

Ethiopians call for greater climate action by government and other stakeholders

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 888 | Anne Okello

Summary

Ethiopia is highly susceptible to climate-related disasters. Cumulatively, the impact of its 2021-2023 drought on the country's arid and pastoral regions ranks among the most severe in the past four decades (World Bank, 2024; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023). Effects of the drought were compounded by conflicts in certain regions, complicating humanitarian aid and access to resources (Yibeltal & Kupemba, 2023). Concurrently, heavy rains triggered flooding in some regions, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of communities already grappling with the effects of the prolonged drought (Davies, 2023; Demisse, 2022).

Climate-induced shocks pose risks to public health, livelihoods, infrastructure, and agricultural productivity. Ethiopia's annual gross domestic product losses due to climate impacts are projected to rise from 1%-1.5% to 5%-10% by the 2040s, underscoring the urgent need for resilient climate strategies and sustainable development practices (World Bank, 2010, 2024).

Through its Climate-Resilient Green Economy strategy, Ethiopia aims to transition to a green economy and achieve middle-income status by prioritising climate-smart agriculture, forest restoration, renewable energy expansion, and energy-efficient industries. Further, under its updated Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, Ethiopia has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 68% by 2030, up from its initial target of 64%, reaffirming its commitment to tackling climate change (World Bank, 2021).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' attitudes and perceptions related to climate change.

Findings show that fewer than half of Ethiopians have heard of climate change. Among those aware of climate change, a majority say the government is doing a good job of addressing the threat. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that stronger action is needed, with large majorities calling for greater engagement by the government, business and industry, developed countries, and ordinary citizens.

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 survey rounds in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In Round 9, the Afrobarometer team in Ethiopia, led by ABCON – Research and Consulting, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Ethiopians in May-June 2023. 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 Ethiopia in 2013 and 2020.

Key findings

- Almost four in 10 Ethiopians (37%) say droughts have become more severe in their region over the past 10 years, ranging from just 17% in the Benishangul-Gumuz region to 78% in Addis Ababa. Three in 10 (30%) report worsening floods, though this ranges up to 79% in Addis Ababa.
- Fewer than half (47%) of citizens say they have heard about climate change.
 - Awareness is particularly low among women, rural residents, and the least educated.
- Among those who are aware of climate change:
 - Fewer than half (45%) say it is making life in Ethiopia worse.
 - Most respondents believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change (75%) and that their government needs to take immediate climate action, even at considerable economic cost (79%).
 - Most assign the primary responsibility for fighting climate change to the government (46%) and ordinary citizens (43%).
 - Overwhelming majorities say greater efforts to fight climate change are needed from the government (90%), business and industry (90%), developed countries (87%), and citizens (87%).
- Even as they call for greater action, two-thirds (66%) of citizens approve of the government's performance in addressing climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions.

Only 37% of Ethiopians say droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their region over the past 10 years, while 48% say they have become less severe and 12% report no change (Figure 1).

Even fewer (30%) say the severity of flooding has worsened, while half (50%) say floods have become less severe.

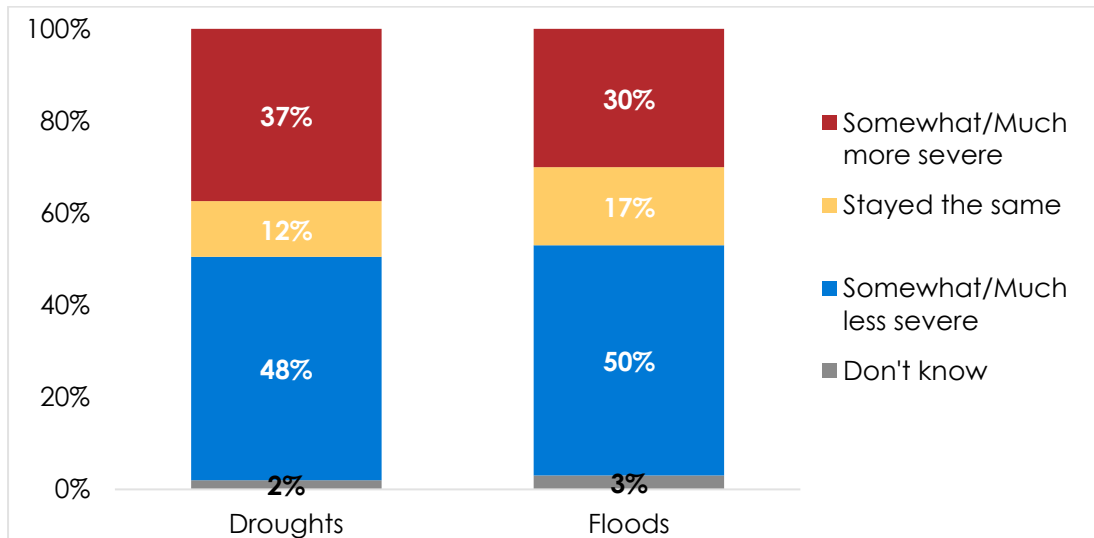
But these assessments vary dramatically by geographic area (Figure 2). Majorities in four regions/chartered cities report worsening droughts, led by Addis Ababa (78%) and Dire Dawa (62%), compared to just 17% in Benishangul-Gumuz. Addis Ababa is the only area where a majority (79%) report worsening floods.

