



Population Ageing in Lower- and Middle-income Countries. Celebrating 40 Years of HelpAge International

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Population ageing is a global mega trend that needs urgent action. The figures speak for themselves – 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 or over by 2030. By 2050, one-fifth of the world’s population will be over 60, of which 80% will live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This trend will have profound social, economic, and political ramifications. There is an urgent need to educate and create awareness among public, CSO’s, Governments, International organisational and private sector about this evolving phenomenon. It is critical that we mobilise and support systematic adaptation to ageing societies. Any delayed policy action can cost us in future. There is a business and economic case on why we should act now.

HelpAge global network is celebrating 40 years of its mission and work across the globe. From five local organisation at the inception stage, the network has grown to more than 180 members and is present in over 90 countries. HelpAge has been in the forefront of promoting the rights of older people to lead a dignified and healthy life. As we come together and foresee the next 40 years of our work, we are determined to step up and amplify our work to inspire a movement for change – a movement to address the issues of population ageing and promote the wellbeing ,dignity and voice of the older people. Our strength comes from older people themselves who have been organised themselves into older people associations in many parts of the world.

HelpAge global network is relentless in promoting a world where ageing is seen as an opportunity rather than a problem, where older people are considered as a contributor and right holders than an economic burden. We believe that working across all ages, we can build a society where everyone thrives and is healthy as they age. Younger generation of today is the older generation of tomorrow. Hence, the fight for adapting to population ageing is the collective responsibility of both the current and future older generations.

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Developed nations have many policies and programmes that address the issue of population ageing. However, the work on the issue of ageing is more challenging in lower- and middle-income countries as the older adults do not have basic social security or social care mechanisms. The governments in LMICs need to develop policies and programme that are affordable and effective so that people can grow older with dignity and wellbeing.

HelpAge and its network members have developed community-based approaches and solutions to meet this challenge. In 2020a, HelpAge undertook a study on older people associations (HelpAge International, 2020b). The study states that older people's associations (OPAs) offer an approach for inclusive, sustainable community development that actively engages the growing population of older people. Help Age commissioned action-based research to assess the OPA model in Asia: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The study outlined various strengths of the OPAs such as offering a wide range of activities with diverse benefits (income generation activities, health, home care and psychosocial support), promoting social enjoyment and leisure, promoting participation of older people in community and development, supporting inclusion of older people with disabilities, promoting participation and leadership of older women and finally strengthening the older people voices.

Developing inter-generational groups within rural and urban communities has been a critical intervention where the communities at local level find solution to the economic security of older adults and community-based health care. These older people associations also promote the rights of older people, protect them from abuse and discrimination. These associations enable the older people to be connected and combat loneliness. HelpAge network members realised that the issue of population ageing needs to be addressed through inter-generational approaches to stamp out ageism and discrimination.

However, these grassroot level movements need to be supported by government policies, law, and programmes through a holistic and systematic approach so that everyone ages with dignity. To explore this further, in 2021, HelpAge International with support of UNFPA Asia Pacific regional office undertook case studies in selected countries – Maldives, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Iran, Indonesia and India. The studies revealed that the policy interventions in each of the case study countries were inevitably at different stages of the policy implementation process, reflecting their different stages in the demographic transition. However, it was found that policy interventions adopted were not able to demonstrate a fully rights-based approach – one that includes elements such as aiming to empower older people and strengthen their inclusion and participation in society. This highlighted the need for more specific criteria to appraise and categorise policy interventions that adopt a rights-based approach. In 2020, the UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) collaborated with HelpAge International to review six national ageing strategies and age-related policies in terms of their alignment with human rights standards. This review was published in a report entitled 'The Rights of Older Persons – A review of national ageing strategies in the Arab region' (UNFPA, 2021). In both regions, we found the need to develop a guidance to undertake a rights-based approach to address the policies on ageing. Looking at this gap, UNFPA ASRO and HelpAge International have

produced a policy Guide entitled ‘The Right to Dignified Ageing – A Guide to Establishing Rights Based Policies for Older Persons in the Arab Region’ (2021).

Population ageing phenomena is further challenged by other development trends such as climate change, urbanisation, migration, humanitarian crisis, and conflict in lower- and middle-income countries. HelpAge experiences show that while older people are disproportionately impacted by these trends, older people also contribute and offer solutions to address the issue. However, the older people are left behind, discriminated and their contributions have been often ignored.

A recent report by HelpAge (2023) titled ‘Climate justice in an ageing world’ illustrates the challenges face by older people in lower- and middle-income countries. Almost 138 million people aged over 60 (close to 14 per cent of the global over-60 age group) are already exposed to climate risks, many of whom live in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Low- and middle-income countries will also face a combination of greater climate-related hazards and a higher socioeconomic vulnerability because of increasing debt burden, deteriorating natural ecosystem and slow progress on development indicators.

In 2020, we published a report titled, ‘If not now, then when?’ (HelpAge International), highlighting the situation of older people in humanitarian crisis. This report is based on analysis of the combined results of needs assessments undertaken by HelpAge International and its partners in the 13 months to the end of 2019. A large and rapidly growing number of older people are affected by humanitarian crises. The proportion of the population aged 50 and over in fragile countries, where conflict and disasters are more likely to occur, is expected to rise from 12.3 per cent (219.9 million) in 2020 to 19.2 per cent (586.3 million) in 2050.

The report highlights that the rights and needs of older people, and their potential to contribute to their communities and families, remain widely overlooked. Older people receive little targeted attention from governments, donors, or humanitarian agencies. They are routinely neglected in humanitarian response and their voices are unheard.

Growing urbanisation and internal migration of young adults from rural to urban centres have created profound impact on the older adults left behind in rural areas. This area needs more studies as it has significant impact on the wellbeing, health, and dignity of older people. The articles found in this edition highlights the challenges faced by older adults in rural communities and also the care burden of grandparents.

Thus, population ageing compounded with other development trends like climate change, urbanisation, conflict and humanitarian crisis will have significant impact if we do not adapt policies and programmes that address the challenges systematically. Governments, civil society groups, private sector and International community including UN must commit to following actions .

- Governments must adopt age inclusive policies and programmes to address the population aging trends and ensure the participation of all ages. Member states should agree on a comprehensive international legally binding instrument to protect the rights of older people.
- Multilateral banks, international financial institutions, and regional institutions to

embed ageing in their policies and plan their investments accordingly.

- Private sector should make global aging a business imperative via product and job development, investment in employee health and well-being and invest in technologies that address ageing.
- UN and international development organisations ought to integrate ageing issues and promote the right of the older people.
- Civil society organisations, older people associations and others must come together to inspire a movement to educate about population ageing, elevate the topic to national, regional and global agenda and demand actions from the governments.

Research and data are fundamental to develop policies that are intergenerational and have a life course approach. Academics, policy makers and practitioners must come together to involve all generations to find innovative solutions. HelpAge global network is committed to this endeavour. Ageing is a process that every generation will go through. The ageist attitudes and behaviours must be challenged to promote a society where everyone ages with dignity.

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