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## **WATER RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT**

Rutgerd Boelens & Paul Hoogendam (eds), 2002

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### **The Theme**

Water management is a complex activity, laced with contradictions. Water users compete and water users constantly vie for increased control over water, all the while needing to co-operate if they are to use it at all. This occurs in contexts of legal pluralism, where multiple normative systems interact, contradict or reinforce each other. To avoid intractable conflicts among the co-users of a water source or irrigation system, it is crucial for these users to clearly define their management principles and strategies. Generally, 'water rights' are the backbone of such strategies in peasant and indigenous systems. These rights define their access to water and to the decision-making arena, and specify their obligations regarding system maintenance and organisational roles and responsibilities.

Fundamentally, a *water right* is a social relationship and an expression of power. It involves access to a valuable resource, but also a relationship of inclusion and exclusion, and control over decision-making. Water management practices in the Andes show that unequal power and inequalities in the prevailing normative systems prevent successful collective co-operation. At the same time, they make it clear that the struggle for access to water, under collective control, may result in greater equity in its distribution and strengthen the position of less powerful stakeholders.

The authors of this book use these insights to integrate and elaborate analytical concepts that make it possible to better understand the relationship among 'water rights', 'collective action' and 'empowerment' – to understand the local contents of water rights, how they are acquired, the dynamics of their production and reproduction, and the strategic uses of water rights in social action. They seek to contribute to the development of methodological proposals that strengthen local water control and empower peasant and indigenous communities.

### **From the contents**

**Chapter 1 : Water rights and collective action in community irrigation**

**Chapter 2 : Cultural politics and local resistance in highland irrigation development**

**Chapter 3 : Materialising rights: Hydraulic property in the extension and rehabilitation of two irrigation systems in Bolivia**

**Chapter 4 : Water rights and strengthening users' organisations: the art of negotiating.**

**Chapter 5 : Gender dimensions of water control in Andean irrigation**

**Chapter 6 : Water rights and watersheds. Managing multiple water uses and strengthening stakeholder platforms**

**Chapter 7 : Recipes and resistance. Peasants' rights building and empowerment in the Licto Irrigation System, Ecuador.**

**Chapter 8 : Design and water rights: small scale irrigation experiences in Oruro, Bolivia**

**Chapter 9 : Local norms and competition for water in Aymara and Atacama communities (Northern Chile)**

**Chapter 10 : Re-negotiation of water rights in the ancient irrigation system of Urucuquí, Ecuador**

**Chapter 11 : The battlefield of water rights. Rule-making and empowerment in the arena of conflicting normative frameworks – irrigation development in Ceceles, Ecuador.**

**Chapter 12 : The Yapa. Water rights, power and empowerment**

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