



CHARACTER OF HOMES FOR THE AGED IN RURAL KENYA

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare, to the best of my knowledge, that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the purpose of awarding a degree in any other institution.

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the examination requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Architecture degree, in the Department of Architecture and Building Science, at the University of Nairobi.

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DEDICATION

To God, and My Family.

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ABSTRACT

The aged are an important part of the African society. They enjoy privileges through the care and support they receive from the extended families. However, due to modernization and weakening of the strong family ties that once held communities together, the aged are becoming a neglected group that lacks care and any type of support. The young who are supposed to be looking after their aging family members lack commitment and do not want to take up this responsibility.

The aged are a dependent lot that needs not only financial help but also emotional and social support. Their neglect and abandonment leads to social isolation, loneliness and depression. As a result, group living schemes such as homes for the aged are becoming popular as they try to fill in the gap in care that is left by the families.

Homes for the aged is a concept in Africa that is foreign as the traditions over the years saw the elderly well taken care of within the family or extended families. With modernization however, there has been some influence on the culture and this is a concept that is slowly being integrated into our societies. Frampton states that a regions' traditions are important in reinforcing a society moving forward in a global world while taking up universal methods.

The study looks at how the homes for the aged fit into the physical, social and cultural context of rural Kenya. What aspects of the traditions have influenced the homes and how the homes have also responded to the context. Through the use of case studies, a descriptive research in nature was conducted with reference to the primary and secondary data collected to conduct a further analysis of the field data. The findings show attempts at integrating the homes into the societies with instances of less success in some aspects.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are 1.2 million people in Kenya above the age of 60 and 10 years from now this number is expected to rise to 2.2 million as people live longer due to improvement in the quality of life. These statistics are according to the latest population figures from the government (Census, 2009). Globally, the population of people aged 60 years and above is estimated to reach a number in 2050 that for the first time in human history will be higher than children under 14 years old (HelpAge International).

The ageing population requires special care as they have limitations on their abilities to care for themselves either due to sickness, old age or disability. Both mental and physical changes that are due to a combination of factors result in lifestyle adjustments and at times the areas where they live.

Traditionally, extended families took care of elderly members but that is now changing as the family structures change. Through the years, Kenya has seen an increase in homes for the aged as more elderly people are being placed in the care of these homes. The homes are becoming popular for they come in to provide care and attention to the aged where family support is unavailable. These spaces specially designed for the older people meet certain regulations that go beyond findings related to universal design such as accessibility ramps and grab rails to addressing in depth their behavioural and social needs.

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members."

Mahatma Ghandi

1.1 Background Study



Fig. 1.01: *St. Mary's Village, Home for the Aged*

Source: Retrieved on 19th September, 2016
from <http://stmarysvillage.blogspot.co.ke>

Age 60 is used widely to define older people although the definition of old age varies among different cultures. (Ezeh, 2006). Features mostly used to define old age are number of years, physical appearance and patterns of social behaviour. Old age comprises "the later part of life; the period of life after youth and middle age, usually with reference to deterioration. Old age shifts according to the context and should therefore not be defined by years but by other aspects such as acquisition of roles that are new, losing of previous roles, or lack of ability in contributing actively to society (KNCHR, 2009).

Today in African society, a vital role is played by older people. Without the contribution of older people, millions of families across the continent would not survive; from caring for grandchildren and catering to their unwell children to providing needed income.

In traditional African societies, elders were taken care of by the extended family or larger community into old age. This is however changing due to the deterioration in socio-cultural safety net and economic conditions, impacts of various diseases and changes in family relations. Forms of caring for older people in the African tradition are breaking down (Tavengwa, 2008).

Younger members of the family do not take care of or provide for their older members as they are not sensitized on their obligation due to the considerable weakening of family support structures resulting from urbanization, economic pressures and changing social values.



Fig. 1.02: *Women Gathered Outside
Doing Some Work*

Source: Retrieved on 19th September, 2016
from <http://www.chioggiatv.it>

Ideally, older persons should be cared for by their children and remain in the community. However, the elderly are being neglected and abandoned leaving a good number of them living in poverty with no family care, being abused and ill-treated and discriminated against. These issues are facing the elderly not only in the urban setting but also in the rural areas (Onyango K. et al, 1984).

