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## **Ageing, Poverty and Neoliberalism in Urban South India**

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### **Abstract**

*Research undertaken in the low-income settlements of India's fourth largest city, Chennai, has uncovered the contribution that older people make to family, society and economy. By situating people at the centre of a study of urban poverty and focusing on what older people do, rather than on what they need, the study has uncovered older people's contribution to the economy, to social reproduction and to the care economy. The backward linkages of older people's work links the rural economy, where fifty percent of India's working population are engaged, to the urban economy. By making up for shortfalls in government social and physical infrastructure, older people have released women into the work force and have themselves provided low-cost inputs to industry and low-cost services to the urban population, thereby buttressing the city's role in the global economy as an IT and manufacturing centre.*

### **CONTEXT**

The study of Chennai, a highly dense and growing city of 4.7 million people, is a particularly apt context for studying three global processes that are having greater impacts on developing countries than on developed countries. The first process, population ageing, is growing fastest in developing countries, which is already home

to two-thirds of the world's people aged 60 and over, and after China and the United States, India has the largest global population of people aged 80 and above (8 million) (UN DESA, 2009:13, 24). Second, the rate of urbanization in developing countries is much faster than in developed countries; currently nearly three times as many people live in developing country cities as in developed country cities. By 2050 this is expected to rise to approaching five times as many (UN DESA, 2012a:4). Third, developing countries are increasingly drawn into the global economy where pre-existing inequalities are deepening (UN DESA 2005, 2013; Ortiz and Cummins, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Chennai provides an example of where developing cities might be headed. It is located within the Chennai Metropolitan Area, comprising 8.9 million people living in Chennai city and its suburbs, and is located within the State of Tamil Nadu which is the most highly urbanized state in India.<sup>2</sup> It is not only India's fourth largest metropolitan agglomeration but also one of the fastest growing metropolitan economies.<sup>3</sup> A by-product of Chennai's prodigious growth is that one third of its population live in slums; and slum households have a small average size of 4.5 people (State Health Society Tamil Nadu). In a city with a literacy rate of 90% (Census of India) these slum dwellers demonstrate that education is now widely accepted, consequently the child labour rate has seen a rapid decline since the 1980s, though the absolute number of child labourers remains large (Kak and Pati, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Alongside high levels of urbanization, Tamil Nadu's fertility rate has fallen

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<sup>1</sup> See Chant (2013) for a comprehensive overview of how gender and class inequalities are manifested in cities of the global south.

<sup>2</sup> Forty-three percent of the State's population live in urban areas (State Health Society Tamil Nadu)

<sup>3</sup> A London-Chennai comparison is illuminating. Both are vibrant economic centres of in-migration. In 2001 Chennai's population growth rate was 13%, by 2011 the rate had slowed to London's rate (7%) but Chennai's population density is over five times that of London (27,000 people per sq km as against London's 5,000 people per sq km) (Census of India, 2011; Office for National Statistics, 2012:23).

<sup>4</sup> In India 'slum' is a technical and legal term with deep political salience arising from the burden placed on the state by the Slum Area (Improvement and Clearance) Act 1956 to provide minimum housing standards and rehouse slum-dwellers in non-slum conditions on the same site. The Corporation of Chennai has failed to notify any slums since 1985, which is one of the foci of slum-dweller associations' current campaigns. State and local governments are coming under increasing pressure from central government and national institutions to reduce

below replacement level (Government of India, 2011a) resulting in a rapidly growing age band of over 60s (11% of the state population, that is 8 million people) and an even faster growing 80+ age band (1.2%, about 900,000 people) (Census of India, 2006:246). India, as a whole, is not expected to reach these proportions for another 10-15 years (UN DESA, 2012b). As of 2011 Tamil Nadu had a life expectancy of 69 years for men and 72 years for women.

