

# Ageways

ISSUE

67

Practical issues in ageing and development

JUNE 2006



## *Older citizens monitoring*

*Improving access  
to services*

*How older citizens  
monitoring works*

*Learning about rights*

*Action in Bangladesh,  
Ethiopia and Bolivia*

**HelpAge  
International**

Leading global action on ageing

## Comment

### Creating a demand

**Welcome to *Ageways* 67. Poor older people have as much right to a decent standard of living as anyone else. But they are often denied this right, because appropriate policies do not exist or are not being properly implemented.**

**This issue of *Ageways* shows how older people themselves can demand better services. It draws on HelpAge International's older citizens monitoring project, which supported groups of disadvantaged older people to learn about their rights, monitor service delivery and press for improvements.**

**No one expected this to be easy and there were many challenges and lessons to be learnt. But the project gathered momentum as the groups gained confidence. The biggest lesson learnt was that older people could raise their voices and find they were listened to.**

**Celia Till**  
Editor

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### Future issues

*Ageways* is published twice a year. Issue 68, due in December 2006, will be on media and advocacy. We welcome articles for consideration by the end of September.

## Letters

### Dying for land and property

On the slopes of Mount Elgon, eastern Uganda, older people surrender their land to the young generation. This custom has been observed for centuries.

But in recent times, population growth has created a lot of discrimination against older people. There is now not enough land.

The elderly flock is diminishing rapidly. After an older person disagrees with his or her relatives about pieces of land or any other property, the culprits either poison or neglect him or her. They grab the weak older person's land or property, leaving him or her to die miserably, or they attack him or her in the night.

This is why a few of us came up with the idea of creating the Zeboole Aged Friends Foundation (ZAFF). The organisation's aims are in accordance with the UN Resolution of 1948, entitling the elderly flock to protection of their human rights.

Our aim is to prolong the lives of older people in Elgon Slopes and to boost the young population to grow well. Our activities aim to sensitise the younger generation to respect older people, on the theme of, 'Today you are a baby, tomorrow you are an elderly person'. We want the custom of inheriting an older person's property before their death occurs to be disregarded.

*Benjamin Mwambu, Chief Executive Officer, Zeboole Aged Friends Foundation, ZAFF, PO Box 596, Mbale, Uganda.*

**We welcome letters from readers. Please write to: The Editor, *Ageways*, HelpAge International, PO Box 32832, London N1 9ZN, UK. Fax: +44 20 7713 7993 Email: [ctill@helpage.org](mailto:ctill@helpage.org) Letters may be edited.**

## News



*Elizabeth Silas Kulola and Zdenek Placher in Madrid in 2002.*

David González/HelpAge International

### Older people to take part in reviewing the Madrid Plan

In 2007, five years will have passed since 159 UN member states adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). To mark this occasion, national governments and regional bodies have been invited to review progress in implementing MIPAA and mainstreaming ageing into development policies and programmes.

The UN Commission for Social Development has agreed that responsibility for reviewing the plan will not be limited to governments, but will be shared with more stakeholders, including older people.

Besides enabling older people to influence the review process, this 'bottom-up' approach is expected to increase awareness of the policy implications of ageing across different government departments.

The timetable for the review is:

**2007** – UN regional economic commissions plan regional reviews with interested governments; national governments identify areas for participatory review of MIPAA.

**2008** – Global report on findings of reviews; roundtables and panel

## New publications

discussions on global issues; identification of themes for ongoing review.

Many governments have established policies and focal points for ageing. However, ageing issues remain a low priority for policy development and budget allocation. Civil society organisations therefore have an important role to play in making MIPAA a reality. They can do this by calling on their governments to review governmental action on ageing and supporting them in the process.

Older people's groups and networks, non-governmental organisations, media groups, research and policy development institutions can:

- contact national focal points on ageing and request plans for the national review and appraisal of MIPAA, or request that a review is carried out according to the recommendations of the UN Commission for Social Development
- offer to participate in review activities by providing expertise, information, access to older people, publicity or resources.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has developed guidelines for governments on how to review implementation of MIPAA. The guidelines offer clear steps for reviewing current policy and shaping future action. Most importantly they provide examples from several countries of how older people can engage in all stages of the process, leading to shaping policies affecting older people and improving implementation of MIPAA.

The guidelines will soon be published in several languages on the UNDESA website at:

[www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing)

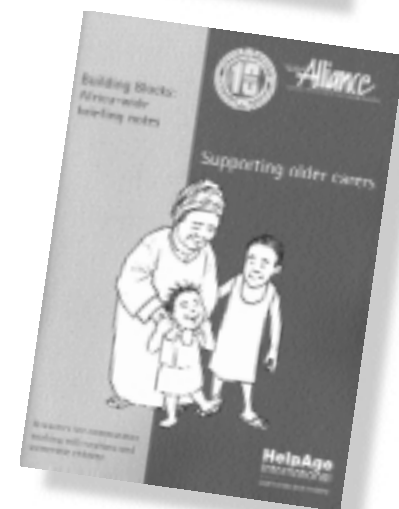
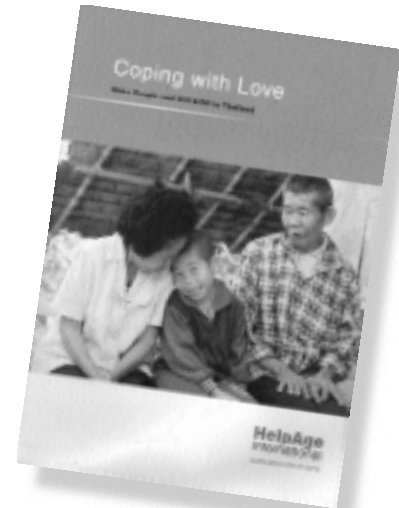
### Coping with love: Older people and HIV/AIDS in Thailand

This report highlights the issues faced by older people affected by HIV/AIDS in Thailand, the contributions they are making to their households, and the lack of services and support available to them. It is published in English and Thai by HelpAge International's Asia-Pacific regional development centre (*address on page 15*).

