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Tanzanians say climate change is making life worse, demand collective action to fight it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 698 | Derick Msafiri

Summary

"The stakes are high," Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan (2023) told the Africa Climate Summit in Kenya this week, "and actions have to take place not tomorrow but today, and literally now."

The president's voice joins those of other African leaders, development partners, business leaders, and activists in calling for action against climate change, an existential threat for people throughout the world. One action she proposed is the establishment of an Africa-specific fund to address the climate crisis on the continent (allAfrica, 2023).

In Tanzania, climate change is causing higher temperatures, rising sea levels, and more frequent and severe droughts and floods, leading to increased food insecurity. The country is a major food producer, with an agriculture sector that employs more than 75% of the workforce, as well as a top tourism destination – both sectors that are highly vulnerable to changes in climate (International Monetary Fund, 2023; USAID, 2018; World Bank, 2021; Melchioly, 2021; Citizen News, 2022).

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2022) ranks Tanzania 145th out of 185 countries, reflecting high vulnerability to climate change and low readiness to confront the threat.

In addition to committing to regional and global agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the government has outlined strategies and plans to strengthen the country's climate resilience in the Tanzania National Climate Change Response Strategy 2021-26 and the Third National Development Plan, among others (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021a, b).

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

Survey findings show that only one-third of Tanzanians say they have heard of climate change. Among those who are aware of climate change, a majority say it is making life worse in their country. Most think the government is doing a good job of trying to limit climate change, but they see addressing this threat as a collective responsibility and overwhelmingly call for greater engagement on the issue by business and industry, developed nations, and ordinary citizens as well as the government.

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

- More than half (55%) of Tanzanians say droughts have become more severe over the past 10 years, while only 10% say the same about floods.
- Only about one-third (32%) of Tanzanians say they have heard of climate change.
 - Awareness of climate change is higher among urban residents and men than among rural residents and women, and increases sharply with respondents' education level.
- Among Tanzanians who are aware of climate change:
 - Eight in 10 (81%) say it is making life worse, including 51% who say “much worse.”
 - Almost nine in 10 believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change (86%) and that the government should take immediate action to limit climate change (86%), even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.
 - Almost all say stakeholders must do more to fight climate change. Large majorities call for “a lot more” effort on the part of the government (88%), business and industry (87%), developed countries (81%), and ordinary citizens (78%).
- While calling for greater efforts, about two-thirds (65%) of Tanzanians approve of the government's performance to date on addressing climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions. More than half (55%) of Tanzanians say droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” over the past 10 years, while 22% say they have become less severe and 21% say they have stayed the same (Figure 1).

In contrast, only 10% say that floods have gotten worse over the past decade, while 62% say they have lessened in severity and 26% see no change.

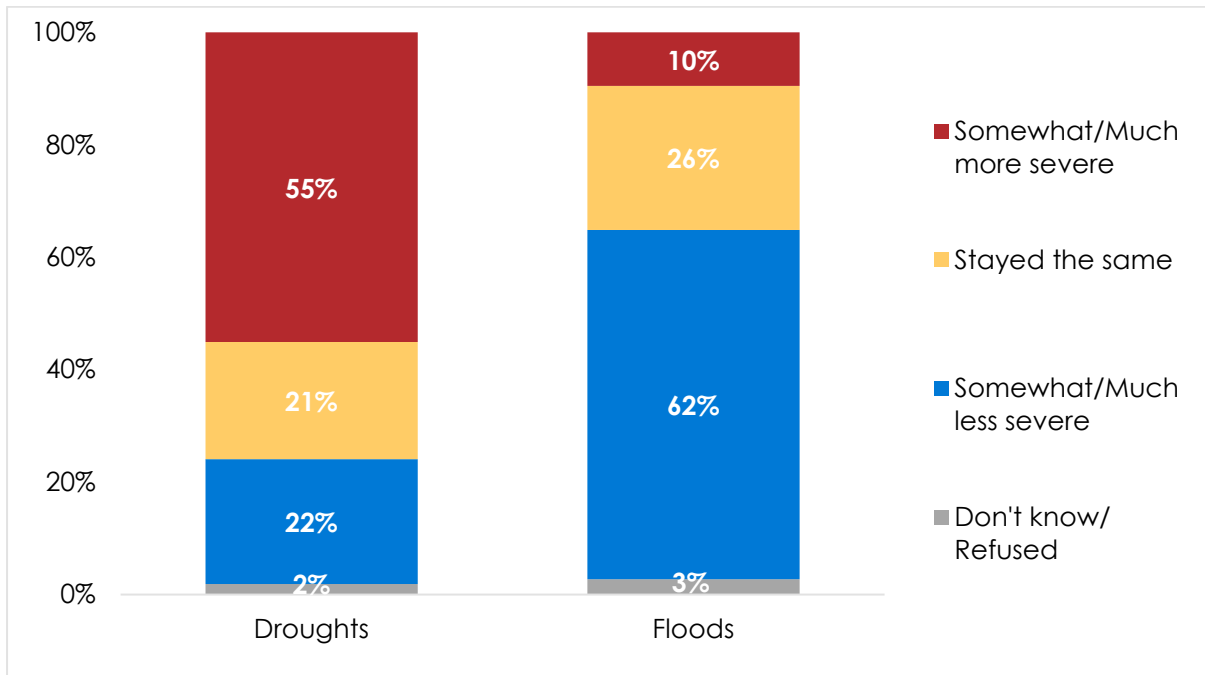
Compared to 2017, the proportion who say droughts have gotten more severe increased marginally (from 52%), while perceptions of worsening floods remained about the same (Figure 2).

