

Social services rank tops in Ugandans' priorities, but not in national budget

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 141 | John Martin Kewaza and Joseph Makanga

Summary

Ugandans view social services¹ as the most important problems facing the country and the areas in greatest need of additional government investment, according to citizens' responses in national Afrobarometer surveys. Yet government budget allocations have not reflected the high priority that citizens assign to these problems.

Over the past eight years, budget allocations for health care, education, and water and electricity supply have barely increased, despite observed annual growth in the national expenditure (National Budget Information Library, 2008-2016). Regarding public health care, for example, Uganda's allocation totaled 9% of the 2016/2017 national budget (Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2015) – far short of the 15% commitment in the Abuja Declaration (World Health Organization, 2011). Government efforts over the past two decades to ensure high-quality health care for Ugandans through a national network of health centers have been undermined by operational budget levels that are inadequate to recruit and retain qualified staff, provide basic equipment, or put an end to drug stock-outs (Uganda NGO Forum, 2016).

Afrobarometer survey data show that while most Ugandans have access to public schools, many lack access to other basic services: Only 59% live in areas containing a health clinic, 30% have access to piped-water systems, and only 39% have access to an electric grid. (Armah-Attah, Selormey, & Houessou, 2016; Walker, 2016; Oyuke, Penar, & Howard, 2016). Six in 10 Ugandans went without needed medicine or medical care at least once in the previous year, and close to half of Ugandans went without enough clean water (Mattes, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016).

This dispatch highlights the high priority that Ugandans assign to health care, education, and other public services as problems that need government attention. They are willing to play their role as citizens – most say it's important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable and to pay their taxes. Almost half would even be willing to pay more taxes or user fees in order to increase government spending on public health care.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

¹ In this paper, we use "social services" to refer to public services provided for the benefit of the community as a whole, including health care, education, water/sanitation, electricity, housing, and care for orphaned or homeless children.

This dispatch draws mainly on Round 6 data, reflecting interviews with 2,400 adult Ugandans in May 2015 conducted under the leadership of Hatchile Consult. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

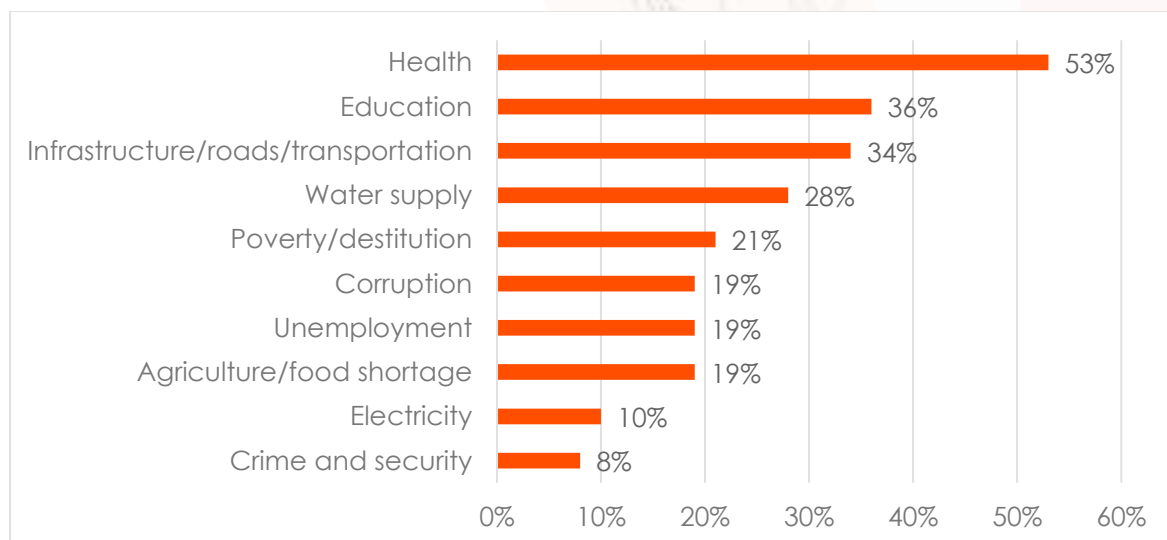
Key findings

- Ugandans' top priorities for government action and investment are social services – particularly health care and education. Government budget allocations have not reflected the high priority that citizens assign to these problems.
- About half of Ugandans who sought assistance at public clinics or hospitals or tried to obtain government utilities say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to get the needed services.
- Majorities of Ugandans consider government accountability more important than efficiency (61%) and affirm the duty of good citizens to pay their taxes (65%).
- Almost half (47%) of Ugandans say they would be willing to pay higher taxes or user fees in exchange for increased government spending on public health care, while 45% would oppose the idea.

Social services as the most important problems

When Ugandans are asked to identify “the most important problems facing this country that government should address,” the most frequently cited problems are health² (mentioned by 53% of respondents as one of their three top problems) and education (36%) (Figure 1). Infrastructure/roads and transportation, when combined, rank third (34%), followed by water supply (28%).

