

COMPLEX SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ELDERLY IN UGANDA AND AFRICA AT LARGE AND HOW TO SOLVE IT.

Uganda Situation for the older persons.

INTRODUCTION

'With age comes wisdom, but sometimes age comes alone', is a famous quote by Oscar Wilde summarizing the complexity of old age. Indeed as one grows older, one is faced with lots of challenging situations and issues associated with aging that tend to fully occupy one to the extent of becoming stressed and worse still blocking one's spiritual growth.

In Uganda, 4% (approximately 1.83 Million people) of the entire population is comprised of persons above the age of 60 (UBOS 2014). Majority of these older persons live in villages and are engaged in farming with no social security and no regular income. With life expectancy of 58.5 years, (56.7 years for males and 60.5 years for females), this number is expected to rise in the subsequent years.

Challenges Faced by the Elderly in Uganda

Loneliness:

In Uganda the older persons are left alone in their homes without help, vulnerable and rarely visited by their children leading to loneliness that then progress to depression. **The lonely older person who may be unable to reach church easily also loses out on spiritual growth since there are no older persons' specific apostolate activities.**

Poverty

Due to diminished income potential, older persons have no regular income. The social pension is limited if available only for those who have worked in Government sector This has led to high rates of poverty among older persons.

Poor Health Care

To get clean water in an African village one needs to walk long distances which is not possible for the older persons so they resort to contaminated water. Toilet usage is also a challenge. This therefore predisposes older persons to communicable diseases.

Furthermore, due to poverty, poor diet, poor mobility, long distances to the health centers and limited medical geriatric expertise, the older persons easily die of treatable health complications.

In the absence of money, care, advice and council, older persons are left to turn to traditional healers.

Ageism: Discrimination Based On Age;

In the past, the African village square was the nucleus of wisdom acquired from centuries of reference for the older persons' advice. Older persons were always visible, highly respected and always depended on, especially for social challenges in the village. They were looked upon in times of crisis or conflicts and relied on to bring stability and cohesion to the society/community.

Currently, their roles have diminished and they are forgotten in the backyards or in the traditional homes. There is a striking lack of older people in public places to the extent that Ugandan cities are full of youth with scanty middle or older persons. This leads to older persons feeling dismissed from society, feeling lack of power and control in their daily living conditions.

The Forgotten Generation:

In Uganda, the older persons aged 60 years and above make up 4% of the population which is approximately 1,600,000 people.

Church programs in place are for the children, the youth, women and married couples but not for older persons. They are left to fit in any of the above programs with little attention to their unique problems. Thus their specific spiritual and social problems are left unattended to by the society and the church.

: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Everyone is born with an inner desire to live a happy fulfilling life till the Lord calls him/her upon the words *'Master, you can let your servant go in peace...'* (Luke 1:29). However majority of older persons live in anguish and are unable to commune with God let alone recognise their roles in the community.

The current trend of development in Parishes requires a lot of monetary contribution from parishioners, just like in other communities. Those still in active service with regular income set the pace to contribute more and they are recognised more with honour. The older persons with fewer 'coins' feel less valuable and shy away.

: Proposed Intervention

The **'Growing Older Graciously - The Gift of Years Program'** is to be a church and local community based program that will utilize the available church and community structures such as the parishes, sub parishes and basic parish communities to reach the older persons with interventions aimed at improving their quality of life as a whole.

: Specific Objectives:

1. Enhance spiritual growth of the older persons and promote their apostolate roles.
2. To promote entrepreneurship skills and property stewardship among the older persons.
3. To provide platforms for social interaction among older persons and intergenerational activities, so as to reduce social exclusion of the elderly.
4. To promote healthy aging, proper nutrition, dietetics and physical fitness among older persons.

: STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

Objective 1: Enhance spiritual growth of the older persons and promote their Apostolate roles.

Activities

- ✓ Organise relevant spiritual talks with the aim of enhancing faith.
- ✓ Mentorship sessions to promote role modelling and discipleship
- ✓ Home visits to the older persons who are unable to come to church in order to bring the love of God to them
- ✓ Radio and television talk shows to enhance faith and spiritual growth of the general population
- ✓ Provide counselling services to older persons in need.
- ✓ Share experiences in the communities.
- ✓ Encouraging sacramental life.

Objective 2: To promote entrepreneurship skills and property stewardship among the older persons.

Activities:

- ✓ Entrepreneurship, financial literacy and property stewardship workshops and trainings
- ✓ Form and register Savings and credit organisations for older persons
- ✓ Workshops facilitated by retirement fund managers
- ✓ Organise pro bono legal clinics and seminars to promote Will making in partnership with the Administrator General's office.

Objective 3: To provide platforms for social interaction among older persons and intergenerational activities, so as to reduce social exclusion of the elderly.

Activities:

- ✓ Regular meetings bringing together older persons to share experiences and interact.
- ✓ Annual dinners where extraordinary older persons are recognised for their community involvement and contribution to community development
- ✓ Supporting documentation of outstanding life-lessons (books, pictures and artefacts) by the elderly for inclusion in local community history.
- ✓ Home visits to needy older persons

Objective 4: To promote healthy aging, proper nutrition, dietetics and physical fitness among older persons.

Activities

- ✓ Healthy living seminars for older persons
- ✓ Workout and physical exercise sessions for older persons
- ✓ Supporting research and promotion of indigenous food crops and staple food types that promote long life
- ✓ Demonstration gardens

- ✓ Enhance accessibility to specific material needs for older persons such as reading glasses, hearing aids, walking ai

: ANTICIPATED BENEFITS/OUTCOMES

- ❖ Improved spirituality and wellbeing of older persons
- ❖ Improved Sacramental experiences especially among the older persons
- ❖ Enriched generational heritage transfer
- ❖ Increased optimism and positive attitude towards growing old
- ❖ Reduced stigma, prejudice and discrimination against older persons
- ❖ Uganda's indigenous knowledge (languages), food types/crops that prolong life preserved
- ❖ Improved involvement of older persons in church activities and apostolate
- ❖ Improved financial literacy and independency among older persons
- ❖ Established Saving and Insurance Schemes for older persons
- ❖ Improved physical wellbeing of older persons
- ❖ Reduced morbidity and mortality among the older persons
- ❖ Enhance accessibility to specific material needs for older persons aids.
- ❖ Dignified Death and burials for older persons.

FROM UGANDA

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