

Basotho want environmental protection but prioritise jobs

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 528 | Libuseng Malephane

Summary

Mining and quarrying are the backbone of Lesotho's economy. The country's diamond mines produce the highest dollar-per-carat value in the world. The mining and quarrying sector's contribution to the gross domestic product grew from 8.7% in 2011 to 16.8% in 2019 before declining to 14.6% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

But large-scale mining can also be a mixed blessing for adjacent communities. A recent study found that environmental pollution and a perceived lack of benefits such as employment were key concerns for communities in diamond-mining areas (Lerotholi, 2021).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of pollution, environmental governance, and natural resource extraction.

In Lesotho, findings show that a majority of citizens consider pollution a serious problem in their community, rating trash disposal and water-source pollution as their most important environmental issues. Most say the government is not doing enough to protect the environment and call for tighter regulation of natural resource extraction activities.

But a majority also believe that the benefits of natural resource extraction, such as jobs, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution. And if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, more than half of citizens want jobs to be given priority.

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

On pollution and environmental governance:

- Nearly six in 10 Basotho (57%) say pollution is a "somewhat serious" (19%) or "very serious" (38%) problem in their community.

- Citizens say trash disposal (cited by 28% of respondents), pollution of water sources (28%), deforestation (14%), and air pollution (12%) are the most important environmental issues in their community.
- Three-quarters (75%) of citizens say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in their community.
- If environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, more than half (55%) of citizens would want jobs to be prioritised.
- More than half (52%) of Basotho say the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean rests with local citizens. Far fewer would defer that responsibility to the national government (28%), traditional leaders (13%), or their local governments (2%).

On natural resource extraction:

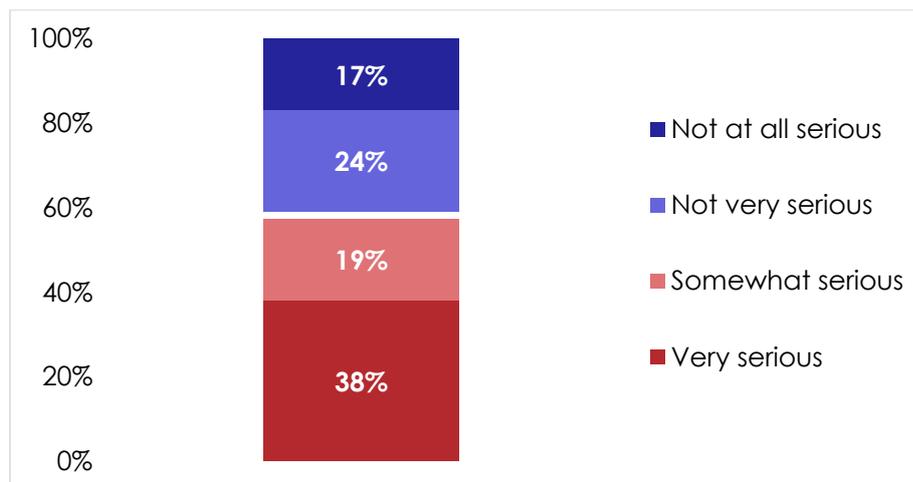
- By a margin of more than 2 to 1, Basotho say the benefits of natural resource extraction, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution.
 - However, a large majority (72%) want the government to regulate natural resource extraction more tightly in order to reduce its negative impact on the environment.

Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

About six in 10 of Basotho consider pollution, such as accumulation of trash or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land, to be a “somewhat serious” (19%) or “very serious” (38%) problem in their community (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Extent of pollution in the community | Lesotho | 2022

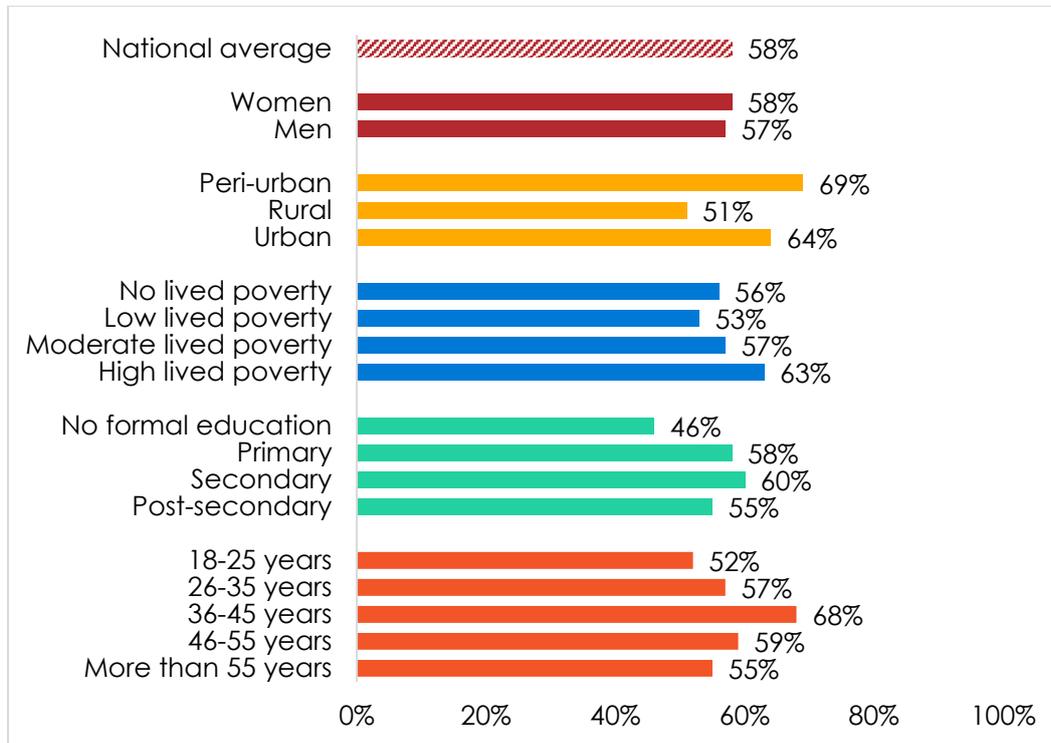


Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community?

Urban (64%) and peri-urban (69%) residents are more concerned about pollution than rural residents (51%) (Figure 2). Concerns about pollution also increase with one's experience of

poverty, ranging from 53% among those with low lived poverty to 63% among those with high lived poverty. Citizens with at least primary schooling (55%-60%) are more likely than those with no formal education (46%) to see pollution as a major problem.

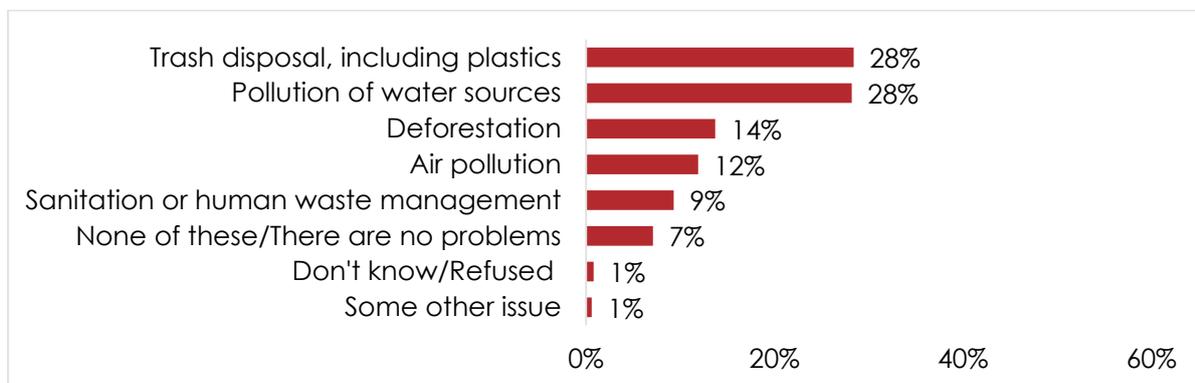
Figure 2: Pollution is a serious problem in the community | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2021



Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

Basotho rank trash disposal (28%) and the pollution of water sources (28%) as the most important environmental issues in their community, followed by deforestation (14%) and air pollution (12%) (Figure 3). About one in 10 cite sanitation (9%).

