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global network

Sharing information to strengthen the HelpAge global network in Asia-Pacific
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Editorial

In many cases, older people are presented as unable to take independent decisions and as a burden to their families and economies. There often seems to be an implicit blanket association of older people with vulnerability. In the minds of much of the development community and some governments, that seems to be where older people fit now – a *vulnerable group*.

This is an assumption we should challenge. Life itself is showing us that people in their later life, as a group, take an active part of their societies, contributing to their economies, families and societies. Who are the leaders of our communities, organisations and national governments? In many cases, they are over age 60, hardly a picture of vulnerability.

We therefore need to rethink old age. Who is old? Is that a chronological definition? As an official designation, “older person” doesn’t tell us much about an individual beyond the latest possible date of birth on their ID card. That’s not very interesting information: it masks a huge variety of experience in later life. We need to abandon obsolete conceptions of a three-staged life – where the last two or three decades is identified simply with decline.

We also need to rethink ageing societies. Does this negative narrative of decline with individual ageing carry over to our discussions of population ageing? Does demographic ageing somehow suggest that a society is in decline, in public perceptions? We should remind ourselves again that ageing societies are a triumph of development. We need to see how a different configuration of population can open enormous possibilities for building fair, equitable societies for all generations, where longevity is a blessing, not a burden, and where intergenerational action becomes the norm, not an exception.

Eduardo Klien
Regional Director
Asia-Pacific Region

Learning creates better understanding

► Thailand

The Thai non-profit organisation forOldy runs a programme for older people as well as a small social enterprise. Its projects focus on building the capacity and improving the wellbeing of the urban poor, particularly older people. ForOldy’s own social enterprise is called ‘Khun Ta, Khun Yai’, a charity shop which receives donations of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, beds and walkers, and then sells or rents them to older people at affordable prices. This is a great help to the mobility of underprivileged older people who are often left at home as their physical wellbeing deteriorates.

With the enthusiasm of the founder, Oranuch Lertkuldilok, forOldy works in eight communities. The Poon Sap community is one place where Oranuch often takes visitors. This community has six home-care volunteers and 58 forOldy members, 24 of whom need physical or psycho-social support.

In June, forOldy welcomed Krishna M. Gautam, the Chairman of Ageing Nepal, and later in August, a delegation from the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) visited the ‘Khun Ta, Khun Yai’ charity shop as well as the Poon Sap Community to learn more about the work relating to older people in Thailand.

“I am deeply touched by her attitude towards life. This is a great example of using social resources for the benefit of society.” said Krishna.



Oranuch presents ‘Khun ta, Khun Yai’ shop – assistive devices for rent and sale.

Wajee Ruangphornwisut/HelpAge International

Involving academia: HelpAge signs MoU with University of Peshawar

► Pakistan

HelpAge International in Pakistan, represented by Program Manager Waqas Qureshi, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the University of Peshawar, represented by Vice Chancellor, Prof Dr Muhammad Asif Khan.

According to the MoU, HelpAge International and the University of Peshawar will collaborate to raise awareness of and increase sensitisation to population ageing and conducting research. The University of Peshawar will conduct a review of research studies on Population Ageing and older people carried out by researchers from different universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This will lead to an academic discourse which will highlight the needs, issues, challenges and potential of older people and give policy recommendations to the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for policy level initiatives.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar said on this occasion that older people’s issues are increasing in society due to multiple factors including immigration and children’s indifference, among others. He called upon relevant partners to holistically follow a beneficial course of action and to campaign for the welfare of senior citizens.



Yakkum Emergency Unit continues recovery support in Sulawesi

► Indonesia

The 7.5-magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami that occurred on Sulawesi Island, Indonesia, in September 2018 not only left thousands dead and many others missing, but also totally destroyed the homes and livelihoods of many people.

HelpAge International has been working with Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU) to support older people and people with disabilities with an emergency response project that began in October 2018. To follow up the progress and discuss ongoing support in the next 18 months, Bert Maerten, Head of Programmes, and a project officer from HelpAge Asia Pacific Regional Office visited YEU in Palu, Sulawesi island from 24–28 June 2019.