Perceptions of worsening droughts are more common among the economically disadvantaged than among those experiencing no lived poverty¹ (52% vs. 25%). The same pattern holds for worsening floods (37% vs. 29%).

Rural residents are less likely than urbanites to report worsening droughts (35% vs. 40%) and floods (28% vs. 35%).

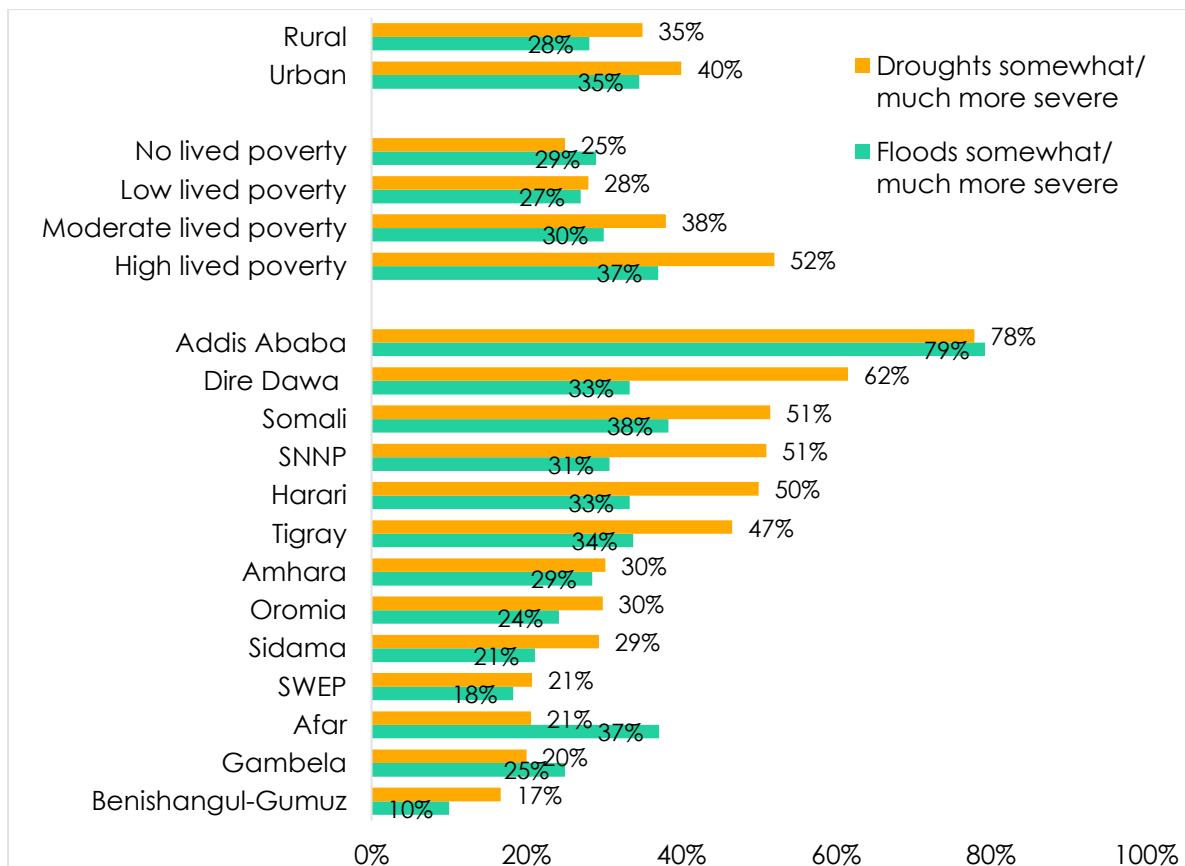
¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 1: Severity of drought and floods | Ethiopia | 2023



