

Aging Asia and its challenges for the productivity movement

Asia occupies roughly one-third of the earth's land area and is home to more than 60% of the world's population. It is also home to the greatest number of the elderly, a figure rapidly increasing in both absolute and relative terms. The problem of aging is a global phenomenon. Both developing and developed countries are experiencing an explosive growth in the number of older people. This presents numerous challenges not only to the productivity movement. The study meeting on Productivity in Aging Societies held in the Republic of China, 17–20 July, discussed these challenges and suggested policy directions and recommendations to enhance the quality of life and productivity of the elderly.

Of the many challenges, the three most pressing are financial security, employment, and provision of healthcare for the elderly. Financial security is the most difficult as the burden of supporting an ever-growing population of the elderly is falling on a decreasing number of the working-aged. "The Japanese government faces, as a result of its aging population, a deterioration in the financial health of the public pension system," said Associate Professor Sumiko Ebisuno, Kaetsu University, Japan, one of three resource speakers deputed by the APO. Prof. Ebisuno stressed the necessity of employment for older people and



Seniors keeping fit in a Tokyo park

reported cases where people aged 60–65 had been reemployed by Japanese companies. Associate Professor Dr. Priscilla Dawn Allen, Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Social Work, presented the various dimensions of healthcare by introducing LSU Research's determinants of healthy aging: social activity, diet, genes, productive pursuits, and exercise.

Participants brainstormed to suggest solutions to the major problems identified. Restructuring of private and public pensions was suggested to ensure financial support. To improve employment prospects, working past retirement age

was proposed, with education and training of the elderly to allow them adapt to new roles. Training family members in basic elderly care, developing innovative programs like Medicare or social support systems for the elderly living independently, adult daycare programs, improved transport facilities, and home care services were mentioned. As fundamental solutions, promoting family values, norms, and ethics was recommended, along with including the elderly in making policies affecting them. The APO was requested to play a key role in identifying best practices to contribute to more informed and better policy decisions on making the elderly more productive in member countries. 🌐