

# **Current State of Research on Social Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific: Focus on Ageing, Gender and Social Innovation**

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# Ageing, Gender and Social Inclusion

- Demographic shifts: late 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Population ageing has economic, social and political implications
- Income security, access to affordable and appropriate healthcare and long term care given the changing social structures
- Older persons are not a homogenous group: diversity
- Divided along gender, ethnic, socioeconomic and residential lines
- Social inclusion becomes critical through policies
- Building inclusive societies calls for social innovation in knowledge and policies

# Ageing, Gender and Social Inclusion

- What does the research say about the elderly, in particular vulnerable groups within the population such as women, and the extent to which they might be excluded or included?
- Unable to effect change
- Lack access to resources
- Older women
- Diverse interests, concerns and experiences: ethnic, socioeconomic, educational and residential differences
- Various identities and face differing contexts and structures

# Ageing, Gender and Social Inclusion: Findings

- Assessment of the current state of research in the Asia Pacific
- Ageing and Gender versus Ageing, Gender and Social Inclusion
- Social inclusion: policy formulation sensitive to differences between and among various groups /sectors
- Fragmented
- Multilateral organizations
- Influence on policymaking

# Research Themes

- Education
- Employment & Livelihoods
- Pensions & Income Security
- Health
- Rural elderly
- Common thread: gender gaps persist and women are disadvantaged

# Research Themes: Education & Employment

- Gender gaps in education remain.
- Cultural barriers in spite of reverse gender gap occurring in some countries.
- Critical barrier in finding employment.
- Dominate informal labour sector and low-paid jobs.
- Unpaid work: agricultural work
- Reinforces the financial vulnerability of women, especially in old age.

# Research Themes: Pensions & Income Security

- Women: lack access to pensions
- Uneven: impacts negatively on women because they live longer than men and are left widowed
- Often cover employees in the formal labour sector: exception Sri Lanka
- Unemployment benefits: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) (2009)
- Some PICs: non-contributory income security
- Financial insecurity a push factor for employment in old age.

# Research Themes: Health

- More prone to disability and chronic illnesses
- Disabilities: mobility issues, vision and/or hearing impairments, diabetes and diabetic complications, cardiovascular diseases, memory loss, and increasingly, cancer.
- Impairs capacity to work
- Medical health insurance schemes

# Research Themes: Rural Elderly

- Proportion of elderly in rural areas growing
- Growing numbers are older women.
- Rural-urban migration
- Thailand: rural women are more likely to live alone.
- Lack of public and private support structures

# Research: Social Innovation

- Example 1 (India):

An innovative state-civil society model of care which utilizes volunteers from the local community trained to identify problems of the chronically ill and to intervene effectively with active support from a network of trained professionals.

- Example 2 (Japan)

Adjusting the pension system to account for longevity and inflation and instituting multiple health and long-term care reforms such as home- and community-based services.

# Research: Social Innovation

- Example 3 (Australia)

Creation of 'men's sheds' in neighbourhoods to facilitate elderly men's interactions and relationship building based on socialization activities such as carpentry, joinery and other hobbies to prevent depression.

- Example 4 (Singapore)

Legislating family care so as to prevent older men from abandonment by their children since they have weaker social networks than older women.

# General Research Recommendations

- Governments, corporates and civil society organizations should aim to bridge the gap between research and policymaking in the areas of ageing, gender and social inclusion in the next two years.
- Member States of the Asia Pacific will support a two-year pilot research project as well as related knowledge brokering activities on the themes of ageing, gender, social inclusion and social innovation.
- At least US\$ 300,000 need to be mobilized to support MOST research on ageing, gender and social inclusion over a period of two years.

# Research Recommendations for the Sub-Regions

- Research should focus on the rural elderly, female and the oldest old tend to suffer from poverty much more than their urban counterparts.
- Research on social care funding, sustainable home- and community-based long-term care systems, and improved services for the elderly.
- Research should extend to cover older women, in particular older women with disabilities and rural older women since these groups of women tend to have limited access to healthcare.
- Research on interventions to foster “active ageing” should focus on social inclusion and participation in all aspects of life by maximizing opportunities for health, employment and security.

# Research Recommendations for the Sub-Regions

- The role of pension systems should be researched further, especially how they would generate the social inclusion of older persons, especially older women who have worked in the informal sector.
- There should be research on how older women might benefit from medical health insurance schemes especially since older women have less education than older men and are more likely not to have engaged in paid employment and thus are left to struggle to have to pay for healthcare services because of inadequate savings.

**Thank you!**