Kindling your spark: an editor's practical advice to writers
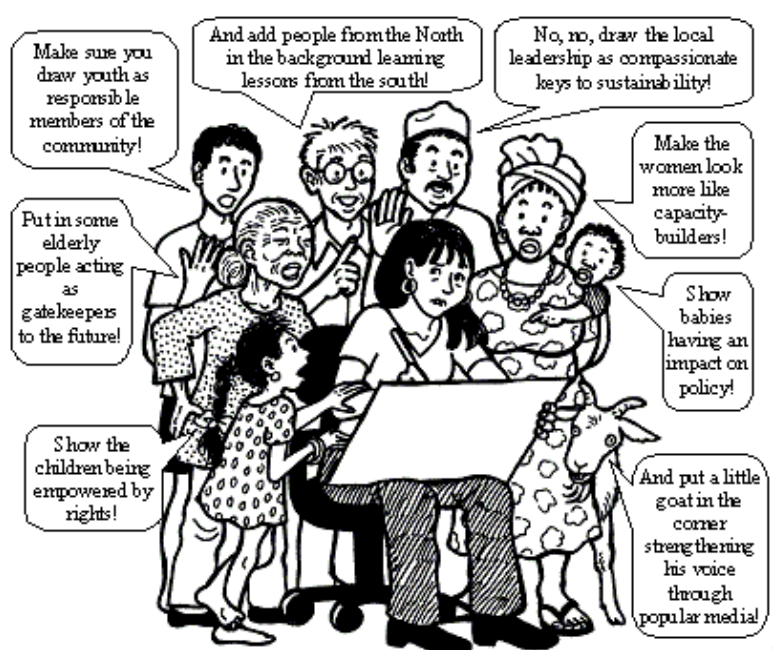

By Holly Ashley

Are you writing an article for *Participatory Learning and Action*? This article aims to take you – the writer – on a journey. It provides you with practical advice, tips and guidance on how to write a 2500 word article for the *Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)* series. I then discuss the different stages of the editorial journey, with information about the *PLA* team, our aims, why we work with guest editors and the role of our Strategic Editorial Board and International Advisory Editorial Board. I also explain the editorial process, why articles submitted to the *PLA* series are peer-reviewed and the sort of feedback writers can expect to receive from reviewers. And lastly, I talk you through how to deal with revising your article in response to our comments.

This is the first draft of 'Kindling your spark' – so I welcome your feedback and comments on how to improve it!

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[1] Cartoon by *PLA* cover artist Regina Faul-Doyle. From 'Regina's *Participatory Learning and Action* illustration challenge,' *PLA* 50 *Critical reflections, future directions*, 2004.

DRAFT

participatory learning and action

Kindling your spark: an editor's practical advice to writers

By Holly Ashley

<u>Finding your spark</u>

When was the last time you read a piece of writing that inspired you? How did it make you feel? Perhaps it was related to your work and you recommended it to your colleagues. Maybe it gave you new ideas about how to do something differently. Or perhaps the writer made you think again – by challenging your own ideas.

The important thing to note here is **your** reaction: **you** wanted to read that article. You found the writing engaging, interesting, relevant and readable. That piece of writing held a spark – and you responded. Our aim is to help you navigate the highs and lows of writing an article for us – and help you kindle your **own** writing spark.

An ongoing learning process

Something that we as writers sometimes forget is that no one is obliged to read our work – we have to make them **want** to! So how do we do this? What makes a good writer?

Perhaps you are thinking of someone sitting at a desk confidently tapping away at their computer. Perhaps you imagine the writer finishing their article with a confident flourish. A masterpiece has been created and now the writer is ready to share it with the whole world.

Can you picture yourself as that writer? If you are anything like me – the answer is no. And that is what this article is about. Writing takes time and practice. Have the courage to write and you will become better and better at it. And with a little help, you can write something that will create a spark in others.

Exploring the pieces of the puzzle

Writing a good article is like trying to solve a puzzle. There are lots of different parts to bear in mind when starting out.

The following sections follow a simple process to help you find your focus on what you want to write. The aim is to help your 'flow' as a writer – from gathering your ideas and exploring how to go about structuring and writing your article. Finally, we look at how to build your confidence and what to do if you get stuck.

PART I: GETTING STARTED

Know your reader

Knowing who your readers are is very important. It is the key to making your writing relevant to them. You are not writing a report for a donor. You are not writing a promotional leaflet. You are writing for other people like you, who want to learn from your experiences.

By practitioners – for practitioners

Participatory Learning and Action is published twice a year. Our principal aim is to share current experiences, critical perspectives and methodological innovations among practitioners of participatory learning and action approaches to development.

The *PLA* series is written by practitioners for practitioners. It is aimed at development practitioners, activists and researchers who are interested in learning about and/or are actively involved in participatory development. *PLA* aims to share **practical learning**, advice and guidance with others – and to share critical reflections on both the **successes and challenges** the authors have faced. It also aims to bring Southern voices and perspectives into the international development arena. All material is copyright free and we encourage readers to reproduce, copy and share.

> *The aim of the notes is to share a wide set of experiences and ideas – our success though depends on receiving contributions from practitioners.*
> *PLEASE WRITE TO US.*
> Gordon Conway, co-editor, 1988

Why does the *PLA* series use guest editors?

Most issues of *PLA* (12 out of the past 14) are based around a particular theme. For these issues, the editorial team works with one or – more usually – a team of guest editors who are particularly knowledgeable in that area. This means that the *PLA* series benefits from their expertise. Guest editors are best placed to provide up-to-the minute accounts of the development and use of participatory methods in specific fields.

IIED staff often act as guest editors or suggest a particular theme and possible guest editors. In other cases, external organisations contact us. They are our important partners in this respect. For example:

- Participation, Power and Social Change team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) UK
- Plan International
- Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in The Netherlands

Until recently, guest editors worked largely independently to select authors to contribute to special issues. Now the *PLA* team is now much more closely involved in this process. With the support of the *PLA* team, guest editors identify authors for the issue in a range of different ways e.g.

- calls for abstracts through networks
- e-forums
- conferences and workshops on a particular theme
- direct contact with likely authors

For some special issues we use writeshops. These bring authors together, giving them space to write and refine their article with support from the other authors, the guest editors and a member of the *PLA* editorial team.

Not all issues of *PLA* are on a specific theme. 'General' issues can be about anything participation-related and cover a wide range of sectors, approaches and arenas of decision making (local, regional, national, international). General articles differ from thematic ones in that they are almost all sent in by prospective authors rather than being commissioned by guest editors.

Who reads *Participatory Learning and Action*?

PLA is an international journal. It began in 1988 and has published 61 issues to date. *PLA* reaches an estimated 10,000 readers per issue through subscriptions to the series, downloads from our website and CD-ROMs in different languages.[2]

Interestingly, nearly half of our subscribers live in Africa. A third lives in Asia, with just over a tenth living in Europe. Our global distribution is around 1200+ hard copies and subscriptions are free to readers from low and middle income nations. Many subscribers also share their copy of *PLA* with others. Nearly half of readers share their subscription with up to five other people – some with as many as 20 other readers![3]

Figure 1: hard copy subscriptions as of June 2010 – 48% in Africa
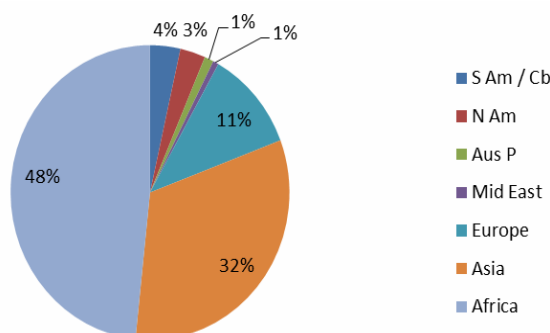
A snapshot of our online readers

All issues of *PLA* are now free online – as soon as they are published. This is helping us to reach a much wider international audience. It also means that *PLA* is freely available while the content is still fresh, up-to-date and relevant – and it has proved to be popular with new readers.

For example, *PLA* 60 *Community-based adaptation to climate change* was the most popular IIED publication download in 2010. It has been downloaded over 8000 times! Not surprisingly, Europe and North America account for almost half of *PLA* 60 downloads (around 4000 copies) and Asia accounts for nearly a quarter (around 2000).

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[2] For more information, see Part IV.
[3] This figure is taken from an online *PLA* readership survey conducted in 2006.

Figure 2: Global download distribution for _PLA_ 60
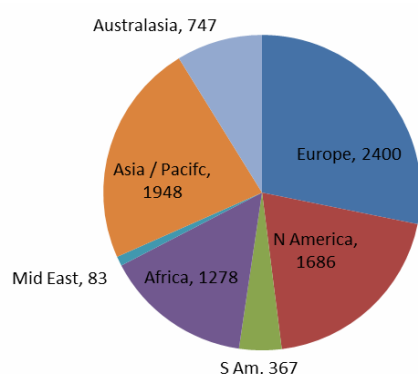
These figures show that we are reaching more readers in Asia, Africa and South America now than ever before – both with our hard copy subscriptions and via the Internet.

So what do _PLA_ readers do?

Most readers are participatory development practitioners, development practitioners, researchers and trainers. Nearly half of our readers work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Roughly two thirds of those are national NGOs. The rest are international. And around a quarter of our readers work in academic research institutes such as universities. Government agencies account for about a fifth and our remaining readers are e.g. students or from community-based organisations, international development institutions and the private sector. And they work in a wide range of different areas of development (see Box 1).

Box 1: Examples of our readers and their work

- Agriculture
- Conservation
- Child and youth issues
- Culture and development
- Economic development
- Environment (green)
- Environment (urban)
- Gender issues
- Health issues
- Indigenous issues
- Information
- Natural resource management
- Planning
- Rural development

Who else might read this special issue of _PLA_?

Of course, each special themed issue of _PLA_ reaches more than just our subscribers. We also work with our guest editors and authors to promote themed issues widely to relevant networks and organisations interested in that particularly area of work and also working in particular regions and countries.

As you write, remember to think about who your article is aimed at and what your main messages are. For example, _PLA_ has very few any private sector readers. But you would be reaching e.g. managers in NGOs/larger community-based organisations who might be supporting communities engaged in relevant development processes, as well as government officials (e.g. at district level) and academics or consultants who advise these kinds of organisations.

What do readers think of *PLA*?

Finally, I'd like to include some feedback from our readers about the *PLA* series. These responses came from an online readership survey for *PLA* 54 *Mapping for Change: Practice, technologies and communications* (Rambaldi *et al.,* 2006).

The following is a selection of comments from our participants:

- Very good idea and very well thought out and presented. If only more workshop reports were presented in such a **user-friendly** manner.
- The language used is **too technical** and difficult to understand taking my background not in research but in livestock production and animal health into consideration.
- The length is **too long** for some articles.
- The simplicity lies in the **practical and illustrative** works of the *PLA* issue.
- I appreciate the **practical format** of this issue. The glossary and introduction, the case studies and conclusion were a great tool for my research.
- Exemplary issue. A great contribution to the field. The way it was **organised** and edited was excellent.
- This is one of the best special issues of *PLA*. It is a **reader friendly** document, especially for community workers.
- Excellent, very **useful** for academics and practitioners.

