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**Rural Development Institute wins World Bank competition
for its innovative solution to rural poverty**
“Barefoot lawyers” help secure land rights for millions of Chinese farmers

SEATTLE – The Rural Development Institute (RDI) has won a prestigious World Bank grant of \$197,000 to support its pilot “barefoot lawyers” program to reduce poverty in China by helping farmers secure long-term land rights. Of the nearly 1,800 applicants, only 22 were chosen by the Development Marketplace, a competitive grant program organized by the World Bank to fund innovation in international development.

RDI’s project will provide legal aid and education to China’s rural poor via “barefoot lawyers,” who will promote the rule of law and secure property rights in the countryside, where two-thirds of the population lives. Through this program, RDI will train local lawyers to raise awareness among farmers and local officials regarding land rights and to help defend them against violations.

More than 40 million poor farmers in China have lost their farmland due to compulsory takings by government to satisfy the demands of urban economic growth. The majority of the rural families received little or no compensation, and most lack the education and skills to find alternative income. Most live on less than \$2 a day.

The growing desperation has led to more than 20,000 violent protests in the countryside each year, and has led to increasing urban migration. RDI’s initiative of free and accessible legal aid will address this situation.

During its 40-year history, RDI has worked in more than 40 countries to help more than 400 million people attain secure land rights and rise out of poverty.

“Secure land rights provide a proven path out of poverty by providing economic and social opportunity,” said Tim Hanstad, CEO of the Seattle-based NGO. “Secure land rights help poor families attain food security, increase income, build shelter, generate wealth and become more invested in the community,” said Hanstad. “The challenge is how to ensure that those land rights are secured in a manner that is peaceful and promotes the rule of law. We have found the solution must be tailored for each country, and sometimes each region within a country.

“In China, our works focuses on securing land rights for farmers to help increase agricultural production, create food security and reduce urban migration. In India, we are working with state and federal governments to provide the rural poor with “micro-plots” of land to help families become self-sufficient and lift themselves out of poverty,” Hanstad said. “In Rwanda, RDI is helping the government implement a new land law that strengthens and protects women’s property rights.”

The Development Marketplace identifies and funds innovative, early-stage development projects with high potential for impact and replication. This year, it awarded more than \$4 million in seed money to 22 innovative projects.

“The Development Marketplace is a consolidated program through which the World Bank can interact with civil society and governments experimenting with new approaches in development. We like to think of it as our venture capital initiative taking risks and planting the seeds for a garden of new and better ways to alleviate poverty,” said Fayezul Choudhry, vice president and controller at the World Bank.

The 2008 global competition was co-sponsored by the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and GTZ. The winning projects can be found at www.developmentmarketplace.org.

About the Rural Development Institute (RDI)

Over the past 40 years, RDI has worked in more than 40 countries, helping more than 400 million people attain secure land rights. With offices in China, India, Indonesia and Rwanda, RDI is engaged in a number of projects with global leaders, governments and NGOs, including efforts to secure women’s property rights and an ambitious “micro-land ownership” program in India.

“When people have secure land rights, they are better able to improve their lives and those of their families, and the ripple effects extend beyond their families to affect the broader economy,” said RDI CEO Tim Hanstad.

RDI has been nominated for multiple awards for its innovative work, including the Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the World Food Prize, the Rio Tinto Alcan Prize for Sustainability and the Nobel Prize. In addition, Roy Prosterman, RDI’s founder and chairman emeritus, won the 2002 Schwab Social Entrepreneur award, the 2003 Gleitsman International Award, and the inaugural Henry R. Kravis Award for nonprofit leadership in 2006.

For more information about RDI, visit www.rdiland.org.