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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

SUITS AND SAVAGES: Why the World Bank Won't Save the World

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PART ONE

Narrator: The Bengal tiger is being driven to extinction in the wild. It's clear that radical conservation measures are needed if they are to survive outside of zoos.

Public pressure is growing to change the way international development is shaped by agencies like the World Bank. In response, governments have poured billions of dollars into a little known aid fund called the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It funds projects that are meant to be at the cutting edge of conservation, made in partnership with local communities, and that provide an example for the World Bank to follow.

To see how such global ideals relate to local realities, we traveled from a tiger conservation project called Ecodevelopment in the forests of southern India to Washington D.C. where the GEF works from inside the World Bank headquarters. The journey starts as we show the GEF's promotional video in one of 58 indigenous settlements inside Nagarhole National Park.

GEF video soundtrack: The earth gives us a rich supply of natural resources, each one of them nurturing life in all its majesty. But we are in danger of destroying this precious mosaic and its delicate balance. Poverty causes millions to over-exploit nature, while uncontrolled growth sometimes ignores environmental safeguards. Our air and water are poisoned. Animals and plants face extinction. We must therefore take up the challenge [and] fight climate change and protect our plants and animals. The future health of the world depends on every one of us. The Global Environment Facility - Caring for the Planet.

Kenchaiah: This is like a drama. It's not real. [It's] not real like life, growing up free in the forests. From the time the [Indian] government got money from the GEF, they told us we'd get many things when we leave this place.

S**omayamma:** The government men said, "If you don't leave the forest, we'll throw you out. We'll shoot you down!"

Kenchaiah: We have not utilized any "Ecodevelopment" money.

Cheloraj: If you want to declare this a National Park, then all rights are barred: right of way, right of living. [That's] because the first reality is for the animals. We have 55 to 60 tigers in Nagarhole National Park. The population is good and the number of sightings is good.

Balachandra: Because of this project we have been able to repair most of the roads and the network has been improved a lot. Now, every range forest office has a vehicle.

Cheloraj: Under this Ecodevelopment project guards are all provided with double-barreled guns. They are all provided with walkie-talkies. And they try to catch the smugglers.

P.K. Sen: There is a competition here in India between human beings and tigers. [The] human population has doubled in the past 25 years. Therefore something has to be given to the villagers for their own sustenance to reduce their pressure on the forests. That was the concept of Ecodevelopment.

Narrator: The basic idea of the project is to keep animals inside the park and people outside.

Balachandra: Some of the people in the village will sell the forest produce to far off places and make their livelihood if we provide them with an alternative livelihood using these funds. It is they [themselves who] have to tell us what is good for them, how they can benefit, and what role they can play in the protection of the National Park.

He is the president of the India Ecodevelopment Project of this village. These people will sit together and decide who should get what. This is the plan of the village approved by Washington.

So we'll go to the shopkeeper now. We have financed him with 1,800 rupees to purchase these commodities. So by that his economic standard has increased now. We have a lot of influence on the minds of the people and we can tell them to say [to each other], "Don't go inside the park."

Narrator: Out of earshot of the officials, some landless women in the village took a different view of ecodevelopment.

Unidentified woman: Out of 40 families, one woman got a sewing machine.

Sidamma: Welfare schemes only benefit the powerful people in the village. Government men don't let us [enter] the forest. They offer us benefits for one year, two years, five years. But what do we do after that?

Unidentified man: At that side of the road is the park.

Cheloraj: This side is the village.

Balachandra: I'll show you. We will be improving the tourism facilities for the people, and we want that tribal people should be involved in tourism also. People in the park, basically, are deprived of the basic amenities. And when they come out to the periphery of the park, they'll be eligible for getting all the benefits of the Ecodevelopment Project.

Kendhaiah: They just say they'll do things for us; they never do. My name is Kenchaiah. I'm an activist for a human rights group here in Nagarhole. Just as the forest has grown here, we have grown here. We're not from the cities. We used to eat roots, fruits, and greens more than rice. This is sollehannu. You can eat this fruit. We get honey for three months of the year. That's why we're called the Jenu Kuruba (Honey Gatherers). The forest animals' relation to us is divine, godly. They are not frightened of us. We are not frightened of them.

