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Bringing Equitable Participation into Sustainable Development Decisions

Initiative for Equality is calling for more equitable participation in the discussions and decisions surrounding sustainable development. The United Nations is in the process of adopting new Sustainable Development Goals to supplant the Millennium Development Goals which expire in 2015. *Initiative for Equality*, or IfE, is a global network of civil society groups and individuals advocating for greater social, economic and political equality. IfE's global Field Hearings project will be presented at the UN's DPI NGO conference at UN HQ in New York this week.

"If we want greater levels of equality in development outcomes, we need to have greater levels of equality in participation when the decisions are being made," according to Deborah S. Rogers, President of IfE and coordinator of the global network. "The communities that need development the most – the very poor and marginalized communities – are the ones that have the hardest time influencing development decisions at the local and global level. We need to find ways to empower their participation," she said.

IfE's global Field Hearings project, now with over 250 local partners organized in over 75 countries, is working to do just that. Local civil society and academic partners are conducting Field Hearings in very poor, socially excluded or marginalized communities to learn what the people there say about their problems and needs, the causes and solutions, and what they want to see happen. These voices are then compiled and brought into various decision-making

processes, including the Rio+20 Earth Summit in June 2012, the UN's Open Working Group's Sustainable Development Goals meetings, and other national and local decisions.

To date, the Field Hearings network claims credit for influencing the Open Working Group to include a stand-alone goal on addressing inequalities in their new July 2014 proposal. This proposal will be presented to the UN General Assembly in September.

Rogers praised the new United Nations *Participatory Monitoring for Accountability* consultation initiated by UNICEF, UN Women and the UN Development Programme. The consultation is discussing ways to bring local citizen input and feedback into monitoring the implementation of sustainable development programs after 2015.

"This consultation is a good example of what needs to be done," said Rogers. "We need to implement this kind of thinking throughout the sustainable development process," she said.

On Friday August 29 IfE will present a workshop at the UN DPI NGO conference from 11:45 – 13:00 in Language Room 7, North Lawn Building, 2nd Floor, at the UN HQ in New York. The workshop, entitled "The Field Hearings Initiative: Addressing Inequalities in Participation Through Partnerships," will talk about how to bring marginalized communities into the decision-making process to advocate for more equitable development, using the Field Hearings as an example. Speakers include Anibal Vivaceta de la Fuente, Regional Coordinator for Latin America (Valparaiso, Chile), Cheri Honkala, Field Hearings partner (Philadelphia, US), as well as IfE's Rogers. The workshop is cosponsored by *Pan African Vision for the Environment* (Nigeria), *Women Environmental Programme* (Nigeria), *Sindhica Reforms Society* (Pakistan), and *Society for Agriculture and Sustainable Development* (Cameroon).

Anthony Akpan, president of *Pan African Vision for the Environment* (workshop cosponsor) and Regional Coordinator for the Field Hearings initiative in West Africa, said that he is involved because he wants to give "people at the bottom of the pyramid" a voice. "The gap between the

haves and have-nots is wide in Africa. Participation in decision-making at all levels of governance in Africa is more or less non-existent—people and communities are not consulted to ascertain their needs and expectations,” Akpan said. “When the call came out, African groups saw these Field Hearings as an opportunity to be heard at the international level,” he said.

“It’s not just poor communities in the developing world that need more equal participation and outcomes,” said Cheri Honkala, National Coordinator of the *Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign*, a US network of 120 groups representing poor or marginalized communities. Honkala is a well-known North American activist on behalf of issues ranging from homelessness to climate change. “Here in the US, we have the same lack of access to decision-making by indigenous communities, migrant communities, inner city communities, poor rural communities.” According to Honkala, “we need to build global solidarity and empower communities around the world to make decisions for their own future.”

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

UN DPI NGO conference: <http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/conference-2014/>

Thematic Roundtable Discussion “Fighting Inequalities – Economic, Social, Political and Environmental” – Wednesday 27 August at 16:30 (includes Deborah S. Rogers)
<http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/files/2014/08/65th-DPI-NGO-Conference-Thematic-Roundtables.pdf>

Thematic Consultation on Participatory Monitoring for Accountability:
<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/accountability2015>

Initiative for Equality website: www.initiativeforequality.org

Global *Field Hearings* Network: <https://www.initiativeforequality.org/index.php/equity-sustainability-field-hearings/getting-involved-in-the-field-hearings>

Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign website:
<http://www.economichumanrights.org/>