

## Global Ageing Takes Stage in Post-2015 Discussions at UN

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*“If empowered and supported adequately, these populations can provide societies with new markets, entrepreneurs, decision-makers, caregivers and expertise in science, technology, mediation” —Hon. Edward Lowassa, former prime minister of Tanzania*

**Open Working Group’s Ambassador Körösi suggests data helpful for negotiators**

The global ageing trend will dramatically impact economic development, employment, access to health, poverty, pensions, and essential services. How to address these challenges—increasingly a conversation among stakeholders in the post-2015 development agenda—was the subject of a panel luncheon hosted by the Business Council for the UN on July 10. “A life-course approach to ageing: the post-2015 development agenda” convened 70 guests from UN Permanent Missions, UN specialized agencies, corporations, ngos, and the broader UN system and took place at the newly-renovated Delegates Dining Room at UN headquarters. **Jane Barratt**, secretary general of the International Federation on Ageing, moderated the discussion and encouraged an interactive dialog after the panelists from government, business, and ngo’s presented formal remarks.

The overarching message was the need to change the perception of ageing as a problem, burden, or disease—and instead embrace older people as a resource whose great potential should be unlocked—not only for the sake of safeguarding their protection and human rights, but also to ensure that their valuable contributions to society are not lost. Thus the speakers urged a shift to more age-inclusive development, with goals, targets and indicators relevant to all ages, and made a pressing case for an increase in the prominence of ageing in policy making.

Speaking from a government perspective, **Edward Ngoyai Lowassa**, former prime minister of Tanzania, addressed the challenges associated with ageing in a developing country context, where national capacity is constrained, social protection schemes are sorely lacking, population dynamics compete with many other equally important social causes or vulnerable groups, such as women and children, and ageing is absent from national development plans. Having been omitted from the MDGs, older people must be visible in the post-2015 goals, he urged. Lowassa also outlined the importance of strategic partnerships, as illustrated by his country’s programs with HelpAge International and Pfizer, in complementing government’s efforts and extending existing budgets.



Honorable Edward Ngoyai Lowassa, former Prime Minister of Tanzania [www.deutschphoto.com](http://www.deutschphoto.com)



Ann Pawliczko, Officer-in-charge, Population and Development Branch of UNFPA [www.deutschphoto.com](http://www.deutschphoto.com)

Ageing, according to **Ann Pawliczko**, officer-in-charge at the Population and Development Branch of UNFPA, is an issue of the present that can no longer be ignored, given that the number of people turning 60 each year is nearly 58 million, equivalent to almost 2 persons every second. “These are not academic projections, these people have already been born,” she said, emphasizing that excluding older people is a violation of their human rights, disregards their economic potential and their contributions to society, and presents a waste of valuable resources. In an effort to advance knowledge of the subject and provide substantive policy guidance, HelpAge International, in conjunction with UNFPA is developing the Global Age Watch index to monitor the social and economic situation of older persons around the world. She also underscored the importance of partnerships, spotlighting that “there is a role for everyone” and she provided specific recommendations for each sector based on respective expertise and comparative advantage.

**Shariq Khoja**, in his role as adviser at the mHealth Alliance—a coalition which champions the use of mobile technologies to improve health throughout the world—outlined the numerous emerging health challenges linked to ageing populations, for example the increase in non-communicable diseases as well as declining cognitive equity and mental health. He proceeded to highlight opportunities that arise when mHealth is utilized to help people age better, sustain good health and support the ageing ecosystem, which not only includes the older population, but also their caregivers and healthcare providers. To that end, mHealth Alliance is working on a range of white papers with Pfizer that endeavor to give momentum to the conversation, advance the evidence base, and mobilize support. There is evidence, Khoja said, that the use of mobile technology promotes efficiencies in care management practices and improvements in health outcomes through behavior change strategies.

**Paul Ong**, health policy adviser at HelpAge International, invited the audience to conceptualize ageing not as a problem, but a triumph of development and a testimony to what civilization has been able to accomplish since World War II. Ong established that ageing is indeed not the face of the future, as it is already occurring, and posed provocative questions on the public perception of ageing and frailty: “This is an older planet, and that is alright. Why are we so afraid of that? Why are we so terrified to accept that there is frailty at the start of life and at the end of life? What’s wrong with that?” He ended with the suggestion to shift the focus of the debate from life expectancy to healthy life expectancy—a holistic concept that includes physical, spiritual, emotional and economic health, and should be framed accordingly in the post-2015 agenda.



Paul Ong, Health Policy Adviser, HelpAge International addressing a question from the audience; Shariq Khoja, mHealth Alliance to his right [www.deutschphoto.com](http://www.deutschphoto.com)

From a private sector perspective, **Jack T. Watters**, vice president of external medical affairs at Pfizer, suggested that omitting the issue of ageing from the MDGs caused a huge gap that left out an entire generation in national development efforts, and should be filled by including the new population dynamics in the post-2015 deliberations in their own right. He echoed the call for public-private partnerships, which have been extremely effective in the past 15 years, and for the strategic pooling of resources—especially in the face of recent budget pressures in every sector. According to Watters, bold action with a common voice will be required to push the momentum forward. “Advocacy is how this is going to happen”, he said. “Ageing will not get on the post-2015 agenda on its own accord”.

Following the panelists’ remarks, **Katsuhiko Takahashi**, minister for economic affairs at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN, offered comments drawing from his country’s experience as a pioneer and frontrunner on the issue of ageing. Given Japan’s long record of hosting the largest proportion of the population age 60 and above (currently at 30%), he described how the country had to modify its system based on demographic trends and the change in behaviors in community members. For the past two years the country has offered its expertise and knowledge on how to mitigate the effects of population ageing to other nations, both developed and developing, by convening stakeholders and hosting discussions.

The panel concluded with a productive discussion from the floor, with numerous participants offering their perspectives and engaging the panel through insightful interventions. Among them was **Laurie Phipps**, advisor at the U.S. Mission to the UN, who raised the issue of elder abuse, a concept referring not only to physical violence, but also encompassing economic scams, abandonment and neglect. **Ambassador Csaba Körösi**, the Permanent Representative of Hungary to the UN and co-chair of the

Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, also took the floor, articulating a request for data and guidance to help the parties involved in the negotiations to determine what investments are required to honor the rights of older people and whether current legal frameworks and international cooperation systems are sufficient to support and empower them.

The panel luncheon was co-sponsored by Pfizer. Supporters included AARP, HelpAge International, Global Coalition on Aging, mHealth Alliance, and International Federation on Ageing.



Jack T. Watters, Vice President of External Medical Affairs, Pfizer [www.deutschphoto.com](http://www.deutschphoto.com)



Katsuhiko Takahashi, Minister for Economic Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN [www.deutschphoto.com](http://www.deutschphoto.com)

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