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Extra, extra, read all about it. RDI has new reports and a sneak preview of coming attractions.

RDI Celebrates 10 Year of Legal Aid in Russia

**Three Russian lawyers.
Five thousand small farmers.
One enormous success story.**



On any given day, some of the poorest rural families in north-central Russia will leave their fields and make the long journey to Vladimir, a small city some 300 kilometers east of Moscow. They are among the 16 million rural people who depend on the country's agricultural land for their survival. Foregoing a day of work that they cannot afford to miss, they come singly, in pairs, and in small groups.

Their destination: a small office with a long name – the Center for Land Reform Support of Vladimir *Oblast* (province). Their goal: to improve their lives and create a better future for their children.

Their chances of realizing their goal are remarkably good. For the last 10 years, the lawyers at the Vladimir Center have been as essential to the provinces farmers as their seeds and fertilizer. Operating on a shoestring budget, the Center's three lawyers devote their days to helping Russia's rural poor obtain the highest value from the land—starting with securing their legal rights to that land.

Russia's rural poor: Beyond the collective farm

Russia's rural people are caught in the excruciatingly slow transformation of the large collective farms of the old Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, collective farm workers and retirees became owners of the land thanks to Boris Yeltsin's efforts. However, this "ownership" was in fact a common right held by the whole group from the collective, rather than ownership of individual plots.

The failure to provide individual ownership largely gutted the potential value of the land rights granted, making these rights only marginally useful to their recipients. However, if this value were realized, it could make the difference between a life trapped in a cycle of poverty and a far different future.

"I am very impressed with the work conducted by this group of three lawyers. The Vladimir Center has become well known to the region: private farmers have realized that there is an institution to help protect their rights. The Vladimir Center advances the land reform much more effectively than some larger projects....assisting many rural people (who) are deprived from their constitutional rights."

*Vera Matusevich, World Bank
Moscow agricultural representative*

The power of individual land rights



For rural families in Russia, having even a small piece of land to call their own is a key stepping stone on the way out of poverty. Secure rights to land held by individuals, families or even small groups of neighbors encourage the people to take an interest in their land, to explore what their land can do for them.

Farmers, retirees and their families gain the sense of permanence in their rights that is a prerequisite for investing in the land. The investments increase the land's productivity and

value, and provide a foundation for the development of a healthy land market. Families develop a commitment to and stake in the land and, by extension, the community. Security breeds confidence and a platform from which community members can voice their opinions and desires on issues ranging from rural development to political change. **In short, secure land rights encourage economic growth and social stability.**

Advocacy, legal advice, and public education: A decade of support

More than 10 years ago, RDI identified legal aid as a needed tool to help the rural population of Russia obtain the land rights promised to them under Russian law. RDI designed a legal aid program, founded the Vladimir Center to execute the program, and has provided financial and technical support ever since.

For 10 years, the lawyers at the Vladimir Center spend every day working toward increasing the land rights of Russia's rural poor.



Though the Center employs only five staff members on a shoestring budget, they have produced remarkable success. Since it opened its doors, the lawyers have taken on over 500 cases, representing farmers, the elderly and their families in state and administrative proceedings. Through these advocacy efforts, the Center's lawyers have helped 5,000 people acquire, strengthen, or defend their rights to land.

Recognizing that knowledge is the beginning of change, at least once a week the lawyers hold community meetings in the countryside to educate the people about their land rights, listen to their challenges and hopes, and provide advice and counsel. The lawyers also regularly prepare newspaper articles and advisory bulletins and have conducted more than 100 educational seminars. These public education efforts have helped both villagers and officials understand and actively protect their rights.

The lawyers provide all of these services to the farmers and rural population at no charge.

To learn more about how you can support RDI's work, click [here](#).

Imagine the Perfect Gift: This Holiday Season, Give the Gift of Opportunity

Imagine the perfect gift: the gift of opportunity for a poor family.



This holiday season, why not give a meaningful gift that will have a lasting legacy?

Honor someone special in your life by giving the gift of hope.

