

By 2050, nearly one in five older people in developing countries will be over 60. The media is taking more interest in population ageing.

Tip: Provide interviewees

HelpAge International put the BBC World Service in contact with an older man and woman living in a displaced people's camp in Darfur, Sudan for a radio series on population ageing.

Working with the media

The media has a vital role to play in raising awareness of older people's issues and generating support for older people. These guidelines, aimed at programme managers and communications staff of older people's organisations, provide practical suggestions for working with the media.

Local newspapers, radio and websites are often the main way that people find out what is happening in their community. National TV, radio and newspapers provide a forum for the country's leaders and thinkers and help shape public opinion.

The media has the potential to reach millions of people. Even stories in local media may be picked up by national or international networks, such as the BBC or Al Jazeera. Social media services such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook also enable millions of people to interact with each other, and are often taken up by mainstream media.

However, older people are widely under-represented in the media. Journalists are often interested when someone reaches 100, but they are less enthusiastic about discussing the issues affecting older people. Older women appear even less often in news, current affairs programmes or drama than older men.

Organisations campaigning for change for older people need to work with the media to address these biases. They can help to create a global "age-friendly" media that depicts the reality of our ageing world and emphasises the contributions older people make and the challenges they face.

How do we get the media interested?

Global population ageing and older people's issues can be difficult to promote to the media. On the other hand, the fact that older people are missing from so many debates means that theirs is often the untold story. They can provide a unique perspective on topical issues such as elections, economic migration or climate change.

The challenge is not just to get into the media, but to get your message across in the way you want. To do this, you need to find innovative ways to make links with the media, and provide stories that will interest their audiences.

Engaging the media

- **Find out what the media wants** Journalists look for two things: new stories, and fresh angles on old stories. What can you offer them? What is new, interesting or unusual? What unique insights can you provide?
- **Develop a strategy** Think about why you want media coverage and what you will gain from it. Then work out how you can best achieve it.
- **Be clear of your aim** Make sure you understand the difference between news and campaigning. Sometimes the media will support a particular campaign, especially if it is considered in the public's best interest, or if it exposes extreme injustice. But journalists usually take their role as objective, impartial reporters seriously, and are wary of campaigning.

"We don't often hear from old people in conflict zones, especially from old people in Sudan, so we think it's really important to get these voices to air."

*Chloë Hadjimatheou,
Producer, BBC World
Service*

Tip: Publish new research

HelpAge India researched abuse of older people and launched a report that attracted widespread newspaper and television coverage, reaching more than 13 million people.

Tip: Provide vivid evidence

HelpAge International collected stories, photos and videos recording older people's experience of dealing with the cold winter months in Kyrgyzstan. These appeared in at least ten different media outlets including national radio and newspapers, regional papers such as *The Times of Central Asia* and internet news services.

- **Get to know the media** Which magazines, radio or TV programmes, newspaper columns or blogs cover the work you do? Which are most used by the people you want to influence? These are the most important media to you. Find out who to contact, such as the news editor, features editor, online editor or producer.
- **Get to know journalists** Try not to feel intimidated by journalists. They need stories just as much as you need the coverage. Find out who is responsible for writing about what you do, and arrange an informal meeting. Ask them what kinds of stories they are interested in. Offer a potential story, such as a new report due out soon containing ground-breaking research. This is called a verbal pitch.

If the journalist is interested, follow up by sending them a written pitch within two days, setting out what stories you can offer, what background information you can provide, and whether there are photos or case studies. Even if you cannot offer them anything immediately, agree to stay in touch. You both may be useful to each other in the future.

- **Know what is a good story** For every idea you have, ask yourself, "Is this news?", "What makes this story different?", "Why might someone be interested?"
- **Decide what kind of piece** Consider different types of stories. Examples include a news story, a feature (such as a profile, day-in-the-life or analysis) or an opinion piece.
- **Work fast** Respond to calls from journalists promptly. Journalists need to work fast to meet deadlines. If you make their lives easier, they will want to work with you again.
- **Develop key messages** Work out the essence of what you want to say on a particular issue and provide some key messages. For example, in a story calling for allowances for older carers, there might be four key messages: the number of older carers, the problems they face, what you are calling for, and how you want that to happen.

Do not provide too much information, or lots of statistics or complex data, as the audience may become overwhelmed or lose interest. Put figures in context – for example, by saying "The floods displaced [number of people] – equivalent to the population of [name of city]."

- **Mention your organisation** Try to make sure your organisation is named in any article or broadcast. People are more interested in supporting organisations they have heard of, but journalists are not always willing to give you a mention. You may spend a lot of time providing information to a journalist and setting up interviews, and in the end, very little mention of your organisation is made.

Journalists will argue that this is their editorial policy, and they cannot be seen to be the "tool" of the NGO. But where possible, make sure that interviewees mention your organisation's name at least once. After all, without your organisation, the issues being reported would rarely be raised.

Tip: Link to an international day

HelpAge Kenya used International Day of Older Persons as a “hook” to get a 30-minute interview with its chief executive broadcast on national television.

International days

International Women’s Day (8 March)

World Water Day (22 March)

World Health Day (7 April)

International Day of Families (15 May)

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15 June)

International Day of Older Persons (1 October)

World AIDS Day (1 December)

Human Rights Day (10 December)

Providing a “hook”

A golden rule of attracting the media is to use a “hook” - to give them a good reason to get involved. Here are some ideas:

- Take journalists to visit a project and interview older people.
- Arrange for people to speak about older people’s issues at special events organised by the local government that the media will attend, such as religious ceremonies and provincial festivals.
- Host a media breakfast to launch a new project or report.
- Run a workshop for journalists with a panel discussion, high-profile speaker or film showing.
- Run media awards for the best coverage of older people’s issues.
- Run competitions for students, such as drawing, poster or writing competitions.
- Organise an eye-catching event with older people, such as a play, demonstration or exhibition.
- Offer new angles on everyday stories, such as a child who is cared for by a grandparent, who has excelled their school exams.
- Launch new research containing surprising statistics.
- Use anniversaries of events, asking questions such as “One year since the government was elected, what has it done for older people?” or “Fifty years after independence, how are people who were young then doing now?”
- Offer a fresh perspective on a topical issue such as an emergency, such as how “forgotten” older people are affected and how they are contributing to relief efforts.
- Offer unusual or touching stories about amazing individuals, such as an older man who is caring for his sick son, or an older woman who has set up an older people’s club.
- Link stories to international days (see left). These receive high levels of coverage in many countries.

Key points

- The media is an invaluable way to help you raise funds, influence policy makers, or dispel myths about older people.
- You can increase your chance of getting media coverage by understanding how the media works and generating stories that will interest the media.

Find out more

Ageways 74: Working with the media

Provides guidelines on how to get the media interested, social media, getting coverage in a crisis, how to write a press release, how to manage the broadcast interview, tips for good writing, writing an opinion piece.

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