

# Connect

HelpAge

global network

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

Just like individuals, many organisations set New Year's resolutions, such as better management, cost-effective performance, and improved impact or profit. We all hope to do better in the coming year.

At HelpAge International, we saw plenty of achievements in 2018, but in a humble spirit we also have to recognise that we could have achieved even more. We start 2019 with more questions than answers but with the understanding that rapid population ageing and the changing environment will require clarity of purpose, focus and efficiency in the use of resources.

HelpAge is approaching the end of our current strategic period 2015–2020 and starting the process of developing a strategic vision for 2030. It will outline how we will focus our resources, across our regional hubs and the countries we engage in, to deliver change for older people and address population ageing over the next ten years – working with, through and for network members. During the strategic planning process, we will listen to and learn from older people and network members regionally and globally. We all need to be engaged, as our varied experience and insights will be crucial for building a shared understanding of our future journey together.

Imagine a better world for all ages – a world where all older women and men can fulfil their rights, be included in decision making and be able to fully contribute without discrimination. This desirable world can become true with our commitments and powerful collaborations to form not just a network but a growing movement on ageing. And of course, older people will be at the centre of this movement we support.

**Eduardo Kliken**  
Regional Director  
Asia-Pacific Region

## Midterm review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development

### ► Regional

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) hosted the Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development on 26–28 November 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. This Midterm Review provided an opportunity for member states to review progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the key actions for its further implementation. This is within the context of the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An indicator framework for further monitoring progress on population and development issues in Asia and the Pacific was discussed. Three thematic panel discussions included:

- Population dynamics and inequality in Asia and the Pacific
- Advancing gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights
- Population dynamics, vulnerable groups and resilience to climate change and disasters

Peter Morrison, Regional Programme Adviser, contributed to the first panel where the participants reviewed progress regarding linkages between population dynamics and inequalities and how these linkages affect and are affected by demographic megatrends in the region, such as population ageing, international migration and urbanisation.

The Chair's summary, regional overview report and synthesis report will be submitted as a regional input to the global review of the ICPD Programme of Action at the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development in New York in 2019.

In addition to the formal programme of the intergovernmental conference, there were side events to discuss the themes of the conference or present relevant initiatives. Peter also attended other panels including 'A Multistakeholder Approach to Healthy and Active Aging' and 'Family, Community & State in Ageing Societies: the way forward for Iran'.



You can find more detail on programme and related documents at <https://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/MTR-APPC>.

## Rapid needs assessment for older people in Sulawesi, Indonesia

### ► Regional

On 28 September 2018, a 7.4 magnitude earthquake hit Donggala, in the province of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. It triggered a tsunami that struck Palu Bay and the western coast of the Donggala Regency.

The official death toll stands at 2,081, while another 1,309 are recorded missing, 4,438 as severely injured and 206,494 internally displaced. Homes and other buildings collapsed, hospitals have been damaged and transport has been disrupted in the areas. The Indonesia Government has been leading the response, with support from local and international NGOs and the UN.

A rapid needs assessment of older people (RNA-OP) was conducted in October 2018. A total of 425 older people from the seven most affected communities were interviewed individually to understand their specific needs. The data was used for needs analysis and to inform a further response programme. The results showed that accessing enough food, and being able to do so safely, was the highest priority for older people and several reasons contribute to this. Besides the fact that many older women and men were unable to reach humanitarian



Yakkum Emergency Unit

services alone and had to rely on their family and friends for support to meet their basic needs, there were concerns about violence, abuse as well as privacy using public washrooms. Significant gender differences were reported on the topics of psychosocial wellbeing and their ability to cope with their current situation. Another important issue for older people was regular medication for chronic conditions.

