

Sharing Session on Elderly in Poverty Background Note

Purpose

This note summarizes the previous discussions in the Commission on Poverty (CoP) relating to the subject of elderly in poverty in order to facilitate the exchange with Members of the Elderly Commission on 10 April 2006.

Previous CoP discussions

2. At its meeting in April 2005, CoP members agreed that it would focus its work on (i) children/youth, (ii) working people, (iii) the elderly and (iv) the community, and that a working meeting would be conducted to discuss the concerns of the elderly poor. Members also noted that there was a need to build on the existing work of the Elderly Commission, and to explore room for collaboration.

3. In considering the poverty indicators for the above four priority social groups, the following indicators have been included to reflect the situation of the elderly poor -

- (i) income support (CSSA) - recipients of old age CSSA (186 500 in Q3 2005);
- (ii) health - elderly patients under the fee waiving mechanism of public hospitals and clinics (22 781 in 2004/05, about 2.1% of elderly population).
- (iii) housing – elderly persons living in private temporary housing and private shared units (27 700 in 2004)

Concerns raised by CoP members in relation to elderly in poverty

Situation of Elderly Poor

4. In discussing the poverty indicators for the elderly in November 2005, CoP members considered that the available statistics have not fully captured the situation of elderly poor not on CSSA. They suggested that the relationship of health and poverty be taken into account in the longer-term development of a territory-wide medical database.

Accessibility to Services by Elderly Poor not on CSSA

5. In connection with the discussion on the support for the working poor in January 2006, some members have raised again the relative difficulties for those not on CSSA to access to service vis-à-vis the convenience enjoyed by CSSA recipients. The operation of the medical fee waiving mechanism was cited as a key area where improvement was needed to facilitate needy non-CSSA recipients, many of them being elderly poor, to access to medical care services.

Other Needs of Elderly Poor not on CSSA

6. In discussing the district-based approach in alleviating poverty, CoP members have expressed concern about identifying “hidden cases” in the community e.g. elderly poor not on CSSA but in need of assistance. Some have suggested examining existing platforms at community level (e.g. role of District Elderly Community Centres, public housing estates, other networks etc.) on room for strengthened interface. CoP members have further suggested exploring ways to fulfill the needs of the elderly poor not on CSSA (in cash or in kind support).

Role of Social Enterprise

7. In discussing social enterprise (SE), provision of elderly home care services is considered one of the key potential areas for its further development. Some CoP members noted the development in the U.K. in using the voucher system in order to instill greater level of flexibility in the provision of such services, and the need to consider how the existing provision of elderly home care services may encourage further SE development.

Other Issues

8. Individual CoP members have also raised other concerns relating to elderly in poverty, including the following -

- (a) retirement protection for the elderly, in particular protection for the poor;
- (b) consideration of self-owned live-in premises by the elderly in assessing CSSA eligibility; and
- (c) adopting a preventive approach and encouraging healthy living, particularly to the “young old”.