections in complex social contexts.[251] It does appear, however, that many scholars have been—and remain—skeptical of the power of transmission-style media. In 1976, Starosta stated that "mass media do not and generally cannot 'persuade' anyone to adopt a new practice. While media energize, stimulate, introduce, prod, implore, or 'create a climate conducive to,' they still reach primarily those groups high in media exposure and usually favorably predisposed toward change."[252]   Servaes and Malikhao, surveying the field in 2007, conclude that "research has shown that, while the public can obtain information from impersonal sources like radio and television, this information has relatively little effect on behavioral changes."[253]

Others are more optimistic. Reinikka and Svensson admit that "while buzzwords like 'information,' 'knowledge,' and 'empowerment' now pepper the policy debate, there is little quantitative evidence on the impact of policy measures aimed at achieving them,"[254] they offer evidence from one case study in Uganda to demonstrate that information access through public media can have real effects on lessening dynamics of political corruption. They show, with data from a quantitative survey, that a national policy of publishing information about financial transfers to local governments for education support significantly decreased the amount of money that "disappeared" in the process. Thus, "through the relatively inexpensive policy action of a mass information campaign, Uganda dramatically reduced district government diversion of public grant funds aimed at improving primary education under its universal education policy."[255]

Given the seemingly tenuous conclusions and results of research into transmission-style development communication, and thus the thinness of theories associated with it, how then can we think about the potential linkages between information and citizen action? Kirzner makes a helpful distinction between "information-knowledge" and "action-knowledge."[256] Not all information, he suggests, leads to or inspires action. Furthermore, "action often does un-alertly ignore fact, which, in the usual sense of the word, one

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248   Mowlana and Wilson 1990, 57.
249   Mody 2000, 189.
250   Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.8.
251   Menou 1995a.
252   Quoted in Nwosu 1995, 37-38.
253   Servaes and Malikhao 2007, 16.
254   Reinikka and Svensson 2006, 1.
255   Reinikka and Svensson 2006, 21. Focusing specifically on the availability and use of information communication technologies (ICTs), Zanello and Maassen's study also painted a bright picture for the potential of information and communication access to "be used in support of (organized) citizen action." While their survey presented a number of examples of contemporary ICT use in East Africa, it does not present evidence regarding--specifically-- the efficacy of information access to trigger citizen agency. Much speculative support is offered for such a connection, but empirical data is (as is the reality in the literature) quite scarce (Zanello and Maassen 2009).
256   Kirzner 2005, 77.

'knows'."[257] These assertions are confirmed by some of the literature on the low correlations found in North America between peoples' information about environmental problems and their concrete actions to address them in daily life (such as recycling and energy conservation behavior).[258] "What determines whether knowledge-as-information becomes action-knowledge is not, in general, the result of any deliberate decision," writes Kirzner, "two individuals may 'know' the same facts; one of them grasps the opportunity which these facts represent, the second fails to do so."[259] What, then, makes for such a difference? How might we identify under what condition information might become action-knowledge?

Twaweza, as noted at the beginning of our analysis of information, identifies four primary ways that information might link with, facilitate or lead to action:

- **Outcomes**. Information about outcomes ("including comparisons"[260]) may allow people to "compare their situation with others" and thus inspire them to take action. In the absence of further discussion from Twaweza, we can speculate that the psychological mechanisms of information-action here might be feeling of indignation and injustice when faced with problematic differences; feelings of desire for what others may have (interestingly similar to the consumer mentality often critiqued in highly industrialized countries)[261]; and possibly a sense of "rights" that might be invoked when shown that people elsewhere in the same country (for example) have access to something different via government provision. All of these potential mechanisms may be tempered or augmented by the many factors described above in our discussions of constraints on agency and information access and use.

- **Processes.** Information around processes ("including information that triggers the imagination"[262]) refers to what Twaweza elsewhere calls "stories of ordinary people taking initiative, making a difference."[263] The links between information and action here could be understood to be some form of inspiration and the cultivation of empowerment from knowledge that "if others like us can do this, so can we."   Do inspiring stories lead to action? Perhaps, though again in a context mediated by constraints outlined earlier.

- **Peer Pressure**. Information "that raises peer pressure (shaming)" may refer to ways in which information transparency—at a local government level—might generate conditions under which local officials would be shamed into behaving in more "appropriate" ways. This information-action mechanism may sometimes work (as, possibly, in Reinikka and Svensson's example), but it also runs up against issues of local social relations and cultural mores as discussed earlier.

- **Coordination**. Information "that enables coordination (everybody that is concerned about health should wear his hair in a pony tail)"[264] Despite the funny example, this dimension should be taken seriously. It is, we would argue, much more about communication than about information. What forms of communication might facilitate increased coordination and organizing among people directly affected by a given issue or problem? Literature on social movements has shown that communication is a crucial dimension to effective organizing and movement-building.[265] Of all the mechanisms connecting information and action mentioned by Twaweza, we suggest that this

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257 Kirzner 2005, 78.
258 Costanzo 1986; Kempton 1993
259 Kirzner 2005, 79.
260 Twaweza. 'unpacking the Theory of Change." p.2.
261 See, for example, Bauman 2007.
262 Twaweza. 'unpacking the Theory of Change." p.2.
263 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.3.
264 All quotes in this bulleted section are from Twaweza. "Unpacking the Theory of Change." p.2.
265 See, for example, Figueroa et.al. (2002). "Communicating for Social Change Working Paper Series."

dimension may be most fruitful to explore. Here, the "brokering role" might be transformed into something more like a networking role between and among grassroots organizing efforts. "What is 'new' is to be found in trying to look through the eyes of citizens to gather and join up experiences of bringing about change that are scattered around the landscape of aid."[266]

D. KEY QUESTIONS ON INFORMATION

➤ How does Twaweza distinguish between data, information, and knowledge?

➤ Are the channels and networks that Twaweza is working with the most effective for animating access to and generation of information to enhance citizen agency?

➤ What "tipping points" would signal an ecosystem of change? How will these be attended to and measured?

V. CITIZEN MONITORING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

A. MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

As a core part of its work, Twaweza seeks to encourage people to "monitor and discuss what's going on." We gather from the organization's literature that Twaweza wants people to monitor for two primary reasons: first, because monitoring can be understood as an act of citizen agency and, therefore, as an end in itself. Second, citizen monitoring has the potential to support *action for accountability*, or the engagement of citizens in relationships of accountability with the institutions they confront in their lives. For Twaweza, this second purpose is primarily oriented toward increasing the accountability of government institutions that provide basic services so that these services might be improved. We will discuss the question of improving basic services and, specifically, its relation to information access, monitoring and accountability in the next section. Here, we focus primarily on the concepts and practices invoked by Twaweza around the activity of "monitoring for accountability."

Monitoring for accountability, we believe, must be understood as two distinct steps: monitoring, in the sense of gathering information about patterns, differences, behaviors; and taking action that generates, activates or sustains actual relationships of accountability. To be sure, the act of monitoring itself may be an action that has real effects, but it must not be assumed that these effects are automatic. It is thus important to separate out the question of gathering comparative information from that of engaging in action that leads to or fosters accountability. In other words, people may monitor, but *this does not necessarily mean that accountability will be enacted*. We treat monitoring and accountability in this report, therefore, as separate but interrelated elements. Twaweza's focus—in its literature at least—is on the monitoring side; we suggest that the accountability side must be featured in equal part in future articulations of the organization's work.

B. CITIZEN MONITORING

Clearly, Twaweza seeks to challenge conventional notions of monitoring as they have been expressed and implemented by many international development projects. "Monitoring in the world of development has become reified, turned into events that are mediated through scorecards and other techniques."[267] Yet Twaweza also does not wish to eliminate the development language of "monitoring"[268]; rather, the

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266 Fowler and Biekart 2008a, 1.
267 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.9.
268 It is curious, given Twaweza's critique of the concept, that the terminology is maintained. Is this for purposes of

organization seeks to generate a new definition: "When we talk about citizen monitoring, we are talking about a simpler, day to day form of monitoring, initially based on noticing differences, on keeping track in one's mind, and on sharing this process of keeping track."[269] Monitoring, in this conception, is expanded to signify a very general process of attentiveness and scrutiny on the part of citizens. We have moved from a formalized data-collection process to a broad process of "noticing differences."

While Twaweza's expansion of monitoring appears to validate forms of citizen observation and knowledge creation that other, more narrow, definitions might exclude, we are left to wonder if the concept retains any real content at all; what is the difference, in such a conception, between citizen monitoring and the daily process of observing and discussing one's reality that most people are continuously engaged in? Does Twaweza seek to differentiate at all between the comparing and contrasting behavior that is always present when "ordinary people are simply getting on with their lives"[270] and forms of observation that are able to be articulated as political claims, demands and actions? While a hard and fast line between the two domains is surely problematic (and the interconnections between the two are crucial), strategic interventions on the part of Twaweza when it comes to supporting some efforts and not others must (and, we are certain, already do) take into account such differences. These might be helpful for the organization to further articulate: what kinds of monitoring (in the broad sense) do and do not lead to the possibility of citizen action and change?

Clearly, monitoring—in its many forms—is a key link for Twaweza between citizens' access to information and the actual improvement of basic services. Monitoring is both a *source of information* and an *action* that citizens might take upon gaining certain information (learning, for example, about how much money a local school is supposed to receive and then deciding to monitor how much is actually received). For Twaweza, there are four primary purposes to monitoring, each of which connects with the organization's conceptualizations of information access and use:

- Monitoring is "important in relation to policies, budgets, laws and entitlements." Citizens, armed with information about these structures, can monitor their implementations and, in so doing, enable themselves to hold government to account for noncompliances. This purpose links with—and affirms—Twaweza's focus on citizenship as a specific relation of entitlement to state-provided services (as discussed in the earlier section on citizenship). Monitoring here is specified as a form of shared observation that is not general, but rather targeted at very specific institutions and types of content.

