

# Do Kenyans Have A Shared Understanding of Fairness? Results from a National Survey

Jason Lakin, Ph.D. | December 2016

## BACKGROUND

In September 2016, the International Budget Partnership (IBP) Kenya put out a number of papers and briefs discussing equity and fairness in Kenyan public policy.<sup>1</sup> In crafting those analyses, we relied on six principles of equity with wide application at global level. Those principles, which we elaborate below, emerge from both empirical research and theoretical analysis around the world, and have been used globally to inform decision-making about resource distribution and other public policies.

Since 2010, Kenya has confronted a number of policy decisions related to how to share resources, including the revenue sharing formula that distributes funds among the 47 counties. While there has been some discussion of these choices, there has been little discussion of how the public in Kenya thinks about fairness. Indeed, there appears to be almost no empirical evidence about Kenyan views on principles of equity.

To begin to generate this evidence, IBP Kenya worked with a Kenyan survey research firm, Infotrak Research and Consulting, to develop and administer a national survey.<sup>2</sup> The survey consisted of a set of simple scenarios about sharing resources designed to trigger views of fairness indirectly (without asking about principles of fairness explicitly). The results of the survey demonstrate that, by and large, Kenyans do share a set of beliefs about what is fair with people around the world. That does not mean that all Kenyans agree about these values; what Amartya Sen calls “heterogeneity of values” is a property of all societies.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the broad finding is that, on average, Kenyans respond to the scenarios we asked about in ways that are consistent with widely shared principles.

The paper first describes the six principles. It then describes the scenarios we used to test the principles. Finally, it reports on the findings from the survey, augmented in a few cases with additional insights from focus groups and

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1 See <http://www.internationalbudget.org/equityweek/>

2 For the Survey Report see <http://bit.ly/IBPKInfotrakReport>

3 Amartya Sen, “Democracy as a universal value,” *Journal of Democracy*, July 1999. Sen argues that the definition of a universal value is not that everyone agrees on it, but that “people anywhere may have reason to see it as valuable.”

other tests we have done with the same scenarios. We conclude with implications for policymaking. The full results upon which this paper is based are available on our website.

## SIX PRINCIPLES OF FAIRNESS

Figure 1 is drawn from a series of pamphlets we released in September 2016 that summarize six key principles of equity.

FIGURE 1. SIX PRINCIPLES OF FAIRNESS

**What does equity mean?**

Sharing resources fairly means basing our decisions on widely accepted principles. This series of pamphlets looks at those principles and then applies them to practices of resource sharing in Kenya. How fair are our current approaches to sharing resources? You decide.

Most people share the idea that creating a more equal society may require us to treat people differently depending on their differing circumstances. This idea is the basis for the concept of equity. From this notion, we can develop some additional principles of fairness.

**The need principle**

The need principle states that people should be treated according to their needs. If we are distributing resources for health care, a person who is sick should receive more than a person who is healthy. This examples relate to the population's need for services and the immediate costs of providing them. For example, if it costs Ksh 100 to provide health care to one individual for a year, and we have 10 sick individuals in one area and five in another, we will want to give more to the area with 10 people. However, we may also need to take into account the starting position of the two areas. If the area with ten people has a well-equipped hospital, and the area with five people lacks a facility, then need would suggest we may need to give some additional funding to the area with fewer sick people to "catch up" to the area with more.

**The capacity principle**

Capacity is the idea that we should not do for people what they can do for themselves. A rich person can afford to pay for more of their own services than a poor person. Assuming that both a rich and a poor person are sick (they have the same **need** for health care), we would be likely to give more to the poor person because they have lower capacity to meet their needs.

**The effort principle**

Effort is the idea that we should reward, or at least not punish, people who do more for themselves with what they have. Consider two poor people who are both sick. They have the same needs and the same capacity. One of the poor people decides to sell his second cow to pay for his health care, while the other keeps both of his cows and requests help from the government. We would feel that the first person was making more of an effort to cater for his own needs given his capacity, while the second was not. We would be uncomfortable giving money to the second person while giving nothing to the first, because this would reward people who do less for themselves.

**The efficiency principle**

Capacity and effort both relate to how much people have and how much they can generate for their needs. Efficiency is about how people use the resources they have. Returning to our poor, sick farmers: one farmer may use the funds they have to purchase highly effective medicines at a low price, while another may choose to spend funds on ineffective procedures at a clinic known for over-charging patients. We would likely feel that we should not give as much money to someone who chooses to spend it on ineffective or over-priced services as we should to someone who uses money prudently.

