

Most Ugandans see worsening drought, say climate change is making life worse

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 303 | Derick Msafiri and Ronald Makanga

Summary

The threat that climate change represents for Uganda and its economic development has been documented for years (Hepworth & Goulden, 2009; Tol, 2009). The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index (2019) ranks Uganda as the 15th-most-vulnerable country in the world to climate change, and the 49th-least-prepared country to combat its effects.

The country's Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2018) says prolonged droughts, floods, and irregular rainfall patterns have significantly impacted agriculture, hydro-electricity production, water resources, human settlements, and infrastructure, with long-term implications of persistent poverty and increased food insecurity. To address climate change, the government 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 2040 and five-year National Development Plan (Ministry of Water and Environment, 2015).

According to the most recent Afrobarometer public-opinion survey in Uganda, there is a national consensus that climate conditions for agricultural production have deteriorated over the past decade, that climate change has made life in Uganda worse, and that it needs to be stopped. A majority of citizens say they can help stop it.

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 results of Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently being disseminated. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative sample.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Ugandans between 26 December 2016 and 8 January 2017. 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 Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

Key findings

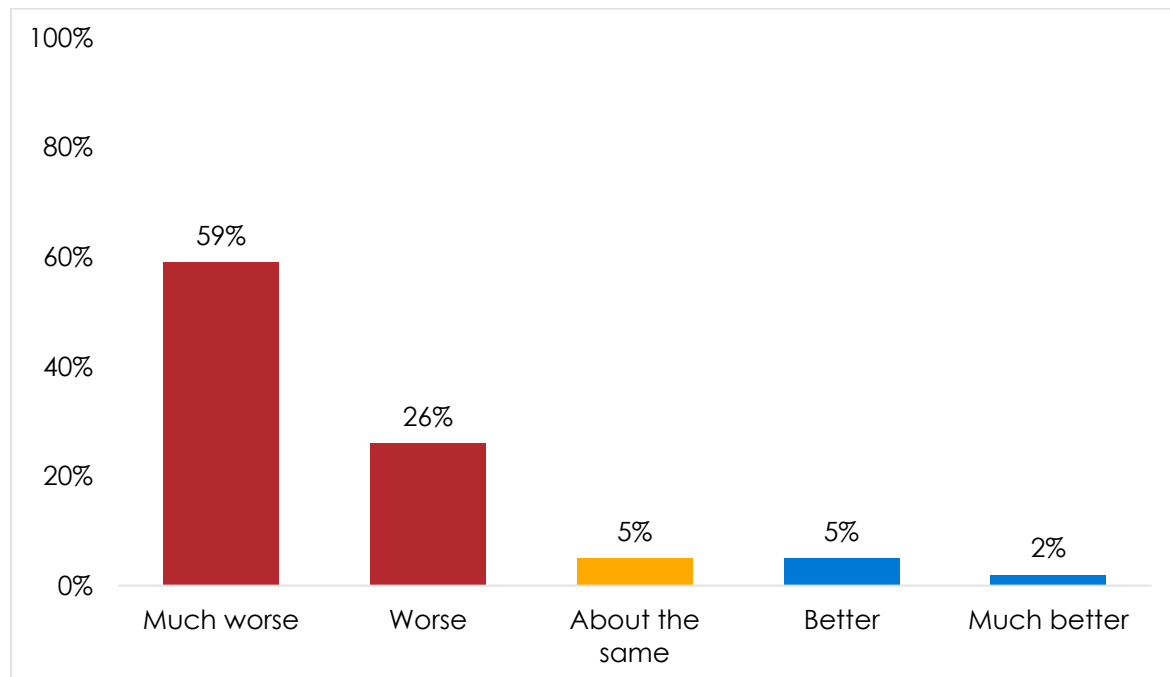
- More than eight out of 10 Ugandans (85%) say climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten worse over the past decade, including 59% who describe them as "much worse."

- In particular, drought has gotten “somewhat” or “much” more severe, according to 87% of respondents. Only 12% say flooding has worsened.
- More than three-fourths (78%) of Ugandans say they have heard of climate change.
- Among those who have heard of climate change:
 - About half (53%) attribute it to human activity, while one-fourth (25%) say it is caused by both human activity and natural processes.
 - Nine out of 10 say climate change is making life in the country “somewhat worse” or “much worse” (93%) and needs to be stopped (90%).
 - Two-thirds say ordinary people can do “a little bit” (37%) or “a lot” (30%) to stop it.

