

# Connect

**HelpAge**

global network

Sharing information to strengthen the HelpAge global network in Asia-Pacific  
Issue 7, January 2020

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## Editorial

After extensive consultations with older people, our network members, peers and colleagues working in the field of ageing, HelpAge has completed our 2030 strategy. Its title expresses our aspiration: “Ageing in a just world”.

The strategy is built around wellbeing, dignity and voice as key components of our aspiration. How could we not work for a world where older people’s wellbeing is central? Or how could that be achieved without preserving the dignity of older generations and ensuring their voice is heard?

The new strategy learns from our experience, achievements and shortcomings in past years but also “peeks into the future”. Adapting to ageing societies will require not only political will, but also the transformative power of social movements that embrace with passion the ideal of a fair world for people of all generations.

The strategy to 2030 also defines the roles of HelpAge as supporter, convenor and thought leader in the field of ageing. The ten focus areas in the strategy will lead to a range of potential interventions to translate our vision into practical action.

Time flies so fast. To ensure that our world is a just and fair one, we need to act now. We need to unite—by co-creation, coordination and collaboration with older people, civil society, government, private sectors and others—and push for change.

I also want to share that in September this year, our Regional Office and partners will organise the biennial HelpAge Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, where we aim to introduce new perspectives on population ageing. We all hear that population ageing is a burden for society, and that it means doom and gloom for our future. While we acknowledge the challenges, we want to look at the issue through a more positive lens. More information on the conference will be announced soon. Please stay tuned.

**Eduardo Klien**  
Regional Director  
Asia-Pacific Region

## Mainstreaming older women’s financial security in southeast Asia

### ► Regional

In the Asia-Pacific region, more than half of the people aged 60 years and over are women. Many of these older women faced financial challenges from taking a supporting role as housewives and carers at a young age, which leads to weak financial security in old age.

In 2018, a six-country collaborative study on older women and their financial situation was conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The research findings led to recommendations and an advocacy plan to promote the financial security of older women.

As a pioneer in this field, the Tsao Foundation actively led advocacy and campaign activities in Singapore. These activities were well received by relevant stakeholders and their collaboration resulted in a concrete set of policy recommendations to policy makers. As a result, they decided to carry out similar approaches in two more countries, the Philippine and Thailand.

On 8–9 January, 2020, representatives from the Tsao Foundation, the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), the Foundation for Older Persons’ Development (FOPDEV), the Voice of Women Network, Thailand and the HelpAge Asia Pacific team met in Chiang Mai to discuss advocacy and capacity building projects in the two countries. The outcome of this meeting was that a two-year project titled “Promoting the Financial Security of Older Women in Southeast Asia” will commence in February 2020, providing the opportunity for learning and creating a better understanding of the relationship between older women and financial security, which can lead to changes in government policy. Consequently, we hope that older women will be able to live their lives with dignity and more independence.



Please visit <https://asiawomen.org.sg/> to learn more about older women’s financial security.

## Working together towards a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People

### ► Regional

Thiruvananthapuram (or Trivandrum), capital of the southern Indian state of Kerala, hosted 30 participants from the Asia-Pacific region to learn from each other and plan their advocacy efforts concerning the UN Convention on the Rights of Older People.

A two-day workshop was held on 13–14 November 2019 by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) with support from HelpAge and local host, the Centre for Gerontological Studies.

Around 30 GAROP members joined the workshop from organisations in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Qatar, Kazakhstan, South Korea and Sri Lanka. Also attending were seven members of the HelpAge global network. Participants

were from organisations of various sizes, with different programmes and interests, but all shared the common goal of promoting the rights and wellbeing of older people.

This gathering was an opportunity for participants not only to meet like-minded advocates, but also to share their experience, analyse stakeholders in their countries and plan their work in a more strategic manner. The forum discussed ways to engage their respective governments, and everyone left the workshop full of energy and enthusiasm, with a strong commitment and valuable lessons learnt. If we want to accelerate the adoption of a new UN convention on the human rights of older people, we need



Baralee Meeusukh/HelpAge International

to synchronise our efforts and not work with a silo mentality. Both GAROP and HelpAge are in full support of those working at the national level as it is in each country where the most important part of the work needs to be done.