Figure 1: Most important problems that government should address | top 10
 | Uganda | 2015

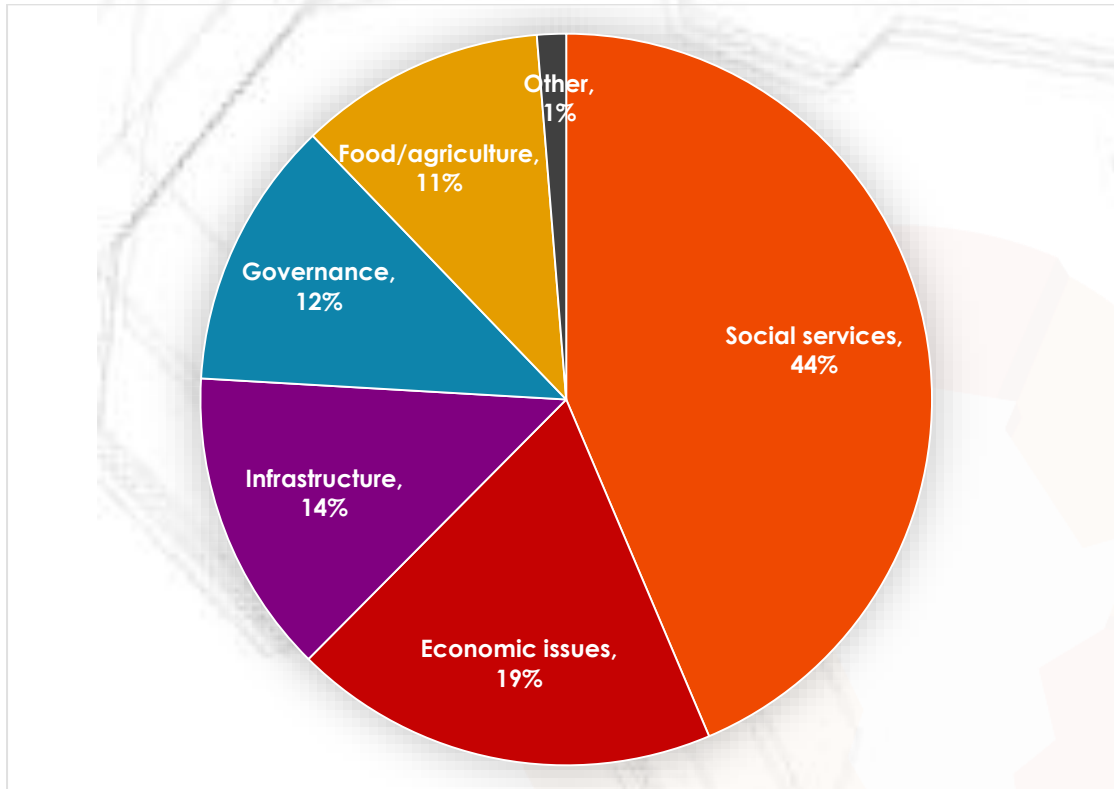


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their top three.)*

² The category “health” also includes the response options “sickness/disease” and “AIDS.”

If we group citizens' responses by sector, we see that the category most frequently cited as priority problems is social/public services (44%), followed by economic issues (19%), infrastructure (13%), governance (12%), and food/agriculture (11%)³ (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Most important problems that government should address, grouped by sector | Uganda | 2015

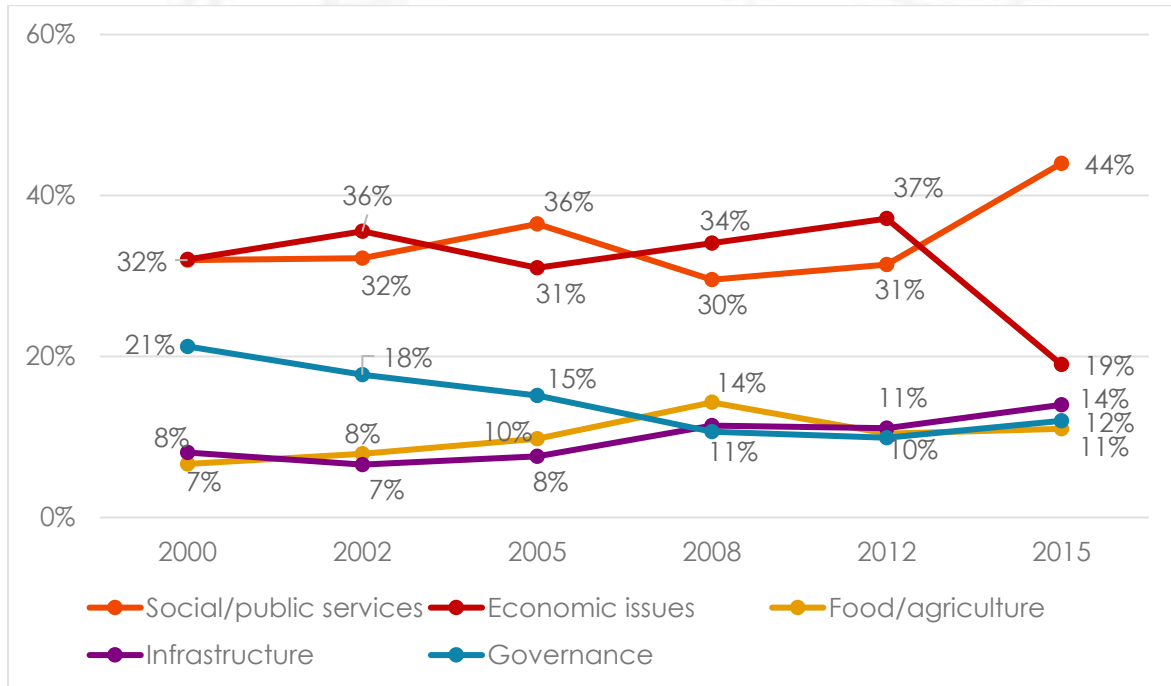


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Figure shows % of responses falling into each category)*

Over 15 years of Afrobarometer surveys in Uganda, social services and economic issues have consistently ranked at the top of citizens' priority problems (Figure 3). In 2015, the proportion of Ugandans who view social services as the most important problems increased by 13 percentage points (from 31% in 2012 to 44%), while economic issues declined by 18 points (from 37% in 2012 to 19%).

