Building knowledge base on
Population Ageing in India
Working paper: 6

Policy Initiatives on Population Ageing in Select Asian Countries and Their Relevance to the Indian Context

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

In most countries of the world, including India, population ageing is likely to become a serious policy and programmatic issue in the coming decades. UNFPA in collaboration with the Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore and the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi has launched a major research project to build a knowledge base on population ageing in India (BKPAI). The study focuses on social, economic, health and psychological aspects of elderly. This peer reviewed publication is one in the series of working papers. We are sure that the findings of this publication will help in generating a healthy debate and policy response amongst a wider cross-section of scholars, professionals, policy makers and civil society.

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Abstract

Rapid socioeconomic change, along with the demographic and epidemiological transition in Asia, has necessitated policy responses to meet the challenge of strengthening and sustaining family and community networks, social security mechanisms, healthcare strategies and long-term care provisions which provide support to older generations and contribute towards improving their quality of life, as well as enhancing the opportunities for using the reservoir of the growing number of older persons' experience and knowledge. Yet only a few countries in Asia have developed comprehensive plans for policy and action with a long-term view to respond to the growing and emergent needs of older people through political will, appropriate initiatives and legislative measures in recognising and addressing the unmet needs of older people. Nonetheless, many countries have developed specific policies and programmes to address special aspects for meeting the challenges of ageing population. The extant policies, practices and models of services and programmes developed by these countries can serve as models for others to adopt. In this paper, the policies of selected countries have been synthesised to highlight their relevance for India.

1. Background

This paper draws from a review of the emergence, extent, and nature of national policies on ageing and associated strategies to address the needs of older persons in Asian countries[1]. The nature and philosophy reflected in the making and implementation of policies and programmes in different Asian countries are in many ways more or less similar, even though the details of care and service provisions vary. The countries share a complex set of socio-cultural, political, economic, health and development factors which influence policy and programme responses to population ageing. Increasingly for the region, the international context is becoming important, as countries get acquainted with research and knowledge of the types of services and provisions for older persons that exist in different parts of the world. Nations can learn from effective policies being realised in other countries, including the development of a coherent conceptual framework linking different practices to meet the needs of older persons and address ageing concerns.

In Asia, most countries from the mid-20th century onwards have experienced a demographic transition resulting in population ageing due to the combined effects of sustained mortality and fertility reduction as well as the emigration of younger people, leading to a significant increase in the proportion (and more importantly numbers in large countries) of older persons. There is also a similarity in epidemiological transition taking place, which is increasing the burden of non-communicable diseases and long-term care (LTC). The broader view of LTC incorporates care and social support needs of not only the ailing, frail and those with disabilities but also special and specific needs of the currently active older persons living alone or with family members or in institutions with a range of support services that will help them to live independently or with their families (Phillips 2000).

Many of the ageing Asian countries are encouraging health promotion and illness prevention at an early age, supported by a firm system of health care, as well as that of family based services and community rehabilitation care. Responses to reduce the burden of chronic diseases and establish care giving mechanisms within and beyond the family and related experience in other countries can offer good learning for others as they work on polices and programmes to cope with ageing issues (United Nations, 2002b).

With increasing numbers of older persons and consequent higher demand for improvements in public services, sound social security measures, and adequate income security, many Asian countries are paying more attention to providing adequate quality and quantity of health, economic and social care (Shankardass, 2006). This has brought new challenges in policy formulation and implementation strategies to balance supply and demand on the one hand and sustainability on the other. It is a fact that many of tomorrow's older persons will be fitter, better-educated and wealthier, but at the same time there will continue to be poorer, less healthy and vulnerable sections of older persons. This

[1] In this paper there is reference to 'older persons' or 'senior citizens' which are today more accepted appropriate terms than 'the elderly'. The term 'the elderly' is used only when it refers to population segments such as cohorts aged (say) 60 and over, or to legislation or specific titled services in the countries in question.

ageing reality and situation of older persons demands a development approach along with welfare orientation and poses challenges to governments, families and societies. Some of the countries in the region are facing the challenges in a more organised and concrete manner, adhering effectively towards a development framework that can offer very good learning examples to others in formulating age-friendly policies and programme responses.

2. The World Assembly on Ageing

Many countries in Asia like India became active in considering and reviewing policies on ageing and on older persons after participating in the First World Assembly on Ageing, and started concretising their action plans by drawing from the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing and subsequently from the 1992 Proclamation on Ageing of the United Nations, and various other internationally agreed principles. However, most countries in Asia, till very recently, did not have a long-term perspective on developing a clear-cut policy on older persons. It is mainly at the turn of the century that the attempts to develop sound formal national policy to meet the growing needs of older people became an important exercise. The *Macau Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific* (Macau POA, ESCAP 1999) provided a set of concise recommendations and specific guidelines within the framework of which individual countries attempted to set their own goals and targets.

Also, the deliberations at the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in 2002 at Madrid, Spain, which led the UN Member countries to adopt the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), further guided nations in expanding the extent and nature of national policies on ageing and associated strategies to address the needs of older people. Subsequently, many countries in Asia framed their policies and programmes in line with MIPAA which outlined three Priority Directions: (i) Older Persons and Development; (ii) Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age; and (iii) Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons (United Nations, 2002a). However, all of the countries have not been able to implement the policies effectively.