**The workshop was supported by the Swedish Lottery Fund.**

**Learn more about GAROP at <https://www.rightsofolderpeople.org/>**

## Emergency preparedness workshop: Building capacity of HelpAge network members and working partners

### ► Regional

The Asia-Pacific region has long been affected by natural disasters, and the threat is increasing year by year. Consider these statistics: natural disasters affect 26 million older people in the world every year, and 97 per cent of people killed by disasters are in developing countries. This shows that preparedness for humanitarian and disaster risk assessment for older people is one of the pressing issues in an ageing society.

A five-day workshop, “Building the Emergency Preparedness Capacity of Network Members and Working Partners”, organised by HelpAge International, took place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 2–6 December 2019. In the workshop, participants from more than ten countries learned about and discussed

crisis anticipation, humanitarian approaches, and then how to apply them to preparedness planning and actual responses. In addition, participants practised scenario-based planning, minimum preparedness action and business continuity planning, addressing a particular crisis in the region, such as flooding, typhoons, drought and political conflict.

In the workshops, participants found that they tended to let some humanitarian standards slip from their minds when they were actually planning, even though they had learned and knew these standards. They discovered how difficult it is to respond to disasters immediately after they happen and how important advance anticipation and preparedness is.

“Large-scale disasters attack this region year on year, and many vulnerable older people have been seriously affected. Although governments and NGOs put inclusion in their preparedness policy and planning, we have to keep asking to what extent people are included at a practical level. In the workshop, we learned about the difficulties and the importance of identifying who and what kinds of support are needed and the response in the field; towards that goal, concrete advanced planning is absolutely essential,” said Yusuke Miyoshi, a participant from Japan.

A commonly used phrase at the workshop was “Fail to plan, plan to fail”. How well you can respond in the event of a disaster depends on how much you prepare beforehand. In the future, to reduce the risk of disaster upon older people, it is important that we prepare plans which are genuinely inclusive in advance.

“We are stronger working with and through our local partners. We have to make sure that we are ready to response to the emergencies wherever it happens.” said Deepak Malik, HelpAge Regional Programme Manager, DRR and Humanitarian Response.



Thanapa Ukaranun/HelpAge International

## Keep the promise on Universal Health Coverage

### ► Nepal

Ageing Nepal has been campaigning for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day (December 12) by focusing on the health of older people since 2017. To mark the day in December 2019, a week of action was implemented in collaboration with many national and local organisations. The slogan “Keep the Promise” was used to raise awareness of the need for a strong and resilient health system, leaving no older people behind. More than 1000 people including older people, media representatives, civil society and policy makers directly participated for the successful implementation of UHC.

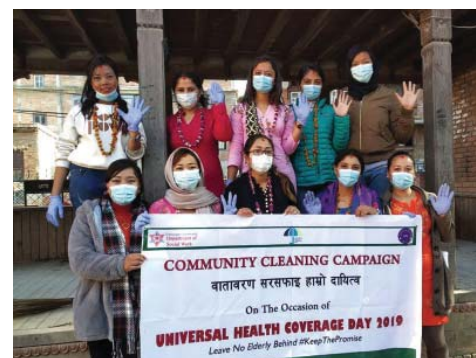
Many campaigns directly promoted the health issues of older people through community service activities, while other activities pressurised the government at the national level to make plans and programmes to achieve commitments made at a UN high-level meeting, to leave no one behind.

Around 80 older people shared their common health issues during a peer group discussion where diabetes, hypertension and joint pain were found

to be the most common problems. Recognising diabetes as one of the common diseases of old age, a documentary was shown to provide in-depth information on how people can live an active life despite being diabetic. Similarly, t'ai-chi was taught to more than 20 older people to encourage them to be healthy and active. A community cleaning campaign was also organised by youth groups.

Many people are still unaware of how UHC plays an important role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3. Considering this, awareness building sessions were organised for three different groups within Kathmandu district. In addition, more than 500 signatures were collected demanding health services that are affordable, available and accessible to older people in an integrated manner, and the petition was submitted to the Ministry of Health and Population. Similarly, print, electronic and social media were mobilised to publish articles, broadcast radio and TV programmes and share photos to

encourage the government to improve the health of the nation. Pamphlets were also distributed to the general public and participants. The campaign ended with a free eye check-up and diabetes screening camp where 160 older people benefitted. Among them, 14 were found to have cataracts and were referred to the Tilganga Eye Hospital for free cataract surgery.



