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The Inclusion of Aged Citizens Support Program: An Urgent Responsibility in Contemporary Nigerian Society

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Abstract

This paper examines the pressing need for the implementation of support programs for aged citizens in Nigeria. The problems are traced to the challenges these category are confronted with especially in a rapidly changing society. As Nigeria grapples with insecurity crisis, economic instability, social disparities, inadequate healthcare, among other issues, the aged citizens often find themselves marginalized almost in all ramifications. For many the retirement plan on where lie their hopes is gradually fizzling out as many practically get retired with little or nothing for self-support. Worst it becomes when there exist dependents members of the families either immediate or extended family as the traditional Nigerian family ties depict. Among whom are students in various citadels of learning as findings reveal through the methods of data collection and data analysis, interpretation and application. This paper argues that establishing inclusive support systems is not only a moral imperative but also a societal necessity to promote the well-being of aged citizens. Having investigated the existing policies, societal attitudes, communal efforts and the roles of government and non-governmental organizations. This work, in conclusion seeks to encourage maximum support of aged citizens' in the Nigeria because of its positive benefits in the society.

Key Words: Aged Citizens, Support Program, Responsibility, Contemporary, Nigerian Society

Introduction

In contemporary society, the demographic shift towards an aging population is becoming increasingly evident. According to the National Population Commission, the

proportion of individuals within the ages of 60 and above is on significant rise where good number of them barely save nothing tangible (government employees) to face this stage of life. This demographic transition

presents a unique set of challenges and necessitates urgent action from both government and society to ensure that the rights and needs of these aged citizens are met and protected. Despite their contributions to society in their youthful years, the society has remained uncharitable. As many of these aged citizens face poverty, inadequate healthcare and social isolation and so on thus, highlighting the urgent need for a structured support program.

This paper is set to explore the critical import of establishing a support framework for the aged citizens in society. By outlining the challenges faced by aged citizens, discussion on the existing policies and their shortcomings. Finally, it will propose a comprehensive support program targeted at enhancing the quality of life for aged citizens, emphasizing the role of government, community and non-governmental organizations in fostering an inclusive society.

Challenges Facing Aged Citizens in the Nigerian Society

The aged citizens are elderly members of the society who cannot engage in vibrant duties. This group falls within the ages of 75 years and above. Majority of them are retirees from public and private organizations. The aged

citizens encounter numerous challenges that significantly affect their quality of life. One of the primary issues is economic insecurity. According to Evsyukova, U.M (1995) in Korpyrina, (2007), says: "The elderly were the first and hardest hit during the many economical crisis following the collapse of the soviet union." This has continued till date.

Many aged citizens rely on informal sources of income, such as family support or small-scale businesses, pensions that are often insufficient to cover basic needs. The absence of a comprehensive pension scheme exacerbates this issue, leaving many aged citizens in poverty. On a regular, these folks are seen queuing either in protest for the non-payment of their pensions or revalidation of documents in anticipation for some payments. This situation makes it very tedious for them to access facilities that can boost their well-being as to have a good and healthy life. This experience is not common to their counterparts in well-structured societies of the world. The challenges are as follows.

- **Healthcare Challenge:** Healthcare access is a significant challenge for aged citizens in the society, this challenge manifest in dimensions where matured financial

involvements are required such as prostate cancer, arthritis, renal crisis amongst other age related issues. The Nigerian healthcare system, characterized by limited resources and inadequate facilities keep disappointing these noble citizens because of regular failure to meeting with the health needs and frequent medical attention. Additionally, the high costs of healthcare services prohibit many aged citizens from necessary treatments. Adding to this challenges is the lack of functional healthcare insurance scheme with special budget for the aged to access medical attention when needs arise.

