



Dispatch No. 547 | 6 September 2022

# Climate change worsens life in Uganda; citizens want collective action to mitigate it

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 547 | Makanga Ronald Kakumba**

## Summary

Like many countries around the world, Uganda is experiencing significant impacts of climate change. Weather patterns are changing, and water levels in several water bodies are dropping. Extreme weather events such as floods, landslides, and prolonged drought are becoming more frequent in the country, threatening people's livelihoods (Irish Aid, 2016).

Landslides in the Busigu sub-region have reportedly killed at least 1,000 people over the past decade and left thousands of families displaced and homeless (Monitor, 2019). Less than a month ago, floods in the Eastern region, triggered by heavy rainfall, claimed the lives of at least 30 people, left 400,000 without access to clean water, and destroyed more than 2,000 hectares of crops (Relief Web, 2022; Guardian, 2022).

More than 900 people have died of hunger this year in the Karamoja sub-region of northeastern Uganda, mostly as a result of prolonged drought. In this region, eight in every 10 households are food-insecure, putting about 23,000 children at high risk of severe acute malnutrition (Monitor, 2022).

Uganda's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture, making the country highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In Afrobarometer's 2016/2018 surveys, 85% of Ugandans – more than in any of the other 33 countries that were surveyed – said climate conditions for agricultural production in their area had gotten worse over the previous decade (Selormey, Dome, Osse, & Logan, 2019).

According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2021), Uganda ranks as the 13<sup>th</sup>-most-vulnerable country in the world to climate change and 160<sup>th</sup> out of 192 nations in readiness to confront the threat.

The government of Uganda has committed itself to the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, and has integrated climate-change interventions in its Vision 2040 and five-year National Development Plan (Ministry of Water and Environment, 2015; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2018). But building climate resilience will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders as well as substantial funding (Busby, Smith, White, & Strange, 2012).

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that Ugandans who are aware of climate change are solidly behind government action to address the crisis, even at significant economic cost. They see addressing climate change as a collective responsibility, and they want greater engagement on the issue by the government, business and industry, developed nations, and ordinary citizens.

Overwhelmingly, Ugandans familiar with climate change say it is making life in their country worse, especially in the Karamoja and Lango sub-regions. But almost half of Ugandans still haven't heard of climate change.

## Afrobarometer surveys

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

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans between 7 and 25 January 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> Afrobarometer survey in Uganda since 1999.

## Key findings

- Almost six in 10 Ugandans (57%) say droughts have become more severe over the past 10 years; only half as many (28%) say the same about floods.
- More than half (56%) of Ugandans have heard of climate change. Among those who are aware of climate change:
  - More than eight in 10 (84%) say it is making life in Uganda worse.
  - More than three-fourths (78%) believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change (71%).
  - Eight in 10 (80%) 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 (4%), business and industry (5%), ordinary citizens (9%), and developed countries (11%) to fight climate change.
  - Ugandans assign primary responsibility for limiting climate change to the government (46%) and to ordinary citizens (43%).
- Six in 10 (59%) say the government is doing a poor job of addressing climate change.

## Severity of extreme weather conditions

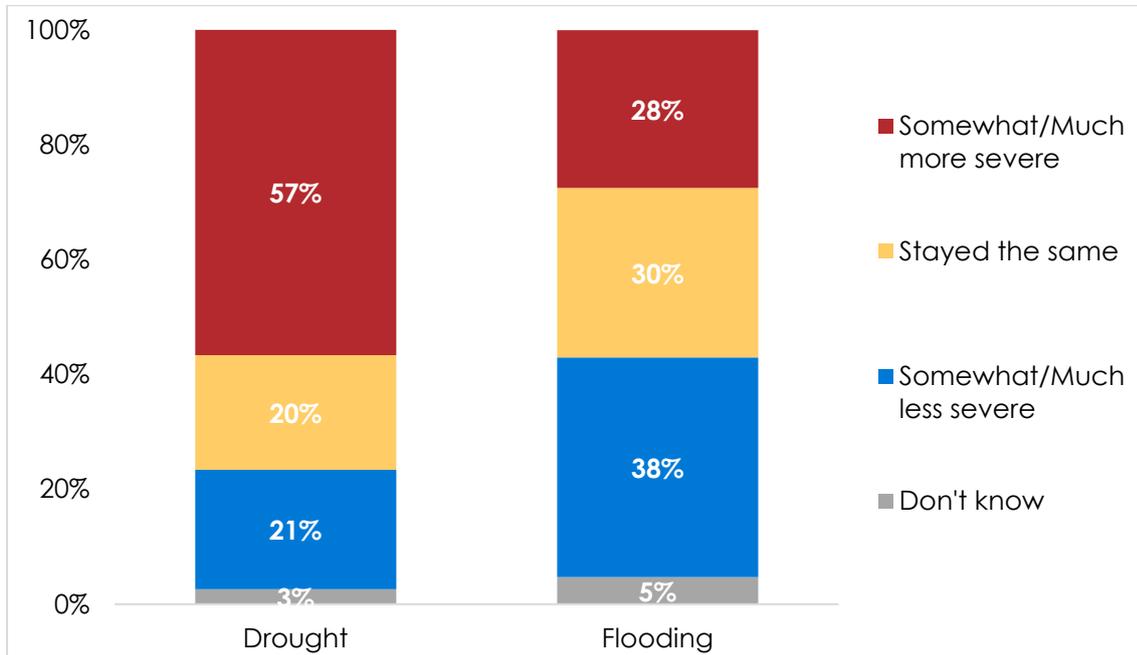
Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions. Almost six in 10 Ugandans (57%) say droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their region over the past 10 years. Two in 10 (21%) say droughts have become less severe, and about the same proportion (20%) report no change (Figure 1).

In contrast, a plurality (38%) of respondents say that the severity of floods has *decreased*, while 28% say they have gotten worse.

