



Turning on the taps?

Ugandans' experiences and opinions on water, sanitation and hygiene

1. Introduction

Access to water is essential to human life and health. Everyone must have water, or they can not survive. And yet, experiences can vary widely. Piped supplies into the household can be taken for granted, though frustrations occur when the supply is dirty, intermittent or costly. But when the only water supply available is a dirty well or river located far from the household, accessing water becomes a serious and constant challenge.

This brief presents data on Ugandan citizens' experiences and opinions on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). How serious of a challenge is access to water for different groups in society? Where do they access their water, and how long does it take? Do they treat the water before drinking, and if so how? And what types of toilet and handwashing

facilities do they use?

Data for the brief come from Twaweza's *Sauti za Wananchi*, a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at www.twaweza.org/sauti, and more detail on panel members can be found in the brief introducing the second panel¹. For this brief, data were collected from 2,809 respondents in the mid-term survey of the second *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted by physically visiting panel members' in their households between 15 August and 13 September 2023.

The key findings are:

- Most citizens say access to clean drinking water is a serious problem
- Citizens point to limited number of

1 <https://twaweza.org/download/voices-of-the-people-introducing-the-second-sauti-za-wananchi-panel/>

- water points as the main challenge they face in accessing clean drinking water
- 2 out of 10 households access drinking water from an unsafe source
- Some progress can be seen in access to safe drinking water between 2018 and 2023
- In the dry season, three out of ten households are able to collect drinking water in under 30 minutes
- 6 out of 10 households treat their water in some way before drinking it
- 4 out of 10 households use an “improved” toilet facility
- 1 out of 4 households has some form of handwashing facility near the toilet / latrine that they use

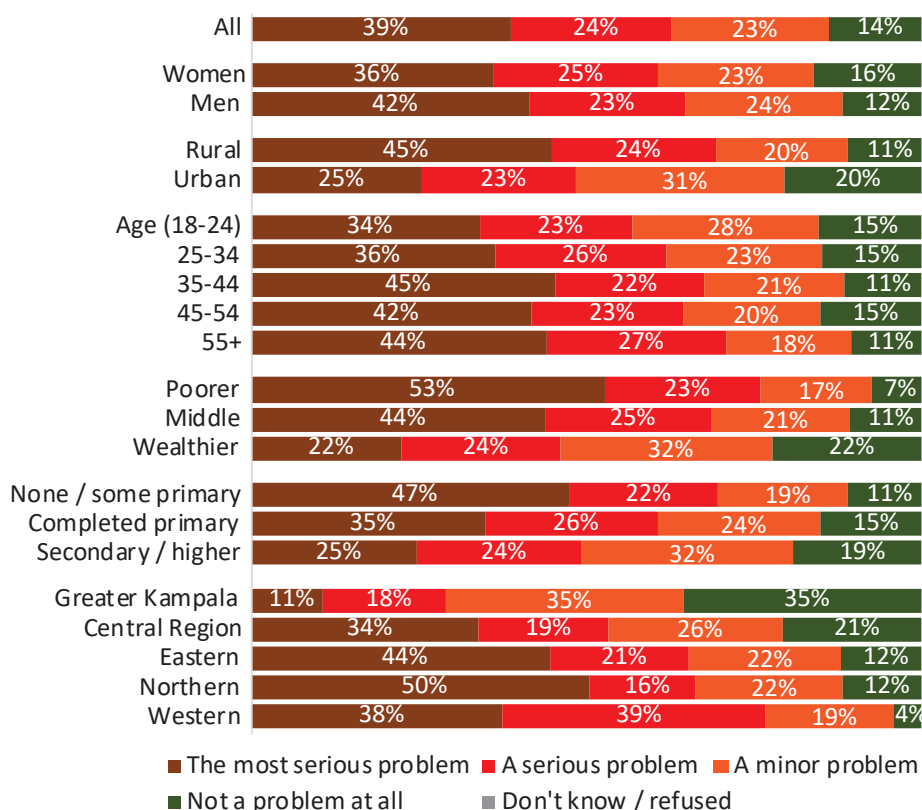
2. Eight insights on water, sanitation and hygiene

Insight 1: Most citizens say access to clean drinking water is a serious problem

Most citizens (63%) access to clean drinking water is a serious problem in their community, including four out of ten (39%) who say it is the most serious problem that their community faces.

