Education, Training, Life-long Learning and Capacity-building

India is home to over 135 million elderly, a number that is expected to cross the 300 million mark by 2045. Of these, approximately 10% of retired employees get pensions from the government and remaining 90% are forced to depend on their children or other sources of income like post-retirement jobs, house rentals, savings, investments, inheritance, etc. With growing age, cost of living also goes up due to inflation and increased medical expenses. Lack of source of income often leads to dependence, insecurity and distress in old age. Today, many people in their 60s and 70s are physically fit and are keen to work, but they hardly find any opportunities to remain independent in old age.

Older persons may be comparatively less educated or less aware of technological changes but they are rich source of experience, knowledge and wisdom, which they earned over the years throughout their life. In developing countries like India, literacy rate among older persons, particularly among older women is very low. Education is one of the primary determining factors, responsible for dismal condition of people in old age. Training plays an important role in the lives of older persons. Lifelong learning like skill development and capacity building provides the needed social interaction that often evaporates as people age.

Education, training and life-long learning help elderly to adapt themselves in changed circumstances, to improve cognitive strength, and to enable them to utilize helpful products and services, that they need in old age.

Skill Development Training for Older Persons

Skill development training and capacity-building plays an important role in overall development of any human being throughout their life. It contributes to independent living and holistic well-being at all stages. In today's world not using technology, to a certain extent, disables access to information and shared knowledge. Some old people who experience lack of interest in technology and its systems, experience loneliness and feel marginalized.

As empathetic individuals, old people very naturally open up to innovative training and skill development initiatives. To ensure active ageing in society, it is inevitable to include the old people in mainstream of the society. Due to complex emotional, mental as well as
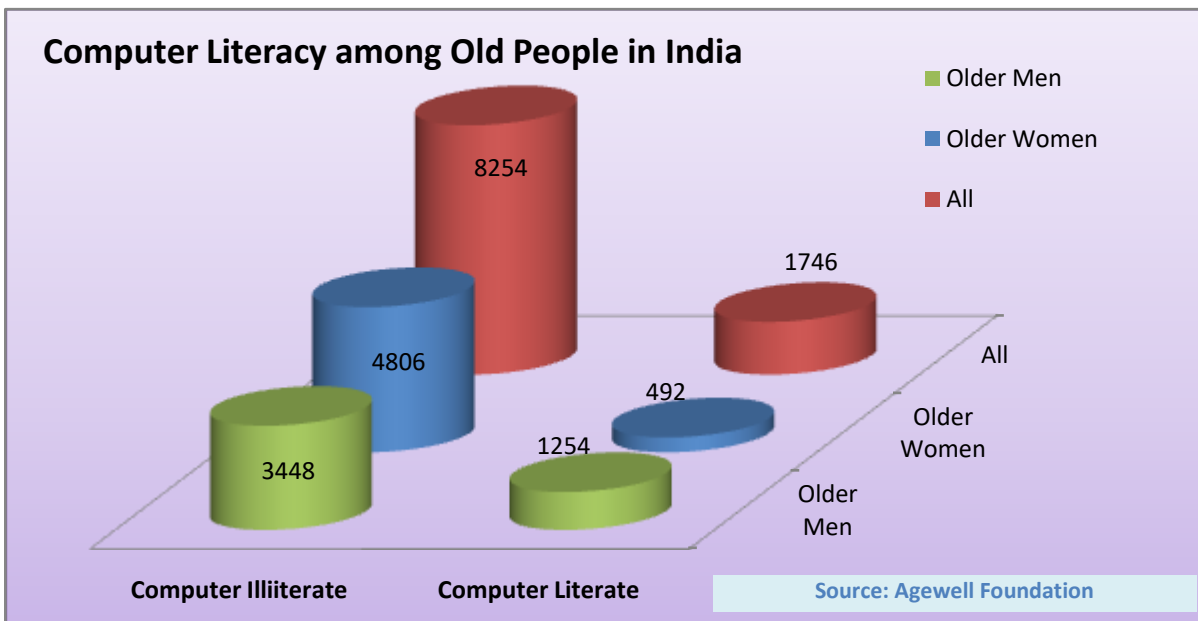
physical process, the rapid changes in the surroundings make ageing more difficult than it appears.

Training of soft skills must aim to stimulate their skills, networks / functions. Such initiatives can help elderly to forget about the insecurities or loneliness that they otherwise experience. Soft skills — a blend of interpersonal and savvy communication skills, along with social intelligence — are in high demand by employers today.

Modern technological know-how and new age skills play crucial role in improving poor living conditions and infrastructure and eradicating poverty. In India where pensions, disability insurance, health benefits, and savings become almost worthless due to rising inflation rates, every retired and old person need to remain engaged in some gainful occupation.

Status of Skills Training for Older Persons in India

- As per the survey conducted by Agewell Foundation on Digital Illiteracy among Older Persons during 2018, approx. 82.5% respondents were found to be digitally

Computer Literacy among Old People in India

Legend: Older Men, Older Women, All

Computer Illiterate: Older Men 3448, Older Women 4806, All 8254
Computer Literate: Older Men 1254, Older Women 492, All 1746

Source: Agewell Foundation

and computer illiterate (72% elderly men & 92% elderly women).

- 58.5% elderly shown their interest in Digital literacy program (74% elderly men and 48% elderly women)

- Approximately 51% respondents claimed that there are hardly any facilities where they can learn computer applications and get digital training. Another 44.6% claimed that they have no idea about facilities where they can get digital training.

- Agewell Foundation's soft skills training are normally conducted for a duration of 2/3 weeks, wherein topics that relate to - Inter and Intrapersonal Communication, Presentation Skills, Leadership Skills, Email Communication, Decision Making, Assertiveness, Problem-Solving, Time Management etc. are covered. These initiatives have been found to have life changing effects.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning has been an integral part of Indian culture. The ancient Indian religious tradition and culture have accorded prime importance to the acquisition of knowledge and upheld the virtues of learning. Despite the gradual modernization of

society and the emergence of multiple channels of learning, the first formal recognition of lifelong learning came in 1966 when the Indian Education Commission (1964-66) made the observation that - *Education does not end with schooling, but is a lifelong process. The elderly needs an understanding of the rapidly changing world and the growing complexities of society. Even those who had the most sophisticated education must continue to learn.*

The process of developing the policy framework of lifelong learning has been rather slow in India and seems to be linked to external motivation. Currently lifelong learning is often used as an umbrella term to cover basic literacy, post literacy, continuing education and extension programs of different organizations, refresher/continuing courses of professional bodies, private institutions and business houses; but not conceived as an overarching framework of learning. For older persons there are almost no lifelong programs being conceived / implemented in India at governmental as well non-governmental level.

***