

AgeNews

Asia/Pacific

Information sharing
to strengthen
HelpAge's network

Issue 10
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Investing in
income security
helps subsistence
farmers be more
productive.



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15th Asia/Pacific Regional Conference on Ageing

Bali - The 15th Asia/Pacific Regional Conference on Ageing took place in Bali, Indonesia, October 2008. It was organised by the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Social Affairs in collaboration with HelpAge International and Yayasan Emong Lansia (YEL), HelpAge's network member in Indonesia.

The conference addressed key issues on ageing, focusing on the particular challenges of ageing in Asia. Topics covered included social services, home and community-based care, and health.

With the theme "*Working together for well-being in old age*", the conference looked back on the efforts of the HelpAge Network in Asia/Pacific to mainstream ageing issues into development policies.

127 participants from 42 organisations in 21 countries attended the conference. Four working groups were set up to share partners' experiences in the areas of social services for older people, home and community care, healthy living in old age, and health priorities.

The regional conference is becoming a platform for action on ageing in the Asia/Pacific region, involving representatives from the HelpAge network, international

organisations, UN agencies, donors, government authorities, and non-government organisations.

It gives the network an opportunity to promote inclusion of older people to policy makers and implementing organisations. However, this requires a strong commitment at all levels – from grass roots community organisations to governments.

To take this work forward, the HelpAge Asia/Pacific network will meet every two years to share partners' experiences and review key issues on ageing.

Read the conference report
helpage.org/Worldwide/AsiaPacific/Resources

Asia's first ever social transfers course

Chiang Mai - HelpAge International and the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) of South Africa have delivered a two-week intensive high-level training course on social transfers in Chiang Mai, Thailand – the first ever to take place in Asia/Pacific.

The course is meant to provide participants with the tools to effectively design and implement social transfers programmes.

It brought together 57 participants from countries as diverse as Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Kenya, Zambia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Kyrgyzstan, the UK and Bolivia.



Chattip/HelpAge International

In addition to EPRI and HelpAge, the University of Maastricht and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex contributed to the course.

The course will be held again in Chiang Mai in October 2009 (see details on page 7).

**HelpAge
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Nargis one year on

more support needed to rebuild livelihoods

Yangon - New research launched by HelpAge International, marking the anniversary of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, reveals that older people affected by the disaster have been unable to sufficiently restore their livelihoods and are facing long-term food insecurity.

The collaborative efforts of the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN, and the international humanitarian world have brought substantial aid to affected communities. Strong local responses were also important in the aftermath of the cyclone. Communities and individuals led the initial response and protected vulnerable groups. Older people themselves were also an important resource in the recovery of their families and communities.

Eduardo Klien, Regional Representative for HelpAge in Asia/Pacific, said:

"The research shows that targeting older people is an effective way of enhancing recovery from emergencies, not only for older people, but also for their families and communities."

Based on the findings of the research, HelpAge International is calling for:

- Highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative approaches and coordinated responses between Governments and international organisations in response to emergencies as well as in development programmes
- Developing programmes that are inclusive and specifically meet the needs of all vulnerable groups, including older people, particularly in the areas of livelihoods and health

- Promoting assessments and data collection on older people by governments and other agencies to inform effective programme responses
- Ensuring that inclusive disaster risk reduction and preparedness programmes, developed and based on the experiences of Nargis-affected areas, are implemented to protect against future disasters

Read the full report:

helpage.org/Worldwide/AsiaPacific/Resources

More information

helpage.org/Emergencies/Myanmarcyclone



Hein Latt Aung/HelpAge International

ASEAN countries expand homecare for older people

Yogyakarta - Volunteer-based homecare programmes supported by HelpAge International's partner, HelpAge Korea, have had a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable older people in 10 ASEAN countries. The success of this approach means it will be expanded to new areas in each country.

The Republic of Korea-ASEAN Homecare for Older People project has been running in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam since 2003.

