



# Clean and safe?

## Ugandans' experiences and opinions on affordable access to clean and safe water

### 1. Introduction

It is often said that Uganda is a “well-watered” country, and many parts of the country are indeed blessed with plentiful rain and widespread lakes and rivers. However, having relatively easy access to water sources does not automatically mean that such sources will provide water that is clean and safe for human consumption. Surface water sources, for example, are often dirty and hazardous to drink.

Piped water is the ideal water supply service. But the high cost of investing in such networks is harder to justify in sparsely populated rural areas than in the more dense urban settlements. And in many cases, even in urban areas, investment in piped networks and their maintenance has not always been able to keep up with rapid population growth and urbanisation. As a result, both in rural and urban areas, many people are forced to make difficult choices, balancing considerations of

cost, time and convenience against health and hygiene. Should you risk drinking water from the lake, which is free and easy to access, or spend time and money collecting water from an improved source that is further away?

This brief explores questions around water supply and related trade offs in Uganda. How many citizens are able to access water from a piped network, or from another improved source? How widespread – and how effective – is rainwater harvesting as an alternative source? How long does it take for people to collect water, and who bears this responsibility?

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, the first of its kind in Africa.

This brief was written and produced by  
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Sauti za Wananchi



Information on the overall methodology is available at [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti). For this brief, data were collected from 1,971 respondents in the third round of calls to the Sauti za Wananchi panel, conducted between 15 January and 2 February, 2018.

### The key findings are:

- Three out of four households access drinking water from an improved source
- 8 out of 10 households harvest rainwater, for half of them it lasts less than a week
- Access to improved water sources is improving in rural areas, with no major change in urban areas
- However, more citizens say their access to water is getting worse than say it is getting better
- On average it takes rural households over an hour to collect water
- Seven out of ten households treat their water to make it safer to drink
- Half the population are not satisfied with local government provision of water services

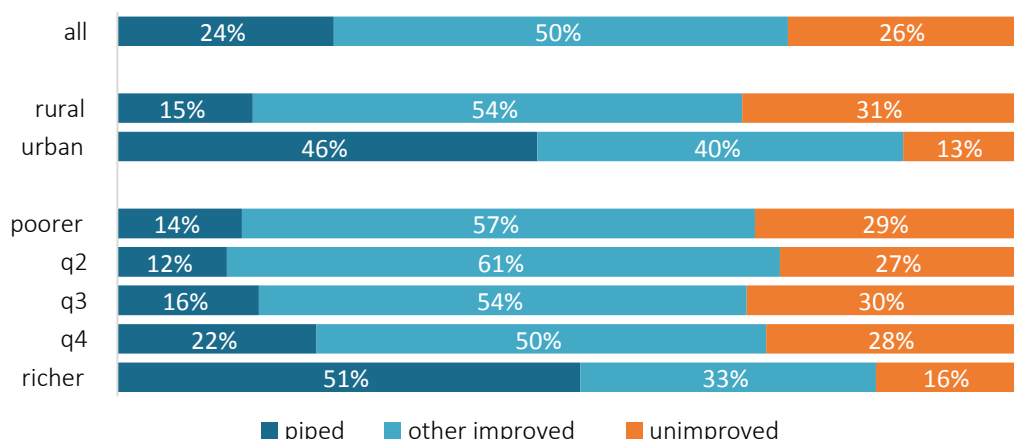
## 2. Seven facts about water, sanitation and hygiene in Uganda

### Fact 1: 3 out of 4 households access drinking water from an improved source

Three out of four Ugandan households (74%) get their drinking water from an improved source<sup>1</sup>. One out of four (24%) have access to piped water, either direct to their household, via a neighbour or from a communal standpipe or kiosk.

Access to piped water is much higher in urban (46%) than in rural (15%) areas, and higher among wealthier households (51%) than among the poor (14%).