India is currently at the stage of revising the National Policy on Older Persons and strengthening the inclusive approach recommended in the 11th Plan for furthering the interests of older people and carrying them forward during the 12th Five Year Plan. As ageing of the population speeds up in India, like other Asian countries, and with demographic shifts increasing the care giving responsibility on families, governments and society, there is a need to craft new policies, improve infrastructure, and develop effective programmes.

Some countries in Asia, namely China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have taken this challenge seriously and have put policies on ageing and older persons in place in line with the priority directions of MIPAA. Broadly these include health care and long-term care, social protection and security, older workers and labour force participation, housing, ageing-in-place and enabling environments, inter-generational relationships, guarding against age discrimination, reducing old age poverty, etc., to anticipate and head off future problems.

This paper attempts to give a synthesis of experiences in these five Asian countries in some detail in addition to giving very brief special policy highlights of relevance to India in seven more Asian countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Nepal, Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka). The country experiences included in this paper are sourced largely from country reports and analyses presented at ESCAP and UNFPA regional meetings on population ageing aimed at capturing MIPAA implementation. The paper also takes into account national documents, and other secondary sources as well as interviews with government officials and experts[2]. There are significant challenges in these countries in providing long-term care, supporting community caregivers and making provisions for safety nets for older populations. While some of these countries have common issues and policy priorities in population ageing, they also show diversity in policy development and implementation (United Nations, 2008). The priority which an individual country gives to ageing issues in policy and programme development depends on its current stage of demographic transition, the growth in the percentage and in the absolute number of older people in the total population.

Like the countries referred to in this paper, India is also experiencing longer life expectancy particularly among women in more senior ages, increases in old age dependency and shrinking support base. India can learn from the experience of countries covered in this paper as they represent models of innovative approach and longer term perspective in putting the MIPAA directions in place, including infrastructure, human resources, financial resources and data collection for planning, monitoring and evaluation as relevant for individual countries. These elements together with policy and programme response provide a comprehensive effort towards addressing the emerging needs of population ageing (United Nations, 2008).

3. Overview of Initiatives

This section covers the first set of five Asian countries mentioned above. Japan and Singapore are presented in one part, China in the second part and in the third part Malaysia and Thailand are discussed together.

3.1 Japan and Singapore

Japan and Singapore have taken policy initiatives by legal and legislative measures for change and reforms to suit the current and future needs of older people. Japan has a sound legal policy framework for improving the health and welfare of older persons, including the issue of health promotion and well-being throughout life and of universal and equal access to health-care services. Legal reforms have facilitated economic participation of older people. Anti-age discrimination legislation protects the rights of older people in employment and in service accessibility. Japan demonstrates the value of the continuing participation of older workers as part-timers or in positions that permit their wisdom to remain in the system and provide support for younger workers. This helps in mitigating intergenerational

[2] This paper draws from the author's continuing review of national policies on ageing and older persons in the region. It uses government documents, UN reports, secondary data as well as discussions and interactions of the author with experts from different Asian countries during the last few years.

work conflict which is becoming significant in urbanising and industrialising developing countries. Japan is also the only country in the region that has provided social insurance to homemakers that ensures access to financial security in later life to women who have no occupational history (United Nations, 2008).

Singapore has an integrated policy response to ageing and older persons with adequate allocation of funds. The political will to strengthen these programmes is visible in the appointment of a Minister in the Prime Minister's office to drive and coordinate policies that "give elders opportunities to stay active, healthy, and engaged" and to oversee policy implementation across various government agencies. There are provisions in the Singapore Penal Code that pertain to protecting seniors from financial, physical and sexual abuse. Also, the Women's Charter which deals with family violence has expanded its scope to include older adults, and protects them against psychological or emotional abuse as well as physical. Through legislative reforms, Singapore has revitalised traditional family values in care of older persons along with support to caregivers (Thailand, Malaysia and China also have similar initiatives as described below). Tax exemption is given to adult children caring for ageing parents when they live with them or provide financial assistance. Children's obligation to support their parents and/or provide them with financial assistance has been legally mandated (in the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong in addition to countries referred to above). Also, encouraging informal social networks for care of the aged is a significant policy initiative on ageing in these countries.

India has also enacted legislation in this context, but not all states have notified it and framed rules for implementation. For India, recognition of economic participation of older persons and their contribution towards the economy is becoming increasingly important as it is a tool for enhancing older persons' value in society and eliminating ageism.

Below are more details from Japan and Singapore under the three priority pillars of MIPAA:

3.1.1 Japan

Pillar 1 Older Persons and Development

- Constantly revise the socio-economic system to ensure its suitability for the coming ageing society. Support older people's individual independence and increase the activities in which they can engage.Also, revise systems and practices that treat older people differently because of their age and infringe on their rights.

- Strengthen inter-generational solidarity. Promote participation in the local community with barrier-free living environment, based on universal design concepts.

