

## **POVERTY AND AGEING IN AFRICA**

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## *INTRODUCTION*

1. In the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the Programme of Action (ICPD-PA), the international community and governments committed themselves to raise the quality of life for all people through appropriate population and development policies and programmes aimed at achieving poverty reduction, and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development. The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action in 1995. The Declaration included ten Commitments. One of them was on poverty eradication. In that commitment, the Heads of State and Government agreed on the goal of eradicating poverty in the world through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative. The Millennium Declaration in 2000 also featured the need to reduce poverty. Consequently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included a target of reducing poverty by half by 2015. In 2002, the World Summit for Sustainable Development also addressed issues of poverty eradication. The summit emphasized the importance of promoting socially and culturally acceptable policies; equal and equitable access to education, health care services and economic opportunities; and initiatives that enable economic and social empowerment.

2. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) addresses poverty reduction as one of the priority areas. Consequently the African Union (AU) Extraordinary Summit, held in Burkina Faso from 8 to 9 September in 2004, adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation and Employment Promotion.

3. Explicit and focused issues of poverty as they affect older persons are found in :  
a) The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) which was adopted at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002, and  
b) The African Union Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted by the AU Heads of State and Government in July 2002.

4. There is consensus that expansion and growth in employment is essential for poverty reduction by half by 2015. There is further consensus that economic growth rate of at least 7 percent per year would be needed to halve the poverty levels by 2015. Unfortunately, most of the African countries are far from reaching the 7 per cent economic growth rate. In 2003, 16 of the 53 African countries registered growth rates of under 4 per cent; only 5 countries registered growth rates of 7 per cent or higher. For Africa as a whole the growth rate was 3.8 per cent in 2003, according to ECA.

5. Despite various declarations and plans of action, there seem to be little or no progress in most countries in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, towards meeting the millennium development target of reducing poverty. According to United Nations,

more than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than \$1 per day. In view of the weak economic situation of the older people in society in Africa and the weakened family support, the older persons are most affected by the impact of poverty.

6. The current situation on poverty should not be allowed to continue. Addressing problems of poverty of the elderly people need to be done in a comprehensive and integrated manner in the context of overall economic and social development, taking into account the intergenerational linkages. The implementation of MIPAA and the AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing should therefore be give particular attention in reducing the impact of poverty on the elderly people.

7. The rest of the paper deals briefly with the following aspects: the concept of older persons and poverty; causes of poverty; recent poverty levels in some African countries; poverty and older people as reflected in the MIPAA as well as in the AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing; some activities undertaken towards the implementation of MIPAA and the AU Plan of Action on Ageing; policy interventions for poverty reduction; and a conclusion

## THE CONCEPT OF ORDER PERSONS AND POVERTY

8. Definition of concepts is generally difficult to agree on. The AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing recommended that member States undertake to standardize the definition of elderly people in line with the United Nations common usage of older persons, i.e. those aged 60 years and above. All though the proportion of older people in Africa is lower than in developed countries, it is increasing in the context of low socio-economic development and leaves no room for adjustment. The AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on ageing acknowledges that the increase in the number of older persons provides a challenge for the continent as a whole, as well as for individual countries.

9. With regard to poverty the definitions are many and varied. For the purpose of this paper, **poverty** is defined as : *the in ability of individuals and or families to satisfy basic needs ( food; shelter; clothing; access to essential services such as health, sanitation, and safe drinking water, transport, education, employment, etc.)* For measurement purposes, poverty is described in terms of income and consumption. Unfortunately, most elderly people in African countries hardly generate enough income or have no income at all. There is generally no data collected on poverty of the elderly people. With the existing high levels of poverty in Africa, the older persons are most affected by poverty as defined above. Some of the other characteristics of poverty of older people include: physical weakness, physical and social isolation/exclusion, powerlessness, insecurity and low self- esteem. In poor countries, particularly in Africa,

poverty is inherited from one generation to the next. Poverty in old age can be reduced if its root causes are seriously addressed.

