

## USE OF 'UPGRADED EVIDENCE' IN CADASTER APPROACHES FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE RETURN

Jon Unruh<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MCGILL UNIVERSITY

\* Corresponding Author jon.unruh@mcgill.ca

The enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, together with the difficulties of their livelihoods and the burden placed on host countries, highlights the importance of planning now for the eventual return of refugees to their housing, land and property (HLP) in Syria. As in all refugee generating scenarios, the manner in which most Syrians departed their HLP resulted in little opportunity to obtain, prepare or bring, the documentation needed prove ownership, occupation, or claim to their properties to which they must one day return. Further, in a great many cases such documentation, as it existed, was incomplete, inaccurate, contested, confused, improperly recorded and of uncertain legal standing. Overlain on this situation is a long history of land and property confiscations, dispossession, grievance, corruption and patronage, which has meant that many HLP assets will be reclaimed anew when their former occupants return. What is needed are ways to 'upgrade' the informal and ancillary forms of evidence that refugees do have and do know about, based on their lived histories on their lands and properties, in order to bring these into innovative cadaster approaches that are able to facilitate effective return to their HLP. Important in this regard is the recognition and recollection of HLP demarcations, distinguishing features, and other informal forms of evidence readily recalled, to be combined with GIS, mapping and aerial photography techniques. This presentation describes recent research with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, as to how the evidence that they do have can be gathered, upgraded, combined and corroborated, and inserted into useful types of cadasters for use in their return to lands, properties and areas of origin.

**Keywords** War and land tenure, Middle East, Arab Spring, Refugee Return, HLP, Property rights