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ISLANDS DRIFTING APART? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE OF RODRIGUES AND MAURITIUS

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Introduction

Mauritius is widely recognised as one of the leading economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the most recent World Economic Forum Report on Global Competitiveness, Mauritius is ranked as the second most competitive African economy after South Africa. In terms of Human Development, Mauritius is one of only two Sub-Saharan African countries to be ranked in the High to Very High Human Development category in the 2013 Human Development Report.¹ Mauritius has also consistently been ranked as the best governed country in Africa, by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Governance Index and Freedom House Index among several governance indicators.

Despite all these socio-political and economic achievements, there is a palpable feeling that the benefits of development have not been evenly distributed among residents of the country's two main islands, Mauritius and Rodrigues. While citizens of the main island of Mauritius have benefitted from the economic growth of recent years, the economy on the island of Rodrigues continues to be heavily reliant on agriculture, fishing and a small tourism industry. As a result, Rodriguans have not gained as much from recent economic achievements as much as their counterparts on the Island of Mauritius. Rodrigues also face severe climatic conditions such as frequent shortage of rainfall and more frequent cyclones which have had a negative impact on the island's agrarian economy.

Given this contrasting background, this bulletin offers an analysis of how Mauritian citizens on the two islands assess the country's economic management and their own living conditions.

Afrobarometer and methodology for the survey

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, 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's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and research findings to inform policy and practice. 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.

During Round 5, Afrobarometer surveys are being conducted in 35 African countries using a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1,200 adult Mauritians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. In order to allow for big enough sample for Rodrigues, we oversampled respondents on the island by selecting a total of 120 respondents from the island's two enumeration Areas (RAs). Thus

¹The 2013 Human Development Report rates Seychelles and Mauritius as the two top ranked countries in terms of Human Development in Africa with HDI scores of 0.806 and 0.737 respectively.

the total sample was made up of 1080 respondents from the island of Mauritius and 120 from Rodrigues. The sample itself was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Mauritian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Mauritius was conducted by StraConsult Ltd between 7 January to 26 February 2012.

Background

The Republic of Mauritius is situated in the southwest Indian Ocean, approximately 900km east of Madagascar. The Republic of Mauritius is made up of several clusters of islands, the two main ones being Mauritius and Rodrigues. According to official government statistics, the total population for the Republic of Mauritius stood at 1.29 million as of July 2012. A majority of the country's population live on the island of Mauritius while slightly less than 40 thousand live on the island of Rodrigues.

At independence in 1968, the Mauritian economy was dependent on sugar production which accounted for 93% of the country's total export revenue. The country was at the same time characterized by high unemployment and high population growth rate. However, by the turn of the century, Mauritius had undergone a complete economic transformation to become one of the most successful African economies, moving from mono-crop agricultural economy to a diversified one strong in exports, driven by manufacturing, and fisheries. The country also is an information-technology hub. As a result, GDP per capita increased more than tenfold between 1970 and 2010, from less than \$500 to more than \$6,000.²

The economic transformation in Mauritius has translated into improved living standards for the country's citizens. Life expectancy has improved, infant mortality has declined and the country has better quality infrastructure.

In contrast to the overall economic transformation of Mauritius, the economy of Rodrigues has lagged and has remained predominantly agrarian. Crop farming, livestock rearing and lagoon fishing are the main economic activities on the island. Rodrigues has lower levels of development and relatively lower quality living conditions than the island of Mauritius.³ Rodrigues is also characterised by a drier climate and frequently faces droughts, which affect agricultural production.

In 2002 the island of Rodrigues was granted administrative autonomy and is now under the jurisdiction of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The granting of political and Administrative autonomy to Rodrigues was made on the understanding that the island has special needs for accelerated development which cannot be remotely addressed from the Island of Mauritius.

