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Poor and rural Mozambicans hit hard by lack of access, connection to electricity grid

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 823 | Asafika Mpako and Stephen Ndoma

Summary

While Mozambique sells energy to its regional neighbours – South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia being the largest export markets – only 40% of the country's population has access to grid electricity (OEC World, 2024; Energypedia, 2022).

Notwithstanding substantial improvements in the country's electrification rate, which stood at 6% in 2000, a major report by five multilateral organisations on energy progress found that 22 million Mozambicans still lack access to electricity (IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, & WHO, 2023). Moreover, only 5% of citizens have access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking, placing Mozambique among the bottom 20 countries worldwide (World Bank, 2021). The country's access deficit can be explained by an underdeveloped transmission and distribution network, limited financing, and a complex bureaucracy that stalls the development of new power projects (International Trade Administration, 2024).

Mozambique's national electrification strategy aims to achieve universal access to electricity by 2030 by expanding electricity infrastructure and introducing off-grid solutions (Government of Mozambique, 2018). It is complemented by the national power utility's strategy, which seeks to widen access to energy, provide quality electricity, and expand generation and transmission capacity to meet growing domestic energy needs and promote industrial development (Electricidade de Moçambique, 2018).

In 2019, Mozambique received grants worth US\$148 million from the World Bank and the European Union, Sweden, and Norway to improve energy access in five of the country's poorest provinces – Niassa, Nampula, Zambezia, Cabo Delgado, and Sofala (World Bank, 2019). More recently, the African Development Bank (2023) provided a US\$33.25 million grant to build the Songo-Matambo electricity transport line to distribute power to central and northern Mozambique.

A recent Afrobarometer survey provides an on-the-ground look at electricity access in the country. Findings show that electricity ranks fourth on citizens' list of priorities requiring urgent government attention. More than half of Mozambicans say the government is performing poorly in the provision of electricity.

While close to half of citizens live in zones served by the electric grid, only about four in 10 enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, including just one-fifth of rural residents and one-fourth of the poor.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,120 adult Mozambicans in October-December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

Key findings

- Fewer than half (47%) of Mozambicans live in zones served by the national electricity grid.
 - Only 22% of rural residents are within reach of the grid, compared to 88% of urban residents. More educated and economically better-off citizens are also far more likely to live in zones served by the grid than those with less schooling and lower economic status.
- Similarly, 44% of Mozambicans live in households that are connected to the national power grid.
 - Among those who are connected to the grid, 89% say their electricity works “most of the time” or “all of the time.”
- Combining connection and reliability rates shows that only about four in 10 citizens (39%) enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, including just 11% of those with no formal education, 18% of rural residents, and 24% of citizens experiencing high lived poverty.
- Electricity ranks fourth among the most important problems that Mozambicans want their government to address.
- A slim majority (53%) of citizens say the government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable supply of electricity, up from 42% in 2021.
 - This assessment is particularly widespread among the less educated (61%-73%), the poorest citizens (62%), and rural residents (67%).

