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Despite Economic Growth, Tanzanians Still Dissatisfied

The third phase government under President Benjamin Mkapa vigorously sustained economic reforms that were first introduced in Tanzania the mid-1980s. The resulting macroeconomic achievements of recent years have been impressive, especially since the second half of the last decade. In 2004, GDP growth reached 6.7%, the average inflation rate declined from 27% in 1995 to 4%, domestic revenue collection increased threefold between 1995 and 2004, and the value of exports increased by 18% in 2004 alone. Furthermore, the balance of payments has improved to the extent that currently, Tanzania has foreign exchange reserves sufficient to cover 7 months imports of goods and services.

Despite these achievements, however, Tanzanians are unhappy with the country's economic conditions and their own living conditions, and they still experience high levels of lived poverty. Indeed, poverty at the individual level is a good part of the explanation for economic dissatisfaction. These are some of the key findings of the most recent Afrobarometer survey conducted in Tanzania between 21 July and 13 August, 2005.

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys on democracy, markets and civil society in Africa. The 2005 Tanzania survey, which was based on nationally representative random sample of 1304 adult citizens, follows previous surveys conducted in 2001 and 2003. It was done in both urban and rural locations, covering all regions of the country, and reaching 69 districts on the Mainland and 7 on Zanzibar. The overall margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3% at a 95% confidence level. All fieldwork was conducted by Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), an independent Tanzanian research institute, under the umbrella of the Afrobarometer Network. Wilsken Agencies Ltd., a Ugandan research and development consultancy firm, provided technical support during the preparatory and sampling stages.

Continuing Dissatisfaction with Current Economic Conditions

Over the three rounds of Afrobarometer surveys in Tanzania, respondents have been asked to describe the present economic conditions of their country. Despite evidence of consistent macroeconomic growth since the mid 1990s, a plurality of Tanzanians remains dissatisfied with the country's economic conditions, describing them as "fairly bad" or "very bad." In 2003, 42% described the country's economic conditions as bad, compared to 33% who rated the situation as "fairly" or "very good." In 2005, there is a slight decrease in negative perceptions, to 38%, but positive ratings have declined as well (to 30%).

The pattern is similar for respondents' assessments of their own personal living conditions. In 2005 a plurality (46%) describes their own present living conditions as very or fairly bad, compared to just 22% who offer a positive assessment. (See Figures 1A & 1B below)

Fig. 1A In general, how would you describe the present economic conditions of this country?

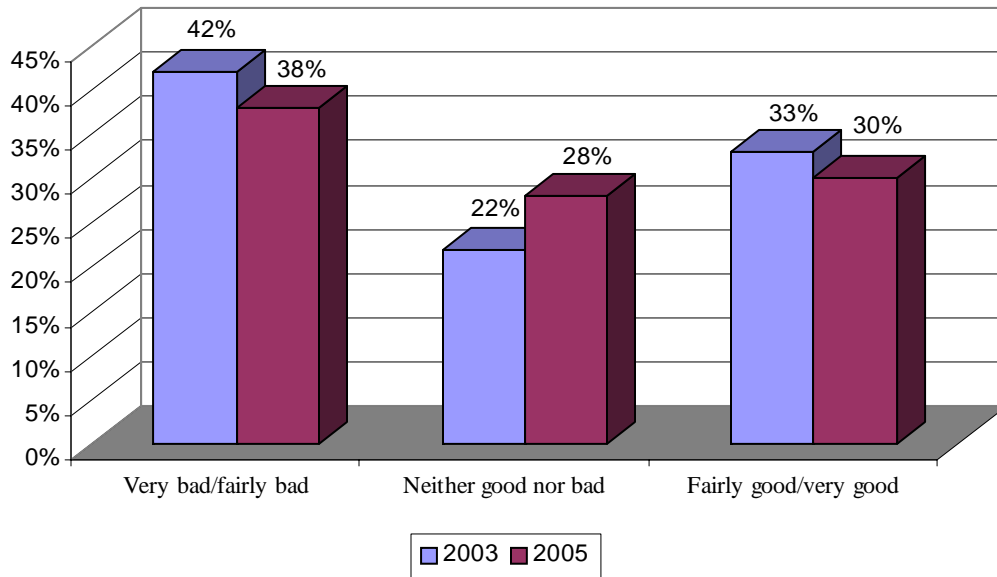
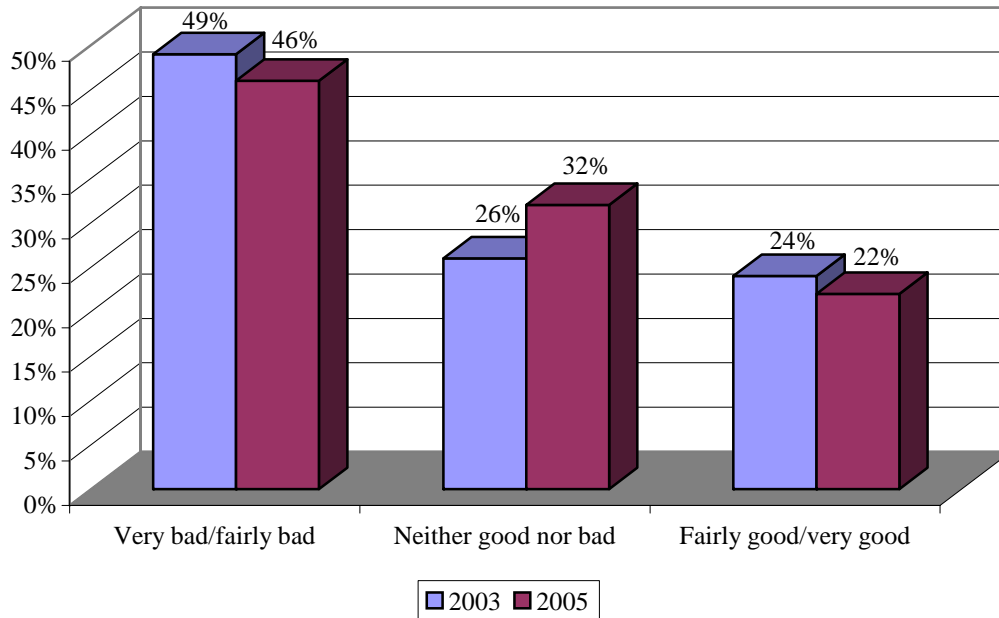


