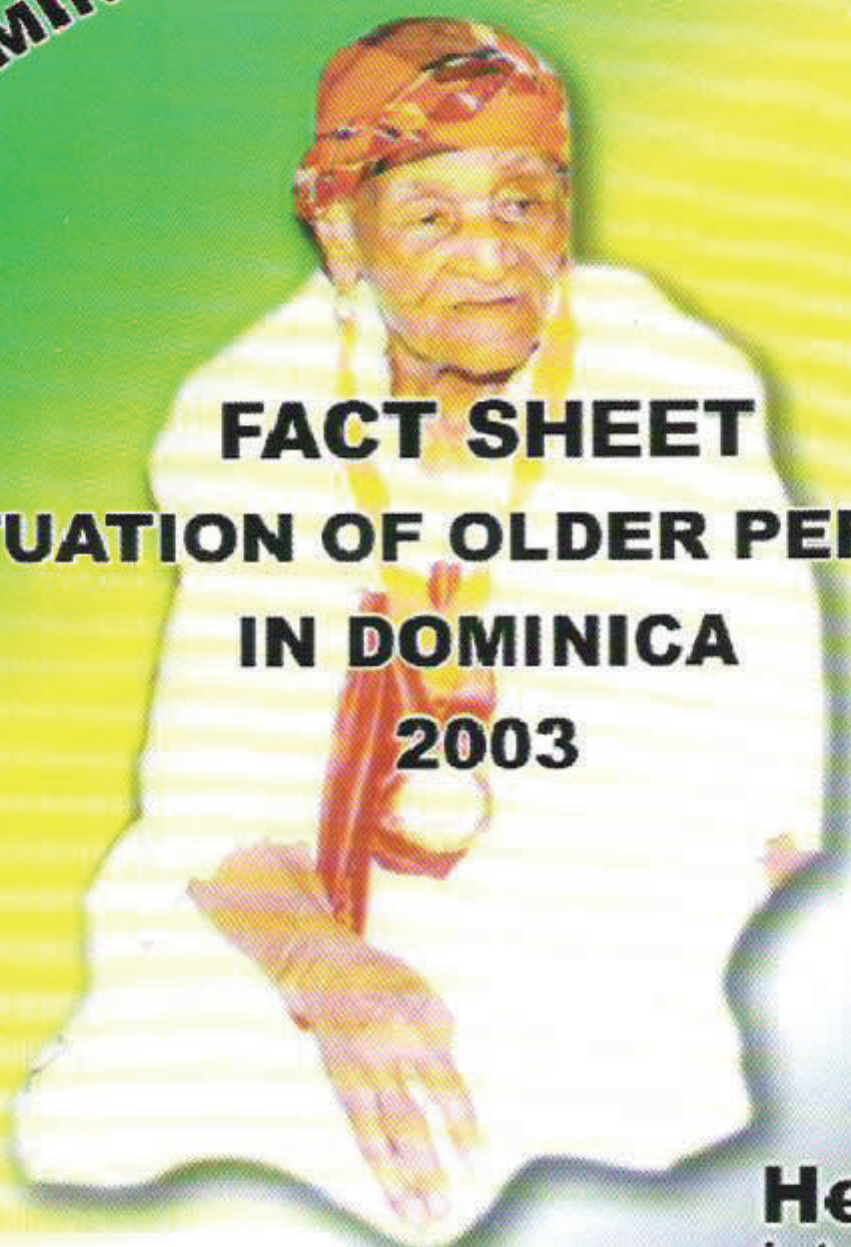


Empowering Older Persons



DOMINICA COUNCIL ON AGEING



FACT SHEET SITUATION OF OLDER PERSONS IN DOMINICA 2003

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**HelpAge
International**

Leading global action on ageing

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INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Dominica, a 289.5 square miles, lush green island, has a Population of 71,727 persons (36,434 males and 35,293 females). It is divided into ten Parishes with an average of 246 residents per square mile. The official language is English but most persons speak a French Dialect based on its historical connections.

Its humid tropical marine-like climate and high percentage of centenarians (22 persons, mainly females) contribute to the island being called the "Nature Island of the Caribbean".

Based on the demographic situation, Dominica, as most other countries is increasingly seeing an ageing population. Indicators however suggest deficiencies in the quality of life of older persons in Dominica and their limited participation in national development. It is on this basis that a research study, commissioned by the Dominica Council on Ageing and funded by HelpAge International and British Department for International Development, sought to gather information needed to determine the most appropriate Policies, Programmes and Services that would lead to an improvement in the quality of life for older persons.

SITUATION OF OLDER PEOPLE

The following represents factual information about older people in Dominica and actions which should be taken to improve their situation.

1. INCOME AND LIVELIHOOD

- Most older persons in Dominica cannot survive adequately on their varied sources of income as identified below.
- *Paid work/ and or rental of assets*
Generally more males than females rely on this source although less than half the males in each age group receive income from this source.
- *Income from children and relatives*
Most older persons receive their financial assistance from children and relatives. However more females are dependent on this source.
- *Pension/Social Security*
Overall more males than females are receiving Pension and or Social Security benefits. This is limited mainly to about half of the males and a third of the females in the 60 - 69 age group. Few males and females aged 70 years and over benefit.

