

Introduction

On 15 September 2022, HelpAge International, supported by Restless Development and WHO, hosted a webinar to showcase HelpAge’s guide to intergenerational approaches, [Bringing Generations Together for Change](#). HelpAge has used intergenerational approaches in its work for many years, recognising how bringing older and younger people together to work on shared concerns can encourage intergenerational understanding and social cohesion, and benefit all ages and communities. We define intergenerational approaches as those which encourage two or more generations to work together for their mutual benefit and to promote greater communication, understanding and respect. Drawing on the WHO definition, ‘intergenerational contact interventions’ typically bring together older and younger people to work on activities or tasks that encourage cross-generational bonding, and address issues affecting one or more age groups and their wider community.

In recent years, particularly in Asia, many community-based older people’s associations have evolved towards intergenerational groups, known as Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs, which have generated positive outcomes for older women and men, along with other age groups and the wider community. In 2022, working in collaboration with Restless Development, HelpAge produced a short guide to document the learning from these approaches and capture insights into what has worked well, and why, or what challenges have emerged, with a view to sharing and promoting this across our 158 network members in the 86 countries that make up the HelpAge Global Network. This draws on 10 country case studies from practitioners on the ground who have used some form of intergenerational approach in their work with communities to address a wide range of issues including ageism, women’s empowerment, gender-based violence, digital inclusion, peacebuilding, and climate change.

The guide captures learning and reflections from experience and provides testimonies of what can be achieved through intergenerational working, but also some of the challenges and dilemmas involved. Key principles and practical considerations have helpfully emerged from this, and from wider research, to guide those interested in adopting or improving intergenerational ways of working. This initiative also highlighted gaps in our knowledge and analysis that gave rise to new questions for further research and dialogue, which we sought to start tackling through a wider learning exchange with other actors working in this space.

Agenda

Welcome	Introductions and overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening remarks from Chair of HelpAge International, Arun Maira
Panelists session	Conversations with people using intergenerational approaches on the ground <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alfred TM Navo, Restless Development, Sierra Leone • Maya Abi Chahine, University of Seniors, American University of Beirut, Lebanon • Sanju Sisodia, GRAVIS, India
Breakout sessions	Examining intergenerational approaches used by others
Discussants and plenary	HelpAge partners highlight their experience with intergenerational approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections from Alana Officer, WHO, and Natalie Agboeze, Restless Development
Looking forward	Next steps on intergenerational approaches

Key themes

Across the case study presentations, breakout sessions and ensuing plenary discussions, the following key themes emerged, some endorsing the principles, practical steps and lessons offered in the guide, others presenting new angles or perspectives, as indicated below:

Societal roles

- Intergenerational engagement is a natural state of society; the organic relationship between older and younger people has fractured over time in some contexts, driven by modern living, migration, and conflict; this initiative presents an opportunity to reconnect, and possibly reconnect better, with more equal power relations between generations and within communities. *(Key principle: Understanding power dynamics)*
- The case study on climate change in the Thar desert in India, presented by GRAVIS, showcased the benefits of younger educated people finding modern solutions to water conservation, while incorporating the traditional knowledge and wisdom of older people. The community benefited from this collaboration and different generations, in particular younger and older women, appreciated the exchange of knowledge, and the increased status that they gained within the community. *(Key principle: Start with the premise that everyone has a skill and some knowledge to transfer)*

Promoting older and younger people's agency

- Intergenerational approaches provide opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the many contributions that older and younger people bring to society.
- There is still a lot of work to do to push for the political agency of older people and ensure they are not depicted as vulnerable, helpless individuals. (*Key principle: Avoid making assumptions*)
- We need to understand the specific contexts within which intergenerational collaboration takes place in order to see what older and younger people each can bring to it; the Lebanon case study demonstrated that using art to connect people helped change social norms and break down silos. (*Key principles: Context, context...; Activities should be fun!*)

Digital literacy

- Older people with a lack of digital literacy need support in navigating the digital world and filtering information. Those without knowledge or experience could be compromised by misinformation. This is an area where intergenerational connection has been highly constructive, especially during COVID-19 related movement restrictions.
- Influence on national policies can be achieved in many ways: UNFPA Moldova's intergenerational project to strengthen older people's digital skills saw 71 older people become bloggers on different issues, contributing to raising the importance of mainstreaming ageing in national policies. (*Key principle: Pay attention to who leads and who can lead*)

Voice

- An intergenerational approach is essential to amplify voices of older people and engage younger people.
- At the global level, there is a lack of youth engagement when it comes to policy and future-facing change; more needs to be done to highlight that becoming involved in policies and structural change, particularly in health, will benefit younger people as they age. (*Key principle: Think 'structural' changes*)

Ageism

- In Lebanon, recent years have seen a large shift from younger people respecting and listening to older people to marginalising and even infantilising them. Intergenerational activities can break down these attitudes. (*Key principle: Use a rights-based approach as a compass*)
- Some participants noted the detrimental impact of self-directed ageism; some older people feel that they cannot learn new things/participate in society for a myriad of reasons (i.e., family pressure, societal norms, isolation and loneliness). (*Lesson: Individual experience will play a crucial role*)
- In times of crisis, ageism and violence against older people often increases, with older people being deprioritised and seen as a burden on their families.

