AFRO BAROMETER
LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Pan-Africa Profiles

Taking stock

Citizen priorities and assessments three years into the SDGs

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Introduction

It's been nearly three years since the United Nations launched its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to provide a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future." At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, which aim to engage all countries in eradicating poverty while protecting the planet. With goals ranging from ending hunger to supplying everyone with electricity to protecting land and water biospheres and responding to climate change, the broad-ranging goals, along with the 169 targets and 228 indicators that define them, lay out an ambitious agenda for change between 2016 and 2030. The SDGs are explicitly designed to recognize the interconnectedness of the many development and sustainability challenges faced in countries around the globe, as well as the complexity of the responses that are required.

One of the obvious challenges presented by the SDG framework is where to begin. Given this intricate web of goals, targets, and indicators, how can individual countries, national and international organizations, and others interested in promoting sustainable development prioritize and translate the agenda into a plan of action? As always, Afrobarometer argues that one critical place to start is to ask the people.

Afrobarometer has long captured data on popular priorities, identifying the issues people would most like to see their governments address. These open-ended responses that allow respondents to identify any problem they choose can be mapped onto the SDGs, offering insight into how Africans prioritize these many goals, especially in contexts of more or less need, more or less development, and more or less democracy.

In addition, tracking progress toward achieving the goals increasingly dominates the SDG discussion, driven especially by the quest to identify reliable sources of data. Here, too, Afrobarometer has much to offer, providing direct feedback from the primary targets of the SDG agenda: ordinary African citizens whose security and well-being are the ultimate goal. In its recently completed Round 7 (2016-2018) surveys across 34 countries, Afrobarometer has captured indicators against 12 of the 17 SDGs. In the coming months, the network will publish extensive cross-country comparative data on a series of critical topics, including many of the individual SDGs. This first report in the network's Pan-Africa Profiles series on Round 7 results provides an initial broad-brush assessment of how governments are performing in the key sectors defined by the SDGs.

The findings presented here reveal a paradox: The highest priority sectors and the highest performance sectors rarely match up. Although priorities vary across individuals and across countries, especially in response to levels of poverty and overall development, jobs and economic growth are the dominant concern in most countries and across all income levels. Yet these are two areas in which most governments get some of their poorest performance ratings. Achieving greater effectiveness in these sectors may be key to SDG success for many African governments.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and findings from Round 7 surveys (2016-2018) are currently being released. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of Round 7 cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This policy paper relies primarily on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). It also makes comparisons to data collected in Round 5 (2011-2013) and Round 6 (2014-2015). Over-time comparisons focus on the 31 countries that were included in all three of these survey rounds.

Key findings

- Across 34 surveyed countries, unemployment tops the most important problems that Africans want their governments to address, followed by health, infrastructure/roads, water/sanitation, education, poverty, and management of the economy.

- Based on mapping the most important problems identified by Afrobarometer respondents onto the SDGs, SDG8, "decent work and economic growth," is the highest-priority SDG (57%), by a wide margin.

- Each of seven other SDGs captures the attention of between 20% and 31% of respondents, including SDG2 ("zero hunger") (31%), SDG3 ("good health and well-being") (27%), SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") (26%), SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure") (24%), SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation") (24%), SDG4 ("quality education") (21%), and SDG1 ("no poverty") (21%).

- The remaining SDGs draw only very modest levels of attention from respondents as "most important" priorities. However, other Afrobarometer data reveal that African publics typically also value these goals (e.g. gender equality, climate change), even if they are not the first things on their minds in the struggle for productive livelihoods and daily survival.

- Poverty and low socioeconomic development, both at the individual level and the country level, strongly shape priorities. Jobs and economic growth (SDG8) as well as good governance (SDG16) are higher priorities for wealthier individuals and for more economically developed countries. Among poorer people and countries, jobs and growth are still important, but people place significantly higher priority on fighting hunger and having adequate supplies of clean water and energy.

- Broad performance indicators suggest that it is frequently the highest-priority sectors (e.g. jobs and economic management) that record the worst government performance, and vice versa (e.g. gender equality and protecting rights of the disabled). Further analysis is needed to understand the mechanisms that explain these patterns.

- On average, the worst area of performance for governments is in narrowing income gaps between the rich and the poor: 31 of 34 countries give their governments their lowest rankings on this issue. Although SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") is not ranked as one of the high-priority objectives, government failure in this sector is consistent with a growing global and African discourse about the political and economic dangers of rising inequality.

1. Continuing challenges: Lived poverty and social-service deprivation

The very existence of the SDGs highlights the ongoing, multifaceted nature of global development challenges that are often found to be particularly acute in Africa. To offer some context for the discussion that follows about how African publics prioritize these challenges, we begin with data that provide a basic profile of these societies and some of their most fundamental challenges.

1.1.   *Persistent experience of poverty*

Afrobarometer tracks "lived poverty" based on how often, in the past year, respondents or anyone in their household have experienced shortages of several critical necessities (food, clean drinking water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income).

During 2016/2018, one in three respondents (33%) say their household experienced significant food shortages (going without "several times," "many times," or "always") in the past year (Figure 1). The countries most affected by this form of lived poverty are Niger, Madagascar, and Malawi, where 60% or more suffered food shortages. In contrast, fewer than 10% experienced such shortages in Mauritius (3%) and Morocco (6%). Even higher numbers experienced frequent shortages of clean water and medical care (38%, not shown), and nearly two-thirds of Africans lacked a cash income at least a few times during the year.

Figure 1: Frequent food shortage (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018
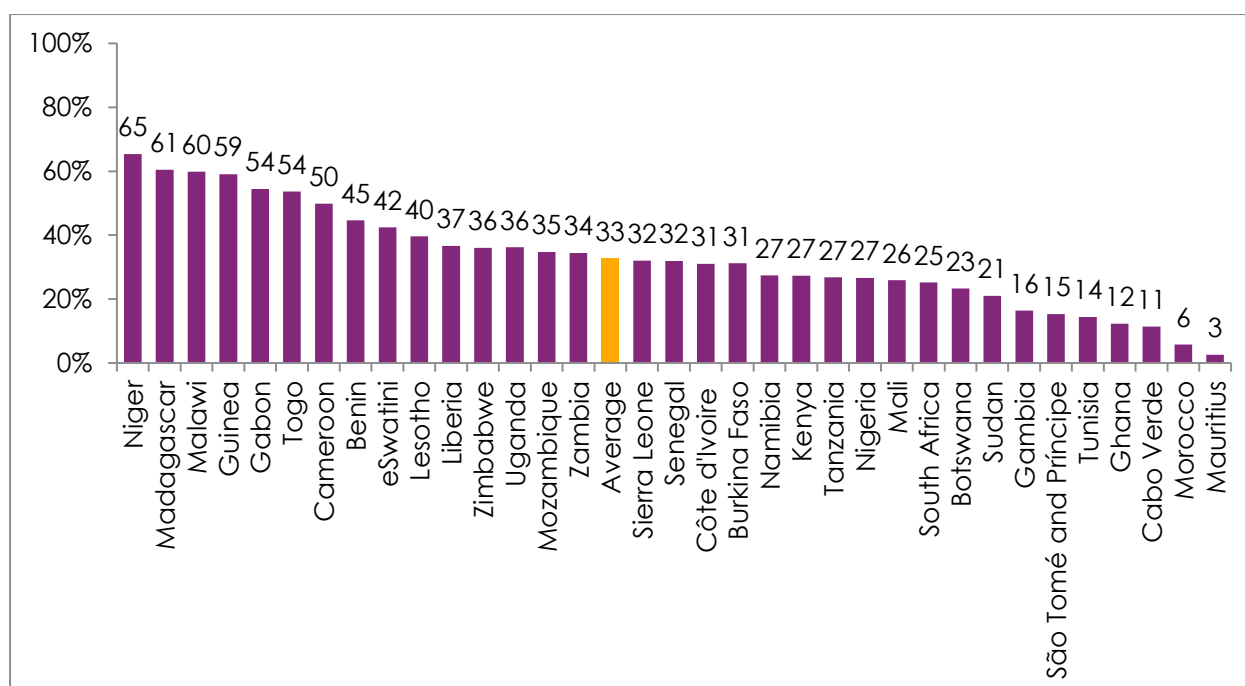
Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: enough food to eat?" (% "several times," "many times," or "always")*

Across 31 countries tracked since 2011/2013, we observe a modest reduction in experience of food shortages between 2011/2013 (Round 5) and 2014/2015 (Round 6), from 37% to 32%. This downward trend stalled between 2014/2015 and 2016/2018 (Round 7) with an increase (not statistically significant) back up to 33% (Figure 2). Still, there remains an important reduction of 4 percentage points in the proportion experiencing food deprivation.

Similar patterns are observed for drinking water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income: Shortages of these goods and services decreased somewhat between Round 5 and Round 6 but increased between Round 6 and Round 7, and in most cases, the earlier gains are nearly wiped out. Overall, there appears to have been only very modest progress over the past six to seven years in reducing the experience of most aspects of poverty across the continent, although the reduction in food insecurity represents critical progress.

The modest aggregate change in food insecurity, however, masks much more significant changes in some countries (Figure 3), both for better and for worse. Between 2011/2013 and 2016//2018, experience of food shortage declined in 19 of the 31 countries tracked. These include eight countries that saw declines of more than 10 percentage points, led by Côte d'Ivoire (-20 percentage points), Sierra Leone (-18 points), Mali (-18), and Senegal (-17). On the other hand, four countries saw the experience of hunger increase by 7 points or more,

including South Africa (+7 percentage points), Benin (+7), Zambia (+8), and Malawi, where experience of significant food shortage increased by an astonishing 20 percentage points.

Figure 2: Going without basic necessities | 31 countries | 2011-2018
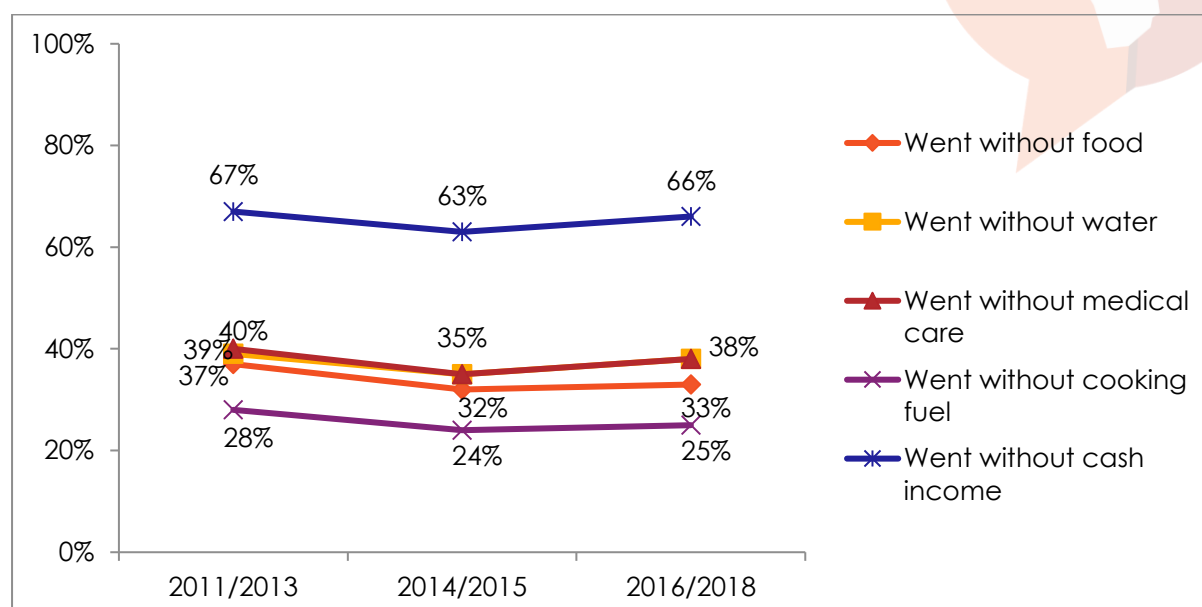
Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income? (% "several times," "many times," or "always")*

Figure 3: Change in the proportion going without food (percentage-point change) **| 31 countries | 2011-2018**
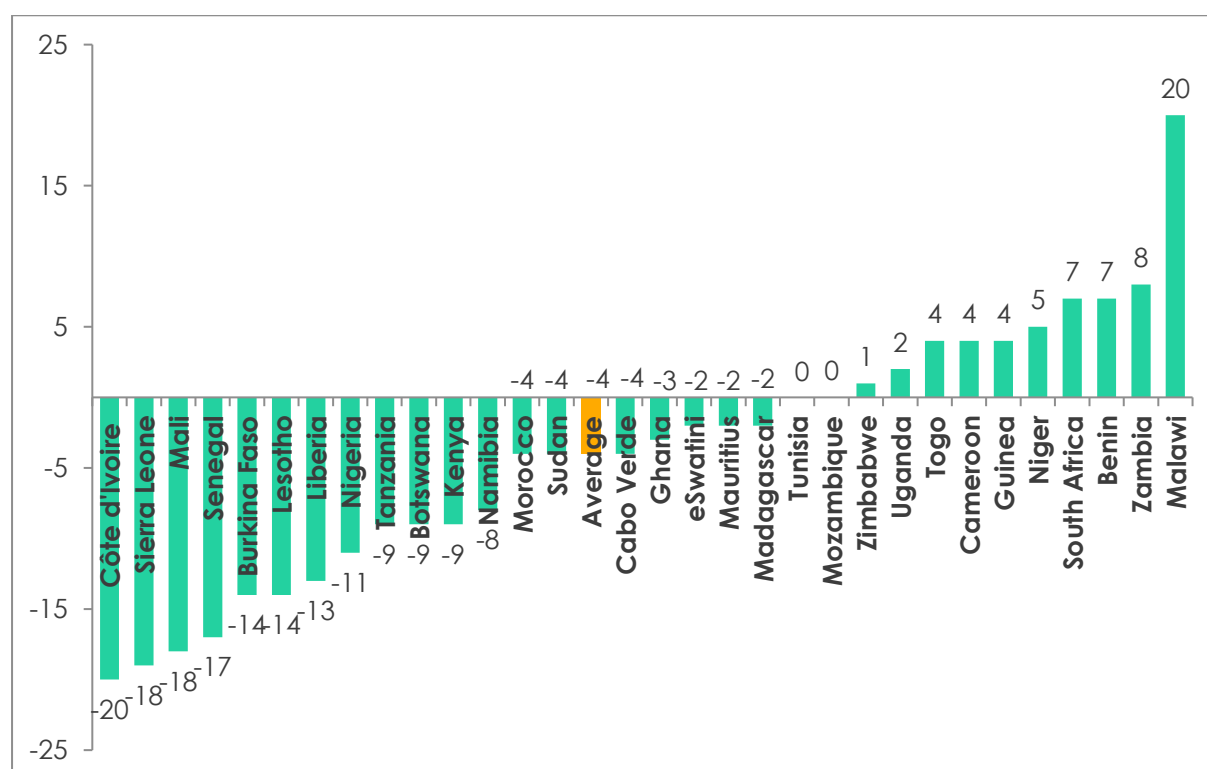
Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat? (Figure shows the percentage-point change, between 2011/2013 and 2016/2018 survey rounds, in the proportion who said "several times," "many times," or "always.")*

1.2. Service deprivation

Data on the availability of critical services and infrastructure provide another indication of overall public welfare. During survey fieldwork, enumerators capture data on the availability of basic services and infrastructure in each community they visit. Services and infrastructure that are tracked in each "enumeration area" include an electric grid, a piped water system, a sewage system, mobile phone service, a school, a police station, a health clinic, a market, a bank, paid transport services, and a paved road to reach the community. A count of the services and facilities that were *not* available in each community can serve as a simple service deprivation index, ranging from 0 (all services and facilities available, i.e. no deprivation) to 11 (no services and facilities available).

