

Welcome to issue 54 of *Participatory Learning and Action* – and a warm welcome to all our readers, old and new.

This has been an exciting year for the *PLA* Editorial team so far. In the last issue, we reported on our new team of International Editorial Advisors. The team has been making a wonderful contribution to the series – and we are grateful to them all for their new ideas and hard work in reviewing articles, providing feedback, and encouraging new authors to write for us. We have recently set up a new email group and forum for our International Editorial team and look forward to exploring other communication and networking tools in the future.

We have also been working hard to plan future special issues of the series. Issues in the pipeline include community-based natural resource management in southern Africa (PLA 55, December 2006) and community radio.

For those of you with online access, our 50th issue special, *Critical reflections, future directions* is now available to download for free online.¹ We are also working hard to improve our guidelines for authors and have plans to improve our website. Look out for updates in the next issue and on our website www.planotes.org.

Themed section

Mapping for change: practice, technologies and communication

This special issue has been co-published with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural

Cooperation (CTA). It is based on articles that were submitted to or presented at the Mapping for Change International Conference on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication. The conference was held at the Kenya College of Communication of Technology, in Nairobi, Kenya, 7th–10th September 2005.²

The conference was an exciting opportunity for participatory practitioners from around the world to come together to share their experiences, learning and reflections on the use of mapping and related spatial technologies for development. Holly Ashley attended the conference, which was a great opportunity to learn about this growing community of practice.

Communicating and networking: a challenge for the guest editors

Producing this special issue has been a particular challenge. Our international guest editor team members live and work around the world, in Africa, Australia, Canada, Europe, and the USA. Over the last seven months, all have worked tirelessly in shaping this special issue, and we have used an innovative process of e-participation, communication and networking.

Over 50 papers were presented at the conference, representing a wide spread of practice. Our remit was to select papers that would provide our

readers with a good overview of the work of practitioners from across the globe, using different tools and approaches, and for different issues. We also wanted to include some more reflective articles, discussing issues that PGIS practitioners face today.³

To achieve this, we used various online, free facilities to keep in regular contact and to share our thoughts and ideas with one another. After the conference, a special email group was established for the team.⁴ We also used a free online file-sharing facility, where we could upload and share documents online. The team participated in several online conference call meetings, to choose which articles to include.⁵ And more than 20 people voted on the title for this special issue, using an online survey facility.⁶

These communication and networking processes have characterised the production of this special issue, both before and after the conference. It has allowed the *PLA* Editorial team to explore and develop these new and innovative ways of working together, which we aim to continue using to work with authors and guest editors in the future.

Introducing the guest editor team

We have been privileged to work with an exceptional international team of guest editors. The team comes from a

¹ Visit www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/pla_backissues/PLA50_000.html

² The conference was organised by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) ACP-EU; International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC); Environmental Research, Mapping and Information Systems in Africa (Ermis Africa); International Institute of Rural Reconstruction – Africa Regional Center (IIRR-Africa); Lands and People Information Sharing Society (LAPIS); GIS for Developing Countries (GISDECO) Network; and West Virginia University, Office of International Programs and Department of Geology and Geography. (<http://pgis2005.cta.int/>)

³ For more details about the final selection of articles, please see the overview article for this special issue.

⁴ D Groups 'Development through Dialogue' (see www.dgroups.org)

⁵ Skype is an online facility that enables you to make free calls over the Internet to anyone else who also has Skype. You can hold conference calls, and use Skype instant messaging/chat facilities. See www.skype.com

⁶ See www.surveymonkey.com

**A view from inside
one of the main
plenary session at
the Mapping for
Change conference**



Photo: Johan Minnie

variety of backgrounds, with a range of expertise and experience in the field of mapping for change.

Giacomo Rambaldi works for the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in the Netherlands. Giacomo has worked in community mapping in developing countries since the late 1980s. In 2000, he launched Participatory Avenues www.iapad.org, a website dedicated to sharing knowledge on community mapping. In 2004, he launched the Open Forum for Participatory Geographic Information Management and Communication (www.PPgis.net). His expertise includes visualising indigenous spatial knowledge for improving communication, participatory spatial planning; and networking, information management and communication.

Jon Corbett has worked with Indigenous peoples in Indonesia and in British Columbia on issues relating to resources and their sustainable management. He is exploring how participation and information communication technologies (ICTs)

can enable local communities to document, store, manage and communicate their culture, language, history and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). He is also interested in how geographic representation of community information using ICTs can strengthen communities and increase their influence over regional decision-making processes.

Rachel Olson is a citizen of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation in the Yukon Territory. Her experience with community mapping began in 1997 with the Halfway River First Nation, in Northeastern British Columbia. Rachel has worked with several First Nations communities on projects relating to traditional land uses, environmental health, and oral history studies. Recently, she has worked with the Aboriginal Mapping Network, completing an evaluation and a strategic plan for the Network.

