



NSINDAGIZA ORGANIZATION

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Written Statement Submitted by NSINDAGIZA Organization, Rwanda at the 13th Session of the United Nations Open- ended Working Group on Ageing, 3-6 April 2023

"Sometimes when I go to the hospitals, they can't even see that I am an older woman who needs to be cared for, but I am used to that, I just take it as it is, I know that we are not respected because we are considered as just consumers without being productive" (Older woman, 75, Rwanda).

NSINDAGIZA Organization commends the opportunity to provide a statement at the 13th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing towards the focus area "Right to health and access to health services".

Rwanda is one of the countries whose primary focus is children, the youth and particularly women, taking into account the aspect of disability inclusion. This helps ensure healthy ageing and ageing preparedness for the younger generation, though the current care and medical services are still an issue for older people who are at high risk to chronic diseases. Some of these include non-communicable and other neglected diseases which are the leading cause of death and disability. Older people are discriminated against at workplaces, by health and life insurance providers and finance companies, and as a result, most of them are unable to access quality health services. This is further enhanced by physical distance, affordability due to high cost and lack of related information. Unfortunately, getting the evidence is not easy, due to lack of adequate data disaggregated by those above 60 years of age.

We, however, appreciate some Government initiatives including the priority given to older people for COVID19 vaccinations, the provision of free community-based health insurance for the most vulnerable people, and the direct support provided to the most vulnerable people, which increased the capacity to pay for some health services. The national "EJO HEZA" long-term saving program gives hope for the providence of the well-being of ageing people in formal and informal works, by giving them social security.



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The Government of Rwanda approved a national older persons' policy in May 2021, with a specific objective on health promotion, which gives hope for the future once the policy is implemented. As for now, it is still unknown to the community. In its implementation, this policy should be complemented by the mainstreaming of ageing in other sectoral policies such as health policy, family, nutrition, gender, disaster management, etc.

Access to health care services is challenging as it is not a priority at different levels, including development partners, donors and civil society organizations. This should be addressed first at the United Nations level, moving down to national and community levels, to ensure that older people are able to overcome barriers when accessing healthcare services, by having systems with geriatric trained professionals. This is because, as much as services are available, they are not necessarily responsive to the needs of older people, as there is no geriatric program or any other training available to health workers caring for older people (UNFPA, 2022).

We commend the existence of the Universal Health Coverage and Ageing program and the UN Decade of healthy ageing. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is defined as everyone everywhere being able to access the quality health and care services they need without suffering financial hardship. Achieving UHC is target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, recommitted to by Heads of States in their political declarations during the High Level Meeting on UHC in 2019. The mission of UN Decade of Healthy Ageing is to improve the lives of older people, their families and their communities. It requires the involvement of the UN agencies, the government, development partners, civil society, private sector and the older people themselves. It's unfortunate that there is no implementation strategy and there is no coordination mechanism, both which should be domesticated and disseminated to all involved.

The UNAIDS gap report 2014 identified that people aged 50 years and older, among 12 populations, are more at risk of contracting HIV. The following reasons were identified:

- Low perception of HIV risk,
- Managing HIV and other health issues is complicated,
- Access to service,
- Stigma and discrimination.



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According to 2018/19 RPHIA, for adult 15-64 years old, prevalence among women is 3.7% as compared to 2.2% among men, but there are no figures regarding older people, who are also sexually active. HIV can cause some disabilities, like blindness.

We strongly recommend that the United Nations, through the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, put in place a new and binding convention which is the only way for the governments to prioritize access to health services for older people at national and community levels.

Elie MUGABOWISHEMA,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elie Mugabowisema", is written over a horizontal line.

President of NSINDAGIZA Organization