

# ENTRANCE POINTS FOR SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN PLANNED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Michael M. Cernea

---

Several scientific disciplines, particularly economics, preside over the processes of planned rural development, but until rather recently, sociology and social anthropology have not been called upon to serve extensively. The storehouse of knowledge and methods amassed within these social sciences has been largely overlooked. However, this imbalance is now gradually (yet only too slowly) changing.

A key premise of this change is the increasingly widespread recognition that repeated failures have plagued those development programs that were sociologically ill-informed and ill-conceived. Although uncomfortable, this recognition is leading to heightened interest in identifying and addressing projects' sociocultural variables. Thus, the perception of the practical use of sociology and anthropology is also changing both within and outside

---

the discipline. Much of what is believed about the exercise of sociology, resulting as it does from what was true in the past, is now obsolete or obsolescent.

While sociologists and social anthropologists<sup>1</sup> are entitled to rejoice in this gradual shift in attitudes and receptiveness, I believe that they also have an increased responsibility to better define the types of contributions which they propose making to the planning of rural change: Will they contribute by supplying baseline social information and background knowledge? By constructing social models? By designing strategies for social action? Or by offering methods for data gathering and for evaluation analysis? Moreover, because some of these contributions must be context specific, how will they vary from one rural society to another and from one type of agriculture to another?

The present paper is concerned primarily with planned rural change in developing (rather than developed) countries and agriculture systems. It will deal with the role that sociologists (in particular, but not exclusively, rural sociologists) and sociological knowledge may fulfill in designing and implementing rural development programs and projects in Third World countries. This vast area is wide open to, and in demand of, sociological endeavor. In my view, it calls for contributions from both indigenous sociologists and social scientists from countries with developed agriculture systems.

Only a relatively small fraction of American rural sociologists is currently involved in research or applied work in developing countries' rural societies. Among social anthropologists, a comparatively larger proportion appears to profess this interest. American sociology has a long and rich tradition of commitment to an involved science, intended to transform society in desirable ways. Lester Ward, Albion Small, E. A. Ross, and others pioneered this respected tradition, and their initial interests in some grand master plans for bettering society have been continued and refined by subsequent generations of sociologists focusing more and more sharply on specific social problems which demand sociological understanding and solutions. Therefore, calling for sociological contributions to planned social development is hardly a new appeal. The challenge now is to get involved in the extraordinary expansion of planning and of state-societal interventions for directing agricultural and rural development. There is a further challenge as well. Social scientists must overcome the skepticism and disappointments that have affected much of the social science community in the wake of the limited results of past efforts. If, however, acute and

the interest in these issues will expand among sociologists from

As a sociologist working for more than a decade within a large-scale international development organization, I am involved in many agricultural development projects in various countries. I also observe the work of many sociologists and anthropologists in these projects, and the position that sociological knowledge holds relative to other fields of technical or economic expertise that the projects require. This paper is based on what my personal experiences have shown that sociology can do in such contexts.

Sociologists who work in development are confronted with a set of methodological, practical, and metasociological issues that are different from those encountered in conventional academic research. From among these issues, I will address five that, in my perception, are high on this agenda, namely: (a) the adequacy of development projects as a format for applied sociological work; (b) the entrance points for sociological knowledge in the planning of development; (c) the formulation of methodologies for social action and the role of social engineering; (d) the new directions emerging for rural sociological research; and (e) the institutionalization of sociology in development work.

## THE PROJECT AS A FORMAT FOR SOCIOLOGICAL WORK

Projects embody a model of purposive planned intervention that is used for accelerating growth and development. But how propitious is the framework offered by a project as a unit of purposive development intervention for promoting sociological inquiry and sociologically informed planning?

Notwithstanding the various limitations of the project format, I would venture to say that development projects offer the scope for a very broad use of applied sociological work, and for employing a much wider array of sociological "products," methods and approaches to inducing change than the sociological-anthropological community has generated to date.

The debate over whether projects are an adequate vehicle for development interventions has pointed out both strengths and weaknesses inherent in the project model of intervention. On the one hand, projects concentrate resources on selected priorities, focus on a circumscribed geographic area, and can address specific population groups and constraints on development. Projects can also be intensive social laboratories that use an innovative approach on a limited scale to gain experience for larger-scale interventions (e.g., national plans). However, projects are only segmented units of intervention; they often bypass overall structures, are

subject to the hothouse overnurturing syndrome, and thus develop atypically. Projects are also criticized because they tend to create enclaves and to siphon resources from parallel nonproject activities, while sustainable development at the same pace beyond their limited time frame is problematic.

The debate on the merits and disadvantages of the projects has not, however, proposed many effective alternatives (Honadle and Rosengard, 1983). Therefore, as long as the project approach is routinely being used in planning, it is legitimate and necessary to identify and address the sociological demands intrinsic to this model of development intervention.