Alongside demographic changes have come significant economic transformations. Pre-liberalisation Chennai combined diversified formal sector manufacturing and a prolific film industry with informal sector services and retail. Since liberalization in 1991 Chennai has successfully orientated itself towards the global economy: it is India's third most important centre for IT and business process outsourcing, its manufacturing sector is rapidly expanding, especially for the international automotive, electronic and textile markets. Yet trade liberalisation has by no means benefited everyone; rather it has led to the deepening immiseration of the growing number of informal sector workers (NCEUS, 2009) via declining regular work, increasing casual work and downward pressure on informal sector wages (Sinha and Adam, 2007; Kaur et al, 2007; Singh and Sapra, 2007). In a country where 92% of working people work in the informal economy or have informal employment within the formal economy (NCEUS 2009:13), where 42% of the population lives on incomes below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day (Chen and Ravallion, 2008), where 45% of children under age 3 are stunted, denoting a long term lack of adequate nutrition as well as recurrent and chronic illness (IIPS, 2005:273) and where 55% of women and 24% of men are anemic (IIPS, 2005:310) it must come as no surprise that older people need to contribute to provisioning and family care work.

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the minimum number of households for, what is called 'slum notification' from 60 households to 20. The Census of India categorises all congested and insanitary areas of 20 households as 'slums'.

Yet until recently the contribution of older people to their families, communities and the economy through their paid and unpaid work has not been recognized. At the root of the failure to recognize older people's role in the economy are the erroneous assumptions that older people are frail and cannot contribute and that their needs are limited and easily met by family members (Vera-Sanso, 2004, 2007). The effects of these assumptions can be seen in a pension policy where coverage is limited and pension value is meagre and eroded by inflation (Vera-Sanso, 2010) and official data collection policies that exclude older people, either at the data collection stage or at analysis. For example, the National Family Health Survey does not collect data on the health of women over the age of 49 nor men over the age of 54 and the National Sample Survey, set up in 1950, undertook its first survey of older people in 1986-7, the second in 1995-6 and the most recent one in 2004. With the exception of one recent report (Government of India, 2011b), the Government of India, when analysing Census data, chooses to use concepts, such as 'working generation' (15-59 years) and 'old-age dependency ratio' that do not take into account that nearly 40% of people aged 60+ are working (Government of India, 2011b:15).<sup>5</sup> By contrast to the assumption that older people's most basic needs are being met, the little evidence available suggests that even in better off households the nutritional status of older people is 'considerably worse' than that of younger people (Gillespie and McNeill 1992: 98) and that amongst the poor anemia rates may be high and Body Mass Indexes low, even reaching to starvation status for 15% of older people, especially amongst women (Public Health Resource Network, 2014).

The failure to recognise older people's paid and unpaid work is not only rooted in the nation's self-perception that 'India supports its aged' but is also the outcome of the System of National Accounts (SNA). By externalizing the labour inputs critical to ensuring the reproduction of the labour force, on a day-to-day and generational

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<sup>5</sup> As older women are more likely to be defined as 'helping out' or 'passing time' the number of older workers may well be higher than 40%.

basis, and creating a context in which that unpaid work and worker is devalued, the SNA encourages the depletion of capacities and resources for social reproduction (Hoskyns and Rai, 2007; Ironmonger, 1996; Picchio, 1992). Similarly, the persistence in using stylized economic indicators that do not reflect reality, such as dependency ratios that assume everyone between the ages of 15 and 59 work and those aged 60 and above not only plays an important role in the failure to recognize older people's economic roles but also justifies the defining and stigmatising of the older generation as a looming policy issue. By misrepresenting the scale of old age dependency and by diverting the planning gaze from age-based labour market segmentation, these indicators not only misconstrue the structure of the labour force, but play a role in licensing age discrimination (Vera-Sanso 2013, forthcoming).

In contrast to the large body of research that posits population ageing as a looming economic and social problem (World Bank, 1994; Holzmann and Hinz, 2005; Rajan 1999; UNFPA, 2002), there is now an emerging body of work that recognizes older people's paid and unpaid contributions to the *whole* economy, including social reproduction, though by no means does all of that focus positively on the contribution that older people make to wider society (Carr, 2005; Johnson and Mutchler 2014). Research on work, productive and active ageing in later life in high income countries (Taylor and Walker, 1994; Chiu et al, 2001, Walker, 2006) and on older women's contribution to the care economy (Smith 2002; Burnette, 1998; Arber and Ginn, 1990) and on volunteering (Wheeler et al 1998; Martinson and Minkler, 2006) is more established than research on older people's work in low and middle income countries.

