



Regional Forum on Policies on Ageing 20–21 July 2017, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Event Report

Key messages

- Asia's populations are ageing rapidly, but policy development has failed to keep pace.
- A single national policy or action plan on ageing is an insufficient response to rapid population ageing. Such policies must be linked to mainstream sectorial plans and national development plans that address a broader range of issues such as health and care, social protection, employment and engagement of older people as a resource in their economies and societies.
- Thus, more comprehensive policy frameworks are needed for addressing the challenges for older people but also of ageing societies.
- A major weakness with policies on ageing has been implementation. Many national policies on ageing appear to have had limited success in implementation. A policy on ageing must be accompanied by a measurable action plan to be effective.
- In addition to the Ministries of Social Welfare or Social Affairs, multiple ministries must be engaged. There are examples of national coordination bodies in Asia and their success depends largely not only on their broad composition but on the strength of their executive body or secretariat and political support.

Background

The Regional Forum on National Policies on Ageing was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, and co-hosted by HelpAge International, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Myanmar's Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. In addition to UNFPA, Myanmar's Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) provided funding for the event. The two-day event was attended by 99 participants, including 44 international participants from 15 countries comprising government representatives, experts/academics, UN and regional agencies, and civil society partners as well as 55 Myanmar government and civil society officials.



Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund



The event was organised in the realisation that governments in the Asia and Pacific region need up-to-date national policies, plans and laws on ageing in order to address the needs of older people and be prepared for the effects of demographic change on their societies and economies. Several countries in Asia are currently drafting or revising ageing policy documents, including Myanmar itself.

The *objective* of the Forum was to share cross-country experience on the nature, role and effective implementation of national policies on ageing in a period of rapid demographic change. The agenda (see attachment) was divided into three main parts:

- A. Introductory session
- B. Policy formulation and scope
- C. Policy implementation



A. Introductory session

Opening speech

H.E. U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population

The Forum was opened by H.E. U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population. He noted that in conformity with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), and in light of population ageing, the Union Hluttaw of Myanmar passed the Law Relating to Older Persons on the 30th December 2016 and continues to finalize its by-laws. At the same time, it has been working to promulgate a National Policy on Ageing for Myanmar. According to the Myanmar National Census figures, out of the country's total population of 52 million or so, 4.75 million (9.06%) are aged 60 and above in 2015-2016. That percentage will more than double by mid-century. Therefore, it is vital to upgrade both social and health services for older persons. Myanmar is currently implementing community-based as well as home-based services. In addition, the first Social Pension scheme as part of the National Social Protection Strategic Plan has begun in the 2017-2018 Budget Year on a universal basis. During this Forum, H.E.

the Minister urged the representatives to learn from each other by discussing the policies being carried out in their respective countries concerning the elderly, including the difficulties encountered, the successes, especially coordinated programmes amongst Asian countries regarding health care and security, and the creation of a supportive environment.

Welcome remarks

Ms Janet Jackson, Representative of UNFPA in Myanmar

Mr Godfred Paul, Country Director, HelpAge International, Myanmar

After the opening speech, welcome remarks were presented by representatives of co-organizers UNFPA and HelpAge International. They noted that the Census shows that Myanmar's population is ageing, so policies are needed to address the challenges. This means not simply that the number of older persons is increasing. It also means that the entire social and economic structure of the country is changing, and these changes are accelerated by trends such as migration.

Framing the Forum: Why ageing policies?

Mr Eduardo Klien, Regional Director, HelpAge International

The speed of ageing in Asia demands renewed attention to policies on population ageing. There are three broad groups of countries, but they all need to respond to changing demographics: (a) the societies with advanced ageing such as Japan and Singapore, (b) those in a middle pace, especially middle income countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, and (c) those with slower rates of ageing such as Philippines. We are moving from a focus on today's older people as a vulnerable group to the wider needs of ageing societies, which requires a different approach from the past. The response must be inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial. Each society must understand its situation through research and measuring change, and countries must share best practices. We do not know the shape of future aged societies but we know they will be different from today's and we need to prepare.

