



Role of Governments in changing lives of the Senior Citizens of India

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Abstract

The demographic ageing of population has implications at the macro and also at household level. The sheer magnitude of numbers is indicative both of the huge human reserve and also of the scale of endeavours necessary to provide social services and other benefits. The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, which is the nodal Ministry for this purpose focuses on policies and programmes for the Senior Citizens in close collaboration with State governments, Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society. The programmes aim at their welfare and maintenance, especially for indigent senior citizens, by supporting old age homes, day care centres, mobile medicare units, etc. The present paper discusses the scenario of aged and the role of government polices a change in the lives of senior citizens only if it is implemented.

Key words: Empowerment, responsibilities, nuclearisation

Introduction:

In many countries people are living longer and enjoying better living conditions than ever before, as a result of increased life expectancy and medical advancements. Unlike previously, in recent times, the function of the family as primary care-giver to the aged has undergone change due to structural changes-both internal and external, most importantly to nuclearisation of family. As a result, one finds the partial shift of caring responsibility of aged on the government/state in the form of various social and economic security programmes. The National Policies on Older Persons will be very widely disseminated for which an action plan will be prepared so that its features remain in constant public focus. The Policy will make a change in the lives of senior citizens only if it is implemented. While the government and its principal organs have some basic responsibilities in

the matter, other institutions as well as individuals with need to consider how they can play their respective roles for the well-being of older persons. Collaborative action will go a long way in achieving a more humane society which gives older persons their legitimate place. Apex level organisations of older persons have special responsibilities in this regard so that they can function as a watchdog, energies continuing action, mobilize public opinion and generate pressure for implementation of the Policy. The present paper discusses the scenario of aged and the role of government polices a change in the lives of senior citizens only if it is implemented.

The demographic ageing of population

The demographic ageing of population has implications at the macro and also at household level. The sheer magnitude of numbers is indicative both of the huge human reserve and also of the scale of endeavours necessary to



provide social services and other benefits. Demographic transition has been accompanied by changes in society and economy. These are of a positive nature in some areas and a cause of concern in others. A growing number of persons 60+ in the coming decades will belong to the middle and upper income groups, be economically better off with some degree of financial security, have higher professional and education qualifications, lead an active life in their 60s and even first half of the 70s, they have a positive frame of mind looking for opportunities for a more active, creative and satisfying life.

National policy statement

Administrative set-up:

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, which is the nodal Ministry for this purpose focuses on policies and programmes for the Senior Citizens in close collaboration with State governments, Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society. The programmes aim at their welfare and maintenance, especially for indigent senior citizens, by supporting old age homes, day care centres, mobile medicare units, etc.

Relevant Constitutional Provisions:

Article 41 of the Constitution provides that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. Further, Article 47 provides that the State shall regard the raising of the

level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties...

Legislations:

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 was enacted in December 2007, to ensure need based maintenance for parents and senior citizens and their welfare. General improvement in the health care facilities over the years is one of the main reasons for continuing increase in proportion of population of senior citizens. Ensuring that they not merely live longer, but lead a secure, dignified and productive life is a major challenge.

National Policy on older Persons (NPOP), 1999

The National Policy on older Persons (NPOP) was announced in January 1999 to reaffirm the commitment to ensure the well-being of the older persons. The Policy envisages State support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, equitable share in development, protection against abuse and exploitation, and availability of services to improve the quality of their lives.

National Council for older Persons:

In pursuance of the NPOP, a National Council for Older Persons (NCOP) was constituted in 1999 under the Chairpersonship of the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment to oversee implementation of the Policy. The NCOP is the highest body to advise the Government in the formulation



and implementation of policy and programmes for the aged. The Council was re-constituted in 2005 with members comprising Central and State governments representatives, representatives of NGOs, citizen's groups, retired person's associations, and experts in the field of law, social welfare, and medicine.

Inter-Ministerial Committee on Older Persons:

An Inter-Ministerial Committee on Older Persons comprising twenty-two Ministries/ Departments, and headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is another coordination mechanism in implementation of the NPOP. Action Plan on ageing issues for implementation by various Ministries/ Departments concerned is considered from time to time by the Committee.

Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 was enacted in December 2007 to ensure need based maintenance for parents and senior citizens and their welfare. The Act provides for:-

- Maintenance of Parents/ senior citizens by children/ relatives made obligatory and justiciable through Tribunals
- Revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives
- Penal provision for abandonment of senior

citizens

- Establishment of Old Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizens
- Adequate medical facilities and security for Senior Citizens

The Act has to be brought into force by individual State Government. As on 3.2.2010, the Act had been notified by 22 States and all UTs. The Act is not applicable to the State of Jammu & Kashmir, while Himachal Pradesh has its own Act for Senior Citizens. The remaining States yet to notify the Act are - Bihar, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.

Central Sector Scheme of Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP):

An Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP) is being implemented since 1992 with the objective of improving the quality of life of senior citizens by providing basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and entertainment opportunities and by encouraging productive and active ageing through providing support for capacity building of Government/ Non-Governmental Organizations/Panchayati Raj Institutions/ local bodies and the Community at large. Under the Scheme, financial assistance up to 90% of the project cost is provided to non-governmental organizations for establishing and maintaining old age homes, day care centres and mobile medicare units. The Scheme has been made flexible so as to meet the diverse needs of older persons including reinforcement and strengthening of the family, awareness generation on issues



pertaining to older persons, popularization of the concept of lifelong preparation for old age, facilitating productive ageing, etc.

The Scheme has been revised w.e.f. 1.4.2008. Besides increase in amount of financial assistance for existing projects, several innovative projects have been added as being eligible for assistance under the Scheme

Assistance for Construction of old Age Homes:

A Non-Plan Scheme of Assistance to Panchayati Raj Institutions/ Voluntary Organisations/ Self Help Groups for Construction of Old Age Homes/ Multi Service Centres for Older Persons was started in 1996-97. Grant-in-aid to the extent of 50% of the construction cost subject to a maximum of Rs. 15 lakhs was given under the Scheme. However, the Scheme was not found attractive by implementing agencies and was discontinued at the end of the X Plan (2006-07). Section 19 of the Maintenance & Welfare of Parents & Senior Citizens Act 2007 envisages a provision of at least old age home for indigent senior citizens with 150 capacities in every district of the country. A new Scheme for giving assistance for Establishment of Old Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizens in pursuance of the said provision is under formulation.

International Day of Older Persons:

The International Day of Older Persons is celebrated every year on 1st October. On 1.10.2009, the Hon'ble Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment flagged off

"Walkathon" at Rajpath, India Gate, to promote inter-generational bonding. More than 3000 senior citizens from across Delhi, NGOs working in the field of elderly issues, and school children from different schools participated. Helpage India, New Delhi collaborated with the Ministry in organizing the event of the day.

Schemes of Other Ministries:

I. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provides the following facilities for senior citizens of:

- Separate queues for older persons in government hospitals.
- Two National Institutes on Ageing at Delhi and Chennai have been set up
- Geriatric Departments in 25 medical colleges have been set up.

II. Ministry of Rural Development: The Ministry of Rural Development has implemented the National Old-age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) – for persons above 65 years belonging to a household below poverty line, Central assistance is given towards pension @ Rs. 200/- per month, which is meant to be supplemented by at least an equal contribution by the States so that each beneficiary gets at least Rs.400/- per month as pension.

III. Ministry of Railways: The Ministry of Railways provides the following facilities to senior citizens:

- Separate ticket counters for senior citizens of age 60 years and above at various (Passenger Reservation System) PRS centres if



the average demand per shift is more than 120 tickets;

- 30% and 50% concession in rail fare for male and female senior citizens respectively of 60 years and above respectively.

IV. Ministry of Finance: Some of the facilities for senior citizens provided by the Ministry of Finance are:

- Income tax exemption for senior citizen of 65 years and above up to Rs. 2.40 lakh per annum.
- Deduction of Rs 20,000 under Section 80D is allowed to an individual who pays medical insurance premium for his/ her parent or parents, who is a senior citizens of 65 years and above.
- An individual is eligible for a

deduction of the amount spent or Rs 60,000, whichever is less for medical treatment (specified diseases in Rule 11DD of the Income Tax Rules) of a dependent senior citizen of 65 years and above.

V. Department of Pensions and Pensioner Grievances:

A Pension Portal has been set up to enable senior citizens to get information regarding the status of their application, the amount of pension, documents required, if any, etc. The Portal also provides for lodging of grievances. As per recommendation of the Sixth Pay Commission, additional pension are to be provided as per details given below to older persons:

As per recommendation of the Sixth Pay Commission, additional pension to be provided to older persons:	
Age Group	% pension to be added
80+	20
85+	30
90+	
95+	50
100+	100

VI. Ministry of Civil Aviation: The National Carrier, Air India, provides concession up to 50% for male senior citizens of 65 years and above and female senior citizens of 63 years and above in air fares

Action Strategies

A. Financial Security:

- Great anxiety in old age relates

to financial insecurity. When the issue is seen in the context of fact that one-third of the population (1993-94) is below the poverty line and about one-third are above it but belong to the lower income group, the financial situation of two-thirds of the population 60+ can be said to fragile. Some level of income security in old age is a goal which will be given very high priority. Policy instruments to cover different income segments will be developed.



- For elderly persons below the poverty line, old age pensions provide some succor. Coverage under the old age pension scheme for poor persons will be significantly expanded from the January 1997 level of 2.76 million with the ultimate objective of covering all older persons below the poverty line. Employees of government and quasi government bodies and industrial workers desire better returns from accumulations in provident funds through prudent and safe investment of the funds. Issues involved will be given careful consideration. It will be ensured that settlement of pension, provident fund, gratuity and other retirement benefits is made promptly and superannuated persons are not put to hardship due to administrative lapses.
- Pension is a much, sought after income security scheme. The base of pension coverage needs to be considerably expanded. It would be necessary to facilitate the establishment of pension schemes both in the private as well as in the public sector for self-employed and salaried persons in non-governmental employment, with provision for employers also to contribute.

B. Health Care and Nutrition:

- With advancing age, old persons have to cope with health and associated problems some of which may be chronic, of a multiple nature, require constant attention and carry the risk of disability and consequent loss of autonomy. Some health problems, especially when

accompanied by impaired functional capacity, require long term management of illness at time, and of nursing care.

- Health care needs of older persons will be given high priority. The goal should be good affordable health services, very heavily subsidised for the poor and a graded system of user charges for others.
- The primary health care system will be the basic structure of public health care. It will be strengthened and oriented to be able to meet the health care needs of older persons as well public health services, preventive, curative, restorative and rehabilitative, will be considerably expanded and strengthened and geriatric care facilities provided at secondary and tertiary levels.
- The development of health insurance will be given high priority to cater to the needs of different income segments of the population and have provision for varying contributions and benefits.
- Trusts, charitable societies and voluntary agencies will be promoted, encouraged and assisted by way of grants, tax relief and land at subsidized rates to provide free beds, medicines and treatment to the very poor elder citizens and reasonable user charges for the rest of the population.
- Private medical care has expanded in recent years offering the latest medical treatment



facilities to those who can afford it.

- Public hospitals will be directed to ensure that elderly patients are not subjected to long waits and visits to different counters for medical tests and treatment.
- Medical and para-medical personnel in primary, secondary and tertiary health care facilities will be given training and orientation in health care of the elderly. Facilities for specialization in geriatric medicine will be provided in the medical colleges. Training in nursing care will include geriatric care.
- For the old who are chronically ill and are deprived of family support, hospices supported or assisted by the State, public charity, and voluntary organizations will be necessary.
- Assistance will be given to geriatric care societies for the production and distribution of instruction material on self care by older persons.
- Older persons and their families will be given access to educational material on nutritional needs in old age.
- The concept of healthy ageing will be promoted. It is necessary to educate older persons and their families that diseases are not a corollary of advancing age nor is a particular chronological age the starting point for decline in health status.

C. Shelter: Shelter is a basic human need. The stock of housing for different income segments will be increased. Housing

schemes for urban and rural lower income segments will be earmark 10 per cent of the houses/house sites for allotment to older persons. This will include Indira Awas Yojana and other schemes of government. Earning persons will be motivated to invest in their housing in their earning days so that they have no problems of shelter when they grow old. This will require speedy urban land development for housing, time bound provision of civic services and communication links, availability of loans at reasonable rates, easy repayment installments, time bound construction schedules and tax reliefs. Development of housing has to be a joint endeavour of public and private sectors and require participation of Housing Development Boards, civic authorities, housing finance institutions and private developers and builders. Older persons will be given easy access to loans for purchase of housing and for major repairs, with easy repayment schedules.

D. Education: Education, training and information needs of older persons will be met. These have received virtually no attention in the past. Information and educational material specially relevant to the lives of older people will be developed and widely disseminated using mass media and non-formal communication channels. Discriminations, if any, against older persons for availing opportunities for education, training and orientation will be removed. Continuing education programmes will be encouraged and supported. These would cover a wide spectrum ranging from career development to creative use of leisure, appreciation of art, culture and social heritage and imparting skills in community work and welfare activities.



Protection of Life and Property

- Old persons have become soft targets for criminal elements. They also become victims of fraudulent dealings and of physical and emotional abuse within the household by family members to force them to part with their ownership rights. Widow's rights of inheritance, occupancy and disposal are at times violated by their own children and relatives. It is important that protection is available to older persons. The introduction of special provisions in IPC to protect older persons from domestic violence will be considered and machinery provided to attend all such cases promptly. Tenancy legislation will be reviewed so that the rights of occupancy of older persons are restored speedily.
- Voluntary organizations and associations of older persons will be assisted to provide protective services and help to senior citizens through helpline services, legal aid and other measures.
- Police will be directed to keep a friendly vigil on older couples or old single persons living alone and promote mechanisms of interaction with neighbourhood associations. Information and advice will be made available to older persons on the importance of keeping contacts on phone with relatives, friends and neighbours and on precautions to

be taken on matters such as prevention of unauthorized entry, hiring of domestic help, visits of repair and maintenance persons, vendors and others, and the handling of cash and valuables.

Implementation

1. The National Policy on Older Persons will be very widely disseminated for which an action plan will be prepared so that its features remain in constant public focus.
2. The Policy will make a change in the lives of senior citizens only if it is implemented. While the government and its principal organs have some basic responsibilities in the matter, other institutions as well as individuals with need to consider how they can play their respective roles for the well-being of older persons. Collaborative action will go a long way in achieving a more humane society which gives older persons their legitimate place.
3. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment will be the nodal Ministry to coordinate all matters relating to the implementation of the Policy. A separate bureau of older persons will be set up. An Inter-Ministerial Committee will coordinate matters relating to implementation of the National Policy and monitor its progress. States will be encouraged to set



- up separate Directorates of Older Persons and set up machinery for coordination and monitoring.
4. Five year and Annual Action Plans will be prepared by each Ministry to implement aspects which concern them. These will indicate steps to be taken to ensure flow of benefits to older persons from general programmes and from schemes specially formulated for their well-being. Targets will be set within the framework of a time schedule. Responsibility for implementation of action points will be specified. The Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry will facilitate budgetary provisions required for implementation. The Annual Report of each Ministry will indicate progress achieved during the year.
 5. Every three years a detailed review will be prepared by the nodal Ministry on the implementation of the National Policy. There will be non-official participation in the preparation of the document. The review will be a public document. It will be discussed in a National Convention. State Governments and Union Territory Administrations will be urged to take similar action.
 6. An autonomous National Council for Older Persons headed by the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment will be set up to promote and co-ordinate the concerns of older persons. The Council will include representatives of relevant Central Ministries and the Planning Commission. Five States will be represented on the Council by rotation. Adequate representation will be given to non-official members representing Non-Government Organisations, Academic Bodies, Media and Experts on Ageing issues from different fields.
 7. An autonomous registered National Association of Older Persons (NAOPS) will be established to mobilize senior citizens, articulate their interests, promote and undertake programmes and activities for their well being and to advise the Government on all matters relating to the Older Persons. The Association will have National, State and District level offices and will choose its own bearers.
 8. Panchayati Raj institutions will be encouraged to participate in the implementation of the National Policy, address local level issues and needs of the ageing and implement programmes for them. They will provide Forums for discussing concerns of older persons and activities that need to be taken.
 9. In order to ensure effective implementation of the Policy at different levels, from time to time the help of experts of public administrations shall be taken to prepare the details of the organizational set up for the implementation, coordination



and monitoring of the Policy.

Conclusions:

Population of aged is increasing in all countries of the world, including India. People are living longer due to economic and social development. Well-being of older persons has been mandated in the Constitution of India. Article 41, a Directive Principle of State Policy, has directed that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right of public assistance in cases of old age. There are other provisions, too, which direct the State to improve the quality of life of its citizens. Right to equality has been guaranteed by the Constitution as a Fundamental Right. These provisions apply equally to older persons. Social security has been made the concurrent responsibility of the Central and State Governments. The last two decades have witnessed considerable discussion and debate on the impact of demographic transition and of changes in society and economy on the situation of older persons. The need has been expressed at different forums where ageing issues have been deliberated. The Statement, by indicating the principles underlying the policy, the directions, the needs that will be addressed and the relative roles of governmental and non-governmental institutions, is expected to facilitate carving out of respective areas of operation and action in the direction of a human age integrated society.

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