Research on all aspects of later life remains thin in low and middle income countries, despite the absolute numbers of people involved. In terms of older people's work the literature is particularly recent despite older people's paid and unpaid work making a significant contribution to wider society. In contexts where intervening generations

are lost, often through HIV/AIDS, older people, particularly grandmothers raise orphaned children and do so with little if any institutional support (Nyanzi; 2009; Bachman de Silva et al, 2008). Grandparents also play a critical role in raising a nation's Gross Domestic Product and increasing foreign exchange reserves: they do so by making it possible for women to join the work force, including the international work force. For example, Bolivian grandmothers ground an international care chain which sees them caring for grandchildren while their daughters care for more privileged children in Spain (Bastia, 2009). Similar care chains ground rural-urban work migration in China (Luo, undated; Judd 2009). Nor is older people's support for younger people limited to childcare, their downward transfers play an important role in supporting younger family members (Schroder-Butterfill, 2004). More recently older people's paid work and income generation are coming to light (eg Alam and Barrientos, 2010; Vera-Sanso, 2007, 2013, forthcoming; Alam and Mitra, 2012; Selvaraj et al, 2011; Government of India, 2011b) and older people's their role in buttressing the national and global economy (Vera-Sanso, 2012) and their vulnerability as workers to shocks in the global economy (Harriss-White et al, 2013) are amongst the findings of the research project described in this chapter.

## THE RESEARCH PROJECT<sup>6</sup>

The research that is the subject of this chapter was stimulated by the work Vera-Sanso undertook in Chennai's slums between 1990-2, prior to India's liberalisation

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<sup>6</sup> Funding was received from the University of London and from five UK Research Council (ESRC, AHRC, MRC, BBSRC, EPSRC) through the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme. The 2007-10 project was conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Law, Policy and Human Rights Studies (CLPHRS), Chennai, with a team comprising V Suresh, Marlia Hussain, J. Henry, Arul George and Barbara Harriss-White (RES-352-25-0027). The ESRC provided follow-on-funding for impact and updating work, 2012-13, conducted with V Suresh, Marlia Hussain, Swathi Priya and Jacqueline Longina (ES/J020788/1).

measures beginning to take effect, as well as work she had undertaken in 2000 in two villages in western Tamil Nadu on older people from the most socially stigmatised and economically deprived caste, Chakkliyors, at a time when local industries and agriculture were in crisis (Vera-Sanso, 2007). This earlier research made it clear that the widespread presumption that in India (or other 'traditional cultures') older people can retire from work and rely on family support is untenable in impoverished communities, especially for those reliant on insecure, irregular and low-paid informal work.

The project's objective was to uncover the impact of neo-liberal policies on older people in developing countries and to do so by tracing the backward and forward linkages of what older people do. Initially the project's main aim was to understand the impact of neo-liberal growth on the capacity of the older urban poor to be self-supporting or to access support from their families and to do so by studying older people's location within the wider context of urban poverty. Seeking to move away from a pre-determined approach of what to study in relation to older people, the project cast its net wide to examine the interplay of factors in the social, cultural, economic, political, legal and planning environments that impinge upon older people's capacity to work, retain control of their incomes and gain access to family and state resources. As the research progressed, however, it became clear that while there were many pressures that severely constrained older people's capacity to make a living, retain control of their earnings or to access support from the state and or family, older people also gained much satisfaction from earning money and supporting their families and benefited from the sociality of working - though there were clearly variations depending on the work. Collaborating with a local research centre, the Centre for Law, Policy and Human Rights Studies, Chennai, to undertake the research and get the results into the public arena, the study's second aim was to stimulate a national debate on older people and their rights as adults, workers and citizens.

The study applied a mixed method, exploratory approach. In 2007 it started with an 800 household survey in five of Chennai's slum settlements, which included every 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> household in each slum, depending on its size. By tracing networks of relatives and their relative proximity, the survey identified the 'inter-generational load' people across the slums carried.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by a focus on older people through free-flowing discussions with 179 older people who took the lead, usually relating their migration and work histories, their experience of inter-generational relations, access to public goods, housing concerns and their aspirations and concerns about their family's wellbeing, their health and so on. In order to capture the potential impacts of the international economic crisis of 2008 and global spikes in commodity prices, three rounds of an economic survey were undertaken comparing economic circumstances with 12 months prior to the survey. This provided data on income, assets, savings and debts as well as eliciting from informants their judgement of whether and in what direction their circumstances had changed and the criteria they used to determine such. In moving around Chennai it became apparent that our study of 5 settlements spread across the city, while uncovering 40 occupations for people aged 60+, did not remotely cover the variety of occupations that could be seen in Chennai's public spaces. A convenience photographic survey was undertaken between 2007-13, reflecting the paths taken by six researchers as they lived and worked in Chennai, in order to document at least some of this range. It soon became apparent that street vending, particularly street markets are mainly 'staffed' by older people, despite a widespread discourse of older people "not working" and pavement stalls frequently being described as "my daughter's". To capture how central older people are to street markets as well as the vicissitudes of