³ The category "economic issues" includes poverty/destitution, unemployment, loans/credit, management of the economy, wages/incomes/salaries, and rates and taxes. "Food and agriculture" includes food shortage/famine, drought, land, agricultural marketing, farming. "Infrastructure" includes transportation, roads, and communications. "Governance" includes corruption, crime and security, war, political violence, political instability/ethnic tensions, discrimination/inequality, democracy/political rights, and gender issues/women's rights.

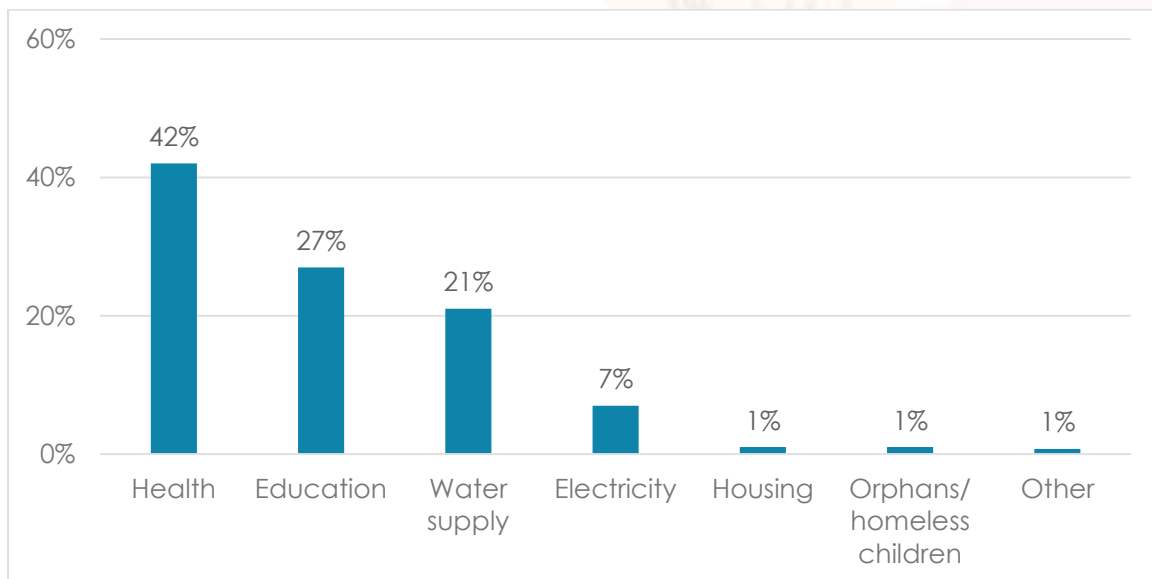
Figure 3: Most important problems to be addressed, grouped by sector | Uganda | 2001-2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Figure shows % of responses falling into each category)

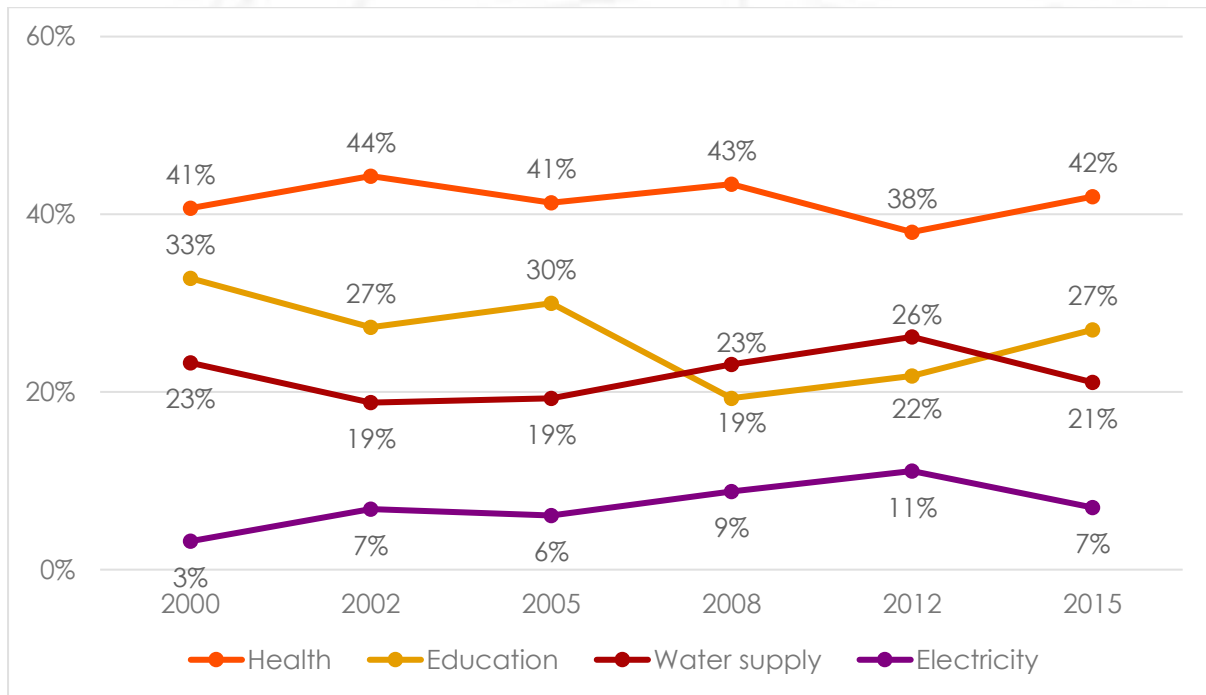
Among all responses focusing on social/public services as top problems, the most frequently cited is health care (42% of responses), followed by education (27%), water supply (21%), and electricity (7%) (Figure 4). This rank order has also been fairly consistent over past surveys, although water supply has at times taken the No. 2 spot ahead of education (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Most important social services to address | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Figure shows breakdown of all responses focusing on social services)

