

Climate change: A little-known reality in Lesotho

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 524 | Libuseng Malephane

Summary

According to its National Climate Change Policy, Lesotho is already experiencing the impacts of climate change. These include increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, less farming and more food insecurity, land degradation, and depletion of the country's natural resources, including loss of biodiversity (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2017).

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index 2021, which summarises countries' vulnerability and resilience to climate change, ranks Lesotho No. 124 out of 182 countries, meaning high vulnerability and low readiness for adaptation (ND-GAIN 2021).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of climate change.

In Lesotho, findings show that while climate change is still an unknown concept to nearly two-thirds of Basotho, those who are aware of it expect far more action from the government to fight it.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advison Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Lesotho in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- About three-quarters of Basotho (73%) say floods have become more severe over the past 10 years, while nearly half (45%) say the same about droughts.
- Fewer than four in 10 Basotho (36%) say they have heard of climate change.

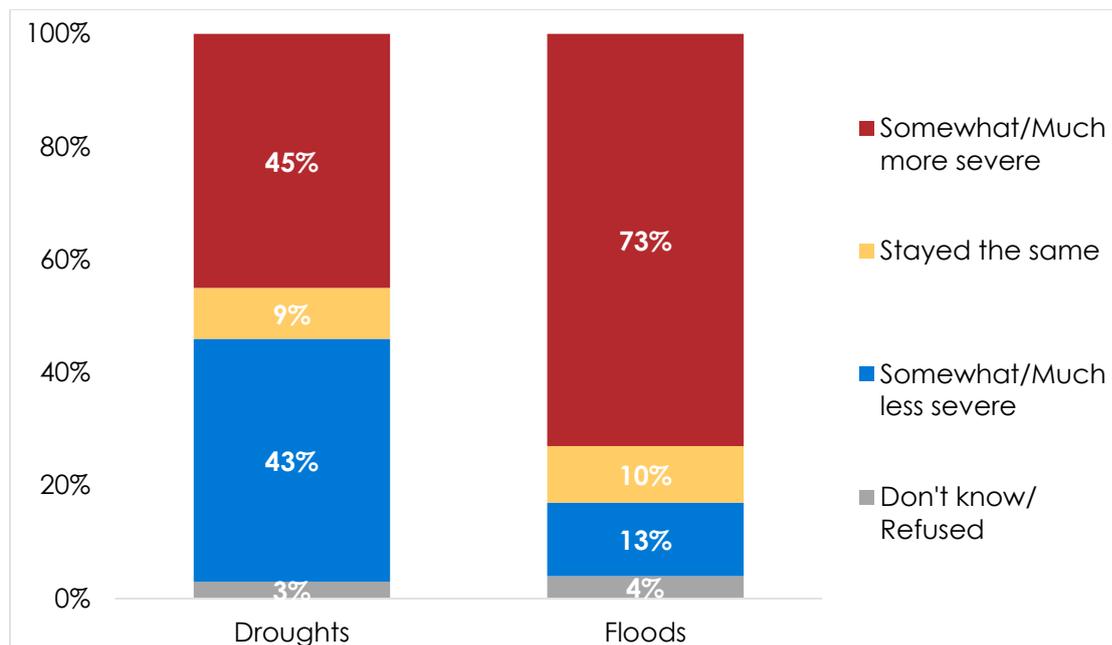
- Among those who are aware of climate change:
 - Almost nine in 10 (88%) say it is making life in Lesotho worse.
 - Half (51%) believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change, and nearly seven in 10 (69%) want the government to take immediate action to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.
 - Only small minorities are satisfied with efforts by the government (7%), developed countries (7%), business and industry (10%), and ordinary citizens (21%) to fight climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions. Almost three-quarters (73%) of Basotho say floods have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” over the past decade (Figure 1).

Assessments are divided when it comes to drought: 45% report that they have become more severe, while 43% say they have become less severe.

