



The Association of Former International Civil Servants, (Kenya)



Report on AFICS Symposium of “The Journey to Quality Ageing” in commemoration of the UN International Day of Older Persons (IDOP)

October 2nd, 2023
UN Complex, Gigiri, Nairobi



Symposium Participants.

Association of Former International Civil Servants (AFICS) Kenya Symposium

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble

In 1990, the first day of October was designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the *International Day of Older Persons* (IDOP) in recognition of the valuable role and contribution that older persons make to society and in order to address the opportunities and challenges associated with aging populations and the growing number of older persons. The year 2023 marked the 33rd commemoration of the IDOP with the theme: *'Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations'*. This year also coincided with the 75th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*. To commemorate the IDOP, AFICS-Kenya organised a symposium that was held in Nairobi at the United Nations Complex in Gigiri, on October 2nd, 2023.

Objectives of the symposium

The theme of the symposium: *'The Journey to Quality Ageing'* aimed to reflect on the global agenda on ageing and the priority areas set during the UN Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). Developed in 2002, the MIPAA addresses the opportunities and challenges of population ageing and set a global agenda to change attitudes, policies and practices around three priority areas: (i) advancing health and wellbeing into old age; (ii) older persons and development; and (iii) enabling a supportive environment for older persons. In light of this, the symposium addressed:

- The policy landscape of ageing in Kenya
- Access to healthcare and social protection for older persons
- Long-term care and self-care to promote successful and active ageing

Structure of the symposium

The meeting was structured into three plenary sessions. The first session was the official opening and welcome. Session two consisted of the keynote address and reflections on the paper by three discussants. Additionally, the session included the lived experiences of eminent senior citizens and practices from countries with more developed systems for supporting their aging populations. This was followed by a moderated discussion and Q&A session from the audience. The final session incorporated the closing remarks and discussion on the way forward.

The meeting was chaired by the President of AFICS-K, Ambassador Dr. John Kakonge; Mr. Michael Mwangi, a member of AFICS-K, was the Master of Ceremonies, and the meeting was moderated by Dr. Evelyn Gitau who is the Director of Research at the Africa Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC).

Participants

A total of 257 participants attended the symposium comprising current members of AFICS, some members of the Association of Former Ambassadors, four representatives from the Africa Population and Health Research Centre, and members of the *'Gifted to Lead'* alumni group of Alliance Girls' High School. Also in attendance were the current ambassadors to Kenya from The Netherlands and Norway.



P.S. Mr. Joseph Motari, Department for Social Protection and Senior Citizen Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Amb. Dr. John O. Kakonge, President, AFICS-Kenya and members of AFICS-K Executive Committee and the Subcommittees responsible for planning and preparation of the symposium.

SESSION I: OPENING AND WELCOME

The **Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Michael Mwangi's** welcoming remarks highlighted the valuable knowledge, wisdom, experience and resilience that older persons bring to society and the need for an environment that fosters healthy ageing and social protection for older persons. A society should not ignore the role of older persons and there is need for an inclusive and age-friendly society that promotes and values their contribution. A supportive environment plays a crucial role in enabling older people to age with quality and to thrive. While recognising the positive contribution of older persons, Mr. Mwangi emphasized the need for a conversation on the challenges and lack of opportunities faced by retirees.

The welcome address from the Director General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) was given by a representative, **Ms. Sandra Macharia, Director of United Nations Information Services.** Ms. Macharia commended the valuable efforts made by AFICS in supporting retirees. By quoting an African proverb which states: *“What an old person can see sitting down, the youth cannot see standing up,”* Ms. Macharia reiterated the commitment of UNON to support AFICS's consultancy service which draws on the wealth of experience of AFICS members and enables its members to continue to remain engaged and to serve as mentors and advisors. In reflecting on the theme of the symposium, Ms. Macharia pointed out that the *‘Journey to Quality Ageing’* is not a destination but a process and that quality ageing should be about adding life to years. The 2023 IDOP coincided with the 75th anniversary of the UN *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* and the message from the UN Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres, reiterated that we must do more to protect the dignity and interests of older persons worldwide, and that older persons are invaluable sources of knowledge and have a lot to contribute to peace, sustainable environments, and development. The Secretary General's message further highlighted the importance of intergenerational dialogue and solidarity and the need to protect lifelong learning and foster inclusion.

