

eSwatini citizens see more severe weather, but almost half are not aware of climate change

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 226 | Siphon Kunene

Summary

Over the past decade, eSwatini has experienced more frequent and intense extreme weather events, including an El Niño-induced drought in 2015 and 2016 (Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Center, 2017). The same period has also seen a sharp decline in crop-production levels and crop diversity due to climate variability. Maize production in the country dropped by 67% between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 planting seasons, especially in the lowveld. Declines in crop production are major setbacks to subsistence and commercial farmers as well as to a national economy in which agriculture ranks second only to manufacturing.

To confront eSwatini's weather-related vulnerabilities, the government has established a National Climate Change Committee, developed a National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, and enacted a National Climate Change Policy (Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, 2016) that aims to support climate-change adaptation programs. Citing the threats of climate change to the country's food security, water supply, and access to social services, among others, the policy says that "building resilience of her populace and the economy is of utmost priority if (eSwatini) is to achieve her quest towards sustainable development and poverty eradication" (p. 9).

While citizens surveyed by Afrobarometer confirm an increase in severe weather, almost half of them say they have never heard of climate change – a serious deficit if the success of adaptation programs depends on popular support. However, among citizens who are aware of climate change, large majorities say it's making life worse and should be stopped, and about half believe that ordinary citizens can play a role in doing so.

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 2015, 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 eSwatini, led by activQuest, interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in March 2018. 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 eSwatini in 2013 and 2015.

Key findings

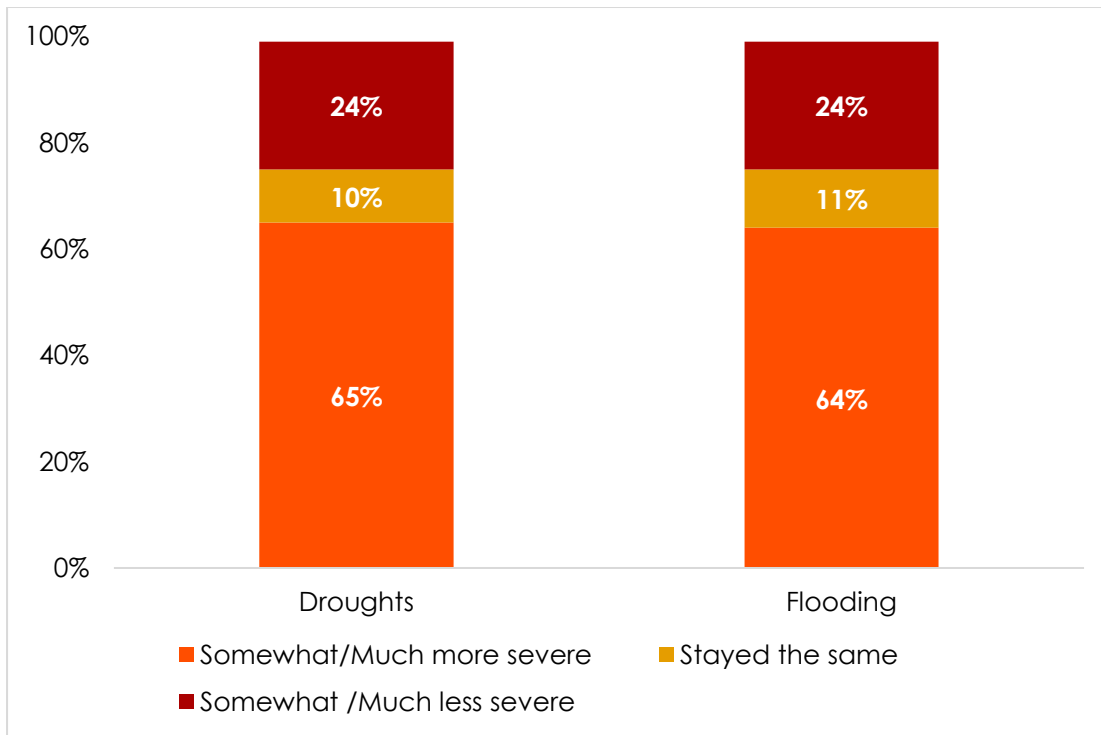
- About two-thirds of eSwatini citizens say that droughts (65%) and flooding (64%) have become "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe" in their region over the past decade.

