



YECA MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER

JUSTICE AT THE SOURCE: USING LEGAL EMPOWERMENT TO END CLIMATE AND RIGHTS ABUSES IN UGANDA



Picture of youth participants after legal empowerment training in Kampala, Uganda

INTRODUCTION.

Dear reader, welcome to YECA's May 2026 newsletter.

In May 2026, the Ugandan president assented to the Uganda Protection of Sovereignty Act 2026, which imposes strict, criminalised controls on civil society organisations (CSOs), including mandatory registration, high-threshold approvals for foreign funding, and penalties of up to 20 years' imprisonment for activities deemed to disrupt national sovereignty.

One of the key objectives of the law is to regulate foreign funding flows into Uganda, a provision that has generated significant public concern and opposition. Through this process, YECA and partners strongly rejected the bill and submitted a memorandum of proposals to Uganda's clerk to parliament, alerting them about the dangers of this bill if enacted into law, as it could undermine

biodiversity conservation and climate action while hurting community livelihoods in the agricultural, tourism and natural resources sectors.

On 5 May 2026, Uganda's Parliament passed the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026, and on 17 May 2026, the President assented to it, making it law which imposes mandatory registration, high-threshold approvals for foreign funding, and penalties of up to 20 years' imprisonment for activities deemed to disrupt national sovereignty, which criminalises the work of civil society organisations (CSOs).

In response, and as part of ongoing efforts to safeguard civic space for climate justice work in Uganda, YECA organised legal empowerment meeting for youth climate justice activists to better understand the impact of the protection of sovereignty law on climate justice work in Uganda.

The meeting happened in Kampala, Uganda, and brought together over 70 youth climate activists and youth-led organisations to discuss challenges imposed on climate justice work due to the Protection of Sovereignty Law 2026. The meeting strengthened participants' understanding of legal rights and advocacy strategies, enabling them to respond more effectively to emerging challenges facing climate justice work.

The meeting brought together youth climate activists, youth organisations and media to discuss the dangers of the protection of sovereignty law and how it will affect not only our work but also the country's National Development Plan (NDP) IV goal, which seeks to ensure that Uganda's economy grows tenfold by FY 2029/2030.

In this newsletter, we share the youth's learning experiences after legal empowerment meeting and share some of the dangers the new law poses to climate justice work in Uganda as discussed with youth climate activists.

Through the legal empowerment training, participants expressed strong concerns about the law and committed to pursuing lawful avenues for engagement and advocacy.

The Protection of Sovereignty law 2026 will harm Uganda's green economic growth and risks undermining citizens' constitutional rights to self-determination, not to mention their freedoms of association and the right to make a living, among others.

Below, we share some of the youth's voices about the sovereignty law and why the law should be dumped. The law threatens major sectors that contribute to Uganda's GDP, including tourism, agriculture, Energy among other sectors.



Mr Akampurira Saul, who was one of the participants, indicated that. Uganda's tourism sector is one of the major sources of foreign exchange for the government. In 2025, the sector earned Uganda a record-breaking Shs. 6.1 trillion (USD 1.7 billion) and attracted 1.65 million visitors. Further, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics' Tourism Satellite Account, the tourism sector employs 1.6 million people, accounting for 14.7% of jobs in Uganda. The Protection of Sovereignty Law, 2026, threatens these gains and may contribute to increased unemployment, economic insecurity, and poverty.

Amanya Ioy, who was one of the participants, indicated that the law will impact Renewable energy developments and climate action efforts, Uganda's Vision 2040, NDP IV, and Energy Transition Plan all of which place energy at the heart of the country's economic transformation. It should be noted that the Ugandan government recognises a diversified energy mix of hydropower, solar, wind, geothermal, and nuclear, which are critical to ensuring that Uganda attains green economic growth. The Protection of Sovereignty Law 2026 will undermine Uganda's efforts to use sustainable energy as a driver of national development.

In addition, participants warned that the law's ban on promoting foreign policy will block Ugandan women, youth, and youth-led organisations from advocating for international agreements on climate action unless those agreements have been ratified by Uganda. This restriction undermines genuine climate action at a time when most Ugandans are highly vulnerable to climate impacts, as recognised in NDP IV. With one of the world's youngest populations, Uganda risks silencing youth voices in climate decision-making and stalling youth-led activism. One of the participants said during the workshop.

