

REPOA Brief



Citizen Engagement in Tanzania: Awareness and Access to Government Information

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Key Messages

Respondents' awareness of their constitutional right to obtain government information declined from two-thirds in 2017 to half in 2022.

Despite higher awareness of rights to information among more educated respondents, education did not significantly influence awareness of the specific types of information available.

Among the types of information designated for public access, procurement-related information was the most challenging for citizens to obtain.

Introduction

Access to government information intended for public use is crucial for effective citizen engagement (United Republic of Tanzania, 2005, 2016) as well as for promoting transparency and accountability (Ally, 2007; Chachage, Kyando, & Rajani, 2005; United Republic of Tanzania, 2005, 2016). In this context, *government information* refers specifically to development plans, financial, and procurement records. Financial information includes budgets, expenditures, and staff salaries.

Article 18 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania enshrines the public's right to access government information as one of the fundamental rights. To uphold this right, the government has enacted the Access to Information Act and established information and communication departments, among other initiatives. However, despite these efforts, citizens still face challenges in obtaining government information. These challenges stem primarily from a lack of awareness about their constitutional right and the types of information they are entitled to access. Additionally, the perceived sensitivity of non-classified government information contributes to limited access.

This policy brief examines the extent to which citizens are aware of their constitutional right to access government information, as well as their understanding of the types of information available. It also investigates the likelihood of success in obtaining such information. The findings aim to inform the implementation of the legislation related to the access to information.

Methodology

Analysis for this policy brief is based on data from Afrobarometer surveys, using a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Tanzanians. A sample of this size yields country level estimates with a margin of error of ± 2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Afrobarometer has conducted previous rounds of surveys in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2022.

For this study, Afrobarometer data were analysed quantitatively to address the core research questions. To assess trends in citizen awareness of access to information rights, the analysis draws on data from Rounds

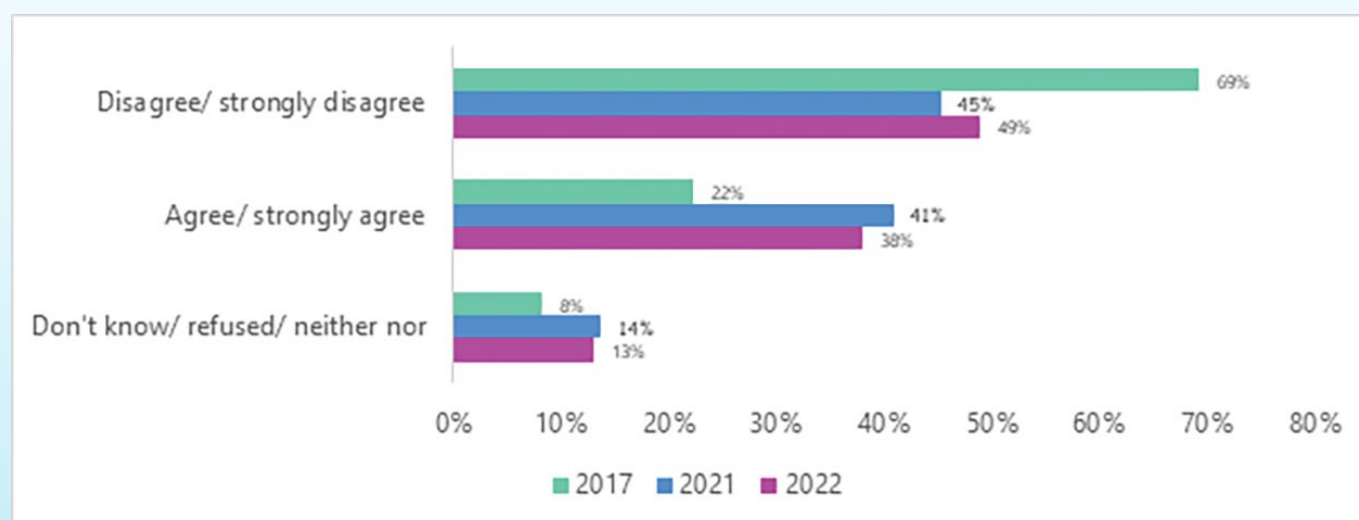
7, 8, and 9. Round 10 was excluded because it did not include the relevant indicators on this topic. For the remaining aspects of the brief, only Round 9 data were used, as this was the most recent round with those indicators.

