



A World Fund for Aging



*World Assembly on Aging,
August 1982.*



*UN Secretary-General Javier
Perez de Cuellar addressing
expert group meeting.*



*Margaret Anstee, UN Under-
Secretary-General, and Everaldo
Compton, President, Banyan
Fund signing relationship
agreement.*

The United Nations Initiative

In a desire to facilitate the implementation of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging, which had been approved by the UN World Assembly on Aging in 1982, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar convened an expert group meeting at UN headquarters in September 1989 to discuss the feasibility and desirability of creating a "world foundation" on aging. In addressing this meeting, the Secretary-General stated the need "to enter into a partnership with the private sector, not only to develop strategies for raising funds, but also mechanisms to allocate those funds. We must be ready to consider and accept new initiatives, to explore new approaches, to traverse untrodden paths."

By consensus, the group agreed on the urgent need for an independent international foundation on aging operating under the patronage of the UN. This recommendation was endorsed a few months later by the UN General Assembly. Following several more meetings in other countries of a special task force drawn from the original expert group, agreement was reached on the structure of the foundation and its relationship with the UN. In May, 1991, the Banyan Fund, as it came to be called, was officially incorporated in France as an independent, non-profit organization. A formal relationship agreement was signed with the UN, represented by Under-Secretary-General Margaret Anstee.

What is the Banyan Fund?

Like the banyan tree* after which it was named, the Banyan Fund seeks to reach out — in this case to the world's growing population of older persons by enhancing their ability to remain independent and active contributors to their communities. The Banyan Fund raises and allocates monies for community-based projects around the world that serve to empower older persons. Our hope is that successful projects, like the banyan tree's branches, will take root elsewhere, and eventually help form new structures to assist older persons.

Established in 1991, the Banyan Fund is an independent, non-profit organization operating under United Nations patronage. This permits the Fund to tap the unique expertise of the UN and its specialized bodies, yet retain the flexibility necessary to raise and allocate monies received from the private and public sectors for local projects serving older persons around the world.

Why the Need for the Banyan Fund?

The Banyan Fund was created in direct response to an appeal for help by the UN General Assembly and UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar in dealing with a potentially explosive issue — the rapid aging of the world's population. This is a trend that will continue to accelerate well into the 21st century. Nations are largely unprepared for the drain on national resources that this situation can create. With other priorities now more visible and pressing, few governments have directed resources toward preventing the social and economic problems that may occur or developed imaginative approaches to tapping a vast new resource of human potential.



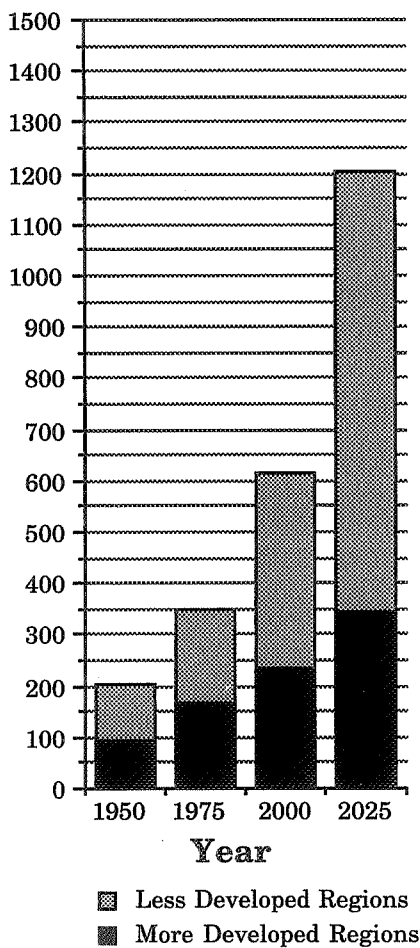
A World Fund for Aging

*The banyan tree was adopted as the symbol of the United Nations' World Assembly on Aging in 1982 to symbolize longevity, self-reliance, and continuing growth. The banyan tree is unique in its ability to send out aerial roots that reach the ground and form the basis for new trunks. Eventually, large arcades of aerial roots are formed, and the flat-topped crown of one tree may reach more than 700 meters in circumference, providing shelter for 20,000 people.