Somayamma: My name is Somayamma. I work for the Council here in the village. I live here with my family. My daughter's family lives opposite us. We have to struggle to live here.

Government men tell us, "Don't go inside the forest, you are robbing it." But they are frightened that we will see what is happening there. [shot of trees felled presumably by forestry officials] Had we been doing this [type of] robbery from the time of our forefathers, how would this forest still exist?

Kenchaiah: We used to live 30 kilometers further inside the forest. That place is called Kai Mara. Forest officials work there now. Since we came out of the forest, modernization means traditions are not being followed. For example, our Kolata dances don't take place as regularly. Since we came to this place, we are forced to work as coolies. And whenever we get money, we [have to] buy rice and rations to eat.

Somayamma: The adivasi (indigenous) people are impoverished while those forestry people are living here making more money. That's why they chase poor people like us out!

Balachandra: Most of them are addicted to alcohol, cheap alcohol, spirits. And they don't save anything, this is the main thing, tribals don't have a habit of saving anything.

Government is very much concerned with the improvement of the tribals. This is why we have another project, a rehabilitation project. Culture, tradition, and all that can be maintained. Here we are at a construction site. We're constructing 50 tribal houses. This is the living room-cum-hall. Here is the bedroom-cum-storage area. And this is the bathroom. The doors still have to be attached.

These people should also be enjoying the benefits and enter the mainstream of society. They should become decision makers and policy makers. They have finally been exposed to the mainstream of society so they are not adivasis (indigenous people) anymore. What is an adivasi? You can call some tribal people in Andaman adivasi since they have not seen the light of development. Got it?

Somayamma: We came together and organized ourselves. We said, "We're not going to give away this place [of our ancestors] whatever happens."

Kenchaiah: They told us not to keep animals. But they are driving around in big vehicles. We went to Delhi to talk about these things.

PART TWO

Narrator: Kenchaiah was one of three adivasi from Nagarhole forest who made the two-day train journey to Delhi for the Global Environment Facility's first Participants' Assembly. Before the big meetings began, there was a day of consultations where activists could challenge the World Bank and the GET directly over their backing for projects like Ecodevelopment.

Kenchaiah: The city looked very nice, but only for one day. The environment there is not like ours. I couldn't eat the food. There was so much smoke from the cars that my nose got blocked up. But it was good that I went to the meeting because I learned much about the World Bank.

Narrator: With $2.7 billion of new money pledged and 128 governments represented, the Assembly was the GEF's chance to establish its place on the international stage.

Mohamed El-Ashry: You can't exist without money, particularly when you are a financial mechanism. No one will listen to you. No one will pay any attention to you. Looking ahead a number of years down the line, one key challenge is survival. Will the GEF exist ten years from now? Participation is time consuming and costly, but it's also been proven that projects that had public participation are better projects.

Kenchaiah: Those big people spoke among themselves. We didn't understand [what they were saying]. After we left the meeting, some things were explained to us.

Neena Singh: They all talk in jargon that is very familiar to each other, but totally incomprehensible to outsiders. But maybe that's the agenda. The three implementing agencies of the GEF are the UNDP, the UNEP, and the World Bank. If you compare GEF to the other organizations, then there is much more openness and there's much more participation.

Hutton Archer: Since the NGOs are such an important part of the body of the GEF, we all listen.

Supriya Akerkar: "Listening to local communities," that's a procedure that the GEF follows. [But] here we have people from a project site who are saying that this is not our project, we have not been consulted, and this project is going against our basic livelihoods.

Robin Broadfield: This is not going to be an easy issue to deal with however much we prepare it, however much we consult in the process. This was one of the most expensive and participatory projects, in terms of preparation, that the [World] Bank and/or the GEF have ever been involved in.

Sunita Narain: You talk about participation without giving people control. The problem with the project is the World Bank and the [Indian] Forest Department. They are two partners who are both extremely arrogant, and they are two partners who treat forests as their fiefdoms.

