

Editorial for the 10th anniversary issue of PLA Notes

• 10th anniversary issue

Welcome to the tenth anniversary issue of *PLA Notes*! The first issue of *RRA Notes* appeared in June 1988. It is testimony to the popularity and importance of participatory methods, and the commitment to sharing experiences amongst practitioners, that this series has evolved into the *PLA Notes* that is produced today.

It is perhaps apt that most of the articles in this anniversary issue explore the theme of participation, literacy and empowerment. Based on experiences with REFLECT, this issue demonstrates how participation must become a community-led dynamic that links analysis to action. This mirrors the move away from RRA and towards (and beyond) PRA to promote a sustained process of participation. The issue emphasises the diversity within and between communities and stresses that literacy, in its broadest sense, impacts upon the ability of different groups to communicate and participate. The articles also explore some concerns common to practitioners of PRA, such as the role of manuals and training in promoting standardisation and/or diversity, how to develop strengthened local level (horizontal) networks of practitioners, and how to scale up a participatory process from the local to regional, national and international levels.

The guest editors for the theme section are Bimal Phnuyal, David Archer and Sara Cottingham, and we acknowledge their hard work in bringing together an impressive collection of thought-provoking articles in this bumper edition of *PLA Notes*.

• In this issue

This issue opens with a suite of more general articles. Participatory planning is central to the

first three articles: Bhattacharyya and Murray describe the use of community-based assessment and planning for maternal and child healthcare in Ethiopia and Zambia, Hamilton et al. introduce a novel way of undertaking participatory needs assessment with displaced people, and Neela Mukherjee outlines her experiences in Bangladesh of introducing community participation at the stage of project formulation.

The final two articles in the general section have an agricultural theme. Thiele and Terrazas present their work in Bolivia on using participatory methods to understand indigenous approaches to soil conservation. This is followed by a short article by William Fielding which, based on his work in Nepal, sets out guidelines for on-farm trials on terraces.

Regular features

In the *Feedback* section, David Thomforde draws on his work in Uganda and sets out some of the challenges and opportunities for using PRA with people with disabilities. In a thoughtful response, Sulemana Abudulai, from Action on Disability and Development in Ghana, agrees that the PRA methods need little adaptation, but emphasises that special attention is needed to understand the barriers that prevent people with disability from communicating and participating. Disability is an important, and new, topic for *PLA Notes*, and thus will also be the subject of the *Feedback* section in October.

The serialisation of the *Trainers Guide to Participatory Learning and Action* follows on from *PLA Notes* 31 and describes the basic principles of participatory learning. *Tips for Trainers* has been prepared by Paul Mincher and describes an icebreaker that encourages group analysis and cohesion. This is followed by *In Touch* and the *RCPLA Pages*.

We look forward to your comments and contributions for any of the sections in *PLA Notes* and hope that you enjoy this anniversary issue.