The findings of the RNA raise significant concerns about the dignity of older people and their right to access humanitarian assistance in a dignified and inclusive way. Key recommendations for an inclusive response were provided and can be found in *Rapid needs assessment of*

*older people affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Sulawesi, Indonesia.*

During the ongoing emergency phase, HelpAge and local partner Yakkum Emergency Unit, with funding from Age International, HelpAge Germany and the Disasters Emergency Committee, is providing outreach health support, homecare, psychosocial support, mosquito nets, water filters and age-assistive devices. We are also supporting older people in getting their documents and ID cards.

The report can be downloaded from <http://www.helpage.org/download/5bed84cf25e07>

## Executive training on pension policy in Malaysia



Charles Knox-Vychmanov

### ► Regional

Across Asia and the Pacific, there is growing recognition of the importance of effective pension systems in the context of changing family structures, demographic ageing and concerns to promote inclusive growth. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

considers social protection systems for all essential to reduce poverty and inequality. Yet pension systems in the region face an array of challenges in relation to coverage, adequacy and sustainability.

Hosted by the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) of Malaysia, the Executive Course on Pension Policy was organised in a partnership between the International Training Centre of the ILO, the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP and HelpAge International. From 17–21 December 2018, this course provided an executive training on pension policy to equip participants with the skills to actively participate in national policy processes towards designing and reforming pension systems. It covered both contributory and social pensions,

and included two elective components on pension policy development and actuarial analysis.

Nearly 70 participants from 14 countries in the Asia-Pacific region attended the training. HelpAge facilitated the participation of 14 government officials, staff and partners from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines, where work on a universal social pension is one of the priorities for HelpAge and the network. This training course therefore directly contributed to building the capacity of stakeholders and advancing our work on social protection/pension in these countries.

## New multicounty programme: Scaling-up NCD Interventions in South-East Asia (SUNI-SEA)

### ► Regional

HelpAge International, Age International and Groningen University Netherlands, along with seven other academic partners in Southeast Asia and Europe, have begun a new 4-year EC funded project, Scaling Up NCD Interventions in South East Asia (SUNI-SEA). The project uses a research consortium approach to develop evidence to inform policy making on the most effective ways of addressing scalable solutions for health systems to address NCDs in Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam. Specifically, the research aims to understand if synergies between community-based activities and primary health care services enhance impact on health. Therefore, the research will look at macro level interventions (e.g. universal health coverage basic package of services) and micro level interventions

(older people's associations or OPAs in this context) and the interaction between them to create evidence useful for policy making in the target countries.

In the first year of the project, a retrospective study will be conducted on the various existing interventions. The overall effectiveness and the cost-effectiveness of approaches will be considered and tools based on global best practice will be developed. This will include a revised, strengthened health approach for OPAs, including tools, IEC materials and the like. For the remaining three years, prospective studies which roll out and scale up best practices will be undertaken in each country and the process and results monitored. The project will develop conclusions, evidence and policy lessons regarding the

interactions and efficacy of the various approaches, and their scalability, viability and sustainability. HelpAge's role will be to serve as country coordinators in Myanmar and Vietnam, to facilitate the research on OPAs in those countries, and to take the lead in communications for the whole project. It is the hope of the project partners and HelpAge Asia Pacific Regional Office that the findings of this project will add significantly to our understanding of how health systems in lower- and middle-income countries can be improved to better meet shifting health needs as populations age. The results from OPAs' health activities and the new revised tools to support them should benefit HelpAge network partners and others working with and through OPAs to improve the lives of older people and their communities.

## Opportunities for promoting income generating activities and care for older people

### ► Bangladesh

To promote the wellbeing of older people in Bangladesh, five Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs (ISHCs) have been implemented in the country under a regional project of the Strengthening Asia Network on Ageing (SANA Phase II).

After a successful Training of Trainers (TOTs) in January 2018, a refresher TOTs course and in-depth capacity building on thematic areas of work, i.e. Income Generating Activities (IGAs), interventions and community-based care for older people, was held on 9–13 September 2018. It was a five-day training with 32 participants, including 25 management committee members from the five ISHCs and 5 representatives of partner organisations, namely the SHARE Foundation, AID Comilla, the Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), Bohubrihy and two HelpAge staff members.