Evaluations of Mauritius' Economic Performance

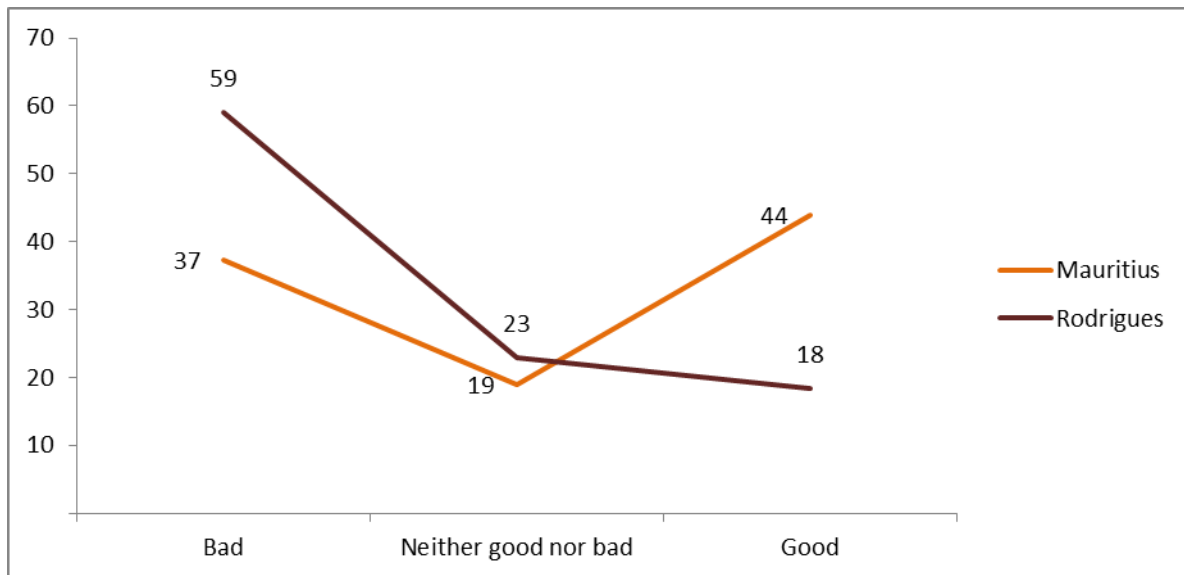
The Afrobarometer surveys allow respondents to assess both the nation's economic performance and their own living conditions.

²See Ali Zafar, (2011), "Mauritius: An Economic Success Story," World Bank Group.

³See the 1990 and 2000 Mauritius *Relative Development Index* reports compiled by Central Statistical Office.

Figure 1: Evaluations of economic conditions diverge on Mauritius and Rodrigues Islands

Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country?* The numbers indicate the percentage who replied good, bad, or neither good nor bad.

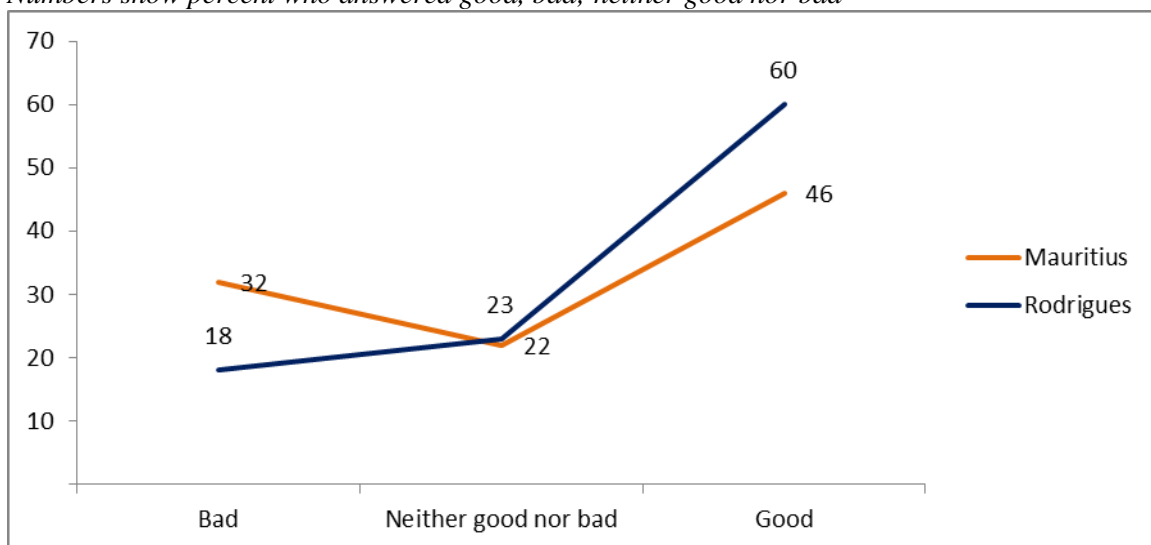


A majority—59%—of Rodriguans rated economic conditions as bad (Figure 1). By contrast, just 37% of those on the island of Mauritius said the current economic conditions were bad, and the highest proportion, 44% said they were good.

