

**ICPD @15 African Regional Review
“ICPD and the MDGs: Working as One”**

Major Findings

AGEING IN AFRICA

1 Background

Africa is the youngest continent in the world and, the numbers of older people in Africa will continue increasing compared to the other world regions. Africa will have the fastest growing numbers of the elderly by 2050, from approximately 42 million in 2002 to approximately 205 million in 2050. Older persons continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Africa. The challenges posed by increasing numbers of older persons in Africa need special attention because of high poverty levels, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates and the general disease burden which affect the quality of life of every individual, especially elderly women. It is in this regard that the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and other commissions, is actively engaged, in activities leading to the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA), the global policy framework adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002.

It is intended that MIPAA be used as a practical tool to help policymakers focus on the key priorities associated with including older persons into mainstream development. The Commission on Social Development (CSD) was designated as the lead organization to support the implementation of MIPAA, by the UN General Assembly. Accordingly, in 2003, the CSD introduced a ‘bottom-up’ participatory review process for MIPAA, which promotes links between local and national ageing initiatives and regional intergovernmental and global levels of review of MIPAA.

In July 2002, African Heads of State and Government adopted the African Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing. In 2004, the African Union Commission launched the Policy Framework and Plan of Action in order to raise awareness on the special situation, needs and welfare of older persons. Activities that are being carried out regarding the Policy Framework and Plan of Action include taking action at the national levels to formulate and implement policies that address issues of ageing. The AU is working in partnership with regional and sub-regional bodies including ECA, the African Development Bank, and the regional economic communities to advocate for the inclusion of ageing issues into policies and development strategies at country level.

Since the adoption of the frameworks in 2002, progress has been made in some countries to develop policies and strategies that address the needs of older persons. However, reviews by ECA and UNFPA on MIPAA (during ICPD +10) and AU on the Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing, reveal that despite regional and global efforts to put in place frameworks and support to encourage governments to take action, the

current situation of older people in African countries remains a matter of great concern. The situation of older people demand policy actions that can deliver adequate health services, income security and sustainable gender sensitive social protection systems. This brief highlights: the changing population age structure and its implications for public policy; the social and economic challenges experienced by older persons; health issues of older persons; the impact of HIV/AIDS; social protection systems; national progress on the implementation of MIPAA and AU PFPA; and recommendations to improve the status of older persons in Africa.

2 The changing population age structure and its implications for public policy

In 1950, the number of older persons above 60 years in Africa was about 12 million persons. By 2007 this number reached about 50.5 million persons. The World Population Prospects 2006 revision also projected that by 2015, which is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target date, the elderly aged 60 or more in Africa will have reached 64.5 million. These numbers will exceed 103 million by 2030 and 205 million by 2050 respectively.

The great majority of the elderly in Africa live in Northern Africa, Eastern Africa and Western Africa and a small fraction live in Central and Southern Africa. As a percentage of the total population, Northern Africa and Southern Africa are the most rapidly ageing regions on the continent. By 2007 the elderly were 7% and 6.9% of the population in these two regions respectively. Future prospects indicate that the elderly in Northern Africa will increase rapidly to 8.2% by 2015, 11.9% by 2030 and 19.6% by 2050. Southern Africa will experience a similar rapid increase but at a lower level. The remaining regions, Eastern, Central and Western Africa exhibit a very similar pattern of slow increase among the elderly as a proportion of the total population. By 2015 the elderly will be between 4.3% and 5.1% of the total population in these regions.

Population ageing in Africa varies considerably by country. The population in Mauritius, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Libya is rapidly ageing. In 2007 the elderly population aged 60 or more constituted about 8.7% in Tunisia and 10% in Mauritius. These percentages will increase to 10.4 and 13.3, respectively, by 2015, and further to 16.8 and 20.9, respectively, by 2030. These are countries experiencing rapid decline in fertility and increased life spans across all age groups. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with rapidly ageing populations include Gabon, Djibouti, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Togo, and Senegal. The remaining countries are experiencing a minimum increase in the percentage elderly of the total population. Overall, the proportion of older people is increasing in most African countries and this creates demand for public policy interventions to deliver adequate health services, income security and protection from poverty.