It is more common in rural areas than urban for citizens to say access to clean drinking water is a serious problem, and more common outside Greater Kampala. It is also more common among poorer citizens and those with lower levels of education.

Figure 1: How much of a problem is access to clean drinking water in your community?



Source: Sauti za Wananchi mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

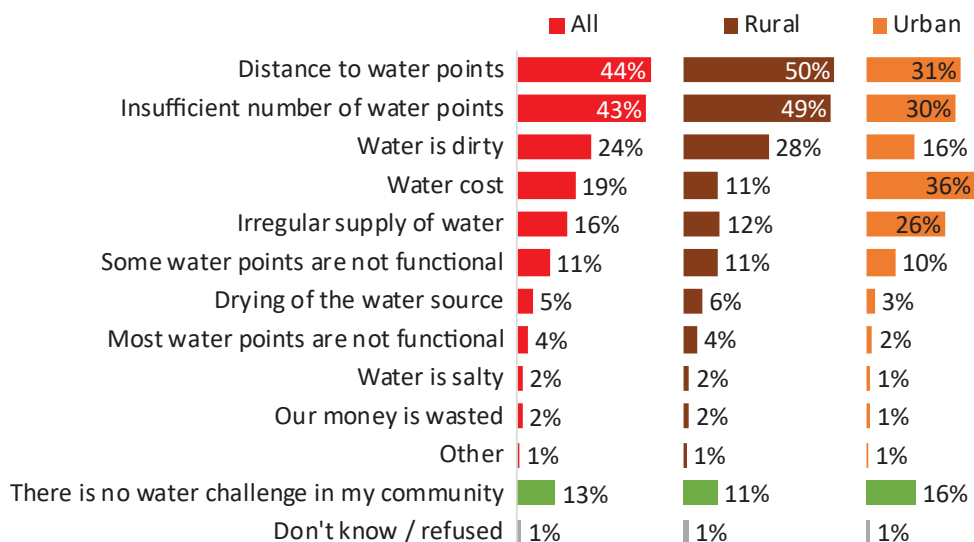
Insight 2: Citizens point to limited number of water points as the main challenge they face in accessing clean drinking water

Citizens point mainly to two closely related matters when asked about the main challenges they face in accessing clean drinking water: distance to water points (44%) and the limited number of water points (43%). Together, these account for the vast majority of challenges mentioned by citizens, as has been the case consistently over recent years. This is particularly the case in rural areas, while in urban areas the cost of water is cited as the biggest challenge, slightly ahead of distance to water points and the number of water points.

Other challenges mentioned include dirty water (24%), the cost of water (19%), irregular supplies (16%) and non-functioning water points (11%).

One out of eight citizens report that there are no challenges in their communities when it comes to accessing clean drinking water.

Figure 2: What are the two main challenges your community is facing in accessing clean drinking water?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);

