Fourth Stakeholder Consultation for the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing - Pacific

Addressing all priority directions of MIPAA, as they relate to the Pacific

Wednesday, 8 June 2022 (14:00-16:00, Suva Time)

Online (Zoom)

SUMMARY REPORT

I. Background

1. In accordance with GA resolution 76/138 and ECOSOC resolution 2020/8, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), supported by regional partners, is organizing the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) from 29 June to 1 July 2022.

2. As part of this review and appraisal, ESCAP organized stakeholder consultations on the three priority directions of MIPAA: (a) older persons and development; (b) advancing health and well-being into old age; and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. Prevalent and emerging issues – such as the impact of COVID-19, intergenerational solidarity, climate change, digital transformation, and the future of work – will be discussed throughout the consultations. Gender considerations will be mainstreamed. The fourth stakeholder consultation focused on all priority directions of MIPAA as they relate to the Pacific.

3. Main findings and recommendations of the consultations have been summarized in an information paper to be submitted to the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Asia and the Pacific. The objective of these consultations was to bring a bottom-up participatory approach of the review and appraisal of MIPAA at the regional level and identify challenges and opportunities of population ageing that transcend national boundaries from stakeholder perspectives.
II. Objectives of the consultation

4. The purpose of the stakeholder consultation is to facilitate and expand collaboration and participation in the regional review and appraisal process, and in particular to elicit stakeholder experiences and views around the review objectives, namely:

- Take stock of the overall progress of implementation of the priority issues to date
- Identify key challenges, opportunities, gaps, and prevalent and emerging issues
- Identify established and emerging good practices and lessons learnt
- Identify resource requirements and capacity building needs
- Formulate recommendations

III. Opening

5. The fourth stakeholder consultation was moderated by Mr. Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor Community Legal Centres, Australia, who addressed the opportunity for Pacific stakeholders to deliberate on specific Pacific issues. Opening remarks emphasizing the need to generate conversations on older persons and development were delivered by Mr. Sudip Basu, Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, Subregional Office for the Pacific

6. The keynote speech was delivered by Mr. Hassan Khan, Executive Director (voluntary), Asia-Pacific Forum on Families International. Mr. Khan addressed social implications of an ageing society in the Pacific along with other developments, such as internal and international migration. The role of Governments and their ability to implement policies and initiate action when it comes to ageing were discussed. To date, Pacific Governments paid not enough attention to population ageing. While some policies on ageing existed, these policies still had to be translated into coherent actions. Overall, coordination of issues related to ageing remained a challenge in many Pacific countries.

7. He stated that overall, there was a lack of coherent strategies to address health care needs of older persons, including a continuum of care. Pacific island Governments relied almost exclusively on family care, while institutional and community care were limited. However, relying on family care was not sustainable because many older persons were living alone due to migration of the younger generations. Social cohesion was eroding and younger people were not always willing to provide unpaid care. The existing health-care system included several barriers to older persons including age discrimination. Mr. Khan discussed the role of negative attitudes regarding the process of ageing, and the impact of community perceptions on the support mechanisms for older persons. As such, faith-based organizations were recognized as enablers to advancing social perceptions of ageing. Providing care for older persons could be a challenge for families with limited financial resources. Older persons in rural areas and older women were particularly vulnerable and at high risk of poverty. Mr. Khan put forth recommendations to be considered by governmental bodies, but also by the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations. Specifically, he recommended establishing a network of older persons in the Pacific and requested Governments to take the lead in designing policies towards the implementation of the rights of older persons.
8. Mr. Tilé Imo, Health Justice Lawyer, Caxton Legal Centre, Brisbane, Queensland and President of the Pasifika Lawyers Association Queensland, Australia, made a special presentation focusing on abuse and violence against older persons, as well as ageism and images of ageing. He cited empirical studies, such as a study on prevalence of abuse in Australia to demonstrate the key issues and understandings about elder abuse in community dwellings and institutional settings, and how one can intervene to prevent and stop such abuse. The data presented highlighted the intersectional issues between ageing, disability, poverty, gender and ageism and elder abuse. The presentation also addressed differing perspectives and methods in conceptualizing elder abuse, including a human rights approach. He suggested further analysis of elder abuse in the Pacific with a focus on the local level to tailor any response and intervention to the community context. He concluded by calling for a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons as a means for safeguarding older peoples’ human rights. A convention would enshrine the important principles of self-determination, autonomy and non-discrimination of older people.

IV. Outcomes of Consultation

A. Plenary discussion I

a) Key Challenges

9. Stakeholders expressed the view that MIPAA was not well known in the Pacific, and that there was limited attention allocated towards the matter of ageing. Various natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic further shifted attention away from population ageing. Moreover, efforts to address population ageing were often inconsistent across government entities, with government focal points not ensuring that the topic was mainstreamed into broader policy frameworks. While some countries had a policy on ageing, it was at times outdated and lacked potential to be translated an action plan, partially due to the lack of awareness around MIPAA in civil society.

10. There were policies on healthy ageing, but they often did not reach the wider public through actions. Policies on the welfare of families also had to include older persons.

11. The coordination of services for older persons remained a challenge in the Pacific. Overall, the quantity and quality of care strategies and age-friendly health services were limited, and traditional family-based care was also decreasing. Due to increased migration of younger persons towards cities or other countries, traditional family support in villages was diminishing, and older persons were often left alone in old age.

12. Older persons were particularly vulnerable to economic and social hardships when living in rural areas. The lack of economic resources available to older persons in remote areas, affected their well-being, and many had become homeless, with only few welfare options available to them. Inadequate social pensions and salaries, lack of access to insurance, and a lack in access to health care, further contributed to poverty and thus increased the burden placed upon family members. Elder abuse and neglect also included financial abuse of older persons. In some cases, family members claimed the pension benefits of older persons through fraud. Some good practices were also reported on, such as the extension of social protection for older persons in Tonga. These situations had worsened due to COVID-19 and several natural disasters, which had led to a reduced commitment to healthy ageing policies.
13. Due to the negative image of ageing, the presence and rights of older persons were often not recognized, both within the family and in communities overall. Younger generations often ignored the knowledge and resourcefulness of older persons. Additionally, the combination of increased migration of young people, and social attitudes against sending older persons to elder care facilities heightened the burden of caring for older persons within families. Moreover, older women often had to assume the role of informal caregivers, causing their own social, economic, and psychological needs to be neglected. The influence of social attitudes also contributed towards the prevalence of abuse of older persons. It was noted that discriminatory social attitudes, interpretations of religious beliefs, and certain traditional practices led to higher cases of violence and abuse.

14. Older persons were also very knowledgeable regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation. There had been incidents where disaster warnings did not reach remote islands because of poor connectivity, but older persons often knew the signs of an upcoming disaster.

\[b\) Recommendations\]

15. To Governments:

- Take the lead in designing policies on the rights of older persons in collaboration with civil society which should support the monitoring of these policies.
- Reconsider budget allocations of various programmes, including social protection programmes, as many older persons have limited access to social services.
- Include care services for older persons in family policies and ensure that caregivers are available to older persons.
- Provide training to caregivers of older persons and consider a wider range of care options away from only family care. Training programmes provided by the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) in Tonga were mentioned as a positive example.
- Regularly review whether existing social protection programmes were achieving their objectives and consider regular adjustments, if needed.
- Develop monitoring mechanisms to protect older persons from abuse, including financial abuse.

16. To Governments and civil society:

- Initiate efforts towards adapting social attitudes on ageing to reduce social stigma and the prevalence of harmful and abusive practices.
- Address negative perceptions of ageing and recognize the rights of older persons.
- Conduct advocacy for the rights of older persons and direct resources towards that advocacy.
- Adopt more holistic approaches towards caring for older persons.

B. Plenary discussion II

\[a\) Key Challenges\]

17. The definition for elder abuse was often not clearly understood, as there was no formal definition of the term. Differences in cultural perspectives often made it difficult to obtain a common understanding.

