

Editorial

Welcome to *Participatory Learning and Action* 62 on reflections on emerging practices in participatory poverty reduction in China. We are very pleased to be able to devote a special issue of *PLA* to China, a country which is experiencing significant shifts in its traditional government-led development. As you will see from the contributions from Chinese authors and others who are working in the region, participatory approaches and changing relationships between the state and citizens are at the heart of these transformations. It is the citizens who are ‘wagging the dragon’s tail’ in a positive and empowering way. In the west the dragon is often portrayed as the nation of China. Within China, the dragon is used as a symbol of Chinese culture.

This issue looks at the interface between government and communities and how this is changing as a precondition to poverty eradication. Participation is becoming key to reducing poverty through improving livelihoods, at the same time as sustaining the environment, maintaining China’s rich cultural and ethnic diversity

and ensuring good governance. Good governance is not just about the performance of government institutions, but about the nature and quality of their relationship with civil society organisations, community groups and citizens (Bass *et al.*, 2005). In other words, it is about shifts in power – a theme which underpins this issue of *PLA*.

Citizen’s participation in decision-making in China started to become possible in the late 1980s. Privatisation of state enterprises began in earnest when it became clear that state-run enterprises were not sustainable and could not compete on a global scale, and so China opened itself up to the rest of the world. In the early 1990s, participatory approaches were introduced into China with the assistance of international funding. Increasingly, the state is giving greater independence to civil society organisations. This is creating opportunities for increased participation by citizens in decisions that affect their lives, as the Overview to the theme section by **Johanna Pennarz** and **Arjan de Haan** shows. These opportunities are accompa-

Photo: Guangxi FCPMC



Yao women in Guangxi Province waiting for training on agricultural production skills to start - with more and more men leaving the villages for work in the coastal areas, women are increasingly taking charge of agricultural production.

nied by changes in the political decision-making process at the local level, largely due to the election of village committees, greater service orientation and increasing attention to consultative processes by government departments. The Overview is followed by a Prologue by **Andreas Wilkes** who sets the scene by reflecting on the impacts and benefits of the introduction of participatory approaches in China.

About the special issue

PLA 62 draws on case studies from a number of projects funded by the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development-China (DfID-China), including the Poor Rural Communities Development Project (PRCDP), a community-based project carried out in Southwest China which started in 2005.¹ In his Preface to this issue, **Alan Piazza** of the World Bank describes how an increasing understanding of poverty by the World Bank and close cooperation with the government alleviation agencies has led to better targeted

projects and a growing recognition that participation of the poor is critical for more effective poverty reduction.

The PRCDP aimed to develop an inclusive and equitable approach to poverty reduction among ethnic minorities in the western provinces of China (see map on p. 16). In this region, people live in remote, rural areas and are among the most impoverished. Their participation in these projects has given them visibility and voice.

Many of the contributors to this issue of *PLA* are community members who had never been given the opportunity before to share their experiences and perspectives with a wider audience. They are all practitioners, many of them government staff, who worked directly with communities. The photos in this issue illustrate the diversity of the community members – an image which is often far from our western view of ‘modern’ China. China has 56 official ethnic groups remaining. The largest group, the Han, makes up over 92% of China’s culture, yet the other ethnic minority groups main-

¹ See Box 1 on p 34 for a summary of the project.

tain their own rich traditions and customary way of life.² Two contributors to this issue represent small and little known ethnic groups – **Nati** (Part I, Article 4) is Lahu, a relatively small group in China, although there are large groups of Lahu living in the region (in particular in Thailand). **Qin Zhurong** (Part II, Article 15) is Maonan, one of the smallest ethnic groups in China.

Many of the articles in the theme section are case studies and reflections from the PRCDP. The majority of these articles were initially prepared for presentation at the Kunming workshop in 2009, where results and lessons were shared. These case studies were reworked for this issue of *PLA* to provide further critical reflection on the processes and lessons learnt. The articles will be translated back into Chinese and published online and will provide a valuable resource for Chinese readers.

