

Climate change making life worse in Mauritius; citizens want collective action to combat it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 584 | Louis Amédée Darga and Nazrana Hurroo

Summary

Located in the Indian Ocean, with a tropical climate, Mauritius is considered particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures sea levels, coastal erosion, altered precipitation patterns, and an increase in extreme weather events (World Health Organization, 2021).

The past decade has seen a drastic increase in the number of people affected by climate-related shocks, particularly this year's tropical storms (International Monetary Fund, 2022; Defimedia.info, 2022). The country is also experiencing frequent and devastating flash floods that severely affect the economy, the ecosystem, and livelihoods (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). According to the World Risk Report 2021, Mauritius ranks 51st out of 181 countries for risk of disaster from extreme natural events (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, 2021; Government Information Services, 2021).

The government of Mauritius has developed strategies to combat climate change. The Climate Change Act, enacted in 2020, will support the mainstreaming and effective coordination of climate change issues at the highest level (Government Gazette of Mauritius, 2020). In line with its goals for national development, Mauritius has already implemented a number of policies and projects that address both adaptation and mitigation, including a Road Map on Renewable Energy, national tree-planting campaigns, coastal rehabilitation projects, and rainwater harvesting systems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). The authorities have set ambitious objectives in the 2021 Nationally Determined Contribution document under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The key objectives to support climate change mitigation are to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions by 40% and to increase the share of energy generation from green sources to 60% by 2030 (International Monetary Fund, 2021).

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

Findings show that citizens who are aware of climate change are solidly behind government action to address the crisis, even if it comes at a significant economic cost. Mauritians 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, Mauritians familiar with climate change say it is making life in their country worse. But almost one-quarter of citizens have still not heard of climate change.

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 Mauritius, led by StraConsult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Mauritians in 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 Mauritius in 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

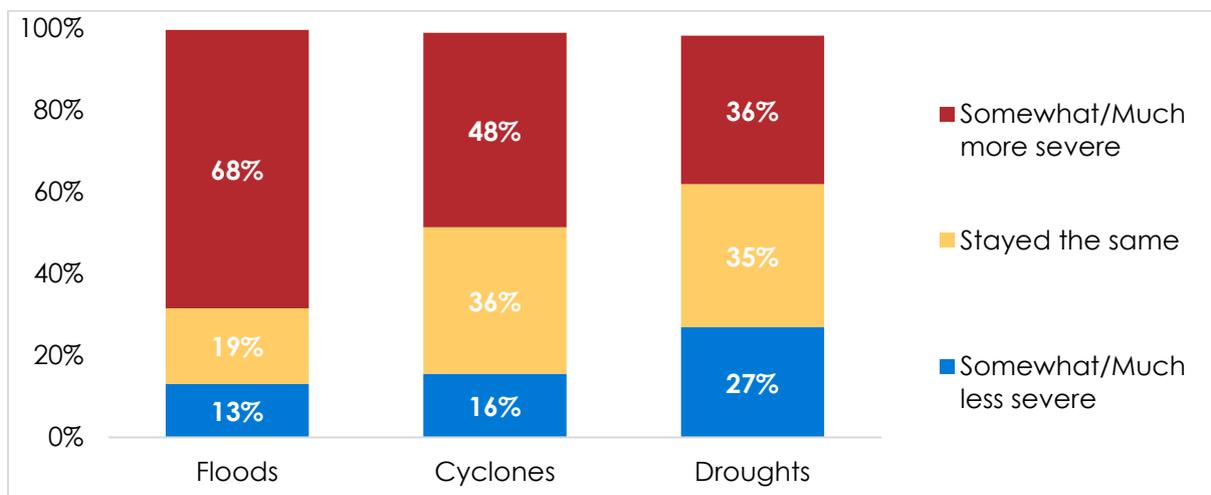
Key findings

- More than two-thirds (68%) of Mauritians say floods have become more severe over the past 10 years; about half (48%) of citizens say the same about cyclones.
- More than seven in 10 citizens (73%) say they have heard of climate change.
- Among those who are aware of climate change:
 - Most (86%) say it is making life in Mauritius worse.
 - About nine in 10 believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change (88%), and nearly two-thirds (65%) 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 (3%), business and industry (7%), developed countries (3%), and citizens (11%) to fight climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions. More than two-thirds (68%) of Mauritians say floods have become "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe" over the past 10 years. Almost half (48%) say the same about cyclones, while 36% say they stayed the same over the past decade (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Severity of floods, cyclones, and droughts | Mauritius | 2022

