

# Lessons learned

## 2022/23

**HelpAge**
**International**


Andalus Media/HelpAge International – Syria

### LESSON 1

## Growing impact and shifting power even in challenging settings

**HelpAge International has succeeded in progressing work for effective, sustainable and legitimate impact for older people through re-organising around locally-led action**

HelpAge has been able to work against the stereotype that it is hard to achieve locally-led development in rapid humanitarian responses. For example, the response programme to the earthquake that affected Türkiye and Syria on 6 February, was almost entirely led by local partners with support from HelpAge. This was enabled by existing relationships with partners in north-west Syria. A particular benefit was the engagement of partners in the Strategic Humanitarian Assessment & Participatory Empowerment capacity programme (SHAPE), which meant that the network member had a capacity strengthening plan in place at the time of the earthquake. This evidences the importance of building long-term, multi-faceted and robust relationships informed by two-way dialogue and learning.

The SHAPE capacity approach was used in workshops with 13 partners in 12 countries over the financial year to build local capacity for inclusive humanitarian action that increases impact for older people. Through the SHAPE approach of ‘holding up a mirror to the organisation’ one consistent learning was discovering with partners that organisations often identify different capacity strengthening areas at the beginning and end of the SHAPE self-reflection. For example, partner HIRDO in Somalia started with a technical analysis of gaps in psychosocial support and cash delivery, but moved to an analysis about strengthening governance, embedding inclusive humanitarian principles about work with older people and other groups, and strengthening institutional linkages with communities and other actors. Another unexpected learning was that partners were able to use the resulting plans to attract funding for capacity strengthening from other partners, as partner HDC did in South Sudan.

**HelpAge has been able to increase impact through drawing on a wide range of approaches from the different strengths of an ever-broadening community of partners**

Working with national partners also generates learning through the interaction of HelpAge as an international specialist on older people's rights, with national partners who are often working with multi-sectoral interventions

or with communities more broadly, not just older people and their associations. There is strong learning in these relationships for HelpAge about where and how a broad community-based approach with elements of specific focus on older people is most effective.

However, as observed in our response in Ukraine, approaches responding to specific risks experienced by older people, e.g., in health, home-based care, and pensions remain valid. In Ukraine, HelpAge is placing emphasis on supporting systems that exist, e.g., in health and care, but HelpAge leans into its unique role as a listener to the voices of older people. This means that it is able to work with older people and partners to generate detailed analysis of barriers that older people face, which range from mobility to challenges accessing digital government services. HelpAge has been evolving its role in Ukraine and is working in partnership with Ukrainian systems at *Oblast* level, with local civil society actors and with older people, to link older people into national systems.

In Colombia, HelpAge began to see long-term results from its work with indigenous peoples which had started with emergency responses but through building up relationships of trust, had extended to work on capacity strengthening of an indigenous people's organisation, and to work with the Colombian government. Work with indigenous peoples, in itself, presented significant learning for HelpAge in working with different languages, autonomous governing structures, customs and intangible heritage. Of particular interest for HelpAge is the different role of older people in governance among the indigenous peoples in Colombia and the experience of indigenous peoples of climate change, mining industries and migration and their responses to these challenges.

## LESSON 2

### **Digital technology has great potential to increase inclusion and equity among older people in access to services and information, but user-centred design that responds to older users is key**

**Older women are demanding inclusion in digital literacy and technological advances, and HelpAge was able to use its platform to raise this voice at the UN**

In March 2023, HelpAge staff and network members from Rwanda and Uganda actively participated in the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67). Its priority theme was **Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls**. HelpAge's engagement at CSW67 ensured that the issues experienced by a much wider group of older women were considered, and promoted fostering their representation and inclusion of their perspectives. HelpAge's network member NSINDAGIZA in Rwanda, was part of the HelpAge delegation and delivered a statement during the General Discussion which highlighted the challenges older women face in lower- and middle-income countries concerning innovation, technological advancements, and education in the digital age. The UN [CSW Press Release](#) →, after the conclusion of the General Discussion, highlighted the important contribution.



