Review of

Participatory Learning and Action

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FINAL REPORT to the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED)

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AG – Accountable Grant
AHRC – Arts and Humanities Research Council
AIT – Asian Institute of Technology
AMARC – World Association of Community Radios
ANU – Australia National University
APC – Article Processing Charge
AR – Action Research
Av. – Average
BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
C4D – Communication for Development Network
CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity
CC – Climate Change Group (IIED)
CGIAR - Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIFOR – Centre for International Forestry Research
CJD – Community Development Journal
CLTS – Community Led Total Sanitation
CommGAP – Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme
Comms. – Communications
COP – Conference of the Parties
CTA - Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, Netherlands
DEFRA – Department of Farming and Rural Affairs
DFID – Department for International Development
DIP – Development in Practice Journal
E&U – Environment and Urbanisation Journal
Ed. – Editorial
Est. - estimate
Fig. – Figure
G&D – Gender and Development Journal
GIS - Geographic Information Systems
HEDON – Household Energy Network
HS – Human Settlements Group (IIED)
IAPAD - Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development
IDRC – International Development Research Centre, Canada
IDS – Institute of Development Studies – Sussex University
IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIED – International Institute for Environment and Development
IIRR - International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, Philippines
IISD - International Institute for Sustainable Development, Canada
INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation
Int. – International
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature
LSE – London School of Economics

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation
n. – number (sample size)N/A – Not applicable
NEPAN - Nepal Participatory Action Network
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NRG – Natural Resources Group (IIED)
ODI – Overseas Development Institute
OM – Outcome Mapping
PAMFORK - Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya
PLA – Participatory Learning and Action
PPA – Programme Partnership Agreement
PRIA - Society for Participatory Research In Asia, India
Prolinnova - PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM
RCPLA – Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action
RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests, Thailand
RIL – Research Information Limited
RRA – Rapid Rural Appraisal
RRI - Rights and Resources Initiative
SDC – Swiss Development Cooperation
SMG – Sustainable Markets Group (IIED)
TORs – Terms of Reference
UNDP – UN Development Programme
UNEP – UN Environment Programme
UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF – UN Children's Fund
URL - Uniform Resource Locator
WB – World Bank
Wk. – week

Executive Summary

This review is both a backwards and forward-looking evaluation of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). The reviewers have looked back at the last 25 years since the journal began, to assess its relevance, performance, impact and asset value for IIED and for its wider constituency. We have analysed the changing context, debates, competitors, institutional players and the way PLA was governed and managed – both as a team and as a journal. Our broad conclusions about PLA are positive but we find that continuing with it, in its present form, is no longer a viable option. We have then looked forward to assess where participation and related debates are going and how the ideals of participation, as a social movement, might still provide a strategic fit for IIED.

The methodology used for this review comprised a set of internal and external interviews: 56 interviews in total; a thorough review of documentation; an online reader survey with 267 responses; an online survey of authors with 30 responses; an email survey of 17 peers; various conversations and exchanges with editors/publishers of other journals/magazines/online networks and with people expressing an interest in taking over PLA in some way or form; finally a literature/web review on academic publishing, contemporary reading habits, current discourses in sustainable development, etc. A final presentation was made to a meeting of the IIED Strategy Team on 25th November 2013 (see slides in Annex 6), at which this draft report was accepted.

The following provides a summary of our findings and our conclusions. We present four future options that IIED could take, which are explained more fully at the end of this report.

Relevance

1. Twenty-five years ago RRA/PLA Notes set a radical new development agenda that created the future relevance of participatory practice.
2. RRA/PLA Notes was the conduit for exchange and information from the movement of practice and research formed by the joint work of IIED and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University.
3. Since then participation, as a social movement, has split into diverse areas of practice and discourse, and is now located in many different communities of practice. This split is a threat to the sustainability and long-term impact of the journal (*c.f.* IDS' new Participatory Methods website)
4. PLA, as a hard copy journal, has kept up with current trends in development discourse but is in danger of being crowded-out by all the other content on the web and the new reading habits of the mobile / digital age.
5. Within IIED, PLA needs to be recognised as both a project and a journal; it could be highly relevant to IIED but it has been poorly supported and under-used.

Performance

6. PLA's activities have largely been appropriate, timely, adequate and effective in terms of meeting its stated objectives.

7. As long as PLA is considered more than just a journal, but a project in its own right, it has offered a reasonable return on the investment of frame and sponsorship funding in terms of capacity-building, IIED's profile, partner-relations, brand-name, and policy impact.
8. PLA is reaching a relatively large and appropriate audience, namely practitioners and researchers, mainly in the global South. We estimate (conservatively) that each issue reaches 13,000 readers.
9. Readership is growing but marketing has been poor: PLA has not managed to retain a strong audience among academics and senior NGO personnel, nor attracted a non-English speaking constituency.
10. Its capacity-building activities have been of high quality but the strategic value of its intensive editorial work with authors/ writeshops is not clear.
11. PLA has addressed gender issues fairly well and has succeeded in bringing out Southern voices. But it has not addressed generational issues adequately.
12. Other areas of weakness include its governance arrangements; lack of documentation of clear impact evidence; failure to review and update image, title and design over the years.

Impact and Asset Value

13. There is limited evidence of impact of PLA mainly because there has been no systematic tracking. There is anecdotal evidence of PLA's impact on policy and practice but this could be made more compelling and be better-publicised. At an individual level there have been capacity effects for individual authors, but unclear evidence whether this has translated into sustained change. Undoubtedly the movement that sat behind RRA/PLA Notes has had substantive impact in both policy and practice terms, due in large part to the active intellectual and practice-based partnership in the first decade between IIED and IDS and the development of a widespread well-informed and trained community of practice.
14. PLA has helped to provide IIED with a brand that sets IIED apart: being rooted in the voices of local people. But IIED has failed to build on this asset and could have used this asset more effectively and continued to fund PLA if it wanted to.
15. PLA, as a journal, has (or had) several non-financial assets such as an excellent hard-working team, a solid reader-base, a long-established name and a good reputation, and a fully archived and indexed set of back-issues.
16. PLA should have better communicated the work it was doing on power, rights and governance both within and beyond IIED.
17. There should have been more championing of PLA within IIED.

Future options

18. Although IIED has made the PLA team redundant, it is not clear to the reviewers that the publication is redundant, as the evidence from interviews, peer surveys and readership surveys indicate. But unfortunately, the option of retaining the PLA publication and its editorial team has effectively been removed.
19. Redundancy, if required, should have proceeded from the results of this evaluation based on evidence to state that PLA was no longer relevant and required rather than pre-guessing the outcome of the evaluation.

20. Looking forward, if IIED wants to run a successor to PLA, it would have to fulfil many elements including having a key individual to lead the team who has enthusiasm, credibility, legitimacy and ability to convene across IIED – probably part of the senior management team; it would have to be a serious action-research programme and would need to draw inputs (e.g. funding, content, IT support, marketing) from across IIED.

IIED has four options:

i. Discussions with interested outsiders

- Several different organisations have indicated that they are interested in taking on PLA in some way, although none in its present form. These are Edinburgh/Coventry Universities; Yunus Institute AIT, Bangkok; Practical Action Publishing. Having these discussions would not preclude any of the following other options.
- Cost implication: none

ii. Orderly closure with legacy website

- This option would close the PLA journal but ensure that PLA left an enduring legacy behind it, by means of a website with a fully searchable and downloadable archive, and an attractive pictorial history, testimonials and a timeline of all the PLA team has achieved over the years.
- Cost implication: Possible one-off cost of £15-£20,000.

iii. Active hand-over to IDS and incorporation into Participatory Methods web-platform

- This option would involve a renewed alliance between IIED and IDS to co-manage their 'Participatory Methods' website[1] and develop it from being just a repository of tools and resources into a contemporary interactive web-platform and a vibrant hub.
- Cost implication: First year £16,000. Subsequent years approx. £27,500 per year.

iv. Re-launch and re-brand as 'Tactics and Tools'

- This option would replace PLA within IIED and start an interactive web-platform and e-journal focused on sharing of tactics, tools and processes for **Inclusive Green Growth**. Its content could include practice papers, webinars, resources, forum, twitter feed, blogs, face-to-face events, e-journal, mobile app.
- The vision is to grow a community of practice around this web-platform: a strategic tool with which to communicate how to achieve inclusive green growth. It could reflect on the different tactics and tools used, supported and developed by IIED and its partners, for example learning groups, community fund management, legal empowerment and how these lead to change.
- Cost implication: approx. £88,000 per year.

[1] http://www.participatorymethods.org

SECTION 1: Introduction and Methodology

This report is an evaluation of the *Participatory Learning and Action* (PLA) journal, published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and an analysis of future options.

Participatory Learning and Action started in 1987 as *Rapid Rural Appraisal Notes (*RRA*)* and developed from a set of field notes into an informal, peer-reviewed journal produced twice a year. PLA is primarily aimed at sustainable development practitioners and researchers. It has been edited by three part-time IIED employed editors, often working with a team of external or internal guest editors. The journal has a Strategic Editorial Board, recently of 5 people, most of whom are staff members of IIED. A 48-strong International Editorial Board carries out most of the peer review, along with guest editors. It is housed in IIED's Natural Resources Group (NRG). PLA aims to build capacity through its editorial process and in some cases writeshops are used to support writing and peer review/reflection process.

IIED commissioned this external evaluation after a period of internal consultation initiated by IIED's Strategy Team on which an internal report by Barbara Adolph (line manager of the PLA team) was published in November 2012. After further consideration, the Strategy Team decided that: beyond production of PLA 66 (due in autumn 2013), further PLAs should be put on hold; the co-editors were made redundant; and the future of any successor to PLA was made contingent on the results of the present evaluation and options analysis.

The terms of reference (TORs – see Annex 5) for the present evaluation specified: 'an evaluation of PLA's impact' (looking back over the last 25 years); a 'forward looking assessment of where participation, fairness, inclusion, 'open and green' society, good governance and related debates are going'; and 'an analysis of gaps and options on how IIED's leadership in these themes might be demonstrated through an appropriate product and process'. The TORs also add: 'A design initiative for the chosen option(s)' might then follow but 'separate to this evaluation'. The TORs comprise 33 questions, so the following report is a response to detailed TOR questions and is divided into the following main sections: **Evaluation** (Relevance, Performance, Impact, Lessons), **Asset-value and Debates** (Asset value, Changing practices contexts and discourses, IIED's capacity to run a successor to PLA), and **Options** for moving forward. Additional explanatory and supporting material is in a set of Annexes.

Methodology

Two independent consultants (Mary Hobley and Mary Myers) worked for a total of 65 paid days from June to the end of August 2013 on this review. A mix of methods was used to address the detailed TORs, as follows:

- A thorough review of all PLA documentation and various IIED strategy papers, evaluations etc., including all the past issues of PLA journal (65 issues), plus budgets, subscriber lists and web-statistics where available.
- Internal and External Interviews: A set of 56 structured interviews with internal (IIED) staff, former staff and editors, and key external people. Most done in person, some by phone and e-mail. Of the circa 70 people we contacted about 90% agreed to interviews or to give their comments. Because of the holiday period, several people were unavailable. See interview list, NOTE 1 p. 72.
- Reader Survey: An online survey in June 2013 of past and current subscribers to the PLA journal, reaching 1,240 recipients with a response rate of 21.5% (267 responses in total). See Annex 3 for full results.
- Author Survey: An online survey of authors in June 2013, which reached 100 recipients with a response rate of 30% (30 responses in total) initiated by PLA co-editor, Holly Ashley.
- Peer Survey: An e-mail survey of 30 peers, i.e. a cross-section of people known to the reviewers who are not directly associated with PLA but who are current or former practitioners of participatory methods in various different fields (e.g. academia, rural development, development communications, community forestry etc.) and therefore current or potential readers of PLA. 30 responses were solicited and 17 replied. See Annex 2 for synthesised results.
- Various phone calls and e-mail exchanges with editors/publishers of other journals/magazines/online networks: *Spore* (Wrenmedia), IDS Bulletin (IDS publications), *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* (ODI Humanitarian Practice Network), *Boiling Point* (HEDON – Household Energy Network), C4D (Communication for Development Network), Sci-Dev.
- Various phone calls and e-mail exchanges with people expressing an interest in taking over PLA in some way or form: Yunus Centre, Asian Institute of Technology (Bangkok); Edinburgh University; Practical Action Publishing.
- Literature/web review on academic publishing, contemporary reading habits, current discourses in sustainable development, etc.

SECTION 2: Evaluation of PLA

2.1. Relevance

2.1.1 Initial and changing need and demand for PLA

There are two important dimensions to relevance: one is PLA's relevance to the external world and the other to IIED. These are discussed separately.

Relevance to the External World

25 years ago when IIED and IDS launched RRA Notes it symbolised a profound change in development practice. It challenged contemporary orthodoxies concerning the role of local people in the production of knowledge, ownership of ideas and drivers of change. It became a highly political movement for transformational change embedded in a radical view of the world. The publication RRA Notes which later became PLA Notes was simply the expression of this social movement and provided the public face to a strong intellectual process of testing, researching and spreading the methods and ideology of participation across the development world. At the time RRA/PLA Notes was more than just relevant, it was setting a new development agenda that created the future relevance of participatory practice. It brought together a set of thinker-practitioners in IDS and IIED who together pioneered the methods and the underlying approach and laid the ground for a whole new generation of practitioners, researchers and policy-makers imbued with the tools of participation as well as for many the ideology of participation.

> "The start of RRA notes was an exciting moment – a new cognate area that links theory with action. We felt we needed a vehicle to help share practice, thoughts and ideas. We wanted a platform for exchange. In those days there was no email or web. These days it would be on Facebook! It was meant to be good enough to be taken seriously but also meant to be fast moving….it changed the way people thought about development". (external interview)

The key elements that made the publication relevant were: intellectual leadership shared between IIED and IDS. These leaders were also practitioners testing and developing understanding in a range of contexts, holding workshops that brought other practitioners together, and so helping to catalyse and consolidate a network of practitioners across the world. The combination of research, practice, reflection, networking and active communication through the PLA Notes led to a dynamic and cutting edge publication, that remained relevant as it was the shop-front for those who were creating the new frontiers of understanding around participation and participatory methods.

Over time the understanding of what PRA was became far more nuanced (as the review of content indicates – **see Annex 4 Analysis of content and country coverage of RRA/PLA issues from 1988-2012**) with a series of seminal editions that critiqued PRA and the ways in which it was being applied. This high level of reflection continued to push the boundaries of practice and was reflected in the change of name from RRA Notes to Participatory Learning and Action in 1995.

PLA as it emerged from RRA Notes became an intellectual leader and challenger and critique of practice, with important editorials that highlighted some of the key weaknesses and gaps in participatory practice and more broadly in development.

Currently, many people still come to IIED's website through searches that are focused on participation. PLA is still one of the most downloaded of IIED's publications indicating its continued relevance to an external audience. However it is clear that PLA is perceived to be less relevant than at its inception: "In the '90s there was so little out there on participation, now there is so much. PLA was a big fish in a small pond when information was hard to access, now it's in an ocean with a lot going on and a lot of easy ways to access exactly what you are after, you don't have to wait until an issue comes out that is relevant to you" (external interview).

Summary of changes in external relevance:

- 25 years of debate have deepened the understanding of participation breaking it down into many elements. This makes it much more difficult to maintain a tight community of practice and to sustain relevance across all these diverse areas of discourse.
- A generation of practitioners is now well-established and has much less need to refer to new practices. The Internet has replaced many of the original PLA unique selling points.

Relevance to IIED

The relevance to IIED of the PLA publication has changed significantly over time. When the original intellectual drivers behind PLA left for other organisations including IDS, PLA became a more externally driven publication that relied on guest editors, and external finance. The internal audience became less connected to the publication and so it became less embedded in IIED research and practice. At the same time the proactive community of practice element of PLA began to fade. This was hastened by two events: 1) the move of the participation resource centre from IIED to IDS (in 2006) and 2) the establishment of the Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) with southern organisations taking the leadership for this network. The earlier impetus for publications driven by practitioner-based workshops on key themes was replaced by guest editors bringing together authors in a particular area supplemented by write-shops, where funding was available, as a form of capacity-building and experience exchange.

As a result of this changing relevance internally there is a highly variable response to PLA, from those who are passionate supporters to those who really do not see the relevance either to their own work or to IIED more broadly. This reflects not just personal interest but the failure to continue to engage internally and demonstrate relevance inside IIED: "We always knew that people in IIED thought we were out-dated and participation was done, they thought it was all about throwing beanbags and that we didn't tackle real issues such as equity, power and governance. We tried to say that this is not what we do and we have changed a lot…" (internal interview). What is interesting

is that the discussions internally over the last 18 months have led to many researchers discovering or rediscovering the utility of the publication. This has led to an overall majority in favour of some continued communication drawing more on IIED work and that of its partners and focusing on the interests of practitioners (see Annex 1 synthesis of interviews). The poor promotion of the publication within IIED was part of the problem, as many were unaware of its potential and it was rarely written into project proposals as a publishing outlet for research outputs. For many staff it was potentially an ideal outlet for the work, but rarely used

"PLA was regarded as a specialist hobby – something they did through their own networks and partners – it had an existence in its own right and was not considered by the team to be a service to the groups and teams in IIED, and so people nodded politely and let it do its own thing" *(internal interview).*

**** PLA's position within IIED is also discussed in Section 2.2.3***

2.1.2 Characteristics of readers and users of PLA

What types, numbers and locations of readers and users of PLA there have been, how they have been engaged with, and how this has changed over the years?

Types of readers:

The target audience of PLA has always been practitioners, researchers, academics, students and activists, and from the evidence, the journal is reaching its target, as its readers are clearly mainly practitioners (see Fig 1). Both our own and previous surveys show that readers predominantly work for NGOs, INGOs and universities (see Fig 2).

Figure 1 - How readers of PLA define themselves (n=1,240) Reader Survey June 2013

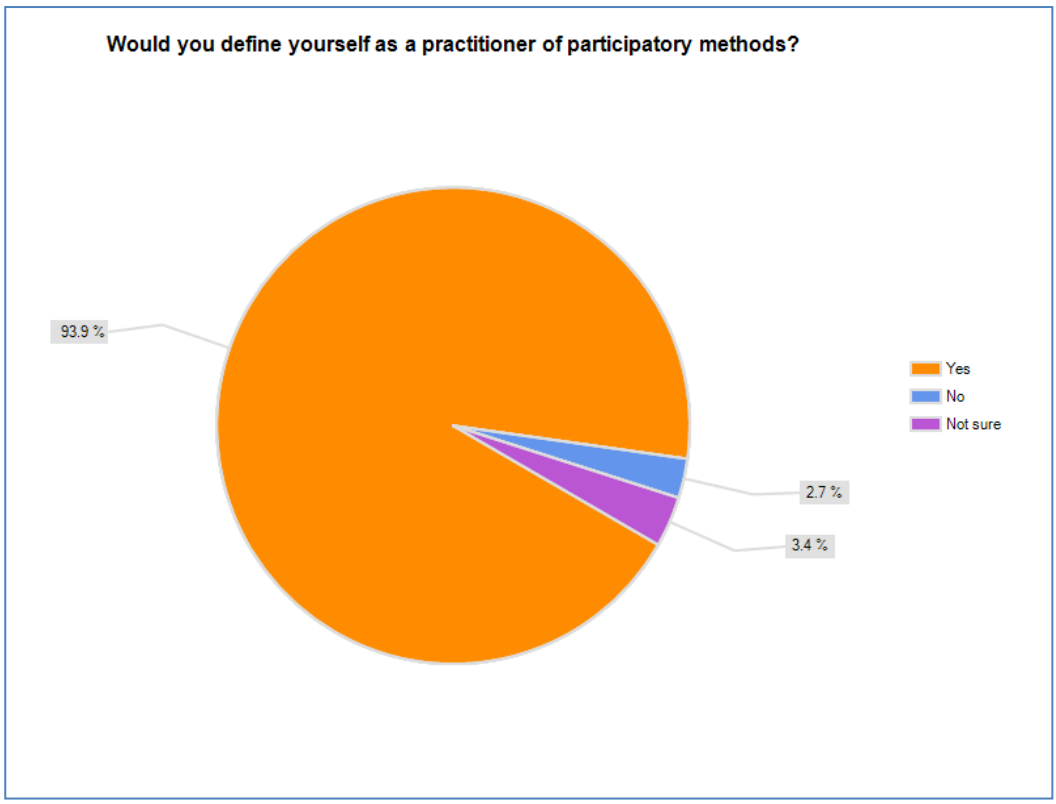
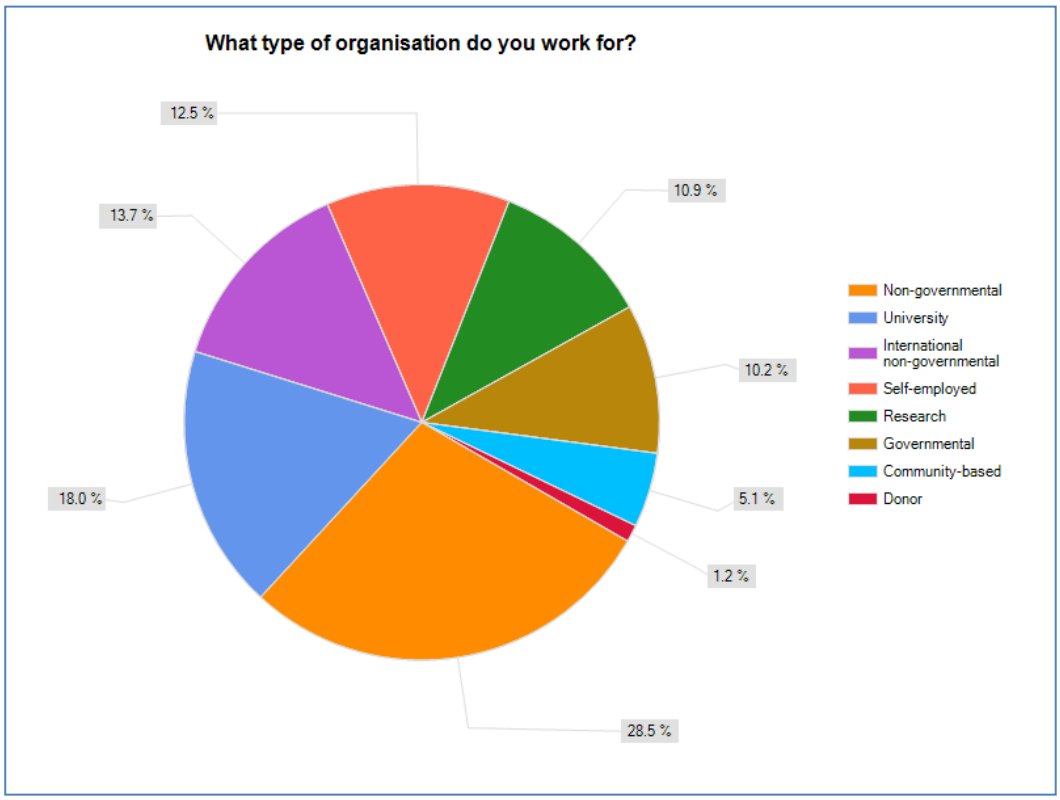
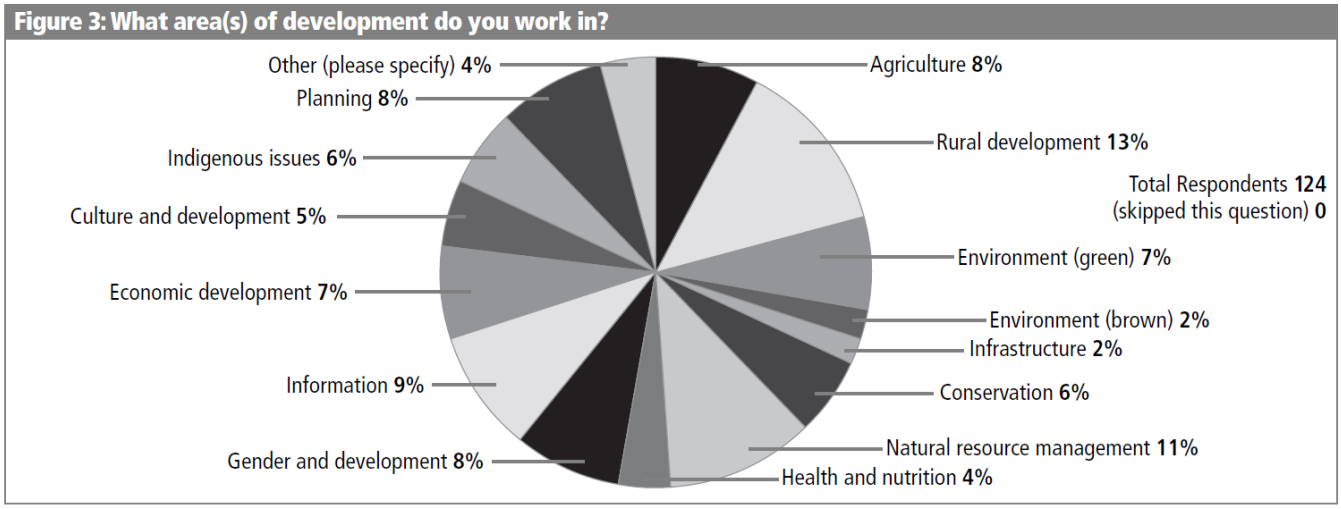


Figure 2 - What organisations PLA readers work for (n=1,240) Reader Survey June 2013



Readers also work in a wide variety of development areas (as Fig 3[2] below shows).

Figure 3 - What area(s) of development do you work in?



Numbers of readers

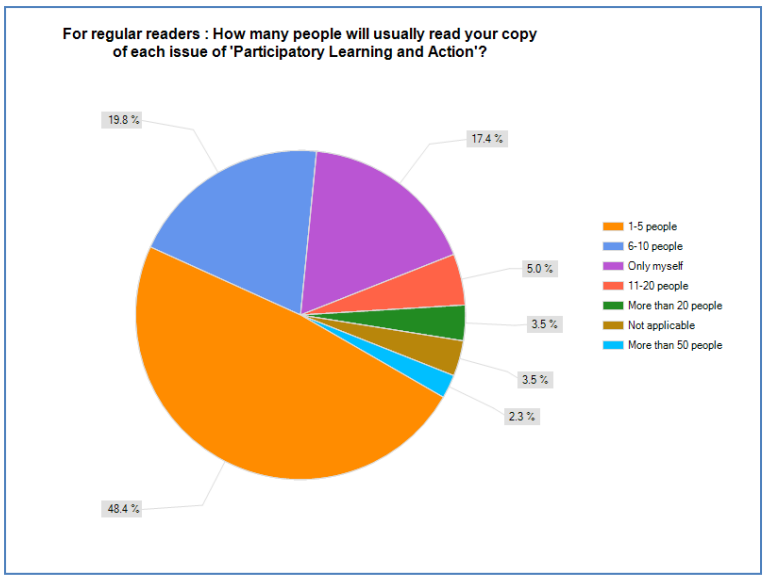
Numbers of readers for any publication are notoriously hard to pin down and PLA is no exception. Estimates can be made by extrapolating from the number of subscribers, buyers and online downloads and by assuming a certain amount of sharing, based on reader responses from surveys.

We estimate that a typical issue of Participatory Learning and Action probably reaches about 13,000 people. We derive this estimate from our own reader-survey (June 2013) which had a high response rate of 21.5% of 1,240 past and current print subscribers (paid and free). We found that sharing of copies remains impressively high, with almost half of respondents sharing their copies of PLA with up to 5 other people and almost 20% sharing with up to 10 other people (see Fig. 4). Therefore from our survey and from current download figures, based on figures for PLA 59 (June 09 PLA 59: total downloads 1,618 plus print run of 2,270), using a conservative assumption of each hard copy being shared 5 times and no sharing of downloads, we arrive at our 13,000 figure.

**** For detail on how reader numbers have been estimated over time see NOTE 2, p.74.***

[2] Extract from 2006 reader survey about special issue PLA 54 (online survey with 124 participants, being about 7% of people invited to participate by co-editor Holly Ashley)

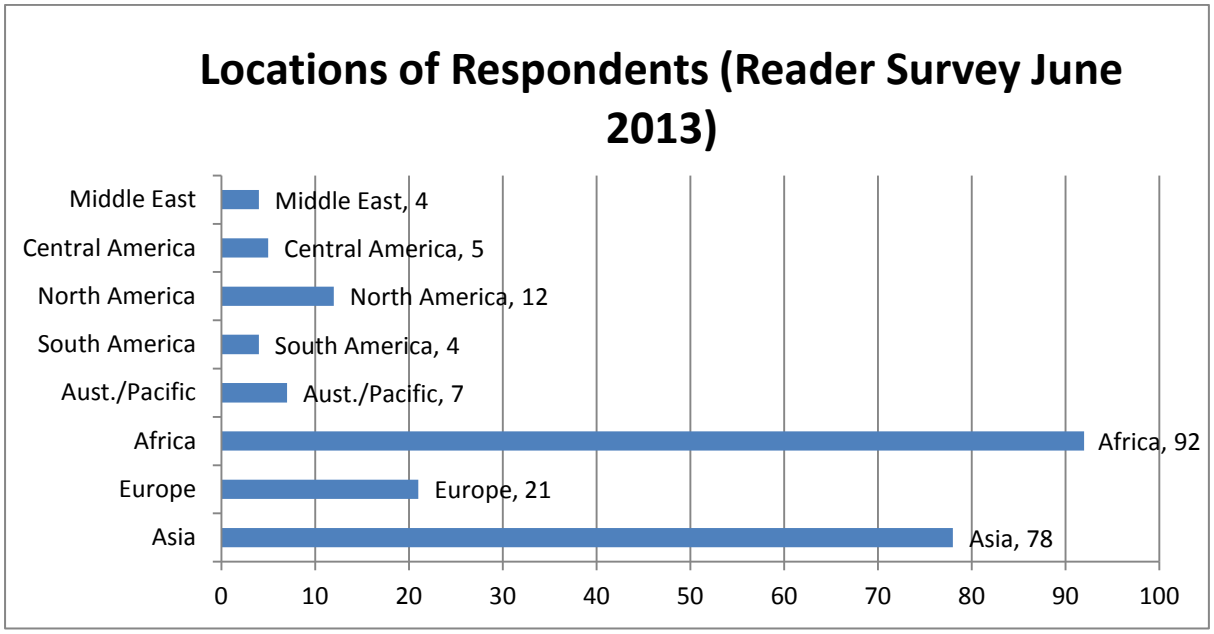
Figure 4 - Sharing of hard copies of PLA from Reader Survey June 2013 (n=1,240)



Locations of readers

From the subscribers' lists and our readers' survey, there is a clear preponderance, overall, of readers from the South. Fig. 5 below shows the locations of the respondents to our survey in June '13, in which Africa and Asia clearly dominate. The four top countries yielding the highest number of respondents were (in descending order) India (43), Nigeria (17), Ethiopia (16) and Kenya (13). However, this is not necessarily a reflection of actual geographical distribution of readers, just those who responded to our survey.

