

Editorial

- **Theme issue**

Most of the articles in this issue of the *PLA Notes* explore the use of performative media in participatory development. The contributors to the theme section examine how the creative potential of the arts can be used as part of a participatory process and how PRA practitioners might benefit from integrating performative and artistic media into the PRA process. The guest editor for the theme section of the *Notes* is Andrea Cornwall, whose work has combined the use of PRA and performance for development.

- **In this issue**

First, however, this issue opens with a suite of more general articles. In the first article in this issue, Katrin Linzer and Robert Kowalski analyse the communication process in PRA. Drawing on transaction analysis, their article explores the conscious and unconscious messages that are exchanged during communication. It demonstrates the importance of PRA practitioners holding appropriate attitudes and behaviour when working in communities.

The second article in this issue, by Michael Edwards, explores the use of PRA in organisational self-assessment. It highlights the importance of combining PRA with secondary information to explore the impact of projects at the local level. The article discusses the need for transparency and openness for organisations to reflect honestly on their performance.

On a similar theme, S. K. Pradhan describes how a participatory approach has improved the performance of many agricultural extension activities in Tripura, India. His article shows how Venn diagrams can be used to explore the effectiveness of different media used in agricultural extension. The paper also describes the use of historical matrices to

understand the legacy of development projects in the local area. Pradhan's article highlights the changes in projects that have resulted from a more participatory planning process.

In the final article in the general section of *PLA Notes*, William Fielding and Janet Riley examine the trade-offs in undertaking agricultural research on farmers' fields. While they advocate a more participatory approach, their article explores how on-farm research can be made more robust and caution against the scaling up from a small number of small plots. This article should be useful to the many agricultural technicians who 'have left the confines of research stations to pursue their investigations alongside farmers'.

- **Regular features**

The *Extracts* section in this issue contains two articles. The first from India, by Narayanasamy and Manivel, highlights the need to cross-check the results of wealth ranking. The second article, by Francis McConville, describes how sexuality lifelines were used in Myanmar to understand women's reproductive health needs.

In the *Feedback* section, Steve Evison describes the challenges of ensuring true local representation, that goes beyond village committees, in participatory programme planning. In a thoughtful response, Meera Kaul Shah suggests that while it may be unavoidable to first enter a community without elected village representatives, 'the participatory appraisal process should try to minimise their influence'. She also stresses the important role that outsider facilitators can play in ensuring that committees are both representative of, and acceptable to, a community.

For trainers in participatory learning, the serialisation of the *Trainers' Guide to Participatory Learning and Action* focuses on

group dynamics and team building. The Tips for Trainers section has been prepared by Sarah Gelpke and explores how good and bad interviews can be used in PRA training.

The *In Touch* pages (at the back of the issue) share experiences and publicise new and relevant materials and training events. In keeping with the theme issue, a review of videos that have been produced on the participation theme is included. *In Touch* also includes a description of the Resource Centre initiative. This has developed in response to the growing need for information on participatory learning.

As always, we welcome your comments and contributions for any of the sections in *PLA Notes*. Happy reading!

CALL FOR EXPERIENCES!

We have planned three new theme issues of *PLA Notes*. In October 1997, we will explore the use of participatory approaches with *fishing communities*. The February 1998 should focus on *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation*, drawing on a workshop on this theme to be held in the Philippines later this year (see *In Touch* pages for details). The June 1998 will explore issues of *Literacy and Empowerment*.

Please send us contributions on any of these themes. Articles should reach us at least two months before the publication date.