



Dispatch No. 953 | 11 March 2025

Gambians call for climate action, including assistance from wealthy countries

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 953 | Bill Clinton Alex and Luqman Saka

Summary

Many African countries are highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, yet few have implemented robust mitigation and adaptation measures (World Meteorological Organisation, 2023). The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2023) ranks the Gambia 151st in climate-change readiness, highlighting the country's limited policy responses and weak mitigation strategies.

Agriculture, a pillar of the Gambia's economy, contributed 24.8% to the country's gross domestic product in 2023, employs 46% of the labour force (Statista, 2023), and sustains nearly 80% of the rural population (FAO, European Union, & CIRAD, 2022). However, rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events threaten agricultural productivity, with severe implications for food security and livelihoods (Saleem et al., 2024; Mirzabaev et al., 2022).

The 2024 rainy season, one of the worst in recent history, exemplifies these challenges, with a slow start, erratic precipitation until August, and above-average rainfall with flooding in September-October (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2025). Rising temperatures and poor infrastructure exacerbated the impact of heavy rainfall and flooding, which resulted in at least 11 fatalities and displaced more than 5,000 people (Africanews, 2024). Without urgent action, climate change will continue to pose severe risks to the Gambia's economy, environment, and people.

A special question module in Afrobarometer's Round 10 survey (2024) explores Gambians' experiences, awareness, and attitudes related to climate change.

Findings show that many Gambians report worsening drought, flooding, and crop failure in their region. Among the two-thirds of citizens who are familiar with the concept of 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.

A sizeable number of Gambians 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, and a ban on tree cutting for fuel as possible policy responses 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 Gambia, led by the Center for Research and Policy Development, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Gambians in April-May 2024. 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 the Gambia in 2018, 2021, and 2022.

Key findings

- Almost four in 10 Gambians (38%) say that drought has become more severe in their area over the past 10 years, and 37% say the same about flooding. One-third (33%) say crop failure has worsened.
- Many Gambians 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 (35%), reducing or rescheduling outdoor work (30%), reducing their livestock holdings or changing grazing patterns (27%), using less water or changing water sources (26%), and moving to a different place (17%).
 - Rural residents and economically disadvantaged citizens are more likely to report taking these steps than urban and better-off respondents.
- Two-thirds (68%) of Gambians say they have heard of climate change.
- Among those who have heard of climate change:
 - Two-thirds (67%) say it is making life in the Gambia worse.
 - Eight in 10 blame climate change on human activity (61%) or a combination of human activity and natural processes (19%).
 - Large majorities call for urgent climate action by the Gambian government (76%) as well as by rich countries (81%), which most respondents (83%) say should provide resources to help Gambians adapt and respond to the negative impacts of climate change.
 - Even so, Gambians see their government (50%) and business and industry (21%) as bearing primary responsibility for limiting climate change.
- Among all respondents, majorities express support for government policies to respond to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation, including putting more pressure on developed countries for aid (83%), investing in climate-resilient infrastructure (82%) and in wind and solar technologies (77%), and banning logging for firewood or charcoal (66%).

