



June 25, 2025

CSOs' communiqué on the 2025 State of the Nation Address

1. Introduction

As part of their civic contribution to national socio-economic transformation, over 61 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) including oil-affected communities, youth, and women-led groups that are dedicated to influencing policies that benefit the poor and vulnerable communities convened in Buliisa district on June 17, 2025.

The meeting aimed to discuss the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA), the national budget, and to offer recommendations to ensure both focus on improving citizens' lives and supporting national environmental, social, and economic transformation.

The civil society groups noted that the State of the Nation Address delivered by His Excellence, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni on Thursday, June 5, 2025, and the national budget read on June 12, 2025, by the Minister of Finance on behalf of the President at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, are critical for national development. Both focused on monetising Uganda's economy through investments in sectors such as education, agriculture, and infrastructure. The President emphasised four key principles: Patriotism, Pan-Africanism, Socio-economic Transformation, and Democracy.

While the President presented an optimistic outlook on national progress including the expansion of the economy to nearly 15 times (UGX 224.9 trillion) compared to the UGX42.6 billion in 1986, it is clear that country still faces many critical environmental, social, economic and other challenges.

The main objective of the meeting by the aforementioned groups in Buliisa district was to discuss the relevancy of the State of the Nation Address and the budget speech and make actionable recommendations to address the challenges facing the country especially the poor and vulnerable people.

At the meeting, the groups made the following observations:

2. Observations

a). Poor strategy to develop the agricultural sector: At the meeting, the CSO groups observed that while the government has outlined its plans for growing the economy to USD 500 billion by 2040, with a focus on agro-industrialisation, tourism, mineral development including oil and gas and, Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), both the State of Nation Address and the budget speech did not address the fundamentals of agriculture. The CSOs expressed concern that the government has not resolved several critical issues that continue to undermine the sector and leave farmers vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen. These challenges include poor feeder roads in many districts which limit farmers' access to main roads and markets; the absence of modern storage facilities for surplus produce; and widespread rural insecurity, such as theft of livestock and crops. In addition, the government's failure to improve the education system continues to impact agriculture negatively. When children drop out of school, they often marry at a young age, prompting their parents to subdivide land for them. This leads to land fragmentation, which in turn hampers effective farming.

They further observed that while the country's National Development Plan (NDP) IV also identifies the agricultural sector as one of the seven high-impact growth areas that need to be invested in to realise a double-digit growth over the NDP IV period and ten-fold economic growth by 2040, there was no clear target in the address and the budget.

b). Shrinking civic space and human rights violations: During the meeting, the CSOs expressed concern about the continuous shrinking civic space due to arbitrary enforcement of restrictive laws, suppression of peaceful protests, and harassment of human and environmental rights defenders. They noted that police crackdowns on peaceful protests often involve arrests and violence hence highlighting a worrying trend against civic freedoms. Members also observed that activists, particularly those critical of the government and other climate change related issues have faced harassment and intimidation which has created a chilling effect on CSOs. Unfortunately, even though protective laws exist, enforcement is inconsistent, creating fear and limiting public participation in governance. To sum it all, the President's address failed to acknowledge these ongoing violations and outline steps to restore civic freedoms. Therefore, members challenged the police and other security organs to learn the lessons from the past and not allow themselves to become tools of CSOs oppression but rather execute their mandate with the highest degree of professionalism and in a manner that will protect the civil liberties of the Ugandans.

c). Debt management and transparency: In addition, members at the meeting observed that Uganda's national debt now exceeds UGX 97.64 billion (USD 25.72 billion) which is intensifying concerns around economic stability and public service delivery. While some restructuring has occurred under the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Extended Credit Facility (ECF) which presents an opportunity to restore financial stability, CSOs remain concerned about the accumulation of non-transparent loan agreements, especially with China, for large scale infrastructural projects. This indicates several risks to sustainability of debt management reforms and the ability of the government to settle these payments. It is worth noting that each of the 45 million Ugandans is now indebted to the tune of UGX 2.5 million. And the success in addressing these concerns hinges on implementing robust governance and transparent debt management

practices. Members encouraged the government to establish a Sinking Fund, a mechanism that can help manage debt repayments proactively.

d). Electricity challenges persist: Further, participants observed that in his address, the President noted that in 1986, Uganda had only one hydropower plant, Nalubaale (formerly called Owen Falls Dam), with a maximum capacity of 150mw. He added that there are now four (4) large hydro power plants including Kiira, Isimba and Karuma, with a combined generation capacity of 1,163.2 megawatts. Other sources such as Kigwabya, XsaboNkongwe solar power in Mubende and others have added another 888.8mw totalling to 2,052mw of installed electricity generation capacity. Participants however, noted that despite the surplus power in Uganda, less than half of the population have access to the grid-based power across the country. Members noted that over 900mw remains unconsumed which raises concerns about the less likelihood of achieving the targets outlined in Vision 2040. More so, the tariffs remain high for poor Ugandans and this explains why over 90% of the people are still depending on charcoal and firewood to meet their energy needs. Further more, the continued absence of a standalone Solar Energy Policy and the slow implementation of off-grid energy solutions prevent equitable energy access.

