



CITIZENS' CONCERN AFRICA

Annual Report 2025

Working across Uganda with women, communities and defenders
for climate resilience, health, human rights and civic space

CICOA

www.citizensconcernafrica.org

A year of results women can hold in their hands

Dear friends, partners and supporters,

In 2025, CICOA worked across Uganda under our national operating licence. From our offices in Mbarara and Wakiso, we ran field programmes with oil-host communities in Hoima, Buliisa and Kikuube, worked with refugee and host communities around Kyangwali in Kikuube and Nakivale in Isingiro, worked with communities along River Rwizi in Ankole, and carried community concerns into national dialogues in Kampala and Mukono.

In Bunyoro, families kept facing hard realities: rising heat, unsafe water, food shortages, pollution and gender-based violence. The women we work with answered with their own hands. Their groups grew poultry projects to more than 1,000 birds per site, sold honey from 190 community beehives, and grew pineapples, okra, carrots, turmeric and eggplant in climate-smart gardens, putting food on family tables and money in household pockets.

In Ankole, we worked with riverside communities to restore River Rwizi and build livelihoods that protect it. Every quarter, we went on air on 91.2 Crooze FM with an Environmental Rights and Information talk show.

We also spoke up where it mattered. We trained journalists across Bunyoro to report on oil, land and human rights, and joined Spice FM to talk about rights and climate adaptation. As civic space tightened ahead of the 2026 elections, we fed into national reviews of land policy, the NGO Act and Uganda's human rights record, and wrote in the national press.

In 2026 we will build on this foundation: stronger programmes with women's groups in more parts of the country, more meaningful partnerships, and steady support for the defenders and journalists who keep communities informed and safe.

Thank you to our partners, supporters and the CICOA team. Your trust is what makes this work possible.

Andrew Mafundo

Executive Director, Citizens' Concern Africa (CICOA)



"These solutions are not imposed from outside. Communities own them."

Who we are

Citizens' Concern Africa (CICOA) is a Ugandan non-governmental organisation with more than 15 years of work on the environment, climate resilience, human rights and livelihoods. We hold a national operating licence and work alongside communities, local governments, ministries, civil society, cultural institutions and development partners.

Our vision

A world where communities are valued, protected and sustained.

Our mission

Safeguarding the planet, empowering communities and upholding human rights.

What we work on

- Environmental conservation and sustainable natural resource management
- Climate change adaptation and resilience
- Protection and promotion of human rights
- Sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction

Where we work

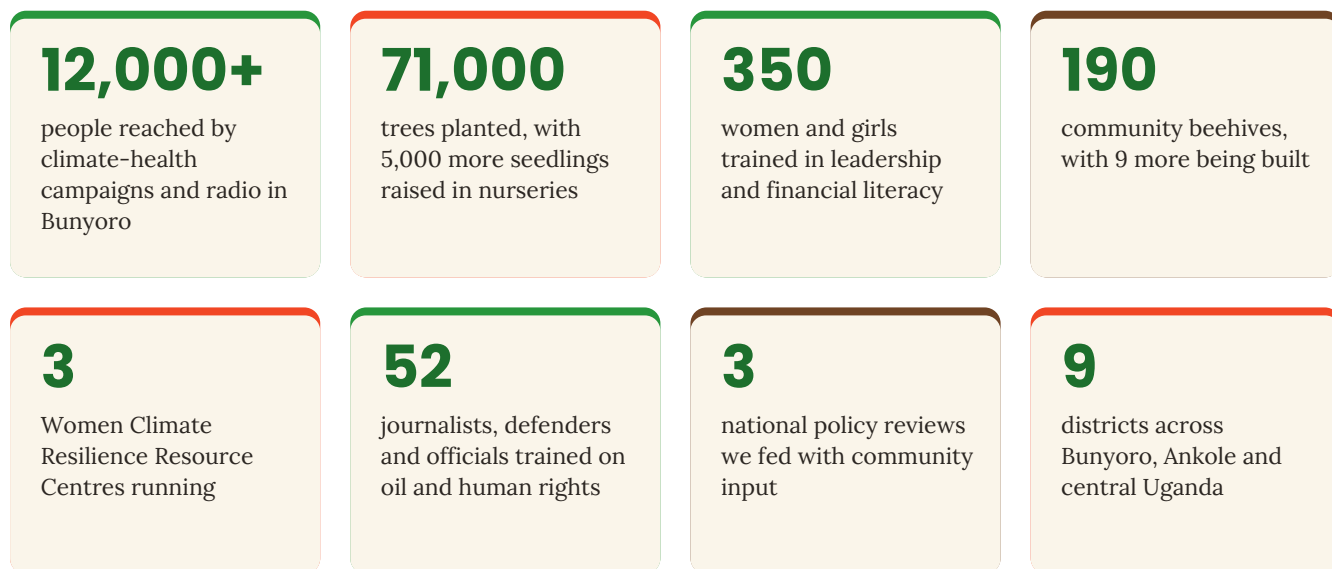
Our programmes have run in Greater Ankole, Kigezi, the Albertine and Bunyoro sub-regions, Greater Masaka and Eastern Uganda. In 2025 we were active in nine districts:

