



A burning planet? It's already happening

Ugandan citizens' opinions and experiences of the climate crisis

1. Introduction

Climate change is no longer a distant concern—it's a current crisis that demands urgent action. Without rapid, substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the situation will only deteriorate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2023 Report emphasises that human activity has already caused significant climate change, leading to a surge in extreme weather events worldwide.

Countries like Uganda, which have historically contributed minimally to climate change, are bearing a disproportionate burden of its impacts. Analysis spanning from 1980 to 2020 reveals a notable increase in weather-related catastrophes in Uganda¹. Both natural ecosystems and human populations have suffered extensive losses and damages.

This brief sheds light on Ugandan citizens' understanding and experiences of the climate crisis. What do they know about climate change and its root causes? How have they been affected by shifting weather patterns? Who bears the responsibility for addressing this crisis? What steps should individuals, communities, and the nation take to mitigate climate change's effects?

Data for the brief comes 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

1 <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/uganda/vulnerability>

introducing the second panel². For this brief, data were collected from 2,762 respondents in the sixth round of calls to the second *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 25 October and 25 November 2023.

The key findings are:

- A majority of citizens report that climate change is a worrying problem that is getting worse
- 7 out of 10 Ugandans see deforestation as the main cause of climate change
- Citizens' experience of a changing climate is mixed, though many report that conditions are increasingly difficult
- 7 out of 10 citizens report declining agricultural yields
- Most citizens report that making a living has become harder over the past 5-10 years
- 8 out of 10 Ugandans report experiencing effects of climate change at the household and community level
- Citizens propose a range of actions to address the climate crisis, with tree planting being the most common
- Citizens see addressing climate change as a shared responsibility
- Citizens have mixed views on whether climate change is due to human activities or natural causes
- 6 out of 10 Ugandans believe that it is not too late to act in addressing climate change
- Half of citizens see rich countries as being to blame for climate change
- Almost all households use either firewood and/or charcoal as the main sources of energy for cooking

2. Insights on citizens' views and experiences on climate change

Insight 1: A majority of citizens report that climate change is a concerning problem that is getting worse

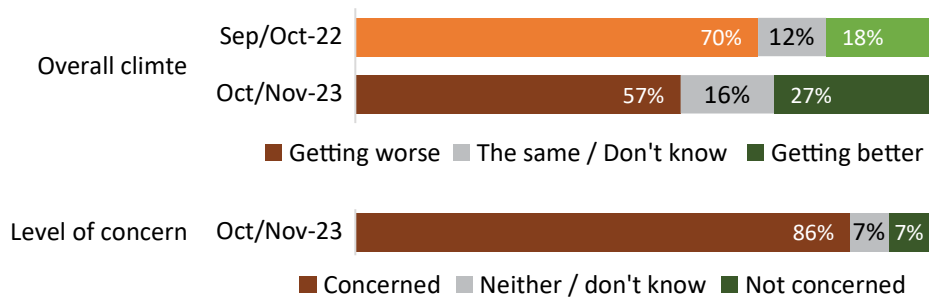
A majority of citizens (57%) say the overall climate is getting worse, and the vast majority (86%) say they are concerned about the impact of climate change on their lives.

It is worth noting that in late 2022 a higher proportion of citizens (70%) said the climate was getting worse. This could be related to differences in rainfall and agricultural productivity between 2022 and 2023³.

2 https://twaweza.org/dowqrt6g_vnload/voices-of-the-people-introducing-the-second-sauti-za-wananchi-panel/

3 The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) reported in December 2023 that “cumulative second season rainfall from September to December was generally above average” across much of the country (with the exception of Karamoja and the north-east), supporting above-average staple food production, in contrast to a poor growing season reported in 2022 due to erratic rainfall. Further, food price monitoring by the World Food Programme (WFP) and others found that staple food prices – maize and matoke in particular – were considerably lower in late 2023 than in late 2022, providing additional evidence that 2023 was a better year than 2022 for agricultural productivity in Uganda. See <https://fews.net> and <https://reliefweb.int> for details.

**Figure 1: Looking at the overall climate, would you say it is getting better, worse or remains the same?
And how concerned are you about the impact of climate change in your life?**



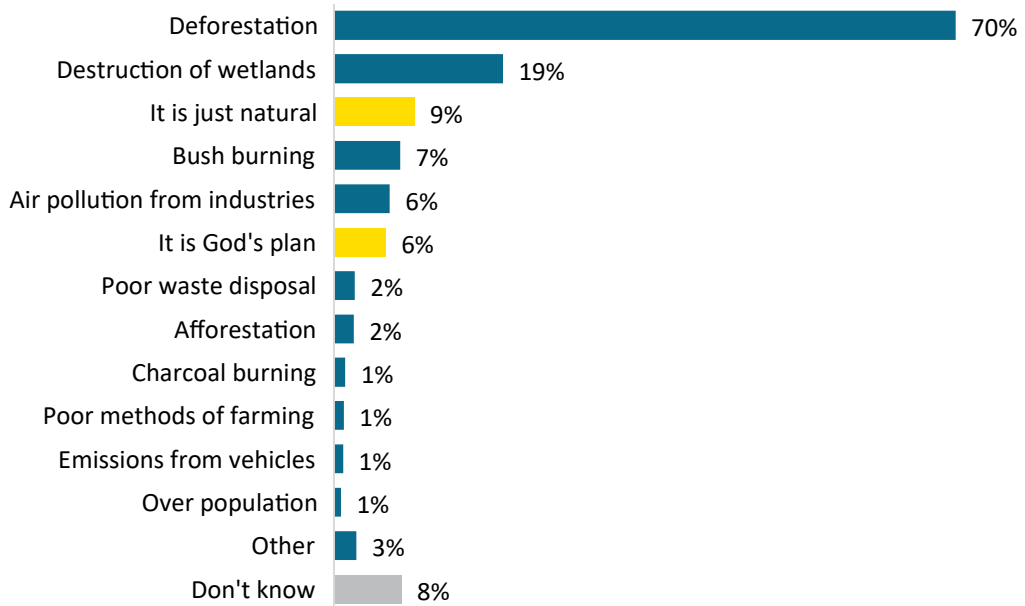
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762
And round 3 (Sep-Oct 2022; n=2,622)

Insight 2: 7 out of 10 Ugandans see deforestation as the main cause of climate change

A clear majority of citizens (70%) identify deforestation as a major cause of climate change, significantly outweighing any other potential cause. Destruction of wetlands follows at a distant second, mentioned by 19% of respondents.

