



ISER'S STATEMENT AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE UN PUBLIC SERVICE DAY

23rd JUNE 2021

Theme: *Innovating the Future Public Service: New Government Models for a New Era to Reach the SDGs.*

Today, 23rd June, marks the UN Public Service Day under the theme: "Innovating the Future Public Service: New Government Models for a New Era to Reach the SDGs." Nineteen years ago, the United Nations General Assembly under resolution 57/277 fixed 23 June as the Public Service Day to celebrate among others, the value and virtue of public service as a vital instrument for enabling the growth and development of communities and nations.

Amidst today's raging COVID-19 Pandemic, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) joins the rest of the world in solidarity to applaud all public servants globally and particularly, here in Uganda for their heroism in ensuring that everyone survives the most disruptive moment of modern history and overcomes the pandemic.

ISER recognises that quality public service delivery plays a vital role in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and will accelerate progress towards building back better the world's systems during and post the pandemic whilst improving livelihoods.

To achieve the envisioned goal- innovating the future public services, both communities and nation states must stand-up to the challenge, leverage on technology and adopt a human rights based approach to public service delivery.

However, worldwide, particularly in Uganda, public servants remain underpaid, exploited and marginalized. Their basic needs remain neglected and their social welfare ignored. This is an injustice, given the circumstances under which they operate.

Relatedly, the presence of unregulated private actors in key sectors like electricity, health, education and water among others has led to commercialisation thereby undermining effective planning, management, and delivery of quality public services. This commercialisation strategy, as evidenced from ISER's research and communities' lived experiences has rendered essential services unaffordable and inaccessible, yet they are the first call of contact for the public, especially the poor, vulnerable, elderly, persons living with disabilities, and those living in hard to reach areas.

What ISER observes is inadequate government stewardship. This is partly due to a blend of neoliberalism, illicit financial flows and corporate capture that has resulted into austerity measures thereby weakening government's capacity to promote and provide essential public services to its populace.

The above notwithstanding, ISER welcomes the government's efforts to draw services near the people. It is in this spirit that we appeal to government and its relevant departments and agencies to;

- Take deliberate and targeted steps towards the delivery of quality public services that are free at the point of use. For services like water and electricity, they must be accessible, affordable and of good quality as highlighted under General Comment No.24 of the Committee on International Covenant for Social and Economic Rights.
- Clamp down on mushrooming corruption, nepotism and favouritism that has taken centre stage in the public service sector. Such vices undermine the principles of equity, accountability and transparency which are the building blocks of a sustainable and reliable public service system.

- Strengthen social protection policies of public servants. To achieve this, the state must revise its fiscal policies, increase domestic revenue and reduce over reliance on *'hand-outs'* by international donors and philanthropists.

We reiterate that quality public service delivery is a noble contribution towards reducing poverty, promoting food security, ensuring healthy lives, promoting quality education for all and protecting the planet.

Without a doubt, this year's theme is timely as it presents an opportunity to reclaim public services. This could be achieved if the state; rethinks private-public partnerships, invests in public service delivery, regulates private involvement in public service delivery and promotes meaningful community participation and engagement in service delivery to her citizens.

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