Empowerment and social participation of older people in Argentina and South Africa

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• Both countries are in vast continents: Latin America and Africa

• Both are developing ("less developed") countries in the "South"

• Population age 60+:
  Argentina  6.2 million  (15%)
  South Africa  4 million  (8%)

• Socio-demographic similarities, but different socio-political histories and contexts
South Africa
Situational analysis

- Empowerment rhetoric since 1991, boosted in 1999 (with UN declarations)
- A national investigation (2001) on elder abuse, perceived marginalisation, etc., lifted the lid on the parlous situation of older people
- A rationale and vehicle for subsequent empowerment and inclusion efforts
But responses were emotional, reinforcing age segregation, deepening perceptions of older people’s vulnerability.

An alternative view emerged: that of older people as contributors to society.

Government programmes aimed primarily at rekindling traditional reverence for older people, restoring their dignity.
The campaign to increase awareness and fight elder abuse proved an important empowerment vehicle.

The non-contributory social pension is an important empowerment tool: it accords beneficiaries pensioner status; enables pension sharing; contributes to multi-generational household livelihoods, local economies and development; thereby earning beneficiaries respect within their family and community.
Empowerment initiatives

- Literacy training programmes
- Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)
- Sports programmes and competitions
- Activities of “struggle” veterans
- Community based development programmes of older church and volunteer groups
- Victim empowerment programmes
The South African Older Persons Forum (SAOPF) is less an independent platform for older people’s voices to be heard, and more a government driven bureau to affirm the value of its policies.....
Envisioning what is in older people’s best interests

- A non-ageist, inclusive society, free of all institutional discrimination
- Continuing empowerment through a variety of training and upliftment, as well as self-help programmes
- Mobilising themselves as a group for institutional representation (no longer simply viewed as welfare recipients and voiceless)
• Greater openness of government to information and evidence; lacks expertise in its ranks

• Greater scope given for the preservation and transmission of cultures – older people being custodians of such knowledge, values and practices

• Enhanced visibility and status, e.g. through integration in intergenerational programmes
Meet basic needs. No longer marginalised. Enable older people to enjoy social justice, to be accorded respect in society and to live in dignity

ILC SA seeks to influence policy in this regard through two core programmes:
- Empowerment though knowledge of their human rights and how to exercise them
- Supporting grandmothers affected by AIDS, including caregivers: through training support, advocacy, dissemination of evidence for decision support, etc.
Successful strategies to date

- Senior centres, operated by NGOs, subsidised by government – Luncheon Clubs

- Variations of the senior centre model, e.g. multi-purpose sites

- Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA) – an NGO that empowers older caregivers through peer support, training, counselling, income generation, etc.
Participation in educare, after-school care, storytelling programmes (earn stipends)

Participation in civic affairs (voter education, advocacy, community leadership, etc.)

Overall: acquisition of skills and development of coping strategies; encouragement to stand up and speak out, to demand respect and respect for their rights, and to be heard
Challenges and the future

- Poverty eradication, implementation of the development agenda, equitable access to social justice
- Includes reducing the unemployment rate, to relieve older people of the burden of supporting adult kin
- Changing mind sets, away from welfarism to self-sufficiency. Weaning successive older cohorts off dependence on the social pension and other state services. Government to view older people as contributors to society
Eliminating ageist and discriminatory practices, that marginalise and debase, and increase vulnerability to abuse and exploitation

Removing or relaxing mandatory retirement laws

Educating older people on their human rights and exercising them

Government being open to evidence from external agencies and less reliant on internal decision making – regarding what is in older people’s best interests. Hearing older people’s voices. Older people speaking out!
Argentina
• Violence, age and gender discrimination are social phenomena with far-reaching effects on personal and Public Health worldwide

• Since first identified as a social and health problem more than 30 years ago, they have become a worldwide critical issue, and the mistreatment of older people is not considered unusual, in both developed and developing countries

• They cross legal, ethical and health care domains within society’s major institutions, constituting a complex issue with moral, socio-cultural, political and personal ramifications
• Age discrimination and elder abuse are barriers to equal treatment. Their rising visibility is markedly influenced by the rapidity of socio-economic change, weakening of the extended family, growing elderly populations, and growing concern for HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE.

