



Brisas del Volador, Colombia

Growing Resilience Together

Age-friendly Community Gardens working with nature

Summary

This case study shows how the Brisas del Volador community gardens address climate risks and social challenges in a vulnerable hillside neighbourhood in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, where limited urban infrastructure and climate hazards affect older people's wellbeing and social participation. In response, a community group, mainly comprised of older people and led by women, worked to upgrade two urban gardens using an approach that combines nature-based climate adaptation (Ecosystem-based Adaptation - EbA) with age inclusive principles (Age-Friendly Cities and Communities-AFCC).

Through participatory processes, capacity strengthening, and collaboration with local stakeholders, the community transformed vacant land located in a risk area for landslides into inclusive green spaces with age-friendly and ecological design features. As a result, the gardens not only helped restore biodiversity and improved food security, but also strengthened social cohesion, enhanced the wellbeing of older people, and demonstrated how community-led, nature-based solutions can build resilience and support climate change adaptation at the local level.



Overview of the Brisas del Volador Community

The Brisas del Volador community is located in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, a rapidly growing urban area shaped by migration, informal settlements, and limited access to services. Around 1,200 people live in this hillside community, where steep terrain, lack of age-friendly public spaces, poor road conditions, and long distances make daily life difficult. This is especially the case for older people, who often face mobility barriers, social isolation, and limited access to healthcare. The local ecosystem corresponds to a High Andean Dry Forest, with dry soils and unique biodiversity, including native plants such as cacti, orchids, and shrubs, as well as birds, butterflies, and pollinators that support the ecological balance.



Picture: Brisas del Volador Community / Bé Estudio Yemail Arquitectura

However, this environment is highly degraded due to informal urban growth, illegal mining, pollution, and low tree coverage that increases the heat island effect. Climate change is increasing risks in the area, with more intense rainfall, increased risk of landslides, extreme heat, and sudden temperature changes. These hazards particularly affect older people, who are more vulnerable to injuries, respiratory diseases, and isolation during extreme events.

What was the project approach?

The project is based on the premise that when older people are equipped, supported, and enabled to actively participate in designing Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCC) interventions, integrating Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) principles and an intergenerational approach, they can act as agents of change, generating evidence and strengthening advocacy for climate change adaptation.



Ecosystem-Based Adaptation (EbA) nature-based solutions to help people and ecosystems adapt to the impacts of climate change.



