



Global AgeWatch Policy Briefs provides authoritative and evidence-based guidance to help international and national policy makers adopt to deliver the rights of older people and respond to their needs.

Policy Brief 1

March 2012

Mainstreaming ageing into the post-2015 process

Key messages

- Ageing is a global megatrend affecting developing countries the fastest, but many lack the policies and frameworks to address the issues of their ageing populations.
- The post-2015 framework must develop and roll out an accountable, rights-based and age-inclusive policy framework that supports people across their life course, and across social, economic and environmental domains.
- The contributions of a socially and economically active, secure and healthy ageing population, alongside the requirement for policies providing active support, must be reflected in the outcomes of the post-2015 framework.

Building “The future we want”¹ – by strengthening the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable and equitable development – requires a focus on building the assets and tackling the vulnerabilities of all people across their life course. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide an important lens through which to deliver development aid, its focus on children and women of reproductive age obscures the full picture of population dynamics – which is most dramatic in terms of overall fertility decline and the rapid increase of the older age group in all regions of the world.

Ageing is a megatrend that affects all countries.² It is already making an impact – both positive and negative – on living arrangements and how societies and economies work.³ Global population ageing, therefore, calls for new approaches to development thinking and practice, which needs to become more age-inclusive and recognise the life course impacts of interventions. Older people contribute to societies in multiple ways – as leaders, consumers, householders, workers, farmers, educators, primary carers, business people, health providers and environmental protectors. In an ageing and generationally interdependent world, these contributions must be acknowledged and require innovative support.

Inclusive- and age-friendly policies are crucial to support and enable older people to contribute to, rather than subtract from, household resources.

A healthy and integrated ageing population is a societal investment, and the opportunities presented by the megatrend of ageing must be accepted as a positive dynamic rather than a threat.⁴ Countries which adopt a positive approach to ageing, investing in health, income and access to services across the life course will be more successful than those that do not. Universally accepted policies, such as the Social Protection Floor (SPF),⁵ which support income and access to basic services across the life course, are already being seen as core elements of sustainable and equitable development policy. Evidence for the SPF often rests on the success of programmes which support the critical contributions of older people to household economies, referring to the use of income transfers in old age to support families and communities.⁶

Nevertheless, the dominant narrative of development is still overwhelmingly focused on children, the young and able-bodied.⁷ There is still not enough attention given to issues of ageing and the dynamic of life in old age, and the need to invest in older age groups as part of the means to secure a sustainable future.

Core issues

The megatrend of ageing is occurring everywhere, even in the poorest countries. It is evidence of the triumph of development, improved health care and aid that works. Already, those over 60 constitute 11 per cent of the global population and by 2030, there will be more people over 60 than children under 14. By 2050, they will account for 22 per cent of the global population – 2 billion people. Currently, 60 per cent of the world's older people live in developing countries, and this proportion is expected to rise to 80 per cent in 2050, with greater numbers in Asia. Africa will see the proportion of its older population rise from 7 per cent today to 30 per cent by 2100.⁸

The implications of global ageing include that of an increasingly generationally interdependent world. Despite the often dominant view that older people are dependent, there is plenty of evidence showing that older people support their families and communities.⁹ Regular income and good health in old age, age-inclusive policies, and support to productive enterprise in old age can support rural and urban households and younger family members in their search for education, employment and sustainable lifestyles.¹⁰ As families struggle in the face of the global crisis, growing unemployment and the increase of the informal economy, they rely heavily on older family members for domestic and economic support. Skipped-generation households, which consist of the very young and the old, are increasingly the norm in countries with high incidence of HIV and AIDS, migration, humanitarian challenges and environmental degradation. Many older people in these households are found caring for young children.¹¹ Many countries experiencing population ageing also rely heavily on small-holder agriculture; in some countries, the median age of farmers is rising above 50, leading some analysts to say that rural development is increasingly being powered by older people.¹²

Policy challenges and opportunities accompany global ageing. Urban planning, rural development and labour market policy are critical to handling population ageing, as are health policy and social security.¹³ Ensuring that the world's rapidly growing older population is healthy, active and included as they age is a societal investment, necessary for the sustainable future we all want.¹⁴ It is as important in low- and middle-income countries as in the developed world. Therefore, threats to this sustainability need to be identified and combated. For example, the World Health Organisation named ageing as one of the four key drivers of non-communicable disease (NCDs)¹⁵ which account for two out of three deaths and half of all disability worldwide.¹⁶ Three-quarters of NCDs occur in the 60-plus age group. Prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of NCDs across the life course are critical for development and the post-2015 framework.

However, the reality in 2012 is that four-fifths of older people do not have regular income, and millions are unable to access basic services, including transport and health, due to high cost, inadequacy of service, indifference of officials, and age discrimination.¹⁷ The growing body of evidence of rights abuse in old age points to a tolerance of age discrimination, abuse that is unchallenged, and a lack of age-specific rights instruments. There is growing consensus that the human rights of older people are not being realised.¹⁸ Analysis for the 2012 review of the 2002 Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which lays out recommendations in human rights, development, health and the enabling environment, points to large gaps in policy and programming.¹⁹ Despite the numbers and evidence worldwide, there is a dearth of attention to ageing, to funded age-friendly programmes, and to mainstreaming of global ageing in all policy domains. In sum, there is a failure to include ageing in development analysis.

Areas for action

A life course approach is needed, with older people's presence and voice, together with statistics on ageing, made visible in all thematic discussion and related data sets attached to the post-2015 framework. Adjustments to current Household Survey (HHS) instruments that exclude women above the ages of 49 and men over the age of 50 will be critical; at present, leading specialists in poverty measurement are referring to ageing as the "missing dimension" or "blind spot".²⁰

In a similar vein, the inclusion of life course and old age as a dynamic in the systematic measurement of inequalities, capabilities and wellbeing must be an essential part of the future development agenda. The reduction of inequalities should also be "integral and central" in development agendas, as inequalities are both an outcome and driver of vulnerability and poverty.²¹

Action on an inclusion framework could build on an inclusive scheme already developed by HelpAge International and the United Nations Development Programme in 2005.

Recommendations

- Develop age-inclusive, rights-based and age-specific recommendations for the post-2015 framework to ensure that action on ageing is mainstreamed and outcomes monitored.
- Ensure a focus on the dimensions and impact of global ageing in the High Level Summit report and all thematic reviews within the post-2015 process, as global ageing impacts on all policy dimensions.
- Ensure that the voices and experiences of older women and men and their organisations are heard in national, regional and global consultations and reflected back in the reporting process.
- Build and use age-inclusive data sets to expose gaps in and measure poverty, inequality, capability and wellbeing across the life course at national and international level.
- Ensure that the post-2015 framework is accountable to and inclusive of people of all ages across the life course.
- Ensure integration of action on NCDs across the life course.
- Take forward full implementation of the Social Protection Floor Initiative in post-2015 recommendations.
- Ensure a focus on older people in the outcomes of the three priority pillars of the Rio Summit 2012, as older people are both affected by environmental degradation and are key contributors to environmental sustainability.

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Notes

- 1 Co-chairs of the UN Rio+20 Preparatory Committee submitted a zero draft outcome document for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled 'The future we want', 10 January 2012, <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/content/documents/370The%20Future%20We%20Want%2010Jan%20clean.pdf> (13 February 2012)
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