

Governments Not Prepared for Ageing, Warns HelpAge International

HelpAge International

World

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Five years ago today (April 12), 159 governments signed the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) committing governments to include ageing in all social and economic development policies, and to halve old-age poverty by 2015, in line with Millennium Development Goals, but new research by HelpAge International shows the state of the world's older people is getting worse.

Research reveals that older people are among the poorest and most vulnerable in many societies, because governments have not prepared for the world's rapidly ageing population.

By 2050, more than one in five people will be aged over 60, thanks to falling fertility rates and longer life expectancy. According to UNDESA, nearly 80 percent will live in developing countries. HelpAge International estimates that 100 million older people now live on less than US\$1 a day and this figure will continue to rise.

Country reports by HelpAge International and its partners on the situation of older people in Uganda, Moldova, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Serbia show:

- Older people need to work into their 70s, 80s or until they die for a regular income as adequate safety nets such as a pension are not in place.
- their rights are not respected
- older people face widespread discrimination and abuse

In Uganda 64 percent of older people live in poverty. Many older people have been affected by the AIDS pandemic and care for people infected with HIV and orphaned and vulnerable children. An estimated 50 per cent of the estimated 1.2 million orphans in Uganda are under the care of grandparents. John Riukaamyia is 73 years-old and has more than 20 orphans dependent on him.

"Seven of my children died of AIDS and left their children in my care," says John. "Everyone lives in this house which only has six rooms. I was a government servant so now at least I get a small pension, 110,000 Ugandan Shillings (US\$6.4) a month but this is our only income.

"Before the orphans came I could sustain my wife and our immediate family. With this pension now I have to buy school books, clothes, food and look after the house. When the children are sick we have to buy their medicines. When my wife and I are sick we have to pay a consultation fee as well as buy what the doctor prescribes, because it is never available free in the health centre. "

The United Nations is reviewing progress that governments have made towards implementing MIPAA and will present results in New York early next year (2008). HelpAge International has asked older people's organisations in 11 countries to prepare their own national reports in advance of this process to ensure that the real situation of older people is represented.

On the anniversary of MIPAA, HelpAge International's Chief Executive Officer Richard Blewitt is calling on all governments to implement age friendly policies and practices.

"Millions of older people across the world experience isolation, poverty, violence and abuse and have limited access to health services, education and legal protection. With no regular income older people are often forced to work in low-paid or demeaning jobs to provide for themselves and their dependants. We are asking governments to implement a tripartite package of universal social pension, free healthcare and non-discriminatory laws."