



## A fair slice?

### Kenyans' views and opinions on poverty, fairness and inequality

#### 1. Introduction

Inequality has long been a major dividing line in politics, with some saying that it gives people an incentive to work hard and others arguing that a major function of government should be to redistribute wealth, opportunity and power in society. For many years, economists focused more on increasing the overall size of the cake – on growth in economic output/GDP – but in recent years this has changed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently concluded that “excessive inequality can erode social cohesion, lead to political polarization, and ultimately lower economic growth.”<sup>1</sup>

According to World Bank’s calculation of the most commonly used measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient – inequality in Kenya is

substantially higher than in either Tanzania or Uganda<sup>2</sup>. But even without such expert economic data and analysis, the huge differences in income and wealth between the poor and the elites are obvious to all, as are the resulting differences in power, opportunities and lifestyles.

This research brief presents data on citizens’ views and opinions of inequality and related matters in Kenya. Do they see inequality as a serious problem, and what do they think the government should do to address it? Where do citizens see themselves on the income scale? Do they think the justice system treats rich and poor differently? And what do they think about traditional gender roles and preferences?

- 1 For example, see <http://www.imf.org/en/publications/fm/issues/2017/10/05/fiscal-monitor-october-2017>
- 2 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=KE-TZ-UG>

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Sauti za Wananchi



Data for this brief comes from Twaweza's flagship *Sauti za Wananchi* initiative, which is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti). For this brief, data were collected from 1,672 respondents from Kenya's *Sauti za Wananchi* panel in the twenty-first round of calls to the panel, conducted between April 18 and May 15, 2018. The poll has +/-2.4% margin of error at 95% confidence level.

The key findings are:

- Almost all citizens say the gap between rich and poor in Kenya is too large.
- Half of citizens see unemployment as the main cause of poverty.
- A majority believe hard work is the most important thing people need in order to get ahead in life.
- Citizens see social safety nets and quality public services as the main things the government should do to reduce inequality.
- 3 out of 4 citizens believe it is easy to increase wealth through hard work.
- About 1% of Kenyans consider themselves rich.
- 4 out of 10 citizens say wealth can allow people to escape justice.
- 8 out of 10 citizens say boys should not be given priority over girls in access to education.
- 6 out of 10 citizens say national leaders are not showing sufficient urgency in addressing income inequality.

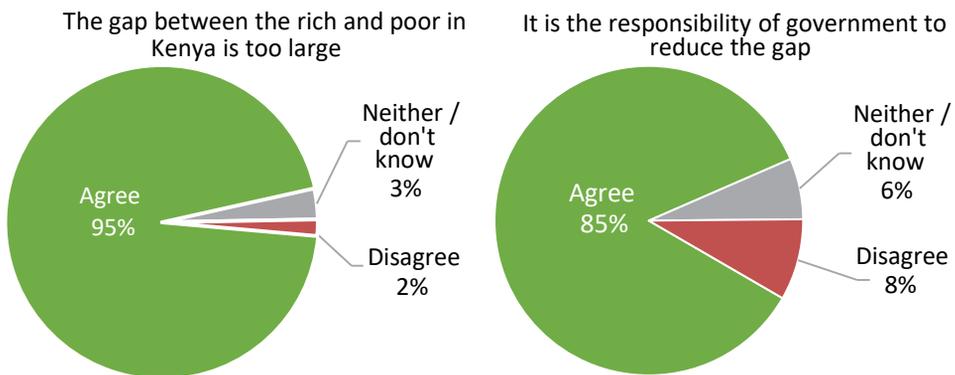
## 2. Eight facts about inequality in Kenya

### Fact 1: Almost all citizens say the gap between rich and poor in Kenya is too large

Almost all citizens (95%) agree with the statement that the gap between the rich and poor in Kenya is too large, compared to just 2% who disagree.

The majority (85%) also say this is something the government has the responsibility to address, with less than one out of ten (8%) disagreeing.