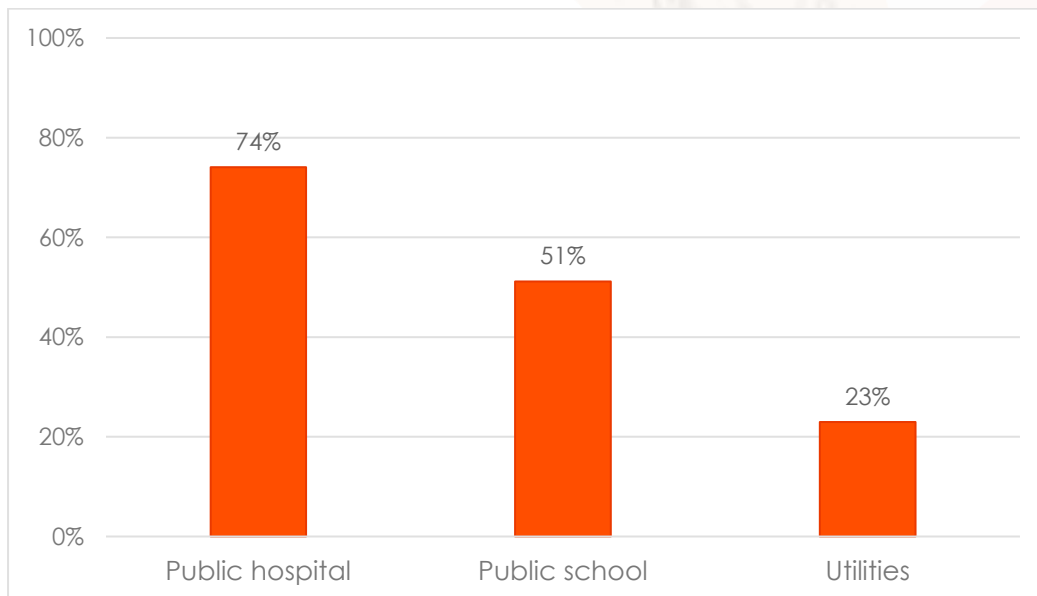
Figure 5: Most important social services to address | Uganda | 2000-2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Figure shows breakdown of all responses focusing on social services)*

More than half (53%) of respondents say they had contact during the 12 months preceding the 2015 survey with at least one public service, such as seeking assistance from a public clinic or hospital (74%) or a public school (51%) or trying to obtain water, sanitation, or electricity services (23%) (Figure 6).

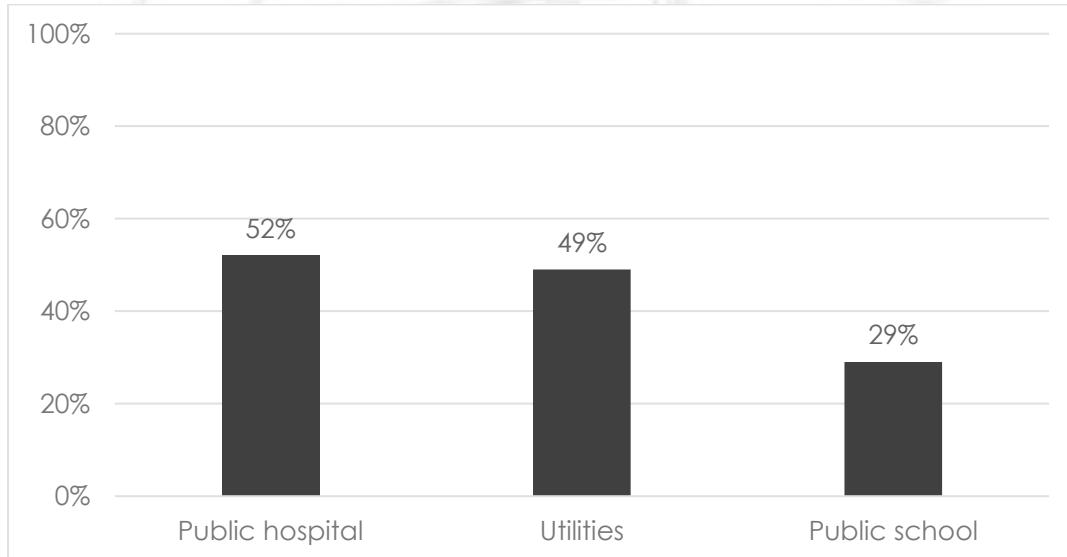
Figure 6: Contact with social services | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you: Had contact with a public clinic or hospital? Had contact with a public school? Tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government? (% who say "yes")*

Among those who say they tried to obtain these services, significant proportions describe the process as either “difficult” or “very difficult,” especially with regard to medical services (52%) and public utilities (49%) (Figure 7).