- Subsidise Senior Citizens' Clubs engaged in a comprehensive range of social activities in local communities. Provide support for awareness-raising activities conducted by municipalities concerning the social participation of older persons, as well as for volunteer activities for older people.

- An annual National Welfare Festival is organised that features a variety of activities, in areas such as sports, culture, health and welfare, which targets older people.

- Steps have been taken to ease or eliminate age restrictions on jobs and to secure equal employment opportunities for all, regardless of age. Subsidies are provided to employers for 'Promoting Continued Employment' as well as to employers having more than a pre-determined proportion of older workers. These efforts have helped to expand employment opportunities for middle-aged and older job seekers.

- Japan has promulgated the Law to Partially Amend the Law Concerning Stabilization of Employment of Older Persons (Law No. 103, 2004). Under its provisions employers are obliged to take measures to ensure employment up to age 65.

- A financing system has been established which provides loans to Elderly Entrepreneurs at preferential interest rates. Silver Human Resources Center Project has been set up to promote employment opportunities in local communities of older people who wish to engage in temporary or short-term light work following their retirement.

Pillar 2 Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age

- The policy "Healthy Japan 21" contains 70 specific measures to ensure that people live healthy lives when they grow old.

- Comprehensive plans to target people from 40 years onwards are being implemented by the municipality, based on the Law for Health and Medical Services for the Elderly.

- The range of health-related projects being steadily implemented includes health education, check-ups, training to enhance skills, and home visits and guidance.

- In May 2004, the government announced the Health Frontier Strategy for promoting measures to combat lifestyle-related diseases and prevent the need for nursing care with the objective to further extend healthy life expectancy.

- There is development of advanced medical and assistive devices to support healthy and active participation of older people in the activities of society.

- There is systematic training of care providers and health professionals who play a major role in long term care.

- In order to improve local care management, measures have been taken to strengthen the support system for care managers, including the establishment and development of regional comprehensive support centres.

- Efforts have also been made to secure high-quality residences on a stable basis by taking into account the diversified needs of older people and others and also making provisions for allowing residents suffering from limited physical functions or disabilities to continue to live there.

- Social welfare and medical facilities have been strengthened in residential areas as well in nursing homes for older people.

- Long-term Care Insurance Plan has been implemented and systematic improvements have been made to ensure a high-quality care service infrastructure that responds to the needs of older persons who require care.

- Efforts have included the training of home-based service providers, such as home helpers, and the development of nursing care-related facilities such as special nursing homes.

- The Law for Partial Amendment of the Long-Term Care Insurance Law (Law No. 77, 2005) includes a range of measures to shift the existing nursing care system towards prevention-orientation, monitor adequacy of accommodation, meals and fees paid by nursing home residents, as well as establish a new service system, and improve quality of care service.

Pillar 3 Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons

- By various initiatives, such as putting in place standards for barrier-free environments in existing residential sites and new public housing projects, and prioritising housing for older people, the living environments of older persons has been improved.

- A legal framework provides support to older people by ensuring that agricultural facilities in rural areas are barrier-free, and the living environment is made easier for older people to negotiate.

- Support is being provided to agricultural cooperatives that are engaged in their own efforts to assist older persons.

- The government has ensured learning opportunities to those who demand them in the course of a lifetime in the fields of education, culture and sports by forming a collaborative relationship with municipalities, private agencies and organisations to promote the advancement of life-long learning proactively and comprehensively.

- As of June 2006, Departments of Life-long Learning have been established in almost all parts of the country.

- Japan has made significant efforts to address the issue of emergency situations for older people. Priority is given to older people in disaster preparedness and management.

- Age-friendly plans are in place to protect hospitals, residential homes for older people and areas with a high percentage of older people from disasters. In addition, special measures have been outlined to be taken up by municipalities to support the evacuation of older people requiring assistance during disasters.

- Certain programmes have been formulated which lay out the goals and measures for barrier-free environments and improve transportation accessibility. A variety of traffic safety measures have been promoted in local communities, homes and schools and other locations, with priority to concerns of older people. Measures include the development of a universal-design-based road traffic environment.

- To tackle and reduce abuse, neglect and violence against older people, beginning April 2006, Regional Comprehensive Support Centers have been established which provide appropriate services. In addition, the Elder Abuse Prevention and Caregiver Support Law, enacted in 2005, stipulates that efforts to prevent abuse of older persons and provide support for those who provide care to them should be undertaken mainly by prefectural or municipal authorities. Efforts are made through the formulation of guidelines and policies to ensure that such work is smoothly implemented by local governments.

- Surveys and research are used to craft appropriate methods of responding to cases of abuse, and develop appropriate methods of caring for older persons, and provide support for the prevention of abuse, protection for victims of abuse and assistance for care providers.

- Special programmes are organised to improve the image of ageing in Japan

3.1.2 Singapore

Pillar 1 Older Persons and Development

- There is a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to address the well-being, health and social care needs of older persons, which is coordinated by integrating inter-ministerial level of the government with prominent NGOs in the country and seniors themselves. It is part of the "Many Helping Hands" approach which involves collective responsibility from all sectors.

- The starting point of this policy framework is that it is the individual's responsibility to plan and prepare for old age and that family must be the first line of care.