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<sup>7</sup> No assumptions were made regarding direction of labour and resource transfers between generations.



street marketing, one large street market was monitored for four years, vendors were interviewed and the city flower wholesale market was monitored for four days.

For the follow on study (2012-13) 40 pensioners from the original study were asked what difference the state's doubling of the social pension (from Rs400-Rs1,000 per month) made for them. The main objective of this study was to build on 2007-10's impact by stimulating a national debate on the circumstances and contributions of older people. This required not only identifying powerful new ways of disseminating research but also finding ways of generalising the main research findings, in order that they would not become pigeon-holed in the "that's Chennai, Chennai's always different" box. Two strategies were employed. First, the project undertook the production of two documentaries, '*We're Still Working*' and *The Forgotten Generation*, using informants taken from Chennai, rural Rajasthan and tribal Maharashtra.<sup>8</sup> Local NGOs, *The Association of Strong Women Alone*, and *Kashtakari Sanghatna* anchored the filming in Rajasthan and Maharashtra, providing informants and local expert advice. In order to extend the scope further, *The Hindu National Photo Competition on the Working Elderly* was launched with *The Hindu*, one of India's most widely read newspapers. The competition asked contestants to submit photos in the past year that depicted older workers in a positive light, demonstrating their endurance and contribution. The competition produced nearly 3,000 photos, many with commentary, demonstrating that older people work across

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<sup>8</sup> '*We're Still Working*' is available for streaming in English, <http://vimeo.com/78510012>, and Hindi, <http://vimeo.com/81929055>.

India in a hugely diverse range of work and environmental contexts.<sup>9</sup> The on-line gallery of photographs is located at <http://bit.ly/19Y6jqp> and represents a globally unique collection of work that older people do. Despite the range depicted, this collection is by no means exhaustive as contestants photographed what they came across; it does not record the night work that older people do nor their work in offices, factories, hotels and restaurants, etc. to which the public do not have access.

The 800 household survey revealed that the presumption that the working generation is aged 15-59 is erroneous, instead the working age starts later and its pattern of curtailment in later life is considerably more contingent and gender nuanced. In 2007/8, two percent of 10-14 year olds were working and only 24% of 15-19 year olds were working, a figure close to the percentage of 70-74 year olds classed by informants as working. In other words, Chennai's slum-dwellers, including older slum-dwellers, have accepted that children's education is a family priority with the result that there were twice as many women in the slum workforce aged 60 and above than women/girls aged 15-19 and slightly more men aged 60 and above than men/boys aged 15-19, many of whom were in apprenticeship and would be better described as 'more learning than earning'. Slum families find themselves caught in a pincer movement between a local labour market, swelled by a large youth bulge, in which employers use credentialism to select the most compliant employees, and a

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<sup>9</sup> The competition and public awareness of older workers was foregrounded by five weeks of articles in *The Hindu* and a social media campaign that also produced 34,000 votes from the public for pictures they liked.

competitive global economy that demands an increasingly educated, low-paid workforce.

The survey demonstrated that the youth bulge is also contributing to age discrimination against men in some sections of the labour market, beginning when they reach their early forties. In addition, to age discrimination older men are facing a reorganisation of the labour market that marginalises middle aged and older workers, increasingly relegating them into the most irregular, poorly paid work available, that of casual and piece rate work. In the slums there is a long tail of men working into their 90s. Women's work pattern is typically one where they enter the workforce in mid-life, often to compensate for men's declining real incomes. Sixty-two percent of women classed as working are aged over 40; 37% are aged 45-49 and 20% are aged 65-69. In other words, if we take on the standardised institutional discourse that defines the 'working generation' and the 'old age dependency ration', in the slums work is more closely aligned with 'post-retirement age' than with 'early working life' and that for women the association of work with later life is stronger than it is for men (Vera-Sanso 2012).

