

# Editorial

## Welcome and news

Welcome to this issue of *PLA Notes*, which is slightly later than usual! *PLA Notes 41* has a range of articles from authors of different disciplines, areas of research and backgrounds. This reflects your responses, taken from our recent Readership Survey, that subscribers would like to read more articles about general topics from time to time. We hope that there will be something of interest for all of you.

This year has seen some changes in the *PLA Notes* team at IIED. Laura Greenwood, who has co-ordinated, edited and contributed so much to the success of the *Notes* over the past four years, has left IIED to join the Child Rights Information Network at Save the Children Fund, UK. We are very pleased to welcome Cristina Zorat, who also works in our Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action. Cristina provides administrative and co-ordination support to the Editorial team. Holly Ashley, who also manages the *PLA Notes* subscriptions, has stepped in as acting editor and co-ordinator for this issue.

The IIED Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action is soon to publish a new CD-ROM containing the entire *PLA Notes* series from issues 1-40 later this year. You can find out more information about the CD-ROM in the next issue. *PLA Notes 42*, October 2001, will be a special issue on children's participation. It will be guest edited by Louise Chawla, International Co-ordinator for *Growing Up in Cities*, a UNESCO-MOST Programme project, in co-ordination with Sheridan Bartlett, IIED, who is also an affiliate of the *Children's Environments Research Group*, City University of New York Graduate Centre, New York, USA.

Some suggestions that you made when replying to the Readership Survey included having a *Letters to the Editor* page. We'd really like to get started with this new section, so please send in your letters, comments and questions.

Just as important, don't forget to send in your own experiences and share them with us. This can be either articles about your experiences or feedback on anything you have read about in the *Notes*. Feedback is a valuable way of co-learning, and we would like to hear your views. Have you tried any of the methodologies you read about here? Were they successful? How did you modify them?

What drawbacks did you come across? What did you learn from your experiences that you would like to share?

Guidelines for authors can be found on the inside back-cover of this issue. We always welcome your contributions! *PLA Notes* really depends on your input and reflections as readers, and as practitioners in the field.

## In this issue

As a general issue, we have a broad range of articles in *PLA Notes 41*. The first article by Christopher Townsend is unusual in that it documents the experiences of using PLA with prisoners suffering from HIV and AIDS in Malaysia to assess their needs in prison, using a participatory assessment process involving several different tools. Hans Bauer and S Kari write about the use of PRA to assess the people-predator conflict in the Waza National Park, using local knowledge, and detailing how this could contribute to recommendations for future revisions in the park management. Levis Kavagi's article on multidisciplinary research projects outlines eight lessons about the benefits and pitfalls involved in conducting research with a team from diverse professional backgrounds. Neela Mukherjee and her colleagues look at the results of several capacity building workshops that they undertook in Vietnam, using

participatory approaches to create village micro-plans to contribute to commune-level planning. Michael Vabi's article discusses using participatory approaches to stimulate community participation in conservation and development initiatives, whilst being aware of the limitations such processes face. Lucy Stevens and Sue Marshall share their methodology of using participatory approaches to develop the 'typical families' tool, helping local residents from informal urban settlements to

better understand and address poverty issues within their own communities. Lori and Cindy Hanson provide some thought-provoking reflections upon the role of facilitators in participatory training and capacity building as co-learners themselves, and outline tools to help facilitators learn from self-reflection.

Parinita Bhattacharjee writes about lessons learnt from a social mapping exercise in India, explores the tools used and provides recommendations for maximising their effectiveness. Grindl Dockery, Lyn Barry and Erica Hedley



give an account of how a locally established community health organisation in the UK used PLA to help keep their local clinic open, improve health services and reduce health inequality in their area.

Paul Vare's article looks at the development of a pilot project in Ghana that uses people-centred approaches to enable local stakeholders to become involved in, and aware of, an environmental management project through the use of field-neighbours, or *Washirika*. Joanne Harnmeijer writes about the use of a reproductive health education pack named 'Auntie Stella', modelled on the 'agony aunt' concept (someone you might turn to for advice). It is based on the stories, experiences and expressed needs of adolescents in the four secondary schools where the research was conducted. Lastly, Martin Butcher gives an example of how simple log frames were used to assess priority projects for community development funding in Australia.

## Regular features

Our *Tips for Trainers* section this issue takes a different aspect to the usual *Tips* featured, and looks at how participatory processes help to link valuable local peoples' knowledge into the wider national-level strategies of the National Forestry Programme in Malawi.

The *In Touch* section contains information about forthcoming events, new books and reviews, and training courses. Also in this issue is our second *e-participation* page, with listings and reviews of participation-related websites on the Internet, as well as discussion lists centring on participatory development. We also ask for our readers to recommend and send in their reviews about new websites and discussion lists, especially ones developed in the South, and in different languages. Tell us what you think about the Internet – is it working for you? The *RCPLA Pages* show listings of all the RCPLA Network partners, with news and updates on events.

Lastly, *PLA Notes* recently received a late completed Readership survey. We can't be sure if our reader was being serious or not, but it contained perhaps one of the most original comments about *PLA Notes* we have received yet – and certainly merits a mention here!

*... the words are so sweet, reading it is like eating a well-ripened banana, which I do like to finish, so I always carry it around in my bag...*

We hope that you enjoy this issue just as much... Don't forget to send in your letters to the editor – your comments, feedback and suggestions about anything in this or previous *PLA Notes*. So go on – get in touch!