

Ageing & Development

Issue 3 • May 1999

New law in South Africa tackles age bias

Efforts to protect the rights of older people in South Africa and to ensure more equitable provision of resources took a step forward with the passing of the Aged Persons Amendment Bill.

The new legislation aims to eliminate racial and other discrimination in service provision and resource allocation, and provide more effective measures to halt corruption. Social welfare corruption robs many older people of their retirement and other benefits. In addition, black pensioners in townships and rural areas still have to stand for hours at pension payout points, where there is no protection against the weather or criminal attack.

Groups working with older people in South Africa have welcomed the legislation but remain concerned about the desperate lack of resources for elder care.

Thembi Mapetla, of HelpAge International (HAI) South Africa, wants to see much wider provision for older people. Explaining that the current focus of care is on the frail elderly, she says: "There are a lot of people who are not frail but poor and displaced, for example retired domestic workers who have always worked in someone's home and leave with no pension and no home of their own."

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International agencies sideline older people

Most key development reports for 1998 did not acknowledge the importance of ageing as a major global trend.

A survey of seven reports published by the main international development agencies shows that only two gave significant coverage of ageing. These were the UN Population Fund: *The State of World Population: The New Generations* and the WHO: *World Health Report, Life in the 21st Century, A Vision for All*. Most other reports barely touched on ageing.

Some reports focus only on ageing in industrialised countries, ignoring the fact that more than half the world's older people live in developing countries.

Overall, there is very little disaggregated data for older populations in developing countries. Some reports

focus only on ageing in industrialised countries, ignoring the fact that more than half the world's older people live in developing countries. Others reinforce misconceptions, for

instance by excluding older people from labour force statistics.

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	Coverage of ageing in developed countries	Coverage of ageing in developing countries	Disaggregation of data on older populations	Recommendations for meeting the challenge of global ageing	Focus on the issues facing older women
UNFPA (The State of World Population 1998)	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
WHO (World Health Report 1998)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
World Bank (World Development Indicators 1998)	n/a	✗	✗	✗	✗
IFRC (World Disasters Report 1998/9)	✗	one reference	✗	✗	✗
World Bank (World Development Report 1998)	n/a	✗	✗	✗	✗
UNDP (Human Development Report 1998)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Social Watch NGO Coalition (Social Watch 1998)	n/a	✗	✗	✗	✗

Latest UN population projections

The UN's most recently published population projections show that in developing countries, over 65-year-olds will make up a quarter of the population by 2150 - five times their proportion in 2000 - and 10% of these people will be over 80. In contrast, the percentage of under 15-year-olds is expected to drop from 32% in 2000 to 18% in 2150.

With such trends, it is not surprising that dramatic improvements in life expectancy are forecast. A woman in Africa whose life expectancy in 1995 was 53, could expect to live until she was 86 by the year 2150. However, several factors can undermine this expectation - see *How gender affects lifespan*, page 7 and <http://www.undp.org/popin/wdtrends/wdtrends.htm>

Age Bites



United and inclusive in Hanoi

The Hanoi Declaration of the fifth regional conference of Asia and Pacific Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies gives special recognition to older people as a major source of voluntary service as well as recipients of services.

A section on 'The Young and the Old' appears in the first half of the document. This commits the societies to consulting and involving older people in the design of their programmes and to developing services that promote a dignified and independent life for older people.

The Asia Pacific region website of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is at: <http://www.redcross-ap.ifrc.org>



Towards healthy change

Development of health services that are sensitive to diverse cultures, the transition from primary curative health care to more holistic approaches and the links between formal and informal (family-based) care of older people are the main themes in a new publication on health and ageing.

"Health Systems and Aging in Selected Pacific-Rim Countries: Cultural Diversity and Change" addresses these issues from the perspectives of diverse cultures and health care systems. Edited by Andrew V Wister and Gloria Gutman, the book is published by the Gerontology Research Center of Simon Fraser University.