Ugandans’ perspectives align with available evidence on the primary drivers of climate change in tropical regions, with forest clearance recognized as the main source of greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change. However, a small fraction of citizens in Uganda (less than 6%) correctly identified greenhouse gas emissions from factories and the transportation sector as contributors to climate change. Nonetheless, some citizens attribute climate change to factors unrelated to human activity, such as natural variation (9%) and the belief that it’s part of God’s plan (6%).

Figure 2: What do you think are the main causes of climate change?
(multiple responses permitted)

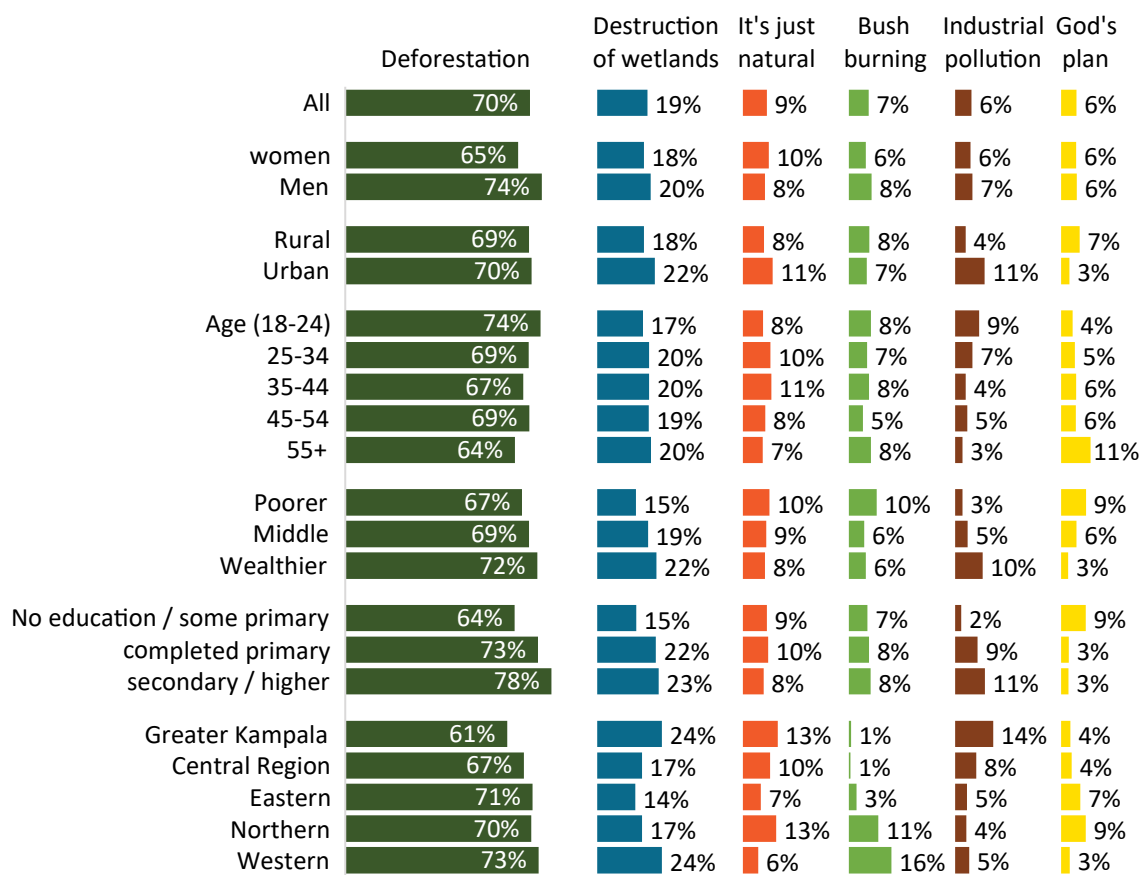


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

The causes of climate change that individuals identify often correlate with their level of education. Citizens with higher levels of education tend to attribute climate change to factors such as deforestation, wetland destruction, and industrial pollution. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of education may attribute it to religious beliefs, viewing it as part of a divine plan.

Moreover, older and poor (economically disadvantaged) citizens are more inclined to attribute climate change to divine intervention, while younger, wealthier individuals, particularly those residing in urban areas, are more likely to attribute it to industrial pollution. Nevertheless, regardless of demographic factors, deforestation remains the most widely acknowledged cause of climate change across all groups by a significant margin

Figure 3: What do you think are the main causes of climate change?
(multiple responses permitted)



Source: Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Insight 3: Citizens' experience of a changing climate is mixed, though many report that conditions are increasingly difficult

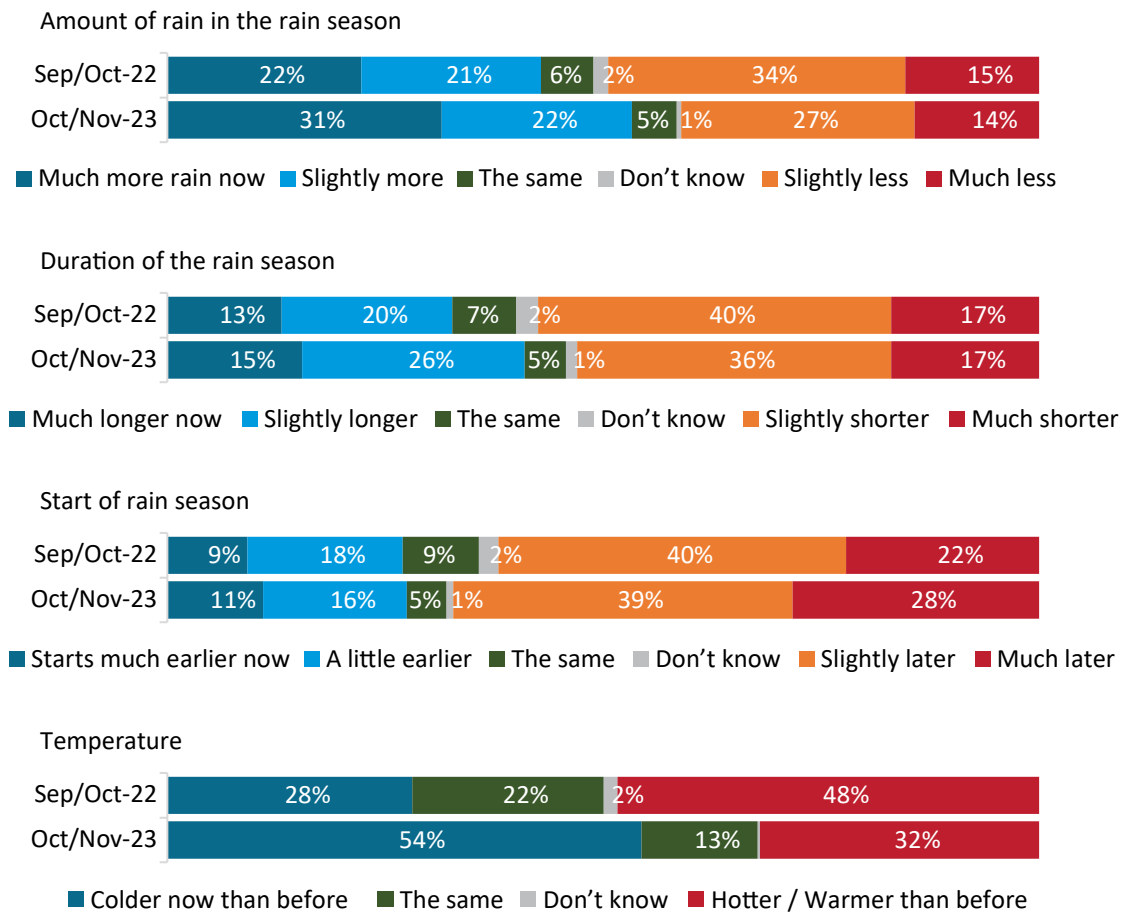
Most citizens consistently acknowledge that the climate is changing across four key climate variables: amount of rainfall, the onset and duration of the rainy season, and temperature. Only a small minority (5%) report no observed changes.