Rural residents are more likely than urban residents to report increasingly severe droughts (58% vs. 50%), perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of the effects of a lack of rainfall in more agricultural areas (Figure 3). Economically disadvantaged respondents (those experiencing moderate or high “lived poverty”¹) are significantly more likely than better-off

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).

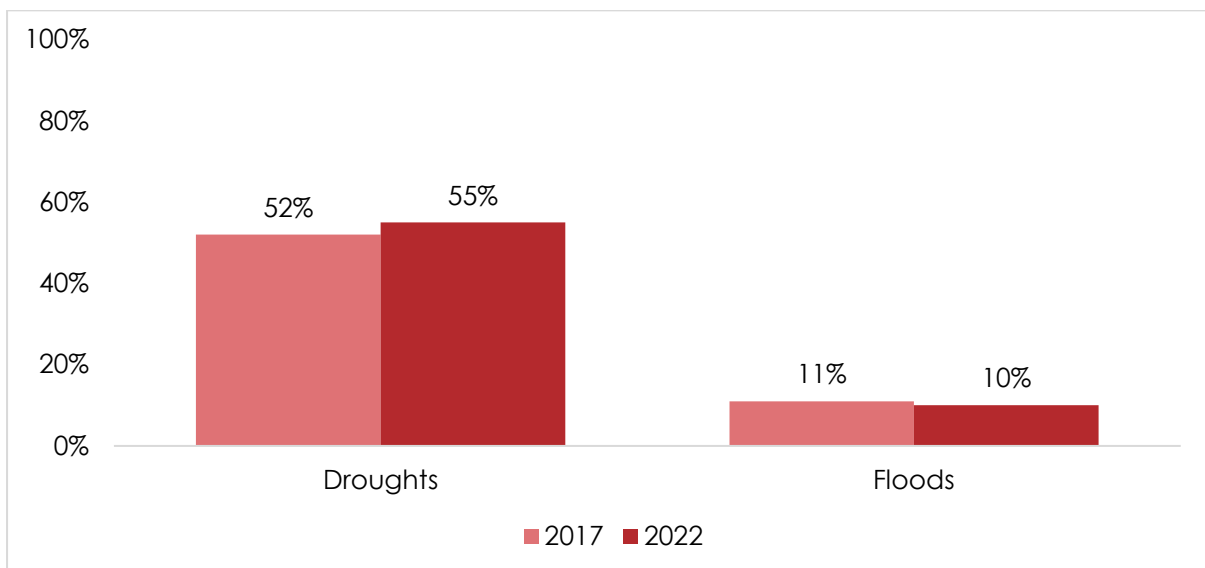
citizens to report increasingly severe droughts as well as floods. For example, while 39% of those experiencing no lived poverty say droughts have worsened, 68% of the poorest respondents say the same.

