

Kalahari Game Reserve, although they had no formal title and the government had evicted them. This was the first recognition of the legal doctrine of 'native title' by an African court and was won after the longest and most expensive case in Botswana's history. The government fought hard to defend its crimes, and to make the case as drawn out and costly for the Bushmen as it could, but justice finally prevailed.

The legal principle – that indigenous peoples have rights to their land because they were living on it a long time before anyone else arrived – might seem just plain common sense, but it has taken generations for it to gain widespread acceptance in law. This is happening more and more nowadays, though there is still a very long way to go before it is properly upheld.

Governments are very reluctant to apply these laws and principles essentially because commercial interests want to take tribal land, usually justified by the false assertion that everyone will benefit if they do so. This lies at the core of the 'development' argument.

Development

Development, where it means helping the poor out of poverty, is vitally important and has brought crucial improvements to many parts of the world. The main problem with 'development' more generally is that it can attempt to replicate Western ways of life in areas, and with peoples, which cannot sustain them, do not want them, or both. When it comes to 'developing' indigenous peoples it can do immense damage and has been directly responsible for much suffering and death.

I have touched on this when describing the prejudice which asserts that tribal people are stupid: they must surely be fools not to want to live like Westerners. When people think this – and many do – they usually mean ‘to live like affluent Westerners’, with good education, health care, nutrition and housing. In reality, there are many people, including in the richest countries, who live in poverty and have access to none of these. For example, about one in every five American children is considered extremely poor, and more than half of United States citizens will sink below the poverty threshold at some stage in their lives.

There is little doubt that if offered the choice to have all the benefits enjoyed by the well-off in the West, particularly if it included continuing to live on their own land in their own communities, many indigenous people might well opt in. The problem is, that is not what is on offer. There is an enormous trade-off for practically everything that passes for ‘development’, and it can leave people in a worse state than before, frequently much worse.

An extreme, but common, example is the enforced boarding schooling already described. Even programmes where the benefits should be obvious, such as health care, can bring more harm than good when they are carried out by badly-trained professionals, who have a superior and aggressive attitude to those they are caring for. Unfortunately, this is the case more often than not.

The biggest key to why such projects fail is that the intended beneficiaries have no sense of ownership over them. They are not asked if they want them. Or, if they are, it is frequently in hasty meetings, conducted in an alien environment, with people they have never met before. Indigenous representatives may casually agree to ill-conceived and little-understood proposals on the basis that

they have nothing to lose, just hoping that there might be some benefit, somewhere along the line.

The solution to all this is not difficult, but it needs more time and common sense in planning, as well as usually far less money. These factors sit uneasily in the agendas of many development agencies, which are simply not flexible enough and too pressured. Good projects may be cheaper than bad ones, but the job of agency staff is generally to spend money, not save it. Funds remaining unused may result in smaller budget allocations in future years, and no one wants to be responsible for that. The vetting of projects involves time and work, and it is far easier and quicker to approve a few big ones, costing tens of millions, than lots of small ones, costing a thousand each, even though the latter might be preferable and bring much more benefit to those on the receiving end.

For example, in the usual developmental model, and in the minds of many Westerners, 'education' implies buildings, books, children on chairs in rows, teachers from outside the community, and a curriculum dictated by city officials, often bearing little relevance to rural life. The result for indigenous people is that their children learn little which helps them, in an alien environment, and from unsympathetic tutors. Children sitting under a tree, or on the floor, listening to a teacher from their own community telling them things, in their own language, which are going to equip them for their changing lives, are rare exceptions. The same goes for health projects.

Peel away the rhetoric from many development agendas and they begin to look all too closely like the old colonial enterprise: everyone must learn to live like Westerners, like it or not. Dig deeper, and the connection with business and profit is inescapable. Everyone must not only learn to live like Westerners, they must either supply raw materials to

Western markets, or buy their finished products, and preferably both.

Trillions of dollars have been spent on ‘development aid’ in the last couple of generations and this has undoubtedly both helped many poor people and impoverished others (largely by taking their land for ‘development’). The single biggest factor, by far, in enabling people to live healthier and longer is not financial assistance however, but knowledge of simple hygiene – the understanding that human faeces transmit fatal disease through microbes too small to be seen. If people defecate near water supplies, or fail to wash their hands afterwards, or if insects carry the germs into the water, then serious illnesses result.