Figure 5 - Locations of Respondents (Reader Survey, June 2013)



The download statistics in Table 1 below show more downloaders in the North than the South, which is unsurprising, given continuing global inequalities in online access. On the other hand it shows that download figures are rising year by year in all regions.

Table 1 - PLA Downloads by region 2008-2012. Source: IIED

PLA Downloads by region 2008-2012

	PLA	ALL	Europe	N.Am	C.Am	S.Am	Africa	Mid.E	As/Pac	% South
2012	SABL, NATRES	14,797	4,168	2,909	97	294	1,968	156	3,450	40
2011	SABL, NATRES	11,004	3,173	2,577	76	154	1,829	148	2,797	45
2010	SABL, NATRES	5,345	1,696	1,613	41	67	568	75	1,337	39
2009	SABL, NATRES	1,973	469	564	5	104	282	29	517	47
2008	SABL, NATRES	1,643	245	783	4	12	81	12	50	10
	TOTAL	**34,762**	**9,751**	**8,446**	**223**	**631**	**4,728**	**420**	**8,151**	**41**

2.1.3 Readers' uses of the journal

PLA's readers use the journal in many different ways. Our survey revealed that the most common uses were quite general, i.e. to keep them 'up to date with participatory methods' and to give them 'general ideas and inspiration' (see Fig. 14 below).

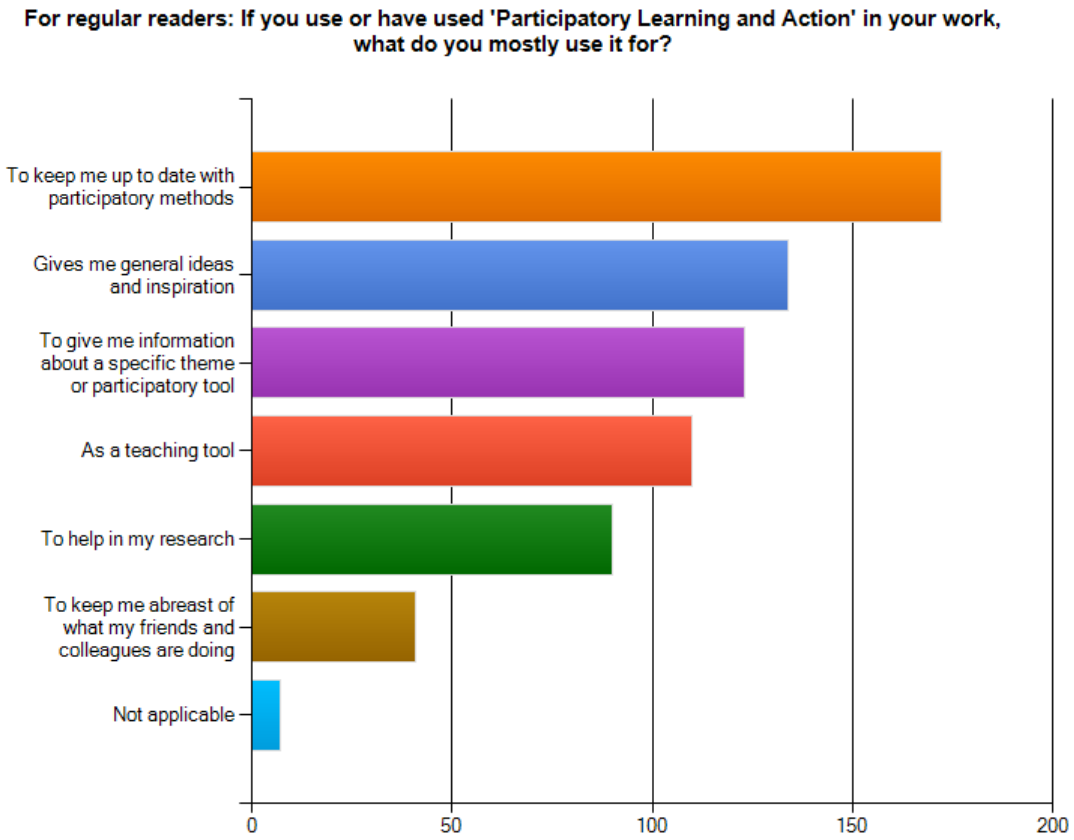
Our Readers Survey gives an indication of how many people can benefit from one issue of the PLA journal when readers share it in the course of their work: for example trainings, rural development work with communities, library-work etc. The results are encouragingly high numbers, with 32.8% of respondents saying that over 50 other people might possibly benefit from their one copy of PLA (although it must be remembered that this is not necessarily a representative sample of all readers).

From the responses to questionnaires and our interviews we can divide the ways readers use the journal into the following nine categories:

As a support to IIED's work; Resource-material or 'text-book'; Source of inspiration; Training tool; Documenting work in the field; Capacity-building for contributors; Networking for specific communities of practice; Source of practical tools and techniques; Citations by academics and campaigners.

**** For illustrations and quotes on the various ways readers use the journal see NOTE 8, p.84.***

Figure 6 - What PLA is mostly used for (Reader Survey June 2013 n=259)



2.1.4 PLA's 'reach' over the years

By and large PLA is reaching its intended target, who are practitioners, researchers, academics, students and activists, mainly in the global South – this is confirmed by the Reader Survey (see Annex 3 for full results).

PLA's reach has grown steadily over the years, from an estimated readership of 6,600 at the beginning (1991) to 13,000 now. Our latest reader survey may not be representative but it showed that 93.9% of respondents are practitioners of participatory methods. The largest group of surveyed readers, in print, are based in the global South – mainly Asia - and are from NGOs (28.5%) followed by people from universities (18%), then from intergovernmental organisations (13.7%), then self-employed (12.5%). Meanwhile, downloads have grown massively over the last five years (from 1,643 in 2008 to 14,797 in 2012) and so online readers are gradually overtaking the number of print readers. But, in contrast to the print readers, the numbers of downloaders are slightly higher in the global North than the South.

So, a typical reader of a print copy of PLA would be an Indian NGO worker, whereas at the moment, a typical online reader would probably be a researcher from Europe, typically from the UK[3]. From the available data we do not know the gender of PLA readers, but a glance at the subscriber lists indicate that the majority of the print audience in the South is male (again, no data available for online).

From our reader survey, it appears that there is a continuing and faithful readership, particularly among the print audience in the South. A large group of participatory practitioners started reading PLA in the 1990s and have stuck with it. Not only that but they claim to read large amounts of each issue ***(See bar graph – NOTE 9, p.87***).

"I stopped reading PLA Notes in 2000/1 because what I was interested in had been consolidated in several books including the trainers guide. I had not referred to PLA for a long while as participatory methodologies became part of what I do and so I make my own tools, there is also a limit to how many tools you actually need". (external interview)

However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the academic and senior NGO audience, particularly in the UK, have not been so faithful (see quote above). When PLA was set up it was very new and exciting. It spawned a whole new way of working including processes like the participatory poverty assessments and the influential voices of the poor. Many of the people involved at this stage are now running organisations; they have taken the experience, the principles and the attitudes with them, but many have stopped reading the journal itself (only 5 out of 16 of our peer survey read it regularly any more).

Another respondent (from IIED's Comms dept.) talked about how a lot of downloaders appear to be students (although we could not verify this) so "students are using PLA at that part [the start] of their careers but then a lot of people no longer use PLA when moving into another part of their career". It certainly looks likely that PLA has appealed to students but then failed to access the wider academic community, particularly in the North, because of its informality and lack of academic rigour and because the 'world of participation' has split into many different sub-specialisms.

Over the 25 years of its publication, PLA has included articles on 91 countries, covering a range of themes (See **NOTE 10** for a table synthesising major themes covered by PLA and graphs on country coverage). However the coverage is relatively uneven with a very high proportion of attention on countries such as India, Nepal, China (because of one issue entirely focused on it), Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and UK. There is a limited coverage of French and Spanish speaking countries, reflecting the lack of translation of PLA and the limitations this caused in terms of geographic reach.

So, we know about the types of readers, roughly where they are and the countries they are reading about. The question for IIED is whether these are the people it wants to reach and/or should be reaching?

Many of our interviewees answered in the affirmative; as one staff member said:

[3] It was not possible to extract data about the professional backgrounds or gender of those who are accessing PLA online, so this is a guess.

"There is still an important audience for PLA – and this is the practitioners who work at the interface between converting policy into practice – mostly those who operate at district level in local government, extension workers and other practitioners. They are still the major issue in terms of change at the local level. This is the real niche for PLA." (internal interview)

But others had different views and questioned whether Southern practitioners were a 'strategic' audience for IIED.

One of the important principles of PLA was the publication of diverse voices and where possible voices from the south. Analysis of authorship over 25 years indicates that there has been a consistent trend in the proportion of male and female authorship. Overall 59% of the authors were male and 41% female, the split between northern and southern authors was 61% from the north and 39% from the south. Interestingly as PLA became less focused on tools and methods and based on practitioner experience, authorship from the north tended to be higher.

Figure 7 - Male female authorship over time

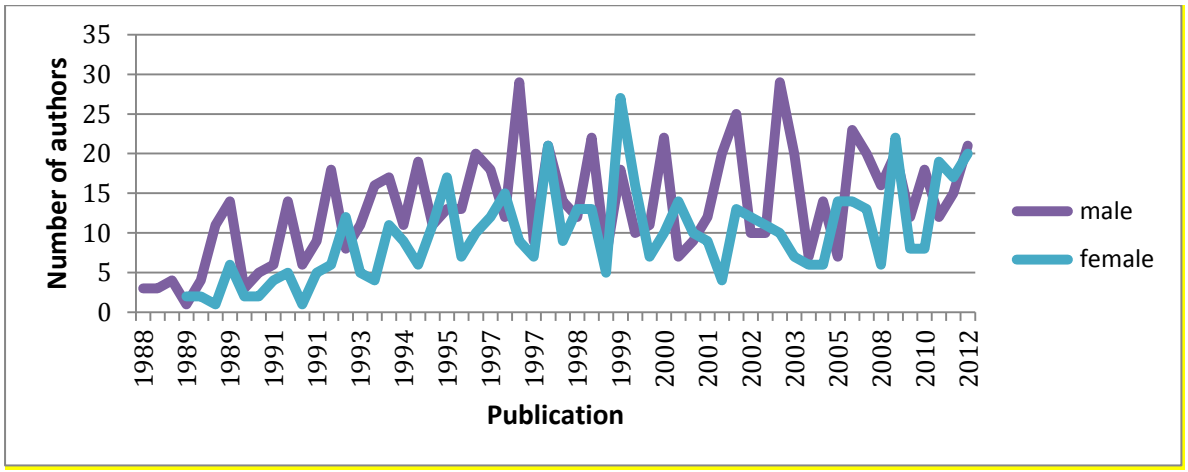
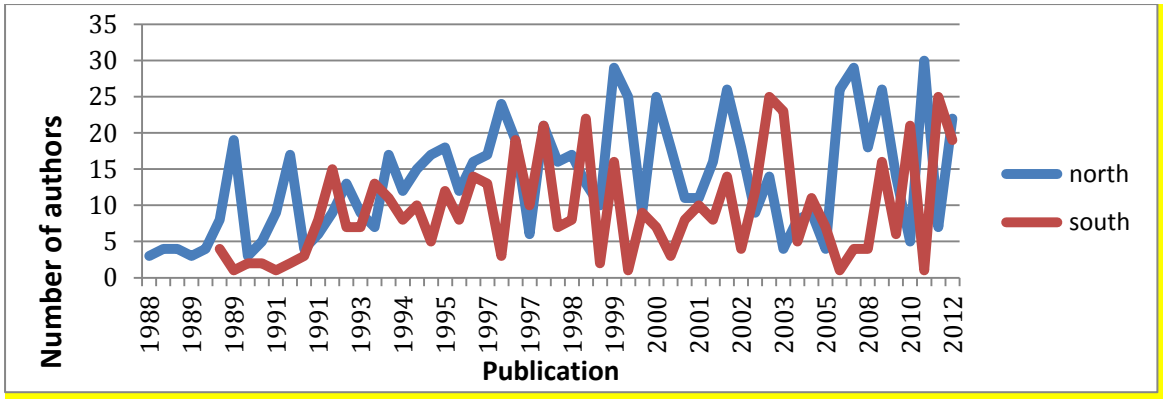


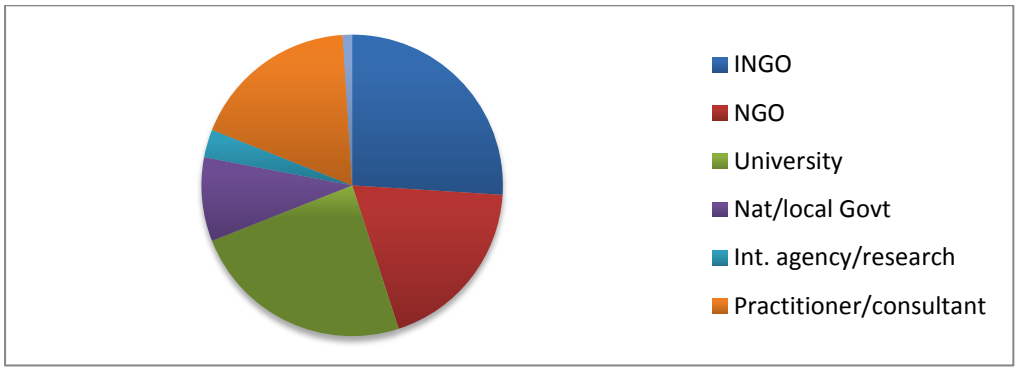
Figure 8 - North-south authorship over time



We also analysed the institutional base for the authors (Figure 17). This shows an unsurprisingly high proportion from international NGOs (26%) and national NGOs (19%), universities (24%), but a smaller proportion of authors derived from national and local governments (9%). Actual local voices

are a very small proportion of the overall authors (1%), indicating that most articles are describing the work of intermediaries, those that translate policy into practice or researcher-practitioners (18%).

Figure 9 - Analysis of authors' institutional backgrounds



2.1.5 Appropriateness, over the years, of IIED as the producer of PLA

IIED survives because it catalyses and synthesises experiences from multiple different countries around different challenges, from slum dwellers to seed producers, forest dwellers to small businesses "we survive because of what we do and because we support country partners to achieve particular goals" (IIED researcher). IIED is different to other competitor organisations because of how it works "distilling policy information and supporting partner voices to have the space in international arenas – this is our distinctive identity that sets us apart from others" (IIED researcher). IIED has been the right place to produce PLA as illustrated by the quote above and PLA fits precisely with IIED's mandate and its ways of working through local partners.

However it is the way in which PLA was positioned within the organisation that has led to it not being used well within IIED, and so reducing its effectiveness internally and its positioning on the international arena. This is discussed further in section 2.2.3.

As our Peer Survey (see Annex 2) indicates, for many PLA disappeared from their radar screens in the late 1990s early 2000s. This coincides with the loss of the main members of the research team behind PLA and the push to make it more academic. IIED is a researcher-practitioner organisation, it is not particularly the place to go to for academic writing and research on participation. When this decision to shift the audience for PLA happened then it would have been also the time to ask whether IIED remained the right organisation to produce such a publication or if it should have moved to IDS which is known for its academic research on participation.

2.1.6 Funding models

As a rough rule of thumb, one issue of PLA costs about £65,000 to produce and distribute, which means about £130,000 per year for two issues. The bulk of these costs are staff salaries[4], plus almost £28,000 per issue for design, printing and distribution.

Finding funding for PLA has almost always been regarded as a struggle. One former editor remembers times during the 1990's when publication occasionally had to be suspended when funding was not available.

"It's always been shoestring. There were times when we had to suspend publishing for lack of money. We had limitations because of shipping in the old days – more like 80 pages in those days. We didn't want to overwhelm people with stuff. But we produced more often per year. At one point it was 4 per year but the cost was too much, so we reduced to 3 per year and brought in more editorial support. It was quite costly, and donors don't like open ended funding arrangements, for maintaining a series. Our subs arrangement wasn't very successful. We didn't make a lot of money from it. The argument was it would subsidise distribution to the South but this didn't go very far, because of all the admin. costs." (external interview)

A look at the PLA finances since 1998[5] shows that there have been some good efforts at fundraising for themed issues, over the years. Twenty-eight different sponsors have contributed at different times.

*** *For the list of these sponsors see NOTE 3, p.77.***

This sponsorship has mainly been spent on 'extras' like write-shops, translations, and other products such as CD-Roms but they have not covered the core costs for the staff and basic design, printing and distribution. In terms of income, very little revenue comes in from subscriptions (for example £4,108 from subs and sales in 2012 and £3,247 in 2011). This is mainly because it has always been part of the journal's ethos to offer free access to Southern-based readers.

Finding finance for PLA through what IIED calls 'projects' (theme areas with one or a few dedicated partners managed inside Groups) has also been problematic. One Principal Researcher expressed "Regret that it [PLA] was never promoted across the institute so that we would factor in costs for publishing through PLA in our project design, we were never encouraged to think of a special issue of PLA notes as a vehicle to get project findings out there, even though for all our work it is probably the most appropriate outlet".

During Barbara Adolph's internal review of PLA (B. Adolph, 2012) she spoke to at least one IIED staff member who expressed the view that: "If *PLA* was purely or mainly thematic, more funds could come from project funding – but this would require the willingness and ability of *PLA* to flexibly respond to the needs of the specific theme / project / team, rather than 'selling' a process that is set

[4] Until July, three jobs relied in whole or in part on PLA: two part time jobs devoted wholly to PLA one full time job devoted in part to PLA.
[5] The date from which budget information was made available to the consultants by IIED

more or less in stone," thus reflecting a view held by some in IIED that PLA was not sufficiently flexible as a product and as a community of practice, to attract project funding.

Whether or not this perception was or is correct, the consequence is that the bulk of funding for PLA has always had to be found from IIED's core funds – or what are known as unrestricted frame funds from donors such as DFID, SIDA Sweden, NORAD Norway etc. In 2012, £75,224 was contributed to PLA from frame funds and in 2011 it was £105,000. Since 2005, frame funding has covered an average of 64% of PLA's total costs every year. Between 2005 and 2010 a large part of IIED's frame funds came from a grant from DFID called the PPA (Programme Partnership Agreement). This period was relatively comfortable for PLA: as one former member of the team said:

"We had space to do things in IIED – we were lucky because over this 5 year period we could secure substantial funding from DFID PPA… Under this [grant] DFID was particularly keen to support stuff on participation and inclusion – IIED used PLA as its frontpiece." (external interview)

However, by 2011/12 frame funds for IIED as a whole fell back to £3m, below the level that they were at in 2006/07 (£3.9m). Frame funds fell further to £1.8m in 2012/13 and are likely to become increasingly scarce in the future (IIED, 2012).

A large Accountable Grant (AG) from DFID has recently been signed (November 2012) which will go some way to filling the hole in IIED that the frame funding has left: this will be £17.5m over 4 years. However, unlike frame funds which are flexible, the DFID AG is not so flexible.

As one member of the senior staff put it: "PLA could be a vehicle to publish outcomes of the accountable grant research but not to fund underlying costs. Equally we wouldn't want to go over a certain percentage of the journal to be funded by DFID. If pushing 50%, its credibility would be open to question. The AG could only be seen as source of some funds only and not funding core costs… The tricky thing for IIED is that we have more and more funders who look at bottom line costs for particular outputs and activities don't put much store by the process – ways of working that doesn't necessarily deliver something above and beyond what other organisations do."

Within IIED, frame funds are normally used to fund 1. Central Services, 2. Strategic Work (PLA falls here) and 3) Groups' work. But this year, as well as £38,032 from frame funds, £80,596 was allocated to PLA's budget line from the DFID AG, which represents 69% of all PLA costs so far posted for 2013 (costs are £115,310 in total).

Various staff, including one of the co-editors, quoted below, expressed optimism about the fund-raising possibilities for PLA: "We were managing financially to cover half of most issues already, that was possible. But it would have been very difficult to keep doing this fundraising for each issue, you can't plan ahead, it's so insecure, particularly if you want to do writeshops. So you need to have core funding. Funding from teams didn't seem to be forthcoming except for specific themes, but committing ahead of time was the difficulty. At the time (i.e. last year), there was general uncertainty about funding because of the new DFID funding [the AG] and how it would work, and no one in the teams knew what they would have. Given more time we might have been able to lobby internally. The question mark was whether PLA was an outlet for IIED's work or not. But I don't think it's meant to be a mouthpiece just for IIED's work". (internal interview)

As IIED's Business Plan states: "The downward trend has put pressure on our groups to reassess the funding for teams and prioritise the allocation of funding." (IIED, 2012)

In effect, the funding model for PLA has not changed markedly over the years but what has changed is the overall reduction in the size of flexible frame funds available to IIED as a whole and a question mark over how much of the new DFID AG funds can legitimately be used on strategic work and communications. Thus, a perception has arisen that PLA must be scrutinised for value for money and for its strategic significance within IIED.

2.1.7 How effectively PLA has contributed to achieving IIED's strategic objectives

In many ways PLA at the start defined much of what IIED was about and was part of the profile for IIED; it set IIED apart from other organisations as the place where development was done differently - its 'ways of working' (Hobley et al. 2004). In this sense PLA did not just contribute to IIED's strategic objectives but underpinned them. The team that led PLA were centrally placed in the organisation and together with the partnership with IDS led the conceptual and practical development of participation, putting IIED at the cutting-edge of development practice.

Over time this clear coherence between PLA as a movement for transformative change, with the publication as its most obvious output and what IIED as an organisation was doing was less tightly and explicitly drawn. This was despite the fact that the alignment of PLA with IIED's ways of working and the content of what it was working on were still clear. This change was more to do with the internal positioning of PLA and its champions within the organisation, as well as the changes in funding across the organisation.

The 2009-2014 Strategy notes that "IIED has a distinctive voice …we can draw on ideas, experience and practical engagement from local to global levels. IIED's capacity to manage long-standing relationships with vulnerable groups is a core strength, as is our ability to bring their concerns to the global development table". In many ways this is exactly what PLA has attempted to do by bringing the lessons and experience from practitioners to a wider world to exchange and to learn. The current debate on the future of PLA mirrors the on-going discussion for the future strategy for IIED.

"We need to say that the world needs to look like this, and lay out some big principled rules, instead of accepting that markets and investors are the way things are done, and so we end up as servants of a system heading in the wrong direction, we are only trying to moderate disaster instead of changing it. Bold and clear principles are needed." (IIED researcher)

2.1.8 Capacity development[6]

PLA has always aimed to build capacity through its editorial process. Contributors to the series include practitioners, many of whom have never published before. Over the years the PLA editors have aimed to guide them through the writing and review process, encouraging them to reflect critically on the processes and methodologies described in their articles, making the experience and findings relevant for a wider, international audience and helping them improve their writing style.

One reader (an NGO worker in Iran) said "the process by which the journal is produced is also an inspiring example of how a team can facilitate distant synergy and co-learning." – Reader Survey, June 2013.

In some cases writeshops have been used to support the writing and peer review / reflection process: there have been seven writeshops over recent years (See NOTE 4, p.78 for dates of all writeshops) as well as six workshops held between 1989 and 1998 hosted by local NGOs and universities (such as International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), Philippines and the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex), from which issues of PLA have emerged. PLA's editors have endeavoured, especially when funds were available from outside sponsors, to hold writeshops and thus to practice participatory principles in the process itself of producing the journal.

Our Reader Survey showed that readers place a high value on the informality of PLA as a journal and the fact that it prioritizes experiences from the field over academic writing (62% of readers surveyed thought this was very important). We also found that those respondents who took part in writeshops mainly felt the experience was excellent or good. Writeshops were scored particularly highly on the participatory facilitation; allowing participants time away to learn, reflect and write; developing a shared understanding of the issues; peer-reviewing with other participants; and the one-to-one editorial support during writeshops[7].

Feedback from participants in writeshops has been consistently positive, as attested by the following selected remarks:

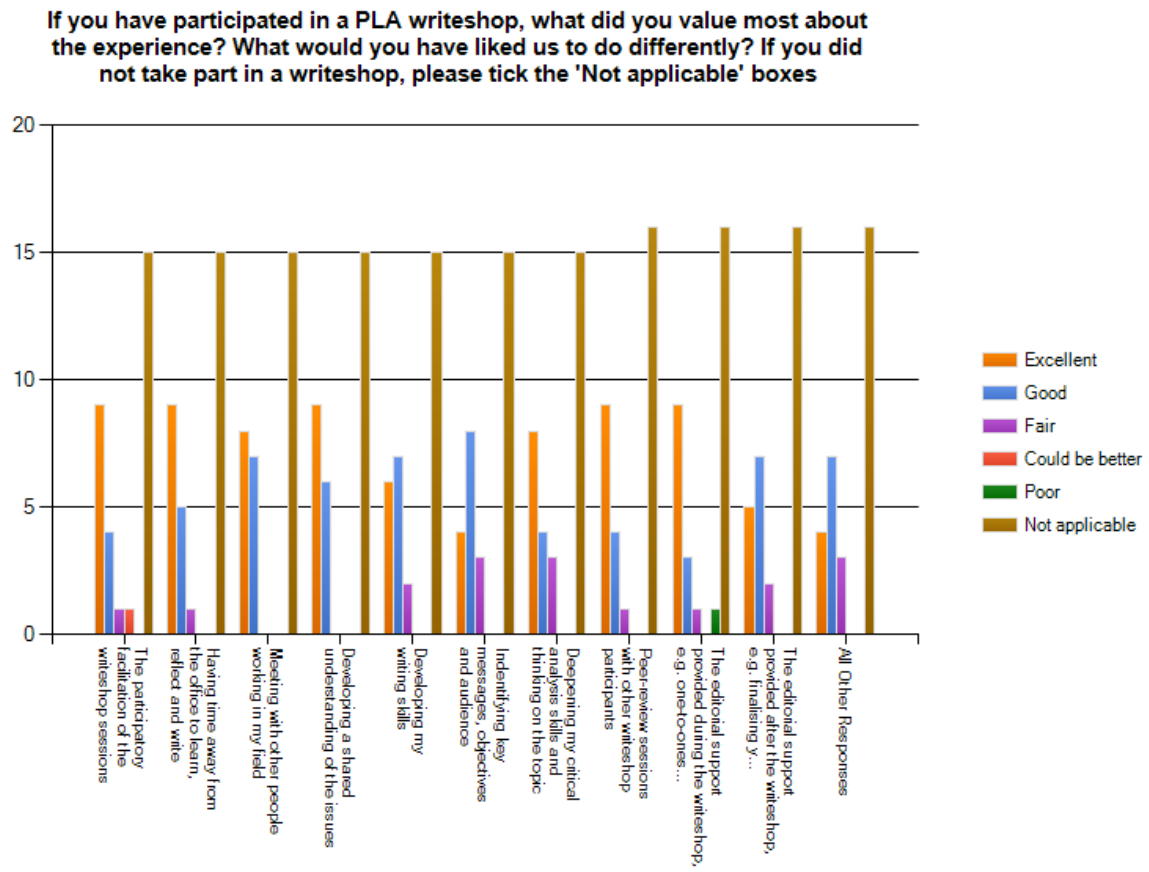
- "I am highly appreciative to the PLA family for the support given me while developing my article... What was most rewarding about the PLA process was the editing skills developed from the write-shop." – author, PLA 64 Young citizens

- "It was a wonderful experience! I think it's at the core of the experience being rewarding and a truly learning exercise that widens the impact of PLA in authors." PLA 63 How wide are the ripples?

[6] NB. This section focuses on capacity –building of PLA's *contributors*. A discussion of the impact of PLA on its *audience*, and whether or not readers' capacities have been built is under section 2.3.3 below.

[7] From June 2013 author's survey by Holly Ashley (n=30, response rate 30%

Figure 10 - Value placed by participants on the writeshop process



Holly Ashley, one of PLA's co-editors, wrote a booklet / manual on writing for the journal entitled *Kindling Your Spark an editor's advice to writers'* (http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G03143.pdf) in 2011. This was well-received and well-used, especially at the 20011 Nairobi writeshop for PLA 63. It remains a useful resource and deserves to be more widely used by would-be writers to informal journals, rather than just being limited to the 'PLA community'.

The capacity-building aspect of the editing process has also met with strongly positive feedback. It is clear that the editorial team were genuinely 'passionate about building people's capacity to share their stories with an international audience' (Ashley, 2011). For example, the majority of the 30 authors polled in June 2013 agreed with the statement 'my article was improved as a result of the editorial process'(86%) , and an impressive 93% of them said that the experience of contributing to an issue of PLA had 'provided [them] with new knowledge useful for carrying out [their] job more effectively'.

One respondent from IDS saw the utility of publishing in PLA: "For those wanting to write a quick and practical piece then PLA is attractive but it does not provide any academic credit and no kudos inside IDS. For those early in career, still students, it is a very attractive opportunity, for those more progressed it is a useful testing ground for ideas that can then be further refined before publishing in a more academic journal."

However, some contributors and guest editors commented negatively about some aspects of the editing process. For example, some felt there was too much 'back and forth' before their work was deemed acceptable: "As a guest editor… I found the editing process slightly onerous, and felt that the editors did not completely trust us as guest-editors to deliver a top quality edition - there was a lot of backwards and forwards and the process felt quite drawn out." (from Author's Survey). Some have felt that the editing process was too rigid: "we came with our idea and had to turn it almost entirely into something else" (author, PLA 64).

A further complication for PLA is that all papers always go through a further peer review process by the international editorial board. As Angela Milligan pointed out: 'this resulted in another round of revisions being requested. In some cases, the reviews were quite critical, even though authors had worked extremely hard on revising and re-revising their drafts.' (PLA 61 2010).

On writeshops, regardless of the extensive positive feedback from participants, it is important to weigh their benefits against their costs. One member of IIED's staff and a guest editor did not use the writeshop process for developing his edition and suggested it is an expensive luxury that makes a difference to very few people. Another member of IIED's staff observed "If PLA is a project about capacity-building then there are other projects doing this – learning groups etc… I wouldn't choose to run writeshops if it is not strategic. Who are we teaching to write?" (internal interview).

One member of PLA's International Editorial Advisory Board pointed out that PLA's writeshops are not original or unique: "I thought [PLA writeshops were] a really good technique to generate useful material. But the International institute of Rural Reconstruction (Philippines)… invented the writeshop [which is how] they generate their publications on technologies".[8] As well as IIRR there are several other places (both physical and virtual) around the world where practitioners are able to get guidance on writing-skills to turn field experiences into print. Many practitioner newsletters and magazines explicitly offer help with shaping an article for publication (see for instance, *Boiling Point*, published by HEDON Household Energy Network[9] and guidelines for Joto Africa published by Arid Lands Information Network[10]). (See also NOTE 5, p. 78 for other examples of online guidance for the kinds of writers who are contributing to PLA.)