Challenging Alzheimer's

Everyone with an interest in Alzheimer's disease and issues around dementia is invited to take part in the 15th Alzheimer's Disease International Conference - "Dementia: Challenge of our time" - in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 16-18 September 1999.

Information about programmes, registration, fees etc, is available from adi99@globalconf.co.za and on the ADI website at <http://www.globalconf.co.za/adi99>

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The State of World Population – UNFPA 1998

The New Generations is a document full of data relating to older people and ageing issues, such as the shift in population balance towards older people. Two of five chapters are devoted to "Intergenerational Relations" and "Adding Years to Life and Life to Later Years".

The report calls for more data and research on the implications of ageing societies. It says policies need to take greater account of the roles of family and community in relation to older people. It also draws attention to the neglect of older women in health policy, in the context of ensuring the right to health - particularly basic primary health care - for older people.

World Health Report 1998

Life in the 21st Century, A Vision for All has a focus on the global, social, individual, gender and health challenges of ageing. It talks of the change in social units, with the trend towards families with fewer children to care for their elderly parents, and the expectation of increased social service intervention/provision.

Although developing countries are mentioned, the issues discussed reflect the needs of older people in developed countries.

World Development Report 1998: Knowledge for Development

The report contains nothing on ageing. Strongly focused on its theme of knowledge for development, the tables give even less detail than the World Development Indicators (see below).

The only reference to age is a column for Life Expectancy at Birth for 1996, by gender. The table on Population and Labor Force gives a breakdown of the population which only goes up to age 64.

World Development Indicators – World Bank 1998

This gives Age Dependency Ratios for 1996 but not disaggregated for each end of the life spectrum:

- Age groups of over 60 and above for 1996 and projected for 2010
- Women per 100 men aged 60 and above for 1996 and projected for 2010
- Average annual population growth rates for age 65+ between 1990-96.

World Disasters Report 1998

The only reference to older persons relates to ICRC home care and mobile technical teams which visit older and disabled people living alone in Sarajevo.

Human Development Report 1998

This report addresses ageing in industrialised countries but - with one exception - not developing countries.

The population index tables for industrialised countries give a percentage for the population over 65, but those for developing countries give no such breakdown.

The Social Stress and Social Change table for industrial countries refers to "One person households headed by women aged 65 and above". There is no equivalent for developing countries.

Similarly, the health profile includes "Likelihood of dying after age 65" of cancer and heart disease in industrialised countries but not in developing countries.

The South-North Gap table gives the difference in life expectancy at birth for the years 1960 and 1995.

Social Watch – No 2 1998

The gender perspective in this report is very strong but their chart of Progress towards Social Development Commitments and country studies focus entirely on the earlier stages of the life spectrum.

Age Bites



Mental health models?

Successful models and activities around ageing and mental health are being sought by the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) as part of its programme for World Mental Health Day, 10 October 1999.

Information about innovative ageing and mental health programmes can be sent to Pam McKinley at WFMH, e-mail: wfmh@erols.com



AGES Workshop

The African Gerontological Society (AGES International) held its third African Regional Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, from 12-17 April.

The workshop theme was Ageing in Changing Societies - Africa preparing for the next millennium. Plenary sessions focused on:

- Healthy Ageing as a Key Development Issue for Africa
- Conflict and the Aged: the invisible crisis
- Development and participation: older women in the next millennium.

Conference report from Dr. Morag Insley e-mail: ages@finsley.idiscover.co.uk



Dutch reach out

The Dutch government is planning to release a statement this year on a national policy for the support of older people in developing countries.

This follows an expert group meeting on ageing in developing countries, held in the Netherlands on 29 January. The meeting was a joint initiative of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Dutch IYOP Committee.

Although there is not yet clarity on what kind of support will be offered, the policy will integrate a focus on older people into the government's foreign aid programme, which targets some 60 countries.

New research questions assumptions that non-nuclear families cannot provide care

Despite voluminous research reports on elderly caregiving during the past three decades, key questions about the nature of care and the responsibility for providing it remain unanswered, according to Dr William T Liu, of the East Asian Institute at the University of Singapore.