- Even so, almost half (45%) of respondents say they have never heard of climate change.
- Among respondents who are aware of climate change, six out of 10 (61%) attribute it to human activity.
- More than eight in 10 eSwatini citizens who have heard of climate change (83%) say it is making life worse.
- More than half of citizens who are aware of climate change believe that ordinary people can do “a little” (27%) or “a lot” (24%) to fight climate change.

Severe weather

Before mentioning climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents in eSwatini whether droughts and flooding have gotten worse, gotten better, or stayed the same in their region over the past 10 years. About two-thirds (65%) of respondents say droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe,” while only one out of four (24%) say drought has become less severe. A similar proportion of respondents (64%) say flooding has become more severe (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Severity of drought and flooding | eSwatini | 2018

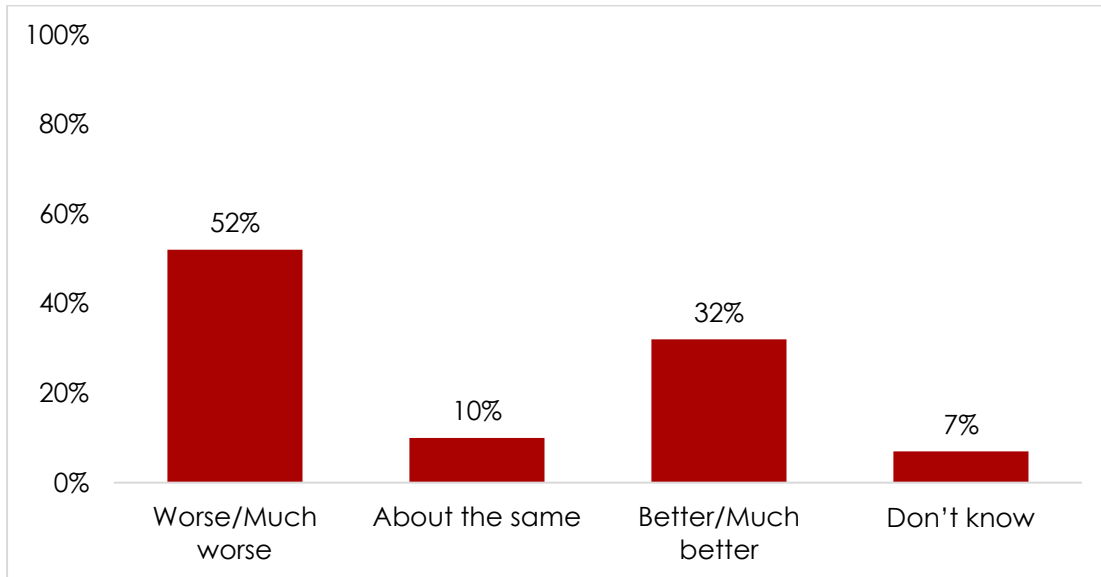


Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

- Severity of droughts?
- Severity of flooding?

Asked about climate conditions for agricultural production, a majority (52%) of eSwatini citizens say they have gotten “worse” or “much worse” over the past 10 years, compared to 32% who say they’ve improved (Figure 2).

