

THE ARCHITECTURE OF CARE:

Building Intergenerational Social Bonds
Through Community Initiatives



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Gold Award Winner 2025

Decent Shelter for All

The Architecture of Care: Building Intergenerational Social Bonds Through Community Initiatives

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Foreword

At Tanzania Women Architects for Humanity (TAWAH) we believe that architecture is most meaningful when it improves lives. Beyond designing buildings, it has the power to strengthen communities, restore dignity and create opportunities for people to thrive. This publication reflects that belief. It captures how a shared vision, community participation, and women-led construction can create spaces that foster inclusion, wellbeing, and human connection. The Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub is not simply a building; it represents a model of care, respect and intergenerational solidarity that places older people at the heart of community life.

The success of this initiative has been made possible through the commitment of our partners, community members, women builders, volunteers and supporters, whose contributions continue to demonstrate that lasting change is achieved through collaboration. We hope this publication will inspire architects, development practitioners, policymakers and communities to embrace people-centred design and recognize that the true value of architecture lies not only in the spaces we create, but in the lives those spaces enrich.

Thank you for taking the time to read our story.

Victoria M. Heilman

Victoria Marwa Heilman

Co-Founder and Executive Director

Tanzania Women Architects for Humanity (TAWAH)

Acknowledgements

This publication is the result of the generosity, collaboration and dedication of many individuals and organizations who shared TAWAH's vision of creating dignified spaces for older people through community-driven architecture. We sincerely thank the **World Habitat Awards in partnership with UNHABITAT** for recognizing our work and providing the funding that made the Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub possible. We are equally grateful to the **Segal Family Foundation** whose African Visionary Fellowship linked us to **Kyaro Assistive Technology** for the physiotherapy and assistive equipment and **Tengeneza Generation** for the inspiring murals that brought the Hub to life.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the local government leaders, people of Mhaga Village, and especially the elderly residents, whose trust and participation made this journey meaningful. We are deeply grateful to our **women builders**, the trainers, artisans, the Building Research Unit of Ardhi University, and all technical partners whose knowledge and commitment transformed ideas into lasting impact.

Finally, we thank all TAWAH members, staff, volunteers and friends whose passion and dedication continue to drive our mission. Every contribution has helped build not only homes and the Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub, but also dignity, hope and stronger intergenerational social bonds.

Tanzania Women Architects for Humanity (TAWAH)

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Bibi Msese - Mhaga Village

KHANGA NZITO, MALI YAFIRIKI

Introduction:

Building Intergenerational Social Bonds Through Community Architecture in Tanzania.

In Tanzania, the elderly are more than just the oldest members of a community. They are its living memory, keepers of culture, tradition and history passed down through generations. Yet, for many of them daily life is a struggle. As young people have moved to cities in search of work and better opportunities, the elderly have been left behind, often living alone in crumbling homes, or caring for young grandchildren with little support from the wider community.



These challenges came to TAWAH's attention during its initial engagement in Mhaga Village, Kisarawe District where TAWAH was supporting the establishment of a girls' secondary school through design and supervision of construction work. In recognition of this contribution, TAWAH was allocated five acres of land on which it established a Vocational Training Centre (VTC) for Women. As part of construction training it was decided to build houses for older village residents in extreme poverty.