In a Paper presented at the HelpAge International 1998 Asia/Pacific Regional Seminar in Singapore, Dr Liu questions which mode of care is best suited to provide different services to old people. On one side is the Western approach, characterised by formalised state welfarism, on the other the Eastern one, based on family-centred care.

While recognising that the West has different social values with respect to the care of older people, the author questions the evidence of the erosion of the values of filial piety in many East Asian societies. He uses his own research in Shanghai to illustrate the impact of these values on caregiving. He suggests that the assumption of the erosion of family values arises from a confusion between households and families. The former is a statistical

description of sharing residence; the latter is a testimony of shared obligations that defines both the relationship and the sense of common identity.

Eugene Litwak shows the importance of classifying tasks that match the type of social relations between the caregiver and the elder.

There is a lot we can do, Liu concludes, before we become too frightened by reports of the demise of the family's ability to provide elderly care

and the unwillingness of the government to help. We need a constructive partnership between the government and the family.

Liu recommends the work of Eugene Litwak who distinguishes between face-to-face caregiving tasks and daily assistance in living; though the two are not mutually exclusive. He then looks at the emotional investment in various tasks: many do not require such an investment and can be done by paid help; others – those with an affective element – can only be done by family members. Litwak shows the importance of classifying tasks that match the type of social relations between the caregiver and the elder.

Ghana research aims to shape policy

"We are not government workers and therefore cannot go on a pension". Older women, Ammasu.

A recent study in Ghana of the contribution of older people to development found two key determinants. The first is that the different socially assigned roles, responsibilities and entitlements of older men and women determine their livelihood priorities, and that their sense of well-being relates directly to the fulfilment of these roles. The second is that older people's participation is determined by the extent to which institutions are gender and age aware.

The research, conducted by HelpAge International and HelpAge Ghana as part of a study in six countries, drew directly on the views and experiences of poor older people using Participatory Learning Analysis methods (PLA).

The findings were presented at a national policy workshop in Ghana

attended by older people from three regions – Brong Ahafo, Upper West and Greater Accra – as well as government, NGO and international agency representatives. The workshop made recommendations on each of the five key issues; the contribution of older people, health, wellbeing, livelihood, services and support.

For example in relation to health, money for treatment and the attitude of health staff are the main problems. Recommendations included establishing special queues for older people, geriatric training for medical personnel, and extension of free medical care to the over 60s, with provision to enable people from rural areas who have no evidence of their age to access the service.

The research findings and a report on the national workshop are available from Amanda Heslop at HelpAge International: mheslop@helpage.org

Age Bites



Pensions in Crisis

Low rates of return on pension investment portfolios are a matter of concern in many developing countries. The economic crisis in Latin America is hitting hard. In Mexico transaction costs coupled with inflation rates of over 15% result in a real rate of return on the consolidated account of just 2%. But as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) reports, 'a 2% rate of return probably sounds pretty good to Chileans right now', since rates of return on pensions investments for the year ending May 1998 were 0.8% (See <http://www.aarp.org/intl/>).



Adding value to education

In Mozambique preparation for IYOP began in earnest with a regional seminar on ageing in May 1998. The seminar, involving government, civil society and church representatives from Tete, Manica, Sofala and Zambezia provinces, was held in Tete.

Among the topics discussed was the importance of including educational messages about the value of older people in society in the school curriculum and the media. The seminar highlighted the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to ageing issues and recommended that the Mozambican Ministry for Social Welfare draw up a national policy on ageing.



Global forum

Ageing in a society for all ages is the theme of the fourth global conference of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA). The conference, to be held in Montreal, Quebec, from 5-9 September 1999, is intended to be a forum for older people from around the world to make their voices heard.

Conference themes are: economic security, health, housing and the environment, creativity and the spiritual contributions of older people, and their political rights and responsibilities.