Think about what the readers are saying to you as a writer. What do they like? What don't they like? What are the good and bad points they make? How will their comments influence your own writing?

Writing for your reader

As you write, continue to think about who you are writing for, and what they will learn from your article.

- Who are you trying to reach?
- What are you trying to tell them?
- Why will it be useful to them?

I think it helps to remember that each individual reader will read your writing by themselves. Try to think of your reader (the person you are writing for) as a sympathetic friend. They are participatory practitioners themselves who are interested in your area of work and what you are doing but don't necessarily know much about it. They want to learn more – so tell them something that will stick in their memory!

Now you know **who** you are writing for it's time to find your focus: decide on your objectives and decide on the key messages you want to share. After that we will look at structuring your article and how to write well so that it is interesting, engaging, relevant and readable for your reader.

Finding your focus

When you set out to write something, it helps to have a clear goal in mind. You may want to write an article about a participatory project or a particular tool or method you have used or adapted successfully. But when it comes to communicating these things to others, often we as writers get a little lost along the way. We are not sure what we should include – and what we shouldn't.

The first thing you need to do is be clear about you want to achieve and why. Think about your **objectives** and the **key messages** that you want to share. It helps you to find the focus for your writing.

- What are your objectives?
- What are your key messages?
- Who will write with you?

What are your objectives?

You objectives are the reasons why you have set out to write an article in the first place: your purpose. When thinking about your **objectives**, try not to make broad goals – e.g. 'I want to write an article' – but think about more defined outcomes. For example, these were mine when I set out to write this article:

'I want to provide easy to follow, practical tips on how to write an article.'
'I want to inspire my readers to try writing themselves.'
'I want to show how people can gain more experience and confidence in writing.'

What are your key messages?

I've given you an example of my objectives. But what am I trying to tell you, the reader? What is my **key message**? When thinking about your key messages, make them clear to yourself and others. For example, I hope my key messages have come across to you already:

'I want to show that good writing can inspire others to learn from our experiences.'
'You can gain the confidence to write well with a little help and guidance.'

Stick to one or two – closely related – key messages, otherwise you will lose your focus. If you are not clear what your key message is going to be and you work on a project with other people, e.g. field staff, community participants, sometimes it is helpful to find your focus by exploring the most significant change (MSC) – something significant that has happened that has contributed to your own learning from experience (see Box 1).

Who will write with you?

Remember to acknowledge all those who contributed their experience to your piece of writing, e.g. field workers, community members. Even better, co-author the article with them. You could use the MSC approach described in Box 1. This is a great way of getting other people involved in writing with you. It helps to bring new ideas to the article and different perspectives and learning. And it is also central to the aims of *PLA* – strengthening voices and acknowledging different viewpoints within a process. There are some further suggestions in Appendix 3 on how to work with co-authors by using active listening and adopting a coaching style when writing together.

Box 1: What is most significant change?

The most significant change (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories (project impacts) from the field level. You select the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff who are also involved by 'searching' for project impacts.

Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact.

Adapted from: Davies, R. & J. Dart (2005)

Guiding principles

You should have a clearer idea now on what you want to write about and who for. Next I want to move onto some guiding principles for writing an article for the *PLA* series. As a journal on participatory development, these are points that we think are very important for our writers to consider.

When writing for the *PLA* series, seek to examine the quality of the methods and process of participation used. We ask all our authors to share critical reflections on both successes and challenges. Analyse the limitations as well as the successes of the approaches you describe. Give more importance to issues of power in the process and the impact of participation. Who sets the agenda for participatory practice? Critical analysis helps to further develop our collective thinking around participatory learning and action.

- Be **honest** in your writing. Don't just describe what worked well – really think about the challenges you faced and what could have been done better. If someone else wants to try following your advice, what should they be aware of?
- Acknowledge other people's involvement, particularly staff members, participants or communities. Allow them to have a voice too – include their quotes and reflections or even better, include them as **co-authors**.
- Keep your language **simple** and easy to read. Remember that *PLA* is an informal journal, aimed at practitioners. It is not an academic journal.

Think about your own guiding principles when writing – what is important to you?

Another important aspect of participatory development approaches is acknowledging that when we write, we are interpreting other people's reality with our words. Whose accounts are you writing about? What are your biases as an author? (Box 2).

Box 2: Towards a more participatory writing style

- Be reflective. Give readers an idea of who you are and how your own interpretations and bias has shaped your article. Writing as though you are having a conversation with the reader can help this.
- No tool or method is perfect. Include details of the tools and methods you have used and make clear their limitations – but without compromising the questions raised and conclusions made.
- Only use an active authoritative voice for points you make for which there is general agreement by different groups involved.
- Use 'I' or 'we' to communicate your (the author's) interpretation. Use verbs such as 'appeared' or 'seemed' to indicate personal interpretation.
- Include different perspectives and interpretations when using quotes and attribute them even if anonymous. Also attribute analysis and sense-making by key informants/participants. Include important issues and hypotheses that have emerged but not proven as questions for reflection and further investigation.

Adapted from: Shutt (forthcoming)

I've also included and adapted an extract from a previous issue of *PLA* on practical ethics for practitioners that you might find useful to think about (see Box 3).[4]

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[4] The 'Who' and 'Whose' questions come from a presentation by Robert Chambers. The questions became the basis for two articles on practical ethics for participatory practice (Rambaldi *et al.*, 2006; (Elkanah Absalom *et al.* and Giacomo Rambaldi *et al.,* 2009). Here, the questions have been adapted for documenting participatory practice.

Box 3: The 'Who' and 'Whose' questions: guiding principles

Who writes?
- Whose problems, questions, and perspectives?
- Whose voice counts?
- Whose information and knowledge?
- Who decides?
- Who is informed? (Transparency)
- Whose reality is expressed?
- Whose reflections and analysis?
- Who takes the credit?
- Who is acknowledged?

Ultimately…
- Who was empowered? Who was not?

Once you are clear on the principles that are going to guide how you write, you can move on to what you hope to achieve – imagining success.

Having a vision

Think about your finished article. What do you hope it will achieve? What will success be like? Who will benefit?

Be bold – think of all the positive outcomes. Perhaps you can imagine someone else trying out your ideas and learning something really useful from what you had to say. Or learning more about your own work as you write through a process of critical reflection.

- Imagining success helps you to focus on what you are writing.
- It creates ideas and a clearer picture of what you want to say.
- It helps to motivate, clarify, focus and expand your creative thinking on why and how you are writing.
- It helps to capture positive features, aspects and qualities.
- It allows you to think about how you will build on your achievement in future.

There is an important point to remember here. **Imagining** success (in your writing) helps to motivate you. But remember you are not just **writing** about success. You also have to consider the challenges you have faced and the lessons you have learnt when writing an article.

The next section discusses these issues in more detail – by helping you to think about all the different elements you will need to bring to your article.

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PART II: WRITING

You should now have a clearer idea of what you are trying to achieve – your objectives and key messages, working with others, who your readers are and what you want them to learn. Now we will move on to how to get started with planning what you are going to include.

Capturing your ideas

The first thing you need to do is to capture your ideas. Think of all the elements – people, questions, facts, qualities, lessons and events – that you should address in your article. Remember to focus on who, what, why, when, where and how.

The principle here is to capture your ideas first, and figure out how to structure them later on. At the moment, you don't need to analyse or organise your ideas, just get them down on the page – in whatever order they come to you.

Some people like to make lists, others to use mind mapping. You might want to write each idea or point separately on pieces of card or paper. You can then move these around later on when you begin to organise your ideas into a structure.

If you are working with co-authors, consider using e.g. the Snowball method to capture your ideas and then go on to create your structure: http://pubs.iied.org/G02963.html

What sort of things should I include?

Here are some questions that might help you to get started. You will probably find you have multiple answers to list under each point.

- What is the main focus of your article?
- What is the key message you want to share with readers?
- Think about some of the details you should include: Who, what, when, why, how?
- Whose voices are going to be included in your article? (Refer to Part III)
- What was the purpose of your project or programme?
- What did you expect to happen and why?
- Who participated? Who did not? Why not?
- When it was done?
- Who was involved, which organisations?
- Who funded it?
- What tools, methods and processes did you use?
- Did you make any innovations e.g. adapting or combining existing methods and processes?
- How well did they work?
- What happened – was the project successful?
- What were the challenges you faced, and how did you overcome them?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- What's going to happen next?
- Could you improve how it was done?
- Could you improve people's participation?
- Could the process be scaled up or used in another context?
- Do you have any boxes, photos, flow charts, diagrams, tables or cartoons to add to your article?

Creating a structure – making your article flow

Once you have captured your thoughts and ideas, the next stage is to cluster them together into a logical pattern. Here is an example of how you could structure your ideas:

- Title – accurate, appealing, informative, and brief
- Introduction – make it interesting and engaging
- Background information – to put your article in context
- Methods and processes – what you did and how
- Lessons learnt, critical reflections and analysis – your successes and challenges
- Ways forward – what will happen next
- Conclusion – the key message you want readers to remember
- Abstract – 150 words which summarise the key points in your article

Still having trouble with the structure? The most important part about the structure is making your writing flow well. The sections should link together logically. The reader should be able to move seamlessly between each section of your article and feel ready to move on from one section to the next.

- Write post-it notes of your main points and move them around until you have a logical flow from point to point.
- Use headings and sub-headings to provide structure and signposts for the reader.

Remember, you can always come back to your structure later on and make changes.

Before we move on, I want to make an important here about writing. Please do not think you are not a good enough writer because you are unsure about English spelling and grammar. For many of our writers (and readers) English is not their first language. Checking spelling mistakes and grammar is the job of the editors: that's what we do. Your job is to share your experiences with us.

Tips on how to write your article

By now, we hope that you feel confident enough to start writing. But before we move on with some tips on writing well, let's recap and remind ourselves of some the key points we've already covered.

- No one is obliged to read your work – make them **want** to!
- Write for your **reader**, not for yourself.
- Be clear **who** you are writing for and what your **key messages** are.
- Involve **other voices** in your writing.

First and foremost, *PLA* provides a forum for sharing learning and debate about good participatory practice. *PLA* aims to share experiences that will help practitioners facilitate high-quality participatory processes and ultimately strengthen the voices of often-excluded and unheard groups.

High-quality participatory processes have the potential to empower poor and marginalised groups to shape their own development, increase their voice and influence in decisions that affect them, and hold government and others to account.

- Think about the **quality** of the methods and process of participation used.
- Analyse the **limitations** as well as the **successes** of the approaches you describe.
- Give more importance to issues of **power** in the process and the **impact** of participation.
- Critical analysis helps to further develop our **collective thinking** around participatory learning and action.

What sort of article am I writing?

