

Climate change a priority in Sudan – among those who have heard of it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 758 | Simon Templer Kodiaga and Elmogiera Elawad

Summary

Even as armed conflict ravages Sudan (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2023), a less obvious but insidious phenomenon threatens the well-being – even the survival – of its people: climate change.

Blamed for rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, record floods, and increasingly frequent droughts, climate change puts agriculture and other livelihoods at risk, with grave consequences for food security and health (Climate-Related Peace and Security Risks Project, 2022; USAID, 2016; ReliefWeb, 2020; Tayebi, 2021).

Evidence suggests that climate change has also increased competition for access to scarce resources, including water and grazing lands, fuelling cycles of intercommunal conflict (Climate-Related Peace and Security Risks Project, 2022; United Nations Environment Programme, 2022).

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2023) ranks Sudan among the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change worldwide (179th out of 185).

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

Findings show that almost half of Sudanese have not heard of climate change. Among those familiar with climate change, most say the government is doing a poor job of addressing the threat. But most also call for greater engagement by business and industry, developed countries, and ordinary citizens as well as by the government.

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

The Afrobarometer team in Sudan, led by the Sudan Polling Statistics Center (SPSC), interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adults in November-December 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 Sudan in 2013, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

Key findings

- More than half (51%) of Sudanese say flooding has become more severe in their region over the past decade. About four in 10 citizens (39%) say the same about droughts.
- A slim majority (54%) of Sudanese say they have heard of climate change.
 - Climate-change awareness is particularly low among citizens with no formal education (36%), those experiencing high levels of lived poverty (46%), rural residents (50%), and women (46%).
- Among Sudanese who are aware of climate change:
 - Only four in 10 (41%) say it is making life in Sudan worse.
 - More than two-thirds say that citizens can help limit climate change (68%) and that their government should take steps now to limit climate change, even if it is expensive (68%).
 - More respondents assign the primary responsibility for fighting climate change to the government (47%) than to ordinary citizens (18%), business and industry (13%), or developed countries (13%).
 - But large majorities say greater efforts to fight climate change are needed from developed countries (79%), business and industry (75%), and citizens (60%) as well as from the government (81%).
- Only about one in 10 citizens (11%) approve of the government's performance to date in addressing climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before being asked about climate change, survey respondents were asked about their experiences with extreme weather conditions.

More than half (51%) of Sudanese say that floods have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their region over the past 10 years, while 30% say they have lessened in severity and 19% see no change (Figure 1).

About four in 10 citizens (39%) say droughts have worsened. A similar proportion (38%) think they have become less severe, while 23% see no change.

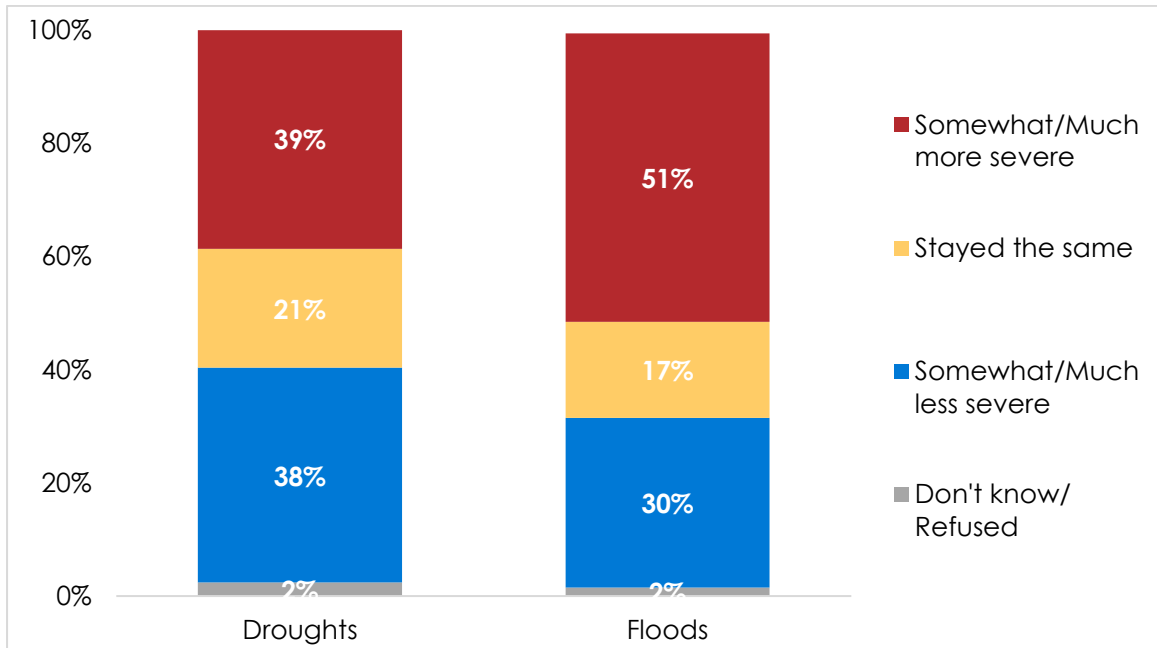
Compared to survey findings in 2018, the proportion of Sudanese who say droughts have gotten more severe has increased by 12 percentage points, from 27% to 39%. The perceptions of worsening floods have more than doubled, from 23% to 51% (Figure 2).

