



Dispatch No. 647 | 31 May 2023

Zambians say climate change is making life worse, want collective action to limit it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 647 | Edward Chibwili

Summary

This year's deadly flooding – described as Zambia's worst in half a century – put the weather in the news again, joining tropical storms and prolonged drought among the growing threats posed by climate change (VOA, 2023; National Assembly of Zambia, 2022; Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, 2020; Care, 2023). Zambia ranks among the world's countries highest in vulnerability and lowest in resilience to climate change, according to the ND-GAIN Country Index (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, 2020).

The country's dependence on rainfed agriculture, which employs two-thirds of the workforce, and on hydropower make it particularly vulnerable to climate shocks, threatening food production, electricity supply, and economic growth (Tembo, 2020; Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, 2020; Kalantary, 2010).

The government of Zambia has committed itself to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, and has integrated climate-change interventions in its Vision 2030 and successive five-year national development plans and programmes. Its 2017 National Climate Change Policy seeks to coordinate a national response to promote sustainable development (Policy Monitoring and Research Centre, 2017; Ministry of National Development Planning, 2016).

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that fewer than half of Zambians have heard of climate change. Those who are aware of climate change are firmly behind government action to address the crisis, even at significant economic cost. They see addressing climate change as a collective responsibility, and they want greater engagement on the issue by the government, business and industry, more developed nations, and ordinary citizens.

Overwhelmingly, Zambians familiar with climate change say it is making life in their country worse.

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. Eight rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys are being completed in early 2023. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zambia, led by the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 Zambian adults between 3 August and 7 September 2022. 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 have been conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- About half (49%) of Zambians say droughts have become more severe in their region over the past decade, a proportion that has almost doubled since 2017. Only 30% say the same about floods.
- Fewer than half (44%) of Zambians say they have heard of climate change.
 - Awareness of climate change is particularly low among rural residents, women, poor citizens, and less educated respondents. It is significantly higher among frequent news consumers than among those who rarely follow the news.
- Among Zambians who are aware of climate change:
 - More than eight in 10 (82%) say it is making life in Zambia worse.
 - More than three-fourths say that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change (77%) and that the government should take immediate action to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy (76%).
 - Large majorities say “a lot more” action to fight climate change is needed from the government (78%), business and industry (73%), ordinary citizens (68%), and more developed countries (67%).
- Twice as many Zambians approve as disapprove of the government's performance on climate change (40% vs. 19%), while many (41%) say they “don't know.”

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences with extreme weather conditions. About half (49%) of Zambians say droughts have become “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their region over the past 10 years. Three in 10 (31%) say droughts have become less severe, while 15% report no change (Figure 1).

In contrast, a plurality (42%) of respondents say that the severity of floods has decreased, while 30% say they have gotten worse.

Compared to survey findings in 2017, the proportion of Zambians who say droughts have gotten more severe has increased by 22 percentage points, from 27% to 49% (Figure 2).

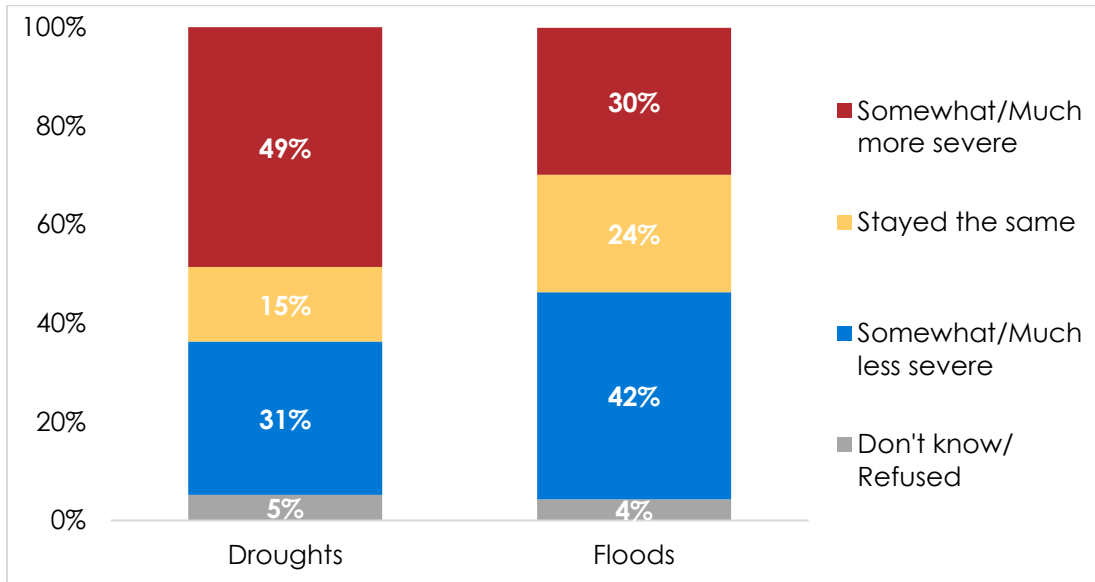
The share of citizens who report more severe flooding has remained unchanged.

Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to report increasingly severe droughts (60% vs. 35%), perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of the effects of a lack of rainfall in more agricultural areas (Figure 3). For similar reasons, citizens with primary education or less (60%) and those experiencing high “lived poverty”¹ (57%) are more likely to say droughts have

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without 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 & Patel (2022).

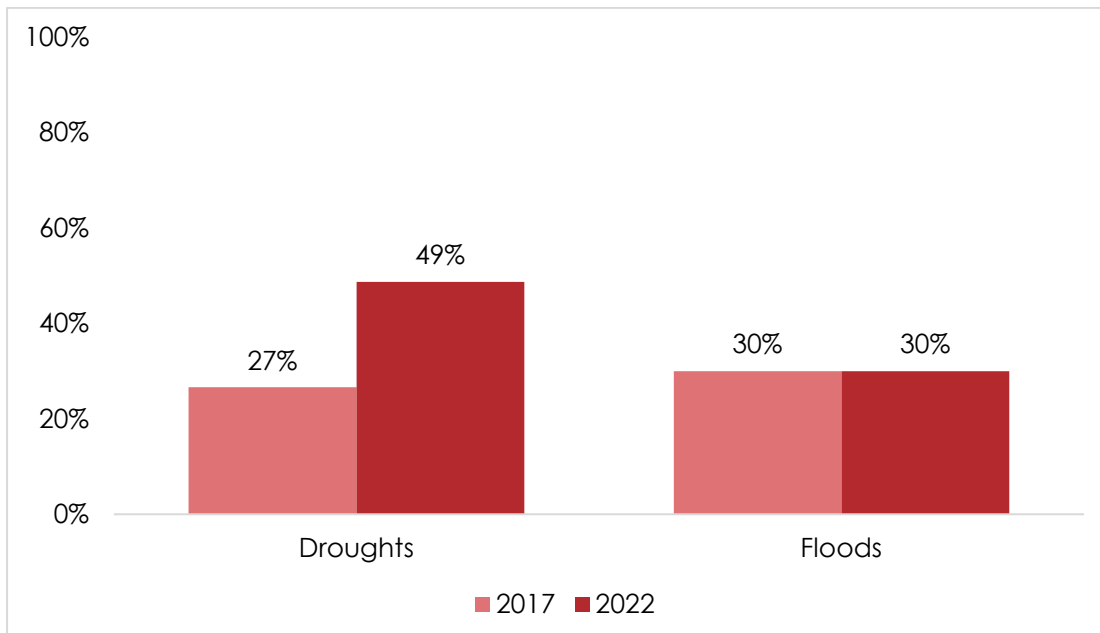
worsened than their more educated (37%-43%) and better-off (45%-48%) counterparts. More men than women report worsening droughts (56% vs. 42%).

Figure 1: Severity of droughts and floods | Zambia | 2022



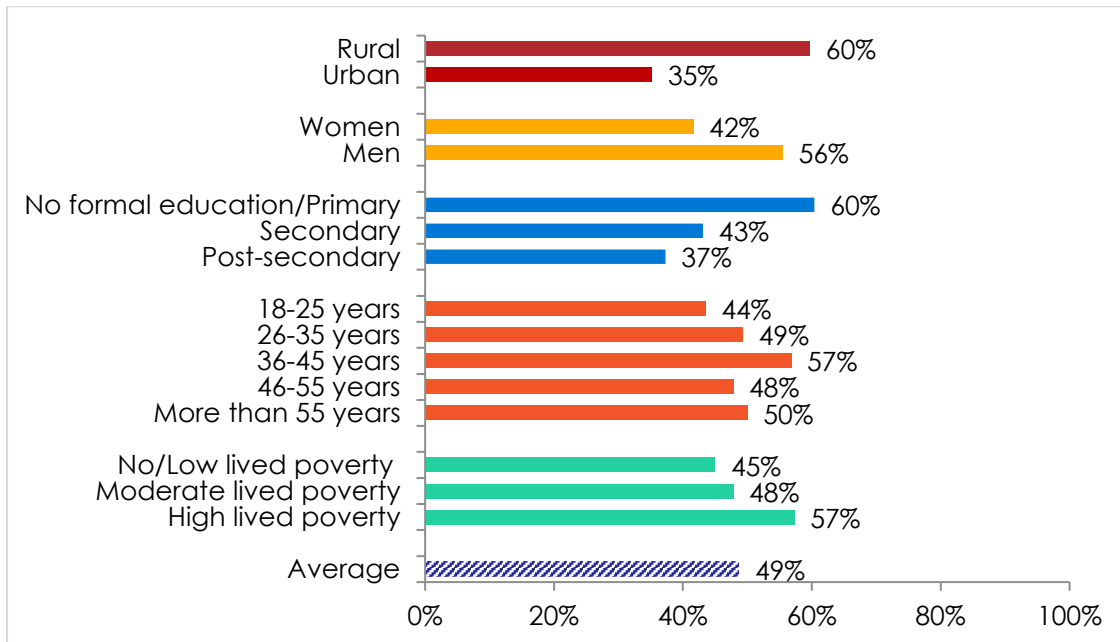
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live: Drought? Flooding? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

