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*For immediate release*

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## **WRI and RDI Launch New Initiative to Communicate Property Rights Lessons in Africa**

SEATTLE and WASHINGTON, D.C., October 9, 2009 –The World Resources Institute (WRI) and the Rural Development Institute (RDI) are launching a new initiative, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) that will use web-based multimedia tools to illustrate and communicate complex property rights issues in Africa.

In many parts of Africa, there is a great divide between property rights granted under formal law and customary land rights from traditional authorities, such as village chiefs. These differences and contradictions often lead to insecure property rights and can result in conflicts, poor agricultural productivity, and poverty. “As a result, people lack incentives to invest in their land, and poor communities are vulnerable to losing their land altogether,” said Peter Veit, a WRI senior fellow and director of the project.

Using interactive maps, charts and other attention-grabbing media tools, the WRI-RDI project will share country experiences and lessons learned in compelling ways designed to educate and engage the development assistance community, including government officials, land tenure experts and agricultural specialists. The web-based project will provide this audience with a thorough understanding of tenure issues in six target countries—Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana and Mali. Users, who at present often lack access to the information they need to strengthen tenure and improve agricultural production, will be able to download the project material and tailor it to their specific educational needs.

“Development initiatives that fail to understand the complexities of land rights can risk threatening local livelihoods and unintentionally inflict harm,” said Tim Hanstad, president and CEO of RDI. “Addressing the knowledge deficit can help ensure that governments and development agencies are well-informed and have a stronger understanding of land tenure issues before they design new initiatives and projects.”

“To date, interactive digital media has not been widely used to share information and ideas on land tenure and natural resource property rights in Africa,” said Diana Grusczyński of the Agricultural Program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “We are delighted to support WRI and RDI in this new way of conveying information on such important development matters.”

The BMGF grant totals \$485,000 and the project will be implemented over the next 18 months.

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***The World Resources Institute** ([www.wri.org](http://www.wri.org)) is an environmental think tank that goes beyond research to find practical ways to protect the earth and improve people’s lives.*

***The Rural Development Institute** ([www.rdiland.org](http://www.rdiland.org)) is an international non-profit organization that works to secure land rights for the world’s poorest people. For over 40 years, RDI has worked in over 45 countries to secure land rights for more than 100 million families.*

***The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** ([www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)) works in developing countries and in the United States to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. The Seattle-based foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.*