- **Bunyoro** Hoima, Buliisa, Kikuube, Masindi
- **Ankole** Mbarara, Isingiro
- **Central** Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono

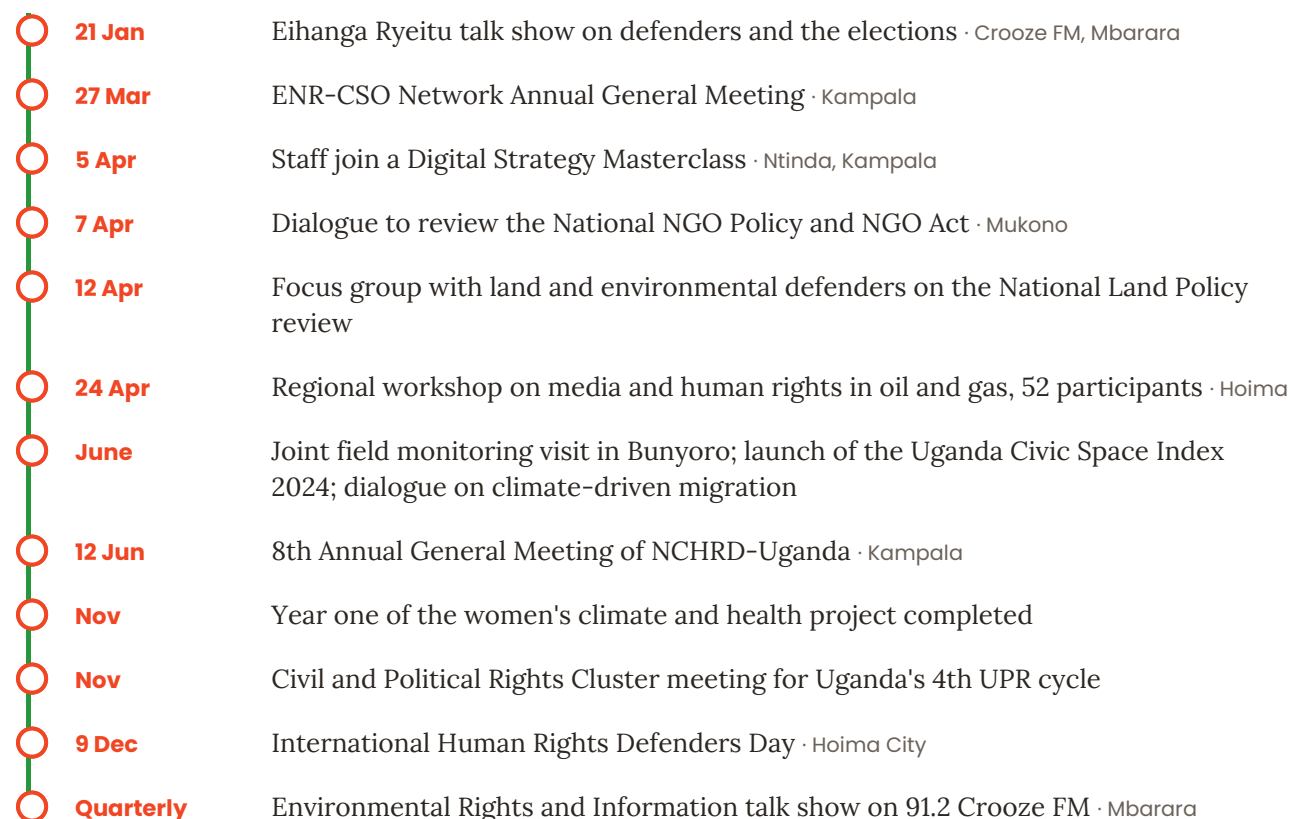
How we are run

A six-member Board of Directors governs CICOA and five full-time staff run it. Women hold four of the six board seats, including the Chair and Vice Chair, and three of the five staff posts. We work under a Finance Policy and Procedures Manual and policies on procurement, anti-fraud, conflict of interest, whistleblowing, human resources and risk, with an annual external audit.