Climate conditions for agricultural production

Before mentioning climate change, Afrobarometer asked respondents about weather changes in their region. More than eight in 10 respondents (85%) say climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten “worse” (26%) or “much worse” (59%) over the past 10 years. Only about one in 10 Ugandans say climate conditions have gotten better (7%) or stayed the same (5%) (Figure 1).

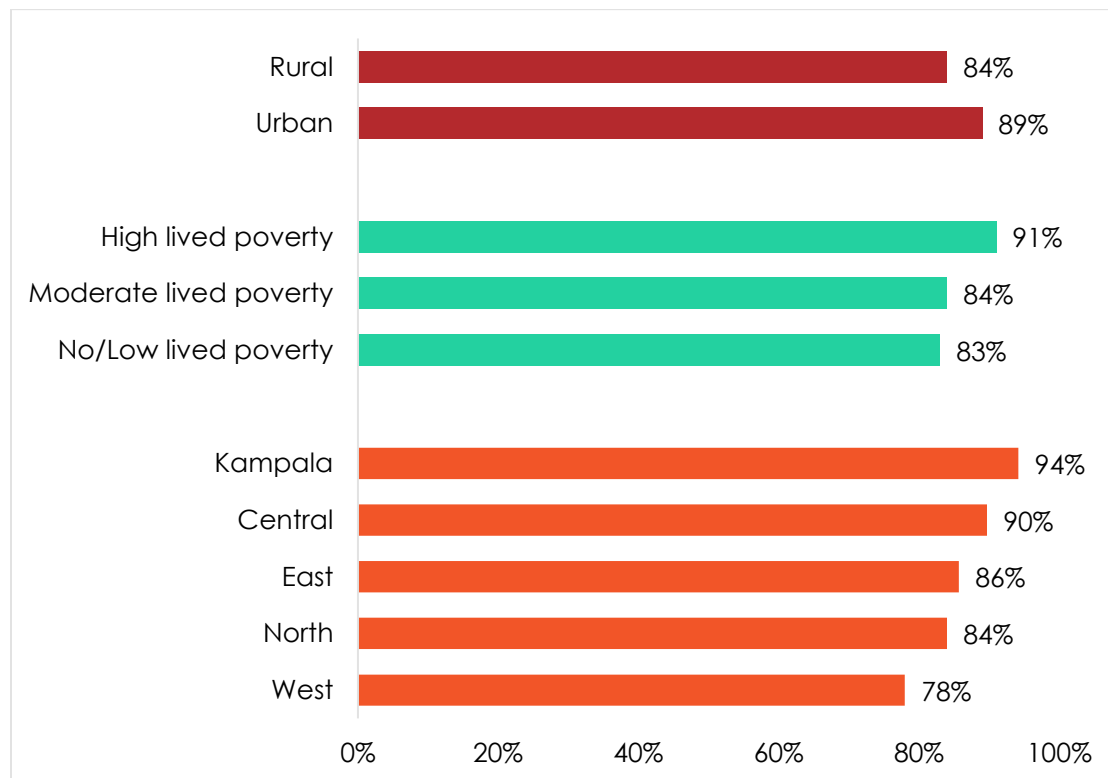
Figure 1: Climate conditions for agricultural production compared to 10 years ago
 | Uganda | 2017



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?*

Respondents in urban areas are somewhat more likely than rural residents to say climate conditions have worsened (89% vs. 84%). And perceptions of worse climate conditions are more common among the poorest respondents (91%) than their better-off counterparts (82%-84%).¹ Respondents in the West region are least likely to see worsening climate conditions (78%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Climate conditions for agricultural production worse than 10 years ago
 | by urban-rural location, lived poverty, and region | Uganda | 2017