**The basic minimum principle**

The principle of a basic minimum is that when we distribute funds, we may look at need, effort, capacity, efficiency, and even other principles not discussed here. After doing so, we might end up deciding that all of the funds should go to one person, or one community or one region. The basic minimum principle would tell us that we should first ensure that everyone gets some small share of the total before we distribute the rest according to other principles. Many people would feel that everyone should get at least a token from the resources available, so that everyone feels that they are part of the system and receive something from it.

**The fair process principle**

The fair process principle emerges from the realization that the principles above may conflict with one another, and that balancing them is a difficult task. There is no one right way to do this. For example, we might find that the person with the greatest needs makes the least effort. What should we do in this case? We will want to give them more due to their needs, but we will want to give them less due to their lack of effort. As there is no one correct solution to this problem, the only way to address it is to ensure that we make the decision through a fair and transparent process in which people give their reasons, these are thoroughly debated, and a decision that people may disagree with, but can agree is well-reasoned, is reached.

Assessing attitudes about fairness can be challenging. Direct questions about whether people support principles (e.g., “How important do you think that need is when sharing resources?”) may be too abstract to generate valid results.<sup>4</sup> One way of getting at people’s attitudes is to ask them about how they would act in concrete scenarios. These types of questions also have limitations: we cannot be certain that the choices people make in these scenarios are motivated by a consistent set of principles. This is a limitation of all surveys, however; they tell us something about what people think, but not necessarily why they think in that way. The advantage of using scenarios is that they allow us to assess choices about policy, which are closer to our ultimate question: how do Kenyans think about what is fair when making decisions about resource sharing?

Figure 2 shows a series of scenarios we developed to test how people think about fairness in resource sharing. Each question is meant to elicit a particular principle or set of principles. We first discuss the intention of the scenarios and then look at how survey participants responded to them.

**FIGURE 2. SCENARIOS AND THE PRINCIPLES THEY WERE DESIGNED TO TEST**

<b>You are a government officer and have been given Ksh.100,000 by the government to share among different people. In the following scenarios, please state how you would share the Ksh.100, 000 among the people involved.</b>		
<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Principles</b>
Scenario 1: There are two Kenyans. One is sick and one is healthy. The sick one will need to visit the hospital for several treatments this year while the healthy one will visit the clinic once for a checkup this year. How will you distribute the 100,000 Ksh among them?	<b>Person 1:</b> Ksh: _____	This scenario tests the “need” principle: do those who are sick (need more health care) deserve more than those who are healthy? By how much?
	<b>Person 2:</b> Ksh: _____	
Scenario 2: There are two Kenyans. One earns Ksh 250,000 a month and the other earns Ksh 10,000 a month. Both have two children to send to school. How will you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?	<b>Person 1:</b> Ksh: _____	This scenario tests the capacity principle. We have two Kenyans with the same needs but different financial capacity to pay for those needs. Who should receive more and by how much?
	<b>Person 2:</b> Ksh: _____	
Scenario 3: There are two Kenyans. Both live in the same estate and both earn Ksh 35,000 a month. One has used the small plot behind their house to plant vegetables to sell and supplement their	<b>Person 1:</b> Ksh: _____	This scenario is intended to gauge effort, because the two Kenyans are making different efforts to provide more for themselves with their available resources. Who deserves more and by how much?
	<b>Person 2:</b> Ksh: _____	

<sup>4</sup> Gary King, et al, “Enhancing the validity and cross-cultural comparability of measurement in survey research,” American Political Science Review, February 2004. The authors suggest a more sophisticated approach than what we use here, known as anchoring vignettes, which can also address cultural differences in understanding concepts.

