

Elders in Rwanda need leaders' support to face old age, study finds

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Rwanda's Government should investigate how leaders can honor and

support older people who – despite making a valuable contribution to society across their lifetimes – face intense poverty in old age due to lack of water, food and health care, according to a new report.

Rwandan elders seek a retirement as mentors, cultivators, neighbors and citizens, but face growing old after the Tutsi genocide of 1994 with severe mental health challenges, loneliness and the dislocation of rapid urbanization.

They also face financial and other abuse from neighbors and some rogue parts of the churches they attend – with Rwanda's traditional landscape of care by the extended family is broken by genocide and social change.

Produced by researchers at the University of Birmingham and commissioned by Christian charity Tearfund, the report sets out a blueprint for supporting older people in Rwanda, calling for a presidential commission of inquiry to explore how to support elders. Tearfund will now trial a [pilot project](#) to respond to the report in country.

Lead researcher Francis Davis, Professor of Communities & Public Policy at the University of Birmingham, commented: "Rwanda will increase its number of older people threefold over the next 30 years, yet so many of the country's policy makers claim that the future is youth."

"Our study explores the needs of older people to identify how a better-equipped Christian church might work with partners to fulfill those needs. However, elders' needs are greater than expected and traditional approaches to meeting them won't be enough on their own." "We now want to work with partners in-country to design, develop and trial a pilot program that combines a refreshed elder and mental health inclusive and integrated approach to caring for older people in Rwanda."

He added that by 2050, there will be more over-65s than under-18s in the world, yet despite this and Rwanda's predicted increase in older people, June's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, in Kigali, will take youth as its theme.

The study's major findings show:

- Profound vulnerability and invisibility around the needs of older people.
- Very challenging mental health gaps, trauma and stigma affecting older people.
- Gaps in social protection and health policy and WHO advice in regards to older people, despite Rwandan welfare successes.
- Significant faith-based good practice with a huge critical mass
- Gaps in the churches' understanding of older people and their consequent response.
- Possible weaknesses in the traction of Tearfund's approaches when it comes to inclusion of older people.
- Local elder abuse and safeguarding risks within churches, and wider NGO safeguarding risks.
- Gaps in development of relevant safeguarding policies and codes of conduct in the wider NGO sector when it comes to the distinctive needs of older people.

Professor Davis commented: "The traditional narrative of caring for older people by families is broken, but not entirely replaced by any other coherent form of care or support. The new care landscape presents new pressures and big opportunities for church, state and nation. It will be a tragedy if this isn't debated not only in Rwanda but also as the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting makes its way to Kigali later this year."

More information: Ageing in Rwanda – Challenges and Opportunities

for Church, State and Nation. learn.tearfund.org/~media/fil...wanda-compressed.pdf

Provided by University of Birmingham

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