- **Social Isolation:** This factor further compounds the challenge of these individuals. Many aged citizens find themselves alienated from their families and communities, which lead to mental health issues such as depression, repulsion and anxiety. Traditional family structures are eroding gradually with younger generations migrating to urban areas in search of better opportunities, leaving behind their elderly relatives. In most case, some are kept in an unsupervised care of minders who

oftentimes suffer irritable treatment and abandon from those domestic workers who perceive their choices and taste as archaic. These attitudes leave them in some sort of frustration thereby conceiving old age as painful, punishment and death syndrome. Most individuals because of the problems these aged citizens undergo consider old age detestable. Some younger generation in whose cares these aged citizens seek to derive respites gets reversed side of the coin because the aged citizens are perceive as liabilities.

- **Feeding:** It sounds ridiculous that reasonable numbers of the aged citizens in the society recently are victims of starvation. For some, it is traced to total lack, while for others, their inability of securing that which suites their aged body system. An Igbo adage says: *Aguo gu'ta, oria aria'ta, onwu araghikwa ahu* (hunger merging with illness speeds up the certainty of death). According to Karioukhin (2014), "Many older people cut back on their basic necessities such as food or reduce the dosage of their medications in order to make it last longer." In the just

concluded Mbaise Economic Summit second Edition held on the 19th October, 2024. Titled: "Developing Mbaise Nation through Small and Medium Scale Enterprises." An illustrious son of the community, who had held profile positions and served in the highest sectors of the country's political and educational settings says: "I took to farming, if for no other reason, to ensure that I eat at old age, a natural and chemically free meals, secondly, the country and younger generation have no trusted budget for us." Certainly, in spite of his exposure is convinced that as long as old age is concern for the common person, it will remain pitiable in the Nigerian society. He is therefore seeking for a dark-skinned nanny before nightfall (*ichu nne ewu, tupu chi ejie*) by gradually securing and broadening his retirement plans and scopes in case any of the feared aforementioned predictions comes to fruition. These are few amongst other challenges the aged citizens are faced with on a regular basis. In investigating these challenges, it will be advisable to verify the extent of

policies towards that track and shortcomings.

Existing Policies and their Shortcomings

In recognizing the significance of the needs of aged citizens in the society, Nigeria's policy framework remains inadequate. The National Policy on Aging, established in 2005, aims at promoting the welfare of aged citizens. However, its implementation has remained inconsistent lacking the necessary funding and resources. Whereby, majority of the aged citizens continue to fall through the cracks of social and economic support systems. Moreover, there are lack of awareness and understanding of the issues faced by aged citizens. This ignorance often results in ageist attitudes that further marginalize aged citizens, undermining their dignity and rights. The aged citizens deserve some reserved attention and space in the society, most especially in public circles such as banks, markets (supermarkets) and transits. Even when on walkways, the society, (motorists) are so blind to the feeble limbs of an aged citizen in considering safe crossing of traffic lanes where necessary. In the 1970s, a popular musician, Dennis Osita Osadebe captured such act of sheer mannerlessness in his track "*Okongwu chaara m na uzo*" (old fellow, make way for

me) in this song, the lyric carefully presented old age as a blessing and the need for the younger generation "the society" to treat those folks with respect, care and tolerance. In furtherance, describes such situation as that which awaits every human alive. Frederick (2003), says: "Respect for the elderly has always been thought to be a common heritage of mankind." Therefore, it is pertinent to understand that the aged citizens must not be denied of maximum respect, comfort and care in the evening period of their lives. To this, support plans should be set in place.

Proposed Support Program for Aged Citizens

To address these challenges, a comprehensive support program for aged citizens is essential. World Health Organization recognizes: "However, most of the older people in all countries continue to be a vital resource to their families and communities." Such should be enabled in Nigeria as well through proper programmes such as:

- **Economic Support:** Establishing a functional universal pension scheme that provides a basic income for all aged citizens will significantly reduce poverty levels among the aged

citizens. Additionally, initiatives such as microfinance programs can empower them to engage in small businesses, promoting financial independence. Frederick (2003), advises: "Those elderly people who could assume responsibility for their own future should do so not only for their own sake, but also as an act of solidarity with the whole human community. These particular moral obligations both of and towards the elderly stem from the fact that all human beings share responsibility for the well being of all other human beings." Some religious organizations through faith-based establishment create job opportunities for the experience aged and retired citizens viable in rendering services. Through such engagements, the "retired and not tired" individuals dazed with financial crisis are opportune to catering for their families.

