

AARP Speaks with Leading Advocates for Older Adults Around the World

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Zanzibar

JUWAZA is an organization dedicated to improving the welfare of retirees and older people in Zanzibar. JUWAZA addresses challenges facing the aging community in Zanzibar by providing health care services, a universal pension program, and community education opportunities. To learn more about JUWAZA, AARP spoke with the organization's Secretary Ms. Salama Ahmad Kombo.

AARP How was JUWAZA founded?

Salama Ahmad Kombo JUWAZA was founded in 2001. Most of the founders were pensioners and former civil servants who were living off their accrued pensions of 5,000 Kenya shillings (about 39 USD) per month in accordance with their last salaries in services. Five thousand shillings is a very small amount and when the pensioner from the district came to town to collect his pensions, he would spend most of it paying for transport and buying a few loaves for the family. He would go back home with almost nothing. Most of them had to return to work on the land and try local farming to help support their families. When the situation was tough, pensioners and senior citizens decided to come together to create JUWAZA to cater to their needs and convey their concerns.

Today, the organization has more than 1,500 registered members in both islands of Zanzibar





We define success as seeing older people being active and socially respected and connected.

but serves all 85,518 older people (60 and over) in Zanzibar. JUWAZA's main office is located in the urban district, about 2 km from Zanzibar Town.

AARP What are the major challenges that older people face in Zanzibar and how does JUWAZA address them?

SAK Some major challenges that face older people in Zanzibar include:

- **Stigmatization:** Younger people and other community members believe that older people have already had their share and should not be given an extra opportunity to live happily. Many say "Kala chumvi nyingi," translated to "An elder has already consumed sacks of salt that were put in foods they have eaten since birth."
- **Reliance on Family for Care Services:** Many older people cannot undertake necessary tasks because of weakness that comes with age. Many older people remain at home waiting for help from their children to eat and complete other necessary tasks.
- **Disease and Inaccessible Health Facilities and Services:** Health facilities are not readily available in Zanzibar. Although the Government has some facilities, distances and lack of money prevent older people from accessing them until they become seriously ill. The family and community members take them to nearby health centers where there is very limited equipment to treat older people's needs. This also means that necessary seasonal check-ups are not readily available to older people in Zanzibar.
- **Financial Insecurity:** Financial institutions are not willing to grant loans to older people in fear that they will die before they are able to pay their loans.
- **Lack of Representation:** Older people are not represented on decision-making boards, meaning some decisions are made without taking their views into account.

JUWAZA addresses these challenges through community education and health care services.

To address the stigmatization, we educate community members, especially youth, that aging is not an omen but rather an opportunity to live a long life. While working with our partner, HelpAge International, we have established health care forums and trainings in all 388 Shehia (districts) of Zanzibar through a project called "Better Health for Aged." We also continue to train and encourage older people to depend on themselves. We encourage them to advocate for their rights and we train them to cultivate small vegetable gardens at home.

AARP How does JUWAZA define success? Which of JUWAZA's projects have been most successful?

SAK We define success as seeing older people being active and socially respected and connected. We have achieved this goal through our projects. Through Better Help for the Aged, we have helped train people and to aid in health care and care responsibilities. Our intergenerational training programs have helped reduce the stigma by teaching younger people how to help and take care of older people.

We have advocated for an increase in the universal pension and helped older people afford indoor plumbing and small businesses. For example, there was an older woman who had almost been hit by cars many times while crossing the road to get water. When she received her pension, she was able to save enough money to afford a connected water system in her house. Similarly, another older person used his pension to buy bicycles to rent to tourists for 3 USD using his pension money. This small business supports him.

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

SAK Many of the volunteers are young. These volunteers are a blessing to us, as we depend on them for errands and expertise. The volunteers have all graduated from different courses. They help us with modern technology and digital affairs, including printing, photographing, scanning and setting up zoom meetings. Other volunteers have experience serving as civil servants in fields such as nursing, administration, accounting, auditing, and even at home care.



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

SAK Our collaboration with HelpAge International has been outstanding. Many trainings on aging and ageism with older people and advocacy organizations on the Tanzanian mainland have been facilitated through HelpAge.

AARP What are JUWAZA's long term goals?

SAK JUWAZA's long-term goals include ensuring older people in Zanzibar grow old in good health and financially independent, while being included in society. We want to increase awareness about the issues we older people face within the community at large. We hope to advocate for government officials and other influential people to focus on the issues older people face, as they will grow old themselves. ●