

Celebrating the 50th issue of *Participatory Learning and Action*

Reaching our 50th issue has been no small feat on the part of the *Participatory Learning and Action* team, and for all the many people who have been involved over the past 16 years. We felt that such an occasion could not go unmarked in the series' history. So we decided to publish a bumper double issue, with a new look and a new name!

This anniversary led us to reflect on the achievements of our previous editors, guest editors, authors and other contributors, whose support and expertise have enabled us to continue producing the series. *Participatory Learning and Action* (formerly *PLA Notes* and *RRA Notes*) reaches more than 10,000 readers in over 200 countries, and our readership continues to grow, with more than 300 new subscribers each year. To think that we included a distribution list with *RRA Notes* 4! The series has published contributions from over 350 authors from across the globe and across multiple disciplines. We have benefited from the support of many donors and from the expert guidance of over forty guest editors, who have produced an impressive thirty special issues, out of the fifty that we have published so far. We would like to thank all our past editors and guest-editors, many of whom have contributed to this issue. You will find a list of editors with the full backlist of *Participatory Learning and Action* on page 223.

Participatory Learning and Action has always sought to publish frank accounts which provide a critique of best practice, confront issues of power and transformation, and contribute to the continuing and

evolving discourses on participatory development. The wealth and calibre of shared experience and learning, and of time given freely, has meant that *Participatory Learning and Action* has continued to provide a forum for those engaged in participatory work – whether they be practitioners, trainers, activists, policy-makers or students – to share their experiences, reflections and innovations and to act as a 'voice from the field'. Even with the colossal amount of free time donated – by our authors, guest editors and reviewers – producing the series is expensive. We would like to have the resources to send free back issues to our many readers who request them. We would like all our articles to be available for free on our own and others' websites, from the moment of publication. The contributions of our paying subscribers have covered many of the costs of free dissemination. This has enabled us to extend free subscriptions to community and voluntary groups in the North as well as the South. And we would like to thank all our donors who have supported and continue to support the series over the years.

We are particularly indebted to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) for their support of this issue. Not only did they host and fund a special writeshop, but they also co-financed the issue, together with our long-standing donors, Sida and the Department for International Development UK (DFID). IDS has been a solid partner over the years and we plan to collaborate further with future issues. We would also like to thank **Angela Milligan** for initiating this special issue.

Critical reflections, future directions: defining the context for the 50th issue

We decided it was time to celebrate this new milestone with a set of articles reflecting on key issues and trends in participation, past, present and particularly future.

In January this year, a group from IIED met with Robert Chambers from IDS to discuss the possibility of publishing a collaborative special 50th edition of the series. It was agreed that guest editors of past special issues would be approached and asked to update the overviews they had written for their issues, and that a writeshop would be held to brainstorm major changes and trends in PLA, to which all authors would be invited. The contributions in this special issue are based on the outcomes of this writeshop, held over two days on 23 and 24 April 2004 in room 221 at IDS, the very room in which the series began its life sixteen years earlier (see Box 1).

With the kind assistance and unflagging support of Robert Chambers and our colleagues at IDS, we held the 50th writeshop. Here we mapped out our workplan and assigned ourselves various writing tasks. This writeshop brought together the *Participatory Learning and Action* editorial team and several of our previous guest editors, all of whom have vast experiences of using participatory methods in their own particular field.

Participants at the 50th workshop were David Archer (ActionAid), Holly Ashley (IIED), Robert Chambers (IDS), Louise Chawla (Kentucky State University), Andrea Cornwall (IDS), Charlotte Flower (Oxfam), John Gaventa (IDS), Vicky Johnson (Development Focus), Nazneen Kanji

Box 1

RRA Notes No 1 was the outcome of the first RRA workshop held on 19 May 1988 at IDS. Participants were Robert Chambers (IDS), Graham Clarke (IDS/QEH), Gordon Conway (IIED), Sander Essers (ILEIA), Rosalid Eyben (ODA), Mick Howes (IDS), Naila Kabeer (IDS), Priscilla Magrath (ODA), Jenny McCracken (IIED), David Potten (Hunting Technical Services Ltd.), Jules Pretty (IIED), Ian Scoones (Imperial College of Science & Technology), Andrew Scott (ITDG), Lawrence Smith (Wye College), Shelia Smith (University of Sussex), Mary Tiffen (ODI) and Camilla Toulmin (IIED).

