



# Dear Landlord, here are things we wish you understood

In Uganda, renting is no longer a temporary phase for students and young professionals. It is a long-term reality for families trying to survive. Entire neighbourhoods are now defined by apartment blocks stacked skyward. Behind the iron gates and freshly painted walls lies a relationship that is often polite on the surface but tense underneath. Where landlords see an investment, tenants see their homes. Here are five things we need you to understand.

BY TONY MUSHOBOROZI

Dear Landlord,  
Economic hardships are real. We know these houses are your investments. We know you expect returns, monthly rent and long-term appreciation. We are not naive. But please read the economic environment

from which our rent comes. Salaries fluctuate. Businesses struggle. Inflation bites. Contracts end unexpectedly. In tough seasons, even reliable tenants can find themselves squeezed. That is when we need you to be humane, not harsh penalties, not eviction threats.

We, commercial tenants, are the hardest hit.

"My name is Abby Mashero. I am an entrepreneur in Arua Park. My landlord suddenly increased my rent from Shs2m to Shs3.5m just after I had bought a struggling shop on goodwill. I nearly lost my business because of that hike."

## Here is our ask:

Show patience during difficult months, and we will show loyalty. A tenant who is treated with understanding during hard times, like many of us were during the lockdowns in 2020/2021, is more likely to prioritise

rent and protect your property when stability returns. A good tenant is not your enemy. Do not turn us into one.

## Respect my privacy

"My name is Aaron Baranga. I live on Konge Road in Makindye, Kampala. Once we move into your property, it becomes our domain. Please respect that. In many rental setups, you live on the same compound as us. In extreme cases, we share water and electricity metres. Too often, you misuse this proximity. You observe our movements. You notice our visitors. You eavesdrop

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our conversations. Constant proximity feels suffocating. Please keep a distance. I know it is your house, but when you rented it to me, it temporarily became mine. Knocking on my door all the time is irritating. Even if you want your rent, send a reminder as a text on my phone. I do not want you at my door. Renting a house is not just paying for walls and a roof. It is paying for personal space. The psychological comfort of knowing that our comings and goings are not under surveillance matters deeply. This does not mean we are hiding wrongdoing. It means we value independence."

## Here is our ask:

A rental unit should feel like a home, not an extension of your living room. Respect our space, and we will respect your property. It is that simple. Feed the cow, landlord, the milk will follow.

You collect rent every single month. That is your milk. But when was the last time you fed the cow? We are the ones who live with the leaks, the rust, the cracks, the swollen doors, the damp bedrooms. Water damage is probably the most widespread problem in Uganda's property industry. We watch it get worse month after month while you do nothing. Then, when we finally move out, you take our security deposit to fix the very problems you ignored for years. Please stop blaming us for everything. Not every crack in the wall is our fault. Not every rusty pipe is our carelessness. Some things

## SECURITY

Some landlords have watched their property lose value because a tenant treated it like a disposable hotel room. From their view, the deposit is often the only leverage they have. When a tenant damages a door or removes built-in cabinets, that deposit barely covers the repair. The problem, then, is not the deposit itself but the lack of clarity. A simple solution exists: a detailed check-in inspection with photographs, signed by both parties, and a written checklist of what counts as wear versus damage. When both sides agree upfront, the deposit stops being a battle and becomes what it was meant to be, protection for the property, not punishment for the tenant.

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## moves in

Another common experience is moving into a house that clearly needed renovation before we arrived. But you promise that the cracked sinks are "about to be replaced." Peeling walls will be "fixed after we settle." Loose wiring will be "sorted next month." You always tell us to first pay rent and security deposit, and then wait for improvements. This annoys us. Deeply. Moving is time-bound. By the time we come looking for a house, we have already reached the end of our previous tenancy agreement. We do not have time to wait after paying. When we commit our savings to rent a space, we expect it to be ready for habitation, not a project under negotiation.

## Walter Okello, a father of four:

"In 2018, I moved into a house on Semawata Road, Ntinda, whose taps and plumbing fixtures were from a time when my father was still renting. I said these needed to be changed before I moved in. The landlord continued to enter before he fixed them, saying he would do it in no time. They did not work well, but I decided to be patient. Two months later, the landlord was still ignoring me. In frustration, I left after three months. And he wanted to take my security month to change the old plumbing."

Renovation should happen between tenants, not during the new tenancy. Handing over a property in proper condition signals professionalism. It also sets the tone for how we will treat the space. When a house looks

## Renovate before the next tenant



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neglected at the start, it subconsciously lowers our standard of care. You cannot hand us a broken home and then expect us to treat it like a palace.

## Here is our ask:

If you want responsible tenants, send the first message loud and clear that you value your property. Renovate before we arrive. Not after. Not "next month." Before.

## Security deposits need transparency

For us, the security deposit represents serious sacrifice. We scraped and saved to give you that money. When deductions at the end of tenancy are unclear, or refunds are delayed without explanation, mistrust grows. This is a very common problem. Too often, landlords find excuses not to part with that money, even when there is no genuine damage.

## Cissy Namaganda, a property expert, puts it well:

"I do not object to accountability. If genuine damage has occurred, responsibility should be taken. But transparency is key. Clear documentation of the property's condition at move-in and move-out protects both parties."

## Bright Alomugisha, a tenant in Ndege off Entebbe Road:

"A deposit should not feel like a trap. It should feel like a professional agreement with clear rules. Wear and tear is not always misuse. Please stop

trying to make it appear so. We are all adults here. Every house ages. Hinges loosen. Paint fades. Door handles weaken. Electrical switches stop responding."

Not all deterioration is the result of reckless behaviour. Please distinguish between deliberate damage and natural wear. When every issue is treated as our fault, the relationship becomes adversarial. Suspicion replaces cooperation.

## Here is our ask:

Be transparent. Document the property's condition when we move in and when we move out. Return our deposit promptly if there is no genuine damage. Treat us like adults, and we will act like adults.

## A note on our own responsibilities

Fairness requires balance, fellow tenants. We too must understand that we are living in someone else's property. Frying rent grants temporary use, not ownership. Walls should not be broken casually. Fixtures should not be modified without consent. Agreements should be honoured.

A respectful relationship cannot be built on entitlement from either side. When we delay rent without communication, misuse facilities, or ignore agreed terms, we contribute to the very mistrust we complain about. Responsibility runs both ways. When you feel secure in consistent payments and respectful occupancy, you become more inclined to improve the property. We know that. And we promise to do our part.

Many of our conflicts arise not from bad intentions, but from informal expectations. Unclear timelines. We can do better than that.

Let us sign a professionally drawn tenancy agreement with clear rules, and stick to them.

At its heart, our relationship is not meant to be a battlefield. Both of us want the same things: stability, predictability, and security. You want timely rent, preserved property value, and long-term returns. We want safe living conditions, privacy, fair treatment, and predictable costs. These goals are not mutually exclusive. When you invest in maintenance, communicate transparently, respect our privacy, and understand economic realities, you create loyal tenants. We will pay on time. We will protect your property. We will stay for years.

Meet us halfway, landlord. We promise to meet you there too.

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