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UNIV 391

October 27, 1992

*The No-Nonsense Guide to International Development* by Maggie Black

The *No Nonsense Guide to Development* by Maggie Black takes an in-depth approach to what is happening in developing nations and what is being done to them in the name of aid and development. Throughout the book Black exposes the hypocrisy of developers and the truth of who actually gets aid. Black divides the book into sections starting with history of development, the international contributions from other nations, the economic, political, and social element of foreign aid and development.

Black begins by stating that ever since the term “development” was coined, unprincipled, unscientific, and undemocratic processes have been an epidemic in developing countries. She uses an example of a Dam built in Northern India that has displaced 10,000 villagers, inundated fertile farm land, and worst of all was built on a fault that has had an earthquake that reached 8.5 on the Richter scale in recent years. This is an example of undemocratic and unscientific development that is happening everywhere.

Black talks about the history of development in these nations. The 60’s were a golden age for awareness and politicians being willing to deliver aid to needy countries. Most of Africa had become independent so willingness and enthusiasm for aid was high. The 70’s brought the oil crises and the formation of OPEC which hiked up gas prices and saw the first sign of struggle for developing nations. The 80’s were termed the “lost decade” for development as debt payments from these nations overtook aid. Poor nations owed richer nations payments on development projects they simply could not afford or payoff. This time was known as the development reversal era.

Not everyone is doing their part, says Black. The UN target nations are to give for foreign aid was set at .07 GNP (Gross Net Product) and currently only four countries are giving that amount to developing countries. The U.S. only gives .01 of its GNP for development. Black also exposed that most aid isn’t even given to the poorest countries, instead it is given to the poor nations that can offer political gain for the donating country or can offer a military alliance. The U.S for example gives a disproportionate amount of aid to Israel for security reasons, and France to its former colonies in Africa to strengthen military alliances. The poorest of the poor that have no connection or nothing to offer are simply left out. Nothing is given out charity, there is always a special interest involved.

The impacts of development are complex and far reaching. Like in the case of the Dam built in India, or an airport that was developed over farmland in Mexico, some economic progress deprives locals of their livelihood, creates unemployment, and causes more harm than good, all to benefit the elitists of the nation. Black suggested a bottom -up approach to growth is needed where it affects communities first and then the elitists, instead of the current top-down model where elitists benefit first and the effects never reach poorer communities.

Development is not economic but social too. Black states that people are assets when they have the ability to work and liabilities when they can’t. In Afghanistan, 43 percent of men and 12 percent of women are literate. Black states that there is no way a country can develop when half of its workforce is uneducated and suppressed. Political rights, literacy, nutrition, family size, social spheres etc. all matter when it comes to international development.

Lastly, Black says sometimes people don’t want to abandon their old ways, and a democratic process of development is well…impossible. Cultural barriers and old ways of life are difficult to breakdown. In many African villages, having more children equals more security for the parents in old age, and being secure is the only thing that matters for some of these families.

My reaction to this book isn’t of surprise. Black offers some interesting facts and points on why such negative and unfair things are happening in development, but I think that if one is an informed citizen and keeps up to date on the news, the information in this book is not surprising and many cases states what we already know about injustice, corruption, and unfairness of aid and development in these poorer nations.