

WORKSHOP ON LIVING CONDITIONS OF POOR OLDER PERSONS IN URBAN AREAS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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(By Richard May, FAICP, Senior Associate, Institute of Public Administration and member of the Committee on Human Settlements, United Nations, New York)

This workshop focuses on cities in developing countries where by far the greatest and fastest growing housing and living problems of older persons exist. The draft text of the **Plan of Action on Ageing 2002** under consideration at this **Second World Assembly** fails to reflect the magnitude and the serious nature of this problem; or provide a realistic response to the emerging needs of urban governments in developing countries in improving living conditions of their growing ageing populations..

The growing scale of this problem is shown in demographic trends. In 1998 the urban areas in the less developed regions of the world housed one-third of the population. Now growing at a rate of about three percent per annum, people in urban centers will comprise 57% of the population of these regions by 2030 when 4.1 Billion people in the developing world will be living in cities.

At the same time the ageing population (over 60) in the less developed regions will also be increasing rapidly, growing from only 8% of the total to a projected 21% by 2050.

The combined effect of these two projections indicates that the urban population over 60 in the less developed regions may multiply 16 times from about 56 million in 1998 to over 900 million in 2050, or one-fourth of all people in cities.

Most of this growth in urban population is occurring in the informal settlements within and surrounding most cities in the developing world. For example, in 1968, 49% of the population in Guayaquil Ecuador lived in

squatter areas; 48.4% in Ulaanbator Mongolia; and 42% in Monrovia Liberia (State of the World's Cities, Habitat). Poverty abounds in these areas. According to the World Bank 26% of the population in developing countries in 1998 lived on less than one dollar per day, and 56% on less than \$2 per day. One-quarter of the urban housing stock in LDCs consists of non-permanent structures. About 220 million urban dwellers, 13% of the world's urban population do not have access to safe drinking water, and about twice this number lack even the simplest of latrines (World Bank). This is the habitat of most of the ageing people in the developing world.

As a contribution to the International Year of Older Persons 1999, UNCHS (now the UN Human Settlements Programme) and the Institute of Public Administration in New York undertook a worldwide study of the Living Conditions of Low-Income Older Persons in Human Settlements by sponsoring surveys and interviews with poor older persons living in urban communities in twelve countries. Over 200 interviews were conducted by volunteers from NGOs providing services to ageing persons in these countries. In September 1999 the country managers of the surveys met in a five day workshop in Amersfoort, the Netherlands as guests of the Netherlands Platform Older People and Europe and UNCHS. (Some of these managers are attending the World Forum)

The cities where the surveys were conducted included Sydney Australia, Santiago Chile, Beijing China, Cairo Egypt, Budapest Hungary, New Delhi India, Kingston Jamaica, Nairobi Kenya, Manila Philippines, Cape Town South Africa, Ankara Turkey, and Newark New Jersey USA.

The social characteristics of the ageing persons interviewed and their living conditions as found by the surveyors reflected the general population and shelter conditions of the areas surveyed. A detailed description of each of the survey findings is presented in the final report on the study. Although poor housing conditions due to overcrowding; poor construction and lack of sanitary facilities were found in most areas surveyed, the most desperate conditions were found in the ageing persons living in squatter areas in Nairobi, New Delhi and Manila. Next perhaps, are the conditions in the vast Western Cape Flats area near Cape Town with a population of over four million of whom 7.7% are over 60. Here, as in Kingston Jamaica there

is severe overcrowding and social disorganization with high levels of gang-related violence constituting a threat to the ageing people surveyed. A summary of each of the survey findings is presented in the leaflet distributed here. Copies of the complete report can be requested from the Institute of Public Administration, 411 Lafayette St., New York, NY, USA, or by Email: www.theipa.org.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKSHOP IN AMERSFOORT

Shelter conditions and rights

1. Encourage and provide incentives to older people to continue sharing their family dwellings and maintain their traditional role as members and leaders of families. Urge younger family members to respect their elders and share their homes with them ;
2. Provide legal land tenure, security of occupancy and prevent illegal evictions, particularly to squatters;
3. Assure people's right to choose where to live;
4. Provide sites at affordable costs and low interest loans to purchase building materials;
5. Establish minimum housing standards: Accessible; affordable; of durable materials; Adequate indoor and outdoor spaces; with minimum sanitary facilities: water, sewage and solid waste disposal;
6. Organize the older persons groups so they can join in building and maintaining their dwellings with the help of their families and neighbors;
7. For those unable to remain in family households, Consider alternative housing types: group homes with shared facilities; assisted living schemes, and congregate homes in areas with accessible social and community services;
8. Other strategies to improve housing for older persons:
 - Provide a voice in processes related to their living conditions
 - Empower community organizations in housing improvement and development
 - Promote the role of NGOs, CBOs and public-private sector cooperation in housing development

The residential environment

1. Provide protection from crime, discrimination, traffic and other hazards, with adequate police and fire fighting services.
2. Ensure that housing sites are non-hazardous. Avoid too-steep slopes and flood-prone locations; free of air, water and soil pollution; dumps, hazards, noise and odors.
3. Infrastructure: Safe access for pedestrians by road or path, water supply, electricity, and fuels for cooking and heating at affordable costs.
4. Transport services, accessible and at reduced affordable fares for elderly persons to reach hospitals or clinics, community facilities churches, schools, shops and community centres.

