

DAY 1: 26 AUGUST 2013, MULTIPURPOSE HALL

India International Centre 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi-110001

TIME: 11:30-1:00 PM

The Session for Plenary: Gender Responsive Policies, Programmes & Practices was taken by

1. *Introduction to Plenary*: Dr. Moneer Alam, *Head of Population Research Centre, Institute of Economic Growth, Univ. of Delhi*
2. Ferdous Ara Begum, *Gender Issues Specialist; Former Member of UN CEDAW Committee (Bangladesh)*
3. Lily Thapa, *Founder, Single Women Group (WHR); Women for Human Rights (Nepal)*
4. *Smt. Salma Ansari*
5. Rashmi Singh, *Former Mission Director, Mission Convergence; Samajik Suvidha Sangam, Govt of Delhi & currently Executive Director, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Govt. of India*
6. Dr. Ranjana Kumari, *President, Centre for Social Research (India)*

Comments and Observations:

- Rashmi Singh- need for a change in mechanism at government level, benchmarks the standards of quality and care of government facilities, coordination between scheme implementers of different departments.

Abstracts from this sessions are:

1. **Author:** Ferdous Ara Begum, *Gender Issues Specialist; Former Member of UN CEDAW Committee (Bangladesh)*

Distinguished chief guest, panelists, experts, ladies and gentlemen, very good morning to you all.

In the beginning, I would like to thank Stree Shakti, HelpAge international, Global Women Forum and TSAO Foundation for inviting me in this important discussion on Ageing Women , Critical Challenges and Concerns aiming at strengthening the protection of the human rights of older women in the region through the implementation of the age and gender responsive policies and programmes, based on existing national and international frameworks including General Recommendation number 27 of the CEDAW Convention.

Today number of ageing population is increasing more than a rate that was expected, mainly due to decline in fertility and rising longevity. Former UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan, stated at the 2002 Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid that the world is undergoing an unprecedented demographic transformation. Between now and 2050, the number of older

persons will rise from about 600 million to almost two billion. The demographic study of ageing reveals that women are more likely to live longer and to live alone than men.

While both men and women face discrimination due to old age, women experience ageing, and thus discriminatory biases, differently. Gender relations impact the entire life cycle from birth to old age, and influence their access to resources and opportunities and life choices.

Even their lifelong contribution to the family and society not recognized. In South Asian Countries due to urbanization and rapid migration for work older women taking burden of household care, but these services are rarely acknowledged.

Good health, economic security and adequate housing are essential requirements to age with dignity. Older women in both developed and developing countries face difficulties in equally accessing these basic requirements of life.

In South Asian countries older people are most likely to live with members of their extended families, such as, their sons, daughters or grandchildren. Despite the strains of migration and urbanization on traditional support systems, the societal expectation is that a family will take care of its older members, which on the other hand creates a high economic dependency and burden as well on the family.

In many rural areas a large proportion of older people live in multigenerational households with inadequate facilities. In many cases they are treated as a burden to their families and suffer from abuse and neglect. Reports commonly include accusations of abuse in long-term care facilities from family members or caregivers. In most cases state support and national legal systems fail to sufficiently protect older people. Older women are more vulnerable to these situation as they live longer and mostly have no control over power and economic resources.

Women over sixty are most likely to be widowed in Northern Africa and Central Asia. According to a 1991 census, about ten percent of women in India are widows, compared to only three percent of men. Widowhood, poverty, illiteracy, childlessness, social isolation and displacement including negative stereotyping put older women at high risk of physical, sexual and or verbal abuse and neglect.

Widowhood in old age is a huge problem in India and Nepal. Last year I have visited one old home in Nepal meant for Nepali widows and personally witnessed a huge human rights violation and deprivation of all basic needs in every steps of their life. I could imagine, one day in the past these unfortunate women had hopes and dreams, they had family and friends. Now they have nothing. Who is responsible for their misery? Why we can't make governments accountable for

this situation? Why most of the Governments do not have any age and gender friendly policies and programme? Why there is no enough budget allocation for older women's human rights?

We could make Governments accountable for this inaction if we could prepare a shadow report on the situation and rights violation of widows and submit the report to the CEDAW Committee. As of today 187 countries are parties to the Committee and they are obligated to improve the life of women in the respective countries and submit reports on the advancement of women to the committee including implementation of the recommendations of the committee.

Older women face rights violations during armed conflict and natural disaster or climate change situation too.

In Sri Lanka during the armed conflict and post armed conflict also during Tsunami in 2004 rural women, widows including older women were heavily affected by natural and manmade disaster. Government support for rehabilitation of older women including all victims were very meager. Older women in Afghanistan, who are members of minority, ethnic or indigenous groups, or who are internally displaced or stateless and refugee women often experience disproportionately a higher degree of discrimination.

The Government of Bangladesh adopted a social protection mechanism, called “the old age allowance,” to benefit poor older persons, which can cover only a fraction of eligible people.

Distribution of voter identification cards for all adults, including older men and women, has improved a sense of security in old age. Widow’s pensions are available in the public sector in Bangladesh.

