Brief on Twaweza/Uwezo’s Participation in the 4th Annual National Literacy Conference  
20-21 July 2016, at Silver Springs Hotel, Bugolobi, Kampala - Uganda

On 20th -21st July 2016, Uwezo at Twaweza participated in the 4th annual literacy conference, an event organised by the Reading Association of Uganda (RAU), at Silver Springs Hotel, Bugolobi. The event was presided over by the Minister of Education and Sports Mrs Janet Museveni (represented by the State Minister of Primary Education, Hon. Nansubuga Rosemary Snninde).

This is an annual event that brings together all key stakeholders to discuss what they are doing to improve literacy, the challenges faced and the way forward. This year the event brought together over 300 participants from the education sector, including officials from the Ministry of Education, district officials, university lecturers, principals and tutors from teacher training colleges, teachers and head teachers, practitioners from education related NGOs, primary going children, and the media.

**Powerful statements from the speech by the Minister of Education and Sports:**
- “The reports of Twaweza have enabled us all realise where we are”. Quoting Uwezo’s findings that indicate that 3 out of 10 Primary 7 children cannot read or count at Primary 2 level, she wondered how Uganda could move into a middle-income country when much of the citizenry is illiterate.
- “We can’t develop the nation if our people cannot read and comprehend issues”
- If we want children to understand what we are teaching, we should start with their local languages (thematic curriculum)
- We should move from the level of just reading text to reading with **comprehension and analysis**
- We need to move out of the classrooms/hotels and go to the communities. Communities and parents play a key role

**Powerful statements from the keynote address delivered by Robert Kabushenga – CEO Vision Group, member of Twaweza Governing Board**
- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), for one to be considered intellectually healthy, they must read at least 12 books a year.
- In order to acquire skills of reading and writing and any higher skills you need to start by reading. Literacy begins with reading.
- Ability to read, write and count changes the quality of people’s lives
- Message to parents: Even if you don’t intend to read, just spread the books around for the children to see. They need to imitate things that are consequential to their lives. Keep opening and reading the books as the children watch.
- Parents and communities are a very critical factor. Messages to parents:
  - Visit a book store with kids and allow them to develop a love for books
- Message to government:
  - Allow books to be printed locally so that they are made affordable to citizens.
  - Allow books to be printed on news print not only hard paper, again to make the reading materials accessible and build a culture of reading in the country
Uwezo’s engagements at the conference:

We participated in 6 activities at the conference:

1. Exhibition: we exhibited our materials including learning assessment reports, test booklets, survey booklets, calendars, samples of academic publications drawing from Uwezo work, and the emergent readers.

2. Remarks at the conference opening ceremony: We were given a slot to give remarks at the opening ceremony presided over by the Minister of Education and Sports. In Twaweza’s remarks, Mary Goretti emphasised the importance of using data to drive improvements in literacy. She highlighted the contribution Twaweza has made over the years to put the issue of low learning outcomes in literacy high in public debate using citizen-led data. She praised the Minister for being an ardent follower and user of Uwezo assessment findings over the years in parliamentary discussions.

3. Panel discussion: We gave a presentation as part of a panel discussion (involving Uganda National Examinations Boards, Ministry of Education and Sports and USAID/RTI School Health and Reading Programme). The panel focusing on the theme; The Status of Reading in Uganda Primary Schools: evidence and way forward was chaired by Dr Daniel Nkaada, Commissioner for Basic Education in the Ministry of Education and Sports. Twaweza’s presentation was titled: Uwezo household level efforts to measure reading achievement. It gave the nuts and bolts of our simple household-based citizen-driven assessment. A major question from the audience was whether there was evidence of any action taken at community level to improve learning as a result of Uwezo citizen-led assessment. We shared that the success on this was slow drawing from the LPT and R4D evaluation studies - the reason why in addition to the learning assessment we are now also deliberately investing our thinking and resources into catalyzing public agency.

4. Workshop chairing: We also chaired a workshop titled: Literacy and environment, which was basically showing how addressing climate change would go hand in hand with ensuring a literate citizenry.

