

editorial

Welcome to issue 53 of *Participatory Learning and Action*.

Tools for influencing power and policy

This special issue is guest edited by **Sonja Vermeulen** from IIED who coordinated the Power Tools initiative – Sharpening Policy Tools for Marginalised Managers of Natural Resources – which involved 35 partners from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Sonja is a senior researcher in the Forestry and Land Use Programme of the Natural Resources Group at IIED, London. She was previously a research fellow at the University of Zimbabwe. Her particular interests lie in tools and tactics for natural resource governance, assessment of ecosystems and biodiversity and company-community partnerships. Sonja's current work includes the Forest Governance Learning Group in Africa and Asia, and financial and institutional mechanisms for watershed management in Indonesia.

The articles in the theme section of this issue are written by eight of the partners from the Power Tools project. Each article reflects on the authors' experience. The authors analyse and suggest ways forward on the adaptation and application of tools in participatory action and learning situations, where participants must deal with more powerful institutions and individuals. Instead of waiting to be consulted by government or other policy processes, many people – who are usually excluded from policy processes – want actively to take their own values, priorities, analyses and demands to the powerful. The tools aim to help less powerful people and their allies achieve positive change in natural resource policy – through

understanding, organisation, engagement, resistance and persistence.

Before each article, we have included a summary of the corresponding Power Tool. This takes the place of the usual Tips for Trainers section.

In her overview, Sonja looks at the explicit connection between power and tools – and how tools can change power relations. The articles give real examples of working with power tools in India, Brazil, Ethiopia, Mali, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

General section

We have two general articles in this issue. First, **Phil Howard, Tim Galarneau, Jan Perez, and Dave Shaw** recount their experiences of integrating two approaches to participatory meeting facilitation: open space technology and dynamic facilitation. Open space allows participants to guide meetings creatively and spontaneously. But documenting such meetings is not always easy, with implications for implementing decisions made by participants afterwards. By combining a simple, dynamic facilitation approach with open space, such meetings can retain their flexibility but also document proceedings at the same time.

Our second general article is by **Paul van Mele and Ann Braun**. The authors explore the importance of methodological diversity in agricultural research and development. They argue that a wide range of methods and of actors implementing them allows for greater responsiveness and flexibility when working with different groups in different settings. Does flexibility in the choice of methods used promote

creative thinking in development? And how can methods evolve and contribute to organisational learning?

Regular features

Tips for Trainers in this issue takes the form of the tools summary card before each theme article. Our In Touch section includes book reviews and events and training, followed by e-participation which is dedicated to some of the website links from the Power Tools website.

We have exciting news from the RCPLA Network, which has a new coordinator, **Ali Mokhtar** from CDS in Cairo. Our thanks go to **Tom Thomas** for his excellent work as coordinator over the last three years. We bring you an update on this and on the Communications for Change initiative in the RCPLA Network pages.

New international editorial advisory board

In this issue we would like to introduce you to our new international editorial advisory board. We have long had ambitions to expand our editorial board to include a wider membership of practitioners, academics and others, drawn from all those parts of the world where participatory approaches flourish, and also those where they are still at the fledgling stage. We believe that this expansion is vital for ensuring that *Participatory Learning and Action* remains in touch with those practising and using participatory approaches in their everyday work around the world.

The **day-to-day management** of *Participatory Learning and Action* will still be carried out by our editorial team, **Nicole Kenton** and **Angela Milligan** (Co-Editors), and **Holly Ashley** (Assistant Editor). There will also still

be a **core strategic editorial board** consisting of staff from IIED and the Participation, Power and Social Change Group of the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, who will advise on the strategic development of the series.

Members of our new, 45-strong international board have strong links to participation networks in their own countries and regions, and can act as our eyes and ears on the ground, helping to tap into innovative work taking place, particularly in the South, and to expand the reach of the series.

They will be providing input in the following main areas:

- encouraging practitioners and

others, particularly those in the South, to write about their work for possible publication in *Participatory Learning and Action* and suggesting ways in which the editorial team can support people to write;

- promoting the series through their own networks and at conferences and workshops to ensure the series reaches the widest possible audience;
- reviewing articles relating to their particular interests; and
- commenting/advising on plans for future themed issues and possible guest editors and authors.

These areas may well develop or change to some extent as the board becomes more established.

Because of the size of the board, and its international nature, board meetings will be held electronically, although we will explore the possibility of bringing the board together on a biannual basis.

Editorial board members, each with a short biography, are listed at the end of this editorial. We would like to say a big welcome and thank you to them all, and look forward to a fruitful and mutually rewarding relationship with them.

We would especially like to thank those who reviewed articles for this issue and hope that you all enjoy reading it. We look forward to your feedback.