

## **Kenyans say climate change affecting personal lives and country**

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 183 | Wairimu Macharia, Thomas Isbell, and Andreas Kopf**

### **Summary**

Last August, Kenya made headlines by banning the use of plastic bags (Guardian, 2017) – a drastic measure, but just one of many steps that have moved the country into a leadership role on the path toward a sustainable environment. Among other actions, Kenya – headquarters for the United Nations Environment Programme – has been a strong advocate for the Paris Climate Accord and worked to implement a 2016 Climate Change Act that aims to ensure a healthy environment for its citizens (Bwire, 2017; Capital News, 2017).

Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Amina Mohamed underlined the government's commitment in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September, saying that climate change not only costs Kenya about 3% of its gross domestic product per year but also threatens the livelihoods of millions and the planet's capacity to sustain life (Capital News, 2017). Kenya has also been grappling with a persistent drought and related food insecurity since 2014 (ReliefWeb, 2017; Niang et al., 2014).

The United Nations (2017) identifies climate change caused by human activity as one of the major challenges of our time, and building climate resilience will require a committed and coordinated effort (Busby, Smith, White, & Strange, 2012).

The most recent Afrobarometer survey in Kenya suggests that the government has a solid popular base for its fight against climate change. About half of Kenyans say climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten worse over the past decade. Two-thirds have heard of climate change, and most attribute the problem to human activity, say it is affecting their lives, and believe that ordinary citizens can contribute to fighting it. Still, these findings suggest there is plenty of opportunity for further public information efforts targeting the substantial number of citizens who haven't heard of climate change or don't consider it a problem.

### **Afrobarometer survey**

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were completed in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, led by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, interviewed 1,600 adult Kenyans in September-October 2016. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2014.

