



# The haves and the have nots

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

### 1. Introduction

Inequality has long been a major dividing line in politics, with some saying that inequality 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 have focussed 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 Uganda is substantially lower than in Kenya, but higher than in Tanzania<sup>1</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 brief explores such matters. It presents data on citizens' views and opinions of inequality and related matters in Uganda. 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?

Data for the brief come from Twaweza's new *Sauti za Wananchi* initiative. *Sauti za Wananchi* is a nationally-representative, high-

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>

This brief was written and produced by  
Twaweza East Africa.

Naguru Go down, Suwara Road, Plot 77  
P.O Box 40163, Kampala

t: +256 312 112815 | e: [info@twaweza.org](mailto:info@twaweza.org) |  
[www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti)

Sauti za Wananchi



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 1,925 respondents in the fourth round of calls to the *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 12 and 30 May, 2018.

The key findings are:

- A majority of Ugandans say laziness is the reason why some people are poor
- Almost all citizens say the rich-poor gap in Uganda is too wide
- To reduce inequality, citizens propose free quality public services, reduced regulations and taxes, and strong social safety nets
- Citizens see hard work as the route out of poverty, but are divided on social safety nets / benefits
- Few citizens think they are wealthy relative to the population as a whole
- Most citizens are confident that the justice system treats everybody fairly
- Citizens are divided on whether men and boys should be given priority over women and girls when circumstances are tight
- 7 out of 10 citizens say addressing inequality is urgent, while 3 out of 10 say national leaders are treating it as urgent

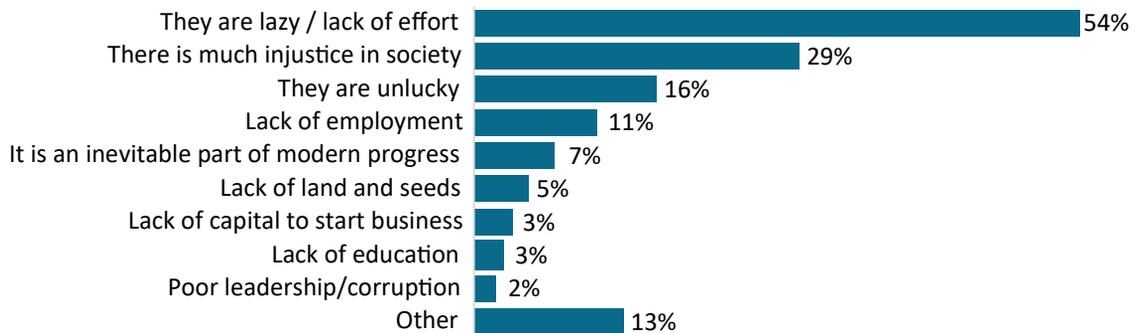
## 2. Eight facts about inequality in Uganda

### Fact 1: Slightly more than half of Ugandans say laziness is the reason why some people are poor

A small majority of citizens (54%) cite laziness / lack of effort as a major reason why some households are poor. Three out of ten (29%) point instead to social injustice. Other widely cited reasons include bad luck (16%) and unemployment (11%).

Slightly more residents of rural areas (56%) than urban areas (49%) see laziness as a major reason for poverty (not shown in charts).

**Figure 1: Why do you think some households in Uganda are poor?<sup>3</sup>**  
(multiple responses permitted)

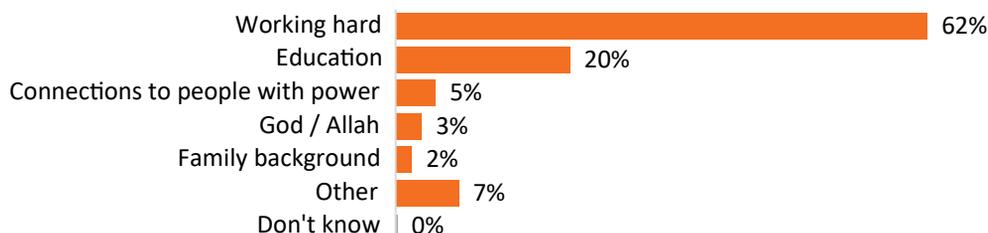


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

<sup>3</sup> Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Similarly, a majority of citizens (62%) say the main thing that someone needs in order to improve their status in life is to work hard. A substantial number (20%) point instead to education.

