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Amid adaptations to changes in weather, Ugandans call for collective climate action

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 817 | Sophie Sunderland

Summary

Africa is the continent most vulnerable to climate change and its impacts, yet many African countries remain unprepared to confront this threat (World Meteorological Organization, 2023). According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2023) country index, Uganda ranks high (14th) in vulnerability and low (163rd) in readiness to act against climate change.

Given that agriculture accounts for about one-fourth of Uganda's gross domestic product and employs more than 70% of its labour force, rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns pose threats to livelihoods and food security (World Bank Group, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2018). Citizens are also grappling with the consequences of global warming and more frequent extreme weather events, including both droughts and destructive floods (World Bank Group, 2021; Andrew, 2021).

The glaciers of the Rwenzori Mountains, a major source of fresh water for Ugandans, are melting at an accelerated rate, triggering floods and landslides (Baluku, 2023). Flooding is eroding copper waste pools from old mining operations, washing toxic waste into Uganda's water supply and soil (Mukpo, 2024).

The government and stakeholders have worked to mainstream climate action in the country's National Climate Change Policy (Republic of Uganda, 2015) and Green Growth Development Strategy (National Planning Authority, 2017), prioritising strategies to protect the economy and the livelihoods of the population. In June 2023, the government launched a \$2.9 million initiative to develop a National Adaptation Plan to address the growing impacts of climate change (United Nations Environment Programme, 2023).

A special question module in Afrobarometer's Round 10 survey (2024) explores Ugandans' experiences, awareness, and attitudes related to climate change. Findings show that a majority of citizens report worsening drought and crop failure in their region. Among the two-thirds of Ugandans who are familiar with climate change, large majorities blame it on human activity, say it is making life worse, and call for urgent action by their government and developed countries.

In significant numbers, Ugandans report taking steps to adapt to changing weather patterns, including changes related to crops and foods, livestock, and water use. And majorities express support for government investment in weather-resilient infrastructure, funding for wind and solar energy, a ban on tree cutting for fuel, and other policies in response to changes in climate.

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 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Ugandans in January 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2022.

Key findings

- Seven in 10 Ugandans (70%) say that crop failure has become more severe in their area over the past 10 years, and 53% say the same about droughts.
 - Increasingly severe droughts are reported most commonly in the Northern region (71%), while large majorities in all regions except Kampala say crop failure has become more severe.
- Many Ugandans report having to adjust their lives in response to changing weather patterns, including changing the types of crops they plant or the foods they eat (54%), reducing their livestock holdings or changing grazing patterns (43%), using less water or changing water sources (40%), reducing or rescheduling outdoor work (39%), and moving to a different place (23%).
 - Residents in the Central region are most likely to say they have made changes in their crops or foods (63%), livestock holdings or grazing patterns (55%), and water use (56%).
- Two-thirds (66%) of Ugandans say they have heard of climate change.
- Among those who have heard of climate change:
 - Three-fourths (76%) say it is making life in Uganda worse, up from 43% in 2019.
 - More than eight in 10 blame climate change on human activity (68%) or a combination of human activity and natural processes (16%).
 - Three-fourths (76%) say the people, businesses, and government of Uganda are primarily responsible for causing climate change.
 - Eight in 10 (80%) say the government must take immediate action to limit climate change, "even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy." The same proportion call for climate action by developed countries, including climate aid to Uganda.
 - Even so, Ugandans see themselves (45%) and their government (40%) as bearing primary responsibility for limiting climate change.
- Among all respondents, majorities express support for government policies to respond to changes in climate, including infrastructure investment (81%), placing pressure on developed countries for aid (75%), investing in wind and solar technologies (64%), and banning tree cutting for firewood or charcoal (59%).

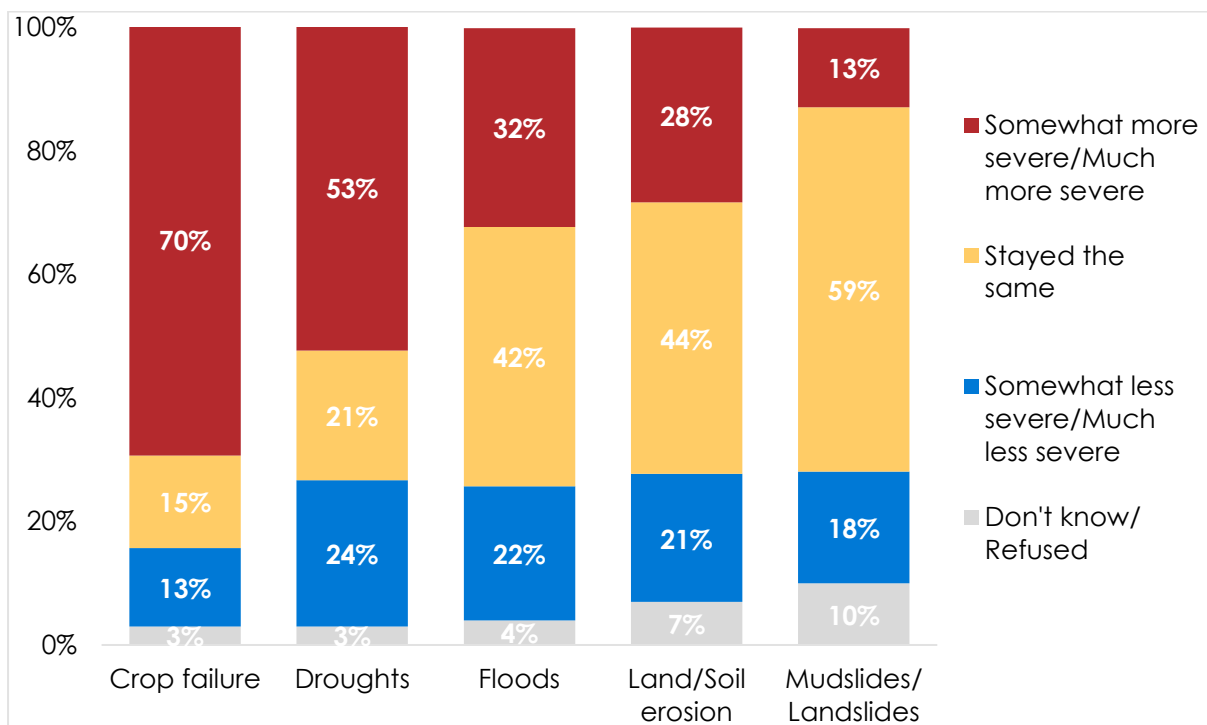
Changes in weather conditions and their consequences

