

International
Institute of
Social Studies

Energized Embedded Engaged

The ISS strategy for
**Global Development
and Social Justice**
2018 to 2022

Who are we?

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) is a world-renowned centre for research and teaching focussed on global development and social justice. Based in The Hague and part of Erasmus University Rotterdam, our high quality and societally relevant research, teaching and engagement activities aim to inform best practice in development studies and promote social justice and equity around the world.



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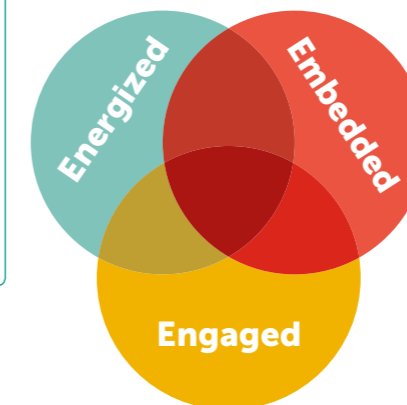
Energized, embedded, engaged

Established in the Netherlands in 1952 to carry out capacity building in social studies, ISS has evolved over the years to embrace the changing needs of the communities it serves.

Today, we are a diverse, inclusive, dynamic global university institute, with researchers and students from all over the world and alumni in over 100 countries.

In the year 2022, we aim to be:

Energized - exploring, discovering and co-creating new knowledge and best practice, to further our pursuit of greater social justice and global equity.



Embedded - in society across the global South and the global North, and in the local environment of The Hague, and - as part of Erasmus University - in the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus university alliance.

Engaged - embracing diversity and inclusion to deliver world-class research and teaching that can influence policy and social development, at home and abroad.

As we look forward to the next four years, we are excited about the role ISS will play in helping to create a fairer society for all.



Our vision

The ISS vision is of an interconnected world in which social justice is the norm, with full and unfettered development of individuals and communities.

Our mission

Our mission is to enhance social justice and create a more equitable world. We do this by conducting societally relevant development-oriented research and by educating the next generation of development leaders from around the world.

Our core values

Throughout our history, the core values of ISS have remained the same: social justice and equity.



ISS part of Erasmus University Rotterdam

The ISS vision and mission fit within the common purpose of Erasmus University: to inspire independent-minded and societally active students and researchers working closely together in order to take and expound individual and collective responsibility, by adapting academic excellence and research as driving forces through life-long learning, in order to make the world a better place.