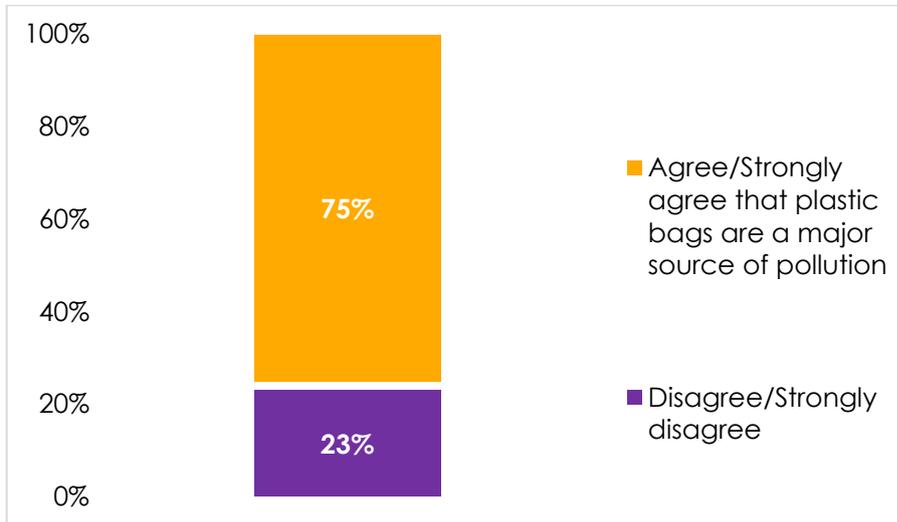
Figure 3: Most important environmental issue in the community | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following is the most important environmental issue in your community today?

Fully three-quarters (75%) of citizens “agree” or “strongly agree” that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Lesotho (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Are plastic bags a major source of pollution? | Lesotho | 2022



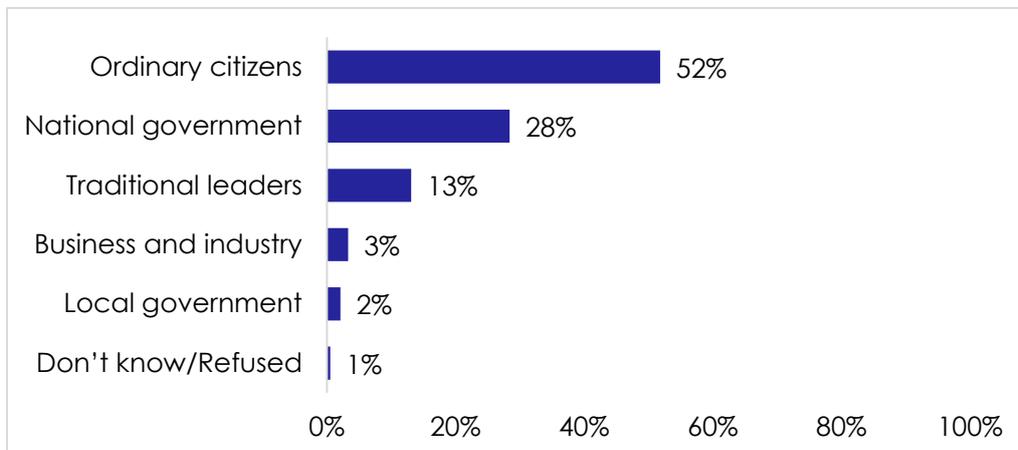
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country?