- The community is the second line of care and it should provide support to enable families in their care-giving role.

- The role of the State is to enable the individual, the family, the community and the government to each play its part in providing support for the well-being of older persons.

- Policy response is towards providing support and strengthening the family in its ability to care for its older members as well as enabling older people to remain physically, mentally and socially active for as long as possible.

- The resulting outcome is that institutionalisation of older member remains a measure of last resort for older individuals and their families.

- The government has recommended measures to enhance the cost competitiveness of older workers, redesign jobs and shape public perceptions to accept older workers in society. It has also contributed to shaping positive perceptions towards older people.

- By bringing in certain legislative changes, in 2012 Singapore intends to provide for workers to work till age 65 and subsequently till 67 years. The proposed legislation intends to make re-employment of older workers more flexible and mutually beneficial to the employer as well as to the employee. It will facilitate raising workers' skills and value.

Pillar 2 Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age

- There is provision of a range of affordable health-care and elder-care services to older people in the community through private, people and the public sector modes of delivery.

- There is focus on strengthening the health-care infrastructure, training of family physicians and allied health-care workers in chronic disease management and care of older persons.

- Programmes to better train and support caregivers are being realised through availability and accessibility in universities and polytechnics.

- There is growing emphasis on community-based care approach, which is 'wellness-centric' as well as 'senior-centric'.

- Funds from the national budget are set aside to keep seniors in the community healthy and socially engaged. It involves: (a) providing information and referral help for eldercare, health, and social services within the community; (b conducting regular health promotion and disease prevention activities including health screening and engaging local general practitioners to follow up if necessary; (c) connecting seniors to activities involving volunteer work, lifelong learning, inter-generational interaction, and physical exercises; and (d) facilitating better integration of existing social services for seniors, e.g. day care and day rehabilitative services.

- Initiatives have been introduced to augment the home nursing and geriatric care sectors.

Pillar 3 Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons

- The government has made adequate provisions for barrier-free and accessible environment, especially with regard to housing and public spaces, as well as through public transport system of buses and rails which enables older persons to participate in economic and community activities.

- The government is also adopting technological solutions to allow older persons to age–in-place. The Housing and Development Board has introduced several design features in its public housing provisions to make them age-friendly and accommodate the growing needs of people in their later years.

- The government has embarked on large-scale exercise of public education on ageing and there are special funds marked for promoting intergenerational bonding, active ageing and for community programmes to take these initiatives forward.

- There is significant NGO activity supported by the government to strengthen intergenerational solidarity in the country.

- The establishment of Council for Third Age, an independent civic group, in 2007, is to oversee these activities and also organise special programmes for maintaining greater mental and physical well-being of older citizens by encouraging practices for independent living, lifelong learning, healthy lifestyles and sports, leisure, recreational and voluntary activities. The government has earmarked special funds to be administered by the Council for Third Age.

3.2 People's Republic of China

The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People stipulates that an older person's guardian is obligated to till the land contracted to the older person he/she supports, and also to tend forestry and livestock under the older person's charge. The revenue from these goes to the older person as a guaranteed source for his/her basic livelihood. The State encourages people to sign a "family support agreement," which stipulates how the older person is to be provided for and what level of livelihood he/she will have. Village (neighborhood) committees or other relevant organisations supervise the implementation of the agreement. The vulnerable older people enjoy the State's "five guarantees" system, which means that their food, clothing, housing, medical care and burial expenses are taken care of and subsidised by the government. China (and 'Thailand' covered below) has also taken concrete steps to promote a positive image of ageing. They have included issues relating to older people in school curricula.

China has managed to bring ageing issues into the overall strategy of national economy and social development and is trying to perfect the framework of its ageing institutions, and improve the well-being of older persons by promoting affordable medical care and services for older people. The government has strengthened formulation of laws, regulations and policies regarding older people, covering such areas as social security, welfare, services, hygiene, culture, education and sports, as well as the protection of the rights and interests of older people and related industries. Development plans for the aged encourage the extensive involvement of the whole society in efforts to care for the aged. China has established a new three-pillar system of social pooling, individual accounts and voluntary supplementary corporate schemes, which is a worthy step in providing safety net to its retired workers, but is still constrained in meeting the challenges of delayed implementation, lack of incentives and inability of beneficiaries to pay for contributions (Beland and Yu, 2004; Williamson and Deitelbaum, 2005).

China has set up an inter-agency/inter-ministerial committee on ageing to monitor and implement policies and programmes for older people. The Chinese State Council has established the China National Committee on Ageing (CNCA) consisting of 26 government ministries and national NGOs to plan, coordinate and guide work on ageing nationwide. CNCA has established committees on ageing and offices at all levels throughout the country which works as a complete system, all the way from the central government down to the grassroots level. The State has established a supervision and evaluation system to conduct mid-term and final checks on the implementation of plans, to ensure that they are properly put into practice. It has also established a statistical work system which will provide basic data to help the formulation of plans, monitoring and evaluation through appropriate indicators.