Figure 1: Severity of droughts and floods | Lesotho | 2022

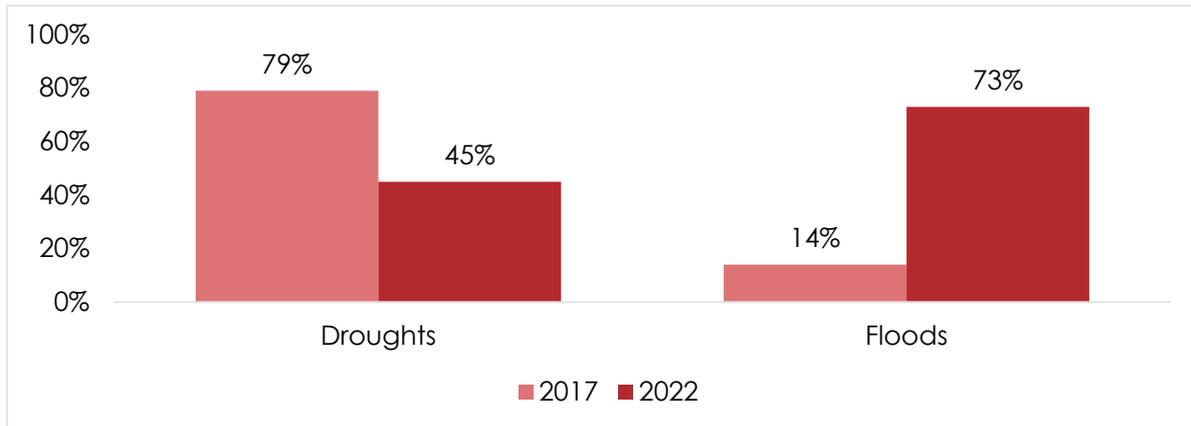


Respondents were asked: *In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?*

Compared to 2017, the proportion who say droughts have gotten more severe has decreased by 34 percentage points, from 79% in 2017, while perceptions of worsening floods have increased by 59 percentage points, from just 14% in 2017 (Figure 2).

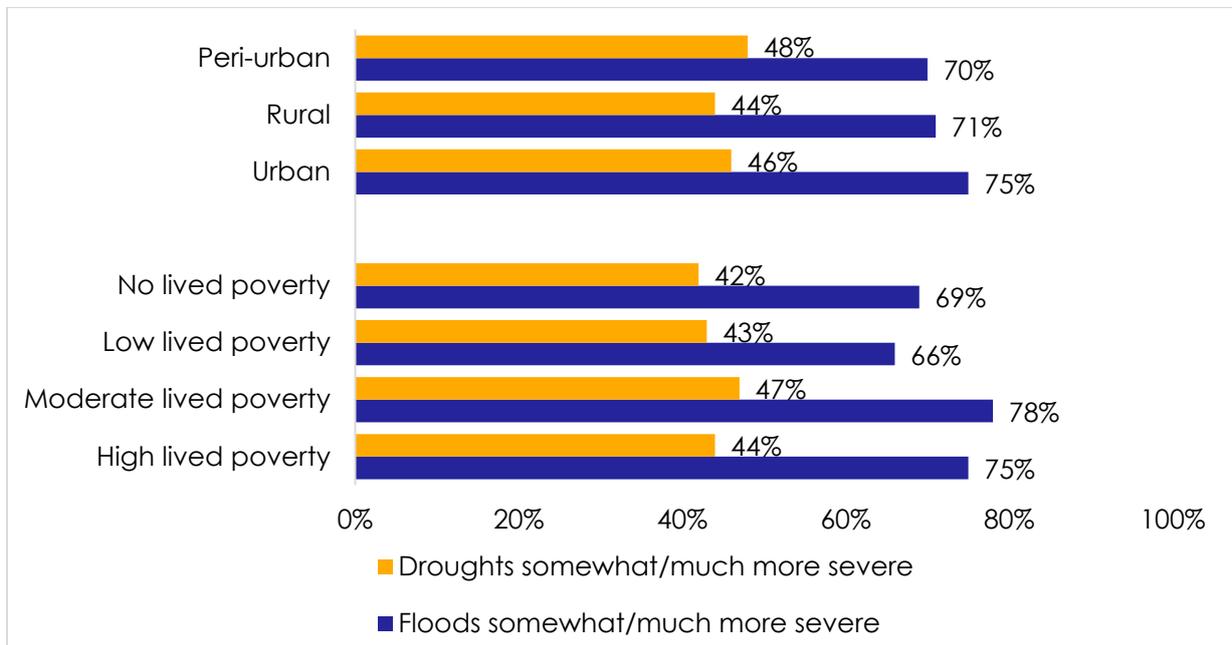
Urban and rural residents differ little in their experience of these climatic events. Economically well-off respondents (those experiencing low or no “lived poverty”¹) are somewhat less likely to see increasingly severe floods, conceivably because they are more sheltered than their less-well-off counterparts (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Severity of droughts and floods | Lesotho | 2017-2022



Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

Figure 3: More severe droughts and floods | by urban-rural residence and lived poverty | Lesotho | 2022



