



**Integrating Land Governance into the Post-2015 Agenda**  
**Harnessing Synergies for Implementation and Monitoring Impact**

Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty Washington DC, March 24–27, 2014

**FOCUS ON LAND IN AFRICA:  
LINKING PROPERTY RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Bee Wuethrich, Peter Veit & Reem Gaafar**  
Landesa & World Resources Institute



**Paper prepared for presentation at the**  
**“2014 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”**  
**The World Bank - Washington DC, March 24-27, 2014**

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## **Abstract**

In most of Africa, land is at the heart of economic, social and political life. Therefore, land and natural resource rights and governance issues profoundly affect and are affected by development initiatives across the continent. To fully succeed and contribute to ending extreme poverty in the post-2015 world, development initiatives must recognize and strengthen the land and natural resource rights of local people, especially the rural poor and women. However, while there is growing awareness of these issues, they are often overlooked. Some within the development community consider land rights too politically sensitive to address. Others may lack the knowledge and expertise to strengthen tenure security in the course of development.

Focus on Land in Africa (FOLA) is an on-line educational resource designed to help meet these challenges by providing information on land and natural resource rights to non-tenure specialists within the development community. With primary funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Resources Institute and Landesa partnered to create FOLA, and experimented with several approaches before launching the new FOLA in 2013. The paper shares successes and challenges in communicating about complex property rights issues with a non-technical development audience.

**Key Words:** Africa, Communications, Development, Land Rights, Natural Resources



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## **Focus on Land in Africa: Linking Property Rights and Development**

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### **Introduction**

Focus on Land in Africa (FOLA) is an online educational resource that highlights the critical role of land and natural resource rights for development in Africa. Jointly developed by the World Resources Institute and Landesa, and primarily funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, FOLA's main objective is to raise awareness of these issues among non-land tenure specialists in the development community, including practitioners and policy makers, and to provide a bridge between the technical expertise of land tenure professionals and the broader development community.

Without such bridges, the in-depth technical knowledge that is so essential to land reform and governance—and to achieving poverty reduction in the post-2015 world—will go unused.

Africa stands at a critical juncture regarding land and natural resource rights and governance. FOLA's underlying premise is that during this time of rapid economic growth in Africa, to fully succeed and be sustainable, development initiatives must uphold and help strengthen the land and natural resource rights of local people, especially the rural poor.

Ideally, the planning and implementation of development initiatives— in areas such as food security, nutrition, agricultural productivity, conservation and biodiversity, women's rights, microfinance, energy, and water and sanitation —would take into account a sophisticated consideration of local land use, gender relations, customary practices, constitutional rights, and statutory law and policies regarding land and natural resources. This is necessary to optimize development outcomes; lay the basis for sustainability; and avoid unintended harms, such as increased land-based conflict, diminishment or loss of land and livelihoods without consent or just compensation, or further impoverishment or restriction of the rights of women and other marginalized people.

While there is growing awareness in the broad development community of these issues, for a number of reasons, they are often not taken into consideration. Some within the development community may consider land rights too politically sensitive to address. Others may lack access to information on how land is being locally used and governed, or an understanding of how to act on such information. FOLA is designed to help meet these communication challenges.

The FOLA team has experimented with several approaches to communicating property rights issues to non-tenure experts within the development community. In this paper, we describe our experiences regarding the successes and challenges in communicating about complex property rights issues with our target audiences.

## **FOLA**

FOLA was first launched in September 2011, with a set of in-depth technical briefs sharing experiences and lessons related to land and natural resource rights in six countries. The briefs were written by land tenure experts, and the level of technical detail limited the audience largely to other land tenure experts. In addition, although there was a wealth of legal resources available on the site, there were few explicit links to development issues. By a year following launch, usership remained relatively low, at fewer than 200 unique users per month, who were most likely primarily land tenure experts or academics.

However, we knew that the site contained a huge wealth of information from an ever-growing number of African countries and could provide valuable insights to our target audiences. We defined these audiences as non-land expert development practitioners (including those working with NGOs, foundations, multilaterals, and bilaterals), African policy makers, and African CSOs, as well as land tenure experts, with a secondary audience of the engaged public. Therefore we decided to redesign FOLA, tailoring it to more intentionally meet the knowledge needs of the broad development community.

### **FOLA's Redesign**

Following a series of stakeholder interviews, primarily with development practitioners including country directors and program officers of major NGOs, foundations, and African CSOs, FOLA adopted a tiered approach to content, which retained the deeper technical levels and added new content that is shorter and less technical.

Through the interviews, it became clear that we needed to restructure FOLA to provide a basic framework through which to understand property rights issues and their connections to development, conveyed both visually and through use of non-technical language. We also identified the need for examples that concretely illustrate both how to address land rights and the benefits of doing so, which we called “road maps.”

We worked with the web firm ichameleon to redesign and rebrand FOLA, designing the homepage to be open, professional, established, and engaging. It uses simple, short messages and statements to engage

visitors quickly and imagery that establishes a sense of connection. Navigation is ordered and logical, to feel familiar even to a first time visitor.

In order to accommodate a wide range of users, we designed FOLA to be fully adaptive to any size device, including laptops, desktops, tablets and mobile phones, such that the navigation and layout based on the device being used. To date, about 20 percent of FOLA visitors do so through mobile phones.

The reorganization also entailed:

- Restructuring FOLA to enable users to access information either by country, development theme, or property rights issue. The site currently offers content on 15 countries, five development themes, and five property rights issues;
- Developing standard country landing pages, with concise country summaries, a consistent set of data, and links to related content;
- Distilling each technical brief into either a short summary text or relatively short illustrative slide show;
- Launching a commentary page, “Talking Land,” to directly engage development practitioners, civil society advocates, and policy makers focused on African issues in providing timely perspectives and inviting discussion;
- Making better use of multi-media and its story-telling capacity, including through theme-based photo movies;
- Re-activating FOLA’s Twitter account, which had been rarely used;
- Launching a Facebook page; and
- Initiating a section on Impact Stories.

### **Conveying the Impact of Secure Land and Natural Resource Rights**

Based on our stakeholder interviews, we know that concrete examples of what works, and how it works, is potentially one of the most powerful ways to engage the interest of development practitioners, and we have woven this understanding into the new content on FOLA, including through the stories we tell through multimedia, which we developed with our partners, the Center for Digital Storytelling and Georges Collinet.

We are also in the process of developing a new section of Impact Stories that will identify and present the most compelling examples of the positive impacts of land and natural resource rights.



We have begun this process in collaboration with CARE's Pathways to Empowerment program, developing FOLA content that concretely illustrates the role of land rights in improving women's agricultural productivity in Mali and Ghana. One impact story is from Soumatogo, Mali, where Pathways led a grassroots effort to transform the gender relationships and customary land practices that constrained women's agricultural productivity. In order to do that, they needed a deep understanding not only of agriculture, but also of gender, local custom, and national and constitutional law, and land policies.

Community education and community conversations, including with the local women's collective, village chief and village mayor were part of a grass roots process that enabled the women's collective to secure a three-year lease on a plot of land. The impact story quotes the chief, who said: *"It's the first time in my village that women have asked for land—and also insisted on having an official Deed."*

The chief's statement speaks to a fundamental behavior change among both women and men in Soumatogo, and behavior change—beyond law and policies—is essential to both the realization of land rights and their contribution to food security and poverty alleviation.

In the case of Soumatogo, secure rights to collective land allowed the women to employ new agricultural techniques, which led to significant increases in their yields of shallot, millet and rice. By working with content contributors and partners to share such impact stories, FOLA hopes to illustrate not only the connections between secure land rights and development objectives, but also to shed light on how development initiatives can concretely address these rights.

### **FOLA Promotion and Usage**

The redesigned site went live in August 2013, and was officially "launched" in October 2013, largely through a targeted social media and email campaign. Since the launch, communications activities have been closely linked to the promotion of new content. We have also worked closely with content contributors to promote their work to local and national media, and have had a number of FOLA slideshows posted on the home page of AllAfrica.com. More recently, we have experimented with paid online advertising using Google ads, Facebook, and YouTube.

What have been the results? Seven months after the redesigned FOLA went live, we are seeing encouraging signs. From Sept. 1 to Feb. 23, the monthly average of unique visitors was 1,246, up from around under 200 per month on the original site.

The month with the highest number of visitors was January 2014, when some 4,000 unique visitors came to FOLA. This timing coincided with a FOLA Google Ads campaign and with FOLA participation in the “Cracking the Nut: Improving Rural Livelihoods and Food Security in Africa” Conference in Rwanda.

For FOLA overall, visitors have come from 142 different countries. The greatest interest by country (from highest) is: US, UK, India, France, Kenya, Canada, South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, Ghana, Germany, Vietnam, Liberia and Sweden. Sixty percent of FOLA visitors are under 35 years old, 54% are men, and 46% are women.