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: More severe droughts and floods | by urban-rural residence, lived poverty, and region | Ethiopia | 2023



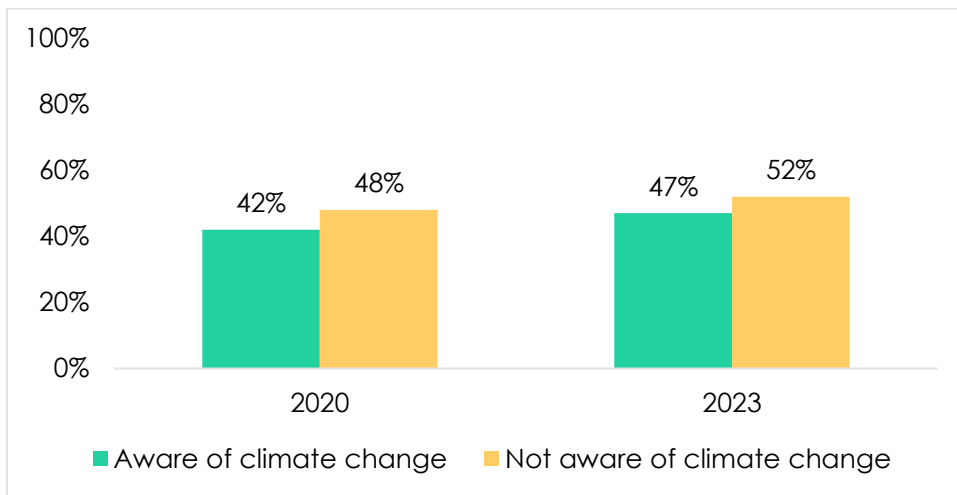
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

Awareness of climate change

Fewer than half (47%) of Ethiopians say they have heard about climate change, a 5-percentage-point increase since 2020 (Figure 3).

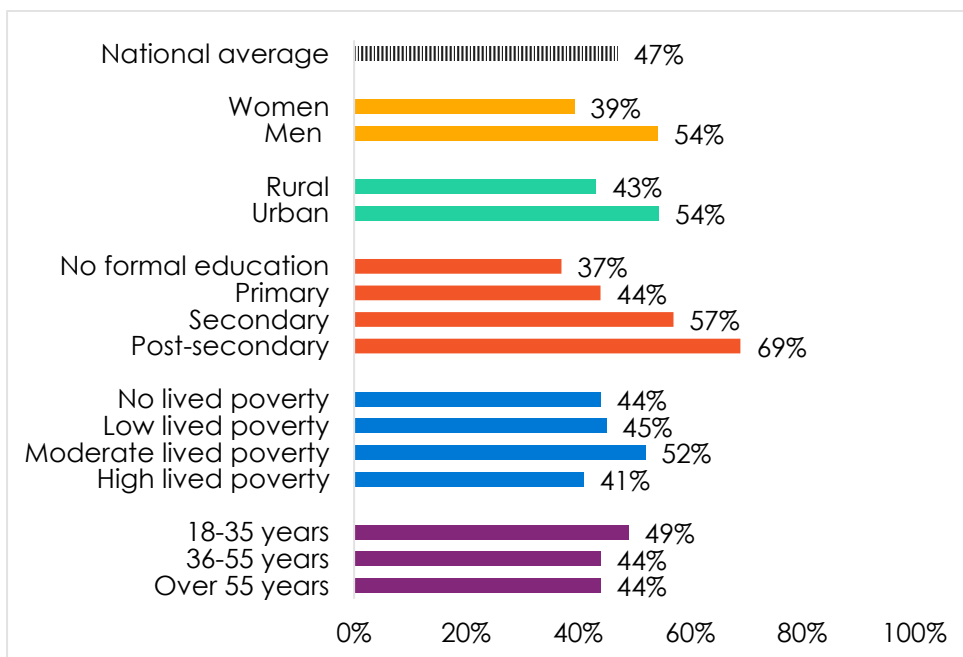
Awareness of climate change is higher among men than women (54% vs. 39%), among urbanites than rural dwellers (54% vs. 43%), and among the youngest cohort than older respondents (49% vs. 44%) (Figure 4). As might be expected, awareness increases with respondents' level of education, ranging from 37% of those with no formal schooling to 69% of those with post-secondary qualifications.

