

# 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

RCPLA activities for year 2007-2008 are designed to disseminate global participatory initiatives providing members with opportunities to learn about individual and institutional work implemented internationally, as well as sharing the knowledge and experience gained. The network coordinator is currently working on identifying the theme focus for the coming two years and building the relevant activities around it. The choice of the theme and activities will be based on RCPLA members' needs and interests and at the same time reflecting the network's main objectives:

- help maintain the integrity of participatory learning and action principles;
- encourage the allocation of

resources to make information management a priority in project planning;

- focus on the generation and distribution of appropriate research and development approaches regarding policy change and institutional capacity building;
- encourage the creation and production of grassroots documentation;
- encourage the creation of language and non-text accessible documentation and communication to record the experience of local people;
- create a culture of sharing information;
- encourage a non-exploitative ethic on research and documentation.

### New members

Over the last few months, many

organisations have shown interest in joining RCPLA. We have the pleasure to welcome on board Stairway Management, Nepal; CARAVAN, Pakistan; Swat Participatory Council, Pakistan; and Soba Sri Environmental Forum (SOSED), Sri Lanka.

**Stairway Management** was established in 1994 with the mission of catalysing a shift in the way organisations are developed; designing and implementing more effective and innovative coaching, and consulting programmes for development practitioners in private and public organisations; enhancing the skills of consultants, coaches, mentors, and facilitators; and finally promoting participatory learning and action in development sectors. Currently this institution is one of most professional leadership

development institutes in Nepal and is considered the centre for understanding and expanding the leadership capabilities of individual and organisations from across the public, private, and civil sectors through a participatory approach.

**CARAVAN** is a sub-national NGO, with headquarters in Swat District of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Pakistan. It was established by social workers and development professionals from NWFP in 1998.

Its mission is to contribute to poverty reduction by supporting local communities. It helps them to harness their potential and capabilities. This is done by helping them organise themselves into village and supra village level self-managed, self-reliant and sustainable institutions. They should be capable of taking the development agenda into their own hands through active participation at the local level. To do this, the NGO approach is based on proved and tested models of participatory philosophy of development, through effective partnership between all the development actors in an organised manner. To find out more about CARVAN please visit [www.caravan-swat.org](http://www.caravan-swat.org).

**Swat Participatory Council** is a regional network of 32 community based and development organisations. SPC was established in 2001. Its mission is to enhance the capacity of local communities, especially marginalised groups through promoting education, dialogues and information dissemination. It contributes to participatory development processes at different levels through advocacy and network development while utilising potentials of the devolved system to realise positive change.

Also, SPC establishes coordination mechanisms with government line agencies to institutionalise citizen's participation for ensuring good governance practices in transitional tribal environment.

**Soba Sri Environmental Forum** is an alliance of organisations which have come together to conserve the region's environment through designing awareness and advocacy campaigns, conducting research and developing networking among different stakeholders. SOSEF was established in 2001 with the aim of empowering disadvantaged communities, especially women, who live in environmentally sensitive areas, to participate in the protection of the environment through making use of traditional knowledge and the inherited culture. To learn more about Soba Sri Environmental Forum, please visit [www.geocities.com/sosefsl/](http://www.geocities.com/sosefsl/)

### News from the Asian Regional Coordinator



#### Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices

We believe that money alone will not eradicate poverty. Inclusion of the poor in the development process will. As an Institute for Participatory Practices, we at Praxis, take as well as create opportunities to spread the concept of **Participatory Development**.

The Praxis International Thematic PRA Training Workshop, an annual event, is one such proactive effort. It is bookmarked by all those who are interested in the concept of participatory development. In

September this year, the 10th workshop was held at the National Institute of Small Industry Extension and Training (NISIE), Yusufguda, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. This year the event had about a 100 participants from over 13 countries. The workshop was very well received; the participants took back with them clear ideas on how to include the voice of the excluded in the mainstream. As part of the opening session, an International Symposium on Three decades of PRA took place at the same venue. For more information on the workshop, visit the Praxis website at [www.praxisindia.org](http://www.praxisindia.org)

Another area that we at Praxis are keen to explore is the promotion of **Immersion**s. Inadequate knowledge of communities often results in policies that are neither sympathetic nor relevant. Staying with intended beneficiaries sensitises the development worker to the ground realities and puts them within earshot of what the poor actually have to say. We are initially looking at creating a platform that will enable all those who have undergone **Immersion**s to interact and share their experiences.

