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Tanzanians want greater government action on environmental problems, even if it's expensive

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 676 | Derick Msafiri

Summary

Tanzania is blessed with a wealth of renewable natural resources, including wildlife, fresh water, forests, and fisheries, that provide livelihoods for its people and drive a dynamic tourism industry. Prioritising its biodiversity, the country has placed almost one-third of its land under conservation protection (World Bank, 2019; USAID, 2017, 2023).

Going back decades, the government has also committed itself to global and regional agreements to protect endangered species, the ozone layer, wild fauna and flora, forests, and biological diversity and to fight climate change, domesticating these in a series of national policies, laws, and strategies. Most recently, a legal ban on the production, sale, import, and use of plastic bags took effect in 2019 (Feukeng, 2019).

Yet population growth, urbanisation, and industry leave the country highly vulnerable to a range of environmental problems, including deforestation, inadequate waste management, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and degradation of land and water resources (World Bank, 2019; UNEP, 2023). Mining of the country's gold, iron ore, diamonds, tanzanite, and other industrial and fuel minerals contributes jobs and export revenues (International Trade Administration, 2023), but it also adds pollution to the environmental challenge.

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

A majority of Tanzanians see pollution as a serious problem in their communities. Citizens rank trash disposal and deforestation as their most important environmental issues and consider plastic bags a major source of pollution in their country.

Almost unanimously, citizens want more government action to limit pollution and protect the environment, even at the cost of jobs and incomes. And when it comes to natural resource extraction, a majority favour tighter regulation of the industry to reduce its impacts on the environment.

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. Nine rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 Tanzanian adults in September-October 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage

points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

On pollution and environmental governance:

- More than half (54%) of Tanzanians consider pollution a serious problem in their communities.
 - Citizens cite trash disposal (33%), deforestation (33%), pollution of water sources (13%), and human waste management (9%) as the most important environmental issues in their community.
 - More than eight in 10 respondents (81%) say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Tanzania.
- Tanzanians assign the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean to ordinary citizens (46%) and their local and national governments (35% and 13%, respectively).
- Almost nine out of 10 citizens (88%) say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 74% who want it to do “much more.”
- Even if environmental-protection policies threatened jobs and incomes, two-thirds (68%) of Tanzanians would want the government to prioritise the environment.

On natural resource extraction:

- More than half (53%) of Tanzanians say the benefits of natural resource extraction, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution.
- But almost eight in 10 citizens (78%) say the government should regulate the natural resource extraction industry more tightly in order to reduce its impacts on the environment.

Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

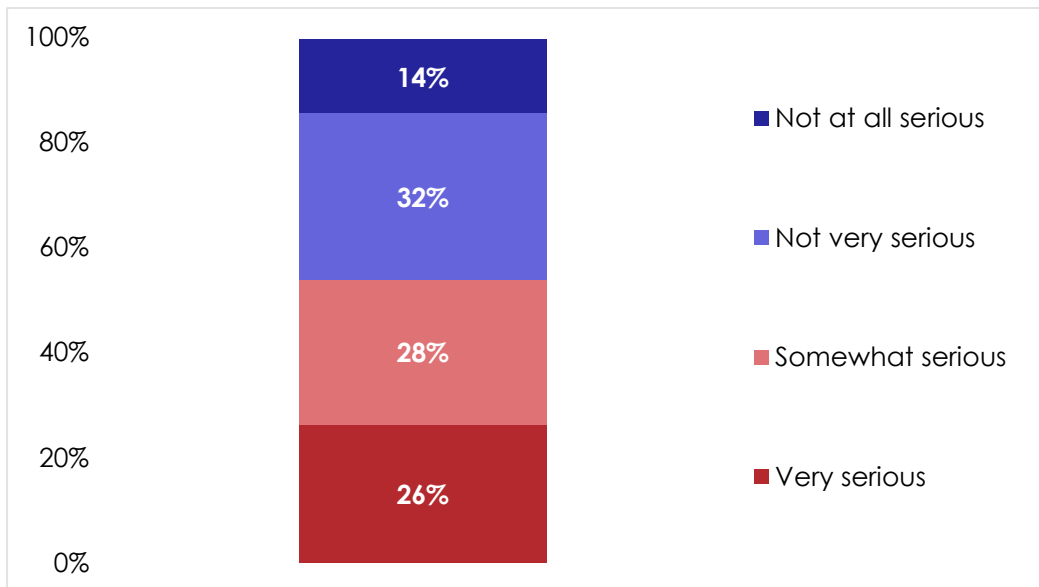
More than half (54%) of Tanzanians consider pollution in their communities a “somewhat serious” (28%) or “very serious” (26%) problem (Figure 1).