Changes in weather conditions and their consequences

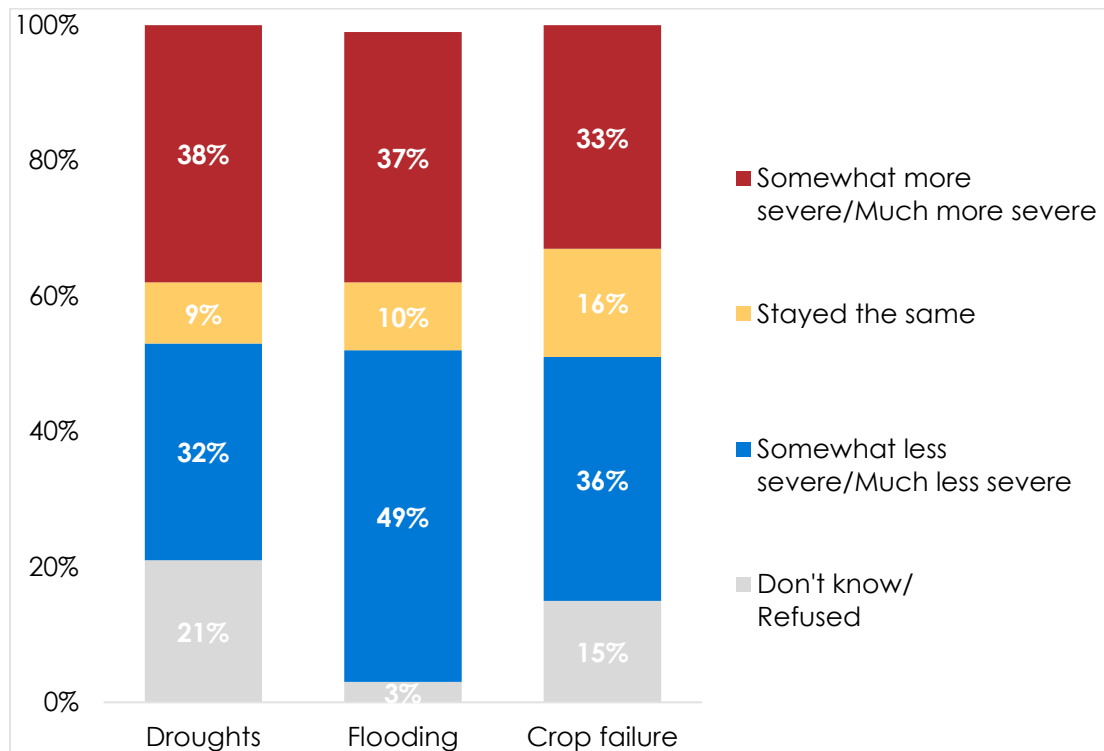
Gambians are divided in their experiences with changing weather conditions, the effects of such changes, and steps they have had to take in response to changes in weather patterns.

Almost four in 10 respondents (38%) say that droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their area over the past 10 years, while 32% say they have gotten less severe (Figure 1).

Similarly, 37% report worsening floods over the same time period, while half (49%) say flooding has decreased.

One-third (33%) report more severe crop failure, while a similar share (36%) say crop failure has become less severe.

Figure 1: Severity of droughts, floods, and crop failure | Gambia | 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? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?*

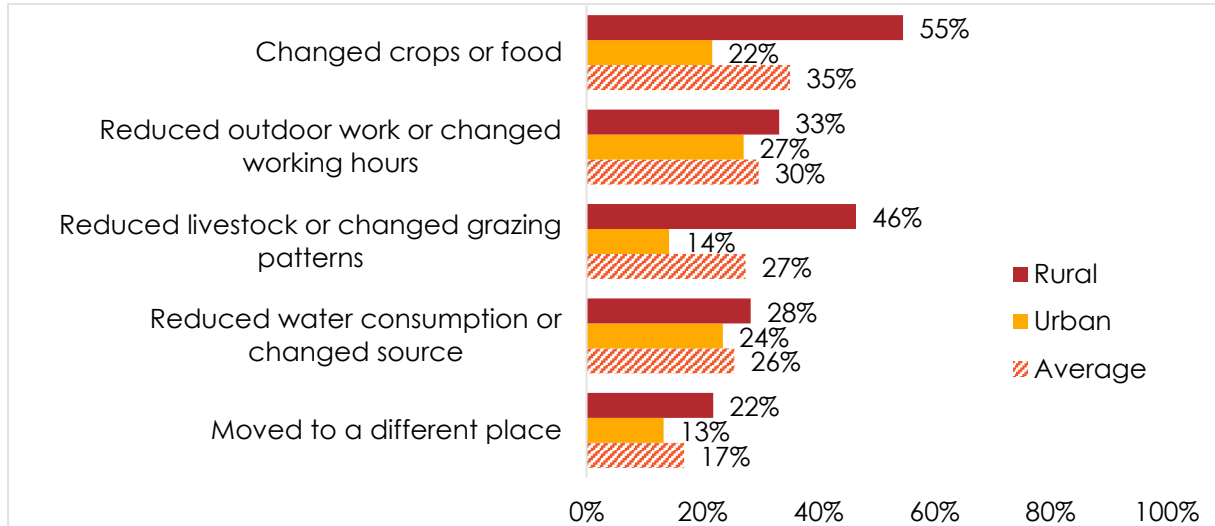
In significant numbers, Gambians say they or their families have had to take steps to adapt to changing weather patterns (Figure 2). More than one-third (35%) say they have made changes in the types of crops they plant or the foods they eat because of changes in the climate. More than one in four report reducing or rescheduling outdoor work (30%), reducing their livestock holdings or changing grazing patterns (27%), and/or changing the source or reducing the amount of water they use (26%), while 17% say they have had to move (change their place of residence) because of changes in weather patterns.

