

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO A JUST, PEACEFUL AND RESILIENT UGANDA

2025 Civil Society New Year Statement

Fellow Ugandans, we welcome you all to the new year, 2025! As we step into this new year, we reflect on the progress our country has made in 2024 and recognize the challenges we continue to face as a country.

Global Leadership and Regional Influence

In 2024, Uganda demonstrated its growing influence in global and regional affairs by hosting the Third South Summit, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirming developing nations' commitment to sustainable development, peace, and cooperation. Its leadership within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) enhanced Uganda's role in global governance, emphasizing trade, science and technology, and tackling global challenges like crime, terrorism, and climate change.

Healthcare Advancement and Public Health Resilience

Uganda's health sector achieved significant progress, highlighted by the rollout of the malaria vaccine, a critical step in combating one of the country's deadliest diseases. This complements ongoing prevention efforts like mosquito net distribution and indoor spraying. Additionally, investments in community health workers and the second National Action Plan for Health Security have strengthened healthcare systems and improved disease preparedness and response.

The Potential of the Parish Development Model

In 2022, the Government of Uganda launched the Parish Development Model (PDM) to transition 17.5 million Ugandans from subsistence living to active economic participation. Over three years, progress has been made in improving parish-level infrastructure and services increasing citizen engagement in government programs, supporting local business growth. However, challenges like limited citizen ownership, corruption and abuse of office hinder the program's potential. Addressing these issues, particularly prioritizing the "mindset change" pillar, is essential for sustaining the PDM's impact and achieving its objectives.

Challenges Continue to Persist

Uganda has made significant progress in the past year, but challenges persist in human rights, poverty and inequality. Economic growth is offset by rising living costs, unemployment, and disparities, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Climate change worsens these issues with erratic weather disrupting agriculture, food security, and livelihoods. Floods and landslides in districts like Kasese and the Mt. Elgon region displaced tens of thousands, while inadequate funding hampers effective responses. Corruption remains a major obstacle, diverting resources from critical sectors and hindering sustainable development.

Political freedoms are constrained, with restrictions on expression, assembly, and association. Civil society organizations face operational challenges, and citizens and activists endure harassment thereby limiting democratic participation and advocacy for governance, human rights, and social justice.

CSOs have been instrumental in Uganda's national development and global advocacy. We contributed to the National Development Plan IV (NDPIV), integrating priorities like agro-industrialization, resource management, and human capital development. CSOs also played a key role in Uganda's Voluntary National Review and continue to advocate for policy reforms in electoral democracy, health, education, gender equality and climate change. In response to the refugee crisis and climate-related disasters, CSOs provided humanitarian aid including food, shelter and healthcare, while supporting displaced communities in rebuilding and reintegration.

Looking Ahead, the year 2025: Strengthening Democracy and Development

Next year, Uganda will hold its 7th General Election under the 1995 Constitution. While past elections have offered lessons, challenges like voter bribery, voter intimidation, limited media access for the opposition, violence, and suppression of dissent persist thus, undermining the process's integrity. Without significant reforms, the upcoming election may face similar issues, with heightened political tension, restricted assembly, and growing militarization raising concerns. Civil society organisations are actively engaging stakeholders including the Electoral Commission to address these challenges and advocate for a more transparent, free, and fair election. Citizen participation remains crucial, and efforts are ongoing to support voter and civic education to ensure Ugandans are informed, and empowered, to engage meaningfully in shaping the country's development trajectory.

The localization agenda remains a key focus for civil society as we continue to advocate for locally-led solutions to development challenges. It is essential that Uganda strengthens its commitment to people-centered development, where the priorities of the people, especially those from underserved communities are fully integrated into national policies and programs. The collaboration between CSOs, government, and the private sector is fundamental in achieving the SDGs and advancing Uganda's Vision 2040.

For God and My Country