

Age Demands Action in Uganda

Progress on implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)



Older people like Antoinette, 60, need government support to fulfil the essential role of caring for orphans and vulnerable children.

Introduction

In 2002 the Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its challenge of 'building a society for all ages'. This focuses on reducing poverty, addressing healthcare issues and introducing anti-discriminatory legislation for older people.

Why MIPAA is important

MIPAA is important because:

- It is an international agreement which commits governments morally and politically to include ageing in all social and economic development policies, including poverty reduction strategies.
- It aims to ensure that people everywhere can age with security and dignity, and continue to participate in their society as citizens with full rights.
- It emphasises the right and potential

of older people to participate actively in economic and social development.

The older people interviewed in the process of researching this report have clear ideas about what they want to enable them to participate fully in society. They want basic needs and rights including adequate shelter, access to free medical services and transport, and income security particularly in the form of social pensions.

Older people in Uganda

In 2002, 4.5 per cent of the population were older people aged 60 or over, numbering 1,101,039 (561,530 women and 539,509 men).¹ It is also clear that as life expectancy improves the size of the ageing population will increase.

Among the many competing demands for resources, older people are not yet recognised as a priority group in Uganda's existing national poverty reduction objectives and targets.

Purpose and content

This briefing report can be used:

- by government and civil society organisations to support advocacy for older people and their dependants
- as a resource for national reporting on MIPAA
- as an information source for future development of Uganda's plan of action on ageing.

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Uganda's Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (2002) indicated older people were among the poorest in Uganda and additional research showed 60 per cent of older people live below the poverty line.

Current perceptions of ageing populations worldwide tend to overlook the actual and potential social and economic contributions of older people.² These contributions provide an argument for dedicated funding to enable older people to better contribute to society.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has impacted upon Uganda's older people. Many have taken on the responsibility of caring for people living with HIV and AIDS and orphaned, vulnerable children.

One out of five children is now cared for by an older person. This is an example of a key role in society that older people perform which deserves support. National data is currently unavailable on people over 59 living with HIV/AIDS, which leads to many falling through the net of service provision.

Implementing MIPAA in Uganda

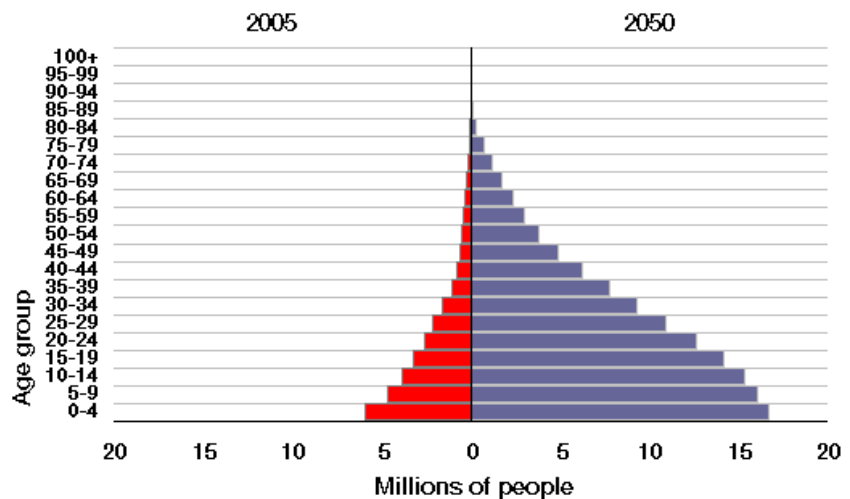
Since 2002, the Ugandan Government has developed a range of programmes which have the potential to include older people. Those older people who have been able to access them have acknowledged notable improvements in their quality of life. However these programmes do not reach the majority of older people.

Interviews with government representatives at ministry and local level as well as representatives of older people and older people themselves, give insight into what has worked and what challenges remain in three critical areas: ageing policy, poverty and health.