Western science discovered this link in the mid-1800s, though ideas about hygiene are certainly not a monopoly of the West. It took a century, even in the richest countries, before the infrastructure needed to keep people safe in cities was in place and houses were connected to both piped water and sewerage. (As late as the 1970s, a friend’s Paris apartment had its WC sited in the middle of the kitchen, with privacy provided merely by a makeshift screen!) In spite of all that is spent on ‘development’, most people in the world still live without piped water or sewerage. This is obviously much less a problem in rural areas with low population densities than it is in urban conglomerations where many people are taking water from the same source, and where much more contaminating material is produced. A few people falling ill in cities can rapidly turn into fatal epidemics.

Child mortality rates are not a bad way of judging whether development ‘works’. In most countries, they are lower than they were twenty or so years ago, but this is not so everywhere. Kenya for example is one of the biggest

recipients of aid, but mortality rates there have actually risen. The large proportion of the Kenyan population which is rated as 'undernourished' – nearly one in three citizens – has only been marginally reduced.

Real facts about whether more people overall are better or worse off as a result of 'development' are difficult to pin down. For a start, a lot of the data gathering is relatively recent, the definitions used can differ over time and from study to study, and they are open to government manipulation. What counts as 'poverty' in one place is different to another. Another problem is that much of the information is, of necessity, presented as averages, and these can hide as much as they reveal. For example, the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country is the apparent monetary value of everything produced there. But if a tiny number of people produce most of the 'value' and most of the rest produce nothing at all, then the average GDP figure per head of population gives only a distorted picture.

Davi Kopenawa, the prominent Yanomami Indian, was once in a meeting with the UK government's development agency, trying to explain the needs of his community. After an hour listening to the thinking behind the programmes being offered, he felt it necessary to point out to the perplexed official that the Yanomami were not 'poor': the help they needed was to counter the catastrophic effects outsiders had brought, principally from previously unknown diseases carried in by illegal miners.

Some companies accept that their activities *do* harm some people through making profits for others, so they sponsor beneficial 'development' projects in the hope of mitigating this. The claim is that the locals end up better off overall. In India for example, the Majhi Kondh saw the

schools, which were there anyway, acquiring new signs announcing they were funded by the mining firm which had taken their land. Even where a company funds worthwhile projects, there is an intrinsic problem here: if an enterprise is violating the rights of a people, can it 'offset' this by doing good elsewhere? Such a concept would not be accepted for other crimes: someone who had saved the lives of many men could never claim it excused his murder of a few! If funding benevolent projects is seen to legitimize harmful 'development', then the fundamental principles of inalienable human rights and justice quickly crumble.

Nevertheless, such a notion is gaining strength as resource extraction continues to make a few businessmen and politicians rich, and as corporations and governments increasingly fund supposedly independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, one of the largest American not-for-profits, Conservation International, is controlled by a board which includes the president of one of the world's largest public companies, JPMorgan Chase, as well as the president of Botswana. Both the investment house and the Botswana government have conducted unlawful activities, with Botswana held responsible for the recent inhuman and degrading treatment of Bushmen. What relevance has such behaviour to the not-for-profit sector?

In reality, NGOs now encompass some huge corporations with budgets running into hundreds of millions of dollars. Some argue that this is a sign of their maturity and professionalism, that they are now working for change 'from the inside' and that the earlier not-for-profit model was inefficient and amateurish; others just see an infiltration and takeover of the sector by business and the state. Some of these organizations are certainly a world away from the

original NGO stereotype, once dominated by altruism and notions of service that have largely fallen from fashion. The real problem may be the silence of some not-for-profits when faced with atrocities in areas where they work, or their tacit provision of ethical and environmental ‘credentials’ to those who do not deserve them.

The bigger question, however, remains whether or not the gap between the wealthiest and poorest has narrowed. Has the proportion of extremely poor shrunk as the world’s population has grown? The answer seems to be: probably not. There have of course been winners and losers but, by conservative estimates, one in every six people in the world now goes hungry. That amounts to one billion people – more than ever before. About half of all child deaths are specifically related to malnutrition, with a child dying as a result every few seconds.

Governments, their laws, and industry, have taken the principal roles in how the world has treated tribal peoples, but there is another component of nation states which has also played an extremely important supporting role – its churches and missionaries.

Missionaries

Many tribal people’s understanding of spirituality and religion is different from Western norms in an important way: for example, after recounting their creation myth some shamans ask, ‘That’s our story, what’s yours?’ They know that different peoples have different visions, whereas Western religions tend to think only one account can be correct. Some framework of beliefs is one of the primary ways that human