More information from the IFA website at <http://www.ifa-fiv.org> or e-mail ageingconf@jpd.com

Ageing

Cairo +5 makes practical recommendations to support older people

Practices to assist developing countries to address population ageing were considered by a technical meeting of experts on this issue in Belgium in October. Recommendations included:

- Donors to renegotiate external debts of poor countries to release funds for social services for older persons
- Governments and international agencies to:
 - integrate consequences of ageing into development strategies
 - consider intergenerational relationships
 - establish gender-sensitive population policies
 - enable ageing persons to leave the workforce gradually (e.g. through job redesign, flexible pensions, mentoring).

The meeting was organised by the UN Population Fund and the Population and Family Study Centre, as part of the five-year review of implementation of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. (See <http://www.unfpa.org/ICPD/ageing/age-agenda.htm>).

Urban action

The search for innovative local policies on ageing in urban communities has led the Fondation de France to mark IYOP with an international seminar of local councillors. The seminar, titled Ageing Well in One's Town, aims to make local councillors more aware of the consequences of ageing, to compare perceptions of and approaches to ageing in different societies, to highlight and disseminate good practice, and to encourage transnational exchange and cooperation around ageing issues.

Noting that action on ageing in industrialised countries has often been inappropriate and has led to the exclusion and loneliness of older people, the organisers cite the record rate of suicide among older people in France.

The seminar will take place in Dijon from 9-10 September. Representation is expected from more than 50 countries. Urge your local council to participate – contact Marie-Jo Guisset on fax + 33 1 44 213197, e mail: mjg@fdf.org for more information.

Message is spreading through IYOP action

Several developing countries are actively supporting IYOP through events and programmes.

The *Ageing in Africa* newsletter of HelpAge International's Africa Regional Development Centre (helpage@net2000ke.com) reports on continent-wide initiatives. These included a march by older people, children and the Minister of Labour in Tanzania, the setting up of an interministerial committee to plan and fundraise for IYOP in Kenya, the minting of commemorative postage stamps in Uganda and a sports festival for older people in South Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire launched the year with an international conference on global ageing in Abidjan. 'How to grow old in good health' was the theme of discussion.

In Nigeria, the International Federation on Ageing hosted the first National Ageing Forum, established the Senior Citizens' Association of Nigeria and plans a sub-regional conference next year as part of its IYOP programme.

The Ministry of Women's Rights and Human Development in Peru is taking a lead in raising positive awareness of the situation of older people and launching a national campaign on ageing.

Older people are known as 'precious pearls' in the Bahamas, where IYOP was launched with a month-long celebration 'to promote a positive image for older persons so that they can achieve their desires at any age'.

Action

Older voices marginalised at Global Meeting of Generations

The right to be heard was one of the crucial human rights that needed to be guaranteed to older people in the new millennium, HelpAge International's Deputy Chief Executive Mark Gorman said in his background paper to the Global Meeting of Generations.

However, it was clear from the presentations to the conference, held by International Development Conference (IDC) in Washington in January, that the voice of older people was still marginal even in a forum dedicated to intergenerational dialogue.

The majority of contributions focused on youth or on general issues of dialogue and partnership. Participants also expressed concern that many discussion panellists were white men and some delegates noted that 'the time allocated to the views of the middle-aged – the experts – reflects their dominance in the power structure of most societies'.

Inputs that did focus on older people or on genuinely intergenerational dialogue included panels on:

- the role of world religions in fostering an intergenerational ethic;
- intergenerational debate;
- grandparenting in North and South;
- business partnerships with youth and retired people in developing countries;
- lifelong learning;
- strategies for development education;
- technology for all.

IDC's website is at <http://www.idc.org/gmg>

UN strengthens International Plan of Action on Ageing

A long-term strategy on ageing is being formulated by the UN Commission on Social Development to strengthen the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

While the Plan of Action stresses the lifelong nature of ageing, it focuses primarily on the situation of older people. In view of the focus of International Year of Older Persons on building a society for all ages, the Commission is seeking a strategy that would take both an age group and a sectorally integrated approach to ageing.

The approach explored by the General Assembly is based on the individual lifecourse, alongside micro-social environment (family, neighbourhood, community of interest) and macro-social environment.

