

Leveraging Intergenerational Solidarity to Advance Aging Issues in Youthful Kenya

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Like many nations, Kenya is experiencing a growing trend of population aging, with the proportion of people age 60 and older steadily increasing. While the country has a largely youthful population structure today — according to the National Council for Population and Development² 46 percent of Kenya's population, or 21.9 million people, is under 18 — the older population is projected to more than triple by 2050, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the population by midcentury.

As this demographic shift is taking place, Kenya is also experiencing rapid urbanization, which is changing attitudes and experiences for families and communities. Previously, the proportion of older people in the cities was lower: A significant number of people retired in the rural areas, leaving fewer older people in the cities. But the projected population aging means that there will soon be more people growing older in cities than in rural areas.

Today's older population is still largely able to tap into the rural community structures that address social issues related to aging, and governance structures continue to be attuned to the specific needs of the unique population structures across the rural-urban divide. But Kenya must prepare for a future where these arrangements no longer match the places and ways that people live.

Already, the increased movement of younger persons from rural to urban areas in search of employment has led to changes in family structures, resulting in the breakdown of the extended family support and built-in social protection systems for older persons that have traditionally been part of rural society. At the same time, rural-to-urban

migration has created a segment of older persons in urban areas who face particular challenges that defy the hitherto rural or urban character of aging in the Kenyan society. As population aging and urbanization advance, older adults will need new support systems, formal and informal, to promote healthy longevity.

To address some of these challenges and help Kenya prepare for the coming demographic shift to an older population, the HelpAge International programme works with Network Members and partners to advance age equality while building agency and lifting the voices of older people. In this regard AARP has been an invaluable partner to the Kenya program.

In January 2024, the Kenya program and network members hosted AARP in Nairobi and Narok. Nairobi remains the epicentre of political, economic and commercial activity in the country, and is the destination of most rural-to-urban migration. As a result, there are several peri-urban and informal settlements that have emerged where the different dynamics of population aging play out. Kibera, the largest informal settlement in Africa and the third largest in the world³, plays host to diverse communities straddling the youth and older people age-divide.

One of the highlights of the Nairobi visit was the engagement with the Intergenerational Self-Help Age Groups, Older Persons Association, and Older Citizen Monitors. Hosted by the Kibera Day Care Centre for the Elderly (KDCCE) the intergenerational engagement brought to light the power of community mobilization and intergenerational solidarity in advancing aging issues in places where the population faces significant economic challenges.

This intergenerational engagement is important, as it allows the community to address aging and the issues affecting older people in Kibera in a holistic manner. The young people can see the challenges faced by older people and are able to then actively plug into the advocacy initiatives by KDCCE for policy and administrative change. Collaboration between Akili Bomba, a youth led organization, and KDCCE came alive through an intergenerational discussion during the AARP visit. The importance of a life course approach to aging was reiterated through discussions that focused on health, wellbeing, and income security for older people. The young people were able to engage from a place of specific interest as “older people in waiting,” with the aim of improving the lives of older adults today and avoiding similar challenges as they age.

The advocacy by the older people in the KDCCE programs is boosted by the energy of the young people in Akili Bomba, who also bring creativity to bear through songs, spoken word, and dance. These interactions give older people a chance to share perspectives on topical issues while engaging in social activity amongst themselves and with younger people — helping to address common challenges of social isolation and loneliness. Through their participation, their experiences add to the advocacy of KDCCE and Akili Bomba and allow the latter to take a forward-looking perspective to aging, based on lessons learned from older adults in the KDCCE.

AARP also visited Older People Associations with Maasai Elders in Narok. The group membership consists of about forty older men and women who run sustainable agricultural

initiatives aimed at promoting opportunities for food security. Their work also enhances community cohesion as they come together to plan for produce, market access, and scalability.

While population aging is changing the dynamic of cities, the country's predominantly younger population⁴ has yet to fully embrace the concept of age-friendly cities. Fostering more of the intergenerational solidarity and engagement seen with Akili Bomba and KDCCE will be essential in the years and decades ahead. Population aging and increased urbanization represents a break from many of the traditions and norms of Kenya's past. Successfully navigating these changes will require strong connections, clear understandings, and shared goals between younger and older generations. •

¹https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/2022_healthy_ageing_country_summary_reports_kenya.pdf

²<https://ncpd.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Situation-Analysis-of-Kenyan-Adolescent-Report.pdf>

³<https://www.kibera.org.uk/facts-info/>

⁴<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/12/CHARITY-POWERPOINT-PRESENTATION-UNDESA-WKSHOP-NAIVASHA-Report-Revised.pdf>



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