Figure 3: Awareness of climate change | Ethiopia | 2020-2023



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

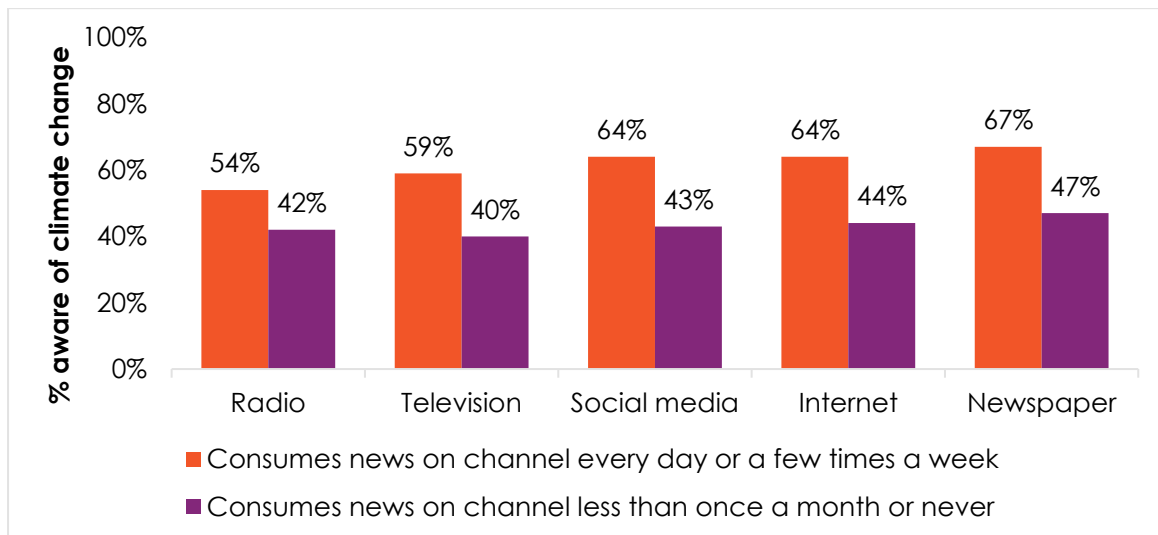
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023



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. Those who get news "every day" or "a few times a week" from the radio, television, social media, the Internet, or newspapers are significantly more likely (by 12 to 21 percentage points) to be familiar with climate change than those who use these news channels "less than once a month" or "never" (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by news media consumption | Ethiopia | 2023

