

# UGANDA: Privatisation failed to

**Privatisation of rented flats has been the “buzz word” in the housing sector for the last few years in Uganda. The idea has been to solve the troublesome renting business, providing poor and middle income families with a decent living. But this has not happened, argues tenants’ unions and housing activists.**



Back in 2002, the Ugandan state was in the process of selling some 5,000 dwelling units, 1,500 of them in the capital of Kampala (Global Tenant, September 2002). This followed the international trend to privatise a growing number of rented flats. Now - four years later - some of these flats have still not been sold.

## Average income is not enough

Low- and middle income tenants have found these privatised flats too expensive. At the same time affluent people have been offered a number of options, as most of the new production are aimed for the high income range. This has caused a lot of stress in Kampala where the Uganda National Tenants Union, UNTU, has tried to influence the housing policies.

“It’s been a very hard job and we still have a lot of work to do”, says Daniel Rugarama, formerly Secretary General of UNTU. The Tenants’ Union, currently without an acting head, is working with tenants’ savings and credit schemes with the aim to introduce these options on a national basis. UNTU is also engaged in civic education, bridging the gap between tenants and landlords.

“We have been pushing the government and other relevant institutions to introduce laws that would strengthen the tenant’s rights”, adds Rugarama.

## Teachers’ wage does not cover rent

Over the last years, the typical rent has increased by 5 to 10 per cent every year. This is far more than wages have developed. Due to this, many tenants have to use almost all their income to pay the rent. The standard monthly rent for a flat is around 238 000 Uganda Shillings (132 US\$), not including expenses for water, electricity, security arrangements etc. These high rents in a Ugandan setting can be compared with typical wages for a teachers and nurses being 200 000 Shillings (111 US\$) a month.

Following this, many families have to take any opportunity to earn some extra money. Many tenants have also found it necessary to let a room in their flats to be able to pay the rent.

## Slums and cholera

“We need a lot more flats at reasonable prices. As things stand right now, the building industry is only concerned with those who can afford costly apartments”, says Grace Ewiku, a “housing activist”, engaged in tenant issues. Still,

# benefit poor tenants

living with her parents at 26 years of age, Grace feels that housing policies has to change drastically.

“Poor people are forced to move to slum areas as they can not afford anything else. Once in these poor areas, often shanty towns, they suffer from bad sanitation, also running the risk of attracting serious deceases. During spring 2006, several people died of cholera”, adds Grace.

Grace Ewiku got familiar with the living standards of many Ugandans while working as a census numerator for the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, counting the number of people in households. She has also been engaged in educating tenants on their rights by law in order not to be exploited.

“I was quite chocked by the living standards in many flats when I did this job. The way many people were living, jammed together in small apartments, made me very upset, says Grace who since then has been supporting the tenant’s struggle in Uganda on a voluntary basis.

## Lack of basic laws

One major problem is the lack of effective laws for tenants.

Anyone can be evicted with short notice. Others face chock increases in monthly rents, forcing them to leave urgently without any anywhere else to go. Some may end up in the slums where they still have to pay 10 – 15 000 Shillings (5-10 US\$) for being jammed together with oth-

ers without clean water, sanitation and electricity. Not to mention the poor or rather non-existent security of these parts of the city.

## New houses fall apart

For those who can afford newly built flats, there are still problems to be addressed as Ms Epodoi Carol can testify. Ms Carol is not happy when showing her two-bedroom apartment in the Bugolobi settlement in the outskirts of Kampala “The walls are full of cracks and the wallpaper is just about coming off. This place needs a total renovation even though it’s only a few years old”, says Ms Epodoi. The neighbourhood is considered relatively safe. Still, the entry door has steady iron bars as a safety precaution.

Paying 400 000 – 500 000 Shillings (222-277 US\$) a month, affordable as Epodoi’s husband has a well paid job at the university, the family still has to cope with cold water and frequent power cuts. However, on a positive note, the apartment, built under the National Housing Programme, comes with a balcony. This is the bonus part of the deal. Here, the Epodoi family can socialize with neighbours and friends. The spacious balcony also serves as playing ground for Ms Epodoi’s seven months old son, Oscar Okume.

Text and photo David Dahmén, freelance

