

Editorial

Welcome to this issue of *PLA Notes*. As many of our readers will be aware, *PLA Notes* has now been produced for over 12 years and during this time, has reflected the growth and development of participatory methodologies.

In an era where participatory approaches have often been viewed as a panacea to development problems or where acquiring funds for projects has depended on the use of such methodologies, it is vital to pay attention to the *quality* of the methods and the *process* of participation. Whilst *PLA Notes* is still a series with a methodological focus, it is important to emphasise issues of power in the process and the impact of participation, asking ourselves who sets the agenda for participatory practice. It is only with critical analysis published in *PLA Notes*, that we can, as a group, further develop our thinking around participatory learning and action.

Theme issue

The special theme for this issue is *Participatory Processes in the North* which presents a variety of case studies where participatory techniques have been used in a range of sectors and contexts, the key linkage between them being their location in the 'North'¹. Participatory approaches have been increasingly adopted in northern countries, influenced by the long history of participatory practice in the South.

The Guest Editors for this issue are Charlotte Flower, Paul Mincher and Susan Rimkus. Charlotte Flower is currently working as the Participatory Methodologies Adviser for Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme, which seeks to address poverty and social exclusion in the UK. Charlotte has a PhD in forestry and a background in forestry research, with overseas experience in Nepal, Cameroon and Namibia. Paul Mincher is currently the Project Co-ordinator of the Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action at The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and offers support to the RCPLA Network². Trained as a marine biologist, Paul spent six years using participatory methodologies in natural resource management in the Philippines. Susan Rimkus works as the Instructional Support Program Planner for Teaching Support Services at the University of Guelph, Canada. Her main interest is teaching in a participatory environment which recognises the students' capacity to offer something to the learning environment.

¹ For the purpose of *PLA Notes*, this is defined as the membership of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

² Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) Network. See the *RCPLA Pages* towards the end of this issue for further information.

In this issue

As usual, this issue opens with a general selection of articles. In the first article, Thackwray Driver and Axel Kravatsky discuss a participatory project which, in their words, 'went wrong'. Through critical reflection, they raise issues regarding how projects using PLA methodologies to make changes can get stuck in predetermined outcomes from the outset.

In the second article, Kees Blok presents a training project which focuses on training professionals to develop skills in facilitation of participatory processes. The article concentrates on attitudes required for good facilitation and uses what occurs 'here and now' in the training sessions as a starting point for reflection on interaction and attitudes.

Next, Laura Greenwood reviews the recent Francophone Exchange for participatory development. This review summarises the main issues raised by the participants and the mission statement '*La Declaration de Dakar*', which was a key output from the meeting.

Regular features

In the *Feedback* section, C. O. Izugbara presents an interesting piece about the behaviour and attitudes of field workers. The author describes how problems regarding the conduct of fieldworkers can also arise in the case where they share the same ethnicity as the communities with which they are working. Drawing from his experience in work around behaviour and attitudes, Somesh Kumar provides an interesting response to the issues raised, including discussions about the insider/outsider dynamic, treatment of key informants and how to develop a good relationship with a community with which you are working.

The *Tips for Trainers* section for this issue has been prepared by Françoise Coupal of Mosaic.net International, Canada, and shares an exercise which can be used to form teams based on criteria which are established by the participants themselves.

The In-Touch pages at the back of the issue publicise new and relevant materials and training events. The *RCPLA Pages* in the *In Touch* section provide information about the forthcoming RCPLA network meeting in September, along with updates and news from RCPLA members in Uganda, Nepal, Thailand and the UK.

Happy Reading!