



The Republic of Uganda

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Presentation by Uganda,

At the event organized by the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the UN, the Canadian Government and other partners held on June 14th at the UN headquarters in New York.

Introduction

As you are aware, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day was launched on June 15, 2006 by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) and the UN's World Health Organization. On March 9, 2012, the UN General Assembly resolution 66/127 established June 15 as a UN International Day.

Demographic Trend

According to the Uganda Population and Housing Census of 2002, 4.6% of Uganda's population were older persons aged 60 years and above. The Uganda National House Hold Survey report of 2009/2010 indicates that the population of older persons in Uganda is 1,304,464 of which are 703,811 females and today the projected population of older persons in Uganda is 1,540,000.

The contribution of older persons

In Uganda older persons contribute immensely to the creation of wealth, support and care for children including HIV/AIDS orphans, creation of social cohesion and conflict resolution in their communities and the nation as a whole. They make valuable contributions to society as guardians of traditions and cultural values which are passed on from generation to generation.

Elder abuse

Older persons are abused socially, physically, sexually, economically and psychologically. Their basic human rights such as the right to life and liberty, the right to work, the right to freedom from discrimination are violated. They suffer abuses such as rape, theft and burglary, dispossession of property by individuals, families or the community and are, among other things, accused of witchcraft, preventing or causing too much rain for which they are tortured and assaulted. This situation arises because they live in isolation or they are too frail to defend themselves and there are no mechanisms to protect them. The media has continuously reported about the vice of elder abuses that are happening in Uganda today. Older women have been accused of practicing witchcraft and are thought to cause death of young children in villages.

When some communities cannot find logical explanations for events, such as a death or crop failure, they may accuse older women in their village of witchcraft. Such accusations have been used to justify driving older women from their homes, stealing their possessions or killing them for their property.

Older persons have been victims of property grabbing (especially land) and this is because they do not have information on laws that protect rights in Uganda.

Like in most parts of Africa, Uganda is not exceptional to some forms of violence against older women which is based on cultural practices that specifically target widows, who are often regarded as insignificant without their husbands. While widows of all ages are subjected to mistreatment, older widows are particularly vulnerable because age lowers their status in the community and makes caring for them more difficult. Older women face double tragedy in this regard.

The National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17 has proposed a number of interventions to address Elder abuse concerns for older persons through; training older persons in precautionary measures and personal security alertness, sensitising families and the community on older person's security, and monitoring the security of older persons by different stakeholders in the community.

HIV and AIDS

The HIV and AIDS pandemic poses a challenge to the Ugandan society and has had a devastating impact on older persons. They are sexually active, caretakers of HIV and AIDS patients and many are sexually assaulted. Lack of support or approval from family members for widowed older persons to re-marry leads them to secret sexual engagements, which exposes them to HIV infection. Most of the traditional healers and traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are older persons. They are not targeted for support in terms of access to information on or protection from HIV and AIDS in the course of providing assistance to patients. As a result they are at a risk of contracting HIV.

In Uganda today wife inheritance is a common form of elder abuse and this is contributing to the transmission of HIV. Indeed a widow who is HIV-negative faces the risk of contracting the virus from the man who inherits her. Through inheritance, widows who contracted HIV from their late husbands who may have died from an AIDS-related illness have transmitted the disease to their inheritors who force to have sex with them. This situation has been worsened by polygynous practices, setting off a chain of events in which the man transmits the virus to his other wives, who in turn infect others if they are widowed and inherited, and so on. The tradition of wife inheritance is practiced by a number of communities in Eastern Uganda and particularly in the Districts of Busia, Butaleja and Bugiri. Despite the risks, the tradition of wife inheritance continues because most widows have no alternative. If they refuse, they risk rejection by their communities.

There is also a common practice targeting widows in Eastern Uganda known as 'Widow Cleansing'. This custom denies women their basic rights and increases their risk of HIV infection.

According to the practice, a woman is required to have sex with a village cleanser after her husband dies in order to be reaccepted into her community.

Widow cleansing is a belief that a woman is haunted by spirits after her husband dies. She is also thought to be unholy and 'disturbed' if she is unmarried and abstains from sex. A widow must undergo the ritual before she can be inherited.