The TOTs was conducted by the HelpAge Regional Project Manager and the

Regional Programme Advisor from the regional office with the assistance of the HelpAge Bangladesh country team and the SHARE Foundation.

Throughout the 23 major sessions, participants learnt about age-friendly livelihood, micro-credit management, healthy and active ageing, self-care,

homecare activities, rights and entitlement, the ISHCs management and bookkeeping system, local fund raising, monitoring tools and survey and data collection systems. In addition, an action plan for the country was developed by the HelpAge team, its partners and Club Management Board members.



## 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Centre for Human Rights and Development

### ► Mongolia

The 10<sup>th</sup> of December is International Human Rights Day, but it is also a special day for the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), a HelpAge global network member in Mongolia, to celebrate its success. In 2018, CHRD turned 20. The anniversary celebration involved many older people from different provinces. Kate Wedgwood, HelpAge's Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigning, and Baralee Meesukh, Regional Head of Network Development, also joined this special moment.

Established in 1998, CHRD is a non-governmental organisation with the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and social justice in Mongolia. With a focus on human rights advocacy, human rights protection and community development, it strives to strengthen national human rights mechanisms and processes through capacity development, awareness raising, community driven processes and public interest litigation. In addition, the CHRD has established community savings groups with community groups throughout Mongolia. Upwards of 80 groups have been established with approximately 1000 participants that have been supported.



The CHRD has worked in conjunction with HelpAge since 2015, running several campaigns around the issues of health literacy, long-term care and palliative care, autonomy and independence, income and pensions. Ageism is another topic that the CHRD has been working on finding ways of addressing in its laws and policies. The campaigns have reached over 8,000 older persons throughout Mongolia.

In recent years, the CHRD has successfully advocated for a commitment from the National Human Rights Commission and the Government of Mongolia towards the rights of older persons. A joint government-civil society organisations Working Group was established to carry on advocacy towards



Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)



ensuring non-discrimination and full enjoyment of human rights by older women and men of Mongolia. The CHRD's participation at the UN's Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing was well received. The CHRD is now part of the Global Alliance on the Rights of Older Persons (GAROP) and continues to engage in advocacy for older persons locally, nationally and internationally.

## One voice for Thailand's older people

### ► Thailand

As ageing is becoming one of the major issues in Thailand, civil society organisations gathered to form a national ageing alliance in order to get themselves ready and prepared as the country will become an 'aged society' in 2021 and later, a 'super aged' society in 2030.

In November 2018, nine representatives of Thai civil society met to inaugurate the first meeting of civil society organisations working with and for older people in Thailand. The group ranged from small Older People's Clubs, faith-based organisations to larger non-profit organisations working at the regional level. Though they vary in size and their area of work, all have the same goal of

working to improve the quality of life for older people.

Old age allowance, health care, home care, healthy ageing, extending retirement age and age discrimination are among the issues that need to be put on the table, discussed and resolved together.

This first meeting was merely a chance to get to know one another and express a determination to meet more regularly in the coming years. The alliance was formed in an informal manner with a basic agreement on how to communicate among groups, their roles and responsibilities. Membership of the group is fluid and is not limited to the initial attendees.



Baralee Meesukh/HelpAge International

By coming together, the group hopes that it will strengthen the voice of civil society and provide legitimacy for influencing policies that have a direct impact on older people.

# The right to health for older people, the right to be counted

At the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the foundation of the World Health Organisation in 1948 was the global commitment to establish the right to health of all people everywhere. Unfortunately, the reality is that older people's right to health is undermined by significant data gaps in both older people's health status and in their access to universal health coverage (UHC).

