



Rural Ageing and Livelihood Challenges: Findings from FAO study conducted in Rural Areas of Zomba District, Malawi

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Outline of the Presentation

- **Study Design**
- **Findings**
 - Challenges being faced by the elderly
 - Health and health conditions of the elderly
 - Socio-economic characteristics of the elderly
 - Food consumption patterns
 - Access to natural resources (water, firewood, fish and land)
 - Access to social protection Programmes
- **Summary of Key Findings from the Study**

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Background

- Traditionally, old people are taken care of by their descendants and the general community
- However, this is changing as more young people become educated (leave villages to town) and the burden of HIV and AIDS
- Young people often fail to look after the ailing grandparents due to economic pressure and the changing social values
- The elderly are increasingly reverting back to 'active parents' and are being overburdened to care for their sick children and thereafter, orphans ([SKIP-GENERATION PARENTING](#))

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Background cont'd

- Studies conducted in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda and Thailand between 2004 and 2007 show that over half of primary caregivers of sick people both in institutions (such as hospitals) and in homes are aged between 60 and 85
- Social protection is one of the 5 themes of the MGDS and is aimed at preventing the most vulnerable from plunging further into poverty and at assisting the development of their resilient mechanisms to absorb livelihood shocks (agricultural, health, economic etc)

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This study

- FAO-Malawi, with support from the Government of Norway has been implementing a capacity building project for the agricultural and natural resource sectors
- This study was initiated within this project to unravel the linkages between rural population ageing, poverty, livelihoods, HIV/AIDS and natural resources

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Study questions

- How do rural people conceive ageing?
- How is the process of ageing experienced in terms of livelihood systems, societal and family roles?
- What effects is HIV/AIDS bringing on the affected households especially on social organisation and food security?
- Which support systems do exist (formal and informal) for the elderly and their households?
- Which are the common health and social problems facing the elderly?

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The study

- Study was conducted in Zomba district in the areas of T/A Kuntumanji, T/A Chikowi and T/A Mwambo
- The study was cross-sectional; data collection was done between December 2006 and April 2007
- Methods included:
 - Individual interviews (250 respondents), one elderly person per household
 - Focus Group Discussions (6 sessions involving 35 men and 39 women aged >60 years with 12 aged 22-50)
 - 4 of the FGDs involved either men or women in separate groups
 - Points of contact in each village were the villages heads and local support groups

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Characteristics of the respondents – FGD

Characteristics	Sex of the elderly		All (N=74)
	Male (n=35)	Female (n=39)	
Main occupation			
% saying 'None'	5.7	0.0	2.7
% citing 'Farming'	91.4	92.3	91.9
% citing 'Business'	2.9	7.7	5.4
Marital Status			
Single	14.3	0.0	6.8
Married	77.1	48.7	62.2
Divorced	5.7	12.8	9.5
Widowed	2.9	38.5	21.6

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Characteristics cont'd – Individual interviews

Characteristics	Sex of the elderly		All (N=250)
	Male (n=99)	Female (n=151)	
Main occupation			
None	8.1	27.8	20.0
Farming	70.7	62.9	66.0
Business	9.1	6.6	7.6
Fishing	2.0	0.0	0.8
Artisan work	7.1	1.3	3.6
Salaried job	1.0	0.0	0.4
Other	2.0	1.4	1.6
Marital Status			
Married	76.8	22.5	44.0
Divorced/separated	9.1	10.6	10.0
Widowed	14.1	66.9	46.0

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Limitations of the study

- Sample is not representative of the elderly in Zomba and of the elderly in Malawi
- The Rural versus Urban differentials are not captured
- The study was cross-sectional (the findings may therefore reflect scenario of one season --- rainy season)
- The views represented in the report are not balanced – the survey respondents were the elderly only
- Issues of Pensioners, formal insurance etc. not covered

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What is ageing? Being an elderly?

- Chronological age (as conventionally viewed) is silently used
- Ageing or being an elderly is defined:
 - **On the basis of declining physical fitness**
"our bodies get weaker everyday.....when we go to draw water we use a small pail...sometimes the water is so little that we cannot even bath..." - 75 year old woman, T/A Mwambo
 - **On the basis of phenotypic outlooks** (*grey hair, wrinkled skin, bald head and walking using a stick etc.*)
 - **Deteriorating health status** (*rheumatism, backaches, memory loss poor vision and difficulties in understanding*)
 - **Socio-economic status** (*poor housing, difficulties in finding money and food etc*)

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Roles of the Elderly

- In the home/household
 - *Advisors of young children on social and sexual morals (although usually viewed as archaic)*
 - *Caring for young children when active parents are away*
 - *Caring for sick children (their own and grandchildren)*
 - *Health workers (Traditional healers)*
- In the community
 - *Selecting successive chiefs and advise them*
 - *Organizing funerals*
 - *Resolving conflicts (e.g. over land)*
 - *Initiation ceremonies*
 - *Health workers (e.g. TBAs, Traditional healers)*

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