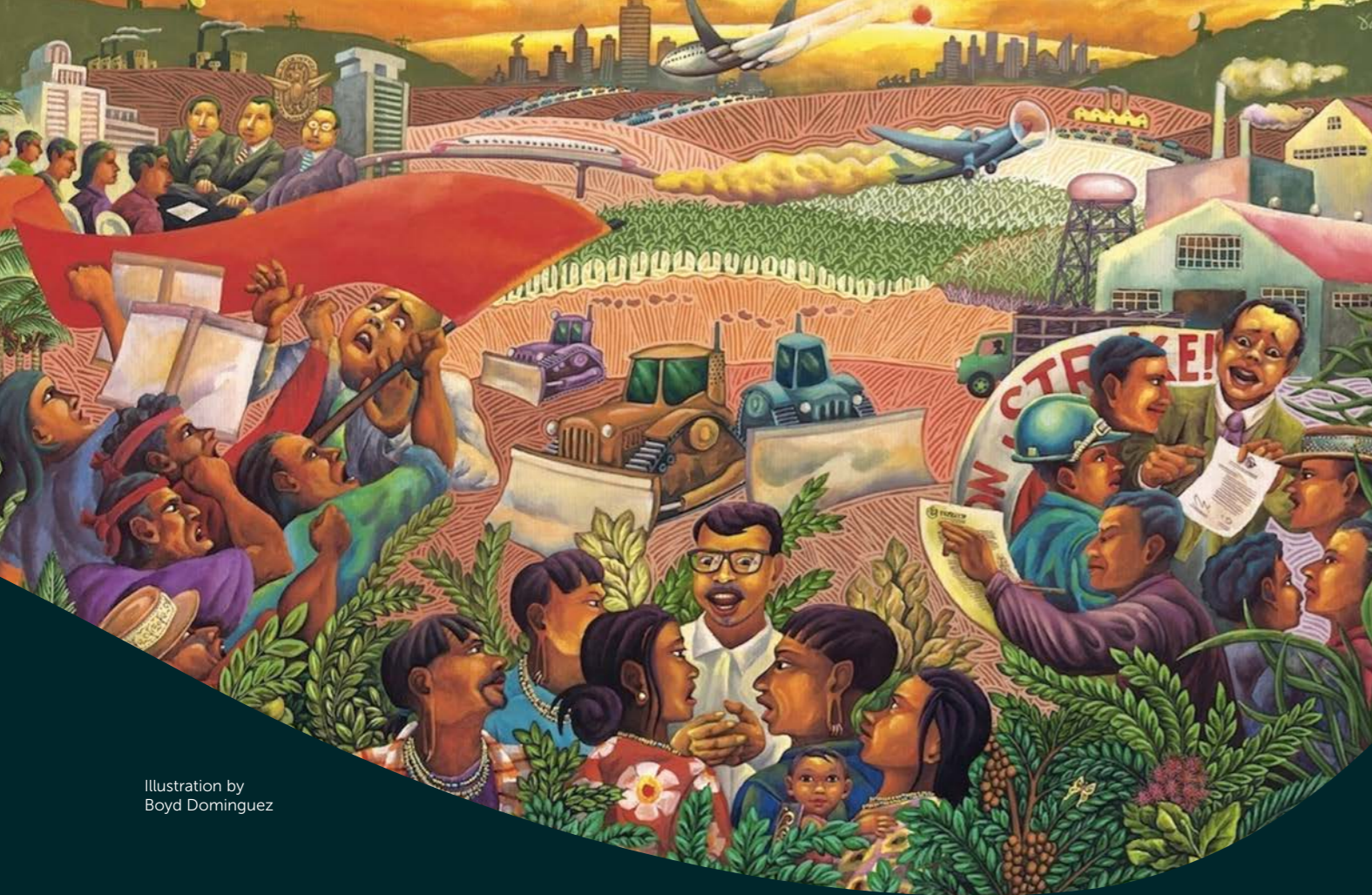


Illustration by Boyd Dominguez

ISS in action

The ISS MA programme is critical in nature. We refer to this critical approach as ‘contesting development’. One example of how we ‘contest development’ is by aiming to decolonize development studies.

Decolonizing Development Studies

Our teaching and research on post-development and decolonizing development aims to pose some challenging and critical questions. Such as: why is development studies so concerned with poverty only in certain parts of the world – and not with the tens of thousands homeless people that live in large urban cities in the North? Why are ‘experts’ sent into countries they hardly know to advise people whose language they do not speak in order to ‘develop’ them? And why are there no experts from these countries coming to solve the problems of the ‘developed’ countries?

Our teaching and research about racism, major geo-cultural differences and the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge examines how the histories and modern practices of the development project itself need to be deconstructed.

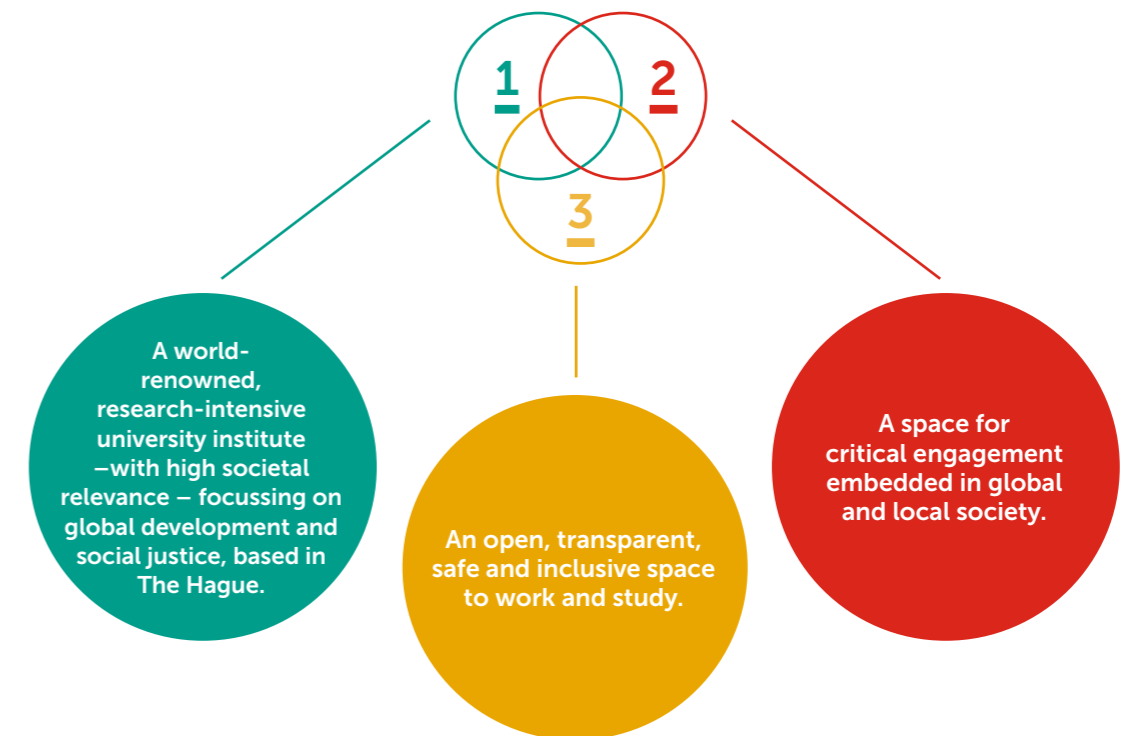
We aim to challenge the more mainstream traditions of development studies by exposing implicit privilege and biases. Our inspiration comes from important writers such as Sara Ahmed and Arturo Escobar. But we also draw on the experience of our students, most of whom come from the global South, and have seen the impact of the legacies of colonialism first hand.

