

**Research Article****Architectural Contribution towards Active Ageing: A Case of Dar es Salaam Tanzania****Dr. Shubira L. Kalugila and Winnie F. Tesha**

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**ABSTRACT:** Wants and needs change overtime as people age. At old age, options are reduced and elderly are going through a lot of changes in this stage of their life and tend to suffer from depression and feeling of isolation. Most elderly people feel detached with their communities but only wish to be part of it. Putting them in an environment that feels like an institution would aggravate their depression and may lead to other problems. The purpose of this study was to explore architectural approaches in creation of age-friendly supportive environment so as to maintain them in their communities. The research used case study method in the area of Mwananyamala settlement and Msimbazi elderly centre. It was found that caring of elderly people is mainly understood in terms of responsibilities of families and the community. That it is difficult to separate elderly care without including families and communities. Also, preferential core spaces needed by elderly are those that incorporate them in communities and not those that separate them with their communities. It was concluded that elders should be allowed to interact with everyone in the community and consideration of their spaces is essential.

**Key words:** Architecture, Community, Ageing, Age-friendly Environment, Elderly, Elderly Care, Dar es Salaam, Space

**1. INTRODUCTION**

As moving through time from childhood to old age, there are various considerations made. During childhood there is thoughtfulness of different needs including the spaces of the children desire. In adulthood one makes own choices of their needs. But in old ages little considerations are made and there is limitation of choices as well as awareness on adaptability to different changes.

Aging and old age is a concept that defines the final stage of human growth. According to URT(2003), in Tanzania an individual is recognized as an older person based on age, responsibilities and his or her status. But in most developed countries old age is associated with retirement at 60 years. Moreover, other countries old age is accordance to gender, that is men and women retire at different ages. To be an elderly person is to be more than 60 years old, more or less recently retired (Martinoni & Saltoris, n.d.). It is clearly indicated that at the age of 60 most people acquire decrease in abilities (mostly physical abilities). Thus, according to URT (2003), in Tanzania both the National Health policy and the public service Act recognize 60 years as retirement age. For that purpose, an older person is an individual who is 60 years and above.

**1.1 Situation of Aging people in the Modern Era**

As societies transform, care for elderly also change. In most societies especially in developing countries like Tanzania; elderly care has been a responsibility of family members, however in this modern society where children go to school and most parents go to work, elderly people are mainly alone at home during the day, a situation which leads to loneliness.

Loneliness can be defined as absence of some close relationship. According to Hauge and Kirkevold (2012), one-third of older people with age 65 and above feel loneliness in

their life and the outcome is even more at age 80 and above; the main reason for this includes decreasing family size, everyone being busy with their daily jobs and moral deterioration.

Different solutions are created for elderly care, one of them being elderly homes where old people reside for the sake of being taken care away from families. An increment in the percentage of elderly homes is being developed in order to cater for the needs of the elderly people to reside and to be taken care of (Syed, et al., 2005). Loneliness has also been observed by different researchers even in elderly homes. Gurung and Ghimire (2014) commented that in elderly homes you may find very good nurses to care for elderly but they have scarcity of time to chat with elderly, to meet interpersonal need and assist them emotionally. They are busy to provide physical support, routine and paper work. Therefore, family is significant and necessary to connect elderly people with their family members to reduce their loneliness. Thus, a new perspective has to be developed, in which elderly persons can be seen as people who actively play a roles in the communities, instead of being regarded as people who represent a problem.

**1.2 Cultural Influence of Aging People in Tanzania**

With urbanization and population increase; more and more elderly reside in the urban areas. The care of elderly is mainly within the family however, changes that come with modernization are leading to those responsible in caring for them being too busy with their everyday duties. This pushes families to move elderly to elderly homes. In developing countries like Tanzania, there is sensitivity to both cultural and individual interpretations. People believe in formation of great bonds and attachments with families or relatives because most

of them practice extended family mode. Even the way they live their daily lives, they become so dependable on each other unlike most of developed countries families where one is trained to be independent at early age. For these reasons most of them become so attached with the environments and people they are used to. Moving to new unfamiliar environments might disturbs them and create a feeling as if they are abandoned to die. Moving to elderly homes away from their homes creates change in lifestyle where they will have to live away from the people they are grown attached to; hence, most of elderly in countries like Tanzania lack motivation and refuse to move to elderly homes as they believe moving there is like being abandoned by their own families.