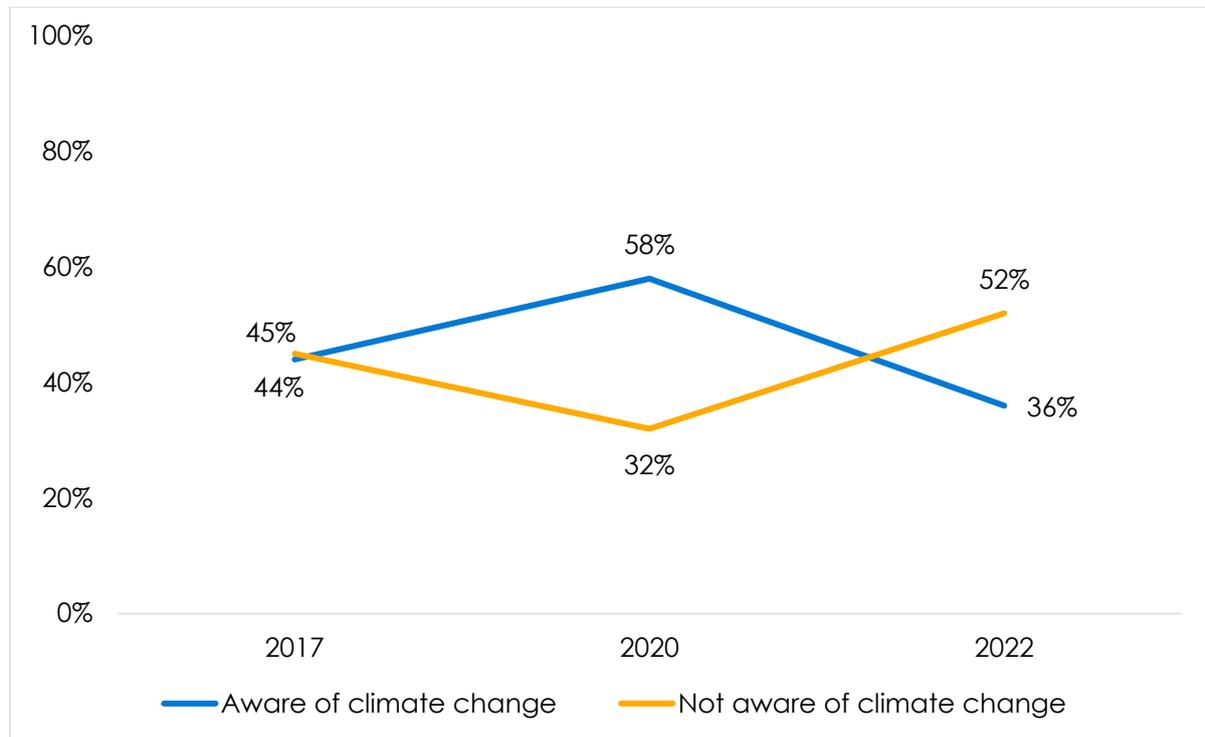
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

¹ Because the sample experiencing “no lived poverty” is relatively small (n=71), findings have a relatively large margin of error.

Awareness of climate change

Fewer than four in 10 Basotho (36%) say they have heard of climate change. This is a 22-percentage-point decline from 2019 (58%), perhaps reflecting high public awareness of the lack of rain – though not necessarily of “climate change” – in 2019 (Figure 4).

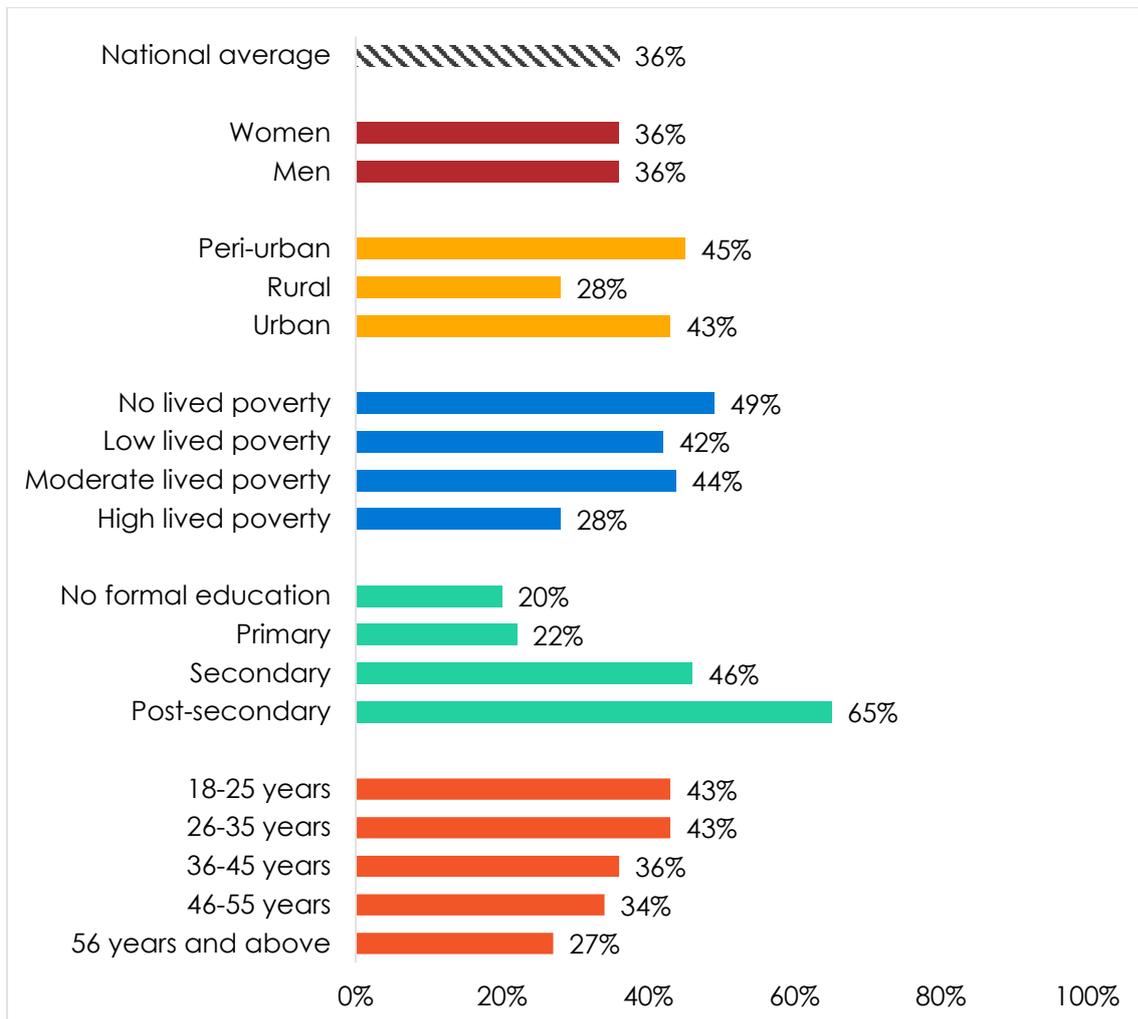
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Lesotho | 2017-2022