We are partnering with other institutions and experts to hone the skills and strategies required to create and construct a decolonized form of development studies. Our staff bring decolonial and post-development scholarship into curricula and syllabi. This in turn stimulates new research among staff and students, to raise questions from a decolonial and post-development perspective, with the ultimate aim of improving people’s lives.

Our strategic goals for the next four years

Bringing together all of our staff, and taking into account the evaluation of our current research and MA programmes, we have distilled our ambition for the next four years into **three clear goals**.

In the year 2022, ISS will be:



ISS in action

Introducing WEGO-ITN

Well-being, Ecology, Gender and cOmmunity Innovative Training Network

The first international feminist political ecology research network of its kind, WEGO-ITN aspires to tackle socio-ecological challenges linked to policy agendas across multiple countries in the global South and global North.

This innovative and path-breaking project will help local communities to build resilient, equitable and sustainable futures through research that will demonstrate to policy makers how communities actively sustain and care for their environment and community well-being.

WEGO-ITN is made up of scholar-activists working on feminist political ecology from ten institutions in the European Union and five institutions from the rest of the world.



'Ocean Dreaming'
image by Vicki Golding

Climate change, land grabbing and conflict

ISS is involved in projects that aim to investigate land politics and policies, agrarian movements, resource conflicts, climate change, biofuels and food sovereignty. We also cover the politics of democratizing access and control of natural resources (land, water, seas, and forests) through public policies such as agrarian reform and restitution.

As much as possible, our projects are embedded in the advocacy work and political campaigns by activist organizations around key social justice issues. 'Climate change politics, land grabbing and conflict' (named Mosaic) is one good example of this kind of research, carried out in the tradition of scholar-activism.



Global land grabs, by Boyd Dominguez

A world-renowned, research-intensive University Institute

Our focus has always been on critically examining responses to social, economic and policy issues that impact on global development and social justice. Since becoming a part of Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2009, **we have become increasingly research-intensive**. We will retain and further strengthen this direction in the years to come.

Four distinct research themes

For the next four years we have four distinct research themes, each inspiring a wide range of research. Each of these themes works across multidisciplinary lines, integrating with academic and social partners around the world, and feeding into our teaching programmes. Our aim is to continue to acquire externally funded research projects that fit into our themes and support our vision.



Research and education working together

Our goal now, building on our high quality research and [PhD](#) and [MA programmes](#), is to get research and education working more closely together.

We expect the ground-breaking research we undertake in both the global South and the global North to inform, challenge and inspire our students.

At the same time, we see our positioning as a global centre for critical social science as an opportunity to foster opinion-leading debate among researchers, policy-makers, politicians, students and the general public, which can feed back into our research.

Energized by the need to understand and tackle development and social issues around the world.

Embedded in Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Engaged in the highest quality research.





ISS in action Collaborating on Frugal Innovation

The Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa, a Leiden-Delft-Erasmus initiative, is a good example of societally relevant academic collaboration. It involves researchers, students and other partners from all three universities. With a primary focus on Africa, they are all working together for science and society on frugal innovation in water, energy, food, health and ICT.

Installation of a solar panel for a frugal innovation project in Africa



With high societal relevance in everything we do

We constantly look for ways to bridge theory and practice; to combine rigorous academic research with societal relevance that has the potential to drive action at every level of society.

We ask ourselves:

What are the societal challenges we should focus on?

How is development cooperation changing?

How can we respond to these outside developments and innovate, based on our rich expertise?

Over the coming years, these questions will help us to make the right choices concerning our research, education, innovation, talent management and recruitment, and our overall societal engagement.