The symposium was officially opened by **Mr. Joseph Mogosi Motari, the Principal Secretary, State Department of Social Protection and Senior Citizens Affairs** at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Mr. Motari underscored the commitment the current government is making towards addressing issues pertaining to older persons. The government has made significant policy interventions through a robust national policy on older persons. It is currently in the process of passing the *Older Persons Bill* which will provide the legal framework to implement the various policies on older persons.

Further, the government has committed substantial funds to promote entrepreneurship among women and older people through the *Hustler Fund*, the *Women's Fund* and entrepreneurship training. *The Hustler Fund* provides 50 billion Kenya shillings annually for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), making financial access more affordable. *The Buy Kenya, Build Kenya* programme supports locally manufactured products. These initiatives recognise the entrepreneurial skills and spirits of older persons.

Mr. Motari also highlighted the *Social Protection Policy* which provides a safety net for the vulnerable in society. In this regard, the funds committed to the *Older Persons Cash Transfer* (OPCT) programme have increased from 19 billion Kenya shillings to 26 billion Kenya shillings representing an increase

from 0.8% to 1.5% of the GDP. The government intends to enrol half a million older persons in the OPCT in 2023 and every year for the next four years. The other key initiative from the State Department of Social Protection and Senior Citizens Affairs was the launch of the *Kirinyaga Rescue Centre* in 2021 for vulnerable older persons who are victims of neglect, abandonment, and abuse. The Department is in the process of establishing another centre in Kilifi County as the cases of elder abuse are particularly rampant in this county. Further, as part of commitment to universal health care, health insurance subsidies for vulnerable populations are provided by the National Health Insurance Fund.

Mr. Motari concluded his opening speech by inviting the Association to partner with the State Department of Social Protection and Senior Citizens Affairs as a key stakeholder to enrich the approaches seeking to address dignity and wellbeing of older persons in Kenya.



Symposium Participants.

SESSION II: KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction to the session and discussion agenda

The **President of AFICS, Amb. Dr. John Kakonge**, introduced the session by providing the background history of AFICS, its achievements and the objectives of the symposium. Founded in the 1970s and now with 70 chapters globally, the role of AFICS is to address pensions and health insurance for former international civil servants. AFICS has been successful in ensuring that members' pension funds are invested wisely at a time when other pension funds have collapsed due to poor management and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. AFICS has also successfully advocated for continued after-service health care and provides timely information to its members on health care options. In 2017, AFICS established a consultancy service to tap into the wealth of knowledge and experience of its members.

Dr. Kakonge highlighted the lack of political and policy priority on ageing issues more generally and the need for a special unit for older persons at the United Nations. At the national level, he noted that a lot of work is needed to mainstream ageing and that strategies could include the establishment of a *National Council of Elders* noting the successes of *The Elders Council*, founded by Mr. Nelson Mandela in 2007. The latter is an independent group of global leaders working for peace, justice, human rights, and a sustainable planet. To enhance the security and prevent abuse of older persons at the community level, Dr. Kakonge suggested that the terms of service for *Nyumba Kumi* be extended to include welfare and security of older persons.



President of AFICS-Kenya.

Noting the discrimination of older persons in employment and the ageist sentiments raised in Kenya's National Assembly against older persons holding senior positions in government, Dr. Kakonge highlighted that older persons have a right to decent employment and a right to determine when and how to retire from service pointing to renowned public figures like Henry Kissinger an American diplomat, Rupert Murdoch the media mogul, and Mahathir Mohamad, former prime minister of Malaysia who are all over the age of 90 years and still active in their careers. He called for an age inclusive and age diverse society that recognises everyone. Dr. Kakonge concluded by thanking all sponsors who made the symposium successful, namely: the UN office; Africa Population Health Research Centre; the Retirement Benefits Authority; Union Logistics; KCB; Mayfair Insurance, and MilikiSpace Property.