Fig. 1B: In general, how would you describe your own living conditions?



Tanzanians give mixed reviews when asked to compare several specific aspects of the economy to the situation a few years ago. A majority of 57% think that the availability of consumer goods is “better” or “much better” than it used to be. However, at the same time, a similar number (58%) sees an increase in the income gap between rich and poor, and an even larger majority (68%) thinks that the availability of job opportunities is worse than a few years ago.

Dissatisfied but Hopeful

Despite dissatisfaction with the country’s economy and their personal living standards, Tanzanians have not lost hope. When asked to compare the country’s present economic conditions to what they were 12 months ago, a plurality of 35% said they were better, although many see either no change or even declining conditions. But when asked what they expect them to be in 12 months time, results show more pronounced optimism: 37% say they expect the country’s economic conditions to get better in the future, compared to just 11% who think things will get worse. Nevertheless, a majority of respondents amounting to 39% are unwilling to make any prediction, responding with “don’t know.” In 12 months time, the country will be under a new, fourth phase government. Perhaps people are finding it difficult to predict the future trend of the economy due to uncertainty about the anticipated performance of the incoming government.

Evaluations of personal living conditions compared to the past and the future follow similar patterns and trends (Figures 2A and 2B).

Fig. 2A: Perception of the state of current country's economic conditions compared to what they were 12 months ago and what they are expected to be in 12 months