### 1.3 Need for Aging Care

To cope with the current era of modernized societies where the need for care is crucial and family connection still being the key factor for elderly, there is a need to think of ways to cater for both these needs instead of just having elderly homes. As reported in Tanzania progress report on matters related to aging;

*“The ability of the oldest old to manage themselves is either minimal or not existing. Due to this fact the society has the responsibility of providing them with care and support. However, the family will remain the basic institution of care and support for older people. Institutional care of older people will be the last resort (URT, 2007)”.*

People inherently need to feel that they matter and can make a difference. This basic desire should not change when one enters old age. The ability to connect with the community should be more readily available. Without doubt, some older people wish to stay in their homes independently for as long as possible, but the infrastructure needed to support this choice is often inadequate (Boaz, et al., 1999). Old people have the right to have their needs fulfilled and should not be treated differently due to the fact that they no longer contribute to society in traditional ways. Since they no longer work in the traditional sense this does not mean that they don't have a meaningful contribution to make. They should be enabled to contribute which will add value to both them and society. Boaz, et al., (1999) argues that older people need a flexible home care that will increase the balance potential between internal and external factors and increase the ability of adaptation to environment within their homes and communities.

### 1.4 Problem Statement

In developing countries like Tanzania elderly care is done in two ways, through elderly homes or being cared at home. Many elderly homes are isolated to communities sometimes seen as posing barriers to social interaction a situation which causes most elder not to wish to be there. Moving to elderly homes however, do not favour most elders in terms of transitional environment as elderly people often face difficulties in making transitions in their living environments since the ability of adaptation to environment is reduced due

to their old age problems. In their family homes however, elderly people often view their existing homes or community as maintaining their sense of identity and autonomy, which connects them to the community but still have unsolved problem of elderly care as there is no one to care for them at all. Reduction in family size is thought to be associated with reductions in family elder care. Thus, little is known on changing the perspective of ageing care to support their choices and needs. So there is a need to know architectural approaches and supportive conditions in creation of the flexible home care of elderly to maximize interaction and connection to communities and still get all the care they desire.

This study aimed at studying architectural approaches in creation of active age-friendly supportive environments for a flexible care for elderly people that allow a wide range of older people to interact, being cared for and maximize their contribution to the community; by analyzing the spatial requirements and qualities of spaces needed by the elderly preferential requirements in creation of the flexible home care conditions that favor connection to communities; examining the potentials and drawbacks of the existing contextual spaces within elderly homes in order to establish contextual design recommendations favoring flexible home care designs for elderly.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research involved understanding people's views on what they know about elderly care, the core spaces and qualities in creating a flexible elderly care also what possible solutions are suggested in changing the perspective of elderly care. In examining all these factors, case study strategy approach was used.

### 2.1 The Case Area

Dar es Salaam was selected because it is the most densely populated and the largest city with people from almost across the whole Tanzania making it the largest city in Tanzania (URT, 2014). On top of that, Dar es Salaam has large number of older people with mixed cultures from different origins and regions. Urban life imposes life challenges to older people who have retired from work on top of busy work and family schedules in urban life. Two cases were studied which are Mwananyamala informal settlement and Msimbazi care centre.

#### 2.1.1 Mwananyamala

Mwananyamala is an informal settlement located in Kinondoni District in Dar es Salaam Region. According to the population census (2012), the ward had a total population of 50,560. The settlement has old people who have lived in that community for decades with population of older people of at least not less than 7% of the total. Case study was conducted in Mwananyamala Msisiri settlement, in which variety of people were interviewed including elders and caregiver. Targeted elders ranged from age 60 to 70 years old. Data was mainly collected through interviews and observation.

2.1.2 Msimbazi Elderly Centre

Msimbazi elderly centre was established in 1954, connected to an existing Msimbazi Catholic Centre by the St.Vincet de Paul Catholic Church. The centre constitutes old people from different cultures who are provided with long term care and residence. The centre offers free care services which are provided by St. Francisco sisters. The centre is run under funds from different fund raisers organizations charity from any well wisher. The centre has a capacity of accommodating forty five (45) elderly and only accepts old people of age 60 and above for men and 55 and above for women, but during the time of the study it had a total of ten (10) old people six (6) of them being female and the rest four (4) are male ranging from 70 to 90 years of age. The centre is built as a village with three house type units; four bedroom, three bedroom and 2 bedroom units (Figure 1-6). Data was collected through interviews and Observation.