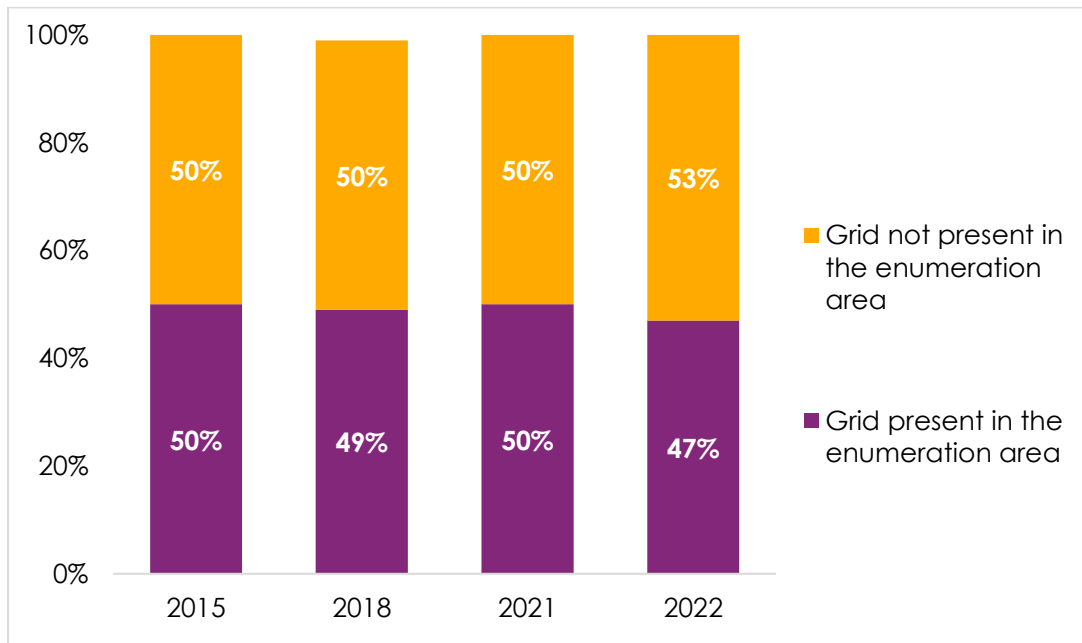
Access to the electricity grid

For most households, having access to an electricity grid will remain a prerequisite for obtaining power until alternative energy resources become more widely available. According to Afrobarometer’s 2022 survey in Mozambique, fewer than half (47%) of citizens live in areas served by an electricity grid, a proportion that has changed very little in recent years (Figure 1).

The presence of the electricity grid is far more limited in rural areas: Only 22% of rural residents live within reach of the grid (Figure 2). In contrast, residents in urban areas (88%) are four times as likely to live in zones served by the electric grid. Young people (51% of those aged 18-25 years), citizens who are economically well off¹ (62%), and respondents with secondary or post-secondary education (71%) are more likely to live in zones served by the electricity grid than older citizens (40% of those aged 46 years and above), the poorest respondents (34%), and those with no formal education (24%).

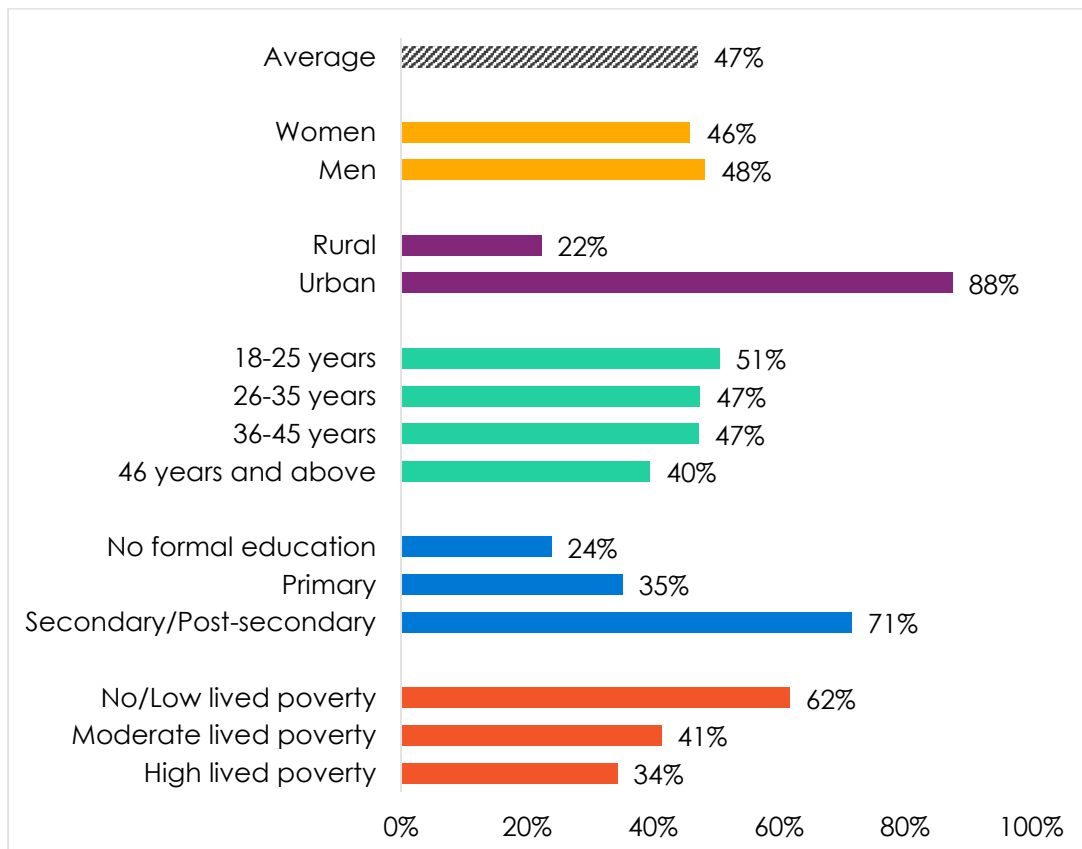
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the past year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

Figure 1: Presence of electricity grid | Mozambique | 2015-2022



Survey enumerators were asked to record: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Electricity grid that most houses can access?