**Figure 2: What is the most important thing that one needs in getting ahead in life/improving their status?**



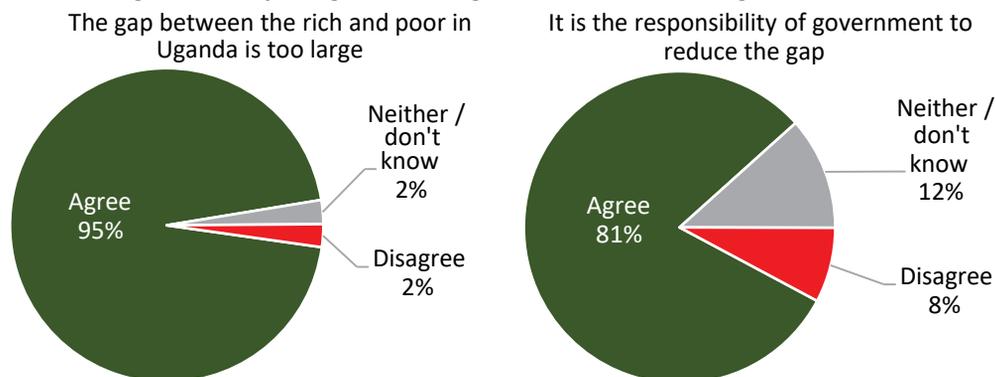
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

**Fact 2: Almost all citizens say the rich-poor gap in Uganda is too wide**

The vast majority of Ugandans (95%) say the gap between rich and poor people in the country is too large, and almost as many (81%) say it is the responsibility of government to reduce this gap.

Very few people directly disagree with either statement.

**Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



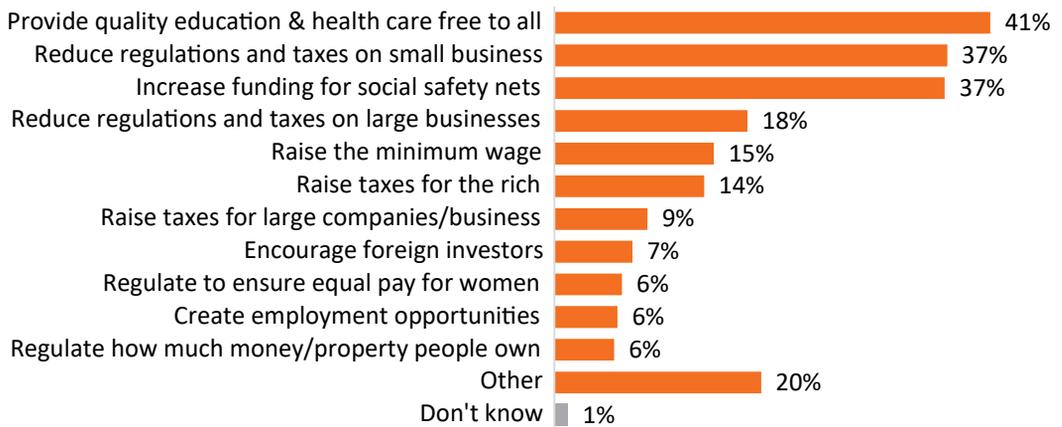
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

**Fact 3: To reduce inequality, citizens propose free quality public services, reduced regulations and taxes, and strong social safety nets**

The most popular suggestions for government action to address inequality in Uganda are: provision of quality education and health care free to all (41%), reducing regulations and taxes on small business (37%), and an increase in funding for social safety nets (37%).

