



Dorcas

Submission to the call for contributions on older women 2021

Contributions from Iraq, South Sudan,
Ethiopia, Tanzania

Compiled for Dorcas
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1 Dorcas

Dorcasⁱ is an international organisation for relief and development. Dorcas works in 14 countries in three regions around the world: Africa, The Middle East and Eastern Europe.

We are Dorcas. We are a Christian organisation, inspired by the potential that lies within every human being. When we look at the world, we see unique individuals everywhere - striving to make the best of their situation. We strive for lasting change for those who live in poverty, are excluded, or are caught in a crisis. As Dorcas, we work directly with vulnerable individuals, the communities around them and wider societal structures to ensure our programmes are relevant and have a lasting impact.

2 What is in this contribution?

This written contribution contains a summary of responses to selected key questions from the questionnaireⁱⁱ. The responses summarized are provided by colleagues from four countries where Dorcas is present and active:

- Iraq
- South Sudan
- Ethiopia
- Tanzania

In addition a summary is given of a recent Dorcas report on COVID19 and the Rights of Older People in Developing Countries. The report and a National Aging Policy from Tanzania are shared along with this written contribution.

3 Summary of responses to selected key questions

The rights of older women in international, regional and national law, policies and programmes

1. What legal instruments, policies and programmes exist to address the particular challenges faced by older women, and how are they implemented and monitored?

In **Iraq**, older women (widowed, disabled, and divorced) are eligible to receive a social income from the Directorate of Social Care. This helps them face some of their income related challenges. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq the Ministry of Social Affairs manages infirmaries where older people can receive treatment.

The constitution of **South Sudan** recognises the rights of older people, however there are no adequate laws and policies to protect these rights and to ensure that their needs and concerns are addressed. Article 30 of the South Sudan Constitution states:

(1) all levels of government shall guarantee to persons with disabilities or special needs participation in society and the enjoyment of rights and freedoms set out in this Constitution, especially access to public utilities, suitable education and employment and

(2) the elderly and persons with disabilities or special needs shall have the right to the respect of their dignity. They shall be provided with the necessary care and medical services as shall be regulated by law.

Furthermore, the Pensions Fund Act, 2012 only protects the rights of the employed older people who constitute a smaller proportion in the population of older persons in South Sudanⁱⁱⁱ.



The government of **Ethiopia** has developed a Plan of Action addressed at older people in general. This Plan of Action focusses on the following themes:

- Health and well being
Enjoy active and healthy ageing by expanding health education and disease prevention, strengthen basic health care services and facilities; enabling older persons suffering from multiple diseases and permanent injury to receive long term treatment and care.
- Family and community care
Strengthen and sustain care for older persons through rural community and extended family system. Enabling urban families (which are changing to a nuclear one) provide proper care and support to older persons.
- Rights of older people
To properly understand rights of older persons. Enabling older persons exercise their rights.
- Housing and living environment
Enable older persons to benefit from various services within their living environment. To improve the livelihoods of the rural elderly. Integrate older persons living in distant places to their area of residence. Help older persons live in elderly-friendly houses. Make older persons living environment accessible for mobility and services.
- Social security
Enabling step by step all older persons to be covered by social security schemes.
- Education and training
Enable the society to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding about older persons in areas of education and training. Enable older persons to live properly by providing them access to education and training. Provide older persons with access to modern methods of working and technology. Enhance the participation of older persons to enable them transfer their accumulated knowledge and skills to the new generation.
- Employment and Income Generation
Change the negative attitude concerning employment and income generating jobs for older persons. Enable older persons to be engaged in productive works through reliable income and permanent employment.
- Poverty Reduction
To reduce the general poverty prevalent among older people. To bolster up the participation of older persons in poverty reduction activities. Design and implement gender-focused poverty reduction strategies.
- Gender and older persons
Fight wrong perceptions about older women; do away with traditional harmful practices and give recognition and respect to the contribution of older women and men. To enhance the social, economic and political role of older women. Cater for the problems of oldest and frail women through care and support programs.
- Protection of life and property
To prevent violence against older persons. Provide the necessary legal, economic social, and psychological support to older victims of violence.

In **Tanzania** legal instruments to address the particular challenges faced by older women include the following:

- Village to national level elderly councils



- Gender desk at district administration level
- National days for women and older persons

Tanzania has a National Ageing Policy under the Ministry of Labour, Youth Development and sports of 2003. The text of this policy is sent along with this written contribution.

The government of **Tanzania** implements various programmes to address the challenges faced by older persons and cooperates with different stakeholders in their implementation. These include:

- Non-Governmental Organizations such as Dorcac Aid International Tanzania, World vision, Help Age and others
- Voluntary agencies
- Government institutions annual programs

2. What type of statistical data are collected on older women, if any, and is it disaggregated by age, gender, and other relevant factors? How are older women defined for the purposes of law, policy and data collection?