Figure 2: Presence of electricity grid | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked to record: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Electricity grid that most houses can access? (% "yes")

Connection to the electricity grid

Living in a zone served by an electricity grid does not, of course, guarantee a supply of electricity. Costs associated with service from the power grid – including fees for inspection, house wiring, and connection – may present prohibitive hurdles for many citizens.

How many Mozambicans are actually connected to the national grid? Fewer than half (44%) of citizens live in households that are connected to the national power grid (Figure 3), with enormous differences in access across demographic groups.

As might be expected, urbanites are far more likely to be connected than rural residents (81% vs. 21%), as are the economically well-off (64%) and the most educated (72%) compared to the poorest (29%) and respondents with no formal education (16%) (Figure 4). Younger citizens (46%-49% of those aged 18-35 years) are also more likely to be connected than their elders (36%-38%).

Figure 3: Connection to the national electric grid | Mozambique | 2022

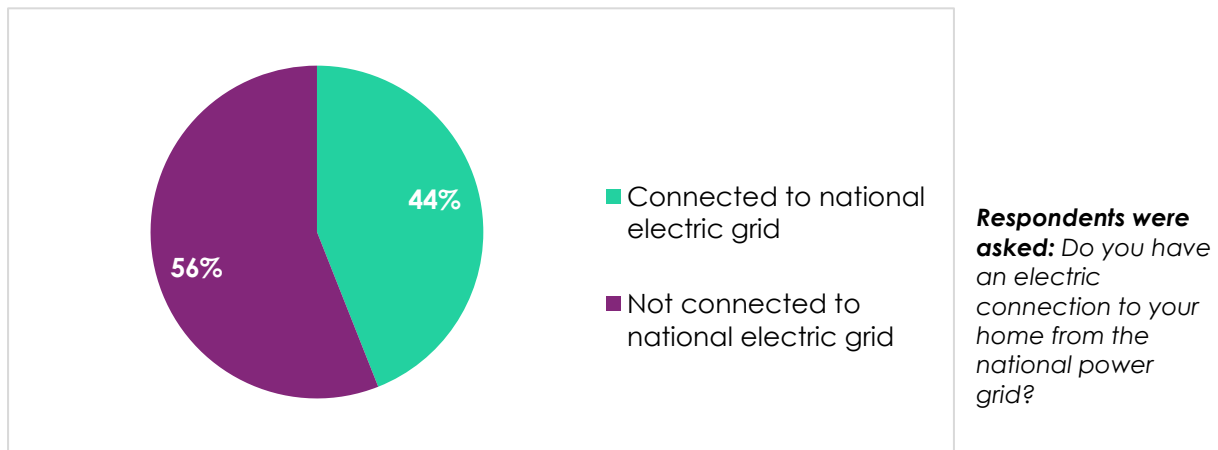
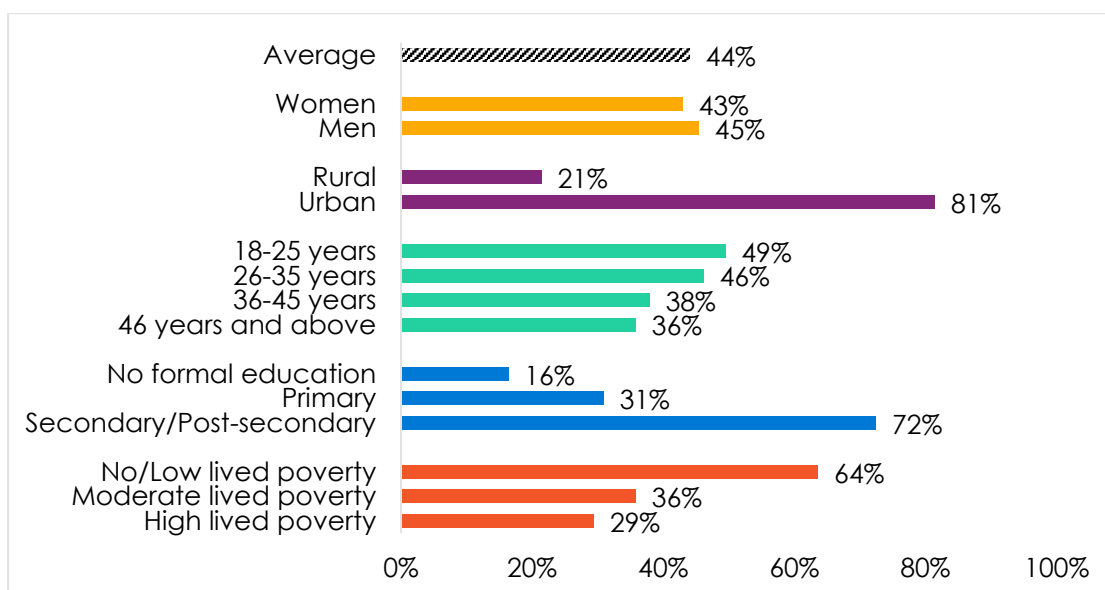


