



# More food, less money

## Ugandans' experiences and opinions on poverty and livelihoods

### 1. Introduction

The year 2017 saw widespread food stress across East Africa, including Uganda. The very first call round of Sauti za Wananchi Uganda saw half of the population report having gone for a whole day without food in a three-month period due to a lack of food or other resources.

The same survey found that poverty and economic concerns were high on citizens' list of problems facing their households. Just one out of five households said their income was sufficient to cover their daily needs and the three most cited household level problems were poverty, hunger and inflation, all of which relate to economics.

This brief presents data on citizens' views on poverty and livelihoods, including food security, in late 2018. What do citizens see as the most serious challenges facing the country and their households? How many households

lack the income to cover their basic daily needs? What action do they take when their income leaves them short? And how many households experienced food shortages in 2018 compared to 2017?

Data for the brief come from Twaweza's new Sauti za Wananchi survey. Sauti za Wananchi is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti). For this brief, data were collected from 1,905 respondents in the eighth round of calls to the Sauti za Wananchi panel, conducted between 15 and 27 November, 2018.

The key findings are:

- Citizens say the most serious problem facing Uganda today is poverty
- The number of citizens citing economic

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Sauti za Wananchi



issues as the most serious problem facing Uganda has increased

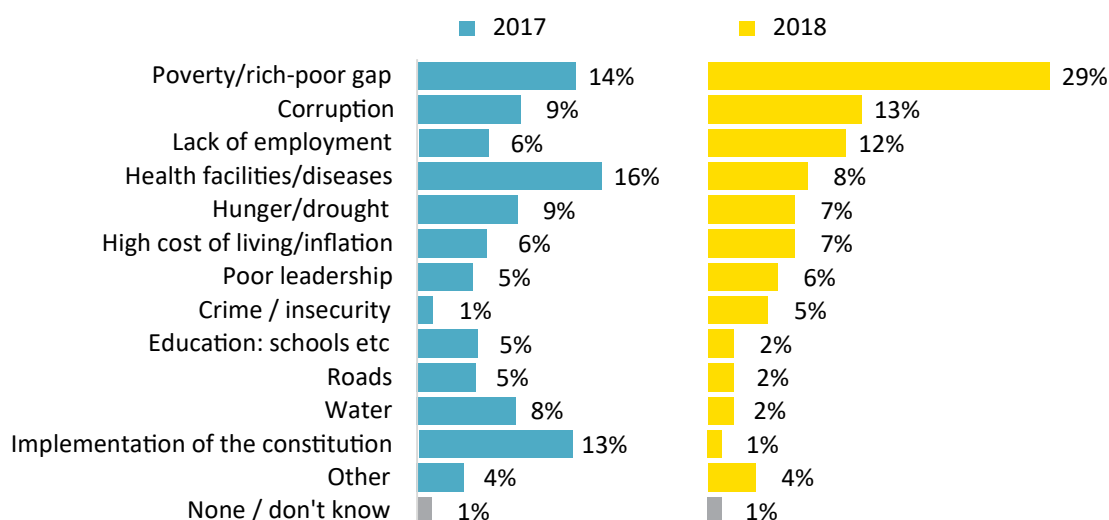
- Most citizens are dissatisfied with the country's direction on economic matters, corruption and employment
- At household level, citizens also cite poverty as the most serious problem
- Households were less likely to suffer food stress in 2018 than in 2017
- 4 out of 5 households say they lack sufficient income for their daily needs
- Households facing financial difficulties try to reduce their spending to cope
- For Ugandans, a cash injection would mostly be spent on starting or boosting a business
- Half of Ugandan households have had household members drop out of school for financial reasons

## 2. Seven insights about livelihoods in Uganda

### Insight 1: Citizens say the most serious problem facing Uganda today is poverty

Three out of ten citizens (29%) cite poverty or the rich-poor gap as the most serious problem facing Uganda today, more than for any other issue. This is followed by corruption (13%) and a lack of employment (12%). The most-named issue from 2017 – health – now ranks in fourth place, cited by half as many citizens in late 2018 (8%) compared to late 2017 (16%).