In her welcoming the keynote presenter, **Dr. Evelyn Gitau, Director of Research at APHRC**, highlighted that responding to and addressing issues relating to older persons is not only a concern for older person but should be a matter to be addressed by all. The number of older people is rising and as a society we cannot afford to leave anyone behind if we are to fulfil the *Declaration for Human Rights* for all and to ensure equity. In order to build a diverse and inclusive society, older people should enjoy the rights to be economically and socially productive, the right to meaningful work, the right to decide when and where to retire, the right to social protection, and the right to economically benefit from their contributions. Dr. Gitau indicated that APHRC has pioneered research on older persons and was for a long time the only institution in Africa conducting research on ageing.

Keynote Address by Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi:

Journey to Quality Healthy Ageing in Africa

Dr. Kyobutungi, Executive Director of the African Population and Health Research Centre, began her address by showcasing the life of her own parents who have remained active and engaged beyond the time they retired from the civil service. Her father, who recently celebrated his 80th birthday, first retired at the age of 40 years but has continued to be active through service to the community in various capacities. Equally, her mother, who is a trained midwife, retired at the then mandatory age of retirement of 55 years and went on to work for the private not-for-profit sector offering her midwifery knowledge and expertise. In her remarks, older persons can and are still providing services to society despite retiring from formal employment. Echoing the theme of the symposium, Dr. Kyobutungi emphasised that healthy ageing is a continuous process that ensures we have fulfilling lives throughout our life-course and it is important to collectively do the things that will make our old age meaningful. Nonetheless, healthy ageing is not only a function of the individual, but also a function of the structures and enabling environment in the society in which we live.

Highlighting the share number and the rapidly growing population of older people in Africa, despite it being a young continent, the wakeup call now is to start developing supportive social and policy frameworks to respond to the needs of older people. In Kenya alone, there are over 2 million people over the age of 60 years. The need for urgency of action was invoked through the Chinese proverb: *"the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second-best time is now."*

Dr. Kyobutungi spoke of four key areas that need addressing. The first is changing the attitudes towards and about ageing, especially the prevailing negative attitudes which perceive older people as weak and frail. Secondly, there is need for a responsive healthcare system as the current systems were designed for communicable diseases. Currently, 1 in 3 Kenyans has a non-communicable disease (NCD), so there is need for health systems that encourage NCD prevention and promote healthy ageing. The third key area, is the need for implementation of existing international and national policy and legal frameworks. Finally, social protection, which is a widely recognised approach to cushion populations against economic risks, was highlighted as the fourth area. Globally, 68% of older people have access to an old age pension which is a form of social protection. In Kenya, only 25% of older people have access to a pension, which leaves out 75% of eligible people. The non-contributory pensions currently in existence in a small number of African countries provide between USD 6 and USD 20 dollars per month which is not sufficient to maintain a descent quality of life. Dr. Kyobutungi emphasised the need to increase the amount and coverage.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Kyobutungi reiterated her scorecard towards a journey to quality ageing which entails: (i) changing the narrative about old age as there is still a long way to go in acknowledging shifts in the ageing context, opportunities, and challenges; (ii) implementing adequate social protection; (iii) shifting healthcare systems to adapt to the dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and (iv) acknowledging the realities of long-term care in the Africa context. Families alone cannot fully support and meet the needs of their older members and thus governments need to step in. The solutions should be adaptive to Africa and not just copy wholesale long-term care models from other contexts. Africa needs a body of evidence in order to have a clear understanding of the trends, the lived experience, and how policies and interventions are working. APHRC, as a leading African research, policy and advocacy organisation is committed to partnerships in order to make the life of older people in Africa better.

