

# Global ageing and climate change

Regional dialogue series

## Africa

Webinar summary



# Introduction

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The world is undergoing a major demographic change. In 2018, for the first time, the number of people aged 65 and over exceeded the number of children under the age of five worldwide. Despite the considerable risk climate change poses to the health, well-being, and livelihoods of older people, climate discussions often overlook this ageing phenomenon.

To bridge this gap, the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) at the University of York, HelpAge International and Prototopia have launched the Global Ageing and Climate Change Regional Dialogues. Stemming from the findings of the [Climate Justice in an Ageing World Report](#), this initiative focuses on the unique effects of climate change on older individuals, particularly in lower and middle-income countries.

Undertaken in 2024, the dialogues covered several geographical regions, including Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Eurasia and Middle East. The webinar series aimed to catalyse action, increase awareness of the intersection between global ageing and climate change, and develop policies tailored to the challenges of growing old in a changing climate.

## Ageing and Climate Change in Africa

The African region faces unique challenges as it grapples with two megatrends: ageing populations and climate change. To address these converging challenges, a webinar was organised to discuss the intersection between ageing and climate change, exploring the exposure, risks and contributions of older adults in climate action and resilience.

# Opening remarks

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Dr Gary Haq, a Senior Research Fellow at the [Stockholm Environment Institute](#) at the University of York, addressed the challenges posed by the growing older population in Africa.

Although Africa is a young continent, it is ageing rapidly. The population aged 60 and over is expected to increase from 74.4 million in 2020 to 235.1 million by 2050. This demographic shift has significant implications for social care, health systems, and the challenges posed by climate change.

Older populations vary in terms of health and mobility. While some individuals remain active, others become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of health challenges. This vulnerability is pronounced in less developed countries, where the capacity to manage the effects of climate change is limited.

Key factors regarding the ageing population in Africa include:

- **Population Growth:** The population aged 60 and older is projected to grow significantly by 2050.
- **Proportionate Growth:** Less than 7% of Africa's population is aged 60 and older, but this proportion is expected to increase.
- **Geographic Variations:** Northern and Southern Africa have the highest proportions of older people, while Eastern Africa has the largest number of older individuals.
- **Country-Specific Highlights:** The 28 African Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are experiencing a significant rise in the number and proportion of older people, projected to triple by 2050.

The intersection of an ageing population and a changing climate was underscored, with Africa being disproportionately affected. The State of the Climate report in Africa 2022 states Africa's temperature had increased by 0.3°C above the global average, resulting in more severe weather events, food insecurity, economic and social disruption, and resource conflicts. In 2002, over 110 million people were affected by severe weather events, with 5,000 fatalities primarily from droughts and floods. Agricultural productivity had declined by 34% since 1961, with food imports projected to rise from \$35 billion to \$110 billion by 2025. Climate change is driving displacement and migration, with losses projected at \$290-\$440 billion by 2030. Diminishing resources are fuelling conflicts over land and water, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Projections show that by mid-century, heat exposure for older adults in Africa would nearly double compared to other regions, increasing health risks and demands on local governments, public health interventions, and social services. Strategies are urgently needed in the Africa region to address the dual challenges of population ageing and climate change.

Several challenges and opportunities were highlighted:

- **High Heat Exposure for Older Adults:** By mid-century, there will be a nearly doubling of heat exposure for older adults in Africa compared to other regions, leading to increased vulnerability because of lower adaptive capacity, particularly in low-income areas.
- **Severe Health Risks:** Heightened vulnerability to rising temperatures because of common age-related health conditions.
- **Infrastructure and Policy Demands:** A substantial need for local governments to develop cooling systems and heat early warning systems and implement public health interventions to protect vulnerable populations.
- **Economic and Social Challenges:** Strain on social services and healthcare systems, requiring integrated climate adaptation and ageing policies.

Gary Haq stated, "When we talk about older people, we are not saying that all older people are the same. We are aware that some are very active and healthy, but equally, there are older people who suffer from particular illnesses and mobility issues, which makes them potentially more vulnerable to climate impacts and extreme weather events."

In 2023, extreme weather disasters in Africa have caused the death of at least 15,700 people and affected a further 34 million people.

A resilient and healthy ageing population is crucial for contributing to climate action and community resilience. Older Africans face significant challenges, including economic difficulties, high participation in the informal economy, rural poverty, and health issues arising from both non-communicable and communicable diseases. The focus is on addressing the challenges and opportunities related to ageing and climate change in Africa, with an emphasis on the need for improved healthcare and long-term care systems to support the ageing population.

