



Guidance from the Housing Land and Property Technical Working Group on COVID-19

May 2020

Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights continue to be a key protection issue across South Sudan. The HLP Technical Working Group strives to ensure the integration of HLP rights, concerns, and responses to ensure that key affected populations are supported. As such, the HLP TWG recognises that the current exceptional global emergency of COVID-19 is likely to significantly impact HLP in South Sudan in a number of ways. This short note therefore summarises key challenges, priority actions, and recommendations from the HLP TWG for the information and action of affected agencies. For further questions please contact the HLP TWG via Thiago Söthe sothe@unhcr.org and Anna Salvarli anna.salvarli@drc.ngo.

Key HLP Challenges in Light of COVID-19

1. **Increased risk of evictions:** In urban and peri-urban areas, the HLP TWG have identified an increased risk of evictions of individuals and HHs – most likely in two ways. Firstly, country-wide restrictions to movement and trading has occurred across South Sudan, resulting in reduced income for many HHs. Reduced income, leading to failure to pay rent, could lead to evictions in a number of instances in locations such as Juba. Secondly, IDPs living in abandoned or unused buildings, may be at increased risk of eviction as owners try to mitigate an outbreak of COVID-19. IDPs are often not given much notice of eviction, are already vulnerable HHs, and may lack means or opportunity to challenge the eviction or find an alternative place to stay.
2. **Potential increase in HLP disputes in areas of return or relocation:** With the recognised increased risk of COVID-19 in congested locations, South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring counties and IDPs living in PoC or other displacement sites may try to return or relocation to less congested areas. HHs choosing to leave displacement sites due to an increased risk of COVID-19 are therefore likely to either return to areas of origin or habitual residence, or choose to relocate to a third location, prematurely. In a number of instances, this is likely to mean HHs arrive to areas with no HLP, with destroyed HLP, or with others occupying their HLP. Given the emergency nature of the COVID-19 situation and restrictions on humanitarian agencies, this also means full HLP assessments or other activities will not be always possible.
3. **Increasingly complex coordination by HLP partners:** As a result of the COVID-19 situation, many humanitarian agencies have scaled down international and relocatable field staff. Movement restrictions are also being increasingly imposed, impacting the ability of partners to meet and deliver activities. Finally, the current stage of the peace process means many Government coordination structures at the field level are not yet fully in place. Whilst at a national level, the HLP TWG – which includes the Parliamentary Land Committee - and other guidance bodies have been able to smoothly move to virtual meetings and coordination, at the deep field level this becomes more challenging. All of this leads to difficulty in identifying, reporting, and responding to HLP issues.

Priority HLP Activities in Light of COVID-19

The Protection Cluster has conducted an identification of priority activities to be maintained in case of COVID-19 spread in South Sudan. These are considered as general recommendations on the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) activities, and each organization retains the final responsibility for the implementation of activities and should carefully consider measures to ensure

the safety and security of its staff and beneficiaries. Regarding HLP, the priority activities as agreed with the HLP TWG are as follows – all of which should be carried out as feasible and in line with conflict sensitivity principles:

1. Awareness-raising: Awareness raising activities on HLP-related issues should continue if feasible while maintaining adherence to WHO guidance on avoiding transmission of COVID-19 and may also include information on the containment, prevention and response to COVID-19 if staff are properly trained by health actors. Prevention and mitigation measures to protect staff and beneficiaries should be put in place, including maintaining physical distance and limiting the number of persons for each activity and as otherwise provided in WHO/ Health Cluster guidance.
2. HLP monitoring: As part of protection monitoring, HLP monitoring is key to ensuring partners keep documenting issues and refer as needed to the Protection Cluster and HLP TWG.
3. Legal assistance: This is an essential activity that directly relates to the fulfilment of some fundamental rights of affected individuals and their access to assistance. While access to public institutions such as courts and Land Committees as well as other administration offices may be fully or partially disrupted at this time, legal assistance services should be maintained whenever possible.
4. Advocacy: Advocacy on ongoing HLP-related issues and potential rights violations should continue. Advocacy should also now focus on the key HLP challenges identified as a result of COVID-19. As deemed necessary, the HLP TWG will support advocacy at a national level through various methods and is already working on key areas such as prevention of eviction.

HLP TWG Recommendations

1. Awareness raising on HLP should be mainstreamed and integrated into general messaging, across South Sudan in recognition of the above points.
2. HLP considerations must be taken into account as far as feasible with the provision of assistance by humanitarian agencies supporting HHs to leave displacement sites i.e. appropriate S/NFI support in line with Cluster guidelines.
3. Based on updates and requests from operational partners, HLP TWG and the PC will be developing standard messaging on HLP rights and risks in light of COVID-19 for affected communities.