Improving engagement

Our aim is to take our knowledge and insights out into the wider world in many different ways.

From intervening in public policy debates, co-producing knowledge with research partners, and disseminating research results via social media and other communication channels, our objective is to constantly benchmark the role of ISS with the needs of society.

We work closely with our 13,000+ ISS alumni all around the globe. A good number of them hold influential positions in governments, NGOs, universities and the media.

Focussing on global development and social justice

Over the next four years, our academic focus will remain on global development and social justice, but our emphasis is shifting.

Embracing the global North as well as the global South

Whereas in the past we were chiefly orientated towards issues in the global South, we now see the global North as an equal sphere of cooperation; we expect research findings from both areas to inform one another.

We are already introducing themes from the global North into our Development Studies curriculum. Over the next four years, we also expect to see a growing proportion of our research covering issues, policies and fieldwork based in the global North.

Realizing the potential of the global classroom

Our goal is take the exciting, participatory methodologies we use in the global, intercultural classrooms of ISS and share them with other educators.

Our researchers, teaching staff and students bring perspectives from different backgrounds, cultures and contexts. Developing a framework to encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas will formalize this process, helping to create a best-practice model for use around the world.



The core questions we need to ask are:

What is development? What does it mean?

What does a positive outcome look like and is it the same for the governments, NGOs, civic institutions and citizens involved in any issue?

This academic and highly relevant question is one we aim to thoroughly explore over the coming years.

Participatory university courses

Our PhD and MA programmes are globally recognized within their fields, currently attracting students from over 50 countries worldwide.

Over the next four years, our aim is to increase PhD numbers still further and maintain our current MA student intake. We aim to host more PhD defences based on the highest quality research, and to educate the next generation of development professionals from around the world.

Innovation in teaching methods

We are committed to embracing new ways of learning, taking our teaching closer to the communities we serve, ensuring that our didactical approach is exciting and innovative and that it meets the needs of future students.

Energized by the cross fertilization of ideas from the global classroom.

Embedded in the global North as well as the global South.

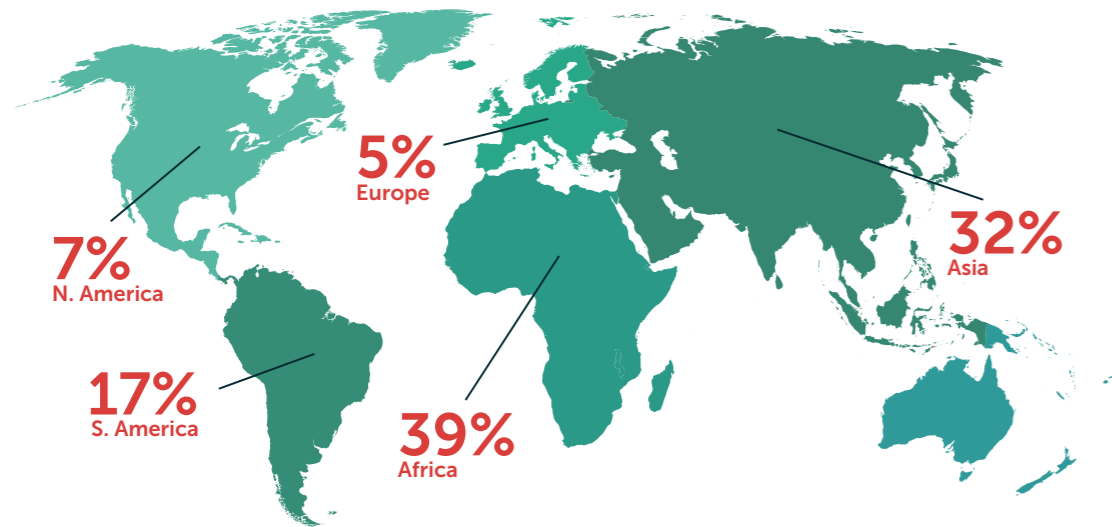
Engaged in critical thinking across development in relation to policy and societal issues.



A space for critical engagement embedded in global and local society.

ISS is a global University Institute. We want to continue to expand our reach. Raise our profile. Be part of the global conversation. One of the most effective ways of doing this is through partnerships with other educators, organizations and professionals engaged in development and social justice.

The ISS alumni network



A global network of over 13,000 alumni

ISS has a thriving, dynamic community of over 13,000 alumni – many in positions of responsibility in social justice and development roles.

One of our goals in the coming four years is to proactively engage with our alumni to further strengthen our activities, pursue partnership possibilities and explore new opportunities.