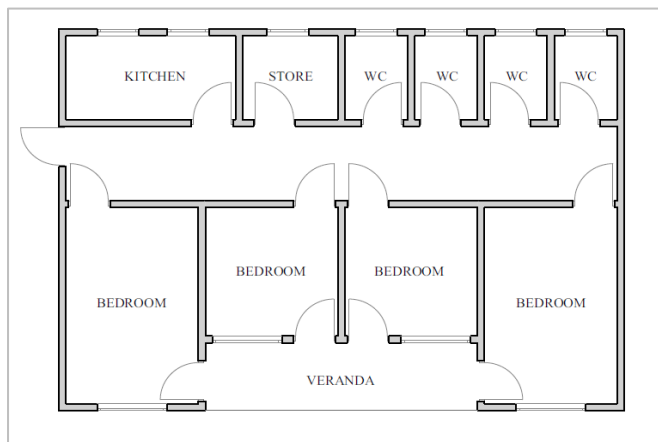


Figure 1: Four bedroom house layout Source: Fieldwork, 2017



Figure 2: Four bedroom house Source: Fieldwork, 2017

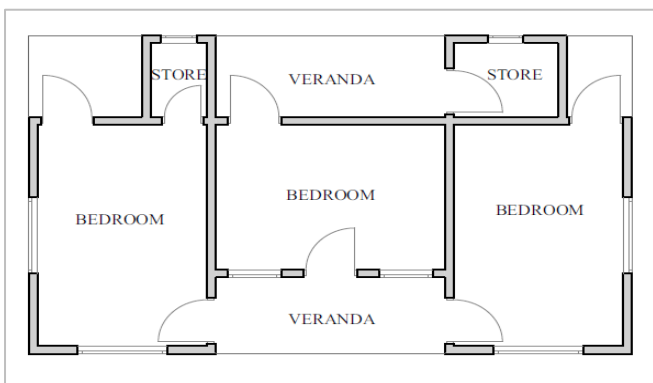


Figure 3: Three bedroom house layout Source: Fieldwork, 2017



Figure 4: Three bedroom house Source: Fieldwork, 2017

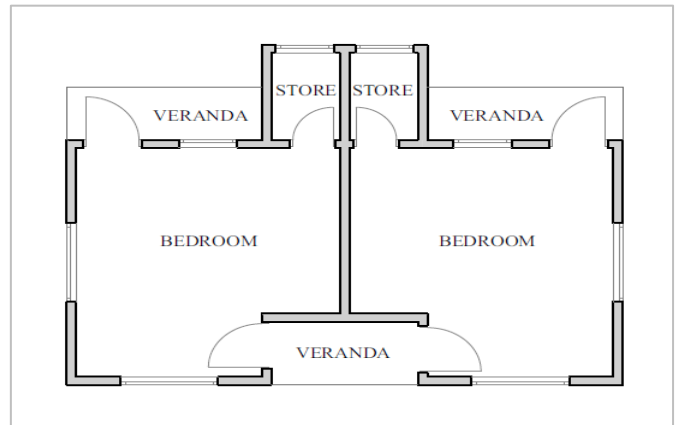


Figure 5: Two bedroom house layout Source: Fieldwork, 2017



Figure 6: Two bedroom house Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Observation facilitated collection of primary data through an active look and respective documentation. Interviews were conducted in which information such as existing knowledge about elderly care in Tanzania, preferential core spaces of a flexible elderly care, qualities of core spaces needed by the elderly preferential requirements and suggestions on possible solutions in changing the perspective of elderly care were obtained. Therefore a specific group of people were chosen for in-depth interview; in this case elderly people and those who take care of them thus either family members or non-family members (caregivers). Information from existing literature was also consulted during the study.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Concept of Elderly Care in Tanzania

Elderly care is about meeting and fulfillment of elderly needs simply by keeping them in their homes with their families. Elderly care is the responsibility of the society and families; this was verified by different opinions from different groups of people (elderly and non-elderly) who were interviewed. As one of the elder said during an interview;

“Elderly care is the responsibility of families; I mean old people should be cared for in their respective families”.

Another elder added by saying:

“First, there is elderly care in terms of family, meaning the ones responsible there are their children, grandchildren and relatives...”

Therefore elderly care is directly related to families, relatives and the society at large. As people age everything in them becomes delicate including their body, mind and even the environment they live in, they need to be cared for so that they do not feel isolated and abandoned by members of the society. As spoken by one of the caregiver said during an interview;

“...When we talk about elderly care we involve our societies in caring for them and recognizing their contribution in the society by making sure they live happily and in peace”.