Protecting the environment

Actions to reduce pollution can range from making small every-day adjustments to once-in-a-generation game-changers – from shifting (back) to reusable shopping bags to dismantling a coal-burning industry.

For Basotho, protecting the environment starts at home: More than half (52%) of respondents say ordinary citizens have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean (Figure 5). Only 28% would instead place that responsibility on the national government, and even fewer would look to traditional leaders (13%), to business and industry (3%), and to the local government (2%).

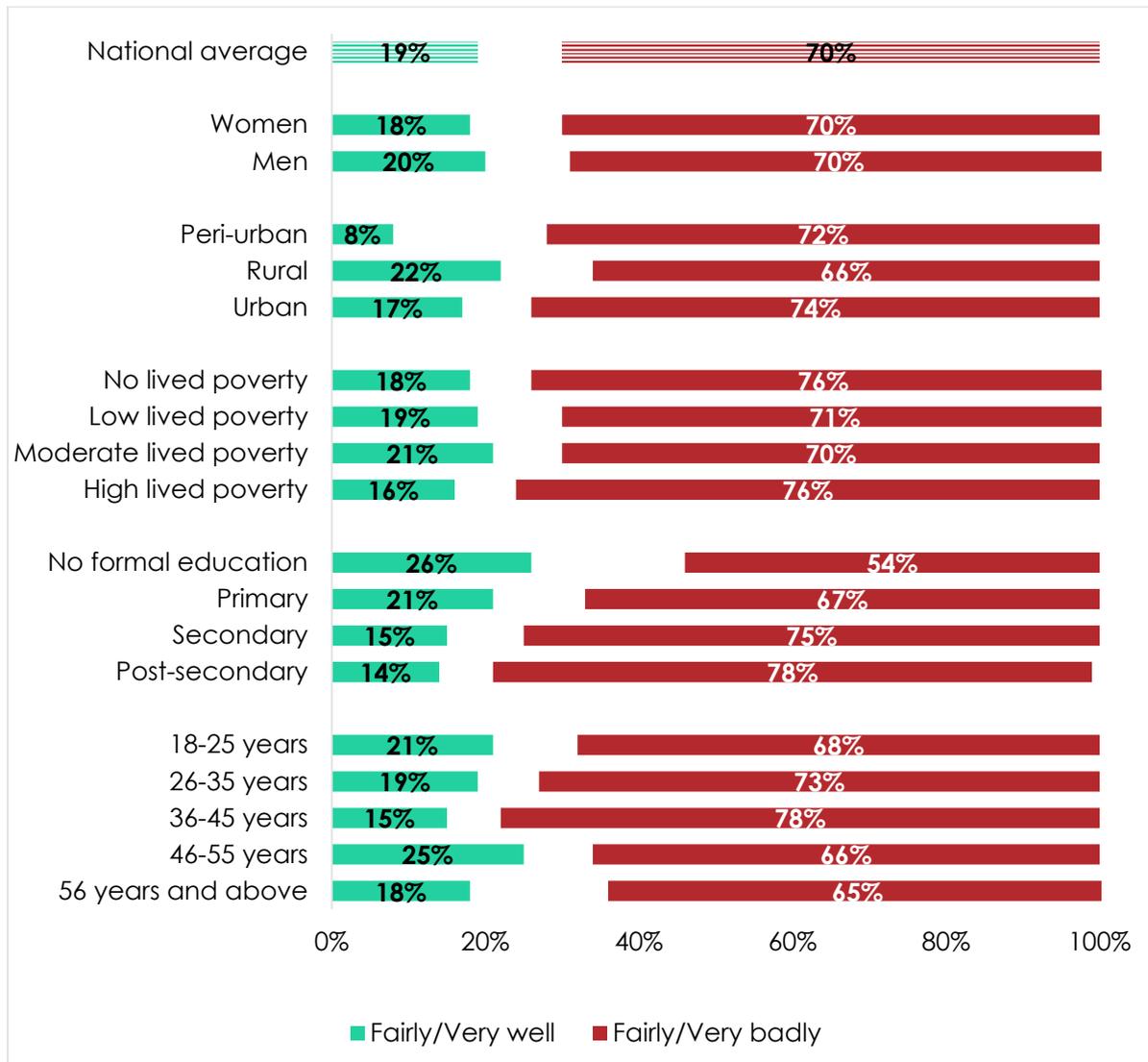
Figure 5: Who should be responsible for reducing environmental pollution? | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping your community clean?

