



United Nations
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Population Ageing in the Small Island Developing States in Africa

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United Nations Workshop on Preparing for the Challenges of Population Ageing in Sub-Saharan Africa: review of the draft survey tool to the sub-Saharan African context.

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Background and Context

- ECA undertook research activities on “*Ageing and development in Small Island Developing States in Africa*,” as part of a field project on the Demographic Dividend in Africa
- ECA recognizes Africa’s older persons’ potential relevance and their roles in achieving a demographic dividend.
- This research built on the findings and recommendations of the 2013 Africa Regional Review of the ICPD-PoA, and on the ECA report on the review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in Africa.
- The research activities aimed at generating robust gender disaggregated knowledge and information on older persons in the Small Island Developing States of Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius and Sao Tome and Principe



Background and Context

- In Africa, older people have traditionally been viewed in a positive light, as repositories of information and wisdom to society. In this regard there is need to have programs that keep them fit and experience a healthy ageing process and contribute their time, experience and knowledge , so they can feel useful, increase their self-esteem and contribute to improving existing social needs;
- Across the continent, 64 percent of men over 60 years continue to work across the formal and informal sectors. Older women continue their domestic and subsistence farming roles;
- Despite the indispensable contribution, many older people in Africa continue to experience deepening poverty, discrimination, violence and abuse. Many live in rural areas, where, they experience economic exclusion and they do encounter social exclusion due to age discrimination and changing roles and practices within the family.



Objectives of the Study

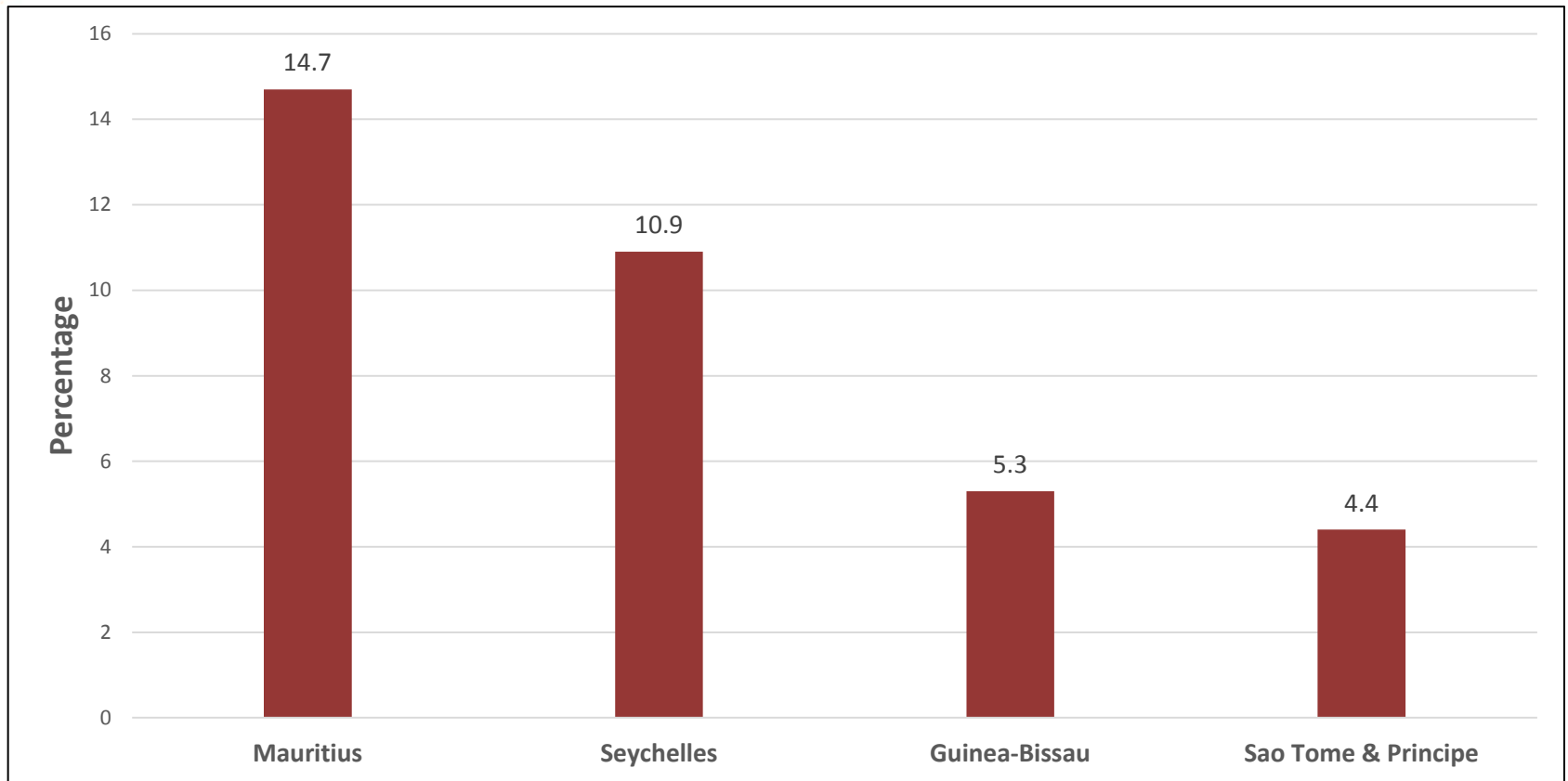
The broader objective of the study was to generate new knowledge and information on implications and opportunities of population ageing with attention to its gendered dimensions in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the ECA.