<p>income by Ksh 5,000 a month. The other has not used their plot to supplement their income. How will you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?</p>	<p><b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	
<p>Scenario 4: There are two Kenyans. One earns Ksh 1,000,000 a month, while the other earns Ksh 10,000 a month. How will you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>This scenario is also related to capacity, but it is primarily designed to test the “minimum shares” principle. We assume that the capacity of the richer Kenyan is so much higher than the poorer Kenyan that people will uniformly give most of the money to the poor Kenyan. But if they believe in minimum shares, they will still give at least some money to the richer person in the scenario.</p>
<p>Scenario 5: There are two Kenyans. Both earn Ksh 40,000 per month. One spends a significant part of salary on alcohol, and is often unable to work. The other does not drink and has not missed a day of work in two years. How would you share the Ksh 100,000 between them?</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>This scenario measures what we refer to as efficiency above: how do people use the resources that they have? Here the Kenyans have the same capacity but they use their funds in different ways. Who deserves more and how much more? The question also touches on minimum shares: does someone who does not use funds well deserve anything from the state?</p>
<p>Scenario 6: There are two Kenyans. Both earn Ksh 40,000 per month. One uses their salary to take out a loan and buy a Prado to enjoy. The other saves half of their salary and invests in a side business. How would you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>Again, we are looking at efficiency in this scenario. In the previous case, efficiency was about how people behave at work and might be more commonly described as “discipline” or “prudence”. Here, we are looking at efficiency from a different angle: the difference between productive and non-productive investment.</p>
<p>Scenario 7: There are two people: one from a rural county and one from an urban county. Both earn the same salary. How would you distribute the Ksh.100, 000 among them?</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>This scenario asks respondents to consider whether urban or rural residents have greater needs. Urban areas often have higher costs of living, meaning that urban dwellers need more funding. But rural areas may be thought to be marginalized and need more funding to catch up with urban areas.</p>
<p>Scenario 8: There are two people: one from your county and one from a different county on the other side of the country. Both earn Ksh 40,000. How would you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>This scenario asks respondents to consider two people with similar capacity and tries to gauge whether other factors, such as whether one of the people is from your part of the country, is significant in deciding how much to allocate. It is meant to be compared to the other scenarios that are more principle-based.</p>
<p>Scenario 9: There are two Kenyans. One lives in an area with no tarmacked roads, school buildings or health clinics, the other lives in an area</p>	<p><b>Person 1:</b> <b>Ksh:</b> _____</p>	<p>This is another scenario related to need, but in this case, the difference in need is not related to current service needs (both Kenyans have two children) but to historical differences in access to services. It is meant to gauge the importance of the “need” for</p>

with good roads, new school buildings and a hospital. Both have two children. How will you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?	<b>Person 2:</b> Ksh: _____	affirmative action or special treatment for marginalized areas that need to “catch up” to more favored areas.
Scenario 10: There are two Kenyans. One is sick and one is healthy. The sick one will need to visit the hospital for several treatments this year while the healthy one will visit the clinic once for a checkup this year. However, the sick one earns a salary of Ksh 200,000 while the healthy one earns a salary of Ksh 20,000. How would you distribute the Ksh 100,000 among them?	<b>Person 1:</b> Ksh: _____	This final scenario is a “balancing” scenario in which two principles are at play: the two Kenyans have different needs (one is sicker than the other), but also different capacities to pay (one is richer than the other). The principles conflict in this case, because the needier Kenyan also has a higher capacity to pay. How do we treat competing principles like this?
	<b>Person 2:</b> Ksh: _____	

## RESULTS

Figure 3 shows the results from the survey. In each case we report the mean, median, and modal amounts given to each member of the pair in the scenario.

**FIGURE 3. RESULTS FOR SCENARIOS 1 TO 4**

Scenario	Person	Mean	Median	Mode
There are two Kenyans. One is sick and one is healthy. The sick one will need to visit the hospital for several treatments this year while the healthy one will visit the clinic once for a checkup this year. How will you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	63377	70000	50000
	Person 2	36143	30000	50000
There are two Kenyans. One earns Ksh.250,000 a month and the other earns Ksh.10,000 a month. Both have two children to send to school. How will you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	24114	20000	0
	Person 2	75886	80000	100000
There are two Kenyans. Both live in the same estate and both earn Ksh.35,000 a month. One has used the small plot behind their house to plant vegetables to sell and supplement their income by Ksh.5,000 a month. The other has not used their plot to supplement their income. How will you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	56465	50000	50000
	Person 2	44017	50000	50000
There are two Kenyans. One earns Ksh.1,000,000 a month, while the other earns Ksh.10,000 a month. How will you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	16483	10000	0
	Person 2	83508	90000	100000

If we look at the mean and median responses, it seems clear that, on balance, respondents chose allocations that are consistent with the principles we were intending to elicit. We discuss the results for each scenario in more detail below.