Base: all respondents; n=2,809

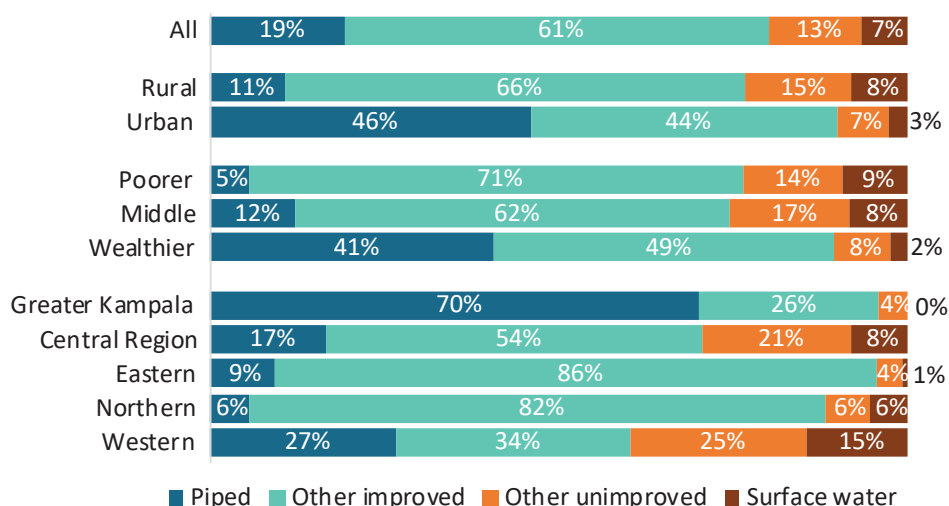
Insight 3: 2 out of 10 households access drinking water from an unsafe source

Two out of ten households (20%) collect drinking water from an unsafe source, either a surface source such as a river or dam (7%) or another type of unimproved source such as an unprotected spring or well (13%). It is more common among poorer households and those in central or western parts of the country to be dependent on unsafe sources. It is considerably less common in urban areas, Greater Kampala in particular, and eastern and northern regions.

Two out of ten households across Uganda (19%) access their drinking water from a piped source, which includes both piped connections to the household and public standpipes. A further six out of ten (61%) access drinking water from another type of “improved” source, including protected springs, protected wells and boreholes.

Disparities in access are extreme. Households in Greater Kampala are at least ten times more likely than households in northern Uganda to access their drinking water from a piped source.

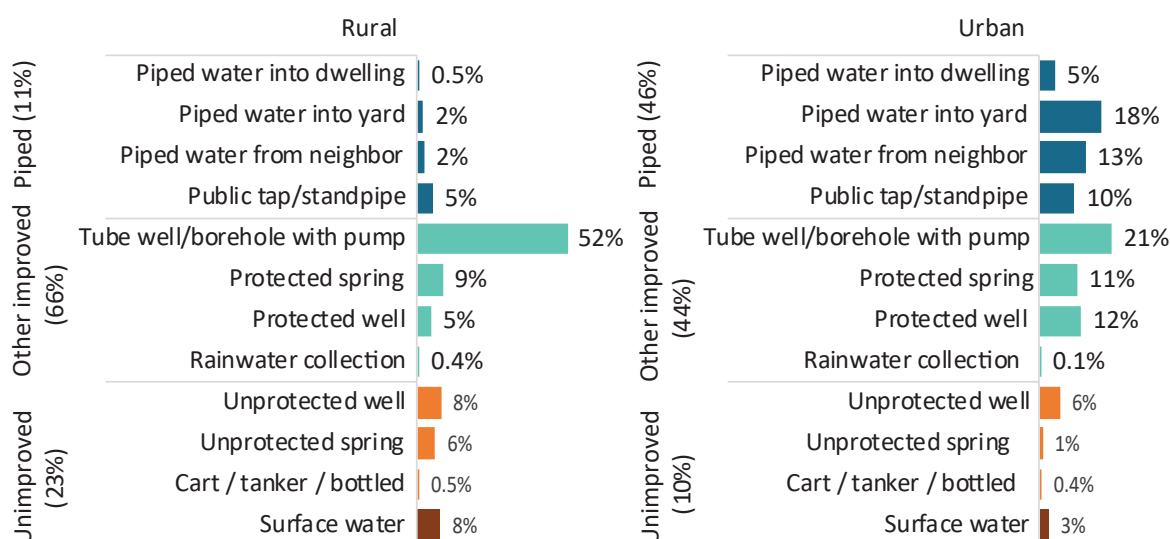
Figure 3: What is the main source of drinking water for your household?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

In rural areas, the single most common type of source for drinking water is a tube well or borehole with a pump, accounting for half of all households (52%). In urban areas, a wider range of sources are widely used, including tube wells and boreholes (21%), protected springs (11%) and protected wells (12%) and public standpipes (10%). One out of twenty households in urban areas (5%) has piped water into their home, and a further two out of ten have piped water to their yard (18%), while a considerable number access water from a neighbour (13%).

