

# GLOBAL TENANT



INTERNATIONAL UNION OF TENANTS' QUARTERLY MAGAZINE September 2002



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Photo: Magnus Hammar, IUT

# Segregation and man are equally old

Wherever man has settled down he has always found someone to treat inferior, less worth and as such directed to live isolated or in the outskirts. This ugly phenomenon has been due to religion, ethnic belonging, language, customs or just simply being different from the rest.

We all remember scenes from our school days. We all have experiences of segregation.

I am not quite sure if the term segregation was invented by the time hundreds of thousands left their villages in the Old World to enter the New World through Ellis Island in New York.

Most of the newcomers did not speak English, dressed differently and had different customs and religions. Many felt insecure, but found security and a feeling of home together with others of their own kind. Also, there was a feeling of solidarity and you helped your neighbour.

Today's immigrants also leave their homes for something better, for a chance of a better life for their children. They enter up in unfamiliar environments, with languages they do not speak and with strange customs. The furthest they have been before they left the country was to the nearest market town. Of course anyone in this situation would look up your kin, previous neighbours or fellow-countrymen. To be once again part of a group, a network for mutual benefits.

Why, someone perhaps objects? I did not look up other Englishmen or Catholics when we moved to Brussels last year. No, because you spoke both the actual language and the hidden cultural language that creates invisible links between people. Well, I know of Swedish clubs in Spain, "white" clubs in Zimbabwe and Jewish congregations in Cairo. All of them created as to feel comfortable, secure and to belong to a network.

So, how about integration? Does this mean that immigrants have to be diluted into their new country? Does someone integrate when he or she learn our language, dress like we do, eat the same kind of food, or even convert into our religion? I think not. Definitely not. I mean, how many Europeans have changed their suits for an African traditional dress, more practical, when moving to Africa?

Instead of integration I prefer the term social inclusion. Every newcomer should feel included in her or his new society, and be allowed to keep whatever traditions and customs they like, but not impose them on others. Also everyone should receive the rights that every native citizen has, and at the same time accept new obligations.

The article from Spitalfields in London serves as an illustrative example.

*Magnus Hammar*  
Secretary General, IUT



## Calendar

### 2002

**October 4-7:** IUT annual east/central European conference. Krakow, Poland.

**October 7:** International Tenants' Day / World Habitat Day

**November 14-15:** European Cities in a Global Era – Urban Identities and Regional Development. Copenhagen, Denmark

**November 18:** European Housing Forum meets in Brussels.

**November 21-23:** Housing & Health Symposium, Forli Italy

### 2003

**March 19-21:** Unhealthy Housing, promoting good health, Univ. Of Warwick, UK

**May 26-28:** Make Cities Work - Next annual ENHR conference. Tirana Albania

**June 11-14:** German Tenants Day/General Assembly of the German Tenants Union in Erfurt, Thüringen

For more information, check [www.iut.nu](http://www.iut.nu)

# Are ethnic minorities disadvantaged on the Dutch housing market?

By Ria Meijerink MSc, Policy Officer Nederlandse Woonbond – Dutch Tenants Association

**The large cities of the Netherlands are developing into ‘multicultural’ towns, with more than 50 percent of the population being first or second generation immigrants. These groups are mostly accommodated in low-income housing estates, with large families in small dwellings. On the other hand, the national policy on allocation of houses is based on freedom of choice. In theory, the Dutch system of housing allocation does not discriminate between Dutch citizens and foreign residents.**

## Allocation of free dwellings

Social housing, organised in associations, represents 36 percent of the total housing stock in the Netherlands. 80 percent of the associations advertise their vacant dwellings in the local newspapers and on the Internet. People can register for one or more dwellings. Most social housing associations use criteria for the allocation of their houses; Income versus rent and size of the household versus number of rooms in the house. In addition there are criteria for determining who comes first when several people apply for the same dwelling. The sequence is usually determined by the number of months or years a household has been ‘waiting’. Waiting equals the period of inhabitation in a particular house for people who are already renting. For starters on the housing market the moment of registration is used. Just like Dutch citizens, foreign residents can register for any house as long as they meet the criteria. The system of allocation gives local councils and social housing associations little room for assigning houses to specific households.