**Figure 1: Households using piped and other improved sources of drinking water<sup>2</sup>**



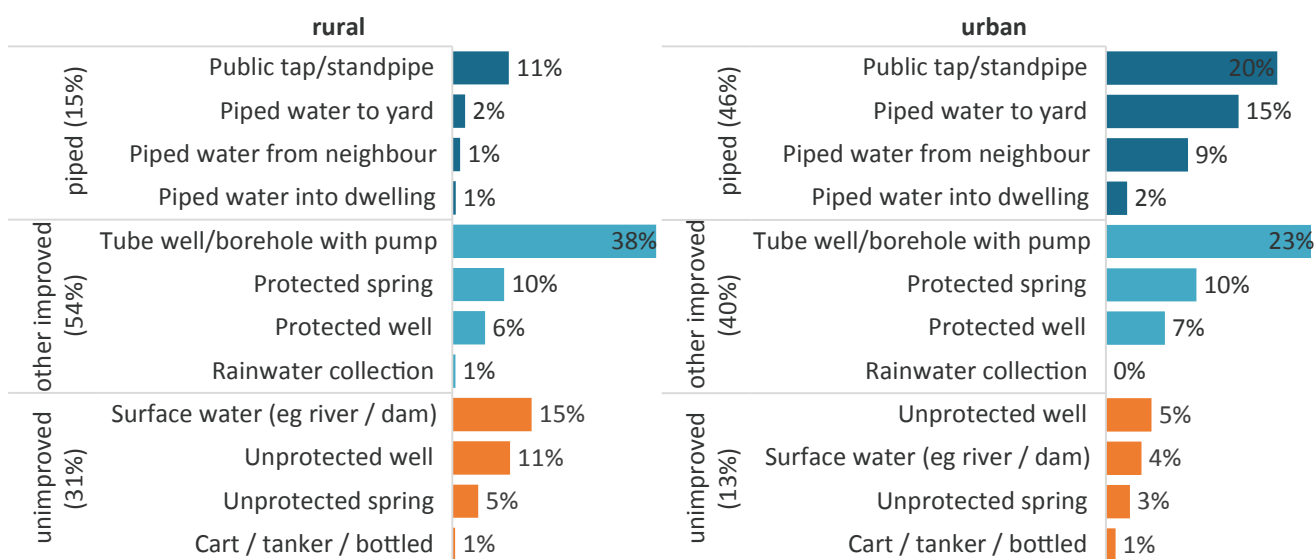
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

In both urban and rural areas, boreholes are the main source of drinking water for more households (rural 38%, urban 23%) than any other type of source. Even in urban areas, just 2% of households have water piped into their home. One out of six rural households (15%) depend on surface water sources such as rivers, streams, dams and lakes, though this water can be very unclean.

<sup>1</sup> As defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF – see <https://washdata.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Figure 2: What is the main source of drinking-water for members of your household?**

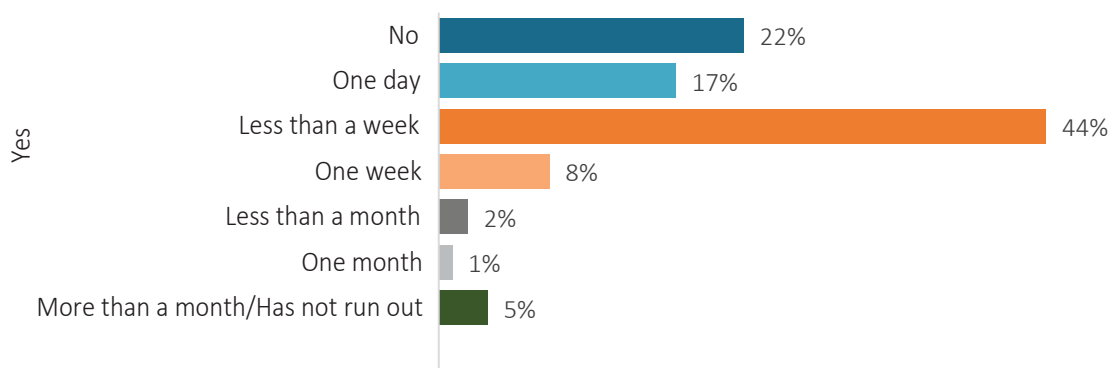


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

## **Fact 2: 8 out of 10 households harvest rainwater, for half of them it lasts less than a week**

Eight out of ten households (78%) harvest rainwater. However, less than 1% use it as their main source of drinking water (see Fact 1). Further, for most households (69%), the rainwater ran out after a week or less last time they collected it; less than one out of ten households (7%) were able to use it for a month or more.

