



ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES RIGHTS ON THE STATE OF PUBLIC SERVICES , CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECONOMIC SOCIAL RIGHTS IN UGANDA

Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is a non-governmental organisation based in Uganda that monitors and documents economic social rights and has observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (Observer number 490). ISER coordinates a coalition to reclaim public services in Uganda and coordinates organisations working on economic social cultural rights in reporting to regional and international human rights mechanisms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The issues raised in this report are from of organisations working on economic, social and cultural rights and the coalition to reclaim public services in Uganda. The methodology of how this report was generated is in Annex 2.
2. In light of the challenges faced during Covid 19 and other crises like cost of living, climate change, it is more important than ever for the government to prioritise public services like health, education, water, social protection, electricity, and holistically address economic, social and cultural rights.
3. This report finds that in prior reviews, Uganda received recommendations on economic social rights, which it is yet to fully implement and the Covid 19 pandemic further reinforced why swift attention must be paid to addressing these recommendations. Vulnerable groups particularly indigenous minority groups and persons with disabilities continue to face systematic exclusion from social economic rights.
4. Despite heightened attention to health during the Covid 19 pandemic, the public health sector is inadequately financed resulting in stock-outs of medicines and key supplies. This alongside limited regulation of private actors in health has resulted in majority of Ugandans failing to access health services.
5. The education sector is struggling to recover post Covid 19 and remains underfinanced and underequipped. Yet more children are reliant on the public education system following the Covid 19 economic decimation. The failure to regulate private schools has resulted in unjustified fees hikes and exclusion of children particularly those from vulnerable groups. Adolescent mothers are unable to access school.
6. The country is also struggling to fund climate change mitigation which has resulted in failed harvests and food insecurity, flooding and the loss of homes.
7. Social protection is more necessary than ever given the cost of living crisis, climate change and recovery from covid 19 but remains underfinanced, is provided piecemeal

and does not adequately cover all who need it. The insistence on using digital identification locally known as ‘ndaga muntu’ as a pre-requisite to accessing social protection like the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) given to older persons has resulted in the exclusion of many otherwise eligible individuals.

8. Rights require resources. As a whole, financing public services remains inadequate and the country’s increasing debt burden puts public services like health and education at risk as the country spends more on repaying debt than health, education and social protection combined. If the rising debt is not curbed, Uganda will have to make unacceptable tradeoffs between funding to mitigate climate change or servicing debt. Already as a result of the rising debt and austerity measures being imposed as part of fiscal consolidation, we are seeing financing for public services stagnate and hiring freezes undermining the quality of public services. The rising debt will ultimately harm the vulnerable.
9. The failure to curb corruption, illicit financial flows and the lack of progressive taxation where the wealthy pay their fair share of tax undermines financing for public services and the realization of economic social rights.
10. The country’s development agenda which has focused on obtaining middle income status pays inadequate attention to poverty and rising inequality which makes development gains precarious.
11. Amidst the proliferation of unregulated private actors providing social services and human rights violations in the context of business activities, we underscore the need for government to protect human rights. We commend Uganda for the adoption of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and continue to underscore the need to swiftly implement it and also implement the guidance provided in General Comment 7: State Obligations Under the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights in the Context of Private Provision of Social services.

A. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER AND ITS SUPPLEMENTARY PROTOCOLS AND/OR THE IDP CONVENTION

NEED TO RATIFY AND DOMESTICATE KEY HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS THAT COULD STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS.

12. Uganda is yet to ratify important human rights instruments that would go a long way in strengthening economic, social and cultural rights. These include: *The Protocol to the African Charter on the Right of Citizens to Social Protection and social security; The Optional Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.*

13. Recommendation

- ***Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on the Right of Citizens to Social Protection and social security and the Optional Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.***

LIMITED FINANCING OF PUBLIC SERVICES

14. Covid 19, climate change and the cost of living crisis have severely impacted the realization of economic social rights. With poverty and inequality rising due to the COVID 19 pandemic, cost of living crises, it is more urgent than ever that the State invest in quality public services like health, education and social protection.

15. Public services are underfinanced and risk being undermined given increasing fiscal consolidation and austerity measures.ⁱ Only 16% of the health budget is funded by the State. Government spends 20,000 USH per child per year for public schools.ⁱⁱ This limited funding results in poor quality and high out of pocket costs for public services.