All of these adaptations are more common in rural areas than in cities. Changes to crops and food are more than twice as frequent in rural areas (55% vs. 22%), and changes in livestock or grazing patterns more than three times as common (46% vs. 14%). Considering only rural residents who say they have grazing land and/or keep livestock, more than half (53%) say they have had to make changes.

Rural residents are also almost twice as likely as urbanites to report having to move (22% vs. 13%).

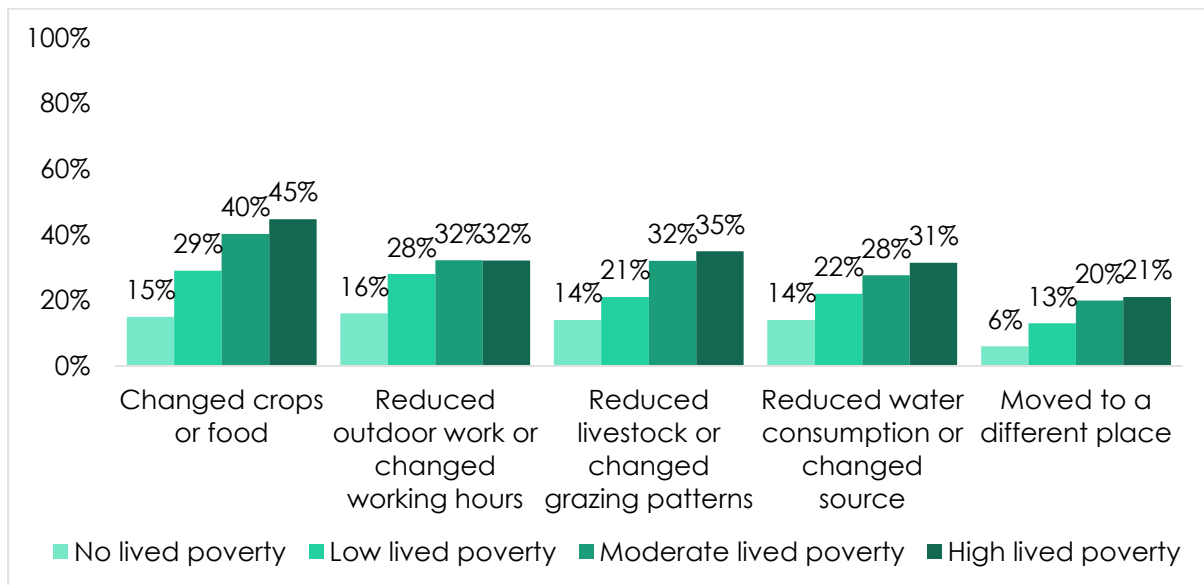
The frequency of these adaptations also varies significantly with respondents' economic status: The poorest are 15-30 percentage points more likely to report having to take these measures than their well-off counterparts (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by urban-rural location | Gambia | 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 3: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by lived poverty | Gambia | 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")

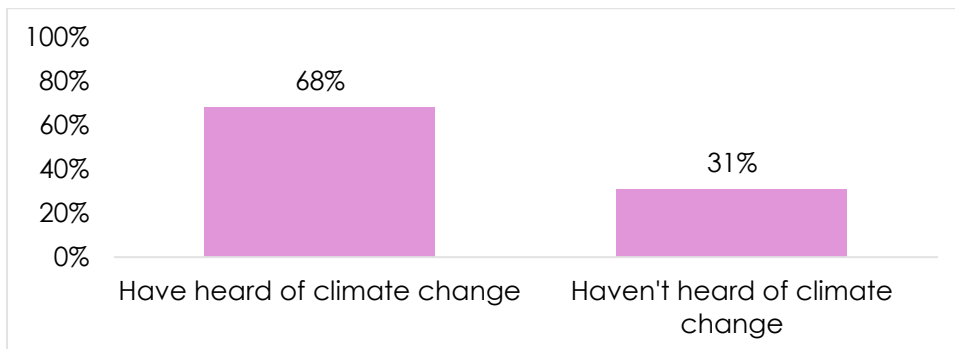
Awareness of climate change

While most respondents offer assessments of weather-related events, not all Gambians are aware of the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns known as climate

change: Two-thirds (68%) say they have heard of the concept, up from 56% in 2022, while one in three (31%) say they have not (Figure 4).