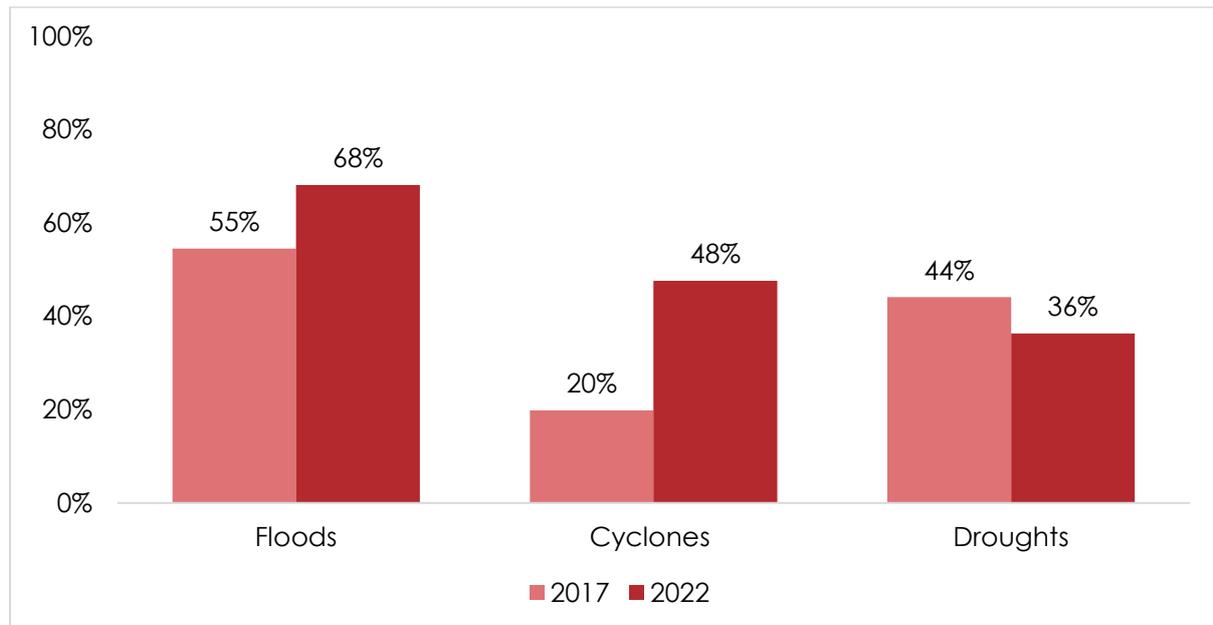


Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

More than one-third of Mauritians (36%) say that the severity of droughts has increased, while the same share of citizens (35%) say they stayed the same.

Compared to 2017, the proportion who say floods and cyclones have gotten more severe has increased by 13 and 28 percentage points, respectively, while perceptions of worsening droughts have decreased by 8 percentage points (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Severity of floods, cyclones, and droughts | Mauritius | 2017-2021



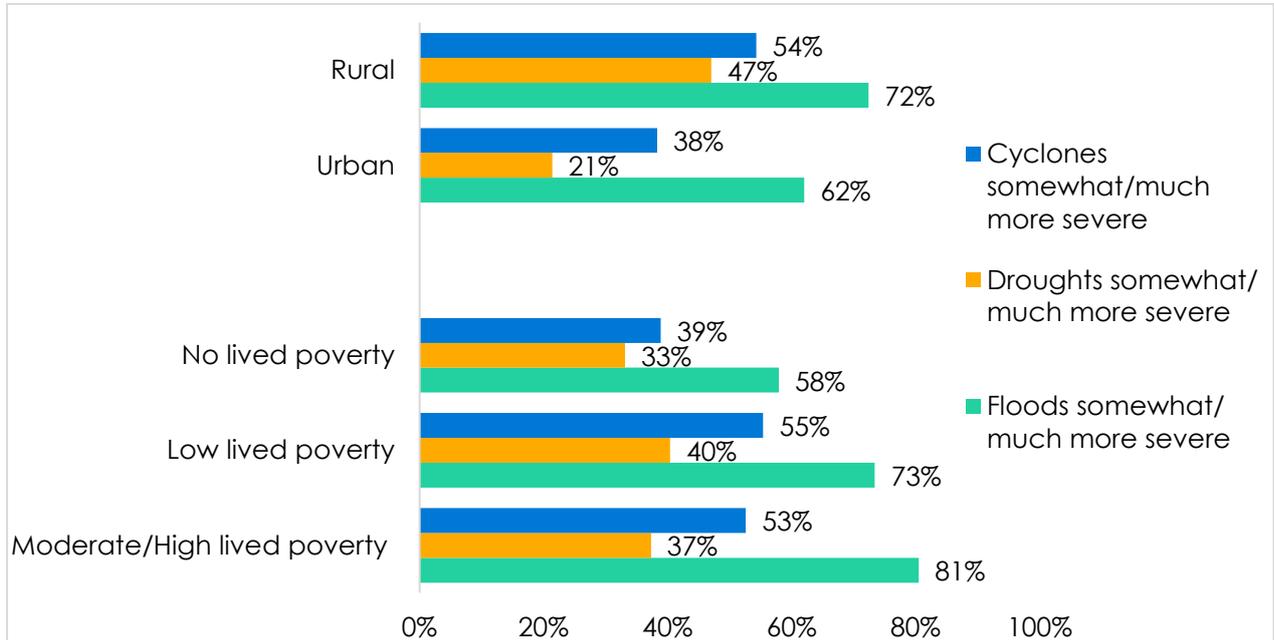
Respondents were asked: *In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")*

Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to report increasingly severe cyclones (54% vs. 38%), droughts (47% vs. 21%), and floods (72% vs. 62%). Economically well-off respondents (those experiencing "no lived poverty"¹) are less likely to see increasingly severe cyclones, droughts, or floods, conceivably because they are more sheltered than their less-well-off counterparts (Figure 3).

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¹ 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 3: More severe cyclones, droughts, and floods | by urban-rural residence and lived poverty | Mauritius | 2022



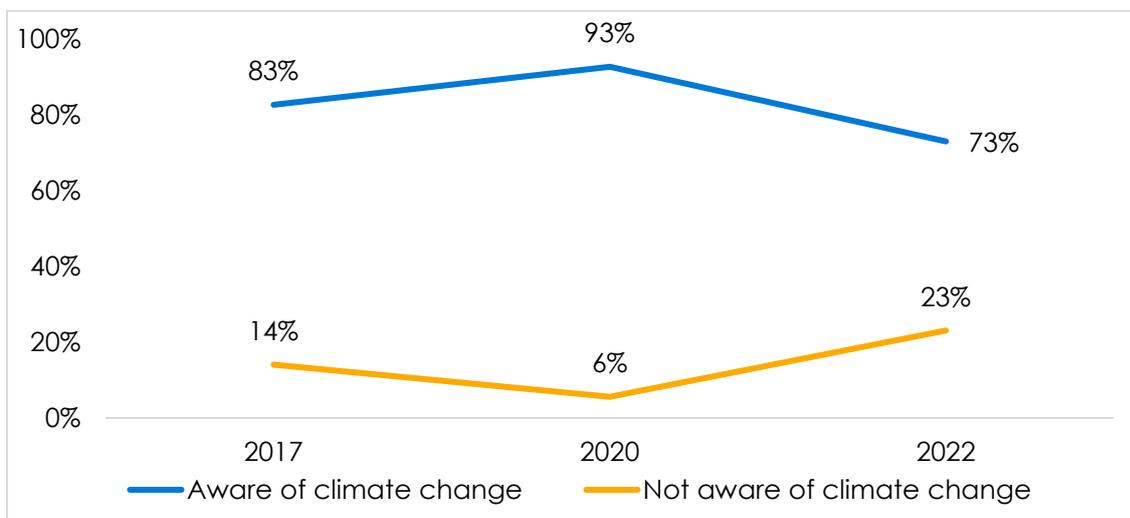
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

Climate change

Awareness of climate change

A large majority (73%) of Mauritians say they have heard of climate change; however, this is a 20-percentage-point decline from 2020 (93%), perhaps reflecting high public awareness of natural disasters – though not necessarily of “climate change” – in 2020 (Figure 4).

