

Asia/Pacific Regional Conference 2014

Older People in Ageing Societies: Burden or Resource?

Network Action Plan on the Conference Theme

The HelpAge Asia/Pacific Network Regional Conference was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in September 2014. The theme of the conference was *Older People in Ageing Societies: Burden or Resource?* The Regional Conference discussed how societies can best maximise the vast potential of their older citizens while minimising social and economic tensions associated with population ageing. The conference highlighted three interrelated aspects of this theme: health as a precondition for older people's active contribution, older people as an economic resource, and perceptions of older people in society and the media.

Purpose: This document aims to identify the main actions the Asia/Pacific Network will take to follow up on thematic issues arising from the 2014 Regional Conference. The HelpAge South Asia region (SA) will partner with the East Asia/Pacific region (EAP) in the follow-up with collaborative actions and shared learnings across many of these actions.

Action Plan timeframe: January 2015 to May 2016 (date of next Regional Conference)

Priority issues and actions by sub-theme

Health and care

Key issues

Whether from an economics or rights-based viewpoint, improved health of older people benefits everyone. Today's health systems are often oriented towards yesterday's threats and need to be restructured to respond to the changing health perspectives of rapidly ageing societies.

- Non-communicable diseases make up a vast proportion of regional morbidity and mortality. Investing in the prevention, diagnosis and effective management of NCDs is needed.
- Investment in costly curative services should not come at the expense of expanded primary health care and community-based solutions. Cost effective community-based solutions play a pivotal first line role in healthy ageing, social care, early diagnosis and effective referral.
- Greater attention to healthy and active ageing, including self-care and health promotion, is a cost-effective strategy. The World Health Organisation has done important work on policy recommendations and strong collaboration with them is recommended.
- Chronic underinvestment in mental health, dementia and preventable causes of functional decline also needs to be corrected in light of population ageing and greater longevity.
- Universal health care will benefit today's older people and future older generations. Investment in young people can ensure that future generations of older people are more able to realise their potential. This can be done by promoting healthy behaviours across the life-course.

Priority actions

1. Use HelpAge's project on public health and NCDs in Myanmar to develop messages on health for the Network, leading to an EAP and SA regional action plan on health by the 2016 Regional Conference.
2. Link to the separate EAP regional care strategy by building messages of Older People as a Resource into advocacy on community-based social care. Conduct studies on community-based care approaches to further understanding and policy dialogue, with an emphasis on home care and social care.

Economics and ageing

Key issues

Population ageing affects economies in a wide variety of ways which are often misunderstood. Strong use of evidence and clear messages are needed to counter the impression that ageing simply creates economic and fiscal burdens.

- There is an urgent need to develop alternative thinking to the dominant paradigm that equates old age with dependency and burden.
- The links between ageing and economics, and the contributions of older people to the macro-economy and household economies, need to be further researched and highlighted and the current narrative of 'burden' corrected.
- People who are willing and able to continue working into old age should be facilitated to do so. Creative solutions are needed, including flexible retirement arrangements, access to credit, job training and measures that reduce discrimination and barriers to work in the formal and informal sectors.
- The value of non-market work through volunteer and unpaid household and agricultural labour should be measured and recognised.
- All countries should aim at universal, adequate and sustainable systems to ensure income security in old age, including the provision of social pensions and other means of social protection for those without formal pension coverage.
- Looking to the future, states need to invest in human capital through improved education and health care, in order to develop more healthy, productive, and highly skilled workforces.

Priority actions

3. Hold an initial workshop with the network and several experts in 2015 to help crystalize the key points of advocacy in relation to the economics of ageing societies.
4. Use the UNFPA research on income security to draw out evidence related to the economic contributions of older people across 5 countries in EAP and SA and share findings with the Network in 2016 and 2017.
5. Conduct cross-country research on the impact of Older People's Organisations to develop evidence for how organised older people can play a strong, resourceful role in community development.

Perceptions of older people and ageing

Key issues

Skewed perceptions of older people lead media, governments and civil society to treat them as a homogenous group of frail, vulnerable and dependent people. These misperceptions should be changed to recognise the significant economic and social resources of older people.

- A broader evidence base, and dissemination of that evidence through clear messaging, is crucial for changing perceptions of ageing, as is working alongside the media to increase fact-based representations of older people.
- Older people who are frail, vulnerable and no longer an economic resource should not be devalued or overlooked. A rights-based approach will lead us to respect the worth and dignity of all persons, rather than measuring their value only on their tangible contributions to society.
- The United Nations post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals need to demonstrate inclusion of older people. The push towards a convention on the rights of older people should also be accelerated in coming years.

Priority actions

6. Produce a communications plan to follow up on the themes of the Regional Conference. This is expected to include three components: network knowledge building, a survey of perceptions of older people in selected countries, and production and dissemination of communications products.

Disaster Risk Reduction and emergencies

Key issues

Emergencies and disasters are another arena in which the prevailing paradigm considers older people as a vulnerable group. In reality a majority of older people are active and often have the time, ability and willingness to provide assistance to others in their communities. In this region, older people are involved in assessments, relief distribution, monitoring of activities and developing contingency plans.

- Organising older people to assist in DRR and emergency relief, particularly through community-based mechanisms such as OPAs, is the best way to maximise their involvement and effectiveness in DRR.
- We should include in rapid assessments both older people who are vulnerable and older people with potential to support immediate relief distributions.
- We should expect active roles for older people in refugee and displaced camps and increase their technical knowledge.
- Relief efforts must ensure the mainstreaming of older people, both as recipients of relief and as volunteers serving their communities.
- Older people's indigenous knowledge on climate change needs to be transmitted to younger generations.

Priority actions

7. Develop information, education and communication (IEC) materials on the potential active role of inclusive DRR and resiliency in the EAP and SA regions, plus capacity building training, if requested by partners.
8. Scale up advocacy on the resourcefulness of older persons at the World Congress on DRR in Sendai in March 2015.