SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2024 CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

MAY 2024

OVERVIEW

These notes follow the 2024 Conference on Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Crisis Contexts held on May 16-17, 2024, at Howard University's Department of Architecture in Washington, D.C.

The event brought over 188 participants together (67 in-person, 121 online), including humanitarian and development organizations, academics, donors, private sector, the United Nations, international organizations, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations specializing in land tenure and property.

Several organizations and universities closely coordinated the event, including InterAction, IOM, Global Protection Cluster HLP AoR, Habitat for Humanity, Howard University, NRC, University of Puerto Rico, and Verent Solutions, with the support of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. The purpose of the conference was to share experiences and practices related to housing, land, and property (HLP) issues faced by displaced and at-risk communities both globally and within the United States to build a community of practice and identify steps forward. The conference sought to build upon last year's inaugural Conference on Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Crisis Contexts, which took place in June 2023, to further conversations and action items.

The two-day conference featured three keynote speakers, four plenary sessions, and seven in-person breakout sessions, as well as nineteen 10-minute "lightning talks" where attendees presented their organization's work related to HLP.

You can find the outcomes document [HERE](#).

WHAT IS HLP?

HLP stands for "[housing, land, and property](#)" and it refers to the rules and arrangements that make it possible for people to live on a plot of land and use and enjoy their rights to their homes and property. HLP is not only about laws—although laws are essential. HLP also involves the practices, customs, and attitudes around specific land and property rights. Therefore, it is critical for not only lawyers and specialists but also humanitarian professionals to address concerns and provide solutions for HLP issues.

Addressing HLP rights from the beginning of a response is essential for successfully sustaining the stability, safety, and livelihoods of the community. Addressing HLP rights helps humanitarian assistance solutions last longer by reassuring people that they can stay on the property in the long term. This encourages, among other activities:

- Documenting the right to use or live on land.

- Peace-making and preventing disputes over land or property from causing future conflict.

- Investing in property maintenance and improvements.

- Local school enrollment and access to other services.

- Stronger relationships with neighbors.

SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS

WELCOME REMARKS

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Day One

Professor Bradford Grant, Interim Chair of the Department of Architecture, Howard University

The Day 1 welcoming remarks acknowledged the Indigenous peoples of the Potomac Valley and their connections to the land on which the conference took place. Grant emphasized the importance of recognizing and considering the histories of the land and its relationships to Native communities of past, present, and future.

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Day Two

Julien Schopp, Vice President of Humanitarian Team, InterAction

The Day 2 welcoming remarks highlighted the crucial role of HLP in humanitarian work and the need to better understand these protection risks to prevent further conflict and improve preparedness. Schopp noted that within the humanitarian sector, HLP is often seen as a technical niche, but it needs to be brought into broader humanitarian responses. To improve humanitarian work, practitioners must address HLP prior to and in the initial stages of a response. The remarks called for concrete recommendations from attendees on how to bring HLP issues forward within the broader humanitarian response ecosystem.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

DAY ONE

Dr. Fritz Olivier, President of University GOC, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

The keynote remarks focused on HLP challenges faced in Haiti, emphasizing that ambiguous and inefficient land tenure and property rights have led to precarious living conditions and protracted displacement, hindering post-crisis recovery and rebuilding efforts. Olivier advocated for the implementation of zoning codes and an urban planning framework to reduce vulnerabilities to disasters and foster sustainable development. He called for a concerted effort from both national authorities and international partners to educate, implement, and continuously assess the effectiveness of critical urban planning measures.

Reverend Dr. Judy Fisher, Executive Director, Mercy Outreach Ministry

Fisher's keynote remarks suggested several critical initiatives in HLP rights in crisis response and recovery, including:

- Informing crisis-affected individuals of their fundamental rights
- Establishing legal frameworks and conducting policy advocacy to integrate HLP into lawmaking
- Capacity building and training to enhance understanding of HLP issues
- Collaborating across sectors to ensure sustainable solutions
- Engaging with communities and supporting local leadership in decision-making processes
- Utilizing innovative technologies and sustainable construction techniques
- Ensuring access to legal aid and justice

She stressed the need for education on HLP rights, gender-sensitive approaches, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

DAY TWO

Dianna Darsney de Salcedo, USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

The keynote remarks focused on the importance of HLP rights throughout Darsney de Salcedo's career in various regions and country contexts, highlighting how HLP work has evolved over the past several years. Darsney de Salcedo's remarks called attention to the need for HLP work to not be siloed, but rather addressed with a holistic approach that is sensitive to the needs of women, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, individuals with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. She advocated for the elevation and centering of local voices to ensure that local perspectives are incorporated into humanitarian responses.