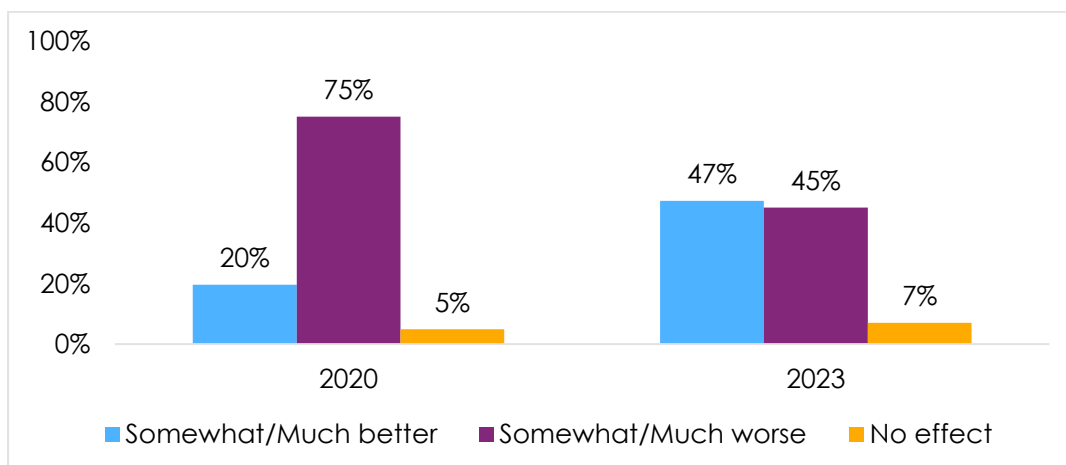


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Effects of climate change

Fewer than half (45%) of citizens who are aware of climate change say it is making life in Ethiopia "somewhat worse" or "much worse," while a similar proportion (47%) think it is making life better (Figure 6). Perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change have declined significantly since 2020 (75%), perhaps reflecting a limited understanding of climate change tied to particular weather events.

