



NSINDAGIZA ORGANIZATION

Po.Box: 5573 KIGALI, Tel: (+250) 0788509060 & (+250) 0788749692
E-mail: nsindagiza2014@gmail.com; www.nsindagiza.org

NSINDAGIZA ORGANIZATION's inputs on the 12th session of the UN OEWGA

Contribution of older persons to sustainable development

Data from the four Rwandan censuses indicate that the proportion of older persons first increased from 4.8% in 1978 to 5% in 1991, dropped again slightly to 4.3% in 2002 and has only minimally increased to 4.9% in 2012. Despite this stagnation in terms of population shares, it is important to note that the number of older persons in the country has more than doubled since 1978, growing from 231,999 to 511,738.

Currently, less than 40,000 older persons receive a pension and the pension itself is not high enough to cover their basic needs.

Older persons are custodians of cultural values and are willing to leave the legacy to the younger generation, from whom they have heart, time, experience and respect. However, when Governments focus all their efforts into supporting children and the youth who are considered as the hope for the future of the nations, they fail to sufficiently consider or value older persons' contributions to sustainable development. Consequently, young people are maximally exploited to the level of not being able to prepare for their old age. This results in the vulnerability of older persons who are seen as a burden to their families, government and the society in general, forgetting their huge contribution throughout their life course. Though they are still willing and able to serve and contribute to the development of their families and communities if given the opportunity, all stakeholders are still reluctant to invest in the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons, including the right to participation.

Participation is a Human right

Participation is one of the key human rights principles. Everyone has the right to participate in decisions which affect them. Everyone should be able to participate in society, to defend their interests and to help create a society, which also fulfills their interests and desires. In Rwanda, we have the forum for children aged 6-17, the national youth council, national women's council, national council for persons with disabilities, and other different forums, but there is no single mechanism to allow older persons to share their views and contribute to the decisions regarding their interests.

Leave no one behind

In 2015, Governments convened regarding the 17 sustainable development goals and agreed that no goal would be considered achieved if anyone was left behind. Civil

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society organizations, UN agencies, bi-lateral cooperations and private sectors are all encouraged to invest in childhood development and youth and women's empowerment. There are, hence, a lot of programs/projects intervening in those areas with the motto to leave no one behind. However, there are no actors involved in ageing and supporting older persons, which exacerbates their risk of being left behind. Older persons face ageism and age discrimination in access to employment and work opportunities and skills development and those who lose their jobs at an early age do not have access to any pension until they reach 60 years old. Furthermore, it is almost impossible for people aged 45 and above to get jobs since the most privileged are young people as older persons are deemed unable to work. Age limits on bank loans and other financial services is another challenge for older persons' financial autonomy which prevents them from starting their own businesses.

Remedies

Legal and policy framework: In May 2021, the Government of Rwanda put in place a national older persons' policy with clear objectives to improve older persons' lives. One of the strategies is the promotion of intergenerational relationships in order to allow interaction between older persons and the younger generation so that they will be able to support each other. Hence older persons will acquire the knowledge on how to use technological devices, financial literacy, cooperative management and thereby contributing to a number of sustainable development goals, leaving no one behind, and share their life experience with young people. This would be a good initiative if it was financially supported and development partners, civil society and the private sector were involved in its implementation.

Ageing preparedness plan: Old age comes gradually as it is part of the life cycle. Young people should be taught about ageism and older persons' right, and to prepare holistically for their old age. Older persons can be involved in voluntary work or be involved in the private sector if they are sensitized earlier.

Ejo Heza Program: This is a long-term saving scheme, encouraging the culture of saving, universal access to pension, economic growth and poverty alleviation to attain higher standards of living in old age. Any Rwandan citizen aged 16 and foreigners residing in Rwanda have the right to open an Ejo Heza account, having a formal or informal job, even the farmers.

Elie MUGABOWISHEMA

President of NSINDAGIZA Organization

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