



PREFACE

I participate
 You participate
 He/She participates
 We participate
 But..
 They decide

These phrases were written not long ago on a chalkboard in Bolivia by an informant who wanted to explain the adverse effect of the Law of Popular Participation. It suggests that participation as a concept is meaningful, whilst in practice it can become hollow because decision making processes are often dominated by elites.

Participation of local communities and civil society groups in intervention strategies are considered key in development practice. It has even reached a certain inviolable status since the development sector was criticized for carrying out top-down policies. Consequently, a certain discomfort exists about the questioning of content and use of participatory methods and approaches. However, participation for whom, by whom, for what, and how? These remain vital questions for moving forward in building new narratives and generating appropriate development strategies.

In order to contribute to debates on Civil Society Building (CSB), Hivos and the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in 2005 created the Civil Society Building Knowledge Programme. The aim was to better understand and improve the

contribution of Civil Society Building efforts to bring about changes in the unequal balance of power in favour of vulnerable and marginalized groups. At the core of this collaboration is the interaction between practitioners, researchers, and social activists to facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. By integrating these various forms of knowledge, new insights can be created and strategies formulated that contribute to the development of new policies and practices.

As participatory approaches play an important role in our programme, we are also keen to rethink these. One way to do so is to stimulate knowledge generation by supporting innovative research publications. The present publication contains contributions by a variety of young scholars from the Global South who critically examine current participation discourses and their application in practice. We believe this provides new challenging perspectives and ideas for the debate. But we would agree with the Bolivian practitioner: the reader decides.

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Hivos

Hivos is a Dutch non-governmental organization, founded in 1969, inspired by humanistic values. Together with local organizations in developing countries, Hivos seeks to contribute to a free, fair and sustainable world in which citizens – women and men – have equal access to the resources and opportunities for their development.

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ISS

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), founded in 1952, is a leading postgraduate teaching and research institute in international development. Since July 2009 a University Institute of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), ISS performs a key role in promoting the generation and sharing of knowledge on development issues.

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