Robin Broadfield: That really is a gross misstatement of the efforts that we have made to listen and to respond. Villagers are not required to do anything under this project. They are given the opportunity if they wish to take it.

Sunita Narain: The government believes, and to a large extent I should imagine the World Bank believes, that they are doing something radically different. I don't believe so. The approach was to say that people were the "biotic interference" and were "not needed" in the protected areas. Therefore, they needed to be removed. We believe this [argument] is scientifically flawed.

Robin Broadfield: We have a track record in working to prepare this project in terms of its design and its participation efforts that are really actually close to state of the art.

Sunita Narain: Maybe it is a "state of the art" program and maybe it is very innovative, but only for bureaucracies that are still living in the 18th century.

Robin Broadfield: That's exactly what this project is trying to get away from. Let me just remind you that the preparation of this project was actually conducted by an Indian NGO professional institute.

Shekhar Singh: I was the person who the government of India invited to prepare the India Ecodevelopment Project. My institute and I, we did it. You can't sit in Delhi in air -conditioned comfort and say no, no, no, but you must live in the jungle the way people have lived in jungles. And if they want to change, all you have to do is make sure that the transition process is as ecologically friendly as possible.

There was an ideological criticism [by] people who were opposed to institutions like the GEF and the World Bank. And I said to them, "Look, I can get the World Bank to use some of its funds progressively. If it wasn't used for Ecodevelopment, it's a country -committed fund, it would go to build a dam."

Sunita Narain: The Ecodevelopment Project is a classic case of "you participate in my program."

William Appiah: This is what the people are saying, "In our community, the project is simply just not working. Therefore, something needs to be done." And it is my hope that something will be done.

Robin Broadfield: It's frankly ridiculous to say that the project is not working. And we can possibly know, at this stage, whether it's working or not.

Sunita Narain: You are creating a new process of alienation. And you've only made the words more sophisticated. The actions don't match the words. Thank you.

Hutton Archer: We have ventilated this issue and the views are clear. I think any attempt to reach any other conclusion of this discussion would be dreaming at this stage. May I therefore move onto the next agenda item. We are two hours behind…

Neena Singh: I think it was very clear that the agenda is very limited. It is to celebrate five years of the GEF, not to change its framework and think about where it's really going wrong and make bold decisions. It was much money wasted on an event that [have no social relevance].

Kenchaiah: It's not fair if they make decisions from here and we have to give away the forests.

Neena Singh: People in the local areas are the ones who are most concerned about their local environment. It's the bigger fishes who move from place to place with no roots anywhere [who] are the ones that are creating the problems.

Shekhar Singh: To try and think that one can sit in Washington or Geneva or somewhere else and try and form a global picture of what is required for conservation seems to be an impossible task.

Sunita Narain: Increasingly, it is a centralized and faraway bureaucracy that makes the decisions that affect the lives of local communities. They have the maximum stake in their environment, but they have the least amount of [power] to make those decisions.

PART THREE

Narrator: Across the world in Washington D.C., it's business as usual at the World Bank headquarters where the Global Environment Facility's secretariat is based. It was time to explore how hundreds of projects across the world are funded from Washington in the name of the global environment, given the disparities between glossy project descriptions and realities experienced on the ground. We went to D.C. with a video letter from the people of Nagarhole forest, addressed to the staff of the GEF and World Bank. Despite promising to be completely open about their work, GEF secretariat staff were advised not to appear in this film. Others however, were less reticent.

Robin Broadfield: I'm Robin Broadfield. I got embroiled in that debate, trying to defend the Bank and get the facts on the table about the extensive consultations which we and the Indian authorities had in fact undertaken in the Nagarhole area. But recognizing perhaps that we hadn't done as comprehensive a job of consultation with the communities as perhaps we could have done.

I've had quite a long career here in the [World] Bank. I've been a Bank staff person for almost 14 years now. I'm a kind of middle person between the client and the GEF institutions. But I do get to enjoy the very pleasant experience of living and working in Washington [D.C]., here at the World Bank headquarters. [on phone]: That'll work fine. Alright then.

