

PRIORITISE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR A JUST RECOVERY FROM COVID 19; CIVIL SOCIETY URGES AHEAD OF UN REVIEW OF UGANDA’S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

PRESS RELEASE

Geneva/Kampala, 27 January 2022: As Uganda appears before the Human Rights Council for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), civil society organizations have raised concerns around the prioritization of economic and social rights to ensure a just recovery from Covid 19. The UPR is a peer to peer periodic review of the human rights record of all UN member states. Fifty four civil society organizations coordinated by the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) made a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council on the status of economic social and cultural rights. ISER also submitted a report on Covid 19 and its impact on economic social rights. Government of Uganda also submitted its [report](#).

“This UPR comes as the world continues to battle the Covid 19 pandemic which has underscored why the country must pay greater attention to economic social rights, particularly [strengthening public social services](#) like health, [education](#) and social protection,” said Salima Namusobya, Executive Director, ISER.

As noted in four UPR factsheets published by ISER on [Health, Education, Business and Human rights, Poverty, economic inclusion and fiscal policy](#), there have been chronic deprivations of economic social rights. Despite progress on development outcomes, 1 in 5 Ugandans are extremely poor and live below 1 USD per day. The country has an [education crisis](#) with children out of school for two years and despite a recent reopening, many children are unable to return given the lack of/dire state of public schools and the fees hikes by an unregulated private sector in education. Public schools which still receive \$2.84 (10,000 Ush) per child per year often lack textbooks, writing spaces and even classrooms. As a result of [chronic underfinancing](#) and weakening of public health systems, the country had an [oxygen crisis](#) during its second Covid 19 wave and [private health facilities extort patients with exorbitant changes](#). Vulnerable groups like women, the poor, and persons with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the gaps in public social services and unregulated private actors in social services. Yet the domestic resource mobilization needed to fund quality public social services has been lacking given the country’s failure to curb illicit financial flows and to ensure corporations pay their fair share of tax. Instead, there are regressive tax regimes with a heavy focus on consumptive taxes like Value Added Tax, which often hurt the poor.

Amidst poverty and the economic decimation caused by Covid 19, social protection and economic inclusion is increasingly important yet social protection has been underfunded and piecemeal. The requirement for [digital ID to access social protection or social services has resulted in exclusion](#), particularly for those in extreme poverty. The [economic stimulus package for small businesses](#) impacted by Covid 19 provided by government still leaves out 93% of small businesses.



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“Our findings demonstrate serious concerns about who this country works for. As the country’s debt burden grows, has government met its obligation to devote maximum available resources to realize these rights, especially for the vulnerable?” said Allana Kembabazi, Program Manager, ISER.

Without a strong legal and regulatory framework businesses continue to violate human rights ranging from not seeking [free, prior and informed consent](#) of affected communities before their investment projects, [child labour](#) to violating [rights like health in the midst of a pandemic](#).

“We were glad to see Uganda pass the National Action Plan on Business and Human rights a key recommendation from the last UPR cycle which we hope can be implemented to strengthen the legal framework.” said Joseph Byomuhangi, Coordinator, Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability

Uganda has undergone two prior UPR reviews in 2011 and 2016. During the last UPR, Uganda received 226 recommendations, 148 were accepted by the government and 78 were noted.

“We worked closely with government to monitor the last cycle’s UPR recommendations including by developing a matrix with indicators and baselines to track recommendations harmonized with the SDGs. We hope to see strong recommendations from this review that could aid our advocacy on the ground.” said Elizabeth Atori.”

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