

“Aged care and intergenerational solidarity in Small Island Developing States (SIDS):
A case of the Maldives”.

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Elderly and intergenerational solidarity: the past

Maldivian households in the past consisted of extended families. The eldest man is usually the head of the family household and descent is patrilineal. The close-knit island communities practiced mutual aid to survive difficult circumstances, providing a safety net for members of family as well as neighbors going through difficult times and in illness. While the older family members were looked after by the family, older people contributed to the care and up-bringing of children. Elders in the family were looked upon with respect for advice and guidance. Family cohesiveness existed through regular family gatherings to mark special cultural and religious occasions such as naming ceremonies, religious festivals, and anniversary days, that enabled family members of all ages to meet and spend time together.

However, those strong bonding in the families as well as in the island communities are gradually fading away. The rapid socio-economic developments together with globalization, modernization and rapid urbanization have changed the traditional family structure from extended families to nuclear families and living far apart. Changes in the family structure modified living arrangements, a redefinition of roles and status, a redistribution of work among family and household members which also influences change in the attitude of younger people towards older people. There is also a decline in intergenerational care and support.

With limited opportunities for the older generation to educate themselves, they continued their life their old ways and thinking, finding difficult to keep pace with the younger generation and the use of digital technology for the benefit to the geographically dispersed families to share in meaningful interactions. When the young family members visit their older family members, there is a big communication gap in the way of thinking and behavior. Many children are unable to engage in a conversation with their elders in the local language because English is used as their day-to-day mode of communication. At the same time, the older people are reluctant to engage in conversation, because they often associate the young with

antisocial behaviors, which further widened the gap between generations. This gap further widened when the older parents become sick and totally depend on the younger generation to look after them. More and younger generation turned to the state to look after their older parents resulting in total disconnection with the family. Therefore, a support system has been built to encourage elderly to remain with their families rather than depend on state care.

Country profile

In planning anything it is vital to understand the unique features of the country. Maldives is a group 1,192 coral islands covering over 9,000 square km, widely dispersed in a narrow chain of atolls in the Indian Ocean. Only 298 square kilometers of that is dry land. Islands average only one to two square kilometers in area and lie between 1–1.5 meters above mean sea level. Currently 187 islands are inhabited with a population of 521,021 in 2023.



According to the 2022 Census, about 40 islands have a population less than 500 people. Most of the islands have a population within the range of 500-999 people. Only 2 islands have a population within the range of 5,000 to 9,999 people. Three islands (Hithadhoo, Kulhudhufushi and Male’), have a population of more than 10,000 people. According to The Bureau of National Statistics, population aged 65 years and above in the Maldives increased from 2.4 % in 1973 to 4.8 % in 2022 and expected to increase to about 7 percent in 2030 and reach 14 percent by 2050. Although literacy rate in Dhivehi, the local language is high among current elderly population literacy level is low in English and digital technology.

Financial support for older persons and vulnerable groups

As people aged, they retire, often become frail and dependent, putting physical as well as financial burden on their family. Especially out of pocket expenditure increases for medical care placing heavy financial burden on families. With this in view, the Maldives government, introduced a safety net system for its citizens in 2009 through a universal health coverage, an allowance for single parent, for those with special needs and a monthly monetary benefit of approximately US\$ 344.4 (MVR 5,000.00) for citizens aged 65 years and above.

Connectivity and digital technology for older persons

The growing capabilities of digital technology are enabling increasing support for communication and meaningful social interactions between generations and family that spans distance. Given the country’s relatively high broadband and mobile internet penetration, there is an enormous opportunity for expanding the use of digital technology by all elderly population.

Today Maldives is digitalizing most of its public services such as online banking, medical consultations, and many other public services. As the theme of the 2023 International Older Persons Day, “Resilience of Older Persons in a Changing World” reiterates, there is great need to address the issue of older persons who are not fully beneficiaries of these technologies and call to train them about the usage of mobile phones, the internet and computer according to their needs, hobbies, and interests. In the Maldives, the two companies providing internet access covers over 99% of its territory. It is estimated that in 2021 there is an average of 1.4 mobile phones per person in the Maldives and it is known that many families and peer groups operate groups either on Viber or Whatsapp, connecting the family or peer members across the country or globally.

While computer games and Online games are a popular past time among young generation, as well as among middle-aged persons, game-based approach could be an effective and fun way of creating positive attitudes and connectivity between generations, allowing both age groups to see each other as a peer, playmates, and even as team member. Many older persons in the Maldives are familiar with smart phones, online games could be taught to interact with different generations using different applications to keep connected those living far apart.

Engagement of older family members in upbringing of children

Once people retire at the age of 65 years many of them become redundant. However, there are many ways to show intergenerational solidarity through grandparents. For example, encouraging them to share their wisdom and experience with their grandchildren. In the Maldives we are gradually seeing older persons been utilized to be in care of children, and as mentors in schools to teach young children about social values and cultures. In some islands civil society organizations and some youth centers are encouraging in engaging their elders in the community in teaching traditional arts, crafts, and cultures.

Highlighting the significance of older persons

Currently special days such as “Kaafa Maama Day” (Grand Parents Day) is being marked annually throughout the country and such activities could be organized more frequently at island level by civil society organizations, women’s organization to highlight the significance of elderly people in their island communities.

Challenges and Conclusion

While various programs have been developed across the globe to bridge the intergeneration gap and strengthen intergenerational solidarity, no uniform program can be uniformly advocated across the globe. It must be unique to the local context. Especially when small pockets of elderly are scattered in the widely spread islands organizing programs become a challenge.

While globalization and socio economic will influence demographic changes lifestyle changes will occur. But the responsibility lies among all generation in maintaining a healthy society. Intergenerational

Solidarity is no doubt the key to interconnection between generations within a society, indicating that each generation is responsible for supporting others.

To ensure that no one is marginalized, there is great need to work to foster successful and equitable intergenerational relations and partnerships. Greater need is there to raise awareness at national level on barriers to intergenerational solidarity, notably ageism, which impacts young and old persons. For widely dispersed populations incorporating programs into existing facilities will be cost effective. Equally important is to engage the media to raise awareness of the importance of intergenerational solidarity for a healthy society.

In 2022 International Youth Day reiterated the importance of Intergenerational Solidarity with the theme of Creating a World for All Ages. It also emphasized that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need to recognize the full potential of young and old, and that Solidarity across all generations is key for sustainable development.