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



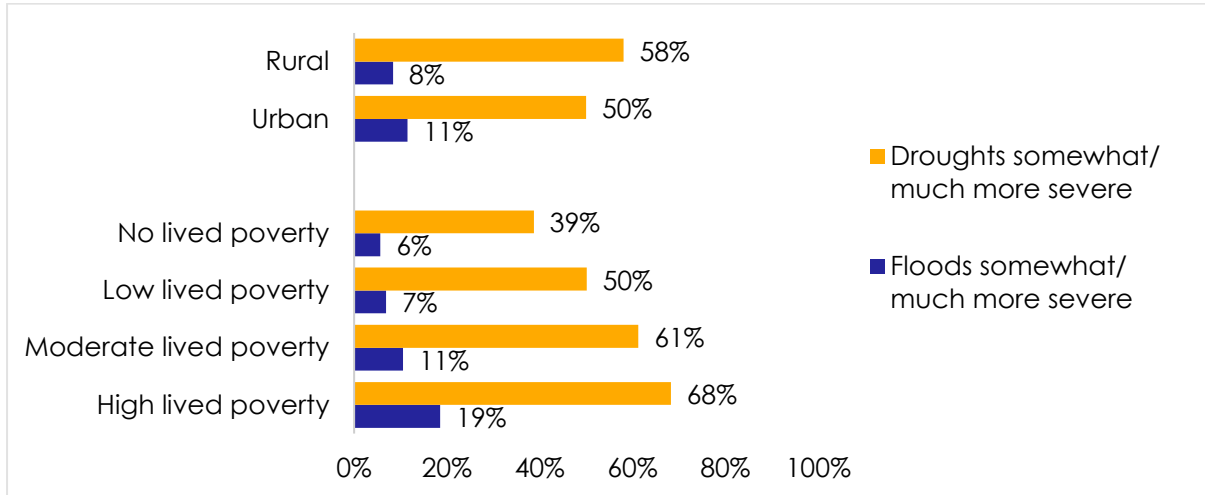
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

Figure 2: Increased severity of droughts and floods | Tanzania | 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? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

Figure 3: Increased severity of droughts and floods | by urban-rural residence and lived poverty | Tanzania | 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? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

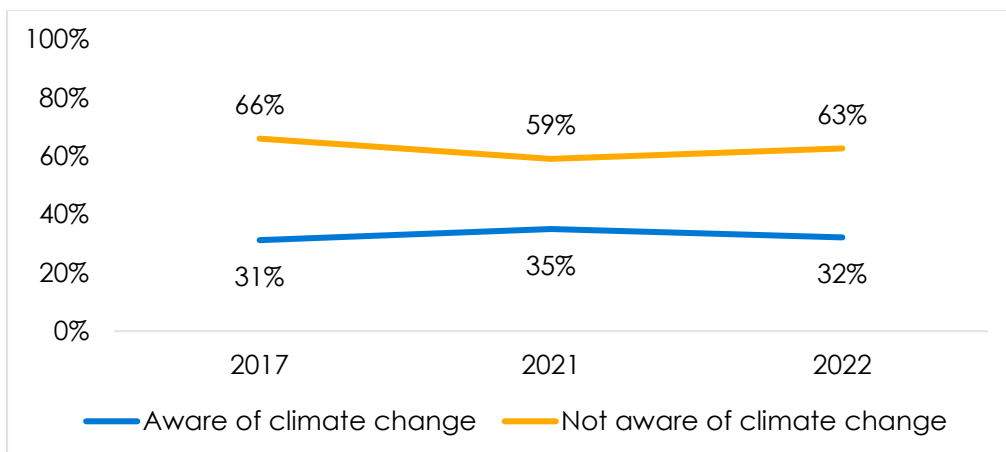
Climate change

Awareness of climate change

Only about one-third (32%) of Tanzanians say they have heard of climate change. This proportion has not changed much since Afrobarometer’s 2017 survey (31%) (Figure 4).

