

**HelpAge**

**International**

**Strengthening social protection and building communities through inclusive self-help groups**



## What are inclusive self-help groups?

HelpAge International is collaborating with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement to develop inclusive self-help groups (ISHGs) in villages across the country. The programme is a flagship of the Department of Social Welfare's Costed Sector Plan for Social Protection.

ISHGs, which are known as *lu hmu ar man* ("social capital") in Myanmar, are voluntary, participatory membership organisations, led mainly by older people and those with disabilities, with active leadership and participation from other vulnerable groups. They support villagers to improve the health of community members through promoting healthy lifestyles, regular check-ups and referrals to health centres. They provide low-interest loans and training to support people to build livelihoods so that they have a regular, reliable income. And they help individuals access social protection services, such as social pensions and disability grants.

ISHGs are a more inclusive version of the older people's self-help group model HelpAge has implemented since 2009. This redesign focuses on the wider community to include all vulnerable people. This brings together individuals of all ages, allowing younger community members to work with and support older people.

The ISHG model is a community-driven approach to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable groups – including older people and those with disabilities – and their families, as well as others in the communities. The ISHGs build stronger communities by establishing social networks that empower people and provide new opportunities to socialise and participate.

## How do ISHGs work?

ISHGs are multifunctional, supporting community members across three key areas of wellbeing.

### Health and care

- Trained volunteers carry out home care and basic health checks where primary care services are not easily accessible or available. Often in small teams, they go house-to-house in the community and give those they visit an opportunity to socialise.
- Limited financial assistance is available to cover urgent medical needs.
- Education sessions teach members about healthy lifestyles.
- Monthly meetings connect community members with health professionals who provide information on improving diets and get them involved in physical exercise.

### Livelihoods

- Community funds are distributed by the ISHG committees during monthly meetings to help villagers invest in and improve their livelihoods. Loans have lenient repayment and help to financially support local businesses and infrastructure.
- Training sessions are held to help improve productivity, such as developing more effective farming techniques.
- Agricultural equipment is provided.
- Scholarship grants are made available for students.

### Social welfare and protection

- Committees support older people to access their social pension and those with disabilities to access their disability grants.
- Disaster risk reduction projects ensure the community's safety, security and sustainability through developing early warning systems and plans for when disasters strike, and understanding older people's needs in this context.

## Inclusive self-help groups in community development

Through a structured network, ISHGs are able to connect with public authorities to develop or expand the services and resources provided to communities. Individual groups do not work in isolation from each other, but are a part of township network committees (TNCs), which provide external support to the ISHGs and represent their interests to local governments.

The Older People's Federation, which is made up of TNC members, then represents the needs of ISHGs across Myanmar at the national level. Through the federation, ISHGs can have an influence on the country's ageing policy, drafting new laws related to older people, and the Government's five-year ageing action plan. HelpAge supports the federation through the Ageing Network, which is comprised of 12 organisations working for older people, as well as other cross-cutting issues.

### Older People's Federation

National advocacy of older people's rights and TNC strategy discussion

### Township network committees

Technical support and coordination for ISHGs

### Inclusive self-help groups

Support communities' health, livelihoods and social protection

### Subcommittees

Focus on livelihoods, health and care, M&E, DRR

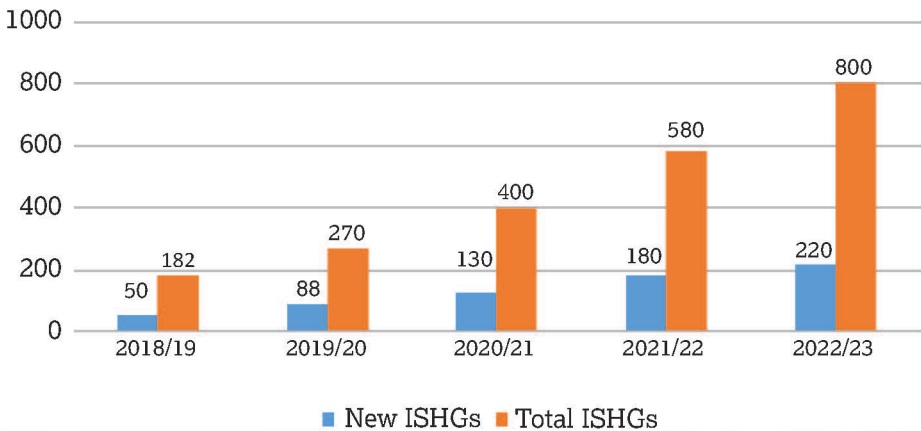
### Members

Voluntary participation, with a small monthly fee

## The future of ISHGs

The Department of Social Welfare plans to add 664 inclusive self-help groups to the existing 136 by 2023, with the total number reaching 800 (roughly 15% of the 6,000 target). HelpAge is gradually moving from leading on the implementing of the groups to providing technical support to the Government and national civil society organisations, who will take over direct implementation between 2020 and 2023.

### ISHG planned expansion





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

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