



**ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
(ENR-CSO) NETWORK**

**POSITION PAPER ON STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND
SUSTAINABLE RESTORATION IN UGANDA**

Financial Year 2024/2025

Prepared by: Environmental Alert (EA)

On behalf of: ENR-CSO Network Members

Submitted to: Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Environment and Natural Resources Civil Society Organisations (ENR-CSO) Network brings together member organisations working across Uganda to promote sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. The Network operates under the coordination of Environmental Alert (EA), serving as the Secretariat. Its core mandate is to coordinate, monitor, and advocate for improved environmental governance and accountability in Uganda's Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) sector.

This Position Paper presents the key findings, challenges, and policy recommendations arising from the ENR-CSO Annual Consolidated Performance Report for the Financial Year 2024/2025. It aims to inform decision-makers, particularly the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), about the contributions of CSOs to national targets and to advocate for stronger collaboration, funding, and policy implementation.

The paper aligns with the National Development Plan IV (NDP IV), the National Environment Act (2019), the Climate Change Act (2021), and Uganda's Vision 2040. It also reflects Uganda's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

2. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Uganda's economy and livelihoods remain highly dependent on natural resources, yet these resources are under severe pressure. The country loses an estimated 122,000 hectares of forest cover annually, while over 60% of wetlands have been degraded due to encroachment, poor land use, and infrastructure expansion. Climate variability, including prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and flooding, continues to threaten agriculture, water supply, and community livelihoods. These challenges have compounded existing gaps in environmental governance, including weak enforcement, limited financing, and inadequate coordination across actors.

During FY 2024/2025, the ENR-CSO Network members implemented diverse projects aimed at reversing degradation, enhancing community resilience, and promoting green livelihoods. Collectively, these organisations reached over 2.5 million Ugandans through field projects, advocacy, and awareness campaigns.

However, despite their efforts, civil society interventions are still constrained by inadequate funding, data gaps, and fragmented policy implementation. This Position Paper, therefore, calls for structured policy action to strengthen governance, scale up restoration, and secure predictable financing for the ENR sector.

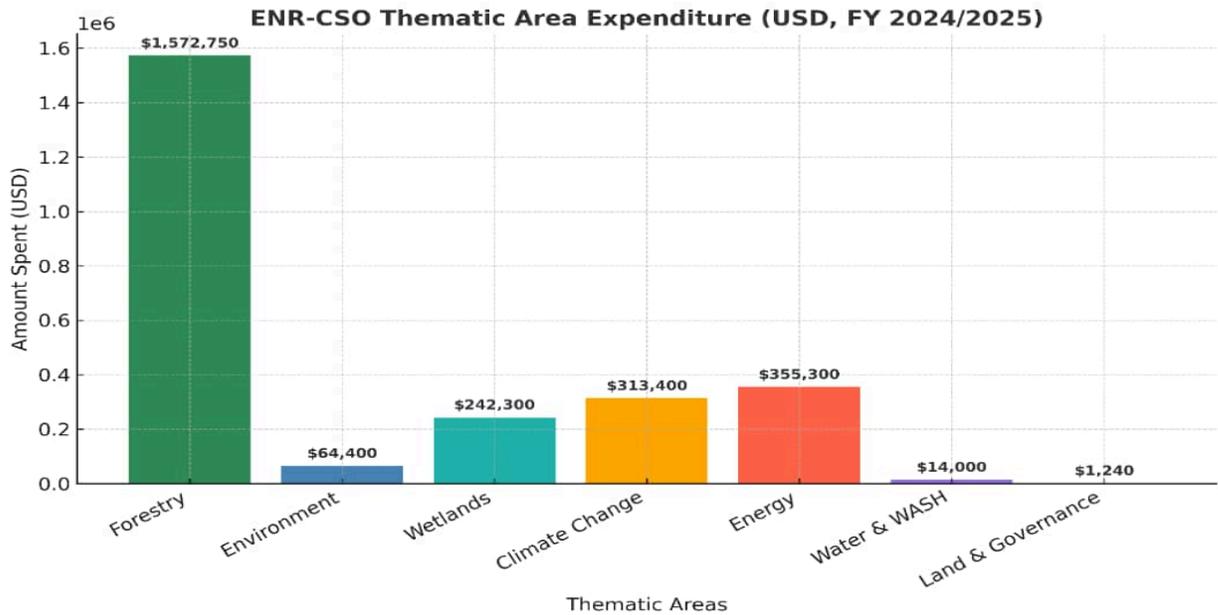
3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ENR-CSO ANNUAL CONSOLIDATED REPORT (FY 2024/2025)