### **CAUSES OF POVERTY**

10. There are many causes of poverty in Africa. These include :

- Low levels of income;
- Low economic growth rates as reflected in deteriorating socio-economic conditions;
- Poor health and the impact of AIDS and HIV;
- Lack of quality education, skills and technological innovations;
- Lack of sufficient food due to inadequate food production;
- Heavy dependence on subsistence farming associated with low productivity;
- Limited gainful employment opportunities, as well as lack of decent employment;
- Poor attitudes to work
- Syndrome of dependence on others and the outside world for help;
- Mismanagement of resources;
- Corruption;
- Poor governance;
- Environmental degradation;
- Demographic factors – population growth;
- Conflicts and wars;
- Lack of access to land and capital assets;
- Lack of adequate investment to support infrastructure and services;
- Exclusion of the older people in the development process; and
- External factors including the impact of globalization and poor terms of trade that Africa experiences with the developed countries.

11. It is apparent from the list of causes of poverty above that poverty is a multidimensional and a cross cutting phenomenon that requires a holistic and integrated approach.

## RECENT POVERTY LEVELS IN SOME AFRICAN COUNTRIES

12. The Table in the Annex at the end of the paper presents some data on national poverty rates, urban and rural in selected countries in Africa between 1990 and 2001. In 22 countries, national poverty rates range from 33 per cent in Benin to 72.9 per cent in Zambia. The table shows that poverty is predominantly much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In 15 countries for which data is available in that table, the rural share of the national poverty ranges from 57.7 per cent in Mauritius to 94.3 per cent in Burkina Faso. This calls for greater efforts in combating poverty to be focused in rural areas where the majority of the population depend on subsistence farming with low productivity. Thus the older people in rural areas bear the blunt of poverty in Africa. Unfortunately, poverty is deepening in most rural areas.

13. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) 2003 Economic Report, close to half of the population in Africa live below the \$1 a day. This shows the nature of the magnitude of poverty. For Sub-Saharan Africa, the ILO 2004-05 World Employment Report, indicates that those living on \$1 a day increased from 42.6 per cent in 1980 to 44.1 per cent in 1990 and is estimated to have reached 45.7 per cent in 2003. Over the nineties, poverty has worsened in Sub-Saharan Africa, increasing by 2 per cent annually.

## POVERTY ISSUES OF OLDER PEOPLE IN MIPAA

14. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) acknowledges that although there has been recent global attention focused more actively on poverty reduction programmes and policies, elderly persons in many countries still tend to be excluded from these programmes and policies. The MIPAA notes that where poverty is endemic, persons who survive a lifetime poverty often face an old age of deepening poverty. Women, in this respect, are more affected by poverty given the institutional biases in social protection systems and the gender inequities and disparities in economic power sharing.

15. The MIPAA has included an objective to reduce poverty among older persons. It has recommended the following **actions** to achieve that objective:

- Reduce the proportion of persons living in extreme poverty by half by 2015;
- Include the older persons in policies and programmes to reach the poverty reduction target;

- Promote equal access for older persons to employment and income generation opportunities, credit, markets and assets;
- Ensure that the particular needs of older women, the oldest old, older persons with disabilities, and those living alone are specifically addressed in poverty eradication strategies and implementation of the programmes;
- Develop, as appropriate and at all appropriate levels, age and gender relevant poverty indicators as an essential means to identify the needs of poor older women and encourage the use of existing indicators of poverty so that the review is carried according to age group and gender;
- Support innovative programmes to empower older persons, particularly women, to increase their contributions to and benefit from development efforts to eradicate poverty.

16. Employment of older persons who are willing and able to work is central to poverty eradication. It is in this regard that the MIPAA has included an objective on employment opportunities for older people who want to work. The MIPAA has thus recommended the following **actions** to attain that objective:

- Enable older persons to continue working as long as they are able to do so;
- Assist older persons already engaged in the informal sector activities by improving their income, productivity and working conditions;
- Eliminate age barriers in the formal labour market by promoting the recruitment of older persons and preventing the onset of disadvantages experienced by ageing workers in employment.

17. It should be noted that at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, the Heads of State and Government adopted a political Declaration which stated that empowerment of older persons and promotion of their full participation are essential elements for active ageing. The declaration then stressed that older persons should have the opportunity to work as long as they wish to, in satisfying and productive work.

