

## **BRIEFING PAPER**

### **MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS IN CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS FOR OLDER PERSONS**

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## **Major Developments and Trends in Creating Enabling Environments for Older Persons**

### **Introduction**

As the impact of population ageing is being experienced by nations, societies and communities across the world there is increasing attention to the importance of creating environments that support people as they age to live independently and remain 'part' of the community. In this summary brief some of the major trends in housing and the living environment; care and support for caregivers; neglect, abuse and violence; and images of ageing will be explored. These four issues are identified in Priority Direction III: Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments which is the third priority of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) (United Nations, 2002).

The promotion of an enabling environment for social development has been on the international agenda for a number of years. Over ten years ago it was one of the central goals agreed at the World Summit for Social Development (United Nations, 2006) and was subsequently renewed and strengthened at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (United Nations, 2000). The Report of the Second Assembly on Ageing (Madrid 8-12 April, 2002) stated that an essential component for the implementation of the MIPAA was the mobilisation of domestic and international resources (United Nations, 2002). Mobilisation of resources has proved a demanding and relentless challenge, and one which continues to require the dedicated attention of civil society.

Despite the increasing interest during the last two decades in the effective use of existing resources the public sector remains hindered by financial constraints and the imperative to prioritise social services and social protection systems in many countries. Global Ageing: The North – South Challenge (IFA, 2006) is a phrase that has been used to describe the differences between developed and developing countries. While the challenges and solutions remain disproportionate it is surprising to note the similarity of some of the core issues such as abuse, neglect and violence.

### **Housing and the Living environment**

Housing and the living environment of older people varies greatly in developed and developing countries as do the trends within and across countries. Housing is not merely shelter, important as it is in providing protection from the elements and space for sleeping and leisure. Rather, especially for many older persons, it is associated with 'place', identity and relationships.

International trends range from a continued lack of affordable housing and deterioration of housing stocks in developing countries to the development of specialised housing in some developed countries.

Adequacy of housing depends not only on the comfort and amenities but also on the availability of community infrastructure and services. Urban and town planners are

increasingly examining housing and the living environment in the context of how essential services can be accessed and social contacts and status within the community can be maintained (Forbes and Janzen, 2004).

There is a growing awareness of the relationship between health status and the living environment. Living environments can help an older person to remain connected to the community, friends and networks and also access essential support services. Housing design, social services and transport are therefore crucial elements of the living environment. A 'living environment' that is accessible, safe, provides choice and 'enables' rather than *dis-ables* leads to independence and creates the possibility of improved well-being (Minkler, Schauffler and Clements, 2000; Kose, 1998; Zafar, Ganatra, Tehseen, Qidwai, 2006).

In developing countries growing numbers of older people continue to experience a deterioration in living conditions linked to a general lack of affordable housing, substandard conditions of existing housing and shortages or absent social services. Furthermore older people often live in isolation bereft of the traditional environment of an extended family (Kaneda, 2006). In the rural areas housing conditions remain generally far worse than urban areas. The migration of youth to urban industrial centers continues which exacerbates the poor living conditions of older persons (Tsuneo and Vassilieva, 2006).

In developed countries the built environment still remains focussed on supporting younger families. Effective and accessible private and public transportation systems are keys to maintaining independence and participation in community for persons of *all* ages. Older persons who are the most likely to have housing problems include the very old and frail, those with a disability, those living in rural areas, and those living at or just above the poverty level.

Because of the physical needs of many older persons, specialized housing is a small but growing trend in developed countries. Retirement communities, shared living homes, group homes, life care facilities, or sheltered housing may be subsidized by the government.

Studies indicate that in general older people want to remain in their home for as long as possible rather than live in a residential or institutional setting (Australian Local Government Association, 2006). The 'for long as possible' caveat relates to the person's health and well-being and their ability to live independently with (in some instances) formal and informal services.

The term 'ageing in place' has been popularised in the wake of the impending wave of 'baby boomers' in developed countries. The preferences that this cohort have for services, built environment and lifestyle have already shaped some local communities and it appears that all spheres of government will feel the impact of a new array of expectations in the years ahead.

For example, the success of Denmark's community-based experiment with new models of home care and housing for older people resulted in a national decision to eliminate new construction of nursing homes and increase access to publicly funded home care (Stuart and Hansen, 2006). In Great Britain, there is both publicly and privately funded small "sheltered housing" for older people. Many older persons with sufficient means are moving into retirement communities or "life care" communities, run by private or religious organizations. A relatively new and growing trend is that of "smart houses" and the use of home-based technology which is reported to not only support but also empower users (Demiris, Skubic, Rantz, Courtney, Aud, Tyrer, He and Lee, 2006).

