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EDUCATION AND AGING

Report of the United Nations  
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AGING AND DEVELOPMENT: THE HUMANITARIAN ISSUES  
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

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## INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 33/52 of 14 December 1978, the United Nations General Assembly decided to convene a World Assembly on Aging in 1982 to serve as a forum for launching an international action programme aimed at guaranteeing economic and social security for older persons, as well as opportunities to contribute to national development. The Assembly called on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to do everything necessary to enable the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, in close co-operation with the specialized agencies and international organizations concerned, to carry out all the work required for the preparation of the Assembly and whatever follow-up activities might be necessary.
2. UNESCO was invited to contribute to the work of the Assembly in the form of a document which it was to prepare on the relationship of education to the elderly and to the phenomenon of aging itself.
3. In its advocacy during the 1960s of the concept of permanent education stretching over a human being's entire life and its rejection of the traditional approach which confines the benefits of education to childhood and adolescence, UNESCO provided an impetus for a far-reaching change in the attitude of the elderly towards education. At the end of a period during which UNESCO carried out studies on the various aspects of permanent education, at its nineteenth session (Nairobi, October-November 1976) the General Conference, as part of the Medium-Term Plan for 1977-1982, 1/ adopted certain priority objectives which included the improvement of educational opportunities for specific social groups and, in particular, for the elderly.
4. Through its adoption, at that same session of the General Conference, of a recommendation on the development of adult education, 2/ the Organization expressed its concern, with regard to the elderly:
  - (a) To give them a better understanding of contemporary problems and of the younger generation;
  - (b) To help them acquire leisure skills, promote their health and help them find increased meaning in life;
  - (c) To provide a grounding in the problems facing retired people and in ways of dealing with such problems, for the benefit of those who are on the point of leaving working life;
  - (d) To enable those who have left working life to retain their physical and intellectual faculties and to continue to participate in community life, and also to give them access to fields of knowledge or types of activities which have not been open to them during their working life.

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1/ Medium-Term Plan 1977-1982 - 19 C/4 Approved, chapter VI, para. 6519, Paris, UNESCO, 1977.

2/ Recommendation on the development of adult education adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth session, Nairobi, 26 November 1976. Paris, UNESCO, 1976.

5. In 1979, UNESCO prepared two studies entitled, respectively, "Questions d'ordre éducatif concernant les personnes âgées" <sup>3/</sup> and "Bibliographie annotée sur le troisième âge dans les pays du Tiers Monde". <sup>4/</sup>

6. In Vienna in 1979, working in co-operation with the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO, the Organization held an international seminar on these questions, <sup>5/</sup> for which the two previously mentioned studies provided the basic documentation. It was shown at this meeting that the impact of education, in all its forms, on what has been called a "successful old age" begins in childhood and continues throughout a person's entire life. The participants concluded that there was a need for research into these matters as well as into the actual process of human aging, which they saw as being due as much to socio-cultural factors as to physiological changes.

7. The Programme and Budget for 1981-1983 approved by UNESCO's General Conference at its twenty-first session (Belgrade, October-November 1981) provided for the preparation of a document on education and aging for the World Assembly on Aging. In addition, the Organization undertook to provide "technical and financial support ... to Member States, in particular developing countries and non-governmental bodies which propose, on the one hand, to make a survey of educational possibilities offered to old people and of the use made in education systems of the knowledge and skills of persons in this age-group and, on the other, to draw up measures to improve the situation in this field." <sup>6/</sup>

8. It will be clear from this brief background that the Organization has for many years been endeavouring to contribute to the better integration of the elderly within their societies, a purpose which it has pursued by combating specifically through the development of adult education programmes - the kind of social segregation of which these persons are frequently the victims.

9. While UNESCO has thought it necessary to stress the educational aspect of the problems of aging, it has not for that reason neglected the cultural and communicational role played by the elderly in a number of societies, in particular those in which oral traditions have retained their full importance.

10. In accordance with the decision mentioned in paragraph 7 above, this document is essentially based on case studies of 18 member States in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. Twelve such studies were commissioned by the UNESCO Secretariat, the countries in question having been selected, on the recommendation of UNESCO's regional education offices, as being of the greatest interest with respect to the subject of aging. For the preparation of these studies, the Secretariat had prepared guidelines aimed at drawing the attention of the authors to the need to highlight

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<sup>3/</sup> "Questions d'ordre éducatif concernant les personnes âgées: Les personnes âgées I", by E. Gehmacher. Paris, UNESCO, 1979. (Enquêtes et études sur l'éducation des adultes).

<sup>4/</sup> "Bibliographie annotée sur le troisième âge dans les pays du Tiers Monde", by I. Beraho-Beri. Paris, UNESCO, 1979. (Enquêtes et études sur l'éducation des adultes).

<sup>5/</sup> International Seminar on "Educational Questions concerning the Elderly", Vienna, 25-27 September, 1979.

<sup>6/</sup> Approved Programme and Budget for 1981-1983 - 21 C/5 Approved, para. 1299, p. 94. Paris, UNESCO, 1981.

policies and practices affecting the elderly in the educational area. Particular emphasis was placed in these guidelines on education for, by, with and about the elderly. Studies were received (see annexed bibliography) from Ghana and Kenya in the case of Africa; from Morocco in the case of the Arab States; from Chile and Guyana in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean; from France and the United Kingdom in the case of Western Europe; and from China, India, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines in the case of Asia. Six additional, uncommissioned studies received from Austria, Canada (Quebec), the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the United States of America, the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Sweden were also taken into account in the preparation of this document.

11. The importance which UNESCO has for many years attached to education for, by, about and with the elderly can be explained in terms not only of the lost opportunities represented, in many societies, by the dislodging of older people from the mainstream of community life, but also of the Organization's conviction that all too often the elderly as a social group are the victims of discrimination and injustice on the part of societies to whose establishment they have in no small measure contributed. Speaking on this point in his opening address to the thirty-eighth session of the International Conference on Education (Geneva, November 1981), <sup>7/</sup> Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Director-General of UNESCO, referred to the need to reduce the serious inequalities in the area of education between individuals, social groups and nations as a means both of promoting the development of the human person and of tapping, for the benefit of all societies, their hidden and unused resources of talent, intelligence and energy.

12. The purpose of this document is to suggest some thoughts on the relationships of the elderly to education. Its first section is devoted to a discussion of different social settings and definitions of aging from the perspective of biology, sociology, psychology, and politics. The second section deals with the "learning processes" of old age and inquires specifically into communication, the body, the intellect, creativity, and social relations. In its third section the paper looks at the various programmes and experiments which are aimed at involving the elderly in education, such as senior citizens' universities, special higher educational courses of limited duration for the elderly, "elders' hostels", the use of elderly people as volunteers in literacy campaigns and as teachers of history and oral traditions in primary schools, etc. The fourth section develops a number of approaches to the question of education for the elderly, while in the fifth section a variety of suggestions are offered on what might be done to expand education for, by, with and about the elderly.

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<sup>7/</sup> Statements of Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow at the opening of the thirty-eighth session of the International Conference on Education (Geneva, 10 November 1981) and at its closure (19 November 1981). Paris, UNESCO, 1981.

## I. CONTEXTS

13. The notion (and expression) "old age" - like "youth" and "maturity", the concepts referring to the preceding periods of life - covers and designates a very wide range of different situations and problems. From one civilization to another or from one system of production to another, the realities in question show little similarity. If the task is to devise educational programmes for the elderly, there must be an awareness both of educational factors in a formal sense and of total cultural experiences as determined by the sociological, economic and political contexts.

### Definitions

14. At what moment in the life of the human being does he or she leave the period of mature years and join the ranks of the aging?

15. Certain societies have a wholly unsentimental answer to this question: a person is considered to be old when he or she is no longer regarded as a member of the economically active population and has retired from active life. But this administrative approach is only an imperfect reflection of reality. To be sure, aging is a universal and irreversible phenomenon, but it affects different individuals and social groups differently. Those to whom life has been kind or who have been endowed with a robust constitution may remain "in the prime of life", capable of great activity and animated by a spirit of enterprise. On the other hand, one can find many persons of frailer health whose vitality has been more or less sapped even at an earlier age. The occupations one has engaged in during active life are also a decisive factor: the person who has spent his working life at the bottom of a mine or in a spinning shop is less likely to be in good physical health at 60 than a man or woman who was not for years surrounded by chemical vapours or by the din and vibration of machinery.

16. Although the retirement system is steadily expanding, it is still unknown to the majority of the world's population. Even in those countries which have long been industrialized, certain segments of the population fall outside this criterion of aging; these include the inhabitants of rural regions and, in the towns, a major portion of those persons who make their living through commerce or the exercise of a liberal profession. These continue to be a part of the economically active population well beyond the age fixed for retirement.

17. This ambiguity regarding the point of transition to the final period of human life is even more marked in most third world countries, where on the one hand most of the population live in rural areas, and on the other retirement and pension systems are as a rule still only in their infancy. In these countries, the point at which a person is regarded as old is not determined by any legislative or administrative provision, but depends on local customs and traditions; nor does it have the character of an abrupt transition, but is rather the outcome of a gradual process.