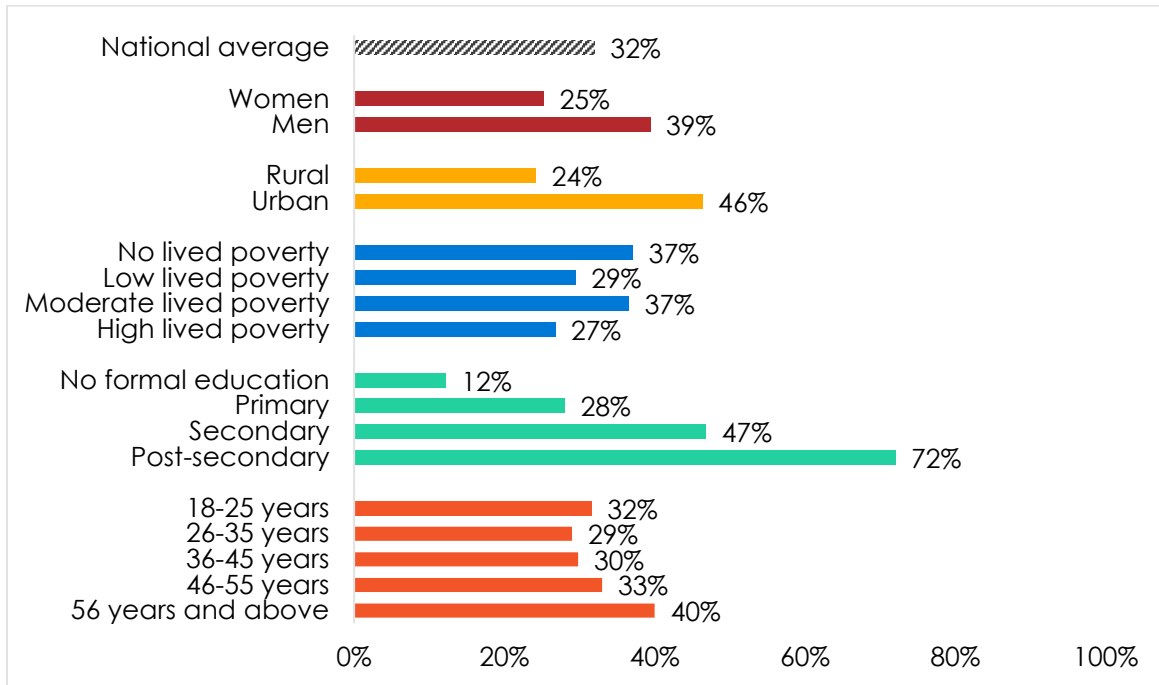
Awareness of climate change is considerably higher among urban residents (46%) and men (39%) than among rural residents (24%) and women (25%) (Figure 5). Awareness increases dramatically with respondents’ education level, ranging from just 12% among those with no formal schooling to 72% among those with post-secondary qualifications, and older citizens (40%) are more likely to be familiar with climate change than younger respondents (29%-33%).

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



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

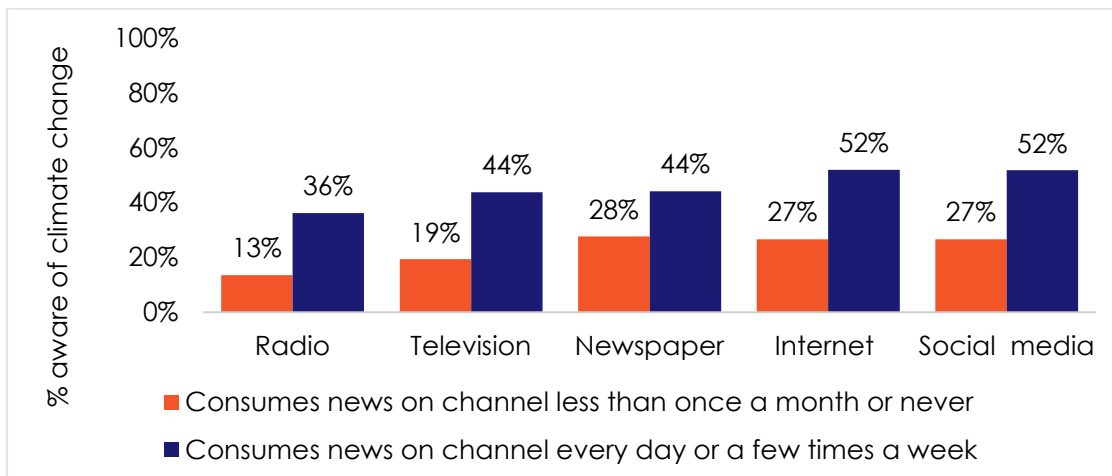
Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022



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 (Figure 6). Among those who never or seldom (less than once a month) get news from the radio, television, newspaper, the Internet, or social media, fewer than three in 10 have heard of climate change. But among citizens who get media news at least a few times a week, awareness of climate change ranges from 36% (among regular radio listeners) to 52% (among regular Internet and social media users).

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



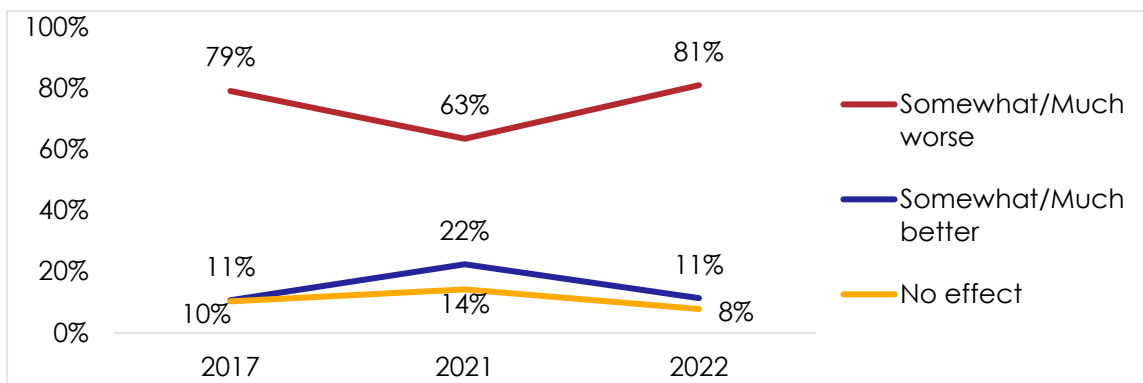
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Impact of climate change