The development of 'walled retirement villages' that were so prevalent in the 80s and 90s is now giving way to less structured communities. Individuals are being re-connected through greater participation in local events and intergenerational programs. Studies suggest participation and 'belonging' leads to less isolation, loneliness and suicide (De Leo, Hickey, Neulinger, and Cantor, 2000). Monk (2000) in an international comparison of the link between suicide, stress and living in isolation found that in rural areas of Australia, Europe and North America, isolation is associated with increased risk of suicide.

Although there does not appear a 'gold standard' in housing, prototypes such as the Grow Home (Friedman, 2001) and the Next Home (Friedman, 2002) have received critical acclaim across North America. The design and shape of cities to suit older people is part of a broader economic, cultural and social change that governments should not be too confident in predicting. The trend and practice of 'senior consultations' as a vehicle in community development has discovered problems older people experience at a local level and at the same time encouraged their involvement in the health and wellbeing of their community and themselves.

Older persons as stakeholders in research and social action is a trend aimed at promoting involvement of citizens working together but also ensuring 'real' situations are examined around reconnecting generations through housing, services and activities (Boldy, Horner and Anthony, 2006).

It is noticeable that population ageing is impacting all spheres of government, its expenditure, revenue and infrastructure. International expositions and debates across disciplines are necessary to be a credible voice in the evolution of infrastructure and living environments. There is no agreement about the best scenarios for housing with an ageing population but we do know that traditional institutional care keeps older people apart and medicalizes old age – this is a practice that is no longer desirable.

### **Care and Support for Caregivers**

Caregiving is an international phenomenon. No nation is without family caregivers and women in both developed and developing countries are still the main caregivers.

The role that 'family' plays in providing essential care services at home or in a care facility is undisputed by many governments. Notwithstanding this some governments

and societies have an expectation that family will still be the first line of support and care for a family member (Mehta, 2006).

Several nations including Israel, The Netherlands, Japan, Australia, Sweden, United States, United Kingdom and Canada have policies that underpin the rights and services of caregivers (National Caregivers Alliance, 2007). The policies generally fit within four main categories: programs of services that either provide care to the recipient and / or respite to the caregiver; public long term care insurance programs; benefits via social insurance systems to provide an allowance, a payment, or a tax credit as a caregiver; and programs and policies associated with employment such as 'paid leave' and 'unemployment protection.'

While progress has been made in understanding the role and needs of caregivers it remains a complex issue with a general lack of formal care services and respite opportunities subsidized by the government or available to be purchased in the private sector. There is a fine balance between complementing versus substituting formal care services, a balance that has not yet been achieved in many countries. Studies in developed countries indicate that caregivers' psychological well-being is a key factor in a person's admission to nursing or residential care (Gaugier, Edwards, Femia, Zarit, Stephens, Townsend and Greene, 2000).

The caregivers' movement grows stronger in advocating, educating, influencing policy and conducting specific research. National organisations including as Carers Australia, Carers UK, and the National Alliance for Caregivers (USA) are linked to the International Alliance of Caregivers. Representation at all levels of government has proved powerful in influencing government policy and program development. Furthermore, disease specific organisations such as the Alzheimer's Association (Alzheimer Europe, 2007) provide essential direction and education to families and individuals diagnosed with the disease.

In developing countries the situation is quite different. Many NGOs recognise the urgent need to help families in their caregiving role and are conducting training programs on a regular basis particularly in the area of dementia care. Funding is scarce as is information and manuals to make training possible. A recent pilot project between NGOs in Tasmania, Australia and Cochin, India resulted in the transference of information and the development of a carer training manual (IFA, 2006). The bulk of care for those with dementia in developing countries is provided by the family at home, where the main caregivers are spouses and children (Prince, 2000). In estimating the overall costs of care for dementia, one must emphasize the value of reducing the burden on caregivers. Caregiving can result in social isolation, psychological stress, and high rates of depression (Fatoye, Komolafe, Adewuya, and Fatoye, 2006)

In 2006 the role of older carers was highlighted in a UNAIDS report which called on governments to develop social protection approaches, such as non-contributory pensions, to help the poorest and most vulnerable households were formally recognised by the United Nations UNAIDS, 2006). Research by HelpAge International showed that older

carers are the backbone of AIDS care, as carers of people living with HIV and AIDS, and of orphaned and vulnerable children (Help Age International, 2006).

