

Tanzanians see country on right track despite persistent poverty

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 193 | Stephen Mwombela, Lulu Olan'g, and Thadeus Mboghoina

Summary

Over the past two decades, Africa has recorded high levels of economic growth. Tanzania has enjoyed Africa's second-fastest-growing economy, behind Côte d'Ivoire, including average annual growth of almost 7% between 2012 and 2016 (International Monetary Fund, 2016). In line with the well-documented link between sustained economic growth and poverty reduction (Dollar, Kleineberg, & Kraay, 2013), estimates of basic-needs and extreme poverty declined, and the 2012 Household Budget Survey reported that the poverty headcount had dropped from 38.6% in 1991 to 28.4% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014; World Bank, 2015). In addition to the creation of more and better jobs, Tanzania has recorded an increase in gross national income per capita from \$320 in 2003 to \$900 in 2016 (Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2018).

But are these promising macroeconomic trends improving the lives of everyday citizens? Results of the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that Tanzanians think their country is on the right track and are increasingly satisfied with their government's economic management. But majorities still describe the economy and their own living conditions as bad, and the experience of lived poverty may be on the rise.

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 conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed 2,400 adult Tanzanians in May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

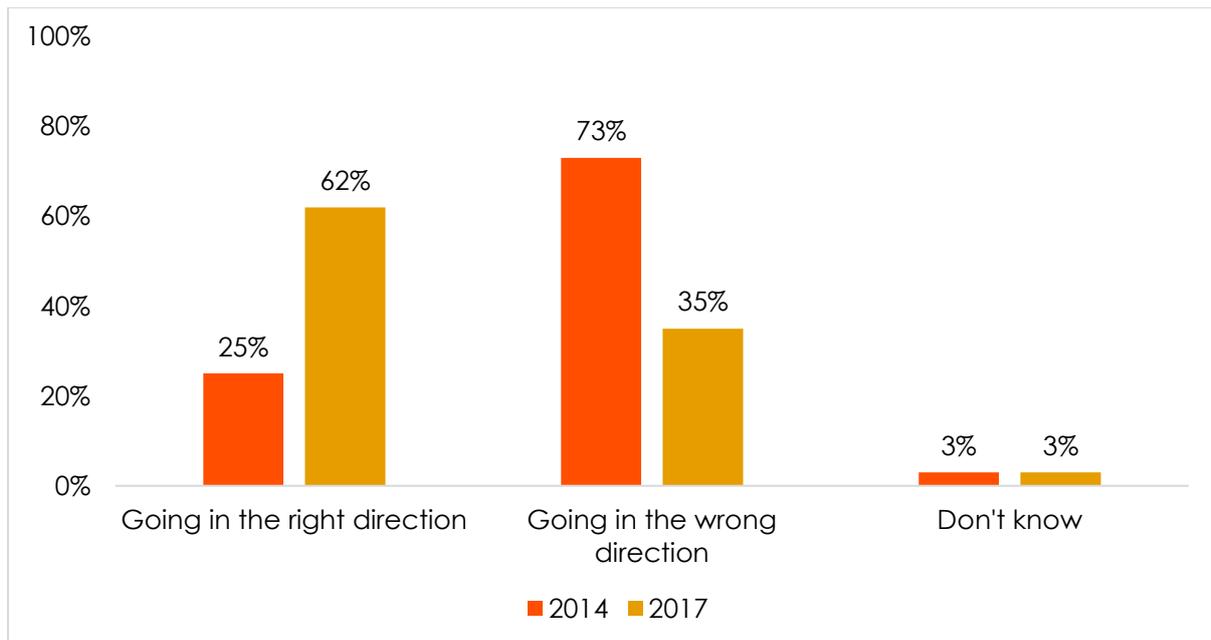
- Six in 10 Tanzanians believe the country is going in the right direction (62%) and the government is handling the economy "fairly well" or "very well" (59%) – both striking improvements from 2014.
- But despite slight gains, about six in 10 respondents still describe the country's economic situation (62%) and their personal living conditions (58%) as fairly/very bad.