A majority of citizens (53%) reported that they had experienced more rain in the rainy season over the past 5-10 years, though most also said the rain seasons had been shorter than before (53%) and started later (67%). A majority in 2023 (54%) said the temperature had decreased over the past 5-10 years.

Moreover, there is a noticeable shift in citizens' reported experiences between 2022 and 2023.

In 2023, compared to 2022, citizens are more inclined to report increased rainfall, extended rainy seasons and decreasing temperature over the previous 5-10 years. This observed trend possibly reflects the difficulty in distinguishing long-term changes in the climate from short- and medium-term weather patterns. Citizens' perspectives may be influenced by differences in rainfall patterns and agricultural productivity between these particular two years, as much as by longer-term changes.

Figure 4: Looking back about 5-10 years, have you noticed any changes in the following?



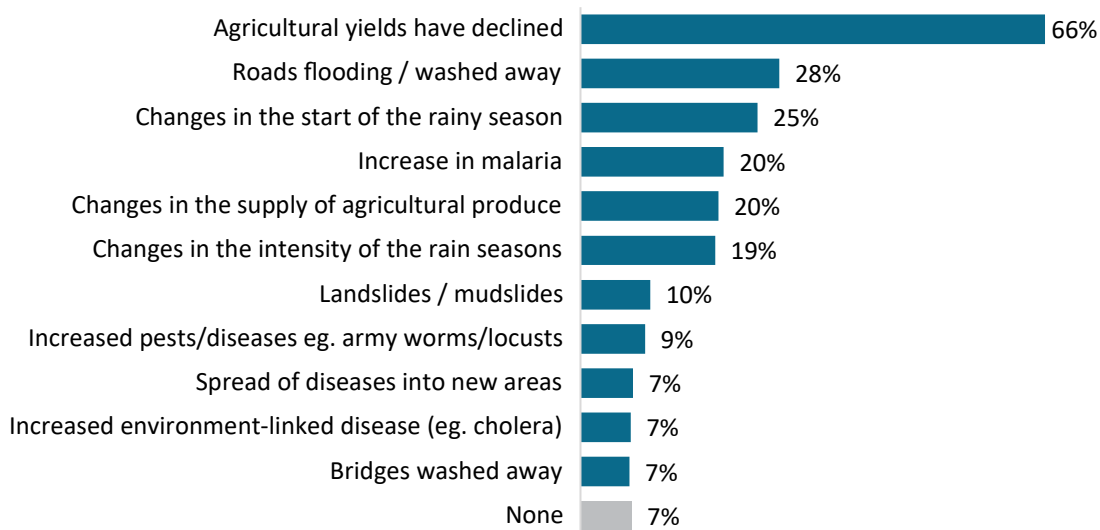
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
 Base: all respondents; n=2,762
 And round 3 (Sep-Oct 2022; n=2,622)

Insight 4: 7 out of 10 citizens report declining agricultural yields as the leading environmental change

Almost seven out of ten citizens (66%) cited a decline in agricultural yields as the primary environmental change observed over the past 5-10 years, in addition to the four climate

variables mentioned previously. This was closely followed by damage to roads caused by flooding or heavy rainfall (27%), alterations in the onset of the rainy season (25%), an uptick in malaria cases (20%), fluctuations in the availability of agricultural produce (20%), and changes in the intensity of rainy seasons (19%).

Figure 5: What other environmental changes have you observed during the last 5-10 years?
(multiple responses permitted)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

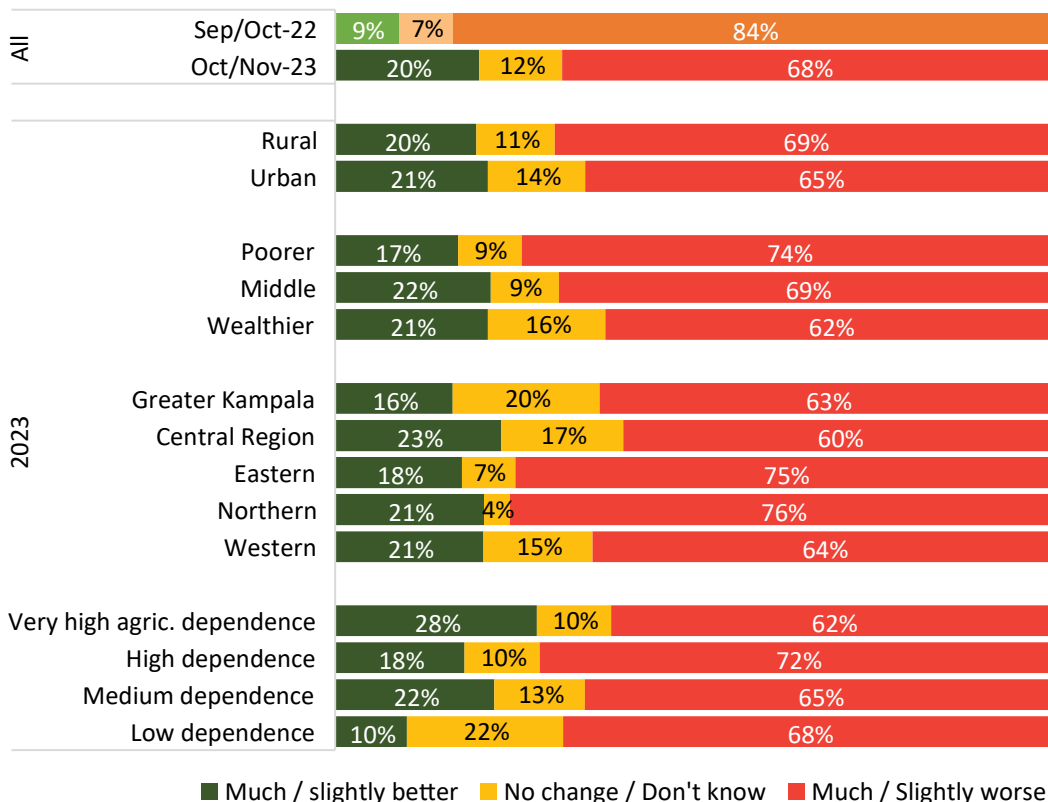
Insight 5: Most citizens report that making a living has become harder over the past 5-10 years

