



# IGPD IN ACTION *in the Caribbean*



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## The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing:

### The Framework for Monitoring, Review and Appraisal

In recognition of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), the forty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development will initiate the first review and appraisal of its implementation at the global level. As a contribution to this first review, a report of the Secretary-General on major developments in ageing since the Second World Assembly on Ageing was issued. This document addresses topics such as the sustainability of social protection systems; older workers' participation in the labour market; approaches to adjusting health-care and social-care services; as well as issues of empowerment of older persons, including the protection of their rights; facilitation of their participation in society; and promotion of positive and balanced images of ageing.

While participants at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid had defined a broader agenda for global issues on ageing, helping to 'demystify' population and individual ageing and to include in political agendas a range of objectives and goals connected to achieving a 'society for all ages', the report found that progress in this field has been rather uneven. However, a sign of clear

advances seems to be the growing awareness of ageing in most countries, says the report.

This document is not expected to replace the global review and appraisal process, which is expected to bring, through a bottom-up participatory exercise, first-hand results, conclusions and follow-up ideas regarding challenges in the implementation of MIPAA.

The Commission for Social Development at its forty-eighth session in 2008 will conclude the first cycle of the review and appraisal exercise with an outcome document that is expected to include the conclusions of the first review and appraisal exercise along with the identification of prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options.

#### *What is happening in the Caribbean?*

In collaboration with other partners in the region ECLAC has spearheaded the review and appraisal process in the Caribbean. This began with an expert group meeting on changing age-structures and challenges for the Caribbean held in December 2006. The main objectives of the meeting were to:

- (a) provide a platform for experts in

this area to share information on the topic and to provide Caribbean governments and other critical stakeholders with the relevant technical knowledge to assist in policy and programme formulation; and (b) to define the Caribbean perspective on changing age-structures and its development challenges as an input into regional and international dialogues.

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In this issue of the newsletter we focus on the elderly. The Caribbean is undergoing a little-noticed demographic shift, a consequence of increased longevity and declining sizes of younger generations. The success in providing basic social and primary health care has resulted in longer life expectancy and declining numbers of deaths in early life-years. This, along with continuously declining fertility rates, has been leading to one of the world's fastest demographic transitions that is occurring under far less favourable conditions than in the more developed world.

Two Caribbean countries, the United States Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, with both 17 per cent, are among the top 25 per cent of countries with the highest percentage of persons aged 60 years and over, according to a 2006 ranking of 192 countries. Eight other countries are among the top half of the world's countries with regard to ageing: Cuba (16 per cent); the Netherlands Antilles (14 per cent); Barbados (13 per cent), Trinidad and Tobago (11 per cent); Jamaica and Saint Lucia (10 per cent); and Suriname and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (10 per cent).

These demographic changes will have a sizable impact on the labour force, the social security systems and the provision of pensions and health care. The present economic system, with its dependency on a narrow range of goods and services, seems no longer viable and universal access to socio-economic support systems and primary health care can no longer be financed solely by governments.

Because the way a society views their aged - as a problem, burden or joy, as fountains of wisdom and persons to be consulted - will determine the social policies that will be instituted to meet or not meet their needs, we will revisit the framework documents of the MIPAA to support the elderly and review some of the policies and programmes developed by Caribbean countries at the national level. To provide a broader background, this newsletter will also take a closer look at the monitoring and appraisal process of the MIPAA) at the global and regional level.

Many countries of the Caribbean have been - to varying degrees - involved in implementing the MIPAA, focusing on areas such as legislation, advocacy, support services and capacity building. We look forward to measuring the impact of these initiatives.

We hope that the information provided in this newsletter will inspire our readers in government, NGOs and academia to promote ageing and to redouble their efforts to integrate older persons into the mainstream of society and encourage coordinated actions on the many fronts related to the ageing agenda. Following the words of Martin Luther King: I have a dream...that some day this region will stand out as an example 'par excellence' for 'a society for all' where old and young find their equal places! ●

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## UNFPA's Policy Guidelines on Population Ageing

*In the area of population ageing, UNFPA's objective is to influence public policy and public policy dialogue to respond to the challenges posed by the social, health and economic consequences of population ageing and to meet the needs of older persons, with particular emphasis on the poor, especially women.*

*The Fund supports training of policy makers, programme planners and assists countries to develop quality data on the number and characteristics of older people and supports research on the social and economic impact of population ageing.*

*Their policy guidelines include:*

- Focus on the older poor, in development and poverty reduction strategies;
- Examine the economic, social and cultural implications of population and demographic changes, and how they relate to development concerns;
- Promote and implement adequate policies and programmes for the active ageing population, including life-long education and training, and the full participation of older persons in community life;
- Recognize and support the care-giving services provided by grandparents, especially women, to grandchildren orphaned by AIDS;
- Eliminate discrimination, financial, psychological and physical abuse and other crimes against older persons, especially women, including intergenerational violence.