Despite the substantial media attention in the past years the action and funds urgently needed to support families and counter the ravages of this disease are insufficient. HelpAge International together with other national NGOs with an international agenda continues to demonstrate leadership in the fight for support and rehabilitation to older people, particularly in their role as caregivers and also for those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Caregiver training for professionals and family is a growing business in the public and private sectors. There is good evidence to suggest that if caregivers are trained this may delay admission to hospitals and admission to nursing care facilities (Brodaty, Gresham and Luscombe, 1997).

Advanced technology creates important opportunities to transfer knowledge across countries and regions (Irvine, Ary and Bourgeois, 2003) however this medium is often prohibitive for developing countries. Although technological advancements bring tremendous opportunities there is also a pressing need to ensure that the cultural practices of traditional caregiving and those of contemporary practice and one should not usurp the other (Nelms and Gorski, 2006).

### **Neglect, Abuse and Violence**

Neglect, abuse and violence are recognized social phenomena (Lowenstein, 2006). They remain largely private, invisible issues in many countries and even tolerated in others (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2002). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002) reported that up to 6% of older people have experienced some form of abuse in their home. In a survey in the United States over one-third of staff in long term care facilities reported witnessing at least one form of physical abuse of an older person in the previous year (WHO, 2002). The MIPAA recognized the importance of elder abuse and put it in the framework of the Universal Human Rights.

The nature of elder abuse in developing countries is not homogeneous however descriptive studies suggest that the nature of abuse varies with social strata. In India emotional abuse was more dominant in the upper social strata as compared with the lower social strata where physical abuse existed in greater measure (Khan, 2006). There is a need to undertake elder abuse prevalence studies stratified by social status, age and gender. The States Criminal Penal Code and Indian Penal Code notes forms of abuse such as abandonment and where it is accompanied by violence or deprivation of resources for survival. Despite this legislation reporting such offences is not common practice. Advocacy efforts by local and national NGOs are focussed on the establishment of a HelpLine and more community based research.

Culture must be taken into account when examining: acts of neglect, abuse and violence; laws that protect; and advocacy efforts of civil society. These acts are universal and cross all geographic, socio-economic, racial and ethnic barriers. All strata of older people

experience it and there are no class boundaries. The differences lie in the nature of abuse – older persons poor may feel vulnerable financially; the well-to-do seniors may feel vulnerable emotionally. The female older person given their low socio-economics status, may experience more abuse than their male counterparts

Elder abuse studies generally have an urban bias and little data has been generated from the rural areas and even less in developing countries. As it commonly occurs in domestic settings, shame and humiliation often make it difficult for older people to speak up; hence it goes unreported (Lowenstein, Doron and Winterstein, 2004).

Major trends include: a growing awareness and intolerance to neglect, abuse and violence from all levels of government, NGOs and to a lesser extent the corporate sector; the creation of legislation that aims to protect older people; community based educational programs; and multisectoral and multidisciplinary programs that include help-lines (Bryan, Joubert and Lindgren, 2001), shelters for persons experiencing abuse and ongoing support groups (Reingold, 2006; Kerby Centre, 2007).

The literature suggests two main legislative directions. Firstly, there are examples of provincial and federal legislation that *protects individuals against* abuse and violence. This legislation may not always be specific to older people but is intended to protect against physical, financial, emotional and psychological abuse in the home and also in institutional settings (eg. Government of Ontario, 2006; Dyson, 2005<sup>1</sup>; Doron, Alon, and Offir, 2005; Ministry Health, Labour and Welfare, 2005)

Elder justice legislation is based on the *rights of older people* to live without fear of abuse and violence. In the United States the proposed Elder Justice Act is groundbreaking legislation intended to facilitate a more visible and supportive federal government role in the national fight against elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. A further example is found in Western Australia where the Ministry of Justice has recently created an elder justice advisory service which compliments the work of the Public Advocate (Office of the Public Advocate, 2006)

In developing countries modernization threatens existing social structures where the family holds the most prominent place. While older people are being challenged to cope with issues such as health, economic security and nutrition there are many more “silent” or “hidden” crises such as abuse and violence that challenge their lives on a daily basis.