Myanmar's situation and policy development

Dr San San Aye, Acting Director General, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

The ageing of Myanmar's population was slow in the past century but has become faster, and the government's response has also changed over time. Pre-2000 there was relatively little attention to ageing – e.g. homes for the aged for the minority of vulnerable people. From 2005 there was more regional engagement on ageing. From 2015 Myanmar's policy situation changed sharply, particularly with the country's new interest in social protection and initiatives on an ageing law and policy. In 2017 the government initiated a social pension, the first national, universal social protection scheme. The changes required a more inter-ministerial approach. The Ministry's own structure still reflects the historical approach to social policy and social services. Fortunately, there is gradual recognition of changing population structures in Myanmar, and compared to many ASEAN countries, the traditional family structure remains largely intact. There may be opportunities to support older people through national and sub-national schemes and inter-ministerial collaboration as the country ages.

B. Policy formulation and scope

With the demographic transition it is widely agreed that comprehensive policy on population ageing is much needed and data is one of the most crucial elements in the formulation of evidence based policy. Previously, policy was focused on a small number of older people as a vulnerable group, but with the demographic shift we need to widen the scope of our policy frameworks and consider how to respond to the ageing of societies.

Distinguishing between older people and population ageing

Dr D. Wesumperuma, Social Protection Advisor

National policy must distinguish between personal ageing and population ageing. In the 1980s, governments responded to the most vulnerable older people through a charity approach. Later governments introduced policy for older people as a whole, not only the small minority that was destitute or abandoned. These policies focused on those currently in old age. As the number of older people increased, policy started examining the issues of future older people as well. We began to see new policies on ageing which were wider in perspective than a policy for older people. For example, such policies promoted healthy ageing, which is a life-long concept to reduce vulnerability among future generations of older people. All of these policies focused on older people, but now that framework needs to be expanded. National policies must look at the wider implications of population ageing – how societies and economies adapt to the challenges of an ageing society. It is crucial to mainstream ageing into national development policies, as we see countries such as Thailand doing now. A single policy on ageing is an insufficient response to the changing dynamics.

What are the policy options?

Ms Camilla Williamson, Independent consultant on ageing

In the region there are three main types of policies on ageing: a national ageing policy (e.g. Fiji), a national action plan on ageing (e.g. Thailand), and a national law (e.g. China's national law on protecting the rights of older persons). Countries need to develop comprehensive policy frameworks, combining all three as needed. Unfortunately, these national policy documents are not at all accessible in one place. A recent study of 26 countries in the region found that 18 countries have some type of ageing policy document. The next step is for ageing to be mainstreamed: older people should be included in the national development and sectoral policies and plans. For the future, we need more evidence and data to evaluate the policy. If we don't collect data at the start, we cannot assess the impact. Policies need to have detailed frameworks outlining the process for monitoring and evaluation. Data on policy implementation should be made available publicly and we should build a better understanding of what works, where and why.

How do policies on ageing fit with broader national policies?

Dr Giang Thanh Long, Associate Professor, National Economics University, Vietnam

There are three components of successful ageing: economic, health and social. Policies should cover all three in order to prepare future generations for an ageing society. This must take the form of practical steps. For example, about 50 per cent of Vietnamese older people are not covered by any pension benefits. Pension benefits must be expanded but also made sustainable. Implementation is crucial, and this means

collaboration between ministries, adequate budget allocations, and involvement of older people to ensure supply responds to demand. Responsibility for social assistance is scattered in Vietnam; it is managed by different ministries, resulting in gaps and overlaps. Collaboration and integrated systems are needed, which will help reach people and also save money. In health, the rise of non-communicable diseases and chronic conditions represent huge costs, so healthcare needs to change significantly. The health system service must be accessible and provide adequate and affordable services. Beyond individual sectors, ageing must be seen as a core development issue. Vietnam has 12 strategies in its Socio Economic Development Plan, for example, but it does not include older people. Asian countries must prepare for this ageing phase as a core element of national development, and the earlier the better.

