

Climate Action



Older People and Climate Action

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The climate crisis has far reaching consequences for everyone. Although the wealthiest countries and their corporations have the biggest impact in global warming, it is now clear that meeting the goals for 2050 will require people of all ages, globally, taking urgent action.

Climate action cannot succeed without older people

The global population is ageing rapidly. Ten percent of the world's population is aged over 60, representing over 1 billion people, and by 2050 this will have increased to 20 percent.¹

People are now not only living longer, but also reaching old age in better health and education than ever before. They are now a formidable segment of the population, and climate action cannot succeed without their participation and engagement.

There is a misperception that older people are less engaged, vote less for movements promoting climate action, and are a cause of the climate crisis. Whilst age-based differences do exist in attitudes towards climate

change, this does not demonstrate that older persons are indifferent, or that age is the determining factor. Fifty percent of people over 60 say climate change is an emergency, compared to an 'all ages average' of 64 percent.²

Multiple studies demonstrate that rates of educational attainment represent one of, if not the main social driver for climate change action and educational levels are a key predictor of climate change attitudes globally.³ Younger generations are now better educated and perhaps more aware about issue of climate change than the older generations.

But older people in fact hold diverse experiences and knowledge around how climate can impact their communities, are socially connected and hold moral authority within their communities. Older people and their civil society presence are well placed to mobilise other members of their communities and use their collective political capital to call for political leaders to respond to the climate crisis. Still largely unexplored is the economic power of older people to direct investment and consumption in climate-friendly manners.

How to support older people's engagement in climate action

How can governments, civil society and other stakeholders support and embrace older people's climate action? How can social movements calling for change benefit from the engagement of older people and their organisations? How can older people strengthen climate adaptation, resilience and decarbonisation strategies?

1. Build knowledge and awareness

Education programmes around climate issues, with knowledge sharing and trainings tailored for older audiences and delivered through a mix of digital and non-digital mediums.

2. Facilitate the engagement of older people in the preparation and follow-up of COP 26

COP 26, as a follow up of the Paris Agreement, will have special relevance this year, considering the awareness brought by the pandemic that we live in a shared world. Older people can make a difference, supporting the elaboration and implementation of government commitments.

3. Embrace mobilisation of older people as community leaders and influencers on climate action

Older people, as community leaders, can enlighten community action and have to be included in plans of action at national and global levels.

4. Include older people in discussions and advocacy around the climate crisis

Stakeholders responding to the climate crisis should always meaningfully include older people, their organisations, perspectives and experiences, in national and global discussions, processes and negotiations, in order to reinforce the achievement of effective outcomes from government policies.

5. Support decarbonisation initiatives at community levels

A large majority of older people are in rural areas, and a significant proportion of them live around farming. The addition of small-scale processes of decarbonisation can add up to make a difference in combating the climate crisis. The most striking example is through the production of biochar, with its multiple benefits, including CO2 absorption.

6. Build links across civil society

Develop strategies for mainstreaming older people and their organisations into environmental action in collaboration with other civil society organisations.

7. Improve understanding around the potential of older people's climate action

There is limited information about the extent and nature of current environmental action among older people, particularly from lower- and middle-income countries. A major task is to better understand and evaluate the involvement of older people in climate change action, documenting best practices to strengthen future engagement.

8. Promote the use of the economic power of older people in climate action

Older people, as a growing segment of the population, hold a considerable proportion of disposable income in all countries, in addition to their providence funds and pensions systems. The potential reorientation of financial investments towards climate-friendly initiatives is a powerful tool, as well as the shift in consumption patterns that older people can support.

A webinar titled "Intergenerational Action on Climate Crisis – Unleashing the power of older people" co-organised by HelpAge International and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), can be viewed at <https://ageingasia.org/event/webinar-intergenerational-action-on-climate-change/>

References

1. UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division; World Population Prospects, key findings and advance tables; 2019
2. UNDP, University of Oxford; People's Climate Vote
3. Luke J. Harrington; Reviewing the links between an ageing population and a changing climate