

## **ISER'S STATEMENT ON THE 2026 WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **SOCIAL PROTECTION IS CRITICAL FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

20th February 2026 — Kampala, Uganda

The [Initiative for Social and Economic Rights \(ISER\)](#) joins the global community in commemorating the World Day of Social Justice 2026 under the theme [“Renewed Commitment to Social Development and Social Justice.”](#) This observance comes at a pivotal moment as governments worldwide reaffirm commitments to eradicate poverty, promote decent work, and advance social inclusion as pillars of sustainable development. Despite progress in education, health, and social protection, millions—particularly in developing countries—remain trapped in poverty, informality, and exclusion

#### ***Why Older Persons must be at the Center of Social Justice***

In Uganda, older persons in particular, who constitute [about 5% of the population](#), continue to face structural and intersecting vulnerabilities driven by poverty, ill health, climate shocks, and limited access to social protection; many live in poverty, experience declining productivity, and face chronic illnesses, and a significant number live alone without reliable family or community support. They mostly depend on subsistence farming, which is increasingly undermined by erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and other climate-related disruptions. These shocks reduce food production and income, deepening vulnerability and threatening their right to an adequate standard of living. For many older persons, social protection programmes are a lifeline.

#### ***Persistent Gaps in Social Protection***

Recent international processes—including the World Summit for Social Development, which concluded with the [Doha Political Declaration](#) and the Financing for Development Conference (FfD4) outcome document ([“Compromiso de Sevilla”](#))—have reaffirmed that sustainable and equitable financing for social protection is essential for reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. These commitments emphasize expanding coverage, mobilizing domestic resources, and ensuring systems that can respond to economic, climate, and conflict-related shocks.

In Uganda, the government [recently pledged](#) to expand the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme by reducing the eligibility age from 80 years to 65 years and increasing the transfer value from UGX 25,000 to UGX 35,000—[reforms long advocated for by ISER](#). This represents an important step toward strengthening income security and dignity for older persons and aligns more closely with the 2015 [National Social Protection Policy](#), which defined older persons as those aged 60 years and above.

However, significant barriers remain. [ISER's research](#) has shown that mandatory reliance on the National ID for enrolment continues to exclude many older persons who lack or cannot easily obtain identification. More flexible and inclusive registration mechanisms are needed to ensure no eligible person is left behind.

Despite the recent commitments to expand the SAGE programme, no funding was allocated in the [National Budget Framework Paper for FY 2026/27](#) to operationalize these reforms. Social protection spending remains a very small share of national expenditure. Without adequate financing, policy promises cannot translate into meaningful improvements.

Overall coverage remains extremely limited. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), just over half of the global population receives at least one social protection benefit, with Africa lagging far behind. In Uganda, only a small fraction of citizens benefits from formal social protection.

The SAGE programme continues to exclude many vulnerable older persons aged 60–79 years who are no longer economically productive yet receive no regular state support. Even for beneficiaries, the grant remains insufficient to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, shelter, and utilities.

### ***Social Protection as a Pillar of Social Development***

This year's theme underscores the need for coherence across economic, social, and environmental policies. For Uganda, a renewed commitment to social justice should include:

- Recognizing social protection as a human right and public investment, not discretionary welfare
- Building a comprehensive social protection system that provides support for the vulnerable across the life cycle
- Addressing structural inequalities affecting older persons, women, informal workers, and rural populations

### ***A Renewed Call to Action***

Effective social protection reduces poverty, stimulates local economies, enhances resilience, and enables citizens to live with dignity. It is also a critical tool for climate adaptation, particularly for vulnerable populations. On this World Day of Social Justice 2026, ISER calls upon the Government of Uganda to:

1. Substantially increase financing to ensure universal social protection coverage for older persons.
2. Enact a comprehensive Social Protection Law guaranteeing enforceable rights to income security in old age.
3. Implement the proposed plans to lower the eligibility age for SAGE to 65 years to reflect actual vulnerability and life expectancy.
4. Integrate social protection into climate resilience strategies, especially for rural populations.
5. Expand coverage to informal workers, who constitute the majority of Uganda's labour force yet remain largely unprotected.