Joint Press Statement by CSOs in West Nile on Budget Priorities for FY 2026/2027

Date: October 22nd, 2025 at Heritage Courts Hotel, Arua City

As National and Sub-national governments prepare the FY2026/2027 budgets, we, the Civil Society organisations operating in West Nile, call upon the local governments and the Central Government to allocate adequate resources for service delivery, climate resilience, and inclusive development.

West Nile, with 4.38 million people, including 800 thousand refugees, remains one of Uganda's most underdeveloped regions. 69.4% of the population is food insecure, 60.6% of youth aged 18–30 are neither in school nor employed, and 59% live below the poverty line compared to the national average of 16.1% (UBOS 2023/2024 national household survey). Refugee settlements intensify pressure on forests, wetlands, and arable land, leading to deforestation, soil erosion, and increased resource competition. Adequate budget allocations are urgently needed to address these multi-sectoral challenges.

Despite its vast population and urgent development needs, West Nile received only 7.4% of the total budget allocation to local governments in FY2025/26, and of this, a mere 8.3% was earmarked for development expenditure. This level of investment remains grossly inadequate to address the critical infrastructural and social service deficits facing the sub-region.

We present the following sector-specific budget priorities and recommendations:

1. Education: Investing in Human Capital for Industrial and Digital Transformation

Education remains the foundation for productivity, innovation, and industrial competitiveness. Yet West Nile continues to face severe infrastructure and staffing gaps that undermine human capital development.

Challenges:

- Only 38.7% of children live within 5 km of a school.

- Early Childhood Education coverage is low (20.7%), and only 45% of nursery graduates transition to P1.
- School attendance remains low (63.5% in primary, 9.9% in secondary) with overcrowded classrooms (67:1 pupil–teacher ratio, 105:1 pupil–classroom ratio).
- Electricity access stands at 1.6%, limiting ICT integration.
- Communities demand new schools in Palaja Parish in Yumbe District, Paraboki, Gbulukuatuni, and Pamvara parishes in Madi Okollo District.

Budget Recommendations:

- Invest in the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, teachers' houses, and secondary schools to expand access and retention.
- Code community schools such as Odrubu, Olyevu, Menjere, and Osukia to qualify them for government funding.
- Provide electricity and ICT infrastructure to promote digital learning and prepare youth for a knowledge-driven economy.
- Fund teacher recruitment, training, and school management systems to strengthen education quality and governance.

2. Health: Building a Productive and Industrial Workforce

Health is central to labour productivity and human capital formation. West Nile's health system remains overstretched and underfunded.

Challenges:

- Only 3,741 of 13,944 approved health positions are filled.
- Drug shortages, lack of ambulances, and absence of electricity and water in many facilities.
- Long distances to facilities cause preventable maternal and infant deaths.

Budget Recommendations:

- Recruit and retain qualified health workers through better remuneration and incentives.
- Construct and upgrade Health Centre IIs and IIIs with electricity, clean water, and security fencing.
- Equip facilities with ambulances, drugs, and emergency response systems to reduce preventable mortality.
- Prioritize digital health systems for data management and service delivery efficiency.

3. Water and Sanitation: Enabling Healthy and Productive Communities

Access to clean water and sanitation is essential for public health, economic productivity, and industrial workforce stability.

Challenges:

- Many communities rely on unsafe water due to broken or absent boreholes.
- Markets and public spaces lack sanitation facilities, leading to disease outbreaks and flooding.

Budget Recommendations:

- Drill and rehabilitate boreholes, extend piped water systems, and promote solar-powered pumping schemes.
- Invest in public toilets and waste management infrastructure in markets and trading centres to support local trade and tourism.
- Promote community hygiene and sanitation campaigns through local leadership and schools.

4. Roads and Transport: Unlocking Market Access and Regional Trade

Transport infrastructure drives **commercial agriculture, industrialisation, and regional market integration**. Yet West Nile's connectivity remains severely constrained.

Challenges:

- Major roads such as Nebbi–Goli–Paidha–Warr–Vurra, Nebbi–Goli–Customs, Arua–Nebbi, and Koboko–Yumbe–Moyo are in deplorable condition.
- District roads including Bugo–Kuduku–Kerwa, Pakwach–Wadelai–Inde, Longira–Midia, Jaura–Okubani, Inde–Ogoko–Olali–Rhino Camp, Payila–Ondeko–Asarua, Laura–Pawor–Ajibu–Aliba, and Offaka–Oribu–Inde–Aliba are cut off.
- Kiyi Bridge in Koboko and Umonda Bridge in Nebbi have collapsed, disrupting trade and service delivery.

Budget Recommendations:

- Prioritize rehabilitation of major and district roads to enhance trade corridors and agricultural market access.
- Reconstruct collapsed bridges and culverts to improve cross-district mobility.
- Fund routine road maintenance and establish regional mechanical workshops for sustainability.

5. Agriculture and Production: Commercializing for Full Monetization

Agriculture employs over **79% of West Nile's population** and remains the bedrock of the regional economy. However, low productivity and poor market integration persist.

Challenges:

- Only **3.9%** of farming is irrigated, leaving crops vulnerable to drought and floods.

- Limited electricity constrains **value addition and agro-processing**.
- Weak extension services and poor road access stifle commercialisation.

Budget Recommendations:

- Invest in irrigation schemes, post-harvest handling, and extension services to build climate resilience.
- Fund agro-processing zones, storage, and cold chain infrastructure to spur industrialisation and export readiness.
- Support value chain development, cooperative marketing, and access to agricultural financing.
- Strengthen research and innovation in digital agriculture for increased productivity.

6. Youths and the Parish Development Model (PDM): Empowering the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

Youth inclusion is key to Uganda's economic monetisation agenda. The PDM offers a unique pathway for youth empowerment but faces implementation gaps.

Challenges:

- Limited awareness of PDM objectives, eligibility, and procedures.
- Inadequate business and financial skills among youth beneficiaries.
- Some parishes have not allocated the mandatory 30% of PDM funds to youth.

Budget Recommendations:

- Intensify **awareness campaigns** using youth-friendly media and local languages.
- Ensure **strict adherence** to the 30% youth allocation under PDM.
- Fund **enterprise development training**, mentorship, and youth incubation centres to promote entrepreneurship and digital innovation.

7. Environment and Natural Resources: Financing Climate-Resilient Industrialisation

Environmental degradation threatens both livelihoods and economic transformation.

Challenges:

- Only 1.2% of households have access to clean energy; 79.4% use firewood and 16.7% charcoal, accelerating deforestation.
- Local governments allocate just 1.3% of their revenue to environmental protection.
- Poor waste management leads to flooding, pollution, and disease.

Budget Recommendations:

- Allocate at least 5% of district budgets to climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, and reforestation.
- Invest in waste management infrastructure and support local bylaws on environmental protection.
- Strengthen enforcement against illegal wetland degradation and unsustainable land use.
- Promote green enterprise development to link environmental sustainability with industrial growth.

Conclusion

We, the Civil Society Organisations in West Nile, urge that the FY2026/2027 budget be guided by the principles of equity, sustainability, and inclusion. Adequate investment in education, health, water, roads, agriculture, youth, and environmental protection will not only address long-standing inequalities but also drive the full monetisation of Uganda's economy through enhanced productivity, industrialisation, and market access.