

**DAY 1: 26 AUGUST 2013, MULTIPURPOSE HALL,
India International Centre 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi-110001**

TIME: 9:30-11:15 AM

The Session for Country-wise Review: Critical Challenges & Concerns was taken by

1. Dr. Massouda Jalal, *Founder, Jalal Foundation (Afghanistan)*
2. SheguftaSharmin, *Communications And Campaign Coordinator, HelpAge International (Bangladesh)*
3. SangitaNirola, *Country Director, HelpAge International (Nepal)*

Comments and Observations:

- Shegufta Sharmin-
 - Poverty rates are high among elderly,
 - No segregated services for geriatric care in health system or policy,
 - Elder people suffering from abuse, neglect, loneliness and lack of care,
 - Policy makers should think of a way to reduce the burden of the Grandmothers

- Dr. Massouda Jalal-
 - Wholesale denial of Human rights and opportunities to women,
 - Gender based oppression,
 - Women generally outlive men, but it is the opposite in Afghanistan,
 - Women are seen nothing more than as a baby-maker,
 - No care and social security for elderly women,
 - Prisoner treatment with verbal, physical and psychological abuse

Abstracts from this session are:

1. **Title:** Empowering Afghan women in a context of an ageing global population

Author: Dr. Massouda Jalal, *Founding Chairperson of Jalal Foundation and Former Minister of Women, Afghanistan*

I. INTRODUCTION

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, a writer popularly known as Mark Twain, once said that “*life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen*”. This is debatable in the context of Afghanistan where women’s life

runs in a spectrum of indescribable suffering throughout their lifetime. But it would be such an inspiration to imagine how power equation would change and how it could foster peace, human rights, and democracy if Afghan women would be born at the age of 80 and men at the age of 18.

Power instantaneously comes with age, but not in Afghanistan where wholesale denial of rights and opportunities are imposed against women in all aspects of life. With a society that supports gender-based oppression and an economy that is held hostage by armed conflict, corruption, weak human resources, and wayward politics, Afghanistan may be the worst place in the world for women to grow old.

II. AFGHAN WOMEN AND THE FEMINIZED AGEING POPULATION OF THE WORLD

The ageing of population and women's dominance in the older age groups is a reality that confronts all countries of the world.

Only two years ago, Afghanistan was known as a country where women never grow old – not because they remain young forever, but because their average life expectancy was only 44 years. While women in many countries are just beginning to peak in their career at this age, Afghan women's life is already over. In the 2011 Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) survey, however, Afghan women's life expectancy was found to have risen to 61 years¹. According to Public Health Minister Suraiya Dalil, this may be attributed to *“improvements in health conditions, nutrition in childhood, positive changes in lifestyle, better management of households, and reductions in the miseries of life”*. It may also be attributed to some improvements in reproductive health care, given that ailments related to reproductive health is the major cause of female deaths in Afghanistan.

Globally, the trend is even more pronounced. Recent population statistics show a sharp upward direction in the growth of older women's population globally; and at a speed that is faster than commensurate growths in other age groups. The United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) predicts that in the next 10 years, the number of people over age 60 and above will surpass one billion. For the Asia-Pacific region including South Asia, the population of older people is predicted to triple from 453 million in 2012 to 1.26 billion by 2050. During such period, it is estimated that one in every four people in the region will be over 60 years old. More importantly, the same data shows that women constitute 53.5 percent of the population aged 60 or older in the region. As the age goes higher, the proportion of ageing women to men also increases. At present, women already represent 61 percent of the “oldest old” or 80 years and older age group². This trend, which also holds true for other regions of the world, shows that ageing has already taken a feminized trend.

III. CHALLENGES FACED BY AGEING AFGHAN WOMEN

¹<http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan%E2%80%99s-rising-elderly-population-im...>

² UNFPA, Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and a Challenge.

1) **Low life expectancy of Afghan women**

Although the dramatic rise in female life expectancy in Afghanistan is hailed as a very positive development, the fact that Afghan women die much sooner compared to their sisters in other parts of the world remains a major concern. The new life expectancy figure for Afghan women is still around 29 years short of the life expectancy of 89.68 years for women in Monaco, which is the highest female longevity in the world as of 2012³.