- **Access to Healthcare:** The improvement of healthcare services specifically fashioned for aged citizens is crucial. This includes training healthcare professionals in geriatric care and ensuring that medications and treatments are

affordable and accessible. Korpyrina, (2007), notes: "Another setback is the general lack of trained specialists in social gerontology, geriatric professionals and social workers." Attending to the aged citizens is such that most medical practitioners find cumbersome because of its extra devotion to duty and habits borne of out of age related infirmities. Hoontrakul, (2007), identifies: "Older people are appreciative and happy when health providers recognize who they are, remember their names and greet them every time they meet both inside and outside the PCU and are disappointed when they are not greeted by providers of care." Hoontrakul, (2007), stresses: "It is important to remember that while age-friendly services benefits older population, they also enable people with temporary or permanent functional limitation to access care and to maintain health independence." Korpyrina, (2007), adds: "Organizers of services for the elderly in rural villages should establish a standard services structure, provide legal basis for a gerontological service system and

provide measures to ensure the actualization of its programmes."

- **Social and Cultural Integration:** Programs that promote social engagement and community involvement can help combat isolation. Initiatives such as senior centers, community events and intergenerational programs foster connections between aged citizens and younger generations. Through social and cultural integration, transmission of traditional values and norms takes effect. The younger generation can boastfully claim knowledge acquired through the aged citizens. Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe described the import of social gathering in the Igbo society. The activities unite the community through love, care, respect and tolerance for every member especially the aged citizens. They in turn, appreciate such moments as opportunities of transmitting cultural values and norms to the younger generation.
- **Partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations:** This is another means through which

effective support program for the aged citizens could be attained. Investors within these mentioned categories are encouraged to provide valuable resources, expertise, sustainability and advocacy to further the cause of aged citizens in various localities. Through such supports, natives especially the aged citizens would not nurse sense of been marginalized and exploited, as the cases of most Nigerian communities appear especially those within the oil producing areas.

- **Intervention by Government:** The government of the day in collaboration with civil society and communities must, as matter urgency implement structured support programs for the aged citizens. The certainty of old age should liven the need for comprehensive support systems as becoming increasingly urgent. Initiative that significantly improves the aged citizens while ensuring that not only is they supported but also integrated in the fabric of the society. According to Archibong (2015 p. i) "Government support for provision of social services for the aged by establishing

more day care centers where the elderly can meet, chat and discuss matters of interests among themselves." Frederick (2003). The negative image of ageing with its discriminative practices characterized by the concept of ageism must be overcome through positive action by governments

As Nigeria navigates the complexities of contemporary challenges, prioritizing the welfare of the aged citizens is essential for fostering a just and equitable society. Worthy of note is the fact good percentage of these individuals served the country during their youthful years. It will be the height of human wickedness to maltreat them by reckless abandon. These are avenues, through which support for the aged citizens can manifest but when neglected, some implications can ensue as listed below,

Implications of Negligence of the Support Program for the Aged Citizens

The problems brewed by sheer negligence for the care of aged citizens have become increasingly prominent in contemporary society. The simple and unpleasant fact

remains that in every wane of second, ones' age is affected and the responsibilities associated with aged citizens' care grow more significant, raising crucial social, religious and ethical questions. Therefore, efforts must be made as to avoid the implications stated below.