Indeed, it is questionable, with the advent of the Internet, whether practitioners from the South need help to get into print these days. As one academic observed: "First hand accounts are easy to access: I will be going direct to organisations working on these kinds of things, the real practitioners – for example Myrada NABARD (India) - I wouldn't bother with intermediary organisations such as IIED" (external interview)

A senior IIED researcher said: "There's always an appetite among practitioners to write. But there's no dearth of places to send a piece to, if practitioners want to get into print. For example IDS has a

[8] See, for example, the following writeshop by IIRR:
Output of the 2012 International Training Course on Capturing Lessons from the Field: The Writeshop Process e-book
http://www.iirr.org/images/uploads/Grassroots_People_Step_Ahead_in_Development_Practice_with_links.pdf

[9] http://www.hedon.info/BP%3AGuidelines?bl=y

[10] http://www.alin.or.ke

website on community based adaptation to climate change. There are several other websites run by large NGOs as well."

Furthermore, PLA is not the only place in IIED that local voices are brought out; "Everything we publish has the voice of our partners" (internal interview); "The voices in the publication Shaping Sustainable Markets are those of our local partners, they co-write them with a lot of background support from the IIED researcher..." (internal interview)

2.1.9 How successfully PLA has adapted to changing circumstances and new challenges in sustainable development.

PLA as the shopfront of the IDS and IIED research-practitioners groups drove debate in the 1990s but it has also developed and adapted to change. PLA moved from participatory methodologies ('rangoli powder and sticks') to deepening understanding of the fundamental structural changes required in power relationships. This is reflected in the changes over time seen in the publication, including the development of important insights into the need for institutional change within major bureaucracies involved in rural development, and the identification of the need for individual attitude and behavioural changes (RRA Notes 19, 1994 and PLA Notes 27 1997)[11]. This spawned a whole area of work focused on the macro- and meso-level barriers that prevent change at the micro-level. This was finally captured in the sustainable livelihoods debates much of which had been developed by Ian Scoones at IDS (a key member of the IDS/IIED partnership on participation).

The edition on participatory M & E in 1995 (PLA Notes 22) marked an important turning point in the work of the group as it began to highlight some of the critical issues emerging about participation. This was based on a workshop held at IDS looking at questions of quality assurance, co-option and ethics, including the exclusion of the extreme poor. This workshop also changed the name of RRA Notes to PLA Notes – participatory learning and action. In the same year PLA 24 focused on the importance of understanding power and politics and was in many ways ahead of critical discourse in the development arena. It also identifies what remains a major distinction between the political agenda of participatory research and the practical agenda of RRA. It was the early forerunner of much of the later work on voice to be developed by IDS (in particular Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa).

This emergence of voice, politics and power marked an important shift in the development debate. This was clearly reflected in the PLA publications with a raft of editions focused on some of the key issues in this arena including PLA 40 (2001)[12] on the theme of deliberative democracy. Issue 50

[11] This was ahead of other initiatives such as the work at IDS reported in Development in Practice volume 12 2002 looking at participatory organisational change and learning. This was then published as a book and was highly influential.

[12] PLA 43 (2002) Advocacy and citizen participation (based on a workshop held in 2001 in USA). This also drew on a highly influential field-guide: 'A New Weave of Power, People and Politics'. This was a natural progression from the PRA trainers guide and deepened the practical means for analysis and understanding of power relations. PLA 44 (2002) focused on local government and participation. PLA 46 (2003) represents an important

(2004) was a seminal publication with a key editorial by Gaventa highlighting the important shift the participation debate had made into governance, but also highlighting this was not new to PLA which had demonstrated long understanding of these issues. The publication reflected on the previous years of participatory practice and set the scene for a more critical reflection on the key issues of participation in democratic governance across a range of sectors and contexts. The introduction of debate on deliberative processes was an early response to what was to become an important area of work more generally in development, including in several of the research programmes of IIED. PLA Notes 40 also underlines the changes in leadership of the participation group within IDS and the effects this had on the partnership between IIED and IDS. Far from being a publication that ignored power and politics, these editions indicate how central this was to PLA. The strong partnership between IIED and IDS in the first 10 years ensured that PLA remained at the cutting edge of the main debates in sustainable development.

PLA continues to be at the cutting edge of major developmental issues, often identifying them ahead of the crowd. Some of the recent issues identified by the editorial team have been cutting-edge in particular the issues on deliberative democracy, community-based adaptation, web 2.0, youth governance in Africa and community based protocols. Table 2 shows the thematic spread of PLA over 25 years.

Table 2 - Synthesis of major themes covered by PLA

Theme	Years	Editions
Tools and case studies	1988-1991 1999 2005 2006 2007	1-10, 12-15, 17,18 36 52 54 56
Health	1992 1995 2000	16 23 37
Fisheries	1997	30
Livestock	1994 2002	20 45
Biodiversity/ Conservation	2006 2012	55 65
Climate change	2009	60
Water and sanitation	1999 2010	35 61
Children/youth	1996 2001 2011	25 42 64
Citizens, local governance, planning, poverty	1991 2000 2001 2002 2002 2004 2005 2008 2011	11 38 40 43 44 49 51 58 62
Policy and institutionalisation	1997 2003 2006 2007 2011	27 46 53 57 62
Communications	1997 2000 2009	29 39 59
Training	1994 2001 2003	19 41 48
Urban	1994	21
Market small business	1998	33
Conceptual base and critique of participatory processes	1995 1998 2004	22 24 32 50
Monitoring, learning	1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 2003	26 28 31 34 47

moment in the development of participatory practice as it focused on the uses of participatory processes for policy change. An issue that is highly relevant to today's practices by IIED and the means by which to change the voices that influence outcomes at this level.

Chasing or creating trends?

The relevance of PLA has changed over time as learning and critical reflection about participation grew. This section looks at the changes in usage of a series of keywords through using the Google Ngram[13] search and a keyword search of all editions of PLA since 1988. This analysis allows an illustration in broad terms of whether PLA has been chasing or creating trends and provides some insights into the relevance of PLA compared to contemporary discourses. A series of keywords were chosen that best reflected the wider trends of the last 25 years. These are: participation, governance, accountability, transparency, empowerment, voice, citizen, and deliberation (deliberative). IIED's recent strategic documents, workbooks and results reports were also searched for the same words to see whether PLA was keeping apace with internal trends (the results from this are presented in Table 3).

Table 3 - Keyword search results

Keywords	Publications								
	2006-2009 Retrospective	Strategy 2009-2014	IIED results 2009-2010	IIED results 2010-2011	IIED workbook 2011-2012	IIED results 2011-2012	IIED workbook 2012-2013	Future World? 2013	Total occurrence
Deliberation	4	0	3	2	3	0	4	0	16
Empowerment	3	2	4	5	4	2	4	6	30
Transparency	1	1	6	4	7	10	7	3	39
Accountability	1	3	7	12	13	4	10	7	50
Citizen	3	3	8	4	10	14	9	4	55
Voice	12	3	12	13	18	19	20	0	97
Gender	2	1	11	18	26	30	20	3	111
Participation	8	0	13	20	18*	23	28	2	112
Poor/er/est	20 (6)	7(2)	33(3)	48(9)	59(11)	54(9)	64(8)	29(4)	314 (52)
Governance	17	6	52	74	82	74	91	11	407
Mentioned PLA as flagship publication									

A keyword search for participation was not used, as this would not have shown any interesting trends, as the ngram graph indicates over the period that PLA has been produced there are no startling changes in the occurrence of participation in the literature, although there is some evidence of a declining trend in its usage during the 2000s.

The ngram graphs in NOTE 6, p.79, show there are some obvious changes in usage of words such as governance, accountability, transparency and deliberation and that PLA has been responsive to these trends with clearly emerging patterns indicating a strong focus on issues of transparency, accountability, political space, empowerment and deliberation. This latter focus is interesting because PLA picked up on this issue early in the emergence of the discourse. Looking at the word-count figures for IIED's strategic documents and the general patterns they reveal the political elements of governance have a relatively low mention (deliberation, empowerment, transparency,

[13] The Google Ngram Viewer is a phrase-usage graphing tool which charts the yearly count of selected n-grams (letter combinations)[n] or words and phrases,as found in over 5.2 million books digitized by Google Inc (up to 2008). http://books.google.com/ngrams

accountability, citizen) whereas the broader terms such as governance, participation and gender have a much higher presence in the texts.

2.2 Performance

2.2.1 Effectiveness of PLA in addressing gender and generation issues over time.

In the early editions of RRA/PLA there is conscious discussion and awareness of 'invisible voices' caused by different factors of social exclusion – gender, class and age (see synthesis of all PLA issues, Annex 4). The trends of word usage in PLA are not dissimilar to the wider literature where there was a marked increase in use of the word gender, particularly in the mid 1990s to 2000s (as shown by the graphs below – Figs 7 and 8). These editions do show that PLA and its practitioners were building a socially differentiated understanding of practice and responding to the importance of understanding different knowledge, levels of power and capacity to engage.

Figure 11 - Occurrences of the words 'women' and 'gender' in PLA since 1988

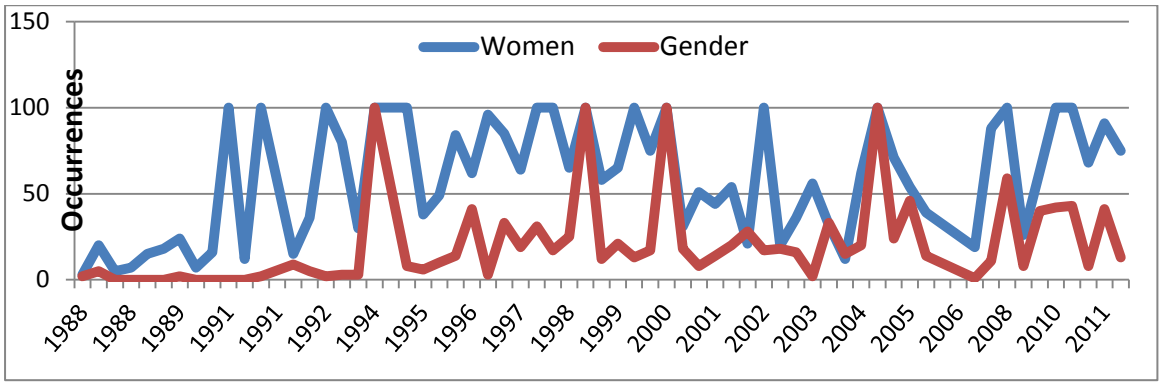
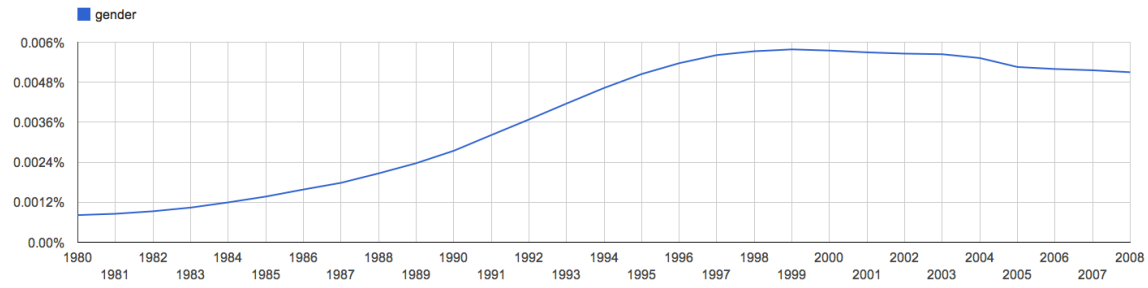


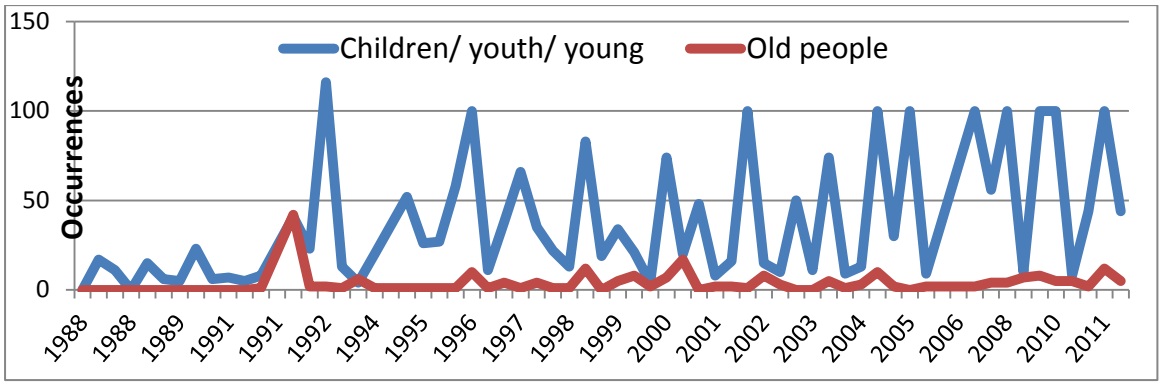
Figure 12 – Google Ngram for 'gender'



There is similar awareness of generational differences with three special issues dedicated to children and youth, most recently PLA 64 which focused on how young Africans are driving change through participatory governance processes. These PLA editions lay out some important principles for effective engagement with children, which remain current today. However, there is not equal attention paid to older people with a very weak understanding of inter-generational issues and the importance of participation of older people (Figure 9). There was an intention to devote an issue to older people and participation, but this was not delivered. These weaknesses on gender and

generational justice were identified more broadly for the whole of IIED by the external review (Kabraji et al 2012).

Figure 13 - Occurrences for 'children/youth/young' and 'old people' in PLA since 1988



Another important aspect of social differentiation is the dynamics of poverty. A keyword scan of PLA articles indicate there is relatively limited discussion of differentiation between poor, poorer and poorest (see Fig. 10 below). This search was deepened with two more searches on elites and power to try to see how understanding of power dynamics were being built into the PLA articles. As Figure 11 shows there is minimal mention of the word elite and power and empowerment have a higher occurrence but are relatively sporadic in their mention across editions.

Figure 14 - Occurrences for 'poor' and 'poorer/poorest in PLA since 1988

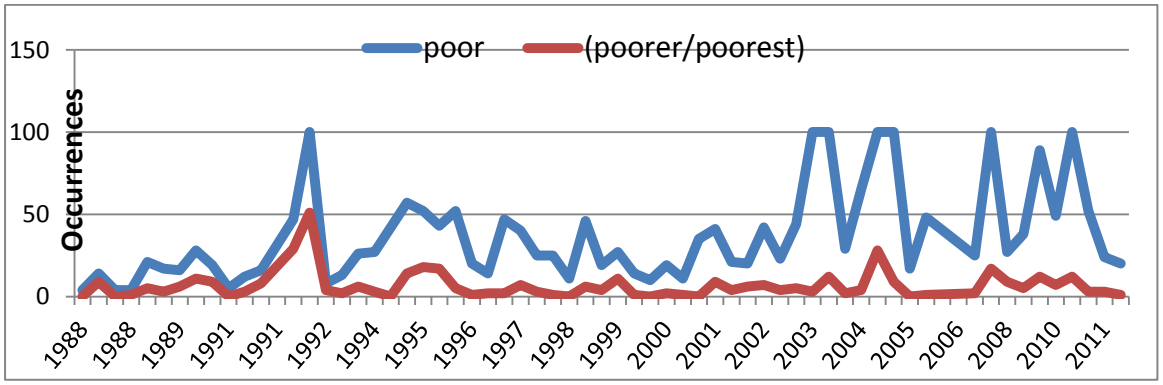


Figure 15 - Occurrences for 'elite' in PLA since 1988

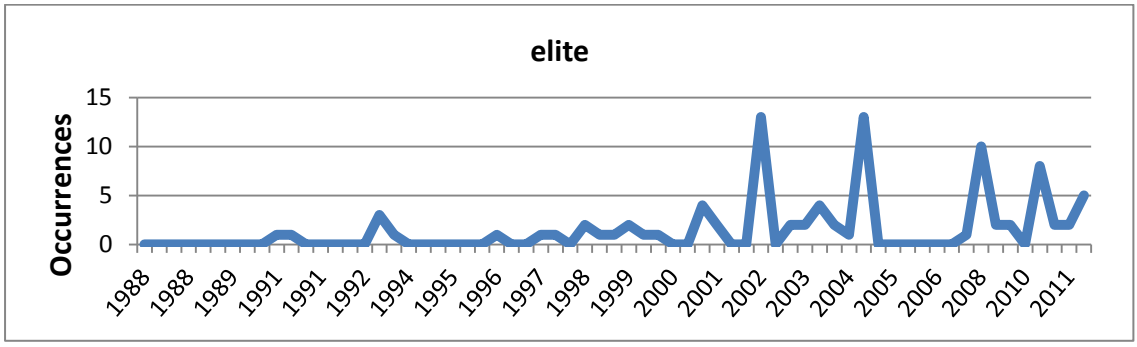


Figure 16 - Occurrences for 'power' in PLA since 1988

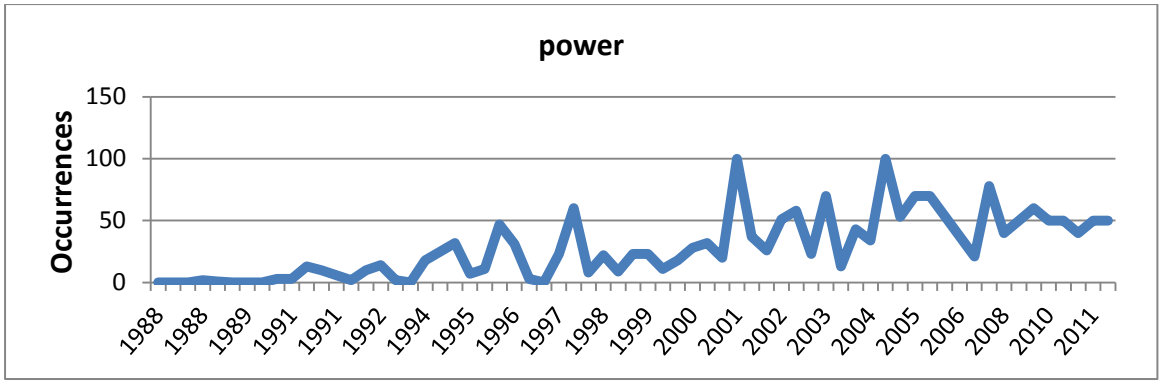
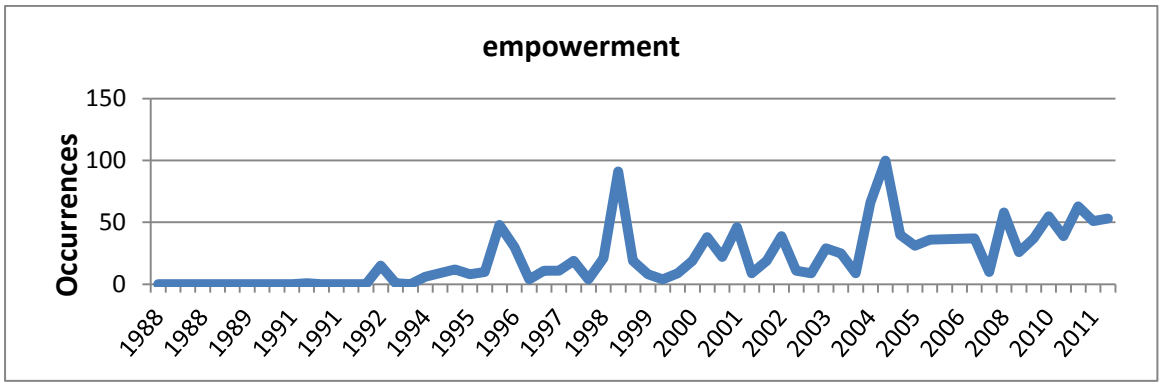


Figure 17 - Occurrences for 'empowerment' in PLA since 1988



Another important dimension to the generational question is the degree to which the principles and practices of PLA have been handed on to the new generation of practitioners. From interviews inside and outside IIED, it is clear that there is a real gap. The major push to institutionalise participation practices within bureaucracies has disappeared, leaving a group of young professionals without the skill sets and attitudes that were developed for the young professionals of the 1990s. The team behind PLA have not been sufficiently proactive at targeting university departments, particularly those offering master's courses in development. During interviews LSE, IDS, ANU all indicated that PLA had not been on their reading lists.

Generational issues inside IIED are also important to understand, where younger staff have not been exposed to the participation debate or had experience of using participatory tools and older staff are saying it is not relevant any more. This results in an uneven knowledge of the principles and practices of participatory processes and a lost opportunity to build the skills and competencies of a new generation of researcher practitioners.

2.2.2 Efficiency of PLA - has PLA offered value for money?

As mentioned in the TORs (see Annex 5), the rough figure that has been used internally by IIED to assess the costs of PLA has been about £120,000 per annum (with two issues per year). A closer look at the PLA budget since 1998 shows this is largely correct, but over the last five years (2008-2012 incl.) the total has been slightly higher at an average of £129,988 per year, with quite a lot of yearly variation, depending on whether or not translations were done or other 'extras' like write-shops were held. A breakdown of this yearly figure shows that over the last five years, each issue (two per year) has cost an average of £37,233 in staff time, plus an average of £27,760 per issue for all the design, production, translation, printing and distribution costs and associated external events (such as writeshops), a total of av. £65,000 per issue.

Table 4 - Extract from IIED Budget for PLA 1998-2013 (as supplied by Chris Wilde, June 2013)

Cost item	**Cost 2008 £**	**Cost 2009 £**	**Cost 2010 £**	**Cost 2011 £**	**Cost 2012 £**	**Annual av. over 5 yrs £**	**Av. per issue of PLA £**
Staff time	**63,362**	**69,764**	**73,025**	**86,427**	**79,757**	**74,467**	**37,233**
'External resource'(design, writeshops, translation)	13,362	8,328	21,755	33,030	26,148	20,525	10,262
Subscription managem't	11,170	10,586	9,416	9,448	9,638	10,052	5,026
Seminars/mtgs	-	-	102	781	472	452	226
Printing	20,347	9,351	12,332	9,540	21,964	14,707	7,535
Postage	11,231	4,568	4,688	5,237	8,000	6,745	3,372
Office and other	2,366	1,911	5,169	3,596	3,070	3,222	1,611
Sub-total Production & Distribution	**58,476**	**34,744**	**53,462**	**61,632**	**69,292**	**55,521**	**27,760**
TOTAL Staff, Production & Distribution for PLA	121,838	104,508	126,487	148,059	149,049	**129,988**	65,000

To put the costs of PLA in context we can compare PLA with other journals and publications produced by IIED and other institutions. For example, IIED's Environment and Urbanisation Journal has cost £68,392 per year (on average over the last five years); the Gatekeeper series shows average costs of £30,134 per year; and the Haramata series showed average costs over the last five years of its life (up to 2011) of £58,657 per year (staff and all production and distribution costs included in all

three cases). All these costings are substantially less than PLA but E&U is the only one immediately comparable with PLA since the two journals are roughly of the same length and both appear twice a year[14]. PLA costs about the double of E&U and furthermore brings in lower subscription revenue because it is not marketed in the same way through the academic publisher, Sage[15].

However, PLA and E&U are very different products:

- PLA is an open-access journal (free downloads and free print copies to individual Southern subscribers and community groups in the North) with a Creative Commons license – which invites free downloaders to 'use and share widely (for not-for-profit purposes only)' whereas E&U is subscription only, via Sage, for current issues (although E&U also has 1,700 free subscribers from NGOs and training institutions in low-income countries).
- PLA's ethos is to prioritise practitioners' contributions and to build authors' capacity to write articles via a relatively intensive process of mentoring from the editors. E&U does not see itself as a capacity-building initiative and does not hold writeshops but does invest time working with authors.
- PLA probably has more translation costs than E&U which is in English and Spanish only: at least six issues of PLA have been translated into at least one other language[16], if not more.
- The PLA team has produced various extras like CD-roms, videos and training booklets over the years.
- PLA shows higher staff costs than E&U on paper but the reviewers understand in fact there are many uncosted hours put in by the E&U team (mainly David Satterthwaite) that do not appear in the accounts.

The partnership between E&U and Sage is obviously cost-effective because it saves IIED staff time and money as well as helping substantially with marketing and getting E&U highly regarded and widely circulated among academic journals of its type. However, for PLA team to partner with Sage would have meant more subscribers for this to be a viable proposition (for Sage) and it would not have allowed for the kind of informal articles by practitioners that PLA sees itself as nurturing; furthermore, charging for reading the journal would be against the ethos of PLA, which has principles of open-access at its heart.

Although PLA is not a conventional academic journal, a rough comparison with scholarly journals is nevertheless of interest. The Article Processing Charge (APC) is a measure which has recently been used in the Finch Report (2012)[17], amongst others, to estimate the total costs involved in taking a

[14] By contrast *Haramata* appeared twice a year but was a much shorter publication (30pp on average) nor was it a journal in the same sense; each Gatekeeper issue is about one specialised topic (average 25pp), so it is not a journal at all and it has nine issues per year.

[15] In 2012, for example, subscription revenue for E&U was around £10,500 compared to subscription revenue for PLA which was around £4,000.

[16] The reviewers are aware of the following translations (most available from the IIED/PLA website as at August 2013, but there may have been others that are not downloadable): Issue 54 Mapping – 'Multilingual' = 11 languages; Issue 59 Web 2.0 – French; Issue 60 Climate Change – Arabic; Issue 61 Tales of Shit – French; Issue 62 Dragon's Tail – Chinese; Issue 64 Young citizens – French; Issue 65 Biodiversity – Spanish,

[17] The Finch report is a UK Government commissioned report of the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings, chaired by Dame Janet Finch in 2012, see refs.

researcher's raw article through the editing and reviewing process and into print. Looking across all types of academic journals, from online open-access to hard copy subscription-only, the Finch report found that costs per article can range from c. £10k to c. £2k, but the average APC is £2,800 per article in the UK[18]. If this measure were applied to PLA, which normally comprises an average of 18 articles, the cost of processing one article by the PLA editing team and getting it into print (ie. PLA's APC) is therefore £3,6111, which is a bit above the average but very respectable compared with other hard copy, peer-reviewed journals[19]. The main factor driving all journal production costs is clearly the time devoted by editors to processing submissions, especially to reviewing and arranging peer-review of articles. PLA has a low rejection rate for themed issues (about 25%) because articles are recommended by the guest editors but a relatively high one for general issues, for instance, for the latest general issue (PLA 66) the editors received circa 40 articles and are accepting around 12. Furthermore, a great deal of editing time in PLA is spent on shaping the raw articles by inexperienced writers into acceptable form. Considering that the PLA team expends much more than the average editor's efforts on building the capacity of many of its contributors, it appears that PLA is quite good value for money when compared with other academic journals.

It must also be borne in mind that because PLA is not a formal scholarly journal it is not in demand from most academic libraries – however, most other journals' publishing revenues are generated primarily from academic library subscriptions, (68-75% of the total revenue), followed by corporate subscriptions (15-17%), advertising (4%), membership fees and personal subscriptions (3%), and various author-side payments (3%) (Ware and Mabe, 2009:16). Almost none of the above revenue sources are available to PLA.

PLA is a hybrid, as it is positioned somewhere between an academic journal and a very informal NGO magazine. It is therefore useful to compare it also with a few practitioner-oriented magazines produced by NGOs and communities of practice: *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, *Spore* and *Boiling Point* were chosen for this purpose In some respects PLA compares favourably in terms of costs: The other publications are all shorter, so if we compare them on a crude cost per page basis, the results are that PLA costs £325 per page to produce per year, whereas 2 of the three publications are much more expensive with *Humanitarian Exchange* working out at £733 per page and *SPORE* at £708 per page to produce per year. (*Boiling Point* costs less at £170 per page). However, if we compare costs per head of reader per issue, PLA works out *poorer* value for money,

[18] 'There are considerable variations in costs per article between different journals, depending on the submission numbers; delivery formats (digital-only, print-plus-digital, or print-only); indirect cost structures; the level of surpluses generated by different publishers; and, above all, the rejection rate (i.e., the relationship between the number of articles submitted for peer review and the number that are finally published). Costs per article published, therefore, tend to be much higher for major journals with high submission and rejection rates – that is, those where there is the fiercest competition among researchers to publish their articles - than for those with lower rates' – Finch Group, 2012, p. 61

[19] It is interesting to note the relationship between article rejection rates by academic journals and costs per article: for example *Nature* (the international weekly journal of science) publishes only 8% of the submissions it receives and reportedly estimates its internal costs at a huge £20,000–30,000 per paper (http://www.nature.com/news/open-access-the-true-cost-of-science-publishing-1.12676).

at £5 per reader[20] with *Humanitarian Exchange* at £1.70 per reader[21] , *SPORE* costing about £3.40 per reader[22] and *Boiling Point* at £0.77 per reader.[23] It must also be noted that *Boiling Point* is very dependent on unpaid volunteer staff, hence its lower costs.

**** See NOTE 7, p.83 for a table summarising our cost comparisons between PLA and Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Spore and Boiling Point.***

2.2.3 The positioning and management of PLA within IIED

The history

PLA at the beginning was driven by researchers who had first-hand experience and were not simply editors soliciting the work of others. It was directed by intellectual understanding of the issues combined with the capacity to actively engage with the intellectual debates surrounding participation. But as the group lost more key staff the team became weaker and much less connected to the rest of IIED.

Strategic changes in organisational structure within IIED led to a further distancing of the PLA team from senior management, when the Agroecology team was absorbed into the Natural Resources Group (2006). The second attempt to reposition PLA occurred in 2009 when it was identified as a flagship publication and positioned under the communications goal 5 together with the *Gatekeeper* series and *E&U*. Much effort was put into identifying the distinctive role of the flagship publications, but this was not followed through. Institutional responsibility for PLA became more important than the discussion about how PLA fitted within IIED and its role. There was continued confusion that PLA was simply a publication and not the output of a coherent action-research process embedded in the work of IIED and others

Gradually there was no one who had the credibility internally to argue not just for money but for the strategic need for PLA. IIED support to the co-editorial team was inconsistent and unclear, putting high levels of responsibility on the team for the future of PLA, including sourcing funding without the institutional authority to take this forward effectively. They were left without an internal champion.

