

## Understanding Participation Through Science and Technology

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Science and technology need society. But does society need science and technology? This is one of the questions posed in this issue of the *IDS Bulletin*, which brings together insights from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Development Studies (DS).

Research proposals and technological planning have little chance of success without anticipating their effects on society. They gain wider acceptance by engaging citizens in debates on potentially controversial developments such as nanotechnology. This acceptance may be guided by norms or ethical principles, or may also be commercially viable. The participatory agenda for science and technology is pushed by global supra-national networks, with programmes across all continents.

So how does participation relate to science and technology? What are the power relations between scientists, policymakers and members of the public? What types of scientific and technological decisions can be influenced through participation? Science and technology is everywhere and taken for granted in our daily lives – drinking water from a tap, buying food from a supermarket - and are implicit in development assumptions about modernisation and economic growth. Nonetheless, this is a changing world where questions of risk, safety and innovation are paramount. Scientific expertise can no longer rely on its assumed inherent authority. News headlines broadcast controversies about how people mobilise around topics like climate change or GMO crops. Innovative new measures – such as consensus conferences, citizens' juries and community-based environmental audits – have been adopted to encourage public participation, and now frequently characterise science and policy processes both north and south.

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