

PROMOTING DECENT WORK IN OLD AGE IN AFRICA

60 million

Older People in Africa

215 million

Older people in Africa in
2050

78% and 58%

women and men in Africa
over the age of 65 cannot
read or write

41%

Older people in Africa active
in the labour force

SDG Goal 8

*“Promote sustained, inclusive
and sustainable economic
growth, full and productive
employment and decent work
for all”*

KEY MESSAGES

Contrary to popular belief,
older people continue to play a
role in the labour market even
after 60.

Pensions are an important step
towards building social
protection, not just for older
people but for overall
development and local
economy.

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, older people's work to earn livelihoods and their contribution to their families, communities, and national economies often goes unrecognised, particularly the work of older women. Simultaneously, the world is steadily ageing. The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is expected to triple in less developed countries over the next 40 years, rising from 5.8 to 15 per cent of the total population, while in the more developed countries this figure is expected to rise from 16 to 26 per cent (an increase of more than 60%)¹. Africa is expected to see a 4-fold increase in its older population by 2050, the largest increase than any other region or age group in the world.

In 2007 ILO adopted the agenda for 'Decent work in Africa' seen as a key approach to eradicating poverty, particularly in the context of the global economic crisis and the food and fuel price hikes. Yet older people are rarely included in formal policies and programmes as promoted by this agenda. ILO's strategic objectives for their Decent Work Agenda include:

Promoting jobs – an economy that generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, skills development, job creation and sustainable livelihoods.

Guaranteeing rights at work – to obtain recognition and respect for the rights of all workers.

Extending social protection – to promote both inclusion and productivity by ensuring that women and men enjoy working conditions that are safe, allow adequate free time and rest, take into account family and social values, provide for adequate compensation in case of lost or reduced income and permit access to adequate healthcare.

Promoting social dialogue – Involving strong and independent workers' and employers' organizations is central to increasing productivity, avoiding disputes at work, and building cohesive societies.

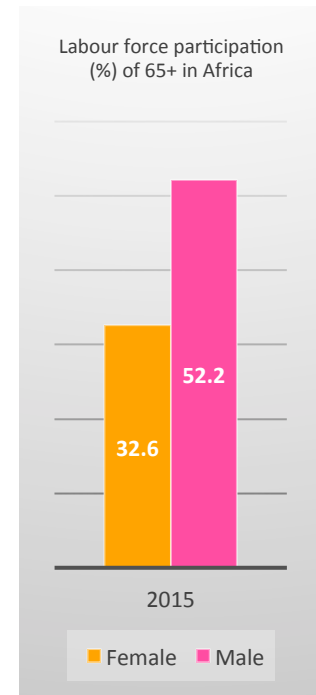
This briefing note will assess the status of older people in Africa's economy in light of the 4 strategic objectives mentioned above reinforcing an often overlooked fact - that older people contribute extensively to an economy through capacity building, experience and knowledge transmission and play a key role in community stability and bridging inter-generational gaps.

¹ http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/magazines-and-journals/world-of-work-magazine/articles/WCM_041965/lang--en/index.htm#P5_1054

CONTEXT ANALYSIS | Where are Africa's Older People?

Older People in Africa's Informal Economy

Significant numbers of people in Africa, over the age of 55 have to work. The share of older workers aged 55 or above in the world's workforce expanded from 10.5 per cent in 1990 to an as yet unseen 14.3 per cent in 2014. According to ILO Senior Economist Ekkehard Ernst, by 2030, the number of older workers in the labour force is likely to increase by a further 270 million to almost 750 million workers. That translates into more than 18 per cent of the total labour force.² 40% of people over the age of 65 in Africa are still active in the labour force while over half of the male 65+ population also participates in the labour force.³ The African economy is characterised by a predominant informal sector and majority of Africa's 60+ labour force find themselves in this sector due to both compulsive reasons of having to earn a living even after retirement or out of choice because they remain able, and interested, a choice that must be respected. Most people engaged in informal activities: (i) are exposed to inadequate and unsafe working conditions, and have high illiteracy levels, low skill levels and inadequate training opportunities; (ii) have less certain, less regular and lower incomes than those in the formal economy, suffer longer working hours, an absence of collective bargaining and representation rights and, often, an ambiguous or disguised employment status; and (iii) are physically and financially more vulnerable because of working in the informal economy, which is either excluded from or effectively beyond the reach of social security schemes or safety and health, maternity and other labour protection legislation⁴. The implications for older people are particularly grim. The exacerbated challenges that they face include age discrimination and violation of rights to land and property, poor health and limited access to healthcare, low incomes, unpaid and unrecognised work, and exclusion from skills development and other programmes to support livelihoods. A cross cutting challenge is that their work remains invisible to everyone.