YEU has worked hard to help older people and people with disabilities by providing essential items for daily life and

assisting those who needed help, as well as providing outreach health support, including mental health support and homecare visits. It was impressive to learn from some beneficiaries how their lives have been improved. Despite many unexpected challenges in terms of logistics on the ground caused by after-effects of the disaster, YEU has successfully brought important relief at a difficult time to thousands of people. Throughout the visit, the YEU team reflected on operational, practical and strategic matters. Their curiosity and openness to learn are great strengths in collaboratively developing humanitarian competence that will benefit older people in the future.

In the next 18 months, HelpAge and YEU will continue to focus on outreach health support and will also expand to support livelihood programmes for older people and people with disabilities through the



community-based older people's associations (OPAs) in five villages. Also, social security schemes and humanitarian assistance will be organised through OPAs to advocate for their basic rights and for their access to the social net scheme. Giving a voice to older people will therefore be an important part of the next phase of this project.

Intergenerational self-help clubs: people-centered and long-term care

► Vietnam

In Vietnam, people are living longer, but they often suffer from diseases and health conditions that require care over many years. Unfortunately, not enough people are able to afford care services or receive social health insurance. Fortunately, with the Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) model replication plan from the government, participants are encouraged to provide support and help for disadvantaged members in the community. With its inclusive structure and activities, the ISHC is able to supply care recipients with long-term care that responds to their needs.

A case in point is Nguyen Thi Thu, who is 66 years old and a member of Group 18, Tan Thinh ward, Hoa Binh city. She lives alone and suffers from several chronic diseases, such as vestibular and blood pressure disorders. She has no home, no pension or social assistance, and no stable income. In April 2018, when Group 18 ISHC was established, she was one of the first people to register as a club

member. After the Club Management Board (CMB) had been trained in operating and managing skills, especially in matters of rights and entitlements, the ISHC and CMB assigned Nguyen Xuan Du, a member of the CMB as well as the group leader, to help Thu prepare documents and propose that the Ward People's Committee classify her as poor in 2018. Although the People's Committee refused to classify Thu as poor, she was considered nearly poor and thus she was granted a free health insurance card, thanks to the help of the ISHC.

"With the care and support of the club, I am very happy. Now that I have a health insurance card, I often go for a health check-up and medicine. In the past, I know a health insurance card cost 804,000 VND and it was very necessary, but I could not afford to buy one. Now

it feels great to have a health insurance card." Thu said.

Beside the health insurance card, the ISHC has also given Thu a loan of 5 million VND (US\$215) to start-up a small business. The ISHC CMB has also proposed that the local authority exempt her from payments for things such as study and transportation.

Thu said: "I raise a few dozen chickens with the loan from the club and now, every day I sell eggs which brings me some money, and the children sometimes help me out too. My life is not so hard any more".



Nguyen Thi Thu with her new health insurance.

Employing past knowledge to better prepare for future floods

► Thailand

During the month of June, the Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV) participated in the Understanding Risk Field Lab: Chiang Mai Urban Flooding 2019 conference. This collaborative project, initiated by Co-Risk Labs, is a month-long arts and technology conference that is exploring critical design practices in disaster risk management, cooperative technology production, hacking, and art. This project platform fosters collaboration across disciplines, practices, and locations.

FOPDEV's project, focussing on vulnerable groups and community mapping, highlighted the Nong Hoi community, a small district of Chiang Mai that suffers from severe flooding on an annual basis. Utilising mixed-method approaches including desktop studies, field observations, interviews, participatory mapping, and other techniques, this experiment brought together the wisdom of the elderly and the knowledge of young scholars from around the world.

Participants specialising in architecture, disaster management, flooding,



technology, and other relevant studies came from a multitude of countries including India, Singapore, the Philippines and England. Learning with and from the elderly of the Nong Hoi community, with the help of several translators, these young participants were able to develop their own projects based on the information that they were able to gather.

For FOPDEV's part, the goal was to make flood vulnerabilities more visible by utilising an age-friendly and participatory approach. The organisation sought to emphasise the importance of the experiences and knowledge of the Nong Hoi elderly community.