Economically disadvantaged respondents (those experiencing moderate or high levels of “lived poverty”¹) are significantly more likely than better-off citizens to report increasingly severe droughts as well as floods (Figure 3). For example, while 15% of those experiencing no lived poverty say droughts have worsened, 46% of the poorest respondents say the same.

Rural residents are somewhat more likely than urbanites to report worsening floods.

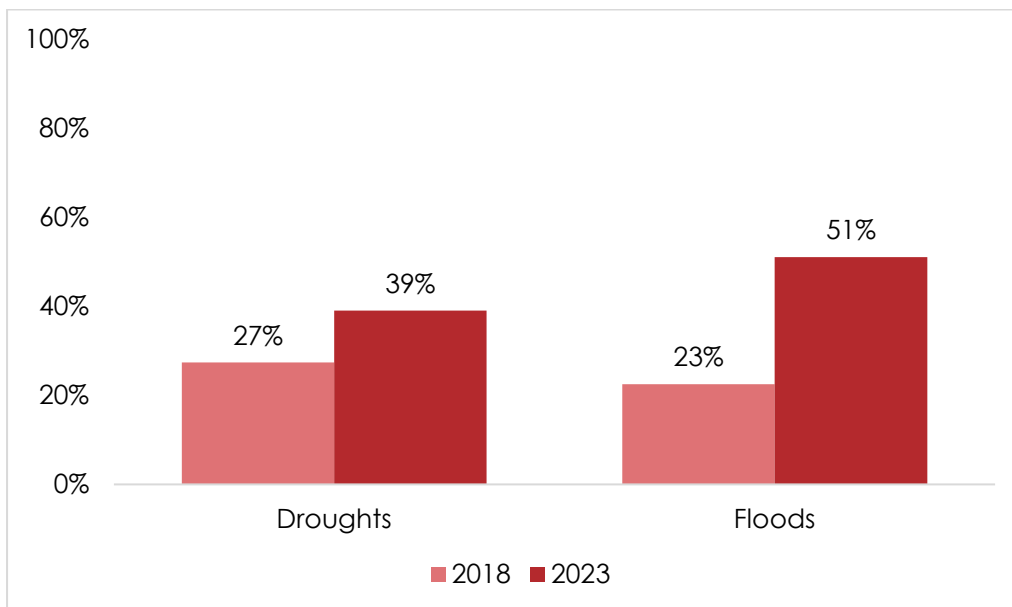
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

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



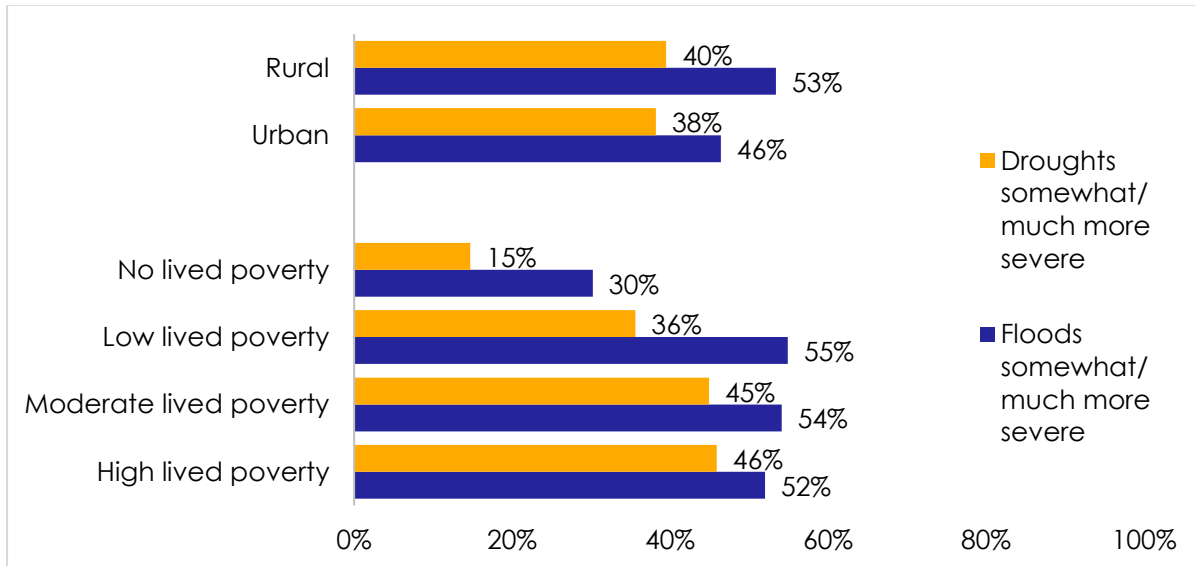
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

