



KEY MESSAGES

WOMEN, LAND AND PEACE

Sustaining peace through women's empowerment and increased access to land and property rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts



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The development of these messages has been a collaborative effort by participants in the HLP Area of Responsibility – with many thanks to all those who have contributed to this process.

ABOUT THE KEY MESSAGES

These messages were developed based on the field experience in fragile and crisis affected contexts of UN-Habitat and the partners of the Global Land Tool Network and the HLP Area of Responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster. They are a quick reference on how to empower women and protect their housing, land and property rights in fragile and crisis affected contexts and why this is an essential element to sustain peace and stability.

The messages are relevant for the different groups of women and girls, independently of their ethnicity, status, disability, sexual orientation or any other characteristic they identify with.

For more information consult the referenced documents and the [UN-Habitat](#), [Global Land Tool Network](#), and [Global Protection Cluster](#) web sites or reach out directly by writing to: unhabitat-gltn@un.org or gpc@unhcr.org

Why it is important to increase women's housing, land and property?

Women play a key role in sustaining peace

Women's role in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is often reduced to that of victims. It is indisputable that women are disproportionately affected by conflicts which they often had little part in creating. However, women also play a critical role in preventing and resolving conflicts and building and sustaining peace within societies. This function often goes unnoticed and is consistently underreported. Women's role as agents of peace, mediators and negotiators in their own communities needs to be given more attention and women need to be given more space to contribute

further to peace efforts. This includes taking part in peace negotiations and peacebuilding actions, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.

Protecting women's housing, land and property rights increases women's ability to sustain peace

To adequately play their role as agents of peace, women need to feel secure in their communities and be empowered to participate meaningfully in decision making and planning. Housing, land and property rights are an essential enabler of both. This is because:

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, when women's housing, land and property rights are protected...

- ...they take a step closer to realizing their right to equality in general.
- ...they are better capable to provide for themselves and their families and to cope with the social and economic impacts of conflict and the lack of their community and extended family support that often is brought about by conflict and displacement.
- ...their vulnerabilities are reduced, and they are better protected from physical and psychological violence, other hazards, and extreme weather¹.
- ...the factors that force them to take up risky behaviours and make them vulnerable to adopt negative coping mechanisms - such as the sale of sex, forced marriage or other harmful practices - are reduced.
- ...the power relations within the household are rebalanced. This enables women to have a greater say in household decisions and to exit abusive and violent relationships.
- ...their autonomy and self-determination increases.

¹ It is also important to mention that, in the short term and in some contexts, claiming HLP rights can expose women to violence, as claims might be considered a threat to power structures and to those in power and control. However, expanding women's inheritance and HLP rights will over time change cultural gender norms and attitudes in a positive way. It is important that immediate protection strategies and measures are put in place to support women who claim their HLP in contexts where they might be at risk of violence.

The above-mentioned factors can contribute to women's increased meaningful participation in decision-making processes within communities and in public discourse and debates, including in peace actions and peace-making. These efforts then lead to more inclusive decision-making and more effective, sustainable peacebuilding outcomes.

Women's housing, land and property rights contribute to preventing and recovering from conflict and fragility

The protection of women's housing, land and property rights mitigate the risk of violent conflicts flaring up and help societies to emerge and recover from war.

It increases agricultural productivity and production, contributing to food security. It is essential to foster the realisation of other related human rights, such as the rights to an adequate standard of living, adequate housing, protection from forced evictions, equality, etc. Overall, the protection of all people's housing, land and property rights helps societies move from humanitarian vulnerability towards recovery and self-reliance. Importantly, the protection of land rights can strengthen the relationship between people and institutions, which is an important factor for state-building and peacebuilding in fragile contexts and countries emerging from war.

How to increase the recognition and protection of women's housing, land and property rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

The pressing urgency of protecting women's housing, land and property rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts calls for increased and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders to identify and promote viable options that can serve the larger number of women in the shortest time possible, while offering enough protection from forced eviction and other hazards. Forcibly displaced women are amongst the most vulnerable groups and their protection should be prioritized.

To protect women's housing, land and property (HLP) rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, it has proven effective to:

- Assess and identify which tenure options are most suitable – in terms of time, scale, cost, sustainability, capacity of and acceptance by the local actors – and can reach a greater number of women in the shortest time (e.g. house-sharing options, communal shelters, tented camps, etc.), while simultaneously working on more suitable medium-term options (e.g. rehabilitation or reconstruction

of shelter, hosting agreements with the local communities, waqf arrangements², etc.).

