What Can People Know in Tanzania?
Findings of a National Opinion Poll


Why this study?
Public opinion is crucial to development and democracy. It can influence government policy, increase government accountability, and instigate positive change in society. However, in order to make knowledgeable choices and provide useful commentary, citizens need access to relevant and timely information. This requires government to provide access to information, and the public to exercise their right to be informed.

With these factors in mind, REDET and HakiElimu conducted a nationwide opinion poll on the accessibility of information in Tanzania, looking specifically at the extent to which Tanzanians are informed of, and involved in, the policies, practices and programs that affect their daily lives. The poll also sought to gather public opinion on the value of introducing a law in Tanzania that would require government institutions to make information public.

Methods
The poll, conducted in Kiswahili, was carried out in September 2005 and covered 21 districts – one from each region on the Tanzanian mainland. The respondent sample, which totaled 1,050 people, was equally divided between males and females. Over half (55%) of the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 45. The majority (63%) had attained a primary education, and two-thirds reported living on less than one dollar per day. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity.

Key Findings

General Access: The great majority of respondents (79%) said they have some means of accessing information, although there were gaps between men and women (81% and 76% respectively) and urban versus rural areas (90% and 79% respectively). The 21% who reported not having access to information were members of populations with fewer opportunities and lower access to public information and services: 57% were women, 83% were rural inhabitants, and 94% had a low level of education (primary education and below).

Compared to previous years, however, access to mass media (particularly radio) has increased significantly and is now the most important medium by which people access information, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Most Popular Means of Accessing Information Among Tanzanians

- **Radio**: 59%
- **Newspaper**: 23%
- **TV**: 15%
- **Mobile phone**: 1%
- **Other**: 1%

*“Other” includes ten-cell meetings, church, posters and flyers, village meetings, and books.*

The use of mobile phones is also growing and increasing the public’s access to information. In contrast, the Internet has yet to have much effect on the population as a whole.

Type of Information: Significantly, 55% of the respondents reported that they knew of an office or specific place to obtain information on government laws, policies and programs. Of these, over half cited accessible village or neighborhood government offices and 18% mentioned the Ward Executive office. Others mentioned the District Commissioner’s Office, the CCM Office, Courts and the Police.

By implication, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other non-governmental sources do not seem
Most people do not appear to be particularly well informed about financial transfers at the local level. Nearly three-quarters of respondents were unaware that the government releases quarterly funds to local councils for maintaining public services, despite the fact that data about these fund transfers is featured in several newspapers and public circulars. Even in regular village/mtaa assembly meetings, which the poll showed to be an important venue for sharing information, there are mixed opinions about releasing information on village government revenue and expenditure. At village meetings where this was discussed, two-thirds found it useful but one third of found it not useful at all.

**Conclusion & Recommendations**

The poll results suggest that many Tanzanians are not aware of the policies, laws and practices that affect their daily lives. On the other hand, the public seems to adhere to a sense that certain information should remain government “property”. Thus, while there is a need to strengthen the supply side of access to information, the greater challenge is to understand and deepen public demand for information.

The following initiatives may be worthwhile:

- A participatory Government-led review and revision of its information and communication policies, which will consider introduction of progressive access to information law
- Strengthening the role and capacity of village/mtaa governments in providing information
- Greater use of radio in sharing public information
- Development of a CSO code of conduct to foster transparency and information sharing.

This brief was prepared by Katherine Manchester and Ruth Carlitz, and edited by Rakesh Rajani.