

# Poor Tenant traps struggling landlord

Real-life issues defy simplistic definition, solutions

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LANDLORD and tenant conjure up different images for different people: capitalist/ oppressive vs poor or sometimes concerned landlord vs a tardy recalcitrant tenant. Generally, poverty and landlord appear to be irreconcilable-as is the notion that there are only good tenants.

A landlady living on the breadline might appear strange, even unconventional, when looking at tenant and landlord relationship. The circumstances of the parties become complicated when the tenant is unable to pay the rent and has accumulated arrears.

The story of a poor tenant and a poor landlady reflects the hardship in our country we are oblivious of. The dwelling was under the brother's care when he took charge of the family's affairs on the death of the father.

Six months later, the sister "inherited" the dwelling from her deceased brother, and the burden of taking care of the family. She rented out the dwelling; hoping the rental would supplement her husband's income and with the small profit she made from a tuck shop business, take care of her family, her brother's children and the destitute children her father had adopted.

The landlady entered into a verbal lease agreement with a tenant who moved into the dwelling with her five school-going siblings. The tenant paid the first month's rental, but that was the only payment she made. She was relying on the state for a grant for her three siblings.

The grant was long overdue. When she made the application for the grant, she was confident

she would be able to pay her monthly rental, electricity, outstanding school fees and at least one meal. She approached a number of government officials and organisations to assist her in the grant application, which seemed to be lost in the bureaucratic system.

In the meantime, the landlady decided to ask her tenant to move out because of the mounting arrears that exacerbated her own predicament. The tenant explained that she would make good her debts when she received the grant.

"Why don't you ask your family to help you? Surely your family cannot ignore your plight. Why not ask them for temporary shelter until the grant is sorted out?" The landlady asked, beginning to lose patience.

The tenant replied that her mother had died recently. Her father had "disappeared" a few years before and the only family member she and her siblings knew was her mother's sister. Her aunt lived in a rural area and was herself dependent on her late mother for financial help.

"I am willing to move out onto a nearby vacant site and build a shack, but I do not have money for the material," the tenant explained. "I know you've been good to me and my family, but I have nowhere to go with my brothers and sisters. Relocating from this area during this part of the year will affect their schooling.

"I will pay the arrears as soon as I get the grant," the tenant pleaded, trying to control her tears. Their plight reflects the many untold stories of our great democracy and a robust economy. What is urgently needed is the introduction of a subsidy for tenants who are barely surviving and landlords who have taken the responsibility of providing shelter.

**Dr Sayed Iqbal Mohamed** is the chairperson of the Organisation of Civic Rights, and a member of both the KwaZulu Natal Rental Housing and Council of Canadian Administrative Tribunals.

Website:[www.ocr.org.za](http://www.ocr.org.za)