Compared to survey findings in 2017, the proportion of Ugandans who say drought has gotten more severe has dropped by 30 percentage points, from 87% to 57% (Figure 2).

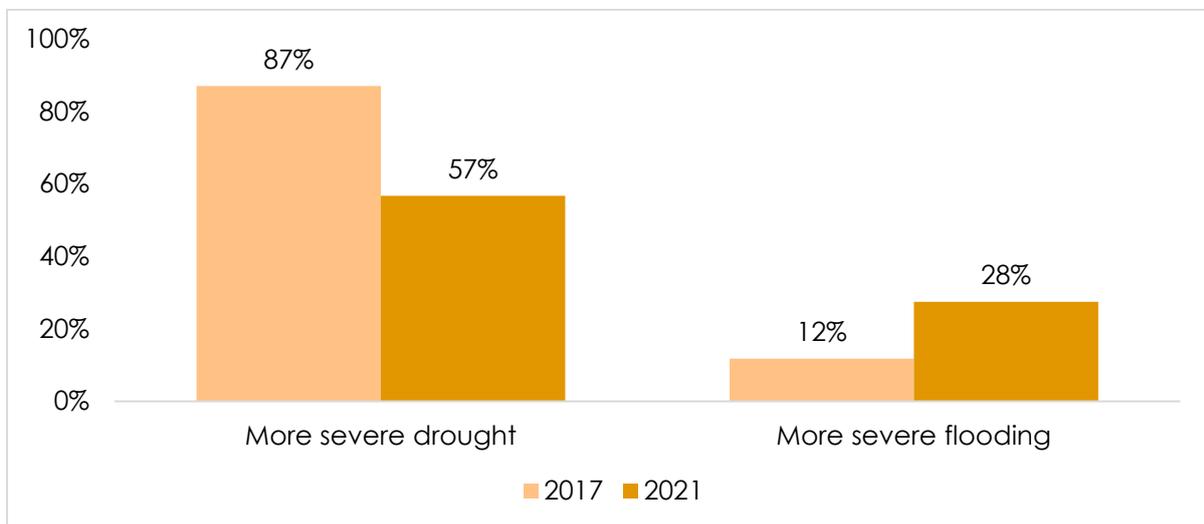
In contrast, the share of citizens who report more severe flooding has more than doubled since 2017 (12%).

**Figure 1: Severity of droughts and floods | Uganda | 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: Drought? Flooding? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

**Figure 2: Severity of droughts and floods | Uganda | 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: Drought? Flooding? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

Rural residents are more likely than urban residents to report increasingly severe droughts (59% vs. 49%), perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of the effects of a lack of rainfall in more agricultural areas (Figure 3).

Geographically, the Karamoja sub-region (94%) stands out as most affected by increasingly severe drought, followed by the Lango (86%), Acholi (73%), and Eastern (71%) sub-regions.

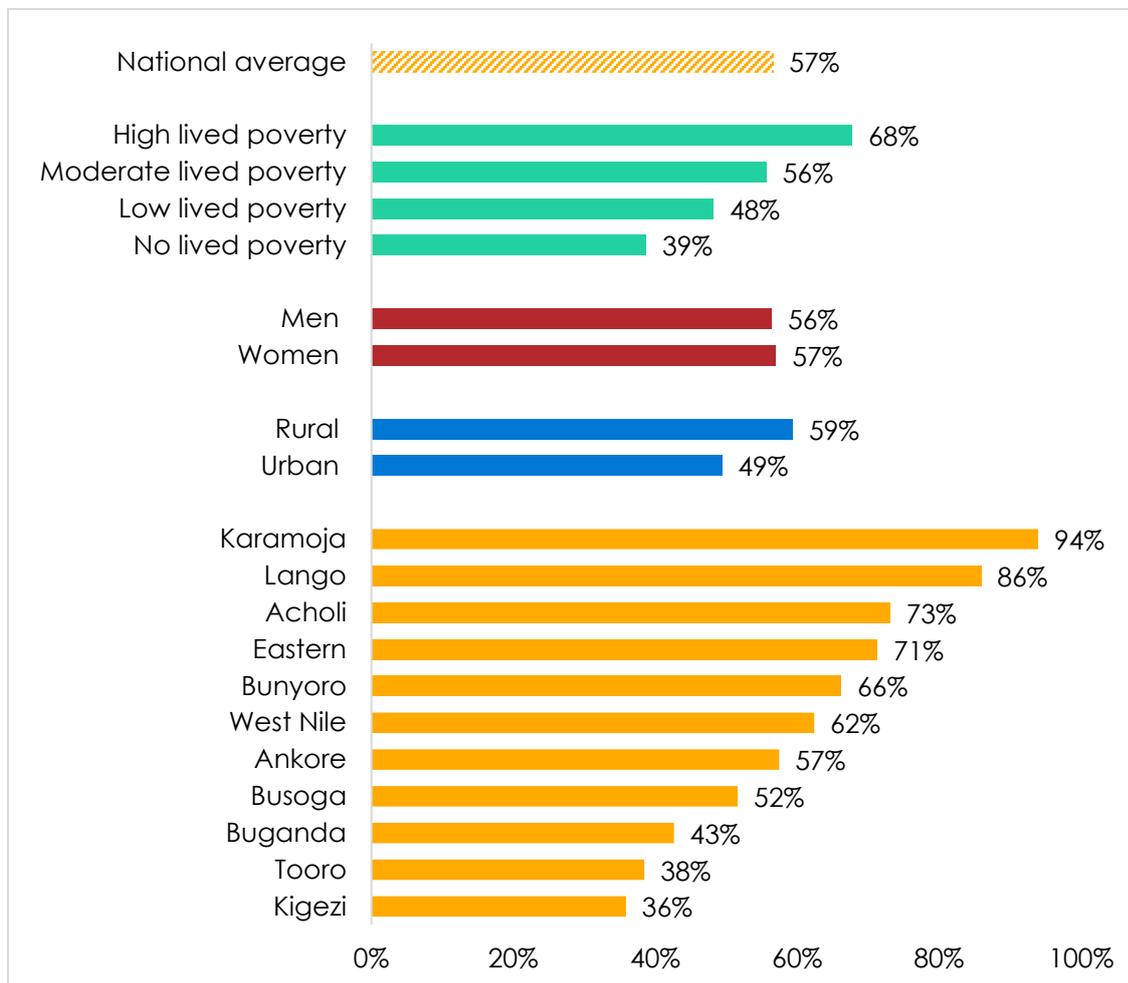
Only about four in 10 residents in the Buganda (43%), Tooro (38%), and Kigezi (36%) sub-regions report worsening drought.