- Monitoring enables a person to "monitor one's situation in relation to others'," hence generating comparisons that might trigger action. Rather than specifying a target for monitoring (as does the previous purpose), this purpose suggests a mechanism by which observation may be transformed into something that influences the exercise of citizen agency. The operative assumptions appear to be that, first, people are motivated by seeking to minimize differences between themselves and others—a very specific cultural assumption that requires unpacking; and second, that—in the case of a shared understanding of rights—people are moved to act when they understand rights to be unequally realized across space. Here, the assumption is that people are driven by a particular sense of fairness, and that violations of this sense lead to ameliorating action. This, too, is a particular cultural assumption that may or may not hold in the context of every community or group.

- Monitoring "can help people compare the past with the present," allowing them to generate further comparisons and to see changes over time (thus noting improvements or lack thereof). Here, monitoring is also about comparisons, but focused more toward the possibility of evaluating change

securing funding from sources that give credence to "monitoring" activities?
269 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.9.
270 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.1.

and progress. Monitoring can be a tool with which the work of social change advocacy—or changes made by an institution which is being held to account—can be measured, evaluated and adjusted accordingly in a learning process.

- Monitoring "can enable perspectives to be shared and compared."[271] Through the generation of new information via the monitoring process, citizens may be able to share this information with others and thus instigate dialog and possible action in relation to identified problems. Here, monitoring is a tool for communication, and this communication—it is hoped—has the chance to spark action and effect change.

A very specific picture emerges from these conceptions of monitoring, one which is distinct from the broad notion of "keeping track." The monitoring that Twaweza is interested in is focused on citizen-state relationships and the various kinds of financial and material entitlements that are associated with these relationships; assumes that people are motivated by comparison, a desire to be similar to others, and/or a sense of fairness (and indignation) in regard to shared rights (hence this also assumes that people *have* and know their rights); seeks to facilitate evaluation and learning with regard to strategies of advocacy (for entitlements); and, finally, is meant as a tool to foster "keeping track in one's mind, and on sharing this process of keeping track"[272] and coordination for citizen action (with regard to state entitlements).

1. Dimensions of Monitoring

A *monitor*, in Latin, is literally "one who warns"[273] Monitoring, then, is not simply about observation. It is about the communication of observation with others; it is about observation and scrutiny that is shared by a group or community. Five key questions are identified in the literature on monitoring:

- Who monitors?[274]
- What do they monitor?[275]
- When do they monitor?[276]
- How do they monitor?[277]
- Why do they monitor (or, monitoring for *what*)?[278]

With regard to the question of *who monitors*, Twaweza's work appears to be somewhat divided. On one hand, the organization seeks explicitly to support projects in which citizens are directly, in their daily lives and work, engaged in observation, scrutiny, and comparison that might spark action. On the other hand, the organization appears to be engaged in significant monitoring projects in which citizens are not the primary monitors, but are, rather, the recipients of information generated by NGO-based monitoring.[279] There is no necessary contradiction or problem with approaching monitoring from both directions; we do not, however, see an explicit acknowledgement in Twaweza's literature that both approaches are important and that the organization is committed to a combination of the two. This acknowledgement is crucial, since—as elaborated in the previous section on information access—the question of who produces knowledge is crucial to understanding its nature and effects and to taking active responsibility for the power relationships

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271   All quotes in this bulleted list from Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.9.
272   Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.9.
273   Wiktionary. http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/monitor. Accessed 8/20/10.
274   Collier 2007, 10.
275   Theis 2003, 6.
276   Collier 2007, 10.
277   Theis 2003, 6; Goetz and Gaventa 2001.
278   Theis 2003, 5.
279   We refer here primarily to Uwazi, which appears to be significantly active as an aggregator of professionally-produced data, a supporter of NGO-based monitoring, and a funder of citizen monitoring.

that inhere in its production.

What is monitored (and who decides) is another central issue. As noted above, Twaweza is focused specifically on projects which monitor "policies, budgets, laws and entitlements." This is quite specific, and raises at least two key issues. First, we encounter the issue noted above of the normative reinforcement this focus makes on a certain model of citizen-state relations. This has been engaged in earlier sections. The second issue is this: if monitoring is about citizens "keeping track in [their minds], and on sharing this process of keeping track,"[280] then what happens if Twaweza's priorities are not those of citizens? To quote Twaweza's own critical question, "what if water, health and education are not at all key areas in which people will want to/are able to exercise agency?"[281] What if the things people observe, notice and keep track of are different from those that Twaweza believes to be important? Who then decides what, really, the priorities of monitoring should be? What are the power dynamics involved when Twaweza (via Uwazi) offers money for people to monitor specific things (in specific ways)? How does Twaweza acknowledge and transparently engage with the challenges of these power dynamics?

Collier's framework for research on accountability raises the question of timing in monitoring: *when monitoring occurs* in the processes of service provision, allocation, and decision-making is important in determining the potential uses of the information collected. Collier distinguishes between *ex ante* scrutiny (how decisions are authorized prior to the actual enactment of a given policy or entitlement) and *ex post* scrutiny (evaluation of how a given policy was implemented or a given service was provided).[282] This distinction can be viewed in light of Kabeer's notion—discussed in our earlier section on agency—of "first and second order choices": "decisions fundamental to the shape of a person's life," and "choices that affect life's quality but to not constitute its defining parameters."[283] *Ex ante* monitoring may involve examination of the actual processes by which basic decisions are made, entitlements generated and institutional frameworks established. *Ex post* monitoring focuses more on the quality of implementation of these already-made decisions and already-established parameters. Where a given monitoring initiative focuses in this temporal process has great bearing on the scope of social change that might be imagined and enacted by those who are generating and sharing monitoring information.

How monitoring is done is also crucial in determining outcomes, particularly in relation to the question of accountability. This "how" has at least two dimensions: the format or methodology through which monitoring (and its communication) takes place and the process by which this methodology is implemented. In the format dimension, monitoring can be executed via a wide variety of formats including mapping, surveys, forums, institutionalized participation structures and the public dissemination of data (to name a few).[284] Twaweza is clearly not limited in its vision to any particular form; indeed, strong emphasis is placed on "innovative ideas" regarding the ways in which citizen monitoring might take place.[285] This openness to a variety of forms and formats is, we believe, a real strength in Twaweza's approach, though one that must be tied to (as the organization understands) ongoing assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of various forms of monitoring.

The second dimension of the "how" of monitoring is in regard to the implementation of various formats, particularly the degree and form of citizen participation. As Welle points out in her survey of "mapping for accountability" projects, "who draws up the map has important implications for the levels of accountability that can be achieved."[286] Uwazi's strategy of offering money to "entrepreneurial individuals and

280 Twaweza. "Concept Note: Twaweza External Evaluation." p.9.
281 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.7.
282 Collier 2007, 10.
283 Kabeer 1999, cited in Cleaver 2009, 133.
284 See Goetz and Gaventa 2001 for a thorough survey of forms and formats for monitoring.
285 Uwazi website. http://www.uwazi.org/index.php?c=64 . Accessed 9/2/10.
286 Welle 2007, 4.

organizations who are able to monitor"[287] appears to be intriguing and complex in this regard. On one hand, such funding may function to make the work of monitoring more accessible to people who would otherwise not have access to the time and resources necessary for such work.[288] On the other hand, the resources required for people to access Twaweza's offer of funds, develop and communicate a proposal, and carry out the subsequent work according to plan may constitute a set of formidable obstacles to real participation by "ordinary citizens." This raises a substantial question regarding Uwazi's strategy: To what extent does this financial incentive approach reproduce problematic dynamics of free-market economics in which questions of power, privilege and differential access to resources (economic, social, educational, etc.) are pushed aside in celebration of the 'entrepreneurial spirit"? Amidst a rhetorical affirmation of the freedom to propose projects and—if they have enough merit in the eyes of intrepid investors—to have these projects funded, only a small group of (already well-endowed) people are able to exercise this entrepreneurial freedom.

Finally, we arrive at the question of *why monitoring should occur* in the first place. What is monitoring for? Theis offers a summary of possibilities:

> Monitoring and evaluation can be undertaken for a range of purposes, including to measure impact, outputs, efficiency, effectiveness or change; to strengthen accountability; to facilitate organizational learning; to strengthen partnerships and team building; to support advocacy efforts; or to influence an organization's culture.[289]

We have already established Twaweza's specific take on these options. Monitoring is meant, ultimately, to generate accountability between citizens, basic service providers, and the institutions that control resources crucial to these services. In an auxiliary fashion, monitoring is also meant to spark citizen agency and enhance citizen communication and coordination in the work of "holding government to account."[290] Here, once again, we see a tension identified earlier in this paper between Twaweza's ostensible goal of "enhancing citizen agency"[291] and the organization's specific focus on "service delivery in water, education and health."[292] Much work on monitoring, as reflected in the scholarly literature, is about seeking to leverage monitored information to make policy or policy implementation changes.[293] Monitoring as a tool for enabling citizen action might, however, be a different type of activity or lead to different strategies or goals. Citizens may, in observing, comparing and communicating differences, decide that "holding government to account" is not a viable or desirable strategy; they may, instead, seek to enact private or collective solutions to problems that they have identified. How, we ask again, does Twaweza navigate this issue? Particularly given that Twaweza has financial resources that it can leverage to encourage certain kinds of action and focus over others, how does the organization work with the tension between its very specific areas of focus (and methods of focus) and the desire for robust and real citizen-driven change?

