

Minutes of the NPOP Review Regional Meeting Held in Chandigarh on 6th July 2010

The first Regional Meeting of the Review Committee of National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) was held under the Chairpersonship of Shri M.M. Sabharwal on 6th July 2010 at Main Auditorium, CII Building, Dakshan Marg, Sector 31-A, Chandigarh. The list of participants in **Annexure A**.

Member/s Present:

Mr. K.R. Gangadharan

Special Invitee:

Dr. S.D. Gokhale

Leave of Absence to Dr. Mohini Giri, Chairperson, NPOP Review Committee, Dr. Shielu Sreenivasan, Member of the Review Committee and Mrs. Purnima Singh, Member Secretary.

1. The Agenda Items for discussion in the meeting were as follows:

- i) To point out the areas where the government both central and state have not done enough vis-à-vis the provisions of the current National Policy on Older Persons
- ii) The efforts made by various senior citizens associations to ensure the implementation of the current National Policy on Older Persons
- iii) Mechanisms to ensure speedy implementation of the new Policy on Older Persons

Mr. M.M. Sabharwal informed the participants that Dr. Giri's was indisposed hence unable to attend the meeting. He introduced the other members of the Committee who were present and welcomed the participants. He also informed the participants about inability of Mrs. Purnima Singh, Member Secretary to attend the meeting due to bad weather condition in Chandigarh.

He informed the participants about the other meetings of the Review Committee held so far. He briefly outlined the purpose of the Regional Meeting and requested the participants to give clear cut suggestions for reform. The Members of the Committee present unanimously agreed to hold the meeting in a public hearing format, where each representative of the senior citizens association from the North Indian states, government functionaries and experts were requested to present their point of view.

Speaker 1: Brig. Keshav Chandra (Retd.), Imdt. Past President, Senior Citizens Association gave the following suggestions. He started by praising the current

National Policy on Older Persons as a well drafted and well presented document. However, he was quick to point out that it was a 'dead document' which lacked 'teeth' as it could not be enforced. He listed out the provisions that were relevant and well intentioned, but, never implemented. He gave a few examples to substantiate his point: ineffective action plan, lack of medical facilities even in government hospitals, partial relief in income tax, no employment opportunities, lack of information about facilities, lack of financial resources to state governments, lack of statutory provisions to implement the policy, faulty identification of beneficiaries, difference in the definition of 'below poverty line', lack of provisions for people just 'above poverty line'.

He praised the Chandigarh Administration for providing better facilities for the senior citizens living in the city: issuing identity cards for the senior citizens, concession in bus fare, hospital, supporting community centre etc.

Suggestions:

- 1) Appropriate allocation of funds under various schemes meant exclusively for older persons and sub allocation of senior citizens under all general schemes.
- 2) Partial coverage of 'above poverty line' population under various schemes
- 3) Involvement of civil society organizations for effective implementation at the grass-root level.
- 4) Progress made under various schemes for the benefit of senior citizens should be covered in the address of the Governor/ President before each legislative session.
- 5) Increased in the age limit for health insurance.
- 6) The provision for expeditious disposal of cases in courts involving senior citizens should be made more effected with outlining minimum and maximum duration within which the case would be disposed off.
- 7) Universal eligibility criteria of 60 years for all benefits.

* Copy of the speech in Annexure B.

Speaker 2: Mr. D.S. Grewal, Executive President, Federation of Senior Citizens' Association Punjab.

Suggestions:

- 1) The ceiling for investment in long term saving schemes should be removed so that senior citizens could invest more money in such schemes and benefit in advanced age.
- 2) Total exemption from IT on total income to all senior citizens above the age of 80 years.
- 3) Nodal officer to be appointed in each court to facilitate fast tracking of the cases involving senior citizens.

- 4) Minimum level of grant should be available in each state for senior citizens associations for basic activities.
- 5) All senior citizens should be encouraged to become member of senior citizens associations and all associations encouraged to make a federation to promote the cause.
- 6) Setting up of a statutory commission for older persons with judicial authority.
- 7) Geriatric facilities should be available in all hospitals and facilities for training of medical staff in geriatrics should be available.
- 8) Government of Punjab has chalked out a programme for pre-retirement training for those above 55 years of age. There should be a body like Directorate of Resettlement in the Armed Forces to help people find employment after retirement.
- 9) Financial support should be available to older persons on easy terms to start small businesses. The condition of getting guarantee from a younger person to get a loan from the bank should be reversed.