- A majority (57%) of Tanzanians say the country's economic situation is "worse" or "much worse" than a year ago. But the proportion of respondents who are optimistic that things will improve in a year's time has almost doubled since 2014, to 38%.
- Popular assessments of the government's performance have improved on a range of issues, including management of the economy. But only one-quarter (23%) of Tanzanians say the government is doing well on food security, down from 43% in 2014.
- Growing numbers of Tanzanians report going without basic necessities, including four in 10 who went without enough clean water (42%) and without medical care (40%) at least "several times" during the previous year. Three-fourths (76%) say they went without a cash income at least "several times."

Overall direction and economic conditions

Six in 10 respondents (62%) believe the country is going in the right direction, while 35% say it is going in the wrong direction. This is a stark contrast to survey responses in 2014, when only 25% felt it was going in the right direction (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Overall direction of the country | Tanzania | 2014-2017



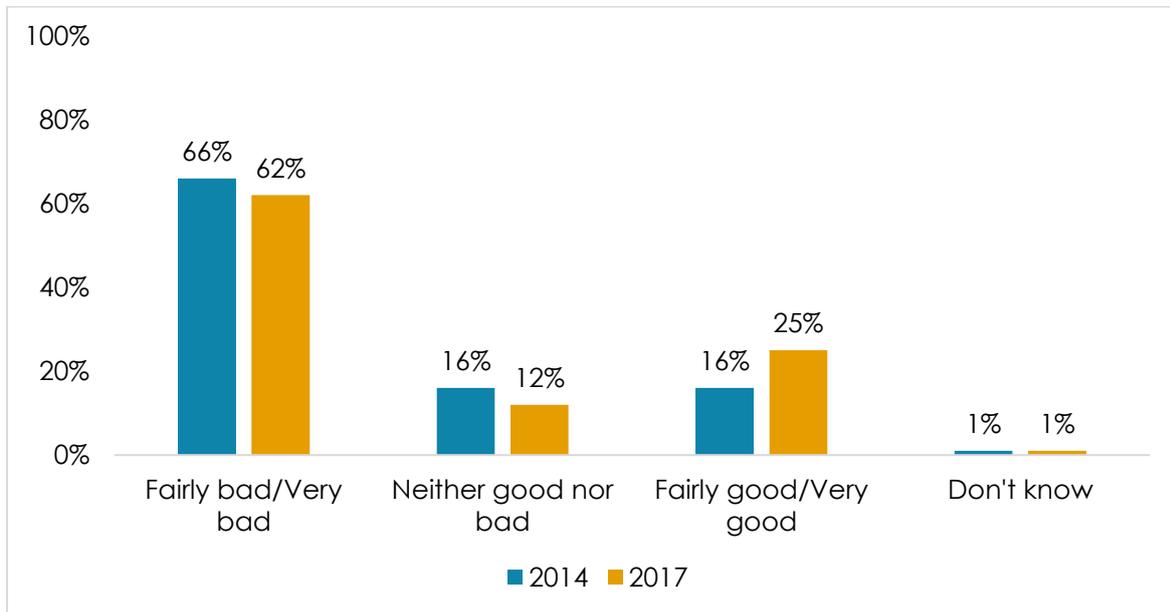
Respondents were asked: Some people might think the country is going in the wrong direction. Others may feel it is going in the right direction. So let me ask YOU about the overall direction of the country: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

Despite this turnaround in perceptions of the country's overall direction, Tanzanians remain largely negative about the country's economic situation and their personal living conditions.

Six in 10 respondents (62%) describe the country's economic situation as "fairly bad" or "very bad," only marginally better than in 2014 (66%) (Figure 2).