It is also important to point out that while women in most countries outlive their male counterparts, the reverse is true in Afghanistan. As of 2009⁴, the population of Afghan women aged 60 and above is around 564,780 or 2.3 percent of the Afghan population. This is lower by 217,356 than the population of males in the same age group; a proof that despite the continuing armed conflict which has been taking the lives of many men for years, women are still dying in disproportionately higher number. These being so, it is important to recognize that discourses on women's ageing need to pay attention to the extraordinary circumstances that prevent them from reaching their full longevity potentials.

2) **Diminished value as human beings**

The experience of Afghanistan shows that once a society accepts that women are generally dying after their child-bearing years, women's importance is consequently reduced to nothing more than a baby-maker. Then, their worth as human beings - with rights, capacities, potentials and other needs across their lifetime - are dramatically obliterated. With a perspective like this, public policy and action tend to give lopsided emphasis to women's pregnancy and domestic roles - to the detriment of their needs as senior citizens. This explains why Afghanistan decision makers miss the agenda of social security measures for ageing women; why no agency of the government is dedicated to the care of the elderly; and why there is no implementing policy for the care and protection of the old people of the country.

3) **Inadequate welfare support to ageing Afghan women**

In policy, the State explicitly commits to assist in the care of needy elders. Article 53, Section 2 of the Afghan Constitution provides that, "*The State guarantees the rights and privileges of pensioners and disabled and handicapped individuals and as well renders necessary assistance to needy elders, women with caretakers, and needy orphans in accordance with the law.*"

Yet, the government does not allocate sufficient resources for the pension and care of needy elders. This was acknowledged in paragraph 16 of the combined first and second reports of the Afghanistan government on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which states that, "*The government*

³The World Factbook, 2012. 2. U.S. Census Bureau, International Database.

⁴ CSO Statistics, 2009.

*has granted the pensions and gives the needed financial support to the elders, poor women.... However, due to shortage of financial resources, the government is not able to provide sufficient social services.”*⁵ The neediest elders receive no more than the equivalent of \$5 dollars a month. And as long as millions of dollars are being spent to fight a senseless battle with anti-government elements, our people could never expect the government to consider social security of the elders as a priority.

In this scenario, the care for elders in Afghanistan continues to be in the hands of families. Unfortunately, Afghan families are ruled by men. All women, including the female elders, are expected to submit to the full authority of the family head - or face the risk of verbal, economic, psychological, and physical violence. Ageing women have limited voice in the family. Their engagement outside of the home is restricted, and they are denied of rights and opportunities for quality life that ageing women enjoy in other societies. Their life is characterized by confinement to household activities, bereft of social, recreational and other stimulating activities – almost like being in a prison with a death sentence.

In such a context, it is important to consider that 36 percent of the country’s population is living below the poverty line. This figure translates into 9 million Afghans being unable to meet their daily basic needs. Likewise, Afghanistan’s Gross National Income and Gross Domestic Product are the lowest in the South Asian Region and its latest value for ‘age dependency ratio’, or the ratio of dependents (people younger than 15 or older than 64) per 100 working-age population in the country, was estimated at 93.55 as of 2011⁶. This figure is still expected to increase given the positive trends in people’s life expectancy. These being so, it is clear that Afghan families may not have the resources necessary to decently care for their elders. Within extremely poor families, old women would increasingly be perceived as an economic burden, especially when faced with expenses for health problems that are normally associated with ageing.

4) **Absence of health services for female Afghan elders**

Ageing is associated with degeneration of health and physical capacities. A UNAMA article last year reported that “*health workers say that disabilities linked with old age, such as weak eye sight, slower mental capabilities and memory loss, have grown*”. Minister Suraiya Dalil also stated in the same article that “*over 65 percent of people above 50 years of age are suffering from eye problems while about six percent reported abnormal behavior*”. Although they are important, such observations failed to recognize the reproductive health issues affecting ageing women and the fact that in a country where people have been constantly exposed to extreme violence and violence against women for years, such experience may have taken a serious toll at their physical and emotional well-beings.

⁵Combined First and Second Report of the Government of Afghanistan on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2011.