**Figure 3: Do you harvest rain water? Last time you did, how long did it last?**

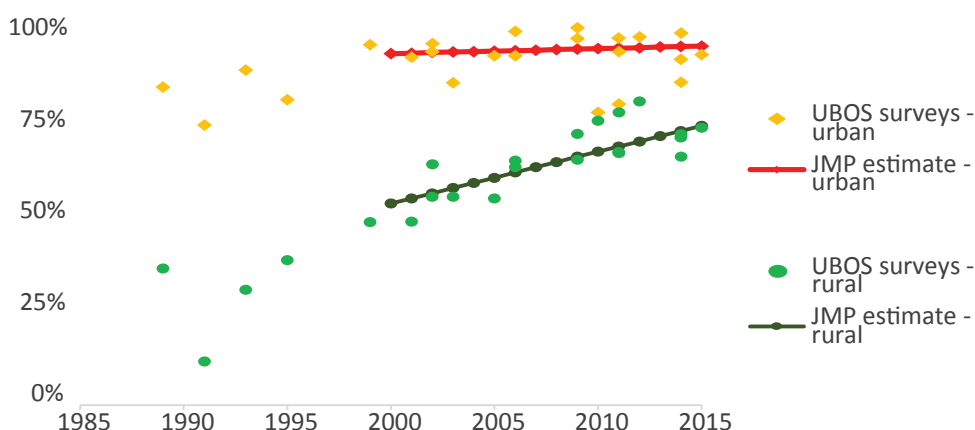


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

### Fact 3: Access to improved water sources is improving in rural areas, with no major change in urban areas

Looking at longer term trends, using data from surveys conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), we can see a clear increase in access to improved water sources in rural areas since 1989, from around 40% of rural households in the early 1990s to around 70% now. In urban areas, the increase has been less dramatic, from around 80% in the 1990's to around 90-95% now.

**Figure 4: Access to improved water sources since 1989, urban and rural**

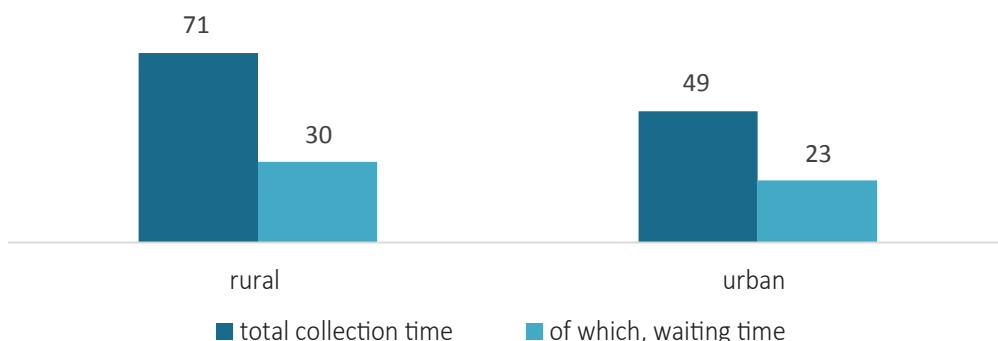


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, baseline (Aug-Sep 2017) and round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971  
UBOS surveys and JMP estimates from JMP<sup>3</sup>

### Fact 4: On average it takes rural households over an hour to collect water

The average time required by rural households to collect drinking water is 71 minutes, of which 30 minutes are spent waiting at the source. The times are a little lower in urban areas: 49 minutes total collection time, of which 23 minutes are spent waiting.