Figure 4: What is the main source of drinking water for your household?

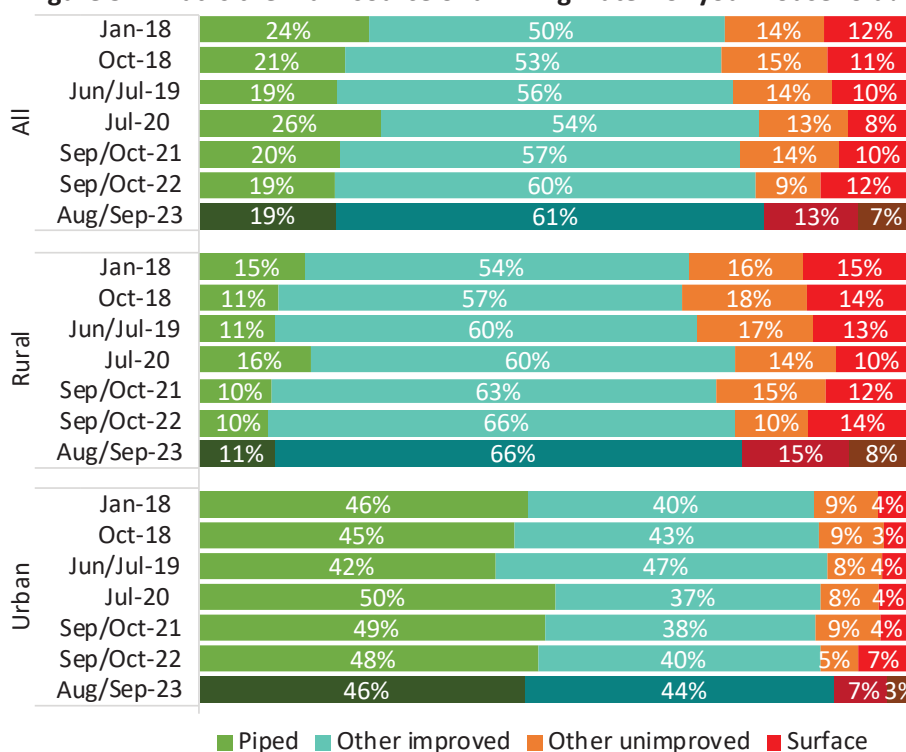


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

Insight 4: Some progress can be seen in access to safe drinking water

Over the last five-six years, some progress has been made at improving access to safe drinking water. Nationwide, the proportion of households that access drinking water from a piped or other improved source has risen from 74% in 2018 to 80% in 2023. Most of this improvement has been seen in rural areas (69% to 77% over the same period), while in urban areas – where access is higher – the change has been smaller (86% to 90%).² However, there are also signs of stagnation in access to piped supplies in the last five years.

Figure 5: What is the main source of drinking water for your household?



Source: Sauti za Wananchi mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);

