

# IMPROVING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE

BY

**OKUNLOLA, R.A. (PhD)**

*Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan Ibadan-  
Nigeria.*

Igba Meta nigba eda laye O...

Igba Owuro;

Igab Osan;

Igba Ale.

Kale san wa jowuro lo Baba rere

## INTRODUCTION

Several images and idioms abound in our society on old-age, but all point to the same thing - that old age is a period of 'returned-dependence', weakness, lack of energy, need for support, a period in which even if the spirit is willing the body is generally weak.

Given this reality, how strong and firm is the structural support/arrangement for the elderly in our society? How well are we supporting or paying back those who have at one point or the other, paid their dues for the society? These and other related questions are what this paper hopes to discuss. This is with a view to make some useful suggestions to improving the conditions of the elderly in our society.

## THE AGEING POPULATION

It is very evident that there is an incipient decline in fertility in Nigeria and this is expected to continue for the next 10-20 years. Also, there is an improved survival chances throughout life cycle. All these imply that the coming decades will witness dramatic increases in the number of the elderly, that is persons 60 years and above. Ageing of the population presents formidable challenges to developing countries - especially Nigeria - particularly within the backdrop of our development crisis.

The international community's attention has been drawn to this increasing demographic phenomenon (as a by-product of the 20th century). Examples here include:

- \* World assembly on the elderly in Vienna 1982 which made recommendations bordering on the elderly's health environment and consumer protection among others.
- . **UN** general assembly. 1991.
- \* Cairo International Conference on Population and Development 1994.
- \* International Federation of the elderly from 1998.

All these international meetings showed concerns for the elderly persons worldwide, and proffered measures for improving their lives and that of the rest of mankind within the context of sustainable development.

There is no doubt that the world's population is ageing. By the end of 2005, 2/3 of world's

population aged 60 years and above will be in the SubSahara Africa (Sharias 1965). In Sub-Sahara Africa itself, the proportion of persons aged 60 years and over in the population is expected to increase by 93% between 2005 and 2020.

Specifically in the case of Nigeria 1991 census puts 4.6 million of Nigerians as aged 60 years and above, about 5.2% of the entire population (NPC 1994). By 2005, Nigeria will have one of the world's largest population of the elderly with a projection of more than 16 million people over the age of 60, a whopping 1230% increase over the figure of 1.3 million in 1950 (World Bank 1994).

While, the world is ageing, there seems to be a general apathy and inadequate attention paid to issues concerning the elderly population. There is also a general absence of an articulated policy on the elderly at all levels of government. The situation of the elderly in Nigeria is not quite different from what is obtainable in other Sub-Saharan Countries. In fact, it is only South Africa and Namibia that currently have a social security system where persons aged 60 years and above are entitled to a monthly pension (Ferreira 1986). The Nigerian elderly are disadvantaged regarding systemic support, yet the growing size of this demographic group makes the demand for social support imperative. Besides, development features are changing social institutions with severe implications for the support for the elderly. Examples that can be highlighted here include:

- \* The nature and structure of family is changing
  - \* More young people are leaving agricultural employment
  - \* Growing wage economy outside agriculture
  - \* Migration to urban areas.
- On the basis of these and many more there is an:
- \* Over-reliance on formal support by the elderly
  - \*\* Declining family income
  - \* Deteriorating health conditions
  - \* Poor nutrition
  - \* Isolation
  - \* Boredom

In Nigeria, majority of the elderly live in rural areas. And as agricultural workers and subsistence farmers they do not receive pension benefits of social sociologies.

## **THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF THE ELDERLY SITUATION**

The worsening condition of the elderly might be one of the major social challenges in the 21st century. The increased longevity and survival (a product of development in the 20th century) represents a fundamental shift in social structure that affects the labour market, family structure and the social contracts along generations.

Traditionally, old people are venerated as a source of wisdom. Transitionally, the elderly provided child care services as the able bodies worked in the modern labour market. Modern developments have eroded these as new institutions have emerged to underplay and in most cases hijack their positions. At the gender level of analysis women elders have fared badly. This is because women frequently outlive their husbands. They experience a distinct drop in standards of living on the death of their spouse because much of their societal accesses to resources have been claimed through their spouse (Deil1992). This is further compounded by the many harmful widow inheritance practices in our society.

Going through available studies on the situation of the elderly, the following submissions can be safely made:

- \* Majority of persons between the age of 60 years above are not socially

and economically secured.

\* With the statutory age of retirement, many able bodied elderly are forced out of the job market with the burden drop of their income at a time when their medical expenses are likely to be on the increase.

\* Unlike the urban elderly, the rural elderly are not forced out of the job market.

*They continue to work until their health permits them.*

\* However, extensive hard physical labours, malnutrition, lack of health care, take their toll on the rural elderly - they aged faster than the urban aged.

\* Rural elders not covered any retirement or supper benefits

\* Rural elders have meager earning which militate against savings.

\* Depend on their children to cater for them.

\* They suffer from the so called de-generative ailments like joint pains, calcium deficiency and weakness etc.'

\* Psychologically, elderly prefer to stay with their sons/daughters as they do not want to move away from their native place of origin.

\* Few provisions included by the government for the benefit of the elderly.

\* Few elderly, covered by this arrangement. Thus the elderly have to prepare for their own old age, financially and socially.

\* Family is the strongest haven for the elderly where children are socialized to care and protect their parents at old age.

\* Unfortunately, the extended, family structure is crashing.

\* Gender differential is important in the chances of the elderly as the female gender tend to suffer more.

## **WHAT SHOULD BE DONE**

Multifaceted approach required. The family and the government cannot solve the challenges of the elderly in any society.

### **Role of the Elderly Persons**

Giving the increasing month of the elderly, there is a need to carve out more roles for them.

To get them meaningfully engaged especially at the household levels.

### **Role of Local Level Organizers**

GBOS and similar organization can engage in the strengthening and developing of the elderly humans resources required to make them functional in suitable economic within their community.

### **National Level Organizer**

\* More pressure should be made for National level policies on the changing requirements of the elderly in the family and community.

\* Family support needs to be strengthen

\* Retirement policy needs rethinking and health care must be made to be pro-elderly.

## **NOTO**

Get more involved in implementing programs for the elderly especially as regards the domestication of international convention

### **International Agencies**

- \* Networking produced to track implementation of conventions
- \* Employment for the Elderly
- \* Several elders can still work. We need to find relevant jobs for the within the community. This can be linked with NAPEP

### **Social Security Policy**

- \* Gratuity should be made adequate
- \* pension should be paid regularly
- \* Elderly should be made to have access to housing loan and other social security to the elderly should be increased.

### **Old Peoples Home**

Old people's home looks strange to our culture, but should be encourage to take care of those whose children are not available. Let it be noted most modern youths are beginning top abandon their elderly ones with, rising phenomenon of elderly beggars especially in our urban centres.

### **Extended Family**

Government should partner with the extended family and put in policies to protect it. Here we need to exalt our traditional African family and tap the benefits they once provided. We should not abandoned this good aspect of our traditional past. For example, we adopt modern architecture that has no provision for the elderly and grannies have become relics that must be stored away in the museums of dilapidated mud houses in the rural areas. Grandchildren only come home for their burials!!

### **CONCLUSION**

The way we treat our elders of today will rub on how we are treated tomorrow. All hands must be on deck to make life better for our own tomorrow. Let us note that in the elderly of today is the picture of our tomorrow. If we abandon them, our children of today will most possibly neglect us tomorrow. Let us safe our future today.

### **THANK YOU**