New York, October 7, 2015—The Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment and the World Bank today introduced the first searchable online repository of publicly available investment contracts for large-scale land, agriculture, and forestry projects from around the world.

The new land contracts database, OpenLandContracts.org, allows users to download contracts, as well as view summaries of key social, human rights, environmental, fiscal, and operational provisions. It also provides guides for understanding land contracts, and will eventually host other tools and resources for assessing and comparing contracts.

Developed with funding from the UK Department for International Development, OpenLandContracts.org was designed to assist host governments, communities, companies, and other stakeholders in accessing, searching, understanding, and comparing the documents that govern large-scale land deals. “Land deals can have significant implications for land users, local communities, and host governments,” said Lisa Sachs, the director of the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment. “OpenLandContracts.org can help host governments negotiate better agreements and monitor contract implementation, and it supports communities by facilitating access to information on investment projects that affect them,” Sachs said.

OpenLandContracts.org will be launched October 7 at Columbia Law School with a demonstration of the site, followed by a panel discussion with government officials and civil society representatives, drawing on their experience with land contracts and land investments.

OpenLandContracts.org contributes to the growing open data movement. The repository provides open and re-usable data, and each contract has been given a unique Open Contracting identifier. This will increase the utility beyond the simple fact of disclosure; for example, the open approach and unique identifiers will help facilitate the combination of contract information with other datasets for more informed analysis and understanding of these deals. Michael Jarvis, Global Lead for Extractives Governance issues at the World Bank, notes that as “transparency over use of public resources becomes increasingly the
norm, we have a shared responsibility to ensure information is utilized and to further empower citizens to push for accountability and tangible benefits.”

Land contract disclosure and greater transparency of contractual terms have been encouraged by a number of prominent guidelines and principles, including guidelines developed by government entities in the United States and France, as well as forthcoming Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains that will be issued jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Ensuring public access to information has also been adopted by UN member countries as a target under the Sustainable Development Goals. “While land contract transparency is increasingly viewed as a best practice, so far few governments or investors have committed to making their contracts accessible,” said Kaitlin Cordes, who leads the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment’s work on land and agriculture. “Our hope is that OpenLandContracts.org will assist governments, investors, and other companies in the supply chain in making these best practices on contract transparency a reality.”

For more information about OpenLandContracts.org, please visit www.OpenLandContracts.org, email info@openlandcontracts.org, or contact:

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For more information about the Oct. 7 launch event, please visit http://ccsi.columbia.edu/2015/10/07/openlandcontracts-org-launch/. For those unable to attend in person, the launch will be streamed online, and will be covered on Twitter using the hashtag #landcontracts.

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