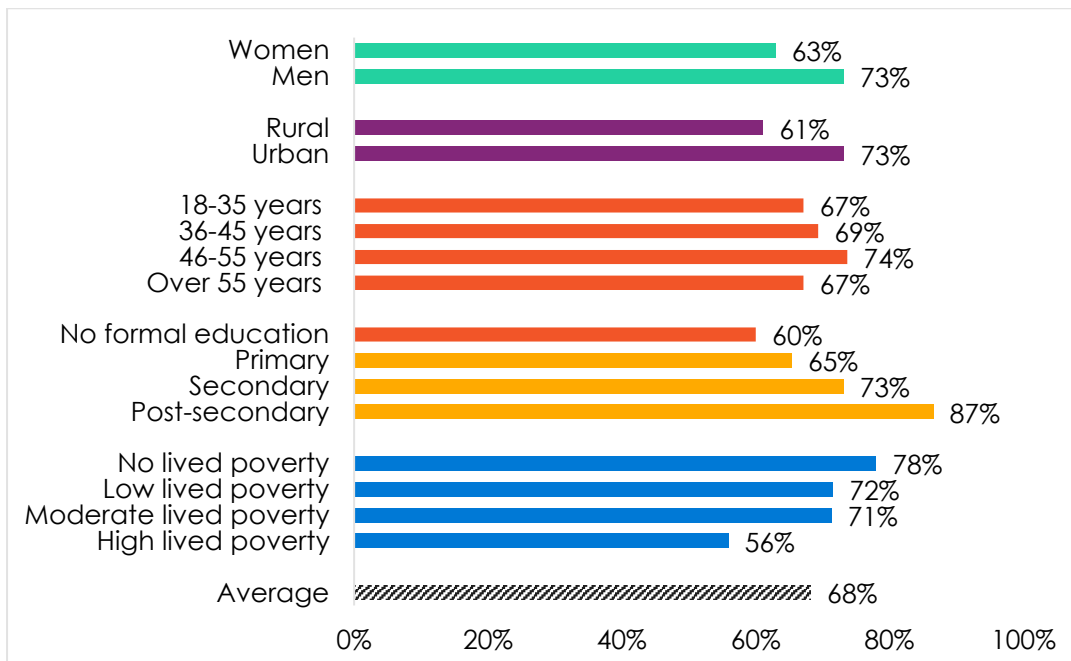
As might be expected, awareness of climate change increases sharply with respondents' education level, ranging from 60% among those with no formal schooling to 87% among respondents who have post-secondary education (Figure 5). Economically well-off citizens are more familiar with the concept of climate change (78%) than those experiencing high lived poverty¹ (56%). Climate-change awareness is also higher among men than women (73% vs. 63%) and among urbanites than rural residents (73% vs. 61%).

Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Gambia | 2024



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 | Gambia | 2024



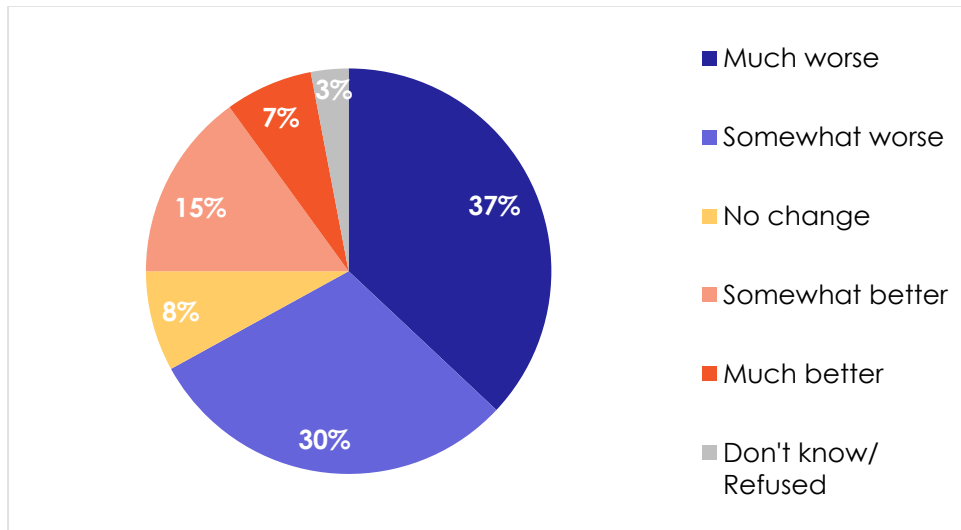
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of 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 Lekalake (2025).