Only about one in five citizens (19%) think the government is doing a good job of reducing pollution and protecting the environment, while seven in 10 (70%) rate the government's efforts poorly (Figure 6). Negative ratings are more common among urban than rural residents (74% vs. 66%) and increase with respondents' level of education (from 54% among those with no formal education to 78% among those with post-secondary qualifications).

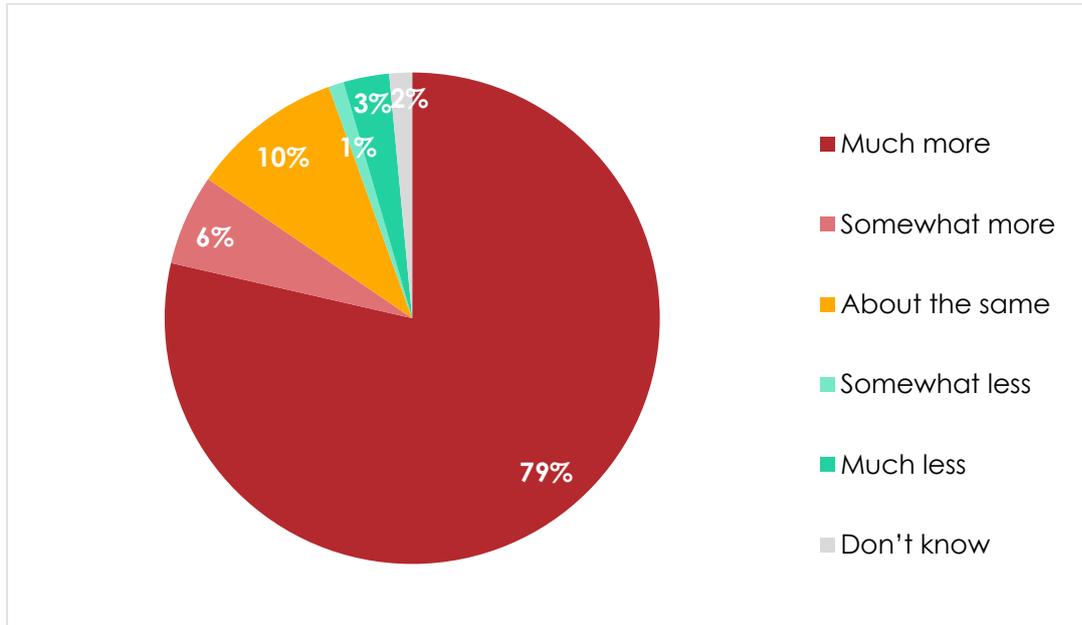
Figure 6: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



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: Reducing pollution and protecting the environment?

More than four in five Basotho (85%) believe that the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 79% who want the government to do "much more" (Figure 7). One in 10 (10%) want the government to keep doing what it is currently doing, while only 4% think it should do less to protect the environment.

