

# theme section

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS



# Foreword

by **JENNIFER RIETBERGEN-McCRACKEN**

Congratulations on your 50th issue, *Participatory Learning and Action*! I can still remember when you were just a twinkle in Robert Chamber's eye at an IDS-IIED workshop back in 1988, when the idea of sharing notes from the field was discussed. The question was – who would coordinate, edit and disseminate an informal 'RRA' journal? All it took was an expectant raising of Gordon Conway's eyebrows, a quick nod of my head, and the Sustainable Agriculture team at IIED had taken you on!

Since then of course you have grown in leaps and bounds, to incorporate PRA and PLA. And it's great to see that you haven't taken on any grandiose or glossy airs over the years. You have stayed true to the idea of sharing cutting edge experiences, straight from the field – a field that has expanded to include every imaginable sector, in both the North and South.

My own field for a few years was in the World Bank when participation was making its first real inroads into the organisational culture there. A group of highly committed staff came together as the Participatory Development Learning Group to develop policy recommendations and practical guidelines for promoting participation in the Bank. Implementing these policies and practices meant trying to remove or circumvent the barriers to participation that were operating in the Bank (that Robert Chambers describes very accurately in his book *Whose Reality Counts?*).

Through the very small role I played in this participatory work, I was struck by the delicate dilemma inherent in mainstreaming participation in such a complex institution.

The initial strategy of developing special programmes to promote participation (including a Participation Fund to encourage participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation activities) was very effective in the early years, in kick-starting participatory activities across Bank operations. The downside though was that these special programmes tended to support a limited 'add on', 'optional extra' kind of participation and did little towards developing an overall corporate responsibility for participation.

Yet, without such programmes, project staff often got little or no support from their managers for spending the additional time and money necessary for participatory initiatives.

The challenge of moving from special support to real mainstreaming requires other measures, including strong supportive messages from the top, clear policies and effective incentives. Promoting a culture of participation also involves shared learning – from both positive and negative experiences. This may be the hardest part of all for performance-oriented staff of a high profile institution – to discuss any failures or shortcomings they have had in their participatory work. Maybe an in-house version of *Participatory Learning and Action* would help – in recognising the value of informal, experimental learning about the reality of participation. Perhaps we should start thinking of a *Participatory Learning and Action* franchise system...?

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# 2

## Critical reflections, future directions: an overview

by NICOLE KENTON and HOLLY ASHLEY

### Sharing learning from personal experience

From natural resource management and animal health, to literacy and communications, the themed articles in this issue come from personal reflections and analysis. Each author speaks from her or his own field of experience. This overview does not seek to draw conclusions – the articles do that for themselves. But in all of the contributions to this special issue we find striking parallels in the lessons learnt and suggestions for ways forward. Each author has identified new frontiers, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. And most themes overlap or have relevance and resonance in multiple spheres – and we can all think of more.

The articles challenge us to look ahead, to see how we can work more effectively together, to build on the successes of the past and to engage continuously in a process of reflection and action towards social justice and an equitable future – wherever and whoever we are.

### The *Participatory Learning and Action* 50 writeshop

After welcoming everyone and thanking them for coming, we began the writeshop with a participatory exercise to create a timeline of the major development trends and innovations in participatory development over the last twenty years (see Box 1). The main themes identified then formed

#### Box 1: Creating a timeline of participatory development

One of the first exercises at the writeshop was a 30-minute session, where we made a timeline of participatory development. The purpose was for participants to pinpoint what **they** felt were significant 'landmarks' in participatory practice and approaches over the past 20 years and link them into broader development trends.

The result was a timeline that listed our participants' own experiences and recollections of many (though by no means all!) events and organisational activities, conceptual and policy developments, publications and other resources against major international trends which have helped to shape participatory development theory and practice over the last two decades.

We began by placing a row of cards on the floor marking each year, from pre-1985, up to and including post-2004. Under these we created columns of cards depicting the significant activities etc. At the bottom of each column we placed the issues of *Participatory Learning and Action* published in each year.

This helped to focus our later discussions, which formed many of the 'critical reflections' of this issue, and led to debate about 'future directions' based on the participants' joint experiences. A reconstruction of the timeline starts on page 13.

**Please send us your own timelines** of your experiences with participation, so that we can continue to enrich our understanding of our shared knowledge and learning.

- Timeline key  
UPPER CASE: Major development trends  
Highlighted boxes: influential publications and other resources  
Bullet-pointed: workshops and events and organisational activities

**Participatory Learning and Action 50** writeshop participants discuss the timeline. From left to right: Charlotte Flower; Vicky Johnson; Nicole Kenton; John Gaventa; Andrea Cornwall; David Archer; Sammy Musyoki; and Jane Stevens



Photo: Holly Ashley

the basis for the articles in this special issue. These were also based on previous special issues of *Participatory Learning and Action* and other areas of participatory development that our participants had been involved with. These themes were:

- literacy, adult education and empowerment;
- participatory communications;
- sexual and reproductive health and well-being;
- gender and development;
- children's participation;
- agriculture, livestock, and fisheries;
- people-centred processes for natural resource management;
- urban participatory development;
- participation and well-being;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- advocacy, citizenship, and rights;
- participatory processes in the North;

- governance and democracy; and,
- critical reflections from practice.

