

THE SECOND MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE ON “INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON ACTIVE AGEING”

**JULY 19, 2013
TOKYO, JAPAN**

“ACTIVE AGEING IN MALAYSIA”

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Malaysia's population has increased from 23.49 million people in 2000 to 29.34 million in 2012. The total population comprises of about 7.76 million people (26.4%) below the age of 15 years, 20.03 million (68.3%) in the economically-productive age group of 15-64 years and 1.56 million (5.3%) elderly people aged 65 years and above.
- 1.2 The crude birth rate reduced from 23.4 per thousand populations in 2000 to 17.5 in 2010. Meanwhile the crude death rate increased from 4.5 per thousand in 2000 to 4.8 in 2010. The infant mortality rate reduced from 6.5 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 6.8 in 2010. The maternal mortality rate has been 30 per 100,000 live births since 2000.
- 1.3 The successive improvements in these vital statistics are evident of an increasingly health conscious community, a political administration

committed to better health care and the economic wealth of the nation.

- 1.4 Besides these vital statistics, Malaysia's per capita income at current price has increased from RM 13,418 in the year 2000 to RM 31,215 in 2012. The poverty rate has reduced from 8.5% in 1999 to 3.8% in 2009. By the end of the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) period, the government targets to reduce the incidence of poverty from 3.8% in 2009 to 2.0% in 2015.

2. DEFINITION OF AGEING

- 2.1 In Malaysia, older persons are defined as those who are 60 years and above. The population of Malaysia is still relatively young compared to those in the developed countries, but changes in the age structure resulting from fertility decline and increased longevity are contributing towards the ageing of population.
- 2.2 Malaysia's total population of older persons in the year 2012 was 8.2% from the total population of the country (2.4 million out of 29.34 million). With declining fertility and longer life expectancy, Malaysia's population is ageing. By 2030, Malaysia will be in the category of ageing nations with older persons constituting more than 15% of the population. In Malaysia, average life expectancy is 72.3 years for male and 77.2 for female.

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

National Policy and Plan of Action for Older Persons

- 3.1 The Government came up with the National Policy for Older Persons in October 1995. In accordance to the policy, the National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons under the chairmanship of the Minister for Women, Family and Community Development was set up in May 1996. As an outcome of the establishment of the Council, a Plan of Action for the Older Persons was formulated in December 1998. The Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is the secretariat for the Council and serves as the focal point for all issues related to older persons.
- 3.3 The new National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons were approved by the Government of Malaysia on January 5th 2011. The policy and plan of action were formulated based on the review made to the earlier National Policy for Older Persons (1995) and Plan of Action for the Older Persons (1998). The review was carried out by the Government to re-look into incorporating the developmental and reintegration of the older persons in the society, in order to instill older persons with a high sense of self-worth and dignity.

- 3.4 The new National Policy for Older Persons acknowledges the older persons as citizens with varied background and experiences, have the rights to enjoy a comfortable and respected life and contribute to the development of the nation. This policy is the government's commitment to create a conducive environment for older persons who are independent, with dignity, high sense of self-worth and respected by optimising their self-potential through a healthy, positive, active, productive and supportive ageing to lead a well-being life.
- 3.5 The objective of the policy is to empower the individuals, families and community to provide friendly services to the older persons effectively and efficiently and to ensure enabling and supportive environment for the well-being of the older persons.

There are 6 strategies outlined in this policy, as below:

- (i) Promotion and Advocacy;
 - (ii) Life-long Learning;
 - (iii) Safety and Security;
 - (iv) Governance and Shared Responsibility;
 - (v) Intergenerational Solidarity; and
 - (vi) Research and Development.
- 3.6 The National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons were formulated taking into consideration of various international conferences that focus on ageing including principles outlined in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).

3.7 The National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons were drafted based on the three priority areas outlined in MIPAA.

(i) Older Persons and Development

The first objective of the National Policy for Older Persons is to develop a caring society and capacity-building of society to face the ageing phenomena. Mainstreaming ageing in the nation's developmental agenda is addressed in one of the strategies in the Plan of Action for Older Persons.

(ii) Advancing health and well-being into old age

The National Policy for Older Persons addresses the safety and well-being of the older persons through its third objective. Health care and services, prevention of diseases as well as improving the quality of life of the older persons are some of the strategies that are outlined in the Plan of Action for Older Persons.

(iii) Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

Among the strategies that are planned to achieve enabling and supportive environment for older persons are to strengthen the human governance and the enforcement of law pertaining to older persons; accessibility and capacity-building of the organizations; and intergenerational interdependence.

3.8 Meanwhile, the implementation of the plan of action for older persons is inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary that involves coordination among the ministries, agencies, non-governmental organisations, private sectors and the community. The implementation of the programmes involves short, medium and long term. The plan of action also enables the National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes carried out for the older persons.

