**Project title:**

**Social Protection and Economic Vulnerability of Elders in Ethiopia: Practices, Problems and Prospects**

**Introduction**

The term “elderly “or ‘’older person” has different meanings in different countries. It is mainly explained by and is related to chronological age, functional age as well as retirement age[[1]](#footnote-2).Individual physical appearance also used as a method to distinguish older person. Gray hair, failing eye sight, physical deterioration, in ability to reproduce and becoming a grandparent are some of the frequent attributes towards the term “elderly”.[[2]](#footnote-3) As per the UN[[3]](#footnote-4) definition, older persons are represented by those with the age of 60 and above which coincides with Ethiopian official retirement age.

Regardless of their increase in number Older people are among those who faces the social exclusion while governments and development agencies pursuing development strategies and action towards the prosperous journey of a nation. Despite their contribution in their young age for social, political and economic development of a nation, observing them as resourceful segments of the society acquiring wealth of skills and experiences and they can be part of the development process of their country is very minimal.

No national development strategy is complete without an explicit national social protection plan. While Ethiopia does not have a systematic social protection plan a large number of activities have involved over the last several years that, taken together, constitute Ethiopia’s de facto social protection strategy.

In Ethiopia, according to the 2006 projection made by Central Statistics Agency (CSA)[[4]](#footnote-5),the rate of the population growth will continue to be high and the same pattern can be observed for those people aged 60 years and above as estimated 2.7 million out of 42 million in 1984 , 3.6 million in 2005 and 5.2 million 2020.

Older people in Ethiopia are exposed to various socio economic obstacles involving poverty and economic crises, poor health and lack of social security. The increasing industrialization and urbanization break the traditional extended family and community structure through which older people rely on for their social and economic support

As a result even though social protection, as a tool, is vital in speeding up progress towards development goals, a national development policy with explicit strategy around which society organizes itself to protect those who would otherwise risk social exclusion (i.e. including elders) is minimal and decentralized into various implementing agencies.

The study hence, aims to address and explore the situation of older persons in Ethiopia. In doing so, important issues related to social protection scheme and economic earning, demographic profile and related organizational structure will be studied.

**Needs for the study**

Older people in Ethiopia are very important in offering advice and guidance to the community. They serve as the head of the family and treated with respect. From the experience, they acquire vital skills and techniques in dealing with health related activities (i.e. healing and birth attendants), traditional practices (i.e. arbitrators, leaders and leaders of cultural activities in marriage) and economical undertakings (i.e. in agricultural undertakings). Therefore elders have a crucial role to play in the traditional community of the nation from activities within the family system to the larger collective activity at the communal level. Recently, however, following the rapid growth of cities in effect of modernization and industrialization results into massive changes in social and economic structure. Family structure tends to transform itself into a nuclear one and elders traditional, social and economical roles are replaced by the formal organization of implementing agencies. Therefore it becomes important to study the systematic development of social protection strategies with the growing modernization and elders’ active participation towards the development process.

**Statement of the problem**

Despite the crucial role old people play in various social and economic activities of the nation, with the growing of cities and modernization, rural - urban migration especially by youngsters’ forces elders facing a lot of challenges and limitations. Some of the vital problems worth of mentioning involves: dissolving of traditional family support system, lack of organized and structured social protection scheme, scarcity of professionals (i.e. social workers, psychologists and sociologists) in building awareness and supporting and developing systematic approach towards alleviating social and economic vulnerability of elders, and well channeled government and nongovernmental organizations organized efforts as to establish income generating and supportive schemes in participating elders towards the development process.

If Ethiopia chooses to evolve to a more efficient development of people accountable for identifying and enrolling vulnerable families and individuals (i.e. involving enders) into protection systems, monitoring their progress and maintain them through medium to long term program, This type of strategy would ideally reduce the burden of vulnerable people on their families and society as a whole as well as lead to a policy that would require the rapid expansion of a professional social worker profession in Ethiopia.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**Social protection:**

Social protection comprises a set of actions including, policies, legislation, social services and social insurance designed to reduce either the risk of experiencing an economic or social shock, or reduce the welfare loss after such a shock has occurred combined with actions aimed at alleviating extreme or chronic poverty.[[6]](#footnote-7) Social protection has been used by various governments to address the problems related to elders. The various short comings faced by old people in the nation has been scaterdly handled by various government agencies independently. This decentralized management makes it unclear how efficient the total collection of activities are delivering on constitutional requirements. No one has a complete picture of what is working well and what is improved.

How to pay for social protection is another vital point which needs a focus. Is it through taxation or other mechanisms as to strengthen social protection of elders which further indicates tax burden in the ‘middle class’ section of the society.