Figure 2: Increased severity of droughts and floods | Sudan | 2018-2022



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 3: More severe droughts and floods | by urban-rural residence and lived poverty | Sudan | 2022

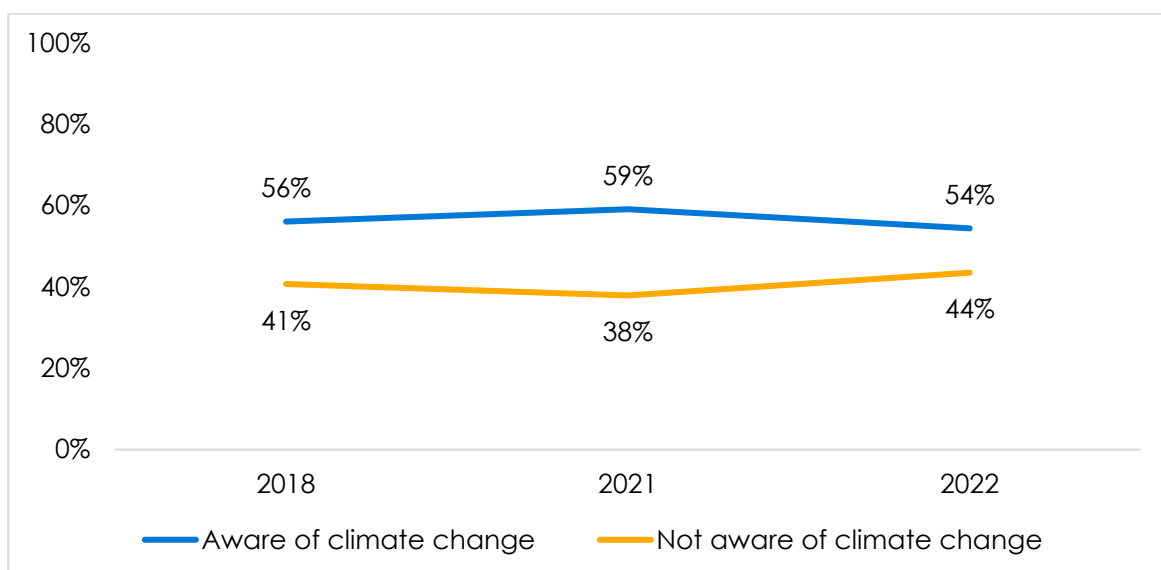


Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

Awareness of climate change

Slightly more than half (54%) of Sudanese say they have heard of climate change (Figure 4). This is a 5-percentage-point decline compared to 2021, 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.

Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Sudan | 2018-2022



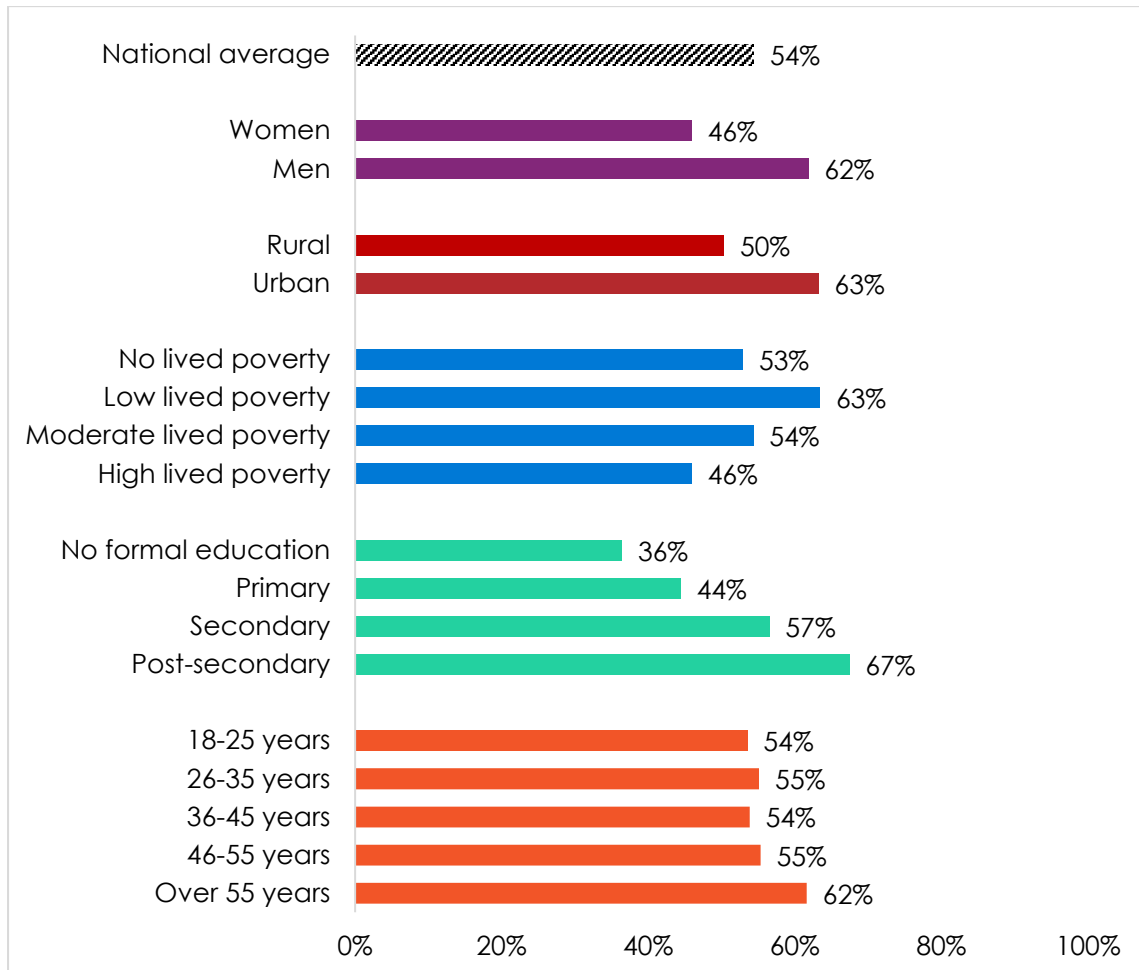
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