Carol Ayango from HelpAge International Africa welcomed participants to the webinar, emphasising the importance of the climate change topic. Help Age International has been increasing focus on climate change over the past two years, though it has been a long-term area of interest.

# Climate action



## Climate Change and Older People in Malawi

Andrew Cavalla, Mande Manepo

Andrew Cavalla, from Mande Maenpo, Malawi's largest network on ageing, described the effects of climate change on older people in the country. Malawi, like many African nations, faces climate impacts such as cyclones and dry spells. These extreme weather events have caused challenges, including poor agricultural yields that have affected food security. Andrew shared a personal example: his mother, who usually harvests 20–30 bags of maize, produced only half a bag this year.

Malawi, a landlocked country in Southern Africa, has a population of about 20 million, including approximately 1 million older people. This demographic is vulnerable to climate change effects, facing food insecurity, rising food prices, and increased mental health issues because of the uncertainties and hardships brought on by climate change. Older people in Malawi are experiencing heightened stress and anxiety, exacerbated by difficulties in accessing healthcare and forced displacement because of continuous floods.

To address these challenges, various mitigation strategies have been implemented. Key initiatives include cash transfers, where selected households receive financial support to help them restart their lives. Food distribution efforts by the World Food Programme and other partners provide maize and essential food items. NGOs are working on reforestation projects to combat deforestation, and there are initiatives to reduce charcoal use and promote sustainable energy sources. Public awareness campaigns are crucial in educating communities on how to respond to climate alerts. The government, working with development partners, is supporting green belt farming by using water resources for agriculture to strengthen food security.

The challenges faced by Malawians, especially older people, in adapting to climate change were highlighted. This emphasises the need for ongoing support and effective strategies to help vulnerable groups in Malawi cope with the impacts of climate change.

# Climate action



## Older Adults in Africa's Climate Crisis

Charles Mwangi, Head of Programmes at the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)

The Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) undertakes work related to older people and climate change in Africa. PACJA has a diverse network, including civil society, farmers, field groups, government entities, and indigenous peoples. Climate change is a multifaceted issue, encompassing environmental, humanitarian, political, and security concerns. PACJA's advocacy ensures that frontline communities, who are most affected by climate change, have a voice in decision-making processes.

Climate change disproportionately affects Africa, despite the continent's minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions. Recent climate-related disasters, such as cyclones in Malawi and severe droughts in the Horn of Africa, have caused significant loss and damage.

To address these issues, PACJA engages in advocacy at national, regional, and global levels, working with institutions like the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, and the Pan-African Parliament. One key initiative that PACJA engages in is developing a model climate change law for the continent, which individual countries can adopt.

Climate finance is important, particularly the unmet \$100 billion per year commitment made in Copenhagen in 2009. A new, quantified finance goal is needed that reflects the actual needs of African communities, including adaptation and loss and damage. There is a significant adaptation gap, with UNEP estimating a global need of \$340 billion per year.

The operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Facility was established at COP27. Although the current commitment of \$700 million is insufficient, given the scale of the challenges.

The mobilisation of internal resources and prioritising adaptation and resilience-building efforts are needed. Although African governments are already spending substantial amounts on adaptation, this is often at the expense of other critical sectors, like healthcare.

# Climate action



## Climate Change and Older People in Africa Gary Haq, Stockholm Environment Institute, University of York

Societal factors, personal choices, and access to health and social care services shape healthy ageing. Climate adaptation is a lifelong process, starting early and continuing into later life to build life course resilience against climate-induced hazards like storms and floods. Factors which determine an individual resilience include:

- **Societal Influences:** Cultural norms and community support shape the ageing experience, either promoting healthy lifestyles or creating barriers that hinder well-being.
- **Individual Choices:** Decisions about diet, exercise, and social participation profoundly impact health outcomes. Personal choices can enhance or diminish the quality of life.
- **Health and Consumption Impact:** The interplay between societal influences and individual choices determines health resilience and resource consumption patterns among older adults.
- **Variability in Health and Activity:** Older adults vary in their health and activity levels, ranging from active and healthy to suffering from chronic conditions or mobility issues. This diversity requires specific healthcare policies and services tailored to varied

### Climate Vulnerability in Africa

The World Risk Index shows the high vulnerability of African countries to climate change, especially Mozambique. Although there are regional disparities in natural hazard vulnerability:

- **North Africa:** This region has the highest World Risk Index (WRI) because of high exposure (3.91) and a substantial lack of coping capacities (48.09), despite having lower susceptibility compared to other regions.
- **Central Africa:** Exhibits the highest vulnerability (51.44), susceptibility (34.66), and lack of coping capacities (58.41), showing significant challenges in managing and responding to hazards.
- **South Africa:** Has the lowest WRI (1.97) and exposure (0.14), suggesting better resilience and lower risk from natural hazards.
- **East and West Africa:** Both regions have moderate levels across most indices, with East Africa having slightly higher vulnerability and West Africa possessing higher adaptive capacities.