These findings are in line with other reports that show Karamoja as the region most vulnerable to drought and worst hit by climate change (Africa Farmers Media Centre, 2016; USAID, 2017; Monitor, 2021).

Perceptions of more severe drought vary widely by respondents' economic status, ranging from 39% of well-off citizens to 68% of those experiencing high "lived poverty."<sup>1</sup>

With regard to more severe flooding, the patterns are quite different across the sub-regions. Worsening floods are of greatest concern to citizens in West Nile (52%) and Bunyoro (50%), while they are of least concern in Buganda (14%) and Busoga (12%) (Figure 4).

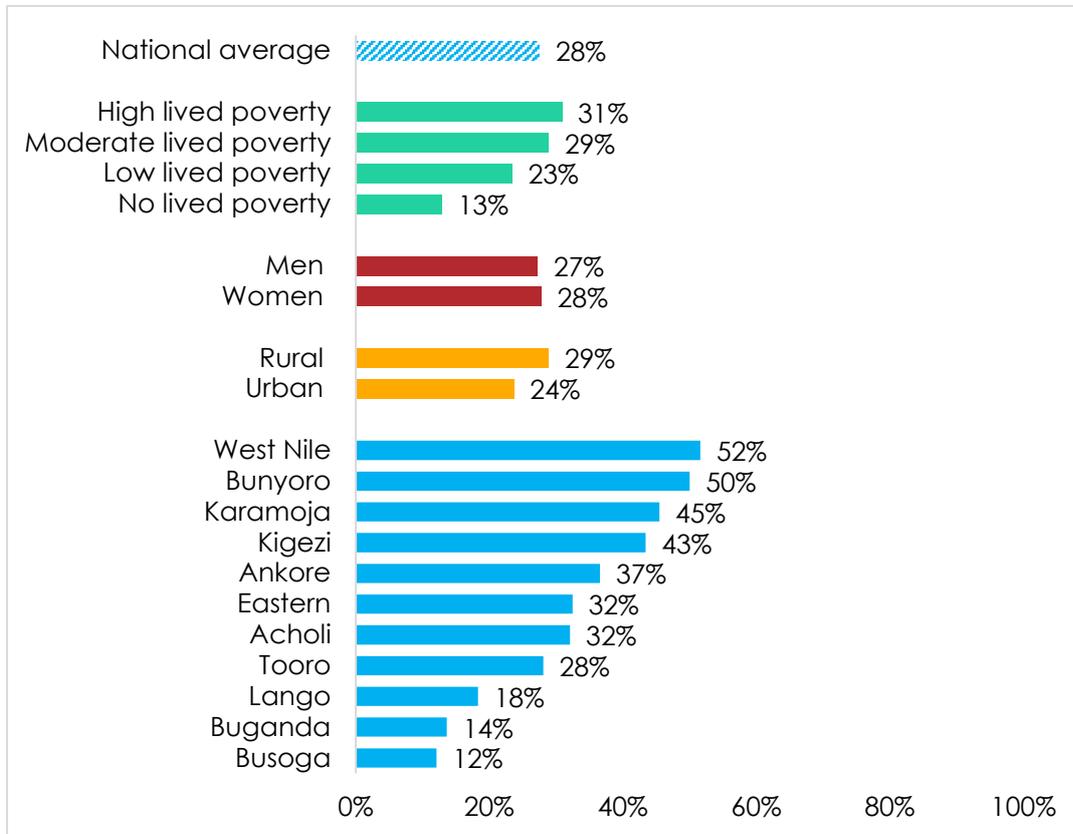
**Figure 3: More severe droughts** | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



**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: Drought? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

**Figure 4: More severe floods** | by demographic group | Uganda | 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: Flooding? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