Although drought and flooding have immediate consequences for agriculture in rural areas, awareness of climate change is lower among rural residents than urban residents (50% vs. 63%) (Figure 5). More men (62%) than women (46%) are aware of the concept. Citizens experiencing high levels of lived poverty (46%) are less often familiar with the term “climate change” than their better-off counterparts (53%-63%).

As might be expected, awareness increases with people's level of education: The most educated respondents (67%) are almost twice as likely to have heard of climate change as those with no formal schooling (36%).

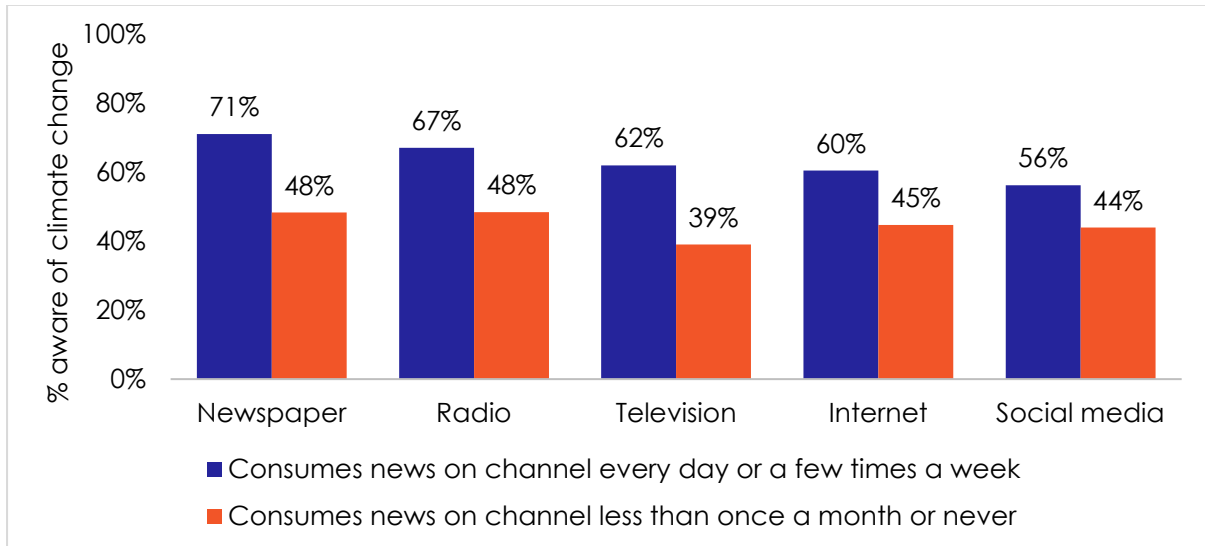
Awareness of climate change also increases with respondents' news consumption. Those who get news “every day” or “a few times a week” from social media, newspapers, the Internet, or television are significantly more likely to be familiar with climate change than those who use these news channels “less than once a month” or “never,” reaching gaps of 23 percentage points for newspapers and television (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Sudan | 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”)