### Supporting older carers

These briefing notes explain why programmes designed to support orphans and vulnerable children need to pay more attention to the needs of the older people who care for them. They are part of the *Building blocks: Africa-wide briefing notes series*, published by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and HelpAge International. Available in English, French and Portuguese from HelpAge International, London (*address on page 16*).

Both publications can be downloaded from HelpAge International's website at: [www.helpage.org/resources](http://www.helpage.org/resources)



## Website says more about ageing

*HelpAge International has relaunched its website to provide a wider range of information on ageing and development in a clearer, more accessible way.*



The new website focuses on four key themes: social protection and livelihoods; rights; HIV/AIDS; and emergencies. It contains more news, statistics, case studies, quotes and photos of older people. All HelpAge International's publications, including *Ageways*, can be downloaded from the website.

Visit the website at: [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)



# Improving access to services

*Why do poor older people need government services? Why do they often miss out? And how can citizens monitoring help? Ageways examines the issues.*

countries will be aged over 60. This growing sector of the population will place more demand on government services, requiring increased spending.

## Missing out

Across the world, poor older people frequently miss out on their right to appropriate services because:

- appropriate policies, laws and services do not exist
- where they do exist, older people are not aware of their entitlements
- selection processes do not benefit the most vulnerable older people
- older people lack identification to prove their entitlement
- they cannot afford to pay for services
- services are too far away
- transport costs are too high
- waiting times are too long
- service-providers discriminate against older people.

In Mozambique, a survey in eight communities found that only two-fifths of older people had identification cards, which they needed to claim free health care. Women were twice as likely as men to lack identification cards.

In Bolivia, as many as 800,000 people have no identity card, which they need to claim a range of benefits. Most of these people are from indigenous communities in rural areas, including large numbers of older people.

## Pro-poor policies

Developing-country governments and international donors are becoming increasingly aware that basic services are not achieving the desired impact on poverty reduction.



*Older people in Jamaica are entitled to subsidised drugs for common age-related illnesses, but many pharmacies do not participate in the scheme.*

**O**lder people have the same right as anyone else to dignity, an adequate standard of living, health and social services, and participation in society. But they are often denied these rights because of age discrimination.

## Need for services

Older people are among those most likely to live in poverty and isolation, because of low income, declining health, and lack of family or social support. In poor communities, or communities disrupted by conflict, HIV/AIDS or other crises, the ability of the family alone to provide for

its older members is severely limited. Indeed, older people often take responsibility for caring for others.

Governments and other agencies provide a range of services to support their citizens' right to live with dignity and security – such as water and sanitation, health and social care, credit and income support schemes, and education. Some services, such as state pensions and treatment for chronic age-related conditions, are aimed specifically at older people. Older people have a right to equitable access to all these services.

Rapid population ageing has major implications for service provision. By 2050, one in five people in developing

*'The government needs older people to advise on how to better run this country. Older people should tell the government what to do and even how to do it.'*

*District councillor, Arusha, Tanzania*

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted by 159 countries in 2002, marks a significant step towards achieving equal participation of older people in the development process, because it specifically applies the poverty-related Millennium Development Goal to older people.

This means that governments are committed to including older people in policies and programmes to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. MIPAA also calls for older people's inclusion in healthcare, social protection and HIV/AIDS programmes.

A key way to implement MIPAA is by including older people's issues in national poverty reduction programmes and sectoral programmes on health and social welfare. This requires older people's participation in the development of such policies and programmes, to make sure that they benefit equitably from them.

Much work needs to be done to turn MIPAA into reality, however. While governments have a duty to implement MIPAA, older people have a vital part to play in monitoring their governments' progress and holding them to account.

## Putting policy into practice

Promoting poor older people's access to services means more than having policies in place – it means supporting older people to demand their rights. Poor older people need to know what services they are entitled to, and how to access them. Without pressure from organised and informed older people, even the best designed policies are unlikely to reach the poorest older people.

Politicians have busy agendas. Older people and their organisations need constantly to remind politicians about older people's issues. Many politicians are supportive of older people, but they need help to take up their issues.

Older people themselves need to demonstrate why they need services, and what the barriers are that prevent them from accessing services. This gives politicians the information they need to persuade their governments to take action.

In many countries, the move to decentralised government has opened doors for community members to participate in development planning. In Bolivia, local governments now draw up their own annual plans and budgets, which civil society organisations are expected to monitor.

Population ageing means that older people are gaining an increasing share of the vote. By mobilising and using their vote, older people can have influence.

At election time in Bangladesh, HelpAge International's partner, Resource Integration Centre (RIC), organised a rally of older people. Parliamentary candidates, addressing the rally, promised to support older people, because they recognised that older people were a voting power and that they were aware of their rights.