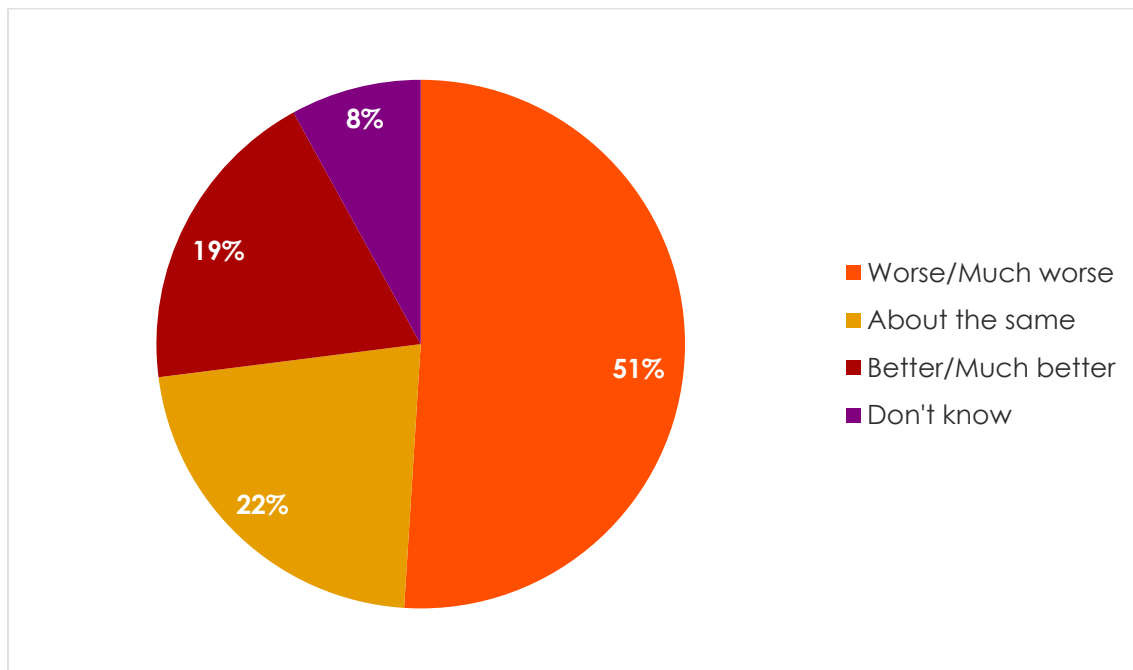
## Key findings

- About half (51%) of Kenyans say climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten worse over the past decade. This view is most common in the drought- and flood-prone North Eastern area (79%).
- Nearly two-thirds of Kenyans (65%) have heard about climate change, though this awareness is considerably more limited among less-educated and poor citizens and residents of the North Eastern area.
- Among those who have heard about climate change:
  - Six in 10 (59%) identify climate change as referring to negative changes in the weather, and the same proportion attribute climate change to human activity.
  - More than nine out of 10 say climate change is affecting their country and their own lives at least “a little bit.” Half (50%) say it is affecting Kenya “a lot.”
  - A majority (59%) say ordinary citizens can do at least “a little bit” to fight climate change, including 33% who say they can do “a lot.”

## Perceived climate changes

Before mentioning “climate change,” Afrobarometer asked respondents whether they think climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same over the past 10 years. A slim majority (51%) of Kenyans say they have gotten “worse” or “much worse” (Figure 1). About one in five respondents (19%) say climate conditions have gotten better, while 22% say they’ve stayed about the same.

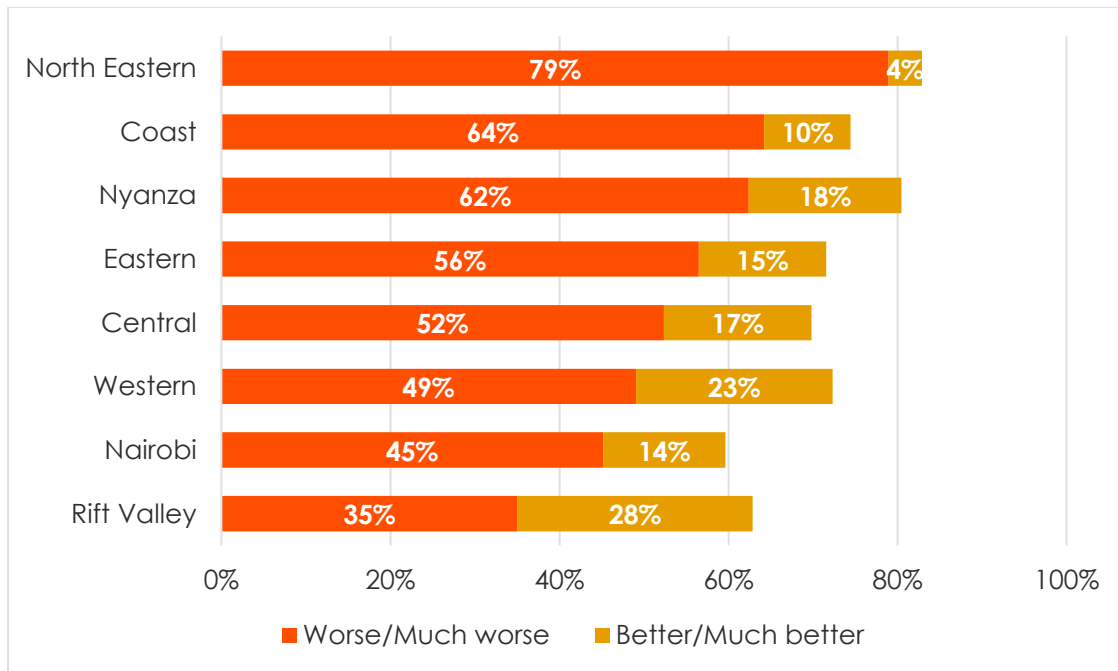
**Figure 1: Changes in climate conditions for agricultural production | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents were asked:** Over the last 10 years, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Responses differ sharply by geographic area<sup>1</sup> (Figure 2). In the North Eastern area, one of the hardest hit by drought and floods, eight of 10 respondents (79%) say that climate conditions for agriculture have gotten “worse” or “much worse.” More than six of 10 respondents agree in the Coast (64%) and Nyanza (62%) areas. In contrast, only 35% in the Rift Valley area say the climate has deteriorated, while almost as many (28%) say it has improved.