**Figure 1: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?<sup>3</sup>**



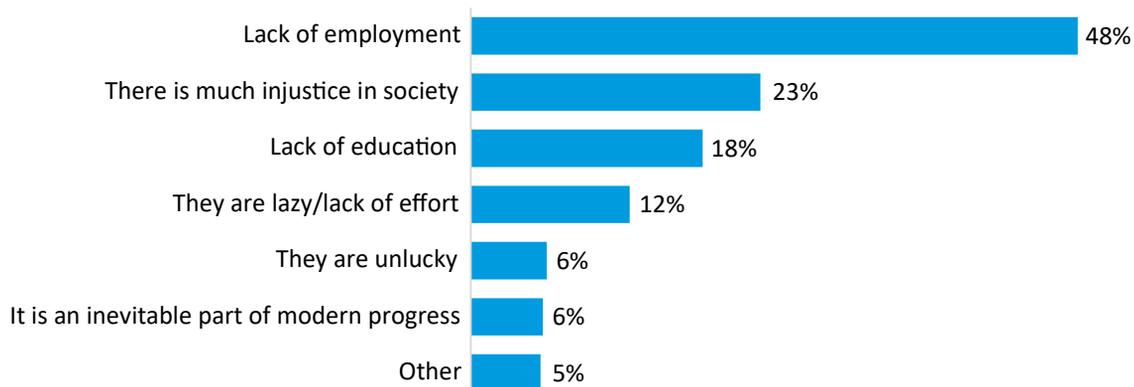
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

### Fact 2: Half of citizens see unemployment as the main cause of poverty, and hard work as the most important thing needed in order to get ahead in life

Half of citizens (48%) see lack of employment as one of the three main reasons why some households in Kenya are poor, more than any other reason. Injustice in society (23%), lack of education (18%) and laziness (12%) are also cited as reasons for poverty.

3 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Figure 2: Why do you think some households in Kenya are poor?**  
(up to three reasons)

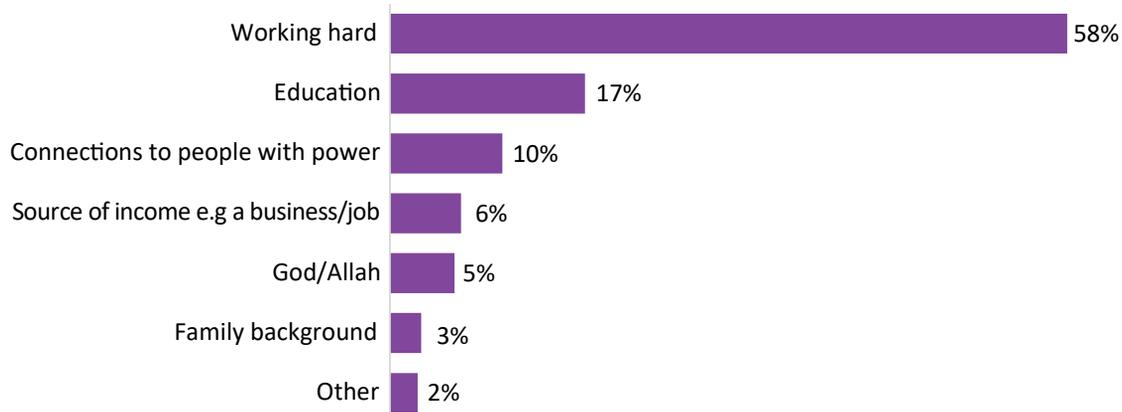


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

A majority of citizens (58%) believe that hard work is the most important thing people need in order to get ahead in life, and just one out of twenty (6%) believe a job is the most important. This perhaps indicates that escaping poverty and getting ahead are seen as two different things: a job is what you need to escape poverty, and then, once you have a job, hard work is what you need to get ahead.

Aside from working hard, citizens cite education (17%) and connections to people with power (10%) as the most important thing needed in order to get ahead in life.