## Older citizens monitoring

This issue of *Ageways* describes how HelpAge International supported older people to monitor the delivery of government services and see how far their governments were implementing MIPAA. The older citizens monitoring project promoted dialogue between older people, civil society organisations and governments, in order to develop policies and practices benefiting disadvantaged older people.

Unlike a practical project, which provides for people's needs here and now, the project aimed to bring about more sustainable change. The point was to benefit both current and future generations of older people, within and beyond the project areas.

Community monitoring requires a lot of time and support, but the investment pays off as community members and supporting NGOs build confidence to take up rights issues. As the following pages show, the citizens monitoring approach proved an effective way of enabling poor older people to raise their voices and bring about change.

# An outline of the project

*HelpAge International's older citizens monitoring project supported groups of poor older people in five countries to monitor the delivery of government services and advocate for improvements.*



Astrid Walker/HelpAge International

*Miriam Said, an activist in Dodoma, Tanzania, now gets free health care.*

**T**he aim of HelpAge International's older citizens monitoring project was to enable poor older people to measure their governments' progress in implementing the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

An underlying principle was that older people should become experts about their rights and reality – they would learn to collect information and use it for their own empowerment.

The five countries and supporting NGOs were:

**Bangladesh** – Resource Integration Centre (RIC)

**Bolivia** – HelpAge International

**Kenya** – HelpAge Kenya

**Jamaica** – St Catherine Community Development Agency (SACDA)

**Tanzania** – HelpAge International, Chawama Arusha and Sawata Dodoma

The project, which ran from 2002-2006 with funding from the UK Department for International Development, was carried out in three phases, with some overlap between each.

In the audit phase, policies were analysed and stakeholders identified. In the second phase, older people's groups, supported by NGOs, planned and carried out monitoring and advocacy activities. In all five countries, they chose to monitor their access to state pensions and/or health services.

In the third phase, the groups continued monitoring and advocacy, and discussed how to extend the project. Supporting NGOs all met at the end of each phase.

A similar project was also carried out in Ethiopia (see page 11).

## Powerful results

The older citizens monitoring project achieved some powerful results. It increased older people's access to services, improved governments' response to older people's issues, and built older people's and partners' skills and confidence.

### Access to services

More older people in the project areas are now registered for pension schemes, or free or subsidised health services; fewer older people are being

charged for free services; banks and health facilities have improved procedures for serving older people; doctors with specialist training have been assigned to health centres.

### Government response

Local governments have given older people's organisations office space; a district authority in Tanzania has issued letters confirming vulnerable older people's eligibility for free health services; the Bolivia government has transferred funds to the national health fund; the Bangladesh government has raised the level and coverage of the old-age allowance.

### Skills and confidence

More older people are aware of their entitlements; more older people are taking up issues with service providers and government officials, including issues other than health care and pensions; older people are supporting each other, for example, through home visits and emergency distributions.

Older people are involved in selection processes for means-tested benefits; older people are participating in local development programmes; older people's organisations are working more closely with local government; supporting NGOs are contributing to national policy development and review.