The year in numbers and moments



Key moments



Women leading climate resilience in Bunyoro

Women and youth in Uganda's oil region carry the heaviest load of a changing climate. Our project with them is now showing real results.

The project *Empowering Women for Resilience against Climate Change Health Impacts in Oil-Host Communities*, supported by Foundation S, works in Hoima, Buliisa and Kikuube. It tackles heat stress, unsafe water, food insecurity, poverty, pollution-related illness, gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence.

In June, we carried out a joint field monitoring visit with VIDEA Uganda and EACOP host communities to check progress and strengthen local ownership. Year one ran to November 2025, and the project continues through 2026.

What is on the ground

- **Poultry:** women's enterprises with more than 1,000 birds per site
- **Beekeeping:** 190 hives in use and 9 under construction, with honey sold through Women Climate Resilience Resource Centres
- **Food gardens:** climate-smart demonstration plots growing pineapples, okra, carrots, turmeric and eggplant
- **Trees:** nurseries for land restoration and shade against heat
- **Clean energy:** biogas and briquette production to cut smoke and save trees
- **Local trainers:** women and youth agroforestry trainers passing skills on within their communities

These solutions are not imposed from outside. Communities own them, built on local knowledge and guided by the Community Strengthening Support (CSS) framework.



What changed for women in 2025

Between January and November 2025, the project worked in 10 oil-affected communities across Hoima, Buliisa and Kikuube. It began with a baseline survey of 124 households, which found water scarcity, weak access to health care, pollution, food insecurity, gender-based violence and lost income.

22

awareness campaigns plus 6 radio talk shows, reaching 12,000+ people

71,000

trees planted; 5,000 seedlings raised in centre nurseries

3

resource centres equipped with solar lights, water tanks and nurseries

350

women and girls trained in leadership and financial literacy

140

women saving through 4 savings groups

200

women linked to the Parish Development Model

120

women trained in business, value addition and trade

130

farmers trained in climate-smart agriculture

32

health workers and VHTs trained on climate and health

168

people screened at a mobile health camp

1,500

leaflets and posters in Runyoro, Lugungu and English

65

women in 6 community platforms shaping local decisions

Challenges and how we responded

Drought, July to October:

water-saving backyard gardens and rainwater harvesting.

Election-season limits on gatherings:

early clearance with the RDC and District Health Officer, and a revised calendar.

Men resisting women's leadership:

male champions and mixed-gender dialogues.

Transport costs:

community-based peer mentors for follow-up.

What we learned

- The resource centres are safe spaces as much as training hubs, where women build confidence and share experiences.
- Radio and storytelling work well for women who cannot read or write.
- Linking tree planting to income, such as soap making and beekeeping, keeps people motivated to look after the trees.

Protecting River Rwizi and the people who depend on it

River Rwizi feeds Mbarara City and the farms and towns along its banks. In 2025 we worked in Ankole to help protect it.

Restoring the river

Encroachment, waste and the loss of riverbank wetlands are putting the Rwizi under pressure. Working with the Ministry of Water and Environment, we replanted degraded riverbanks, ran community clean-up campaigns, promoted responsible waste management to cut pollution, and engaged local authorities on protecting the river and its buffer zone.

Livelihoods that protect the river

Restoration only lasts when families can earn a living without farming or grazing on the riverbank. Alongside restoration, we supported riverside households to build incomes that work with the river, not against it.

On air on 91.2 Crooze FM

Each quarter, we hosted an Environmental Rights and Information talk show reaching listeners across Ankole. It explains people's right to a clean and healthy environment under Article 39 of the Constitution and their right to information under the Access to Information Act.

In January, our Regional Coordinator John Turinawe hosted Eihanga Ryeitu, a prime-time programme on the risks facing human rights defenders ahead of the elections.

4 Environmental Rights and Information talk shows on 91.2 Crooze FM in 2025



Promotion for Eihanga Ryeitu on 91.2 Crooze FM, hosted by CICOA's John Turinawe.



CICOA, civil society and local leaders on air at 91.2 Crooze FM, Mbarara.

Bringing leaders and communities to one table

Our work in Ankole builds on the governance dialogue we hosted in Mbarara in November 2024 with support from the Civic Legacy Foundation.

More than 50 leaders took part, including the Regional Director of RDCs, Resident District Commissioners, district chairpersons, UPDF and Police spokespersons, political parties, media and civil society. They signed a public pledge on good governance and human rights, and set up a joint WhatsApp group so defenders and state actors can keep working together.



Leaders from government, security, media and civil society at CICOA's governance dialogue in Mbarara.