## The freedom of choice is hampered

There are a number of factors that limit the freedom of choice for non-Dutch born. In the first place, the average income of foreign residents is lower than that of Dutch people. Secondly, the average family size is larger and they tend to crowd into too small dwellings. Thirdly, the system of allocation does not give them much chance. There is a general shortage of housing in the Netherlands. The average waiting time varies from two years in the province to eight years in cities. As most immigrants have a relatively short waiting time they end up at the end of the list and too often have to accept houses of low quality in less attractive neighbourhoods. This leads to concentrations of ethnic minorities in low-income areas, followed by a socio-economic decline of the neighbourhood.

## Diversification

The Dutch government seeks the solution to housing and environmental problems in large-scale urban renewal projects. Diversification of houses and lifestyles of inhabitants

is the idea. Through renovation and demolition of houses the neighbourhood changes. A mix of houses for rent and sale is being built, which enables people with different incomes to live in the same area. The assumption is that this will also create a better basis for maintaining schools and socio-economic services.

## Almere – the hope of Amsterdam

Amsterdam places its hope on the neighbouring suburb Almere, created in the late 70’s. Almere with its 165 000 people is supposed to absorb a great deal of the growing and moving population. Today 20 percent is of non-Dutch origin, and is expected to grow to 30 percent. A housing association in Almere recently presented a policy plan to build blocks of houses to meet the needs of specific ethnic minorities, including plans for specific shops, small scale enterprises and mosques. This policy plan induced a political uproar on the desirability of concentration or spread of ethnic minorities. The general opinion was that all people should have the freedom of choice of where to live.



A newly built neighbourhood in Eindhoven. PHOTO: WOONBOND

## There is more to do

The Woonbond is of the opinion that the national policy is too much focused on building houses for sale. For 35 percent of the population with a low income there is no housing available. There is a need for building more affordable rental housing. Secondly, the system of allocating houses on the basis of period of inhabitation is not fair. A system whereby the sequence is determined by the period of actually searching for a house would give foreign residents more equal chances. Thirdly, more active mediation is necessary to accommodate people who are forced to leave their houses because of urban renewal projects. Lastly, housing associations need to make more efforts to involve tenants and their associations, including ethnic minorities, in decision-making processes.

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# Berlin-Kreuzberg and Kottbusser Tor

## An example of urban renewal and integration projects

By Barbara Litke, German Tenants Union



**Berlin-Kreuzberg, – some people say that this district in Berlin is the fourth largest Turkish town after Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. About 150 000 people are living in Kreuzberg, and one third are migrants.**

The area around Kottbusser Tor is where problems of urban renewal and integration are focused, but it is also an area where new projects of integration are being started and reinforced.

Kottbusser Tor was the first urban renewal project in Berlin. An area of 100 hectare has since 1963 been redeveloped. The 100-years old tenement houses with poor living comfort were demolished, and was replaced by modern high rise apartment buildings of which most is social housing. The complex Zentrum Kreuzberg, with both units for living and for working was built in the typical style of the 1970's.

After 40 years the first urban renewal program in Berlin is concluded and the quality of the flats has of course im-

proved a lot since the program began in the 1960's. But, the situation for the residents around Kottbusser Tor is far from rectified. The area still much belongs to the deprived quarters of Berlin.

The social and cultural improvements has since 1999 been the central issue for the district's management team. The German government launched a programme called *Die soziale Stadt*, the socially integrated city. The city of Berlin signed an administrative agreement and initiated at the same time the district and neighbourhood programme. Together with Kottbusser Tor, 14 other districts were declared as areas with special regeneration needs.

### Where east met west

The Kottbusser Tor district has about 4500 residents, and 55 percent of them do not have a German passport. The large concentration of various ethnical groups, together with social problems, has led to conflicts. The German and

Turkish middle-class families moved out in the 60's and 70's, and workers from mainly Turkey moved in. Later refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and from countries in the Middle East moved in. Also, the newcomers represented asylum seekers and émigrés from the Soviet Union. The few remaining German residents felt themselves as a minority.

