



**HelpAge Network**  
**Asia/Pacific Regional Conference 2014**  
***Older People in Ageing Societies:  
 Burden or Resource?***



Jessie George/HelpAge International

***Unlocking potential in later life***

Collaborating organisations





Régis Binard/HelpAge International

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

**HelpAge Network Asia/Pacific Regional Conference  
Older People in Ageing Societies:  
Burden or Resource?**

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Registered charity no. 288180

**The Regional Conference was supported by the UNFPA. The European Union also contributed to this event.**

**Collaborating organisations:**

Ministry of Social Development and Human Security  
Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University  
Foundation for Older People's Development  
Senior Citizen's Council of Thailand

# HelpAge Network Asia/Pacific Regional Conference

## Older People in Ageing Societies: Burden or Resource?

Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1–4 September 2014

The 2014 HelpAge Network Regional conference was attended by 204 participants from 29 countries across Asia and the Pacific. They represented national and international civil society bodies, governments, UN and other multilateral agencies and academia. Through a mix of plenary addresses, panel discussions, and parallel sessions on sub-topics, the conference gave the participants a space to jointly analyse options for ageing societies.



Wiraphat Waisitpedaleru/FOPDEV Thailand



# Introduction

The demographic transition of population ageing, in which we are now immersed, is one of the most rapid, dramatic and comprehensive transitions in history. The population structure is being transformed, with the proportion of populations aged 60 and older reaching unprecedented levels. This change comes as a result of reduced fertility but also longer life expectancies – a success of development. It is not only the change in structure of population but the very nature of age itself: people in later life are now living healthy, skilled and active lives – for longer. This demographic shift presents powerful opportunities and looming challenges for the ageing societies of the Asia/Pacific region.

It is in this context that the Regional Conference discussed how societies can best maximise the vast potential of their older citizens while minimising the obvious social and economic tensions associated with population ageing. Through a mix of plenary addresses, panel discussions and smaller parallel sessions on sub-themes, conference participants debated the theme, *Older People in Ageing Societies: Burden or Resource?* The conference highlighted three interrelated aspects of this theme: health as a precondition for older people's active contribution, older people as an economic resource and perceptions of older people in society and the media.

*“We cannot deal with the situation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the tools of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”*

*Eduardo Klien  
Regional Director, East Asia and Pacific, HelpAge International*

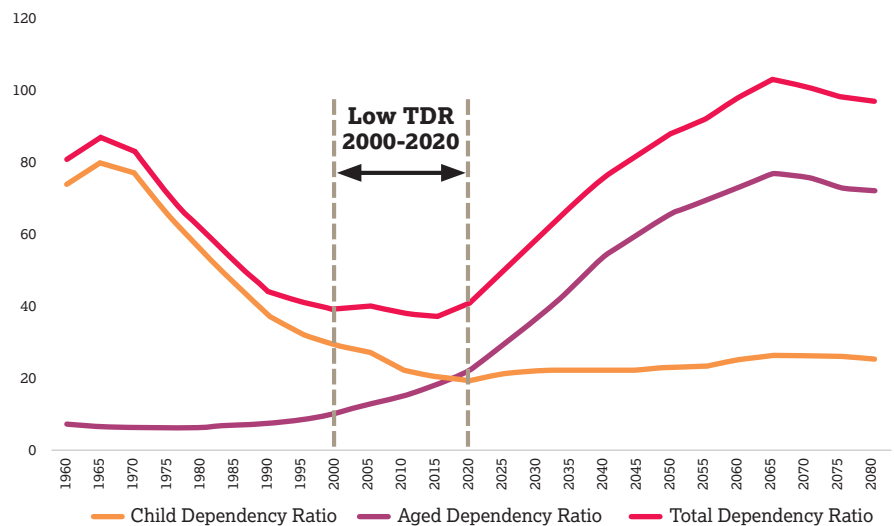
Wiraphat Witiatsilboelert/FOPDEV Thailand



# Older people in ageing societies: burden or resource?

In an opening presentation, HelpAge Regional Director Eduardo Klien noted that the theme of the conference was deliberately provocative and that there is no simple answer to the question *Burden or Resource?* All people are a resource at many points of their lives but need assistance at other points, from birth to death. The challenge is how to redesign our societies so that we can take full advantage of the positive aspects of population ageing and mitigate the risks. Now is the time to develop policies, practices and social behaviours that harness the potential of people in later life while also preparing for the changing needs arising from population ageing.

**The next few years present an opportunity to adapt to future needs...**



Source: Based on United Nations Database  
Cited on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2014

**ASEAN**

Many countries in the region are approaching a unique point in history: total dependency rates lower than ever before, due to drastically falling birth rates. Total dependency rates will rise again as the proportion of older people in the population accelerates, leaving only a short period – a “window of opportunity” – in which to make required policy adjustments. Making the most of this demographic dividend, when there is a higher proportion of working age in relation to non-working age populations, is of great strategic importance in ageing societies.

The trend of better health and education means that tomorrow’s older generations will be able to contribute even more to society than yesterday’s or today’s older generations. How can countries best take advantage of this transformative trend? By restructuring societies and investing in the future: a future with more people over 60 years of age than under 14.

The conference theme was framed through a critical look at the often-reported burdens being faced by ageing countries, such as the rapidly increasing costs of pensions, health and long-term care. Unless people in later life are cultivated as a resource, with the skills, experience and willingness to contribute, the demographic change could indeed create heavy burdens. The three main sub-themes of the conference – health, the economy and social perceptions – were examined further by subsequent speakers, panellists and participants.

# Health as a precondition for older people to contribute to ageing societies

The conference considered two sides of the health coin – costs and productivity – from the perspective of healthy life expectancy and active ageing. The conference discussed how societies and governments need to change attitudes, policies and services so that they can control health costs while taking full advantage of a healthy older generation who contribute to the economy and other spheres of life.

Older people today are far healthier than in the past, and the vast majority of the quickly growing 60-plus population is largely active and independent. On the other hand, the cost of health care for those in later life is seen as one of the biggest strains on national finances. In reality, although age is one factor in higher health care consumption, proximity to death, disease progression and the adoption of new technologies in the health care sector are preeminent drivers of health care spending. In what ways can ageing countries anticipate and control health care costs? Should they see health expenditure as consumption or investment? Do we need to invest more in disease and disability prevention and management and to shift the emphasis away from curative services? How can the promotion of active and healthy ageing ease the burden on health budgets, at national and household levels?

A closely related issue is productivity, where health and the economy come together. To what extent can older people continue to be net contributors to the economy and society, rather than a financial drain? If they are healthy and able to function, they can continue to work, delay retirement, remain active in family care or family business, and play an active role in community affairs.

With a strong contingent of health experts in attendance, the conference spent much time discussing the priorities for healthy ageing and the positive impact that healthy older people have on their economies. All agreed that older people should enjoy access to affordable, adequate health care.



Wiraphat Wlailaisipolert/FOFDEV Thailand



Wiraphat Witsaipeleert/FOPDEV Thailand

## **Universal health care was a cornerstone of Japan's rapid development**

Hon. Keizo Takemi, a Japanese parliamentarian and advocate for global health and development, shared the Japanese perspective on health and ageing in his keynote address. In the post-war 1950s, Japan was a low-income country, and in the early 1960s, it adopted a comprehensive policy package to expand a healthy middle class. The policy package included universal health care, a universal social pension, a plan for income redistribution rather than purely economic growth, low unemployment rates, progressive taxation and enhancing social welfare. The state's investment in the health of its people and the provision of pensions for older citizens were investments in human capital that paid off in economic terms with a healthier labour force. These measures also increased longevity, and Japan is now one of the oldest and healthiest populations in the world.

Currently, about 34 per cent of Japan's population is 65 years and older, compared to only 7 per cent in 1970. With a hyper-aged population, Japan faces many challenges, including managing long-term care costs. The current situation in Japan shows the future for many countries in Asia/Pacific which are rapidly ageing. What can be done to reduce the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy so that people can spend later life active and healthy, continuing to be a resource and delaying the need for intensive medical care?

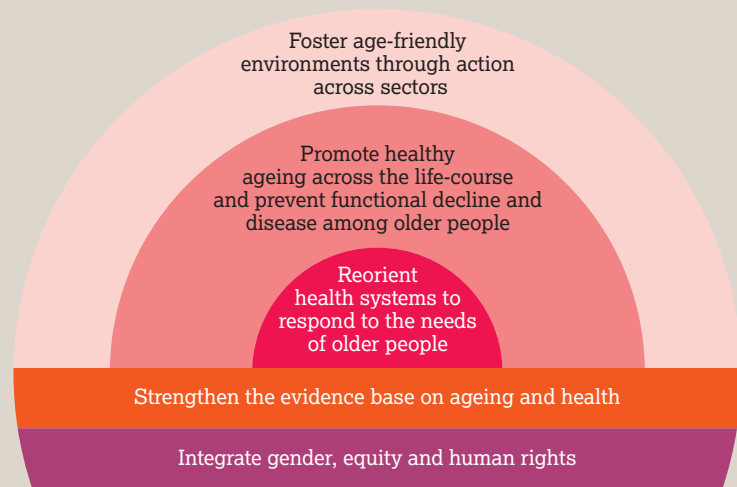
## **The region needs to wake up to the rising burden of non-communicable diseases**

Societies are ageing thanks, in part, to effective public health initiatives which have successfully reduced the communicable and vaccine preventable disease burden. Now, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become the leading causes of death around the world, accounting for over 60 per cent of all deaths. Of those deaths, 80 per cent occur in low and middle income countries, which often are also still combating high rates of infectious disease. NCDs are also a leading cause of morbidity and add to the need for long-term care.

What can be done? A lifecourse approach reminds us that NCD prevention and healthy behaviours can and should begin from childhood, although changes in health behaviours can have powerful effects even if only initiated in later years of life. Older people themselves, their relatives and even medical providers may have perceptions of older people as frail and dependent, rather than understanding the enormous potential of older people to meet many of their own needs through self-care.

Yet self-care and preventive measures are only part of the picture. There must be a rethinking of health priorities and services which takes into account the NCD burden and the special health needs of older people. Also needed is universal health care which ensures access to integrated service delivery, health workers with appropriate skills, equitable health financing and financial protection, and essential medicines and health technology. Government spending to address the health needs of ageing populations has often not been prioritised. The Millennium Development Goals emphasised other health priorities such as reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and fighting HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. The post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals should give greater prioritisation to spending on NCDs and the health needs of people in later life.

## World Health Organisation's framework for action on ageing and health in the Western Pacific with four pillars



Source: World Health Organisation, Regional framework for action on ageing and health in the Western Pacific (2014-2019), 2014

The first two pillars relate to promotion and prevention and the second two to health system response. All of this leads towards allowing older people to maintain good health for as long as possible through prevention and healthy ageing practice and then to allow for appropriate and affordable management of chronic conditions to reduce morbidity and premature mortality.

Some people will eventually require long-term care, and ageing nations need to prepare for a sharp rise in their numbers and a decline in the availability of traditional family caregiving. Family sizes are shrinking and migration is drawing many potential household caregivers to employment opportunities far away from their parents and other ageing relatives. Functional decline from falls, vision difficulties and other causes of disability accompany the NCD burden and escalate with population ageing. Mental health concerns also must be considered, in particular dementia and depression. It is critical for rapidly ageing countries to rethink long-term care solutions which include elements of social interaction, ageing in place and promotion of active ageing.

## Rethinking older people as an economic resource

In considering the economic implications of population ageing, often the picture conjured up is a bleak one: older people who are dependent on their families and governments which struggle to meet the costs of pensions, long-term care and end-of-life health care. Are we facing a future in which 20 to 30 per cent of the population are mostly dependent on others to provide for them?

The impact of ageing populations on economies is actually far more complex. We need to move beyond lazy assumptions and better understand



Wiraphat Wilaisilpdelet/FOPEDEV Thailand



*“The impacts of ageing on growth, labour markets, and public spending are not the unavoidable catastrophe often threatened, but to minimise the downside...is going to require proactive public policy, political leadership and new mindsets across all segments of society”*

*Philip O’Keefe  
Lead Economist, Social Protection  
and Labour, World Bank*



Wiraphat Witiailipdeleert/FOPDEV Thailand

the nuanced interaction between population ageing and the economy. Even the metric of old-age dependency ratios can be misleading: most people in old age are largely independent. The vast majority of older people are reasonably healthy and active, contributing to their households or even leading their communities. We can think of grandparents who are economically active, parents-in-law who watch grandchildren, or highly educated older people at the top of their field as political leaders, researchers and business owners. The Regional Conference itself had dozens of participants over 60 years old: academics, civil society leaders and expert consultants. Still, there is widespread agreement that reform is needed to limit the costs associated with old age and boost the economic participation of people in later life.

### **The macroeconomic implications of population ageing are often misunderstood**

Philip O’Keefe, Regional Lead Economist on Development for the World Bank, gave the conference’s plenary address on the economic implications of population ageing, beginning with an evidence-based analysis of the macroeconomic impact of ageing on economic growth. Many countries in Asia have been experiencing a demographic dividend thanks to falling fertility rates and a working population enlarged by the baby boom, which have led to economic expansion. Simple growth accounting looks ahead mechanically at the economic impacts of demographic ageing as this boom population withdraws from the labour force, and sees major threats on the horizon.

However, this simplistic view may overlook other, countervailing drivers of changing economies. For example, lower fertility rates lead to higher female labour force participation. Smaller family sizes have shown to increase the investment in the education of children, leading to more skilled and productive workforces over time. Extended life expectancy allows people to work longer and save more over their lifetime. Older people are also a growing source of consumption – not just in obvious sectors like health care but across economic spheres – and thereby increase demand for goods and services.

### **Many people can continue to participate in the workforce in later life**

The extension of working years as people live longer is only natural and brings many benefits. Supporting this trend may imply expanding the opportunities for flexible retirement in the formal sector, or promoting other enabling steps for those who wish to continue working into old age in the formal or informal sectors. For the average individual, continued employment obviously improves income security. Also, there is evidence that the earlier a person leaves employment, the earlier cognitive decline will occur. Social isolation is also lower among working older people. From a macroeconomic standpoint, the involvement of older people in the workforce is a near necessity as populations age. Ageing countries should not prevent this experienced and expanding segment of the population from participating in the workforce, but actively create avenues for them to contribute to economic growth.

Forced and fixed retirement ages are a concern because there is nothing to suggest that people can no longer be economically productive once they reach a certain age. In fact, older people have certain skills and experience which are uniquely valuable to the workforce, and they also have lower absenteeism than younger workers. It is also simplistic to say they cannot adapt to new ideas; for example, there is evidence that agricultural

productivity and adaptation of agricultural technologies is similar among older and younger farmers. Some countries enforce a fixed retirement age because of a misconception that older people are holding on to jobs at the expense of young workers just entering the workforce. In fact, the evidence suggests that as more older people work, overall GDP may be higher and more jobs available for younger workers. Also, older and younger workers are generally not in competition for the same types of jobs.

We need therefore to seek creative solutions to increase the labour force participation and productivity of older people. There is a split in strategies for the formal and informal sectors. In low and middle income countries, 60–70 per cent of the population may be in the informal sector, where there is no set retirement age. Workforce participation by age is highest in rural areas, because older people are heavily engaged in agriculture in Asian countries. These older people need to be protected from age discrimination in loan policies and be given job training opportunities. In the formal sector, re-employment and modifications to work environment can help older people who want to work to continue in employment. It is important that public policy, employer/worker behaviour and social attitudes are reoriented to realise the economic opportunities in ageing societies.

### **Unpaid work also needs to be valued**

Older people's contributions to the economy are not limited to employment and consumption. They give enormously through unpaid work, including volunteerism, unpaid domestic labour and childcare. In Asian countries, about half to three-quarters of those aged 65 and older live in intergenerational households. The domestic work and childcare roles often played by older people allow increased labour force participation by younger adults. The impact is heightened by another major demographic trend in Asia: migration to urban centres for work. As a result, many households are made up only of grandparents and their grandchildren. The economic impact of the grandparents' contributions is often overlooked but needs to be quantified, highlighted and recognised.

The conference also heard many examples of volunteerism among older people, particularly older women. They provide care for other older people who are frail. They volunteer in community-led disaster preparedness, emergency response and health education. Many Older People's Associations in this region have become vibrant community-based structures for organising older volunteers. In addition to contributing to their communities, older people also benefit from volunteering by learning new skills, staying engaged locally and expanding their social participation.

### **Social protection is a crucial investment in ageing societies**

The conference discussed the role of state-provided social protection to ensure the income security of poor older people. In particular, this includes social pensions, which are non-contributory state-financed benefits provided to older people. Several speakers viewed social pensions as an investment, citing studies which show that older people receiving a social pension spend much of it locally, boosting local economies, or use it to find work, start a business or support their families. Some touted it as a key tool in income redistribution, noting evidence of a decrease in poverty among households of older people receiving pensions. Others suggested that social pensions should be viewed as compensation for the years of contribution to the country's economy, particularly for those involved in informal sector work or women who contributed throughout their lives with unpaid domestic work or childrearing.



Wiraphat Wilaisijdelet/FOPDEV Thailand

# Perceptions of older people in society and the media

Current policy dialogue and society's views of older people remain entrenched in the perception of older people merely as a vulnerable population to be assisted. Family members, political leaders, community members and even older people themselves can accept a negative perception of people in later life that does not match reality.

The reality is complex. Some older people require care and extensive support, but most do not. While many older people rely on others for income security, others have assets, income or savings that they use to support their adult children and grandchildren. While some older people suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's disease, others continue with achievements and breakthroughs in their professions. Some have physical limitations but retain and use their sharp mental faculties. This diversity means that perceptions and public policy should not be rigid, inflexible and based on stereotypes.

In his plenary presentation, Nalaka Gunawardene, journalist and head of TVE Asia, explained the power of perceptions and how to influence them. Perceptions matter because they influence not only personal opinions but also policy and investment. These perceptions are formed through media, culture, formal education, life experience and advertising. The news media is too often guilty of over-simplification, and social media looks for exciting sound bites which may reach a large audience but which lack depth. Images in the news and entertainment are powerful and may subtly lend to negative social perceptions of older people.

What can be done? Advocacy and education of those purveying media content can pay off. Disseminating accurate, high-quality information is important: when an academic study is published, key messages should be shared with news outlets and on social media. Our messages need to be clear and avoid contributing to simplistic and negative perceptions.



The symbol commonly used to denote older people implies weakness, dependence and impaired mobility.



Wiraphat Wilaisilpdelet/FOPDEV Thailand

## Parallel sessions

This section highlights the discussions during the series of nine parallel sessions held on the second day of the conference. Some of the sessions allowed for presentations of recent research while others provided a forum for debate and discussion on specific challenges and strategies related to the theme of the conference.



Wiraphat Wilaitsipdelet/FOPDEV Thailand

### Flexible retirement

With increased longevity and improved health in later life, flexible retirement is an alternative that can be explored for the formal sector. However, it was recognised that for a significant portion of the region the majority of its workforce is in the informal sector and unpaid household work. Opportunities for older workers to continue employment are often restricted by barriers such as legal/regulatory retirement ages, a preference for younger workers and conditions of pension plans. The right to work should be guaranteed and retirement age deregulated. Job opportunities and re-employment for older people should be considered. Innovations in work environment, redesigned jobs, re-skilling and making allowance for reduced working hours can help increase labour force participation for older people. Changing the mindsets of employers, policymakers and the public at large towards older workers will ease the path towards policy and practice change. Gathering and sharing empirically based data is necessary for advocacy towards a reformed work context for older people.



### Older people in the informal sector

Many people in Asia continue to work in old age, and most of them work in the informal sector as self-employed, casual workers and/or in non-market activities. In thinking about policy priorities for this group, it is useful to distinguish between two policy directions: promoting inclusion for all informal workers including older people (e.g. training and access to credit) and specifically addressing the needs of older informal workers (e.g. social pensions). Both approaches are critical. Work and social protection are reinforcing elements of income support in old age – forming a mutually virtuous circle. It is vital to make sure that older informal workers “exist” in official terms and have legal documentation and that more effort is made to measure and value the significant amount of unpaid or informal work they perform. Organising older informal worker is important to improve work conditions and protect their labour rights.

### Who is farming the land?

As overall populations are ageing in low and middle income countries, so are their farming populations. Farm populations in most countries are ageing faster than urban populations, as younger adults in farming families migrate to urban centres for work or pursue alternate forms of employment. In Asia, a high proportion of those who own agricultural land are over 55 years old, which means that management control over farms is often in the hands of older farmers. People over 60 rely more heavily on agriculture as a source of employment than younger age groups. Evidence from data in Thailand suggests that farm households headed by older people have similar rates of adoption of new technologies, production of cash crops, application of fertiliser, agricultural output and similar access to land and credit as younger farmers. A few questions need further study: How best can the removal of age discrimination, such as exclusion from agricultural support programmes and services, be achieved? How can we ensure inclusion of older farmers and population ageing in the current debates on smallholder farming versus commercial farming? How can agriculture be made more profitable and less strenuous for farmers of all ages?



### Older people in community development

Older people’s associations (OPAs), known by various names around the region, are community-based organisations which mobilise older people to improve their own lives and to contribute to the development of their communities. The OPA approach is flexible to its context but has certain elements which are consistent: all models engage older people in leadership roles and ensure wide ownership and participation; they all promote self-help and build on the community’s existing resources; and the most successful are multifunctional, addressing interrelated needs of the community such as: livelihoods, health and social care; social participation; rights and entitlements; and disaster preparedness. In order to widen their impact, it is important to see horizontal and vertical scale-up of OPAs and higher-level representative structures, such as OPA federations and councils. Civil society can expand and strengthen OPAs. Governments can assist OPA development through policy support, reduce barriers to registration and accessing local sources of funding, and recognise and support the developmental role OPAs can play. The evidence base for OPAs contribution to holistic community development needs to be increased through research and well-documented pilots.



### Older people in emergencies and disaster risk reduction (DRR)

Emergencies and disasters are another arena in which the prevailing paradigm considers older people as a vulnerable group. In reality a majority of older people are active and often have the time, ability and willingness to provide assistance to others in their communities. In this region, older people are involved in assessments, relief distribution, monitoring of activities and developing contingency plans. Organising older people to assist in DRR and emergency relief, particularly through community-based mechanisms such as OPAs, is the best way to maximise their involvement and effectiveness in DRR. Some ideas to improve older people’s productive engagement in emergencies and DRR are:

- 1) to include in rapid assessments both older people who are vulnerable and older people with potential to support immediate relief distributions
- 2) to consider active roles for older people in refugee and displaced camps
- 3) to ensure the mainstreaming of older people in relief efforts, both as recipients of relief and as volunteers serving their communities
- 4) to develop a database on older people's capacities at the local and regional level
- 5) for older people's indigenous knowledge on climate change to be transmitted to younger generations
- 6) to map older people in risk assessments at local and regional levels
- 7) to improve older people's technical knowledge on DRR.

### **Older volunteers in ageing societies: the case of China**

Many older persons actively contribute as volunteers at the community level in China in a variety of ways, particularly towards improved health and education. The formal and informal unpaid contributions of older people must be recognised and encouraged. Older people are better qualified and healthier than in the past, thus it is no longer just the elite who should be considered qualified to volunteer. Also, volunteering has biological, social and psychological benefits for the older volunteers themselves. A study by the Renmin University of China on volunteers over the age of 50 found that 81 per cent of volunteers are married, 79 per cent are women, 30.1 per cent are 50–59 and 40.8 per cent are 60–69. 78 per cent of volunteers have served for more than five years, usually weekly or monthly. There are nearly 450,000 older people's volunteer organisations with 20 million members. Though the number of older volunteers is large, this is a largely untapped resource with much potential. Much still needs to be done in capacity building for volunteer management, particularly in areas of training, retention and protection.





### **How elders contribute to the household and family**

The session focused on findings about the households of older people based on national research on ageing in Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. The research found that older people are making important contributions to their households. Consider the following statistics from these three countries: 57–72 per cent of older people contribute regularly in household chores, 35–49 per cent provide care for household members including grandchildren, 20–48 per cent provide of significant financial support of grandchildren in skip generation households, 23–62 per cent repair and maintain houses, and 62–90 per cent of intergenerational homes are owned by the older person. Between 57–77 per cent of older people in these countries live in households with their children; however, demographic and social changes are altering family structures and relationships. Documenting the material and non-material contributions of older people to the household through additional research would be useful to help change policies and perceptions. Defining the role of public services can provide relief and support to families who lean too heavily on older family members.

### **Healthy ageing: challenges, priorities and roadmap**

The empowerment of older people themselves to maintain good health, seek early diagnosis, and manage their health is an incredibly effective tool in healthy ageing. How can older people be supported to practice healthy behaviours, avoid behavioural risk factors and manage NCDs? There are several promising approaches in the region which should be scaled up and shared. Better Vision and Healthy Ageing in Sri Lanka is looking at the impact of elder clubs and peer education on prevention and management of



eye health problems. The World Health Organisation's Age Friendly Cities initiative aims to create inclusive and accessible urban environments to benefit ageing populations. The Tsao Foundation in Singapore has found improvements in health behaviours and a reduction in social isolation from the Self-Care on Health of Older Persons, a programme which provides uses peer-support groups and training on health promotion, disease prevention, and health seeking behaviour, chronic disease management and anti-stigmatization. HelpAge International and its network partners in the region have been using older people's associations (known under various names) as a way to increase peer education, health knowledge, promote healthy behaviours, increase screenings and check-ups, and link older people to needed care.

### **Ageing in the post-2015 agenda**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global development framework succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will be ratified by the United Nations member states in September 2015. While ageing was not included in the MDGs, the post-2015 SDGs will be more comprehensive. The SDGs thus present an opportunity for addressing global ageing, particularly as they will influence donor funding, government planning and financial priorities, and policy development. Ageing can be included in the SDGs not only by mentioning older people as a vulnerable group but also by taking into account the dramatic population ageing occurring globally. Currently there is a draft of the SDGs which specifically mentions older people or age in several points, using phrases like "for all ages", "for all", "irrespective of age" and "older persons". This is seen strongly in the focus areas on ending poverty and hunger and reducing inequality as well as in the goal for healthy life and well-being for "all ages". These word choices are essential in ensuring the inclusion of older people. The SDG draft is in the inter-governmental discussion phase. We need to identify opportunities to engage with national governments and regional/sub-regional bodies and to seek out champion nations who actively support the ageing agenda.



Judith Escribano/HelpAge International

# Conclusions: How do we redesign ageing societies?

*“There is a small window of opportunity to address these issues and ensure that older people can be a resource and not a burden”*

*Silvia Stefanoni,  
Deputy CEO and Director of Policy  
and Programmes of HelpAge  
International*



Wiraphat Wilaisipdeert/FOPDEV Thailand

Conference speakers and participants made a wide range of suggestions and recommendations throughout the conference. Several common themes emerged:

## Health

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

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

## Economy

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

- There is an urgent need to develop **alternative thinking** to the dominant paradigm that equates old age with dependency and burden.
- The links between **ageing and economics**, and the contributions of older people to the macro-economy and household economies, need to be further researched and highlighted and the current narrative of 'burden' corrected.



Judith Escribano/HelpAge International

*“Older people are human beings, not human ‘doings’”*

*Fransiskus Kupang  
Coalition of Services of the Elderly  
(COSE), Philippines*



- People who are willing and able to continue **working into old age** should be facilitated to do so. Creative solutions are needed, including flexible retirement arrangements, access to credit, job training and measures that reduce discrimination and barriers to work in the formal and informal sectors.
- The value of **non-market work** through volunteer and unpaid household and agricultural labour should be measured and recognised.
- All countries should aim at universal, adequate and sustainable systems to ensure income security in old age, including the provision of **social pensions** and other means of social protection for those without formal pension coverage.
- Looking to the future, states need to **invest in human capital** through improved education and health care, in order to develop more healthy, productive, and highly skilled workforces.

### Perceptions

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

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

*“Older persons have contributed and are contributing and have the same right to live with health, income security and be included in society. I would like the focus to be rights-based and to move towards a convention on the rights of older people”*

*Srinivas Tata  
Social Policy and Population Section, UNESCAP*





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