**Figure 3: What is the most important thing that one needs in getting ahead in life/improving their status?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

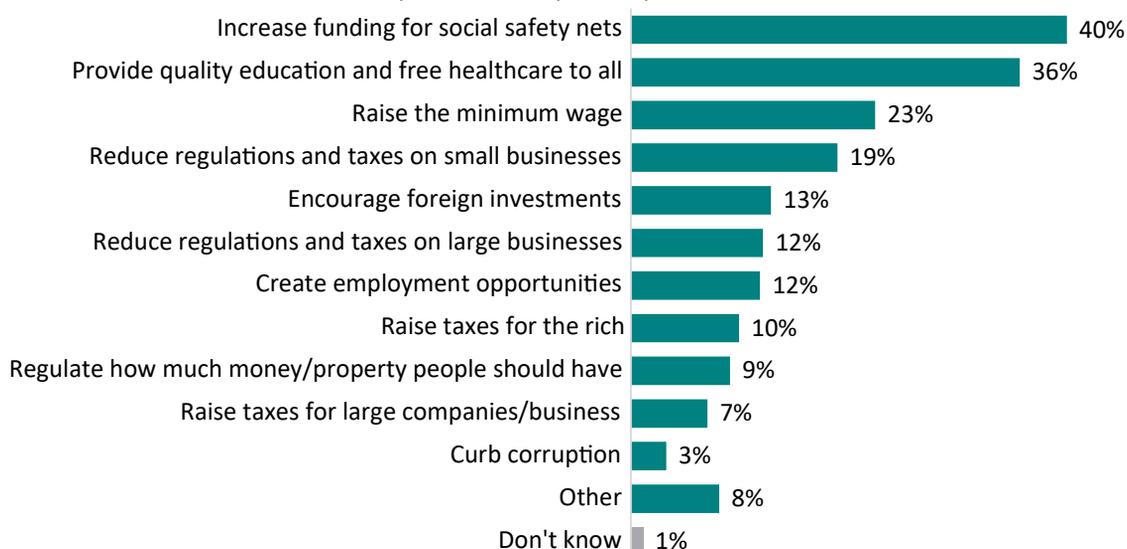
### Fact 3: Citizens see social safety nets and quality public services as the main things the government should do to reduce inequality

Four out of ten citizens (40%) say an increase in funding for social safety nets is among the three most important things the government should do to reduce income inequality. A similar number (36%) cite provision of quality education and health care.

Beyond this, there are a wide range of different actions proposed, including some opposing views. Reducing taxes on small business (19%) or large businesses (12%) is proposed by some, while others suggest raising taxes on the rich (10%) or large businesses (7%). Raising the minimum wage is popular with one out of four citizens (23%). One out of eight citizens (12%) cite the creation of employment opportunities.

**Figure 4: What are the three most important things for the government to do to reduce income inequality in the country?**

*(up to three responses provided)*



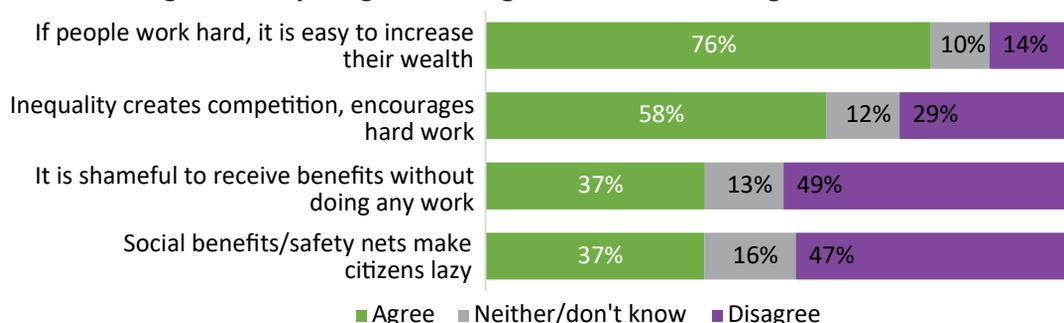
**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

### Fact 4: 3 out of 4 citizens believe you can make money through hard work

A clear majority of citizens (76%) believe that if people work hard it is easy to increase their wealth, compared to just one out of eight (14%) who disagree.

A majority (58%) agree that inequality creates competition and encourages hard work, twice as many as disagree (29%). However, there is support for benefits and social safety nets, with more people saying it is not shameful to receive benefits (49%) than say it is shameful (37%) and more people disagreeing with the idea that safety nets make people lazy (47%) than agreeing (37%).

