

Ageing with a Smile Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

What is ASI? And what is the rationale for establishing the organisation?

Ageing with a Smile Initiative (ASI) is a new and innovative drive which was registered in The Gambia in August 2009. The initiative was launched in January 2010 by Dr Abubacarr Gaye, the Hon. Minister of Health and Social Welfare and its mission is to improve the health and general welfare of the elderly people in the country.



Dr Gaye checking the blood pressure of an old woman at the official launch of ASI

In traditional Gambian society, elderly people have always been adequately cared for by family members, neighbours and the wider community. Changes in our life styles explained by a number of factors including growing economic problems are forcing individuals and families to be more concerned about their own development rather than caring for and supporting others. This situation is putting the lives of many disadvantaged elderly people in misery as they are neglected, living without adequate care and in some cases suffer in silence.

It has been documented in some parts of Africa that with minimum support and care, the lives of these people can be changed in a positive way thus allowing them to live more dignified and fulfilling lives. The elderly have contributed significantly towards the socio-economic development of the country and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

In The Gambia, the elders represent a significant part of the population. They face an increasing burden of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, cardiovascular problems and failing eyesight. Despite their multiple health problems, there is no organization with a particular focus on their welfare.

This initiative, which is based on helping the elderly at their homes and communities, is being piloted in the Greater Banjul Area in partnership with government institutions, the private sector and some NGOs. The outcome of the pilot phase will be shared with a wide range of stakeholders including government, NGOs and community members at a seminar before it is rolled out to other communities in the country.

The aims and objectives of ASI are to:

1. Improve access to basic health care services for disadvantaged elderly people in The Gambia
2. Promote the re-integration of the elderly in Gambian social life
3. Promote inter-generational dialogue
4. Advocate for the rights of the elderly in The Gambia.

To achieve the above objectives, ASI is developing activities that fall under the following intervention areas:

1. Provision of routine health check ups for the elderly at home covering blood pressure, blood sugar, eye care, hearing, dental, health and nutrition, musculo-skeletal problems, etc.
2. Promotion of personal hygiene and basic sanitation for the elderly (provision of portable water supply, laundry, appropriate clothing, etc).
3. Preventing the spread of common diseases like malaria and tuberculosis among the elderly and facilitate treatment services for such diseases.
4. Revival of positive traditional roles of the elderly in Gambian social life – such as story telling, riddles, jokes and knitting.



5. Provision of opportunities for the elderly to meet and interact (socialize) with their peers and also enjoy daily life.
6. Provision of rehabilitative services for elderly people – such as those recovering from stroke, and diabetes.
7. Conducting training/sensitisation sessions for the family members of elderly people on how to support the elderly.
8. Advocate for the provision of essential services for the elderly by the government, NGOs and the private sector.
9. Conducting research on the situation of the elderly in The Gambia.

How are ASI's activities implemented?

To achieve its objectives, ASI is working with a wide range of stakeholders at various levels including government, the business/private sector and civil society. The active participation of the elderly themselves is integral in all the interventions that are implemented by the organisation. This is consistent with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) policy on active ageing. The WHO defines active ageing as *“the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”* Its Policy Framework on ageing states that *“Active ageing applies to both individuals and population groups. It allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well being throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance”*.

Members of ASI currently work in five different but complementary working groups to respond to the diverse needs of the elderly in a comprehensive and integrated way. These groups are:

The Medical & Home Visiting Team

This team comprise medical doctors, qualified nurses, medical students, who visit the elderly people at least once a month at their homes or communities. The organisation also plans to recruit home visiting volunteers who will be visiting the elders on a weekly basis.



The Social Events Team organises trips for the elderly in and around town and also facilitate the interaction of the elderly with their peers. Depending on the interest of the elderly and the availability of funds, the team plans to organise such events on a monthly basis.



The Fundraising & Resource Mobilisation Team spearheads the mobilization of the necessary resources to facilitate the implementation of the planned activities by the other teams of the organisation.