Urban residents are more concerned about pollution than rural residents (60% vs. 51%) (Figure 2). Concerns about pollution also increase with respondents' level of education, ranging from 45% among the unschooled to 63% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

Tanzanians cite trash disposal (33%), deforestation (33%), pollution of water sources (13%), and human waste management (9%) as the most important environmental issues in their community (Figure 3).

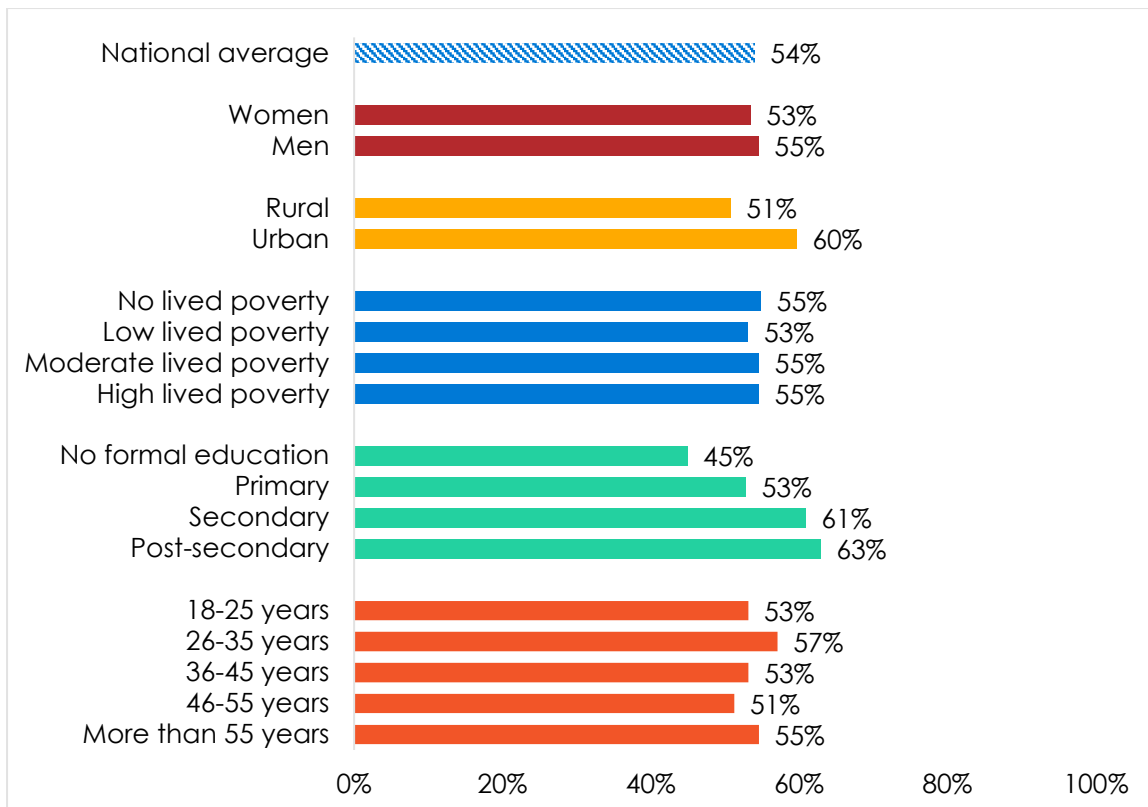
Despite a ban on plastic bags in Tanzania, more than eight in 10 respondents (81%) say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in the country (Figure 4).

