Outcome Document and Recommendations

Regional Community Learning Centre (CLC) Conference
The Role of CLC for Intergenerational Learning
Focusing on the Elderly, Chiang Mai Thailand, 24-28 February 2015

Individual and Social Happiness and Prosperity in the Whole New World through
Independence, Participation, Self-Fulfilment, Care and Dignity

Background
In the next 50 years, it is estimated that more than 64 countries will be considered “ageing societies” – those in which about 7% of the population is over 65 years old. Data tell us that this is happening because of declining birth rates and improvements in life expectancy thanks to advances in medicine and healthcare. It could be said that the family planning and healthcare policy successes of the 20th Century have become the challenges of the 21st Century.

Populations are ageing worldwide across all levels of economic development, however this trend is occurring at a particularly rapid rate in Asia, and it will have the greatest impact here. Of particular concern are those countries in Asia that will find themselves with a relatively old population while still at a fairly low level of economic development. The so-called “demographic dividend” is coming to an end across the region, albeit at different speeds in different countries. By 2050, almost two-thirds of the world’s older persons (aged 60 years and above), or 1.26 billion people, will live in the Asia-Pacific region. Populations with fewer children, shrunken workforces, and many elderly people will result.

The challenges and impacts we will face because of this are multiple and interrelated. First, there are the effects related to elderly people transitioning out of the workforce or changing their roles. Many seniors can still actively participate in the labour force and many more are active in domestic work or self-employed. However, others are not ready to retire. Men in particular are at risk of becoming increasingly isolated and less likely to stay active, whether it be through new work or hobbies or interacting socially with others in the community. In Korea and Japan, for example, the mental stress brought on by ageing has been a serious social issue for decades.

Income gaps in societies will widen as societies age and this has direct implications for the quality of life of ageing populations. There are examples the world over of resources and support drying up for senior citizens as the average age increases.

There is also an increased risk of disability as one ages. An older person’s independence is threatened when physical or mental disabilities make it difficult to undertake the activities of daily living. For ageing societies that means healthcare costs will also rise. Self and informal care are much more effective and also offer the best opportunity for family and community members to get involved and provide support.
When it comes to health care, home arrangements and ageing-friendly environments are essential, and these could be costly. In many ASEAN societies, the majority of elderly people would likely stay in their one homes or those of their offspring. In Japan and other countries, meanwhile, the children of the elderly often grow tired of taking care of seniors with disabilities for many years. When economically possible, seniors with disabilities could then be accommodated in private and public care centres.

To respond to these challenges, governments, civil organizations and private sector players will need to develop and adjust policies and programmes accordingly. Promoting lifelong learning for senior citizens at community learning centres (CLC) and community-based colleges is one of the most effective and promising strategies in this regard.

CLCs have been playing an important role in promoting education for all in Asia and Pacific. CLCs are educational institutions set up and managed by locals that aim to empower individuals and strengthen communities, in particular the disadvantaged, women, youth, and the elderly. It is estimated that there are more than 170,000 CLCs in Asia and Pacific. CLCs are platforms for the elderly to acquire new skills and sharpen existing ones to enable them to remain active members of society. They can be a platform for intergenerational exchange and learning, sharing skills, experiences and local culture with younger members of the community. CLCs can also contribute to changing social attitudes toward senior citizens, raising awareness of how they are assets to families and communities and not burdens.

For CLCs and other community based lifelong learning centres to effectively serve senior citizens through intergenerational learning, there are key challenges to overcome. Though these vary among countries, common issues include fewer men attending the centres; top-down curricula and programmes; course content that isn’t relevant or appealing; failure to address emotional development; inadequate budget and human resources; weak coordination with other sectors; frequent policy changes; lack of information and IT systems; as well as insufficient recognition of senior citizens’ education.

These challenges and others were the focus of the recent regional CLC conference, which was attended by more than 150 representatives from ASEAN countries plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The specific objectives of the conference were:

1. To exchange valuable knowledge and experiences among participants for application in their own CLC activities for the elderly and senior citizens;
2. To be a platform for both domestic and international organizations, including both governmental organizations and NGOs to disseminate their good practices in conducting activities in CLCs for intergenerational learning connection, especially for the elderly, and to strengthen the community;
3. To create recommendations for the development of knowledge management systems for the elderly through each country’s CLCs; and
4. To build a network and support the coordination at the personal and organizational levels among countries systematically and continuously on this matter.
There were three keynote speeches, 13 presentations of country cases in 5 sessions, group discussion and presentations, and study visits during the conference.

The followings are the recommendations for actions that came out of the conference.

**Recommendations for Actions: Inclusive Intergenerational Learning Opportunities**

**Target (Who): Inclusive and mutual learning**
1. Advocate effectively to raise awareness among senior citizens, in particular underprivileged and illiterate elderly people who are likely isolated and alone.
2. Recognize that various services and approaches are required for diverse senior citizens (sex, local contexts, class, age cohorts, economic status, etc.)
3. Mobilize all community sectors concerned to participate in cultural and traditional activities.
4. Develop comprehensive databases on senior citizens – their education levels, learning achievements and health status as well as the names of care givers in the community.

**Strategies (How): Elderly-driven programmes and elders as local cultural assets**
5. Design flexible, relevant, personalized and joyful learning programmes under the leadership of the elderly and make sure that senior citizens are on the CLC management committee.
6. Connect and encourage networking among senior citizens in the community through learning courses and social networks with IT and mobile applications.
7. Mobilize and support elders to take (volunteer) educator roles in formal and non-formal schools as well as in courses for senior citizens.
8. Promote peer learning among senior citizens, utilizing available expertise, resources and local materials in the community.
9. Develop and train professional facilitators and caregivers for senior citizens in line with official standards for quality assurance.
10. Create and utilize a comprehensive platform to access all learning materials and contents online then connect and accredit senior citizen learning programmes with higher education institutions.
11. Partner and collaborate with private companies, religious organizations, health institutions, and other community based organizations.
12. Connect learning with job opportunities in the local government and private sectors.
13. Establish a multi-sectorial ministerial committee to coordinate and share information at the national level.
14. Monitor and evaluate programmes for improvement.
Contents (What): Practical and useful in everyday life
15. Integrate courses on mindfulness and meditation to alleviate stress for the mental health of seniors.
16. Provide courses to enhance health literacy, including information on diseases and treatments.
17. Help develop new competencies and skills so that seniors can develop new businesses, become social entrepreneurs based on their goals.
18. Create opportunities to change mindsets of senior citizens and young generations to encourage them to embrace intergenerational learning effectively.
19. Provide IT skills, stressing information and media literacy.
20. Promote financial literacy and knowledge of financial management.
21. Create a course to help seniors cope with the reality of death and to prepare for it psychologically.

Venue and Time (Where and When): Good accessibility and flexibility
22. Improve the accessibility of CLCs, community cafes, and community colleges.
23. Equip CLCs with information technology infrastructure.