3.2.1 Initiatives in China Under three MIPAA Pillars

Pillar 1 Older Persons and Development

- A development plan that encourages older people to participate in social development;
- Use expertise of retired scholars and professionals;
- Development of sports activities for older people and comprehensive activity centers with adequate multi-functional facilities throughout the country
- Entry to cultural, recreational and learning centers free or discounted for older people;
- Special radio and TV programmes for improving life of older people;
- Allocation of special funds every year for large-scale activities such as national performances by older people, the Chinese Elderly People's Chorus Festival, cultural activities for older people in the community and for international cultural and artistic exchanges
- An educational system for older people, which is multi-level, multi-form and multi-disciplinary, with different lengths of schooling
- The alleviation and elimination of poverty among older people included in anti-poverty strategy.
- Various forms of assistance are officially encouraged, such as pairing up between a well-off family and a poor older person so that the former may give more help to the latter.

Pillar 2 Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age

- Established a basic medical insurance system covering all citizens in rural and urban areas whereby the medical costs for older people's common and chronic diseases get covered by the funds under the unified planning programme, thus reducing the percentage paid by the individual retirees

- Set up a medical subsidy programme covered by the state revenue or from enterprise payments or through supplementary medical insurance system which further reduces the burden of medical costs for older persons.

- Set up a new type of rural cooperative medical system by pooling funds from individual payments, collective support and government subsidies since 2003 which is proving successful

- Priority and preferential treatment for people over the age of 70 provided in medical and social service institutions and community health-service system.

- For ailing and older people with special needs, daily care at home and hospice care is being provided efficiently by grassroots medical institutions empowered to do so. Regular social service amenities are provided at fixed venues and mobile services are available in most places, providing care and housekeeping services, emergency aid, and other free or reduced-payment services to older people as part of the "Starlight Program". Construction of senior citizens' lodging houses, elderly people's homes and nursing homes for the aged have been promoted to provide institutional services for seniors with different financial and physical conditions, especially, for those over 80, who are sick and disabled.

- Under the Golden Sunshine Action programme initiated throughout the country, teenagers and people from all walks of life are mobilised to care for older people with services covering seniors' everyday lives, providing medical and health care, legal aid and forming one-on-one relationships with the aged at home.

- Standards for healthy seniors have been set and national public appraisals of seniors are organised as a way to promote a scientific and healthy lifestyle.

- Mass sports and fitness exercises are being promoted through the initiation of the National Fitness Project since 2003.

Pillar 3 Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons

- Through a range of promulgations on barrier-free design codes, the government has enhanced barrier-free facilities for older people. Construction of barrier-free facilities on roads, in stations, airports, shops, at bus stops, in residential areas and other public buildings in large and medium cities have been developing rapidly, creating convenience for senior citizens in their daily lives and enabling them to engage more fully in social activities.

- The basic laws of China all clarify the rights of senior citizens and stipulate the legal punishments for acts infringing on their rights.

- All provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government promulgate policies and regulations on the protection of the rights and interests of senior citizens.

- The People's Court takes very seriously the handling of cases of mistreating, abandoning and harming seniors.

- Judicial and administrative departments make vigorous efforts to provide legal assistance and services to senior citizens.

- Grassroots people's courts in rural and urban areas have set up "seniors' tribunal" to handle civil cases concerning senior citizens, and established the jury system for cases involving seniors.

- Efforts are on to develop community services for the aged and to continually improve elderly peoples' living environment.

- Policy documents, including Opinions on Accelerating Socialized Welfare Services and Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Social Services for the Aged, speed up the development of institutional social services for the aged.

- The building of elderly people's homes is promoted in rural areas.

3.3 Malaysia and Thailand

Malaysia and Thailand have a strong political commitment in favour of older persons and have achieved a lot in the last 5-8 years. Yet, they continue to face organisational and resource limitations in meeting the severe challenges of the current old-age security system, adjusting the current medical care security system and service system to meet the medical and social needs of the huge rapidly growing older population, in diffusing central policies to local authorities at the village and grass root levels for to increase awareness for the need to respect older people and create a favourable environment for care and support to the seniors. Nonetheless, specific programmes, innovative initiatives, planned processes and legislative enactments of these countries can be good learning models for other countries in the region.

Below is a listing of initiatives in Malaysia and Thailand in each of the three MIPAA pillars:

3.3.1 Malaysia

Pillar 1 Older Persons and Development

- Specific programmes have been introduced to increase community participation of older people and in social and recreation activities as part of the strategy to promote healthy lifestyles.

- Many initiatives are now being taken up to encourage intergenerational activities, establish lifelong learning programmes especially for developing learning skills in ICT, with flexible entry requirements in the private and public institutions of higher learning and expand volunteerism among older people.

- NGOs with membership of older people such as National Council of Senior Citizens Organizations and Golden Age Welfare Association are getting actively involved in the decision-making process by participating in dialogues and forums of relevant ministries, especially in preparation of national plans and in pre-budget dialogues reflecting on and expressing their needs. The NGOs of older people further participate in the National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons to take forward ageing issues and matters for improving quality of life and well-being of older persons in the country.

- Special attention is paid to look after the interests of the ageing labour force by adopting special programmes for improving access to knowledge, education and training in later years.