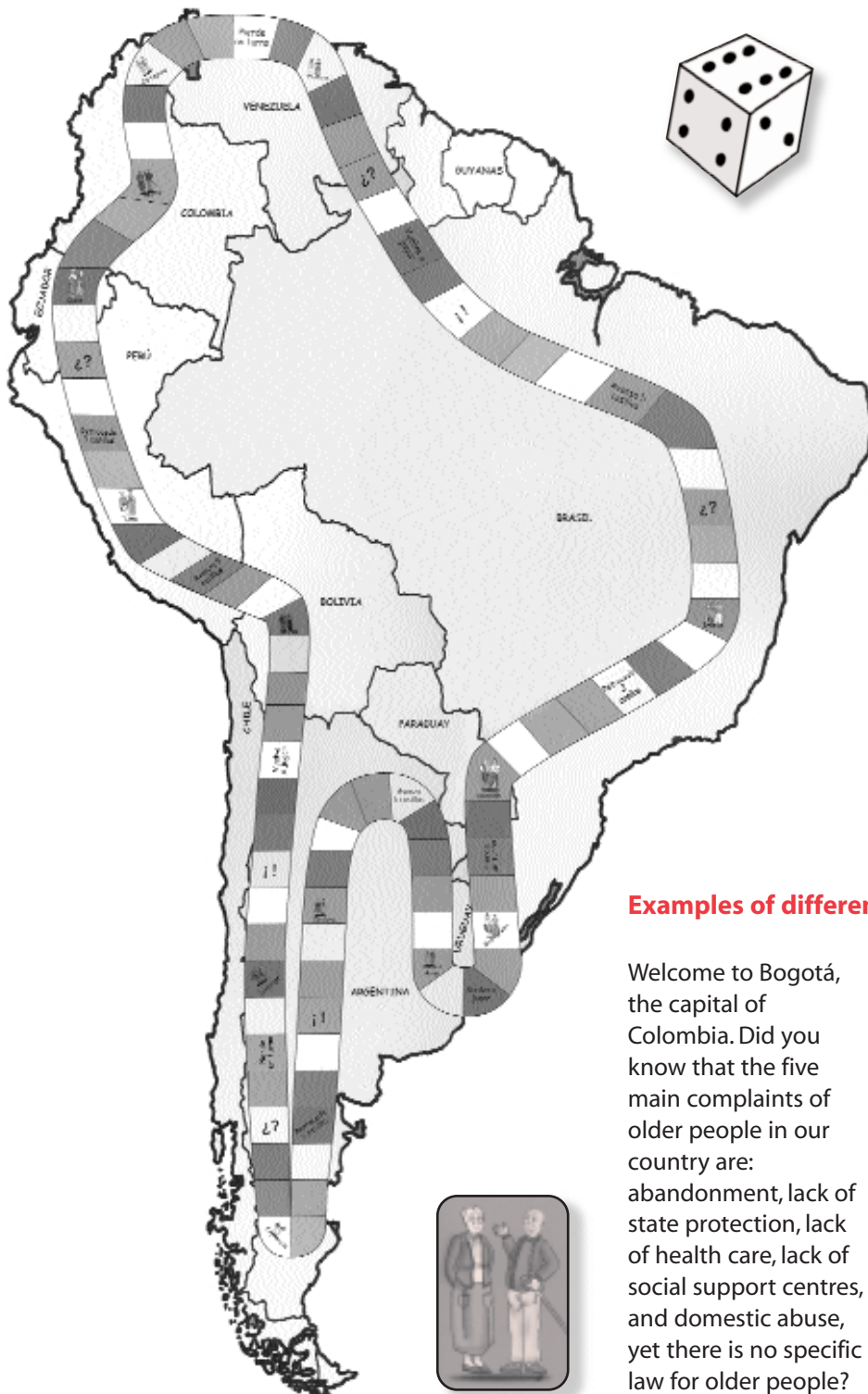
### Taking this approach further

Older people and supporting NGOs are keen to extend the citizens monitoring approach. In Bangladesh, RIC is hosting visits from older people's organisations in India, China, Cambodia and Vietnam, who want to replicate the project. In Bolivia, older people's groups are now planning to monitor the *Bonosol* (annual social pension) and share their experience with groups in Chile and Peru.



# A game for learning about rights

This board game was produced by HelpAge International in Latin America to help older people learn about their rights. You might like to adapt it.



## How to play

The game (originally in Spanish) consists of a large board with a map of South America on it, and three sets of cards. The cards have illustrations on the front and text about older people’s rights on the back.

Players take it in turns to throw the dice and move along a path that takes them through different countries in South America.

Depending on the square they land on, players may pick up a card and read out a statement or answer a question printed on the back (see below).

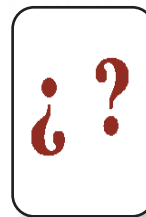
There are also squares telling players to go forward, go back, or miss a turn.

The winner is the player who finishes first – and everyone ends up learning a bit more.

*More information: James Blackburn, Regional Representative, HelpAge International Latin America Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

### Examples of different cards and text printed on the back

Welcome to Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Did you know that the five main complaints of older people in our country are: abandonment, lack of state protection, lack of health care, lack of social support centres, and domestic abuse, yet there is no specific law for older people?



As older people we have a right to participate. How can we make sure that we are listened to?



We older people have the right to a dignified economic income that allows us to live as human beings.

# How older citizens monitoring works

*This article describes the main activities of HelpAge International's older citizens monitoring project.*



*Elijah Osbourne shares a podium with Rae Barrett of the Jamaica health ministry.*

**H**elpAge International's older citizens monitoring project supported groups of older people in five countries to monitor their access to health care and pension programmes (see page 6).

The main activities are listed below, although the order can vary:

- analyse policies and entitlements
- collect data on ageing and poverty
- identify the main stakeholders
- identify and prioritise older people's concerns
- decide what to monitor and launch the project
- support older people to monitor service delivery
- support advocacy and communications activities.

## **Policy environment**

Research rights and entitlements that are relevant to poor older people. These range from international agreements, such as the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), to national and local policies, laws and services.

A key document is often the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). This may mention vulnerable groups, perhaps specifically older people. Other relevant documents include budgetary processes, the national policy for older people, and sectoral plans such as the health plan.

Specific provisions for older people may include free or discounted health services, and pension schemes or other cash transfers.

## **Data on ageing and poverty**

Collect basic information about older people, such as the number and proportion of the population, living arrangements, occupations and income sources, health status and sources of treatment, and main problems faced. Collect separate data for men and women, and for different ethnic groups if relevant.

Sources may include academic research, government reports on social policy, NGO reports, and donor papers, such as DFID country strategy papers. Identify gaps in the information you collect and work out how to fill them. It may help to carry out a survey.

## **Stakeholder analysis**

Find out which groups and individuals can influence policy, and how civil society organisations can engage with these people. Find out what opportunities there are for older people to participate in poverty reduction processes.

Stakeholders include international, national and local organisations, both in and outside the field of ageing – pensioners' associations, other older people's organisations and networks, development NGOs, human rights organisations, local government, service providers, ministries of health, social welfare and finance, government planning and social policy teams, national HIV/AIDS council, international donors such as DFID, international development agencies such as UNDP, and the media.

Meet representatives of these organisations to discuss policies affecting poor older people. Work out which people are potential allies and identify those to work with. Best results are usually obtained by working with people who are supportive, rather than confronting those who are not.

Invite stakeholders to join initial discussions about the project. In Tanzania, district governments in both project areas were very supportive. They mobilised older people and encouraged them to form committees.

During the project the list of key stakeholders is likely to change, as individuals move jobs, new governments are elected, and the project itself develops.

## **Older people's concerns**

Use participatory methods to enable poor older people to identify their



*‘One sees all the sad cases that one wants to help. When you tell people about the rights they have... it’s like taking a blindfold off their eyes.’*

*Doña Mery Lozano, older citizens monitoring group, Bolivia*

main concerns and the way they make these known to local authorities. Make sure that both men's and women's views are represented, and the views of potentially marginalised groups such as disabled older people and those from ethnic minorities.

