Diplomats play a traditional role in helping cultures and nations talk to each other. But the Land Portal Foundation believes that when it comes to strengthening land rights, local communities should take charge and engage directly with each other. With the help of the Land Portal’s website and associated services this is made possible because interested groups can access open data documents which help build alliances and exchange ideas supporting principles governing land rights.

At the root of much of Land Portal’s work is the challenge to reduce duplication and redundancy within open data. If this can be achieved then open data can help produce practical results and offers a valuable service to donors planning ways to reduce rural poverty and increase food security.

Land Portal’s mission is to help assert strong legal rights to land.

The Land Portal website seeks to help organisations that represent those with the most insecure land rights. In improving their entitlement to live and farm without fear of forcible or unlawful evictions, lifestyles can be made better and with security of tenure, food security can also improve for some of the world’s most vulnerable communities. The portal collects and publishes relevant data, making sure it is presented in machine readable, standardised formats under open licenses. This service allows anyone to reuse critical data supporting the right of tenured landholders or small landowners.

Land Portal’s mission is to help assert strong legal rights to land. This is crucial for indigenous peoples and local communities, explains Nicholas Tagliarino, a Land Portal contributor, representing the work of the American-based World Resource Institute.

“When communities have weak or insecure land rights, such areas are particularly vulnerable to expropriation, land grabbing and infringements by outsiders,” says Tagliarino.

And this impacts livelihoods and security. Threats to land end up being threats to life but open data can help cut those risks.

With its base at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands, staff, experts and partners work from hubs across the globe.

Case study: the Mekong region

One Land Portal project, announced in 2016, supports a partnership in the Mekong region and aims to give local communities a voice in the strategic development of the region. The portal collects and shares content on land governance and use in Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

One pressing task, given the region’s size, its disparate languages and range of national priorities, is the need to communicate effectively about complex land issues across borders and between individuals with different skill sets. This requires establishing better ways to record and share information across the network. Land Portal’s access and compilation of open source data puts it in an ideal situation to assist with land rights for local communities.

The Mekong project is complex, not only because of the breadth of countries involved and range of languages catered for, but it brings together a wide range of interests. Land Portal is assisting a growing network wanting access to open data, including governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, development partners and the media.
In offering open source, open data and open content, the Portal promotes greater sharing, collaboration and innovation with all those interested in land governance.

Land Portal is focused on an innovation that expands the value of open data. Laura Meggiolaro, heads up Land Portal’s operations and says, “We are working towards establishing an information ecosystem based on linked open data.”

While open data provides a world of valuable information, it is only useful when there is a shared vocabulary enabling both people and their computers to understand content from a wide variety of sources. Linked open data helps provide that global and interoperable vocabulary. In the case of land rights, vocabulary must be understood by those from technical organisations, campaigning groups and research institutions. Specialists may find sharing information easy due to common standards and similar training, but land issues are spread across a whole range of sectors and across regions of the world that have little commonalities.

It is a subject debated in many languages, by rural activists and between specialists covering very different disciplines. Land Portal’s linked open data approach helps bridge this diversity.

The portal has funding from the UK’s Department for International Development for one of its services, the Land Book Project. This involves collaboration with regional hubs that help share the benefits of open data and support knowledge on accessing land rights data.

Meggiolaro says, “The Team has been working on this and is finalizing a land governance vocabulary inside Agrovoc (a system) that enables the Land Portal to autonomously manage all concepts related to land governance.”

Land Portal is entering into agreements with local partners in West Africa and South America to complement the existing work in Asia.

Although Land Portal addresses a wide range of issues linked to land rights Meggiolaro says some issues, such as gender land rights, are pressing and she is concerned
that across the world women make up the majority of agricultural workers, yet they are inadequately represented as tenured landholders or land owners.

Issues associated with land-based inequality are often inaccessible due to language differences or because information is restricted to an incompatible data base. Yet given the importance of understanding the influence customary practices may play in hindering women’s land rights, more needs to be done to share these experiences across open data sources.

Lack of machine readable land based data is a fundamental difficulty in opening up greater debate on gender rights.

Meggiolaro explains, there might be need to increase the level of data that records cultural practices. It is easy to share individual country’s land legislation, but without sharing knowledge about cultural practices linked to gender land rights, the real issues affecting women are fundamentally incomplete.

So, in many cases the lack of machine readable land based data is a fundamental difficulty in opening up greater debate on gender rights. To address this problem, and other crucial land right subjects, the Land Portal is working out how to present data sets covering, historic records, legal documents, reports, academic articles, and small or dated surveys.

For the future, Land Portal is establishing a cooperation with GODAN on shared open data initiatives and responding to the needs of the land governance community.

“We will do everything we can to make the Land Portal become an effective system that benefits everyone,” says Laura Meggiolaro.

Sources:
http://landportal.info/