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?*

Although drought and flooding have immediate consequences for agriculture in rural areas, awareness of climate change is far lower among rural residents than urban and peri-urban residents (28% vs. 43%-45%) (Figure 5). Poorer citizens are less familiar with the term “climate change” (28% among those with high lived poverty vs. 49% among those with no lived poverty), and citizens with at least secondary education are two to three times as likely as the uneducated to have heard of climate change (46%-65% among those with secondary or post-secondary education vs. 20%-22% among those with primary or no formal education).

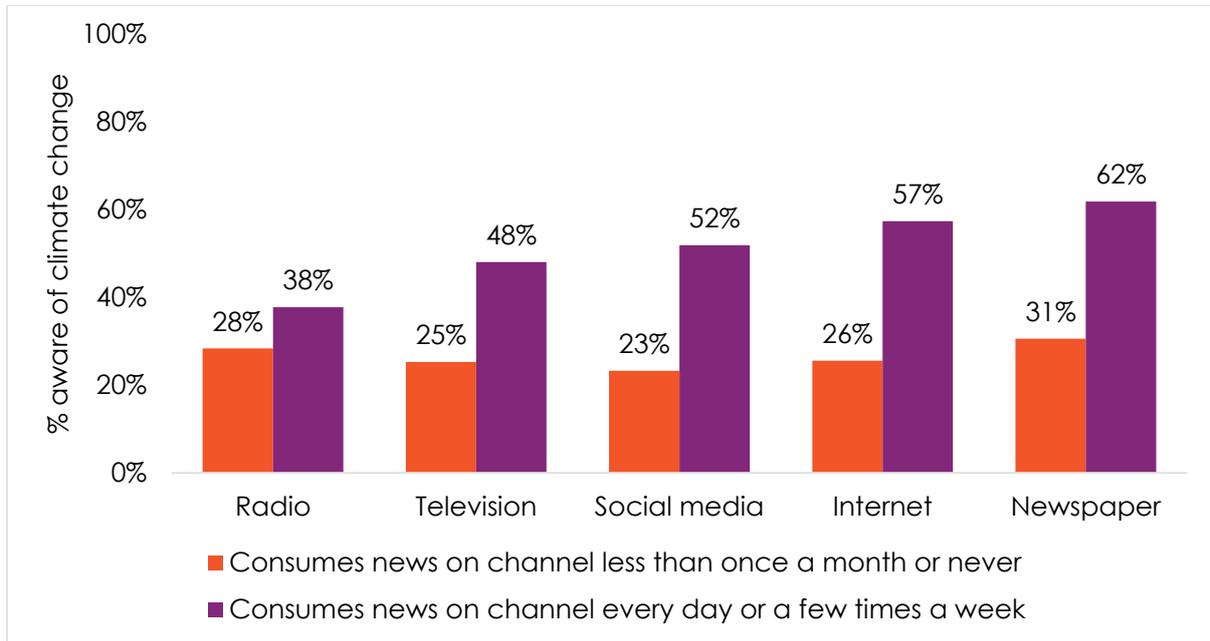
Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Awareness of climate change also increases with respondents' news consumption. Among those who never or seldom (less than once a month) get news from the radio, television, social media, the Internet, or newspapers, only 23%-31% have heard of climate change (Figure 6). But awareness of climate change is as high as about six in 10 among respondents who frequently get news from newspapers (62%) and the Internet (57%), and about five in 10 among regular consumers of news from social media (52%) and television (48%).