### **Project launch**

The project can now be planned in more detail, including which entitlements to monitor and how, and which older people's organisations to work with.

A formal launch involving all the main stakeholders – older people, local and national authorities, international agencies and the media – helps to bring everyone on board and generate publicity.

### **Monitoring service delivery**

Work with existing older people's organisations, or set up new organisations if none exist. Introduce the project aims and approach.

Run participatory training sessions with older people to raise awareness of their right to services, and of their need to be involved in policies that affect them. It can be useful to include local government representatives, service providers and community leaders in awareness-raising sessions.

Discuss with older people what they want to achieve from the project. Consider how this links with national policies and how feasible it is to monitor service delivery. It is easier to monitor delivery of a specific policy or programme than a general right.

Support older people to set up monitoring groups and elect group

leaders. Help the groups plan what services to monitor, how to do this, and how to communicate with different stakeholders. Arrange training for monitoring groups and project leaders in leadership, data collection and analysis, media relations and advocacy.

Help monitoring groups to agree ‘indicators’ to measure the effectiveness of services. In Jamaica, older people monitored their access to a subsidised drugs scheme. Indicators included the number of older people entitled to subsidised drugs, and the number who actually received them.

In Tanzania, older people developed three sets of indicators to monitor their access to free health services. One set focused on quality of care. These indicators were: resting place (chair, ground, standing); medical staff listening to older people (poor, average, good); older person satisfied with the service (yes, no); use of language – discussion (poor, average, good); greetings (yes, no); mocking (yes, no).

### **Advocacy and communications**

Help monitoring groups develop an advocacy and communications plan at the same time as they plan monitoring activities. Details will change as the project progresses, but it is essential to have an overall plan from an early stage, as this will steer the project. This means identifying the main people you want to influence, including other older people, and how to reach them.

Ways to communicate with local governments and service providers may include meetings and round-table discussions, backed up by

documented evidence of older people's experience.

Policy makers and others at national level also need clear information, presented through meetings, reports, presentations or project visits. Arranging for older people to take the microphone at national-level meetings has proved a powerful way for them to put their message across.

Effective ways of communicating with older people and their communities include house-to-house visits, drama, group discussions, community and religious meetings, posters and project newsletters.

The media has an essential part to play in advocacy. Develop links with supportive media representatives, explain the project to them, invite them to talk to older people, ask them to meetings and send them findings. List events that the media is likely to be interested in, such as International Day of Older Persons or national elections, and plan to get coverage at these times.

Older people themselves and supporting NGOs can carry out advocacy at different levels. In Jamaica, older people visited pharmacies and hospitals to encourage them to participate in the government's subsidised drugs scheme. SACDA, the supporting NGO, took part in discussions with government policy advisors. Both SACDA and older people themselves spoke at a national meeting with government representatives.

In Bangladesh, older people gave local administrators lists of vulnerable people to include in the means-tested pension scheme. RIC, the supporting NGO, developed relationships with other older people's organisations, local authorities, banks and public health departments. At national level, RIC organised a parade to mark International Day of Older Persons, and kept in touch with government officials and the wider NGO community.

# Gaining cash and confidence

*More older people in Bangladesh are receiving state pensions, thanks to the influence of older citizens monitoring groups.*



Resource Integration Centre

**Older people involved in the project take to the streets to demand their rights.**

**In Bangladesh, nearly half the population lives below the poverty line. For older people, the situation is particularly tough. The state provides a means-tested old-age allowance and a widow's allowance, but many older people who are eligible for these do not receive them.**

In 2003, the Bangladeshi NGO, Resource Integration Centre (RIC), set up a project to help older people tackle the problem. The project was based in two areas – Pubail, a suburb near Dhaka, and Sreeramkathi in the rural south-west.

The aim was for older people to find out how far the government was delivering on its policy commitments,

to increase older people's participation in planning and monitoring processes, and to influence policy makers to prioritise provision of state benefits for disadvantaged older people.

RIC started by carrying out an extensive analysis of policies and entitlements for older people. RIC then held meetings with older people in nearly 80 villages to discuss their priorities. The major problems identified were food security, low income, lack of assets and inadequate health services.

RIC helped older people in each village to form an association (known as older people's committees). Just under 6,000 older people took part, with similar numbers of men

and women. It was agreed to focus on three entitlements – the old-age allowance, widow's allowance and access to health services.

Each older people's committee elected four or five members to form a monitoring group. Monitoring group members received training from RIC in leadership and data collection. They carried out censuses and collected information from older people on the delivery of pensions and health services.

The research revealed that there were significantly higher numbers of older people than were recorded in the latest government census. It also showed that many older people were not receiving pensions and services, despite being eligible. In Pubail, only 85 older people were receiving the old-age allowance, out of 978 who were eligible.

The monitoring groups held regular meetings with local government officials to discuss their findings. They helped eligible older people to claim their pension entitlements. In Pubail alone, the number of people receiving the old-age allowance rose from 85 to 480. Banks also improved procedures for serving older people.

Representatives of older people's committees are now included in discussions about who should be added to eligibility lists.

At national level, the government increased the old-age allowance from US\$2.50 to US\$2.75 a month in 2005, and extended coverage from 1 million to 1.32 million people – probably at least partly thanks to RIC's work on the issue.