Afrobarometer asked survey respondents about their experiences, if any, with changing weather conditions, the effects of such changes, and steps they have had to take in response to changes in weather patterns.

Seven in 10 Ugandans (70%) say that crop failure has become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their area over the past 10 years (Figure 1). A majority (53%) report worsening droughts.

Fewer say that floods (32%), soil erosion (28%), and mudslides or landslides (13%) have become more severe, while the largest share report that the severity of these events has remained unchanged.

Figure 1: Severity of droughts, floods, landslides, soil erosion, and crop failure
 | Uganda | 2024

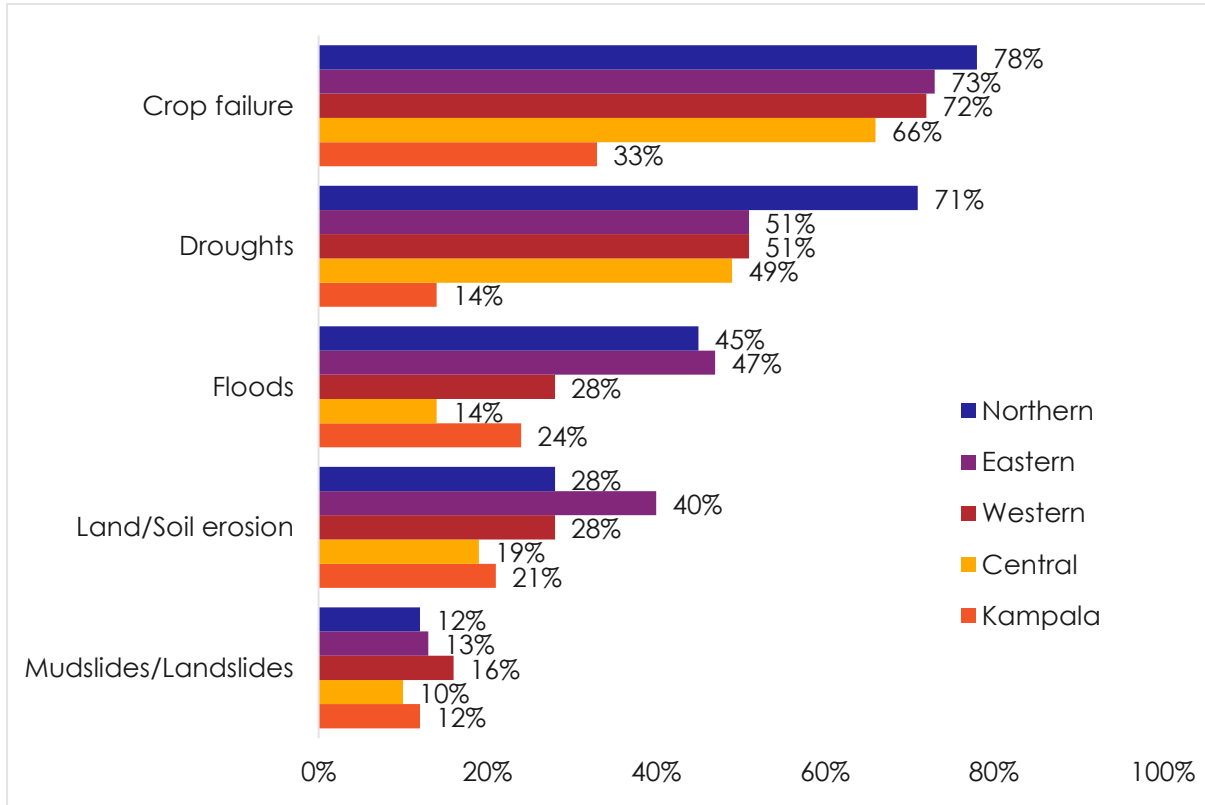


Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live: Drought? Flooding? Crop failure? Mudslides or landslides? Land or soil erosion? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about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

Increasingly severe crop failure and droughts are most widely reported in the Northern region (78% and 71%, respectively), followed by the Eastern and Western regions (Figure 2). Relatively few respondents in Kampala report worsening crop failure (34%) and droughts (14%).

More severe flooding is also most widely experienced in the Northern (45%) and Eastern (47%) regions, while worsening land/soil erosion is most common in the East (40%).

