



CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

JULY 2023

OUTCOMES FROM THE U.S. CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

SUMMARY

The organizing team drafted this document based on feedback from participants at the inaugural U.S. Conference on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) in Crisis Contexts. The conference was held on June 5-6, 2023 at Howard University's Department of Architecture in Washington, D.C.

The event brought together professionals, academics, donors, the private sector, the United Nations, international organizations, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations specializing in land tenure and property. It was also closely coordinated with other platforms, including the HLP Area of Responsibility (AoR) of the Global Protection Cluster,¹ InterAction's Shelter and Settlements Working Group, and the Global Shelter Cluster.² The conference sought to share experiences and practices related to 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 with marginalized and Indigenous communities within the United States to share learnings with colleagues working internationally.

One key outcome of the discussions was the recognition of the significant value that development actors, who have considerable experience in designing and implementing land rights strengthening programs, can bring to the humanitarian context. Collaboration between the humanitarian and development sectors can provide a more robust and integrated approach to HLP challenges. By bridging the gap, practitioners and donors responding to and preventing crises can enhance our collective capacity to secure tenure and protect property rights for all, particularly in areas affected by crises. This will require a commitment to collaboration and open dialogues, knowledge sharing, and coordinated strategies across the two sectors.

WHAT IS HLP?

Housing, Land, and Property refers to the rules and arrangements that make it possible for people to live on their land and use their property.³ HLP is not only about laws—although laws are essential. HLP also involves 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 housing, land, and property issues.

Addressing HLP issues from the beginning of a response is essential for ensuring a successful response and sustaining the stability, safety, and livelihoods of the community. Addressing housing, land, and property issues 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:

- Peace-making and preventing disputes over land or property from causing future conflict.
- Investing in property maintenance and improvements.
- Local school enrollment.
- Stronger relationships with neighbors.

¹ <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/AoR/HLP>

² <https://sheltercluster.org/>

³ https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/mobile_guide_hlp.pdf

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Ensure that HLP is systematically addressed in crisis preparedness, response, and recovery.

To achieve this, practitioners and donors responding to and preventing crises need to do the following:

Learning and understanding

- Acknowledge that the importance of HLP issues to the effectiveness of crisis responses is not systematically understood by practitioners and policymakers at all levels, and recognize that:
 - Effective action on HLP requires understanding the context within which we are working.
 - Addressing HLP issues requires locally led solutions and we must include and elevate local and community voices, ensuring their leadership and knowledge.
 - HLP issues disproportionately affect women, girls, Indigenous people, and other vulnerable and marginalized communities.
 - Humanitarian responses need to better engage with community and collective rights to land and housing, as these are frequently occurring forms of tenure in crisis-affected countries.
 - Practitioners must meaningfully engage on HLP issues to avoid doing harm to local communities, preventing them from accessing essential aid, and delaying potential sustainable solutions to crises, and building resilience.
- Work to demystify HLP for all people involved in crisis response and recovery.
- Support learning opportunities and courses with components on HLP in crisis contexts in universities.

Collaboration

- Ensure collaboration with existing coordination platforms, such as the Global Protection Cluster HLP AoR.
- Increase collaboration with stakeholders who humanitarians do not regularly engage, especially actors specialized in community and collective land rights and peacebuilders through coordination mechanisms that are active within countries.
- Proactively seek to collaborate with development actors such as the World Bank, USAID/FCDO, and development-focused NGOs. These actors have a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and resources that can be effectively harnessed to benefit HLP programming in crisis contexts.
- InterAction will convene Members to determine interest in and value add of hosting a regular HLP Task Team.
- Hold a follow-on conference one year after the inaugural conference.
- Continue to integrate thinking and experiences of HLP in the U.S. with discussions on HLP in international crisis contexts.

Profile of HLP

- Promote enhanced understanding of HLP from senior leaders of crisis response agencies to operations staff.
- Advocate for HLP to be addressed more systematically by more organizations.
- Work with donors to ensure that they demand HLP be included in crisis responses and allocate resources (at a minimum) for due diligence for projects that require access to housing, land, or natural resources.

HLP Resources and Staffing

- Encourage organizations to request donors more consistently fund HLP activities.

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