The majority of citizens (68%) indicate that securing basic necessities for their households has become increasingly challenging over the past 5-10 years. This marks a slight improvement since 2022, when an even higher percentage (84%) reported similar difficulties.

Those from lower-income backgrounds and rural areas, particularly in the Eastern and Northern regions of the country, are slightly more likely to report hardship in securing basic necessities.

This struggle is prevalent across households, regardless of their level of reliance on agriculture for sustenance and income. However, citizens in households where agriculture serves as the primary source of both income and food are slightly less likely than others to report experiencing increased difficulty in this regard

Figure 6: Have you experienced any changes in the means through which you secure basic necessities for you and your household (e.g. food) in the past 5-10 years?

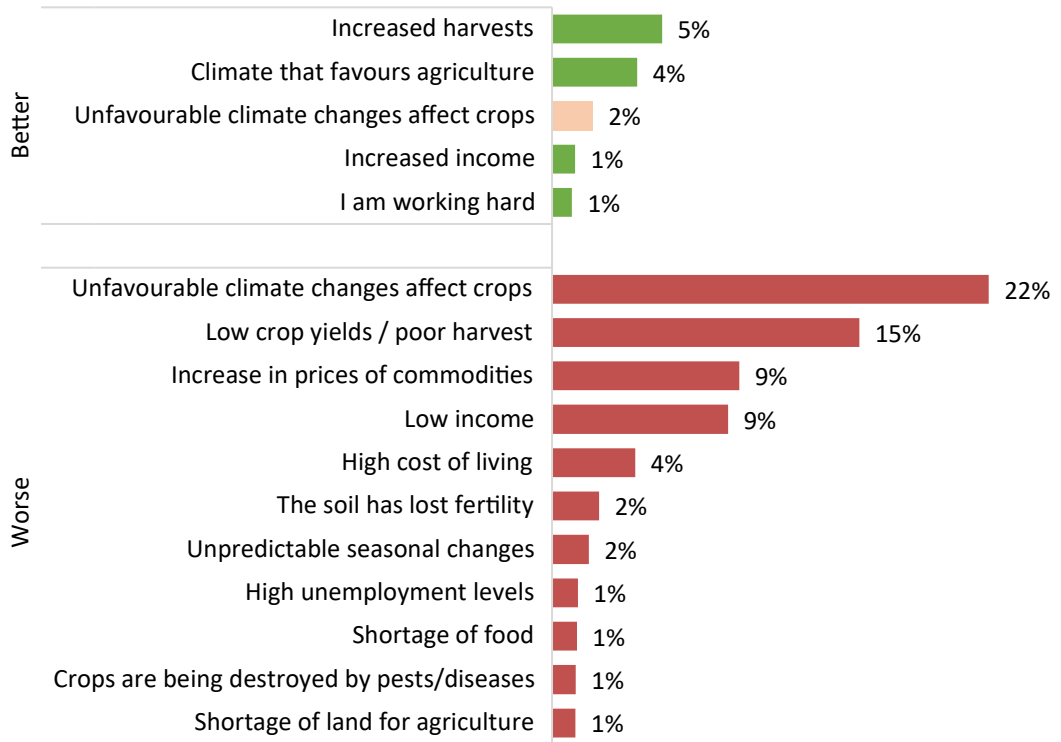


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
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 And round 3 (Sep-Oct 2022; n=2,622)

The main reasons given for the increased difficulty in securing basic needs are climatic changes (22%) and low crop yields (15%), followed by an increase in the price of commodities (9%) and low income (9%). Conversely, 2 out of 10 (20%) report that it is easier to secure basic needs now than before and their main reasons are increased harvests (5%) and a more favourable climate for agriculture than before (4%).

These different responses highlight that individual citizens and households face different circumstances according to a range of factors – likely to include geography, local weather and more. However, this should not disguise the fact that overall, citizens report that making a living is becoming harder.

Figure 7: What caused the change in your livelihood situation to make it better or worse?
(multiple responses permitted)