Discussant I: Dr. Alfred Shem Ouma:

Abandoned and burdened retirees

Dr. Ouma, Retirement Benefits Authority (RBA), Chief Manager, Research and Strategy, focused on pensions, one of the key social protection pillars. Dr. Ouma gave a brief background history of RBA which was set up by an act of parliament in 1997 to regulate and protect the pensions industry. Whereas there has been significant progress in the pensions industry, for instance growing the assets to the current value of 1.7 trillion Kenya shillings, equivalent to 13% of the GDP, there are a number of challenges which still need addressing in order to improve coverage and value of the pension. The 25% coverage in Kenya is overwhelmingly defined by contributions from 17% of the workforce who are in salaried employment and contribute to a pension scheme, leaving behind 83% in the informal sector where collection and remittance is problematic. Another challenge is unremitted contributions, which in 2023 stands at KSHS 41.8 million, placing many employees at risk of not receiving their pension upon retirement. The high unemployment levels among the working age population of about 3 million, almost half of whom are under the age of 30 years, presents a problem for their future security in old age and underscores their dependency on others for their economic wellbeing. A further consequence of the high unemployment rate is supported by findings from an RBA study that showed that the majority of retirees spend their pension supporting their children and grandchildren by paying for school fees, shelter, and other living costs.

While recognising efforts to improve pension coverage, such as the government's non-contributory *Older Persons Cash Transfer* (OPCT) programme, this could be supplemented with food vouchers to improve food security. Dr. Ouma further highlighted two key issues facing retirees: inadequate shelter and lack of comprehensive medical cover. To address the housing issue, the government has put in place a policy which allows pension scheme members to access 40% of the accrued benefits to buy a house. While commenting on long-term care needs for older people, Dr. Ouma noted that most older persons prefer to age in place at home, therefore, trained caregivers can provide care at home but there is need for standardisation and oversight in the emerging elder care industry.

Discussant II: Prof. Dan Kaseje:

Long-term care for older persons

Prof. Kaseje, Professor Emeritus and Chair of the Tropical Institute of Community Health and Development, Kisumu, Kenya, focused on long-term care for older persons drawing on his experience in research and training in community health since 1979 where he has collaborated with various institutions including the University of Nairobi, KEMRI/CDC and the Anglican Church of Kenya. To address the community-based and home-based long-term care for older persons, the Institute of Community Health and Development has adapted a curriculum developed by the Ministry of Health to train and equip home caregivers with skills to care for older persons at home. By the end of a 3-month training offered in community colleges, caregivers have the knowledge and skills for home management, can offer basic healthcare, recognise danger signs, and collect data to enable monitoring and further improvements. The course comprises three modules: *Module I: Life skills* - covers topics such as ethics and value in elder care, counselling, safety in the home, first aid, resource management, cultural context and team approach. *Module II: Home care* - covers tasks around the home, cleanliness, waste disposal, rights to health for older person, essential care package for continuum of care, factors influencing wellbeing, social determinants of health, health promotion and disease prevention. *Module III: Home nursing* - covers the needs of older person, holistic pain management, treatment of common ailments, handling medication, referral linkages, gender-based violence, elder abuse and end-of-life care. Prof. Kaseje noted that in order for continuous development, there is regular engagement with stakeholders including the older persons, caregivers, and service providers.

Panel of Eminent Persons' Contribution:

Lived Experience in Kenya and Experience from Europe

The first talk on the lived experience was by **Hon. Titus Mbathi, a former Minister, Permanent Secretary, Member of Parliament and chair of a parastatal.** Hon. Mbathi, who is 94 years old, began his talk by pointing out that this stage in his life is the best and most productive yet. He first retired in 1969 at the age of 41 years, then re-entered employment, joined politics as an elected representative before again retiring from public service and starting his current profession as a business person. His advice was that one should remain active and that happiness is key. Retirement from public service should not be seen as active life coming to an end as one still has a lot to contribute to society, suggesting that one can shift from been employed to being an employer through engagement in activities which generate employment. Commenting on the theme of the symposium, Hon. Mbathi

stated that quality ageing means access to basic needs, food, shelter, and good health. His observation on the current situation of older people in Kenya is that there has been a change as older people lack support from family members and are perceived as a burden to the community. The cash transfer programme run by the government, though a good initiative, is not sufficient to meet the needs of older people.