5. Conference closing remarks: On the last day of the conference Twaweza was given the honor to give closing remarks and officially close the conference. Representing Twaweza, Mary Goretti noted three key strengths of the conference: i) It put children’s learning at the centre of the discussion ii) it was one of the few forums bringing together policy makers, practitioners (teachers, teacher educators), civil society and academic researchers in dialogue to improve literacy iii) the quality of presenters was high - from the Guest of honor, keynote address and individual presentations. She thanked the organisers and reiterated Twaweza’ commitment to partnerships that focus on learning outcomes especially beginning with the foundations of reading and counting as building blocks for higher learning.

6. We contributed a piece titled The State of Education in Uganda: Uwezo Insights, which appeared in the annual magazine of the Reading Association of Uganda, one of the conference products. The article was based on the 5 key findings of Uwezo’s 5th report that was launched recently.

A NEWS PAPER ARTICLE BASED ON THE CONFERENCE, AND PHOTOS FROM THE CONFERENCE ARE SHARED BELOW:
Experts call for increased investment in literacy among children

By Mary Karugaba
and Clare Muhindo

Experts are worried that with most Ugandans unable to read and interpret numbers, Uganda may not achieve its target of becoming a middle-income economy by 2020.

During the 4th National Literacy Conference yesterday, several speakers noted that without knowledge and skills, it will be difficult for the population to change their lifestyle and drive the country to its desired goals.

Speakers, including the First Lady, Janet Museveni, who is also the Minister of Education and Sports, emphasised that for sustainable development to be achieved, the Government must invest in its children so that they are able to at least read and write.

According to a recent study on literacy in Uganda, over 90% of Ugandan children in Primary Two (P2) and P5 and 30% of adults are unable to read and interpret numbers.

The 2015 study by Twaweza, a regional educational non-governmental organisation, further showed that 50% of pupils in P5 to P7 could not read a P2-level story. Among P5 pupils, only two in 10 could read the P2-level story.

Of the P7 pupils assessed, approximately one in every four pupils could not read and solve a P2-level story and numeracy task.

Janet Museveni, in a speech read by the state minister for primary education, Rose Seninde, noted that literacy and numeracy skills are acquired in primary schools and the Government has embarked on promoting and prioritising quality and relevancy of primary education.

“Universal Primary Education has in recent times come under intense scrutiny for it to be relevant and of good quality. However, as the Government, we are prioritising the promotion of quality education by rolling out the thematic curriculum, improving the provision of instructional materials, improving pupil assessment and ensuring adequate recruitment and performance of qualified teachers,” she said.

However, she noted that the proportion of the education ministry budget being spent on procurement of learning materials is still inadequate. She promised to lobby for more funding in the next financial years.

To improve the learning competencies of pupils, Mrs. Museveni said teachers with competence in teaching literacy in local languages are being identified and empowered in the current reforms at the level of primary teachers colleges.

“I am sure that Uganda can attain middle-income status by 2020, if each of us contributes in our respective capacity,” she said.

Vision Group chief executive officer Robert Kabushenga, in a keynote address, faulted the parents for the poor reading culture in the country and regretted their absence from the conference. Citing the World Health Organisation statistics, Kabushenga said to be intellectually healthy, one must read at least 12 good books every year.

“I am not talking about novels or fiction books, but 600 pages of well written texts by writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chimamanda Ngozi. So, if you are not doing that, please consider yourself intellectually unhealthy,” he said.

Quoting the example of the economic rise and fall of Argentina, Kabushenga said the Government needs to invest in the acquisition of skill and knowledge by its citizens.

“For us to develop and attain the middle-income status, the population must be able to read, write and count in a language that they understand. How can you develop when you cannot even read a bank-note? Just being literate is good enough to take you to another level,” he said.

He insisted that parents must be brought on board and encouraged to inculcate a reading culture in their children as early as possible.

To promote the reading culture among children, Fountain Publishers donated books worth sh100m to different community libraries around the country.
The event in pictures;

Above: Minister of state for primary education (in a long dress) in a group photo. To her left is the patron of the Reading Association of Uganda Mrs Loy Tumusiime and to the minister’s right is Mary Goretti Nakabugo of Twaweza.
Below- State minister for primary education touring the Uwezo stall and getting a copy of the Uwezo Report from Judith Tumusiime
Above: Judith Nakayima giving information about Uwezo and Twaweza materials to participants who visited our stall.
Below: Mary Goretti presenting at the panel discussion alongside other panelists from Ministry of Education & Sports, Uganda National Examinations Board and USAID/RTI School Health and Reading Program.