‘Development’
and the health of tribal peoples
Is this *development*?

- “I say what kind of development is it when the people live *shorter lives* than before? They catch *HIV/AIDS*. Our children are beaten in school and won’t go. Some become *prostitutes*. They are not allowed to *hunt*. They fight because they are bored and get *drunk*. They are starting to *commit suicide*. We never saw that before. Is this ‘development’?”

Roy Sesana, Gana, Botswana.
Deadly progress?

• In the name of development
  – People removed from their lands
  – Children sent away to school, alien language imposed
  – Interactions with environment changed; self sufficiency destroyed
  – Systems of society changed: new rules & rulers

• All impact on their health, wellbeing, culture
• Entire peoples are lost
Why do we want to ‘develop’ them?

- “Civilisation is on the northward march, and for the Eskimo and the Indian there is no escape. ... The only course now open, for there can be no turning back, is to fit him as soon as may be to take his full place as a citizen in our society.”

Walter Rockwood, Canadian government, 1949
Why do we want to ‘develop’ *them*?

- “We became civilised and drive expensive vehicles. They [Gana and Gwi] should be empowered to join the mainstream. We all aspire to Cadillacs and would be concerned about any tribe remaining in the bush *communing with flora and fauna* … … it would be grossly irresponsible if we didn’t expose them to *modern day culture*.”

  Minister Mompati Merafhe, Botswana 2001
Attitudes to tribal peoples

“Foreign people see us not as human beings, but as creatures that are still in the evolution stage to becoming human beings. Consequently these people, especially the companies and the Indonesian government, treat us like animals, with rough and cruel measures.”

Enforced settlement
The Innu, Canada

- Settled in 1950s/60s
- One third of Innu children sniff petrol.
- The youngest start at just five years old.
“My name is Phillip. I’m a gas sniffer. I sniff gas with my friends. … And I sniff gas because both of my parents are drinking and I’m mad at that. … Sometimes, I often think about suicide… about committing suicide.”
Suicide and tribal youth: Guarani (Brazil)

- crowded onto tiny plots
- hemmed in by ranches and plantations
- no longer self-sufficient
- cheap labour for ranchers and plantation owners.

- 320 Guarani-Kaiowá committed suicide between 1986 and the beginning of 2000,
- the youngest was just 9 years old.

‘The Guarani are committing suicide because we have no land. We don’t have space any more. In the old days, we were free, now we are no longer free. So our young people look around them and think there is nothing left and wonder how they can live. They sit down and think, they forget, they lose themselves and then commit suicide.’

Rosalino Ortiz,
Guarani Ñandeva
Removal of Gana & Gwi, Kalahari
“How can you have a Stone Age creature continuing to exist in the age of computers? … If Bushmen want to survive, they must change, or otherwise, like the dodo, they will perish” (President Mogae, 1996)

“Our purpose in resettling these people is to assimilate them into the mainstream … It is done for service delivery, for economic empowerment, for their own orderly development” (Gen. Moeng Pheto, 2002)
Gana and Gwi: Impact of relocation

• Physical health
  – Living conditions
  – ‘Crowd diseases’
  – HIV/AIDS:
    • 40% of deaths in one camp in 2002

• Culture and Mental health
  – Drinking
  – Community disintegration
  – Trance dance, ancestors.

  “Take my photo. I want to go and be buried in my home in Molapo. I am sick now, I am about to die. I have been coughing a lot.”
  Tumelo Sebelegangwana
Gana & Gwi

‘The government talks about development. Let it help us with water, then leave us to our own place. We can think for ourselves; we can think about what we need.’

Mogetse Kaboikanyo 2002.
Westernisation and chronic ill health

• Cramped living conditions, poor sanitation
  – 50% of Aboriginal kids in some settlements need hearing aids

“The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is disastrously poor ... the fundamental cause is disempowerment, due to various factors including continued dispossession from the land, cultural dislocation, poverty, poor education and unemployment.” (Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 1997)

• Sedentary lives and poor food
  – Rations: flour, oil, sugar
  – Dental decay (Maori teeth: 0.1% decay before colonisation, 50% in some communities today)
  – Obesity
  – Diabetes
Westernisation and chronic ill health

• “The rapid cultural transition over one to two generations of many indigenous communities to a Western diet and sedentary lifestyle has led to diabetes replacing infectious diseases as the number one threat to their survival”

Prof Stewart Harris, Canada 2006

• “Without urgent action there certainly is a real risk of a major wipe-out of indigenous communities, if not total extinction, within this century.”

Prof Paul Zimmet, International Diabetes Institute 2006
Nutritional content of wild and store-bought foods

- Caribou
- Beaver
- Moose
- Luncheon meat
- Steak
- Frankfurter

Yellow: Fat
Red: Protein
So, what IS the answer?
So, what IS the answer?

• Davi Kopenawa Yanomami at DFID: *respect*

"It is not that the Yanomami do not want progress, do not want many things that white people have. They want **to be able to chose** and not have change thrust upon them, whether they want it or not." Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, 2003.
Yanomami

- Amazonia: Brazil / Venezuela border
- 40,000 goldminers
- 1970s/1980s: 20% of the Yanomami died

- Land demarcated 1992
Yanomami health project

- Co-operation between health teams and shamans
- Independent funding
- Continuous coverage in the villages.

- 2000: the mortality rate halved
- 2005: government took control
- Spent twice as much but ...
- Malaria rates quadrupled

- Lesson: community-requested, community-led, community-based, independent programmes. ON their own land.
Innu: Tshikapisk Foundation

- Kids taught Innu culture, history
- Geography of their lands, skills
- Removed from cycles of violence, abuse, drugs.

“I feel a lot better about myself out here in the country. In Sheshatshiu all I do is drink...I like it here. It’s peaceful. There are no drunks or drugs”

Key issues

1. Land rights
2. Cultural rights
3. Choice and control
How can we change the script?

• Indigenous empowerment & law
  – UN Declaration, ILO Convention 169
• International awareness
  – Media, web, education
• Exposing the problems with ‘development’
  – Health Report etc.
• Changing the mindsets of ‘developers’
  – There You Go