

Amazon chief sues Body Shop

Anita Roddick exploited me, claims village elder

Michael Durham
and Jan Rocha

THE BODY SHOP, which prides itself on ethical trade with the developing world, has been accused of exploiting Amazonian Indians. A village chief has complained the company has made 'unauthorised' use of his image 'for publicity ends', and the company also faces allegations of failing to deliver 'cultural and intellectual property-rights agreements' with the Kayapo tribe.

The image of Chief Pykati-Re in traditional feathered headdress has appeared on thousands of posters since 1990 to promote the Body Shop's 'ethical' trade in Brazil nut oil with the indigenous Kayapo Indians. His picture also features in an American Express advertisement alongside Body Shop founder Anita Roddick.

Brazil nut hair conditioner, which contains about 1 per cent nut oil, produced by the Kayapo Indians, is one of the Body Shop's best-selling products.

Last night the Body Shop dismissed the allegations, saying they were made by an embittered employee, Saulo Petean, who was sacked as the company's agent in Brazil in January. Ms Roddick's husband, Gordon, is said to be in Brazil working on a foundation project to help the Kayapos.

However, Mr Petean's allegations are supported by an unpublished independent evaluation. The 56-page study, commissioned by the Body

Shop last year, says the cosmetics company is laying itself open to accusations of exploiting the Indians.

Chief Pykati-Re, 43, began a lawsuit last Tuesday, claiming that a photograph of him making a 'thumbs up' gesture had been used in posters, leaflets and drawings by 1,400 Body Shops in 46 countries since 1990. His lawyer, Hildebrando Pontes Neto, is a specialist on indigenous people's rights.

The chief is an elder of Pukanu village, one of two in remote northern Brazil which have been supplying nut oil to the Body Shop since 1991. The oil is produced in tiny village 'factories' and airlifted out.

Only a small proportion of the Indians benefit directly, but chiefs in those villages taking part want the project to continue because of the income it generates. The Body Shop says it pays more than £23 a kilo for the pressed oil, well above the 'world market price'. The extra payment, according to the company, is to reimburse the Indians for photographs used in marketing and pay for community work in Brazil.

In 1993 the Body Shop announced it had reached the world's first cultural and 'intellectual property' agreement between a Western company and an indigenous tribe, namely the Kayapo. Chief Pykati-Re was photographed with Ms Roddick during her highly publicised tour of rain-forest tribes in search of 'ethical' trading links.

However, the unpublished evaluation — by development

experts Rubem Almada, Iara Ferrar and Patricia Stocker — which is backed by the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University, questions the ethical status of the project, saying that formal contracts on images or intellectual property have never been agreed with the Kayapo.

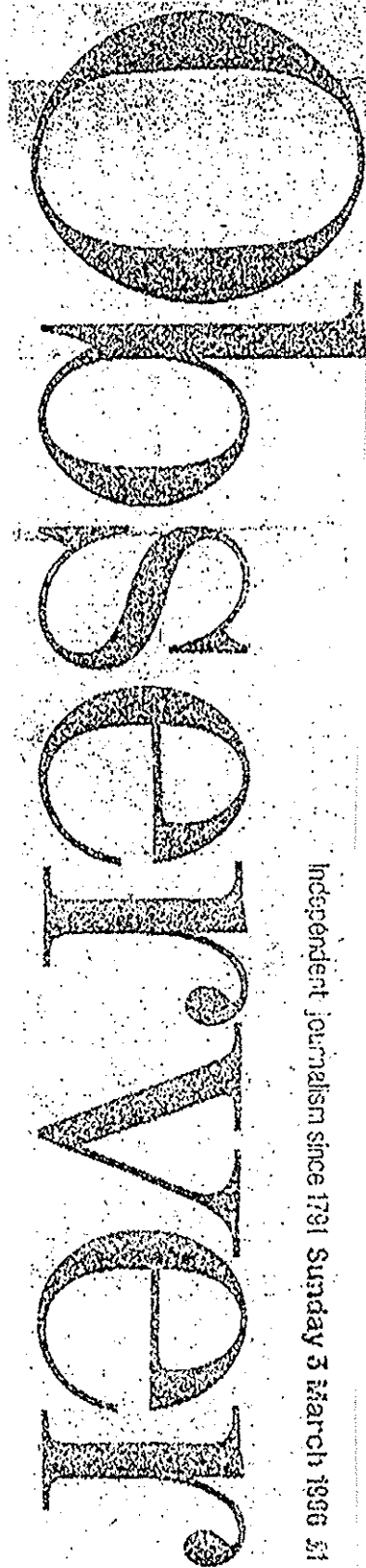
'The concept of intellectual-property rights, widely discussed internationally, is not at all understood in the villages, even by most leaders. This raises an ethical question about the use of the Kayapo image in "marketing" internationally,' the report says.

'The Kayapo leaders do not consider that they have conceded rights of use of image to the Body Shop.'

The report warns: 'There is an implicit — if unanswered — question: is the Body Shop's trading link with the Kayapo "aid", or has it been a deliberate profitable investment in marketing of the company's name?'

• The Body Shop announced yesterday that three international human rights and women's organisations would be allowed free use of one of the firm's office blocks in west London.

The beneficiaries are the Ogoni Community Association (UK), which helps the Ogoni people of Nigeria; the Women's Communication Centre, which promotes women's views; and Woman-kind Worldwide, which supports projects for women in developing countries. The gift is worth £90,000 a year.



Independent Journalism since 1791 Sunday 3 March 1996 21