Effect of climate change

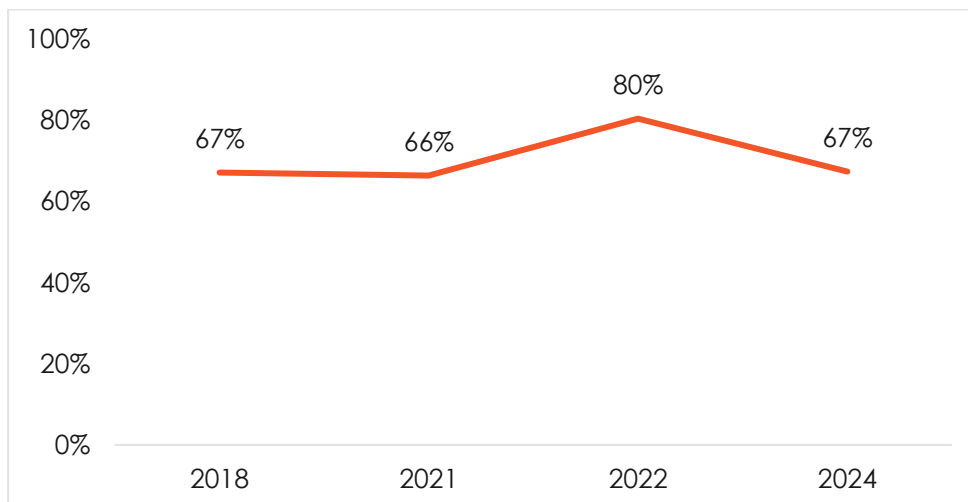
Among respondents who have heard of climate change, two-thirds (67%) say it is making life in the Gambia “somewhat worse” (30%) or “much worse” (37%) (Figure 6). This share has been consistent since 2018 except for a peak (80%) in 2022 (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Is climate change making life worse or better? | Gambia | 2024



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

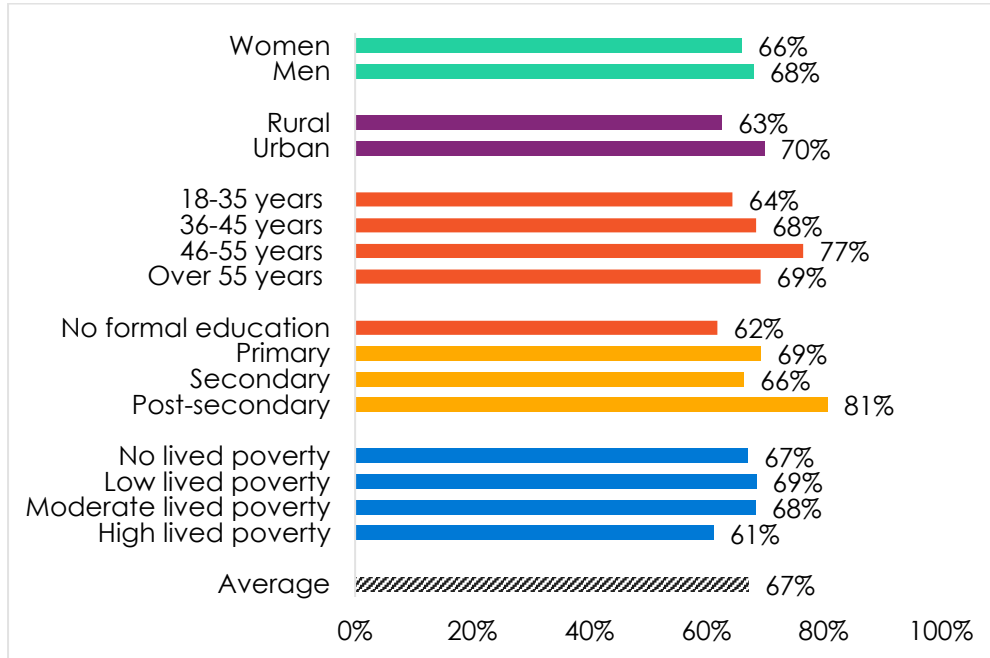
Figure 7: Climate change is making life worse | Gambia | 2018-2024