**Figure 2: Changes in climate conditions for agricultural production | by geographic area | Kenya | 2016**



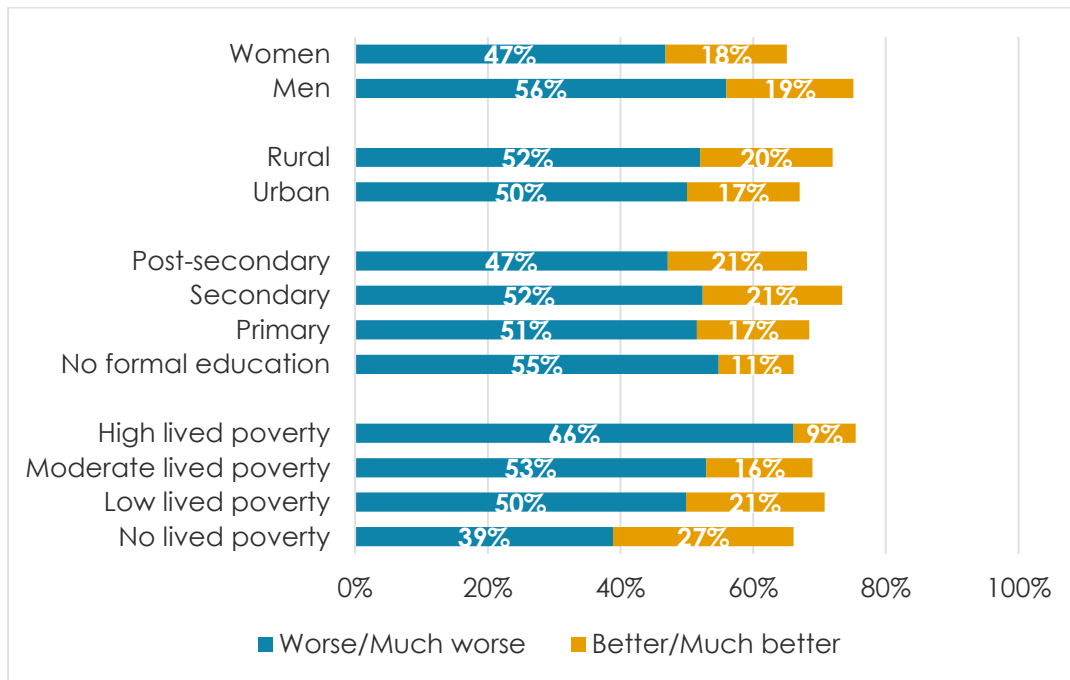
**Respondents were asked:** Over the last 10 years, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same, or haven't you heard enough to say?

While rural and urban respondents do not differ in their assessments, men are more likely than women to view climatic conditions as having deteriorated, 56% vs. 47% (Figure 3). And perceptions of a worsening climate for agricultural production are more common among less-educated and poor Kenyans. Among respondents with no formal education, 55% report worse climatic conditions, compared to 47% of respondents with post-secondary education. Two-thirds (66%) the poorest respondents (i.e. those who experienced high lived poverty<sup>2</sup>) see climate conditions as worse, compared to only 39% of respondents with no lived poverty.

<sup>1</sup> For ease of reporting, this dispatch groups Kenya’s counties into informal regions, as follows: Coast (Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu, and Taita-Taveta counties), North Eastern (Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera counties), Central (Nyandarwa, Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Murang’a, and Kiambu counties), Eastern (Marsabit, Isiolo, Meru, Tharaka-Nithi, Embu, Kitui, Machakos, and Makueri counties), Western (Kakamega, Vihiga, Bungoma, and Busia counties), Rift Valley (Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu, Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Nandi, Baringo, Laikipia, Nakuru, Narok, Kajiado, Kericho, and Bomet counties), Nyanza (Siaya, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Migori, and Nyamira counties), and Nairobi (Nairobi County).