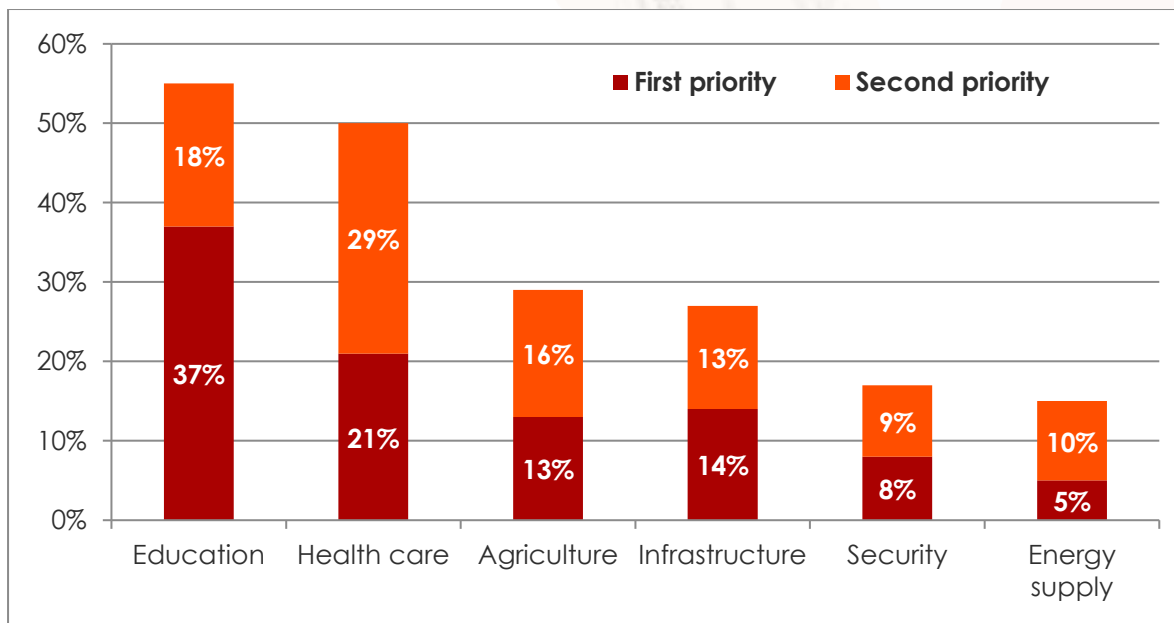
Figure 7: Difficulty obtaining social services | Uganda | 2015



Respondents who sought assistance during the previous 12 months were asked: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed? (% who say “difficult” or “very difficult”)

Citizens reaffirm their prioritization of social services when they are asked which areas should receive additional government investment: Education leads the list (cited by 55% of respondents as one of their top two priorities), followed by health care (50%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Citizen priorities for additional government spending | Uganda | 2015

