

## **Chairman's Summary of the Panel discussion on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing**

At its 6<sup>th</sup> meeting on 10 February 2006, the Commission for Social Development held a panel discussion on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA, acted as moderator. The members of the panel were Mery Lozano de Aranibar, President, Association of Older People "Experience and Life", (Bolivia); Bienvenido Rola, Adjunct Professor, Institute of Strategic Planning and Policy Studies, Laguna, Philippines, President, (Philippines); and, Irina Nicolae Baicalov, Director, "Second Breath for Moldova" (Republic of Moldova).

The objective was to illustrate the value of participatory methodologies and provide practical examples of how bottom up approaches can be used to inform policy and programme implementation and review and appraisal exercises. The Commission agreed, in its resolution 42/1, to adopt a bottom up approach for the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

### **Independent participatory bottom up monitoring of policies by civil society**

A project in Bolivia illustrates how older persons can contribute to the policy process with the right support. In Bolivia, where 63 per cent of older persons live in poverty, monitoring groups of older persons in five cities were established by an NGO. The groups decided to monitor the entitlement to free medical insurance for older persons (Seguro Médico Gratuito de Vejez). This is a benefit granted under law to provide free health care for all those age 60 years and above. The monitoring groups wanted to find out whether older persons knew about their right to health care, had access to it, and were being treated with respect when seeking it. The groups also paid attention to financing, to see if the health care was being funded as it should be according to law. The groups interviewed 500 older persons as well as personnel at health clinics.

It was found that older persons were discriminated against if they were only able to speak in their native language; they were sometimes treated badly by health care staff or not treated because they are old; and they often had to wait for 5 to 8 hours to see a doctor. Furthermore, in rural areas, older persons had no access at all to free medical care. Many older persons lacked the documentation needed to access their right to free care and did not know where or how to get it. Doctors and administrators indicated that their major problem was that the National Health Fund was not receiving adequate resources to fund the free health care programme. Therefore, the monitoring groups decided to talk with the responsible local and national authorities. The result has been improvements in the funding and operation of the medical insurance programme for older persons. Older persons now receive preferential treatment and do not have to wait as long to see a doctor; the Ministry of Finance is providing payment to the health services for older care. The project launched information campaigns to ensure that older persons know their rights and get access to services. They also provide help to get older persons the needed documentation.

The activity was important because it provided valuable information, directly from older persons, on the implementation of policies that were established but clearly were not working. The people involved in the activity obtained a great deal of information and then brought it to the attention of relevant authorities. Because of their engagement, the Government obtained valuable feedback that led to improved delivery of services. The experience also led to greater knowledge and awareness among older persons, and a stronger sense of their own abilities and influence.

### **The benefits of bringing older persons into the policy process**

One of the key issues for older persons in Moldova is rapid emigration of younger people (up to half of the population in some villages), which has left many older persons isolated without family support, and often shouldering child care responsibilities. More than 1 in 6 of those remaining in Moldova are older persons; approximately 44 per cent are considered poor because pensions provide only about one quarter of the minimum subsistence. There have been attempts by the Government in recent years to provide some minimum level of additional social and economic benefits but there is no national plan of action or policy on ageing. The majority of the work with older persons involves social assistance, although there has been an increase in self-help groups and participatory approaches since 2000.

One national NGO undertook a participatory mapping exercise with older persons in 2005 which provided insight into the situation of older persons and identified priority areas for policy changes and programmes which take account of their views. The results were presented to a meeting with Government officials, civil society and the media in May 2005. During 2003-04 approximately 2,000 older persons were trained through participatory methodologies on practical ways to address neglect, isolation and abuse of rights through self help groups and community activities and a best practices manual was produced. These activities resulted in older persons having more self-confidence and knowledge about their rights; a feeling of being more useful to their society as a result of volunteer activities and training others; more contact with younger persons has better integrated older persons into their communities; and the Government has received a better understanding of the issues concerning older persons.

One example of the benefits of engaging policy makers and stakeholders are the associations working with older persons in Chisinau, Moldova who have helped local authorities target social assistance to more than 3,000 older persons in need over a three-year period.

### **Formal government/civil society coordinating mechanisms for review and appraisal**

The “bottom up approach” to review and appraisal is a process that should involve all prospective stakeholders, including media, academia and the implementers of the plan of action. The Philippines, with an active civil society, has long experience in NGO participation with the Government. In fact, the “Republic Act” seeks to maximize

the contribution of seniors to nation building. Regarding monitoring the Philippines Plan of Action for Senior Citizens, the National Coordinating and Monitoring Board has five NGO members. NGOs are also represented at the National and Regional Inter Agency Committees for the Philippines Plan of Action for Senior Citizens. An Office of Senior Citizens Affairs is to be established in each municipality under the new Plan of Action, to be headed by a senior citizen. The Philippines has the building blocks in place for a more in-depth participatory approach with older persons and civil society as envisioned in the Madrid Review and Appraisal process.

### **Hindrances to real participation by civil society**

However, in the Philippines, the evaluation undertaken by the Inter Agency Committee on the implementation of the previous national Plan of Action (1999-2004) showed little participation in policy formulation and implementation by older persons due to poverty, lack of knowledge or indifference. This was particularly marked in rural areas. Pilot community workshops and seminars recently held by an NGO pointed to a lack of awareness of laws, rights and entitlements of older persons and low participation rates by the poor, due mainly to financial constraints. The case studies of two projects in Bolivia and Moldova presented by panellists illustrated how including older persons into the policy process can overcome these issues.

### **Lessons learned**

From these few examples it is clear that bottom-up, participatory review and appraisal can be a tool for better decision making and improved policies and programmes. Participatory methods are being introduced in many countries. The social perspective they introduce provides new and essential information to policy makers and increases their understanding of actual conditions for older persons in their country, while allowing those older persons to gain new and additional knowledge, and to express their priorities and concerns. This, in turn, helps them to feel more connected to their societies. The approach is in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, which views older persons as active contributors to their societies rather than passive recipients of care. Unfortunately, as the examples reveal, older persons still often confront stereotypes that limit their engagement. Encouraging the active involvement of older persons in review and appraisal exercises can help to overcome stereotypes and lead to greater social capital, as people connect, share experiences and resources, organize networks to promote their interests and well being, and contribute to better policies.