

Editorial

Welcome to *Participatory Learning and Action* 66. As Camilla Toulmin, IIED's Director, mentions in her Foreword, we are putting the *PLA* series on hold after this issue, pending the outcome of an external review. The *PLA* series is 25 years old this year and at this important milestone and with the drafting of its new strategy, IIED is taking stock to look at *PLA*'s legacy and future direction.

Since the series started in 1988, *PLA* has seen an explosion of participatory approaches and methods, developed in a wide range of contexts. It has often led the way in bringing together experiences around a particular theme or issue (see Box 1 in Chambers, this issue), as well as reflecting developments in thinking about power and difference, governance, citizenship and rights. It continues to be in high demand on paper and online, with significant downloads. Feedback shows that the material is both relevant and practical. *PLA* 65, for example, on

*Biodiversity and culture: exploring community protocols, rights and consent*¹, was used to guide the development of Brazil's first biocultural community protocols (BCP) under the Nagoya Protocol, and to support the Convention on Biodiversity's capacity-building workshops in developing countries. The Spanish version was used for capacity building in Latin America.

PLA's collaborative capacity-building writing and editorial process, which brings together authors and editors from diverse fields to learn from each other and develop skills for critical analysis and reflection, is – as far as we know – unique, and has brought together a growing network of collaborators with the series.

Over the past year, the *PLA* team and other colleagues from IIED have been carrying out an internal consultation on the achievements and future of *PLA* and we are now awaiting the findings from an

¹ See: pubs.iied.org/14618IIED.html



Nicole Kenton presents her 'river of life' at the RCPLA workshop in Cairo, 2008. The tool allows participants to reflect on personal experiences and influences that have motivated them in their personal and professional life (see also Moussa, 2009; 2008).



Photo: CDS

Photo: David Ngige

Angela Milligan writing up guidelines developed by participants for peer review during the writeshop for *PLA 61 Tales of shit: community-led total sanitation in Africa*. As far as we know, the *PLA* writeshop process is unique. Read more in 'Let's write! Running a participatory writeshop' (Milligan and Bongartz, 2010).

external evaluation. The evaluation may present options on appropriate publication models – online or print – or it may recommend that *PLA* be discontinued. Final decisions will be posted on the website towards the end of this year at www.planotes.org. We thank all of you who have given your time to be interviewed, and/or complete online surveys during the evaluation process.

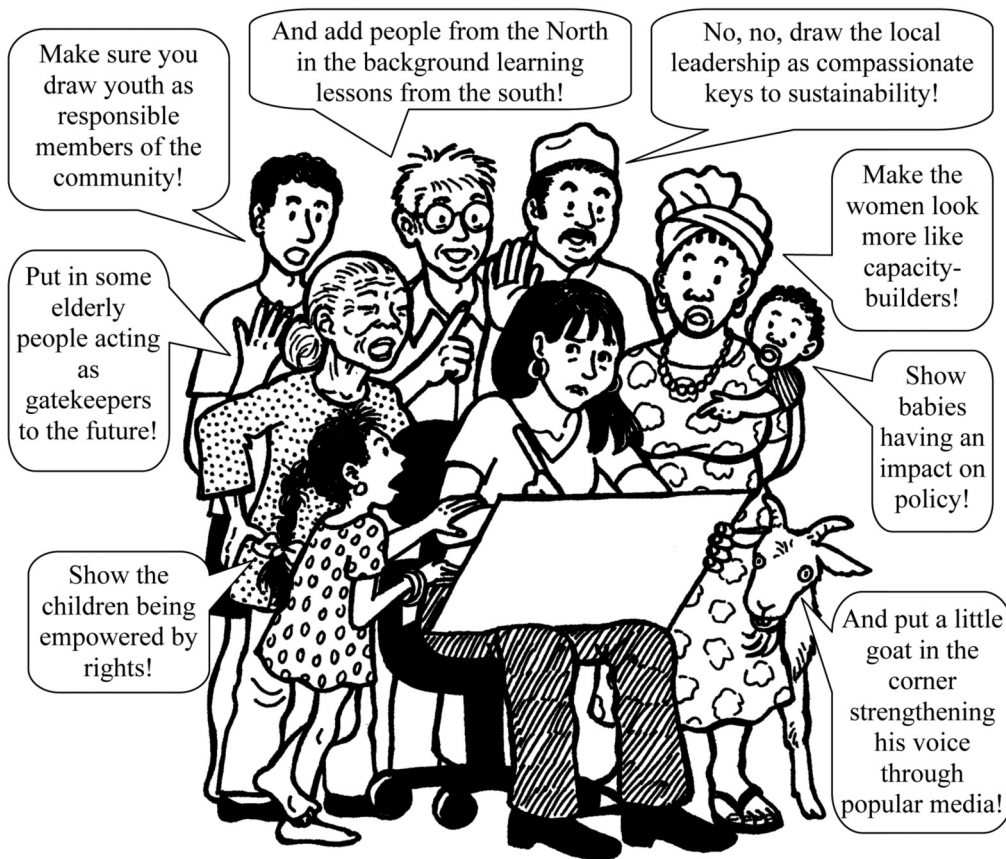
As this will be the last issue of *PLA* in its current format and with its current co-editors, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all those involved with *PLA* since it began its life as *RRA Notes* a quarter of a century ago. In particular we would like to thank Robert Chambers and Michel Pimbert, who have been unfailing supporters during our co-editorship. We would also like to thank all those who edited special theme issues of *PLA*. Without exception, they were hugely dedicated, putting in far more than their allotted hours to produce some really ground-breaking issues. Our international editorial board have read hundreds of articles and provided invaluable

insights and feedback despite their busy schedules, and for this we are truly grateful. One of our longstanding board members, Bardolf Paul, reflects on his time as a *PLA* editorial board member (Box 1, right).