Understanding and responding to the national context

Ms Thelma Kay, Active Ageing Consortium for Asia and Pacific, Singapore

Evidence based policy implies looking overall at projections of population. Building on a National (Master) Plan on Ageing and data analysis, the existing laws and policies should be examined to see how to embed ageing population. Formulation of action plans should assign inter-ministerial responsibilities, including allocation of sectoral budgets within each ministry. A validation process is critical – not top down, but including public consultation to understand the national context. Culture including filial piety and “social piety” is the foundation of state policies on ageing especially regarding care and support. We can build on the current situation, e.g. compact communities that are easier for ageing in place, and enabling rural communities to build on traditions of mutual help. Then add interlinked social security e.g. retirement, housing, health. We should adopt a life course approach because ageing for today’s young generation will be different from that of the current generation of older persons, and some can benefit from new technology. We also need to hear hard truths: for example to re-examine whether nursing homes means abandoning the elderly, especially in light of the growing number of people with dementia.

Ageing and changing family dynamics in Southeast Asia

Dr John Knodel, Research Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan

Dr Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan, Associate Professor, Singapore Management University

Although population ageing varies considerably by country, it is projected to increase throughout Southeast Asia from 2015 to 2050. The challenges posed by rapid growth in absolute numbers of older persons are real, regardless of whether the population is ageing rapidly. Fertility decline, as in the case of Thailand, also translates into decreased family size for older persons in the future. Increased migration and smaller families also result in less co-residence of older people with children. Yet the negative effects of population ageing are overly emphasised by media. In fact, very few older parents in Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar are deserted by their children. And although there is an assumption that a social pension can ‘crowd out’ filial support, statistics show that income received from children has been maintained in Thailand even after the launch of universal social pension in 2009. Older people in turn contribute to their family by sharing their homes, and contribute in other ways such as taking care of grandchildren. All Southeast Asian countries need to respond with culturally specific public policies concerning pensions, healthcare and long-term care systems that respond to demographic change.

Building political will for policy response

Prof. Tengku Aizan Hamid, Professor, University Putra Malaysia

Political will and leadership mean that governments must have commitment to develop programmes for ageing, keeping in mind that diversity in the ageing population means we need different strategies to meet different requirements of older people. Over the years, political influence in Malaysia has resulted in a change from a welfare approach to a more development approach. One of the lessons is that we must understand the relationship between political leaders and their constituencies. Political capital can be directly associated with beneficiary groups, and political leaders are eager to be associated with benefits provided to older citizens. But we must keep in mind that while addressing the needs of the older population, the government must balance social development with economic growth. For building political will, the role of media is often critical – to show how we can highlight the positive work of politicians. International meetings can influence politicians to be ready for an aged society, and international agreements require the government to report back. Professional movements – e.g. geriatrician associations – can influence through seminars and platforms for research because the government looks at evidence to develop policy. In addition, independent evaluation of impact of programmes and activities can promote evidence-based policy making.

Plenary discussion with panel: Policy formulation and scope

Mr Eduardo Klien, moderator. Panel members: HE Chea Chantum, Secretary General, General Secretariat to Population and Development Ministry of Planning, Cambodia; Prof. Tengku Aizan Hamid; Ms Camilla Williamson

Ageing is a relatively new area of policy development for governments, so we should all learn together with governments and shape national systems. Political response must be accompanied by know-how, and policy development requires a clear understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural context. All stakeholders have a role to play in policy formulation and expanding the understanding of the context. The role of government is to regulate and delegate, and an important issue is how responsibility should be shared among its agencies. But government should also engage other actors. NGOs and researchers should get involved in legislation and provide data and other information to ensure that government has a better understanding of ageing issues. Community based organisations play a key role in mobilising the community and should not be forgotten, so Older People's Associations (OPAs) should be supported. Strong communities should be able to play a key role in programme implementation. Policy should be integrated and address all issues related to population ageing e.g. active ageing, financial literacy, health care and preparing young people for old age. Cost is always a challenge for governments but should not be an excuse for inaction; experience from other countries shows that even a poor country can afford a social pension, for example. We need to invest to create society that through a life course approach is fair and equitable for all.