The dual basis of this approach is: facilitation of individual development into late life (with a focus on self-help and independence) and strengthening enabling environments at both micro and macro level.

A key initiative to support the development of such a strategy is the Research Agenda on Ageing for the 21st Century. This will look at the socio-economic adjustments needed to move towards a society for all ages and is recommended to give priority attention to the research needs of developing countries.

The initiative was launched in February 1999, with an expert group meeting in Vienna. The aim of this was to identify research priority areas and expert research teams. An approved Research Agenda is expected to be published towards the end of next year. For further information, see the UN Programme on Ageing's website: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/age4ra.htm>

WEBSITES

UN/ESCAP IYOP: <http://unescap.org/ageing/index.htm>

International Federation on Ageing: <http://www.ifa-fiv.org> - information on global ageing and the September 99 "Fourth Global Conference on Ageing" in Montreal, Canada. Also lists other conferences on ageing matters.

Associations, Organisations and Conferences: <http://www.usc.edu/isd/locations/science/gerontology/orgsource.htm>

International Association of Gerontology: <http://www.cas.flinders.edu.au/iag> - Australian based gerontological organisation with worldwide membership. Online newsletter with information on their members and upcoming IAG conferences.

Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education <http://www.aspbae.org> have a programme on Older People and Adult Learning and produce a newsletter called OPAL. Contact : maria@aspbae.ilbom.ernet.in

Fourth Review & Appraisal of the Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/age4ra.htm>

IYOP Contacts - Global NGOs: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop/iyopac04.htm#COALITION99>

Magazines around the world for seniors – includes publications based in Brazil, Colombia, India and South Africa – is being constantly updated. <http://www.aarp.org/intl/senmagz.htm~Indi>

Also on AARP website: a list of Seniors' Organisations and political parties around the world – 22 developing countries and 4 Eastern European. <http://www.aarp.org/intl/calendar.htm>

Rural Aging: A Global Challenge. International Conference hosted by the University of West Virginia in Charleston, USA. Details on: <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/rural-ageing>

HelpAge International (HAI): information on HAI, issues of ageing, and IYOP <http://www.helpage.org/>

JOURNALS

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Country Profile: Care of the Older Hong Kong Population
J Woo, S C Ho & E Lau

JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL GERONTOLOGY

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Regional differences in living arrangements among the elderly in Ecuador *Susan De Vos*

Children's support for elderly parents in urban and rural China: Results from a national survey *Yean-Ju Lee, Zhenyu Xiao*

Forms of communication: A cross-cultural comparison of older married couples in the USA and Japan *Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Ruth Campbell, Jill Mattson*

Localising senility: Illness and agency among older Japanese *John W Traphagan*

Volume 13 Issue 2 1998

Life satisfaction among Chinese elderly in Beijing *Amy Y Zhang, Lucy C Yu*

Reasons for gateball participation among older Japanese *John W Traphagan*

Men and elder care in Japan: A ripple of change? *Phyllis Braudy Harris, Susan Orpett Long, Miwa Fujii*

Untapped Resources: Women in ageing societies across Asia, edited by Kalyani Mehta *Yokho Tsuji*

BOLD

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Volume 8 No 4 August 1998

From the Director of INIA: *Anthony H B De Bono*

Older Persons and new Social Policies - South Africa
Monica Ferreira

Problems for the elderly in South Africa *A Mark Clarfield*

GLOBAL AGING REPORT

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Volume 3 No 4 July/August 1998

Special Issue on Aging and Development

Is Aging a Development Issue? Yes!

Using Home Help and Self Help to Stay Independent - Adopt-a-Granny in Korea

South African Program targets Literacy

Spotlight on South Africa

Goats, Ducks and Microenterprise - Older Mozambicans help themselves

Volume 3 No 5 Sept/Oct 1998

Older Refugees Everywhere

Spotlight on the Philippines

A Progress Report on Reform - Brazil, El Salvador & Chile

Gray Doves International - "A Helping Hand for Older Women" - mainly Eastern/Central Europe.