**Figure 1: What is the most serious problem facing Uganda today?<sup>1</sup>**

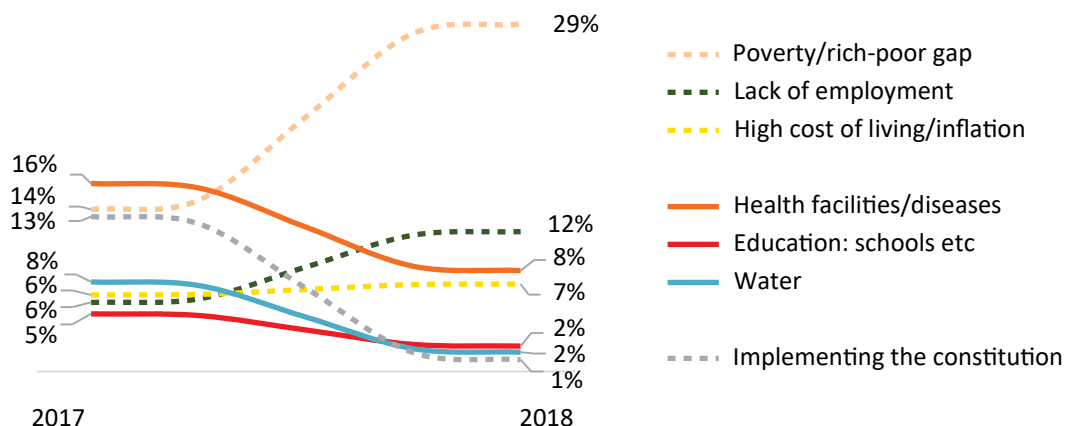


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
**Base:** all respondents; n=1,905

1 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Grouping different problems under two headings – economic matters and public services – we can see a clear change in citizens’ views between 2017 and late 2018. The number of citizens citing economic issues – poverty, unemployment and inflation – has increased, while those citing public services – health, education, water – have decreased. There is also a separate decline in the number of citizens citing implementation of the constitution as the biggest problem facing the country: from 13% to 1%.

**Figure 2: What is the most serious problem facing Uganda today?**  
(selected issues)



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

Wealthier citizens are more likely to cite unemployment (20%) as the most serious problem than poorer citizens (8-9%). Conversely, poorer citizens are more likely to cite hunger / drought (13%) than wealthier citizens (2%) (not shown in charts).

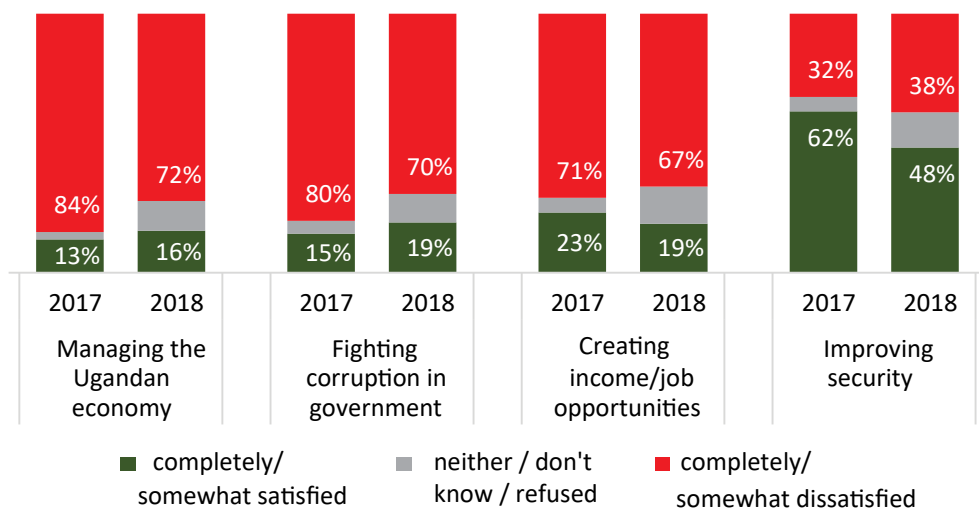
At household level, almost five out of ten citizens (47%) cite poverty and the gap between rich and poor as the most serious problem facing their household today. This has increased from three out of ten citizens (26%) in 2017. Other economic matters are also ranked highly, including inflation / the cost of living (13%), hunger / drought (10%) and unemployment (9%) (not shown in charts).

