

Foreword

One of IDS' strategic aims is to pursue research excellence. That is one of the reasons we choose to have a PhD programme which can contribute to and benefit from a vibrant cutting edge research environment. That is why I am so glad to be able to write a Foreword to this *IDS Bulletin*, written by our PhD students and ably mentored by some of our Research Fellows. Fittingly, this issue is a summary of some of the work our PhD students have recently completed. We asked them to highlight key findings emerging from their work, the methodological challenges they faced and to provide some reflections on how they addressed them. In the course of putting this *IDS Bulletin* together, three sub-themes emerged: (1) Our PhD students are not only researchers but are also agents of development, working *with* people not simply 'on' them. This is part of the overall ethos of IDS, but is also intensified by the fieldwork components of PhD work which highlight the complexity and non-linearity of change. (2) The gaps between legislation, policy and implementation: laws and policies can open

up spaces, but their non-implementation and non-enforcement can also shut them down. Field-level perspectives tend to bring these disconnects into sharpest relief. (3) The importance of positionality – how the nationality, gender, training, and outsider identities of the authors shape their own thinking and biases and the way they shape how others see them. Being aware of power differentials does not make the differentials disappear, but it does help to navigate them and to help them not get in the way of the search for some kind of truth.

All in all, this is a fascinating set of articles written by IDS doctoral scholars who recognise the reality of their engagement in the development process and who do not attempt to sustain the belief that they can stand apart from it. I think you will find the perspectives, attitudes and findings of the authors to be refreshing and invigorating – I certainly did.

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