PLENARY SESSIONS

DAY ONE

Reflections from Puerto Rico Dialogue on Collective and Community Land Rights

*Presenters: **Irantzu Serra Lasa**, ResilireD, consultant for IOM; **Ana Cristina Gomez Perez**, University of Puerto Rico School of Law*

The presenters shared the highlights and lessons learned from the Dialogue on Community and Collective Land Rights held at the University of Puerto Rico in April 2024. The presenters discussed the challenges post-Hurricane Maria, including the denial of recovery funding due to a lack of formal titles and expensive land registration processes. Some of the solutions pursued in Puerto Rico, such as the use of community land rights, advocacy to modify obsolete local legislation and government guidelines for disaster assistance, and the use of adverse possession to secure land rights for vulnerable populations, could be adaptable to other contexts. The presenters highlighted that communal and collective HLP rights are key approaches for disaster preparedness and anticipatory action, and that opportunities for further collaboration should be explored between domestic and international actors working on HLP rights.

Find the full outcomes document of the Dialogue on Community and Collective Land Rights in Puerto Rico at the InterAction website.

DAY TWO

HLP and the Nexus in Climate-Induced Disaster Response

*Moderator: **Claudia Sanchez de Lozada**, InterAction*

*Panelists: **Mario Flores**, Habitat for Humanity; **Fernando de Medina Rosales**, Norwegian Refugee Council; **Miriam Lopez Villegas**, Catholic Relief Services*

Through case studies in Jamaica, Sierra Leone, and Somalia, the panelists discussed the urgent need for localized programming for HLP in climate-induced disaster response and the need to scale up support for those displaced. They emphasized that reducing HLP vulnerabilities of communities through secure tenure is essential to preventing impacts of climate change, as it motivates individuals to invest in their properties, improving resilience at the household and community level. The panelists recognized that resettlement solutions for post-climate displacement can differ from post-conflict, as land is often unhabitable in cases of climate displacement. They underscored the importance of collaborating and coordinating with local actors outside of the humanitarian space on disaster risk reduction at the community level, including local authorities, academia, and the private sector. With the number of disasters increasing, the panelists advocated for increased assistance from donors for funding for preparedness, as there remains a gap in what is allocated for resilience and risk reduction versus what is allocated for emergency response.

HLP in Practice and Academia

Panelists: Dahlia Nduom, Howard University; Jennifer Pindyck, Auburn University; Ana Cristina Gomez, University of Puerto Rico

This session focused on HLP research and frameworks at the intersection of practice and academia. The three presentations shared how university students have engaged in HLP research and practicums related to U.S.-based case studies, including heirs' property in rural Alabama and transitional housing and property law in post-hurricane Puerto Rico. The presenters highlighted the need to continue developing courses and curriculums in universities that allow for the next generation of architects, lawyers, and other disciplines to be engaged in HLP rights issues. They emphasized the importance of having an intersectoral and multidisciplinary approach to break the silos in the teaching of HLP. The session also discussed the question of how students can break into the sector, while expressing the need to ensure that career paths can support diversity and inclusion among the next generation of HLP practitioners.

Recording Land Rights in Crisis Contexts

Presenter: Juan Pablo Soliz, Cadasta Foundation

This session focused on Cadasta's Global Impact Dashboard and how it can be used for humanitarian response. A highlight of this technology is the ability to use it offline and conduct weekly monitoring. The ensuing discussion raised questions around affordability of Esri products for local governments and how the traditional GIS approach to land recordation often undertakes a narrow view of land tenure and ownership. A highlighted need for land tenure recordation approaches was the ability to maintain the data collected and provide affected communities with access to the data.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

DAY ONE

Lightning Talks

In this session, in-person and virtual conference attendees gave short presentations introducing their agency's HLP work. The presentations included the following:

- **Javier Clavijo** of Medici Land Governance discussed their use of technologies, such as blockchain, cryptography, artificial intelligence, and others, to modernize land governance.
- **Isabel Villegas** of Church World Services outlined the Refugee Housing Solutions initiative, which supports refugee and newcomer housing stakeholders to increase access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing for refugee and other newcomer families to the U.S.
- **Mario Flores** of Habitat for Humanity shared the organization's work on secure tenure in Indonesia, Haiti, Jamaica, and Nepal, highlighting their people-centered approach.
- **Jessica Lenz** of InterAction advocated for humanitarians to use a results-based protection framework on HLP protection issues.
- **Paul Prettitore** of the World Bank outlined a pilot conducted to use big data, such as social media, to track and assess risks to land tenure security during active conflict areas in Ukraine.
- **Widad Khalid** of Falls Church High School discussed combating green gentrification in Washington, D.C. and advocated for an Affordability First method when developing large environmental infrastructure to protect existing residents from increasing rent and property taxes.