- **Social Implications:** Neglecting the aged citizens has profound social implications. First, it contributes to the deterioration of community bonds. When families and societies fail to support their aged citizens, isolation becomes prevalent. It often times lead to mental health issues, depression and anxiety, which not only affect the individuals but also create a ripple effect within families and communities. However, societal attitudes toward aging and the aged can turn negative through neglect, especially when society perceives the care for aged citizens as a burden rather than a responsibility; it fosters ageism and a lack of respect and tolerance towards them. This devaluation can lead to reduced opportunities for social engagement and participation in community life for the aged citizens, further exacerbating their isolation. The

African society and her communal way of domicile, perceive the presence of aged citizens as blessings. Their presence are incorporated, acknowledged and felt in the society. Elaborating the significance of the aged citizens in homes, adages like "*Okenye anaghi ano na ulo, ewu amuo na obu*" (that an elder or aged cannot be at home while the goat delivers in tethers). This displays the functions of the aged citizens through social formation, positive orientation, value and cultural transmission. The absence of care and attention to the aged citizens not only causes disruption in communal practices, such as storytelling and wisdom sharing but also abominable. These practices are vital for transmitting cultural values and traditions. When the aged citizens are neglected, these traditions risk fading, leading to a disconnection between generations and a loss of cultural identity in the social order. A common expression holds that indefatigable circumstances that await every living creature are old age and death. Therefore, supports to that regards should be given a careful thought.

- **Religious Implications:** Religious communities often play crucial roles in providing support for aged citizens. Negligence in this context erodes the moral and spiritual foundations of the communities. Many religions emphasize on the importance of honoring the aged. In Pauline teachings expressed in the sacred book, support for the aged is considered a sacred duty when neglected raises questions about the integrity of religious teachings and the commitment of followers to their values. (1st Timothy 5:4) "First responsibility is to show godliness at home and respect their parents by taking care of them, this is something that pleases God." (NLT) The purpose of encouraging family to care for their aged citizens is that children and grandchildren can repay the investment made into their own young lives. Furthermore, (1st Timothy 5:8) "but if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his households, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (ESV) (1st Timothy 5:1) "do not rebuke an older man but encourage

him as you would a father." Moreover, the neglect of age citizens leads to crisis of faith within religious communities. Members, with right conscience always battle with feelings of guilt and shame if they perceive that their community has failed to care for its vulnerable members. The negligence results in the loss of trust in religious institutions, as congregants often feel that those organizations are not fulfilling their moral obligations especially to the very poor and downtrodden in the community.

- **Ethical Implications:** The ethical implications of neglecting aged citizens are profound and multifaceted. At the core lies the principle of respect for autonomy and dignity. Aged citizens possess rights to make decisions about their lives, yet neglect often strips them of this autonomy. When care is inadequate, the aged citizens are forced into institutional settings against their will or deprived of necessary supports undermining their dignity. The inclusion of aged citizens in support programs is not merely an ethical responsibility but a vital necessity for

the overall well-being of the society. By addressing the economic, healthcare and social challenges faced by aged citizens, an inclusive environment that values and respects the aged citizens should be considered. Frederick (2003). "Through the application of ethical concepts which are relevant to different religions, ethnic, racial and social classes, as the practice of ethics is grounded in one's everyday life, whether personal and professional, whether public or private. Ethics requires that human relations, even between generations, go beyond strict justice." Therefore, the ethics of justice and fairness come into play. Society has an obligation to ensure that all citizens, especially the vulnerable receive appropriate care. Negligence not only violates this ethical obligation but also highlights systemic inequalities in healthcare access and resources. Disparities in socio-economic status often determine the quality of support received by the aged, raising critical ethical concerns about equity and justice in healthcare. The negligence meted on aged citizens also

challenges societal values surrounding compassion and community responsibility. When society fails to support the aged citizens, it reflects a broader moral failing that prioritizes individualism over collective well-being. These shifts in values lead to a culture where neglect becomes normal and further perpetuating the cycle of indifference toward the needs of the aged citizens manifests severe social, religious and ethical consequences. It isolates aged citizens, undermines the integrity of religious teachings while challenging the ethical foundations of our society. Confronting this issue requires a collective effort to reinforce the values of compassion, respect and responsibility toward the aged group. It is imperative that society prioritizes, ensuring that moral, social and spiritual obligations are met.

The Inclusion of Support Program for the Aged Citizens as Motivation for the Youths in the Society

The importance of support program extends beyond the aged citizens affair, it influences significantly operation of other individuals in

contributing to societal progress and economic development. The importances are summarized thus.