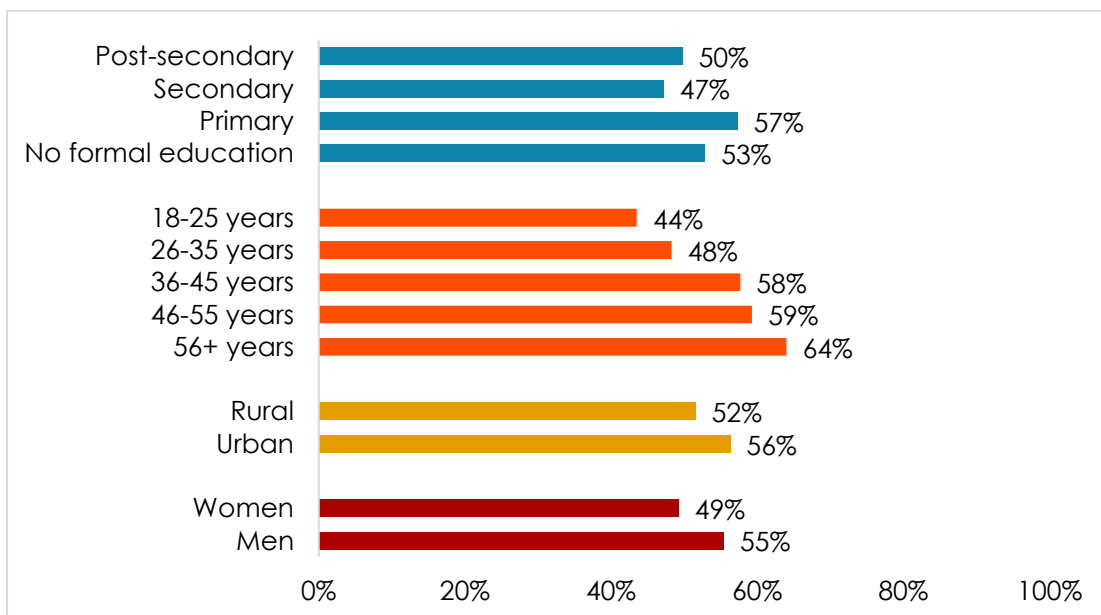
Figure 2: Climate conditions for agricultural production compared to 10 years ago
 | eSwatini | 2018



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

The perception that climate conditions for agricultural production have worsened is somewhat more common among less educated, urban, and male respondents. It increases with age, ranging from 44% of 18- to 25-year-olds to 64% among those aged 56 and older (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Climate conditions for agricultural production worse than 10 years ago
 | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018

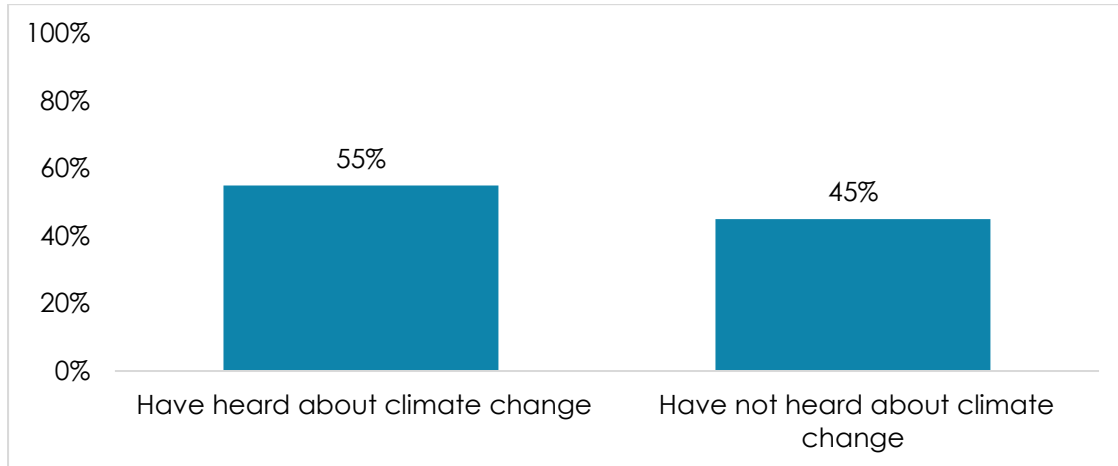


Respondents were asked: In your experience, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same over the last 10 years, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "worse" or "much worse")

Lack of knowledge about climate change

Despite perceptions of changes in climatic conditions, almost half (45%) of eSwatini citizens say they have not heard of the concept of “climate change” (Figure 4).

