No budget approval without national SAGE rollout – MPs

Members of Parliament meeting under the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (UPFSP) have threatened to boycott approving the 2017/2018 budget if the funds to roll out the Senior Citizens grant under the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) is not earmarked.

In a heated debate during a UPFSP workshop on building an economic case on social protection held at the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala on Monday, the legislators cited discrimination in the way the programme is currently being implemented.

"The current system is discriminatory and unconstitutional. Few people can not benefit at the expense of other eligible members of society," said Jova Kamateeka, the chairperson of the human right committee of parliament.

According to Julius Acon, the Member of Parliament for Otuke, older persons are very vulnerable especially in the rural areas that they keep legislators on their toes with incessant demands.

"The kind of calls we receive and the demands from our constituents are quite unfortunate. It’s a bail out of sh20,000 or less. This fund would go along way in empowering our communities as it has in the implementing districts," Acon said.

Currently the senior citizens grant has reached a total of 172,654 out of the over 1.5 million older persons in the country. This is running in 35 out of the 116 districts.

Through the programme, older persons receive a monthly direct grant of sh25,000 direct.

According to the outgoing chairperson of the forum, Flavia Kabahenda, it is time to change the tone of advocacy from begging to demanding.

"We don’t want to beg anymore. We are rebranding the campaign into an economic agenda and asking for an entitlement," she said.

While pitching the economic case for social protection investment to the 122 legislators who attended, Stephen Kidd, a social protection specialist argued that with regular predictable cash transfers to the population, people are sure of a minimum amount for which they can’t fall below.

"Most countries that have developed have invested a significant amount of their GDP towards social protection. Most countries that have developed have invested a significant amount of their GDP towards social protection. Most countries that have developed have invested a significant amount of their GDP towards social protection."