

Commentary on Bangladesh's domain ranks in the 2015 Global AgeWatch Index

By Shegufta Sharmin, Deputy Director Policy and Communication, HelpAge Bangladesh, shegufta.sharmin@helpage.org



Global AgeWatch Index rank

67

out of 96

Bangladesh ranks low on the Index at 67. The change from last year (59) is due to replacement of labour force participation rate with employment rate. It ranks moderately in the enabling environment domain (41) due to high satisfaction of older people with safety (86%), public transport (69%), and civic freedom (70%) compared with regional averages 68%, 65% and 67% respectively. It also ranks low in health domain (71) due to low life expectancy at 60 (18) and healthy life expectancy at 60 (13.8) compared to regional averages 19 and 14.8 respectively.

It ranks low in the capability domain (76). The fall from last year (39) is due to change from labour force participation rate to employment rate. Employment rate among older people (46.8%) and educational attainment of older people (24%) are below regional averages, 55% and 30% respectively.

It ranks lowest on income security (91) with lower than regional average pension coverage (39.5%) and one of the lowest GNI per capita (\$2,953) in the region.

This year to mark the [Age Demands Action](#) campaign, older activists will be forming a human chain and setting up a health camp for older people to visit.



Income security

71

47.2/100

Around a third of the population live in households with someone aged 60 or over. Social protection, including cash transfers to older people, plays a critical role in supporting families, mitigating impact of poverty, and contribution of income to extended family.¹

According to the 2005 and 2010 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), extreme poverty of the total population has fallen by 7.5 percentage points compared to 2.7 percentage points for people living in older-headed households. This shows a greater need for support of households with older people.²

The Old Age Allowance (OAA) is the main non-contributory scheme for older people. It is means-tested with eligibility for men aged 65 and over and for women aged 62 and over.³ The government has consistently expanded the program since 1998, however there are a number of limitations. Firstly, the low coverage - only 2.7 million older people receive the allowance.⁴ Sixty per cent of older people still do not have a pension.⁵ Secondly, inadequate benefit level - 400 Taka⁶ (US\$5.13)⁷ a month. The allowance represents 13% - 21% of the country's poverty line income.⁸ The average benefit level of comparable social protection schemes in other countries is more than double the benefit level under the OAA.⁹



Health status

71

37.7/100

As in many other countries chronic conditions become more common with increasing age and are a major cause of morbidity and death in Bangladesh.

Trends such as rapid epidemiologic and demographic transitions, urbanisation and the adoption of westernised diets and lifestyles are leading to a rise in the prevalence of chronic health conditions in Bangladesh. Non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cancer now account for the major burden of disease. Seventy-eight per cent of older people suffer from chronic illnesses.¹⁰

Life expectancy at age 60 slightly increased from 1990.¹¹ This can partly be attributed to better interventions in overall healthcare. However, for older people access to quality health services remains challenging. Government hospitals are often too far, while private clinics are too expensive.¹² The general government expenditure on healthcare is 7.9% of total government spending and people have to pay for their healthcare bills out of their own pockets.¹³ According to a study only 62 per cent of older people with chronic illness took regular medicine. The access to medication is lowest among the OAA recipients.¹⁴ In light of this the Bangladesh government has committed to attain universal health coverage.¹⁵



Capability

76

24.2/100

This year Bangladesh's rank declined 32 places due to use of employment rate data released by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

According to the ILO 46.8 per cent of people age 55-64 are employed. As in many other lower income countries older people in Bangladesh have to look for employment in old age due to lack of proper livelihood support and adequate social security. However, it is difficult for people with disabilities and older people to find employment.¹⁶

Most older people living under the poverty line have no better access to employment apart from in some informal sectors. Often these are physically demanding jobs such as rickshaw pulling in urban areas or soil digging in rural areas.

According to the official statistics 24.3 per cent of urban men aged 65 and over are employed as skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, followed by 21.5 per cent managerial jobs. Urban women of the same age group are primarily employed in services and sales (37%) and elementary occupations (32.5%). In rural areas 59.2 per cent of older men are employed as skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, followed by 14.7 per cent as elementary occupations. Older rural women are employed in elementary occupations (33%) and service and sales workers (23.1%).¹⁷

Educational attainment among older people is low. According to Socio-economic and demographic report the literacy rate among people age 60-64 is 27 per cent and nearly 23 per cent among the age group 65 and over. The literacy of older men aged 60-64 is 38.9 per cent compared with 14.6 per cent of older women.¹⁸



Enabling environment

41

67.5/100

Bangladesh ranks moderately in the enabling environment domain due to high satisfaction of older people with their physical safety, civic freedom and access to public transport.