### Demographic considerations

18. World population data point to a steady increase in life expectancy coupled with the aging of the population in the majority of countries. This fact can be illustrated by a number of examples taken from information contained in studies which UNESCO commissioned for the preparation of this document. Some countries included projections for the years ahead.

19. Among the most remarkable developments in this area are those which have taken place in the Eastern European countries, where the number of elderly people has increased dramatically over the last 15-20 years. For example, between 1960 and 1976 the number of persons aged 60 and above rose by 600,000 (61 per cent) in Bulgaria and by 500,000 (37 per cent) in Hungary; in Poland there was a two-fold increase in this group, and in Romania a three-fold increase. <sup>8/</sup> In the People's Republic of China <sup>9/</sup> life expectancy rose from 57 years in 1957 to 68 years in 1978; in Brazil it was 40 years in 1900 and 75 in 1980; <sup>10/</sup> and in the United States of America it was up from 49 years in 1900 to 71.9 in 1974. In the latter country the percentage of the population over 65 was 4.1 per cent in 1900 and 10.5 per cent in 1975, and is expected to reach 11.7 per cent by the year 2000. <sup>11/</sup>

20. In the Republic of Guyana life expectancy rose from 31.15 years in 1910 to 66.5 in 1975. <sup>12/</sup> In India, the number of persons over 60 years of age has increased considerably in absolute terms, although the percentage has hardly changed since 1911 (5.2 per cent in 1911 and 5.5 per cent in 1981). However, projections for the next few decades indicate that the percentage will be 7 per cent in the year 2000 and 10.05 per cent in the year 2021. <sup>13/</sup> Certain countries show a remarkable stability within the present time-frame; in the United Kingdom, for example, where the percentage of persons above 60 was 19.9 per cent in 1980, the projected figure for the year 2000 is identical. <sup>14/</sup>

21. Life-span lengthening has a dual significance. Of individuals it requires that they make a sustained effort to enable themselves to deal successfully with the series of problems they will have to face when they are elderly. The same demographic situation also makes it incumbent on public authorities to provide in their development planning, for increased outlays and investments in the area of education for the aging.

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<sup>8/</sup> "Status and condition of the elderly in socialist countries of Eastern Europe", by D.F. Chebotarev, N.N. Sachuk, and N.V. Verzhikovskaya. Contribution to the 1982 World Assembly on Aging. 1981.

<sup>9/</sup> "A study on education and the elderly in China: Age and education", by L. Li. Shanghai, Bureau of Education, September 1981.

<sup>10/</sup> "Vieillesse et sous-développement: le cas brésilien", by C. Attias-Donfut and M.A. Salgado. In *Gérontologie et société*; cahier No. 14, 1981, pp. 135-154.

<sup>11/</sup> Twelfth International Congress of Gerontology, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany, 11-17 July 1981. "Lifelong learning for self-sufficiency: Theme for the 1980s". A report on the findings of the 1981 White House Conference on Ageing Miniconference on "Lifelong Learning for Self-Sufficiency", by S. Timmermann.

<sup>12/</sup> "Education and the Elderly in Guyana: Surveys and Studies in Adult Education", by N. Profitt. Georgetown, 1981.

<sup>13/</sup> "Education and the elderly in India", by Malcolm S. Adiseshiah. Madras, Madras Institute of Development Studies, July 1981.

<sup>14/</sup> "Education and the elderly in the United Kingdom", by D. Radcliffe. London University, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, 1981.

### Biological considerations

22. Like any living organism, the human being is affected by the passage of time. Nevertheless, old age can mean very different, sometimes even opposite, biological situations. It frequently happens that an individual reaching this point in his or her life - for example, reaching retirement age - is still very vital and in possession of his or her physical and mental faculties. This is not true of those who survive to the final years of this period. Rare are those persons whose capacities and faculties are not to some degree impaired through the effects of very advanced age, such as diminished sight, hearing, or mobility.

23. The first signs of morphological and physiological aging appear in the third decade of life. From this period on, the mass of the most active tissue, notably the muscular tissue, tends to diminish. This phenomenon becomes more pronounced and accelerates during old age. The aging process has an analogous effect on the organs and their functions. There are, however, exceptions, which are of great interest with respect to the organization of educational activities. It is noteworthy in this connection that, except in pathological cases, the nervous system undergoes only minor changes. Aptitude tests show that, while reactions to stimuli may be less rapid and precise and the memory less reliable, there is no significant loss in vocabulary skills or in the ability to use information sources.

### Production relationships

24. In most industrially developed societies the aging drop out of the economically active population. This does not mean that they necessarily cease to be productive; but their activities are usually of a marginal nature and take place outside the normal framework of legislation concerning production and administration. There are even cases of countries legislating limits on the number of years each individual may spend in productive work. Two reasons combine in favour of this policy. Firstly, technological advances are increasingly reducing the volume of human intervention in the production process. This circumstance resulting in structural unemployment, is accompanied, secondly, by factors of cyclical unemployment which have the effect of reducing economic activity in a great many countries, particularly in those where a market-economy system applies. This being the case, it is not surprising that measures aimed at curbing unemployment, a social scourge and personal catastrophe, should include a lowering of the retirement age along with steps to combat the holding of more than one position and clandestine labour.

25. On the other hand, the policy of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe <sup>15/</sup> in this area, as it emerges from the document describing the situation in these countries, consists in making the greatest possible use of the productive capacities of the aging. "One should bear in mind that employment of people beyond working age in production reduces the real economic burden of the elderly on the population." After indicating the regional variations in the employment of pensioners in the USSR (50/60 per cent in the Baltic republics and 15/20 per cent in the Central Asian republics during the first five years of pensionable eligibility), the authors of this document add: "It is in the interests of the elderly and of the national economies of the countries of Eastern Europe that special state measures have been taken aimed at utilization of the residual working capacity of people of retirement age."

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<sup>15/</sup> See footnote 8.



26. If it is true that in urban centres, particularly in the industrially developed countries, the basic criterion for categorizing an individual as old is found in the transition from employment to retirement, in rural regions the determining factor in this regard is the person's relationship to work, a far broader and more flexible criterion since the area of application and the nature of the work performed changes with age. The fact is that for their economies to be able to operate, these regions require the productive capacities of the entire population, including those of the aging as long as they are able to contribute.

#### Sociological considerations

27. The same diversity can be found on the sociological level, bearing in mind that the situations encountered are not immutably fixed, but evolve and change considerably over long periods of time.

28. In traditional societies the elderly person was someone who enjoyed respect, prestige and authority. The technical, cultural and ritualistic traditions which such a person possessed were regarded as a collective patrimony irreplaceable in scope and importance. This status has been upset in most modern societies. Industrial and administrative structures are no longer fed and sustained in their operation by the knowledge and experience of the aging; the intellectual, technical and moral capital of which they were the repositories has been devalued. The atomization of society and the replacement of the extended family by the two-generation nuclear family has also negatively affected the role of the aging, many of whom have been displaced from the family circle and have been gradually pushed to the fringes of society where they languish, unused, in individual isolation. In addition, the exodus of young people from the countryside to the cities often dooms the aging to loneliness and isolation and their villages to deterioration and ultimate disappearance.

29. The status of the aging is a very different matter in rural environments in these societies where an elderly person can still find an outlet for his or her abilities, knowledge, and experience. Similarly, the rural aging face no major obstacles to their integration in their various social settings, whether it be the family or the village. It seldom happens that they experience the rigours of isolation.

30. This is still the prevailing situation in many third world countries. In a report from Papua New Guinea, for example, one reads: "We treasure and love our old people and we care for them until they die ... The old people /in the villages/ are respected and their words and advice are heard and kept. They hand down customs, traditions, taboos and their wisdom and skills." <sup>16/</sup> The document presenting "Thoughts on the elderly in Islamic tradition" describes a similar situation: "Moslem society knows nothing of the painful dramas in which the elderly are caught up elsewhere. On the contrary, the old wear a kind of halo of incomparable respect." <sup>17/</sup> In Guyana one can observe a "deep feeling of responsibility for older members of the family which is part and parcel of the tradition of the joint family structure of the old societies of

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<sup>16/</sup> "Education and the elderly", Ministry of Education, Papua New Guinea, 1981.

<sup>17/</sup> "Réflexions sur les personnes âgées dans la tradition islamique", by M. El Fasi. Morocco, 1981.