The continental average for "missing" services is 4.7, with country averages ranging from just 1.7 in Mauritius, indicating that most services are available in most communities, to a high of 6.5 in Burkina Faso, the least-serviced country among the 34 included in Round 7 (Figure 4).

In many cases, the country ranking derived based on experiential indicators such as going without food (Figure 1) corresponds closely with the ranking based on access to services and facilities (Figure 4). For example, Mauritius, Morocco, and Tunisia occupy some of the top spots according to both indicators, while Lesotho and Madagascar fare quite poorly on both. But other countries show seemingly more contradictory ratings. Cameroon, for example, would appear to be one of the best-serviced countries, with an average score on the deprivation index of just 3.5 (sixth overall). But at the same time, the country experiences one of the highest levels of food deprivation, with fully 50% of respondents indicating they went without enough to eat on a regular basis in the past year (seventh worst). These divergent outcomes on the two indicators highlight the complexity of the development challenges that many countries face, and that are reflected in the number and scope of the SDG goals.

Figure 4: Average infrastructure and social-service deprivation index | 34 countries | 2016/2018
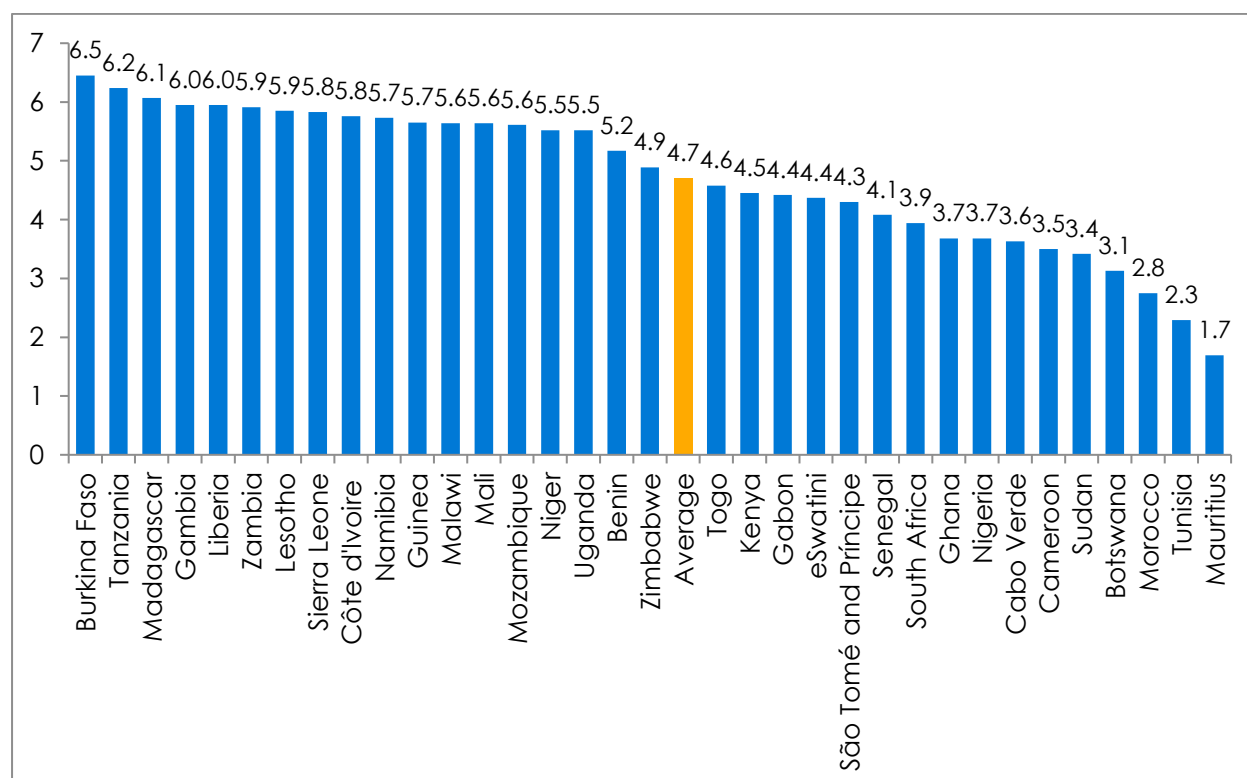
*Note: Afrobarometer field teams collect data about the presence or absence of 11 services and facilities in the enumeration area. The deprivation index is a national average of a simple count of the number of these services and facilities that were **not** available.*

2. SDGs: The global response to development challenges

2.1. Overview of the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 with the aim of establishing a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future." The centerpiece of the agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are intended to serve as a call to action for local actors, national governments, and the global community. The SDGs are explicitly designed to recognize the interconnectedness of the many development and sustainability challenges and the responses they require. The SDGs build on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that served as a similar guide during 2000-2015, but they integrate new priorities such as climate change and peace and justice, and they extend the mandate not only to developing countries but to all UN member states. The 17 SDGs are summarized in Table 1. (For further information on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs).

The 17 goals are elaborated via 169 targets and 228 indicators to track progress toward achieving the goals. Each indicator can be disaggregated by income, gender, age, and other socio-demographic characteristics such as labor market position, area of residence, handicap, and other factors. For international comparisons as well as internal monitoring of progress, each UN member state is called upon to strengthen its statistical and planning systems, mobilize internal and external resources, and set up an effective monitoring and evaluation system.

2.2. What the people say: Identifying the most important problems

One of the obvious challenges presented by the SDG framework is where to begin. Given the diversity and interconnectedness of this complex web of goals, targets, and indicators, how can individual countries, national and international organizations, and others interested in promoting the sustainable development agenda prioritize and develop a plan of action? As always, Afrobarometer argues that one critical place to start is to ask the people.

Afrobarometer has long captured data on popular priorities, incorporating a question that asks respondents to identify what they see as "the most important problems facing this country that government should address." Respondents can give up to three answers. This is posed as an open-ended question, i.e. rather than being given a pre-selected list of problems to select from, respondents may identify any problem they choose. Interviewers then code these responses onto a list of problem categories that has been developed based on responses in previous survey rounds. If an individual offers a response that does not fit within any of the existing response categories, the interviewer can capture this response verbatim for later review and coding, with new coding categories added when necessary. The key point here is that respondents are allowed to identify any problem that they deem important – they are not limited to choosing among priorities identified by others.

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.

Figure 5 shows the most important problems (MIPs) identified across 34 countries in Round 7. As in the past, unemployment dominates the popular agenda: 40% of all respondents mention unemployment as one of their country's top problems. This is followed by health, mentioned by 27%, infrastructure/transport/roads (24%), water and sanitation (24%), and education (21%). Concern for economic conditions follows, with one in five mentioning management of the economy (21%) and poverty (21%), followed by food shortage (18%). (For detailed discussions of the most important problems identified in previous survey rounds, see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 67 and Policy Paper No. 18 at www.afrobarometer.org.)

Figure 5: Most important problems | 34 countries | 2016/2018
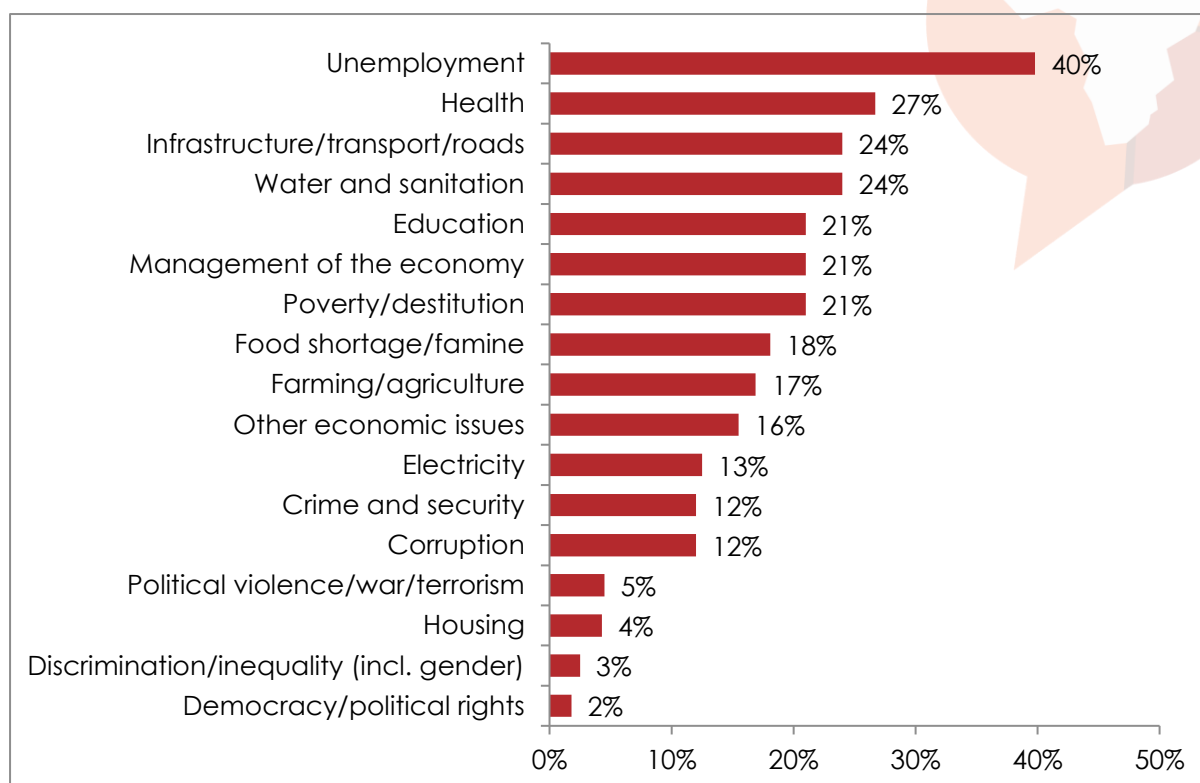
*Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (**Note:** Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem as among their top three.)*

2.3. Mapping MIPs to SDGs

To assess what these broad responses regarding most important problems (MIPs) can tell us about the popular prioritization of the SDGs, we begin by mapping or linking each MIP category as captured by Afrobarometer onto one of the SDGs (see Table 1). We can then find the total number of respondents who identified the problems that are linked to each SDG as an indication of the popular prioritization of the SDG.

In some cases there is a clear one-to-one correspondence between a particular MIP and an associated SDG. For example, "education" as an MIP clearly maps directly onto SDG4 ("quality education"), and the same is true for SDG5 ("gender equality").

In other cases, the individual SDGs can be linked to several different MIPs. Thus, "food shortage" as an MIP obviously maps onto SDG2 ("zero hunger"), but so do several MIPs related to agriculture and land management. Similarly, "poverty/destitution" as an MIP maps directly onto SDG1 ("no poverty"), but so do problems identified with grants for the elderly and with orphans and street children.
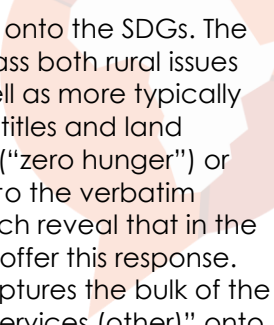
While in most cases it is clear how MIPs can best be mapped onto SDGs, this is not always the case, particularly if there is overlap in the issues captured by separate SDGs. For example, the issue of elderly grants is clearly linked to poverty (SDG1), but also to inequality (SDG10). In these more ambiguous cases, we look to the targets and indicators associated with each SDG to determine the best fit. In the case of elderly grants, we note that SDG Target 1.3 specifically mentions "social protection systems," whereas references to these types of programs do not appear in the targets for SDG10, hence the placement of this MIP under SDG1.

SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") is also a wide-ranging goal that does not always align with our assumptions. The targets reveal that the focus here is on inequality both within and between countries and that the framers were intentionally incorporating issues as diverse as

the experience of discrimination based on protected identities (i.e. the MIP "discrimination/inequality") and fair immigration policies (i.e. the MIP "immigration").