## Insight 2: Most citizens are dissatisfied with the country’s direction on economic matters, corruption and employment

Three out of four citizens (72%) are completely or somewhat dissatisfied with Uganda’s direction on economic management. Almost as many are dissatisfied with the country’s direction in the fight against corruption (70%) and in terms of creating income and job opportunities (67%). In these three cases, dissatisfaction has declined since 2017, although a majority of citizens remain unhappy.

On a fourth issue – improving security, satisfaction with the country’s direction has declined since 2017 – from six out of ten citizens (62%) to five out of ten (48%).

**Figure 3: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the direction Uganda is heading in the following areas?**

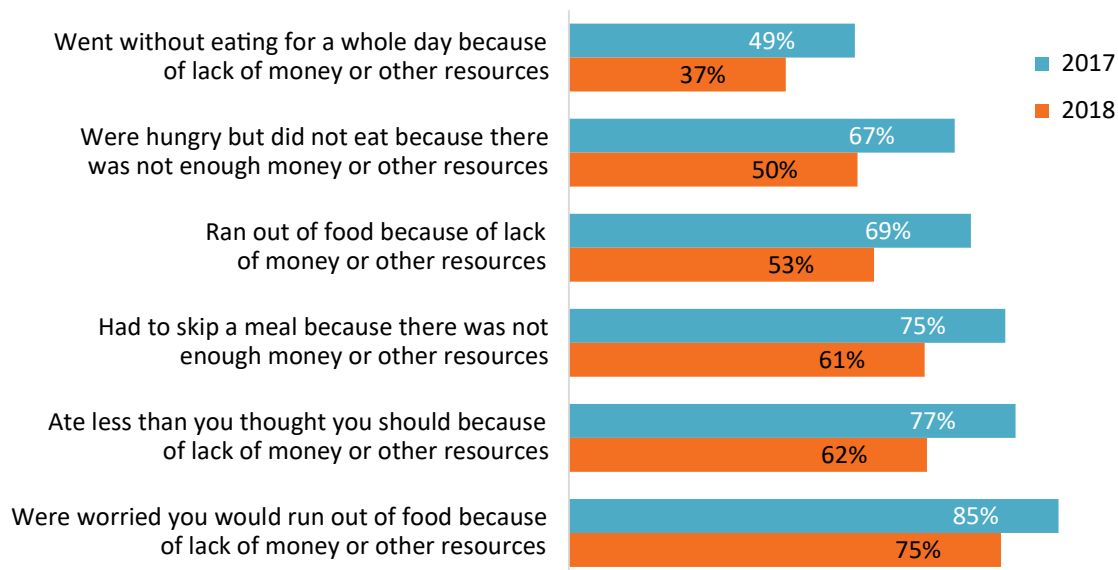


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

### Insight 3: Households were less likely to suffer food stress in 2018 than in 2017

Across six different measures, households report that they experienced fewer signs of food insecurity in 2018 than in 2017. This includes households reporting that they went without eating for a whole day in the previous three months (down from 49% to 37%), that they were hungry but did not eat (down from 67% to 50%), or that they ran out of food (down from 69% to 53%).