Uganda has noted the challenges faced by older persons and come up with the National Policy for older persons and the National plan of action to implement the policy. In the area of HIV and AIDs the following interventions have been proposed; Creating awareness about HIV and AIDS among Older Persons, training Older Persons as peer educators in HIV and AIDS counselling and guidance, Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in all programmes targeting older persons as well as providing follow up and home based care services for older persons living with HIV/AIDS

Accessibility

Physical accessibility to facilities is vital and has a major impact on the mobility and independence of older persons. Poor physical accessibility discourages older persons from leaving their homes to enjoy their rights in society. Physical planners, engineers and architects do not consider the needs and rights of older persons. As a result, there are no age-friendly buildings, pavements, public toilets, and walkways. In urban centres older persons face rough times from the youth who shout at them to re-locate to rural areas.

A number of interventions have been included in the National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17; promoting functional rehabilitation and providing assistive devices for older persons, developing accessibility standards for physical environments, making special customer services arrangements for older persons such as separate queues, accessible public transport and accessible venues for social events among others

Food Security and Nutrition

Older persons in Uganda are the worst hit by food insecurity and poor nutrition. They mainly feed on carbohydrates and take only one meal a day. Inadequate food intake and poor diets has pre-disposed older persons to malnutrition, ill health, emaciation and chronic energy deficiency. In some communities older persons are culturally not allowed to eat some nutritious foods such as goat meat, chicken, Nile perch fish and fruits such as avacado, sweet bananas, guavas etc.

A number of interventions have been included in the National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17; protecting the land rights of Older Persons, advocating and lobby for

mainstreaming of older persons nutrition needs into the National Development Plans and Policies, linking older persons to existing agricultural extension services and promoting nutritious feeding and life styles among older persons

Economic Situation

In Uganda, majority of older persons live in rural areas where poverty is rife, economic opportunities are limited. They work in the agricultural sector, which is characterised by fluctuations in produce prices, irregular income and low returns to labour. About 85% of the active older persons are engaged in crop farming with no social security, rendering them totally vulnerable. Older persons are often denied credit by financial institutions due to the misconception that they are risky borrowers.

Older persons engaged in Agriculture face a certain form of abuse from unscrupulous middle men who cheat them by undervaluing their products.

It is common that some older persons are not able to count money and some of them are victims of memory loss. Unscrupulous middle men are exploiting this opportunity to cheat them.

A number of interventions have been included in the National Plan of Action for older persons; Forming Savings and Credit Cooperative organisations(SACCOs) for older persons, training Sub-county chiefs, Community Development Officers and SACCO leaders in management of SACCOs, conducting advocacy and lobbying consultative meetings with finance institutions for better financial services to older persons, training older persons in entrepreneurship development skills and Linking older persons and their households to participate in mainstream poverty eradication programmes.

Shelter

A study on the Health Needs of Older Persons conducted in Uganda in 2002 established that, in many communities, older persons live in semi-permanent, grass-thatched, mud and wattle houses. Some of the structures are dilapidated and this puts them and their dependants in grave danger, especially during rainy seasons.

A number of interventions have been included in the National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17 such as; Providing appropriate shelter for older persons, networking with agencies involved in the provision of shelter to support shelter needs for older persons, providing standard low cost houses to older persons, and networking with the private sector to support shelter needs of older persons under their corporate social responsibility function

Conflicts and Emergencies

Older persons have been abused during war situations that have been common in Uganda until up to ten years ago. During these conflict and emergencies older persons suffered because of their frailty. Moreover the existing conflict, emergency and evacuation management measures as well as resettlement programs do not adequately cater for their concerns and needs.

A number of interventions have been included in the National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17 such as: establishing appropriate emergency response, and recovery programmes for older persons, providing resettlement and re-integration services that address the special needs of older persons, reviewing policies and guidelines for protection of older persons during conflict and emergency situations and promoting the involvement of older persons in conflict resolution, disaster preparedness and management.

Government is aware of these challenges faced by older persons and is committed to addressing their concerns. It recognizes that as people reach old age, they should continue enjoying dignified lives through active participation in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. Government is therefore determined to enhance the recognition of the contributions of older persons and has put in place mechanisms to eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse and violence against older persons.

Policies, laws and programs

The Government of Uganda recognizes that as people reach old age, they should continue enjoying dignified lives through active participation in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. In this regard, Government is determined to enhance the recognition of the contributions of older persons and has put in place mechanisms to eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse and violence against them.

The **Constitution of Uganda** under its National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy stipulates that; “The State shall make reasonable provision for the welfare and maintenance of the Aged.” and Article 32 of the Constitution regarding affirmative action in

favor of marginalized groups states that “ Notwithstanding anything in the Constitution, the State shall take affirmative action in favor groups marginalized on the basis of sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribe, creed, gender, age, or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them”

Section 14 of **The Equal Opportunities Commission Act 2007**, provides for monitoring and evaluation of policies, laws , plans ,activities, practices ,traditions, cultures, usages, and customs to ensure that they are compliant with equal opportunities and affirmative action in favor of groups marginalized on the basis of sex, race,colour, ethnic origin, tribe, creed, gender, age, or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them”

Government also established **the Uganda Human Rights Commission**, under Article 51 of the Constitution of Uganda and the Uganda Human Rights Act No 4 1997 to promote and protect human rights and investigate at its own initiative a violation of any human rights including the rights of older persons among other age groups.

