Handout 4:
'Engaged' domain case study

HelpAge Pakistan – Engaging older women in older people's associations

HelpAge Pakistan has developed tailored approaches to engaging and strengthening women's voices in different contexts. The Country Director, Ajeeba Aslam shared, "Something that works in one area won't work in another". In southern Pakistan, where society is more integrated on gender lines than in the north of the country, HelpAge has worked to include older women in older people's organisations (OPA), alongside men. Staff began by engaging men in the OPAs by explaining they would be keen to hear from women as there are issues that affect them uniquely. HelpAge staff would raise issues specific to women. Men increasingly wanted to be able to provide this perspective for HelpAge staff and gradually would encourage women to join their group. Staff shared examples from other communities where older women were included. This acted as an incentive and encouraged members of the OPA to assist HelpAge in hearing older women's voices – it was considered a big achievement.

Gradually, more women have joined these groups and have been actively encouraged to take on leadership roles. This has been supported by partner organisations working with women only groups whose members had participated in skills training and leadership and who were happy to join the older people's organisations.

In northern Pakistan, a different approach has been used. Society is much more split along gender lines and only women social mobilisers are engaged in women's groups. To address the issue of including older women in organisations, HelpAge Pakistan began by speaking to men who participate in older people's groups. HelpAge staff explained the need to address issues of relevance to older women which only women have experience and the necessity of creating a space to hear their voices and engage with them on services and policy design, for example. Taking this approach, HelpAge has been able to initiate all women's organisations.

Ajeeba notes that Voice work involving older women depends very much on how it is framed. She said "If we said, 'we're working on a transformation agenda and want women to be included' it wouldn't work. If you talk about 'no one else has the insights on the issues that affect older women', it can work".

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Handout 4:'Engaged' domain case study
continued

Engaging diverse groups

The project was initiated by bringing together existing community groups of people of all ages to discuss how they might work to improve the lives of older people in their village. Stakeholders who agreed to participate in the project decided to hold a public meeting, inviting older people to attend and to identify their needs and discuss what activity could be undertaken together. Posters were developed and placed in different settings to advertise the meeting. The group used community mapping to identify specific groups who might have missed the written material or the announcement at the market, including those with communication needs or people who are more socially isolated or housebound.

The group identified individuals and organisations who had contacts with groups that were harder to reach. These included religious associations, health and social workers, and friends and family. They identified 'community champions' to reach those who were more excluded. The community champions visited different associations and asked them to help circulate information about the meeting. They also visited individuals by going door-to-door in specific areas of the village that were more isolated. The community champions also made plans for how these older people could join the meeting, including considering how they could make the venue more accessible to people with different needs. They considered how individuals could reach the venue, how they could enter the venue and be comfortable within it, and how they could actively participate in the meeting, ensuring their communication needs were met. Where people weren't able or didn't want to join the meeting but were keen to be involved in the project, the community champions gathered comments or suggestions from them on the topics that were going to be discussed and shared these at the meeting. They agreed to feedback information about the discussion and to communicate next steps.

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