

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Two pensioners during the public hearings in Mpumalanga

1.1 Historical Context

The First World Assembly on Ageing took place in 1982, predating the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa by a period of twelve years. The 1980s were indeed the height of brutal implementation of apartheid policy, an institutionalised discrimination based on race and colour. Apartheid left a legacy of human underdevelopment, the large-scale disintegration of communities and families, and a culture that did not respect human dignity or human life.

The first democratic government of South Africa inherited a society in which:

- The distribution of wealth and income was skewed along racial lines. Sixty-one percent of African people were classified as poor, in contrast to one percent of Whites classified as poor.
- Many households had unsatisfactory access to housing, clean water, energy, health care and education.
- Seventy-two percent of the poor lived in rural areas and the poverty rate in rural areas was 71 percent.
- Land ownership was racially skewed and racially-based land policies were a cause of insecurity of tenure, landlessness and poverty amongst Black people.
- Social services and social security for Black people were inferior to those provided to White people.

The major challenge for the incoming government was to redress the imbalances of the past and ensure sustainable human development within the context of globalisation. The Reconstruction and Development Programme introduced by the ANC-led Government, provides an integrated, coherent socio-economic framework, which seeks to mobilise the people of South Africa and the country's resources to eradicate all apartheid structures and to build a democratic society.

Principles of the RDP:

- An integrated and sustainable approach to harness all the country's resources towards redistribution and development.
- A people-driven process which would be inclusive of all regardless of race, sex, urban, rural, rich or poor and lead to the empowerment of people.
- Promotion of peace and security.
- Nation building to unify the country and promote national and regional interests.
- Linking the need for reconstruction of society with development that serves the interests of people and is not seen purely as economic growth.
- Democratisation of South Africa is central. (Source: RDP, 1994: 4-7)

South Africa is participating for the first time in the World Assembly on Ageing since the advent of democracy in 1994. Consequently, the SA Government has since 1994, studied closely the resolutions of the First UN World Assembly held in 1982 and has taken an active part in various international fora, with the aim of incorporating the fundamental principles into the policies and programmes of the government and society at large.

In this regard, the South African Government as well as civil society structures have and continue to play an active and critical role in the development of policies and programmes of the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community. This process is underpinned by the quest to build a better life and a caring social, economic and political environment for older persons in a sustainable way. It is therefore envisaged that the birth of the African Union on 1 July 2002, will give further impetus to the acceleration of the process of building a better life for older persons.

South Africa, since 1994 has had the enormous challenge of addressing the backlog of development. Within the context of older persons, the challenge has been to improve the social and economic conditions of older persons and to prevent the generation of children and younger adults from becoming a generation of older impoverished people.

1.2 Profile of South Africa

The following profile has been extracted from the South Africa Year Book 2001/2002, published by the Government Communication and Information Service.

The Constitution

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), was approved by the Constitutional Court on 4 December 1996 and took effect on 4 February 1997. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. No other law or government action can supersede the provisions of the Constitution. South Africa's Constitution is one of the most progressive in the world, and enjoys high acclaim internationally. Fundamental rights are contained in Chapter Two of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court guards these rights and determines whether or not actions by the State are in accordance with constitutional provisions.

Government

Government is constituted as national, provincial and local spheres, which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated. The powers of the law-makers (legislative authorities), governments (executive authorities) and courts (judicial authorities) are separate from one another.

Parliament

Parliament is the legislative authority of South Africa and has the power to make laws for the country in accordance with the Constitution. It consists of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). Parliamentary sittings are open to the public.

The Public Service

On 31 December 2000, the Public Service employed 1 042 392 people. This represents a decrease of 23 607 from 31 December 1999. Public service numbers have declined gradually but steadily since 1994, when the still-fragmented Public Service consisted of approximately 1.2 million officials. About two-thirds of public servants are in provincial departments.