In **Iraq** the percentage of the older population in Iraq amounted to 3%, according to the estimates of the Central Bureau of Statistics for the year 2018. The percentage of the older female population was 3.3%, while the percentage of older men was 2.9%." Iraq defines older people including older women as being 55 years of age and above.

In **South Sudan** it is very difficult to get good statistical data at country level as collection of statistical data is hardly done as a cause of conflict. Most data is coming from NGOs and UN-bodies, but in those cases is not covering the full country. Data collected (by NGOs) is more and more disaggregated by gender and age. From that point of view it should theoretically be possible to distract some date about older women from available statistics. In general it is not clear how and where to obtain comprehensive data covering the whole country.

Most likely this is also related to the fact that there is no clear definition for older persons.

There are no separate statistical data on older women in **Ethiopia**, but some studies show that the number of Ethiopian older women over 90 years of age reached 5000 in 2000 while that of men of the same age group was only 2400. Population projections show the number of older women will continue to grow proportionally over the coming years.

The definition for older women is assumed in the general definition for older people. The term 'elderly' or older person has different meanings in different countries; it is mainly explained and related to chronological age, functional age, as well as retirement age. According to the UN definition older persons are those people whose age is 60 years and over. This definition has gained acceptance in the Ethiopian context as it coincides with the country's official retirement age.

In **Tanzania**, statistical data are collected for all older people. However, during the collection of data, information is gathered based on gender. Older women are referred to be the group of older people aging from 60 years and above, that are not given equal opportunities with older men, faced with poverty, and always their number especially in rural areas is bigger than that of older men.



Economic, social and cultural realities lived by older women

4. What are the specific challenges and concerns faced by older women, including on the basis of their accumulated life experience as compared to older men, in enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights (for example in terms of social protection, health, education, work, adequate standard of living, land and property ownership)? Please provide related data and statistics, including disaggregated data, where available.

In **Iraq** older women's existing challenges are added to be the general expectation on them to take care of other family members especially those that are disabled, sick and weak. Women of 55 years and above in Iraq may experience verbal violence by family members when being told that they cause a burden on the family. Older women in Iraq are concerned about the future for different reasons such as the likelihood of having to leave their usual residence due to health reasons; the increasing cost of health care without the monetary means to pay for it; being afraid to go to care homes for older people.

Older women in **Iraq** are also affected by the security instability after 2003. The extended family ties are gradually shrinking resulting in the decline of coexisting extended families and the increase of separately living smaller (nuclear) families. This has negative repercussions on the lives of older women especially after the loss of a husband. They experience loneliness and isolation, despite the fact that the customs and social traditions in Iraq and other Arab countries urge others to take care of older people to their ability. Older women struggle with the complexities of the contemporary way of life, difficult economic conditions, living conditions of families and the expansion of the housing crisis.

Life is harsh for women in **South Sudan**. This applies to all women, but maybe the older women are in some cases a little bit better off because they're more respected than young women. Furthermore, if her husband has more wives (which is very common in South Sudan) and she is the 'first' wife, she has certain privileges, and many household chores are tasked to the other wife(s). Well-being of older women is very much depending on the family she has. In general, the family is supposed to take care of older people. However, due to years of war this kind of social bonding and support is no longer a given. Often it is even the other way around, whereby the older women have to take care of orphans whose parents died in the conflict.

In **Ethiopia** due to long standing and widely exercised harmful practices, the attitude towards women continues to be unjust and unbalanced. So older women as parts of female population are not exempted from these problems. As they get older and due to feminization of old age they live in destitution and loneliness. This problem is more pronounced for those who have lost their husbands. Many older women shoulder multiple responsibilities of caring for the sick, raising orphans and vulnerable children and children who lost their parents because of HIV/AIDS and providing care for older persons who must stay at home because of old age. In addition some older women have to work continuously to get by financially. In those case their income is insufficient they often have to resort to begging. Older women do not obtain remuneration for the service they provide both in and outside the house and their contributions are not clearly recognized. They are erroneously considered as dependents living on the support of others. Due to these attitudes older women are given less attention and respect than they deserve. Older women can find themselves in abject poverty as a result of being denied decision making powers, the right to property ownership and of being assigned to works that do not generate income and problems caused by HIV/AIDS.



Challenges facing older people, including women, in **Tanzania** are:

- Unequal opportunity to participate in decision making.
- Poor access to equal opportunities in economic development.
- Denial of rights to own and inherit property after the death of their spouse (especially land).
- Older women in some areas of Tanzania are raped and killed due to traditional and customary beliefs.
- Inadequate care and support from the community.
- Lack of nutritional food, most women are left at home with no access to enough and right food available. Older men can easily go out and look for the desired meal. This is due to the culture and norms of many societies in Tanzania.
- In poverty ranking, older women are the poorest group in most of the Tanzanian society.

6. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected older women differently than older men and how?