The format of the articles in this issue of *PLA* is slightly different. We have included a brief introduction to the authors at the start of the articles. In most cases, we have not given contact details for the Chinese authors, as most are not English speaking. If you have any questions or comments for the authors, please contact **Song Haokun**, one of the guest editors, who worked closely with the authors.³

The issue is divided into sections, with an Introductory Overview and a Concluding Overview. Parts I-III look at enhanced participation at the local level through facilitators and changing management roles, reflecting on the PRCDP. Part IV is devoted to a participatory project which evaluated the impact on livelihoods of a large-scale watershed rehabilitation project in Gansu Province. Part V focuses on participatory approaches in the health and education sectors, and Part VI looks at processes and initiatives for scaling up the participatory approach in China. In our

Tips for Trainers section we have three articles, the first from **Maruja Salas**, an experienced facilitator who has worked in Southwest China. The second article reflects on experiences with the PRCDP by those involved in the project, and the third article is written by practitioners from PRA training organisations in Southwest China, giving information on their training activities and resources.

Our regular In Touch section includes details of other resources on participation from China, as well as other general resources on participation and updates from the RCPLA network. See the news from IIED on p. 209 for updates on the analysis of contributors to *PLA*.

About the guest editors

We are delighted to have the expertise and experience of four guest editors – **Johanna Pennarz, Song Haokun, Deng Weijie** and **Wang Jianping. Arjan de Haan** was also instrumental in the conception phase and has provided invaluable inputs to the issue.

Johanna Pennarz is lead guest editor. She has been working as a researcher and consultant on poverty and local governance issues in China since 1991. Johanna conducted long-term research on livelihoods strategies in rural Sichuan from 2001-2004, and was based in China as a programme manager and advisor on poverty reduction projects between 1997 and 2004. Johanna was the participation specialist for the PRCDP from 2002. During her time in China, she worked with a number of NGOs on poverty reduction issues and has published several articles from her field-based work on participatory development. Johanna has been based in the UK since 2004, where she works as a social development consultant for ITAD.⁴ We are grateful to Johanna for initiating this issue of *PLA*, giving us expert advice, liaising with the authors and other guest editors, and for com-

²<http://no2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/aboutchina/nationality/200903/20090306117655.html>

³ Email: songhk@ynu.edu.cn

⁴ www.itad.com

menting on and assisting us with the editing of articles.

Song Haokun is Associate Professor in Yunnan University and an executive member of the council of the Yunnan Participatory Association (formerly PRA Network). His main areas of expertise are rural development and social impact evaluations of construction projects. He participated in the PRCDP in 2004 as Project Coordinator and edited the Participation Manual.⁵ He was invited as a local expert to carry out the impact evaluation of the project. We are also extremely grateful to Song Haokun for his coordinating role with the authors of this issue.

Deng Weijie is Associate Professor at the Sichuan Agricultural University. He has been working on participatory development in China for more than 10 years, as a trainer and facilitator on national and international projects, including the PRCDP and the CWMP.⁶ Deng Weijie supported the Chinese authors throughout the editing process of this issue of *PLA*.

Dr Wang Jianping is Associate Professor in Yunnan University and a member of the Yunnan Participatory Association (formerly PRA Network). In addition to teaching work at the university, she has extensive project experience working with local NGOs, international institutions, the private sector and local government. Her research focuses on the sustainable management of natural resources, poverty alleviation and more specifically on the use of interdisciplinary approaches to evaluate the impact of policy interventions and development projects. Wang also worked closely with the Chinese authors in the editing process.

Arjan de Haan worked as a social development adviser for DfID between 1998 and 2008 – the last three years of which in



Photo: Johanna Pennarz

PLA 62 guest editor Deng Weijie presents his feedback at the PRCDP Reflections Workshop in Kunming, 2009.