Caught between bureaucratic systems and challenges due to ageing

Older Persons rights are often overlooked in Africa's fragile countries while the challenges that they face due to ageing - declining health, stamina and responsibilities towards families only increase due to migration of young persons to urban areas and as HIV carers. Additionally, their care responsibility towards orphans and vulnerable children and also responsibility towards other older persons in the family increases. A large percentage of OVCs are taken care by older persons⁵. Lack of awareness, unwillingness to support older persons who are perceived by policy makers as not adding value compounded with the challenges of weak economies and bureaucratic systems mean that there exist weak pension systems that do not adequately safeguard the future of older workers, despite international recognition that social pensions based on universal coverage can have a major impact on reducing poverty and supporting multi-generational households. Some countries in Africa have led the way towards facilitating social protection and providing social pensions. These include, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Zanzibar.

Neglected rights

While the right to decent work applies to older people as much as any other age group, neither existing human rights instruments nor key international development initiatives have led to a breakthrough in addressing specific issues affecting older people⁶. Older people's knowledge and skills are important not only

² http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/audio/WCMS_358943/lang-en/index.htm

³ UNDESA

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015%20Highlights_excerpt%20for%201%20October_4.pdf

⁴ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_412835.pdf

⁵ http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/africas_orphans.pdf

⁶ HelpAge International, Forgotten Workforce

to ensure the survival of indigenous languages, culture and traditions, but also for earning a living for their families. Their knowledge and understanding of the natural environment and farming practices in particular are important. From this perspective, it is important to note that ILO's Recommendation No. 204 acknowledges that most people enter the informal economy not by choice but as a consequence of a lack of opportunities in the formal economy and in the absence of other means of livelihood.⁷

Gaping hole in data on older people in the labour force in Africa

Indicative of the lack of clarity and information that older people have on local economies is a report titled, "Decent Work Indicators in Africa, A First Assessment based on National Sources" which does not provide age-aggregated information in any of the indicators except those pertaining to social security and pensions. This is true of most data sets and literature pertaining to labour markets and social protection that either join together ages over 60 or do not provide disaggregated information by age at all. These are serious omissions given that the ILO's resolution and conclusions concerning decent work and the informal economy adopted in 2002 recognise **older workers as one of the groups "especially vulnerable to the most serious decent work deficits in the informal economy"**.

The Social, Political and Economic Role of Older People in Africa's Economy

The trends of neglect that leave older people behind and vulnerable stem from myths that a) older people do not work and b) that they have no contribution to make when there are younger and more educated people in the market. This is a critical anomaly in development thinking and it is crucial to understand and emphasize the huge potential older people can also have for local economies and societies. This paper shows that their contribution to the economy is real, but severely underestimated. Older people have a role and continue to make unrecognized contributions in terms of capacity building (especially in the informal sector), knowledge transmission and experience. Socially too, they play a critical role especially at the community level and with youth. Older people, especially in the East-African context where migration, conflicts, socio-economic crises are frequent, have a political role to play by bridging the generational gap and generating steady incomes that contributes to the rest of the household. This wealth of experience and key bridge of values must be optimized and harnessed.

I. JOBS | Older People in Africa's Labour Market

There is large emphasis on youth employment in Africa and in the world in general. While understandably, youth play a critical role in the economy, so do older people. The latter however are assumed to not work beyond a certain age. The reality however is starkly different. While they face increasing challenges because of old age, their need to work to support their family and responsibility to look after themselves does not diminish. They are thus at heightened threat of being pushed into poverty and destitution.

Vulnerability to risk and shocks due to irregular and unstable income; deteriorating health, declining stamina, reduced physical ability, agility and strength, as well as decreased mobility; age discrimination; high out-of-pocket health expenditures due to the onset of work- or age-related illnesses; high levels of stress and anxiety about how they will earn enough to buy food and other basics, especially where they are supporting grandchildren or other family members who are sick; are only a handful of challenges that face older people in the work force. Some other challenges faced by the older people in Africa's labour market are:

⁷ Ibid

Limited access to markets UGANDA

Older people in rural areas find it difficult to access markets due to lack of transport or inability to pay for transport, or reduced physical mobility.

