10th Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing: Focus Area: Education, training, life-long learning and capacity-building

Prof. JACOB JOHN KATTAKAYAM,
Centre for Gerontological Studies,
Trivandrum, India.
Email: jjkattakayam@yahoo.com

National Legal Framework

1. In your country/region, how is the right to education, training, life-long learning and capacity building in older age guaranteed in legal and policy frameworks?

India's National Policy on Senior Citizens and the National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly, both in 2011, and the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, has forced all of India's public systems -- be it health, transport, police, education, banking, to integrate the idea of geriatric care into their services. At 18 regional geriatric centres (RGCs) across India, post-graduate courses are being offered in geriatrics to train medical and paramedical personnel in primary, secondary and tertiary health care. Facilities for specialization in geriatric medicine in medical colleges has also begun on a small scale. Training in nursing care will include geriatric care. India has a National Literacy Mission which encourages illiterate elderly to access the world of education. NGOs and religious/charitable bodies now shoulder the bulk of the responsibility in elderly care and have spearheaded capacity building but as societies age, governments are also coming into the picture.

Availability, Accessibility and Adaptability

2. What are the key issues and challenges faced by older persons in your country/region with regard to the enjoyment of all levels of quality education, training, life-long learning, and capacity building services?

'Discrimination" against older persons for availing opportunities for education, training and orientation has to be removed. Because India is a young society -- median age of population is just 29 -- the focus of human resource development is entirely on the youth. This has led to distancing of elderly from public spaces and employment opportunities. Open universities, distance learning centres, online education, offer opportunities for elderly but few are latching on. The lack of

coordination between the two national bodies dealing with adult education and skill development viz; National Literacy Mission and National Skill Development Mission and overlapping of their functions has also put hurdles in the path of development of a comprehensive national policy on lifelong learning.

3. What steps have been taken to ensure that education, training, life-long learning, and capacity building services are available and accessible to all older persons, adapted to their needs, suited to their preferences and motivations, and of high quality?

UGC accord maximum priority to lifelong learning with a view to meeting the demands of emerging knowledge society and facilitate the process of developing a learning society (University Grants Commission, 2010). It suggested that universities need to integrate formal and non-formal education by opening their doors to adult learners and making them adult learner friendly. It is expected that lifelong learning will soon become a reality and an important strand of India's education policy. The launching of the first Masters Program in Lifelong Learning by the University of Delhi in 2014 may also play a key role in furthering lifelong learning program mainly by providing professional manpower. With the concerted efforts of the government and universities and the cooperation of UNESCO and European Commission, it is expected that India will soon have a comprehensive policy on lifelong learning. The smartphone promises to make a revolutionary change in the lives of the elderly allowing them to communicate much easier with the rest of the world.

4. In your country/region, are there studies and/or data available on the access of older persons to the right to education, training, life-long learning and capacity building in older age?

Agewell Foundation made a study and reported that that lack of computer skills and digital illiteracy was affecting their life in old age adversely. A project on 'Digital Literacy Programme for Older Persons' is made to provide free computer and digital training to the elderly. It has set up training centres at over 75 different locations. Dignity Foundation made a study on Gram Nidhi in India successfully embedded a more holistic approach to learning within a micro-finance project.

Equality and non-discrimination
5. In your country, is age one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination in relation to education in older age?

Age is not a prohibition for education in old age in India. Academia uses the services of meritorious scholars as emeritus professors. Many of India's leading politicians are in their 60s,70s and some even in their 80s. But in the private sector age is certainly becoming an issue because of India's burgeoning young workforce which is increasingly finding it difficult to find jobs. India's private workplaces are entirely dominated by the youth. As a result of the global economic slowdown and because the young start on lower salaries, senior and midlevel employees are increasingly facing the heat. Even their experience and expertise becomes devalued. As a result of the population pressures, ageism is slowly but surely creeping up.

Accountability
6. What mechanisms are necessary, or already in place, for older persons to lodge complaints and seek redress for denial of their right to education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building?

Article 15(1) of the Constitution of India says "the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them." Perhaps, age also needs to be included in the grounds of potential discrimination. This will ensure strong penal and civil laws come into effect. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act has provisions relating to elderly care but nothing related to capacity building or education.