

# editorial

Welcome to the 56th issue of *Participatory Learning and Action*. For this issue, we have published a series of articles of general interest. We are grateful to all the authors for their contributions to the series – and to our International Editorial Advisory Board for their comments and suggestions.

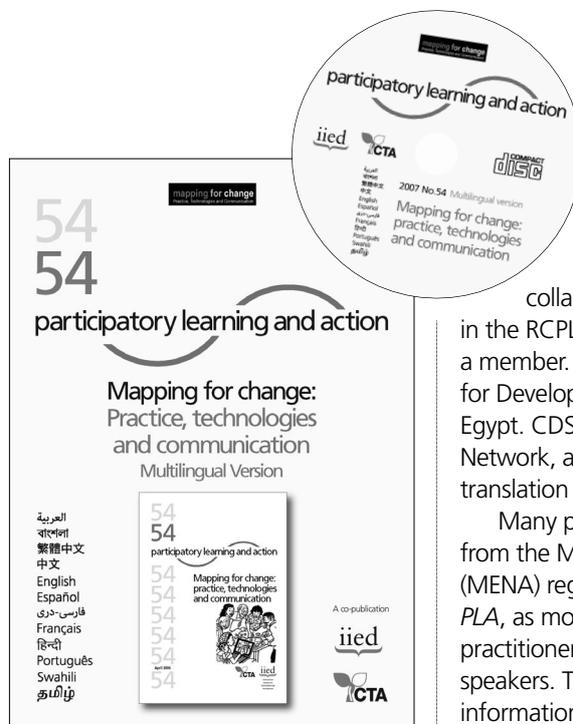
The first half of 2007 has been busy for the PLA team. In particular, there have been three very important developments! Here's what has been happening:

## **Participatory Learning and Action subscriptions now online**

The *Participatory Learning and Action* series has teamed up with IngentaConnect, a leading international online publisher. Current subscribers will now have a free online subscription in addition to their paper copy subscription and will be able to read current issues of *Participatory Learning and Action* free online as soon as it is published! Or, readers can choose whether to have an online only subscription. All our current subscribers will have received a letter with this issue, with details of how to access their *PLA* subscription online. If you're not a subscriber, you can use the pay-per-view service to read current issues online. And back issues are still free to all to download from our website. For more information, see our subscriptions order form at the end of this issue, visit our website [www.planotes.org](http://www.planotes.org), or email us at [pla.notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.notes@iied.org).

## **Multilingual CD-ROM: *PLA 54 Mapping for Change – practice, technologies and communication***

We are pleased to announce the publication of our new CD-ROM. All subscribers will have received a free copy with this issue. Co-published by IIED and CTA, the CD-ROM includes



translated articles in twelve languages: Arabic, Bangla, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), English, French, Hindi, Persian-Dari, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili and Tamil. It also includes other key resources, such as DVD examples from practice, a glossary of terms, and practical ethics for PGIS practitioners, as well as previous relevant articles which appeared in *PLA* – all presented in an easy-to-use format. We are grateful to all our partners for their support and to the Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) Network and other colleagues for assisting us with the translation of articles. Thanks especially to co-Editor **Nicole Kenton**, who has so successfully coordinated this huge project!

We hope that you find the CD-ROM useful and look forward to your feedback. Please send your comments to us at the usual address, or by emailing us at [pla.notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.notes@iied.org)

## **Proposed Arabic edition of *PLA***

Producing the new multilingual CD-ROM has had one very important

offshoot: a proposal to produce an Arabic edition of *PLA*.

The project will be a collaboration between partners in the RCPLA Network, of which IIED is a member. It will be led by the Center for Development Services (CDS) in Egypt. CDS is Chair for the RCPLA Network, and coordinated the Arabic translation for the *PLA 54* CD-ROM.

Many participatory practitioners from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are unable to access *PLA*, as most development practitioners in this region are Arabic speakers. This limits the resources, information and knowledge they can access. The proposed Arabic issues will include the main themed issues as well as the most important case studies that this region can benefit from. A specialised MENA committee of practitioners, academics and researchers from the region will select articles for translation. We hope that translating back issues of the *PLA* series into Arabic will be an effective method to share participatory approaches with development practitioners in the region.

Initially, the Arabic editions will contain all the most relevant articles from the series in five volumes, each covering ten issues. The aim is for the Arabic editions of *PLA* to catch up with the current international issues within two years. After this, a regional agency will produce the Arabic edition on a regular basis.

## ***PLA* International Editorial Advisory Board**

### **A warm welcome to new members**

We are pleased to welcome two new members to the International Editorial Advisory Board:

**Giacomo Rambaldi** works for the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in the Netherlands. Giacomo has worked in participatory mapping in developing countries since the late 1980s. In 2000, he launched Participatory Avenues – [www.iapad.org](http://www.iapad.org) – a website dedicated to sharing knowledge on participatory mapping methods and approaches. In 2004, he launched the Open Forum for Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Technologies ([www.PPgis.net](http://www.PPgis.net)).

