

AARP Speaks with Leading Advocates for Older Adults Around the World

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Bangladesh

The Resource Integration Centre (RIC) was founded in 1981 as part of the post-liberation NGO movement. Through innovative physical, financial, and social, health programs, RIC empowers the older community to age healthily. To learn more about RIC, AARP International interviewed RIC's Assistant General Manager Ferdousi Begum.

AARP What are the major challenges that older people face in Bangladesh?

Ferdousi Begum Older People in Bangladesh are facing some basic human problems, such as poverty, limited and inadequate health care facilities, and poor social support due to changing family structure and cultural norms. The government provides a few retirement and pensions systems. The Social Safety Net includes programs such as the Old Age Allowance, the Allowances for the Widow, Deserted and Destitute Women, and the Vulnerable Group Development program. However, most older people are not eligible for the programs because the pensions are limited to retired federal workers. This leaves private sector and migrant workers without pensions and therefore financially insecure.





By organizing multi-dimensional activities, RIC helps older people receive necessary economic and material support to achieve an adequate standard of living.

AARP How is RIC addressing these challenges?

FB By organizing multi-dimensional activities, RIC helps older people receive necessary economic and material support to achieve an adequate standard of living. RIC's programs include an old age allowance, an innovative microcredit program, eye care, housing and emergency support, and material and medical equipment support. In addition to providing these programs, RIC also organizes monthly union-based Older Person's Association (OPA) meetings; trains older people on leadership, monitoring, and communication; and gives awards to older people and children for their community contributions.

One of RIC's biggest initiatives is the Older People's Social Centers, spaces where older people can meet every day and share time by talking, watching television, reading, playing games, and enjoying music. The Centers are organized and run by the OPA, to create a social place for older people to lead a dignified and connected life.

AARP Can you describe a partnership or collaboration that has been particularly successful?

FB To strengthen the development of programs, especially at the national level, RIC is working with several national and international funding partners. At the national level RIC works with NIRAPAD, CUP, Disaster Forum, CDF, CEN, COFCON, ARC-B, FNB, Forum for the Rights of the Elderly, Bangladesh and the Platform for the Elderly. At the international level RIC works with Help Age International (HAI), FORUM ASIA, International Federation on Ageing, and Global Alliance for the Rights of The Older People. RIC's main goal is community-based rehabilitation for older people, achieved by community and family acceptance of older people. Based on this shared goal, RIC has partnered with HAI for more than three decades, implementing different community-based rights programs in various areas of Bangladesh.

AARP How does RIC define success? Which RIC projects have been most successful?

FB RIC has a diverse array of programs and experiences which have led to good practices and results. According to the plan made in the Madrid Convention and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, HelpAge introduced the Older Citizens Monitoring Program (OCMP) in October 2002, which works to support older people, society and the government. The OCMP is active in Bolivia, Kenya, Tanzania, Jamaica, and Bangladesh. We worked directly with HAI to implement the project. The OCMP was a great way to promote the rights of older people in the community, strengthen solidarity, and elevate voices. After official completion of the OCMP in 2005, RIC enhanced its project activity and scaled up with assistance from HAI. We are now a strong, inclusive program that is well known in Bangladesh.

AARP How does your team connect with new volunteers? What types of support do these volunteers provide?

FB The volunteers at RIC are community members who do everything from connecting older people to programs, to rewarding older people for their contributions. Volunteers organize monthly OPA meetings and keep members up to date on RIC programming, while mobilizing community resources for funerals, festivals, and youth-based cultural programs. Representatives of the OPA volunteer to supervise the Social Centers, conduct regular home visits for older people, and even step in to solve family conflict. The volunteers help teach youth to have positive attitudes towards older people.

AARP What are RIC's long term goals and what steps is the organization taking to achieve them in the coming years?

FB RIC's long term goal is to promote older people's social protection, income security, and health care services. To achieve these goals RIC will mainstream the issues and interests of older people in Bangladesh, create new partnerships and connections to expand programs, utilize the social capital and knowledge of older people in Bangladesh, and launch a savings and credit program to educate and empower older people to manage their own finances. ●