C. ACCOUNTABILITY

Setting aside such questions for the moment, we turn to Twaweza's particular focus in regard to monitoring: accountability by government for the provision of basic services. Twaweza makes the link, in its work, that citizen (and, presumably, NGO) monitoring can lead to increased accountability on the part of service providing institutions. This accountability will, in turn, lead to improvements in the quality of services provided. This is a proposition supported and echoed by many authors. Theis, for example, states that

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287 Uwazi website. http://www.uwazi.org/index.php?c=64 . Accessed 9/2/10.
288 As Goetz and Gaventa write, "citizens' interest in and capacity for participation is necessarily limited by time, interest, and their work and social commitments" (2001, 63).
289 Theis 2003, 5
290 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
291 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
292 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.7.
293 See, for example, Theis 2003, Commins 2007, and Walker 2009.

"monitoring is a fundamental approach to promoting human rights. The collection and dissemination of data about unfulfilled rights and about rights violations puts pressure on duty bearers to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights."[294] Jameel, similarly, points out that "one popular recommendation for improving services is to mobilize and empower communities to hold providers accountable. Service recipients may be unaware of the quality of their care, or of available opportunities for improvements. If so, information and mobilization campaigns could improve service delivery."[295] But what, exactly, is "accountability" and what kinds of links can be established between monitoring and an increase in accountability between citizens and government?

1. Defining Accountability

Accountability, over the past several years, has become a kind of buzzword in the world of international development literature.[296] Its meanings vary as widely as the diverse actors who utilize the term. As Fox writes, "one person's transparency is another's surveillance. One person's accountability is another's persecution. Where one stands on these issues depends on where on sits."[297] Most generally, accountability "refers to the nature of a relationship between two parties."[298] The DFID's definition is nearly identical to that used by Twaweza: "the process by which people are able to hold government to account,"[299] yet does not shed much light on the actual content of that "account." Newell and Bellour offer a more robust definition, proposing that accountability must be understood to have two key dimensions: *answerability*, "providing an account for actions undertaken," and *enforceability*, "punishment or sanctions for poor or illegal performance."[300] This dual understanding raises a critical point. It is not enough to understand accountability as a relationship in which authorities are obligated to answer to their constituents or clients (what Fox calls "weak accountability"[301]); enforcement mechanisms or channels must be in place to make this answerability actually *mean* something.

A related point (one raised earlier) is that monitoring, information access, and the exercise of citizen voice based on such information, is *not* accountability. As Fox writes, "when only information access is present…an institution is transparent, but not accountable."[302] Similarly, even when information access might lead to the expression of citizen needs, "voicing demands can strengthen accountability, but it will not on its own deliver accountable relationships."[303] It is not the information exchange or the vocalization of demands that makes accountability, it is rather the power to enforce concrete actions. Accountability, then, must be understood as a relation of power: "to apply accountability principles is to define who has the power to call for an account and who is obligated to give and explanation for their actions."[304]

As with monitoring, a number of key questions can be asked in defining and specifying accountability: Goetz and Jenkins ask: "who is demanding accountability; from whom is accountability being sought; where – what forum—are they being held to account; how is accountability being delivered; and, for what are

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294 Theis 2003, 5.
295 Jameel 2009, 8.
296 See Cornwall 2007; Cornwall and Brock 2004; Eyben 2008.
297 Fox 2007, 663.
298 O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 3
299 UK Department for International Development (DFID), quoted in Eyben 2008, 10.
300 Newell and Bellour 2002, 1-2
301 Fox 2007, 668. Fox writes that "answerability without consequences falls short of accountability." (668).
302 Fox 2007, 668.
303 O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 4-5. **Accountability** and **voice** are, for them, "intimately related" but "not the same" (O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 4). "Voice is about people expressing their opinions. Accountability is about the relationship between two agents, one of which makes decisions which have an impact on the other and/or which the other delegates to them" (O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 4).
304 Newell and Bellour 2002, 2.

people/institutions being held accountable?"[305] These dimensions and others have been elaborated by a number of writers and can be summarized as a series of distinctions. Accountability, as we see in the literature, can be internal or external; formal, informal or "rude"; vertical, horizontal, or direct; bottom-up or top-down; political, social or managerial; and individual or institutional. We summarize these distinctions here:

- **Internal or external**.[306] Here we address the question of where the impetus and enforcement comes from in relation to the institution being held to account. *Internal accountability* is that which comes from inside an institution, self-imposed and self-enforced (though it can be accompanied by outside pressure and oversight). Twaweza's "external evaluation" is an example of this kind of process. *External accountability* comes from the outside, imposed or enforced by people or groups other than the institution itself. This is the kind of accountability that Twaweza refers to when it speaks of "holding government to account."

- **Vertical, horizontal, or direct**.[307] The question here is of the institutional level from which accountability pressure comes, and is very related to the internal/external distinction. *Vertical accountability* (a form of external accountability) "is that which is demanded from below by citizens and civil society groups,"[308] often through institutionalized processes such as elections and referendums. *Horizontal accountability* (which can be internal or external) "refers to the capacity of state institutions to check abuses by other public agencies or branches of government."[309] A third form of accountability in this vein can be termed "*diagonal accountability*"[310] and refers to "efforts which engage citizens directly in the workings of horizontal accountability institutions."[311] In these structures, citizens develop and participate in formal or quasi-formal institutions capable of directly enforcing accountability expectations, effectively "breaking the state's monopoly over responsibility for official executive oversight."[312]

- **Formal or informal**.[313] This is a distinction regarding the channels through which accountability action and enforcement are executed. *Formal accountability* utilizes existing legitimate legal and political channels such as courts, comment and appeals processes, elections and formal oversight structures. *Informal accountability* uses informal, non-legal or non-institutionalized channels including shame, social exclusion, protest, complaint, blockade, obstruction or riot.   Hossain, studying accountability practices of poor people in Bangladesh, names certain informal practices as forms of "rude accountability," which "work through shame and embarrassment, pressures to maintain reputation and status, and the threat of violence."[314] F aced with daunting obstacles to the effective use of other forms of action, Hossain contends that poor people seeking service improvements "have good reasons to use these methods in preference to formal accountability mechanisms."[315]

- **Bottom-up or top-down**.[316] Here we refer to the nature of the methods used to hold institutions or officials accountable. *Bottom-up methods* (often also external and vertical) utilize non-hierarchical,

305 O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 5, citing Goetz and Jenkins 2005.
306 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6.
307 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6; Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 8.
308 Newell and Bellour 2002, 7.
309 Newell and Bellour 2002, 7.
310 Goetz and Jenkins 2001
311 Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 8. See also Commins 2007, 8.
312 Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 8.
313 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6.
314 Hossain 2009, 3.
315 Hossain 2009, 3.
316 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6.

participatory processes that engage citizens directly in accountability actions. *Top-down methods* utilize hierarchy and hierarchical processes, often imposed by one powerful institution on another (as in a court ruling).

- **Political, social or managerial**.[317] This is another distinction regarding the means (and, to some extent, the focus) through which accountability occurs. *Political accountability* "consists of checks and balances within the state including over delegated individuals in public office responsible for carrying out specific tasks on behalf of citizens."[318] It is "derived from the responsibilities of delegated individuals in public office to carry out specific tasks on behalf of citizens,"[319] and therefore requires a political context in which such a notion is accepted by both citizens and the state. *Social accountability* "focuses on citizen action aimed at holding the state to account using strategies such as social 52ehavior52or52, press reports and legal action."[320] Managerial accountability, finally, refers to "financial accounting and reporting within state institutions, judged according to agreed performance criteria."[321] Twaweza appears to be interested primarily in a combination of social and managerial accountability, with its actual work to date (primarily through Uwazi) leaning in the direction of a managerial focus.

- **Individual or Institutional**.[322] Here, the question is one of focus. "While some [accountability initiatives] are intended to tackle corruption, and therefore focus on crime," writes Fox, "others attempt to encourage improved institutional performance more generally."[323] *Individual accountability*, then, focuses on holding specific politicians, managers or service-providers accountable for their actions. Work to reduce corruption of specific officials or to increase staff attendance at health clinics or schools are examples. *Institutional accountability*, in contrast, targets institutional structures, patterns and procedures rather than individual behavior. Work to ensure that budget entitlements are reaching their proper destinations is an example.

- **Provider-focused or Policy-focused**.[324] A final distinction can be made with regard to the focus of accountability actions. As Collier writes, "accountability in the provision of public services can usefully be decomposed into a system for holding the service providing agency to account, and a system for holding the government to account."[325] *Provider-focused accountability*, or what Commins calls the "short route of accountability"[326] in regard to service provision is focused on holding those individuals and institutions who directly provide services to account for their work. This type of action directly engages education, health and other suppliers in improving their provision activities and mechanisms. *Policy-focused accountability*, or the "long route of accountability,"[327] focuses on the policy-makers and institutions which fund, oversee, and shape the conditions of operation for service provision agencies. Commins' graphic representation of these two "routes" is shown in Figure 8, below.

