A global network

The International Forum for Rural Transport and Development, known as the **IFRTD** or **'The Forum'** is a global network of individuals and organisations working together towards improved access and mobility for the rural poor in developing countries. It achieves this aim by identifying gaps in knowledge and capacity and priority issues for change, supporting networking and new research, and pursuing a programme of advocacy work that will influence donors, policy makers and practitioners.

Who is a member?
IFRTD membership is voluntary, flexible and free. Members fall into one or more of the following categories:

- **Members** range from passive subscribers to the IFRTD newsletter to more active participants in IFRTD's regional, national or international projects and activities.

- **National Forum Groups** (NFGs) are autonomous national networks that subscribe to the vision and mission of the IFRTD. They currently form the pillars of IFRTD's self governance.

- **Communities of Practice** (COPs) are autonomous networks of practitioners with a mutual interest in a thematic issue. The IFRTD supports COPs that focus on particular themes within the rural transport agenda.

- **Institutional Members** include organisations that contribute financially to the sustainability of the IFRTD and also those that forge strategic alliances with the network at an institutional level.

Who makes decisions?
IFRTD is a Southern driven network and its mandate comes from an Executive Committee composed of representatives of its membership. *The governance of the network is further explored on page 15.*

The network is facilitated by a small decentralised Secretariat, based in the UK and the network's four focus regions – Latin America, Asia, Francophone Africa and East and Southern Africa.

How do we work?
The IFRTD encourages its constituency in the South to use the network as a means of gathering a critical mass of stakeholders around particular issues to advocate for improved policy and practice.

IFRTD's networking, information sharing, research and advocacy activities range from the organisation of workshops that will facilitate debate and collaboration, through research programmes that bridge knowledge gaps and build Southern capacity, to the publication and dissemination of new resources that will encourage a fresh approach to mobility and access problems.

A networked research approach
A major challenge for researchers and those supporting research activities related to development and poverty reduction is to ensure that findings are relevant to and taken up by poor people and those who work with them. In response to this challenge the Forum has developed a networked research methodology that brings together people from different countries and contexts, and builds ownership and communication into the design of the research programme itself. This has demonstrated several significant impacts:

- Encourages learning and sharing across geographical and hierarchical boundaries.

- Harnesses local knowledge, experience and latent research skills.

- Creates national ownership of research findings.

- Stimulates debate at local and national level.

- Creates opportunities to raise awareness of the issues and commits a wide range of stakeholders to their resolution.

"IFRTD made conscious what I have had as an intuition for years. That rural transport is vital for rural livelihoods. IFRTD supports my actions. It motivates me to feel, think, say and above all, to do."

Mauricio J Gnecco, APROTEC/FDTA, Colombia

"I have been enormously influenced by IFRTD because of the way that it chooses to work as a network that is genuinely collectively driven and therefore following a 'Southern Agenda'. I have not found many networks that actually operationalise this rhetoric in the way that IFRTD does. The techniques come neither from rocket science nor some pious evangelical belief, but from some quite determined application of basic principles that are the cornerstone of participative development."

Megan Lloyd Laney, Communications Consultant