The project has had wider benefits too. The sense of solidarity and communal strength within the older people's committees has boosted older people's confidence enormously. Many have since become involved in wider community activities.

*More information: Haseeb Khan, Director, RIC, GOP Box 2789, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: ricdirector@yahoo.com*

*'Before, we were lambs. Now we are lions!'*

*Bhimkanthi, older people's committee chairman, Bangladesh*

# Securing a role in development planning

*Lizzie Nkosi and Conny Demontis explain how older people in Ethiopia have secured a role in district-level planning.*

**E**thiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. More than half the population is under-nourished and 80 per cent live on less than US\$2 a day. Ethiopia is a signatory to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, but older people's voices are rarely heard in poverty-reduction processes.

HelpAge International worked in two poor *woredas* (districts) of southern Ethiopia to improve the quality of life of poor older people and their communities by increasing older people's participation in development planning.

Ethiopia's decentralised poverty reduction programme (SDPRP) provided an opportunity for engagement at local level.

The first step was to assess the capacity of *woreda* governments to plan and manage development projects and agree areas of capacity building.

At a project launch in each *woreda*, a committee was established to select 12 peasant associations (the lowest level of government administration) to work with – those in the most deprived areas.

Older members of each peasant association were elected to form monitoring groups, one each for men and women, so that their different views would be represented. Following training in participatory rural appraisal, the older people's monitoring groups consulted their communities to identify priorities for inclusion in *woreda* development plans.

Each monitoring group selected a representative to sit on a special 'apex' group. The apex group had a place on the *woreda* development committee, the body responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring development projects.

## Building on local traditions

In the project areas, older people, particularly older men, have a traditional role as community leaders. Peasant associations and *woreda* development committees usually include elders' representatives. The project built on these traditions, enabling older people, through the apex groups, to provide a formal link between their communities and *woreda* governments, and contribute to *woreda*-wide planning.

A three-day workshop was held in each *woreda* for apex group members, *woreda* officials and partner NGO staff. The apex groups and *woreda* officials jointly agreed indicators for monitoring basic services. They also agreed how the *woreda* government would respond to priorities identified by communities. The apex groups and *woreda* development committee members monitored delivery of key services on a quarterly basis.

## Managing the community fund

The project provided a community fund to pilot participatory planning and management processes. The fund was managed jointly by the *woreda* government, apex group and partner NGO. Older people's monitoring groups and apex groups monitored delivery of services.

The community fund financed 14 projects, including water supply, health post construction and non-formal education classes, in line with the priorities identified by poor communities.

Overall, the project increased poor older people's understanding of community issues, government plans and budgets, and the SDPRP. It established older people's role in *woreda*-level planning. Communities became better organised to demand their rights. It also increased *woreda* officials' awareness of the SDPRP and their ability to engage with communities.

*HelpAge International's partners were the Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association and HUNDEE-Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative. The project was funded by the Development Assistance Group.*

*Lizzie Nkosi is programme director, HelpAge International, Ethiopia and Conny Demontis is programme officer, HelpAge International, London.*

*More information: Abiy Seifu, Project Officer, HelpAge International, Ethiopia (address on page 15).*

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*'The Government has never come to our areas with development work, and asked us what we want. This is the first time in all my life. Our voice is heard through this project.'*

*Apex group member from Mulo Sululta woreda, Ethiopia.*

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# Some questions *answered*

*Here are some practical tips from HelpAge International's citizens monitoring project and a similar project in Ethiopia.*



Resource Integration Centre

**Older men and women in Bangladesh use household items to represent different services and identify priorities for the older citizens monitoring project.**

## **What was the supporting NGOs' role?**

Supporting NGOs had a crucial role in introducing the concept of citizen monitoring and facilitating older people to organise. Many older people who are socially excluded do not believe they have the power to change things. Supporting NGOs helped older people to build their confidence and understand that they had rights.

Some supporting NGOs felt that it was important to work with existing older people's organisations, while others established new groups. In Jamaica, SACDA worked with existing senior citizens clubs, integrating older citizens monitoring into their activities.

In Bangladesh, RIC helped to establish older people's committees (associations) in 80 villages. However, RIC had already worked in these villages for several years. This proved an advantage, since poor people often expect to see immediate gains from participating in a project. The older people were more willing to become involved in the project because of the existing relationship with RIC.

## **How were the monitoring groups organised?**

Older people's organisations elected members to form monitoring groups of about 5-15 people. The monitoring groups collected information, reported back to their fellow older people, and planned follow-up activities.

Some monitoring groups had their own premises, while others worked from their homes, schools or community centres. In Bangladesh, monitoring groups recommended having a meeting room for each older people's committee for the project's sustainability.

## **How important was it for older people to collect information?**

It was important for older people themselves to collect evidence about the problems they faced. This mobilised older people and made them visible to service providers and policy makers. The evidence they collected, combined with data gathered by supporting NGOs, provided a powerful tool for advocacy.

At first, some monitoring groups collected more information than they needed and found it hard to analyse. Some initially struggled to collect information regularly, using the same indicators each time.

## **What were some of the key challenges?**

Some supporting NGOs felt that the less tangible nature of the older citizens monitoring approach made it harder for older people to understand. Understanding and 'ownership' of the project needed to be built gradually.

The word 'monitoring' has political connotations and was not always easy to accept. HelpAge Kenya chose to describe the project as 'participation in decision-making'.