Some of the more recent editorial decisions were responsible for breaking trust within IIED. PLA became the victim of difficult relationships. At the same time the funding squeeze which began around 2010/11 forced the team to look for alternative sources of funding, but without a strategic process to assess the future of PLA within IIED. The editorial team were not well-positioned to look

[20] PLA: £65,000 costs per issue / av. 13,000 readers = £5 per reader per issue.
[21] *HE*: £22,000 costs per issue / c. 12, 835 readers (estimated on the same basis as PLA, i.e. 5 people sharing each hard copy and no sharing of downloaded copies) = £1.70 per reader per issue. Source Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI, by email.
[22] *SPORE*: £17,000 costs per issue / av. 5,000 readers = £3.4 per reader per issue. Source Wrenmedia, editors of *Spore*, phone interview.
[23] *Boiling Point*: £8,500 costs per issue / av. 11,000 = 0.77 per reader. Source Household Energy Network HEDON, by email.

for funding and were left stressed and uncertain about their future and that of the publication. Internal processes to elicit views on the future of PLA provided the basis for future options, and an agreement on an external independent evaluation was required. However, prior to this, a decision was taken to make the editorial jobs redundant.

IIED support to the co-editorial team has been inconsistent and unclear, putting high levels of responsibility on the team for the future of PLA, including sourcing funding without the institutional authority to take this forward effectively. They were left without an internal champion who could argue for the team and the publication and were not involved in major discussions about their future or that of PLA. The editorial team were not researchers and were seen to be relatively junior within the organisation. As a team they were not confident to put forward a strong position for PLA inside IIED and relied on others to voice this for them. Major funding cuts put in place forced the team to look for alternative sources of funding, but without a strategic process to assess the future of PLA within IIED. The editorial team were not well-positioned to look for funding and were left stressed and uncertain about their future and that of the publication.

The redundancy process was not well handled, with poor communication and misunderstanding, and personal relationships colouring decisions. The process was wrong – jobs first made redundant, then evaluation and possible design was the wrong sequence of events, the process should have been evaluation, design and then the decision about jobs.

What could have been done differently?

PLA shifted from being central to the organisation to effectively a projectised output sitting within a team that itself became isolated within IIED. It is interesting to compare PLA to the other flagship publication Environment and Urbanisation and the way this has been managed by the Human Settlements Group. E&U compared to PLA is similar in several important ways: it does not have a constituency internally and gains its credibility from its external audiences. The key features that have made E&U successful are:

- Tight and long-term leadership of the Human Settlements group, extremely well connected and networked
- Strong internal champion operates at senior level in IIED and able to fight for the publication
- Strongly owned by the whole group and used as their front to publish their research as well as that of others
- Intellectual capacity of the group drives the issues and not funding
- Funding is not left to one individual but is the responsibility of the entire group, this includes cross-funding their inputs to the publication from other projects
- E&U is a group endeavour and builds on the group's intellectual capital
- The group members are intellectual leaders in the field and able to horizon-scan effectively identifying gaps and cutting-edge issues that makes E&U, as the output of this process, exciting and ahead of the game (for example an issue on climate change and cities (date) helped in negotiation of accountable grant with DFID, as it was clearly ahead of the times in identifying key issues)

- Strong internal group ownership translates into significant inputs of 'free' time for reviewing papers and editing special issues
- Proactive outreach to audiences through Facebook and briefs sent to targeted policy-makers
- Group vision for urban issues is very clear and held collectively, this strengthens the coherence of E&U
- Two issues per year that are based on serious knowledge of the intellectual context and written by those engaged with these issues

PLA needed the level of intellectual leadership that it had started with to ensure that it remained at the cutting edge; critically it needed to be part of a research group that were actively working in the field, building and renewing the community of practice and using the publication as a major outlet for their work as well as that of others. Only in this way could it have remained central to IIED and continued to connect IIED to a larger world of innovative change.

2.2.4 Effectiveness of PLA's governance arrangements.

For the first 14 years of PLA there was no strategic or international editorial board. It was an informal publication that linked practitioners and gave them voice to express and exchange ideas, backed by a team from IIED and IDS that were themselves engaged actively in developing the conceptual and intellectual framework for participatory practices.

The editorial advisory board was introduced in 2002 and was composed of a mix of staff from IDS and IIED. More recently (2005) this board became the strategic editorial board composed of seven members four from IIED with the intention to try to build cross-institutional linkages between participatory practice within IIED's groups and PLA and three members from IDS (now only one member) reflecting the partnership between IIED and IDS that underpinned PLA. This board was supposed to be responsible for strategic developments, choice of themes and solving disputes, if they arose. The international editorial board represented a range of people with different interests, networks, ensuring diversity across gender and geography. Board members included academics active in the field, as well as NGO members. Their main function was to act as peer reviewers although neither clear terms of reference nor responsibilities were defined.

The international editorial board comprised a diversity of key players in the rights, democracy, and participation fields; they are an influential group of people. Their collective skills have not been well deployed or respected during this period of review and uncertainty for the future of PLA. IIED has been very poor at communicating effectively with the international board concerning the plans for PLA and for the future of the members of the board. Board members are annoyed at the low level of communications and although many have tried to help this has not been well recognised or responded to by IIED. This body of knowledge that the international board represents could have been effectively used to help inform the discussion of future options for PLA. This represents a major lost opportunity for IIED as well as a loss of goodwill for IIED. From a PR point of view this appears to have been very poorly managed with little thought to either the short term or longer term

consequences for IIED's partnerships with these particular individuals and the organisations they work for.

Overall the governance arrangements for PLA have been weakly developed; neither of the two boards has developed as active governance mechanisms or providers of strategic guidance. The Strategic Editorial Board has had little or no strategic role either in the overall development of PLA as a publication nor in decisions about the conceptual evolution of participation (interviews IIED researchers). It did not meet physically and had no involvement in discussion of what the next issues to be covered should be, instead this selection tended to be driven by funding rather than by the scanning the horizon to see what is important (external interview). Individual board members have been consulted as individuals on an informal basis, but were not used by the PLA team as a strategic mechanism to either strengthen their internal position and communications or to help develop future strategies. Similarly the International Editorial Board has remained a passive group of individuals that are occasionally called on to review articles in their subject areas; they have not had a wider remit. The nature of the engagement with the board was erratic, sometimes they were asked for their views on important decisions and then ignored.

"I have been supposed to cover articles to do with Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV and Gender-Based Violence. However, the staff haven't sent any articles my way to review on these issues for some years. I am afraid I haven't volunteered to review other articles about other issues because I have had too much work on my plate" (external interview).

The decision taken to shift PLA to a more academic audience and style was discussed with the international editorial board, but did not seem to be part of a wider strategic reflection on whether this was a necessary and relevant change. The strong push for change came from the more academic members of the strategic board, arguing that the publication would have more credibility if it looked more like a conventional journal. The implications of this were several-fold including the change in format, and the introduction of peer reviewers. However, unlike most formal journals the peer reviewers were not chosen for their academic credentials but for their experience in participatory practice, reflecting again the uneasy mix between a formal and informal journal. To become a credible academic journal peer reviewers would have to have been identified for a particular article, rather than leaving it up to the international board to decide which articles they were able to review.

The change in format has led to confusion; it is unclear to many as to whether its audience is academic or practitioner, as a result it does not meet the needs of either. "The format is more academic and has put it somewhere between academics and practitioners, but it doesn't satisfy either audience. It is now no longer as accessible to practitioners, it cuts out many people as they cannot write in the academic-practitioner style required, but at the same time it is also not academic enough." (external interview)

Again this discussion misunderstands the important underpinnings of PLA that it was not a standalone publication but was the product of a social movement practising and reflecting on new ways of doing development. The change in style of the publication was a lazy change rather than a carefully thought out decision as it is easier to get articles in an academic style of writing than to invest in really getting the voices of practitioners published. This requires the editors or others in the

research team to have good networks able to identify these practitioners with an understanding of the issues and who is best positioned to write about them. At the beginning it was the direct voice of practitioners, now it is filtered.

2.3 Impact

2.3.1 Scale and intensity of impact and evidence of change

Building evidence of impact is very difficult for a publication that has spanned 25 years of development practice and has had no intentional monitoring system. Thus much of the evidence remains anecdotal and difficult to attribute directly to PLA.

However, returning to the initial years and PLA as the shop-front for a participation movement then the impacts are clear to see.

"In the mid 1990s everyone was riding the wave… What it did was give people confidence to try and listen differently and experiment, a lot of bad work happened in the process, but also it was the foundation for some really excellent work" (external interview)

Its original intentions to share good practice and innovation among practitioners did deliver some major benefits, including a large community of practice. For the first 10 years IIED and IDS staff ran innumerable training courses and programmes in at least 50 countries, building a whole cohort of people and organisations using participatory practices as the cornerstone of their development approaches. It changed the way in which poor people were seen by those in power, leading to a whole new approach within major multilateral and bilateral donors focused on the voices of the poor. It became a unifying theme and set of principles that was actively practised by extension agents and policy makers.

PLA as part of the combined work of IIED and IDS has had a huge impact in helping practitioners initially to change practice and have the confidence to do so. More recently its focus on cutting edge application of participatory principles and approaches, for example participatory mapping, has helped to push boundaries and shift the use of technologies.

A recent carefully planned edition of PLA that included developing a theory of change and an action plan for influence has been able to show some elements of impact that can be tracked back to the edition. There were direct effects on an inner core of authors and co-authors who learnt from each other and then a range of indirect effects, particularly including positive changes to the reputational profile of IIED with a key UK government department. Unfortunately tracking of outcomes has not been systematically pursued by the PLA team, so PLA 65 remains the only concrete example that demonstrates both direct and indirect effects.

Direct and indirect effects of PLA 65 - Biodiversity

1. Immediate knowledge changes in authors through a reflection on practice approach
2. Secondary knowledge changes through networks of authors
3. Translation of knowledge (in the publication) into skills through training courses run by CBD Secretariat
4. Improved recognition and positioning of IIED on the international stage, particularly with key donors
5. Close relationships with important UK government departments – DEFRA (invited to key meeting on Access and Benefit-Sharing)

Finding evidence of change and attributing it to any publication is always difficult and normally relies on anecdotes, especially where there is no baseline to measure any 'change' against. PLA is no exception, but we can certainly find many such anecdotes and examples over the years: the best and most telling examples we have gathered are below.

But there are probably many other members of PLA's community of practice, who we have not been able to talk to, who have anecdotes and stories of influence and change that do not appear here. There have also clearly been some very transformational changes at a personal level for those who have guest-edited and contributed to the journal – we have documented some of these in section 7 (capacity-building). We also know that just over 68 % of PLA's readers polled believe that PLA has a' very high' or 'high' impact on development policy or practice, as evidenced by the chart in NOTE 11.

The following examples derived from discussions and surveys indicate the level of impact several issues have had:

PLA 54 2006: Mapping for change: practice, technologies and communication: - This issue, focusing on participatory GIS (geographic information systems) was very popular and went into several re-prints as well as translations into eleven different languages. According to Nicole Kenton (PLA co-editor) and Bardolf Paul (International Editorial- Advisory Board), the network coordinated by Giacomo Rambaldi called the Open Forum on Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Technologies[24] out of CTA Wageningen "really took off as a result of this issue of PLA" and is now a "very active community of players with lots of events all over the world… People are exchanging actively, communicating with each other to help each other solve problems and it's very well run by Giacomo: it has a very narrow focus on participatory mapping and so perhaps this is why it works". This network now has over 1200 members divided into four: the global discussion list which is Anglophone, and its Latin American (Spanish), Lusophone (Brazilian) and Francophone chapters.

PLA 57, 2007: 'Immersions: learning about poverty face-to-face':- This issue was published and then launched at DFID, attended by an aide to Andrew Mitchell (then shadow minister), who then adopted the idea of immersions for DFID staff so that they had more awareness of realities on the ground[25]. Whether it was fully implemented when the Conservatives came into power is unknown, but this issue of PLA seems to have had an impact on thinking and gave many instances of how immersions had changed the thinking of policy-makers (government and NGO). It also included the perspectives of 'host' families.

[24] Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS) 'promotes interactive participation of stakeholders in generating and managing spatial information and it uses information about specific landscapes to facilitate broadly-based decision making processes that support effective communication and community advocacy' (see http://www.ppgis.net).

[25] (http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2008/03/Poverty_immersions_for_International_Development_staff.aspx)

PLA 58 2008: 'Towards empowered participation: stories and reflections': -

According to Tom Wakeford (Edinburgh University), who was co-guest-editor of this issue (and of issue 40), this issue had two specific pieces of policy impact in the UK. Firstly, it was cited as a justification for the successful National Project on Beacons for Public Engagement "Connected Communities" programme (a UK Research Council initiative which recognised and valued PLA-type processes[26]). And secondly, several articles in PLA 58 were cited in the working group of the Human Genetics Commission and, apparently, influenced processes around citizens' enquiry into forensic DNA, leading to a policy change whereby DNA records were wiped from databases in the UK.[27]

PLA 60 2009: 'Community based adaptation to climate change': -

This issue has had the highest number of downloads of all PLA issues, and is one of the most popular of all IIED's publications. Saleemul Huq (IIED Senior Fellow, Climate Change) said this issue was good for his team and IIED in general. Mainly NGO practitioners got back to him with appreciative remarks. It apparently helped the problem of climate change "get out of the camp of just environment people and into the development camp and among all those working with communities to adapt to climate change" (external interview). The impact on the guest editors of this issue was transformative, according to Angela Milligan (PLA co-editor): "[Rather than] perceiving participation as a set of PRA tools for finding out more about how communities are adapting to climate change, [the guest editors and authors saw it as] a process through which communities could begin to monitor change and take steps to adapt themselves, and identify external support needed. My feeling is that that is why the issue was so popular - because this was a new way of thinking for climate change specialists."

PLA 65, 2013: 'Biodiversity and culture: exploring community protocols, rights and consent': - This was the first and only edition where a Theory of Change was drawn up and it is clear that this more targeted thinking about the process and use of the publication made it more effective. Krystyna Swiderska, the issue's guest editor, describes it as "rings of effect: there is an inner core where the authors and co-authors learnt a lot from each other – they then transmitted this through their networks and so it gets dispersed". The publication was then targeted at the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) secretariat and they have taken it up and used it in their training, it is translated into Spanish and used in Latin America. The first policy target was the 1st July Nagoya Protocol Inter-governmental committee which attracts a range of researchers and NGOs – all the PLA copies provided to that event disappeared very quickly, as it was the only publication that had operational practice in it, and, according to Swiderska "everyone needed this". At the CBD COP (October 2012) Swiderska had a side-event where 3 case studies were presented and the overview from this issue of PLA which elicited "a lot of interest in the publication". DEFRA came to the event, were very enthusiastic and part-funded the Spanish translation. "It has been very good for positioning in the donor world particularly with GIZ. It has opened doors that were otherwise difficult to get open. I now have closer relationships with DEFRA which has influenced Defra's perspective and helped them to understand about communities and the need for community protocols" - Swiderska. There is now improved recognition of the need to support community protocols among CBD policy-makers.

[26] See http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/beacons

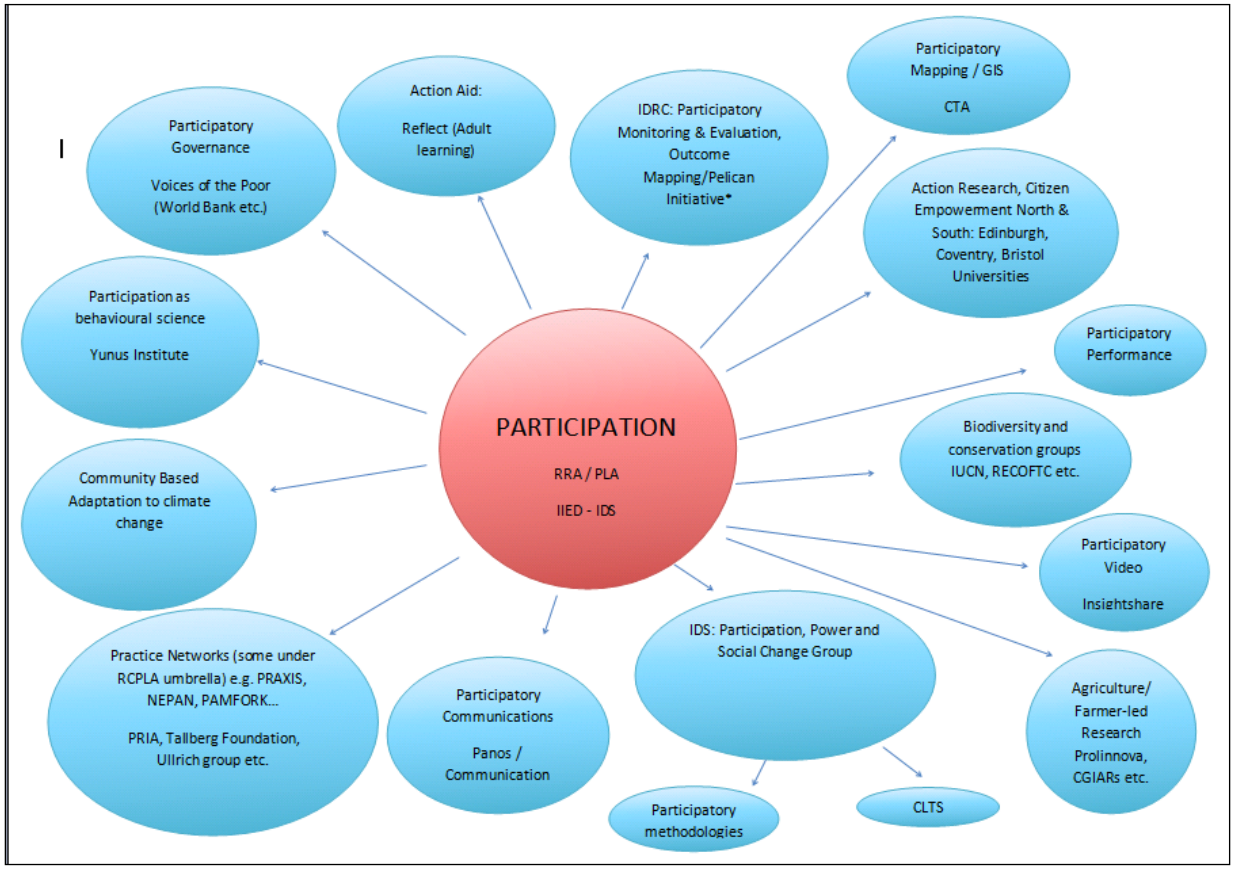
[27] See *A citizens' inquiry into the forensic use of DNA and the national DNA database.* Wakeford, Tom. Department of Health, London, 2008.

2.3.2. Extent to which PLA has contributed to a community of practice in participatory techniques and how it has nurtured and expanded it.

At the beginning of RRA/PLA Notes there was a relatively small group of people involved in developing practice focused on a few key institutions. However the growth of participatory practices means that it is no longer possible to have a defined community of practice, as it is not possible to organise and connect with so many disparate people. The active movement of the 1990s cannot be recreated, neither can the control over quality that RRA/PLA Notes were able to exert at the beginning. By 2003 (Cornwall and Pratt reporting on the Pathways to Participation project in PLA 47) it was already clear that PRA had dispersed so widely that much that was being done could no longer be described as PRA where empowerment of the local people through their own analysis of their situation was the primary purpose.

The following diagram portrays the way the core community of practice that began simply as 'participation' with its locus in IIED/IDS, has since split off in many different directions and has become a much more disparate group – or rather a set of sub-groups, with homes in various different institutions (e.g. CTA, PRAXIS, IDRC, IDS, Action Aid etc). Now, the smaller sub-groups, such as practitioners of 'Reflect' methods or participatory GIS people, are probably much more coherent communities in themselves and are easier to keep together than the original idea whose initial locus was IIED and the RRA/ PLA journal.

Figure 18 – How the 'Participation Community' has split



2.3.3 Evidence to demonstrate that PLA has successfully increased the capacity of its targeted audiences

Although the PLA journal is not primarily a pedagogical tool, it is used extensively as a training resource and in teaching contexts. The uses to which the journal has been put are illustrated with quotes in NOTE 8, p. 84 (Quotes on ways PLA is used); some of the most eloquent and common mentions are of copies of PLA being used in the context of trainings in developing countries. Here is another typical quote: "I regularly get involved in training others, running workshops and networking in international development. My practice is influenced by the latest learning I incorporate, and in general my first stop for participatory methods and good practice is PLA" (reader survey June 2013, Argentina/UK, NGO).

Capacity-building is not only about teaching skills and imparting knowledge (both of which PLA has been used for) but also about inspiring and motivating people to take up participatory methods or to transform their existing work in the field; again the quotes in NOTE 8, p. 84 provide evidence that this has happened. Other typical quotes about PLA as a motivational tool, especially for those working with the poor in developing countries include the following: "I often discuss some of the thematic areas with my colleagues who work in the field more directly and encourage them to try and use the practical tools and new learning in their work" (reader survey, June 2013, Ghana, NGO); "For me as a youth from developing country and working with people in the remote areas, it has helped me, I regard it as one of the teach your-self manuals for community development. I love it. It has helped me very much" (Reader survey June 2013, Zambia, NGO). The Trainers Guide (Pretty, et.al., 1995), which was derived from the tools developed as part of the PLA practice and published in PLA Notes, remains one of the most influential training guides in existence for participatory tools. This is still cited and used by many practitioners and is a major contribution to participatory practice globally.

In 2006 PLA's editors explicitly asked readers about the extent to which issue 54 ('Mapping for Change') had provided new knowledge, expanded readers' thinking etc. The results in Table 5 below show a very positive picture of capacity being built among readers on the theme of participatory geographical information systems (GIS). This was one of the most translated and widely circulated issues, probably reaching tens of thousands of readers.

Table 5 - Selected Results from Readers Survey 2006 (n=110)

With respect to this special issue, please comment on the following:	I agree strongly	I agree	I disagree
Reading this special issue provided me with new knowledge useful for carrying out my job more effectively	29% (32)	**59%** (65)	4% (4)
Reading this special issue provided me with new contacts and links	28% (30)	**59%** (64)	6% (6)
Reading this special issue has expanded my thinking about the topic	46% (50)	**49%** (53)	1% (1)

The true extent and number of people whose capacity has been built by reading, citing and referring to PLA over the years is impossible to know. Because it is not a conventional academic journal it is

not listed on citation or impact indexes, in the world of academia. But considering that we found that 42% of readers use it (amongst other things) as a teaching tool its capacity building impact over the years must be quite extensive.

2.3.4 Unintended, and/or negative impacts, and/or impacts clearly missed

From all our interviews, surveys and conversations with PLA's stakeholders we have picked up on four major areas in which PLA clearly failed to achieve its intended impacts or clearly missed opportunities that it should have taken.

1. Despite the fact that PLA shifted to a more academic style journal, it failed to reach the wider academic community in the UK or internationally. This is evidenced by the fact that PLA does not appear on the usual citation indexes (e.g. Thomson Reuters' Social Science Citation Index), does not have a 'journal impact factor'[28] and is not regarded as a proper peer-reviewed journal. Therefore it does not confer academic 'points' to authors who publish in it. Neither does PLA seem to be on many university reading lists: rather tellingly it is not even on the reading list for IDS' MA in Participation, Power and Social Change[29], although individual articles were found to be on three other reading lists at LSE, IDS and Manchester Universities in 2011 (Morris, 2010). The open-access, informal nature of the journal (which is its selling point, though to a different constituency) has meant *PLA* has missed the chance to get academic kudos and thereby has failed to ensure that the voices of local partners reach into international arenas and to universities where they can inspire and influence a new generation.

2. PLA missed reaching as many readers as it could have through a failure of marketing. We discern three main ways PLA was not marketed as it should have been:

- Website: despite some efforts made on the part of the PLA team and by IIED's Communications department (see section 12 above), the PLA website was never revamped as intended. This meant that issues of PLA are not properly searchable (e.g. by article author), the table of contents is not visible and individual articles cannot be read online and are not downloadable separately (without downloading the whole issue). Key word searches are not possible either. Opportunities were missed to create a blog, more interactivity through a web-forum (Q and A's, tips, news etc.), Facebook, Twitter feed etc. More resources were intended for writers on the website and an interactive online 'writeshop' platform was even proposed at one point. Although web and social media were not specifically part of the co-editors' job descriptions, 'marketing and promotion' and 'networking and multimedia dissemination' were. There should have been efforts to make PLA come high up on Google searches, through search engine optimisation. But plans were not completed through lack of time and, most recently, a lack of support from various other

[28] This is a measure which captures the number of times articles in a given journal are cited by other academics.

[29] Jane Stevens, IDS Participation group, pers. comm. 4 July 2013

departments within IIED. It is clear that much more could have been done to make PLA's web-platform more exciting and attractive.

- Subscriber lists: we believe that PLA missed expanding its reader numbers and that a review of PLA's subscriber lists and a proper 'joined up' strategy with IIED's central database would have yielded significantly more. It is questionable, for instance, whether the sub-contracted company, RIL (Research Information Ltd.) is really handling subscribers properly[30]. Sub-contracting to such a bulk-mailing company also means that the personal touch is lost and individual complaints and queries are not dealt with. PLA has its own data-base of free and paid subscribers for print copies while IIED's 'hub' which is controlled by Communications department also has a separate list of 30,000 people who have signed up to receive IIED materials including those who have expressed an interest in 'Participation': it is not clear whether these separate lists have been merged or rationalised. Neither is it at all clear who is downloading copies of PLA from the IIED website. For instance we were told it was not possible to access the statistics that are currently being gathered about downloaders' professional backgrounds (a multiple-choice pop-up box appears when a website visitor requests a download) or to disaggregate figures for downloaders of PLA from those of the Gatekeeper series. If better statistics were kept it would surely be possible to market IIED products (including PLA) better to web-visitors, to specialised networks and to the public generally.

- Failure to update its old-fashioned look/title: We received a number of comments on the old-fashioned look and feel of PLA. Even though the majority of existing readers were happy with the look and the title , the negative views from a lot of non-readers make us wonder how many potential new readers might be put off PLA because of the way it is presented. Its black and white images, its long and somewhat 'jargony' title, its cartoon image on the front, its 'recycled paper' look, its somewhat 'cosy' image, the small font… all these were commented on negatively by various interviewees (see box below). We believe that, whatever preferences may be – and these are largely a matter of individual taste, PLA undoubtedly failed to update its image over time and this probably deterred potential new readers, especially younger people, and probably had the unintended consequence of giving the whole topic of participation a feeling of being old-fashioned and stuck in the 1990's.

[30] For instance, when we did the reader survey for this evaluation over 20 of the 267 readers who responded complained that their subscriptions had mysteriously lapsed and/or their copies were not reaching them; furthermore 228 out of 1468 registered subscribers' e-mail addresses bounced back. From RIL's lists it is not possible to interrogate it easily with straightforward questions such as: how many libraries currently subscribe? and what the proportion of North/South recipients are there?

"PLA feels old fashioned, it looks it. But you've got an underperforming star, with some decent marketing this could substantially increase its reach" (Communications consultant and former IIED and IDS staff member)

"If it continues - the title must change - it is a thing of the 1990s or early 2000s at best" (IIED staff member)

"Dreadful cover puts you off completely … Articles are very short … They don't appear to be very critical and are instead rather cosy" (IDS staff member)

' I got disillusioned with the patronising nature of PLA – there was an assumption that people out there needed a special kind of simple version to overcome elitist language used in other journals, but then all it did was to deliver its own elitist language and infantilised issues with the use of cartoons'(external interview)

"The term PLA now alienates and obscures as no-one knows what it means, [you] need to avoid acronyms" (DFID staff member)

"Currently the internal layout is too dense, stuffy and difficult to read. It needs to have more illustrations and to be shorter. At the moment the size stops you reading it immediately and makes you put it to one side to read later – of course then you never read it." (IIED staff)

3. We should mention how internally damaging some of the articles in issue 63 were ('How wide are the ripples?' 2011) because they alienated key people and served to isolate PLA within the institute. Also, there have been a small number of other issues and editorials which were not of a rigorous standard.

4. The journal failed to have much impact beyond the English-speaking world. This is despite the fact that some issues of PLA were translated into several languages and that there have been many requests from readers for more translations. This is evidenced by the fact that very few survey respondents over the years have come from non-English speaking countries and there has always been an especially low-showing among Spanish-speakers in Latin America. Low readership among non-English speakers can be explained partly by lack of marketing effort, the lack of bilingual people on the PLA team and the very high proportion of articles focusing on English-speaking countries such as India, Nepal, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and UK. It was also argued by a number of our interviewees that 'participation' itself is rather a UK-based set of concepts and has not been able to penetrate into academic or practitioner discourse even in places like Canada, Denmark or Australia.

2.4 Lessons

The following section draws lessons from the experience of the last 25 years of RRA/PLA. Because 25 years is a long time, these lessons dwell more on recent developments (roughly the last five years) and a little less on the whole span of the journal's life.

Communication, capacity and collaboration

The development and publication process of the journal has been a very collaborative one (i.e. working with guest editors, contributors, designers etc.). But it has been one which increasingly has looked outwards from IIED rather than collaborated as much as it could have with researchers within the institute. Outside IIED, a whole raft of organisations have been involved every year and over the years (e.g. other UK university departments (notably IDS) and international and local NGOs, training institutes, research projects, consultants and companies). The development and publication process has thus become a whole project in itself, with capacity-building and the process of production becoming as important as the end product. The down-side of this wide collaboration was the creation of a rather cosy and clubby 'participation world', more or less separate from IIED.

The lesson to draw is that PLA needs to be recognised for what it is: a project, not just a journal.

Flexibility and innovation

PLA has kept up with relevant contemporary discourses and practices, over the years, but has not been so good at making this widely known or at keeping its image and marketing updated to keep pace with the times. The lessons to draw are:

1. PLA should have updated its design, format, title and its web-presence by means of regular reviews and consultations with its board and IIED's Communications department over the years.

2. The length of the journal and its hard-copy subscriptions policy should have been reviewed regularly by its board, in consultation with IIED management, Finance and Partnership departments.

3. The decision to outsource subscription management to RIL should probably have been reviewed before now, since there is some doubt about the quality of its work.

4. There should have been more and bigger reader surveys at regular intervals to inform the above decisions, i.e. regarding design, content, length, title, print-run, hard-copy dissemination, extent of on-line readership etc.

5. PLA should have been better at marketing itself, improving its 'search engine optimisation,' and getting visibility beyond its core readers to show that it was keeping up with contemporary discourse and capable of reaching an even bigger audience.

6. PLA should have better communicated the work it was doing on power, rights and governance both within and beyond IIED.

7. Because PLA could potentially have been relevant to many areas of IIED's work but was isolated and not recognised as such, there should have been more championing of PLA within IIED.

Project management

Various sections of this review point to some poor management practices and decisions regarding PLA. Rather than re-iterate these, here are some overall lessons to draw:

1. Over its life, PLA's Strategic Editorial Board should have been much more involved in strategic decisions beyond just the content of the journal itself, such as ethos, direction, marketing, dissemination, personnel etc.

2. Clear and timely decisions should have been made as to where PLA sat within the institute and whether or not it was any or all of the following: a 'flagship' output, a 'sub-brand', a project in its own right.

