

Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS)

The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies is the Foundation's 'think tank,' devoted to policy analysis, continuing education, studies and discussions, which are pre-requisites for modernisation and nation-building. The Institute's objectives are to:

- Promote and undertake interdisciplinary studies in order to formulate public policy options
- Disseminate its findings and generate an informed public debate about policy choices
- Enable professionals, intellectuals, and community leaders to interact, in order to develop a shared understanding, and multiple perspectives and solutions to problems
- Offer training programmes, lectures by eminent people, workshops, meetings and publications
- Create institutional capability for policy advice, and build networks of global collaboration.

The Institute's research programmes cover economic reforms for the poor, international economic relations, information technology, law reforms and panchayati raj. It provides research-based ideas, analysis, policy and practical programmes in identified areas. The Institute differs from other research institutions in two ways: it is not interested in purely academic work devoid of policy content, believing instead in imparting policy direction to whatever work is carried out; and it believes that any reform should be pro-poor – if it is to succeed – by being widely accepted and universally beneficial.

RGICS seminars and other public events (April 2005 – March 2006)		
Event	Date	Associate(s)
Seminar on the "New Patents Law"	April 19, 2005	Liberty Institute
Seminar on "Hindu Equilibrium" "Pro-poor Growth & Governance" – A Panel Discussion	April 29, 2005 May 14, 2005	Liberty Institute ICPRD
National Training Workshop for Elected Women Panchayat Members	July 19-21, 2005	Government of Ireland
"The Final Settlement: Restructuring India-Pakistan Relations" – A panel Discussion	August 25, 2005	RGICS
"India: Industrialization in a Reforming Economy" – Book Release	August 26, 2005	Academic Foundation
"Issues in Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution" – A seminar	October 5, 2005	RGICS
Eighth Dr Mahbub ul Haq Memorial Inter-School Debate Competition	October 24, 2005	IMA & UNDP
"Europe and India: Identities in Globalization" – A Lecture	November 25, 2005	Bertelsmann Foundation (Germany)
Dialogue with Journalists on "Rural Employment Guarantee Act"	November 12-13, 2005	FNSt
National Workshop on Panchayati Raj	November 19, 2005	RGICS
National Seminar on "Status of State Finance Commissions"	December 2, 2005	PRIA
Dialogue with Journalists on "Media Ethics and Challenges Ahead"	December 16, 2005	FNSt
Talk by Dr. Stevanne Auerbach on "Toys for Education & Child Development"	March 2, 2006	IITM & CDC
Discussion on "Regulatory Reforms: Experience of Korea"	March 9, 2006	FISME
Dialogue with MPs on "Regulatory Reforms: Experience of Korea"	March 10, 2006	FISME

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

In 2005-2006, the Institute published a series of research papers under its International Economic Relations Series. These working papers are written in reader-friendly style for wider dissemination. The working papers are distributed gratis to policy makers and members of parliament. This year, the Institute published three working papers covering diverse areas such as trade and economic reforms (see annexe for the list of papers).

The Institute also organized two major seminars during 2005-06, namely "Issues in Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution" and "Regulatory Reforms: How to Do and What to Do?" The former seminar was an outcome of a research study funded by the Centre for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn. The seminar on regulatory reforms was jointly organized with the Federation of Indian Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME). The Institute published two books and held 15 seminars and presentations during the year.

RGICS also carried out research on a variety of contemporary issues. The Institute in association with the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare undertook a research study on "Implications of WTO agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures as well as Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) on access to health." It also conducted a study for the Ministry of Small Scale Industries on "De-reservation and the Small-scale Sector in India." The Institute was also actively involved this year with industry associations like the FISME and private sector giants such as the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC).

The WTO and trade-related issues are some areas in which the RGICS staff have a great deal of research expertise. Other than formal and institutional publications, the RGICS staff individually published

their work in international journals, magazines and newspapers.

PANCHAYATI RAJ

RGICS in association with PRIA (Participatory Research In Asia) organized a national seminar in New Delhi in December to discuss the present status of State Finance Commissions (SFCs) and initiatives required to strengthen them. The representatives (eight chairpersons and three member secretaries) of 11 SFCs, senior officials from State/Union governments and other experts on public finance and local government participated in the seminar.

Participants included Dr. C. Rangarajan, Chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council; Prof. Abhijit Sen, Member, Planning Commission; Sri L.C. Jain, a former Member of the Planning Commission; Prof. Bibek Debroy, Director, RGICS; Shri Rajesh Tandon, President of PRIA; and Prof. B. K. Chandrashekhar, former Professor of Law at IIM, Bangalore.

Being of recent origin, the SFCs are experiencing teething problems and the seminar deliberated on all aspects of their functioning. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen financial and functional autonomy of these bodies. They were of the opinion that interactive debates like the present seminar would provide a forum to discuss these issues in greater depth. Such an exercise would help the state governments to take necessary action. A mechanism also needed to be developed, it was felt, to analyse the action taken as per the recommendations of the SFCs.