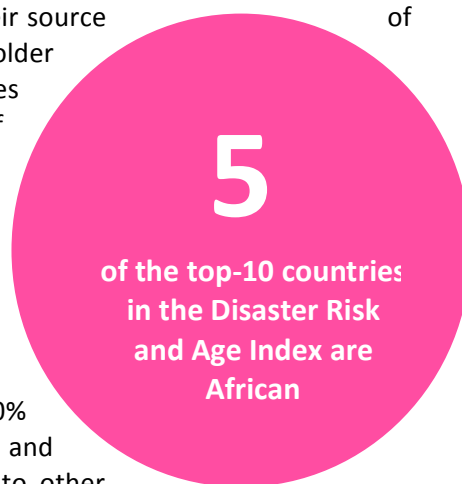
Older men and women in **Uganda**, for instance, have reported being exploited by middlemen, as their own physical limitations prevent them from taking their goods to the market to sell. These middlemen buy their crops and other goods to sell on for a better price, knowing that the older people are not in a position to negotiate a fair price for their goods.

Impact of Urbanisation Programmes SOUTH AFRICA

Urban development policies and programmes frequently have extremely detrimental consequences for people who are struggling to make a living, and older people in particular.

In **South Africa**, a programme to develop a shopping mall at a major transport hub and street market in Durban, provoked a strong reaction from street traders who would be displaced by the scheme

Furthermore, the impact of shocks on poor households is particularly severe for older members. With older age, a person's health and strength is often compromised. Combined with other factors, such as low literacy levels, this makes older people less resilient and less able to diversify their source of income in the event of a shock. Shocks are therefore more likely to push older women and men into chronic poverty, as their traditional coping strategies are, in many cases, no longer available. Shocks can include the loss of ability to earn, through failing health or increasing and persistent ill health. Older people often have to sell any assets they have to pay for unanticipated expenses such as health consultations and medication, funerals, and grandchildren's school fees. Other shocks include the sudden loss of social support through death, injury, illness or abandonment. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, the high incidence of illness and death among the working-age generation due to HIV and AIDS means that many older people are now caring for young dependents – 90% as reported by UNICEF⁸, as well as trying to manage farm production and other income-generating activities. Their care giving role also extends to other older people within the family. As a result, older people in western Kenya, for instance, have reported that their harvest yields and food consumption are much lower due to conflicting priorities with their role as carers.



Overall, older people in Somalia, Central African Republic and Afghanistan face the highest risk as noted by the Disaster Risk and Age Index 2014 developed by HelpAge. This is in part due to ongoing conflict, coupled with the lack of services provided for older men and women. For example, in the Central African Republic there are only 0.5 doctors per 10,000 people. There is no pension coverage, low life expectancy at 60 and high numbers of older displaced people⁹. Other African countries like South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Niger, Mozambique and Nigeria feature in the top-20 where there is heightened risk of disasters on older people.¹⁰

II. RIGHTS AT WORK | Challenges faced by Older People in Africa

As another consequence of older people working in informal sectors in order to support large families and increasing medical bills, their rights go undermined and unnoticed. When the need for security, of income, access, legal protection and redressal is greatest, these mechanisms often fail when it comes to the older in Africa.

⁸ http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5519047ce4b0d9aaa8c82e69/t/5551c74ce4b0e19eaeac9c30/1431422796385/HIVandAID_strategy_older_people.pdf

⁹ Ageing and Risk, How to get it right, March 2015, <http://www.unisdr.org/archive/42943>

¹⁰ HelpAge International, Disaster Risk and Age Index

Irregular and low pay

Income security is a concern for all age groups, but becomes even more acute for older people. Low levels of income for older people are common in low- and middle-income countries across the world. Older people in rural areas are more likely to have lower incomes than older workers in urban areas, as there are even fewer opportunities to find other ways of earning income. The irregularity of earnings is also a major problem for older people working in the informal sector.

In Uganda, for example, a market trader might earn nothing for several days and then make US\$5 in one day – income that has to support the older person and usually a number of dependents.

Even one day of sickness could mean the difference between an older person having enough income to buy food and medicine, and going without these. Furthermore, if an older person cannot afford to eat or buy medicine, they are likely to become even weaker and in poorer health, trapping them in a cycle of low energy levels, low productivity and low income¹¹.