## Climate change

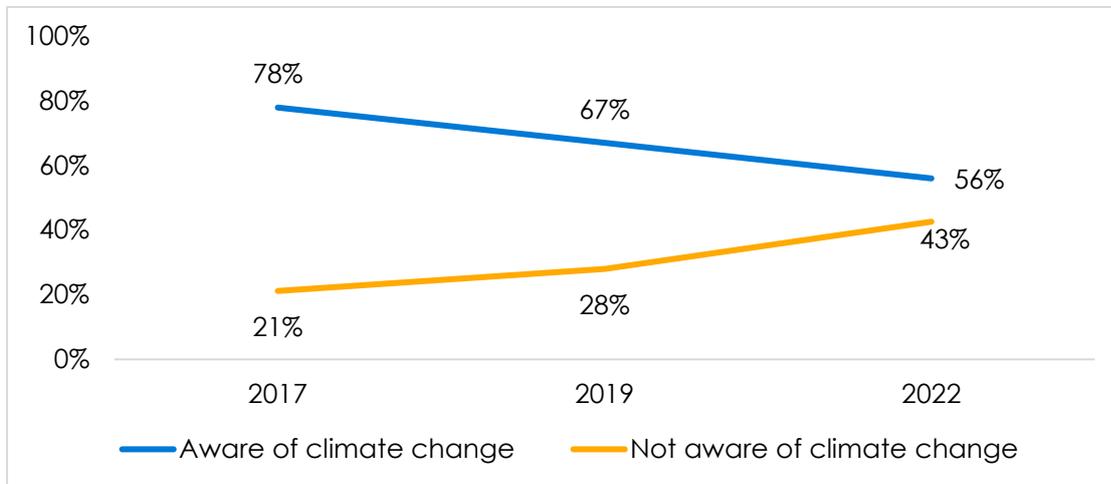
### Awareness of climate change

Lack of awareness is a major obstacle to climate change adaptation in developing countries (Shahid & Piracha, 2016). In Uganda, 56% of citizens say they have heard of climate change (Figure 5). This reflects a large decline from 78% in 2017, perhaps reflecting a still-emerging understanding of climate change, with awareness that may fluctuate in response to whether media attention is focused on extreme weather events or other topics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although worsening drought is widely felt in the Karamoja and Acholi sub-regions, relatively few residents in these areas (50% and 37%, respectively) are aware of climate change (Figure 6). In the Lango and Eastern sub-regions, both experience of increasing drought and awareness of climate change (79% and 59%, respectively) are relatively high.

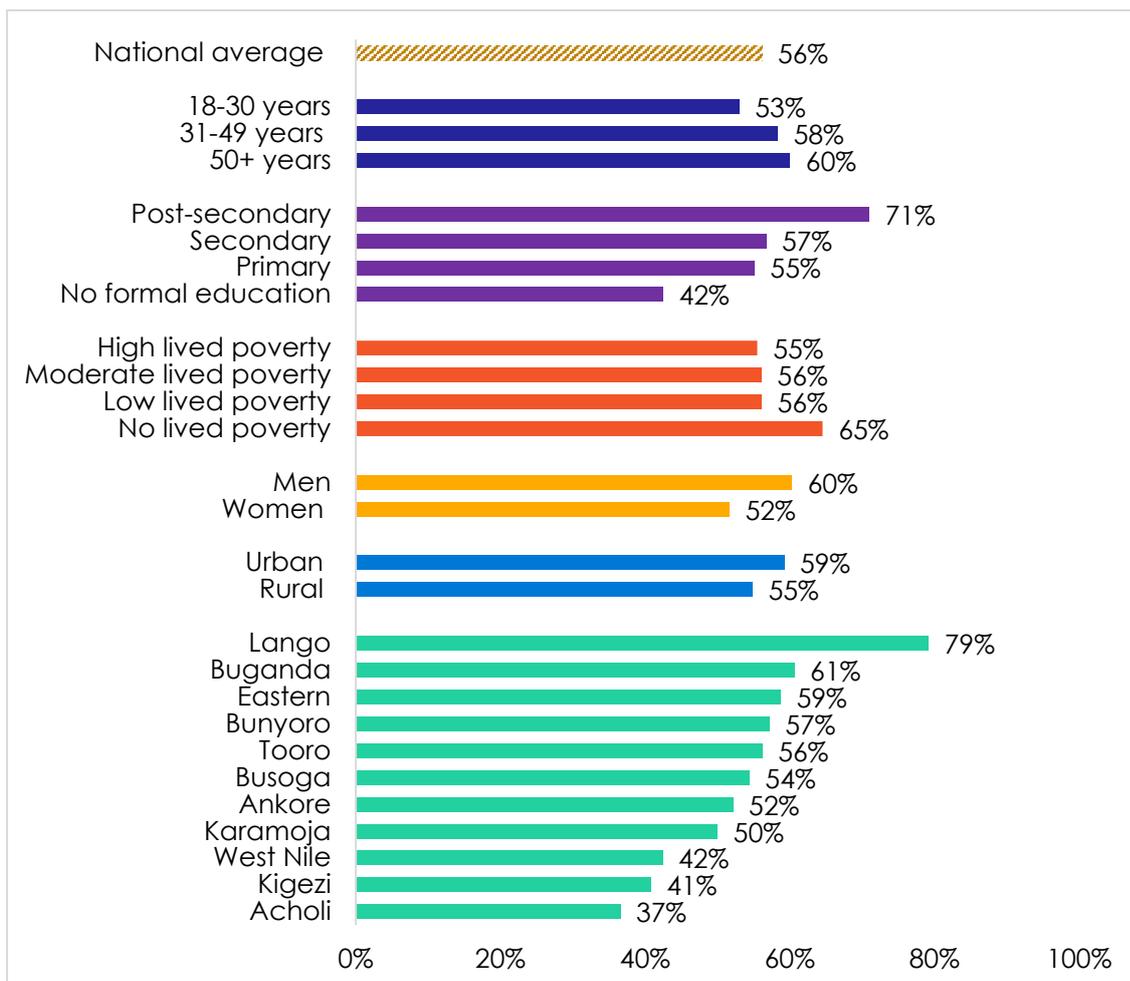
Economically well-off citizens (65%) are more likely to be familiar with the term "climate change" than those experiencing lived poverty (55%-56%). As expected, awareness increases with an individual's level of education, with the most educated respondents (71%) far more likely to have heard of climate change than the uneducated (42%). More men (60%) than women (52%) are aware of the concept. Awareness of climate change increases with age, ranging from 53% of those aged 18-30 to 60% of those in the 50-and-above category.

**Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | Uganda | 2017-2022**



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

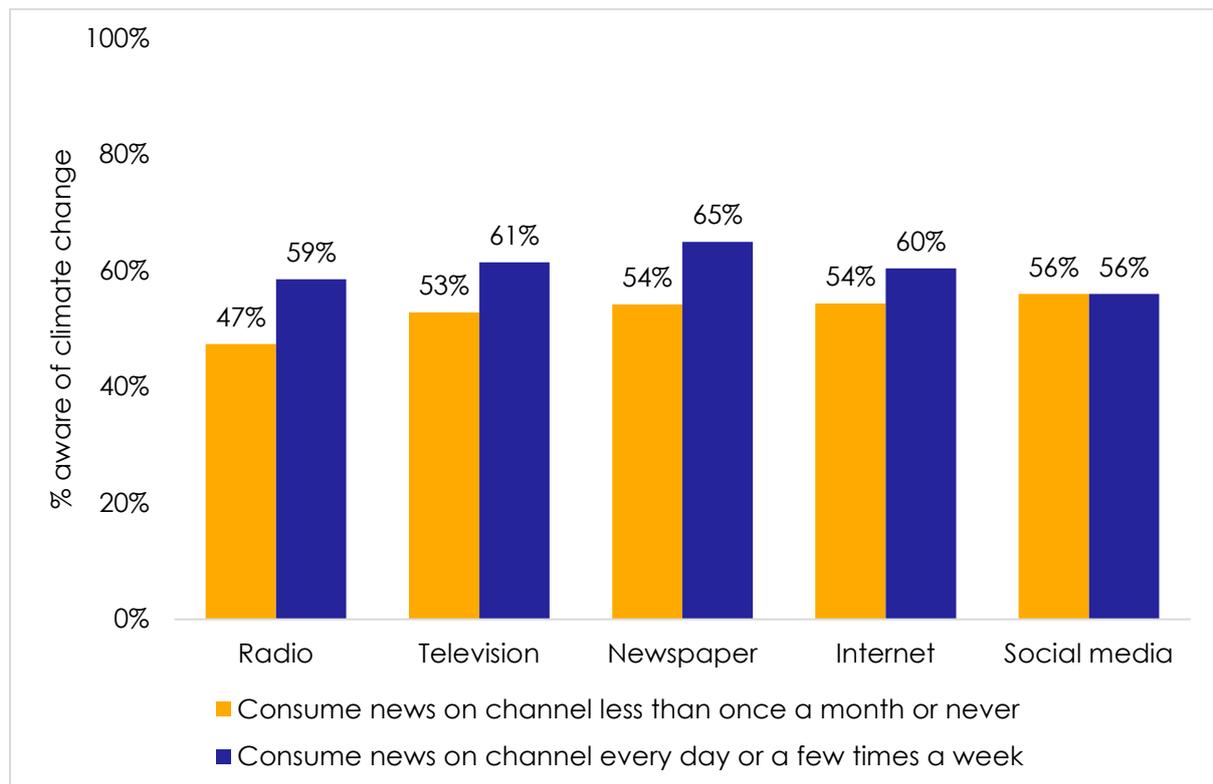
**Figure 6: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**



**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 increases with respondents' consumption of news via most media platforms. Among those who never or seldom (less than once a month) get news from the radio, television, the Internet, or newspapers, 47%-54% have heard of climate change (Figure 7). But awareness of climate change is significantly higher among respondents who frequently get news from newspapers (65%), television (61%), the Internet (60%), and radio (59%). Social media is an exception, showing no difference between frequent users and non-users (both 56%).

**Figure 7: Awareness of climate change** | by news media consumption | Uganda | 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")

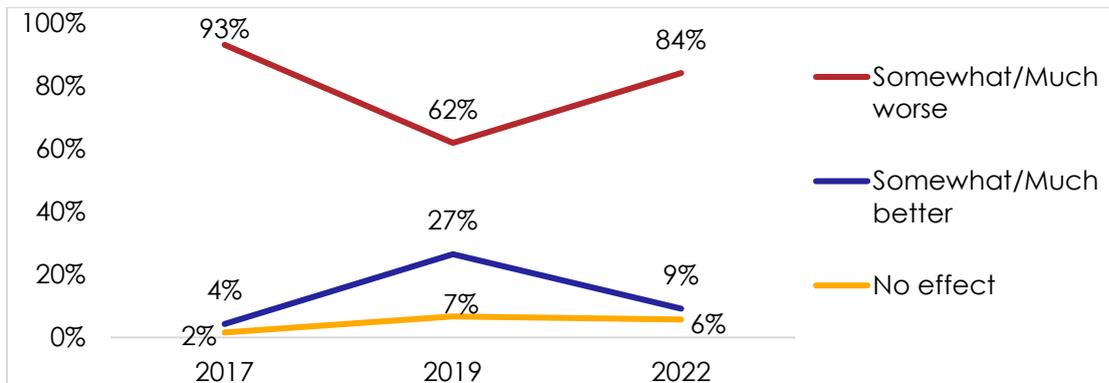
### Effects of climate change

Among citizens who are aware of climate change, more than eight in 10 (84%) say it is making life in Uganda "somewhat worse" (30%) or "much worse" (54%) (Figure 8). Perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change increased sharply between 2019 (62%) and the most recent survey, rebounding from a significant drop between 2017 and 2019.

Like increasing drought, the negative impact of climate change is most widely felt in the Karamoja (94%) and Lango (93%) sub-regions (Figure 9). Older citizens (89%) are more likely to report negative effects than younger respondents (82%-83%).

