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# Annual Report 2015

**Land Portal Foundation**

hello@landportal.info

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## Foreword

It has been almost one and a half year now, since the foundation was established on September 2014. It was a period of shaping the organisation behind the foundation and at the same time bring the website to a new level of service providing to the land community.

This annual report gives an overview of the achievements in the period extending from the establishment of the foundation on 14 September 2014 up to and including 31 December 2015, thus being the first annual report of the foundation.

In this period, remarkable things have been achieved, which are all summarized in this first annual report. The board wants to express its gratitude to all the people that work for this great initiative, especially the members of the Advisory Committee and the Team that does the day by day work for the Land Portal. Special words of thanks go to Laura Meggiolaro, who took responsibility of the coordination of the Land Portal. Her commitment and relentless efforts are of crucial importance to the Land Portal.



**Leon Verstappen**

Chair of the Board of Directors

Land Portal Foundation

## Thanks to our donors

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**The Department for International Development (DFID)**

Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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**The International Land Coalition (ILC)**



INTERNATIONAL  
LAND  
COALITION

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**GLTN**  
GLOBAL LAND TOOL NETWORK

**The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)**

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## Partnerships & Resource Mobilization

The Land Portal has always been a collaborative project, steered by multiple partner organizations. Even though the Land Portal is now an independent foundation, its primary strength remains that the Portal and those who support it are key actors in the community it intends to serve. A fundamental comparative advantage for the Land Portal is the vitality of its founding partners, who have remained a part of the Land Portal in partnership or key advisory roles since the changes in governance structure. The breadth, diversity, capacity and reach of the Land Portal partners and networks brings substantial resources in terms of both gathering and pooling existing information as well as creating and sharing a steady stream of new content. It also positions the Land Portal as a unique intermediary to facilitate exchange and bridge gaps between civil society, governments and other stakeholders. Its position within the network of the land community is central to how the Land Portal promotes itself and its services as well as to the applied methodologies for development new content.

2015 has been a transitional year for the Land Portal, where it moved from being an International Land Coalition-funded project hosted by the International Land Coalition (ILC), to an independent, not-for-profit Foundation in the Netherlands, funded primarily by the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, more specifically their Department for International Development (DFID). Other partnerships have been established in 2015, both with organizations that work on land-related issues, as well as in the area of linked and open data.

### Department for International Development (DFID)

The main source of funding in 2015 came from the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who funded the Land Portal Foundation for two years for the purpose of the Land Book project. In light of the Land Book project, the Land Portal committed itself to work on three particular areas of work, namely to establish:

1. a vibrant and diverse online community of civil society, advocacy, government agencies, researchers and technology specialists, media players, and private companies that contribute content, share information, exchange good practices

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and use open data on land to increase transparency and influence land policy at national, regional and international levels;

2. a decentralized data collection mechanism in place with 10+ focal partner organizations in charge of the following:
  - a) identifying relevant content, research and add content to the data catalogue,
  - b) identifying actionable information, populate the country pages and crowd-source additional content,
  - c) promote re-use of the Land Book content, identify information gaps and needs; and
3. an increased understanding and commitment to engage with Linked Open Data and participate effectively in a globally linked data ecosystem through dialogue and advocacy.

Since DFID was the Land Portal's main source of funding in 2015, most of the activities focused on establishing these three outputs.

### LEGEND Partnership

The project under which DFID is funding the Land Portal is called "Land: Enhancing Governance for Economic Development" (LEGEND). As a part of the LEGEND partnership, the Land Portal team has worked extensively with partners to use the Land Portal constructively as a joint platform for promoting the LEGEND Bulletin and the LEGEND Challenge Fund Grants. Several web pages have been established for both purposes.

### International Land Coalition (ILC)

Since the establishment of the Land Portal as an independent foundation and moving away from the facilitation of the ILC, the ILC has remained a partner organization which funded the Land Portal 2015 and has been involved in its activities.

### Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)

The Land Portal has established a partnership with the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), on the GLTN Partnership for "Land Tool Research and Learning" which will be complementary to the work the Land Portal is doing for the DFID Land Book-project. A grant agreement was finalized in December 2015 and a pilot project will be implemented in early 2016. This pilot project is comprised of two elements, the first being the ingestion of GLTN-generated resources in the Land Library in Linked Open Data formats, and the second to host an online discussion on the Land Debate on the

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Gender Evaluation Criteria. The project is regarded by GLTN as a test to assess whether the Land Portal could be a platform to be used by the Network and its partners on a long-term basis.

### Global Open Data for Impact and Capacity Development in Agriculture & Nutrition

In 2015, the Land Portal Foundation participated in a joint venture with the partners of the Global Open Data for Impact and Capacity Development in Agriculture and Nutrition (GODIVAN), which proved to be successful on November 26<sup>th</sup>. The Land Portal Foundation joins the esteemed company of the University of Wageningen, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) as partners.

### Other collaborations

The Land Portal Foundation has established many other informal partnerships in the course of 2015. These collaborations range from creating organizational profiles on the Land Portal website, engaging its users to post content; to exchange data and resources with different websites with similar objectives (such as OKhub or Openlandcontracts.org) and other work in areas of linked open data or land-related issues.

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## Service Development

The ultimate goal of the Land Portal is to become the platform where a vibrant and diverse online community of civil society, advocacy, government agencies, researchers and technology specialists, media players, and private companies can contribute content, share information, exchange good practices and use open data on land to increase transparency and influence land policy and national, regional and international levels.

The Land Portal underwent an extensive assessment in 2012, from which was concluded the Portal did not yet fill this role. The review concluded that, despite successfully bringing information together from many sources, the website was struggling to provide clear structure and navigation for users. In trying to do too much, the Portal was in danger of being of little practical value. In its response to these findings, the Portal saw a major technical redevelopment and currently provides three core services: the Land Book, providing comprehensive country and thematic pages building on engagement with local information providers and commitment to linked open data standards; the Land Library, as an extremely well structured and searchable online repository of documents about land; and the Land Debate, as a forum for discussion, the sharing of experience and the co-creation of new thinking and practice. This new Land Portal website was launched in 2014.

Since the launch of the new website, some technical improvements were necessary and much of the content of the old 'legacy'-website needed to be transferred to the new website, along with new content. These changes required significant human resources and careful consideration to put in place. Since the Land Portal team was only fully operational in July 2015, the work on these developments started later than originally planned. However, in the latter half of 2015, clear work plans were developed to address these issues. The Portal has already delivered many technical improvements on the user experience side of the website as well as the back end. In 2016, the Portal will continue to improve the technical aspects of the website and to increase the resources it offers.

### Communications Strategy

Keeping the Land Portal website updated with the latest news and events related to land governance is one of the highest priorities of the Land Portal's Communications and



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Resource Mobilization Specialist. Extensive land-related news and information is now consistently posted on the Land Portal from diverse sources, including from grassroots organizations in the South and leading international organizations working on land-related issues. Blogs from leading voices are regularly posted on the website as well. The former New Digest, which was distributed every three weeks and provided the latest news in the land governance community, has been re-instated in an improved format. This news digest, along with the monthly newsletter, is sent to a mailing list of over 16,000 subscribers. The formerly active community on the 'legacy' Land Portal need to be re-engaged and familiarized with the new Land Portal website. To encourage this, many technical development sprints have been implemented to improve the user experience of the new website. Part of the re-engagement strategy, is to reinforce the online debates and discussions hosted by the Land Portal. While the Land Debate tool has not been used in 2015 to facilitate such discussions, the Land Portal has been planning for several online discussions in the course of 2016, taking place at both local and international level. The first online debate on the Land Portal's Land Debate is scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup> 2016, in collaboration with the Global Land Tool Network and other relevant stakeholders. Efforts to promote these forms of content and activities on social media, especially Twitter, form part of the communications strategy to enhance awareness of the activities and resources available on the Land Portal.

### Country pages and portfolios

One of the main aspects of the Land Portal's Land Book-project funded by DFID, is the development of country and topic pages. The Land Portal offers country pages for most the member states of the United Nations. These pages are generated automatically around a number of large data sets collected for almost all countries by large international organizations. One of the main priorities of the Land Portal Foundation is to develop these pages to incorporate more land data and more links to other land-related resources for sixty countries in which land governance is a live development issue. Beyond this, in light of the DFID-funded Land Book-project, it is intended to develop more in depth portfolios on twenty countries, with links to locally collected data and local organizations working on land issues. These country portfolios will be developed in partnership with local organizations as a part of the Land Portal's Localization Strategy.

