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HelpAge Voice framework

An Introduction



The Voice framework was developed to guide action on Voice. It illustrates the range of activities that HelpAge International and HelpAge Global Network members are undertaking on Voice, showing how the different activities relate to each other and how, collectively, they contribute to strengthening older people's voices. This document introduces the framework. The full version of the Voice framework is also available which unpacks each element of the framework.

Introduction

Older people tell us that they value being treated fairly, with respect and dignity, making their own decisions, having their voices heard, participating in their own and others' development, and having access to services that respond to their different needs.

Yet for many older people realising this is a struggle – from making decisions for themselves within the family and going about their lives according to their own values and preferences, to ensuring they are included and able to influence change within social and political spheres at local, national and international levels.

We want to support older people to exercise their right to speak as they wish and to have their voices heard and their issues included in laws, policies, programmes and services.

Our approach to voice

Voice is about older people's ability to claim their rights, to make choices and to participate meaningfully in decision-making in all parts of their lives, including the personal, family, social and political. It is also about older people's ability to challenge ageism and inequality. At HelpAge, voice is often used as an umbrella term to capture the areas of participation, empowerment, agency, autonomy and accountability.

Voice has intrinsic value. The opinions we hold, the decisions we make, and the actions we take constitute a significant part of who we are. Having choice and agency in relation to these is central to our dignity, wellbeing and sense of self-worth, and to a rights-based approach to ageing. Voice also has instrumental value. Including older people's voices in development and decision-making processes that affect them can lead to better outcomes, including inclusive institutions, improved access to and quality of public services, and positive human development.

Voice work is fundamentally about power. Strengthening older people's voices necessitates nurturing their empowerment at home, in their community, at work and in policy and decision-making processes. To succeed, voice activity must challenge deep-rooted power imbalances and attitudinal, environmental and institutional discrimination that lead to ageism and inequality.

The Voice framework and how it can be used

Voice domains

The Voice framework was developed to guide action on Voice. It illustrates the range of activities that HelpAge International and HelpAge Global Network members are undertaking on Voice, showing how the different activities relate to each other and how, collectively, they contribute to strengthening older people's voices. The voice framework includes five **domains of voice activity**.

The domains of voice activity relate to **older people's voices being...**

- **Engaged** – Older people can say: "I am able and motivated to access and take part in activity that strengthens my voice and my rights regardless of my identity, individual or group characteristics, or the context in which I live."
- **Informed and empowered** – Older people can say: "I have access to information and knowledge related to my rights and entitlements and I have the resources, skills and confidence to claim these rights and to raise my voice."
- **Shared and combined** – Older people can say: "I have opportunities to meet with others, share my experiences and debate between ourselves. We are all able to express our needs, identify solutions, and form a collective, legitimate and representative voice."
- **Amplified** – Older people can say: "I have the opportunity to amplify my voice through a variety of channels and to join with others to campaign, influence agendas, and create movements for change."
- **Heard** – Older people can say: "My voice is heard through my active participation and influence in decision-making processes. Governments and other power holders are responsive to my needs and my rights."

When Voice related activities are implemented they can contribute to:

- building older people's '**power within**' themselves
- creating opportunities for older people to come together to realise their '**power with**' others
- supporting older people to harness their '**power to**' claim their rights and be heard
- enabling older people to have influence, control and have '**power over**' other more influential people or institutions and over key aspects of their lives

The framework suggests that older people's voices are strongest when all the domains of voice are addressed, from ensuring older people's voices are engaged to ensuring older people's voices are heard by power holders and that they can effect change. However, work on all these domains doesn't necessarily have to happen at the same time and the process of strengthening older people's voices should not be thought of as linear. What is important is that how different domains interact is systematically considered in the project design stage and that the relationship with other domains is considered. In this way, the framework can help you identify which actions to focus on and how the activity will contribute to strengthening older people's voices.

Individual and group characteristics and context

The relationship between voice and power means that achieving success means undertaking in-depth power and context analysis to inform project design. This must explore the **individual and group characteristics** of the older people you are working with, as well as how social and political norms, environmental and physical **contexts** manifest themselves in power dynamics from the household to the national level.