C. Policy implementation

Arrangements for the implementation and monitoring of a national policy on ageing must be clear. This is where the policies of many countries have been ineffective. The policy or an accompanying action plan should specify how the country will achieve its aims and measure its progress. In the Forum, implementation was examined from two angles. One is institutional responsibilities for implementation. A weakness in many countries is that implementation is left to ministries of Social Affairs or Social Welfare, with limited engagement by other critical ministries such as finance, planning, health, labour, population, women's affairs and so forth. A second major issue is how to measure progress. Some countries have devised measurement plans for delivering the actions agreed and measuring progress against aims, which can serve as a model for discussion.

Overview of institutional implementation arrangements

Ms Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Associate Social Affairs Officer, UNESCAP

The regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) has seen uneven progress in strengthening the institutional structures and frameworks to effectively protect and promote the rights of older persons, although there is a trend towards establishing central government committees or councils. The current MIPAA Review is based on survey responses from 28 countries. Overarching legislation on older persons is available in two-thirds of the countries surveyed, and 80 per cent have a national policy or action plan on ageing. In most countries, the funding specific to older persons is not distinguished within general budgets, or is spread across different government units. A gap remains, particularly in lower income countries and countries with younger populations, in adopting ageing-specific frameworks. Evidence on effective coordination, monitoring and transparent resource allocation is lacking. There is a need to enhance the development of institutional mechanisms for implementation of policies and to integrate considerations of older women and persons with disabilities into all ageing frameworks.

Reflections on institutional implementation options

Dr D. Wesumperuma, Social Protection Advisor

When demographic changes had not yet started accelerating, the limited work on ageing was typically handed to social affairs or Social Welfare ministries. With rapid ageing, this may no longer be an appropriate approach. Inter-ministerial approaches did become more common after MIPAA, though their power and influence varied. Involving a range of ministries – health (NCDs), disability, social protection, and so forth – implies further consideration of a structure that enables them to interact. We need to consider how ageing can move beyond the Social Welfare ministry, how well national committees function – looking at policy, monitoring, implementation – and whether they are properly resourced.

Plenary discussion with panel: How to move beyond Social Welfare and engage others?

*Dr Sita Sumrit, Assistant Director, ASEAN Human Development Directorate, moderator.
Panel members: Dr Myint Han, Director General, Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports (Myanmar); Dr Bapak Maliki, Director of Population Planning and Social Protection, Bappenas (Ministry of National Development Planning), Indonesia; Ms. Ajeeba Aslam, Pakistan Country Director, HelpAge International*

To move population ageing beyond ministries of Social Welfare, we must ensure that the issues are widely understood by government at all levels, advocate for coherent and integrated policy, and raise the issue of the rights of older people, now and in the future. To promote healthy ageing, health and social issues must be integrated. Culture also plays a significant role: care is considered the responsibility of families in many countries, and little long term care or integrated care is provided by government. Long term care is a major concern for most countries in the region, and it requires adequate plans, budgets and professional human resources. All levels of government must be engaged. In Myanmar, for example, the role of government at central and sub-national levels has varied, but rural services must be available to address the needs of older people including rising rates of NCDs. In Indonesia most provinces still need to be convinced that ageing should become priority for their work. Advocacy with parliament is also essential, ensuring that older people themselves are involved.

How can we measure progress?

Ms Siriwan Aruntippaitune, Senior Expert on the Elderly, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand

The key policy on ageing in Thailand is its Second National Plan on the Elderly 2002-2021 (revised in 2009), a 20-year plan which includes five strategies. Thailand can share its experience of using a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the plan against indicators every five years (2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021). Key components include Health, Social, Economic and Living Arrangements. For example, indicators for income security include the rate of family savings, and indicators for health security include proportions of the elderly who access an annual health examination. Led by an Academic Advisory Team, the College of Population Studies of Chulalongkorn University conducts analysis. There is an annual review of the "Situation of the Thai Elderly" by the Thailand Gerontology Research Institute, and the National Statistical Office conducts the periodic National Survey of the Elderly. M&E steps include documentary analysis, qualitative research (such as FGDs) and quantitative research (the survey) to assess progress. The second M&E round showed that of a total of 51 indicators, only 26 were considered "passed", thus highlighting areas that needed further attention. This process supports a cycle of effective planning, including reporting, revision and re-planning. For example, responding to the M&E assessment in 2006, the national plan was revised in 2009.