Figure 6: Awareness of climate change | by news media consumption | Lesotho | 2022

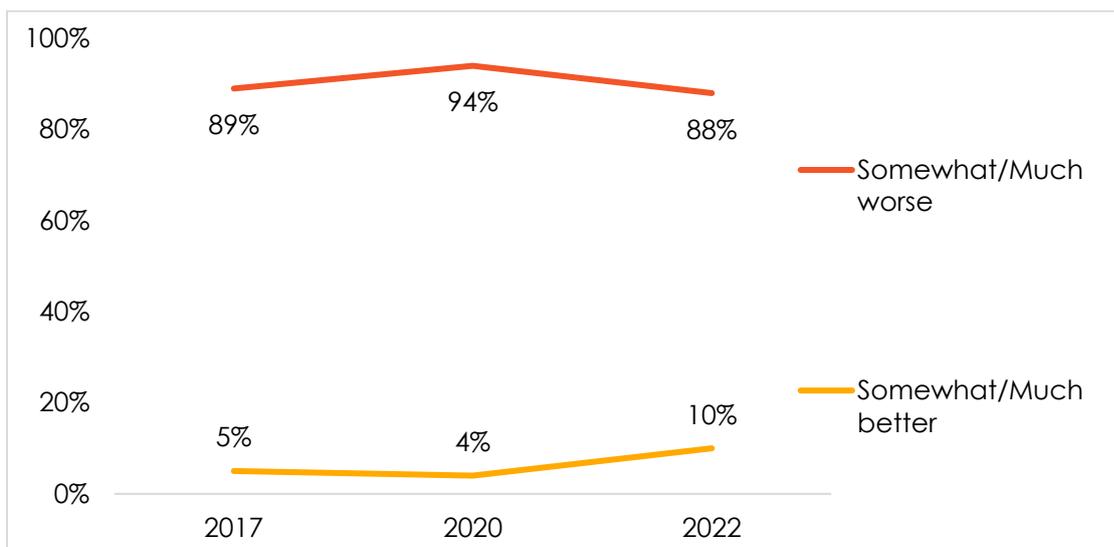


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Effects of climate change

Among citizens who are aware of climate change, about nine in 10 (88%) say it is making life in Lesotho "somewhat worse" or "much worse," a modest decrease from 2020 (94%). Only one in 10 (10%) say it is making life better (Figure 7).

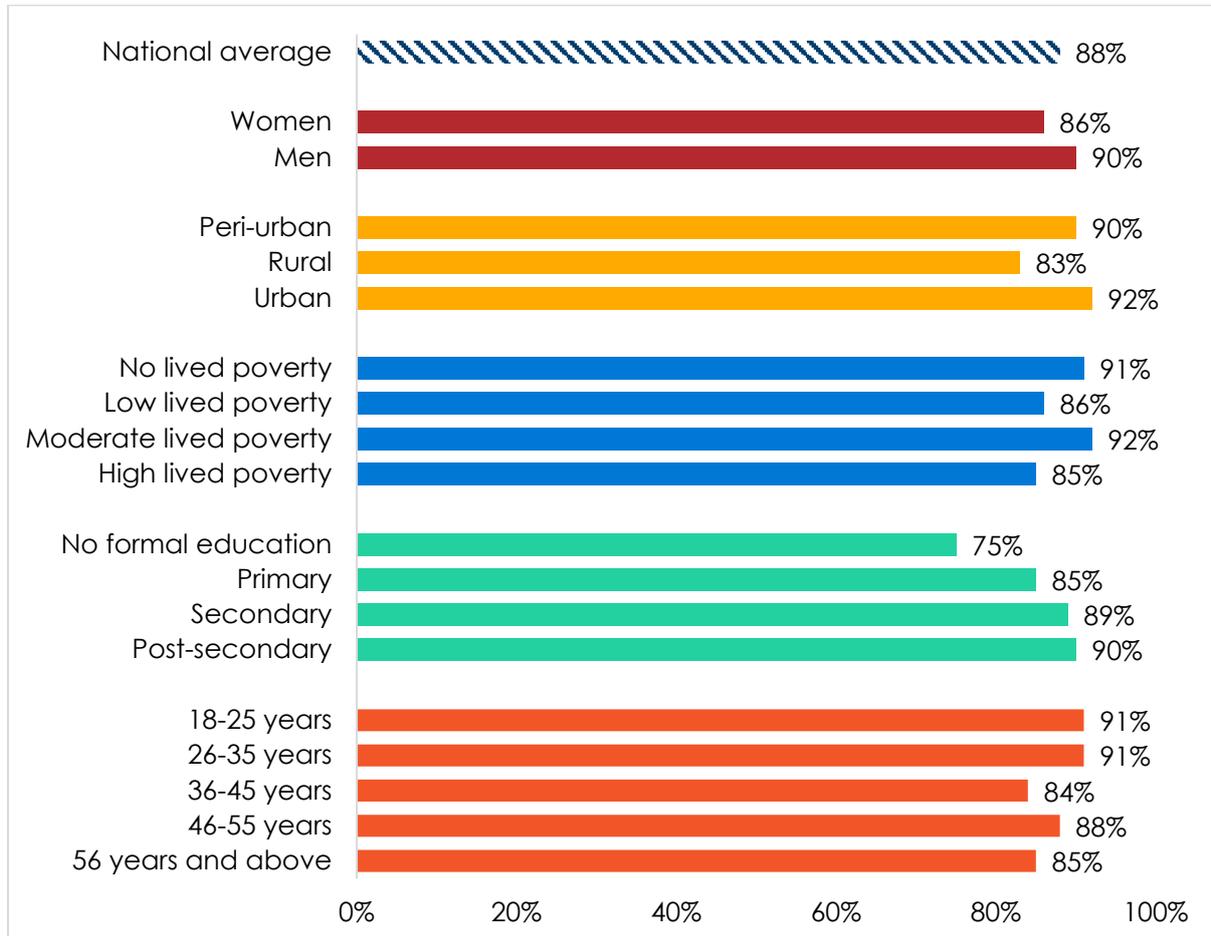
Figure 7: Effects of climate change | Lesotho | 2017-2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Lesotho better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Urban residents (92%) and the highly educated (90%) are more likely to see climate change as making life worse than are rural residents (83%) and the unschooled (75%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