Volume 3 No 6 Nov/Dec 1998

Viet Nam embraces its Older Generation

How to make Healthy Communities for People of all Ages featuring China and India

The Great Jamaican Music Project

SOUTHERN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF GERONTOLOGY

Human Science Research Council/UCT, Centre for Gerontology, University of Cape Town, Observatory 7925, South Africa

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Special Issue: Health and Ageing in Africa Guest Editor: Karen Charlton

Health, healthcare and ageing in Africa: challenges and opportunities *Karen E Charlton*

The role of gender in gait analysis in the elderly *Pamela A MacFarlane, Claire M Nicholson & Greta M M Muller*

Vitamin C and zinc status of elderly women in residential care in Cape Town *Karen E Charlton, Farima Joosen & Shamiela Jaffer*

Language practices in caregiving in a South African nursing home: conflict and tension *S B Makoni*

Outcomes of a community-based HIV/AIDS programme for rural older women in Botswana *Shiela D Tlou*

Guest Column: An African perspective on nutrition and ageing *A R P Walker*

Opinion 1: Principles to guide geriatric care services in Africa. A New Era? *A O Wilson*

Opinion 2: The need for geriatric care services in Ghana *Y Duodo*

Debate: The free radical theory of ageing *Susan van Rensburg & F C V Potocnik*

POPLINE: WORLD POPULATION NEWS SERVICE

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Older populations expanding rapidly

The State of World Population Report 1998: The New Generations

Towards a Society for all Ages is 1999 UN Theme

Old age security systems in doubt

Older populations are predominantly female

DEVELOPMENTS

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Issue 1 First Quarter 1998

Granny knows best: Dr T Scarlett Epstein argues that by concentrating on the young to the detriment of the old, developers are way wide of the mark

AGEWAYS

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Age Bites



Americas at a glance

A clear and striking wall chart has been produced on Aging in the Americas into the 21st Century.

Comparative data on older populations in the Western Hemisphere is presented through text and graphs. An Aging Index for 1997 and 2025 highlights the fact that the proportion of persons aged 60 or over compared to the youth population is likely to double or triple during the next three decades.

The chart is available in English and Spanish from the US Bureau of the Census (<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew/html>).



Caregiving online

Caregiving professionals are invited to join a new discussion ListServe set up by the US-based National Alliance for Caregiving.

The aim of the ListServe is to provide an online discussion group through which those involved in caregiving internationally can discuss ideas, share information and collaborate on projects.

Membership is by invitation and anyone interested in joining should respond by e-mail to kelly.nac@erols.com (fax: +1 301 652 7711).



Cultures of caring

Sharing the experiences of different cultures in caring for their older populations is one of the key expected outcomes of the third international conference of the International Association of Homes and Services for the Ageing (IAHSA).

The conference, Ageing Societies in a New Millennium: Global Trends in Care and Services, will take place in Honolulu, Hawaii, from 27-30 June.

Issues to be discussed include housing, assisted living, patient treatment, development, financing and future trends.

More information from Robert Greenwood at iahsa@aahsa.org

Older widows as leaders

Realising the potential leadership role of older widows may be an important aspect of improving the economic and social security of poor women in India. This is one of the suggestions arising from a study of property, land and economic security conducted by Bina Agarwal¹, of Delhi's Institute of Economic Growth.

Agarwal's research highlights the need to ensure command over property, namely arable land, for widows and the need to see widows not as a category but as embodying a stage in most women's lifecycle often concurrent with old age.

Agarwal argues the importance of contesting women's rights in India on legal, administrative, social and ideological grounds, given the entrenched dependent status of particularly rural, poor women of all ages.

She notes that even where women gain access to land, their ownership/control of it is still insecure due to social and family pressure in a patrilineal society. One way to improve this would be to promote collective rather than individual ownership and management of land by groups of poor women.