⁶World Bank staff estimates from various sources including census reports, the United Nations Population Division’s World Population Prospects, national statistical offices, household surveys conducted by national agencies, and ICF International.

The Ministry of health created a special department to develop an action plan to combat diabetes, cancer and cardiac illnesses, which could also be beneficial to ageing women. However, ageing women could only access them on limited basis because shortage of public resources generally shrinks the outreach of such services, leaving many remote areas deprived of health care. Furthermore, there are only a handful of female health service providers in the country and Afghan society still frowns upon treatment of female patients by male health professionals.

5) **Lack of studies/data on the ageing Afghan population**

Because of the doubling of Afghan population in the past decade, the number of old people is likely to grow sharply. It now comprises 6 percent of the population, a 200 percent increase from the figure of the past ten years.

Despite this reality, very little attention is being given to the issue of the ageing population in the country. There are no comprehensive studies about their situation that could inform policy/law making, planning and programming. The government's preoccupation with the peace process leaves the concern of ageing women invisible in government priorities. There are very scanty data about the ageing population and there is hardly any effort to use them for policy or program decision making.

Where data on elders are available, the analysis of gender differences in their health, security, physical, emotional and other needs are missing. As female elders do not have much opportunity to raise their voice in public affairs, there is little attention and interest on them as a subject of research. The fact that all people are bound to become elders in the future may be an opportunity to make ageing an agenda of youth, women, and other marginalized groups. In an ideal situation, however, elder women themselves will have to speak up and call attention to the State's neglect of their situation.

6) **Absence of activism for the ageing Afghan women**

Afghan NGOs and international entities usually act as advocacy groups and providers of missing interventions to the neglected sectors of the Afghan population. However, nothing of this kind is present to address the plight of ageing women. There are no entities promoting the organization of ageing people, coming up with agenda for advocacy and action, or raising public consciousness on the needs and issues affecting them. There is an Afghan Elderly Association that was founded in Fremont, California on 8 January 1995 but little is known about what it does for the ageing population inside Afghanistan. Media, which has always been active in bringing information and knowledge to the public, are also silent about the situation of ageing women. Male elders who are involved in policy and decision making never bring up the issues and needs of elders as it may not augur well with the image of continuing competence that they try to maintain for themselves in public. All of these reinforce the lack of attention to the ageing women of Afghanistan and contributes to their invisibility in the realms of public policy and action.

7) Gender biased attitudes of society toward ageing Afghan women

Respect for elders is very much part of Afghan culture. However, the standard of respect and behavior remarkably differs for old women and men. Men are revered and their ideas are sought in important decision making processes at the national, community and family levels. These include settling of disputes and resolution of economic, political and security issues. 'Shuras' or councils of elders are traditionally limited to men although the peace and reconstruction initiatives of the past 12 years had paved the way for the formation of all-female shuras or the membership of women in traditionally male-only shuras.

The older a man becomes, the greater is the value and status he gains in society. This is not the same for women. Right from birth, females are already consigned to a subordinate status and the degree of subordination heightens, up to the time that a daughter-in-law joins the household. The eldest woman presides over the affairs of the younger women in the family, especially in preserving the tradition of honor and morality, which in Afghan society, is symbolized by women's purity, subservience, self-sacrifice, modesty, and obedience to traditions that are dictated by men. This power is gradually taken over by the next-in-line as a woman gets to be too old to carry out such function. Because they are confined to the very limited social circle of the family, their twilight years no longer give space for further growth and productivity. Very old women, especially those who could no longer take care of themselves, may increasingly be perceived as a burden to some members of the family and to the household economy.

8) Greater vulnerability to violence and disasters

In an "honor and shame" society like ours, little is known about the extent of violence that elder women experience within the family. Disrespect for elders is a very shameful act, both for the offender and the victim. It is possible however, that emotional or verbal violence among ageing women is rampant in the country.

More worrisome, however, is the fact that a country that is constantly in conflict, like Afghanistan, may leave ageing women as among the most likely casualties of armed fightings and bombings. The extent of this problem may never be known as media and authorities do not disaggregate the record of casualties by sex and age. This is also true for victims of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. Failing eyesight, poor locomotive capacity, diminished mental alertness, and weakening of senses make them vulnerable and unable to save or protect themselves when necessary.