Other popular ideas include reducing regulations and taxes on large businesses (18%), raising the minimum wage (15%) and raising taxes on the rich (14%).

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



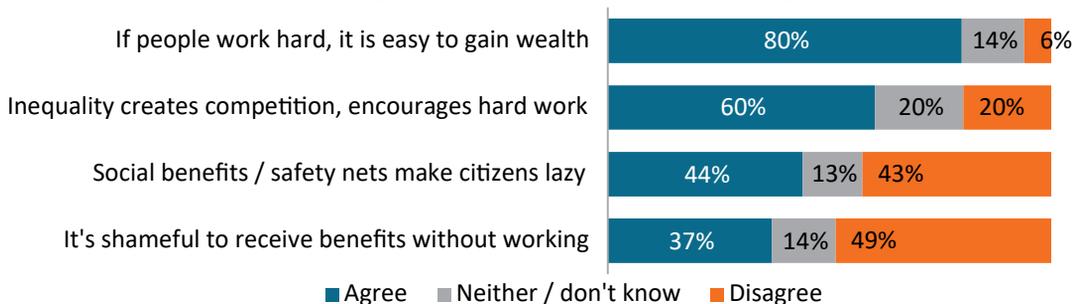
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

**Fact 4: The majority of citizens see hard work as the route to wealth but are divided on benefits and safety nets**

Eight out of ten citizens (80%) agree that if people work hard, it is easy to gain wealth. Six out of ten (60%) also see the benefit of inequality, agreeing that inequality creates competition and encourages people to work hard.

On social benefits / safety nets, citizens are split, with the same number agreeing (44%) as disagreeing (43%) with the statement that benefits make people lazy. More people disagree (49%) than agree (37%) with the statement that receiving benefits without working is shameful.

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

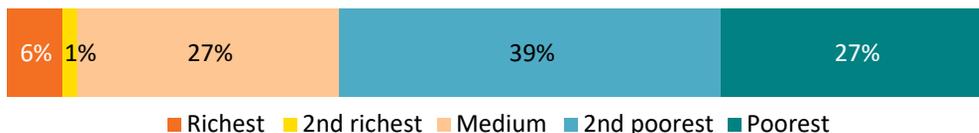


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

### Fact 5: About 7% of Ugandans consider themselves rich.

Less than one out of ten citizens (7%) think their household is in the top 40% richest households in Uganda. A clear majority (66%) think they are in the poorest 40% of households in Uganda. Overall, most citizens think they are poorer, relative to other Ugandans, than they really are.

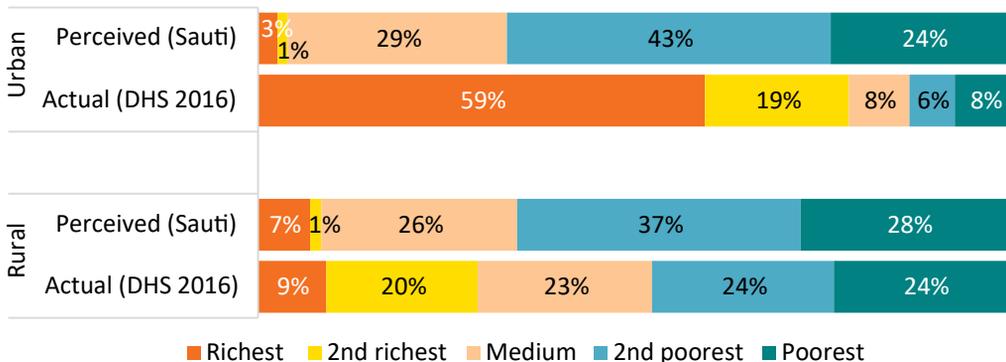
**Figure 6: Assume that households in Uganda are grouped in 5 different income groups each with a similar number of people. Where would your household fall?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

The difference between citizens’ own perception of their position on the income scale and their actual position is larger in urban areas than in rural. In both urban and rural areas, citizens generally think they are poorer than they really are, but in urban areas the discrepancy is bigger. Very few urban residents (4%) consider themselves to be among the richest 40% of the population, when in reality, four out of five residents of urban areas (78%) are among the richest 40% of Ugandans.

