



## Increasing number of older persons: Is Kenya prepared?

### Population ageing is a global phenomenon

Countries in the world are experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons aged 60 years and above in their population. In 2015 there were 901 million women and men aged 60 and above worldwide. This figure is projected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030 (UN, 2015).

The growth of the elderly population is also accelerating in the developing countries including Kenya and it is projected that these countries collectively will account for 6.3 percent of the global population aged 60 years or over in 2030 (UN, 2015).

The growing number of older persons raises questions about their wellbeing in terms of economic security in old age, social support, healthcare, and living conditions. It is therefore important that the government puts in place policies that will target the needs of the older persons.

This policy brief highlights the changing demographics in Kenya and demonstrates the challenges of an aging population and the major issues that need to be addressed.

### Trends in population of older persons in Kenya

An examination of the demographic trends reveals that there is a growing size of the elderly population. The number of elderly Kenyans aged 60 and above

increased more than three-fold from 587,983 to about 1.9 million between 1969 and 2009. This population on average represents about 5 percent of the total population.

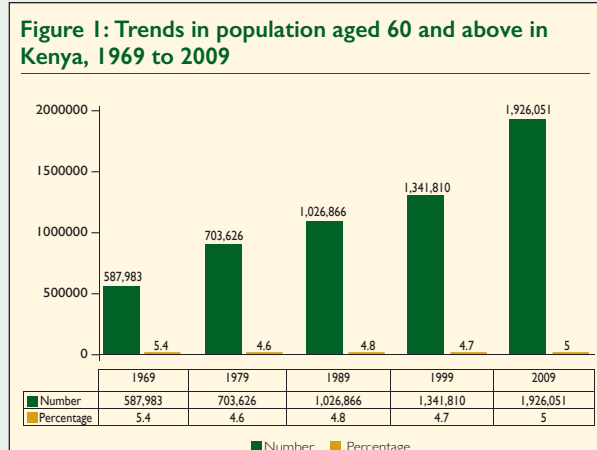
### Sex ratio

Women tend to live longer than men, on average, and thus comprise a majority of older persons in all the ages (UN, 2011). As women live to a more advanced age, they are more likely than men to experience disabilities and multiple health problems associated with old age.

Table 1: Distribution of elderly persons by age group and gender, Kenya

| Age group    | Males          | Females          |
|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| 60-64        | 295,197        | 298,581          |
| 65-69        | 183,151        | 207,612          |
| 70-74        | 160,301        | 179,000          |
| 75-79        | 99,833         | 118,675          |
| 80+          | 159,125        | 224,576          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>897,607</b> | <b>1,028,444</b> |

Source: 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census



Source: 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census; Analytical Report on Population Dynamics

### Population of the elderly persons by County

The distribution of elderly persons varies across Counties. Kiambu County has the largest elderly population (97,389) which constitutes about 5 percent of the County population followed by Meru with 84,905 elderly persons—which makes up 6 percent of the County Population; Muranga County with 77,383 and Machakos County with 75,649 elderly persons. The lowest population of the elderly is found in Lamu County (5,431).