**Figure 5: Average water collection time (mins)**

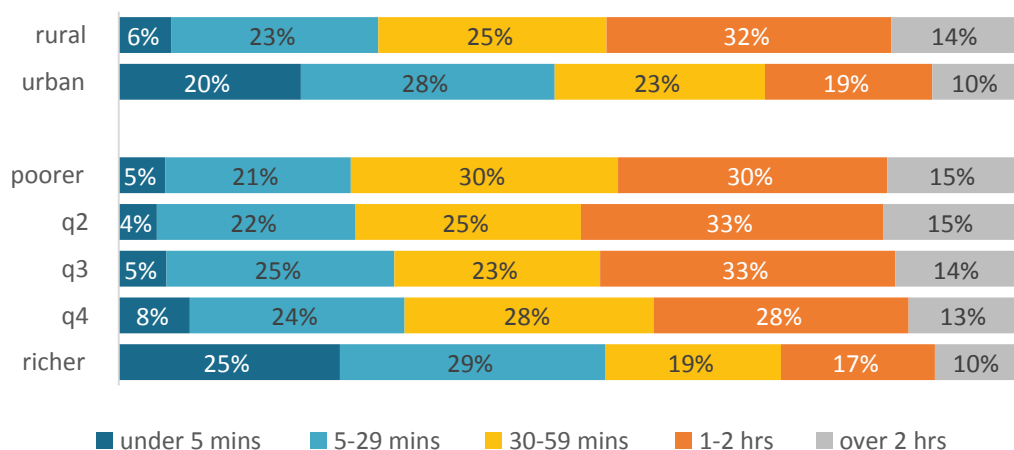


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

<sup>3</sup> UBOS and JMP data available from <https://washdata.org/data>

Two out of ten urban households (20%) and a similar number of wealthy households (25%) need less than five minutes to collect water. This is largely households with a piped supply to their household or yard. In rural areas, 14% of households need over two hours to collect water, and even in urban communities a substantial minority of households (10%) need more than two hours to collect water.

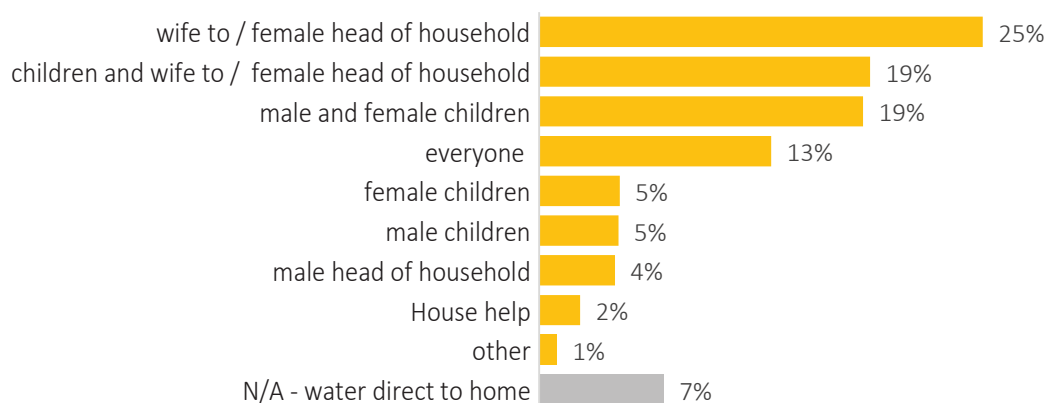
**Figure 6: How long does it take to get to your water source, collect water and come back?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

For one out of four households (25%), the main responsibility for collecting water is borne by the wife of the head of household or the female head of household. And for one out of two households (48%), the responsibility is borne entirely or in part by children. So the time commitment required to collect water can represent a considerable obstacle to women engaging in paid work or other productive activities, and can take time away from children's learning.

**Figure 7: Who in your household is the person responsible for collecting water?**

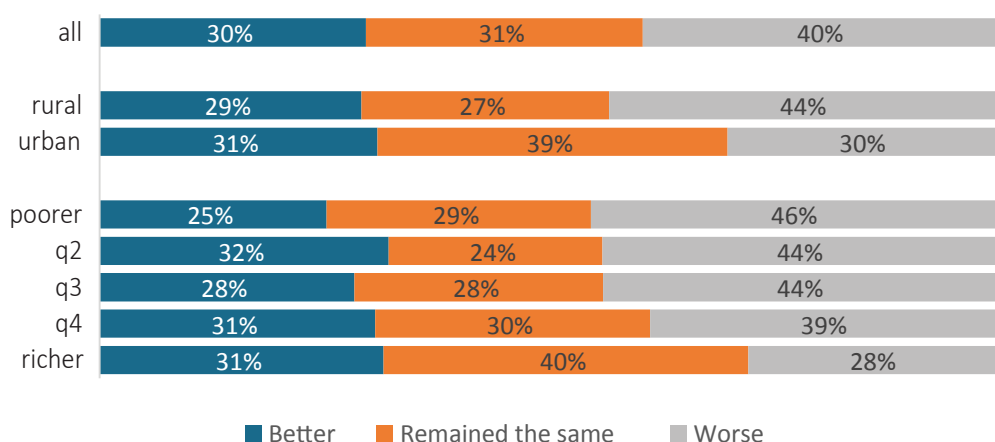


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

### Fact 5: More citizens say their access to water is getting worse than better

Four out of ten citizens (40%) say their access to clean and safe water has gotten worse over the past 12 months, compared to three out of ten (30%) who say it has improved. Residents of rural areas are more likely to say the situation is getting worse (44%) than those in urban areas (30%), and the poor (46%) are more likely to feel this way than those who are relatively rich (28%). These perceptions appear to contradict the findings from Uganda Bureau of Statistics that access to water is improving, especially in rural areas (Fact 3) but they are based on a much more recent and shorter time frame, and on people's own perceptions.

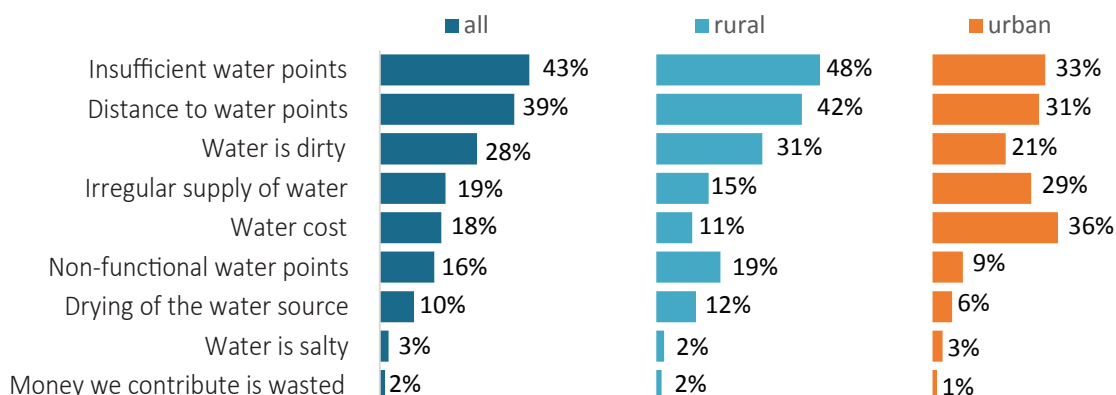
**Figure 8: If you reflect on the past 12 months, has your access to clean and safe water gotten...?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

Nationwide, the two main challenges cited by citizens in accessing clean drinking water are linked: a shortage of water points (43%) and distance to water points (39%). In urban areas, the cost of water (36%) and irregular supply (29%) are mentioned the most.

**Figure 9: What are the two main challenges your community is facing in accessing clean drinking water?**

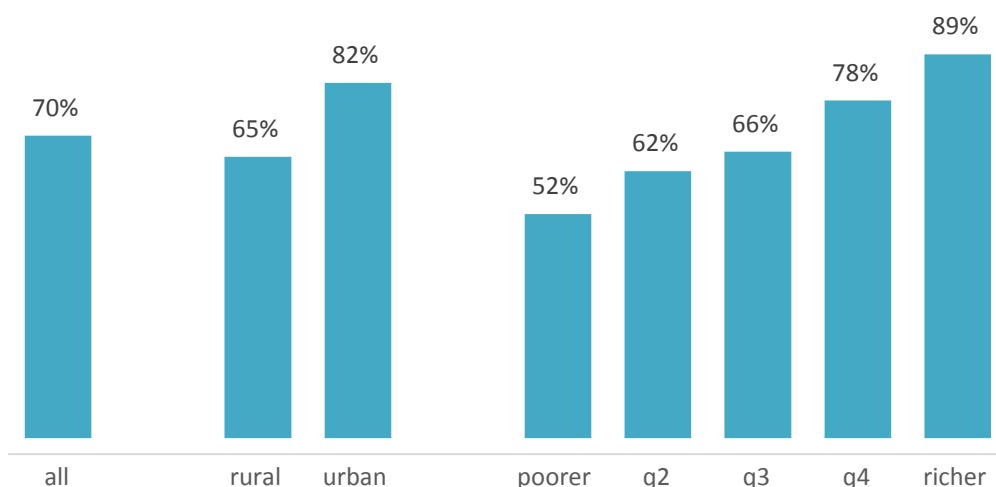


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

### Fact 6: 7 out of 10 households treat their water to make it safer to drink

Most households in Uganda (70%) treat their water before drinking, to make it safer. This is higher in urban areas (82%) than rural (65%), and higher among wealthier households (89%) than the poor (52%).