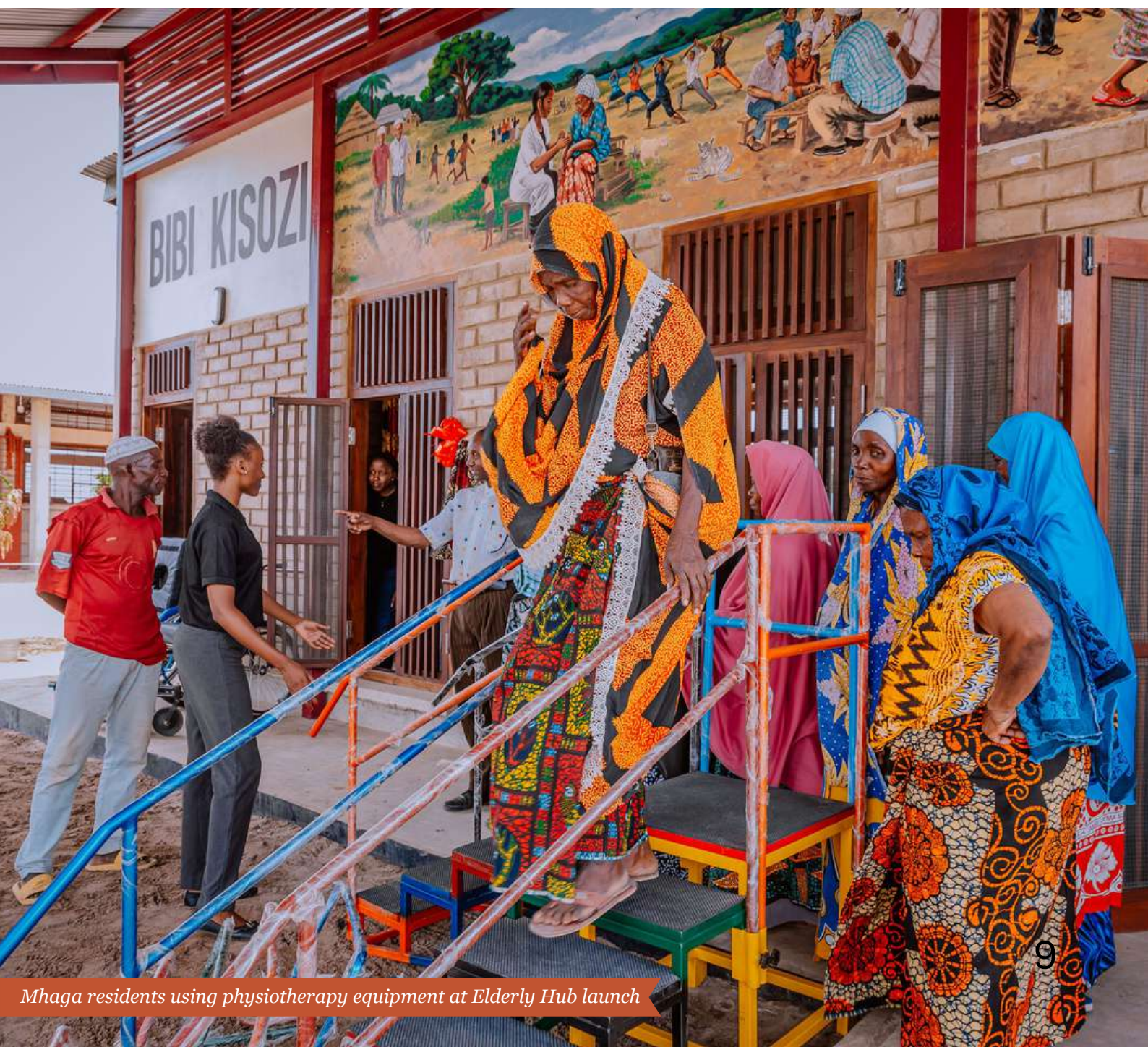
*“Wazee wetu ni
tunu yetu,
tuwatunze.”*



In 2022, TAWAH built a new home for Bibi Kisozi. What happened during the construction shaped what followed. Bibi Kisozi was visibly transformed by the presence of the women builders around her. She became more outgoing, joyful, engaged, and full of life whenever the team arrived. The women building her home noted how much she loved their company and how she kept them company in return. That simple human connection planted a seed and this physical act of building shelter leading to new generational social connections did not go unnoticed. World Habitat Awards in partnership with UNHabitat recognised TAWAH's efforts and awarded a prize fund to take the vision even further.

From that seed grew the idea of the Elderly Hub: a dedicated communal space where older villagers could regularly gather with the women builders, young trainees, children and other community members. A place not just for shelter, but for connection, health, learning and belonging. Situated within the TAWAH VTC, the Hub situates elderly residents in a friendly group of people and it gives the younger generation regular access to the wisdom and stories their elders carry.

This booklet tells the story of how the Elderly Hub came to life. It covers the people who built it and those it was built for; the architectural choices made to ensure the space is safe, sustainable and welcoming; and the way the project aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. More than anything, it is a story about what happens when a community chooses to care.



Mhaga residents using physiotherapy equipment at Elderly Hub launch



Salma Mape singing at the Elderly Hub launch

TAWAH's Engagements with Elderly Communities

From A Pregnant Cow to Homes.



