THE BIG TREND

Modifying your home for a Person WITH DISABILITY

Designs should allow a person to easily access spaces

BY RITAH MUKASA

As you strive towards achieving a dream home, you should plan for any uncertainty that may hinder you from enjoying its comfort.

In other words, while you are still able, take a minute to think and plan for disability, which can occur anytime.

At our workplaces, on errands and even in the comfort of our homes, we are prone to accidents that can leave us disabled.

According to Jolly Acen of Uganda National Association of People with Physical Disabilities (NUWODU), every home should be adapted for any eventuality and emergencies.

"Having accessible homes is not only for families of people with disabilities, but also a necessity in preparation for any accident, sickness and old age," she says.



Beds should be adjustable

Prepare your home

Willis Otto Olanya, the chairperson of the Uganda Society of Architects, says there are different types of disability such as limited mobility, sight or hearing impairments.

However, one's experience will be more bearable if they are able to transition smoothly to the new situation.

"The provision of a disability-friendly environment should ideally start at the design stage of any project," he notes.

The designs should allow a person to independently access as many of the spaces as possible.

Olanya adds that the most noticeable is wheelchair access.

"Provide a ramp into the building, preferably with a maximum gradient of 1:12. Also, allow for maximum natural lighting and ventilation to all spaces," he adds.

If not catered for during the construction stage, a timber ramp can be installed to allow access by wheelchair access to ease mobility and make a home more comfortable.

Olanya adds that a bungalow is the easiest to make wheelchair access. Ensure that the changes in level are limited.

For a masionette or flat, it is better to place many of the shared spaces such as the kitchen, lounge and dining room on the ground floor.

"A homeowner should have a master bedroom scale on the ground floor. In case of disability, one can comfortably move upstairs," he advises.

On the other hand, Olanya is of a view that while the law currently allows for the construction of up to four levels without a lift, it is better to make provision for one, especially in apartments.

"Lift technology has fast evolved, requiring less energy use. More so, the installation and maintenance costs have reduced," he notes. Olanya says where funds do not permit immediate installation, at minimum, the design should allow for future installation.

Lifts allow comfortable access to every apartment in a block, increasing its marketability.

WHEELCHAIR SPECIFICATIONS

In case of a limb fracture or a stroke, one is subjected to a wheelchair.

Chrissy Ethel Namono, a designer with Iconic Hedges, says it is important to have some knowledge about how a wheelchair can ease mobility in a home.

For comfort, measure the wheelchair from front to back, not forgetting the footrests.

Also, ascertain its turning radius to know how much space it takes to turn.

On average, most wheelchair armrests are 29 inches from the ground.

"Getting the right wheelchair will help you use your counters comfortably," she notes.

Besides, create some knee space of about 30 inches wide, 27 inches high and 19 inches deep under the counters for wheelchair users and those who need to sit while working.



Bedrooms should be near

Chrissy Ethel Namono, a designer with Iconic Hedges in Ntinda, Kampala suburb, says while preparing a home for disability, more consideration should be put on safety, convenience, easy mobility, accessibility and affordability.

In this case, locate the rooms downstairs and place items in a visible, lower surface area to enable easy access. Doors should have accessible handles.

"Change your bed to an adjustable one for a good night's sleep. This will help disribute weight evenly and provide support for the body and spine," she argues.

Enjoying your kitchen

Making a few modifications in the kitchen will allow the homeowner or member to continue using this space in case of any disability.

Remember, it is the most used space, but equally dangerous.

Namono advises that one should ensure that it is spacious enough so that a wheelchair user can move around and turn easily.

Lower the counter tops to at least 28 inches high to ensure the stove tops are usable.

Add knobs to cabinet doors and include cabinet accessories such as pull out drawers.

Also, place a fire extinguisher within easy reach.

For the visually impaired, it is important to install small work spaces with all appliances close by for easy cooking.

Rolling storage cans will do a wonderful job for the kitchen user. You can designate them to hold particular foods, ingredients or cook ware.

Choose flat surface worktops and burners on which one can easily slide pans while cooking.