IV. GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF AGEING WOMEN

Globally, there are important opportunities to promote the empowerment of ageing women in Afghanistan.

1. Women-specific empowerment provisions of MIPAA

MIPAA or the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Political Declaration may be considered as the major springboards in defining a framework for the empowerment of ageing women globally.

These international policy instruments were adopted in April 2002 by 159 governments. Their priority directions are: (1) older persons and development, (2) advancing health and well-being into old age, and (3) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. They put emphasis on the role of governments in “*promoting, providing and ensuring access to basic social services, bearing in mind specific needs of older persons*”.⁷ More importantly, Article 5 of the Political Declaration states that, “*We reaffirm the commitment to spare no effort to promote democracy, strengthen the rule of law and promote gender equality...*”. MIPAA also provides that “*Older women outnumber older men, increasingly so as age increases. The situation of older women everywhere must be a priority for policy action. Recognizing the differential impact of ageing on women and men is integral in ensuring full equality between women and men and to the development of effective and efficient measures to address the issue. It is therefore critical to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into all policies, programs, and legislation*”.⁸

These provisions serve as guiding principles to governments and international agencies in ensuring that the differential needs of women and men are analyzed and taken into account in the design and implementation of policies and actions for their older population. Although the Afghanistan government appears to be unaware of these policies, any international policies that would evolve from MIPAA should be promoted in the country and used as a framework for the empowerment of ageing Afghan women.

2. Opportunities from the review of MIPAA implementation

The implementation of MIPAA has been under review in the recent years. The result of the review provides vital information and insights that are crucial to the empowerment of ageing women in various regions of the world. Captured in the UNFPA report entitled, “*Ageing in the 21st Century: A Celebration and A Challenge*”, the findings provide evidences on the differential impacts of ageing for women and men. For the Asia-Pacific region, including South Asia, the report pointed out that “*older women are more vulnerable to poverty than older men due to a combination of disadvantage throughout their lives, including lower educational levels, limited participation in the formal sectors, and the continued reliance on women in many societies to provide unpaid care giving and other work.*”

⁷UNFPA and HelpAge International, Overview of Available Policies, Legislation, Data and Research and Institutional Arrangements Relating to Older Persons – Progress Since Madrid. 2011.

⁸ MIPAA, Introduction, Paragraph 8.

The review process also created opportunities that are important in widening the advocacy for ageing women. Among the many opportunities created during the regional review was the adoption of resolution 67/5 by Member States of the Economic Commission on Asia and the Pacific in May 2011 which calls for *the full and effective implementation of the MIPAA in the region and the incorporation of a gender perspective into all policy actions on ageing and strengthen the empowerment and legal protection of older people, in particular of older women.*⁹ Likewise, the MIPAA review in the Asia-Pacific region noted commendable achievements which could serve as strong foundations in furthering the empowerment of ageing women. For example:

- at least 21 countries have already introduced national policies on older persons;
- 12 countries have established special bodies on ageing within ministries; and
- several countries have made progress in improving social protection and care for older people, such as Republic of Korea's Second Basic Plan on Low Fertility and ageing society which pointed to the need to develop a policy on employment that can tap into the professional knowledge and skills of older women as well as on the expansion of pension rights for older women.

Among the general recommendations of the region, the need to support older women in their role as primary caregivers, address their health condition and reduce their vulnerability to poverty, social isolation and violence and abuse were highlighted. The recommendations also called for the collection and analysis of data that are disaggregated by sex, disability, and economic status as well as age.

3. Other possibilities to empower ageing Afghan women through MIPAA

In addition to the above mentioned gains, it is extremely important to flesh out in detail the gender dimensions of all other actions that have been proposed in the general recommendations to empower the ageing population in the Asia-Pacific region. Below are examples of actions that could further promote the empowerment of ageing women within the context of the recommendations for MIPAA implementation in the region:

- ***National mechanisms on ageing*** - State Members should ensure that their national mechanisms for the promotion of ageing persons are equipped with capacity for gender sensitive policy making, implementation, monitoring and budgeting. A regional program may be initiated to train key staff of national mechanisms on ageing in this regard. An on-line introductory, interactive, didactic and self-paced e-course on the empowerment of the ageing women may also be made available to them. Gender responsiveness and empowerment of ageing women should be explicitly reflected in

⁹ UNFPA, Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: a Celebration and A Challenge. 2012.

the mandate and functions of such mechanisms and in the job description of staff, especially the decision makers and senior technical officials.