The Global AgeWatch Insights report 2018, *The right to health for older people, the right to be counted*, was developed to highlight those data gaps. The data gaps are considered in the context of three key transitions challenging contemporary policy makers. These are transitions in demographic, epidemiological and health systems. Essentially, health systems need to adapt to the world's ageing population and the growth in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to ensure that older people's right to health is met. The global push towards UHC (given increased momentum by the Sustainable Development Goals) provides opportunities to guide this transition. The aim of UHC is to ensure affordable access to essential health services of good quality for everyone, regardless of age, sex, disability, race or other socioeconomic characteristics.

The Insights report is supported by 12 country profiles. The profiles provide some comparative information on trends in older people's physical and mental health status and on their access to universal health coverage. In the case of Asia Pacific, the three country profiles are of Myanmar, Pakistan and Vietnam. Available data shows that NCDs accounted for approximately 80 per cent of the total number of years lived with a disability in each of these countries. In the later stages of life, the main types of NCD causing disability are cardiovascular disease (CVD), chronic pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes.

While the data available on older people's mental health is limited, it does show some interesting trends. The prevalence of major depressive disorders is higher among women than men in all of the profile countries except Myanmar where the prevalence is slightly higher among men. In older women in Vietnam, prevalence increases between the ages of 50 and 60 and then decreases until around age 80, after which prevalence starts to increase again. In Pakistan, prevalence steadily increases among women and men between the ages of 50 and 80. Of the three countries, the highest prevalence of major depressive disorders was found among older people in Pakistan, approximately 5 per cent among

women aged 75 to 84 and 3 per cent among men of the same age in 2015. What the available data does not tell us is why we have these variations in trends between countries.

The report also explores the rate of mortality due to self-harm. In Vietnam, the burden of deaths due to self-harm is highest among men aged 70 and over across age cohorts and both sexes. In 2015, the rate was approximately 33 per 100,000 for men aged 70 and over. Looking at the burden of deaths resulting from self-harm in Pakistan, the rates were higher among women



Hereward Holland/Age International

across all age cohorts in the early 1990s. However, this pattern is changing. The female self-harm mortality rate began to fall around 2000 for the cohorts aged 50 – 69 and around 1995 for those aged 70 and over. It was below the self-harm mortality rate for men of the same age in 2015. Patterns have also been changing in Myanmar. Self-harm mortality rates among women aged 70 and over were higher than men but have declined since 1995 while rates among men of the same age have increased and are now marginally higher (13.5 deaths per 100,000 for men and 13.2 per 100,000 for women).

From the data in the Insights report, it is evident that, while older people are living longer, for many their later years are marred by unnecessary ill health, disability and loss of wellbeing. Access to UHC is essential to address these issues. Again, while the available data is patchy, it does raise concerns about barriers to access UHC for older people, and about deficits in care. These include insufficient diagnosis and treatment of mental and cognitive health conditions such as depression and dementia, and limited recognition of self-harm as a risk for older people.

## The three transitions



### The demographic transition

- The world is ageing rapidly – by 2020, there will be more than 1 billion people aged 60 and over.
- Low- and middle-income countries are home to 70% of the world's older people.
- Women outlive men around the world by an average of 4.7 years.



### The epidemiological transition

- The global pattern of disease is shifting towards non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- NCDs have a disproportionate impact on older people – in 2011, 75% of deaths from NCDs in low- and middle-income countries were of people aged 60 and over.



### The health systems transition

- Health systems need to adapt to the world's ageing population and the growth in NCDs to ensure older people's right to health is met.
- The Sustainable Development Goals and the global push towards universal health coverage provide opportunities to guide this transition.

## The four components of older people's right to health

1

### Availability

Health workers are not trained to respond to health challenges common in older age. Across 11 African countries, *only 4 per cent of medical schools offered specialist courses in geriatrics and nearly 50 per cent had no geriatrics training* in the broader curriculum at all.