Figure 2: Droughts and floods more severe | Zambia | 2017-2022



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? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

Figure 3: Droughts more severe | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022



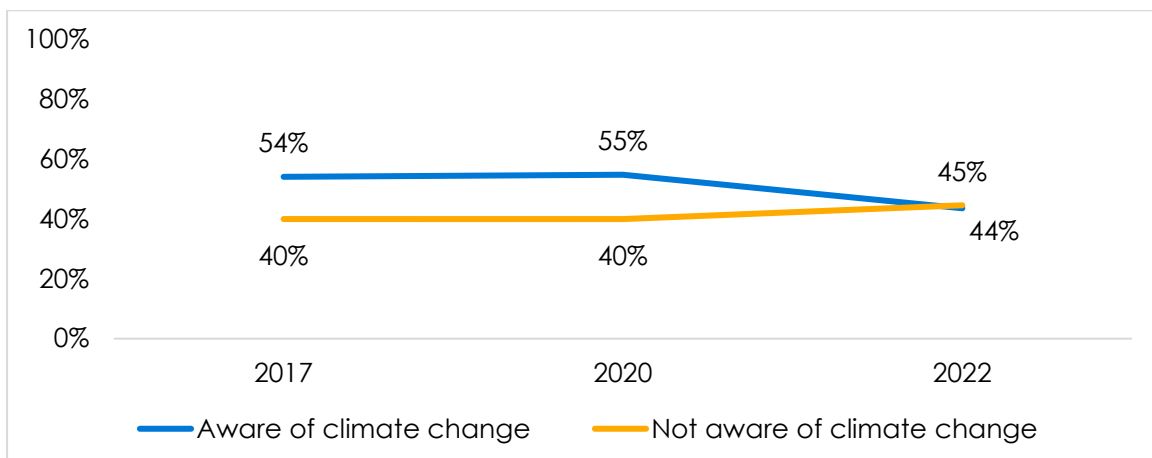
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live: Drought? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

Climate change

Awareness of climate change

Lack of awareness is a major obstacle to climate change adaptation in developing countries (Shahid & Piracha, 2016). In Zambia, only 44% of citizens say they have heard of climate change (Figure 4). This reflects a significant decline from 55% in 2020, perhaps reflecting a still-emerging understanding of climate change, with awareness that may fluctuate in response to whether media attention is focused on extreme weather events or other topics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Zambia | 2017-2022