Ageing policy

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development holds responsibility for older people and has developed programmes that integrate their needs including:

Population structure: Uganda, 2005 and 2050



Older people in Uganda: Facts and figures

- The proportion of the voting population over the age of 60 was 10 per cent in 2005.³
- The proportion of males to females is 85 per cent for people over the age of 60 and 76 per cent for people over the age of 80.⁴
- The life expectancy was 15.2 years for 60-year-olds and 5.5 years for 80-year-olds in 2005. In 2050, it will increase to 19.2 years for 60-year-olds, and 6.7 years for 80-year-olds.⁵
- The proportion of people over the age of 60 in the labour force is currently 81 per cent for men and 57 per cent for women.⁶
- 50 per cent of the estimated 1.2 million orphans in Uganda were looked after by grandparents in 2002.⁷

- the poverty alleviation programme under the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture

- water and sanitation programmes.

There are no targeted interventions because the Ministry is challenged by lack of both central policy on ageing and dedicated funding for older people initiatives.

Over the next five years the Ministry plans to prioritise:

- a policy for older persons
- a social protection policy
- a social pensions programme
- a public awareness programme for both public and private sectors to mainstream older people's issues.

Current positive developments at local level include political representation of older people as well as the inclusion of elected older people on technical committees at village and district

levels. Local level representatives view capacity building and strengthening leadership of older people's community-based organisations/faith-based organisations (CBOs/FBOs) and income generation projects as priority interventions.

Poverty

The Ugandan Government is committed to national poverty reduction policies.

National level interventions

The Ministry of Finance plays a pivotal role in national budgetary decisions. While MIPAA calls for a non-contributory pension for older people, a Ministry of Finance representative reported that this option is currently viewed as too costly and challenging to administrate: 'It is a good but expensive programme, prone to manipulation given the weak birth registration.' The Ministry's proposed reform and privatisation of

the National Security Fund and Pension Reform Program would benefit people in formal employment only.

The Ministry of Finance action on the MIPAA goal of reducing old age poverty by half, takes the form of plans to increase the budget for social protection through prioritising medical insurance and providing free universal education. The potential impact on reducing old age poverty appears indirect and long term. In the shorter term the Ministry views the introduction of community programmes to reduce poverty as a positive option.

Local level interventions

At the local level improved political representation of older people is seen as progress, enabling them to influence poverty reduction policies and programmes. For example, income generation projects at household level are viewed as an effective intervention.

Older people's perspectives

Individuals interviewed felt that the government has overlooked them and their needs were overshadowed by prioritised groups in any programme to reduce poverty.

Alternatively, older people's representatives cited agricultural community support services as an example of an intervention that benefited those able older people with access to land, by improving incomes and increasing food security.

Health

Older people include adequate health services as a fundamental requirement. Addressing their health issues not only attends to a basic human right but also serves the country by strengthening their increasingly important role as carers of people and children affected by HIV/AIDS.

National level interventions

The Ministry of Health has actively responded to MIPAA by:

- developing a five year strategy in 2003 which integrates older people's health needs

Case study: Antoinette

Antoinette (60) cares for seven grandchildren. She does not receive a pension and supports her extended family through income generation activities funded by HelpAge International, but she still finds it difficult to provide the basic necessities. Antoinette calls for government action:

'Old people need special hospitals or places they can go when they get very sick and can get special care for free. They need pensions, whether they have worked for the government or not.'

'Old people need to be given decent houses because they need better accommodation to give them security and protect them from the rain. Old people should also have access to loans so they can make a better income to support the orphans that are in their care.'

'In this community the government has not helped the old people at all. There doesn't seem to be a policy to help the elderly and they don't have a voice.'

Antoinette provides an example of how much older people contribute to the community. She is a trained home-based carer for people with HIV/AIDS, a former traditional birth attendant and a mobiliser of community support for the most vulnerable. Antoinette's energy and commitment are remarkable, but both she and her community need support.

- developing plans to improve age-appropriate access to health services and drugs at lower level health units
- continuing to provide free basic healthcare.