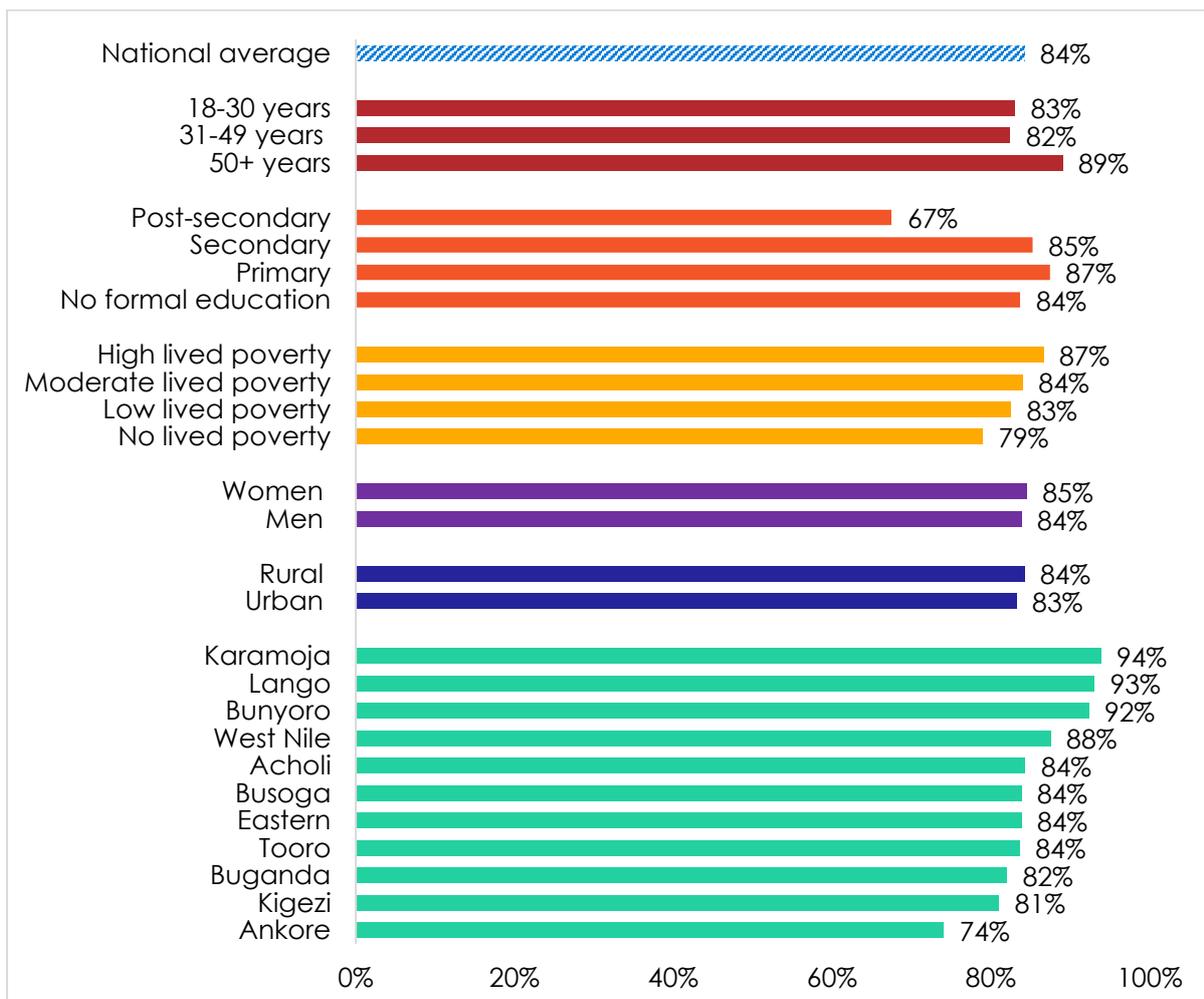
The poorest citizens (87%) are more likely to feel the adverse effects of climate change than the economically well-off (79%). Individuals with post-secondary education (67%) are far less likely to feel the negative impacts of climate change than their counterparts (84%-87%).

**Figure 8: Effect of climate change | Uganda | 2017-2022**



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

**Figure 9: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**



**Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked:** Do you think climate change is making life in Uganda 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.)

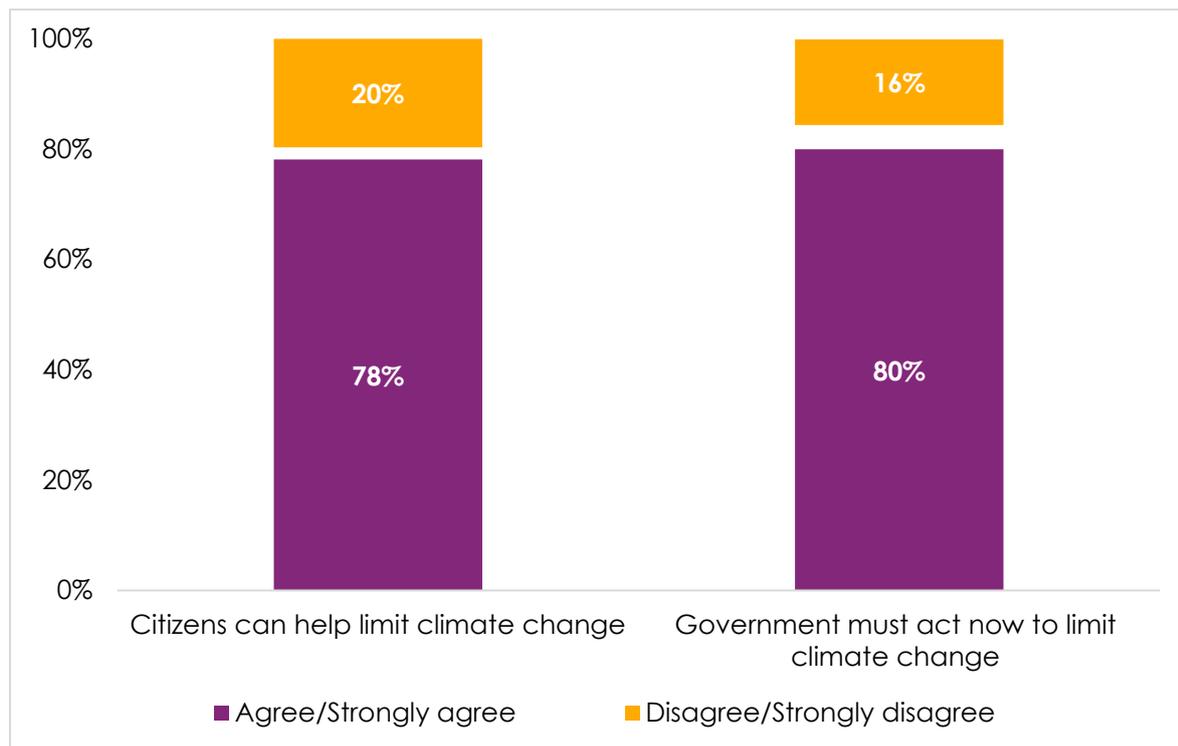
## Who is responsible for addressing climate change?