The situation was reversed when respondents evaluated personal circumstances (Figure 2). Fifty-nine percent of Rodriguans said their own living conditions were good as compared to 46% of their counterparts.

Figure 2: Evaluations of living conditions among residents of mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues

Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe: Your present living conditions?* Numbers show percent who answered good, bad; neither good nor bad



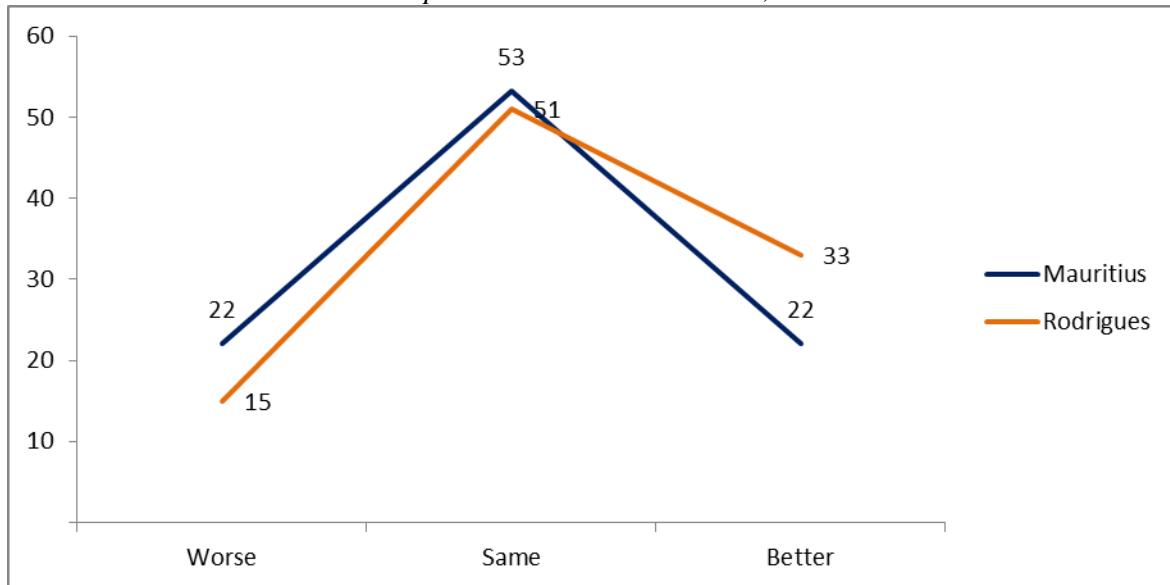
Despite their pessimism about the country’s economic conditions, a higher proportion of Rodriguans are positive about their own living conditions than of their counterparts on the main island. Only 18%

of Rodriguans rated living conditions as bad compared to 32% of the residents on the island of Mauritius.

A higher percentage of Rodriguans—33 percent—said their own living conditions were better than those of their compatriots. That compares to just 22 percent of Mauritian islanders. The same percentage of Mauritius islanders said their conditions were worse than those of their peers, while just 15 percent of Rodriguans had that view.

Figure 3: Comparative evaluations of living conditions among residents of Mauritius and Rodrigues

Respondents were asked In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other Mauritians? Numbers show percent who answered better, worse or the same



A majority of respondents from Rodrigues and from the Island of Mauritius regard their own living conditions as about the same as those of other Mauritian citizens. However, despite the economic challenges facing their island, more Rodriguans hold the view that their living conditions are better than those of their fellow countrymen. This is in contrast to residents of the island of Mauritius, who are evenly split among those holding the view that their economic conditions are worse and better than those of their compatriots.