Sixty-nine per cent of older people are satisfied with public transport. However, the latest research shows that hospitals, schools, transport and recreational activities lack specially adapted infrastructure and facilities, making access to a wide range of services for persons with disabilities and older people difficult.¹⁹

According to Gallup, 86 per cent of older people feel safe. Bangladesh has second lowest homicide rate in Southern Asia.²⁰ However, domestic violence against older people is seldom reported and/or investigated. There is a need to improve enforcement mechanisms of the domestic violence act and public education campaigns.²¹

For older people, the lack of family support is a pervasive problem. Families often view their older members as a burden, especially when they are not earning. Sometimes older family members are abused; sometimes they are abandoned.²² An unpublished study from HelpAge with Dhaka University shows that 54% of older people living in urban slums are suffering from abuse and neglect within their households, more than half are older women.²³

Urbanisation is affecting families. According to UNDESA, urban population in Bangladesh grew annually by 3.5 per cent while rural population grew by 0.06 per cent.²⁴ Urban centres are becoming major hubs for education, employment and other facilities. Young people are migrating from rural areas and are leaving their parents alone in the home. The rural population aged 0-59 decreased by 0.03 per cent annually while the proportion of older people increased by 1.3 per cent.²⁵

¹ Haque Khondker B, Knox-Vydmannov C and Vilela A, *Old age social protection options for Bangladesh*, Bureau of Economic Research of the University of Dhaka and HelpAge International, 2013

² Ibid

³ <http://www.msw.gov.bd/site/page/18350636-86ea-46fc-8ecf-df73ed933a96/Old-Age-Allowances>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Global AgeWatch Index

⁶ <http://www.msw.gov.bd/site/page/18350636-86ea-46fc-8ecf-df73ed933a96/Old-Age-Allowances>

⁷ Central Bank of Bangladesh exchange rate 1 January 2015

⁸ Sharifa Begum, Old Age Allowance Programme of Bangladesh: Challenges and Lessons, <http://www.ipc-undp.org/conference/south-south-learning-event/presentations/Sharifa%20Begum.pdf>

⁹ Khondker et al, 2013

¹⁰ Raisul Awal Mahmood, Sharifa Begum, A. B. M. Shamsul Islam *Bangladesh in Social Security for the Elderly*, Experiences from South Asia, 2008, ed. S. Irudaya Rajan, p.200

¹¹ WHO, Global Health Observatory Data Repository <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.688?lang=en>

¹² ADD International, HelpAge International, Alzheimer's Disease International, IDS, Sightsavers, 'We can also make change', April 2015

¹³ <http://www.helpage.org/blogs/?bid=707&all=1>

¹⁴ Mahmood, et al, 2008

¹⁵ http://www.searo.who.int/bangladesh/news/story_page_HS/en/

¹⁶ ADD International et al, 2015

¹⁷ Socio-economic and demographic report, Table P08, 2011

http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/BBS/Socio_Economic.pdf

¹⁸ Socio-economic and demographic report, Table P07, 2011,

http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/BBS/Socio_Economic.pdf

¹⁹ ADD International et al, 2015

²⁰ UNODC Homicide Statistics 2013

https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/data/GSH2013_Homicide_count_and_rate.xlsx

²¹ Siti Zaharah Binti Jamaluddin, Gan Ching Chuan, Mohammad Abu Taher, *Strategies in the Prevention or Reduction of Elder Abuse in Bangladesh and Malaysia*, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, Volume 172, 27 January 2015, pp. 42-48

²² ADD International et al, 2015

²³ <http://www.helpage.org/blogs/?bid=707&all=1>

²⁴ UNDESA World Urbanization Projects: The 2014 revision,

http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Wallcharts/WUP_2014%20Urban-Rural%20Areas%20Wallchart.pdf

²⁵ Calculation based on UNDESA Urban/Rural population by age and sex,

The Global AgeWatch Index ranks countries by how well their older populations are faring.

For general enquiries please contact HelpAge International's Media Manager, Sarah Gillam (sarah.gillam@helpage.org).