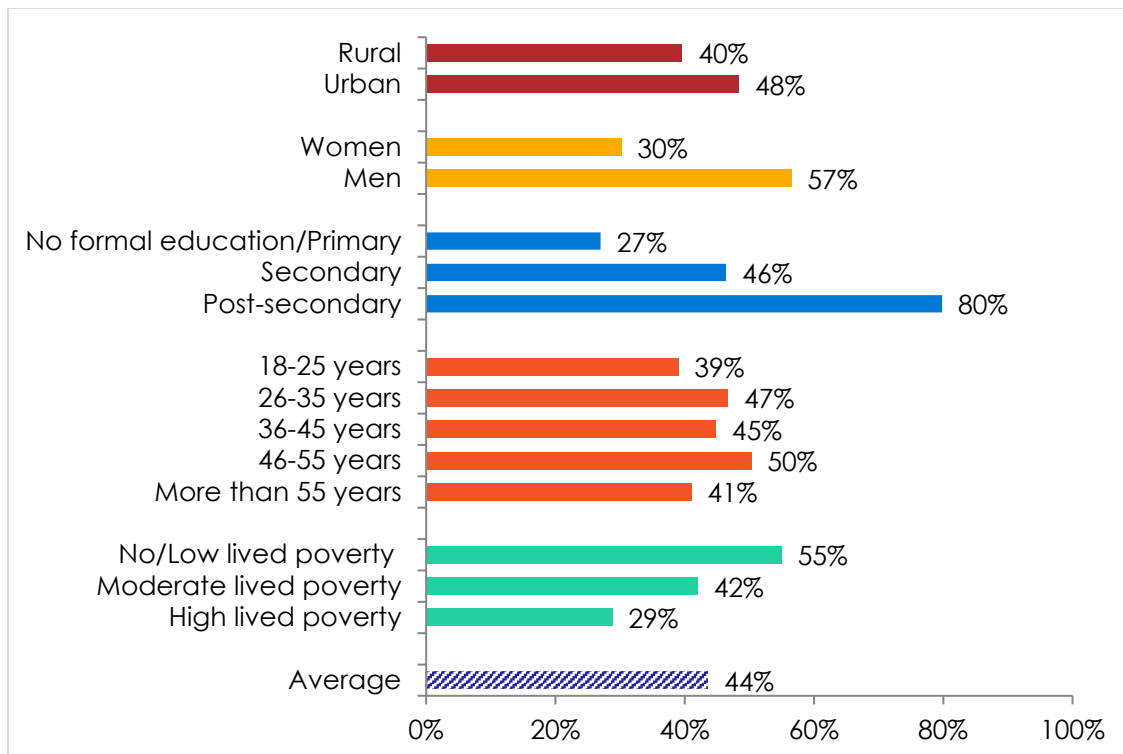


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

Economically well-off citizens (55%) are more likely to be familiar with the term “climate change” than those experiencing lived poverty (29%-42%) (Figure 5). As might be expected, awareness increases with an individual's level of education, ranging from 27% among those with primary schooling or less to 80% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

More men (57%) than women (30%) have heard of the concept, and awareness is higher in cities than in rural areas (48% vs. 40%). Awareness of climate change is particularly low among the youngest (39%) and oldest (41%) citizens.

Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022

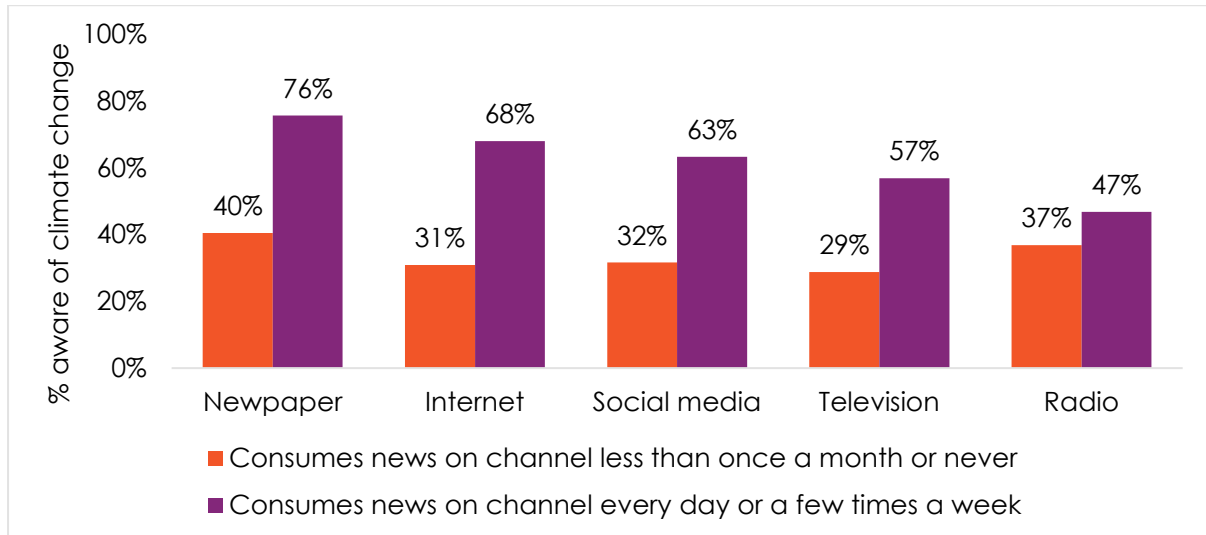


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say “yes”)

Awareness of climate change increases with respondents' consumption of news via most media platforms. Among those who never or seldom (less than once a month) get news from traditional or digital media, 29%-40% have heard of climate change (Figure 6). But awareness of climate change is significantly higher among respondents who frequently get news from newspapers (76%), the Internet (68%), social media (63%), television (57%), and radio (47%).

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.

Figure 6: Awareness of climate change | by news media consumption | Zambia | 2022



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

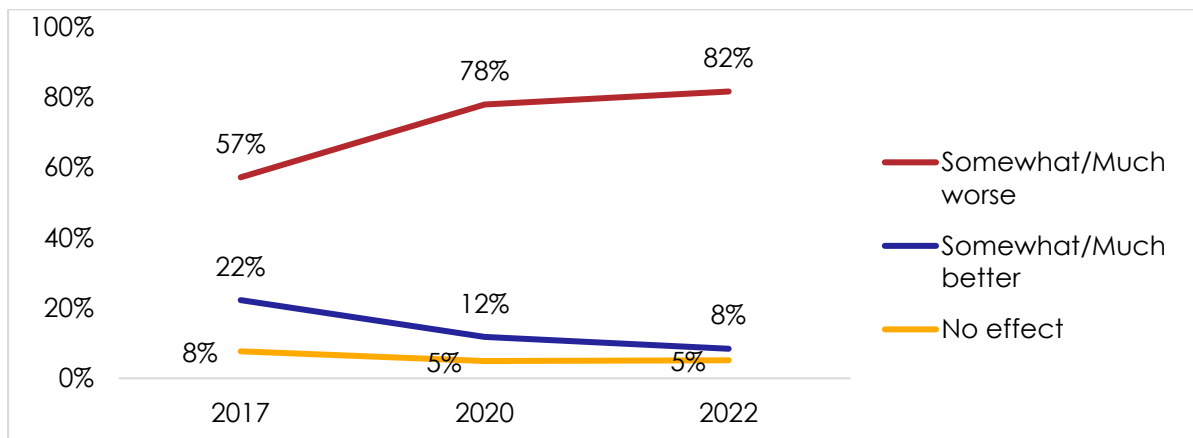
Effects of climate change

Among citizens who are aware of climate change, more than eight in 10 (82%) say it is making life in Zambia "somewhat worse" or "much worse." Perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change have increased significantly since 2017 (57%) (Figure 7).

