



International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics

The Global Social Initiative on Ageing
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GSIA Africa: Research Themes and Strategic Plan

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Background

The Global Social Initiative Mission and Themes

The Global Social Initiative on Ageing (GSIA) is a core activity of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (www.iagg.info and www.wun.ac.uk/research/global-social-initiative-ageing). The mission of the GSIA is to foster collaborative, transnational knowledge creation and capacity building on critical challenges at the intersections of global trends and population ageing:

- The ability of families to sustain intergenerational support in the face of poverty, pandemics, and changing family structures and beliefs.
- The sustainability of older rural populations who face increased poverty and out-migration of young people in pursuit of economic opportunities, among others due to the impacts of climate change on agricultural capacity.
- Global shifts in world economies toward the individualization of risk that have led to increasing income disparities, older adults who are left behind in migratory transitions, and widening north-south divides.
- The erosion or absence of social welfare provisions that have resulted in increasing social and economic costs to older adults, their families, and communities.

GSIA Themes

Families, Liveability and Care

To optimise the GSIA's global relevance, three themes have been developed as primary foci for its initial activities. The themes encompass areas of concern that are already of high priority among social gerontologists and in the IAGG/UN Research Agenda on Ageing, and that tie in with current debates on major global issues beyond ageing (e.g. climate change, world economic crises, international migration, etc.).

Families

The world looks to families as the key social group in which older people are embedded and supported.

The objective of this theme is to identify global trends in the discourses and realities of family strengths and obligations.

Families are pivotal for understanding and addressing challenges of ageing in **Africa**. As in other parts of the world, there is concern in the region about the ability of families to sustain support to its younger and older members within contexts of poverty, rural-urban and international migration and social strain, including pandemics and conflict. At the same time, dominant policy discourses uphold the

strength of Africa's families and 'traditional' family values (vis-à-vis those in the developed 'West') as a major, even moral, asset upon which development in the continent can and must build.

The juxtaposition persists in a vacuum. There has been virtually no systematic debate or inquiry into how the ideal of the African family relates to the realities of family and intergenerational support in the region. There are pockets of discussion as part of deliberations on social protection schemes for older Africans. However, there is little focused examination of the nature of family structures and intergenerational bonds, their normative underpinnings and impacts on well-being and the opportunities for transformation and growth they carry.

By framing and stimulating discussion and identifying priority evidence needs on these and other key questions, GSIA Africa will lay a ground for debate and the development of effective responses to strengthen families and their support functions as well as their role in advancing development in the continent.

Liveability

"Liveability" results from having access to sufficient economic and social resources to meet basic needs and ensure a good quality of life.

The objective of this theme is to identify trends in access to material resources and impacts on survival and citizenship of older persons.

Issues of *liveability* attain critical importance in **Africa**. They need to be explored against a backdrop of persisting systemic poverty, but also a promise of sustained progress and growth in the continent. Within this context, a major policy concern regarding liveability and ageing centers on queries about exclusion of the older population, relative to younger age groups, from contributing to, and benefitting from development.

The palpable constraints of hardship – lacking infrastructure and basic public service provision, material deprivation and environmental hazards – affect all ages, young and old alike. But, do older persons face a systematic disadvantage compared to younger adults in access to resources, services and economic opportunities? And what age, generation or cohort effects – and structural and policy determinants engender such inequities? How, at the individual level, do older Africans experience their situation relative to younger generations and how does it relate to their conceptions of quality of life in old age? And what are the implications for policy? Such questions go to the heart of debates not only on ageing, but also on social and human development in the continent.

GSIA Africa will foster a critical discourse and build basic evidence on these issues, and will identify other salient liveability queries in order to advance the gerontological and development endeavour in Africa and globally.

Care

Enabling the provision of adequate care to the world's rapidly ageing population has been equated with climate change in its global importance.

The objective of this theme is to document patterns and determinants of care by and to older adults in order to promote the identification of appropriate and sustainable care provision models.

In Africa, most care for older persons is provided by families, typically within settings of entrenched poverty and infrastructural constraints. Yet, debate on the experience of caregiving for older persons and its implications for policy in the region is virtually non-existent.

Some concern has focused on the economic and social costs of care provided by older to younger generations, in particular in context of HIV/AIDS. However, little attention is paid to questions of care for older persons. There has been no systematic documentation of how care for older persons is provided, nor is there active discussion on what should be the relative care roles and responsibilities of families, the state and other sectors. Further, there is little systematic documentation of care needs of older persons, the amount and type of care received or the impact on older people and their families of unmet care needs.

A key reason for the lack of inquiry and debate is an overriding official discourse, which declares the centrality of the family in the care for older persons as an unassailable African value and model.

GSIA Africa will address the critical question of how the dominant discourse relates to realities of caregiving for older persons: the extent of care needs, the care options and structures available to families, the amount, type and adequacy of care received, the impacts on caregivers and recipients, and their own normative perceptions on who ought to provide care and why?

By fostering discussion and an understanding of these issues, GSIA Africa will help to build an urgently needed knowledge base to promote the development of appropriate and effective long-term care policy for ageing populations in the continent.

GSIA Strategic Plan for Africa

Introduction

The overall goal of the plan is to advance understanding of, and policy responses to, the most salient challenges concerning ‘families’, ‘liveability’ and care’ and older persons on the continent.

