The Framework for Monitoring, Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

Preface

This publication is prepared to support the processes of monitoring, review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which was adopted in 2002 by the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, Spain. While the principal approach to the review and appraisal – bottom-up, participatory and flexible – has been decided, some of the modalities of this new approach remain obscure and require explanation. Given the novelty of the bottom-up participatory approach and absence of practical experience in monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA, this paper is an attempt to offer a framework, which strives to provide both substantive background and practical recommendations in order to inform and facilitate the monitoring, review and appraisal processes.

This publication serves several purposes. First of all, it explains the rationale and content of the bottom-up participatory approach as a relatively new procedure for monitoring, review and appraisal of international policy documents, such as MIPAA. Second, it describes and compares the quantitative and qualitative methods of monitoring, review and appraisal and suggests possible links and relations between them. Third, it proposes a set of indicators specifically designed to monitor and evaluate the Madrid Plan. Over all, it intends to help governmental officials and their national partners involved in the policy and programmes on ageing to choose the most suitable methods and establish the most appropriate procedure for the monitoring, review and appraisal exercises.

The process of implementation of MIPAA is an evolving one, so is the procedure for its monitoring, review and appraisal. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the UN entity responsible for promoting the implementation of the Madrid Plan, offers this publication as the first step in assisting Member States in their efforts to implement, monitor and evaluate the MIPAA at the national level. DESA would like to invite all interested parties to share their experience during the first cycle of the monitoring, review and appraisal exercise, so that both good practices and obstacles of this exercise could be identified and shared by the international community.

1. Introduction

MIPAA responds to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the twenty-first century and promotes the achievement of a society for all ages[1]. As stated in MIPAA, "It is essential to integrate the evolving process of global ageing within the larger process of development "[2]. MIPAA proposes to address ageing issues from the developmental perspective and calls for all-inclusive, and simultaneous, action, ranging from individual to family to community to society at large.

MIPAA includes three priority directions, eighteen priority issues, thirty-five objectives and two hundred thirty-nine actions. Monitoring, review and appraisal are required to assess the progress achieved within the three priority directions for action defined in MIPAA[3]. They are: older persons and development; advancing health and well being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments. "The priority directions are designed to guide policy formulation and implementation towards the specific goal of successful adjustment to an ageing world, in which success is measured in terms of social development, the improvement for older persons in quality of life and in the sustainability of the various systems, formal and informal, that underpin the quality of well-being throughout the life course."[4] Under each priority direction, specific objectives and actions could be chosen by national and local governments from a broad spectrum of those recommended in MIPAA. In accordance with the three priority directions for action, three corresponding areas of inquiry for monitoring, review and appraisal could be identified: the level of integration of ageing and development, the quality of life of older persons, and the state of supportive environments that promote individual development into older age. To evaluate the progress in reaching the specific objectives and implementing the selected actions, precise questions have to be asked within each area of inquiry.

Table 1

Priority Directions of MIPAA	Areas of Inquiry
I. Older Persons and Development	I. Level of integration of ageing and development
II. Advancing health and Well-being into Old Age	II. Quality of life of older persons

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[1] The Political Declaration, article 1
[2] MIPAA, paragraph 9
[3] See Sidorenko A. and Walker A.
[4] MIPAA, paragraph 14

III. Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments	III. State of supportive environment promoting individual development into older age

MIPAA identified the Commission for Social Development – a consultative body of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations – as the entity responsible for follow-up and appraisal of the Plan[5]. Following the adoption of MIPAA in 2002, efforts of the Commission for Social Development have been focused on defining the modalities for the review and appraisal. At its sessions in 2003 and 2004, the Commission considered the issue and endorsed the bottom-up participatory assessment approach.

The bottom-up approach shall be an open-ended, participatory process that seeks to incorporate and link local and national activities to UN regional intergovernmental bodies and up to the global level of the review and appraisal of MIPAA. The core of the bottom-up review and appraisal is *participatory policy research*, which could be defined as "a general term for investigations using principles, approaches and methods that enable local people to conduct their own analysis and that involve personal and institutional change."[6]

The central idea of the bottom-up approach is to allow the traditional intergovernmental deliberative process to benefit from a sound and carefully considered participatory assessment of whether or not the objectives of MIPAA are being achieved at local, national, sub-regional and regional levels. The bottom-up, participatory approach to monitoring, review and appraisal should be seen as an on-going process rather than a product delivered at a certain time. In this sense, the bottom-up monitoring, review and appraisal should be viewed as an innovative tool for evaluating global policy documents on ageing, such as MIPAA, as it promotes the inclusion of views from groups that may have been previously excluded from the process of development, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect their lives.

A bottom-up, participatory approach is expected to offer the following advantages:

- to broaden the sources of information available to policy makers by complementing numerical data with qualitative information;
- to provide governments with policy relevant information when other information does not exist, for instance when statistics or other data are not available and cannot be gathered on short notice;
- to establish priorities for policies and programmes that reflect peoples' interests;
- to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies and programmes and reorient them if needed;
- to provide an opportunity for people, particularly those who are excluded or marginalized, to articulate their conditions, needs and aspirations.

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[5] MIPAA, paragraph 132
[6] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.80

The Commission, at its 2004 session, also identified the following general modalities of the review and appraisal:

- Review and appraisal will be undertaken every five years;

- Each review and appraisal cycle will focus on one of the priority directions of MIPAA;

- A specific theme emanating from MIPAA will be identified by the UN Secretary-General for the first cycle;

- Review and appraisal will include two dimensions: ageing-specific policies and ageing-mainstreaming[7] efforts; and

- The bottom-up and flexible approach will be the major format of the review and appraisal exercise.

In addition to, and in connection with, the bottom-up participatory approach, countries would review and appraise the implementation of MIPAA with the help of indicators: the development of indicators and the collection of age-disaggregated information has been urged by all major UN legislative documents on ageing, starting with the MIPAA itself.

The key attributes of the principal approach for monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA are participatory, bottom-up and flexible. The participatory nature originates from the major thrust of MIPAA, which promotes the participation of older persons in societal development. MIPAA calls for participation of older persons in decision-making processes at all levels[8], which should include their involvement in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the policy and programmes that affect their lives and well-being. In the specific area of care, MIPAA underscores that the participation of older persons in assessing their own needs and monitoring service delivery is crucial to the choice of the most effective option[9]. The needs and expectations of older persons are at the core of MIPAA. At the same time, the Plan promotes the development of a society for all ages, thus envisaging the participation of men and women of different ages in its implementation and evaluation.

But the meaning of the participatory nature of review and appraisal is even broader, as progress in the implementation of MIPAA is contingent upon effective partnership between Governments, all parts of civil society and the private sector[10] (box 1). By extension, effective partnership is an essential pre-requisite for successful review and appraisal of MIPAA.

MIPAA and the Political Declaration that was adopted with the Plan, refer repeatedly to the importance of local action to achieve their objectives, thus envisaging

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[7] See Venne R.
[8] MIPAA, paragraph 22
[9] MIPAA, paragraph 104
[10] MIPAA, paragraph 116

the bottom-up direction of the implementation process (box 2). The need to act locally and from the grassroots suggests also the local nature and bottom-up direction of the review and appraisal exercise.

Another important feature of the monitoring process is its flexibility. A flexible approach begins with identifying priorities for the implementation of MIPAA, which have to be defined on the basis of national and local circumstances. Different challenges and specific opportunities, including available capacity to address those challenges and bring forward opportunities, would influence the selection of objectives and actions, and, by definition, the corresponding methods of their review and appraisal.

An important feature of a flexible approach to review and appraisal is also an opportunity to engage various actors and institutions in the process. MIPAA underscores that independent, impartial monitoring of progress in its implementation is valuable and can be conducted by autonomous institutions[11]. The implementation of MIPAA in each country has its specific, multi-dimensional content that should be reflected in the methods choosen for monitoring, review and appraisal. The bottom-up participatory and flexible approach to the review and appraisal, that was agreed by the international community, promotes both diversity and specificity in assessing the progress in the implementation of MIPAA.

Box 1

Governments have the primary responsibility for providing leadership on ageing matters and on the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, but effective collaboration between national and local Governments, international agencies, older persons themselves and their organizations, other parts of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector is essential. The implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 will require the partnership and involvement of many stakeholders: professional organizations; corporations; workers and workers organizations; cooperatives; research, academic and other educational and religious institutions; and the media.

The Political Declaration, Article 17.

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[11] MIPAA, paragraph 119

Box 2

We stress the primary responsibility of Governments in promoting, providing and ensuring access to basic social services, bearing in mind specific needs of older persons. To this end we need to work together with local authorities, civil society, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector, volunteers and voluntary organizations, older persons themselves and associations for and of older persons, as well as families and communities.

The Political Declaration, Article 13

2. Approaches to monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA

This section provides a substantive background to monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA. First, it offers a brief description of main elements of the policy evaluation process, including definitions of the terms "monitoring", "review" and "appraisal". After that, principal approaches to review and appraisal of several international policy documents are briefly reviewed. Following this, the lessons learnt from the process of review and appraisal of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing are described. Finally, the general modalities of review and appraisal of MIPAA are outlined.

2.1 Monitoring, review and appraisal as elements of policy evaluation

Evaluation is a quintessential component of the policy process. The principal objective of the evaluation is to analyze anticipated and unanticipated results of policy implementation. The evaluation can lead to (a) the continuation of a policy in case the results of its implementation are satisfactory, (b) the adjustment of a policy to achieve the desired results, or (c) the termination of a policy when the results are unsatisfactory or when the "by-products" of a policy have worsened conditions compared to the status quo ante.