China. He then became a senior lecturer in social policy at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague and moved to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada in 2011. His main interest is migration, poverty analysis and social policy. Arjan has written several publications on these themes in the context of China.⁷ He provided valuable advice and comments on this issue.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of all of those involved, we would like to thank DfID and the World Bank for funding the PRCDP and the Kunming workshop, thereby providing the *PLA* series with such rich material. DfID-China provided the financial support to enable the guest editors to work with the authors and for this special issue of *PLA* to be disseminated. DfID's bilateral aid programme to China closed in March 2011, so this issue has brought this chapter of DfID's support in the region to a close. DfID's work in China has established strong relationships that have enabled the UK and China to start working together to tackle global poverty. The future focus for DfID UK is on a strategic partnership with China that benefits the UK, China and other developing countries.

⁵ See: www.itad.com/PRCDP

⁶ The CWMP is the China Watershed Management Project (see Part IV).

⁷ Recent publications include *Towards a New Poverty Agenda in Asia: Social Policies and Economic Transformation* (2010), *Narratives of Chinese Economic Reforms: How Does China Cross the River?* (edited volume with Zhang Xiaobo and Fan Shenggen) and *How the Aid Industry Works: An Introduction to International Development* (2009).

We are also grateful to DfID UK, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), Irish Aid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (Danida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) for their core funding to the *PLA* series.

We would like to thank our designers **Smith+Bell Design** for their continued professional layout and design of *PLA* and to **Cath d'Alton** for drawing some of the maps in this issue. We thank **Simon Lim**, **Su Luo** and **Zhiyan Ma** for designing and translating the Chinese illustrations on the cover and section dividers.

Our special thanks go to **Lila Buckley** and **James Keeley** from IIED for their feedback and encouragement. Lila has also contributed an article on participatory policy-making in China in Part VI. As always, we would like to thank our *PLA* editorial board for their support and advice.

News from the *PLA* Editorial Board

While we were in the final stages of preparing this issue for publication, we received the sad news that Dr **Neela Mukherjee** passed away in June 2011. Neela was a valuable member of our board, and one of the leading and pioneering champions of PRA, as well as a very dear friend of *PLA* and IIED. I remember the time she spent at IIED on sabbatical in the early 1990s, and her regular visits to IIED since then, when she always gave us a colourful account of life from the field. Neela also played a large role in this issue of *PLA*, as she worked closely with the facilitators and provincial management groups in PRCDP and inspired many of the practices that are presented here. It was her suggestion to share practices of Chinese practitioners with the wider participation community. We are sad that she will not be able to see this issue in its final form. We will remember her as a source of inspiration and motivation for participation in China and beyond.

Multimedia bilingual DVD – *PLA 61 Tales of shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa*

We are delighted to enclose with this issue the bilingual (English/French) multimedia DVD of *PLA 61* on Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa (CLTS). This DVD contains several video documentaries on CLTS, as well as other resource material. Our thanks to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Plan International, UNICEF, Irish Aid, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as our core donors, for funding this DVD, and to **Maryck Nicolas**, our translator, for doing an excellent job as always of translating articles and other resources into French.

Changes to online subscriptions

For 2011, the *PLA* series is now completely free online – and with no online subscription required. This is because *PLA* is no longer hosted online by IngentaConnect. Instead, all issues of *PLA* are available for free on the IIED website as soon as they are published. This means that subscribers can now access the series online without an online subscription. To download *PLA* online visit: www.planotes.org

New website

We are revamping our website and it will be relaunched towards the end of 2011. Our apologies to visitors to our current site, which has not been able to feature updates and recent issues. We plan to publish general articles and more multimedia resources online. Our web address will remain www.planotes.org

Forthcoming issues

PLA 63 How wide are the ripples? From local participation to international organisational learning

This next issue of *PLA* is guest edited by **Kate Newman** and **Hannah Beardon**.

