

Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing: Towards a Regional Strategy for the Implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

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Enabling environments for older persons with specific reference to urban land use, housing and transport in Barbados.

Presentation by Clayton N. Springer, Barbados

An enabling physical environment may be defined as a set of physical conditions designed to facilitate and support the continuing well being and social development of elderly persons.

The creation of such a set of conditions must not be seen as a haphazard, unplanned, isolated activity. Rather it is an orderly, planned, determined, systematic, coordinated process, involving multiple stakeholders.

This process must be embraced and enacted within a legislative framework that provides implementable and enforceable mechanisms. This is to ensure continuity periodic monitoring, evaluation and redirection.

In essence we are speaking about a healthy public policy that is sensitive to the psycho-socio-economic realities.

Pillars in Process of Creating an Enabling Environment

1. Emphatic Public

Politicians, policy specialists and analysts, social planners, economists, academics, families, young people, ordinary people.

2. Erudite Professionals

Informed professionals – medical personnel, social workers, physical/social planners researchers, educators, gerontologists, geriatricians.

- Issues of training, retraining, enhanced professional competencies.
- Reduction of priorities.

3. Enhanced Press Relations:

- Embrace of .. sector is vital, role of the media is vital in transformational process.
- The media can influence self concept of the elderly, shapes negative view of the youth creates disconnection between groups.

4. Evolving Paradigm:

- Focus not only on healthy ageing but active ageing.
- It is a human rights issue.
- Rejection of compensatory approach.
- Emphasis on participation, independence, dignity, care, self-fulfillment.

5. Empowered Elderly Persons:

Informed of the issues.
 Involved as participants.
 Integrated at all levels.

6. Enlightened Policy Process:

Policy seen as a cycle, not as static but constantly evolving from vision/idea policy development – enactment – implementation analysis – reformulation/amendment – vision, etc.

Urban Land Use

Urban areas usually have at least two faces, often in close proximity.

- Commercial business center
 - modern city center
 - old city center
- Residential areas
 - Population of several elderly persons, often indigent,
 - Usually old, squalid with poor sanitation.

- Overcrowdedness, congestion, decaying buildings.
- Absence of open spaces, absence of recreational facilities.

The urban areas of Barbados reflected this reality. Bridgetown the capital is now celebrating 375 years as a commercial center.

Government of Barbados has engaged in massive urban renewed initiative

- Modernization of Town Country Planning Act – Upgrade of Department – Staff training
- 1997 Development of Urban Development Commission
 - To Track delivery of services of Greater Bridgetown Area.
 - Execute program of renewed of physical environment of the most degraded city districts.
 - Encourage restoration of buildings of architectural interest.
 - Construct roads and drainage.
 - Enforce town planning regulations.

The U.D.C. seems to eradicate poverty in the urban corridor through physical, social and economic programs aimed at improving the standard of living and quality of life for urban dwellers a large percentage of whom are elderly.

Impact of this initiative

Major improvement in conditions of elderly, indigent persons

- provision of new housing
- restoration of buildings
- clearance of "slum areas"
- provision of street lighting
- construction of drainage
- repaving of dilapidated roads
- construction of waterborne toilet facilities
- development of enterprises for economic improvement
- provision of recreational facilities
- development of "open spaces", landscaped and beautiful

Rural Land Use

Development of Rural Development Commission to ensure equal treatment in service provision to rural areas. Resulted in improved access roads, provision of new or improved housing. Stimulation of agriculture, cottage industries.

The government has facilitated the purchase of house lots by elderly persons who lived on plantation lands. This security of tenure is a major social policy initiative.

Housing/Accommodation Issues

- Goal –
- Improve living conditions of elderly persons
 - Ensure safety, comfort, independence
 - Maintain residence in community
 - Delay institutionalization for as long as possible
 - Provide accommodation options to reflect choice by elderly persons

Government has rationalized indigent housing program. House provision repair or replacement is facilitated for individual elderly persons.

- Houses equipped through furnishings program
- Smoke detectors installed
- Home care services available daily
- Community/doctor visits facilitated – including mental health personnel
- Meds on wheels as necessitated
- Proposals for National Coordination of Meds on Wheels

Accommodation Options for Elderly

- Night shelter for homeless – street characters
This is being reorganized to provide rehabilitation.
- Hostel for Homeless Elderly – short term facility
- Small Group Home for Elderly – (less able) long term
- Geriatric Hospital – long term care institution for “ill elderly”

New optionf in accommodation

- The village concept – reflection of historical, cultural Barbados.
- Soroplomists International – Senior Citizens Village
- Voushell Senior Citizens Complex
 - State constructed, multi-purpose facility
 - Promotes independence, sense of community
 - Available for singles, couples
 - Disabled access – ramped etc.
 - Residential, recreational. Day care facilities; Community Hall Promotes intergenerational solidarity.

Transportation Issues

Goal – To ensure the provision of available, accessible transport for elderly persons.

Outcome

..... Public transport available to pensioners at ...

- Incremented provision of “accessible buses”
i.e. wheelchair access, appropriate signage
- Designated seats for elderly, disabled persons
- Roads being constructed to replace dirt tracks in both rural and urban Barbados
- Application of Low Planning Regulation in design of new roads
- Pedestrian crossings exist in urban areas – constant enhancement of provision required

Much more public education is needed, to be sensitized appropriately in relation to dynamics of the elderly.