"Older persons are an asset to and make a significant contribution to global development"
- United Nations, Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon

MAKE THAT CHANGE!

In This Issue:

- 1 October 2015 International day of Older people
  Empowering the Elderly: law as a tool to change

- Negligence on Ageing (April 2014) – a meeting of Albanian Society for All Ages (ASAG) and Municipality No.1 in Tirana to raise our awareness on ageing through the promotion of the printed report on the Tirana International Conference on Ageing.

- An evening of poetry 'in memory of' an important founder of ASAG, Dr. Bukurie Skënderi and her valuable contribution in publishing our conference report titled: ‘Burning Problems and Needs of Ageing in Albanian Society’ who passed on last March.


- Older woman want an active community (June 21st, 2015) – a pre-electoral meeting with various stakeholders which took place in Tirana in order to build momentum on the issue of older persons while Albania is preparing for new local governance elections.
Background:

As local elections approach in Albania, the elderly are disregarded by the public debate and not included at all in the current and prospective treasury of local governments, a situation that continues to linger ever since the transition period (almost 25 years now) from a communist society to a democratic one.

Albania does not yet have comprehensive policies on ageing and as such, it faces big challenges on measures to help older people preserve health and remain active. These policies are a necessity and not a luxury; however, governance on all levels remains deaf and blind.

On April 1st, 2015 newspaper "Telegraph" published an excerpt titled: 18 million US$ from government funding goes to associations and boards managed by family members of several government officials, while on the other hand ASAG as an association with a long and vital contribution on Ageing is excluded and marginalized.

Poverty of elderly is based on the well-founded premise that its root is a political condition and that solutions too must be based upon transformations and redistributions of power.

The lack of a solid strategy by the government of Albania has resulted in a huge gap between where needs lie and where funds go. International donors dictate how support and funding are distributed without taking into account the real issues that we actually face. The elderly are not benefiting from national wealth and development! ASAG, an organization with exclusive focus on Ageing, is seeking public debate and transparency on all levels of decision-making. Our input is left untapped and our works is undermined by greed.

ASAG’s Short CV:

In the past, we would say 16 years, there has been substantial development in terms of our understanding of our capacity as volunteers. ASAG is the only coordinator between UN and the
Albanian Government, which prompted the visit of UN experts in Albania in October 10-13, 2011 followed by the Report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission: “Policies and programmes for older persons in Albania”. As an influencing Member at the Central Working Group for developing the National Strategy and Plan on Ageing, the board at the Central Working Group for development of National Standards for Older People, ASAG has been at the core of publishing and dissemination of various international and national studies, reports and articles aiming to sensitize our society and influence policy-making in Albania. In this framework our most important publication was the translation and dissemination of the “International Plan of Action on Ageing”, a Political Document signed by the President and Albanian Government in the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid 2002. Lately ASAG and its partners organized the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING TIRANA / ALBANIA (April 2014) under the auspices of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania, with the participation of 14 European countries and Israel.

Empowering the Elderly: law as a tool to change
1 OCTOBER 2015, INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PEOPLE

The activity was organized by ASAG, UNFPA, Ombudsman and Open Door at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania.
During the conference, the participants reviewed various examples of measures taken in response to the challenges facing older people and outlined some of the major gaps in those responses.

The conference identified several areas where much work needs to be done:

- **Violence against older persons and women in particular**: Closely linked with disempowerment and discrimination, violence often goes unreported and under-documented, as older persons are reluctant or unable to report such incidents.
- **Financial exploitation**: Older persons continue to face multiple threats of financial exploitation, including fraud, arbitrary deprivation of their property, theft and expropriation of their land, property and goods.
- **Participation in policymaking and political life**: Direct and informed participation of older persons in the design of public policy is central to their integration as right-holders. The conference highlighted as particularly lacking, mechanisms ensuring participation and accountability.
- **A round table** should be organized to review and discuss the draft law for older persons which is lying in government drawers since 2008. All stakeholders should be invited to the round table in order to measure the adequacy for national reference budgets, based on a list of realistic needs so that the elderly can at least live in dignity. The results of the discussions and recommendations will serve as an input to the draft law and will also rekindle our lobbying effort.