Denial of rights to land and property

Assets are critical to older people's livelihoods. They provide older people with some status, and can help leverage support from social networks as well as access to formal financial markets. Yet older people's right to own property, as set out in Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is frequently violated due to discriminatory institutional structures and exploitative personal relationships. Older women, in particular, may lose their homes, land and property when their husbands die as a result of discriminatory inheritance laws and practice.

HelpAge International's work in various parts of Africa has revealed cases where older people have lost their lifelong acquisitions through cheating, victimisation and civil strife. An older man who lost his livestock as a result of tribal clashes in Kenya said: "When my case went to court, they continuously spoke in English and I could not understand the proceedings. In the end I was told that my case was closed and I came away empty-handed."

In a survey carried out in Kenya, older women reported losing property as a result of abuse, including false land deals and removal of deceased children's property by landlords under the pretext of rent arrears. These violations of older people's rights take away valuable assets, exposing them to increased risks, and preventing them from earning a living.

III. SOCIAL PROTECTION | Increased Vulnerabilities of Older People

Social protection helps older persons and their households cope with shocks, invest in the health, buy food and education for members of their households¹². Help Age's 2008 Social Pensions Strategy outlines its definition of social protection for operational and advocacy purposes as "the system of social transfers – usually provided by the state – that offer income security to people in case of poverty, unemployment, sickness, disability, old age and loss of the breadwinner". Important features of this definition are an emphasis on (a) state provision, (b) social transfers (rather than services) and (c) lifecycle shocks and stresses.

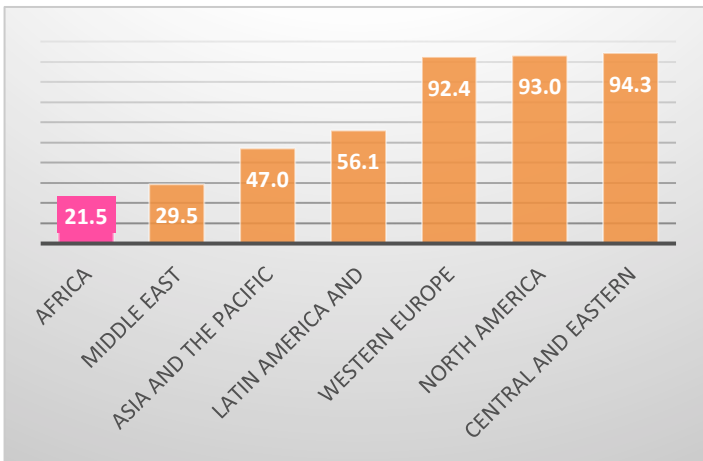
Social Protection Floor

The concept of a **social protection floor** has developed over the last decade, as a minimum set of social security guarantees that countries should prioritise in expanding their social protection system. Its clearest articulation, and legal underpinning, is in ILO Recommendation 202. Since the adoption of the recommendation in June 2012 the concept has been increasingly prominent in social protection policy at both national and international levels.

¹¹ Ibid

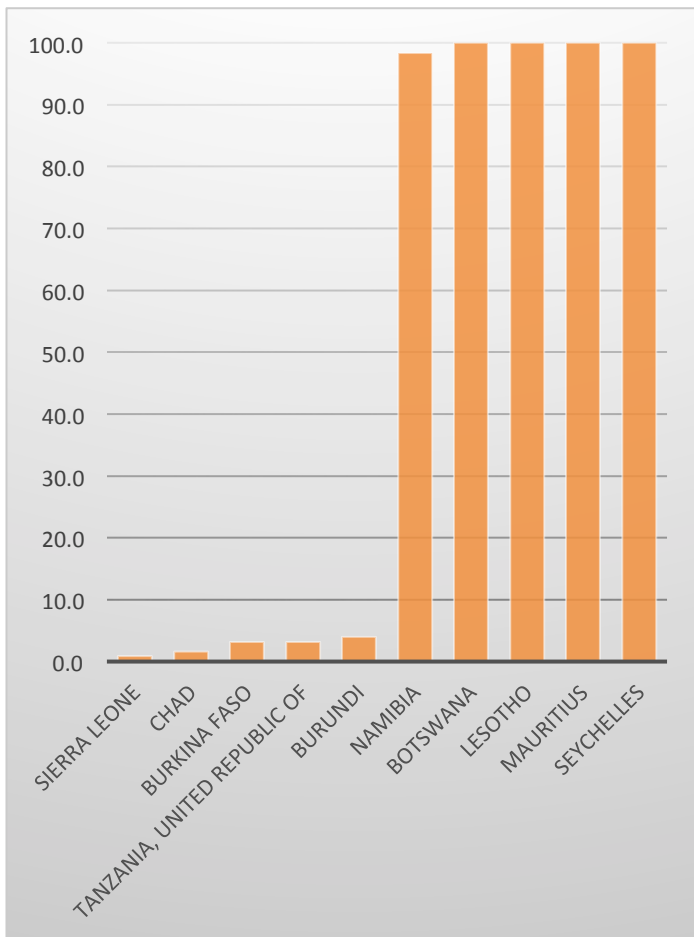
¹² HelpAge International Discussion Paper, Unpublished