• Concern is driving a worldwide effort to increase awareness of the problem, and to encourage the development of treatment and prevention programs.

• The effort is predicated on the belief that elders are entitled to live out their advancing years in PEACE, DIGNITY, GOOD HEALTH AND SECURITY.
INEQUALITIES

- Structural inequalities that have resulted in low wages, high unemployment, poor health services, gender discrimination, and a lack of educational opportunities have contributed to older persons’ vulnerability.

- For elders in the developing world, the risk of communicable diseases still exists and environmental hazards present yet another threat. At the same time they are subject to the long-term incurable and often disabling diseases associated with old age in the developed countries.

- The majority of elders “affirm that societal [structural] abuse” is the most frequent type of abuse, at least in most developing countries (WHO-INPEA, 2002).
Violations of Human Rights may have serious consequences for health. Policies and programs can either promote or violate Human Rights, depending on how they are designed and implemented.

Vulnerability and ill-health can be reduced by taking steps to respect, protect and fulfill older people’s Human Rights.

Human rights are relevant to a great many health issues, including prevention and treatment of multiple diseases, access to clean water and adequate sanitation, education and information regarding health, medical confidentiality, the availability of vital drugs, and taking care of marginalized and vulnerable groups such as the very old, racial minorities, refugees and people with disabilities.
“THE MARK OF THE NOBLE SOCIETY IS FOUND NOT IN HOW IT PROTECTS THE POWERFUL, BUT IN HOW IT DEFENDS THE VULNERABLE…” (O. Darkwa, 1997)

- Governments should work towards a national and comprehensive strategy to stop denial of rights and violence on grounds of age.

- Encompassing supportive legal frameworks, public education and training for professional staff in the public sector, and equipping them to detect and act on abusive situations.

- Policies that deliberately or by default marginalise people from active contributions to society because they are OLD are not only in breach of established human rights principles, but a waste of human and social resources.
RECOMMENDATIONS

- More solid knowledge and comprehensive research are necessary for policy, planning and practice
- We need intervention research and intervention programs
- Programs must stress the importance of stimulating seniors’ capacity for self-help and mutual aid, advocacy, choice, social participation, empowerment and leadership
- To be recognized as still valuable to society, to be considered a persona – a subject and not an object, should lower the risk
- To learn about remaining capacities, but at the same time: “To be able to come to terms that they might have to resign to some things in life”; that they might not get “all they want and should have to adapt themselves to new situations in the future”
Older people should enjoy a life of fulfilment, health and security; participate actively in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their society; and live with DIGNITY, free of negative stereotypes.

Only a change in attitudes, including elders’ attitudes and expectations, will be able to reduce discrimination and exclusion, and result in allocation of resources to meet their needs.

Social development as a way of thinking is ready to define, measure and act in a multidimensional context by paying attention to the promotion, realization and commitment of the full range of Human Rights of ALL PEOPLE...
Challenges and the future

- Social and economic transformation, due to internal and external migration, and the liberation of women and their progressive entry into the labour force – for example, calls for a rethinking of the roles of the State and the private sector, and about the concept of the extended family

- Policy makers must take into account weakening family support systems and inadequate social service provision, and provide older people with a decent standard of living

- The scope of the challenges means that the public sector, the private sector and academia should combine efforts and resources in innovative, multi-sectoral research

- Older persons must be included in the equality agenda

- Stronger political will and resources are needed to foster greater participation of older people in society
The LA region and Argentina in particular need innovative solutions to enhance older people’s well-being, to foster their social inclusion, and to ensure age and gender equality.

Ultimately the challenge for all, is not only to listen to what has been said, but to believe and act upon it…

Only then may we be able to achieve social cohesion and deliver lasting HUMAN RIGHTS, at ALL LEVELS of OUR GLOBAL SOCIETY…

Thank you for your attention
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GLOBAL ALLIANCE
Conclusions

- The socio-political climate in South Africa enables and impedes older people’s empowerment.
- A strong movement is under way in Latin America (and globally) to empower older people through protection of their human rights.
- A human rights approach is a powerful tool for enhancing all areas of older people’s life – and promoting their empowerment and social participation in the future.