16. Social Protection is underfinanced.ⁱⁱⁱ A large part of these direct cash transfers is provided by donor grants or concessional loans, which threatens the sustainability of the sector. Uganda spends a paltry 0.7% of its GDP on social protection compared to the average spent in Africa which is 3.8% of GDP.^{iv} In 2023, the Youth Livelihood Fund and persons with disability fund faced funding cuts.^v For the SAGE grant which provides social assistance grants as a form of social protection for older persons, there was barely any increment at the current amount allocated to it, 121.220 billion shillings, so it will only be able to support a third of the older persons over 75 years that need it.^{vi}

17. The underfinancing of public services detrimentally impacts the poor. 1 in 5 Ugandans are poor. Only 1% earn over 1,000,000ush (~300usd) per month.
18. Moreover, revenue allocation does not target increasing access to essential public services. The country's tax regime is largely regressive in nature, disproportionately taxing the poor more than the rich, and hence has widened income inequalities across the country.^{vii}
19. The exponentially rising sovereign debt undermines funds that could otherwise finance essential public services.^{viii} More money is spent servicing debt than on health, education, and social protection combined.^{ix}
20. Uganda should curb its appetite for debt and conduct human rights impact assessments for debt. Among things it could do is curb illicit financial flows^x and implement progressive taxation^{xi} so as to get sufficient domestic revenue and reduce its reliance on debt and aid. It could also use special drawing rights to fund public services.^{xii}

21. Recommendations

- **Increase financing for public services.**
- **Ringfence financing of public services and ensure there are no budget cuts to them when undertaking fiscal consolidation and austerity measures.**
- **Curb unnecessary debt and conduct a human rights impact assessment before undertaking further debt.**
- **Make the wealthy pay their fair share of tax and stop unjustified tax exemptions.**
- **Curb illicit financial flows and corruption.**

UNREGULATED PROLIFERATION OF PRIVATE ACTORS IN SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERY

22. The persistent underfunding of the public services has opened up the market to private actors that operate with insufficient oversight and with little or no accountability. As

ISER's research has found, the unregulated expansion of private actors in social services has detrimentally impacted access to these services, particularly when they exist in lieu of public options. We continue to see limited investment in these essential public services and increased marketization of public services through arrangements like public private partnerships.^{xiii} As we saw during Covid 19 and documented in our research [Profiteering Off a Pandemic](#), private facilities violated patient's rights including charging exorbitant fees and detaining patients who failed to pay.^{xiv} In education, absent government regulation, private schools arbitrarily raise school fees and impose burdensome requirements on parents making education inaccessible. The most affected are poor and vulnerable populations.

23. We congratulate the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights on passing a landmark General Comment on private actors and social services which provides the most progressive and comprehensive interpretation of States' human rights obligation to regulate private involvement in the delivery of social/public services.^{xv}

24. The Uganda state violates its human rights obligations when it leaves social services like health and education to the market. The African Commission had in its 2014 Concluding Observations cautioned the state against the lack of regulation of private actors in education.

25. *Recommendations:*

- ***Implement the General Comment on Private actors and social services by ensuring that even when private actors provide social services, at the minimum, are:***
 - (a) **available to all individuals on an equitable basis and without discrimination;**
 - (b) **accessible, even in times of emergency;**
 - (c) **acceptable to the users;**
 - (d) **of the highest attainable quality;**
 - (e) **effectively regulated;**
 - (f) **and subject to democratic public accountability.**

- **Refrain from investing public funds in for profit actors providing social services.**

INCREASING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY BUSINESSES IN THE CONTEXT OF LARGE INVESTMENTS

26. These range from land grabbing, evictions, unlawful possession of people’s property without free prior informed consent (FPIC), poor or zero compensation of citizens for their grabbed property among others, child labour.^{xvi} Testimonies have been shared by employees working for some multi-national companies and other corporate entities like those owned by Chinese,^{xvii} Indians, Koreans, Germans and Dutch over land grabbing, exposure of their employees to precarious working conditions, meager pay that does not translate into their hard labour, among others. This state of affairs continues to prevail in a policy environment in which the government has on a number of occasions been reported to connive with investors at the expense of the local communities/ citizens.^{xviii} Even the government institutions whose mandate clearly charges them to pursue the protection of people’s rights and responsibilities, such as the Labour officers, Commercial officers, and Environment officers at the district level have not been properly facilitated to aid their actions.^{xix}

27. Article 19 of the African charter provides that ‘All people shall be equal; they shall enjoy the same respect and shall have the same rights. Nothing shall justify the domination of a people by another.

28. We commend Uganda for passing its National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as one of the few African countries on the Continent to do so. It can go a long way to mitigate and reduce human rights violations by investors and it must be swiftly implemented.