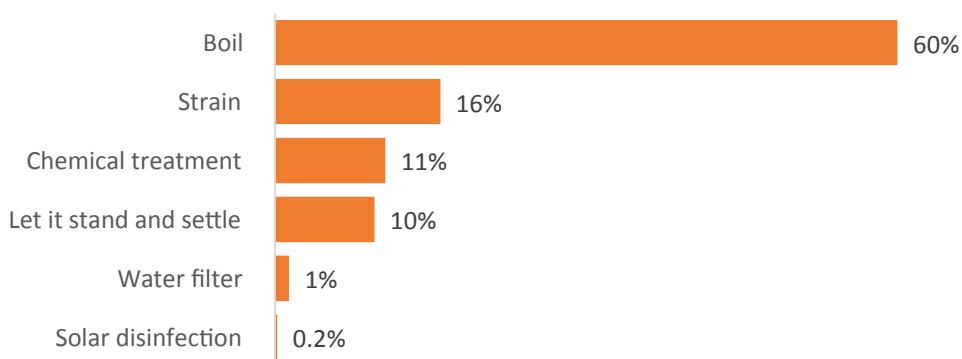
Figure 10: Do you do anything to your water to make it safer to drink?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

The most common water treatment practice is to boil water before drinking, practiced by six out of ten households (60%).

Figure 11: Do you do anything to your water to make it safer to drink?  
(% answering "yes")

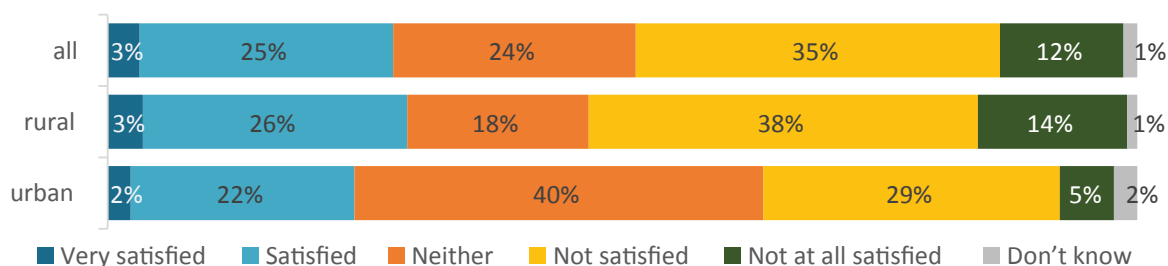


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

### Fact 7: Half of citizens are unsatisfied with water services

Half of citizens (47%) are not satisfied or not at all satisfied with the performance of their local government in terms of providing water services. One out of four households (28%) are satisfied or very satisfied. In urban areas, citizens are most likely (40%) to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with water services.

**Figure 14: How would you rate your local government in terms of providing water services to you and your household?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, round 3, 15 January and 2 February 2018; n=1,971

## 3. Conclusion

This brief highlights many of the challenges facing Ugandan citizens in accessing water. In particular, while the number of households accessing water from an improved source is relatively high by regional standards, at 74%, and has been growing steadily since the 1980's, this is not the whole story. Among the wealthiest households, half have access to a piped supply, compared to just one in six of the poorest households. This translates clearly in a massive time saving: for around half of all urban households and half of the wealthiest households, collecting water takes less than 30 minutes, while for nearly half of all rural households and poorer households, collecting water takes more than an hour.

This burden does not fall equally on all household members. For the vast majority of households, collection of water is done primarily by adult women and by children, taking up time that they could be valuably using for other activities such as agriculture or education.

Perhaps as a result of these challenges, a large number of citizens are dissatisfied with provision of water supply services. More citizens say their access to water is getting worse than say it is improving. And half the population are not satisfied with government efforts to provide services. This should serve as something of a wake-up call to national and local government and to the National Water and Sewerage Corporation to improve access to affordable clean and safe water.