Mhaga Village is not the first instance where TAWAH looked to improve the lives of elderly communities in Tanzania. In October 2019, during Nyerere Day, we reflected on what Tanzania's first president stood for, namely dignity and equality for all. To honour this, we decided to spend time with elders at the Nunge Home for the Elderly in Dar es Salaam. In preparation for the visit TAWAH raised funds to purchase a six-month-pregnant cow for the Nunge Home. We also collected and contributed new and pre-owned clothes and shoes, and dedicated our time to being present for a day - listening to their stories, sharing moments, and offering care and companionship.

That day left a lasting impression. Beyond immediate support, the cow provided a sustainable source of activity and benefit for the home. More importantly, the experience deepened our understanding of how meaningful engagement can restore a sense of dignity and belonging. It became a defining moment, shaping how we approach our work with elderly communities and strengthening our commitment to keep our elders in mind in whatever we do and wherever we go.



TAWAH visits Nunge Elderly Home

When we first arrived in Mhaga in 2019 to work on the girls' secondary school, we were struck by the extreme housing poverty, especially for elderly residents. It was deeply concerning, and we felt a clear responsibility to use our expertise to help improve the situation.

While our primary focus is training women for construction work, another key priority quickly emerged: supporting elderly residents living in poor conditions without reliable support systems. Our training approach is "learning by doing" through working on actual construction projects. We believed that the construction projects that would provide the most benefit for our students and marginalized community members would be to build houses for elderly community members living in extreme housing poverty. This training model not only builds skills but ensures that each elderly beneficiary gains a safe and dignified home. Through its close partnership with the community, TAWAH identified elderly people who were living in unsafe and deteriorating homes.

The impact on the elders who have gained new houses has been profound, far beyond what we initially anticipated. An unexpected positive impact of the houses has been improved health for the elderly beneficiary as they now live and sleep in safer, more secure environments. There is a visible increase in happiness that is manifested in smiles, renewed energy, and a stronger sense of belonging. Social interaction has improved with greater engagement among neighbours. Most importantly, there is a restored sense of dignity in how they live.

While nineteen homes represent only a small fraction of the need for quality housing for the elderly, we believe in leading by example. TAWAH cannot address this challenge alone. Our hope is that other organizations and community members will be inspired by this work, learn from it, and take collective responsibility to support the elderly in their communities to live in safe and dignified conditions.



Before



After

“The housing crisis is not just about bricks and mortar – it is a crisis of dignity, safety, health and opportunity”

Ana Claudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

The architecture of the homes is grounded in simplicity, sustainability, functionality, and a quiet, dignified aesthetic. As illustrated in the photo below, these award-winning homes are designed with two rooms, a sleeping area and a living space, carefully oriented along an east-west axis to enhance thermal comfort.

Large windows and generous roof overhangs provide natural ventilation and effective shading, helping to maintain cool and comfortable interiors. Both the interior and exterior walls celebrate the natural beauty of earth construction. The bricks are made from soil excavated directly from the site while digging the foundation allowing

the bricks to preserve the land's original colour and texture. This approach not only reduces costs and environmental impact but also creates homes that are both contextually appropriate and visually harmonious.

Access to water is also a major concern in the village. Our homes are equipped with a rainwater harvesting and collection system.

Besides having access to decent and dignified homes, as part of the construction process TAWAH ensures that the elders have recognized legal ownership of the land and house so that relatives who had abandoned them do not try to take the property.



Front view of a typical TAWAH home in Mhaga Village



“Those who have received the privilege of education have a duty to repay back to community by serving others”

Mwl. Julius Kambarage Nyerere

Women Builders Learn by Doing Projects that Improve their Community

“Women are Builders”

TAWAH has spearheaded efforts to empower our daughters, sisters and mothers by equipping them with construction skills. The establishment of the TAWAH VTC has become a beacon of transformation for underprivileged women, especially those who were deprived of formal education. Through hands-on practical training in construction, they become skilled builders capable of earning income and improving their families' quality of life.

What began as a simple idea soon evolved into a widely embraced community initiative. At the beginning of 2020, Kisarawe District Government, Mhaga Village leaders, individual community members, and TAWAH came together to further develop this transformative vision. Initially a total of 120 women signed up to become women builders, of whom 48 started training by making sun-dried Interlocking Stabilised Soil Bricks (ISSB) on the bare 5-acre plot. Later trainees helped to construct the TAWAH VTC - “Designed by Women, Built by Women, For Women”. As of July 2026, 169 women from different parts of Tanzania have been trained.