Figure 7: Should government do more to limit pollution? | Lesotho | 2022



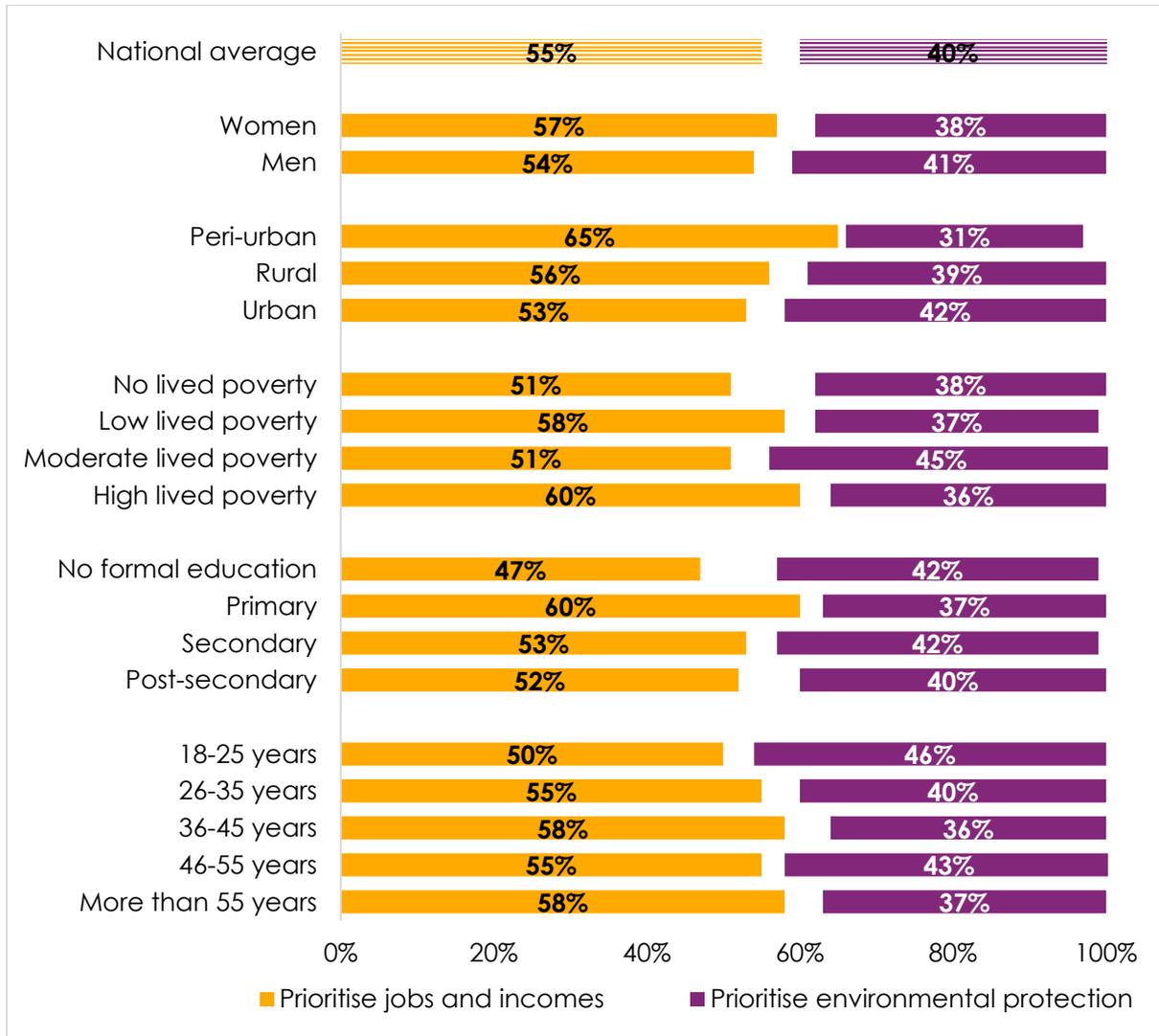
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, should our government be doing more or less than it is currently doing to limit pollution and protect the environment in this country?*

However, if environmental-protection policies threaten livelihoods, more than half (55%) of respondents say reducing pollution or other environmental damage must take a back seat to job and income creation. Four in 10 (40%) would prioritise protecting the environment, “even if this means there will be fewer jobs or there will be other disruptions to our daily lives” (Figure 8).