The consolidated analysis of performance data from 16 ENR-CSO Network members shows strong achievements across multiple thematic areas. In total, member organisations mobilised and spent approximately UGX 9.74 billion (USD 2.56 million) during FY 2024/2025 on environmental restoration, advocacy, renewable energy, research, and coordination activities.

Key Achievements:



Performance Indicator	Achievement FY 2024/2025	Comments/Significance
Total Trees Planted	2,300,000+	Contributed to the national target under the Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Strategy
Total Area Restored (forests, wetlands & land)	2,968 hectares	Supports Uganda's Land Degradation Neutrality target
Wetland Boundaries Demarcated	74.7 km with 610 pillars	Reduced encroachment and improved community protection
Farmers Trained in CSA & SLM	11,000+	Improved food security and soil productivity
Improved Cookstoves Distributed	5,000	Reduced deforestation and indoor pollution
Radio Listeners Reached with ENR Messages	2.5 million+	Enhanced environmental awareness at the national level
Youth and Women Engaged	7,000+	Promoted inclusiveness and gender equality
Beehives Distributed	1,453	Enhanced alternative livelihoods in restoration zones
Solar-Powered Irrigation Systems Installed	13	Improved climate resilience in dry regions
Wetland Management Plans Developed	7	Guided district-level restoration and protection efforts
CSOs Engaged in Policy Dialogues	60+	Strengthened civil society voice in ENR governance



Total Expenditure: UGX 9,740,882,000 (USD 2,563,390 million).

These results demonstrate that CSOs are not only implementing activities but are actively complementing government programmes, particularly under the Environment and Natural Resources, Climate Change, and Land and Water Management (ECCLM) framework.



4. POLICY GAPS AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

Despite commendable progress, the following cross-cutting challenges continue to limit environmental sustainability efforts:

Inadequate and unpredictable funding remained one of the major challenges affecting the operations of CSOs in the environment and natural resources (ENR) sector. Many organisations, such as BECD, EA, COREI, and ECO, reported that donor support was irregular and often restricted to short-term projects, which limited continuity and scaling up of successful initiatives. For instance, several restoration projects in the Albertine and Elgon regions could not proceed beyond pilot phases due to funding gaps. The lack of predictable domestic financing and overreliance on external grants hindered sustainability and long-term community engagement.

Climate variability and environmental shocks such as prolonged droughts, floods, and pest infestations severely affected the survival rate of planted trees and restoration sites. Fairventures Worldwide, for example, reported that high temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns reduced the survival rate of seedlings in some demonstration plots from 85% to 60%. Similarly, ARCOS and UBF observed that floods destroyed portions of wetland restoration zones in Kikube, Terego, and Kasese, forcing replanting and delaying project timelines. These climatic disruptions increased operational costs and limited achievement of planned targets.

Limited technical capacity and logistical support within local governments continued to constrain effective enforcement of environmental laws and monitoring of project outcomes. In many districts, District Natural Resources Officers operated without adequate transport, staff, or data-collection tools. TOORONET and KIIMA Foods noted that some subcounty environmental committees lacked motorcycles, fuel, and digital monitoring tools, making it difficult to supervise community-based activities or verify progress on tree-planting efforts.

Weak coordination and collaboration among CSOs also emerged as a recurring challenge. Several organisations working within the same geographical areas, such as Vi Agroforestry, ARCOS, and TAU in the central and western regions, implemented similar restoration activities independently, leading to duplication of efforts. The absence of a harmonized reporting framework and shared monitoring tools limited information flow and reduced opportunities for joint learning, advocacy, and resource mobilisation.