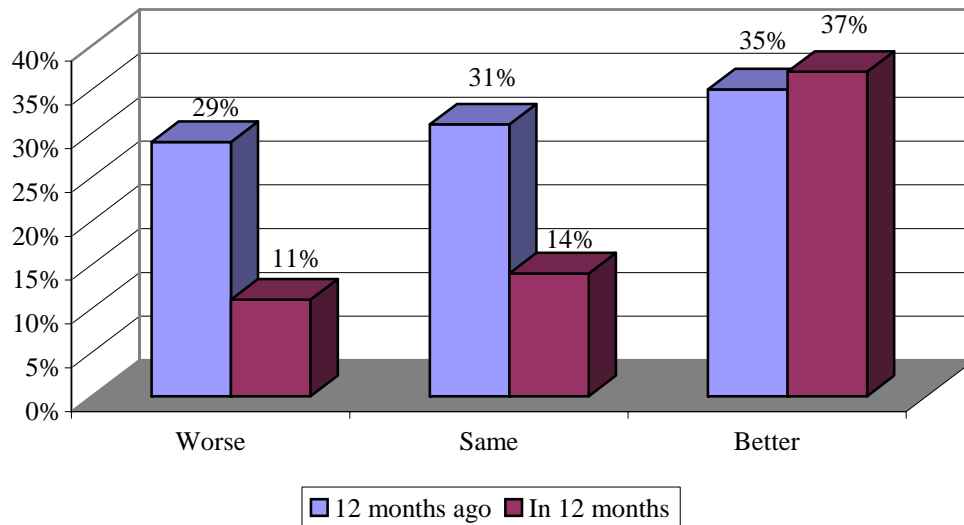
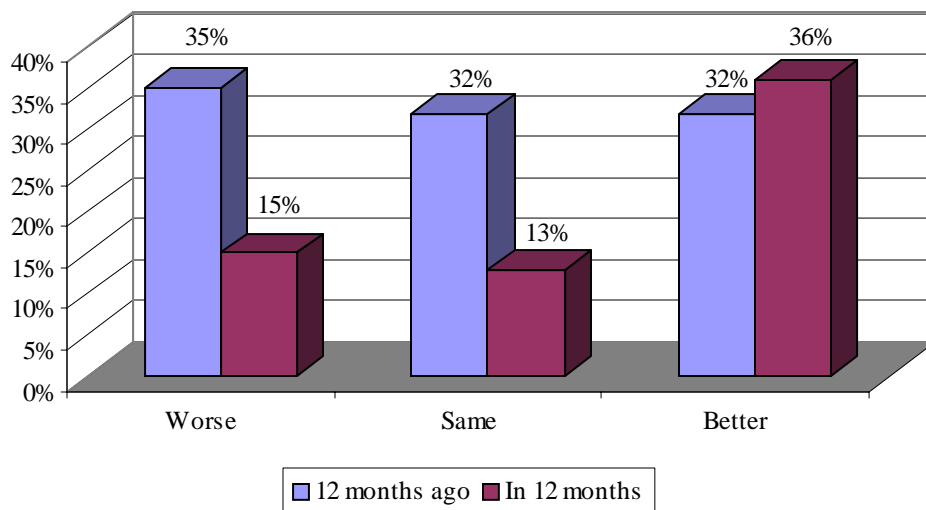


Fig. 2B: Perception of the state of own living conditions compared to what they were 12 months ago and what they are expected to be in 12 months



Evaluations of Government Economic Performance

This combination of dissatisfaction with present conditions but considerable optimism about the future is a consistently surprising finding of Afrobarometer surveys across many African countries. What explains this seeming contradiction?

One possible reason for Tanzanians’ optimism about the future is their positive approval of the government’s overall performance regardless of their personal current living standards. People tend to show positive approval whether their current living conditions are “good” or “bad.” For example, those who consider themselves as having “bad” living conditions nonetheless grant the government quite high approval ratings in a range of policy sectors, including addressing educational needs (83%), reducing crime (65%), and fighting corruption (52 %). With respect to educational services, there is no statistical difference in performance evaluations between those with “good” and “bad” living conditions (Table 1).

Nonetheless, fewer than half of all Tanzanians give the government positive marks for its efforts to create jobs or narrow the income gap between the rich and the poor. And those who see their current living standards as “bad,” also give negative evaluations to the government’s performance at delivering household water (only 38 % positive) and keeping prices stable (only 40% positive) (Table 1).

Moreover, in almost all respects, Tanzanians use their personal living standards to judge government performance. With the exception of addressing educational needs, those who say they have “good” standards are significantly more likely than those who say they have “bad” standards to judge that the government is performing well.

Table 1: Assessment of government performance in relation peoples' current living conditions¹

Assessment of government performance (%)		Your current living condition (%)			
		Bad	Neither	Good	Don't Know
Addressing educational needs	Badly	14	9	11	14
	Well	83	87	85	57
	Don't know	3	4	4	29
Reducing crime	Badly	28	23	19	43
	Well	65	70	75	43
	Don't know	7	7	5	14
Improving basic health service	Badly	34	20	18	29
	Well	62	76	79	43
	Don't know	3	3	4	29
Managing the Economy	Badly	25	16	13	29
	Well	61	73	80	43
	Don't know	14	12	7	29
Fighting corruption	Badly	34	23	17	43
	Well	52	68	73	43
	Don't know	14	10	10	14
Keeping prices stable	Badly	49	35	35	43
	Well	40	52	54	29
	Don't know	11	12	11	29
Delivering household water	Badly	58	53	46	43
	Well	38	44	51	29
	Don't know	4	3	3	29
Creating jobs	Badly	60	50	45	43
	Well	29	41	47	29
	Don't know	12	9	8	29
Narrowing income gaps	Badly	61	52	43	43
	Well	23	31	41	29
	Don't know	17	16	16	29

High Levels of Lived Poverty

Similarly, one would expect economic evaluations would reflect the high levels of poverty experienced by many people in Tanzania. The Afrobarometer examines people's levels of "lived poverty" by asking how often they or any member of their household has gone without various basic necessities during the past year (Table 2).

