

# Editorial

## Welcome to Issue 43 of *PLA Notes*.

### Special theme

Although this issue was intended to be a general one, we had an offer of a special theme that was too good to refuse – Advocacy and Citizen Participation. This is an area of work that has become increasingly important for civil society groups as more attention is paid both to popular participation in decision making at all levels and to holding those in power accountable.

The theme is based on a workshop which took place in the USA in November 2001, which brought together 48 activists, development workers, and researchers from 18 countries. The workshop arose from a feeling that advocacy is often viewed as primarily a technical exercise concerned with influencing formal policies and laws, in which all groups have equal opportunity and space to put forward their views and lobby for change. Participants felt that insufficient attention was paid to power dynamics which prevent the voices of certain groups from being heard or which never allow certain issues onto the agenda. They pointed out that some power is visible – for example processes of socialisation that perpetuate exclusion and inequality by making it appear ‘natural’, as in the case of women and certain racial minorities. The participants believe that advocacy needs to be ‘reclaimed’ and recognised not just as policy change but also longer-term processes of organising, consciousness-raising, political empowerment, and social transformation, with the aim of creating a more just and equitable society.

The guest editors for this special issue are Jethro Pettit and Beth Harrison of the Participation Group of the Institute of Development Studies, UK, and Valerie Miller, Lisa VeneKlasen and Cindy Clark of Just Associates, USA, a network-based organisation promoting learning and action partnerships for social justice.

Jethro Pettit works with the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex. Previously he was education director and international team leader for World Neighbors, a people-centred development NGO. He has worked on development, social justice and human rights issues in Latin America and Asia with Oxfam America and with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and has been active in the US and UK on justice, peace and environment issues.

Beth Harrison works in the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies and also teaches English to asylum seekers. She was recently travelling in Canada where she worked in a cultural centre on the Hay River Dene Reserve, Northwest Territories. Previously, she has lived, studied and worked in France and Italy.

Valerie Miller has worked on issues of advocacy, international development, gender, popular education and human rights for over 30 years. Currently co-director of Just Associates, she has worked with many organisations, including UNICEF, the Washington Office on Latin America, the Highlander Center, Oxfam America, the Institute for Development Research, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the Global Women and Politics programme of the Asia Foundation, and Women Law and Development International.

Lisa VeneKlasen is co-director of Just Associates. Until recently she led an advocacy capacity-building programme with the Asia Foundation’s Global Women in Politics Programme. Previously, she has worked in many countries with Women, Law and Development International, and lived for six years in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she helped form Women in Law and Development in Africa, a regional network committed to women’s rights.

Cindy Clark worked with PARTICIPA, a Chilean NGO, on citizen participation programmes in Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru. She is currently an associate of Just Associates, until recently concentrating on the production of the *Action Guide*. She is also Programme Coordinator at Women, Law and Development International where she coordinates a capacity-building programme in women’s human rights advocacy.

I would like to thank all the guest editors for their enormous efforts and dedication in bringing together this issue over such a short timescale. Thanks also to IDS for their financial contribution for this issue. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the team at IIED, especially Cristina Zorat and Holly Ashley, for their efforts behind the scenes.

I hope you find the resulting articles as thought-provoking and enlightening as the editorial team have done in reviewing and editing them.

## General section

This issue's general section includes three articles on very different themes.

Jane Dodman writes about organisational strengthening programmes in Jamaica which aim to increase the capacity of local community groups to plan and implement their own community projects. In the planning and management module, the participants, all members of community organisations, compared four different methods for determining community priorities and discussed their relative merits as planning tools. The conclusion was that each tool – priority ranking, individual voting, scoring and pairwise ranking – provided for a different form of decision making and that the most appropriate would depend on the context. For example in priority ranking the whole community has to come to a joint decision about the ranking order, which may not be easy if different parts of the community have very different priorities.

Saxena and Pradhan write from Uttah Pradesh about the problem of dependency and erosion of values. In their article they share their experiences with farmers' organisations, using a participatory process which reinforces human values that has helped farmers to keep themselves on the path of self-reliance, and has enabled them to judge and pursue what is in the interest of themselves, their organisations, and society.

Finally, Chimaraoke Izugbara writes about a very different situation in which participatory approaches were used, that of conflict between two communities in Nigeria. The conflict broke out as a team of researchers investigating local knowledge of HIV-AIDS arrived in the community. Izugbara describes the process of facilitating negotiations to resolve the conflict, and draws together lessons for successful mediation, for understanding local traditions and culture, and the behaviour of the mediators.

This issue also includes a feedback section in which readers can challenge, react to or comment on articles and other material in *PLA Notes*. This feedback from Levis Kavagi is a response to an article in *PLA Notes* 40, 'Introducing PRA techniques in the learning of environmental education in Southern Peru' by Sonia Gomez Garcia and Jose Pizarro Neyra. Levis draws on his experience with the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Environmental and Education Training Programme to develop some of the issues raised by Garcia and Pizarro. He argues that, for environmental education to make a difference, it must be based on practical participatory activities to solve the real problems of the school and surrounding communities from which pupils are drawn.

## Regular features

This issue does not include the usual 'Tips for Trainers' article. Instead, we have added four extracts from Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller's new book, *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (World Neighbors, Oklahoma City, OK, 2002) in the special themed section. The four articles – (i) The advocacy debate, (ii) Causes, consequences, and solutions, (iii) Assessing entry points, and (iv) Power and empowerment – present innovative tips for trainers and facilitators of participatory advocacy.

Other regular features of *PLA Notes* are included as usual. These consist of the Resources section containing information about books, websites, and workshops, including those related to participatory advocacy, and the RCPLA pages.

I hope you enjoy the issue. As ever, your feedback and comments are very welcome.

Angela Milligan, Editor