**Figure 5: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

### Fact 5: 1% of Kenyans consider themselves rich

Asked to place themselves into one of five income groups each with a similar number of people, less than 1% think they are in the richest 20% of the population. According to analysis by the Society for International Development (SID) and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) in 2013<sup>4</sup>, anyone with household expenditure above KES 7,200 per month is in the top 20% of the population.

**Figure 6: Assume that households in Kenya are grouped in 5 different income groups each with a similar number of people. Where would your household fall? (options read out)**



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

1% think they are in the next richest 20%. In reality, anyone with monthly household expenditure between KES 3,880 and 7,200 is in this group.

Half of all citizens (51%) think they fall in the middle, and a similar number (49%) think they are in the poorest 40% of the population.

**Table 1: Actual household consumption expenditure cut off points**

Quintile	Monthly household expenditure (KES)
Richest 20%	>7,200 per month
Second 20%	3,881-7,200 per month
Middle 20%	2,841-3,880 per month
Second poorest 20%	1,441-2,840 per month
Poorest 20%	1,440 or below per month

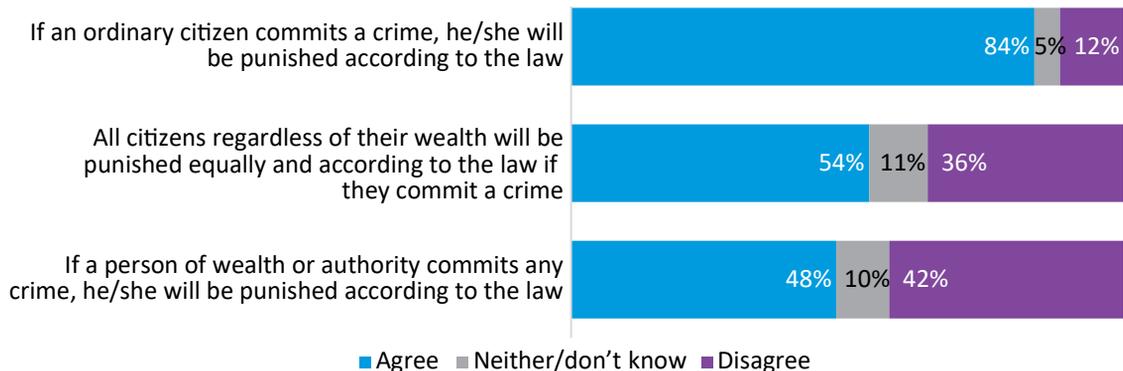
**Source:** SID and KNBS, 2013

4 <http://inequalities.sidint.net/kenya/abridged/consumption-expenditure/>

### Fact 6: 4 out of 10 citizens say wealth allows people to escape justice

Four out of ten citizens (42%) say rich and powerful people are able to escape punishment when they commit crime, compared to just one out of ten (12%) who say the same about ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, a majority (54%) say that all citizens regardless of their wealth will be punished equally and according to the law.

Figure 7: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

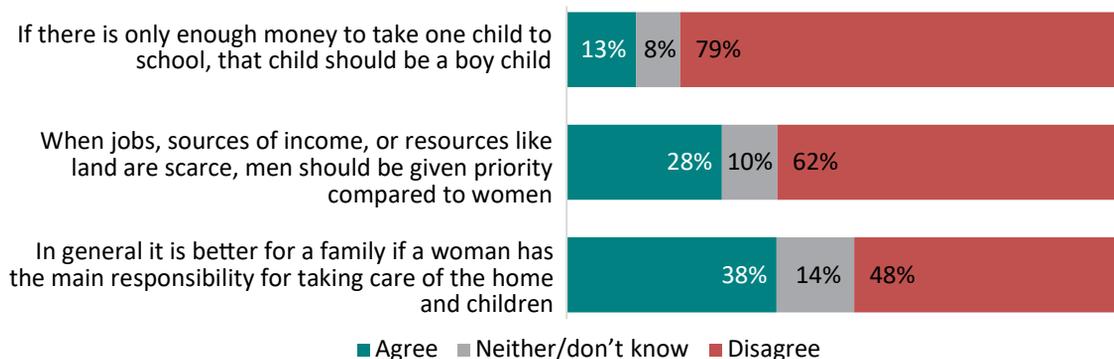
### Fact 7: 8 out of 10 citizens say boys should not be given priority over girls in access to education

One out of ten citizens (13%) agree with the idea that when money is scarce, boys should be given priority over girls in access to education, compared to eight out of ten (79%) who disagree.