**Press Release:**

Tirane, 1 October, 2015

On the occasion of October 1st, 2015, the International Day of Older Persons, the Ombudsman held a press conference along with representatives various older persons NGOs: Mr. Osman Terziu Association for Integration Pensioners Albania, Mr. Ilia Telo, Albanian Association of Demography, Mrs. Ermira Pirdeni, Executive Director (ASAG) Albanian Society for All Ages.

Ombudsman Mr. Igli Totozani, urged the ratification of the Third Age Status as well as the publishing of an official minimum living standard in Albania, necessary to guarantee the rights of the elderly. (Albania is one of those few countries in the world where there are no official figures to assess the minimum living standards.)
Message from the Executive Director:

The 2015 celebration of the 25th anniversary of International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) by UN, aims to demonstrate that an age inclusive agenda is crucial for sustainable urban environments to promote equity, welfare and shared prosperity for all.

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality and engage in seeking solutions. In order to address the many facets of an ever-degrading situation for older people in Albania, new measures which require political commitment as well as a significant investment of resources should be introduced. Our efforts are mainly focused in resuming our negotiations regarding the draft law on the care towards elderly and in encouraging public debate. As our efforts would not be as effective if it wasn’t for the support and echo we have received by our partners and donors. In this framework I would like to thank:

Dr. Valbona Nesimi, vice-chairman of the Democratic Party of Macedonia, who shared her valuable experience as a political woman by reporting on the situation of elderly in Macedonia, the policies being undertaken to improve it and the ethnic marginalization.

Decemland partner, Mr. Jaime P. Monfort for collaborating in our international conference as well as the publishing and dissemination of the article: “Albania's Ageing Problem” on 25 September 2015 among international and local newspapers such as: “Huffington Post” and “Albanian Daily News”. This article recognized the efforts of our team and made a very realistic overview on the situation of the elderly in Albania.

Miss Elsone Agolli and Miss Elida Nuri, analysts at UNFPA Albania who as young women with an insightful vision and enthusiasm have steered UNFPA to recognize and support the issues of the elderly in Albania.

I look forward to our continued cooperation to promote and strengthen the issues and rights of poverty-affected Older People as a wider response based on the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Poverty in old age cannot be the alternative!

With Best Wishes,
Mira Pirdeni

Neglicence on Ageing:

As local governance elections approach, ASAG in an effort to gather support and influence political movements to make ageing a part of their agenda, organized the event: “Negligence on Ageing” to show that population ageing raises many fundamental questions for policy-makers. We want the phenomenon “Demographic Change” be at the center of public discussion.

Mrs. Mira Pirdeni, Director Executive of ASAG posted the following questions in this event, questions that were subsequently published in the local newspaper ‘Civic Tribune’:

- As people are living longer, how can the quality of life in old age be improved?
- How do we help people remain independent and active as they age?
• How do we best balance the role of the family and the state when it comes to caring for people who need assistance, as they grow older?
• How do we acknowledge and support the major role that people play as they age in caring for others?
• NGO of elderly raising questions about their legitimacy and sustainability.

The meeting was followed by a discussion on the importance and international impact our publication titled: "Burning Problems and Needs of Ageing in Albanian Society"

The event was accompanied by an evening of poetry 'in memory of' ASAG founder Dr. Bukurie Skenderi whose volunteer work and contribution on various events, publications and translations has been of immense value to us. Unfortunately she passed away on March 09, 2015 and will be dearly missed.