In many cases, the project challenged a culture in which older people were used to listening to leaders, whether government or religious, but not to questioning them. Nor were older people used to speaking to one another about their concerns. Older people's confidence grew as the project progressed.

## **How easy was it to engage poor and marginalised older people?**

Poverty presented a challenge. In Kenya, older people were reluctant

to take part in a monitoring project while their needs for material support were unmet. Project funds were used to support income-generating activities, around which older people's groups were formed. These then became forums for planning and carrying out monitoring activities.

In Tanzania, monitoring groups found that some older people were unwilling to be interviewed because they expected to receive some tangible benefit. The problem was dealt with by village leaders providing one-off contributions to vulnerable older people and their families, as they learnt about their situation through the project.

Some groups experienced high drop-out rates. In Bolivia, numbers in some groups dropped from 15 to 6. Reasons given included health problems, tiredness, the need to work, death, lack of family support, and lack of respect shown by authorities. However, the main reason given was that the work was unpaid, although this had been explained at the outset.

In Bangladesh, marginalised groups, such as an itinerant snake-charmer community, became involved in the project, although their participation was limited. In general, the poorest and oldest people were the least actively involved. However, they tried to remain in touch with the older people's committees because they still had expectations of possible benefits.

### How were different views of men and women represented?

Most older people's organisations and monitoring groups included both men and women. In Ethiopia, however, separate groups of men and women were formed to represent their different views.

In Bangladesh, RIC followed the government principle of reserving at least three of the 12 places in each monitoring group for women. However, leaders of these groups were mainly men.

In Tanzania, non-literate men or women were elected as chairpersons of older people's committees, and literate men or women were elected as secretaries. This resulted in fairly equal representation of men and women, with more women than men becoming chairpersons. In Bolivia, monitoring groups elected men as leaders and women as treasurers, following local tradition.

In Kenya, women were confident to speak in some situations, such as the church, but not in others, such as *barazas* (meetings called by village heads), even when they were in the majority. However, women involved in the older citizens monitoring project became more confident about speaking in public and received encouragement from village heads.

### How important were language and literacy skills?

Participatory research techniques enabled less educated older people to identify and prioritise their problems. In Bangladesh, groups of older people produced diagrams on the ground, using household items to represent different needs and availability of services. In Kenya, the use of posters on poverty, HIV/AIDS and rights helped to generate debate about these issues among older people.

In Bolivia, some monitoring group members did not speak Spanish, the official language, so members worked in pairs of Spanish and non-Spanish speakers. Although some indigenous-language speakers found it difficult to communicate with Spanish-speaking officials, they were regarded as an asset, because they could communicate effectively with some of the most excluded sectors of the population – older indigenous people.

Lack of literacy skills was not necessarily a barrier to communicating. In Bolivia, one older woman, who took responsibility for communication, did not know how to read or write, but she spoke well on TV and radio.

### How did monitoring groups engage with local authorities?

Some older citizens monitoring groups had more cooperation from local government than others. In Bolivia, some local administrators did not understand the groups' role and were not willing to share information with them. They used excessive bureaucracy as a weapon, sending the monitors from office to office or telling them to return the next day.

The use of official credential cards, signed by the supporting NGO and local government or regional association of older people, helped them gain access. Insistence was the principle strategy used by all the older people's monitoring groups, however. They simply kept knocking on doors until they were opened.

In Tanzania, older people in Monduli district benefited from a good relationship with a very supportive ward councillor. The councillor had a seat on the district council and was chairman of the district sub-committee on health and water. He realised that the older citizens monitoring approach could provide him with the necessary information to push forward his personal commitment of supporting older people's issues.

He used the information gathered by older people, about the problems that vulnerable older people were having in accessing their entitlement to free health services, to persuade ward executive officers to put this on the agenda of the district council committee.

The district council followed up by issuing guidelines to all ward executive officers in the district. The guidelines stated that government doctors should be informed of the new policy to offer free health services to vulnerable older men and women, and that village leaders should provide lists of vulnerable older men and women to all government health centres and dispensaries.

# Bringing improvements in healthcare

*Orlando Gonzales describes how groups of older people in Bolivia have helped to translate the government's healthcare policy into real improvements in services.*



Orlando Gonzales/HelpAge International

**A monitoring group in Tarija.**

**B**olivia is the poorest country in South America. Nearly six in ten older people live on less than US\$1 per day.

The Bolivian government is a signatory to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Its Poverty Reduction Paper also commits support to older people. The government has adopted a number of policies and laws favouring older people, including discounted services and taxes, free health care and an annual pension.

So the provisions are there, but are they being followed through? After analysing the policy environment, HelpAge International supported existing groups of older people to find out. The groups, under the umbrella of the National Association of Older People, were based in five cities, including the capital La Paz,

At an introductory workshop, the older people's groups decided that the most pressing issue to monitor was the implementation of free health care for older people with no health insurance. Each group selected one

or two representatives to become 'experts', who were committed to participating throughout the entire project.

In the larger cities, the experts monitored the actions of various stakeholders responsible for providing health services, including local government officers, healthcare providers and the *Caja Nacional Salud* (national health fund), which provides free health care through its urban clinics.

The older people's experts in La Paz also engaged with staff in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health, to make sure that payments were being made to the national health fund, and to propose better systems for service provision.

The project presented a number of challenges. The older people's experts needed extensive training in skills such as public speaking, stress management and data analysis. Not all of them spoke Spanish, the official language – so they worked in pairs with at least one in each pair being a Spanish-speaker.