Each author was given copies of relevant articles from previous issues of *Participatory Learning and Action*. We then discussed each theme and each author gave the group an update on developments in their own particular field of experience.

We identified several important crosscutting themes that emerged during our discussions. In each article, we wanted to reflect on:

- the shifting and evolution of participatory discourses over the last two decades;
- sharing learning and best practice between the South and the North;
- recognising the political significance of participation, democratisation and issues of power and powerful/powerless agendas within development;
- scaling-up and institutionalising participatory approaches,

The finished timeline with the corresponding Participatory Learning and Action issues for each year



Photo: Holly Ashley

**TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS**

**Pre 1985**  
**STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT**  
*Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Cultural Action for Freedom* Paulo Freire (1970)  
 Kevin Lynch's (ed) *Growing Up in Cities* (1977) – advocacy planning methods adapted for children  
 Participatory methods as a 'mode of transformation'  
 Methodological innovation, e.g. RRA and NRM – 1980  
 John Dewey – philosophy & practice of progressive education  
 Adult education empowerment  
 WEA

Advocacy planning versus 'bulldoze it all down' urban development  
 The work of Ivan Illich  
 Basic needs/basic rights  
 Liberation theology  
 c.1980: Agroecosystem analysis evolved by Gordon Conway and others at the University of Chiang Mai, Thailand  
**1985**  
**BAND AID APPROACH, ETHIOPIA**  
 ■ International Conference on RRA, University of Khon Kaen, Thailand  
 ■ Farmer First workshop (Book later published 1987)

*Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* Paul Richards  
**1986**  
**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**  
**1987**  
 Right to development  
 Structural Adjustment with a 'human face'. Participation as a way of defusing agitation  
 ■ IIED RRA training with Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with Gordon Conway, Jules Pretty, John Thompson and others  
*Our Common Future* commonly known as the *Brundtland Report* World Commission on Environment and Development

Centre for Environmental Technology  
 Khon Kaen University  
 Proceedings of the 1985 International Conference on Rapid Rural Appraisal  
**1988**  
**TIED AID**  
**RRA Notes 1: General issue** June 1988  
**RRA Notes 2: General issue** October 1988  
**RRA Notes 3: General issue** December 1988  
 Scales from eyes – 'they can do it' 1988-89 in Ethiopia/Kenya/ West Bengal

1989-91 Indian innovation and excitement  
 Developing community-based natural resource management from 1980s models to participatory methods in 1990s  
 ■ Ethiopian Red Cross RRA training in Wollo  
 Community Action Plan, Machakos, Kenya  
**1989**  
**FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL: END OF COLD WAR**  
**RRA Notes 4: General issue** February 1989  
 ■ AKRSP Participatory RRA, Gujarat (McCracken in RRA Notes 4)

“...there are striking parallels in the lessons learnt and suggestions for ways forward. Each author has identified new frontiers, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. And most themes overlap or have relevance and resonance in multiple spheres”

so that the ethos and best practice of participation continues to be embedded in all decision-making processes and development agendas, at all levels and in all sectors of development;

- the continuing importance of critical reflections and participatory monitoring and evaluation; and
- the links between working at the local, national and international levels.

The list of themes and issues that we identified are by no means exhaustive, but they indicate some of the most important issues being faced in the arenas of participatory development today and have resonance in both the North and the South. Another significant area is that of strengthening the voices of the South.

The rest of the first day was spent working out how each of these challenges would be woven into the themed articles, by building on lessons learnt and critical reflections. At the end of the first day, the participants got together to give feedback of their progress to the group. On the second day, participants continued to develop the structures of their articles, making the most of this opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences.

David Archer explains to participants at the writeshop how Reflect processes have developed and converged



Photo: Nicole Kenton

### Reflections and directions

The first of our theme articles is by co-guest editor **Robert Chambers**. Robert has been a regular contributor to the series since 1988. Most recently, Robert guest-edited a section in *PLA Notes* 47, on the development and growing use of participatory numbers. In this issue, Robert presents

### TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

*RRA Notes* 5: General issue May 1989  
*RRA Notes* 6: General issue June 1989  
*RRA Notes* 7: Proceedings of second joint IDS/IIED RRA review workshop. September 1989  
 Farmer First: Farmer innovation and agricultural research  
 CIAT video: The IPRA Method (Ashby)  
 Technology assessment and evaluation  
 World Bank Participation learning group established (from December 1989 onwards)

Convention of the Rights of the Child – fundamental benchmark for children’s participation  
 ■ Jimmy Mascarenhas of Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), first PRA process in India, four nights in Kalmandargi village, Karnataka, followed by others  
 ■ December World Bank Participation Learning Group starts  
**1990**  
 JOMTIEN Education for all  
*RRA Notes* 8: General issue January 1990

*RRA Notes* 9: General issue August 1990  
*Community Action Planning Manual*, Kenya  
*Literacy and Power, the Latin American battleground*, David Archer; Patrick Costello. Earthscan  
 Gender/difference coming as an issue in participation work  
**1991**  
*RRA Notes* 10: General issue February 1991  
*RRA Notes* 11: Proceedings of joint IIED and Development Administration Group (University of Birmingham), local level adaptive planning workshop, London May 1991