If you are writing an article for *PLA*, what sort of article is it? You might be describing a particular tool or method – or a process or project you have been involved in. Or you might be drawing together wider lessons from your own experiences with a particular focus – for

example, lessons for policy makers or discussing theory and reflection on practice. Or you might be writing practical advice for participatory trainers and facilitators.

For example, in *PLA 61 Tales of Shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa* the issue was divided into five parts: providing an overview to the issue, discussions on community-level processes and tools, participatory management and organisational change, issues around policy and going to scale, and finally practical advice for trainers and facilitators (see Appendix 5).

Whether you are writing a practical guide or reflecting on theory remember to keep your focus. Choose your **key messages** and stick to them. Write one article at a time!

Make it engaging, interesting, relevant and readable

So now you have captured your ideas and the different elements your writing will include and you have organised them into a structure. Now you need to take each point and write about them, creating a flow of words that allows your story to unfold as you speak to your reader.

Think about the order in which you present information: consider using the inverted pyramid. This is particularly important for your title, introduction and abstract. Make sure you include your most important points first in your introduction. The rest of the story should then unfold logically as you provide more detail for the reader.

Keep your story relevant and engaging

- **Be honest! What** is important about this experience? **What** are the wider lessons? **What** were the challenges and how did you overcome them?
- Tell **enough** of the story to make sense and draw out the main lessons, but don't include every detail and activity. If something is not absolutely necessary to your story, cut it.
- Stay **focused** on your key messages. Refer back to your title often. Am I addressing my main point?

Make it easy to read

- Use straightforward, clear and simple language (little jargon, few acronyms). Many readers do not speak English as their first language. Use plain English wherever possible.[5]
- If you need to include technical terms, jargon and acronyms – explain them. Include a footnote or a text box to provide enough detail for the reader to understand.
- Make your paragraphs **flow** by linking them, e.g. repeating words from the previous paragraph in the first sentence of the next paragraph.
- Vary the length of your sentences and avoid very long sentences. Nothing is harder to read than long sentences with lots of difficult words in them. If you have to read something twice to understand it, it needs changing!
- Use questions to make the text more engaging. For example, 'We set out to challenge a theory. Would a question make the text more interesting?'
- *PLA* is an informal journal – not an academic one. Keep your references to a minimum – use enough to support your arguments and to acknowledge other people's work.

Short but sweet

As *PLA* articles are only 2500 words long, you want to make every word count. Go through your text carefully and look for unnecessary repetition. Have you repeated something you have already said earlier in the article? Sometimes it is useful to repeat a main point but doing it too often puts the reader off.

Have you described one thing in two different ways? For example:

- 'I found that I had repeated myself several times. I read through my text and some of it was repetitive.' (20 words)
- 'When I read through my text I found I had repeated myself several times.' (14 words)

Try to use the active voice rather than the passive. 'We did' rather than 'It was done'. It helps readers to understand who is speaking. It also makes sentences shorter.

For example:

- 'It was discovered that sentences were longer using the passive voice.' (11 words)
- 'We discovered that sentences were shorter using the active voice.' (10 words)

Find your voice

Make it personal – find your voice. It really engages readers. Write as you talk and be enthusiastic. If you have really learnt from the experience you're describing, put yourself in the article. You should always say what your role was in the process so that people know whose perspective this is (called 'positioning'). Here are some examples from *PLA*:

> *For the guest editors, this special issue was an opportunity to help 'demystify' Web 2.0 and Web2forDev and share learning and reflections. We hope that it will help to bring Web2forDev to a wider audience of development practitioners and academics: inspiring you to give Web 2.0 tools a go and share your successes and challenges* (Ashley *et al.*, 2009).
>
> *Not long ago, I myself would have been surprised to find that shit makes for such a good source of conversation and can bring people closer rather than make them recoil with disgust, embarrassment and discomfort. However, since starting to work*

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[5] Plain English (or plain language) is writing that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. Plain English takes into account design and layout as well as language. See e.g. www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html

> *on Community-Led Total Sanitation about four years ago […] I have to remind myself frequently, when in non-CLTS company, that others may not feel quite as comfortable talking about it whilst enjoying a plate of food* (Bongartz, 2010).

Choosing a title

We often forget the importance of a good title. The title is what will grab a potential reader's attention and draw them in. A good title should also give the reader a clear idea of what your article is about.

- Your title should be concise and catchy – accurate, appealing, informative and brief.
- Don't make it too long or complicated. It needs to be interesting but also indicate what your article will be about – your key message.
- Remember that not all readers will hold a copy of the published journal in their hands. Some will search for and read articles online. A good title helps your article really stand out and makes them want to read more.
- Sometimes using a question in your title helps you to focus on the purpose of your article.
- When you feel a bit lost in your writing, think back to your title. Am I still answering the question my title asks? Have I wandered away from my main message?

This example shows the original title and the amended one:

> *Kindling your spark: an editor's practical tips, guidance and advice on how to write an article* (16 words)

> *Kindling your spark: an editor's practical advice to writers* (9 words)

Your introduction

You've grabbed your reader's attention by having a great title. Now you need a strong introduction.

- Say **briefly** what your article is about but don't summarise all of your arguments at once. Focus on the main question or point you want to explore.
- Whet your readers' appetite and keep them wanting to read on. For example, pose an interesting question or use a real example from your experience to demonstrate why action was needed.
- Your introduction is not your abstract. Avoid making statements (adding your conclusions). Turn them into questions you will go on to answer instead.
- Make the reader feel you are speaking to them. Imagine an individual reading your writing. Why is this relevant to them? Thinking about your reader helps to hold their attention to the end. Maybe ask the reader a direct question: 'Have you ever thought…?'

Background and context

We have already covered some of the elements you will need to include. This next part looks at how to put your article into context. Remember to include: who, what, when, where, why, how?

When did it happen and why?

It is important to include enough detail to put your article into context for the reader.

- When did the experiences you are writing about take place? How long did they last?
- What was the purpose of your project or programme? What did you expect to happen and why?

Who was involved?

- Who was involved? Which organisations?
- Who funded it?
- Who participated? Who did not? Why not?

If you discuss a particular group, you need to provide some details. For example, you might refer to a youth committee. Who is on the committee? What is its purpose? When was it formed and why? Who do they represent? How were its members chosen? Who decided? What other groups do they work with?

Remember, you don't have to provide a lot of detail – just enough for your reader to understand the context and the relationships involved.

Where did it happen?

Say where your experiences took place – again, include just enough background detail so that your readers can understand the context. Describe the conditions and/or the circumstances that explain to the reader why action was necessary. Include a map if possible, showing the locations where your experiences took place.

**What process did you use? How did you do it?**

- What tools, methods and processes did you use?
- Did you make any innovations e.g. adapting or combining existing methods and processes?
- What were the results?
- What happened? What changed?

Describe the results – even better, include visuals that show what participants learnt or how they have influenced future decision-making.

Discussing results

Before you move onto your critical analysis – discussing the successes and challenges – you need to tell the reader **what** happened.

See this example below from *PLA* 60. Mental models are a visual tool that allows various stakeholders to depict how they understand drivers and impacts of climatic changes. Mental models are described as psychological representations of 'problems' in the form of a conceptual map of ideas. They also help participants to start thinking about strategies to deal with the problems.
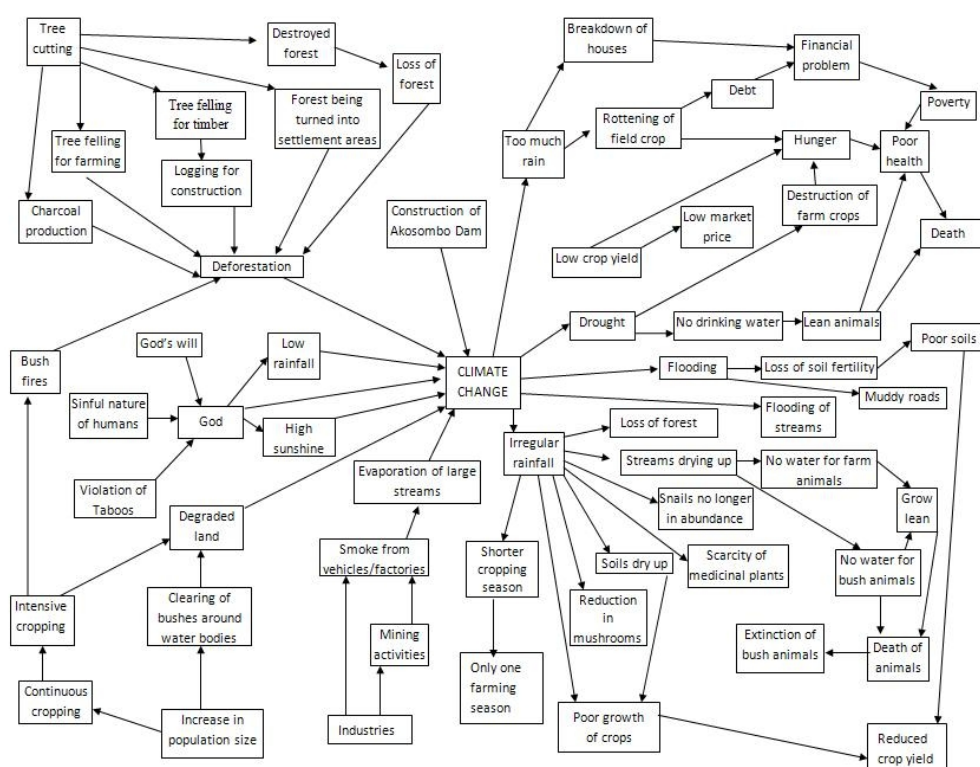
Caption: Mental model from communities in Kwahu North, Wenchi/Tain and Bawku East.

…all participants listed negative impacts first… On the positive side, people envisioned more fish and increased availability of drinking water under wetter climatic conditions… Surprisingly, the large majority of strategies that participants proposed to deal with observed changes focused on planting trees, constructing drainage systems and dams, storing food, and preventing deforestation and bushfires (Tschakert and Sagoe, 2009).

The reader now knows what you did, what you expected to happen and who was involved. They know how you did it – and what the results were. Now you can move on to discuss the challenges and limitations of the approaches you used.

Try to include **quotes** and give **examples**. If you say that e.g. participant responses were positive, list some of the benefits they described! For example:

> *Within Kilifi District the villages that have attained ODF status have now moved on to tackle livelihood issues, undertaking sustainable organic agricultural production activities such as passion fruit, cassava, mushroom and melon farming* (Bwire, 2010).

Readers can see here **what** livelihoods issues villagers have tackled – not in great detail but enough so that they understand the context.

Remember, no tool or method is perfect. You need to make clear their limitations – but without compromising the questions raised and conclusions made by those involved in their use. Make sure you include different perspectives as well. Who was involved in the analysis of the results? What did it mean to them (sense-making)?