## Enhancing women's leadership in drought mitigation

### ► India

The Thar desert, in Rajasthan of India, is one of the harshest climatic zones, yet also one of the most densely populated desert eco-systems in the world. Climate change has resulted in the increased occurrence of droughts, which has led to food and water insecurity, malnutrition and poverty for the population in the area.

About half of the region's 27 million residents are women and girls, who are constantly engaged in water-fetching drudgery and also contribute significantly to natural resource management at both the household and community levels. These contributions are often not recognised, and gender inequality has been prevalent here.

For over three decades, Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS) has been implementing its drought mitigation programme in the Thar Desert. Recognising the issue of gender injustice for women and girls, and the related

impact of climate change on their lives, GRAVIS came up with the idea of linking gender issues and drought mitigation together. Therefore, GRAVIS is about to start a new five-year programme for enhancing women and girls' leadership in climate change adaptation.

This new programme looks at transforming women and girls into community leaders. It will be implemented in 20 villages of four districts of the Thar Desert. The four districts are Barmer, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur. The team will work with existing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and form new Intergenerational Learning Groups (ILGs), bringing marginalised women and girls into leadership roles.

Based on an inclusive approach, the groups' members will comprise older women, younger girls and women and girls with disabilities. They will be empowered to take leading roles with full

participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all activities concerning drought mitigation, natural resource management and climate change adaptation. While younger girls can offer literacy, older women will bring traditional knowledge to community-based drought mitigation. Community members, especially men and boys, as well as local authorities, will be sensitised to gender equality which will lead to attitude change towards women and girls and recognition of their abilities.



The official launching ceremony was held on 28 January.

# People's movement for National Universal Pension Act

## ► Thailand

In Thailand, the pension system consists of the Government Pension Fund, a Social Security Scheme, and an Old Age Allowance. Despite this, Thai pensions cover only about 15-23 per cent of the entire population. This means that of 65 million people, over 50 million people are not covered, including 10-11 million older people, a number which is increasing rapidly. In addition, access to pension remains limited as it is designed only for “underprivileged elderly” rather than as a public right for all.

The Welfare Watch Network, a civil society network supporting labourers, older people, children and youth, women, ethnic groups, disabled people, farmers, patients with chronic conditions, slum/urban communities, human rights and community saving has urged the Thai government to adopt the “National Universal Pension Act” by submitting a draft of the proposed National Universal Pension Act and a list of 14,654 supporters on 6 November 2019, to promote equal access to pension for everyone aged 60 and above. The principle of a National Universal Pension is to guarantee income security and sustainable living, and to make sure that all Thai people aged 60 and above do not live below the poverty line. Therefore, the minimum monthly pension should be set

at 3,000 baht (US\$100) per month.

The Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV) has been involved in this movement as a member of the Welfare Watch Network for over five years. FOPDEV has focused on building knowledge and understanding of older people's rights, income security, and policies for older people. In addition, FOPDEV assisted in the establishment of an older people's association to promote and seek support for the “National Universal Pension Act” at the community level in four major northern provinces of Thailand: Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, and Mae Hong Son. As a result, a list of over 3,000 supporters was submitted.

The current situation was summarised by Khunikorn Thumyom, Programme Manager of FOPDEV, as follows.

“A monthly pension of 3,000 baht is the only hope for older people because the existing pension system does not provide enough support. Such an amount would allow older people to have a decent standard of living. So how could the government get a budget for the National Universal Pension? The fact is that older people are paying tax both directly and



indirectly, so this tax should be returned to them as universal pension benefits. All older people should receive equal benefits from the universal pension, whether they are private sector workers, informal sector workers, farmers, or poor and unemployed older people”.

As required by law, the Thai parliament is checking the list of supporters, a task which was expected to finish by 20 January 2020. Following this, if the list has more than 10,000 supporters, parliament must seek the signature of the Prime Minister and submit the draft act to be formally adopted.