A majority of respondents—60%—say their own living conditions have not changed in the past 12 months (Table 2). A slightly higher proportion of Rodriguans—28%—hold the view that economic conditions have actually improved. Just 22% of their counterparts on the island of Mauritius hold that view.

Table 1: Evaluations of economic performance over time

Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to twelve months ago? Economic conditions in this country? The numbers show the percentage who answered worse, much worse, better much better or the same

	Mauritius	Rodrigues
Much Worse	1	3
Worse	18	18
Same	56	48
Better	22	28
Much Better	2	3

On both islands, a majority of citizens held the view that economic conditions were the same as they were 12 months ago, while just over 2% on each island said that their living conditions were better when compared to the previous 12 months (Table 2).

Table 2: Evaluations of individual living conditions compared to the previous 12 months

Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to twelve months ago? Your living conditions? The table shows the percentage who said much worse, worse, better or much better

	Mauritius	Rodrigues
Much Worse	1	0
Worse	15	15
Same	60	59
Better	22	23
Much Better	2	3

Survey participants were also asked to predict their future living conditions. A higher percentage of Rodrigues residents expressed optimism than respondents on the island of Mauritius (Table 3).

Table 3: Economic Outlook

Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse? Economic conditions in this country in twelve months time? The numbers show percentage who provided each answer.

	Mauritius	Rodrigues
Much Worse	6	3
Worse	31	10
Same	34	28
Better	22	38
Much Better	3	8
Don't know	4	15

Rodrigues survey participants also showed optimism about their own future living conditions (Table 4). A majority of Rodriguans (57%) said they expect that living conditions will improve in the next 12 months. By contrast, only 23% of residents of the island of Mauritius expected better future conditions.

Table 4: Views of future living conditions

Respondents were asked: *Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse? Your living conditions in twelve months time? The numbers show percentage of those who provided each answer.*

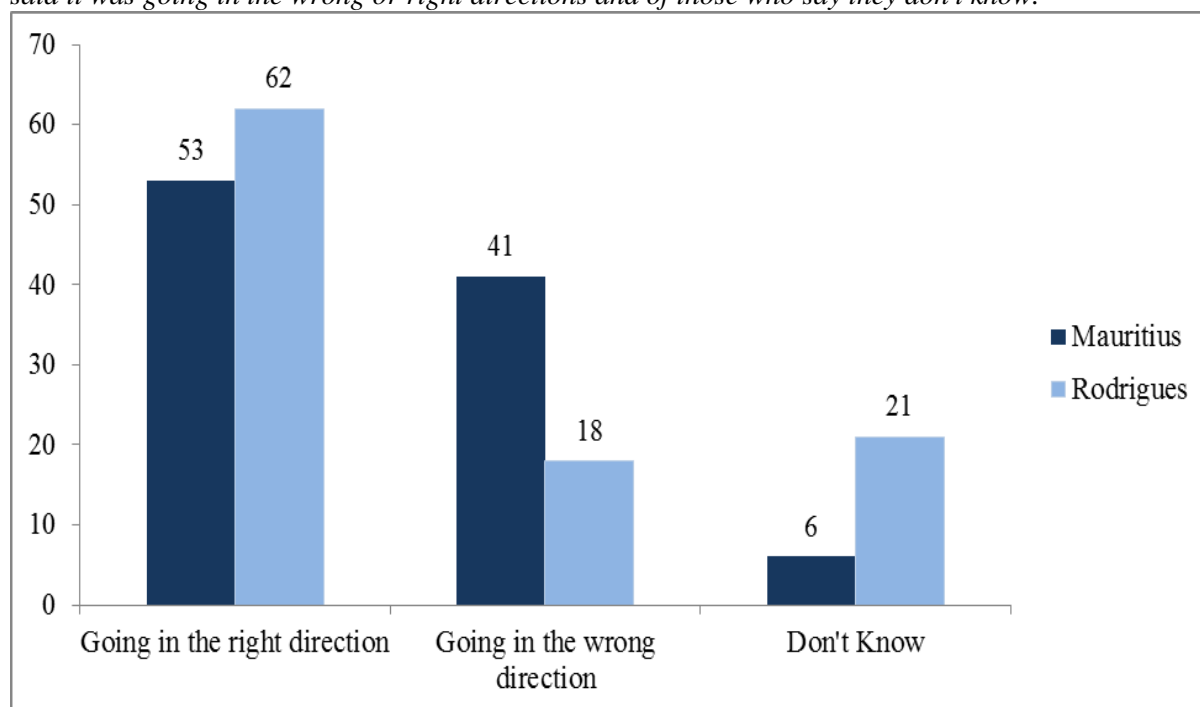
	Mauritius	Rodrigues
Much Worse	6	3
Worse	25	8
Same	40	28
Better	23	49
Much Better	3	8
Don't know	4	5