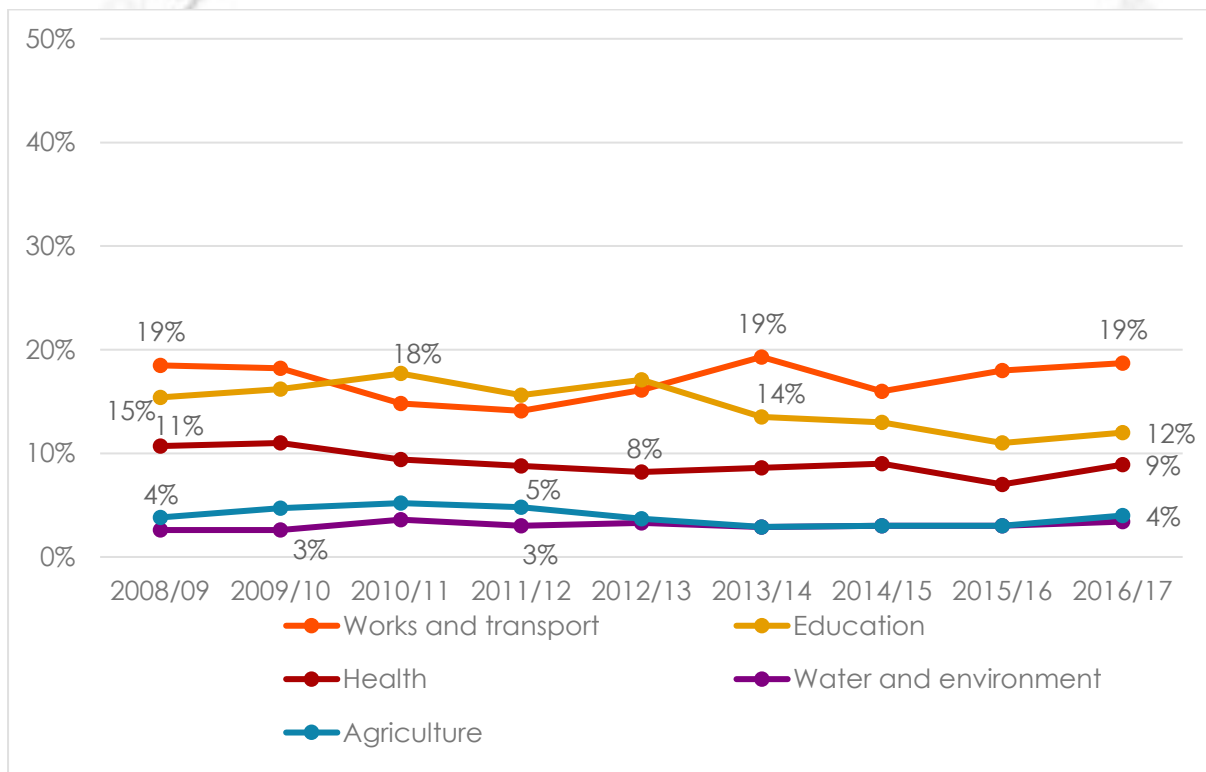


Respondents were asked: If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas do you think should be the top priority for additional investment? And which would be your second priority?

National budget allocation vs. citizen priorities

Whereas Ugandans view social services as the most important problems the government should address, these priorities have not been reflected in government budget allocations. As shown in Figure 9, allocations for health care have remained relatively flat, ranging from a high of 11% of the budget in Fiscal Year 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 to a low of 7% in FY 2015/2016. The allocation for education has actually declined as a proportion of the national budget, from a high of 18% in FY 2010/2011 to a low of 11% in FY 2015/2016. The allocation for water and environment has varied little since 2008.

Figure 9: National budget sector allocations | Uganda | 2008-2016

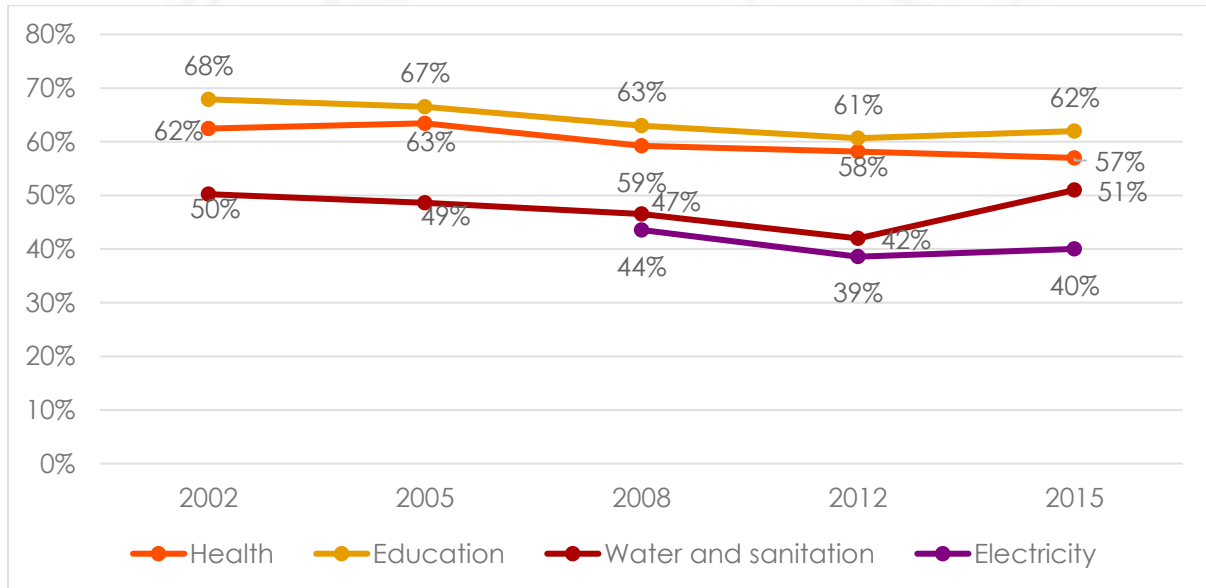


Source: Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Government performance

Public assessments of government performance in providing health and education services have been more positive than negative but on a gradual downward slope (Figure 10). Six in 10 citizens (62%) say the government has performed "fairly well" or "very well" in addressing educational needs, down from 68% in 2002. Similarly, popular approval of government efforts to improve basic health services is down slightly, from 62% in 2002 to 57% in 2015. On the other hand, the government's performance rating in provision of water and sanitation services improved somewhat between 2012 and 2016, from 42% to 51%.