Few persons are receiving Public Assistance/ Welfare support. However, this is more evident among males in the 70 and over age group.

This is not a significant source of income for the target group. Older females are more dependent on savings than older men.

Significantly there are few, if any, persons receiving Public Assistance in Rest of St. George / St. Mark / St Luke and St. Patrick.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- The Public Assistance Programme should be reviewed, since there are some persons who are really in need and are not receiving Public Assistance while some who are getting do not really need it.
- Government should amend existing Legislation or enact new ones where necessary to safeguard the rights of older persons.
- Ensure that all paid workers contribute to the Social Security Scheme or a Pension Fund.
- Provide for increased Public Assistance and concessions through National Discount Cards for the older persons.
- Publicize and enforce the existing Maintenance Act so that children care for

elderly parents especially when they have control over the older person's property.

Review the age of retirement upwards to allow for more effective participation/ contributions of older persons in society in view of the fact that Dominica is an ageing society and the perception that many young adults are migrating.

- Review Gender Policy with respect to work and wages.
- The Ministry of Community Development through the Welfare Division should review its assessment of needy person's island - wide to ensure that the Poverty Alleviation Programme target the older persons as a special subset.

Income Earning Activities



2. SOCIAL SITUATION AND SERVICES AVAILABLE

There is need not only for increased financial assistance but also for social support and improved services. The majority of females

compared to less than half of the males.

The level of loneliness and or abandonment among the older persons is not as high as usually perceived by many. Significantly the majority of lonely men and women reside in the Roseau area. A half of the lonely females are in the 80+ age group. Those older persons who expressed that they are lonely do not have extended families.

Generally most older persons feel happy or satisfied with their social status although more women than men emphasize this point.

Many of the older persons complain about the level of disrespect displayed by the youth. In this regard a minority of both males and females feel that older persons are poorly treated.

The main areas of need as identified by older persons are:

- * Financial support for the majority
- * Social support (visits, social functions)
- * Greater awareness of services
- * Community activities and involvement

There is little community orientation and involvement of older people in the urban and suburban areas.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Government Departments should foster greater public awareness of their services

Council, Welfare Division.

- Establishment of a support and care network at the community level to include Officials of the Local Authority. Special focus must be placed on older persons with disabilities.
- Many elderly persons prefer not to be placed at an institution therefore children and relatives should ensure that they receive proper care within their home settings.

Develop programmes to foster greater positive interaction between the young and old as a priority area.

Social Activity



3. HEALTH AND COPING WITH THE AGING PROCESS

The main health problems, in descending order, as identified by less than half the older persons in each age category are:

Hypertension and arthritis
Eye problem
Diabetes

Many persons suffer from more than one health problem.

The women are more aware of their health problems and seem to have greater interaction with the Health Sector. Both males and females utilize prescribed medicines from Health Centres/Hospitals as well as bush medicine prepared at home. Prescribed medication when unavailable at Health Centres, is bought at private Pharmacies. However many persons find that they are unaffordable.

Most persons have 2-3 meals per day. Half of them have a mixed or balanced diet while the meals of the others lack adequate protein.

Despite the diet related health problems only a few indicate adherence to prescribed or special diets.

All older persons have access to water, however about a third do not have pipe borne water at home so they obtain water from a standpipe in the village.

The home environment /sanitation are generally rated as good or satisfactory, except for a few that need improvement.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

Garbage disposal in the urban and suburban communities is managed by organized collection system, (Dominica Solid Waste Company.) Most persons in the rural communities bury, compost or burn their garbage.

Indications are that most persons are adjusting or coping satisfactorily with the ageing process within their level of wellness. However there is a lack of specific information on the process of ageing and death.

- Conduct educational programmes on healthy life styles to include nutrition and diet, exercise, good medical practices and proper hygiene, ageing and death. Encourage the utilization of facilities and Out-reach Programmes to ensure health and fitness (physical, mental and



emotional) tailored specifically to the needs of the older persons and care givers.

Strengthen the existing programmes of the Health Department to address the needs of older persons in all communities.

The Physical Planning Officials should seek to influence the designs and construction of both private and public buildings to ensure that they are more accessible by older persons.

Provide concessions for older persons to purchase essential items such as medications and food and to meet the cost of utilities and transportation.

4. HOUSING

Most persons feel that their housing situation is very good or satisfactory. However housing is an area needing urgent attention for approximately a quarter of the older persons since their houses are in a state of disrepair and without adequate living facilities. Many of them are unable to meet the costs of the repairs. The Silver Lake Community needs priority attention.

Most persons live in concrete or wooden houses while the minority have their houses constructed of both concrete and wood. The majority of persons own and have lived in their houses for more than one or two decades however they rely on financial assistance

obtained from paid work/assets, children, pension/public assistance to maintain them. Generally most homes have access to social amenities although less than one half have indoor toilet and bath and about one quarter with toilet outdoors. Few persons have no toilet facilities. This is prevalent in the Carib Territory, St. Mark/St. Luke, St. Joseph and St. Patrick areas. This may be linked with the poor potable water system in the specific areas e.g. Carib Territory and St. Joseph.