The project gives training and support to family members and community

volunteers caring for older people. The home-based care assists older people to continue living in their own homes. The next phase of the project (June 2009 – May 2012) will support the ASEAN member countries as they implement the volunteer-based homecare model on a wider scale.

Delivering his key note speech at the opening ceremony, DR H Bachtiar Chamsyah, Minister of Social Affairs, Indonesia, said:

"Social service provision for older people currently focuses on services to protect rights fulfillment. This implies that every older person is entitled to enjoy better services."

HelpAge International

age helps

HelpAge launches new brand

HelpAge International unveiled its new look on November 2008 to celebrate 25 years as the only global network focused on the needs and rights of older people.

Our new brand reflects our core ethos – that **"age helps"**, and that the invaluable contribution of older people as carers,

mediators, mentors and breadwinners should be recognised and supported.

Richard Blewitt, Chief Executive of HelpAge International, explains:

"Our new brand puts older people at the centre of our work and encourages people to re-think their attitudes to ageing."

"We believe that with greater support, older people can fulfil their potential and lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives."

Our new logo: The overlapping panels represent the link between what we do – helping older people, and our positive view of ageing – age helps.

Our vision: A world in which all older people fulfil their potential to lead dignified, active, healthy and secure lives.

Our Mission: We work with our partners to ensure that people everywhere understand how much older people contribute to society and that they must enjoy their right to healthcare, social services and economic and physical security.

Thai PM guarantees rights in old age

Bangkok - The Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr Abhisit Vejjajiva, has declared social pensions a basic human right and will seek ways to expand the country's current pension system to deliver income security for all older people.

Mr Abhisit was speaking at a forum, "Sustainable universal social pensions for older people in Thailand", held in Bangkok on 8 April 2009. The event was hosted by a group of NGOs including HelpAge, with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

In his opening speech to the forum, Prime Minister Abhisit said:

"The old age social pension is not a populist policy, but rather a basic human right that everyone deserves. Social pensions promote income security in old age and the government is committed to ensure access to basic social pensions for all."

His positive messages recognise income security in old age as a basic human right, and that the government intends to continue the extension of the old age allowance. The Thailand Older Persons' Act is being revised. He recognised the size of the benefit was insufficient to raise recipients above the poverty line, and mentioned the need to set up a contributory scheme to complement the old age allowance.

Key points discussed in the forum:

- **Beneficiaries:** Some suggested a two-tier pension system in which two age groups would receive different levels of benefit. The older the person, the larger the benefit.
- **Eligibility:** Most stakeholders supported 60 years old as an entry age.
- **Size of benefit:** It was agreed that the benefit should be increased at least up to the poverty line of 1,453 baht per month (US\$41).
- **Source of income:** New sources of revenue to increase the level of the benefit could include increases in VAT, excise tax, inheritance tax and corporate tax.
- **Participation:** The government should encourage participation by all key stakeholders in the pension debate including civil society, local authorities

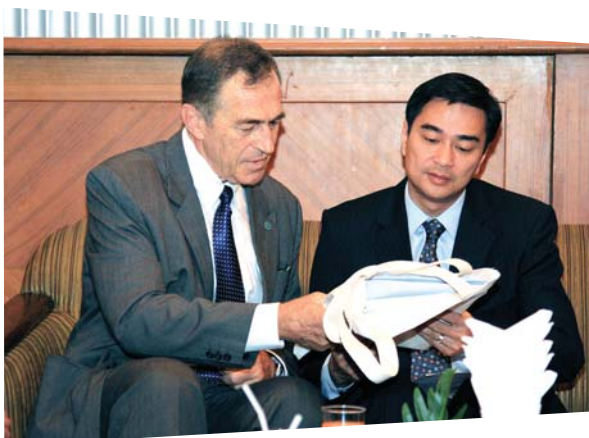
and communities. This could include the creation of a working group, with the participation of civil society, to be functioning in the next few years.

- **Sustainability:** To motivate participation, a voluntary contributory scheme should be subsidised by the government.

'The old age social pension is not populist policy, but rather a basic human right that everyone deserves.'