Figure 10: Perceived government performance on provision of social services
 | Uganda | 2002-2015



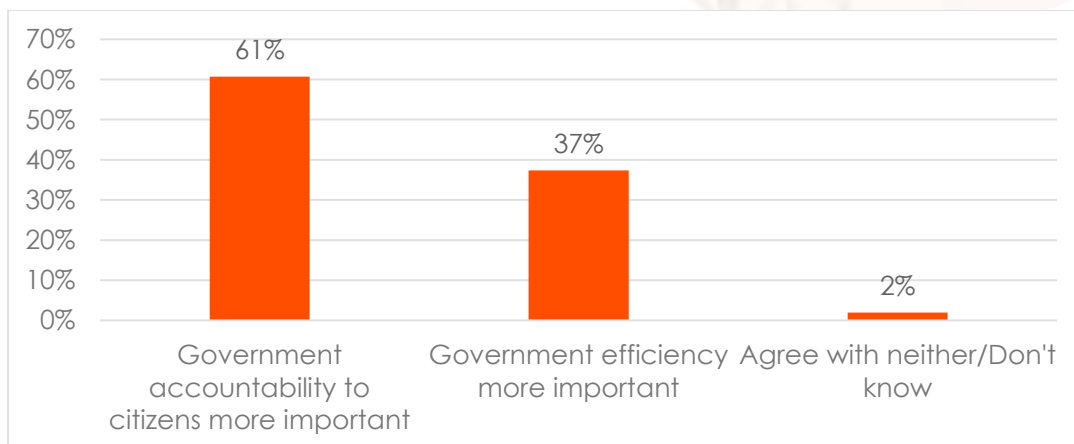
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Improving basic health services? Addressing educational needs? Providing water and sanitation services? Providing a reliable supply of electricity? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Citizens' willingness to play their role

Survey responses suggest that most Ugandans stand ready to play their role as citizens, with majorities affirming the importance of government accountability to its people as well as their willingness to pay taxes to support their country's development.

Six in 10 Ugandans (61%) value government accountability more highly than government efficiency (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Government accountability vs. efficiency | Uganda | 2015

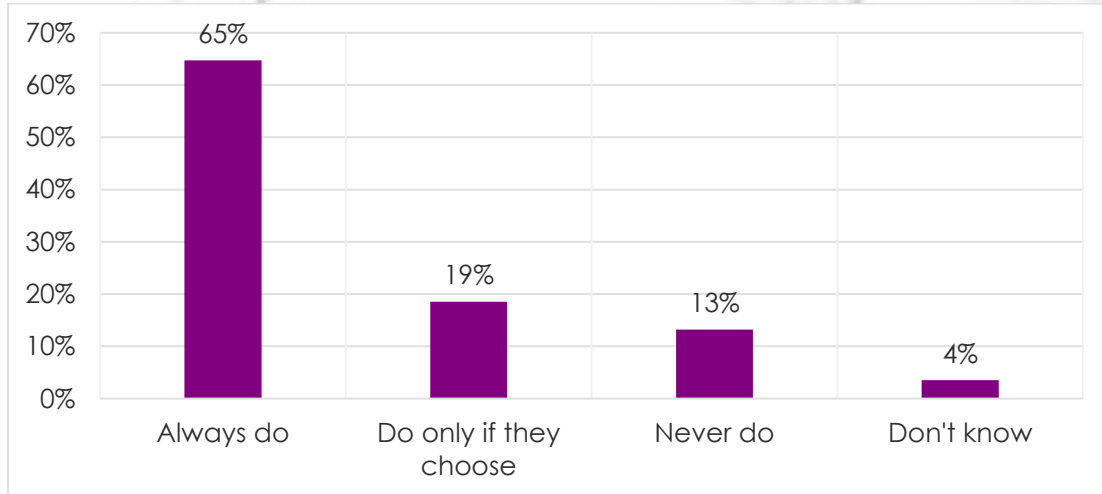


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.
- Statement 2: It's more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it takes decisions more slowly.

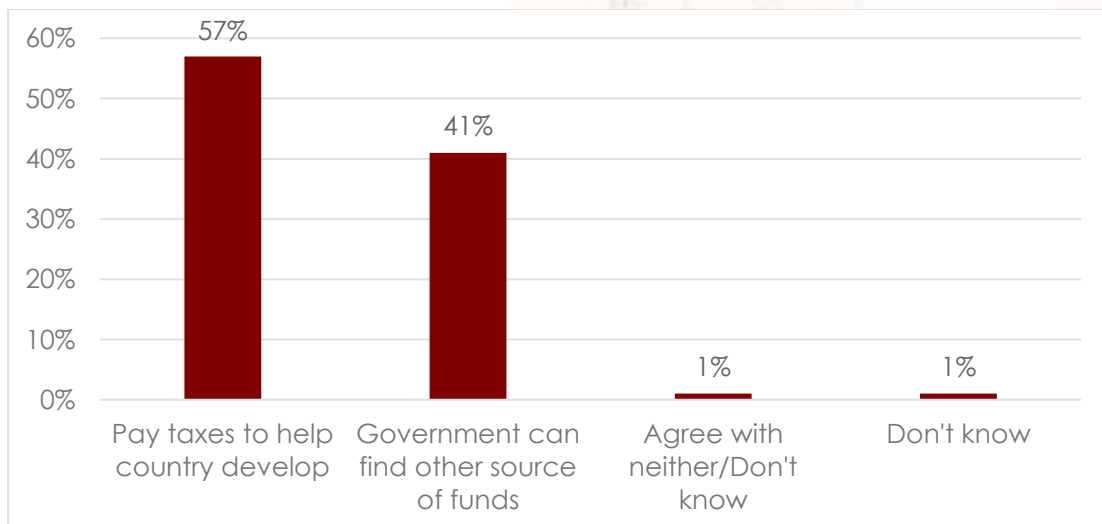
And on two separate questions, a majority of Ugandans affirm their duty to pay taxes to the government. Two-thirds of respondents agree that good citizens in a democracy should “always” pay their taxes (Figure 12), and 57% “agree” or “agree very strongly” that “citizens must pay their taxes to the government in order for our country to develop,” vs. 41% who say that “the government can find enough resources for development from other sources without having to tax the people” (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Citizen’s duty to pay taxes | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose.

