



OUTCOMES FROM THE 2024 CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

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College of Engineering and Architecture

SUMMARY

The steering committee¹ drafted this document based on feedback from participants at the 2024 Conference on Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Crisis Contexts. The conference was held on May 16-17, 2024, at Howard University's Department of Architecture in Washington, D.C.

The inaugural Conference on Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Crisis Contexts held in June 2023 brought together professionals, academics, donors, the private sector, the United Nations, international organizations, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in land tenure and property. The conference sought to share experiences and practices related to housing, land, and property (HLP) issues faced by displaced and at-risk communities to build a community of practice and identify steps forward. The conference also looked at HLP rights for marginalized communities within the United States to share learnings with colleagues working internationally. Several recommendations from last year's conference were moved forward in the past year:

- Dialogue on Community and Collective Land Rights held in Puerto Rico in April 2024.
- Support to Howard University students to attend the Dialogue on Community and Collective Land Rights in Puerto Rico.
- Support to the development of open-source HLP country briefs by students and professionals.
- A two episode podcast mini-series highlighting the importance of HLP rights ([Episode 1](#) and [Episode 2](#)).
- Continued collaboration with the Global Protection Cluster's HLP Area of Responsibility.
- A session on securing tenure in crisis contexts at the World Bank Land Conference.
- Creation of an HLP Task Team for U.S.-based international NGOs.

The 2024 conference sought to further the conversations and action items from 2023. A key highlight of this year's discussions was not just the reiteration that HLP rights are essential for other global goals on climate change, protection, women's rights, and durable solutions, but also the in-depth discussions on how to further mainstream HLP rights across crisis response—including disaster resilience, advocacy, cross-sectoral engagement, the use of digital tools, and collaboration with academic partners.

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.

¹ The steering committee was composed of InterAction, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA), the Global Protection Cluster HLP Area of Responsibility, Habitat for Humanity, Howard University, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the University of Puerto Rico, and Verent Solutions.

- 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.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the cross-cutting nature of HLP rights, their importance to the success of humanitarian assistance, and their implications for peacekeeping and development, practitioners and donors responding to and preventing crises must work toward the following goal:

Ensure that HLP rights considerations are mainstreamed across crisis preparedness, response, and recovery, and in all programming that accesses buildings, land, property, or natural resources.

While we should continue to strive toward achieving the [recommendations from the inaugural conference](#), practitioners and donors responding to and preventing crises need to do the following:

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

- Understand how HLP rights link to climate, both in terms of how access to HLP rights can support climate resilience, mitigation, and adaptation measures, and how climate change impacts HLP rights.
- Understand how HLP rights intersect with many humanitarian sectors including protection, shelter, WASH, food security, nutrition, health, education, and others.
- Train humanitarian actors across sectors on how to conduct HLP due diligence.
- Share land rights mapping and recording tools with humanitarian aid implementing organizations.
- Continue to refine and develop approaches to demystify HLP and promote engagement of humanitarian actors on the concepts of tenure, security of tenure, tenure agreements, tenure systems, forced eviction, and due diligence.
- Host an HLP career panel for university students.
- Create an online discussion space to enhance and link existing communities of practice on HLP rights.
- Develop a blog series on HLP rights in crisis contexts.
- Support the development of HLP country briefs as an educational tool or pro-bono activity.

COLLABORATION

- Increase collaboration with academic stakeholders. This could include partnering with academic institutions and professors to conduct HLP rights related research, participating in university courses to educate students on what HLP rights are and how they can be addressed in different disciplines, and supporting student hands-on learning by partnering with universities to conduct research projects.
- Host a roundtable conversation with humanitarian and development actors to brainstorm how these actors can collaborate from the beginning of a crisis response.
- Continue conversations and engagement with U.S.-based responders to HLP rights issues. Consider hosting another dialogue in a U.S. context to learn from the successes and failures of domestic HLP rights responses.

- Connect with other stakeholders on the use of digital trails as a secondary source of evidence of land occupancy or ownership.
- Build ties with other land actors and work to engage them on HLP in crisis contexts within their spaces and events.

PROFILE OF HLP

- Conduct collective advocacy toward humanitarian implementers and senior leadership on the importance of HLP rights in humanitarian programming.

HLP RESOURCES AND STAFFING

- Conduct collective advocacy toward humanitarian aid donors. Efforts should seek to advocate for donors to encourage HLP due diligence for all projects that require access to buildings, land, property, or natural resources; include HLP rights as a critical component of preparedness activities as a key to preventing, mitigating, and adapting to climate change impacts and risk; and integrate HLP considerations across all humanitarian sectors to minimize protection risks.
- Engage donors beyond the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance on the importance of HLP rights in crisis response.
- Encourage implementing organizations to request resources for HLP activities (at a minimum for due diligence).

Disclaimer: This document represents the outcomes of the conference and does not necessarily reflect institutional policies.