# Climate action

## Impacts on Older Adults

Climate change exacerbates the vulnerability of older adults through various channels:

- **Health and Safety:** Climate change elevates mortality risks from heatwaves, natural disasters, and air pollution, exacerbates existing health conditions and mental health challenges, and heightens vulnerability to violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse during emergencies.
- **Mobility:** Climate-related emergencies and gradual climate changes affect older people's mobility, posing challenges in accessing safety during emergencies, returning home, getting compensation for damage, facing potential statelessness, adapting to technology, and confronting cultural and spiritual attachments that hinder relocation decisions.
- **Housing:** Traditional building materials are becoming scarce, homes are ill-prepared for temperature extremes, and older adults often face exclusion from state initiatives. There are significant challenges in disaster planning, evacuation, shelter access, property damage recovery, and rebuilding efforts.
- **Food Security:** Climate change disrupts food and agricultural systems, often reducing production and availability. Older people face challenges coping with rising food costs, potential scarcity, malnutrition, and limited access to specialised diets, traditional foods, and relief efforts during emergencies.
- **Water and sanitation:** Water insecurity disproportionately affects older people, exacerbating health risks because of dehydration and infectious diseases associated with inadequate sanitation. Often, this requires relocation, as physical, financial, and infrastructural barriers contribute to insufficient water and sanitation services.
- **Cultural Traditions:** Climate change affects cultural traditions and heritage sites, with older individuals often experiencing significant loss and reluctance to accept adaptation measures that threaten these cultural aspects.

# Climate action

## Policy Recommendations

There is a need for comprehensive policies that address both immediate disaster responses and long-term resilience building. Key priorities include:

- **Reduce:** Mitigate climate impacts through targeted interventions.
- **Mobilise:** Engage older adults in climate action by leveraging their knowledge and experience.
- **Protect:** Develop age-friendly cities and communities, integrate healthy ageing and climate adaptation, and enhance disaster response mechanisms.

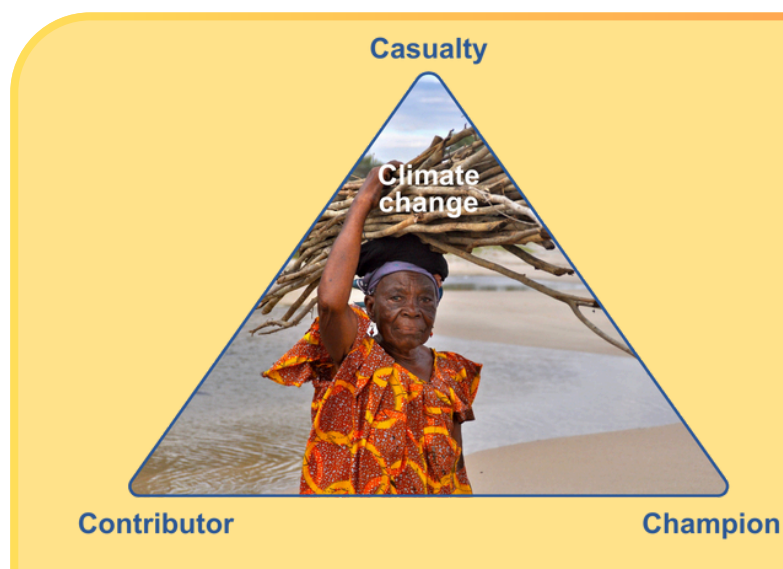
## Contributors, Casualties, and Champions

The roles of older adults in the context of climate change can be classified into three categories:

1. **Contributors:** Older adults whose consumption patterns and lifestyle choices influence greenhouse gas emissions.
2. **Casualties:** Older adults who are particularly vulnerable to climate-related risks, such as heatwaves, cold spells, and disruptions to infrastructure.
3. **Champions:** Older adults who advocate for sustainable living and climate policies, promote community resilience, and drive positive policy change.

