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Extracts

- **Getting your head above the water**

An article in the Extracts section of *PLA Notes* 28 looked at how props can be used in research. We received an interesting response to this article, which follows the short summary of the original article below.

In *PLA Notes* 28, Bourai et. al. described how the rural population in Garhwal, India, where they worked, often had difficulty in understanding questionnaire surveys. They used props to help people understand the meaning of questions. By props, they meant tools that enable local people to visualise the theme of questions and debates. A ladder proved a useful prop to help people express their level of satisfaction. The ladder was made of sticks and each rung of the ladder represented higher levels of satisfaction.

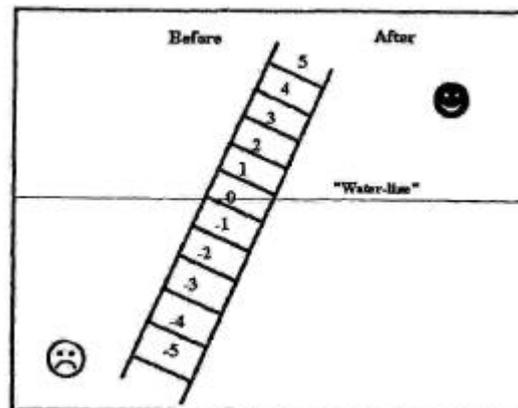
Respondents were asked to choose a step that best represented their level of satisfaction. For example, to the question, 'How much are you satisfied with your level of education?', respondents could point a step on the ladder representing: Very dissatisfied (Step 1), Dissatisfied (Step 2), OK (Step 3), Satisfied (Step 4) and Very satisfied (Step 5).

In response to this article, Lepcha and Virgo working in India described their use of ladders in participatory research. The following is an extract from their letter:

"We were interested to read the *PLA Notes* article by on the use of 'Props for Research'. We have found the ladder technique to be useful in assessing villagers' perceptions of their location in the development process, such as confidence, decision-making skills and awareness of environmental conditions.

However, a problem in the conventional ladder approach is that one assumes that villagers start at 'Step 1'. Some villages are starting from well below the norm; their primary task is to 'get their heads above water' before they can start thinking about development. To reflect this, perhaps the imaginary ladder should be half-submerged (see Figure 1). Moreover, the rungs should be wider-spaced below the water-line, because these are the most difficult steps.

Figure 1. Getting your head above the water



Another approach is to visualise development in terms of milestones. To get to the 10 mile goal, some villagers may be starting from '0 miles', but others, those who have not yet even reached the starting line, may be at '-10 miles'.

- **S.T.S. Lepcha** and **K.J. Virgo**,
Watershed Management Directorate, Indra
Nagar Forest Colony, Dehradun 248006,
India.