Here is another quote from *PLA 57 Immersions: learning about poverty face-to-face*.[6] It is by Ama Gariba, a woman who hosted one of the participants in an ActionAid facilitated

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[6] *PLA* 57 describes experiences of learning about poverty face-to-face, often referred to as immersions. Immersions are opportunities for development professionals to spend a period of time living with and learning from a poor family.

immersion in Funsi, Ghana, in June 2005. Ama talked with Kweku Koranteng, programme manager for ActionAid's Upper West Regional Development Programme, about what she thought of her experience.

> *My biggest disappointment about the immersion was that you did not bring another batch to Funsi in subsequent years. As married women we scarcely get the opportunity to interact with people beyond our family on general matters for that length of time, let alone people from outside our country. We were getting more confident about the programme and looking forward to more of these kinds of opportunities presented in the way the immersion was done.*

As you can see, Ama expresses her learning on both the good and bad aspects of her experiences. Using quotes allows you to include other perspectives and sense-making in your writing.

Be honest about challenges and limitations

Reflect critically on your own experiences and learning and the limitations of the approaches you use. Include important issues and that have emerged as questions for further reflection and investigation. It is how you learn and how others learn with you. Here's an example from *PLA* 61 (Wolfer and Kloot, 2010).

> ***Realisation: it's not a water problem, it's a shit problem***
> *As we prepared for our 2009 trip, we realised that by fostering dependence on Western technology and donations, we were probably hindering rather than improving access to safe drinking water. Our role as outsiders had to shift from a technology-based approach (i.e. bringing chlorinators with us) to a knowledge-based approach (i.e. using questions to inform people of the various water treatment options available). We also had to face the fact that sanitation was the underlying problem. But apart from raising money for pit latrines (which would be more difficult than raising money for water systems) we had no idea of what to do about that issue.*

In their conclusion, the authors go on to say:

> *Our initial efforts to help, however well intended, now appear naïve and unrealistic, lacking in respect and inattentive to island dynamics. Fortunately for us and the islanders, we maintained relationships and followed up to learn about problems engendered by **our** initial solution. As a result, we avoided foisting that solution on other communities.*

What makes this writing powerful? What are the authors sharing with you?

Ways forward and conclusions

Your conclusion is the final message you want readers to take away with them. It is what they learnt from your story that will leave a lasting impression. But is it the **end** of the story? Think about what will happen next – the ways forward.

- What learning did you take with you as you moved forward with your work?
- What changed as a result of the experiences you have shared with your reader?
- How will you build on this in future?
- What new developments have taken place since?

Including ways forward is important. They demonstrate that your experiences were worthwhile and are part of a longer, ongoing process of improving your own participatory practice.

As authors Giacomo Rambaldi *et al.* (2006) wrote in their conclusion to a *PLA* article:

> *… participatory approaches are open ended and based on continuous innovation and change. 'Conclusions' are never 'real conclusions' – and this fact should be considered as the beauty of innovation.*

What innovations are **you** going to share with your reader? And what will come next?

Bring your text to life: make it interesting!

Making your writing easy to read is not just about language and sentence structure. Try making your article more reader-friendly by adding boxes, visuals, quotes and stories. And remember to let your voice come through!

- **Break up the text**! Use boxes (to provide examples, short case studies, quotes, descriptions of methods), bullet points and visuals.
- **Visuals** include tables, figures, photos, diagrams, maps and cartoons.
- Some written information can be represented just as well by visuals as words. Use e.g. a diagram or table rather than long sections of descriptive text.
- Make your writing come alive – include **quotes** from participants.
- **Write as you talk** and be enthusiastic.
- Make use of **stories** – they lodge in the consciousness. Include quotes and short examples that illustrate your points well.

Include quotes – other people's voices

As discussed earlier, remember to acknowledge other people's involvement, particularly staff members, participants or communities. Allow them to have a voice too – include their quotes and reflections or even better, include them as co-authors. This quote comes from a *PLA* article by Tamara Plush (2009).

> *One difference is how the children feel about the knowledge they gathered through their video research and their sense of ownership: 'Special workshops on climate change are only one-way communications. Using video is two-way communications. Hidden things in the community become real.' Raj Kumari Rokaya, age 15, Bageshwari.*

Make use of stories

Stories lodge in your reader's consciousness. Include quotes and short examples that illustrate your points well. This story comes from Ravi Kanbur and is particularly powerful (Birch *et al.,* 2007).

> *The next day I ask again about the temple. Later. But later never comes. The programme is busy, and enjoyable. As we finish dinner with the family, this time I ask Ramilaben's husband, as he is leading me out to the toilet facilities. He says 'yes, the temple is open now.' Oh good, I think, we can go there on the way back. But he is still talking and what he says stops my heart. So obvious, so stupid of me not to realise: me, with all my exposures, and all my dialogues and all my reading. And my three visits to Ganeshpura. The temple is not open to him, to Ramilaben, the Senmas or any of the lower castes. But, he says, I am sure you can go there, no problem. I'll speak to them if you like. They'll let you in, but I can't go in. That's OK, I say, we'll do it another time, lets get back to Labuben, Indhiraben, and the others in the house.*

Using 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.

Here are two examples from *PLA* 61 (Bongartz *et al.*, 2010). **Box 2** below draws out the key principles of Community-Led Total Sanitation – readers can easily see what they are without having to go through all of the text.

sanitation ladder in the two years since CLTS was first introduced. In Zambia alone, through the CLTS approach, over 245,000 people are now living in open defecation free (ODF) communities (Bevan and Hickling, this issue).

This issue draws on this large and growing body of experience from Africa. It will be of interest to the many organisations and individuals involved in implementing and taking CLTS to scale in Africa and elsewhere, as well as to other participatory practitioners.

In this overview to the issue, we provide an introduction to CLTS: how it differs from traditional approaches, its key principles and methodology, its history and spread, and its potential for revolutionising rural sanitation. We then look at some

Box 2: Key principles of CLTS

- From 'we must help the poor' to 'they can do it'
- From imposing solutions and standards from the outside to local solutions, diversity and context-appropriate innovations
- From teaching, educating, telling people what to do, to facilitating, empowering, enabling people to come to their own conclusions
- From sanitised words to crude ones
- From counting latrines to counting ODF communities
- From building latrines to building capacity
- From being sensitive to cultural norms and taboos to letting communities deal with them[6]
- From focus on individual behaviour change to social solidarity, cooperation and collective action

encouraging people to wait for handouts rather than build toilets themselves, or repair existing ones. Traditional

Box 6 includes a short personal reflection which helps to illustrate the point that children and youth can play an important role in CLTS.

Box 6: Children and CLTS: a personal reflection

I vividly recall an incident in one village in which the adults had tried to hide the extent of open defecation. Their position was challenged when the children provided their analysis during the joint meeting for sharing action plans. Whereas the adults said that in their village the majority of the homes had functional latrines, the children contradicted this, saying that the figure was only about 30%. One of the adults who was unhappy with this revelation challenged the children by asking them, 'How can you say such a thing! What proof do you have that only 30% of our homes have latrines?'

One of the children promptly stood up and said, 'In our group of 30 children from different homesteads, less than 10 children have latrines in their homes.' The adult bowed his head in shame as the stark truth was bared to him.

Philip Vincent Otieno, Plan Kenya.

Children and youth

Children can play a key role in CLTS, acting as powerful advocates of (behaviour) change, for example by leading proces-

Whilst it is clear that children often play an important part in CLTS processes, Shutt (this issue) raises the question of whether this involvement empowers children and

Photos and images

A good picture will help to bring your writing to life. Try to include what I think of as 'active' images – people doing things. Remember to include a **caption** and a **credit**: who took the photo?

Caption: Community natural leaders present their action plans to the workshop during a CLTS training organised by Plan RESA in Zambia in July 2009. The training was facilitated by Kamal Kar. It included two hands-on triggerings in the field. **Credit:** CLTS Flickr photostream.
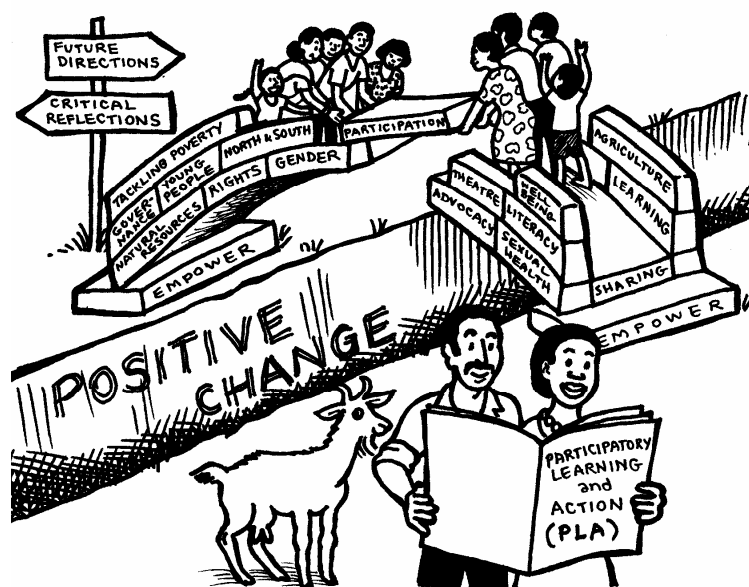
Photos can also be used to show the results when using participatory tools.
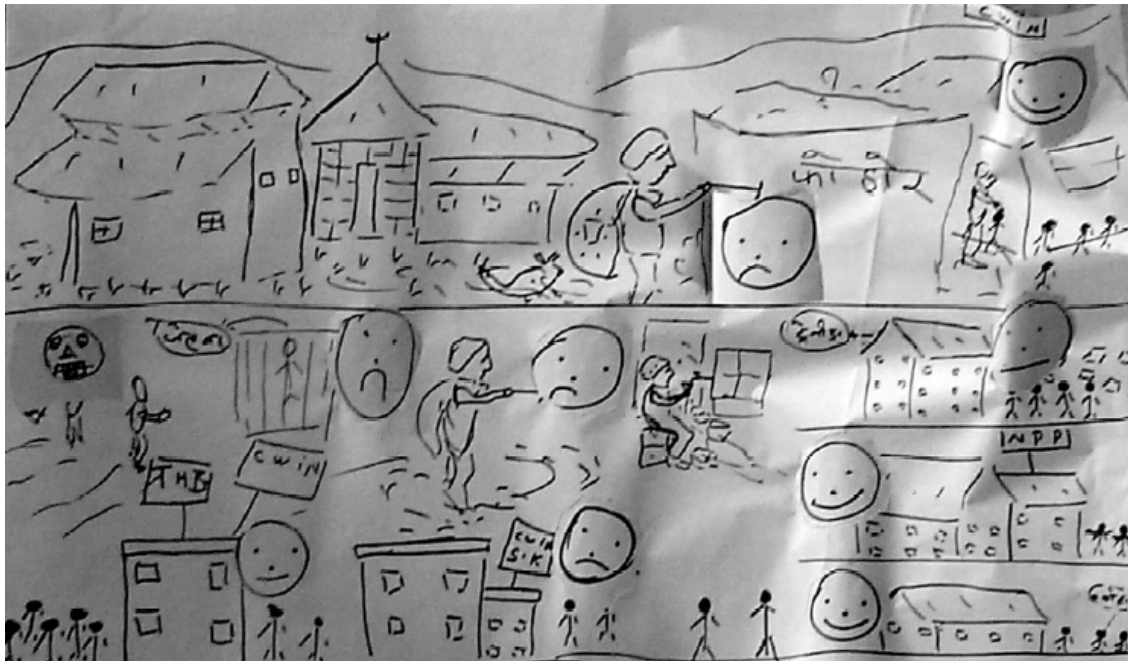
Caption: A timeline carried out by Rachel Bray and a streetchild in Kathmandu to discuss his work and life. **Credit:** Development in Focus.