Plenary discussion with panel: Challenges in implementation

Ms Thelma Kay, moderator. Panel members: Dr Ghazy Mujahid, Member of Board of Directors, Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations and Former United Nations Population Policy Advisor; Dr Venkatesh Srinivasan, Assistant Representative, UNFPA India; Mrs Le Minh Giang, Head, Secretariat, Vietnam National Committee on Ageing

Planning and implementation must go hand in hand. Important elements include coordination of all ministries at all levels and involvement of civil society. A coordination committee is needed at all levels – national, state and local level – to get feedback and input. Governments also need involvement of CBOs and NGOs to ensure that the plan is well implemented. A major challenge in Asia is capacity and funding for implementation of ageing policies. If the national action plan is clearly understood by policy makers, funding will be easier to access. In some cases decentralisation is an important political dynamic in implementation. In the same country, the demographic differences may be vast, and some areas/provinces may need more attention than others. Central

governments may not be the strongest to enforce implementation of policies down to grassroots level due to constraints in human resources; district or regional level governments also need to engage in implementation. In addition to a policy document, specific action plans are required to ensure that the policies work, and collection and analysis of data are essential elements of successful implementation. Monitoring and evaluation of those action plans is often carried out by those in government who are responsible for implementing the policy. However, some people believe that an independent institution such as academic body should conduct M&E, which is in line with the practice described in the Thailand session.

Plenary feedback: policy critique

Small groups by table were given one of two national ageing policies (Myanmar or Tanzania) to critique, in terms of formulation/scope and potential for implementation, given the mechanisms described in the document. The groups provided various observations depending on the policy reviewed, about frameworks on how and when they will be implemented; monitoring mechanisms; the extent of information on financing and human resource requirements; signs of consultative and participatory process; and the strength of linkages with various policies and sectors.

Concluding panel: What is the future of ageing policies?

*Ms Sri Wening Handayani, Principal Social Development Specialist, ADB, moderator;
Panel members: Dr San San Aye; Dr D Wesumperuma; Dr Giang Thanh Long*

The future of ageing policies depends on more effective implementation of the policies we already have and widening our perspectives to consider the impacts of population ageing on society. Learning from implementation, we can review and revise our policies. Countries in the region, all at different stages of ageing, should also learn from one another about their successes and challenges in adapting to rapid ageing. Keys to success include having (political) champions, strong research and good collaboration mechanisms. We must talk about population ageing in broader terms; it's not just about older people. Older people as a topic may not be very attractive, but it becomes more powerful when linked to demographic change, employment and other society-wide challenges. We need to give hard messages – the wider economic and health implications of ageing – backed up by hard statistics in order to convince politicians. Once governments accept ageing as a national priority, ministries will respond. But we should not simply present a negative message: if we know how to adapt to the demographic change, it represents opportunities as well as challenges. Understanding those opportunities and challenges means we must analyse the projected situation for older persons of the future. Current practice mostly focuses on the characteristics and situation of today's older people. We need to be mindful of emerging issues related to ageing, such as the role of foreign domestic care workers, financial literacy, education on nutrition, community based activities, long term care, technology and the role of private sector.

Closing

Dr San San Aye, Acting Director General, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

We can draw a few key conclusions from the sessions of this Forum. For example, many national policies on ageing appear to have had limited success in implementation. A policy on ageing must be accompanied by a measurable action plan to be effective. However, it is now clear that a single national policy or action plan on ageing is an insufficient response to rapid population ageing. Such policies must be linked to mainstream sectorial plans and national development plans that address a broader range of issues such as health and care, social protection, education or engagement of older people as a resource in their economies and societies. Hence, more comprehensive policy frameworks– in the scope of wider strategies to adapt to population ageing– are the way forward, not only for addressing the challenges for older people but also of ageing societies. In addition to the Ministries of Social Welfare or Social Affairs, multiple ministries must be engaged. There are examples of national coordination bodies in Asia and their success depends largely not only on their broad composition but on the strength of their executive body or secretariat. We must learn from the experience in different countries of the region. Although governments need to show clear leadership in adapting strategies, policies and practices to ageing societies, a broader consensus and engagement from civil society, academics, international organisations and older people themselves is needed.

