



## International development: challenges for a world in transition

### *Self Interest or Altruism*

**Narrator:**

Rhamya Subramanian finds this all a bit unconvincing. It assumes that those implementing development projects are not going to pursue their own interests. And it's hard to see how so much emphasis on local knowledge can be reconciled with a broad notion of what is good, that everyone shares.

**RS:**

We don't acknowledge enough that even interveners are not neutral. They carry their own values. They carry their own ideas of what is right. And this is the same kind of conflict you find when bureaucrats interact with the villages. They may have a more offensive way of doing it. You know, a much more kind of hierarchical officious way of telling people they're wrong and the state agenda is right. But that's perhaps a more honest kind of version of what really might go on in other interventions. And I think that is a danger. And I think that also brings up the issue that participation is only as good as the people who are involved in the process of trying to negotiate around participation, or around consulting around programmes. I think if you're not transparent yourself. And if you're not willing to listen. And if you're not willing to acknowledge that you might be wrong. Then the whole thing is humbug anyway. And I think that's something that Chambers has also had to grapple with. Is that you can say all of this. He's actually got a bit of a moral crusade in that sense to make people better people. To make them more transparent. And you don't necessarily find that.

**Narrator:**

One thing that I've found rather inspiring about Robert Chambers recent work. Is this idea that you shouldn't under estimate people's capacity for altruism.

**RS:**

Yes, I think so. And what I'm saying is not to go to the view that people are only self seeking and they only want to serve their own interests. But I'm just saying that when people do have their own interests, I think we should not judge them too harshly as well. At the same time, yes, people have got altruistic motives and are capable of being very giving. But I think it really goes back to talking about the overall institutional structures. If you're talking about the bureaucracy you need to have an incentive structure within the organisation that supports altruism.