## **POVERTY ISSUES OF ELDERLY PERSONS IN THE AU POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING**

18. The AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing has a section on ageing that deals with poverty. The issues addressed are reproduced below as follows:

- Older people are consistently among the poorest of the poor, yet their needs are seldom acknowledged in poverty reduction initiatives. Most people in Africa enter older age without any formal social security and so rely on their own, and their families ability to meet their needs.

- Older people are severely affected by structural adjustment programmes; they are the first to be targeted during periods of retrenchment and are hardest hit by the cuts in social welfare programmes. Despite their needs, older people are systematically denied access to employment, credit, training and other services that would enable them to increase their income.

19. In view of the above, the AU Policy Framework and plan of Action has recommended that member States undertake to ensure that the rights and needs of older persons are comprehensively addressed in poverty strategies. The specific **actions** recommendations in the Plan of Action are:

- Collect, compile, analyse and disseminate information on factors that contribute to poverty experienced by elder people;
- Develop and review policies and programmes on poverty reduction programmes that ensure that specific needs of older people are taken into account;
- Involve older people in the assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty alleviation programmes;
- Conduct research prior to the implementation of structural adjustment programmes to determine the potential impact of such programmes on older people;
- Implement poverty reduction programmes specifically targeting the needs of older people, including, for example, specially designed credit programmes;
- Review anti-poverty programmes to ensure that they support, rather than contribute to the decline of traditional support structures;
- Older persons of low income should be exempted from direct tax; and
- Ensure enlightenment of the populace to change of attitudes that prevent older people from accessing services available to other population groups.

20. With regard to employment, the AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action recommends that member States undertake to eliminate the discrimination against older people in accessing employment and training opportunities and retaining their jobs. The Plan of Action has therefore recommended the following **actions**:

- Enact legislation that prevents discrimination on the basis of older age during recruitment, promotion and retrenchment processes; and
- Introduce flexible retirement policies and appropriate strategies and opportunities to enable older people to continue contributing to the workforce as long as they are willing to able.

**SOME EFFORT BEING MADE TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MIPAA AND THE AU POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING**

21. Some of the effort made towards the implementation of the above plans of action on ageing include:

- a) **A Regional Workshop on ageing and poverty organized in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 29 to 31 October 2003, by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Policy and HelpAge International in association with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania.**

22. Participants at the above workshop included those from Tanzania, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Participants were from government as well as the civil society organizations. The workshop highlighted the following:

- Governments have acknowledged that to date there has been limited attention to the older poor in poverty programmes;
- There is need that national policies on ageing need to take into account the links between the issues facing older persons and the sectoral policy responses to poverty and deprivation;
- Need for the development of national policies on ageing in line with African Union Plan of Action on Ageing;
- National poverty policies and strategies should take into account the needs of older population groups by re-aligning budgetary resources and putting into place measures to address them;
- Need for change in mind set and accept older persons as contributors to a country's development and not just welfare dependents. This emphasizes that older people should be involved and consulted as partners in development.

**b) Tanzania and Ethiopia**

23. In the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2000 – 2003, issues of ageing were not included. Through the lobbying efforts of HelpAge International Tanzania (HAIT), ageing has been included in the second PRSP as a cross cutting issue. In Ethiopia, through the effort of HelpAge International Ethiopia (HAIE), a pilot project is in progress to include older people in the PRSP.



**c) Declaration on Poverty Alleviation and Employment Promotion in Africa, adopted by the AU Extraordinary Summit, 8 to 9 September 2004 in Burkina Faso**

24. In the declaration, the Heads of State and Government have committed themselves to:

- Place employment creation as an explicit and central objective of their economic and social policies at national and continental levels, for sustainable poverty alleviation;
- Support the promotion of the decent work development agenda spearheaded by the ILO;
- Empower the poor and the vulnerable, particularly in rural areas and the urban in formal economy, the unemployed and under-employed by enhancing their capacities through education, skills and vocational training and retraining of labour force, access to financial resources, in particular micro-financing, land infrastructure, markets, technology and services in order to meaningfully integrate them into the labour markets;
- Develop and implement strategies that give young people in Africa a real chance to find decent and productive work and encourage African member States to support and adopt the Youth Employment Network (YEN) initiative with the support of the UN, ILO, World Bank and other competent agencies as well as development partners; and
- Pursue a well developed programme of mass awareness and information dissemination of employment policies and programme as key factors towards achieving the goals of reducing unemployment and poverty alleviation.

**POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS POVERTY REDUCTION**

25. There is need for policy interventions to address poverty reduction as reflected in the MIPAA, the African Union Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing, the Millennium Declaration, the Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development, NEPAD, the AU Declaration and Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation and Employment Promotion, as well as other international, regional, subregional and national development

blue prints including the PRSPs. Particular policy attention should be given to the following:

- Improving rural development programmes through increased rural productivity, especially in agriculture and food production;
- Social mobilization for collective action, self-reliance as key for poverty alleviation;
- Pursuing the ILO Agenda on Decent Employment;
- Mainstreaming gender into poverty reduction programmes;
- Improving education, knowledge and skills;
- Addressing the impact of HIV and AIDS and general health conditions in all economic and social development activities and programmes;
- Providing pro-poor financial services;
- Ensuring social protection mechanism;
- Ensuring that economic growth rates attain at least the 7 per cent required to reduce poverty by half by 2015;
- Mainstreaming issues of ageing in poverty reduction programmes and overall socio-economic development programmes;
- Allocating budgetary resources for ageing programmes;
- Promoting private and public investment and making governments transparent and accountable;
- Increasing financial resource flows from developed countries to Africa as well creating better market access of Africa's products in developed countries; and
- Cancellation of debt African countries owes the developed countries.

## CONCLUSION

26. The paper concludes by stressing that issues of poverty as it affects older people should be given higher priority in socio-economic development in Africa than has been the case before. This has to be in the context of providing the basic needs of the older persons as well as in the context of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity). The intergenerational linkages among all the population groups and their interdependence should be taken into account in dealing with issues of poverty and its reduction.

27. The implementation of the MIPAA and the AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action would contribute to reducing poverty of older persons. Member States need to take concrete action to implement these **plans of action**. Those countries that have not yet formulated policies related to ageing should do so. All stakeholders at national level, including the civil society organizations should be involved in policy and programme formulation as well as their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. International support through financial and technical cooperation is required to assist African

countries in their effort to develop and implement relevant policies and programmes to improve socio-economic conditions of the people including the elderly persons.

ANNEX

National Poverty Rates, Urban and Rural, Selected Countries

Country	<u>National Poverty Rate</u>	<u>Rural Poverty Rate</u>	<u>Urban Poverty Rate</u>	<u>Rural Share of National Poverty</u>
Angola				
Benin	33.0			
Burkina Faso	45.3	51.0	16.5	94.3
Burundi	36.2			
Cameroon				
Central African Republic				
Chad	64.0	67.0	63.0	80.1
Congo, Dem. Rep				
Congo, Rep				
Cote d'Ivoire	36.8			
Eritrea	53.0			
Ethiopia	44.2	45.0	37.0	86.3
Ghana	31.4	34.3	26.7	70.1
Guinea	40.0			
Kenya	42.0	46.4	29.3	74.8
Liberia				
Madagascar	71.3	76.7	52.1	76.5
Malawi	65.3	66.5	54.9	87.2
Mali				
Mauritania	46.3	61.2	25.4	57.7
Mozambique	69.4	71.3	62.0	71.1
Niger	63.0	66.0	52.0	83.7
Nigeria	34.1	36.4	30.4	60.7
Rwanda	51.2			
Senegal	33.4	40.4		64.6
Sierra Leone				
Somalia				
Sudan				
Tanzania	41.6	49.7	24.4	82.3
Togo				
Uganda	55.0			
Zambia	72.9	83.1	56.0	68.9
Zimbabwe	34.9	48.0	7.9	90.0

Urban poverty rate, rural poverty rate, and national poverty rate are for most recent available year (between 1990-2001)  
Rural Share of National Poverty is calculated as (Rural Poverty Rate (100-Urbanization Rate)/(National Poverty Rate)  
Source: World Bank. 2003a. World Development Indicators 2003. World Bank, Washington D.C

Table taken from Jeffrey D. Sachs, et al in a paper entitled Ending Africa's Poverty Trap, April 13, 2004

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