Whendy Ruiz/HelpAge International – Colombia



HelpAge International – Moldova

### **Engaging Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs (ISHCs) as champions, and the youth as a support system for older people, catalysed socialisation of digital platforms in Myanmar and Vietnam**

HelpAge had previously designed and launched a smartphone-based digital application in Vietnam and Myanmar to facilitate community screening for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including self-assessment of health risks. It took time to embed the new technology and build the confidence of older people to utilise and appreciate the platform. HelpAge incorporated different strategies to address this.

In this year, we learned that HelpAge ensured meaningful engagement of older people in the design process through to the evaluation of the application, in order to ensure its appropriateness and user-friendliness. It helped that HelpAge brought inclusion and equity of access as key considerations from the early stages of designing digital applications.

This birthed offline access for people without internet access and design adaptations to meet the needs of people with sight or hearing impairments and literacy issues.

Healthy Ageing learned from this programme (alongside work in Moldova and Ukraine) that digital technology, for older people in particular, is feasible and well accepted but requires a long-term vision and commitment from relevant stakeholders that includes connectivity and hardware, sustained funding, human resources, ongoing capacity building, adaptation according to needs, and advocating to link community-generated data to national health and social care data systems. These lessons will inform future design and introduction of digital technology for healthy ageing approaches, as it has great potential to promote and enhance self-care; strengthen access to health and care services; increase community participation in prevention and management of common health problems; reach communities and people who need the most support; and increase the quality and use of community-generated data – particularly by the community itself.

### **LESSON 3**

## **Ways of working – better in collaboration**

In a rapidly ageing world, there are too few organisations working on older people's issues, so HelpAge must strengthen its collaborative muscle to achieve impact for older people globally. Improving our convening and influencing skills will be crucial in the years ahead, meaning that external collaboration needs to be integrated systematically into our work as a supporter, a convenor, and as a thought leader.



## **HelpAge as a supporter**

### **Working with network members on knowledge, advocacy and engagement of older people makes impact in national processes around healthcare and social protection**

Teams have been trialing new ways of elevating the power of our civil society partners in designing projects, network learning groups and shaping our global advocacy strategies. Co-design is a key strategy in terms of stronger impact and more useful value-add to our partners. It also strengthens relationships and trust between the network members and with HelpAge. An additional level is then to ensure that co-design of work at national and community levels is co-designed with older people too.

**Engagement with network members and other partners this year has helped us to understand more about the barriers and opportunities related to older people's inclusion within community-based approaches to healthy ageing, and health systems at all levels**

HelpAge has gathered insights about how to best support network member action through one-to-one and group consultations, the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) small grants initiative and the UHC Community of Practice. The findings from this work informed HelpAge's UHC strategy and the development of the HelpAge Healthy Ageing Community of Practice.

Similarly, UHC small grants initiative selected 10 partners across eight countries to develop and roll out national and local UHC level strategies with linkages to UHC global level processes. Through the small grants, they facilitated more than 1,500 older people to participate in World Health Day 2023 at the local and national level. The approach showed that even small grants, when well-planned and targeted, can build capacity and support meaningful engagement from grassroots up – including direct action with older people.



Admasu Brook/HelpAge International – Ethiopia

HelpAge also provided technical and financial support on vaccine equity work anchored on small grant projects in Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Kenya, Peru, Colombia, and Tanzania. The learning and best practices informed advocacy with vaccine stakeholders such as Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) the Vaccine Alliance, International Federation of Ageing (IFA), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Rockefeller Foundation leading to strengthening inclusion of older people in global Covid-19 vaccine actions and vaccine uptake.

We continue to see exclusion of older people from issues of relevance to them. We see older women excluded from work on gender-based violence and older people excluded from work on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and have been working in forums like Women Deliver, CSW, work with the International Disability and Development Consortium and the NCD Alliance, and the UN HLM on UHC to ensure that older women and men are visible in these discussions. In our work with partners working at community level in 12 countries across three continents to develop basic standard manuals for self-care for older people and for community health volunteers, the group agreed that SRHR for older people should be included and promoted.