Africa and India from which they came." 18/ The author of the report from China, while describing a situation of a similar kind, adds a new note: "There has always been a traditional respect for the aged in our society, because old people's words and actions greatly influence the younger generations and help set a good example to them." 19/

31. Nevertheless, the same process which has so radically changed the place and status of the aging in industrial societies is also at work in societies of the traditional kind. The document from Ghana reflects this transformation. After stressing the persistence of the traditional role of the aging in several tribes, where "precedence in any social gathering is based on age", and where the family functions as a social security system by taking care of the individual, the author refers on several occasions to the substantial changes which are occurring in this area within the social structures of modern Ghana. Expanding educational opportunities for young people, the spread of the nuclear family, the impact of the media, increasing urbanization and industrialization - all these factors are making for rapid change in the role and status of the aging. The author goes on to note that while "in traditional systems the aged are respected because they never cease to be productive", "the present structure of Ghana's urbanized system makes it difficult to visualize how the aged can be integrated into the main stream of the productive system." Industrialization reduces the value of older persons. "Old people are categorized as weak, senile, rigid in thought and old fashioned in skills, techniques and morality." 20/ It appears that this trend is by no means limited to Ghana but extends to many countries of the third world, where in addition the emigration of young people to the industrialized nations in search of work often contributes to the isolation of the aging. The generally evolving pattern, regardless of the types of society involved, is towards the spread of what the American anthropologist Margaret Mead has called the "generation gap". Of the several reasons for this development, one is the loss of prestige by members of the older generations, resulting on the part of younger people in attitudes of estrangement and even disrespect. The major cause, however, can be found in the quickening pace of change affecting all contemporary societies. In the space of a single generation transformations are taking place which, in earlier times, would have extended over several decades, manifesting themselves in a gradual and largely imperceptible manner. In our age, ideas, customs, fashions, perceptions and behaviour and relationship models are evolving so rapidly that it has become difficult for the aging to keep pace with these changes, to understand their causes and origins, and to adapt to them; the effort required to do so is often beyond their capacity. Incomprehension is rapidly transformed into non-acceptance, rejection, irritation and condemnation on both sides of the age barrier, with the young too concerned with their own lives to pay heed to the older person's difficulties in adaptation.

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18/ See footnote 12.

19/ See footnote 9.

20/ "Education and the elderly: Ghanaian experience", by N. Araba Apt and P.A. Twumasi. Legon, University of Ghana, Sociology Department, 1981.

### Educational levels

32. The level of formal education is another factor which may differ widely from one society to another. This is not surprising when one considers that in many countries whole generations of men and women have not enjoyed the benefits of schooling (and still enjoy them to only a limited degree), having sacrificed their own opportunities in the interests of the education of the young. This of course does not mean that the elderly in traditional societies have received no education or training, but whatever instruction they did receive was based on methods and subject matter largely dissimilar to the kind of education provided at modern schools. As pointed out above, this educational discrepancy is another of the factors setting one generation against another. It may even exist within the same society. This situation is particularly well described in the document on the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, which notes that "the existence of a certain stratum of old people with low education, as a result of past conditions, especially among the rural population, hampers improvement of their quality of life." The authors of this study further write: "There is no doubt that future generations of the elderly will be more educated, more health-oriented, more strict towards themselves and others, with wider and more diverse interests." 21/

### Leisure

33. Leisure time for the aging also differs in role and significance in societies of different types. Where professional activities continue under more or less identical conditions for the different generations, as in farm work, the free time of the aging is virtually indistinguishable from that of the younger members of the community; for both groups, leisure is ill defined, with limits which are difficult to fix. It depends on the rhythm of daily and seasonal work. This is not the case in the industrial community. Unlike the situation of active workers, for whom there is an alternation of leisure with time spent on the job, the time available to a retired person is by definition leisure, i.e. time free of the restraints imposed by the exercise of an occupation. It will be seen in section II that one of the greatest problems facing the aging is the question of how best to spend this time in the interests both of the elderly person himself and of the society, considering that in a number of third world countries beset by chronic under-employment, and increasingly in industrialized nations in the grip of large-scale unemployment, the problem is one of too much rather than too little free time. A development that deserves particular mention at this point is the rapprochement between generations which can take place and is in fact taking place in many cases through the medium of leisure-time occupations. In many activities, whether of a utilitarian or recreational nature, the different generations share common interests and often complementary experiences.

### Psychological considerations

34. Not all older people experience old age in the same way. To take only one example - the matter of retirement - many welcome the end of their professional careers as a kind of liberation, the transition to a time when a large number of restrictions and many sources of fatigue and sickness will be left behind. For such persons, retirement is seen as a long-awaited

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21/ See footnote 8.

opportunity to pursue activities of their own choosing and to develop talents hitherto untried. But for others retirement is a sort of curse. Persons in this situation have so merged their professional self with their personal identity that the disappearance of the professional dimension results in a loss of personality. Except in societies in which the elderly person is normally integrated and suffers no lessening of his or her social status, the loss of the relationships established during one's working career, the reduction in income, the waning of physical vitality and certain faculties, the sense of isolation and the gradual dying off of relatives and close friends, the collapse of certain traditional values - these are all factors which under certain circumstances can put at risk the mental well-being of the aging. To successfully meet the challenge of this new chapter of life requires a greater effort than during the preceding periods. Within this general context, there are of course specific psychological factors associated with the biological considerations discussed above.

#### Political aspects

35. In traditional societies, local decision-making authority often rests with a council of elders. Formerly in Kenya, for example, "the elderly participated in community affairs, and leadership usually went to respected old men. As the heads of extended families, the old men exercised supreme authority". <sup>22/</sup> In Ghana, however, as well as in Guyana and other countries, because of socio-economic changes, the aging are no longer the highest arbiters of authority, the counsellors, or the heads of production activity, as power tends to become centralized and distributed throughout the entire society through the political and administrative channels of the state and the Party.

36. In countries where a representative system has been in operation for several generations, population aging is resulting in the aging of the electorate. Although no systematic study has been undertaken to analyse the effects of this aging on national policy-making, the most widely held view is that the elderly segment of the electorate is more interested in the preservation of the established order than in innovations. The role which in France, for example, has been played by the Senate, whose members are at least one generation older than the members of the Chamber of Deputies, is significant in this respect, even though other factors are also at work. On the other hand, modern history knows many situations when elderly persons have intervened in affairs of state, particularly in times of crisis, and have, through their knowledge, their authority, their judgement, and the prestige of their years, often played a decisive role.

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<sup>22/</sup> "Education and the elderly in Kenya: a case study", by the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. Nairobi, Department of Adult Education, 1981.

## II. TRAINING FOR THE AGING

37. It goes without saying that the physical and moral well-being of the aging is closely connected with their economic status, their financial resources, and the help provided by national or local authorities as regards housing, health care and social services. Yet, however important and indispensable these factors might be, they remain external factors outside the individual's personality. It is becoming more and more evident that a rational use of available resources and strength, during this period of life as indeed throughout life, is linked to the use made by each person of his physical, intellectual, affective and social potential. The subjective element is the natural complement of objective factors.

38. The aging cannot possibly cope with the series of challenges facing them during the remaining years of their lives, and adequately play their new roles and perform their new functions in their own interests and in the interests of the community, unless they make a continuous effort to acquire the skills, capabilities and knowledge demanded by their new status. This systematic effort determines the educational process, which is reflected in practice in various kinds of training. To a certain extent, this training takes place earlier in life. But, in many cases, it is a matter of new types of training or new approaches to types of training begun earlier. As might be expected, the educational process concerns the whole personality and the various situations in which the personality manifests itself.

39. The spirit in which this training has been studied is defined in a precise manner at the beginning of the document prepared by Chile: 23/

"(a) Old age is regarded as a further stage in human life and aging is conceived of as a continuous process accompanying human life and not as a break or process of enfeeblement occurring in the later stages of the life span.

"(b) The education of the aging is regarded as a necessary consequence of life-long education and is defined as a means of facilitating an expansion of their horizons in terms of creativity, independence and participation in social life.

"(c) To consider the situation of the aging from the educational point of view marks a new approach at the world level, as hitherto this age group has been essentially viewed from the point of view of health, assistance, social security and/or working conditions.

"(d) The education of the aging has profound implications for society as a whole, since it postulates a change in the social goal assigned to education as well as to the organization of the educational system. Education is no longer thought of as a process of socialization, of the assimilation of rules and the acquisition of skills with a view to integration in the world of work; it is transformed into a permanent process centred on man and his needs. This implies an extension of non-formal educational structures and the appearance of new approaches to training.

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23/ "La educación y los mayores: El caso de Chile", by G. Messina. Santiago de Chile, Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (CIDE), 1981.

"(e) Lastly, education for the aging presupposes on the part of society a redefinition of the relationships between the different generations, in order to establish between them voluntary, open-ended and multidirectional channels of training, as well as a fair distribution of resources, in such a way that age is not a factor of discrimination and control."

#### Communication

40. The isolation of individuals is one of the negative aspects of modern civilization. To a large extent it is due to material and social factors. The housing conditions which break up communities and reduce the individual to anonymity, have often been identified, and much has been written about transportation difficulties and the decrease in family life. For the aging, additional factors include the gradual decrease in their sensory faculties and their mobility as well as the gradual disappearance of persons near to them physically and emotionally. But isolation does not only have external causes. It is also due to difficulties of social communication. Expressing one's thoughts or feelings with the desired precision and establishing a fruitful and productive dialogue with other persons is not the result of improvisations. The whole personality is engaged in this process. The content and the quality of the dialogue are related to the wealth or the poverty of each individual's experience and with the utilization of the individual's means of expression.