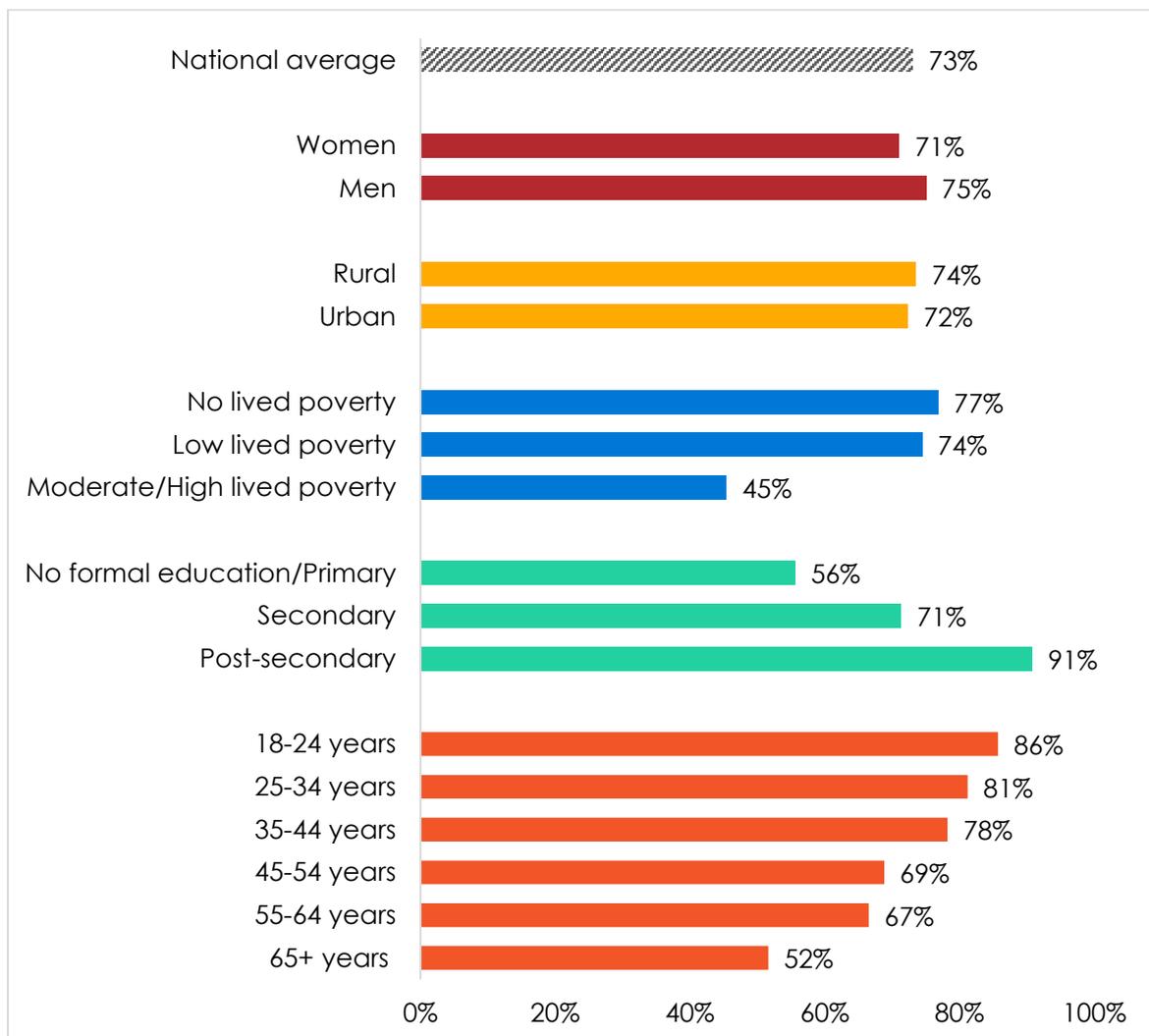
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Mauritius | 2017-2022



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

While experience of severe cyclones, droughts, and floods is more common in rural areas, levels of awareness of climate change are about the same among rural and urban residents (74% vs. 72%) (Figure 5). Poorer citizens are less familiar with the term “climate change” (45% of those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty vs. 77% of those experiencing no lived poverty), and citizens with a secondary (71%) or post-secondary (91%) education are more likely than the less educated (56%) to have heard of climate change. The level of awareness of climate change also decreases with respondents' age, ranging from 86% of 18- to 24-year-olds to 52% of citizens aged 65 and above.