2

### Accessibility

**Physical accessibility:** a lack of community-level health services means older people, many with declining mobility, must travel long distances to receive care. This puts services out of reach. *The average distance to a health facility in Zimbabwe is 10 km.*

**Affordability:** cost can discourage older people from accessing health services. *In China 62 per cent of older people did not seek health services for financial reasons when they felt unwell.*

**Health information:** older people often lack information about their health and where to access services and support. *In middle-income countries, 1 in 10 older people did not know where to access health services.*

3

### Acceptability

Health systems are often insensitive to older women's specific issues. *In rural Pakistan, most of the older women one doctor saw had a physical health issue relating to menopause.* Yet older women are rarely considered in sexual health services.

4

### Quality

Without adequate health data, services cannot effectively meet the needs of the people accessing them. *In Africa, 34 of 40 countries that have conducted the WHO STEPS survey on non-communicable diseases have not included anyone over the age of 64.*

The Global AgeWatch Insights report provides a clear path to action on the data issues and gaps that currently block effective planning and implementation of health systems for older people in low- and middle-income countries. HelpAge is inviting decision makers—in governments, multilateral agencies, national statistical offices and civil society organisations—to join our call to action to achieve older people's right to health. We invite you to read our report at [www.globalagewatch.org](http://www.globalagewatch.org).

## Upcoming events

### Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

11–22 March 2019, New York

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Commission elaborated a multi-year programme of work for the first time in 1987, containing priority themes for discussion and action at its annual sessions. For 2019, the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 11 to 22 March 2019. The priority theme is “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”.

Find more details at UNWOMEN website: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw63-2019>



### 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing

15–18 April 2019, New York

The Tenth Working Session of the Working Group will be held from 15 to 18 April 2019, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The topics for the 10<sup>th</sup> OEWG in 2019 have been chosen which are:

- Social protection and social security, Including social protection floors
- Education, training, life-long learning and capacity building

Non-governmental organisations who want to participate at the 10<sup>th</sup> Working Session will have to apply for accreditation. The deadline for submitting an application for accreditation is 18 February 2019.

Find more details at <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/tenthsession.shtml>

## Global AgeWatch Insights

The right to health for older people, the right to be counted

AARP and HelpAge International



Visit the Global AgeWatch site (<http://www.globalagewatch.org/>) for the report and country profiles, infographics, analysis, expert comments and case studies.

## Facing the Future: Understanding the implications of the feminisation of ageing



Tsao Foundation, Singapore

### ► Singapore

By 2050, the population of the Asia-Pacific region will be one of the oldest in the world. What is less known is that the face of ageing will be female—of the estimated 1.3 billion older persons in the region, more than half will be women. Since women face entrenched gender inequalities in assets and opportunities throughout their lives, this raises several concerns:

- Are there gender differences in ageing?
- Are older women more vulnerable to financial insecurity than older men?
- Do older women have sufficient resources to meet their needs in old age?

These questions were the focus of discussion in a series of events organised by the Tsao Foundation and the Asian Women's Forum on Financial Security in Singapore in November 2018. Representatives from seven countries in East and Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam participated in the “Regional Learning Network on Women's Financial Security: Advocacy Workshop” held on 28–29 November 2018. Bert Maerten, Regional Head of Programmes, HelpAge Asia Pacific Regional Office, attended the workshop.

During the two-day workshop, participants developed an advocacy strategy for each country. The

participants also agreed to work together on a regional advocacy plan, to raise awareness and catalyse policy action on this issue, targeting both governments and inter-governmental organisations such as the United Nations and ASEAN.

Corrina Lim, Executive Director, Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Singapore, provided fascinating insights into the evolution of AWARE's role in policy advocacy in Singapore. This was followed by a presentation by Shailey Hingorani, Head of Research and Advocacy at AWARE, on their current research in collaboration with the Tsao Foundation on “The Financial Costs of Caregiving.” Through the discussions that followed, the network agreed to embark on similar research on caregiving in the region. Country studies will be conducted simultaneously, and a comparative analysis of the different country results will also be completed. The workshop concluded with a reaffirmation of the goals of the network to increase awareness and action on older women's needs.