Demographic research conducted in developed and developing countries indicates that current and past levels and trends of fertility, mortality and migration rates, determine the age structure of any population. These components of population dynamics are influenced, directly and indirectly, by a range of reproductive health and socio-economic

factors, which are the domain of public policies, such as the level of nutrition, use of contraceptive methods, education and the level of income. Changes in population structure and ageing increase the pressure on public policy responses. Ageing populations demand support to adequate health services, income security and sustainable gender sensitive social protection systems. The proportion of older people is increasing in all African sub-regions and this creates demand for public policy interventions to deliver adequate health services, income security and protection from poverty. The implications of the changing population age structure for public policy should be addressed from a multidisciplinary perspective to reflect the multidimensional impacts and repercussions. This would support governments to implement social and economic policies that address current pressing issues and plan for future change.

3 The social and economic challenges experienced by older persons

The social and economic situation of older people in Africa remains dire. Processes of modernization, including individualism, urbanization and migration, and the impact of HIV/AIDS have eroded traditional systems of intergenerational family and community support where many people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) become dependent on their parents for care rather than supporting them in older age. These factors have combined to undermine not only older people's financial security but also traditional levels of respect. The current global economic crisis is exacerbating the negative economic impacts on older persons. Many older people, particularly women, suffer stigmatization, abuse and violence. There is an urgent need for national policies on ageing to address the socio-economic needs and rights of older people and improve their well being.

4 Health issues of older people

In older age health issues change, there is a shift away from the incidence of communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases, typically chronic, degenerative and mental illnesses. This is accompanied by a higher incidence of disability. This situation has considerable implications for health service provision, particularly since there is a widespread lack of specialist services and personnel to serve the health needs of the growing numbers of older people in most African countries. The health system may not have adequate services to meet the needs of older persons; poverty may prevent many from seeking health services; and family and informal support may not be available to help their needs. Increasing numbers of poor older people, particularly women, need help in terms of improving the nutritional value of their diets and paying for services and essential medicines to treat their existing conditions. In order to improve the health situation of older persons, there is need to improve prevention through health education; provide support for the poor older people to maintain healthy diets; and intensify poverty reduction among older people. There is also need for improvement to treatment and health services, which target the health needs of older people and free access to health services and medication for poor older people.

5. The impact of HIV/AIDS on older people

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is impacting negatively on the health and well-being of older people in Africa. Older people typically provide care for their adult children who are living with HIV and foster grandchildren affected by the pandemic. Care-giving, paying for medicines and living expenses, foregoing economic activity and the loss of current and future support, cause a slide into poverty and deplete the health of many older people through poor nutrition and fatigue. There are also people aged 60 and over who are living with HIV who have very limited access to effective medical treatment and prevention services. Given the overall poor access to healthcare in Africa, it is highly likely that older people living with HIV/AIDS have very limited access to effective medical treatment and prevention services. Measures raising the awareness of risk of infection and prevention targeted at older people are therefore necessary. It is important to ensure that health services are developed to meet the needs and circumstances of older people. The increase in the demands made on women especially older women as caregivers is substantial. It is important that the needs of care giving are taken into account in social protection systems and home-based care policies and guidelines.

6. Social protection systems

Informal systems of social protection in the form of cash and kind support from both extended family and community sources have suffered a decline in recent decades because of a falling commitment to traditional systems of support. Their effectiveness has been further eroded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, reducing the numbers of younger people able to contribute. Traditionally, informal social protection has been effective in reaching the poorest and most vulnerable in rural as well as urban areas. The potential for strengthening the characteristically weak resource base of these systems and the re-energizing of commitment to family and community responsibilities are areas for action on ageing.

In the majority of African countries, formal systems of social protection capable of absorbing the increasing numbers of older people do not exist. Former civil servants and formal sector employees may receive pensions from contributory social security schemes, but the vast majority of the older populations across Africa involved in informal sector activities do not receive financial support. Evidence of lower levels of poverty among older people and their households in countries where universal or means-tested non-contributory pension schemes operate, suggests knock-on benefits for the community as well as recipients. Sustainable source of funding for expanding coverage of formal social protection systems in Africa is a major challenge

7. Challenges faced in translating MIPAA and the AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing into reality at national level

There are a number of factors that interplay to influence governments' focus on issues other than ageing. One of the factors is the lack of mainstreaming of the key issues of older persons in national development policies including poverty reduction strategies (PRSs). PRSs tend to encourage focus on the concerns of the younger sections of society

in terms of reducing poverty and funding education to increase their employment opportunities and economic potential. This overlooks the economic potential of older people among whom many remain able and willing to contribute long after age 60 but lack opportunity. Consequently, older people are often left out of the mainstream government policy because their needs are not always recognised as a development issue. This is exacerbated by the lack of voice of this largely vulnerable and marginalized group, where despite exemplary efforts to redress this situation, advocacy instruments are relatively underdeveloped and representation is low in comparison with competing interest groups.