Figure 13: Pay taxes to support development | Uganda | 2015



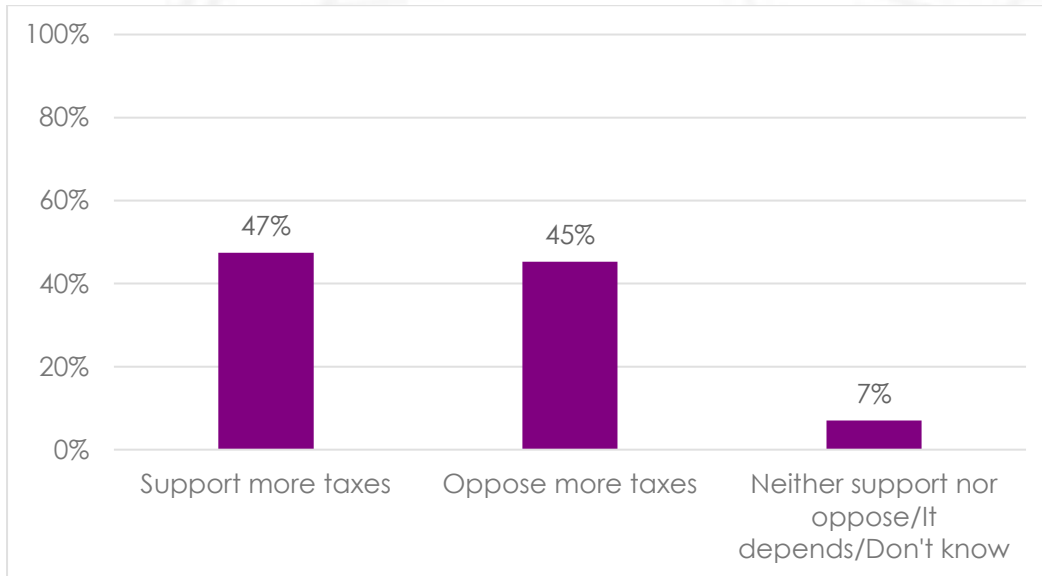
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- Statement 1: Citizens must pay their taxes to the government in order for our country to develop.
- Statement 2: The government can find enough resources for development from other sources without having to tax the people.

When asked whether they would support or oppose increased taxes or user fees in order to enable the government to increase spending on public health care, 47% say they would endorse the idea, while 45% say they would oppose it (Figure 14).

Figure 14: More taxes for increased government spending on health care?

| Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: *If the government decided to make people pay more taxes or user fees in order to increase spending on public health care, would you support this decision or oppose it?*

Conclusion

The delivery of social services such as high-quality education, accessible and affordable health care, and reliable supplies of water/sanitation and electric services, are a basic responsibility of any government. While everyday citizens rank health care and education as their top priorities for government action, Uganda's national budget allocations have not reflected these preferences, and citizen satisfaction with the government's performance in these areas has been declining. At the same time, Ugandans are willing to contribute to improvements by holding the government accountable and paying their taxes, even indicating some willingness to pay more taxes or user fees in exchange for better public health care.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

- Armah-Attoh, D., Selormey, E., & Houessou, R. (2016). Despite gains, barriers keep health care high on Africa's priority list. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 31.
http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Policy%20papers/ab_r6_policypaper31_health_a_priority_in_africa1.pdf.
- Corah, W. (2016). Lack of safe water, sanitation spurs growing dissatisfaction with government performance. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 76.
http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno76_water_and_sanitation_in_africa1.pdf.
- Mattes, R., Dulani, B., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2016). Africa's growth dividend? Lived poverty drops across much of the continent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29.
http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Policy%20papers/ab_r6_policypaper29_lived_poverty_declines_in_africa_eng.pdf.
- National Budget Information Library. (2008-2016). National budget monitoring reports.
<http://www.budget.go.ug/budget/content/national-budget-monitoring-reports-0>.
- Oyuke, A., Penar, P. H., & Howard, B. (2016). Off-grid or 'off-on': Lack of access, unreliable electricity supply still plague majority of Africans. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 75.
<http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad75-unreliable-electricity-supply-still-plague-majority-of-africans>.
- Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. (2015). National budget framework paper FY2016/2017.
<http://budget.go.ug/budget/sites/default/files/National%20Budget%20docs/National%20Budget%20Framework%20Paper%20%28NBFP%29%20FY%202016-17.pdf>.
- Uganda NGO Forum. (2016). Uganda at crossroads! Recreating opportunity amidst threats to a peaceful and prosperous Uganda. ngoforum.or.ug/wp-content/plugins/download-monitor/download.php?id=285.
- World Health Organization. (2011). The Abuja declaration: Ten years on.
http://www.who.int/healthsystems/publications/abuja_declaration/en/.

Kewaza John Martin is a researcher for Hatchile Consult in Uganda. Email: jm.kewaza@gmail.com.

Joseph Makanga is a research associate for Hatchile Consult in Uganda. Email: makangaj@gmail.com.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 141 | 24 April 2017