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



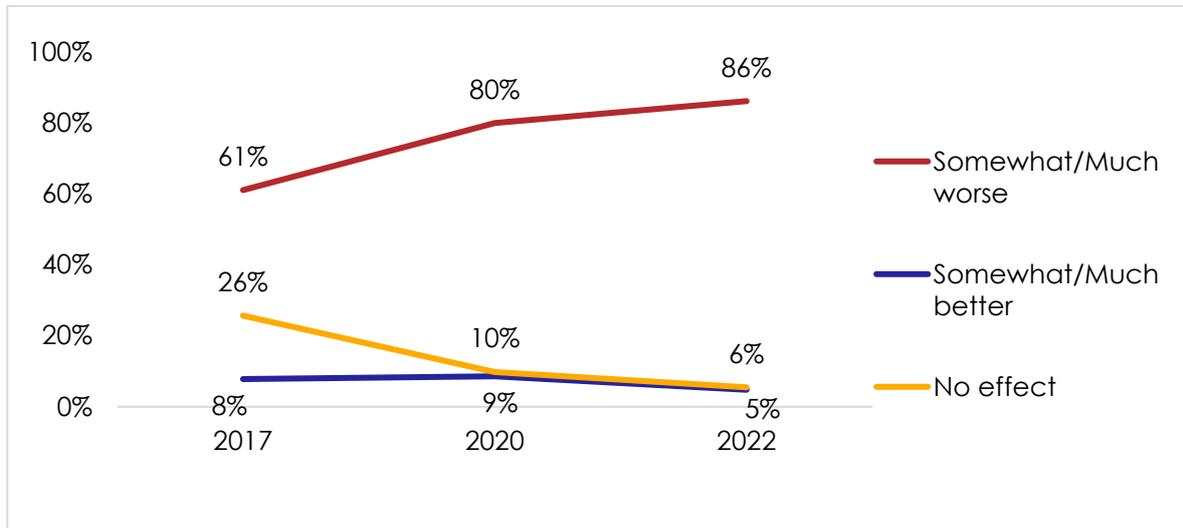
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say “yes”)

Effects of climate change

Almost nine out of 10 citizens (86%) who are aware of climate change say it is making life in Mauritius “somewhat worse” or “much worse” (Figure 6).

Perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change have increased by 25 percentage points since 2017.

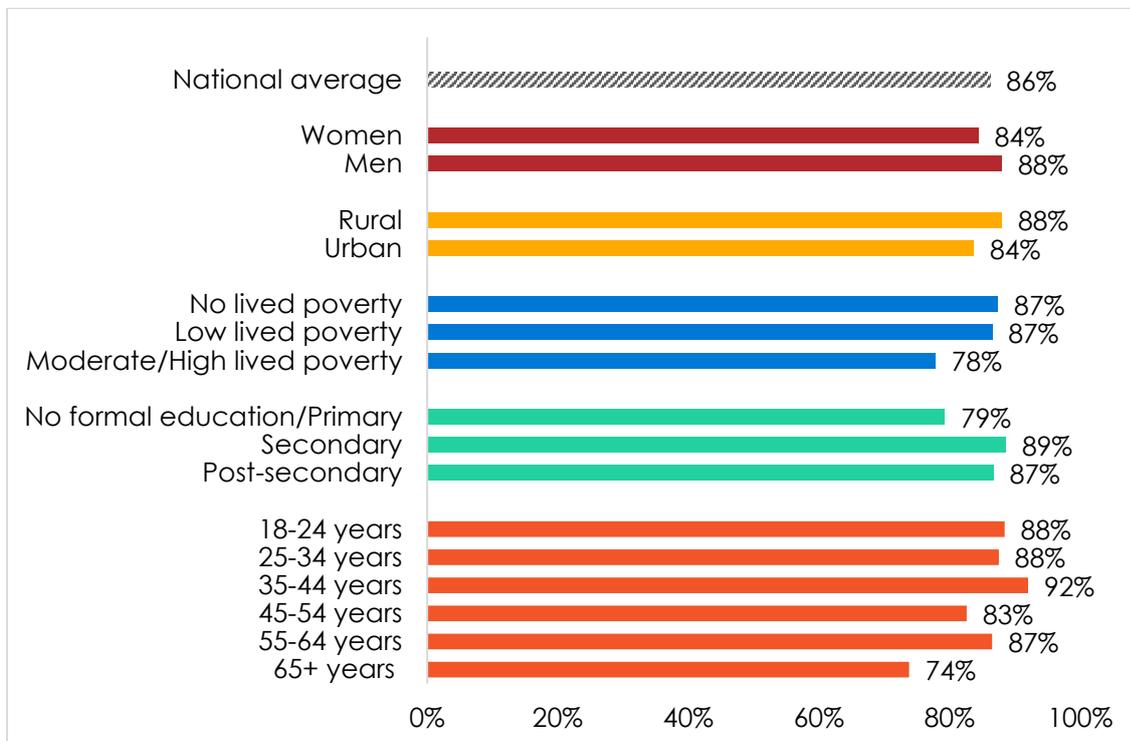
Figure 6: Effects of climate change | Mauritius | 2017-2022



