



A national Day for the senior citizens in Uganda

By Admin

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By Namaganda Rehema Bavuma

Uganda currently has about 1.5 m people over the age of 60. Several arguments have been made in the past, and it is evident anyway, that majority of the elderly in Uganda are living in a precarious situation that calls for urgent care and attention.

With over 40% of them acquiring disabilities in old age, therefore having mobility limitations, many are unable to access health care, take care of the orphans and dependents that we often leave to them.

Accessing water especially in rural communities is a double burden for the elderly whose health and mobility are already compromised. There is thus no doubt that there is need for urgent attention to the needs of the elderly.

The question that we have not yet answered precisely is: who should actually provide this urgently needed attention and care for the elderly?

Whereas elderly doesn't necessarily mean frailty, studies on ageing and disability have proved that for many of them, their ability to accomplish the activities of daily living within and around the home imposes unimaginable pain and difficulty. With the exception of the 4% of them who have access to the (hard-to-get) pension, the 96% have no reliable source of income as they are usually unable to engage in productive economic activities.

The Senior Citizens Grant that is currently being piloted under the "Expanding Social Protection Program" offers elderly people a direct income support of Uganda shillings 23,000 - about US\$8 per month. (www.socialprotection.go.ug) is still a drop in an ocean.

For long we have held the notion that care for the elderly in Africa is provided by the neighbors, relatives and the communities at large. Time has come however that we can no longer hold onto that notion anymore when current evidence suggests otherwise!

Forces around us, such as modernization, urbanization and changing gender roles, are all negatively influencing, the level of social support and care available for them. Studies too have indicated that as the nuclear-type family structure is becoming more common worldwide, the care and support during old age is no longer automatically provided for.

It is time to replace the inadvertent, impulsive and unplanned traditional care systems for the elderly with a more deliberately conceived mode of care for these very important persons in our society.

The first assured way for us to start providing this urgently needed attention, is to instigate a National Day for the Elderly. Among others the day will provide a platform for the elderly to articulate their problems to affirm the studies carried out. The national day will draw the attention of policy makers and the entire public to the needs and rights of the elderly. Above all, it will be a stepping stone towards the implementation and operationalization of the many very good policy documents that have been drafted in an attempt to address the needs of the elderly.

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