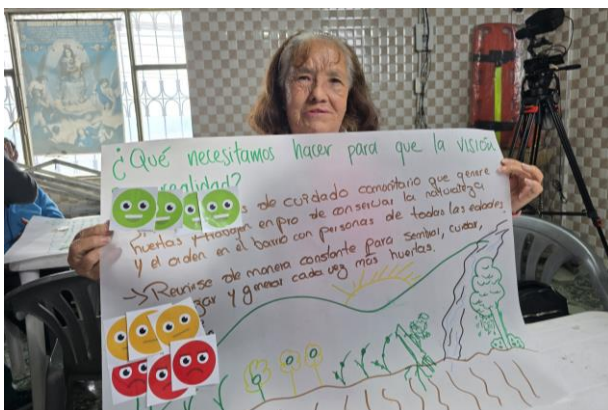
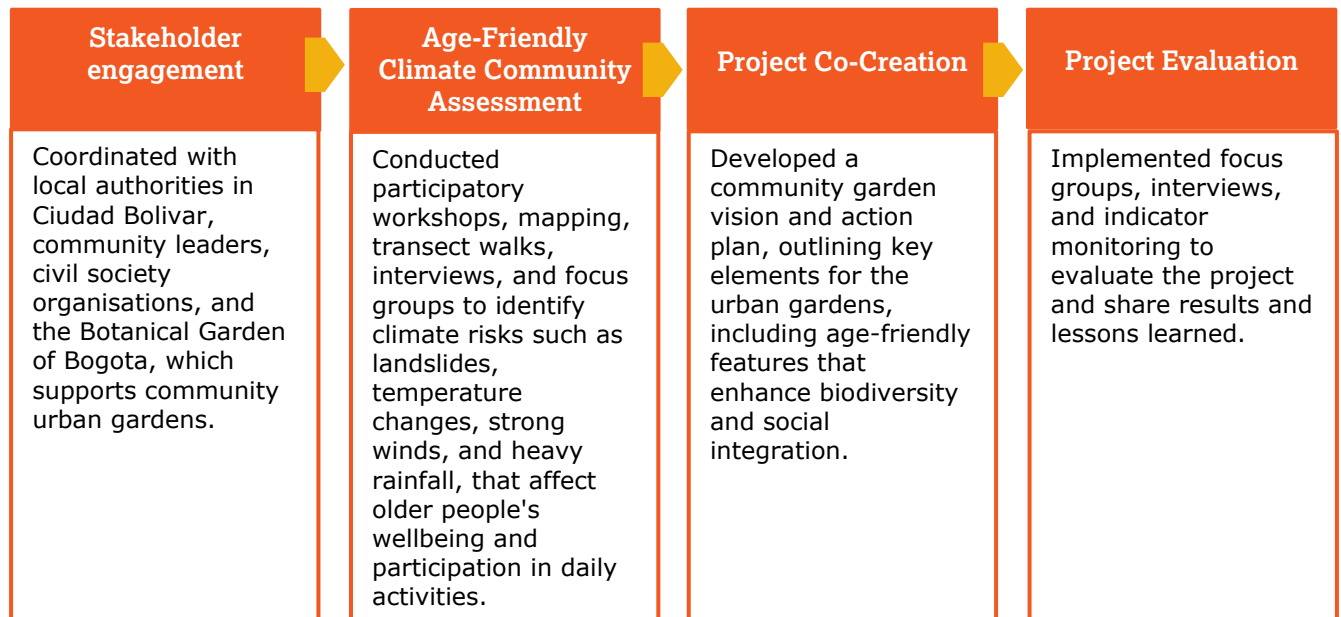
Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCC) promotes inclusive urban environments by improving accessibility, participation, and wellbeing for older people.

What happened?

A community action group of 129 people, mostly older people (85%) and largely led by women (72%), implemented two small age-friendly, nature-based community gardens on vacant plots identified as high-risk areas for landslides, located beside a concrete retaining wall.

Guided by a participatory approach that promoted community empowerment, the garden implementation followed a comprehensive process with the following stages:

Project implementation stages



Picture: Community Action Plan workshop / Daniela Vasquez – HelpAge International



Picture: Climate assessment mapping / Daniela Vasquez – HelpAge International

“I like coming to the garden because I have a strong connection with people... we work in the garden together.”

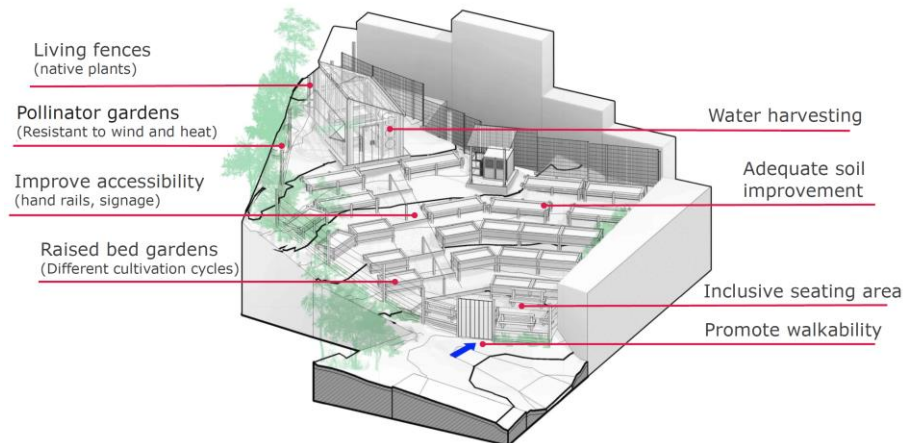
Ana María, 72



What were the results?