In Ghana a project by Help Age International supported by the Development Cooperation Ireland in 2006 aimed to enable older people, particularly women to assert their rights. This project is a good example of grassroots’ partnerships in the development of activities that combat abuse, neglect and violence. Through this project and the rights-

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Dyson, Minister for Senior Citizens, is currently leading a review of the legislative provisions of the Protection of Personal and Property Rights Act 1988 as they relate to the Enduring Power of Attorney. She has asked the Office for Senior Citizens to prepare draft amendments to the legislation.



work, legislation, policies and programs have been influenced. Older people's issues are now mainstreamed in Ghana's National Health Insurance Bill and the current Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (International Development Association and International Monetary Fund, 2006).

The work of NGOs in influencing policy development has been a major trend in the last five years. Campaigns to raise the awareness of elder abuse by national and international NGOs such as Help the Aged (Help the Aged, 2007) and the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse are examples of leading practices and principles that are transferable to other countries.

The effectiveness of government funded programs to raise the awareness and create support services are generally not well evaluated however this is changing. One of the reasons for this is that many programs are planned and implemented at a local level and funded through local government. When the community are participants in the development and implementation of awareness and support programs there is a greater likelihood of success.

Educational programs should emphasize, both through mass media and through various health and social services, intergenerational relationships, and the fight against social exclusion of older people. The media is one of the main vehicles through which societal attitudes are shaped and as such should be used as much as possible through different programs in conjunction with educational facilities.

In many universities, especially in the caring professions like Social Work or Nursing, these issues are interwoven into the curricula. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has undertaken pioneering work in the area with the development of new educational kits on family violence, such as that developed by Lowenstein, Doron and Winterstein (2003).

### **Images of Ageing**

Images of ageing are to some extent a product of the way societies have viewed the value of an older people. Furthermore one's culture, the myths of ageing and the language we use to describe the later years of our lives contributes to the caricatures and characterization.

In order to create accurate images of the process and results of ageing, (ie, an older person) the facts need to combat the myths. Literature suggests that there are myths associated with ageing, poor health and frailty (Positive Ageing Resource Centre, 2007); myths around employability, productivity and the ability to learn new skills (Science and Research Outlook, 2006); and even myths about the physical and mental competence of older persons.

Contrasting the myths with scientific evidence lead Rowe and Khan (1999) to the conclusion that society is in denial of some truths about ageing. As a consequence our perceptions about growing older fail to keep up with the reality of healthy ageing.

As a society we continue to be obsessed with the negative rather than the positive of ageing. Over 30 years ago Dr Robert Butler saw ageism as similar to racism and divorced from reality. The media still tends to focus on frailty as the dominant image of an older person, occasionally interspersed, in recent years, by unrealistic presentations of improbably youthful elders (New Internationalist, 1995)

The terms used to describe older people also help to shape images and confirm myths around ageing. Words such as seniors, the elderly, elders, oldies, retirees may give way to phrases such as 'older adults' as the cohort of baby boomers reaches retirement age.

The value placed on an older person's wisdom and knowledge must be viewed through a cultural lens and in the context of the impact of urban migration and social changes. Images of ageing are slowly changing because older people are becoming more and more important to the economic survival of many countries (Canada, 2007). Incentives are being created to attract mature workers to remain or return to the workforce.

It will take dedicated effort by public and private sectors to firstly acknowledge that the myths of ageing are just myths and then to take actions that demonstrate the importance of older adults in society. Some governments are encouraging the use of positive images of older people (New Zealand Government, 2001; Office of Senior Victorians, 2005).

In developing countries NGOs are the force behind creating positive, realistic images of older people. For example, the Harmony for Silvers Foundation in India (Harmony, 2006) develops activities to enhance the abilities and participation of citizens in the overall development of society. Too often the older members of our community are portrayed in ways that reinforce stereotypes of older people as frail or infirm. Through the commitment of private and public sectors working together against discrimination the image of growing older can only become more positive. The UN Principles for Older Persons (United Nations, 1991) is an important charter to reclaim and reposition on behalf of all older persons in today's world.

## **Conclusion**

To have a deep and exact appreciation of the 'Major Developments and Trends in Creating Enabling Environments for Older Persons' and their broader implications in global ageing issues requires commitment and dedication by the public and private sectors. NGOs have a unique leadership role in partnerships with government and the corporate sector in influencing policy and good practice.

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) through its NGO and governmental members acknowledges the significance of creating an enabling environment to support people as they age. To this end the IFA will convene two major international events in Montreal, September 4-9 2008: IFAs 9<sup>th</sup> Global Conference and the Inaugural Exposition entitled 'Creating Enabling Environment and Participation through Design' that facilitates and strengthen bridges between the design and ageing disciplines.

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