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

Men (88%), rural residents (88%), the economically well-off (87%), and the highly educated (87%-89%) are more likely to see climate change as making life worse (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2022



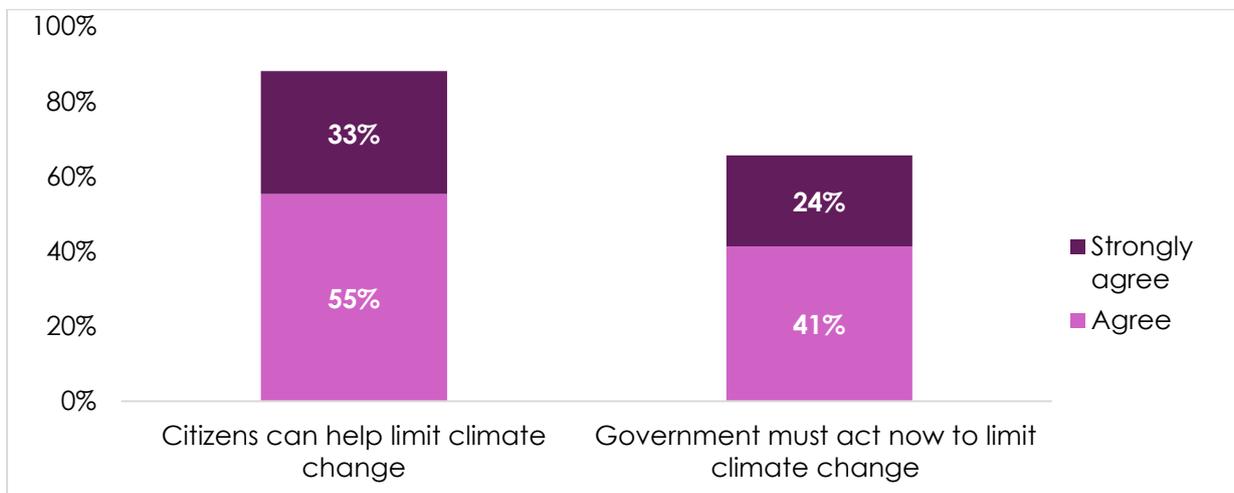
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Mauritius better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Fighting climate change

Large majorities of Mauritians believe that both ordinary citizens and the government have a role to play in limiting climate change. About nine in 10 respondents who are aware of climate change (88%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that citizens can help curb climate change, and nearly two-thirds (65%) of citizens 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 8).

In fact, in Mauritians’ eyes, the government (36%) and ordinary people (30%) share primary responsibility for fighting climate change and reducing its impact. Fewer respondents assign this responsibility to developed countries (22%) and to business and industry (9%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Limiting climate change | Mauritius | 2022



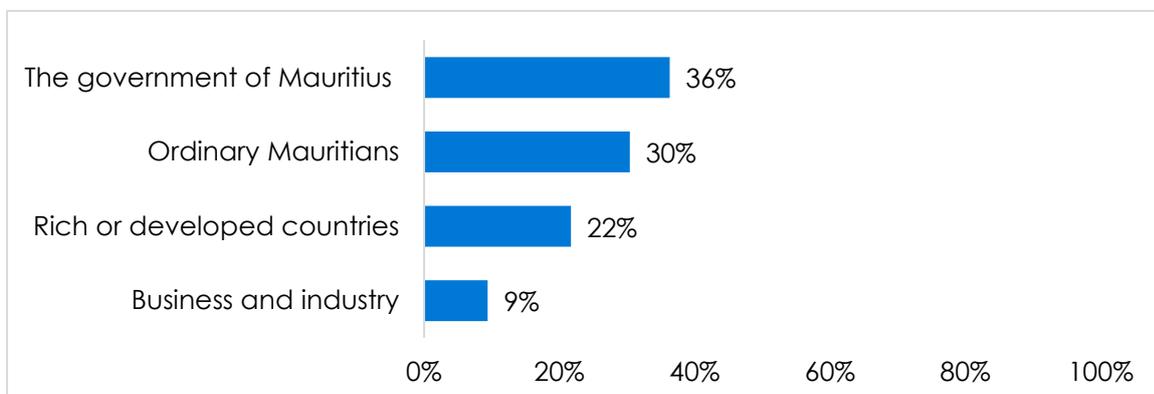
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Mauritians 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.)