29. Recommendations

- ***Implement the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights***
- ***Update legislation to strengthen respect for human rights by all private actors operating in their jurisdiction.***

- *Ensure Free, Prior and informed Consent is provided by affected communities.*
- *Mandate businesses to carry out mandatory human rights due diligence.*
- *Ensure access to information and meaningful participation of affected communities.*
- *Eliminate child labour by investing in public education and strengthening regulation of businesses providing strict penalties for those undertaking child labour.*

B. REPORTING ON THE SUBSTANTIVE PROVISIONS OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER, ITS SUPPLEMENTARY PROTOCOLS AND/OR THE IDP CONVENTION

EDUCATION: This section responds to paragraph 3 of the state report on Education.

30. The government of Uganda has made insufficient progress to ensure the realization of the right to education for all its people in line with Article 17 (1) of the African charter on Human and Peoples Rights
31. The failure to provide public services like education worsens poverty with the government’s own data showing the most chronically poor are those who lack formal education.^{xx}
32. While the government of Uganda has highlighted increased enrolment figures in recent years, it is vital to shed light on significant challenges that continue to plague our public education system.

Underfinancing of public schools resulting in poor quality

33. Despite the government’s rhetoric on free primary and secondary education, the persistent underfinancing has meant public schools are struggling to remain afloat and passing on additional charges to parents. For example, the capitation grant in primary schools, which is the cost of maintaining a child per year in a public school, is 20,000US\$ (approximately 3USD) per child per year. This is woefully inadequate even by the government’s own costing where the National Planning Authority in 2018 had recommended a minimum of 58,000US\$ per child per year and this was before the cost of living crisis and does not account for inflation.^{xxi}

34. The impact of this limited financing is children from lower income families are unable to attend schools with higher dropout rates, particularly for girls.

35. The limited financing also means public schools often lack textbooks, writing spaces and even classrooms.

36. Recommendation:

- *Finance and Equip Public Education System focusing on increasing capitation grants and teacher to pupil ratio.*
- *In line with international benchmarks, increase allocated resources for education to at least 6% of GDP or 20% of the national budget.*

Unchecked rise in the cost of education

37. While school enrolment figures might be increasing as indicated by the government of Uganda, the unchecked rise in the cost of education, including both tuition and non-tuition fees is hindering national efforts to attain universal education thereby, increasing education disparities that disproportionately affect the poor and disadvantaged.^{xxiii}

38. Recommendations

- *Develop a policy on private provision of education and amend the Education Act to strengthen the regulation of private provision of education in line with the Abijan Principles.*
- *Make necessary interventions to regulate the cost of education in order to improve retention and completion rates.*

Teenage pregnancies and inconsistencies in management of pregnancies in school settings

39. While the government's report at paragraph 3.2, page 17, mentions rising enrolment figures over the past years, it fails to highlight the alarming rising rates of adolescent pregnancies, which hinder the educational progress of thousands of girls which undermines their prospects to joining the paid labour market and attaining self-

economic reliance. According to UNICEF, 25 percent of 1.2 million pregnancies recorded in Uganda annually involve adolescent girls.^{xxiii}

40. Article 18(2) of the African Charter mandates the State to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure protection of the rights of the women and child.

41. We commend the government of Uganda for passing the revised guidelines for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school setting in Uganda which remains a concern given the rise in teenage pregnancies during Covid 19.^{xxiv} Although the guides contain several positive aspects, they too have a number of restrictions that effectively constitute as access barriers for girls. For instance, the requirement for pregnant girls to leave school after the first trimester (3 months) and only return six months after delivery, technically keeping a girls away from school for 12months.

42. ***Recommendations***

- ***Revise the current guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting in Uganda and remove all conditions that hinder continued learning.***
- ***Assess the implementation of the current guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting in Uganda in private schools to reduce the number of school drop-outs and promote continuity in education.***
- ***Operationalize the national sexuality education framework.***

HEALTH: This section responds to government progress on Health as mentioned in paragraph 4 of the State report.

43. Uganda's health sector remains chronically under financed and less prioritised undermining Article 16 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. This financial shortfall significantly impedes the achievement of universal health.

Limited Public Health Facilities.

44. Although as noted in the government report **Paragraph 4.3 and 4.5** the government has strengthened efforts to upgrade health centers IIs to IIIs, some sub-counties and parishes still lack health centers within the recommended 3km radius. The latest National Service Delivery Survey indicates that 45 per cent of people do not access public health facilities because they are too far away. Likewise, 56 per cent of communities access healthcare within 3kms country-wide, with Lango having the lowest population proportion at 40 per cent, followed by Karamoja at 43 per cent.^{xxv}

45. The failure to sufficiently invest in public health facilities has resulted in catastrophic out of pocket health expenditure with people having to sell their land and possessions, choose between other basic needs and healthcare.

