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# Introduction

HelpAge International coordinates a global network of organisations who promote the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy, and secure lives. The HelpAge Global Network is a unique worldwide alliance of over 170 members across 91 countries. Our vision is a world in which all older people can lead dignified, healthy, and secure lives. Our mission is to promote the wellbeing, rights, and inclusion of older people so we can all enjoy a future free from poverty, inequality, and discrimination.

Climate change manifests as a profound human rights crisis disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable and marginalised groups such as displaced persons, farmers, indigenous communities, children, women, people with disabilities and older persons[[1]](#footnote-2).

These inputs aim to amplify the voices of our HelpAge International network members mostly from India, Thailand, and Mozambique, highlighting the lived experiences of older persons through their own words. Their responses to the questionnaire paint a vivid picture of how climate change disrupts older persons’ fundamental rights to life, water, sanitation, food, livelihoods, as well as cultural heritage and participation, among others. To collect these responses, we asked our global network to answer the questions with an online session to introduce the questionnaire.

While our network members are keenly aware of the economic losses on older persons associated with climate change, the non-economic impacts deserve deeper exploration and attention. These impacts are particularly acute for older persons, not only due to their physical vulnerability but also because the non-economic losses, such as disruption in traditional ways of life, carry a profound emotional and social cost that is often less understood.

1. **Impacts of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights**

Across the responses from our network members, we identify the impacts of climate change to be a chain reaction of adverse events, causing food insecurity that can have wider impacts. One network member from India shared the following:

“.. dependence on rainfed agriculture poses constant challenges to the life and livelihoods of rural folks in the Thar Desert. Recurrent droughts and water shortage very often manifest in low crop productions, at times insufficient even to fulfil the food requirements for a household. With diminishing physical strength older persons are not able to contribute to the primary processes involved in agriculture and their mobility also becomes quite low**,** their social function within the household gets devalued. Having to eat last most often results in a chronic hunger situation, leading to low nutritional levels, many deficiencies and susceptibility to diseases.”

This response highlights the spectrum of rights violations that can be attributed to climate change, beginning with the right to food and cascading to impacts on the physical and mental health of older persons who may find themselves marginalised and isolated in times of scarcity. In this case the climate impacts are exacerbated by social factors and the need for household members to contribute to the production process. In failing to do so older persons are punished by receiving less food, creating a vicious circle whereby they become physically weaker and can provide even less to agricultural production. This cycle of negative health consequences is felt similarly in mental health as described below:

“With diminished social importance and role within families, older persons may also be gripped by loneliness and isolation, which may cause further complications for their mental health.”

We can see the importance of social factors at the household level here but can explore further the structural issues leading to loss and damage in the context of climate change which stem from inadequate provision of services at a national level that fail to account for the rights of older persons. The same network member from India shared the following:

“Effects of nutritional deficiencies multiply with inadequate water consumption and inability to maintain hygiene. Vulnerabilities to infections, water borne diseases are additional health problems that older persons have to face (…). In case of severe illness too, older persons normally do not get the required medical support owing to the inadequacy of the public health facilities that are either defunct, insufficiently resourced, lack trained staff on geriatric health or completely inaccessible for poor households. Long distances, lack of public transport facilities and dependence of older persons on others to help them access medical facilities remain wide gaps directly affecting older persons’ health and wellbeing".

Another network member from Mozambique has highlighted the lack of lasting solutions to address loss and damage in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai, cited as the costliest tropical cyclone in the South-West Indian Ocean, resulting in violations including amongst others the right to food, adequate shelter, and livelihoods:

“Many older persons, people with disabilities and children heads of families remain without means of survival even though they received immediate support in rescue actions and temporary accommodation. However, in the resettlement process, their relocation to areas considered safe was not accompanied by lasting solutions as, once the support (donations) ended, they faced many difficulties such as lack of food, safe shelter, initiatives to generate family income, among others.”

The severity of the problem of failing to consider older persons, as well as other marginalised groups, in humanitarian interventions is highlighted by the same network member in Mozambique who suggested that older persons:

“… find themselves in continuous depression because whenever they are informed of approaching occurrences of natural disasters they panic, not knowing what to do …, fear and depression affect them.”

In some cases, it is through policies trying to address climate change and environmental degradation that older persons’ rights violations can occur. This is exemplified by a case study submitted by a network member based in Thailand[[2]](#footnote-3). By failing to meaningfully include community members in decision making process, the community members claimed that their right to access to information and participation in decision-making processes was violated. Once again, we observe a case of cascading rights violations as by not consulting with communities and evicting them from their lands the state actions to tackle climate change resulted in loss of land and consequently loss of food security and livelihoods, violating a plethora of rights, such as a right to adequate standard of living, including food.

Across these responses we can see a clear pattern whereby climate change induced suffering of older persons is exacerbated by inadequate, short term, even counterproductive interventions. In each case the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups is shown to be weak, as a triggering event can cause a cascade of human rights violations. Moreover, we can see how these outcomes could potentially have been avoided through the inclusion of the voices of marginalised people and perhaps arranging an alternate source of livelihood in discussion with affected communities so that they have a say in matters that affects them.

