



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 November 2013

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-second session

11-21 February 2014

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by HelpAge International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

In his statement on the theme “Strategies and pathways of empowerment: issues and framing of the expert group meeting”, delivered at the expert group meeting on policies and strategies to promote empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all, held in New York on 10 and 11 September 2013, the Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development defined empowerment as “effective participation by members of society, as individuals and groups, in decisions about their lives, that is conditioned by a supportive enabling environment, and leads to the solution of economic and social problems confronting them”.

It is undeniable that empowerment of all those who are poor, invisible and excluded is vital to achieve a more stable, secure and just world.

Issues of ageing have been considered in both the 2012 and 2013 expert group meetings convened by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. There are clear recommendations on ageing in their reports, with specific policy priorities to promote the empowerment of older women and men. The importance of these recommendations cannot be overestimated. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: a Celebration and a Challenge*, the reality of the demographic transition is that we are entering the era of the “age bulge”, where by 2030 there will be more people over 60 than children under 10. By 2050, there will be 2 billion older people on the planet, the majority of whom will be in developing countries and will be women. Current figures show that there are 84 men for every 100 women over the age of 60. A lifetime of gender-based inequalities often means older women experience financial abuse, violence and discrimination. According to “World population prospects: the 2010 revision” (available from <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>), by 2050, there will be 64 countries with 30 per cent of their population over 60.

Concrete policies are needed now to promote the empowerment of older women and men. In paragraphs 1 and 2 of its resolution 2013/29 on the second review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, the Economic and Social Council stated that “major challenges faced by older persons that undermine their social, economic and cultural participation remain, inter alia, age discrimination, abuse and violence, and access to age-appropriate health-care services, social protection measures and labour markets”; and that “ageing has not always received adequate attention and that older persons often remain confronted by poverty and social exclusion”.

The stark reality is that millions of the world’s ageing citizens live in insecure and indecent environments, lacking basic income and access to essential services, in fear of violence and abuse, their sexual and reproductive rights ignored and unmet, unable to pay essential bills for food, heating and energy and finding it difficult to exercise their rights to civic engagement (UNFPA and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century*).

“The world we want” consultations organized by the United Nations (see www.worldwewant2015.org) have highlighted the unmet needs of older people for health care, jobs and a regular income, for justice when faced with violence and assault and for support in caring for grandchildren. Better health care, education and

more responsive Governments are the top priorities of older people (see country reports on Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Mozambique and the Philippines, available from <http://data.worldwewant2015.org>).

The conclusions of the HelpAge International “Global AgeWatch Index 2013” which assesses the well-being of older people in 91 countries through the lenses of income, health, education, employment and aspects of the enabling environment, illustrate both the importance of social policy and the dangers of the international data sets which do not routinely measure levels of poverty, HIV and violence in people over 49 years of age.

The “data revolution” called for in the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development* (see p. 23), needs to include issues of ageing. Detail on ageing is too often invisible in the work of the United Nations, in policy provision at Member State level and in public attitudes. While we are ignoring issues of ageing in development policy, there is heavy reliance on older people who continually struggle to support households and communities through labour, caregiving, childcare, volunteering and community engagement.

“Older people find it difficult to get jobs and are forced to beg. Older people have no alternative options. For example families prefer younger maid servants because they think they will be stronger. They don’t want to hire older women” (Labone, aged 70, Bhashantek, Bangladesh).

Way forward

All policies to promote empowerment and sustainable development must take account of ageing. Population ageing is shaping our world and it is time for both a consistent, strong and positive narrative on global population ageing and for accountable policies to match. The Secretary-General recognized this when he said in his statement in August 2013 to the twenty-seventh annual conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population in Busan, Republic of Korea, “To ensure sustainable development we need to know how many people inhabit the planet now and how many will be added in the years to come. ... We need to know how old they are and how age distribution will change. Population growth and ageing, migration and urbanization affect all development objectives.”

In relation to the post-2015 development framework, older women and men are calling for participation in its framing and development. Older people are equal partners and contributors to sustainable development and poverty eradication and policies must be accountable to all people, of all ages and abilities. As population structures change, laws, policies, social attitudes and institutional practices must do the same.

Conclusions and recommendations

Member States have a historic opportunity to ensure that the next global sustainable development framework takes a life-course approach that will help ensure sustainable and equitable development for people of all ages and abilities. Concrete age-inclusive policies on empowerment must be taken forward. For this to happen:

- Age must be recognized as one of the cross-cutting issues to be taken into account across all goals and targets.
- The new framework must be accountable and human rights-based to reach all people of all ages and abilities.
- The “data revolution” called for by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Secretary-General must give priority to improved data collection and reporting, which ensures all data is collected, disaggregated, analysed and disseminated for all age groups up to and over 100 years of age, as well as by gender and disability.

In view of these needs the HelpAge International network of 105 affiliates in over 70 countries is calling for goals on:

- Universal social protection and decent work for all people of all ages and abilities. Social protection floors are the right way to go as they are rights-based, nationally owned, have clear measurable objectives and contribute to good governance, security and poverty eradication.
- Universal health coverage, framed to maximize healthy life expectancy at all stages of life, and support for the health of girls, boys, women and men across the life course.
- Gender equality with indicators and targets that are inclusive of all people of all ages and abilities and support both women and men.