For more details of the UNFPA ageing policy and programmes visit the website at:  
[www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

## The Caribbean participates in a Global UN project on Ageing

Representatives of two Caribbean countries, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago, participated in the first Consultative meeting on the Implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing at the National Level.

This meeting was the first activity within the newly approved Development Account-funded project **'Capacity Building to integrate older persons in development goals and frameworks through the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing'**.

The first interregional consultative meeting of the project was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 28 November – 1 December 2006 and was hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Representatives from Senegal and Cameroon in West Africa and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia also participated in the meeting.

The project's main task is to assist developing countries and countries in transition in the implementation of the MIPAA at the national level. It will further enhance the capacity of stakeholders in the participating countries to



Participants of the meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand, December 2006

integrate ageing issues in national development frameworks through advocacy and competency-based training and training-of-trainers (TOTs) approach. Web-based networks in each subregion will enhance knowledge and skills sharing. A tool kit and training materials will be produced to enable other member States to benefit from the project, its experiences and lessons learned. Immediate targets and beneficiaries are member States, including policy advisers and programme practitioners, development partners and older persons and their communities. In the Caribbean the project will be jointly implemented by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development and the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

### The main objectives of the meeting were to:

- discuss the current policy situation in project countries;
- attain familiarity with the project framework and methodologies (including needs assessments, setting

objectives, monitoring and awareness raising);

- agree on capacity building needs and requirements in each of the countries.

**What next?** The next step in the project is for all participants to share the insights gained at the meeting with their counterparts back home and to identify their specific needs for further technical assistance in capacity building and training.

Participants suggested that the website for the project could act as a way for the countries to share information on what they are doing by posting updates and newsletters. It was agreed that the project Steering Committee be comprised of the project hub countries – Kyrgyzstan, Senegal and Trinidad and Tobago.

Specifically, participants will hold meetings with the necessary government officials and stakeholders and make a written proposal for capacity-building assistance to DESA based on meeting discussions and the project framework. The work schedule for 2007 will be set up as proposals are received and approved. ●



Participants of the meeting acknowledged that the demographic transition was well underway in the Caribbean. However, while almost all countries seemed to recognize these dramatic changes, this awareness had not yet been translated into a comprehensive reform of the health-care and social protection systems. Statistics on ageing for the Caribbean were presented, revealing that although population ageing in the region was uneven, the number of older persons represented an increasingly significant proportion of the population.

As a result of this growing problem for the Caribbean, the challenge for countries lay in developing clear strategies that would guarantee sustainable public finances for social security and pensions, as well as a decent standard of living for all.

It was further emphasized that there was need to integrate a gender perspective in all aspects of social protection and social development, especially considering the fact that women tended to outlive men, although older men seemed to be generally healthier than older women. Also, there appeared to be differences in achievements in formal education, access to labour markets and family responsibilities.

In addressing the issues of ageing, several obstacles that slowed down the implementation of age-sensitive policies and programmes were identified. The most significant hurdles were the lack of sufficient financial support, limited qualified human resources, lack of public awareness and concern for older persons and not enough income generation and employment opportunities for this age-group. The need to view older persons as a heterogeneous group with diverse needs was also highlighted. Further, welfare-based programmes that denied older persons the right to live and

work and the lack of specific policies and legislative frameworks would need to be urgently reviewed. It was further reiterated that ageing posed challenges that required the development of sound public policies to facilitate the adjustments necessary for the provision of adequate health care, economic security and social support for the elderly. Governments, the private sector and the general public all had a significant role to play to overcome the challenges of demographic ageing.

### *Review and appraisal of the MIPAA in the Caribbean*

While our aim is to determine how many of the commitments made at global and regional forums have actually been translated into palpable action, we also want to find out what hurdles and obstacles development practitioners and service recipients, such as the elderly themselves and/or their immediate care-givers have experienced. Therefore the research will review and summarize existing information on policies and programmes on ageing in the Caribbean and will proceed to identify specific issues to the countries in the region that need further investigation. As a further step, it is intended to gather additional and more detailed country information by administering a short survey to critical stakeholders from government and NGOs at the national level. Finally, to deepen the understanding of ageing at the individual country level, the idea is to conduct an in-depth country study in a selected number of countries. ●

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To access the full report and for more information about the upcoming session of the Commission for Social Development, please view:  
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/csocd2007.htm>