Cartoons

Cartoons can be funny, evocative **and** provocative… they hold a message. What do these cartoons say to you?

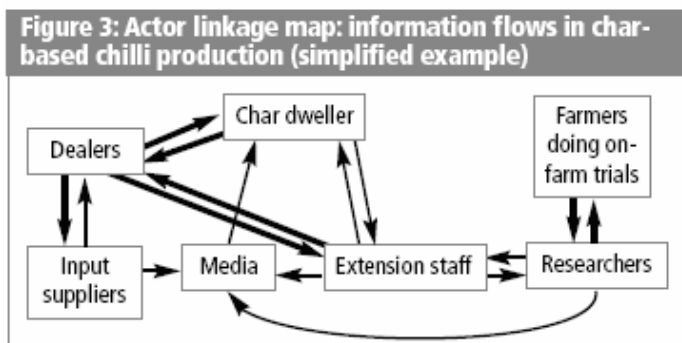By Regina Faul-Doyle. Cover of *PLA* 50 *Critical reflections, future directions*
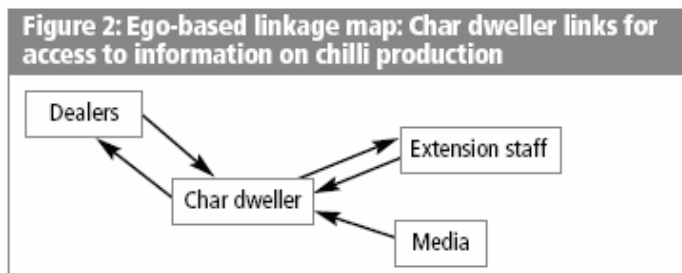

By Kate Charlesworth. Cover of *PLA* 58: *Towards empowered participation: stories and reflections.*

Diagrams

Diagrams are a useful way to present complex information. It helps the reader visualise what you are trying to say. Diagrams can be used to illustrate e.g.

- The flow of events you are describing
- A process or theory of change
- Relationships between different actors in your story

For example, see these diagrams. The first one shows the linkages between different actors involved in chilli production in Bangladesh (Matsaert *et al.*, 2005).

Figure 2: Ego-based linkage map: Char dweller links for access to information on chilli production

Figure 3: Actor linkage map: information flows in char-based chilli production (simplified example)

The figure below shows the core phases of the spread and development of Participatory Rural Appraisal from the end of the 1980s to the present (Cornwall and Guijt, 2004).

Figure 1. Core phases of development and spread of PRA[1]
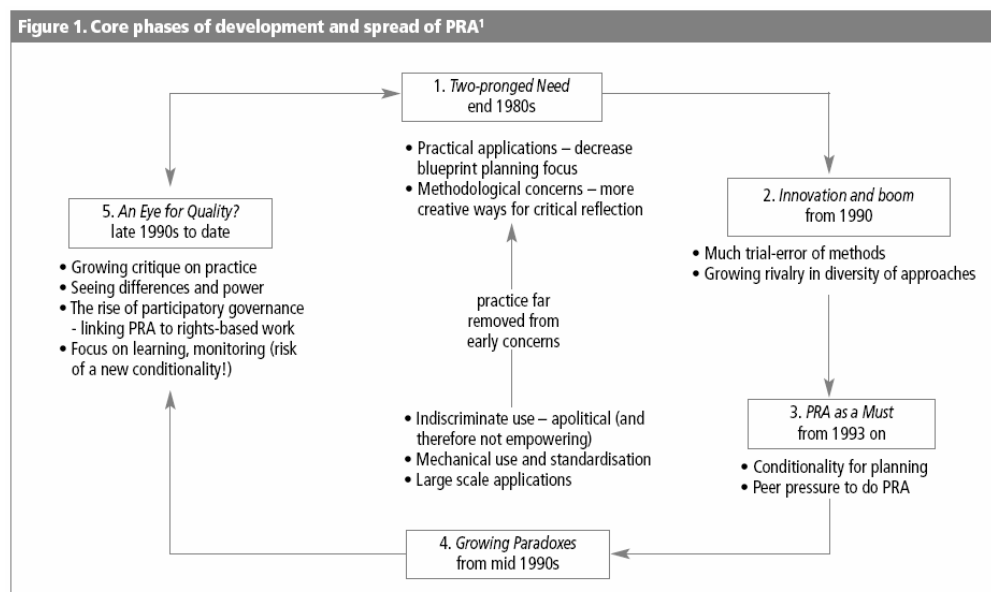
Using tables to present information

Using a table to present information makes it visually easier for your reader to digest what you are telling them. Some written information can be represented just as well in a table as in words. This removes long sections of descriptive text – remember you need to make every word count!

Table 1: Some examples of participatory tools used in CBA	
PARTICIPATORY TOOL/APPROACH	**USES**
Mental models	• Drivers and effects of climate change
Seasonal calendars	• Seasonality and links with livelihoods • Can be combined with timelines to show perceived changes in seasonality over time
Timelines	• Hazards and events • Trends in climate, e.g. temperature and rainfall
Community mapping and modelling	• Resources • Types and causes of risks and threats • Extent of vulnerable areas • Vulnerable households and individuals • Planning DRR/CC adaptation measures
Transect walks	• Vulnerability/risks • Land use • Resources
Ranking	• Vulnerabilities and hazards • Coping and DRR strategies, e.g. water management options, crop varieties
Dream maps and drawings	• Vision of community or farm and how to achieve
Theatre, poems, songs	• Awareness raising of risks and risk reduction measures • Advocacy
Participatory video	• Awareness raising • Farmer to farmer communication • Advocacy
Stakeholder analysis	• Institutions, relationships, power
Key informant discussions (e.g. *storian*)[4]	• In-depth discussion of vulnerability, livelihood sources

<u>Writing an abstract</u>

Every article needs an abstract. This is a short, 150 word summary of your article. An abstract is vital because it will appear online. It is what will make someone want to read your article.

For example, any article that is available online and includes references and an abstract will automatically appear on Google Scholar.

- Remember to start with your key messages.
- Aim your abstract at your key audience.
- Briefly describe what the article covers.
- Add the main points from your conclusion.
- Include your keywords – the words people will use when searching the Internet for content they are interested in.
- Include the names of tools used. Sometimes people who are familiar with the tools use those as Internet search terms.

For example, here is the abstract for this article. Note how it includes the key messages, audience, content and keywords.

"This writing guide provides practical advice for writers who want to contribute to the *Participatory Learning and Action* series. It seeks to help them write engaging, interesting, relevant and readable articles on participation. It aims to give them the confidence to write about and share their experiences, practical learning and critical reflections with other participatory development practitioners. It also aims to encourage Southern writers to share their voices and perspectives in the international development arena. The article is written in four parts. Part I: getting started (know your reader, finding your focus, guiding principles and having a vision). Part II: tips on writing (capturing your ideas, creating a structure and writing an article). Part III: reflections on writing (building your confidence). Part IV: the editorial process. It also includes tools that writers can use such as Most Significant Change (MSC) and Snowballs." (142 words)

My keywords are: guide, tips, authors, writers, writing, participation, 'writing an article', 'tips on writing', 'writing guide', 'most significant change' and 'snowball'.

Sometimes it helps to write an abstract first. It can give you a starting point when facing a blank page.

- Try to describe what you are going to write in 150 words or less.
- You can use sentences from the abstract as headings later on.

But remember, the final article is likely to be different from the abstract as ideas develop in the process of writing. When you have finished your article, go back to your abstract (if you have written one already) and make sure it is correct. Does it include your key messages and main points?

And finally…

- **Very important:** acknowledge all those who contributed their experience, e.g. field workers. Even better, co-author with them.
- **Keep going:** writing is hard, but it gets easier with practice.
- **If you get stuck:** go back a stage and think about e.g. your focus or your structure. Or work on the parts that come more easily and go back to the problems later. Think about your good ideas and remember why you wanted to share them.

PART III: REFLECTIONS ON WRITING

I hope that so far, this article has given you the confidence to get started with your own writing. But it is worth remembering that no matter how experienced a writer is, we all have days when we sit down to write something and simply stare at a blank page waiting for inspiration.

If this has ever happened to you, how did you feel? Full of doubts, lacking in confidence, overwhelmed? Understanding your own state of mind when you write is crucial to working well. You need to recognise what helps you write, but also to be honest about what hinders you. Once you begin to recognise **what** gets in the way, you can start to work around it.

Building your confidence as a writer

Think of something you are good at. It might be cooking, or playing football, or listening to your friends. It might be organising training sessions or doing participatory transect walks. Were you always good at it? Did you face challenges? How did you overcome them? Focus on this for a moment and recognise that this was something you learnt to do – and learnt to do well.

Perhaps the most important thing about writing well is your confidence. The truth is that the more you write, the better you will get and the more confident you will feel.

For some special issues, PLA uses writeshops to bring authors together to develop articles. [7] One aspect of the *PLA* writeshop process is to explore writer's hopes and fears (Milligan and Bongartz, 2010). I think this is a useful exercise for anyone starting out with writing. You have something worthwhile to say that you want to share with others. But just knowing that isn't always enough. You also need to believe you can **write** about it well.

As I said before, you are not alone. Here are some responses from *PLA* writeshop participants who explored their own hopes and fears about writing. [8]

What helps you write?	What hinders your writing?
- Write regularly - Find the right time for you – could be morning, middle of the night! - Carry a notebook to note down thoughts/ideas - Prioritise writing: remember how important it is to communicate your work to the wider world - Write from personal experience (much easier – you are the authority) – self in text, storytelling - Think about who you're writing for: a colleague, policymaker, or a sympathetic friend (removes inhibitions)	- Trying to write and edit at the same time - Not knowing what to share - Assuming what you know is common knowledge - Self-doubt: is this worthwhile? - Waiting for an idea to be perfectly formed - Feeling not a good (enough) writer - Comparing self with others - Feeling write too slowly/chaotically - Perfectionist - Scared of finding out not a good writer - Not fun – boring report writing

[7] See e.g. Let's write! Running a participatory writeshop by Angela Milligan and Petra Bongartz.