The biggest problem in the district is the high rate of unemployment. In 2000, 23 percent of the residents were registered as unemployed and 42 percent were depending on social allowances. Difficulties in speaking and understanding the language and an often low level of education are obstacles for entering the labour market. The stigma attached to having an address in Kottbusser Tor can itself be a burden.

### New innovative and hopefully sustainable methods

The approach of the neighbourhood management groups is cross-sectoral



PHOTO: JÜRGEN SCHOO

◀ Kottbusser Tor, Berlin.

◀ Oranienstrasse in Kottbusser Tor district.

and integrated. To create a sustainable improvement in the area, the traditional approach when working in the field of urban renewal on the one hand, and traditional social work on the other hand, was no longer adequate. Neighbourhood management means that people need initial support to be able to change their own lives according to their own conditions, skills and competence. Crucial goals are to create more opportunities on the labour market, more and better education and improvements of the housing conditions and the surrounding environment. Other important aspects are health, safety, tolerance and participation when it comes to planning the physical environment.

The local management team is moderating the process in Kottbusser Tor. Existing initiatives are supported and brought together. The aim is to create a long-term co-operation between organisations, the business community and the residents. There are many active participants such as the tenant com-

mittees, interest groups of local trades, owners of flats, the administration of the housing estates, welfare organisations, the police and of course the municipal authorities.

## Positive results

The project has in two years time led to 108 trainee jobs for young adults, 25 people having found regular jobs, the opening of a service centre for businesses initiatives and the setting up of a security service for surveillance of the entrances and floors. Local news is distributed through a new local newspaper. The central square has been redeveloped and a new playground together with an adventure playground for older children has been built. Also, the old fashioned concierges has been put back in and lodges have been constructed in the gateways.

The first goal seems to have been basically reached, to stabilise the neighbourhood and to stop the negligence of the buildings and the surrounding

environment. Though the biggest success is perhaps the mobilisation of people and the ability to create a sense of responsibility for the common environment. The first two years have shown that the integrated approach through local management is right. But it is perhaps too early to definitely say that the project is brought to a successful close. Unemployment and poverty still dominate Kottbusser Tor. The work of the neighbourhood management team has to be allowed to continue in the future.



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# স্পিটালফিল্ডস্ হাউজিং এ

## Spitalfields – a safe haven for Bangladeshis

By Mr Ian Weightman

**Spitalfields Housing Association is the largest Bangladeshi led housing Association in the UK. The Association was founded in 1979 by members of the Bangladeshi community in response to poor housing conditions in the Spitalfields area of central London.**

**At that time no other housing organisation was catering for the growing needs of the Bangladeshi community and what started out as a self help group has turned into a multi-million pound social housing provider.**

The area around Spitalfields has always historically been a first stop for immigrants to the United Kingdom – from the Huguenots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Irish community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and through to the Jewish community establishing a stronghold before and during the second world war. Over the last thirty years and more Spitalfields has been the centre of the Bangladeshi community in the UK, a community that has grown substantially since the 1980's.

### On the doorstep to the Financial centre

The Spitalfields area of London is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the UK. A growing Bangladeshi population together with more recent immigration from Somalia and other troubled countries gives the area a genuine cultural mix. On the doorstep of the City of London and the financial centre at Canary Warf, Spitalfields is a well placed to welcome new communities and provide a safe place to live. The economic development of the area since 1979 has been staggering – but there is always more to achieve and there are still serious pockets of deprivation in the borough.

### A self-made solution

When the association began it faced many problems – run initially by volunteers and those without any experience it had problems convincing many that its ideas could work and should be taken seriously. It started without any money and could not afford staff, but with a sustained campaign of lobbying and by raising its profile, the association managed to secure its first properties in 1980, and has seen a steady increase in its stock since. In the early days volunteers had to collect the rents, oversee repairs and ensure that everything worked well. As the association grew it was able to take on its first staff and now employs 10 people,

many from the Bangladeshi community. It ensures the community links remain strong and wherever possible uses local contractors and consultants, local banks and local services.