When a pebble is thrown in the water it has a very visible impact – or splash – and then the ripples spread out, getting weaker

and less defined as they lose momentum. In the same way, a good quality participatory grassroots process can have a strong local impact – for example more representative prioritisation of local spending, more equal power relations within the family or more focused collective action – but the influence and impact naturally dissipates the further away from the original context you get. And yet, the insight and analysis, evidence and stories generated and documented during participatory processes are just the kinds of information which good development policy and planning should be based on.

In this issue of *PLA*, the guest editors and authors share their experiences and reflections of bringing grassroots knowledge and information to bear at international level, and some strategies for strengthening practice. They emphasise the importance of acting as empowered individuals to be a conscious and active part of change. With this issue of *PLA* we hope to inspire other empowered activists working with INGOs to bring about more accountable, equitable and participatory development.

PLA 64 Youth and participatory governance in Africa

In March 2011, IIED, Plan UK and the Institute of Development Studies brought together a group of adults and young people involved in youth and governance initiatives across Africa to take part in a ‘writeshop’ in Nairobi, Kenya. The idea behind the week-long meeting was to share learning and experiences, build writing skills, form new relationships, and develop a set of articles for a forthcoming special issue of *PLA* in December 2011. The guest editors are **Rosemary McGee** and **Jessica Greenhalf**.

All over the world we are seeing experiments in ‘participatory governance’. But exciting as these new approaches are, are they working for all – or are some voices still left

out? In particular, are they working for the young?

The Nairobi writeshop uncovered the vibrancy, energy, persistence, passion and enthusiasm that youth bring to decision-making processes. Participating in governance and policy processes is re-shaping the way that young people perceive and exercise citizenship in powerful ways. It showed us that young people can drive change in creative and unexpected ways – a particularly promising characteristic for governance work.

We hope the forthcoming issue of *PLA* will highlight how young Africans are doing this – addressing the documentation gap that surrounds youth and governance in Africa and enabling other participatory practitioners – young and old – to learn from their experiences.

PLA 65 Biodiversity, culture and rights

Our new strategic board member, **Krystyna Swiderska**, is in the process of selecting articles for this special issue of *PLA* which will be published in 2012 in English and Spanish and distributed at the next Conference of the Parties to Biodiversity Convention (COP11) in India. This issue aims to capture learning from participatory processes to develop community biocultural protocols and secure the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Other news

IIED is moving offices in September 2011, after 27 years in Endsleigh Street. Our new office will be at 80-86 Gray’s Inn Road in London. We are moving into a 1950s building and we are in the process of improving its green credentials. The extra space in the new building will provide a cafe club area, as well as meeting and workspaces. We look forward to welcoming you!