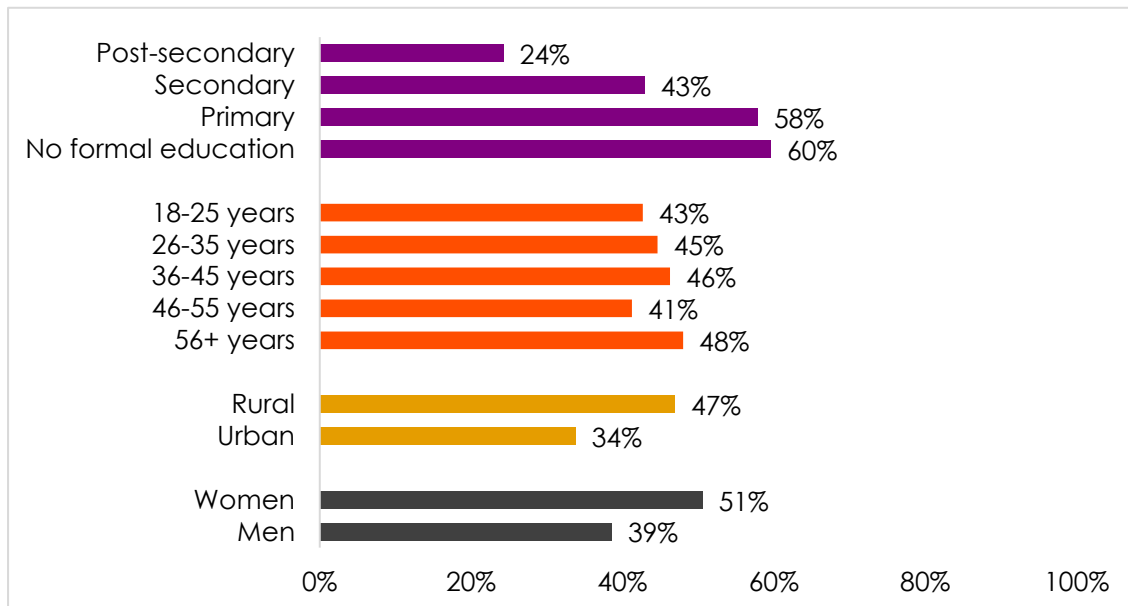
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | eSwatini | 2018



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

Women are more likely than men to be unaware of climate change (51% vs. 39%), as are rural residents compared to urbanites (47% vs. 34%). Respondents with no formal education (60%) or only primary school (58%) are twice as likely to unfamiliar with climate change as those with post-secondary qualifications (24%) (Figure 5).