Figure 2: Increased severity of droughts, floods, landslides, soil erosion, and crop failure | by region | Uganda | 2024



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? Crop failure? Mudslides or landslides? Land or soil erosion? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

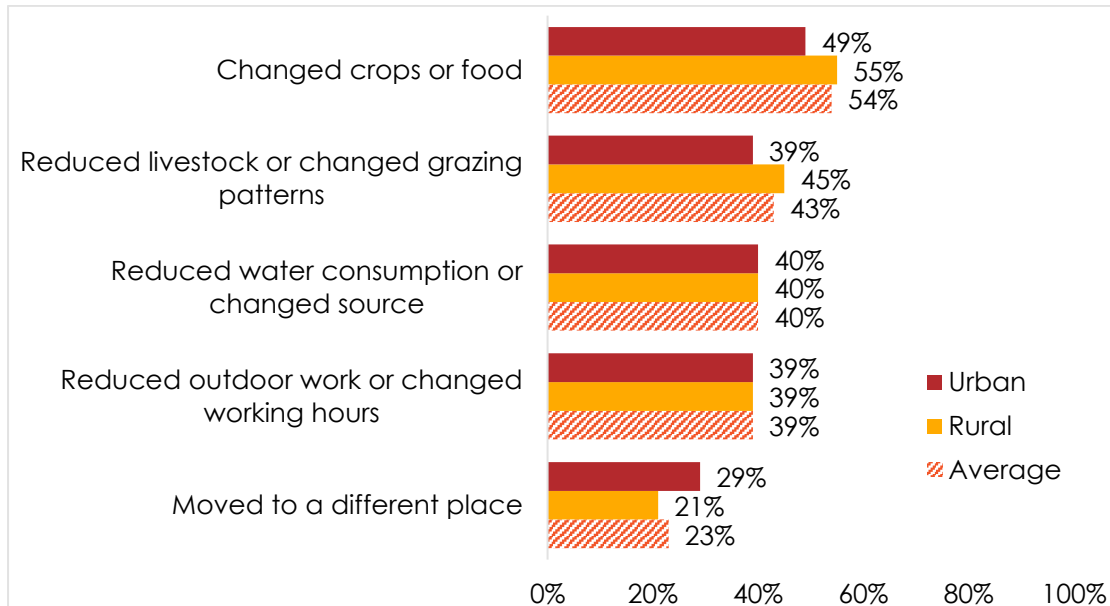
In significant numbers, Ugandans say they have had to take steps to adapt to changing weather patterns. More than half (54%) say they have made changes in the types of crops they plant or the foods they eat because of changes in the climate (Figure 3). About four in 10 report reducing their livestock holdings or changing grazing patterns (43%), using less water or changing water sources (40%), and reducing or changing the hours they work outdoors (39%). Almost one-fourth (23%) say they have had to move because of changes in weather patterns.

Adjustments in crops/foods and livestock/grazing patterns are more common in rural areas, while moving to a different place occurs more often in cities.

Residents in the Central region are most likely to say they have made changes in their crops or foods (63%), livestock holdings or grazing patterns (55%), and water use (56%) (Figure 4). Changes in outdoor work habits (47%) and moving to a different place (40%) are most widely reported in Kampala.

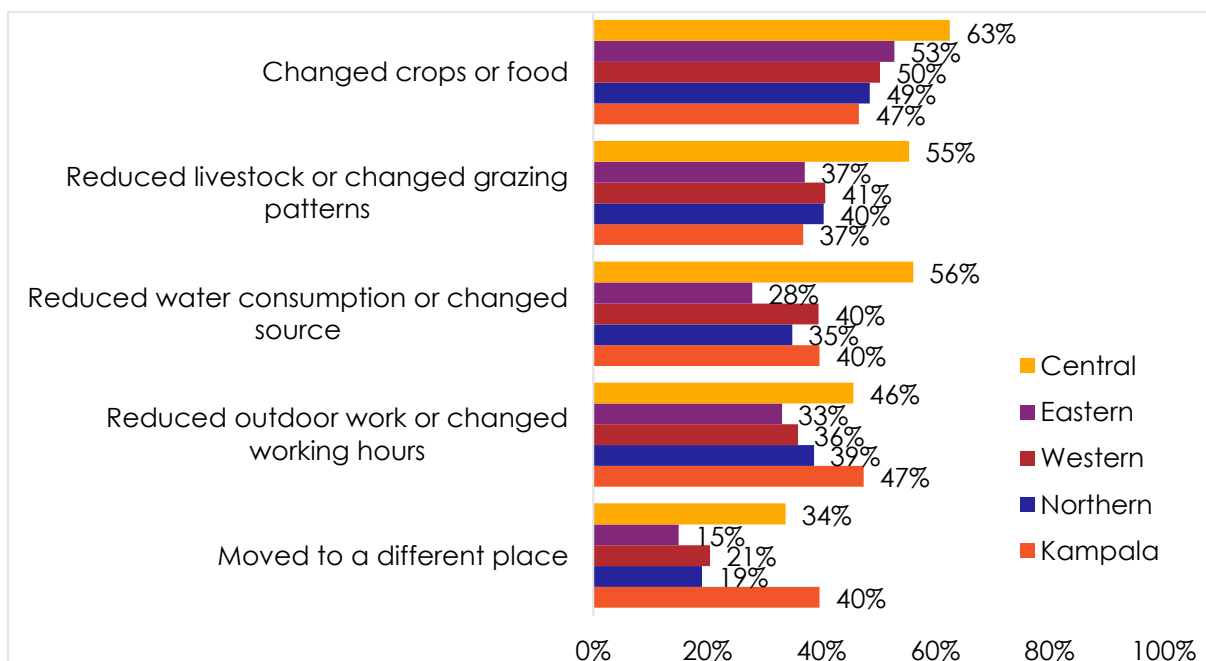
While the frequency of such adaptations doesn't vary dramatically by respondents' economic status, they are consistently (by 3-7 percentage points) more common among the poorest respondents than among the best-off (Figure 5).