<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer measures lived poverty by asking respondents how often, during the previous year, they or their families went without enough food, enough clean water, health care or medicine, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income.

**Figure 3: Changes in climate conditions for agricultural production**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016

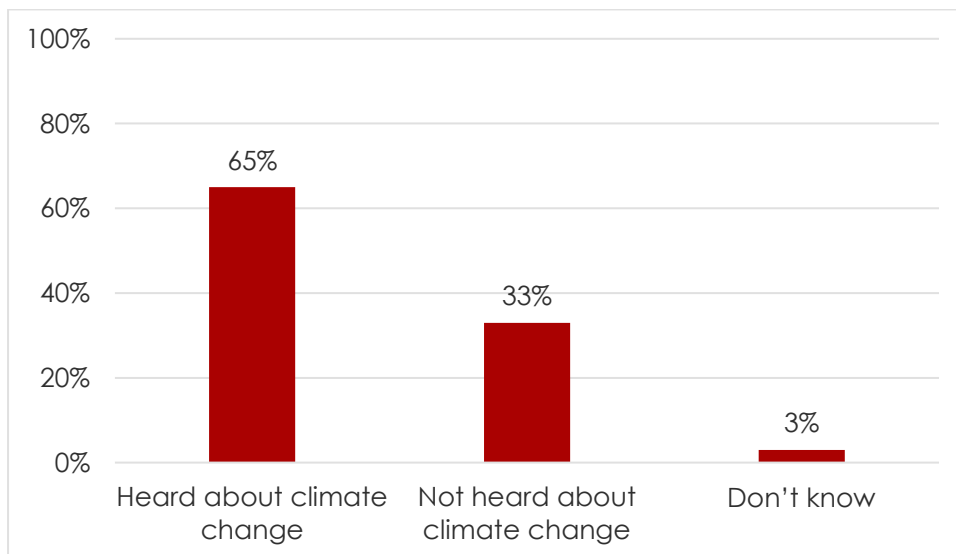


**Respondents were asked:** Over the last 10 years, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same, or haven't you heard enough to say?

### Knowledge about climate change

Besides personal experiences of changes in the climate, almost two-thirds (65%) of Kenyans say they have heard about the concept of "climate change" (Figure 4). Fully one-third of citizens say they have not heard of climate change (33%) or don't know (3%).