*RRA Notes* 12: General issue July 1991  
*RRA Notes* 13: Proceedings of the February 1991 Bangalore PRA Trainers Workshop, August 1991  
*RRA Notes* 14: General issue December 1991  
 International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) video: Participatory Research with Women Farmers (Pimbert/Kumar)  
**1992**  
 UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN RIO DE JANEIRO (THE EARTH SUMMIT) DEMOCRATISATION

Participatory Poverty Assessments  
*RRA Notes* 15: Applications of wealth ranking, May 1992  
*RRA Notes* 16: Applications for health, July 1992  
 Agenda 21  
 – local participatory community processes relevant to global discussions on environment and poverty.  
 – children and youth identified as major groups  
 ■ Beyond Farmer First workshop  
 World Bank Participation Statement

a personal reflection on the development of participatory processes and their subsequent spread across the globe and across sectors. Practitioners have expanded their use from the arenas of community planning, agriculture and natural resource use to include 'almost every major domain of social activity'. What lessons have been learnt in almost 20 years, of both good and bad practice? What new 'frontiers' are yet to be explored?

Using examples from previous issues of the series and elsewhere, Chambers identifies some of the major lessons learnt through practice, reflected throughout this issue, such as quality and scale, institutional change, and professionalism and power. He then presents his thoughts on where participation might be taken forward, to new and expanding areas of practice such as within schools, law enforcement agencies, trade unions and other large organisations. Where will an increased emphasis on governance and democratic systems take us? And how important are continuing personal and professional revolutions in thinking, behaviour and practice? The article concludes by asking each of us to think of a future where we can realise our visions and transformations – by showing what people can do and the **differences** people can make.

### Participation, literacy and empowerment

Our next two articles focus on literacy and communication.

Literacy plays a central role in people's ability to learn and participate in development processes, through written, verbal, visual and performance communication. **David Archer** and **Nandago Maria Goreth** recount the evolution of the Reflect approach, charting its early stages, as seen in *PLA Notes 32: Participation, literacy and empowerment*, which **David Archer, Bimal Phnuyal** and **Sara Cottingham**

## "Good communication requires learning from one another to set the agenda. Collaborative communication strategies are important to the success of participatory approaches and processes"

guest-edited in June 1998. This article describes the growing network and achievements of Reflect practitioners throughout the world.

The Reflect approach seeks to empower people to make change, by equipping them with both the communication tools and the capacity to engage in developmental processes. The focus is on the practical use of skills, whether it be access to media such as radio, performance arts, computers or writing, and is combined with the practical outcomes of using those skills.

The article looks at some of the key challenges that lie ahead. These include scaling up, facilitating organisational change, and using Reflect to build coalitions to work more closely with other participatory practitioners. It concludes by emphasising the need for a constant process of reflection-action-reflection that seeks to challenge the complex practice of power in development.

### Voices aloud: making communication and change together

Good communication is key to vocalising the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized in development. Many achievements have previously been shared, in *PLA Notes 29: Performance and participation* (June 1997) and *PLA*

### TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

1992 onwards – formation of PRA/participation networks in India, Kenya (later became PAMFORK), Nepal (became NEPAN) and other countries.

- Frequent IDS/IIED workshops held
- First South –South Exchange Training in India hosted by MYRADA, ActionAid and AKRSP
- PRA Resource Centre starts at IDS

**1993**

- RRA Notes 17: General issue* March 1993
- RRA Notes 18: General issue* June 1993

PA used in forestry sector in UK – early 90s

UK tenants' movements

*Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care.* Roger Hart

World Vision video: The PRA Report, Zambia

Conception of Reflect as PRA, literacy and empowerment

Freire & PRAREFLECT pilot projects – Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador

PPA process in Ghana, followed by Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique.

- Gender and Participation Workshop, IDS
- PRA training, Kunming, China

**1994**

CAIRO, EGYPT: THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Bilaterals getting into participation

- RRA Notes 19: Training* February 1994
- RRA Notes 20: Livestock* April 1994
- RRA Notes 21: Participatory tools and methods in urban areas* November 1994

*Listening to Smaller Voices: Children in an Environment of Change*, Victoria Johnson, ActionAid, Joanna Hill, Edda Ivan-Smith. A landmark for process and product

Growing up in Cities UNESCO-MOST project revived

Children's participation develops, with general separation in

- Courts and child protection
- Healthcare
- Education
- Development work (labour, street children
- Planning

Fair trade movement

Cairo: Looking at how women and men need to participate in decisions affecting their own lives and decisions on children.

- Stepping Stones training
- International Meeting of PRA Networks, IIED

*The World Bank and Participation* report – Operations Policy Department, September

*Beyond Farmer First: Rural People's Knowledge, Agricultural Research and Extension Practice.* Ian Scoones and John Thompson (eds)

Jane Stevens takes a closer look at the timeline



Photo: Holly Ashley

Notes 39: *Popular communications* (October 2000). In his article, **Oga Steve Abah** presents his experiences of working with participatory communications, how they can create innovative solutions for engagement, and their importance in effecting change, by transforming understanding into action.