As part of its vision to equip women with practical construction skills through a "learning by doing" approach TAWAH combines skills development with community service, allowing women trainees to gain hands-on experience while addressing local development challenges. Following community consultations and household assessments conducted in 2020, a number of elderly individuals were identified as priority beneficiaries. In response, TAWAH's professional architects and construction experts developed simple, safe and climate-responsive house designs that could be constructed by women trainees using ISSB bricks produced on site.

The initiative was first implemented in 2022, when women trainee builders constructed homes for Bibi Kisozi and Mzee Maunda. These projects provided trainees with practical experience in all stages of construction, from foundation work to roofing, while simultaneously improving the living conditions of vulnerable elderly residents.

Since then, the elderly housing programme has become an integral part of TAWAH's training model. Each cohort of women trainees contributes to the construction of homes for elderly beneficiaries, transforming the training process into a platform for community service and social impact. By 2026, a total of nineteen homes have been constructed in Mhaga Village and five in Chanika, Dar es Salaam. Throughout the process, community members actively participated by contributing labour, local materials, and ongoing support to the elderly, strengthening community ownership and intergenerational solidarity.





“A House and a Tree”

During each home handover ceremony, the elderly beneficiary is presented with a fruit tree to plant at their new home.

The tree symbolizes hope, renewal, and a continued sense of purpose, encouraging the elder to nurture it and look forward to enjoying its fruits in the years ahead. It also reflects TAWAH's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development while creating opportunities for neighbours and community members to remain connected and engaged, ensuring that the elderly are supported, valued, and never left in isolation

In 2025, TAWAH's Decent Homes for the Elderly initiative achieved global recognition as the Gold Winner at the World Habitat Awards & UN HABITAT

This recognition highlighted the project's remarkable approach, including:

- *Gender inclusion through women's participation in construction,*
- *Social inclusion through community engagement,*
- *Low-carbon construction using earth ISSB bricks,*
- *Poverty reduction through developing income-generating skills,*
- *Addressing housing vulnerability among the elderly.*



TAWAH in London receiving the 2025 World Habitat Gold Award

The 2025 Gold World Habitat Award together with its prize money inspired and funded the construction of the Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub - a safe, dignified, and healthy social space where elders can meet and socialise. In honour of the late Bibi Kisozi, the first beneficiary to receive a home, we named the Elderly Hub after her.

The Hub connects elders with their peers, women builders, youth, children, and the wider TAWAH community, fostering social interaction and promoting active, healthy, and dignified living. The Hub was jointly designed by TAWAH members and volunteers and constructed by women builders.

TAWAH partnered with Kyaro Assistive Tech, whom we were introduced to through the African Visionary Fellowship of the **Segal Family Foundation**, to install assistive equipment and physical therapy tools.

Our main aim was to ensure the accessibility needs of the elderly and community members with special needs as well as providing tools for rehabilitative physical therapy for the elderly in the community.

“Our elders are our treasure, let us take care of them.”



Bi Sauda Kilumbi leading a musical celebration at the Eldiery Hub launch

Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub launched on the 4th of February 2026 received a warm welcome from fifty-nine elderly attendees. During the launch, we invited Physiotherapist Dr Kanozo and doctors from AfyaCheck Foundation to demonstrate the physiotherapy exercises available at the centre. Sheria Kiganjani joined in to provide legal access support to the elders.

Currently members of the community visit the Elderly Hub weekly to exercise and be part of the community of women builders and trainees that are at the VTC. Going forward we will continue bringing doctors and physiotherapists to the centre, to allow the elderly to receive regular and thorough reviews of their overall wellness.

The Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub represents continuity in TAWAH's community-driven support for elders. It stands as a model for what is possible across Tanzania—creating spaces that honour and preserve the wisdom of the elderly.



Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub Launch

The Architecture of the Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub

The Elderly Hub at the TAWAH VTC campus begins not as a building, but as a question; how can spaces for aging exist within the rhythm of everyday community life rather than outside it? This question guided a deliberate shift away from conventional models of elderly care, which often isolate older adults within specialized or institutional environments.

The Elderly Hub design envisions senior citizens within an active training campus already shaped by movement, learning and shared routines. In doing so, care is no longer treated as a separate function but as something embedded within daily life of the VTC.

From the outset, the intention was to create a place where the presence of elders feels continuous with the surrounding activities. As trainees, staff and visitors move through the VTC, interactions with older adults unfold naturally under shaded verandas, within shared indoor spaces or along circulation paths that encourage pause rather than passage.

