**Concept note**

**9th Annual Conference on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights**

**Theme: Financing a Just and Inclusive Economic Recovery in Uganda**

**1.0 Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic that has had a devastating impact globally has not spared Uganda’s economy. Moreover, like the rest of the World, the country has now been hit by the economic effects of the war in Ukraine. The restrictions adopted earlier on to contain the spread of the pandemic such as the closure of boarders, closure of schools, non-essential businesses, restrictions on movement, and tourism immensely affected the economy. Even with the eventual full reopening of the economy early this year, the state and its citizens are still challenged by the socio-economic fall out from the crisis. Available evidence from a World Bank report demonstrates that the COVID-19 shock caused a sharp contraction of the economy to its slowest pace in three decades.[[1]](#footnote-1) The report notes that following the closure of many firms, jobs were lost and household incomes fell to drastic levels, particularly in the urban informal sector. Sustaining recovery will thus require the government to manage emerging risks including the imminent cost of living crisis, and the widening fiscal deficit. This definitely will require innovation from the domestic revenue mobilization (DRM) perspective to achieve meaningful public financing for recovery.

From the onset of the pandemic, there were projections of economic doom affecting mostly those on the society margins. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) projected that over 2.6 million Ugandans would be pushed into extreme poverty .[[2]](#footnote-2) True to the predictions, these now have to live on less than $1.25 dollars a day, moreover with the current surge in domestic commodity prices .[[3]](#footnote-3) It is evident that vulnerable sections of the population, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and women, have been the most affected. This is given fact that the Country has a weak social protection system and poor social services delivery record. Indeed, the State’s underfunding for key public services like health and education, for many years left the country unprepared for the effects of the pandemic. The Russian war has now aggravated this situation arising from the increasing prices of petroleum products and the disruption of supply chains.

The challenges above have been compounded by the lack of a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), a financing mechanism that would have provided for equity and social solidarity. This would take the form of pooling risks and funds and subsequently ensuring coverage for the poor, vulnerable and those in the informal sector. From the right to education and health perspectives, the effects of liberalization and privatization of critical rights have become most evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and immediate aftermath. This has come at a considerable cost, since private facilities are profit oriented, and have at many a times prioritized profits over rights holders thereby affecting the quality of services they provide.[[4]](#footnote-4) Private health facilities have now for instance, adopted more unlawful, cruel and humiliating methods of recovering their exorbitant medical bills.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Evidence[[6]](#footnote-6) from the National Planning Authority has as well found that public education spending had barely kept pace with the growth in the school-age population. With schools fully reopening this year, many parents have been left unable to meet their children’s fees requirements.

In response to some of these challenges, government instituted a number of fiscal measures to manage the crisis. These included social support in the form of food distribution and direct cash transfers; support for formal businesses through tax relief measures and loan facilities; and most recently financial support for households to engage in productive income generating activities. The latter has been done under the Parish Development Model (PDM). It remains to be seen how these and other initiatives will perform in addressing these overarching challenges.

The socio-economic impact of the pandemic has slowed progress in realization of human rights, and widened the inequality gap between the rich and poor. The *status quo* therefore necessitates government and other stakeholder intervention to address the short-term negative impacts of the pandemic as seen above, as well as avert the longer-term negative impacts.

It is against this background that the partners below come together to organize the 9th Annual National Conference on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that will be held at Makerere University on Wednesday 3rd and Thursday 4th August 2022, under the theme ***Financing a Just and Inclusive Recovery.***

1. **Objectives of the conference**

The overall objective of the conference is to examine the current fiscal and public finance responses to the post COVID-19 pandemic and Russian war economic effects using human rights lenses. Alternative approaches and fiscal measures will also be discussed with a focus on measures best suited to respond to the socio-economic effects on the vulnerable and marginalized sections of Ugandan society in relation to their access to public services. The areas of focus at the Conference will include the following: Responses/recovery measures undertaken; human rights based approach to financing; gender and equity budgeting; financing for public services; social protection measures; taxation and fiscal policy; illicit financial flows; rationalizing state expenditures; management of the surging public debt; maximizing oil revenues for equitable development; and domestic resource mobilization through progressive taxation, among others.

**2.1 The *specific objectives* of the Conference are:**

* To examine the adequacy of fiscal measures and other domestic revenue mobilization measures for a just and inclusive recovery;
* To explore the role of stronger public services in ensuring a just and inclusive recovery;
* To propose a human rights based approach to budgeting for a just and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict context;
* To scrutinize the place of the public debt, specifically the effects the same could have on public finance and recovery;
* To make recommendations for appropriate reforms to enable a just and inclusive economic recovery.