18. The prevalence of elder abuse was relatively high in Australia as well as in some Pacific Island societies. Globally, it had been found that 1 in 6 people experienced elder abuse. Elder abuse encompassed physical, psychological, and financial abuse, which included the stealing of property of older persons and the forceful signing of bank loans. There were also cases of physical abuse and older
persons being forced to stay in bed although there was no medical need for it. Neglectful practice included a range of malpractice possibilities, including the over- or under-medication of an older person. Gender issues related to ageing were also noted, as older women were more likely to experience abuse than older men, and most abusers were male. Often, the abusers were adult children, many of them unemployed and residing with their older parents. Elder abuse was also largely underreported, due to communication barriers and social pressures against reporting.

19. Specific issues faced by older persons with disabilities were also addressed. It was reported that 46.7 per cent of persons with disabilities in Samoa were older persons, and similar figures applied for other Pacific Island countries. It was also stated that life expectancy of persons with disabilities was increasing. The lack of resources and programmes available for older persons with disabilities posed a challenge in the Pacific, and the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the lack of accessibility to services. Lockdowns related to COVID-19 were particularly challenging for older persons with disabilities because they were not able to leave their dwellings to obtain essential health needs and services. Access to assistive devices for older persons with disabilities was very limited. Older persons with disabilities often faced multiple levels of discrimination.

20. The work towards the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons was highlighted, and a shift from a welfare model to a rights-based approach when addressing the needs of older persons was recommended. It was also stated that adequate social pensions would be crucial to ensure that older persons could live in dignity.

**ii) Recommendations**

- Conduct more research on neglect and abuse of older persons, including sexual abuse and target policies more specifically to the types of abuse.
- Improve mechanisms to identify abuse of older persons, for example train social workers to be able to effectively identify abuse and understand the context of family dynamics.
- Train health professionals to recognize the signs of abuse and develop appropriate protocols for health workers to report such abuse.
- Train older persons in self-management to increase their awareness of abuse and empower them to report abuse.
- Increase networking among non-governmental organizations in the Pacific and mainstream ageing issues in other policy areas.

V. **Closing and next steps**

21. In concluding, participants agreed that more awareness-raising on MIPAA was needed in the Pacific and that Governments should actively partner with civil society groups in that respect. It was emphasized that most countries in the Pacific had ratified conventions that were also supporting issues raised in MIPAA, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The ESCAP subregional office for the Pacific was encouraged to take a leading role in supporting civil society organizations to provide more effective activism, and to harmonize implementation of MIPAA with relevant conventions.
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AGENDA

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<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>Participants join Zoom meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00-14:30</td>
<td>Welcome and opening session</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr. Sudip Basu, Deputy Head and Senior Economist, Subregional Office for the Pacific, ESCAP</td>
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<td><strong>Moderator:</strong> Mr. Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor, Community Legal Centres, Australia</td>
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<td>• MIPAA video (6 minutes)</td>
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<td>• Keynote address: Mr. Mohammed Hassan Khan, Asia-Pacific Forum on Families (APFAM) International, Fiji</td>
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<td>14:30-15:10</td>
<td>Plenary discussion I</td>
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<td><strong>Moderator:</strong> Mr. Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor, Community Legal Centres, Australia</td>
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<td>1. Older persons and development</td>
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<td>15:10-15:15</td>
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<td>15:15-15:55</td>
<td>Plenary discussion II</td>
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<td><strong>Moderator:</strong> Mr. Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor, Community Legal Centres, Australia</td>
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<td>1. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments</td>
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<td>2. Emerging issues, COVID-19, digitalization, climate change</td>
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<td><strong>Special presentation:</strong> Mr. Tilé Imo, Caxton Legal Centre, Brisbane and President of the Pasifika Lawyers Association QLD, Australia</td>
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<td>15:55-16:00</td>
<td>Next steps and closing</td>
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<td>Ms. Sainimili Tawake, Inclusive Development Advisor, Pacific Disability Forum, Fiji</td>
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<td>Ms. Sabine Henning, Chief, Sustainable Demographic Transition Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP</td>
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