These moments are unstructured, yet they carry weight. They become opportunities for exchange, where knowledge is not formally taught but informally transferred through conversation, observation and shared activity.



Afya check at the Elderly Hub



Within many Tanzanian communities, elders carry histories, skills and cultural practices that extend beyond formal education systems. The architectural approach to the Elderly Hub seeks to reinforce this cultural role by providing spaces that encourage conversation, storytelling, informal teaching and shared activities.

The building itself is modest in scale, but precise in organization. Its spatial logic is structured as a gradual transition from open and collective zones to more private and contained spaces allowing different forms of interaction to coexist without conflict. At the centre of this sequence is the communal lounge, which acts as the social anchor of the Hub. This space is not defined by a single function; it accommodates a spectrum of activities that shift throughout the day. Storytelling sessions emerge organically, traditional games such as bao are played in small groups and moments of music or dance occasionally animate the lounge. These activities contribute directly to mental stimulation and emotional well-being, reinforcing a sense of belonging that is often diminished in more isolated care environments.



View of Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub

Adjacent to the lounge is the consultation room, a quieter and more controlled environment intended for individual support, health consultations or counselling. Its placement is deliberate. The room remains closely connected to the central activity space, ensuring accessibility while preserving dignity and privacy. This proximity allows users to move between collective and personal spaces without disconnection, maintaining a continuous relationship with the life of the building.

Extending beyond the enclosed spaces, verandas at both the front and rear of the building act as transitional zones that mediate between interior and exterior environments. These shaded areas are among the most dynamic parts of the Hub. They accommodate a range of uses such as resting, observing, informal conversation and physiotherapy sessions while responding to changing climatic conditions throughout the day. Their openness allows for visual continuity across the site, reinforcing a sense of connection.



Mhaga residents at launch of elderly hub



Interior view of Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub

The integration of locally developed physiotherapy equipment, produced by **Kyaro Assistive Technology** in Arusha, further strengthens this relationship between design and use. These tools characterized by their durability and bright, engaging colours, are positioned within shared spaces, making physical activity visible and accessible.

Art reinforces the connection between the building and its community. Murals created by **Tengeneza Generation** introduce local narratives and visual identity to the exterior walls, making the hub immediately recognizable and approachable. These artworks act as both cultural markers and social invitations, drawing people into the space.



Artwork by Tengeneza Generation



Building Materials

Material decisions across the project were guided by a combination of availability, climate responsiveness and construction logic. One of the most defining aspects of the Hub is the use of ISSBs, produced directly on site. Soil excavated during foundation work was repurposed for block production, transforming what would typically be considered waste into a primary building material. This approach reduces transportation costs, minimizes environmental impact and physically and visually anchors the building to its context.

More importantly, the use of ISSBs introduces a construction methodology that is both efficient and participatory. Their interlocking system reduces the need for mortar and accelerates construction time, while their thermal mass contributes significantly to indoor comfort. During the day, the walls absorb heat, releasing it gradually as temperatures drop, stabilizing internal conditions without reliance on mechanical cooling systems.

The production and application of these bricks were carried out in collaboration with the Building Research Institute at Ardhi University. This partnership ensured that technical standards were met while simultaneously creating opportunities for hands-on learning. Trainees were directly involved in the process, from soil preparation to blockmaking and wall construction. In this way, the act of building became an educational process, reinforcing the vocational training mission of the TAWAH VTC.