1. **Relevant quantitative and qualitative data as well as mechanisms and tools to measure, monitor, report on, and evaluate the impacts of loss and damage on the full enjoyment of human rights**

The responses to this question were limited, indicating a lack of mechanisms/tools to achieve the above. One network member from India shared that:

“Older persons’ concerns and contributions to national and economic development are poorly documented, especially issues of older women and older persons with disabilities go unrecognized. There is an ever-growing need of documenting and disseminating the serious impacts of climate change on the older population and how it can lead to large-scale violation of their human rights.”

In this context we echo the IIED’s calls for the establishment of an Observatory on L&D Research to “act as a focal point, featuring these case studies and other vital research in both economic and non-economic L&D. The Observatory aims to provide a searchable repository for experts, university researchers and policymakers” (Bharadwaj & Mitchell, 2023).

1. **Public policies, legislations, practices, strategies or institutional arrangements by the Government in compliance with applicable international human rights law to avert or minimize loss and damage**

Limited responses were received from network members on this question, which may reflect a lack of formal human rights policies that cater to loss and damage in these countries.

Our network member from India highlighted the following human rights related instruments that have been ratified by the Indian Government: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979;Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1979; Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, 2006 Human Rights Council Resolution 32/33.

Further examples from the same network member of efforts by the Indian Government are provided below:

“ India launched the 2014 Climate Change Action Programme, which aims to create and strengthen the scientific and analytical capacity for assessment of climate change and provide a framework for implementation of the National & State Action Plans on Climate Change”

“India has articulated its belief in ethical and people centric approach to climate change through the concept of ‘Climate Justice’. The Supreme Court of India has also recognized the right to clean environment as part of an individual’s right to life guaranteed by the Constitution of India.”

“Climate change litigation in India finds its roots in liability claims as civil society is becoming aware of the fact that human actions can cause irreparable damage to the environment which can also affect human health.”

Despite these examples, this network member includes the following statement regarding policy measures and action plans:

“While some of these legislations and policy measures were undertaken, the issues of climate change and the threat it poses to human rights have not been adequately addressed.”

Another network member from Mozambique shared the following:

“Government of Mozambique through INGD (National Institute for Management and Reduction of Natural Disasters) has clear policies for responding to disaster situations”.

However, they also point out the scarcity of funding that reaches civil society organisations and that as a result, crucial local knowledge is overlooked, and funds may not be used as efficiently.

1. **Critical challenges and promising practices in the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of loss and damage, including examples that highlight multilateral cooperation and approaches.**

The same network member from Mozambique who mentioned the INGD policies for disaster response, explains that the extent to which these policies have been successful is limited by the issue of funding and failure to amplify and respond to the voices who are best placed to design effective interventions thanks to local expertise:

“One of the biggest challenges that civil society organizations face is the lack and/or scarcity of financial resources since large donors only provide funding to international agencies (WFP, UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF...) … small organizations, despite knowing the terrain well and even with better strategies, are left aside.”

The lack of participation of all relevant stakeholders is again shown below:

“We consider a critical challenge to be the lack of consultation with community members who receive displaced families after a disaster and as a result lose some access to the natural resources and land they rely on for their livelihoods often without proper compensation. There is a tendency for conflict to then arise between native and displaced populations as the climate related losses are merely shifted around the community.”

The same network member suggested this mitigation strategy to climate related rights violations:

“to place community assistance teams (health and social assistance technicians) to carry out work at home for health care, assistance and psychosocial support, referring to specialized health units. These teams must work with local Older People’s Associations/Committees[[3]](#footnote-4) who know where most vulnerable people live, such as older women, women with disabilities, children, chronically ill people, and understand the local forms of social coexistence (cultures) that can support people in need in the enjoyment of their human rights.”

Another network member from India describes the key challenges as follows:

“Ageism is widespread across institutions, attitudes, and practices, revealing gaps in the implementation of frameworks and policies for older persons. Knowingly, there are structural barriers that often neglect the existence and needs of older population in context of their contribution to sustainable development, standards of living, learning opportunities and access to services and resources. This has multiplied the vulnerability of older persons to neglect, abuse and serious health issues.

Despite key human rights relating to older persons’ being defined in some legal and constitutional provisions in India, implementation of the respective policies and programmes by the local and the state government haven’t been effective enough to reach the remotest parts of the country.

This has been especially difficult with limited organizational, financial and management resources apart from other factors. A review of the laws enacted specifically for the aged reveals that there is dearth of specialized legislations for senior citizens.

Institutional mechanisms, in developing countries such as India, that are responsible for delivery of essential services such as food, nutrition, education and health are often designed in a manner such that they are accessible and available for a very small percentage of stakeholders.”