Comparison of Pension Coverage across Regions



and South Africa¹³.

Pension coverage in Africa: Top and Bottom 5 countries



Main source: ILO (International Labour Office): ILO Social Security Inquiry; Indicator: old-age pensioners recipient ratio above retirement age. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/ilossi/ssiindic.viewMultiIndic3?p_lang=en&p_indicator_code=CR-1f%20OA [6 Jun. 2014].

¹³ Pension watch Briefing Report No 9

¹⁴ ILO Forgotten Workforce

Pension systems have a central place in the successful design and implementation of national floors of social protection. ILO Recommendation 202 concerning social protection floors clearly states “basic income security for older persons” as one of four social security guarantees within a social protection floor. This reflects the proven importance of pensions within comprehensive social protection systems. Pensions tend to make up the biggest single component of social protection systems in OECD countries, with similar trends emerging from low- and middle-income countries that have spearheaded life cycle systems of social protection in recent years, such as Brazil, China

As the indicators show, Africa is far behind in its total coverage of pensions including social pensions as compared to other regions of the world. That being said, a closer inspection of social pensions coverage within Africa shows that countries like Mauritius, Namibia, Botswana have managed to implement universal pension systems, while others like Chad, Sierra Leone and Tanzania remain extremely behind in their coverage. Stakeholders increasingly realize that pensions are the first big step towards reducing vulnerability in old age and building social protection. Despite substantial work in building the architecture required for social protection systems nationally in African countries, a lot more needs to be achieved.

The challenge of informal economies and contributory pensions in Africa

One of the main reasons for low coverage of pensions in many countries across the continent is the exclusive reliance on contributory pensions. Because many older people in Africa work in the informal economy for most of their lives, they are not entitled to a contributory pension. Even those few who are entitled to a work pension may not always be able to afford the contributions; and those who have paid contributions may not receive their entitlement due to bureaucracy or poorly administered systems¹⁴.

Older women in particular tend to be excluded from contributory pensions due to the fact that they are less likely to work in the formal economy. Even when women do work in formal sector jobs, they are likely to receive lower pensions than men. Over their lifetime, many women work fewer years than men due to their childbearing and household responsibilities, and so have less chance of making contributions to pension schemes, thereby reducing the size of their pension once they retire. This is especially relevant as African economies are marked by agriculture and informal employment. In these sectors, it is next to impossible to introduce pension systems that are based on compulsory contributions.

Social Pensions in Africa

In this context, an increasing number of countries across the world, and in Africa, are extending “social pensions”. These are tax-financed schemes where eligibility is not dependent on previous contributions. Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly the Southern tip of the continent, is the home of some of the largest scale social pension schemes introduced to date. In the early 1990s, following the end of apartheid the social pension schemes in South Africa and Namibia were reformed so that all older people – regardless of race – received benefits on the same terms. These schemes influenced the neighbouring countries of Botswana (1996), Lesotho (2004) and Swaziland (2005) to introduce social pensions that cover all, or most, older people over a set age¹⁵.

More recently, other countries across the continent have begun to experiment with introduction of social pensions. Since 1997, Mozambique began implementing a cash transfer that – while not specifically targeting older people – includes eligibility criteria relating to age, with older people making up the majority of recipients. Over the last five years, Kenya has gradually expanded a means-tested Older Persons Cash Transfer Programme that covers over 10 per cent of people aged 65 and above. Since 2011 the question of increasing coverage of the social pension has also gained attention in parliamentary and electoral debates, including support for an extended social pension amongst a number of political parties. Similar debates are on going in Tanzania, where the government is reportedly finalising legal processes for the payment of a universal social pension of 20,000 Tanzanian shillings (12 US\$) per month.¹⁶

Smaller pilot or state-level schemes that have the potential to inform national-level policymaking have also emerged. Donor-funded pilot social transfers that follow the model of a universal pension exist in both Zambia and Uganda. The Senior Citizens Grant in Uganda, for example is part of the government’s Expanding Social Protection Programme, and provides 23,000 Ugandan shillings to all people 65 and over. In 2011, Ekiti state introduced a social pension of 5,000 Naira (\$) for “indigent” older people over 65 years, and has since been followed by a similar scheme in neighbouring Osun state¹⁷.