[8] For more information on the writeshop, see notes at the end of this article.

- Supportive boss who encourages staff and gives time - Write out what's in your head (anything!) – helps clear your mind - Write after giving a talk: you already have a structure and talking fixes it in your head - Talk it over with a friend - Glass of red wine! - Share your work with others (but can be difficult if critical) - Write an abstract (c 150 words) and use sentences from the abstract as headings. Final result likely to be different from the abstract as ideas develop in the process of writing, but gives a starting point when facing a blank page. - Wanting to change things through writing – MOTIVATION - Keep at it – gets easier - A good title is important – let your imagination fly! - Give yourself a deadline (going out, a favourite TV programme) - Think about your body/alertness - If you get stuck, take a break, or a sleep! Your mind carries on working even during the break	

The list above has some excellent suggestions for what can help us as writers. But I think it is sometimes hard to overcome the things that block us. You can create a list but how do you work around them?

Unblocking your creativity

I want to share some things I have learnt about myself as a writer. I work best alone in a quiet place without interruptions. But this does not always guarantee I will work well. Sometimes I am confused about what I need to do and how to do it, or I can't think of the important things I need to say. Or I have written too much and the structure has become confused. Sometimes I get stuck because I feel I have not got it 'right' in my mind yet. Or my mind just goes blank and I can't focus. Other times, I have more pressing things on my mind that simply won't be ignored. Sometimes I just don't feel like working. But I have begun to recognise the different states of mind that can help – or hinder – how I work. The following are some thoughts on how to unblock your creativity…

Too much work, too little time

Most of us are busy, and feel like there are not enough hours in the day to do everything. If writing is not your priority, guess what? It won't get done. In addition, feeling stressed does not help you feel creative.

If you sit down to write but can't stop worrying about something else you haven't done – like calling a friend, finishing a report or having another deadline – then either go and do those things instead and come back to writing later, or figure out the one thing you need to do to keep those other things moving – and do it. It might be making a phone call or finding time in your diary to deal with another issue. This can sometimes help you to stop worrying about other issues while you try to write.

If something else really does take priority, decide on a time when you will come back to your writing and stick to it. Plan your writing in manageable chunks. It doesn't have to be a whole day. Perhaps it is just a quiet half hour when you can really focus on your writing. You might be surprised how much you can achieve in a short amount of time.

Doing anything but writing

It isn't just about being too busy. Sometimes we feel afraid of writing and don't want to do it. But not doing something can be just as stressful as struggling to do it. If you are like me, you can probably find many excuses for not writing (or anything else for that matter!).

So what happens when I keep putting something off? I start to worry. I worry I won't have time to finish it. Or that it will be too much work. Or that the stress will be unbearable. By this stage, I'm so worried I will do anything not to think about having to write. Instead, I find other things to do. I tidy my house. I call a friend. I sweep the paths. Suddenly these things seem more important than worrying about writing. I will find any excuse not to write.

The trick is learning to recognise when you are avoiding writing – and working out why. Until you figure out how to get around it, you won't move forward.

The chances are you have come up against a problem in your writing that you just haven't found the time to solve yet. Maybe you have created an outline for your article but you are having trouble getting started with your introduction. Perhaps you are finding it difficult to describe an event or an aspect of your work.

My advice is, if you come up against a problem, make a note of it. You can usually tell you've found a problem because you start to feel confused and de-motivated as you write. It might be something that seems like an impossible hurdle. But let me tell you – it isn't.

The important point here is to **recognise** when you're stuck – and to deal with your problems one step at a time. When you get stuck try looking back at your vision for inspiration. And remember to keep at it. Don't lose momentum. You want to keep that spark alive.

Take a break, nurture your ideas

Sometimes stepping back from your work is also important. There is a difference between avoiding writing and taking a break if you are tired or stressed. It helps you relax if you feel stressed. Do something else for a while – go for a walk or have some food. Boost your energy levels. Get some exercise and refresh your mind and body. But if you are doing something else to avoid thinking about writing, you might like to use that time to let your thoughts unfold quietly instead.

Something that helps me is to carry an idea for my writing around in my head and let it grow during the day while I do something else – cooking, the housework, walking to the shops. I like to let my little idea inspire me while I do other things and have my own time to think. Keep a notepad handy and jot down ideas as they come to you – as well as any thoughts and reflections that you have later on.

One step at a time

The other important thing is that you don't have to write or do everything all at once. You can take things one step at a time. For example, if you have not started your article yet, set aside 10-30 minutes to think about your objectives and key messages to begin with.

Take each problem and try to fix them separately – don't get overwhelmed. Each problem you sort out will make you feel less worried. Talk to someone who might be able to help or set

aside 10 minutes to find a book or report that explains something you don't understand. If something doesn't seem to fit into your structure, take it out and leave it aside for the moment. If you're confused about what you're trying to write, look back at your notes. See where the gaps are in your structure. Maybe you have added something new that doesn't quite fit with the rest of your writing yet. Go back and think about where it should go.

I find that focusing on one clear idea and then 'leaving it alone' for a while also really helps. It also helps me to feel as though I have taken an important first step and it stops me worrying about not having achieved anything.

Making time in a busy day

It might sound obvious, but try setting aside a chunk of time when you know you won't be interrupted. Switch off your email. Put a sign on your door. Or find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. Set yourself a time limit – 30 minutes, an hour, an afternoon – and keep going. When you get stuck on one section, move onto another where you feel more confident. Note where you have a problem and come back to the difficult parts later when you have set aside some time to fix them. If all that fails, talk to someone about it!

Talk it through

Talking to someone when you feel stuck helps to make things clearer in your own mind. Try to make the conversation constructive – rather than say to someone 'I can't do this anymore!' and leaving it at that, take one of the problems you have come up against. Focus on that one thing and ask your friend or colleague to listen without commenting to start with – try using active listening.[9] Explain your problem but try to think about how you can resolve it. You will be surprised – more often than not just sharing a problem helps you to see how to get around it.

Reading aloud what you have written can also help – imagine you are reading your work to a sympathetic friend. Think about how it sounds – does it flow well? What sections or sentences are unclear? Does it start to sound repetitive? Where do you lose interest?

It is worth noting here that once you have written your article and sent it to the editors, our job is to work through your article with you – we are also sympathetic friends.

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[9] To read more about active listening see Appendix 4, page 39.

PART IV: THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Your journey towards publication

Writing an article for the *PLA* series is the first step on the editorial journey towards publication. It is a key part of the journey: from having experiences you want to share, to writing about those experiences and refining what you have written. But what happens next?

Creating a special issue takes about 18 months – from developing a concept note for the issue to when our readers will actually hold a copy in their hands. So why does it take so long?

After you have written your article, there are several further stages in the editorial process. This section discusses the next stages of the editorial journey. It includes information about the *PLA* team, our aims, why we work with guest editors and the role of our Strategic Editorial Board and International Advisory Editorial Board. We explain the editorial process and why your articles are peer-reviewed. It discusses the sort of feedback you can expect to receive from reviewers later on. And we talk you through how to deal with revising your article in response to our comments.

Who is involved in PLA?

PLA is co-edited by a team of three women, Angela Milligan, Nicole Kenton and Holly Ashley. One team member (Nicole) is fluent in French. All three co-editors work part-time on *PLA* – together we work the equivalent hours of just over one full-time IIED staff member.

The *PLA* series has guidance from a Strategic Editorial Board. Members come from IIED and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

We also have a wider International Editorial Advisory Board (our reviewers). It currently has 62 members who are experienced participatory development practitioners, researchers and academics. The *PLA* editorial team also take the views of reviewers into account on major decisions, e.g. the recent format change.

Our International Editorial Advisory Board members come from a wide range of backgrounds – much like our readers – from the global South and North. They have different areas of expertise, for example community development, children and youth, agriculture, livestock, climate change, urban issues and so on. Many of them have previously acted as guest editors for special issues of *PLA*. Members are responsible for peer reviewing all articles submitted to the series, and recommending whether or not they should be published. They are experienced in providing feedback on what makes a good article for the *PLA* series.

What does *PLA* publish?

Participatory Learning and Action is published twice a year. Our principal aim 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 *PLA* through its readership.

We also encourage and provide support for practitioners from the South to reflect on, share and publish their experiences in an internationally known and respected journal. By doing this, we help to bring Southern voices and perspectives into the international development arena.

Types of material accepted

- Articles: max. 2500 words plus illustrations.
- 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 online resources.

For more discussion on the types of material accepted, see Appendix 5.

Why does the *PLA* series use guest editors?

Most issues of *PLA* (12 out of the past 14) are based around a particular theme. For these issues, the editorial team works with one or – more usually – a team of guest editors who are particularly knowledgeable in that area. This means that the *PLA* series benefits from their expertise. Guest editors are best placed to provide up-to-the minute accounts of the development and use of participatory methods in specific fields.

IIED staff often act as guest editors or suggest a particular theme and possible guest editors. In other cases, external organisations contact us. They are our important partners in this respect. For example:

- Participation, Power and Social Change team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) UK
- Plan International
- Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in The Netherlands

Until recently, guest editors worked largely independently to select authors to contribute to special issues. Now the *PLA* team is now much more closely involved in this process. With the support of the *PLA* team, guest editors identify authors for the issue in a range of different ways e.g.

- calls for abstracts through networks
- e-forums
- conferences and workshops on a particular theme
- direct contact with likely authors

For some special issues we use writeshops. These bring authors together, giving them space to write and refine their article with support from the other authors, the guest editors and a member of the *PLA* editorial team.

Not all issues of *PLA* are on a specific theme. 'General' issues can be about anything participation-related and cover a wide range of sectors, approaches and arenas of decision making (local, regional, national, international). General articles differ from thematic ones in that they are almost all sent in by prospective authors rather than being commissioned by guest editors.

When will my article be reviewed?

Once you have finished writing your article you send it to the *PLA* team. The *PLA* team then sends your article to be reviewed by the International Editorial Advisory Board.

Each article is read and commented on by two reviewers. When we send an article to a reviewer we do not include the author's name or details. Likewise, we do not tell authors the name of the person who has reviewed their article. The reason for this is to prevent potential biases when commenting on articles or reading comments.

What sort of feedback can I expect from reviewers?

These are the guidelines that we send to our reviewers:

- Reviewers are asked to make their comments as **constructive as possible**.
- Reviewers tell you what they liked and what the article does well.
- But they also tell you what they think could be improved.
- Reviewers focus on the **content and analysis** in the article, as well as the **structure**.
- Reviewers often comment on the style of language – whether sentences are too long or unclear, or words and terms used that are not explained or difficult to understand.

Questions reviewers consider

- Are the key messages of the article coming over strongly, or are you not clear what they are?
- Does the article have a critical lens or does it just describe what happened?
- Does the article describe the process of reaching the outcomes – what was learnt along the way? What challenges were faced and overcome?
- Does the article draw out wider lessons from the work?
- Does the article raise questions/issues still to be resolved?
- What about the structure and style, diagrams, photos etc.?
- Is the language used appropriate for the *PLA* readers?

