

Editorial

You cannot have failed to noticed the recent proliferation of special issues of the *Notes*. Although providing valuable material in considerable depth, they have meant a long wait for those of you submitting more general articles. We feel that both types of article are useful, and so are trying to combine them in 'semi-special' issues. In this issue, along with 10 general articles, we are including a small selection of pieces which describe experiences and discuss issues relating to participatory approaches to HIV and AIDS programmes. We hope that these few articles, and the useful editorial overview by Alice Welbourn, will stimulate some discussion and perhaps encourage others to share their experiences of working in this field.

The articles in the more general section of this issue have clustered around three main themes: participatory approaches to planning, reflections on the potentials and limits of PRA, and the development of new methods.

Participatory approaches to planning

Five articles in this issue provide some useful approaches to using or adapting PRA for participatory planning. The first three of these discuss approaches to planning that incorporate factors such as external forces and internal conflict, which can often undermine community planning processes and natural resource strategies. The opening piece by Michael Warner discusses the importance of ensuring that plans made with communities take into account the external forces which will largely determine the success or failure of those plans. He suggests ways in which strategic planning can become an integral part of a broader process of participatory planning and how an internal appraisal can be linked to external appraisals of the wider context of community strategies. Similarly, Richard Montgomery recognises the need for planners to be aware of the wider forces acting on any development

process. He outlines a method called force-field analysis which can help to determine the constraints and opportunities which shape the future of any aspect of development. His article provides us with two case studies from widely differing contexts - public transport and primary school education - illustrating the potential of such a method. These two pieces - suggesting ways of linking community appraisal to analyses of broader political and economic forces - point to one area where PRA approaches still need further development.

If external influence is one type of force which can undermine the viability of community resource management, another such force is local conflict among different social groups. Derek Armitage and Suman Garcha outline their experiences in Tanzania of developing community-based land and resource use plans in such a context. They suggest an approach they feel was especially suitable for an area where the 'community' consisted of a number of different ethnic groups, including pastoralists and settled farmers, who all had distinct land and resource use patterns. The planning process aimed to be both a tool for planning and a means to bring smallholder groups together. Nick Osborne then gives a more specific example of how participatory methodologies were used in a roads rehabilitation programme in Zambia to allow local people to prioritise and plan for themselves. The case is interesting for it shows how participatory planning increases the community 'ownership' of an infrastructural project. It is also a case where a successful pilot led to the programme-wide adoption of PRA planning processes.

Finally, the piece by Kamal Kar and colleagues assesses the value of PRA in the development of village resource management plans in Sri Lanka. This article also touches on a problem which is key to encouraging the scaling-up of the participatory approach and its institutionalisation. This is the challenge of how to facilitate the reversal of attitudes of civil servants *"locked into age old hierarchical*

bureaucracy and accustomed to top-down planning, inflexibility and an 8-5 day"? One of the conclusions is that the preparation of village resource management plans with those civil servants is one step along the way in this process of reversal. However, the broader challenge of institutionalisation of this reversal in a whole bureaucracy remains, and we would welcome any contributions showing how this process has occurred, or is beginning to occur elsewhere.

Reflections

The second section groups three pieces reflecting - on the basis of experience - on the pros and cons, potentials and pitfalls in work with PRA and PRA training, particularly in national, local and institutional contexts. The first piece, by Andrew Inglis and Ann Lussignea, draws lessons from experiences with using participatory approaches in Scotland. They suggest that PRA does indeed have a role, but that effort will have to be made to ensure quality if its role expands. Interestingly, they also argue that despite the many differences between the developed and developing worlds, the same old problems of institutionalising participatory approaches and of giving a voice to local people are once again all too familiar, in Scotland as much as anywhere else.

Carrie Turk's detailed and thought-provoking piece on identifying poverty in Vietnam takes us one step beyond well-being ranking. She emphasises the inherent difficulties of trying to target development assistance at the truly poorest members of a community and comes up with some useful well-being categories which reflect the constantly fluctuating fortunes of rural households. Her article also shows how community resistance can frustrate the use of well-being ranking to target only the poorest in a village. People may participate in planning processes and methods but they may not want to participate in certain uses of the information generated by that 'participatory' planning.

It is always interesting to read the reflections of those who have conducted PRA training courses. The experiences vary so much from situation to situation and there is always something new to learn. Saloni Singh and Birendra Bir Basnyat's lively and thoughtful account of their experiences in Nepal provides

some lessons on how to stimulate interest in participatory approaches and how to deal with the unexpected!

Methods

As always, this issue contains some creative innovations and adds some new approaches and methods to the repertoire. De Groot and colleagues provide a lively and highly readable account of how they tested and adapted stories in villages in North Cameroon to stimulate discussion and provoke thought. The technique has much potential for application in a variety of ways and settings. Finally, David Archer's fascinating article describes how PRA can be adapted for reforming adult literacy programmes. He bemoans the common misinterpretation of Paulo Freire's teachings and assesses how PRA can be used to put his innovative approach back on course.

Your letters...

We are always pleased to receive comments about *PLA Notes*. Please keep your letters coming! A recent spate of letters indicate that most of you are pleased with the new title. I hope there is general agreement on this - we certainly feel that the name is much more appropriate to the content of the journal. However, we should emphasise that the term "*PLA*" is not intended to be the name for a new 'methodology' and we do not use it as such. It is a collective term which refers to the whole range of participatory approaches to development and research.

Some of you have mentioned that the *Notes* contain rather too many articles on process and that you would be pleased to see more articles on impact and action. We agree with you. The focus on process has certainly mirrored the development of participatory methodologies. We feel that they have now come of age and it is time we turned our scrutiny on how well they are working in practice and the extent to which livelihoods are being improved as a result. In particular, it will be important to know cases where the impact of participatory approaches has moved from the local to a far larger scale. If any of you would like to write up your experiences of how the use of participatory approaches to development have led directly to

action, empowerment and/or improved livelihoods, we'd love to hear from you.

Your space...

On turning to the back pages, you will notice that *Endnotes* has a new title and a slightly new format. These changes reflect our hope that these final pages will become much more of a

resource for readers. There is so much happening in the field of participation around the world - networks springing up, training being carried out, books being written and so on. We feel that there is a pressing need for a forum to keep us all in touch. Your comments and ideas are vital for making this work.

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