Low community awareness and limited behavioural change continued to undermine conservation initiatives. In many areas, especially in Eastern and Northern Uganda, communities remained dependent on charcoal burning, brickmaking, and wetland cultivation for livelihoods. CSOs such as KEA and BECD reported recurring cases of encroachment on restored sites and poor waste management practices in trading centres, despite sensitisation efforts. This reflected the need for sustained environmental education campaigns and practical livelihood alternatives.

Low digital and data-management capacity among CSOs further constrained effective reporting and impact tracking. While organisations such as Tree Adoption Uganda (TAU) had developed digital tree-tracking systems, most member CSOs still relied on manual data collection. This limited the accuracy of monitoring and slowed down the consolidation of national-level performance data. Lack of capacity in GIS mapping, data visualisation, and digital storytelling also hindered the visibility of CSO contributions.



Forest crime continues to be one of the most persistent and destructive challenges undermining forestry restoration and conservation efforts in Uganda. Illegal logging, charcoal burning, timber smuggling, and encroachment into central forest reserves remain widespread, particularly in districts with limited enforcement presence. Several CSOs and district officers report that forest crime has intensified due to weak institutional capacity, lack of patrol equipment, political interference, and absence of real-time monitoring systems. These illegal activities not only reduce forest cover but also destroy restored sites, compromise biodiversity, and impose high financial and operational costs on ongoing reforestation programmes. Without strong enforcement and surveillance mechanisms, forest crime will continue to reverse the gains made through CSO-led restoration initiatives.

Limited gender and youth inclusion remained a sector-wide concern. Despite women and youth being the most affected by environmental degradation, their involvement in leadership and decision-making within community initiatives was still minimal. For instance, in some forestry and energy projects implemented by KIIMA Foods and ECO, male participants constituted over 70% of beneficiaries, highlighting persistent gender disparities. This calls for deliberate strategies to integrate gender equality and youth empowerment in project planning and implementation.

Finally, weak policy implementation and follow-up at both national and local government levels limited the enforcement of environmental regulations. Although Uganda has strong policy frameworks such as the National Environment Act (2019) and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003), enforcement remains inconsistent. Reports from ARCOS and EMLI revealed continued illegal logging and wetland degradation in protected areas due to weak institutional coordination, political interference, and limited accountability mechanisms at the district level.

5. ENR-CSO NETWORK POLICY ASKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and lessons learned, the ENR-CSO Network proposes the following key policy actions to strengthen environmental governance, restoration, and accountability in Uganda:

Forestry

Adoption of a Digital Tree-Tracking System:

To address persistent challenges of poor tree survival monitoring, limited accountability in tree-planting campaigns, and inconsistent reporting across districts, the ENR-CSOs recommend that the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), working through the Forest Sector Support Department, adopt and roll out a national digital tree-tracking system modeled on the existing Tree Adoption App. This technology should enable geo-tagging of seedlings, monitoring survival rates, and generating real-time planting reports accessible to district forest officers, CSOs, and community groups. We therefore request Government to (1) integrate digital tree-monitoring into the National Forestry Information System (NFIS), (2) allocate dedicated funding for training district forest officers and community monitors on the use of this technology, and (3) issue an administrative directive requiring all government, NGO, and private-sector tree-planting initiatives to submit digital survival data to improve forestry accountability and actual forest cover restoration outcomes.

Establish district forestry enforcement units equipped with rapid-response tools.



To deal with the challenge of weak enforcement and increasing forest crime, establish dedicated District Forestry Enforcement Units equipped with motorcycles, GPS boundary-tracking devices, digital forest-crime reporting apps, and portable drones for real-time surveillance. We request MWE and the Environmental Protection Police Unit (EPPU) to deploy at least two trained forest rangers per district, allocate a monthly fuel and patrol budget, and require monthly digital forest-crime hotspot reports. This will strengthen law enforcement and protect restored forests from illegal logging and charcoal production.