Hon. Mbathi highlighted three opportunities and possibilities in which AFICS can contribute as champions for older persons: firstly, by organising similar symposiums annually to highlight issues of older persons. Secondly, AFICS could partner with other organisation such as the *Rotary Club* and *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* to leverage advocacy for older persons, and thirdly, AFICS should consider working with the National Assembly to initiate bills on the welfare of older persons.

Hon. Dr. Julia Ojiambo, an academic and gender activist who has championed numerous courses for vulnerable groups was the second speaker discussing their lived experience. Hon. Ojiambo began her talk by reflecting on a documentary titled: *'Secrets of the Blue Zone'*, which attempts to uncover the key to longevity in communities with the highest concentration of centenarians. A pioneer and frontrunner in many aspects, Hon. Ojiambo credited her career and successes to purposing her life to be of service to her local, national, and international community. She attributed her success to finding an adventure with purpose as she has passionately championed the causes of special groups such as the youth, women and persons who are differentially abled, thus giving her a purpose and goal in life. Commenting about the journey to quality ageing, Hon. Ojiambo noted that there is no formula to ageing, though she advocates for good nutrition, nurturing long-term relationships and continuously creating new networks. Hon. Ojiambo has continued to be active in society as this gives her intellectual stimulation and social challenges to pursue, for instance, she is currently a trustee of the National Council for the Disabled and of the University of Nairobi. She is currently writing an autobiography which has given her time to reflect on her life journey and the three key principles which she attributes to her success, namely: her religious faith, her commitment to serve vulnerable people, and her commitment to family.



Hon. Dr. Julia Ojiambo - Symposium panelist

Drawing on the life of individuals such as the British Fauja Singh who started running marathons at the age of 90 years, Hon. Ojiambo reckoned that our experiences of ageing are different. Commenting on the situation of older persons in Kenya, she highlighted the disadvantages faced by women through low pay and lack of access to pensions and the burden of taking care of children and grandchildren. Despite the many challenges however, Hon. Ojiambo sees many opportunities brought about by advances in technology citing platforms such as Zoom and mobile phone technology which have revolutionised connectivity and a series in The Economist magazine: *‘Living to 120’*, which showcases various ways science is advancing in slowing the process of ageing.

Hon. Ojiambo commended AFICS for being supportive and a useful resource for its members. Retirees are a useful resource and have a lot to contribute and the forum has a potential to create an inclusive society by pushing for equal opportunities for older persons in society and advocating for policies to bring services closer to those in need and those that support the wellbeing of older persons.

His Excellencies Mr. Maarten Brouwer, the Ambassador of The Netherlands in Kenya and **Mr. Gunnar Andreas Holm, the Ambassador of Norway** in Kenya highlighted the major differences and a few similarities between ageing in The Netherlands and Norway compared with Kenya. Amb. Brouwer commented on the advanced stage of population ageing in The Netherlands where the median age is 42.4 years and 20% of the population is retired. Over the past decades, there have been changes in the characteristics of the older population. Currently, the population is much more diverse and due to improvements in health and quality of life, the population is less dependent on others and is much healthier and thus more active in demanding their rights from government. Whereas in the past the majority of older people moved into retirement homes upon retirement, there is now a growing preference for ageing in place, living independently and receiving long-term care at home. This, however, raises the issue of loneliness for those with challenges with mobility and the need for environments that enables movement for those with functional limitations. The old age dependency ratio is a huge concern in The Netherlands and constantly raises debate on the pressure of retirement pensions on the working age population. What is common with the Kenyan situation is the issue that older people still want to be relevant in society. In his conclusion, his advice was to have a plan for old age where one is not too dependent on others for social and economic wellbeing.