41. The elderly person must make an extra effort to sustain and maintain the process of physical, intellectual and affective communication, since his memory, and the keenness of his senses, tend to diminish at the same time as his mobility. The weakening of visual and auditory acuity and some slowness in understanding have a negative impact on the ability to engage in dialogue. Furthermore, the level and quality of communication depend essentially on the components of the experience of each of the persons concerned. It is, however, inevitable that the elderly person's experience tends to diminish when he is cut off from his former contacts with the world of work and that his scope for investigating the human and natural world tends to decrease.

42. The efforts of the elderly person to maintain fruitful contacts with the different circles in which he moves must take several directions.

43. The enrichment of language: it was noted in paragraph 23 (biological considerations) that among the faculties which do not diminish to any significant extent with age is the mastery of vocabulary. Language is in itself a resource, if it is true that it is the product and repository of the common experience of a civilization as one generation succeeds another. The aging should neglect no opportunity for reinforcing, asserting and developing this key instrument of social communication. In this light, the role of culture, in the traditional sense of the word, emerges as essential. Constant contact with the products of the mind, whether in the form of books, magazines, newspapers or plays made accessible by the mass media, exerts a strong influence on language, of which it develops the resources.

44. The broadening of experience: as indicated above, the experience the aging can acquire is limited by the conditions in which they live. Nevertheless, the new temporal dimension available to them, that is to say the time they no longer have to spend on occupational obligations, provides an opportunity to engage in new activities aimed at making the most of their physical, intellectual, affective and social potential.

45. In many cases, the aging are a source of information on the lives of members of the family or of the community, and a valuable link between the younger generations and a more or less distant past which the young often know nothing about.

#### Understanding

46. In the following paragraphs consideration will be given to a number of those activities which, in addition to their specific aims, enrich the personal experience of every elderly person and, in that way, support and nourish communication.

47. To guard against the threat of isolation due to subjective factors, it is essential that the aging should resolve not to dwell upon their personal position and problems, but to adopt an outward-looking attitude towards the world. At the centre of this world there are other human beings, especially those with whom the aging are in contact. To enable dialogue to take place smoothly between the aging and the other members of the community in which they live, to make it possible for a current of mutual aid and sympathy to flow between them, efforts to achieve understanding are indispensable.

48. The most important thing from the intellectual point of view is to establish a positive relationship with time as a factor of change. Thus the elderly person must avoid the trap of mental rigidity which threatens human beings in the process of aging. Adopting this attitude, the elderly person will try to keep up with the great movement which overturns established positions and continually changes ways of thinking, feeling and expressing oneself. As far as possible, he will endeavour to perceive and to distinguish between the underlying reasons for these developments and their accidental causes, avoiding setting himself up as judge or systematically applying old criteria to new situations.

49. This kind of behaviour, which is always beneficial, is particularly indispensable in relations with young people. It may be felt that this is asking a great deal of the aging. Constant efforts must be made if such an attitude of openness and understanding are to be achieved. But it must be recognized that, contrary to general opinion, the last stage of human life is not a time of rest. If it is not to be a burden but a source of satisfaction, this stage needs a variety of types of training, of which training in communication is an important element.

#### The body and health

50. One of the paradoxes of the human condition is the contrast between, on the one hand, the place occupied and the part played by the body in everyone's life and preoccupations, and on the other the view taken of the body in most of the traditional educational systems. Contrary to what happened in the time of the Greeks and the Romans, the place, role and value of the body as an object and means of education are in modern society generally despised or simply ignored. At most the body is considered an instrument or a support. The truth is that, in the various processes which enable the individual to take possession of what constitutes the essence of his presence in the world and marks his individuality, the part which the body is called on to play is of primary importance. To accept the reality of one's body, to make of it an appropriate instrument for perception and to use its resources to express

oneself and to communicate with others - these are among the fundamental aims of that training in living and being which is at the heart of human experience. This process of learning, indispensable throughout life, has a particularly important place during the closing period, since one of the conditions for an elderly person's well-being is the preservation and improvement of his physical capacities. This requires additional efforts from him to the extent that physical equilibrium is the most vulnerable and the most threatened element of his organizational structure. The education in question takes place at several levels.

51. Keeping the elderly person in good health, apart from its importance for the elderly person, is also of public concern: it forms part of national policies and local provisions with regard to old age; it constitutes a specialized branch of medicine - geriatrics - which is steadily growing. Furthermore, the maintenance of good health has important implications from the educational point of view. At this stage in life, every person has to adapt himself to his bodily changes. The general rules relating to health, a rational diet, physical exercise and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco naturally apply to the aging. However, special efforts are needed to acquire new habits, for instance with regard to eating, and these efforts entail an understanding of the situation and of the factors involved as well as the imposition on oneself of disciplines which often run counter to one's earlier life-style.

52. During the later stages of life, the body no longer performs the same functions as regards relationships with other people as in the earlier stages of life. It is no longer one of the essential instruments of seduction and it plays a decreasing role in relations between the sexes. However, it continues to occupy a position of fundamental importance in communication. It is by means of gestures, posture and sign language that a human being voluntarily or involuntarily reveals his thoughts and his feelings. Of course a large part of these signals are not learnt in any specific educational process. They are the natural reflection of states of mind, themselves linked to the state of the body. But there is an important sector of bodily signalling where deliberate action and forms of training play a role. In the appearance of every person, whatever his age, there are, side by side with the physical structures provided by nature, more elaborate features which are not unconnected with the desire to please and a concern with aesthetics. With other resources and following other paths, this desire and this concern also exist during the later stages of life. To fashion his physical presence and adjust his appearance, every human being, as he advances in years, needs a corpus of knowledge of himself and of others, of savoir faire, of concern for others, of skill and of artistic judgement which can only be acquired through continuous education.

### The intellect

53. The last stage of life opens up new horizons for intellectual activity, since three factors frequently restrict the field of interests of a person engaged in a gainful occupation: lack of time, the fatigue caused by work and travel, and the concentration of thoughts on situations and problems connected with the occupation. These obstacles disappear when the person concerned ceases to be of working age. Such a person acquires a new dimension of time, freed from the constraints of attendance at the place of work, and the fatigue caused by his occupation also disappears. The mind ceases to concentrate on problems arising within the framework of the workshop or the office.



54. There is no need to stress the scope and volume of the resources which offer themselves for mental activity. Through this activity, the person concerned enters an unlimited world of knowledge, thought and poetry. He finds answers to the various questions which arouse his curiosity. Investigating the fields of knowledge, undertaking research and making unexpected discoveries provide opportunities for intellectual and spiritual enrichment as well as for personal satisfaction and pleasure. For the elderly person, this feeling of well-being brought about by the use of his mental faculties is all the more precious in that, except with regard to some marginal aspects, it is not threatened by any tendency to diminish, but on the contrary faces a future of continuous development. However, this development and, in general, the exercise of intellectual faculties do not take place automatically. One has to learn how to use one's mind as one learns how to use one's muscles and one's nervous resources. Chapter III discusses the formal and non-formal structures and methods brought into play to help the aging make the best use of their intellectual energy and of their desire for knowledge, whether this concerns education or the provision of suitable materials.

55. In the field of intellectual activity, there is a privileged sector within the population, made up in part of those whose natural disposition is directed towards intellectual activity rather than the transformation of the material world and, in part, of those who, since their youth or later in life, have become accustomed to intellectual work. This last consideration throws into relief the crucial role played by the various structures for adult education, throughout life but particularly in the period just before retirement. Education imparted on a wide scale in the community as a whole may provide adequate preparation for mental activities in old age.

56. Furthermore, intellectual activity provides a support and climate which are of fundamental importance for communication, the significance of which has been underlined earlier. The acquisition and deepening of knowledge, research and discoveries and the thinking which these inspire all constitute an inexhaustible subject for dialogue both among the aging themselves and across age frontiers.

57. However important, however irreplaceable intellectual activity is as a person advances in years, it represents only a part of his life. Most elderly people doubtless feel the need to be active, whether this means continuing what they were doing earlier or undertaking something new. Far from weakening, the creative instinct asserts itself continually. The activities to which it gives rise may be divided into two sectors: technology and art.

#### The technical sector

58. The use of various materials and sources of energy, the making of an object, the building of a piece of equipment and the repair of machinery provide opportunities for an energetic person to use and develop his skills. Apart from its economic aspects, "do-it-yourself" is a manifestation of creativity. Among these various types of practical activity, gardening is one of the most important. To look after a garden and to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers is a source of unique satisfaction for the gardener. In addition to the exercise of his skills, the application of his knowledge and the advantages and pleasures produced by the results of his labours, the amateur gardener brings about a synthesis between the creative work of nature and human creativity.