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Gambia 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 more widespread among citizens with post-secondary education (81%), urbanites (70%), and economically well-off citizens (67%) than among those with no formal education (62%), rural residents (63%), and the economically most vulnerable (61%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Gambia | 2024

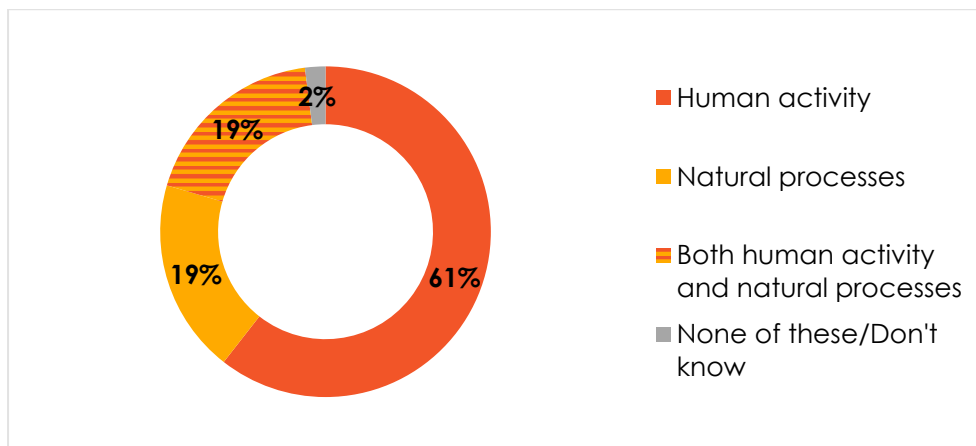


Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Gambia better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Causes of climate change

Among Gambians who are aware of climate change, six in ten (61%) see human activity, such as cutting down forests and burning fuel, as the primary cause of climate change. About one-fifth (19%) blame natural processes, while the same share (19%) think climate change is caused by a combination of human activity and natural processes (Figure 9).

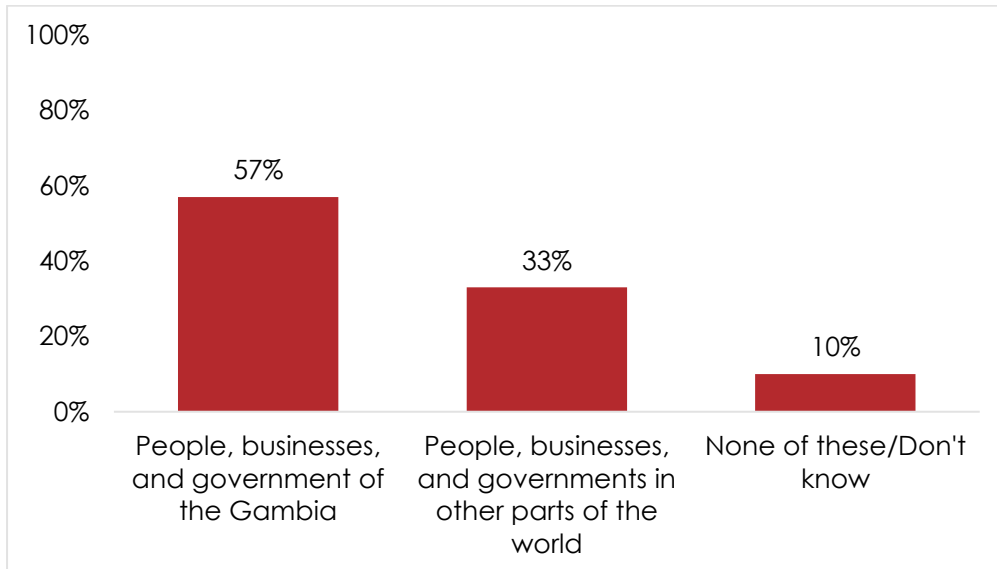
Figure 9: Main causes of climate change | Gambia | 2024



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.)

With regard to the specific actors most responsible for causing climate change, a slight majority (57%) blame the people, businesses, and government of the Gambia. About one-third (33%) say other parts of the world are more responsible (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Who is most responsible for causing climate change? | Gambia | 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 the Gambia? People, businesses, and governments in other parts of the world?*

Addressing climate change

Survey findings suggest that Gambians see addressing climate change as a collective responsibility. Three-fourths (76%) say the Gambian 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 11).