The GSIA Africa strategic plan builds on the global agenda including the three critical social themes: families, liveability and care. In consultation with a range of stakeholders, the GSIA Director and IAGG Regional Chair for Africa have developed a GSIA Strategic Plan for the Africa Region. The overall goal of the plan is to advance understanding of, and policy responses to, the most salient challenges concerning “families”, ‘liveability’ and care’ and older persons on the continent. The plan encompasses a systematic programme of *Agenda Setting, Capacity Building and Research Activities*, which will be undertaken by a range of partners and foster active engagement of the academic, civil society, policy and practice community on ageing in Africa.

The remainder of this document sets out a proposed agenda for GSIA Africa activities for a period of three years from January 2012 to December 2014. An overview of their sequence and timing is presented in Figure 1.

GSIA Programme for Africa

1. Agenda Setting

Three key activities will be undertaken to stimulate reflection and active discussion on the three GSIA themes among African and international research, policy and civil society stakeholders in the field of ageing in order to a) set the agenda for subsequent GSIA-led knowledge creation and capacity building and b) advance global scientific and policy debates broadly.

• Agenda scoping commentaries

The development of three commentaries, one for each of the strategic themes of ‘families’, ‘liveability’ and ‘care’, will be coordinated by the IAGG Africa Region Chair and GSIA Director through a consultative process with a spectrum of African and international researchers and civil society role players.

Each commentary, to be published in a relevant journal, will frame and demarcate salient issues and perspectives on its theme, suggest major queries and basic evidence needs that GSIA-led research should address as a priority, and invite

stakeholders to critically consider and comment on the propositions made in their oral and written work. Ensuing relevant publications will be posted on the GSIA Africa and African Research on Ageing Network (AFRAN) websites (contingent upon quality review) to stimulate further reflection and exchange.

2. Research - *Multi-country research families and caregiving*

• Developing a research agenda on Families and Ageing

Given the pivotal importance of families and generations for understanding and addressing issues of ageing in Africa and the profound gaps in scientific knowledge and debate in this area, an intensive 2-3 day research workshop will be held in South Africa in the second half of 2013 to develop a GSIA agenda – and concrete plans – for incisive, scientifically and policy-relevant multi-country research on families, intergenerational dynamics and ageing in Africa.

• Investigations on families and caregiving

Separately, full technical and financial proposals will be developed for single or multi-country mixed method investigations on 'Caregiving for Older Persons in Contexts of Poverty in SSA: Understanding Discourses and Realities'.

The research will be a combination of systematic secondary analysis of relevant existing datasets and focus on primary qualitative and quantitative data collection projects. The research program will build on the critical priority issues set out in the caregiving commentary. It will generate scientific and policy relevant knowledge on critical but extremely poorly understood issues regarding:

- ◆ Policy, public and private discourses on caregiving for older persons:
 - The primary official discourse and its underpinnings
 - The general public normative discourse
 - Personal normative conceptions of intergenerational, family and third party obligations
- ◆ The extent of caregiving need within the older population:
 - Extent of functional impairment
 - Extent and severity of non-communicable, chronic diseases (NCDs)
- ◆ The availability/provision and adequacy of family care:
 - Options (family/friend and/or formal) for caregiving for older persons in the population and especially among the poor/rural residents
 - Structures and arrangements through which care is provided
 - The amount and type of care provided/received
 - The quality and adequacy of the care provided/received
 - Individual, family and structural (local, national, and global) factors that shape caregiving constellations, content, and quality

- ◆ Key impacts of care constellations and quality on:
 - The well-being and quality of life of the older care recipient
 - The well-being of the caregiver
- ◆ Key implications:
 - for the discourse on caregiving
 - for current policy agendas on NCDs, health and care systems in Africa

3. Capacity Building

To build capacity for research, policy and practice on the GSIA strategic themes, three core capacity building activities will be pursued.

- **Intensive research workshop on families, intergenerational dynamics and ageing**

The planned intensive 2-day research workshop on 'families, intergenerational dynamics and ageing' in Africa will, in addition to forging a research agenda, encompass an explicit focus on capacity building.

Bringing together key international and African experts as well as emerging African scholars - in the fields of family gerontology and relevant social science disciplines, the intensive workshop will comprise critical discussion on, and pinpoint state of the art theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches for illuminating issues of families, generations and ageing in Africa.

- **Support for Conference Attendance**

Exposure to the global discourse and academic community are essential to capacity building. Where possible, conference attendance for African students or scholars at relevant conferences will be supported through GSIA Africa. This will likely occur through three avenues:

- ◆ Award of a number of student bursaries, on the basis of competitive applications, to attend the 2013 IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics in Seoul. The bursaries will be awarded on the basis of competitive applications as part of the IAGG Student Travel Award scheme.
- ◆ Timely alerts and dissemination, through AFRAN and IAGG websites, of relevant information of bursary or grant opportunities for attendance at regional or international conferences to the African gerontological community.

- **Knowledge sharing**

Developments in, and outcomes of GSIA-led knowledge generation, research or capacity building activities will be disseminated to the African and international ageing community through notifications on the AFRAN and IAGG websites and list-serves and, where feasible, through succinct policy, research or practice briefs for various stakeholder audiences.