In his concluding remarks Dr. Rangarajan emphasized the importance of the SFCs and informed the seminar how the Finance Commission faced problems with the quality and uniformity of SFC reports. He said that SFC reports in fact reflected unevenness in actual devolution of powers to Panchayats and Municipalities in states.

Women in Panchayati Raj

The Task Force on Panchayati Raj of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation has implemented a Project, "Strengthening the Role of Women in Grassroots Democracy," funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland. The project formally started in October 2003. The objectives of the project were to initiate and strengthen a process of social mobilization of gender groups; create a cadre of training providers to women functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions; develop Training of Trainers (ToT) modules and develop a network of women functionaries of PRIs, which would act as a participatory support platform for such potential/ future women functionaries.

In order to develop the capacity of the women functionaries of PRIs, a three-day National Training Programme for Elected Women Members of Panchayats was organized at Jawahar Bhawan in New Delhi. Twenty-five women from different parts of the country participated in the Training Workshop. In the workshop, participatory methods and techniques were adopted in addition to lectures, where the facilitators only acted as agent provocateurs. The methods and exercises included open discussion, small group discussion, group exercises, learning games, scoring, ranking, Delphi, cobweb analysis and empowerment-circle analysis.

National Workshop

A National Workshop was organized on 19 November 2005 in which all the reports including the updated draft Handbook for Master Trainers, Consolidated Evaluation Reports, Report on Setting up of Helpline Network, Document on Best Practices, were deliberated upon. It was attended by 40 participants consisting of heads of training institutions, experts in the field and a few members of the Task Force as also trainers. Various suggestions were made which were subsequently incorporated in the final training modules.



Ms. Liz Mohn, Vice-Chair of the Bertelsmann Foundation, speaking at the international dialogue

A Task Force Meeting was organized on 19th November 2005 to review the outcome of the National Workshop.

Evaluation Report

The thirteen participating State Training Institutes under the overall supervision of the Foundation were in the process of preparing and validating their state-specific training modules for the capacity building of women members and functionaries of Panchayats. These modules were given a test run by individual institutions. Observers from the Foundation were present when the modules were put into operation at the field level.

Given the importance of the test runs, it was desirable to have a rigorous Evaluation Framework for the training modules for the ready reference of the observer. Such a Framework was prepared keeping in mind all causal factors that might impinge upon the training

effectiveness of the modules. The validation of the modules was made in terms of clearly defined processes and, wherever possible, measurable outcomes.

All was finally brought together in a manuscript, *Empowering Women Panchayat Members: Handbook for Master Trainers Using Participatory Approach*, and handed over to a publisher. The principal author of the Handbook is Dr. Amitava Mukherjee, Regional Advisor (Poverty Reduction) with the Bangkok-based UNESCAP, who worked as a consultant to the project. The book is expected to come out very soon. With this the Irish-Aid funded project will come to an end, and the Institute is in the process of finalising the next phase of its research agenda on Panchayati Raj.

EVENTS JOINTLY ORGANISED WITH PARTNERS

As in the past, the Institute organized

many conferences and seminars in cooperation with several partner-institutions, such as the Liberty Institute, the FISME, and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNSt). The Institute continued with the *People's Forum*, an FNSt-funded once-a-month open debate to discuss issues of public interest. Held on the second Friday of every month at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, the Forum is structured to include two or three experts on a given subject, who explain their respective positions, followed by a Q&A session in which public is given ample time to express their views as well as receive answers from the experts.

RGICS and the Bertelsmann Foundation (Germany) jointly organized an international dialogue, "Cultures in Globalization: A Europe-India Dialogue on Challenges and Visions," on November 25, 2005 in New Delhi. Dr. V. Krishnamurthy, an RGF trustee, and Ms. Liz Mohn, Vice-Chair of the Bertelsmann



Finance Minister Shri P Chidambaram presents the best school award to Carmel Convent (Chandigarh) as Dr. Maxine Olson, Resident Representative of the UNDP in India, looks on

Foundation, represented their organizations. Dr. Karan Singh and Prof. Dr. Werner Weidenfeld (member of the Executive Board, Bertelsmann Foundation) shared Indian and European views on “Identities in Globalization.”

ACTIVITIES WITH SCHOOLS

RGICS works with schools and students as well. In collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Market Assessment (IMA), the Institute organized the 8th Dr. Mahbub ul Haq Memorial Inter-school Debate Competition to mark the International Poverty Week. This year more than 500 schools participated in the competition at twelve centres – Delhi, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Srinagar, Lucknow, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore, Jaipur, and Kolkata. The finals were held at Delhi: the topic for the final round was “Trade, and not Aid, will lift India out of poverty.” Union Minister of

Finance, Shri P. Chidambaram, gave away the prizes. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Maxine Olson, Resident Representative, UNDP.