**Figure 4: % of households who, at some point in the last 3 months ...**

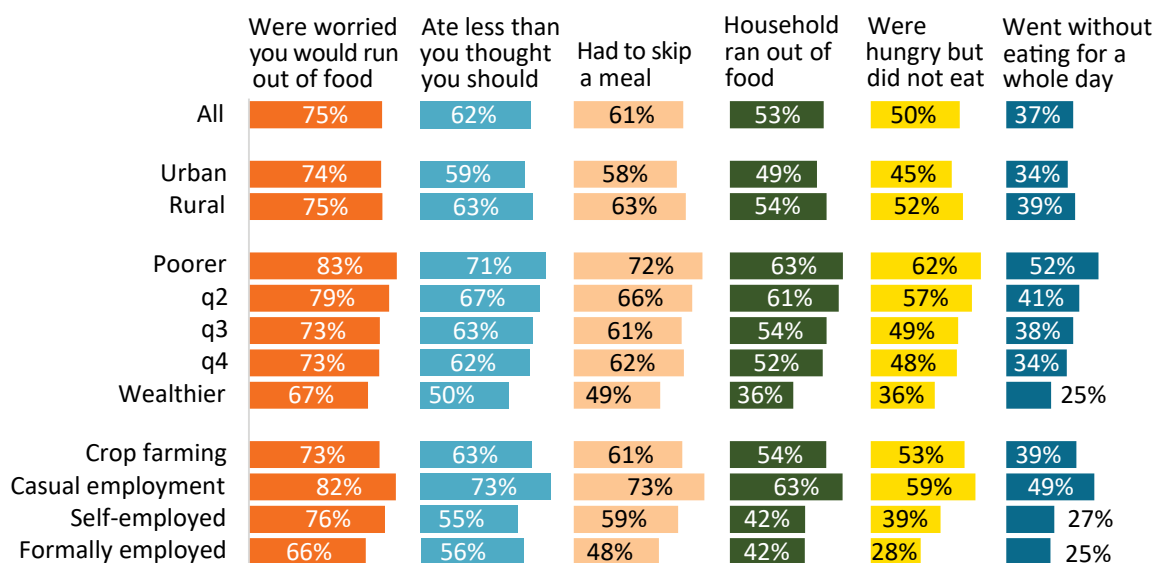


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

These experiences of food constraints differ somewhat between different types of households. Those in rural areas were a little more likely than those in urban areas to face each form of food scarcity. A bigger difference is by wealth: wealthier households were less likely to suffer food constraints than poorer households. Similarly, households where the main source of income is casual employment struggle the most, followed by those engaged in crop farming.

However, even in the least-disadvantaged households a significant minority suffer food constraints. For example, one out of four households (25%) in both the wealthier group and in the formal employment category went without eating for a whole day due to a lack of money or other resources at some point in the previous three months (August to October 2018).

**Figure 5: % of households who, at some point in the last 3 months, due to a lack of money or other resources ...**

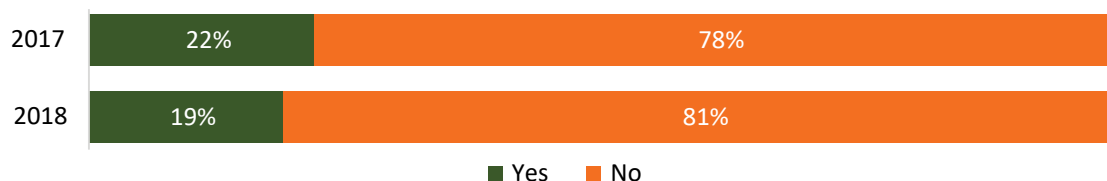


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

#### Insight 4: 4 out of 5 households say they lack sufficient income for their daily needs

Four out of five households (81%) say the income obtained by their household is not enough to cover household expenses on a daily basis. This is similar to 2017, when 78% said the same.