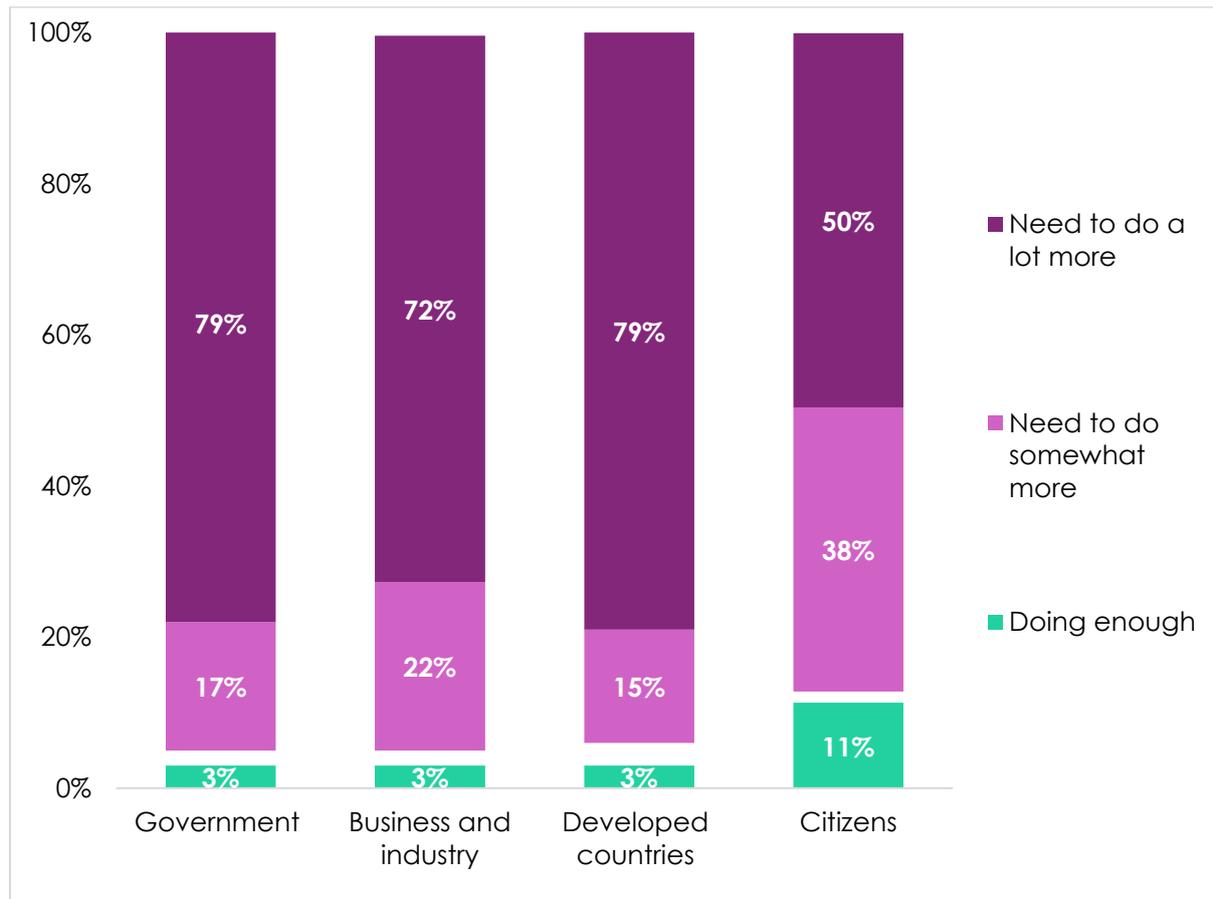
Figure 9: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Mauritius | 2022



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 (3%), business and industry (3%), developed countries (3%), and citizens (11%) are making enough of an effort to fight climate change (Figure 10). Large majorities believe more needs to be done, including almost eight in 10 (79%) who say the government and developed countries need to do “a lot more.”