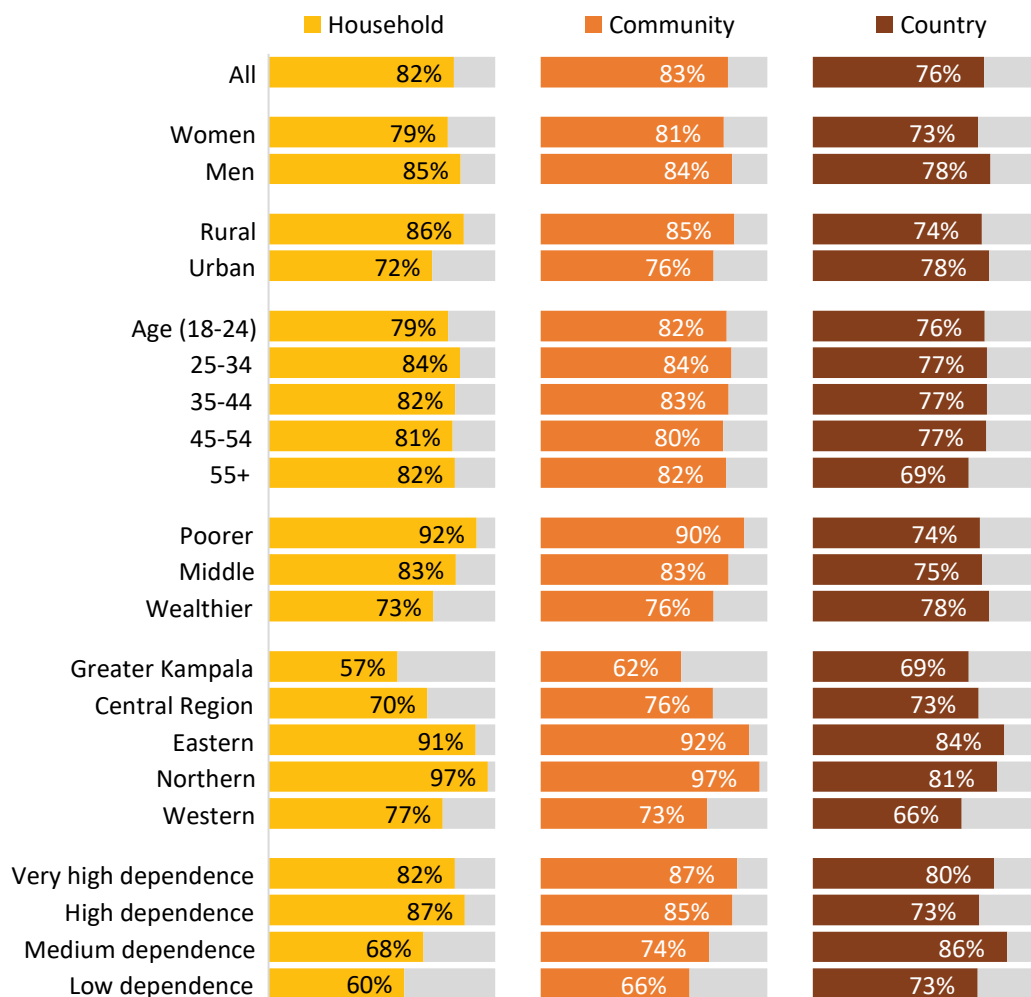


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Insight 6: 8 out of 10 Ugandans report experiencing effects of climate change at the household and community level

Most citizens report experiencing the effects of climatic or environmental changes at the household (82%), community (83%) and country (76%) level. This is more common in rural areas, among poorer households, and among households that are more dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. It is also substantially more common in Northern and Eastern parts of the country than in and around Kampala.

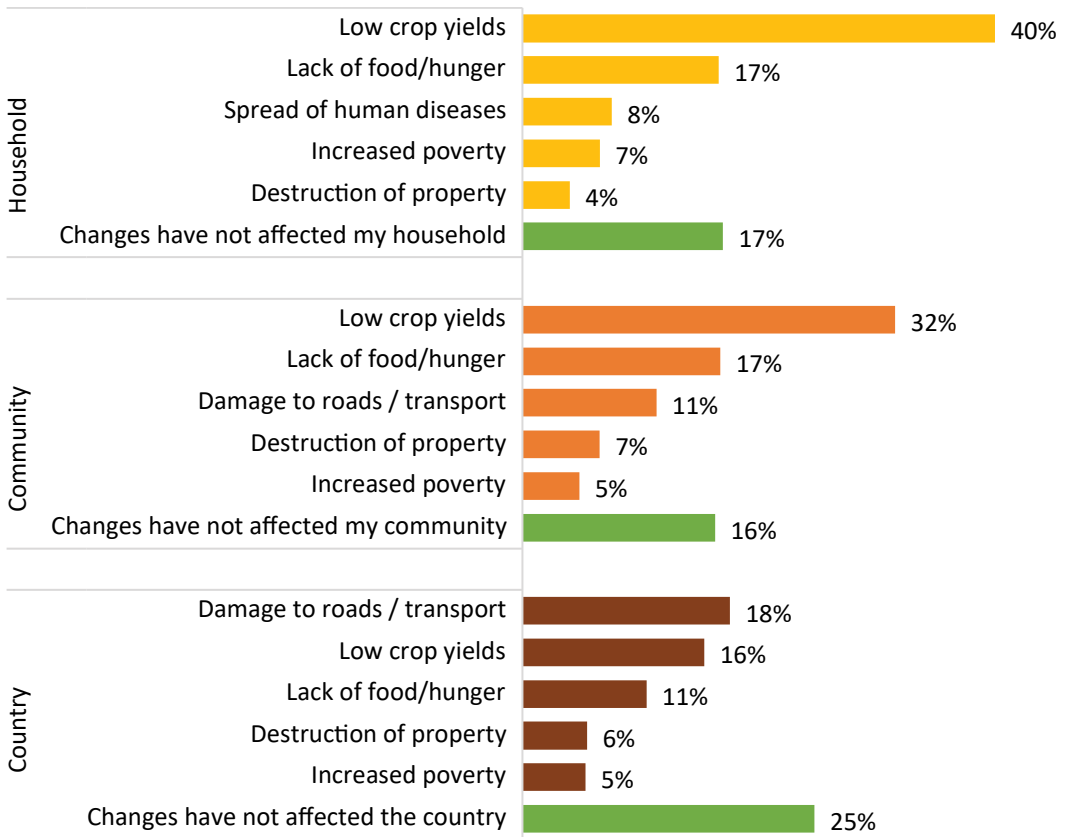
Figure 8: Have climatic or environmental changes affected your household / community / the country?
(Percentage answering “yes”)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

The main effect of climatic or environmental changes on households are low crop yields (40%) and lack of food (17%). The same two issues dominate among community-level impacts as well (32% low yields; 17% lack of food). Damage to roads is also widely report both at community level and national level.

Figure 9: How have climatic / environmental changes affected your household / community / country?
 (multiple responses permitted; top five responses shown in each case)



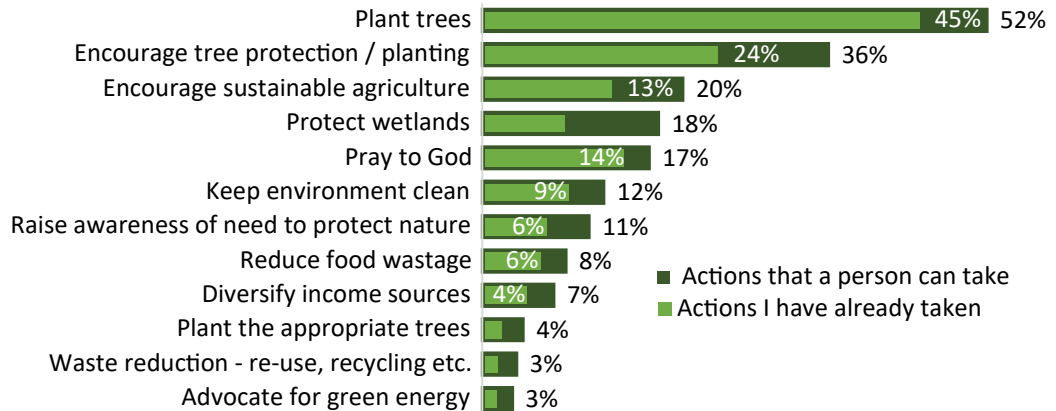
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
 Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Insight 7: Citizens propose a range of actions to address the climate crisis, with tree planting being the most common

Planting trees is the most frequently recommended action to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, with 52% of respondents endorsing this suggestion, and nearly as many (45%) claiming to have already undertaken this activity. Following closely behind is the related action of advocating for tree protection or planting, cited by 36% of respondents. Other proposed measures include promoting sustainable agriculture (20%), conserving wetlands (18%), and engaging in prayer (17%).