Findings

Awareness of a constitutional right to access government information

Awareness of the constitutional right to access government information is essential for enabling citizens to exercise that right. According to the analysis, the proportion of respondents who were aware of this right declined from two-thirds in 2017 to half in 2022. Notably, in 2021, awareness was slightly below half, indicating a fluctuation but overall downward trend (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Respondents' awareness of constitutional right to obtain government information between 2017 and 2022

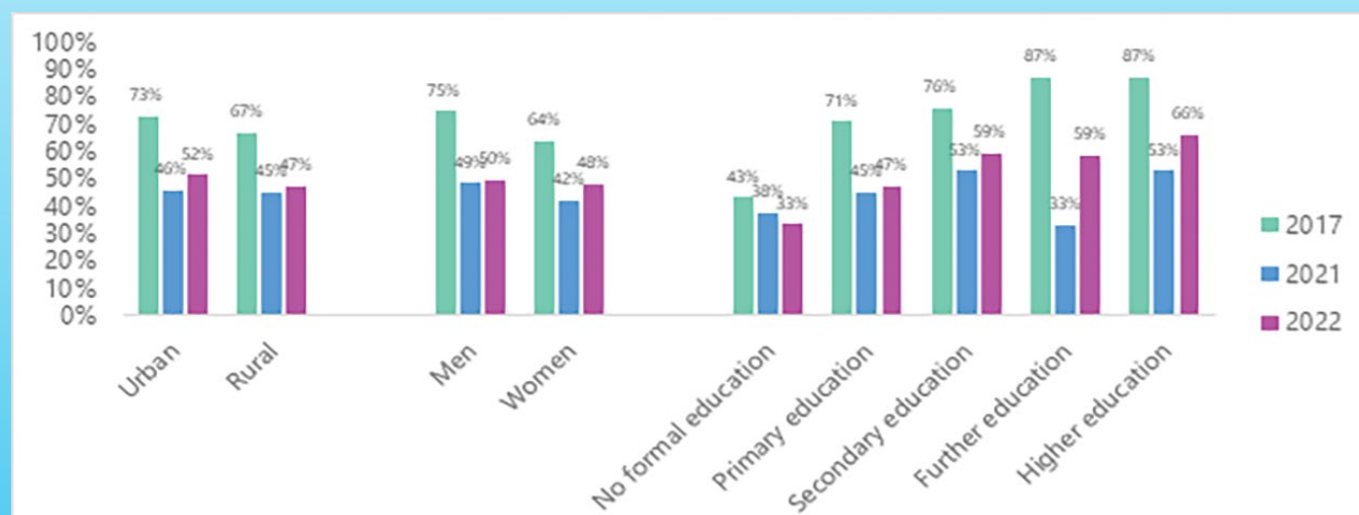


Source: Afrobarometer Data, 2017, 2021, and 2022

Further, urban residents and men were more likely than rural residents and women to disagree that government information is for government use only (Figure 2). However, the size of these differences was generally small, with 2017 being the only year that showed a noticeable gap.

In addition, awareness increased consistently with education level. Despite this pattern, the results for 2021 shows that only about one third of respondents with post secondary education reported being aware of their right to access government information.

Figure 2. Citizens' awareness of their constitutional right to access government information by geographical location and education level



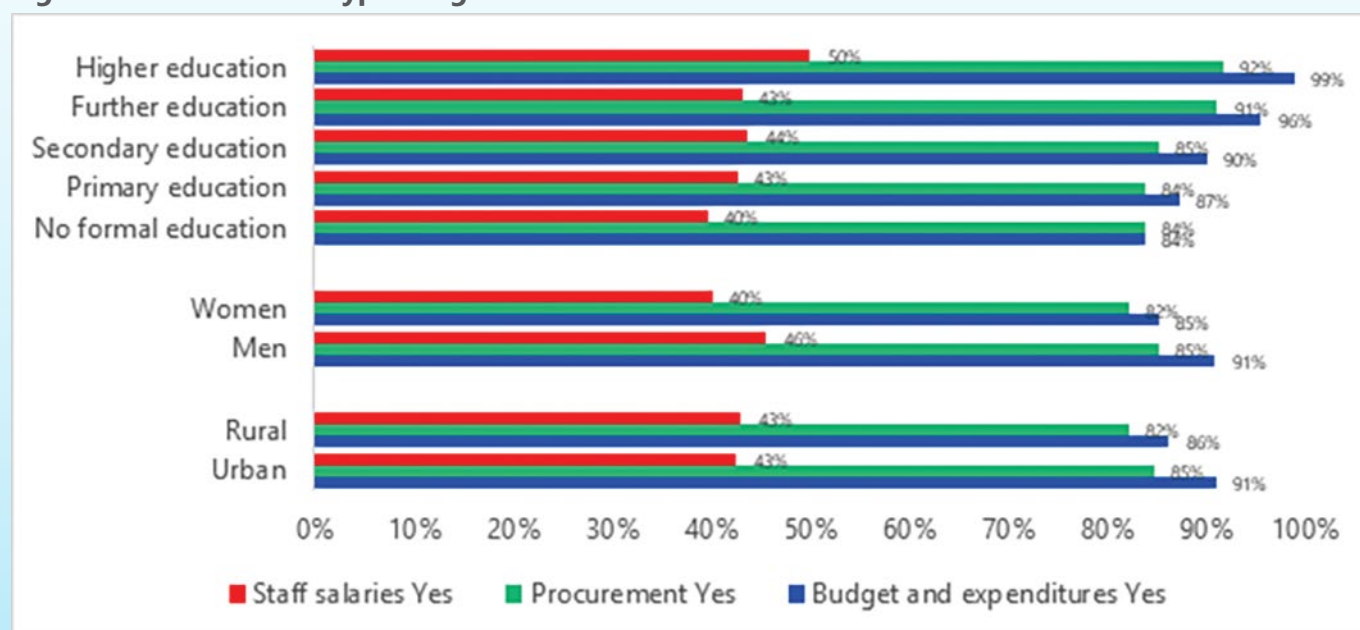
Source: Afrobarometer Data, 2017, 2021, and 2022