* Copy of the document on problem faced by elderly and suggestions for future submitted by B.S.B. Welfare Society, Dorha Khanna, Punjab in Annexure C.

Speaker 3: Maj. Gen. M.S. Kandal (Retd.), President, Chandigarh Senior Citizens Association. He added that the Chandigarh Administration had taken initiative to involve 200 NGOs in implementation of various schemes. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act was notified last year and the Rules for the same have been drafted and discuss with the various bodies of the senior citizens. The government department dealing with senior citizens was responsive and accepted many suggestions that were given by the Chandigarh Senior Citizens Association. He also described the activities undertaken by the association in partnership with the government for the benefit of senior citizens.

Speaker 4: Ms. Navraj Sandhu, FC Cum Principal Secretary, Dept. Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of Haryana. She explained the challenges faced by the government department dealing with the issue of older persons. She explained that the policy by itself could not be implemented unless Acts are passed to implement its provisions. She added that the department dealing with ageing issues also has to deal with other issues resulting in lack of attention to this issue. The government officers dealing with these issues lack specialized training.

Suggestions:

- 1) Allocation of adequate funds
- 2) Creation of specialized department for ageing
- 3) Appointment of consultants for periodic advice to maintain continuity in effort

4) Training of manpower

Speaker 5: Dr. A.S. Khehra, President, Federation Senior Citizens Association Punjab. He reiterated the increase in the number of older persons in future and the need for urgent attention. However, he pointed out that the analysis of allocation of funds in the tenth and eleventh Five Years Plan show that though the allocation increased for Social Defence but the proportion of funds for older persons decreased from 4.5 % to 3.5 %.

Suggestions:

- 1) Create separate Ministry or Department for older persons.
- 2) There should be provision for Integrated Policy for Older Persons at state level.
- 3) There should be multi-purpose centres in each locality to facilitate functioning of senior citizens association. There should be changed in the building bye-laws or master plan for this purpose.
- 4) There should be provision for more pay and stay homes with good facility in each city. This should be in the PPP (Public Private Partnership) Model.
- 5) Associations should be encouraged to enroll older women as members and if possible membership of older women in the association should be made an eligibility criteria for getting government funds.
- 6) Old age pensions should be given to older persons from low income families, not necessarily from BPL households. There should be provision for giving additional money to people over 70 years, over 80 years, childless and those who have only daughter/s. Cess could be charged for the purpose; but, this fund should be managed exclusively for the purpose and not mixed with the general kitty.
- 7) Retirement age should be increased to 65 years and people with outstanding record should be allowed to continue even after the age of 65.
- 8) There should re-employment opportunities.
- 9) There should be protection against family violence on the lines of Domestic Violence Act. Rules should be changed to help older persons facing problems with their tenants etc.
- 10) All the information pertaining to senior citizens should be available in the website of the Ministry and the design of the website should be elderly friendly.

Speaker 6: Mr. Kaushal Kishore Jain, President, Varistha Nagrik Sansthan, Rajasthan.

Suggestions:

- 1) Focus of the government programme should be on the older persons from the unorganized sector as they are most vulnerable.
- 2) Government should be sensitive to the issue of access to various schemes in rural and urban areas.

Speaker 7: Mr. K.P. Prashar, Himachal Pradesh

Suggestions:

- 1) The grass-root level organizations face the apathy, indifference and corruption at the district level administration. Efforts should be made to address these issues.
- 2) There should be mechanism for independent monitoring and evaluation of all government schemes.
- 3) PPP (Public Private Partnership) Model should be adopted in future for effective implementation of schemes for senior citizens.

Speaker 8: Mr T.R. Sarangal, Principal Secretary, Social Security, Government of Punjab informed about the various initiative taken by the state government.

- 1) Celebrate International Day of Older Persons
- 2) Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act notified and Rules under consideration. Tribunals have been constituted and 39 cases have been registered.
- 3) State Policy on Older Persons has been drafted and under consideration, includes: old age home, day care centres, health, financial security, emotional security, protection of property, higher education for older persons, and chapter on awareness.
- 4) State government gives pension Rs. 250/- per month to 1.37 million older persons. Increase in the amount is under consideration.
- 5) Regular meetings with the senior citizens association.

Suggestions:

- 1) Destitute older persons should be the first to get services.
- 2) The real problems in old age are faced by people from the unorganized sector and special provision should be made for such people.

Speaker 9: Wing Cdr. H.L. Ratta (Retd.), President, Panchkula Residents Welfare Council.