Among Tanzanians who are aware of climate change, eight in 10 (81%) say it is making life in their country “somewhat worse” (30%) or “much worse” (51%), an 18-percentage-point increase compared to 2021 (Figure 7).

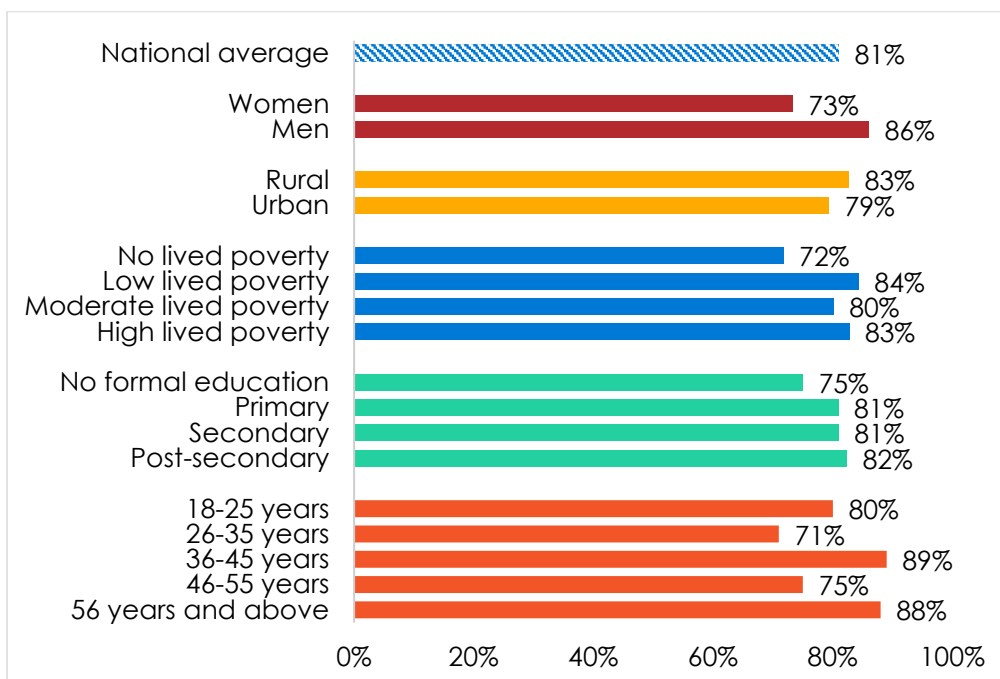
Men (86%) and rural residents (83%) are more likely to see climate change as making life worse than women (73%) and urbanites (79%) (Figure 8). This perception is less common among well-off respondents (72%) and those with no formal schooling (75%).

