



SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS

JULY 2023

# SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS OF THE U.S. CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

## OVERVIEW

These notes follow the inaugural U.S. conference on Housing, Land, and Property in Crisis Contexts, held on June 5-6, 2023 at Howard University's Department of Architecture in Washington, D.C.

The event brought together over 80 humanitarian and development practitioners, academics, donor organizations, private sector companies, the United Nations, international organizations, and NGOs specializing in land tenure and property.

The event was closely coordinated with other platforms, including the Housing, Land, and Property Area of Responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster, InterAction's Shelter and Settlements Working Group, and the Global Shelter Cluster. 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 issues with marginalized and Indigenous communities within the United States to share learnings with colleagues working internationally.

The two-day conference featured two keynote speakers, two expert panels on trends and coalition building in HLP, six breakout sessions highlighting specific HLP issues, a participant-wide interactive training, and market stalls for a variety of humanitarian, development, and private sector organizations.

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

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 HLP 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/mobile\\_guide\\_hlp.pdf](https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/mobile_guide_hlp.pdf)

## WELCOME REMARKS

### Welcome Remarks Day One

*Kimberly Jones, Associate Provost and Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Howard University*

*Julien Schopp, Vice President of Humanitarian Policy and Practice at InterAction*

The welcoming remarks highlighted the interconnected nature of HLP issues and broader systemic injustices. They focused on the importance of bringing together practitioners and academics to share experiences and best practices in this field and the importance of considering HLP issues throughout a response.

### Welcome Remarks Day Two

*Dr. John Anderson, Dean of the College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University*

*Vincent Houver, Chief of Mission at IOM*

The welcoming remarks highlighted the need to prepare future leaders to make a positive impact. They focused on the importance of tenure security on people's ability to prosper.

## KEYNOTES

### Keynote Day One

*Lise Grande, President and CEO of the U.S. Institute for Peace*

Grande's remarks focused on the effort to protect HLP rights before, during, and after the outbreak of conflict. She referenced the 2005 U.N. Pinheiro Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons as a foundational international text on HLP rights. Grande explained that the most common HLP violations during conflict are forced evictions carried out for various purposes, including ethnic cleansing, territorial conquest, and tactical military purposes.

Grande offered a series of steps that the international community should take to safeguard HLP rights, namely:

- Integrate HLP into the Terms of Reference of United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators.
- Support proof of ownership and land documentation processes, including through technical assistance.
- Support donor-funded rental subsidies for displaced families.
- Provide legal aid to help displaced people file land claims and negotiate for compensation for lost immovable assets.
- Include HLP restitution in peace negotiations.
- Promote full compensation for individuals for whom land and property cannot be restored.

## Keynote Day Two

*Sarah Charles, Assistant to the Administrator of USAID/BHA*

Charles introduced the role of USAID in humanitarian crises and HLP rights worldwide, specifying that USAID programming, much like HLP issues, sits at the nexus of a diversity of areas, including shelter, protection, livelihoods, and water access. Charles emphasized that HLP responses must do more to consider the vulnerabilities of women and other marginalized communities and the risks associated with increasing climate impacts. To improve HLP programming, Charles advocated for various actions, including breaking down silos between technical experts and looking at what people need holistically, developing localized solutions, and increasing the understanding of humanitarian actors of local land tenure issues before conflict begins.

## OPENING PANELS

### Panel Day One

**Moderator:** *Professor Dahlia Nduom, Assistant Professor of Architecture at Howard University*

**Panelists:** *Charles Setchell, Senior Shelter, Settlements, and Hazard Migration Advisor, USAID/BHA; Karol Boudreaux, Senior Land and Resource Governance Advisor, USAID; Ibere Lopes, HLP Advisor, IOM; Irantzu Serra Lasa, Senior Director, Disaster Risk Reduction and Response, Habitat for Humanity*

This panel highlighted the importance of HLP rights; the impact and exacerbation of HLP violations in conflict situations; and recommendations for addressing HLP issues, promoting social justice, and driving transformative change.