Prapai Amornsak, leader of the Nong Hoi older people's group, said that the activity

had been beneficial to everybody. "Participating in this activity has been like revisiting ourselves and our community to resolve our problems. We shared our stories with other participants and gained knowledge which helps us to better prepare for floods. From planning to prioritising what to do and who to take care of when a flood occurs, we could effectively coordinate with the community and local government."

The results of the week's activities were exhibited at Weave Artisan Society in Chiang Mai from 28 June to 31 July 2019, under the title "Living with Water".

Read a compilation "Understanding risk: Disaster preparedness planning with older persons" at <https://bit.ly/2kQpnsD>

Health and hygiene: the invisible threat after disaster

► India

Originating in the south-eastern region of the Bay of Bengal, Cyclone Fani made landfall in the east of India on 3 May 2019. This was one of the strongest cyclones to hit India's east coast in the last two decades. Odisha State and one-third of its population (15 million people) were severely affected.

Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS) took initiatives to meet the needs of people in eight villages of Puri District, Odisha State, and reached out to almost 2000 people. The major focus of the response was on the older population, who are the most vulnerable section of the affected population.

GRAVIS was anxious about the general health conditions of the residents of Fani-hit villages. They were in urgent need of safe drinking water, medical and

hygiene supplies, food, and long-term recovery and rehabilitation support to cope with the disaster.

In line with these needs, GRAVIS arranged health camps. Hygiene kits and medicated mosquito nets were distributed to each household, helping them to recover at the time of crisis. Health camps were organised in four Gram Panchayats (village councils) where the villagers could conveniently report for a health check-up when needed. Senior medical officers and pharmacists from the cities extended their support and expertise along with medical supplies and advice. It was found that most people were suffering from different diseases, including skin diseases, diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases.

As there was a lack of knowledge on health and personal hygiene practices



Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS)

and their important role in better health, GRAVIS, in collaboration with its local NGO partners, conducted awareness campaigns to impart knowledge among the affected community on personal hygiene practices and preventive measures for those diseases in particular. Also, more health checkup programmes were organised to prevent the number of casualties from increasing.

Inauguration of basic literacy class for older persons 2019

► Nepal

Ageing Nepal in collaboration with the Senior Citizen's Welfare Association of Nepal (SCWN) inaugurated a "Basic Literacy Class for Older Persons" in the premises of SCWN at Devi Nagar, Baneshwor-10 on 8 August 2019. Thirty neo-learners aged over 60 are attending the two-hour class on working days regularly for 8–10 months. The programme aims to empower neo-learners with the basic skills of reading, writing, numeracy, and handling electric/electronic gadgets such as mobile phones, home appliances and things of daily use. A retired government officer of the community, Mr Kashi Timilsina is responsible for running the class, while Ms Pabitra Adhikari, Programme Director of Ageing Nepal, is coordinating the class.

The chairperson of Municipality-10, Mr Rajkumar K.C., graced the occasion of the first class as the chief guest. Other



dignitaries present included representatives of local government and non-government organisations, the media and the general public. An estimated 100 participants were present at the event.

At the end of the opening ceremony, Mr K.C., chairperson of the ward, announced that the local government will be responsible for continuing the class after its successful completion by SCWN and Ageing Nepal in 8 to 10 months time from now.

Older people are an inspiration: a campaign in Sindh

► Pakistan

A week of action with the slogan 'You are an inspiration' was observed in the Jacobabad district of Sindh Province in Pakistan. Older men and women, media representatives, civil society and policy makers actively participated in a number of activities. The objective of the campaign was to raise awareness of the importance of the implementation of the Sindh Senior Citizens Act.

Older men and women from older people's associations organised a rally, in which more than 250 people participated, and which ended at the district press club. Older people shared their views with journalists and called on the government for the speedy implementation of the Sindh Senior Citizens Act.



More than 500 people also participated in the signature campaign, which highlighted the need for the implementation of the act and emphasised the contribution older people play in society. The week ended with a folk music night at which members of the provincial parliament, civil society and media promised to play their part in expediting the implementation of the act.

Upcoming events

4th ASEM conference on Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons

Date: 1–2 October 2019

Location: Seoul, Korea

The 4th ASEM Conference on Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons will share information on policies to respond to population ageing not only in Europe and Asia but also of the UN and the international community. It will also discuss measures to further develop policies.