His expertise includes visualising indigenous spatial knowledge for improving communication, facilitating peer-to-peer dialogue and managing conflicts on issues related to the territory, collaborative natural resource and protected area management, participatory spatial planning, and networking, information management and communication. Giacomo was also one of the guest editors for the recent special issue, *PLA 54 Mapping for Change – practice, technologies and communication*.

**Lolichen Pullemplavil Joseph** has been working with the Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Bangalore, India with children and information management for the past eleven years. He currently heads the Centre for Applied Research and Documentation (CARD) at CWC. Lolichen has previous work experience with the students' movement and the tribal populations of northeast India. He is a recipient of the Macarthur Fellowship of Leadership Development on a participatory project on the sexual and reproductive rights of children and youth.

Lolichen has been involved in training and capacity building in the areas of children's participation, protagonism and governance, both at the national and international level. He

has been leading an innovative area of empowering and facilitating children to carry out their own research, resulting in their informed participation in governance. We are pleased to include a contribution on children's participation by Lolichen, Chapter 7, this issue.

We look forward to the continued input of these new members to the series.

### In memory of Anil C. Shah

We are very sorry to share the news that *PLA* Editorial Board member Anil C Shah passed away on the 12th April 2007. Anil was a very experienced participatory development practitioner, and an active member of our International Editorial Advisory Board. Anil succumbed to cancer after fighting the disease for almost three years. He had been working on an article for *PLA* (Chapter 1, this issue) right up to the week before he died.

Anil was the Founder Chairman of the Development Support Centre, Ahmedabad, Gujarat and also the first Chief Executive of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India). Both are non-governmental organisations that have played a major role at the state and national level in demonstrating the feasibility of community managed natural resources. Before retirement, Anil was a member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) where he held important positions as head of different government departments such as Agriculture, Rural Development and Industries.

Blending field-level issues with macro-level policy, he played a crucial role in reforming major policies and procedures governing participatory natural resources management programmes such as Joint Forest Management (JFM), Watershed Management and Participatory

Irrigation Management (PIM) at the state and national level. He adapted and popularised participatory methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) among development practitioners, academic institutions and government functionaries. He was also a prolific writer and researcher and has written more than 100 papers in English and Gujarati on issues related to natural resource management and his experiences in Government.

His colleague at DSC, Executive Director Sachin Oza, shared his personal reflections with us:

*He was so passionate about PRA that he used to tell us that, as a doctor always carried his stethoscope and a barber his tools, as development practitioners we should never be going to villages without carrying a few chart papers and markers. In fact he instructed the drivers that these should always be there in the DSC vehicles! He could never imagine how one could have dialogue with villagers without employing some method or other. It was a treat to watch him employing various methods, which came so naturally to him.*

*As always, he never gave up and until the end was working on refining his paper, 'Sequential steps for empowering rural communities for local development', something that was always so dear to him. As a person who championed the cause of people's participation in natural resource management, it will be difficult to fill the void that he has left. However, the best way of respecting and remembering him would be by taking his work forward.*

### In this issue

In memory of **Anil Shah**, our opening article is his 'Sequential steps for

empowering rural communities for local development'. When development professionals approach a community, they often have an agency mandate to introduce a particular development programme. In Anil's experience, the tendency is to offer it to the community before they even have a chance to consider whether it is relevant or appropriate to them. Anil argues that true empowerment only comes when the community themselves has precedence over the decision-making process.

Here, Anil shares his personal account of a facilitating approach, intended as a guide for development professionals. He takes the reader through a step-by-step sequence of activities. In this process, the facilitator works with the whole community to:

- identify what type of development the community might need;
- assess whether and how the development might be beneficial to them; and
- decide how they could plan, implement and, ultimately, sustain the development in the long-term.

Anil argues that only once the community has been through this process, should a development professional even propose that any programme of development is available. As he writes, real empowerment does not occur when there is the lure of subsidy to be had. It occurs when communities are able to plan what development is most appropriate – and of most benefit – to them.

The next article is by **Karen Hillyer** and **Simone Purohit**. They describe the evolution of a participatory monitoring and evaluation process in Bangalore, India, and the learning through trial and error that took place before a

satisfactory process was developed. After asking communities for their help in identifying indicators for M&E, the facilitators realised that they had dominated the process and that only limited participation took place. In the next stage, they worked with self-help groups not just in identifying indicators, but also in deciding how to measure them, who would do this, and how frequently. Despite the self-help groups and facilitators working closely together, there were still doubts about the sustainability of the monitoring process because communities did not see the use or value of much of the monitoring. The breakthrough came when the results for one indicator were analysed and shown graphically, so that communities could see the results and discuss them. The facilitators realised that if the full cycle of design, data collection, analysis and interpretation was completed for a single, simple indicator, participants could appreciate the purpose and value of M&E, and gain confidence that they could do it themselves.

