

Verity McGivern - Challenges and pathways to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world

3-5 minutes

Distinguished delegates, your excellencies, colleagues and friends.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak today and offer an ageing perspective to discussions on challenges and pathways to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world. The world is indeed changing (pause) and one of the dynamics shaping our world is that so many of us are living longer lives. By 2030, there will be more people over 60 worldwide than children under 10. For the first time in human history, most people can expect to live into their 60s and beyond. Age is an issue of relevance to each and every one of us in this room.

The 2030 Agenda's transformational vision and the pledge to "leave no one behind" means that development agendas must include all persons, of all ages. Implementation of all SDGs must be based on equality, social justice and human dignity across the life course and recognise that older persons have an equal right to development, alongside all other human rights.

Critical to this recognition is acknowledgment of the diversity and heterogeneity of the population of older persons, and also an understanding of how ageism and discrimination, which we so often hear reported by older persons themselves, are barriers to their inclusion in policies and programmes.

I'll turn here to the picture on the screen behind me which shows Nora, an older woman from South Africa. The quote from her illustrates the challenges faced by many older people who find their health concerns are dismissed as just old age.

"The hospitals say, 'we have no pill to treat old age'. We are not made to feel welcome in hospitals. They are impatient with us."

There are significant barriers to the realisation of older persons' rights that must be addressed through the implementation of Agenda 2030 if the commitment to leave no one behind is to be fulfilled. From inadequate access to age-appropriate health and care services, income insecurity, increased gender inequality in older age to significant gaps in data.

Adopting a life course approach will be useful in improving our understanding of how the decisions we make, the social and political systems we are part of and trajectories of advantage and disadvantage, shape experiences and opportunities in later life.

As SDG implementation accelerates at national level, coherent policy packages are needed that consider how they support and influence younger people to make decisions that lead to greater well-being in their old age in the future; how they lead to greater equity between generations; and how they ensure well-being of people who are older today.

Social protection floors and universal health coverage provide important opportunities so long as schemes are designed to have transformative impact for older persons, rather than simply meeting basic needs.

The voices & preferences of older persons are critical to achieving the SDGs and recognising their right to self-determination and autonomy. These must be amplified to ensure that governments are accountable to their older populations in implementation of the SDGs. We must also recognise that the conventional instruments of voice and empowerment – information and communication – are often out of reach for older people, particularly older women whose literacy levels are often very low.

More must be done to guarantee participation of, and build capacity for, older persons to contribute to and benefit from national, regional and global policy development. Older people's associations and older citizens monitoring (OCM) are practical examples of models that work. One example of local impact as a result of older citizen monitoring is the recruitment of staff with knowledge of indigenous cultures and languages in Bolivia.

There is an urgent need to ensure that structures are in place at regional and national level to guarantee participation of the broad range of stakeholders covered by Agenda 2030. We welcome the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM) which has created space for 17 constituencies to engage in the process at regional level. However, in other regions, and often at national level, we have not seen the same willingness to open up civil society structures to the broader range of stakeholders included within Agenda 2030.

Thank you for your attention.