More fundamentally, some local governments had difficulty

understanding the concept of civil society monitoring. This was addressed through awareness-raising workshops to explain the project's objectives.

National Association of Older People chair, Don Felipe Francisco, commented afterwards: 'Now they know that we're here to help them, and to show them where the problems lie.'

## Treasury debt

The experts' findings confirmed that healthcare services for older people were indeed inadequate. They also revealed that this was not the fault of the service providers, but was because the Bolivian treasury had failed to provide funding for the health insurance scheme. The treasury owed the healthcare providers nearly US\$15 million.

The groups presented their findings to the Bolivian finance minister, resulting in a commitment to cancel the debt. By September 2005, most of the debt and annual premium had been paid.

Locally, the project helped to improve services – for example, reducing waiting times for older people at clinics, and assigning medical staff with training in older people's health issues to older people's services.

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*'The problem was that the authorities wanted to ignore us. They made us return time after time, but we were insistent... They finally gave us the attention we deserved.'*

*Don Felipe, monitoring group member, La Paz*



## HelpAge International Affiliates

### Caribbean

Action Ageing Jamaica  
ECHO, Grenada  
HelpAge Barbados/Barbados National Council on Aging  
Haitian Society for the Blind  
HelpAge Belize  
National Council of and for Older Persons/HelpAge St Lucia  
Old People's Welfare Association (OPWA), Montserrat  
REACH Dominica  
Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP), Antigua

### Africa

APOSEMO, Mozambique  
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Elim Hlanganani Society for the Care of the Aged, South Africa  
HelpAge Ghana (HAG)  
HelpAge Kenya  
HelpAge Zimbabwe  
Maseru Women Senior Citizen

Association, Lesotho  
Mauritius Family Planning Association  
Muthande Society for the Aged (MUSA), South Africa  
Regional Centre for Welfare of Ageing Persons in Cameroon (RECEWAPEC)  
Senior Citizens' Council, Mauritius  
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Sudanese Society in Care of Older People (SSCOP)  
Uganda Reach the Aged Association

### Asia/Pacific

Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (BWHC)  
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Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), Philippines  
Council on the Ageing (Australia)  
Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV), Thailand  
HelpAge India  
HelpAge Korea  
HelpAge Sri Lanka  
Helping Hand Hong Kong

Instituto de Acção Social de Macau  
Mongolian Association of Elderly People  
NACSCOM, Malaysia  
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Pakistan Medico International  
Positive Ageing Foundation, Australia  
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Tsao Foundation, Singapore  
USIAMAS, Malaysia

### Europe

Age Concern England  
Caritas Malta HelpAge, Malta  
Centre for Policy on Ageing, UK  
Cordaid, Netherlands  
DaneAge Association, Denmark  
Elderly Woman's Activities Centre, Lithuania  
Help the Aged, UK  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), UK  
Mission Armenia

Second Breath (Gerontological Association of Moldova)  
Slovene Philanthropy  
UMUT (Resource Centre for Elderly People), Kyrgyzstan  
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### Latin America

Asociación Gerontológica Costarricense (AGECO), Costa Rica  
Caritas Chile  
CooperAcción, Peru  
CESTRA, Colombia  
ISALUD, Argentina  
Mesa de Trabajo de ONGs sobre Personas Mayores (Lima Co-ordinating Group), Peru  
Red de Programas Para al Adulto Mayor, Chile  
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# The greatest experience of my life

*Doña Mery Lozano de Aranibar, a community activist from Bolivia, describes how it felt to address the United Nations.*



*Doña Mery Lozano de Aranibar speaks at the United Nations.*

**D**oña Mery Lozano de Aranibar is a 63-year-old widow from La Paz, Bolivia. She is president of an older people's community organisation and an active member of an older citizens monitoring group supported by HelpAge International. In February 2006, Doña Mery travelled to New York to address the UN Commission for Social Development's session on reviewing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).

'When I talked about the older citizens monitoring project I sat in front of the United Nations commissioners and talked from the heart.

'I wasn't nervous or scared because I have been a part of the project for three years and feel proud of our achievements in securing access to health care for older people in El Alto and Potosí. At times I felt overcome with emotion and wanted to cry.

'When I finished, I looked around the meeting room at the various commissioners from around the globe.

I hoped that they had listened to my words and understood the importance of better implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. It is my hope that they will take this message back to their countries.

'After the meeting the chairman of the Commission for Social Development, Ernesto Aranibar Quiroga, from Bolivia came up to me and told me that he had listened to my talk with great interest. He treated me kindly and with respect and asked me all about the older citizens monitoring project.

'This has been the greatest experience of my life and given me a true feeling of self-worth. I wear my age with pride and will fight for older people's rights.

'When the review process of MIPAA begins I hope that national governments and international organisations will give ageing the respect and attention it deserves.'

*For more about the older citizens project in Bolivia, see page 14, and to read about the MIPAA review process, see page 3.*

**HelpAge International is a global network of not-for-profit organisations with a mission to work with and for disadvantaged older people worldwide to achieve a lasting improvement in the quality of their lives.**

**Ageways exchanges practical information on ageing and development, particularly good practice developed in the HelpAge International network. It is published twice a year by HelpAge International, with funding from Help the Aged (UK).**

Ageways is also available on the web at: <http://www.helpage.org>

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Front cover: A member of an older citizens monitoring group in Gazipur, Bangladesh, with proof of her entitlement to the government's old age allowance.

Photo: Resource Integration Centre



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