Qualitative data drawn from the 179 interviews demonstrated that being classed as 'working' is as much about gender-age identity as it is about whether a person works. Women are less likely to be classed as working; instead they are classed as 'helpers' in another person's micro business, usually a daughter's, or as 'passing time' no matter whether that business was started by them or they are the primary or

only worker. Older men, by contrast, spend much time searching (or more accurately waiting) for casual work and are classed as working up to the point that they have given up their search for work. The resulting overall pattern is that men's economic contribution to the household is largest at the beginning of the marriage and declines over the life course and women's economic contribution starts with no paid work and no 'helper' role and then rises over the life course to compensate for men's declining contributions to the household and continues into deep old age (Vera-Sanso 2012). While this reverses the usual claims that women are dependent in old age, it supports quantitative research on mortality risk for older men and women in rural Bangladesh, which found that risk is raised for spouseless older men, but not for older women; their risk is raised where they do not have two surviving sons, demonstrating that reduced fertility may have greater long-term effects on women than men (Rahman, 1991).<sup>10</sup>

The need for older people, particularly older women, to work into late life arises from the way Chennai is incorporated into the global economy. Aside from the pressure for better and longer education and training, the city's rapid expansion and density places housing at a premium. In 2007/8, 97% of rents in the slums studied were double or more than Rs300 a month, at a time when the social pension was Rs400

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<sup>10</sup> Two sons were found to compensate for the uncertainties of a son's capacity to support a parent in the precarious livelihood contexts found in India. Having more than two sons did not have an impact – supporting research that older people are deemed by sons to have limited needs (Vera-Sanso, 2004).

per month. Consequently, even the few people who *did* receive a pension had to work both to supplement it to meet their basic living costs and to pay their rents.<sup>11</sup>

Further, the economic surveys revealed that the slum households, not just slum households in which older people lived, were impacted by the global economic crisis, global price hikes in food and fuel and the impact of climate shocks (flooding and rising temperatures and humidity) (Harriss-White et al, 2013). While the urban poor are trapped in seasonal cycles of extreme events and environmental insults, that lower incomes and assets and raise costs and debts, it was the price rises and insufficient work (due to the contraction of the economy) that most people identified as the cause of their declining economic circumstances. This led to their deteriorating debt status, reduced food consumption (cutting protein, vegetables and meals) and compromised capacity to replace broken and worn-out things. The economic surveys demonstrated that events initiated by speculation in the financial fortresses of London and New York *do* quickly find their way to the doors of slum-dwellers; they found that men and women above the age of 60, and households headed by people over the age of 60, suffered the most from the predations of global markets, especially if they undertook waged work in the service sector (Harriss-White et al, 2013).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In 2004/5 the Planning Commission had declared that Rs538 per month was the sum needed to meet the urban calorific norm of 2100 calories per day.

<sup>12</sup> The quantum of waged work, such as domestic work, was set by the employer; by contrast self-employed people, such as street vendors, were initially more able to extend their work hours. However, as time passed markets contracted and extended work hours did not insulate the self-employed.

In this context of reduced consumption, when populations are already confronting stunting and anaemia, family networks must make choices about how resources are utilised. In these circumstances older people reduced their consumption further, delayed health seeking, provided cash to younger relatives and, in the case of older women, increased their labour inputs into paid work, 'helping out' or taking on unpaid work in order to allow younger woman to join the work force. These transfers of resources and labour did not just happen between relatives living in the same household but among people in family networks, including networks that spread across the urban/rural divide (Vera-Sanso, 2012). In impoverished households older people are not the ones with the strongest claims to family resources. When poverty deepens, older people absorb the greater share of deprivation, both as a matter of expectation and out of their desire to reduce their children's and grandchildren's suffering.