We would like to acknowledge the support of DfID in producing this issue, together with IIED's frame funders – Irish Aid, Danida and Sida – and all those who have supported the production of *PLA* over the years, including translations into many different languages and multimedia editions.

We would also like to include a special mention of Andy Smith and Denise Bell, our designers (www.smithplusbell.com), for their calm and organised presence and their tolerance of our moving deadlines, and also Regina Doyle, our cover illustrator, for her patience and creativity. When we produced our 50th issue in 2004, Regina sent a vivid representation of the challenges (and joys!) of working with us.

Last, but definitely not least, we would like to thank all of you who have contributed to, subscribed to and read the



Box 1: Reflections from a PLA editorial board member

As a neophyte in the development field in 1989–90, direct exposure to experimentation in southern India with the PRA methodology had a profound impact on my thinking and on the future direction on my work and career in the years following. It therefore was a great honour to be invited onto the Editorial Advisory Board of *PLA* in 2006. Because I tend to work in fairly remote and isolated areas, it provided an opportunity to plug into the mainstream of thought and action in the field of participatory practices, and to provide comments and insights from my own experience in working with this development approach and philosophy. As a result, I felt much more connected with current practices and thinking, and felt I was making a wider contribution to furthering participatory practices.

**Bardolf Paul, Executive Director, Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta², Indonesia
August 2013**

series during our time as editors of *PLA*. We hope that you will continue to find a way to share and learn from each other's participatory experiences.

About this issue

It is fitting that we start *PLA* 66 with some reflections from Robert Chambers, who as one of the pioneers of PRA/PLA approaches, was instrumental in launching *RRA Notes*, with other colleagues from the Institute of Development Studies and IIED.

We then move on to the articles for this issue, which have all been submitted by you and cover a range of contexts, with an emphasis on sustainable natural resource management and livelihoods. We would like to say a huge thank you to all the authors who worked with us on

² For more information about Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta, see our In Touch section.



Photo: Holly Ashley

During the writeshop for *PLA 64 Young citizens: youth and participatory governance in Africa*, Holly Ashley ran a session on practical writing skills. This was later developed into a booklet providing guidance for *PLA* contributors (Ashley, 2011).

their articles and also to those whose articles we have been unable to publish due to time and space constraints.

We also include a short introduction to the Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) pages, providing some reflections and thoughts on ways forward for *PLA* from the perspective of RCPLA network members including Tom Thomas, from Praxis India, and colleagues from the Centre for Development Services, Cairo.

Articles in this issue

Our first article is on participatory three-dimensional modelling (P3DM) and its capacity to mirror and address community needs, and this theme is reflected in our cover image. **Antonella Piccolella, James Hardcastle and Jimmy Kereseka** describe the cases of Chivoko and Boe Boe in the Solomon Islands. Although extensive work has been dedicated to the advantages of P3DM, limited effort has been made to provide evidence of its multifaceted impacts or identify the factors underpinning its effectiveness. Combining P3DM with good facilitation generated community-led and commu-

nity-controlled processes, with benefits that went beyond project boundaries. These ranged from ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change to sustainable natural resource management, from women's empowerment to sharing cultural heritage. The P3DM exercise also became a critical tool for rights-based advocacy.

The 1992 southern African drought was the region's worst drought in living memory. By the time the drought ended, famine had been averted – but how? In our second article, **Christopher Eldridge** describes how he and the late Saiti Makuku investigated the responses of low-income rural people to the drought. While travelling in Zimbabwe, the author realised that villagers were already responding to the drought in various ways, long before significant quantities of relief food began to arrive. However, their activities went largely unrecognised, partly because they were many, small and varied and so were not supported during the relief effort. The study used a modified form of scoring, within a livelihoods framework, which revealed how famine was averted largely by the activities of

those whom the drought most severely affected. Although the drought happened over 20 years ago, there are lessons that we can learn today from this experience.³

The third article, by **Lisa van Dijk, S.K. Pradhan, Murad Ali and Ramesh Ranjan**, looks at community-led action in India to improve animal health and work practices, and the development by the community of a participatory animal welfare needs assessment tool. It describes its success and its scaling up from village level to associations and eventually union level. Working animals support the livelihoods of millions of rural and urban families throughout the world and the loss of an animal can cause major stress to families. Yet the role and value of the working animal is still overlooked by government and non-governmental organisations, because their services are mainly focused on improving the health and husbandry of livestock that produce milk, meat, eggs or wool, and working animals do not produce a visible output – their productivity is in their body energy. They play a variety of important roles, including providing a primary source of income by transporting people and goods, supporting agricultural activities and reducing some of the labour and burden, which impacts positively on women in particular, as they are able to spend less time on household tasks and take up opportunities of other employment.