Figure 3: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by urban-rural location | Uganda | 2024



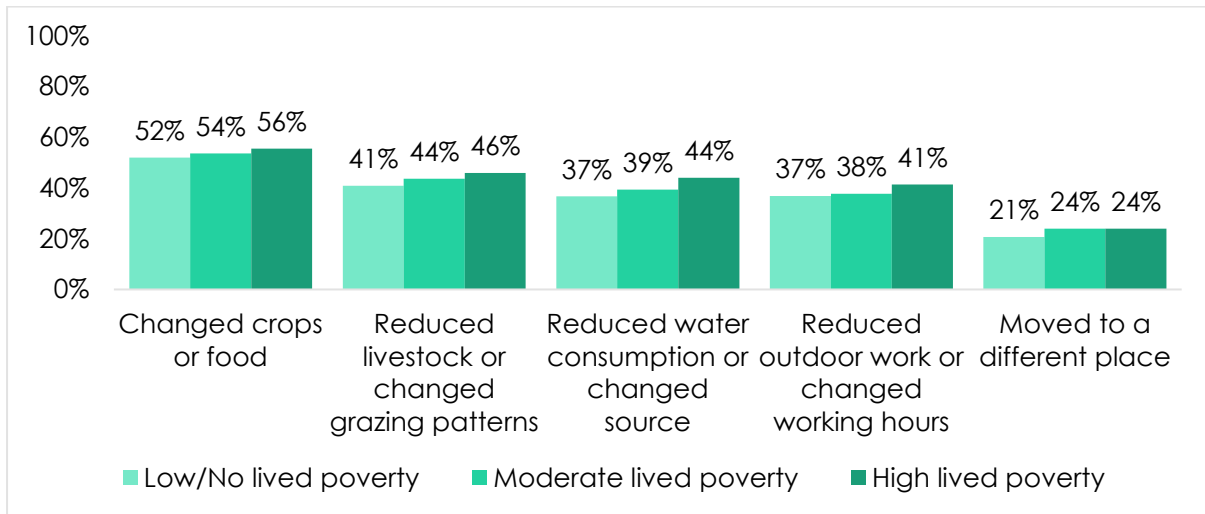
Respondents were asked: Here are a range of actions that some people have had to take because of climate changes or changing weather patterns. Please tell me whether you or your family have had to do any of the following in the past five years: Change the source or reduce the amount of water that you use? Reduce the amount of work you do outdoors or work outdoors at different times? Move to another place? Change grazing patterns or reduce the number and type of livestock you keep? Change the types of crops you plant or the types of food you eat? (% who say "yes")

Figure 4: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by region | Uganda | 2024



Respondents were asked: Here are a range of actions that some people have had to take because of climate changes or changing weather patterns. Please tell me whether you or your family have had to do any of the following in the past five years. (% who say "yes")

Figure 5: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by lived poverty | Uganda | 2024

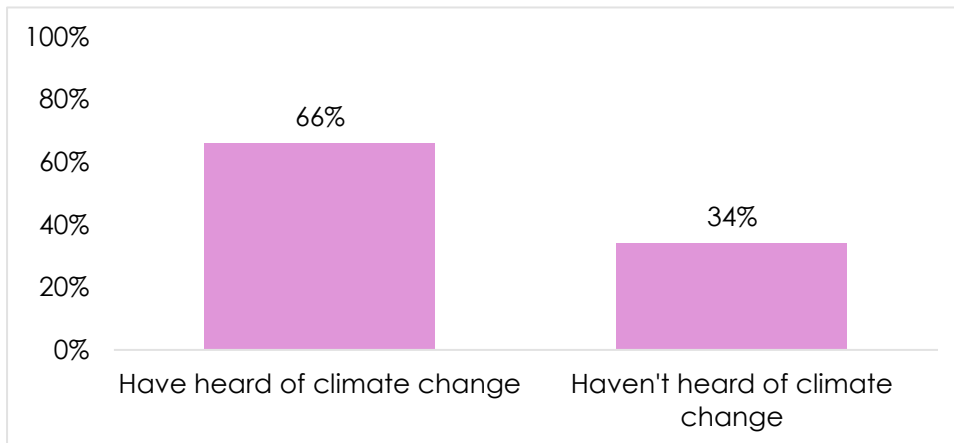


Respondents were asked: Here are a range of actions that some people have had to take because of climate changes or changing weather patterns. Please tell me whether you or your family have had to do any of the following in the past five years. (% who say "yes")

Awareness of climate change

While most respondents offer assessments of weather-related events, not all Ugandans are aware of climate change: Two-thirds (66%) say they have heard of the concept, while one in three (34%) say they have not (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Awareness of climate change | Uganda | 2024



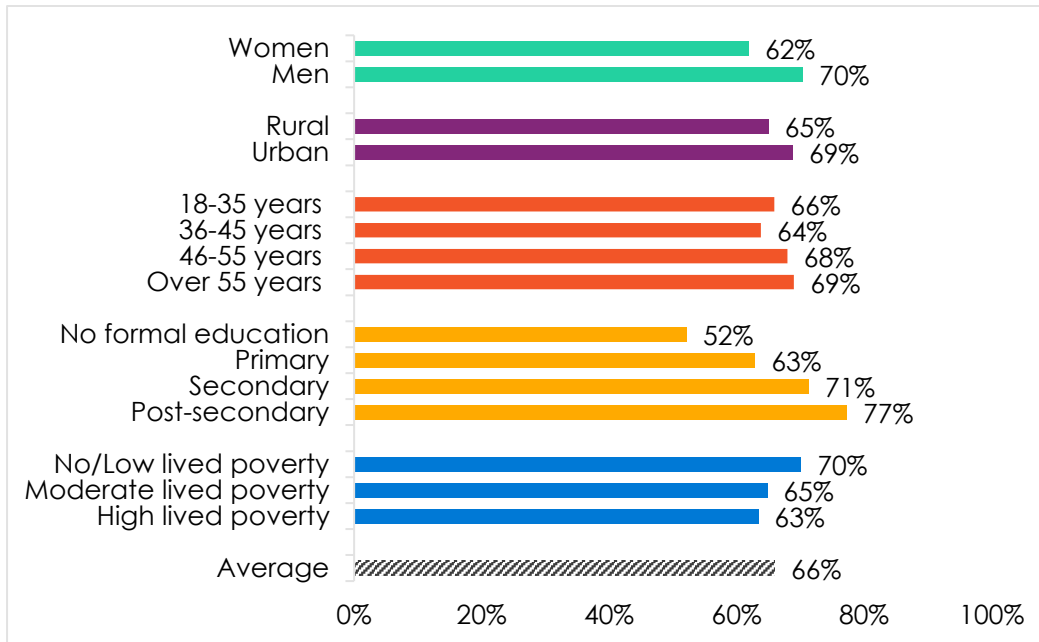
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

