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Transcript

George Leeson

Welcome to the Ageing Conversation, a series of podcasts from the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing at the University of Oxford. I am Professor George Leeson, Senior Professorial Fellow at the Institute. The Oxford Institute of Population Ageing is now celebrating nearly 30 years. was the first institute to move away from looking at old age per se and instead to examine the implications for societies, economies, political systems and indeed the wider global community of the profound demographic shifts brought about by falling fertility and increasing longevity. We are a multidisciplinary institute and the topics presented in this podcast series reflect the breadth of expertise exploring different aspects of population ageing, past, present and future. Each of these podcasts features an interview conducted by one of our research fellows and I'm delighted that the current series features Dr Chiara Fukaci and Dr Kate Bancroft. The opinions expressed by the interviewees do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute.

Chiara Foccaci

Welcome to the podcast series of the Institute of Population Aging at the University of Oxford. In this series, we're going to look at interesting aspects of why we age the way we age. Let's dive in. Welcome, everyone. Today I'm here with Dr. Ignatius Gutza. Hello, Ignatius.

Ignatius Gutsa

Hi.

Chiara Foccaci

Very well, thank you. It's a pleasure having you here. Ignatius is a senior lecturer at the Department of Community and Social Development at the University of Zimbabwe and also a research associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pretoria. Now, your research is very interesting. You look at older adults' experiences with caregiving systems of care, sexual and reproductive health, HIV, ADS, climate change and livelihoods, especially focusing obviously on Zimbabwe. Maybe we can start talking about one of these topics and particularly I think what is extremely relevant today is

climate change. So maybe you can tell us a bit more about how, for instance, older women who are heads of households experience climate change in rural Zimbabwe.

Ignatius Gutsa

Okay, thank you very much for that question. I would say that elderly women who are heading households are experiencing climate change in rural Zimbabwe in very diverse ways. And this actually having an impact on their ability to take care of the household and also some who are living with grandchildren, their ability to take care of those grandchildren. So climate change is actually manifesting itself in poor rainfall, which is also affecting their crop production, both for the normal agriculture season and also for those who are farming vegetable gardens. So all that is actually affecting their ability to till and farm the land, which is also leading to limited produce from their fields. And it's also affecting their ability to collect water for both household use and also for their foods. So what you mean that this also increasing the pattern on them, they sometimes they have to walk long distances to collect water and also sometimes they also have to spend more time at the wells waiting for the water to refill at those wells. And also when you look at the heat, especially during the dry season, it's usually very hot. So those high temperatures also affecting their bodies and their ability to be productive during the day. So I would say that it's very diverse. It's ranging from the health issues around climate change and also their ability to farm their small plots and even their ordinary fields and all that is actually affecting them.

Chiara Foccaci

What distances are we talking about when you mention the fact that they have to walk even longer distance? Could you maybe tell us a bit more?

Ignatius Gutsa

I'll say that in the experience of the study area that I've mainly carried out my study, mainly carried out my study in Goromondi District. And Goromondi District, I would say that the distances, they range up to at least a kilometer to two kilometers. And of course, some of the walls are a bit close. But it's not every other woman who is living close to a water source. So the decision is actually very varied. But it also now become very difficult considering that we're looking at total people who range from 65 up to 65 and above. So if you are an elderly, young elderly, let's say in 65, at least ideally are mobile. But then the more one grows older, the more difficult. It also means the ability to walk long distances. So it's really varied really. But the bottom line is that they are walking distances to collect water.

Chiara Foccaci

I mean, I can only imagine how hard it must be to walk all these distances in your 80s, let's say, with this rising heat. I come from Italy, as you know, and already there, we

have achieved 44 degrees in some places. And I can imagine that in Zimbabwe it's even drier and the heat is even more significant. Now let's switch to another problem that is experienced in this population. So we can talk a bit about sexuality among older adults and you've conducted a study in Harare, which is the capital of Zimbabwe. What are some of the challenges that older people and older women experience?

