

**“Towards a comprehensive and integral international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons (document A/C.3/67/L.9/Rev.1)”**

**Sri Lanka’s National Policies and Programmes on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Older Persons**

**Identified Elements for Consideration**

- a) Sri Lanka welcomes GA Resolution, “Towards a comprehensive and integral international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons (document A/C.3/67/L.9/Rev.1)”, as a timely initiative to holistically address the issues and challenges facing older persons, especially in the context of the formulation of a Post 2015 development agenda.
- b) Deference for older persons and caring for one’s parents has been a timeless cultural and social practice in Sri Lanka. Parents were looked after by their children. However, policy makers have recognized that the traditional family and community based caring structures are eroding due to increasing urbanization and migration. Sri Lanka’s ageing population is expected to increase dramatically over the next 30 years. Those 60 years of age or over currently account for 9.8% of the population. The figure is expected to rise to 24.8 percent 2040, the third-highest percentage of elderly citizens in an Asian country. In this scenario, by 2050 the overall national health spending on the ageing population is expected to rise to 0.4.09 % of the GDP.
- c) Two areas pertinent to the discussion on the Post - 2015 Development Agenda are population dynamics and Non - Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which have direct relevance to the wellbeing of older persons. The formulation of an international instrument to protect the rights and dignity of older persons must focus on these two elements. Therefore, it is pertinent to emphasize access to affordable and quality healthcare as a right for older persons.
- a) Sri Lanka has identified several key cost drivers of its national budget over the 2005-2050 period in the context of addressing the needs of its ageing population. They are as follows:
  - i) The most significant in the short and long term will be income disparities and other changes in the income-levels affecting access to medical services.
  - ii) The changes in the age and gender complexion of the population. Over time, the percentage of older females is expected to increase, while the ageing population

continues to increase. According to current data analysis, women seek more medical services than men.

- iii) The changes in productivity in the public sector affecting the health services. National expenditure for NCDs is already a major component of the national budget, and will likely increase in the next few decades. This increase will impact the overall levels and patterns of spending in Sri Lanka by 2050. A major challenge for the public health sector today is addressing the issue of chronic non-communicable diseases, which are the leading cause of morbidity and disability among the ageing population. This has led to increased expenditure and utilization of health resources. Sri Lanka adopted a national policy on NCDs in 2010. Given the political will and policy commitment for the prevention and control of NCDs, Sri Lanka is cited as one of the leading countries in the region in implementing a nationwide NCDs programme.
- iv) Developing countries should be enabled by the developed countries by way of transfer of technology to manufacture medicines at an affordable cost. Member States should consider an international mechanism to revise the IPR system so as to facilitate the transfer of services and production relevant to the health of older persons to the developing countries at a flexible/affordable cost.

## **National Legislation, Policies and Programmes to Protect the Rights and Dignity of Older Persons:**

### **Legislative Provisions:**

- i. Act No. 9 of 2000 - Protection of the Rights of the Elders
- ii. Act No.5 of 2011 - Protection of the Rights of Elders

Act. No. 9 of 2000 has enabled the establishment of the following:

- a. **Council for Elders:** Comprises 15 members representing the Ministries of Social Services Health and Finance, as well as elders and voluntary organizations that are engaged in providing services for elders and professionals; its principal function being the promotion and protection of the welfare and the rights of elders, and assisting elders to live with self-respect, independence and dignity,
- b. **National Secretariat for Elders:** Is the implementing arm of the National Council. It is headed by a Director and assisted by 95 Elders Rights Promotion Assistants who are attached to Divisional Secretariats. The Secretariats implement the programmes directly, and where necessary, also allocates funds to Provincial authorities and Divisional Secretariats for this purpose.

### **National Policies/Programmes for Elders:**

- c. **National Policy and National Charter:** Formulated as per the Madrid Plan of Action, National Policy for Elders was adopted by the Cabinet in 2006. Appropriate strategies were formulated in terms of the three priority areas decided at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, viz: i. *Elders and Development*, ii. *Advancing health and well-being*, and iii. *Ensuring, enabling and supportive environment*.
- d. **National Plan of Action on Ageing 2012-2021:** the National Secretariat in collaboration with the WHO formulated the National Plan of Action on Ageing in 2010 in line with the priority areas and strategies identified in the National Policy. Activities, timeframe for implementation and responsible implementation partners have been identified. The Action Plan has been submitted to the Department of National Planning for implementation.
- e. **The National Fund for Elders:** The goal is to address poverty among older persons. The fund receives financial contributions from the Treasury, private donors and grants from other organizations.
- f. **Maintenance Board:** Considers maintenance claims filed by elders. A neglected elder, who is unable to maintain himself/herself, may apply to the Board for an order that one or more of his children pay a monthly allowance or a lump sum for his/her maintenance.
- g. **Elders' Committees at Village, Divisional and District Levels:** The National Secretariat commenced the programme in 2003. There are 10056 Village level, 229 Divisional level, 17 District level and 05 Provincial level and functional Elders Committees. As delineated in the Madrid Plan of Action, the aim of forming these Committees is to encourage the participation of elders in decision making processes on issues affecting their wellbeing. The members of these Committees receive training and capacity building in advocacy and evaluation of programmes for elders. Such active involvement also provides opportunities for their participation in economic, social, cultural activities and continuous learning programmes. These Committees also seek to ensure that policies and programmes for the elderly are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. The National Secretariat grants funds to strengthen the financial capability of the Committees.