### **Impact of Social Media**

Social media has provided an important means both to connect to our audiences and to promote FOLA. Needing to prioritize resources, FOLA has relied primarily on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube as social media platforms. We chose these platforms for their simplicity of use, popularity in the development community, and the relatively low cost of paid on-line advertising.

For many non-profits, Twitter is an essential tool to expand reach, promote views and content, support like-minded initiatives, and engage with others. However, Twitter is still far more popular in North America and Europe than in African countries, where Facebook remains one of the most extensively used social media platforms.

To increase our impact via social media, we partnered with Burness Communications to develop and implement a marketing campaigns using Google Ads, Facebook, and YouTube.

**Google AdWords:** A Google AdWords campaign in January 2014 yielded some interesting results. With a Google AdWords campaign, an organization pays to have its ad pop up on the page of Google search results, when the search keywords correspond to key words designated by the campaign. The campaign also sets the geographic parameters of the target audience.

The use of five different Google Ads brought 3,250 unique visitors to FOLA in a two-week period. The greatest number of visits came from Africa (1,350), followed by the US and EU (1,185).

Keywords varied by region, revealing different driving interests. In the US, the most popular key words were: housing, deforestation, and human rights. In Africa, the most popular keywords were: development, agriculture, and forests.

Different ads also fared differently by region. In the US and EU, the two most popular ads were:

- Focus on Land in Africa: Land & Natural Resource Rights: an Urgent Priority for Africa, and
- African Land Rights Count: Share Your Knowledge: Submit Briefs, Commentary & Video

These ads were written to appeal to a sense of urgency within the development community, and to people who are prone to engage.

In Africa, the two ads that triggered the greatest response in terms of people clicking through to FOLA were:

- Focus on Land in Africa: Find Out How Five Property Rights Issues Impact Development in Africa, and
- Focus on Land in Africa: Land & Natural Resource Rights: an Urgent Priority for Africa

The popularity of the first ad suggests the immediacy of property rights as a daily issue in Africa; the popularity of the second suggests that viewers related to its sense of urgency.

**Facebook:** Our Facebook Ads campaign in February 2013 used six different ads, each designed to be visually appealing and each addressing a different theme or message. The ads were either targeted geographically to a select number of countries, in Africa or globally, or to people based on their stated organizational affiliation (primarily major non-profits or bilaterals). (See addendum 2 for the six ads and their results).

Overall, the campaign garnered 3,857 FOLA Facebook followers and generated 14,951 clicks on the ads. The overall click-through rate (the rate at which people click through from the ad on their Facebook page to FOLA) was 1.17%, which is above the industry average of 0.04 - 0.16%.

The geographical posts campaign produced over 11,000 clicks, and generated hundreds of comments and shares. Well over 90% of those who commented were Africans, many of whom were university students. While this is not FOLA's primary audience, it is a sector that is important to FOLA and to the future of land and natural resource rights in Africa.

The organizational campaign targeted individuals who listed a select number of NGOs, foundations, and government agencies on their Facebook pages, representing our primary target audience. This campaign reached 3,500 people and generated 288 clicks, for a click-through rate of 8.0%. This exceptionally high click-through rate tells us that the Facebook ads resonated with our target audience.

**YouTube:** FOLA has developed four photo movies ranging in length from about two-and-a-half to five minutes. We have also begun a series of “Short Takes,” interviews with Land Rights Leaders in Africa that are typically under one minute long. These have been added over time. Between September 2013 and February 25, 2014 the videos had been viewed a total of 1,220 times, on either FOLA, our YouTube page, or another site with YouTube embedded.

The initial result of an on-line YouTube advertising campaign in February has been impressive. We promoted just one of our videos, “Women, Land and Opportunity in Africa.” In less than two days, the video went from having been viewed 189 times, to more than 5,890 views, and some 1,200 click-throughs to FOLA. We are still analyzing the results of this campaign to gain insights into what drove its initial success, although we suspect that it was a combination of clear targeting of the ad and the resonance of the issue.

**Twitter:** The number of FOLA Twitter followers has grown from 31 in March 2013 to 500 in March 2014. While still a modest number, it has enabled us to connect with an ever-widening range of individuals and organizations in the broader development community, as well as land-rights experts, academics, and a handful of policy makers. Using the handle @AfricaLandRts, tweets drive a significant minority of traffic to FOLA.

### **What Are FOLA Visitors Finding of Interest?**

As of this writing, we have had just six months of data available on the new FOLA, from Sept. 1 through Feb. 23. This is a relatively short time span from which to draw conclusions, however, we do have a number of observations.

Usage thus far shows that:

- The most popular pages (in descending order) include:
  - Homepage

- Countries landing page (which enables visitors to click on their country of interest to find related content)
  - “About FOLA” and “Engage with Us”
  - *Talking Land* commentary page
  - Multimedia page
- Pages with the most social interests (likes and tweets) include:
    - Homepage
    - Nigeria Credit and Land brief
    - Mali CARE impact story
    - Women’s Empowerment landing page
    - Multimedia landing page.

From April 2013 to February 2014, 615 different items were downloaded 14,357 times.

- The top ten most popular downloads were:
  - The Kenyan Constitution (1083 downloads);
  - Brief: Nigeria Land Rights and Access to Credit (423)
  - Brief: Kenya History of Land Conflicts (389)
  - Brief: Women, Inheritance and Islam in Mali (329)
  - Brief: Large-scale Land Acquisitions in Ethiopia (307)
  - Brief: Land Registration in Cameroon (299)
  - Brief: Urban Poverty and Property Rights in Liberia (293)
  - Brief: Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Mali (289)
  - Brief: Land Administration at a Crossroads in Ghana (284)
  - Brief: Burkina Faso Striking Gold (278)

### **Is FOLA Reaching Its Target Audiences?**

It is difficult to assess the extent to which FOLA is reaching its primary target audiences of development practitioners, policy makers, and African CSOs working on land. However, several factors lead us to think engagement among these sectors—particularly development practitioners—is increasing. These include:

- The main countries and cities engaged on FOLA include those with large development communities: Washington DC, Seattle, Nairobi, London, Paris, Montreal, Kampala, and Atlanta (the latter being home to a number of large NGOs, including CARE, and others focused on global health);
- Direct outreach to development practitioners (through email and twitter) generate increased visits to FOLA.
- Both development practitioners and policy makers have begun to contribute commentaries to *Talking Land*;
- Organizational outreach to select NGOs through Facebook ads generated a significant response;
- Twitter followers include a growing number of people who represent our target audience, these include nonprofit organizations and foundations outside the land community; individuals associated with NGOs, African CSOs, and key influencers within the policy making realm.

While the land tenure community and academics still appear to represent the majority of our audience, we are gradually gaining traction with development practitioners, especially in the US, the UK and EU more generally, and a number of African countries. Engagement by policy makers has been more limited, although we have seen some initial progress. We believe a likely explanation for the lower engagement by policymakers is that many tend to have very discrete information needs, and information presented in very short form with illustrative data. Development of this type of content has not been a focus of FOLA to date, and would possibly need a dedicated track within FOLA for policymakers.

In short, while we have made significant progress, we believe that there is much more that FOLA can accomplish in terms of reaching our target audiences and raising awareness of land and natural resource rights issues and their impact on development.

### **Next Steps**

By demystifying property rights, FOLA contributes to more informed decisions that support land and resource rights in Africa. It also provides a tool for educators to train the next generation of policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and scholars in land use, agricultural development, and tenure matters. Indeed, one of the most consistent sources of traffic to FOLA is McGill University in Canada, and visitors from Canada tend to spend the longest time on FOLA. Many of our Facebook and Twitter followers hail from major universities around the world, including in Australia, Ethiopia, the European Union, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States.

We believe that the positive trends in usership demonstrate FOLA's value, and that of similar educational and informational resources.

Going forward, we anticipate developing several new dimensions to FOLA, which will further increase its relevance to our target audiences. These include broadening the development themes addressed on the site to include a clearer focus on food security and adding new areas of climate change and health. We are also developing a section on best practices in land-based investments and another on community land.

We are developing a series of impact stories, showing the benefits of secure land and natural resource rights for poverty alleviation and development across a whole spectrum of dimensions.

We are assessing to what extent we can specifically focus on broadening the engagement of policy makers, which requires both content and communications strategies specifically targeted to this sector.

We will also be improving the quality of information we receive from Google Analytics, and drilling further into that data in order to understand where content demand is strongest. We plan to add language signposting to FOLA to increase usage by non-English speakers, and encourage more user-led content (feedback and comments, and commentaries).

Finally, we know that partnerships are key to success, especially given convergent interests and constrained resources. We therefore look forward to continuing to collaborate with both established partners, and new partners, as we highlight land and natural resource rights as an urgent priority for development.