

CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL INTEGRATION



Two older people at a community meeting in Kuruman, North-West Province

6.1 Community – Based Support Programmes

For many years government policy has operated on the assumption that older persons in black communities can rely on the immediate family and the extended family as a support network. Experience suggests that this assumption no longer holds true. Whether through economic circumstances or disintegration of cultural norms, the reality is that many families are not able to support their older relatives. In fact, many younger relatives are dependent on the social grants of older persons. Community-based support programmes are becoming increasingly important in the services provided to older people.

Clubs and Service Centres

The South African National Council for the Aged has played a leading role in the provision of community support through its clubs for older persons (also known as luncheon clubs). There are approximately 900 clubs in the country and they operate mostly in disadvantaged communities. The number of clubs has increased nearly threefold since 1993 and has an estimated membership of over 65 000. The actual number of people attending the clubs is larger than the official membership as family members and friends also attend. The clubs provide meals, recreational opportunities, religious activities as well as opportunities for income generation projects. Larger clubs provide health screening and health education and in some instances outreach services such as meals-on-wheels. Older persons are required to pay a membership fee. The Provincial Departments of Social Development subsidise the clubs, but due to budgetary constraints in some provinces, not all clubs receive subsidies.

The establishment of these clubs is a response to the need for community-based support programmes in disadvantaged communities. Alongside the increase in the number of clubs there has been a decrease in the number of service centres for older persons. Historically, the majority of service centres were for White people. There are approximately 217 service centres serving 67 232 older persons.

Lending Depots

Lending depots or equipment banks provide care equipment on loan to families who care for frail older persons. These lending depots are critical for those families who

cannot afford to purchase equipment. The lending depots are run by non-governmental organisations who have to rely on donations of equipment.

Pension Committees

Pension Committees operate in all provinces. These pension committees consist of volunteers who assist older persons at pension pay points and organise transport to and from pension pay points. Pension committees also provide refreshments to older persons at the pension pay points.

6.2 Abuse of older persons

Ministerial Committee on the Abuse, Neglect and Ill-treatment of Older Persons

The abuse of older people occurs in many countries, developed and developing and South Africa is no exception. The abuse of older persons has been hidden from view for many years. Following reports of abuse of older persons in residential care, the Minister of Social Development appointed a committee to investigate the nature and extent of elder abuse, neglect and ill-treatment and to make recommendations for prevention. The Committee was appointed in March 2000 and was chaired by the Human Rights Commissioner, responsible for monitoring the rights of older persons. Other members of the Committee included Members of Parliament and people who had been working in the field of ageing. The Committee submitted its report to the government in February 2001 and the findings and recommendations of the Committee were adopted by Cabinet.

The approach adopted by the Committee was to hold public hearings in all the provinces, paying special attention to rural areas. The Committee also visited institutions, pension pay-points and the private homes of individuals to gain first hand knowledge of the conditions under which older people lived.

The Committee found that abuse - physical, emotional, financial - and neglect was common in residential homes, within families, within communities and by government officials and other service providers. The main findings of the Committee include:

Residential Care

- There were no uniform standards with regard to cleanliness, accommodation, nutrition, staff ratios and the minimum standards for registered homes were often not observed.

- Conditions in black homes were worse, with a lack of adequate equipment and staffing.
- Admissions policies effectively excluded older persons with limited means.

Payment of social grants

- Conditions at pension pay points were undignifying. Older persons were expected to stand in long queues for hours without shelter. Frail people were not prioritised for payment. Officials and payment contractors were abusive towards older persons. Money lenders, burial societies and vendors harassed older persons.
- Delays in obtaining new identity documents resulted in grants being stopped without adequate warning or explanation.

Family and community care

- At all public hearings older persons complained about abuse by family members.
- There was an increase in reports of violent crimes against older persons. People in rural areas complained about a lack of responsiveness of police to their complaints.
- Help lines were inaccessible to older persons who do not have access to telephones.
- Residential homes consumed a large portion of the budget, leaving very little to fund community-based support programmes. Much of the work done by volunteers and non-governmental organisations did not receive adequate financial assistance from the government.
- Local authorities were unhelpful towards older persons who, due to circumstances of poverty, were unable to pay the increased costs of basic services such as water and electricity. Many local authorities did not apply the Indigency Policy.
- Services provided by government departments were fragmented.
- Generically trained social workers were not equipped to respond to the needs of older

persons.

The Committee made comprehensive short term and medium term recommendations. The main recommendations include:

- The establishment of a national representative statutory mechanism to ensure effective communication and coordination on issues of ageing
- The establishment of a Task Team to attend to the urgent issues identified in the report
- A comprehensive new Act on the Status of Older Persons
- National norms and standards for all forms of care, including funding
- Community-based support programmes for older persons affected by HIV/AIDS
- Training of social workers and instituting disciplinary action against those who disrespect older persons
- Establishment of an inter-sectoral committee of government departments to enhance coordination
- Urgent attention to the issue of affordability of basic services
- Expansion of and support to community-based care and support programmes
- Investigation of individual complaints received in the course of the public hearings
- Improvements in application procedures and payment of social grants as well as improvement of pension pay points
- Indexing of social grants to inflation to ensure that the real value of the grant is not eroded
- An audit of subsidised homes for older persons and the identification and inspection of all unregistered homes

Progress with Implementation

There has been progress with the implementation of the recommendations.