ANU-RGICS SCHOLAR EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

The Institute has an MoU on Scholar Exchange Programme with the Australian National University. During 2005-06, Prof. Kunthala Lahiri-Dutt visited the RGICS for three months under the RGICS-ANU programme.

WORKING PAPERS

- “Impact of Sanitary Measures on Exports of Fishery Products From India. The Case of Kerala,” Spencer Henson, Mohammed Saqib and D Rajasenani, Working Paper No. 50.
- “A Sustainable and Scalable Approach in Indian Pension Reform,” Ajay Shah, Working Paper No. 51.

- “An Analysis of Severance Pay Policies in India and Sri Lanka,” Mukul G. Asher & Pundarik Mukhopadhaya, Working Paper No. 52.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- *Economic Freedom for States in India-2005*, Bibek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari. RGICS in cooperation with FNSt. (2005)
- *Land Use By the Poor in Delhi: Issues of Fuzzy Ownership*, Bibek Debroy, Laveesh Bhandari and V N Saroja. RGICS in cooperation with FNSt. (2005)

Media Coverage

As in the past, the Foundation's activities got good media attention during the year.

The "Red Ribbon Express" project initiated by RGF to promote HIV/AIDS awareness in the country was covered by the mainstream newspapers. News reports quoted the Union Health Minister, Dr Anbumani Ramdoss as saying that the Foundation's initiative would help make every person in the country aware of the gravity of the HIV/AIDS problem. The street plays being scripted by noted writers, to be performed from the Red Ribbon Express, was the focus of a dispatch by the *Asian Age*. The *Tribune* carried two four-column reports on the workshop at Surajkund to develop a training guide for HIV/AIDS volunteers and a communication strategy for the project.

Coinciding with the death anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May, the *Indian Express* carried a big article on the various activities being undertaken by RGF. It gave special emphasis to RGF's Tsunami relief operations. The *Hindu* too carried a dispatch on the support being provided to the children orphaned by the Tsunami. The *Jansatta Express* daily of Lucknow had a comprehensive article on RGF's various relief and welfare activities.

The *Pioneer* newspaper, Delhi, in a write-up on 9 June 2005, noted: "When it comes to the welfare of society, the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation has been a forerunner. Established to commemorate Rajiv Gandhi's vision, the Foundation acts as a catalyst in promoting sustainable programmes in key areas of national development". The newspaper then went on to give an overview of the Foundation's programmes.

To commemorate the birth-anniversary of

Rajiv Gandhi, the *Times of India*, the *Hindustan Times* and the *Navbharat Times* on 20 August 2005 carried articles on the role being played by the Foundation. The *Pioneer* and *Hindu* carried articles on RGF's distribution of motorized triwheelers to orthopaedically challenged persons, and there were pictures in the *Rashtriya Sahara*, *Tribune* and *Punjab Kesari*. The *Jagaran* daily and the *National Herald* also presented highlights of the Foundation's activities.

Media advocacy is one of the essential elements in the smart parenthood campaign in Kurukshetra district, Haryana. The issues being promoted through the project were widely covered in *Dainik Jagaran*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Hari Bhumi*, *Amar Ujala*, *Punjab Kesari*, *Dainik Tribune* and *Ajit Samachar*. *Dainik Jagaran* reported the formation of 100 Village Health Committees (VHCs) and highlighted the decision of VHCs of Kirmich and Bint villages, to ostracize families involved in female foeticide.

The workshop on empowering women members and 'sarpanchs' of the Panchayats, organized by RGF in Delhi on 19 November 2005 was widely reported by the *Hindu*.

RGF organized another triwheeler distribution on 19 November 2005 to coincide with the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Smt Sonia Gandhi personally handed over the vehicles to the beneficiaries. The event was well covered by many newspapers, including the *Hindu*, Hindi *Hindustan*, *National Herald*, *Quami Awaz*, *Rashtriya Sahara*, *Navbharat Times*, *Asian Age*, *Business Standard* and *Punjab Kesari*.

RGF organized the 11th Rajiv Gandhi Science & Technology Lecture at

Bangalore on 2 February 2006. Nobel Laureate Prof. David Gross gave an illuminating lecture on "The Future of Physics". It was a significant event for the scientific community in the country. The event along with photographs was reported by leading newspapers and magazines. Among them were: the *Deccan Herald*, *Times of India*, *Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *Prajawani*, *Kannada Prabha*, *Siasat* and *Salar*.

The *Hindu* newspaper dated 4 March 2006, had a three-column report on the workshop in Delhi for about 50 INTERACT children from Jammu & Kashmir and Assam. This programme gave an opportunity to the children to talk about the problems of living in a 'conflict zone' and dealing with the pressures and trauma of losing one or both parents, the paper added.

In March 2006, a South Asian regional workshop was organized by RGF in Delhi on the issue of women and sanitation. Major newspapers covered the workshop.