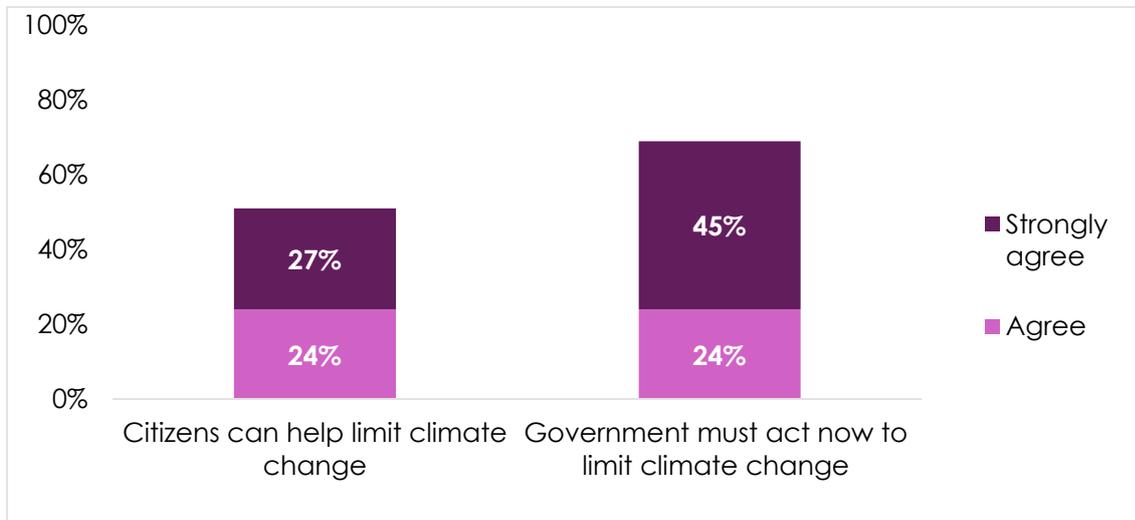
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Lesotho better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Fighting climate change

A majority of Basotho believe that the government and, to a lesser extent, citizens have a role to play in limiting climate change. Half (51%) of respondents who are aware of climate change "agree" or "strongly agree" that citizens can help to curb climate change. And more than two-thirds (69%) want their government to take steps now to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy (Figure 9).

In fact, as far as Basotho are concerned, the government (44%) has the primary responsibility for fighting climate change and reducing its impact. Some survey respondents assign this responsibility primarily to citizens (18%), developed countries (18%), business and industry (9%), and traditional leaders (3%) (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Limiting climate change | Lesotho | 2022



