Mainstreaming ageing into national policy frameworks
– An Introduction

From Vienna to Madrid

The **Vienna** International Plan of Action was adopted by Member States in 1982 at the first World Assembly on Ageing at a time when the ageing of populations in developed countries was already becoming a reality, while in developing countries it was on the distant horizon. As a result, the Vienna Plan of Action concentrated on two facets of population ageing – humanitarian, relating to the specific needs of older persons, - and developmental, the implications of an ageing population for socio-economic development – the latter focusing on general concepts to ensure that older persons did not become a drain on national development and resources.

In addition, given the demographic picture in 1982 and the approach to social issues at that time, the Vienna Plans' main focus was policies for developed countries that tended to be more welfare oriented in nature. Over the twenty years that elapsed between the adoption of the Vienna Plan in 1982 and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002, many things changed, including, inter alia

- the now pressing issue of population ageing in developing countries at a speed much greater than that experienced by developed countries;
- new approaches to development policy; and,
- a transformed economic and social landscape that has brought about policy changes.

These issues were the main driving force behind the decision by Member States to draft a new Plan of Action.

The **Madrid** Plan of Action has two main core concepts –

- a developmental approach to population ageing through the mainstreaming of older persons into international and national development plans and policies across all sectors; and,
- a life-course or intergenerational approach to policy that stresses equity and inclusiveness for all age groups through all policy arenas.

 The main difference in the Madrid Plan could be said to be the emphasis on including older persons in policies rather than designing policies for older persons.

Implementation of the Vienna Plan of Action was very uneven – particularly in developing countries with high rates of poverty, where many groups compete for limited resources. Although many countries enacted policies, programmes, principles, and even plans of action for older persons, many of them remain unimplemented due to, among other things,

- a lack of resources,
- a lack of capacity,
- and/or low political priority.

Understandably, Governments tend to give more attention and resources to those groups that comprise the largest segment of the population - particularly children and young people, who have traditionally been seen as the key for successful national development and increased productivity. Older persons have often been viewed as yet another group requesting new programmes in an environment short on resources. The mainstreaming of ageing issues aims to overcome this perception.

Many Governments are still constrained by a traditional cultural image of family in which older persons are held in high esteem by family members and therefore, whatever social or economic problems there may be will be taken care of by family. A lack of age disaggregated data in many developing countries tends to perpetuate this assumption, even though qualitative information is often telling a different story.

The development of ageing policy and the thinking about how older persons fit in to the wider policy environment can be equated to the situation of policies to promote the advancement of women 10 to 20 years ago. The Madrid Plan of Action moves the debate surrounding older persons and the ageing of societies from the descriptive to the analytical. So for instance, the debate is moving from simply talking about how policies affect the welfare of older persons, or how the number of older persons affects the economy, to recognizing that bias against older persons can affect the outcome of the policies themselves. Soon after the Vienna Plan of Action was adopted in 1982, small field projects were initiated that focused on the productive role of older persons and income generating type projects - an approach that only affected a minority of people and still left older persons in general on the margins of development and treated as a "vulnerable group". The participation and empowerment of older persons – emphasising older persons as an untapped resource for society – became the centre of much of the debate in the early to mid 1990s. The approach to ageing policy was similar in many respects to the approach adopted to mainstream gender concerns in policies.

The empowerment of older persons and projects focussed on promoting the productivity of older persons still have their role in improving the situation of older persons. But policies aiming specifically at older persons are no longer considered sufficient, and the Madrid Plan also calls for *mainstreaming* to make further progress. The United Nations believes that an integrated and mainstreamed approach to ageing will facilitate the implementation of key recommendations of the Madrid Plan of Action within the larger policymaking environment as well as prove cost and resource effective for Governments and civil society organizations. Too many national plans of action on ageing have remained unimplemented awaiting allocation of budgets, personnel and the creation of new responsible government apparatus.

What is mainstreaming?

Mainstreaming, as defined by the Economic and Social Council in 1997[1] in the case of gender, is the process of assessing the implications for men and women of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design,

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[1] ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2.

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

What is age mainstreaming?

> *"Mainstreaming as a strategy can be applied in any area of development. It is not intrinsically linked to gender equality" (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2000)*

In the same way, the aim of mainstreaming ageing is to ensure that all ages are treated equitably in programmes and policies. It is basically a shift in thinking from targeting older persons as a separate marginalized group to integrating policy approaches to ageing across all sectors.

> **"*Mainstreaming ageing is a process and strategy to work towards the inclusion of older people and ageing issues into development policies. It is not about creating a new target group but about specifically including older people in development interventions. Therefore, the overall priority should be to include all marginalized and vulnerable groups in poverty reduction initiatives, including older persons. This will reinforce an intergenerational approach which will ensure that the poverty of all segments of society is reduced, and that communities as a whole benefit from the active participation and contributions of all their members*". (HelpAge International, March 2003, <u>Recommendations to the EC on actions required to mainstream ageing into EU development policy</u>).**

Why mainstream ageing?

We cannot successfully mainstream ageing or teach people the "how's" of mainstreaming if the "why" has not been successfully answered. Decision makers need to be convinced that investing effort into the inclusion of older persons into planning and policymaking has a pay off for the government.

It is generally agreed that sustainable development will only be achieved if the interests of all groups are taken into account rather than favouring one group over another. As a growing proportion of the population ages it is becoming more important to bring this developmentally marginalized group into the mainstream. Policy making should not be a zero sum game that puts the interests of one group over another for whatever reason. When this is applied to age groups it also calls for an intergenerational approach to policy, with equitable access by all   So, for example, if we are talking about care giving by the family, we might talk about policies that support family members in their care giving roles across the spectrum – that is care for children, disabled persons and older persons, rather than separate policies for each population group.

Furthermore, a move out of the "social policy" box to take into account the whole range of policies is especially true for ageing. According to the Madrid Plan of Action, ageing, like gender, should not be treated as a welfare issue.

What we are finding in relation to development policy in general is that older persons are being marginalized within larger marginalized groups so that they face two layers of discrimination. So, for example, older persons are not generally considered when development policy and projects are initiated that encompasses women or farmers, and older persons are routinely denied credit in order to continue working or to set up a business, even from development organizations designed to target the poor such as the Grameen Bank. It is clear that in general, people are still not convinced of the utility of including older persons in the range of development policies and plans.

Part of the objective of this meeting is to see how we can usefully adapt the theory of gender mainstreaming and the lessons learned from that experience to promote and effectively mainstream ageing. Some of the issues that are central to successful gender mainstreaming can already be seen to be highly significant to the issue of ageing and require further discussion and elaboration during the meeting.

How do we mainstream?

By collecting disaggregated data/age analytical information and presenting the evidence on older persons – the need for disaggregated data on older persons in developing countries is high. Many countries do not collect this data and it makes the inclusion of older persons as a target group very difficult in initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals and PRSPs even if the qualitative information is telling us that there are problems of exclusion for older persons. Data gives us the evidence base as well as the specific needs and approaches to address them. In addition, participatory methodologies should bring the experiences and views of older persons into baseline research and the policy process. The mainstreaming of ageing also has to happen in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the policy process when impact analysis takes place. Are policies reaching and/or including target groups of all ages?

By producing short issues papers (maybe sector specific) that present information in a reader-friendly manner to reach the target audience that helps staff to identify where and the methodologies of how to integrate ageing into their work

By arranging meetings with and training/information sessions for different Ministries/major NGOs

When do we mainstream?

Mainstreaming needs to be initiated from policy formulation through implementation and appraisal. The research forming the basis of policy (situation analysis) should be informed by disaggregated data and the input of older persons themselves. It should be taking place at all levels, and not simply by including perfunctory statements about the situation of older persons.

Who is responsible?

The mandate and political support to mainstream ageing must come from the top in Government and down through line ministries, donor organizations, international and regional organizations and civil society organizations if it is to be successful. One of the tasks we have at this meeting is to discuss HOW we get that political support, will and commitment.

With what?

By capacity building in the upgrading of mainstreaming skills and knowledge of government/civil service staff (may require technical assistance and funding for training from United Nations/donors); Educating and informing the international community/donors /agencies etc. on mainstreaming of ageing issues at the international/intergovernmental level (United Nations, national governments.) Reorientation of national budgets to become more age inclusive and socially equitable by using a participatory process in the formulation of budgets that takes into account the views and situation of people of all ages and looks at how different groups either benefit or are overlooked in the provision of publicly provided services and government expenditures.

Questions for further thought in preparation for the meeting

1. Using your country's situation, what are the main impediments to effective implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing?
2. How would you address the issue of mainstreaming ageing if you were appointed:

   a. Minister of Health?
   b. Minister of Social Affairs?
   c. Minister of Finance?
   d. Minister of Planning?

What specific actions would you propose and who would you seek to work with?

3. As a practitioner or policymaker, what skills (or capacity) do you consider essential to playing an effective role in mainstreaming ageing?

4. In general, what are the strengths and weaknesses of current (international) efforts aimed at implementing the Madrid Plan of Action?

References

Hannan, Carolyn, "From Concept to Action: Gender Mainstreaming in Operational Activities". Paper prepared for Technical Review Meeting. Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming and Empowerment of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa, New York, March 2000

Department for International Development, UK. Gender Manual: A Practical Guide for Development Policy Makers and Practitioners. April 2002