Figure 7: Effect of climate change | Tanzania | 2017-2022



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

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



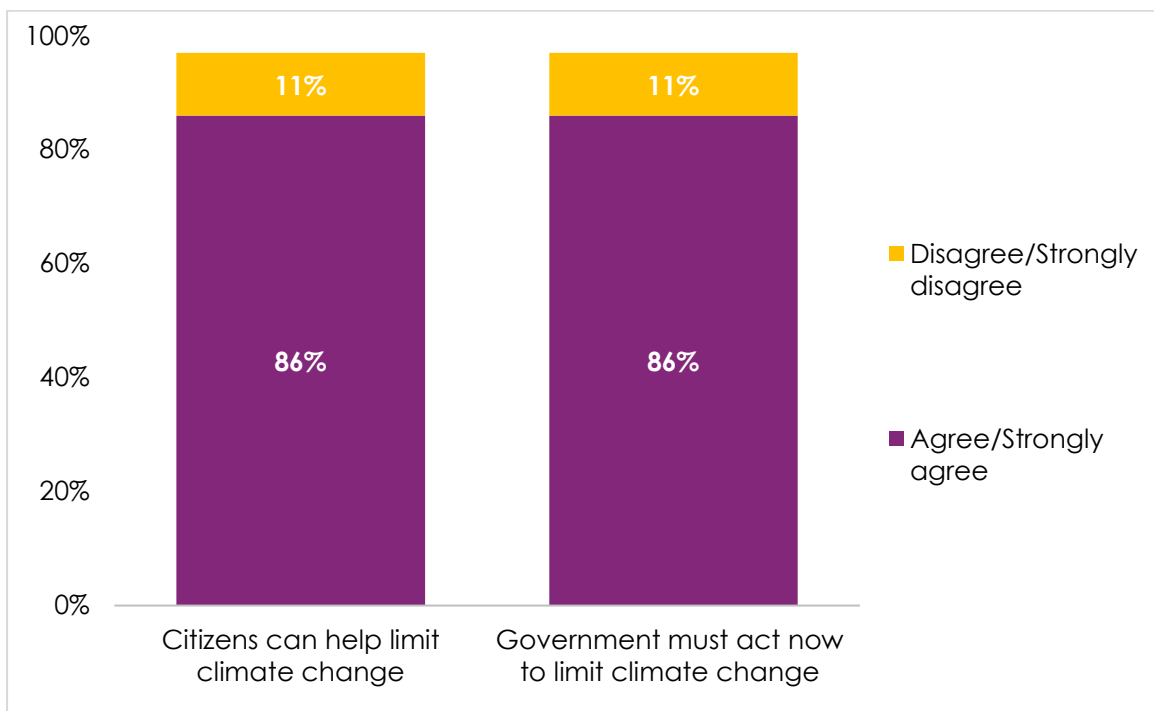
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Tanzania better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say “somewhat worse” or “much worse”) (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Fighting climate change

Large majorities of Tanzanians believe that both ordinary citizens and governments have a role to play in limiting climate change. More than eight in 10 respondents who are aware of climate change (86%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that citizens can help curb climate change (Figure 9). The same overwhelming majority (86%) 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.

Indeed, when asked who should have the primary responsibility for limiting climate change and reducing its impact, most Tanzanians look to either ordinary citizens (45%) or the government (40%) (Figure 10). Far fewer assign this task primarily to business and industry (9%) or to more developed countries (4%).

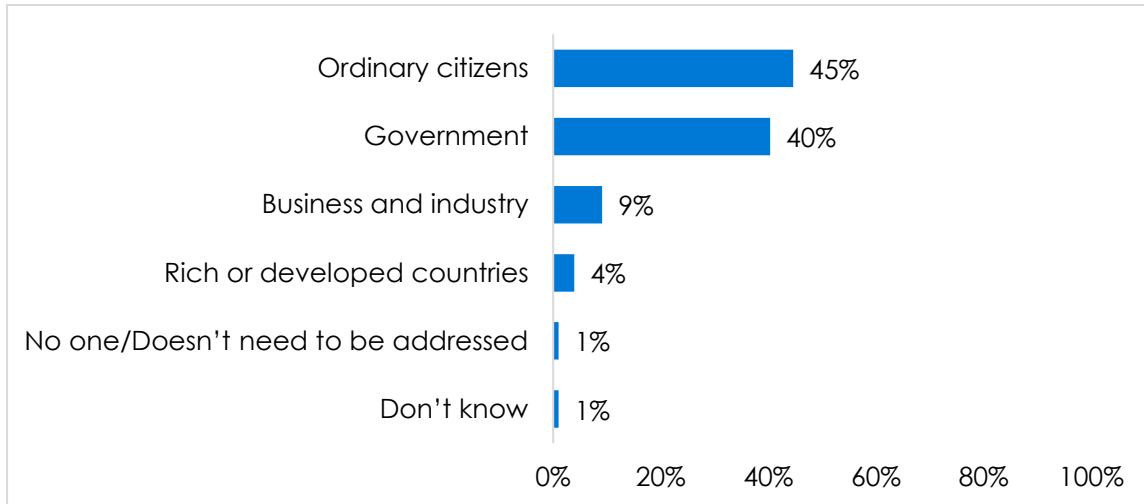
Figure 9: Limiting climate change | Tanzania | 2022



