

# Grey and Green road map for climate actions

*Consultation report to help achieve the Grey and Green manifesto priorities*



## Contents

- 1 Background
- 2 Climate change and older people: challenges
- 3 Grey and Green actions
- 6 Recommendations

## Background

HelpAge launched its Grey and Green manifesto in November 2022, setting out its commitment to put older people at the forefront of climate solutions and provide a platform for organisations, practitioners, and HelpAge global network members to ensure older people are included in efforts to mitigate against – and adapt to – climate change.<sup>1</sup>

In February 2023, HelpAge held a consultation with 50 of these experts to discuss the challenges of climate change and their impact on older people. The role of older people in communities and societies was given pivotal importance to amplify this role in climate debates.

The aim of the consultation was to create a roadmap of climate actions to help achieve the Grey and Green manifesto priorities. This roadmap provides a summary of activities and actions necessary to achieve the inclusion of older people in climate actions.

## Climate change and older people: challenges

Climate change presents a growing and significant global challenge. Evidence indicates that older people are disproportionately impacted by extreme events that are exacerbated by climate change, such as flooding, extreme heat, droughts and storms.<sup>2</sup> Most research concludes that older adults face higher risks from climate change compared to the rest of the population. For example, older adults are vulnerable to being trapped in poor environments through lack of mobility, disability and frailty. They are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and higher risk of dehydration due to physiological changes that occur as part of the ageing process. Similarly low nourishment from the poor diets during a drought compounds the impact and long-term implications for health.<sup>3</sup>

This higher degree of vulnerability to climate change is made worse by poorly designed mitigation and adaptation policies that do not consider older people's special circumstances, and inadequate analysis of population ageing and its intersection with climate change. Both shortfalls require immediate remedy

At the same time, there are few studies of the distinctive abilities, expertise, traditional knowledge and leadership that older people can offer to climate action, and to making a difference to how local climate actions are planned and implemented in communities. A strong example of how older people can lead change is HelpAge's work in Southeast Asia, led by Older People's Associations and implemented by the Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV), to produce biochar<sup>4</sup> from biomass to increase crop yields at local level.

Older people are often seen as having caused climate change by not protecting the environment, or as being "victims" of it, rather than as champions and agents of change, with many reporting that they are excluded from planning responses to climate change. In addition, there is insufficient attention to climate change and its integration in other sectoral plans relevant to older people, eg health, care, social protection and livelihoods etc.



## Five priorities for inclusive climate change action



## Grey and Green actions

The Grey and Green Roadmap for climate change categorises climate actions by older people around five priorities.

### **1** Collect data and spotlight the facts on links and intersections between climate change and global ageing population

It is important that the impacts of climate change on older people are documented and communicated, and appropriate measures are integrated in local, national, regional, and global climate policies and plans to help build older people's resilience to climate change.

It is equally important to recognise the voice and experience of older people and to include them in planning processes so to better depict their needs, but also to convey their knowledge and lived experiences of a world experiencing rapid climate change.

Data collection and sophisticated modelling are also needed to understand changing population growth patterns and their impact on climate change – this will allow for proper mitigation and adaptation measures in places based on actual demand, and to plan for a future that is greener and inclusive. Planning and implementing adaptation and mitigation measures without recognising the intersection with ageing will impose high social, economic, fiscal, and health-related costs now and in the future.

### **2** Ensure that older people are engaged, supported and involved in climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives

A just and equal society requires equal participation of all citizens within communities, society and globally – regardless of age, status and income level. Reducing climate vulnerability of older people should be a priority for government and donors, and older people must be prioritised in climate action with appropriate financing.

There is a need to explore new avenues for inclusion of older people in climate change initiatives. Digital technology offers huge opportunities, especially on raising awareness and accessing timely information on climate risks. HelpAge partner in Indonesia, YAKKUM Emergency Unit (YEU), has developed an app





specifically designed for visually impaired people, and can function in the dark to emit signals, especially during evacuations. Activities can also be adapted for the differing levels of ability among older people, ie alternatives to internet-based strategies.

Older people make important economic and social contributions at all stages of their lives, with many continuing to undertake paid employment on farms. Within families, older people often provide financial support to other family members or help with childcare. It is important that older people's economic contributions are recognised and acknowledged in climate change planning and relevant processes.

Cities and urban development efforts should ensure that older people have appropriate amenities, including access to urban green environments – which allows a wide range of positive health outcomes and benefits. Spending time in natural surroundings encourages physical activity and engagement, increases energy, fights depression, boosts memory, improves physical health, reduces stresses, provides restorative experiences, and encourages social relations.<sup>5</sup>

HelpAge is working with older people in Latin America to develop age-friendly environments and improve community spaces through nature-based solution, eg urban gardens, as a way to support the physical and mental health of older people with positive climate and environment impacts.