UNESCO/W. Pines

World Population Aged 60 and Over
(in millions)



The Demographic an

Aging is an issue that will not go away. The world's population is aging rapidly in both developed and developing regions. Every month, the net balance of the world's older population increases by nearly one million persons. By 2025, there will be well over one billion persons over the age of 60 – 14% of the total world population. The majority will be women since, as a group, they outlive men.

A typical Chinese family in the 21st century will consist of two middle-aged adults, one adolescent child, and three or four grandparents. The Chinese situation is not unique. In fact, older persons constitute the most rapidly growing population group almost everywhere in the world as a result of increases in life expectancy and declines in fertility rates.

The age group that is 80 years of age and older will be growing twice as fast as the 60+ age group in developed and developing regions alike. This becomes significant because it is the oldest of the old who require the most health and social services and care by family members. Longer life does not necessarily guarantee good health. At the same time, however, much larger numbers of persons will reach old age in good health and be able to enjoy many years of active life ahead of them.

Where will older people be living in 2025? According to UN figures, 58% of the projected 1.2 billion persons will live in Asia; 12% in Europe; 8% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 8% in Africa; 7% in North America; 6% in the USSR; and 1% in Oceania. Over 70% of the elderly will live in developing countries – those countries that, in some ways, may least be able to cope with population aging. The process of population aging in developing countries is occurring at a much more accelerated pace than was the case in more developed nations. This is due to rapid advances in recent decades in public health, medical care and family planning which both reduce fertility rates and increase life expectancy in these countries. Yet, many developing countries cannot yet afford the health and social systems found in the developed regions of the world to help address the needs of the elderly.

Social Reality

While families, the traditional support system for older persons, remain strong in developing countries, the stresses and opportunities that accompany development have begun to tear families apart. Often, being "cared for" by one's family simply means sharing the family's poverty. Continued reliance on family support as the sole social agent to support older persons is a weak reed on which to base the well-being of tomorrow's elderly.

Although economically better endowed, more developed countries are also experiencing stresses associated with population aging and will continue to do so. In some countries as much as 20-25% of the population will be 65 or older by the year 2025. Even the rich array of policies and programs serving older people in most developed nations cannot fill the void created by viewing older persons as passive, dependent members of society, primarily in need of care.

"The progressive aging of societies, the continuing increase of the elderly population both in absolute and in proportional terms, is neither an unexpected, unforeseeable event nor a random result of national and international development efforts. It is the first and most visible outcome of a sectorally-based approach to socio-economic development all over the world and should be accompanied by equally efficient interventions in other areas in order to ensure balanced growth and integrated development.

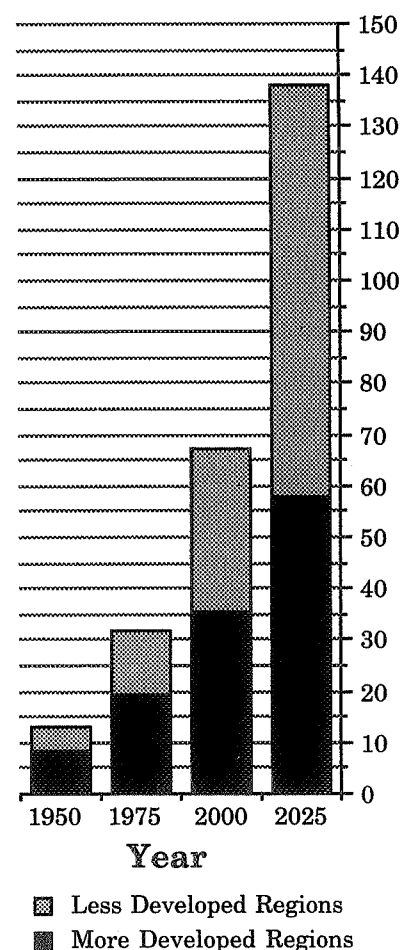
"To this end, policies and actions should be inspired by the determination to give further qualitative content and meaning to a quantitative process in order to make sure that the generally expanding lifespan of individuals the world over will be accompanied by efforts to fill these extra years with a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and that people will not be relegated to a marginal and a passive role after a certain age level."

Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging
(approved by the UN World Assembly on Aging, August 1982)



World Population Aged 80 and Over

(in millions)





UNESCO/ de Decker

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The Organization of the Fund

The Banyan Fund is headquartered in a suburb of Paris. National "Friends of the Banyan Fund" support the activities of the Fund through information dissemination and fundraising. Funds will be sought primarily from corporations, foundations and the general public. (The Fund does not receive regular financial support from either the UN or governments.) The Fund's Board of Directors and Council of Patrons are composed of eminent persons from around the world expert in aging, human resource development and finance.*

Projects are identified and monitored through close collaboration with the UN and other public and private international organizations. The Fund seeks to optimize the use of existing resources and networks and avoid duplication.

Collaboration with the UN takes place through regular joint meetings which oversee and coordinate the Fund's programs that are of relevance to the UN. The Fund and the UN have agreed to cooperate in:

- implementing the International Plan of Action on Aging
- mobilizing public interest in and support of the UN program on Aging
- raising awareness of the worldwide donor community to the needs and opportunities presented by the aging of individuals and populations, and
- expanding international funding for meeting the needs of aging populations.

*Officers and members of the Board of Directors include Everaldo Compton, *President* (Australia); Alain Gillette, *Treasurer* (France); Julia T. de Alvarez, *Secretary* (Dominican Republic); Horace Deets (U.S.A.); Christopher Beer (U.K.); Sharad Gokhale (India); Alicia Paolozzi (Italy).

New Approaches

Many of the efforts made to help older persons have been based on a welfare model that views aging as a time of illness, weakness, poverty, isolation, and depression. Older people are seen as vulnerable, dependent, and helpless – something less than full citizens, capable of playing only a circumscribed role in life.

Such an image would not have gained ascendancy if there were not some truth in it. There is a minority of older persons in all countries for whom the first response must be to provide protection and care. To extend this image to the majority of older persons, however, is to do them and society a gross injustice.

Older persons everywhere remain capable and eager to remain productive members of society. They are a national resource of great importance, representing a reservoir of knowledge, skills and experience that can and should be tapped. The Banyan Fund seeks to support projects that both meet the needs of the frail aged and tap the human resource potential of the world's older population.

The Task Ahead

There is precedent neither for the aging of the world's population nor for solving the problems associated with such a demographic upheaval. The task cuts across generations, international borders, and the boundaries of traditional social, economic and political institutions. It calls for new ways of thinking, an enlarged sense of social responsibility and a willingness to imagine and create something for which there is no blueprint.

By supporting the work of the Banyan Fund, donors have an opportunity to play a leadership role in partnership with the UN and assure that in adding years to life, we are also adding life to years.



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Goals

Among the Fund's major goals are to:

- raise awareness of the worldwide donor community to the needs and opportunities created by the aging of individuals and populations
- support research and action-oriented projects that advance the goal of empowering older persons to maintain maximum independence and a continuing ability to contribute to society
- support the work of the UN in implementing the 1982 International Plan of Action on Aging and assisting in the development of policy frameworks and organizational structures response to the new demographic reality.

Towards these ends, funding is sought to support projects in areas such as life-long education and skills development; income-generating opportunities; promotion of health and well-being; training of practitioners; applied research and data collection; public education about the aging process; and public policy formation.

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