Regional Forum on Policies on Ageing 20–21 July 2017 Nay Pyi Taw

Agenda

Starts	Ends	Day 1: Thursday July 20 th
08:00	08:45	Registration
09:00	09:15	Official opening <i>H.E. U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population</i>
09:15	09:30	Welcome remarks <i>Ms Janet Jackson, Representative, United Nations Population Fund, Myanmar</i> <i>Mr Godfred Paul, Country Director, HelpAge International, Myanmar</i>
09:30	09:40	Introductions
09:40	10:00	Framing the Forum: Why ageing policies? <i>Mr Eduardo Klien, Regional Director, HelpAge International</i>
10:00	10:30	Myanmar's situation and policy development <i>Dr San San Aye, Acting Director General, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement</i>
10:30	11:00	Tea/coffee break and photo
<i>Policy formulation and scope</i>		
11:00	11:15	Introduction to policy critique
11:15	11:20	Short video
11:20	11:45	Distinguishing between older people and population ageing <i>Dr D. Wesumperuma, Social Protection Advisor</i>
11:45	12:10	What are the policy options? <i>Ms Camilla Williamson, Independent consultant on ageing</i>
12:10	12:35	How do policies on ageing fit with broader national policies? <i>Dr Giang Thanh Long, Associate Professor, National Economics University, Vietnam</i>
12:35	12:45	Announcements
12:45	13:45	Lunch
13:45	14:10	Understanding and responding to the national context <i>Ms Thelma Kay, Active Ageing Consortium for Asia and Pacific, Singapore</i>
14:10	14:35	Ageing and changing family dynamics in Southeast Asia <i>Dr John Knodel, Research Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan</i> <i>Dr Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan, Associate Professor, Singapore Management University</i>
14:35	15:00	Building political will for policy response <i>Prof. Tengku Aizan Hamid, Professor, University Putra Malaysia</i>
15:00	15:30	Tea/coffee break
15:30	16:20	Plenary discussion with panel: Policy formulation and scope <i>Mr Eduardo Klien, moderator</i>
16:20	17:00	Policy critique exercise: Policy formulation and scope

17:00	17:05	Announcements
17:30	19:00	Capital tour
19:30	21:00	Welcome dinner at Park Royal Hotel

Starts	Ends	Day 2: Friday July 21st
<i>Policy implementation</i>		
09:00	09:20	Overview of institutional implementation arrangements <i>Ms Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Associate Social Affairs Officer, UNESCAP</i>
09:20	09:30	Reflections on institutional implementation options <i>Dr D. Wesumperuma, Social Protection Advisor</i>
09:30	10:15	Plenary discussion with panel: How to move beyond Social Welfare, engage others? <i>Dr Sita Sumrit, Assistant Director, ASEAN Human Development Directorate, moderator</i>
10:15	10:45	Tea/coffee break
10:45	11:15	How can we measure progress? <i>Ms Siriwan Aruntippaitune, Senior Expert on the Elderly, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand</i>
11:15	12:00	Plenary discussion with panel: Challenges in implementation <i>Ms Thelma Kay, moderator</i>
12:00	12:45	Policy critique exercise: Policy implementation
12:45	13:45	Lunch
13:45	13:55	Announcements
13:55	14:25	Plenary feedback: policy critique
14:25	15:15	Concluding panel: What is the future of ageing policies? <i>Ms Sri Wening Handayani, Principal Social Development Specialist, ADB, moderator</i>
15:15	15:30	Closing speech <i>Dr San San Aye, Acting Director General, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement</i>
15:30	16:00	Closing refreshments and networking
16:00	onwards	Side meetings (optional)