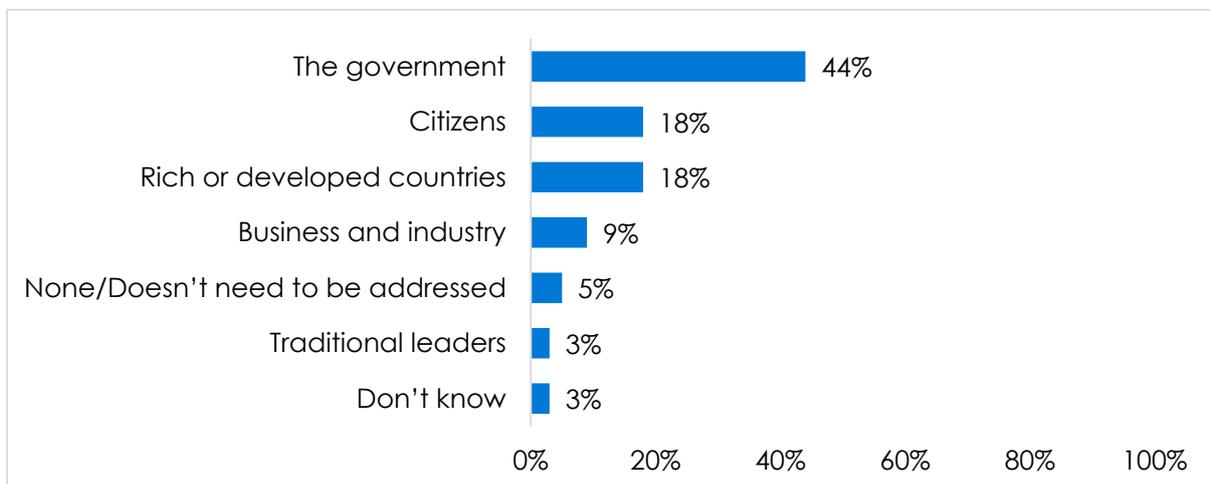
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Basotho can play a role in limiting climate change.

It is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.

(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

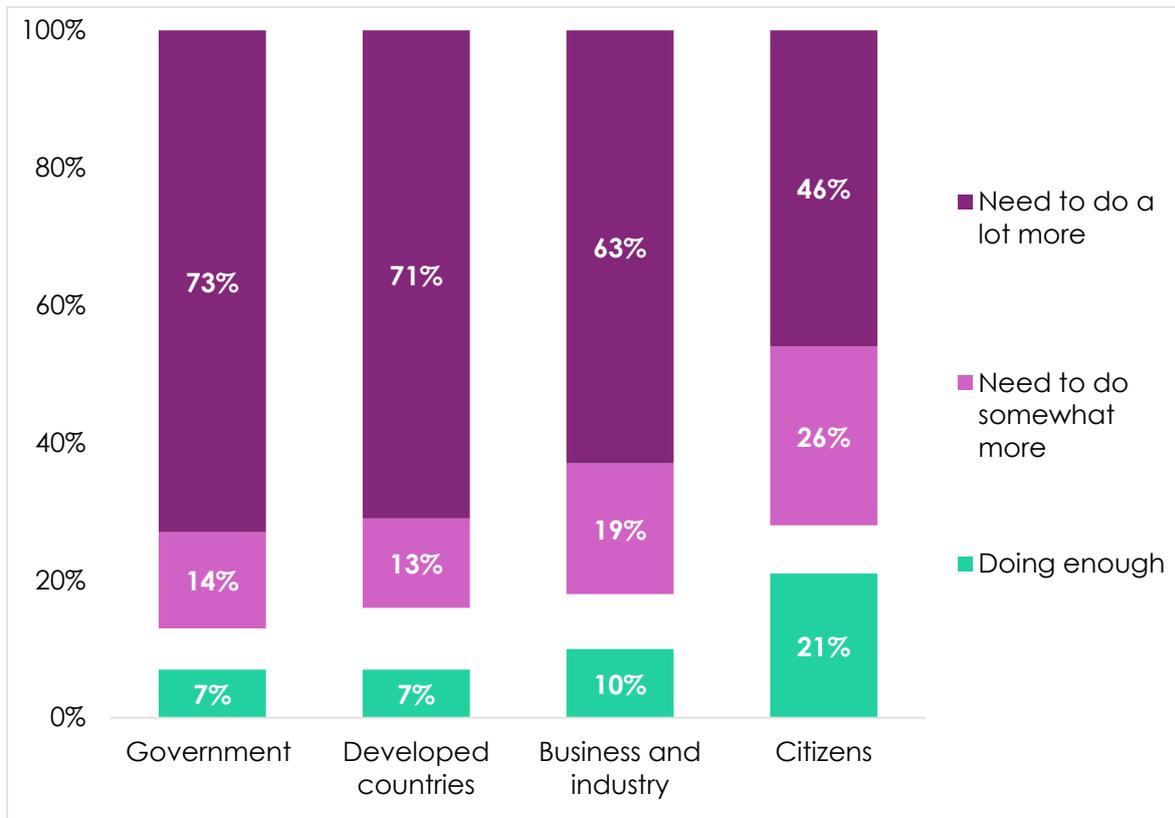
Figure 10: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for trying to limit climate change and reduce its impact? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? Respondents answer with a resounding “no.” Only small minorities say the government (7%), developed countries (7%), business and industry (10%), and citizens (21%) are making enough of an effort to fight climate change (Figure 11). Large majorities believe more needs to be done, including more than seven in 10 who say the government (73%) and developed countries (71%) need to do “a lot more.”