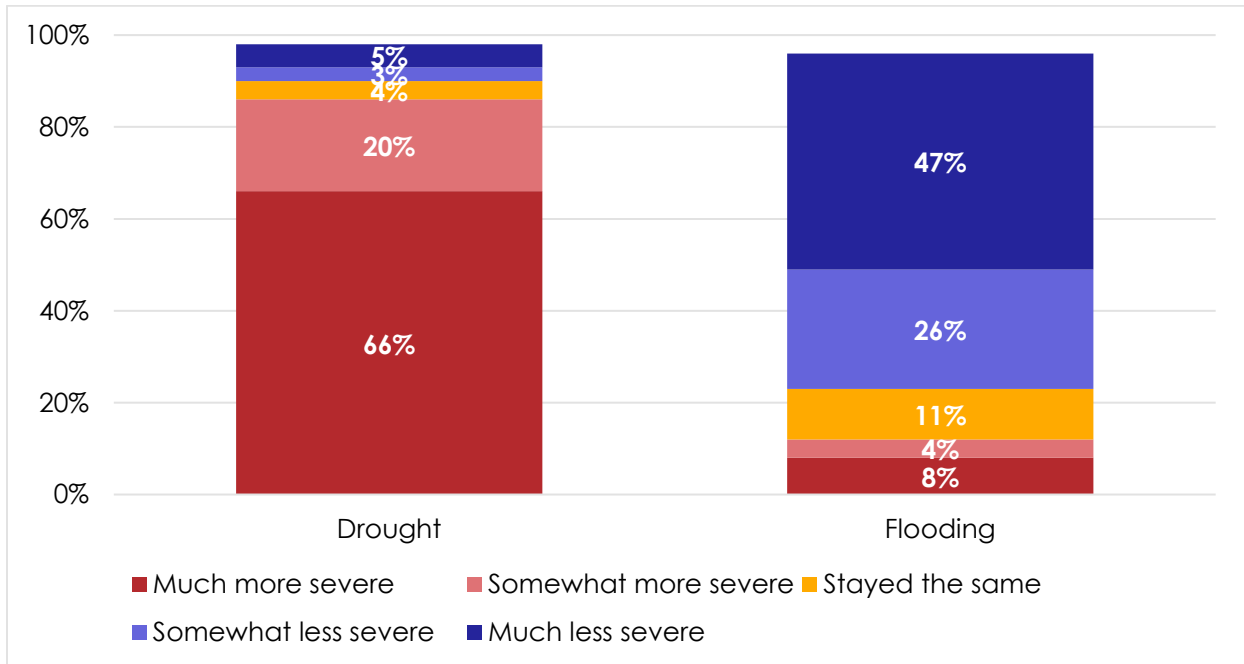
Respondents were asked: In your experience, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same over the last 10 years, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "worse" or "much worse")

The negative changes in the climate consist primarily of drought, survey responses indicate. Almost nine out of 10 Ugandans (87%) say drought has gotten more severe over the past decade, including a remarkable 66% who say it has become "much more severe" (Figure 3).

Only about one in eight respondents (12%) say flooding has worsened, while more than three-fourths (78%) say it has gotten less severe.

¹ Afrobarometer assesses respondents' "lived poverty" based on responses to the following questions: 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?

Figure 3: Severity of drought and flooding | Uganda | 2017



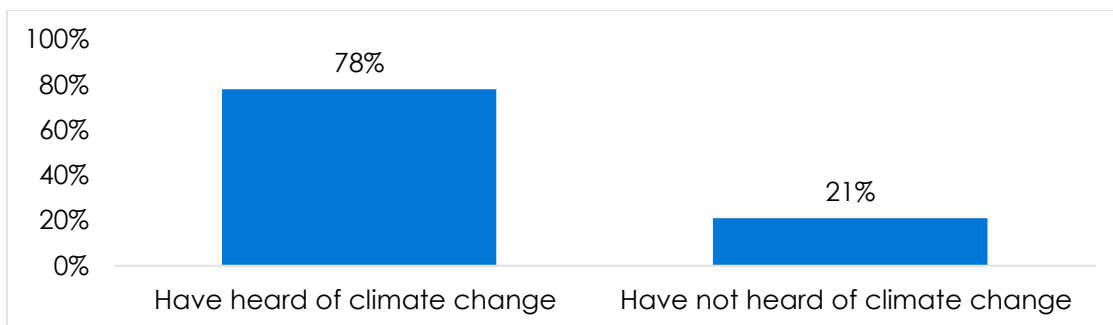
Respondents were asked: *In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of droughts/flooding in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?*

Awareness of climate change

When asked whether they had heard of “climate change,” more than three-quarters of Ugandans (78%) say they are familiar with the concept, while only 21% say they have not heard about it (Figure 4).