Structuring and integrating intergenerational interventions

- Intergenerational approaches and groups take time to establish; progress is rarely linear. (*Lesson: It takes time to co-create with participants*)
- Practitioners must engage participants as active agents who can and should be encouraged to lead on shaping intergenerational action. (*Key principle: Go beyond participation to meaningful engagement*)
- An intergenerational initiative cannot be approached without questioning our own assumptions about what older people and younger people are capable of doing, especially in terms of leadership.

New questions and implications for further exploration

Some new questions and implications were highlighted during the learning exchange:

- **Mainstreaming:** should we be mainstreaming intergenerational approaches in programmes so that organisations can avoid segmenting and targeting single groups (i.e., older people, younger people, women, etc.)?
- **Can we encourage donors** to embrace the strength and process benefits of intergenerational approaches and invite them to promote this in funding calls and encourage grant applicants to embed this into proposals and programme design?
- **Can we encourage policy makers** to recognise the equal legitimacy and validity of the voices of older and younger people, especially when they join forces to address common challenges to amplify their collective power and advocate for one another?
- **Linking to faith-based initiatives:** can we engage with what churches and other faith groups are doing globally and nationally on intergenerational dialogue, and explore how we might link to this?

Reflections for the future

After the webinar, we also received some very insightful personal reflections from speakers and contributors at the event for us to think about as we move forward:

- **Intergenerational action helps tackle ageism:** The case studies demonstrated that by acting together, both older and younger people changed their attitudes towards each other, and ageism began to dissolve in the communities' own social realities.
- **Listen carefully:** Collective, intergenerational action must be directed towards something that matters to the community. Outsiders must listen to the community without imposing agendas. By acting on something that matters to them, in terms that make sense to them, people are more likely to cooperate and coordinate with each other. Common goals allow for strengthened working together. When people listen to the concerns and aspirations of others in their communities, and arrive at consensus through dialogue, they can achieve collective results and strengthen the social fabric. These methods must be nurtured, and not substituted or smothered

by 'more efficient' conventional ways of getting things done. This is the aim of the work on intergenerational dialogue.

- **Primacy of community-led action:** There are implications for the roles that external organisations with resources should play in enabling community-led action. They should be wary of imposing their own theories of what is most important and how results will be obtained. External organisations with resources (financial and human) must continue to reflect on their role, with both humility and a basic 'do no harm' approach
- **Embrace difference:** With time and openness to value each other's differences, people of different ages (but also with other intersecting differences or identities) can indeed address together local issues that are crucial to them. It is however important to be realistic and acknowledge that conflicts, misunderstandings and even violence can interrupt the process - especially if stereotypes and traditional social norms hamper the dialogue. It takes time, attentive listening, and selfless patience.
- **Restore the social fabric:** At the community level in most countries, intergenerational interactions have traditionally been part of a 'natural' family/social structure: urban economic migration, refugee crises and extreme poverty have broken some of these structures and created fragmentation of the social fabric, along with trauma, loneliness and destitution. For programme designers and implementers, especially if based in a different country, it is essential to understand micro-context situations before engaging in development interventions bringing different groups together. It is also imperative to trust local organisations and individuals, younger and older, to lead, and not make assumptions on their capacity to do so, as they are more likely to initiate activities that are culturally appropriate, and bring fun, joy, and emotion to the exchanges.

Annex: Additional resources and participants

Additional resources

Webinar participants shared the following resources that may be useful to anyone considering an intergenerational approach in their work:

- Arun Maira
[Author Site](#)
- Restless Development
[The Youth Collective](#)
[The Leadership Labs](#)
[The Power Shifting Principles](#)
- WHO
[The Global Report on Ageism](#)
[UN Decade of Healthy Ageing Platform](#)
- Confederación Española de Organizaciones de Mayores
[Unifying Generations: Building the Pathway to Intergenerational Solidarity](#)

Participants

HelpAge would like to acknowledge all the representatives from a variety of donor bodies, civil society organisations, research institutes and NGOs that attended the event:

Africa Development Aid, South Sudan	InsightShare, UK
Age International, UK	Nadace Krása Pomoci, Czech Republic
Ageing Better UK	Oxfam Netherlands
American University in Beirut, Lebanon	PAHO
Bolton Clarke, Australia	Plan International, Netherlands
Confederación Española de Organizaciones de Mayores	Politechnique University of Valencia, Spain
(COSE), Philippines	Public Health Agency of Canada
Dorcas, Netherlands	Restless Development, UK and Sierra Leone
European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Austria	SIDA, Sweden
Fundacion Navarro Viola, Argentina	The National Endowment for Democracy, USA
Geropolis, Chile	The Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health, Kenya
Global Seniors, Denmark	UNFPA Moldova
GRAVIS, India	UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia
HelpAge Canada	Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile
HelpAge International	Université de Limoges, France
HelpAge USA	Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
	WHO