- The government is making efforts to increase gainful employment of people in their old age to enable them to contribute economically for longer. Employment opportunities for older people are provided by the Ministry of Human Resource whereby employers are allowed to claim 100 per cent tax rebate on re-training costs for older people taken in as employees.

- Re-training and skill upgradation of workers is an important exercise undertaken by the Ministry.

- There is support for re-employment of retirees on a contractual basis. The retirement age has been increased by a year in the public sector.

- The Institute of Gerontology has been set up and there is access to Open University for persons aged 55 years and above with provision for subsidised fees.

- A development approach has been adopted with greater attention to active and productive ageing.

Pillar 2 Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age

- In 2006, about 70 per cent of the rural health clinics had implemented health care for older persons.

- Hospital care and health clinics have been made 'elderly friendly' by giving older persons priority in waiting lines and comfort in treatment.

- Pensioners are given entitlement to free health treatment at clinics and for poor and destitute older persons, fees are waived at hospitals. The government has introduced a multi-disciplinary approach in medical care for older persons, which includes a good geriatric assessment of the patient.

- Ministry of Health has started programmes that promote health care through public education, screening and health appraisal, treatment and counselling, nursing, physio- and occupational therapy, home visits and recreational activities through formation of elderly clubs in health clinics and these have been piloted in several states.

- The success of these programmes lies in the fact that the government has encouraged efforts towards education and training of health staff in various areas of health care for older persons. Along with

training in geriatrics, specialised training in rehabilitation medicine, palliative care and nursing care management is also being encouraged and provisions being made for their delivery.

- Options and facilities for in-service training are being made available to a large proportion of the health manpower. Modules for training of community and family caregivers have also been developed and are being made available to a large section of the population.

- Government has set up homes for the chronically ill, where residents remain for the rest of their lives, availing a range of services.

Pillar 3 Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons

- Government provides specific privileges to older persons, concessions for travel and special considerations in housing to enable ageing in place and in community and to promote independent living.

- In the rural areas, assistance is given to older persons for building new huts or to repair their existing ones, so that they can continue to stay within the community instead of having to be institutionalised.

- Setting up of Day Care Centres and Activity Centres is a step taken to cater to the needs of older people and of families that support and care for them. These establishments utilise the resources available in the community and address needs of long term care.

- Home Help Mobility programme provides a range of services, such as counselling, disaster relief operations, and help with different chores inside and outside the house.

- Government has created standards for maintaining barrier-free environment and has given special attention to developing assistive devices to reduce dependence of older persons on others.

- Through the design, implementation and expansion of preventive, supportive and rehabilitative programmes, a culture of mutual respect, caring and sharing of resources and responsibilities among the family members is fostering intergenerational solidarity between older people and the younger generation.

3.3.2 Thailand

Pillar 1 Older Persons and Development

- Act on Older Persons in force since 1 January 2004 covers significant issues on elderly rights, national mechanism on the elderly, tax privilege for children who take care of their parents and the elderly fund. Tax exemptions are given to income-earning children who take care of their older parents and parents-in-law and tax deduction entitlements for health insurance policies purchased by any children for their older parents and parents-in-law. It serves as an incentive for children to look after their parents and parents-in-law and promotes healthiness of older people.

- Government promotes the skill development of older persons after their retirement.

- The establishment of Brain Banks throughout the country facilitates coordination of use of skills of older persons as per their requirement and gender. This promotes their well- being, employment in later years and postponement of retirement. Government has also shown special consideration to older persons affected by emergencies and disasters by providing assistance in various forms.

- There is emphasis on establishment of elderly clubs in every sub-district of all provinces of the country.

Pillar 2 Advancing Health and Well-Being into Old Age

- Proclamation of "Healthy Thailand" as a national issue has ensured quality of life at all ages.

- It has brought special attention to seminars on orientation for retirement, on sports, recreations and health promotion for older people and has led to setting up of Standards of Welfare, Promotion and Protection for Older Persons.

- There is special budgetary support for the promotion of health of older people.

- The Health Security Project of the Ministry of Public Health ensures access of older populations to health-care services for prevention, promotion, treatment and rehabilitation. Government has established special clinics for older people in hospitals and arranged Green Channel/ fast lane for older persons in using the medical services of the out-patients section, as well as made provision of mobile services.

- There is provision of home-health care by multidisciplinary teams from community and provincial hospitals for older people with disabilities or suffering from chronic disease and without any caregivers.

- In addition, there is promotion of mental health for older people by disseminating relevant documents, manuals and knowledge through older persons' clubs and organisations.

- The project of Health Promotion carried out by temples in districts reaches out to older persons and also allows for their involvement in religious activities, thus contributing towards their well-being.

- Launching of the Project "Return of Smiles to the Elderly" in 2007 has been an opportunity to insert and fix dentures and provide oral health care accessories free of charge to older persons all over the country.

Pillar 3 Enabling and Supportive Environments for Older Persons

- Thailand's Bureau of Empowerment for Older Persons has launched a national campaign called, 'Sunday, the Family Day' for strengthening love, relations and care among family members of all ages. This has initiated a caring system for older people at the community level, whereby trained Community Volunteer

Caregivers in collaboration with the public agencies involved, and local administration organisations, provide care to older persons especially those who have no caregiver but need assistance to perform their daily activities.