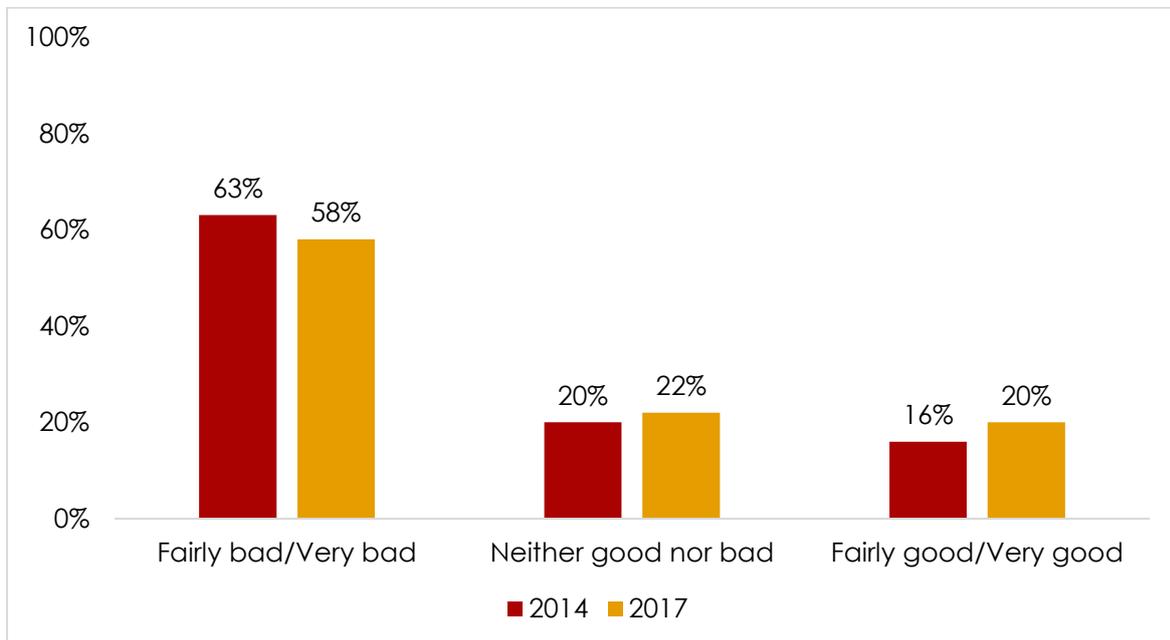
Almost as many say their personal living conditions are "fairly bad" or "very bad" (58%), again a slight improvement from 63% in 2014 (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Country's present economic condition | Tanzania | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

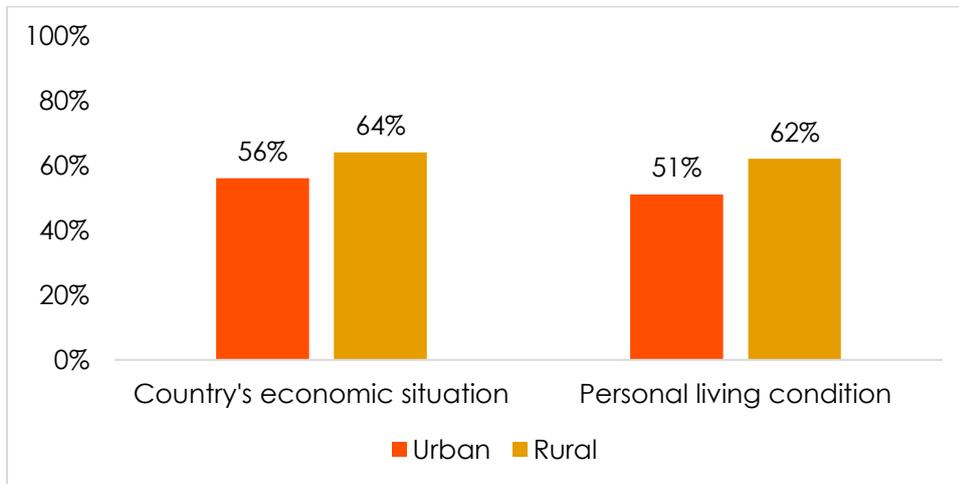
Figure 3: Personal living conditions | Tanzania | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?*