**Economic vulnerability of elders**

Economic vulnerability of elders has been emanating from disintegrating family and community support system which used to actively participate older people in the various activities and supply them with the necessary respect. Due to industrialization and urbanization, people nowadays are able to live longer. However, despite the high growth rates being experienced in Ethiopia many people are being left behind. The development plans and strategies tend to focus on productive activities and are more targeted at younger age groups while elder people can also contribute better to the development process.

**Challenges for improving provision of various social protection schemes and economic earning**

Regardless of the economic growth registered in the last decade, the situation of the countries elder population remains dire. This is to some extent emanates from the reluctant nature of government and agency activities as to what extent their social protection responses reach older people. Most of the programs require their beneficiaries to be labor intensive, subject to manipulation of power by those who influence the community and reaching only smaller section of the society. Some of an as such programs involve the Ethiopian food security project and the productive safety net programs (PSNP).

Despite the above efforts, systematic organization of elders as to participate in productive and economic earning schemes has been minimal. Development programs and organization of older people in active economic activities like urban agriculture, in production of artifacts and exploiting their ideas and techniques are some of the means the community failed to employ to overcome the challenges of the elderly.

**Objectives of the present study**

The general objective of the study is to analyze the impact and/or relevance of social protection schemes particularly for old persons for national social welfare and sustenance development. In a country where a significant group of society, in our case the aged ,have no dependable source of social protection schemes and economic means, there will be a high burden for the productive population to support them. Therefore, there is an overriding argument that the state must employ an adequate and somehow sustainable system of social protection and income generating means from elderly. Hence the objective of the study is to analyze the existing social protection efforts and the economic challenges followed it via elder’s activity.

The specific objectives of the study include:

* To analyze the historic development and current practice of social protection schemes in Ethiopia including the scope of coverage and its progress;
* To assess the limitations of and positive aspects of social protection responses and economic viability of elders.
* To explore the socio-economic and survival strategies of different categories of old people.
* To investigate the status and roles of the selective elder-related organizations.
* To recommend possible solutions to alleviate the problems of social protection responses to elders and their earning capacity.

**Universe of study**

The universe of the study involves all older people throughout the nation despite their sex, ethnicity and location. There are about 3000 non-governmental organizations throughout the country, out of these about 100 organizations are conducting social and developmental activities related to elders. Therefore conducting a case study of two elder related organizations will be appropriate as to catch the glimpse of the national scenario through specific examination.

**Methodology**

**Data collection Method**

Data will be collected by using a combination of techniques. These include reviewing literature, participatory observation, in-depth interviews and sample survey. These methods are designed to complement each other.

*Review of related literature*: Relevant materials on the elderly, aging, and gerontology will be identified and reviewed with an objective to establish statement of the problems designing a questionnaire and conceptualizing the study. Furthermore, the literature will be used to compare the findings of the study with related work whether there are similar or different outcomes.

*Participatory Observation*: In the course of the study, the investigator will conduct an assessment of two elder- related organizations in particular. During the assessment, the history of the institutions, their objectives, organizational structure, project activities, future plans, challenges and short comings will be examined. These enabled the investigator to identify organizational effort towards social protection responses and develop rapport.

*In depth interview*: Since the study focuses on historical development and practices of social protection responses of older people in Ethiopia, it is hardly possible to select sample population that pertains to the issue. The researcher will aimed at focusing on the key informants who were authorities in Government offices formerly and currently, pensioners who had awareness about the issue, and the Elderly and Pensioners National Association. Thus, the interviewees will be selected intentionally by the researcher. The interviewees include those who had served or being giving services as authorities in the Prime Minister’s Office, Social Security Authority, Federal Civil Service Commission and beneficiaries from the under studied organizations. Structured interview will be developed by the researcher based on the basic questions.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative information collected through different data gathering methods will be analyzed manually. In analyzing the data, attempts will be made to carefully review and examine the rapport, participatory observation and in-depth interview. Finally, triangulation will be used to obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality (good information) from different methods to meaningfully respond to the objectives set forward.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized under four parts and six chapters. The first part is concerned with the problem and its approach; the second part which comprises three chapters deals with the review of the related literature, the experience of the two elder-related organizations and the development of Social protection responses in Ethiopia via elders; the third part (chapter five) presents and analyses and discusses the data gathered from the interviewees and the facts from documents. Finally, the last chapter (six) presents the summary of the findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study. Social Protection and Economic Vulnerability of Elders in Ethiopia: Practices, Problems and Prospect.

**References**

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1. **(MOLSA, 2006).** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. **(Help Age International, 2006).** [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. **UN Department of International Economics and Social Affairs. (1985).The world aging situation: strategies and policies, Cited in Inter generational challenges in Ethiopia, 2010.** [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. **(MOLSA, 2006).** [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. &6 **People at risk: *Towards a* *social protection strategy for Ethiopia***,**2011*(Quoting Pearson, Webb and Ashenafi).***

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)