In this era, families and societies seems to be distant to elders and treat them as an isolated group who don't matter anymore. One elder commented during an interview;

“In this era old people are seen as outdated and there is nobody who has time for them, even our own children forget our presence and they no longer respect our opinions and they control our lives as it pleases them”.

More was clarified by another elder who said:

“As for me what I understand is that in our families there is lack of discipline, what I really see from where we are from is that our families are not close to these elders (from this response, abandoning elders is related direct to lack of discipline)”.

Another elder also added:

“...Others have children who do not appreciate them; you see so when a child has no time for his or her old parents, those elderly starts feeling as they are useless to their children and the entire context of their life”.

This can be concluded that elders need care from within the context they are used to which their families and friends live in and thus they should be enabled to contribute in the society and should not be treated any different as human beings. Though things have changed in these modern days but few opinions were suggested on what should be done so as elderly care to be taken seriously by everyone. One of the elders suggested;

“Education should be given especially to youth so as they can

be disciplined so as to be able to care for their elders, because nowadays children don't listen what their elders want until when commanded something; that is not okay”.

A change of perception towards how older people and the society relate to each other is essential. This change necessitates older people's views and needs to be truly valued, represented, and understood from their perspectives as well as in the bigger picture by all members of society (Wong, et al., 2017). To ensure that elderly care today in our societies acquire same standard of life as everyone else does and with even much more attention they should be able to live in an environment whereby they do not wish to die early (Aumann, et al., 2010).

#### 3.2 Acceptability of Elderly Homes

Most of elderly homes have no connection to society. As elderly homes still exists elders in societies like Tanzania sadly discourages going to particular places since they appear as drastic changes of environment which most of the time they refuse to adapt. Interviews were conducted to some of elders who shared their opinions on the acceptability of elderly homes. One of the elder said;

“As for me I do not see any reason of sending elders in these elderly homes, I do not know because there are several kinds of old people, but sending them in these centers may lead even to early deaths because it affects them psychologically, and you find this old person just sitting with no exercises at all”.

Similarly another elder commented:

“Were, you mean if I wish to reside to those elderly homes? What about my wife and family? On my side I do not wish to go to those centers... I see no reason of going there”.

Most of the elders spoke on elderly homes as a place for people with no other option but moving to these homes and only wished if things were different they could go for other options. But mostly had common reasons which were unavoidable, illness was the main reason which forced them to move to elderly homes, other reasons were like no one to care for them at home as most of them had no families. One of the elders had views on staying in elderly home, he said;

“As for me sadly God has never blessed me with children, my husband died long ago and his relatives did not want me anymore as I had no children, my parents and a brother and a sister are also gone so I ended up with nowhere to stay so I came here. If only I had my own children I would have been staying with them and not here. This area is so lonely”.

More is clarified with one of the elders who spoke about this and said;

“You mean you have your own parent who have given birth to you, raised you, educated you and now you are educated, how do you even allow you old parent to come and live in places like these. There are certain things we have to accept that our heads are not okay. How can you bring a parent in centers like these?”

But another issue was also observed that these centers only receive elders who do not have families at all and those who



cannot support themselves physically. The society encourages that elders should be taken care within their respective societies and not otherwise. Moreover those caregivers in these elderly homes only do this as charity. One of the caregiver in the visited centre had something to say on this; “There is a strict information mentioned in the constitution that, elderly people received here should have no relative and he has no one to depend on. For men we receive here starts from age 65 and above and for women age 55 and above, you see”.

It can be concluded that people are aware of the idea of elderly homes in Tanzania, but for most elders it is not the place they wish to stay (both elders at care centers and those staying at home). In elderly homes the care is good and even has professionals; the reason of elders not preferring them is to live there they have to change the environment they are used to and live away from their homes. This behavior was also observed in Sweden where Sookyoung, et al., (2007) explained; moving into a new environment for an elderly resident coming from a long period of independent living at home can initiate feelings of lost identity and lack of a place in the community. Same case was observed in America in which Budesu (2006) argues, elderly people want to see people, meet people and not feel isolated hence they should be actively incorporated in the city.

### 3.3 Importance of Caring for Elderly While Living Within Their Residences

#### 3.3.1 Elders are able to live to their fullest

Caring for elders within their residence helps elders to live long lives with less stress of feeling isolated, lonely or abandoned. Also helps them feel as part of the society and have contribution to the society as they can still be useful, work and produce. One of the elders said;

*“Elders are very important group in the society so they should be included in the societies and are supposed to engage themselves in different activities so as they could live long life. I mean elders are supposed to at least walk instead of just sitting around... So do not say let me just keep them in (and not be active), they will not take long before they die”.*

Elders should be given choices to involve themselves in whatever they feel and want so as they could live a happy long life without feeling detached to the environment and people they are used to.

