



STATEMENT BY THE “CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL PROTECTION” ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS, 2026

The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives

1st October 2026 | Kampala, Uganda

On the occasion of the 2026 United Nations International Day of Older Persons, under the theme “The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives,” the Civil Society Working Group on Social Protection calls for a fundamental rethink of how Uganda prepares for and supports people as they age.

Living longer is certainly one of humanity’s greatest achievements. But longevity can only be celebrated when the additional years of life are accompanied by dignity, health, income security, participation and freedom from poverty and exclusion. A longer life without adequate social protection, accessible healthcare, decent housing, food security and meaningful economic participation can instead mean a longer exposure to poverty and vulnerability.

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Platform for Labour Action
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Women and Girl Child Development Association
(WEGCDA)
HelpAge Advocacy Network Uganda (HANU)

Uganda's own demographic trends make this conversation increasingly urgent. According to the [2024 National Population and Housing Census](#), persons aged 60 and above constitute 5 percent of Uganda's population, representing approximately 2.3 million people. Women account for a larger share of the older population than men. The Census further shows that 13.3 percent of older persons live in single-person households. At the same time, Uganda's life expectancy at birth has increased substantially. [UBOS reports](#) that life expectancy rose from 63.7 years in 2014 to 68.2 years in 2024, reaching 70.1 years for women and 66.9 years for men.

Uganda's social protection system has not kept pace with this demographic reality and continues to face significant gaps in coverage and adequacy, particularly for older persons. In November 2025, Cabinet approved [expanding](#) the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) programme by reducing the eligibility age to 65 years and increasing the monthly grant from UGX 25,000 to UGX 35,000 starting in FY 2026/27, but this decision is yet to be implemented. This is particularly important in Uganda, where [more than 80 per cent](#) of the labour force is engaged in informal employment, meaning that many workers reach old age without access to social security and may depend on non-contributory support for income security.

“When the Government announced that it would expand SAGE program to cover more older persons and increase the grant, we were happy because we knew this would make a real difference in the lives of many older persons. But the promise has not yet been implemented, and many older persons who were hoping to benefit are still waiting.

We urge the Government to fulfil this commitment so that older persons can begin to benefiting from this programme,” said John Orach, the chairperson of the National Network of Older Persons Uganda.

LONGEVITY REQUIRES ADEQUATE SOCIAL PROTECTION

The [A People's Pension: A Manifesto on Social Protection for Older Persons](#), developed by the CSO Working Group called for a recognition of social protection for older persons not as charity or a discretionary government programme, but as a right.”

“Social protection is a right, and as such, the government must provide adequate social protection for all older persons. As Uganda's population ages and people live longer, social protection must evolve with them. For older persons, access to social protection is not simply a matter of government assistance; it is important in ensuring that they age in dignity,” said Angella Kasule Nabwowe, Executive Director of ISER.

The idea of an “age of longevity” therefore requires us to think beyond simply increasing the number of years people live. It requires us to ask what those additional years look like. The right to social security under Article 9 of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) applies to everyone, including older persons. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has specifically recognized the need for non-contributive old-age benefits or other assistance for older persons who have not completed the contribution requirements for a pension and have no other adequate source of income.

We commend the government of Uganda for ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security. These commitments provide an important foundation for building systems that recognize older persons as rights-holders rather than passive recipients of welfare.

A rights-based approach to social protection also requires attention to adequacy, accessibility, non-discrimination, participation and accountability. This also means ensuring that older persons are not excluded from accessing benefits because of a mandatory requirement to have or use the digital national ID. Rethinking systems for longevity there need building a comprehensive social protection system that recognizes old age as a normal part of the life course and protects people in their old age and other risks associated with ageing. This is consistent in universal social protection income security, alongside accessible public services including healthcare, disability support, housing, and food security.

The implementation of these commitments also requires adequate public financing. ISER's analysis of the FY2026/27 National Budget found that UGX 121.2 billion was allocated to SAGE, against an estimated UGX 373.36 billion required to implement the planned expansion, leaving a financing gap of UGX 252.16 billion. Closing this gap is essential if the Government's commitment is to translate into increased coverage and adequate income support for older persons.

Our Call to Action

On this International Day of Older Persons, the CSO Working Group on Social Protection for Older Persons calls upon the Government of Uganda to:

- **Enact legislation recognising social protection as a human right**, including mandating its financing and provision for social protection across the life cycle.
- **Implement the expansion of the SAGE programme** by allocating the UGX 252.16 billion financing gap required to reduce the eligibility age to 65 years and increase the monthly grant to UGX 35,000.
- **Ensure gender-responsive social protection** measures that address the disproportionate vulnerabilities experienced by older women.
- **Expand social protection coverage** to workers in the informal economy.
- **Increase financing for social protection**, and periodic review and indexation of the SAGE grant to protect its value against inflation and rising living costs.
- **Provide accessible alternatives** for older persons who do not have the digital national ID to access social protection benefits.