**Figure 7: Comparing perceived position in income distribution with actual wealth distribution**



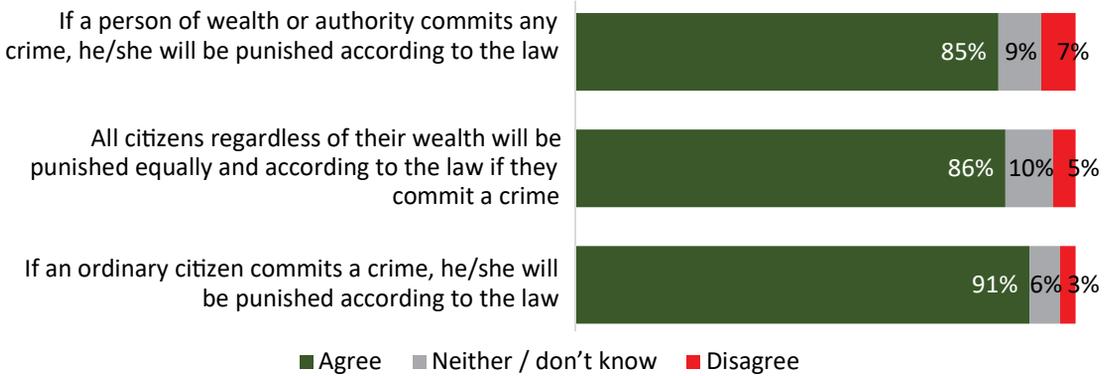
**Sources:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925  
 UBOS Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2016, wealth quintiles based on asset ownership<sup>4</sup>

4 Wealth index: Households are given scores based on the number and kinds of consumer goods they own ranging from television to a bicycle or a car and housing characteristic such as source of drinking water, toilet facilities and flooring materials. These scores are derived using the principal component analysis. National wealth quintiles are compiled by assigning the household score to each usual household member, ranking each person in the household population by her / his score and then dividing the distribution into five equal categories each comprising 20% of the population

## Fact 6: Most citizens are confident that the justice system treats everybody fairly

The vast majority of citizens (85%) agree that when a person of wealth or authority commits a crime, he or she will be punished according to the law. This is only slightly lower than the number (91%) who think ordinary citizens will be punished according to the law in similar circumstances. Further, a large majority (86%) agree that all citizens will be punished equally regardless of their wealth.

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



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

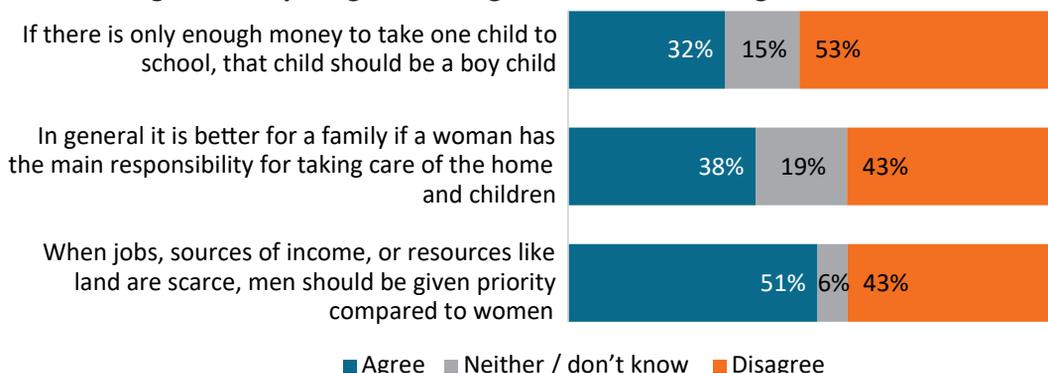
## Fact 7: Citizens are divided on whether men and boys should be given priority over women and girls when circumstances are tight

One out of three citizens (32%) agrees with the idea that boys should be given priority over girls when it comes to access to schooling, fewer than the number who disagree (53%).