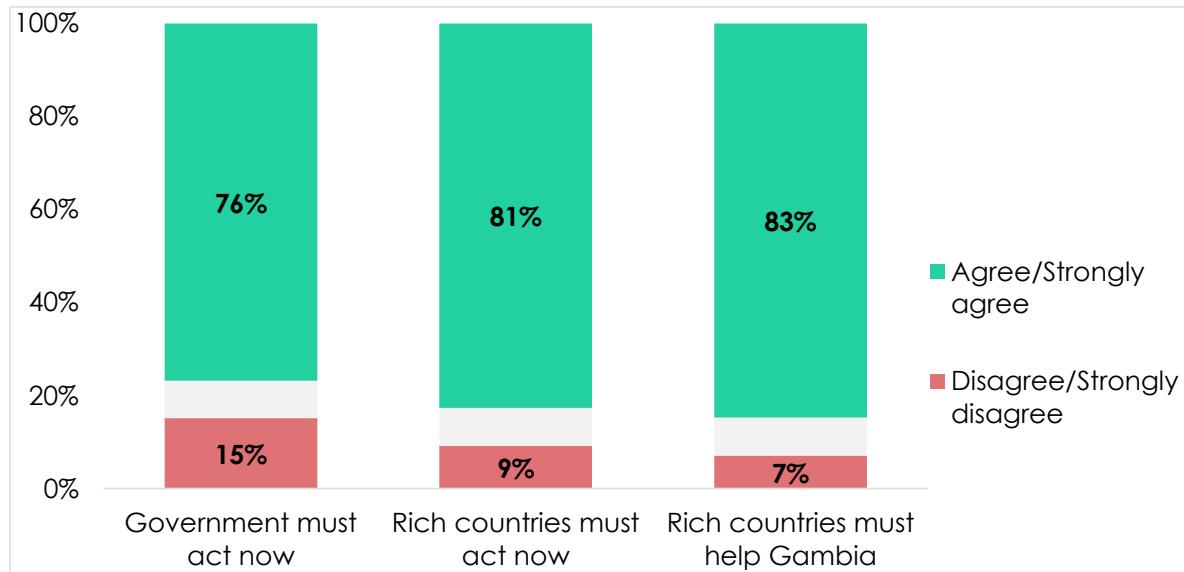
An even larger majority (81%) say that rich or developed nations, which have contributed most to causing the problem, should take steps now to fight climate change, “even if it is costly for those countries.”

And a similar majority (83%) think that wealthy countries have an obligation to assist the Gambia in responding to the crisis.

As for who bears the primary responsibility for limiting climate change and reducing its negative impacts, Gambians cite their own government (50%) and business and industry (21%) (Figure 12). Much smaller proportions view ordinary citizens (13%) and rich or developed countries (10%) as primarily responsible for efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change and strengthen climate resilience.

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Figure 11: Who must act to limit climate change | Gambia | 2024



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

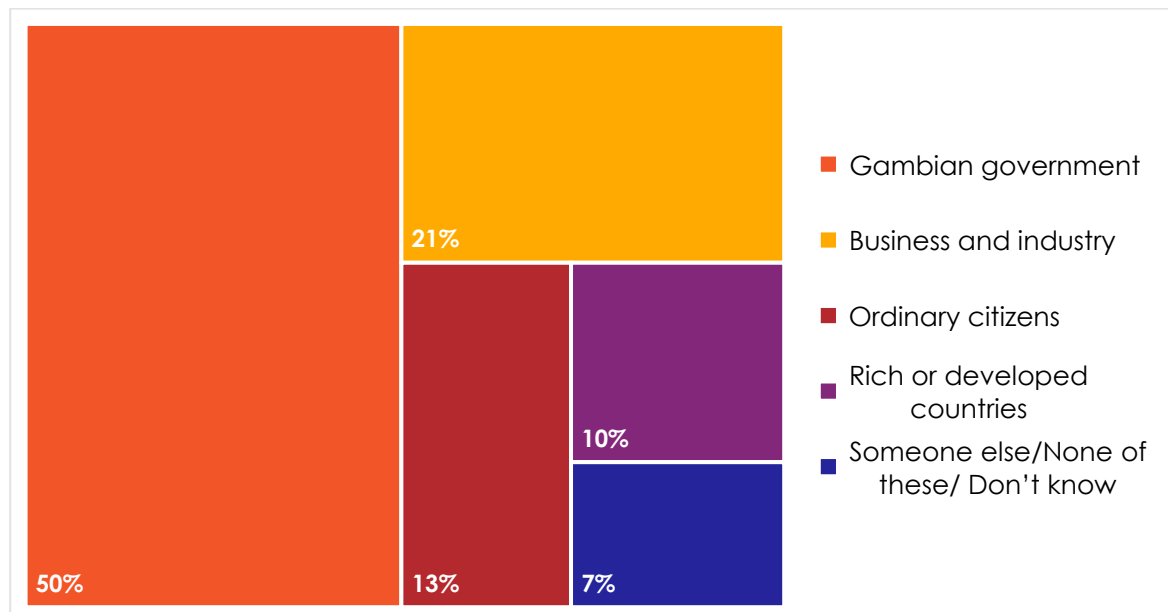
It is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.