In 2015, a survey was sent to the Land Portal mailing list and identified stakeholders to receive input on how the design of the country page should look like, but mostly on the content the users would expect to see there. Based on these results, the Land Portal team has been developing a wireframe for the Land Book country and topic pages that incorporate an introductory narrative, indicators and indexes, with certain fixed

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indicators and certain indicators that are modifiable by the user, as well as default infographics and the possibility to change to other indicators and compare with any country. Qualitative information, including related news, events, blogs, local organizations, resources from the Land Library, as well as social media will also appear on these country pages. Once any technical and design issues are resolved, this model will be expanded to an increasing number of countries according to the terms of the agreement with DFID.

While working on these new and improved country pages, the Land Portal team has worked intensively to increase the number of resources to be integrated in the country portfolios. More than 12,000 records from FAOLEX and more than 1,000 from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) were integrated into the Land Library; this information will be pulled into the relevant country pages. The Team has worked on country narratives to include in the pilot country portfolios and efforts have been made to improve the profiles of both users and organizations by adopting recognized international standards; specific information will be pulled into country pages, thus increasing the understanding of the country context. Efforts have also been made to incorporate a greater variety of numerical and bibliographic information sources that could complement the existing information in country pages. Specific importers need to be developed for each data source, and as a result the Land Portal team is carefully planning technical work to allow for an increase in both statistical and bibliographic information sources.

### Topic portfolios

The original Land Portal website offered both country pages and topic pages. These responded to the partners' and users' needs and priorities by organizing information around both geographical and thematic areas. Currently, the Land Portal only offers country pages. The old country and topic pages will not simply be re-created, but developed into more comprehensive country and topic "portfolios", including a number of pages on each country and topic. Thereby, the Land Portal will respond to the fact that there is a lot of information and statistics available per topic or country, and by creating a portfolio rather than a single page, the user accessibility and experience will be improved, which is one of the goals of the new Land Portal. Because the Land Portal intends to respond to existing demands in the land governance community, several thematic areas were identified through a participatory process which drew on inputs from partner organizations. Thus the initial topics for which the new Portal will be creating portfolios on are likely to be the following: Urban Tenure and Urban Planning; Rangelands; Climate Change and Environment; Land Administration; Land and Food Security; Land Use, Agriculture and Investment; Gender and Land; Indigenous Peoples

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and land; and Collective Tenure rights. The Portal, however, remains open to altering or further developing this list in response to feedback from Land Portal partners, LEGEND partners or other users and to collaborate with them in developing new content.

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## Localization Strategy

The main innovation DFID is sponsoring the Land Portal for under the Land Book-project, is to enable a step change in the producing and use of local content. To date, most of the content (data and metadata about other information) on which the Land Portal relies has been gathered from large international institutions such as the World Bank, FAO and OECD. An explicit and innovative feature of the Land Portal's work has been to make such content available in the form of linked open data (LOD). The main aim of the support from DFID that has been sought and offered is to enable the Land Portal to stimulate improved data collection and use at country level through interaction with local partners. Achieving this is intended to raise the capacity of partners to apply information to local land governance debates whilst, at the same time, extending the range of information available on the Land Portal's own website.

This represents a new challenge to the Land Portal in terms of collaboration with other organizations. It is also a challenge which needs to be addressed in a highly dynamic environment. So far, there have been very few initiatives based on LOD in developing countries and evidence as to their experiences has only very recently become available. The first priority of the Land Portal in 2015 has been to develop its localization plans in light of its agreement with DFID and of the early evidence from other relevant programs. The resulting Localization Strategy can be found on the Land Portal website. Its key features are that the Land Portal is not intending to build whole new systems from scratch, but to work with existing organizations and networks to, in the case of land oriented bodies, to develop their capacities to gather and use data or, in the case of information bodies, increase their services related to land issues. Throughout this year, the Land Portal has pro-actively sought out possible partners in the global South to implement the Land Portal's localization strategy.