In **Iraq** COVID-19 is changing older people's daily routines, the care and support they receive, their ability to stay socially connected, and how they are perceived. Older people are being challenged by requirements to spend more time at home, lack of physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues, temporary cessation of employment and other activities and also by anxiety and fear of illness and death. In addition, women have less access to information on COVID-19 than men and are more likely to be unable to protect themselves from the disease. Women's incomes and livelihoods are more affected by coronavirus prevention measures than those of men. Women have less access to stable income than men such as retirement pension and social security benefits. Most of the women depend on assistance from relatives or debit. Many women-headed households who were dependent on small businesses have lost their business, and they will try to sell their assets to support their children and themselves.

In **South Sudan** direct health impact has been limited until the beginning of February 2021. Recently the number of cases is rising. However, to date the indirect impact is of much more of a concern. It is estimated that in 2021 the population in need of humanitarian assistance will increase to the highest level in recent years, driven by the escalation of inter-communal conflict, recurrent flooding, persistently poor macro-economic conditions, and the economic indirect impacts of COVID-19. Especially the IPC^{iv}-outlook is grim, projected many people to be in IPC 4 (emergency) or IPC 5 (catastrophe).

The government of **Tanzania** is not providing information regarding the situation of COVID-19. The situation in Tanzania seems to be serious to the older men group than the other group existing in the community.

7. Please share examples of how older women participate in and contribute to economic, social and cultural life, including inter-generational solidarity and support.

In **Iraq** older people socially play a role in sharing their life experiences with younger generations. From **South Sudan** this contribution is also mentioned: older women take care of grandchildren or other orphans because so many people have died during the ongoing conflict.



In **Ethiopia** Dorcas implements projects aiming to provide a future for children and to strengthen community networks supporting older people. In the households supported a woman is usually the breadwinner. The social structure they operate in aims at fulfilling cultural requirements and strengthening the intergenerational solidarity of the community. In the wider community women play an important role in the social, economic and cultural setup and intergenerational connectivity. This role is often played unseen and unrecognized. Recent HelpAge research and evaluations indicate that older persons in Ethiopia remain economically productive as long as they are physically and mentally able and as long as household requirements demand their contribution. Older persons are key contributors to household income and food security through compensated waged labour, profits from petty trade and small businesses and growing of agricultural produce as well as livestock rearing for direct household consumption and sales. Older persons especially women support households through complementary domestic activities including cooking, cleaning, washing and firewood and water collection. Both older men and older women act as primary caregivers for children and grandchildren in their care.

In everyday social life in **Tanzania** older women are sources of information, knowledge, and experience. In traditional life both older women and young people shared responsibilities. Whereas older women were custodians of customs and traditions, advisers, mediators and child carers, young people had the responsibility of providing basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, and protection.

Report on COVID-19 and rights of older persons

In addition to the information provided above, with this contribution Dorcas is also sharing the report **COVID-19 and the Rights of Older People in Developing Countries**.

With this report, we aim to inform and inspire policy makers and humanitarian and development practitioners on inclusion of the rights of Older People in the current COVID-19 crisis, as well as others yet to come. In the report we summarize data and evidence from recent studies and reports on the rights of older people in times of COVID-19 in low- and middle-income countries. We also share examples from Dorcas' practice and formulate recommendations based on good practices of other organisations as well as our own.

The recommendations and good practices are:

1. **Listen to** the voices of **all older people**. **Acknowledge** their capacities, leadership, knowledge and Resilience.
2. Specifically consider the risk and vulnerabilities of **female older persons**.
3. Engage **local (faith) leaders** in providing support to vulnerable older people in their communities and to mobilise their constituency.
4. Undertake a so-called **VAN (violence, abuse and neglect)** surveys among older people, to identify risk of and cases of violence, abuse and neglect.
5. Strengthen **community awareness programmes for prevention and control** of COVID-19 in local languages and through preferred modes such as radio, community meetings and word of mouth.
6. **Advocate** for increased access to diagnosis, testing, and treatment services for COVID-19 at province and district levels.
7. Ensure that messages are **appropriate and targeted** to older persons.
8. Provide **protective equipment** to older people in their homes.
9. Establish **volunteer groups** to provide home deliveries of medicine for older people who have a mobility disability or are unable to reach the health centre.



10. Expand existing **social protection programmes** for older people in order to respond to the pandemic in the short term and to build resilience in the long term.
11. Encourage and promote **home-based income generating activities** that will sustain older people and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.
12. Provide **psychosocial support** to older people, people with disabilities, and older people living alone.

Key documents

- Dorcas report on COVID-19 and the Rights of Older People in Developing Countries (2020).
- Tanzania National Aging Policy 2003.

ⁱ <https://www.dorcas.org/>

ⁱⁱ Key questions 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 from the questionnaire are answered. The other questions (3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) are not included in this contribution text.

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: https://media.africaportal.org/documents/ProtectionOfRightsOfOlderPersonsInSouth_Full.pdf

^{iv} Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of analytical tools, and processes, to analyse and classify the severity of a food security situation according to scientific international standards.

