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## **RDI launches Global Center for Women's Land Rights** *New initiative to reduce hunger and poverty through land rights for women*

**Seattle (WA)** – Secure land rights for the world's poorest people are central to the alleviation of global poverty. At the center of providing secure land rights are issues of women and land. That's why the Rural Development Institute (RDI), an international nonprofit working to secure land rights for the world's poor, is launching the Global Center for Women's Land Rights on October 15, 2009, the International Day for Rural Women. The Global Center for Women's Land Rights will serve as a resource for research, create partnerships for collaborative action, and advocate for policies and laws that provide secure land rights for women and girls.

While women produce up to 80 percent of the food, they own less than two percent of the world's titled land, according to the United Nations. With the burden of responsibility for growing and preparing food falling primarily on women, it is critical for them to have access and rights to land. "In many developing countries, women cannot own property--especially in places where women are viewed as property," said Renée Giovarelli, founding director of the Global Center for Women's Land Rights. "Women feed the world. Providing women with secure land and property rights is essential to addressing poverty, food security and violence against women."

Without rights to the land they farm, women and their children are at risk of undernutrition, poverty, exploitation and disease. When women are able to control assets such as land, they are able to improve the lives of their families and their communities. Research shows that when women have secure land rights, they can provide better nutrition for the household, increase food security, increase income and economic growth, and have improved bargaining power and status within the household and community.

"Unfortunately, there are not enough people working to improve women's legal rights to land, and those that do are often isolated and unable to connect with the best resources and experts," said Giovarelli. "The Global Center for Women's Land Rights was created to catalyze global efforts and create a community of practice that will provide policymakers, scholars, philanthropists, and multi-lateral institutions with an opportunity to share ideas, interventions and strategies for improving women's access and rights to land."

"Our understanding of the relationship between women's access to land and rural poverty has come a long way over the last four decades," said Tim Hanstad, president and CEO of RDI. "Because women play multiple roles in the household and informal economy as caretakers, farmers, etc., it is vital that they have access to inputs such as land—their most important resource."

Since developing its Women and Land program ten years ago, RDI has pioneered a number of programs and partnerships with developing country governments to strengthen women's property rights. RDI's work has shown that a small parcel of land, sometimes as small as one-tenth of an acre, can make a big difference for sustainable poverty alleviation. The newly launched Global Center for Women's Land Rights will expand RDI's existing efforts to partner with governments on reforms to laws by creating several initiatives:

- **Advocacy and Education** to address the "knowledge deficit" among government, donors, and policymakers about the importance of secure land rights for women. RDI will offer events, training workshops, forums and policy briefings with NGOs, donors and policymakers to raise global understanding of women's property rights.
- **Global Fellowship and Visiting Scholars Program** to provide professionals seeking to pursue a career in helping secure land rights for women and girls with appropriate training and comparative legal knowledge.
- **E-Library on Women's Property Rights** to make legislation concerning women's property rights throughout the world widely accessible through a user-friendly open-source platform.

RDI's work to secure land rights for women and girls is funded in part by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation, Omidyar Network and the Nike Foundation. RDI's ongoing efforts to raise awareness about women's land rights include their annual International Women's Day Luncheon for Land Rights, and sponsorship of events like the World Affairs Council event featuring *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof in Seattle. Most recently, RDI was featured the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) for its commitments to create the Global Center for Women's Land Rights and its "micro-land ownership" program in India, where RDI is working with the Indian government to help landless women get a plot of land to call their own.

"This year's focus on women and girls at the Clinton Global Initiative provided RDI an extraordinary opportunity to connect with others who share our passion for improving the status of women in rural communities," said Hanstad. "The will to improve women's empowerment is gaining quick momentum. Our hope is that RDI's Global Center for Women's Land Rights will serve to catalyze the global community and provide a greater understanding of the important relationship between women's land rights and rural poverty."

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#### **About the Rural Development Institute**

RDI is an international non-profit working to secure land rights for the world's poor. Over the past 40 years, RDI has worked in more than 45 countries, partnering with governments on reforms that have helped more than 100 million families attain secure land rights. A global pioneer in using law to create land ownership opportunities, RDI's collaborations with government partners create leveraged, sustainable and generational poverty alleviation. For every dollar contributed, on average, RDI has helped secure land rights for six families. For more information, visit [www.rdiland.org](http://www.rdiland.org).