National Health Policy for Older Persons

3.9 The Government through the Ministry of Health has also developed the National Plan of Action for Health Care of Older Persons in 1997. The need for a more effective, coordinated and comprehensive health care has led to the development of the National Health Policy for Older Persons in 2008. In the formulation of this policy, 6 guiding principles were adopted as follows:

- (i) Maintaining Autonomy and Self Reliance;
- (ii) Recognising the Distinctive Needs of Older Person;
- (iii) Supporting Carers;
- (iv) Promoting Healthy Ageing;
- (v) Providing Continuity of Care; and
- (vi) Maintaining the Rights of Older Person to Quality of Life and Death.

3.10 Through this Policy, the Government has made a commitment to ensure older persons will achieve optimal health through integrated and comprehensive health and health related services. 7 strategies were identified, namely:

- (i) Health Promotion;
- (ii) Provision of a Continuum of Comprehensive Health Care Services;
- (iii) Human Resource Planning and Development;

- (iv) Information System;
- (v) Research and Development;
- (vi) Interagency and Intersectoral Collaboration; and
- (vii) Legislation.

NATIONAL FAMILY POLICY

3.11 Malaysia through the National Family Policy (NFP), advocates the concept of 'Family Well-being' based on family values such as love, caring, honesty, justice and equity regardless of status, gender and age to impart positive values from generation to generation, thus the importance of family development in tandem with the objective of creating a caring society.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 There is no specific law with regards to the older persons as they are covered under the concept of equality as enshrined in the Federal Constitution, specifically under Article 8 (1) of the Federal Constitution which states that “all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law.”

5. PROGRAMMES TO STRENGTHENING AND CARING THE OLDER PERSONS

5.1 Homes for the Older Persons

The current facilities and services for older persons in Malaysia are provided by the Government, NGO's and the private sector. The objective of the services provided by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development through the Department of Social Welfare is to meet the needs of the poor older persons. However, institutional services are provided as the last resort for the older persons. This is because family values to care for the elderly are always instilled among the society and is the best support system for the elderly.

Currently, there are 9 Homes for the Older Persons directly under the management of the Department of Social Welfare and financed by the Government and these homes, known as Rumah Seri Kenangan, are located throughout the country. The objective is to provide proper

care and protection for the needy elderly, treatment and better quality of life. Currently, there are 1,662 occupants in these homes.

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has also established 2 homes for the chronically ill known as Rumah Ehsan. The objective of this home is to provide a comfortable and tranquil surrounding, care, treatment and shelter for those who are not self-sufficient and those with chronic illnesses. Currently, there are 222 occupants in these homes in which 70% of them are older persons.

5.2 Activity Centre

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has also established 22 Activity Centres for older persons throughout the country to organise activities and socialise with the community. There are 19,904 older persons registered with these centres. There are 23 more Activity Centres will be developed for the year 2013.

5.3 Home Help Services

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has established the Home Help Services throughout the country through smart partnership with NGOs to provide care for older persons and persons with disabilities (PWDs) living alone. Among the services

provided are bringing the bedridden older persons and PWDs to hospitals/clinics for health treatment and assisting the older persons and PWDs to clean themselves in the aspect of personal hygiene. There are 451 NGO volunteers providing services to 1,769 older persons and PWDs.

5.4 *Unit Penyayang (We Care Services)*

We Care Services have been established by the Central Welfare Council of Peninsular Malaysia and supervised by the Department of Social Welfare. Transportation to bring older persons to hospitals/clinics for health treatment or other purposes is provided through this service. It is also medium of accessibility to older persons/person with disabilities. Until December 2012, this service has benefited 3,405 older persons.

5.4. Financial Assistance for Older Persons

The government through the Department of Social Welfare provides financial assistance for older persons amounting RM300 (about USD100) per month to assist the elderly poor to remain in their families/communities. The recipients of this financial assistance must be registered with the Department of Social Welfare, Malaysian citizens aged 60 years and above, and with household income below RM720 per month for Peninsular Malaysia; RM830 for Sarawak and

RM960 for Sabah. There must also be other factors that confirm that a family is in need.

In 2012, 152,138 older persons receive the financial assistance which cost the government a total RM519.3 million (about USD 173 million). This amount constituted about 35.3% of the total financial assistance allocated by the government.

5.5 Life Long Learning

Enculturation of lifelong learning is one of the seven (7) strategic directions of the Ministry of Higher Education to promote active citizenship and evenness in social status as well as fulfilling individual and manpower needs of the country. Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (RMK-9), older persons were encouraged to be active and productive so that they can continue to contribute to the family, society and country. The first University of the Third Age U3A in Malaysia was set up in affiliation with the Institute of Gerontology, Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2008 to encourage learning for leisure among the elderly.

5.6 Other Benefits for Older Persons

The Government of Malaysia is very committed towards providing conducive and enabling environment for older persons in the country.