Strengthen Forestry Crime Prevention Through Digital Surveillance and Fast-Track Enforcement

To deal with the challenge of increasing forest crime, establish a Forestry Crime Prevention and Response System combining community reporting, digital surveillance, and district-level judicial action. We recommend that MWE and the Environmental Protection Police Unit set up District Forestry Crime Desks equipped with GPS-enabled patrol devices, drones, and digital reporting tools such as TIMS, Forest Watcher, and the Tree Adoption App for real-time alerts. The government should also introduce fast-track environmental courts or magistrates to expedite the prosecution of forestry offences. This will improve detection, deter illegal activity, and protect restored forest areas.

Wetlands

Promote resilient Wetland Restoration Through Geo-Mapping and Local Enforcement Units:

To address recurring challenges of flood damage, climate shocks, and weak enforcement in wetland ecosystems as experienced in Terego, Kikube, Kasese, and other restoration sites, the ENR-CSOs recommend that the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), through the Wetlands Management Department, establish Climate-Resilient Wetland Restoration Units at the district level equipped with geo-mapping tools, GPS boundary demarcation kits, and low-cost flood-early-warning sensors. This unit should work with CSOs to digitize all restored wetlands, continuously monitor encroachment, and update flood-risk maps. We request the government to (1) provide dedicated budget allocations to District Natural Resources Offices for wetland surveillance, (2) recruit and deploy at least two wetland rangers per high-risk district, and (3) issue a directive requiring all districts to submit quarterly digital wetland-status reports to strengthen accountability and climate-proof wetland restoration efforts.

Promote wetland livelihood transition interventions.

To address the challenge of community dependence on wetland cultivation and charcoal burning, develop structured livelihood transition packages such as fish ponds, bamboo enterprises, papyrus craft groups, beekeeping units, and upland CSA demonstration farms. We request MWE and local governments to co-finance start-up kits for at least 200 households per hotspot district, provide extension support, and enforce wetland-use compliance checks every quarter. This will reduce pressure on restored wetlands and support sustainable livelihoods.

Environment

Enhance behaviour-change and community environmental education programme.



To address the challenge of low community awareness and persistent encroachment, enhance behaviour-change communication by deploying community eco-champions, a quarterly radio drama series, door-to-door sensitization tools, and environmental mini-labs in schools. We request NEMA and MWE to fund district-wide ENR radio programmes, integrate behaviour-change indicators into district performance assessments, and support CSOs to train village-level eco-champions. This will strengthen public understanding and reduce destructive practices.

Establish waste-management and clean-energy community hubs.

To address the challenges of charcoal dependence and poor waste disposal, establish community waste-sorting hubs, briquette-making centres, plastics-buy-back points, and clean-energy kiosks supporting LPG, biogas, and improved stoves. We request local governments and NEMA to allocate community land, provide start-up waste-handling equipment, and integrate community waste hubs into municipal planning. This will reduce pollution and promote green livelihoods.

Climate change

Develop local climate information hubs & early-warning digital systems.

To deal with the challenge of droughts, floods, and pest outbreaks disrupting restoration, develop Local Climate Information Hubs equipped with automatic rain gauges, soil-moisture sensors, community SMS warning systems, and pest-alert dashboards. We request the Climate Change Department to deploy these tools in every district, train district staff and CSOs in their use, and integrate the data into the National Climate Information System. This will safeguard restoration investments and guide seasonal planning.

Adopt climate-smart restoration and CSA scaling protocols.

To deal with the challenge of climate-related seedling losses, adopt standardized Climate-Smart Restoration Protocols including mulching, micro-catchments, shade nets, drought-tolerant tree species, rain-harvesting pits, and seasonal planting windows. We request the Climate Change Department and MWE to issue national CSA/restoration guidelines, fund regional CSA demonstration sites, and require CSOs to align with these protocols in project approvals. This will improve survival rates and reduce climate-related losses.

Land & governance

Strengthen district ENR offices with tools, transport, and staffing.

