ROLE OF UNITED NATIONS IN ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF POPULATION AGEING

Dr. Chandreyi Banerjee

Department of Geography, B. S. R Govt. Arts College, Alwar

Abstract

The population structure of any area is the result of the process of *demographic transition* operating in it for which fertility and mortality are the major players; migration being the third factor. As fertility begins to decline from elevated levels, there is a subsequent change in the age structure of the population, from the state of *demographic dividend* that may prove to be conducive for economic growth to an increasing concentration of population at older ages which may be termed as *population ageing.* The phenomenon of population ageing has attained such a dimension today that, several plans and policies concerning older persons across the globe have been formulated and various programmes have been initiated by international communities to address the specific needs of the elderly. Ageing in this 21st century can be a celebration as well as a challenge. The **United Nations (UN)** is an international, intergovernmental organization currently made up of 193 member states. Over the years, the UN has evolved to keep pace with the rapidly changing world. It is one forum where all the world's nations can gather together, discuss problems and find shared solutions that ultimately benefit the entire humanity. With a view to attract worldwide attention to the problems associated with the greying population, two *World Assembly on Ageing* were organized at *Vienna* and *Madrid* and *Plans of Action* were formulated for being adopted by the member nations. But, in reality, much of the situations of the older persons depends on the socio-economic structure of any particular country.

Key Words: Demographic transition, population ageing, United Nations, Vienna, Madrid, Plans of Action.

Introduction

The population structure of any area is the result of the process of *demographic transition* operating in it for which fertility and mortality are the major players; migration being the third factor. As fertility begins to decline from elevated levels, there is a subsequent change in the age structure of the population. Initially, there is a surge in the

population of the working ages, a state of *demographic dividend* prevails that may prove to be conducive for economic growth. Subsequently, the fertility transition leads to an increasing concentration of population at older ages. This may be termed as *population ageing.* Population ageing may have major implications for labour markets, households, social security, education, health care and so on.

The phenomenon of population ageing has attained such a dimension today that, several plans and policies concerning older persons across the globe have been formulated and various programmes have been initiated by international communities to address the specific needs of the elderly.

The **United Nations (UN)** is an international, intergovernmental organization currently made up of 193 member states whose work is mainly guided by the principles and purposes contained in its founding charters. Though over the years, the UN has evolved to keep pace with the rapidly changing world, it is one forum where all the world's nations can gather together, discuss problems and find shared solutions that ultimately benefit the entire humanity.

Programmes of the United Nation for Population Ageing

With a view to attract worldwide attention to the problems associated with the greying population, it was resolved by the *General Assembly of the United Nations* on **December 14, 1978** to convene a *World Assembly on Ageing* in **1982.** The purpose of this Assembly was two-fold:

i.   To create a forum for launching an international action programme for ensuring socio-economic security to the older persons.

ii.   To formulate plans as to how the elderly people be provided with opportunities and how their potentialities be channelized towards national development.

In another resolution dated **December 11, 1980,** it was decided that the outcome of the World Assembly would be the creation of societies that would be responsive towards the socio-economic implication of the process of ageing as well as the specific needs of the aged people.

Hence, two different categories of issues related to population ageing were identified. While one category dealt with *humanitarian issues* related to the specific needs of the elderly such as health and nutrition, education, income security, housing and environment, family and social welfare; the other category dealt with *developmental issues* associated with the socio-economic implications of population ageing and covered such matters *inter*

alia as the effects of population ageing on production, consumption, savings and investment.

With the above facts in view, an *International Plan of Action on Ageing* was conceived and launched at the *World Assembly on Ageing* at **Vienna (Austria)** in **1982** within the framework of other international plans and strategies namely, the *Charter of the United Nations,* the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights,* the *Declaration on Social Progress and Development,* the *Declaration and the Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order* and the *International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade.*

The *Vienna Plan of Action* was formulated with certain objectives:

i. To develop and apply the policies at the regional, national and international levels,designed to enhance the lives of the ageing as individuals and allow them to enjoy in body and mind, fully and freely, their advancing years in peace, health and security.

ii. To study the impact of greying population on the process of development and that of development on ageing for enabling the potential of the ageing to be fully realized and for mitigating any negative effects resulting from this impact through appropriate measures.