Tom Rowley describes a participatory natural resource management project where community representatives used Google Earth imagery to precisely identify key resources on a global reference grid. Participants were able to navigate the satellite imagery with ease and lead the collection of data to reflect their priorities.

This allowed local knowledge to be described precisely, and therefore more useably, in digital maps. Iterative cycles of the mapping process and exploration of satellite imagery encouraged deeper consultation of local knowledge, generating a fuller description of key resources and usage patterns. The local knowledge mapped has been used to design byelaws and inform planning for the management of resources central to local livelihoods and the local economy, particularly in a context of increasing climate variability, such as the drylands of Kenya and Tanzania.

Govinda Prasad Acharya and **Pramod Jaiswal** examine how the Kamaiya, a former bonded-labour group in Nepal, have campaigned to uphold their rights of access, use and control of community forests, using participatory methods such as Reflect circles to analyse their situation and converge on consensus within the group. More than eleven thousand Kamaiya have now become members of local community forest user groups (CFUGs), even managing around 40 community forests on their own. Many have also been elected to leadership roles on CFUG executive committees. These groups now produce ginger, turmeric and herbs and have started agro-forestry cooperatives. The Kamaiyas' use of indigenous knowledge, unity and participation has also led them to establish community schools, training centres, nurseries and cooperatives.

In the next article, **Jindra Cekan** describes a drought-rehabilitation and resilience project in Niger, focused on restocking women's sheep, building mixed-use wells for communities, improving forage storage and transhumance. The author carried out baseline

³ When reviewing the proportional piling method and participatory methods in general, Christopher writes that it became apparent that aspects of them reflected certain fundamental principles of human psychology. According to Christopher, advances made in the understanding of these principles have contributed to a revolution in the behavioural sciences over the last 40 or so years, and this revolution has paralleled the participatory revolution in the last few decades. For more information, download and read the discussion paper which accompanies this article (Eldridge, 2013).

and final evaluation studies with the target communities, combining qualitative participatory and quantitative gendered budget analysis. The results, such as rises in income, were interesting, but also unexpected, such as the impact of water provision on women's incomes and decreased household violence. There are some interesting lessons for practitioners focused on increasing community resilience.

Our next article is co-authored by **Peter Kayiira Byansi, Paul Bukuluki, Janet Seeley, Pontiano Kaleebu, Leslie Nielsen, Kidega William, Simon Sigirenda, Kalinda Jimmy, Rebecca Nabbose and David Walugembe**. They reflect on their experiences as a multidisciplinary team, using participatory methods to research HIV/AIDS prevention in fishing villages in Uganda. Several of them were born and raised in fishing communities with professional training in social and medical anthropology, behaviour change communication, health and social work. Coming from backgrounds that participants identified with helped to break down communication barriers and build trust. A blend of PLA methods and ethnographic approaches proved invaluable in conducting research with fishing communities, and would be with other vulnerable or high risk populations.

John Rowley with Marilyn Doyle, Susie Hay and the Participatory Practitioners for Change (PPfC) members outline the ethical issues facing them in their participatory practice. The article discusses the statements of principles and good practice put together by the members to describe what kind of participatory work they hope for in their work. This article tells the story of these repeated attempts to describe better participatory work and to define the ethi-

cal issues of participation and asks if clear definitions can be widely approved and applied. Can we define ethical standards for participatory work or do practitioners have to struggle with the ethical issues in each different piece of work?

Next, **Viviana Fernández Prajoux** describes the process of community engagement in two urban redevelopment projects located in an eastern commune of Santiago, Chile. The first proposal was for a shopping mall, and the second to enclose a public park. In both cases, the community rejected the project proposals, since they were not given any opportunity to participate in the planning process. The community groups' ability to organise and to engage other actors made it possible to stop these proposed developments, and hopefully this action will have an impact on future decision-making processes in the commune.

In our final article, **Bernward Causemann and Eberhard Gohl** describe the activities of a collective of about 50 northern and southern NGOs that have developed tools for participatory impact assessment. The tools have been used by communities to define, measure, monitor, review and analyse progress towards their own social, economic and political targets.

We hope that you enjoy reading the collection of articles in this issue of *PLA*. We look forward to the next chapter in the history of *PLA* and to continuing to be part of a growing network of individuals and organisations promoting and practicing participatory learning and action. Please continue to share the rich resource of articles from our complete back issue collection: www.iied.org/download-participatory-learning-and-action.

Holly Ashley, Nicole Kenton and Angela Milligan

CONTACT DETAILS



Holly Ashley
Freelance participatory writeshop facilitator
and editor
Email: holly@hollyashley.com
Website: www.hollyashley.com



Nicole Kenton
Freelance editor and local food activist
Email: ndkenton@gmail.com
and nicole@ourfood.org.uk



Angela Milligan
Email: amilligan62@gmail.com

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