



**SPEECH BY HON.SYDAN.M. BBUMBA, MINISTER OF GENDER, LABOUR AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

AT THE

**OFFICE OPENING AND EQUIPMENT HANDOVER
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS FOR EMPOWERMENT (SAGE)**

VENUE: KIBOGA DISTRICT

DATE: 2ND SEPTEMBER, 2011

TIME: 10.00am

District Chairperson

Resident District Commissioner

Honourable Members of Parliament

Chief Administrative Officer and your Staff

Officers of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

Development Partners

Members of the media

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Today is an important day for our country! It is important because the opening of this SAGE office and handover of equipment represents a major milestone in Government's efforts to fight poverty and vulnerability, in a different way.

Although we have over the years managed to significantly reduce poverty to about 24.5% today, there remains a section of our society that lives in poverty. Poverty and vulnerability continue to deny many of our people access to basic services and numerous opportunities that come with the impressive growth of our economy over the last twenty years.

Older persons, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children and the chronically ill - the kind of people that this programme targets -are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Many of these people cannot afford the basics of life that most of us take for granted. They live with the knowledge that even their children will not achieve their full potential or get access to the opportunities which could provide them with a route out of poverty, such as UPE or free health services; because even with free education, the mother who cannot afford exercise books or a uniform for her children won't be sending them to school. The same way, a mother who cannot afford the cost of transport to a local health centre won't be taking her sick children to the clinic.

Social Protection is now recognised all over the world as a critical component of national development strategies and key to achieving all inclusive, pro-poor, equitable development and social transformation. From Asia, to Latin America to our own continent, the development of social protection systems is increasingly recognized as both a catalyst and indicator of national development.

Through social protection programmes such as SAGE, a sustained programme of small but regular and predictable payments – will empower the very poorest households to make a choice about the future and improve their own lives. Experience shows that when the poorest people receive regular cash transfers they use this money to improve their diet, to access health care, educate their children and make investments.

The SAGE programme therefore represents a new and innovative way in which the Government of Uganda, through our Local Government Authorities, is able to directly reach our most vulnerable citizens, delivering tangible benefits, directly to people and demonstrating this Government's commitment to all our citizens. It enables all Ugandans to contribute to, and benefit from, Uganda's social and economic transformation.

Many people will ask if Uganda can afford this programme. They should perhaps be asking if Uganda can afford **Not** to have this programme –without it, the country is condemned to be continuing a future where millions of vulnerable people cannot escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

People will ask ‘wouldn’t it be better to directly invest more in health, education and other basic services? The fact is that investments in service delivery have to go hand in hand with improving people’s ability to reach out to available services, if public services are to reach the people, and people to directly access the services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a few weeks ago the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Local Government and Kiboga district local governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining our respective commitments towards the successful implementation of the SAGE programme. I would like to reiterate that adherence to these commitments is absolutely critical to generating the political and public support necessary to achieving the expansion of SAGE beyond its preliminary pilot phase.

Today, I would also like to reaffirm my personal and the Ministry’s commitment and responsibility to provide overall strategic leadership, technical support and effective supervision of SAGE and to build the capacity of local government structures to ensure smooth transition to full government management of the programme over the coming years.

I would like you to particularly note that a key objective of the SAGE pilot is to determine an effective, appropriate and sustainable institutional framework for implementing social assistance programmes over the longer-term. I would therefore like to strongly encourage you to work with this Ministry and the Ministry of Local Government to advocate for adequate prioritization of the Community Services Department within the local government and to support the full integration of SAGE within local government systems and structures. Your inputs in these processes will be critical.

Let me draw your attention to the important commitments made by Kiboga District Local Government in the MoU that was signed a few weeks ago. The Local Government committed to:

- i. Mainstream SAGE into district plans, budgets and performance management systems.
- ii. Maximise the positive impact of the programme on poor and vulnerable households by establishing appropriate linkages between SAGE and other government and non-governmental development interventions in the district.

- iii. Actively participate in regular district- and national-level programme reviews and learning exercises with a view to informing the refinement of SAGE design.
- iv. Ensure that SAGE operational funds are used efficiently and for the purposes intended.

District local governments are at the forefront of the SAGE pilot and your commitment, energy, creativity and professionalism are key to its success. The whole country will be watching Kiboga district over the coming months and decisions on whether SAGE is scaled-up or not beyond the pilot phase in many ways depend on you. I encourage you to engage with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and work to ensure that the programme is properly understood in Kiboga district. I would particularly encourage the District Chairperson and members of Parliament to exercise oversight of the programme and ensure that political actors in the districts are properly sensitized to the programme to avoid any mis-understanding.

I would like to congratulate my technical team within the Ministry and here at the district, for their continued hard work on this programme. I am also aware of and would like to appreciate the support we have received from the District Chairperson, Chief Administrative officer, Senior Community Development Officer and other district staff as we prepared to implement this programme. I extend my sincere appreciation to our development partners, DFID, Irish Aid and UNICEF, for agreeing to support this government initiative.

I would like to wish the entire SAGE implementation partnership well in its endeavors. I call upon you all to live up to your commitments for the good, not only of the poor and vulnerable in Kiboga and the other 13 pilot districts, but indeed for all Ugandans.

I thank you once again for turning up for this important function.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY