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High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan
of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

9-11 October 2007
Macao, China

Country Report

*Bangladesh**

* This paper was prepared by Mr. Mainul Hassan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, for the High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), 9-11 October 2007, Macao, China. The views expressed do not necessary reflect those of the United Nations. The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Country Statement on

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High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) Macao, China

01. Introduction:

- 01.1 The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh attaches its highest importance on the issues of human rights and also to the issues relating to the older persons: such as their independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. The Government has also given much importance on the issue of achieving secured ageing through poverty reduction, empowerment of elderly people for their full participation, development of health care services for elderly people and enabling supportive congenial atmosphere for the well being of the elderly people.
- 01.2 The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has been working hard in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). The Government has special activities in the areas like older persons and development, health care services for the older persons and facilitate the supportive environment. Before going to explain the said areas the demographic position of the elderly population of Bangladesh may be discussed.
- 01.3.1 Traditionally and religiously the elderly people of Bangladesh are very much respectable both in family and community. They are considered as the key of family ties and symbol of family identity. They are treated as the guardian of ancestral values since the time immemorial. They are also considered as venerable counselor. For these reasons they are always respected and the youngs try to take best care of their elderly relatives in the family. But due to various socio-economic changes over the years traditional values and customs are eroding. It is assumed that because of breaking traditional joint family to nuclear family system and increased landlessness and poverty have weakened the relationship between elder members and other members of the family. Because of declination in family size, the elderly does not get support from their adult wards and because of rural poverty many adult wards moves to urban areas in search of employment. In urban areas women are also joining the work force of the society in an increasing number and they have less time to take care of the

elderly family members as they did in the past. It is not clear how long our society will be able to hold the tradition of taking care of the elderly people by young members of his family.

01.3.2 This situation throws the elderly population, particularly the elderly population of the poorer section into large-scale social, health and economic insecurity. The elders become mentally sick from a feeling that they are not important or necessary in the society now. They feel insecure due to lack of financial support either from the family or from the state. Their sufferings are going up due to lack of sufficient community support.

01.3.3 Demography:

With the increase in life expectancy of the world population ageing is now a global issue. It is common all over the world that elderly age range is increasing rapidly and on the other hand the number of children and youth population is decreasing. We know from the various sources that in 1950, the number of world population of age 60 yrs. and above were about 200 million, constituting 8.1 % of the total global population. In the year 2050, there will be a manifold increase; the world's elderly population is projected to be 1.8 billion which is about 20% of the total 9.8 billion. Here it is found that the annual rate of increase of population is 1.5%, while at the same time the rate of increase of the elderly population of age 60 + would be 2.5%. The elderly population of Bangladesh is also increasing in a remarkable rate.

The table below shows the trend of increase in the number of elderly persons in Bangladesh:

Sl. No.	Age Group	Population Census of 1974	Population Census of 1981	Population Census of 1991	Population Census of 2001
1.	55-59	1351885	1620374	1949721	2356440
2.	60-64	1682629	1948649	2270142	2828640
3.	65-69	735255	901571	1092919	1443140
4.	70 +	1639056	2053133	2339704	3318560
5.	**55 +	5408825	6523727	7652486	9946780

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

02.0 Magnitude of the problem on social, health and economic issues for the elderly population:

The elderly population of Bangladesh suffers manifold problems in respect of health and socio-economic issues. These problems may be identified as below:

- Poor socio-economic condition.
- Lack of nutrition.
- Abuse by family members and society both psychologically and financially.
- Affects from air and water pollution.
- Affects from natural calamities like flood, cyclone and river erosion.
- Lack of awareness and knowledge about health and diseases.
- Lack of health care facilities, specially designed for elderly people.
- Lack of community participation for addressing the issues of elderly people.

03. Steps taken by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the issue of older persons in accordance with the MIPAA

03.1 Older Persons and Development

03.1.1 Legal supports towards the elderly people:

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ensures every rights and privileges of the elderly people along with other citizen. The article 15 of the Constitution speaks clearly on this issue, which is as follows:-

“It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain, through planned economic growth, a constant increase of productive forces and a steady improvement in the material and cultural standard of living of the people, with a view to securing to its citizens-

(a)....