Rural residents offer more negative assessments of economic conditions than their urban counterparts. Almost two-thirds of citizens in rural areas describe the country's economic situation (64%) and their personal living conditions (62%) as "fairly bad" or "very bad," compared to 56% and 51%, respectively of city dwellers (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Negative assessment of country's economic situation and personal living conditions | urban vs. rural | Tanzania | 2017

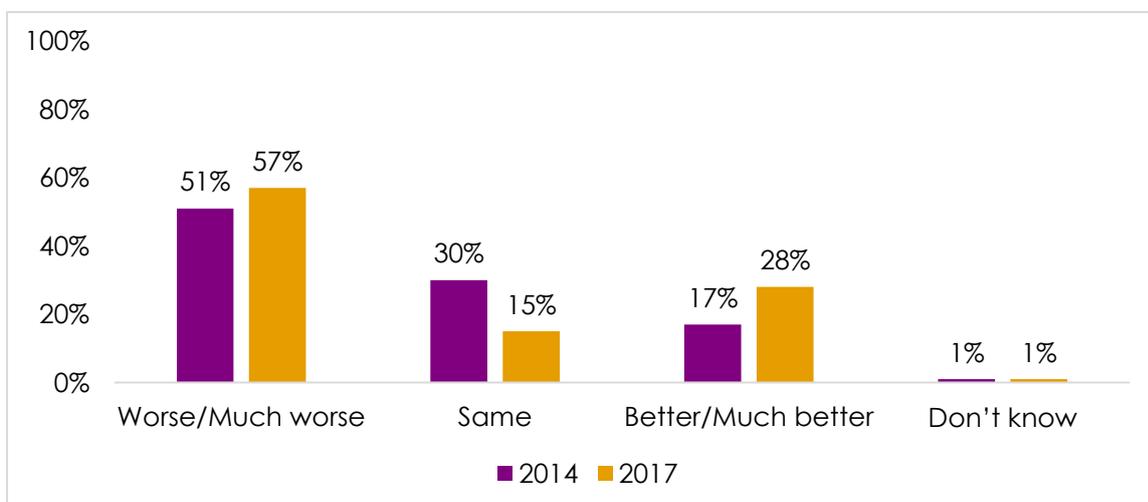


Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad")

Moreover, a majority (57%) of respondents believe the country's economic situation has gotten worse since a year ago – a slight increase from 2014 (Figure 5).

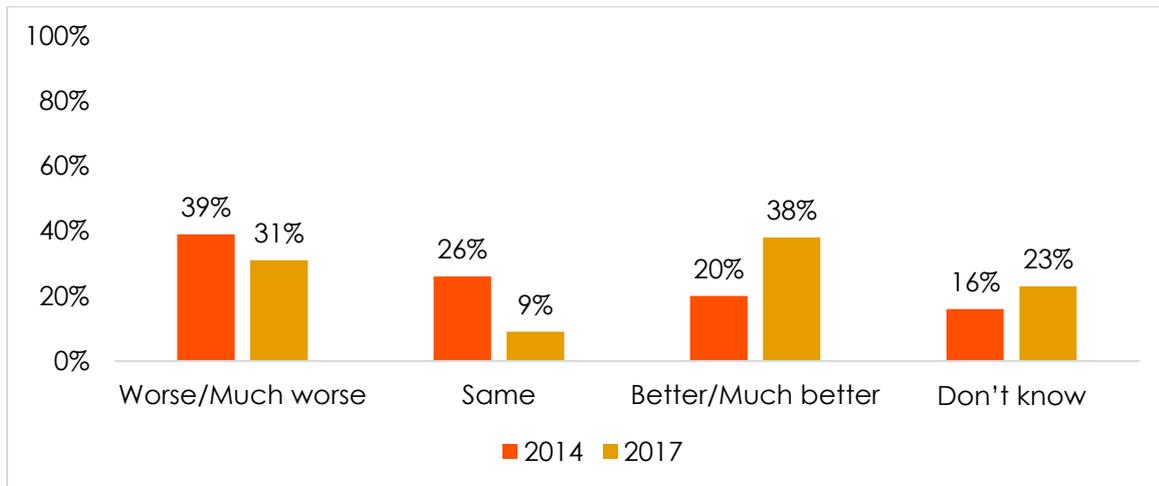
But there are also signs of optimism to go along with the perception that the country is on the right track. The proportion of respondents who think the country's economic condition is better than a year ago increased from 17% in 2014 to 28%. And compared to 2014, far more Tanzanians now say they expect the economy to improve in the coming year; this percentage has almost doubled, from 20% to 38%, surpassing the 31% who expect things to get worse (Figure 6). Men are somewhat more optimistic than women in their economic outlook (42% vs. 34% who say the country's economic condition will improve). Notably, almost one-fourth (23%) of respondents say they "don't know," indicating considerable uncertainty about what the future has in store for the country's economy.