Speakers provided diverse examples of HLP issues in crises, featuring cases from the Philippines, Jamaica, and Afghanistan. They also spoke about actions that can be taken to reduce risk, including assessing existing gaps and opportunities, making communities visible through mapping and land rights recognition, and aligning incentives to support housing affordability and nature-based solutions. Panelists emphasized the importance of context, understanding the local political economy, and reliance on data and statistical modeling to support interventions.

### Panel Day Two

**Moderator:** *Sarah Fuhrman, Director of Policy at InterAction*

**Panelists:** *Jim Robinson, Co-Coordinator of the HLP Area of Responsibility, Global Protection Cluster; Derrek Niec-Williams, Executive Director of Campus Planning, Architecture, and Development, Howard University; Madiha Waris Qureshi, Director of Strategic Communications, Rights and Resources Initiative*

The panel discussed the importance of, and the barriers to, building robust and active networks and coalitions to address HLP issues. The discussion highlighted the need to work across silos, elevate local communities' voices, and understand the history and context of the place where we are working. There was a particular focus on increasing the political and legal access of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous communities or those suffering from gentrification, whose land ownership lacks recognition. All three panelists highlighted the need for local actors to have a voice in global coalitions.

Challenges faced by global coalitions include language barriers and limited opportunities for legal and political empowerment for local activists who are critical to local land efforts. The discussion concluded with examples of revitalization initiatives and affordable housing projects that facilitated minority participation and local engagement.

## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

### HLP and Gender

**Moderator:** *Caroline Zullo, InterAction*

**Panelists:** *Christen Corcoran, Global Land Alliance; Alina Potts, Global Women's Initiative, George Washington University*

The HLP and Gender session focused on assessing barriers to women seeking to access HLP rights in conflict settings and the impact of these barriers on women's socioeconomic empowerment, livelihoods, and financial security. Case studies discussed included Ukraine, Uganda, and Iraq. Panelists showed how women might struggle to assert land ownership when land documentation is registered in male counterparts' names—a challenge further exacerbated in conflict settings. Lack of access to HLP rights also serves as a barrier to women seeking to generate income. Panelists discussed the risks to women when HLP rights are not assured, referencing the increased vulnerability of women and children to gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in the context of unsafe shelter.

Panelists advocated for prioritizing HLP support in refugee settings to mitigate risks of GBV and SEA, actively including women in the peacebuilding process during conflict resolution, and promoting gender-sensitive approaches to ensure women's empowerment and safety in conflict and reconstruction contexts.

### HLP and Climate

**Moderators:** *Mohamed Hilmi, InterAction; Melina Holder, IOM; Chuck Setchell, USAID/BHA*

**Panelists:** *Yuliya Panfil, New America; Anthony Piaskowy, Cadasta Foundation; Krista Jacobs, Landesa*

The session on HLP and climate focused on the unprecedented risk that climate change poses to housing security worldwide. During the discussion, panelists noted that climate change impacts correlate to increased socioeconomic inequality, as wealthier populations migrate away from affected areas while more vulnerable communities are left behind. Without preemptive programming and adaptation strategies, cities receiving climate migrants may experience increased housing costs, housing scarcity, or climate gentrification.

In response to these challenges, panelists emphasized the importance of taking proactive measures to HLP issues, addressing land rights in future climate-related disaster planning, and using up-to-date hazard mapping when designing responses. Panelists also advocated for strengthening tenure rights for Indigenous and local communities, demonstrating how increased land tenure security empowers communities to better adapt to climate change and sustainably protect and manage land.



## HLP and Conflict

**Moderator:** *Ibere Lopes, IOM*

**Panelists:** *Ioana Bouvier, USAID; Victoria Stanley, World Bank; John Leckie, Development Alternatives Incorporated*

The session on HLP and conflict emphasized land's role as a source of sustained conflict. Drawing upon case studies from Somalia, Colombia, Tanzania, and Rwanda, panelists discussed the challenges associated with displacement, resettlement, and land restitution in conflict settings. Barriers discussed included incomplete land registries, lack of equitable access to HLP rights for vulnerable populations, and misalignment in interests between governments and donors.