To deal with the challenge of limited district technical and logistical capacity, enhance DNRO operations by providing motorcycles, tablets for field data collection, GPS units, fuel budgets, and two additional ENR extension staff per district. We request MWE to recruit additional officers, integrate ENR monitoring into the district inspection checklist, and require quarterly field verification of all restoration sites. This will improve enforcement and monitoring across the ENR sector.



Gender & youth inclusion

Adopt gender-responsive ENR programming with mandatory targets.

To deal with the challenge of low women and youth involvement, adopt mandatory participation thresholds requiring at least 40% women and 30% youth in all forestry, wetlands, energy, and climate projects. We request MWE and NEMA to include gender indicators in ENR project approvals, fund women-led tree nurseries, and support youth green brigades in digital monitoring. This will enhance equity and broaden environmental stewardship.

Cross-cutting recommendations

Establish a National ENR Pooled Financing Mechanism

To deal with the challenge of limited and unpredictable funding affecting CSO operations and sustainability, establish a National ENR Pooled Financing Mechanism under MWE to consolidate resources from government allocations, climate funds, private-sector CSR, and development partners. This fund should adopt transparent disbursement windows for multi-year CSO projects, support district-based restoration initiatives, and prioritize scale-up of proven models. We request MWE to allocate a ring-fenced annual ENR budget, set up a multi-stakeholder fund management committee, and pilot three-year financing cycles for CSOs to reduce project instability and ensure continuity of successful interventions.

Develop a National Climate Risk–Proofing Framework for ENR Projects

To deal with the challenge of climate variability and environmental shocks (droughts, floods, pest outbreaks) that damage restoration sites and increase operational costs, develop a National Climate Risk–Proofing Framework requiring all ENR projects to integrate drought-tolerant species, mulching practices, seasonal planting calendars, micro-catchment water harvesting, flood-buffer restoration designs, and pest management protocols. We request the Climate Change Department and MWE to issue official guidelines, train district ENR officers and CSOs, and support the procurement of climate-resilient restoration kits for hotspot districts. This will safeguard investments and increase restoration success rates under changing climatic conditions.

Enhance CSO Coordination Through a National ENR Collaboration and Learning Platform

To deal with the challenge of weak coordination and duplication among CSOs working in the same areas, enhance national collaboration by establishing a National ENR Collaboration and Learning Platform that hosts shared annual workplans, joint monitoring schedules, digital reporting templates, GIS project maps, and a repository of restoration data. We request MWE and the ENR-CSO Network to convene quarterly coordination meetings, require joint district-level planning sessions, and adopt shared monitoring tools to harmonize interventions. This will reduce duplication, promote joint advocacy, and strengthen collective impact across the sector.



6. CALL TO ACTION

The ENR-CSO Network appeals to the Ministry of Water and Environment, development partners, and the Government of Uganda to:

1. Adopt and implement the policy actions outlined above.
2. Prioritize financing for environmental restoration and governance reforms in FY 2025/2026 and beyond.
3. Recognize ENR-CSOs as strategic partners in implementing national and international commitments such as the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.
4. Integrate CSO-generated data into national performance frameworks, especially the Water and Environment Sector Performance Report.

A whole-of-society approach combining government leadership, CSO innovation, and community ownership is key to achieving Uganda’s vision of a sustainable and climate-resilient environment.

7. CONCLUSION

The ENR-CSO Network reaffirms its commitment to working closely with the Ministry of Water and Environment and other stakeholders to strengthen Uganda’s environmental governance and restoration agenda. The findings from FY 2024/2025 clearly show that civil society actions are producing measurable results from tree planting and wetland recovery to renewable energy access and climate adaptation.

However, sustaining these achievements requires policy coherence, predictable financing, and inclusive participation. The Network therefore calls upon government and partners to invest in the ENR sector, adopt technology and innovation, and ensure that environmental management remains a national development priority.

“A healthy environment is the foundation of Uganda’s prosperity. Together, we can restore, protect, and sustain it for current and future generations.”