Figure 5: Country's economic condition compared to 12 months ago | Tanzania | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago?

Figure 6: Country's economic condition in 12 months' time | Tanzania | 2014-2017

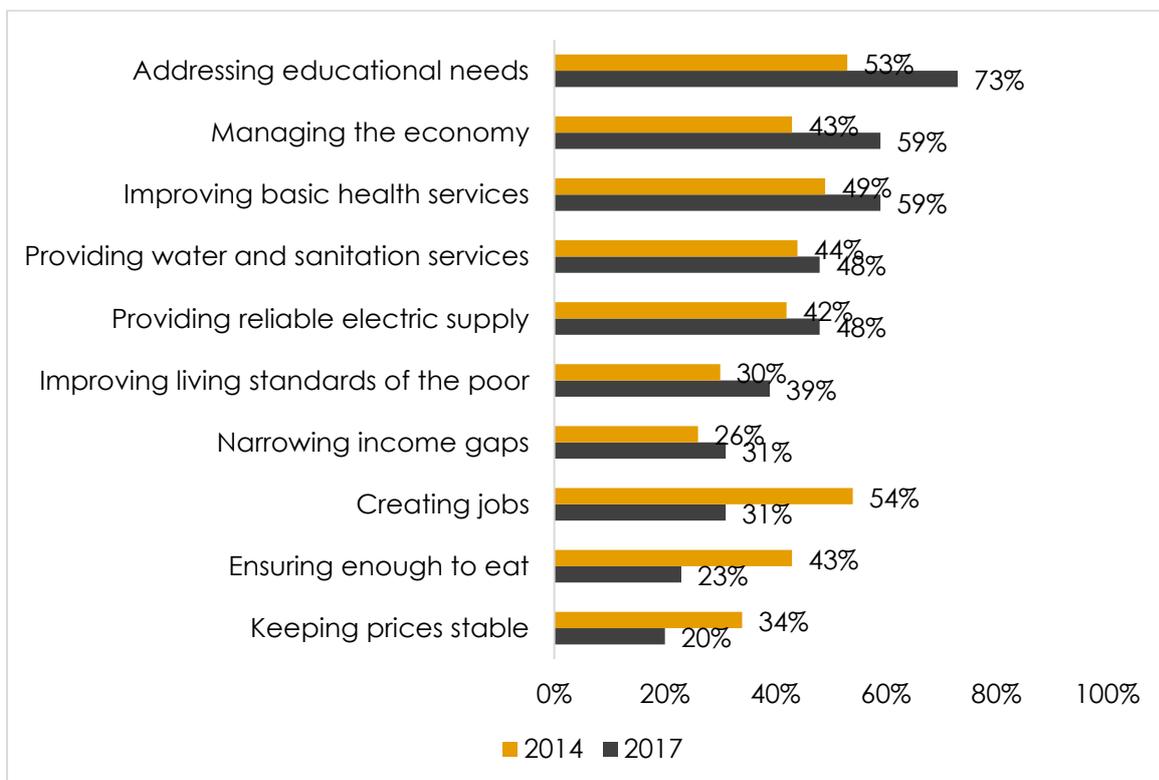


Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Government's handling of socioeconomic issues

The government receives better marks than in 2014 on a range of socioeconomic issues, including its management of the economy (Figure 7). A majority (59%) of respondents say the government is handling the economy "fairly well" or "very well," a substantial improvement from 43% in 2014.