As might be expected, awareness of climate change increases sharply with respondents' education level, ranging from 52% among those with no formal schooling to 77% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 7). Economically well-off citizens are more familiar with the concept of climate change (70%) than those experiencing high lived poverty¹ (63%).

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 past year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

Awareness is higher among men than women (70% vs. 62%) and is slightly higher in cities than in rural areas (69% vs. 65%).

Figure 7: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Uganda | 2024

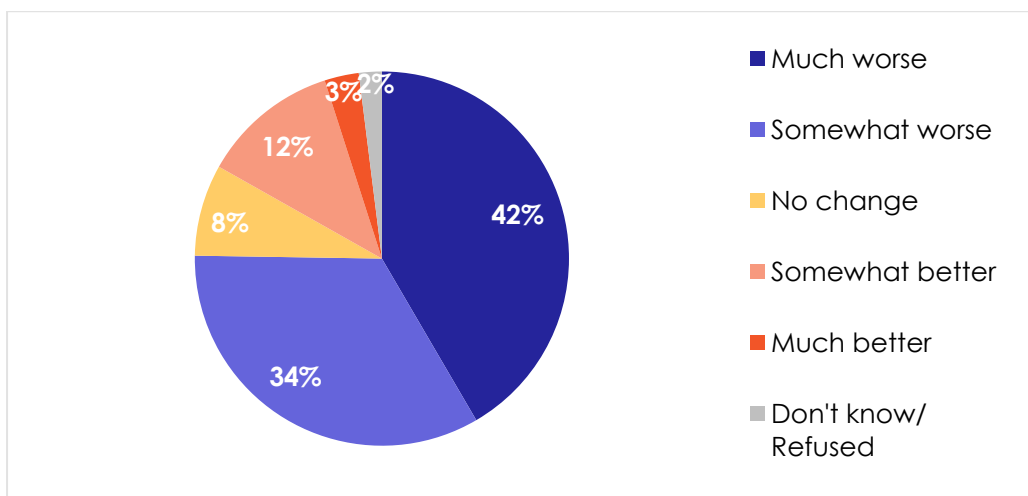


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Effect of climate change

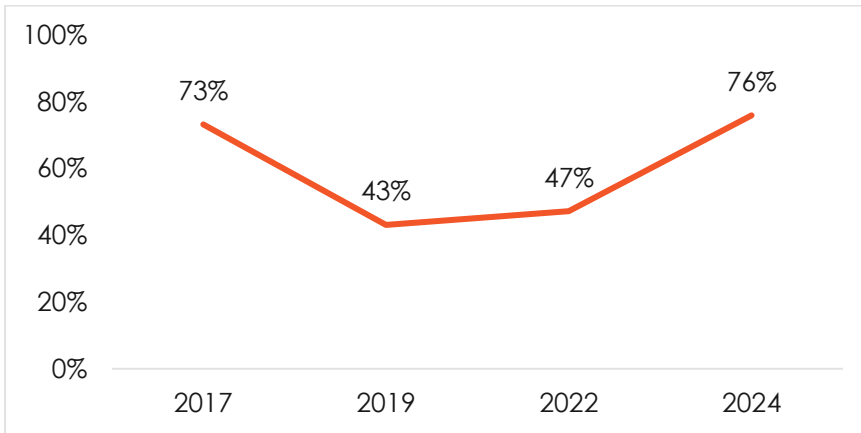
Among respondents who have heard of climate change, three-fourths (76%) think it is making life in Uganda worse, including 42% who say "much worse" (Figure 8). The share of citizens who see climate change as worsening the quality of life has increased by 33 percentage points compared to 2017 (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Is climate change making life worse or better? | Uganda | 2024



Respondents who had heard 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 had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