#### 3.3.2 Maintain good health

Good health doesn't reflect only physical health; good health is involves also physical, psychological, social and environmental aspects. One of the elders emphasized on health as one of the most crucial criteria to most elders, thus they even need exercises instead of just sitting and lying on bed and said;

“Elders should be taken care within their communities and not being sent to centers, or may be if those centers would be a place where an elder would exercise by walking up to there and do few activities if available and return to their own home.

But if you have your own place I do not see any need of residing to the centers. Excises to old people are very important... such kind of old people who excises may live better, you know when he or she does that you might see him or her as a fool but to me I see that very healthy. But if you see that it is hard for him or her and decide to send him or her to the centers just to sit, you have killed them already”.

Thus elderly care could be done anywhere but a key factor being within their communities that they will be in good health physically, psychologically, even socially and not be exiled to unknown and unfamiliar places just to have only physical health without the rest.

### 3.4 Spatial Requirements Needed by Elderly

#### 3.4.1 Communal spaces

From field study it was observed that most of elders these days especially in urban areas such as Dar es Salaam do not get to meet as there are no any communal spaces which they could all meet and exchange ideas. One of the interviewees commented;

“Yes, it would have been nice, because in this modern life old people do not get opportunities to meet and exchange ideas; they only meet maybe on occasions for example a funeral. What I see is if there where communal spaces for meeting it would have helped connecting us and at least we become active our stresses are released...”

Communal spaces seem to also be demanded as they enhance social interaction. One of the elders' responded;

“People should meet to exchange ideas, as for me what I know in the context I live old people are staying a bit far, If there were a possibility of uniting us it would be great...”

In this case social interaction with everyone and among themselves is observed as a key factor for active aging. This can be done through creation of communal spaces as demanded by most. Aumann, et al., (2010) had also a similar opinion on this creating a group living arrangement where the old and friends could care for each other. Benefits of communal spaces includes, enhancement of interaction, encourages activities, and eliminate sense of isolation.



Figure 7: Elderly people interacting Source: Fieldwork, 2017



**Figure 8: Old people playing ‘Bao’ and drinking coffee**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2017

### 3.4.2 Areas for fitness activities

As people get old their bodies become weak. This does not imply that they are incapable of doing anything. In fact exercise is proven to make anyone fit regardless of age. As observed from field study most of elders demand fitness activity including opportunities for walking. One of the elders during an interview commented;

“So, if you are willing to take care of elder people you should also provide exercises for them. Not to just let them sit around...this is might shorten their lives”.

One of the caregivers also mentioned work outs for elders as among the important things to elders. The interviewee said; “If only there were special trainers for body work outs it would be nice...Also those people who provide counselling are really needed here because some old people are affected psychologically and others have lost hope to live because societies have isolated them”.

Many older people spend most of their time each day just sitting and laying down with no exercises. Taylor (2014) explained that physical activity and exercise participation improve health in older adults. But fitness requires space, space requires location. Therefore demand for space for fitness where elders could meet for work out is required.

### 3.4.3 Areas for performing productive activities

From field study most of elders explained the importance of having something to do including income generating activities. One of the elders explained;

“I see there it is important that old people who see themselves fit and strong should have something to do that they think it helps them even in gaining income or in making them active. So as to help them not to think bad on their own children because they do not care for them anymore, it is important for them to have something to do”.

Physical activity can lead to a better quality of life as we grow older (Dwyer, et al., 2000). It is observed that elders wish to have something to do but only lack push factors that will enable them to work.



**Figure 9: Old man doing tailoring** Source: Fieldwork, 2017



Most interviewees suggested to have a location within each community where elders could perform activities they wish in one area. This could bring a sense of closeness and interaction as one elder responded;

“So, most of us prefer practicing agriculture, entrepreneurship, livestock keeping but we need to be able to do such kind of activities without feeling alone. Doing such activities may help us even gain income”.