Figure 7: Approval of government performance | Tanzania | 2017



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? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Popular approval of the government's performance has also increased with regard to addressing education needs (from 53% in 2014 to 73% who say fairly/very well), improving basic health services (from 49% to 59%), providing water and sanitation services (from 44% to 48%) and reliable electricity (from 42% to 48%), improving the living standards of the poor (from 30% to 39%), and narrowing income gaps between the rich and the poor (from 26% to 31%).

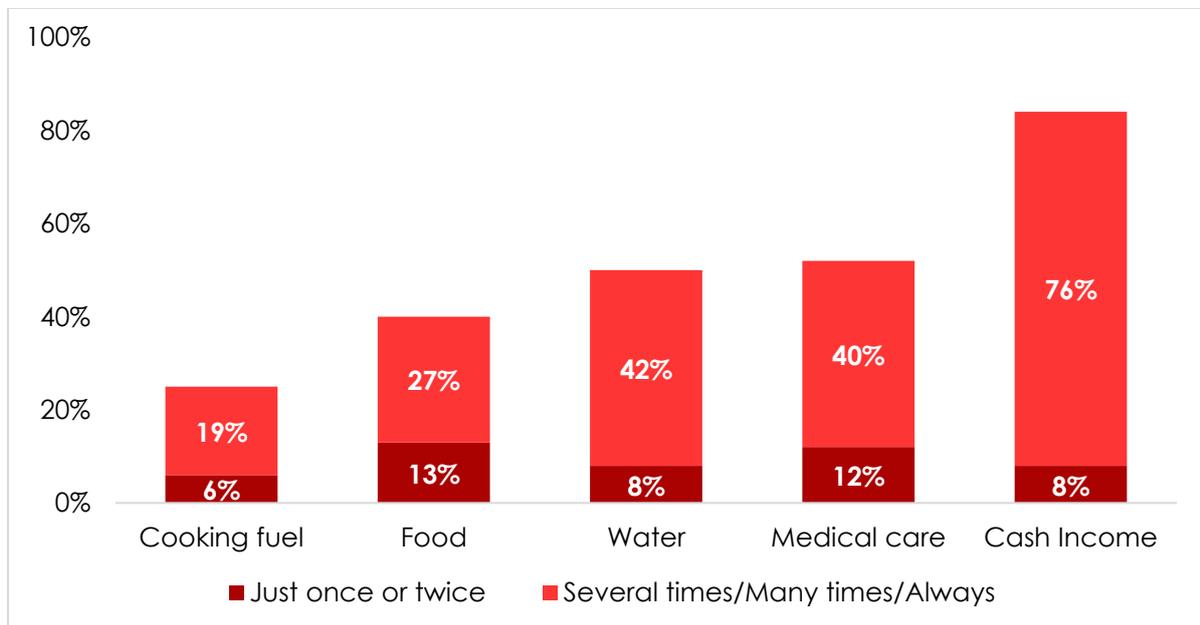
Another issue on which popular perceptions of the government's performance have improved dramatically is the fight against corruption in government: 71% of Tanzanians say the government is doing fairly/very well, up from 37% in 2014 (see Olan'g & Msami, 2017, for details).

However, approval has dropped drastically for the government's performance on creating jobs (from 54% in 2014 to 31% who say fairly/very well), ensuring everyone has enough to eat (from 43% to 23%), and keeping prices stable (34% to 20%).