Like increasing drought, the negative impact of climate change is more widely felt by rural residents than urbanites (89% vs. 74%) and by men compared to women (85% vs. 74%) (Figure 8). Perceptions that climate change is making life worse increased with respondents' age, ranging from 77% of 18- to 25-year-olds to 89% of those over age 55.

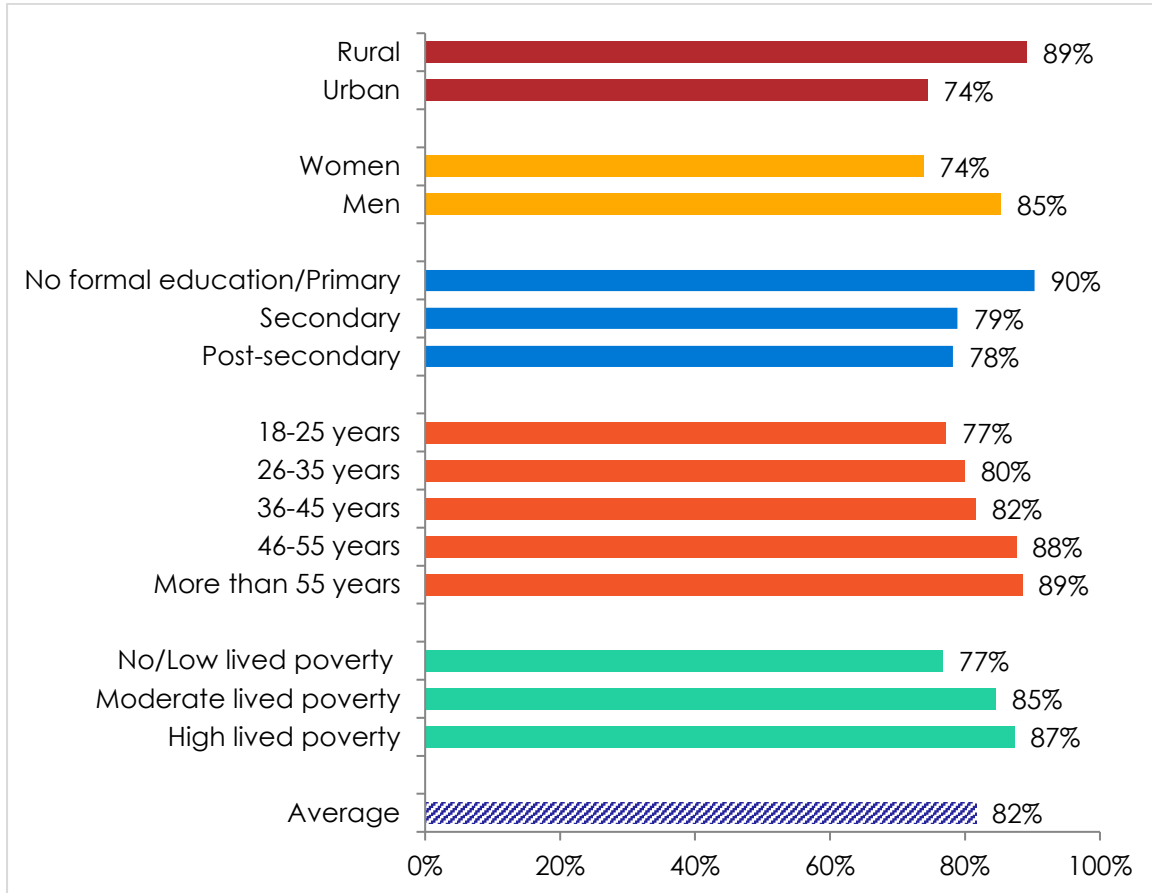
The poorest citizens (87%) are more likely to feel the adverse effects of climate change than the economically well-off (77%), as are individuals with primary schooling or less (90%) compared to those with more education (78%-79%).

Figure 7: Effect of climate change | Zambia | 2017-2022



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

Figure 8: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Zambia
 | 2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Zambia 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.)

