

Uganda UPR: Commitments to socio-economic reform must now be followed up with resources and action

PRESS RELEASE

21 March 2017, Geneva/Kampala/New York: The Ugandan government has agreed to implement a range of social and economic rights reforms recommended by the United Nations Human Rights Council following its recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Uganda.

Compared to Uganda's previous review under the UPR in 2011, the UPR outcome report adopted on 16 March includes a substantial number of recommendations focused on the realization of economic and social rights. Indeed, the recommendations accepted by the Government potentially set out a comprehensive agenda for policy reform, including: taking measures to improve the quality of education; introducing a national health insurance scheme; enacting a national action plan on business and human rights and implementing the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights; developing a national urban policy to address the human rights problems arising from rapid urbanization; and strengthening the implementation of the National Agriculture Plan. It also accepted recommendations to strengthen key human rights institutions.

Overall, the Government delegation to the UPR in Geneva, represented by Ambassador David Etuket, formally accepted 148 of the 226 recommendations made to it by its peers and noted 78, without accepting them. The recommendations it accepted reflect a number of the concerns that Ugandan civil society organizations raised at the UPR, and both the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) and the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) welcome its commitment to taking action to address them.

The government, however, did not accept certain recommendations essential to realizing economic and social rights. These included: passing a minimum wage bill; implementing social security reforms to protect the most vulnerable groups and individuals; and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which would enhance the access to remedies for victims of violations of these rights.

A number of countries also recommended increasing public health funding to 15% of the government's budget, a target that Uganda committed to in 2001 under the Abuja Declaration. This recommendation did not enjoy the government's support. To see the Government's commitment to this target weakened is a disappointment, particularly when concerns about grossly underfunded, poor quality and unaffordable health services remain persistent. In 2016/2017 the Government allocated 8.9% of its budget

to health and this figure – which has remained more or less stagnant since 2011 - is to be reduced even further in the 2017/18 financial year.

As evidenced in a series of [factsheets](#) prepared by ISER and CESR [for Uganda's UPR, failing to invest in key social sectors](#) like [health](#), [education](#), [housing](#) and [agriculture](#) has led to systemic human rights deprivations and development disparities, systematically marginalizing vulnerable groups such as rural women, indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. There are also a number of ways the Government could raise the public resources needed to realize the right to health, and other economic and social rights. Its tax-to-GDP ratio is 13.4%, [barely half the 25% target](#) identified in the East Africa macroeconomic convergence criteria, for example. While the government has become [increasingly reliant on the private sector](#) to fund development, it has made meagre efforts to mobilize corporate taxation, and the [framework of corporate accountability and regulation remains weak](#).

At the adoption of the report, Ambassador Etuket committed to implementing the recommendations accepted. Civil society organisations reiterated the need for multi-stakeholder dialogue, urging the government to collaborate with them when implementing recommendations.

“Uganda’s second UPR was an opportunity to take stock of progress. We are glad to see more recommendations on economic and social rights, unlike in previous years” said Ms Salima Namusobya, Executive Director of ISER. “We look forward to working with the government to develop specific measurable indicators to track implementation and we hope the government will provide a mid-term report on its progress and continue to consult with civil society as it implements these recommendations and finalises the National Action Plan.”

“The recommendations on advancing economic and social rights can provide useful guidance as Uganda implements plans for meeting its sustainable development commitments,” explained CESR Executive Director, Mr Ignacio Saiz. “Nevertheless, rights require resources, and such pledges risk remaining empty promises without the fiscal commitments to back them up”.

The UPR is an intergovernmental review mechanism where countries’ human rights records are evaluated by their peers in the community of nations, rather than by a panel of independent experts as is the case with other UN human rights oversight bodies. Before the review, the government submits a report accounting for its human rights record and other stakeholders, including national human rights institutions and civil society organisations, also submit reports. During the review, other states make recommendations, before the state under review responds, deciding whether to accept or note them. States are reviewed every five years, but can also submit voluntary mid-term progress reports.

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ISER UPR submission: [Progress Safeguarding The Right To Education, Right To Health And Rights Of Vulnerable Groups In Uganda](#)

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