**Figure 4: Awareness of climate change** | Kenya | 2016

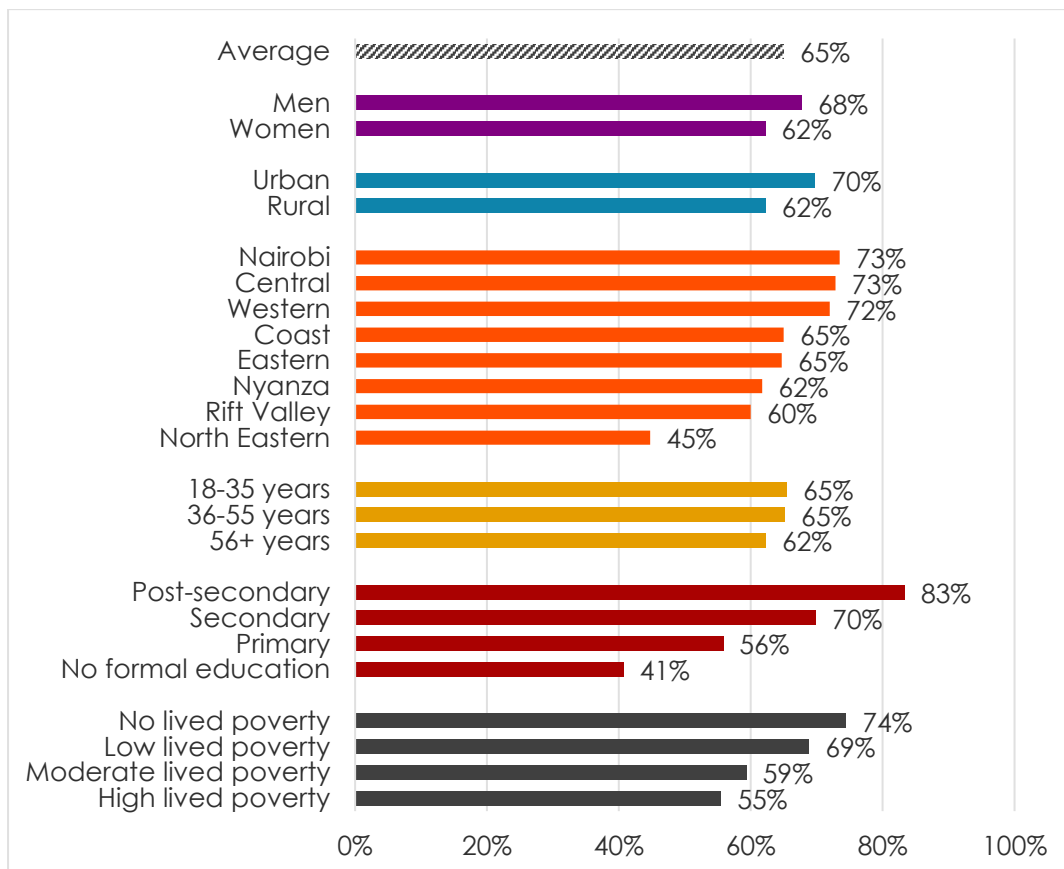


**Respondents were asked:** Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

As might be expected, respondents' education level makes a major difference in their familiarity with climate change: Those with post-secondary qualifications (83%) are twice as likely to have heard about the concept than those with no formal education (41%) (Figure 5). Similarly, wealthier Kenyans are more aware of climate change than their poorer counterparts. Men (68%) and city dwellers (70%) are somewhat more familiar with climate change than women (62%) and rural residents (62%).

About three-fourths of those dwelling in the Nairobi (73%), Central (73%), and Western (72%) areas have heard of climate change, compared to just 45% of North Eastern area residents.

**Figure 5: Awareness of climate change** | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016



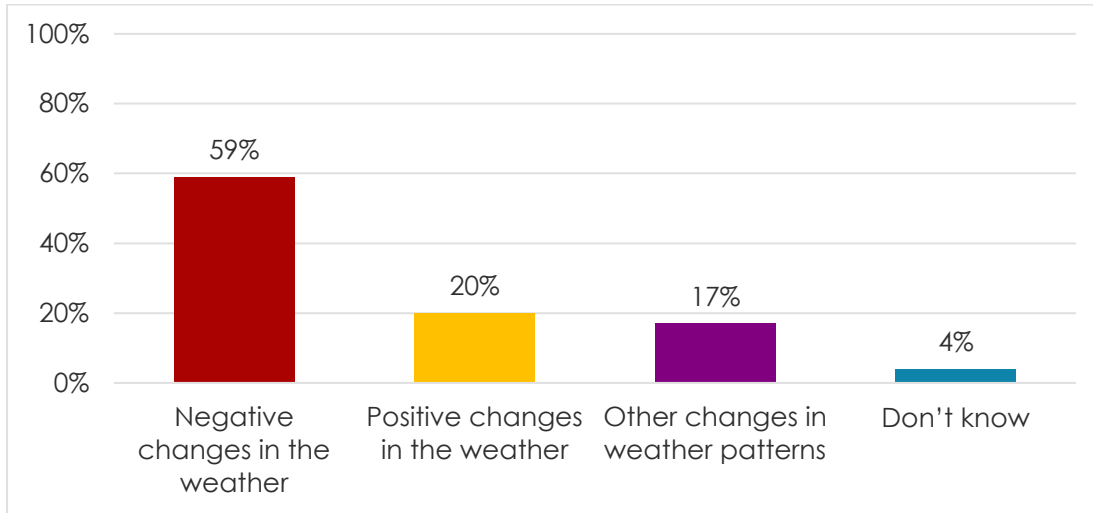
**Respondents were asked:** Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