You change the development path that countries follow by offering the incentive of GEF financing on top of a World Bank loan to redesign a project in a way that is more globally environment friendly.

Bob Watson: The challenge is, how can governments get to grips with reducing our pressure on the global environment while continuing economic development. The GEF is actually a very important instrument. It's got a modest amount of money, the current replenishment was $2.4 billion over a four-year period to address issues of climate change and biodiversity that are very, very large in magnitude.

Robin Broadfield: So I see the GEF as really a facilitator in a locally managed process of consultation, negotiation, hopefully reaching agreement and then implementing a collaborative way of managing these natural resources.

Video Letter Title: "A Letter to the GEF and the World Bank"

Kenchaiah: What we have to say is, we are the people who live in the forest.

Somayamma: If they get the money, it's like throwing rocks on our heads.

Kenchaiah: Because you are asking us to leave the forest, and only then offering to help, we don't want any of your help.

Laxmi: Even if we're going to be killed, we're not prepared to move from this place.

Subramanian: We don't know what the World Bank will do next. What we do next depends on that.

Somayamma: Let us work together, us and the Forest Department. Then, we can save the forests. We want that duty!

Robin Broadfield: Well, I think there's a very heartfelt need on the part of the people featured in the video here to work with their local authority, their Forest Department, to find collaborative ways to better manage the forest resources. And that's exactly the philosophy that the GEF is encouraging.

Narrator: So why can't scientists and bureaucrats working for the GEF bridge the gap between this philosophy and the reality of situations like that in Southern India?

Charles Chipato: The GEF, at the moment, seems to be driven more by the donor community. It is young, and there has not been enough time to penetrate its structures right up to the bottom. Take the World Bank for instance. It's basically more tuned to address issues with big corporations…

Korinna Horta: As soon as this idea of some kind of global fund came up the World Bank readily offered itself. Having been so heavily criticized for their environmental and social record, the Bank saw this as an opportunity to actually obtain somewhat of a

"green veneer" by being the main player in the GEF, and it is the main player: it is the administrator of the GEF Trust Fund, it is the main implementing agency, and it houses the GEF Secretariat. They have to move money. It has to make projects and approve them quickly so that at the next replenishment negotiations, the GEF can ask for more money. Because should they ask for less, that wouldn't make it look good. The gap between international policy makers and local people who are directly affected by GEF projects is enormously great.

Narrator: As we saw in Delhi, some activists and NGOs do try to bridge that gap - not always successfully.

Paul Sanchez-Navarro: We're invited to attend the meetings of the GEF. What we've done so far is play a sort of a watchdog role, looking at the key problems, things that are affecting conservation projects on the ground. There are some wonderful groups doing excellent work at the local level, but there's no way to get their voice to even the national or the international level, and that's one of the challenges that the network faces.

Narrator: So, whose voice is heard at the global level in the GEF's democratic governing Council?

Asda Jayanama: It's quite unique, you know. It's quite unique compared to the other organizations I'm used to. During the time I've been here, I don't think there has been one occasion when we had to have a vote. So, it's more business-like and we want to move ahead and it's more… more… more technical.

Robin Broadfield: Clearly, reaching consensus among 32 constituency representatives on the Council is a very tall order. And, I think that's what bringing the CEO and chairman together in the body of one person really does facilitate. It allows him to work with individual Council members in the corridors, to get issues out on the table in a more private and constructive environment to address them.

Asda Jayanama: So, he is a very powerful person who directs and guides the work of GEF.

Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen: This is very attractive to individuals in search of a global role which may not actually change the world very much, but while you're working there, you know, you feel you're somebody, and you're running the world. In practice, there's a lot of politics going on, but it's not admitted.

Narrator: The GEF aspires to be "non-political," preferring to emphasize its scientific and technical expertise.

Bob Watson: One of my first positions was indeed the chairman, the first chairman, of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. So, I do believe there is a need for a strong element of scientific research in the GEF, but it should indeed be directed to serve the end goals of the GEF, which is indeed the protection of the climate system, biodiversity, etc.