For more information please visit <http://www.2019asemhr.kr/eng/index.php>

Regional learning event on strengthening older peoples' associations

Date: 23–24 November 2019

Location: Hanoi, Vietnam

HelpAge believes that a well-managed older people's association (OPA) is one of the most effective local mechanisms to improve older peoples' lives and to mobilise their contribution to bring about positive changes.

The successful Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) model in Vietnam has been shared throughout the region and beyond. It is being tested in a number of countries in the region, including Bangladesh, Cambodia and Indonesia.

To strengthen the development of older people's associations in the region through learning and sharing the experiences of network organisations, a regional learning forum will be held this November. This event will also be an opportunity to share findings from regional research, aiming to provide comprehensive analysis of the critical success factors in the operation of the ISHC model in Vietnam, as well as the strengths and weaknesses in the operation of OPAs in the other three countries.

For more details, please contact: Teeraporn Sudachan (Apple) at apple@helpageasia.org

Social issues are everyone's issues

Learn from a Thai disability advocate:

An interview with Suporntrum Mongkolsawadi, Secretary General at the Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities.



What was the experience of disability groups in advocating for their rights in Thailand and at the international level?

In 1981, when the UN announced the International Year of Disability, the disability movement began at all levels in Thailand. We had activists working at both regional and international level. We had UN offices in Bangkok, and they were supportive of our work.

There was also a movement towards the Decade of Disability in Asia Pacific 1993-2002. The network of people with disabilities at national, regional and international levels was well connected.

In Thailand, in around 1997, a new constitution was drafted. There was great involvement of disability groups as we had representatives in the drafting committee. The rights of people with disabilities were not recognised at the time, so we held many forums to share experiences and listen to the views of people with disabilities, and that created a lot of momentum on disability issues. We then teamed up with other NGOs, medical experts and rights-based organisations on advocacy work. Following that, people with disabilities were invited to join political parties. When a government was formed, an advisory group to the Prime Minister on disabilities was set up, and it was led by a disabled person.

At the international level, there was a movement for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).



Prof Viriya Namsiripongpan (left), President of Universal Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, and Mr Monthian Buntan (right), member of the United Nations CRPD Committee, at the ninth session of the Conference of the States parties to the Convention (2016).

Thailand appointed Mr Montian Buntan, a visually impaired senator, to represent the working group. That all happened as a result of the strong movement of disability groups. People with disabilities were very much involved in their own issues.

There were leaders and followers in this process. You called yourself a follower. Can you describe your role as a good follower?

When we negotiate with the government or political parties, one or two organisations alone cannot succeed. We need mass support. We need negotiators. We need someone to follow up what had been discussed and someone to create pressure. We need to set up forums, seminars, discussions and even organised rallies on the street. Therefore, the role of supporters was very important. For example, before the first law on disability in Thailand was passed, the draft simply provided guidelines on how things should be done to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. It was not mandatory and there was no punishment for those who did not follow the guidelines. We thought that this would not really benefit people with disabilities, so we negotiated, lobbied, and even protested. The role of leaders and followers had to complement one another to create an enabling environment for negotiations.

Why are rights so important?

If we don't have rights, and live in a society based on charity, we are simply beggars waiting for left overs. We will only get what the government thinks we should. The resources of a country do not belong to one group of people, they belong to everyone. A rights-based society means that a government must value its citizens. They must manage the resources and distribute them fairly.

What can older people's groups learn from disability groups?

The issues of people with disabilities are not just about people with disabilities —they apply to issues of women and children as well as older people. Social issues are everyone's issues. You have to make the issues of older people everyone's issues. Of course, older people need to be the key and build the movement by themselves. It is crucial to find 'champions'. You should link your work with other groups such as people with disabilities and other networks to gain support.

Many people with disabilities may not know much about the CRPD; that's why you need 'champions' to talk about it. Keep talking about the convention for the rights of older persons to older people, to the government, to politicians. Even though the members of your network may not have a full understanding of it, they will soon realise that it is useful for them.

How does the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) help you with your advocacy work?

