



From left: Akatukunda, Mafwabi, Stephen Kasaija the head of Expanding Social Protection Programme and sign language expert at the ministry Monica Ndikibulirani. This was after a media briefing at Media Centre in Kampala yesterday. (Scan the picture using the Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

GOVT INCREASES SAGE PACKAGE, LOWERS AGE FOR BENEFICIARIES

By Charles Etukuri

The Government has increased the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) for older persons from sh25,000 to sh35,000 per month and lowered the eligibility age from 80 to 65 years.

The State Minister for the Elderly and the Disabled, Dominic Mafwabi, made the announcement yesterday while addressing the media at the Uganda Media Centre in Kampala.

He noted that the changes will take effect in the next financial year (2026/2027). SAGE is a social protection programme by the Ugandan Government that provides monthly cash transfers to eligible older persons to combat poverty.

Through the programme, senior citizens receive support to meet basic needs and live dignified lives. "The Government takes pride in the strides made through the available programmes and recognises their impact on the lives of beneficiaries," Mafwabi said.

To implement this decision, he said government will allocate an additional sh252.16b to the programme in the next financial year. This will be added to the current sh121.2b budget, bringing the total SAGE allocation to sh373.36b, enough to reach 1,048,598 beneficiaries aged



An older person receives SAGE cash at Kigoma Primary school in Bushenyi district

65 and above. Presently, 306,759 beneficiaries aged 80 and above are enrolled on the programme. SAGE was established in 2010 with support from development partners including UK Aid, Irish Aid and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The programme was initially piloted in 15 districts to generate lessons for nationwide expansion and to build systems for managing social cash transfers.

"The pilot phase registered tremendous success because we established systems for social protection delivery and generated evidence to inform administrative visibility and long-term sustainability.

Government also developed the national social protection policy, launched in 2015," he said.

Mafwabi added that over the years, the lives of older persons have improved, with positive changes seen in nutrition, access to health and education services, savings, investment and productivity at community level.

COVERAGE OF SAGE

By June 2019, the programme had expanded to 61 of the 146 districts, reaching over 200,000 beneficiaries.

"Due to the positive impact and demands from citizens, government decided to roll out SAGE nationally. In March 2020, President Yoweri Museveni launched the national roll-

out, covering all remaining districts, cities and municipalities. However, the age threshold was set at 80 years and above, with the intention of progressively lowering it," Mafwabi said.

The roll-out coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing income security during the crisis.

Currently, 306,759 beneficiaries receive sh25,000 monthly, delivered quarterly as sh75,000. With the increase to sh35,000, they will now receive sh105,000 every three months.

SPECIAL GRANT FOR OLDER PERSONS

Mafwabi noted that Government has continued to establish programmes to reduce poverty and vulnerability among older persons. Between 2020 and 2023, the Special Enterprise Grant for Older Persons (SEGOP) was introduced with sh10b to improve their quality of life through financial support and specialised entrepreneurial training.

SEGOP targets older persons aged 60-79 in groups of five - ten. It has supported 13,449 beneficiaries, 6,565 men and 6,884 women, across 181 local governments.

He added that the gender ministry, together with the Office of the Prime Minister, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

HOW TO JOIN

Sight Akatukunda, the communications officer Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) programme said not everyone above the age of 65 years will benefit.

"We will use the National Identification and Registration Authority data. We will get that data and verify with the local government and then go down to the villages to enroll. It's the reason the Minister was emphasising that the older persons must get the NIN so that they can open up their bank accounts. Anybody without the NIN will not be captured. We work with Centenary bank as the payment service provider," she said.

"Pensioners will not benefit under the SAGE programme. This will be double dipping. SAGE is for people who have never worked with Government, they are poor and vulnerable and pensioners are not under this category."

(UNHCR), government of Ireland and the World Food Programme, also initiated a social cash transfer programme for elderly refugees.

The model, patterned after SAGE, currently operates in Lobule and Bidibidi settlements, reaching over 350 beneficiaries, with verification under way in Rhino and Terego to expand coverage to 700.

Older persons have also been integrated into the Parish Development Model (PDM), with a dedicated 10% allocation for starting small businesses.

"Results show that out of 1,022,902 PDM beneficiaries, 3% are elderly," he said. Mafwabi added that the ministry is developing a strategy to extend social security to informal workers and sensitise them on the importance of saving schemes.

By participating in Government programmes, he noted, older persons significantly contribute to the National Development Plan (NDP) IV and Vision 2040, which emphasise social protection, wealth creation and good governance. Stakeholder comments.

The Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (UPFSP) welcomed the increase in SAGE payments and the lowering of the age threshold.

Gloria Nakajubi, the advocacy and communication lead at UPFSP, said: "This is a welcome development. With increasing vulnerability levels, the age of 80 for the senior citizens' grant has always excluded many potential beneficiaries. Inclusivity is a core principle of a comprehensive social protection system."

"The critical issue now is ensuring that this decision is backed by adequate financing," Nakajubi said. UPFSP will closely monitor the 2026/27 budget to confirm the inclusion of additional SAGE funds as promised.