**Figure 6: Is the income obtained by the household enough to cater for the household needs on a daily basis?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

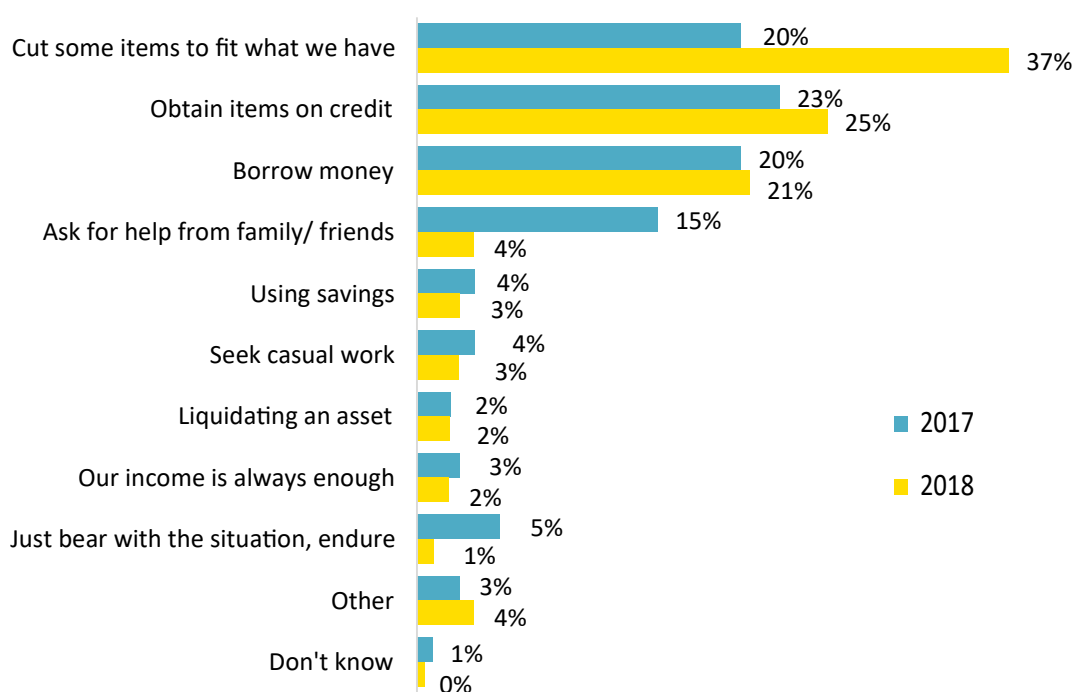
On average, households say they require UGX 10,300 per day to meet their needs – UGX 9,700 in rural areas and UGX 11,800 in urban areas; and UGX 9,100 in poorer households and US\$ 12,300 in wealthier households. These figures are lower than in 2017, when the average household reported needing UGX 11,800 per day (not shown in charts).

## Insight 5: Households facing financial difficulties try first to reduce their spending

Four out of ten households (37%) say their main strategy when lacking funds on a daily basis is to cut their spending. This has increased from two out of ten (20%) in 2017. Borrowing – either in the form of making purchases on credit (25%) or borrowing money (21%) – is also a common response.

Fewer households said they would turn to family or friends (4%) than said the same in 2017 (15%).

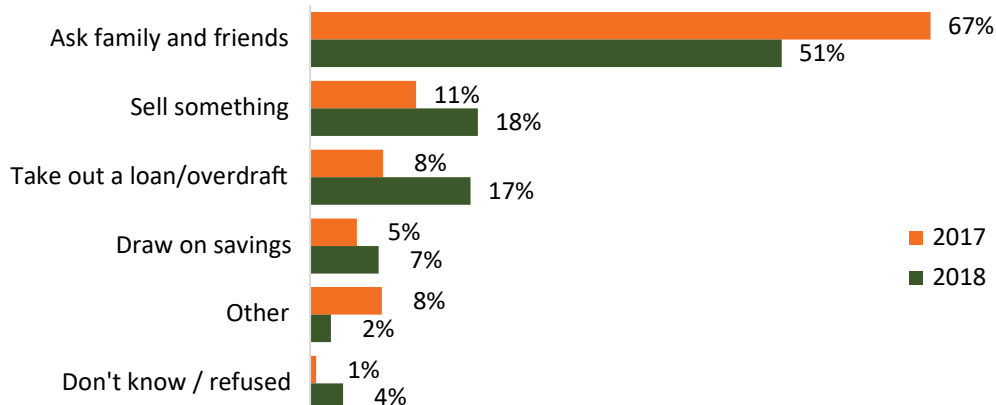
**Figure 7: What happens when the amount to run the household on a daily basis is not enough?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