Thai laws on disabilities are quite advanced because we have tried to include the content from the CRPD. It is clear that the convention provides technical knowledge and enables us to use it and adapt it to the local context.

At first, I did not give much weight to the work at international level. However, I discovered that when dealing with government agencies and presenting them with our own research or findings at the national level, we could not go very far in our negotiations but referencing the narrative in the convention could help with the argument.

We would say to the government that since they had already signed up to the convention, it was their responsibility to keep their word.



The convention also comes with a reporting mechanism. It requires meetings to review the progress of the government's work, which provides a good opportunity for us to meet with relevant agencies and update them on progress and share new knowledge. There is also a process of shadow reporting or optional protocol which provides us with a tool to raise our voice. It is better to work in collaboration because it's more fun and more beneficial to people in general.

Shaanxi's First Summit Forum on Health and Care of the Elderly

► China

Shaanxi's First Summit Forum on the Health and Care of the Elderly took place in Xi'an on 14 June 2019 with the theme of "Healthy Shaanxi and Population Ageing". With the support of the Shaanxi Provincial Health Commission, the event was held by the Shaanxi Ageing Development Foundation, and organised by the China Ageing Development Centre and four other organisations working for older people in Shaanxi. More than 200 delegates from 143 agencies and institutions, including scholars and experts in elderly care, attended the forum. The forum was held in response to the implementation of China's strategies on ageing development and health and care of the elderly.

The rapidly increasing ageing population has posed great challenges to health services and elderly care systems in China, and promoting healthy ageing is the only way for China to cope with the issue. The forum thus focused on the integration of medical services and elderly care in Shaanxi as well as a strategy for healthy ageing following the aspirational slogan "Healthy China, Happy elderly care".



The forum discussed international and national strategies for elderly care which could serve as an inspiration for Shaanxi and China, in a broader view, to cope with population ageing and to promote healthy elderly care systems.

As part of different explorations in policy formulation, the HelpAge representative shared key initiatives from six countries in Asia and the Pacific in formulating health care strategies for older people and developing community- and home-based care services. Also, Hong Kong's experience of a long-term care service system, service assessment and community care was presented.

The forum then focused on the Shaanxi context and its elderly care services. Presenters highlighted trends in the development of ageing related work and



the challenges involved in providing quality care for older people, including health management, mental health care, and the integration of medical services and elderly care services. Living conditions and the environment were also seen as factors affecting older people's health. In addition, different models and practices implemented by the public and private sectors in China were shared.

Finally, the forum concluded with a round table dialogue on "Developing the Direction of the Shaanxi System of Health and Care for the Elderly". Five speakers proposed suggestions and counter-measures on the integration of medical services and elderly care, community- and home-based care, family care and personnel training for health and care services for the elderly in Shaanxi.

Building cooperative relations for the benefit of older people

► Vietnam

From 24 to 28 June 2019, a delegation of five representatives from the Vietnam Association of the Elderly (VAE) visited the China National Committee on Ageing (CNCA). The aim of this visit was to foster relationships and exchange ideas on the current situation of older people and policies on ageing. Xiao Caiwei, Vice President of the CNCA, and its senior members cordially received the VAE delegation.

Nguyen Hoa Binh, VAE's Vice President, talked about the situation of older people in Vietnam, national policies on the ageing population, the role and responsibilities of VAE as a leading organisation working for older people, as well as their major works and achievements. During these four days, the VAE team worked closely with the CNCA leaders. They held discussions on possible future collaborations such as information sharing, exchange visits of older people's associations (OPAs) located near the border, joint conferences and



advocacy on the UN convention on the rights of older persons.

CNCA representatives also shared their country information with the group. China has been an ageing society since 1999. Today, it is the country with the largest number of older people in the world. There are 250 million persons aged 60 years and older, which account for 18 per cent of its total population, while the working-age group accounts for 37 per cent of the population. The cohort aged 50–60 years is also growing rapidly. Thus, the Chinese government has been paying

more attention to development work and ageing issues, including elderly health care, rights and social protection. The State Council has released a national plan on population development 2016-2030, which includes a section that ensures a better social environment and better care for older people.

During their visit, the group had the opportunity to visit the Embassy of Vietnam, elderly care centres and OPAs in Xicheng and Fengtai districts in Beijing.