He pointed out that tremendous demographic changes have made effective implementation of the Policy very difficult for the government. He informed that Haryana Government gives Rs. 750/- per month as old age pension to poor elderly. The government has also devised a scheme to build one old age home in each district. In Panchkula district a senior citizens club was established by the government.

Suggestions:

- 1) Civil society organization should make effort to help disadvantaged senior citizens.
- 2) Counseling centres should be established for dealing with family conflict.
- 3) Awareness and mainstreaming issues pertaining to ageing and policy on ageing.
- 4) There should be political will to implement the Policy.

Speaker 10: Mr. Anand Khullar, President, Senior Citizen Association Prem Nagar, Dehradun.

Suggestions:

- 1) Older persons who have knowledge and experience should be given opportunities to contribute to society.
- 2) Draft legislation should be accompanied by draft Rules for speedy implementation.
- 3) Effective monitoring implementation should be put in place at senior level in government bureaucracy i.e. level of secretary or chief secretary.
- 4) Senior citizens should be made part of the flagship schemes of the government like NRHM, JNNURM, Food Security Act, NREGA, NACO, etc.
- 5) Uniform age of eligibility for all schemes and benefits.
- 6) Age budgeting concept should be adopted.
- 7) Schemes like New Pension Scheme should be sensitive to the needs of people from the unorganized sector and provision should be made for 75% contribution from the government and 25% from the individual to ensure social security in old age.

Speaker 11: Mr. Yogendra Kohli, Member, Senior Citizen Association Prem Nagar, Dehradun.

Suggestions:

- 1) Moral education focusing on need for caring for the elderly to be integrated in the curriculum from class I to the highest possible level of education.
- 2) All senior citizens to be given the same treatment as given to any persons living below poverty line.
- 3) Older people in the hilly areas have specific problems which should be focused specially.
- 4) Registration fees for senior citizens association should be minimum.

Speaker 12: Mr. J.L. Mattoo, All J&K Sr. Citizens Welfare Council.

He informed the participants that the J&K Government has neither adopted State Policy on Older Persons nor notified the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007.

Suggestions:

- 1) There should be a mechanism to encourage state government to adopt the Policy and implement other schemes meant for senior citizens.
- 2) There should be change in the reverse mortgage scheme where house of the older person if constructed on the lease land needs a specific bond to execute which incurs stamp duty of 22% to 23% of the cost of the property.
- 3) Creating awareness among children in school about ageing issues.

Speaker 13: Mr. S.S. Randhawa, Secretary, Chandigarh Senior Citizens Association.

Suggestions:

- 1) Create new job opportunities for older persons.
- 2) People should be allowed to work as long as they are willing and able to work. Conversely, there should be no mandatory retirement age.

Concluding Remarks of Chairperson and other Members of the Committee:

Mr. Sabharwal said that the associations have a great responsibility for assisting older persons, articulating the needs of older persons and partnering with government in implementing beneficial schemes for older persons. He also emphasized the need for building the capacity of the civil society organizations to move forward.

He informed the participants that the Committee understands the problems and challenges faced by the older persons and the senior citizens associations. He assured the participants that the Committee has noted all the suggestions and would try to present it in the best possible manner to the government so that better policy is framed for future.

He expressed gratitude for proactive participation by all the members of the various associations. He thanked the local team of HelpAge India for organizing the event and CII for providing facilities.

Mr. K.R. Gangadharan added that the Committee would do its best to ensure that the suggestions put forth by the members were incorporated in the recommendations.

Dr. Gokhale thanked the participants for adding to the knowledge of the Committee various facts and initiatives taken for the benefit of older persons in the participant states. He assured that the suggestions could be incorporated in

the recommendations and expressed hope that one day these would be implemented.

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Presentation to NPOP Review Committee

Madam Giri and Members of the Review Committee,

Let me on behalf of senior citizens of the UT Chandigarh, extend a very hearty welcome to you.

Let me briefly introduce myself and the organisation I represent.

I have been engaged in the welfare of senior citizens for the last 20 years but more intimately since the formation of Chandigarh Senior Citizens' Association in 1996. I was its founder Secretary General and am currently its President for the second time. Accompanying me are some of our office bearers: Gen Kandal, Smt. Surjit Kaur, Sh. D S Grewal, Sh S C Kapoor and Sh Satnam Singh Randhawa.

Chandigarh Senior Citizens' Association is a state level NGO and recognised by the UT Administration as representative of ALL senior citizens.