Limited funding and low availability of geriatric training for health workers slows the response, though a positive attitude exists, as a District Health Director says: 'The public need to be educated about the health needs of older people. Concrete steps should be taken to incorporate geriatrics in all health worker training institutions.'

Local level interventions

Older people do not yet benefit from specific policies or programmes. A District Health Director stated, 'If the Ugandan Government considered the elderly as a priority then the health sector would not hesitate to put in place specific services for them.'

Older people's perspectives

Older people appreciated basic free healthcare but spoke frankly about long distances to clinics and poor attitudes of health workers towards older people.

Future priorities for implementation of MIPAA

In 2006 the Intergovernmental Conference on Social Protection

for Africa hosted by the African Union and the Zambian Government endorsed MIPAA goals, notably social cash transfers and recognition of the real and potential economic contribution of older people. The obstacles to progress identified by that conference match the difficulties experienced by the Ugandan Government and older people of Uganda since the launch of MIPAA.

A priority, therefore, for MIPAA implementation is mobilisation of the political will of core decision makers in central government to devise national policy and commit dedicated funding. Currently the scale and specific nature of older people's needs are not known. A key priority is to gather disaggregated statistics and information within the 60 and over age range, which incorporates the views of older people themselves. Filling this information gap will help the Ugandan Government draw up relevant and targeted policy and programmes.

It is also a priority to investigate the potential for joint funding from international donor agencies and the role of civil society organisations in implementation, including NGOs, CBOs and FBOs.

Case study: John

John (73) looks after more than 20 orphaned grandchildren (he is not sure of the exact number). He receives a government pension of 110,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$64) each month, but it is not enough. John has applied for an income generation grant and it is vital that he maintains his health. However he faces problems:

‘Often the doctors prescribe medicine that isn’t in the hospital stock. This is because it is medicine that is special to old people, so we have no choice but to buy it. But if there is no money we go without. The government has done nothing to increase my pension or to improve the healthcare system for older people and we still have to pay for our medicine. Medical provision for the elderly should be a priority but there is a negative attitude and a real discrimination towards older people from the younger generation. The last time I went to the hospital the staff just laughed at me and I was made to wait a long time. They just didn’t want to attend to me.’

Recommendations

Over the next two years the following actions are recommended:

Mainstreaming older people’s issues

- **Priority:** The government to give a clear statement now on what steps need to be taken to pass a national policy for older people.
- Raising awareness of MIPAA goals at national and district government levels to drive action on older people’s needs.
- Collection of disaggregated data on people 60 and over including information on older people’s contributions to society.

Financial security

- **Priority:** The government to give a clear statement on plans to financially support the 80 per cent of older people who were not in the civil service and therefore do not receive a pension.
- Introduction of a social protection policy including non-contributory pensions for all older people.

Health security

- **Priority:** The specific targeting of geriatric illnesses in the health service delivery system.

Inclusion in society

- **Priority:** The government to include older people representatives in parliament.

- The participation of older people as key stakeholders in guiding policy, planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Negotiation of joint approaches between government and international donors for funding, and civil society organisations for implementation.

‘There is a very important role for older people, because most of us are now bringing up the orphans of our children. Without us there would be a huge problem. It is important that the government is made to see this role and that it will start to support us because at the moment we get nothing.’

Emina (70) a widow, cares for seven orphaned grandchildren.

- 1 2002 Population and Housing Census Report, Uganda
- 2 Social Protection for Africa, Intergovernmental Regional Conference Report, Livingstone, Zambia, 20-23 March 2006
- 3 World population prospects: the 2004 revision population database, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
- 4 Ibid
- 5 UN World population ageing: 1950-2050, UNDESA, 2006
- 6 Population ageing wallchart, UNDESA, 2006
- 7 2002 Uganda Human Development Report

HelpAge International has a vision of a world in which all older people fulfil their potential to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives. HelpAge International is a global network striving for the rights of older people to economic and physical security; healthcare and social services; and support in their caregiving role across the generations.

Research for this briefing paper was undertaken by Uganda Reach the Aged Association.

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