

Enhancing Long-Term Care and Social Participation of Older Persons in East and North-East Asia

Outcome Document of the
ESCAP Subregional Meeting on Enhancing Long-Term Care and
Social Participation of Older Persons in East and North-East Asia,
3-4 November 2011, Incheon, Republic of Korea

The Subregional Meeting was convened as a follow-up to the Regional Forum on Elderly Care Services in Asia and the Pacific, 21-22 January 2011, Nanjing, China, and was organized against the background of the regional and global MIPAA review towards 2013.

Based on the experiences and ongoing challenges from the five countries in East and North-East Asia (China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation), the Meeting identified the following items as recommendations for all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 1: Promote positive images of ageing and the elderly

The Meeting recognized that there were negative views about ageing and the elderly in the societies of the East and North-East Asian subregion, as if older persons were a burden to the society. However, the Meeting reviewed the positive contributions, including social, cultural, economic and political contributions, that older persons have been making, and recommend all relevant stakeholders to promote positive images of ageing, including the recognition that the elders are assets to our societies.

Recommendation 2: Increase opportunities for older persons to utilize their professional capabilities, expertise and rich experiences

Older persons possess a wealth of skills and capabilities resulting from their rich professional and personal experiences. Increasing opportunities for older persons to effectively utilize their capabilities and expertise will benefit the society as well as the individual older persons in their continued social participation.

Such opportunities may be gainful employment (full-time or part-time), or other engagements including ad hoc work and volunteering. Possible workplaces for older persons include private enterprises, including small and medium enterprises, schools, and communal and public facilities, or abroad for skills transfer projects.

In addition, the Meeting recommends the following items for continued discussions:

- NGOs or national/local government entities to match older persons' skills and job openings are known to enhance employment of older persons. Such entities can be supported by the national government.
- Highly skilled jobs can be taken up by elders, and other jobs can be taken by younger workers. The two groups do not have to compete on the same ground. More study is needed on the impact of increased employment opportunities for older persons (including delaying the legal retirement age) on job opportunities for younger population.
- Working for longer years but less hours per week (eg. 35 hours per week instead of over 40 hours) merits consideration.

Recommendation 3: Promote older persons' associations (OPAs)

Creating OPAs is an effective means to enhance participation of older persons in society. OPAs help decrease the marginalization of older persons, represent older persons' voices, and act as a channel through which older persons gain access to information on laws, policies, and available services.

OPAs can also act as a mutual support group in addressing common concerns including health promotion, improvement of living conditions and infrastructure, and alleviating poverty of older persons through livelihood improvement projects.

Recommendation 4: Improve governance at the local and national levels

It is important that local and national governments listen to the voices of older persons. Trust between older persons and the local government is crucial for effective implementation of programmes for the older persons and promotion of active participation of older persons in decision-making at all levels.

Related to the above, legal and fiscal decentralization of services from national to local levels, supported by excellent coordination between different levels of government, NGOs/OPAs and community organizations, is recommended in order to meet the various needs of older persons resulting from gender inequality, urban/rural residence, migratory status, as well as personal preferences, lifestyles, and physiological needs. There are also enormous regional differences in ageing within a country, and decentralization and localization of services help address these differences.

Recommendation 5: Develop “community holistic care” as appropriate to each country and locality, in order to enable “ageing in place”

The Meeting agrees with MIPAA which clearly states that the primary responsibility of ensuring the well-being of older persons rests with the national governments. The need for the government to provide social security to older persons, including a pension system, cannot be overstated. However, long-term care is costly and securing the fund is a constant challenge (some countries use tax, others use insurance premiums). As it becomes more and more difficult for the national government to provide the necessary care alone, collaboration with other stakeholders in providing long-term care is necessary.

“Community holistic care” includes medical and social care of older persons within the community, in which older persons’ daily life is anchored. It provides safe and reliable daily living conditions for older persons, enabling them to age at home or near their homes, and includes availability of appropriate housing, home care services, transportation, and building designs, so that the whole environment contributes to the health, well-being and care of older persons. It is the most useful and viable approach to long-term care.

Enhancing social participation of older persons directly contributes to long-term care, from the perspectives of both prevention and provision of care.

Other recommendations related to “community holistic care” are as follows:

- Increase training opportunities for local health workers and other service providers, local authorities, community volunteers and family members in order to address shortage of care givers and improve the quality of care at the community level.
- Actively involve other generations in caring for the old. Increasing opportunities for inter-generational interactions will nurture the basis of creating an enabling environment for older persons.
- As more and more profit-making companies begin to provide care services, enact national regulations to control the quality of care services.

Recommendation 6: Raise the priority of population ageing issues for all levels of government

Even though population ageing has become an increasing concern for many national governments, the policy responses have not caught up with the fast speed of ageing. Population ageing in the subregion, as well as in Asia and the world, deserves similar attention as other prominent global issues such as climate change.

This can be achieved through, but not limited to, the following:

- Increase public awareness about population ageing and the urgent need for long-term care.
- Mobilize funds for ageing related issues.
- In all subregional countries, older women outnumber older men, with the Russian Federation having almost twice as many women than men. Incorporate gender perspectives in all policies related to ageing.
- Support research and data collection on various aspects of population ageing and its effects to the society, so that policy-making is based on solid data analysis rather than speculations.

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