Prepared by:

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A summary of challenges and recommendations

POLICY GAPS / CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED	THEMATIC AREA	CORRESPONDING ENR–CSO NETWORK POLICY ASKS & RECOMMENDATIONS
Inadequate and unpredictable funding for ENR CSOs; dependence on short-term donor funding; limited domestic financing.	Cross-Cutting / Financing	Establish a National ENR Pooled Financing Mechanism to consolidate government, CSR, climate, and donor funds; provide multi-year financing; transparent disbursement windows; scale up proven CSO models; support district-based restoration.



Climate variability and environmental shocks (droughts, floods, pests) affect tree survival and restoration success.	Climate Change / Forestry / Wetlands	Develop Local Climate Information Hubs and Early-Warning Systems; adopt Climate-Smart Restoration & CSA Protocols; create a National Climate Risk-Proofing Framework requiring integration of drought-tolerant species, mulching, seasonal planting calendars, water-harvesting measures, and pest management protocols.
Limited technical capacity and poor logistics (transport, tools, staffing) for DNROs and local environmental committees.	Land & Governance	Strengthen District ENR Offices with motorcycles, GPS units, tablets, fuel budgets, and additional ENR extension staff; integrate ENR monitoring in district inspection tools; and quarterly verification of restoration sites.
Weak coordination and collaboration among CSOs; duplication of activities; lack of shared reporting and monitoring systems.	Cross-Cutting Coordination / Governance	Establish a National ENR Collaboration & Learning Platform hosting shared workplans, joint monitoring schedules, GIS project maps, reporting templates, and digital dashboards; convene quarterly coordination meetings.
Low community awareness, persistent dependence on charcoal, wetland cultivation, and poor waste management practices.	Environment / Energy / Wetlands	Enhance Behaviour-Change and Environmental Education Programs (eco-champions, radio dramas, door-to-door sensitisation, school environmental mini-labs). Establish Waste-Management & Clean-Energy Hubs (briquette centres, plastics buy-back hubs, clean-energy kiosks).
Low digital capacity among CSOs; reliance on manual reporting; weak GIS and digital storytelling skills.	Forestry / Cross-Cutting Digital Capacity	Adopt a National Digital Tree-Tracking System integrated into NFIS; mandate digital survival reporting for all tree-planting actors; train district officers and CSOs in digital monitoring, GIS mapping, and data visualisation.
Increasing forest crime (illegal logging, charcoal production, encroachment) due to weak enforcement and a lack of surveillance tools.	Forestry / Governance	Establish District Forestry Enforcement Units with motorcycles, drones, GPS trackers, and digital crime-reporting tools; deploy forest rangers; allocate fuel budgets. Introduce Forest Crime Prevention & Fast-Track Enforcement (crime desks, real-time alerts, environmental courts).
High community dependence on wetlands for livelihoods causes encroachment and degradation of restored wetland sites.	Wetlands / Livelihoods	Promote Wetland Livelihood Transition Interventions (fish ponds, bamboo enterprises, papyrus crafts, beekeeping, upland CSA demonstrations); co-finance start-up kits; enforce quarterly wetland-use compliance checks.
Weak wetland enforcement; climate shocks (floods, encroachment) are damaging restored wetlands.	Wetlands / Climate Change	Establish Climate-Resilient Wetland Restoration Units equipped with geo-mapping tools, boundary demarcation kits, flood-early-warning sensors; recruit wetland rangers; require quarterly digital wetland-status reports.



<p>Limited gender and youth inclusion in ENR activities and leadership.</p>	<p>Gender & Youth Inclusion</p>	<p>Adopt Gender-Responsive ENR Programming with participation targets (40% women, 30% youth); include gender indicators in project approvals; support women-led nurseries and youth green brigades for digital monitoring.</p>
<p>Weak enforcement of environmental policies (NEA 2019, NFTP 2003) at the national and district levels.</p>	<p>Governance & Land Management</p>	<p>Strengthen ENR enforcement units, deploy environmental police, adopt digital monitoring tools, and introduce fast-track environmental courts to enforce compliance and accountability.</p>