Figure 4: Connection to the national electric grid | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



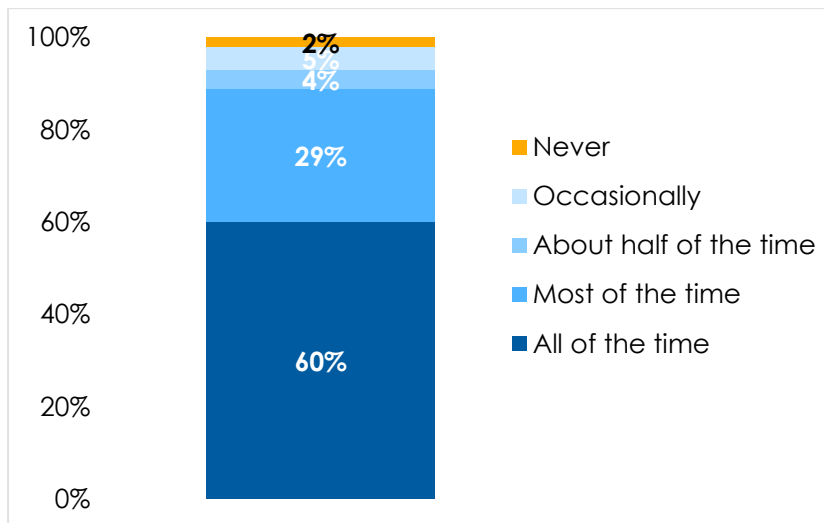
Respondents were asked: Do you have an electric connection to your home from the national power grid? (% "yes")

Reliable supply of electricity

Even if houses are connected to an electric grid, the reliability of their power supply may be poor. How many Mozambicans actually have reliable electricity?

Among citizens who report being connected to the power grid, nearly nine in 10 (89%) say that their electricity works “most of the time” (29%) or “all of the time” (60%) (Figure 5). About one in 10 (11%) say that power is available only “about half of the time” or less.

Figure 5: How often is electricity available (for households connected to the grid)?
 | Mozambique | 2022



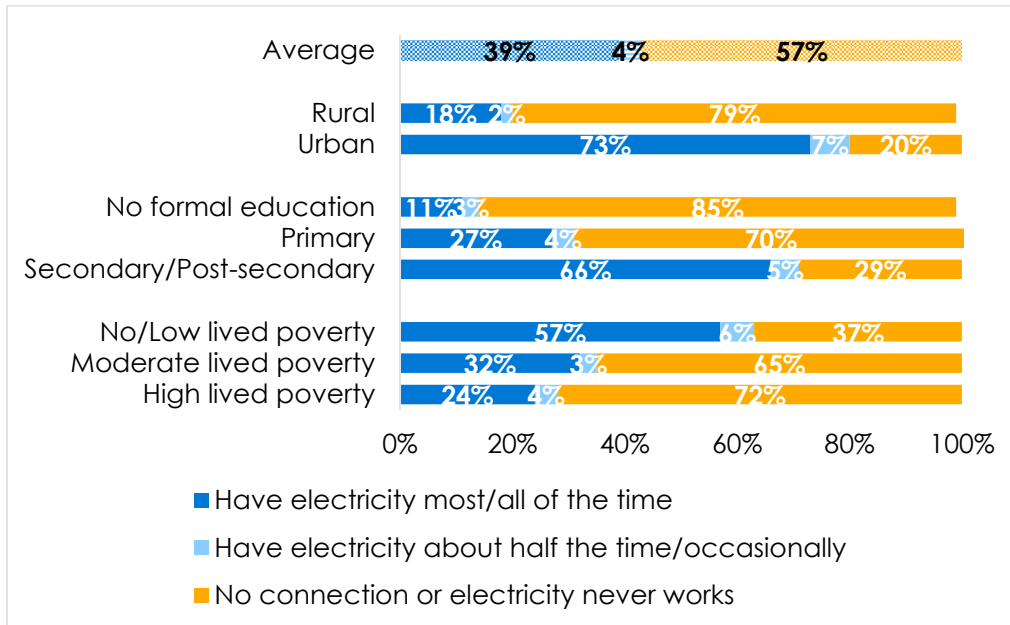
Respondents who said they have a connection to the national electric grid were asked: How often is electricity actually available from this connection? (Respondents without a connection to the national grid are excluded.)

While these numbers suggest that existing connections are fairly reliable, looking at the entire population (rather than only those who are connected to the grid) shows that only about four in 10 Mozambicans (39%) report having electricity that works “most” or “all” of the time (Figure 6).

There are, however, stark differences by economic status, education level, and urban-rural location. Among the poorest respondents, only a quarter (24%) say they have reliable electricity, compared to a majority (57%) of those experiencing no or low lived poverty. In rural areas, only about two in 10 citizens (18%) enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, against nearly three-fourths (73%) of urban residents. And while fully two-thirds (66%) of citizens with secondary or post-secondary education report having electricity that works “most” or “all” of the time, only 11% of those with no formal education say the same.

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Figure 6: How many citizens have reliable electricity? | by urban-rural location, education, and lived poverty | Mozambique | 2022

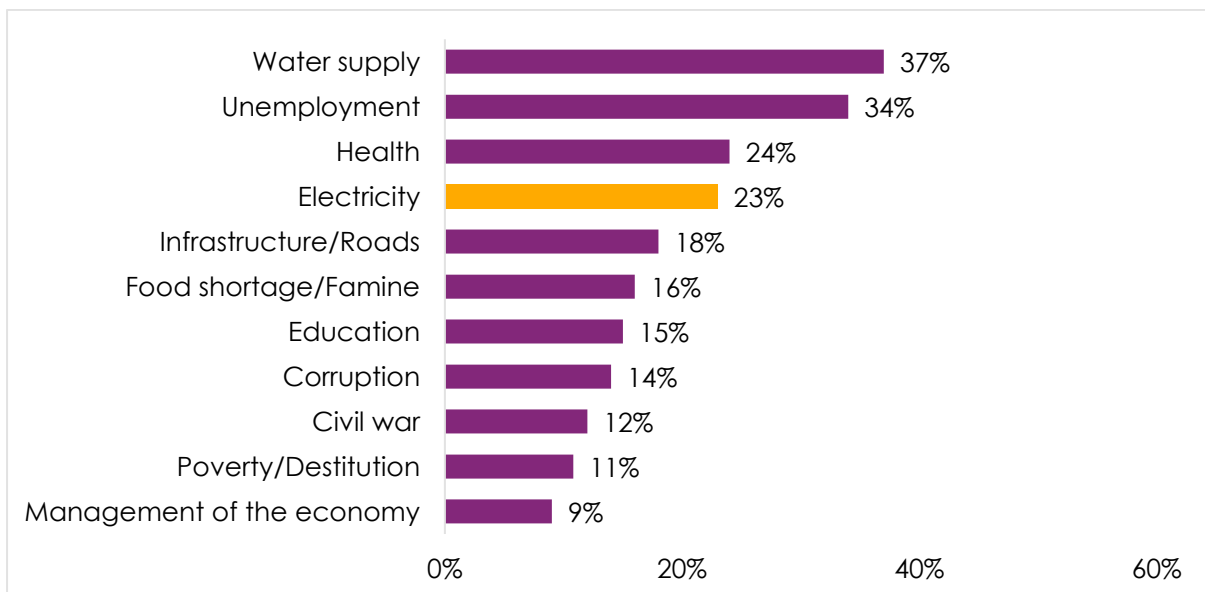


Respondents were asked: Do you have an electric connection to your home from the national power grid? (If “yes”:) How often is electricity actually available from this connection?

Priorities and government performance

The provision of electricity ranks fourth among the most important problems that Mozambicans want their government to address (cited by 23% of respondents as one of their three priorities) (Figure 7). Electricity follows water supply (37%), unemployment (34%), and health (24%).