46. Recommendation:

- *Increase the number of public health facilities and adequately equip public health facilities with human resource, infrastructure, medical supplies and equipment.*
- *Increase funding to the health sector to meet the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases threshold of 15 per cent of the annual budget.*

Retention of health workers. Paragraph 4.6 of the government report

47. While the government's efforts in enhancing the salaries of medical officers and rehabilitating healthcare facilities are commendable, we note that health workers often face delayed payments and recruitment which are critical blocks to maintaining a motivated and dedicated healthcare workforce and ensuring uninterrupted healthcare services.

48. Recommendation:

- **Increase the number of health workers and sufficiently remunerate them.**

Rights Violations and Patient Detention in Private Health Facilities

49. In the absence of strong regulation, private facilities continue to detain patients when they face difficulty paying their medical-related bills, disproportionately affecting

women seeking maternal services. Patient detention is contrary to Uganda's Constitution, which prohibits arbitrary detention, inhuman and degrading treatment of people. No action has been taken by government against these facilities. Some of the facilities engaging in this receive government support in the form of primary health care grants and credit lines at the Joint Medical Stores to help underserved populations.^{xxvi} As we saw during Covid 19 and documented in our research [Profiteering Off a Pandemic](#), private facilities violated patient's rights including charging exorbitant fees and detaining patients who failed to pay.^{xxvii}

50. Recommendation:

- **Develop and implement a legal framework that regulates private actors providing healthcare and bans detention of patients.**
- **Government should pay for patient's bills in locations where there is no comparable public health facility.**

National Health Insurance Scheme

51. Uganda still does not have a national health insurance scheme. It is not clear that the national health insurance scheme being discussed within government will prioritise the vulnerable. If it does not, it will heighten inequality.

52. Suggested recommendation

- *Fast-track the passing of the national health insurance scheme that ensures healthcare is free at point of use and that will fully include the poor and vulnerable.*

SOCIAL PROTECTION MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER BUT UNDERFINANCED. This section responds to page 78 of the government report and references Article 5, 18 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.

53. The COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and climate change have all served to exacerbate poverty and inequality in the country underscoring the need for social protection. According to the latest World Bank estimates, three in ten Ugandans live below the poverty line. The latest Uganda Bureau of Statistics assessment shows an

incidence of multi-dimensional poverty at 42.1%. At least half of Ugandans are vulnerable to falling back into poverty.^{xxviii} The World Bank's latest assessment found shocks affected 40% of rural and 30% of urban households with a disproportionate impact on the poor. As ISER's research report "I Must Work to Eat"^{xxix} pointed out, there has been an increase in child labour and street children in urban areas. The informal sector, which comprise 86 percent of the working population, was severely affected by strict containment measures introduced by the Government of Uganda to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xxx}

54. Despite having a National Social Protection policy 2016, existing social protection programs are limited in scope and insufficiently cater for the informal sector. While the government has provided social protection to older persons above 80 years old in the form of Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE), the minimum age of 80 years to access SAGE and the requirement to have a national ID excludes many.^{xxxi} Close to 48 percent of older persons above the age of 65 years live in poverty.^{xxxii}

55. Stimulus packages, were not only disproportionate to the informal sector but also inaccessible due to rigorous requirements.^{xxxiii}

56. *Recommendations*

- *Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on the Right of Citizens to Social Protection and social security*
- *Implement a right- based approach to social protection.*
- *Ensure that spending on health, education, and social security meets, at a minimum, international benchmarks as a percentage of GDP and national budgets.*

Digital national identification system barring access to public services

57. Uganda is increasingly requiring national id to access public services like social protection and even attempted to do so for covid 19 vaccines.^{xxxiv} However, the current national ID system excludes vulnerable groups such as street-connected children, stateless individuals, and children with single parents. This oversight excludes them from crucial planning and support mechanisms.^{xxxv}

58. Up to a third of the adult population in Uganda remain shut out of the Ndaga Muntu (digital ID) system because they do not have a national ID, and many others have critical errors in their data or are unable to biometrically verify their identity.^{xxxvi} The UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty found that for example, between 23 and 33 percent of the country's adult population have not received a national identity card.^{xxxvii} Despite publicly recognizing this, the government continues to make the national ID a mandatory requirement for accessing many social services including social protection like the SAGE grants for older persons, thereby excluding thousands of eligible older persons.

59. In Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, every citizen shall have right of equal access to the public service of their country. Barring people from accessing public services like social protection, health, education because they lack digital id violates this. Exclusion on the basis of lacking digital ID, in particular, violates the rights of women.