To quote Gordon Conway, the first editor, *...we established an informal newsletter, based at IIED, initially called RRA Notes. Later, the newsletter was renamed PLA Notes (Editors' note : now Participatory Learning and Action)...in recognition of the widening array of participatory research and development approaches. The idea was to provide a forum for practitioners to describe their experiences and innovations and so disseminate good practice. We envisaged that new ideas reported from an African village one week would be tried out in an Asian village the next – and that has happened.*

Source: Conway, G. (2003) 'Sustainable Agriculture' in Cross N. (ed), *Evidence for Hope: The Search for Sustainable Development*. The Story of the International Institute for Environment and Development, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London, 2003.

(IIED), Nicole Kenton (IIED), Samuel Musyoki (IDS), Jethro Pettit (IDS), Michel Pimbert (IIED), Jane Stevens (IDS) and John Thompson (IIED). You can find more information about each of our contributors in the overview to this issue and in the contact details at the end of their articles. Our thanks also to those authors who were not able to attend our writeshop but who not only co-authored articles, but were also involved in the peer review process for this issue: Nandago Maria Goreth (Pamoja, Uganda), Sheela Patel (SPARC, India), Gill Gordon, (International HIV/AIDs Alliance, UK), Alice Welbourn (independent), Oga Steve Abah (Nigeria), Irene Guijt (Learning by Design, The Netherlands), Andy Catley (AU/IBAR, Kenya) and Jenny Rietbergen-McCracken (independent).

The plan was to take stock of the current state of play in participatory development, and to reflect upon how developments in people's individual fields of expertise have evolved since the publication of previous special issues. The question

of 'where are we now?' inevitably led to 'where do we go next?'

Once drafted, articles for this issue went through a peer review process. Each author was given two articles to comment and feed back on, one in first draft and another in second draft. Robert Chambers then undertook the task of reviewing all the articles. You can read more about the writeshop process in the overview

Looking ahead enabled the workshop participants to identify gaps and brainstorm future themes for *Participatory Learning and Action*. Here's is a list of possible themes, the first of which is already in process:

- Civil society participation in the implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies (PRS);
- Gender;
- Participation and conflict;
- Participation in the North;
- Participation and global and local transformation;
- Land tenure;
- Methods for social and political analysis;
- Participatory budgeting and

economic literacy;

- Participation and disability;
- Institutionalising participation;
- Immersions for development professionals: REALISE – Reflective Experiences and Learning In Situ Encounters.

We welcome contributions or collaboration on these themes or any other suggestions for future issues!

At this point we would like to thank our colleague John Thompson, a stalwart of *Participatory Learning and Action* since the early days. John's involvement with IIED goes back to 1989 when he met Jenny McCracken,¹ one of the first editors of *RRA Notes*, for lunch in a Nairobi trattoria and compared notes. Jenny and John had been corresponding for several months about their mutual interest in and experiments with Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). At that time, Jenny had been working in India with Gordon Conway (IIED) and Robert Chambers (IDS), in collaboration with Anil Shah, Meera Shah and Parmesh Shah of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), where they were developing an approach they called 'Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal' (PRRA). John was working in Kenya on a programme entitled *From the Ground Up*, employing RRA to actively involve small farmers in the diagnostic process, working with them in the critical analysis of their own problems and opportunities, and supporting them in their efforts to generate and implement viable resource management plans. They decided the approach could be better termed 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' or 'PRA', as it sought to involve local

1. Jenny opens this issue with her memories of the early years (see Foreword).

people directly in the research process, to make the findings relevant to their lives, and to link analysis and reflection to action. In 1989, Robert Chambers, at Jenny's request, invited John to a workshop at IDS on RRA (documented in *RRA Notes 7*), where he presented some initial lessons on the application of PRA.