Low Income Housing



Many complain though, about meeting the high costs of utility bills.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Conduct more in depth assessment of the housing conditions of older persons with a view to providing affordable housing with improved conditions for the lower socio-economic group.
- A special effort should be made by the Dominica Water and Sewerage Company to improve the water system in the specified communities to ensure improvement in the

socio-economic situations of the older persons.

Erect proper pit Latrines where potable water is unavailable.

5. EDUCATION LEVEL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

Almost all persons attained only primary education and left school between standard two to seven. Few older persons have secondary or tertiary education.

Main reasons given for the majority not attaining higher education are:

- ⊙ Unaffordability by parents
- ⊙ The need to assist parents with younger siblings
- ⊙ the need to find paid work
- ⊙ Illness
- ⊙ Non-existence or inaccessibility of secondary institutions at the time.

Majority of older persons feel that they would have had a better standard or quality of life if they had obtained higher education.



Local Cultural Dance

Many older persons are aware of current events through three major sources

- Radio - Television - Friends and neighbours. Newspaper is apparently not a significant source of information. The findings indicate that older persons from St. Joseph, Marigot and Vieille Case communities are highly aware of service groups targeting the older persons whereas it is minimal in the other communities. The groups frequently mentioned were Reaching the Elderly Abandoned Citizens Housebound (REACH), Day Centres and Cultural Groups.

The older persons communicate their needs mainly to family members, friends and health workers but there is minimal interaction with either Local or Central Government officials except for those who receive Public Assistance at the Village Councils.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

Non Government Organizations, Community Based Organizations and Government to cooperate in mounting education programmes on the Ageing process and proper retirement planning.

- The Media is being encouraged to play a more significant role in targeting programmes for older persons.

PRIVATE sector, SERVICE organizations, TOURISM and other Community Groups need to organize and implement programmes to foster closer relationship with the older persons especially in the transference of traditional skills and art form.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Most persons were involved in economic activities (more so men) in earlier years and hence contributed both financially and materially to their families and communities. Many women were involved mainly in unpaid domestic work.

Economic activities mainly included - Agriculture Fishing and Boat Building, Craft/Wood Work and Sewing.

Currently most activities have shifted to more technical support for families such as caring for

children and grand children, minor house chores and counseling (advice and guidance)

It is evident that, in terms of community participation, there is significant involvement by the older persons in Church, Social, and

SCHOOL CITIZENS groups and LOCAL Government (Village Councils).

There is also evidence of greater participation of the older persons in community groups in the Parishes of St. Joseph and St. Andrew than in the other Parishes. There are fewer persons in the Roseau area who are involved in more than one group. The Parish of St. Paul is

significantly low in this regard. The participation of males in community groups is significantly low.



ACTIONS REQUIRED

Most of the fishermen / boat builders, cassava and arrowroot producers are older persons. It is important that specific programmes be implemented to prevent the loss of some traditional art.

Community Based Organizations, Non Governmental Organizations and Government Departments should undertake projects to ensure the incorporation of the ideas and input of more elderly persons of our society and provide them the opportunity to pass on knowledge and skills through:

- Summer school Programme
- Youth skills Training
- Women's Groups
- Specially Managed Community Sessions

- Encourage the Elderly to take up Leadership Roles within their Communities.

GENERAL ACTIONS

Capacity Strengthening of Dominica Council on Ageing and related Government Departments to implement the recently adopted National Policy on Ageing

- Review and enforce existing legislation and enact new ones where needed to protect the rights of the older persons.
- Mass education programmes on issues of ageing at national and community levels.
- Projects and programmes should be undertaken by key players geared at greater involvement of the older persons and to address their specific needs and concerns
- Provide priority parking for older persons

The recommendations throughout the document point to the need for an integrated / all inclusive approach to address ageing issues and thus realize the goal of improved quality of life for the older persons of Dominica.

There already exists a National Policy on Ageing adopted by the Government of Dominica. However there are limitations to its effective implementation because of:

- ❖ Limited Financial and human resource capacity
- ❖ Infrastructural barriers and weaknesses
- ❖ Implications of other policies namely mandatory retirement age without targeted programme for continued involvement of senior citizens

It is therefore recommended that Dominica Council on Ageing

Spearhead a collaborative process with other stake holders/social organizations – Welfare, REACH, St. Vincent De Paul, Day Centres etc. to include Social Centre and the Social arm of the Evangelical / Adventist Churches to better utilize scarce human and financial resources targeted at the older persons. This is necessary in preparing an integrated programme to avoid multiple services to some older persons while others are not reached. It may also reduce religious bias which was inferred in some cases.

Review and Enforce the Public Assistance Act.

Reference:

2002 Research study on situation of Older persons
Dominica National Council on Ageing

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Social Gathering



Retreat Day