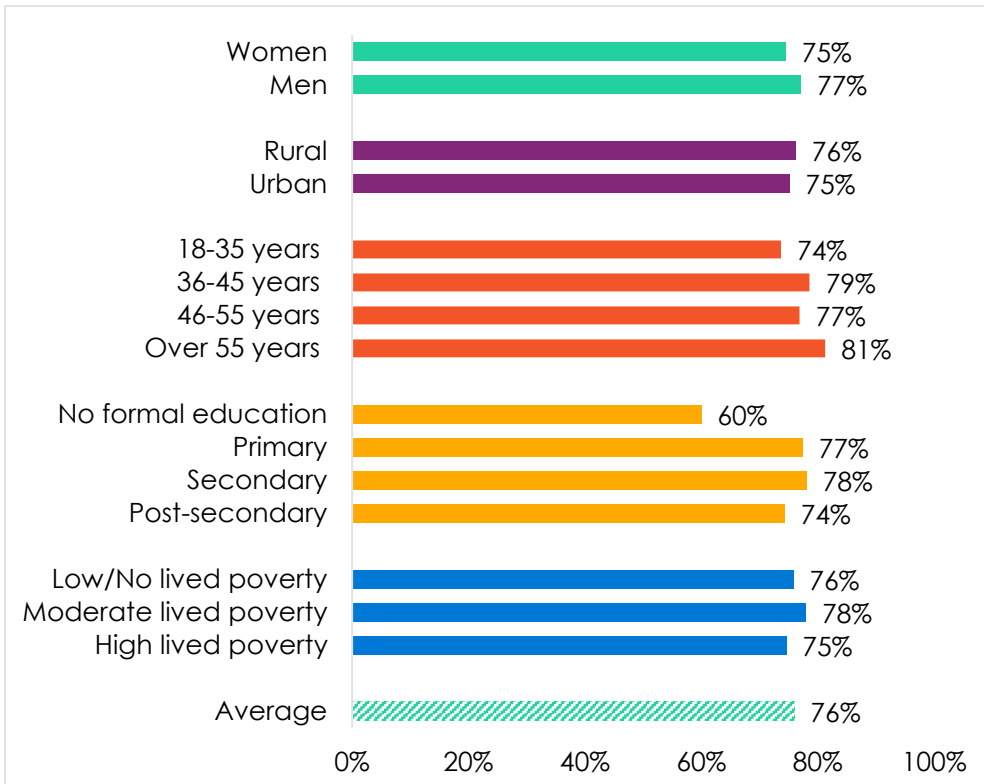
Figure 9: Climate change is making life worse | Uganda | 2017-2024



Respondents who had heard 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 had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Perceptions of the negative impact of climate change are fairly consistent across key demographic groups, though somewhat less common among respondents with no formal education (60%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Uganda | 2024



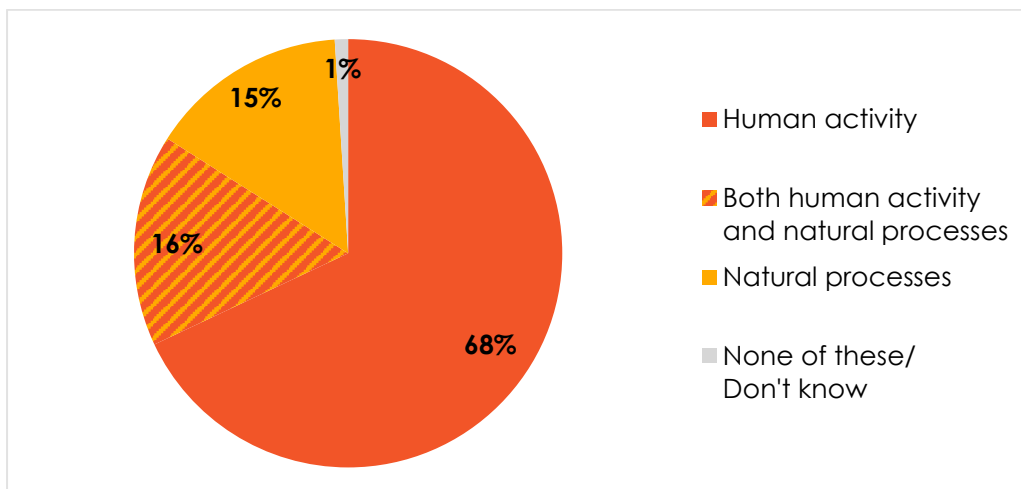
Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Uganda better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Causes of climate change

Among Ugandans who are aware of climate change, more than two-thirds (68%) see human activity as primarily responsible for causing climate change. About one in seven (15%) blame natural processes, while about the same share (16%) think climate change is caused by a combination of human activity and natural processes (Figure 11).

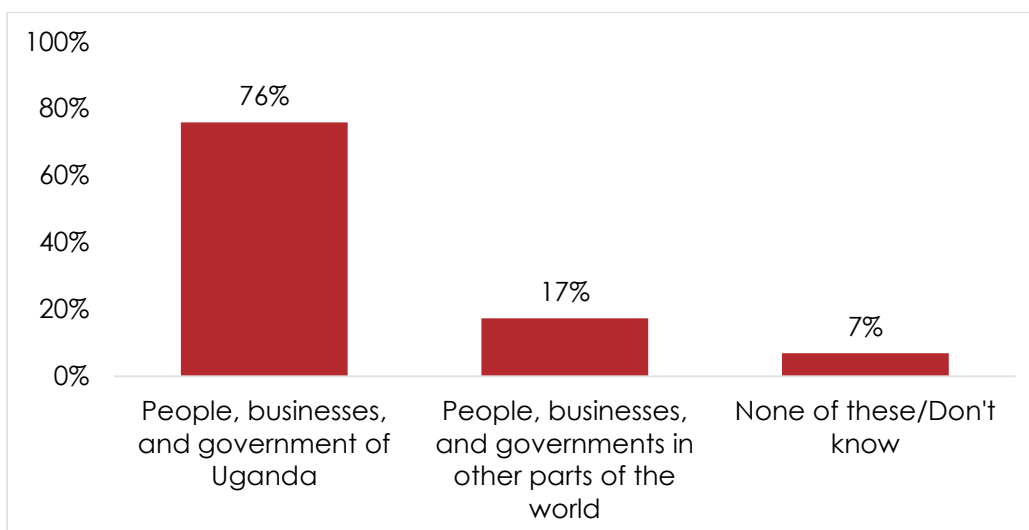
With regard to the specific actors most responsible for causing climate change, three-fourths (76%) of respondents blame the people, businesses, and government of Uganda. Only 17% say other parts of the world are most responsible (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Main causes of climate change | Uganda | 2024



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: People have different ideas about what causes climate change. What about you? Which of the following do you think is the main cause of climate, or haven't you heard enough to say: Human activity, like cutting down forests, or burning fuel and other activities that pollute the atmosphere? Natural weather patterns or natural processes? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 12: Who is responsible for causing climate change? | Uganda | 2024



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Who do you think is most responsible for causing climate change: The people, businesses, and government of Uganda? People, businesses, and governments in other parts of the world?