John joined IIED in 1991 and was Director of the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme from 1996 to 2003. John, who was present at the writeshop, was hoping to contribute an article on agriculture, a major theme throughout the series. However, production of this issue coincided with John's move in August to Just Food in New York, where he is now Director of Research and Development. Just Food works to develop a just and sustainable food system in New York City by fostering new marketing and food-growing opportunities that address the needs of rural family farms and poor urban communities. However, we are delighted that John's planned co-author for the article on agriculture, Andy Catley, was able to step in at the eleventh hour to provide us with an article on community-based animal healthcare. We wish John well as he focuses again on making a difference at the local level.

We would also like to make a special mention to **Regina Faul-Doyle**, our series' illustrator. She has provided her personal experience of working on the series on page 168 and you will see examples of her past work throughout this issue.

General section

We have three articles in our general section.

Many development and aid relief agencies, including NGOs and local

governments assume that participatory approaches to development in war times is unfeasible. **Benedict Korf** relates his experiences of working with the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) in Sri Lanka. Using participatory approaches to work with local people, government officials, Tamil rebels and other NGOs and groups in the area, the IFSP has adopted a project approach aimed at rebuilding infrastructure whilst implementing income-generating activities – and helping local groups to work together more effectively.

Our next two articles are closely related. The first, by **Kumala Sari** and the **Pradipta Paramitha Team** in Indonesia share their experiences of using the Methodology for Participatory Assessments (MPA) to evaluate water and sanitation services in Wotawati hamlet, near Pucung. The community there were able to use the MPA, which included creating stratified maps based on villager's own poverty definitions, to replace open-air defecation by the installation and use of latrines, achieving almost 100% coverage by 2003.

The final article in our general section is a continuation of the first, in that it describes the experiences of adapting the MPA tools specifically for use in the Nepal context. **AJ James, Raju Khadka, Michelle Moffatt** and **Corine Otte** recount how Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) adapted the MPA to create the NEWAH Participatory Assessment (NPA). Their article describes how the NPA was used to ensure that marginalized groups, in particular women, were included in decision-making processes related to water and sanitation projects and access.

Tips for trainers

As promised on our website, this issue has a bumper collection of training tips, provided by our authors for this issue.

Alice Welbourn shares her experiences of a workshop method called 'Quoting the issues'. It uses a series of quotes from people who have found themselves in disempowering situations to help open up debate among workshop participants about participatory approaches and issues of power and empowerment.

Next, an extract from **Reflect's Communication and Power** manual describes how photographs can be used to tell a story or to make people think about issues. What is going on in the picture? What does the picture not tell us? And how can we use photographs as a powerful visual form of advocacy?

Andrea Cornwall and **Gill Gordon** then present their ideas for workshop ground rules, which can be agreed with participants at the start of a workshop to help create safer and more inclusive spaces for people to engage in.

Next, **Gill Gordon** writes about her experiences of using the fishbowl method. The fishbowl can be used to facilitate groups of both men and women to open up and share their thoughts and experiences, for example about sexuality and sexual health, in a safe environment.

Finally, **Vicky Johnson** and **Robert Nurick** explain how ranking lines can help people to explore issues such as wealth and health. Participants use the line to rank, for example, how rich or how poor, or how good or bad their diet is. They then can discuss strategies to improve these – in other words, how to move themselves 'up the line'.

Regular features

For this issue we have decided to expand our resources section to include reviews of several websites, books and videos mentioned in our theme articles in this issue. Some have been reviewed in previous issues, but are listed here again to take into account new updates and additions, or because of their particular relevance to this issue.

The **RCPLA Network** pages outline the exciting *Communications for Change* initiative and also provide updates on RCPLA member activities, such as the recent RCPLA write-workshop on Participatory Democracy held in April 2004 in Delhi, India. We also have news from the Eastern and Southern Africa RCPLA Network, the National

Working Group on Participation (GNTP) and partners in Bolivia, and from European members, the Participation Group at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). Overall, the main focus of members' activities this year has been participatory communications and their importance for advocacy, democracy, capacity building and shared learning, in particular to strengthen voices from the South.

Next issue

Our next issue, *Participatory Learning and Action* 51, will be on civil society participation in the implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies, guest-edited by Alexandra

Hughes and Nicholas Atampugre. See **News from IIED** on page 219 for information of the authors' writeshop held in July. This promises to be a very interesting issue and will be published in April 2005.