Figure 6: Effect of climate change | Ethiopia | 2020-2023

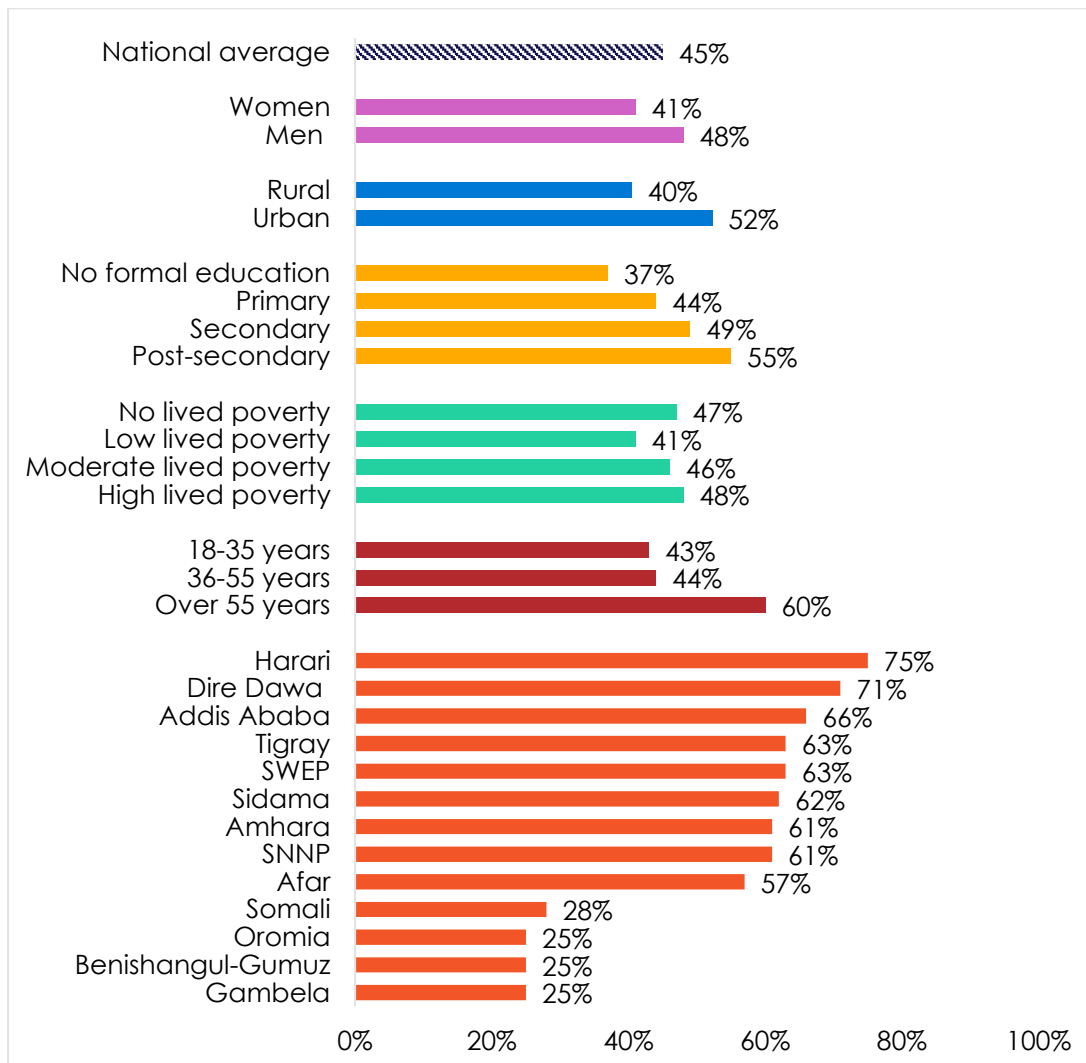


Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Ethiopia better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Concern that climate change is making life worse varies widely by geographic area (Figure 7). Majorities in nine of 13 regions/chartered cities offer this assessment, led by Harari (75%) and Dire Dawa (71%), while only about one in four residents share this perception in Gambela (25%), Benishangul-Gumuz (25%), Oromia (25%), and Somali (28%).

This concern is more widely expressed by men than women (48% vs. 41%), by urban residents than their rural counterparts (52% vs. 40%), and by those with post-secondary qualifications than the least educated (55% vs. 37%). The young (43%) are less likely to recognise the negative impact of climate change than the elderly (60%).

Figure 7: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023

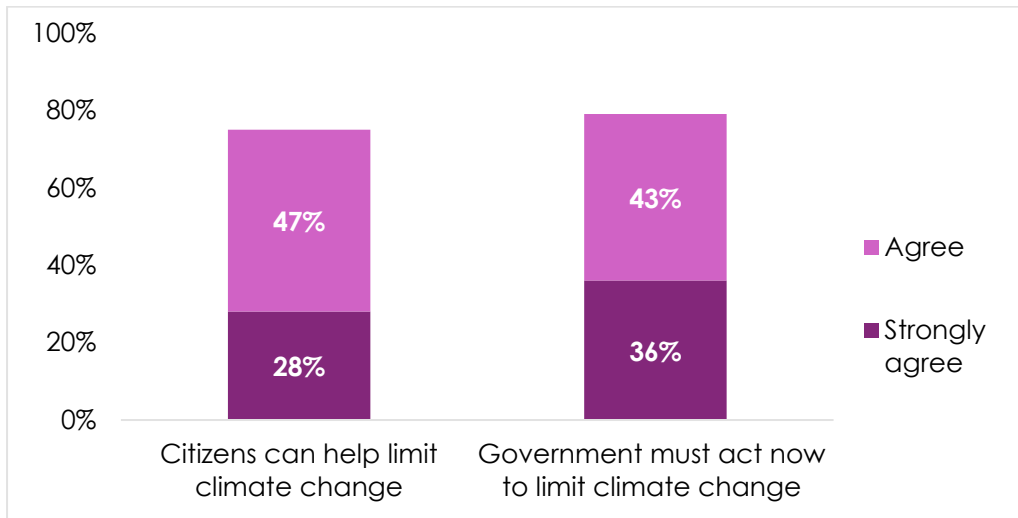


Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Ethiopia better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Fighting climate change

Three in four respondents (75%) who are aware of climate change believe that ordinary citizens can help to limit climate change (Figure 8). An even larger proportion (79%) want their government to take immediate action to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.