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317 Newell and Wheeler 2006.
318 Newell and Wheeler 2006, 2.
319 Newell and Bellour 2002, 7.
320 Newell and Wheeler 2006, 2. The World Bank has similarly defined social accountability as "an approach toward building accountability that relies on civic engagement in which citizens and civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability." (Malena et al. 2004).
321 Newell and Wheeler 2006, 2.
322 Fox 2007.
323 Fox 2007, 666.
324 Collier 2007; Commins 2007
325 Collier 2007, 3.
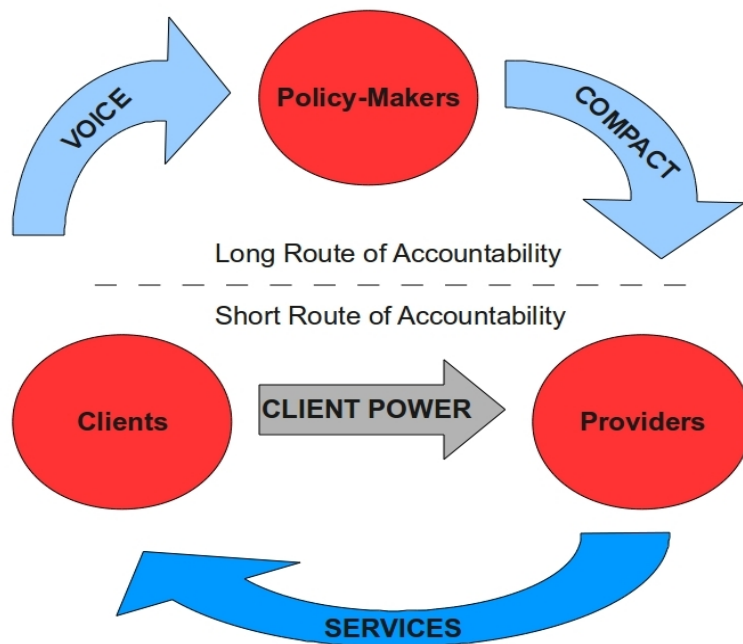326 Commins 2007, 1.
327 Commins 2007, 1.

Figure 6: Long and Short Routes to Accountability (from Commins 2007).

A final point must be made in closing our discussion of definitions of accountability. The understandings outlined above are derived from academic writings and from conceptualizations mobilized by development workers and agencies. Like all concepts, however, accountability must be understood as culturally-specific; the definitions described here are only one set of possible ways of understanding accountability and are derived from—and affirmative of—a specific set of political, social and economic arrangements centered on Western notions of governance, citizenship and responsibility. These notions may not hold up in all East African contexts. "In Africa," Lange points out, "there appears to be a lack of fit between the way local people think about accountability and the way that donor agencies and central government officials think about it. Local ideas of accountability are rooted in a patriarchal family mode of thinking where an accountable leader/father provides for his constituency/family."[328] This is particularly important for an organization such as Twaweza, focused on mobilizing citizen-based modes of accountability, to consider. How, in fact, do the specific definitions of accountability implicit in Twaweza's work match with those held by "ordinary citizens" on the ground? How does/will Twaweza navigate the challenges of conflicts that might arise between "local" notions of accountability and those of the development organization? *To whom is Twaweza accountable when it comes to deciding on what accountability actually means in practice?*

2. Constraining & Enabling Factors for Accountability

Under what condition, we must ask, can efforts to build accountability between citizens and agencies or governments be successful? What constraints do citizens and institutions face in enacting accountability relationships? In our review of the literature, we identify ten key factors that enable and constrain accountability: citizen capacity; rights; institutional mechanisms; institutional responsiveness and capacity; enforcement and sanctions; the issue of multi-level governance; linkages between various forms of accountability; public culture; risk; and continuity and persistence.

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328   Lange 2008, 1140.

- **Capacity**. Effective accountability relationships require citizens to have access, on a regular and consistent basis, to knowledge, resources and power—the capacity necessary to enact these relationships and engage in accounting action.[329] As Foresti et al. write, "linking 'voice' and 'accountability' can only be meaningful when citizens have the knowledge and power to make demands."[330] These dimensions have been explored in detail in earlier sections of this report.

- **Rights**. Accountability relationships require there to be a structure and perception of formal or informal rights through which responsibilities are designated and through which institutional behavior can be legitimately contested. Accountability is severely limited or foreclosed, write Newell and Bellour, in a context where people lack "rights upon which to base accountability demands (lack of effective rights, or lack of actual rights due to limited or exclusionary citizenship)."[331] This dimension harkens back to our earlier discussion of issues surrounding citizenship: "citizenship is in many ways the concept that brings accountability and participation together. Who has the right to hold to account and who should be held to account? Who is entitled to participate in public (and private) decision making and who is not?"[332]

- **Institutional Mechanisms for Accountability**. Though not necessary for all forms of accountability action (see, for example, forms of informal or "rude" accountability described above), the existence of institutional mechanisms and structures through which accountability relationships are realized and formalized can be a crucial factor in determining the depth and strength of citizen-institution accountability.[333] These mechanisms may include, among others, "competitive elections, auditing and evaluation, public hearings, third-party monitoring by a free press, and procedures for recall.[334] Accountability is severely limited in a context in which "there are few institutionalized opportunities for citizens to participate in regular monitoring and evaluation of government services."[335]

- **Institutional Responsiveness and Capacity**. Perhaps the most important dimension of accountability—indeed, a core of its very definition—is the response that institutions make to citizen demands. As Fox states, "the power of transparency, defined in terms of the tangible impacts of the public spotlight, depends in practice on how other actors respond."[336] Institutional responsiveness, of course, can be severely constrained by the capacities of the institutions and their agents. Here we have an important distinction between two interrelated elements: the ways in which institutions respond to citizen demands and the abilities of these institutions to respond. Goetz and Gaventa, examining numerous citizen-based accountability efforts throughout the world, conclude finally that "the degree of institutionalization of the state, in terms of the efficiency of its bureaucracies and the probity of its accountability institutions, is the main determinant for the effectiveness of responsiveness initiatives…state capacity is the bottom line in determining attentiveness to citizen voice and client focus in service delivery."[337]

- **Enforcement, Sanctions and Incentives.** Institutions, assuming that they have the capacity to respond, are not likely to respond in the absence of enforcement mechanisms, sanctions, and/or

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329 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6; Francis and James 2003, 327.
330 Foresti et al. 2007, 1.
331 Newell and Bellour 2002, 6.
332 Newell and Bellour 2002, 23.
333 Jones and Gaventa 2002.
334 Steiner 2008, 38.
335 Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 21.
336 Fox 2007, 666.
337 Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 46.

incentives.[338] While it is clear that "different forms of accountability rely on different enforcement mechanisms,"[339] researchers on accountability agree that "clear and credible procedures for sanctioning are required."[340] Accountability "is only as effective as the mechanisms it employs, and inconsequential accountability is not accountability at all."[341]

- **Relations Between Forms & Levels of Accountability**. The strongest accountability relationships appear to exist in cases in which the forms and levels of accountability are multiple, overlapping and interconnected—in which institutions are held accountable through a number of different relationships and channels at once. Horizontal accountability, write Newell and Bellour for example, "should be buttressed by strong vertical accountability in which citizens, mass media and civil associations are in a position to scrutinize public officials and government practice."[342] The converse is also the case.

- **Continuity and Persistence.** Goetz and Gaventa note the importance of "a continuous presence of…observers throughout the process of the agency's work."[343] Singular actions for accountability are often not enough to generate a sustained response. Institutional patterns and momentum are such that sustained work must be done by citizens or other agents of accountability to ensure that the relationship is maintained. This ongoing work, of course, is hindered for citizens by the numerous factors that constrain agency discussed earlier in this report.

- **Public Culture.** Accountability in the absence of a "public culture of accountability" is difficult to cultivate and sustain. As Steiner notes, such a culture "enhances the readiness of the population to complain about the 55ehavior55or of politicians and civil servants."[344] In its absence, citizens may be more likely to ignore or justify unaccountable or unjust behavior on the part of service providers or public officials. This issue, of course, points back to our earlier discussion of the complexities of navigating differing cultural conceptions of accountability and public responsibility.

- **Risk**. Citizen action for accountability is likely to be constrained by any risks, perceived or real, that might be involved in making demands of public institutions. As Rai points out, "risk is…built into the exercise of agency and needs to be assessed, minimized and addressed in order to expand the sphere of freedom in which it is exercised."[345]

- **Multi-Level Governance**. A final factor that must be considered as a potential constraint or enabler of accountability is the contemporary reality of multi-level governance. As Newell and Bellour observe, "the challenge of ensuring accountability is multiplied when political authority is shared, as it increasingly is, across a number of levels from the local to the national to the regional to the global."[346] This appears to be particularly true in East Africa where political decentralization processes have created numerous layers of governance and authority and where international donors and financial institutions exert strong influence on regional and national governance and policy.[347] "Given the interdependent nature of different levels and forms of accountability…and increased non-state involvement in accountability," write O'Neil et al., "the functioning of any one

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338   Collier 2007.
339   Newell and Bellour 2002, 8.
340   Steiner 2008, 61; see also Theis 2003.
341   Newell and Bellour 2002, 8
342   Newell and Bellour 2002, 7
343   Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 53
344   Steiner 2008, 38
345   Rai 2008, 1.
346   Newell and Bellour 2002, 4
347   Shiner 2003; Alexander 2003

accountability relationship, of the effectiveness of a donor intervention relating to such a relationship, is likely to be shaped by other accountability relationships."[348]

3. The Dangers of Accountability

We conclude our exploration of accountability now with a brief discussion of some of the dangers associated with this concept and practice that have been identified in the scholarly literature. These are important for Twaweza to consider in tracing and taking responsibility for the potential effects of adopting the accountability frame. To be clear, we do not suggest that accountability should be abandoned as a concept because of these dangers; rather, we propose that a recognition of the dangers is crucial to effectively navigating them and making responsible choices. The dangers of accountability appear to be threefold, relating to issues of complicity with neoliberal restructuring programs, avoidance of structural questions of political economy, and the closure of political discourse around alternative possibilities for social and economic organization.