A larger number, but still a minority (28%) say when jobs, sources of income or resources like land are scarce, men should be given priority over women, compared to six out of ten (62%) who disagree.

When it comes to traditional divisions of domestic responsibilities, citizens are even more divided. Four out of ten (38%) agree with the idea that it is better for women to bear the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children, compared to close to half (48%) who disagree.

**Figure 8: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

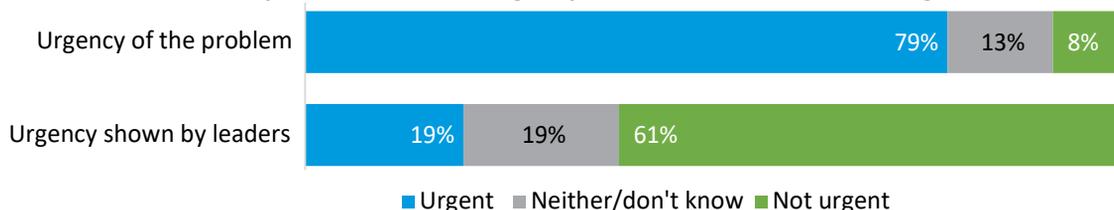


**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

### Fact 8: 6 out of 10 citizens say national leaders are not prioritising income inequality enough

Eight out of ten citizens (79%) say addressing income inequality is an urgent priority for Kenya, but only two out of ten (19%) say national leaders are showing urgency in their efforts to do so. In contrast, six out of ten (61%) say national leaders are not showing sufficient urgency.

**Figure 9: How urgent is addressing the difference in incomes between the rich and poor in the country? And how much urgency are national leaders showing?**



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 21 (April 18 to May 15, 2018; n=1,672)

### 3. Conclusions

Citizens overwhelmingly say inequality is an urgent problem, that national leaders are not treating the issue with urgency, that the gap between rich and poor in Kenya is too large, and that it is a responsibility of government to address this. However, they also say that people can easily become rich through hard work, and that inequality is beneficial in some ways, by creating an incentive for people to work hard. Although these findings may appear contradictory, there is a logical trajectory here: once the basic conditions for prosperity are in place (including access to employment / income generation opportunities) citizens believe the rest is up to them through their own sweat and toil. But perhaps citizens do not believe this enabling environment exists and so are sending a clear signal to government on the need to tackle inequality.

Similarly, while a majority blame a lack of employment opportunities for poverty, very few either see having a job as the most important thing needed in order to get ahead, or argue that the government should prioritise job creation as a strategy to reduce inequality. Instead, they focus on a combination of hard work on the side of citizens together with public investment in social safety nets and quality schools and health facilities.

The findings represent a useful reminder that inequality is a complex issue that does not have easy answers.

When we look at people's own judgement of their position on the wealth scale in Kenya, just about 1% think they are in the top 40% richest households, a group that comprises everyone with monthly household expenditure above KES 3,880. People are either very unaware of their own financial circumstances, or, more likely, very unaware how their financial circumstances compare to other citizens.

Finally, the brief also looks at attitudes to inequality of a different kind – gender. Notably, it finds that the vast majority of citizens feel that boys should not be given priority over girls when it comes to schooling, and the majority say men should not be given priority over women when it comes to access to resources and opportunities. On domestic responsibilities, however, the picture is more divided, with a substantial minority supporting the view that women should bear the responsibility of caring for the home and family.

Although tackling inequality is a complex global challenge, these data clearly show that Kenyans are not satisfied with their government's approach. The government would do well to hear these views, and the ideas proposed by citizens of how to address the problem as a starting point for reform.