The Welfare Watch Network is planning to organise a public seminar on 3 April 2020. This event aims at promoting the National Universal Pension to the public and to seek support from Thai society, with an expected 600 participants.

## Upcoming events

### SAVE THE DATE

9–12 June 2020



For more information on the course, please contact us at [events@helpageasia.org](mailto:events@helpageasia.org)

### HelpAge training course “Developing Long-Term Care Systems for Older People”

Date: 9–12 June 2020

Location: Chiang Mai, Thailand

For the third year, HelpAge Asia Pacific is organising the annual training course on Developing Long-Term Care Systems for Older People. The course aims to provide participants a solid understanding of the essential considerations in developing long-term care (LTC) systems and the key policy and design decisions required. Participants from all countries are welcome to apply.

## International experiences and learnings on non-communicable diseases

### ► Regional

The Global Alliance for Chronic Disease (GACD) held their Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) from 13–15 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, bringing together donors, multidisciplinary researchers and project partners which form the GACD research network. The GACD is an alliance of health research funders representing 80 per cent of public health research funding worldwide. They pool their resources to jointly fund practical research in low-income settings on non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, lung disease and mental health. The scientific meeting is a key aspect of their work, bringing together researchers participating in GACD-funded projects to share the challenges they face and learnings from their research in common topic areas. They emphasise the implementation of science, sustainability and scaling up solutions which work and recognise that solutions for non-communicable diseases require the engagement of a wide range of actors, including policy makers, practitioners, communities, and civil society.

Project partners from four of the nine partners in the research consortium project Scaling Up NCD Interventions in South East Asia (SUNI-SEA), including HelpAge International, attended this

year's ASM, presenting the project's design and findings from other researchers in the network. Currently, the SUNI-SEA project is nearing the end of its retrospective phase and is in the process of designing a 2.5 year prospective study with a focus on synergies between community-based activities such as older people's associations (OPAs) and primary health care services in Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam. As all GACD research network members are funded through a select number of calls, the SUNI-SEA team found many presentations from other GACD projects relevant for the design of the SUNI-SEA prospective phase. For example, the Community Health Assessment Program in the Philippines (CHAP-P) found that using the Finnish Diabetes Risk Score (FINDRISC), a questionnaire style screener for diabetes, was efficient and cost-effective as a first-line screener for diabetes. A workshop on how to measure scaling up highlighted that using modelling and scenario analysis is a good fit for NCD studies, given the complexity of the contexts in which work is being conducted and the multi-faceted and ongoing nature of interventions to address them.



HelpAge has also been undertaking an exercise in parallel to SUNI-SEA to review our overall approach to community-based groups and health, wellbeing, care and support. This exercise aims to identify evidence-based approaches and develop and support a community of practice in this area. We know that health systems are not solely sufficient in achieving health and we see community-based groups as one way to address social determinants of health, strengthen self-care and extend the reach of primary health care.

Please contact **Caitlin Littleton, Regional Programme Adviser – Care and Health**, if you would like to learn more about this initiative: [caitlin@helpageasia.org](mailto:caitlin@helpageasia.org)

### About SUNI-SEA

#### *International research project* **Scaling-Up NCD Interventions in South East Asia (SUNI-SEA)**

The SUNI-SEA research consortium project was initiated in February 2019 with the objective of strengthening the provision of NCD prevention and management, especially of diabetes and hypertension. Through evidence-based research in Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam, SUNI-SEA will help inform countries how to effectively scale up strategies to tackle non-communicable diseases.

This project has three leading themes: the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of scaling-up interventions and global NCD-instruments for capacity building. Comparative effectiveness research in combination with a participatory approach will be undertaken. Mixed methods will be used to gather qualitative and quantitative data.

Visit the project website for more detail [www.sunisea.org](http://www.sunisea.org)

Follow our Twitter and facebook: [@SUNISEAproject](https://twitter.com/SUNISEAproject)

*This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 825026.*



# Interview

Jaap Koot is a medical doctor. He has over 20 years of experience in international public health and management. Besides his responsibilities at the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG), he also takes the role of Project Coordinator for the SUNI-SEA research consortium project.