Some civil society organisations have successfully established positive practices to address the above. Our network member in India stated that

“the most critical aspect for the effectiveness of this approach is collaboration with local communities and turning to indigenous resources and skillset to design sustainable community development solutions and strategies. Shared platforms like Inter-generational Learning Groups (ILGs) have been created in the desert villages … in all training programmes and sessions organized with a focus on older persons, as a conscious strategy ... Multifunctional, these groups engage in a variety of activities that are inclusive and ensure that they cater to the basic needs and rights of senior citizens. These include ensuring access to nutritious food to older persons by organizing horticulture units, promoting healthy and active ageing to ensure their immediate health needs by providing medical services as well as outreach medical services, educating older individuals and health workers on double burden of disease, self-care and preventive measures and creation of assets like rainwater harvesting structures and farming dykes for them to address long term issues of community’s water and food insecurities. Their confidence and leadership skills are bolstered by trainings and other capacity building interventions which transform them into powerful social change leaders who advocate for the benefits of an entire community in addition to their own.”

1. **Specific recommendations on how to address the critical challenges with actions to be taken by different stakeholders (Governments, development agencies, financing institutions, and others)**

**All Stakeholders:**

• Reversing negative climate change impacts requires a combination of strategies, legislative alterations, technological advancements, and continuous research involving governments, businesses, development agencies and communities.

• Policies should recognize older persons not only as potential victims of climate change but also a powerful resource in climate action, engaging them in the planning of action to address climate impacts on human rights of older persons to ensure they are age- and gender-responsive, and enable the inclusion of traditional knowledge and experience of older persons and expertise of local communities to be included in climate solutions.

•Promote and strengthen intergenerational support for climate action to build sustainable societies for all ages.

•Share experiences, information, and good practices in climate action between countries (policymakers, civil society, groups most affected by climate change) and strengthen international cooperation in this regard. Engage in national, regional, and international processes to promote human rights-based action on climate change.

•Ensure that decisions on climate change are participatory, non-discriminatory, and accountable, with the benefits and burden of climate action shared equitably.

**National Governments**

• Reinterpreting pe-existing human rights in the environmental context. India must incorporate provisions for the protection and promotion of human rights from climate change in its existing legislations (India’s National Action Plan for Climate Change does not deal with climate justice and fails to incorporate human rights in their approach).

• For infringements that take place under climate change, often it is difficult to hold the violators accountable because of the practical difficulties in establishing the causation between acts/omissions that constitute climate change and the violation that takes place. Therefore, a structured remedial mechanism is required to establish and ensure transparency for human right violations that take place due to climate change.

• Understanding the factors that contribute to older persons’ vulnerability and resilience can strengthen the capacity of governments to prevent and minimize climate-related effects on this demographic group.

• Mainstream concerns related to older persons in policies addressing climate change and related issues and build capacity among government representatives on climate-related threats to older persons and share good practices to address such threats within human rights framework/policies.

**Civil Society Organisations**

• Promoting effective coordination, consultation, and collaborations between CSOs to enable effective dissemination of existing and new Government policies and programmes aimed towards older persons’ rights.

**Financial Institutions**

Loss and damage fund agreed at UNFCCC’s COP27 and 28 should recognised adverse climate change risks to older people and must place human rights at its core. The fund should provide comprehensive, fast and effective remedy and redress for all harms caused by climate change to affected communities in developing countries, who are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Conclusion

There are significant gaps in the international human rights framework with regards to older persons’ rights,[[4]](#footnote-5) including those most significantly affected by climate change, such as the rights to life, adequate standard of living and health. While the core UN human rights treaties apply to everyone the lack of explicit references to older persons has resulted in a lack of understanding and awareness of the human rights challenges that older person's face, a lack of international practice, as well as a lack of Government action.

Only a new UN Convention on the rights of older persons could address the gaps in the existing human rights system as it would:

* cover all areas of older persons’ lives that are currently not adequately provided for, included areas affected by climate change,
* clarify states’ human rights obligations and responsibilities towards older persons and require states to implement laws and policies that promote older persons’ equality, dignity and autonomy in the context of climate change.
* require states to collect, disaggregate, analyse and disseminate information and data on older persons’’ rights in the context of climate change,
* establish dedicated monitoring and accountability systems,
* generate financial and other resources for programmes and interventions to support older persons’ and make the implementation of recommendations in ageing and development and climate change policies more likely.

Resources:

* [The #GreyAndGreen Manifesto](https://www.helpage.org/resource/greyandgreen-manifesto-en/)
* [Climate Justice in an Ageing World](https://www.helpage.org/resource/climate-justice-in-an-ageing-world/)
* [A rising force for change: Older people and climate action (Video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJSJpUUHf0A)

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1. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023) Key messages on human rights and loss and damage [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Manushya Foundation (2022) Complaint for Urgent Action for Protection of the 14 Sab Wai Villagers facing human rights violations due to Thailand’s False Climate Solutions [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. OPAs are community-based organisations that mobilise older people to improve their own lives and to contribute to the development of their communities across many domains. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on the normative standards and

   obligations under international law in relation to the promotion and protection of the human

   rights of older persons (A/HRC/49/70). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)