It is arguably the largest single NGO of its kind in India in that:

- It has a membership of approx 1350 but it works not only for its members but all senior citizens, in that, its services and facilities are available to every senior citizen free of charge irrespective of social class, caste or creed.
- In spite of its size, its Governing Body is elected by Director Election.
- It is the only NGO to receive grants on a regular basis from two state Govts and a UT Administration.
- It has a budget of nearly 15 lakhs per year for its welfare activities.
- Physiotherapy; Pre-retirement counselling; generation gap; poor & needy: couples.

Let me start by saying that the NPOP 1999 is a very well drafted document is well intentioned and written in good English. In fact when we first saw it we were greatly enthused and had great expectations from it. We even organised a seminar to disseminate its main features. Our expectations were belied. Eleven years on the implementation of the National Policy is a dead document. Not a single policy aim has been fulfilled. Yes, an odd goal may have been attained partially or wholly in some states but we are talking at the ALL India level. Yes, the Government has been able to bring in the Maintenance of Parents and Senior

Citizens Act 2007 but it has yet to be implemented in most states. Even the periodical reviews have not been carried out.

So, what were the shortcomings in NPOP 1999 and why does it need a review? The main shortcomings are:

- The main weakness lies in the absence of any mechanism to ensure implementation. Except giving a few guidelines the Centre has no role in enforcing implementation.
- No resources have been allocated for execution of the projects nor a time bound plan made to monitor progress. The stock reply of the State Govts. when questioned about tardy progress is “non-availability of funds”.
- The Policy is more like a vision, a dream – if I may say so, a pipe dream. There are no statutory provisions except in the Maintenance Act. So, if things are not moving (and they have not moved) there is nothing one can do.
- The criteria for identification of beneficiaries are ill-defined and outdated (e.g. persons below poverty line). By those criteria it is near impossible to find any beneficiary among the indigenous population. It is also a wrong assumption that persons notionally above poverty line can be left to fend for themselves.
- There is no involvement of the peer groups in monitoring the implementation of the Policy.
- UT level – Concession

The revised policy must address the above points.

- First and foremost it must allocate resources. This is not as difficult as it appears at first sight. There are funds allocated for various types of projects and schemes. If a proportionate sum is earmarked under that project for senior citizens there requirement can be met from within existing resources e.g. funds allocated for welfare of SC/ST could be further sub-allotted for the older persons among them.
- Senior citizens APL should also be made eligible to get benefits, if necessary, at concessional rates.
- Senior Citizens NGOs at the appropriate level should be involved in planning, execution and monitoring of age-specific programmes.
- Addresses by the President or Governor must contain a paragraph on implementation of the NPOP. Periodical reference is the best way to ensure action on outstanding issues because the Government of the day is always sensitive to criticism in the event of no-progress.

Other issues that may not be within the purview of the NPOP but need to be addressed in consultation with concerned authorities.

- Age limit for health insurance must be raised above 70 years.
- Litigation involving senior citizens must be made time-bound
- Some departments, notably IT, still do not give senior citizen concessions to persons between the age of 60-65 years. This needs to be rectified.

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National Policy of Elders Problems of Elders

1. Lack of old age security Elders who are not receiving the old age pension.
2. No facilities for elders in the Govt. Hospitals.
3. No facility for the elders in Police Stations.
4. Very small number of Senior Citizens Homes.
5. Very small numbers of Day Care Centres.
6. Very small number of walking place in the parks.
7. Elder victims of violence in domestic clashes.
8. No legal aid service for the elders.
9. Free Bus passes for elders was not implemented at lower level by Bus Conductors.
10. Lack of common places for the elders in the villagers.
11. Lack of specialist doctors for elders like Children & Women.
12. No Awareness for the elders diet in the Homes.

Our Suggestions for National Policy for Elders

1. Formation of Elder Commission like women commission & child commission at State Level.
2. Formations of elders help lines at sub-division level.
3. Separate Counter for Elders in the Banks for Pension.
4. Formation of Elders centre in Govt. Hospital like Mother & Child Health Care Centre.
5. Elders Help Lien in SSP officers at Distt. levels like Women Help Line.
6. Opening Senior Citizen's Home.
7. Direction for walking place in Municipal Parks.
8. Opening of day care centers at city & town level for elders.
9. Media Policy for Elders cares Coverage.
10. Opening of Free Legal Aid cells for the elders.
11. Direction for the implementation of free Bus Pass Programme.
12. Setting of new common place centers for elders.
13. Training of Doctors for old age health care.
14. To create awareness for the proper diet of elders.