

**PRESENTATION BY THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND
SOCIAL SERVICES**

BY

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AT

**THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE REPORT OF
THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE SECOND REVIEW AND
APPRAISAL OF THE MADRID INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF
ACTION ON AGEING**

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The age structure of older people in Africa is changing dramatically and the continent is experiencing the fastest rate of growth of numbers of older people than any other continent in projections to 2050. There are high levels of economic growth in the African region, however wide disparities exist, and high levels of social exclusion persist amongst the older people. Policies need to unlock the potential of societies to sustain high economic and social growth to promote social justice and social inclusion. A decline in the well-being of older persons in Africa has been observed in the five years since the first review cycle, owing to limited human, financial and institutional capacities, demographic shifts, increased disease burden, abuse and neglect of the rights of older persons, economic, social and cultural changes, and the impact of HIV and AIDS.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized an interactive training workshop in 2011 in Addis Ababa, to support

national review and appraisal capacities for the regional review. The participants agreed to focus on the rights of older people to health care as the theme for the regional review of MIPAA and countries submitted national reports contributing towards the compilation of the regional report.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Ladies and Gentleman, in terms of what the African region has achieved, the African Ministers of Social Development have adopted the Draft African Common Position on the rights of older persons in Africa that recognize ageing as a pertinent and cross cutting development issue in Africa. Not only that, the AU Commission has already finalized a draft Protocol on the rights of older persons. Most African countries now recognize aging as a development policy priority and have put in place a number of strategies, policies, legislation and programmes that address the particular needs of older persons. Zimbabwe recently enacted the Older Persons Act (2012) which is a piece of legislature that enhances the participation of older persons through the establishment of the Older

Persons Board. Mozambique has developed a country-specific and country-led policy and strategy to implement social protection programmes for older persons. Ethiopia has drafted its National Social Protection Policy aimed at alleviating poverty, vulnerability, exclusion and to promote the general well-being of vulnerable groups including older persons to become more productive.

Some countries in the region have already started implementing programmes for the elderly in collaboration with other stakeholders including local governments, faith based and civil society organizations, as well as the private sector. In Gambia, the Department of Social Welfare collaborated with partners such as the World Health Organization, Age Care Association as well as Ageing with a Smile, and has provided key intervention strategies for older persons, such as building homes and providing homecare support as well as rehabilitation services. Zimbabwe is currently implementing the Harmonised Social Cash Transfer Scheme which is a social protection programme where more than half of the beneficiary households are headed by older

persons (67%). Ghana is implementing the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP), a cash transfer programme that provides conditional and unconditional cash grants to extremely poor people and those above 65 years of age.

The AU Ouagadougou Declaration of 2004 followed by the sub-regional meetings in Zambia and Cameroon in 2006 initiated more awareness in Africa on the issue of social protection. Thereafter, some African countries established new social safety nets programmes for the elderly and have also expanded programmes already in existence. Uganda's National Policy for Older Person 2009 offers policy framework and direction for all interventions geared towards older persons, including health accessibility, research on health needs of older persons and mainstreaming health issues of older persons in existing training curricula for health workers at all levels. Indeed social protection in Africa is increasingly becoming an effective tool for combating poverty including older persons. However several of the new programmes are pilots funded by donor organizations, UN agencies, as well as NGOs.

Only ten African countries (including Botswana, South Africa, Senegal, Mauritius, Lesotho, Liberia, Namibia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Swaziland) provide some form of social transfer, like old age pensions or disability grants.

CHALLENGES

Although many countries have now introduced social protection measures for older persons, the majorities of older persons do not have pensions and social protection, and continue to work until advanced ages mostly in the informal sector. Most of such programmes target older persons 65 years and above leaving out those between 60 years and 65 years. Due to exclusion, inequality and subjugation, older women are worse off than their male counterparts. The Economic Commission of Africa notes that the incidence of death among the middle generation, especially from HIV and AIDS, has had multiple impacts upon older people as they lose their possible source of external financial support in their old age. Physical obstacles further impede the access of older persons to healthcare services in Africa. Facilities are often situated too

far from older persons' residence, with transport being too expensive, inadequate, or simply unavailable to them. Much of Africa continues to have a large human and resource gap in public health systems. Most programmes are oriented towards eradicating preventable childhood diseases rather than treating chronic diseases or addressing the healthcare needs of older persons.

Throughout Africa, there is very little awareness or recognition of the human rights of older persons, particularly of older women, who suffer the most discrimination and abuse. The regional review and appraisal process identified lack of awareness of human rights of older persons, age discrimination and marginalization, gaps in social security provisions as the major human rights challenges for older persons in Africa. However, several governments and non-governmental organizations have allocated significant budgets to support homeless older persons. South Africa has passed legislation specific to older persons including Aged Persons Act and Aged Persons Amendment Act that aim at protecting the rights of this age group. Efforts have been

made by countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda through national plans of action or local government acts, to ensure the participation of older persons in decision-making processes on matters that affect their lives through their representation at various levels of local government from village to district level.

More African governments are beginning to recognize the need for action in enacting policies specifically addressing older persons, and while the development of such policies have increased from 13 in 2007 to 20 countries in 2011, many of them were drafted in an ad-hoc manner, and not systematically mainstreamed in national development strategies and policies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, or national budgets. Most of them are either still in draft form, or with minimal implementation. Furthermore, only a few African countries, such as Uganda, have aligned ageing policies with the objectives of the Madrid Plan of Action, specifically through its 2009 National Policy for Older Persons, National Plan of Action for Older Persons (2011/2016) and the National Council for Older Persons.

PRIORITIES

Progress made in some countries is lost due to lack of political will and policy clarity. While awareness on ageing has increased, inclusion of older persons in the development process remains a challenge. The only way forward of furthering the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action for ageing is by engaging the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, in developing approaches to meeting the needs of older persons and promoting participatory dialogue of older persons in decision making. Comprehensive data collection and research on the issue of ageing should be made available in order to address barriers such as exclusion, and lack of empowerment of older persons, as well as to provide the groundwork for policy-making and strategies. It is essential that countries embark on vigorous research and data collection for issues pertaining to the elderly and ensure that data is aggregated according to sex as well as recognize rural and urban differences. Governments should promote health and well-being for older persons by addressing the lack of specialist services and personnel to serve the health needs of the growing numbers of older people. Free

health services and medication for poor older people should remain a goal. International cooperation is needed to support the countries' engagement through training and capacity development activities. There is need to recognize the complementary nature of the International and Continental policies and seek to package simple communication materials for the elderly.