



Guidelines for contributors

The principal aim of the ***Participatory Learning and Action*** (formerly *PLA Notes*) series is to share current experiences, critical perspectives and methodological innovations among practitioners of participatory learning and action approaches to development. We aim to keep the series informal to enable the rapid sharing of practical experience from the field with the wide network of practitioners linked to the *Participatory Learning and Action* series through its readership. *Participatory Learning and Action* is published two to three times a year.

Types of material accepted

- *Articles*: max. 2500 words plus illustrations - see below for guidelines.
- *Feedback*: letters to the editor, or longer pieces (max. 1500 words) that respond in more detail to articles.
- *Tips for trainers*: training exercises, tips on running workshops, reflections on behaviour and attitudes in training, etc. Max. 1000 words.
- *In Touch*: short pieces on forthcoming workshops and events, publications, and on-line resources.

The Editor reserves the right to edit and amend contributions for publication in *Participatory Learning and Action*.

Criteria for publication

Participatory Learning and Action has been produced for over ten years now and during this time has reflected growth and development in thinking and experience around the use of participatory methodologies. Whilst we continue to welcome accounts of recent experiences in the field (or in workshops), we would like to emphasise the need to **analyse the limitations as well as the successes of these approaches**.

In an era in which participatory approaches have often been viewed as a panacea to development problems, or where acquiring funds for projects has depended on the use of such methodologies, it is also vital to pay attention to the **quality** of the methods and process of participation, as well as to the **practical outcomes** of such approaches. Whilst the focus of *Participatory Learning and Action* is methodological, we feel it is important to give more importance to issues of **power** in the process and impact of participation, asking ourselves who sets the agenda for participatory practice. It is only with critical analysis that we can further develop our thinking around participatory learning and action.

In addition, we are interested in hearing about the use of participatory approaches at **regional and national levels**, as well as at local levels, and in different arenas, for example in **policy-making**.

To summarise, we are particularly looking for articles that contain one or more of the following elements:

- an **innovative angle** to the concepts of participatory approaches or their application;
- **critical reflections** on the lessons learnt from the author's experiences;
- an attempt to develop **new methods**, or innovative adaptations of existing ones
- consideration of the **processes** involved in participatory approaches;
- an assessment of the **impacts** of a participatory process on the livelihoods of the target community;
- potentials and limitations of **scaling up and institutionalising** participatory approaches; and
- potentials and limitations of **participatory policy-making processes**.

Articles should, if possible, be co-authored by all those involved in the research or development project. This ensures that everyone's contribution to the development process is fully valued and acknowledged.

We particularly welcome contributions from practitioners in the South and can offer editorial support and advice to potential authors. If you have an idea for an article, but are unsure of whether it is suitable, please contact the Editor, giving details of the area you wish to cover.

Basic article structure: some ideas

We have found it helpful to give authors an idea of the sort of structure we are looking for in an article. The following are a few suggestions that may help you to get started:

Introduction

- What will your article be about?

Background information

- What was the purpose of your project or programme?
- Who participated?
- When it was done?
- Who was involved, which organisations?
- Who funded it?

Methods and processes

- What processes did you use?
- What methods did you use?
- What innovations did you use? e.g. adapting or combining existing methods and processes

Lessons learnt, critical reflections and analysis

- What happened – was it successful?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- Could you improve the process?
- Could you improve people's participation?

Ideas for ways forward

- What's going to happen next?
- Could the process be scaled up or used in another context?

Conclusion

- What is the main message you want to share with readers?

Visuals

Do you have any photos, flow charts, diagrams, tables or cartoons to illustrate your article?

Boxed examples

An effective way of bringing your article to life is to add some short pieces of text. These can explain something in your article in more detail. Some ideas could include:

- an experience which illustrates a point you are making
- to describe how a method works in more detail
- to describe an element of your project or programme in more detail
- to describe questions or issues participants have been discussing
- to highlight participants' voices

Language and style

Our readership covers many different disciplines, countries and educational backgrounds, and English is not the first language of many readers,. For this reason, please try to use a clear and accessible style when writing contributions:

- Keep sentences short and simple
- Avoid jargon, theoretical terminology and overly academic language
- Explain any specialist terms that you do use and spell out acronyms in full
- Use the active voice: 'we did' rather than 'it was done'.

Length

See under 'Types of material accepted'.

References

If references are mentioned, please include details. However, since Participatory Learning and Action is intended to be informal, rather than academic, references should be kept to a minimum. Please cite in-text references as follows:

The Zimiseleni adult team now plays the role of enlightened witness (Miller, 1990).

OR

Miller (1990) argues that

Photographs and drawings

These should have captions and the name(s) of the author and photographer/illustrator clearly written on the back. If you are sending electronic files, make sure that the photos/drawings are scanned at high enough resolution for print (300dpi) and supply captions and the name of the photographer/illustrator by email. Please do not import photographs or drawings into Word files; they should be sent as separate files (preferably jpps).

Format

We accept handwritten articles but please write legibly. Typed articles should be double-spaced. Please keep your formatting as simple as possible. Avoid embedded codes (e.g.

footnotes/endnotes, page justification, page numbering). Titles and headings should be lower case, except for the initial capital of the first word. Use bold for headings and italic for sub-headings.

Submitting your article

Articles can be sent by email or on disk. Handwritten articles can be sent by post. Articles should be sent to the address/email given below.

The editorial process

All articles are reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Advisory Board. If we feel that the article has potential but needs some revision, we will write back to you explaining the kinds of revisions we think are needed. We then wait for your response, after which the second draft is circulated to the Editorial Board. Further revisions are sometimes needed, but are always undertaken in consultation with the author(s).

We aim to respond to your initial contribution within 3 months, but due to the travelling commitments of the Editorial Team this is not always possible.

For further information, contact:

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