Even though the poorest respondents are most likely to consider pollution a serious problem (as shown in Figure 2), they are also more likely than well-off citizens to prioritise job creation over environmental protection (60% vs. 51%). And economic issues outrank environmental protection for 65% of peri-urban residents, vs. 53% of urban and 56% of rural residents.

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Figure 8: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if that means increasing pollution or other environmental damage.
 Statement 2: The government should focus more on preventing pollution and protecting the environment, even if this means there will be fewer jobs or there will be other disruptions to our daily lives.
 (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

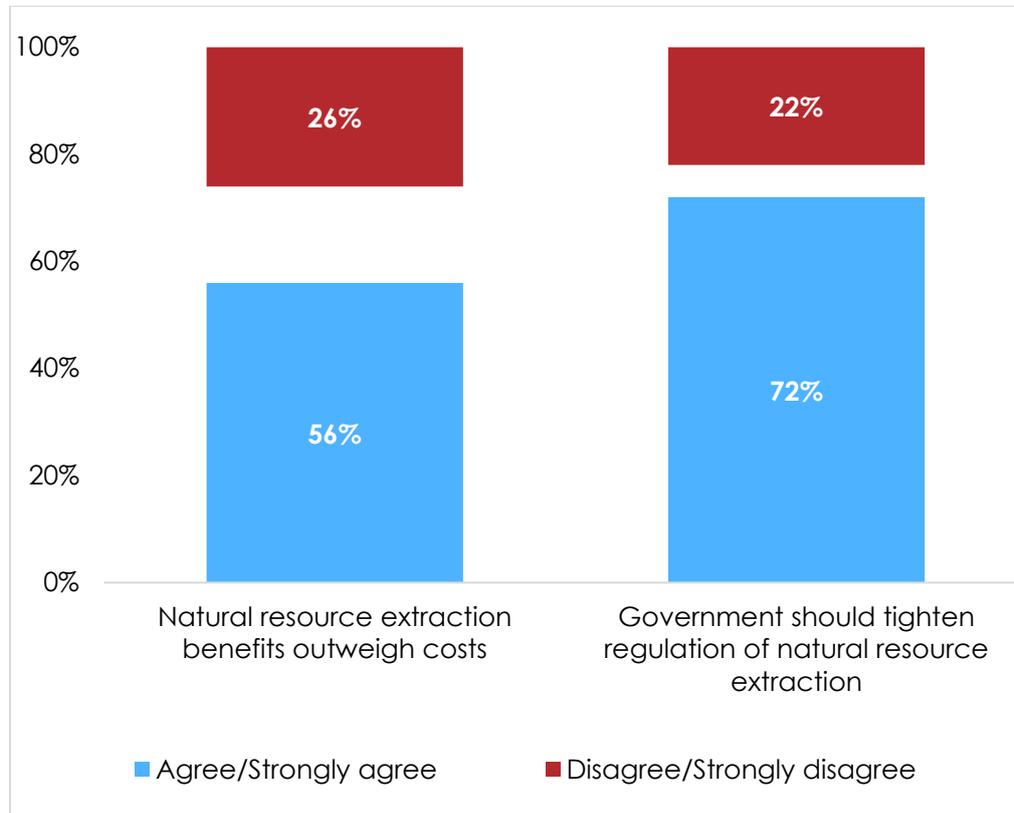
Natural resource extraction

In Lesotho, quarrying and diamond mining are an important source of employment. But resource extraction can also be a major source of local-level environmental damage.

A majority (56%) of Basotho “agree” or “strongly agree” that overall, the benefits that natural resource extraction brings to communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution. Fewer than half as many (26%) disagree with this assessment (Figure 9).

Nevertheless, in order to reduce the negative impacts of natural resource extraction on the environment, a large majority (72%) of citizens want the government to regulate the industry more tightly.