The project upgraded two community urban gardens named Maravillas de la Montaña (Marvels of the Mountain) and Brisas de las Mariposas (Butterflies Breeze), by integrating age-friendly and ecological design elements. These included raised planting beds at accessible heights, a greenhouse and a greater diversity of food crops, railings, pathways and signage to facilitate mobility and orientation, climbing plants to cover the existing concrete retaining wall, living green fences to support pollinators and seating areas with armrests and backrests to encourage rest and social interaction.

Maravillas de la Montaña Age-friendly nature-based Urban Garden



The project achieved two main results. First, it incorporated the voices and knowledge of older people, particularly their agroecological practices and expectations, through capacity-building activities that created a shared learning environment. This enabled them to make decisions about plant species, organize working groups, plan sowing cycles, and contribute to the design of more accessible gardens.

“For me, the change was like night and day. The water system is very good and well organized, and the flooring and the width of the beds are excellent.”

Antonio, 79



“There has been a huge improvement... now we can work standing up to clean and sow. We are very comfortable.”

Luis, 71



Second, the project introduced age-friendly features that demonstrate how urban interventions can improve accessibility and encourage the active participation of older people in both physical and social activities, ultimately enhancing wellbeing and reducing social isolation.



Picture: Age-Friendly Nature-based urban garden by Bé Estudio Yemail Arquitectura

Community gardens such as those in Brisas del Volador play a key role by restoring ecosystems, promoting biodiversity, improving food security, and creating safer, more inclusive spaces that enhance climate change resilience and wellbeing for older people at the local level.

“I really enjoy sharing in the garden, planting, organizing... taking care of them, watering...you have to really look after the plants.”

Diocelina, 65



Key results



- Engaging local stakeholders, including authorities and community members, was key to understanding how urban gardens could reflect local culture and respond to the specific context.
- Integrating well-designed, age-friendly features into shared open spaces can significantly improve accessibility, comfort, and usability for garden users.
- The project involved a diverse group of stakeholders across risk management, environmental issues, social inclusion, and urban planning, creating strong opportunities for future collaboration and scaling up similar initiatives.
- Ensuring that older people had a voice and were involved in decision-making from the beginning was essential for effective and sustainable implementation, while also strengthening community ownership, empowerment and visibility.
- The community has increased its understanding of climate change and learned the importance of working with nature to protect biodiversity and build resilience.
- This experience demonstrates that age-friendly design combined with nature-based approaches can mutually reinforce climate resilience, accessibility, and social inclusion, while offering strong potential for replication in other vulnerable neighbourhoods facing climate and social challenges.

"I feel very good because... I really like getting out of the house, being with others, and learning new things... you can always learn."

Cenaida, Age 74



Project partners



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



Age International (legally known as HelpAge International UK) is a subsidiary charity and the 'international arm' of Age UK and the UK supporting member of the HelpAge Global Network. Age International responds to the needs and promotes the rights of older people, focused on those facing challenging situations in low and middle-income countries.
www.ageinternational.org.uk



Fundación Placemaking Mexico transforms public spaces into vibrant meeting points. It is not just to intervene in the physical environment; it is to unite efforts to create places with identity that communities embrace, enjoy, and maintain over time.
www.placemaking.mx

Funding partners



Supported by:



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

based on a decision of
the German Bundestag



The Global EbA Fund is a catalytic funding mechanism for supporting innovative approaches to EbA to create enabling environments for its mainstreaming and scaling up. The fund is financed by International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and co-managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and partners. Learn more about the Fund and apply for a grant through the website:

www.globalebafund.org

As part of this project, HelpAge, alongside its project partners, produced a number of resources to support communities and policymakers to take action.

You can find all of this content and more online at:

www.helpage.org/america-latina-y-el-caribe/adaptacion-basada-en-ecosistemas/

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Front page photo by Daniela Vásquez / HelpAge
International

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