Spitalfields is seen as a safe area by Bangladeshis in London – a strong sense of community spirit, its mosques, specialised shops and the possibility of employment have all helped to draw Bangladeshi families to this area. New arrivals often faced difficulties with languages, experienced fear of isolation, disorientation and had difficulty in adapting to a new environment. By coming to an area where the community is already established, many of these problems have been reduced.

### A long tradition of isolation and harassment

In 1979 it was difficult for Bangladeshi families to integrate into predominantly white council estates – for fear of abuse, harassment, arson attacks and isolation. The association was set up to deal with these problems and provide safe affordable housing to those in need. Spitalfields Housing Association is open to all – its tenants and residents reflect the diverse cultural mix in the area. Spitalfields now own around 500 homes and is building in excess of 200 new properties over the coming two years. The association has an active group of tenants associations and work closely with tenants on housing design. Five of the Board members are tenants of the association.

Whilst much has changed since 1979, fears do remain and the community remains protective of its environment. The number of racial attacks has dropped significantly over the years and the services provided by voluntary organisation and the local council have improved significantly to meet the needs. Much has been done to improve facilities in the area and to ensure that education, employment opportunities and conditions of housing meet standards expected.







## Tenant participation creates self-confidence

By buying up and renovating properties in the area the association is creating the feeling of ownership and permanence amongst the Bangladeshi community – the association is a major landlord in the area and its tenants know its houses are there for the community as long as they are needed. The people of Spitalfields are proud of their achievement, they are protective of their environment and they look after it. It is a safe haven.

Mohammed Sanur Rahman, a tenant of the association says “It does help a lot being surrounded by families who have the same culture – you know everyone and everyone knows you – and I personally would not want to live in an area without other Asians. You also know that you have safety in numbers here – is something ever happened you know there are others who would stick up for you. That’s why no racist groups tend to come here now and cause trouble, they know we are now able to defend ourselves.”

The association works on more than just providing housing – it is currently into our third year of its Housing Trainee scheme – providing employment and training for young Bengali locals to gain experience and a qualification in housing. The first three trainees have already completed their courses and have all found work within local authorities or housing associations. In addition the association is about to take on an Employment Officer to work with its tenants to access employment, training and further education. Spitalfields remains determined to retain its community roots whilst at the same time achieving considerable growth over the coming years.

Mr Ian Weightman is the Managing Director of Spitalfields Housing Association.  
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## Notices

### DENMARK



Do not sell off the public housing stock, says 57 percent of the Danes in a recent poll. Denmark voted for a new right wing government in November last year. The Liberal /Conservative coalition declared that they immediately would start selling off the public housing stock. In the same poll only 36 percent favoured such a decision.

Source: Beboerbladet

### JAPAN



The elderly and disabled in Tokyo fear the abolishment of housing allowances. This comes when figures show that the percentage of social housing fell from 5.4 to 4.6 percent between 1973 and 1998. The trend continues.

Source: The Japanese Private Tenants Association

### LITHUANIA



The government has now privatised 97.5 of its housing stock and set the rents free, a governmental official reported at a recent UN Habitat meeting in Geneva. He also said that at the same time 40 percent of the people waiting in line for a new flat can not afford to pay market rents.

Source: Ministry of the Environment, Lithuania

### SWEDEN



Will the new majority in the Town Hall in Stockholm start building new housing, as they promised before the elections on September 15? Today over 70 000 people are queuing for 50 available flats in Stockholm. The black housing market for rental contracts is flourishing and many private landlords make fortunes out of the situation when selling rental contracts. Housing is one of the major issues discussed daily especially among the young.

Source: Swedish Union of Tenants

### USA



Landlords blacklist activist tenants. Through databases and the Internet, US landlords identify alleged troublemakers without giving tenants a clear and define opportunity for rebuttal. Tenants who are registered are rejected by most landlords. The most commonly used databases are the New American Registry ([www.residentscreening.com](http://www.residentscreening.com)) and the American Tenant Service ( [www.atshome.com](http://www.atshome.com)).

