

Social Justice: What sort of aid should we give?

Our foreign aid to poor countries can be either “top down” or “bottom up”. When we give to Non Government Organisations like Baptist World Aid, they use it for “bottom up” aid: for example, getting kids into primary education; or providing basic health care for communities, clean drinking water, or loans for women to start up tiny businesses that significantly improve the income of their families.

Governments often give “top down” aid – providing help for governments to run more efficiently; building infrastructure like roads or bridges; or offering scholarships to enable people from our region to study in our universities.

Which is better?

Both “top down” and “bottom up” forms of aid are important. The Millennium Development Goals focus particularly on making a difference for poor people in their towns and villages.

This is vitally important – the first step. See www.un.org/millenniumgoals.

Without enough food or clean water or decent health and basic education, all the roads and bridges in the world will not make a difference.

But this type of “top down” development aid does play an important part. Without it, those building small businesses face great difficulties.

Social Justice: Why is infrastructure aid important? Part 1

“Julia” is building a small business. She developed new skills through her community self help group, saved small amounts of money into the community fund, and eventually borrowed \$50 to start her enterprise. It went well. She paid back that initial loan, and then borrowed \$100 repeatedly to expand. Each loan has been paid back in full. Her business has grown, so that she now has produce to sell beyond her own village. Her children can now go to school and the family eats one healthy meal every day.

But how can she get it out there when the roads are so poor? She spends so much on transport that her produce is now too expensive to sell.

Other things get in the way too: the electricity is intermittent, meaning she loses production time. The police are too few and too poorly paid, so she often loses goods because they are stolen. Her staff is often sick and has poor skill levels anyway because they have not been able to learn to read and write.

She needs help – her country needs help. Rich countries like Australia are able to help, and need to do so. We need to be generous so that others can have a fair go too.

For more information go to: www.catalystonline.org.au; <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/> and <http://www.makepovertyhistory.com.au/>.