In view of this, various benefits are provided for the older persons to participate actively in the society. Among these benefits are:

Health

- Tax relief up to RM5,000 has been extended to those who are providing care for their elderly which includes cost of sending to the day care, cost of salary for maids who are hired specifically for the care of elderly and cost of purchasing daily needs such as disposable diapers.
- Exemption from registration charge for out-patient consultation as well for specialist consultation at all government hospitals and clinics. Older persons are also given 50% discount and up to maximum of RM250 for every admission at the third class wards at all government hospitals.

Transportation

- In line with social inclusiveness as national agenda, older persons are also provided with discounts between 25% and 50% for major modes of transportation in the country.

Employment

- The Work Regulations (Part-Time Workers) 2010 was enforced by the government effective 1 October 2010. The regulation is

to encourage more people, especially the latent workforce such as housewives, the elderly, disabled and students to enter into labour market.

- The mandatory retirement age for **the public sector** has been raised from 58 years to 60 years, effective from January 2012. As for the **private sector**, the **Minimum Retirement Age Act 2012** will be implemented from 1 July 2013. This Act states that minimum retirement age of private sector employees shall be upon attaining the age of 60.

5.6 Legislation

There are several laws pertaining to matters such as employment, retirement, health care but are not specifically focusing on older persons. Among the laws are as follows:

Employment Act 1955

- Provide minimum standards on working hours and overtime, weekly holidays, public holidays, sick and annual leave, maternity leave benefits, termination and benefits and so forth.
- Older persons who are still working benefit from this act since it guarantees their rights and interests.

Wills Act 1959 (Revised 1988)

- Providing guidance in preparing wills, thus benefiting older persons who wish to prepare them for family members or any persons concerned.

Employees' Social Security Act 1969

- An act to provide social security in certain contingencies and to make provision for certain other matters in relation to it.
- Social security is essential especially upon entering retirement age.

Destitute Persons Act 1977

- An Act to provide for the care and rehabilitation of destitute persons and for the control of vagrancy.
- Old destitute persons and vagrants are also subjected to this act, thus may be taken for care and rehabilitation.

Pensions Adjustment Act 1980

- An Act to provide for the adjustment of pensions and other benefits of officers in the public service and in statutory and local authorities as well as the dependants of such officers.
- Pensions are social security upon entering retirement age.

Employees Provident Fund Act 1991

- An Act to amend and re-enact the law relating to provident fund for persons employed in certain occupations and for matters incidental thereto.
- Older persons benefit from this act since there are provisions on withdrawal of contributions, which may be used after retirement.

Care Centre Act 1993

- An Act to provide for the registration, control, and inspection of care centres and for matters connected therewith.
- Care centres for older persons are also subjected to this act.

Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 1998

- An Act to provide for the regulation and control of private healthcare facilities and services and other health-related facilities and services and for matters related hereto.
- Older persons also benefit from this act since they may be patients/clients of private healthcare facilities and services.

Persons With Disabilities Act 2008

- An Act to provide for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and wellbeing of persons with disabilities (PWDs), the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and for matters connected therewith.
- Older persons who are also PWDs benefit from this act since it guarantees their rights and interests.

Domestic Violence Act 1994

- An Act to provide for legal protection in situations of domestic violence and matters incidental thereto.

- Older persons also benefit from this act since they may become victims of domestic violence.

Mental Health Act 2001

- An Act to consolidate the laws relating to mental disorder and to provide for the admission, detention, lodging, care, treatment, rehabilitation, control and protection of persons who are mentally disordered and for related matters.
- Older persons who are mentally ill benefit from this act as it ensures their wellbeing especially those having such illness as they age.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Government realises that harnessing pool of resources from the older persons are valuable. Therefore, in the Tenth Malaysia Plan period from 2011 to 2015, continued emphasis will be placed on ensuring the health and well-being of older persons so that they are able to age with dignity and respect as well as lead independent and fulfilling lives as integral members of their families, communities and country.

6.2 Measures will be undertaken to provide a conducive environment for older persons to remain healthy, active and secure. In line with this,

programmes will focus on enhancing elderly friendly infrastructure, improving access to affordable healthcare, ensuring adequate provision of shelters and improving financial security and opportunities for employment. Programmes to create greater awareness among family members and the community in caring for older persons will also be undertaken. In this regard, values such as familial responsibilities, understanding and caring for older persons will be given greater emphasis.

- 6.3 To encourage greater employment opportunities, the 100% tax rebate on costs to retrain older persons will be continued. In addition, the database on employment opportunities for older persons under Jobs Malaysia will be promoted more actively to create greater awareness for those who are actively looking for a job.
- 6.4 Independent living will also be emphasised through the Home Help programme where volunteers will provide assistance in managing the daily chores especially for those who live alone. Activity centres for older persons, which are established in partnership with NGOs, will be expanded. Access to healthcare will also continue to be improved through provision of free transport to hospitals and clinics by the Department of Social Welfare.