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Assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Statement submitted by Women's Health and Education Center, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Lifelong education, economic and social participation

A framework for healthy ageing

Globally, in the past 20 years, the population of older persons aged 60 years or over has increased by 56 per cent, from 490 million in 1990 to 765 million in 2010. During this period, the increase in the population of older persons in developing countries (72 per cent) was more than twice of developed countries (33 per cent). The number and proportion of older persons are rising in almost all countries, with projections estimating that the proportion will reach more than 20 per cent of the population in Europe and 15 per cent of the population in the Americas by 2030. If projections of rapid growth in the population of older persons in the coming decades are correct, the number of older persons will surpass the number of children by 2047. Many developed countries are already facing difficulties in investing in health across their lifespan. It is a prerequisite for economic and social development of rich and poor countries alike.

Because women's life expectancy is longer than men's at older ages, elderly women out-number elderly men in most societies. In 2012, globally there were 84 men per 100 women in the age group 60 years or over and 61 men per 100 women in the age group 80 years or over. Integrating gender into policies and support for older persons is therefore critical, including in health, other types of care, family support and employment.

Population ageing demands attention to the physical infrastructure to ensure safe housing, mobility, and the means of meaningful participation of older person. Our advocacy program guides and helps policymakers modify legislation, design and planning guidelines, and infrastructure to ensure that the increasing number of older, single persons have access to needed and appropriate housing, transportation, recreation, and the amenities of communal life. It is our privilege to share with you the UN document [E/CN.9/2023/NGO/9: Rethinking the purpose and content of education for the 21st Century](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/stories/2023-06-20-rethinking-the-purpose-and-content-of-education-for-the-21st-century), published on the occasion of the 56th Session of Commission on Population and Development. Also available at: <http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/documents/56CPD-Written-Statement-WHEC.pdf>.

Sex and sexuality. The sexual health of older persons is often overlooked both in academic discourse and policy responses to rapid population ageing, perhaps because the subject of sexuality in older people remains largely taboo in many cultures. Yet in a recent study of older adults in the United States of America, in which a broad definition of sexual functioning was used, women between 57 and 74 years showed no decline in sexual activity. Sexual functioning was found to be more associated with self-rated physical health than age. Women's Health and Education Center's health education projects and programs recommend that healthcare professionals and policymakers should adopt best practices, policies, and programs on sexual health to better meet the changing sexual needs of older persons. Our Continuing Medical Education Project and Program include special courses on healthy ageing.

Current public-health approaches to population ageing have clearly been ineffective. The health of older people is not keeping up with increasing longevity; marked health inequities are apparent in the health status of older people; current health systems are poorly aligned to the care that older populations require even in high-income countries; long-term care models are both inadequate and unsustainable; and physical and social environment present multiple barriers and disincentive to both

health and participation. Societies that adapt to the changing demographic and invest in healthy ageing can enable individuals to live both longer and healthier lives and for societies to reap the dividends.

A new framework for global action for healthy ageing is required

It is time to realize that ageing and health is a global issue; it should be considered as an essential component of the continuing globalization process that is reshaping our world. It should be included in the growing current interaction between countries in terms of world trade, services, foreign investment, and capital markets. Investing in women's health across their lifespan and their environment is a prerequisite for sustainable development. As women live longer than men, the quality of their life is of central importance. Primary prevention strategies will be most effective when started as early as possible.

The process of healthy ageing argues that all sectors share a common goal: to build and maintain functional ability. The Women's Health and Education Center's initiatives are structured around five key domains of functional ability that are essential to older people:

1. Ability to meet basic needs;
2. Ability to learn, grow and make decisions;
3. Ability to be mobile;
4. Ability to build and maintain relationships;
5. Ability to contribute.

To ensure functional ability in older people is important to address population ageing. The consideration of older people's abilities, relevant to all countries, emphasizes personal and environmental resources as well as intrinsic capacity. Placing emphasis on maximizing functional ability supports governments, civil society, and other partners in increasing their focus on results and impacts.

Women's Health and Education Center, focuses on these three key areas and cross cutting issues in its initiatives:

1. Combating ageism;
2. Enabling autonomy;
3. Supporting healthy ageing in all policies and at all levels of government.

As people age, their healthcare needs tend to become more chronic and complex. Many existing services in many countries were designed to cure acute conditions or symptoms; health issues are often managed in a disconnected and fragmented manner; and coordination is frequently lacking across care providers, settings, and time. Transforming health systems from these outdated approaches requires action on several fronts. These approaches are crucial if alignment is to be achieved.

Our action plan is designed to enhance different domains of abilities and encourages different sectors to encourage functional ability. In times of heightened concerns over the implications of population ageing, increased national austerity and scarce aid dollars, the focus on abilities provides a way for all sectors at all levels of government, to decide together, how to add health most efficiently to years.

Recommendations

1. Develop and ensure access to services that provide older-person-centered care;
2. Orient systems around intrinsic capacity;

3. Ensure a sustainable and appropriately trained workforce;
4. Recognizing long-term care as an important public good;
5. Assigning clear responsibility for development of a system of long-term care and planning how this will be achieved;
6. Creating equitable and sustainable mechanisms for financing care;
7. Defining the roles of government and developing the services that will be necessary to fulfill them;
8. Enacting legislation supporting flexible working arrangements or leaves-of-absence for family caregivers;
9. Supporting community initiatives that bring older people together to act as a resource for caregiving and other community-development activities;
10. Creating age-friendly environments.

Although these actions will inevitably require resources, they are likely to be a sound investment in society's future: a future that gives older people the freedom to live lives that previous generations could never have imagined.