**HelpAge can create unique data sets with older people and network members. Further knowledge exchange systems are needed**

Social protection systems are needed to support people throughout their life course and help prevent and reduce poverty and vulnerability to risks. In April 2022 HelpAge started engaging with network members from 10 countries to create a research study on the '*Food, Fuel and Finance Crisis*' → (3Fs) to assess how the global shocks exacerbated by the war against Ukraine were impacting on older people around the world. The unique data set showed that far more older people reported a precarious situation of depending on aid from neighbours and family members rather than government supports such as pensions, transfers, or subsidies. Where pensions exist, current payments were reported as no longer sufficient to cover basic needs. Older people who could previously access finance services were reporting that this access has been cut off, eroding their financial resources. The data also revealed major gender differences: where the data was analysed from a gender lens in three African countries, women were starkly worse off than men in terms of the food they could eat.

The findings from this study have been used to inform two subsequent studies on gender-responsive social protection and shock responsive social protection; in convening with the social protection community and to generate national advocacy plans. The network members involved valued the championing of this project by HelpAge, the small grant support, and ongoing technical engagement.

An area of development identified is that an online platform for knowledge exchange would be valuable. However, nobody would have collected data about the impact of the crisis on older people had HelpAge not done it.

Data on the number of older people affected is rarely collected or used to ensure they are included. An assessment conducted by HelpAge on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators that relate to older people in India, Sudan, Tanzania, the Gambia and Ukraine showed that better disaggregation of data on older people is precluded by a variety of factors such as missing data, social dynamics, and small sample sizes. Specific areas of action by National Statistics Offices and their UN partners are needed, including synergies with relevant national and international data processes such as the *Inter-secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys* →.

## HelpAge as a convenor

### Uphold ageing as a specific issue but integrate it into other key agendas

In the Africa regional team, the greatest learning has been to **tease out ageing but at the same time bring it to other key agendas**. This was a learning about how to approach the intersectionality of ageing with other key issues and is derived from HelpAge's human rights-based approach. The reflection process was that older people's rights are distinct, but certain rights also accrue to older people because they are women, and/or because they live with disabilities, they are affected by climate change or humanitarian crises. In practical terms this has meant linking in a strategic and governance capacity to movements that exist in the other spaces, participating in the board of FEMNET and the steering committee for SOAWR (Solidarity for African Women's Rights), so that decisions that are made are inclusive of older people's issues. Next, we seek to extend this habit of convening with others to the youth and climate change movements.

The importance of **joining the convening of others** was also highlighted in the Latin America and Caribbean region, which has seen high growth in numbers of partners in recent years and is delivering nine humanitarian responses with local partners. One of the learnings from this region is that 'localisation cannot be done online' as it requires a committed presence to build trust and establishing relationships effectively at all levels, including governmental, with other NGOS and communities, and with self-regulating structures. In this respect, we can bring the intersection of ageing to other axes of exclusion at larger convening activities and in this way, ensure that older people are addressed proportionately in policy and programme responses.



Fedaa Qatashshah/HelpAge International – Jordan

### Use unique HelpAge knowledge to build credibility, and then continue to anticipate and meet the needs of stakeholders

Another learning particularly from the Middle East region in relation to convening is that our credibility is enhanced first by **the creation of unique knowledge products**, and secondly by the **attitude that convening is part of forming long-term relationships and anticipating needs** of stakeholders. A long-term example of this is that since 2020, HelpAge produced a report on national ageing strategies in the Middle East, critiquing them from a human rights perspective. This awakened responses from UNFPA and League of Arab States about what the next steps should be, and in response HelpAge developed during this financial year a Policy Guide for practitioners on how to formulate policy on a human rights basis as it relates to older people.

Similarly, during the Madrid International Programme of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) review process which took place at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023, HelpAge and its network members decided to focus on the participation of older people, as this was anticipated to be a gap from other stakeholders who would focus on the technical level. In its convening for the review, HelpAge drew on its experience of how to engage older people effectively and in a rights-based way, and HelpAge has now been asked to serve UN ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission on Western Asia) on a civil society advisory group with the role of facilitating the engagement of older people. This success generates learning that validates our focus, however HelpAge also acknowledges the challenge of how to engage the *most excluded* older people to secure their voice in policy debates.