Sonjy Boehmer-Christiansen: Science is definitely needed. The big question is which science, because there are many different sciences involved. And whose science? For example, the huge publication on biodiversity, and a lot of environmental economics research, politically simply reflects those interests which created the Global Environment Facility.

Asda Jayanama: As a Council member, you cannot be expected to understand every aspect of GEF's work. For example, there is this concept of incremental costs. I don't think it's in any economic textbook. It's something created by GEF which I still don't fully understand, I must confess.

Robin Broadfield: I think there's a lot of confusion or lack of precise understanding over what exactly incremental costs are.

Narrator: The GEF may only fund the extra costs of creating what it calls "global environmental benefits." Who calculates these costs? And who really benefits?

Robin Broadfield: The message I would send back is that the World Bank has heard your concerns, we fully understand them, we will respect them in the way that we work with the Indian authorities in implementing the Ecodevelopment project. We simply have to sit down with the various interest groups in our client countries and try to find a way forward.

Bob Watson: I do believe what we're seeing in the World Bank is an evolution where the clients themselves are starting to want cleaner projects.

Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen: A lot of international bodies are looking for new tasks, and the environment being an important global one is starting to attract all international organizations. They all want to have a part of the environmental cake, if you like. As globalization continues, and as more responsibility is handed, in some areas, to these international bureaucracies, we're going to have to have a closer look at them. How many countries have the power to exclude these global interests? Not too many countries left I think.

PART FOUR

Narrator: The World Bank's Independent Inspection Panel investigates disputed projects. It is the last legal recourse for affected communities.

Jim McNeill: We received a request from a group of tribal people in Nagarhole who claimed that the Bank had violated a number of its policies. We went out to the field and we did our own assessment.

Kenchaiah: They were nice people. We invited them here to this settlement.

Jim McNeill: We broadly found merit in the complaints.

Kenchaiah: They said, "You stay here. The government is wrong to be forcing you out."

Jim McNeill: Lack of consultation, prior consultation with the tribals, failure to develop an indigenous peoples' plan, which is required by Bank policy, the absence of choice as to whether tribals can remain in the park or not…

Narrator: Despite this damning report, the Bank's governing Board has decided not to act. In fact, most Inspection Panel reports are rejected, and Bank policy on indigenous peoples is being watered down to avoid it being broken so often.

Sunita Narain: I feel that the World Bank needs to become more accountable, and not just accountable to Washington-based NGOs but accountable to the civil society in the countries it lends to.

Neena Singh: There are lots of people inside the World Bank who are keen to change the way things happen. Some feel helpless. I think some feel helpless because a large part of the World Bank is dominated by economists who don't want to change the way things work.

Korinna Horta: As long as you do not change these institutional cultures, even if you have a number of, you know, sympathetic social scientists on board, will in the end not do you much good.

Somayamma: Now, they tell us, "We have come for the development of your people." They should come and consult our leaders, our gods, our people about using the money. Then it will be useful to us.

Neena Singh: I think that's the way GEF should be moving towards: Less bureaucracy, less paperwork, less institutional arrangements, and more direct responsibility and resources to the people.

Narrator: Decentralizing control to local communities would make global conservation fairer, but such democracy would challenge the very power structures underlying the Global Environment Facility.

Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen: To disguise political decisions as non-political is not only dishonest, but will alienate many people and will, in the end, reduce the credibility of these international organizations.

Sunita Narain: Some sort of ecological governance is going to become inevitable and I think that is what we are seeing today. But what is important is that the rules for this global governance are increasingly devised in a way that they are fair and just.

Caption insert: Since this film was shot, activists have been arrested and some Adivasi have been violently evicted from Nagarhole forest. The Ecodevelopment project continues, and the tiger population remains in decline.

Yashoda's Song: The forest is like my own child. Whoever comes, whatever comes, I will guard it. The land which is full of brave and courageous people, I will live with the same courage. I will live with the same courage forever… forever… Whatever comes, whoever comes, we will face it.

Based on research from the University of Hull, UK
Conscious Cinema 2000 (38 minutes)
[www.consciouscinema.co.uk]