



Better indicators are needed to track the well-being of elderly in developing countries

With aging becoming a pressing issue in many countries, especially in Asia, governments need better indicators that track the well-being of the elderly to craft policies to better meet the needs of the aged.

Many countries do not have the data needed for sound policy making, planning, and investment targeting, which leads to piecemeal public policies with little sense of priority.

The People's Republic of China, Thailand, and Viet Nam are just some of the countries relatively unprepared to deal with their rapidly aging societies.

Multilateral and nongovernment organizations have developed several global aging indexes that focus on various aspects of aging and well-being.

The indexes cover mostly developed countries and selected emerging economies, but none capture well-being in its entirety or provide enough information on the systems, such as health care, long-term care, housing, post-retirement employment, safety, and security, that will ensure the well-being of the elderly.

Indicators need to look at governments' financial capability to support aging societies, such as budgets for old-age benefits, their fiscal room to adapt, and the degree of elderly dependence on public benefits.

Income of the elderly should be tracked to determine whether it can support living standards. The information should also show whether the elderly can still hold a job, and whether they have family support.

The indicators need to look at public support systems, which include housing and transportation, adequate health care and social benefits, safety, food and income security, and employment in old age.

Some global indexes cover some of these factors, but only partly, pointing to the need to merge existing measurements or create a new one to cover all aspects of aging and overcome the piecemeal approach to preparing for aging in many countries.

To develop such an index, other factors should be considered.

One is the sustainability of public support systems to ensure the future well-being of the elderly. Existing indexes provide data mainly about the current situation and not the sustainability of public support systems.

A well-being index should examine the preferences of the elderly to ensure policies are more targeted.

Developing a well-being index cannot be left to politicians or technocrats. Other members of society, including the young and the elderly, should be involved.

Countries could avoid much of the current piecemeal policy making if they had access to information that comprehensively monitored and measured the elderly's well-being, focusing on preferences and sustainability.

This episode was based on research conducted for ADBI by Claude Bodart, an international advisor at the Center for Ageing at the Beijing Normal University.

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