Good communication requires learning from one another to set the agenda. Collaborative communication strategies are important to the success of participatory approaches and processes. How are participatory tools and communication methods selected? How are they combined to have relevance and appeal to diverse groups working together? What are the differences in how issues are understood, and how do you negotiate to reach common ground?

From storytelling, songs and dance, through to the use of television, radio and videos, Abah describes how these performances can also help to reach a wider audience and frame broader debates that focus on rights, citizenship and development – and how learning together through participatory communications can also help to create new consciousness and empower people to make change.

### Reflections on gender and participatory development

There are often tensions between gender and development (GAD) and participatory development and it is important to understand and address issues of gender inequality in participatory approaches at all levels. In her article, editorial board member and participatory researcher **Nazneen Kanji** gives us



an insight into some of the dilemmas facing practitioners, as well as some positive directions for future work.

How can participatory processes be designed so that both women's and men's views and needs are incorporated into processes and outcomes, so that the most vulnerable and marginalized are given a voice? What are the dangers of stereotyping women, men and communities? The article highlights key achievements in increasing awareness and the participation of women in development, notably in the arenas of sexual and reproductive health, literacy and adult learning, and in the increasing number of networks that support women in participatory development.

Yet challenges remain which must be addressed in order to create more equitable approaches to development. The article concludes that strengthening alliances amongst both advocates for gender and development and participatory development will help to create a strong basis for change.

### Not for children only: lessons learnt from young people's participation

In February 1996, **Vicky Johnson** guest-edited *PLA Notes* 25, our first special issue dealing with children's participation. Later, in October 2001, **Louise Chawla** and **Sherry Bartlett** guest-edited a second children's issue, *PLA Notes* 42: *Children's participation – evaluating effectiveness*. For this issue, **Louise Chawla** and **Vicky Johnson** focus on children's participation and the growing recognition of the rights of children and young people in development. This article explores some of the realities that children and those working with them face.

Children may be a distinct social group identified by

**“The growing phenomenon of urban poor federations is arguably a great example of ‘good governance from the bottom up’. Over the last 20 years, these self-organised collectives have joined together to create wide networks and federations across cities, nations and continents”**

age, yet all too often their needs are either regarded as being in isolation from wider community or policy agendas – or their views are seen as irrelevant to participatory decision-making processes.

The authors discuss the importance of power relations, conflict resolution, the need for safety and ethical frameworks when working with children and the need for advocacy to vocalise their rights at all levels. Monitoring and evaluation are key to ensuring that the processes they are engaged in are empowering and do not increase vulnerability. Practitioners need to continue to make sure that good practice continues to be learnt, shared, and followed.

Children's participation is distinct from adult participation: it should provide both autonomy and care for the children involved, but also increase recognition of their rights, which should be more widely practiced in participatory development and with groups of all ages. The authors provide examples and conclusions that show how engaging and communicating with children, in ways that are embedded within wider development agendas and processes, are essential not only for children, but for everyone.

## TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

### 1995

COPENHAGEN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

*PLA Notes* 22: General Issue February 1995

*PLA Notes* 23: Section on participatory approaches to HIV/AIDS programmes June 1995

*PLA Notes* 24: Critical reflections from practice October 1995

‘Sharing our concerns’: statement made by an informal group of practitioners (published in *PLA Notes* 22, 1995)

John Major's ‘Citizen's charter’ (UK)

Formation of PRA/PLA/Participation Networks e.g. NEPAN/PAMFORK

Participation and organisational change/learning

Institutionalising ‘good practice’ – spread/scaling up

Coherence – applying Reflect at all levels/in all spaces – especially to ourselves – subjectivity (esp. Latin America)

Community based NRM and conflict management (World Neighbors – SE Asia)

*Participatory Learning and Action: a trainer's guide*

Pretty *et al.* (eds)

### 1996

CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING, BEIJING

*PLA Notes* 25: Special issue on children's participation February 1996

*PLA Notes* 26: General issue June 1996

*PLA Notes* 27: Participation, policy and institutionalisation October 1996

Self censorship? Lack of open critique from ‘within’

IDS workshop on scaling up and policy

Institutionalisation of participation

Children's participation – acts of random excellence

In UK: Training in Hull (Andy Inglis) PA spread from here to Edinburgh/Walsall

Publication of *REFLECT Mother Manual*

DDA/DFID action research report

Istanbul: Children's participation written into Habitat Agenda – UNICEF's Children's Rights and Habitat

■ First South-South International Thematic PRA Training Workshop convened by Praxis in Ranchi, India

*ABC of PRA: Report on the South South Workshop on PRA: attitudes and behaviour, Bangalore and Madurai* – Somesh Kumar (ed). Also an article in *PLA Notes* 27

■ International PRA Networking meeting in Nepal

■ Attitude and Behaviour Change workshop, Bangalore and Madurai

### 1997

DEATH OF PAULO FREIRE

DEBT CAMPAIGNS

*PLA Notes* 28: Methodological complementarity February 1997

“...the way forward now lies with a new generation of practitioners, capturing again the ‘excitement, energy and creativity’ that first inspired people to use participatory approaches”

### Sexual and reproductive well-being and rights

*Participatory Learning and Action* first published a special issue on health in July 1992 in *RRA Notes* 16, guest-edited by **Marc Lammerink** and **Dick de Jong**. Then in February 2000, *PLA Notes* 37: *Sexual and reproductive health* gave an update on developments in related approaches, methods, processes and policy.