Table 1: Mapping "most important problems" to Sustainable Development Goals

Most important problems (Afrobarometer)	UN Sustainable Development Goal
Poverty/destitution ▶▶▶	
Elderly grants ▶▶▶	SDG1: No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Orphans/homeless children ▶▶▶	
Food shortage/famine ▶▶▶	
Farming/agriculture ▶▶▶	SDG2: Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Agricultural marketing ▶▶▶	
Land ▶▶▶	
Health ▶▶▶	
Sickness/disease ▶▶▶	SDG3: Good health and well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
AIDS ▶▶▶	
Drugs/alcoholism ▶▶▶	
Education ▶▶▶	SDG4: Quality education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Gender issues/women's rights ▶▶▶	SDG5: Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Water supply ▶▶▶	SDG6: Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Services (other) ▶▶▶	
Electricity ▶▶▶	SDG7: Affordable and clean energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Management of the economy ▶▶▶	
Unemployment ▶▶▶	SDG8: Decent work and economic growth: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Wages, incomes, and salaries ▶▶▶	
Transportation ▶▶▶	
Communications ▶▶▶	SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Infrastructure/roads ▶▶▶	
Discrimination/inequality ▶▶▶	SDG10: Reduced inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries
Immigration/foreigners ▶▶▶	
Housing ▶▶▶	SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Drought ▶▶▶	SDG13: Climate action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Crime and security ▶▶▶	
Corruption ▶▶▶	
Democracy/political rights ▶▶▶	SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Political instability/ethnic tensions ▶▶▶	
Political violence ▶▶▶	
Civil war ▶▶▶	

Some ambiguities may remain about the best way to map a given MIP onto the SDGs. The category of "land" is a prime example. "Land" problems can encompass both rural issues relating to insufficient agricultural land or disputed property rights as well as more typically urban problems related to land for housing and businesses, urban land titles and land grabbing, and related issues. So should "land" be mapped onto SDG2 ("zero hunger") or SDG11 ("sustainable cities and communities")? In these cases, we turn to the verbatim responses that have been captured for some of the MIP responses, which reveal that in the case of "land," agricultural issues take precedence when respondents offer this response. While it is a somewhat imperfect mapping, we believe it accurately captures the bulk of the responses in this category. It is on a similar basis that we map the MIP "services (other)" onto SDG7 ("water and sanitation"), because the bulk of the verbatim responses associated with this category referenced sanitation issues.

We do not claim that the MIPs mapped onto a given SDG fully capture all aspects of that SDG. For example, with regard to SDG13 ("climate action"), the only existing MIP that maps onto this is "drought." Clearly the SDG encompasses much more than this single problem. But the point is not to fully "capture" an SDG. The point is to fully translate those popular priorities that the public has identified onto the SDGs. In this case, mention of drought as an MIP is the only way in which climate-related issues appear directly on the popular agenda.

We also note that several of the SDGs cannot be linked directly to any of the popular priorities. For example, the targets that describe SDG12 ("responsible consumption and production"), SDG14 ("life below water"), and SDG15 ("life on land") largely refer to the environmental sustainability of consumption and production and the protection of biodiversity on land and in the oceans. While they are of critical global importance, these issues do not register as Top 3 priorities among African respondents. As we will discuss further below, this does not mean that these SDGs should be left aside or ignored in Africa. But understanding how the public sees the landscape of challenges their countries face is an essential starting point for building effective responses.

Finally, SDG17 refers not to local challenges but rather to the need to create the global partnerships needed to achieve the goals – partnerships that are likely to be especially critical in pursuit of goals such as SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 15 that reflect global priorities more than local ones. These SDGs are more likely to be captured in the programs of regional or continental organizations that can establish partnerships between the continent and the rest of the world to confront global challenges such as climate change and environmental protection and sustainability.

3. How Africans prioritize the SDGs

3.1. Aggregate SDG scores

The mapping process produces a clear hierarchy among the SDGs, at least at the highest level (Figure 6). SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") unambiguously stands out as the top priority for African respondents: Fully 57% of respondents identify one of the problems linked to SDG8 as a top priority for government action, nearly double the second-highest score. Given that the sweeping aims captured under the SDG8 umbrella include the concept of "livelihoods" and people's ability to secure the means to survive – and to attain many of the other goals highlighted in the SDGs – it is hardly surprising that this SDG occupies such a dominant position from a popular perspective.

After this first stage, however, the hierarchy is somewhat less distinct. Each of five SDGs captures the attention of between about one-fourth and one-third of the public. It is notable that the second position is occupied by SDG2 ("zero hunger"), since this SDG also taps into both the overall economic well-being of societies and the other main source of livelihoods in most African countries, the agricultural sector. In all, 31% mention agricultural issues or food security as key priorities.

Figure 6: Citizens' prioritization of the SDGs | 34 countries | 2016/2018
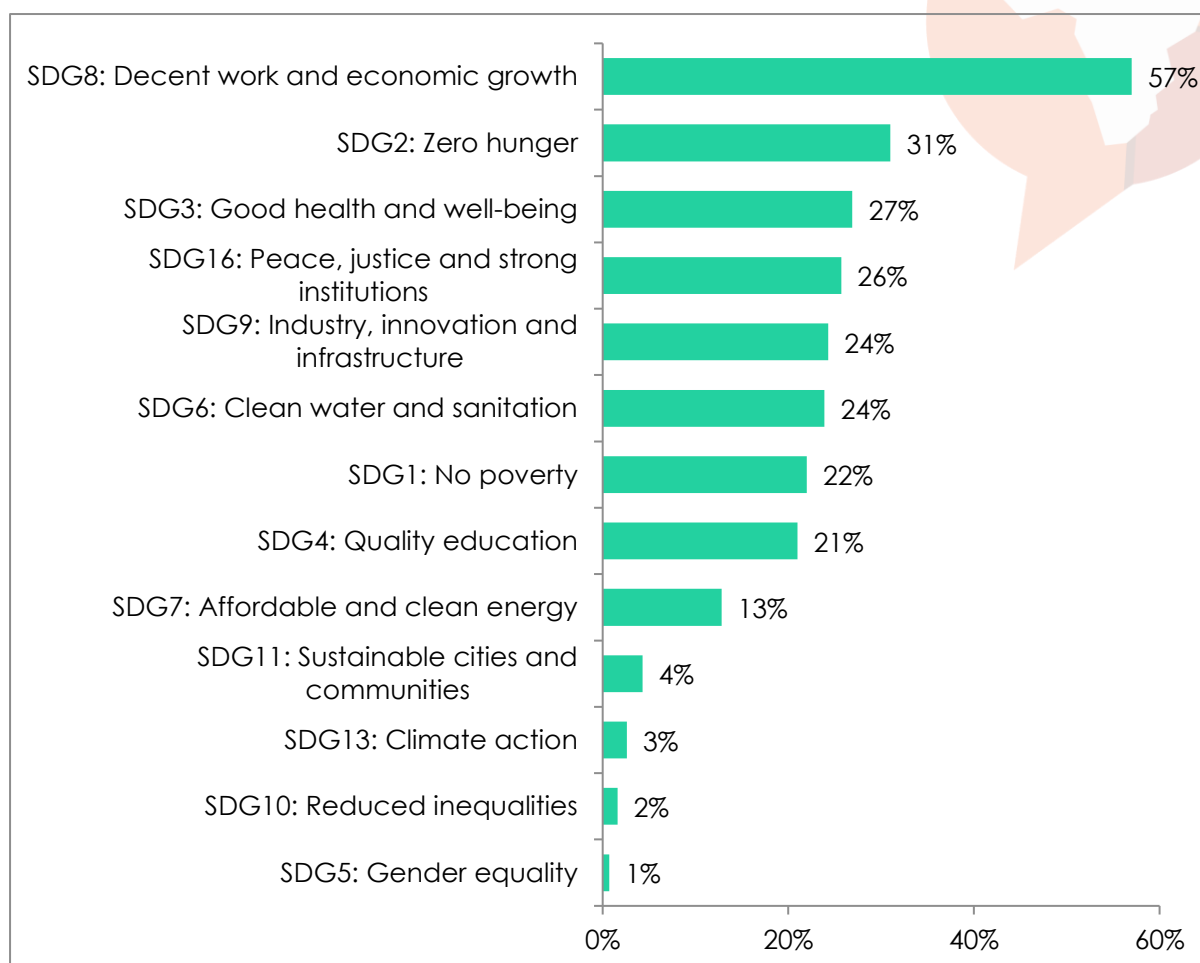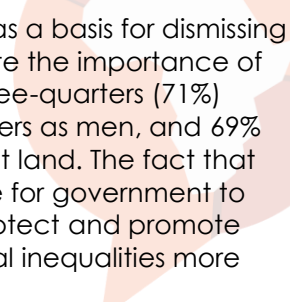
(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs.)

But livelihoods and broad issues of economic management are not the only things on the public mind. SDG3 ("good health and well-being"), cited by 27% of respondents, follows closely on SD2, and the governance issues captured under SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") – including fighting corruption, reducing crime, and protecting political rights – are mentioned by 26%. Infrastructure (SDG9, 24%), clean water and sanitation (SDG6, 24%), and quality education (SDG4, 21%) all score above 20% as well, along with SDG1 ("zero poverty") (22%), a goal that is in many respects closely linked to SDG8. SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy") captures a more modest 13%.

The remaining SDGs, however, barely register. SDG5 ("gender equality"), SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"), SDG11 ("sustainable cities and communities"), and SDG13 ("climate action") are all linked to problems cited by fewer than 5% of respondents. And as noted above, the other four SDGs (12, 14, 15, and 17) do not even have any commonly cited problems that map onto them.

What are the implications of what appears to be the low priority accorded to issues such as reducing inequality, protecting women's rights, and climate action – three topics that are increasingly prominent in the global debate? Do Africans not care about these issues? Does the lack of explicit prioritization suggest that governments and others should ignore them?

Not necessarily. One message for proponents concerns the need for more advocacy aimed at raising the profile of issues such as gender equality, discrimination, and climate change. Public education can help people better understand how these factors interact with other challenges to directly affect their lives, and may boost the popular priority of these concerns.

But it is also essential not to misinterpret the low scores for these SDGs as a basis for dismissing them as unimportant to Africans. Other Afrobarometer findings indicate the importance of these lower-ranking issues to ordinary Africans. For example, nearly three-quarters (71%) agree that women should have the same chance to be political leaders as men, and 69% believe women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. The fact that gender equality does not rise to the level of the "most important" issue for government to address does not mean that Africans are indifferent to the need to protect and promote women's rights, and the same can be said for discrimination and social inequalities more generally.

Similarly, Afrobarometer finds clear popular demand for climate action. Among the 58% of respondents who have heard of climate change, three-quarters (76%) agree that action needs to be taken to stop or mitigate it.

In short, since Afrobarometer respondents – including a significant share who still face challenges in meeting their most basic daily needs – were given the opportunity to cite only three "most important problems," it is hardly surprising that issues linked to basic livelihoods and survival take precedence in their responses. Other issues embedded in the SDGs should not be dismissed but instead warrant further analysis and more public advocacy and education.

3.2. National differences in SDG prioritization

We next look beyond these aggregate results to investigate each country's unique SDG priority profile. To the extent that a country's priorities reflect its own national circumstances and level of development, we should expect to see considerable variation at the national level, and this indeed proves to be the case (Graphic 1).

The emphasis on SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") is widespread; it is the highest priority for 24 of 34 countries, led by Cabo Verde (86%), Mauritius (82%), and Botswana (80%). It is a Top 3 priority in five more countries, but in another five – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Tanzania – other goals take precedence.

SDG2 ("zero hunger"), the second-highest priority overall, rates as the top priority in Malawi (79%), Niger (70%), Mali (64%), and Sierra Leone (58%), and it is the second- or third-highest priority in 12 other countries. SDG3 ("good health and well-being"), the third-highest category overall, is the top priority for Burkinabè (50%), Tanzanians (49%), and Ugandans (46%).

SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions"), which follows as a close fourth in overall precedence, is the top concern for Kenyans (54%) and Malagasy (53%), and another eight countries make this their second-highest priority, including nearly as many Mauritians (51%), Tunisians (48%), and Cameroonians (47%). Clean water and sanitation (SDG6) takes precedence for Guineans (60%), who are also most likely to cite infrastructure (SDG9) (51%), making it their second-highest priority. Water and sanitation is the second-highest priority in Tanzania (47%) and Benin (34%), while Infrastructure is the second-highest priority in another seven countries.

Education (SDG4) is not the highest priority in any country, but it ranks as second in importance in Gabon (50%), Sierra Leone (56%), and Uganda (32%). There is somewhat less focus on SDG1 ("ending poverty"), but 40% in Niger, 36% in Namibia, and 30% in eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) make this the second priority in those countries.

SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy") is not a Top 3 priority in any country, but is nonetheless cited by significant numbers in Guinea and Lesotho (30% each), Benin (27%), and Mozambique (26%). And finally, while SDG11 ("sustainable cities and communities") is rated as one of the lower priorities overall, it is the third-highest priority in South Africa (24%), driven by concerns about housing, and nearly as many Zambians (22%) mention this issue. Gender equality (SDG5), reduced inequality (SDG10), and climate action (SDG13) do not draw significant attention in any country.