3. Co-editors should not have been allowed to work outside the London office to the extent they did, as this reduced their visibility and increased the PLA team's isolation within the institute.

4. The PLA team could have received more support with fundraising, communications and marketing from within the institute.

5. Recent management decisions regarding staff redundancy should have a. waited for the outcome of this review b. been handled with much more sensitivity c. involved the Human Resources department and the staff trade-union more closely.

Funding and value

This review has looked back at the financial story behind PLA and found, broadly, that it has offered good value for money. As long as PLA is considered as more than just a journal, but a project in its own right, we would argue that it has offered a return on the investment of frame and sponsorship funding in terms of capacity-building, IIED's profile, partner-relations, brand-name, and policy impact. The reviewers are aware that there have been some references to wider funding problems across IIED to justify PLA being put on hold. But it must be said that IIED is a relatively well-funded institute and does not have an immediate or overwhelming funding crisis. We believe IIED could probably find ways to fund PLA if it wanted to. The question of PLA's future should be recognised, therefore, not as a question of funding but one of institutional strategy. As one staff member said to us: "IIED funds the things it likes".

Depending on IIED's future strategy, the only lesson that can be drawn at this stage is that IIED should have waited for this review before it decided that PLA was not good value for money and before deciding it would use funding issues to justify making the PLA team redundant.

Sustainability

The community of practice which has grown up around both the journal and around IIED and IDS over the years have meant that the journal and the community have become mutually sustaining to some extent. However, this review has also found that 'the participation community' has split in many different directions, which is a threat to the sustainability and long-term impact of the journal. There is nothing that could or should have been done to prevent these splits; they were probably inevitable and healthy. But more could have been made of the impact of the journal itself:

1. IIED should have done more to publicise the stories of PLA's impact, such as the policy influencing work that happened around the climate change and biodiversity issues – for example there could have been more features about PLA's achievements in IIED's Annual Report and more promotion of PLA at high level policy events and in meetings with donors.

2. Within IIED there could have been more internal awareness of how popular some of the PLA issues were (i.e. climate change is one of IIED's top downloads) and a greater desire created internally to contribute to it. The IT department could have played a stronger role in this internal publicity (for example, by creating a 'dashboard' showing IIED staff how well their publications/articles/ reports were doing in terms of downloads, mentions in policy-forums, re-Tweets etc.)

3. PLA should have done more to re-visit projects it had formerly case-studied to follow-up on stories, emphasise successes and show the long-term impacts of participatory initiatives on the ground. For IIED and PLA the importance of developing evidence for the effectiveness of these ways of working remains critical for the credibility of IIED and its use of participatory processes.

Differences – in how IIED has managed, resourced and developed other IIED publications such as Environment and Urbanisation, Tiempo and Haramata.

Other IIED publications like E&U, *Tiempo* and *Haramata* are (or were) different from PLA, partly because they are on a theme (urbanisation, climate change and drylands) as opposed to PLA which is on a methodology. So, unlike these other publications, PLA does not have a distinct Group within IIED to back it up, or to continue working on the theme should the journal disappear – as has happened with *Tiempo* and *Haramata*. Further, as we have described above, PLA is different from E&U for several reasons. It would not be possible to finance and resource PLA in the same ways as E&U. The lesson we must draw here is that:

1. In terms of strategic importance, all of these publications are different and must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Just because *Haramata* and *Tiempo* were discontinued fairly painlessly, without any significant loss of reputation or audience for IIED does not necessarily mean the same would apply to PLA, were it to be discontinued.

2. In terms of funding and sustainability, a lesson can be learned from *Haramata* because Ced Hesse and colleagues in the Drylands team tried to look for a new alliance to continue to publish it but they found they "could not raise the money from the donors – [because donors are] not prepared to fund a stand-alone communications product. We could only get a donor if it were associated with a research programme with the publication as one output amongst many".

Linking – how well has the PLA team linked with and learned from other similar initiatives such as IDS's Participation, Power and Social Change programme?

The relationship between IDS and IIED was central to the functioning of PLA and its wider intellectual development. In the beginning, the partnership between IIED and IDS was seamless, intellectually compounding and grew strongly over the first 10 years of PLA. Over time the intellectual driver for PLA shifted to IDS where workshops hosted by IDS as part of their wider research programmes often

provided the material for PLA **- See our synthesis of all PLA editions in Annex 4 - Analysis of content and country coverage of RRA/PLA issues from 1988-2012**.

Over time IDS has changed considerably both in terms of intellectual focus and leadership, as a result the partnership between IIED and IDS has also changed, although there has been no active account taken of these changes. At the start the IDS participation group was accessible and supportive of practitioners, the resource centre shift from IIED to IDS was a reflection of this. When the leadership of the participation group at IDS changed, the focus of PLA changed and shifted away from practitioners to a strongly academic focus drilling-down into the political underpinnings of participation and its role in a more rights-based discourse. The failure to renegotiate the terms of the partnership and to understand the effects of these changes in IDS on the partnership, meant that effectively IIED lost the active IDS role that had focused on practitioners and continuing to engage and build the networks, but did not replace it. Effectively the community of practice that had been developed jointly by IIED and IDS disappeared as the centrality of servicing the needs of practitioners fell off the IDS agenda and was not replaced by actions by IIED. The fact that IDS has just recently (May 2013) started a new website called 'Participatory Methods' (http://www.participatorymethods.org/) without having had any discussion with IIED or the PLA team, is a startling indication of the current lack of communication between the two institutes.

Building effective communities of practice

Although at the outset PLA and the movement underpinning it did produce a successful community of practice this is now dissipated. Perhaps what has happened is that the original PLA has spawned so many different areas of participatory activity that it is now no longer possible to draw a common thread around them, so the centres of excellence and excitement are now in different places. There are lessons to be learned from how to maintain and sustain a community of practice which IIED could usefully build on for future activity; It is useful to look at the outcome mapping community supported by Simon Hearn at ODI (and see also the website of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community http://www.outcomemapping.ca/). The important lessons for success are as follows:

1. Role of facilitator is key - this person needs to be engaged in the subject area so they can actively facilitate the network and be able to identify when something is new and exciting, know when a discussion needs to be kept going and when a new discussion needs to be brought forward.
2. Relatively tight issue boundary makes it easier to network with members seeking particular understanding of use of methods
3. Use of regional stewards for the networks who are practitioners of outcome mapping and have strong individual networks in the region; they represent the community of practice and steward the development of outcome mapping from the perspective of the community of practice
4. Strong governance mechanism with the stewards as representatives of the community of practice leading the network, control the budget and decide with the ODI facilitator how it is to be allocated. This mechanism works through monthly teleconferences
5. Importance of an annual face-to-face event to build trust between members, live exchange of experience and networks between individuals based on individual understanding. These

annual events are combined with other events to keep the network alive and cutting edge, such as running master classes for more advanced topics in outcome mapping

6. Research is necessary as part of the network to feed the network and keep it alive, to keep on pushing the boundaries and at the same time connect with practitioners who are experimenting and pushing the operational boundaries.
7. Use of small grants offered through competitive process to network members for short studies, development of new tools and production of short papers describing members' innovations.
8. Recognition that online facilitation is a whole new area of practice that requires particular skills and knowledge to make it work effectively.[31]

All these lessons are relevant to any future work that IIED supports to build these types of communities of practice.

[31] ODI worked with Nancy White an expert on online facilitation http://www.fullcirc.com/about/

SECTION 3: Analysis of asset value, debates, practices and needs

3.1 Asset value

There are two important elements to the asset value of PLA: its brand within IIED and its financial value. As the box below illustrates from with quotes derived from interviews with both external key informants as well as staff members, PLA has a significant asset value to IIED that encompasses its history as well as its contemporary utility.

PLA asset value to IIED

"PLA as a product has not made much difference to IIED, but if stopped it would cut off the last thread to participatory past, it would send a signal to the outside world and to people inside IIED that it doesn't matter any more. We are trying to be different from ODI and on the side of the vulnerable and neglected, we need to be in command of the tools that make this difference" (IIED staff member)

"PLA is a strong IIED asset that can be brought back into play" (IIED staff member)

"If PLA disappeared would lose a brand and in a sense would lose a vehicle for cross-sectoral and cross-group working in IIED, lesson learning still needs to be done with practitioners and still needs to be disseminated so there is still an important role for it." (IIED staff member)

"If IIED lost PLA it would lose credibility, the need for it is still clear, but where to position it is not clear now the team has been removed. If its best chance for survival is IDS it should go there" (IIED staff member)

"If PLA moves away from IIED, IIED would lose a lot, as PLA provides an identity and rootedness in participation that sets IIED apart from other competitors and provides evidence of how they work differently with their local partners." (IIED staff member)

"What underpins PLA is a strong identity with the way IIED works, is it a strong enough thread in what we do, not really and perhaps we do need a set of researchers that are constantly reflecting on this." (IIED staff member)

"PLA brand has a long-standing track record in an area of interest that covers a range of disciplines and practitioners; it has strong credibility with readers and users." (External interviewee)

"More and more funders are looking at the bottom line costs for outputs and activities and not as interested in the process by which they are delivered, unless the ways of working can be shown to deliver something above and beyond what other organisations do. " (IIED staff member)

"PLA is an absolutely key journal as a practitioner academic, it is a complete tragedy it is coming to an end" (External interviewee)

"PLA has been part of IIED's profile, in the sense that they have made a name for themselves being on the ground participatory and strongly linked. In theory PLA is one of the ways in which they can demonstrate this" (External interviewee)

The value for IIED of a brand that provides a public profile to its ways of working cannot be underestimated. It is very important for IIED to be able to show in what way it is distinctively different from its competition (ODI, IDS, Chatham House, WRI) and also distinctive from local NGOs in the south that are now better able to access funding directly. IIED has to be able to demonstrate its relevance as a London-based organisation. PLA has shown that it can be part of the process for building local partnerships based on trust and understanding that allows deeper more effective relationships. These emerge through working together in write-shops, which in their turn can be built on for stronger research relationships. All of this implies proactive networking, relationship building and face-to-face events based on research that is then linked to the publication.

PLA has created the space and opportunity for IIED to build on its strengths and demonstrate on a global stage the importance and distinctiveness of its approach to development. The asset value that PLA has developed provides the brand that sets IIED apart – an institute that is rooted in the voices of local people, based on an understanding of the forms of transformation necessary to deliver fair and equitable outcomes. PLA has shown how to share this practice in accessible material that provides the tools and the contextual understanding to deliver these changes. In the words of one external interviewee this brand can be built on to strengthen IIED's position:

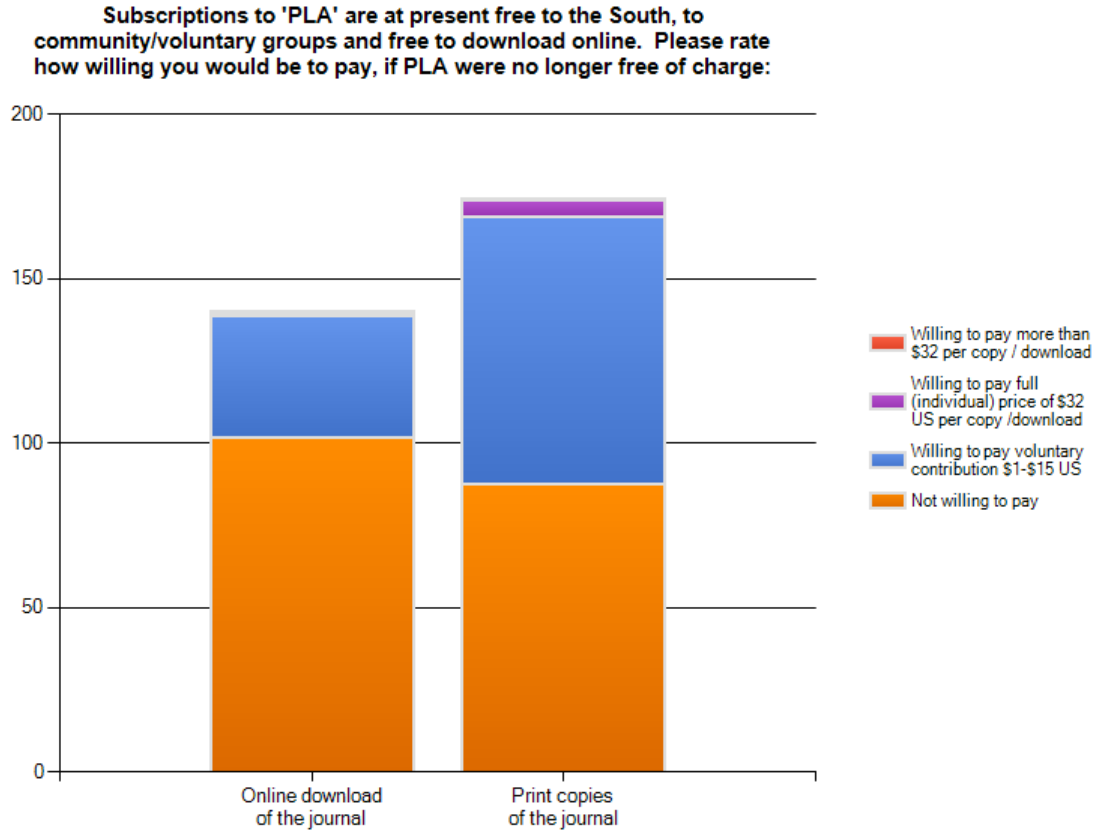
"IIED has remained rooted in a technical managerial view of development.. IDS and ODI have moved with the times, they have very clear thematic working groups, produce nuanced analytical frameworks, think differently and help others to reflect on practice... IIED should have a very clear niche in the environment/sustainable development arena on accountability, power, politics of engagement, conflicts around climate change and induced changes in natural resource management. People are crying out for 'how to' in this area. They should be noticed in this area and should be carving out this niche." (interview: external commentator)

In terms of being a financial asset, the PLA journal is clearly not a money-making concern at present but it has a good number of assets which should be borne in mind if IIED were to 'sell' PLA to another organisation or publishing company:

- Relatively high and growing numbers of readers - our conservative estimate is 13,000 per issue – both print and online. (Better subscription management and marketing could probably increase numbers of readers markedly).
- A long-established name and good reputation
- A solid constituency of readers, supporters and users, mostly in developing countries and who are increasingly ICT-enabled (internet and mobile)
- A solid and potentially growing constituency of actual and potential contributors who will write pro bono
- A team of experienced and dedicated co-editors (but who may disappear imminently and find other work now they have been made redundant by IIED)
- A strong international editorial board who will review articles pro bono (but, again, who may resign, depending on what happens to PLA)
- A fully archived and indexed set of back-issues, currently downloadable online as well as several associated training manuals, CD roms and videos.

Our reader survey showed that readers are not willing to pay the current full price for PLA (see chart below) because most of them are in developing countries on low incomes. But many are willing to make a contribution, especially for the print version and over a quarter are even willing to pay to download copies, which they get for free at the moment.

Figure 19 – Willingness to pay



3.2 Changing practices and contexts

NB: This section is a summary of a longer essay on changing practices and contexts available in NOTE 12, p. 91.

In this section we consider the areas of contemporary debate that are framing the context for sustainable development and the possible implications for future work by IIED drawing on the best practice and principles from PLA. Table 12: ***Timeline of key events within the NOTE 12 essay*** describes the key events that surrounded the development of PLA as a practice and publication, including changes in IIED's partner IDS during this period and changes in development discourse.

The shifting interest in the voices and knowledge of citizens: At the beginning, participatory methods were at the cutting edge of development and IIED was the leader in the field. However, as pressures from funders changed and the emphasis on demonstrating results has become dominant, the need for a rethink about IIED's participation legacy is necessary. Pressure for results and evidence are forcing a focus on expert-based quantitative instruments and has reduced the space for

the PLA-type approaches that are characterised as soft and not evidence based. The space for voice and citizens is reducing as the demand for 'hard evidence' is increasing. At the same time funders such as DFID now have little capacity to build deep relationships with external organisations such as IIED to co-produce ideas and to lead onto joint working. This is also forcing change in how organisation such as IIED can work in these more closed development agency arenas. Other actors such as the private sector are increasingly the holders of the levers to create the incentives for change. These are important new audiences for influence particularly in building the linkages with local voices.

Transparency, accountability, governance: As it became increasingly apparent that the major issues preventing sustainable livelihoods are within the political context and constraining policy and institutional frameworks, increasingly researchers and practitioners alike began to look to influential work that was investigating the role of participatory governance and the agency, voice and capabilities of citizens to hold governments and other providers of services to account. Much of the last decade has focused on questions of corruption, transparency and providing mechanisms and tools to increase accountability and improve transparency. This work has also highlighted the politics of consumption and the way in which this drives unfair, exploitative practices that lead to major social and economic degradation.

Inclusive growth… to green growth… to inclusive green economies: This shift from sustainable livelihoods to growth and the determinants for it led to a growing recognition of the interdependence of politics and economics and the need to take political-economy factors into account when thinking about growth. Major policy statements have attempted to operationalise practice on green growth, but with little evidence that allows for real development of these ideals. Inclusive green growth is posited as the pathway to getting to sustainable development where economic and environmental sustainability can be delivered. However, attempts to get global buy-in to a green economy agenda failed at Rio+20 in 2012, leaving a fear that "pursuit of so-called green economy approaches would not prioritise poverty reduction, equity and environmental stability"[32] So it is the *inclusive* green economy agenda that is at the heart of IIED and its foundations around sustainable development.

The big issues on the table now are about consumption patterns and changing demand side practice. What emerges from these two decades of work and now crystallising in debate about inclusive green economies is the embedding of a set of principles[33] that should underpin pathways to sustainable development. Critically, solutions do not lie with experts, bureaucrats, private sector or the citizens, but through complex arrangements of all working through deliberative processes that ensure informed participation, capable voice and effective negotiated outcomes. Much of what drove the work of PLA is captured in these principles, but what is still lacking is how to put these principles into practice and deliver real examples of inclusive green economies in a range of different contexts.

[32] Tom Bigg http://www.iied.org/five-things-we-ve-learnt-rio20

[33] Builds on some of principles of Natural Resource Charter http://naturalresourcecharter.org and the 9 principles of a green economy http://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/updates/sign-9-principles-green-economy

There are still major knowledge and operational gaps to understanding 'how to' develop green and inclusive economies, based on the use of renewable natural resources.

A new set of communications is needed that could help to inform and build a more aware demand-side understanding of the effects of our collective and individual consumption decisions. This together with a focus on building the roots of IIED into practice in the UK could lead to a dynamic process of change that has many of the attributes of the original RRA/PLA movement and could demonstrate what inclusive, resilient green economies look like and what the underlying principles and practices are to deliver on this. Our suggestion for this new set of communications, is web-platform and community of practice, outlined as **Option 4: Re-launch and re-brand as 'Tactics and Tools'.**

3.3 Understanding the competition: other communications products

There are several existing publications and communication products that overlap with PLA.

Firstly there are the formal academic journals. Probably the closest 'competitors' to PLA are Community Development Journal (CDJ), Development In Practice (DIP) and Action Research (AR). These are similar in that they prioritise the practical experience and case-studies of those working in community development. Many of their contributors are researchers from the South. A superficial scan of their latest issues shows many topics which would not be hard to imagine featuring in an issue of PLA[34]. Furthermore, part of DIP's policy involves 'actively seek[ing] out and offer[ing] editorial assistance to new writers, with the broader aim of bringing alternative views and critical voices into the international arena'[35] – something that PLA also prides itself on doing.

However, these journals are different in that: average article length is longer (average 5,000 words) as opposed to 2,500 for PLA; contributors are almost exclusively students and academics; the articles are written in academic language; these journals are peer-reviewed in a formal sense[36], not just by

[34] For instance, the latest issue of Community Development Journal (Vol 48 (3), Oxford Journals – open access) is extractive industries, and includes articles entitled 'Oil production, seaweed and community-level grievances in the Western Region of Ghana' (A. Ackah-Baidoo); 'Mining, development and corporate–community conflicts in Peru' (F.Triscritti) and 'The mining boom in Malawi: implications for community development' (P.J. Kamlongera). The latest issue of DIP (Vol 23 (4) Taylor and Francis – by subscription) is a general one and includes several articles about participation, e.g. '"SMART" Photovoice agricultural consultation: increasing Rwandan women farmers' active participation in development' (M. Gervais & L. Rivard); ' "I'd like to participate, but . . .": women farmers' scepticism towards agricultural extension/education programmes' (C. Charatsari, et al.) and 'Developing participatory communication: a case study using semi-structured interviews in Samoa' (J. Schischka). In the current issue of Action Research (Vol 11 (3) Sage – by subscription) we find an article on 'Collaborative participatory action strategies for re-envisioning young men's masculinities' (J.Eckstein & K.Pinto) and (the rather more abstruse) 'Participatory action research as a tool in solving desert vernacular architecture problems in the Western Desert of Egypt' (M.Dabaieh)

[35] See http://www.developmentinpractice.org/about-dip/about-journal/about-journal

[36] i.e. the "double blind" review process: authors are not told who reviewed their paper and reviewers are not told who wrote the paper.

an editorial board; they are mostly not open-access (with the exception of CDJ); they appear on citation indexes and have academic impact factors; and they do not offer hands-on capacity-building for first-time writers (i.e. writeshops) to the same extent as PLA.

As well as the above journals, we know that some of PLA's target audience also reads the following academic journals (as mentioned at least once by our peer survey, in random order): World Development, Development and Change, Nature, Ecology & Society, Society and Natural Resources, Environment and Urbanisation, IDS Bulletin (2 issues of which were edited by IDS' Participation team in 2012), Journal of Extension, Geoforum, Int'l Journal of Lifelong Education, Third World Quarterly, Journal of Peasant Studies and Global Environmental Change, Glocal Times (informal e-journal).

From an organisational point of view it is interesting to compare IIED with Oxfam who have published their journal, *Gender and Development* for the last 20 years. Again, this is more formal and academic than PLA and it brings in more subscription revenue (marketed through Taylor and Francis), but the same issues arise about sustaining it. C. Sweetman, G&D's editor makes an important point about this in a recent blog: "It is to Oxfam's credit that it has understood the need of the whole sector to have such a journal serving it – and that it has financed it as a project from the start. Of course, publishing G&D also has strong benefits for Oxfam in terms of enhancing its reputation and credibility for being serious about gender and women's rights, and about learning and dialogue within the development sector as a whole."[37]

A second area of overlap, in terms of publications that PLA's target audience is also likely to read, are those variously published by NGOs and specialised networks and communities of practice. While there is no other regular periodical like PLA, there are several books, working papers, briefings, newsletters and reports published every year by the wider 'participation world'. Most of these still appear in hard copy, as well as online. IDS' Participation Power and Social Change Team appears to be the largest generator of new publications on participation: last year (2012) this team produced 9 briefings and working papers, several books and two editions of the IDS Bulletin[38]. Practical Action Publishing currently lists 19 titles under the category 'Participation' – most of them books.[39] PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia) lists 12 new resources published this year (mostly 20 page reports on average), it also publishes three regular newsletters *Prakria, Global Partnership* and *Gender News and Views* (almost all of PRIA's publications focus on India or the sub-region and many are in Hindi).[40] The Honeybee network in India publishes a biannual journal/newsletter in English and seven Indian languages.[41] The Dutch NGO Both Ends regularly publishes working papers and briefing papers about the work of its environmental partners in the South, some of which aim, like PLA, to present "preliminary and unpolished results or analysis that are circulated to encourage

[37] Caroline Sweetman, 14th August 2013, response to "Should ODI bite the open access bullet for its journals? Response to last week's rant on the Academic Spring", Duncan Green's Poverty to Power blog http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=15525

[38] See http://www.ids.ac.uk/team/participation-power-and-social-change

[39] See http://developmentbookshop.com/participation.html#.Uh8a1Rusim4

[40] The PRIA website also claims to publish a journal entitled 'Participation and Governance' but no issues more recent than 2006 seem to appear on PRIA's website, see http://www.pria.org/-media/newsletter

[41] The aim of the Honeybee network is the 'documentation and dissemination of local and traditional knowledge and innovations' – mostly in India. See http://www.sristi.org/hbnew/aboutus.php

discussion and comment".[42] Similarly, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in the Philippines publishes guides and reports of the writeshops they run which "capture lessons from the field' about participation and community management experiences, the latest being from 2012."[43]

Thirdly there are the many non-print purely web-based platforms which make up a substantial online 'world of participation'[44]. Many of the following sites feature blogs, webinars, podcasts and have active social media communities centred around their websites, as well as downloadable reports, guidelines and training materials etc. Several are portals that aggregate participation-type resources and links (e.g. FAO[45], IDS' Participatory Methods[46] and learning for sustainability.net[47]) while others are the homes of specialised participatory communities of practice which are generating new outputs all the time – these include, for example, the mapping community within Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development (IAPAD)[48], participatory video centred around, for example, Insightshare[49], participatory communications groupings such as the Communication for Development (C4D) Network[50], the community forestry community of RECOFTC (Center for People and Forests)[51], and the Reflect community of practice[52]. There are some groups that used to be active but do not seem to have posted much new content for several years but still showcase useful resources (e.g. the Participation Group in the Social Development Department of the World Bank[53]). Many participation-type organisations and institutes are linked together, for example, IDS's 'Participate' project collaborates closely with sixteen Northern and Southern institutes concerned with participation, all of which have their own websites.[54] Praxis India, which is often featured in the back 'In Touch' pages of PLA, also stands out as an active institute (mainly in India) with a relatively strong online output (reports, briefing papers etc.) as well as being an archive for resources and for

[42] See http://www.bothends.org/en/Publications/

[43] See, 'output of the 2012 International Training Course on Capturing Lessons from the Field: The Writeshop Process e-book: *Grassroots People Step Ahead in Development Practice*' http://www.iirr.org/images/uploads/Grassroots_People_Step_Ahead_in_Development_Practice_with_links.pdf

[44] The websites mentioned here are not an exhaustive list of the many online NGOs/communities/resource-centres around the world that deal in some way with participatory approaches to development (but see http://www.iapad.org/links_participation.htm for a useful directory and the portals mentioned below). We have, however, tried to mention the most active and those which overlap most with PLA.

[45] See http://www.fao.org/Participation/

[46] See http://www.participatorymethods.org/

[47] See http://learningforsustainability.net/: a 'guide to on-line resources … for government, natural resource management and development agency staff, NGOs and other community leaders working to support multi-stakeholder learning processes to guide sustainable development activities'.

[48] See http://www.iapad.org/: which 'as focal point for sharing lessons learned and innovation in practicing ethically-conscious community mapping and participatory GIS'

[49] See http://www.insightshare.org/

[50] See http://www.c4dnetwork.org/

[51] See http://www.recoftc.org/site/

[52] See http://www.reflect-action.org

[53] See http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,menuPK:410312~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:410306,00.html

[54] See http://www.participate2015.org/organisations/

doing research, trainings and organising face-to-face events such as their 'Annual Commune on Participatory Development' in India.[55]

Finally, we should mention some of the other websites, not necessarily about participation but on related topics, that compete for the attention of PLA's constituency. The following sites were mentioned by our survey of peers, in addition to those already mentioned above (in random order[56]): IFAD rural poverty portal, Forest Trends, M&E Notes, SciDev, CIFOR Centre for International Forestry Research, ODI, RRI, IISD SD Gateway, IDRC, World Bank's CommGAP; The Communication Initiative, UNFCCC, UNDP, UNEP, BBC Media Action, Gender links, AMARC, African Development Bank, UNICEF, University of Malawi, Concern Universal, World Vision. Blogs mentioned were: 'On think tanks', 'Impact and Learning', 'Poverty to Power' and 'Global Development.'

Gaps in the above communication product provision

Given the plethora of communication products on participation and related concepts and practices, as set out above, it is hard to see if there are any gaps and, if so, where they lie. Table 6 shows that PLA's various functions are all fulfilled in different ways by other organisations, networks, publications and/or websites. From this analysis, it starts to become clear that PLA has only a very small niche, in the current landscape of communication products.

As one of the founding editors of PLA said, "if we were to start PLA today, it would be a Facebook page". PLA (RRA Notes) began as a central marketplace for the rapid sharing of ideas which was meant to be inclusive, international, accessible and current. Now the web and particularly blogs, e-mail networks and social media (such as Facebook), fulfil many, if not all, of these functions. Before the web, the PLA journal was one of the few places where genuine 'voices from the field' could be found; now these voices are everywhere on the web.

Table 6 - Attributes of PLA compared with other platforms

Attributes of PLA	Also fulfilled by:
- a central market-place of ideas and point of reference for participatory approaches and tools	- IDS Participation Methods website
- an academic journal for conceptual reflection by practitioners of participatory methodologies	- other journals such as DIP, Community Development Journal, IDS Bulletin and Action Research
- a place for sharing practical and immediate concerns	- Websites and blogs of other sub-sections of the participation community (e.g.iapad.org, reflectaction.org, www.communityledtotalsanitation.org etc.) - SDC Knowledge and Learning Processes website 'daretoshare.ch' - email list-serves of specialist networks of practitioners (e.g.Communications4Development

[55] See http://www.praxisindia.org/ and for 'The Workshop 2013' in Kerala, see http://www.theworkshop.in/
[56] See acronym list; Website URLs are not given for the sake of brevity.

	network) - Blogs on IDS website
- a way for IIED researchers to disseminate their research	- Many other IIED publications (e.g. Reflect and Act, Gatekeepers series, Shaping Sustainable Markets series, E&U journal) - IIED website and social media - Face-to-face events convened by IIED and partners, etc. - Academic journals
- a place for IIED's Southern partners to express themselves and disseminate their research	- As above - Via many other international NGOs and institutes' publications and websites (e.g. IDS' 'Participate' project and climate change websites, Cambridge University's e-journal 'Conservation Evidence', Wrenmedia's 'New Agriculturist') - Via Southern-based centres and institutes (e.g. Honeybee, India, RECOFTC Thailand etc.)
- a capacity-building project to enable better writing standards and documentation of participatory field experiences	- Writeshops organised by IIRR in Philippines - Practitioner based magazines that offer guidance to contributors, like Baobab, Joto Africa, *Boiling Point* - Various online and face-to-face trainings available to NGO staff to enhance writing skills (e.g. free online courses, tips and guides from Sci-Dev, LSE, etc.)
- somewhere to find genuine voices from the field	- Many different local NGO websites showcasing community-development work and field-based specialisms (e.g. Myrada, Honeybee, Praxis, IIRR, RECOFTC, etc.) - INGO websites & newsletters featuring Southern stories & experiences (*SPORE*, Sci-Dev, Both Ends, Oxfam, Wrenmedia etc.) - IIED's own specialist networks (e.g. Poverty and Conservation Learning Group, Shaping Sustainable Markets, http://researchandmedia.ning.com/ etc.) - Bloggers from all over the world (e.g. Global Voices.com)

Furthermore, reading habits have changed because of the internet. All our peer respondents (from North and South) and many of our interviewees emphasised how they now accessed most of the material about participation they needed on the web, chiefly by using Google Search and Scholar as their first steps to find it: "I don't know about PLA… We don't subscribe to journals as we used to in ODI, so I might come across a peer reviewed journal through a Google search or most of my reading comes through organisations through twitter feeds and much more grey literature; once I look for something, then other stuff emerges." – (researcher at ODI). One of the big drivers of these changes in reading habits for NGO employees is the sheer volume of relevant content on the web which means they are swamped with information and consequently feel they don't have time to read a journal like PLA any more "I will visit a website if some article is flagged-up by electronic commentary or an email list or correspondence because that's all I have time for. Even compared to

5 years ago I would have had 20 + websites on 'favourites' that I would scan on a regular basis – now that's all gone. International processes (i.e. on climate change) are producing more material than I can consume, so the question is what to read in the short time I have?" – (researcher, ODI).