Lived poverty increasing?

Despite the somewhat encouraging trends reported above, responses from ordinary citizens suggest that lived poverty has intensified. In 2017, four in 10 Tanzanians (40%) say they went without enough food to eat at least once during the previous year, including 27% who went hungry "several times," "many times," or "always" (Figure 8). Half say they went without enough clean water for home use (50%) or without needed medical care (52%), including four in 10 who did so at least "several times." More than eight in 10 (83%) report having gone without a cash income at least once during the preceding year.

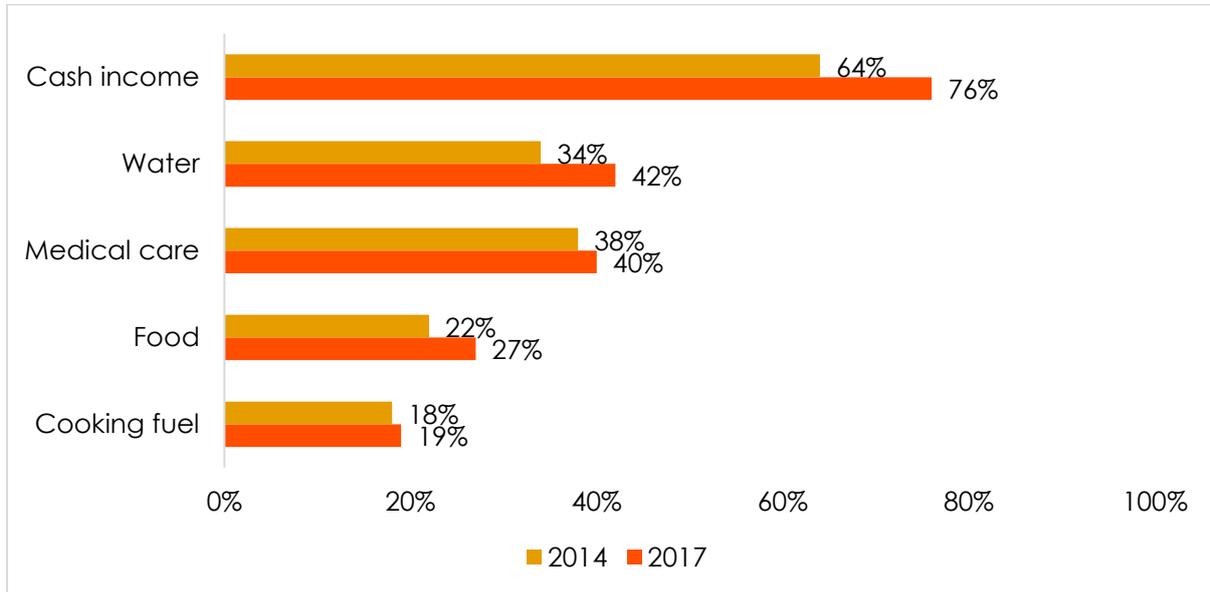
Figure 8: Going without basic necessities | Tanzania | 2017



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

The proportion of respondents who report being unable to meet these basic needs "several times," "many times," or "always" increased between 2014 and 2017 when it comes to food (from 22% to 27%), water (from 34% to 42%), and a cash income (from 64% to 76%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Going without basic necessities at least “several times” | Tanzania
 | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income? (% who say “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

Conclusion

Tanzania's Fifth Phase government has taken deliberate measures to improve the management of public resources. As the country continues to experience economic growth, it is crucial that this growth translate to development of the country and better lives for Tanzanians. Survey results suggest perceived gains in the government's handling of the economy and provision of basic health care, water and sanitation, electricity, and education services – key components of the government's goal of industrializing Tanzania.

Despite these positive indicators, survey results also highlight that living conditions remain far from acceptable, especially in rural areas. Indeed, poverty is still pervasive in Tanzania, with substantial proportions of the population experiencing repeated shortages of food, clean water, and other basic necessities.

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