59. In principle, training in technology for the aging is independent of any sort of vocational concern. There is, however, a notable exception. As pointed out in paragraph 25, efforts are made in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe to utilize the working capacities of pensioners. It was indicated in the section of this report 24/ concerning this situation that the use of elderly people in gainful occupations requires the establishment of continuous training programmes.

#### Artistic experience

60. Artistic experience is a vital dimension of the human personality, which is unfortunately often neglected or even forgotten in school syllabuses and in training programmes. An interest in paintings, sculptures and urban and landscape architecture, the capacity to be moved by these different expressions of artistic creativity, the ability to appreciate music and, generally, all pleasures of aesthetic origin constitute inexhaustible resources not only for the harmonious development and refinement of the mind and of principles of conduct but also for combating boredom. An interest in the arts is also a fundamental element in social communication and, as such, has a major impact on the various sectors of intellectual activity. Reading, familiarity with works of artistic popularization and participation in study groups are all supports for these aspects of cultural life. Through records, radio programmes and cheap but good-quality publications, it is possible to seek and to maintain permanent contact with all kinds of artistic production.

61. However, in order to be complete, artistic experience should not be confined to the field of knowledge, but should also take place on the level of doing, which opens the way to more thorough knowledge. In this field as in others, passivity is the main obstacle. In the absence of a personal commitment, and where habits have not been acquired in earlier periods, weariness or indifference soon take over. In so far as is possible, it is therefore important to foster positive attitudes. While study and discussions are particularly to be advised, the ideal is to provide opportunities for the creative instinct to manifest itself in practice. Whenever circumstances permit, especially in institutions where the aging gather, arrangements should be made for activities permitting them to express themselves, whether through art work, or participation in musical activities such as choral singing, or productions of a literary nature such as recitations and poetry.

#### Social relationships

62. The problem of social relationships poses itself in the dual context of the attempt to overcome loneliness and of the utilization of the abilities of the elderly person. These social relationships come under the headings of utility and recreation.

63. Because of the free time he has, his accumulated experience and the specific nature of his interests and potentialities, the elderly person is in a position to render great services to the community in which he lives. One of his obvious roles is as a leader in community activities. In favourable circumstances, it is his task to take an active part in the socio-cultural programmes of his area. The use of the experience which he has acquired through reading, technical work, organization and administration or, for example, the playing of an instrument

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24/ See footnote 8.

can enrich the cultural life of his surroundings. The transmission of this knowledge and experience does not operate automatically. Here too there is a need for sustained effort, discipline and the acquisition of habits through specific training.

64. Such training is even more necessary when the service rendered is in the nature of teaching. In a traditional society, the teaching of the young by the old is done naturally, informally, without any specific training being necessary, but things are different when an elderly person is called on to teach a subject which requires a high level of theoretical and practical knowledge. Such is the case for instance with the teaching of English provided in some areas in the People's Republic of China by elderly persons. <sup>25/</sup> In such circumstances, these elderly people have to learn the principles of teaching.

65. One of the sectors where the elderly person's services are of particular importance is the family. In an urban society, it frequently happens that both parents are absent from home for the greater part of the day, either working or engaging in occupations connected with family life. Sometimes, also, both parents feel the need to escape from their daily concerns and to carry on a leisure activity which is indispensable for their psychological equilibrium and their cultural life. In all such cases, it is in the nature of things that grandparents fulfil a part of the functions attached to the status of father and mother. These functions are manifold: they may concern guarding or caring for the child or helping in its education. In any event, their aid has the result of lightening the parental burden which, in the nuclear family, weighs heavily on both parents.

66. In order that the elderly person may perform the functions expected of him, a number of conditions must be met, of which the main ones are of an educational nature. Instinct and tradition are not in themselves enough in this field, any more than for the father or the mother. The data provided by theorists and practitioners of various disciplines - doctors, social workers, sociologists, specialists in bodily and mental hygiene, educators of children and adults - have thrown into relief the need to train parents. This also applies to grandparents. Such training includes instruction on the factors relating to the physical and mental development of children, the elements which come into play in the formation of character and the types of play suitable for the first stage of life. Both training and, generally, a willingness to accept innovations in the field of ideas, customs and feelings are necessary for the elderly person to become qualified properly to perform the functions expected of him within the family.

67. In the life of an elderly person, recreation is of prime importance. Games in all their forms fulfil several functions and involve many faculties. For instance, attentiveness and knowledge of a high level must be combined if one is to hold one's own in such games as pinochle or belote, bridge, chess or draughts. Skill in this field is the product of natural gifts and of regular and systematic training, which not only calls for mental activity but also helps to maintain its quality. A popular game such as bowls or pétanque also fulfils the function of physical exercise and requires serious training.

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<sup>25/</sup> See footnote 9.

All these recreational activities possess a notable advantage, the possibility of steady improvement. A second function of games is to encourage social relationships. Most games are played with others. They therefore represent one of the most effective ways of breaking down isolation. Good-neighbourly relations are established during recreational activities and these relationships are frequently extended to other fields of life. The competitive aspect which is often present in recreational activities may be a very beneficial factor in enabling an elderly person to assert his value, and this is all the more important as the aging often tend to feel diminished or unappreciated by members of younger generations around them.

#### Political education

68. This is a particularly important field, comparatively easy of access and yet curiously underdeveloped also. It seems that, for many people, withdrawal from active life leads to a reduction of interest in public affairs. This is an error of perspective and orientation as well as a lost opportunity. Only partial, insufficient and largely improvised solutions will be found for problems of aging so long as the people concerned themselves remain unaware of their political power. The retired make up a growing percentage of the electoral body. If they were organized and conscious of their rights and interests, their considerable power could have a decisive impact on policy towards the aging. This presupposes and demands a broad policy of an educational nature which, making use of particular motivations, should lead to a general interest in political matters to the extent that no problem in society exists in isolation. Here there is vast scope for instruction in the economic, legal and sociological aspects of national and international life. It is, moreover, essential that the retired person should keep an open mind and follow developments in ideas, behaviour and situations if the influence which he wields, individually and collectively, is not to hamper necessary changes. With regard to matters of more immediate concern, closer to daily reality, experience proves that it is possible and desirable to enlist the participation of retired people in many fields, on either a voluntary or a partially paid basis.

69. Already there are many who lend their aid to associations, municipal services and social centres, for example. As can be seen, each aspect is linked to the others and in a certain sense depends on the others. For instance, retired persons need to learn to live together, to form groups and to carry out collective activities in order to find the essential motivation and the support for those activities of an intellectual and artistic nature whose importance is recognized by everyone. Social responsibility and a sense of usefulness go hand in hand, just as the development of judgement and the habit of study are decisive factors in political education.

### III. EDUCATION AND THE AGING: STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

70. The education of the aging in the various countries is subject to a number of factors, the most important of which may be assumed to be cultural heritage, ideology and systems of values in interaction with demographic and economic conditions. However, it is probable that the planning and implementation of policies and of resultant practices in this area will in future be greatly influenced by intensive exchanges of experience between nations organized on an international scale.

71. A number of activities and strategies pursued in member States and described in the case studies listed in the annex formed the specific basis for the considerations and recommendations presented below. An attempt will be made to deduce the principles underlying the educational activity associated with the aging and, as far as possible, the objectives of this activity and the institutions, structures and bodies within which it is carried on; similarly, we shall describe the methodology governing the activities of the various institutions concerned. We intend to look not only into education for adults, which is doubtless the most important component for the vast majority of States, but also into education imparted by the aging, education about them and education which these persons share, or may share, with the members of other age groups.

#### Education for the aging - some national examples

72. We shall describe here some experience derived from the studies mentioned above (\*) which illustrate various types of education intended for the aging.

73. In Austria, 26/ owing to the very considerable increase in the number of people over 60 years of age, many such people are participating in adult education and lifelong education programmes and the educational institutions have had to adapt their programmes and courses accordingly. For example, specific training programmes (in modern mathematics, foreign languages, etc.) are given to grandparents to enable them to provide better help to children in whose education they are participating in one way or another. As an experiment, Vienna University organized special courses in 1978-1979 for three categories of the aging: those who held secondary school diplomas entitling them to register as regular students; those who held a university diploma and wished to enjoy the status of non-matriculated students and, lastly, those without secondary school or university diplomas who simply wanted to take courses. At the very outset 600 persons showed an interest in this experiment and took part in launching it. In addition, a number of adult education schools are at present organizing special courses and programmes for the aging. Although the aging who take part in these courses are still a minority, their number is steadily increasing since, taking advantage of the experience of Vienna University, all the Austrian universities have decided to open their doors to the aging.

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(\*) See paragraph 10 of the "Introduction".

26/ "Studies on education and the elderly in Austria", by K. Harb, Graz, Austria, European Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly, n/d, 1981.

74. In Canada, the Quebec Higher Educational Council 27/ is assigning increasing importance to the development of adult education, considering it to be a normal service which an advanced society should have, just as it has health services, and it is of the opinion that, when the aging have come to feel fully at ease in the educational system and are using all its resources, it will be possible to consider the advent of lifelong education to be imminent. At present, the aging have access to various forms of education in Quebec: part-time general training programmes, literacy programmes, socio-cultural training programmes (adult education and community leadership).