The Advocacy and sensitisation Team complements the efforts of the Home Visiting Volunteers. Members are drawn from multimedia practitioners including radio stations, journalists, dramatists/artists and others with experience in communication and advocacy. To support the efforts of this team, ASI maintains a website, which is updated periodically. We also have a page on Facebook which gives us the opportunity to interact with our fans.



The Research and Publication Team produces evidence-based information that is used by ASI and other stakeholders to design appropriate and responsive interventions aimed at improving the health and general well being of the elderly in The Gambia.

How can I become a member of ASI?

Membership to ASI is open to everyone irrespective of age, sex, colour, ethnicity, residence, and nationality, religious and political affiliations. However to be registered as a member, one has to meet the following minimum requirements:

- Have a keen interest in development issues, particularly in helping to improve the welfare of the elderly in The Gambia
- Commitment to the objectives of ASI
- Integrity (have high moral standards, honesty, respect, etc)
- Technically competent in one of the intervention areas of ASI
- Have good team working spirit
- Ability to communicate clearly

There is a prescribed membership application form which can be downloaded from this link: <http://www.asigambia.org/downloads.html>

What criteria are used for the selection of the elderly supported by ASI?

The goal of ASI is to improve the health and general living condition of the elderly. Our definition of an elderly is someone who has attained the age of 60 years and above. In this project, we are focusing on the disadvantaged elderly (i.e. those with little support to meet their basic requirements for food, safe water, shelter, health care and clothing).

Elders identified for support by this project are screened using a standard form and enrolment is made when at least three (3) of the following conditions are met:

1. *Has attained the age of 60 years and above*
2. *Poor health status (physical disability, poor vision, hard off hearing, arthritis, recovering from stroke, hypertensive, diabetic, malnourished, etc)*
3. *Does not have adequate attention from family members and neighbours as a result of which he/she feels lonely*
4. *Is economically very poor and does not have adequate support from family members or organizations to lead a healthy and dignified life.*



For the purpose of the pilot, only elders resident in the Greater Banjul Area are being enrolled. The elders and their families must express willingness to participate in the project. Those selected are also required to have a family supporter to work with project volunteers.

How is ASI funded?

The activities of ASI are funded by contributions from its members and other funds raised by the organisation both within The Gambia and abroad. These include support from individuals, private/business organisations, faith-based organisation, local and international non-governmental organisations, and foreign missions in the country and United Nations agencies



We recognise that funding is the lifeblood of the organisation. It is in recognition of this fact that a working group is dedicated to raising funds and mobilizing required resources for the successful implementation of the project.

How does ASI account for the funds and resources provided for the project?

The Executive Committee of ASI recognizes the need for accountability to the project beneficiaries, the donors and The Gambian people. The following measures are put in place to ensure accountability and promote transparency:

1. All funds raised by ASI are deposited in the organisation's bank account
2. An asset register is maintained and this register is updated periodically
3. There are four signatories to ASI's bank account. At least two signatories are required for the withdrawal of funds from the organisation's bank account.
4. A register/database of the project's beneficiaries is maintained and this is accessible to the Executive Committee, the Advisory Committee and where necessary members of the local media or any body authorised to review the organisation's records.
5. Quarterly programmatic and financial reports are produced by the Executive Committee and these are presented to the Advisory Committee for review.
6. The project will be audited at least once a year. Such audits will involve reviewing the financial records of the project and interviewing project participants/ stakeholders.

How can I support the work of ASI?

If you are interested in financially supporting any aspect of our intervention areas, you can send funds to our bank account using the following details:

Ageing with a Smile Initiative

Bank Account Number: 002102000236

Bank PHB Gambia Ltd

P.O.Box 211 Banjul

The Gambia

Fax: (220) 422 93 12

Swift code: ITBCGMGM

You can also support our work in many other ways. If you have experience working with the elderly, we will be interested to learn from you. and can organise a seminar for our members and others who are interested. You may also want to come and join one of our five working groups.

For further information, please contact visits our website and Facebook page at the following addresses:

www.asigambia.org

Facebook Page : www.facebook.com/ASIGambia

E-mail: asi.gambia@gmail.com

You can also contact the following people on the phone numbers given below:

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