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



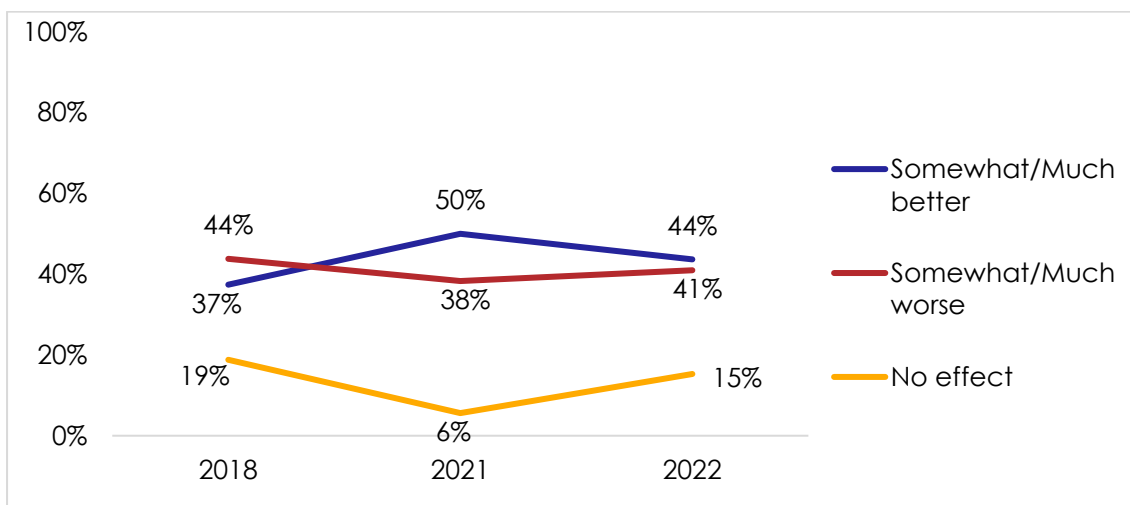
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Effects of climate change

Among citizens who are aware of climate change, only four in 10 (41%) say it is making life in Sudan "somewhat worse" or "much worse," while 44% think it is making life better. Perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change have increased slightly since 2021 (38%) (Figure 7).

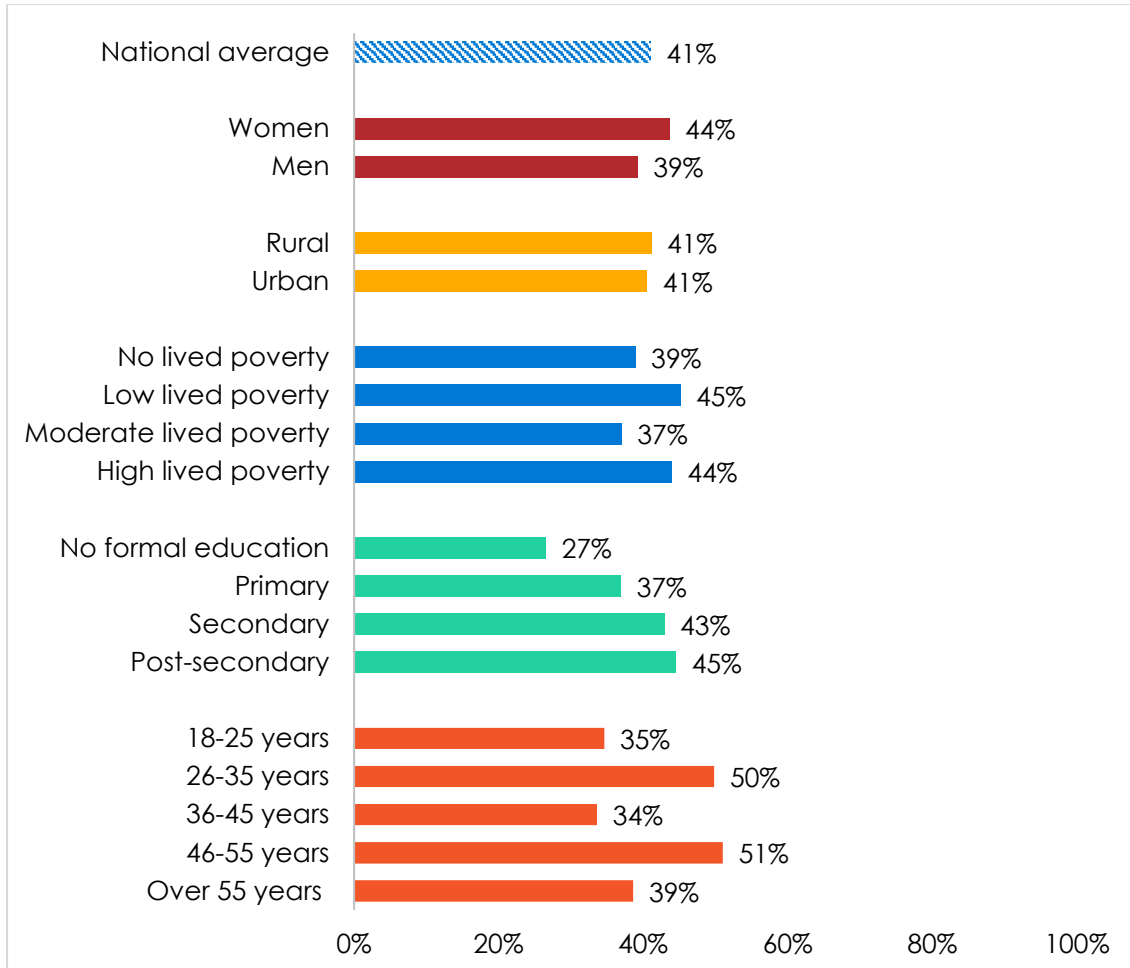
Perceptions that climate change is making life worse increase with respondents' education level, ranging from 27% among those with no formal schooling to 45% among those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Is climate change making life worse or better? | Sudan | 2018-2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Sudan 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 | Sudan
 | 2022