Figure 11: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Lesotho | 2022



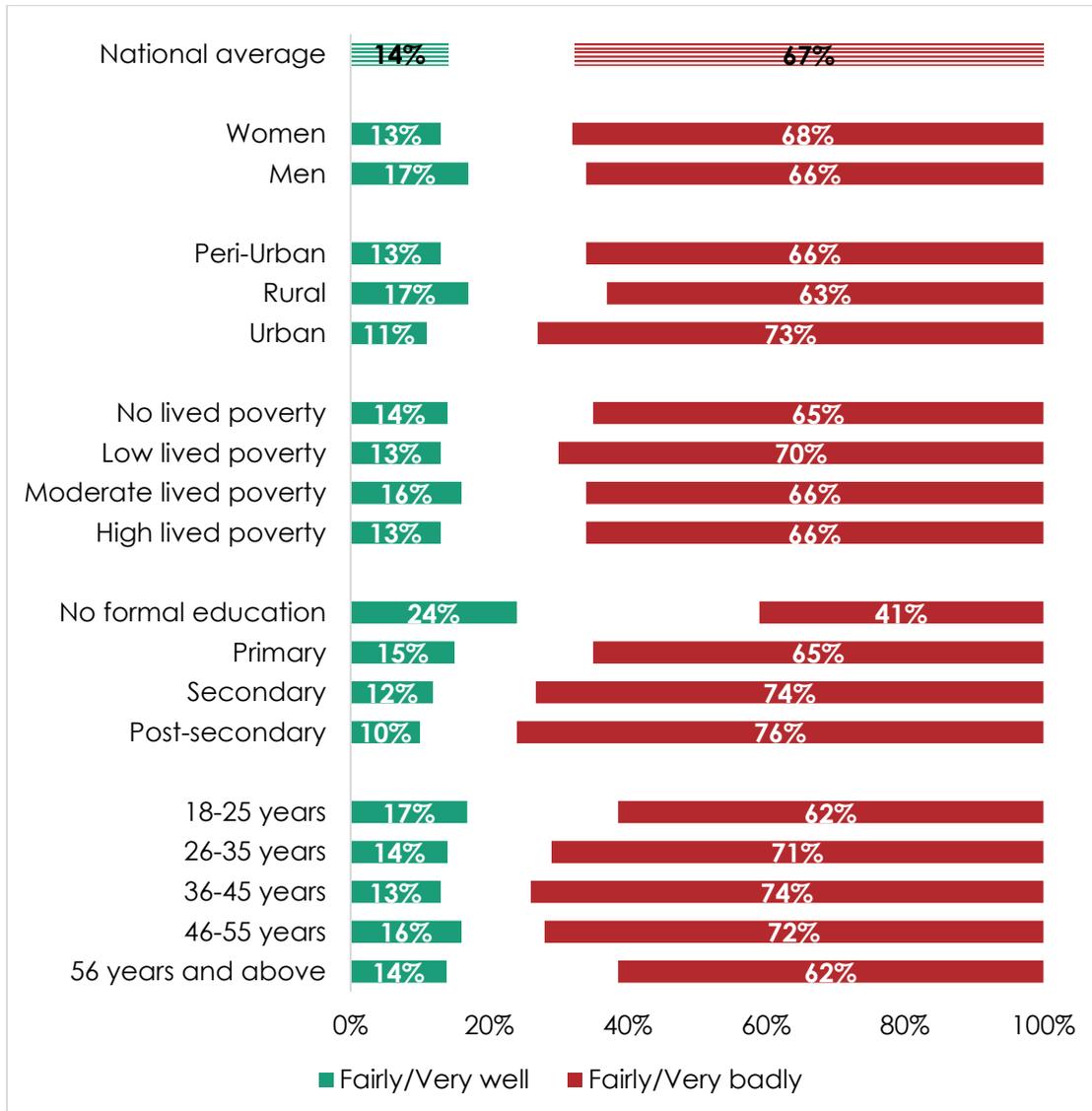
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

When asked to assess how well the government is addressing the problem of climate change, only 14% of all survey respondents describe the government's performance as "fairly" or "very" good, while two-thirds (67%) give the government a failing grade on this issue (Figure 12).

Negative assessments of the government's performance on climate change are particularly common among urban residents (73%), citizens with at least a secondary education (74%-76%), and middle-aged respondents (72%-74%).

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Figure 12: Government performance in handling climate change | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



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: Addressing the problem of climate change?

Conclusion

Basotho who have heard of climate change overwhelmingly call for greater action by the government, developed countries, and business and industry to fight it, even if doing so takes a toll on the economy.

But most Basotho are still unaware of the phenomenon. This calls for intensified efforts to educate the population, whose support will be needed for climate change prevention and mitigation policies to succeed.

References

Kingdom of Lesotho. (2017). National climate change policy. Ministry of Energy and Meteorology.
ND-GAIN. (2021). Notre Dame global adaptation initiative country index.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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