Poems by various national and international writers accompanied by the sounds of a talented violinist and pianist paid homage to our sister. During the event family members, friends and associates of the late Dr. Bukurie Skenderi were interviewed giving their impressions and sharing experiences of collaboration and humanity. Dr. Bukurie’s 16 years of work and cooperation in ASAG in favor of older people and new international vision on Ageing and sustainability made for an abundant evening.

The song is ended, but the melody lingers on ... Irving Berlin
Speaking older friend of Dr. Bukurie Skenderi

Dr. Eda Elbasani as a reciter, former director of the focal point on ageing at the Ministry of Health, member at the Central Working Group for developing the National Strategy and Plan on Ageing.
Anila Bega – President of Shalom Center Albania proclaimed in kindergarten initiative: “I love grandma”

Edi Hallulli - The best-known violinist completed studies at Vienna University for music and art
Generations Together:

Mrs. Nora Malaj – Deputy-Minister of the Ministry of Education and Sports
Laura Xhaxhiu / “Open Door” Association

Mira Pirdeni / ASAG
Attendees

The European Day for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (April 29th) workshop raised awareness of the issues such as: human rights, gender, intergenerational exchange and social justice. It was an effort to encourage all policymakers and stakeholders to set themselves goals and take action to meet them so as to go beyond debating and start bringing tangible results in their communities.

Participants explained how they started up projects in the community, shared their work experience and strategies used to involve different stakeholders.

This event was free and open to the public, and it was broadcasted by a large number of printed and electronic media.

Special thanks go to the excellent organizational skills of Mrs. Laura Xhaxhiu Vice/President of ‘Open the Door’ Association curator of the event.

Older woman want an active community:

On May 27th, 2015, Municipality No. 1 in Tirana promoted the first ever of its kind community journal volume publishing. It serves as a public record for every citizen, student and interested party to review and learn about the management of the public and local resources over the years. A meeting with representatives from all political forces, civil society and business community was organized. The meeting was attended by many inhabitants and media outlets and was echoed as a positive step forward in improving communication, information and transparency in local governance.
The journal itself mirrored the cooperation between the actors at stake and was praised for its transparency and assistance in the establishment of solid bond between the community and the persons they had trusted with their votes with. It addressed development challenges in a more holistic, inclusive, transparent and accountable manner with new levels of cooperation. Such engagement is of critical importance for the achievement of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Mrs. Pirdeni, (Executive Director of ASAG) congratulated the event and the possibility that the newspaper had given ASAG to express the voice of older people and particularly the elderly women.

“An older system dies quicker than our pace to replace it. The clash between the old and new is so powerful! Community newspaper "The Civic Tribune" is a unique case in Albania!” in her words, Mrs. Pirdeni stressed the importance of genuine and uncensored information. Public Participation is the basis of government in a democracy. Public Participation is public dialogue. Public dialogue involves the public in the social and political life and encourages participation in the community. Communication is listening and responding to concerns. The purpose of public participation is the establishment of a relationship, between the government and the public to create trust.
Conclusion:

Women in age feel responsible for the fate of their families. They understand and seek the development of a skilled local stature in addressing community issues by conducting development and inclusion of all human resources. We want an active community!

ASAG has a unique collaboration with local authorities, which in return has nurtured the spirit of a team where strength and power lie in the passion of the people. Such collaborations can lead to meaningful change. A change where communities move away from rhetoric towards action, thus meeting the aspirations of the elderly. Social movements can play an important role in keeping political parties and leaders committed to the public. They provide legitimacy, spiritual virtue and added political action.
The activists and people mentioned in this publication, include thought leaders, executives, writers, artists, researchers, experts, volunteers, and everyday people who are changing how we age and think about aging in Albania.

“Our readers are hungry for new ideas, products, policies and programs that help them live the way they want as they age. ASAG's influencers in Aging are men and women who are leading that charge. We are proud to shine a light on their accomplishments and hope to inspire others to engage in this important work.”

Credit:
Prepared by Mira Pirdeni / Director Executive of ASAG
Translated by Dritan Pirdeni
Sponsor UNFPA
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