Refugees and the communities that host them

Uganda hosts more refugees than any other country in Africa, and the families who receive them often share the same land, water and firewood. In Kikuube, we worked with refugees and host communities around Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. In Isingiro, we worked with communities in and around Nakivale Refugee Settlement. Our focus is on women and young people: building livelihoods and small businesses, coping with a changing climate, and living together peacefully.



Signing the pledge on good governance and human rights.

"CSOs, I am not telling you to be loyal to the government, but I want you to be patriotic and partner with the government in development so that every Ugandan benefits."

Lt Col. James Mwesigye, Regional Director of RDCs, closing the dialogue

Journalists as defenders of community rights



Regional Workshop on Media and Human Rights in the Context of Oil and Gas Development in Bunyoro, Kontiki Hotel, Hoima.

On 24 April 2025, we brought journalists from Hoima and the wider Bunyoro sub-region together at Kontiki Hotel for training on media and human rights in oil and gas development.

The workshop was made possible with DefendDefenders, VIDEA Uganda, NCHRD-Uganda, Hoima and Kikuube District Local Governments, EACOP host communities, Albertine Regional Police, the Petroleum Authority of Uganda and Bunyoro media houses.

Its aim was simple: equip local media to hold oil projects to account, so that the rights and wellbeing of affected communities come first.

"Journalists are HRDs by the nature of their job! Every time you tell a story that speaks for the voiceless or publish an article that exposes environmental degradation, every time you challenge corporate impunity or government neglect, you're defending the dignity and rights of communities."

Robert Kirenga, Executive Director, NCHRD-Uganda

On air in Hoima



Andrew Mafundo on Spice FM, Hoima.

Our Executive Director joined a talk show on Spice FM in Hoima to reach communities directly. The conversation covered adapting to climate change, finding other sources of income, better farming methods and tree planting. It also explained the rights of Project Affected Persons (PAPs), who continue to face rights violations and unfair compensation.

What the training changed

The April workshop in Hoima was part of Strengthening Media Advocacy and Reporting Skills in the Bunyoro Sub-Region, supported by DefendDefenders through the PACER project. Its results went well beyond the day itself.

52

journalists, defenders, media owners and officials trained, against a target of 50

15

media houses represented, from community radio to national TV

26+

stories published and aired on oil governance, PAP rights and the environment

300,000+

estimated listeners for our vernacular talk show on Spice FM

3

media houses expanded their coverage of environmental justice and rights

1

new Bunyoro Regional Media and HRD Network for ongoing peer learning

In their words

"This workshop opened my eyes to the fact that oil reporting isn't just about infrastructure. It's about people, rights, and the future of our communities."

Leira Balley, Journalist, Spice FM Hoima

"We, the local government, welcome such initiatives. Media literacy on oil development helps us manage expectations and improve service delivery."

Hon. Peter Banura, Chairperson, Kikuube District

"I now understand that as a journalist, I'm also a human rights defender. I need to report boldly, but responsibly."

Idirisa Sentongo, Reporter

Participants asked for longer mentorship, a digital toolkit for journalists and defenders, and regular meetings of the new network. The network gives us a base to deliver all three.

Holding the line as civic space shrinks



Uganda Civic Space Index 2024.

Uganda Civic Space Index 2024

In June, we took part in the launch of the Uganda Civic Space Index 2024. Based on citizens' views, it found civic space tighter than in 2023, shrinking fastest in urban areas as the 2026 elections drew near. Key findings:

- The health of democracy and the rule of law continued to decline.
- Freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful protest came under threat, online and offline.
- Media and human rights defenders faced more censorship in "sensitive" areas.
- Political violence and fear kept women and youth out of civic life.

The Index called for wider digital civic space, the return of women and youth to civic leadership, protection for media workers and defenders, and open urban spaces for public participation. It stressed that government and civil society must work together to protect rights and deliver peaceful, fair elections.

Defenders meet in Kampala

On 12 June 2025, we joined more than 150 human rights defenders at the 8th Annual General Meeting of NCHRD-Uganda at Hotel Africana, under the theme "*Promoting accountability and transparency amidst an ever-changing civic space context.*" Members elected board members, a Technical Thematic Working Group and regional focal persons.



Human rights defenders at the NCHRD-Uganda AGM, Hotel Africana.

Uganda's human rights review

In November, we shared our experience at a one-day Civil and Political Rights Cluster meeting for Uganda's 4th Universal Periodic Review cycle, to help track how government implements UPR recommendations.

Human Rights Defenders Day

On 9 December 2025, we joined NCHRD-Uganda in Hoima City under the theme "*Celebrating and protecting the work of Human Rights Defenders.*" We used the day to honour women human rights defenders, who speak up for the vulnerable and demand accountability where silence would be easier.