75. In Chile, 28/ educational programmes for the benefit of the aging, which are very little developed within the national education system, come mainly within the province of informal adult education and their expansion depends very much on the growth of the latter. It is mainly within the framework of medical assistance institutions and of social and educational action that we find educational projects intended for the aging. The clubs and associations of the latter have an important role, especially as regards social readaptation, individual development, leisure and the promotion of culture.

76. It is in line with the idea of lifelong education that education for the aging has developed in China, 29/ and particularly at Shanghai, since 1958. Associations of veterans and retired workers have been formed for this purpose. Other specialized bodies, such as the Physical Education Association for the Aging and the Medical Association for the Aging, are also organizing educational activities. In most cases the aging devote one day per week to the study of such diverse subjects as poetry, philosophy, Chinese boxing (taijiquan), traditional therapeutic practices and the prevention and treatment of illness. The launching of educational activities of this kind enables many of the aging to bring their knowledge up to date, to keep their minds alert and to have better contact with the other generations. The need to adapt teaching techniques to the specific requirements of the aging is generally recognized and taken into account.

77. In 1976, adopting special legislation on the subject of lifelong education, the United States of America created a political instrument for planning, evaluating and co-ordinating educational activities in the context of lifelong education. 30/ It was recognized, in particular, that the educational system as it now exists does not satisfy the needs of the aging in respect of education. However, obvious changes are taking place with respect to the possibilities of education for the aging in the United States. For example, one university out of three is offering programmes for the aging at the present time. Several states have passed laws allowing them to take courses free of charge or at reduced prices. Approximately half of the adult education institutions offer special opportunities for the aging. Various bodies, such as centres

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27/ "Education des personnes âgées au Québec", by H. Boily, Direction générale de l'éducation des adultes, Ministry of Education, Quebec, Canada, December 1981.

28/ See footnote 23.

29/ See footnote 9.

30/ Twelfth International Congress of Gerontology, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany, 11-17 July 1981. "Education for Older Persons in the USA", by S. Timmermann.

for the aging, community schools, museums, associations of elderly persons and libraries are organizing activities on their behalf. At the level of higher education, there are two highly original institutions in the United States which operate exclusively for the benefit of the aging. 31/ These are the elders' hostel programme and the Institute for Retired Professionals. The former is a summer residential programme with reduced prices under which the aging devote a week to study at the universities participating in the scheme. It combines leisure activities and educational experience. A feature of the second is that both teachers and students are retired persons holding university degrees and having long professional experience. Some community schools also offer special courses for the aging in addition to courses for young people, as a means of increasing the economic return on equipment which for the most part is under-employed.

78. Innovative educational institutions for the benefit of the aging are in operation in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. 32/ Among these, mention may be made of the public health universities in the Soviet Union which are responsible for organizing popular science courses on various subjects relating to the aging. The Veterans of Labour University in the German Democratic Republic and the Scientific Education Society in Hungary are further examples of this concern for innovation. We should also mention the programmes and activities in preparation for retirement and the programmes of education in health and hygiene which are to be found in most of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

79. In France, 33/ educational activities for the benefit of the elderly are undertaken by the universities for the aging and by the clubs and associations organized for this age group to prepare them for retirement. It was in France, in 1973, that the first university for the aging was set up. There are now something like sixty of them. The activities undertaken in this connection by the various universities consist in various forms of instruction or in activities relating to cultural and leisure activities. The clubs for the aging, of which there are 14,000 in France, include in their programmes various forms of cultural activity, courses and, above all, arrangements for providing information on various practical problems of daily life or of retirement, or for introducing members to a variety of activities, e.g. handicrafts. This is education in the sense of the acquisition of new skills - a process which is carried on more systematically in the universities for the aging. Preparation for retirement concentrates on the specific problems posed by the transition from an active life to a new form of existence. The main purpose of this preparation is to promote participation in the cultural and not only in the material production of society. The law on the continuous training of adults (16 July 1971) has recently been broadened so as to permit the extension of financing to activities connected with retirement.

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31/ See footnote 30.

32/ See footnote 8.

33/ "Education et personnes âgées. Données et réflexions critiques sur la situation en France", by C. Attias-Donfut. Report for UNESCO, 1981.

80. The educational activities for the aging which are being carried on in India 34/ were conceived of as a means of aiding the persons in this group to solve many of the problems associated with aging and to enrich their lives. A number of these activities are of the functional type and are carried out under the national adult education programme: they are concerned with hygienic conditions, good citizenship, health, measures for the prevention of infectious diseases and also agriculture, poultry raising and handicrafts. However, the age limit - 35 years - which is laid down for participation in activities coming under national education programmes seriously limits the number of elderly people who can benefit by certain educational programmes.

81. Among the most representative innovations introduced in Kenya 35/ for the benefit of the aging, mention should be made of a retirement home which, in response to the request of its occupants, established a training programme in modern methods of bee-keeping applicable to local conditions. In this way, not only were the retired persons able to familiarize themselves with these methods but they also had the satisfaction of applying them for the benefit of their respective communities, whose harvests showed a marked increase thanks to these innovations.

82. In the United Kingdom, 36/ where there is a long tradition of adult education, thanks in particular to numerous community centres, the media and the "open" universities, the aging who so wish can participate in various training programmes or activities for updating their knowledge and skills by means of cultural, technical or university-level programmes established for their benefit by these different institutions. Education in preparation for retirement is also very active in the United Kingdom, where responsibility for it is assumed by associations of retired persons and employers and other bodies concerned with the aging. A special forum, the Forum for the Rights of the Elderly Persons to Education, stimulates awareness of the rights and needs of the aging in respect of education in both the school and the informal, non-school context. It should be pointed out that, although attention is paid to the aging by educational programmes, universities and local authorities, there are actually only a small number of programmes designed and organized directly for them.

83. Still in the United Kingdom, we should mention the efforts being made in Scotland, where a work group concerned with aging recently emphasized, on the occasion of a special symposium on the development of a national policy of education for older people, 37/ that it was important to work out a national policy of education and information for the benefit of the aging who, since they belong most often to a less-favoured social category, do not have ready access to these things. The aging may be considered not only as beneficiaries

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34/ See footnote 13.

35/ See footnote 22.

36/ See footnote 14.

37/ Scottish Symposium on Education for the Elderly, Glasgow, 11 January 1982. "Education for older people: A national policy framework", by E. Midwinter, 1981.



or "receivers" of education but also as "transmitters", provided that they receive psychological support and counsel. As "receivers" they should participate actively in the preparation of the programmes designed for them. On the other hand, their role as "transmitters" could apply to the handing down of traditions, local history and moral values as well as to activities in connection with literacy, reading and the sharing of their experience with the younger generations.

84. In Sweden 38/ approximately one-third of the adult population are pursuing studies in a variety of forms. Changes which have occurred in compulsory education policy during the last decade, including the introduction of a more active recruitment policy, have made it possible to extend the participation of certain categories of the adult population and, in particular, that of elderly people who have had six or seven years of primary studies and are interested in various programmes of lifelong education. Their educational requirements are taken into account in various programmes and study circles, courses organized in the context of adult educational institutions and municipal and national adult education programmes. There are also radio and television educational programmes, correspondence courses, consumer training courses, trade union education courses and the like for their benefit. These programmes are all financed from public funds. Courses are likewise organized by pensioners' organizations with a view to making retirement more agreeable and generally more satisfactory. The staff of centres for pensioners receive special training for the purpose of making them more aware of the problems of aging and more suited to work with people in this category.

85. It is in higher education that we find particularly interesting innovations and original activities designed especially for the aging. 39/

86. Universities for the aging, which have made great strides in a number of countries (France, Canada, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Poland), elders' hostels (United States), health universities (Soviet Union) and veterans' universities (German Democratic Republic) are examples of educational institutions established especially for the benefit of the aging. Their objective is to extend the cultural horizons of pensioners, to update and enrich their knowledge, to promote and develop human contacts and to encourage participation in the life of the community. It must be realized, however, that these types of institution are intended only for a privileged minority of the aging who have a high level of education. Literacy and basic education programmes leading to greater participation in community development would doubtless be better suited to the needs and capabilities of a majority of the aging.

87. Education is most often designed, especially in the developing countries, for the benefit of children and young people. The extension of school attendance in the last few years has resulted in a marked reduction in

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38/ "Adult education in Sweden". In: Fact Sheets on Sweden. Stockholm, the Swedish Institute, 1980.

"Pensioners' organizations: An active part of Swedish society", by V. Ekberg. In: Current Sweden, No. 190, May 1978. Stockholm, Swedish Institute, 1978.

