

**YOU
DO
NOT
QUALIFY!**



December 2023

Experiences of older persons access to
social protection in Uganda

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Introduction

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) and Research & Action for Income Security (RAISE) are implementing a project to create awareness among the general public, civil society, government and other stakeholders on the recently adopted African Charter *'Protocol on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security'* and how this Protocol can be used to advocate for improved access to social protection in Uganda.

The protocol describes a broad range of standards for government provision of social protection, and provides a useful new entry point for advocacy and dialogue about the obligations of the state.

The United Nations defines social protection as a set of policies and programs aimed at preventing, protecting and overcoming situations that adversely affect the well-being of people through out the course of their lives. Through out the life cycle, there are situations that may impact on a person's ability to earn an adequate income i.e sickness, disability, old age, unemployment, climate -related hazards and other pandemics/crises.

In Uganda, the major social protection programme for older persons – Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme is a cash transfer programme under the

Uganda government's Expanding Social Protection Programme (ESP). While it is a good step towards realizing social protection for the elderly, SAGE is only eligible for older persons 80 years and above. Despite evidence pointing to improvement in the living standards of the beneficiaries, the programme is breeding social exclusion with many would be beneficiaries left out especially due to lack of or errors on the National Identification (National ID) which is the sole requirement to receive that money.

Through this photo essay, we have profiled older persons from selected districts in Uganda that have been negatively impacted by lack of access to social protection, as a result of limited coverage of the current senior citizens grant. In an earlier research report titled "Chased Away and Left to Die", by ISER, the Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice at the New York University (NYU) School of Law, and Unwanted Witness (UW), 10,000 eligible older persons are unable to access the Senior Citizens' Grant and 40,000 persons over 80 years of age wrongly excluded due to errors on their national IDs.

The stories are shocking. 90 year old Babirye is a sole bread winner of a household of 6 people which includes her two children with learning disabilities and four grand children so whatever little she gets from the grant is easily used up.

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82-year-old Komuhanda Dimulodi from Rakai District is missing out on SAGE. His earnings from digging in people's gardens amount to a paltry 3,000-5,000 Ugx (\$1.50) a week, leaving him unable to afford a National ID replacement. The cost of replacement is over ten times his weekly income."

Lomuria Alice suffers from a mobility-limiting sickness that prevents her from obtaining a National ID and as a result, is excluded from the SAGE grant.

As these stories from across the country all reveal, social protection is more necessary than ever as Uganda deals with poly crises of climate change, recovery from covid 19, cost of living crisis, Russia/Ukraine war. The government must prioritize investing in robust social protection measures. It should refrain from implementing budget cuts to existing programs, particularly those designed for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Additionally, it should explore the implementation of child-sensitive social protection programs, as demonstrated by Babirye's case, highlighting their interconnectedness.

- Government must invest in robust social protection. It should desist from financing cuts to existing social protection programmes like for the PWDs and consider child sensitive social protection programmes because as Babirye's case shows they are interlinked.

- Government must rethink the sole use of digital national ID as a requirement to access social protection and allow alternative forms of ID. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) should work closely with Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Program to profile all vulnerable older persons who have never registered for an ID.

- The National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) should waive the requirement for older persons to pay 50,000 Ugandan shillings to replace lost IDs. This will enable older persons, often living on fixed incomes, who face financial constraints that make it difficult for them to afford such fees.

- The government must lower the eligibility age for social protection. While it requires those eligible to be 80 years, as these stories show and the government's own data, in doing so, it excludes many vulnerable older persons.

We cannot forget these are rights. Article 18(4) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights reaffirms the rights of older Persons to the right to "special measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs" and their right to universal social security mechanisms is enshrined in the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Right of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security. Government must devote maximum available resources to fulfil them.

“
We are twins. My twin sister gets money from government but me I don't get. I was not registered because I was sick. I feel very bad. My children are gone, I don't know where they are. I stay here with my sister and we survive by grinding sorghum for some wellwishers.

Berendeta Ngorok

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Berendeta Ngorok (the one raising up her hands in the picture) is from Kongkwa Village, Lokuwas Parish, Matany Sub County in Napak District. Her attempts to enrol for SAGE have been futile.

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“ I have been to the SAGE distribution point three times. My son escorts me. The last time I went there was in September 2023. The CDO [Community Development Officer] always tells me , yours is not yet [not of age], you do not qualify

Chegem Pauline ”



Pauline is aged 79. She is from Napak District in Karamoja, the poorest sub region in Uganda. The life expectancy in this area according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics is 63 years.

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Okello Yovani is a resident of Buswale Parish, Buswale Sub County in Namayingo District in Eastern Uganda. He used to live in the home on the right until a well wisher stepped in.



“ I was born in 1930. I had 50 children but I remained with only one girl but I don't know where she is. The rest [49] died. As you see me, I am a person with disability. I am blind and physically disabled. A son to my brother helps me. I am alive because of God's grace. I have a National ID but I also wonder why I am not a beneficiary of this program[SAGE] . When I get this money I will use it for feeding. I will buy some meat.