Afrobarometer asked respondents who had heard of climate change what the concept means to them. A majority (59%) say it refers to negative changes in the weather. About one in five say it refers to positive changes in the weather (20%) or other changes in weather patterns (17%), while 4% say they don't know (Figure 6).

Again, more-educated respondents are more likely to identify climate change as consisting of negative effects on the weather, ranging from 64% of those with post-secondary qualifications to 55% of those with no formal education (Figure 7).

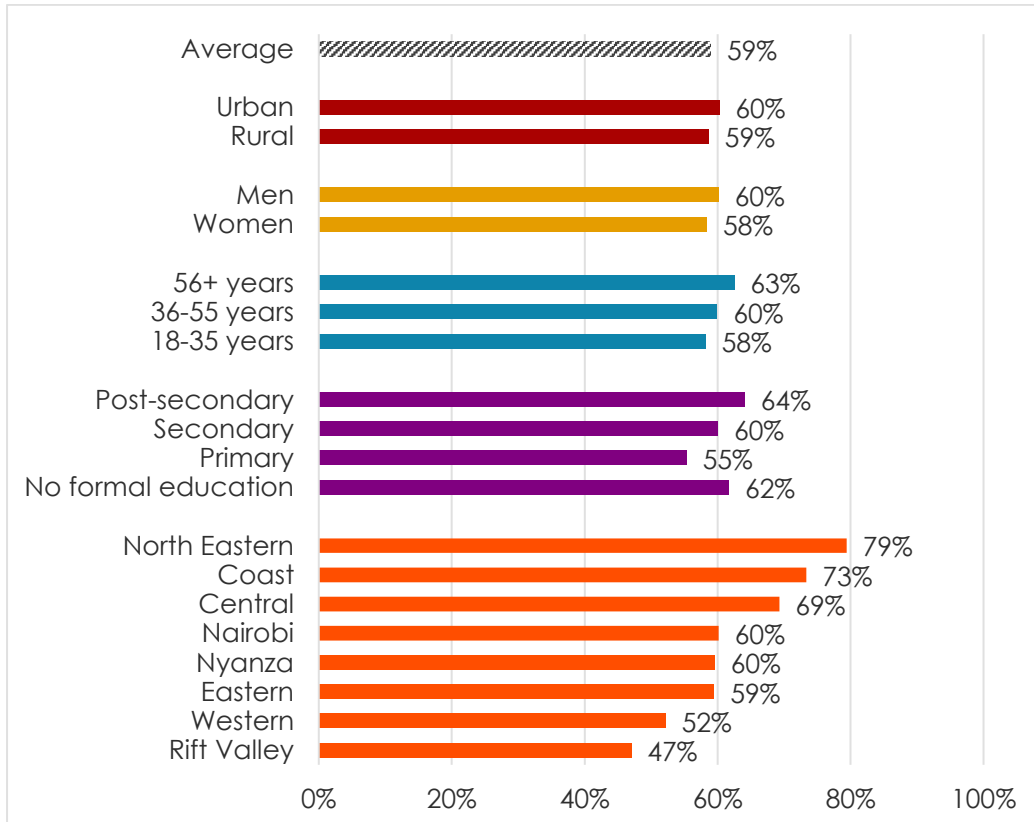
Among North Eastern area residents who had heard of climate change, more than three-fourths (79%) described it as negative changes in the weather, compared to only about half in the Rift Valley (47%) and Western (52%) areas.