The way most people read has now changed, particularly in the North, but increasingly in the South. Research into the way people read online digital text indicates that 'a typical 'screen-based reading behaviour' is emerging, characterized by more time spent on 'browsing and scanning, keyword spotting, one-time reading, non-linear reading and reading more selectively', while less time is spend on in-depth reading, and concentrated reading' (Cull, 2011 quoting Liu, 2005) . Mobile is coming increasingly to the fore: IIED's Communications department says "In 2012 we had 353,000 visits to our website: of these 20,000 were via mobile" - which means people read in increasingly short, bite-size pieces and are arguably less willing to read a long 200 page journal, like *PLA*.

So *PLA*, as a hard copy journal, which used to be the central, go-to place for the participation community, has to a great extent been crowded-out by all the other content on the web and the new reading habits of the mobile / digital age.

Most of *PLA*'s readers and subscribers are now able to access the internet. We know this because our reader survey used email to reach all those we polled (1,468 recipients) out of a total subscriber list of 2,500 (past and present), which shows that the majority of PLA's hard-copy subscribers is able to access the web. Downloaders are all online, of course, and indications are that numbers of downloaders of PLA are already outstripping print readers (the latest (PLA 66) print run is 1,000, whereas total downloads per issue seem to be around 1,600[57]). As one IIED senior researcher observed: "I think book-type publications aren't as useful as they used to be. People, like NGO workers in Bangladesh, read off their laptops or they print stuff off the web. Download speeds are OK now for Bengali NGOs and practitioners".

However, that is not to say that there is no longer a place for print, particularly for a journal aimed at field practitioners in the South. Many of the respondents to our reader survey made a point of saying how much they value the fact PLA is in print – and free of charge. What is more, a print journal is more likely to be shared, and possibly accorded higher status than an e-journal. It is noticeable that most practitioner-oriented newsletters/magazines such as *Baobab, Spore, Humanitarian Exchange, Boiling Point* and Practical Action's practitioner-focus journals such as *Waterlines* are all still available both in print and online. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that one of IIED's main competitors, ODI, has almost completely abandoned print:

"Our briefing papers are sometimes in print but a decision has been made that all our audience are able to access material online. Whether they like doing it is another matter, but we do assume they can." – communications department, ODI.

[57] Based on figures for PLA 59 for which the best data exists for total downloads

3.4 IIED's capacity to run a successor to PLA

In partnership with southern organisations, IIED co-produces cutting edge thinking with southern organisations. IIED's value is its global reach and capacity to synthesise big issues. The work through local partners is the strategic way forward for IIED 'keeps us relevant as a northern NGO' – (internal interview).

Major elements needed to run a successor to PLA effectively:

- Key individual to lead with leadership, credibility, legitimacy and ability to convene across IIED, people need to enjoy being with this individual and respect them
- Needs to be a serious action-research programme
- Needs to sit at a strategic level, so has a clear voice and influence at this level and also responds to strategic needs of IIED
- Needs to ensure internal practice is aligned with external actions
- Positioning: within a team or group builds up ownership and commitment to its continued support, more commitment to ensuring quality and credibility, more likely to have the intellectual power behind it to ensure it remains cutting-edge, identifying gaps and new frontiers; downside to linking a PLA successor to a group is it is more difficult to ensure it is understood and owned by the wider institute. However, this could be overcome with careful internal agreement over the final positioning of the PLA successor, as well as ensuring that whoever leads it is part of the senior management team
- Any successor to PLA needs to be able to draw from across the organisation, but currently there are no incentives for people to work across groups. As funding has become tighter and the need to deliver sharper, the idea of the objective teams in the current strategy that push people to deliver across the Institute has a much lower priority and is not really happening. Incentives are not there to do cross-cutting work, so it means issues like participation (and indeed gender) do not have a clear pathway to be addressed.

Table 7 (below) compares PLA with the publications of other organisations attached to communities of practice.

Table 7 - Alive and vibrant? Conditions for Success for Publications attached to Communities of Practice: PLA compared with other practitioner-focused publications

Publication and Network	Community of Practice	Conditions for Success							
		Topic is exciting / new/ filling a gap / niche	Strong intellectual and / or charismatic lead	Host organisation has strong convening power	Big personal &time committed by key people/editors/ contributors	Solid funding/ revenue source	Regional hubs / grounded personnel	Strong online presence	Regular face-to-face events & exchanges among COP
Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-57	Humanitarian practitioners	✓	✓	✓ (ODI)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Environment and Urbanization Journal, IIED / Sage http://eau.sagepub.com/	Human settlements researchers/ activists/NGOs	✓	✓	✓ (IIED / Sage)	✓	✓	?	✓	?
OM Ideas (series) http://www.outcomemapping.ca/index.php	Outcome Mapping Learning Community	✓	✓	✓ (IDRC)	✓	?	✓	no	✓
Participatory Learning and Action http://www.iied.org/participatory-learning-action	Practitioners of participatory methods	no	no	✓ (IIED)	✓	no	no	no	no
Haramata (now defunct)	Drylands practitioners	✓	✓	✓ (IIED)	✓	no	no	no	no

SECTION 4. Development of Options

4.1 Options

As outside reviewers, it is clear to us that PLA in its present form within IIED is no longer viable, even though, on balance, our evaluation of it is positive. We present four options for the future of PLA:

1. Discussions with interested outsiders
2. Orderly closure with legacy website
3. Active hand-over to IDS and incorporation into Participatory Methods web-platform (Active handover to IDS)
4. Re-launch and re-brand as 'Tactics and Tools'

Before detailing these options we would like to reiterate that this review should not have been left until after the PLA team were made redundant because this left it too late for all the options for its future to be weighed equally. This bad timing has effectively ruled out PLA continuing or reviving it in its present form. Nevertheless, it is clear that PLA has several assets, such as a good reader-base and a relatively well-known name and brand (see section 29 on 'asset value').

Option 1. Discussions with interested outsiders

We have received indications from several different organisations that they are interested in taking on PLA in some way, although none in its present form. So IIED's first option would be to have discussions with any or all of the following groups and individuals. This option would mainly require liaison between IIED and the key people below, so would have no significant cost implications. The downside would be to prolong the period of hiatus before a proper decision is reached about what IIED wants to do with PLA. On the other hand, such discussions would not necessarily preclude any of the other three options below.

Firstly, some members of PLA's editorial board at Edinburgh and Coventry Universities and some academics involved with the 'Action Research' journal are actively pursuing the idea of a journal on the topic of participation and are currently looking at formats and funding models. We were not told much more than this, other than that it would probably be an e-journal and would not have the same name. One of those involved told us: "We're already working on a business plan. It won't be the same – it will be a more virtual thing – plus 100 or so activist scholars. It's going to happen. Its demise at IIED means we're not doing a successor – but something a bit different…". Key contact: Tom Wakeford

Secondly, a PLA contributor involved with the Yunus Centre at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, has said that his centre would be 'very interested indeed in participating in PLA's future in some way'. This centre is concerned with social business and there are ideas to 'apply advances in the behavioural sciences to environment and development issues and to social business'. But, again, it is unclear exactly how PLA would be taken forward here. Key contact: Chris Eldridge

Thirdly, Practical Action Publishing has indicated it might be interested to take PLA on as a title in its portfolio and/or to market the back issues of PLA. A lot would depend on whether Practical Action

judged PLA presented a viable business case. No more details have been discussed than this. Key contact: Toby Milner.

Option 2. Orderly closure with legacy website

This option would close the PLA journal and come to the end of the line. It would involve accepting that it has done a fantastic job but that there is no longer a viable way of continuing to produce it. However, it would involve ensuring that PLA left an enduring legacy behind it, by means of a website with a fully searchable and downloadable archive, and an attractive pictorial history, testimonials and a timeline of all the PLA team has achieved over the years. Current board, subscribers, former editors and authors etc. would be contacted individually to inform them of the closure, notify them about the legacy website and request testimonials about its achievements. For comparison, Panos London, which closed recently, ensured it left behind an attractive 'Panos archive' website[58]. No partnerships with any outside agencies would be involved, except perhaps a sub-contract to a web-designer and some staff time devoted to the website from IIED's Communications and IT departments. Possible one-off cost of £15-£20,000.

Option 3. Active hand-over to IDS and incorporation into Participatory Methods web-platform

IDS has arguably always been the home of participation and its new website 'Participatory Methods' grew out of the former resource centre and is managed by Jane Stevens from the IDS Participation Power and Social Change team. It aims, in the words of Stevens' blog post, to 'provide much needed support to practitioners, development workers, activists and concerned individuals'[59]. This option would involve a renewed alliance between IIED and IDS to co-manage this website and develop it from being just a repository of tools and resources into a contemporary interactive web-platform. It is already well-designed and functional with its distinct web domain name[60] (not IDS's main site). It has four 'task areas': Plan, Monitor and Evaluate; Learn and Empower; Research and Analyse; Communicate; Facilitate. It could be developed to feature blog posts by staff and partners from both IIED and IDS (e.g. Robert Chambers and other 'names'). There would be a fully searchable archive of PLA's back-issues as well as the possibility of a space for new articles, a forum for members, social media links (e.g. a Twitter feed) and news from different participatory communities of practice around the world. The site could retain its present name 'Participatory Methods' but would be co-branded IIED and IDS. It could have PLA's archive and present logo appearing more prominently under 'Resources'. Present readers of PLA would be invited to sign up as members.

IDS currently has funding from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) for building and maintaining the website which is almost 3 days per week of Jane Stevens' time. Stevens is keen to make the site into more of an active community of practice, but this would require someone working full-time, to keep it a really dynamic hub. IIED could contribute perhaps 2 more paid staff days per week to begin with. SDC money is due to end in mid-2014, after which IIED and IDS would have to negotiate and

[58] See 'Welcome to Panos London's Archive Site' http://panos.org.uk/

[59] See http://participationpower.wordpress.com/2013/06/11/launching-participatory-methods-website-from-spare-room-to-the-world/

[60] http://www.participatorymethods.org

both look for funding for this full-time salary over the longer term. Optional membership fees could be solicited from individual and institutional members, but for core-funding SDC might be approached for another cycle. Office overheads, IT support, admin (for processing subscriptions), marketing and travel might add around £15,000 total per year, which IIED would share with IDS. Therefore total annual cost to IIED would be: First year £16,000 for 2-days staff time. Subsequent years, say £20,000 per year for half of one full time web-master's salary (the other half possibly covered by IDS) and £7,500 for half of office costs = £27,500 per year.

Option 4. Re-launch and re-brand as 'Tactics and Tools'

Output: Interactive web-platform and e-journal
Possible name: 'Tactics and Tools for Accountability'[61]
Focus: Sharing of tactics/process for Inclusive Green Growth
Content: practice papers, webinars, resources, forum, twitter feed, blogs, face-to-face events, e-journal, mobile app.
Vision: Tell the world about the tools and ideas to achieve inclusive green growth that IIED is supporting and developing. It would involve the sharing of honest descriptions of how people connect and detailed explanations of what can be done to influence and demand accountability and environmental rights. It could reflect on the different approaches used by IIED, for example learning groups, community fund management, legal empowerment and how these lead to change. It should challenge what works in terms of practices/approaches and share lessons. Other areas could include theories of change, democratic/accountable governance/decision-making. It would provide space for the partners' voices.
Rationale: Currently all the work in IIED is dissipated through many publication outlets, all are doing work on bringing quality investment to different sectors, forests, agriculture, business, cities all working with different audiences to distil this understanding. In different ways each group is working on the 'how' and not just describing the problem but working with partners on the detail of how to make change happen. This is still clearly IIED's niche and increasingly the question is being asked, with increasing pressures on natural resources, population increases as to how to meet local needs and protect public goods. People are looking for answers for how to do development.
Position within IIED: Placed as a genuinely IIED-wide resource, mandated to promote engagement as an IIED platform in the Comms Dept.
Outcome: Solidify IIED's identity as an institute that has these principles at its core, the e-journal would be Institute-wide publication focused on 'how things are done'.
Costs: estimate £58,000 per year for editorial, member management, admin, management and overheads, IT at 20 hours per week @ £15 per hour. Plus 1 face-to-face event per year at say £30,000. Total £88,000 per year

[61] Other names suggested to us were: 'Doing Local Development' ; , 'How' ; , 'Governance, Power Rights'; , Tactics and Tools (for political accountability); 'Participation for social justice'; 'The complete participation resource centre'; 'Wiki-participation' ; and 'Deep listening'.

Funding: It would be a cross-IIED platform and important element of IIED's brand for which all groups and project within IIED ear-mark funding. Praxis would be interested in co-ownership (Tom Thomas interview), and could help with fundraising. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has a funding stream on Connecting Communities[62] (one of PLA's board members has already discussed PLA with the head of this stream and she was very interested and thought it might be fundable). This fund supports a lot of UK work – very interested in communication between communities of practice – may be about capturing some of more academic side and working in UK.

Audiences: 1) new generation (the 'google generation' with no idea about participatory methods and principles – basics on 'how to', include twitter feed 2) experienced audience looking for how to apply ideas and practices to new contexts: climate change, M&E, policy processes, inclusive green economies.

Governance arrangements: Collective editorial board based on equals.

[62] See http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Pages/Connected-Communities.aspx

NOTES

NOTE 1 List of interviewees

Internal / IIED

1. Barbara Adolph - NRG
2. Holly Ashley - PLA
3. Steve Bass – SMG
4. Tom Biggs - Partnerships
5. Hernan Blanco – IIED International Fellow
6. Alistair Bradstock - Partnerships
7. Chris Busiinge – IIED International Fellow
8. Liz Carlile- Comms
9. Lorenzo Cotula - NRG
10. Clair Grant-Salmon - Comms
11. Nick Greenwood - HR
12. Ced Hesse - CC
13. Saleemul Huq - CC
14. Nicole Kenton - PLA
15. Duncan Macqueen - NRG
16. James Meyers – NRG
17. Simon Milledge - NRG
18. Angela Milligan – PLA
19. Elaine Morrison - NRG
20. Emily Polack - NRG
21. Dilys Roe - NRG
22. David Satterthwaite - HS
23. Krystyna Swiderska - NRG
24. Cecilia Tacoli - HS
25. Camilla Toulmin - Director
26. Chris Wilde – Finance
27. Emma Wilson – SM

External: close associates of PLA, former staff of IIED, Strategic Board members etc.

28. Jo Abbott - DFID
29. Robert Chambers – IDS Sussex University
30. Irene Guijt – independent practitioner
31. Vicky Johnson – Bournemouth University
32. Nazneen Kanji – Aga Khan Foundation UK
33. Bardolf Paul – independent consultant Indonesia
34. Michel Pimbert – Coventry University

35. Jules Pretty – Essex University
36. Patta Scott Villiers – IDS Sussex University
37. Peter Taylor – IDRC Canada
38. Tom Thomas - PRAXIS
39. John Thompson – IDS Sussex University

External interviewees

40. Geoff Barnard – Independent Communications Consultant
41. Neil Bird – ODI
42. Emily Brickell - ODI
43. Mary Ann Brocklesby – Independent Practitioner
44. Marlene Buchy – Independent Practitioner
45. Jane Clark - DFID
46. Ros Eyben – IDS Sussex University
47. Clementine Hill O'Connor -Postgraduate student
48. Andy Inglis – Independent Practitioner
49. Alison Norwood – IDS Publications
50. Peter O'Hara – Consultant participatory NRM.com
51. Nick Scott – ODI
52. Gill Shepherd – Independent Researcher
53. Susanna Thorp – Wrenmedia
54. Tom Wakeford – Edinburgh University
55. Anne Waters-Bayer – ETC Foundation, Netherlands
56. John Young – ODI

NOTE 2 Reader Surveys

Over the years reader surveys (see Table 8 below) have indicated that each copy of RRA/ PLA is shared on average between 5 and 8 times and most readers read each issue thoroughly. Considering that there has always been a high proportion of subscriptions going to libraries and resources centres (around a third of all subscriptions in 1996), the multiple times one copy is read is not surprising, and the numbers could possibly be even higher than estimated. But there will always be a wide margin of error, especially considering that it is often the keenest and most devoted readers who will answer reader surveys and say they share their copies extensively, thus possibly skewing the figures towards the high side.

Once free online downloads were introduced in 2010 it was no longer possible to make estimates about the reader numbers of one issue at a single point in time because each issue remains online indefinitely and tends to register a continuous trickle of downloads after an initial spike. So, for instance, PLA 60 (community-based adaption to climate change), registered 1,068 downloads in its first month of publication (Jan 2010), then 655 the following month and so on. It is not possible to tell whether these downloaders are all different individuals (i.e. one person may download the same issue more than once), nor is it possible to tell how much of each issue is actually read, as opposed to skimmed or just searched for key words, nor how much it is shared once printed off. But we do know that the climate change issue – probably the series' most popular one – was downloaded 8,450 times over the first year of its publication (Jan 2010 – Feb 2011). If we add hard copy subscribers (1,775) and assume each of these copies is shared 5 times, that gives a total estimated readership of 17,325 for PLA 60 in 2010. Since then it continued to be downloaded regularly and had registered 13,000 full-issue downloads between Jan 2010 and November 2012 (Adolph, 2012)[1]

Those audience members who browse the IIED website and view the PLA pages can also be counted – for instance we know that between 3 May 2011 to 6 May 2012, the PLA section of the website was visited 12,165 times – but, again, it is impossible to tell whether or not these were additional readers over and above regular print subscribers, whether they were separate individuals (or the same people returning more than once), or how much of PLA content these individuals actually read online.

Table 8 (below) shows that in the past IIED staff have mainly used a working estimate of 10,000 readers per issue, although one former editor mentioned his working estimate was 25,000 and one reader-survey by the PLA team in 2006 made an extrapolation of 70,000 readers for PLA 54. It is a summary of findings from all the PLA reader surveys that have ever been done and shows that Southern readers are in the majority for hard copies of PLA.

Table 8 - Summary of findings from all PLA reader surveys since 1991

Date of reader survey	Reader types	Estimated reader numbers (extrapolated, based on self-reported sharing of copies by recipients)	Circulation numbers and locations: South or North (based on actual subscription figures/print-run/ downloads)			Numbers of respondents out of number of people surveyed (with percentage of respondents)
		Total readers (est.)	South	North	Total subs	
1st reader survey RRA Notes 14, 1991	Question not asked	6,590	727 (58%)	529 (42%)	1,256	185 / 850 (22% response rate)
2nd reader survey PLA Notes 26, 1996	Question not asked	7,000	76%	24%	2,341	154 / 2,341 (6.5 % response rate)
3rd reader survey PLA Notes 40, 2001	"34% were from NGOs, 24% University/Research Institutes; 16% non-OECD Governmental organisations; 9% Community based-organisations; 4% OECD Governmental organisations."	10,000 "39% of respondents share… If 39% of the entire mailing list shared their copy of PLA Notes with 10 or more people, this alone would lead to a potential readership of more than 10,000."	87%	13%	2,570	352 / 2,032 (18% response rate)
4th reader survey PLA 55, 2006	"Nearly half our survey respondents work for non-governmental organisations. Most participants are development practitioners, with 38.7% working as participatory development practitioners. After this, the next highest results were for the development researcher and development specialist categories."	70,000 "Ninety-four people responded … And based on their answers, we estimate that as many as 1,900 other readers could have access to those 94 copies of the special issue. Over 3,500 copies were distributed. So if these responses are indicative, that could amount to as many as 70,000 extra readers!"	Not asked	Not asked	3,500	124 / 1,771 Online survey (7% response rate)
IIED Analysis of top downloads 2009 (PLA 59)	Not analysed	Not estimated	700 (48%)	918 (62%)	PLA 59: total downloads 1,618 Plus 2,270 print run Plus 2,000 CD roms	Not a survey
IIED Analysis of top downloads 2009 (PLA 60)	Not analysed	Not estimated	1903 (49%)	1906 (51%)	PLA 60: total downloads 3,809 and total print run 1,775	Not a survey

External reader survey done for this review, June 2013	93.9% of respondents described themselves as practitioners of participatory methods. The largest group of respondents were from NGOs (28.5%) followed by people from universities (18%), then from intergovernmental organisations (13.7%), then self-employed (12.5%).	13,000 per issue assuming each hard copy is shared on average 5 times and each download is just read by one reader (based on figs for PLA 59 excluding CD Rom).			Print run for PLA 66: 1000	267 / 1,240 (21.5%)

NOTE 3 Funding and Sponsors

Twenty-eight different sponsors have contributed to PLA at different times, including several relatively large grants from Plan International (£59,739 contributed in 2011 and 2012), CTA Wageningen (£47,302 contributed between 2007 and 2013), IDS Sussex University (£33,838 since 2003) and from collaborations with other universities such as Edinburgh and Newcastle. In 2012, enough outside sponsors were found to cover half (50%) of all PLA's costs; although this was unusual, the average being about 36% coverage from outside sponsors over the last eight years.

This sponsorship has mainly been spent on 'extras' like write-shops, translations, and other products such as CD-Roms but they have not covered the core costs for the staff and basic design, printing and distribution. In terms of income, very little revenue comes in from subscriptions (for example £4,108 from subs and sales in 2012 and £3,247 in 2011). This is mainly because it has always been part of the journal's ethos to offer free access to Southern-based readers.

List of Sponsors since 1998

1. ACTION AID
2. CIFOR
3. COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT
4. DEPT. ENVIRON, FOOD& RURAL AFFAIRS
5. DEV'L OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
6. DFID AG Grant
7. EURO. ASSOC. DEV. RES. TRAIN.
8. European Association of Development
9. FIRST PEOPLES WORLDWIDE
10. GTZ
11. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF AFRICA CO
12. INSTITUTE DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
13. INSTITUTE OF INTER'L EDUCATION
14. INT WATER & SANITATION CENTRE
15. INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICUL
16. ITC
17. KHANYA-AICDD
18. ORGANISATION OF AFRICA UNITY
19. OXFAM
20. Plan International Inc
21. Tech Ctr for Agr & Rural Co-op (CTA)
22. THE CHRISTENSEN FUND
23. UNESCO
24. UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
25. UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE
26. USE THE BIG LOTTERY FUND
27. WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE UK
28. WORLDWIDE FUND FOR NATURE

NOTE 4 PLA Writeshops

Table 9 - Date, Place and Theme of PLA Writeshops.

Date of writeshops	Place	Theme
1 week December 2011	Nairobi	Young Citizens – PLA 64
1 week October 2010	Nairobi	Tales of Shit – PLA 61
March 2010 & September 2011 (two 2-day events)	London	How wide are the ripples? PLA 63
1 day May 2006	Pretoria	Community Conservation – PLA 55
1 week July 2004	Nairobi	Civil Society - PLA 41
2 days April 2004	IDS, Sussex University	Anniversary general issue - PLA 50

NOTE 5 Examples of online guidance / handbooks for writers

Examples of online guidance / handbooks for writers

Online handbooks for NGOs for writing case-studies, reports etc. are available for http://www.eldtraining.com, also through networklearning.org www.reportingskills.org

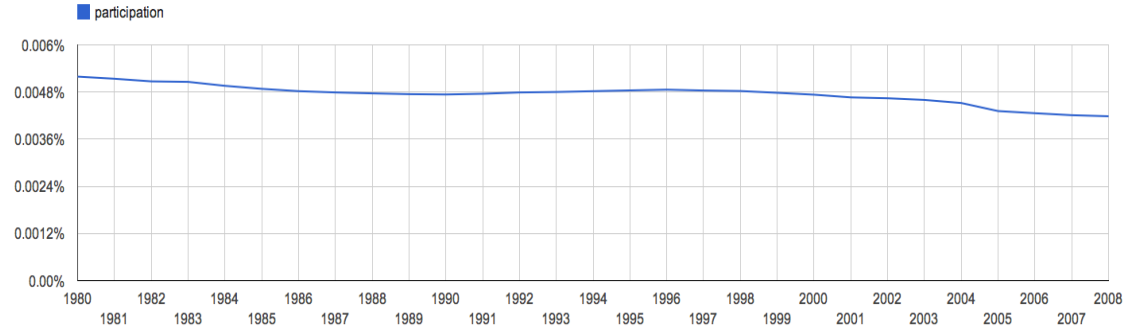
Tips for good academic writing are available on many websites – see for example http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/14/stylish-academic-writing/

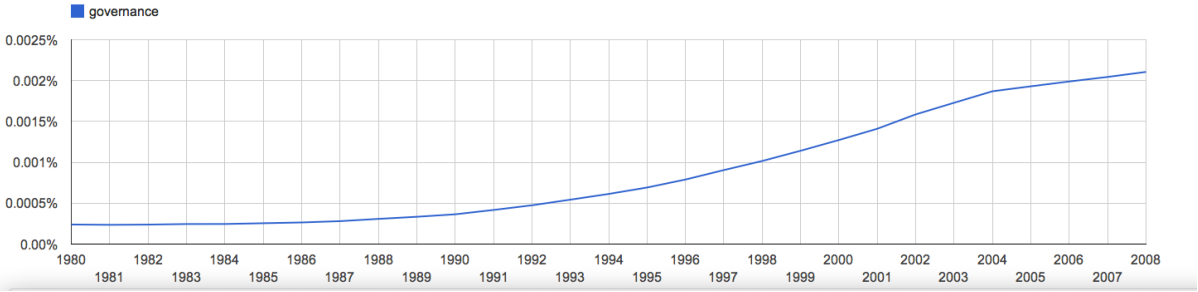
Sci-Dev website contains many tips and links about communicating technical and scientific subjects to a wider audience for example: http://www.scidev.net/global/journalism/practical-guide/how-to-write-about-your-science.html

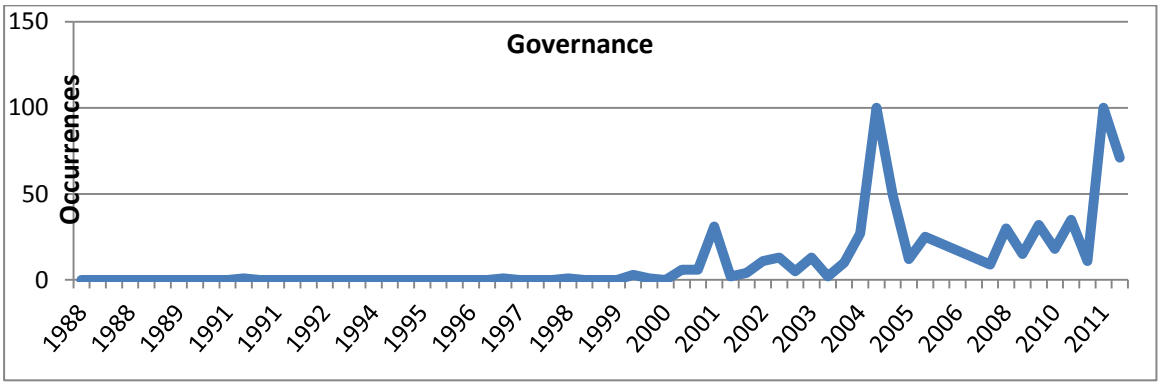
The World Federation of Science journalists has free online course in science journalism, including writing skills http://www.wfsj.org/course/pdf/en/e04.pdf

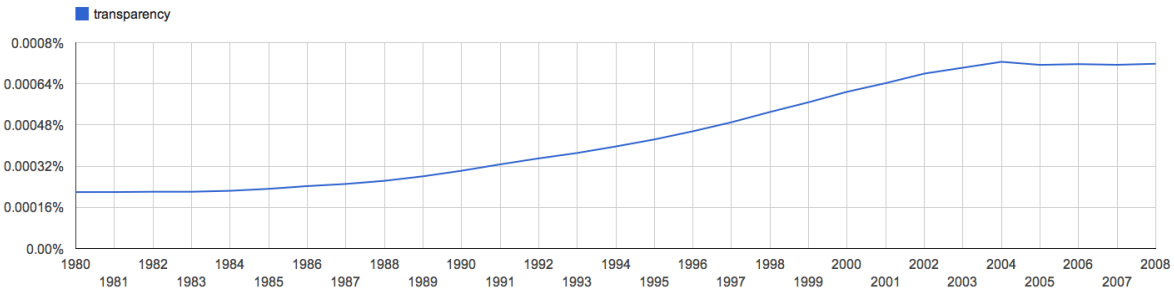
IIED's Mike Shanahan has set up an online network called http://researchandmedia.ning.com/ which 'brings people together to improve communication of research findings' and includes tips on writing, and notices of face-to-face training events for writers around the world.