Source: Shelterforce journal

### UNITED KINGDOM



The British government looks set to approve the building of thousands of homes that will be available for the first time at subsidised cut price rents in the latest initiative to tackle the key worker housing crisis. The new programme is targeted to help key workers in London and the south-east who are priced out of the property market but earn too much to qualify for affordable housing.

Source: The Guardian

# Rinkeby, Sweden – where the school and washhouse build bridges

By Magnus Hammar, IUT

**Rinkeby, about twenty minutes west of the city, was built between 1969 and 1972, as part of the government's "million-dwelling-programme", to be built in ten years time. Swedish industrial workers and farmers left their villages and homes for a new future in the cities. Swedes from the north first populated Rinkeby. Then workers from Finland, Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia moved in. In the 70's many refugees arrived from Chile and other parts of Latin America. Later came refugees from Iran and Kurdistan. The most recent refugees and immigrants arrived in the 90's from Somalia and Bosnia. By now, most of the Swedes have moved out.**

There is a diversity of people in Rinkeby, originating from more than 100 countries. About 75 percent of these 15 000 people have foreign (first or second-generation) background – compared to 20 percent in Stockholm as a whole. Half of these have foreign citizenship. Only 40 percent have regular jobs, in Stockholm 75 percent.

Rinkeby has for many years been used as the stereotype immigrant community, and has been a favourite subject for many research projects and politicians, with different aims.

## Public housing dominates

70 percent of the 5000 housing units in Rinkeby are managed and owned by the three main public housing companies in Stockholm. Private landlords, such as insurance companies and larger real-estate companies own 30 percent. All but 21 newly built terraced houses are flats in multi-storey buildings. 83 % are flats with three rooms + kitchen and bathroom.

## The school has become the centre of activities

The people of Rinkeby, together with progressive new-thinkers from the municipality, got together to find new ways to beat segregation and deprivation.

The senior level compulsory school used to have a very bad reputation. The school was covered with graffiti and the interior was smashed up. Truancy and bullying were part of the everyday scene.

10 years ago a huge campaign was launched, partly with the participation of parents. Several high status external activities were moved into the school; a school of music, the library, a school of arts and dancing, the recreation centre, to name a few. The recreation centre engaged and employed parents and stays open 365 days a year, from 4 p.m. till midnight.

The initiatives also included highly advanced IT activities and with the school's computer-room remaining open till after school hours, for pupils to do their homeworks.

To bridge the gaps between different ethnic and religious

groups, a program called Abraham's Children has been developed to work on similarities between different creeds.

Violence and vandalism have diminished, the school has considerably raised its level of achievements, and teachers stay on. As a result, the school now attracts children from neighbouring more high-status districts.

## The unique washhouse

Many come to visit the famous washhouse in Rinkeby. Normally a washing room is situated in every house. The machines are often in need of repair, the users fail to clean the facilities and complaints are plentiful. One of the housing companies decided to shut down their many washing rooms and replaced them with one single large wash house. The wash house, with a reception, cafeteria and crèche, has become the main meeting place for the women. The house also contains rooms to rent for social events such as weddings and funerals.

## A house for everyone

The same housing company also opened The House. Mr Pepe Alanis from Montevideo, Uruguay, runs classes in painting and theatre. The Somalis run their own classes in Swedish. There are also classes for women in sewing and cooking. Wednesday evenings are for women only, when the Somali and other Muslim women can attend. There are youth activities and a sauna, particularly enjoyed by the Finns. The House is sponsored by the local tenant association.

Much can be said about Rinkeby, but when standing on the busy Market Square on a Saturday it is not possible to say that 20-years of governmental integration policies have succeeded. After so many years people have perhaps come to a new understanding of integration. Do people really want to become integrated? Perhaps integration does not necessary have to mean that immigrants can not live close together, keeping traditions and cultures alive and active. The full right to participate, be seen and be part of the society, which includes all rights and obligation are perhaps more important than becoming Swedish.