Most of the elderly find satisfaction of their needs and concerns in the family relationships. Living arrangement within the family setup helps cushion the elderly against inadequacies in the provision of their needs. However, the weakening of extended family structures that used to cater for the aged who are deemed a dependent lot has left them with no source of security, social and financial support systems. This neglect and abandonment by family and the larger community, where the older people lack caregivers, leads to societal disengagement of the elderly which in turn leads to social isolation that most often cause stress and depression (Maclean, 2010).

As a result, the aged are being placed in the care of elderly homes that are growing by number, something that a generation ago was unheard of. This is becoming popular as a means of providing care for the ageing population where the family or community structure lacks or are struggling in providing proper care and attention.

1.2 Problem Statement

The aged are a vital part of African societies as they serve as a link between the past and the present. Their importance demands that they are supported and cared for through the later part of their lives in a peaceful environment that preserves their identity both personally and within the community. However, with the growth and change of communities, due to issues such as modernization, the aged have become a neglected group which was once the responsibility of the community. As a result, the aged are being placed in homes that are dedicated to giving the elderly proper care and attention. Therefore, the study intends to examine how the homes have been structured to meet the social and cultural needs of the aging Kenyan population.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to analyse the character of homes for the aged in rural Kenya and its ability to improve their well-being.

- To establish the character that is consistent in homes for the aged.
- To identify and analyse the trends of homes for the aged in rural Kenya.
- To investigate how the design of existing homes for the aged respond to the needs of the older people.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the character of homes for the aged?
- What are the trends of homes for the aged in rural Kenya?
- How does the design of existing homes for the aged respond to the needs of older people?

1.5 Justification of the Study

The aged are an important group to a country as they constitute a vital link with our history and provide important skills and wisdom for the younger generations. Provision for their care should be a key concern for all. The rights of the elderly according to the UN include; independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. Their rights can be met through a design approach that encompasses health and well-being, inclusion and sustainability. Housing is being used as a solution to the challenges by placing the aged in homes.

Homes for the aged are supposed to act as a centre of rescue for the neglected and abandoned aged population. These spaces become the areas in which the elderly get to live out their lives. These homes provide security and social support that is much needed by the elderly.

This study uniquely looks at how the elderly homes fit into our social and cultural context. As a result of this study, meaningful architecture will be a result and means of giving care to the aged through a research based on the natural, physical and social environments.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study is limited to the investigation of homes for the aged that are in rural Kenya. There are several homes that are in the rural parts of Kenya but this study limits itself to research of three homes due to time constraints. This research will not investigate cost implication in relation to the design, construction and operation of the facility.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Aged - According to the United Nations, World Population Ageing document, the aged are persons who are 60years and above. The WHO, however, recognized that the developing world often defines old age, not by years, but by new roles, loss of previous roles, or inability to make an active contribution to society. Throughout the entire document, there is an interchangeable use of terms denoting the aged such as old people, the elderly, the aged population, older persons etc.

Adequate Environment - This refers to the satisfactory or acceptable quality and quantity of the surroundings or conditions in which the elderly live or operate. It is a surrounding that is sufficient to satisfy a requirement or meet a need.

Social isolation – This is the complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and society. It differs from loneliness, which reflects a temporary lack of contact with other humans. Ocharo (2009) says social isolation occurs in cases where there is a low level of contact between an individual and his/her family, neighbors, community, and social sources.

Neglected – This refers to the aged who are not given due care, attention and time that they need. Legally it refers to the elderly who are under one's care but are not provided with proper food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care, or emotional stability.

1.8 Organization of Study

Chapter 1: Introduction – This chapter introduces the research topic and states the research problem and gives a detailed explanation about the purpose of the study. It gives an overview of what the document is about by giving enough background information to understand this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – This chapter involves a review of both published and unpublished works. It is a review and synthesis of prior studies and works related to the research problem under investigation. The purpose is to place the problem within the larger whole of what has been explored.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology - This chapter involves consideration of the structure within which the research is conducted. It evaluates the objectives of this study and discusses research strategies that help the author assess the homes for the aged in Kenya. It discusses how the research is conducted, how the data is collected, analysed and how it is presented.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis – This chapter involves analysing the data collected from the fieldwork against the parameters derived from the literature review.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations - This chapter contains summarized information on the topic and the author's conclusion on the subject. The author also suggests various recommendations that can be used in the design of homes for the aged in Kenya.