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Substantive inputs on the focus area of the 10th session of the General Assembly Open-ended Working Group for the development of a possible international standard on the protection of the rights of older people on “Social Protection and Social security”

Introduction- Nigeria, the country with the largest population in Africa (191 million), has an elderly projected population growth rate of 3.2%¹ this rate has been estimated to double by 2050². This trend calls for concern as it poses major economic, psychological, health, and social challenges to the Country. What really heightens the challenge is the absence of clear policy, or any functional social security service for the elderly people in Nigeria. Consequently, social policy for the elderly people remains turbulent, especially with the retrenchment of the welfare system in favor of the adoption of neoliberal policies in Nigeria.

Background- Ageing in Nigeria is occurring against the background of socio-economic hardship, widespread poverty, health epidemic and the rapid transformation of the traditional extended family structure³. With relatively low levels of social and economic development and little access to adequate health care, it will be hard-pressed to meet the challenges of large numbers of elderly people, especially as traditional family support systems for the elderly are breaking down. One of the major challenge facing Nigeria is developing policies and responding to the current social priorities and complex needs of an increasingly ageing population in the country.

Challenges Regarding Social Protection and Social security- Changing demographics in Nigeria, breakdown of the family structure, rapid growth of the elderly and extreme poverty present unique challenges to the elderly in Nigeria especially as there is no functional national policy on the social protection and security/welfare programme for the elderly. During the oil boom era (1971–1980) the period saw free medical services, welfare and security programme for the populace including food for hospitalized patients who were admitted to public health facilities⁴. In this era, the government was up to its responsibility to the elderly. However, the drop in oil prices in the international market resulted in a deficit of Nigeria's balance payment which led to the retrenchment of the welfare system and provision of basic amenities and the introduction of a neoliberal policy in 1986⁵. This condition exposes the elderly to untold hardship, poverty, sicknesses and financial insecurity. However, the burden of care for the elderly squarely rests on family members despite the provision made in Section 14.2(b) of the

¹ (Population Reference Bureau 2012 Population Reference Bureau. (2012). *World population data sheet (2012)*. Washington, DC: Author. [Google Scholar].

² (Mbah, 2016 Mbah, P. O. (2016).

³ (Adebanjoko & Ugwuoke, 2014 Adebanjoko, A., & Ugwuoke, O. W. (2014). Poverty and the challenges of insecurity to development. *European Scientific Journal*, 10(14), 361–372. [Google Scholar].

⁴ (Alubo, 1987 Alubo, O. (1987). Power and privileges in medical care: An analysis of medical services in post-Colonial Nigeria. *Social Science and Medicine*, 24, 453–462. [Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 453).

⁵ (Ekanade, 2014 Ekanade, O. V. (2014). The dynamics of forced Neoliberalism in Nigeria since the 1980s. *Journal of Retracing Africa*, 1(1), 1–24. Retrieved from <https://encompass.eku.edu/jora/vol1/iss1/1> [Google Scholar]; Mbah, 2016 Mbah, P. O. (2016).

Constitution¹ which states that the security and welfare of its people shall be the primary purpose of the government.

Unfortunately, the government has reneged on these promises, as most elderly people are not covered by any social policy. There is no welfare and special medical care for the elderly. The Nigeria pension scheme design with high expectations for a sustainable standard and other benefits to the elderly after retirement has its own share of problems and has not met pensioners' expectations.

Remedies and Accountability – As a nongovernmental organization we have always emphasized the need for the Nigeria government to make serious efforts to cater for the needs of the elderly. Hence, it has become imperative for the government, faith based organizations, civil societies and relatives to position ourselves to face and address the economic, health, social, and psychological challenges that is unleashed with ageing in the twenty-first century. Poka Health Care Foundation is proposing a policy intervention that will initiate policies that will support older people, train and empower health and social service providers as well as the general public and will re-direct government focus for help.

Conclusion - Lack of planning for the elderly either by the government or for themselves forces them to cope with the paradox of dwindling financial resources, increased health challenges and a geometric rise in medical expenses because of no money while some of them die just a few years after because of poverty. They continue to engage in menial jobs and manual work on the farms with meager earnings as long as their physical strength can afford just to keep body and soul together.

¹ 1999 Nigeria constitution as amended.