Residents in Rinkeby prefer their own individual channels!



# The US based National Alliance of HUD Tenants held it's 8th annual Save Our Homes Conference in June

The conference in Washington, D.C. drew over 400 tenants and local organisers representing 167 tenant unions in 16 states. Participants could choose from 25 tenant-led workshops, including topics such as How to Start a Tenant Group, Advanced Strategies to Cope with Management Harassment, Buying Your Building:

Winning Resident-Controlled Ownership and Beyond, Grass-Root Fundraising for Your Tenant Group. In addition, tenants were able to raise concerns with government officials at an Accountability Session.

The conference also featured a national press conference at the Tyler House, an at-risk HUD, government subsidised, building in Washington, D.C., within sight of Capitol Hill. Tenants marched to the local District of Columbia HUD Office nearby, then on to the Center for Creative Non-Violence, the largest homeless shelter in the District. The rally and march supported local tenants struggles and urged support for legislation and action by HUD to save at-risk homes. The National Coalition for the Homeless helped co-ordinate and supports the action.

NAHT also held its Annual Meeting during the conference and elected the all-tenant Board of Directors who will take office at the September retreat when they will follow-up with HUD officials on issues raised during the conference.

Also, there was some time for dancing and singing and exiting meetings with interesting people! affirms Magnus Hammar who represented the IUT.

More info from NAHT,  
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Debra Junor from Houston receives the Jose Sanchez award from Vern Zuehlsdorff, Seattle.

On the march for affordable housing with NAHT activists from all over the US.



Tenants tired of being screwed!

Rally outside Tyler House, a substandard HUD building in Washington D.C.

PHOTO: MAGNUS HAMMAR, IUT

# Privatisation, a global trend – now in Uganda

By Magnus Hammar, IUT

**It is very difficult to find any applicable statistics about the housing situation in Uganda, as well as statistics about anything else. People come and go and most people do not want to have anything to do with the authorities. Authorities mean trouble, in most cases. According to The Ministry of Works, Housing & Communication, about 30 percent of Kampala's population of one million people are owners of their dwellings and 65 percent rent their accommodation. 5 percent are provided with an accommodation where the rent is part of the salary. These are employees at hospitals, schools and railroads.**



Bukoto Housing Estate.

Others of these categories live in *core housing*, which is council housing. These are very modest accommodations; one room without electricity, running water or cooking facilities for which the rent is about 20 000 shillings per month, approx. US\$ 11.

Through the NHCC, National Housing & Construction Corporation, the state still owns 5000 dwelling units in Uganda, of which 1500 are in Kampala. But privatisation is ongoing and should be finished by 2004. The tenants are being offered to buy their flats. If the tenant chooses not to buy, he or she can sell his option and receive "Goodwill money", as the Ministry puts it, which is neither sanctioned nor expressly forbidden.

NHCC still builds houses, but nowadays only for the rich, according to information on their website [www.nhcc.co](http://www.nhcc.co). Nice houses are let for between US\$ 1000 and 2000 a month!

An average income in Kampala is around \$40, a school teacher or a policeman may earn \$80 per month.

## So how does the ordinary citizen live in Kampala?

The tenants in the Bukoto Housing Estate, owned by NHCC, seem to live a relatively comfortable life. The estate is well kept, lawns are neatly kept and there is a satellite dish on the roof, together with a pair of marabouts.

Mrs Grace Krakone-Magambo is a drawing teacher who lives in a two bedroom flat for which she pays \$115 a month plus another \$30 for electricity. She has running cold water, but no electrical cooker.

– Too expensive! I prepare my food on this coal-heated

cooker, she says, and bends down to the floor to stir. Annoying smoke slowly oozes out through the small window. Ms Krakone-Magambo have heard that NHCC will sell these flats for at least \$900. She probably will not afford it. We never clearly understood how she could manage the rent!