Abhisit Vejjajiva
Prime Minister of Thailand

Read more:
helpage.org/News/Latestnews/dFxi



Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, and Eduardo Klien, Regional Representative of HelpAge discussing an economic simulation model for social pensions.

HelpAge network unites for ADA

On the UN International Day of Older Persons, 1st October, older people around the world united for HelpAge International's Age Demands Action (ADA) campaign.

36 countries across four continents are taking part in the campaign. Delegations of older people met with their national governments to demand recognition and support of older people's vital contribution to society.

In Asia/Pacific, HelpAge network members in nine countries joined the event -- Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

They called for action to deliver improvements to ageing policies in their countries, including better access to healthcare, pensions, and income-generating activities.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has echoed Age Demands Action's message in his message on the International Day of Older Persons in which he said:

"...much more needs to be done at the national level to support older persons, promote their income security and social protection, and ensure quality health care as well as the provision of long-term care services."

"To make this possible, national ageing-specific policies must be improved substantially and the concerns of older persons mainstreamed into a wider policy framework."

Globally, HelpAge is calling on the international community to include older people in three key areas of the international development agenda: HIV and AIDS, the Millennium Development Goals and human rights.

Read more about ADA:
helpage.org/Researchandpolicy/AgeDemandsAction2008

Sign up to HelpAge global petition:
helpage.org/Researchandpolicy/AgeDemandsAction2008/Globalpetition



A Pei Mama, China

A Pei Mama, 75, lives in Pingbian township, Sichuan. Although she stays with her son and family, with many lives to feed, the family still faces poverty. She is a member of the older people's association (OPA), a community-based self help group.

"We borrowed money from the OPA to buy livestock i.e. piglets, goats, chicken, and buffalo for extra income apart from farming."

Now pig raising has become the main source of income for her family.

"I am grateful to the OPA for making it possible for my family to have this income."

China hosts regional discussion on older people's associations

The Chinese government has responded to the recommendation of the Macau review of MIPAA by initiating a workshop on how grass-roots organisations of older people can support poverty alleviation.

A ten-day workshop, "Grass-root level organisations on ageing and community-based poverty reduction", was jointly hosted by the China National Committee on Ageing (CNCA) and HelpAge with senior delegates from 12 Asian countries.

It focused on the strong models of older people's associations (OPAs) in the region and ways forward for expansion at the country level. This expansion will give older people a mechanism to participate in society, to provide mutual support to each other, and to contribute to the wider communities.

The field visits to OPAs in Shaanxi and activities for older people in Shanghai very well complemented the learning process. Participants agreed to expand the model throughout the region.

Network updates

Aceh project proves its success

Banda Aceh - HelpAge's Aceh programme for tsunami recovery and rehabilitation ended December 2008 with success in implementing pilot programmes on age-friendliness and supporting other humanitarian agencies in Aceh on ageing.

It started in February 2006 to ensure that older people affected by the tsunami were treated with dignity and respect, guaranteed security in old age, and protected from future disasters.

Key areas of working included:

- **Health:** Sensitised humanitarian organisations to include older people in their programmes. Built capacity of government staff on healthcare for older people. Created a model district in Bireuen where 340 cadres were trained to start *Posyandu* (integrated health stations) in 17 subdistricts.
- **Community mobilisation:** Established a forum of older people's associations (OPAs), consisting of 14 OPAs. The forum advocated to government and NGOs to further support income generating activities. Several OPA members started to receive pensions as a direct result of its advocacy.

- **Livelihoods:** Implemented livelihood cash grant programme for 790 households in 14 villages. Published a study on impact of livelihood cash grant programme. Training on livestock raising, vaccinations, and micro-credit.

- **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** Linked with the British Red Cross and the Canadian Red Cross to provide technical support to their DRR programmes. Broadcasted age-friendly DRR via local radio in 14 villages.

- **Advocacy:** Collaborated with INGOs - British and Canadian Red Cross, AustCare, Aide Medicale, Handicap International, Merlin - to promote joint activities on age-friendliness e.g. health magazine, livelihood programmes, age-friendly training, formation of OPAs in DRR programmes.