- *Older people's associations* – In supporting the development of older peoples' associations and community mechanisms for hearing the voices of older people, attention should be given to proportionate representation of ageing women in the management and leadership of such bodies as well as their equal participation in community activities and decision making.
- *Comprehensive and universal protection systems* – A system for the valuation of care-giving within the household should be studied with the end-view of developing a scheme to provide social protection to family members who are engaged in the provision of unpaid care to other family members. Governments should also consider implementing a home-visit program for older people who live alone, such as parents of overseas workers, to ensure that they are able to meet contingencies in life through proper referral, information, and support in regularly communicating with relatives, especially during crises.

4. A life-spectrum approach

Ageing is another layer of the many factors that already bear down upon the status of Afghan women in society. In conceptualizing a framework for the empowerment of older women in Afghanistan, actors should pay very close attention to these age-related factors, not only during the older years, but throughout women's life spectrum.

For this reason, development actors should not only think of what can be done within the framework of MIPAA. There is also a need to consider the importance of the many activities that are already going on in the field of gender equality and the empowerment of girl children, female adolescents and women in general. Within such initiatives, there is a need to incorporate an ageing perspective to ensure that the female population is able to acquire the skills, support systems, knowledge, and status that they need to lead the increasingly ageing population of the future.

Afghan women who were born in 1990, for example, are only 23 years old today but they are the first generation of women to jump into the 1.26 billion mark of ageing women in the Asia-Pacific region by 2050. Right now, they are preoccupied with living their life as young adults without realizing that they have the potential and responsibility to serve as the pilot generation for older women's leadership in the next 37 years. They should be targeted as a

primary group to carry the torch and serve as model of how women should be, as ageing people. This is important to demonstrate to the rest of the women and to the society in general an entirely transformed vision of ageing women – from being treated as used, worn out, useless, burden, dependent, and weak to being looked up to for wisdom, strength, inspiration, and power.

Within this age group, media could ignite a strong awareness of the scenario predicted by population statistics. Society should be inspired to embrace a new vision that will make ageing a positive destination that women should look forward to, rather than fear, deny or avoid. Among Hollywood women, there is a trend which says that “40 is the new 20” in terms of looks. A campaign could be launched to make 60 as the new 30, not in terms of looks but in terms of a life-stage of increased autonomy, empowerment, productivity, leadership and self-fulfillment as women.

There are so many more strategic actions to add an ageing perspective into interventions for girl children, female adults, women, and even their male counterparts. For example, interactions could be deliberately promoted among associations of girl children and female senior citizens to enable girl children to learn from older women’s experience and encourage them to enlist in the new vision of ageing for women. Women NGOs could also train older women and promote their appointment into governing boards of NGOs for female adolescents. They could also call upon their networks to examine their current efforts on women’s empowerment and gender equality and determine ways of incorporating a perspective on older women’s empowerment into their programs and projects. The possibilities are many and exciting. And their potential outreach and impacts are enormous.

5. Lobbying for an International Convention for Older People

Given the imperatives of promoting the empowerment of ageing women all over the world, Afghanistan should support the global campaign to adopt an international convention for older people. The implementation of MIPAA demonstrated that while an international Plan of Action is helpful, it is not enough. Although there have been positive gains in the past, the absence of MIPAA’s binding effect may have been a factor for its tepid implementation in some countries. According to HelpAge, unprecedented demographic ageing means that the number of people who may experience age discrimination and violation of their rights in old age is likely to increase. The adoption of an international convention on the rights of older people is therefore necessary because it would:

- provide a definitive, universal position that age discrimination and ageism are morally and legally unacceptable,
- provide clarity on governments' human rights obligations towards older people,

- create an enforceable monitoring mechanism to hold those in authority to account for their actions towards older people,
- put age discrimination and older people's rights higher up on governments', donors' and NGOs' agendas, and
- encourage a shift in attitude from older people being considered recipients of welfare to rights holders with responsibilities¹⁰.