This suggests that elders necessarily need to perform activities of their desire within their homes but within their communities where they get to work as groups. Fernandez, et al., (2001) explained, engaging in activities increases life satisfaction for older adults. Similarly Rowe & Kahn (1997) argue contact with others, exchange of information, emotional support and direct assistance, combined with productive activity, is central to successful ageing and overall happiness. This would help elders to perform routine activities for themselves in a safe interactive environment. It was also noted that activities for elders should reflect their interests and abilities because each elder is different from the other and that’s why variety of activities are suggested for them to have choices.

### 3.4.4 Areas for health facilities

As discussed earlier, good physical, mental as well as psychological health is crucial for elderly. Mental health can be affected by the environment one interacts with. In modern days most elders suffers from mental health as they get to be pushed away from their families and societies. Elders suggested the importance of having services that are specifically for them. As one of the elders pointed;

“You know elders do not need only care but as they get old their health deteriorate...the services we get in some hospitals is not good,... what I would suggest is that may be if there were facilities for treating elders only it would have been better”.

Significance for elderly centers was also pinpointed that provision of quality assured health-care services for the elderly population is a challenge that requires joint approach and strategies (Sookyoung, et al., 2007). Failure to address the health needs today could develop into a costly problem tomorrow. Good health is the most important factor in maintaining independence in older age (Dwyer, et al., 2000). Thus provision of health facilities for elderly within their communities is required so that elderly people can remain healthy and independent and can continue to contribute to their communities and families.

### 3.5 Qualities of Core Spaces Needed by Elderly

#### 3.5.1 Interaction

Interaction is a way to communicate with others to share differences and encourage each other. Spaces required are those that enhance interaction. Elders do not only require spaces for performing different activities but spaces that are interlinked and closely connected for interaction. Suttie (2014) explain, interaction is achieved with deep social connections and a commitment to taking care of one another, this will keep elders in the community healthy and preventing the need to move into some other less interactive environment like elderly homes. Cerruti & Shepley (2016) also explains intergenerational interaction through meaningful activities can promote positive effects and behaviors of older adults. Therefore architecture can be used to promote interaction so that elderly people can feel included in the society through producing, sharing and living together interactively.

#### 3.5.2 Comfort

Comfort can be achieved when one is satisfied with what is available. Availability of spaces depends on what is needed. One can have variety of choices of what to do in the spaces available and not be bound to limited spaces. As one of the respondent explained;

“If you really let an elder live as he or she wants, and just keep on doing things of his choices, trust me you will be amazed how long he or she will live”.

For elders allocation of spaces will be grouped in terms of their choices and needs that are satisfying and comfortable to them. According to Suttie (2014), living in a place with greater social connection where there is more trust and more helpful neighbors, one can feel more comfortable walking around to get to places one needs to go which helps staying mobile.

#### 3.5.3 Image of the place

Image explained here is in terms of where and how spaces will look like and be allocated. In most cases, elderly homes are perceived as more of hospitals and a place of death. Location of spaces required in communities are those which will be

perceived as places of joy and life extension as of the interviewee said;

“As for me I would not wish my parent to stay in elderly homes as they are more like hospitals, we do not want him to go and become sick there. But if he stays here with us at least he will have choices even to walk around anywhere he wants and come back at home”.

According Moldafsky (2014), most of the time elderly homes have no connection to society. They are characterized as a place of ‘withdrawal’ molded by socio-economic factors. They are perceived as institutions that no one wishes to go and end their lives in them. Bhatt (2015) argued, most elderly living communities are institutionalized and made to feel like a facility rather than a home. The elderly are going through a lot of changes in this stage of their life and tend to suffer from depression and a feeling of isolation. Putting them in an environment that feels like an institution would exacerbate their depression and may lead to other problems. Despite less favorable living conditions, many elderly people prefer to live in the community rather than in institutions (Ho Po Ying, 2001). Therefore elders should be cared in spaces that feel like a home and part of the community.

#### 3.5.4 Accessibility

It is important to create spaces that can be accessed without any help and support from people; Accessibility in terms of orientation of spaces, walk ability, and organization of spaces. It involves a network of quality that links spaces and encourages walking. As observed from field study, most elders undergo walking problems which makes them face difficulties to access various spaces and activities. Epimakhova (2016) argues, as a person ages, the supports available in the built environment and existence of accessible services and activities should complement the decline in the physical and cognitive competence of individuals as they age. Appropriate settings and access to supportive services in the built environment could support the elderly for aging in place and facilitate the optimization of their life space. He further adds saying that, another dimension of accessibility is physical access of the built environment which refers also to services available at an acceptable distance which could be freely reachable by everyone. Neighborhood environments are being increasingly recognized as factors that influence health and wellbeing (Gomez, et al., 2015). Neighborhoods should be designed to be more walk able and encourage elderly people to walk more and promote physical activity and social connectedness; which in turn has beneficial effects on health and wellbeing, particularly in older people.