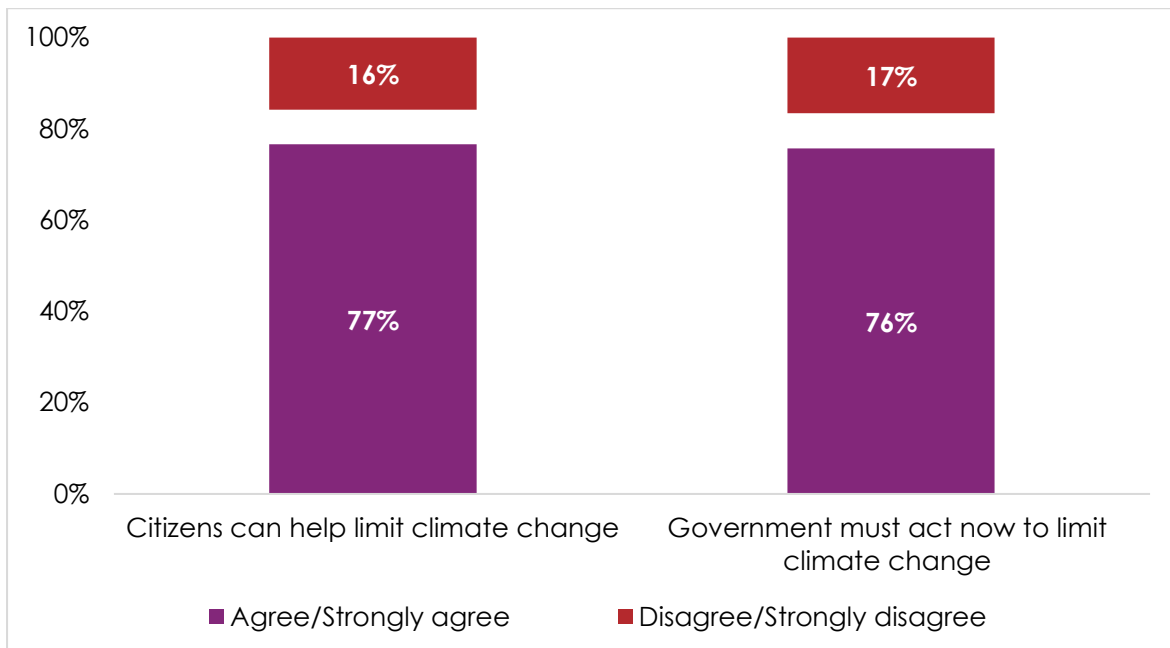
Who is responsible for addressing climate change?

According to Zambians, addressing climate change is a collective responsibility. Almost eight in 10 respondents who are aware of climate change (77%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that citizens can help curb climate change (Figure 9). And about the same proportion (76%) want their government to take steps now to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.

Zambians assign primary responsibility for limiting climate change and reducing its impact to ordinary citizens (47%) and the government (32%). Far fewer cite business and industry (6%), more developed countries (3%), and traditional leaders (3%) (Figure 10).

Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? Respondents answer with a resounding "No." Only small minorities say the government (2%), business and industry (2%), citizens (3%), and developed countries (5%) are making enough of an effort to fight climate change (Figure 11). Across the board, large majorities (67%-78%) say these stakeholders need to do "a lot more."

Figure 9: Limiting climate change | Zambia | 2022



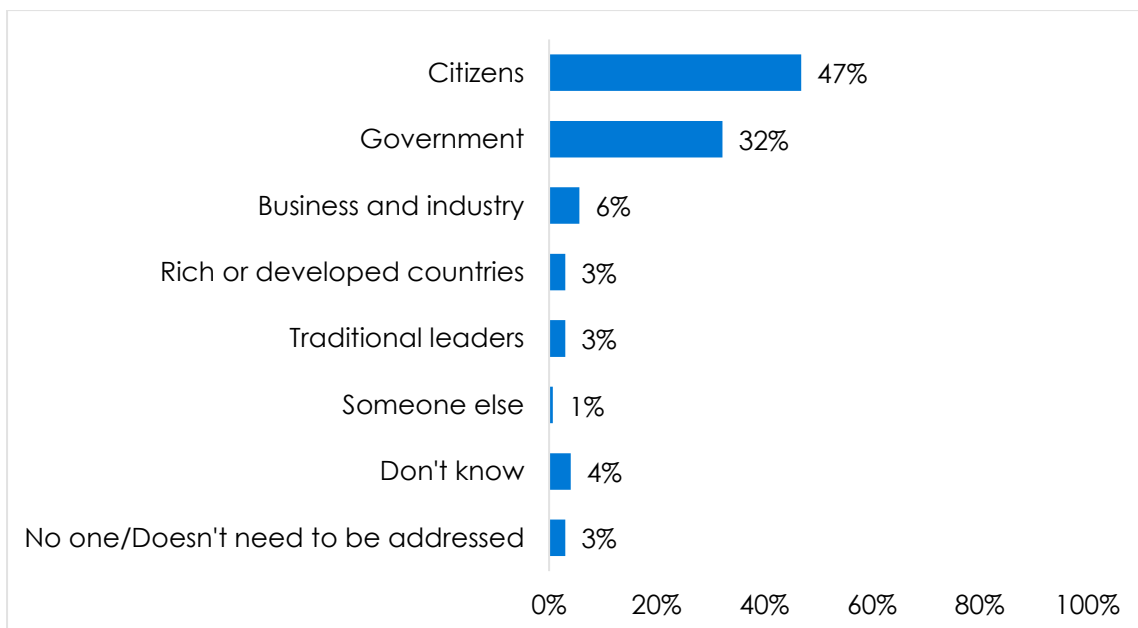
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Zambians 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?

