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2. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CONSULTATION ON EMPOWERMENT, CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Over the past two decades Hitchcock has worked for the governments of Botswana, Somalia, Swaziland, Namibia, Lesotho and Zimbabwe as well as for non-government organizations, the Ford Foundation, the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). He concentrates his efforts at the grassroots level where he deals with community-based sustainable development and natural resource management strategies. A past president and current board member of the Kalahari Peoples Fund (KPF), Dr. Hitchcock is also a founding member of the Committee for Human Rights (CfHR) of the American Anthropological Association. He is a member of the Panel of Environmental Experts for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project .(LHWP) and currently is working on a compensation and resettlement programme for the Komati Basin Water Development Authority (KOBWA) in Swaziland.

Introduction

Development can be defined as the strategy whereby the social and material well-being of people is raised. Some human rights analysts see development as a fundamental right of all people (*Barsh 1991*). It is ironic, therefore, that much of the development work that has been conducted is seen by some in the developing world and in the development community as having had negative effects on sizeable numbers of people, especially the poor, women and indigenous peoples. Global wealth flows have changed enormously over the past 50 years since the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Development Association (IDA) were founded. What has *not* changed is the domination of these flows by wealthy institutions, agencies and individuals. Over one fifth of the world's population lives below the poverty line, the line below which it is impossible for an individual to sustain herself or himself. Third World poor people argue vociferously that they have in fact been pushed into poverty both by international institutions and government efforts to deal with the debt problem. In a number of countries, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, prices have risen at much faster rates than economies have grown. The proportion of malnutrition among children has increased in many of the countries that have undertaken economic reforms. Infant mortality rates have also risen in some areas. Workers' wages have fallen in some of these same countries resulting in lower buying power at the local level, thereby hurting regional economies.

The number of female-headed households in the category of 'the poorest of the poor' have risen substantially. Female unemployment has increased, especially in rural areas. Some of these households have had to resort to begging or

worse in the minds of some, depending on handouts from the state. What most people in the North fail to realise is that they are having to underwrite the costs of these relief programmes, while the wealth flows toward the elites of society.

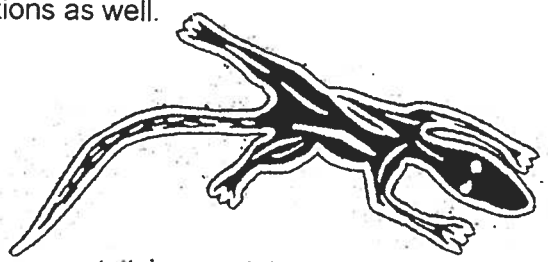
Given the importance that rural Third World people place on ensuring long-term social and economic security for their families, it comes as no surprise that they often oppose structural adjustment programmes. The International Monetary Foundation and the World Bank have responded by attempting to "put a human face" on these programmes. "Growth with equity" has become a new international objective. The crucial question is how to design a development strategy that minimizes the costs involved in this process while best meeting people's needs and desires.

A specific aim of strategies would be to develop and assist community initiatives and more generally, increase participation of indigenous peoples, women, the young, the elderly and the poor in community activities. In order to raise the income levels of people in the informal sector they need access to land, capital, improved technology and enhanced management skills. A well-designed micro-intervention can play a critical role in supporting the income-earning capacity of the most vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, during economic crises (*Cornia and Stewart 1987*). This has been amply illustrated in the cases of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) in India and Banco Popular in Costa Rica (*Wahid 1993; UNDP 1997; World Bank 1997*).

Much more emphasis needs to be placed on the role of participation of local people in decision-making and policy analysis. It would be useful, as Le Roux *(Le Roux 1996)* has argued, to carry out "community-owned development" in which local people have control over all aspects of development, from needs assessments to project planning and from development project implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Building on the cultural values of the group or community is essential. Among San and other indigenous peoples, there are some basic principles by which the societies operate, including

1) respect for the land,
2) consensus-based decision-making,
3) sharing and reciprocal use and exchange of resources, information and indigenous knowledge,
4) gender and equity and
5) mutual respect for people's ideas, values and ideology.

By incorporating these principles into a holistic development approach it would be possible to bring about local empowerment and to promote equitable, community-owned development that benefits not only the present, but future generations as well.



Whether or not it is possible to ensure that there is true equity will depend on whether communities have the right to do development on their own terms. Russel Barsh *(Russel Barsh 1991)* has argued that indigenous peoples and most people in the Third World see development as a fundamental human right. In order for this right to be realized in full it will be necessary for international finance institutions, states and private companies to reform themselves in such a way as to allow indigenous peoples not only a voice but also total and complete power to determine their own development paths.

The Consultation

The Kuru Development Trust is hosting this consultation of indigenous peoples and community organizations at Shakawe, Botswana in September 1998. The theme of the consultation is, as outlined above, empowerment, culture and spirituality in community development. There are many lessons to be learned from indigenous peoples' experience with development, ranging from the importance of maintaining one's cultural values in the course of engaging in development projects, incorporating indigenous spirituality and respect for people, the land and the natural and spiritual world, the significance of self-awareness and self-evaluation, the importance of transparency, accountability and broad-based participation and consultation, the need for finding an equitable balance among the individual, the group, the community and the nation and the role of responsive and responsible leadership in a democratic system.

This consultation will draw upon representatives of indigenous communities and organizations from Southern Africa and around the world. The agenda will include short presentations of lessons learned about community-owned development, discussions of case studies, small group reflections and exploration of challenges and opportunities facing indigenous peoples. The deliberations in the meeting will be open-ended and will build on the experiences of the people taking part in the consultation as well as those which are summarized in the case studies for the meeting. It is hoped that the end result of the indigenous peoples' consultation in Shakawe will be a more holistic, sensitive and flexible approach to community development that builds on the cultural values, traditions and spirituality of the world's indigenous societies.

> "I am very happy this was a grassroot conference. I am occupied with culture and it was very interesting to hear about the daily life ot these people. I hope that I have contributed only by being present, because these people have to solve their own problems, but we can inspire them. I missed a service there, cause I hear many of the San are Christians and so am I."
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> (Anne-Christine Mortensen, Norway)