Assessment of the country's overall direction

A majority Rodriguans also expressed satisfaction about the overall direction of the country—62% of respondents said Mauritius is going in the right direction. This figure is nine percentage points higher than that reported by survey participants on the island of Mauritius. Meanwhile, a higher percentage of people from the island of Mauritius—41%—said the country was going in the wrong direction, where just 18% of Rodriguans said the country's direction was wrong.

Figure 4: Perceptions of country's overall direction

Q. What about the overall direction of the country? Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? The chart shows the percentage of respondents who said it was going in the wrong or right directions and of those who say they don't know.

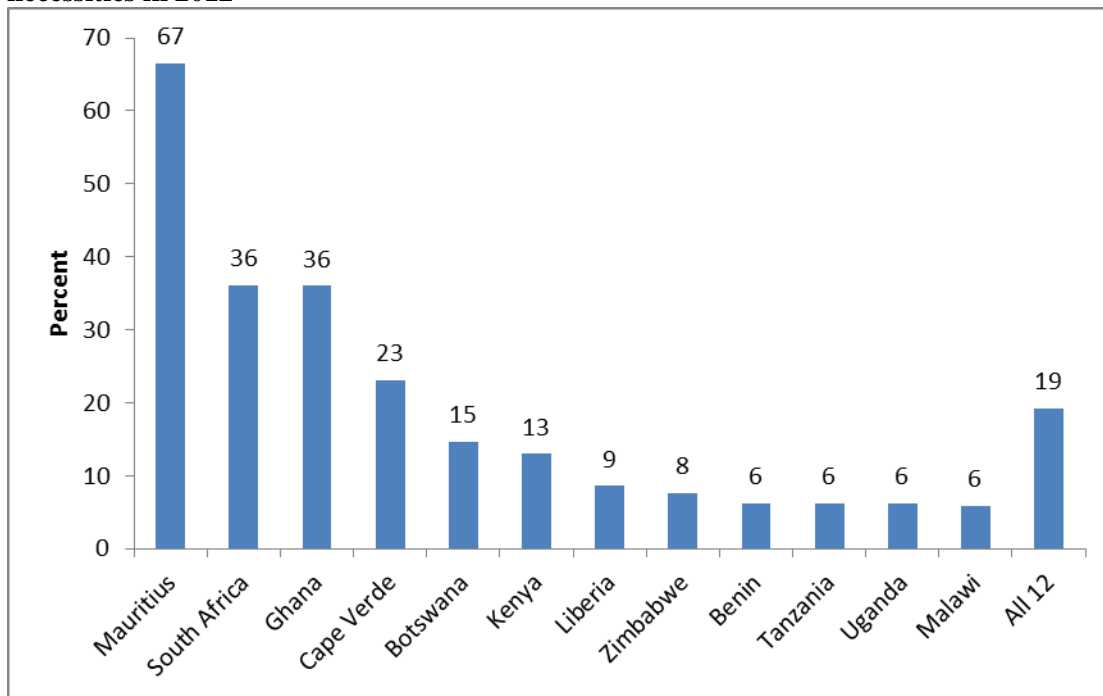


Lived poverty in Mauritius and Rodrigues

Mauritians reported lower levels of economic deprivation than those in 11 other countries polled by Afrobarometer. The majority of Mauritian citizens said they did not go without clean water, food, medical care, fuel for cooking or a cash income over the previous year, (Figure 5). In the countries

with the next lowest deprivation levels, South Africa and Ghana, only 36% of the population said they had never gone without these basic human needs.

