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Comprehensive Policy Framework

A Life-Cycle Approach to Ageing in Thailand



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Preface

Population ageing is one of the most significant trends of the 21st century. Today one in eight people in the world are aged 60 and over. As long as fertility rates continue to decline and life expectancy continues to rise, older people will steadily increase as a proportion of the population. And while population ageing is a global phenomenon, it is progressing fastest in developing countries – including those with large youth populations. Thailand is ageing fast and becomes the 2nd most aged society in ASEAN after Singapore. Currently, 20 per cent of Thais are older than 60 years old. About one-third of Thai population will be over 60 years old by the year 2030, the level not far behind what Japan is facing today.

Thailand has responded positively to the ICPD vision for a comprehensive approach to population development, including enabling people to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human rights. The difficulties of balancing family-raising and work commitment experienced by many women underpin the very low fertility Thailand is experiencing. Policies to address this must be sought, so that the desire to raise a family can be realized without compromising other desired aspects of a full life.

As Thailand's population decline is under way, it is important to invest on human capital development throughout a life cycle, especially in fulfilling young people's potential. The government recognizes a rapid slow-down of the economy which has become more volatile. Not only Thailand's workforces are ageing fast, about 60 per cent of them are in the informal sector with inadequate social protection for a better living.

For people to make the most out of longer lives, and for societies to reap a longevity dividend, it is important that countries adopt a more comprehensive approach to ageing. The way individuals arrive at old age, critically depends on choice, opportunities, and support individuals received from the very beginning of their lives. Healthy and active ageing is determined even before the birth of a child with readiness of the mother, and it is shaped by several factors throughout the life cycle. These include access to health, including maternal, new-born and child health and sexual and reproductive health care, information and services, as well as lifelong learning. Together these factors have an influence on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as the transition from adulthood into older ages.

It is not solely about well-being of today's generation of older persons, but also about investments today that will augment the well-being of the current and future generations of younger persons. The younger generation is essential for sustainable responses to population ageing, and understanding their concerns and aspirations, as well as their needs is essential for any successful response to low and falling fertility. Efforts to build and cultivate human capital must begin at earliest childhood and include investments in both lifelong education and health. Ageing is a process, not a state, and it is not only about older persons but about all of us.

If strategize carefully, Thailand can benefit from the opportunities this shifting demographic landscape presents. The country has the opportunity to invest in a new society, where all citizens across the age spectrum are able to benefit from social and economic planning and policies. Thailand can also build stronger education systems and decent employment for all especially for young people. Hence, it is in one hand the country needs to provide better long-term care and sustainable pension schemes for healthy ageing, and on the other hand to strengthen investments in fulfilment of young people potentials on one hand to capitalize the human capital development potentials.

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