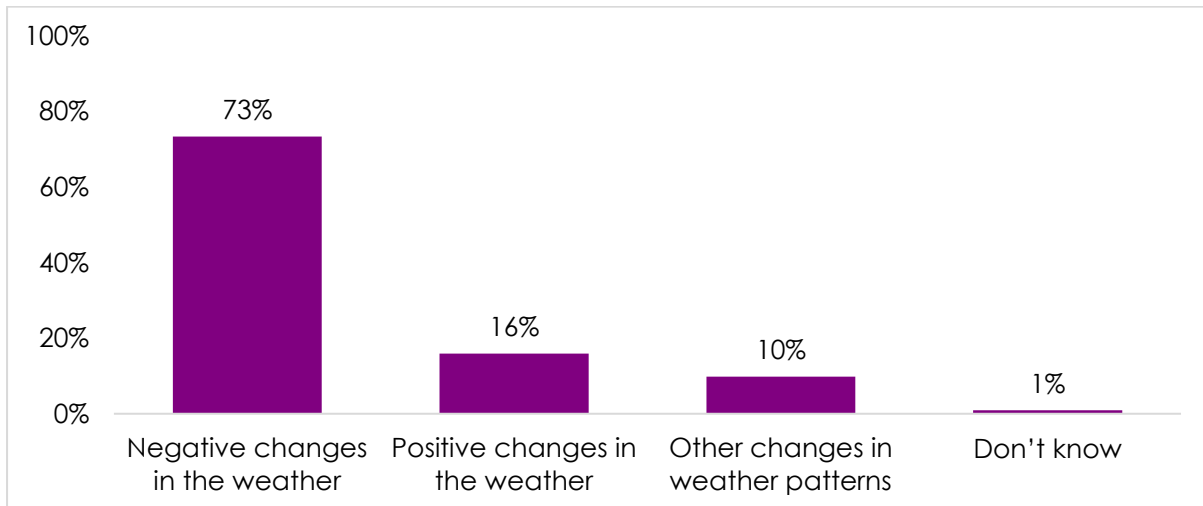
Figure 5: Have not heard of climate change | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say “no”)

Among respondents who have heard of climate change, almost three-quarters (73%) understand it as negative changes in the weather, such as more droughts, floods, or extreme heat (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Meaning of climate change | eSwatini | 2018

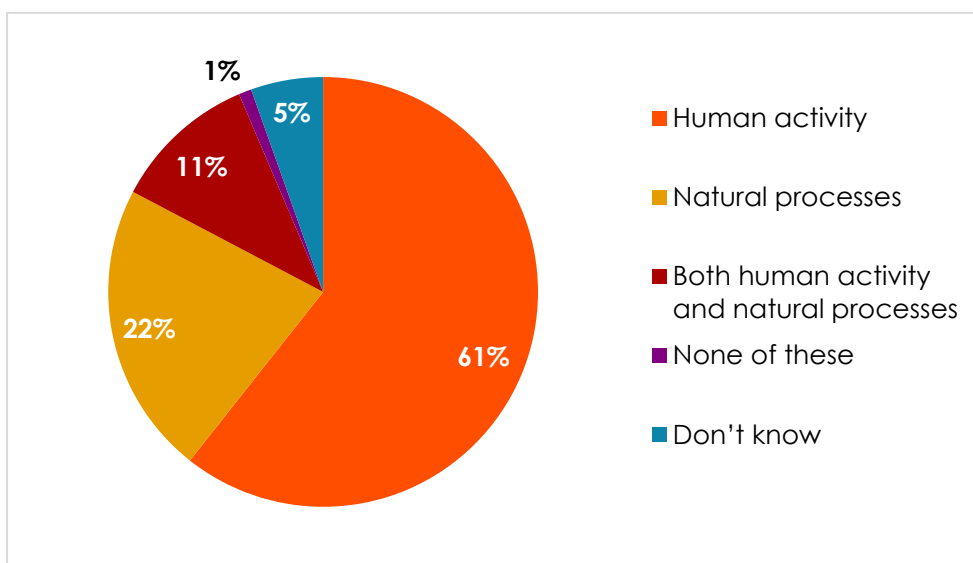


Respondents who said they had heard of climate change were asked: What does the phrase "climate change" mean to you? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Causes and effects of climate change

Among those familiar with climate change, six out of 10 respondents (61%) say its main cause is human activity, while about one in five (22%) attribute climate change to natural causes. A further one in 10 (11%) say that both human activity and natural processes cause climate change (Figure 7).