- **Alaa Assani** of University College London presented on HLP discourse in Syria from a feminist perspective, discussing how feminist lenses can be used to address the complexities of each component of HLP regarding advancing gender equality.
- **Barbara McCallin** of the Danish Refugee Council discussed the organization's HLP work in South Sudan, including HLP monitoring, individual counseling and assistance, information dissemination, capacity building, and advocacy.
- **Joy Oyiza Obadoba** of the University of Lagos presented ongoing research on urban justice in Nigeria, assessing how to foster more inclusive, equitable and sustainable housing for low-income earners in Abuja.
- **Rana Mitri** of GIZ discussed the safeguarding of HLP rights of Syrian refugees and internally placed persons through a holistic approach combining preparatory measures with preventive measures shaped around awareness raising, safeguarding of HLP documents, monitoring, and documenting of HLP violations, and local capacity development.
- **Samer Weber** of UN Habitat discussed their programming to support land tenure security for women-headed households in Yemen, underscoring that sustainable peacebuilding requires HLP considerations.
- **Zmnako Taha** of the Danish Refugee Council discussed their BzBz Project in Iraq and the use of alternative dispute resolution methods to address HLP disputes.
- **Dagnachew Shibru** of IOM discussed efforts to protect HLP rights in shelter interventions in Ethiopia, including awareness and capacity building and the formation of national due diligence procedures.
- **Roman Skotomets** of Acted discussed the legal components of conducting housing repairs in Ukraine and advocated for methods of cooperation and exchange of information and experiences between NGOs.
- **Nour Harastani** of Syrbanism discussed and advocated for the establishment of specialized Syrian urban planning organizations to address specific HLP challenges effectively and the development of resilient urban recovery frameworks that specifically address the impact of conflict on the ownership system of informal settlements in Syria.
- **Behrooz Taleb** of the Danish Refugee Council discussed the outcomes of Ukraine Shelter Cluster's position paper on adequate housing, which advocates for a durability mindset that involves a sustainable use of resources and a dignified response.
- **Gubjir Nelson Jebes** of IOM discussed the organization's HLP response in Nigeria, including the conducting of needs assessments, tenure mapping, and capacity building activities.
- **Ziad Al Hassan** of the Danish Refugee Council discussed HLP components of DRC's interventions in Yemen, highlighting the need for improved data collection and analysis and community engagement and empowerment, among others.
- **Jim Robinson** of Norwegian Refugee Council discussed the HLP Area of Responsibility and the need to enhance global attention to HLP through donor engagement, advocacy, and HLP inclusion across clusters.

Demystifying Tenure

Facilitators: **Miriam Lopez-Villegas**, *CRS;* **Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque**, *The Tenure Beat Consulting*

This session addressed the issue of language and jargon. While the concept of housing, land, and property "tenure" is central to effective humanitarian action, it is often communicated with inaccessible technical jargon and therefore misunderstood. The interactive workshop was designed based on the assertion that tenure is a simple concept that anyone can connect to, regardless of background. At its core, tenure is about relationships, since housing, land, property, and natural resources are inseparable from peoples' relationships to them.

Over the course of 1.5 hours, facilitators guided participants through a story, adding additional layers of relationships around housing, land, and resources. Facilitators used each layer of the story to illustrate a key concept, while also encouraging participants to relate to these concepts from their own experiences. This story communicated to participants why tenure is

central to effective humanitarian action, and how humanitarian actors can contribute to improving these relationships and, thus, improving security of tenure. The session ended by discussing the potential to make this training and communications tool more widespread across the humanitarian sector.

Effectively Advocating on HLP

Facilitators: **Juli King** *and* **Caroline Zullo**, *InterAction;* **Fernando de Medina-Rosales**, *NRC*

This session focused on targeted and collective advocacy initiatives that can be conducted around HLP in humanitarian settings. The participants discussed advocacy objectives on due diligence, climate, and protection focusing on what changes need to happen for objectives to be met, what audience or influencers should we be targeting with this advocacy, and what specific activities can the broader community take to work towards achieving those objectives. Outcomes from this discussion will be used to draft a one-year HLP advocacy strategy, targeted towards US-based humanitarian donors, senior humanitarian leadership, and humanitarian aid implementers.