Our next two articles give a further update. First, **Andrea Cornwall** and **Gill Gordon** reflect upon lessons learnt in the arena of sexual and reproductive well-being and rights.

The article highlights four key issues and looks at some of the advances in, and barriers to, participatory community-based HIV prevention and care work. They discuss how poverty, and the lack of funding and resources, can severely impact upon the ability of communities and programmes to deliver effective sexual healthcare and education. They explore how learning about sexuality and gender issues in a positive way enables people to learn about their own emotional and sexual well-being. They investigate how development agendas, driven by donor agencies or by communities, often fail to recognise the complexities within societies regarding sexual activity and rights. They can often do more to stigmatise sexuality and sexual health issues by advocating unrealistic policies.

The authors conclude that using participatory approaches to create ‘quick fixes’ is no solution. Instead they advocate approaches that enable people to **understand** their rights and foster a sense of entitlement – approaches which are transformative in nature, and which stem from ‘locally owned and appropriate strategies to realise sexual and reproductive rights and well-being’.

### Gender, participation, health and positive thinking

Living with HIV and AIDS has a serious impact on wider development issues that go beyond the individual’s health, such as their ability to work, support families and prosper economically. **Alice Welbourn** discusses the global pandemic of HIV and AIDS and issues relating to gender, participation and positive thinking. What problems do people face, particularly women, living with the virus? How can communities work together to remove the stigma attached to those infected and address problems caused by poverty and lack of access to drugs? How much is effectively being achieved by the work of such institutions as the UN and the World Health Organization? And what are the barriers to the effective participation of people and networks in creating solutions to the pandemic?

Her article brings to the fore many of the issues faced by those working to tackle the spread of the virus, both globally and within families and communities. Despite the enormity of the challenges, Alice offers us a positive view of how participation **can** and **does** make a difference.

### Participatory methods and the measurement of well-being

Participatory assessments of well-being are becoming more and more mainstream. Well-being ranking has partly

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*PLA Notes* 29: Performance and participation  
June 1997

*PLA Notes* 30: Participation and fishing communities  
October 1997

20-30 practitioners (incl. Oxfam) met three times to reflect on PA practice in the UK

Integration of reproductive health and NRM (World Neighbors)

Stepping Forward Flow on from *PLA Notes* 25 to look at key issues of children and young people’s participation in development process

■ International workshop on PM & E, at IRR in the Philippines

### 1998

UK GOVERNMENT SCHEMES THAT REQUIRE ‘PARTICIPATION’ NGOS PILOTING CAPACITY BUILDING TO MAINSTREAM

*PLA Notes* 31: Participatory monitoring and evaluation  
February 1998

*PLA Notes* 32: Participation, literacy and empowerment  
June 1998

*PLA Notes* 33: Understanding market opportunities  
October 1998

UK Ban on production and sale of landmines

### PLA toolkit

Gender, power and stratification in Reflect – breaking myths of ‘harmonious’ communities

Reflect beyond literacy to governance, democratisation, rights, people’s own spaces.

PLAN Indonesia two-year programme of capacity building in participatory approaches and children’s participation

UK government funded schemes e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal, New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Children’s Fund, PCTs requiring participation of local communities

*Changing Views on Change: Participatory Approaches to Monitoring the Environment*  
Joanne Abbot and Irene Guijt

*The Myth of Community: Gender issues in participatory development.* Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (eds)

*Whose Voice? Participatory research and policy change*  
Jeremy Holland with James Blackburn (eds)

*Who Changes? Institutionalizing participation in development*  
James Blackburn with Jeremy Holland (eds)

Stepping Forward: Children and young people’s participation in the development process  
Vicky Johnson et al. (eds)

### 1999

*PLA Notes* 34: Learning from analysis. February 1999

*PLA Notes* 35: Community water management  
June 1999

*PLA Notes* 36: General issue  
October 1999

Trend towards electronic resources

■ Popular communications workshop at IDS  
Participatory budgeting

evolved from wealth ranking methods. In May 1992, we published *RRA Notes 15: Applications of wealth ranking*. In the next article, **Jethro Pettit** and **Sarah White** discuss some innovations which have begun to focus more on issues of well-being and the increasing awareness of its importance in development.

Well-being encompasses people's personal and social relationships, their values and their understanding. Methods can be used to reveal complex pictures of social and economic situations and their implications for participatory development. The authors discuss how we might define the terms 'well' and 'being', with their complex associations with the self and social and cultural relationships. They highlight some of the challenges that face practitioners of participatory approaches in adopting processes that seek to address issues of livelihoods and sustainability and, at the same time, well-being.

Measuring well-being is a complex process, and there is much debate about it. How do wealth ranking and well-being ranking differ? When do methods and techniques need to give way to issues of 'ethics, conduct and principles of research'? What are the trade-offs between going to scale and more intensive processes? How can participatory practitioners represent or distort the reality on the ground and enable 'genuinely different voices to heard'? And lastly, the authors ask us a tantalising question: 'does more development mean greater well-being?'