Base: all respondents; n=2,809

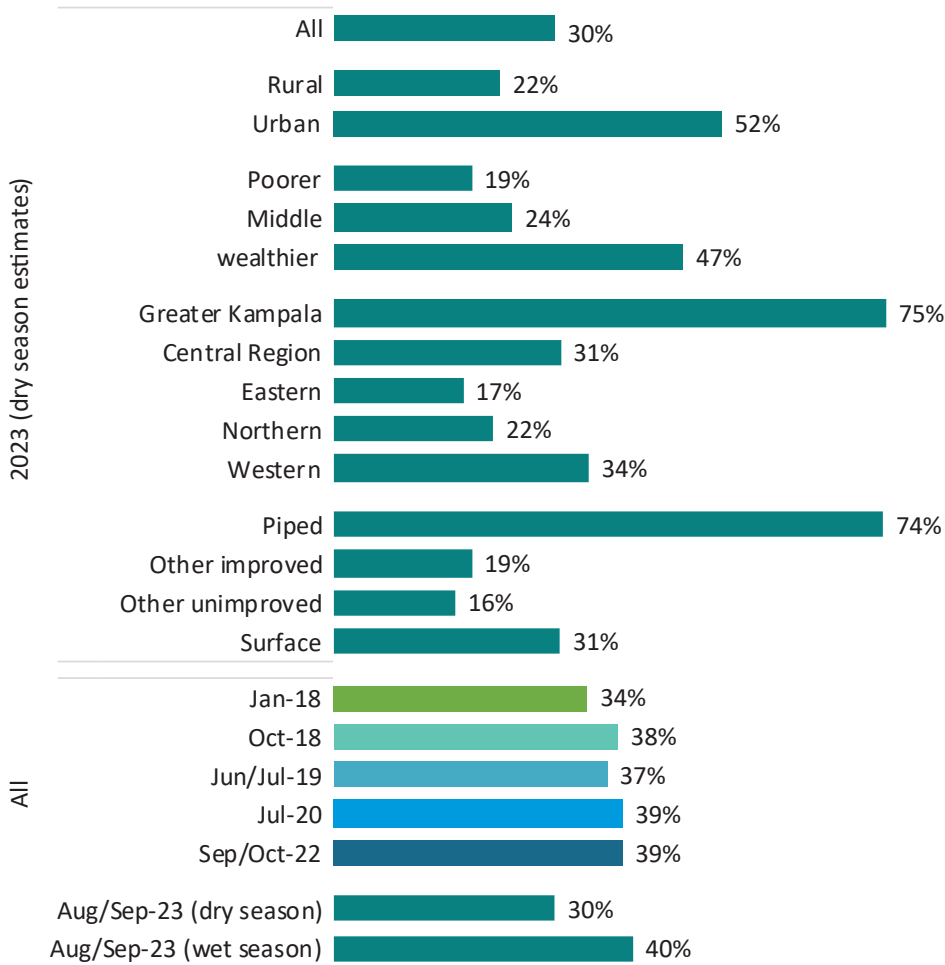
Insight 5: In the dry season, three out of ten households are able to collect drinking water in under 30 minutes

In the dry season, three out of ten households (30%) are able to collect their drinking water in under 30 minutes. This figure is considerably higher in urban areas, particularly Greater Kampala, and among wealthier households. Unsurprisingly, it is closely linked to the type of source on

² It is unclear why there was a small but significant increase in use of piped water supplies in 2020, and why this increase was only temporary. It is likely that this was related in some way to the Covid-19 pandemic, perhaps with some households opting to switch from their usual source of water to a better source – a piped supply – in order to raise their hygiene standards at a time when increased attention was focused on hygiene

which a household depends, with piped supplies much more likely to be accessible within 30 minutes.

Figure 6: Households with water collection time under 30 mins (drinking water) during dry season:



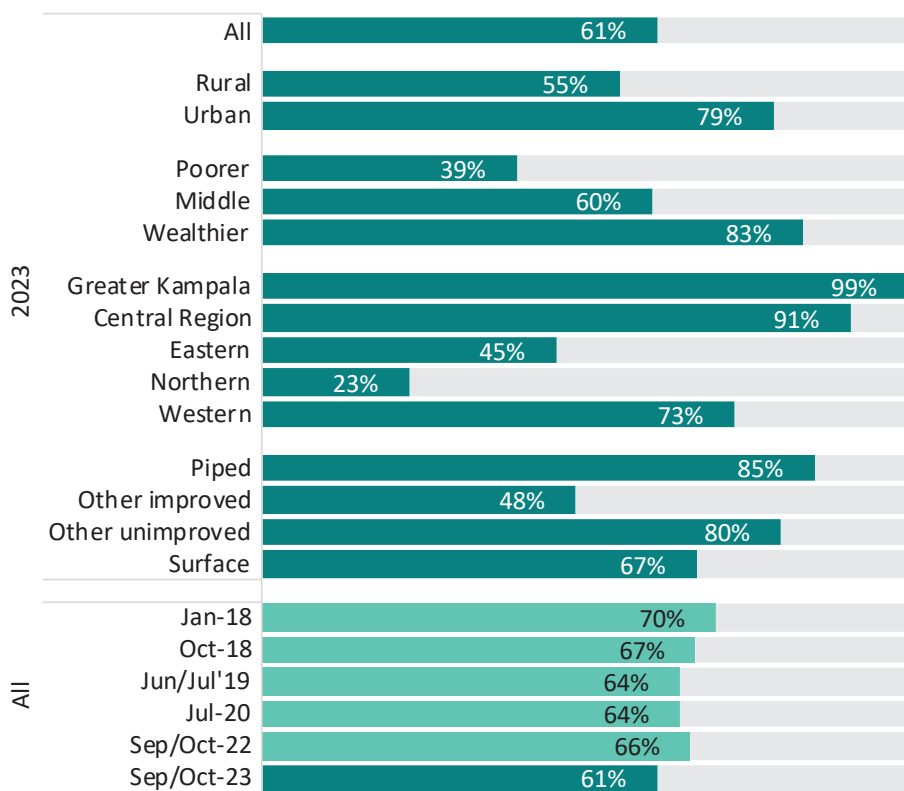
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

Insight 6: 6 out of 10 households treat their water in some way before drinking

Six out of ten households (61%) treat their water in some way before drinking it. This rises to eight out of ten households (79%) in urban areas, and almost all households (99%) in Kampala. Poorer households and those in northern and eastern parts of the country are less likely to treat their drinking water.

Treatment of drinking water has declined by 9 percentage points in the last 5 years.

Figure 7: Do you do anything to your water to make it safer to drink?



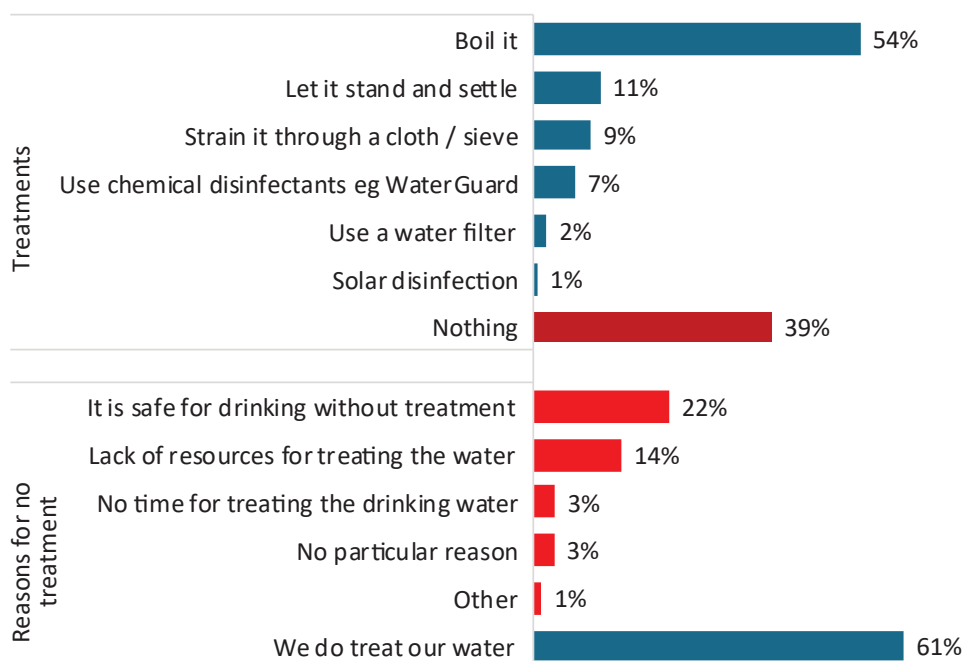
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);

Base: all respondents; n=2,809

The most common form of water treatment is boiling (54%), followed by allowing it to stand and settle (11%), straining it (9%) and using chemical disinfectants such as WaterGuard (7%).