Graphic 1: Citizen prioritization of SDGs as critical problems for government (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018

Country	1 No Poverty	2 Zero Hunger	3 Good Health and Well-Being	4 Quality Education	5 Gender Equality	6 Clean Water and Sanitation	7 Affordable and Clean Energy	8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	10 Reduced Inequalities	11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	13 Climate Action	16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Benin	27	24	18	18	1	34	27	56	30	1	2	1	17
Botswana	25	19	22	21	2	20	3	80	14	2	2	2	26
Burkina Faso	18	46	50	25	0	43	5	32	26	1	1	5	17
Cabo Verde	33	19	24	13	1	13	4	86	10	2	7	24	37
Cameroon	11	17	19	16	0	26	20	51	20	4	2	1	47
Côte d'Ivoire	30	29	32	20	0	27	21	50	29	1	6	1	21
eSwatini	30	16	18	20	1	28	7	59	26	2	3	4	20
Gabon	15	6	48	50	0	17	11	62	32	0	14	0	14
Gambia	9	45	34	21	0	32	24	46	28	1	1	1	20
Ghana	14	14	19	33	0	27	16	62	39	2	2	0	22
Guinea	7	44	28	20	0	60	30	31	51	1	3	1	7
Kenya	16	26	27	20	1	26	8	47	19	3	1	1	54
Lesotho	23	16	11	9	2	36	30	60	45	1	1	2	31
Liberia	5	45	24	34	1	6	6	48	46	1	1	0	9
Madagascar	17	46	16	15	0	12	4	45	29	1	1	6	53
Malawi	21	79	23	9	1	23	8	52	7	2	1	1	20
Mali	32	64	34	17	1	28	4	31	9	3	1	2	45
Mauritius	39	7	16	5	1	9	0	82	19	1	10	0	51

Key % of all respondents

Ranking in the country 1st 2nd 3rd

Note: Afrobarometer asked respondents, "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" Responses (up to three per person) are mapped onto U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

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Graphic 1: Citizen prioritization of SDGs (continued)

	1 NO POVERTY	2 ZERO HUNGER	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	13 CLIMATE ACTION	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Morocco	35	4	40	34	1	11	1	71	19	2	5	3	27
Mozambique	26	19	23	12	1	30	26	61	36	2	2	2	22
Namibia	36	36	13	17	2	15	12	77	10	2	14	8	23
Niger	40	70	28	19	1	39	9	28	9	2	1	1	12
Nigeria	30	46	10	15	0	9	21	77	13	1	1	1	32
São Tomé and Príncipe	15	18	31	14	1	25	23	75	32	1	4	0	11
Senegal	20	43	36	22	2	18	17	54	21	1	5	3	19
Sierra Leone	10	58	40	56	0	22	8	44	23	1	3	0	12
South Africa	17	12	13	18	2	21	10	71	15	5	24	2	43
Sudan	23	25	16	21	1	8	5	88	15	3	1	3	25
Tanzania	10	39	49	24	1	47	18	31	32	1	1	2	12
Togo	18	21	39	30	0	25	15	66	18	1	1	1	26
Tunisia	13	4	10	14	1	2	1	77	5	1	1	0	48
Uganda	25	26	46	32	1	31	8	31	24	2	1	6	29
Zambia	26	36	33	7	1	26	23	49	19	0	22	1	16
Zimbabwe	17	32	20	16	1	16	3	74	32	1	3	4	19
Total	22	31	27	21	1	24	13	57	24	2	4	3	26

Key

% of all respondents

Ranking in the country: 1st, 2nd, 3rd

Note: Afrobarometer asked respondents, "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" Responses (up to three per person) are mapped onto U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

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3.3. Individual differences in SDG priorities

Priorities may also vary according to other characteristics of both individuals and countries. We will first explore differentiation across three individual demographic factors – age, gender, and economic status – and then consider the impacts of national levels of development and of democracy. Finally, we will explore differences across the key regional economic communities on the continent.

Disaggregation by age cohorts reveals that the priorities of African youth differ from those of their elders in several important ways (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Older respondents place somewhat higher priority on poverty (SDG1), hunger (SDG2), health (SDG3), and water and sanitation (SDG6), each of which increases by several percentage points among the oldest respondents compared to the youngest. In contrast, youth place substantially greater emphasis on education (SDG4) by 7 percentage points, and they are more focused on jobs and the economy (SDG8) by 12 percentage points. Modest variation is also evident with regard to energy supply (SDG7), but for the other SDGs, variations across age groups are only marginal.

Differences by gender are quite modest (Figure 9). There is no significant difference in the priority men and women place on the top priority, jobs and economic development (SDG8). Men are more interested than women in peace, justice, and strong institutions (+6 points, SDG16), and infrastructure (+3 points, SDG9), while women are more invested than men in ending poverty (+5 points, SDG1). Women are also very modestly more committed to eliminating hunger (+2 points, SDG2) and securing clean water and sanitation (+2 points, SDG7), but gender differences are insignificant with regard to other SDGs.

Figure 7: Increasing priority with age | 34 countries | 2016/2018
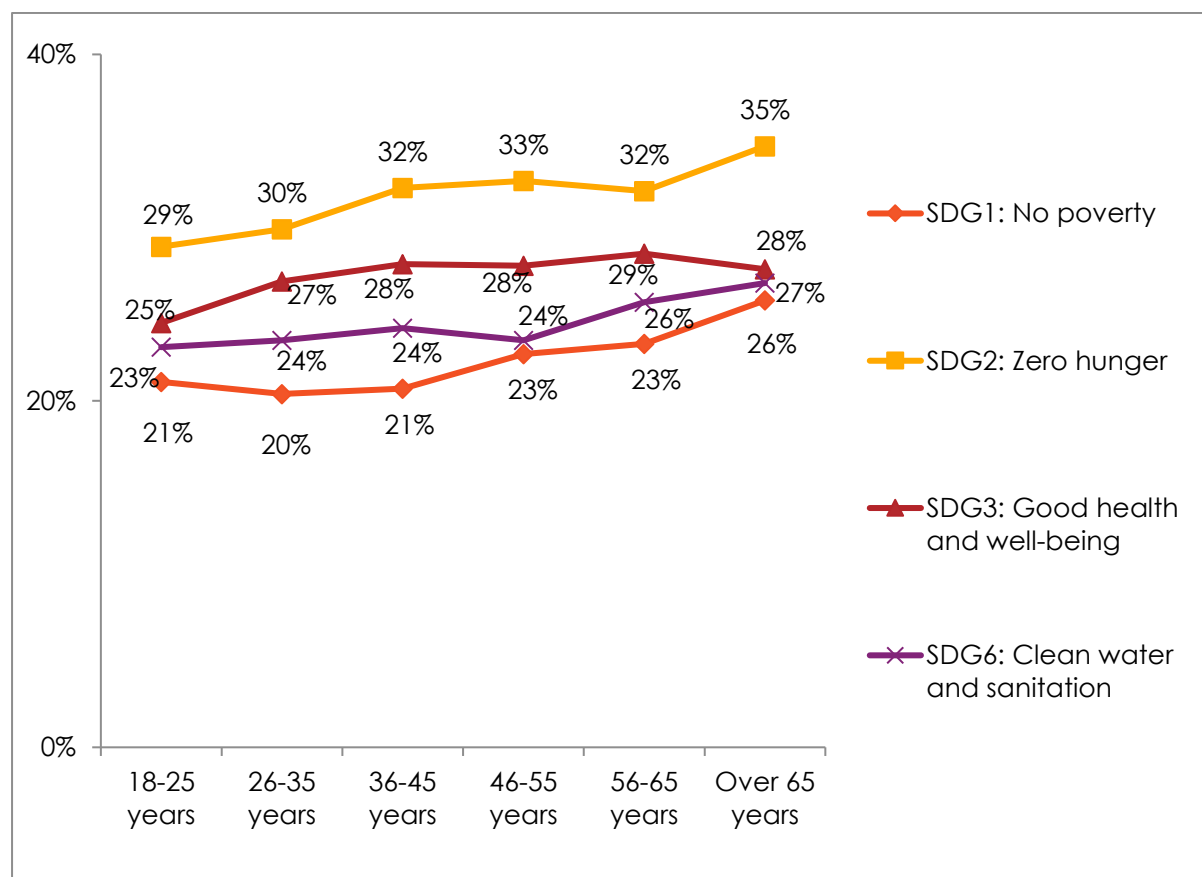
(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by age.)

Figure 8: Decreasing priority with age | 34 countries | 2016/2018
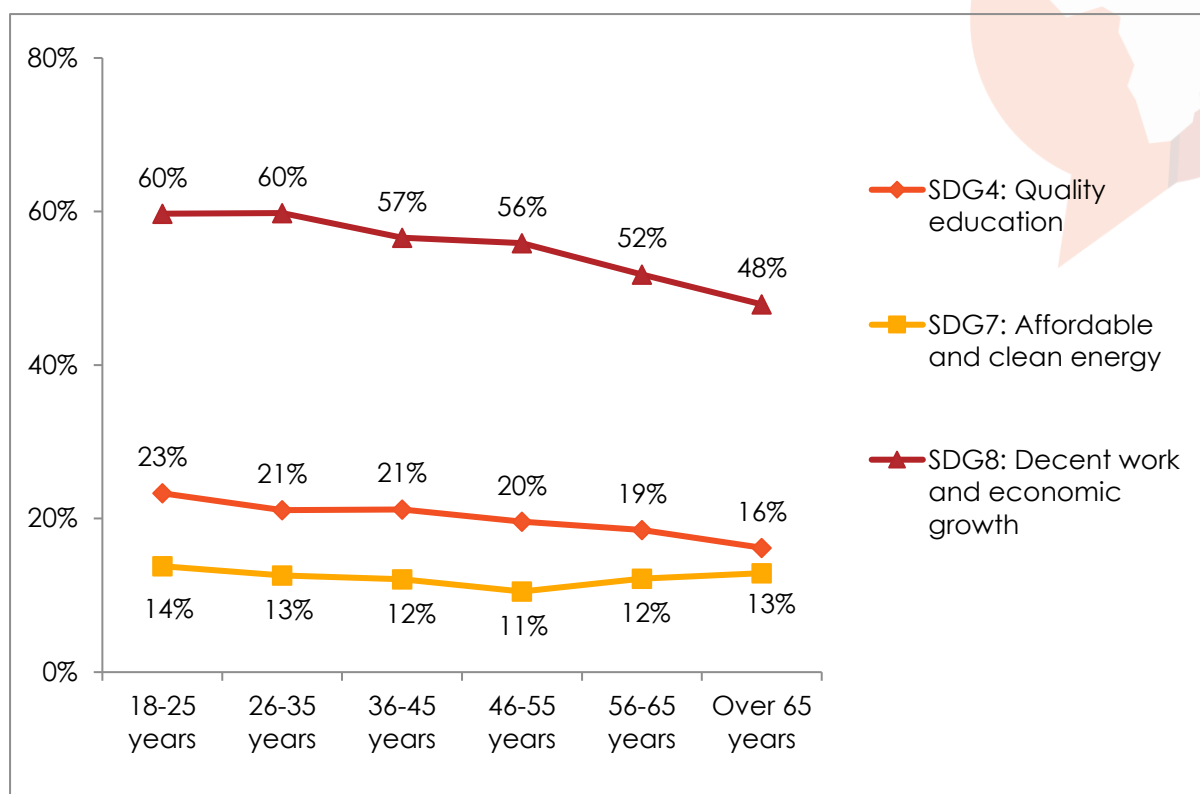
(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by age.)

Figure 9: Gender variance in SDG prioritization | 34 countries | 2016/2018

(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by gender.)

In contrast, differences based on individual economic status are quite pronounced (Figure 10). Survey respondents can be grouped by socioeconomic level using Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI), an experiential measure based on the shortages of basic necessities described above (see Figure 2). An average index or score is calculated for each respondent, ranging from zero for those who never went without any necessary item to 4 for an individual who reports always going without all of them. Respondents are then sorted into four groups: those with no lived poverty (LPI=0, 13% of respondents), those with low lived poverty (LPI=0.2 to 1.0, 37% of respondents), those with moderate lived poverty (LPI=1.2 to 2.0, 32% of respondents), and those with high lived poverty (LPI>2.0, 19% of respondents).

Priorities differ markedly with economic status. Hunger (SDG2), health (SDG3), water and sanitation (SDG6), access to energy (SDG7), and infrastructure (SDG9) all matter more to the poor. Moreover, in all cases except infrastructure, the differences are quite large: The poorest are 22 percentage points more likely to identify water and sanitation as a priority problem than those with no lived poverty (36% vs. 14%) and 19 points more likely to identify hunger as a top concern (37% vs. 18%).

In contrast, the wealthiest respondents are 24 points more likely to cite jobs and economic growth (SDG8, 71% vs. 47%), and they are more concerned about issues of peace, justice. and strong institutions by a 17-point margin (SDG16, 36% vs. 19%). These sharp distinctions highlight the challenges that confront many countries when it comes to balancing the needs, interests, and priorities of their poorest citizens against the diverging interests of wealthier groups.