### Rights, advocacy and participation – what's working?

A common theme that runs throughout the articles in this issue is that of participation and transformation. In February 2002, **Cindy Clark**, **Beth Harrison**, **Valerie Miller**, **Jethro**

**Pettit** and **Lisa VeneKlasen** guest-edited *PLA Notes 43: Advocacy and citizen participation*. In our next article, **Jethro Pettit** and **Sammy Musyoki** give us an update and explore how participation and transformation are essential components when challenging the root causes of social exclusion, poverty and marginalization. The authors reflect upon the need to understand effective strategies for participatory advocacy and citizenship. Yet as ever, issues of power, even in rights-based development processes, remain.

The article addresses some of the dangers inherent in engaging in 'participatory' approaches that seek to advocate for people's rights without challenging inequalities of power, from both within and outside of communities. The authors emphasise the need for slow, deliberative approaches that do not seek to provide a 'quick fix', but instead understand the complex dynamics involved.

In an age of globalisation, rights need to be negotiated not just at the local and national level, but also at the international level. Using examples of successful approaches and processes from around the world, the authors conclude by emphasising the need to revolutionise the structures and systems of donor-led procedures to support rights and citizenship.

### Completing the globe: tackling poverty and injustice in the North

We have published various articles over the years from authors about northern experiences, although so far we have only published one special issue – *PLA Notes 38: Participatory processes in the North*, guest edited by **Charlotte Flower**, **Paul Mincher** and **Susan Rimkus** in June 2000. As the early years saw an explosion of the use of PRA tools and methodologies in the South, **Charlotte Flower** and **Vicky**

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Community Pride Manchester  
Work with Save the Children on Participatory M&E with young people and different stakeholders 'saying power'  
Piloting of PA methods in UK with Sustain and Oxfam  
Development Focus formulating approach in UK  
From 'participatory development'/methods to 'participation in development' politics  
■ Dakar World Education Forum – Civil Society Action on global and national level ... building coalition and campaigns.

### 2000

#### POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPERS (PRSPs)

*PLA Notes 37: Sexual and reproductive health*  
February 2000

*PLA Notes 38: Participatory processes in the North*  
June 2000

*PLA Notes 39: Participatory communication*  
October 2000

Pathways to Participation project, Institute for Development Studies, UK and international partners

■ Workshop: Making Change Happen – IDS, ActionAid, Asia (in *PLA Notes 43*)

*From the Roots Up: strengthening organizational capacity through guided self-assessment* World Neighbors (Methodologies for community capacity building and self-assessment)

■ Dakar, Senegal, April 2004. West African *L' Echange Francophone*, hosted by IIED-Senegal and Fondation Rural de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (FRAO). Conference on participatory development  
'Carpet bombing' PRA Africa, Indonesia

*Reaching the Parts... Community mapping: working together to tackle social exclusion and food poverty* Food Poverty Network

Creation of CIRAC  
"International Reflect Circle"

■ Deliberative democracy for political engagement: *Prajateerpu* – a citizen's jury on food and farming futures held in Andhra Pradesh, India

How to institutionalise children's participation

'Reaching the Hardest to Reach' consultation with 14-25 year-olds and subsequent report by the Prince's Trust – recognised as important in UK local community processes

*Learning from Change: Issues and experience in participatory monitoring and evaluation* Marisol Estrella et al. (eds)

### 2001

GROWING HEGEMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCE INSTITUTIONS (IFIs) AND AN INCREASINGLY WEAKER UN CLIMATE CHANGE – KYOTO PROTOCOL

*PLA Notes 40: Deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment*  
February 2001

*PLA Notes 41: General Issue*  
June 2001

Johnson discuss here the rise of PLA in the North, and in particular, the UK<sup>1</sup>.

Participatory approaches are being used more and more widely in the UK, for example in urban regeneration and community health work and other forms of service delivery. However, while many development agendas and policies now require community participation, all too often the processes lack the necessary depth. Issues of social exclusion often remain unresolved. The concern is that without real depth and quality, these processes may in fact jeopardise a real potential for change.

Despite this, there are many examples of excellent work in the UK. There is much potential for long-term transformational learning to evolve attitudes, behaviour, and skills and to understand issues of power, democratisation and empowerment. A major difficulty is the issue of representation. Participatory approaches can be used to identify power differences within communities – and to effectively address them.

The authors discuss not only how local authorities can help to build a community's capacity to engage, but also how civil society can challenge those in power, and create spaces for participatory decision-making to occur. They conclude that with collective critical reflection, greater inclusion and the sharing of best practice and lessons learnt, real and effective change can occur.

### Tools and methods for empowerment developed by slum and pavement dwellers' federations in India

In November 1994, we published *RRA Notes 21* on *Participa-*

*tory tools and methods in urban areas*, guest-edited by **Diana Mitlin** and **John Thompson**. Since then, articles relating to urban participatory development have also appeared in, for example, *PLA Notes 38: Participatory processes in the North*, *PLA Notes 40: Deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment*; and *PLA Notes 44: Local government and participation*. In our next article, **Sheela Patel** discusses her experiences with urban poor federations in India and internationally.

The growing phenomenon of urban poor federations is arguably a great example of 'good governance from the bottom up'. Over the last 20 years, these self-organised collectives have joined together to create wide networks and federations across cities, nations and continents. These federations have succeeded in creating and sustaining their own poverty reduction strategies by using and building on their own experiences, capacities, resources and networks.