Figure 7: Most important problems | Mozambique | 2022



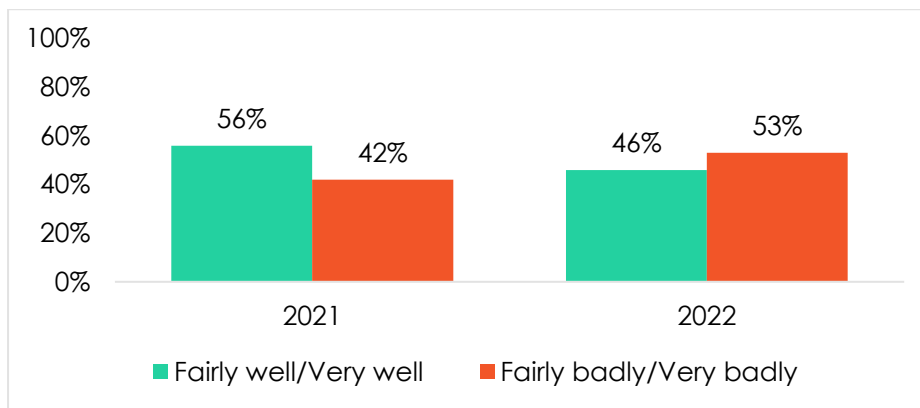
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per person; figure shows percentage of respondents who cite each problem as one of up to three priorities.)

Views are mixed on whether the government is doing a good job of providing a reliable electricity supply. A narrow majority (53%) of Mozambicans rate the government's efforts to provide electricity unfavourably, a rise of 11 percentage points since the previous Afrobarometer survey in 2021 (Figure 8). Only 46% consider its performance "fairly" or "very" good.

Women (57%) are more likely than men (49%) to disapprove of the government's efforts on electricity, as are rural residents compared to urbanites (67% vs. 29%) (Figure 9). Negative ratings are also higher among older respondents (62%), the poorest citizens (62%), and those with no formal education (73%) than among their younger, better-off, and more educated counterparts.

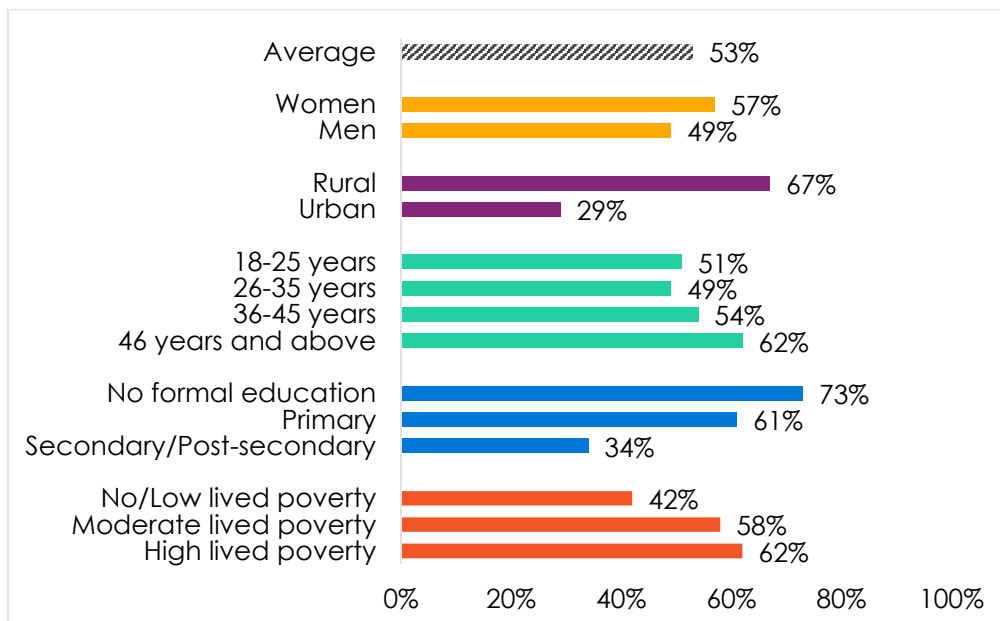
Figure 8: Government performance in provision of reliable electricity supply

| Mozambique | 2021-2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing a reliable supply of electricity?

Figure 9: Government is performing badly in the provision of reliable electricity supply | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing a reliable supply of electricity? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Conclusion

Many Mozambicans still lack access and connection to the national power grid, and only about four in 10 enjoy a reliable supply of electricity. Rural residents, the poor, and the less educated are particularly disadvantaged, and this is reflected in their unfavourable ratings of the government's performance on providing reliable electricity.

These findings point to the need to address the challenges of vulnerable communities by accelerating the pace of gains in access to electricity, most urgently by bridging the urban-rural and class divides.

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