How long does the reviewing stage take?

We allow our reviewers three weeks to read your article and send us their feedback and comments. Once your article has been reviewed, the *PLA* team collates the feedback and comments and add our own comments as well.

This process usually takes about five weeks in total. We then get in touch with you to discuss any changes the reviewers have recommended you make to your article and how also to respond to feedback and revise your article in line with our comments.

Working with editors and responding to feedback

Remember, the reviewers will be making constructive comments on what they feel you need to improve. After you have written and sent us your article, you will still be working with and supported by the *PLA* editors. Our job is to work through any changes needed in your article with you – we are your sympathetic friends.

As editors, we know that no article is perfect the first – or even second – time around. We remember working with Robert Chambers, the guru of participatory development, on an article for the *PLA* series in 2004. Was his article perfect first time? No! In fact, we worked through eight drafts before it was ready for publication. However, usually an article is finalised by the time we reach the third draft.

Revising your article

Most reviewers give an overall summary of their comments which we will send to you in the text of an email. Reviewers also add comments directly into a Word document using the comments function. These refer to specific points in your text that the reviewers feel need further explaining or clarifying.

Usually articles are only reviewed once by members of the editorial board. However, if an article has been changed significantly, we may ask the original reviewers to read it again.

There are three important practical points to consider when you revise your article:

- When you revise your text, please remember to use **track changes**. This makes it easy for the editors to see where you have made changes in your text. As editors, it can be very confusing trying to compare two different drafts when we can't see easily what has been changed!
- Please also leave the reviewer's comments in place so that we can see how you have responded to their suggestions.
- Please save your own article using this format: PLA64_YourSurname_date.doc. For example: PLA64_Ashley_12-03-11.doc. This means that the editors can clearly tell which the latest draft is.

Sticking to deadlines

First of all, it very important that you stick to deadlines. Be aware of when you will need time to work on your article and respond to the feedback you have received – make a note in your diary or aim to have some free time to digest and respond to the feedback.

Stay in touch with your editors

To get the best out of the editorial process, it is important to stay in touch.

What if you are away e.g. on holiday or a field trip? We can help you fit your work into your busy schedule, but we need to know in advance. Remember to let us know if your email address changes – otherwise we can't contact you!

If you are unsure what to do next or how to revise your article – or unhappy with a comment someone has made about your work – then please tell us: we are here to help you.

Is my article guaranteed to be published in PLA?

Sometimes articles are not published. It may sound obvious, but we only publish articles that are suitable for the *PLA* series. When an article is not accepted for publication, it is usually for one of these reasons:

- The article is not really about **participatory approaches**
- It does not describe an **innovative angle** on participatory approaches and their use or an attempt to describe the development of **new methods**, or innovative **adaptations** of existing ones
- The article does not include enough **critical reflection**
- The author is **unwilling** to revise their article along the lines suggested

Every writer worries that their article might not be accepted for publication. We know you will have worked hard to develop your writing, with support from your editors. The reviewers also know this and will make every effort to provide constructive feedback to help you further improve your writing – and ensure that it is suitable for and relevant to the *PLA* readers.

Sometimes our reviewers have different opinions about an article. One person may think it is excellent, another person may have doubts. A reviewer may feel strongly that your article is not suitable for our readers without significant changes. When this happens, we ask a third person to review the article and discuss the comments further with the guest editors. We then decide how best to work with the writer to improve their article along the lines the reviewers have suggested.

The last point is very important. No amount of editorial support is going to help you get published if you don't respond constructively to the feedback you have received. And as we said before, if you are unhappy, contact us. We can help you find a solution.

We also have experience of writing and know how hard it can be. It can be disheartening to realise that once you have written your article, someone else will read it and ask you to make

changes to your hard work. But it is important to remember that you are writing for your reader, not yourself. And the reviews are all part of the same writing process.

If you feel de-motivated, read Part III Reflections on writing again. Think about how to overcome blockages in your writing. And ask for help if you need it. Remember that your editors and reviewers want to help you on the road towards getting published. Trust your editors to help you do the best you can.

The key thing is not to give up – even when it seems hard. You have something important to share with others. You are learning all the time. What will you gain from this experience that will help you in the future?

Look forward to the next steps and think about what you have already achieved – we hope you enjoy the journey.

Bringing the flames to life

I want to end with a simple metaphor that occurred to me when I was thinking about writing this article. Good writing is like lighting a fire. You need fuel, oxygen and a spark to make it burn. But each of these things alone is not enough – you need a combination.

Imagine you are building a fire. You have a pile of wood and sticks of different sizes. You have leaves or paper to make them burn. And you have a match to spark the flames.

Think of the match as your starting point. It is the spark that you use in your title and your introduction – your key message. It sets the scene for your reader and provides a focus that will bring your article alive. It inspires your reader and draws them in to read more.

The fuel – the wood and sticks – represents the building blocks of your story. These are the facts, the people and the events that you want to write about. It is what you expected to happen, how you set out to do it – the tools, methods and approaches you used – and what actually happened.

The oxygen is the reflection and learning that gives your story relevance and power. It consolidates your key message. It is how you share your successes, your challenges, the lessons you have learnt and how you can move forward. It is finding your voice and speaking honestly to others. It is respecting and acknowledging all the people involved. It is sharing your insights so that others can learn from your experience.

And lastly there is the flame: what the reader takes away at the end. It is what first caught your reader's attention and kept them reading. It is what they have learnt from your story that will leave a lasting impression. It is the new ideas you have shared with someone else and how you have inspired them.

Create a piece of writing that is engaging, interesting, relevant and readable. Find your spark – and kindle a flame in someone else. You never know until you try!

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APPENDIX 1: Practical information – formatting and files

Photos

- Send photos as separate JPGs in this format: PLA 64_SURNAME_Photo1_date
- Note in the article where photos should be placed, e.g. Photo 1 here.
- All photos need to credit the photographer and have a short caption (max. 10 words)
- Make sure that photos/drawings are scanned at minimum 300dpi (print quality)

Figures and tables

- Our designer can help with putting figures and tables into electronic format

Author contact details

- Please include full contact details: name, title, address, email address, phone number and website with your article.
- Your contact details will appear at the end of your article, but if you prefer not to include all your details, let us know.
- We also use your contact details to send you a hard copy of the published issue and future issues of *PLA* – let us know if you DON'T want to receive these.

Author photos

- Please send us a photo to include at the end of your article. Save as: PLA64_SURNAME_Authorphoto

References

PLA is an informal, rather than academic, journal so keep references to a minimum. Any references included should be cited as follows:

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

Format

- Keep formatting as simple as possible as it all has to be removed at design stage.
- Make headings clear – put [H1] before a main heading, [H2] for a sub-heading, [H3] for a sub- sub-heading.

File names

- Please save the final draft of your article using this format: PLA64_YourSurname_date.doc, e.g. PLA64_Ashley_12-03-11.doc

Making revisions

- Please leave reviewers' comments on your article in place so we can see how you've responded to their suggestions.
- Remember to use **track changes** when you make changes to the text in response to comments.
- Save your revised article with a new date, e.g. PLA64_Ashley_15-03-11.doc

APPENDIX 2: Guidelines for reviewers

What feedback do reviewers provide to authors?

- Tell the author what you liked and what the article does well.

- But also tell them what could be improved, in your view.

- Focus on the **content and analysis**. Don't worry about misspellings, ungrammatical sentences etc – these will be dealt with at copy editing stage.

- Make your comments as **constructive as possible**. Remember to be a 'sympathetic friend'.

Questions reviewers consider when giving feedback

- Are the key messages of the article coming over strongly, or are you not clear what they are?

- Does the article have a critical lens or does it just describe what happened?

- Does the article describe the process of reaching the outcomes – what was learnt along the way? What challenges were faced and overcome?

- Does the article draw out wider lessons from the work?

- Does the article raise questions/issues still to be resolved?

- Do you have any other comments about the article e.g. on structure and style, diagrams, photos etc.

How to provide your feedback

- Summarise your main points in a separate Word document.

- You might also like to use the 'Comments' function in Word to make more detailed comments on the electronic copy of the article.

- Save your feedback in the following format:

  PLA 64_AUTHORSURNAME_your initials_date.doc

  e.g. PLA64_Greenhalf_HA_13-03-11.doc

Thank you! We look forward to reading your comments.

APPENDIX 3: Advice for co-authors: coaching and active listening

The following tips were originally drafted for a recent *PLA* writeshop. They were adapted from: Buchanan-Smith, M. and I. McConnan (2006) 'Better conversations: Coaching skills for managers.' London, UK – a training workbook developed for IIED. The tips were intended for authors who were peer-reviewing each others' articles as part of the writeshop process.

However, I feel that these tips could also be useful for anyone considering co-authoring an article for the *PLA* series. If you are working with a co-author, I suggest that you try them out, as you will both need to listen to one another carefully and provide each other with constructive feedback and suggestions for improving your article. Adopting a coaching style and using active listening can be very helpful.

Coaching as a conversation

Think of coaching as a conversation – but not just any conversation! Here are the main ways that make it different:

- The intention is to facilitate another person's reflection and learning
- There is a clear and agreed outcome
- It requires a discipline on the part of the 'coach' to retain focus
- The emphasis is on the learning process rather than on the detail of the content
- It uses a range of skills on the part of the 'coach' that support listening and asking questions – such as reflecting back and building rapport
- It is based on a clear set of beliefs, values and principles

Beliefs and values of coaching

- Each person is creative, resourceful and whole
- Each person has, or can find, their own answers
- We have behaviours and thought patterns that help or get in the way and we can change these
- We all learn in different ways and at different paces
- It is about believing in the magic of the person and of their potential
- We are each responsible for our own learning and development

Principles of coaching

- **Respect** for the person
- Creating a **safe** environment for learning and self-discovery
- **Confidentiality**
- The **focus** is chosen by your peer review partner
- **'Forwarding the action':** moving forward towards the desired outcome
- **To facilitate** thinking, learning & awareness

Building rapport

How do we build rapport naturally, and how can we develop this skill to use it more consciously? One of the most powerful ways of building rapport is by matching and mirroring, for example of the other person's body language, their energy, their voice, even the words that they use.

By **consciously** becoming aware of how to match and mirror, you can use this skill **consciously** to build rapport with your peer review partner. This will really help you to get a sense of the other person early on in your interaction.

In order to build rapport, pay attention to, and match:
- the way the other person holds their body
- any significant gestures they make
- their breathing rate
- their energy level
- the volume and speed of their voice
- the pitch of their voice
- the words and phrases that they use

This requires sensitivity on your part. It will also be affected by the state that you are in. The more centred, open and receptive that you are, the easier it will be to build rapport.

You may want to take a few moments before your peer review session starts to check your own state and to centre yourself. Self-awareness greatly enhances coaching skills.

It is worth considering how there may be times when you want to break rapport – to mismatch. For example you might want to do this towards the end of a coaching session if you are running short of time or the session is coming to a close.