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

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



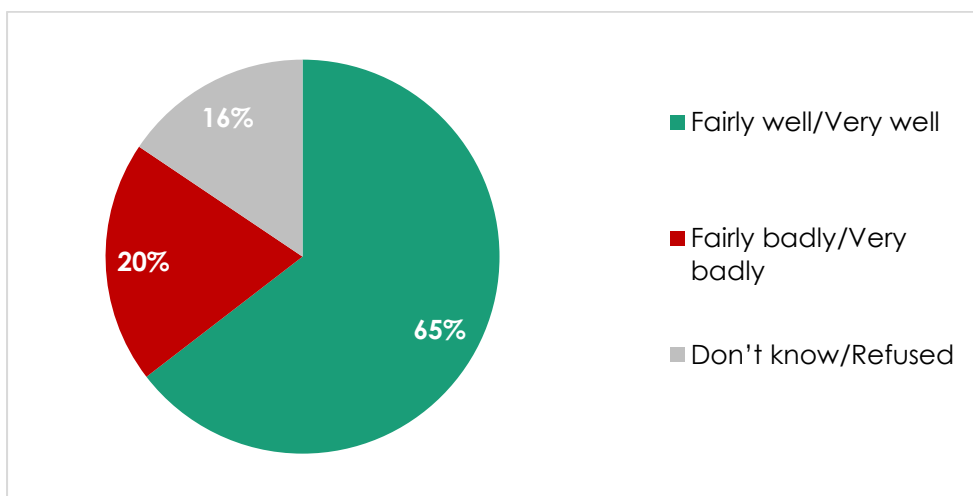
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for trying to limit climate change and reduce its impact? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Overall, Tanzanians approve of the government's performance on addressing climate change: About two-thirds (65%) it is doing a "fairly" or "very" good job, while only 20% disapprove (Figure 11).

Respondents who are aware of the term "climate change" are more likely to rate the government favourably than those who are not (74% vs. 62%) (Figure 12). Fewer women than men approve of the government's efforts (61% vs. 68%).

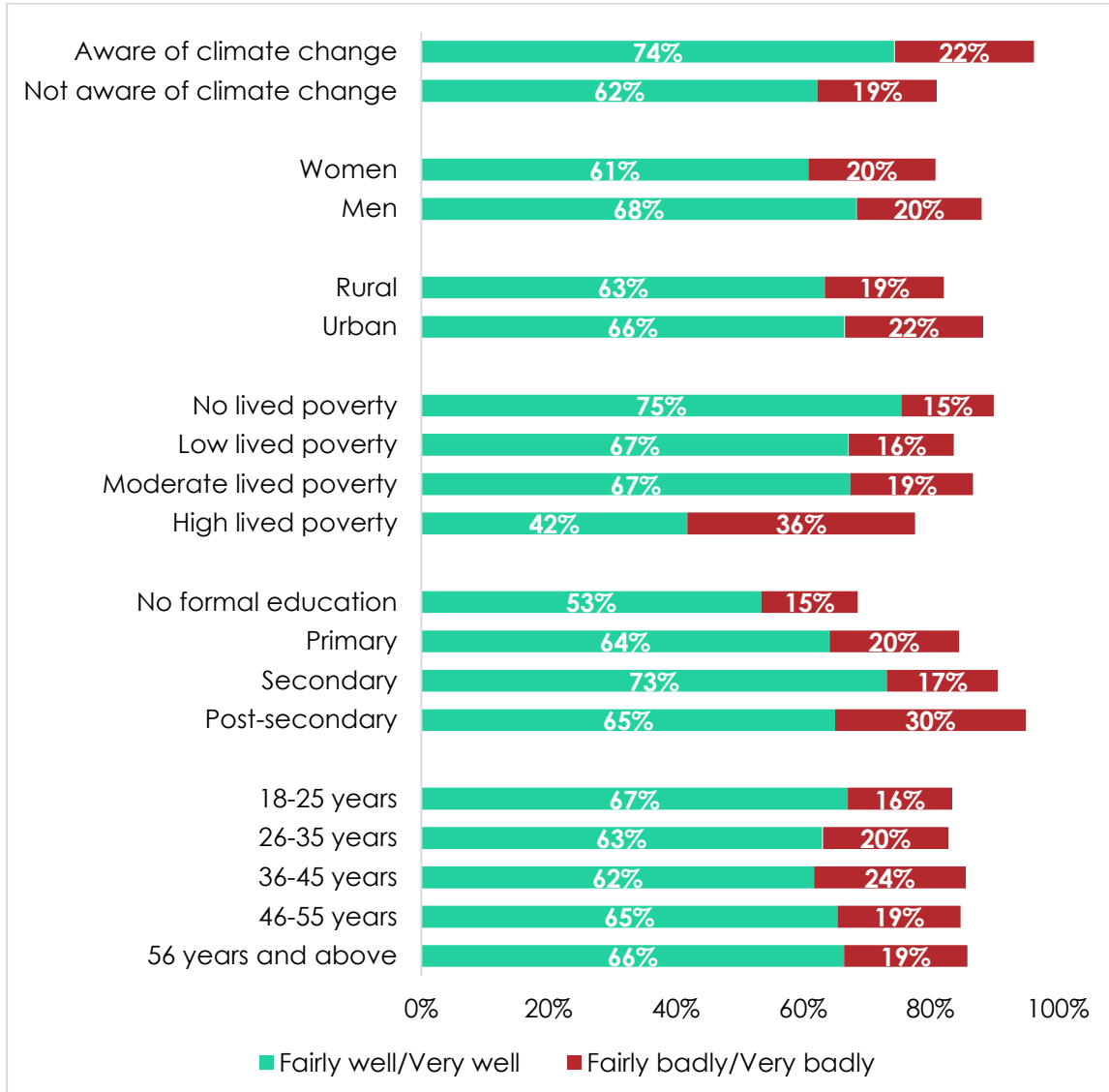
Poor citizens are particularly critical of the government's performance on climate change: Only 42% approve, while 36% disapprove. Approval is also less common among those with no formal schooling (53%) than among more educated respondents (64%-73%).