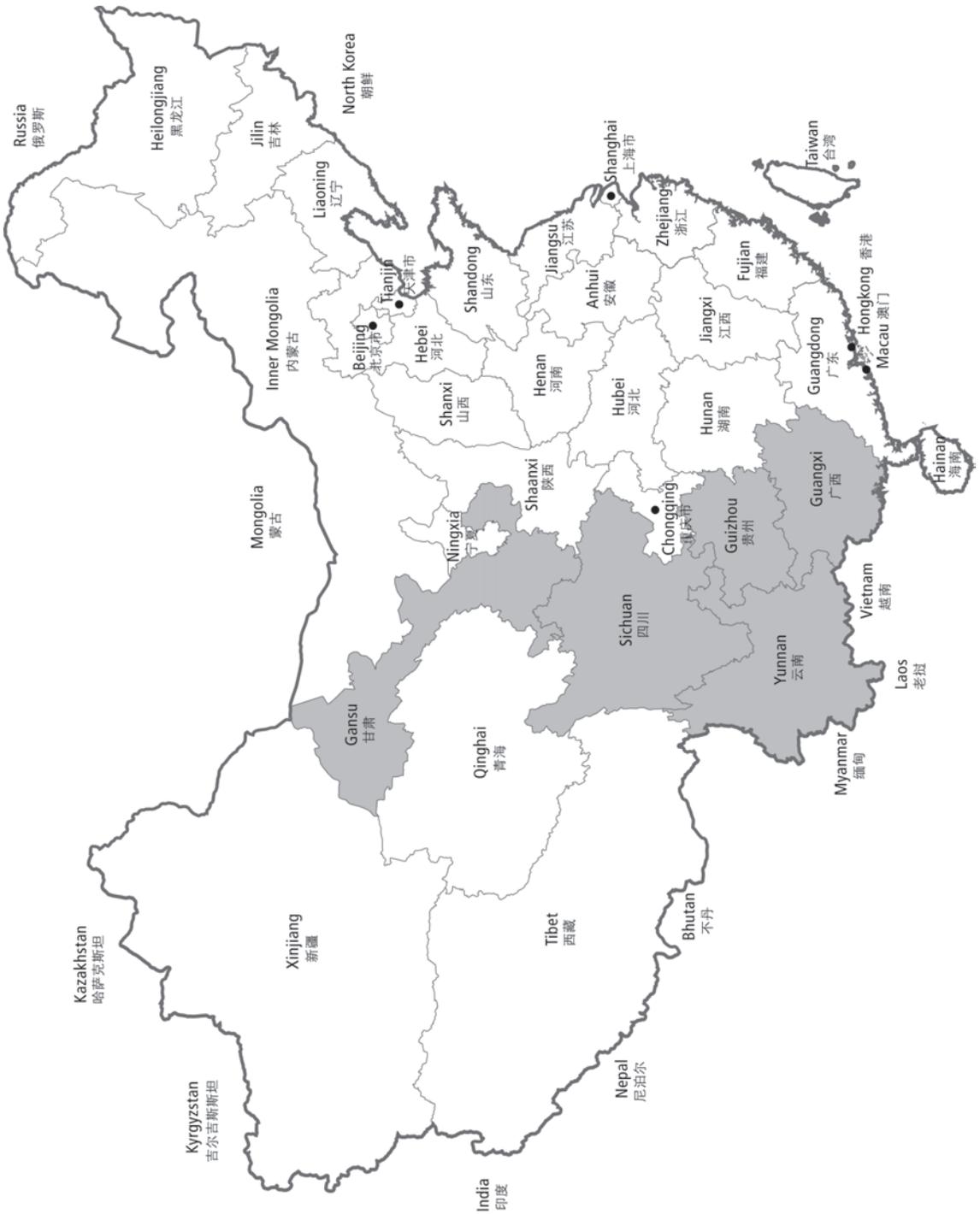
Nicole Kenton, Co-editor, *Participatory Learning and Action*

REFERENCES

- Bass, S., H. Reid, D. Satterthwaite and P. Steele (Eds.) (2005) *Reducing Poverty and Sustaining the Environment: The Politics of Local Engagement*. Earthscan: UK.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARA	Action-reflection-action
CBD	Community-Based Development
CBO	Community Based Organisation (CBO)
CDD	Community-Driven Development
CGCO	Chengdu Gay Care Organisation
CWMP	China Watershed Management Project
DfID	Department for International Development
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPL	Environmental Protection Law
FCPMC	Foreign Capital Project Management Centre
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (UK)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
MEP	Management of Environmental Protection
MWR	Ministry of Water Resources
NRM	Natural resource management
PM&E	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PADO	Poverty Alleviation and Development Office
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PP	Participatory Planning
PPA	Participatory Poverty Analysis
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRC	People's Republic of China
PME	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PMO	Project Management Office
PPMO	Provincial Project Management Office
PRCDP	Poor Rural Communities Development Project
RMB	Renminbi (or Chinese yuan) is the currency of the PRC
SLCP	Sloping Land Conservation Programme
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDP	Village Development Planning



Map of China showing provinces (shaded) covered in this issue of PLA.