## Why is it important to work on NCD intervention with older people in particular?

The first reason is that NCDs occur more in older people, especially with complications. If you have hypertension when in your 40s, then the complications come only in your 50s and 60s. If there are no complications yet, you can prevent them occurring through these interventions. So NCDs by their nature increase with age – you have more NCDs when you are older. The second reason why we need to work with older people is that many of them do not take proper care of themselves. They may not have the energy to eat well, they may feel lonely and when you are lonely, you stop eating and stop being physically active. All those kind of things are related to wellbeing, so if you can prevent loneliness and prevent people from not eating, you can avoid all these NCDs. That is why we need to focus on older people if we want to reduce NCDs and their complications.

## Why is it important to involve the community in NCDs intervention?

Many NCDs such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes are lifestyle related, which means the way you are living. Staff at health facilities can give you medicine, tell you what to do to be healthier and how to avoid complications, but they cannot control how you behave at home. We know from our experience in many countries that if you are alone, it is very difficult to change your behavior. If you have family, friends or neighbours who can help you, it is easier to change your behavior.

## Can you explain the relationship between early intervention and cost effectiveness?

With early intervention, you can avoid medical costs. For example, if you have a stroke or diabetes, there are high medical costs. It depends on the health system in the country. If there is private insurance, the insurance company will have to pay those costs, but if there is no insurance and people have to pay by themselves, which puts a big burden on their families. If you can revert hypertension or diabetes symptoms and get back to normal blood pressure or blood sugar levels, you can avoid those medical costs.

There are also costs for society. If a family member has a stroke and cannot get out of bed, the person who cares for them is losing productivity because that person cannot work in the field or perform any income generating activities. Some older people still do useful work. Even if they are not very active, they can look after their grandchildren or work in some other useful capacity. Losses in productivity place a big burden on society. You can avoid that through early diagnosis and early prevention.

## What have we learnt so far?

We are still at an early stage but we have learnt that even though countries have national programmes or policies, these are difficult to implement. Many health facilities have poorly trained staff or staff are not sufficiently aware of NCD issues. For community groups, the level of functioning is different in each country. We need to work on all those aspects. We cannot give trainings and information without follow-ups. The ability of people and the availability of follow-ups are important elements to make the programmes sustainable.

I hope we can show that you can get better results when health facilities, health centres and dispensaries work together with communities. I hope that we will change the mentality from one of curative care, or treating people when complications arise from their NCDs, to one of prevention of NCDs in the first place. This is part of a bigger programme to achieve better health for people.



## Central Sulawesi relief: Small grants for livelihood support



### ► Indonesia

Fifteen months after the earthquake and tsunami hit Sulawesi island in Indonesia, the Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU) in collaboration with HelpAge International is continuing the relief programme to help the affected population get back to their normal life. The relief phase focuses on outreach health support and livelihood support for older people and people with disabilities. Strengthening older people's associations to be able to manage their activities well and advocating for older people's rights are also important aspects of the programme.

To give older people a chance to set up their income generating activities quickly, cash grants were distributed to about 370 older people in five affected villages. As the first instalment, 60 per cent of the grants requested were given after the application process, which included the submission of business plan proposals.

In December 2019, the YEU monitored the first instalment at a monthly meeting. Bringing together all of the older people who had received a grant, a questionnaire generated from KoBoToolbox was used to collect data. The questionnaires aimed to get information about the usage of the first instalment of the cash grant, whether they had started their business yet or not, and what challenges they faced in running the business. Older people were also requested to bring receipts of items purchased for their business and their business plan along with them. There were also one-on-one interviews in which YEU staff and volunteers could check directly whether the items purchased related to their proposed business plan or not. In the cases of those older people who could not provide the complete documents and receipts, YEU staff planned to visit them at their homes (or temporary shelter) or their business site at a later date for verification. A similar visit was planned for those who were not present during the monitoring.

### Seed fund helps Ibrahim to restart his business



Ibrahim and his wife.