Awareness of types of government information to access

Government information falls into two categories: classified and non classified. In this context, classified information refers to items such as salaries of Local Government Authority (LGA) staff, while non classified information includes budgets, expenditures, and procurement records. As shown in Figure 3, on average, most respondents (88%) recognised that non classified information is intended for public access, whereas on average close to half of respondents (43%) correctly identified classified information as being for government use only.

Further analysis reveals a clear pattern regarding non classified information: awareness increases with higher education levels, with respondents who had attained more education being more likely to know that such information is publicly accessible (Figure 3). In contrast, no clear relationship emerged between education level and awareness on classified information. Respondents across all education groups showed similar levels of understanding regarding the restricted nature of classified information.

Figure 3. Awareness of types of government information to access

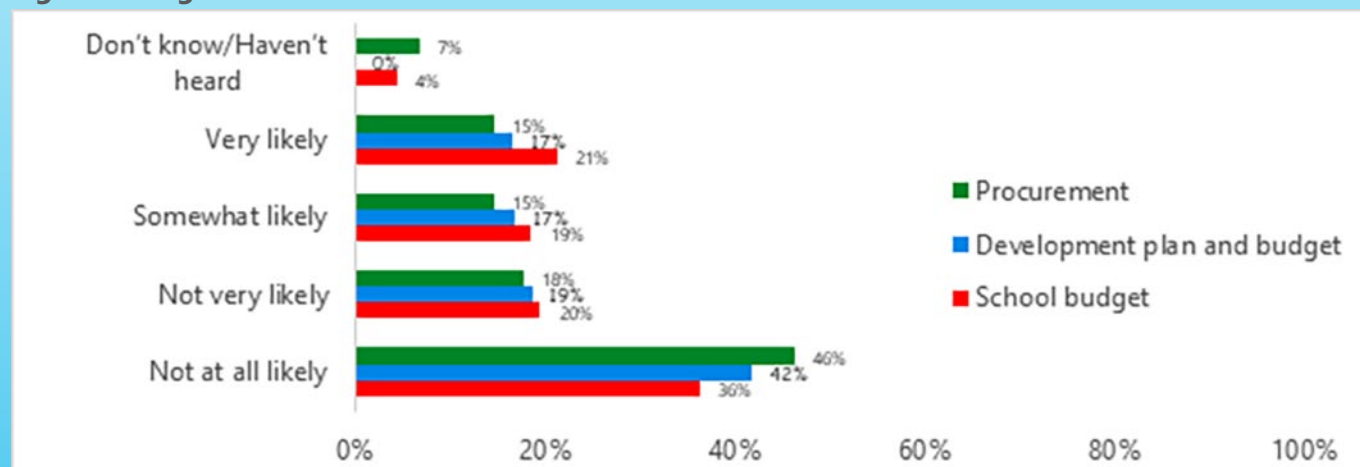


Source: Afrobarometer Data, 2022

Likelihood to access information

Non-classified government information was challenging for respondents to obtain at varying degree. For example, the most challenging type to access was procurement information, while the least challenging was a school budget (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Degree of likelihood to access information



Source: Afrobarometer Data, 2022

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings suggest that many citizens are aware of their constitutional right to obtain government information, but half of them do not distinguish between classified and non-classified government information. Despite government initiatives, it appears that some government offices are reluctant to provide non-classified government information to citizens.

It is therefore recommended that, first, the government should encourage public servants to provide non-classified information to citizens and to hold them accountable for non-compliance. Second, it should also inform citizens about the types of non-classified information through various communication means. Finally, citizens should endeavour to learn and distinguish between classified and non-classified information.

References

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