The article explores the routes by which alliances such as the National Slum Dwellers Federation, *Mahila Milan* and SPARC have successfully influenced policy and change. What are the challenges faced in creating solutions that work by urban poor federations? How do federations strengthen relationships with municipal authorities? And perhaps most importantly, what are the lessons learnt, and how are these shared throughout and across networks?

Patel provides examples from practice, highlights key change processes and demonstrates that poor communities can work together to negotiate and continue to create a more equitable and sustainable future.

### Natural resources, people and participation

The early issues of *RRA Notes* and later *PLA Notes* began with a strong emphasis on agriculture and livelihoods. These were the arenas where the first innovations and approaches were

<sup>1</sup> The terms 'North' and 'South' are used here to distinguish between OECD countries – (member states of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) – usually richer or 'developed' countries and non-OECD countries, usually poorer or 'less developed' countries.

## TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

*PLA Notes 42: Children's participation evaluating effectiveness.*  
October 2001

■ Participatory Methodology Forum – ActionAid Bangladesh power in institutions 'Participation' of 'civil society' in PRSPs

Gellideg work with CBOs to develop gendered needs assessment

*Listen hear: the right to be heard.* Summary of the report of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power. January 2001. Oxfam GB.

■ PLAN International holding international debates around children's participation and institutionalisation.

RCPLA coordination transfers from IIED to Praxis in India

*Transforming Power: report of the Participatory Methodologies Forum*, ActionAid, Dhaka, February 2001

*Rights through Evaluation: Putting Child Rights into Practice in South Africa and Nepal.*

Executive summary of a report of the same name, December 2001. Produced by Development Focus International, Himalayan Community Development Forum, and ActionAid in Nepal,

and the Early Learning Resource Unit and the National Working for Water Programme, in South Africa.

### 2002

THE THIRD WAY – WHAT SPACE FOR ALTERNATIVES TO NEO-LIBERALISM?

*PLA Notes 43: Advocacy and citizen participation*  
February 2002

*PLA Notes 44: Local government and participation.* June 2002

*PLA Notes 45: Community based animal healthcare*  
October 2002

'Linking rights and participation' project, Institute for Development Studies, UK

Working with teams around UK and having reference groups of service providers and policy makers to get local action happening

Salford, UK: New Deal for Communities evaluation of post 'PA' experience!

UK National Action Plan: Social Inclusion – influenced by grassroots – UK Department for Work and Pensions opening up to participation

Creation of PAMOJA, the Africa Reflect Network

*Participation: The New Tyranny Bill.* Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds)

*A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: the action guide for advocacy and citizen participation.* Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller

*Realizing Rights: transforming approaches to sexual reproductive well-being.* Andrea Cornwall and Alice Welbourne (eds)

UK activists visit Uganda to learn from UPPAP

focused in. Since then, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of natural resource management, both as a means of sustaining local livelihoods and protecting biodiversity and wild habitats. Here, **Michel Pimbert** looks at lessons learnt, in both the North and the South, in people-centred approaches to natural resource management (NRM). How can participatory ways of knowing be used to acknowledge the role of people in a complex and dynamic ecological, social and economic environment? How do more powerful actors in NRM processes continue to exclude, marginalize and undermine the very people that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods? How important is individual, transformational learning in creating more socially and ecologically responsible practice?

The article explores the shift away from a focus on tools and methods at the local level, towards emphasising the importance of exploring longer-term processes. Understanding local realities within a process is vital to enable more democratic and equitable platforms for citizens to evolve and develop.

What levels of change and learning are required? What are the key conditions and drivers for this change? What role do the State and trans-global institutions play in inhibiting or encouraging such change? The article concludes with a set of key criteria for reversing structural constraints to create new dynamics for democratic, inclusive, equitable and empowering change in NRM.

### Participatory approaches in animal healthcare

Keeping healthy livestock and checking the spread of livestock disease is crucial to many people's livelihoods and to rural economies. Building on the articles featured in the special issue *PLA Notes 45 on Community-based animal*

*healthcare*, **Andy Catley** gives an account of the evolution of these approaches. The article documents important legislative and policy changes that enable community-based animal health workers (CAHWs) to operate. It shows how successes have helped change professional and academic attitudes towards participatory approaches, whilst presenting some of the barriers faced by advocates of community-level work.

Looking to the future, the article summarises key challenges and opportunities. How can CAHW approaches ensure that services are affordable to poor users, and who is currently excluded or does not have access to these services? What are the links between improving markets for livestock and improved animal healthcare? How important are networks of CAHWs and active community engagement in selecting and supporting CAHW services? How can governments continue to legislate for enabling policies which will monitor effectiveness and quality? The article concludes that increased face-to-face engagement between policy makers and communities will continue to play a key role in policy and institutional change.