Ibrahim is 60 years old. He was one of the victims of the earthquake and tsunami disaster, and he currently lives in a temporary shelter in Bangga Village, South Dolo Subdistrict, Sigi Regency. Ibrahim has been a member of the Bangga older people's group since last May and he submitted a request for funds to restart his business, which had stopped since the disaster happened in 2018. With a grant that was given to him, he has opened his food stall in a temporary shelter area. With his wife's help, this business has been running for a few weeks. His food stall is well received by the community; customers including village officers and NGO staff come for lunch and dinner. From the daily profit of around 200,000-300,000 Indonesian Rupiah (US\$14-22) per day, he is able to save money and has bought a second-hand motorbike to support his business.

*"I am very happy to be selected as one of the beneficiaries of the livelihood support activity by the YEU. With the funds I received from the first instalment I was able to start my business, and I hope I will receive the second instalment soon so I can use the money to develop my food stall," Ibrahim told YEU.*



## International Day of Older Persons: celebration and government's commitments

### ► Pakistan

Older people in Pakistan actively observed the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2019. Older people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province organised a march in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare, asking for a speedy implementation of the Senior Citizens Act. The Chief Minister of the province shared his message, which was published in the newspapers, highlighting that the wellbeing of older people is the government's top priority.

HelpAge in Pakistan and the Ministry of Human Rights worked jointly towards for the International Day of Older Persons and an awareness-raising campaign was carried out in Islamabad on the day with banners placing along the main roads around the capital. Messages highlighting the contributions that older people make to society and the challenges they face were on aired on the radio.

The Federal Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen M. Mizari, issued an official statement to mark the occasion. She said that the government would take all possible measures to ensure the rights of older people.



Waqas Qureshi/HelpAge International

## Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs bringing benefits to all

### ► Vietnam

In Vietnam, HelpAge's Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) model has now become the Vietnam government's model to respond to rapid ageing, as indicated in the national Plan of Action on Ageing and the national ISHC replication project, as per Decision 1533 of the Prime Minister. There is a growing need for capacity building for local government and the Association of the Elderly (AE) in ISHC establishment, operation and management. In 2018, with support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), HelpAge in Vietnam and the Vietnam Association of the Elderly (VAE) started to implement a three-year partnership project, which focuses on providing technical support for local government and associations of the elderly through

piloting the standard ISHC model in nine selected provinces/cities and coaching local partners during the project's implementation.

As one of the selected provinces, Hai Duong Association of the Elderly (HDAE) has been very enthusiastic and committed in implementing the project. As advised by HelpAge, HDAE approached the provincial Father Land Front (FF) to see if their 'Fund for the Poor' could support the ISHCs. As a result, in 2018, the provincial FF agreed to fund 24 existing ISHCs with 5 million VND (US\$217) each to buy equipment. Continuing their good practice of fundraising, in 2019, by organising study tours and inviting leaders from FF, governmental agencies and mass organisations to attend ISHC activities, the HDAE has shown that where there are ISHCs, people are more confident, more united and have a desire to rise out of poverty.

Seeing the great benefits that ISHCs have brought for the poor and disadvantaged, Hai Duong FF finally decided to support seven more ISHCs, including one special club for the leprosy patient community, with a

total budget of 630 million VND (US\$27,187). Of this amount, each of the six clubs received 50 million VND (US\$2,170) for revolving income generating activities (IGA) as a start-up fund, and 5 million VND (US\$217) for necessary equipment such as weighing scales, blood pressure gauges, whiteboards and wireless microphone sets. For the leprosy patients club, as they have special health care needs, the total budget raised by the AE and FF in partnership with the leprosy hospital is much bigger, 300 million VND (US\$12,946), of which 75 million (US\$3,237) was allocated for equipment and facilities and 225 million (US\$9,709) for the club IGA revolving fund.

"We are considering funding more ISHCs in the coming years through HDAE, as we have found that this is a good investment" – said the chair of HDFF.

These fundraising activities of HDAE have been documented by the project and shared widely with many provinces. Hopefully, more and more provinces will follow this great initiative of Hai Duong and there will be more ISHCs in the country to bring multiple benefits for the older people of today and tomorrow.



For more information please visit <https://bit.ly/2FI4W7Q> or contact Vu Hoai Thu at [thuvh@helpagevn.org](mailto:thuvh@helpagevn.org)

# Promoting the needs and role of older people in Myanmar

## ► Myanmar

Myanmar's Older People's Conference, established in 2015 and funded by HelpAge International, takes place every November. It brings together people who work on issues affecting older people from across the country in an attempt to understand older women's and men's specific needs and how to address them.