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



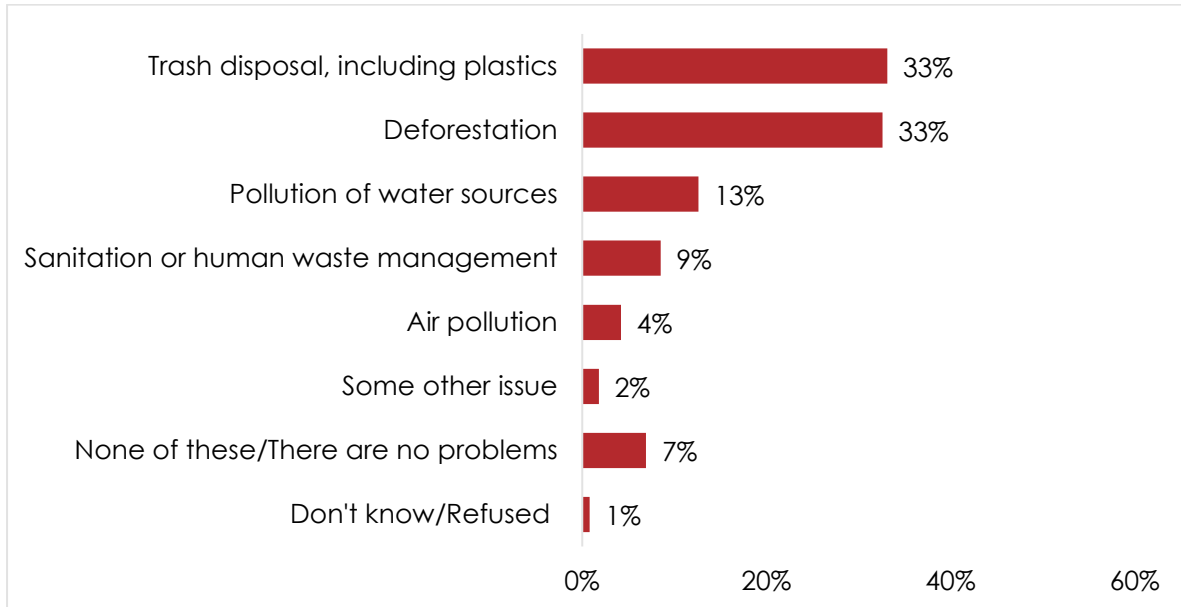
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community?

Figure 2: Pollution is a serious problem in the community | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022



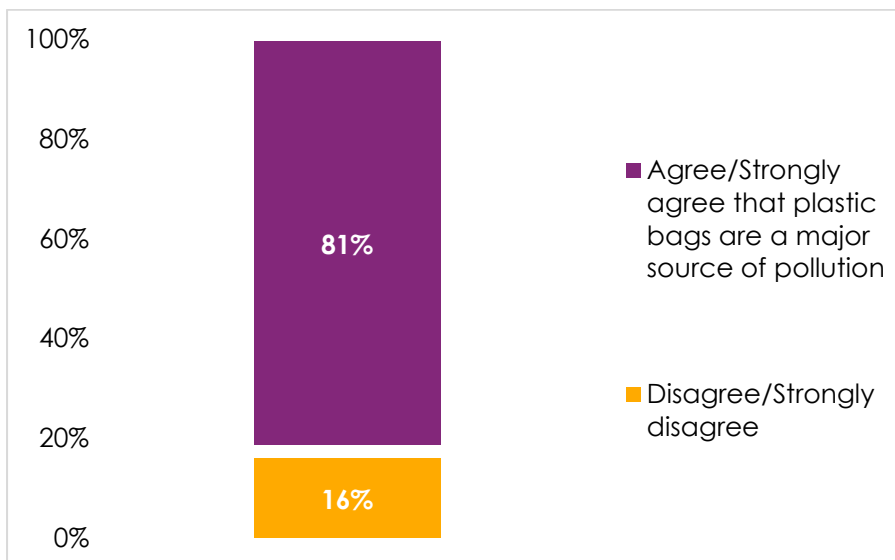
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