- As part of social assistance to older persons there is provision for housing in emergency and pecuniary support for funerals for destitute older persons.

- Government has established learning centres for older people.

- Since 2005 there is law concerning the facilities within buildings so that they are accessible and usable by disabled persons and older persons.

- Government has developed Minimum Standard of Housing and Environment for Older Persons including accessibility of prototype public toilet and physical environment and facilities in primary care units. Government has also established 'An Appropriate Environment for Elderly Research Unit'.

- Many of the public agencies entitle older persons to privileges, such as exemption from fees for visiting tourist attractions i.e. zoos, national parks, wildlife preservation parks, national museums, historical sites, etc.

- 'Standards of Practice for Institutional Care for the Elderly' have been developed which includes care and support for caregivers, training of caregivers and of health personnel.

- Protection of the rights of older persons is given due consideration by dissemination and distribution of the Act on Older Persons, 2003.

- There is a Committee to monitor and appraise the implementation of the Act on Older Persons.

In summary, section 3 shows that

- China, through policy action, has been pushing forward healthy sustainable development of undertakings for its ageing population since the adoption of MIPAA in 2002. The government has attached importance to publicising and popularising laws, regulations and policies concerning senior citizens;

- Japan has been constantly revising the socio-economic system to ensure its suitability for the coming ageing of society as well as supporting individual independence in addition to sustaining a secure lifestyle for older people through an appropriate combination of self, mutual and public support;

- Malaysia, which until 1995 had no specific policy for older persons, now has a national policy which guides several action plans. The approach of the government is to empower older persons, families and community with knowledge, skills and an enabling environment to promote healthy, active and productive ageing along with providing optimal health care services at all levels and by all sectors.

It has initiated establishment of six sub-committees under a National Senior Citizens Policy Technical Committee set up by the Social Welfare Department to address respectively social and recreational; health; education, religion and training; housing; research, and publicity concerns;

- Singapore has developed its principles in policy for ensuring holistic well-being of older persons into four strategic thrust areas, primarily - employability and financial security; holistic and affordable health care and elder care; ageing-in-place; and active ageing;

- Thailand formatted formal national policy on ageing based on MIPAA guidelines and issued its 2nd National Plan for Older Persons (2002-2021), which is an indicative master plan identifying integrated strategic framework and actions covering five sections, namely, (i) Preparation for quality ageing; (ii) Promotion of well-being in older persons; (iii) Social security for older persons; (iv) Development of management systems and personnel at the national level; (v) Conducting research for policy and programme development support, monitoring and evaluation of the 2nd National Plan for Older Persons. The government has imperatively set indicators to appraise its implementation and development. Each of these countries, in facing the challenges of population ageing, indicates commitment of the government towards formulation of policies that reflect the developmental aspects and needs of older persons in the country.

4. Brief Review of Special Initiatives Relevant for India

A brief review of specific programme highlights of seven other Asian countries and their relevance for India is presented below:

Country	Highlight of Policy Initiative	Critical Concern	Relevance for India
Bangladesh	Achieving secured ageing through poverty reduction programmes, especially with micro-finance/credit schemes for people in rural areas in particular.	Including people of 60 years and above in micro-finance/ credit schemes.	Developing micro finance schemes including micro-pension and micro- insurance is a growing need for India, given the high proportion of older people in rural areas and those without social security.
Cambodia	Strengthen Older People's Associations and encourage NGOs to implement programmes, especially home care provisions for older people and promote a life-course perspective on health and ageing.	Building public-private partnerships.	In recent years there has been a growth of senior citizens' associations and forums which need to be strengthened and brought under policy development and implementation.

Country	Highlight of Policy Initiative	Critical Concern	Relevance for India
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Since April 2007 has established a lawful framework for caring for older persons and is working towards provision of universal free medical care and social security for its older population.	Building a national strategy on how to prepare society for challenges of ageing.	India has brought in legislation -Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 - but is facing issues related to its implementation and proper utilisation with regard to care by the family and provision of medical facilities for older people.
Hong Kong	In 1997 formed the Elderly Commission which works as an umbrella organisation to coordinate major policies on health, welfare and housing through the corresponding principal executive departments.	Establishing an umbrella agency to coordinate ageing issues across ministries/ departments.	At present limitation of NPOP is lack of 'one window framework' in implementation of policy and programmes. A Commission for Older People may facilitate better coordination for meeting needs of older people.
Nepal	Provides old age security to persons 75 years and above and is developing legal and institutional mechanisms to ensure welfare and rights of senior citizens.	Developing a sound social security system.	Universal provision for old age security/pensions for persons 75 or 80 years and above is seen to be a feasible option by many senior citizens' associations and other NGOs.
Republic of Korea	Provides the Elder Respect Pension to those not covered by its national pension scheme.	Increasing the level of payment for older persons to enable them to live comfortably.	While many states in India have increased their contribution towards National Old Age Pension Scheme, it is still targeted only towards the destitute.
Sri Lanka	Making available geriatric and mental health services, providing domestic and nursing care within the home, pre-retirement planning, skills development and part-time employment.	Meeting health and employment needs of the growing ageing population.	Developing geriatric health services and nursing care at the community and family level is an emerging need along with pre-retirement planning, skills development and part-time employment for older people.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The synthesis of experiences given in this paper offers many lessons for India for its enhancement of policy initiatives on older persons as appropriate and relevant to the socio-economic, political and development milieu. The review also indicates that it is not enough to identify priorities and policy initiatives: adequate resources for implementation are needed, for which political will is essential. A majority of older persons in India live in rural areas where programmes and services have limited

reach. Clearly, mainstreaming ageing issues in development planning is a priority towards which this synthesis offers many pointers.