Figure 10: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Mauritius | 2022

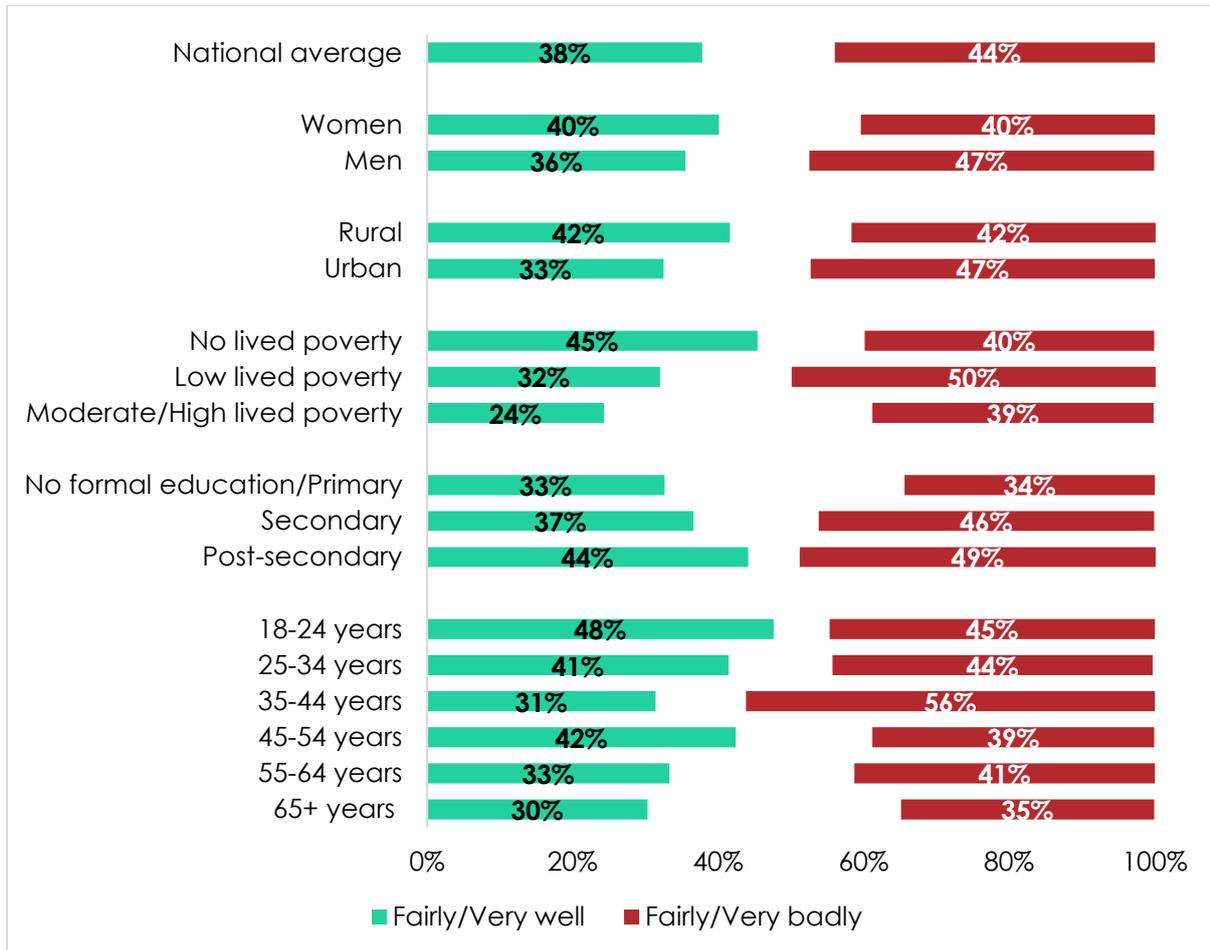


Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

When asked to assess how well the government is addressing the problem of climate change, about four in 10 (38%) of all survey respondents describe the government's performance as “fairly” or “very” good, while 44% give the government a failing grade on this issue (Figure 11).

Men (47%), urbanites (47%), and citizens with higher education (49%) are particularly critical of the government's efforts.

Figure 11: Government performance in handling climate change | by demographic group | Mauritius | 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 climate change continues to negatively impact the lives of Mauritians, these survey results suggest that broad support for the mitigation of climate change is building – at least among those citizens who have heard of climate change.

Majorities among those who are familiar with climate change say it is making life in the country worse, and citizens call for immediate government action, even if policies and programmes are expensive, cause job losses, or take a toll on the economy. In addition, a majority of Mauritians expect other stakeholders – including business and industry, developed countries, and ordinary citizens – to make greater efforts to limit climate change. Since more than one in four Mauritians still have not heard of climate change, awareness raising may be one important step toward an all-hands-on-deck fight against climate change.

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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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