#### 3.5.5 Safety and security

Safety is a major concern when working with or providing care to older adults. Security and safety depends on one another, provision of security leads to feeling safe. One of the respondents said; *...mainly is to make sure elderly environment is safe for them to be free and with lots of entertainments like sports.* Physical environment has a



remarkable influence on personal safety and security. According to (Huitt, 2007) in discussing Maslows Hierarchy of needs, stated that safety is one of the most important human need.

### 3.6 Potentials and Challenges in Existing Elderly Spaces in the Visited Home

#### 3.6.1 Potentials in existing elderly spaces

##### Organization

From observation in the field study houses seem to be arranged linearly which makes it easier for and old person to identify spaces. Visibility of spaces matters to any old person as they have decreased abilities to reason and see. Thus organization of spaces is very important. Spaces need to be arranged in a formal simple way that can easily be accessed without any directions and assistance.

##### Safety and security

One needs to be secured in order to feel safe. Security is based on tangible protection but safety is just a state. As observed from the care centre visited, the centre is surrounded by a tall solid fence wall with a single entrance gate. The wall is for security purposes to protect those who are inside especially from intrusion from outside and also to secure those from the inside from not going out randomly without permission, as some of the elders are psychologically affected; also those who have lost hope might decide to run away.



**Figure 11: Wall fence for security purpose** *Source: Fieldwork, 2017*

Elders do not necessarily feel safe walking around the centre as the physical environment is not such friendly. Tall grasses can be observed around; most spaces are not in use, and there is presence of stairs which may sometimes cause elders to fall.



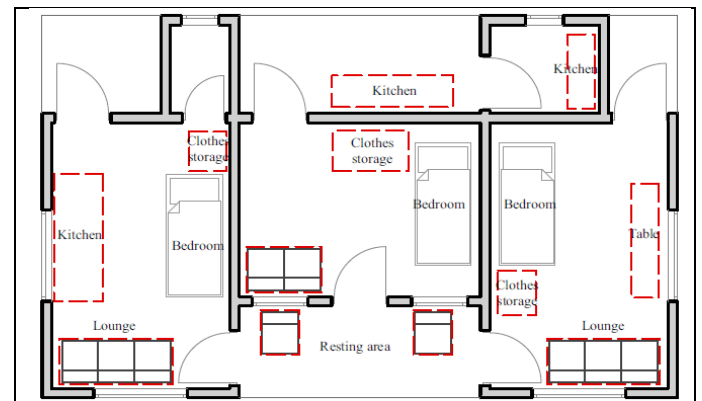
**Figure 12: Grasses to the surroundings which elders don't feel safe walking around** *Source: Author, 2017*



**Figure 13: Spaces and buildings that are not in use** *Source: Author, 2017*

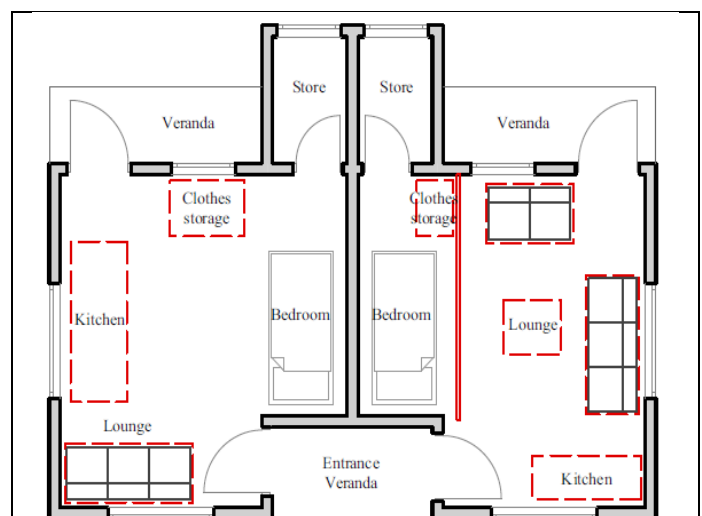
##### Privacy

Privacy is observed through space ownership. Each elder owns one private room, which he has freedom to personalize it for his or her private purposes. The rooms are used for sleeping and to some they even have kitchen and assets of their own.