A number of authors have been concerned with ways in which discourses and practices of accountability are bound up in free-market ideologies. "The prevailing focus on state accountability, " write Newell and Bellour, "can be understood in light of prevailing notions about the appropriate relationship between states and markets and assumptions within neo-liberal ideology about the inefficiency and lack of responsiveness of states to the needs of citizens, defined as consumers."[349] Linked to discourses of "good governance" that are quite common in international development circles, accountability may sometimes function as a language with which to levy critiques on states that justify restructuring, privatization and deregulation in the name of meeting citizens' needs more effectively. These notions often disguise the real exclusionary and undemocratic effects of such neoliberal policies on communities, particularly the most vulnerable. Kelsall, more specifically, discusses the ways in which anti-corruption "accountability" processes in Tanzania often "aim to press the subjectivity of Tanzanians into a liberal-developmental mould. Technical solutions, and political-cultural solutions, are inscribed each within the other."[350] Szeftel (1998) also links the anti-corruption agenda to a neoliberal development agenda. To what extent, he asks, might "citizen monitoring" as an accountability strategy sometimes act as a form of "outsourcing" as funding for government audit and monitoring capacity is cut by neoliberal adjustments?[351]

Another concern revolves around discourses and political possibilities that accountability may sometimes serve to obscure. In a general sense, the assumptions built into accountability discourses that accountable relationships are always possible may sometimes obscure real challenges in regard to the political and economic conditions facing East African governments. There is a danger, Hyden notes, that a strong focus on accountability may "overlook the underlying structural conditions in Africa and assume that democratic forms of governance can be built in just any condition."[352]

On the other side of the coin, this accountability focus may—in reinforcing a specific set of assumptions about the necessary political arrangements of society and the rights and responsibilities that accompany them—risk closing off conversations about the redistribution of power. In the case of service provision, to what extent might a focus on accountability eclipse discussion and citizen imagination about different forms of democratic, community-controlled service provision such that the state (for example) was not the institution that provided them or determined their allocation in the face of citizen pressure?[353]

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348 O'Neil, Foresti and Hudson 2007, 5
349 Newell and Bellour 2002, 3
350 Kelsall 2002, 601
351 Szeftel 1998, 233
352 Hyden 2006, 19
353   In her critique of the dominant utilizations of a "rights-based approach" to development, Bullain (2008, 3) suggests that a common focus on rights and entitlements (which is embedded in accountability discourses) often

D. DOES MONITORING LEAD TO ACCOUNTABILITY?

Having explored definitions and dimensions of both monitoring and accountability, we are able now to examine the possible connections between the two. Twaweza's implication, as we have previously noted, is that monitoring—as a practice of accessing, generating and communicating information (creating what Fox calls "transparency"[354])—leads to accountability on the part of government and service providers. The literature is, however, less than clear with regard to this connection. "The evidence on this approach," writes Jameel, "is mixed."[355] Fox, taking an even more skeptical position, states that "the actual evidence on transparency's impacts on accountability is not as strong as one might expect…after reviewing the empirical evidence for the assumed link between transparency and accountability, I have come to the conclusion that one does not necessarily lead to the other."[356]

If there is to be a connection between monitoring and accountability, the specific mechanisms of causal linkage would need to be identified. How, precisely, does citizen access to information from monitoring (and, in many cases, the resulting public dissemination of this information) lead to accountability? We can name at least three mechanisms, all of which are highly dependent on context: shame, mobilization and threat. *Shame* operates at the level of social relationships and is a form of informal, individual accountability. Service providers or government officials, presumably concerned about their reputations, are pressured into acting accountably. This hinges, of course, on an actual *concern*; yet as Fox notes, "if the power of transparency is based on the 'power of shame', then its influence over the really shameless could be quite limited."[357] *Mobilization*—which Twaweza refers to in its discussion of monitoring as a tool for citizen communication and coordination[358] -- can be effective to the extent that information sparks citizen organizing and this organizing, in turn, successfully applies political pressure or exercises power in relation to service providers or politicians. This mechanism is limited by all of the dimensions of citizen agency discussed earlier in this report. *Threat* is a mechanism by which the fear of citizen action, mobilization, or even the public dissemination of certain forms of information lead to policy or behavior changes in agencies and governments. In general, it appears that the conditions under which each of these mechanisms (and perhaps others) can actually work to generate accountability are difficult to pin down. "It remains unclear," writes Fox, "why some transparency initiatives manage to influence the 57ehavior of powerful institutions, while others do not."[359]

Collier's notion of an "incentive system" does link monitoring and accountability in a clear way. He proposes that "the concept of accountability can…be decomposed into verifiable observation of performance [monitoring] and a system of rewards-penalties linked to the information so generated."[360] This structure must, however, be integrated into a single system for it to realize its full effectiveness. In a manner that embodies Goetz and Jenkins' notion of "horizontal accountability"[361] (discussed above), citizen monitoring must be institutionalized in a way that is linked to the power of the rewards-penalties system. This linkage is, however, difficult to make in a robust way. Even when institutionalized, the power of monitoring efforts to influence sanctions or rewards may be minimal: such oversight bodies "rarely have sufficient institutional clout to be able to act on their findings, whether by proposing mandatory sanctions, policy changes,

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eclipses the importance of responsibilities and the possibility of civic self-organization and provision.
354 Fox 2007.
355 Jameel 2009, 8.
356 Fox 2007, 664.
357 Fox 2007, 664.
358 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?"; see also Twaweza. "Theory of Change and Approach," p.3.
359 Fox 2007, 665.
360 Collier 2007, 5.
361 Goetz and Jenkins 2001.

protection from violations, or compensation for past abuses."[362]

Robust linkages between monitoring and accountability are clearly limited by all of the factors that might limit the effectiveness of each element, as discussed above. Three issues in particular may affect this linkage, namely, the free-rider problem, the issue of capacity and power, and the danger of capture by local elites.

First, as Olken notes, "monitoring public projects is a public good, so there may be a serious free rider problem."[363] Particularly in a context in which resources and time are scarce, and perceptions of the potential effectiveness of accountability monitoring may be low, people are less likely to participate in an ongoing process that may happen without them. "Whether one can actually control corruption by increasing monitoring in such an environment is an open, and important, empirical question."[364]

Second is the issue of power, summarized effectively by Jameel:

> The goal of community monitoring is ambitious: to make providers more accountable by making communities more active without actually changing who hires and fires providers. In addition to the coordination and free-riding challenges to collective action of this kind, community members are usually poorer, less educated, and less connected than providers— in other words they have less power.[365]

Power is key. Monitoring that is not linked with the power to enforce is unlikely to be effective and therefore can be very risky. Put differently, "mobilizing community members to complain, without giving them the power to take decisive action, may not always work."[366]

The third issue is related to this challenge of power. Citizen monitoring is necessarily embedded in the social and political relations of power in which citizens themselves are embedded. The quality, consistency, use, dissemination, and communication of information generated from monitoring actions may be affected by these relationships. "Grass-roots monitoring," says Bardhan, "may…be prone to capture by local elites."[367] This is a paradox that merits further consideration: if monitoring can be influenced and controlled by the very local elites that it seeks to hold accountable, then how effective can it be as a tool for generating further accountability?

Shifting our focus from these more conceptual considerations, what does the empirical literature have to say about the links between monitoring and accountability? Generally, Jameel suggests that "attempts to increase accountability to the poor had mixed effects on absence; some methods worked in some places, while similar methods failed in others."[368] In particular, "community-based mobilization and information has mixed results, is complex, and needs more study."[369] Positive linkages have been found, to be sure, but even these results do not offer the substantive evidence we would need to make conclusive statements about broader connections. For example:

- Bjorkman and Svensson found that, in a randomized field experiment on community monitoring of health provision in Uganda, this process did lead to increased accountability of service providers to

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362 Fox 2007, 664.
363 Olken 2005, 2
364 Olken 2005, 2
365 Jameel 2009, 8
366 Jameel 2009, 8
367 Bardhan 2002; see also Bardhan and Mookherjee 2003 and Olken 2005, 2.
368 Jameel 2009.
369 Jameel 2009, 11

their clients and to an overall improvement of service provision.[370] It must be noted, however, that this research did rely on a monitoring process that was sponsored and facilitated by outside NGOs. The question of whether such monitoring could be initiated and sustained by "ordinary citizens" working alone is an open (and, admittedly, dubious) one.

- Deininger and Mpuga's econometric analysis in Uganda found a positive correlation between "household knowledge on how to report inappropriate behavior by bureaucrats" and accountability and the quality of services.[371] Their study does not, however—and this is crucial for the discussion at hand—allow us to make strong conclusions regarding the causality of these correlations. In other words, while we may know that informed people are more likely to coexist with accountable institutions and quality services, we do not know whether—in any particular context—an increase in knowledge (as through monitoring) would also lead to an increase in accountability. Correlation, as is well known, is not causation.

Doubt about the connections between citizen monitoring and accountability have been cast by other studies. Olken's randomized field experiment in Indonesia, for example, found that while the threat of government audit did lead to a measureable decrease in resource capture by local elites, "grass-roots participation in the monitoring process only reduced missing wages, with no effect on missing materials expenditures."[372] Studies by Banerjee et al. and by Nguyen and Lassibille, of citizen monitoring efforts in India and Madagascar, respectively, showed similarly unfavorable results.[373]

E. KEY QUESTIONS ON MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

➢ What dispositions and experiences foster a "monitoring-mindedness" on the part of ordinary citizens?

➢ Does the sustainability of citizen monitoring and accountability assume positive responses on the part of government? What might be the implications of this for Twaweza's strategy?