Active listening

'The quality of your attention determines the quality of the other people's thinking'[10]

Coaching requires us to listen with **attention** and clear **intention**. It requires us to be fully in the present.

The quality of listening in coaching – or indeed any other conversation – influences the quality of the other person's thinking. According to Nancy Kline, 'When you are listening to someone, much of the quality of what you are hearing is **your effect on them**. Giving good attention to people makes them more intelligent …'

A peer review partner needs to listen in order to:

- Understand the content their partner is bringing to the conversation
- Understand their partner's values and beliefs
- Understand the emotion they bring
- Understand their personality as it impacts on the issue
- Understand the energy they attach to the issue.

It can be helpful to think in terms of three levels of listening, moving between them according to the situation.

Level 1 – I hear the other person's words and relevant content. At this level I relate what they are saying to me, in so far as it confirms what I already know and my habitual judgements.

Level 2 – I hear the other person's words and relevant content. At this level my attention is entirely with the other person, and I am listening empathetically. I connect with them at a deeper level and begin to see the world through their eyes.

Level 3 – I sense the energy, emotions and values behind the person's words, drawing on my intuition and experience. This enables me to engage with the person at a deeper level.

Some of the **skills that support listening and asking questions** include:

- Building rapport, matching voice and body language
- Encouraging
- Championing the person and their potential

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[10] Kline, Nancy (2001) *Time To Think. Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*. Ward Lock

- Clarifying
- Summarising, paraphrasing or reflecting back
- Demonstrating empathy
- Allowing silence to happen, accepting that silence allows the other person to think
- Reframing a situation or issue to enable your peer review partner to consider a different perspective
- Intruding in certain situations, such as when the person is wandering off the point or avoiding the issue
- Knowing when to challenge
- Offering and providing feedback

Asking questions

'Questions create space in which the imagination can grow ...'[11]

Asking open-ended questions with genuine interest and curiosity enables the person you are coaching to go further in their thinking and awareness. Curious questions evoke personal exploration, allowing your peer review partner to explore, discover and learn.[12]

As a peer review partner, you need to use what have been described as 'quantum questions'.

'Quantum questions ... help build towards outcomes ... they are quantum because they enable the transition from one energy state to another. They leverage the move from being stuck to being able to act.'[13]

The questions most likely to move thinking forward are:

- What?
- How?
- When?
- Where?
- What else?

'Why' questions aren't included here because they can magnify problems instead of leading towards solutions. Asking 'why' often implies criticism and can make the other person defensive.[14] Alternatives to asking e.g. 'Why haven't you done this..?' might be:

- What are you trying to do?
- What else could you do?
- What could help you?
- What's been going well so far?

Hypothetical questions: What if?

Asking 'what if' questions can unblock thinking and free a person from limiting assumptions. Kline says that these questions help us in 'freeing the mind to think afresh'.

For example:
- If you want to take action, but you are stuck, ask yourself, 'What am I assuming that is stopping me?'
- Listen to the answer, which might be 'I'm assuming that I don't deserve success'.
- Then remove it: 'If I knew that I do deserve success, what would I do right now?'

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[11] Owen, Harrison (1997, second edtion) *Open Space Technology. A User's Guide.* Berrett Koehler
[12] Whitworth, Laura et al (1998) *Co-Active Coaching. New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life.* Davies Black Publishing
[13] Pemberton, Carole (2006) *Coaching to Solutions. A Manager's Toolkit for Performance Delivery.* Elsevier / BH
[14] Whitmore, John (new edition 2001) *Coaching For Performance. The New Edition of the Practical Guide.* Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Examples of incisive questions include:

- If you were writing this article for the first time, what would you change?
- If you were working on a new article, what would you do first?
- If someone came to you with a similar problem, what would you advise them to do?

Giving feedback

Before giving feedback, it is helpful to reflect on how you think and feel and how this might affect what you say and do. What are your feelings and assumptions?

Assumptions that can help you when giving feedback are those of the Mutual Learning Model developed by Roger Schwarz and colleagues.[15]

The core assumptions are:
- I have some information, others have other information
- Each of us may see things the others do not
- Differences are opportunities for learning
- People are trying to act with integrity given their situations

If you give feedback with thoughts of learning in mind (rather than assuming that you have got it right!) you become genuinely curious and interested in what the other person has to tell you.

Here are some tips for how to approach giving feedback:

- Be transparent with the person about the strategy for the conversation (be specific, acknowledge how you feel, show that you are interested in knowing how s/he feels and that you're interested in learning, ask if they are willing to talk to you about this).

- Suggest a process for offering the feedback (to describe how you see it, share reactions and acknowledge you may see it differently).

The benefits of this approach are:
- It reduces defensiveness (yours and others)
- It significantly increases learning: you both get the specific, candid feedback you want, and can make specific, powerful changes if you wish
- Because you are being genuinely curious, and saying what you're thinking, there's an important additional side-effect of all this: increased trust and higher quality relationships. [16]

Exercise: trying out a coaching vs. directive style of management

- Pair up with your peer review partner.
- Decide which of you is will be the 'manager' and who will be the 'coachee'.
- The manager delegates a task to the coachee, e.g. 'I want you to think of how to include more quotes from participants in your article.'
- First, do this using a coaching style. Ask questions of your coachee that helps them think through for themselves how they are going to carry out the task you have given them, and listen! Stay in this style for 5 minutes.
- Next, do this using a directive style, i.e. tell and instruct your partner how to do the task. Continue using this style for 5 minutes.
- Switch roles and repeat the exercise again, for a further 10 minutes.
- Pause and reflect on which style you found easiest. Debrief with your partner.

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[15] Schwarz, Roger et al. (2005) *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook. Tips, Tools and Tested Methods for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers and Coaches*. Jossey Bass
[16] *Fundamental Change vol 1, number 5 15th August 2005. www.schwarzassociates.com*

So what *is* coaching? There are many definitions! Underline the words that resonate for you. What would your definition be? Here are a few:

International Coach Federation
Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives.

Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Developing a person's skills and knowledge so that their job performance improves, hopefully leading to the achievement of organisational objectives. It targets high performance and improvement at work, although it may also have an impact on an individual's private life. It usually lasts for a short period and focuses on specific skills and goals.

Myles Downey in *Effective Coaching*
Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.

John Whitmore in *Coaching For Performance*
Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

The Work Foundation
Helping someone see their situation clearly and calmly in order that they can make better decisions about what they do.[17]

John Leary Joyce, Academy of Executive Coaching
Two people engaged together in raising the awareness of one of them, and therefore their ability to act.[1]

Anne Davidson and Dale Schwarz in '*The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook'*
Our purpose for coaching is to generate creative, purposeful action towards a client's goals and desires.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Adapted from: Buchanan-Smith, M. and I. McConnan (2006) 'Better conversations: Coaching skills for managers.' London, UK. Training workbook developed for IIED.

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[17] Cited in Pemberton, Carole (2006) *Coaching To Solutions. A Manager's Toolkit for Performance Delivery*

APPENDIX 4: Types of material accepted

If you are writing an article for *PLA*, what sort of article is it? You might be describing a particular tool or method – or a process or project you have been involved in. Or you might be drawing together wider lessons from your own experiences with a particular focus – for example, lessons for policy makers or discussing theory and reflection on practice. Or you might be writing practical advice for participatory trainers and facilitators.

- **Articles**: max. 2500 words plus illustrations.
- **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 online resources.

First and foremost, *PLA* provides a forum for sharing learning and debate about good participatory practice. *PLA* aims to share experiences that will help practitioners facilitate high-quality participatory processes, and, ultimately, strengthen the voices of often-excluded and unheard groups.

High-quality participatory processes have the potential to empower poor and marginalised groups to shape their own development, increase their voice and influence in decisions that affect them, and hold government and others to account.

Articles should seek to examine the quality of the methods and process of participation used. We ask that authors share critical reflections on both successes and challenges. Articles should analyse the limitations as well as the successes of the approaches they describe. It is also important to give more importance to issues of power in the process and the impact of participation, asking who sets the agenda for participatory practice. Critical analysis helps to further develop our collective thinking around participatory learning and action.

Examples of different types of articles published

PLA 61 Tales of Shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa the issue was divided into five parts: providing an overview to the issue, discussions on community-level processes and tools, participatory management and organisational change, issues around policy and going to scale, and finally practical advice for trainers and facilitators.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial, Glossary of CLTS acronyms, terms and definitions, International Glossary of Shit and Theme issue abstracts

THEME SECTION: TALES OF SHIT: COMMUNITY-LED TOTAL SANITATION IN AFRICA

This section includes two articles. They provide the background and context to the CLTS approach, drawing out wider lessons for policy and scaling up.

1. Overview: Tales Of Shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa
Petra Bongartz, Samuel Musembi Musyoki, Angela Milligan and Holly Ashley
2. Scaling up CLTS in sub-Saharan Africa
Sophie Hickling and Jane Bevan

PART I: COMMUNITY-LEVEL PROCESSES

This section includes five articles which discuss individual project experiences:

3. Freeing the imagination: innovations in CLTS facilitation in Zimbabwe
Herbert Kudzanai Chimhowa

DRAFT

PART II: MANAGEMENT/ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES

The two articles in this section include a discussion on participatory management approaches and styles when working with those implementing CLTS, and a discussion on how to analyse the types of organisational changes that might be needed when adopting CLTS.

PART III: GOING TO SCALE

Here we have four articles. The authors discuss their experiences of scaling up the CLTS approach e.g. at a national level as well as implications for government policy. They also discuss the opportunities, challenges and lessons. The final article looks at the importance of global networking to share learning among practitioners from different countries.

PART IV: TIPS FOR TRAINERS

This section contains practical advice for trainers, facilitators and those commissioning CLTS training. It includes an extract from the Handbook on Community-Led Total Sanitation with practical and clear step-by-step information on how to use the CLTS approach with communities. The final article focuses on practical advice when running a writeshop.

REGULAR FEATURES

In touch includes reviews of resources related to CLTS (books, DVDs, websites etc.)

In Touch and RCPLA Network

DRAFT

Examples of articles on tools and approaches

It is worth reading previous articles that authors have written to get a feel for what you will write yourself. Here are a few more *PLA* articles that I recommend:

Child-friendly participatory research tools
By Fatima Molina, Grace Molina, Tom Tanner, and Fran Seballos

The world in a suitcase: psychosocial support using artwork with refugee children in South Africa
By Glynis Clacherty

Using participatory video to develop youth leadership skills in Colombia
By Harriet Menter, Maria Cecilia Roa, Omar Felipe Beccera, Clara Roa and Wilson Celemin

Examples of articles on theory and reflection on practice

Evaluating children's participation: seeking areas of consensus
By Louise Chawla

Children's participation in community-based disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change
By Thomas Tanner, Mercedes Garcia, Jimena Lazcano, Fatima Molina, Grace Molina, Gonzalo Rodriguez, Baltz Tribunalo, and Fran Seballos.