**Table 2: Percent Distribution of Population Age 60 or Older by County and Gender, Kenya, 2009**

| County       | Total population for male age 60+ | Total population for female age 60+ | Total population for both female & male age 60+ | Percent of population aged 60 or over | County          | Total population for male age 60+ | Total population for female age 60+ | Total population for both female & male age 60+ | Percent of population aged 60 or over |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Kiambu       | 43,283                            | 54,106                              | 97,389  | 4.9                                   | Migori          | 16,196                            | 20,636                              | 20,636  | 3.65                                  |
| Kirinyaga    | 17,150                            | 22,661                              | 39,811  | 6.58                                  | Siaya           | 25,702                            | 37,605                              | 63,307  | 6.45                                  |
| Nyandarua    | 16,529                            | 20,479                              | 37,008  | 5.66                                  | Bungoma         | 27,069                            | 31,925                              | 58,994  | 4.03                                  |
| Nyeri        | 28,114                            | 35,663                              | 63,777  | 8.28                                  | Vihiga          | 21,375                            | 25,350                              | 46,725  | 8.14                                  |
| Muranga      | 33,905                            | 43,478                              | 77,383  | 9.0                                   | Kakamega        | 32,742                            | 38,507                              | 71,249  | 4.88                                  |
| Kwale        | 15,667                            | 16,520                              | 32,187  | 4.96                                  | Busia           | 17,099                            | 21,608                              | 38,707  | 4.80                                  |
| Mombasa      | 12,668                            | 12,134                              | 24,802  | 2.60                                  | Nairobi         | 32,653                            | 27,703                              | 60,356  | 2.04                                  |
| Tana River   | 5,289                             | 4,917                               | 10,206  | 4.41                                  | Tharaka Nithi   | 12,591                            | 14,916                              | 27,507  | 7.06                                  |
| Taita Taveta | 9,536                             | 11,126                              | 20,662  | 6.57                                  | Meru            | 39,530                            | 45,375                              | 84,905  | 5.90                                  |
| Kilifi       | 25,586                            | 31,031                              | 56,617  | 4.78                                  | Baringo         | 12,593                            | 13,978                              | 26,571  | 4.51                                  |
| Lamu         | 2,873                             | 2,558                               | 5,431   | 5.42                                  | Bomet           | 18,083                            | 21,561                              | 39,644  | 4.09                                  |
| Embu         | 16,446                            | 20,572                              | 37,018  | 6.47                                  | Elgeyo Marakwet | 9,479                             | 11,043                              | 20,522  | 5.16                                  |
| Isiolo       | 3,835                             | 3,751                               | 7,586   | 5.21                                  | Kajiado         | 10,928                            | 11,643                              | 22,571  | 3.17                                  |
| Kitui        | 32,086                            | 41,208                              | 73,294  | 6.67                                  | Kericho         | 12,009                            | 12,928                              | 24,937  | 4.02                                  |
| Machakos     | 33,320                            | 42,329                              | 75,649  | 6.14                                  | Laikipia        | 11,176                            | 12,076                              | 23,252  | 5.63                                  |
| Makueni      | 27,571                            | 35,613                              | 63,184  | 6.40                                  | Nakuru          | 32,941                            | 36,271                              | 69,212  | 4.10                                  |
| Marsabit     | 9,024                             | 8,254                               | 17,278  | 5.97                                  | Nandi           | 17,847                            | 19,071                              | 36,918  | 4.74                                  |
| Garissa      | 13,211                            | 9,693                               | 22,904  | 3.95                                  | Narok           | 14,800                            | 15,382                              | 30,182  | 3.45                                  |
| Mandera      | 20,703                            | 10,562                              | 31,265  | 3.70                                  | Samburu         | 4,771                             | 5,173                               | 9,944   | 4.26                                  |
| Wajir        | 14,579                            | 8,760                               | 23,339  | 4.01                                  | Trans Nzoia     | 15,973                            | 16,785                              | 32,758  | 3.92                                  |
| Homa Bay     | 21,904                            | 29,106                              | 51,010  | 4.74                                  | Turkana         | 16,411                            | 15,104                              | 31,515  | 3.69                                  |
| Nyamira      | 11,546                            | 12,765                              | 24,311  | 4.92                                  | Uasin Gishu     | 17,005                            | 18,274                              | 35,279  | 3.79                                  |
| Kisii        | 28,078                            | 34,105                              | 62,183  | 4.66                                  | West Pokot      | 9,245                             | 10,536                              | 19,781  | 3.63                                  |
| Kisumu       | 20,207                            | 25,727                              | 45,934  | 4.26                                  |                 |                                   |                                     |   |                                       |

Source: 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census

## Challenges in old age

The vision 2030 defines the elderly as a vulnerable group faced with several challenges including high levels of poverty, health insecurity and need for care, weak family and community support, insecurity and poor housing. Like most African nations, Kenya is not best equipped to deal with the rise in numbers of older people. The main concerns are related to poverty, healthcare provision and social protection schemes. Older persons living in urban areas for example seek shelter from informal settlements (PSA, 2013). Information on their living conditions is however lacking, making it even more difficult to develop initiatives that can improve their circumstances.

## Health challenges

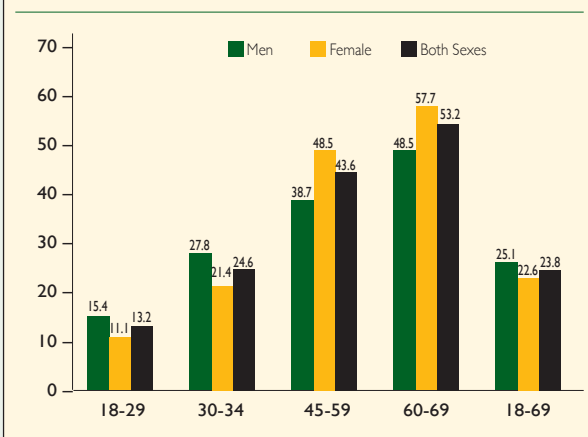
A key concern for the elderly is access to healthcare. Kenya experiences the challenge of making healthcare affordable and accessible to all. Of great concern is affording healthcare for the vast majority

of the elderly, especially with the government spending far less on healthcare. The aging population faces a set of health challenges which is highly linked to long term physical and mental disability and a number of long term chronic conditions and will likely increase personal care needs. As populations age, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for a growing share of the overall disease burden and this confronts healthcare systems with new prevention and treatment challenges (UNDESA, 2014). These include cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and respiratory diseases, as well as other prominent causes of disability, such as arthritis, hearing and vision loss, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Some of the lifestyles by the elderly expose them to risk factors for NCDs. The Kenya STEPs (2015) survey indicates that at least 25.9 percent of Kenyans aged 45 to 69 have a lifestyle in which there are one or more risk factors for NCDs. These include smoking, eating less than five servings of fruits

and vegetables a day, insufficient physical exercise, being overweight or having high blood pressure. The survey further shows that older persons aged 60-69 have the highest prevalence of raised blood pressure (53%). Women have a higher prevalence (58%) compared with men in the same age group (49%). Raised blood pressure is a major risk factor for development of cardiovascular disease. According to World Health Organisation (2016), the most important behavioural risk factors of cardiovascular disease include unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol. (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents with raised blood pressure or currently on medication**