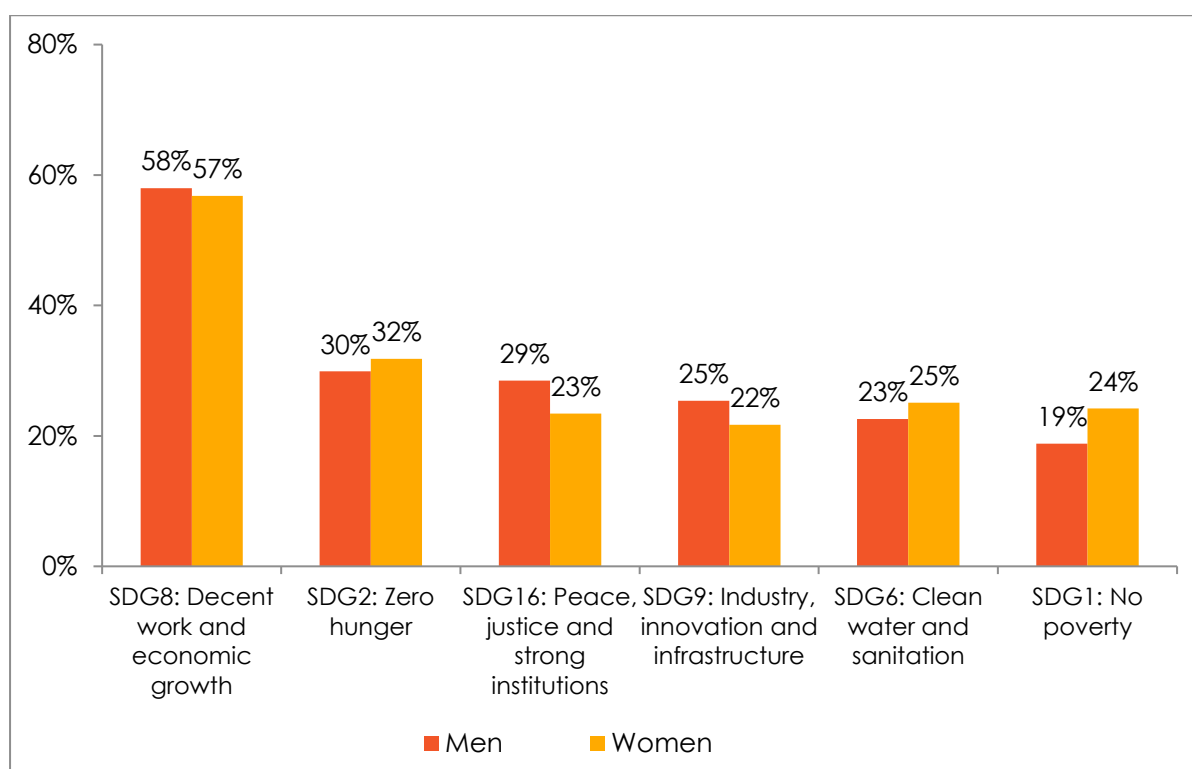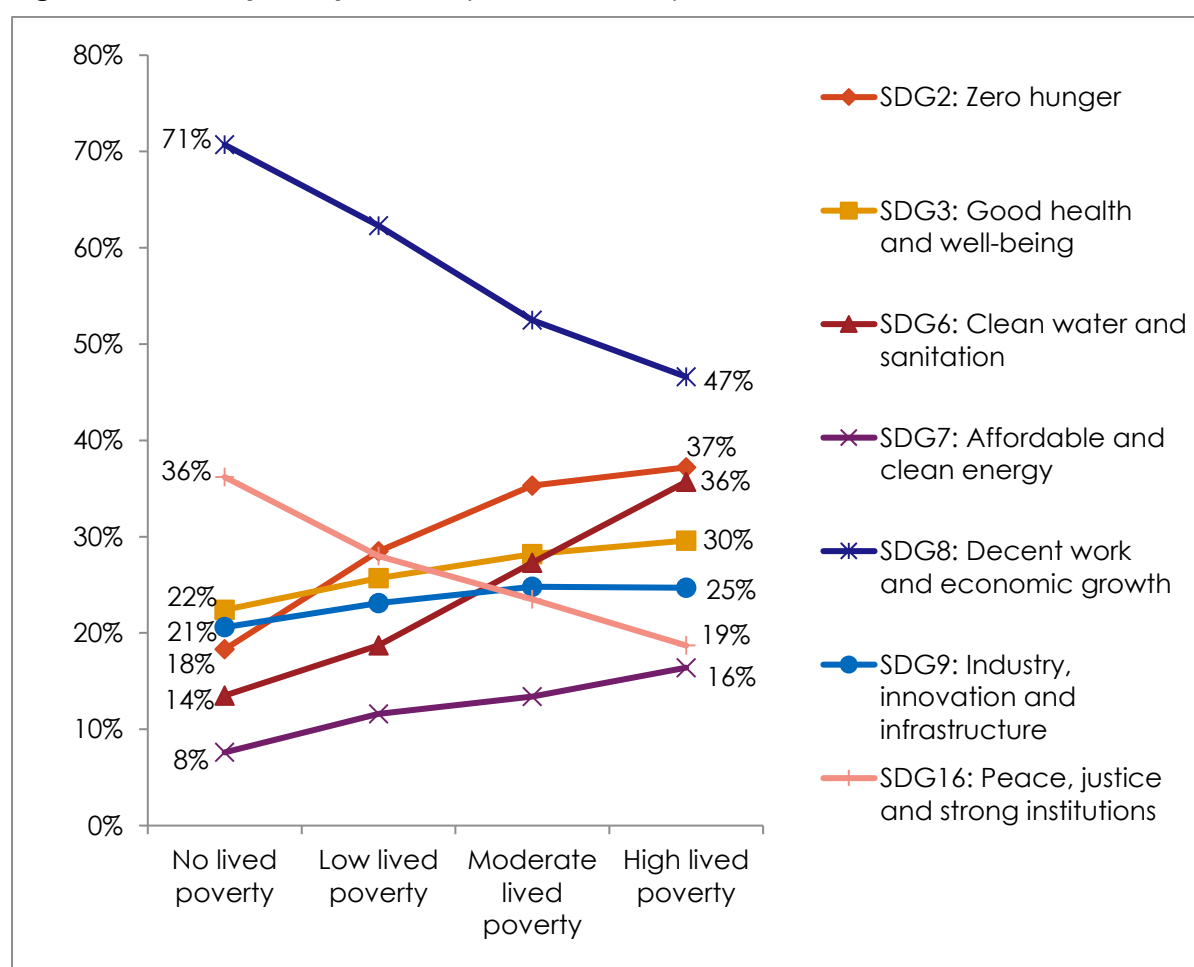**Figure 10: Poverty and priorities** | 34 countries | 2016/2018

(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by Lived Poverty Index score.)

3.4. Other cross-national differences in SDG prioritization

Just as priorities differ across individuals of different economic status, we might expect them to vary across countries at different socioeconomic levels. To test this, we grouped countries according to their ranking on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) (see http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI).[1] The patterns relative to national economic and development status (Figure 11) are quite similar to those observed above based on individual economic status. Countries with a high HDI prioritize SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") at 75%, compared to 50% in countries with low HDI (although SDG8 was still the top priority at all HDI levels). These same high-HDI countries are also more invested in SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") at 34%, compared to 22% for low-HDI countries.

Figure 11: Human Development Index and SDG prioritization | 34 countries | 2016/2018

(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by countries' Human Development Index scores.)

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[1] The HDI classifies our sample into:
- 20 low-HDI countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe
- 10 medium-HDI countries: Cameroon, Cabo Verde, eSwatini, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa, and Zambia
- Four high-HDI countries: Botswana, Gabon, Mauritius, and Tunisia

On the other hand, countries with lower HDI scores are more than four times as likely to prioritize food security (SDG2) (41% vs. just 9% in high-HDI countries), more than three times as likely to cite energy (SDG7) as a priority (14% vs. 4%), and more than twice as likely to highlight water and sanitation (SDG6) (27% vs. 12%). Other differences are more modest, with gaps of 8 points on infrastructure (SDG9) and 5 points on health (SDG3). For other SDGs, countries are relatively consistent in their prioritization regardless of their HDI level.

Overall we can see that while countries at all levels rate jobs and the economy (SDG8) as the top priority, the rankings of remaining priorities are more variable. High-HDI countries rank governance (SDG16, "peace, justice and strong institutions") second, whereas it is sixth among low-HDI countries. Low-HDI countries, on the other hand, rank hunger (SDG2) as a strong second, whereas this issue ranks sixth for high-HDI countries. Health (SDG3) and infrastructure (SDG9) are important goals in countries at all HDI levels.

It is also worth exploring whether the level of democracy and freedom enjoyed in a country shapes popular priorities. We can group countries according to whether they are rated by Freedom House as "free," "partly free," or "not free" (see https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2018-table-country-scores).[2] However, no clear pattern emerges in this case (Figure 12).

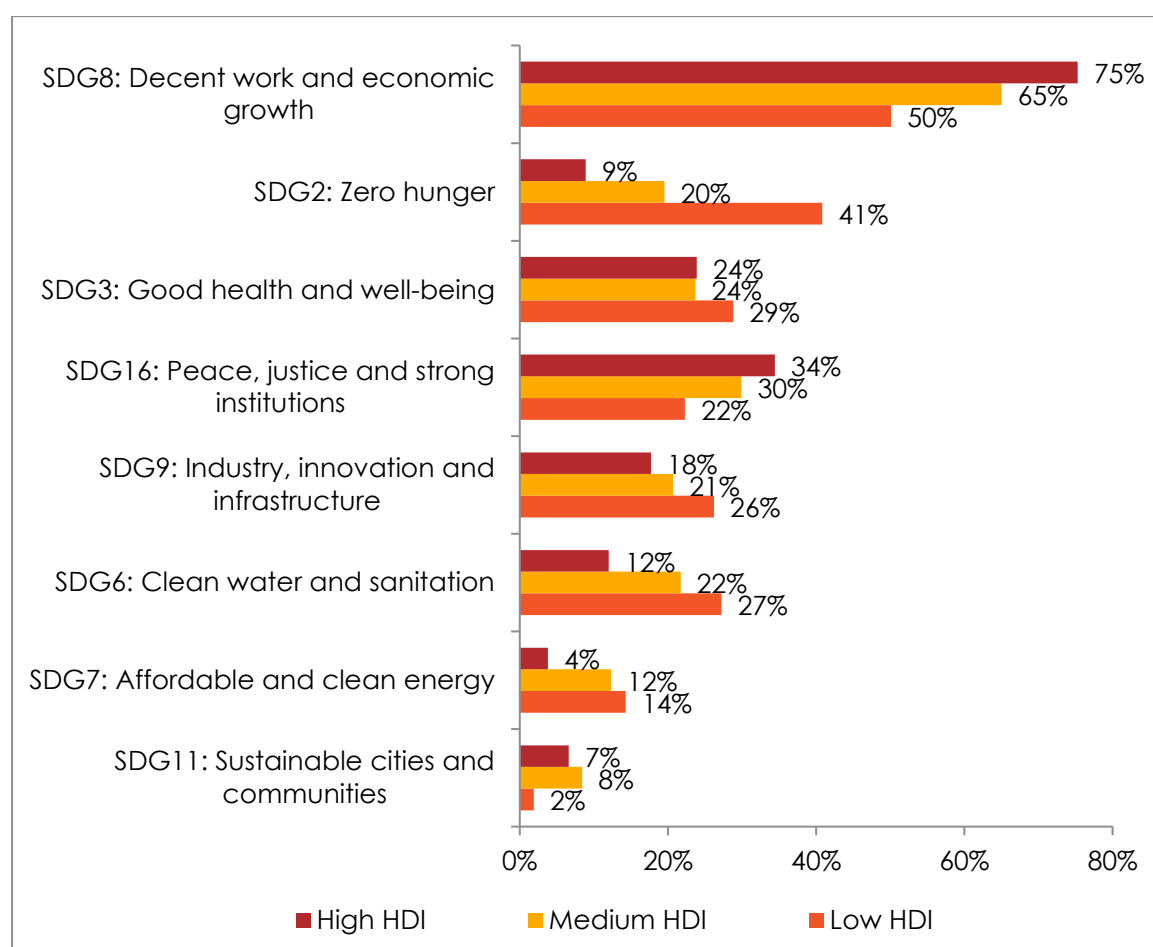**Figure 12: Level of democracy and SDG prioritization** | 34 countries | 2016/2018

(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by countries' Freedom House ratings.)

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[2] Countries are ranked as follows:
- Not free countries: Cameroon, eSwatini, Gabon, Sudan, and Zimbabwe
- Partly free countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia
- Free countries: Benin, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia

The "standout" category, frequently exhibiting either the highest (SDG2, SDG3, SDG9, SDG6) or lowest (SDG8) priority across the three groups, is the "partly free" grouping. These patterns may in fact reflect economic status more than level of democracy. The "partly free" group is both the largest, with 19 countries, and the least developed, with 16 countries at low HDI, and just three at medium HDI level. In contrast, the other two groups both reflect more diverse development levels and thus higher overall levels of development (10 "free" countries include two at low HDI, five at medium, and three at high; five "not free" countries include two low HDI, two medium, and one high). But the "free" group does, notably, place the highest priority on SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions"). Those who already have the most freedom and the most democratic institutions also are most likely to want more of the same.

3.5.   *Regional economic communities and SDG prioritization*

The SDGs are intended to guide not just local or national priorities and interventions, but international ones as well, so how regional organizations' member states prioritize the SDGs will be relevant to their collective planning and decision making. Most Afrobarometer countries belong to one of five regional economic communities: the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), or the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in North Africa.[3] There are key differences in the SDG priorities across these different organizations (Figure 13).

The AMU (including only two countries from our sample, Morocco and Tunisia) is the most economically developed region. For example, as shown in Figure 4, these countries record two of the three highest scores with regard to access to services and infrastructure. As a result, work and the economy (SDG8) register as a significantly higher priority here compared to other regions – by a margin of 2 to 1 when compared to the EAC (74% vs. 37%). In contrast, hunger (SDG2), water and sanitation (SDG6), and energy (SDG7) barely register as concerns in this region. Notably, the AMU is also the region where the interest in peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG16) is highest at 37%, nearly double the level in ECOWAS states (21%).

Priorities are somewhat more consistent across the other four economic integration zones, although there is still important variability. The EAC, for example, is the only region where decent work and economic management (SDG8) are not the highest priority, although even there they fall only slightly behind health (SDG3) (41% vs. 37%). The ECCAS region in Central Africa stands out for the low priority placed on eradicating hunger (just 13%) compared to other sub-Saharan regions, whereas ECOWAS stands out for the unusually high priority on this issue (41%). SADC is notable for the relatively low concern with health care and education relative to other regions. Whether the low priority on these sectors reflects relatively greater government success in the region in addressing these needs or lower priority on these issues due to other pressing concerns and demands is a topic for further study.