Figure 9: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits | Lesotho | 2022

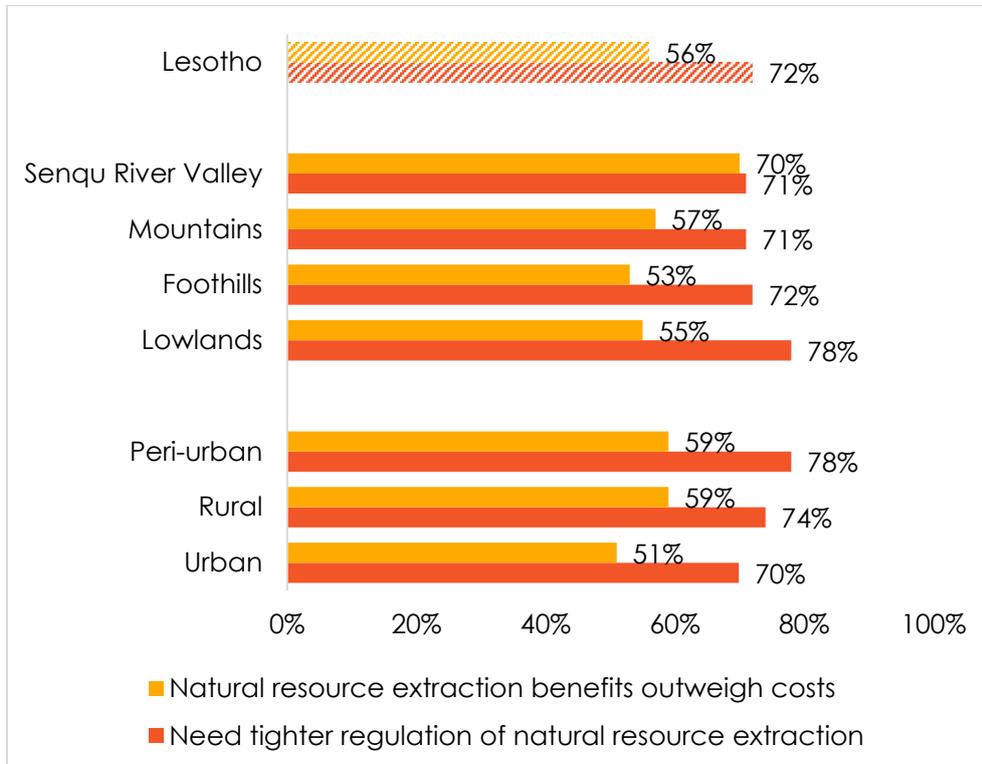


Respondents were asked: Natural resource extraction such as mining, oil drilling, or wood harvesting can have benefits, such as jobs and revenue. But it can also pose problems for nearby communities, such as pollution or deforestation. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution.
 In this country, natural resource extraction should be more tightly regulated by government to reduce the negative impacts on the environment.

Residents in the Senqu River Valley rate the benefits of natural resource extraction more highly than do their counterparts in other ecological zones (70% vs. 53%-57%). So do rural and peri-urban residents (59%) compared to their urban counterparts (51%) (Figure 10).

Support for tighter government regulation is strongest in the lowlands (78%) and in peri-urban communities (78%).

Figure 10: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits | by location | Lesotho
 | 2022



Respondents were asked: Natural resource extraction such as mining, oil drilling, or wood harvesting can have benefits, such as jobs and revenue. But it can also pose problems for nearby communities, such as pollution or deforestation. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution.

In this country, natural resource extraction should be more tightly regulated by government to reduce the negative impacts on the environment.

Conclusion

Basotho recognise pollution and environmental protection as issues requiring urgent attention from citizens themselves and the government. Due to high levels of poverty and unemployment, citizens are not ready to sacrifice jobs and incomes in favour of maintaining the integrity of the environment. Nonetheless, these findings indicate that Basotho want the government to put regulations in place to ensure that natural resource extraction is done in an environmentally responsible manner.

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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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