In addition, HelpAge has co-created a **Community of Practice project** with country-based partners that collectively champion a locally-led movement for change on healthy ageing. In this year, consultations pointed out the need to establish a stronger and sustained foundation for engaging country-based partners other than the Health and Care Learning. In the next reporting period, HelpAge will act on learning from consultations this year to formalise a governance structure that provides leadership in co-design and delivery support to co-created actions with country-based partners engaged in healthy ageing actions. This will then support future collective advocacy and policy influencing actions and capacity building and build a project pipeline.

### **Both new consortia and long-term partnerships are key for identifying new learnings and opportunities to influence debates**

**HelpAge in Kenya** learned that working in consortiums and collaborating with other organisations is crucial in reaching a wide range of vulnerable older people. HelpAge Kenya joined a consortium with AMREF Health Africa, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the Albinism Society of Kenya (ASK). The consortium won a grant (based on its experience with data) to implement data-driven inclusion research targeting older refugees and those living with disabilities, which is key in yielding reliable data for future evidence-based programming. The process of consortium formation, engagements and aligning roles and responsibilities was very significant for the team as they learned best practices and improved their problem-solving skills.

For **HelpAge in Ethiopia**, multi-sectoral collaboration such as with Ethiopian Elderly and pensioners National Association (EEPNA), Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and other concerned stakeholders enabled the team to achieve planned goals in the areas of Society for All Ages and Movement for Change. This was through proactive engagement in the social protection system development processes, policy influencing initiatives, intensive capacity-building efforts and facilitating continuous discussion forums.

**Age and Disability Working Groups (ADWGs)** have emerged as a key vehicle for ensuring influence in the humanitarian system on age inclusion, as we increasingly localise. The ambition has grown to ensure there is an ADWG in every country where clusters are active.

There are skills gaps that we will address in HelpAge about leading and supporting online groups in terms of facilitation: managing online platforms and relating well to the large numbers of diverse stakeholders.

## **HelpAge as a thought leader**

The launch of the Intergenerational Approaches Guide, *Bringing generations together for change* →, in partnership with *Restless Development* →, provided an opportunity to showcase and highlight the expertise and knowledge of network members and partners to promote the application of successful **intergenerational approaches**. The applications highlighted in the guide have led to a pilot study in conjunction with University of Newcastle and Restless Development to bring together generations in Nepal and Uganda working together on climate change action. Reflection on the success of the guide and its on-going implementation highlights how to effectively promote the expertise of local actors and practitioners and bring in broader voices and experiences into technical spaces and link to global approaches.

Chiefly the guide was written by practitioners for practitioners to be able to improve or expand their intergenerational work. This bottom-up approach ensured that the focus of the guide remained on the development of a simple set of principles, aligned with our culture and values. This approach allows for a diversity of actors and organisations to be included. Investing in time to take an iterative and flexible approach, with a small guiding task team and advisory group working collaboratively allowed network members and partners with different levels of experience to effectively tell their own story and experience and contribute to the principals.

Working with partners to develop the guide also opened several questions for HelpAge to explore. There is a need for us to begin better tracking and follow up for the period after publication to identify the impact of these pieces going forwards. A reflection on how and where we express power through our current guidelines on branding and communications in core pieces that promote the work of others is a key conversation to explore in our on-going commitment to shifting power and locally-led development.

HelpAge continued to refresh learning about working with the key structure of **Older People's Associations (OPAs)**.



Steve Okumu/HelpAge International – Kenya



Brayden Howie/HelpAge International – Vietnam

HelpAge facilitated a three-webinar learning exchange that brought together over 60 participants, from HelpAge network members and staff, **to share experiences and approaches to working with OPAs** (or equivalent structures) in Vietnam. Key principles collaboratively recommended were that OPAs should be community-led; rights-based while ensuring meaningful participation; reflect the diversity of older people and include those who are traditionally more marginalised; support older people's leadership and voice; be intergenerational; include stakeholder engagement and a network approach; raise awareness; act as a support system; and have a strong management structure. Older People's Associations should also be a space where older people feel they belong.

### **HelpAge through its contributions to the climate change agenda learned that adding a climate change lens, but building on our existing experience, creates confidence for climate action**

Through scoping and strategic planning work completed at the end of 2022, HelpAge began to develop plans aimed ultimately at connecting ageing directly to broader climate change actors. Internally there is still much to do on mainstreaming climate change into all of our areas of work. Key learning in shifting practice to create space has been in reframing our language. This was particularly successful in our thinking around our humanitarian work, beginning to introduce the idea of resilience to climate change into existing programmes previously focused on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This was achieved through taking a broader understanding of risks

by looking into the future together with the past. This builds HelpAge confidence and builds on and enhances our experience and expertise.