Monitoring, review and appraisal are the elements of policy evaluation. The monitoring element consists of collecting and tracking empirical data, while the review component includes study and analysis of collected data. The appraisal element aims at assessing the overall implementation status of a particular policy such as MIPAA.[12] Based on these definitions, monitoring, review and appraisal are the pillars on which policy evaluation rests on.

The evaluation process can only become operational after an organizational structure for collecting and analyzing information is established. Such a structure would ideally include a national mechanism responsible for coordination of implementation efforts among major stakeholders, including government offices and civil society organizations, such as relevant NGOs, academia, the private sector, and religious organizations. Adequate financial resources, staff, facilities, and good communications with clients are important ingredients for a successful evaluation process. After having set up an organizational structure, key considerations of monitoring have to be addressed: (a) who are the end-users of the collected information, (b) what kind of information is needed, (c) from what sources should the information be collected, and (d) when should the information be collected? Answering these questions will also determine the methods that will be employed.

At the initial stages of policy evaluation it is important for all stakeholders to understand the policy objectives of MIPAA, how to meet them and how one could know whether they have been met entirely, in part or not at all. To this end, policy evaluation

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[12] for definitions see *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.)*

should aim at producing data that would inform all major stakeholders about progress in reaching objectives and, simultaneously, would allow them to conclude whether policy adjustments are necessary. Information gathered should be reliable, valid and timely. To get a comprehensive picture of achieved changes, both quantitative and qualitative data should be collected and analyzed in the process of policy research (for more detailed discussion about methodology see section 3). Policy research is the building block of policy evaluation. Concrete methods of policy research listed in the box below, with exception of developing projections, could be included in the monitoring, review and appraisal exercises.

Box 3

"Policy research may be descriptive, analytical, or deal with causal processes and explanations; it may evaluate a new or existing policy programme, describe examples of best practice, measure social change, develop projections on the basis of large-scale modelling excises, or consist of large-scale experimental research in real-life settings running for years or even decades. Most policy research espouses a multi-disciplinary approach."[13]

The *monitoring* element of policy evaluation consists of data collection throughout the entire implementation process.

The *review* element should be designed to analyze data originating from documents, participatory observation, censuses, surveys, deliberations of focus groups, and semi-structured, individual interviews. Interpreting available data should be an attempt to put information into perspective. Data could be analyzed with the use of indicators that have been developed according to the priority directions, issues and objectives of MIPAA. The outcomes of the review process will allow various stakeholders to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current phase of implementation of MIPAA and formulate proposals for addressing the policy and programmes deficiency.

The *appraisal* exercise focuses on drawing conclusions and recommendations, which are based on the results of the review. The essence of appraisal is to compare the initial objectives and targets with the achieved results. In the case of national policy on ageing, the central question would be whether the quality of life of older persons changed for the better as a result of policy interventions in particular areas. If that is the case, policy makers could be encouraged to shift their attention to other priorities while continuing to monitor the original objectives and actions. New programmes could be started as soon as the situation in a particular area of concern has improved. In case of lack of progress, necessary adjustments to policy have to be introduced following the recommendations drawn within the appraisal exercise.

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[13] *A Dictionary of Sociology*, p.500

Evaluation consisting of monitoring, review and appraisal is an inherent and important part of the implementation of MIPAA. Planning for the implementation cannot be envisioned without a prior conceptualization of a comprehensive evaluation strategy. The importance that the international community attached to follow-up and global monitoring, review and appraisal is apparent in the last chapter of MIPAA which addresses these issues.[14] In the next sub-section, we will turn our attention to examples of evaluation of earlier international policy documents in the socio-economic realm.

2.2 Monitoring, review and appraisal of international policy documents

Various international conferences during the 1990s and the Millennium Summit in 2000 produced comprehensive policy documents on diverse socio-economic issues. The monitoring, review and appraisal mechanisms of these documents could serve as insightful guides for conducting the evaluation process of MIPAA. In this sub-section, the focus will be on the evaluation processes of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD; Copenhagen, 1995), the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD; Cairo, 1995), the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and the Millennium Declaration (2000).

Modalities for monitoring, review and appraisal of these documents vary. The process of evaluation of implementation of international policy documents is usually based on (a) questionnaires – designed and sent by the UN Secretariat to governments, (b) national reports from governments or other sources, and (c) data from population censuses, surveys, and other sources. The information used can be of quantitative or qualitative nature. Some of the methods of data collection will be described in detail in section 3.

Primary responsibility for implementing UN policy documents rests with governments, which committed themselves to achieving the objectives and goals contained in these documents. Therefore, governments are expected to take a leading role in coordinating national efforts in monitoring, reviewing, and appraising progress made in implementation of various national policies and programmes based on international consensus documents. Governments develop strategies and set up national implementation and evaluation mechanisms.

The UN General Assembly decided to assess progress made in the implementation of the outcome documents every five years. The first five-year reviews of ICPD, WSSD and the Beijing Conference were conducted in special sessions of the General Assembly, while the ten-year reviews were held at the level of the three functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council concerned with issues related to population (Commission on Population and Development), social development (Commission for Social Development) and women (Commission on the Status of Women). In addition, the functional commissions have the responsibility for continuing annual follow-up focusing on specifically identified topics. A comprehensive review of the follow-up to the

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[14] *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing,* p. 45-49

Millennium Summit and the implementation of the Millennium Declaration is planned in 2005 in the General Assembly. In addition, the Secretary-General submits annual reports to the General Assembly on progress made in fulfilling the Millennium Declaration commitments focusing on specific themes.

At the regional level, UN regional commissions have organized review and appraisal activities including various regional and sub-regional meetings to assess progress and identify obstacles in the implementation of the four documents. Regional reports have been prepared, based on national data and statistics.

National data collection mechanisms differ considerably. During the first round of evaluation of the WSSD Programme in 2000, only questionnaires were used, asking member states to evaluate progress in implementation. This approach was abandoned in 2005 in favour of independent data collection by the UN Secretariat without direct involvement of government officials. The 2005 report prepared by the UN Secretariat relied on empirical data from scientific literature and other available information. The same approach was also chosen for both quinquennial review and appraisal rounds of the Cairo Programme of Action in 1999 and 2004. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action in 2000 and 2005 used a combination of methods of survey questionnaire and analysis of available additional information. The additional sources of information included reports on implementation of national action plans, reports of the States parties to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, information taken from national Human Development Reports, NGO reports and information from the UN system. For the evaluation of implementation of the Millennium Declaration, indicators for measuring progress were developed – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To assess national implementation, one-hundred country reports regarding national progress on reaching the MDGs have been issued by governments.

It is evident that for monitoring, review and appraisal of the policy documents, mostly government-generated data has been used, including reports and statistics and other empirical data that originated for the most part from government-sponsored research. With the exception of the Beijing Platform for Action, civil society involvement in the evaluation process has been minimal. Developing a system for monitoring, review and appraisal that relies mainly on participatory methods of data collection and focuses on opinions of people most affected by a particular policy - such as older persons in the case of MIPAA - would be a novelty and would require efforts and considerations that are of a pioneering nature. Within the United Nations, the experience of participatory evaluation of specific projects has existed for a certain period of time; however, until recently no attempts have been made to conduct a global evaluation exercise of one of the international policy documents, such as MIPAA using participatory methodology. Before turning to conceiving such an approach, we will describe in the next sub-section the evolution of evaluation procedure from the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing to the Madrid Plan as well as lessons learned regarding monitoring, review and appraisal. In addition, the major differences between the two plans will be briefly outlined.

2.3 From Vienna to Madrid – the changing approach to monitoring, review and appraisal of international action on ageing

The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, which was adopted at the first World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna in 1982, provided the first comprehensive policy framework for addressing ageing issues. The Vienna Plan recommended a variety of actions in employment and income security, health, housing, education and social welfare while focusing predominantly on the issues of ageing in developed countries.

The Commission for Social Development became the intergovernmental body designated to review the implementation of the Vienna Plan every four years. The review was based largely on government replies to questionnaires sent by the UN Secretariat. The questionnaires focused on the overall situation of older persons, their quality of life and the adoption and implementation of specific policies concerning older persons. The findings of review and appraisal were presented every four years in a report of the Secretary-General to the Commission for Social Development. The number of countries that responded to questionnaires decreased over the years: from 77 countries during the first review and appraisal in 1984 to 58 countries in 1988; 81 in 1992; and 55 countries in 1996 – during the fourth and last review and appraisal of the Vienna Plan.

The reasons for low participation of countries were both substantive and procedural. The major substantive obstacle was that the recommendations of the Vienna Plan were designed to address primarily the challenges of individual and population ageing in developed countries, thus leaving aside the specific concerns of developing countries and the newly emerged Eurasian transitional economies. The procedural obstacles arose because interpretations of the questions varied greatly among States. However, the differences in interpretation were not apparent in the responses and consequently were not discussed in the review documents. Finally, the group of responding countries changed with each review and appraisal cycle, making progress and comparability difficult to assess.

Proposals of the UN Secretariat for enhancing the monitoring of the implementation of the Vienna Plan of Action included merging the reports on the world ageing situation with the review and appraisal; elaboration of an ageing-related development index complementing other indices within the Human Development Report; constructing an Internet accessible database of national policies and programmes on ageing; and conducting national household surveys. Due to the beginning of preparations of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the proposals for enhanced monitoring, review and appraisal of the implementation of the Vienna Plan were never pursued.

Leading up to the Second World Assembly, two principal tasks were identified: (1) development of a long-term strategy on ageing and (2) a revision of the Vienna International Plan of Action itself. The latter point was based on the fact that the Vienna Plan reflected the conditions of its time, and that newly emerged socio-economic and political realities after the end of the Cold War, as well as the changing demographics of developing countries, had to be considered for the elaboration of new recommendations

for policy action. It was also envisioned that civil society and the private sector should play a more prominent role in national and international action on ageing in the twenty-first century.