Key partnerships around the world

We have numerous established research, educational and corporate partnerships, helping to support and grow our activities and develop new initiatives.

By encouraging key partnerships in the global South and the global North, our aim is to help build capacity and expand our sphere of influence.

Energized by over 13,000 alumni playing a significant role in policy-making around the world.

Embedded as a global Civic University within The Hague.

Engaged with our academic community as Erasmus-by-the-sea.



Welcome to Erasmus-by-the-sea

As part of Erasmus University, ISS has been working ever more closely with other faculties and Erasmus partners, improving research and teaching alliances, cooperation and integration.

A clear vision for the next four years is for ISS to adopt the mantle of Erasmus-by-the-sea, thus adding a new geographic and academic dimension to the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus network.

Becoming a global Civic University, embedded in our community

At the same time, our ambition is to embrace the 'Civic University' concept, first put forward by Professor John Goddard. He describes a model in which the institution is engaging in learning beyond the campus walls; in discovery which is useful beyond the academic community; and service that directly benefits the public.

For ISS, this means making stronger links with the community and the environment of The Hague: looking for opportunities in which our expertise in development and social justice can inform and impact the lives of people who live on our doorstep.

Feeding insights back into our research and teaching

ISS is a centre for high quality societally-relevant research. We already organize conferences, seminars, debates and meetings of civil society groups in The Hague.

Our plan is to increase the cohesiveness and the outreach of these events in order to integrate the insights and innovations that emerge into our research and teaching programmes.



In this research project in the Amazon, modern technologies, such as satellites, drones and tablets are combined with the centuries-old knowledge of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon



ISS in action All eyes on the Amazon

This project, designed to halt deforestation in the Amazon, combines modern technologies, such as satellites, drones, smartphones and tablets, with the knowledge of the indigenous inhabitants.

Working as part of a coalition of environmental, human rights and local community groups led by Hivos and Greenpeace, ISS involvement focusses on Peru, Ecuador and Brazil. It builds on more than a decade of capacity-building and research with indigenous groups in the Amazon.

Monitoring socio-environmental change

In separate projects, ISS is also working with Universidad San Francisco de Quito, El Frente de Defensa de la Amazonia (Amazon Defense Front) and UDAPT (Union of People Affected by Texaco) in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The aim is to

strengthen the ability of local organizations and individuals to use community-based systems to monitor socio-environmental changes in their territories. Particular focus is on gathering robust evidence to hold oil companies responsible for their liabilities in the region.

Activist scholarship

These projects are designed and executed in a way that transcends the boundary between 'research' and 'action'. Research questions are articulated through sustained dialogue between ISS academics and their partners in Latin America, leading to research findings that correspond to concrete local needs while advancing global scientific debates.

An open, transparent, inclusive space to work and study

Whilst ISS is clearly a diverse, multicultural institute, welcoming people with different backgrounds, ethnicities and genders, we recognize that there is much more we can do to embrace diversity in our work.

Our Diversity Task Force, in-house counsellors, participatory meetings and Well-being Action Plan are all examples of an institute focussed on creating the right working and learning culture.

Over the next four years, we will continue to promote diversity and inclusivity in our work around the world.

Energized by students from over 50 countries.

Embedded in diverse cultures around the world.

Engaged in improving diversity in our teaching and support staff.





ISS in action
**Ageing in the City:
Delhi and The Hague**



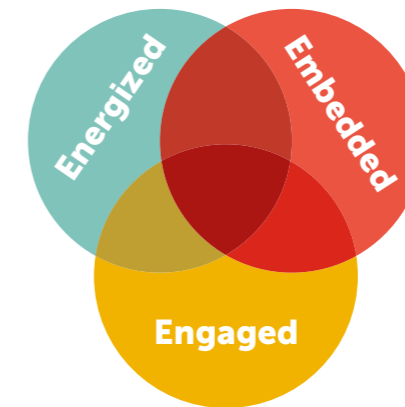
The research and action project 'Ageing in the City: Delhi and The Hague' bridging the global South and the global North.

A collaborative study between ISS and Ambedkar University, Delhi, the project explores a range of issues faced by senior citizens in the two cities. This includes a focus on the implications of changes in the cultural differences between co-residence of aged parents with their children in India, and the residence of the elderly in old age homes and the shift to home care in the Netherlands.

Join us on the journey

With a clear purpose supported by this four-year plan, we are confident of an exciting future, **energized**, **embedded** and **engaged** in our pursuit of social justice and best practice international development.

Energized by our ambitious vision for the next four years.



Embedded in a coalition of like minds committed to social justice and international development.

Engaged in reaching out to an ever-wider audience at home and abroad.









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