



Fact or Fiction?

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Feel-good Environmentalism Can Hurt the Poor

Environmental groups received over six and a half billion dollars in 2006. I doubt that many folks who donated to these groups know that some of their money is used to thwart projects destined to help poverty-stricken people in poor nations. The groups don't publicize this fact. For example, when you go on the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) website you see lots of pictures of adorable animals and stories of WWF projects to save gorillas and macaws. But they don't publicize the dirty fact that they are working to bring down a mining project in Madagascar, the world's third poorest country.¹

The world's poorer nations need the economic growth that mining projects provide. However, radical environmentalists stand in their way. Their desire to hold the developing countries to First-World green standards consigns people in developing worlds to slow - and in some cases no - economic growth.²

In the summer of 2002, when famine gripped Africa, the U.S. sent massive amounts of corn to several countries, including about 17,000 tons to Zambia. But there it rotted. Turns out the Zambian government had been told by environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth that the food was "poison."³ Says Dennis Avery, "Thus Greenpeace and Friends say that starving Africans should forego foodstuffs that most of those organizations' American members have been eating for the past decade with no ill effects, so that Western greens can make a political point." Never mind that this was the same pest-resistant corn that had been approved for safety by three different U.S. government agencies, and eaten daily since 1995 by millions of Americans in such forms as corn flakes, corn flour and through livestock feed, hamburgers and ice cream. Avery adds, "Biotech foods have undergone more testing than any foods in history, with no danger found."⁴

The World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Sierra Club, Rainforest Action

Network and other multinational activist corporations battle against mines in Romania, Peru, Chile, Ghana and Indonesia; electricity projects in Uganda, India and Nepal; biotechnology that could improve farm incomes and reduce malnutrition in Kenya, India, Brazil and the Philippines; and DDT that could slash malaria rates all over Africa, where it kills 3,000 children every day. While stressing the speculative danger of technology, these groups ignore the real, immediate life-or-death dangers that modern mining, development and technology would prevent. They never mention the jobs, clinics, schools, roads, improved housing and small business opportunities these economic activities make available - or the electricity, refrigeration, safe water, better nutrition, reduced lung and intestinal disease and fewer deaths of children.⁵

A recent documentary, "Mine Your Own Business," provides some vivid examples. A gold/silver project in Rosia Montana, a dirt-poor community in Romania, expected to produce 635,000 ounces of gold is being held at bay. A proposed mining project in Madagascar, where the environmentalist speaking out against the mining industry investing untold millions of dollars in another dirt-poor area happens to live in a lovely villa with a lovely dock for his \$35,000 catamaran, proclaims that the locals would be much better off being poor. And in South America, a local peasant explains why the incredibly affluent landowners near the proposed mine along the border of Chile and Argentina support the obstructionists. Miners would make twice the \$9 a day the landowners pay workers to carry stuff on their backs like mindless mules.⁶

Financial Times Associate Editor Martin Wolf points out the environmentalists, most of whom are outsiders and fly in only for photo ops, think lives of such dire poverty are quaint. Hence, the environmentalists "really don't want change," he says. "The environmentalists really are

against growth. They don't want economic growth at all."⁷

No debate, there are environmental impacts from mines, dams and other development. They change lives and communities, and there are health and other risks. However, as Roy Innis notes, "...those changes also came with the Industrial Revolution. Are we worse off for it? Would we prefer to return to the jobs, lifestyles and living standards of pre-industrial, pre-electrical America - when cholera and malaria were ever-present and the average life expectancy 45?"⁸

Yet, all this aside, Mark Dowie claims that the biggest threat to the worlds indigenous people today isn't logging, mining or oil drilling. It's conservation. He writes, "From the Maasai nomads of East Africa to the Hmong hill people of Southeast Asia to Mayan villagers in Mexico, indigenous tribes around the globe are increasingly being expelled from lands where they have lived in harmony with nature for centuries or millennia. Millions of these 'conservation refugees' now live in squalid squatter camps on the edges of national parks, and other nature sanctuaries. The total area of land now under conservation protection worldwide has doubled since 1990, with over 12 percent of all land, a total area of 11.75 million square miles, now protected. That's an area greater than the entire land mass of Africa. The unintended consequences of the global conservation movement's success have been mass dislocation. Worldwide estimates of the number of people displaced by conservation activities range from 5 million to tens of millions."⁹

Dowie adds; "It is a strange paradox that a movement that exhorts the harmonious coexistence of people and nature, worries about the continued survival of nature (particularly loss of habitat problems), somehow forgets about the natural survival of humans, especially those who have lost their habitats or food sources. If this trend continues, a vital piece of the web of survival will be missing."⁹

At the 1992 United Conference on Economic Development held in Rio de Janeiro, environmentalists from the northern hemisphere staged demonstrations every day. One *Journal do Brazil* headline said: "Americans and Europeans March in Defense of Animals, Forests and Ecology." The subhead told the real story though: "Brazilians protest hunger, poverty and oppression." Even more telling, in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro. Mark Dowie reported: "No one who attended the nongovernmental organizations' (NGO) preparatory meetings in New York would have been surprised by the behavior of American environmentalists in Rio. There and in Rio, third-world delegates found them to be imperious and insensitive." "We don't want to be lectured as to what we should do, unless it is done in a cooperative and democratic way," said delegate Mani Shankar. "I am not about to go to my people and tell them they must face more deprivation because some lady in Maine is fretting over the cutting of a tree or because some chap in San Francisco wants to drive his Volvo in a better conscience. We can sit down and talk when we realize that one job in Cincinnati is not one bit more important than one job in Delhi."¹⁰ *P&SF*

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