Protecting the rights of older people: Challenges and opportunities

► Bangladesh

Through a joint initiative of the Bangladesh Country Office of HelpAge International and Prothom Alo – the most popular newspaper in Bangladesh, a round table on “Protecting the rights of older people: Challenges and opportunities” was held on 19 June 2019 at the Prothom Alo office in Dhaka. High-level government policy makers and officials from relevant ministries and agencies, representatives of network members, INGOs, researchers and academicians, partners and media personalities participated in this event.

Rabeya Sultana, the Bangladesh Country Director of HelpAge International, presented a keynote speech that began by pointing out that older people now constitute eight per cent of the population. The country is facing several challenges relating to its ageing population. Older people are facing poverty, loneliness, limited access to government welfare services and



discrimination by the state and their families, so a platform to serve as a foundation for older people's social security is needed.

Diverse issues were presented by representatives from the government and civil society organisations, ranging from discrimination towards older people and the situation of old age care and nursing homes to the inadequacy of the current old age allowance and the feasibility of universal social pension in Bangladesh. There were also discussions on the

empowerment of older people so that they are in a better position to be respected and have autonomy.

At the end, many recommendations were made to promote older people's rights in Bangladesh. One of the major achievements was that the Minister of Planning and the Chairperson of the Standing Committee from the Ministry of Social Welfare acknowledged the need for a non-contributory universal social pension in Bangladesh.

Business World International Award 2018 given to HelpAge Sri Lanka

► Sri Lanka

On 21 June 2019, HelpAge Sri Lanka received the “Business World International Award 2018” from the Business World International Organisation (BWIO) at their annual awards ceremony held at Tan Samudra, Colombo, Sri Lanka. This event is one of the most prestigious annual events of the BWIO.

HelpAge Sri Lanka was presented with this Award in recognition of its service excellence, for its high standards of ethical conduct, integrity and civic and social responsibility. The award was made in recognition and celebration of business excellence, thus providing a forum to inspire business and set benchmarks for best practices.

HelpAge Sri Lanka was amongst the top ten award winners who received this Service Excellence Award for its helpful services to needy elders of this country, with various services all free of charge for poor elders.

HelpAge Sri Lanka operates its Mobile Medical Unit in remote locations, miles away from towns, screening needy senior citizens for non-communicable diseases and cataracts that develop into blindness. It has successfully shouldered part of the weight on the state, particularly relating to cataract surgeries, by successfully completing over 36,000 cataract operations during the period from 2002 to 2019, in its own state of the art Eye Hospital at No.14, Sinsapa Road, Wellawatta.



Deshabandu Tilak de Zoysa receiving the Award from Minister Rauff Hakeem.

Business World International

Promoting intergenerational group activities during Indonesian National Day of Older People

► Indonesia

On Sunday, 23 June 2019, twenty members of Intergenerational Groups (IGs) were invited to participate in the commemoration of the National Older People’s Day of Sleman District, located at Siwa Park, Prambanan Temple, Yogyakarta. The event, organised by the Regional Commission of Older People in Sleman District and supported by the Indonesian Association of Senior Living, was attended by more than 1000 older people from 17 sub-districts across Sleman District. The event started with

physical exercises, followed by art performances from older people’s associations (OPAs) in Sleman, and a talk show on health topics with Dr Probosuseno from the Central Hospital of Sardjito. The members of IGs took this opportunity to ask questions about health. They also had a free medical check-up that included a hearing examination.

Apart from participating in the event, IG members organised an exhibition booth to promote IG activities and sell IG products such as food, crafts and batik

clothes. The IG members also demonstrated an easy way to make bean sprouts, which was observed by visitors, including the Vice Regent of Sleman district, Ms. Sri Muslimatun. She promotes IGs as a trainer of age-friendly livelihood topics for women’s farming groups and older people’s groups. “We can’t help getting older. But we can choose to be healthy and valuable as older people. Older people in Sleman should stay healthy and active,” said Sri Muslimatun, who also acts as Head of the Regional Commission of Older People in Sleman.