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[3] Of the 34 countries, 33 are members of these five free-trade zones (Sudan is the exception). There are several other overlapping groupings that are not included in this analysis to avoid double-counting some states, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), of which Sudan is a member; the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD). The membership of the five organizations included here includes:
- EAC: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania
- ECOWAS: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo
- ECCAS: Cameroon, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe
- SADC: South Africa, Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe
- AMU: Morocco, Tunisia

Figure 13: Regional economic zones and SDG prioritization | 33 countries | 2016/2018
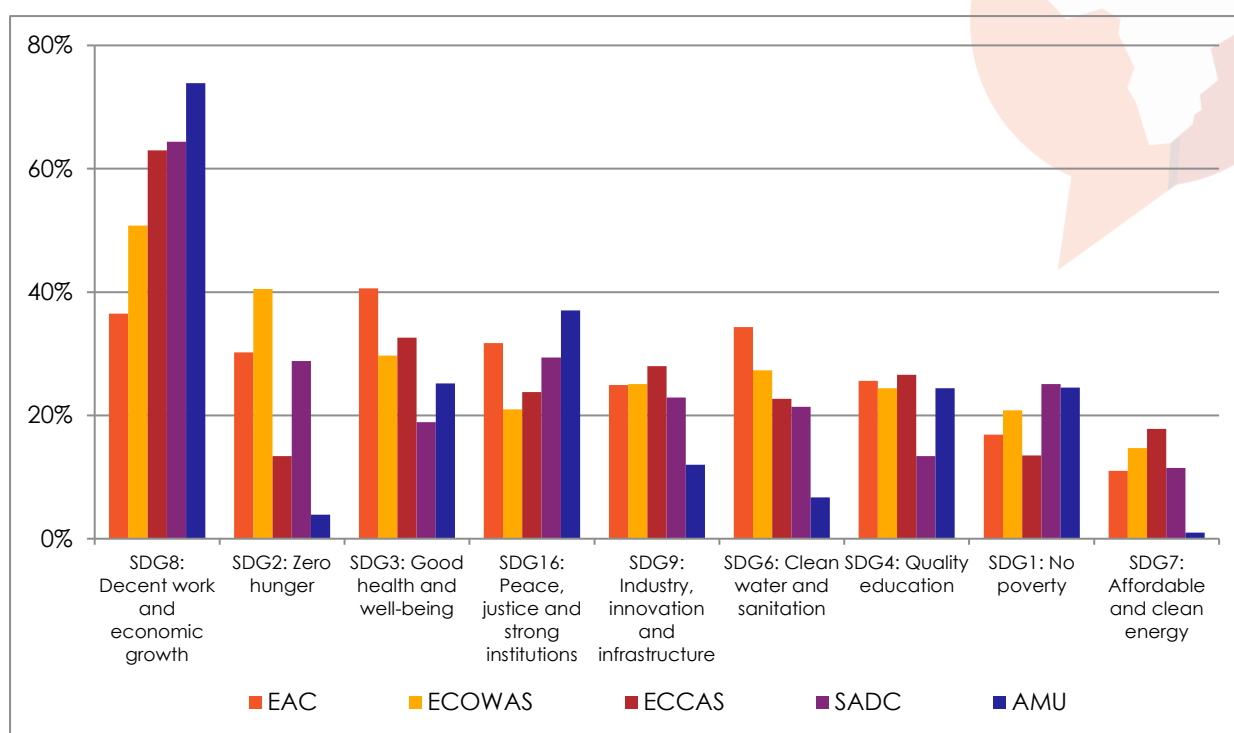
(Figure shows % of responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" mapped onto the SDGs, disaggregated by regional economic zone. Note: Sudan is excluded because it does not participate in any of these regional economic integration organizations.)

4. The supply side: How governments are performing relative to SDG priorities

While the primary goal of this assessment has been to understand what people most want their governments to do, and how states should focus their resources and attention, we will also briefly consider the supply side of the equation. The SDG framework includes a large and ambitious set of targets. Measuring progress against these goals, targets, and more than 200 indicators has become a top priority of the global development community, and will likely remain so until the 2030 endpoint for the SDGs is reached. While debates about data sources, the adequacy of the indicators, and related issues are ongoing, we begin here with a broader brush.

Afrobarometer collects a wealth of detailed indicators on a wide range of topics, including many measures that can be used to track progress on at least 12 of the 17 SDGs (all of those discussed in the previous section except SDG11 ("sustainable cities and communities") and SDG14 ("climate action"). Over the course of the next year, as part of its Pan-Africa Profiles series on Round 7 cross-country comparative results, Afrobarometer will be publishing detailed presentations of its most recent data relating to a number of these specific sectors, including health, education, water and sanitation, electrification, poverty and hunger, safety and security, climate change, and several others. For now we will begin by taking a first macro-level look at sector-level performance, asking how well governments are performing in each SDG sector. We will also look at how the strengths and weaknesses in government performance match up against the popular priorities of citizens identified above.

4.1. Mapping government performance onto SDGs

To examine how effective governments have been so far in tackling the SDG challenges, we turn to a core Afrobarometer question that asks respondents "how well or badly" they rate their current government's performance across a wide range of sectors, from water and sanitation to job creation to promoting gender equality. As with the alignment between most

important problems and individual SDGs discussed in the previous sections, we can also map performance indicators onto the relevant SDGs (Table 2).

Table 2: Mapping government performance to Sustainable Development Goals

Indicator of government performance (Afrobarometer)	UN Sustainable Development Goal
Improve living standards of the poor	SDG1: No poverty
Ensure everyone has enough to eat	SDG2: Zero hunger
Improve basic health services	SDG3: Good health and well-being
Address educational needs	SDG4: Quality education
Promote opportunities and equality for women	SDG5: Gender equality
Provide water and sanitation services	SDG6: Clean water and sanitation
Provide reliable supply of electricity	SDG7: Affordable and clean energy
Manage the economy	SDG8: Decent work and economic growth
Create jobs	
Maintain roads and bridges	SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
Narrow income gaps between rich and poor	SDG10: Reduced inequalities
Protect rights and promote opportunities for disabled people	
Reduce crime	SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
Fight corruption	

Again there is a clear one-to-one correspondence between some AB performance indicators and particular SDGs. For example, performance relative to SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation") can be measured by responses to the question, "*How well or badly … is the current government handling providing water and sanitation services?*" Similarly direct correspondence between AB performance indicators and specific SDGs can be mapped with respect to SDG1, where performance relative to the "no poverty" goal is captured by the government's handling of "improving the living standards of the poor," as well as to SDGs 2, 3, 4, and 5.

In other cases, the available Afrobarometer indicator may be somewhat more limited in scope, perhaps capturing only one part of the full purview of a given SDG. But even these more limited measures of performance can give us some insight into how governments are performing in these priority sectors. Examples include: SDG7, where the goal of "affordable and clean energy" can be significantly, though perhaps not entirely, captured by Afrobarometer's question about performance in "providing a reliable supply of electricity," and SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure), for which performance in "maintaining roads and bridges" can provide an indicative, if incomplete, indicator of government effectiveness.

Finally, for several very broad SDGs, more than one performance indicator may be directly relevant. One example is SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"), which can be directly linked to performance both in "managing the economy" and in "creating jobs." Similarly, the aims embedded in SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") are directly connected to government performance both in "reducing crime" to increase personal security and in "fighting corruption in government" to build stronger, more effective, and more rule-bound institutions. Likewise, progress toward achieving SDG10 ("reduced

inequalities") can be measured by performance in both "narrowing income gaps between rich and poor" and "protecting rights and promoting opportunities for disabled people." In these cases, rather than combining the two performance indicators into a single average, we will report each separately, on the assumption that each captures a quite distinct but important aspect of what governments need to do to achieve the SDGs.

4.2.   Aggregate performance on SDGs

Performance differs markedly across the various sectors reflected in the SDGs (Figure 14). At the high end, nearly two-thirds (64%) give their governments positive marks for promoting opportunities and equality for women (SDG5). But only two other sectors – education (SDG4) and health (SDG3) – get positive marks from even slim majorities (54% and 52%, respectively). In contrast, fewer than one-quarter offer positive ratings for government performance at creating jobs (24%) (SDG8) or narrowing gaps between rich and poor (20%) (SDG10), while three-quarters (74%) rate government efforts as "fairly bad" or "very bad" when it comes to addressing income inequality.

Note that in some of the sectors linked to two performance indicators, performance on one can differ radically from the other. For SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"), almost half (49%) say their governments are doing well at the specific task of protecting rights and promoting opportunities for the disabled, but only one in five (20%) say governments are successfully tackling income disparities. Similarly, half (49%) say their governments are successful in reducing crime (SDG16), but only one-third (34%) say they are effective in fighting corruption (also SDG16). On the other hand, both indicators for SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") are quite poor: 36% positive for managing the economy and 24% positive for creating jobs. The varied, evidently slow and inadequate performance reflected in this array of performance indicators is consistent with what the UN itself has reported regarding the uneven and sometimes slow progress in pursuit of the SDG goals (see for example https://www.devex.com/news/sdgs-show-slow-progress-not-on-track-to-reach-2030-targets-un-reports-92971).

4.3.   Priority vs. performance

Performance weaknesses come into even sharper focus when we compare performance ratings to priority (Figure 15), as frequent mismatches become readily apparent. The highest-performance sector – gender equality (SDG5) – is also one of the lowest in terms of popular priorities. A similar pattern holds with regard to rights and opportunities for the disabled (SDG10): It is a relatively high-performing but low-priority sector. On the one hand, the low priority placed on the issue could reflect a public perception that performance is already so good in this sector that it does not need to be ranked as a widespread public concern – the problem is already, in effect, being adequately addressed. On the other, people may give higher performance ratings in low-priority sectors precisely because they are paying less attention to these areas, and thus grading government efforts less stringently. In a context where many respondents face dire needs to ensure their livelihoods, governments may be "getting a pass" on things such as disability issues that do not directly affect everyone, and gender equality concerns that may not rise to the highest level of priority in the face of hunger, joblessness, and related concerns.

But the even more troubling element of these findings is the fact that government performance is sometimes lowest where priority is highest. As discussed above, the highest-priority SDG is SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"), but government performance is rated poorly on both of the linked indicators: Significant majorities rate the government poorly on both managing the economy (58%, not shown) and creating jobs (73%, not shown). It is not surprising that people will hold their governments to the highest standards on the issues that matter most to them, but it is particularly concerning that even with the extra incentives for action associated with the 2030 Agenda, governments do not seem to be achieving the successes that will be required in order to reach the SDG targets.

Figure 14: Government performance in SDG sectors | 34 countries | 2016/2018

Afrobarometer indicators on government performance

Indicator	%
For SDG5 ("gender equality"): Promoting opportunities and equality for women	64%
For SDG4 ("quality education"): Addressing educational needs	54%
For SDG3 ("good health and well-being"): Improving basic health services	52%
For SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions"): Reducing crime	49%
For SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"): Protecting rights and promoting opportunities for disabled people	49%
For SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure"): Maintaining roads and bridges	46%
For SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy"): Providing a reliable supply of electricity	45%
For SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation"): Providing water and sanitation services	44%
For SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"): Managing the economy	36%
For SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions"): Fighting corruption in government	34%
For SDG2 ("zero hunger"): Ensuring everyone has enough to eat	31%
For SDG1 ("no poverty"): Improving the living standards of the poor	30%
For SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"): Creating jobs	24%
For SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"): Narrowing gaps between rich and poor	20%

(Figure shows % of "fairly well" or "very well" responses to Afrobarometer questions about government performance mapped onto the SDGs.)
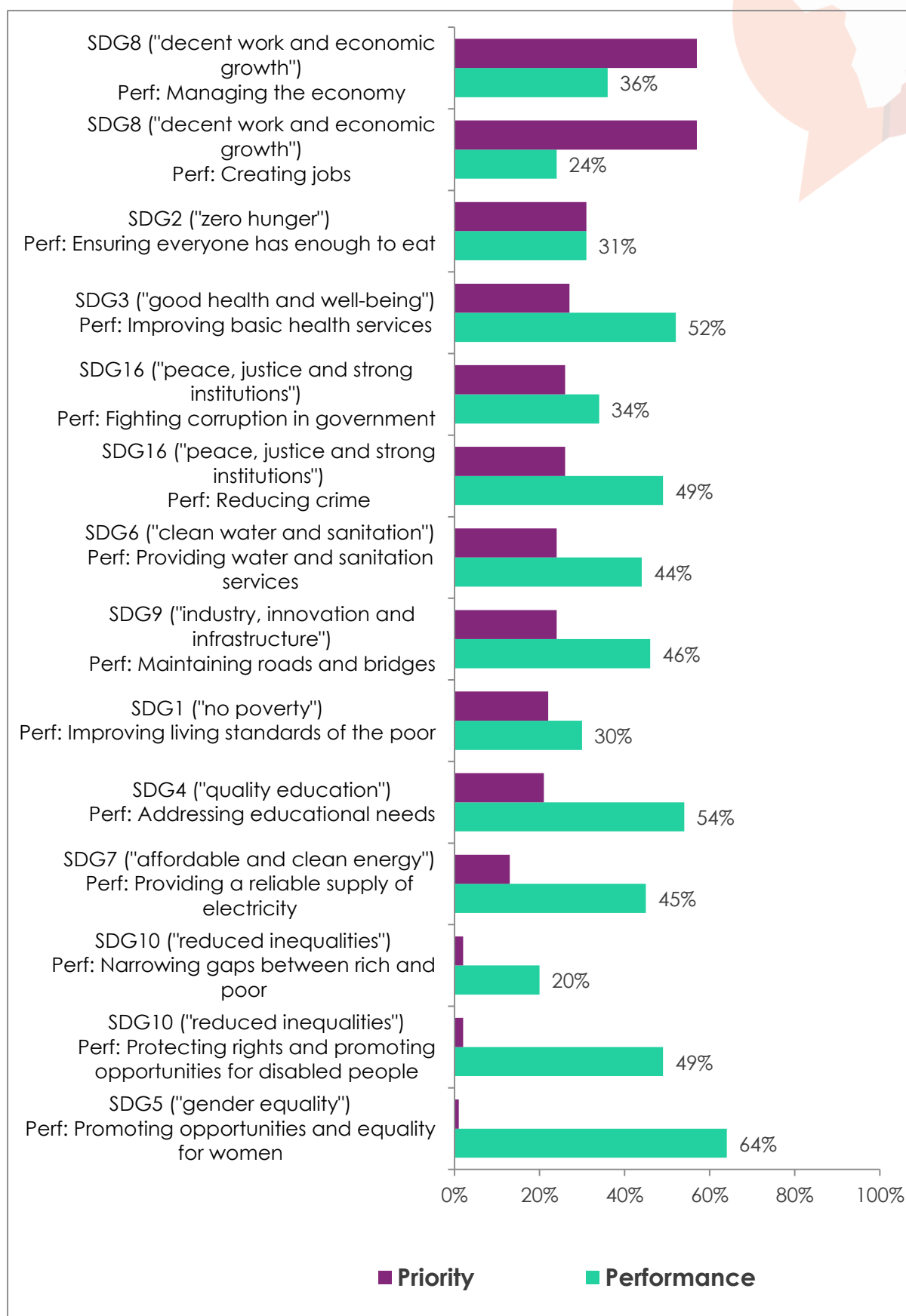
(Figure shows % of responses to Afrobarometer questions about most important problems ("Priority") and government performance ("Performance," "fairly well" or "very well"), mapped onto the SDGs.)