- **The Youths' Commitment to Social Development and Crime Reduction:** Support for aged citizens play crucial roles in shaping the character and contributions of younger generation to social development by fostering a culture of responsibility and community service. The manner to which the aged citizens are supported through retirement plans among other benefits would certainly motivate the younger generation in actively engaging in national development and curbing the tendencies of criminal activities. When the aged citizens are properly supported, immediate advantages abound. First, the contentment and utilization of one's income and reduced financial stress. Second, the youths will be committed to service, be relieved of certain financial tensions that trigger embezzlement of public funds in various positions. The issues of suspected abandon during old age prompt individuals into sourcing for opportunities of securing the undetermined future. The care of

aged citizens positively influences the young, enhancing their commitment to societal well-being and promoting a more stable environment. Currently, the youths have lost confidence in the government due to careless manner through which the aged are treated.

- **Intergenerational relationships:** This factor enhances learning and knowledge transfer and manages the gap in between. The younger generation gain insights from the experiences and wisdom of the aged citizens, enriching their understanding of history, culture and life skills. This exchange fosters sense of continuity and belonging, thereby strengthening community ties and encouraging society that is more integrated. The youths' involvements in this course foster sense of responsibility and civic engagement. When young people participate in supporting their aged citizens, they develop empathy and compassion as essential qualities for creating a cohesive society. As young people form connections with aged citizens, they gain mentors who can provide guidance, intellectual support and wisdom. This mentorship can inspire

them to pursue positive life paths and educational opportunities, reducing the incidence of engaging in delinquent behavior. This engagement not only benefits the aged citizens but also equips younger ones with valuable skills, such as communication and problem solving, which are critical in today's workforce.

- **Economic Improvement and Societal Progress:** Investing in support of the aged citizens is crucial for long-term economic improvement. A society that adequately supports its aging population can reduce healthcare costs associated with negligence, such as emergency care and long-term hospitalization. By emphasizing preventative care and community support, resources can be more effectively allocated, enhancing overall economic stability.

Furthermore, supporting the aged citizens promotes a more productive economy. Healthy, engaged aged citizens could continue contributing to the labor force, whether through paid work or volunteering, providing

mentorship and guidance to younger generations. This involvement fosters a culture of collaboration and innovation that is essential for a progressive society.

- **Strengthening Communal Resilience:** The support of the aged citizens also plays vital roles in building communal resilience. Communities that prioritize the well-being of their aged citizens are better equipped to handle social challenges. A supportive environment encourages civic participation, volunteerism and social cohesion, which are vital for addressing collective issues.
- **Developing Empathy and Social Responsibility:** Support for the aged citizens cultivates empathy in young people. By interacting with aged citizens, they acquire and appreciate diverse perspectives and life experiences. The youths foster a sense of social responsibility. Korpyrina, (2007), states: "Respect for older people encompasses the understanding of older people's problems, the elderly are often the targets to abuse and neglect even

worse, when the seniors are not aware of their rights and services available to them." This emotional support provided by the youths encourages aged citizens to remain positive to their communities.

Conclusion

The inclusion of support programme for the aged citizens in the society would not only be beneficial. It is also means through which the services of the aged citizens who contributed to the national and social development could be rewarded. Support for parents especially at old age is a responsibility that should not be thrown overboard. The negligence of this responsibility has serious negative implications that affect the society. The appreciation is such that impacts greatly beginning from the younger generation by fostering hard work, empathy, building intergenerational relationships, enhancing life skills, commitment to service, creating opportunities for community involvement and reducing isolation. Support for the aged citizens empowers young people to contribute positively to society. This engagement not only nurtures the personal development of the young but also strengthens the fabric of communities. It leads to a more cohesive and crime-resistant

society. Investing and implementing strategies, which promote support for the aged citizens is therefore, a strategic approach to nurturing responsible, engaged citizens who are dedicated to serving their nation.

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