



## REALISING THE RIGHT TO SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR OLDER PERSONS IN UGANDA.

A photo essay on access to the  
Social Assistance Grant  
for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme.

June 2020

### Initiative for Social and Economic Rights

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With funding support from



In 2017, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) petitioned the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on behalf of 45 older persons challenging the inequitable and discriminatory nature of implementation of the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme. The SAGE program is a scheme where the government pays 25,000 Uganda shillings to older persons aged 60 years for Karamoja region and 65 years for other regions. At the time of filing the complaint, the programme was operational in a few districts and even in such districts, only the 100 oldest persons are enrolled per sub-county. The complainants, for whom ISER filed a case, represent a section of older persons that were left out in the implementation of the scheme. ISER came across these older persons during field engagements in the districts of Kayunga, Kaliro, Namutumba and Rakai.

The journey to seek redress was comprised of hearings, mediation as well as field visits in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities Commission. After a period of close to two years, the EOC acknowledged that indeed the way the implementation of the SAGE program is discriminatory and violates the right to social protection. Furthermore, that government proposal of increasing the eligibility age to 80 years will leave out a huge number of older persons and that failure to protect the right to social protection in turn violates other incidental rights such as the right to education and the right to health.

That notwithstanding, the EOC tribunal proceeded to order that; a) the Government should take into account gender and equity considerations when rolling out the program in different areas; b) the program should be prioritized and allocated sufficient funds by the Government; c) the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) should register and rectify older persons' National ID details nationwide at the parish level at no cost and; d) the Government should submit periodic reports of the national rollout plan of the SAGE program to the Commission every 12 months.

The ruling of the tribunal, though progressive in acknowledging discrimination and violation of the older persons' right to social protection, did not offer much to the extent that the program couldn't be extended to all eligible older persons as prayed for.

This photo essay is therefore a photographic representation of the journey to get older persons enrolled on the SAGE programme in an equitable manner. A journey that has seen some older persons die before achieving the justice sought. It includes initiatives undertaken both at the EOC tribunal level and in the field. The issues highlighted in this photo essay, though hinged on a section of older persons, reflect the plight and struggle of thousands.





*Ms. Angella Nabwowe Kasule, the Programs Director at ISER introduces the older persons' complaint to Commissioners of the Equal Opportunities Commission comprising of (from left to right) Mr. Joel Cox Ojuko, Mr. Patrobas Sirabo Wafula, Ms. Sylvia Muwebwa Ntambi, and Ms. Zaminah Malole.*





*The late Mr. Charles Matumbwe from Kayunga District asks for an explanation from the Equal Opportunities Commission why he is not receiving money from government and yet his colleagues from the same district are beneficiaries. Charles is one of the five complainants who died before final determination of the matter by the Commission.*





*The older persons with some of the EOC Commissioners after filing of the complaint.*





*The Presiding Commissioner, Mr. Joel Cox Ojuko of the EOC records a witness statement from one of the complainants during a hearing.*



*Mr. Stephen Kasaija, Head Expanding Social Protection Program, under examination by the tribunal on implementation of the SAGE Program.*





*From right to left. Ms. Joyce Katende (Commissioner Legal, EOC), ISER's Programs Director, Ms. Angella Nabwowe Kasule and Program Officer, Mr. Kiira Brian Alex talk to the Head Expanding Social Protection Program, Mr. Stephen Kasaija. The team sought to draw Mr. Kasaija's attention to the challenges faced in the SAGE program as well as pick his mind on the remedies going forward.*





*After persuasion from the ISER team and the EOC chairperson, the team making the cash transfers agreed to move the older persons to a shade and served them in an orderly manne*





*After verification, one heads to the pay point – the double cabin. One of the SAGE beneficiaries had to be carried to the pay point because he couldn't get there without aid.*





*Commissioner Joel Cox Ojuko delivers the final ruling in the presence of a section of complainants.*





*ISER visited one of the complainants, Ms. Edisa Habululu, in Kayunga District with the Chairperson of the Commission, Ms. Sylvia Ntambi Muwebwa (in foreground). Having listened to Ms. Habululu's ordeal of missing on the SAGE program for lack of a National ID Card, Ms. Muwebwa pledged to avail her with an equivalent of the cash transfer until such a time that she's enrolled.*





*A subsequent visit to the LC5 Chairperson of Kayunga District, Mr. Tom William Serwanga, to probe into the implementation of the SAGE program largely disclosed that the Local Government is hardly involved in its implementation.*





*One of the complainants, Mr. John Isiko, from Namutumba District expresses his disappointment with the tribunal's ruling and adds that they are ready and willing to pursue this cause in the courts of law if given the chance.*





*For one to be verified for payment, they ought to present their National Identity Card. Lack of one, as is the case with some older persons, means missing out on being considered for payment.*





*Kayonza sub county Chief - Kayunga District, Mr. John Namate, explains the gaps and challenges faced in the implementation of the SAGE program. Some of the challenges include non-involvement of the local government as well as limited funds and monitoring.*





*Older persons in Kayunga District bear the brunt of the sun as they wait in line for verification before they can access the SAGE money. Some of them were too frail to wait it out under the sun, let alone climb the veranda to be verified.*