4.4. Country-level performance on SDGs

Graphic 2 indicates sectoral/SDG performance by country, with the two top-performing sectors highlighted in blue and the two worst-performing sectors highlighted in orange. A few key points stand out.

First, some strong and consistent patterns across many countries are evident. For example, gender equality (SDG5) is one of the highest-performance categories for almost all countries, and even in those where it is not among the top two, it generally receives a high (>50%) score. Nigeria (48%), Sudan (48%), South Africa (47%), Gabon (46%), and Guinea (41%) are the only countries where less than a majority give the government a positive rating (and in all but Nigeria, that still makes it a top-performing sector).

Education (SDG4) is among the top two performance sectors in 14 of 34 countries. In this case, however, while overall performance is relatively good, there are some markedly low-performing countries as well, especially in North Africa, where Morocco (18%), Tunisia (23%), and Sudan (28%) all give their governments abysmal ratings, along with Gabon (15%).

Performance in many of the other sectors is even more mixed. While respondents in eight countries give their governments among their highest marks on the SDG16 indicator of reducing crime, led by Tanzania (75%), only 15% feel this way in Gabon, along with fewer than one-quarter in Madagascar and South Africa (both 23%). Similarly, the eSwatini government gets some of its top marks for ensuring basic health services (SDG3) at (83%), in contrast to Morocco at just 18% (although this was not even one of the two lowest scores in Morocco). Performance in providing a reliable electricity supply (SDG7) is led by Mauritius (81%), and it is a top area of performance for a number of other countries (eight countries have positive marks at 60% or above), but three countries rate their governments below 20%, and at just 13% positive, this rates as one of the worst categories for Malawi. Infrastructure (SDG9) is a high-performance category for Côte d'Ivoire (68%), Senegal (67%), and several others, but at just 13% positive, the Zimbabwe government appears to be failing to meet the needs in this sector, and Gabon, Guinea, and Madagascar also score below 20%.

At the other end of the spectrum are several sectors in which nearly all countries perform poorly. Narrowing income gaps between the rich and the poor (SDG10) ranks as one of the worst areas of government performance in 31 of 34 countries; in only four countries (Botswana, the Gambia, Ghana, and Mozambique) do even one-third say their government is effective on this issue. Although the previous section identified reducing inequalities (SDG10) as one of the lowest-priority SDGs, this has nonetheless been a topic of mounting global concern over the past decade, and Africans clearly feel that their governments are failing to adequately address this issue.

Creating jobs (SDG8), one of the highest-priority SDG objectives among our respondents, also garners the lowest performance marks in 19 countries, including 10% in Zimbabwe and 9% in Guinea. And in no country does even a plurality give the government positive marks on this high-priority issue. The only near-exception is Ghana, where people are evenly divided as to whether the government is performing well (45%) or badly (45%).

Graphic 2: Government performance relative to SDG sectors (% "fairly well" or "very well") | 34 countries | 2016/2018

Government performance indicator	1 Living standards of the poor	2 Ensure enough to eat	3 Ensure basic health services	4 Address education needs	5 Equal rights & opportunities for women	6 Water & sanitation services	7 Reliable electricity supply	8 Manage the economy	9 Create jobs	10 Maintain roads and bridges	11 Narrow income gaps	12 Rights/ opportunities for disabled	13 Fight corruption	14 Reduce crime
Benin	22	35	50	56	65	37	35	34	23	37	21	44	44	48
Botswana	73	57	72	66	84	63	72	59	30	57	40	81	52	64
Burkina Faso	37	38	67	62	73	41	30	47	34	29	29	61	51	54
Cabo Verde	22	23	48	54	66	45	57	34	14	61	17	51	26	37
Cameroon	23	33	56	61	65	33	28	31	28	30	14	54	28	48
Côte d'Ivoire	28	35	58	64	75	37	51	49	34	68	18	53	32	47
eSwatini	47	44	83	81	72	65	54	47	42	56	29	73	54	73
Gabon	8	14	28	15	46	16	25	9	14	17	6	32	12	15
Gambia	47	46	52	57	66	55	63	59	42	56	38	51	55	54
Ghana	53	53	64	80	68	60	71	66	45	46	37	57	60	60
Guinea	16	18	41	39	41	18	18	24	9	18	11	18	17	41
Kenya	34	24	68	75	66	48	69	43	28	62	21	61	25	55
Lesotho	46	22	60	54	57	38	37	47	26	37	27	48	60	68
Liberia	23	26	49	59	70	52	41	34	34	52	28	53	40	53
Madagascar	11	12	44	53	68	35	14	17	11	19	6	34	10	23
Malawi	22	19	41	42	57	40	13	14	17	51	13	48	19	35
Mali	25	33	62	49	61	49	28	32	25	48	20	47	26	36
Mauritius	34	44	65	64	65	62	81	35	28	57	22	60	32	28

Key

% of all respondents

Ranking in the country — ● Two best | ● Two worst

Note: Afrobarometer asked respondents, "How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?" Responses of "fairly well" and "very well" are mapped onto U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG icons: 1 NO POVERTY | 2 ZERO HUNGER | 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | 4 QUALITY EDUCATION | 5 GENDER EQUALITY | 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES | 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

AFROBAROMETER — LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Graphic 2: Government performance (continued)

Government performance indicator	Living standards of the poor	Ensure enough to eat	Ensure basic health services	Address education needs	Equal rights & opportunities for women	Water & sanitation services	Reliable electricity supply	Manage the economy	Create jobs	Maintain roads and bridges	Narrow income gaps	Rights/ opportunities for disabled	Fight corruption	Reduce crime
Morocco	14	45	18	18	55	45	61	26	11	38	10	26	14	46
Mozambique	36	42	56	59	58	44	49	40	27	51	36	52	37	50
Namibia	40	49	67	67	75	57	51	35	24	67	24	74	33	50
Niger	23	21	46	38	51	39	28	32	20	46	18	33	30	69
Nigeria	25	19	51	50	48	40	37	33	25	53	16	37	59	53
São Tomé and Príncipe	27	33	59	72	71	59	53	41	18	53	15	42	31	38
Senegal	40	37	54	50	71	58	61	49	20	67	28	55	32	54
Sierra Leone	27	25	53	74	59	45	44	43	29	54	21	43	66	62
South Africa	31	31	42	49	47	44	43	33	22	43	20	47	25	23
Sudan	9	24	28	28	48	27	38	9	12	36	9	28	15	46
Tanzania	39	23	58	73	73	48	48	59	31	56	31	58	71	75
Togo	19	33	36	37	64	37	43	18	16	54	12	42	21	51
Tunisia	16	40	32	23	62	40	60	19	16	37	9	35	25	32
Uganda	32	19	47	53	86	46	44	37	24	60	15	64	19	70
Zambia	28	22	58	60	70	38	42	35	21	48	17	47	24	53
Zimbabwe	27	33	44	54	71	33	39	31	10	13	18	44	22	54
Total	30	31	52	54	64	44	45	36	24	46	20	49	34	49

SDG icons: 1 NO POVERTY · 2 ZERO HUNGER · 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING · 4 QUALITY EDUCATION · 5 GENDER EQUALITY · 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION · 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY · 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH · 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE · 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES · 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Key % of all respondents

Ranking in the country: ● Two best ● Two worst

Note: Afrobarometer asked respondents, "How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?" Responses of "fairly well" and "very well" are mapped onto U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

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4.5. Priority vs. performance at the country level

Finally, we take a partial look at priority vs. performance at the country level for three sample countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana.

Ghana ranks overall as one of the highest-performing countries, with an average positive performance rating across all 14 indicators of 58%, so there are some reasonably high performance scores across many (low- and high-priority) sectors (Figure 16). Even so, Ghana reflects a mixed record in a comparison of priorities to performance.
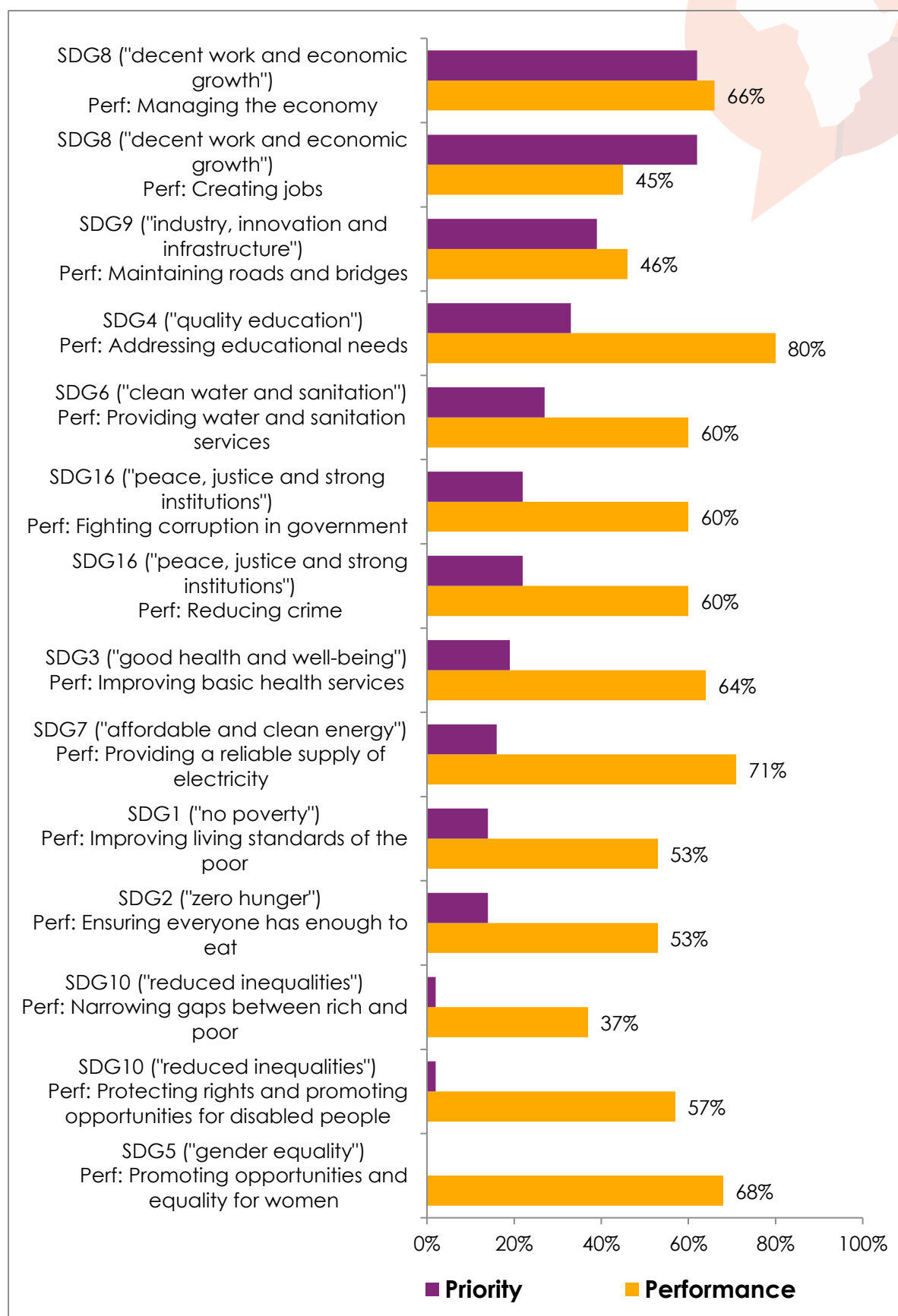
The highest-performance sector is education (SDG4), which ranks fourth overall in priority, followed by electricity supply (SDG7), which ranks seventh in priority. But with respect to the highest-priority SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"), performance is quite mixed. The performance score for managing the economy (66%) is one of the top scores in Ghana and offers a solid positive review. In contrast, just 45% give positive marks for "creating jobs," the second-lowest score across all sectors. Meanwhile the third-lowest performance score of 46% goes to the next-highest priority, SDG9 ("maintaining roads and bridges"). The lowest performance score, as in many countries, is for SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"): Just 37% say the government has performed well in narrowing income gaps.

Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 17) ranks as a mid-level performance country, with an average positive score of 46%. But perhaps even more importantly, performance is noticeably more out of sync with priorities here. The highest performance score, 75%, is linked to the lowest-priority sector, SDG5 ("gender equality"). In contrast, the highest-priority sector, SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth"), gets positive marks of just 49% for managing the economy and 34% for creating jobs. The only sector where high priority is matched by relatively strong performance (58%) is the second-highest priority, SDG3 ("good health and well-being"). As in Ghana, narrowing income gaps is the poorest-performing sector, with a mere 18% rating government efforts as effective.