Kenyan do weight need in deciding how to share resources. The first scenario posits two Kenyans, one with greater needs than the other. We would expect respondents to give more to the needier member of the pair (the sicker Kenyan in this case), and indeed they do. Looking at the mean and median figures together, there is a general tendency to allocate about twice as much to the needier member of the pair. At the same time, the most common response to the question (the mode) was to allocate an equal share to the two Kenyans, which suggests that the notion of giving more to the needy is not universal.<sup>5</sup> However, from focus groups, we know that some respondents that allocated 50-50 wanted more information in this scenario (as in all scenarios) to fully assess how multiple principles were interacting in a particular case. For example, in a focus group in Nakuru, one respondent wanted to know if the sicker person was from a richer family, suggesting a desire to balance need with capacity. This type of response suggested that even respondents who selected 50-50 were still doing so from the same set of principles (need, capacity, effort, etc.), but were uncomfortable giving unequal amounts without sufficient data.

Kenyan also weight capacity when making decisions about resource allocation. The second scenario assessed capacity. As expected, Kenyans believe that, where people have similar needs and different capacities, a person with more resources should receive less assistance. They gave about three to four times as much of the available resources to the poorer Kenyan. And the mode suggests that some respondents wanted to give all of the resources to the poor. We can compare this result to the fourth scenario, which was intended to gauge minimum shares. Here the capacity gap is even larger between the two, and we can see that respondents gave even more of the funds to the poorer member of the pair, now somewhere between five and nine times as much. Still, some focus group respondents wanted more information about the pair, such as their relative costs of living, before making a decision.

Kenyan do support the notion of minimum shares. Continuing with scenario four, while some people again wished to give all the money to the poor (this was the mode), on average people still wished to give a small amount to the richer person. Given that the richer member of the pair earns 100 times as much as the poor, and given that the amount to be shared is trivial for the richer member, it is quite striking that respondents still opted to give something to the richer Kenyan. This is consistent with a belief that everyone deserves a minimum share from any sharing process.

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<sup>5</sup> In one innovative interpretation, participants in a dialogue in Korogocho, Nairobi, suggested that the healthy member of the pair should receive more to go out and work and support the sicker member. This approach ultimately recognized need but also brought in other principles in a way that resulted in a different distributional outcome.

Kenyans are also inclined to consider effort to some degree when sharing resources. The third scenario, intended to measure effort, shows that, on average, Kenyans do believe that those who make more of an effort should receive more. However, it is notable that they do not reward the Kenyan making more of an effort by very much (about 28 percent more for the more industrious member) and the median and mode suggest that many respondents would not reward effort at all. Some respondents might believe that the additional income from the effort is its own reward, and the main thing is not to give the person making that effort less than the other. This was mentioned in at least one focus group, but more research is needed to clarify motivations here. Some focus group respondents also wanted to know whether the one who was not farming was lazy or lacked skills or resources. As in other scenarios, these questions suggested that respondents were evaluating the principles, but pushing further beyond the information we gave them before responding with an allocation.

**FIGURE 4. RESULTS FOR SCENARIOS 5 AND 6**

Scenario	Person	Mean	Median	Mode
There are two Kenyans. Both earn Ksh.40,000 per month. One spends a significant part of salary on alcohol, and is often unable to work. The other does not drink and has not missed a day of work in two years. How would you share the Ksh.100,000 between them?	Person 1	28277	25000	50000
	Person 2	71723	75000	50000
There are two Kenyans. Both earn Ksh.40,000 per month. One uses their salary to take out a loan and buy a Prado to enjoy. The other saves half of their salary and invests in a side business. How would you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	34059	40000	50000
	Person 2	65912	60000	50000

Kenyans generally believe that the way you use the money you receive (what we term efficiency) should have an impact on how much you receive. Both scenarios five and six touch on efficiency in different ways. Scenario five is about prudence and discipline; scenario six is about productive versus non-productive investments. In both cases, respondents preferred to give more to the more prudent or more productive member of the pair. The mode again shows that this tendency was not universal, and there was a more severe attitude toward the alcoholic than the person buying luxury goods. The teetotaler was given two and a half to three times as much as the alcoholic. The saver and investor was given 50 to 90 percent more than the Prado purchaser. In focus groups, some participants asked whether the Prado was not also an investment that could yield further returns. Although the question was not worded in this way (the Prado is “to enjoy”), it is true that it is more likely that one can find a productive use for a Prado than for the alcohol that the other consumes. However, other respondents also suggested that if the

person who spends on alcohol was able to keep his job in spite of his drinking, he might actually be more efficient and could deserve more!

