

STATEMENT

UPR Pre-session on Uganda

Geneva, December 2021

Delivered by: Initiative for Social and Economic Rights

1. Presentation of the Organisation

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, a not-for-profit, indigenous organization set up to promote the realisation of economic and social rights in Uganda. The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights has worked around the UPR processes at the national and international level since 2016.

2. National Consultations for the drafting of the National Report

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the inter-ministerial consultations for the development of the National Report. The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights led the Civil Society Organisations consultations for the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Cluster and development of the Alternative report.

3. Statement

Health

Notwithstanding the Abuja Declaration commitment to allocate 15 percent of the national budget to the health sector, Uganda's healthcare system has been characterised by weak government stewardship and chronic underfinancing – with the budgetary allocation averaging 6 – 7% for the last five years. Conversely, the private sector is increasingly relied upon to deliver health services albeit with weak regulation. The public health sector, which is the first point of call for the most vulnerable, suffers a poor ambulance system, inadequate bed capacity, oxygen crisis, shortage of drugs, health workers and delayed allowances for emergency health staff. More so, in the midst of the pandemic, with many Ugandans being pushed into poverty, the cost of healthcare services has increased and this has made the need to enact the National Health Insurance Scheme Bill more urgent.

Education

Despite an increase in enrolment of pupils, the survival rate is still low. For instance, there has been an increase in enrolment from 8.84 million pupils in FY2017/18 to 10.76 million (representing a 22% increment) and maintained gender parity with both girls and boys at par with a 50:50 in Primary in FY2019/20 as well as 1.37million in FY2017/18 to 1.99million for secondary, representing a 45% increment in FY2019/20 (MoES, 2020). However, in 2017, the primary survival rate stood at 56%, which is considerably below compared to other countries within the region such as Kenya, which is close to 100%, Ethiopia at 72%, or Rwanda at 68% (World Bank, 2018). The recent data indicates that 13.3% of the children aged 6 – 12 years are

out of school (UNHS, 2016/17). Covid 19 made this worse with children, particularly from poor backgrounds out of school for more than a year. More so, the continued closure of schools has exposed children to exploitation in the form of child labour, sexual abuse, and high rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriages.

Business and Human Rights

Despite receiving a recommendation on minimum wage, it is yet to be implemented. Uganda's outdated minimum wage does not enable workers to earn a decent living. The minimum wage has not been adjusted since 1984 and stands at UGX 6,000 (USD 2) per month. Uganda also embarked on developing a national action plan on business and human rights in line with the 2016 recommendations. The national action plan was adopted and launched by the Government and now awaits implementation.

Failure to regulate private actors in social service delivery

The Government of Uganda continues to run a private sector led economy that is however dismally regulated. Amidst chronic underfinancing and weakening of public social services, there has been gradual privatization and commercialization of public social services. The private sector is increasingly relied upon to deliver public social services like health care and education, organized in procedures ranging from purely private to public private partnerships (PPPs). In health, 55% of the health facilities in Uganda are private or community owned with a push for public private partnerships by Government and International Finance Institutions despite evidence that [PPPs in health do not achieve equity in health](#) and [fail to reach the poorest](#). The Impact of under financing and weakening public health services has been felt most acutely during the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic with an [oxygen crisis](#) and [private sector profiteering off the pandemic](#), charging exorbitant prices resulting in people failing to access healthcare. The failure to regulate the private sector in education has resulted in private schools insisting on charging exorbitant fees and this has disproportionately left out many children - especially those from poor backgrounds. The unregulated expansion of private actors, particularly when they exist in lieu of public options, is detrimental to the accessibility of health care and education.

Recommendations

1. The Government of Uganda should increase the health sector budget to match the 15 per cent Abuja Declaration commitment.
2. Pass into law the National Health Insurance Scheme Bill 2019.
3. Robustly finance and equip the public education system.
4. Pass the Minimum Wage Bill into law and ensure implementation of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.
5. Strengthen regulation of private actors engaged in social service delivery.