### **We will continue work on climate change and older people through:**

- demonstrating projects that others can scale
- integrating focused messages and asks into our existing advocacy agendas and
- exploring new entry points to amplify the voices, needs and role of older people.

### **While there is rich engagement on the issues, network members need additional resources to deliver national work engaging older people in climate change action**

Bringing together the discussion of the opportunities and challenges of population ageing, and the need for intergenerational approaches on climate change is proving a clear way forward for HelpAge to engage within the broader climate change space. However, efforts to build more of a climate change focused movement across our network with the launch of the *GreyAndGreen Manifesto* → have slowed down. There is a need for us to link network members with key messages at national level that will help with advocacy directly with and for older people on climate issues – to be practically involved in actions and solutions. We will need to attract new resources to deliver this substantial work with network members.



Bogdan Rozumnyi/HelpAge International - Ukraine

## LESSON 4

# Shifting power

Anchored in its support for locally-led development, the 2030 Strategy commits HelpAge to work with, through and for network members and partners. To this end, HelpAge has fully committed to a partner-led programming (PLP) approach. PLP is not new to the organisation. In 2022, alongside work our country offices and programmes, HelpAge supported projects and provided funding to network members and partners in more than 20 countries. Going forward, HelpAge seeks to scale the approach and improve its partnership work.

In 2022/23, we made great strides towards delivering this commitment, including through the development of a PLP Strategy.

### Reflecting on this work, several key learnings were identified:

- In shifting to PLP, HelpAge needs to be clear about the 'core' elements of its collaboration in relation to inclusion, program quality and accountability.
- While committing to localisation, we recognise that power, privilege and coloniality exist everywhere, including ourselves, and in local civil societies and communities.
- As we scale PLP, we need to grow and deepen our partnership relationship capabilities in terms of resources, skills and enabling systems.
- Finally, partnerships and localisation are dynamic and often complex – sometimes messy and even involving real dilemmas. These can only be resolved in and through practice.

As a corollary of its commitment to partner-led programming, HelpAge is transitioning its country offices and programmes to locally-led entities. In 2022/23, HelpAge initiated the assessment process for all country programmes and offices (except Ukraine, on hold due to the invasion). A range of models and aspirations emerged: from becoming a national organisation, to creating an ageing platform or coalition, to exploring social enterprise-based activities.

The process and subsequent design have and continue to be a source of massive learning and where #ShiftingThePower becomes a practical act. HelpAge partnered with Stopping As Success, a collaborative learning project on INGO transitions, to support its learning. Throughout the year, we organised reflection and learning events for countries-in-transition, including on governance, business models, localisation of funding, etc.

### Key learnings from this first phase include:

- There is a tension between the commitment to locally-led development and the responsibility of stress-testing and reviewing emerging proposals as part of the localisation process. Critical reflection and two-way dialogue is needed as the aim of locally-led development is to support local change makers to bring greater and sustained impact for older people. The organisation, teams and leaders had to adjust to more adaptive management approaches. Encouragingly, through practice, capabilities have grown.
- While localisation and country transitions are generally seen as positive by the country teams as it leads to increased ownership and control, a higher degree of local empowerment, and more adaptability to respond to the local context, there is sometimes uncertainty on whether the transition process will bolster legitimacy and increased sustainable outcomes for older people. Just like HelpAge, emerging entities will have their own trajectory of organisational development.
- Developing viable funding business models for the emerging entities is hard work and is a distinct skill set, especially when the business model is not centered on grant-based project funding. External advice and support are beneficial but not easily secured. Access to institutional funding during the transition process is often complicated as new, emergent organisations sometimes do not fit eligibility criteria. As in other areas, while it is steep, HelpAge progresses swiftly on the learning curve.

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

### HelpAge International

PO Box 78840, London SE1P 6QR, UK  
4th Floor, 35–41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL, UK

Tel +44 (0)20 7278 7778

info@helpage.org [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)

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