

# ISER's STATEMENT IN COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

10 December 2025 – Kampala, Uganda

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) joins the international community to commemorate International Human Rights Day, 77 years since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the blueprint of national and international human rights frameworks in the world. This year's theme, "Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials," speaks to a fundamental truth: human rights are not distant ideals or policy aspirations; they are the everyday conditions that enable people to live with dignity. At the centre of these conditions is the right to social protection, which provides a supportive foundation for the enjoyment of other rights, including healthcare, education, food, and housing.

Social protection is not charity; it is a right and a backbone for social and economic justice, enabling especially the vulnerable to live in dignity. It helps families withstand economic shocks, climate shocks, keeps children in school, facilitates access to healthcare, and protects vulnerable groups, including children, women, older persons, and persons with disabilities, from falling into extreme poverty.

Where social protection systems are weak, inequalities deepen, and the poorest and most marginalized are left behind. Social protection is foundational. Without income security, the rights to healthcare, education for children, adequate food, and an adequate standard of living remain notional." — Angela Kasule Nabwowe, Executive Director, ISER.

Despite this central role, ISER notes with concern that Uganda's social protection system remains limited in scope and underfunded. While the government has taken strides in improving social protection by adopting the 2015 National Social Protection Policy and the recent National Social Protection Strategy (2024-2029), to provide for a concrete framework to address risk and vulnerability in Uganda,

Implementation of social protection interventions has largely centred on older persons through the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme. As a result, overall coverage remains critically low, with only about 3% of Ugandans receiving at least one form of social protection benefit. Uganda also still lacks a comprehensive Social Protection law that guarantees social assistance for vulnerable persons across their life cycle.

ISER commends the Government of Uganda for the recently announced decision to expand SAGE eligibility from 80 to 65 years and to increase the monthly benefit from UGX 25,000 to UGX 35,000. However, further increments in the grant value will still be necessary in the coming years to ensure that it keeps pace with the current cost of living.

ISER has consistently advocated for a rights-based approach to social protection, including calling for the establishment of a universal pension that guarantees income security for all older persons. Our research shows that universal pensions are not only fiscally feasible but essential for reducing poverty, addressing inequality, strengthening household resilience, and upholding dignity in older age. For many older persons, nearly 48% of whom live in multidimensional poverty, the promise of social protection remains unrealized.

In Uganda, delivery and access to social protection and other essential public services remain dependent on digital public infrastructure, particularly the digital National ID. Yet more than 17 million Ugandans as of May 2025 remain without an ID. ISER's research has shown that the mandatory reliance on digital identification continues to exclude thousands of eligible vulnerable groups, including older persons, women, and persons with disabilities. "While digital systems offer opportunities to improve efficiency in public service delivery, including social protection, without inclusive design, they risk reproducing and deepening existing inequalities instead of closing them. A rights-based approach to digital infrastructure must ensure that technology expands coverage rather than determines who is left out," Saphina Nakulima, Programmes Director at ISER.

On this Human Rights Day, ISER calls on the Government of Uganda to:

1. Increase financing for social protection through domestic revenue mobilization, including progressive taxation, and to avail funds in the 2026/27 national budget to actualize the newly made commitments on SAGE.
2. Allow alternative modes of identification to ensure that the mandatory requirement of a national ID does not hinder older persons' access to social services and social protection benefits;
3. Enact a comprehensive Social Protection law mandating social protection for all, including older persons and children.

As we commemorate this day, ISER reaffirms its unwavering commitment to ensuring that human rights, particularly social and economic rights, are not merely declared but delivered – every day, for every person.

## Contact

Plot 60, Valley Drive, Ministers' Village, Ntinda. Email: [info@iser-uganda.org](mailto:info@iser-uganda.org)  
Phone: +256 414 581041 Website: [www.iser-uganda.org](http://www.iser-uganda.org)