On the wider issue of empowering women, collective action is again advocated – for example, by groups of women, women's organisations and coalitions. Simply attending a meeting can be seen as challenging and abnormal behaviour in some communities. In this context, Agarwal points out that widows and unmarried women, who are under fewer social constraints, have been particularly active in several instances of collective action on environmental issues.

She says: 'The potential role that older widows in particular could play in organising women's groups or participating in other collective initiatives thus needs probing.'

1 From a paper published in *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 32, Part 1. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

How gender affects lifespan

The problems of older people are, largely, the problems of elderly women, who greatly outnumber elderly men in most nations. In developed countries, 52% of females have a life expectancy at birth of more than 80 years; but only 2% of males. In developing countries, the figures are 7% for females and for males – zero.

There has been a general increase in life expectancy in developing countries - with some exceptions in Latin America and Africa (the latter due to the impact of HIV/AIDS). In Uganda, for example, life expectancy for women has increased by less than two years since 1950; in Japan it has increased by just over 20 years.

The gender/age gap in developing countries is, on average, only three years - partly due to high levels of maternal mortality. It is, however, expected to increase, as has happened in industrialised countries. No scientific explanation has been found for this gender gap, though it has been suggested that greater male exposure to risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol and occupational

hazards might be a factor. The gap might, therefore, lessen as more females use tobacco and alcohol and find work in the formal sector.

In reporting these latest figures on increased life expectancy, the US Bureau of the Census raises the issue of the quality of life for older people. Noting that various studies agree that

The gender/age gap in developing countries is, on average, only three years... It is, however, expected to increase.

women can expect to live more disability-free years than men, it points out that, because they live longer than men do, at age 65

the *proportion* of disability-free life remaining tends to be less for women. Women are also more likely to be widowed and research has shown both a positive relationship between longer life and marriage, and that the loss of a spouse can have negative effects financially and on health.

There is very little comprehensive data on the health of older women. Women's health and access to health care are often disproportionately affected by such factors as high levels of poverty and economic dependence, violence, limited decision-making power and negative cultural attitudes.

Age Bites

Focus on women

Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Health and Education, Dr Aline Wong, will be guest of honour at the Women's Health – the Nation's Gain conference (see issue 2) in Singapore in July. Invited keynote speakers are Dr Gro Harlem Bruntland, Secretary General of the WHO, Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM, Ms Myrna Lewis, of Mount Sinai Medical Centre and Dr E Margaret Fulton, of the Women's World Summit Foundation. Older women in Asia is a special focus of the conference. More information from: <http://www.asiawomen.org.sg>



Bristol channels information

An International Institute on Health and Ageing opened at the University of Bristol in the UK last November. The Institute aims to be a catalyst for the pooling of information and resources on ageing issues, and for collaboration between institutions.

It is running six programmes, on:

- Intergenerational relations
- Biography and the lifespan
- Long-term care
- Positive health in later life
- In-situ care
- The end of life – death, dying and bereavement

More details by e-mail:

malcolm.johnson@bristol.ac.uk

Comment

Call for a global summit

A call for a Summit on Global Aging has come from the Chairman of the Institute for International Economics.

Under the sensationalist title **Gray Dawn: the Global Aging Crisis** (Foreign Affairs, January/February 1999), Peter G Peterson writes of the need to 'shift public discussion [of ageing] into fast forward'. He says that since leaders have been willing to convene summits to discuss global warming, they should support one on global ageing, 'which will hit us sooner and with greater certainty'.

Peterson says that apart from raising the profile of ageing issues, the summit process would also 'help provide an international framework for voter education, collective burden-sharing and global leadership'.

Peterson, who is also Deputy Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, discusses the question of ageing purely from a dependency perspective and only in terms of the 'threat' a growing older population poses to the economic and political power of the world's richest industrialised nations.

Some of the issues he raises, such as the level of unfunded pension commitments in many countries, certainly require urgent attention. A global summit would provide a forum for world leaders to address many such objective economic realities. Perhaps more importantly, it would enable all those working on ageing issues to lobby leaders and opinion makers to adopt a more informed and balanced view of the actual and potential contribution of older people to global development.

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