For Ugandans, addressing climate change is a collective responsibility. About eight in 10 respondents who are aware of climate change (78%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that citizens can help curb climate change (Figure 10). And a similar proportion (80%) 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.

In fact, in Ugandans' eyes, the government (46%) and ordinary people (43%) share primary responsibility for fighting climate change and reducing its impact. Very few survey respondents assign this responsibility to business and industry (3%), developed countries (2%), and traditional leaders (2%) (Figure 11).

Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? Respondents answer with a resounding “No.” Only small minorities say the government (4%), business and industry (5%), citizens (9%), and developed countries (11%) are making enough of an effort to fight climate change (Figure 12). Large majorities believe more needs to be done, including 79% who say the government needs to do “a lot more.”

**Figure 10: Limiting climate change | Uganda | 2022**



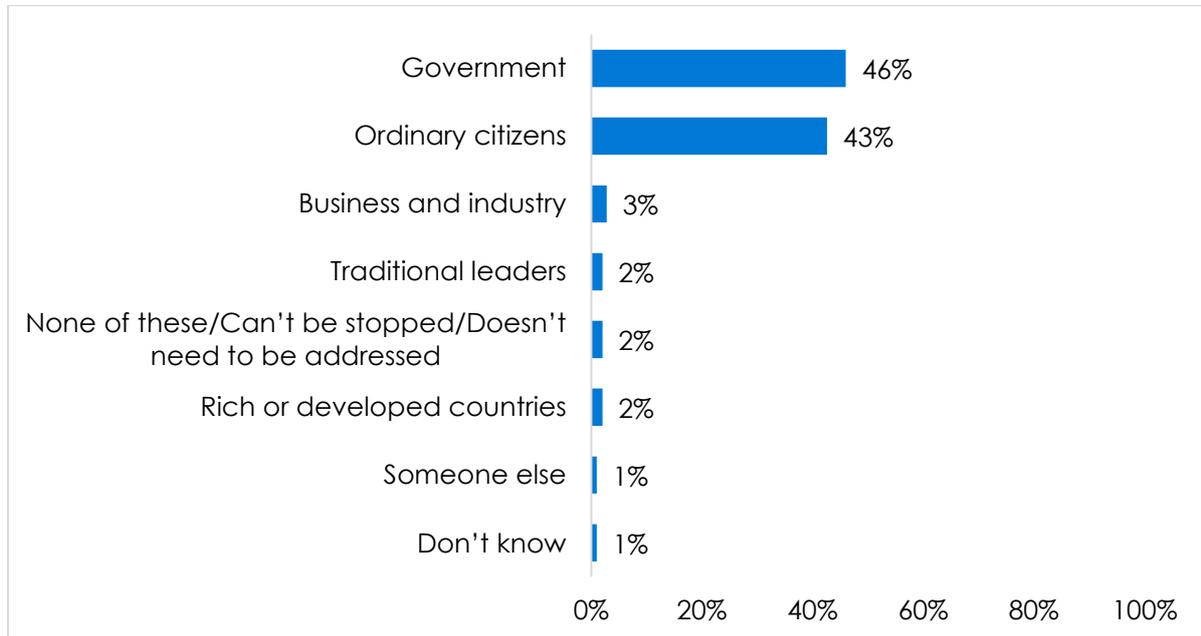
**Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Ugandans 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?

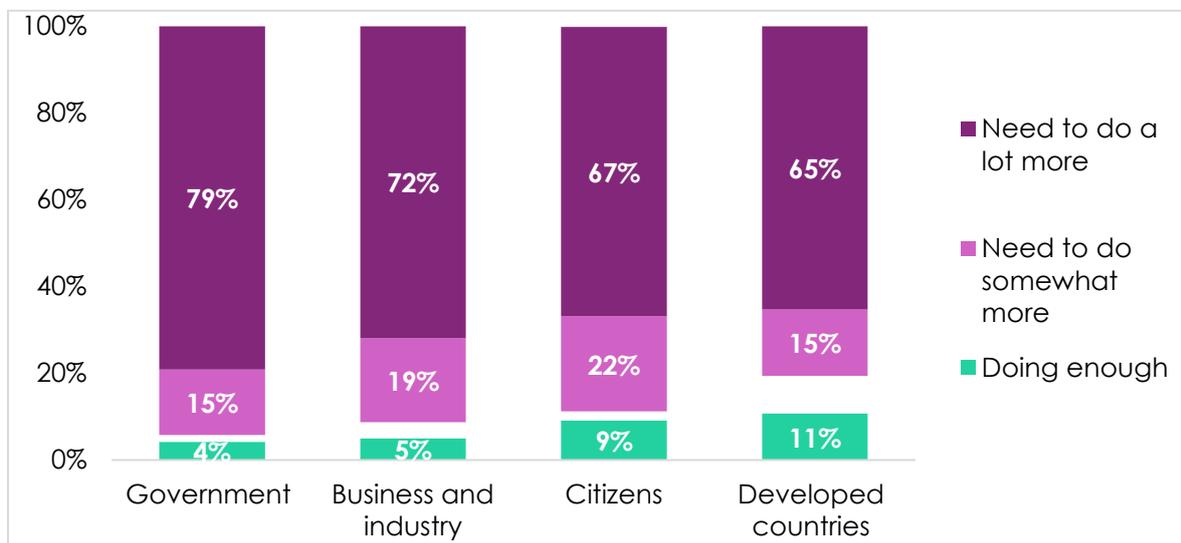
(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

**Figure 11: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Uganda | 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.)

