

Greetings,

I am Afra Nawar Rahman,

the Youth coordinator at YPSA-Center for Youth and Development. YPSA which stands for “Young Power in Social Action” is a registered nonprofit voluntary organization working for the sustainable development of society in Bangladesh since 1985. Center for Youth Development is a link organization of YPSA formed to empower youths for their positive and uninhibited development.

Challenges

I'm from Bangladesh, a country with a dense population of 164.8 million, 15 million of whom are over 60. They are referred to as senior citizens. Our life expectancy is increasing along with the population. According to predictions, Bangladesh's senior population would reach 36 million by 2050, or 22% of the country's overall population.

As the number gets bigger, the responsibility on our shoulders gets heavier. The UN Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This equality does not change with age. But how many of them actually know their rights? I'm from a country where the literacy rate is rising, but not all of our older citizens, particularly women, had the good fortune to have a solid education. They retire at age 60 and lose their financial independence. Slowly they are deprived of their freedom. Even if the older people want to gain financial freedom, lack of job opportunities, lack of skill, chronic diseases and disabilities due to old age stand as their barrier, making them unfit for work.

The reason for increasing negligence towards the elderly can be seen due to the intergenerational gap. For a long time, in Bangladesh most homes were large joined families. However, little nuclear families began to form leaving for better opportunities. Later, as their children grew up without the embrace of their grandparents and at times busy parents, they matured into adults without understanding what genuine kindness, affection, family ties and love truly meant. The difference in mindset and opinion arising from the generation gap makes it harder to understand each other's perspective. It makes it easier to be indifferent, but indifference is not living in harmony.

Aged Rohingya people are not safe from such negligence either. YPSA is one of the first humanitarian responders in 2017, who responded to the Rohingya influx. From our experience we have observed, the aged Rohingya are uncertain about the future of their families as they lost their land. They have experienced torturous events causing in heavy mental stress and physical wounds leading to disabilities.

Instruments

In the 5 years plan, The Bangladesh government has enacted several laws, policies and is implementing programs to protect the rights and welfare of the older people adapting Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging 1982, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging 2002 (MIPAA) etc. Recently, the government has finalized the Welfare of Older Foundation Rules 2018 and older people were brought under a social safety net program which provides funds for repair of disaster-damaged housing, allowance for widow and distressed, freedom fighter honorarium and funds for vulnerable group feeding (VGF).

There is a Parents Maintenance Act, 2013 regarding protection of older parents, but parents might feel dejected to file a complaint against their children even after facing tremendous hardships. Especially in rural areas where older women are more used to just accepting their fate. We have to prioritize these women, as they tend to be neglected more often. covid -19 has made the situation even worse; some sick older patients were not taken to medical care centers due to fear of contamination, few were lucky to survive but with lasting damage.

Requests and recommendation

The United Nations should develop an international law or other instrument that would serve as a shield to defend the welfare and rights of the elderly and encourage UN members to rectify it. The state should promote older people's care-giver roles across younger generations. This will foster greater intergenerational harmony and provide moral education that will inspire young people to show love and respect for the older people. A creative initiative would be rewarding children for taking care of their parents and recognizing the contributions older people make to society as a means of raising grassroots awareness of their rights.

The development of programs to promote intergenerational cohesion and acceptance of difference in mindset and opinion should be our next course of action. The mass media should play a proactive role here.

Nationally, The Number of Old Age Allowance receivers should be maximized and National Laws should preserve special provision for marginalized groups. My request would be to Create a distinct "Aging Affairs" department within the Ministry of Social Welfare and a nationwide monitoring and care system for all social security programs; Establish free shelter houses and senior rehabilitation facilities for the low-income, and older disabled groups in each district, as well as providing home caregiving facilities. Establishing Geriatric Medicine Department in all public and private Hospitals and establishing easily accessible recreational centers for older people.

Ultimately, today's youth are tomorrow's older people, so ensuring the rights of older people will also be a positive investment for our future. Promoting and protecting the rights of older persons is to promote our own future and that of generations to come. I look forward to when the promise of SDG "leaving no one behind" would soon be a true reality.