VI. IMPROVING BASIC SERVICES

In our final section of this report, we examine scholarly literature related to Twaweza's goal of enabling "many more people to enjoy improvements in their lives with regard to quality basic education, health care, clean water and other areas that may be meaningful to them."[374] Quite surprisingly, and despite the explicit focus in their purposes and goals statements, Twaweza's literature (to which we had access) says very little about the organization's focus on the sectors of education, water, and health, about its understanding of the contexts in which these services are currently provided (or not) throughout East Africa, or about the possible opportunities and challenges that strategic interventions by citizens (especially utilizing Twaweza's favored pathways of information access and monitoring) face in regard to making improvements in service delivery. If these dimensions have been unpacked in other documents, we do not find evidence of any conclusions drawn or questions raised in the primary public literature of Twaweza.[375]

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370 Bjorkman and Svensson 2009.
371 Deininger and Mpuga 2005.
372 Olken 2005, 1.
373 Banerjee et al. 2008; Nguyen and Lassibille 2008. Interestingly, some of the few studies that appear to have demonstrated more conclusive connections between monitoring and accountability have focused on "citizen report card" initiatives that Twaweza seems to somewhat disparage. Balakrishnan and Sekhar's (2004) report on citizen report cards in Bangalore, India, for example, shows favorable results over time.
374 Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.2.
375 An exception to this silence is found in the "More Than a Thousand Miles" document (p.4-6) where there is some

Unlike in other sections, then, we have very little to examine or respond to on behalf of Twaweza in our research. Also unlike other sections, the topic itself does not lend itself well to the kind of question-raising literature surveys that we have been able to undertake within the constraints of this project. "Basic services in East Africa" names a wide and complex literature addressing details that vary considerably between and within the three countries in which Twaweza works. As Jameel states, "the institutions that deliver public services are complex and the details matter."[376] While Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya have much in common, they represent distinct fields of practice when it comes to the provision of basic services and a detailed survey of water, health and educational service provision across the three countries is clearly beyond the scope of this report. Our approach, instead, in the absence of material from Twaweza and in the context of an overwhelming body of research, has been to engage in a general survey of the literature on basic service provision in East Africa, and in developing nations generally, in order to raise critical issues and identify key questions for Twaweza to consider as it moves forward in its work. In contrast to other sections of this report, this examination of basic service provision will be relatively brief, drawing substantially on the analytical and conceptual groundwork that has already been laid.

This said, we do wish to use Twaweza's general suggestions about its approach to service provision as a launching point for our analysis. Overall, we find in Twaweza's literature two key assumptions or propositions that shape this approach. First, the organization appears to assume (by default of not mentioning otherwise, at least) that the basic services of water, health and education are primarily "public" services in East Africa. This language invokes both a notion of rights, linked to the state and to specific entitlements that citizens might claim over their access to quality services, and a specific duty of the state to provide these services to citizens. While it is the case that Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya have all, in various ways, enacted policy that expresses some form of intention to provide citizens with these services (or, at least, with *access* to these services), this formal acknowledgement must be distinguished from any kind of robust form of *enacted* rights. Moreover, as we shall explore in more detail below, statements of intent from the state often coexist with a very complex, multi-layered and often extra-governmental reality of on-the-ground service provision. Services may be "public" in the sense that (some) citizens expect their governments to provide access, but they cannot be assumed to be publicly *supported, governed, or monitored*.

A second key dimension to Twaweza's approach to the improvement of basic services may be found precisely in its silence with regard to the details of actual service provision structures. Rather than engaging in any kind of specific analysis, advocacy or detail-based campaign, Twaweza seeks to work at the "ecosystem" level via its strategies of information access to "trigger" citizen agency. It is left, presumably, to *citizens* to figure out how basic services work, who provides them where, to assess their quality, to diagnose their challenges and dysfunctions and to organize effectively to make changes. The assumption chain goes something like this:

- Basic services are basic, therefore must be important priorities to citizens.
- Since (Twaweza conjectures) increased access to information leads to the enhanced exercise of effective citizen agency,
- Then citizens will decide to exercise their agency in the realm of these important services (via monitoring),
- And this exercise of agency will lead to an increase in the quality of those services.

anecdotal observation of basic service availability and quality in villages visited by Twaweza staff. These notes do not, however, constitute (or claim to be) a substantive analysis.

376 Jameel 2009, 1.

To be fair, Twaweza acknowledges that citizens might exercise agency in other realms as well,[377] but the organization's work remains (contradictions aside) rooted in an explicit focus on the three particular realms of basic service provision.

With these two key assumptions and dimensions in mind (the notion of "public" services and the notion that citizens will be the effective transformative agents of these services), we turn now to examine—with broad brush strokes—both the political and economic governance structure of service provision in East Africa and the various obstacles that citizens (or, for that matter, anyone) might face in seeking to improve the quality of such services in the region. Both of these dimensions, we contend, are crucial to the work that Twaweza seeks to do and should be thoroughly considered in any organizational strategy for change.

A. THE COMPLEX NATURE OF SERVICE PROVISION IN EAST AFRICA

Far from being simply "public," the field of service provision in East Africa spans a wide range of possibility regarding how institutions may be organized, funded and governed and, thus, who is responsible and accountable for and to them. Therkildsen and Semboja, in their study of the region's service provision structure, contend that "in practice, the importance of the state, voluntary and private sectors varies significantly among the three countries and types of services. Who provides what is socially and politically defined and constructed, and depends on past and present co-operative and conflictive relations."[378] More specifically, they note that "resources do not just come from one or a few sources. They originate from households (with men and women having different rights and obligations), POs, NGOs, all tiers of government, and from donors."[379] Their assessment of this complexity and of the state of research in its midst leads them to conclude that, "unfortunately information about the multitude of such resource inputs is limited and incomplete."[380]

In seeking to wrap our minds around this complexity, Cleaver (drawing on Merry et al.) offers a framework for understanding complexity in natural resources governance built around three dimensions of what she calls "plurality."[381] This framework may be useful in understanding service provision as well, since most generally, "such analyses of plurality indicate the complexity of the arenas in which the individual agency of rights bearers is exercised."[382] These dimensions are:

- **Polycentric Governance.** This refers to the wide variety of specific actors and organizations involved in basic services, including public, private, voluntary and complex combinations of the three.

- **Institutional Pluralism.** This names the "multiplicity of rules" that may be at play in a given service provision context such as, for example, "congruent traditional and modern water 'laws'."[383]

- **Multifunctionality**. This refers to the multiple uses of and values of a given resource or service,

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377 And, we must note, this acknowledgement is voiced with no small bit of self-doubt: "what if water, health and education are not at all the key areas in which people will want to/are able to exercise agency?" (Twaweza. "Twaweza: How Does Change Happen?" p.7.). This is a crucial question.
378 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 6. Lange notes these complexities as well, even tracing the breakdown of public service provision to them (Lange 2008).
379 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 9. A huge portion of funding for education, health and (presumably) water comes, for example, from external sources (donors). In Tanzania in 1994, more than 50% of state-funded education & health was supported by external donors (Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 17).
380 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 9.
381 Cleaver 2009, 132; Merrey et al. 2006, 212.
382 Cleaver 2009, 132.
383 Cleaver 2009, 132.

as when, for example, a water pump becomes a source of personal or family income (selling water to neighbors) in order to make debt payments.

To summarize, we can examine service provision complexity in terms of different forms of governance (different types of service providers), different rules which shape service provision, and different functions which services may play in a given context. While all of these are crucial, we will focus on the more widely-applicable question of "polycentric governance" that characterizes the provision of basic services throughout East Africa.[384] In this regard, the literature identifies a number of institutional forms through which services are currently provided:

Public. East African governments certainly do provide some basic services to some of their citizens, though the amount of such provision varies substantially from country-to-country and across sectors. In the 1990s, for example, Therkildsen and Semboja identified government service provision as the primary structure (though varying by local and national government provision) for education in Tanzania and Kenya, while Uganda's voluntary sector ranked higher.[385] In the domain of health care, government provision was found to lag behind both private and voluntary sector provision in all three countries.[386] In the realm of water provision, Tanzania's focus remains primarily on public sector provision (despite significant forays into privatization experiments),[387] while Kenya's Water Act of 2002 mandated a significant privatization of the country's water provision sector.[388] Uganda's water sector is significantly public, though has strong private participation as well.[389] These variations are far from being internally consistent. Because of the various political manifestations of decentralization programs across the three countries, responsibility for the provision of these basic services also varies widely in terms of localized versus centralized control and responsibility. Such differences matter, for they determine the flow of financial resources, the loci of decision-making power and the levels on which both managers and politicians must be held to account.[390]

Private. Particularly under the influence of structural adjustment programs and other forms of policy influence from international financial institutions and donors, East African countries have been engaged in various privatization processes and efforts with regard to basic services.[391] Once again, these efforts vary widely across countries and sectors as noted by Therkildsen and Semboja.[392] Of particular distinction, though a difference for which it is hard to find empirical data, is the breakdown between for-profit and non-profit NGO-based private service provision. It is clear that donor organizations of all types play a dramatic role in both supporting public sector services and in providing services themselves. Donors fund, for example, nearly fifty percent of total health care provision in Tanzania[393] and private non-profits run forty-two percent of Uganda's hospitals.[394] Within the large realm of private service provision, the actual structures vary widely: "private sector involvement can be seen as a continuum of options ranging from

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384 The question of differing rules and functions is equally as important and must be considered in on-the-ground work to improve services. It is however, a set of issues that cannot be adequately addressed through the study of scholarly literature alone; it requires, quite substantially, empirical study of specific places and contexts.

385 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 7. This situation changed in the second half the 1990s. Their work is instructive, however, for its findings.

386 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 7.