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

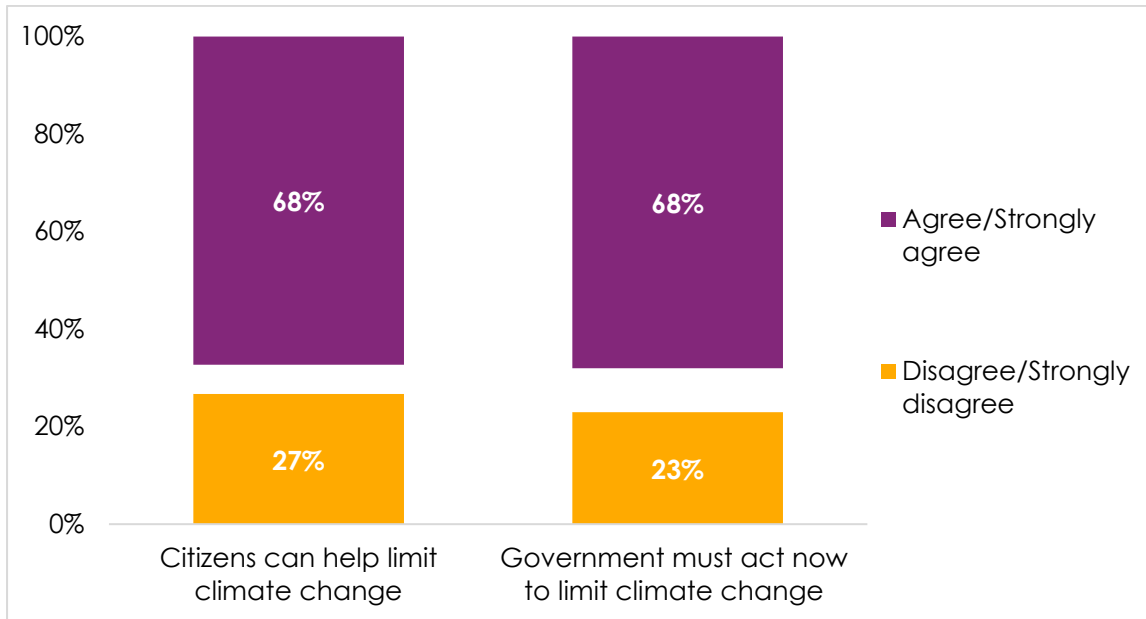
Fighting climate change

More than two-thirds of Sudanese say that ordinary citizens can help limit climate change (68%) and that their government should take steps now to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy (68%) (Figure 9).

When asked who should have the primary responsibility for limiting climate change and reducing its impact, respondents most frequently cite their government (47%). Far fewer assign this task primarily to ordinary citizens (18%), business and industry (13%), or more developed countries (13%) (Figure 10).

Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? Most Sudanese who are aware of climate change call for greater engagement for climate action, including "a lot more" effort by the government (61%), developed countries (53%), business and industry (47%), and ordinary citizens (31%) (Figure 11).