Men (59%) are more inclined than women (46%) to recommend tree planting, whereas individuals aged over 55 are more likely than others to suggest prayer (24%) (not shown in charts).

Figure 10: What actions can a person take to deal with the negative impacts of climate change? And what actions have you personally taken?
(multiple responses permitted)



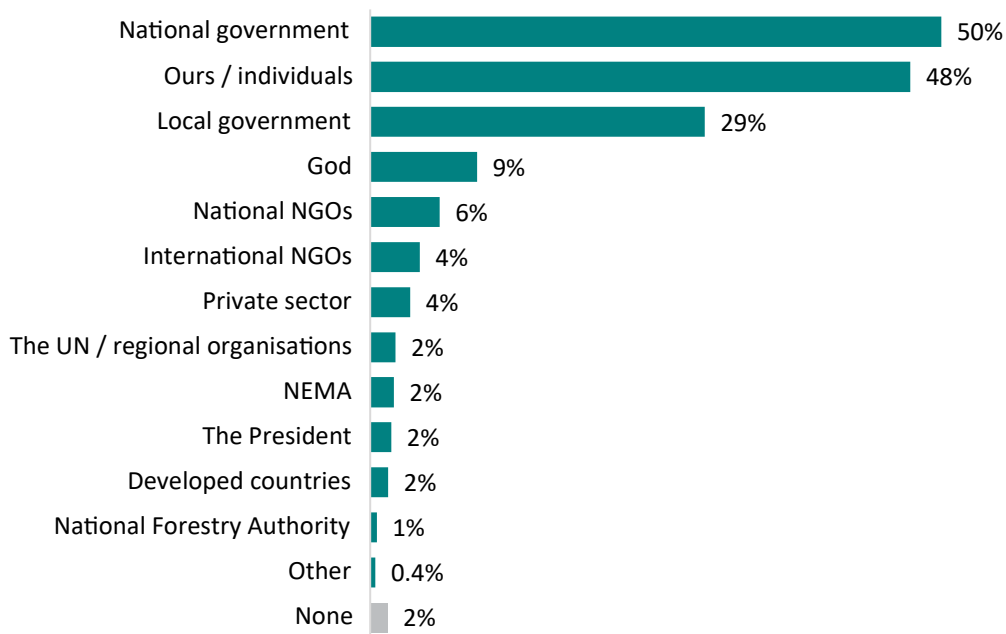
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Actions suggested for community and national level similarly focus on tree planting. Planting trees and encouraging tree planting are the top two suggestions for both communities and national government. (Not shown in charts).

Insight 8: Citizens see addressing climate change as a shared responsibility

Citizens see responsibility for addressing climate change in Uganda as shared between national government, cited by half of citizens (50%), and individual citizens, cited by a similar number (48%). Local government is also cited by a significant number of citizens (29%).

Figure 11: Whose responsibility is it to solve the climate change problem in Uganda?
(multiple responses permitted)

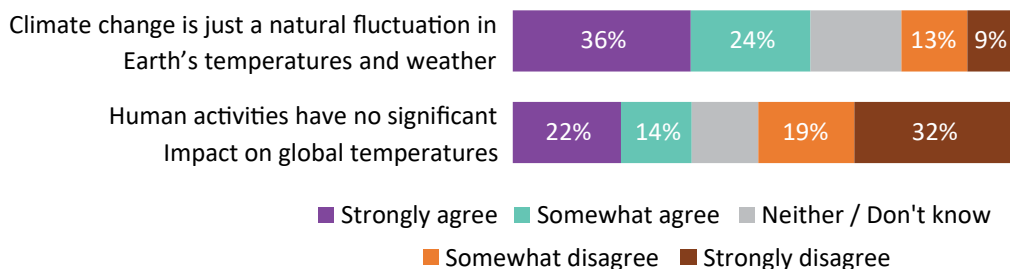


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Insight 9: Citizens have mixed views on whether climate change is due to human activities or natural causes

Six out of ten citizens (60%) agree with the statement that climate change is just a natural variation in the earth’s temperature and weather. At the same time, however, five out of ten individuals agree that human activities have a significant impact on global temperatures. These two observations imply that citizens have mixed views on whether climate change is due to natural causes or driven by human activity.

Figure 12: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

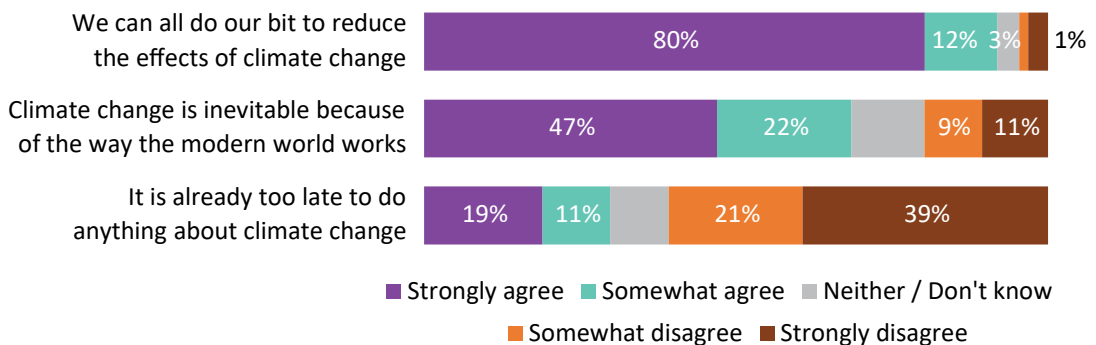
Insight 10: 6 out of 10 Ugandans believe that it is not too late to act in addressing climate change

Almost all citizens (92%) agree with the statement that we can all do our bit to reduce the effects of climate change, and relatively few (30%) agree with the statement that it is already too late to do anything about climate change.

Nevertheless, a significant majority (69%) agree with the statement that climate change is inevitable due to the way the modern world works.

Younger and better-educated citizens are a little more likely than others to believe that we can all do our bit, and that it is not too late to do something about climate change (not shown in charts).