Figure 8: Limiting climate change | Ethiopia | 2023



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

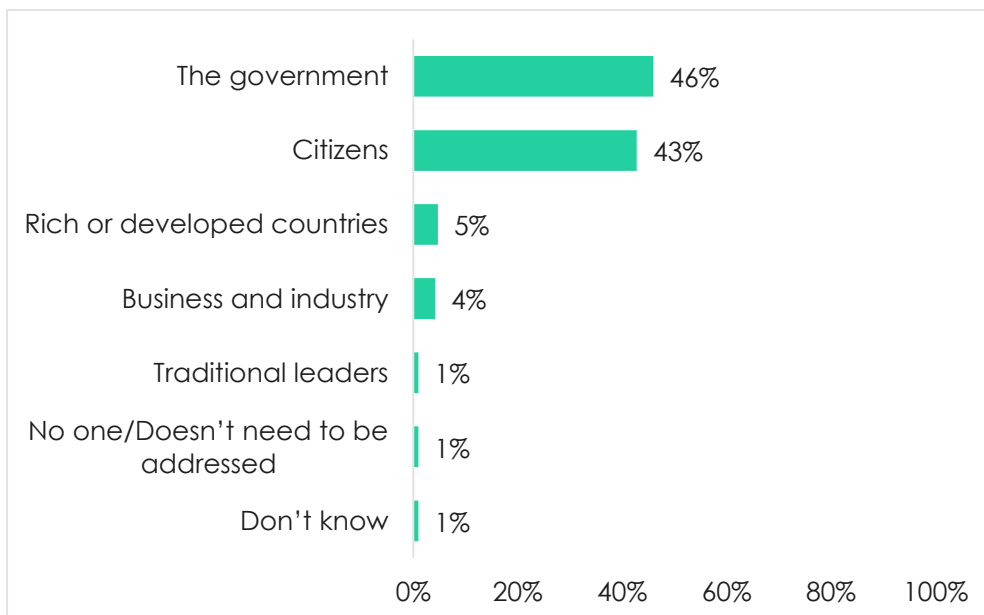
Ordinary Ethiopians can play a role in limiting climate change.

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.)

In fact, in Ethiopians' eyes, the government (46%) and ordinary people (43%) share primary responsibility for fighting climate change and reducing its impact (Figure 9). Fewer survey respondents assign this task primarily to developed countries (5%), business and industry (4%), and traditional leaders (1%).

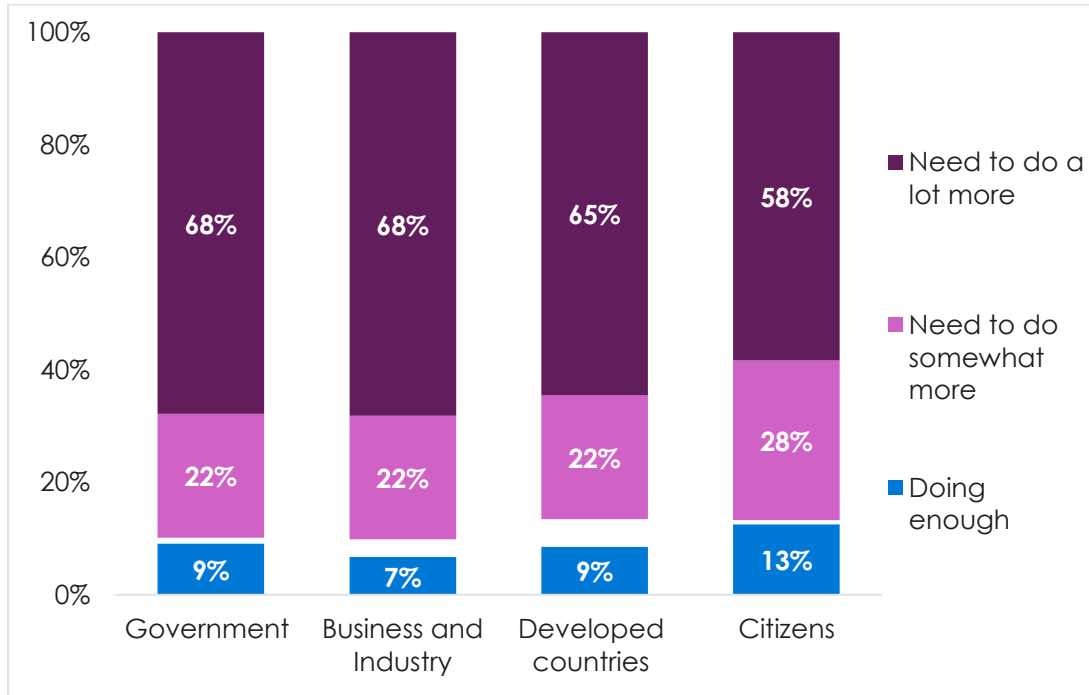
Figure 9: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Ethiopia | 2023



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? Majorities of Ethiopians who are aware of climate change call for greater engagement in climate action, including “a lot more” effort by the government (68%), business and industry (68%), developed countries (65%), and ordinary citizens (58%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Ethiopia | 2023