In some countries, including Bangladesh, the retirement age in the public sector is below 60 years. This age limit is not appropriate when considering the average person’s life expectancy. The retirement age should not be less than sixty-five years of age in order to create opportunities for older people which will enable them to utilize their productive years to benefit society and establish a positive image for themselves in their country.

The CEDAW Convention as a landmark tool for setting global standards of gender equality recommends through the committee that the physical, financial and emotional needs of older women be addressed, and older women’s access to health care be improved.

The Committee placed strong emphasis on the need for governments to collect and analyze statistical data disaggregated by sex and age. This will allow policy makers to more effectively assess the living conditions including violence against older women. Policy-makers will thus be better equipped to implement gender sensitive policies with a life cycle approach.

Older women are rarely included in sexual health care programmes and budget allocation for the long term health care is a challenge for the Governments as well. There is no research on the long term effect of the impact of early marriage, multiple births and exposure to harmful

traditional practices such as female genital mutilation on the physical and mental health of older women. States Parties should adopt a comprehensive health policy for the protection of health needs of older women.

Networking among older women , more and more old homes for ageing people , popularizing living in the community homes and one stop services for better health care and wellbeing including free legal help may secure older people's rights and give them a greater visibility .

Age and gender specific training for caregivers and family members is essential to create an age friendly atmosphere at home for ageing population. Governments, NGO'S and civil society members need to take initiatives in this respect.

In conclusion I would like to say, Population ageing is now more than just a demographic issue – it is a social and economic issue and must be addressed with increased attention and resources and can be effectively targeted through the achievement of millennium development goals by 2015 and beyond. From this point of view I think the impact and importance of this conference and knowledge sharing is enormous.

2. **Author:** Lily Thapa, Founder, *Single Women Group (WHR); Women for Human Rights (Nepal)*

Honorable Chief Guest, Respected members of SANWED, Distinguished Guests, civil society organizations, friends from media and our esteemed guests from South Asian committee members

First of all thank you so much for inviting me to be here and giving me the platform to share the experiences that I am engaged with in Nepal.

As you all know that Nepal is a beautiful and small country and always been known for its diverse, rich culture and tradition where older citizen are always respected and adore where different generations live together under same roof sharing and caring till few years back.

But it has been totally dismantled by the concept of nuclear family, due to the internal migration and due to the ten years armed conflict, where most of the young children moved from the house leaving behind older parents alone in the villages.

It has basically changed the whole scenario of family. This has led older citizen to be one of the most vulnerable groups.

Among the older citizens, women and especially the **widows are particularly vulnerable due to gender inequality and culturally accepted norms.**

As you all know, senior widows are often amongst the poorest in the region where they bear the brunt of conflict, discrimination due to the generation gaps and economic dependency upon the children.

Most of them lack any support system as a result they are left vulnerable in the society.

There is a common thread in the South Asian context, where senior women and widows are marginalized due to factors such as social, cultural and religious traditions and opportunities.

At present in Nepal, many senior widows **are forced to live rest of their lives at an old age homes, temples, on streets and their situation in the old age home is beyond imagination.**

Most of the old age home are running in a charitable way with no basic standard.

The violence against senior widows is also increasing but rarely it come outside and rarely some actions are taken. The news we hear regarding violence inflicted upon these people are merely just the tip of the ice berg.

Apart from that we do not have any mechanism so they can raise their voices and demand justice.

Traditionally eldest member of the family are supposed to be treated with respect and consultation, advice when needed because of their life long experience.

But with changing social and family structure they are completely ignored.

Government also plays a bigger role in these changing situations. **Our country considers our older citizen an unproductive, passive citizen not entitled with proper benefits, rights in spite their commitments, hard work done throughout their life.**

I just want to give you an example of a college level *course curriculum which considers older citizen as big problems.*

In Nepal, very few elder citizen have ownership and decision power regarding to their property. **As legal provision their children are legally entitled to their property after 16 but parents do not have any rights on their children income nor the children are bound to take care of their parents legally.**

That's why we have submitted an appeal to the Legal Reform Commission to make children liable to take care of their parents or entitle the rights of some sort of share on the income of the children to their parents.

I am here today to get all of your suggestions and feedback on this important steps that we want to achieve not only in Nepal but also in South Asia because I know we all the South Asian countries are on the same threads on many things.

Nepal's existing **social security programs do not provide adequate income** to elderly people thus making them dependent on their children.

Poor vulnerable and elderly widows are usually accused of witchcraft and become the victims of violence sometimes having deadly consequences.

Amongst the cases seen in the last five years 70% of the victims accused of practicing witchcraft were elderly widows.

Older widows are imposed with many work burdens whether as caretakers, Field labor, and house hold worker.

Most crucial problem apart from social stigma is lack of access to legal documents to attain service provided by Government.

Many elderly widows do not have legal documents as citizenship, birth certificates, and death certificates or hardly knows the importance.

I hope this conference will develop an institutional mechanism to ensure the rights of senior citizens in South Asia since we have similar status of the ageing people.

We have many organizations working for this issue hence we need to develop a network and mainstream ageing issues as an important issue in South Asia and in global platform.

However, we shouldn't rest on our laurels but instead focus on the tremendous amount of work which still needs to be done on this issue.