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



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

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

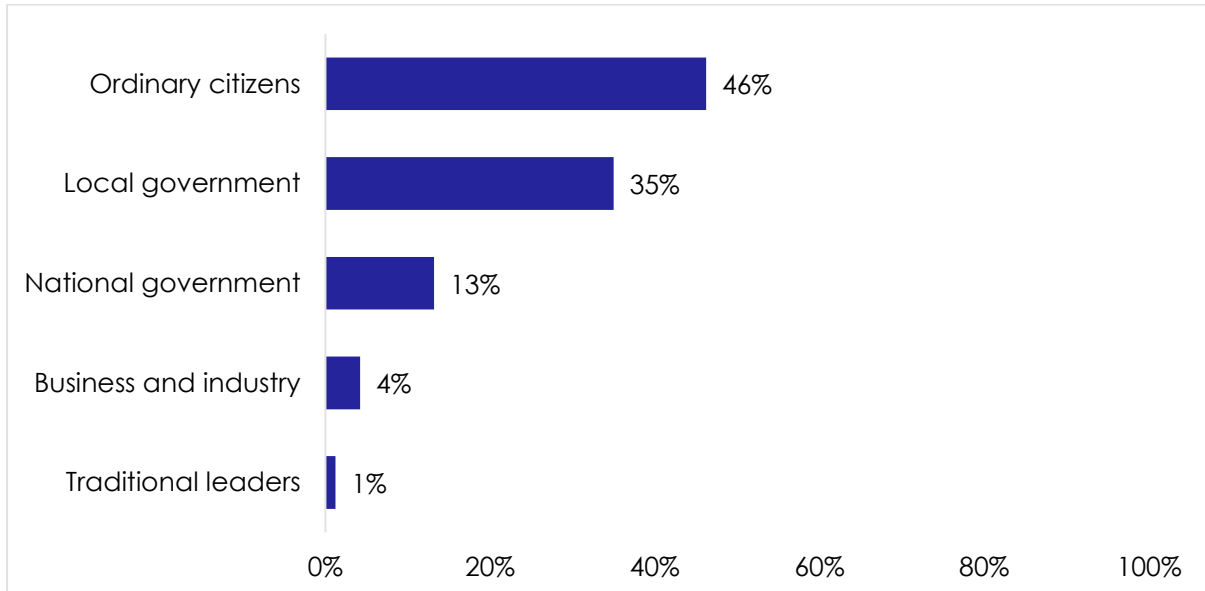


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country.

Protecting the environment

For Tanzanians, protecting the environment starts at home: A plurality (46%) of respondents say ordinary citizens have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean (Figure 5). A similar proportion place that responsibility on the local (35%) or national (13%) governments, while far fewer look to business and industry (4%) and traditional leaders (1%).