The specific objectives were:

- To assess the situation of older persons in SIDS and specifically in the areas of social and economic development, health and well-being, and enabling and supportive environment;
- To identify and review policies, programmes and strategies that SIDS have put in place in addressing concerns of older persons, and
- To document good practices and lessons learned that can inform policy formulation and implementation on ageing and development in both the SIDS and mainland states of Africa.



Figure 1: Percentage of Older Persons (60+ years) to Total Population in the Study Countries (2015)



Characteristics of Older Persons

- According to Figure 1, the proportion of population aged 60+ years was highest in Mauritius (14.7%), followed by Seychelles (10.9%), Guinea-Bissau (5.3%), and Sao Tome and Principe (4.4%), respectively.
- Evidence also suggests that the sex ratio of population aged 60+ years as of 2015 was highest in Guinea-Bissau at 86.6, was 79.7 in Seychelles, 79.3 in Mauritius and was least in Sao Tome and Principe at 76.4.





Findings

1: Older Persons and Development

Older people contribute to their families and societies in multiple ways— as leaders, consumers, householders, workers, farmers, educators, primary carers, business people, health providers and environmental protectors.



Findings

2. Health and well-being of older persons

There are health care costs associated with an ageing population that African SIDS and mainland countries need to acknowledge.

- In Guinea-Bissau for example poor health system in terms of hospital equipment and infrastructure, doctors and medical assistance. High illiteracy rates were a hindrance to effective delivery of health services to older persons, diseases such as malaria, diarrheal diseases, as well as AIDS and an almost established cycle of cholera epidemics. Threats of Ebola were imminent due to the geographic proximity to neighbouring Guinea-Conakry and the porosity of borders.
- In Sao Tome and Principe multiple factors influenced the health status of older persons, notably: access to safe drinking water, personal and environmental hygiene conditions, removal and treatment of waste, the availability of latrines or toilets, regular and balanced feeding among many others.
- The leading causes of deaths among older people are from non-communicable diseases in Sao Tome and Principe were diabetes, hypertension, tumors and stroke. Similarly, information gathered from Guinea Bissau's Simão Mendes Hospital in November 2015 highlighted the most common diseases among older people as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension and respiratory diseases among others.



Findings

3. Enabling and supportive environment

An essential component of the well-being of older persons is their living conditions including housing and an enabling environment that is supportive to ageing.

- The continuum of services/programmes to care for older people includes government social welfare services, old people's homes, community care and residential care.
- Access to these differential levels of care depends on the needs for each individual and income levels. In most cases, those that can afford tend to use privately run (and better equipped) old people's homes or receive such services from professional care-givers in the comfort of their homes.
- On the other hand, the indigent rely of government social welfare programmes, or are left at the mercy of their communities or their family members to provide such care.
- The study identified varying levels of access to enabling and supportive services. Mauritius tended to have better organised systems to address issues of older persons compared to other SIDS.



Conclusions

- Ageing in Africa, is happening during a relatively shorter period, and African countries are facing the simultaneous challenge of development and meeting the needs of rapidly increasing numbers of older persons.
- There is a wide range of lessons to learn from the experiences of the Small Islands Developing States:
 - Expanding and reforming pension systems
 - Incentives that encourage employers to retain, train, hire, protect and reward older workers
 - Ensuring that health care systems respond to the needs of older persons
 - Investing in Universal Health Coverage
 - Creating age-friendly environments
 - Creating inclusive environments that embrace age diversity



Policy Recommendations

African countries and SIDS especially are therefore called to urgently:

- **Treat** ageing as an opportunity not a burden. Governments need to harness the potential of older persons through enhancing their economic activities, the intergeneration connections and their representation at community and national levels.
- **Use** the window of opportunity to have forward looking policies and plan for the longer term in terms of social security and promotion of universal health coverage.
- **Move** from health care systems that focus mainly on curative needs to broad health care systems that meet people's needs throughout their life course; thus health systems that respond to preventive, curative, palliative and specialized needs.
- **Create** enabling and supportive age friendly environments to ensure older person's abilities. This entails improving infrastructure and the use of new technology to enhance mobility and independence, combating age related abuse, discrimination and neglect and ensuring human rights of older persons are upheld.
- **Strengthen** collection and use of age-inclusive data including on income security, health care and social security in regional and national policy processes.



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