

Review of: "Participatory budgeting for public involvement in environmental sustainability at a Thai university"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Prof. Wade offers this useful case study at a particularly important moment. The #ShiftThePower / “Decolonizing development” conversations have gained traction at high policy levels (Power 2021). In many ways, it was the extraordinary success of Brazil's highly participatory Zero Hunger program (da Silva et al, 2011) that encouraged the world to adopt such ambitious global goals for 2030 (UN 2015). Thailand is also often cited as an example of the positive impact of decentralization on rapid progress in nutrition and education. (WHO 2012).

As a non-academic development practitioner and policy advocate, I found the well-chosen collection of references particularly useful, particularly the frameworks that distinguish mere consultation and true participation. Perhaps the best reference for the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969) which illuminates quite bluntly that most levels range from manipulation through various forms of tokenism rather than real citizen control.

Wade does point out the difference between community-level participation and the challenge of meaningful participation at the national level. Indeed, this lies at the very heart of the principle of subsidiarity – that the only form of social organization consistent with human dignity is one that moves decision-making as close to people as is practical. (Pius XI 1931).

One bit of data that should always be included in such a case study is gender. Wade emphasizes the hierarchical nature of Thai society, and thus one would expect different experiences of male and female participants.

References

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