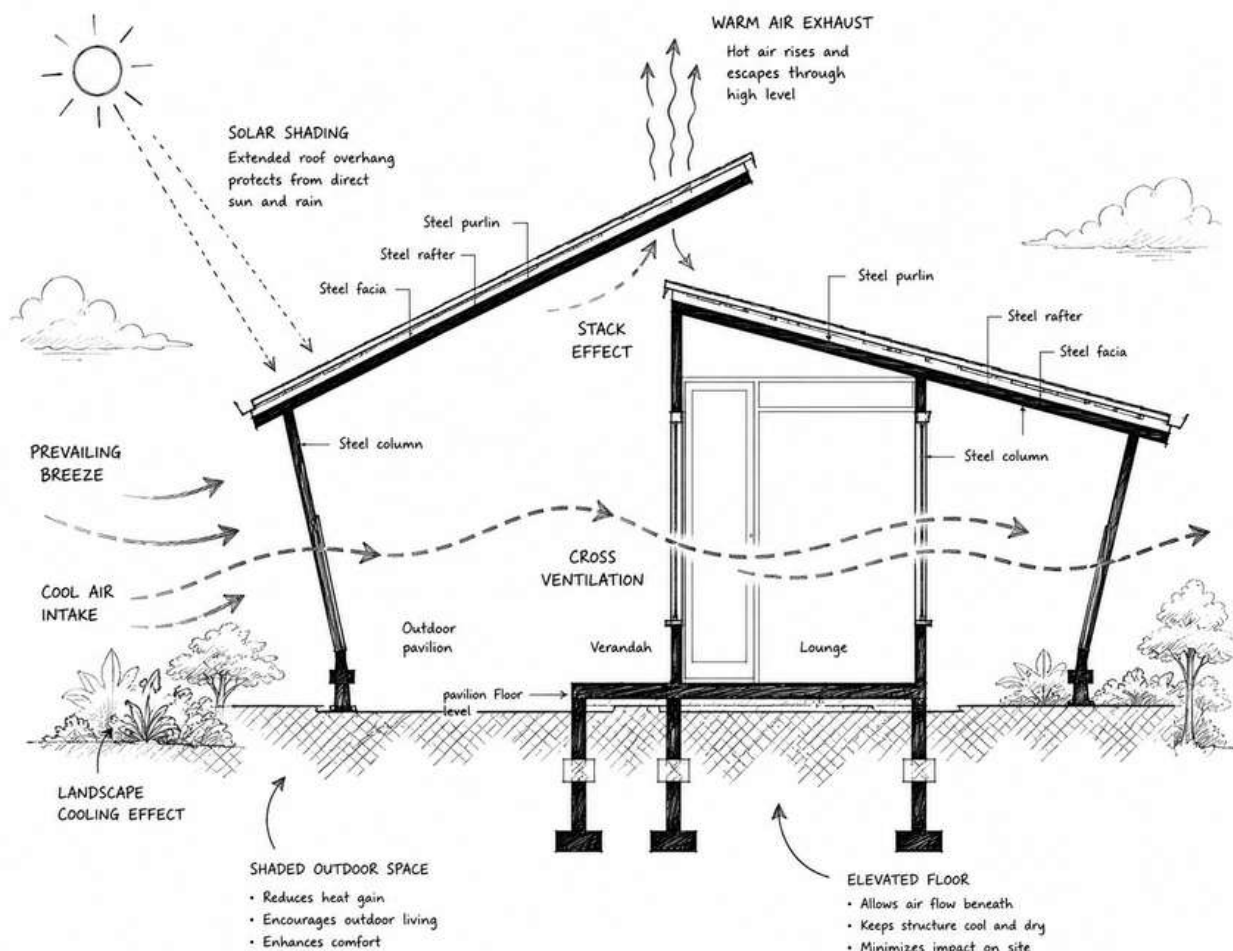
Roofing and Shade

The roof structure plays a central role in both environmental performance and architectural expression. Extending well beyond the building envelope, it creates deep overhangs that protect walls and openings from direct sunlight and heavy rainfall. These shaded zones allow spaces to remain usable throughout the day, reducing heat gain while enhancing comfort.

Supported by inclined steel columns, the roof also introduces a distinct visual identity. The angled supports suggest both structural stability and a sense of movement, subtly referencing the strength and resilience associated with older generations. The steelwork, executed by Evance Jowi Obuya in collaboration with women trainees, reflects a construction process that is both

skilled and inclusive. Techniques were demonstrated, practiced and refined on site, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is built through doing.

Internally, the material palette remains intentionally restrained. The earth-based wall finish contributes to breathable indoor conditions, improving air quality while maintaining a tactile connection to the surrounding environment. Sand-cement screed flooring provides durability and ease of maintenance, responding to the practical demands of daily use. Textile elements introduce warmth and cultural familiarity, adding layers of colour and softness without overwhelming the spatial clarity.



Landscaping

The landscape surrounding the Hub is conceived as an extension of the architecture. Trees are positioned strategically to provide shade and improve microclimatic conditions, while planting areas create informal gathering points that encourage outdoor use. Some elements incorporate reused construction materials, including hard hats repurposed as plant containers. These gestures bring a welcoming aesthetic and reflect a broader culture of resourcefulness that emerged throughout the construction process.

Open sandy areas are deliberately preserved, allowing barefoot movement that supports sensory engagement and physical stimulation. This responds to both cultural practices and emerging research on therapeutic landscapes, which highlights the role of natural environments in reducing stress and enhancing well-being, particularly among older adults.