Figure 13: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

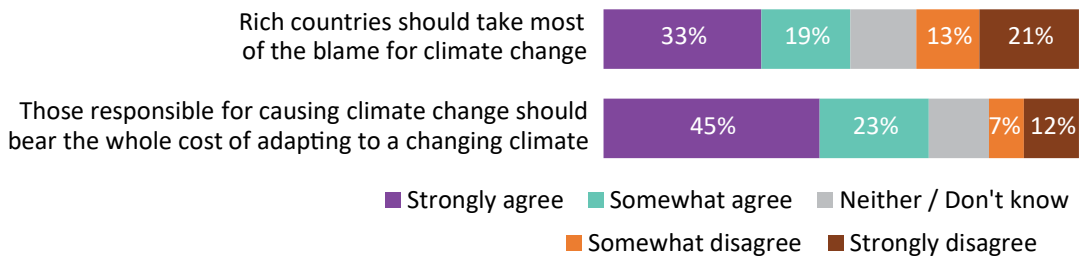


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023); Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Insight 11: Half of citizens see rich countries as being to blame for climate change

Half of citizens (51%) agree with the statement that rich countries should take most of the blame for climate change, while one out of three (34%) disagree. However, citizens are less divided on the view that whoever is responsible for causing climate change should bear the whole cost of adapting to a changing climate. Seven out of ten citizens (68%) agree with this statement.

Figure 14: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

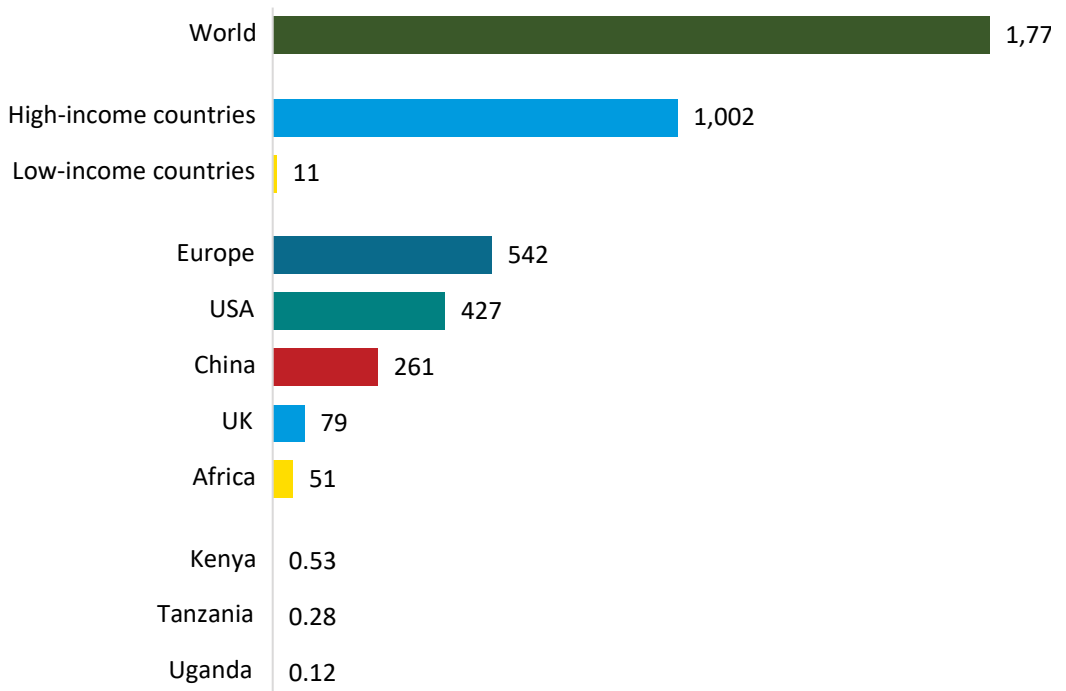


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
 Base: all respondents; n=2,762

The difference above is likely to relate to different understandings of who is responsible for causing climate change. In reality, climate scientists are clear that responsibility for climate change lies almost entirely with wealthy, industrialised nations. Cumulative carbon dioxide emissions since 1750 originating from African countries are very small when compared with emissions from wealthier countries and regions. For instance, emissions from the UK alone surpass those from the entire continent of Africa, and emissions from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda are so negligible that they barely register on the emissions chart.

While deforestation in East Africa may exert some minor influence on carbon dioxide levels and local weather patterns, the scientific consensus is that climate change predominantly stems from the carbon emissions of industrialised nations.

Figure 15: Cumulative CO2 emissions, 1750-2022, selected countries/regions
(billion tonnes)



Source: *Global Carbon Budget (GCB)* via Our World in Data⁴

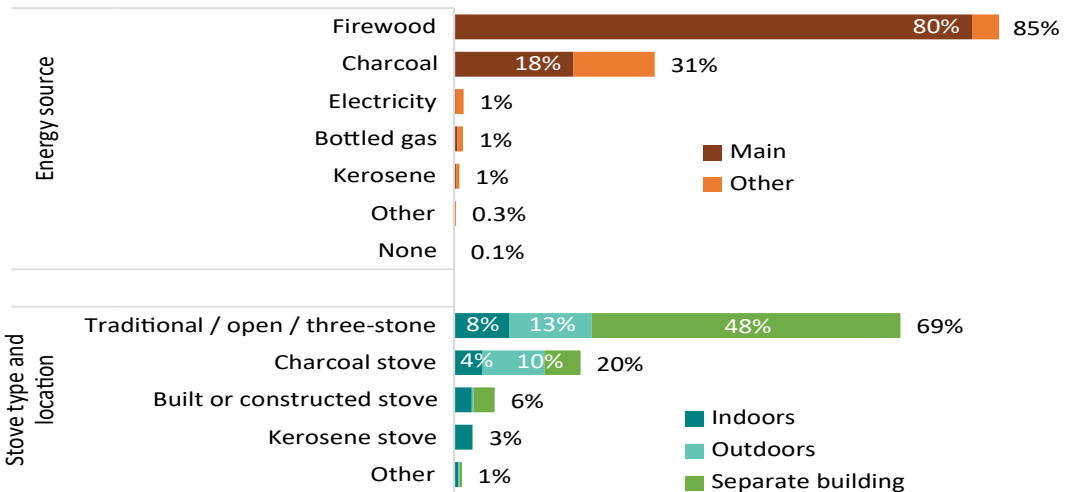
Insight 12: Almost all households use either firewood and/or charcoal as the main sources of energy for cooking

Ugandans almost entirely depend on firewood and charcoal as their main source of energy for cooking with 98% of households reporting using one or both of these two sources. Very few households use electricity, gas or kerosene (3%), mostly as a secondary source of energy.

Besides having impacts on the environment, the use of firewood and charcoal for home cooking can have negative health consequences. The smoke and other particles emitted by these fuels can cause respiratory complications.

