

Women and ageing population

Implications for Sri Lanka

UNFPA brings international policymakers to discuss feminisation of ageing in Sri Lanka, in line with World Population Day

The life expectancy of a Sri Lankan woman is 79

years, as opposed to 72 years for a man. This means that at age 60, women can live 19 more years, compared to 12 more years for men. With the fastest growing ageing population in South Asia, it

is predicted that by 2030, 1 in 5 Sri Lankans will be over 60. With the majority of the country's ageing population being women, feminisation of ageing brings about unique challenges and opportunities that the country must be prepared for.

This year's World Population Day calls for global attention to the unfinished business of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, where 179 governments recognised that people's rights, choices and well-being are the path to sustainable development. In line with this, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with the Primary Industries and Social Empowerment Ministry and together with HelpAge Sri Lanka, convened the second of a series of high-level policy dialogue on population ageing, titled 'Ageing Without Limits'.

The dialogue aimed to provide policy-level inputs to maximise the opportunity of population ageing, with input from other countries. The theme for this dialogue was 'Feminisation of Ageing', which focused on the gender dimensions of population ageing, sexual and reproductive health and social protection issues.

Social Welfare and Primary Industries Minister Daya Gamage said "Preparing for an ageing population is vital to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sri Lanka should ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all at all ages, including for older women".

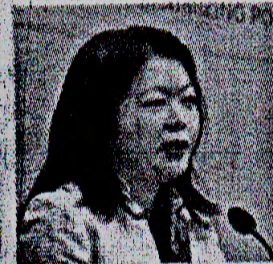
Highlighting issues around gender inequality, Ritsu Nacken, Representative of UNFPA Sri Lanka, said that: "Gender relations affect the entire life cycle from birth to death,



The panellists at the discussion



Minister Daya Gamage



UNFPA Sri Lanka Representative Ritsu Nacken

influencing access to resources and opportunities. For example, the impact of gender inequalities in education and employment opportunities increases through every stage of an individual's life, hitting hardest in old age. Women also spend more time in unpaid care work than men. As a result, older women are more likely than older men to be poor without savings or pension. Gender inequality, poverty and ageing manifest as the face of feminisation of ageing".

The panel comprised former Chief of the Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and former Senior Advisor on Age-

ing at the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Singapore, Thelma Kay, Regional Advisor for Population Ageing and Sustainable Development at UNFPA Regional Office - Thailand, Rintaro Mori and Dr. Pabasari Ginige, Senior Lecturer and Consultant Psychiatrist at the University of Peradeniya.

The insightful discussions focused on how feminisation of ageing must be addressed through a life cycle approach, to ensure that women's rights and needs are looked into throughout their life, and on the importance of achieving gender equality when addressing issues around women and ageing.

The role of women and their contribution to a silver economy was discussed, where the need for rights based and evidence-based policies were highlighted as key to ensuring that women age with security, dignity and their full rights.

The panel was moderated by the Executive Director of the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute, Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja, and officials from the Government, international community, civil society, academia, private sector and the media engaged in the dialogue.

UNFPA will continue this series of dialogues to provide inputs to strengthen policies and support the development and implementation of a holistic system to ensure that Sri Lanka is prepared to benefit from this situation.