Subsequent to this, the *United Nations Principles for Older Persons* was adopted vide resolution of the General Assembly dated **December 16, 1991** which laid down certain principles to be incorporated in the policies of the national governments whenever possible. These were:

Independence

- Older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help.

- Older persons should have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income-generating opportunities.

- Older persons should be able to participate in determining when and at what pace withdrawal from the labour force takes place.

- Older persons should have access to appropriate educational and training programmes.

- Older persons should be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.
- Older persons should be able to reside at for as long as possible.

Participation

- Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.
- Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
- Older persons should be able to form movements or associations of older persons.

Care

- Older persons should benefit from family and community care and protection in accordance with each society's system of cultural values.
- Older persons should have access to health care to help them to maintain or regain the optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being and to prevent or delay the onset of illness.
- Older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection and care.
- Older persons should be able to utilize appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.
- Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

Self-Fulfilment

- Older persons should be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential.
- Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

Dignity

- Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.
- Older persons should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.

The *Madrid Plan of Action* was adopted at the *Second World Assembly on Ageing and Political Declaration* at **Madrid (Spain)** in **2002.** *"Building a Society for All Ages"* was the buzzword of this Assembly which focused on three priority areas----older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age and ensuring, enabling and supportive environments.

This was in continuation of the *International Year of Older Persons* in **1999** which highlighted on four dimensions----individual lifelong development, multigenerational relationships, the interrelationship between population ageing and development and the situation of older persons.

The *Madrid Plan of Action* focused separately on the implications of the greying population for the developed and developing countries. Like the *Vienna Plan of Action,* the *Madrid Plan of Action* was also formulated with certain objectives:

i. The full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all older persons.

ii. The achievement of secure ageing which involves reaffirming the goal of eradicating poverty in old age and building on the *United Principles for Older Persons.*

iii. Empowerment of older persons to fully and effectively participate in the economic, political and social lives of their societies through income-generating and voluntary work.

iv. Provision of opportunities for individual development, self-fulfillment and well-being throughout life especially in later life.

v. Ensuring the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights of persons and the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against older persons.

vi. Commitment to gender equality among older persons through *inter alia* elimination of gender-based discrimination.

vii.   Recognition of the crucial importance of families, intergenerational interdependence, solidarity and reciprocity for social development.

viii. Provision of healthcare, support and social protection for older persons including preventive and rehabilitative healthcare.

ix.   Facilitating partnership between all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and older persons themselves in translating the *Plan of Action* into practical action.

x.   Harnessing of scientific research and expertise and realizing the potential of technology to focus on *inter alia* the individual, social and health implications of ageing, particularly in developing countries.

xi.   Recognition of the situation of indigenous ageing persons, their unique circumstances and the need to seek means to give them an effective voice in decisions directly affecting them.

Today, the *UN Programme on Ageing* functions under the aegis of the *Division for Inclusive Development***(DISD)** and *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs* **(UNDESA).**

Conclusion

Population ageing is almost a pan-global phenomenon today and so, this issue is also being currently addressed by several international communities. The United Nations as an international intergovernmental organization of which nearly all the countries of the world are constituent members, therefore, is also concerned about the multifarious implications of this phenomenon. Accordingly, several plans of action have been formulated by the United Nations from time to time for ensuring secure ageing to the elderlies of this world which are equally binding on all the member nations. However, in reality, much of the situations of the older persons depends on the socio-economic structure of any particular country.

References

https://www.un.org/en/about-us
http://social.un.org/ageing/
https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/ageing-1
http://www.unfpa.org/publications/ageing-twenty-first-century
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013), *World Population Ageing,* New York.