Faced with the prospect of needing money in an emergency, half of Uganda's households (51%) say family and friends would be their main recourse. This is more than any other strategy, but down from two out of three (67%) in 2017. Households are now more likely to sell something (18%, up from 11%) or take out a loan (17%, up from 8%) than they were in 2017.

**Figure 8: Right now, what would you do if you needed money in an emergency?**

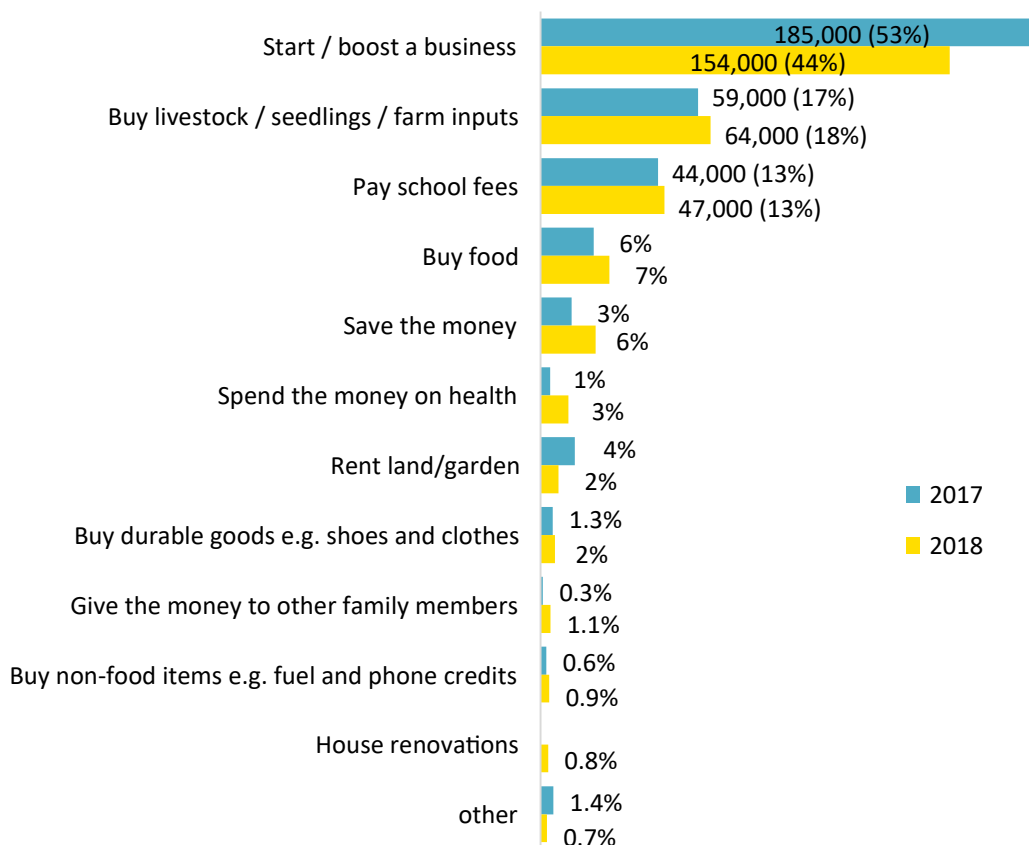


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

### **Insight 6: For Ugandans, a cash injection would mostly be spent on starting or boosting a business**

In the hypothetical situation of being given a gift of UGX 350,000 by the government, citizens say they would spend on average UGX 154,000, or a little under half the amount (44%), on starting or boosting a business venture. Substantial amounts of the hypothetical gift would also be spent on boosting agricultural productivity (UGX 64,000 / 18%) and on school fees (UGX 47,000 / 13%).

