

Living in Dignity – Livelihoods & Social Protection for Elderly

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The Elderly in India are an invisible work force. While it is generally presumed that they are unproductive it can be said that it is only an assumption. Studies conducted by Organisations working with the elderly as also the NSSO point to the fact that at any point of time nearly 68% of the elderly are involved in productive or maintenance functions within or outside the household.

The reduction in fertility level, reinforced by steady increase in the life expectancy has produced fundamental changes in the age structure of the population, which in turn leads to the aging population. The analysis of historical patterns of mortality and fertility decline in India indicates that the process of population aging intensified only in the 1990's. The older population of India, which was 56.7 million in 1991, is 72 million in 2001 and is expected to grow to 137 million by 2021. The data on old age dependency ratio is slowly increasing in both rural and urban areas. Both for men and women, this figure is quite higher in rural areas when compared with that of urban areas.

HelpAge India has pioneered and successfully implemented a model of sustainable agecare for elderly using “Elders Self Help Group (ESHG)”. The concept of ESHGs can be described as community based organisations of people aged 55 and above, aimed at improving their living conditions, providing community social support mechanism and for facilitating activities and delivering services. At the activity level, the groups engage in savings and credits, advocacy and awareness raising. An ESHG comprises a group of 10-20 people aged 55 and above.

The elders through ESHGs aim to achieve sustainable livelihoods, by proving that elders are bankable. Variety of income generation activities improves the self esteem of the elders and gets them respect from others. Once the group starts with a seed amount, weekly meets and networking follow. After a year the group saves enough money to support livelihood activities of the needy. From a ‘recipient mode’ they have grown into a ‘provider mode’ wherein elderly take care of their peers in the community, especially the disabled and the poor. These groups are federated at Village and District level and it works as a deeply empowering intervention.