- **Documentation:** Published studies and reports on older people and emergencies including DRR, mainstreaming age-friendliness, livelihood cash grant programmes, training manual on integrating older people.

Two studies on social pensions in South Asia

Two policy reports on social pensions were released by the HelpAge network to demonstrate the impact of social pensions for older people.

The first report, *The social pension in India: A participatory study on the poverty reduction impact and role of monitoring groups*, was carried out by HelpAge India and HelpAge International. It provides a better understanding the impact of India's pension and the role of the older people's groups in monitoring the implementation of the scheme.

The second study, *The universal social pension in Nepal: an assessment of its impact on older people in Tanahun district*, was undertaken in collaboration with

NEPAN. It assesses the social and economic impact of the non-contributory social pension in Nepal, commonly known as the old age allowance. The study has findings on 1) living arrangements, 2) economic impact, 3) social impact, and 4) perception of the old age allowance.

Download the full reports:

helpage.org/Worldwide/AsiaPacific/Resources



Experts meet in Asia forum on ageing in Singapore

Singapore - A group of experts met in Singapore to agree on an important step in bringing together leaders from Asian countries to share innovations and programmes that provide quality care for the older people.

The “Asia forum on ageing 2009” was sponsored by the Tsao Foundation, the International Association of Homes and Services for the Ageing (IAHSA), and the Federation on Long Term Care in Chinese Community. The forum presented challenges of population ageing in Asia not only to government but to providers.

Mr Lim Boon Heng, Minister for Prime Minister's Office of Singapore, said at the opening ceremony that both preventative care and community care should be offered to the aged.

He said Singapore has introduced the Wellness Programme to help senior citizens to be physically healthy and socially engaged. In September 2007,

Singapore also enhanced the Elder Shield scheme to help defray the cost of long-term care to the older people and their care-givers.

“In view of our rapidly ageing population, it is imperative for us to find a way to adequately provide financing for long term care for all of us”, he added.

Eduardo Klien, Regional Representative of HelpAge, gave a presentation on “Home and community care in rapidly ageing societies in Asia” to share the ROK-ASEAN homecare experience and trends of ageing population in Asia.

The HelpAge network has been implementing home and community care programmes for older people for almost 10 years. It provides care-giving through community mechanisms which proved an effective service for vulnerable older people.

More information about the forum:
asiaforum.tsaofoundation.org

OPAs secure life and care in old age

For tens of thousands of older people around the world, older people's associations (OPAs) improve their quality of life, their access to services and their confidence to stand up for their rights and bring about change in their communities.

In Cambodia, the OPA model utilises the skills and experiences of older people so they can help themselves and their families and communities.

“I am willing to work to help my community. I have been able to improve my skills to help more people. I want to help the OPA for a long time, as I feel it is a way for villages to reach a good standard of living”, said Chuan Chheout, 53, member of Preak Chdor OPA.

HelpAge Cambodia set up OPAs in 1998, and since then has been using them to successfully deliver other projects.

In Vietnam, the OPAs supported by Vietnam Women's Union and HelpAge

International run the project to help improve the health and livelihoods of older people living in challenging circumstances.

The project provides not only the loans to older women affected by HIV and AIDS, but also training so that they can earn money and repay those loans.

“I haven't missed a meeting since this club was established two years ago. We keep coming back not only because of the club's vocational training lessons, but also its joyful atmosphere. Together, we escape from the sad stories of real life to engage in doing new things. It's like a kindergarten for us”, said Nguyen Thi Mua, 64, member of Vinh Tuy Club.

Read more about how to set up OPAs:
Ageways 72 (Celebrating the network)
helpage.org/Resources/Regularpublications/Ageways

In brief

● **COSE's new CEO:** The Coalition of Services of the Elderly Inc. (COSE), our partner in the Philippines, appointed a new Executive Director, Mr Fransiskus Kupang (cose@cosephil.org), in Feb 09.

