

PRESS RELEASE

December 20, 2011

Contact: Rena Singer
renas@landesa.org
Tel: (206) 257-6136

3.4 million farming families receive legal access to land in rural China, India

Landesa's model of partnering with governments helps scale programs that provide land ownership opportunities for the world's rural poor

SEATTLE –Landesa, which works with governments and local NGOs to create laws, policies, and programs that provide secure land rights for the world's poorest, reported today in its [2011 Fiscal Year Annual Report](#) that its partnerships in India and China over the last year helped more than 3.4 million farming families receive secure rights to their land, providing these families with a foundation to escape extreme poverty and build a better future.

“Our latest numbers demonstrate that broad-based efforts to strengthen land rights and alleviate rural poverty are most effective when governments are a central part of the equation,” said [Tim Hanstad](#), president and CEO of Landesa, which recently won the prestigious [Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship](#) for its focus on citizen-driven change. “Many of our largest funding partners, including the [Omidyar Network](#) and [The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), recognize the immense value of a policy-based approach in achieving long-term, structural change.”

Since its inception 46 years ago, Landesa has partnered with governments on reforms that have helped more than [109 million families](#) gain secure rights to land and the opportunity for a better life. Each of its programs is rooted in the basic idea that the world's rural poor share two traits: they depend on agriculture to survive, but lack secure rights to the land they till. By 2015, Landesa aims to help another 14 million families become landowners, so they can invest in their land to build a better future for themselves and their families.

“There is a growing global awareness of the fundamental connection between land ownership and poverty,” said Hanstad. “For a poor rural family, the opportunity to own land for the very first time can be a historic moment, but what comes next is even more powerful. That family now has a source of economic opportunity and the means to improve nutrition, income, shelter. This is more than a short-term solution. When land rights are secure, the cycle of poverty is broken – for an individual, a family, a village, a community and entire countries.”

Below are highlights of Landesa's work over the last year:

- In [China](#), another 2.6 million farming families gained documentation of their land rights and greater awareness of their legal rights to land. Landesa also completed its [fifth annual survey of land rights](#), in which it interviewed more than 2,000 farmers across 17 provinces. The results of this survey have helped inform senior government leaders in China as they continue to guide the country's historic transformation. Ongoing efforts to strengthen land tenure have the potential to increase China's rural income by \$80 billion.

- In [India](#), an additional 811,942 rural families in the states of [Andhra Pradesh](#), [Karnataka](#), [Odisha](#), and [West Bengal](#), among others, became landowners or gained secure title to the land they were already tilling. Innovative programs like [micro-plot ownership](#) continue to prove that owning a plot of land, sometimes as small as a tennis court, can dramatically help improve the lives of those living in extreme poverty.
- In [Africa](#), Landesa launched new programs in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Liberia and Rwanda. Together with World Resources Institute, Landesa also launched “[Focus on Land in Africa](#),” a web-based interactive education tool which provides practical information linking land rights and development goals.
- The [Landesa Center for Women’s Land Rights](#) worked on programs to strengthen women’s property rights in law and in practice in countries where Landesa works. The Center initiated a fellowship program to train the next generation of gender land rights specialists and began work in two new regions: Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The Center also launched an innovative [new pilot program](#) in India designed to ensure that both mothers and daughters have rights to land. As part of this pilot, Landesa created community groups in six villages where families have received land. These groups are engaging in transformative dialogues about the importance of **girls’ inheritance rights**.

Landesa was also invited to the 2011 [Clinton Global Initiative](#) in New York to share successes and best practices from its work on women’s land rights with key figures in the public and private sectors. In much of the world, while women help shoulder the burden of food production—producing nearly half of the food in the developing world—they often don’t have secure rights to the land they farm. Although they till the fields, they are often barred from inheriting or owning those fields. This puts them at risk for losing that land if they lose their husband, father, or brother because of illness, violence, or migration.

“Landesa’s work continues to show that when women are able to legally own, inherit, or lease their land, they can become investors in their family’s future and can ensure that their children’s needs are met,” said [Renee Giovarelli](#), executive director of the Landesa Center for Women’s Land Rights. “Consider 3.4 million families, and the extraordinary ripple effect spread to villages and beyond when you invest in a woman’s right to own land.”

To learn more about Landesa’s impact on rural communities across the globe, read the [2011 Annual Report](#) or visit [Landesa.org](#).

Background on Landesa

Grounded in the knowledge that having legal rights to land is a foundation for prosperity and opportunity, [Landesa](#) partners with governments and local organizations to ensure that the world’s poorest families have secure rights over the land they till. Founded as the Rural Development Institute in 1967, Landesa’s partnerships have helped more than 109 million poor families gain legal control over their land. When families have secure rights to land, they can invest in their land to sustainably increase their harvests and reap the benefits—improved nutrition, health, education, and dignity—for generations.