Next, **Clement Akasoba** and **Lance Robinson** describe a participatory approach to public accountability that is being used by communities in Ghana, with support from a network of NGOs. Communities assess the performance of government service providers, in this case primary schools, by developing criteria and indicators for performance. They then score schools according to the criteria and summarise these scores for different communities in a district. Some of the areas of poor performance identified can be addressed at local level with school heads and teachers. However, some issues need to be taken to the district level. The communities present the scores at a multi-stakeholder, district-

level forum, which includes representatives of the ministry of education, head teachers from the schools concerned, teachers, parent-teacher association members, local leaders and NGOs. The main value of the forum is in providing an opportunity for communities and education providers to meet face-to-face and for each to gain a better understanding of the others' perspective. However, there is also great potential to use the forums for action planning, so that possible changes and improvements identified during the dialogue are actually put into practice. The forums could also form part of longer term monitoring of education providers (or other service providers), if repeated every year or two, providing information for communities and their supporters to lobby for further improvement in services.

In his article, **Chris Lunch** discusses how two methods – participatory video (PV) and Most Significant Change (MSC) – can be combined in a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process. PV is useful for opening up channels for community-led learning, sharing and exchange. It can convey a 'rich picture' of voices and views across different sections of a community. The MSC technique is a qualitative M&E process. It is akin to storytelling, and uses participatory approaches to document and systematically analyse stories of significant change. By combining the two, communities can document their MSC stories themselves, with minimal training. Different sections of the community can film their stories of most significant change and show them to the whole community for feedback. Filming the stories allows them to be shown and disseminated widely, and feedback from, for

example, decision makers and scientists can also be videoed and shown to the communities, creating a feedback loop. The article includes an example from a workshop where the combined methods were used to evaluate a research programme, to illustrate how the technique works.

Next, **Frances Hansford, Virginia Araújo Lima Santana, and Gérman Hílares Reinoso** describe a participatory systematisation process. A group of NGOs had completed demonstration projects to strengthen food and nutritional security in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. So a participatory systematisation process was developed to promote a regional network for sharing learning more widely and influencing policy within the region. The group wanted to capture diverse local perspectives and knowledge about the projects, and put these experiences into an organised system of information. It was also seen as a way to promote a dynamic process of collective learning and action.

To implement this, an effective two-phase process was used to train 20 local NGO facilitators by external consultants, who then applied their skills in the field over the following months. In phase one, ten facilitators were trained, and in phase two, these facilitators trained another ten. A series of workshops enabled the trainee facilitators to learn how to apply the methodologies, review progress, and learn about information analysis, documentation and dissemination. A final workshop reflected on lessons learnt and to prepare the facilitators to replicate the methodology. Following this, each facilitator formed a core local research

team, working with local communities. Using examples, the article outlines the basic steps needed to implement the systemisation process. It discusses local outcomes, and the impact that the process has had on increasing both capacity and confidence, and in influencing food security policy at regional levels. Lastly, the authors discuss some of the challenges they faced – and provide advice for others thinking of engaging in a similar process. Our tips for trainers this issue (page 56) 'Reflective learning: building capacity in systematisation methodologies' discusses this further.

Next, **Ravi Jayakaran** describes the wholistic worldview analysis (WWVA) tool. Using PLA exercises, this tool has been used successfully to create a wholistic baseline for a community, analyse its needs and identify its vulnerabilities, with the ultimate aim of building capacity to overcome those vulnerabilities which had been hindering any community-level development plans. The author discusses how a community's worldview and its survival strategy are connected, i.e. what challenges they must face to survive and how they perceive them in relation to their survival strategy, and their capacity to cope with them. The article then describes how to create a WWVA diagram. Using a combination of PLA analysis methods, such as livelihood, problem and uncertainty analysis, the community decides which issues they want to analyse in the diagram. Then, the community is facilitated to assess which of these issues are within or outside of their control to change. The diagram is used as a visual aid and a record, helping to analyse how – or if

– these vulnerabilities can be reduced, who the key stakeholders are, and what programme activities and capacity building are needed to address the issues.

Our final article is by **PJ Lolichen**. He describes how children themselves became researchers – planning, collecting information and analysing data – in a study of children's mobility and transport issues in Karnataka, India. Despite the difficulties involved in fitting the research work around their school, home and work responsibilities, the children felt they had gained a huge amount from being researchers. The process of the research equipped them with the skills and expertise to plan and carry out research using appropriate tools, hold discussions with children and other stakeholders confidently, and put across their points, supported by appropriate data. They have also developed solutions to their problems and formed organisations to implement these solutions, in partnership with other stakeholders. They are in the process of negotiating with local-level bodies for permanent and fully recognised children's participation in decision-making and governance, and have become strongly aware of their right to know and the need to participate.

### Next issue

Our next issue, no 57, will be on the 'unspoken dilemmas of participation'. Our guest editor will be Tom Wakeford and others. This issue will reflect critically on 'citizen participation' and its impact on the mainstream policy-making processes and look at ways forward. We anticipate an interesting debate.

# general section