

# RCPLA and *PLA*: two sides of the same coin

by TOM THOMAS

The Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) Network and *PLA* have been like two sides of the same coin – one practicing and researching, and the other documenting and reflecting on the action and research. The combination gave an apt institutional expression to the Freirian notion of Praxis. An attempt at building knowledge *a posteriori*, this combination was the pride of practitioners and a humbling learning for the academic. The *PLA* team worked zealously on the daunting task of turning passionate practitioners with an aversion to writing into published development writers and the result is evident in the 66 editions of *PLA*. The RCPLA team for its part continued its efforts at networking field practitioners from around the world to deepen both the theory and practice of participatory approaches. In a significant move, just a few years after its formation, RCPLA devolved its leadership to southern partners – Praxis India being the first southern secretariat and subsequently the

Centre for Development Services (CDS) in Egypt. This move gave additional impetus to the southern focus and built more south-south exchanges and dialogues. The southern writeshops saw the compilation of many critical southern experiences ranging from grassroots democracy to community radio.

*PLA* has completed 25 years and RCPLA's journey has been with it for over 15 years. One wonders whether in these two decades, has the world become participatory and are RCPLA and *PLA* now irrelevant? Far from it. Though every top-down and patriarchal institution has imbibed the lingo/jargon of 'participation', there is scant regard for its purpose. There is an urgent need to deepen participation at all levels if we are not to lose the gains of over two decades of learning together with communities.

I would like to see the current evaluation of the *PLA* series find a way for the continuation of *PLA* (as well as RCPLA). It is an opportunity to take a pause and recast *PLA* and RCPLA with

more vigour and purpose, both in form and content, to continue the true praxis of development practitioners and thinkers.

Salute to the entire *PLA* team of 25 years.

Until *PLA* 67,

**Tom Thomas**

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