Source: Kenya STEP Survey, 2015

Investment in improved health among older people by encouraging improvements in behavioural risk factors at all ages and early detection and treatment of chronic disease is critical.

### Poverty

According to the integrated household budget survey (KIHBS 2005/06), the proportion of older people living in poverty was 56.4 percent which was higher than the national average (45.9%). The situation was even worse in households where older people lived in families with young children (61.3%). The KDHS 2009/08 further indicate that women-headed households are more likely to be poor.

Protecting the elderly from the risk of poverty is a challenge. Old age poverty is usually given low priority in development policies. Public pension programmes appear to be beyond the capacity of most poor developing countries like Kenya and such programmes seem increasingly difficult to finance. In the absence of policy intervention, older people and their households will continue to live in poverty.

### Inadequate social protection schemes

Social protection refers to “policies and actions, including legislative measures, which enhance the capacity and opportunities for the poor and vulnerable to improve and sustain their lives, livelihoods and welfare; enable income-earners and their dependents to maintain a reasonable level of income through decent work; and ensure access to affordable healthcare, social security and social assistance” (The Kenya Social Protection Policy, 2011).

The Government has been investing in social protection programmes, including social insurance schemes and safety net programmes to address poverty among the elderly people. The Older person Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme was introduced in 2006 to improve livelihoods of older persons. The programme targets extremely poor households that include a member aged 65 or older who does not receive a pension. The programme currently covers 203,011 households. Kenya Shillings 2,000 per household per month is delivered every two months through the appointed payment agent (National Social Protection Secretariat, 2016). This is however not adequate and needs to be scaled up to include more elderly persons.

Older people face several vulnerabilities which include; lack of income, health insecurity, and the need for physical care. Social protection is therefore necessary because individual and family resources are often insufficient to protect the elderly from a broad array of vulnerabilities.

The key impediment to implementing social protection programmes for older people is financial. Pensions, health insurance, for example involve direct expenditures from the treasury that can only take place at the expense of other possible uses of public funds. Lack of political will is also a barrier to meeting the needs of older people through social protection programmes.

Development of social protection schemes for older persons in Kenya is necessary. This is in line with the Constitution and other formal commitments to such action, including being a signatory to the 2002 United Nations Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing and the African Union (AU) Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing. The Madrid International Plan of Action for example recognizes population ageing as an important global trend and focuses on key areas

NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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of concern which include advancing health and well-being into old age through access to healthcare and ensuring an enabling and supportive environment by providing adequate housing and protection from neglect, abuse and violence.

## **Policy Implications**

As population becomes increasingly aged, it is crucial for the government to design policies and provide services specifically targeted to older persons—including those addressing, housing, employment, health care, infrastructure and social protection. This is integral to achievement of sustainable development goals such as poverty reduction, ensuring healthy lives and providing safe human settlement.

There is also need for Kenyans to individually prepare themselves by putting in place mechanisms for their support during their old age through private saving. This will reduce reliance on family.

Lack of data has meant that little is known about the challenges that older people face and the support they need. There is also lack of awareness of the appropriate ways in which to support ageing populations and these need to be addressed.

Policymakers are called upon to be forward-looking and respond effectively to the demographic changes that are anticipated especially with regard to the elderly persons.

## **Recommendations**

- Social security programmes are important for the survival of all the vulnerable elderly persons and both the national and county governments should ensure these programmes are expanded in an effective manner to enhance the economic capacity and security of poor elderly persons
- Targeting and protecting elderly persons through provision of cash allowance to households headed by poor elderly persons or those that have a burden to fostering orphans and vulnerable children will be critical
- Elderly persons can be supported with cash and/or credit to invest in income generating projects
- The Ministry of Health should include geriatric care in existing health workers' curricula and geriatric clinics in health centres
- There is need to increase investment in the collection, analysis and utilization of data on ageing for planning. Elderly-specific surveys are therefore critical.

## **Conclusion**

The vulnerabilities associated with advancing age must be addressed. Thus far, issues of ageing attract little attention in public and policy discourses as more attention is given to providing opportunities for the large population of young people. If policy-makers and leaders do not plan adequately, the effects of ageing, such as strained pension systems, and overburdened health care systems will be overwhelming.