60. As UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty discussing Uganda's national digital ID cards recommended, "digital identity systems should not be a prerequisite for benefiting from social protection schemes and when they are set up, they should be designed in a way that is inclusive."^{xxxviii}

61. Recommendation

- *National digital identity card systems should not be a prerequisite for accessing public services like health, education, social protection.*

62. VULNERABLE GROUPS

Indigenous minority groups

63. In line with Article 22, the displacement of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and the resulting landlessness has significant ramifications for these communities. Food security in the rural context is largely related to land. The small plots of land allocated to communities that have been evicted from National Parks or forests are insufficient to provide enough food to sustain the communities. Further still, for hunter gatherer communities such as the Batwa and the Benet, denial of access

to their traditional lands in the forests contributes not only to loss of food security but also to loss of cultural rights and income generating activities.

64. Although on paper ethnic minorities should have equal access to education, this is not the case in practice. Some of the issues that negatively impact ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples' ability to access UPE, USE include:

- a. Remoteness of the location of many of the ethnic minority and indigenous communities and the long distances many children have to travel to reach the schools. The Batwa for example must walk long distances to attend these schools. The Mount Elgon Benet Indigenous Group report that most Benet children must walk up to 8 km to attend school.
- b. Poor quality of the infrastructure, teachers and sanitation facilities of these schools;
- c. Inability to cover the cost of scholastic materials, school uniforms and sanitary items and inability to pay for tuition fees at Tertiary institutions.
- d. Need for families to have their children working to earn an income for the family. This is particularly prevalent in the Batwa communities;
- e. Early child marriages.
- f. Discrimination from other dominant groups as most classes are taught in the language of the majority in that area and not the language of the ethnic minority or indigenous group. This kind of forced assimilation is experienced, for example, by the Ik (language not written) in Kaabong district who are taught Karimojong instead of Ik and the Basongora in Kasese district who are taught Lukonzo instead of Rusongora.

65. The Benet and Batwa face serious difficulties in accessing health services.

66. Suggested Recommendations

- ***The Government of Uganda, as part of affirmative action, should introduce targeted provision of educational services and health infrastructure to ensure that minority and indigenous peoples are not marginalised regardless of population numbers or traditional livelihood system.***

Persons with Disabilities

67. Article 18(4) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights mandates the state to pay special attention to older persons and those with disabilities in line with their physical and moral needs.

68. Persons with disabilities face barriers to accessing social and economic rights. Persons with hearing disabilities are not able to access healthcare due to the lack of sign language interpretation. Despite bringing a court case, Constitutional Petition 29/2017 government has not addressed this.

69. Suggested Recommendations:

- ***Ensure sign language interpretation in health facilities.***

ANNEX 1

NDP III	National Development Plan III
ISER	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights
NIRA	National Identification and Registration Authority
ACHPR	African Commission on Human & People's Rights
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EMIS	Education Information Management System
FY	Financial Year
GoU	Government of Uganda
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
SAGE	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USE	Universal Secondary Education

ANNEX 2: METHODOLOGY

The report preparation was coordinated by ISER. The issues discussed in this report were initially generated from a series of consultative meetings started in 2018, 2019 and the thematic clusters were led by the organisations below with broader input from other organisations within these clusters.

- **Land & housing, Business & human rights , Trade & Investment** – SEATINI, Centre for Economic Social and Cultural Rights Africa and the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability(UCCA), Platform for Labour Action
- **Health** – Centre for Health Human Rights and Development (CEHURD), Coalition for Health Promotion and Social Development (HEPS), Uganda Network on Law Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET), Palliative Care Association Uganda (PCAU), SHU
- **Social Protection** – ISER and PCAU
- **Education** –Women and Girl Child Development Association, Cross Cultural Foundation Uganda, Joy for Children
- **Indigenous Minorities** – Minority Rights Group, Cross Cultural Foundation Uganda
- **Financing and Taxation-** SEATINI, Uganda Debt Network
- **Access to safe and clean water** –Centre for Economic Social and Cultural Rights Africa

When the government report was delayed, further consultations were held on these issues in 2022 and 2023 especially with the [Reclaim Public Services in Uganda](#) coalition which was birthed at the height of the pandemic in 2021 and issues raised on public services, covid 19 were from the meetings held by the coalition. The coalition consists of 153 members and has a [PEOPLES MANIFESTO](#).

This report was also validated at a broader CSO meeting held by the National Coalition on Human Rights Defenders in 2023.

The report references both government data, court decisions and other reports from civil society and UN mechanisms.

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