**Figure 6: Meaning of climate change | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked:** People have different ideas about what climate change means, what causes it, and what the impacts will be. I would like now to hear from you what you think about these issues. Which of the following things most closely captures what the phrase "climate change" means to you, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Note: Respondents who said they have not heard of climate change are excluded.)

**Figure 7: Climate change means negative changes in weather | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016**

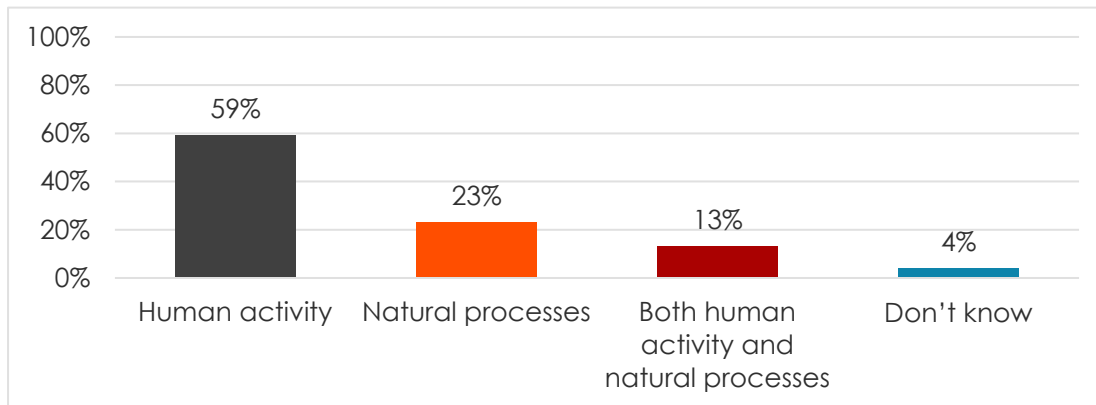


**Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked:** Which of the following things most closely captures what the phrase "climate change" means to you, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "negative changes in the weather")

## Causes and effects of climate change

Among respondents who have heard about climate change, most attribute the phenomenon to human activity (59%) or a combination of human activity and natural processes (13%) (Figure 8). But almost one in four (23%) say climate change occurs due only to natural processes.

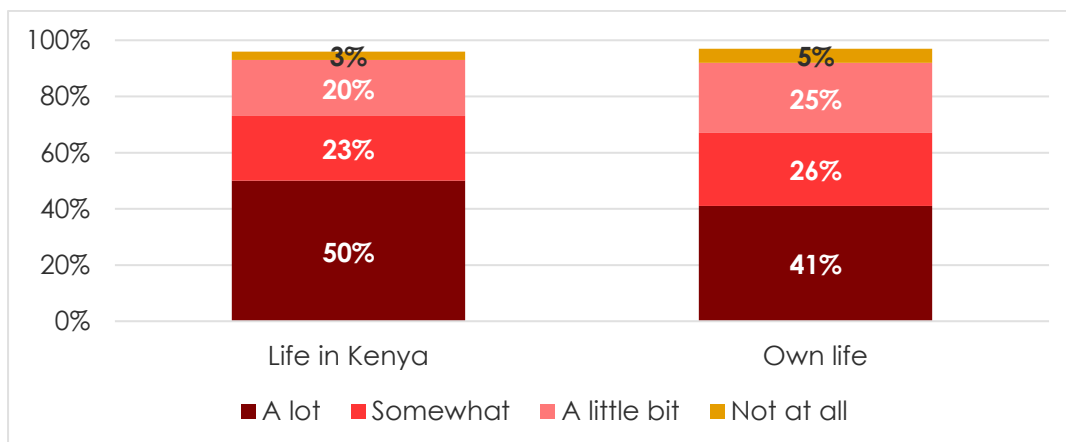
**Figure 8: Causes of climate change | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked:** Which of the following do you think is the main cause of climate change, or haven't you heard enough to say: Human activity, like burning fuel and other activities that pollute the atmosphere? Natural processes? Both human activity and natural processes