**FIGURE 5. RESULTS FOR SCENARIOS 7 AND 8**

There are two people: one from a rural county and one from an urban county. Both earn the same salary. How would you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	50868	50000	50000
	Person 2	49243	50000	50000
There are two people: one from your county and one from a different county on the other side of the country. Both earn Ksh.40,000. How would you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	54499	50000	50000
	Person 2	45437	50000	50000

Kenyans tend not to see urban or rural residence as a basis for allocating more or less to citizens. There was a slight bias in favor of rural areas in the responses to scenario 7, but the general view seems to have been that this was not sufficient information to motivate special treatment. We noted that in some discussions, people were conflicted about two competing possibilities. The first was that life in urban areas was more expensive and thus urban dwellers needed more funding. The other possibility was that rural areas were more marginalized and deserved more to catch up. Similarly, one could argue that urban dwellers live closer to health facilities, so their cost of arriving at the facility is lower than for a rural resident. This would again suggest that the rural dweller should be favored in the allocation. Thus people may be conflicted about who should get more. In cases where respondents find that there are good arguments on both sides or lack data to fully assess the situation of the two people, they tend to allocate 50-50.

The survey revealed a slight bias in favor of “our people,” though it was not pronounced. Given two otherwise similar people, respondents would give as much as 20 percent more to the one from their county, but many respondents would again split the funds 50-50. This suggests that principle is a significant factor in resource sharing, even when personal interests may be involved.



**FIGURE 6. RESULTS FOR SCENARIOS 9 AND 10**

Scenario	Person	Mean	Median	Mode
There are two Kenyans. One lives in an area with no tarmacked roads, school buildings or health clinics, the other lives in an area with good roads, new school buildings and a hospital. Both have two children. How will you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	61116	60000	50000
	Person 2	39073	40000	50000
There are two Kenyans. One is sick and one is healthy. The sick one will need to visit the hospital for several treatments this year while the healthy one will visit the clinic once for a checkup this year. However, the sick one earns a salary of Ksh.200,000 while the healthy one earns a salary of Ksh.20,000. How would you distribute the Ksh.100,000 among them?	Person 1	49375	50000	50000
	Person 2	50863	50000	50000

Marginalization is a legitimate basis for distribution. Kenyans awarded about 50 percent more to those in marginalized areas. Similar to the case regarding urban and rural areas, some respondents may have assumed that the residents living in the areas with better facilities also faced a higher cost of living, which may have led them to moderate the degree to which they favored marginalized areas.

When confronted with conflicting information about need and capacity, Kenyans tend to revert to equal sharing. Our final scenario examined a situation where a richer person was sick and a poorer person was healthy. The first person had higher needs but also higher capacity, while the second had both lower needs and lower capacity. There was a slight preference to assist the person with lower capacity, but the overwhelming impression from the data is that most respondents preferred equal shares in such a case. This is consistent with our interpretation of scenario seven: where there are potentially conflicting interpretations, respondents prefer equality.

## CONCLUSION

It is sometimes asserted that ordinary Kenyans cannot participate in discussions about technical subjects like resource allocation. Insofar as these discussions involve fundamental values, however, they are not the preserve of

technical elites. We have demonstrated in various forums, including sessions filmed in a number of counties, that Kenyans are capable of engaging in principle-based discussion about resource allocation.<sup>6</sup>

The results of this national survey further demonstrate a high degree of consistency among Kenyans about how to apply basic principles of fairness, including at least five of the six discussed at the outset (none of the scenarios measures fair process directly). In addition to applying these principles, many focus group participants indicated that they wanted more data to be able to assess them fully. The types of questions that they asked in many of the scenarios suggested they wanted to balance various principles, not just decided based on the principle that was being assessed by the question. The focus groups also suggested that those survey respondents who chose 50-50 allocations for certain questions may not have been refuting the underlying principles, but felt that they did not have enough information to justify unequal treatment. This further reinforces the notion that the values assessed in the survey are widely shared.

Of course, a survey cannot fully elucidate the reasons for Kenyan preferences, nor are survey results a substitute for face-to-face discussion and deliberation about complex topics. Taken together with the deliberations we have carried out around the country, however, these results are consistent with a public that, when provided with accessible and relevant information, is capable of forming sophisticated judgements about technical matters like resource allocation.

The evidence is beginning to mount that if public engagements around the budget process are not meaningful or do not yield useful inputs from the public, this is due as much if not more to the way these processes are informed, organized, and moderated as it is to the weak deliberative powers of the ordinary citizen. National and county government must therefore begin to rethink the approaches used to organize such forums in order to realize more meaningful feedback from the public.

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<sup>6</sup> See videos A Measure of Fairness <http://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/measure-of-fairness/> and Equity Week Day 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zhAiOgQQ7o&feature=youtu.be&list=PLuAL7CEtZWbo2FJAQoiossQH-bOKU5gBz>