Today, more than 3.4 billion people around the world exist on less than \$2 per day. The majority live in rural areas, where access and rights to land define economic and social opportunity.

Land is their most important source of income, nutrition, wealth, status and credit.

Yet the majority of people who depend on land for their livelihoods have no secure access to it. Without land of their own, families are trapped in a cycle of poverty.

But there is hope. RDI is working to reverse this situation by securing land rights— and with these rights, *opportunity*—for millions of poor families worldwide.

Land rights help families break the chains of poverty. Land rights free people from vulnerability to hunger. They provide assets and income, helping children to be fed, educated and receive healthcare. Land rights increase social status, and improve one's self-esteem, security, and dignity.

Land rights provide hope.

Each day, RDI works to pave the pathway to a more equitable, stable, and secure world - a world where millions of poor men, women and children will finally have a means for lifting themselves out of a debilitating day-to-day existence towards a more fully realized life and a better future.

This holiday season, give a certificate of hope to RDI in honor of someone important in your life. They will receive a *Certificate of Support* informing them that a gift has been made in their honor, and they will be touched knowing that this gift is improving the lives of poor, rural families around the world.

Visit <http://www.rdiland.org/GIVING/Support.html>, and click "Contribute in Someone's Honor."

With your help, RDI can provide the support that will change someone's life. Happy Holidays, and thank you!

Philanthropist Bill Clapp Joins RDI's Board of Directors



L to R: RDI board members Bill Clapp, Bill Robinson, and Roy Prosterman.

RDI is pleased to welcome the appointment of Bill Clapp to RDI's Board of Directors!

Clapp is a world-renowned philanthropist and the great-grandson of a founder of the Weyerhaeuser Corporation.

Lincoln Miller, RDI's Chief Operating Officer, says Clapp brings RDI an abundance of expertise, passion and accomplishment in the arena of global poverty alleviation. "Bill is a dynamic innovator who makes things happen," said Miller. "We're thrilled he can share his talents to further our mission of bringing land rights to the world's poor."

Clapp is co-founder of Global Partnerships, a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating poverty through micro-lending programs for the poor, and co-founder of the Initiative for Global Development, a national organization of business and civic leaders dedicated to ending global poverty. His appointment to RDI's Board of Directors follows his recent honor as "2006 World Citizen" by the World Affairs Council.

Clapp joins political, business and community service notables on RDI's board of directors including James C. Pigott (Chair), Roy Prosterman, Douglas Beighle, Jerome Cohen, Janet Curry, Jack Faris, John Fry, Jr., Laura Lee Grace, Heng-Pin Kiang, Michael B. King, George W. Martin, Jr., Margaret A. Niles, Sidney Rittenberg, William T. Robinson, Jill Ruckelshaus and Robert F. Utter. In addition, members of the advisory council – Bill Gates, Sr., Congressman Norm Dicks, former Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn, and Kimberly Kreiling also welcome Clapp to RDI.

RDI Beijing Attorney Awarded Visiting Scholar Grant from Norwegian Centre for Human Rights

This fall, RDI attorney Keliang Zhu received a great honor: the [Norwegian Centre for Human Rights](#) (NCHR) expert panel at the University of Oslo awarded him a visiting scholar grant to travel from Beijing, China to Oslo, Norway to meet with global experts and foster dialogue on land rights issues in China.

During his week in Oslo, Keliang made a keynote presentation at a seminar on “Land Use and Rights-Based Development in Rural China,” revealing selected findings of RDI’s 17-province survey on land rights in China. After sharing the results of the survey, Keliang found himself peppered with questions from an eager audience intrigued by RDI’s in-depth data on China’s rural land rights and its impact on economic development. Following the presentation, Keliang was then interviewed by Kjersti Strommen, a reporter from the radio station NRK in Norway, regarding China’s rural land reform.



Keliang also made a presentation on land issues in China during a workshop held at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (formerly known as the Norwegian Agricultural University) followed by a panel discussion on “Land Rights in a Changing Society.” The panel provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences and discuss their views on land tenure issues in Norway, China and Africa.

Keliang also attended workshops with:

- ❖ The International Centre for Property Rights and Development, National Mapping Authority of Norway;
- ❖ the Land Consolidation Court, Norway’s specialized tribunal for land disputes including state expropriations and acquisitions;
- ❖ Norwegian People’s Aid / Land Rights Watch Network, an NGO that works closely with the UN Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and is particularly interested in promoting equal land rights for women and indigenous people.

Participants in these events included individuals from the NCHR, Australia National University, College of Humanity Science and Center for Integrated Agricultural Development, China Agricultural University, University of Nottingham, Guangxi University Law School, FAFO (Institute for Applied International Studies), Centre for Property Rights and Development, UMB, (formerly known as the Norwegian Agricultural University), Land Rights Watch Network, the Oslo Land Consolidation Court, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, and the International Centre for Property Rights and Development.

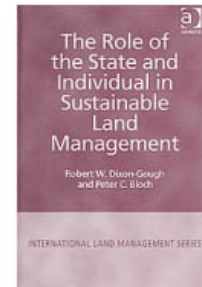
For more information about supporting RDI’s work in China, click [here](#).

RDI IN PRINT

The Role of the State and Individual in Sustainable Land Management.

Dixon-Gough, Robert and Peter Bloch. Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

A must read for anyone exploring the relationships between property rights and resource management, this book brings together case studies from Africa, Europe, North and South America to make a fresh assessment of the role of the individual and the state in land development. The book discusses a range of issues related to land reform, sustainable land development and land management, emerging land markets and environmental issues, and natural resource development. Various perspectives on balancing state control and empowerment are documented clearly, with examples spanning a wide range of current global resource management issues.



David Bledsoe, RDI Senior Attorney, provides the chapter, “Managing informal settlements in Botswana.”

Productivity of Intensively Used Homestead Plots in a Central Javan Village.

Mitchell, Robert, Roy L. Prosterman, and Akhmad Safik. RDI report #122. 2006.

Most programs to help poor rural families begin with the presumption that rural families require full-sized farms—often as large as two or more hectares—in order for the family to make any meaningful use of the land. Because land is often scarce in densely populated regions, there is not sufficient land to distribute to each family and this option is therefore taken off the table as means of addressing persistent poverty.



However, the presumption that a small plot of land cannot provide meaningful benefits to a family merits further analysis. This study in a village of Central Java, Indonesia, examines the many benefits that families derive from homestead plots (*pekarangans*) as small as 25 m² and concludes that homestead plots can contribute significantly to household income and nutrition. In our sample, sale of production from homestead plots increased the cash income of families by an average of 25 percent, with some as high as 67 percent, making homestead plots a viable option to address rural poverty.

Women’s Land Rights in Rwanda: How can they be protected and strengthened as the Land Law is implemented?

Brown, Jennifer and Justine Uvuza. RDI Report #123. 2006. (English and French)

This report, co-written by RDI attorney Jennifer Brown and Rwandan attorney Justine Uvuza, discusses the importance of strengthening women’s rights to land in Rwanda, a country where civil war, genocide and HIV/AIDS have resulted in female-headed households constituting 30 percent of all households in the country. As in much of the developing world, women in Rwanda are heavily involved in and dependent on agriculture. However, despite women’s dependence on land, their access to land generally hinges on their relationships with their birth or marital families and they rarely hold land in their own right. Women in Rwanda still face customary restrictions on land acquisition.



The report provides research findings of women's current land rights, including the rights of women widowed from HIV/AIDS and the Rwandan genocide. The report also discusses Rwanda's new body of land legislation, RDI's efforts to develop complementary land legislation to ensure that women's land rights are taken into careful account, and suggested next steps for building a stronger, more equitable country.

COMING SOON:

Women's property ownership: An examination of the process and impact of Karnataka's Rural Housing Program Titling Directive.

RDI attorney Robin Nielsen led the work on this project and is the primary author of this study in India conducted by RDI and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). 2006.