- A large part of the recommendations was related to social grants. The Department of Social Development has taken up these issues in its programme to improve social security.
 - o Grant increases are above inflation rate
 - o Norms and standards for social security services have been developed and implementation has commenced
 - o An audit of infrastructure at pension pay points is close to completion
 - o Most provincial departments of social development have established help desks at pension pay points
 - o A special course is being developed to train 3000 social security officials over a period of three years
 - o Negotiations with banks to waive administration fees are in progress
 - o Service level agreements of pension payment contractors have been reviewed in brought into line with national norms and standards
 - o Procedures for the review of eligibility for social grants have been simplified
 - o The government has appropriated R2 billion to make arrear payments to beneficiaries who were disadvantaged by administrative delays

- The data collection on the audit of residential homes has been completed and the data is being analysed.

- Provincial Departments of Social Development are investigating over 1500 individual complaints received by the Committee. Progress in the rural provinces is slow due to difficulties in contacting the complainants.

- The issue of abuse of older persons has been incorporated into the government's Victim Empowerment Programme. This programme provides counselling and referral services to victims of abuse.

- The draft policy and legislation on the Status of Older Persons is being reviewed to ensure alignment with the recommendations of the Committee

- The programme of providing free basic water and electricity is underway.

- The transformation of services to older persons, including the issues of subsidising non-governmental organisations and the training of social workers, form part of a comprehensive transformation programme.

As older persons are susceptible to robberies, domestic violence and rape, Police Station Commissioners have prioritised the protection of older persons, especially at pension pay-points. The South African Police Services are also conducting awareness, raising programmes which focuses on the rights of older persons as victims of crime.

The Committee's report revealed serious violations of the human rights of older persons, the very people who fought tirelessly for the achievement of democracy in South Africa. The work of the Committee is an important milestone in the realisation of the rights of older persons. It gave older persons the opportunity to be heard and placed the issue of older persons high on the national agenda. It also demonstrated the government's commitment to tackling the problem of abuse.

6.3 Volunteerism and Community Participation Amongst Older People

Many older persons in South Africa live under difficult circumstances. This has not, however, diminished their willingness to be active participants in their own development and in the development of communities when given the opportunity to do so. This is evidenced by their participation in poverty relief programmes and in home/community-based care for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS.

Older persons have a long history of volunteerism and they continue to play a significant role in the volunteer movement in South Africa. The International Year of Volunteerism highlighted the contribution made by volunteers, many of whom are older persons, to the development of South Africa. Older persons also displayed a high level of participation in the national elections of 1994 and 1999, an indication of their interest in contributing to building the country.

There is a need for comprehensive research on the participation of older persons in community activities and as volunteers to design appropriate strategies to support participation of older persons in community affairs. Women are more likely than men to participate in poverty relief programmes, luncheon clubs and in the volunteer programmes of churches. Social integration of older persons requires that all older persons, irrespective of gender, culture or race have the opportunity for participation.

6.4 Opportunities for Learning and Sharing Knowledge

Learning is an important aspect of active ageing and opportunities for learning must be created for older persons. Equally important is the need to create opportunities for older persons to share their knowledge with others.

Community-based poverty relief programmes provide older persons with the opportunity to develop skills in running small enterprises and training others in amongst others traditional crafts, etc. Older persons also receive training as volunteers in home-based care and community-based care programmes. The South African National Council for the Aged also runs training programmes for the members of the luncheon clubs and for volunteers. These training programmes cover a range of issues such as health, finances, HIV/AIDS awareness and dealing with abuse of older persons.

According to the 1996 Census, there are nearly 24 million adults in South Africa, of whom 3.2 million have not had any schooling, and a further 9.4 million have not completed Grade 9. This means that over 12 million people (54% of the adult population) have not completed a general education. Denial of access to education and the provision of inferior education to Black people by previous governments have resulted in low levels of literacy amongst older persons in South Africa. The lack of literacy and numeracy skills makes it difficult for older people to negotiate their affairs such as social grants and health services and dealing with institutions such as banks. It also presents a barrier to their participation in programmes.

The National Department of Education launched the South African National Literacy Initiative in June 2000 to teach approximately 3.2 million adults who are not literate. The aim of the campaign is to achieve a significant reduction in the levels of illiteracy amongst the adult population.

The right to education, including adult basic education is enshrined in the Constitution. The Department of Education has formulated the following vision for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) in its recent policy on adult basic education:

A literate South Africa within which all its citizens have acquired basic education and training that enables effective participation in socio-economic and political processes to contribute to reconstruction, development and social transformation.

The ABET policy is based on the principle of lifelong learning and incorporates the need to improve the levels of literacy in South Africa. In keeping with constitutional principles, all people wanting to learn must have access to the ABET programme.

The Adult Basic Education and Training Act was passed in the year 2000 and provides the legislative framework for the implementation of the ABET policy. By 1999 there were already 387 000 learners enrolled at 2 236 public adult learning centres across the country.