Among Kenyans who have heard of climate change, overwhelming majorities say the phenomenon is affecting them both personally and as a country (Figure 9). About four in 10 (41%) say climate change is impacting their own lives "a lot," while 52% say it is having "a little bit" or "somewhat" of an effect on their lives. Similarly, 50% see climate change as having "a lot" of impact on life in Kenya, while 43% say it's having "a little bit" or "somewhat" of an effect on the country. Fewer than one in 10 say climate change has no effect on their own lives (5%) or their country (3%).

**Figure 9: Does climate change affect you and the country? | Kenya | 2016**



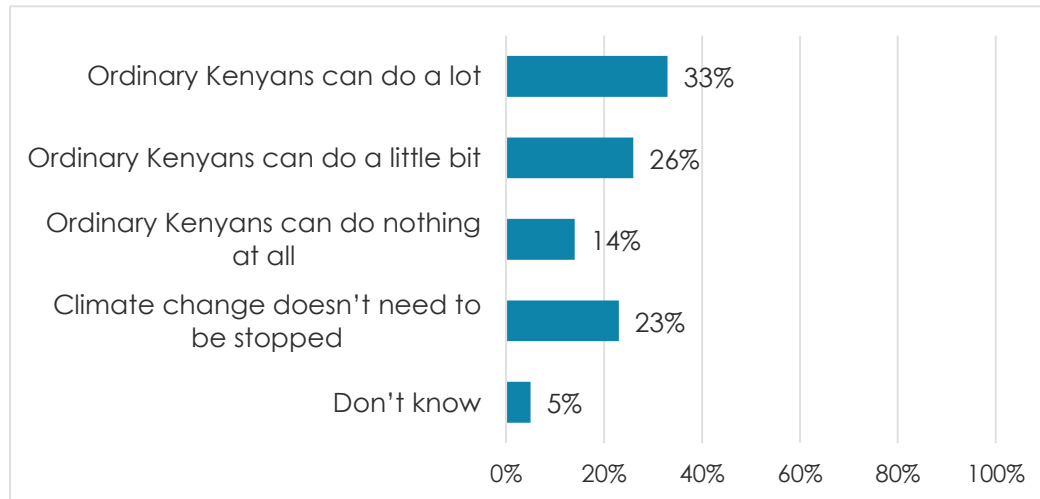
**Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked:**

- How much, if at all, do you think climate change is affecting life in Kenya, or haven't you heard enough to say?
- How much, if at all, do you think climate change is affecting your own life?

## What can Kenyans do about climate change?

Do Kenyans believe they can do anything to combat or mitigate the effects of climate change? Among those who have heard of climate change, a majority (59%) say ordinary citizens can do at least “a little bit” to fight climate change, including 33% who say they can do “a lot” (Figure 10). About one in seven (14%) say there’s nothing that ordinary citizens can do, while 23% believe that “climate change doesn’t need to be stopped.”

**Figure 10: Ordinary citizens’ role in fighting climate change | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked:** Do you think that climate change needs to be stopped? [If yes:] How much do you think that ordinary Kenyans can do to stop climate change?

## Conclusion

While individual environmental policies such as a plastic-bag ban will always be controversial, survey findings suggest that Kenya has a critical mass of public awareness to underpin its efforts to build a sustainable environment. Among the two-thirds of Kenyans who know about climate change, most attribute it to human activity and think that ordinary citizens can do at least “a little bit” to fight it.

Still, it is clear that sensitization campaigns could do more to reach those who haven’t heard of climate change or haven’t made connections between human activity, changes in weather patterns, and the environment. Such campaigns might target specific geographic areas, citizens with less formal education, and those who must sustain agricultural production in spite of changes in climatic conditions. Better popular understanding of environmental and climate-change issues will facilitate timely policy action that will only grow more difficult and costly if delayed.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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