### Participatory development or participatory democracy? Policy and governance

Previous issues of the series have looked at issues of democracy and governance (e.g. *PLA Notes 40: Deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment*; *PLA Notes 44: Local government and participation*). Linkages between participation and governance are becoming more and more important. Here, **John Gaventa** presents his insights into issues of citizen involvement in influencing policy and institutional change. Decentralisation has opened up new opportunities for democratic engagement. New ways of increasing public intervention and more rights-based

## TIMELINE OF PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

### 2003

**PARTICIPATION SHIFTS FROM 'CLIENT' TO 'CONSUMER' – RESPONDING TO MARKET INFLUENCE**

*PLA Notes 46: Participatory processes for policy change* February 2003

*PLA Notes 47: General issue* August 2003

*PLA Notes 48: Learning and teaching participation* December 2003

*Pathways to Participation: reflections on PRA*, Andrea Cornwall and Gareth Pratt (eds)

Labelling 'empowerment' as local development rather than political action

Participation and policy processes – resistance to change  
Publication of *Communication and Power* – new Reflect resource materials

Reflect and Stepping Stones 'STAR' – HIV/gender/power/learning and action

UN Literacy Prize to Reflect/CIRAC

'Have you been PA'd?' from evaluation of two Glasgow projects (health) using PA

Communities First project in Wales piloting use of PA

Reflect in schools/with children (Get Global)

Central government and local government more willing to fund longer more rigorous processes based on previous processes.

### 2004

*PLA Notes 49: Decentralisation and community-based planning* April 2004

*Participatory Learning and Action 50: Past reflections, future directions*

*What Men and Women Want: a practical guide to gender and participation*. Gender and Participation Toolkit, Oxfam UK Poverty Programme

Surveys show declining child and youth knowledge and interest in formal politics

Local evaluation of Children's Fund programmes and Working with Children and Young People in local development processes around the UK

Trained teams of residents and workers carrying on with community research and action and local participatory evaluation.

Tension between national UK targets and locally derived targets and indicators

Critical analysis of when institutionalised processes for children's participation work

PA being used as a consultation process not addressing empowerment/change

Possibility of North East England PPA

Participation and power in coalitions and alliances on education – Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF)

MA in Participation, Development and Social Change launched at IDS

### Post 2004

Reflect Europe circle

MAP Social inclusion European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) and ATD Fourth World

The North other than UK

approaches are appearing to actively and directly involve citizens in full participation. These also seek to make institutions and policy makers more accountable to citizens.

There are valuable lessons to be learnt from past practice. Yet there are still challenges to be faced. How can participatory strategies around deliberation, local government and advocacy improve citizen engagement and deepen participatory governance? What forms could a deeper democratic process take, and whose versions of democracy are appropriate? And which issues are still 'off limits' to public debate?

There is a need to challenge deeply held political cultures and practice, deal with conflict, work with minority groups, build on gains made by community action and go to scale appropriately. The article concludes that documenting and sharing experience and learning that show how participatory governance actually makes a **difference** to people's lives is key to building on success and looking to the future.

### Shifting perceptions, changing practices in PRA: from infinite innovation to the quest for quality

In February 1998, we published *PLA Notes* 31: Participatory monitoring and evaluation. In this current issue, **Andrea Cornwall** and **Irene Guijt** offer us some personal insights from their long experience as 'critical insiders' in participatory development. Their article traces the initial developments of RRA and PRA through to evolving and innovative practices – and also evolving concerns over quality and appropriateness – and how participatory methods have developed beyond merely fitting into 'development business as usual'.

From the initial focus on methods, to wider and deeper issues of governance, should participation now be inherently apolitical or more political in its approach? What do new discourses around the issues of rights, citizenship and governance mean for participatory development practices? How important is participatory learning in shaping the ways in which we attempt to 'do development'? How important will

renewed thinking on monitoring and evaluation be?

In the last ten years, the community of practitioners has become increasingly diverse and the applications of PLA have evolved into new and challenging areas of work. Within this wealth of evolving practice, Cornwall and Guijt suggest that perhaps the way forward now lies with a new generation of practitioners, capturing again the 'excitement, energy and creativity' that first inspired people to use participatory approaches.

And finally...

### Regina's *Participatory Learning and Action* illustration challenge

Even before they first appeared on the cover of *PLA Notes* 29 in June 1997, **Regina Faul-Doyle's** distinctive cartoons have helped to really characterise the series. Has this been one of the greater challenges faced by those in participatory development? Regina's illustrations have always managed to be comical, appropriate and tell a whole story all at once, summing up the essence of each issue in one tiny square. This time, Regina has got her own back on us....

### Future directions...

As all our authors have shown, sharing our experiences, learning and best practice is invaluable. Even after 16 years in print, authors who contributed to *Participatory Learning and Action* in its original incarnation as *RRA Notes* and later *PLA Notes* are still sharing their learning with us. We hope that you find the articles in this issue challenging, stimulating, and inspiring, and above all, that they offer an insight into how we can all make a difference.

We hope that you continue to send us your critical reflections and examples of innovations and best practice. Send us your letters, articles, training tips, networking information, photos, drawings, website links and songs. Send us your emails, videos, CD-ROMs, posters, books, pamphlets, and DVDs. Send us whatever you have that you want to share – your own experiences of participatory learning and action.

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Holly Ashley joined IIED in 1998 to manage

and promote *Participatory Learning and Action* subscriptions. In 2001, she took on the role of acting editor for the series, and then again in 2002. Holly has recently completed an MSc degree course in environmental and energy studies for architecture. Her focus has been on the effectiveness of participatory approaches towards creating a more sustainable built environment in the UK.