

editorial

Welcome to issue 44 of PLA Notes

Special theme

The themed section for this issue is about local government and participation, and discusses examples of where local government agencies are using participatory learning and action approaches to address issues of concern to their constituencies. While it is frequently national governments that formulate policy, it is usually local governments that are charged with the responsibility of implementing it, whether it is delivering essential social services, carrying out civic improvements or coordinating integrated land-use planning activities. Recently, local government bodies in a variety of contexts have begun to employ a range of people-centred approaches, including participatory consultations, stakeholder dialogues and participatory budgeting, in an effort to involve citizens in the key decisions and actions that affect their communities. The articles selected for this special issue include a range of examples of innovative uses of participatory approaches by far-sighted local government agencies in India, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Scotland and elsewhere.

The guest editors for the special section are **Andy Inglis**, an independent practitioner and trainer, and **Ced Hesse**, a Senior Research Associate in the Drylands Pastoral Land Tenure Programme at IIED. Over the past decade, Andy Inglis has worked as an advisor and facilitator of participatory approaches in over 30 countries for UN agencies, NGOs, national and local governments and community groups. Much of his work has been to do with rural development forestry, but he has also been

involved with the application of participatory approaches in tourism and recreation, health, transport, agriculture, fisheries, social development, housing and local environmental planning and management.

Prior to joining IIED, Ced Hesse worked for Oxfam in Mali and Burkina Faso on food security and early warning programmes, and was a co-founder of the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN/RITA) based in Dakar, Senegal. His current work focuses on improving pastoral land tenure security through a number of research and training activities on the following themes: community-based natural resource management and planning, conflict management particularly in pastoral areas, community participation in decentralised governance, reinforcement of pastoral civic society and the gender dimensions of pastoral tenure issues.

In their overview, the guest editors examine the many issues surrounding participation and local government, including how local government officials in both the North and the South can learn from each other and how participation can be used to influence new styles of leadership that are more democratic, transparent and accountable.

Andy and Ced have worked extremely hard to commission, collate and edit the diverse set of articles in the special section, and I would like to thank them and the authors for their insightful and thought-provoking contributions. I would also like to thank **Angela Milligan**, the Editor of *PLA Notes*, who is currently on maternity leave, for coordinating this special issue, and lastly, of course, thanks to the Editorial team, **Cristina Zorat** and **Bansuri Taneja**.

General section

The general section for this issue has five articles.

Nagaratna Biradar and **CR Ramesh** explain the benefits and changes made when IGFRI, the Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute, adopted participatory methodologies to better inform and conduct research to develop more effective technologies to serve the needs of the farmer population.

RS Saxena and **SK Pradhan** look at how to train staff, who are used to working in a top-down, authoritarian way, to become participatory facilitators. They discuss issues around training to inform not just knowledge and skills, but attitudes and behavioural change that respect local people's knowledge and experience and enables them to identify with local/project needs and goals.

Assessing what positive gains participation can bring to a rural rice farming community in Nigeria, **Chris Ekong** and **Ndiyo Ayara** write about how Community Development Associations were able to advocate a more equitable sharing of rice paddy plots in swampland for poorer rice farmers, whilst ensuring a growing revenue to be reinvested back into the community farm.

Benedikt Korf looks at how PRA was used in a weeklong workshop 'Planning for a Future' in a village community in Germany to develop plans for areas that suffer from environmental degradation, and asks whether or not PRA is an appropriate instrument for participatory community development in societies with functioning local democratic institutions.

Lastly, **Jane Thomas** writes about a project in Bangladesh that focused

on using community participation to design and build flood control measures, which would be sustainable in the long term. The methods used enabled the project to assess power dynamics within the community using power analysis, Venn diagrams and power ratings.

Regular features

Our Tips for Trainers section for this issue is taken from **Robert Chamber's** new book *Participatory Workshops*:

A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities, reproduced with kind permission from Earthscan, and looks at some of the issues trainers might encounter when ending workshops. As always, you will find other regular PLA Notes features, book reviews, events, and e-participation in the *In Touch* section, as well as the RCPLA pages.

Finally, regular readers will notice a change in the look and feel of the design of this issue. In response to

your comments, we have made several changes in order to make the format more lively and user-friendly. I would like to thank **Andy Smith** for his advice and assistance with the new design. I would welcome any comments you have on the new layout and on the contents. Please send your feedback to the usual address.

I hope that you enjoy reading this 'new-look' issue of *PLA Notes*.

Holly Ashley, Acting Editor