⁴ The Global Carbon Budget (GCB) – see <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

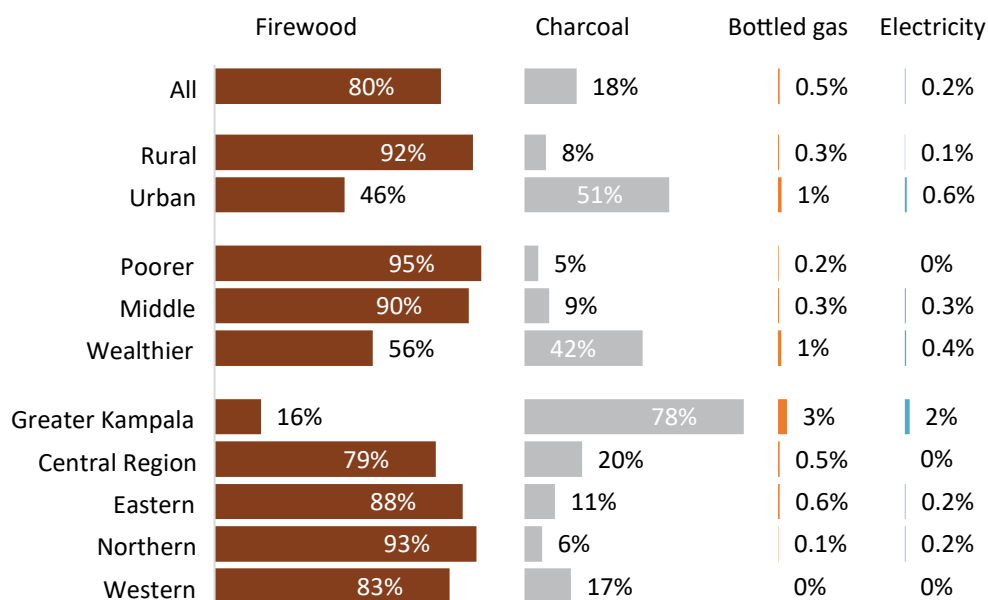
Figure 16: What type of energy do you use in your home for cooking?
(multiple responses permitted)
What type of stove do you use, and where is it located?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
 Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Most rural households (92%) use firewood while an almost equal number of urban households use either firewood (46%) or charcoal (51%) as their main energy source. Charcoal is the main energy source mostly for urban households (51%), particularly those in Kampala (78%).

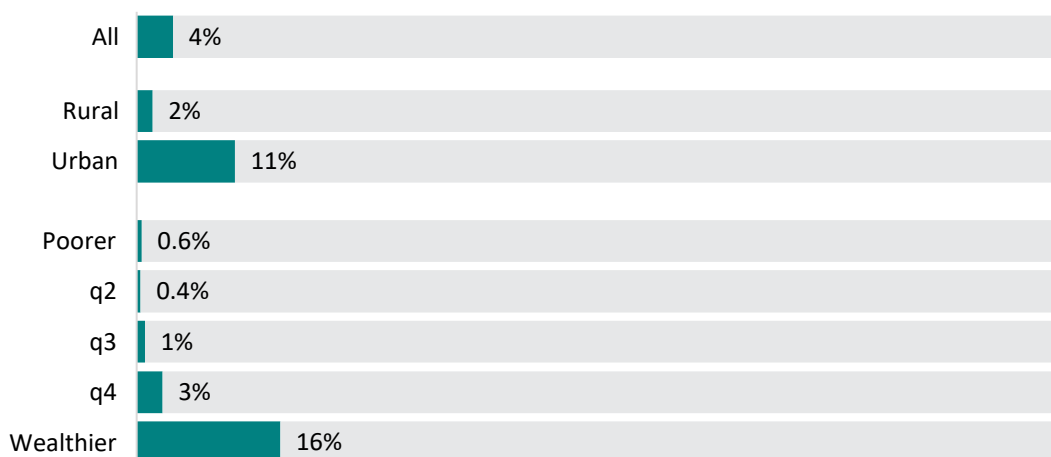
Figure 17: What is the main type of energy that you use in your home for cooking?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
 Base: all respondents; n=2,762

Similarly, very few households in Uganda own a gas or electric stove. Across the whole country, just one out of twenty households (4%) own a gas or electric stove, rising to one out of ten (11%) in urban areas. Ownership of such stoves is very closely linked to wealth, with ownership rates considerably higher among wealthier households (16%).

Figure 18: Percentage of households that own a gas or electric stove:



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone panel survey round 6 (October-November 2023);
Base: all respondents; n=2,762

The widespread use of firewood (and charcoal) demonstrates that it will not be straightforward to change such practices, however beneficial for the environment this would be. If the livelihoods and energy needs of poor households are not taken into consideration, this may push people deeper into poverty and reduce their support for measures that protect the environment.


3. Conclusions

With a geographic location on the equator, weak institutional capacity, low income, and reliance on climate-sensitive economic activities, Uganda is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Rain-fed agriculture is particularly vulnerable, with extreme weather events already becoming more common and seasonal weather patterns becoming less conducive. As such, climate change is a threat to the livelihoods of millions of citizens.

As the Ugandan government and other stakeholders work to mitigate ongoing climate changes, adapt to the current climate shifts, and recover from related losses and damages, it's crucial to understand citizens' perceptions and experiences of the climate crisis.

This brief explores Ugandan citizens' experiences and perspectives on climate change, focusing on two main areas: firstly, how climate change impacts their daily lives and livelihoods, and secondly, their views on the causes, urgency and responsibility for addressing the issue.

On the first of these issues, it's unsurprising that citizens report concerning effects of climate change on their lives and livelihoods. They highlight declining agricultural yields and challenges in securing basic needs, attributing these issues to the combination of climate and environmental problems, compounded by pre-existing economic and livelihood challenges



such as rising costs of living. While there was a slight improvement in rainfall in 2023 compared to 2022, with some citizens noting a better year, the majority still report delayed rains within a shorter rainy season, negatively impacting food production. This underscores the persistent challenges posed by climate variability despite occasional improvements in weather patterns. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that citizens report a high level of concern about climate change.

Which brings us to the second section. The headline here is that concern around climate change among Ugandan citizens is high. However, there is less certainty around the causes of climate change, but a degree of confidence that concerted action could yet turn the situation around. They point primarily to tree planting and wetland protection as steps to take in this regard, with responsibility shared between government and citizens. This would have significant value, though citizens' high level of dependence on wood and charcoal as fuels make it challenging. They also point to the responsibility of wealthy industrialised nations for causing climate change, and that these same countries should therefore also bear the biggest burden for addressing the issue.

Overall, despite their demographic differences, it's evident that the majority of Ugandans now recognise climate change as an immediate issue rather than a distant concern. It is actively impacting their lives. Coordinated and sustained efforts at household, community, national and global levels are urgently needed to address the crisis before it is too late.