

ISER'S STATEMENT ON THE WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

INCREASE FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR OLDER PERSONS IN UGANDA

20th February 2025, Kampala - Uganda.

The recent [National Population and Housing Census Report\(2024\)](#) indicates that older persons aged 60 years and above constitute 5% of Uganda's population of 45,905,417 people. According to the National Social Protection Strategy (2024-2026), older persons face multiple vulnerabilities including increasing frailty, chronic illness, declining productivity, and live in poverty and yet 13.3% of them live alone. Many older persons rely on subsistence farming – which is increasingly affected by unpredictable weather patterns and prolonged droughts – to fend for themselves. These climatic shifts significantly reduce their agricultural yield, deepening their vulnerability. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by increasing food insecurity and heightening economic instability.

On this World Day of Social Justice, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) emphasizes the urgent need for a robust social protection system as a fundamental pillar for climate action and a just society. This year's theme, "[Strengthening a Just Transition for a Sustainable Future](#)," highlights the necessity of inclusive social and economic policies that protect the most vulnerable from the effects of climate change.

Social protection remains a crucial mechanism for supporting the most vulnerable in responding to climatic and economic disruptions. However, according to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) [World Social Protection Report 2024-26](#) – which calls for universal social protection for climate action and a just transition – only 52.4% of the global population is covered by at least one form of social protection. In Africa, coverage drops to just 19.1%, and in Uganda, only 3.1% of the total population is covered by at least one form of social protection.

Currently, Uganda's Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) program only supports older persons aged 80 and above, leaving those between 60 and 79—many of them informal workers with unstable sources of income—without assistance. It is crucial to note that [over 80% of Uganda's labour force is informal](#), yet these workers have limited access to social protection benefits, leaving them highly vulnerable to financial instability especially during economic downturns. This exclusion means that many older persons live without basic necessities, healthcare, and financial support.

Social protection is not merely a safety net; it is a critical tool for adaptation and resilience against climate change. Uganda's [National Social Protection Policy, 2015](#) acknowledges this role, yet funding for it remains grossly inadequate, standing at only 0.7% of GDP—as [ISER's research](#) has shown. The budget for the SAGE

programme has stagnated the last three years i.e. FY 2021/22 – 2023/24¹²³ at US\$ 121 billion Uganda Shillings and has been even cut further to now US\$ 100 billion⁴ in the current 2024/25 FY budget. As a result of this cut, 109,000⁵ eligible older persons will not receive their cash benefits in the last quarter of this financial year. Additionally, beneficiaries under the program receive only UGX 25,000 per month, an amount unchanged in over a decade and grossly inadequate to meet their basic needs.

Uganda's growing debt burden has only exacerbated the situation, as increased debt servicing has significantly reduced funds available for vital public services, including social protection. As [ISER's budget analysis](#) showed, in FY 2024/25, Uganda spent up to US\$ 41.7 trillion on debt repayment and financing but only a meagre UGX 172 billion (only 0.2% of the total budget) for social protection interventions.

Strengthening social protection by increasing its funding is very essential for climate action and for just transition. It is essential for reducing poverty, enhancing economic stability, and fostering a resilient population capable of coping with climatic and economic shocks.

A Call to Action

On this year's World Day of Social Justice, we call upon the government to;

1. **Increase Financing for Social Protection** by increasing budgetary allocations to ensure comprehensive coverage for all older persons.
2. **Enact a Social Protection Act** to mandate social protection for all especially older persons.
3. **Lower the SAGE eligibility age to 60** to expand access to social protection benefits to all (older) persons.
4. **Integrate Social Protection and Climate Action** by reforming and implementing social protection policies that directly address climate-related vulnerabilities

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<https://budget.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/National%20Budget%20docs/Approved%20Budget%20Estimates%20FY%202021-22.pdf>

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<https://budget.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/National%20Budget%20docs/Approved%20Budget%20Estimates%20FY%202022-23%20Volume%201-%20Central%20Government.pdf>

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<https://budget.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/National%20Budget%20docs/Approved%20Budget%20Estimates%20for%20Central%20Governments%20Vol.%201%20FY%202023-24.pdf>

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<https://budget.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/National%20Budget%20docs/Approved%20Budget%20Estimates%20for%20Central%20Governments%2C%20Vol.%201%20FY%202024-25.pdf>

⁵ Summary of Programme Performance, December 2024, Expanding Social Protection Programme, Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development.