(b)...

(c)...

(d) The right to social security, that is to say, to public assistance in cases of underserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age, or in other such cases.”

03.1.2 National Policy on Ageing: The Ministry of Social Welfare has already finalized the National Policy on Ageing. This policy is formulated in line of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). The main objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure the dignity of the elderly people in the society.
- To identify the problems of the elderly people and address those.
- To change the attitude of the mass people towards the elderly people.
- To take new programmes to address the needs of the elderly people for their socio-economic development.
- To develop special measures to help the elderly peoples during emergency like natural calamities, cyclone, earthquake etc.
- To ensure social security, health care, employment and rehabilitation.
- To implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

03.1.3 Implementation Strategies:

- Ministry of Social Welfare has been entrusted to implement the above policy.
- Inter-ministerial action plan has been chalked out.
- Integration of public, private and International efforts to ensure implementation of various programmes.
- Short term, mid term and long term programmes has been chalked out.
- Special budget allocation has been made for different programmes.
- Collection of information and data for the welfare of elderly people.
- Formulation of required legal rules and regulations.
- Building of national awareness.

Moreover, the said policy has given a guideline to form committees on ageing at different levels i.e. National Committee, District Committee, Upazilla (Sub District) Committee etc. The responsibilities of these committees are to oversee the issues relating to the elderly people. The National Committee on ageing is headed by the Minister/Advisor in charge of Ministry of Social Welfare, while the Committees of District and Upazilla are headed by Deputy Commissioner and Upazilla Nirbahi Officer respectively those who are the Chief Executive Officers of the area concern.

03.1.4 **Poverty reduction programmes for the elderly population :**

The elderly people of Bangladesh is one of the important segment of beneficiaries of poverty reduction activities. In Bangladesh, poverty reduction has featured as an important programme of the Government. If the statistics of poverty situation for last 30 years is considered, it is found that the number extreme poverty stricken people is decreasing at an remarkable rate. In 1975 number of people living below poverty line in Bangladesh was about 83% while it came down to about 50% in the 1990, 47% in 1996 and 44.7% in 1999. World Bank report shows that it is 33% at present.

03.1.5 **Micro credit:** The Government has initiated micro-credit for poverty reduction in Bangladesh which was replicated by others at the later part. About 15 ministries and a lot of NGOs are providing micro credit for self employment aiming at poverty reduction. The Ministry of Social Welfare is one of the leading micro credit providers for the poor and distressed people. The micro credit programmes of the Ministry of Social Welfare are unique in nature and different in practice. This micro credit is free of interest and collateral. The Department Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare is running four micro credit programmes which are :-

- (1) Rural Social Services Programme
- (2) National Population Activities through Rural Mother's Centre,
- (3) Rehabilitation Programme for the Acid Burnt Women and Physically Handicapped and
- (4) Urban Community Development Programme

The Ministry of Social Welfare has provided Tk. 2910 million as micro credit since the inception of these programmes in different times starting from 1974 to 2003. This fund is revolving among the target population. The numbers of beneficiary families are 2.9 million. Elderly people are also included in these 2.9 million families. They are also getting the benefit.

03.1.6 **Old Age Allowance:** As per the commitment of the Constitution, the Ministry of Social Welfare has introduced Old-age Allowance Programme in 1998. The Old-age Allowance Programme was initiated to provide financial support to the poor and distressed old-age people. At present,

about 1.7 million people of 65+ yrs. of age are enjoying the benefit of this programme. The Government has allocated Tk. 4488 million for Old Age Allowance programme. The Old Age Allowance programme is an epoch-making achievement of the Government & has a positive impact on the recipients and their families and also on the society as a whole. The Government is increasing the number of beneficiaries and also enhancing the amount of allowances gradually.

03.1.7 **Social Safety net programmes:**

The Government of Bangladesh has given much importance on social safety net programmes. Under this programme elderly people are getting benefit. The government spends less than 1% of the GDP and about 4.4% of public expenditure in social safety-net programme. Following programmes are included in 27 safety-net programmes being run by Government.

- Food for works programmes
- Cash for works programmes
- Vulnerable group feeding
- Gratuitous relief fund
- Emergency fund for risk mitigation during natural disaster
- Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)
- Fund for Housing of Distressed

03.1.8 **Pension:** There is an opportunity of retirement incentives for the Government employees in Bangladesh. It is estimated that about 1.2 million people work in Government establishment. After attaining the age of 57 years they retire from service and they get pension as retirement benefits. He/She enjoys pensions up to death and after death his/her spouse also gets the pension till his/her death. Majority of the labour force in Bangladesh lives in rural areas and most of them serves in non Government organizations, in most of the cases there is no provision for pension facilities.

04.0 Development of Health Services for the elderly people:

Bangladesh has given very much importance on health care service for the elderly people including others. The Government has adopted the Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPSP). The main strategy for HNPSP is to deliver an essential service to the grass root level. Under this programme nutrition, communicable disease control, curative health care and behavior change communications are included. To reduce the tuberculosis among the elderly population along with others national tuberculosis programme has been providing services. Upazilla Health Complex and Family Welfare Centres are providing health service for the elderly people. The public sector outlays per capita expenditure on health have shown a rising trend over the years. The Ministry of Social Welfare has introduced Hospital Social Services programme in Government and Non-Government Hospitals. At present, 87 units of Hospital Social Services are functioning through out the country. The preference is given to the elderly people by the Hospital Social Services in respect of medical assistance, counseling and rehabilitation.

Recently the government has been increasing NGO's involvement in providing primary and community-based health care and nutrition services.

05.0 Enabling Supportive Congenial Atmosphere for Elderly Population:

05.1.1 Advocacy Programme:

The Government of Bangladesh has given much importance for enabling Supportive Congenial Atmosphere for Elderly Population. The Government believes without community support and favorable atmosphere nothing can be done for the well being of the elderly people. So Government has been creating favorable atmosphere through advocacy programmes, awareness building and community participation. The Government of Bangladesh observes International Day of Older Persons, International Family Day for improving the quality of life of the elderly people.

05.1.2 **Community Empowerment & Participation:**

The Government of Bangladesh strongly believes that to create a congenial and healthy environment for the elderly people community empowerment and participation are obviously needed. Accordingly the Ministry of Social Welfare has given much importance to involve the community for the well-being of elderly people. The Ministry of Social Welfare is the major registering authority of the NGOs. At present, about 50 thousands NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare. At the time of registration preference is given for those organisations who are dealing with the issues of elderly population. The Ministry of Social Welfare has also provided project aid amounting to Tk. 100 million to the Elderly Citizen Welfare Association named as “*Probin Hitaishi Sangha*”. The Ministry also observes International Day for the Elderly People and sensitizes the people on the issues regarding welfare of elderly persons.

06.0 **Action to be taken for the better future for the Elderly People:**

Though a good number of initiatives have been taken for the welfare of the elderly people, but yet there is a long way to go. For more safe as secured environment of elderly population the following measures may be taken:-

- Building of social awareness about the thinking and aspiration of elderly people.
- Local level organisations should be strengthen and more organization to be formed with elderly people under the leadership of community leaders to look after well-being of the elderly people.
- Ensure elderly people’s participation in decision making.
- Social security programme should be extended for all elderly persons.
- Specialized health service may be introduced for all elderly people at a subsidized rate.
- Community participation and involvement of NGOs should be ensured for the addressing the problem of elderly people. Rural health club for the elderly people should be established.
- Elderly people with disabilities may be specially handled by the community as well as Government agencies.

07.0 **Conclusion:**

Social protection in old age can be achieved in various of ways. These include personal savings, family support, public and private assistance, social insurance, special grants and credits etc. Sustainable programmes should be taken for ensuring healthy ageing. Community participation can make the efforts for the well being of the elderly population successful. The Government of Bangladesh in the Ministry of Social Welfare believes in ensuring successful ageing.

A special regional monitoring system may be developed to oversee the implementation status of MIPAA in the South Asian countries including Bangladesh.

It is expected that this Regional Review Meeting of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing will surely contribute a lot to the welfare and development of elderly people all over the world.