Ms Diana Mbanibu is a law student. Together with her cousin she is subletting two bedrooms and a kitchen. The subletter lives in the third and largest bedroom. Diana and her cousin pay a monthly rent of \$230. For a flat which actually costs the "landlord" only \$90 a month! No, the extra charge does not seem to upset about her much. She says it is very difficult to find accommodation in Kampala, and her brother helps them to pay the rent.

## Pit latrines and dung heaps destroy the wells

One step down the social ladder is the Kagugube Village with about 15 000 people. Almost all are tenants and live in simple one and two room brick houses. Cows, belonging to the landowner, stroll among the playing children. Two large dunghills are placed on an open space. Half of the houses have electricity, and the toilets are open *pit-latrines*. The open latrines together with the dung have caused the previous well to become contaminated. The landowner has now been forced to dig a new and deeper well. A two-room house is let for \$30 a month.

Further down the ladder is the Makarere Village. A large informal settlement with mostly single-room houses close together. The landowner does not allow the residents to build any structures with cemented or fixed foundations.



There is no real spare time for the women in Makarere Village.



Mrs Grace Krakone-Magambo prepares dinner.

But after complaints from the residents he has agreed to shallow cement ditches, for the rainwater mixed with sewage from the pit-latrines to pass into a creek. During the rain season the whole village must be a mudhole, with water trickling into the living quarters. The people of Makarere Village have all built their own houses. They pay the landowner some \$1.5 a month, for a one-room dwelling.

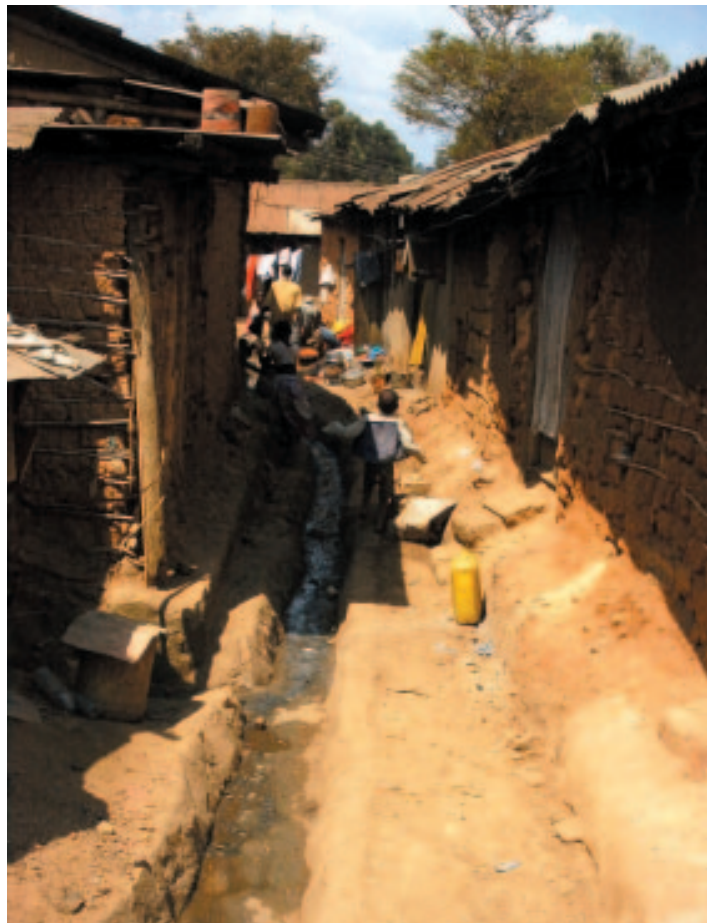
### Simple, but clean

What amazes a visitor in this poor and dusty settlement is that everyone manages to be well dressed and clean. Indeed, most women do not have many spare minutes and washing up seems to go on continuously. But on the other hand, the men did seem to take care of any free time available...

There is a well functioning infra structure, with a market, TV-repair shop, coffee shops, hair dressers and a variety of other whole-in-the-wall shops.