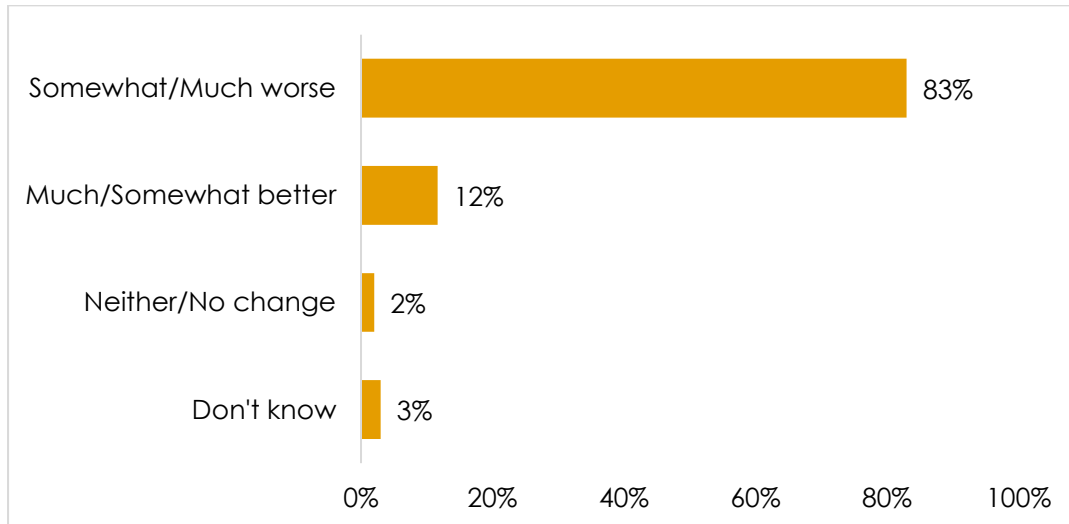
Figure 7: Main cause of climate change | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents who said they 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 change, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

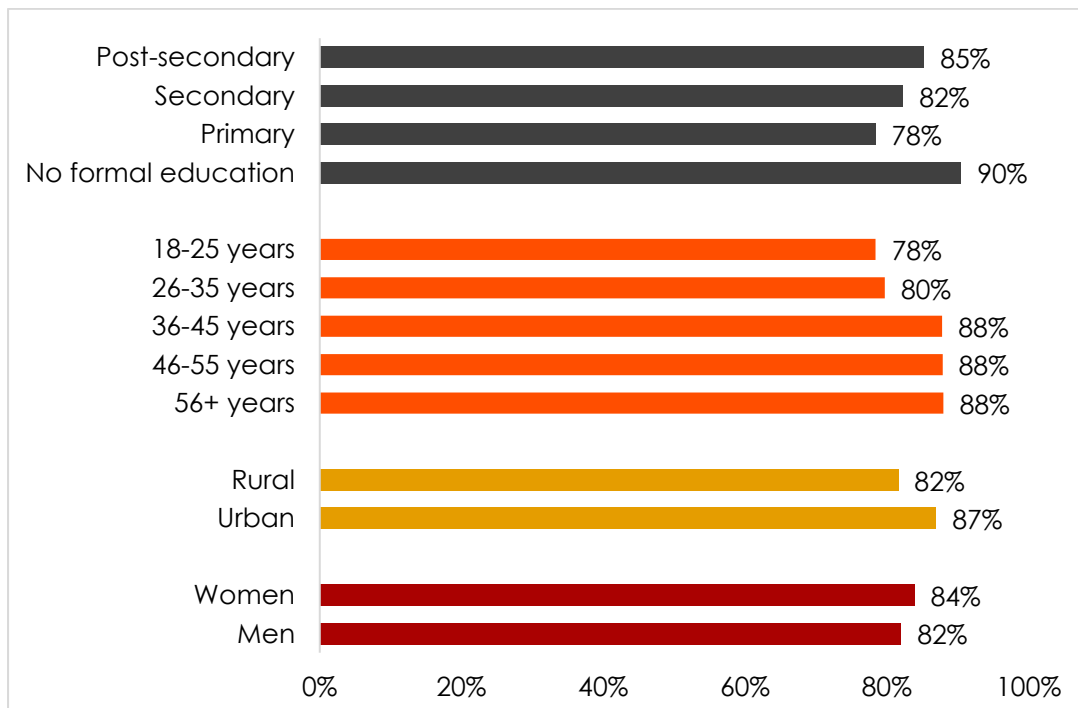
More than eight out of 10 eSwatini citizens (83%) who have heard of climate change say it is making life in their country “somewhat worse” or “much worse” (Figure 8). This view is particularly common among respondents with no formal education (90%), those who are more than 35 years old (88%), and urban residents (87%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Climate change affecting life | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in eSwatini 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 | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018