National responses to MIPAA and AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing have been influenced by the lack of adequate data and information on ageing to inform the development agenda. There is need for systematic data collection and research on to provide governments with evidence-based arguments to influence resource allocation and development of relevant policies to address older persons.

Implementation of plans of action on ageing has human and financial resource implications that are a challenge to fulfill in most countries. Government interventions tend to prioritize other development issues rather than action on ageing in a highly competitive funding environment.

It is important to recognize that successful and lasting implementation of plans requires participation of all stakeholders, particularly older people themselves. This remains a major challenge in some countries. Thus, at the country level, governments are encouraged to involve national and local government bodies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, older people, the private sector, the media and research institutes in decision-making. At the regional and international liaison levels, relevant UN agencies and the AU offer mechanisms for coordinating efforts for facilitating review and appraisal of national responses.

Another major challenge is lack of awareness on the importance of mainstreaming ageing issues into national development. It is essential for stakeholders to engage in the global (MIPAA) and regional (AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing) review processes because this has the direct potential of raising awareness at all levels and promoting action on ageing in Africa.

8. Recommendations to improve the status of older persons in Africa.

Based on the analysis in the report the following recommendations are proposed.

Changing age structures of African populations:

1. International and regional communication of the relevance of ageing concerns and the exponential rate of population ageing to current public policy action at country level needs to be strengthened in messages to both the international community and to national governments.

Social and economic situation of older people in Africa:

2. The erosion of traditional familial and community support structures caused by multi-dimensional modernization processes and the impact of HIV/AIDS requires country level responses to re-instill the notion of reciprocal responsibility at family and community levels.
3. Policy focus is required on the concerns of older people, particularly older women, who in general experience higher levels of poverty and disadvantage than older men.
4. The stigmatization of older people in society is an increasing trend. The right to age with dignity and respect should be upheld and anti-discriminatory legislation introduced to address violence, abuse and accusations of witchcraft.
5. The economic potential of older people needs to be supported through policy action to enable those older people willing to work to stay economically active for longer, in both formal and informal sectors

Health issues of older people:

6. Greater emphasis should be given to the rights of older people to access healthcare, and the need to provide targeted public healthcare services for older people, particularly women who, on average, live longer than men. Action is needed on a) training personnel in the care and treatment of older people's health issues b) the provision of specialist services c) the improved availability of relevant medicines.
7. Health education campaigns are required to raise public awareness of a) ways to promote healthy living to contribute to prevention or delaying the onset of older age health issues b) self care advice to relieve low-level symptoms.
8. Poor older people need support to maintain healthy diets, access health services and buy essential medicines. Free healthcare should be introduced for poor older people.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on older people

9. Provide targeted health education to reduce older people's risk of infection with the virus.
10. Promote HIV prevention among older people.
11. Support older people caring for people living with HIV/AIDS and those fostering orphans.
12. Training in new income generation activities is required for survivors of HIV/AIDS, including older people, to promote secure livelihoods.

Social protection systems and population ageing:

13. Improve the coverage of formal and informal systems of social protection.
14. Non-contributory social protection systems should be introduced to guarantee a minimum income for poor people aged 60 and over.
15. Social protection systems should be gender sensitive to respond to the higher levels of poverty and vulnerability experienced by older women.

Policy environment recommendations:

16. Provide support to national governments to encourage engagement in the MIPAA and AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing review processes including a) training activities on organising and coordinating bottom-up nationwide review and appraisal and b) regional review and appraisal events (meetings/conferences) to evaluate the national experience and identify future priorities for implementation.
17. Mainstream ageing and the concerns of older people into national development frameworks and poverty eradication strategies.
18. National governments to prioritise action by formulating and approving a national policy on ageing.
19. National governments to support the implementation of policies and plans on ageing by allocating specific budgets for older people's concerns.
20. Systematically collect disaggregated data and conduct research to build the evidence base on ageing to inform policymaking and planning on ageing concerns within country contexts.

Brief is based on ECA's Report The State of Older People in Africa – 2007-2008: Regional Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing