



Ministry of Social Welfare,
Relief and Resettlement



Voice of older people forum

8-10 May 2012, Yangon, Myanmar



**HelpAge
International**

global network



Foreword

How could anyone be an “expert” on ageing without listening to the voice of older people? It would be like having a tree without roots or a symphony without violins.

So, in parallel to the Regional Conference of the HelpAge Network held in Myanmar, 17 senior citizens, men and women, from all over Asia gathered in Yangon to share their personal experiences and express their views on care in old age.

They came from 13 countries and related to different spheres of life. Some were farmers, others social workers, academics or union leaders. Some of them were retired, others did not really know the meaning of “retirement”. The oldest – but with a very young spirit – was 93 years old. Their average age was 75 years. Their combined life spans added to nearly 1,300 years. They had their own deliberations at *the Voice of Older People Forum*, which later enlightened the Regional Conference in a memorable session. The points they made were sharp, clear, rooted in common sense and were shared eloquently with wisdom and a recurrent sense of humour.

Their message is clear: ageing is challenging. But older people are also part of the solution.

This report summarises their views and recommendations.

**Eduardo Klien, Regional Director
HelpAge International
East Asia/Pacific Regional Office**

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

Voice of older people forum

Published by HelpAge International – East Asia/Pacific Regional Office

HelpAge International – East Asia/Pacific Regional Office
6 Soi 17, Nimmanhemmin Road
Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai 50200
Thailand, T: +66-53-225440 F: +66-53-225441
www.helpage.org hai@helpageasia.org

Photos by: Carolyn Canham/HelpAge International,
Jim Holmes/HelpAge International, Judith Escibano/Age UK,
Wiraphat Wilaisilpdelert/FOPDEV Thailand

Any parts of this publication may be reproduced for non-profit purposes unless indicated otherwise.
Please clearly credit HelpAge International and send us a copy of the reprinted article or a web link.

Why is care important in old age?



Care in old age is a basic human right. It contributes to having a full life, with dignity. It is important for older people to be treated with the respect and gratitude they deserve. Providing older people with quality care evokes happiness and affirms that they are still needed. Spiritual care is equally as important as physical and mental care. It is vital to be at peace with yourself when you get older.

“Care is more beneficial if it is loving care, given with commitment and not just out of duty.”

*Dr. Daw Khin Aye Win, 73
Myanmar*

Key points

- Holistic care is essential for the wellbeing of an older person.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on mental health of older people as they are vulnerable to isolation and depression.
- Socialisation is important for mental and emotional wellbeing.
- Old age is a time to be enjoyed.
- Older people still have much to give back to the community.

When is living alone no longer an option for older people?



It is estimated that over 8 per cent of the population living in Member States of the World Health Organization's South-East Asia Region are above the age of 60 years. This proportion is expected to increase to 12 per cent by 2025, and to over 20 per cent by 2050. Increasingly, a growing segment of this population is forced to live alone due to migration, lack of family support and changing family structures. Poverty is the main reason for abandoning the older people.

However many older people, particularly those living in urban cities with sufficient resources are also choosing to live alone. It was interesting to discover that 6 out of the 17 participants in this forum live alone.

“I did not realise I was old until I was asked to attend a meeting for older people!”

*Cho Ki Dong, 81
HelpAge Korea*

However recurring health problems and the lack of adequate health and social services are circumstances where it becomes almost impossible for older people to live alone. The participants insisted that it is the poor and vulnerable older people who need most support for whom living alone is not a choice but is forced upon them.

Key points

- It is the poor and vulnerable older people who are forced to live alone.
- Migration of the young has significantly contributed to the increasing number of older people living alone in rural areas.
- While some countries offer free or subsidised healthcare, others have to spend a high proportion of their little income for healthcare and medicine.
- Six out of the 17 participants live alone.

What care services will be required by older people living at home?



Most people prefer to age at home or in their communities. But most households and communities are not prepared, even if they have the willingness. It is important to promote preventive care and healthy ageing for the old and the young in urban and rural communities. In this way older people can be independent longer.

“The spiritual dimension also needs to be taken care of to spend the rest of your life in happiness.”

*Dr. Daw Yin Yin Myint, 75
Myanmar*

Key points

- Older people’s associations (OPAs) are vital for supporting and caring for older people in their communities.
- Train volunteers and healthcare professionals in home care for older people.
- Psychological and spiritual support should come from the communities themselves.
- Day care centres for older people if their carer or family cannot look after them.
- In rural areas community-based care and/or transport for older people who cannot reach hospitals and medical clinics on their own.
- Palliative care should be available even in rural communities.
- Geriatric medicines are critical for an older person’s health.
- Gender-specific care is very important.
- Introduction of social pensions for the very poor

How can care services be delivered in urban settings and rural communities?



Home care services can be provided for older people through community organisations in both rural and urban settings. Professional short courses, diplomas or certificates in home care for older people could be offered through universities and other educational institutions. Older people are not just passive recipients of care; they too can be employed to offer services to fellow older people in the community. Older people's associations (OPAs) have proven to be very effective in many countries and communities.

One of the most significant recommendations to arise from the two-day forum was the potential role faith-based organisations could play in supporting and caring for older people. These organisations can mobilise community members and raise awareness on the issues of older people, as well as organise groups to deliver services and disseminate information about older people's care to the community. Faith-based

organisations could also be a valuable resource for recruiting volunteers as they are important for social networking and already do much respected work in the community in assisting vulnerable citizens. Temples and churches are crucial in emergency relief as they serve as a centre for refuge in disasters.

“To remain young, you must not think of yourself as old. If you start listening too much to older people you grow old faster.”

*Datuk Lum Kin Tuck, 93
Malaysia*

Key recommendations

- It is a **basic human right** of every individual to be able to live a full and healthy life with dignity.
- Older people are not a homogenous group. They have different needs at **different stages of life**.
- Some older people are unable to take care of themselves, it is important that in the absence of family they still receive the **physical, mental and spiritual care** they need.
- Care is beneficial when it is **given with love, compassion and commitment** and not just out of duty.
- The introduction of **social pensions** should be a **priority** of governments in addressing ageing.
- **Older people's associations (OPAs)** are vital for providing care and are effective in facilitating dialogue between community and local government.
- Reliance on the government's efforts alone is not the solution. A **community response** must be delivered as well. **Government, NGOs and civil society should partner** to deliver care services to older people in the community.
- More **volunteers and healthcare professionals** must be trained to provide support in the home for older people when it is needed.
- Older people are not just passive recipients of care, they are also **capable of delivering services** to fellow older persons. Older people could be trained to become community volunteers to provide **holistic care services**.



- A **network of retired professionals** could be developed, including nurses and doctors, who can volunteer and train others to serve the needs of vulnerable older people.
- The use of **information technology** could be implemented to expand care services in communities and training for volunteers on the use of mobile technology to support older people in need.
- **Collaboration** between governments and the private sector could consider implementing a **health insurance programme** for older people.
- **Faith-based organisations** can mobilise community members, raise awareness on the issues of older people particularly their care needs, and organise groups to deliver services.

Participants



Datuk Lum Kin Tuck, Malaysia, at 94 years old, was the oldest, and perhaps also the youngest, of the group. Since founding the National Union of Teachers of Malaysia in 1950, he has never stopped fighting for the rights of others. He is the President of NACSCOM and has wide recognition and respect, from the humble and the powerful alike. When Datuk Lum speaks everyone listens.



Ms Basiano Salvacion Nazarrea, Philippines, is a former President of the Confederation of Older People's Association of the Philippines (COPAP). She was one of the leaders of the public rally of older persons campaigning successfully with the President for the Expanded Social Protection Bill for Senior Citizens. In 2009 she received an award for one of the 10 outstanding older people in the Philippines.



Dr Daw Myint Myint Khin, Myanmar, is the President of the Support group for Elderly Doctors in Myanmar. She is a distinguished academic and writer. She is an expert on issues of mental health and older people. Her commitment to improving the health of people in the country is very inspiring.



Mr Bala Tampoe, Sri Lanka, is the General Secretary of the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU) for 60 years. Now in his 90s, he is an example of lifetime commitment in the search for creating equitable societies. The eloquence and passion he demonstrates in his daily activities and his work ethics are truly inspirational for the old and young in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



Mr Sovann Tan, Cambodia, is a leader of the Prey Touch older people's association in Cambodia. He is one of the key spokesperson and represents older people at provincial and national forums in Cambodia. He is devoted to community development so all can benefit equally.



Ms Elfy Roesmiani, Indonesia, is 76 years old. She has been a member of Yayasan Emong Lansia (YEL) since 1999, and is now the Treasurer. She is also an active member of the Epilepsy Association and the Jakarta Communication Forum of older persons. Although soft spoken, she makes very strong points.



Dr Daw Khin Aye Win, Myanmar, is a Freelance Consultant on Education. She is equally committed to social development issues and has a vision of a country where the young and the old share and learn from each other to create stronger societies.



Ms Vajiraya Buasri, Thailand, is the Vice President of the National Council of Social Welfare of Thailand (NCSWT) and a voice for older people in the country. She is a strong advocate on active ageing of older people in Thailand. She herself is a great example of positive thinking and positive ageing.



Mr Saradin Rahman, India, is a leader of the village older people's association of Jetadasar village in the desert state of Rajasthan in India. The desert is an extremely difficult and a hard place to live and survive. It is people like Mr Saradin who share their knowledge and experience to support and encourage the rest of the community to lead a better quality of life despite the hardship.



Ms Ferdous Ara Begum, Bangladesh, is a former member of the UN CEDAW Committee and a Gender specialist. She has been involved in women's empowerment for many years and is a leading voice in the country and internationally.

Participants



Mr Cho Ki-Dong, Republic of Korea, is one of the leading social workers in the Republic of Korea. He is the founder of HelpAge Korea and the architect of the ROK-ASEAN Home Care Programme. He is modest and inspirational, a visionary of ageing not only in Korea but in the Asia region.



Dr Daw Yi Yi Myint, Myanmar, is a Founder and advisor to the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs' Association. She is also the Executive Committee Member of the Myanmar Academy of Arts & Sciences and Vice President of the U Hla Tun (Cancer) Foundation. She is a very committed social worker and strives hard to improve the lives of people through her many activities.



Ms Nguyen Thi Ngoc Trai, Vietnam, (Madam Ngoc Trai) combines her vocation of researcher and critic of literature in Vietnam with her commitment to the Red Cross and to the Research Centre on Ageing. She is a leader of the home care programme in Vietnam, and is a well known advocate for older people.



Ms Lee Li Ming, Singapore, is around 73 and was caregiver for almost 40 years to her husband. She now shares her experience nationally and regionally to raise awareness of families and care providers on effective caring within families.



Mr Pham Huy Tien, Vietnam, is a Medical Advisor with the Centre for Ageing Support and Community Development (CASCD) in Vietnam. He brings years of experience to strengthen healthcare services for older people in Vietnam.



Mr Pak Sutrisno, Indonesia, retired as a Captain from the Indonesian Army several years ago. After the Tsunami of 2004, he became a leader of the older people's association (OPA) in Banda Aceh, and of the Forum (Association) of OPAs. He is an action-oriented person, involved not only in what the OPA and the community are doing, but also in what they still have to do.



Dr Yin Htoon, Myanmar, is a member of the Executive Committee at Hnin Si Gone Home for the Aged in Yangon. He is very knowledgeable about the situation of older people in Myanmar and is keen to share his experience to improve their lives.

“If you think about yourself, you turn inward. If you think about other people you are not depressed and you move forward. Life communicates life.”

*Bala Tampoe, 90
Sri Lanka*



Front (Left to right): Basiano Salvacion Nazarrea (Philippines), Nguyen Thi Ngoc Trai (Vietnam), Elfy Roesmiani (Indonesia), Dr Daw Yi Yi Myint (Myanmar), Dr Vajiraya Buasri (Thailand), Ferdous Ara Begum (Bangladesh), Dr Daw Myint Myint Khin (Myanmar), Dr Daw Khin Aye Win (Myanmar), Lee Li Ming (Singapore)

Back (Left to right): Pham Huy Tien (Vietnam), Jib Juthamas (HelpAge), Kov Meng (HelpAge), Godfred Paul (HelpAge), Pak Sutrisno (Indonesia), Bala Tampoe (Sri Lanka), Sovann Tan (Cambodia), Dr Yin Htoon (Myanmar), Saradin Rahman (India), Cho Ki-Dong (Republic of Korea), Datuk Lum Kin Tuck (Malaysia), Htsu San (HelpAge)

“Doing things for others keeps older people active and involved. It gives them a lot of satisfaction.”

*Saradin Rahman,
India*