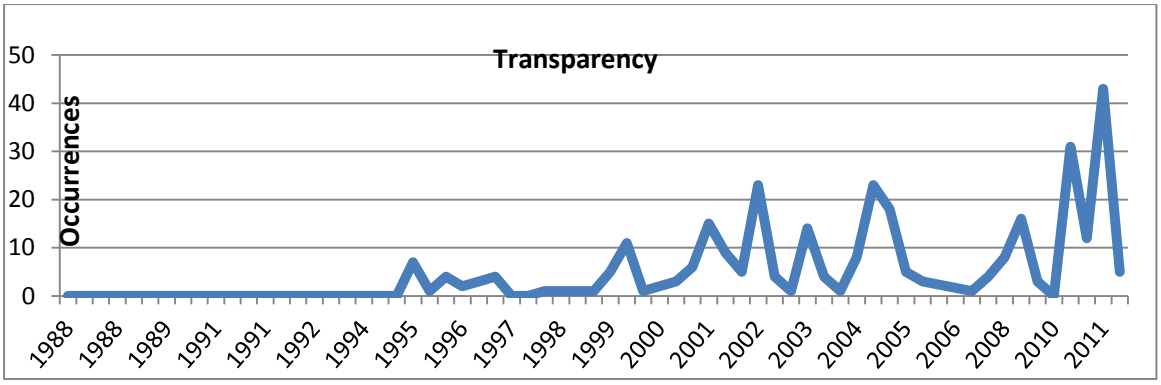
NOTE 6 Comparisons between Google Ngrams and word occurrence in RRA Notes/PLA







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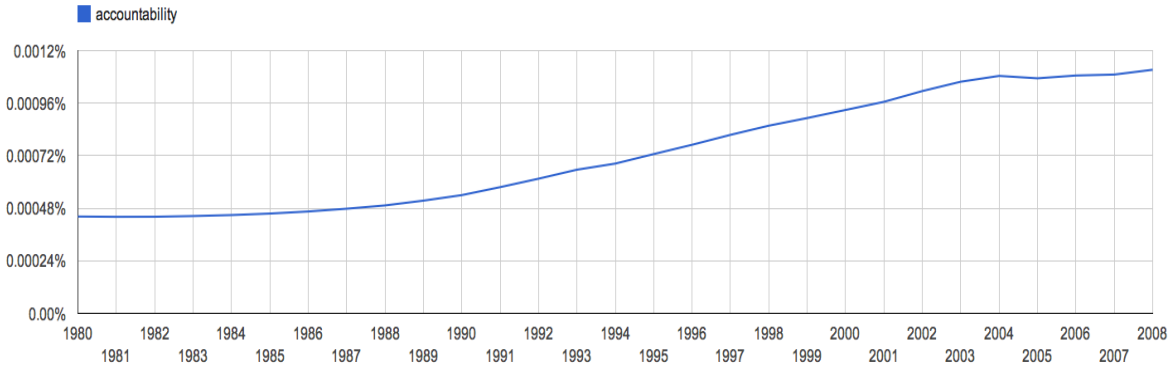
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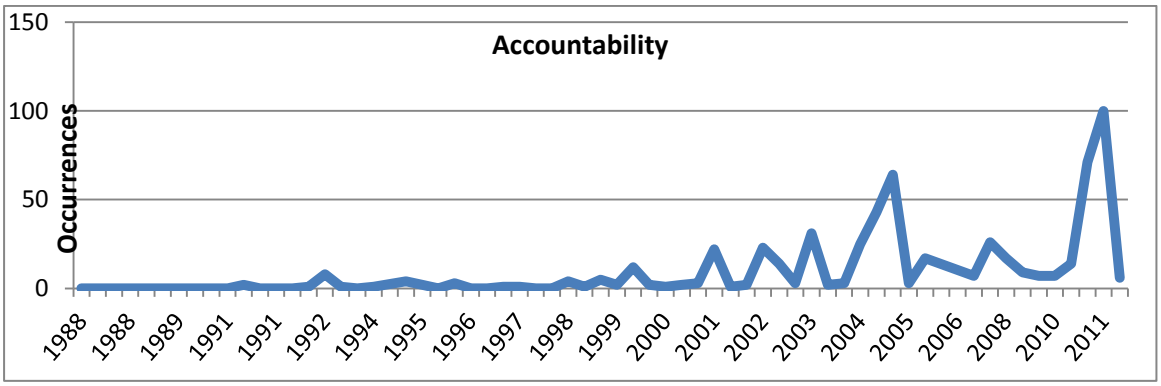
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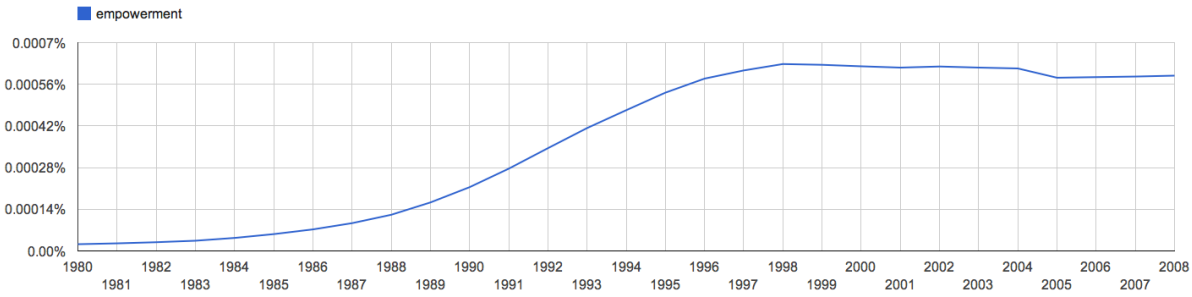
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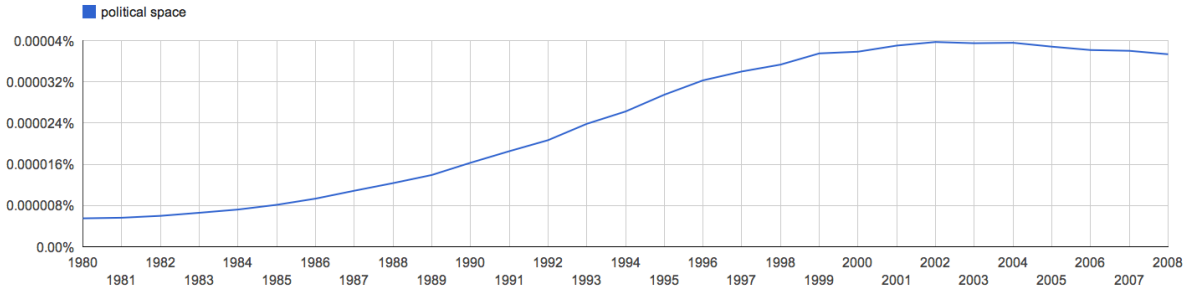
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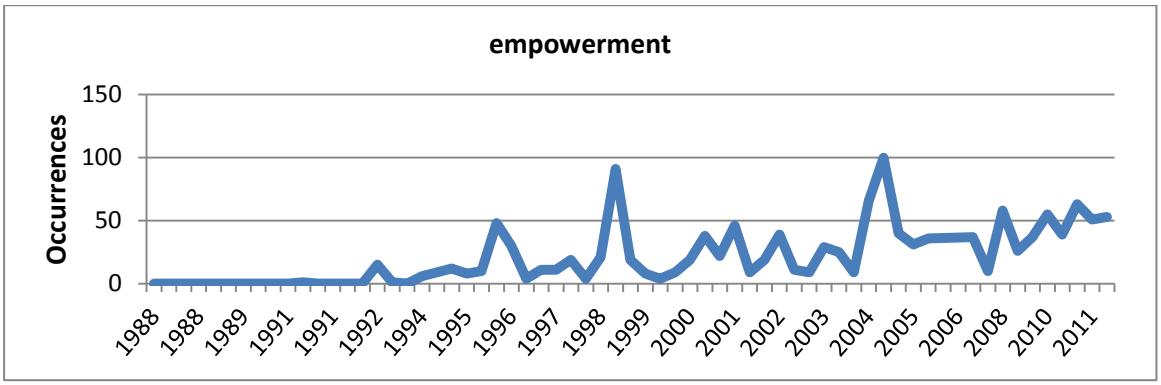
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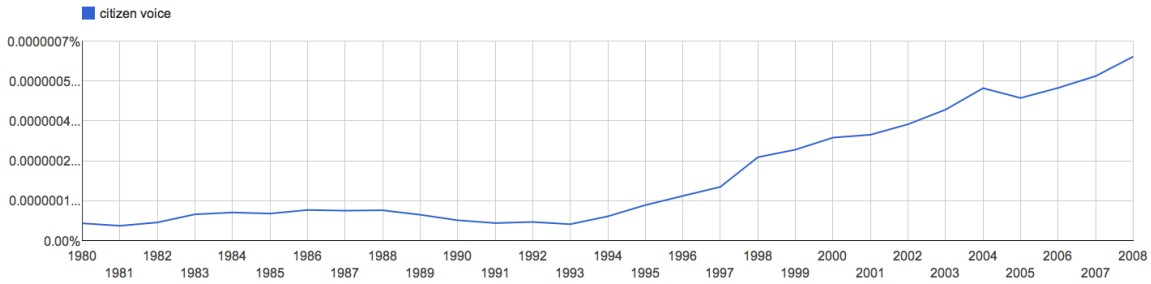
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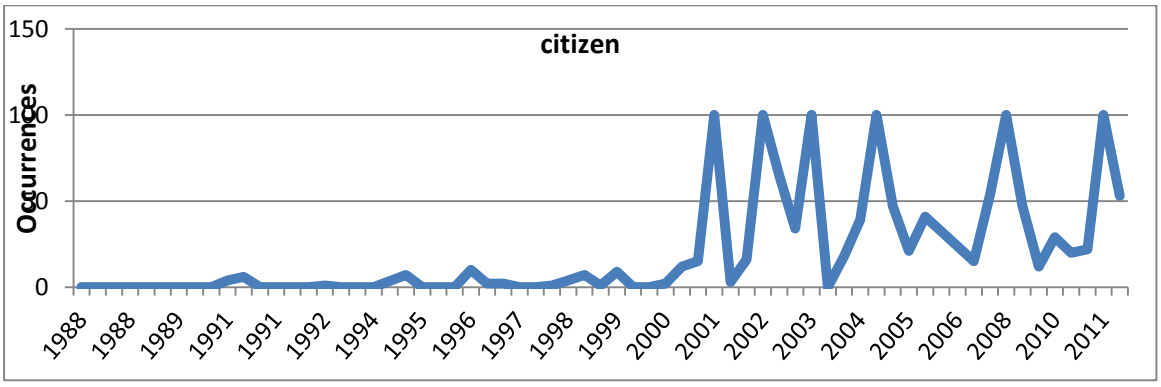
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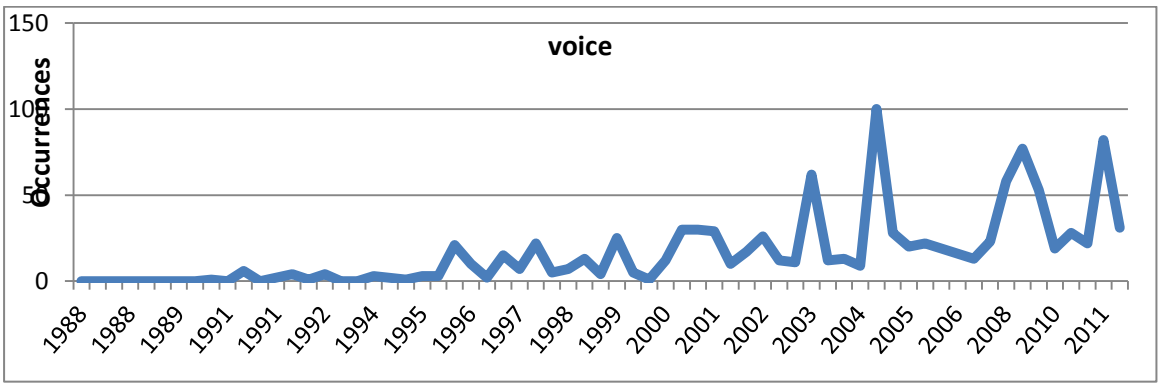
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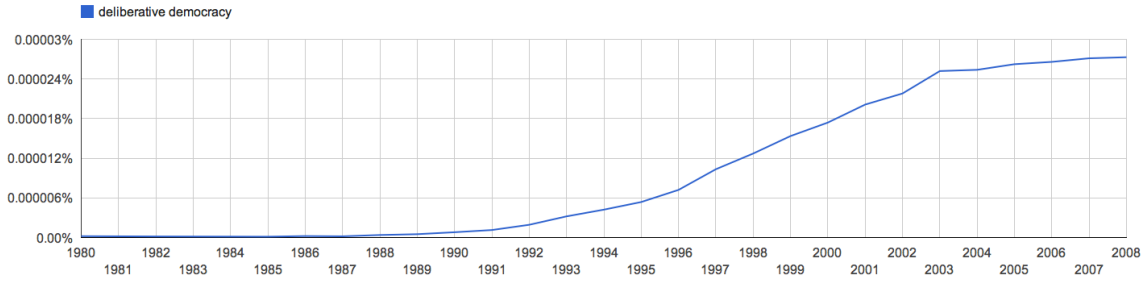
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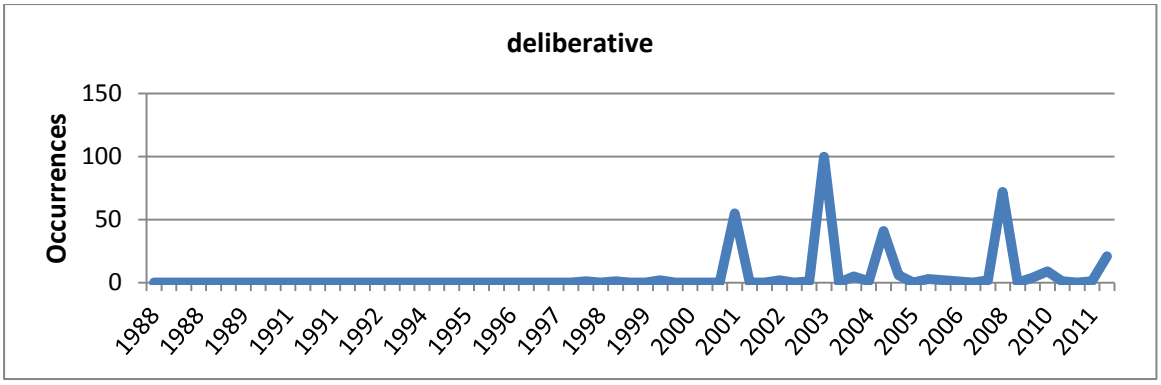
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NOTE 7 Cost comparisons with other publications

The following table shows cost comparisons between PLA and *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, *Spore* and *Boiling Point*, published respectively by the Humanitarian Practice Network of ODI, by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in The Netherlands, and by the Household Energy Network (HEDON) in the UK.

Table 10 - Comparisons between PLA journal and other NGO publications of a similar type.

Publication	Organisation	Type of publication Journal/ magazine /	Target audience	Frequency	Length per issue approx.	No/ of hard copies per issue (print-run)	No. of downloads per issue (typical)	No. of readers per issue (approx.)	Costs 2012 Per year
PLA http://www.iied.org/pla	IIED	Informal journal – print and download - free of charge	Practitioners & researchers	Twice a year	200 pp	2,000	4,077	13,000	£ 130,000
Humanitarian Exchange http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine	ODI	Magazine – print and download – free of charge	Humanitarian practitioners	Four times a year	30 pp	2,287 free	1,400	c.12,835	£ 88,000
SPORE http://*Spore*.cta.int/en/	CTA	Magazine – print and download – free of charge	'the magazine for agricultural and rural development in ACP countries'	Six issues per year	24 pp	?	?	5,000	c. £102,000 for Eng. Version only
Boiling Point http://www.hedon.info/View+issue&itemId=12254	Household Energy Network (UK)	Peer-reviewed informal journal – print and download – free of charge	'a practitioner's journal for those working with household energy and stoves'.	Four times a year	50pp	Total subscribers 2000	5,000 unique page views per year	'more than 11,000'	£34,000

NOTE 8 Quotes on ways PLA is used

Illustrations and quotes on the various ways readers use the journal.

1 – **PLA as a resource-material or 'Text-book'**: "My team do look at it [Climate Change edition], they regard it almost like a text book. I say that it is required reading for new staff" (internal interview).

"PLA is really a significant resource material... We use the PLA in our advocacy programs and a reference material in our public library (indigenous mountain people of the northern Philippines)".(Readers' Survey - Philippines, Community-based organisation)

2-**PLA as source of inspiration and 'spreading the word'**: "It has become a key publication for us to disseminate at our workshops and at international conferences. Very timely as it captured CLTS in Africa at a moment of great progress being made. I think people particularly appreciated the multi-media CD Rom with the French translation, additional resources and videos- easy to carry and share due to the format and great to have so many resources together." - Petra Bongartz, IDS, PLA 61: Tales of shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa (October 2010). "It encourages the spread of good practice" – Tom Wakeford (Adolph, 2012)

"The thoughts and the tools are very helpful to those of us in the field and are making a difference. You should really proud of what you are doing specially for those of us in the South! Thank you!" our reader survey" (Ethiopia, self-employed)

"[There is] Something very important about valuing experience of people actually doing it, trying to make development projects work at community level." (UK, self-employed)

"Living in a country where participation is either misunderstood or miscarried, reading through PLA case studies and other articles gave me an extra push to keep on trying as a participation practitioner, and pleanty of knowledge to enrich my work.Other times I've been leafing through the copies just for my own pleasure, not looking for something particular." Reader survey (Greece, self-employed)

3- **PLA as a Training tool** "good material for education and re-use (e.g. in the PGIS TK and in the Web 2.0 learning Opportunities. For example, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation EU-ACP (CTA), in collaboration with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and UN/ECLAC, hosted a 5-day Web 2.0 Learning Opportunity **05-10 March 2012"**. – Giacomo Rambaldi (Adolph review)

"PLA is important for the work I do, especially as a trainer working with extension officers and rural communities."– reader survey (Zambia, INGO)

"I use extracts for a methods module for masters students once a year, drawing on more than one issue...." reader survey (South Africa, University)

"I've loved PLA since I came in contact with it, I've learned a great deal from it, I've used a lot in my trainings." (Colombia, Self-employed trainer)

"It helped in 2 of my students getting a Master degree on rural ecology in the Egyptian Delta and one of them got Ph.D. and had a full brilliant career as trainer of trainers in the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture." – reader survey (Egypt, University)

"PLA is the most practice oriented journal which I am using in my teaching- the subjects such as "Agricultural extension communication" , "Agricultural knowledge and information system AKIS" and "agricultural policies" to present tools, cases to my students and even for training purposes in my community service tasks.whenever I receive, I am putting my copies for some days in our school mini library for my colleagues to have look at it." – reader survey (Ethiopia, University)

"it is listed is on the "Notes for Workshops" handout that Robert Chambers gives all the students who attend his workshops (these are big and involve most of the students from most of the courses across IDS)." (external interview IDS)

4- **PLA as a forum for documenting work in the field** and to either get it noticed for the first time or to bring it to a wider audience

" It's unique in bringing the field experience of practitioners it would be a great loss to for many in the field especially in the south if this magazine disappears" – our reader survey (Egypt, private sector consultant)

"I think there is a place for a practitioners journal of this kind - there are new initiatives and ideas constantly evolving and they need to be shared in a simple, easy to digest form." (UK, self-employed)

5- **As a vehicle for building capacity** of its contributors (dealt with under 2.1.8 above):

6- **Used by members of specific communities of practice** to help strengthen their existing networks – for example CLTS practitioners: " I think the issue captured some of the key issues for CLTS in Africa very well and has therefore contributed to the debate and to the knowledge base. It also brought together a variety of writers from different organisations and countries and thus helped to make some linkages between different actors." - Guest editor Petra Bongartz, IDS, PLA 61: Tales of shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa (October 2010).

7- **Used in the field as a source of practical tools and techniques** – "I work with people as a leader, trainer and practitioner, [the] ideas I get from PLA reach far and wide it is a special publication that has shaped my practice over years" readers survey, Zambia

" I am a field level worker promoting Developmental activities in a community Driven Development project in Tamilnadu India. I share all the views of PLA notes with my fellow counterparts. While imparting training the notes and examples are very useful." – reader survey

"I have learnt a lot and gained personal benefit from the articles. My training delivery has improved by adapting the new methods in the PLA series. Its wonderful opportunity for me." – reader survey (Sri-Lanka, INGO)

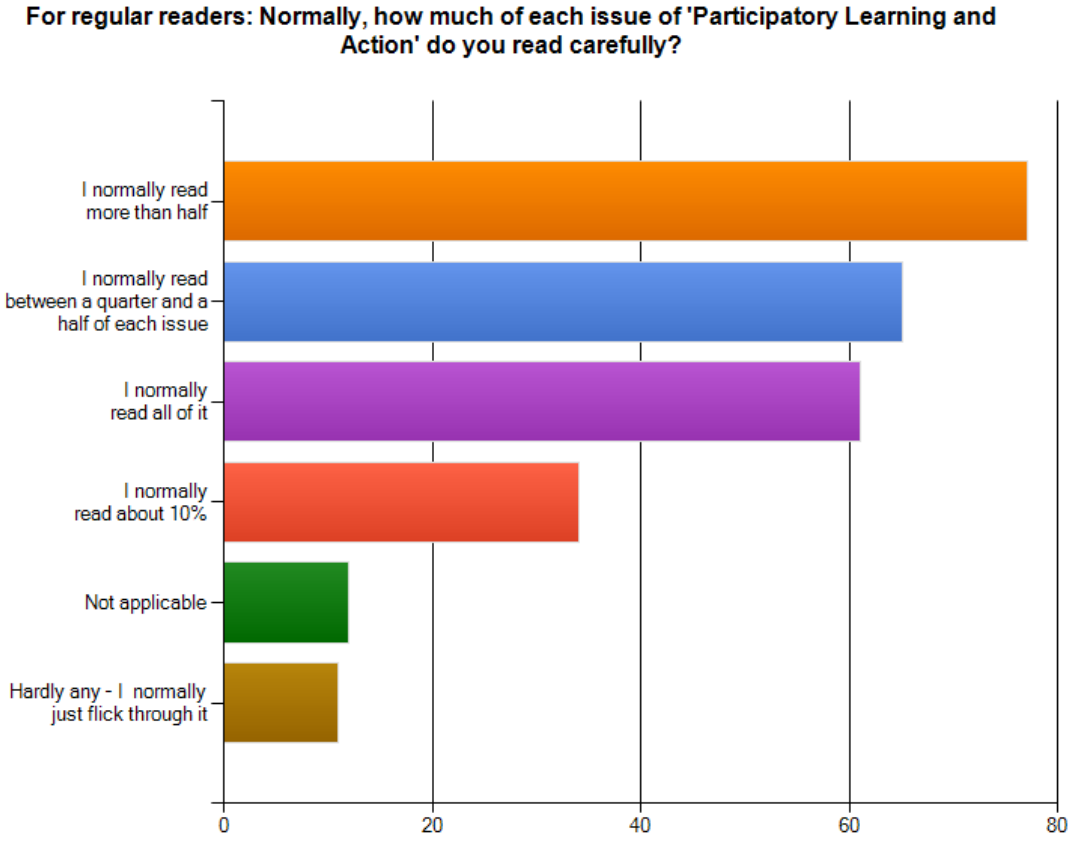
"[I use it] as a source of evidence and examples for particular concepts, methodologies and tools" - reader survey (Iran, NGO)

8- **PLA is cited by students, researchers and campaigners** as a means to add weight to a cause and to back-up their arguments:

" I refer regularly to PLA Notes and the participation group at IDS when addressing these issues with UN staff etc, to explain that there is a whole other academic and practical world out there and that "participation" is a fundamental part of good effective practice." – member of ed. board

NOTE 9 How much of each issue is read

Figure 20 - Amount of each issue of PLA that readers read (Reader Survey June 2013)



NOTE 10 Synthesis of major themes covered by PLA

Table 11 - Synthesis of major themes covered by PLA

Theme	Years	Editions
Tools and case studies	1988-1991 1999 2005 2006 2007	1-10, 12-15, 17,18 36 52 54 56
Health	1992 1995 2000	16 23 37
Fisheries	1997	30
Livestock	1994 2002	20 45
Biodiversity/ Conservation	2006 2012	55 65
Climate change	2009	60
Water and sanitation	1999 2010	35 61
Children/youth	1996 2001 2011	25 42 64
Citizens, local governance, planning, poverty	1991 2000 2001 2002 2002 2004 2005 2008 2011	11 38 40 43 44 49 51 58 62
Policy and institutionalisation	1997 2003 2006 2007 2011	27 46 53 57 62
Communications	1997 2000 2009	29 39 59
Training	1994 2001 2003	19 41 48
Urban	1994	21
Market small business	1998	33
Conceptual base and critique of participatory processes	1995 1998 2004	22 24 32 50
Monitoring, learning	1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 2003	26 28 31 34 47

The following four bar graphs illustrate the coverage of countries by articles in PLA over the last 25 years.

Figure 21 - PLA country coverage Asia and Pacific

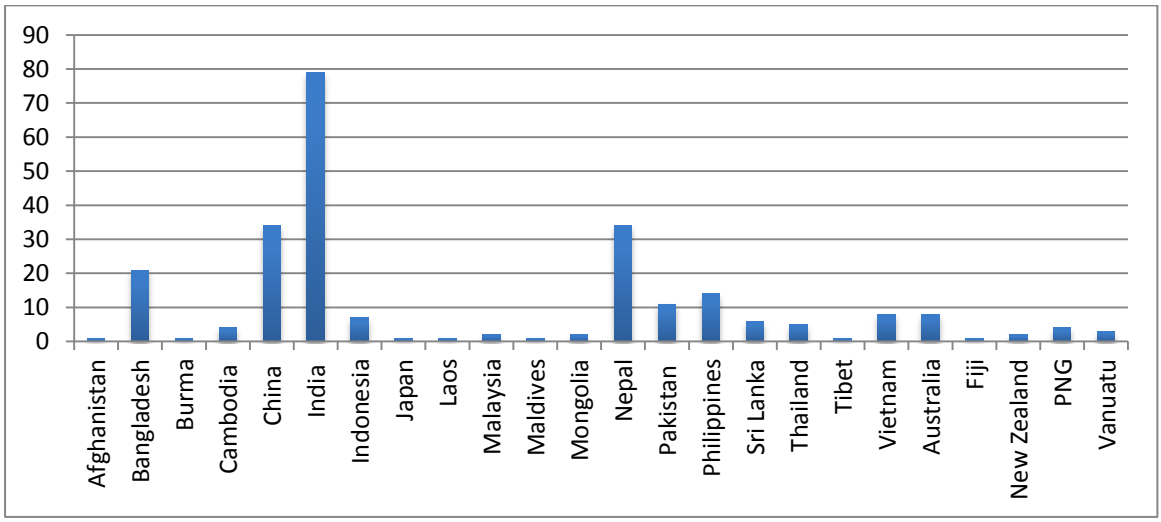


Figure 22 - PLA country coverage Africa

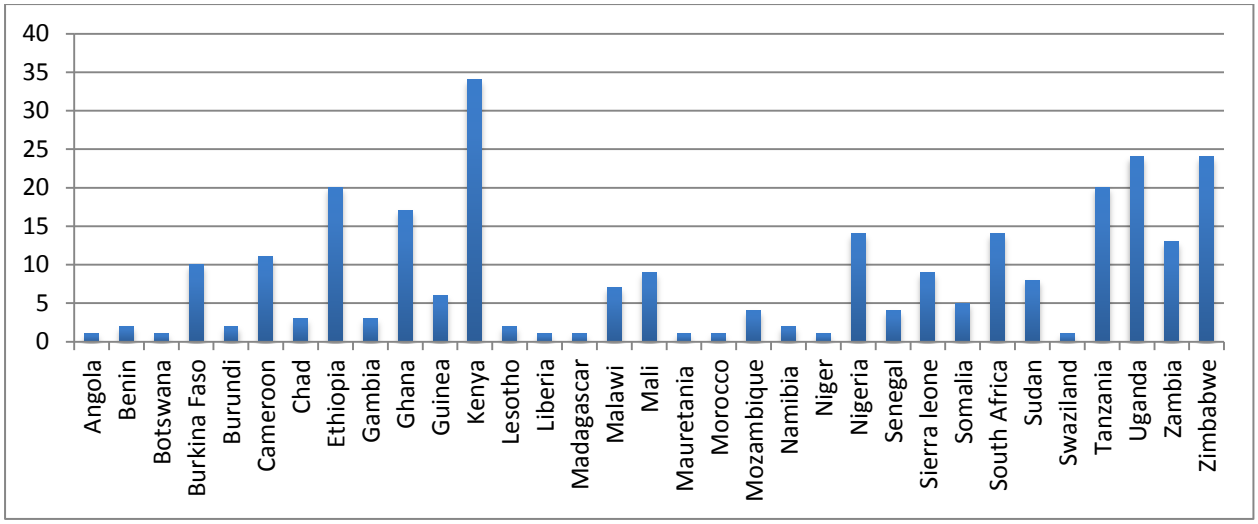


Figure 23 - PLA country coverage Europe and Middle East

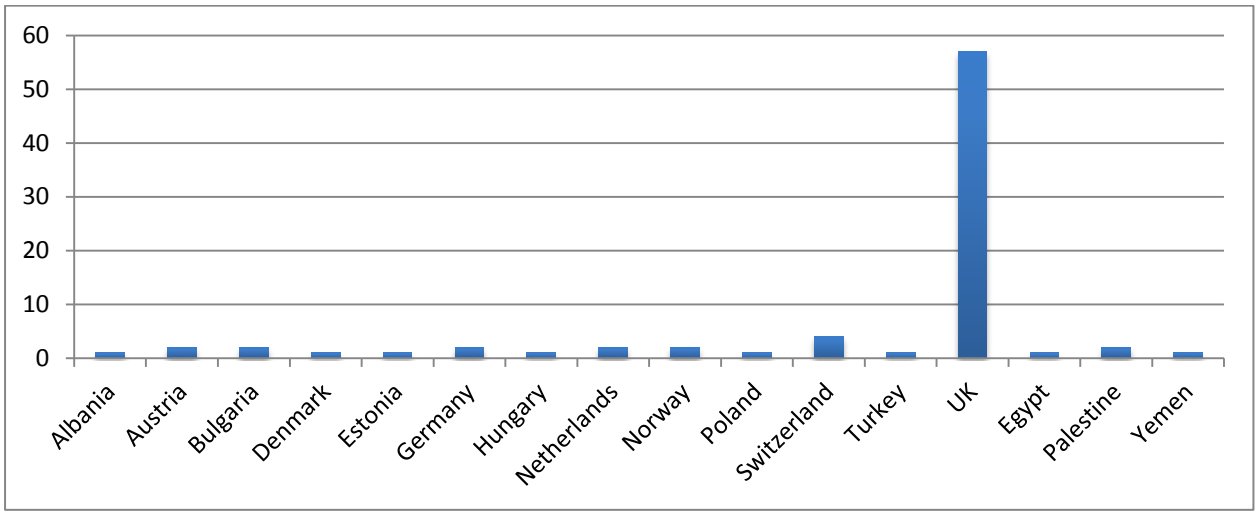
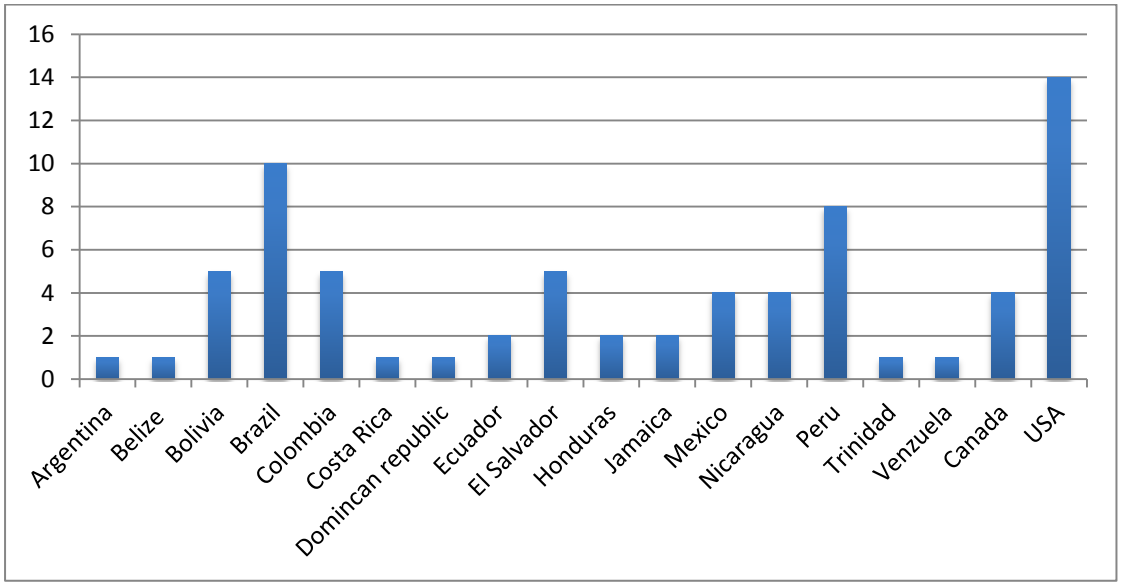