The Ugandan National Tenants Union, UNTU, under the leadership of Mr Ephraim G.K. Buriituza, lobbies the ministries and local authorities. UNTU is very much needed in Kampala. With a minimum of resources and tools, such as the Tenants' Charter and UN documents, they try to make the decision makers implement some of what they have promised and signed during the previous years.

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Newley cemented ditches in Makarere Village.





# Can the rent be negotiated? The Swedish model

By Mr Tomas Lindencrona, Vice President SABO

**Who should decide the level of the rent and rent increases? Procedures when setting rents vary a lot between different countries, European ones included. Many countries move towards a more market oriented setting of rents.**

Never the less, in the Netherlands the state stipulates the intervals within the rents may change every year. Tenants living in public housing in Denmark set the rents themselves, as they collectively own their housing associations. In England a state rent officer sets the rents for housing owned by local councils.

There are about 4.2 million dwelling units in Sweden. About 60 percent are self managed and self-owned and about 40 percent are rental accommodations, mainly in multifamily units. The local authorities, through housing companies, own a bit more than half of these rental accommodations. The remaining rental stock is owned by private property owners with an interest of a maximum return of investments.

## Rent setting through the prime cost principal

Already in the 1960's Sweden introduced a system of annual rent negotiations between the municipal non-profit housing companies and representatives of the tenants. These negotiations have since then been carried out according to the prime-cost principal. This means that the housing companies present figures on the expected increases of costs, e.g. capital costs, costs for heating and increases in property tax. The tenant representatives, most often the local tenant associations, study the figures, discuss alternatives and finally negotiate on an acceptable level for rent increases. These changes in rent levels also become, by law, a maximum for rent increases in the privately owned housing stock. In recent years these local negotiations have more and more become characterised by other factors, such as the tenants ability to pay and the local housing market. However, this system has so far survived these changes.

The tenants are represented in the

negotiations by their local tenant association. Members pay a fee, which, among other things, cover the costs for the tenant associations to negotiate the rents.

Not all tenants are members of the tenant association. However, the result of the negotiations also includes and affects those households who are not members. To be able to carry out these negotiations the local tenant associations are financially compensated by the housing companies, both public and private ones.

## Negotiating with a few or with many?

The reason for this compensation is that the housing company regards this collective way of negotiations as an advantage, instead of having to negotiate with every single tenant. If the housing company would have to negotiate with several tenant organisations or with individual tenants the situation would become very complicated and administratively circumstantially.

Indeed, both parties are not completely happy with this present system of negotiations. Talk of the need for depositing more money for future maintenance costs does not often gain a hearing among the tenant representatives. The tenant themselves often experience difficulties when redistribution of the rents are being discussed, in order to increase different rents between housing estates in different locations in towns and cities. But today there is no better solution within sight.

The whole issue of the remuneration fee to cover costs for negotiations is very much discussed. Many private landlords claim that e.g. if the rent stays unchanged, there are no real negotiations and in that case there should not be remuneration fee. Others oppose to

the remuneration fee in principle – why pay the opposite party for participating in negotiations? The members of the tenant organisation should instead pay for this procedure.

## Landlords and tenants arm in arm...forever?

The municipal housing companies are in most cases working well together with the local tenant organisations. It is true that there are sources of irritation as they negotiate annually about, in most cases, rent increases. Never the less, the tenants and the housing companies share common interests when it comes to the development of e.g. tenants participation, of services, elements of security, cable for television and broadband for the Internet.

Many delegations have, especially since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, come to Sweden for the purpose of studying the way this country have created and maintained its high housing standard. The visitors often have had problems in grasping the way the rents are being negotiated. Yet, this system has been, and continues to be, an important element in the Swedish housing policy. Nevertheless, an element in dispute.

The Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies, SABO, is the biggest organisation on the Swedish housing market. The approximately 305 companies affiliated manage some 900.000 dwelling units. This is 22 % of the total housing stock in Sweden and about one third of all dwelling units in multi-storey houses. Altogether 1,5 million people live in SABO homes.

More info: [www.sabo.se](http://www.sabo.se)