A holistic approach in policymaking is needed to recognise older people's multifaceted roles as contributors, casualties, and champions in the context of climate change. This approach requires integrated policies that address the diverse needs of older adults and promote sustainable and resilient communities.

A triangular strategy for addressing ageing and climate change was outlined, centred around three primary actions: Protect, Reduce, and Mobilise. The "Protect" action emphasises the need for robust climate adaptation and disaster response strategies that specifically address the needs and capabilities of older adults.





## Climate Justice in an Ageing World

Dr Sylvia Szabo, Global Income Security Adviser, HelpAge International

Despite the increased global attention on climate change, many fail to consider the implications of global ageing for climate action. The Help Age International report [Climate Justice in an Ageing World](#) addresses the intersection between global ageing and climate change.

Most Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) do not mention ageing or include relevant policy actions, despite the significant impact of aging populations on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Older people, along with children, are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Factors such as vulnerability to natural disasters, sensitivity to extreme temperatures, prolonged exposure to pollution, and pre-existing health conditions exacerbate their risk. Without adaptation and economic growth, the estimated annual death toll could reach 24 million by the end of the century.

Low and middle-income countries face greater climate-related hazards and have higher socio-economic vulnerability because of poverty, poor infrastructure, and inadequate healthcare systems. However, these countries contribute less to global emissions, highlighting a disparity between impact and responsibility. The report categorises countries based on resilience and the pace of population ageing: low resilience with rapidly ageing populations (e.g., Bangladesh, Myanmar), medium resilience with rapidly ageing populations (e.g., China), low resilience with young populations (e.g., Niger, Chad), and young populations with higher resilience (e.g., Timor-Leste).

Africa's population is expected to exceed 2.2 billion by 2050, with a significant increase in the proportion of older people, requiring greater healthcare services and better infrastructure for healthy ageing. Climate risks in Africa include loss of life, livelihood, infrastructure, water, food, and energy insecurity, and increased death and disease. The report also highlights regional disparities in adaptation capacity within Africa, with Southern Africa having higher resilience compared to West and Central Africa.

The report makes several key recommendations:

- 1. Integrate Ageing into Climate Analysis:** Ensure that future scientific publications, NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, and assessment reports consider ageing and population structures.
- 2. Strengthen Life Course Resilience:** Adopt a life course approach to building resilience from an early age through targeted public policies and age-sensitive climate risk and needs assessments.
- 3. Empower Older People:** Engage older people in decision-making for a just, low-carbon, and resilient future, including targeted age-sensitive awareness campaigns.
- 4. Support Intergenerational Solidarity:** Include all generations in advocacy and action for climate justice through intergenerational dialogues and co-designed projects by youth groups and Older People's Associations.
- 5. Address Carbon Inequalities:** Tackle intra- and inter-country carbon inequalities and provide adequate support to the most vulnerable older people.
- 6. Promote Gender-Sensitive Climate Programming:** Provide income generation opportunities for women through nature-based solutions, enhancing their independence and contribution to climate action. Encourage the creation and enforcement of legal frameworks that protect the rights of older people when it comes to climate change.



**Climate justice in  
an ageing world**  
*Discussion paper*

**HelpAge**  
International

Charveriat, C., Bodin, E., Cartier, B., & Haq, G. (2023). Climate justice in an ageing world.

Access online:

<https://www.helpage.org/resource/climate-justice-in-an-ageing-world>.

# Challenges and opportunities

After the presentations, the workshop included a discussion on the contributions of older people to climate adaptation and resilience in African communities, drawing on local experiences and case studies.

## Local Experiences in Climate Adaptation

- The link between air pollution and dementia was highlighted, emphasising the importance of addressing air pollution through initiatives like introducing eco-friendly cooking facilities that improve indoor air quality and reduce carbon emissions.
- Mobilisation of older persons for a national tree planting initiative in Kenya was discussed, showcasing their role in climate change interventions.
- An intergenerational group's focus on planting climate-resilient crops to adapt to unpredictable weather patterns in Naro County, Kenya, was presented.

## Challenges Faced by Older Persons

- Older people are being excluded from the rapidly advancing technological solutions designed to address climate change, particularly in Uganda, where many lack ICT knowledge.
- Barriers faced by older people in accessing basic services like pensions and health coverage were emphasised, often because of lack of awareness and digital connectivity.
- The importance of quantifying both the impacts and costs of climate change on older people was stressed, including the cost of inaction and the value of their contributions to mitigation and adaptation.