Furthermore, participants indicated that the law provides that no person or agent of a foreigner may obtain, solicit, or receive any

financial support, donation, loan, or other assistance from a foreigner, whether in cash or in kind, amounting to approximately UGX 400 million or USD 106,000, within any twelve months without prior written approval from the Minister responsible for internal affairs. The clause notes that any funds received in breach of this threshold are subject to forfeiture to the State by court order. Mr Aine noted that the provision could significantly affect a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses, private sector actors, and civil society organisations.

Also, Mr Ason, who is a tourist guide, also indicated that this law restricts the amount of money that tourism sector stakeholders could source for investment annually unless they have written permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs. This will hurt investment because, according to the available information, the premium lodge owners are among those who earn the most from the tourism sector. Substantial investment is required for these earnings to be realised.

According to the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), a prospective premium lodge owner needs to invest about Shs. 3.1 billion (USD 876,720 to set up a single lodge. Acquisition of such funds could require syndicated loans, with foreign banks providing some of the required money. Participants expressed concern that the law could negatively affect employment and investment opportunities across the tourism sector.

In addition, Mr Odingo indicated that the Government's energy developments, including solar, hydro and geothermal projects, frequently depend on foreign development finance institutions, including the African Development Bank (AfDB), International Finance Corporation (IFC), and World Bank. The government uses some of these funds to sometimes provide subsidies to private sector entities that are supporting

government efforts to increase clean energy access. This is seen under programmes such as the Result-Based Financing Facility. Such private sector entities could be seen as receiving funds from foreigners, undermining their access to funds.



Potential Impact of Sovereignty Act to climate justice work in Uganda

i) Criminalisation of Advocacy: It is a criminal offence for a foreign agent to sway public opinion against the government or engage in activities aimed at influencing election outcomes. This will hinder the implementation of democratic practices to influence change.

ii) Funding Paralysis: The bill enforces strict, mandatory approval for foreign grants, with significant compliance burdens. This may lead to the closure of many CSOs that depend on external funding to sustain their operations.

iii) Surveillance and Control: The Ministry of Internal Affairs gains power to vet CSOs, including checks on identities, finances, and activities. This may create operational uncertainty and increase compliance risks for affected organisations.

iv) Threat to Governance of NGOs: YECA predicts that work related to democracy, human rights, and public advocacy is at high risk of prosecution and this will increase organisational risks not only to the organisational structure but also to activity and project implementations.

Finally, clause 22(1), which imposes a funding cap of UGX 400 million per 12 months on affected organisations, will cripple the activities of such organisations as opposed to encouraging them. Stakeholders expressed concern that this provision may limit the operational effectiveness of organisations working to support Uganda's

OTHER IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES



On 5 May 2026, YECA supported university students in capacity-building training on their roles in climate justice in Uganda. The training brought together university students from Kyambogo University, Makerere University, Kampala University, and Uganda Christian University, representing their respective university organisations. The training was attended by over 70 youth participants, who were empowered in community organising and movement building to defend their communities against environmental injustices in Uganda. At the end of the training, participants shared the work plan to be implemented. They requested support from YECA, which we are sharing with our partners.



Also on 12th May 2026, YECA organised a meeting with youth climate activists who are opposing the construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). The objective of the meeting was to document the experiences youth have faced during the campaign and to discuss measures that should be put in place to stop police brutality and numerous arrests targeting youth climate activists in Uganda. The meeting brought together 30 participants and increased youth's understanding of security and safety skills to continue operating in a shrinking civic space, especially after the protest asserting to the protection of the Sovereignty Law 2026. Participants requested support in accessing security assessment, risk analysis, and incident-tracking tools to strengthen their safety and resilience while operating in a shrinking civic space.



On May 23, 2026, under our Know Your Rights campaign, we held a training at Nyakyera secondary school to educate students on their human rights. During the session, the students openly discussed challenges affecting their wellbeing, including health issues affecting girls, child abuse, and domestic violence. After engaging with the students, we met with teachers and supported the school in selecting a senior woman teacher to continue training students on their rights. A key gap identified was the absence of a child protection policy, which prevents children from safely reporting violations. In response, the school requested YECA's support to develop safeguarding policies and strengthen their child protection systems.

**We value
your
feedback**

**Thank
you.**

About YECA

Youth for Environmental Justice and Climate Action is a youth-led non-profit organisation in Uganda. The organisation aims at building climate justice movements in Uganda through community organising and movement building to end fossil fuel extraction across Africa.

Mission: To mobilise and empower young people to take positive action for global climate action and environmental justice.

Vision: A sustainable world free from fossil fuels.

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**Youth for Environmental
Justice and Climate Action**

