



Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)

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PRESS RELEASE

Afrobarometer: Poor South Africans More Active, but Less Well Served by Government

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering up to 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, and evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as four rounds of surveys have been held from 1999 to 2008 and Round 5 is currently underway.

Afrobarometer's work in South Africa is coordinated by Citizen Surveys. Fieldwork for Round 5 was conducted in South Africa from 20 October - 30 November 2011. The survey interviewed a total of 2399 adult South Africans, and a sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level.

Introduction

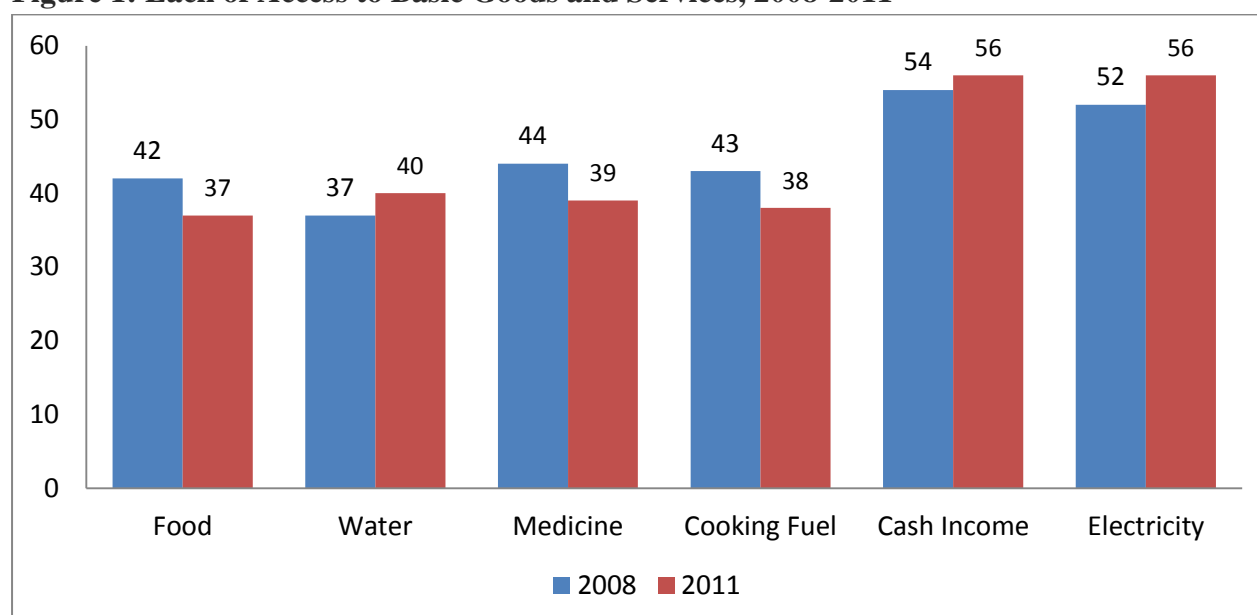
Most South Africans looked forward to the State of the Nation Address (SONA), with anticipation that President Jacob Zuma would provide more concrete and time-framed solutions to the aching problems of poverty, inequality and unemployment. These issues were identified during the 2012 SONA as the top most problems facing the nation, and South Africans are particularly keen to hear the government's plans to alleviate poverty. During the SONA, the President noted the steady progress made in addressing social challenges in areas such as health, education, energy, water provision, rural development, and in harnessing social ills such as crime and human settlements. However, he bemoaned the lack of progress in arresting the triple challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty. Alas, the SONA fell short of providing answers to poverty challenges.

Findings

The Afrobarometer survey measured people's experience with poverty across a wide range of indicators that include access to basic needs like, food, clean water, medicines, fuel, cash income and electricity in the home.

The survey reveals some improvement in access to food, cooking fuel and medicines since 2008, but slight there were slight declines in access to clean water, electricity, and a cash income (Figure 1). For example, 37% of South Africans sometimes went without food in 2011, compared to 42% in 2008. Declines were also recorded in going without medicine (39% in 2011, 44% in 2008) and cooking fuel (38% in 2011, 43% in 2008). Poverty still ranks as one of the top five problems facing South Africans: a total of 21% identified poverty as the most serious problem affecting the country.