On 29 November, 2018, the Regional Learning Network on Women's Financial Security in Old Age hosted a wine and cheese reception to celebrate the publication of the book, “Financial Security of Older Women: Perspectives from Southeast Asia.” The book is the outcome of the Network's research project

in six countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. It is the first cross-country comparative study that assesses the status of financial security of older women in the region. Using the life-course lens to analyse the financial status of older women, the book argues that women's financial insecurity in old age is the cumulative outcome of gendered inequalities faced by women throughout their lives. The book emphasizes the pivotal impact of women's caregiving responsibilities on their ability to accumulate income, savings and pensions; and calls for policy interventions at key risk stages in women's lives.

From a regional discussion on older women, the focus shifted to Singaporean women at the Singapore Forum “We Leaned In, Now What? Responses to Women's Life Course Risks” held on 30 November 2018. About 150 international and local delegates joined the event. The event commenced with an inspiring speech by the Guest of Honour, Member of Parliament, Ms Foo Mee Har who underlined the importance of addressing the needs of older women. This was followed by a presentation of the main findings of the Singapore study by Dr Supriti Bezbaruah, Research Fellow, and Ms Susana Concorde Harding, Director of ILC Singapore. Both highlighted, among other things, the need to ensure that women enter, remain and progress in the



labour force for financial security in old age; and the impact of caregiving on women's ability to accumulate assets and income for old age.

A major highlight of the event was the launch of the Singapore Alliance of Women in Ageing (SAWA). For the first time in Singapore, SAWA brings together four organisations working on gender and ageing – the Tsao Foundation, AWARE, the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) and PPIS (Singapore Women's Muslim Association) to collectively address the financial security needs of older women.

The event also brought together stakeholders from the private sector, with the launch of a joint report from the Asia-Pacific Risk Center (Marsh & McLennan Companies) and the Tsao Foundation on the "Gender Retirement Savings Gap of Low-Income Professionals." After the launch of the report by Ms Godelieve van Dooren, Regional Industry Leader, Asia Pacific Mercer, a lively panel discussion on these topics ensued with representatives from Mercer, AWARE and the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC).

The event ended with a call to action from all participants to raise awareness and work together to improve the financial security of older women.

## HelpAge in Myanmar champions inclusive approach through new disability project

In Myanmar, an older person who is unable to walk or a teenager with learning difficulties is likely to be unable to live an ordinary life in which they can study, work, socialise and participate in society. The older person may not be able to attend community meetings and have their voice heard because they cannot physically get there, and negative perceptions about the teenager's ability to study may stop them attending school, potentially preventing them from finding work in later life.

This does not need to be the case. These barriers prevent participation, but they can be dismantled to ensure that people with impairments can be included in all aspects of life. HelpAge Myanmar's new two-year project, funded by the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT), aims to end this exclusion in communities in Magway Region in central Myanmar and Kayin State in the southeast.

In these areas there is a significant gap in education and working opportunities for people with disabilities, as well as a lack of awareness on issues surrounding disability and no sustainable community structures that can promote inclusion. Meanwhile, the Government of Myanmar has limited capacity and resources to address the social protection needs of people with disabilities. By addressing the wider issue of inclusion, we can promote the human rights of people with disabilities.

To address this wider narrative of inclusion and promote the rights of people with disabilities, we are partnering with the Disabled People's Development Organisation and Karen Baptist Convention to strengthen existing village community groups and establish new organisations to support people with disabilities. They will provide assistive devices like wheelchairs and eyeglasses, and will help children with disabilities to attend school, help develop livelihoods through skills training, promote better nutrition through food safety and hygiene workshops, and raise awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities.