- Remove legal and administrative blockages that prevent displaced women (and men) from using, renting or owning houses, land and properties.
- Promote the use and broker the recording of clear and fair housing, land and property agreements, such as ownership documents, tenancy and lease agreements. Records can be oral or written, depending on the appropriateness for the context. If oral, they should be witnessed by trusted intermediaries/authorities and/or recorded digitally with phones so that parties can refer back to them at a later date.
- Advocate for and support the (re)issuing of civil documentation - such as identity cards,

² The holding and preservation of a certain property for the confined benefit of a philanthropy with prohibiting any use or disposition of the property outside that specific purpose. The definition indicates the perpetual nature of waqf as it broadly relates to land and buildings, although there is waqf of books, agricultural machinery, cattle, shares and stocks, and cash. Oxford Dictionary of Islam.

marriage certificates, death certificates, etc. – which are often needed to formalise marital and family relationship and housing, land and property rights.

- Support the retrieval and re-issuing of HLP documents as a means to facilitate the enjoyment of durable solutions and in preparation for return/reintegration, restitution or compensation processes.
- Establish information and support centres and complaint mechanisms at the grassroots level to help women identify their land tenure options available and how to access them.
- Provide legal counselling and assistance on HLP rights, civil documentation and other matters of priority. Explore the use of collaborative dispute resolution mechanisms and techniques (such as mediation and negotiation) to resolve HLP disputes and promote women’s access and enjoyment of property.
- Ensure that women are empowered to partici-

pate and lead land-related processes – such as land and return commissions, etc. – and that such processes do not discriminate against them.

- Collect and analyse gender disaggregated data on issues faced by women in accessing land and other land-related dynamics.
- Identify common properties and resources such as water, trees (for fuel, food, and medicine) etc. Ensure that women’s access and use of these are protected and that women are meaningfully included in their management. If these are being degraded, for instance, because of an influx of displaced peoples, or because of conflict or other reasons, invest in their restoration and ongoing management.
- Work with local associations, influential individuals and community members to organise accompanying activities that mitigate the risk of threats of violence to women asserting their housing, land and property rights.

How to empower and increase women’s participation in processes related to land management and housing, land and property rights

The protection of women’s access to housing, land and property rights is an essential condition to ensure women’s empowerment and participation in peace actions (Section 1). However, specific actions are needed to empower and increase women’s participation in processes related to land management and housing, land and property rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Although everyone’s life is deeply affected by decisions related to land management and HLP rights, such discussions are considered difficult to engage in and technically complicated. This perception adds to discriminatory gender roles and social norms and contributes to excluding women from such decisions. Despite women’s major contribution in working the land and putting into effect decisions taken over land management, the topic is

too often perceived as a “men only” issue and the land sector is overwhelmingly male-dominated.

Efforts are needed to ensure that women are empowered to participate and lead discussions related to land management and HLP rights in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This includes negotiation and mediation efforts related to access to, use of and control over land and land related resources, dispute resolution processes, land commission, return and restitution commissions, definition of land and HLP-related provision in peace agreements and other relevant frameworks. This prepares the ground for women’s involvement in broader land and HLP discussions during the recovery and reconstruction phase (e.g. legal and institutional reforms, land administration, etc.).

Key actions to promote women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected contexts include:

- Raise women's awareness and understanding of housing, land and property rights, so that they are better able to claim them and engage in land and HLP-related processes.
- Support the inclusion of women in reconstruction and rehabilitation processes.
- Promote, strengthen and develop the capacities of women and women's associations to

participate in land-related processes.

- Make women's participation a requirement in all peace negotiations, land conflict resolution mechanisms, and land-related commissions to ensure women's grievances and needs are addressed during the negotiations.
- Collect and analyse gender disaggregated data on land administration processes, land use patterns, issues faced by women in accessing land and other land-related dynamics to guide reforms and decision making.
- Support women's employment in land administration and in the different aspects of land management.

Women's housing land and property rights for conflict prevention and recovery: the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

With a long-term perspective towards durable conflict prevention and recovery strategies, laws and practices should be analysed and reviewed to ensure that they protect and advance women's housing, land and property rights. Particular areas of focus includes the revision of gender-discriminatory inheritance and personal laws; the promotion of the registration of written marital contracts containing information on land and property regimes; the removal of the impediments keeping women from accessing land administration services, financial facilities and mechanisms systems for land

rights at the national and regional level, and among family and community members, and key land actors;

- Raise awareness on international frameworks protecting women's housing, land and property rights;
- Raise awareness among decision makers on the economic and social values of women's work, this will assist them in understanding the benefits they, and their families, will enjoy by guaranteeing women's equal access to and

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