**3.0 Expected Outcome**

It is hoped that the conference will contribute to broader consensus between Government, citizens and other stakeholders on financing priorities, effective domestic revenue mobilization and fiscal measures. This is in addition to consensus on how to manage public debt, the role and forms of illicit financial flows and how they affect revenue mobilization for a just and inclusive recovery.

**4.0 Proposed participants**

The Conference will draw participants from various quarters, which will include policy makers, government bureaucrats, politicians, civil society actors, academics and members of the community.

**5.0 About the Organizers**

**Initiative for Social & Economic Rights (ISER)**

ISER is an independent, not-for-profit human rights organization responsible for promoting the effective understanding, monitoring, implementation and realization of Economic and Social Rights in Uganda. This they do by promoting a Human Rights Based approach to the design and implementation of legal and policy frameworks relating to Economic and Social Rights; building awareness about Economic and Social Rights and exploring strategies for securing their realization; broadening individuals’ and communities’ access to Economic and Social Rights in Uganda; strengthening community participation in the design and implementation of social and economic policies and programs that affect them; ensuring government accountability for Economic and Social Rights through community empowerment; and mobilizing and building capacity of Non-Governmental organizations and the media to advocate more effectively for Economic and Social Rights including using Regional and International mechanisms. ISER also hosts the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA)

**The Public Interest Law Clinic (PILAC)**

The Public Interest Law Clinic (PILAC) is the premier University Based Law Clinic in Uganda. Established in 2012, PILAC seeks to promote Social Justice through hands-on experiential learning as well as exposing students to ‘live’ cases of individuals who have been confronted by the law in its varied manifestations. The Clinic has a Clinical Legal Education (CLE) programme, which is intended to equip law students with public lawyering skills. PILAC has also extended the benefits of hands-on practical learning through the establishment of a Community Law Programme and mobile clinic (CLAPMOC), which is used to extend legal literacy sessions and other legal services to the communities around the university. PILAC also hosts the Network of Public Interest Lawyers which is an umbrella organization that brings together individual lawyers, CSOs/NGOs and law firms committed to public interest litigation and advocacy.

**Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA)**

The UCCA was established in August 2015 as a civil society consortium on corporate accountability aimed at enhancing accountability by corporations, States, international finance institutions and development partners for violations or abuses of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). It has a founding membership of four organizations specializing in different areas of rights protection, including the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), the Public Interest Law Clinic at Makerere University Law School (PILAC), Legal Brains Trust (LBT) and the Center for Health Human Rights and Development (CEHURD). Its membership currently stands at 23 organisations and is still widening its membership to include more organizations and community-based organization to strengthen the platform working around business and human rights issues. The UCCA is an active member of regional and international networks including the African Coalition on Corporate Accountability (ACCA) and the International Network on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) among others.

**Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC)**

Uganda Human Rights Commission is a national human rights institution that was established on 6th November 1996 to promote and promote human rights in Uganda. Under Article 52 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, its functions include monitoring the enjoyment and realization of all human rights (ESCR rights inclusive) in Uganda and Government’s compliance with international treaties and conventions it has ratified. It also receives and initiates complaints of ESCR related abuses/violations and conducts ESCR advocacy and sensitization activities with stakeholders at national level and at the grassroots. UHRC produces Annual and Special Reports on its findings and recommendations and they are submitted to Parliament of Uganda to follow up implementation from its stakeholders. In May 2016, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) launched a preliminary web-based country guide that aims to be a resource for businesses, Civil Society Organizations, Governments, multilateral institutions and all other relevant local and international actors, to enable these actors ensure that business fosters sustainable development in line with human rights standards. UHRC is accredited with "A status" by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), Geneva Switzerland, giving it enhanced access to the United Nations human rights system. It is also a member of the Network of African NHRIs (NANHRI).

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/06/08/uganda-economy-recovering-from-covid-19-impact-amid-uncertainties> (accessed March 22,2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.finance.go.ug/press/statement-minister-finance-parliament-economic-impact-covid-19-uganda> (accessed April 3, 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Uganda: Rising commodity prices worry legislators <https://allafrica.com/stories/202203020083.html> (accessed April 4, 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Economic and Social Rights Advocacy (ESRA) Brief: Reclaiming public health services in Uganda. August 2021 – Issues 13, page 13. Accessed at https://www.iseruganda.org/images/downloads/ESRA\_Brief\_Reclaiming\_public\_health\_services.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, page 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. National Planning Authority (NPA) 2021, Towards Safe Opening of The Education Sector in Covid-19 Times: Technical Note, Accessed at [http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NPA-on-Reopening-of -Schools-AmidstCOVID19.pdf](http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NPA-on-Reopening-of%20-Schools-AmidstCOVID19.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)