A majority of Tanzanians (53%) say they have gone without enough food to eat at least once during the past year, and 16% have done so "many times" or "always." Nearly two-thirds (62%) have gone without enough drinking water at least once during the past year, or without medical care (55%), or without a cash income (84%).

The data also show increasing levels of deprivation over time for every basic human need we have measured. For example, shortages of food went up by six points and shortages of clean water by 10 points between 2001 and 2005.

¹ Except for educational services, there are strong associations between variables that are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 2: Lived Poverty

During the past year, how often if ever have you gone without	Percent who experienced the problem at least once		
	2001	2003	2005
Enough food to eat	47%	45%	53%
Enough clean water for home use	52%	49%	62%
Medicines or medical treatment	48%	54%	55%
Enough fuel to cook your food	-	30%	32%
A cash income	77%	73%	84%
School expenses for your children (like fees, uniforms or books)	31%	-	35%

Most importantly, the experience of living in poverty clearly undermines popular approval of the government's economic policy performance. An index of lived poverty² is strongly, and significantly related to an index of economic policy performance.³ And the relationship is negative,⁴ which indicates that poorer people are less likely to approve of government performance in the economic sphere than are relatively well-off people.

These impacts of poverty are consistent with the ongoing debate in the country that macroeconomic achievements have not translated into micro level poverty reduction (P&HDR 2005).

Policy Evaluations Over Time

Yet time series analysis shows interesting contrary results. Tanzanians' positive evaluations of government performance at various aspects of management of the economy and provision of social services increase overtime.

Table 3: Assessment of Government Performance

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters	Percent saying "fairly well" or "very well"		
	2001	2003	2005
Addressing educational needs	59%	77%	85%
Fighting corruption	55%	52%	78%
Improving basic health services	50%	70%	70%
Managing the economy	-	67%	69%
Reducing crime	63%	57%	69%
Keeping prices stable	48%	52%	47%
Delivering household water	-	46%	43%
Creating jobs	29%	39%	37%
Narrowing income gaps	25%	37%	30%

From 2001 to 2005, positive perceptions of government performance at addressing educational needs increased tremendously from 59% to 85%, fighting corruption from 55% to 78%, and improving basic health services from 50% to 70% (Table 3). With the exception of approval of the maintenance of price stability – which stayed steady at around 47% to 48% – the remaining aspects of government performance showed increased positive trends between 2001 and 2005.

² Calculated as a person's average frequency of encountering shortages of food, water, medical care and cash income.

³ Calculated as an average evaluation of managing the economy, creating jobs, keeping prices stable, and narrowing income gaps.

⁴ Pearson's $r = -.278, p < .001$.

Ambivalent Support for Government Economic Reforms

Despite rising approval for policy performance, the public's continuing dissatisfaction with the country's economic conditions could be the ambivalent public support for the government's economic reform program. Although the third phase government has put a lot of effort into implementing economic reforms, the 2005 Afrobarometer survey indicates that the reform policies receive limited support among general public.

We asked respondents several questions on which they were to choose between pro-reform (e.g., fees for schools, civil service retrenchment) and anti-reform (free schooling, no civil service reform) positions. Respondents support some reform policies, while rejecting others, but nonetheless continue to show considerable patience and goodwill as regards the necessity of reform.

For example, 56% of Tanzanians prefer to have free schooling for their children even if this may compromise the quality of education, and 58% prefer to have let civil servants keep their jobs even if paying their salaries is costly to the country. Moreover, a majority of Tanzanians (61%) claim current government economic policies have hurt more people than they have helped. Nonetheless, a majority (53%) agrees that the government should not abandon its reform efforts, and acknowledges that current hardships are necessary in order for the economy to get better in the future.

Conclusion

While it is clear that there has been significant economic growth at the macro-level of the national economy, it appears that the effects are yet to be felt at the micro-level of the ordinary Tanzanian, especially among poorer people. The public nonetheless gives the government at least some credit for its efforts, and remains at least somewhat hopeful for the future. If the government can take advantage of this public goodwill and patience and address those aspects of the economy that most affect the individual's own living conditions and outlook – e.g., unemployment, safe household drinking water, food shortages, and income distribution – it may enjoy a more positive public assessment in future.

This Briefing paper was prepared by REPOA.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by Wilsken Agencies, Ltd. in Uganda, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and Michigan State University. REPOA should like to thank Wilsken Agencies, Ltd. and Michigan State University for their technical support during the third Afrobarometer survey (2005) in Tanzania. REPOA thanks the Department for International Development (DFID, UK) for financial support, with additional assistance from the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org