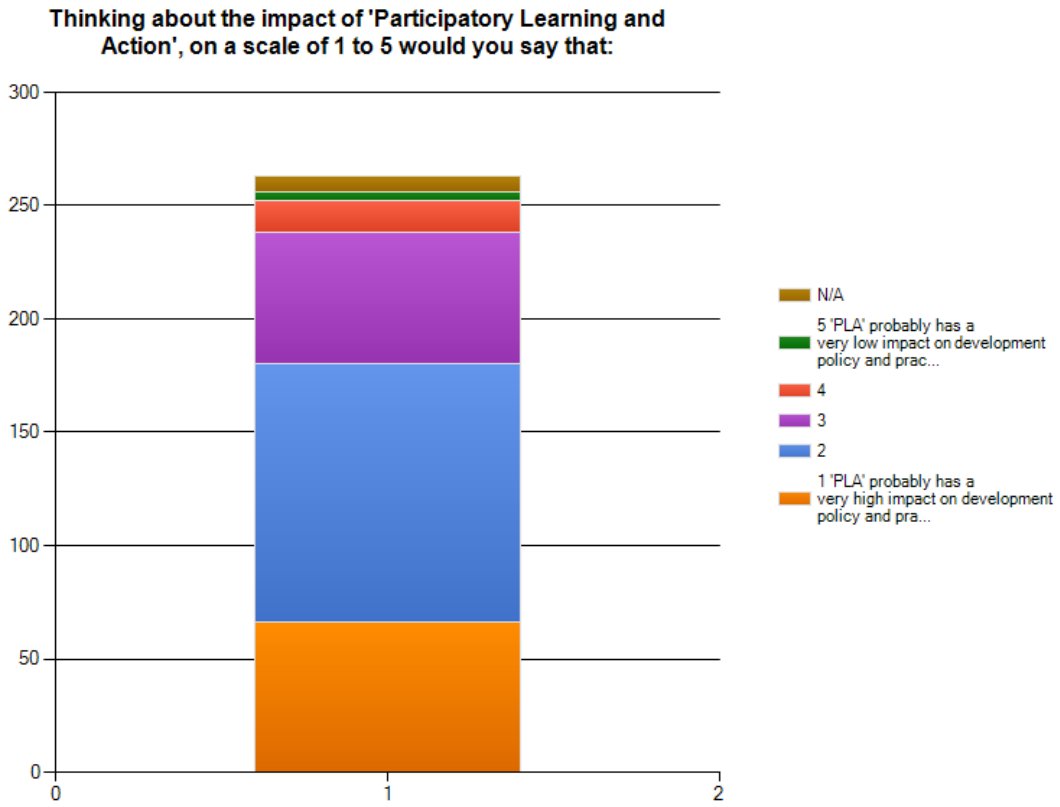
Figure 24 - PLA country coverage Caribbean, North and South America



NOTE 11 Readers' perceptions of the extent of PLA's impact

Fig. 25 Readers' perceptions of the extent of PLA's impact on policy and practice (from Readers Survey, June 2013, n=263) which asked readers to rate the extent of influence on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low):

Figure 25 - Readers' perceptions of the extent of PLA's impact



NOTE 12 - Essay on PLA and Changing Practices and Contexts

Changing arenas for development practice

In a context of major global shifts in development financing, the role of IIED, the issues it focuses on, the partnerships it makes and any form of communication needs to be carefully thought through. As a recent report from Greenhill and Prizzon (2012) on trends in development finance show (see box), the traditional forms of influence through development finance are now highly challenged by different flows of finance. This means that the usual routes for engagement by development practitioners are far less likely to be influential. Given this context what does it mean for any future communications on participatory type processes? Who are the audiences and how are they best reached? In this Annex we consider the areas of contemporary debate that are framing the context for sustainable development and the possible implications for future work and communications by IIED drawing on the best practice and principles from PLA. The table below describes the key events that surrounded the development of PLA as a practice and publication, including changes in IIED's partner IDS during this period and changes in the sustainable development discourse.

Conclusions on Financing for Development

- Developing and emerging economies have been driving global growth over the past decade and it is this, not aid, that has been the main driver of poverty reduction at a global level
- Developing countries have also been expanding domestic tax revenues at a rapid rate, giving much more scope for development to be funded domestically. The average tax ratio rose from 23% of GDP in 2000 to nearly 29% in 2011.
- All the main sources of development finance considered in this paper have been expanding rapidly over the past decade. Foreign direct investment inflows and workers' remittances tripled in nominal terms between 2001 and 2010; philanthropic funding more than tripled between 2003 and 2009.
- The relative importance of official aid vis-à-vis other forms of finance has declined. In middle income countries, aid/GDP ratios have nearly halved during the 2000s, whereas tax revenues, FDI and workers' remittances have all seen an upward trend.
- These trends are very uneven across countries, with private cross-border flows heavily concentrated in middle income countries, whereas low-income countries remain much more dependent on aid
- While aid is now under pressure, there has been rapid growth in new 'aid-like' forms of development finance, which are not classified as aid but nevertheless have a public interest purpose. This includes South–South cooperation, philanthropy and other private development assistance and climate finance. All these flows have been growing at rapid rates over the past decade and are likely to continue to do so in future

Source summary of conclusions from Duncan Green blog (accessed August 2013)

Table 12 - Timeline of key events in participation and sustainable development: 1972-2013

Year	Event	Key actors and output
1972	International Institute for Environment and Development renamed Highly influential book Only one Earth published by Rene Dubos and Barbara Ward	Founded by Barbara Ward and developed as a highly influential centre for international research and practice on issues of sustainable development
1980s 1983	Changing development paradigm	Chambers 1983 Rural Development: Putting the Last First
1980s 1987	Sustainable rural livelihoods	Swaminathan 1987 Food 2000: global policies for sustainable agriculture, report to the World Commission on Environment and Development
1985	Social Forestry Network (later known as Rural Development Forestry network) established at Overseas Development Institute London	Strongly focused on participatory practices in forestry and promoted community-based resource management
1987	Only One Earth: conference on sustainable development	Richard Sandbrook Chambers 1987 Sustainable rural livelihoods: a strategy for people, environment and development
	Our Common Future (Brundtland Report World Commission on Environment and Development	Popularised term sustainable development
	IIED RRA training Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation	Gordon Conway, Jules Pretty, John Thompson
1988	Start of RRA Notes	Amalgam of informal partnership between IIED and IDS – key players Gordon Conway, Robert Chambers, Jules Pretty
1989	IIED publishes Blueprint for a Green Economy	Establishing basis for current debates on green growth
	World Bank Participation Learning Group established	Institutionalisation of participation into multilateral programme practice
1991	Gender issues emerging in participation practice	Noted in RRA Notes 12 Mick Howe
	Use of participatory practice for local level planning	RRA Notes 11 IIED and University of Birmingham
1992	UNCED Rio Earth Summit Agenda 21 focus on local participatory community processes, identification of importance of children and youth as major group	Impetus to participation work of IIED and IDS as the weak outcomes from the Earth Summit prompted IIED and others to expand local level working with partners to empower local groups to claim natural resources
	Working definition for sustainable livelihoods	Conway and Chambers IDS working paper
1993	Emergence of REFLECT built on Freirean concepts	ActionAid
	World Bank and Participation	Formal position of WB on participation
1994	UN International conference on population and development	Led to interest in participation by bilateral aid agencies By this time participatory rural appraisal methods were being used in 120 countries
	A Voice for the Excluded: popular participation in development – utopia or necessity	Culmination of an UNRISD research programme on popular participation that started in the 1970s.
1995	World Summit for Social	Clear commitment to eradicate absolute poverty

	Development	
	Formation of RCPLA	John Thompson funding for south-south immersion visits that stimulated the formation of the network, 35 networks set up
	Participatory Learning and Action: a trainer's guide	Jules Pretty This influential training guide is still in demand
1995	Power and Participatory Development: theory and practice.	This book, edited by Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, is an early indication of the level of understanding of power relations affecting participation; it includes chapters by key individuals involved in the PLA work at IIED including Jules Pretty and Ian Scoones
1996	Depoliticising development: the uses and abuses of participation. Development in Practice pp6-15	Highly influential article by Sarah White which systematically challenged the weak understanding of power and politics and that participation is a political issue
1998	Series of highly influential books critiquing and reflecting on participatory practice	The Myth of Community: gender issues in participatory development, Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (eds) Whose Voice? Participatory research and policy change Jeremy Holland with James Blackburn (eds) Who changes? Institutionalising participation in development. James Blackburn with Jeremy Holland (eds)
1999	Voices of the poor - Methodology guide for consultations with the poor	World Bank over 60,000 experiences of poor men and women were gathered in this major study to inform the 2000/1 World Development Report on Poverty and Development. It built the methods for participatory poverty assessments. Global synthesis authored by Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera Shah, Patta Petesch
2000	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers	World Bank
2000-1	World Development Report: Attacking Poverty	Strongly incorporates the work on voices of the poor and participatory processes to unpack an understanding of the dynamics of poverty
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development	Strong focus on climate change
2002	Critical influential book on participation Influential training book on understanding power	Participation: the new tyranny. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds) A new weave of power, people and politics: the action guide for advocacy and citizen participation. Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller
2003	World Development Report: Sustainable Development in a Dynamic World	A resurgence of sustainable development thinking with an attempt to rebalance the pressures to deliver on market based development and economic growth
2003	The trouble with PRA: reflections on dilemmas of quality. PLA Notes 47	Important reflections by Andrea Cornwall and Gareth Pratt on some of the critical issues with PRA arose out of an IDS project 'Pathways to Participation' reflecting on 10 years of PRA practice
2004	World Development Report: Making Services Work for Poor People	Identified the critical links between demand for services and responsive delivery, moving the debates onto the governance structures for pro-poor responsive services
2004	MA in Participation Development and Social Change launched at IDS	Responding to the growing interest in understanding the underlying structural changes required to deal with the complexity of power relations that inhibit inclusive development
	Gaventa editorial in PLA 50 on participatory governance	Clearly signifies the development of PLA and the deepening understanding of moving from participation in knowledge

		creation to building citizen voice to influence policy process
2006	World Development Report: Equity and Development	Identifies the growing inequality in many countries highlights several aspects of change that are requerd including securing tenure rights and increasing the levels of public engagement in the political arena
2007	World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation	Highlighting the importance of building the human capital of young people
2009	Citizens' Voice and Accountability: Understanding what works and doesn't work in donor approaches	Publication by ODI of an important study providing evidence of the importance of voice and accountability in poverty reduction
2010	World Development Report: Development and Climate Change	Consolidating the understanding that climate change is the responsibility of all including the need to institutionalise this understanding and create different incentives for growth. Another important element of the emerging discourse around green growth and the need to build in resilience
2012	Gender Equality and Development	An audit of change in women's lives and identification of ongoing human, ecomomic and social capital gaps. A particular focus on the importance of building women's voice and agency.
	Rio+20	Seen as a significant step backwards in the push for sustainable development with some interesting emergent groupings signing up to ideas of green economy and others challenging the 'commodification of nature'. However, there was no clarity on what green economies might look like or commitment to the pathways to achieving them.
2013	IDS Participation Power and Social Change Group breaks up into two separate groups Launch of IDS' participatory methodologies website Publication of two important books: Andrea Cornwall 'Participation Reader' Jeremy Holland 'Who Counts'	This significant development reflects some of the tensions extant in the participation debate with one group focused on participatory approaches and methods centred on the IDS' 'Participate Initiative' and the other group continuing the work on power and political processes These two books underline the continued importance of the participation debate as well as the major current questions on what constitutes evidence
	Report of the High Level Panel for beyond 2015	This clearly outlines an agenda for transformative change based on citizen-centred sustainable development. An agenda that puts IIED's mission, values and ways of working centre-stage.

The shifting interest in the voices and knowledge of citizens

At the beginning participatory methods were at the cutting edge of development and IIED as the protagonist was the leader in the field. It was a hugely exciting time as it was a new way of working for most people that challenged a range of orthodoxies. Over time the success of the roll-out of participatory processes meant that there were many people around the world who were effective practitioners, and in many ways ahead of IIED. The network fostered by IIED (RCPLA) was a key element of this movement. In the words of one informant: *'The big days of PLA are over, the concepts are accepted – they either work or they do not because they are not used in the right way,*

used cynically or inappropriately'. The issue is no longer the methods but the power relationships behind the methods. It is all about understanding the power relations and not replacing this understanding with normative methods around participation.

However, as pressures from funders change and the emphasis on demonstrating results becomes dominant, the need for a rethink about IIED's participation legacy more broadly is necessary. Pressure for results and evidence are forcing a focus on expert-based sophisticated quantitative instruments. PLA has lost its crucial role and positioning to advocate with evidence the power of using participatory processes to deliver evidence. This is because development practice is facing a period of extreme pressure to only value evidence that has come through expert-driven quantitative methods, such as randomised control trials: *'we have almost lost our countervailing voice, there are lots of practitioners out there who don't know what to do and are giving up on participation. How is it that we are having these conversations about RCTs and quantitative surveys without a balance from the qualitative side, it is because things like PLA and the people behind it have not continued to influence and build the evidence necessary to counter the pressure for quantitative evidence'.* (external interview). This despite the fact that there was early identification of the need to develop PLA approaches to deal with aggregation of data from qualitative processes. However, PLA did not return to this topic and it is only this year in response to the dominant trend for quantitative analysis that Jeremy Holland finally produced his book on 'Who Counts: the power of participatory statistics' (this book was already promised in PLA 47 (2003) that focused on participatory numbers).

The push for rigorous (quantitative) evidence based data collection and processes has reduced the space for the sorts of approaches that are characterised as soft and not evidence based such as PLA type approaches. The demand for peer-reviewed scientific rigour, quantitative (randomised trial type) evidence, means there is significantly less interest in qualitative research and the use of mixed methods. There is a strong drive inside donor agencies, particularly DFID, to demonstrate results through this type of research. Internal knowledge management systems have also been strongly privileged at the expense of maintaining external links to think-tanks and innovation from the outside, ideas are derived internally rather than from a co-production with external agents. This is a major shift from the past where DFID had tended to draw on external ideas first before looking internally.

There is now little capacity to build deep relationships with external organisations such as IIED to co-produce ideas and to lead onto joint working. This means in its turn that staff of donor agencies such as DFID have less knowledge of organisations such as IIED, where previously relationships were built on working together and building joint networks. The opportunities for this form of working are now highly limited particularly for new generations of DFID staff. The previous channels – joint workshops, information exchange, use of publications have all gone. This requires a major rethink by think-tank organisations as to how to work in these much more closed development agency arenas.

The private sector is increasingly the place that has the levers to create the incentives for change where asset managers control billions of dollars and make the investment decisions that drive profound environmental change. Some are turning this into new philanthropic foundations that are

then through their funding influencing development decisions.[63] There are important new audiences particularly in the private sector whose influence is profound and with whom IIED needs to proactively engage. IIED has particular qualities that need to be brought to the forefront: its ability to link across sectors, to bring together ideas and challenge orthodoxies combined with the capacity to bring together different actors. This mix provides the basis for the IIED brand and the means by which to reposition themselves and use the PLA space to look at what are the real cutting edge issues of the day: *'those that are super-wicked highly complex problems, cross-disciplinary, cross-silos and myth breaking' (external interview:)* In the past this was sustainable development now this is captured by words such as inclusive, resilient green economies.

Sustainable livelihoods

Just as the participation debate spawned an excited community of practice, this was further developed by many of the same drivers of the intellectual debate around participation for the development of sustainable livelihoods. Much of the thinking that underpinned participation, the importance of rights, the empowerment of people to influence and institutional structures the need to use participatory practice to achieve changes in livelihoods was embedded in the sustainable livelihoods debate. The huge drive behind the sustainable livelihoods work in terms of policy commitment and funding diluted much of the growing political thought that had underpinned the participation debate.

'The vibrant and energetic community of practice of the late 1990s has taken its eye off the ball. A certain complacency, fuelled by generous funding flows, a comfortable localism and organisational inertia, has meant that some of the big emerging issues of rapid globalisation, disruptive environmental change and fundamental shifts in rural economies have not been addressed.' (Scoones 2009)[64]

In its turn, sustainable livelihoods began to lose intellectual ground as these major new development agendas began to take centre stage. Much of this new debate is captured in the emergence of a shift of emphasis from sustainable livelihoods to the macro-economic and political drivers for growth[65].

The emergence of political drivers for change and shift to green economies and growth

Transparency, accountability, governance

[63] Jeremy Grantham http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/apr/12/jeremy-grantham-environmental-philanthropist-interview ; http://www.granthamfoundation.org/index.html

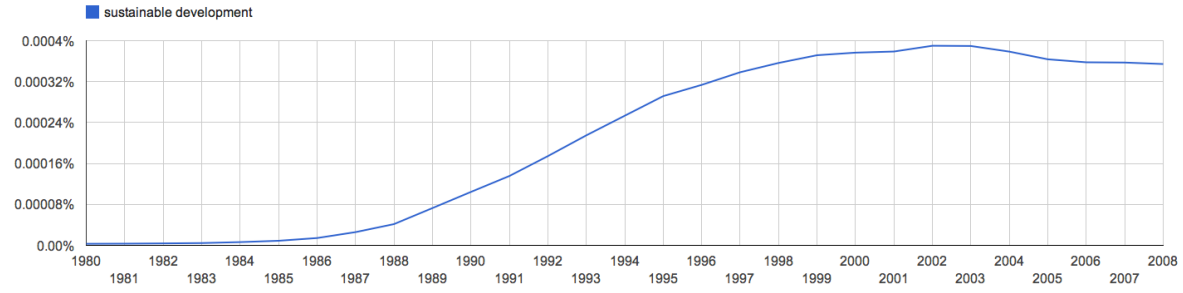
[64] Scoones I 2009 Livelihoods perspectives and rural development. Journal of Peasant Studies vol 36(1)

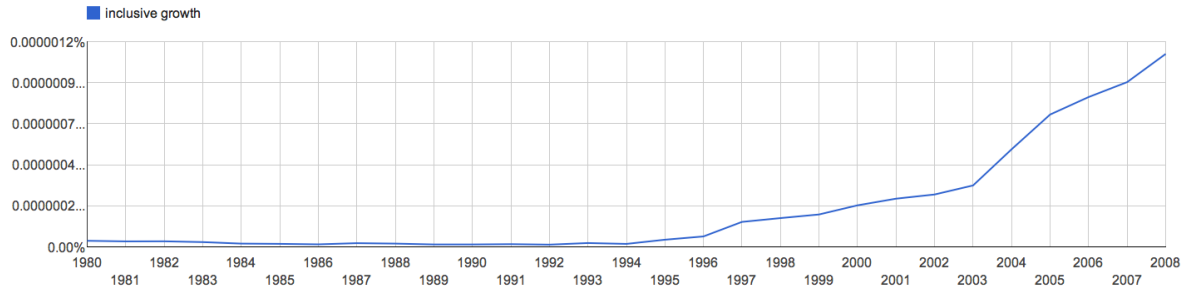
[65] See for example DFID's work on Drivers of Change which became highly influential in country programming and setting a development agenda more firmly rooted in political economy analysis. This spawned work that helped to explain the political drivers for change and the potential pathways for development to address these drivers (e.g. http://www.odi.org.uk/events/2756-putting-politics-into-practice-political-economy-analysis-practice-development) and Harris and Booth 2013 Applied political economy analysis: five practical issues ODI Methods and Resources .

As it became increasingly apparent that the major issues preventing sustainable livelihoods and sustainable development lie within the political context and constraining policy and institutional frameworks, increasingly researchers and practitioners alike began to look to influential work that was investigating the role of participatory governance and the agency, voice and capabilities of citizens to hold governments and other providers of services to account. Much of the last decade has focused on questions of corruption, transparency and providing mechanisms and tools to increase accountability and improve transparency. This work has also highlighted the politics of consumption and the way in which this drives unfair, exploitative practices that lead to major social and economic degradation.

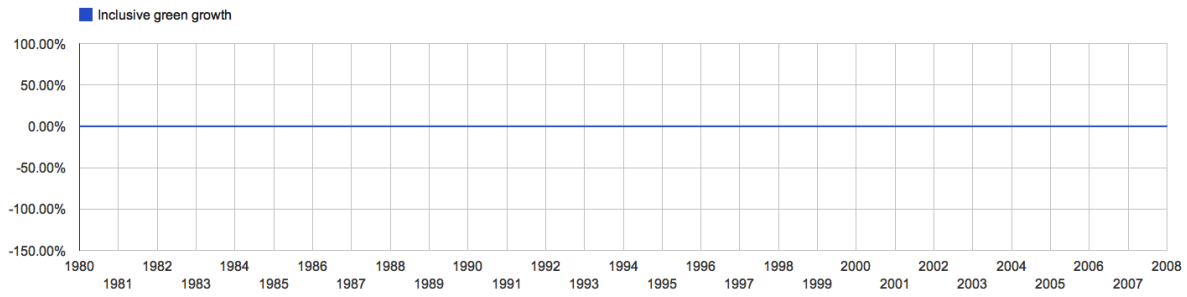
This shift from sustainable livelihoods to growth and the determinants for it framed development discourse and led to a growing recognition of the interdependence of politics and economics and the need to take political-economy factors into account when thinking about growth. The work on governance, accountability and transparency was drawn into these discussions and crystallised in Collier's influential writing in the 'Bottom Billion' (2007). This book focused on the role of political elites that have been responsible for poor governance and economic outcomes and underlined the need to understand the underlying social and political dynamics of growth. Collier built on this initial analysis to move the agenda along from inclusive growth to inclusive plus green growth in the Plundered Planet (2010). As the graphs below illustrate, sustainable development as a concept is declining in use at the same time concepts such as inclusive green growth are taking off.

Emergence of green economy from sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods





As the graph below shows, based on an analysis of literature prior to 2008 inclusive green growth is a relatively new area of discourse.



Globalisation and consumption

The commodity boom of 2005-2008 and the financial crisis of 2008 further underlined the multiple crises being faced by poor people through food shortages, exposure to the effects of climate change and the role of international investment driving land grabs and alienation of local rights. It highlighted the need for different approaches to economic development and shone the light on problems of consumption as well as production. Major policy statements (2011) and a book by OECD 'Putting Green Growth at the Heart of Development' (2013 (with contributions from staff at IIED)) attempts to operationalise practice on green growth, but with little evidence that allows for real development of these ideals.[66] The World Bank (2012)[67] link inclusive and green together highlighting the importance of the potential distributional effects of shifts to green economies. Inclusive green growth is posited as the pathway to getting to sustainable development where economic and environmental sustainability can be delivered. However, attempts to get global buy-in to a green economy agenda failed at Rio+20 in 2012. Leaving a fear that despite the promise that *'the green economic approach has the potential to lift people out of poverty through a better use of natural resources, and wouldn't act as an anti-competitive brake on development, as many fear. Pursuit of so-called green economy approaches would not priorities poverty reduction, equity and environmental stability* (Tom Bigg http://www.iied.org/five-things-we-ve-learnt-rio20). It is the inclusive green economy agenda that is at the heart of IIED and its foundations around sustainable development[68].

'Green growth policies must be carefully designed to maximize benefits for, and minimize costs to, the poor and most vulnerable, and policies and actions with irreversible negative impacts must be avoided.' (World Bank 2012:xi)

This whole arena of work has also spawned new organisations based on green growth (Global Green Growth Institute – founded 2010 with offices in Seoul, London, Copenhagen and Abu Dhabi). Chatham House have held discussions on the potential for green growth and a Green growth knowledge platform (UNEP, GGI, OECD, WB) has been launched. The Green Growth Forum (3GF) held annually convenes governments, businesses, investor and international organisations to act together for inclusive green growth' (http://3gf.dk/en/) This underlines the importance of engaging

[66] http://www.iied.org/green-growth-equity-must-go-hand-hand

[67] Inclusive green growth: the pathway to sustainable development. World Bank, Washington

[68] IISD has established a Partnership for Procurement and Green Growth focused on the demand-side issues of promoting green growth through changes to procurement. IIED organised a 'Fair ideas' conference prior to Rio+20 to help inform the debates during the conference

with the private sector as an important player in developing the pathways to sustainable development[69]. This was further underlined in the recent report of the High Level Panel for post-2015 that reiterated the *need 'to integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development and to address the need to promote sustainable patterns of consumption and production'* (UN 2013). To this end the Panel has put sustainable development and inclusive growth at the core ensuring that no-one is left behind. It is however, limited in its ideas for transformation as a process to be led by citizens. [70]

The big issues on the table now are about consumption patterns and changing demand side practice. Instead of looking at how people in rural areas elsewhere are managing their livelihoods the attention has shifted to how consumers in industrialised countries are driving change in low income countries. Building resilient, inclusive green economies is not something for other countries to do, but can only be delivered by changing practice in countries such as the UK at the same time as building the capacity for change in low income natural resource rich countries. The other major area preoccupying many is the gap between public investment in services and their actual delivery. This is highlighted in the High-Level Panel concerns for post-2015 (UN 2013) [71]which identifies the principle that there should be 'no-one left behind'. This large agenda more than encompasses the entire work of the Institute and provides a set of unifying principles that allow IIED to communicate clearly about the breadth and compound value of the work of all its groups.

*"We only work on consumption in an indirect way – sustainable markets. But it means private sector entities, supply chains, urban settlements, consumption issues. There's now lots of evidence that agriculture and NR improvements won't necessarily improve the situation because of disposable incomes, rising populations etc, so then overconsumption overrides all other efforts …. We could come together on that agenda…." (*IIED researcher)

What emerges from these two decades of work and now crystallising in debate about inclusive green economies is the embedding of a set of principles[72] that should underpin pathways to sustainable development. Critically solutions do not lie with experts, bureaucrats, private sector or the citizens, but through complex arrangements of all working through deliberative processes that ensure informed participation, capable voice and effective negotiated outcomes. Much of what drove the work of PLA is captured in these principles, but what is still lacking is how to put these principles into practice and deliver real examples of inclusive green economies in a range of different contexts:

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[69] For more information on inclusive growth see http://www.gsdrc.org/go/gateway-guides/inclusive-growth#blog

[70] reflections on high level panel report by ground-level panel facilitated by Participate 2015 http://www.participate2015.org/2013/06/06/participate-response-to-the-high-level-panel-on-the-post-2015-development-agenda-report/

[71] A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development

[72] Builds on some of principles of Natural Resource Charter http://naturalresourcecharter.org and the 9 principles of a green economy http://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/updates/sign-9-principles-green-economy

- Empowerment and accountability to support poor and marginalised people to build resources, assets and capabilities to exercise greater choice and control over their own development and hold decision-makers to account
- Ensuring fairness and inclusion in the benefits of growth
- Governance of resource revenues for sustained inclusive economic development
- Building livelihoods adaptable and resilient to climate variability
- Ensuring efficient and wise use of natural resources
- Ensuring inter-generational and intra-generational fairness
- Sustainable consumption and production - changing the consumption patterns that drive bad governance, social and environmental outcomes

There are still major knowledge and operational gaps to understanding ***'how to'*** develop green and inclusive economies, based on the use of renewable natural resources (RNR). The key issues that frame this debate and the gaps that still need to be filled are:

1. The importance of renewable natural resources to inclusive growth is accepted but at present we lack a detailed and systematic understanding of *how* they influence inclusive growth.
2. We also lack an understanding of, and tools to interpret, how the political economy context and different forms and interpretations of the state affect the use and management of RNRs, and the potential of RNRs for contributing to growth of the poor and mediating the possible negative impacts of growth for the poor.
3. We lack a common discourse and conceptualisation which brings together the social, political, economic and environmental aspects of RNR management to inform and allow better incorporation of RNR benefits into broader economic planning and analysis of equitable growth processes.
4. We also lack the capacity, and diagnostic tools, that will allow us to predict and respond to how key exogenous changes will influence the political economy, how they will interact with RNRs and their role in processes of growth and inclusive growth, and how these influences might be addressed and mitigated.

'Participation opened the door to many very big questions that are not answered in PLA. I think these big questions of linking decisions to very far away consequences is very relevant to the participation debate. There are lots of interesting tools to better link decisions and consequences for example linking consumers/investors/ taxpayers in the West directly to the consequences of their purchases/investments/development assistance. If you look at the root causes of land grabs it is probably uncontrolled investments, the root cause of the uncontrolled investments might be pension funds looking for high returns. The root cause of this is that people in the west want decent pensions. Would we really be willing to compromise on our welfare – not only in pensions but so much of our wealth is still generated from the exploitation of the poor. Methods are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to participation, there is so much more to the provision of opportunity for affected people to take control of decisions that affect them: apathy in the West, aid looking for very superficial results, aid organizations and institutions never practising internally in terms of participation what they preach, unwillingness of the powerful to provide opportunity for citizens to

participate- often overlooked in participatory processes that over-emphasise 'empowerment' of poor people, perverse incentives in politics and international trade and investment policies, contradictions between trade/investment and aid etc.' (external interview:)

This commentary from a practitioner of participation provides the entry to look at some of the major issues that could form the basis for a new set of communications that could help to inform and build a more aware demand-side understanding of the effects of our collective and individual consumption decisions. This together with a focus on building the roots of IIED into practice in the UK to address the apathy, frustration with politics, lack of social skills, participation between people living side by side and the social exclusion of old people, all could lead to a dynamic process of change. It would have has many of the attributes of the original RRA/PLA movement but could lead to practical and real change in demonstrating what inclusive, resilient green economies look like and what the underlying principles and practices are to deliver on this.

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