Indonesia’s National Older People’s Day has become an important event for IGs to participate in. Not only does it allow them to introduce IG activities, but this event also presents opportunities to make connections with other stakeholders from the media and the private sector who share the same vision—to promote healthy and active ageing.



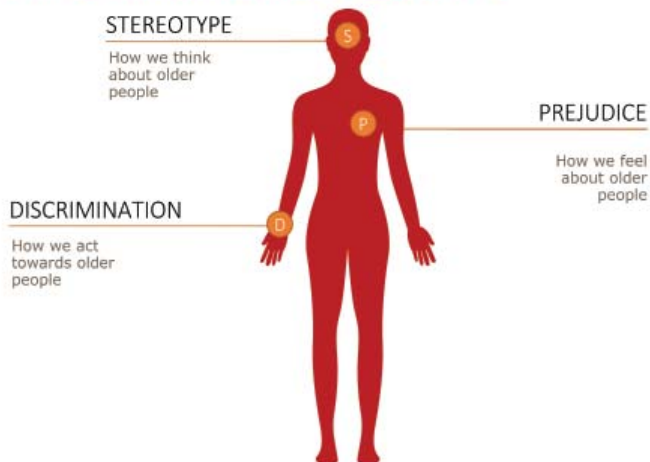
#ExposeAgeism

What is ageism and what can we do about it?

Ageism is so ingrained within our societies that it often goes unnoticed. For this year's International Day of Older Persons we want to increase the recognition of ageism amongst our network members and our allies too. Together we must #ExposeAgeism!

So, what is ageism? The World Health Organization defines it as "the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age." In a HelpAge focus group discussion, older people in Costa Rica defined it as "... direct or indirect actions by which someone is excluded, considered different, restricted, ignored, or treated as if they didn't exist because of their age."

Three dimensions of ageism



Throughout society, people make oversimplified assumptions about older people and older age which do not reflect reality. Some of these assumptions include thinking that older age is a time of frailty, dependency or mental and physical decline. This results in prejudice, discriminatory practices and inequality, and means that individual experiences of ageing are ignored.

For instance, the assumption that older people don't have sex means they get excluded from sexual health programmes. Or the assumption that all older people live with and are supported by other family members means they don't get the humanitarian assistance they may need in a crisis.

In a recent study, participants said they experienced ageism in:

- **employment**

"Teaching is in my blood, so not surprisingly I felt devastated when the government told me at the age of 50 that I must stop working. They told me I was old and that I should allow young people to do the teaching." (Kenya)

- **healthcare**

"Older people are not valued here. They are not respected even when I am in the field. When I visit the hospital, especially in the private sector, the doctors scold the older patients in spite of the fact that their role is to serve the people." (older man, Pakistan)

- **the financial sector**

"I received a letter telling me that people over 70 years are not allowed an overdraft on their accounts. I asked what this is all about. I receive my pension regularly, so I cannot be in debt. And he repeated the regulation that no overdraft is allowed to people over 70." (older person, Serbia)

- **even within their own families**

"Sometimes it is our own family that labels us as old, and with that comes the thought that you're no longer useful, you can no longer do anything." (older woman, Costa Rica)

Ageism can manifest itself in policies in many forms. For example, compulsory retirement ages, age caps on access to health care services, and age caps on data collection (many data systems stop at age 49), could all discriminate against older people.

So, what can we do about it? We are calling on our network members and allies to take action against ageism between 30 September and 6 October. Across the world, older activists and our Age Demands Action partners are organising flash mobs, marches, community forums and even theatre productions to increase awareness of the ageism that older people face.

If you are organising an event, let us know by emailing campaigns@helpage.org. Or go online and tweet about ageism using the hashtag #ExposeAgeism. We look forward to hearing from you!