Amb. Holms echoed the views from the Ambassador of The Netherlands that there are large social and demographic differences between Kenya and Norway, however, in terms of similarities, the importance of family and the sense of belonging cut across the two societies. Of major concern to Norway is the large proportion of older men; 25% of the population of older people have never married, raising concerns related to long-term care and loneliness. Amb. Holms’s advice to retirees was for the need for practical planning and investment, for instance: carefully choosing the location and type of housing that is accommodative of ageing, the need to prepare for reduced income upon retirement, and the need for building social networks especially among men in order to remain socially engaged. He also advised on being more flexible about when to retire, as retiring early can give opportunities to younger people.

Q & A session:

In the Q&A session, **Amb. Boaz Mbaya** raised a concern on the plight of retired civil servants who earn meagre pensions yet they have higher responsibilities and social expectations in the society due to their past positions. **Eng. Chris Njenga** commented on the lack of social protection for traders and craftsmen and asked whether they can be included in the upcoming bill. **Dr. Ouma** responded that the informal sector is largely excluded from the current pension system which relies on mandatory deductions by employers whereas the self-employed have to make voluntary contributions to a pension scheme. The aspiration of RBA is to make pensions enrolment mandatory in line with global trends. Responding to a question by **Eng. Njenga** on the inclusion of the topic of elder abuse, persecution and penalties in the training curriculum for caregivers given the rampant cases in the community, **Prof. Kaseje** commented that while elder abuse is currently covered in the training, there is need for evidence to advocate for legislation.



Dr. E. Gitau - Symposium moderator and Dr. C. Kyobutungi - Symposium keynote speaker.

SESSION III: CLOSING SESSION

Following a recap of the day's proceedings and the points of action to be taken forward presented by **Dr. Gloria Langat** and **Prof. Linda Ethangatta**, the closing remarks were given by **Mr. Charles Machira**, the **Chief Executive Officer of the Retirements Benefits Authority (RBA)**. Mr. Machira highlighted the progress the RBA has made in legislation and policies governing pensions in Kenya since it was established in 1979. Nonetheless, he pointed out the challenges which include: the low proportion of Kenyans saving for retirement, and the low return of the pension which, at about 32% of salary at the point of retirement, is below international standards. The incentives given to retirees are also inadequate and this needs improvement in order to incentivise a culture of saving for retirement and improving the quality of life of retirees. A Retirement Benefits Policy, currently in the process of being developed, will assist in addressing some of these challenges.

Recommendations

1. Formation of a Council of Elders to champion the cause of older people.
2. Adoption of a collaborative approach whereby government agencies, organizations, and the community work together to address the multifaceted challenges of an aging population.
3. Hold an annual symposium in recognition of IDOP organized by AFICS-K and partners.

Specific areas that need further research and development:

1. Expansion of social programmes, in terms of amount and coverage, re: pensions, healthcare, and social protection.
2. Acknowledgement of the long-term care realities of African families and increase support to families and communities.
3. Development of long-term care and self-care strategies to support healthy aging.
4. Provision of thorough training for care-givers and standardization of the industry.
5. Provision of learning support to elderly people regarding technology use, particularly regarding its benefits of social connectivity.
6. Development of education programmes to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes about older persons.
7. Implementation of national and global policies and legislative frameworks.
8. Address unremitted pension contributions by employers.
9. Realignment of national healthcare to provide more care for NCDs.
10. Government appointment of qualified people to boards without limitations on age.

To conclude the symposium, a vote of thanks was given by **Prof. Wariara Mbugua**.



*“ You can only perceive **real beauty** in a person as they get **older.**”*
— Anouk Aimee



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