● **Nepal lowers entry age to pension:** In Sept 08, the government of Nepal more than doubled the social pension to 500 rupees (US\$6.50) per month and reduced the age of eligibility from 75 to 70. In the poorer Karnali region, the age will be reduced to 60 years. The old age pension has reached almost 80 per cent of the eligible population.

● **State Bank of India to give funds to HelpAge India's older people groups:** The State Bank of India (SBI) agreed to provide Rs.50,000 in revolving funds with Rs.10,000 as a subsidy to Elder Self-Help Groups (ESHGs) in Cuddalore, India as a result of their successful management in saving and lending policy and systems.

● **Free eye care hospital in Sri Lanka:** In May 09, HelpAge Sri Lanka (HASL) opened a *Free Eye Care Hospital* for cataract operations in Colombo. The operations if done privately would cost Rs. 25,000 plus expenses for drugs after surgery. HASL received a 1 million USD donation from the Sultan of Oman for the running costs of the hospital.

● **Mekong's media visit FOPDEV project:** 16 journalists from five countries - Cambodia, Lao, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand - visited the ageing and development programme of the Foundation for Older Persons' Development in Chiang Mai. The visit was part of the Regional Media Training Course of the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation.



OPAs are a lifeline to many older people and they can be a way to bring about change.

Voice of older people in Asia



15 representative older people from across Asia/Pacific came together for a forum entitled "Voice of Older People", held during HelpAge International's Regional Conference on Ageing in Bali, Indonesia.

The forum was supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and provided an innovative platform for older

people from a variety of backgrounds and life experience.

The participants, aged between 60 and 91, shared their suggestions and opinions on how to improve the lives of older people in three key areas: 1) income security 2) healthcare 3) dignity and respect.

Positive ageing

The forum brought together invaluable experience, insight and knowledge, with the combined age of all the participants adding up to 1,045 years!

Many had lived through difficult times and witnessed moments of key historical significance such as World War II, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. They lived through hardships and rapid change; they showed in this meeting an amazing blend of tradition with innovative spirit.

All of them spoke of the positive aspects of old age, such as wisdom. They also shared their secrets to well-being in old age, highlighting strong connections with family members as being central to a happy life.

National policy for older people

Their overarching recommendation was the drafting in each country of a national policy for older people. This would extend support for older people in key areas such as financial security, healthcare, shelter and welfare.

The policy would also aim to protect older people against abuse and exploitation. It would create opportunities to develop their potential by including them in policy-making processes and providing services to improve their quality of life.

Such principles already included in the constitutions of countries such as India, Thailand, and Nepal. However, the forum called for all governments in the region to draft a holistic national policy for older people, and for those that already have such a policy, to implement it more effectively.

Presentation to the plenary

The forum presented its conclusions and recommendations to the plenary of the Regional Conference on Ageing in Bali, Indonesia.

In response, HelpAge International's Regional Representative in Asia Pacific, Eduardo Klien, said:

"We are humbled by the strength and wisdom of this group....they are a vivid demonstration that including older people in the design and implementation of policies and development programmes is a must."

Words for thought...

"The OPA is for all older people. When we get together in an OPA, authorities listen to us."

Pak Sutrisno, Indonesia

"Once you think you are old, you will restrict yourself. We have to learn something new every day."

Datuk Lum Kin Tuck, Malaysia

"Many older people are not entitled to pensions - if governments have an aversion to pensions, then we can develop other strategies to improve older people's lives from an economic prospective."

Dr Myint Myint Khin, Myanmar

"Older people can work and contribute to their families. Sometimes all they need is a little support to be able to work."

Mr Sultan Singh, India

Read the report and list of participation
helpage.org/Worldwide/AsiaPacific/Resources

Older people in rural China

A burden or a resource for economic development?

By Peter Morrison, HelpAge International

China's impressive record of economic growth is well known. But what about the role of China's 143m older people in the country's economic development and poverty reduction? Are older people only a barrier to economic development, or can we say that "age helps" in many ways? In several ways, older people are making important contributions to China's development and poverty reduction.