For older people, it is particularly important to recognise how **age** impacts upon a person's voice, and how ageist attitudes, beliefs and structures can lead to older people being discriminated against, excluded, and being denied their rights. Age intersects in a unique way with **gender** and **disability**, as well as other characteristics, which can intensify disadvantages and accumulate across the life course. These disadvantages mean that older women and older people with disabilities will always face much more of a challenge to raise their voices in all contexts and at all levels.

Analysis of these characteristics and contextual factors helps to inform the design of interventions, identifying how activity can best seek to transform power relations in order to strengthen older people's voices.

Visual representation of the Voice framework



An example of the domains in practice: Multi-functional Older People's Associations (OPAs)

OPAs can support older people to be agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries in their own lives and communities, mobilising older people to empower themselves, improve their lives and contribute to the development of their communities. Many of the activities undertaken by OPAs relate directly to the voice framework and support the realisation of older people's 'power within', 'power with', 'power to' and 'power over'.

Across countries and regions, OPAs vary and each OPA will undertake different activities. This can include:

- Actively engaging older people in activity, seeking to motivate different groups to participate, including older women and older people with disabilities (**Engaged**)
- Addressing interrelated needs of the older people in the community, including: income security; health and social care; social connection; rights and entitlements; disaster preparedness; women's participation; transparent governance and community participation. In doing OPAs support older people to be informed and empowered. (**Informed and Empowered, Shared and Combined**)
- Drawing upon the community's existing resources, particularly the capacities of older people themselves to serve as agents of change in their lives and communities. (**Informed and Empowered, Shared and Combined**)
- Seeking to strengthen links for older people at the community level with local government and services. (**Heard**)
- Where OPAs have national-level associations or federations these sometimes represent the interests of older people to policy-makers or do accountability work, ensuring older people are receiving entitlements. Others strengthen the voice of OPA members with policy-makers. (**Amplified, Heard**)

Examples of specific activities OPAs undertake include:

- Regular meetings providing a space to get together (**Engaged, Shared and Combined**)
- Sharing of information on rights and entitlements (**Informed and Empowered**)
- Promoting older women's membership and leadership (**Engaged / Informed and Empowered**)
- Community-wide problem solving (**Shared and Combined**)
- Participation by national federations of OPAs in ageing taskforces, thus giving older people a voice in national policy-making (**Amplified, Heard**)
- Connections with local authorities for trainings or accessing local government funds allocated for community-led development / Collaboration with local authorities to improve the efficiency of state-led initiatives (e.g. DRR, health check-ups, pensions) (**Heard**)

The impact of these activities support older people to have choice, control and a voice in their lives and exercise their rights. The activity can also lead to more inclusive institutions, improved access to and quality of public services, and positive development outcomes.

For older people, the impacts include:

- Increased sense of empowerment as a result of addressing multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusions and building power within
- Increased self-worth, purpose and respect
- More opportunities to come together, share experiences and collectively identify solutions

- More confidence to speak in meetings and share their opinions, including older people
- More confidence in communicating with local
- Increased confidence in communicating with local authorities and power holders
- Increased knowledge about government processes

More widely the impact includes:

- Increased awareness and uptake of rights and entitlements (e.g., pensions, health insurance)
- Strengthened relationships between community and government
- More efficient implementation of policies and programmes at community-level
- Better informed policy decisions.

Resources

- **HelpAge Voice framework**

If you would like to read the full HelpAge Voice Framework, you can access it here: www.helpage.org/what-we-do/society-for-all-ages/voice/

- **Voice training toolkit**

We have developed a 'Voice training toolkit' to help partners, network members, and staff become familiar with the key elements of the framework and to strengthen their confidence to implement activities that ensure older people are heard at all levels. The toolkit comprises a facilitator's guide, four training modules, and a series of handouts which can be found here: www.helpage.org/what-we-do/society-for-all-ages/voice/

- If you are interested in taking up the training, or would like to join our global Voice Learning Group, please get in touch with our Global Voice Adviser, [Jemma Stovell](#).