

# 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

Over the last few months, the network coordinator has been publicising the RCPLA among academic, research, and development institutions and promoting the participatory approach to generate new members and expand it within these sectors, particularly in countries that are not currently represented in the network. The network provides members with multiple opportunities to present individual and institutional work, and share knowledge and experiences in international spheres. RCPLA activities are a vehicle for disseminating participatory initiatives globally. Simultaneously they are structured to fulfil participants' needs and interests as well as to develop their personal skills and support their

organisation's goals. Usually, members decide on the participatory theme they want to focus on and build it around relevant activities. Communication for Change (C4C) was the selected theme for 2005. The success of RCPLA activities depends on the active participation of its members.

Many organisations have shown interest in joining the RCPLA. We are honoured to announce that **Padma** in Bangladesh, **Fantsuam Foundation** in Nigeria and **Marie Michael Library, Coady International Institute** in Canada have recently joined the RCPLA. Each member will bring to the network a specific strength, but all are united in their desire to work together to make a difference through adopting and promoting participatory approaches.

**Padma** is a local non-governmental development organisation founded in 2000 by a group of educated youth from Jhenidah district and named after the most prominent river in Bangladesh. Moved by the sorrows and distress of the poor and oppressed and victims of socio-economic discrimination, Padma was established as a means of realising their dream of a democratic society within a stable ecosystem, based on economic equity and social justice. The organisation emerged out of necessity for socio-cultural change in the southwest region. Padma is known for its remarkable contribution to increasing accessibility to information and knowledge, especially among disadvantaged women; creating a sustainable environment; empowering poor

communities; and protecting human rights. To learn more about Padma visit [www.padma.5u.com](http://www.padma.5u.com)

**Fantsuam Foundation** was established in 1996 with the mission of reducing poverty among rural women in Nigeria. Its holistic poverty reduction services have led to its involvement in several activities including the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and promoting micro-finance for health and education in rural Nigeria. Fantsuam's package of integrated projects always starts with provision of micro-finance and ICT services to organised women and youth groups. However, it is important to note that the micro-finance programme supports health and adult education programmes, community and children's health, waste disposal, rural road access, water and sanitation, agricultural-based services, market information services, cottage industries for value-added agricultural produce, and integration of indigenous knowledge. Currently, the Foundation works in 9 chiefdoms and has succeeded to disburse N11.9Million to 1,528 women as of April 2005. To learn more about Fantsuam Foundation visit [www.fantsuam.org](http://www.fantsuam.org)

**Marie Michael Library, Coady International Institute** was established by St. Francis Xavier University in 1959 with a mission to promote learning for individuals and organisations engaged in community action to achieve well-being, global justice, peace and participatory democracy. It is known worldwide as a centre of excellence in community-based development. The Institute was named in honour of Rev. Dr. Moses Coady, a prominent founder of the Antigonish Movement – a

people's movement for economic and social justice that began in Nova Scotia during the 1920s. The Marie Michael Library was established in 1964 to meet the information needs of students and teaching staff of the Coady International Institute. Coady envisions achieving a just and equitable world for current and future generations, where all people participate in shaping their own destinies and where they can enjoy the full and abundant life envisioned by Dr. Moses Coady. To learn more about Coady International Institute and Marie Michael Library visit [www.coady.stfx.ca](http://www.coady.stfx.ca)

#### **News from the Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya (PAMFORK)**

##### **Institutionalising Rights in Development through Citizen Participation**

Following a writeshop convened by PAMFORK, the RCPLA is pleased to announce the publication of *Institutionalising Rights in Development through Citizen Participation*. This includes 18 case studies from practitioners in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. For more information see the In Touch section on page 139.

##### **Hunger Survey Report Dissemination Workshop**

In October 2004 a hunger survey was conducted in Kenya by PAMFORK on behalf of Bread for the World (BFW). The overall goal of the survey was to define hunger and extreme hunger from the perspectives of the households that go without food – their characteristics, root causes of hunger and its impact. The output of the survey was a report titled *Moving*

*Out of Hunger, Extreme Hunger and Starvation: The Case of Kenya*. The dissemination workshop for this report took place in Nairobi, Kenya on 13th–14th February 2006. Some 17 participants with the responsibility of implementing hunger reduction programmes among the BFW partners in Kenya participated in the workshop including one representative from BFW. The survey revealed four categories of households affected by hunger and consuming less than 1800 Kcal per day. Category A and B consume above 1400 Kcal a day and are affected by moderate hunger while category C and D consume less than 1400 Kcal and suffer from extreme hunger.