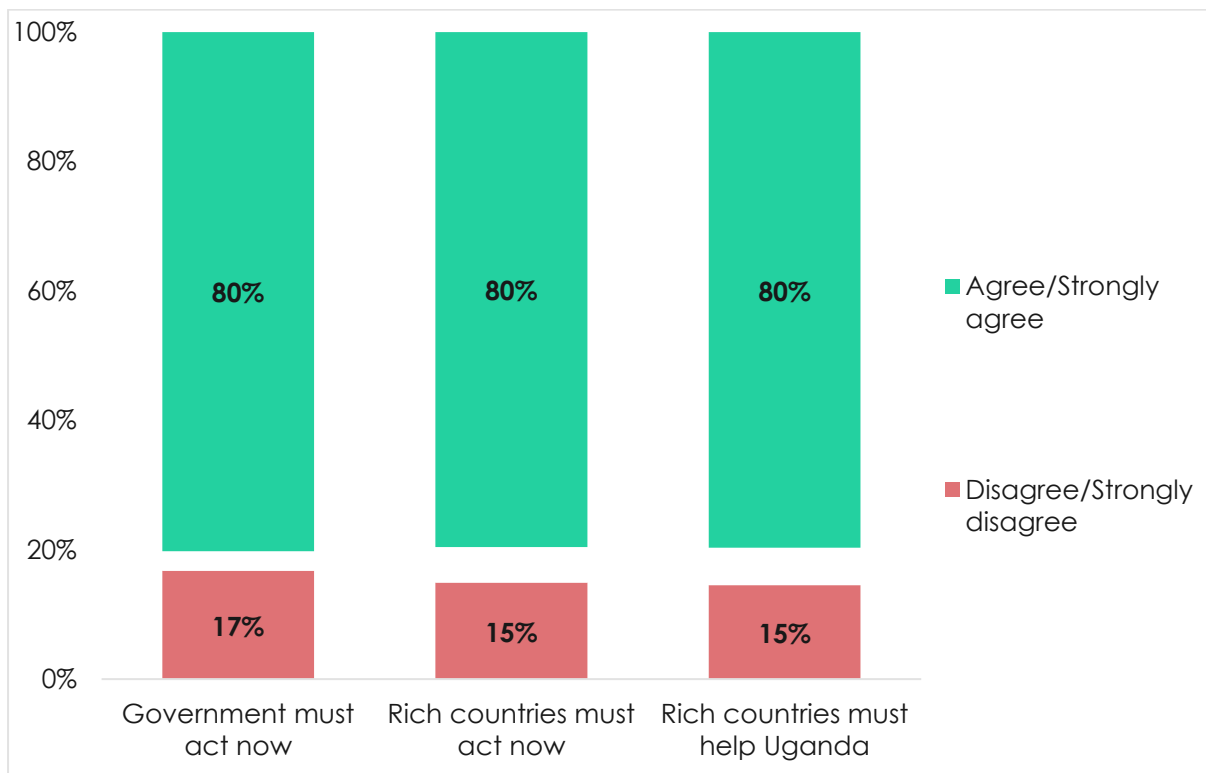
Addressing climate change

Survey findings indicate that Ugandans view addressing climate change as a collective responsibility. Eight of 10 respondents (80%) say the government must act now to limit climate change, “even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy” (Figure 13).

The same proportion (80%) say that rich or developed nations should take steps now to fight climate change, “even if it is costly for those countries,” and have an obligation to assist Uganda in responding to the crisis.

Ultimately, Ugandans see ordinary citizens (45%) and their own government (40%) as sharing the primary responsibility for limiting climate change. Only a small proportion of Ugandans view business and industry (6%), rich countries (4%), or traditional leaders (2%) as bearing primary responsibility for fighting and reducing the impact of climate change (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Who must act to limit climate change | Uganda | 2024



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

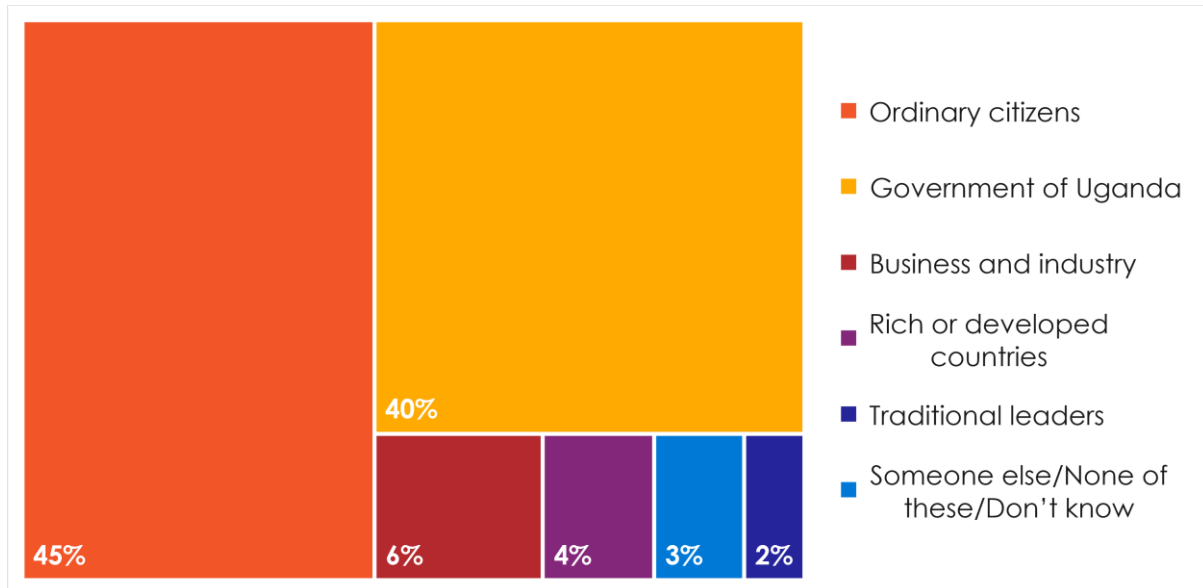
It is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.