The fifth conference was held in Wethe village, Shwe Thauung Yan Township in Ayeyarwaddy Region on 14–15 November 2019. The conference was organised by Myanmar's Older People's Federation and township network committees. This year, the attendance rose to nearly 400 people, with representatives from the Department of Social Welfare, Myanmar's Older People Federation, township network committees (TNCs), inclusive self-help groups (ISHG), the Myanmar Ageing Network and other stakeholders.

During the event, discussions were held on how to raise funds to help community members access healthcare and improve their livelihood opportunities, and to establish ISHGs in new villages.

Also on the agenda were challenges faced by the TNCs, which play an important role connecting village-level ISHGs with Myanmar's Older People's Federation, which represents older people at the national level. There are 12 TNCs representing 136 ISHGs. They provide technical support to ISHGs, monitoring them and liaising with local authorities. However, poor attendance at meetings,

difficulties in forming new groups, lack of funding, poor collaboration with local authorities, and weak participation of volunteers and young people in the groups were some of the issues raised by the TNCs at the conference. The conference provided an excellent opportunity to think about how to solve these issues, and included suggestions such as providing food to members to encourage attendance, organising more fun activities, engaging with youth leaders and maintaining closer relationships with local authorities.

HelpAge informed attendees about the ongoing success of ISHGs in Myanmar and how it plans to build on this success. Currently, there are 216 ISHGs across five states and regions, and Daw Moe Moe Min, Deputy Director of the Department of Social Welfare, shared the government's plans to establish 150 more.

In conclusion, several recommendations were made to improve the health and wellbeing of older people in Myanmar:

- Provide quicker access to certification/ registration cards so they can get discounts and priority services.
- Reduce the age eligibility for the state-funded social pension from 85 and raise the amount given from

10,000 Myanmar kyats (US\$6.80) to 15,000 (US\$10).

- Establish specialised care facilities for older people.
- Provide health insurance.
- Reduce transportation costs and medical expenses.
- Provide more employment opportunities for older people.
- Make day-care centres for older people more accessible by reducing entrance criteria and making them more affordable.
- Provide an allowance for older people who live alone and have no one to support them.

These recommendations brought together voices from across the country, and they will be used to advocate for policy changes by the government.

“This conference is a vital forum to find ways to improve older people's lives in Myanmar, particularly through community groups. Everyone needs to be united on this objective. We had very good discussions, with useful recommendations and objectives we can work towards in the coming year,” said Godfred Paul, Country Director, HelpAge International Myanmar.





## Resources

### Publications



**Keeping our dignity**  
HelpAge International



**Ageing and the SDGs - Key messages**  
HelpAge International



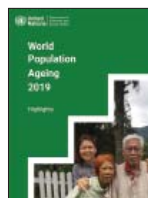
**Tackling perceptions to address mental health in Myanmar**  
HelpAge International



**Using community structures to prevent and manage non-communicable diseases**  
HelpAge International



**Age-inclusive disaster risk reduction toolkit**  
HelpAge International



**World Population Ageing Highlights 2019**  
The United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs



**Disability at a Glance 2019: Investing in Accessibility in Asia and the Pacific**  
The United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific



**Growing Old Before Becoming Rich: Challenges of An Aging Population in Sri Lanka**  
The Asian Development Bank

### Blogs

**Relief aid a lifeline for flood-affected villages in Myanmar** (<https://bit.ly/2O2gYO0>)

Ben Small, HelpAge International

**A step closer towards universal health coverage for an ageing world** (<https://bit.ly/3aNc9ll>)

Camilla Williamson, HelpAge International

**Keeping our dignity on Human Rights Day, and every day** (<https://bit.ly/2GsEDTy>)

Bridget Sleep, HelpAge International

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**Share your ideas with us:** We welcome your opinions, ideas and suggestions. Let us know what you think about *Connect* and how we can improve.

In addition, we welcome articles for consideration. Please send articles at any time to:

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**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**

*Connect* aims to highlight issues of ageing and the rights of older people in Asia Pacific as well as share experiences of the network working with and for older people.

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