Figure 9: Limiting climate change | Sudan | 2022



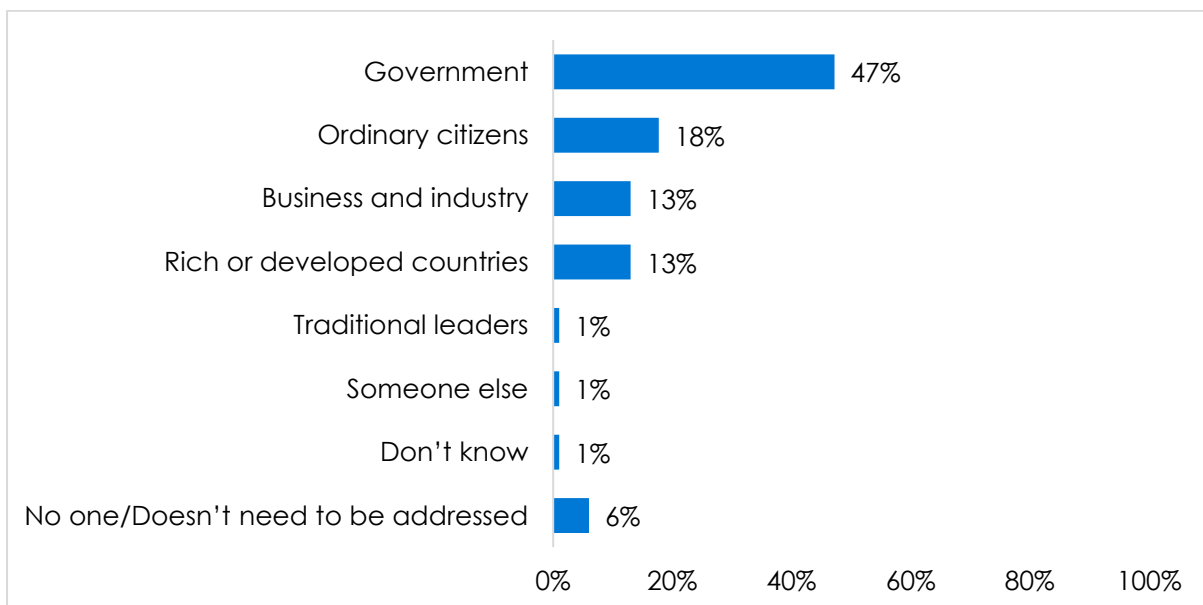
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Sudanese 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.

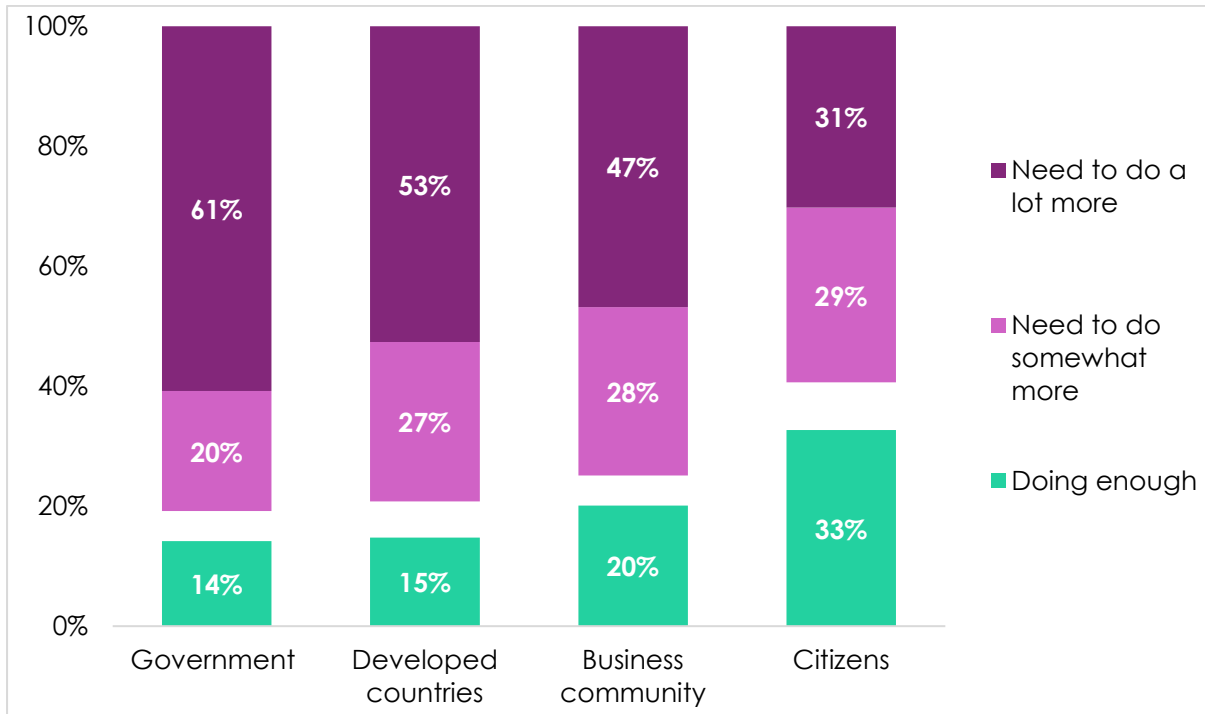
(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 10: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Sudan | 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.)

