This is a research study on the planning options for housing the ageing population in Kibera Division of Nairobi. The “graying” population as they are referred to is a phenomenon that has received little attention from development planners. The reality of the population ageing has been proved in several demographic studies to be increasing and increasing at a higher rate. Whereas now there is a total of 37,401 persons in Nairobi over age 60 as par the 1999 census, this is projected to increase to approximately 2 million by the year 2020. This unprecedented increase of the aged in the population is exposing the older people to many hardships especially in the urban areas. These include socio-economic changes like the increase in the numbers dependant on the elderly, limited employment opportunities, difficulty in accruing credit etc., deterioration of cultural values and morals, the breakdown of family cohesion, drug abuse and prostitution; perennial man-made and natural disasters like tribal clashes, political incitement as seen in the recent tenant/landlord standoff in Kibera – Nairobi and the deadly HIV-Aids scourge, among others. Quite startling is the fact that all these changes are finding governments, the private sector, NGOs, the society, the family and the individual in general, completely unaware and unprepared to deal with the problems facing the aged (G.O.K., 2001).

The study used multi-stage sampling to reach this cadre of persons aged 60 years and above in Kibera Division. The methodology besides using primary data also included secondary sources to arrive at the present demographic statistics and trends in Kibera Division. The special needs of the elderly were evident by the living conditions/standards of the increasing number of the elderly in the areas of residence within Kibera Division as analyzed from the data collected through various data collection methods (field survey observations, household and institutional questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews). Kibera Division was a fitting study area because among other reasons it includes low income populace living in the slums, middle income residents of the Lanagata residential estates and the high income Karen residents. The varied needs for elderly persons was thus wholly covered and proposals made to alleviate their different problems as they contend with physical, institutional and systematic barriers. These hinder their everyday activities and their participation in urban life.

It is evident from this that the elderly (who epitomize what the situation will be as the population continues ageing) have not been catered for within our housing development plans and so the research proposes or makes recommendations to alleviate their plight and enhance their well-being. The study describes housing as more than a roof over the head: it entails adequate space, ventilation, security, basic services, secure tenure, location with respect to employment opportunities and public amenities, structural stability and durability, and favourable environmental quality. All these should be affordable. The dwelling should also promote social interaction and economic advancement. Housing should therefore be seen not only in physical terms, but also in terms of what it does to the elderly population economically, socially, psychologically and environmentally.