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



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

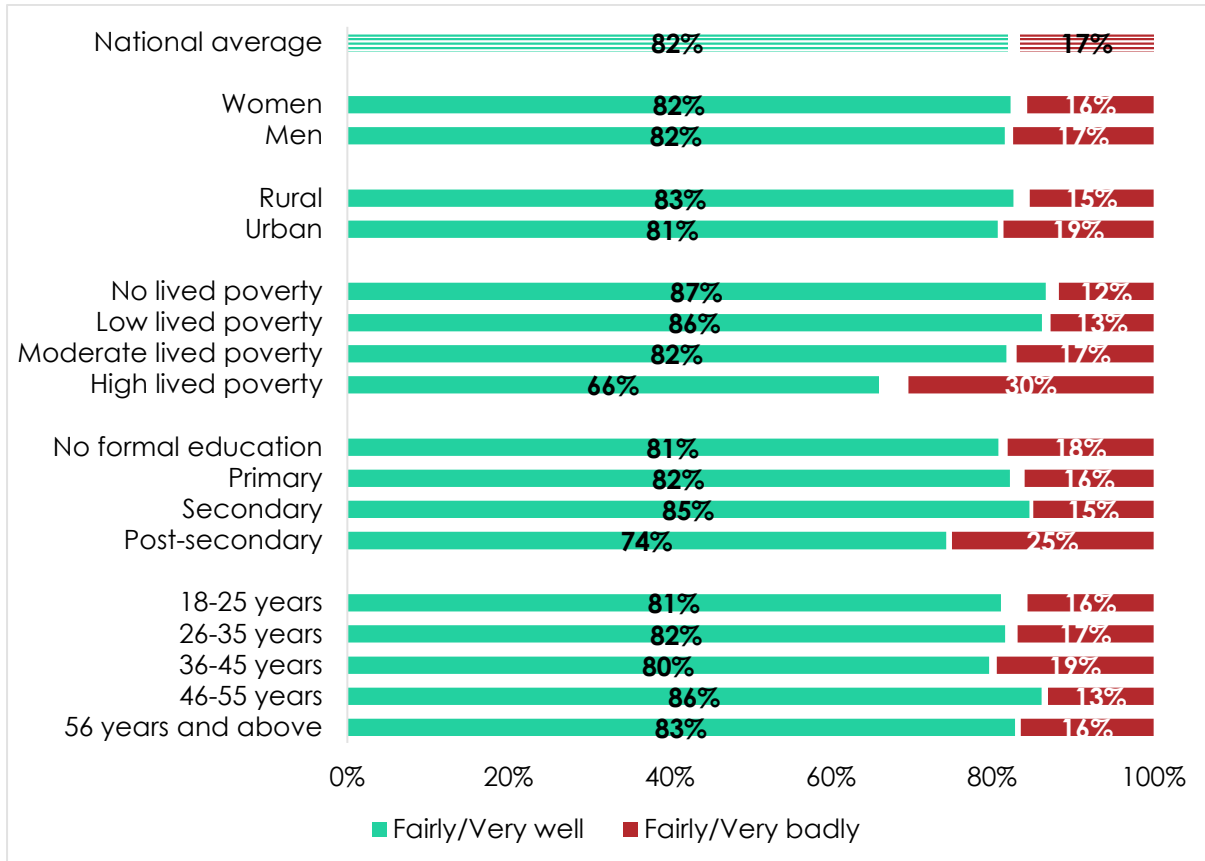
More than eight in 10 citizens (82%) think the government is doing a good job of reducing pollution and protecting the environment, while only 17% rate the government's efforts poorly (Figure 6). Favourable ratings are less common among citizens with high lived poverty¹ (66%, vs. 82%-87% of better-off respondents) and among those with post-secondary education (74%, vs. 81%-85% of those with less schooling).

Despite their positive ratings of the government's performance, Tanzanians overwhelmingly (88%) say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including about three-quarters (74%) who want it to do "much more" (Figure 7). Only about one in eight respondents want the government to keep doing what it is currently doing (10%) or to reduce its efforts (2%) to protect the environment.