Burkina Faso (Figure 18), finally, is also a mid-level performance country (average positive score of 47%) but stands out in part because it has a distinct priority profile, with SDG3 ("good health and well-being") ranked first and SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") ranked only fourth. But Burkina Faso also stands out because it achieves its second-highest performance score (67%) in its highest-priority sector. Burkinabè both rate health care as their most important concern and feel that this is a sector in which the government excels. However, the record is more mixed with regard to the priorities that follow. None of the next four priorities rates a performance score above 50%. As in a number of other countries, the highest performance score is linked to gender equality (73%) and the lowest is for narrowing income gaps (29%).
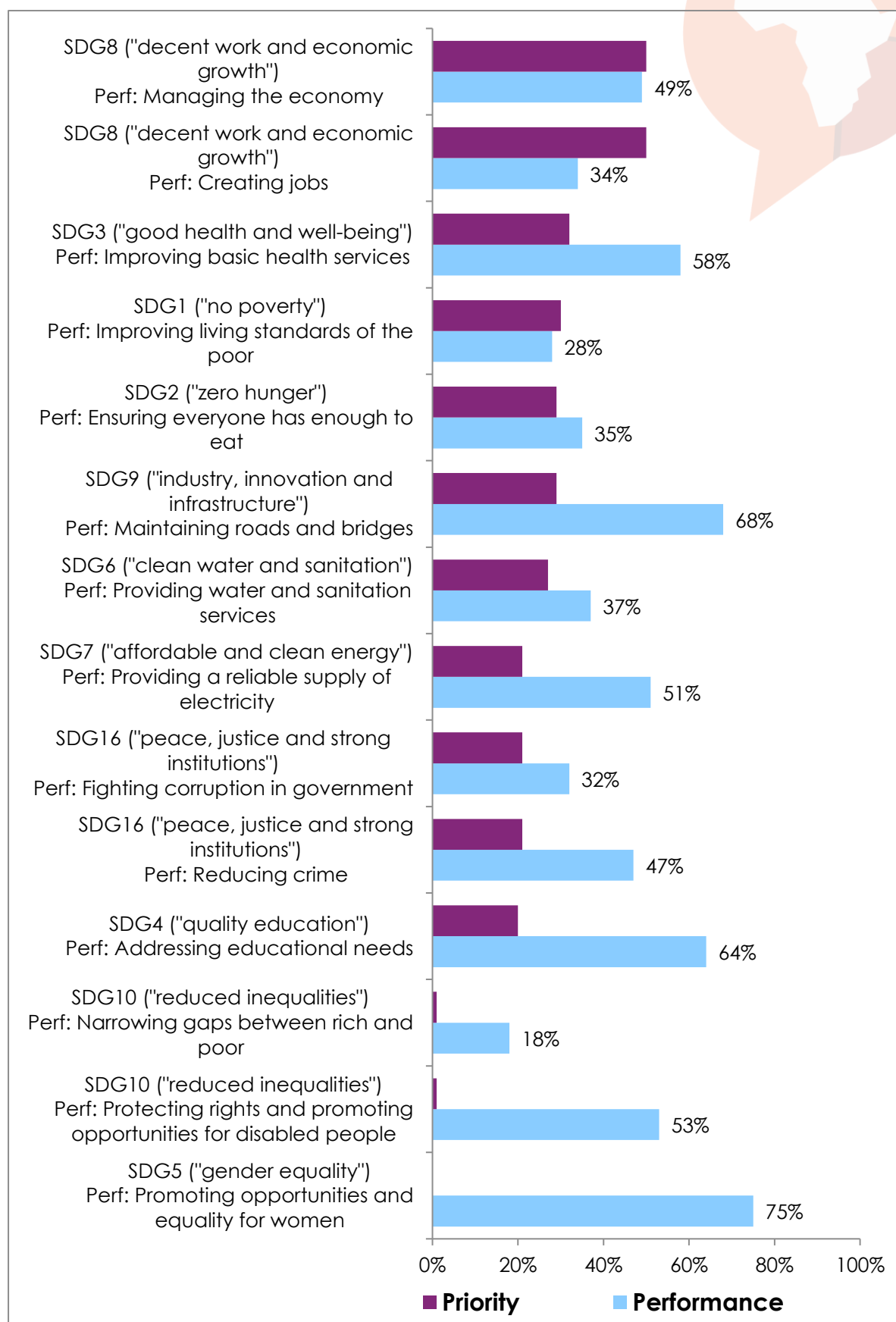
Unfortunately we do not have sufficient space here to report similar details across all of the countries in our sample, but readers are invited to make their own comparisons of the country-level priorities revealed in Graphic 1 against the performance scores reported in Graphic 2 for countries of particular interest.

Figure 16: SDG priority vs. government performance | Ghana | 2017

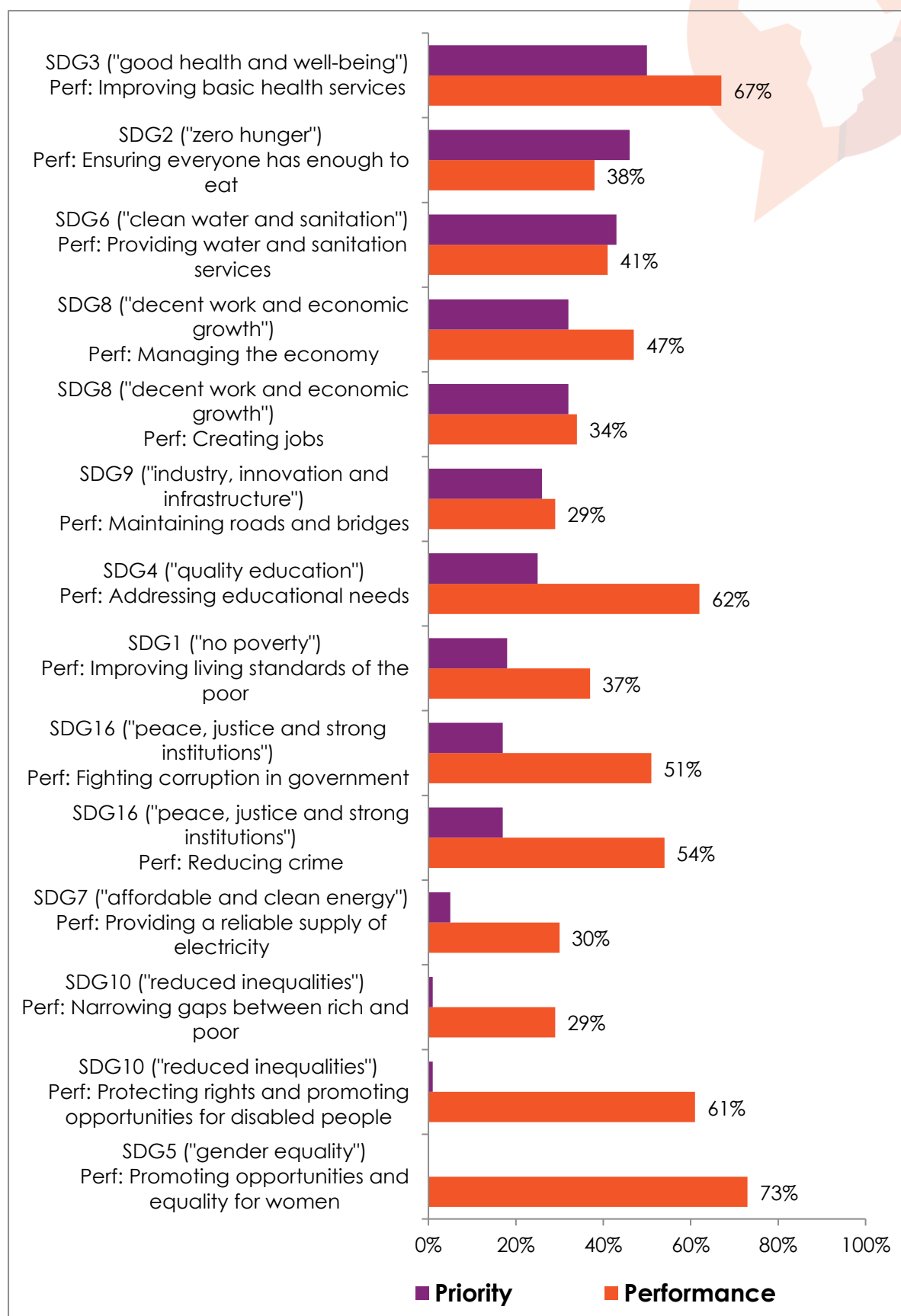|	Priority	Performance
SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") Perf: Managing the economy		66%
SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") Perf: Creating jobs		45%
SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure") Perf: Maintaining roads and bridges		46%
SDG4 ("quality education") Perf: Addressing educational needs		80%
SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation") Perf: Providing water and sanitation services		60%
SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") Perf: Fighting corruption in government		60%
SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") Perf: Reducing crime		60%
SDG3 ("good health and well-being") Perf: Improving basic health services		64%
SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy") Perf: Providing a reliable supply of electricity		71%
SDG1 ("no poverty") Perf: Improving living standards of the poor		53%
SDG2 ("zero hunger") Perf: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat		53%
SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") Perf: Narrowing gaps between rich and poor		37%
SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") Perf: Protecting rights and promoting opportunities for disabled people		57%
SDG5 ("gender equality") Perf: Promoting opportunities and equality for women		68%

■ **Priority**   ■ **Performance**

(Figure shows % of responses to Afrobarometer questions about most important problems ("Priority") and government performance ("Performance," "fairly well" or "very well"), mapped onto the SDGs.)

Figure 17: SDG priority vs. government performance | Côte d'Ivoire | 2017

	Priority	Performance
SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") Perf: Managing the economy		49%
SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth") Perf: Creating jobs		34%
SDG3 ("good health and well-being") Perf: Improving basic health services		58%
SDG1 ("no poverty") Perf: Improving living standards of the poor		28%
SDG2 ("zero hunger") Perf: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat		35%
SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure") Perf: Maintaining roads and bridges		68%
SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation") Perf: Providing water and sanitation services		37%
SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy") Perf: Providing a reliable supply of electricity		51%
SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") Perf: Fighting corruption in government		32%
SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions") Perf: Reducing crime		47%
SDG4 ("quality education") Perf: Addressing educational needs		64%
SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") Perf: Narrowing gaps between rich and poor		18%
SDG10 ("reduced inequalities") Perf: Protecting rights and promoting opportunities for disabled people		53%
SDG5 ("gender equality") Perf: Promoting opportunities and equality for women		75%

(Figure shows % of responses to Afrobarometer questions about most important problems ("Priority") and government performance ("Performance," "fairly well" or "very well"), mapped onto the SDGs.)

Figure 18: SDG priority vs. government performance | Burkina Faso | 2017

SDG3 ("good health and well-being")
Perf: Improving basic health services — 67%

SDG2 ("zero hunger")
Perf: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat — 38%

SDG6 ("clean water and sanitation")
Perf: Providing water and sanitation services — 41%

SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth")
Perf: Managing the economy — 47%

SDG8 ("decent work and economic growth")
Perf: Creating jobs — 34%

SDG9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure")
Perf: Maintaining roads and bridges — 29%

SDG4 ("quality education")
Perf: Addressing educational needs — 62%

SDG1 ("no poverty")
Perf: Improving living standards of the poor — 37%

SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions")
Perf: Fighting corruption in government — 51%

SDG16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions")
Perf: Reducing crime — 54%

SDG7 ("affordable and clean energy")
Perf: Providing a reliable supply of electricity — 30%

SDG10 ("reduced inequalities")
Perf: Narrowing gaps between rich and poor — 29%

SDG10 ("reduced inequalities")
Perf: Protecting rights and promoting opportunities for disabled people — 61%

SDG5 ("gender equality")
Perf: Promoting opportunities and equality for women — 73%

■ **Priority**   ■ **Performance**

(Figure shows % of responses to Afrobarometer questions about most important problems ("Priority") and government performance ("Performance," "fairly well" or "very well"), mapped onto the SDGs.)

5. Conclusions

New data gathered in 2016-2018 across 34 countries during Round 7 of Afrobarometer can help both in guiding implementation of the SDG framework and in assessing progress toward achieving its ambitious goals. To summarize the key point: Good jobs and economic growth dominate the popular agenda among most economic groups and in most countries, but performance, especially in creating jobs, lags. This is an area where governments struggle most to find effective solutions.

Of course, the full picture is considerably more complex. Popular priorities vary across countries and regions, income levels (individual and national), and other factors. Alongside jobs and economic growth, citizens also place high priority on several other SDGs, including those focused on food security (SDG2), health (SDG3), peace and justice (SDG16), infrastructure (SDG9), and water supply (SDG6). Poorer citizens, and poorer countries, tend to place even greater emphasis on ending hunger, as well as on the availability of clean water and electricity.

But even some of what appear, from this analysis, to be the "lesser SDGs" in terms of priority should not be overlooked. While gender equality (SDG5), reduced inequality (SDG10), and the environmental-action SDGs (13, 14, and 15) might not beat out jobs and food for "most important" ranking, other Afrobarometer evidence suggests strong commitment to women's rights, widespread concern about increasing income inequalities, and growing support for climate action. In any case, citizens – and their governments – are capable of valuing and acting upon more than three interconnected goals. The point, in short, is not to identify goals that matter and goals that do not. Like the global community, most Africans would likely agree that all of the SDGs lay out worthy goals. But by better understanding how ordinary citizens prioritize and understand the interactions among these goals, governments and advocates can design more effective interventions and engage more successfully with the public to achieve the goals encompassed in the 2030 Agenda.

There are important initial messages with regard to performance as well. The relatively poor ratings for government effectiveness captured in the performance indicators reported here are consistent with the UN's own reporting to date revealing that progress on the SDGs is uneven and too slow to achieve the 2030 goals. Of equal concern is the frequent mismatch that emerges between priorities and performance: The highest-priority sectors, especially jobs and economic management, often record some of the worst performance ratings.

These findings can offer useful guideposts to African governments interested in boosting their performance ratings and achieving SDG success. Understanding and responding to public priorities can facilitate more effective policy making and strengthen public engagement, which may in turn result in better performance. Scrutinizing the priority-performance gaps in each country could be especially instructive. For the many countries where performance is high in low-priority sectors and low in high-priority sectors, the gaps may, on the one hand, call for evaluating policies and investment decisions. Are governments over-investing in low-priority sectors and under-investing in high-priority ones, for example? On the other hand, it may suggest that these governments need to do some education and advocacy of their own if they conclude that their publics undervalue critical sectors and goals.

Finally, we highlight again the finding that the worst area of performance in 31 of 34 countries concerns narrowing income gaps between the rich and the poor, linked to SDG10 ("reduced inequalities"). Although this ranks as a low-priority SDG for many Africans, the growing discourse both in Africa and globally about the dire political and economic consequences of burgeoning inequality suggests that tackling both awareness and performance relative to this goal should be given critical attention.

Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Round 7 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cabo Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini (Swaziland)	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012,2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Principe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

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