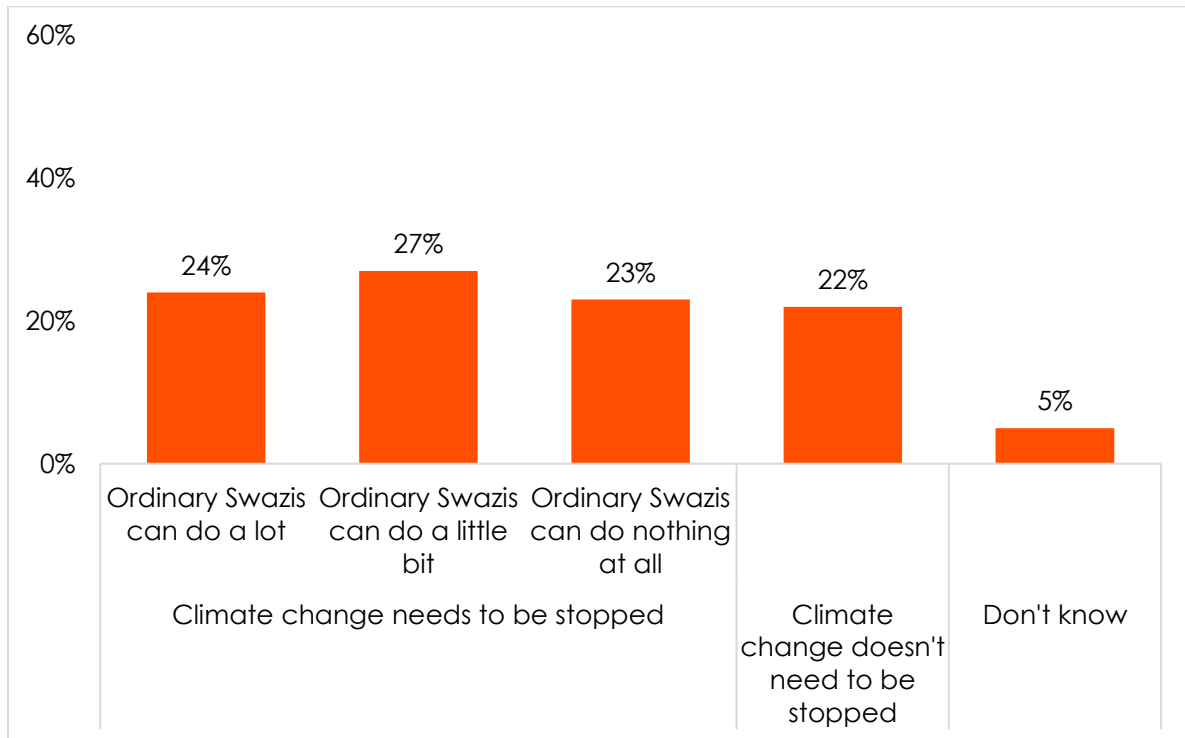


Respondents were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in eSwatini better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say “somewhat worse” or “much worse”) (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Can ordinary citizens fight climate change?