**Figure 12: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Uganda | 2022**

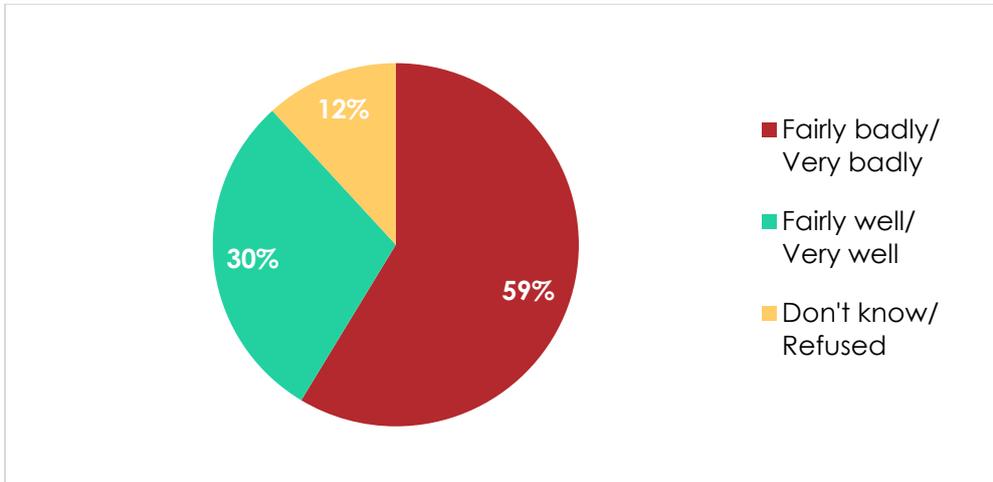


**Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked:** Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

When asked to assess how well the government is addressing the problem of climate change, fewer than one-third (30%) of all survey respondents describe the government's performance as "fairly" or "very" good, while six in 10 (59%) give the government a failing grade on this issue (Figure 13).

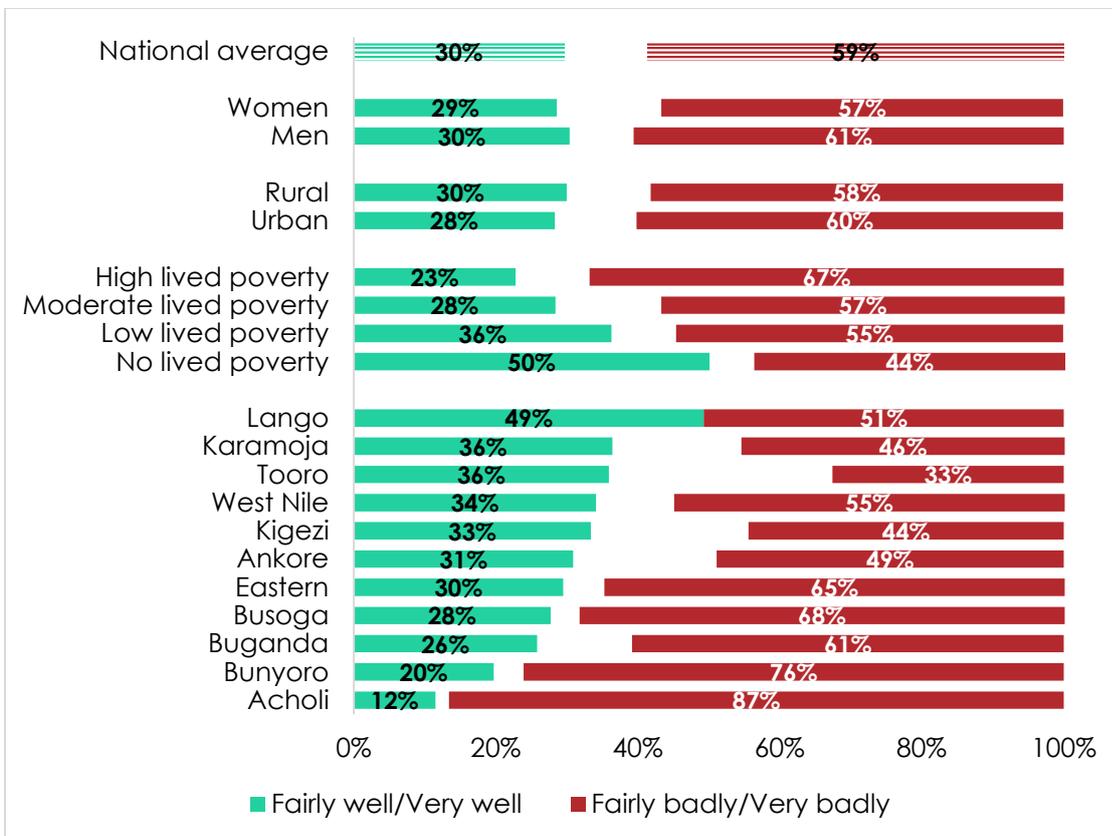
Approval of the government's efforts declines as respondents' level of lived poverty increases, dropping from 50% of the wealthy to just 23% of the poorest (Figure 14). Lango is the only sub-region where approval almost equals disapproval.

**Figure 13: Government performance in addressing climate change | Uganda | 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?

**Figure 14: Government performance in handling climate change | by demographic group | Uganda | 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

As Ugandans continue to experience the deleterious effects of climate change, findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey suggest that broad support for concerted climate action is building – at least among those citizens who have heard of climate change.

Large majorities of those familiar with climate change say it is making life worse and requires immediate government action, even if such policies and programmes are expensive, cause job losses, or take a toll on the economy. But overwhelming majorities also say they expect greater efforts by other stakeholders, including business and industry, more developed countries, and ordinary citizens.

Since more than four in 10 Ugandans say they have not yet heard of climate change, one step toward building momentum for climate action may be targeted interventions to educate more citizens about the threat they face.

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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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