Okello Yovani

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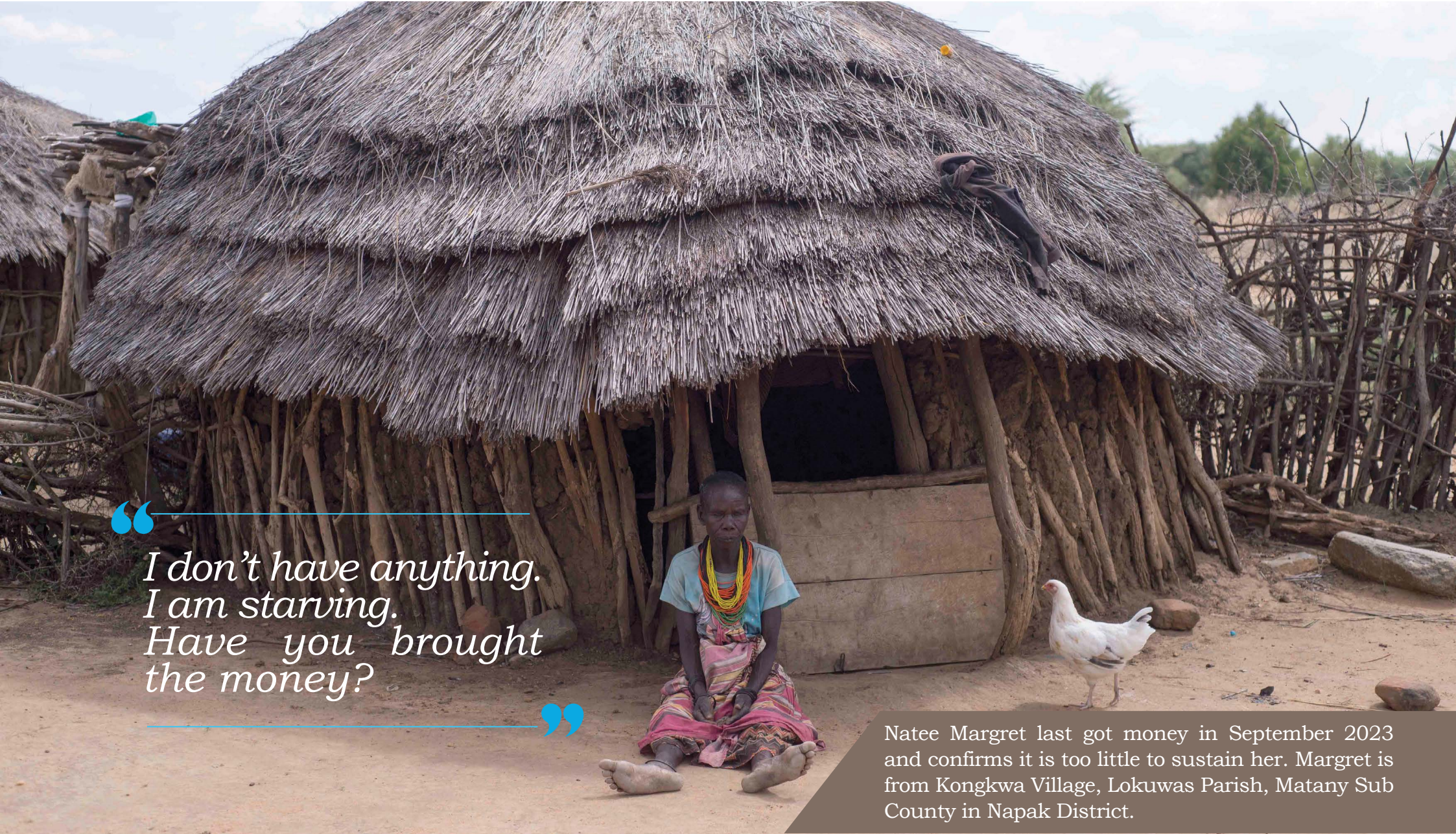
“

*I have never received any money for older persons. I am in my 90s. My grandson took me on a boda to Kalisizo to get money but they told me I don't qualify. On the way back, I fell off the boda boda and I almost died. I can't move now. I had people staying here with me but all disappeared when I lost my sight four years ago. **Nampijja Kevina***

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Nampijja Kevina is 84 years old. She has a baptism card that proves her age but authorities registering beneficiaries of SAGE rejected her due to lack of National ID. She attempted to get a National ID but the journeys were too dangerous considering her age and ill health. She is almost blind. She lives with a grandson.



“
*I don't have anything.
I am starving.
Have you brought
the money?*
”

Natee Margret last got money in September 2023 and confirms it is too little to sustain her. Margret is from Kongkwa Village, Lokuwas Parish, Matany Sub County in Napak District.