Social services

Only very limited social services for the elderly can be provided in developing countries due to the scarcity of funds and traditions under which such facilities and services are not a part of the dominant rural cultures where families provide such support. Such services are more necessary in urban societies where citizens have become more dependent on government services. Local governments, in addition to providing schools, parks, health clinics and community centres, can therefore assure the provision of the following services:

1. Accessible retail shops and services provided by the private sector are a necessity for older people.
2. Religious facilities (churches, mosques) which are a traditional source of social contacts and in some cases provide services such as health services, recreation and home visits.
3. Encourage and support the activities of NGOs and CBOs in providing home health visits, meals on wheels, etc.
4. Recognize and support the vital role of the informal sector the economy, and in providing work opportunities and income for the poor elderly and disabled. Since in many countries it is the largest source of employment, ways should be developed to legitimize and

regulate its operations and provide some local or income tax contribution.

5. Promote opportunities for community and group income generating activities.
6. Offer small business loans on affordable terms to older people
7. Recognize non-paid, informal household work in national economic statistics; and desegregate by age and gender in national census statistics.

Gender considerations

As in most countries women live longer than men, the majority of ageing persons are usually women. In developing countries, older women present the most serious problems and greatest needs. Governments can reduce the problems and cost of providing assistance to aging women by:

- Enacting laws protecting women's rights and forbidding sex discrimination;
- Protecting the rights of women to own property, have their own savings accounts and receive loans;
- Provide for equal pay for equal work and rights to pensions

International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002

A review of the draft Plan of Action as of 25 March 2002 reveals a lack of understanding and insufficient concern of the housing and environmental problems of ageing persons in urban areas of developing countries. Of the total of 56 pages in this document, only 2 are devoted to the issue of Housing and the Living Environment, and these contain no mention or description of living conditions of the ageing in informal or squatter settlements. Moreover, the actions cited seem to be more directed toward alleviation of conditions and problems of the ageing in industrialized countries than the developing world.

A FEW EXAMPLES;

“Issue 1 Housing and the living environment”

“(87) Housing and the surrounding environment are particularly important for older persons due to factors such as accessibility and safety; the financial burden of maintaining a home; and the important emotional and psychological security of a home. It is recognized that good housing can promote good health and well-being. It is also important that older persons are provided where possible, with adequate choice over where they live, a factor that needs to be built into policies and programmes.”

“(88) In developing countries..... rapid demographic ageing is taking place in a context of continuing urbanization, and a growing number of persons who are aging in urban areas lack affordable housing and services..... Left alone, they are often without adequate transportation and support systems.” (a true statement, but needs more definition of these conditions)

“(89) In developing countries, the built environment (?) and adequate transportation for older persons are also a growing concern.(?) Housing developments are typically designed for young families who have their own transport (!) ...In addition, some older persons may continue to live in houses (!) they are unable to maintain after their children have moved out or after a spouse has died.”

“(90) Objective 1: Promotion of “aging in place” in the community with due regard to individual preferences and affordable housing options for older persons

Actions:

- a) promote the development of age-integrated communities. (they exist in slums)
- b) Coordinate multi-sectoral efforts to support the continued integration of older persons with their families and communities. (is support needed?)
- c) Encourage investment in local infrastructure such as transport, health, sanitation and security, designed to support multigenerational communities. (just encourage?)
- d)ease access of older persons to goods and services (how?)
- e) Promote equitable allocation of public housing for older persons. (Where is there any more public housing ?)

- f) Link affordable housing with social support services to ensure the integration of living arrangements, long-term care and opportunities for social integration.
(This is meaningless in developing countries)

Added items proposed –

- Encourage age-friendly (?) and accessible housing design and ensure easy access to public buildings.
- Provide older persons, their families and care-givers with timely and effective information and advice on housing options available.(!)
- Ensure that housing provided for older persons takes appropriate account of their care and cultural needs(!)
- promote growing continuum of housing options for older persons.” (!)

“(91) Objective 2. Improvement in housing and environmental design to promote independent living. Actions:

- a) Ensure that new urban spaces to be free of barriers to mobility and access
- b) Promote employment of technology and rehabilitation services to support independent living
- c) Meet the need for shared and multi-generational co-residence through design of housing and public space
- d)

“(95) In the last two decades community care and aging in place have become policy objectives of many governments...(In developing countries?)

Conclusion

It is clear from the wording of these sections that the **International Plan for Action** is lacking in its perception of the plight of ageing persons in urban places; particularly those who live in temporary structures in informal settlements where the majority of the poor ageing and in-migrants are located. The orientation of the Plan appears to be biased toward the needs and conditions in industrially developed countries.

A more perceptive response to the problems of ageing persons in urban areas was presented in the **International Strategy for Action on Ageing 2002** prepared by the Commission on Social Development (29 August 2001) :

“(87) The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda established the goal of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world. The urgent need to improve the quality of human settlements was also recognized. Housing and the surrounding environment are particularly important for older persons.....(88) In developing countries, rapid demographic ageing is taking place in a context of continuing urbanization, and a growing number of persons who are ageing in urban areas lack affordable housing and services.”

A more realistic and specific call on governments was included:

“(105) National Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the broad recommendations of the International Strategy for Action. A necessary first step is to mainstream ageing and the concerns of older persons into national development frameworks and poverty eradication processes.”

“(106) It is essential that a Minister be appointed with responsibility for political leadership of each national strategy on ageing. Furthermore, a designated Government office such as a ministry is required to support him or her in the coherent implementation and monitoring of the strategy including the coordination of various departments and public agencies involved”