From China, India has the opportunity to learn about strengthening the work on ageing at the state-level departments and from central government to grassroots levels. India can take lessons on improving quality of life of older people through construction and expansion of social security and by establishing a uniform basic old age insurance system in rural and urban areas. Secondly, by encouraging and supporting older people to adapt to society and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle through participation in activities of education, training, development and application of science and technology and being involved with sports activities and exercises for better health and well-being. Thirdly, it can learn to develop community services and improve supportive environments for older people. Finally, and most significantly, India, like China, must strengthen institutional machinery to deal with issues of ageing. The Chinese government has taken the important step of establishing a fully-fledged National Committee on Ageing, which demonstrates the political will in achieving the goals of age-specific policies.

From Japan, a developed country which has retained many of the traditional Asian cultural values, India can learn to bring emphasis on the implications of improving health and rising wealth among the older population and the contribution it can make to economic dynamism. Also, how older persons may themselves become key actors in ensuring healthy ageing provided there are policies which support such initiatives.

Malaysia provides an illustration of a developing country turning older people who are generally considered a liability into an important asset of society. Also, that it is not necessary for a country to be rich to face the challenges of an ageing society.

India can learn from Singapore's provisions for incentives, which are non-financial, i.e. providing impetus for creating an active ageing culture and from initiation of programmes viewed as innovative, fundamental, with high public visibility, which are not strongly dependent on the system, but involving individual and family responses. It can learn to expand employment opportunities for older workers and to encourage positive perceptions towards older workers. It can learn about investing in age-friendly infrastructure and a continuum of community-based service-delivery systems and programmes targeted at the healthy, the frail older people, as well as their caregivers.

Thailand, which announced its Declaration on Older Persons in 1999, the same year when India announced its policy on older persons, has shown greater efforts towards the promotion, development and provision of care to older persons. The setting up of the National Commission on the Elderly, presided over by the Prime Minister, supervises the implementation of plans and orientation of policies towards ageing issues.

The overall recommendations for India to face the challenges of ageing are to

- Establish better laws and regulation systems to meet the needs of older people
- Have effective implementation of policies and plans at the local and grassroots level, beyond the cities to the villages;
- Enhance and expand an old-age security system and view public-private sector partnerships with respect to social protection
- Adapt the work life system to more effectively meet the needs of an ageing population;
- Provide opportunities for suitable economic participation by older people;
- Establish mechanisms and infrastructure for lifelong learning facilities;
- Establish and perfect the social services system, which combines family care and social care, for the aged, and incipiently establish markets which especially sell old-age goods and meet the needs of older persons.
- Develop dedicated policy on long-term care;
- Enhance the construction of age-friendly infrastructure in public and private spaces
- Create an atmosphere of respecting, loving and helping older people, and developing harmony among generations
- Develop practices and educational campaigns to eliminate age discrimination
- Create more favorable social and health advantages for older people to realise the goals of using the opportunity to do what they can for the society, while enjoying their later years
- Enhance the leadership role of the coordinating ministry through greater administrative power, increased resource allocation, more well-defined responsibilities coupled with capacity development on results oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation.

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About the Project

The United Nations Population Fund - UNFPA supported project BUILDING KNOWLEDGE BASE ON POPULATION AGEING IN INDIA (IND7P41G) aims at contributing and further expanding the existing knowledge base on the emerging population dynamics in India which are resulting in significant shifts in the age structure towards higher proportions of older persons aged 60 years and above. The project supports the preparation of a series of thematic studies using existing secondary data sources as well as the collection and analysis of new primary data. Dissemination of the findings to various stakeholders is a key objective of the project to help enhance the overall understanding of the situation of elderly in the country for further research and policy analysis on the growing numbers of India's senior citizens. The project is a partnership between the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore, the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), New Delhi and UNFPA, Delhi.

More information on the project can be obtained from http://www.isec.ac.in/prc.html or www.iegindia.org or www.indiaunfpa.org

The first phase of the project includes several commissioned papers prepared by experts using existing secondary data sources such as the National Sample Survey Organisation and the National Family Health Surveys. The second phase of the project involves an updated situation analysis through the collection of primary data from seven states in India which have relatively higher proportions of elderly. These are Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The survey data includes socio-economic characteristics, family dynamics, living arrangements, health and awareness of social security programmes of the elderly.

The papers prepared by experts in India under the project are listed on the back cover of the series of working papers. The project invites the readers to provide feedback and help finalise the papers for publication.

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