It is important for rich or developed countries that have done the most to cause climate change to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is costly for those countries.

Rich or developed countries that have done the most to cause climate change have an obligation to help Uganda cover the costs of adapting and responding to the negative impacts of climate change.

(Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 14: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Uganda
 | 2024



Respondents who had heard 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 had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Views on policies in response to changing weather patterns

Afrobarometer asked all respondents, regardless of whether they had heard of climate change, about their views on measures their government might take in response to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation.

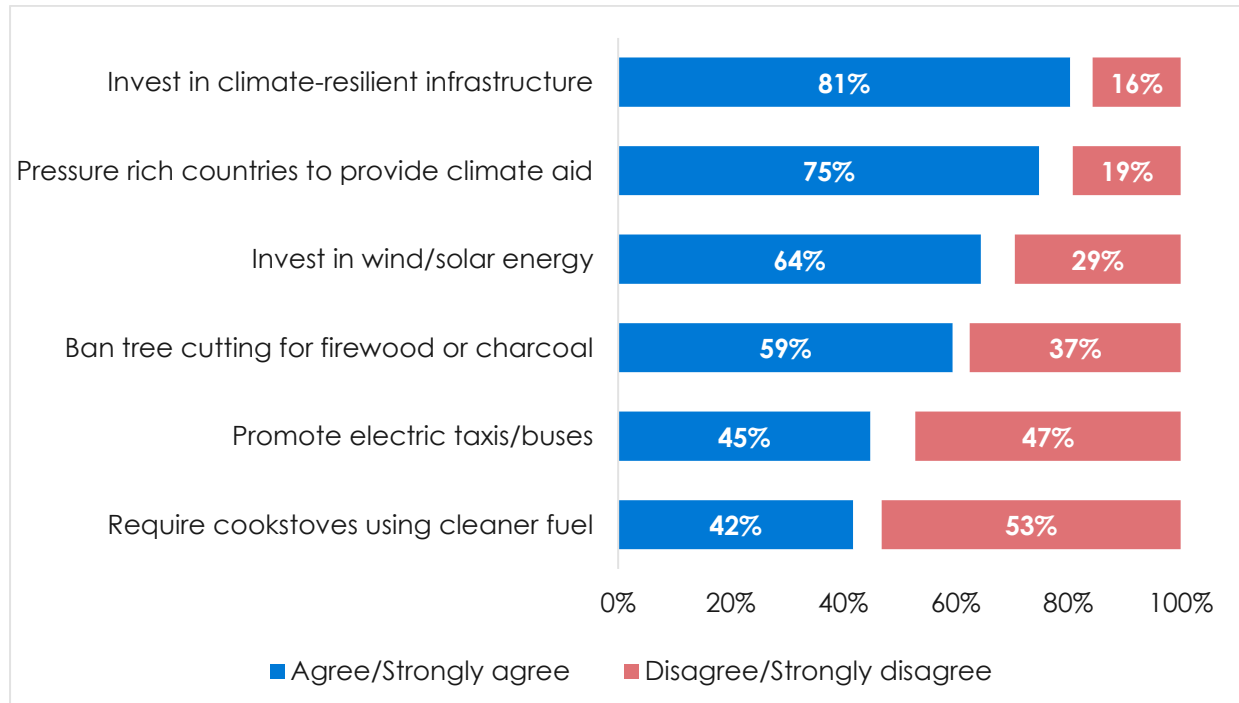
Strong majorities endorse investing in infrastructure to increase resilience to floods and droughts (81%), putting pressure on rich or developed countries to provide resources to help Ugandans affected by changes in weather conditions (75%), and investing in wind and solar technologies, even if it increases the price of electricity (64%) (Figure 15).

A slimmer majority (59%) support making it illegal for people to cut down trees for firewood or charcoal.

Views are divided on whether the government should promote the use of taxis and buses that run on electricity if that would mean higher fares, and only a minority (42%) favours a requirement that everyone switch to cookstoves that use cleaner fuels, such as electricity, gas, or propane.

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Figure 15: Views on policies in response to changing weather patterns | Uganda | 2024



Respondents were asked: *There are many policies that our government could adopt in order to respond to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation. Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with each of the following options:*

- Make it illegal for people to cut down trees for firewood or charcoal, even if it means we have to pay more for other sources of energy.*
- Require everyone to switch to cookstoves that use cleaner fuels like electricity, gas, or propane, even if it means we have to pay more to cook our food.*
- Invest in improving infrastructure so our country can withstand more extreme floods and droughts.*
- Put more pressure on rich and developed countries to provide resources to help Ugandans who are affected by climate change or changes in weather conditions.*
- Promote the use of taxis and buses that run on electricity, even if that means we have to pay higher fares.*
- Invest in wind and solar technologies to generate electricity, even if it increases the price.*

Conclusion

The most recent Afrobarometer survey shows that in significant numbers, Ugandans are experiencing effects of climate change such as drought and crop failure, are personally taking steps to adapt to changing weather patterns, and are supportive of a range of climate-related policies, even at considerable expense.

While one-third of citizens have still not heard of climate change, those familiar with the threat are largely united in seeing it as making life worse, in blaming it on human activity, and in calling for urgent climate action by their government and developed nations.

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Sophie Sunderland is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. Email: sunder16@msu.edu.

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