Countries that have introduced social pensions have found major impacts on the lives of older people and their families. In South Africa, for example, girls in households with older person receiving pension 3-5cm taller than girls in other households, largely as a result of improved nutrition.¹⁸ Nevertheless, those schemes that exist often face major limitations. The benefit can often too low to live on, particularly where older people are caring for other family members and contributing to household income. Schemes targeted to poor older people – such as those in Kenya and Mozambique – also often face issues in terms of targeting errors that mean the poorest older people are not reached.

Using pensions and skills as collateral

Pensions can act as important collateral enabling older people to access capital. Older women and men report that having a regular, guaranteed income gives them the confidence to take out a loan and reduces

¹⁵ Robert Palacios and Charles Knox-Vydamanov, *The Growing Role of Social Pensions: History, Taxonomy and Key Performance Indicators*,

¹⁶ Exchange rate from xe.com 14/05/2013

¹⁷ Exchange rate as of 14/03/2013

¹⁸ Case, Anne. 2001. “Does Money Protect Health Status? Evidence from South African Pensions.” *NBER Working Paper 8495: Cambridge, MA.*, no. October: 1–32. doi:10.2139/ssrn.279919.

the pressures of being in debt to a financial institution, particularly where they are engaged in unstable and irregular work. A social pension can increase an older person's risk-bearing ability by providing a form of repayment protection.

In Zambia, for instance, a pilot scheme providing social pensions enabled a 75-year-old widow who looks after four of her grandchildren to buy a piglet that she fattened up and sold on. She used some of the money for schoolbooks and uniforms.

In Uganda, a pension enabled a 62-year-old woman to access microfinance, partly because the regular pension income acted as collateral, meaning the bank had greater confidence in her ability to repay

Caring for family members with HIV

Older people and others providing community and home-based care to people living with HIV are playing a crucial role in the response to the epidemic. In many countries, particularly those with generalised epidemics, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, health systems have been unable to cope. Family structures are changing as older people become the main carers of adults with HIV and orphaned children (often their own grandchildren). Yet the contribution that older carers make, either to their own family members or others in the community, goes unrecognised and unsupported – both financially and emotionally. Surveys in seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that around 40 per cent of people living with HIV were being cared for by older people, with each older carer supporting an average of two people living with HIV.

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Older parents living with an adult child during their illness are more likely to provide care, pay medical costs and take responsibility for orphaned grandchildren. In Uganda, approximately 50 per cent of the estimated 1.2 million children who have lost their parents to AIDS are being cared for by grandparents. UNICEF estimates that 12 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Yet these older carers receive little support to carry out this vital role.

BEYOND SOCIAL DIALOGUE | WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Most decent work strategies and programmes do not address the specific challenges older workers face. If older people are not included in such interventions, the international community is not only failing in its human rights obligations to older people, but it is failing to grasp a critical opportunity to break the intergenerational poverty cycle and to harness the potential role that older people can play in garnering continuity and stability. Governments, international organisations, donor agencies, civil society and NGOs must act now to a) recognize and emphasize the important and significant role that older people play in Africa's economy and b) include older people in their decent work and social and economic development programmes. In particular, HelpAge International calls on governments across the world to:

An International Effort that Reflects Global Demographics

To the Governments and International Community:

Implement age discrimination legislation

to protect older workers from discrimination and exploitation in both the formal and informal economy.

Create flexible economic policies

that includes and utilise older workers' skills and experience.

Expand coverage of social pensions

to ensure income security for all older men and women.

Provide free healthcare

to all older people by removing barriers such as user fees.

Facilitate inclusive education

and training programmes that are open to men and women throughout their life.

Facilitate access to microfinance programmes,

especially micro-credit schemes, allowing older women and men to have equal access to financial resources available to other age groups.

Remove mandatory retirement legislation,

making the age of retirement flexible and voluntary.

Research and disaggregate data on older workers

in the formal and informal economies, thereby recognising their contributions and needs.

**HelpAge
International**

age helps

HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives.

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