By combining an analysis of what older people do and theorizing their backward and forward linkages, it soon becomes clear that older people, far from being a drain on family or national resources, are in fact buttressing the global economy. We have already seen that their paid and unpaid work is important for keeping family budgets positive ( see also Durr-y-Nayab, 2010 on Pakistan) both by working directly themselves or releasing younger women into the workforce and in helping to ameliorate and even absorb downturns in the global economy. The importance of older women's role as unpaid labour in family businesses is demonstrated by vending businesses collapsing when these 'helpers' and 'time passers' become terminally ill and die. As vendors and as porters in wholesale markets and transporters of vendors and their wares from the market, older people are an

important linchpin linking the urban and rural economies.<sup>13</sup> The incomes and homes of older slum dwellers, or the incomes of the younger women that they have released into the work force, are used to further in younger people's education, including the education of grandchildren who come to Chennai from rural areas for IT and other training. Older women's take up of heavy domestic work (including queuing for water lorries, carrying pots of water, clearing sewage-laden storm water and so on) and care work (covering shortfalls in education and health provision), substitutes for the State's failure to provide adequate social and physical infrastructure, allowing the State to invest in policies that favour Foreign Direct Investment. If we trace the links forwards from older people's paid and unpaid work, we can see that, by taking on the work that younger people no longer do, older people contribute to Chennai's place in the global economy by providing low-cost services to Chennai's current and future workforce and by providing low-cost inputs to industry. In taking on social reproductive work, older people are not only patching over the impacts of the State's neoliberal policies of favouring capital, particularly foreign capital, they are also releasing younger women into the workforce at exactly the moment when the population's age structure could potentially produce a demographic dividend (Vera-Sanso 2013). The World Bank (2008) has identified expanding employment, increasing productivity, raising human capital and drawing women into the workforce, in order to increase per capita productivity, as critical to realising a demographic dividend and, of course, a low-cost, skilled labour force is seen as the way forward to cornering a larger share of the global economy. It is unquestionable that older people contribute significantly to each strategy identified by the World Bank barring, it might be thought, the increased productivity. However, even here they can be seen to contribute as increased productivity can be achieved either by increasing output, assuming wages stay the same, or sustaining output but

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<sup>13</sup> Fifty percent of Indians work in agriculture and agriculture-related industries, a good proportion of whom are themselves over 60.

reducing wages, or reducing wages faster than output. Age discrimination in wages effectively increases the productivity of older people's work.<sup>14</sup>

This leaves us with the question of what does working do for older people? Paid work can provide social recognition, and a sense of self-work and sociality. Those who live alone specifically point to their ability to spend their money how they wish, not needing to ask others for money nor feeling answerable to them over not pooling it with the rest of the family. That is the potential. The downside is that the incomes are small and they have negligible if any cushion for illness. The main issue that older workers face is whether they are in trades, or can move into trades, that give them control over their work, allowing them to tailor it to their needs and capacities. Paid domestic work, for example, is arduous and leaves the employer in control, in the position to determine income, hours and continuity of employment. Breaking bricks is physically depleting and isolating work. Waiting, with little success, for small building repair work, produces negligible income and low self-esteem. Pulling a cycle rickshaw facilitates control over the work process, and vending similarly enables older people to control the intensity and hours of work as well as having a high degree of sociality. Unfortunately, while these two trades provide important livelihoods for older people and low-cost services for the working population they are under attack by the authorities for not being commensurate with India's image of itself as a modernising nation. Planners, and individuals who are using Public Interest Litigation to move the Courts against street markets, are endangering vending livelihoods. Further, the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan has explicitly identified the refrigerated distribution of food 'from farm to fork' as an arena that the corporate sector should move into – in order to reduce food waste, although the Plan readily admits that there is no evidence on the extent of food wastage and that India has a significant energy-deficit. If implemented this would impact on many older people's

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<sup>14</sup> For age-based income inequalities see Vera-Sanso, 2007, 2013; Harriss-White, 2013; Gosh et al, 2010.



livelihoods who are engaged in the chain of effort that brings produce from the wholesale market to the final consumer (market porters, cycle rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers and street vendors).

