

CONTRIBUTION OF OLDER PERSONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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In Uganda, there are legal provisions and policy frame works that recognize older persons' right to participate in and contribute to sustainable development. The rights of older persons among other vulnerable groups are clearly set in the Uganda Constitution of 1995 as amended. For instance, objective XIV (b) of the Constitution states. "All Ugandans shall enjoy rights and opportunities and access to education, health services, clean and safe water, work, decent shelter, adequate clothing, food security and pension and retirement benefits."

Chapter four of the Constitution provides for protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

There are specific laws that recognize the rights of older persons among other vulnerable groups and these include;

The Local Governments Act (Cap 243) Section 10(1)(f) provides for two older persons, a male and a female elected by their associations to represent them in Local Government Councils. The Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act provides for representation of older persons in Parliament.

At the moment, five older persons represent older persons in the Parliament of Uganda.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) provides for monitoring and evaluation of policies, laws programmes and plans to ensure that they are compliant with equal opportunities and affirmative action.

Part II of the persons with disabilities Act (2020) provides for respect and promotion of rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities. Note that in Uganda disability increases as you grow older.

Access to Information Act (2005) was enacted to ensure that all citizens of Uganda including older persons have a right to access to information.

The Education Act (2017) provides for the right to education by all citizens. This was included to implement Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Uganda Human Rights Commission was mainly established to investigate at its own initiative or on a complaint made by any person or group of persons against the violation of any human right.

The National Development Plan III (2020/21-2024/25) was prepared using the human rights based approach. This is the overall planning framework where all development programmes are hinged. The Social Development Sector Strategic Plan where programmes for older persons have been integrated is also based on human rights programming. An example of the programmes for older persons is the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE). The SAGE is part of the social protection programmes implemented by the Government of the Republic of Uganda under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The programme is implemented by the Ministry in collaboration with civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

The good practices to ensure that older persons participate in and contribute to sustainable development include;

Formation of councils for older persons at all levels to ensure that the needs and rights of older persons are included in their programmes and plans.

Representation of older persons in Parliament is another good practice that can be enhanced.

Formation of National Advocacy groups involving different stakeholders is a good practice too.

These can be cascaded to the lowest levels of the organisational hierarchy.

According to the study conducted by Uganda Reach the Aged Association (2019), older persons experience many challenges including ageism which is one of the most pressing social issue affecting older persons. They also experience discrimination based on disability status.

Ageism affects older persons' psychological wellbeing. Ageism promotes prejudicial attitudes towards older persons. Ageism generates and reinforces fear and denigration of the ageing process and stereotyping presumptions regarding competence and the need for protection. Due to ageism, older persons are systematically denied resources and opportunities that others enjoy.

A study conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2012) asserts that ill health is a major source of worry and stress among older persons. Poor health reduces the capacity of older persons to generate income, curtails their productivity and compels them to depend on other people. Older persons can hardly afford the costs of travelling to health facilities. Their health problems are compounded by lack of money for seeking appropriate medical attention or buying drugs for non-communicable diseases. To make matters

worse, Uganda lacks well trained geriatricians to manage the diseases that often attack older persons.

Data on older persons in Uganda is scarce and this limits evidence based policy formulation and allocation of resources to prioritize needs of older persons.

Measures being taken by the Government of the Republic of Uganda to eliminate ageism, ageist stereotypes, prejudices and behaviours that devalue older persons' contribution to sustainable development include the following;

- Developing evidence based policies and programmes
- Strengthening the implementation, monitoring and coordination of older persons' legal, policy and programmes.
- Government is working closely with Civil Society organizations to advocate for policy implementation.
- Access to financial and credit services among older persons including eliminating age discriminatory laws and policies in employment and other social services are being enhanced.
- Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Health is working out strategies for integrating geriatrics in the curriculum for training of health workers at all levels.

In its effort to protect and promote fundamental human rights and freedoms in Uganda for sustainable development, the Uganda Human Rights Commission developed a complaints procedures manual which is used in various parts of the country.

The National Council for older persons has also established desks where older persons and other members of the community lodge their complaints on human rights. The complaints are forwarded to relevant authorities for redress.