The most common reasons given for not treating water before drinking are a belief that the water is already safe for drinking (22%) or a lack of resources for treating the water (14%).

**Figure 8: What do you do to the water to make it safer to drink?
/ Why don't you treat your water to make it safer to drink?**
(multiple responses permitted)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

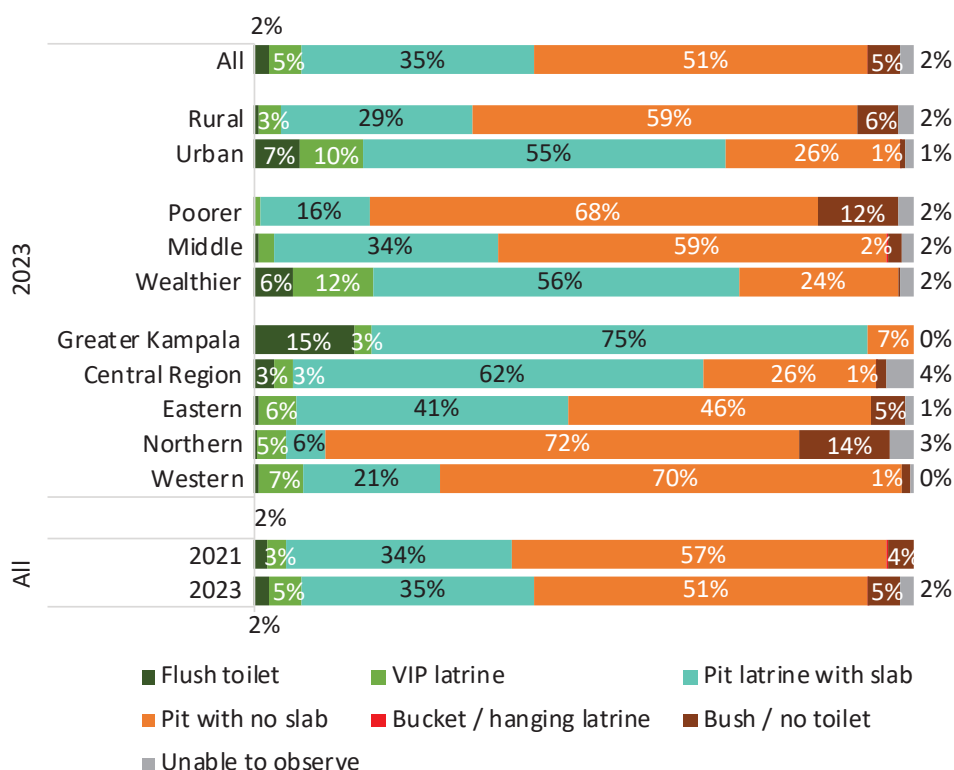
Insight 7: 4 out of 10 households use an improved toilet facility

Half of all households (51%) use a pit latrine without a slab as their toilet facility, and a further 5% do not have access to any facility. A small number have a flush toilet (2%), dominated by households in Greater Kampala (15%), use a pit latrine with a ventilation pipe (5%), or a pit latrine with a slab³.

Lower quality toilet facilities are much more common in rural areas, among poorer households, and in eastern, northern and western parts of the country.

³ Facilities were physically observed by surveys teams.

Figure 9: What type of toilet do household members use?



