

# Editorial

Welcome to the latest edition of *PLA Notes*. As usual, we aim to bring you innovative and current thinking around participatory approaches, and we hope there is much here that is both thought-provoking and useful.

This issue has been coordinated by Holly Ashley, supported by Cristina Zorat, Editorial Assistant for *PLA Notes*. However, for the next issue, Holly will be handing over to our new Editor, Angela Milligan. Angela joined IIED in October from NR International, where she was responsible for disseminating and promoting the results of five DFID-funded natural resources research programmes. She has wide experience of communications as well as practical knowledge of using participatory approaches in natural resource management in East Africa. Over the next few months, Angela will be looking at how to take forward recommendations and comments from the last readership survey, including how to make *PLA Notes* more interactive, and the possibility of translation into other languages. Watch this space!

We are all very pleased that a major project for IIED – that of putting past issues of *PLA Notes* (and its predecessor, *RRA Notes*) into a digital format – is now nearing completion. Back copies from 1998, when the very first issue of *RRA Notes* was produced, through to 2001 will be available on a single CD-ROM. The material will be fully searchable, so that users can easily find articles in their particular areas of interest – for example, training, M&E, or natural resources management. For more details of the CD-ROM and how to obtain it, please see the *In Touch* section, page 69.

Our next issue in February 2002 will be a general one and there is still time (just) to put pen to paper and send us an account of your experiences with participatory approaches. Looking ahead a little further, we hope in the future to have an issue on **disability and participation**. Yalli Yanni's article from the Yemen (see *In this issue* below) highlights methodological innovations which enable disabled people to participate, and we would welcome more accounts of work with the disabled.

Although this issue has a special theme (see below), it is worth remembering that many lessons from experiences

of using participatory approaches and tools can be adapted for use with different groups and situations. One of the articles in our themed section, "Making children's participation in neighbourhood settings relevant to the everyday lives of young people", highlights constraints to involving children in participation, but these factors can be just as applicable to adults in many contexts.

## Theme issue

The theme for this special issue is children's participation in community settings – evaluating effectiveness. Since February 1996, when *PLA Notes* first focused on the theme of children's participation, there has been growing interest in including children and youth in planning, implementing, and evaluating processes of community development. Like all new notions in development, however, there is a danger that rhetoric may substitute for reality. It is also the case that participation can involve risks for children as well as benefits. Therefore, this second special issue on the theme of children's participation focuses on the following questions:

- What happens when children participate in community development?
- What are their own beliefs and attitudes about their participation?
- How can organisations know that participatory processes and outcomes are in fact in the best interests of children themselves and the settings of which they are a part?
- How can governments and organisations effectively support the most beneficial forms of participation?

Our guest editor for this issue is Louise Chawla of Kentucky State University. Louise is International Coordinator of the Growing Up in Cities project, funded by UNESCO's MOST programme. She is an environmental and developmental psychologist who has published widely on topics related to children and the environment, and teaches at Whitney Young College, an interdisciplinary honours programme at Kentucky State University in the U.S.A. Many thanks are due to Louise for her hard work and dedication in producing this issue, and also for agreeing to bring it forward from its scheduled date.

Thanks also to Sheridan Bartlett of the Children's Environment Research Group, University of New York for her collaboration and support.

Finally we would like to thank UNESCO's MOST programme and Childwatch International, both of which have generously provided financial support for this special issue of *PLA Notes*.

## In this issue

As usual, you will find some general articles on participatory approaches in this issue – but you will now find these articles **after** the themed section rather than before. In our first article, Peter Taylor and Per Rudebjer present an account of the use of a participatory curriculum development methodology to create an agroforestry curriculum development guide in South-East Asia. The article outlines the steps used to include stakeholders in the process, and how the outcomes of the workshop led to the creation of a guide, which in turn can be shared with a much wider audience.

Our second general article by Valli Yanni documents her experience of using PRA for training in a workshop on community participatory development in Yemen, and discusses how participatory tools were adapted for disabled participants. Amongst other innovations is the use of “three dimensional” diagrams made out of tactile materials, to enable participants who are visually impaired to participate fully in the activities.

## Regular features

The *Tips for Trainers* section for this issue, “Knives and Forks”, has kindly been supplied by Josh Levene of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, U.K. The aim of the exercise is to introduce participants to some of the principles of participation and empowerment, transparency, and sharing. Josh also refers to another warm-up exercise called “Fruit Salad”, from *Participatory Learning and Action: a trainers' guide*. Details of this exercise can be found as a footnote in Valli Yanni's article.

Our *In Touch* section features our usual selection of book reviews, workshops and events, e-participation pages, and order forms for subscriptions and back issues. The RCPLA pages cover recent activities of members of the RCPLA Network, with news from Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, U.K., Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Nigeria.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *PLA Notes* and – as usual – we welcome your feedback and comments on its contents.

Happy reading!

### Correction – PLA Notes 41

Please note that the article “The use of ‘typical families’ to explore livelihoods and service provision in urban informal settlements, South Africa” was authored by Sue Marshall and Lucy Stevens, and not Sue Case and Lucy Stevens as appeared in the contents listing for the issue. Many apologies to Sue Marshall for this mistake.