MIPAA broadened the content of policy action on ageing considerably, introduced new issues of concern to older persons and shifted the exclusive focus on ageing in economically and demographically 'advanced' countries to population and individual ageing in developing countries and economies in transition. In addition, the overall priority of global action on ageing has shifted from 'humanitarian' to 'developmental' concerns. While the Vienna Plan identified ageing as an internationally significant issue, the Madrid Plan called for inclusion of ageing into the international development agenda[15].

After the adoption of MIPAA in 2002, modalities for monitoring, review and appraisal of the new plan needed to be developed. For the monitoring component, national data collection and analysis, such as compilation of age-specific information for policy development, are underlined in MIPAA.[16] In addition, sharing of best practices and research findings are listed in the plan as important elements for its successful implementation, which should be facilitated at the regional level. MIPAA also calls for the elaboration of practical tools for evaluation, such as key indicators.

The Commission for Social Development is again, as it was for the Vienna Plan, responsible for the systematic follow-up and review of implementation. During the 41st session of the Commission in 2003, a note by the Secretariat specifically addressing the issue of "Modalities for the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002" was issued. The note outlined the role of the Commission in integrating various dimensions of population ageing in its work and proposed a bottom-up and flexible approach for the review and appraisal of MIPAA. The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/14 endorsed the bottom-up approach. In 2004, the Commission for Social Development decided, in its resolution 42/1, to undertake the review and appraisal every five years, "with each review and appraisal cycle to focus on one of the priority directions identified in the Madrid Plan of Action".[17] The scope of each national review and appraisal exercise will be defined by the specific priorities and objectives decided by governments in consultation with other stakeholders, including older persons, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector.

The use of a participatory, bottom-up approach for evaluation of the implementation of a major international conference outcome is a novelty within the UN system. Such an approach will rely on a mix of information, which will be obtained through participatory methods of evaluation, which will be described in detail in the next section. Since it was noted in MIPAA that "independent, impartial monitoring of progress in implementation is also valuable and can be conducted by autonomous institutions"[18], it does not seem

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[15] See Venne R.
[16] see *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*, p.46
[17] E/CN.5/2004/8, p.17
[18] *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*, p.46

surprising that the international community chose a participatory approach for reviewing progress in improving the quality of life of older persons. Relying only on government responses to questionnaires has often been insufficient for getting a comprehensive picture of the situation of older persons or the implementation of policies affecting them. A mixture of sources of information would ensure a more complete picture. However, it should be pointed out that successful monitoring, review and appraisal should not rely exclusively on qualitative information but could be complemented by quantitative information available from census data, surveys, academic research findings and other sources that would accompany information collected by participatory methods.

3. Conducting a bottom-up participatory monitoring, review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA

The purpose of this section is to outline methods for conducting a bottom-up participatory monitoring, review and appraisal process. The first part (3.1) of this section outlines general organization ("how to") of the review and appraisal process, specifies the roles of major stakeholders and co-ordination of their involvement. The second part (3.2) describes key components (phases) of the participatory approach. This is followed by description of participatory methods of gathering information (3.3); and the concluding part (3.4) focuses on analysis of research findings collected by participatory methods.

3.1 Organizing the process. Mobilizing key stakeholders

Somewhat paradoxically, for a bottom-up, participatory approach to function appropriately, particularly at its initiation, a top down central mechanism may be needed. Such a mechanism, which should be established at the national government level, would be useful for encouraging action while ensuring ownership of the process at the grassroots level. This is a delicate function. Grass roots evaluation is unlikely to occur without some support and encouragement form higher up, but there is always a risk that central authorities will overwhelm or stifle local action. A careful balance must be struck, and central authorities must understand their roles as facilitators, not directors, of the process. Thus, the process of review and appraisal should be facilitated at the top level of government and supported by national legislation. The role of government is crucial for ensuring sustainability and continuity of the appraisal process, including through provision of financial assistance to the local level.

The facilitating role of the government includes providing assistance in clarifying the involvement and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including how to get multiple stakeholders interested in the process, and what kind of procedure would be adopted to meet different expectations.

A suitable coordinating mechanism for the national monitoring process should be established among already existing committees on ageing, or the coordination of existing entities should be improved. This might be done through a governmental body with well-established links to other ministries and governmental entities, research institutions, local authorities, NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies. Such a body could include the lead agency charged with responsibility for mainstreaming ageing, as well as representatives of all the major stakeholders. In addition to this, the government may want to consider establishment or designation of a national autonomous body with advisory function, in order to ensure the independent and impartial monitoring of progress in implementation of the Madrid Plan. Moreover, it is most important, to create a permanent working mechanism that can coordinate and administer the process of monitoring, review and appraisal, and pass valuable experience and lessons learned to policy makers.

Some countries have already established independent advisory bodies (committees, commissions) on ageing and concerns of older persons, consisting of academicians, and representatives of the private sector and NGOs with the task to integrate the issue of ageing into all policies. Such bodies could be set up as a complement for government policy-making, to ensure that government machineries do not overlook the needs of older persons. Advisory bodies would recieve and analyze opinions and facilitate close and regular monitoring of policy implementation at the local (community, village, district, etc.) level. Equally important, such bodies could evaluate policy proposals by government, assess the impact of newly proposed policies on older persons and suggest possible changes. Advisory bodies could be established at the local, regional and national level.

Once relevant information is collected at the local level, it will have to be passed along to provincial to national authorities. It is important for governments to clarify the process by which this will take place. Rules, legislation, traditions, networks, ethnic alliances, patronage, political allegiances and bureaucratic structures form a complex and fluctuating environment through which such information might be channelled, but it will take careful planning and analysis to determine which methods are most appropriate.

The all-encompassing nature of population and individual ageing demands that the review and appraisal should engage all major **stakeholders**: older persons, government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and international organizations. The bottom-up, participatory approach will ultimately take place at different levels, and different types of stakeholders will be involved. Individuals and members of communities would participate at the grassroots level, where it is also likely that local leaders and municipal authorities, government officials, politicians, academics, representatives of NGOs or community based organizations (CBOs) and many others would be engaged. A bottom-up, participatory approach would allow the perceptions and experiences of local people, and particularly older people (the "primary" stakeholders and target group), to feed into policy-making, planning, implementation, monitoring, review and appraisal.

The degree of commitment of authorities will determine how well the process functions. Support from higher up is essential, and national governments should assume the responsibility to facilitate the process without necessarily directing it. Government should be open to various ideas and willing to mainstream ageing issues into relevant policy areas. The involvement of existing elected bodies, including legislative structures, and interested elected officials, can be especially important for motivating and sustaining the process. The already established participatory processes, such as networks of concerned organizations, could offer useful experience.

Civil society organizations, many of which have substantial experience in the use of participatory approaches and in the area of ageing and development, should be actively engaged. Stakeholders from the non-governmental, academic and scientific community bring experience and insight, an integral feature of any successful outcome. NGOs and academic institutions are important in both collecting and distilling information from the local to the national level. They can supply government with useful information and

provide findings concerning the situation of older persons and their needs as they work directly with older persons. They can also provide operational support for the feedback mechanism of the monitoring, review and appraisal through measuring the impact of policies that are being implemented. Older persons must be included at all levels and in all components of the monitoring, review and appraisal, including the processes of gathering of information, its distillation and decision making for policy development.

Various NGOs should fully cooperate on behalf of older persons; in addition, they could reach out to the grass roots by promoting, supporting and facilitating community projects for the well-being of older persons. Nation-wide networking of NGOs could be established for more efficient impact. Older persons should be encouraged to join associations that serve as pressure groups and seek training in various areas. The role of media would be in the realm of advocacy i.e. in educating and informing citizens about issues pertaining to ageing and the impact that the ageing process will have on all spheres of society, including family, economy, culture and politics. The private sector could – apart from providing funding when possible – remove corporate policies that discriminate against older persons, and provide retirement training and contribute to community development schemes targeting older persons. Specifically with regard to review and appraisal of MIPAA, the private sector could use its marketing techniques for awareness raising and provide administrative and organizational support. The essential role of academia is to provide data through research, help in the distillation process, engage in national and local capacity building and assist in policy formulation and evaluation.

The government may identify as its major partner an independent entity with an expertise in conducting participatory evaluation research to help facilitate the monitoring, review and appraisal exercises. Indeed, MIPAA underscores the value of independent, impartial monitoring of progress in implementation that can be conducted by autonomous institutions[19]. Such institutions could be selected among research and academic entities or NGOs. They could be ageing specific or belong to other social and economic areas. The important pre-requisite, however, is their engagement and positive experience in conducting bottom-up participatory evaluation.

UN agencies, particularly those with local field offices, can provide specific contributions in their areas of expertise: ILO - employment and social protection; WHO – healthy ageing and lifelong development; FAO and UNDP - rural ageing and development, for example.

Overall, the cumulative impact of partnerships in the monitoring, review and appraisal could be considerable, with potential to provide a richer context and deeper understanding of the issues and just how varied and multifaceted the responses can be. The key is to ensure that the monitoring, review and appraisal process appropriately utilizes the experience, expertise and resources of all stakeholders at the local and national level, and that this process is linked to the sub-regional and regional levels.

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[19] MIPAA, paragraph 119

3.2 Key components of bottom-up, participatory policy research

A bottom-up, participatory approach to assessing the implementation of MIPAA includes several key components:

1. Awareness raising/advocacy;
2. Assessment of needs and setting of targets;
3. Gathering of information;
4. "Distillation" of the local findings into policy-relevant formats; and
5. Adjustment of policies and programmes in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the review and appraisal.

Raising awareness at national and local levels about the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the recommendations of MIPAA as well as about regional implementation strategies[20] should occur throughout the process of the Plan's implementation and subsequent evaluation. In order for people to be able to participate in a monitoring, review and appraisal activities, they must first be informed about the content of MIPAA and the regional implementation strategies. The ultimate goal of this initial stage, therefore, is to inform older persons, as "primary" stakeholders, of their rights, responsibilities and opportunities as defined in MIPAA and national legislation, and establish a notion of local ownership of its implementation and follow-up. Provision of information, as well as education and communication activities can help older persons to understand that they are crucial actors in ensuring their own well being, and they have a critical role in the bottom-up, participatory approach. In practical terms, translation, publication and wider distribution of MIPAA and its regional implementation strategies are recommended.

An advocacy campaign should lead to the **assessment of local needs**, setting targets and formulation of appropriate programmes of action to translate MIPAA into programmes and actions that are appropriate to local circumstances. The point of departure should be an inventory of which measures have been taken since the adoption of MIPAA in 2002. What results did these measures have so far? Based on the current situation and possible changes since 2002, what should happen next? National priorities and policy directions should be identified. Views on the practical implementation of the relevant parts of MIPAA and how they can be translated into country specific policies may be sought individually and collectively, at both the local and national level. Older persons would directly participate in decision-making through their involvement in the process of consultations. Such consultations could also include health practitioners, service providers, local governmental officials and representatives of civil society and private sector. Documentation of the outcomes of consultative meetings can provide a rich source of information about how the MIPAA recommendations are being translated

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[20] Regional strategies for implementation of MIPAA were adopted for the UN ECE region: (http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/age/conf2002frame.htm); for UN ESCAP: (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa/shanghai.htm); and for the UN ECLAC region (http://www.eclac.org/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/celade/noticias/paginas/1/13561/P13561.xml&xsl=/celade/tpl-i/p18f.xsl&base=/tpl-i/top-bottom.xslt)

into practice and how they impact the lives of older persons and their families. Local level monitoring and appraisal exercises would be ongoing and feed into existing reporting frameworks, such as for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[21] and/or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)[22]. Specific reviews of implementation of MIPAA would therefore be integrated into MDGs and/or PRSPs reporting processes that occur every three to five years. Information specifically relating to the implementation of MIPAA could be collated through a series of meetings, workshops and documents.

Gathering relevant information is the core of the monitoring, review and appraisal process. The essence of the participatory method is to listen to stakeholders and to give them a chance to state their views at different stages of the implementation process. This allows a different type of information to emerge, information which may be more qualitative in nature, and which can complement quantitative monitoring. Given the heterogeneity of issues related to ageing and corresponding policy responses, entry points of information for evaluation of the MIPAA must be multi-faceted rather than confined to a single method.

It is of great importance to gather "new" information on those groups of older persons who were neglected in policy action, such as rural older persons, especially rural older women. In order to engage civil society in policy development, monitoring, review and appraisal, many forms of participatory research and assessment are being used by donors, development agencies and governments. This experience and expertise should be identified and employed in conducting the evaluation of MIPAA at the national and local (community, village, district, etc.). The primary information could be collected by utilizing a variety of methods, which are described in detail in sub-section 3.2.

Using the bottom-up, participatory approach, governments would **distill** the findings of local consultations into policy-relevant formats that are meaningful at national and international levels. As the information obtained is passed from the local to the national and regional levels, efforts would be undertaken to identify relevant experiences and draw lessons for policy. Part of the distillation process will be to prioritize critical issues from among the many valuable inputs that will be received from the local and provincial levels during the evaluation exercise.

It is important that the distillation of gathered information occur at all levels of the process. It would, therefore, not be necessary to assign this function to a particular body or confine it to a particular stage of the review and appraisal process. Normally, verification of findings would be undertaken locally, particularly since locally detected issues would require local solutions. At the same time, the entire process needs to be carefully coordinated so as not to discount the heterogeneity of the older population and the diversity of the information already gathered.

To achieve this, partnerships involving all major stakeholders are required in order to collate all the information and feed it into the appropriate channels throughout the review

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[21] Millennium Development Goals and Targets are posted at: http://www.undp.org/mdg/abcs.html
[22] PRSP document library it posted at: http://poverty.worldbank.org/prsp/

and appraisal exercise. Information, once analyzed and distilled, also needs to be fed simultaneously back to the community for verification. This is a crucial step designed to ensure that the lessons derived from the exercise are indeed the lessons the community agrees with.

Ultimately, the evaluation process should lead to the necessary **adjustments of policies and programmes,** in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the review and appraisal. The national level of the review and appraisal process is where the findings must be translated into recommendations for improving policy and programme design in order to promote better implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in local and national contexts.

3.3 Gathering of information: participatory methods of data collection

After having addressed the key components of the bottom-up, participatory approach, we will focus now on gathering of information through the various participatory methods of data collection.

Participatory data collection, or research, is generally associated with qualitative methods of information gathering. Qualitative methods in comparison to quantitative ones tend to be more concerned with words than numbers. *Qualitative methods are therefore based on data collection and analysis which focus on interpreting the meaning of social phenomena based on the views of the participants of a particular social reality.* (See table 2).

Participatory approaches contain a variety of data collection methods: (a) participatory listening and observation; (b) visual tools such as maps, daily activity diagrams, institutional diagrams and Venn diagrams, flow diagrams and livelihood analysis; (c) semi-structured interviews; and (d) focus group discussions. Among the participatory methods of evaluation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups are the most often used instruments for gathering the views of participants on certain topics and issues. Participatory listening and observation and various visual tools would normally be undertaken at the initial stages of the evaluation process as they often provide the basis for the design of in-depth questionnaires for semi-structured interviews and the conduct of focus groups.

While quantitative questionnaires are structured in the variety of answers that a respondent chooses from, qualitative surveys and focus groups allow for more nuanced, semi-structured and open-ended responses. The objective of qualitative designs is to capture values, attitudes and preferences of participants to permeate the 'how' and the 'why' underlying a phenomenon. Since data resulting from qualitative research approaches does not lend itself to numerical coding, evaluation of qualitative findings is more complex compared to quantitative research results. Tables, rows of data, or correlations are therefore not generated by qualitative research. Information has to be

grouped under topical headings and generalized in its diversity. More details on how collected data is analyzed are described in sub-section 3.3.

Table 2

Participatory monitoring, review and appraisal differs from conventional monitoring, review and appraisal approaches in several important ways[23]:		
	Conventional	*Participatory*
Who plans and manages the process:	Senior managers, or outside experts	Local people, project staff, managers, and other stakeholders, often helped by a facilitator
Role of 'primary stakeholders' (the intended beneficiaries):	Provide information only	Design and adapt the methodology, collect and analyze data, share findings and link them to action
How success is measured:	Externally-defined, mainly quantitative indicators	Internally-defined indicators, including more qualitative judgments
Approach:	Predetermined	Adaptive

    To capture the full extent of a specific social reality, many research designs are based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collated by quantitative research methods is rarely sufficient to provide a full explanation of an observable social issue. Based on their experience, researchers have realized the importance of integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative methods while trying to provide policy makers with a comprehensive portrait of the socio-economic situation of various social groups. Such an integrative approach would also be of use in reviewing and appraising the implementation of MIPAA. While section 4 will address quantitative approaches to data collection, such as censuses and sample surveys, we will describe below the methods of qualitative participatory research.

a) Participatory listening and observation

    Listening and observation skills are the basis for attaining a comprehensive understanding of the situation of older persons in a particular community and to viewing social reality through the eyes of older persons. These skills are of great use for any participatory research design and should be applied for the duration of any project.

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[23] Guijt, Irene; Gaventa, John (1998), Participatory monitoring, review and appraisal: learning from change, *IDS Policy briefing, Issue 12,* http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/briefs/brief12.html

Participatory listening and observation assumes that "the participant observer/ethnographer immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworkers, and asking questions".[24] It is therefore "a major research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given area of study through intensive involvement with people in their natural environment."[25]

A bottom-up, participatory research project in a particular community may be started by familiarizing oneself with the environment. This is usually done in a *guided walk* – or *transect walk* – that often involves an individual or a group of people who would guide the researcher(s) through a community to observe and talk about things of local importance. The organizational set-up of a community, the quality of housing and the availability of social services for older persons can be studied on such a walk. As a result, maps could be drawn reflecting the crucial local institutions that are relevant to older persons.

With regard to *participatory listening* it is important for the listener to ensure that his/her appearance and manner are conducive to the research environment and are acceptable to the older persons themselves. Every person should be encouraged to speak, and interest in what is said should be demonstrated at all times. Non-verbal communication such as body language should be given due attention as well. The researcher(s) should seek clarification if needed to understand correctly what an individual tries to express. Expressive or verbal judgments of what older persons have said should be avoided.

Participatory observation complements the listening component. People or events should be observed at different times of the day and at different days of the week to ensure that a balanced impression has been gained. Observations and conversations should be written down in field notes as soon as possible since human memory can be deceptive. Particular attention should be given to power relationships among older persons, what roles various individuals play in the community, what activities and tasks are performed at what frequency, and what issues engender excitement, irritation, agreement or disagreement among older persons.

Participatory observation and listening form the basis from which further and more complex inquiries depart. What has been observed and heard is often the starting point for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions during which observations can be checked and clarified in interview questions to determine whether the researcher has accurately interpreted what he/she has seen and heard.

b) Visual tools

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[24] Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* p.292
[25] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.482

"Visual tools – such as maps, diagrams, seasonal calendars and daily activity charts – are important elements of participatory research. They enable older people to explore complex relationships and link issues in ways not possible through verbal methods alone, generating a deeper analysis of local issues."[26]

A common participatory approach in visualizing is it to draw figures, maps and diagrams and/or to use tools such as stones, sticks or other objects to demonstrate the layout of a particular community. One of the advantages of using visual tools is that illiterate members of a community would also have the opportunity to participate in the evaluation exercises, so that a balanced representation of older persons within the community could be ensured. That means that older persons from various socio-economic strata and from different geographic areas of the community should have the opportunity to participate. Age and sex distribution should be accurately represented as well.

Maps can be informative tools showing characteristics of a location, where evaluation of MIPAA is being undertaken. HelpAge International distinguishes between *resource maps* and *mobility maps*. The former show where (older) people live as well as the general infrastructure of a community, while the latter outline movements within a community. In addition to these two methods, *body maps* could be an important source of information, about the health status of older persons, which could be depicted on a large map of the human body. However, body mapping should be approached with utmost sensitivity. Although there would be a general introduction to the mapping exercise by the researcher(s), the mapping itself should be conducted by people living in the location of evaluation and the evaluation team shall not interfere during the mapping activity. Since different groups of older persons would be asked to participate in the mapping exercise, it might be expected that different maps would highlight the different perceptions within a community. The mapping exercise should also include an inquiry about historical changes of a community that could be reflected in mapping as well.

To understand how members of a community spend their time, *daily activity diagrams* are helpful. Daily work patterns and other activities of older persons could be recorded with the assistance of such a method by using little stones that would symbolize time spent on particular activities. Of special interest would be gender differences with regard to time use as well as how much older persons contribute to household and community activities. In addition, changes of time use can be demonstrated by inviting older persons to reflect on their whole lives and how much their daily activities have varied over the course of time discerning trend lines and creating historical profiles. Caution is in order when asking participants about their (extended) past, since human memory can be very deceptive.

Similarly, *institutional diagrams* would illustrate key institutions and individuals within the community. By drawing rectangles of different sizes, older persons would demonstrate the influence and power that certain local institutions and individuals possess. Connections between institutional and individual power are of interest to the

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[26] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.53

researcher(s) as well: Venn diagrams are used to explain changes in relationships between institutions, groups and individuals (see fig.1). With regard to Venn diagrams, the same procedure of using rectangles of varying sizes should be utilized. The rectangles would represent different institutions (with the larger rectangles representing institutions that play a more important role in the community). The distances among the rectangles would represent the level of contact among various institutions. Overlapping of rectangles would symbolize the extent to which the various parts of different institutions collaborate on particular issues. An example for two overlapping institutions could be the local police force and the local government. Since questions regarding power within a community are often sensitive, it may be prudent to engage in such exercises after a period of trust-building has passed.

Fig.1

FOUR ELEMENT
VENN DIAGRAM

(Source: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-3/schooley.html)
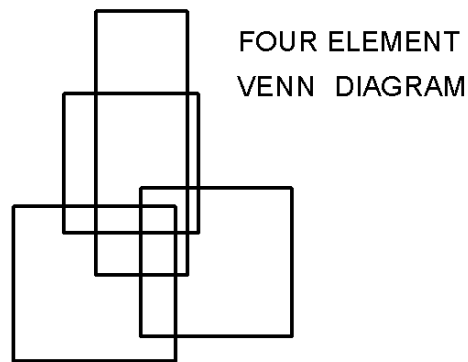
"*Flow diagrams* show causes, effects, and relationships. For example, a flow diagram could show the relationship between old age, livelihood and security. They can also show the impacts of an event, policy or programme on people's lives, for example the impact of new health policy on older persons' wellbeing."[27] Events (problems, issues), their causes and effects can be visualized by lines of varying thickness expressing their significance (see fig.2). They would also be used to identify the extent which issues are interrelated. The opinions of participants on effectiveness of policies can be measured by flow diagrams. Similarly, effectiveness of policies affecting the lives of older persons can be ranked and scored on a matrix to establish which policies are viewed as successful or failing in delivering what was promised to older persons. In that sense, flow diagrams and ranking and scoring matrices would be promising tools for monitoring of existing or future policies and programmes specifically geared towards older persons.

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[27] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.57

Fig.2
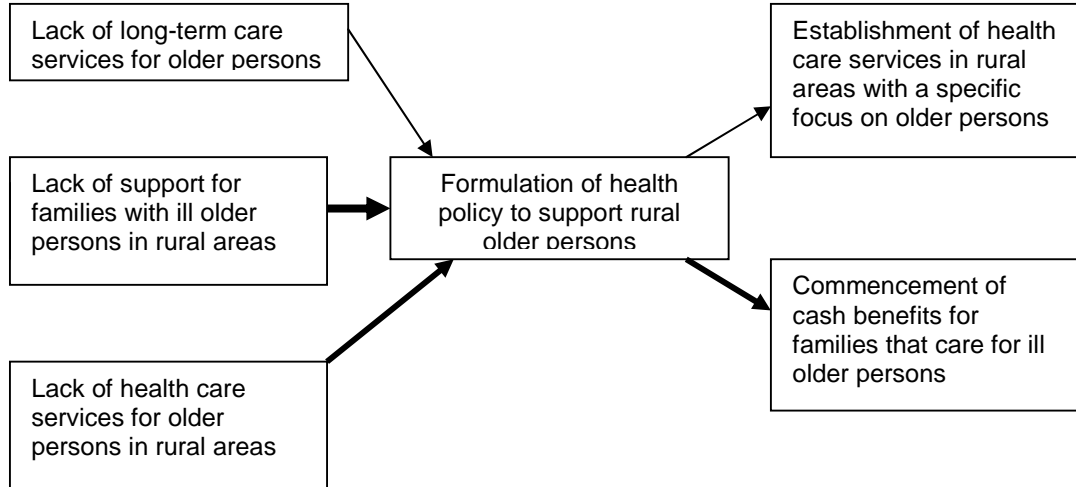
Livelihood analysis aims at learning about people's income (cash and in kind) and expenditure (see fig.3). It can also be seen as a participatory, economic household analysis, since older persons would be asked to list how many household members reside where they live. Participants would draw three circles and divide the first one according to sources of income, the second one according to on what kind of expenditure the resources are spent and the third one according to which household member spends how much of the available resources.

Fig.3
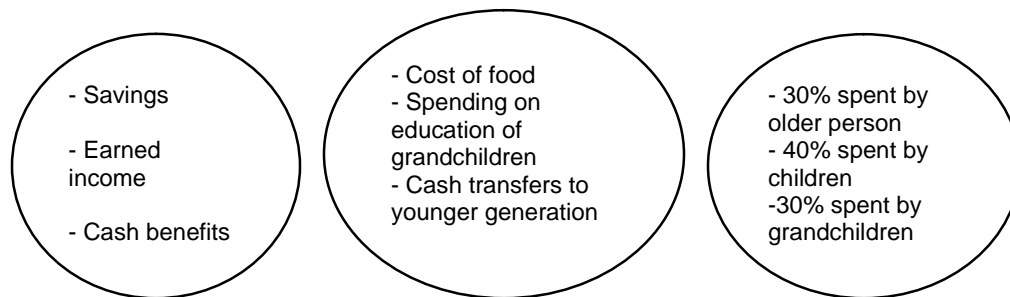
The final maps, daily activity diagrams, institutional diagrams and Venn diagrams, flow diagrams and outcome of the livelihood analysis that have been created by various groups and individuals should be copied or photographed by the evaluation team. The results will be valuable in influencing the design of semi-structured interviews and in conducting focus group discussions since a rather diverse body of base information has been gathered by visual tools. More focused in-depth data collection can follow once the listener has attained a more nuanced understanding of a particular community and its older persons.

c) Semi-structured interviews

"*Semi-structured interviews* – conversations based on a set of guideline questions – are a key technique in participatory research, and a powerful way of learning about the views of older people."[28] Although all guideline questions will be asked during an interview – albeit with the possibility of varying order – new questions may arise during each interview. Therefore, the interview process is *flexible* compared to the rigidly structured interviews that we will turn to in the next section. This kind of flexibility will allow the interviewee to describe events, observations and issues in very personal terms and he/she will thus be less restricted to respond to questions in his/her own words. The set of questions however, will ensure comparability of data when the interviews are analyzed.

The guideline questions of the interview should be organized according to topical areas of inquiry that should succeed each other in a logical fashion. The language used should be comprehensible and jargon free. It is obvious that the interviewer has to be able to speak the language of the community in which he/she will conduct semi-structured interviews. An ability to (a) ask short, simple and easy questions, to (b) listen attentively, to (c) steer the interview sensitively in the desired direction and to (d) remember what was said earlier and interpret correctly respondent's statements during the interview are of paramount importance for the interviewer. Questions that would lead the respondent in a particular direction (Do you agree that….?) should be avoided. At the outset of an interview, it is important to select appropriate participants, to explain why the researcher(s) conduct this interview, to record the interviewee's name, age, gender and, importantly, whether the individual belongs to certain community institutions, how large the residential household is and how the interviewee locates him/herself within the community. Being outfitted with good quality recording equipment and making sure that the interview location is quiet and private are practical issues that are important for successful interviewing.

Nine types of questions in qualitative interviewing could be identified: introducing (please tell me about …!), follow-up (what do you mean by that?), probing (could you say some more about that?), specifying (what did you do then?), direct (are you happy with…?), indirect (what do most people here think about…?), structuring (I would like to move on to a different topic!), and interpreting (do you mean that…?) questions as well as silence (pause to signal to respondent to reflect or amplify answer).[29] These questions suggest that the interviewer(s) should be engaged without being invasive. Besides getting answers to the guideline questions, another objective of the semi-structured interview is to get a better picture of the values, beliefs, behaviour, formal and informal roles, relationships, emotions, stories, encounters, and places and locals of the interviewee.[30]

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[28] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.51
[29] Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*
[30] see Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* p.328

Notes should be taken during an interview on the non-verbal language of the interviewee as well as on certain specificities (the way responses were phrased) that were notable about the interview. Usually, it is not necessary to transcribe the whole interview from recording. To save time and energy, it is often sufficient to transcribe the crucial parts that have been the most illuminating for the evaluation.

To ensure the validity of data, representativity is a major goal in evaluation designs. *Representativity* is achieved by making certain that a sample exhibits the same key characteristics as the general population, i.e. gender distribution among older persons and age representativity. In addition, quality of life and the general situation of older persons in *various* communities have to be evaluated to control for differences that would be expected e.g. in rural areas compared to urban centres or variations in regions of a country.

Probability sampling of potential interviewees entails either (a) random samples of older persons of a particular community or (b) stratified random samples in which a population of older persons is already divided into subgroups, or strata, e.g. older persons in need of care, or ill older persons, etc. In addition, there is *snowball sampling*, in which the researcher is introduced by one interviewee to the next and *theoretical sampling* which starts with a particular hypothesis to be tested in the interview survey; as soon as the researcher realizes repetitions in the answers of interviewees, 'theoretical saturation' is reached and no new interviews are necessary. Both, snowball and theoretical sampling cannot claim statistical representativity and thus have their limitations. We will address the issue of representativity and sampling in greater detail in section 4.

d) Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are "a research strategy which involves intensive discussion and interviewing of small groups of people, on a given 'focus' or issue, usually on a number of occasions over a period of time."[31] The difference between individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions is that the latter gives an opportunity to follow the group dynamic that evolves during the discussion. How interviewees react to each other's responses and make up their opinion, often as a reaction to what other participants have expressed is of core interest during a focus group discussion. Since participants may argue about certain aspects of an issue that is being discussed during a focus group, the reactions expressed and opinions voiced may be more realistic compared to an individual interview. In addition, views of participants can be challenged by others more profoundly than in a semi-structured interview. Thus, focus group discussions ideally complement semi-structured individual interviews.

The moderator who facilitates the focus group should try to be not too intrusive and should rely on a rather unstructured setting for the discussions to extract the opinions, views and perspectives of the participants. He/she should have a rather small number of guiding questions to stir the discussion and should intervene minimally. Only when the

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[31] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.233

discussion veers clearly off track or when there are unproductive silences, should the moderator get involved. The moderator should record the discussions on audio equipment and make notes on the non-verbal behaviour of the participants. Naturally, the main interest would be on the range of opinions expressed, who are the opinion leaders and *how* the participants express their views during a focus group discussion. As with semi-structured interviewing, it is not necessary to transcribe the entire discussion; the focus should be on the most important parts of a focus group to document what was said.

Evaluation of living conditions of older persons, for methodological reasons, should be based on numerous focus group discussions.[32] There is no clear guide on how many discussions on a particular topic are sufficient, but in case of measuring the quality of life of older persons, it seems that a more limited number of discussions would be in order since only older persons would participate compared to a sample reflecting the entire society. If a starting hypothesis exists (i.e. income of older persons decreased due to pension scheme reforms), 'theoretical saturation' could be applied here as well: if the evaluation team hears repeatedly similar or identical responses and discussions of focus groups, it will conclude, there is no further need to continue with more discussions.

The size of each focus group should range between six to ten participants to allow every speaker enough time to express him/herself. The participants shall be selected randomly on a variety of characteristics: older age (60 and above) being the most obvious, but also based on differences of educational attainment, income and occupation, marital status and sex. Since participatory research on views of older persons will be organized within a community or locale, it is evident that many of the participants in focus group discussions will know each other in advance.

It is recommended to start a focus group by thanking the participants for taking part in the discussion, by explaining the evaluation purpose and design, and the reasons for recording the session. In addition, anonymity during evaluation should be assured and certain conventions (e.g. only one speaker at a time) of focus group discussions should be outlined. Forms could be filled out that would provide the evaluation team with general socio-economic (educational attainment, occupation) and demographic (age, sex) data of the participants. Thereafter, participants would introduce themselves to the group and attach name tags. A free flow of discussion topics should be facilitated by the moderator using a set of guided questions. Every participant should have the opportunity to express uninterrupted his/her respective opinion and more quiet participants should be encouraged to speak as well. Similarly to the semi-structured interviews, the language used by the moderator should be clear and jargon-free. In addition, the guided questions should be relevant to the group assembled. Thoughtful questions would engender a lively debate and avoid replies such as 'yes' or 'no' from the participants. A successful focus group discussion would allow the moderator to see the debated issues through the eyes of the participants and to glean a much deeper understanding of issues concerning the lives of older persons.

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[32] Bryman, for instance, evaluates seven different research designs based on focus groups and notes a variation of eight to fifty-two focus group discussions held (see *Social Research Methods,* p.350.)

3.4 Analysis of qualitative data

Since the results of participatory research are rather unstructured in nature, analysis of qualitative data is not a simple or straight-forward process. The recorded outcomes of methods of participatory evaluation as outlined above have to be categorized to generate meaning.

The process of coding, which categorizes data according to topical considerations, is commonly used to make sense of qualitative research findings. Coding breaks for instance an interview transcript or field notes down into its components, which are organized according to topics of inquiry that allows the evaluation team to "examine, compare, conceptualize and categorize data"[33]. In regard to analyzing qualitative data on older persons, categories could, for instance, be health issues, care provided by relatives or institutions, income security in old age, or the household situation in which older persons live. It is helpful to begin the coding process as early as possible, i.e. after interviews and focus group discussions have been transcribed. Early coding would permit the research team to categorize data and to perceive the social reality of older persons through those categories. Coding would allow patterns to emerge from the field notes and other collected material. Established codes should be reviewed to ensure that changes in coding could be made in case it seems prudent to do so. Coding it therefore a highly flexible approach to making sense of collected qualitative data.

Various codified categories could be connected. The evaluation team should explore possible linkages and how categories could be related to each other. Coding, however, does not substitute for analysis. Since it is only a mechanism to categorize data, the findings still have to be interpreted.

Content analysis is the coding of documents and transcripts, to obtain counts of words and/or phrases for purposes of statistical analysis. The evaluation team creates a dictionary, which clusters words and phrases into conceptual categories for purposes of counting. Based upon this, the recurrence of often used words and phrases can be utilized and would inform the team of important topics that are mentioned repeatedly by older persons during interviews and focus group discussions.

Narrative analysis is another method to analyze qualitative research data. It attempts to analyze a chronologically told story, with a focus on how elements of the story are sequenced and why some elements are evaluated differently from others. Narrative analysis is seen as an alternative to semi-structured interviews, allowing for the uninterrupted flow of information. Some proponents of narrative analysis see it as a truly participatory and empowering research methodology insofar as it gives respondents the venue to articulate their own viewpoints without any structure restricting their expressions on a particular subject.

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[33] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques,* p.61

Four models of narrative analysis can be distinguished: *thematic analysis* (emphasis on *what* is said compared to *how* it is said), *structural analysis* (emphasis on the way a story is told), *interactional analysis* (emphasis on the dialogue) and *performative analysis* (emphasis on performance such as gestures used).[34] Notes and transcription of semi-structured interviews are analyzed to interpret the findings of a story told concerning a particular event.

Problems with narrative analysis are that the memory can deceive the narrator regarding the accuracy of a story told. Some researchers call for the introduction of questions at the end of a story to clarify any outstanding issues. Another criticism of narrative analysis is that stories told are treated uncritically and are only recorded without any analysis.

Qualitative data analysis is not controlled by the same strict rules as quantitative analysis. The nature of qualitative data contributes to the evolving nature of analysis and to a less structured approach. Coding, content analysis and narrative analysis seem to be rather tentative approaches to interpret collected data and to invoke meaning of the material assembled. Nevertheless, qualitative evaluation should be able to portray a social reality in greater complexity compared to quantitative methods. Participatory research is capable of generating more nuances concerning the lives of older persons. Such an approach should however be flanked by quantitative methods that would complement the qualitative data. Quantitative methods of data collection will be the focus of the next section of this paper.

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[34] see Riessman, 'Narrative Analysis' in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Methods*

4. Quantitative methods of data collection and indicators for monitoring, review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

This section describes quantitative research methods that may be used complementarily to the participatory, qualitative approaches outlined in the previous chapter. After a brief, general introduction of quantitative research methodology, the methods most often used to compile quantitative data will be presented. They comprise (1) the population census, (2) sample surveys and (3) civil registration. Following that, indicators for evaluation of MIPAA that could assist in the analysis of collected data are also introduced.

4.1 Quantitative research for monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA

Quantitative research refers to methods of collection and analysis of numerical data, which could be used for monitoring, review and appraisal. These methods include population census, civil registration and sample surveys. The population census is a periodic, quantitative attempt to measure different (e.g., social, economic, demographic) characteristics of an entire population in a given geographic area. Some countries use civil registration instead of or in addition to censuses. A registration system records birth, death and marriage of all residents of a particular country in a continuous manner. A sample survey, through analysis of responses to questions, can provide a quantitative description of the situation of older persons and their quality of life. Provided that it is representative, reliable and valid, the collection of quantitative data enables a researcher to extrapolate the findings from a sample survey to the whole population. With the assistance of statistical analysis and indicators, data generated by these three methods can be organized and processed.

4.2 Population census

"*A population census* is the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analyzing, and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specific time, to all persons in a country or in a well-delimited part of a country".[35] Usually, censuses are taken at least every ten years. To ensure universality of coverage, national censuses are based on legal compulsion of participation and cooperation of the entire population. Because of its scope, the population census requires considerable logistic and financial commitment by the government.

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[35] *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, Revision 1, 1998, p.3; for general information and introduction to the population census: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm (web-site of the UN Statistics Division)

The objective of the population census is to capture demographic changes over a certain period of time, such as increase or decrease of the entire population, changes in its age structure, internal and international migration and other parameters. A census also allows to reveal economic (e.g., labour participation, income level) and social (e.g., literacy and educational attainment) developments since the most recent census took place. The data is tabulated for the country as a whole as well as for each of its provinces and municipalities.

The census also provides data that is essential for national planning, administration and policy-making. New census findings can ultimately alter policy interventions. Based on census results, decision-makers can assess demographic, economic and social changes and determine which resources should be directed into certain administrative areas of a country or which population and social groups should benefit more from resource flows than they have in the past.

Censuses reflect the age of all individuals in a country. Therefore, census information reveals, among other parameters, the share of older persons in the overall population and the average and median age of a society. Most censuses collect additional age-disaggregated information that particularly pertains to persons age 60 years and older such as (1) sex of the individual, (2) household size in which individual resides, (3) country of birth and nationality, (4) work participation, (5) educational attainment, and (6) disability status. This information becomes useful in determining the situation of *the entire population* of older persons and in developing possible policy approaches based upon these findings. It should however be noticed that the population of older persons should not be treated as a homogenous demographic group of persons of 60 years and older. Important information on ageing could be gathered by simply disaggregating data up to 100 years and older.

Since the population census attempts to quantitatively portray a society in its entirety, its utility in complementing the participatory, bottom-up approach is evident. While taking a census and conducting participatory, qualitative research are two independent exercises, the enormous amount of data produced can be used to inform the topical focus of participatory research. For example, the percentage of older persons, their sex ratio, percentage of age cohorts (all 60-year-olds, all 61-year-olds, etc.) compared to the overall population as established by the census should be taken into consideration when planning participatory monitoring, review and appraisal. In practical terms it should help to determine the age and gender composition of e.g. focus groups. In addition, changes between censuses regarding income, the number of households headed by older persons, or labour participation of older persons could be investigated more in-depth through participatory research. Participatory data along with census information describe the socio-economic conditions of older persons in complimentary ways and should be used as qualitative *and* quantitative attempts to provide a better picture of the overall quality of life of older persons. While censuses collect numerical data, participatory methods allow qualitative information such as feelings and opinions of older persons related to the subject of inquiry, to be gathered.

Population censuses are a source of most comprehensive information about the population of a country. Meanwhile, censuses have some limitations and deficiencies that are largely system-immanent. In many countries, census data that has been collected is not tabulated because of the sheer magnitude of data and lack of resources (staff, equipment) to process it. Hence, useful information is never analyzed and disaggregated, including disaggregation by age. Besides, since censuses are only conducted every ten years, the collected information is already outdated a few years after the completion of a census. Because it provides enumerations of an entire population, the census is not very suitable for gathering complex data that could only be collated through more detailed questionnaires as used in surveys or semi-structured interviews. Paradoxically, the census, due to its comprehensiveness, is methodologically not superior to sample surveys. Insufficient qualification of the interviewers can lead to inefficient questioning by census takers. Partial omission of certain population groups during census-taking is common. For instance, the number of immigrants who can be reluctant to respond to census questions is often underreported in censuses. This can add up to greater technical non-sampling errors (underreporting) compared to sampling errors (lack of representativity) in i.e. surveys.

Censuses often provide the sampling frame (actual representation of older persons in general population) reflecting the demographic, economic and social features of a society for surveys from which individuals or households may be selected. Thus, surveys on specific topics, including ageing and older persons, are often based on information that was generated by the population census.

4.3 Sample surveys

A sample survey is "any systematic collection of facts about a defined group"[36]. "Surveys can be used to provide descriptive statistics for national, regional, or local populations; to examine the clustering of social phenomena; to identify the social location and characteristics of subgroups for more intensive follow-up case-study research; and to analyze causal processes and test explanations."[37]

Sample surveys collect information based on small but representative samples of individuals or households. The essence of the survey methodology consists of collecting responses from selected respondents to questions from specifically designed questionnaires, such as structured questionnaires, which allow the transformation of collected opinions into quantitative information. Surveys can be conducted by contacting respondents in person, by telephone or by mail. The small sample size (typically 2000 – 20000 persons) makes surveys less expensive and more flexible compared to censuses and civil registration, especially when it comes to collecting information on a specific topic such as ageing.

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[36] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.654
[37] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.654

Quantitative sample surveys give the respondents the option to choose from a list of possible answers. The advantage of such an approach is that the answers can be easily coded, entered into computer data bases and analyzed by using statistical methods. There are two types of surveys: *cross-sectional surveys* collect information at one point in time in contrast to *longitudinal surveys*, which gather data over a period of time, usually years or even decades. While cross-sectional surveys tend to determine the relationship between two factors (e.g. age and social participation), longitudinal surveys attempt to capture long-term changes in a population and to describe and/or explain them. The latter approach can be achieved through *cohort studies* that for instance, survey a sample of 60-year-olds in 2000 and would conduct a similar study of 60-year-olds again in 2005. *Panel studies* follow the *same* individuals over a longer period of time and sample and study them repeatedly on a particular issue using similar questions. Panel studies suffer from attrition rates, and these are higher the longer the studies are conducted.

Quantitative surveys depend on representative samples - an accurate proportional representation of the overall population. The methods of developing representative samples include randomizing and stratifying. Computers are used to create *randomized samples*. That means that individuals (for instance, older persons) are given numbered codes, which are entered into computers. A computer programme would then randomly generate a list of i.e. a 2% or 5% sample of the population entered, which would thereafter receive the survey questions. In case a particular attribute of older persons is of importance, *stratified samples* can be generated by taking into account sub-categories (rural/urban, female/male, educational attainment, income bracket, etc.) of this population. The computer would again produce a list that would reflect various sub-categories represented according to their real share within the overall population of older persons. Surveys based on stratified samples would produce a more complex picture of opinions about living conditions of older persons compared to randomized samples.

Structured questionnaires are the central tool of gathering data in quantitative surveys. 'Structured' refers to the procedure of the survey wherein each respondent is asked exactly the same questions in the same order. Questions used in the questionnaires have to be considered carefully, so that the rendered results are meaningful for policy planning. Questions should be clear, concise, relevant and sensitively worded, so there will not be any confusion about the precise meaning of a particular question. In addition, questionnaires should be designed to solicit a single answer per question (for example by using multiple choice response possibility), should be easily understood and should not lead the respondent towards a particular answer.[38]

If properly designed, surveys can inform in greater detail about the quality of life of older people. Sample surveys are an effective and flexible tool to collect views of older people and to gain additional information that is missed in population censuses.

There are however, shortcomings of sample surveys that should be kept in mind. Since survey participation is always voluntary, the response rate can be very low. Low response rates could indicate that an intended representative survey would generate non-

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[38] for question design see Babbie, *Survey Research Methods*

representative results. The same can occur if a survey is conducted based on a too small sample of participants. In addition, errors can arise due to poorly designed questionnaires that lead to deficient responses.[39]

Despite some limitations, sample surveys have become an increasingly popular tool to measure public opinion on a variety of issues. Sample surveys are often used to update census information. Survey findings on older persons and ageing generated by academia, NGOs or government should be utilized to flank the participatory, bottom-up approach of data gathering for monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA.

4.4 Civil registration

Civil registration is defined as "the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population".[40] Civil registration documents the following vital events in a person's life: birth, death, marriage, divorce and adoption. It produces *vital statistics* and serves as an important source of demographic information. In many countries, civil registration has been established for decades or centuries.

A *civil registration system* refers to "all institutional, legal, technical settings needed to perform the civil registration functions in a technically sound, coordinated and standardized manner throughout the country, taking into account cultural and social circumstances particular to the country."[41]

Civil registration is carried out to (a) produce statistical information about the population and to (b) establish an information basis for providing individuals with government services such as identification cards, passports, driver's licenses and for defining eligibility to general social services (school entry, socio-economic benefits, age-related services) based on complete, accurate and timely information. Civil registration serves therefore statistical, legal and administrative purposes.

A system of civil registration is costly and can only be operated successfully if adequate and tested facilities are available for continuous, comprehensive and complete updates, which is usually facilitated by the national statistical office. Since registration is compulsory, it should lead to the timely registration with government of all vital events that take place within its national boundaries. To be within reach of every individual, a local registration authority has generally the responsibility for arranging or providing local registration services. The national statistical office usually publishes a yearly update on vital statistics in the annual statistical yearbook.

A major advantage of civil registration is its continuous operation unlike the periodic occurrence of the decennial census. A registration system provides up-to-date information that is unique compared to any other data collection system and due to its

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[39] see Scott, *Tracking Human Development,* p.10
[40] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/civilreg/default.htm
[41] *Handbook on Training in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems,* p.5

universality does not suffer from sampling errors. In addition, it is a helpful tool for the effective provision of individual benefits for older persons that would be difficult to carry out without the assistance of civil registration. Due to its comprehensive and continuous collection of data, civil registration provides also the informational basis to plan and carry out surveys, especially longitudinal research such as cohort studies and panel studies.

Despite these positive aspects, civil registration is a crude and limited tool for measuring overall living conditions of older persons. It is only effective in determining changes in life expectancy, but a more multi-layered description of socio-economic parameters of quality of life is beyond its scope. To achieve that, both quantitative sample surveys as well as qualitative participatory approaches should be utilized.

4.5 Indicators for evaluation of MIPAA

After information has been collected, statistical analysis is undertaken to determine e.g. average and median values of a data set, as well as possible relationships (correlations) between variables (e.g. age and income, age and HIV/AIDS status, etc.). Additional tools can be used to further classify data. Such tools are indicators.

Indicators are commonly defined as quantitative measurement tools that are used to reflect change in a social or economic facet of society[42], i.e. life expectancy, income levels, educational attainment etc., summarizing a single or a mixed aspect of social reality. For accuracy, an indicator has to be based on valid and reliable data. Relying on a system of elaborate indicators is necessary for the comprehensive monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA through categorizing and making sense of both quantitative and qualitative information gathered by a variety of methods as outlined in the previous chapters.