### Open Development Mekong

The first official partnership under the Land Portal's Localization Strategy was established in November 2015, with the East West Management Institute (EWMI). In

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light of EWMI's Open Development Initiative, their work currently focuses on Open Development Mekong, a scalable, replicable model similar to Open Development Cambodia, but for the whole Mekong region (including Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand). This is managed by a small regional team, linked with country level websites. The Open Development Initiative program is building and supporting the architecture, facilitating the start-up of the network, developing tool kits and training country partners and developing regional level partnerships for data sharing. The approach is very similar to what the Land Portal is doing at global level; therefore it fits very well with the Land Portal's Localization strategy. Open Development Mekong has become the first pilot for establishing local 'hubs', focused on land issues. A Memorandum of Understanding to outline this collaboration has been established as well as a Grant Agreement for several collaborative activities, such as the contribution by Open Development Mekong to the Land Portal's Land Book Pages and technical support by the Land Portal to implement the Linked Open Data strategy for Open Development Mekong.

### Open call for hub partners

In November 2015, the Land Portal Foundation launched a global call for applications to become a Land Portal (national or regional) hub partner. The call was widely distributed to partners in the global South in English, Spanish and French. Many promising proposals were received and will be reviewed in January 2016. The result of this process should enable to establish agreements with multiple entities in furtherance of the Localization strategy.

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## Linked Open Data Standards

One of the values of the Land Portal Foundation is 'open development', meaning that the Land Portal is based on open source, open data and open content. The Land Portal has implemented this value by piloting and innovative information management services by adopting international recognized standards to structure and expose its content and making use of Linked Data technologies. By making use of Linked Data technologies and the semantic web, the content on the Land Portal will become more discoverable and easy to be shared by users and the land community as a whole. Linked Data stands for semantically well structured, interconnected, syntactically interoperable datasets that are distributed among several repositories either inside or outside organizations. Content becomes more discoverable, because linked data technology uses standard controlled vocabularies, like AGROVOC, to index metadata records. In this way, the Land Portal and its partners contribute to create an ecosystem of information providers where sharing and re-use of land governance content becomes the norm.

### Standardized Land Thesaurus

In light of the Land Portal's work with regards to adapting Linked Data technologies, the Portal has been working with the University of Rome and AGROVOC to establish an independent standardized vocabulary on land governance and land use, currently available in English, French and Spanish. The Land Portal is taking an inclusive approach to establish this thesaurus, taking the FAO Land Tenure Thesaurus as a basis. For years, the Land Portal has involved land governance champions in the process of establishing one vocabulary for the land governance community, thereby strengthening the possibilities of content and resources being discovered. The Land Portal is following initiatives such as the Global Land Indicator Initiative, to ensure the Land Thesaurus is always up to date with the latest developments. Part of the Land Portal's collaboration with its hub partners (such as Open Development Mekong) is to enrich the vocabulary by translating it in many other languages and ensuring the vocabulary is not Northern-oriented but also reflects terminologies used on the ground to describe issues related to land governance issues.

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## Partnerships

To help achieving the goal to create an ecosystem of information providers where sharing and re-use of land governance content becomes the norm, the Portal advocates for partner organizations to make use of Linked Data Technologies. The Land Portal encourages partner organizations to publish structured data in machine readable standardized formats under open licenses that allow re-use and thereby increasing the value and usefulness of the data. Metadata from libraries of the organizations are harvested, enriched, linked to the standardized vocabulary and made available as Linked Open Data through the Land Portal Land Library or its other services. This approach not only makes the content more discoverable and available through different platforms, but also drives more traffic to partner organizations' websites where the original documents are stored.

In 2015, the Land Portal has been testing these technologies with content integrated from organizations such as the World Bank, FAO, USAID, IFPRI, IDS, ILC and other organizations. A partnership with the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) was established, in which the GLTN intends to pilot whether making use of these technologies and using the Land Portal as a platform to share their information, is a sustainable solution for information-sharing within its Network. In this partnership, the Land Portal assists GLTN by enriching the metadata records of their content, integrating the Land Thesaurus in the metadata, under guidance of a land governance terminology expert. This technical support to create, enrich and expose metadata is a service the Land Portal not only offers to global organizations, but also advocates in its partnerships with local hub partners in the global South.