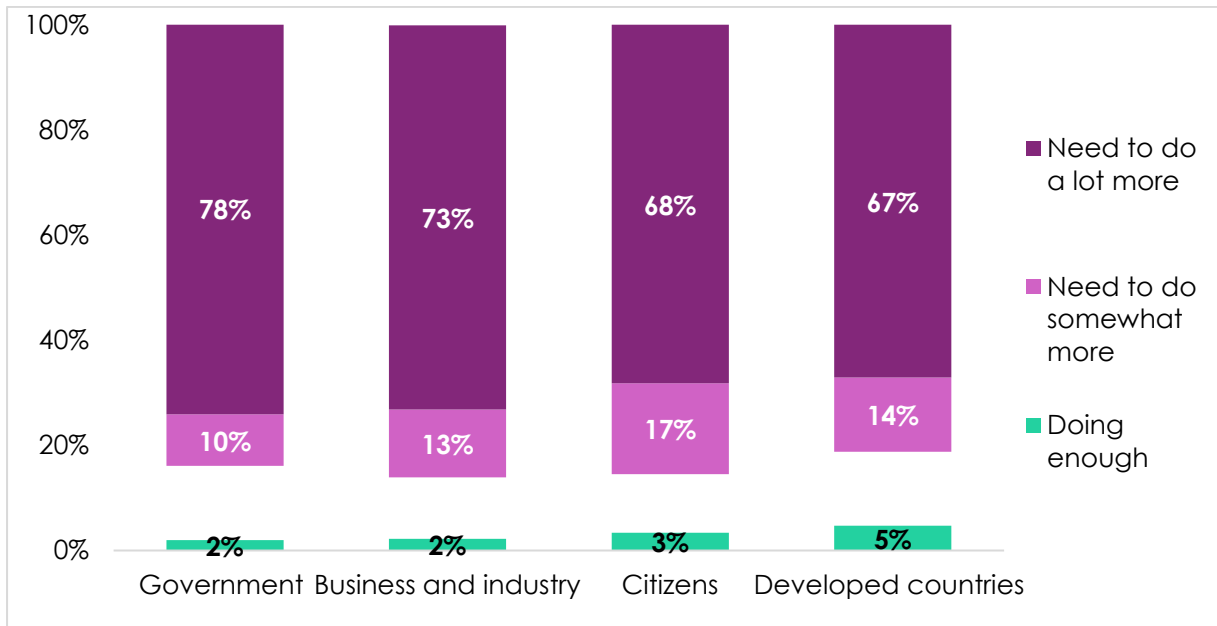
(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 10: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Zambia | 2022



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.)

Figure 11: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Zambia | 2022

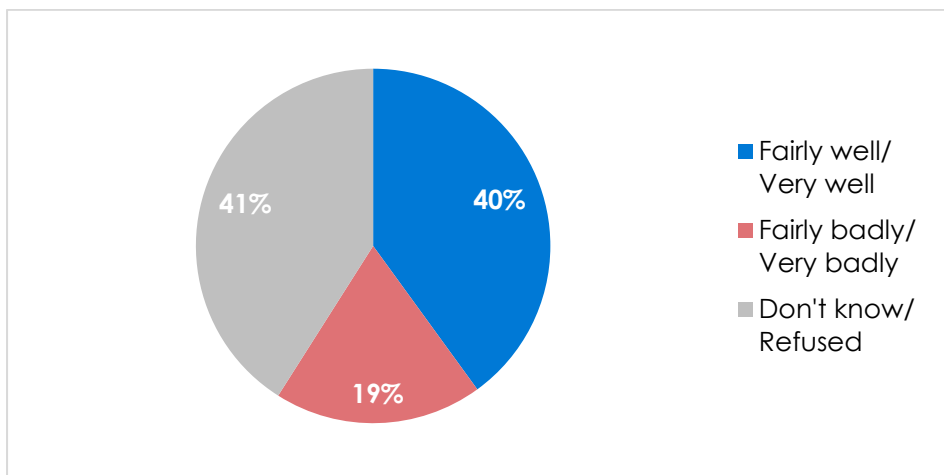


Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

When asked to assess how well the government is addressing the problem of climate change, 40% of survey respondents describe the government's performance as "fairly good" or "very good," while half as many (19%) give the government a failing grade on this issue. Four in 10 (41%) say they "don't know" or declined to answer the question (Figure 12).

