

Strengthening and Supporting Health, Economic Activity, and Engagement for Older Adults in Tanzania

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In Tanzania, older people are respected as guardians, advisors, preservers of cultural values through intergenerational dialogues, and a central pillar of peace and harmony in our societies. They are also caretakers: Around 40 percent of orphans today are in the care of their grandparents, and a majority of these grandparents are age 60 and older. Older adults also play a pivotal role in Tanzania's economy, particularly in sectors such as trade, agriculture, forestry, and fishing, just to mention a few. Therefore, it is vital that the social, political, and economic contributions of older people are not only acknowledged by the government, but also facilitated through programs.

The Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups (CDGWSG), which I oversee within the Department of Social Welfare in Tanzania, is responsible for the provision of Social Welfare services to the most vulnerable groups in our society, including older adults. The CDGWSG has been collaborating with other ministries and development partners to design and implement various programs aimed at supporting older persons to get the services they need, from health services, livelihood support, and psychosocial care and support, to social protection and humanitarian services during emergencies.

RIGHT Two members of the Kabuku Active Ageing Club in Tanga, northeastern Tanzania.



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In Tanzania, Social Welfare services for older persons are guided by a number of policy instruments developed over the last two decades. The National Aging Policy was passed in 2003 and revised in 2024. A National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was passed in 2004, followed by the National Health Policy in 2007 and the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 9 of 2010, all of which have relevance to older adults. Tanzania also has a strategy for provision of older-person-friendly health services, and the provision of good services for older people is also clearly articulated in the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the current Five-Year National Development Plan.

According to the 2022 Tanzania Population and Housing Census, the population of Tanzania is 61,741,120. Out of this population, older people — which we have defined as anyone who is 60 years old or older — were recorded to constitute 3,406,464 (1,546,221 males and 1,860,243 females) which is equivalent to 5.6 percent of the total country population.

Programs to Support Older Adults

As is the case in other developing countries, older persons in Tanzania face a number of challenges. Many have limited incomes and struggle to afford health services, good shelter, food, clothes, recreation, and other emotional and social needs. The government has responded with a range of programs and support.

For example, the government provides social welfare services like food, clothing, and medical treatment to vulnerable older persons living in 13 government owned elderly homes. The Ministry also coordinates services to elders in 15 non-state-owned elderly homes.

To support healthy longevity and affordable care, the government works with local authorities to provide Community Health Fund Cards that help lower-income older people access medical services. Public health facilities also offer free medical services for vulnerable older adults and, to date, more than 588 special windows have been established in facilities around the country to ensure that older patients seeking medical services are attended to in a timely manner. As the country moves to universal health insurance in the near future, the government will ensure premiums for vulnerable older people are covered.

Health education and socialization are also important elements of government support for older people. HelpAge Tanzania, through my ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government, has been able to establish over 100 Active Ageing Clubs in districts such as Korogwe, Handeni, and Morogoro. In these clubs, older people are meeting regularly to exercise, learn how to keep themselves healthy, and broaden their knowledge on managing non-communicable diseases that are more likely to affect them. My ministry, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government are exploring ways

to replicate these active aging clubs in all wards in Tanzania.

On the economic front, through Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), the government provides multipurpose cash payments to poor families including those headed by poor older people to enable them to meet basic needs and do small income generating activities. To date, more than 350,000 older people are benefiting from TASAF. Furthermore, to ensure older people fully participate in matters of their interest, the government established more than 20,700 older people forums, ranging from village and street level to the national level. These forums facilitate communication, networking, and platforms for older adults to meet, speak out on their most important issues, and advance their key agenda items.

Unlike other vulnerable groups, such as children and women who have a number of civil society organizations, partners, and donors actively supporting them, older people often struggle to mobilize resources in support of their chief concerns. As of now, only HelpAge Tanzania has demonstrated the technical capacity and vigour needed to work in the area of aging at the national level. Other age care focused organizations are still challenged with limited capacity. The ministry will continue to work closely with HelpAge Tanzania and other emerging age care focused organizations to provide necessary support and partnership in the work to improve the wellbeing of this important segment of our population.

Future Plans for Supporting Older People

As Tanzania's population continues to age, the government is considering a number of initiatives for improving their well-being. Those include developing a comprehensive older persons regulation to ensure older people have established rights around access to quality health services, income security, protection, education, adequate care, participation, emotional support, and

recreation. The regulation will also stipulate the roles and contributions of older people in society.

Building on the success of our government-owned elderly homes, we plan to construct a new, modern national older people's home in the Dodoma Region, which will host vulnerable older persons who have no relatives to provide care. The desired center will be used as the model for how older people homes should be designed and run across the country.

Finally, the government will continue to combat ageism and raise public awareness around the contributions of older adults to our society and the importance of providing the support they need. Through all this, we remain committed to providing health, economic, and social support to this group that is so important to Tanzania's past, present, and future. •



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