Water management is addressed through a rainwater harvesting system integrated into the sloped roof. This system captures and stores rainwater for reuse, reducing reliance on external sources while responding to local environmental conditions. Its simplicity ensures ease of maintenance and long-term functionality.



Connections

What ultimately defines the Elderly Hub is the way these elements operate together. Spatial organization, material selection, environmental strategies and construction processes are developed as interconnected systems, each reinforcing the other. The building does not rely on a single defining feature, but on the coherence of its parts. Within the broader life of the TAWAH VTC, the Hub is fully integrated.

Women trainees engaged in construction and craftsmanship move through the space as part of their daily routines. Their presence introduces a continuous exchange between generations, sometimes through direct assistance, sometimes through shared time. These interconnections accumulate, shaping a social environment where care and learning coexist.





Conclusion

Remembering Bibi Kisozi

The Bibi Kisozi Elderly Hub is more than a building. It is a statement about what a community can do when it chooses to look after its most vulnerable members. It is a practical example of how thoughtful design, sustainable construction, and genuine human care can work together to build something that addresses a social problem and is aesthetically pleasing.

The Hub is named to memorialise Bibi Kisozi, the woman whose joy during the construction of her new home inspired this vision. While Bibi Kisozi was not able to experience the Hub herself, naming it in her honour ensures that her spirit, and the warmth she showed the women who built her home, lives on at the heart of the project. Since the launch, community members have been coming to the Hub, to exercise, to socialise, and to be part of the community of women builders and vocational trainees based at the VTC campus.



TAWAH and the late bibi Kisozi at her home



Pius from Tengeneza Generation hands over Bibi Kisozi Portrait for display in the Hub

Looking at the broader picture, the Hub speaks to some of the most pressing goals of our time. Its design uses local materials and labour, reduces building costs and carbon emissions while supporting responsible use of resources.

Its gardens and natural landscaping support the emotional wellbeing of older residents, and its rainwater harvesting system ensures sustainable access to water. By relying on natural ventilation and daylighting, the building minimises its ongoing energy use.

The project also reflects a commitment to gender equality. Women were central to the construction of the Hub, as skilled builders, as trainees developing professional expertise, and as caregivers in the community. Their visibility and leadership in both the building process and the ongoing life of the centre challenges long-standing norms about who builds and who leads.

Elderly Hub and Sustainable Development

Together, the key elements of the Elderly Hub place it in direct alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).



Going forward, TAWAH hopes to bring healthcare professionals and trainers to the centre on a regular basis, so that elderly residents can receive thorough, consistent support for their overall health and wellness without having to travel far from home. The ambition is for the Hub to grow into a true anchor for the community, a place where generations meet, where care is given and received, and where the elders of Mhaga are not just looked after, but are truly seen.

Bibi Kisozi showed us what it looks like when an elderly person feels surrounded by community. The Hub that bears her name is an effort to give that feeling to as many people as possible, for as long as possible.

About Authors



Victoria Marwa Heilman

Co-Founder and Executive Director

Victoria has over 20 years of experience leading sustainable, women-led construction in Tanzania. She champions the cause of alleviating poverty through adequate shelter and empowerment. Under her leadership, TAWAH has evolved into an internationally recognised force for changing the landscape of women's involvement in construction.



Esther Sabine Kitindi

Fundraising and Strategic Planning Lead

Esther is a certified Project Management and Urban Development Professional with experience coordinating real estate and built-environment projects. She is particularly interested in sustainability, inclusive urbanism, and socially responsive architecture. Through TAWAH, she contributes her skills to initiatives that empower women and strengthen communities.



Winnie George Karpa

Research and Training Programs Lead

Winnie is a young pioneering architect whose guiding philosophy revolves around the belief that great architecture is fundamentally about people, emotions, and connection to spaces. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the University of Dar es Salaam. Winnie is passionate about innovative, sustainable design solutions and a strong advocate for mental wellness through therapeutic design.



Joyce Said Faustine

Design and Construction Programs Lead

Joyce is an architect with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Ardhi University, Tanzania. Her work focuses on sustainable and inclusive design, affordable housing, and community-centered architecture that promotes healthy, resilient, and age-friendly built environments. She is committed to advancing sustainable urban development across Tanzania and Sub-Saharan Africa through innovative and socially responsible architectural practices.



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