## Policy Changes Needed

- There is a need for inclusive urban and regional planning policies that integrate older people into climate resilience strategies was discussed.
- Greater representativeness of stakeholders, including older persons, in policy formulation and implementation was called for.
- Stronger legal frameworks and political will at national, district, and local levels to support climate action involving older people was suggested.
- An example from Zambia highlighted the need for better implementation of existing climate change policies and stronger political will at various levels.

# Challenges and opportunities

## Engaging Older People in Climate Change

- The need to involve older people in disaster risk reduction processes through bodies like older people associations was highlighted.
- The importance of using existing channels, such as social protection and cash transfer systems, to reach older populations was emphasised.
- The concept of single window services, or one-stop shops, in Zambia was discussed to provide integrated access to various services, facilitating the inclusion of older people in resilience-building efforts.

## Additional Research Needed

- The lack of involvement of older people in climate change programmes and the need to incorporate their traditional knowledge was highlighted.
- Cross-disciplinary research to assess the impact of climate change on older people and the capacity of institutions to represent them was advocated.
- The necessity of comprehensive surveys focused on the well-being of older people, incorporating climate change modules, was underscored.

# Future directions

The discussion outlined the following recommendations.

## **Recommendation 1 Local Experiences in Climate Adaptation**

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**Enhance Indoor Air Quality:** Implement initiatives to introduce eco-friendly cooking facilities that improve indoor air quality, reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the health risks associated with air pollution, such as dementia.

**Mobilise Older Persons for Environmental Initiatives:** Continue and expand national tree planting initiatives, particularly in Kenya, actively involving older persons to leverage their experience and commitment to climate change interventions.

**Promote Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Support intergenerational groups in planting climate-resilient crops, especially in areas with unpredictable weather patterns, such as Naro County, Kenya, to ensure sustainable agricultural practices.

## **Recommendation 2 Challenges Faced by Older Persons**

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**Bridge the Digital Divide:** Develop and implement training programmes to enhance ICT knowledge among older persons, particularly in Uganda, to prevent their exclusion from technological solutions addressing climate change.

**Improve Access to Basic Services:** Increase awareness and improve digital connectivity among older populations to ensure they have access to essential services, including pensions and healthcare.

**Quantify Climate Impacts on Older Persons:** Undertake research to quantify the impacts and costs of climate change on older persons, including the economic value of their contributions to climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

### **Recommendation 3 Policy Changes**

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**Integrate the Needs Older Persons in Urban Planning:** Formulate and implement inclusive urban and Establish Single Window Services: regional planning policies that incorporate older persons into climate resilience strategies.

**Enhance Stakeholder Representation:** Ensure that the formulation and implementation of climate-related policies represent older persons, therefore enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of stakeholder groups.

**Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Advocate for the strengthening of legal frameworks and the increase of political will at national, district, and local levels to support climate actions that involve and benefit older persons.

**Improve Policy Implementation:** Focus on effectively implementing existing climate change policies, ensuring that political commitment at all levels aligns with these policies.

### **Recommendation 4 Engaging Older People in Climate Action**

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**Involve Older Persons in Disaster Risk Reduction Processes:** Actively involve older persons in disaster risk reduction initiatives through organisations such as older people associations, recognising their unique perspectives and experiences.

**Leverage Existing Social Protection Systems:** Use existing social protection mechanisms and cash transfer systems to reach and support older populations in resilience-building efforts.

**Develop single window services, or one-stop shops:** To provide older persons with integrated access to various services, thus facilitating their inclusion in climate adaptation and resilience strategies.

### **Recommendation 5 Further Research**

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**Incorporate Traditional Knowledge:** Undertake research to better understand and integrate the traditional knowledge of older persons into climate change programmes, ensuring that their insights are valued and used in climate adaptation strategies.

By aiming to encourage a more inclusive approach to climate adaptation, the recommendations ensure that not only are older people protected, but they are also engaged in creating climate resilient communities. The workshop concluded with a clear call for enhanced research, better data collection, and stronger policy frameworks to address the intersection of ageing and climate change in Africa. The discussion highlighted the complex relationship between ageing and climate change in Africa, emphasising the need for region-specific strategies and inclusive policies to tackle these challenges.

## Resources

Falchetta, G., De Cian, E., Sue Wing, I. et al. (2024) Global projections of heat exposure of older adults. *Nat Commun* 15, 3678. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-47197-5>

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