Mike McCall has been involved in participatory spatial planning, especially participatory mapping and GIS, for over a decade. Since 1993, Mike has worked at the International

Institute for Geo-Information Sciences and Earth Observation (ITC) in the Netherlands, where he has been involved in training, researching and project activities in participatory spatial planning and natural resource management policies and planning.

Julius Muchemi is the Executive Director of Environmental Research Mapping and Information Systems in Africa (ERMIS Africa), Kenya. Since the 1990s, he has been engaged in PGIS/community mapping initiatives to develop compatible, spatial-based solutions for securing territories, cultures and commonly shared resources among indigenous people in Africa. He is currently setting grounds for a PhD in Traditional Spatial Knowledge Systems in Eastern and Central Africa.

Peter Kwaku Kyem is an Associate Professor of Geography at Central Connecticut State University, USA. Peter is a Ghanaian with a GIS Professional Certificate (GISP) obtained from the GIS Institute (USA) and a PhD in Geography from Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. His research interests focus on participatory GIS applications, conflict management and PGIS applications in resource and environmental management. Peter has also authored several articles on community-based GIS applications.

Daniel Weiner is Professor of Geography and Director of International Programs at West Virginia University. He received a PhD in Geography from Clark University in 1986. Dan's research focuses on the political ecology of development in the Appalachian and Southern African regions and participatory Geographic Information Systems.

Robert Chambers has worked in a variety of areas, including canal

The conference participants gather for a group photo at the end of the conference at the Kenyan College for Communication Technology, Nairobi.



Photo: Jeroen Verplanke

irrigation management, community forestry, perceptions of poverty, and creativity and pluralism in participatory methodologies. His current interests include community-led total sanitation; poverty immersions for professionals; institutional learning and change in agricultural research; and, how we know – or think we know – about things in development.

Aside from the time given freely by our guest editors and authors, we are grateful for the generous support from our donors (see inside front cover for details).

General section

Here we present two articles. The first is by Glynis Clacherty. Glynis writes about the innovative and inspiring Suitcase Project, and how it has used artwork to provide

psychosocial support to refugee children in South Africa. This article was originally published in ChildrenFIRST, South Africa. The second is by Dipankar Datta. Dipankar reflects on important lessons learnt, when observers argued that a project designed to reach the extreme poor in Northern Sudan had been 'hijacked' by the local elite.

Regular features

Tips for trainers

For this issue, we present the Snowball technique. This method was used at the Mapping for Change conference during parallel working group sessions and was very effective in facilitating discussions. Read how it was done, and what the participants themselves thought of the approach.

In Touch

Much of our In Touch section is devoted to the wealth of resources available to PGIS and mapping practitioners. We also present a short report from Susanne Schnuttgen and Nigel Crawhall, about a new UNESCO initiative related to Cultural Mapping.

RCPLA pages

Find out the latest news from our partners and colleagues from the Resource Centres for *Participatory Learning and Action* Network.

International editorial advisory board

In the last issue we introduced our readers to most of our new international editorial advisory board. We are also pleased to welcome to the team Meera Kaul Shah. Meera is a

freelance participatory development consultant and trainer. She is involved in developing and promoting participatory approaches in project design and implementation, developing accountable and transparent public delivery systems, and participatory policy research. Previously she worked with Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India, where she helped pioneer, with others, participatory rural appraisal methodology. Her publications include *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development* (co-edited) and *Embracing Participation in Development: Wisdom From the Field* (co-edited).

Forthcoming: Mapping for Change multi-lingual CD-ROM

In addition to this special issue, the *Participatory Learning and Action* Mapping for Change CD-ROM is an exciting multi-lingual project that will soon be available. It will contain PDF versions of articles from this special issue and other key multimedia resources. Various organisations are already supporting this exciting project, and we are seeking additional contributions. To contribute, or for

more information, please contact co-Editor Nicole Kenton, email: Nicole.Kenton@iied.org

About CTA

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area. CTA's programmes are designed to: provide a wide range of information products and services and enhance awareness of relevant information sources; promote the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensify contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and develop ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including

those relevant to science and technology. CTA's work incorporates new developments in methodologies and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social capital.

Next issue

Our next issue will be published in December 2006 (*Participatory Learning and Action* 55). This will be a special issue on the experiences of practitioners involved in community-based natural resource management in southern Africa.

Finally, many thanks to all the authors, guest editors and reviewers who contributed so much to this special issue. As Giacomo Rambaldi noted in his closing words at the conference:

What strikes me is that we have been using the word 'learning' so frequently here, and that we want to share. Networking and communication has emerged as the leading way forward – and the platforms for sharing are there. Now it's our responsibility to make this work.

We hope that this special issue helps to share the wealth of knowledge and learning that was brought to the conference.