

## Comment on the paper “Ageing Policies in Asia and the Pacific” by Alexandre Sidorenko

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In his article on *Adjusting to population ageing: evidence for policy action*, Alexandre Sidorenko makes two critical points. The first is that policies on ageing are changing and are increasingly focusing not only on the needs of older people seen from a ‘compassionate perspective’, but also on addressing the implications of population ageing for the whole of society. This development perspective focuses on ensuring that society embraces and adapts to ageing, promoting equal treatment and opportunity for people of all ages.

The second important point made by Sidorenko is that this shift is a result of a number of factors, including: increasing public awareness of population ageing, the advocacy efforts of civil society organisations, and the political will of national governments to meet the challenges and opportunities of ageing societies. Sidorenko argues that this has also been significantly aided by an increase in the collection and analysis of evidence and research on ageing for policy and programme development. Although, he concludes that the “world of policy research on ageing is fragmented and insufficient” especially in less developed regions.

Two recent reviews of laws and policies on ageing in Asia and the Pacific (Stefanoni et al., 2015a; Stefanoni et al., 2015b) illustrate how a selection of low and middle income countries are starting to embrace a development perspective on ageing. The review shows that a development perspective on ageing is being addressed in two main ways. Firstly, in the spirit of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) by ensuring that policies and practices enable older men and women to participate and contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of society; and secondly, by recognising, and promptly addressing, the challenges that population ageing can bring. These include in particular the transformation of workforce participation and income opportunities, social protection (including preventative health and care services that improve health across the life course), and attitudes and behaviours toward older people.

The Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines governments, for example, have embedded a developmental perspective on ageing into their national pol-

icy documents (Stefanoni et al., 2015b) by focusing them not only on establishing health, care, housing, education, social protection and economic services for older men and women, but also by using them to set the directions for more profound systemic changes to ensure society responds to rapid population ageing. These changes include promoting more flexible and intergenerational working practices and opportunities, building more comprehensive social protection systems, reorienting health and care systems towards prevention in the community, promoting independence and autonomy, developing age-friendly infrastructures for social inclusion, and combating ageism.

Responding to the potential challenges of rapid population ageing through societal changes is taken a step further in ageing policy documents by countries such as Mongolia (MSWL, 2009, pp. 9-11). Here the aim is to increase workforce participation by, for example, encouraging more women to enter the workforce to counteract the potential reduction in the labour force. Another interesting example is Sri Lanka (MSSSW, 2006, p. 17), which aims to influence societal perspectives on ageing by issuing policy guidance on promoting positive images of older age through the mass media, formal and informal education, and mobilising older community leaders as change agents. Its National Policy for Senior Citizens (2006) also promotes projects that foster intergenerational learning and highlights the abilities of active, creative and productive older people.

In addition to considering national policies focussed solely on older people and ageing, a recent analysis of policies in Asia and the Pacific (Williamson, 2015, p. 12) also highlights that issues of ageing and older people are being integrated into population-wide policies, including national development or poverty reduction plans, social protection strategies, and national health plans. The integration of ageing and older people into such documents is another important indication that policy on ageing is moving, in some places, from a response to the needs of a “vulnerable group” to a broader development concern.

These reports, and the research they are based

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upon, help to build a stronger base of evidence from which we can see how policy is developing in some low and middle income countries, and how the theoretical shift that Sidorenko maps from the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing (VIPAA) to MIPAA is being filtered into practice. Disappointingly, though, these reports evidence Sidorenko's comments regarding the significant developments that are needed on the research agenda on ageing. Despite many governments having research functions built into national focal points or institutions on ageing (UNFPA et al., 2012, p. 29; Williamson, 2015, p. 11), evidence of the effective use of data and research to inform and shape policy was found in only a few countries (Stefanoni et al., 2015b). Thailand provides one example (ibid., p. 4). Here, the process used for revising the Second National Plan on the Elderly (2002-2021) in 2009 was informed by findings of the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation and a wide range of data, including the national survey on older people conducted the previous year, wider government data and academic research. Globally, another exceptional example is Ghana's use of a knowledge-translation framework on ageing and health, developed by the World Health Organisation and Age UK, for revising existing policy (Araujo de Carvalho et al., 2015).

Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks are essential for enabling effective use of research and data in national policy, but are often inadequate (Williamson, 2015, p. 11). The Philippines and Thailand have strong outcome matrices for monitoring and evaluation and outline clear processes for the review of policy implementation to ensure evidence is used to strengthen policy. The results of this evaluation, however, are not publicly available, meaning, as with all the policy documents studied in the reviews discussed in this article, there is a significant knowledge gap in regard to policy implementation.

The findings of these reviews support Sidorenko's assertion that some progress has been made in ad-

ressing ageing as a developmental issues but also that a great deal more needs to be done to advance the research agenda on ageing and policy, particularly at the regional level, and to support governments to use data on ageing effectively in the policy process. Building this capacity is an essential priority if we are to promote evidence-based policy on ageing globally but also if we are to increase our collective knowledge of what policy works, where and why; and how it can be replicated.

## References

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## Response to Comment by Silvia Stefanoni and Camilla Williamson

Alexandre Sidorenko<sup>2</sup>

The commentary is an essential supplement to the article as it provides several references to missing examples of national policy with a developmental approach to ageing. Most of these examples are coming from Asia, where population ageing has gathered unprecedented speed and scale. The authors of the commentary make an important point regarding the two main ways of addressing the developmental perspective of ageing: by enabling older persons to participate and contribute to societal development, and, second, by tackling the challenges, and also opportunities, of population ageing. It is encouraging to learn that several governments have set the 'directions for

more profound systemic changes to ensure society responds to rapid population ageing'.

The commentators also mention a couple of countries in Asia which have managed to establish strong information based instruments and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of policy on ageing. At the same time, the results of the evaluation are reportedly not publicly available. This observation confirms that independent (outside of governmental entities) and transparent monitoring of national policy process on ageing is difficult to find.

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