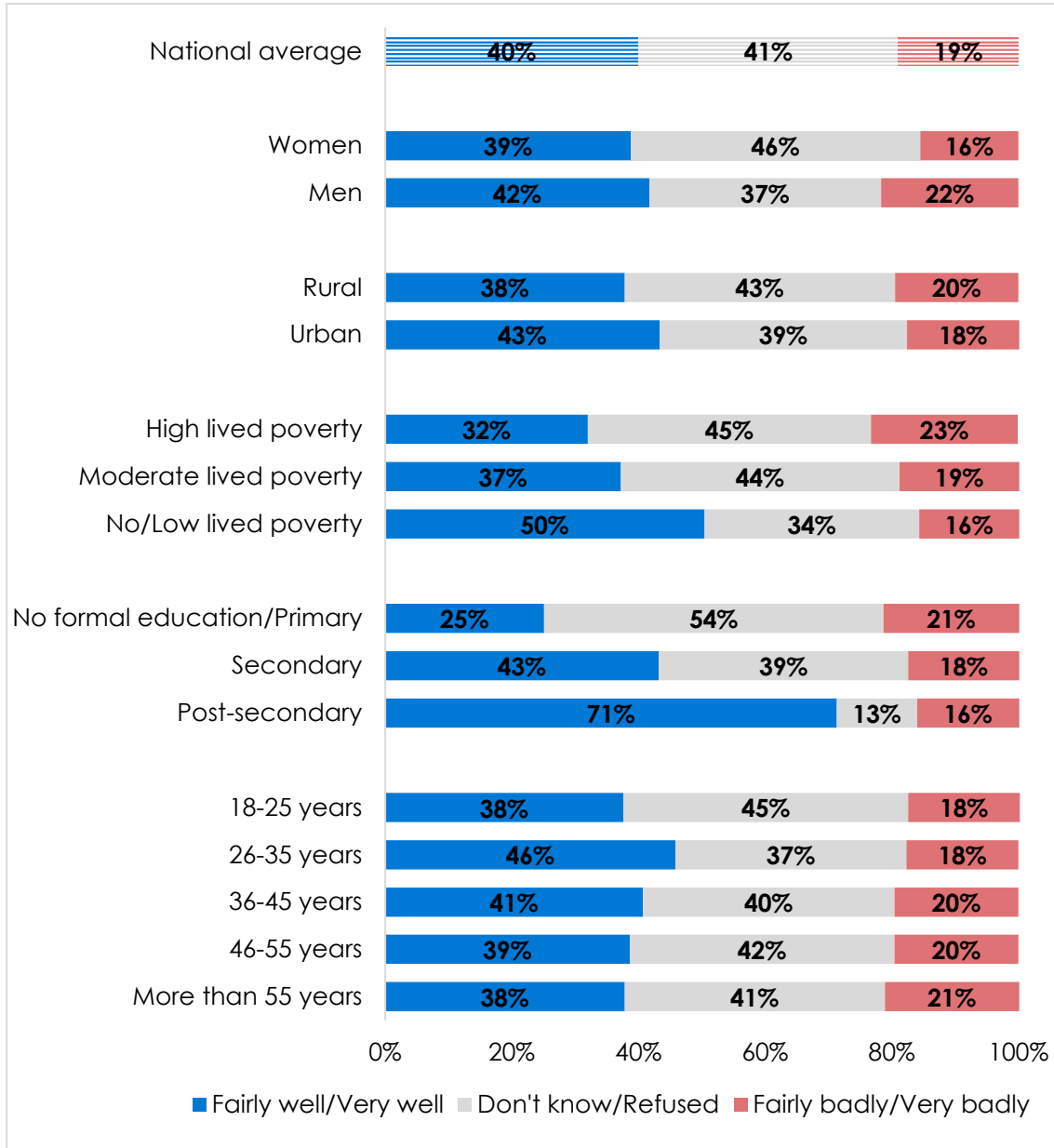
Approval of the government's performance on climate change is higher among citizens with post-secondary education (71%), economically better-off respondents (50%), urban residents (43%), and men (42%) than among their respective counterparts, who tend to record larger proportions of "don't know" responses (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Government performance on climate change | Zambia | 2022



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?

Figure 13: Government performance on climate change | by demographic group
 | Zambia | 2022



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

As climate change continues to negatively affect the lives of Zambians, findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey suggest that broad support for collaborative climate action is building – at least among those citizens who have heard of climate change.

Large majorities of those familiar with climate change say it is making life worse and requires immediate government action, even if such policies and programmes are expensive, cause job losses, or take a toll on the economy. But overwhelming majorities say they expect

greater efforts by other stakeholders as well, including business and industry, more developed countries, and ordinary citizens.

Since fewer than half of Zambians say they have heard of climate change, one step toward building momentum for climate action may be targeted interventions – especially among rural, less educated, and economically disadvantaged populations – to educate more citizens about the threat it poses.

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Edward Chibwili is a research fellow at the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia. Email: edward.chibwili@unza.zm.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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