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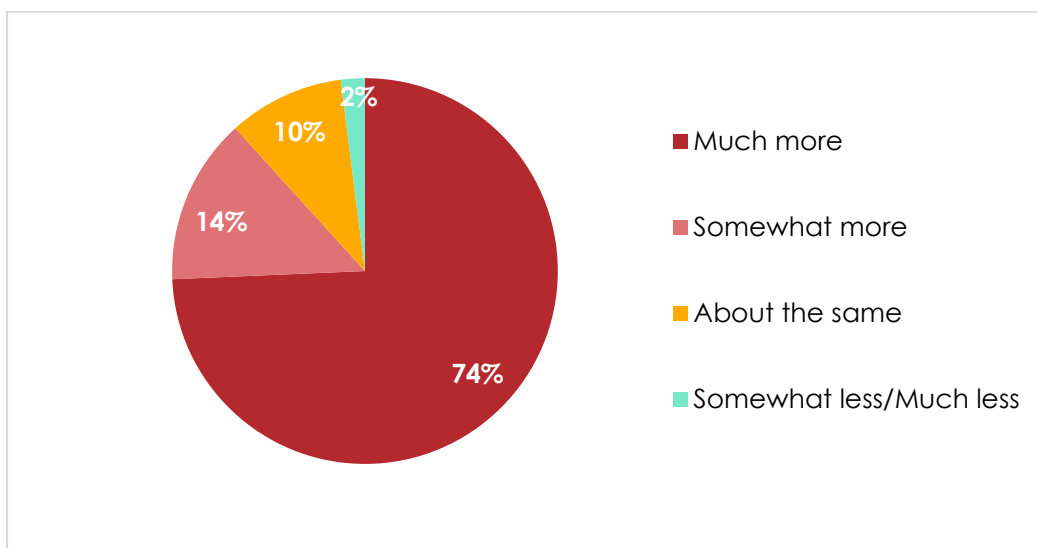
¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

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

Figure 7: Should government do more to protect the environment? | Tanzania | 2022

