

# RCPLA Network

In this section, we update readers on activities of the **Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action Network (RCPLA) Network** ([www.rcpla.org](http://www.rcpla.org)) and its members. RCPLA is a diverse, international network of national-level organisations, which brings together development practitioners from around the globe. It was formally established in 1997 to promote the use of participatory approaches to development. The network is dedicated to capturing and disseminating development perspectives from the South. For more information please contact the RCPLA Network Steering Group:

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## News from the RCPLA Network Coordinator

Deepening Participation for Social Change was selected as the RCPLA theme for 2008–2009. The most recent RCPLA workshop was held in Cairo from 4th–6th March 2008. It reaffirmed the network's focus on helping organisations adopt participatory approaches, and improving and deepening understanding and implementation of participation. This workshop was also an opportunity for network members to gather together from around the globe. We gave particular attention to building group cohesion and 'bridging the gap' between old and new members, allowing old and new to interconnect, share information and lessons learnt, and benefit from each others' experiences and

capabilities. The momentum created on the first day helped members to discuss the future of the network and work closely to develop a focused network plan for the coming years.

For more details about the Cairo workshop, and to learn more about RCPLA news and activities, please visit the newly redesigned website at [www.rcpla.org](http://www.rcpla.org). To join the RCPLA network please contact Ms Passinte Isaak, email: [pisaak@nefdev.org](mailto:pisaak@nefdev.org)

## News from the Asian Regional Coordinator

Praxis – the Institute for Participatory Practices – is currently organising TheWorkshop'08, an annual commune on participatory development. Based in New Delhi, with branches in Chennai, Patna and London, Praxis works to promote

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participatory practices in all spheres of human development. Praxis carries out consultancies, and also engages in several self-funded initiatives to further the cause of participatory development. TheWorkshop is one such initiative.

Now in its twelfth year, this event provides development workers, policy makers and proactive individuals with a forum for reflection as well as learning. Participants can learn about the latest tools, techniques and trends in participatory development from experienced workers in the field.

Over the years, this event has drawn an enthusiastic response from the sector. More than 1100 participants from 33 different countries and organisations have attended to date. Among these are participants from the Asian

**Dr Robert Chambers  
facilitating a session  
at TheWorkshop'07.**



Photo: Praxis

Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, UNDP, UNOPS, ActionAid, Care, CARITAS, NIPRANET, British Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, JICA, Oxfam and Brooke Hospital, as well as other bilateral and multilateral organisations, national and international NGOs and various government departments.

This year, TheWorkshop'08 will be held from 19th–28th August 2008, in Thrissur (Kerala), India. Registration has now closed for 2008, but please look out for this event next year! For more information, visit [www.theworkshop.in](http://www.theworkshop.in)

### **News from the eastern Africa Regional Coordinator**

#### **How can practitioners stand up and be counted in the development of the National Social Protection Strategies? Lessons from Kenya**

Following up on its recent hunger survey, during 2007–2008 Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya (PAMFORK) has collaborated with Bread for the World (BftW) to do

a survey on basic social security as part of social protection in Kenya. The survey covered the work of BftW partners and other independent actors. It was part of a wider international study in Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia.

The findings helped to shed more light on social security systems and provided a solid contribution in terms of policy recommendations based on the knowledge gathered from the study. The study findings are expected to direct attention to how communities can sustain social security systems and complement the work of BftW partners by analysing what inhibits people's access to social security and how to design appropriate corrective measures. The findings will be useful to all the BftW partners and national agencies responsible for social protection systems or implementing basic security systems. This will allow them to better understand social protection systems that can work for the vulnerable and extremely poor sections of society.

Following the study, PAMFORK is hoping to play a lead role in developing the Kenya National Social Protection Strategy for the country. The exercise is spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services with support from UNICEF and UNDP.

Poverty and vulnerability are the greatest challenges facing Kenya with 46% of the population living below the national poverty line while 19% live in hardcore poverty unable to meet their basic food requirements. Many are vulnerable to poverty because of a wide range of factors, including natural disasters such as floods and drought, environmental degradation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a lack of income following retirement and a breakdown of traditional safety-net mechanisms.

The current worldwide economic recession has resulted in rising prices of basic commodities, especially food – which has further driven more people into extreme poverty and vulnerability. Extreme poverty and vulnerability in Kenya has been exacerbated by the post-election violence in which more than 350,000 people have been displaced from their homes and about 1200 killed. The majority of those internally displaced people depend on relief and emergency support from the government and others. But this is not sustainable. They require social protection in the short-term to protect their basic livelihoods. Greater social protection strategies are needed.