**Figure 9: If you were to receive 350,000 UGX from the government, how would you use it?**  
(average figures)



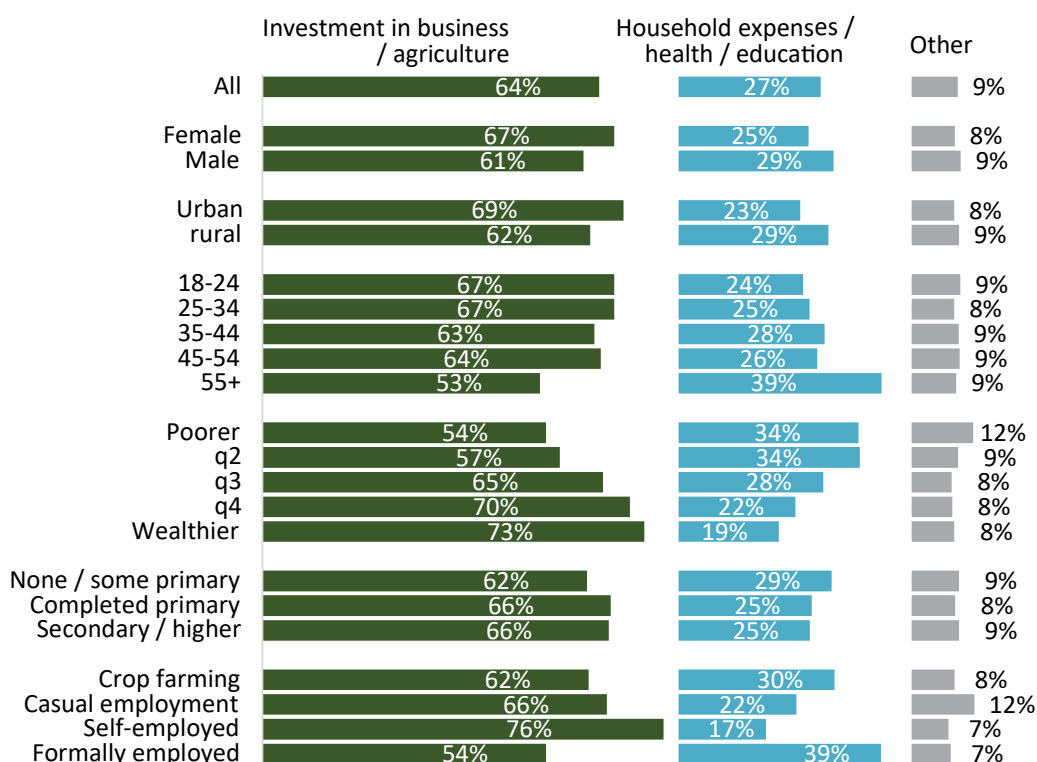
**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018, and round 1, October 2017;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

If we group the various types of expenditure under two main headings – investments in business / agriculture and household expenses including health and education – we can see how different demographic groups would prioritise use of the hypothetical UGX 350,000.

In particular, women and residents of urban areas would spend a little more of the money on investments in productivity, compared to men and residents of rural areas. Older citizens would spend less on investment than the young, as would poorer citizens compared to wealthier citizens.

The biggest differences, however, are seen when comparing households according to their main source of income. Households that depend mainly on self-employment would spend more of the money on investment, while those in formal employment would spend less in this way.