In the first place, many older people continue to work and add to their family's income. A majority of older men and many older women in China's rural areas are economically active. Even those women who do not earn cash income are performing household tasks that enable income generation.

Second, one of the great drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction in China has been the increased mobility of its workers. Millions and millions of younger workers have migrated from rural areas to cities to seek paid work. Older people hold the family together while their adult children migrate. Older people are minding the grandchildren who stay back in the village, farming the family land, and maintaining family house and assets. The efforts of older people therefore help to give China the flexible workforce that is allowing the country to develop economically.

At the same time, older people are also sustaining the informal family network and culture of mutual support, the traditional basis for social protection in China. At a time when the State still lacks the resources to fill all the gaps, the

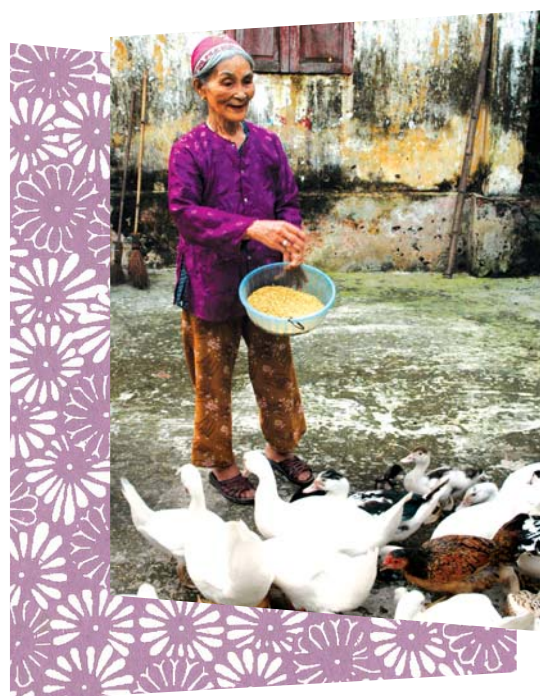
extended family is still the fundamental guarantor of social welfare.

The Government of China is taking steps to improve the income security of older people in rural areas. Those steps will help older people to fulfil their roles as family caregivers, enablers of economic development, and contributors to the family's resources.

For example, the government has now committed to build a social security system covering more than 1 billion people by 2020. A strong social security system can be a critical resource for older people who support the family's income and for those who care for young children – mainly women. In many countries, for instance, a universal pension contributes to the welfare of the whole household, not simply the older person.

A second step is at the local level. Efforts by the government, led by the China National Committee on Ageing with the support of HelpAge International, aim to transform village older people's associations (OPAs) into effective mechanisms for income generation and rural livelihoods development. A new project in Shaanxi Province aims to prove that local governments can be key players to build OPAs, which can then become strong contributors to village economic development and poverty reduction.

Therefore, to characterise older people as simply a burden on developing economies is a mistake. And since older people represent one of the persistent pockets of rural poverty, China understands that it will not be able to eradicate poverty until it meets their needs.



Judith Escribano/Help the Aged



Designing and Implementing Social Transfer Programmes Course

25 October - 7 November 2009, Chiang Mai, Thailand

HelpAge International and the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), together with the University of Maastricht will organise the 'Designing and Implementing Social Transfer Programmes Course' in Chiang Mai, Thailand during 25 October to 7 November 2009. It is aimed at government officials and policy-makers, representatives of bilateral and multilateral agencies, and staff of non-governmental organisations.

It will provide participants with an in-depth understanding of the conceptual and practical issues involved in the development of social transfer programmes.