387 Gine and Perez-Foguet 2008.

388 K'Akumu 2006.

389 Mabasi 2010.

390 Yilmaz et al. 2010; Francis and James 2003; Mamdani and Bangser 2004; Palloti 2008.

391 Alexander 2003. Ngowi offers a typical justification of this process with regard to the supposed inefficacy of public institutions: "Such a sector therefore is inadequate in the whole exercise of effectively, efficiently and sustainably producing, rendering and improving the needed quantity and quality of goods and services. The private sector therefore can be seen as the next best and more sustainable alternative" (Ngowi 2005, 4).

392 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 7.

393 Shiner 2003.

394 Tashobaya et al. 2007.

supply and civil work contracts to management contracts and concession type of arrangements."[395] These differences matter with regard to the question of who can and should be held accountable by citizens for the services in question.

Private-Public Partnerships. These hybrid structures, which also take many specific and different institutional forms, appear to be growing in popularity throughout the region.[396] Uganda's Public Private Partnership for Health initiative outlines a process whereby public and private agencies will collaborate on issues as extensive as "policy development, coordination and planning; resources management including financial resources mobilization and allocation, and human resources for health development and management; services delivery including management and provision of health services and community empowerment and involvement."[397] Tanzania's Health Sector Reform process, similarly, holds public-private partnerships as one of its key strategies.[398] These programs, in varying ways, blur lines regarding issues of accountability and how citizens might interface with the governance and implementation of basic services.[399]

Voluntary Sector. The "voluntary sector," a broad category that refers to non-monetized activity taking place outside of the institutional frameworks of private or public agencies, has always played a major role in the meeting of basic needs in East African communities.[400] These can be formally-organized community associations, such as the much-studied Harambee Movement[401], or—perhaps more predominately—informal groups of people developing family or community solutions to basic service needs.[402] In the case of these voluntary sector initiatives, issues of accountability and the improvement of basic services are likely to be intimately bound up with questions of social relations of power at the family and community level, as well as political relations at the level of local authorities. Unless Twaweza envisions the eventual replacement of such community-based institutions by government-provided public services (which does not appear to be the case), then work to "trigger" citizen agency must thoughtfully and delicately navigate the complexities of these profoundly socially-embedded forms of service provision organization. What role does information and monitoring play (if any) in such contexts? How would support and networking on the part of an external development organization such as Twaweza look different when engaging in community-based service provision improvement rather than in accountability work via the state?

International Financial Institutions. A further consideration in the realm of basic service governance is the role of international financial institutions in constraining and enabling certain forms of service provision and not others. While international institutions are most often directly involved in service provision only in the role of funder (a powerful role, to be sure), their influence on national and regional-level policy may sometimes contribute greatly to shaping the "ecosystem" in which service provision takes place. Shiner summarizes in the domain of health care:

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395 Ugaz 2003, 3.
396 Ugaz 2003.
397 Tashobaya et al. 2007.
398 Tanzanian-German Programme to Support Health. http://www.tgpsh.or.tz/public-private-partnership.html.
       Accessed 9/6/10.
399 Miraftab 2004.
400 Hyden 2006.
401 Mwiria 1990.
402 To the extent that basic service provision occurs in the context of societies with strong informal interpersonal
       networks—that often might take precedence over formal networks and institutions--how must our
       conceptualization of the exercise of "agency" work? Another way to frame this: if "citizens" are people
       constituted as agents in relation to a formal polity, and if people in East Africa are often acting not as citizens but
       as members of community, then what does this mean for agency? In relation to services? How much of the
       agency necessary to transform service delivery must come from "citizens" and how much from "community
       members"?

International financial institutions provide aid in the form of grants and loans, with the condition that the recipient country meets requirements set out in the economic recovery, structural adjustment, and poverty reduction strategy programmes that they endorse. Such conditions include economic reforms that either directly affect the financing of health care or indirectly affect health through the effect of economic change on welfare.[403]

Alexander's research identifies numerous specific financial and policy mechanisms through which institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank exert influence on the form and governance of service provision in developing countries.[404] In seeking to identify the leverage points at which citizens might exercise power in holding service providers and governments accountable, we must keep in mind that "many developing country governments are 'outwardly' accountable to external donors and creditors" and are therefore limited in their ability to be "inwardly" accountable to their citizens.[405] How does Twaweza account for this macro-scale issue in its work? Are consideration made, for example, regarding the importance of information about the role of international financial institutions in shaping East African economic and political contexts? What about citizen "monitoring" of these institutions or the national governments that are engaged in negotiating condition-filled loan agreements for international aid? Indeed, when Twaweza talks about enabling citizen agency, does this include work that might enable citizen-based social movements that are seeking to contest externally-imposed policies that they perceive might lead to the reduction or eclipse of citizen control of basic services?

B. OBSTACLES TO IMPROVING SERVICE PROVISION

Even if citizens are able to navigate the complex corridors of institutional service provision to identify ways in which they might hold (someone, who?) accountable, numerous obstacles may remain on the road to effecting an increase in the quality of services. Reviewing the literature, we identify a number of these, some of which have been covered earlier with regard to issues of citizenship, agency, access to information and accountability:

- **Rights.** As discussed in our exploration of accountability, people must--in the case of public provision, at least--have both an institutionalized right to demand service improvements and a *sense* of that right.

- **Political Will**. As a number of authors identify, there must be political will on the part of authorities to both provide basic services and to work towards their improvement.[406]

- **Funding**. Clearly, there must be adequate funds available to implement and improve services.[407] This is a significant obstacle in many cases, yet as Besley and Ghatak remind us, "public spending and outcomes are not necessarily related."[408]

- **Material Resources**. In addition to financial resources, there must often be material resources available in order to facilitate effective services.[409] Perhaps the most obvious example is in the realm of water: during severe drought, there is little possible relief.

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403   Shiner 2003, 829.
404   Alexander 2003.
405   Alexander 2003, 1.
406   Gutierrez 2007; Besley and Ghatak 2007.
407   Ugaz 2003; Penny et al 2007; Devarajan and Reinikka 2002; Mamdani and Bangser 2004; Besley and Ghatak 2007.
408   Besley and Ghatak 2007, 130.
409   Penny et al 2007; Mamdani and Bangser 2004.

- **Corruption**. The frequently cited misuse or misappropriation of funding is a critical obstacle to improving service provision and may not be easily transformed.[410]

- **Incentives to Provide Services**. As Devarajan and Reinikka identify, "even when the money reaches the primary school or health clinic, the incentives to provide the service are often very weak."[411] Teacher and health provider absenteeism are notable symptoms of this challenge.

- **Skill & Knowledge.** Effective, high-quality services require skilled providers and managers, which are often in short supply due to economic, educational and other constraints.[412]

- **Mismatch**. Ugaz identifies that there can often be a "mismatch" between the form and content of a given service and the actual needs and desires of the population.[413] This may be particularly true in cases in which obstacles to participation are high.

- **Urban Bias**. Some observers have noted a strong urban bias in service provision, in which economic inequities are compounded by spatial inequities.[414]

- **Accountability**. The degree of accountability that a given service provider--and the broader institutions and conditions in which they are embedded--has will profoundly influence service provision quality.[415] This has been discussed earlier in detail.

- **Information about Coverage and Quality**. It is often difficult for citizens and service providing institutions to know the extent to which services are needed, how well they are currently being provided, who is providing them, and how well this is happening.[416] This is one dimension in which Twaweza's work seems particularly useful, though actual improvements in service provision quality are likely to require changes in other dimensions as well.

- **Coordination and Linkage.** Articulations at various scales between institutions, sectors and governance domains are crucial in determining the provision of services, their quality and the responsiveness of institutions to citizen pressure.[417]

Many of these dimensions will sound familiar, linked to our earlier discussions of constraints and enabling factors for both the exercise of citizen agency and the effective construction of relationships of accountability. These are, most fundamentally, issues of power and the relationships between "ordinary citizens" and the larger institutions and contexts with which they engage. Any approach to imagining, encouraging or "triggering" citizen-based action to improve lives and livelihoods must take these elements into account.

C. FURTHER QUESTIONS

We close this section with two final, and much broader, questions raised by the scholarly literature on improving basic services: who defines "basic," and who defines "better"? The first question is raised by the

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410 Mamdani and Bangser 2004; Francis and James 2003. See also World Bank 2010.
411 Devarajan and Reinikka 2002, 3. See also Besley and Ghatak 2007; Mamdani and Bangser 2004.
412 Penny et al 2007; Besley and Ghatak 2007; Mamdani and Bangser 2004.
413 Ugaz 2003, 8.
414 Ugaz 2003, 8; Devarajan and Reinikka 2002, 3.
415 Mamdani and Bangser 2004.
416 Gutierrez 2007.
417 Gutierrez 2007; Lange 2008; Francis and James 2003.

work of De Walle, who studies the politics of how services are defined (or not) as "basic" or "essential." Some services, and not others, he observes, are "considered as 'essential' services, the lack of which for an individual or a group of individuals is to be considered as problematic and to be remedied by some type of (government?) intervention."[418] The question of what is included in the category of "essential" is not simply one of objective necessity nor of basic public opinion; these are, rather, highly political decisions. The contest over what is considered "basic" is a contest about *rights*, which is, therefore, also a contest about what is to be protected as a public good and what is to be left to the private market.

If water, health, and education are "basic," then this implies (in many domains of Western political sensibility, though not all) a social and moral obligation (often via the state) to provide access for everyone in society (or, at least all "citizens"). Yet what about food, housing, transportation, energy, communication, jobs, or income? Calling some of these "basic" might threaten certain assumptions about what should be left to the "private domain," or about what is (or is not) a moral obligation. In societies shaped by capitalist value systems, the notion of an adequate income as a "basic" social obligation may not be popular with those who believe that poverty is an effective incentive against "free-riding." The point is this: the definition of "basic" is not always simple, and can be an ideological and political issue as much (or more) than it is one of simple *need*. Such a recognition must carry us back to our earlier questions about Twaweza's tension between both "targeting" certain form of services and, at the same time, claiming not to target any particular domain of citizen action. Who, in the end, gets to decide what is basic, what is important?