### **3 Spearhead the leadership of older people by amplifying their voice when demanding climate action and build joint political influence and empowerment**

We need to explore how climate change can stimulate new opportunities for public engagement and activism involving older people as change agents. This should be recognised in different forms, ranging from formal types of participation on committees to more informal networks of participation at a local level.

Advocating for representation of older persons in climate change initiatives and local councils for disaster risk reduction and climate change programmes is key to ensuring inclusion of older people in local climate actions. There is a need to empower older adults to bring about changes at different levels so that they can influence policy decisions for the benefit of wider community.

Grey and Green climate actions aim to promote older people's access to decision-making spaces within climate debates – from local to national and international levels – and to participate meaningfully within these spaces. The visibility of older people in public encourages greater engagement and mobilisation of other older people – eg, promoting older people's visibility in spaces like the United Nations' various Conferences of the parties (COPs) on climate change and biodiversity will in turn attract more older people.<sup>6</sup>

HelpAge network member, Age Nigeria Foundation, actively lobbies for older persons' rights and to have their needs reflected in local state and national climate change programmes in Nigeria. Most of this lobbying is older-people led and is inspiring others to join so that their voices are also heard.





#### **4 Foster active engagement of older and younger people to take collective actions on climate change**

In contrast to the vulnerability of older people, young people are frequently represented as active agents for tackling the climate catastrophe and advocating for change. In other instances, younger people may also be represented as victims of the climate crisis, through a narrative that pits generations against each other, blaming the older generation for destroying the futures of young people.

There is a need to better understand the capacities as well as the challenges facing these different age groups and bringing them closer could offer opportunities for jointly influencing inclusive climate actions at different levels.

There is a need to have intergenerational dialogues as one of the key transformations underpinning climate action. Greater funding and visibility for intergenerational solidarity principles and projects can help overcome this divide and build trust.

HelpAge network member, Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS), is addressing the knowledge gap between younger and older generations in India's Thar Desert through intergenerational learning groups. These discussions have proved very useful, as older group members (who were mostly women) provided insights on how to conserve traditional natural resources, while younger members talked about current debates in natural resource management and climate adaptation. This is an excellent example to create intergenerational solidarity, as young people appreciate older people's advice and validation.



#### **5 Promote international solidarity on climate change guided by the need to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries**

"We are all together" should be the message underpinning all the work on climate change. No country in the world today is spared the effects of climate change and it is imperative that we move forward together.

International solidarity on climate change is key to building resilience and covers important aspects such as finance, aid, technology transfer etc. Climate change necessitates solidarity across the developed and developing world, and working together to address the shared challenge of protecting our environment.

There is a need to bring older people from around the world to talk about how climate change impacts older people in different contexts. Creating a chain of communication and a platform such as the Grey and Green actions are key to bridging geographical divides.



Foundation for Older Persons' Development

## Recommendations:

Based on the discussions held at the workshop, the following recommendations can be made:

- Focus on ageing in climate change modelling and analysis, and predicting the impact of climate change on projected population scenarios.
- Support research that presents a more detailed understanding of older people as an age group to guide climate policy.
- Better engage older adults in climate conversation – provide opportunities for getting involved and utilise the knowledge and expertise of older people to drive forward interventions that address climate change.
- Ensure older people’s resilience to climate change is enhanced through age sensitive adaptation measures.
- Amplify the voice of older people’s representatives in climate debates and thereby draw in more older people as agents of change.
- Support older people to see themselves as powerful agents of change, ready to self-mobilise as part of community climate activism and action.

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

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### Endnote

1. HelpAge International, *The #GreyAndGreen Manifesto*, <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/society-for-all-ages/older-people-and-climate-action/the-greygreen-manifesto/>
2. Bryant N et al., *The Impact of Climate Change: Why Older Adults are Vulnerable*, LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston 2022, [https://ltsscenter.org/reports/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Why\\_Older\\_Adults\\_are\\_Vulnerable.pdf](https://ltsscenter.org/reports/The_Impact_of_Climate_Change_Why_Older_Adults_are_Vulnerable.pdf)
3. Harper S, The Convergence of Population Ageing with Climate Change, *Population Ageing* 12, 401–403, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12062-019-09255-5>
4. The potential of utilising biochar to sequester carbon in the soil and improve soil health is referred in various reports by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
5. American Psychological Association, Nurtured by nature, *Monitor on Psychology*, 51(3), 2020, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>
6. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change support the global response to the threat of climate change. The Convention on Biological Diversity is dedicated to promoting sustainable development signed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. All States that are Parties to the Convention are represented at the COP to take decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention, including institutional and administrative arrangements.