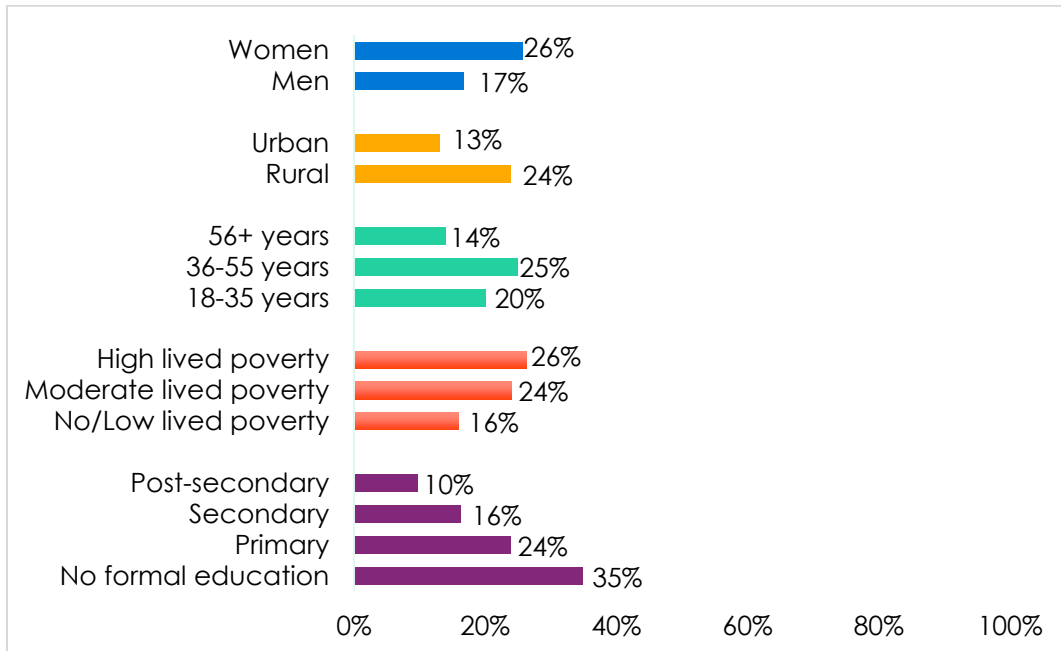
Women (26%) and rural residents (24%) are more likely than men (17%) and urbanites (13%) to be unaware of climate change, perhaps reflecting less access to news media and/or education. Unfamiliarity decreases as respondents’ education and socioeconomic levels increase (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Uganda | 2017



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

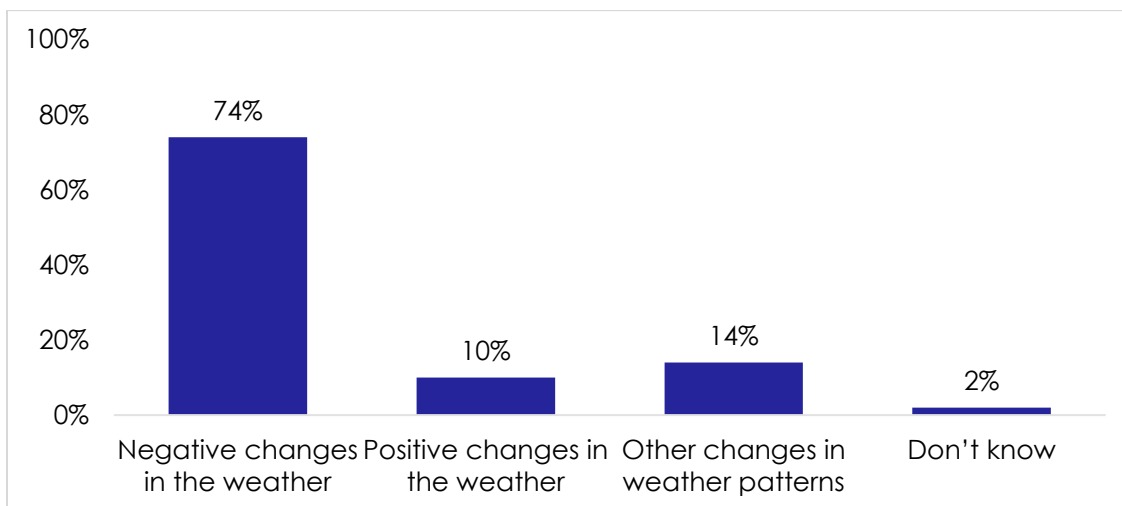
Figure 5: Have not heard of climate change | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2017



Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? By socio-demographic status (% who say "no")

Among Ugandans who had heard about climate change, almost three-quarters (74%) understand the term as negative changes in the weather, while 10% define it as positive changes in the weather and 14% think it refers to other changes in weather patterns (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Meaning of 'climate change' | Uganda | 2017

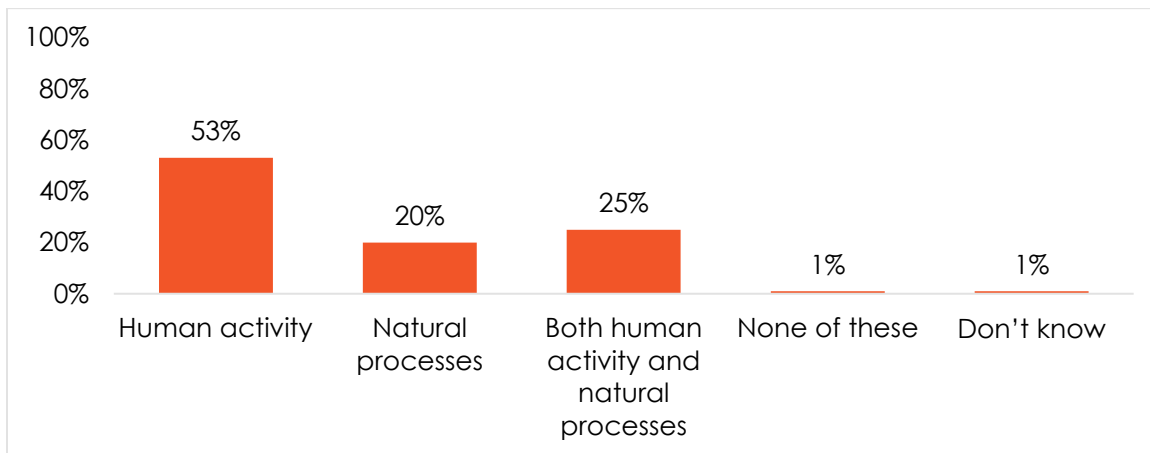


Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: What does the phrase "climate change" mean to you? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Cause, effects, and mitigation of climate change

A majority (53%) of respondents who had heard of climate change say it is caused mainly by human activity that pollutes the atmosphere, such as burning fuel. In addition, 25% attribute it to both human activity and natural processes, while 20% say climate change is brought about by natural processes (Figure 7).

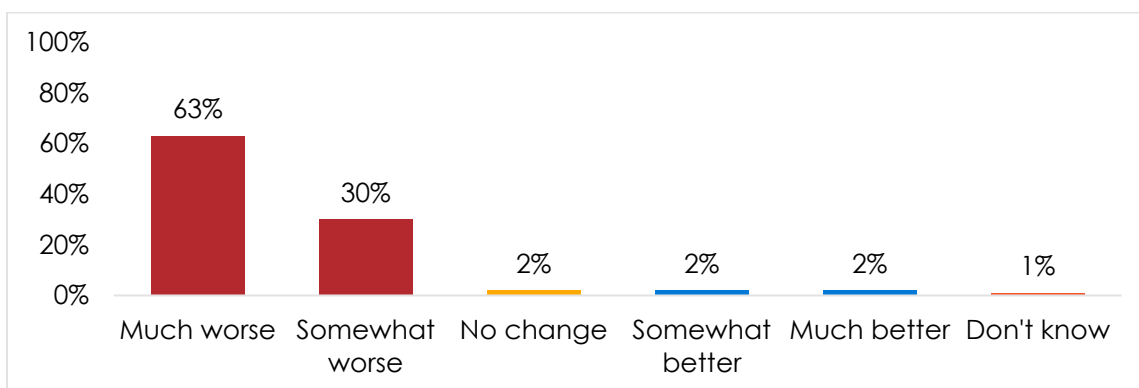
Figure 7: Main cause of climate change | Uganda | 2017



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 change, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Overwhelmingly, Ugandans who had heard of climate change say it is hurting the quality of life in their country (93%), including 63% who say it is making life “much worse.” Fewer than one in 20 (4%) say it is improving life (Figure 8). This assessment of the impact of climate change differs little no matter the respondent's gender, age, residency location, or socioeconomic level. Only education level shows a modest difference: The most educated (95%) are more likely than those without formal education (87%) to say climate change is making life worse.