Workshop participants overwhelmingly agreed with the findings of the hunger survey report and noted that it reflected the reality on the ground. They recognised the existence of different categories of the households affected by hunger, and specifically category D households who are affected by extreme hunger and who they agreed are not reached by hunger reduction interventions. They agreed with the findings that development actors have minimal impact in reducing extreme hunger attributing this to weakness in targeting, design and implementation of programmes against hunger. Despite these weaknesses BFW partners still have great potential in impacting on extreme hunger as they work at the grassroots level. Workshop participants were able to share their experiences and challenges on their work with the hungry households. They also shared the lessons they had learnt from the report and were able to make recommendations and

strategies for the way forward in the fight against hunger in Kenya.

In conclusion, workshop participants jointly agreed that the real challenge is coming up with interventions and sustainable programmes for category D households. These interventions should however not be implemented in isolation of other household categories, rather partner institutions should design interventions that are appropriate for each category. Development partners should be aware that there are risks involved when working with category D households only and thus they may not be able to achieve donor results as soon as possible. They all agreed that there is a lot of work to be done in order to eradicate extreme hunger in Kenya and a lot of support is needed from BFW and other donor organisations.

Out of the hunger survey various good practices were identified. They form the basis for various recommendations to all development partners in the fight against hunger.

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

The Participation, Power and Social Change Group at IDS has seen two exciting developments in its Learning and Teaching for Transformation (LTT) initiative. A new blog (web-log) page has been set up which gives members of the LTT dialogue an opportunity to add news and comment on the latest LTT developments and discussions, as well as enabling interactions outside of the e-fora dialogues. February also saw the publication of *Currents of Change: exploring relationships between teaching, learning and development. Conversations from the*

*Learning and Teaching for Transformation workshop.* Inspired by the discussions of participants at the event last April, this report seeks to deepen understandings of the inter-relationships between education, participation and development. For more information please email [LTT@ids.ac.uk](mailto:LTT@ids.ac.uk)

We are also organising a ten-day training course on Participatory Video for organisations and individuals interested in deepening knowledge and gaining skills in popular methods of communication. The course aims to equip participants with the skills necessary for empowering the poor and marginalised to have a greater impact on decision-making processes and advocate for social justice. The training includes background and rationale of Participatory Video plus a fieldwork placement to apply what has been learnt. The course will run from 5th–6th June 2006, and again from 2nd–3rd October 2006. No previous video experience is necessary but experience of participatory methods (e.g. PRA/PLA/Reflect) and good facilitation skills are required.

A new resource CD on *Resources, Citizen Engagements and Democratic Local Governance* (ReCitE) is now available from LogoLink (Learning Initiative to Strengthen Citizen Participation and Local Governance). This CD brings together materials generated as part of the ReCitE initiative and is aimed at those working towards greater citizen engagement in the 'fiscal spaces' of local governance. ReCitE CDs are available from [logolink@ids.ac.uk](mailto:logolink@ids.ac.uk), or through the LogoLink Regional Partners (contact details available at [www.ids.ac.uk/logolink](http://www.ids.ac.uk/logolink)). Other recent resources include *Insights into*

*Participatory Video: A Handbook for the Field* by Chris and Nick Lurch, (Insight) which is a practical guide to setting up and running Participatory Video projects anywhere in the world, and *Love of the heart: Tales from Raizes Vivas Brazil*, by Andrea Cornwall, which has come out of ActionAid International's Critical Stories of Change Project.

For further details on any of the above please email [participation@ids.ac.uk](mailto:participation@ids.ac.uk)

### News from IIED

On 25th–29th January 2006, IIED co-facilitated a citizens' jury on genetically modified crops in Sikasso, Mali, where two-thirds of the country's cotton crop is grown. The jury, composed of local cotton-growers and other farmers, cross-examined 14 international witnesses – including biotech scientists, international agencies, and farmers from South Africa and India with first-hand experience of growing GM crops – and voted against the introduction of GM crops. Instead, the jurors proposed a package of recommendations to strengthen traditional agricultural practices and support local farmers. Though the jurors' decision is not binding, it is expected to influence the future direction of agricultural policy in Mali and across the region where most people rely on subsistence farming.

The citizens' jury was hosted by the regional government (Assemblée Régionale de Sikasso) and designed and facilitated by IIED and RiBios, the University of Geneva's Biosafety Interdisciplinary Network, together with a wide range of local partners in Mali.

To read the full verdict, visit: [www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/ag\\_liv\\_projects/verdict.html](http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/ag_liv_projects/verdict.html)