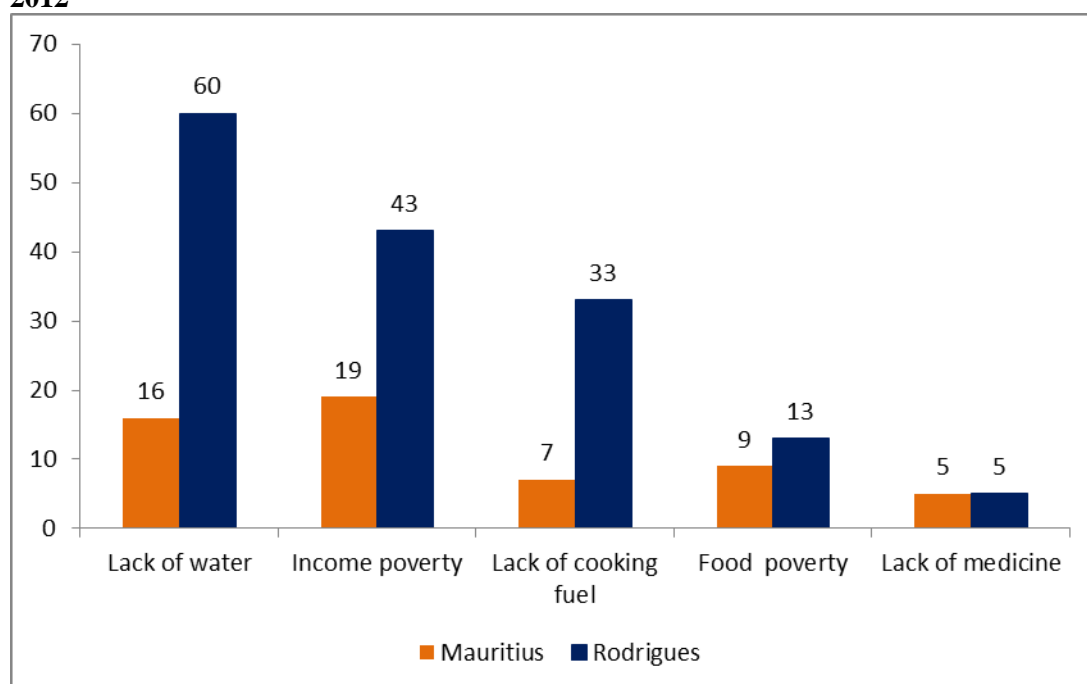
Figure 5: The percentage of respondents in 12 African countries who did not lack basic necessities in 2012



Data from the Afrobarometer survey, in other words, corroborate the expert analyses which rate Mauritius as one of the leading performers in terms of socio-economic development on the African continent.

However while the experience of lived poverty for the entire republic of Mauritius stands above the other twelve countries; more Rodriguan respondents said they experienced deprivation than those from the Island of Mauritius. As Figure 6 below shows, 60% of Rodriguans said they experienced a lack of water compared with just 16% of respondents from mainland Mauritius. Forty-three percent of Rodriguans said they had gone without a cash income at least once in the previous 12 months, compared with just 19%, (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of people who had gone without one of these necessities at least once in 2012



In the same way, a shortage of cooking fuel was encountered by 33% of Rodriguans compared with only 7% of respondents from the Island of Mauritius. The only areas where the experience of lived poverty was comparable between the two islands was on access to food and medicines, with residents of both islands expressing similarly low shortages rates.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this bulletin corroborate, for the most part, expert assessments of Mauritius as one of the strongest African economies that has also managed to lower levels of deprivation compared to other African countries. As this bulletin has shown, Mauritian citizens themselves acknowledge these achievements, a majority of whom hold the view that their living conditions have improved compared to the previous 12 months. Despite more people reporting they suffered relatively lived poverty, residents of the Island of Rodrigues are actually more optimistic about their present and future living conditions.

However, this brief has also established that the distribution of the country’s economic wealth has trickled down unevenly between residents of Rodrigues and the island of Mauritius. This has translated into relatively more frequent and severe forms of lived poverty among Rodriguans.

References

StraConsult 2010. Monitoring Progress Towards Good Governance, Mauritius Country Report, UNECA, Addis Ababa

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Gilles D. Joomun, Consultant at the StraConsult and Boniface Dulani, Afrobarometer Operations Manager (field).

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