Alternatively, you can add a mirror above the oven to help watch what you are cooking and also go for cookers with front push-in and out knobs to avoid getting burnt while reaching across burners.

Create space

Mariah Kiwagama, an interior designer with Amari Interiors, advises homeowners to remove all fall hazards by de-cluttering all spaces.

"Remove loose mats and rugs. Clean the house while discarding the clutter to create space for easy mobility," she elaborates.

She adds that carpets can make it difficult to move around independently in a wheelchair because it requires more energy to do so.

Hardwood and laminated floors not only make the home easier to navigate, but are also popular and uplift home value.

Buy or make specialised furniture such as adjustable beds and support chairs. There is also need to re-arrange furniture so that there are clear paths between rooms for easy movement. The ramp surface must be rough all the way down the slope.



The laundry room should be easily accessible to people with disabilities



A home should have both the stairs and ramp

A case for commercial buildings

Acen says landlords should adhere to the Building Control Act to ensure the accessibility of people with disabilities to commercial and public facilities.

"We also sensitise the public to have accessible homes, for any eventuality and in times of emergencies," she says.

According to Olanya, in the 20th century, there was not much emphasis on disability rights. This inevitably reflected in the architecture of the time.

"As a result of successful advocacy by rights groups, it is now a requirement for commercial and institutional buildings to be disability-friendly, otherwise the planning approval would be denied," he says.

There has also been successful litigation over disability access for buildings that were constructed before this requirement.

Olanya notes that the Uganda Society of Architects constantly monitors the construction industry and engages the authorities to limit unplanned developments.

"We have constantly put the planning authorities to task over problem projects, and one of the parameters we emphasise is disability friendliness," he affirms.

Olanya adds that property developers and landlords who provide for disability increase their potential market since disability does not necessarily imply financial inability to purchase or rent.

MODIFY YOUR BATHROOM

Mariah Kiwagama, an interior designer with Amari Interiors in Naguru, a Kampala suburb, says preparing a bathroom for any uncertainties is important.

"We spend most of the time in the bathroom, which is why it should be altered for the convenience of people with disabilities," she stresses.

Nevertheless, there are some modifications that can be made to allow for safe usage of the bathroom and toilet.

You can begin by widening the doorways to at least 32inches or even replace the whole door if it is too narrow to allow for easy mobility by wheelchair.

If the floor is too slippery, it can cause falls that can le to more harm to the already fragile person.

Change the floor to a rustic one or add rugs that are fi on the ground as rolling a wheelchair on them does not come easy.

"For easy tub usage, add bathtub mats, handrails, and bench to help one get in and out of the basin with minim help," Kiwagama says.

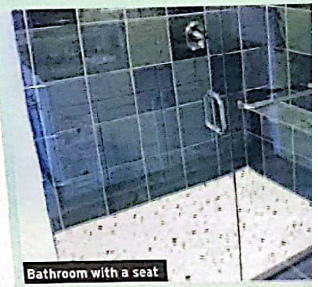
Grab bars in the showers ease bathing. Also, you can adjust the sinks, toilets and shelves to a convenient he so that the user does not have to stretch or bend too n

Hand rails also give support when getting on and off toilet or in and out of the shower cabin.

In the toilet, lower the toilet seat and all necessary equipment should be placed at a location that can eas accessed by the user.

Kiwagama advises that in a storeyed house, it woul important to relocate or move the bathroom and bedr for people with disabilities, down stairs.

If the budget allows, install an elevator or stair lift ease mobility up and down the house.



Bathroom with a seat



EXPERT ADVICE

Chrissy Ethel Namono

Ample lighting

Chrissy Ethel Namono, a designer with Iconic Hedges in Ntinda, says one can light up all spaces used in the home.

In case of visual impairment bright lights will save the injured from falls.

Also, make use of natural light as much as possible because it improves visibility and also saves energy. Where artificial lighting is necessary, make sure it is within the reach with no cords running across the path ways.

Light switches, sockets, door handles, bells and phones should be placed at convenient heights as they will help them to find their way round. In the same way, ensure the staircase is well-lit to avoid stumbles and falls.

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