The Government of Uganda established a fully fledged Department in-charge of Disability and Elderly, with a Minister of State for Disability and Elderly Affairs. The Department is responsible for initiating policies, plans, laws and programs to protect and promote rights of older persons. For instance the **National Policy for Older Persons** was approved in 2009 to provide the guiding framework for interventions towards older persons

To operationalise this policy, Government is finalizing the **National Plan of Action for older persons 2012/13-2016/17** with a number of interventions to address the needs and concerns of older persons proposed.

Government has also enacted the **National Council for Older persons Act (2012)** which is in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The objective of this council will among others include setting standards and regulations to guide government, Civil Society Organizations and private sector on the quality of services provided to older persons with the view of redressing any bottlenecks encountered.

Uganda’s **2010-2015 National Development Plan** outlines objectives for expanding social protection to reduce vulnerability and enhance productivity of the country’s human resource. Specifically, the NDP outlines activities to “develop and implement social transfer programmes including cash transfer programmes, to the elderly, persons with disability and the poorest quartile of the population” (p283).

The Social Development Sector Strategic Investment Plan (SDIP) addresses major challenges in inequality, inequity, exclusion, unemployment, and low productivity among the poor and vulnerable. It articulates interventions for promoting their participation and ability to access services

In 2010, Cabinet approved the Expanding Social Protection program including one of its core components Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) on a pilot basis up to 2015.

SAGE aims to provide monthly direct income support – small, regular payments of money to provide a minimum income for vulnerable households including older people - of USD10 per month to 95,000 poor and vulnerable households in 14 pilot districts. The program is on schedule to reach a milestone of 60,000 beneficiaries by December 2015.

A core component of SAGE is a **Senior Citizen's Grant (SCG)** to older persons aged 65 and above. The SCG is designed to reduce old age poverty by providing a minimum level of income security to all older people. However, the senior citizens grants have been shown to increase access to health and education services amongst older people and their families and have also been shown to have a significant impact on child nutrition and development as older people tend to invest a portion of their entitlements in meeting their grandchildren's needs. Where older people are able to continue working, SCGs are also intended to support them by providing the necessary investments to start small businesses and hiring labour to till their land.

Evidence from field monitoring visits indicates that Senior Citizen Grants (SCG) have already, after only eleven payment cycles, had notable positive results:

Productive livelihoods and local economic effects:

Beneficiaries have started to save and make small investments to start productive livelihoods through purchase of small productive assets in the form of livestock and hire of casual labour to till untended land as well as repairing their houses. Local businesses have reported increased turnover.

Human Development: The grants have enabled families to afford better meals and removed the economic barriers to accessing government services such as health and education; thereby increasing the impact of the government's significant investments in the supply of basic services. In supporting improved nutritional status as well as access to health and education services for today's children, such direct income support will stop the transmission of poverty from parents to children and contribute to building of the human capital necessary for Uganda's long term productivity.

Dignity and Empowerment: Through beneficiary forums and renewed ability to spend, beneficiaries have been socially empowered and reintegrated into the community, subsequently boosting their self-esteem and restoring their dignity in society. Local

Government officials have indeed observed that beneficiaries have become empowered and no longer ask for petty things like soap and sugar but are instead asking for tangible services like improved roads, hospitals and schools. Some of the beneficiaries have started to join local savings and credit groups while others are coming together to form their own groups.

Poverty reduction: Analyses carried out by the Expanding Social Protection Program shows that national implementation of the SCG is likely to have significant impacts on poverty: 30% of beneficiary households would be lifted above the poverty line and the poverty gap (a measure of the depth of poverty) among households with a member aged 65 years and above would reduce by 79%, a significant achievement which would benefit around 15% of households nationally. Furthermore, the national poverty gap would be reduced by 17%.

Direct tangible service delivery: Direct Income Support is an effective way to directly reach our most vulnerable citizens, delivering tangible benefits directly to people and demonstrating government's commitment to ensuring that no citizens are left behind Uganda moves forward to middle income status. Indeed, during the launch of the SCG in Kaberamaido District, an older person commented that: "This is one of the best government programs that directly reaches out and touches the people."

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