The Cabinet of Ministers has granted approval to award construction work contracts directly to village-level Elders' Committees in order to improve their financial status. Committees that generate additional incomes/funds have been awarding scholarships to needy children, as well as housing and self-employment grants to needy elders.

- h. **Day Centers:** These cost effective Centres provide medical services, income generating activities, and other recreational programmes. These Centres also help elders maintain their family ties.
- i. **Training of Medical Personnel in Geriatric Medicine/Care:** In order to ensure the delivery of quality health services to elders, Sri Lanka has been providing specialized

training for medical personnel in geriatric care. The Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) in collaboration with the Health Ministry commenced postgraduate programmes on geriatric medicine. Elderly care has also been included in the undergraduate medical curriculum and basic training programmes for public health personnel are being provided to enhance the quality of health services.

- j. **Counseling:** A Counseling Division has been established in the Ministry of Social Services with 100 counselors attached to Divisional Secretariats. A 24-hour counseling hotline service is also available. Awareness programmes regarding Counselling Centres are being conducted for public sector officials, teachers and community leaders.
- k. **Raising Awareness:** Awareness raising programmes are formulated and coordinated by national agencies and NGOs. They are disseminated through the print and broadcast media. Special programmes are also organized on International Day of Elders to promote positive images of older persons. The Legal Aid Foundation in collaboration with the National Secretariat has conducted several such programmes nation-wide for the legal empowerment of elders. Photography, poster exhibitions and essay competitions on older persons have been conducted to raise public awareness, including awareness among school children. A handbook on the rights of older persons, their needs and challenges, etc. has been published in Sinhala, Tamil and English and disseminated to the public.
- l. **Pre-retirement seminars for a healthy and active life:** Employees of the Public Sector close to retirement are given access to above seminars. The objectives of these seminars are to prepare public sector officers for an active, productive and healthy lifestyle after retirement. The National Secretariat conducts two-day seminars at the national, provincial and district levels.
- m. **Home-Care Service:** The Secretariat initiated the care-givers programme to meet the demand for service providers. Service providers are provided with continuous training by the Ministry of social Services in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.
- n. **“Wedihiti Awarana” (Elders Sponsorship) Scheme:** Elders over 70 years of age, and who do not have any income are entitled to receive financial assistance under this programme implemented with contributions from well-wishers. Sponsors adopt elders from the list maintained by the National Secretariat. Sponsorship funds are credited through the National Secretariat.
- o. **Identity Cards for Elders:** Special Identity Cards for elders are issued enabling them to get preferential treatment when obtaining public services including admission to hospitals. Senior citizens are entitled to a 5% discount on medicine purchases from any outlet of the State Pharmaceutical Corporation. Higher interest rates for fixed deposits are available for senior citizens in some State run banks.

- p. **Home Gardening for Elders** – Financial assistance is provided to start home gardens in homes for the aged. Capable elders are encouraged to grow vegetables for home consumption.
- q. **Homes for the Aged:** Service Providers for providing residential care for elders have to register themselves with the Elders Secretariat in terms with the provisions of the relevant Act to ensure that standards with regard to the buildings and services are in conformity with the requirements of the Act.
- r. **Age-friendly Cities:** It is a requirement that all public buildings, places and services should be made accessible for elderly and disabled persons. This program has immensely benefitted the elderly persons with mobility problems.
- s. **Social Security for Elders:** There are several social security schemes for different categories of people to support them in their old age, such as Farmers’ Pensions, Fishermen’s Pensions and Self-Employed Persons Pensions.
- t. **Monthly Public Assistance Scheme:**  
All low income group elders over 70 years, and who have been beneficiaries of public assistance, are given a monthly allowance of Rs.1000.00, while the payment of a monthly public allowance for those below 70 years continues.
- u. **Elders Homes:** There are 171 Elders Homes with a total of 6009 elderly persons, in 08 Provinces, majority of them run by NGOs and semi-NGOs, while some are financially assisted by the Ministry of Social Services of Sri Lanka.

**Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES OF SRI LANKA**