

# editorial

## Welcome to issue 49 of *PLA Notes*

### News

Firstly, allow me to introduce myself as Acting Editor of *PLA Notes*, as Angela Milligan is now on maternity leave. As we go to press, I am delighted to announce that Angela had a baby boy, Lindley, on 21st March. I am sure you will all join me in congratulating Angela and her family and wishing them well.

My name is Nicole Kenton and I have been working in the Drylands Programme at IIED for the past 13 years, and as some might say, time for a change! I am delighted to be able to take up this new challenge and I would like to thank Angela for ensuring that the handover was smooth and thorough, and to thank her for all her work on this issue, since she did the bulk of the coordination and editing prior to going on leave. I am also indebted to Holly Ashley, the Editorial Assistant, without whom I would not have been able to produce this issue. Holly, as previous Editor of *PLA Notes*, has provided invaluable experience and help and has worked long hours to get this issue to print. I am also grateful to Andy Smith for his usual high standard of design work. I look forward to working with both of them on the next issues. My thanks also go to the *PLA Notes* Editorial Board for their support and their detailed comments on the articles, with special thanks to Bansuri Taneja. And last, but not least, I would like to thank the two guest editors for their professional and tireless efforts in commissioning and assisting the authors and coordinating all the contributions, and of course I would like to thank the authors themselves. You will see

that the quality of the articles is a reflection of the hard work, professionalism and dedication of all parties involved.

### Theme section

The guest editors of this special issue of *PLA Notes* on decentralisation and community-based planning (CBP) are **Dr Ian Goldman** and **Dr Joanne Abbott**.

Ian Goldman has a Master's degree in Tropical Agricultural Development, and wrote his thesis on enabling planning. He has worked for long periods in Mexico, Zambia, the UK and South Africa, and on short assignments in many countries of Africa and Europe.

Ian was a founder of Khanya-Managing Rural Change in 1998, a collectively-owned and managed company working on sustainable livelihoods and community-driven development. Since then Ian has been involved in a range of work focusing on poverty and reconnecting citizens with the state. One element of this has been on community-based planning, where Ian initiated and has been the project manager of the four-country action research project. He is currently Executive Chair of Khanya.

Jo Abbot completed her PhD at University College London in Biological Anthropology in 1996, combining natural and human science research approaches to examine local use and management of miombo woodlands in a protected area, Lake Malawi National Park. She subsequently joined IIED in London where she worked as a Research Associate, focusing on policy and practice issues around participation, biodiversity, and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa. For the last four years, she has worked for CARE

International, first in Uganda and currently in South Africa and Lesotho, where she coordinates CARE's programme on rural livelihoods, HIV/AIDS, and good governance.

As Jo used to work for IIED and coordinated *PLA Notes* for three and a half years, editing eleven issues, it has been something of a *déjà vu* for her to be guest editing an issue five years later!

This issue on decentralisation and community-based planning draws on the four-country CBP Project, the action-research study in Africa which Ian managed. This project is outlined in article two, and articles three to six give experiences from the four countries – South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, and Zimbabwe. The issue also includes other examples, outside of the four-country CBP Project, from francophone Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

What is community-based planning? It is defined in the overview as 'planning by communities, for their communities, which is not isolated from but links into the local and or national government planning systems'. Given increasing decentralisation in many countries, this theme is timely. CBP attempts to be more responsive to local people's needs, through participatory planning and resource allocation, by improving the quality of services, and by deepening democracy through promoting community action and involvement at a local level.

The country studies in this issue seek to draw comparisons between the different approaches, objectives and scales used in community-based planning projects. They highlight the need to look beyond the narrower focuses that have been prevalent in the past, which have resulted in

barriers to participation for the most vulnerable, or have been less than inclusive in their scope and implementation, or have failed to deliver real democratic power to the communities concerned.

The underlying principle of CBP, that the guest editors and authors have sought to demonstrate in this special issue, is how communities can plan for their future, as part of an integrated planning process for an area, thereby improving local governance.

### General section

For this issue we bring you two general articles. The first is by **Dipankar Datta** and **Neli Sen Gupta**, and explores the effects of the work undertaken by Concern Worldwide in *haor* areas of Bangladesh to promote the socio-economic empowerment of poor women, principally by examining the level of domestic violence experienced by housewives.

Our second general article is a little different to the usual, and we hope that you enjoy it! It comes in the form of a series of cartoon extracts by **Kate Charlesworth** taken from *Teach Yourself Citizens' Juries: A handbook by the DIY Jury Steering Group*, published by the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences (PEALS) Programme

at the University of Newcastle. These extracts look at what a citizens' jury is, why you might want to have one, what the main ingredients of one are, and how to get started.

### Regular features

Continuing with the special theme, this issue's **Tips for Trainers** section brings you two extracts from Khanya-Managing Rural Change's *Action Research for Community-Based Planning* project manual.

The manual offers a practical 'how to' approach to community-based planning, giving a background to the subject, and providing useful information about facilitating and organising CBP activities. These short extracts discuss two of the initial phases of the CBP process: how to ensure the effective representation of people within the planning community, and how to prepare and run a pre-planning community meeting.

Our **In Touch** section contains the usual selection of book reviews, forthcoming events and courses, and our e-participation website reviews. We always welcome contributions from our readers for this section, so please get in touch at the usual address.

The **RCPLA Network** (Resource

Centres for Participatory Learning and Action) has undergone a review of its vision and mission statements with the aim of taking on a far more proactive role within the development sector. You will see from the update, that in order to orient member organisation towards this new focus, it is organising a number of activities this year, including a series of writeshops to document field experiences. We look forward to hearing more about the outcomes of these activities in future issues.

### PLA Notes celebrates its 50th issue!

The next issue will be our 50th and to celebrate this anniversary, we will be inviting past guest editors of *PLA Notes* to give an up-to-date picture of developments in their particular areas, and also to look ahead and think about – what next? And even, what will be in the 100th issue! We are very pleased and privileged to have Robert Chambers guest-edit this special issue and welcome any contributions for our **In Touch** section. In the meantime, enjoy this 49th issue of *PLA Notes*. We welcome your feedback and comments. As Angela would say, happy reading!  
**Nicole Kenton, Acting Editor**

### Corrections

*PLA Notes* 48: In our In Touch section on page 82, we gave a wrong website address for PEANuT. The correct address is: [www.northumbria.ac.uk/peanut](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/peanut). Our apologies to PEANuT for this.