Bringing community voices into national policy



Left: stakeholders at the NGO Policy and NGO Act review dialogue, Mukono. Right: the LEDTAF focus group with land and environmental defenders.

The NGO Policy and NGO Act

On 7 April 2025 in Mukono, we joined government, civil society and other stakeholders to review the National NGO Policy and the NGO Act, Cap. 109. The goal was to update the rules that govern the sector, strengthen support for it and improve accountability. We shared practical input drawn from our own work.

Land and environmental rights

On 12 April 2025, we took part in a focus group run by the Land and Environmental Defenders Task Force (LEDTAF) of Defenders Protection Initiative. Defenders shared their experiences and recommendations for a research paper and policy brief feeding into the review of Uganda's National Land Policy (2013).

Climate-driven migration

In early June, our Advocacy and Communications Officer, Francis Otucu, joined a dialogue on climate and migration at the invitation of SLYCAN Trust. Our message: the sooner we act on climate-driven migration, the more vulnerable people we protect, especially women and youth.

Environment and natural resources network

On 27 March 2025, our team attended the ENR-CSO Network Annual General Meeting in Kampala, where members reviewed past work, set future plans and elected a new steering committee.

Building our team's skills

On 5 April 2025, staff attended a Digital Strategy Masterclass by BLU Flamingo Digital Africa and DigiCon Academy in Ntinda, Kampala, to sharpen how we reach and serve our communities online.

Keeping community issues in the national conversation

Through 2025, our team wrote letters and opinion pieces in the national press, carrying the concerns of the communities we serve to decision-makers and the wider public.

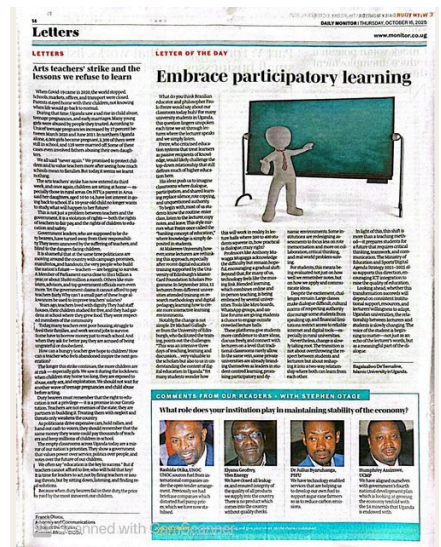
Topics included domestic violence, Uganda's shrinking media space ahead of the 2026 elections, and the case for participatory learning in schools.



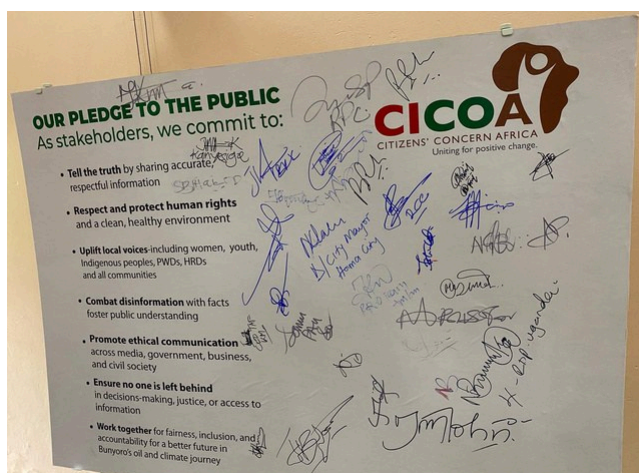
"Domestic violence is violence against us all"



"Uganda's shrinking media space and what it means for the 2026 elections"



"Embrace participatory learning"



A public pledge

Stakeholders signed our pledge to the public, committing to respect human rights, communicate ethically and fight disinformation with facts.

THANK YOU

Our partners

Lasting change happens when communities shape their own future and partners stand with them. We are grateful to everyone who worked with us in 2025, including:

- Foundation S
- Vijana for Sustainable Development and Environmental Action (VIDEA Uganda)
- EACOP host communities
- National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda (NCHRD-Uganda)
- DefendDefenders
- CivLegacy Foundation
- Ministry of Water and Environment
- Denmark in Uganda
- Ireland in Uganda
- Netherlands in Uganda
- Defenders Protection Initiative
- Hoima and Kikuube District Local Governments
- Spice FM and the media of Bunyoro
- 91.2 Crooze FM and the media of Ankole

Looking ahead to 2026

We will build on this year's results with stronger programmes, more meaningful partnerships and continued support for the communities, women's groups and defenders at the heart of our work.

Get in touch

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