39/ "L'université et le troisième âge", by M. Levet-Gautrat. Nanterre, Université Paris X, 1981.

illiteracy among young people. Among the aging, however, and especially in the case of women, the illiteracy rate is still very high. This is all the more regrettable as the aging, and particularly the women among them, have a privileged role to play in the education of the younger generations. The mass literacy campaigns carried out in certain third world countries, e.g. Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Tanzania or Iraq, have shown the interest that the aging take in the proposed programmes and their willingness to participate actively in this effort, either as beneficiaries or as voluntary literacy workers, a mission which very often they perform more competently than their juniors.

88. In view of the fact that in most countries the school system is designed primarily for children and adolescents, it is not surprising that it is informal education which offers most of the opportunities to adults of all ages to continue their training, generally through institutions concerned with their welfare and the defence of their interests, or at their former place of work. At Shanghai, for example, the plants or enterprises in which they formerly worked offer retired persons the possibility of taking courses. Some plants and trade unions employ staff specialized in problems of social assistance to retired workers who continue their training, most often one day per week.

#### Education by the aging

89. In a great many circumstances and situations the aging perform educational tasks of an informal or formal nature. Especially in countries where solid traditional structures continue to exist, many aspects of the education of the younger generations are taken care of by the aging. For example, it is they who have the responsibility of transmitting traditional ideas, unwritten codes of thought and behaviour, and a knowledge of rites. Their educational contribution includes the study of the natural environment, which is often very rich, and the transmission of practices of daily life - with respect to farming, hunting, handicrafts or domestic life, as the case may be. This contribution of the aging is emphasized in most of the studies devoted to the situation in the countries of the third world, especially in those from Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. However, as already indicated above, this traditional teaching and training role tends to be reduced in scope and importance with the introduction into these societies of such factors of modernization as urbanization, industrialization, media penetration and expansion of educational institutions. As far as informal education is concerned, the aging - and especially grandparents - continue to be valuable auxiliaries in the basic activity for which the schooling institutions and universities are responsible. When circumstances permit the aging person to be accepted and utilized by his environment, he is able to assist the pupil or student in doing his homework and to communicate what knowledge, experience or judgement he may have.

90. The case of Austria <sup>40/</sup> offers an excellent example of the interdependence of education for and by the aging. In both the rural and the urban areas of this country family assistance to small or very young children is mainly

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<sup>40/</sup> See footnote 26.

educational assistance. However, as study programmes have undergone numerous changes in recent years, the aging find it necessary to bring much of their knowledge up to date and to acquire new knowledge. It is here that adult education enters in, offering a great number of opportunities for catching up (introductory courses in new methods for teaching mathematics, foreign language courses for parents and grandparents and so forth). This educational activity within the family is hardly mentioned in the documentation supplied in response to the survey, doubtless because it does not lend itself to census taking or statistical treatment. It is nevertheless of definite importance among the educational contributions made by the aging.

91. At the community level, the aging play an important part in a group of educational activities of both formal and informal type. This function is emphasized in the report on the findings of the White House conference on "Lifelong Learning for Self-Sufficiency". <sup>41/</sup> The importance of the role being played by the aging demonstrates their ability both to learn and to teach and represents an enrichment of the United States tradition of voluntary service. According to this report, "Education for community participation offers older persons an opportunity to learn specific skills", which "empowers older persons to help their communities cope with mounting social and economic problems, and ... make institutions responsive to human needs". In some countries, certain teaching functions under the official educational system are entrusted to the aging. For example, in the People's Republic of China, where educational activities are numerous and varied, elderly people with specialized knowledge or skills receive training under government sponsorship and are then assigned to transmit elementary knowledge and professional skills to young people. The teaching covers a number of subjects, and especially mathematics, physics, chemistry, public finance, accounting, English, photography, Chinese painting, business management and cookery. The average age of the persons participating in these teaching activities is 65 years. <sup>42/</sup>

92. In India the aging make a very special contribution to preserving the living traditions of music, dancing and the theatre in the community. They do not only teach and orchestrate these dances and songs, but also serve as media for imparting religious, ethical and social education. What is involved, therefore, is an essential contribution to the cultural continuity of many societies, the aging members of which are presumed not only to provide a special kind of teaching but to be the principal transmitters of values and models.

93. In a large number of countries, in particular among those which have been industrialized the longest, a kind of gerontocracy has come into being in the most prestigious university and post-graduate institutions. Along with the definite advantage of thus enabling many successive younger generations to profit by the knowledge and experience of great scientists and excellent professors, this situation sometimes has the serious drawback of blocking the access of young people to more modern knowledge and approaches

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<sup>41/</sup> See footnote 11.

<sup>42/</sup> See footnote 13.

and to slowing down the rise of the best senior staff among the intermediate generations into the highest echelons of their respective professions. The fact that in several countries it has been necessary, in order to put an end to these practices, to pass strict laws or to reintroduce earlier rules governing departure upon retirement in certain professions at least represents an involuntary tribute to the absolutely intact intellectual capacities of many elderly people. It should be mentioned here, even though it will be necessary to return to the subject when we take up the educational aspects of a possible action programme, that intellectual vigour and the aptitude for learning and teaching until the end of life are most often a function of lifelong involvement in educational, cultural, scientific and technical activities.

#### Education about the aging

94. The spectacular extension of human life expectancy and the lowering of the retirement age in many countries have led to the development of a general interest in questions relating to aging and, as a result, in education on the subject of the aging. Gerontology, the study of the phenomena of aging and the morphological, physiopathological (geriatric), psychological and social aspects of old age, draws upon a number of sciences and is studied, taught and practised by eminent specialists. The development of gerontology has begun to put an end to a situation in which, too often, only the aging themselves and, in the best of cases, the State systems directly concerned take an interest in the problems of aging. Even today we have to realize that the main emphasis in this connection is on the health and survival aspects and not on the sociological, psychological and educational dimensions of aging. Evidence of this is to be found, for example, in the survey conducted in Chile, which shows clearly that social policy for the benefit of the aging is concerned primarily with problems of health, assistance tasks and social security.

95. The delays which have occurred in this area are generally attributed not to indifference but to the fact that in most human beings there is a kind of inability, or even refusal, to imagine one's self in the aging group. This takes the form, in the youthful stage of adulthood, of an attitude of great negligence with respect to the steps and precautions which are, after all, indispensable in preparation for aging, both as regards financial resources (retirement pensions) and such matters as health, mode of life or educational, cultural and recreational activities.

96. In many countries the only persons interested in the problems of the aging are staff directly concerned with questions of health, assistance and social security. This situation is deplored in many quarters where the opinion is held that it is not enough to encourage understanding for the aging solely among specialized personnel.

97. Despite the innovations which are appearing on the scene in connection with the aging and with education, it is nevertheless still difficult to gain wide acceptance for the idea that the concept of education is not linked exclusively with childhood and adolescence and that there is absolutely no incompatibility between education and aging. It is quite evident that the lessening and the subsequent elimination of this particularly unjustified, harmful and inhuman prejudice depends first and foremost on the intensive

development of education on the subject of the aging. At present, as shown by the study made in the Philippines, the need for information on the subject of the aging is particularly great in rural areas. The report submitted by Austria indicates the harm done by the inaccurate information on aging and on the elderly carried by the media and recommends the establishment of centres for the dissemination of scientific information on aging for the benefit of media personnel.

98. It is encouraging to be able to report the appearance and development - which has been going on for some time and in a number of countries, although still not enough of them - of a trend which is infinitely more favourable to the aging and to the study of their problems. In France, for example, education on the subject of the aging has made considerable strides in view of the need to train very large numbers of persons to handle educational tasks and cultural activities for the benefit of the aging. Thus it is not uncommon to find that France's newspapers and radio and television broadcasts contain detailed information on gerontological questions and on the educational resources and facilities available in this domain. It should also be noted that in some countries the efforts are being made both by official institutions and by non-governmental organizations and that there is often some degree of co-ordination between them. Recently a single newspaper, a publication with a large circulation, contained announcements about a number of courses, training programmes and conferences organized under the sponsorship of a multidisciplinary gerontological centre for the benefit of group leaders, physicians and administrative, social and voluntary assistance personnel.

#### Education with the aging

99. Only a few countries (France, United States, Kenya, Philippines, Austria) mention in their studies the implementation of educational projects which include different generations. A survey conducted among the aging in an urban environment in the Philippines <sup>43/</sup> shows that 73 per cent of them would like to participate in projects of this kind. To undertake educational and leisure-time programmes with young people would not only be profitable for them but would help fill the gap between generations and contribute to greater understanding and true appreciation on both sides.

100. In the United States it is particularly common to find all types of elderly persons and younger adults attending courses simultaneously. The practice of organizing night schools is gradually being abandoned and more and more day programmes for adults of all ages are being organized. Under-utilized schools are being transformed into "community schools" in which it is the most natural thing to find both young people and the aging. In France it has been found that a majority of these persons would rather have the university courses which are open to all than the very general, and often superficial, instruction which is designed for them. The former Vincennes university, which is now installed at Saint-Denis in the Paris suburbs, is an interesting example of an institution intended for students of all ages, without any kind of limitation in respect of advanced age or lack of a diploma.

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<sup>43/</sup> "Education and the elderly: The Philippine experience", by L. Makasiar Sicat, 1981.

