

Editorial

• Introduction

Most of this issue is devoted to the use of participatory approaches with children. Why did we feel that children's participatory merited a special section? As the articles in the section reveal, and as those working with other 'invisible' groups can confirm, the benefits of 'community' participation and sustainable development will not automatically trickle down to children unless their specific needs and situations are taken into account. Victoria Johnson opens the section with an excellent introduction to the subject, and to the articles in the issue. These present a variety of perspectives, from the conceptual to the practical, yet all demonstrate the value and importance of seeking children's views.

The articles are just a taste of the work being done. We hope they will inspire others to work with, and for, children. If you have any experiences to report on working with children, or comments about the section, please write to us - we'd like to hear your views.

• Taking the long view

First, however, the issue opens with a collection of more general articles. These again reflect an amazing variety of themes and locations. However, a theme common to three of the articles is the value to be gained from taking a historical perspective when trying to make sense of, or improve upon, today's situation.

For example, participation has a long history in Latin America, and last August the first ever meeting to share experiences of practitioners was held in Mexico. Costanza de Toma's neat summary of the event illustrates how the advent of democracy generally in the region is helping to institutionalise participatory approaches. The roots of participation in the region lie in the

empowerment focus of radical political thinkers in Latin America, notably Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. However, workshop participants warned that institutional co-option may dilute how 'participation' is put into practice. Remembering these eminently political roots may be a way of avoiding this dilution.

The importance of understanding history in other situations is described by Ailsa Holloway and Diane Lindsey. They used a variety of time-related PRA methods with refugee returnee populations in Mozambique. Their aim was to identify people's historical capacity to withstand drought, as well as their vulnerabilities, and to build on these to strengthen them.

The way that certain approaches to relief and development create dependency is a common obstacle to many trying to encourage more self-reliant communities. Wilbert Sadomba describes a useful PRA method, again based on a historical perspective, for addressing this issue. Described as a "*growth-oriented learning approach*", Retrospective Community Mapping proved to be an ideal way of enabling people to understand historical cause and effect in their present situations. He found it created a strong sense of common identity and cohesion in the Zimbabwean communities with whom he worked: "*When they reflect upon their history and understand the way things have developed to the present, they appreciate that poverty is not a static and immutable condition, and has not been there for time immemorial.*"

• A question of perspective

We are pleased to be able to include two gender-related articles - a welcome addition since the subject is relatively scarce in past issues. Janet Seeley and colleagues deliver a timely reminder, based on their experience in Uganda, that gender affects the way people interpret and contribute to PRA exercises, in

this case, well-being ranking. They warn against aggregating information given by a 'community' as this will iron out important gender (or age) related perceptions. Judith Dent's reflective account of a recent PRA training in Indonesia provides some practical steps for incorporating an awareness of gender into PRA activities.

Robert Leurs presents a rare account of staff perceptions of the impact of PRA on the work of the Indian NGO MYRADA and on the communities involved. While the staff felt that while their work had definitely become more participatory, especially in the planning stages of projects, the evaluation stage of the project cycle remained largely donor-driven. He also highlights the difficulty of separating cause from effect in impact analysis. We hope to be able to include more examples of impact analysis in future issues of *PLA Notes* - if you have any examples, please do write to us.

Finally, Ann Hudock writes from a context that is fairly new to the *Notes* - the difficulties associated with attempting participatory research in conflict-ridden situations. Her experience in Sierra Leone throws up some important lessons, not least of which is the necessity of and approach needed for gaining a community's trust when fear and suspicion are rife. She concludes that too often, conflict situations are seen as separate and distinct from the development process. However, as she says, *"if care is taken to adapt PRA exercises to the context of conflict, they can provide a means of enhancing people's understanding of conflicts, and ensuring the appropriateness of interventions undertaken to alleviate their effects"*.

Finally, we must thank readers for the overwhelming response to the readership survey sent out with the last issue of the *Notes*. Completed survey forms are still pouring in, so we hope to be able to present you with the results in the next issue.

Many thanks also to Save the Children Fund UK for supporting this issue.

HELP NEEDED

IIED is launching a major project which aims to evaluate the environmental, social and economic impacts of community-oriented wildlife management initiatives in both developing and developed countries.

Our first task is to identify existing community wildlife management initiatives worldwide, and research being undertaken in this area, and we would like to hear urgently from any individuals or organisations involved in work of this type.

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