Digital Trails

Facilitators: **Yulya Panfil**, *New America;* **Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque**, *The Tenure Beat Consulting*

This interactive workshop introduced the possibility of using "digital trails" (the data automatically generated by our smartphones) as a potential tool for humanitarians and governments to verify claims of occupancy or ownership. Many people affected by conflicts and disasters often do not have legal proof that they own their homes or lands, which often makes it difficult to access reconstruction or restitution assistance to rebuild their lives. Humanitarian and government agencies are seeking alternatives to demonstrate at least a measure of long-term occupancy, but these procedures are slow and cumbersome, and difficult to scale.

Participants were asked to conduct an inventory of all the apps on their phones that track location data and, based on this information, to generate a "tapestry of credentials" that could give humanitarian and government agencies sufficient confidence about their land claims. Participants then discussed the technical and legal challenges, the limitations on who can be served, and the ethical considerations that must be addressed before these kinds of tools can be used.

Due Diligence and Secure Tenure Principles

Presenters: **Ibere Lopes, Aia Khadem,** *and* **Melina Holder**, *IOM;* **Fernando de Medina-Rosales**, *NRC;* **Bernardo Almeida**, *Leiden University*

This session focused on how to ensure adequate due diligence is conducted for projects requiring access to housing, land, property, and natural resources to uphold the do no harm principle of humanitarian interventions. The participants discussed the pros and cons of outsourcing HLP due diligence. Advantages included access to technical and legal expertise, while drawbacks included cost and not building this capacity within organizations.

A case study example of building HLP due diligence capacity within a country mission through the development and execution of an HLP strategy was presented, including how the HLP team advocated for relevant units to include HLP due diligence in their budget lines. From Mozambique, a case study was presented on the resettlement of communities following hurricane Idai, and actions that were taken to secure land for communities for long-term tenure security. A main takeaway from the session is that HLP due diligence is a critical step in supporting long term solutions for people and communities affected by crisis.

DAY TWO

Lessons for Intelligent Crowdsourcing on HLP: Findings from AU's Research Practicum

*Facilitators: **Courtney Levine** and **Noah Doherty**, American University*

This session introduced and workshopped the HLP briefs on Northeast Nigeria, Mozambique, Somalia, and Ethiopia created by American University students through a research practicum course. These briefs were designed to be used as a resource for rapid deployments to help explain and introduce HLP concepts to practitioners traveling to specific countries. The facilitators discussed the challenges of creating hyper-localized HLP briefs, particularly in country contexts that have complex tenure systems that overlap and vary among regions. Recommendations included creating both a printable and digital version for smartphones, including critical definitions of local terms, and further incorporating issues of due diligence into the factsheets. The participants agreed on their interest in expanding and developing the open-source HLP country briefs in additional country contexts with other universities and professionals.

HLP Practice Beyond Silos

*Facilitators: **Fernando de Medina-Rosales**, NRC*

This session delved into the practical implementation of how a variety of actors can work together to ensure HLP approaches are coordinated across clusters and sectors. In particular, the session observed barriers to HLP rights with a specific lens on Somalia and forced evictions. Participants discussed the causes of the forced evictions, the legal environment, and what the response of local and humanitarian actors has been. Participants then broke into groups to develop collaborative, integrated approaches necessary for minimizing protection risks and ensuring access to HLP rights. Two groups discussed the Somalia context, while one group focused on U.S. refugee support, discussing HLP rights for resettled refugees in the U.S. Each group analyzed the key barriers and how to collaborate across different actors, ranging from humanitarian to development to private sector.

Recording Tenure: Comparing Methodologies

*Facilitators: **Ibere Lopes** and **Melina Holder**, IOM*

This session explored conventional methods of land tenure recordation and the shortcomings of such methods in crisis contexts. One of the identified issues discussed is that the information required for land tenure recordation, such as clear boundaries, documentation, or personal identification are not always accessible to communities affected by crises. A key outcome of the discussion was the idea of embracing vagueness in people's relationship to land. The session emphasized the need to develop a flexible approach to land tenure recordation that enables individuals and communities to use information they already have to build a story of their relationship to land and property, allowing them to better prepare for disaster and return or reclaim their rights post-disaster.