Figure 11: Government performance on addressing climate change | 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: Addressing the problem of climate change?

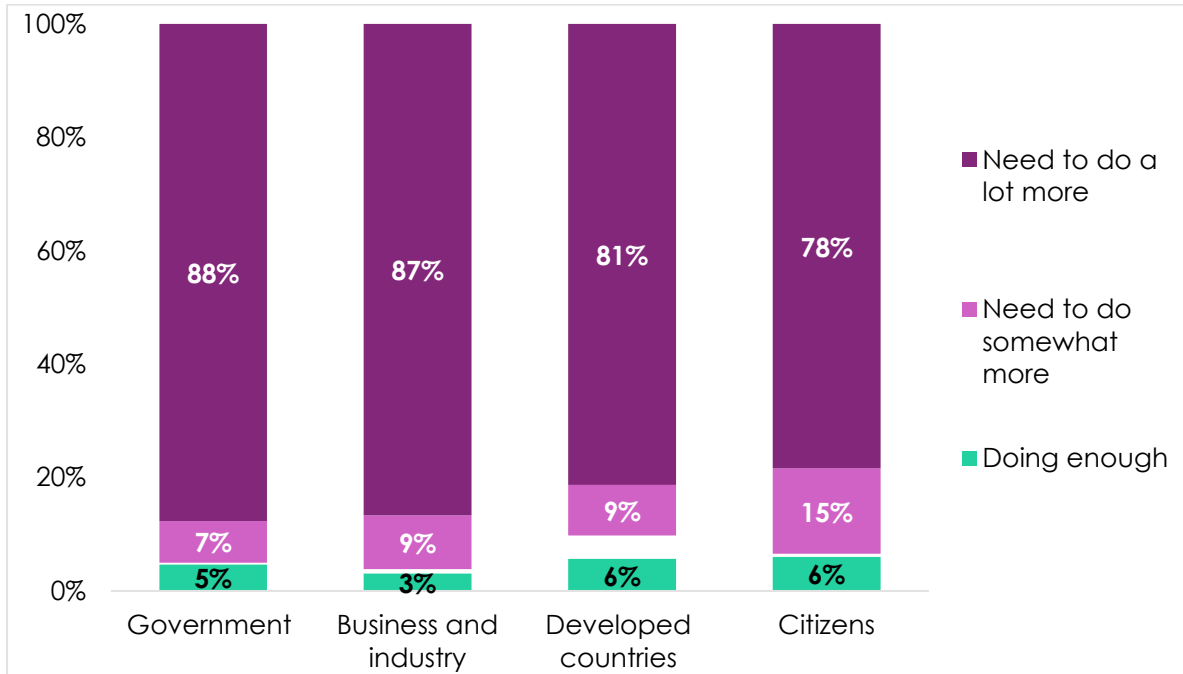
Figure 12: Government performance on addressing climate change | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022



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: Addressing the problem of climate change?

Despite their favourable assessment of the government's performance so far, Tanzanians who are aware of climate change almost unanimously call for greater engagement for climate action, including "a lot more" effort by the government (88%), business and industry (87%), developed countries (81%), and ordinary citizens (78%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Tanzania
 | 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.)

Conclusion

Among Tanzanians who have heard of climate change, most say it is making life worse. While they approve of the government's efforts on the issue, they see addressing climate change as a collective responsibility, and in a nearly unanimous voice call for greater engagement by business and industry, developed nations, and ordinary citizens as well as the government.

But only one-third of Tanzanian adults are even aware of climate change, suggesting that targeted interventions to inform more citizens may be one step toward building momentum for urgent climate action.

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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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