**Figure 14: Three bedroom unit with a single old person in each room for privacy**

*Source: Author, 2017*



**Figure 15: Two bedroom unit, each room owned by a single old person for privacy**

*Source: Author, 2017*



### 3.6.2 Challenges in existing elderly spaces

#### Lack of sense of community

The elderly care centre visited was located where there is no any interaction with the outside. One of the caregivers said; “Elders here lack social spaces; they need spaces for social activities like watching TV, and exchanging ideas. By providing them social activities they become motivated, you see”.

The visited centre was observed to have only a single centered outdoor area for communal purposes but it appeared not to be so friendly and was not surrounded by natural elements, the space acted as a stand along structure which has less sense of a community. Through observation the centre felt like an isolated place of special people in need. Being a part of something real enlightens and awakens ones soul, mind and body. Elders in elderly homes feel like their end of life has reached as they are not part of anything anymore but a burden to those who care for them. Therefore suggestions were made, if there were connected to the outside world it would save their lives.

#### Shortage of space for different functions

It was observed that elderly care centre visited have just enough spaces for elders to reside but not enough for what most of elders really wanted. Demand for spaces for what they really wanted to do. One of the respondents in elderly home expressed;

“A lot of available spaces here are not in use, if only they would allow us to do different activities it would have been nice”.

Observations indicated that elders in these areas wish they would have some sort of activities that they would keep them active and not just sitting and sleeping.

#### Supportive environment

Aging could be depressing and lonely if the environment provided for the elderly is not supportive. The elderly care centre visited had poor supportive environment in terms of space allocation and walk ability to favor living conditions of elders occupying the area. As observed there were problems in walking spaces around the entire compound at the centre. Poor walking environment was even testified through an interview with one of the respondent who said;

“One of the challenges faced here is that the environment is not friendly so they feel lonely. So if the environment was friendly they could even have wheelchairs which they would be moving around with, but as you can see even these walkways are not conducive to them”.

Problems were also observed in the allocation of some spaces. Spaces that are daily used such as toilets are to be located in an area where one need to feel comfortable and easily accessible. From field study it was observed that toilets were located outside where elderly had trouble moving in and out just to use them. An interview with one of the elderly talking about problems in use of spaces available said;

“The challenge here is accessibility and location of toilets. As

you can see those outdoor toilets, if only the toilet was indoor it would have being easy”.



**Figure 16: Outdoor toilets** Source: *fieldwork*, 2017

Supportive environment for elders is very critical as their ability to move around and explore is reduced. Environment affects older people’s physical performance (Lotvonen, et al., 2017), hence considerations are to be done. According to WHO (2018), to create age-friendly environment they need to be accessible, inclusive, safe, secure and supportive so as to ensure everyone has an opportunity to fully participate. Thus, environment and various aspects of surrounding locations strongly influence their wellbeing and quality of life. Their wellbeing can be substantially improved by appropriate modifications of their environment to meet their needs.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

For an elder to be active physically, mentally and socially, care should be provided to them just as part of everyday life and not as an isolated action. Care for elders should be done by their families, community and among themselves. Most elders prefer to be part of the communities they are bond to and not as an isolated group which limits them to share their values and lifetime with anyone. They should be treated as they matter to their families, community and the world at large which they call it ageing with dignity. It has been found that people are aware of the existence of elderly homes but most of them do not want to reside there. They perceive these centers as places that isolate them from the world which makes it difficult to connect with the outside life by staying there. On top of that in elderly homes, old people are left feeling the end of their lives is near, in short places to die fast. Caring and keeping elders in facilities they are not comfortable with is just as killing their inner activeness. Being taken care of within their communities and within their residences allows elders to interact with everyone in the community. This will keep most elders actively strong and alive.

Moreover, care within elders’ communities is not only done in their homes but other places of the community as most elders had preferable spaces that they needed which would make them as part of the community. Elders should be given choices to meet and exchange ideas and even do any activity they wish

to perform and not just enclosing them in one place, this can lead to active aging through integration with both the community and the environment. The best way to design such places in the community depends on factors like location and needs. That is location should be strictly within their communities close to where they live. It is important to have spaces for interaction so as to improve the quality of life and life satisfaction of the elderly. Also provision of physical activities is an important way for older people to stay healthy. Any provided space for elders should enhance interaction, comfort, safety and accessibility.

Failures of elderly homes are not only based on how they are perceived, but also on lots of other design problems. Through the available problems conclusion is made that spaces provided should not only end to needs but other features such as supportive environment that elders require is essential.

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