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“ As you can see, my leg is sick. I can't move long distances. I tried to send the children to Kangole [NIRA office about 20kms away] but the officers refused to give them the ID. I do not have any assistance, I rely on neighbours for survival and my 7 year old grand daughter to fetch water. My children abandoned me. I wish I could also get some money from government. **Lomuria Alice** ”



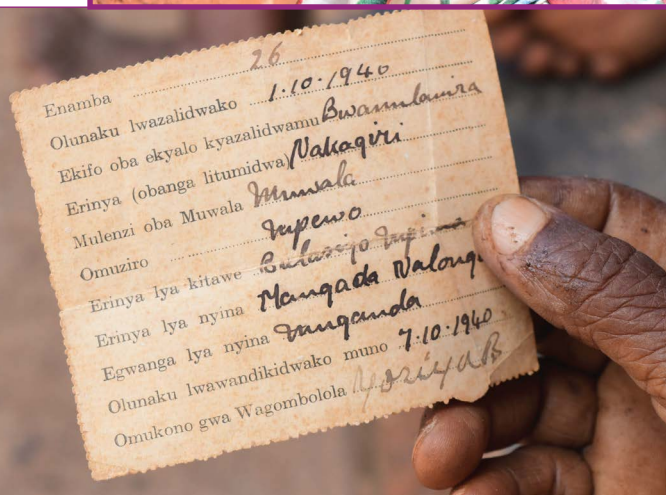
Alice is one of the most vulnerable persons in the area. Alice is about 82 years old and lives with a 7 year old grand daughter. Alice is being chased away from her hut because she does not own the land and was given a deadline of December 2023 to vacate but she has no where to go and has no strength and resources to build another hut.



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“ This is my sister’s home. She got me from my home because I was alone and sick. I have no child. I rented my land to someone so that I can get some money from it since I could not utilize it. I am 83 years old but I don’t get money from government. I don’t have a National ID. The time they were registering I was sick and could not make it to the Sub county. But now it is really difficult for me to move to NIRA offices for registration given my health status.”

Nakagiri Nakato



Nakagiri Nakato was in 1940 at Bwamiramira village , Kitatya parish, Kitimbwa Sub county Kayunga District. She is hopeful about receiving SAGE and she would like to utilize it to buy food.

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“

I get money from government. My son helps me to collect it. He has my National ID. I am happy that I get that money because I use it to take care of my family. It is a struggle but I have nothing to do. I have to work hard because it is not enough. Two of my children have mental problems [learning disability] and they completely depend on me, and four grand children.” I thank God that I don't have any illness of old age now.

Babirye Christina

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Babirye Christina is in Banda Village, is a sole bread winner of a household of 6 people which includes her two children with learning disabilities and four grand children so whatever little she gets from the grant is easily used up. She is also lucky that the officers responsible for SAGE distribution in her area allowed her son to pick the money on her behalf.





Oguttu Magadalena, from Namayingo District, is one of the older persons who petitioned the Equal Opportunities Commission for government to roll out SAGE nationwide arguing that her not receiving money while others did amounted to discrimination.

“
I started receiving my sage money from September 2023. I got 285,000 Ugx. I used some of the money to buy a goat to rear at 110,000Ugx.
”

Oguttu Magadalena

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“

I didn't have where to stay. A good man had pity on me and allowed me to stay in this house. I am on my own. I am 82 years, I don't have any relatives, my people disowned me. I know that old people like me get money from government but me I don't because my National ID got lost. I was told that I have to go to Rakai District Headquarters with 50,000Ugx. I don't have that money. what I earn from digging in people's gardens is sometimes 3,000 or 5,000 and I use it to buy food. I can't dig much because I am old. **Komuhanda Dimulodi**

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Dimulodi is from Kito Village, Kyengenza Parish, Kilumba Sub County, Kyotera District (curved out of Rakai District) The nearest NIRA office is at the Rakai District Headquarters which is over 20Kms from where he lives. This means that he needs an additional 20,000Ugx for transport.He is missing out on SAGE as his earning from digging in people's gardens i.e 3,000-5,000Ugx (\$1.50) a week. The NIRA fee for National ID replacement is over ten times his weekly income.

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Acknowledgement

This photo essay is a publication of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) in collaboration with Research & Action for Income Security (RAISE). This photo essay forms part of ISER and RAISE's work to advocate for improved access to social protection in Uganda.

Monitoring visits were done in the districts of Napak in Karamoja Sub region, Namayingo in Busoga Sub region, Kayunga, Kyotera and Rakai in Buganda Sub region. The districts were chosen based off the Government of Uganda poverty statistics among other criteria. The districts of Kyotera and Rakai were specifically chosen because of the impact of HIV/AIDs in the area that led to deaths of youth and left many homes with older persons and grandchildren. Older persons were left with a care burden with no access to social protection.

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