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 Gambia 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 12: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Gambia | 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 policy responses to changing weather patterns

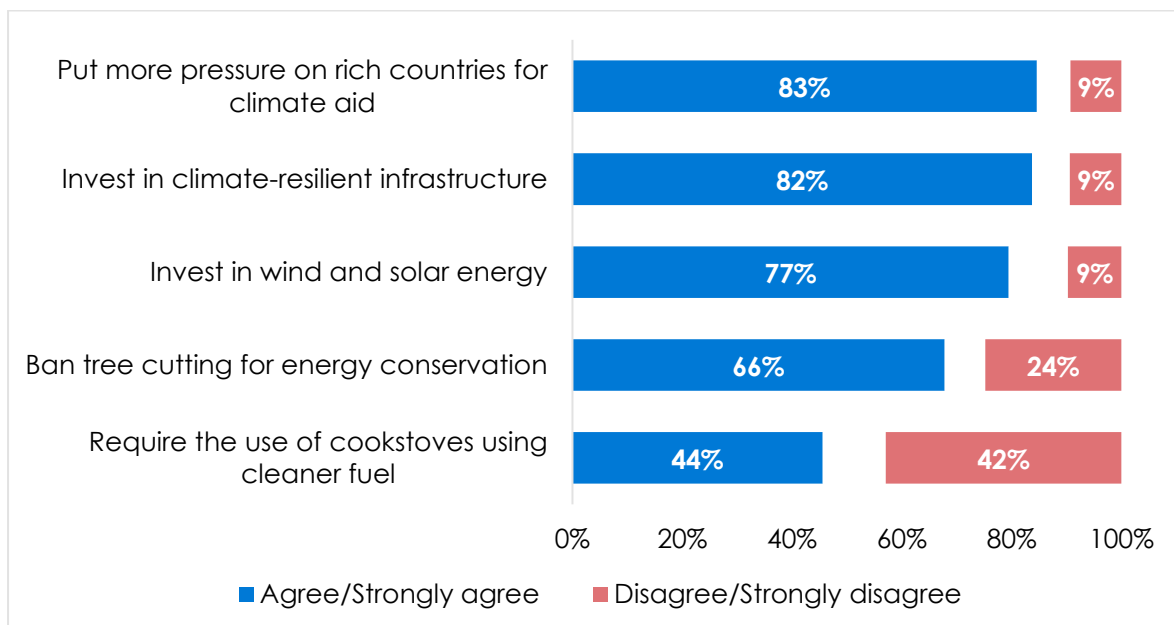
Afrobarometer asked all respondents (regardless of whether they had heard of climate change) about their views on measures their government might take in response to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation.

Strong majorities express support for putting more pressure on developed countries for aid (83%), investing in climate-resilient infrastructure (82%) and in wind and solar technologies (77%), and banning logging for firewood or charcoal (66%) (Figure 13).

Views are divided on whether the government should promote the use of cookstoves that use cleaner fuels, such as electricity, gas, or propane.

Figure 13: Views on potential policies in response to changing weather patterns

| Gambia | 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 cook stoves 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 Gambians 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

Survey findings show that while one-third of the population still lack awareness of climate change, those who have heard of the phenomenon say it is making life worse and requires urgent government action. They also call for climate action by developed countries, including resources to support the Gambian response.

A substantial number of Gambians, especially rural and poor citizens, say they have had to make life changes in response to changing weather patterns, and most voice support for government investment in infrastructure and wind/solar energy as well as a ban on tree cutting for fuel.

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