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## Governance & Administration

2015 has been a transitional year for the Land Portal Foundation. The Land Portal project was hosted and facilitated by the ILC as an informal project, overseen by a Steering Committee comprising the ILC, the International Fund on Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), L'association pour ameliorer la gouvernance de la terre e des ressources naturelle (AGTER), el Instituto de Estudios del Hambre (IEH), Action Aid (AA) and the International Alliance on Land Tenure (IALTA) based at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. In 2015, the Land Portal moved from the ILC to an independent not-for-profit foundation, registered in the Netherlands. This process started in late 2014, but the transition of responsibilities has been gradual, providing continuity in the Land Portal's work as the funding and contractual relationship on which the Land Portal is based changed.

### Board of Directors

The Land Portal Foundation started with two board members, Leon Verstappen (the Netherlands) and Francisco Sarmiento (Portugal). Three further members, Terry Parnell (Cambodia), Joan Carling (Thailand) and Magdalena Kropiwnicka (Uganda) were selected through an open call followed by a competitive recruitment process according to the criteria for a diverse board in the Foundation's Articles of Association. The Articles of Association require a Board of Directors that is gender balanced, represents different stakeholders in the land governance community and has a regional representation. Board members do not receive remuneration for their work. They do have a right to reimbursement of the expenses incurred by them in the performance of their duties and approved by the Board. A required sixth board member will be recruited in 2016.

### Land Portal Team

To achieve the goals of the Land Portal Business Plan and Strategy, the newly established Land Portal Foundation needed to appoint a team of people with a range of expert knowledge, committed to their delivery. The Land Portal Team is dispersed over



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several countries in the world, which enables the Portal to access expertise wherever it is available while encouraging others to engage with the Portal in relation to their position in other organizations, which codifies the role of the Land Portal as a unifying force among the network of organization working on land issues. The contracts for each of the Team members is arranged according to their location and circumstances. Some Land Portal partners will be providing employment and office space for the Team members, according to specific agreements with the Land Portal Foundation. This manner of recruiting the Team members has created some delays in implementing the planned activities for 2015. In October 2015, the following team was in place: Ms. Laura Meggiolaro (Coordinator) based in Rome, Italy; Mr. Neil Sorensen (Communications and Resource Mobilization Specialist), based in Paris, France; Mr. Jules Clement (Technology Officer), based in Berlin, Germany; Mr. Marcello de Maria (Junior Researcher and Data Analyst), based in Reading, United Kingdom; and Ms. Lisette Meij (Administrative Officer), based in Groningen, the Netherlands. Two other researchers have been recruited to join the Land Portal Team in 2016, co-funded by Land Portal partners Actuár (Portugal) and the World Resources Institute (United States of America) / University of Groningen (the Netherlands).

### Monitoring and Evaluation

The need for continuous evaluative practice within the Land Portal was an explicit component of the Land Portal's business plan and of its agreement with the current main donor, DFID. These components have been further developed and laid down in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which is available on the Land Portal website. A Monitoring and Evaluation expert was recruited in 2015, who has been monitoring the activities performed by the Team and Board in light of the Land Book-project, funded by DFID.

### Advisory Committee

As described in the Business Plan, the Portal aims to maintain the involvement of the former network of stakeholders and benefit from their experience. The Articles of Association of the Foundation therefore provide for an Advisory Committee, consisting of a Policy Group and a Technical Group. The Policy group will provide strategy and policy guidance to the Foundation; at the first Annual Land Portal Meeting in October 2015, the Policy Group members have been invited and provided for useful input on past and future activities. The Technical Group consists of individuals with experience across the full range of the Land Portal's activities, from rural development, NGO management, ICT4D and cutting edge semantic web implementation. These members have been consulted during 2015 in the specific areas of their expertise.



**Land Portal Foundation**

Postbus 716

9700 AS Groningen

RSIN number: 854 330 045

Chamber of Commerce number: 614 089 05

[www.landportal.info](http://www.landportal.info)

hello@landportal.info