Figure 1: Lack of Access to Basic Goods and Services, 2008-2011

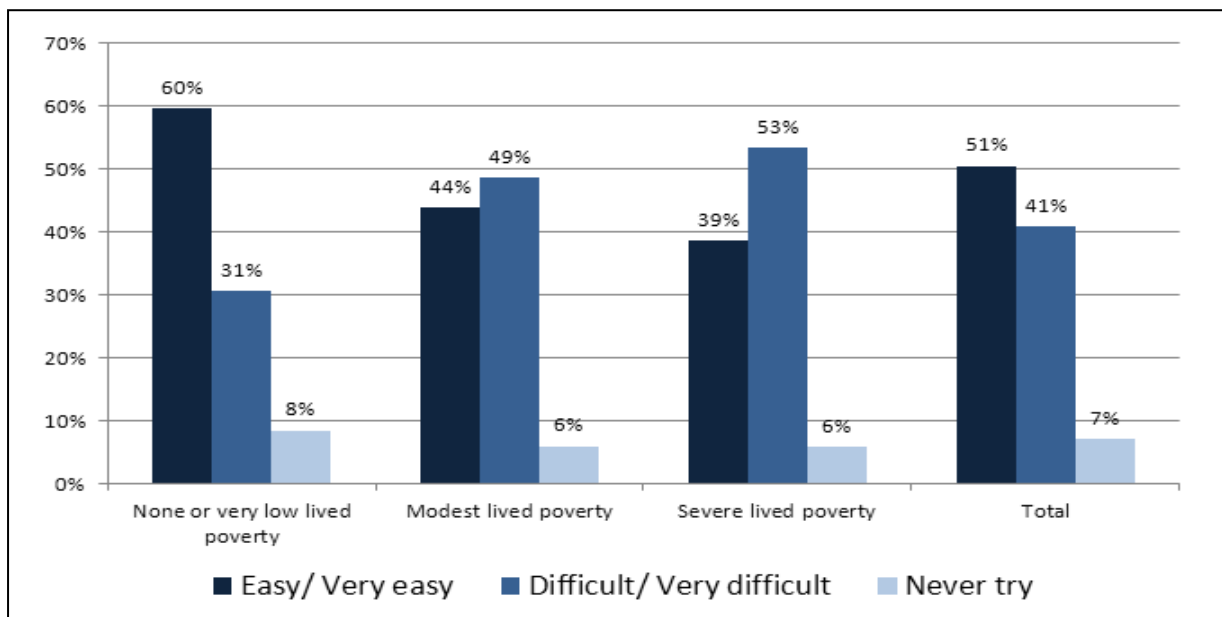


Question: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: · enough food to eat; enough clean water for home use; medicines and medical care; enough fuel to cook your food; a cash income; electricity in your home? *Note: Figures represent the aggregate percentage of respondents **who ever went without** a basic good or service, i.e., responded 'once or twice', 'several times', 'many times', or 'always'.*

The survey also clearly reveals an accessibility gap between rich and poor South Africans. Overall, 71% report having a water supply located either within their houses or within the compounds, and 29% outside their compounds; 44% report having a toilet located inside their houses, while 9% have no latrines at all.

Moreover, a majority of poor citizens (53%) report that they encounter significant difficulties in accessing household services from government, as compared to just 31% who say the same among their wealthier counterparts (Figure 2). Similarly, 45% of the poorest report significant difficulty in accessing medical care from public clinics, compared to just 24% among wealthier respondents.

Figure 2: Access to Household Services from Government, by Poverty Level, 2011



Question: Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is it to obtain the following services from government (or do you never try and get these services from the government): Household services like piped water, electricity, or telephone?

Finally, the survey also finds that the poor citizens are more politically active than their wealthier counterparts. Between November 2010 and November 2011, close to a third (31%) of the poorest respondents had contacted their local government councillor, compared to 22% among the wealthiest. And 69% of the poorest had attended a community meeting at least once in the past year, whereas only 49% of the wealthiest had done the same. The poor are almost twice as likely as the wealthy to protest: 17% had done so in the past year, compared to 9% of the wealthy.

The message is clear: poor South Africans are still clearly deprived of basic services, and although they are politically more active, they nonetheless face greater challenges than wealthier South Africans even in securing basic services from their government.

Attention therefore now shifts to Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, who will deliver his Annual Budget on Wednesday, 27 February 2013. The nation looks forward to seeing the government's commitment to channeling resources into this critical area.

For more details, see "The Experience of Poverty in South Africa: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 2000-2011", available at www.afrobarometer.org or contact Anyway Chingwete at achingwete@idasa.org.za.

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