## TEXT BOX

# 1



*Don't call me a  
young woman;  
It's not a compliment  
or courtesy  
But rather a grating  
discourtesy.  
Being old is a hard-won  
achievement.*

*Not something to be  
brushed aside  
Treated as infirmity  
or ugliness  
or apologised away by  
"young woman."  
I am an old woman,  
a long liver.  
I'm proud of it, I revel in it.  
I wear my grey hair  
and wrinkles.  
As badges of  
triumphant survival  
And I intend to grow  
even older.*

Excerpt from "Don't Call Me a  
Young Woman"  
By Ruth Harriet Jacobs



Left to right -  
Jeniffer Rouse (Trinidad & Tobago),  
and Linda Evans(Grenada)

### The Caribbean participates in a Global UN project on Ageing Bangkok, Thailand

Nov - Dec 2006



Left to right -  
Bob Huber (UN-DESA), Linda Evans (Grenada),  
and Rosemary Lane (UN-DESA)



Left to right -  
Rajwatti Bhagga - Wegener (Trinidad & Tobago),  
Bayan Ahmetzhanord (Kazakhstan) and  
Jeniffer Rouse (Trinidad & Tobago)



Left to right -  
Bayan Ahmetzhanord (Kazakhstan),  
Clement Francis and  
Linda Evans (Grenada)



Left to right -  
Rajwatti Bhagga - Wegener and  
Jeniffer Rouse (Trinidad & Tobago)

### Visions of Bangkok, Thailand





*“Aunty Ruthie, look at what Mummy gave me”; “Aunty Ruthie, Kia is hitting Adrie”; “Aunty Ruthie, may I go to the bathroom please?” These were the voices of children ages 3 – 5 years old, attending Springer’s Learning Centre based in Tunapuna, Trinidad. The early childhood centre is owned and operated by Mrs. Ruth Springer, an 86-year old retired school principal. Teaching since the age of 18, Aunty Ruthie, as she is popularly known, says that for her teaching is a vocation.*

Aunty Ruthie recalled that in 1981, upon retiring from the government Teaching Service at the age of 60, “after a few weeks of relaxation at home, I started to wonder what to do next, since I did not feel weary”. Her sister, also a retired teacher at that time, had started a small pre-school and she decided to “help out” since she felt she still had much to offer. Over 25 years later, she is still “helping out”. She says that since the school has been in operation, over 90 per cent of the teachers have been retirees. She opines that they all did it as a way of giving back to the community and because they had lots of time on their hands, and were bored being at home.

She defines her job as “helping out” because although the school functions on a full-time basis, it is not a profitable enterprise, since it does not help in paying any of her bills. She laughingly remarks, “I have an average of twenty students per year, and the school fee is TT\$150.00 per month, but would you believe, every year I receive over 50 per cent of my students on full scholarships.

## Elderly Profile: Aunty Ruthie

When I pay my teacher, the little that is left is used for the purchase of school supplies.” She acknowledges that a number of her students come from poor families, and so is happy to provide a service they may not receive otherwise.

Because she had begun teaching at such a young age, Aunty Ruthie had always looked forward to retirement as a time to relax. But she later quips “I come from a family of educators, who lived way into their eighties, you have to ask yourself how much time you need to relax”. During the interview, her brother Horace who recently celebrated his 90th birthday stops by for his “ritual morning visit”. Like Auntie Ruthie, Horace is still active - involved in the daily operations of his family’s bakery.

When asked as to what she would like to do for the next 5-10 years, Aunty Ruthie replies, “keep doing what I do, until the Lord is ready for me”. She fears however that this may not be possible, since she has learnt that the new policy governing the operation of pre-schools prevents persons over age 65 years from running these institutions. The perception is that, given their ages, they would not have been trained in early childhood education. However, Auntie Ruthie is of the opinion that since older educators would have been trained in Montessori courses and what was now needed to bridge the gap was additional training in the new methods utilized.

Although she fully supports the need for standardizing and regulating the system, her strong opinion is that “there are enough retired, willing and experienced persons available, who can provide good service not only in the field of education, but in all areas, and we need to use them”.



**In 2003, Dr. Rouse assumed duties as the first Director of Trinidad and Tobago's newly created Division of Ageing in the Ministry of Social Development. Her PhD thesis, "A Case Study of Ageing in Trinidad and Tobago: The Role of Interest Groups in Defining New Policy Objectives", she believes, turned out to be a road map for her job.**



**Interview with  
Dr. Jennifer Rouse,**  
*Division of Ageing,  
Ministry of Social Development,  
Trinidad and Tobago*

To date, her Division has won the Prime Minister's Innovating for Service Excellence Award: Making a Difference to People - Social Inclusion Award" for the Senior Activity Centres. Other programmes spearheaded by her Division to date include the Older Person Information Centre (OPIC) and the Public Open Forum for Old Persons. She is also a lecturer at the University of the West Indies in social gerontology.