While work can give older people choices which being dependent on impoverished others does not, and paid work can often be less onerous than the heavy social reproductive work that living in slums demands, older people need the wherewithal to enable them to refuse to take on the most physically depleting and menial work available to them and to determine how much they work. The wherewithal is multi-levelled. Their rights as workers need to be recognised and protected by the State, as does their right to work, particularly to age-friendly work in which older people that enables older people to control their extent and intensity of their work.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly older people need the certainty of a meaningful pension that they can depend on. The project's 2012-3 follow-up study of the impact of the 125% increase in old age pensions from Rs400 to Rs1,000 between late 2010 and early 2011 demonstrated that pensions, at this rate, do not relieve older people of the need to work, but it did give them a greater sense of security, a feeling that they stood a better chance of bridging the monthly income-expenses gap as all people working in the insecure and unstable informal economy must. It is unlikely that a larger pension would encourage older people to completely stop working, as the benefits of working is not just one of having an income, but of being seen to have an income and of being able to help family members in a network of people trapped in and trying to escape from the uncertainties of the informal economy. What a large pension will do is to put older people in the driving seat, allowing them to decide what and how much work they will do and if and when they will stop working.

## IMPACT

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<sup>15</sup> In some parts of rural India, the workfare scheme, Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme does provide work for older people that sets age-friendly daily work load quotas.

A central aim of the 2007-10 and 2012-13 projects was to try to generate a debate on older people's contribution to family and economy, their rights as workers and rights to work and pensions. An innovative strategy of combining standard academic outputs (articles, chapters, conference papers) was combined with new methods for gaining the attention of policy makers, activists, NGOs, journalists and the general public. The included newspaper articles, Policy Notes presented to policy makers in Chennai and Delhi, the documentaries and photo competition mentioned earlier in the chapter and a photo exhibition/essay created out of the convenience photo survey of Chennai undertaken by the research team, supplemented with photos taken in rural Rajasthan, that demonstrated older people's role in social reproduction and the economy. Pop-up exhibitions were held at pension rallies and government offices in India and at international conferences in India and Europe. The research project spurred an initial 25% rise in pensions in late 2010 in Tamil Nadu and helped place old age pensions on the agenda for the State elections which resulted in a further 100% rise in pensions in spring 2011 for three million pensioners. Research presentations to activists at the project's conference in March 2010 in Chennai and in August 2010 to the 4<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Right to Food and Work Campaign (RTF), India's highly successful network of activists and NGOs spurred a unanimous resolution to campaign for a universal pension, index-linked to inflation. In August 2011 the Pension Parishad was formed by members of the RTC and others. Having set a universal pension rate at Rs2,000, half the minimum wage, by 2013 the Pension Parishad and placed the universal pension on the policy agenda, having secured a public announcement from the government in support of universality and, now in February 2014, with over 200 NGOs, academics and politicians from across all the major parties supporting the campaign, the Pension Parishad is making the Rs2,000 universal pension an election issue for India's 2014 national elections. If the Pension Parishad is successful they will have completely reframed the Government of India's approach to older people, which has hitherto been to shift all responsibility for older people onto their family, only scooping up

some older people (living below the institutionally determined poverty line) with the most meagre pension of Rs200 and reliant on, but not enforcing, State-level match funding. They have over 200 NGOs, academics and politicians from across all the major parties supporting the campaign and it is likely to become an election issue in 2014. If the Pension Parishad is successful, because of the size and profile that India has as an emerging economy, the demonstration effect at a global level could be substantial in relation to pensions. The project team continue to present their research at Pension Parishad and RTF events and are working with HelpAge International to secure recognition of older people's roles and rights as workers and to work.

## CONCLUSION

The study challenged the perception of older people as dependents who are, or should be looked after by their families. It demonstrated that older people make a significant contribution to family, society and economy; playing a substantial role both in bridging the shortfalls in state provision for people living in low-income settlements and reliant on public services (education, health, infrastructure) and in providing a skilled yet comparatively low-paid work force for the global economy. It demonstrated that older people, far from being a demographic problem are the ones who, under current state provision, will facilitate the realisation of India's potential for a demographic dividend. Older people, along with others, physically absorb the impacts of global financial crises. The state policy and planning trends look as though they will undermine the potentials of age-friendly occupations for older people. This study revealed the extent to which public and private discourse represent older people, that is *older adults*, as frail, dependent, non-workers, with limited needs. From demographic concepts, through policy measures, to the labour market and inter-generational relations, older adults are more often not recognised for what they do but for an erroneous, essentialist, infantilising, conceptualisation of what they are – as no longer equals of the unmarked category of *adult*. In placing the

research before the public, NGOs, activists, academics, planners and politicians the project has helped to bring attention to the needs, contribution and rights of a population of *adults* who have been assiduously ignored and misrepresented.

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