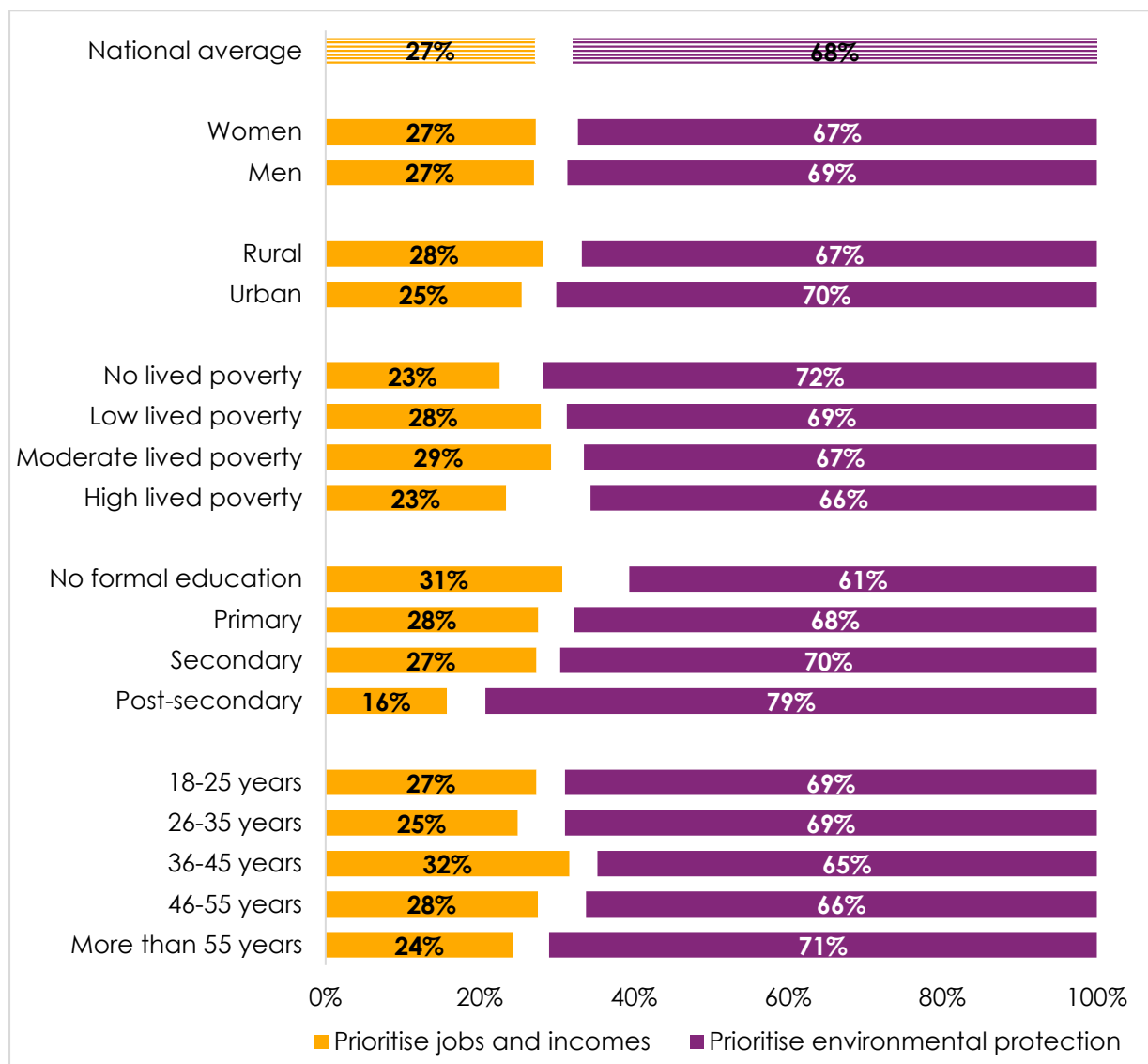


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, should our government be doing more or less than it is currently doing to limit pollution and protect the environment in this country?

Even if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, more than two-thirds (68%) of Tanzanians would still want the government to prioritise the environment. Only about one-fourth (27%) of respondents instead say that reducing environmental damage must take a back seat to job and income creation (Figure 8).

The tendency to choose environmental protection over job creation increases with respondents' education and economic levels, ranging from 61% among unschooled citizens to 79% among those with post-secondary qualifications, and from 66% among the poorest to 72% among the best-off respondents.

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

While natural resources rents contributed 6.7% to Tanzania's GDP in 2021 (World Bank, 2023), resource extraction can also be a major source of environmental damage.

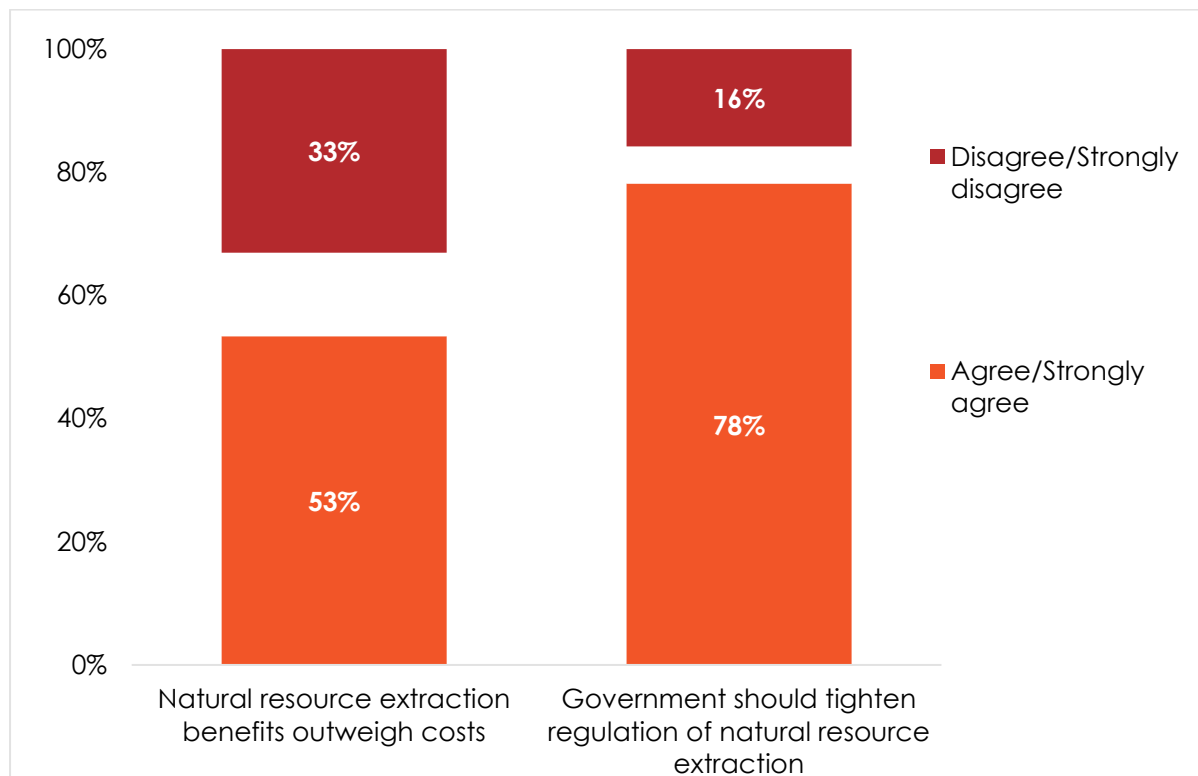
More than half (53%) of Tanzanians say that overall, the benefits that natural resource extraction brings to communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution. One-third (33%) of citizens disagree with this assessment, while 14% don't take a position (Figure 9).