Dr. Rouse is the first Caribbean person to obtain a PhD in Public Policy - Aging Issues. She decided to pursue an undergraduate education at age 44 and credits her upbringing and familial structure as being the biggest influences on her educational and career paths. Born to parents who were both in their 40s, and having spent most of her formative years around her grandmother, she believes that "being around aged and aging adults all of my life must have had an indelible influence in my choice of vocation."

In response to the question on how to translate these seemingly successful local programmes to the region, Dr. Rouse identifies channels such as CARICOM, bilateral links with other countries and opportunities for capacity building such as her country's participation in an interregional project on ageing funded by the United Nations. Other initiatives include the idea to establish a Caribbean-wide Regional Ageing Network and activities such as Senior Games. As to the main issues affecting the older population, she identifies the challenges facing the Caribbean region as income security, social security, health care and loneliness.

In terms of mainstreaming ageing issues, Dr. Rouse sees great scope since the key policy makers, including politicians and the business sector, are from the "baby boomers" generation. As such, she recognizes they will all have a vested interest in their own lives. As to the scope of the ageing issue in the Caribbean, she

describes it as "gargantuan" because it cannot be measured. Why not? Because she admits the issue is yet to be properly conceptualized. This she attributes to the fact that family structures have changed, with grandmothers becoming increasingly younger; intergenerational issues, adequacy and tension issues, problems in housing, elder abuse over relations regarding property, migration, divorce and environmental pressure which she defines as the "social and physical demands" thrust on older persons. These she identifies as critical factors impeding the proper conceptualization of the issue.

Her mantra that "ageing is involuntary, but how we grow old is in our hands" is her own gauge in terms of how she lives her life. She identifies most health challenges faced by older persons as preventable, and directly related to lifestyle and choices made. Knowing what to expect and how to deflect genetics through nutrition and careful planning are important tools for individuals, she posits. Her passion for the issues facing the elderly is palatable, and her advice to all is to "start planning for old age at a younger age". ●

*Wisdom doesn't  
automatically come with  
old age. Nothing does - except  
wrinkles. It's true, some wines  
improve with age.  
But only if the grapes were  
good in the first place.*

*(Adigail Van Buren, 1978)*

## UN project on Ageing



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## Fast Fact

### Population Ageing

Today 60% of older persons live in developing countries; by 2050, that proportion will increase to 80 percent.

## Quotable Quote

Viewed as a whole the "problem" of aging is no problem at all. It is only the pessimistic way of looking at a great triumph of civilization. (Notestein, 1954)

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# Tips for Living with and Caring for the Elderly

If you are a caregiver - a family member, friend or neighbour who takes care of an elderly individual, here are some tips for you:

- **Maintain independence as long as possible** – recognize older persons' anxiety over the loss of freedom and respect their wish for continued independence;
- **Never do for the elderly what they can do for themselves.** It is a common mistake to expect incapacity in old age. But there are wide variations in the abilities of older persons. It is vital therefore to distinguish normal physiological changes from treatable disorders;
- **Take care of yourself.** Caring for the elderly can be both a difficult challenge and rewarding experience, but it can be stressful. Emotions such as anger, guilt, grief and anxiety are normal. Don't forget to also take

care of yourself. When it is appropriate, ask for help or accept help when it is offered;

- **Pay attention:** How can you tell when the elderly are no longer able to live on their own? Their ability to perform basic activities of daily living is a key indicator. If they are having trouble with personal hygiene, dressing, preparing meals, shopping, etc those kinds of things can be telltale signs that maybe you need to think about some type of assistance;
- **Home safety:** by minimizing danger, you maximize independence. Tips include - clearly display emergency numbers and your home address near all telephones; install smoke alarms; remove throw rugs; use washable carpets in bathrooms to prevent slipping on wet tile floors; avoid clutter, which can create confusion and danger; and keep all walk areas free of furniture.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- **Population ageing is the process by which older individuals become a proportionately larger share of the total population.** Demographers refer to it as "demographic transition" - a gradual process wherein a society moves from a situation of high rates of fertility and mortality to one of low rates of fertility and mortality.
- **Elder abuse** is a term referring to any knowing, intentional or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to vulnerable adults. Types of elder abuse include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment and financial or material exploitation
- **Ageing is another aspect of population dynamic that affects the level of poverty.** As fertility declines and the population ages, traditional family based systems for providing old age care may, weaken, leaving the elderly vulnerable.