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## **Rural Development Institute hires two Rwandan attorneys to support land rights in Rwanda**

**SEATTLE** – The Rural Development Institute (RDI), an international nonprofit that partners with governments in developing countries to secure land rights for the rural poor, as a critical component to alleviating global poverty, has hired two Rwandan attorneys in response to that country’s growing demand for RDI’s land-rights legal expertise.

RDI and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are helping the Rwandan government as it modernizes the country’s property rights system, a sensitive issue in a largely agrarian society where small agricultural plots are the sole source of survival for impoverished families.

RDI has been working in Sub-Saharan Africa since 2001, an area plagued by widespread poverty and violence. Currently, RDI is working in three countries that have been severely affected by this instability: Angola, Burundi and Rwanda. RDI has also worked in Uganda and Nigeria. As these countries strive to avoid further conflict and meet the needs of their poor, insecure land tenure remains a persistent obstacle.

Today, more than a decade after Rwanda’s genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed, the country continues to heal, yet demographic changes and so much upheaval pose daunting challenges.

With funding from USAID, RDI is working with Rwanda’s Ministry of Lands, Environment, Forests, Water and Mines (MINITERE) to develop a new and comprehensive policy and legislative framework to govern land relations. This effort includes the drafting of a suite of laws and regulations needed to implement the new Organic Land Law, with specific emphasis on improving women’s access and rights to land. This project is being carried out in coordination with the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

As part of this assistance, RDI has hired Ben Ntaganira, who has 10 years experience in legal drafting, legislative processes and institutional development, and Justine Uvuza, a highly-regarded consultant on gender and law issues for both governmental and non-governmental organizations, including DFID, Women Waging Peace and the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians.

Ntaganira previously has helped to train members of the Rwandan Parliament and other governmental bodies in legal drafting and also has worked as in-house counsel for private companies as well as with members of civil society and human rights organizations. He holds an LLM in International Law and Politics from the University of Quebec in Montreal, and an LLB in Law from the National University of Rwanda.

Uvuza, in addition to her expertise in general land law and policy, also has expertise in the promotion of and advocacy for women's rights. She served for five years as a legal officer for the Rwandan Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. Uvuza holds an LLM in Law in Development from the University of Warwick (UK), and an LLB from the National University of Rwanda.

"This is an exciting time for RDI and its work in Rwanda," said Robert Mitchell, Director of Programs and Senior Attorney at RDI. "Historically, land pressure has been a severe problem in Rwanda, where more than 90 percent of the population practices agriculture and lives in rural areas. The new Land Law establishes the major framework for land rights—a key to rebuilding the lives of refugees and survivors of the genocide."

Today, RDI is engaged in a number of land rights projects globally, including an ambitious "micro-land ownership" program with the governments of three states in India, one of the world's most populous and impoverished countries, and ongoing policy work in China, which has just adopted a new Land Law with the potential to help 850 million rural poor.

RDI, headquartered in Seattle, is a recognized global pioneer in using the law to design innovative strategies that create land ownership opportunities, helping to lift the world's rural poor out of poverty. Over the past 40 years, RDI has worked in more than 40 countries, helping more than 400 million people secure land rights.

For more information about RDI, please visit [www.rdiland.org](http://www.rdiland.org).

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