e). Environmental sustainability: Furthermore, participants observed that Uganda faces growing vulnerability to climate change, particularly due to prolonged droughts that severely impact agricultural productivity which is a cornerstone of the economy and food security. The effects of climate change are increasingly evident, with more frequent and intense droughts causing substantial agricultural losses, threatening livelihoods, and destabilising the economy. CSOs recognised the government efforts to address these challenges, including initiatives to promote climate-smart agricultural practices and engage with international climate finance mechanisms, like the Green Climate Fund, to support climate adaptation and mitigation projects. However, members noted that challenges continue to persist including limited financial transparency, underutilised partnerships with the private sector and civil society and a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation which has resulted into inadequate adaptation measures. Additionally, the long-overdue operationalisation of a National Gender Climate Action Plan (NGCAP) limits targeted adaptation efforts, especially for women.

f). Natural resource governance challenges: CSO groups at the meeting further observed that whereas Uganda is endowed with significant mineral wealth, the governance of these resources faces challenges that limit accountability, equity and long-term sustainability. They commended government's efforts in addressing some of these challenges through initiatives like Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), putting in place measures to counteract tax loss from mining operations. The members also noted that despite such measures, Uganda still encounters considerable obstacles in ensuring effective governance in this sector. A key challenge is the absence of comprehensive frameworks to guide transparent and equitable resource management and benefits, gaps in tax and revenue collection resulting in leakages, which affects the potential gains from natural resources. The CSO groups revealed that the Auditor General (AG) report 2024, uncovered widespread irregularities in Uganda's gold export industry, revealing that exporters have shipped gold worth UGX 11 trillion without obtaining the mandatory export permits from Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD). They noted that such issues which are partly contributed due to insufficient transparency in resource extraction have hindered

accountability and disproportionately impacted communities near mining areas hence leading to limited benefits from these activities for such communities.

g). Destruction of tourism areas: CSO groups observed that while the State of Nation Address indicated that tourism revenues had USD 1.473 billion in 2024, a significant recovery from USD 562 million in 2020, it is absurd that the government is continuing to conduct oil activities in Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP), allowing sugarcane companies to destroy Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (BCFR) and many other critical systems in the Albertine Graben.

3. Recommendations

At the close of the meeting, the CSO groups proposed the following actions:

- i) **Protect ecologically sensitive areas:** Put a stop to ongoing oil activities in national parks and forest reserves such as Murchison Falls National Park, Bugoma and Budongo forests, Lake Albert, and the River Nile to preserve tourism and biodiversity assets.
- ii) **Prioritise climate adaptation in agriculture:** Government should invest in sustainable agricultural technologies to help farmers adapt to climate change and safeguard food security is urgent.
- iii) **Invest in rural infrastructure and education:** Prioritise improving feeder roads, irrigation systems, modern storage facilities, and education to support farming and reduce land fragmentation driven by school dropouts and early marriages.
- iv) **Curb unnecessary borrowing:** Limit new loans, especially for oil infrastructure, which have contributed to debt doubling since 2012, and focus resources on essential public services like health and education.
- v) **Improve electricity access and affordability:** Address high electricity tariffs and expand the use of affordable off-grid solutions like solar power to increase access, particularly in rural areas.
- vi) **Promote community participation in clean energy:** The government should launch pilot renewable energy projects in rural communities to reduce reliance on the national grid and promote local ownership.
- vii) **Safeguard civic space:** The government should implement legal and policy reforms to protect civil liberties and promote inclusive, participatory governance.
- viii) **Boost funding for agro-industrialisation and tourism:** The government should align the FY2025/26 national budget with NDP IV by increasing support for sectors that drive employment and inclusive economic growth.

- ix) **Combat corruption:** The President should spearhead efforts to eliminate corruption, including curbing the creation of unnecessary administrative units such as districts, constituencies and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs).

SIGNATORIES

- Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)
- Youth for Green Communities (YGC)
- African Initiative on Food Security and Environment (AIFE)
- Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED)
- Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)
- Center for Conservation and Ecoenergy Initiative (CCEI)
- Friends with Environment in Development (FED)
- Fridays for Future Uganda (FFFU)
- Youth Concern on Environment and Development (YCED)
- Foundation for Ecological Preservation (FEPU)
- Centre for Environmental Research and Agriculture Innovations (CERAI)
- Women for Green Economy Movement, Uganda (WoGEM)
- Strategic Response for Environment Conservation (STREC)
- Environment Governance Institute (EGI)
- Initiative for Green Planet (IGP)
- Youth for Nature Conservancy (YNC)
- Food Rights Alliance (FRA)
- Tasha Research Institute Africa
- Center for Citizens Conserving Environment and Management (CECIC),
- Guild Presidents Forum on Governance (GPFOG)
- Centre for Sustainability Innovation and Research (CSIR)
- Toro Initiative for Socio-economic Development
- Women on Environment Mission Uganda (WEMU)
- Liberty Probono Initiative (LPI)