Social protection activities in Kenya are multi-sectoral and involve several government ministries and departments, and other stakeholders such as development partners, NGOs, CSOs and organisations involved in

providing social protection at different levels. But a lack of coordination is a major impediment to effective delivery. A social protection strategy is required to coordinate the roles and contributions of different stakeholders. A social protection policy will also raise awareness amongst important government decision makers and development partners.

Ghana and Pakistan already have national social protection strategies, and several African countries are in the process of developing them, including Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. This is emerging as best practice in addressing poverty and vulnerability in developing countries. Practitioners in other countries need to play a proactive role to ensure informed and meaningful community participation in creating and implementing social protection strategies.

We believe that 'a stitch in time saves nine'. PAMFORK is calling on all practitioners wherever they are to stand up and be counted – for the time is now!

### News from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

The Participation, Power and Social Change Group at IDS is pleased to announce the launch of the *Champions of Participation Resource Pack*. The Champions of Participation events took place in June 2007 and January 2008 in the UK. Local government officers, elected officials and citizen representatives from 14 different countries came together to share their experiences of citizen participation in local governance. A new resource pack drawn from this international learning experience is now available. The pack includes a

report, policy brief and a series of case studies. In particular it addresses experiences, challenges and lessons from different participation practitioners in the UK and internationally. To receive a pack email [ppsc@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ppsc@ids.ac.uk)

We are still welcoming applications for the MA in Participation, Power and Social Change. The course will start in October this year and is designed for working practitioners who wish to study and practice ways of increasing the participation, influence and voice of people in development processes. If you would like further information please contact [teaching@ids.ac.uk](mailto:teaching@ids.ac.uk)

Finally, our Participation Resource Centre holds a collection of practical and analytical materials relating to participatory approaches to development, citizenship, rights, governance and the environment. Details of the collection are available through our website [www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/prc](http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/prc) and we run a limited information and document delivery service, which is free to those in the South – please email: [ppsc@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ppsc@ids.ac.uk).

### News from IIED

#### *Affirming Life and Diversity*: how Indian farmers became filmmakers

Non-literate Indian farmers have turned into filmmakers, to take part in a research project. The project's innovative ethical approach is described in a new book and series of films, which were launched at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity conference in Bonn in May 2008.

IIED, Deccan Development Society and a team of village-based women's groups (*sanghams*) teamed up to study ways to sustain local food

systems, the biodiversity they depend on and the livelihoods they support. The project identified ways of sustaining local crop and livestock diversity to increase people's livelihoods options and their ability to adapt to climate change. The project sparked a revival of local food culture that is helping to preserve agricultural biodiversity and traditional farming practices in several hundred villages in Medak district, Andhra Pradesh.

The women involved in the project decided that they wanted to use video to document the research and share its findings. The Deccan Development Society had previously trained villagers to use video and had proven that non-literacy was no barrier. The project shows that local food systems, crop and livestock diversity, and livelihoods can be sustained in the face of modern pressures. As such, it offers both policy and practical guidance for the programme of work on agricultural biodiversity that the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity approved in 1996.

For more information, and to order a copy of the book *Affirming Life and Diversity* and 12 films on 4 DVDs, see our **In Touch** section.

#### What next for IIED? Video messages to IIED from our partners in Peru

IIED has been undergoing a critical process to develop its new institutional strategy. IIED and the Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity and Livelihoods (SABL) programme believes that it is very important to find ways of including the analysis and views of local partners with whom we work. We recognise that our choices should fully take into account their perspectives, their contribution to our success, and the

impact of whatever we decide on their work.

During the month of April 2008, IIED collaborated with ANDES (Association for Nature and Sustainable Development) an indigenous NGO based in Cusco, Peru. We asked indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes to help frame IIED's next Institutional Strategy on policy research and advocacy work.

We invited some of our partners to give their views on what IIED should be doing next as part of its new institutional strategy. Following extensive discussions, SABL and its partners decided to use participatory video methods to elicit views, analysis and recommendations from

a range of non-literate and literate people with whom we work in Peru, India and Iran.

The goal of this consultation is to listen to communities' views and priorities – and understand how IIED can better work together with its partners and the communities they represent, to achieve common objectives. These consultations are crucial in integrating perspectives from our partners on emerging priorities and bodies of work:

- how they see us and to get their perceptions of what added value IIED brings to the work on sustainable environment and development; and
- how they think an organisation like IIED can make a difference.

We now have a series of video messages sent by indigenous communities and other partners based in Peru. An outline of the methodology used for this participatory video process is also on the website as well as a description of the questions used. More videos will be added soon, including the ex-Minister of the Environment and indigenous parliamentarians. Other videos will show national and international perspectives/analysis to complement the local community perspectives which you can now access on this website.

You can watch the videos online at [www.iiedwhatnext.org](http://www.iiedwhatnext.org)