Panelists reflected on their experiences in the field, where they engaged in participatory land mapping initiatives and facilitated transparent communication between the humanitarian or development actor and the beneficiary community. To mitigate the risks associated with conflict and HLP rights, panelists recommended promoting policies and capacity-building programming that strengthen land administration and documentation systems and ensuring strong community involvement and participation in HLP humanitarian interventions.

## Domestic Land Policy and Practice

**Moderator:** *Professor Bradford Grant, Howard University*

**Panelists:** *Jasmine Fuller, PhD Candidate in Economics, Howard University; Dahlia Nduom, Assistant Professor of Architecture, Howard University; Michelle Divil, Research Scientist/Adjunct Professor, Howard University; Amaris Torres-Rivera, Executive Director, Fundación Fondo de Acceso a la Justicia*

The session on domestic land policy and practice investigated HLP challenges faced by sudden, slow, and repeated onset disasters, with a particular emphasis on climate change, resilient design, and climate gentrification. It drew upon case studies from Puerto Rico and coastal communities in the United States. The discussion focused on issues of inequity, with panelists sharing concerns regarding discriminatory housing markets, which disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority populations, and the financial barriers to ensuring widespread preparedness for natural disasters, including those associated with climate change.

Panelists emphasized the need for inclusive policies, community engagement, and centering the specific needs of vulnerable populations to build resilience and ensure equitable outcomes. To this end, panelists advocated for applying a racial justice lens to HLP issues and analyzing the role of educational and religious institutions and other community leaders in guiding communities that seek clarity on how to respond to a weather event. They advised shifting the conversation away from adaptation and mitigation and toward engaging more directly with relocation planning and climate refugee support.

## Collective and Community Land Rights

**Moderator:** *Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque, Verent Solutions*

**Panelists:** *Ana Cristina Gómez Pérez, School of Law of the University of Puerto Rico; Lilia Granja, Norwegian Refugee Council, Colombia; Gabrielle Newell, Baldwin House*

This session emphasized that protecting and strengthening community and collective tenure in both urban and rural areas is essential to resolve several of the world's intersecting environmental, social, and political crises. However, crises and disasters often accelerate the degradation and loss of communities' lands and housing, especially for Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities. These communities' collective rights to land and housing are often overlooked in crisis responses.

Crisis response systems, organizations, and practitioners are often ill-equipped to engage with community/collective rights resulting in:

- Communities receiving compensation and assistance at a slower rate.
- Greater vulnerability of their rights, either due to inaction by practitioners and organizations or by actions that are doing harm.
- Missing opportunities to find sustainable solutions.

There is an urgent need for humanitarians and other HLP practitioners to better understand how to engage with these tenure systems and populations based on their unique circumstances and particular connection to their lands and housing.

## The Ideal HLP Response

**Moderators:** *This session was facilitated as an open discussion moderated by Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque, Verent Solutions and Joseph Ashmore, IOM*

This session invited participants to offer their insights into the qualities of the ideal HLP outcome in response to disaster, protracted conflict, and social system failures. For example, participants highlighted concerns regarding HLP responses that aim to strengthen the land tenure of communities situated on land that rightfully belongs to a different, evicted community or that fail to integrate the processes and preferences of the beneficiary community or local government, which will subsequently revoke the HLP intervention once the humanitarian actor has left.

Participants advocated for a series of best practices, including taking advantage of reliable data, considering both communities directly affected by the crisis and communities experiencing secondary or indirect effects, and considering the "do no harm" humanitarian principle.

## CLOSING REMARKS

In the closing remarks, participants and organizers shared key insights from the two-day conference and discussed potential next steps for developing and implementing outcomes in the HLP space. There was an immediate agreement to continue the efforts of this conference with a second event in 2024.