Orientation workshops on universal social pension

► Bangladesh

Two workshops took place recently in Bangladesh with the aim of developing the knowledge and understanding of network members and partners on a Universal Social Pension (USP), and of identifying a way forward for policy advocacy on adopting a USP in Bangladesh. On 16–17 July, a one-and-a-half day workshop was held at the Swiss Garden, Dhaka, Bangladesh with the participation of 26 development professionals, including HelpAge country office staff, representatives from four

network members (BAAIGM, BWHC, DAM and RIC) and other partners (Aid-Comilla, BOHUBRIHY, BITA and SHARE Foundation). The training of trainers was conducted by Wesumperuma Dharmapriya, Usa Khiewrord and Peter Morrison from the HelpAge regional office. During the nine sessions, participants learned about the challenges and opportunities of old age and pensions, different approaches to designing social pensions, the need for a universal social pension, the experience of USP schemes in other countries, the

experience of means-testing for old age allowance in Bangladesh, the method of implementation and its challenges, the feasibility of USP and its potential impacts in Bangladesh, as well as strategic planning for USP policy advocacy. In addition, one key person from each organisation was assigned to scale up the USP campaign in Bangladesh.

Addressing the same purpose, a half-day workshop took place with the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) on 18 July 2019, involving 26 mid- and top-level officials, including Mr. Mohammad Jashim Uddin, Deputy Managing Director of PKSF. The PKSF, an apex development organisation, was established by the Government of Bangladesh in May 1990 for sustainable poverty reduction. Through the sessions, PKSF officials become more sensitised to the feasibility of a USP scheme in Bangladesh. They planned to initiate a pilot project on universal social pension for older people at one or two unions to gather evidence for broader advocacy.



Research findings reveal challenges faced by older Cambodians

► Cambodia

On 22 August 2019, HelpAge Cambodia organised a dissemination workshop on the research findings on the issues facing and the needs of older people in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Seventy-four participants joined this workshop, including government officials, development partners, NGOs, educational institutions, universities, representatives of the media and members of the Cambodian Ageing Network (CAN) from six provincial capitals (Kampong Thom, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh).

The research, entitled “Needs and Challenges of Older People”, was conducted in five provinces in collaboration with the National Institute of Social Affairs and other relevant ministries starting at the end of 2018. The research aimed to understand the needs

and challenges of older people, especially older women and older people with disabilities in relation to health, economic, community engagement and policy gaps.

Using a mixed methodology, the research results were obtained from 316 older people. The investigations queried the older population about their Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) performance, disabilities, cognitive difficulties and depression, dietary nutrients, family health care and economic support, and examples of abuses. More in-depth analysis such as correlation studies were applied to understand the relationship between and influence of some variables.

In its conclusion, the research provided recommendations on mainstreaming ageing issues, raising awareness,



HelpAge Cambodia

collaboration between government and non-government organisations, as well as improved implementation of policies on financial security, health care and the optimisation of older people’s associations.

Tum Vira, the Executive Director of HelpAge Cambodia, pointed out that ageing issues in Cambodia are not yet a priority of the Cambodian government’s agenda, but suggested that the country should start thinking and preparing for population ageing by learning from countries in South East Asia such as Myanmar.

For more information please contact Von Bunret at cao@helpagecambodia.org

Resources

Publications



Why social pensions? Achieving income security for all older people in Myanmar
HelpAge International



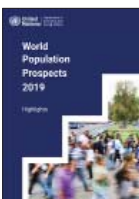
Improving basic mental health services in Myanmar's primary healthcare system
HelpAge International



Tackling non-communicable diseases to achieve universal health coverage in Myanmar
HelpAge International



Research priorities to help prevent, manage and control non-communicable diseases in Myanmar
HelpAge International



World population prospect 2019
The United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)



The Social Protection Indicator for Asia: Assessing Progress
The Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Blogs

Older women won't count, if they are not counted (<https://bit.ly/2XfEkBG>)

Margaret Kabango, Activist from Uganda

Campaigning for older people's rights on World Humanitarian Day (<https://bit.ly/2Z7iFwz>)

Whendy Ruiz, HelpAge International

Age-inclusive data collection in humanitarian responses (<https://bit.ly/2ZaRe4P>)

Deepak Malik, HelpAge International

Universal health coverage must be fit for an ageing world (<https://bit.ly/2IMwhqS>)

Camilla Williamson, HelpAge International

Video

Myanmar's ageing volunteers on the health frontline (<https://youtu.be/-vRl2eu7zVs>)

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How to adapt person-centered health services to ageing populations? (https://youtu.be/Wp_SaMtMSZM)

World Health Organization

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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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