In this connection, women's organizations can launch a campaign to support the regional and global initiatives towards an international convention on the rights of older people. Women NGOs in Afghanistan could engage the media to educate our people to prepare for the worrisome scenario that is predicted by statistics on world population. They can even talk to the government and send a letter to the concerned bodies of the United Nations to strengthen the international lobbying on this matter. They can also forge alliances around this agenda, sign an online petition, and get their networks to do the same. They can do many things and they need to act right away. In the meantime, the good practices of other countries in empowering ageing women should be documented and disseminated regionally and internationally so that countries could learn and draw inspiration from them.

CONCLUSION

Afghan women continue to have very low status in society and are denied rights and opportunities for empowerment throughout their lifetime. Within such an oppressive context which is aggravated by inept governance, lack of security, and massive poverty, Afghanistan may be the worst place for a woman to spend her twilight years.

There are interrelated concerns and challenges that are faced by ageing women in Afghanistan, which are: (1) low life expectancy; (2) diminished value as a human being; (3) inadequate welfare support; (4) absence of health services; (5) lack of studies/data for policy and action; (6) absence of activism for the population of ageing women; (7) gender biased attitudes of society towards them; and (8) greater vulnerability to violence and disasters.

These are only a few of the many challenges that ageing women in Afghanistan are experiencing and could not be taken as a substitute for a comprehensive study on the subject. A research on the situation of the ageing population in the country, with special attention to the plight of ageing women, must be conducted within the immediate future to create evidences that would support policy advocacy and programming for them. It is still a long way to go, but the first steps must begin now.

¹⁰<http://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/rights/towards-a-convention-on-the-rights-of-older-people/>

Empowerment of women in Afghanistan should take into consideration the opportunities presented by global initiatives to address the growth of ageing population all over the world. Paradoxically, while it is generally recognized that ageing is an inevitable course of life, people still live their younger years without sufficient regard for their needs when they reach their older years. Some people continue to deny that they are already ageing unless the diminishing efficiency of their body functions tells them so. Some people even live as if they are not going to grow old. But even in a country that is constantly battered by war like Afghanistan, where people do not expect to live beyond the present, a substantial proportion of older population continue to exist – proof of the fact that ageing is here to stay and people grow old every day.

Ageing is not something to avoid or deny, but something to prepare for. Empowerment of women is one way to do so. While they may be enough opportunities to create for them an empowering life during their twilight years, the most effective measures should begin when they are still young. Thus, the empowerment of ageing women cannot be divorced from the empowerment of the female population across their life spectrum. An enabling environment that empowers and supports female members of society to attain autonomy, raise their voice, make decisions, access and control resources, and constantly interact with people and institutions throughout their lifetime is necessary. This way, the older years of women could be transformed into a stage of life that they could look forward to - not with anxiety or fear – but with anticipation of self-fulfillment, peace of mind, and greater appreciation of life.

2. **Title-** Nepal Ageing Policy

Author: Ms. Sangita Nirola, *Country Director, Help Age International-Nepal*

Though Government of Nepal has a progressive plan policy and guidelines for ageing population in Nepal, Elderly issues has not been addressed properly as it is based on welfare rather than right based. Implementation of existing plan and policies are crucial till date. There is no separated Ministry/department for Senior Citizen and Ministry of women, children and social welfare is taking care of elderly as well. Following are the snapshots of the initiation of Government of Nepal (GoN) on Senior Citizen.

For the first time, in 1990, constitution of Nepal indicated affirmative action for the protection and advancement of elderly.

In 1995 universal pension program (100/month) for senior citizens above 75 was introduced .In 2008/9 it was revised and provided to 70 +(500/month)

Senior Citizen Policy

In 2002 GoN promulgated Senior Citizens Policies and Operational Strategy to utilize knowledge, skills and capability of senior citizens.

National Plan of Action (NPA)

In 2005 the National Plan of Action on Ageing has been framed following the Madrid Plan of Action (2002). This action plan identifies the elderly as one of its main target groups.

Senior citizen Act 2006

In 2006 Senior Citizen Act was enacted to ensure the social, economic and human rights for the elderly citizens.