101. In a completely different context, it has been found, in Guyana, that there is the same reticence on the part of the aging towards allowing themselves to be isolated in the ghetto of an education dealing exclusively with the problems of aging or designed on the basis of what is presumed to be the primary concern of persons belonging to this category. A response to these very widespread wishes of the aging has been found in the regional systems of various countries in which administrative decisions relating to several domains are taken and in which representatives of all generations of adults, from the youngest to the oldest, meet together. In this connection, the study prepared in Kenya shows how, at centres in which older farmers are brought together, the practical and educational use of their knowledge and experience in a farming operation resulted in increased productivity, the acquisition of indispensable knowledge by younger people and the establishment of mutually profitable relations between young and old. It should be pointed out, however, that in some countries, for example in India, the aging are reluctant to participate in the same courses as young people, either for reasons of prestige or because they are afraid to find themselves in a position of inferiority with respect to their aptitude for learning.

#### IV. PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS RELATING TO EDUCATION AND THE AGING AND POLICIES WHICH COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR SOLUTION

102. The studies which served as a basis for the preceding part of this paper in many instances confirmed the striking lack of political will and, consequently, of resources where education and aging persons are concerned. At the risk of seeming to state the obvious, it would appear necessary at this point to give at least a brief description of the main features of the situation and to suggest some guidelines which could be considered by the drafters of the international plan of action and whose implementation should make possible an improvement in the present state of affairs.

##### Diversity

103. The first observation that we can make is that, far from being homogeneous at the international level, or often even within the bounds of one and the same country, the aging population is today more diverse than in any other period in the history of the human race. The main differences may lie in the economic situation, the social and family setting, the health or the personal and professional history of the individual, his past and present relationship to education and culture, and so on. There are of course vast differences among the aging with respect to temperament, some of them being active and others weak or dependent, as a result of an infinite range of formative experiences and social factors. The consequence of this extreme diversity is that any national policy and, all the more so, any international policy in this respect must be designed and implemented with great flexibility, and that the most unremitting attention must be paid to the original features of the situations, the social groups and the persons concerned.

##### Risks

104. It is well known that aging, which can legitimately be expected to open up a period of freely available time, well-being and infinite opportunities for intellectual and cultural enrichment, is often a source of deep disappointments and experiences of which deterioration of health is not always the worst. They may be due to worsening of the financial situation or even to poverty, to infrequency of family, professional and social contacts, and to loss of identity and justification for existence in the community. Where suitable educational and cultural systems are not available and where there has been no association with such resources during youth and adulthood, the aging are likely to be condemned to solitude, emptiness and boredom. The reality of these dangers should prompt the public authorities to devise a consistent policy with respect to aging and to equip themselves with the wherewithal for carrying it out; in drafting and implementing the policy they should be able to reckon with the participation of the aging themselves and with the co-operation of the non-governmental sector.

##### Education

105. Without claiming that adult education should be considered a panacea, it would appear, judging by all the experience on which this document is based, that in its various dimensions it is a prerequisite for preparation for retirement and entry into the last stage of life as well as for creation of the conditions for "a good old age". Consequently, education should be

a fundamental aspect of any policy relating to aging and elderly persons, and the latter should be closely associated with specifying the educational priorities and the systems to be established in this connection.

106. In countries where oral traditions prevail it would be most important for the authorities to ensure that the aging are enabled to give the community the fullest possible benefit of their knowledge, experience and moral authority, for example, by recording what they have to say and disseminating it via the media. Here, more than anywhere else, education should not be conceived of as a process limited to the formal transmission of knowledge and techniques, still less as an activity confined to a particular stratum of the population or age group, but rather as a fundamental human right.

### Financing

107. It is well known that in the budgetary arbitration that goes on at the summit of States, education is rarely in a privileged position relative to the other items of expenditure and, within the area of education, that for adults and even more so for the aging most often gives the impression of being a poor relative. Aggravated by the economic crisis, this state of affairs is not only contrary to the interests of the social categories and persons directly concerned but it is also in conflict with the true interest of countries, and particularly the developing ones, to whose progress the aging can make a very potent contribution. Of course, a prerequisite for this contribution is that the aging should be literate and that they should receive education and training suited to the tasks which they could perform. Over and above the productive and pace-setting functions that they can perform, special emphasis should be placed on their aptitude for teaching the young and also the less young; to a considerable degree, this represents compensation for the expenditure on education for the aging. Furthermore, it is generally recognized that proper preparation for retirement, in which education is a fundamental factor, in most cases helps avoid problems of both mental and physical health which, besides being especially poorly tolerated at this stage of existence, can be extremely expensive for social security systems - that is to say, for the nation. It may therefore be hoped that States will really want to make available the financial resources which are indispensable for implementing their political intentions with respect to the aging and that they will consider expenditure on the education of the aging to be a particularly profitable investment, while sometimes seeking supplementary resources from the non-governmental and voluntary assistance sectors.

### Women

108. Men and women are usually considered together under the heading of the aging. However, given the greater longevity of women, the fact that it is often harder for them to have access to the benefits of literacy and education in general, and the often subordinate and laborious nature of the tasks which are their lot in the household as well as in production and in the tertiary sector, they tend to be particularly disadvantaged, handicapped and lonely in the face of aging. This situation warrants special attention on the part of the persons responsible at the various decision-making levels to ensure that the difficulties peculiar to the circumstances of aging women can be offset by specific and practical measures.



Research, innovations, exchanges

109. The studies on "education and aging" carried out for UNESCO showed that there are extremely conspicuous shortcomings with respect to research, innovations and exchanges of ideas and experience on this subject. This deficiency is particularly regrettable in that the matter has been ignored and neglected for such a long time. Among the innumerable subjects for possible and worth-while research one might wish to pay special attention to teaching the aging to read and write, to the effects of prior access to educational and cultural resources on the utilization of free time for creative purposes and on the adaptation of individuals to the status of retirement, professional and technological readaptation of the aging and so forth. Research of this kind, in which the aging should be extensively associated, would undoubtedly result in innovations which could have a considerable effect on their situation and, probably, on society as a whole. It would appear to be very desirable that various developed and developing countries should engage in mutually profitable exchanges in this domain where, by analogy with the isolation to which the aging are so often exposed, the action of States nearly always takes place in solitude, ignorance, and even indifference, as compared with what happens in other areas.

## V. EDUCATION IN THE WORLD PLAN OF ACTION

110. Since it is understood that education should occupy a position of choice in the world plan of action on aging, it must be pointed out that the fundamental idea that the access of everybody and of all ages to education and culture is based on an inalienable human right should not lead to the classification of education among so-called "humanitarian" tasks. On the contrary, it should be considered as a means of taking full advantage of the incalculable asset which the aging represent, especially from the point of view of economic social and cultural development.

111. It would be highly desirable for the world plan of action to be based on a broad interdisciplinary approach to the solution of the problems of aging and for it to avoid entrusting the study of the aging and the formulation of suitable solutions solely to specialists in the narrowest sense of the word. For example, research enterprises concerned with research on health questions should arrange for sociologists, psychologists and educators to work together with geriatric experts. Similarly, studies on the reorientation of the aging should not be conducted by educators alone, without recourse to the valuable assistance of gerontologists.

112. Just as it would be a good idea to set up a centre responsible for the collection and dissemination, at the international, national and regional levels, of the most recent information, experience and findings on the subject of aging, it would also be appropriate for the world plan of action to consider ways of promoting direct and highly intensive international exchanges in these matters.

113. In the recommendations to States and to the various institutions in the non-governmental sector which the world plan of action could include in a section relating to education and aging, emphasis should be placed on the imperative need to associate the aging, either directly or through their representative organizations, in any activities that are being considered, paying due attention, here as elsewhere, to the infinite variety of situations.

114. Listed below, by way of illustration, are some educational aspects of the problems of aging that could be included to advantage in the priorities of the world plan of action, as regards both recommendations to States and activities to be undertaken on an international and regional level:

- Teaching all society's age groups to read and write;
- Expansion of adult education in the framework of lifelong education;
- Preparing the aging for the creative use of free time;
- Preparing adults for a professionally and socially productive retirement;
- Recognizing and encouraging the eminent role which the aging can play in society and in the most varied areas, in particular those of teaching and group leadership;
- Integrating the aging into society and, in particular, into educational institutions alongside members of other age groups;
- Promoting research and studies on the subject of the aging, covering all fields of gerontology;

- Paying attention, as a matter of priority, to the problems of aging women;
- Financing education in respect of the aging, considered both as a humanitarian obligation and as an investment.

115. The world plan of action should take full account of the contribution of all the specialized agencies of the United Nations system to its implementation. More particularly, it should envisage the possibility of the United Nations Development Programme financing research on the educational and socio-cultural policies and practices applied in various countries with respect to the contribution of the aging in various areas of educational and socio-cultural life. It would appear particularly desirable to encourage the design and implementation of pilot projects relating to this contribution and to promote the dissemination of the results.

ANNEX

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