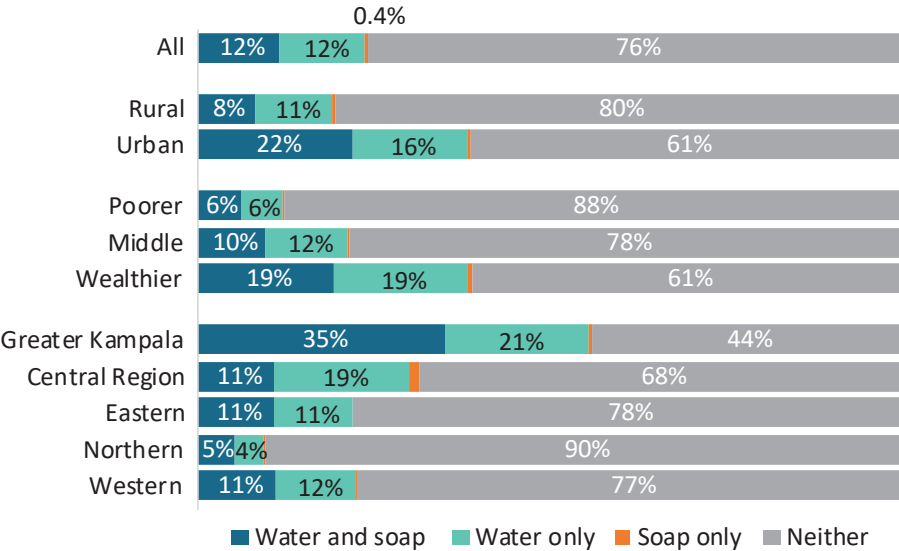
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

Insight 8: 1 out of 4 households has some form of handwashing facility near the toilet / latrine that they use

One out of four households (24%) has a functional handwashing facility with either soap and water (12%) or just water (12%) located close to the toilet / latrine facility that they use.

Handwashing facilities are more common in wealthier households (39%) and those in urban areas (39%), Greater Kampala (56%) in particular.

Figure 10: Is there a functional hand washing facility with soap and water near the toilet/latrine?




Source: Sauti za Wananchi mid-term survey (Aug-Sep 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,809

3. Conclusions

Access to clean drinking water (and other aspects of water, sanitation and hygiene) are highly dependent on where in Uganda you live and how wealthy you are. If you are relatively wealthy – and remember less than one quarter of citizens earns more than UGX 300,000 (USD \$80) per month – then your experience of accessing drinking water is very different from that of most Ugandans.

For the relatively wealthy, drinking water is most likely to be accessed via a piped supply: either directly into their household or yard or from a neighbour. For the poor, it is most likely to be accessed from a less convenient type of source: most likely a tube well or borehole. For the relatively wealthy, it is unlikely that it will take much time to collect that water, for the poor it can take hours each day leading to lost time. The wealthy are much more likely to treat their water before drinking it, and are much more likely to also have access to a higher standard of toilet and handwashing facility. It is not surprising, therefore, that fewer than half of wealthier households, and even fewer in the Greater Kampala area, consider access to drinking water to be a serious problem in their communities, while three out of four poorer households feel this way. Perhaps more than any other aspect of public services, your experience of water supplies is very different depending on where your household fits in the country’s socio-economic structure.

The challenge this raises is that those responsible for decisions about what types of public investment should be prioritised may be having an easier experience of accessing water than



the majority of their fellow Ugandans. This means first that decision makers may prioritise issues that they and their immediate communities experience as more pressing. And second, it means that their priorities when it comes to improving water supply services may also focus more on expanding piped supplies into more yards and more households rather than addressing the more fundamental challenge – a shortage of water points – experienced by the majority of citizens. In the context of limited resources, this is necessarily a trade-off: to prioritise public investment on improving services for the poorest and least-well-served – which often represent greater value for money in terms of quantity – or to focus on expanding the more expensive water pipe networks to reach more middle-class households. This survey of Ugandans suggests that on the grounds of equity and value for money, investing in water points may be the more prudent action to take.