HelpAge Myanmar Country Office is helping the local government to increase its social protection support for people with disabilities by connecting community groups to local authorities through exchange visits and explaining how cash transfers are delivered electronically.

Ultimately, this will help improve the status of people with disabilities in 40 villages across Magway Region and Kayin State, directly reaching 700 people with disabilities and a further 30,000 people among their households who will benefit from stronger community organisations, links to local training centres, and improved markets for their businesses.

We know physical and mental impairments can be both a cause and consequence of poverty, and that is why it is vital that we dismantle the barriers that prevent people with these impairments from fully participating in society in Myanmar. The project runs until July 2020 and we look forward to sharing the impact it will have on people with disabilities and their households in rural Myanmar.



Hereward Holland/Age International



Visit the link to download the e-book <http://asiawomen.org.sg/news-events/financial-security-of-older-women-perspectives-from-southeast-asia>

## Replication of Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs (ISHC): Achievements in 2018

### ► Vietnam

After the approval of the government's decision on the replication of the Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) model in the 2016–2020 period, the Vietnam Association of the Elderly (VAE) was assigned to chair and coordinate with related ministries and its branches to implement this national plan. The targets are set to establish and maintain the activities of about 2,000 ISHCs in at least 45 provinces (with at least 100,000 members, including 65,000 elderly participating and benefiting) by 2020.

In order to implement this decision, most localities in the country have actively participated with a spirit of responsibility and high determination. As of the end of December 2018, 55 of 63 provinces nationwide had been approved by the Provincial People's Committee Plan to replicate the ISHC model; more than 1,650 ISHCs had been established (25 per cent higher than the set target). Many localities have replicated the club methodically, with eight key areas of operational activities, which have a



Vietnam Association of the Elderly (VAE)

comprehensive impact on the older people and the community.

The VAE has organised 12 training courses on club formation for more than 800 cadres of the Elderly Association at the provincial, district and commune levels, as well as Club Management Boards in 24 provinces in the country.

For Vietnam, the ISHC model is considered the best kind of club with a profound, comprehensive and sustainable

development approach. Up to now, these clubs have been operating effectively, helping to promote the independent strength of the older people, having positive and multidimensional effects on care and promoting the role of older people. The model is highly appreciated by ministries, sectors, donors and the public. Many international organisations have come to visit ISHCs, study the model and exchange experiences.

## Scoping visit on potential for advocacy for universal social pension

### ► Bangladesh

On 19–23 November 2018, Usa Khiewrord and Dharmapriya Wesumperuma, on behalf of HelpAge Asia Pacific Regional Office, conducted an initial scoping visit to explore the opportunities for and the prospect of advocating a universal social pension in Bangladesh. The HelpAge team had meetings with high-level management and policy/decision makers of the General Economic Division (GED) of the Planning Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), the Resource Integration Centre (RIC), the Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAAIGM). They also had conversations with experts in development and social pensions.

The open discussions during the visit enhanced stakeholders' understanding of the concept of a universal pension. The country's limitations and constraints on introducing universal social pension were discussed and different examples from other Asian countries that have implemented a universal pension were shared. The network members in Bangladesh expressed an interest in and a commitment to supporting a universal social pension as well as establishing their own platforms for advocacy. Close collaboration and knowledge sharing between HelpAge and the network members will continue. Obviously, regular dialogues with policy and decision makers and senior technical officers in the relevant ministries/departments are important to build a strong political will. The key take-aways from this visit will be considered, along with the contemporary political situation, in shaping our strategies and action plan for a successful advocacy for a universal social pension in Bangladesh.



HelpAge International

## Life stories

### “I lived in hope and the OPA changed my life”



#### ► Nepal

Gambir Man Gurung's life changed when he lost his vision at the age of just 7 years old due to a severe attack of measles. Born into a poor family, his childhood was tough with no access to basic facilities. But this setback did not stop him from hoping to live a good life. Now living with his cousin, he is 61 years old and a member of the older people's association (OPA) in Lumle Village.

