

# AARP Speaks with Leading Advocates for Older Adults Around the World

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## Kenya

Ethel Foundation for the Aged (EFA) is a charitable organization in Africa that was founded to respond to social issues affecting older people. The EFA provides home-based health care options, builds social networks, and advocates for the rights of older adults. To learn more about the EFA, AARP spoke with Rev. Fr. Cornel Omondi Oredo C.Ss.R, the Founder and Director of the organization.

**AARP** How was your organization founded?

**Fr. Cornel Omondi** While carrying out pastoral outreach work in 2017, I noticed the vulnerability of older people who were isolated, neglected, and had limited access to basic health care, decent housing, and nutritious food. Moved by their dire circumstances, I founded the Ethel Foundation for the Aged to respond with love and empathy, committed to supporting their dignity as they aged.

**AARP** What are the major challenges that older people face in Kenya? How does the Ethel Foundation address those challenges?

**FCO** Many older Kenyans rely on informal work and subsistence farming, which becomes increasingly difficult as they grow older. Pensions and social security are limited, leaving many without a stable income in their later







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years. This makes it hard to afford quality and specialized health services, adequate housing, and nutritious food.

EFA facilitates access to home-based health care services in collaboration with partners in the health sector to help older people manage illness by bridging the gaps in access and affordability. EFA's home-based health care model, paired with programs that improve residential conditions through construction and renovation, ensure older people with limited mobility get the health care they need. Additionally, EFA's food and income security programs teach older people income-generating skills, like chicken and goat rearing, that can ensure access to regular income and nutritious meals.

Traditional family structures that once provided support are weakening. Young people are taking opportunities outside of the community, leaving older people alone and isolated. This leaves older people susceptible to abuse, including financial exploitation, physical violence, and emotional neglect. To promote emotional and spiritual wellbeing, EFA builds social networks for older people by organizing community activities and offering at-home psychosocial counseling and pastoral services.

Kenya's limited legal frameworks to protect the rights of older people makes it difficult to enforce policies that could improve their living conditions. But the EFA continues to protect and empower older people by working with local and national authorities to influence policies that address abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

**AARP** How does the Ethel Foundation define success?

**FCO** The Ethel Foundation's definition of success is a "life of dignity," which is defined as a life free from want, abuse, and discrimination while aging. At EFA, success is defined by sustained access to health care, decent housing, a sense of belonging, income, food and nutritional security for every older person. Also, older people need to be supported by inclusive policies and legislation to promote and protect their rights.

**AARP** How does your team connect with new volunteers? What types of support do these volunteers provide?

**FCO** EFA reaches out to potential volunteers through our website, community events, social media campaigns, local schools and universities, and partnerships with other organizations. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and go through an elaborate onboarding process. Volunteers offer both programmatic and operations support, while those with specialized skills provide targeted support with health screenings, counseling sessions, or educational workshops. Volunteers benefit through personal fulfillment, skill development, increased awareness, networking opportunities, and increased empathy and perspective.

**AARP** Can you describe a partnership or collaboration that has been particularly successful?

**FCO** The EFA has collaborated with the local branch of Equity Afya, a private health care provider, to provide services targeting older persons who cannot access health care. The older people receive services like screenings, diagnostics, consultations, and references at no cost. Additionally, those who have impairments receive assistive devices to improve their functioning.

Another partner, Tabaka Ward Uongozi Wa Utu (TAWUWU) is a community-based organization that focuses on using social welfare to mobilize and empower older people in Kisii County. In collaboration with EFA, TAWUWU rallies aging stakeholders, including gatekeepers, community leaders, business leaders, and government officials to act and promote the rights and wellbeing of older persons in the county.

These partnerships are effective because partners share EFA's commitment to improving the quality of life for older people. While Equity Afya brought medical expertise, TAWUWU contributed needed community outreach infrastructure. Our resource-sharing made health screening events and health workshops possible, accessible, and effective. Through partnership, each organization served and connected with older people who were otherwise isolated or underserved, while raising awareness for rights and policies that serve their community.



**AARP** What are the Ethel Foundation's long-term goals? How will the Foundation achieve them?

**FCO** The EFA has several long-term goals including to: enhance health care access, establish a sustainable financial model for long term economic support, foster strong community integration, advocate for inclusive and protective national legislation for older people, and enhance capacity of staff and volunteers to maximize quality support given through EFA and its partners.

To achieve these goals EFA will work to: strengthen partnerships, expand programs to address emerging needs, secure sustainable funding, increase community engagement, advocate for the protection of rights for older people, build the capacity of staff and volunteers through training investments, and implement a monitoring and evaluation program to assess impact and make data-driven revisions. ●