Of those familiar with the phenomenon, more than three-quarters (78%) say climate change needs to be stopped, and about half say ordinary people can do “a lot” (24%) or “a little bit” (27%) to help. Almost one in four (23%) say there is nothing that ordinary citizens can do, and about the same proportion (22%) say climate change doesn’t need to be stopped (Figure 10).

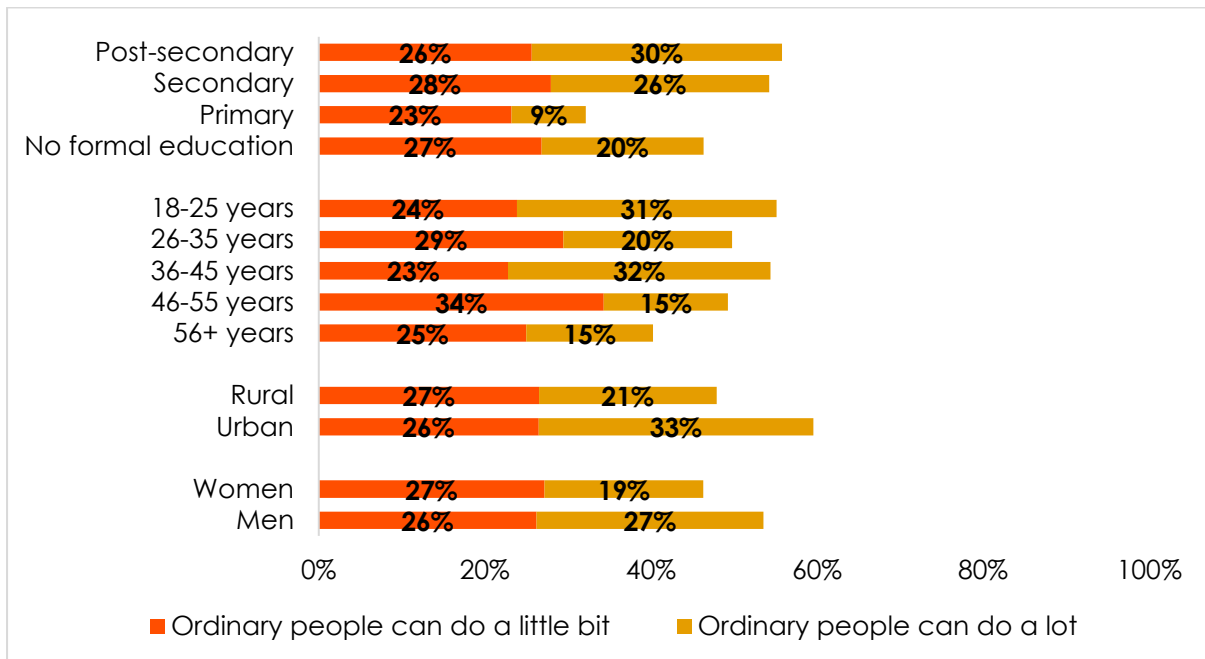
Figure 10: Can ordinary people help stop climate change? | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents were asked: Do you think that climate change needs to be stopped? [If yes:] How much do you think that ordinary Swazis can do to stop climate change? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

The view that ordinary citizens can help fight climate change is shared more widely by urban residents, men, and respondents with secondary or post-secondary education than by women, rural residents, and less-educated citizens (Figure 11). The differences by socio-demographic group are mostly due to differences in the proportions who think ordinary people can do “a lot.”

Figure 11: Can ordinary people help stop climate change? | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents were asked: Do you think that climate change needs to be stopped? [If yes:] How much do you think that ordinary Ivoirians can do to stop climate change? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Conclusion

Changes in weather conditions and their impact on agricultural production are apparent to many people in eSwatini. However, almost half of all citizens have not heard of climate change. It is therefore important that public information and advocacy efforts focus on improving knowledge about climate change, especially among rural residents, women, and older citizens. A well-informed citizenry will provide a strong base for climate-change adaptation programs to succeed.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

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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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