We are also in the process of putting together a new CD-ROM, containing a full set of articles from issues 1-50, in a more user-friendly format. There will be more details about the new CD-ROM on our website soon, and in the next issue!

We hope that this double issue has been worth the wait and look forward to your feedback. And as Robert Chambers says in his article, 'PLEASE WRITE TO US bears repeating!' Perhaps we can reinstate the correspondence corner!

Nicole Kenton and Holly Ashley

Corrections

PLA Notes 49:

Our apologies for including the wrong address for Khanya-managing change cc on pages 14 and 21. Khanya's address is 16A President Steyn, Westdene, Bloemfontein, 9301, South Africa. The telephone and fax numbers are correct.

Our apologies to Giacomo Rambaldi, who together with James Hardcastle, was one of the primary authors of article 11.

Our apologies to BM Opong, Ansah Sampson Kwarteng and Francis Owusu, authors of article 5, for misprinting their names.

acronyms

and terms used in this issue

ABC	Attitude and behavioural change
AEA	Agroecosystem analysis
Appreciative enquiry	An organisational change methodology
AR	Anti-retroviral
AU	African Union
CAA	Community assessment and action
CAHW	Community-based animal health worker
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CAP	Community action plans
CBO	Community-based organisation
CCFC	Christian Children's Fund of Canada
CDS	Centre for Development Services (Egypt)
CEDAW	Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
CEF	Community Empowerment Fund
CIAT	Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical / International Centre for Tropical Agriculture
CIPM	Community integrated pest management
CIRAC	Circle of International Reflect Action and Communication
CLTS	Community-led total sanitation
CRC	Convention on the rights of the child
Danida	Danish Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FFS	Farmer field schools
GAD	Gender and development
GAP	Gender and poverty
GIS	Geographic information system
GNTP	Grupo Nacional de Trabajo para la Participacion (Bolivia)
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics, Hyderabad
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IDS	Institute for Development Studies, University of East Sussex, UK
IEC	Information, Education and Communication Unit
IFI	International Financial Institution
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development, UK
IFSP	Integrated Food Security Programme
IRR	Institute of Rural Reconstruction
IPID	Institute for Participatory Interaction in Development (Sri Lanka)
IPM	Integrated pest management
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IPRA	Investigación Participativa con Agricultores / Participatory Research with Farmers (CIAT)
JFM	Joint forest management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCH	Maternal and child health
MPA	Methodology for participatory assessment
NEPAN	Nepal Participatory Action Network
NEWAH	Nepal Water for Health
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

Novib	One of the 12 organisations which are part of the alliance of Oxfam International, based in the Netherlands
NPA	NEWAH participatory assessment
NRM	Natural resource management
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Participatory appraisal
PAMFORK	Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya
PAR	Participatory action research
PAVE	Participatory Approaches to Veterinary Epidemiology
PDS	Participatory disease searching
PE	Participatory epidemiology
PEPFAR	(US) President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PHRA	Participatory human rights assessment
PIP	People in power
PLA	Participatory learning and action
Planning for real	Community design tool effective in involving local communities in developing their own ideas and plans for regenerating their neighbourhoods
PM&E	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
PNA	Participatory needs assessment
PPA	Participatory poverty assessment
PPAZ	Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia
PPI	Participatory poverty index
PRRA	Participatory rapid rural appraisal
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
Praxis	Institute for Participatory Practices (India)
PRS	Poverty reduction strategy
PRSP	Poverty reduction strategy paper
RCPLA	Resource centres for participatory learning and action
REALISE	Reflective Experiences and Learning In Situ Encounters
Reflect	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowerment Community Techniques
RIPS	Rural integrated project support
RRA	Rapid rural appraisal
SAREC	Department for Research Cooperation, Sweden
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SPEECH	Society for People's Education and Economic Change (India)
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SSI	Semi structured interviewing
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TBA	Traditional birth attendant
TFD	Theatre for development
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPPAP	Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project
VCT	Voluntary counselling and HIV testing
WHO	World Health Organization