For adults, the situation is reversed, with half (51%) agreeing with the idea that men should be given priority over women when it comes to access to jobs, sources of income or resources like land, while a slightly smaller number (43%) disagree.

Citizens are very evenly split on whether or not it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children. Slightly more disagree (43%) with this idea than agree (38%).

**Figure 9: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

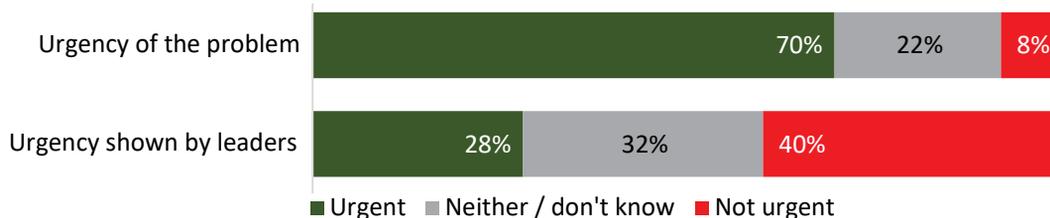


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey, Round 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

**Fact 8: 7 out of 10 citizens say addressing inequality is urgent, while 3 out of 10 say national leaders are treating it as urgent**

Seven out of ten citizens (70%) say addressing income inequality is an urgent priority for Uganda, compared to one out of ten (8%) who say it is not urgent. However, citizens are less confident that government is committed to the issue: three out of ten (28%) say national leaders are treating the issue as urgent, while four out of ten (40%) say they are not.

**Figure 10: 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 4, 12 - 30 May 2018; n=1,925

### 3. Conclusions

There is an element of inconsistency in citizens’ views on inequality in Uganda. Almost all say the rich-poor gap is too wide, that addressing the issue is a government responsibility, and that addressing inequality is urgent. However, at the same time, most of the ‘blame’ for poverty and inequality in Uganda is laid at the door of the poor themselves. The majority say laziness is the main reason why people are poor, and see hard work as an effective route out of poverty. Social injustice is not seen as a major reason for poverty by many. And citizens see some aspects of inequality as positive - particularly in terms of motivating people to work hard.



Holding views that do not entirely match up is quite normal - most people are comfortable holding inconsistent views. However, it does present challenges for anyone hoping to address inequality. And it suggests that inequality is not a well-understood topic by the population at large - that perhaps poverty is the more salient concern.

There is a second, though less obvious, inconsistency in these data when it comes to government action to address inequality. Social safety nets are a popular suggestion, alongside free and high quality public services and reduced regulations and taxes on small business. However, there is also a strong belief that receiving benefits without working is shameful, and a strong suspicion that benefits and safety nets encourage people to be lazy.

Other points raised in the brief include good news for the justice system: citizens are confident that the police and courts treat the rich and powerful much the same as they treat ordinary citizens.

There is less good news, however, for the cause of gender inequality. A majority think that men should be given priority over women when it comes to access to resources and opportunities, a substantial minority think boys should be given priority over girls in access to schooling, and citizens are evenly split on whether traditional domestic gender roles - with women bearing the main responsibility of care for the home and family - should be maintained.

Citizens see an urgent need to address the issue of inequality. This calls for government to do things differently: formulating policies that benefit all citizens and perhaps even target the more marginalised sections of society; ensuring quality delivery and eliminating mismanagement; and engaging with citizens at the community level to help shape these policies. As we commence the process of budget consultations, there is an important opportunity to start instituting more inclusive governance.

Although tackling inequality is a complex global challenge, these data clearly show that Ugandans 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.