One day while talking to his neighbour, he heard about the Lumle OPA and a project that supports the issues of older people, which was implemented by the Community Support Group. Gurung was surprised and happy when his name was listed among the beneficiaries for a cash grant of NRs.7500 (US\$65) from the Lumle OPA, funded by the Community Support Group.

“As soon as I got the grant, I thought of using it in a good way, so I bought a goat the very next day”, said Gurung. These days, rearing goats is part of his daily routine. “Joining the Lumle OPA has brought some hope into my life”, he added. As a member, he attends every meeting that the Lumle OPA holds and shares his opinions with other members as well as with his neighbours.

### “I will never fall again”: how a disability cash allowance lifted Daw Toe Ma from depression

#### ► Myanmar

Daw Toe Ma is a 78-year-old woman from Hta Naung Kone in Myingyan Township, close to Mandalay in central Myanmar. She started struggling when her husband left her over 30 years ago. Living on her own, she had to work very hard to get by, which later made her physically impaired. She could not see or move easily.

Daw Toe Ma now receives a disability allowance of 15,000 Myanmar kyats (US\$9.75) a month, thanks to a pilot social protection project launched by HelpAge International. She was first registered in January 2017 when her village's social protection committee, after receiving training, began assessing who should be registered to receive cash through the project.

When the committee started distributing the money, she saved it and then used it to buy four sheep, but due to her disability she was unable to take care of them. Thankfully, her neighbours stepped in and helped free of charge, and a while later the sheep gave birth to two lambs.

She also has visits from care volunteers at her home two or three times a month to help her with housework and personal hygiene. Sometimes they provide medicine and food too.

Daw Toe Ma used to think she would be lonely, hungry and in pain as her life came to an end. Now, through the support of the project, and due to the kindness,

compassion and determination of the members of the village's social protection committee, she leads a better life and has transformed her outlook on life.

She knows the allowance won't continue after the project ends, but she says, “I do not worry about that. The committee will continue to provide some money as a disability allowance, and I already have six sheep, which my neighbour looks after. I had fallen, but the project and the committee picked me up. I will never fall again,” Daw Toe Ma said.



## Resources

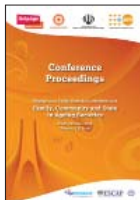
### Publications



**Who Cares: Why older women's economic empowerment matters for the Sustainable Development Goals**  
*Age International*



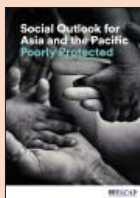
**Battling against Droughts: Recollecting older people led climate resilient drought mitigation efforts in the Thar Desert, India**  
*Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS)*



**HelpAge Asia-Pacific Regional Conference 2018: proceedings**  
*HelpAge International*



**Disability and ageing in Myanmar**  
*HelpAge International*



**Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected**  
*The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)*

The Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific lays out new arguments and evidence for the critical and urgent need to increase investment in people, particularly in social protection, over 20 years.

### Blogs

**When older people flee their homes from danger, ageism is a barrier to accessing help** (<https://bit.ly/2RZATAs>)  
*Madeleine McGivern, Humanitarian Policy Advisor, HelpAge International*

**Dancing lotuses bring joy to all ages in Vietnam** (<https://bit.ly/2RZF1QT>)  
*Patrick Wilson, Head of Communications and Digital, HelpAge International*

### Video

**Active, Self-reliant and productive: Empowering older people through intergenerational group** (<https://bit.ly/2B2prKx>)  
*YAKKUM Emergency Unit, Indonesia*

### Website



*New website on ageing — the Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative (AHWIN)*  
[www.ahwin.org](http://www.ahwin.org)

**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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**Share your ideas with us:** We welcome your opinions, ideas and suggestions. Let us know what you think about *Connect* and how we can improve.

In addition, we welcome articles for consideration. Please send articles at any time to:

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