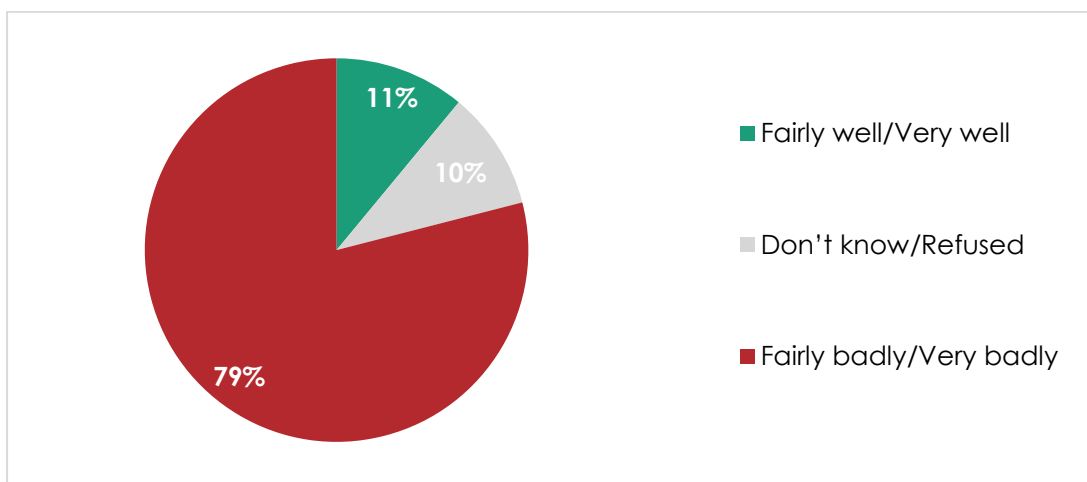
Figure 11: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Sudan | 2022



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.)

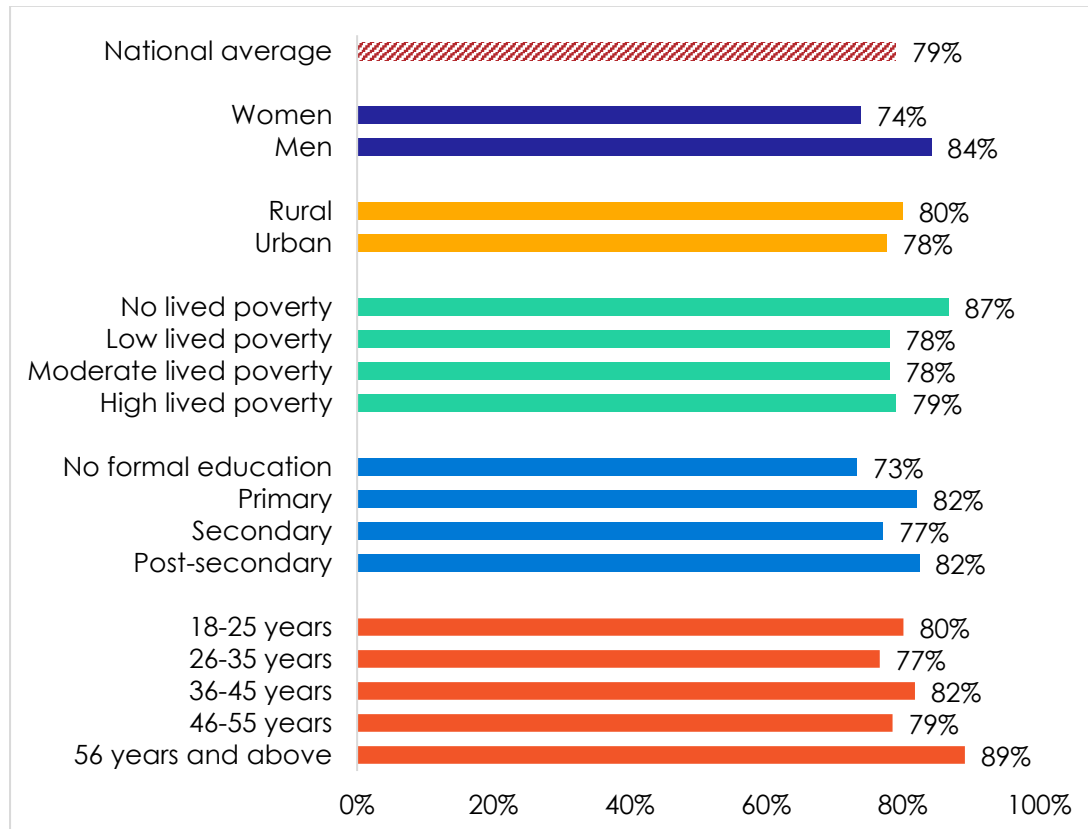
Overall, most Sudanese (790%) disapprove of the government's performance on addressing climate change, while only 11% think it is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job (Figure 12). Men are more critical than women of the government's efforts (84% vs. 74%) (Figure 13). Negative assessments of the government's performance on climate change are particularly widespread among the oldest respondents (89%) and among well-off citizens (87%).

Figure 12: Government performance in handling climate change | Sudan | 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 13: Government performing poorly in handling climate change | by demographic group | Sudan | 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

Despite the threat it poses to their livelihoods and well-being, almost half of Sudanese remain unaware of climate change. Among those who are familiar with the concept, large majorities call for greater engagement on the issue by the government, developed countries, business and industry, and ordinary citizens.

Given the widespread lack of awareness of climate change, one step toward building momentum for climate action may be targeted interventions – especially among rural, less educated, and economically disadvantaged populations – to educate more citizens about the threat.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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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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