By helping this positive trend gain momentum, we hope to bring those at the helm of affairs closer to the ground and therefore to the idea of participatory development.

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

Participation at IDS  
The Participation, Power and Social Change Group at IDS has been furthering its work on a number of fronts. In the spring of this year an international workshop took place on **Learning for Social Change**, as part of our Learning and Teaching for

Transformation (LTT) initiative. Involving a diverse group of activists, researchers and organisational leaders from around the world, it looked at how those of us engaged in social change processes can develop our capacities in ways that enable us to be more reflective, innovative and adaptive. We have now produced a report from this workshop entitled **Learning for Social Change: concepts, methods and practice** (download at [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/home/new.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/home/new.html))

Continuing our work on deepening our understanding of the complex web of inter-relationships within the aid world we published **Relationships for Aid**, edited by Rosalind Eyben, earlier in the year. Looking at how the top-down international aid system is failing to respond to the needs of the very people it purports to help, the authors call on all aid agencies to reorient their priorities and learn how to build lasting relationships that transfer power to the powerless. See the **In Touch** section for a review of this publication.

Learning about, and encouraging the use of, popular communications continues to be an important part of our teams work. In September, The Development Research Centre (DRC) on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability ran a two week participatory video training with Insight. Taking place in Nigeria, it involved researchers from Jamaica, Bangladesh, Angola, Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria. More information is available from Alison Dunn (email [A.Dunn@ids.ac.uk](mailto:A.Dunn@ids.ac.uk)).

Further recent publications include **Poverty Unperceived: Traps, Biases and Agenda** by Robert Chambers which aims to illuminate

some of the problems of bias in the perception of poverty, which often results in inappropriate decisions being made. It goes on to explore new approaches for experiential direct learning, which are enabling organisations to better understand and be more in touch with the changing realities of people living in poverty. Two additional IDS Working Papers are: **Civil Society Participation in Trade Policy-making in Latin America: Reflections and Lessons** by Diana Tussie and Peter Newell, which explores the question of civil society engagement with trade policy in Latin America; and **Triumph, Deficit or Contestation? Deepening the 'Deepening Democracy' Debate** by John Gaventa. This focuses on emerging debates within the 'deepening democracy' field. A number of other publications are due out soon, including an IDS Bulletin **Exploring Power for Change**, and two books, **Springs of Participation** and **The Power of Labelling: How people are categorized and why it matters**.

For more details of the above publications, email [participation@ids.ac.uk](mailto:participation@ids.ac.uk) or visit our website at [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/)

#### News from IIED

We were sorry to say farewell to **Nazneen Kanji**, fellow member of the *Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity and Livelihoods Programme* of the Natural Resources Group at IIED, who moved to the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in October this year. Fortunately, Nazneen will continue to be a member of the *PLA Strategic Editorial Board*.

Nazneen is heading a programme to assess the impact of AKDN's efforts to improve the 'quality of life',

in the geographical areas where it works, i.e. South and Central Asia and Africa. AKDN consists of seven different organisations addressing rural development, culture, economic promotion, health and education, including the Aga Khan Foundation itself, which is a key member of the network. Nazneen's new role combines methodological development, team building and policy/programme influence with close links to the ground. Her country focus will initially be Mozambique, Mali, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Syria, but she is still based in London. We wish her every success.

#### The unspoken dilemmas of participation: forthcoming December 2007

This special issue of PLA will be guest edited by Tom Wakeford and others. Its aim is to reflect critically on processes which set out to be participatory, but which further disempower those with least power. Problems may be political, for example, when the outputs threaten to undermine a pre-conceived institutional objective. They may also be methodological, for example, organisers are often not aware that oppressed groups, such as women or the disabled, have been further marginalised by the way in which the process was facilitated. We are looking for contributions to this issue that will deepen our understanding of participation, and also suggest ways to improve practices and policies. If you have an idea for a possible contribution, please send a short outline of your article to [pla.notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.notes@iied.org).