The Economy

South Africa is one of the most advanced economies on the African continent. Blessed with a wealth of natural resources, the country contains wide disparities of wealth, with obvious implications for broader socio-political policy directions. Given its history of inequalities and its location as an African country whose fate is bound up with that of its neighbours, South Africa has a strong shared set of interests with the developing economies of the world. South Africa's economy displays many world-class features. These include a sophisticated financial and physical infrastructure, good telecommunications and energy supply networks, and one of the top 10 stock exchanges in the world. The challenge is to translate this into levels of investment high

enough to promote an economic growth large enough to reduce the country's substantial unemployment levels.

Unemployment remains South Africa's most formidable economic challenge. Statistics South Africa released the South Africa in Transition Report in July 2001. Between October 1995 and October 1999, the number of not-economically-active people has stayed static over time, at about 12.8 million. The number of those who are economically active, i.e. both the employed and the unemployed (using the official definition), has, however, increased from 1.4 million in 1995 to 13.5 million in 1999. In other words, an increasing number of people, over time, are entering the labour market. The number of employed people (in both the formal and the informal sectors) has also increased over time, but this increase, from 9.6 million in 1995 to 10.4 million in 1999, has been rather gradual. The number of unemployed has also increased over time, from 1.8 million in 1995 to 3.2 million in 1999. Statistics South Africa announced in September 2001 that the country's official unemployment rate stood at 26.4% for February 2001. In February 2000, it stood at 26.7%.

The People

On the night of 9 October 1996 there were 40,58 million people in South Africa (Census 1996). Of these, 76.7% classified themselves as African; 10.9% as white; 8.9% as coloured; and 2.6% as Indian/Asian. According to Statistics South Africa, the country's population estimates in the year 2000 stood at 43 686 million, of which some 22.7 million were women. The second democratic census was held in October 2001 and will be published in 2002.

Languages

The South African Constitution, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), states that everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice, but no one may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. Each person also has the right to instruction in the language of his or her choice where this is reasonably practicable. To cater for South Africa's diverse peoples, the Constitution provides for 11 official languages, namely: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages, the Constitution expects the Government to take positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages. According to the Census '96 figures, isiZulu is the mother tongue of 22.9% of the population, followed by isiXhosa (17.9%), Afrikaans (14.4%), Sepedi (9.2%) and English (8.6%).

The Provinces

There are nine Provinces in South Africa, each with its own legislature, Premier and Executive Council. The names of the Provinces and their proportion of the total population according to the 1996 Census is shown below:

- Eastern Cape (15.5%)
- Free State (6.5%)
- Gauteng (18.1%)
- KwaZulu-Natal (20.7%)
- Limpopo (formerly the Northern Province) (12.1%)
- Mpumalanga (6.9%)
- Northern Cape (2.1%)
- North West (8.3%)
- Western Cape (9.7%)

1.3 Structure of the Report

This country report reflects on the progress made by South Africa since 1994, to address the needs of older persons.

Chapter 1 provides a brief historical context and profile of South Africa

Chapter 2 provides an overview of ageing in the South African context. It provides a demographic profile of older persons, the legislation relevant to older persons and the main government departments responsible for providing services to older persons.

Chapter 3 focuses on ageing and development. It describes the income support measures for older persons and poverty reduction programmes of government.

Chapter 4 deals with the health and well-being of older persons. It describes the services available to older persons through the health system and highlights issues of disability and HIV/AIDS.

Chapter 5 covers housing and the living environment. It provides an overview of access to housing and basic services.

Chapter 6 deals with the issue of social integration of older persons. It provides an overview of community-based support programmes, initiatives in the area of literacy and adult basic education and training, and the importance of volunteerism amongst older

persons. It also discusses the issue of abuse and neglect of older persons.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of steps taken by the government to promote the status of older persons.

Chapter 8 outlines the challenges faced in realising the goal of a society for all ages and the steps to be taken by South Africa in meeting these challenges.