To apply online, visit www.epri.org.za. For further information, please contact Eduardo Klien (Regional Representative) HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, asiacourse@helppageasia.org or Ingrid van Niekerk (Director), EPRI, ivanniekerk@epri.org.za

Resources

Publications

HelpAge International

All available from:

www.helpage.org/resources

The situation of older people in cyclone-affected Myanmar: Nine months after the disaster
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

The social pension in India: A participatory study on the poverty reduction impact and role of monitoring groups
HelpAge India and HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Enhancing social protection for older people in Thailand: National workshop on social pensions in Chiang Mai, Thailand
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Asia/Pacific Regional Conference on Ageing 2008: Working together for well-being in old age
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Voice of older people in Asia
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Integrating older people: A training of trainers manual for successful mainstreaming of age-friendliness in the Canadian Red Cross'

programme in Aceh, Indonesia
Canadian Red Cross and HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Older people and Cyclone Nargis: A study of the situation of older people 100 days on
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2008

The new rural social pension insurance programme of Baoji City Shaanxi Province, China
Zhang Wenjuan and Tang Dan,
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2008

The universal social pension in Nepal: An assessment of its impact on older people in Tanahun district
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2009

Analysis of livelihood cash grant programme implemented for older people after tsunami, Banda Aceh, Indonesia
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2008

Tackling poverty in old age: a universal pension for Sri Lanka
HelpAge Sri Lanka, 2009

Older people and micro-credit: Bangladesh experience
HelpAge - Asia/Pacific, 2008

Related ageing publications

Development cooperation for social safety nets in East and Southeast Asia

Korea Institution for International Economic Policy, 2009 (kiep.go.kr)

Decent work for older persons in Thailand: Policy implications of labour market issues in Thailand for older persons

International Labour Organization, 2009 (ilo.org)

Social security programs throughout the world: Asia and the Pacific, 2008

International Social Security Association (issa.int)

Websites

www.socialprotectionasia.org

A pioneering programme in research, advocacy and network building that aims to create a regional voice and develop a research base for advocating innovative and informed policy on social protection issues.

www.globalaging.org

It reports on older people's needs and potential within the global economy. It advocates by, with and for older persons worldwide.

We believe age helps. With age comes experience and understanding. The contribution older women and men make to society is invaluable.

HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives.

AgeNews Asia/Pacific aims to highlight issues of ageing and the rights of older people in Asia/Pacific as well as sharing experiences in working with and for older people.

This newsletter is published every four months. The next issue will be in October 2009.

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Help the Aged provides core funding to HelpAge International, and is also a leading partner of HelpAge International's global network of not-for-profit organisations.

Growing from strength to strength

Update on Forum Kusuma Bangsa from Aceh, Indonesia

Forum Kusuma Bangsa (*blossoming flower*) is a federation of 14 older people's associations (OPAs) that was set up in Aceh as a part of the DEC funded Tsunami Extended Response Programme that concluded in December 2008.

The forum has more than 900 members and provides services such as cheap grocery programme, micro credit, health awareness and advocacy for older people's needs. It is supported by an advisory committee, which is composed of members from various government and non government agencies.

This forum has also received an annual grant of 12 million IDR (US\$ 1,200) from the provincial Social Welfare Department.

After the closure of HelpAge's programme in Aceh, the forum

has taken over the responsibility of sustaining the initiatives taken during the project period to improve the lives of the OPA members. A few highlights of the forum's activities in the last five months have been the following:

- The forum has completed a radio programme on disaster risk reduction for older people with Radio Djati - a local radio station. The CDs of this radio programme are made available. This radio programme will be aired across Aceh. This programme disseminates knowledge about older people's vulnerabilities during and after emergencies and explains in detail how older people should plan to evacuate.
- The forum has successfully hosted an advisory committee meeting to make its plan of action for this year. The advisory council has suggested that the forum should prepare its

application for setting up the first ever cooperative of older people in Aceh.

- Two member villages of the forum - Ruyung and Lamna have received approval from the Provincial Annual Budget for social security support for older people above 70 years old in their villages. Meanwhile, the 12 other member villages of the forum are currently preparing the official letters to submit a similar request to the Committee for Social Workers.

Although HelpAge's tsunami recovery programme was terminated, Forum Kusuma Bangsa has been able to take its activities forward. This is a positive indication of the members' involvement and integrity. It's hoped that the forum will continue to sustain itself and will grow from strength to strength.