Nevertheless, to reduce the negative impacts of natural resource extraction on the environment, more than three-quarters (78%) of citizens want the government to regulate the industry more tightly.

Assessments are mixed when it comes to the stake of ordinary citizens in natural resource extraction (Figure 10). Fewer than half (45%) of respondents say that people have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities, while four in 10 (42%) disagree.

And only 38% of respondents say local communities receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction, while 41% disagree.

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

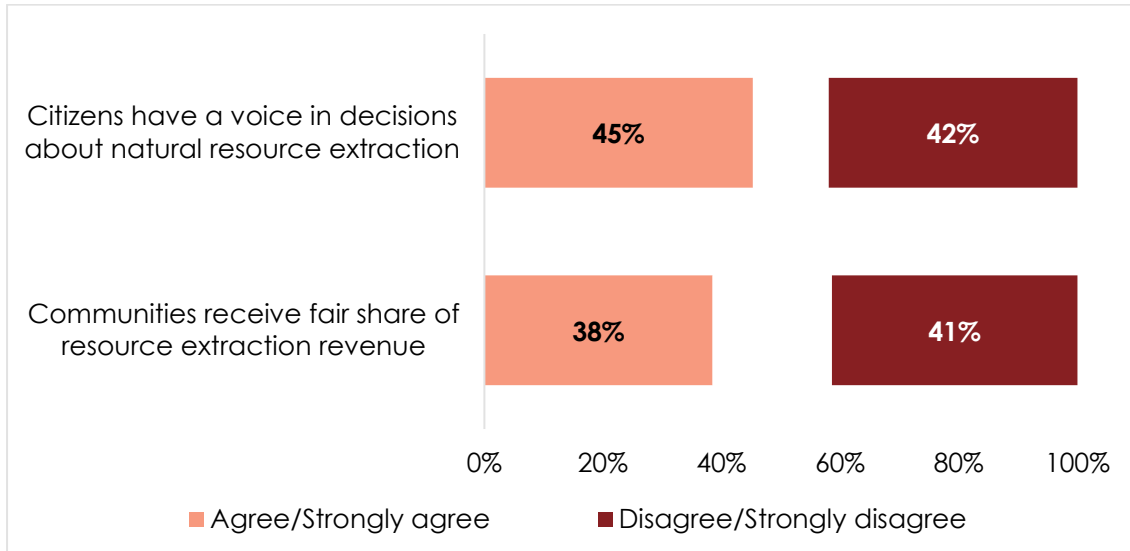


Respondents were asked: Natural resource extraction such as mining, oil drilling, or wood harvesting can have benefits, such as jobs and revenue. But it can also pose problems for nearby communities, such as pollution or deforestation. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following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

Figure 10: Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Ordinary Tanzanians currently have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities.

Local communities currently receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities.

Conclusion

A majority of Tanzanians consider pollution in their communities a serious problem, citing trash disposal and deforestation as their most important environmental issues.

While most citizens approve of the government's performance on reducing pollution and protecting the environment, they want "much more" environmental action – even at considerable economic cost.

A slim majority think the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its costs, but most support tighter regulation of the industry to reduce its environmental impact.

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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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