Chiara Foccaci

Okay, thank you very much for that question. I would say that there are quite a number of issues that they are experiencing, both elderly men and also elderly women. And also this experience is also varied among, let's say, elderly men in terms of, and also elderly women. You know, in the study that I did in Zaresekwa, Some of the older people are saying that society generally frowns upon elderly people who appear to be sexually active. So it's something that's almost like is regarded as not expected of the older they grow old. But then they are saying that being sexually active is being part of them. And they will also want to continue being sexually active. That's nature according to the conversation that were coming up. And that actually creates a lot of tension because you're trying to live the ideal that society expects. And then you're also trying to live according to your desires or according to how you're supposed to behave. So that creates a lot of tension. But of course, some of the women also saying that it's very difficult to leave even to go to a health center to demand like condoms, sort of, because that's part of the sexual and reproductive health right that they are supposed to Absolutely. To access. But then if you, they say that if you go to a health center and let's say request for female condoms, the hospital sometimes look at it as if it was scandalous, for them to be requesting those services, which was also the same with the elderly men that I also talked about to. And they were saying that here the They also call upon traditional medicines, which are the sex enhancers, to increase their libido, sort of, because they also want to be It's almost like trying to live the image of being a masculine.

Chiara Foccaci

It's interesting that you mention this because everywhere in the world, I believe we experience this stigma towards older people, that they should not experience sexuality. And it's interesting to see that this is common also in Zimbabwe and not just in European countries.

Ignatius Gutsa

I think the other issue that they were talking about was also the limited access to information and education and communication services. They say that even if you look at what the media is portraying, it's usually portraying the very young ones as if they are the ones who are in need of access to information, education and communication services. They say that you never see an advert that let's say it's promoting condom use

that features an elderly person. It's usually the young, the bold, and the beautiful, you know, male, female. So they say that by default it appears that the designers of that message and also the providers of that service have by default already removed them from the picture. So it becomes like it's something that is amplified already, ranging from the program planners themselves in the health HIV sector. And then there's no way you can actually run away from those services the moment you talk about sexuality in a broad sense.

Chiara Foccaci

Yeah, there is a very significant exclusion of this segment of the population from anything that is related to sexuality. When it comes to, for instance, differences between women and men, Obviously, I can imagine there is a difference with respect to access, to, for instance, stewardship over animals or food sovereignty, because we've talked about the issues that arose from climate change. I was wondering if there is also some type of difficulty that older women experience when it comes to taking care of their animals or when it comes to their food and so on.

Ignatius Gutsa

Thank you very much. When I was looking at food sovereignty, I was mainly looking at the experiences of these elderly women. And what they said that there's a very big difference and also expectation of the type of domestic animals that are expected to have in their position. You know, usually poetry is ranging from, is usually reserved for women. And this is also the, like a traditional chicken is the, we call it the roadrunner, but it's just a Colombian name. But the traditional roadrunner is different from what I call the broilers, those hybrid which grow in about 6 weeks. compared to these ones, which grow naturally, which is almost like free-range chicken. So these free-range chicken, they're also the ones which are given to a visitor as a treat when they visit. So what you mean that there are higher chances of the older lumen stock being depreciated more compared to the husband, see, if they are married. Then if the head of household It also means that it is their stock that is depreciated when they receive a visitor. But these are almost that is mutual. But that mutual aspect does not... Let's say if a visitor goes to visit, they expect to get that treat. But without really looking at the circumstances and the hole or the gaping hole that will be created when that chicken is slaughtered because each and every chicken in the household is adding to an income because it's also exposed in the lean times but also supposed to be eaten so it creates a lot of tension whether you should acknowledge the custom and prepare for the visitor or not prepared for the visitor, but then the visitor would have, you know, negative thoughts about whether they were accepted as a visitor or not. It's almost like part of being accepted when you visit a place. So that's one aspect of it. And then I also noticed that like in Omoshawa, in Guromonze, there's a lot of cattle rustling that has been happening. And it's like For an elderly person, we are more vulnerable. It's easier

for the cattle rustlers, because before they pounce, they would know the setup of the home, who is the male relative at the home, and also their chances of coming in the home. stealing those cattle in the evening. So it actually means that for elderly women, they are actually more vulnerable because they are living alone and they don't have security during the evening. Even if you hear a strange sound outside during the evening, it's very difficult for you to go out and check what it is, you know. So those also creates a lot of challenges because it means that the security around them domestic animals is very lax, which also makes them vulnerable to stock TV.

Chiara Foccaci

Yeah, thank you so much. These are very interesting insights because we always tend to focus a lot on the Western older adults and having insights that are so relevant from someone who studies in Zimbabwe and is part of that population is extremely important to understand a lot of other problems that older adults have to experience, especially older women. So I want to thank you really very much, Ignatius, for sharing these research insights with us. Thank you.

Ignatius Gutsa

Thank you very much for the opportunity.