The second question is also one of definition, but in this case in regard to the quality of services. Here, we recognize with Leonard et al. that varying definitions of "better services" or of "service improvement" can lead to very different perceptions with regard to the effects of various service-oriented change actions. Leonard et al., examining dynamics of attendance at health clinics in rural Tanzania, sometimes "observe people leaving villages in which there is a high quality clinic to seek care at a low quality clinic further away."[419] While initially puzzling, it became clear that people hold differing definitions of "quality." Other studies of clinic quality in the area, Leonard et al. point out, measured "the number of beds, number of doctors, hours open per week, drug availability and services provided,"[420] none of which were measures that made sense out of the pattern of patient mobility. Studying actual patient preferences, however, they found that "patients seek facilities that provide high quality consultations, are staffed by more knowledgeable physicians, observe prescription practices, and are polite."[421] The relevant point that we take here for Twaweza is that "objective" measures of improvement in the quality of basic services may not exist. In seeking to engage citizens with such work, and in seeking to evaluate impacts in the long-run of its own work, Twaweza must begin with the quality-definitions of citizens themselves.

LINKS II & III: CITIZEN AGENCY AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF BASIC SERVICES

We arrive now at the question of linkages between citizen agency and the improvement of basic services, posed in Twaweza's theory of change. Because we have touched on many dimensions of this linkage earlier in the report, this section will serve primarily to raise a few further questions. This linkage has two primary dimensions: first, the question of how citizens do, in fact, exercise agency with relation to basic services? The second question has been posed previously: what if citizens do not choose to exercise agency in the direction of seeking improvements in basic services (or, more precisely, in the basic services that Twaweza identifies as central)?

Therkildsen and Semboja provide an excellent overview of the various ways that households in East Africa

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418   De Walle 2009, 522.
419   Leonard et al. 2001, 1.
420   Leonard et al. 2001, 4.
421   Leonard 2001, 1.

have been found to respond to increasing obstacles to service access, or to low-quality services:

- "They may be cut off from service benefits by deliberate choice or economic compulsion."[422] Sometimes people simply do not act. For a wide variety of reason--presumably related to some combinations of the issues identified in this report as obstacles to exercising agency, people must cope with a lack of access or with very low-quality services.

- "They may switch to a lower quality service."[423] Faced with obstacles to accessing services of higher quality (outlined earlier), people resort to those services which are available, more accessible, but may be of significantly lower quality.

- They may seek means of meeting personal and family needs through private arrangements, such as paying for access to tap water, hiring a tutor, and going to the private pharmacy to get medications and drugs.

- "They may search for cheaper outlets."[424] This may involve greater travel time, greater risk, poorer quality or the undermining of social support for more "public" options (as in the case where private options are cheaper, even if due only to increased exploitation of labor or the externalization of social and environmental costs).

- "They may join others to provide services collectively."[425] When resources are available, and the social conditions are amenable, cooperative or collective solutions may be organized. In other circumstances--particularly in situations of unequal access to resources and the absence of social mechanisms to collectivize power and access--people may often resort to private provision of services to others in the community. Thus, as has been offered as an example earlier, a water pump purchased by loan may become a source of income and an effective move toward further privatization of resource access.

- They may advocate for lower obstacles and higher quality in existing, currently-utilized services.[426] Finally, we arrive at the outcome that Twaweza seeks to encourage. It is, indeed, a possible action that citizens might take. Suffice it to say, however, that it is far from the only option and--in many circumstances--may not be the most likely.

Some key questions that must be asked in any given (specific, grounded) context include: Which of these options are most desirable, tenable, and, ultimately, might lead to improved access, equity and quality in public services? What specific processes and conditions might facilitate a person, household or group to pursue one path and not the other? Under what circumstances, and with what enabling factors and resources, would someone pursue the desirable pathways toward genuine improvement in public services?

The second question has been raised earlier, but is worth repeating and elaborating: what if citizens don't *want* to exercise agency through the improvement of basic services? Another way to raise this question is to propose that the goals of "improving basic services" and "enabling citizen agency" may or may not be congruent. They are linked only to the extent that citizens *choose* basic services, provided through the state, as the locus of their action. Should they choose otherwise, then the current theory of change advanced by Twaweza ceases to hold up. We come face-to-face, again, with the question of how Twaweza navigates the

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422 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 11.
423 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 11.
424 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 11.
425 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 11.
426 Therkildsen and Semboja 1995, 11.

tension (even, perhaps, the contradiction) between advocating for "enhanced citizen agency" and maintaining a strong focus on basic services and their improvement via information access and monitoring.

This issue cuts across all dimensions of Twaweza's work. If citizen agency is the goal, then would Twaweza choose to focus on the other three dimensions specifically (information, monitoring and services)? Wouldn't Twaweza, instead, seek to explicitly identify obstacles to citizen agency and self-organization on-the-ground and then work to support this? In the realm of information, we can see that if "improving basic services" provided by the government is the locus of action (rather than agency), then it may be true that information of the type that Twaweza focuses on is crucial to effective action. But it is just as clear that *not all effective citizen action requires the same kinds of information* (and thus the same kinds of access to information). Putting resources into access to information or monitoring activities in light of having *decided* on the sphere of citizen action "beforehand" means *not* putting those resources into other kinds of enabling information, or into other kinds of enabling activities. Again, where should the decision lie regarding the form that citizen agency should take? Who has the power to shape this through funding and other resource leverage? How is Twaweza taking explicit responsibility for the power that comes with this role?[427]

LINK IV: CLOSING THE CIRCLE: BASIC SERVICES AND CITIZEN AGENCY (THROUGH INFORMATION)

We have arrived at the final linkage in Twaweza's model, and one that is perhaps the least explicit in the organization's literature. Basic services, this link indicates, are crucial elements in the enabling of citizen agency. Twaweza acknowledges this link briefly in its "Theory of Change" document, stating that "better basic services, more effective use of public resources and accountable government will contribute to strengthening human capability and citizen agency."[428] This statement, we suggest, is more crucial to the elaboration of Twaweza's work than its sparse presence in the organization's literature would suggest. All other dimensions of its theory aside, if Twaweza seeks to build a robust conceptual or causal linkage between the various dimensions of its work—particularly between the improvement of services and the notion of "citizen-driven change"—it must be done at this point of connection. Basic services must be conceptualized as offering a significant response to some of the limiting factors of resource access and inequity that make the exercise of citizen agency difficult. Sen's capability approach (reviewed earlier in this report), which Twaweza subtly invokes in its above statement of linkage, can provide a robust framework for theorizing these connections. It may bear fruit for Twaweza to explore this pathway more thoroughly.

Such exploration does not, of course, enable a sidestepping of some of the sticky questions involved in this linkage that have been raised earlier: Who decides which basic services are most "basic" and will most effectively enable an increase in citizen agency and action? Of all of the constraining or enabling dimensions of citizen agency for Twaweza to choose, why choose "basic services" as the primary point of intervention? Why not choose other points? On what basis have these choices been made? Has a strategic analysis of potential intervention points led to such a narrowing of focus? If so, who participated in that process? Who

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427 There is another dimension to this question as well, but from a more "strategic" standpoint with regard to leveraging resources for social change. It may well be the case that basic services need to be a priority for development work, but we also need to think strategically about this: If the goal--the ultimate goal—is a robust, empowered citizenry capable of advocating for (or meeting!) their own basic (and nonbasic) needs, then we need to open up the possibility that an approach starting with advocacy *for* basic needs might not be the only strategy. Anne Larson argues, in her study of decentralization in Nicaragua, that natural resources might serve as a useful leverage point (Larson 2005). But, she says, "local leaders...may be more likely to ignore natural resources and concentrate on the service and infrastructure investments that many consider to be their top priority" (Larson 2005, 10). The question is: what is the most effective leverage point to begin to built robust democratic power-from-below? Of course basic services must be on the radar, but are they the most effective place to start? Where might democratic decentralization--of the "downward accountability" type—most effectively begin to succeed in ways that then open up possibility for further transformation?

428 Twaweza. "Theory of Change." p.2.

had a voice and who did not?

VII. CONCLUSION

The broad question that our identification of these complex dimensions raises for Twaweza, we believe, is essentially this: Can the provision of information access and support for monitoring actually lead to effective results in the face of so many challenges? If so, how, specifically, does Twaweza envision this effect to occur? There is no doubt that one organization cannot meaningfully and effectively address even half of these issues alone, and nor do we intend to imply as much. What we do suggest is that the crucial, small work of any one organization—particularly one seeking to link as many spheres and dimensions as Twaweza in its vision of change—be explicitly connected with an acknowledgement of the larger context in which it works. An effective theory of change must engage the hard questions head-on and seek to articulate provisional, open-ended ideas about how these questions might be addressed. Sidestepping issues of power and the profound challenges of inequity and participation—even in the guise of an "ecosystem approach"—will not ultimately be helpful to the long-term work of imagining new pathways for change.

Yet neither do we wish for our critical questions to be understood as pessimistic nay-saying. Far from believing that the challenges we have identified indicate the impossibility of people-driven change, we see them as crucial ingredients in a learning process through which substantive and strategic change can be truly imagined. Even those elements that we have identified (drawing from the work of others) as "structural constraints" should be read as *tools for thinking* rather than as objective determinants of any transformative process. Problems and challenges are opportunities for learning. Looking Goliath in the eye is the first step to believing that David is capable of what previously seemed impossible.

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