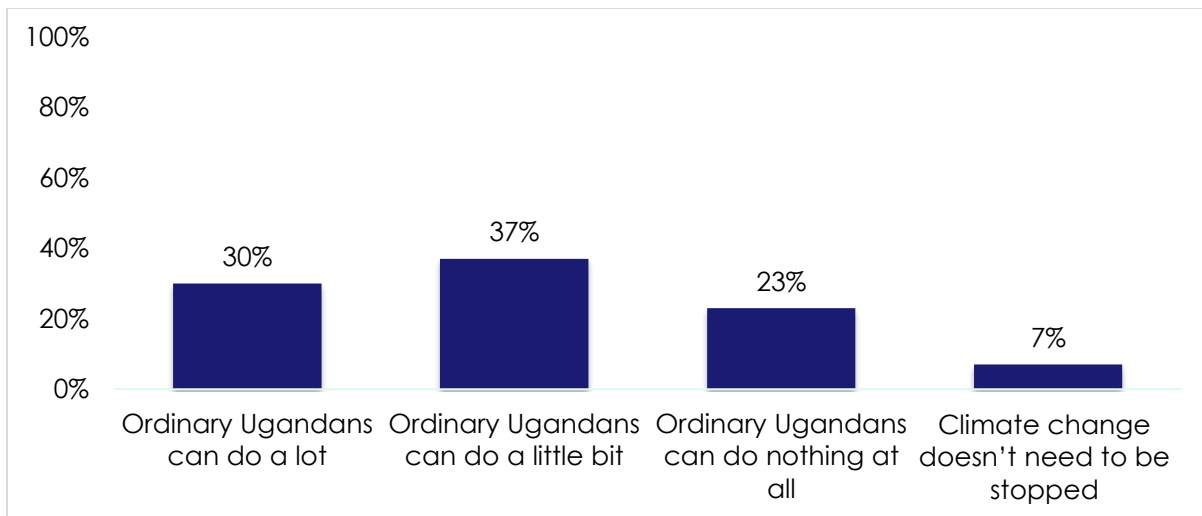
Figure 8: Climate change affecting quality of life | Uganda | 2017



Respondents who had heard about climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Uganda better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Nine out of 10 Ugandans (90%) who had heard of climate change say it needs to be stopped. And two-thirds say that ordinary citizens can do “a lot” (30%) or at least “a little bit” (37%) to stop it. Three out of 10 say either that there’s nothing ordinary people can do (23%) or that climate change doesn’t need to be stopped (7%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Stopping climate change | Uganda | 2017



Respondents who had heard about climate change were asked: Do you think climate change needs to be stopped? (If yes;) How much do you think ordinary Ugandans can do to stop climate change?

Conclusion

Climate change commands attention in Uganda. With more than 80% of the population living in rural areas largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture, persistent drought and other climate changes are likely to affect almost every Ugandan family. Afrobarometer survey findings show that ordinary citizens are keenly aware of climate change and its negative impacts on their quality of life. Overwhelmingly, they say it needs to be stopped, and most appear ready to follow an informed leadership in combating it.

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

- Hepworth, N., & Goulden, M. (2008). Climate change in Uganda: Understanding the implications and appraising the response. ReliefWeb report. <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/climate-change-uganda-understanding-implications-and-appraising-response>.
- Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. (2018). Effects of changing weather patterns in the agricultural sector: How has production and livelihood been affected? Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit Briefing Paper 17/18.
- Ministry of Water and Environment. (2015). National climate change policy. <https://www.mwe.go.ug/sites/default/files/library/National%20Climate%20Change%20Policy%20April%202015%20final.pdf>.
- Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. (2019). ND-GAIN country index. <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>.
- Tol, R. S. (2009). The economic effects of climate change. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23(2), 29-51.

Derick Msafiri is an intern at REPOA, the Afrobarometer national partner in Tanzania. Email: msafiriderick@gmail.com.

Ronald Makanga is a research associate for Hatchile Consult Limited, the Afrobarometer national partner in Uganda. Email: makanga.ronnie@gmail.com.

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, 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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, and Transparency International.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 303 | 18 June 2019