Senior Citizen Regulation 2009

In 2009, Senior Citizen Regulations was introduced to provide guidelines for effective implementation of the Senior Citizen Act 2006.

National Health plan / policy/guidelines

Ministry of Health & Population (MoHP) formulated Second Long Term Health Plan (SLHP, 1997- 2017) and Health Care Implementation Guidelines for Elderly (2005).

MoHP started social service unit in 8 hospitals & geriatric wards in 3 hospitals and also preparing for First National Ageing Survey.

Senior Citizen Treatment Service 2003 AD targeting to deliver health services to elderly. The guideline envisages offering basic health care service entitled to free medicines and free treatment worth up to NRs.2000 at a time.

Gaps in Policies and Programmes

The existing policy and programmes are based on welfare approach and lacks to establish rights based approach to respect the rights and dignity of the senior citizens.

Due to lack of disaggregate data there is no appropriate policy to mainstream ageing in development agenda and in human rights bodies.

There is no proper attention to age appropriate health services / Geriatric care, no adequate Age friendly services/privilege.

Lack of funds for older people centric programme

Lack of information/ mechanism to record elderly abuse

HelpAge Intervention

Revision of SCA 2006

HelpAge International with collaboration of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) has recently revised Senior Citizen Act. The revised SCA is more right based and

aims to ensure the right and dignity of Elderly. It incorporates the right to inherit, sell or buy the property

Revision of Plan of Action for SC

HelpAge has revised National work plan for Senior Citizen with collaboration of MoWCSW that emphasizes on mainstreaming of senior citizen in development policies and programmes. It suggests active ageing programme. Formation of Senior Citizen committee at central and district level. Allocation of fund for district level and VDC level programme

New Policy on Standardization of OAH

HelpAge has also prepared a new policy on standardization of old age home with collaboration of (MoWCSW). This policy provides a guideline to existing and new Old Age Home (OAH). It also incorporates the monitoring aspect of OAH. The policy will help in setting standard for upcoming OAH and monitoring of existing Old ones.

3. Title: Shouldering the burden of RMG Capitals: A new challenge for Grand Ma's living BPL

Author: Shegufta Sharmin, *Bangladesh*

In Bangladesh, the number of persons over 60 years of age is projected to increase from about 10.28 million people in 2012 to 43.58 million in 2050. Like many other developing countries, people suffer endless problems during their old age. Older women often go through more challenging situations as they are 'female' and 'old'. They even have to serve the family as caregiver or grandparents in their old age.

RMG industry is currently Bangladesh's most important industry sector, which shares 13% of GDP. Mainly young people work as the driving force of RMG sector, 90% of them are women. RMG sectors ensure indirect employment of 10 million people. We often acknowledge the role of these low paid working people.

But do we ever acknowledge the hidden contribution of older people, mainly the older women? Yes, the contribution of older women. They have a huge engagement in the development of RMG sector; they have a great sharing of burden of the RMG capital. But which is completely unseen.

Let me tell two stories... Komola (22) is a widow and has 2 daughters. She came to Dhaka 2 years back after her husband's death. Now she lives in a tiny room along with three other mates in an urban slum.

Her children are being looked after by her mother (62) at Panchagarh the extreme north district which is more than 500 KMs far from the capital. Komola gets only one yearly vacation for three days during Eid, which is not enough for supporting either her mother or the children.

Another story is about Alif. He is only two and a half years old and has already lost the dearest person of his life — his mother — who would, otherwise, have been by his side teaching him all the childhood lessons. Her beloved mother Morzina was a machine operator of a garment in Rana Plaza, which collapsed 4 months back. The tragedy cut short Morzina's life at 21. Now Alif is being looked after by his grandmother.

The stories are not just limited within Komola and Arif. It is very common among the 3.1 million workers, who migrate from the villages towards main city in Dhaka and Chittagong as most of the factories are located there. They have to leave their children and older parents together behind. From here older women start to look after their children without any formal support, provided by factories or government apart from the old age allowance of 300 taka per month for 2.5 million older people and same amount as widow allowance for .92 million.

That shows without having any concentration of expert or policy makers older women are building a generation silently. So its high time to include these left behind older grand ma's in all development programmes.