Older People's Associations (OPAs)

Older People's Associations (OPAs) are community-based groups that provide a wide range of activities and benefits for older people within our communities.

They also provide a platform for older people to exercise their voice, speak out on behalf of their communities, raise awareness, and exert their rights. OPAs are run by older people, for older people, which means they decide what they want to do with and for their communities.

OPAs nurture social connection and a strong sense of community among members and provide a "social safety net"—in some instances filling gaps or advocating for government services (e.g., health and employment). OPAs empower older people to be key players in local and national development who are contributing to society, in addition to being more vocal about their rights and entitlements. There are currently more than one million OPAs globally with hundreds of millions of members in all regions where HelpAge works.

OPAs are diverse in their structure, roles, and titles, but they have generally proven to be highly effective in promoting older people's wellbeing and rights, as well as ensuring that older people's knowledge, skills, and resources are fully recognized and harnessed in community-level planning and action.

Questions?

Do you have questions about the OPA model or just interested in learning more? Visit our website or contact us for additional information!

🔗 helpageusa.org

✉ info@helpageusa.org

📞 202-709-8442

"Of the three elements that constitute quality of life, health, income, and social inclusion, the OPA model is the only model (in the evaluation models) that can deliver all those benefits and be consistent over time."

- Kenneth Howse, Oxford Institute on Population Ageing, Assessment Report "OPAs in East and Southeast Asia"

Food and income security
1) Food and Income Security topic awareness
2) Access to revolving fund loans
3) Establishment of support groups
4) One to one technical support from volunteers/experts

Health care
1) Awareness and practice (exercise and sport)
2) Monthly health screening
3) Semi-annual checkup
4) Access to health insurance
5) Medical referrals

Resource mobilization
1) Revolving fund interest
2) Membership fee
3) Local fund raising
4) Collective incomes
5) Grants from donors

Community-based Care
1) Social care
2) Personal care
3) Living support care
4) Health care

Social and cultural
1) Social and cultural groups
2) Monthly social and cultural performances
3) Social and cultural events for communities

Community-led Development
1) Community development volunteer service
2) Social and development funds
3) Partnership with others in development

Life-long Learning
(1) Monthly talks
(2) Exchange and study visits
(3) One-to-one technical support

Rights and entitlements
1) Right and entitlement awareness
2) Monitor access
3) Legal support service
4) Dialog with authorities and policy makers

8 MAIN COMPONENTS OPA

What OPAs Do - An example from Vietnam

Our role in developing and supporting OPAs

The structure and functions of OPAs in any country are responsive to cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. However, OPAs are often intergenerational in approach and include members from many different age groups, and can help to forge intergenerational cohesion and solidarity. HelpAge assists local partners with forming, developing, and promoting OPAs as active agents in development and humanitarian action.

HelpAge USA is part of the HelpAge Global Network, which is comprised of more than 150 organizations in 90 countries. HelpAge pioneered the OPA model over 30 years ago and has continually refined the OPA development approach to ensure it best responds to learnings from the OPA experience and the rights, needs, and aspirations of older people. HelpAge is committed to bringing the benefits of OPAs to more people around the world, supporting older people to have a greater say in the development of their communities.

The value of OPAs

- Inclusive of young and old people, poor and non-poor people, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups.
- Empowering for OPA members, enabling them to lead and participate in local and national development.
- Cost-effective and affordable for members, communities, and governments in low- and-middle-income countries.
- Sustainable and able to continue to grow even after external funding support ends.
- Dynamic and replicable in multiple contexts (e.g., rural and urban, humanitarian and development).
- Scalable at a national level.

What your support could provide

- An investment in helping countries and governments develop sustainable OPA policies and models.
- Training local partners and governments working with OPAs on a wide range of OPA-led initiatives related to aging and ageism, gender and inclusion, food and income security, social protection and financial inclusion, healthcare, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, civic engagement, life-long learning, rights and entitlements, and climate change.
- "Training of trainers" to train older person leaders, development practitioners, and governments on forming OPAs.
- Support governments in drafting national OPA policies, guidelines, and operational manuals to reflect national policies that respond to population aging.

Case Study

Ms. Run Na is from Cambodia. She is 61 years old and living with a physical disability. She has been living alone in the pagoda for many years. She said:

"I feel less lonely and more joyful during OPA meetings every month. Before the OPA was established, we did not meet often or have fun like this."