MIPAA makes several references to data collection and the development of indicators to gain better information on the socio-economic conditions of life of older persons[43]. As noted in MIPAA, elaborating and using comprehensive and practical tools for evaluation, such as key indicators, is necessary to facilitate a timely policy response. MIPAA also states that indicators for its monitoring should be linked to such issues as poverty and standards of living, as well as the health status of older persons. Indicators should be linked to national priorities of action on ageing and used as tools for internal (local, national) monitoring, assessment, and advocacy.

During an expert group meeting on modalities for review and appraisal of MIPAA in Malta in November 2003, participants agreed upon a set of indicators (see attached annex) that are recommended to evaluate progress made towards the implementation of MIPAA. The suggested indicators for monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA are organized by objectives that pertain to priority issues within the three priority directions

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[42] see *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.303/304
[43] see *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid,* p.5 (article 11) and p.49 (para.129)

of the Plan. Efforts were made to link the proposed indicators with those for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[44], as well as to employ indicators that have been already used by HelpAge International/WHO/US Institute on Ageing[45], by the United Nations[46], the World Bank[47], UNDP[48] and ILO[49].

Two types of indicators are proposed for national monitoring of MIPAA[50]: *instrumental and outcome indicators*. *Instrumental indicators* aim at evaluating the availability, scope and coverage of programmes and policies, which governments have adopted to address issues of population ageing and improve the well-being of older persons. The principal source of information is government, NGO and private sector reports. *Outcome indicators* attempt to identify positive or negative changes in the quality of life of older persons through participatory bottom-up data collection methods. The two types of indicators would allow to relate to changes in socio-economic conditions of older persons during a defined period of time to policy intervention or inaction. It should be noted that the process of selection of indicators is an evolving one, and the proposed set should be regarded as a point of departure. The prioritized actions and targets that might differ from country to country should inform the actual selection of appropriate indicators. In addition, already existing national indicators should be used as well.

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[44] see http://www.undp.org/mdg/abcs.html

[45] see *Indicators for the Minimum Data Set Project on Ageing: A Critical Review in sub-Saharan Africa*

[46] see *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*

[47] see annual *World Development Report*

[48] see annual *Human Development Report*

[49] see annual *World Labour Report*

[50] see *Report of Expert Group Meeting on Modalities for Review and Appraisal of MIPAA*

5. Conclusion

The preceding chapters have outlined the concepts of monitoring, reviewing and appraising as the elements of policy process; reviewed the approaches to evaluation of various international policy documents; described how the issue of ageing evolved between the two world assemblies on ageing, and, most importantly, discussed the modalities for a participatory bottom-up review and appraisal of MIPAA. Various stakeholders and elements of the bottom-up participatory approach, as well as established methods for participatory data gathering, were described. These methods were juxtaposed to quantitative approaches to collecting information. Finally, indicators for analyzing the information to be collected during the review and appraisal of MIPAA were introduced.

The participatory, bottom-up approach is an entirely novel approach to evaluating an international policy document. It is a more complex exercise involving a variety of actors and different levels of operation. The aim of participatory evaluation is to provide average citizens the opportunity to voice their opinions, instead of only seeking the views of decision-makers. In addition, the participatory approach has the advantage of evaluating the *results* of policy interventions from the perspective of individuals and groups, such as older persons, targeted by these interventions.

Before the monitoring, review and appraisal of MIPAA begin, it is important to undertake an advocacy campaign of the bottom-up participatory approach, in order to secure support and participation of older persons, civil society and other partners – as participants, collectors of information and collaborators in the process of distillation and delivery of the results. This publication is the first substantive contribution of the UN Secretariat to the process of raising awareness among all parties about the review and appraisal tasks and procedure. Within the awareness campaign, it is necessary to translate MIPAA, its regional implementation strategies and other relevant documents, including this publication, into national and local languages and disseminate to all parties to be involved in the implementation and evaluation of MIPAA. At the preparatory stage, it is also important to hold meetings of government officials with NGO representatives to discuss their support, identify strengths and needs of NGOs, which will be participating in review and appraisal, and to define the cooperative arrangements between government and civil society.

Which topical focus for the national review and appraisal of MIPAA is selected, will depend on the particular situation with regard to ageing and older persons in the respective country. The choice will be the result of a consultative process between government and civil society, including NGOs, academia, media, unions, business representatives and religious organizations. The theme of each quinquennial review and appraisal cycle will be chosen by the Commission for Social Development on the basis of the three priority directions of MIPAA. It would, therefore, be advisable for countries to follow the Commission's decision in order to benefit from the direct involvement in the international process of review and appraisal.

Many international, national or local NGOs and other civil society organizations that have already worked on issues specifically related to ageing and older persons and have accumulated extensive experience and expertise in the past, would be able to support and facilitate the evaluation process through their already established relationships and networks. The contribution of civil society organizations that operate in related areas, such as gender, youth, family, poverty etc., should also be harnessed. NGOs and academic and research institutions may possess an essential expertise in conducting participatory research in their respective areas. To reach and involve potential partners that could be of assistance during the review and appraisal exercise is an opportunity that should not be missed.

The question of financial support for the national review and appraisal has to be addressed as well. Governments should give thought to how to support civil society partners in their specific tasks within the review and appraisal of MIPAA. Civil society organizations that have demonstrated their capability regarding participatory information collection are an obvious choice when providing financial resources. At the same time, training of representatives of organizations that are new to the process of evaluation of policies and programmes on ageing is an important contribution to national capacity-building.

The process of distillation of national data is a core challenge in summarizing the local findings and utilizing them for informing policy process at the national level. Every country may have its own approach to organizing the compilation of data and its distillation. Uniform presentation of findings is less important than the substantive learning and empirical evidence collected, and the participation experience provided by the evaluation exercise. Multiple partners in the process of gathering and analyzing information should also be involved in the process of distillation of data at local and national levels. Once again, procedural and methodological aspects of the distillation process have to be decided in advance, and relevant training should be provided.

The results of local and national evaluation of MIPAA will be presented at regional forums. The United Nations regional commissions will play a crucial role at this level of the review and appraisal process. The task of the UN regional commissions is to assist member countries in coordinating their efforts as well as in analyzing national findings at the regional level. Differences regarding the content and depth of collected data as well as the overall capacity of individual countries to conduct a participatory evaluation have to be addressed. Based on identified deficiencies, the regional commissions could offer technical assistance, in case governments request it. National governments should be persuaded that there will be no attempt to rank countries on the basis of their performance in improving the quality of life of older persons.

The national and regional evaluations of MIPAA should feed into the quinquennial review and appraisal at the Commission for Social Development so that the global event utilizes the results collected at the national and regional levels.

Bottom-up participatory, qualitative methods of data collection will form the core content of the evaluation of MIPAA. The bottom-up approach could benefit from utilizing and building upon the already collected representative quantitative information. The qualitative tools of evaluation, such as qualitative surveys and focus groups, should be designed, as appropriate, taking into consideration the earlier findings of censuses, civil registrations and quantitative surveys.

Advantages and disadvantages of various quantitative research methods should be kept in mind when considering their use for MIPAA evaluation. Civil registration – in the countries where it exists – has the advantage of being a continuously operated collector of demographic information that tries to cover changes in vital statistics about everybody in society but accumulates only a small amount of information compared to a census. Its greatest utility is in possession of information about life expectancy in a country. Population censuses attempt to also reach 100% of a given population but are only conducted every ten years and tend to collect and tabulate information that does not go beyond a general description of individuals. The cost of a census and possible errors due to underreporting of certain population groups increase the appeal of sample surveys. Surveys are characterized by their topical freedom which allows for gathering as much information as the questionnaire aims for and a respondent is ready to provide. At the same time, the findings of surveys are only based on extrapolating the data from samples, and a poorly designed questionnaire and insufficient sampling will produce misleading findings about older persons. These pros and cons of methods as outlined in more detail in chapter 4 should be considered before using data from censuses, civil registration or sample surveys as basis for participatory policy evaluation.

The methodological limitations of qualitative research tools should also be deliberated before the participatory bottom-up evaluation is launched. Participatory observation and visual tools as described in chapter 3 are useful to gain a general impression about a particular community and when gathering data from mostly illiterate individuals. To gain more detailed information about older persons, qualitative surveys and focus groups are most often used. Problems that can arise are connected to a lack of representativeness of an interviewed sample or poorly worded questionnaires. Perhaps the major potential obstacle of the bottom-up participatory assessment in that it could be diffuse and unsystematic[51]. To diminish the negative effect of these limitations, it would be desirable to have some uniformity of questionnaires that are used at the national level, at least with regard to the design and the questions asked, in order to arrive at valid conclusions and recommendations at national level. Inaccurate representation of social, economic and demographic characteristics of older persons would lead to the distortion of data and could eventually lead to inadequate policy intervention.

All these concerns should be carefully considered while pondering which methods would be most useful in evaluating MIPAA. The obvious conclusion is that the single ideal method of evaluation simply does not exist. It is important to realize that while not

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[51] Sidorenko A. and Walker A. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing: from conception to implementation. Ageing & Society (Cambridge University Press) 24, 2004, 147-165.

being free of obstacles and limitations, participatory methods are distinguished from quantitative approaches by the greater depth and complexity of information. It is primarily because of this advantage that the international community decided to adopt a participatory bottom-up approach, this novel technique of evaluating an international policy instrument, as the major approach to evaluation of MIPAA. Its validity is going to be tested pretty soon during the first cycle of the review and appraisal exercise, and the lessons to be learnt should be used for improving the methods of future evaluation of MIPAA.

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