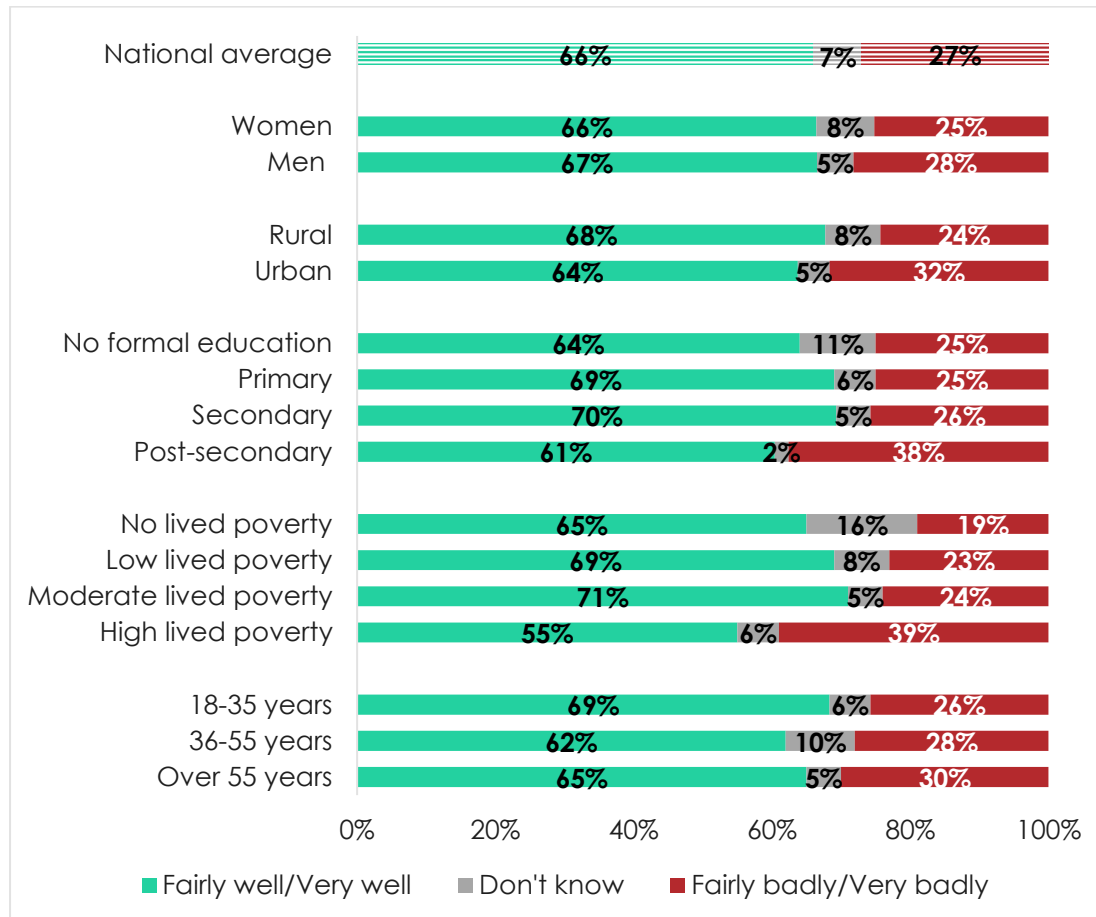
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Even so, when asked to assess how well the government is addressing climate change, two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents describe the government's performance as “fairly” or “very” good (Figure 11). In comparison, 27% give the government a failing grade on this issue.

Urbanites (32%) are more critical of the government's efforts in addressing climate change than rural residents (24%), as are citizens with post-secondary qualifications (38%) compared to the least educated (25%). Disapproval is also considerably higher among poor citizens (39%) than among their better-off counterparts (19%-24%).

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Figure 11: Government performance in handling climate change | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023



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 its recurrent impacts on their livelihoods and well-being, fewer than half of Ethiopians report having heard of climate change. This lack of awareness poses a barrier to effective climate adaptation, underscoring the need for targeted informational interventions, especially among women, rural communities, and less-educated populations.

Ethiopians who are aware of climate change overwhelmingly call for immediate government action, even if it involves high costs, job losses, or economic strain. Moreover, majorities recognise the need for a collective response, calling for robust government leadership and broader stakeholder involvement, including businesses, developed countries, and ordinary citizens, to tackle the escalating crisis.

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