**Figure 10: If you were to receive 350,000 UGX from the government, how would you use it?**  
(average figures)



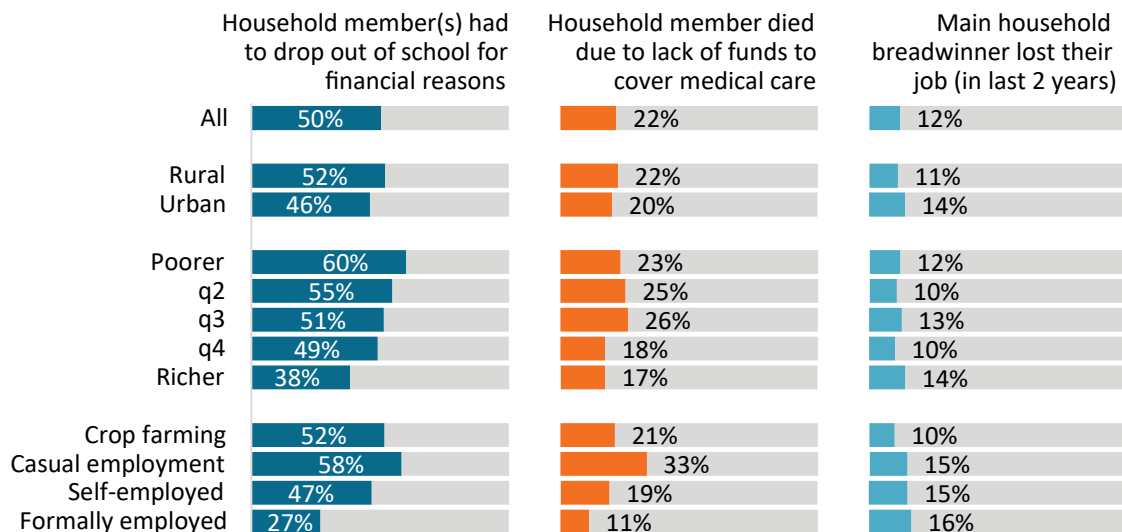
**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018;  
Base: all respondents; n=1,905

## Insight 7: Half of Ugandan households have had household members drop out of school for financial reasons

Half of all households in Uganda (50%) have experienced a situation where a household member had to drop out of school for financial reasons. This number is higher in poorer households (60%) than in wealthier households (38%).

Two out of ten households (22%) have experienced the death of a household member due to lack of funds to cover medical expenses, and one out of ten (12%) has experienced their main breadwinner losing their job in the past two years.

**Figure 11: Have any of the following things ever happened in your household?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 8, November 2018;

Base: all respondents; n=1,905

### 3. Conclusions

The clear headlines from this brief are that food stress was lower in 2018 than in 2017, but that citizens' are more concerned about their economic situation..

Let us take these two points in turn. First, across a range of measures, households report suffering food stress less often during 2018 than in 2017. For example, while half of the population reported having gone for a whole day without food in a three-month period in mid-late 2017, this fell to 37% in 2018. Similar falls in the number of households experiencing problems can be seen across different measures of food stress including going hungry, running out of food, skipping meals and more.

This shouldn't mean we are complacent, however. In part, this is because there are still millions of households and millions of citizens across Uganda who continue to struggle, lacking sufficient food or access to food on a regular basis. In part, the economic concerns that citizens also raise in this survey leave people very vulnerable to weather conditions, family illness and other shocks.

Which bring us to the second part of the headline conclusion: economic matters. It is striking that the number of citizens citing poverty and inequality as the most serious problem facing the country has doubled since 2017: from 14% to 29%. The number citing the same issue as the most serious problem facing their household has also increased dramatically, from 26% to 47%. In both cases, citizens also show more concern about unemployment in 2018 than in 2017 and have shifted away from concern about public services.

The brief has further evidence that citizens' economic concerns are genuine. Four out of five households say their income is insufficient to meet their daily needs, and there are signs that citizens experiencing financial difficulties are now more likely to cut back on spending and less likely to turn to friends and family for assistance – perhaps a sign that many are facing the same challenges.