Development-oriented sociologists and anthropologists have become much more involved with projects in the past two decades. Although often uncomfortable with them and straitjacketed by blueprints, technocratic biases, short time frames for their field work, and other restrictions, many social scientists have gradually been learning how to make operational contributions within this planned approach to development. Many have discovered that the format of development projects does open up multiple points of entrance for substantive sociological contributions of various types, rather than only for habitual research.

Since the project model in induced rural development, despite being only one of several conceivable approaches, will probably remain ubiquitous and be preferred by national and international agencies alike, I contend that noneconomic social scientists would gain from exploring its potential, in order fully to use—and also broaden—the opportunities available for inquiry and, mainly, for action-oriented sociology.

These opportunities should not be seen as merely a chance for individual sociologists to offer piecemeal services to one project or another. The present paper argues that these are opportunities to (a) develop systematic bodies of sociological know-how, fitted to purposive development intervention and flexible enough to be used and adjusted cross-culturally; (b) to foster patterned, interdisciplinary interaction between sociologists and other development practitioners, technical experts, economists, and so on and (c) to formulate strategies and sociological methodologies for development action.

Sociologists, obviously, would not need to be persuaded to “put people first” in projects. I have written extensively elsewhere about the need for putting people first in development projects. This should not be regarded as an appeal to the humanitarian feelings of planners. If interpreted only as a goodwill advocacy, this slogan will walk on short legs and stumble fast. I submit that “putting people first” in development programs must be read as a scientifically justified demand addressed to policy makers, planners, and technical experts to recognize the centrality of what is the primary factor in the development process. This interpretation implies a call

for changing the approach to planning and will carry the demand for putting people first quite a long way.

When the requirement to admit the centrality of people in projects is addressed to the actual project makers—primarily to the technical and economic planners of development programs—it becomes tantamount to asking for a reversal in the conventional approach to project making. This is not to say that people are totally out of sight in conventional approaches, but many approaches are so overwhelmingly dominated by the priority given to technical factors or economic models stripped of the flesh and blood of real life that the characteristics of the given social organization and the very actors of development are dealt with somewhere as an afterthought.

My argument is that the model intrinsic to those project approaches that do not put people first clashes with the model intrinsic to the real social process of development, at the core of which are its actors. This clash seriously undercuts the effectiveness of projects that attempt to induce or accelerate development. Putting people first is a reversal because it proposes to take another starting point in the planning and design of projects than do the current technology-centered approaches. Such a reversal would demand to identify—in every single technical, financial, or administrative intervention—the sociological angle and the variables pertinent to the social organization that is affected or targeted by that intervention. This is why putting people first is not a simple metaphor, but rather a tall demand for incorporating sociological knowledge and applied sociological work into the process of planned development.

A major opening up of the project approach toward such a reversal and toward incorporating more sociological contributions occurred in the early and mid-1970s. At that time a reconceptualization of development policies—from “trickle down” theories to the alleviation of poverty through rural development—was being proposed and started to take hold. Perhaps for the first time the concept of a “target group”—the poor, those with an income below the absolute or relative threshold of poverty—was brought to the forefront. With it came the need to define the beneficiaries (or sometimes the victims) of development, to understand the social stratification and distributive patterns within rural communities, and to explain the farming systems and economic behavior of small farmers. The shift from an emphasis on physical infrastructures to a recognition of social structures was a shift in the direction of people-centered or actor-centered development projects.

When this shift began, there was little experience about how to conduct sociological analysis that would respond to the specific needs of projects and would fit into the process of project making. In hindsight, it can be said that the sociological community didn't know how to use this oppor-

tunity and largely underused it. There is more experience today, 10 or 12 years later, but still not enough. Moreover, the lessons of the experiences that have been accumulated have not yet been sufficiently learned among sociologists themselves.

Besides the factors extraneous to sociology which limit the extent of its applied use (these are discussed often and need not be repeated here), it is crucial to also identify the factors internal to the discipline that constrain its use in planning and policy making. Such internal factors include the state of the discipline's theory and body of knowledge, the state of its practitioners' craftsmanship, the patterns of their professional and social organization, and so on. Besides these, and no less important, seems to be the sociologist's own view on how applied sociology is to be conducted. In a powerful analysis of "Why Sociology Does Not Apply" in public policy, Scott and Shore (1979) argued that sociologists have been largely ineffectual in policy-relevant work because they have remained captive to their disciplinary process and manner of doing sociology, rather than interpolating themselves and their work into the policy-making process itself. "A main source of the present difficulty with applied sociology is that attempts to make sociology relevant to policy are conceived and executed with disciplinary, and not with policy concerns in mind" (Scott and Shore, 1979:35). This is a very important and consequential point. It entails that the work to be done by sociologists, the methods used, and their order of use, are substantially different in a policy perspective than in a disciplinary perspective. When guided by an inward-looking disciplinary perspective, applied sociological work begins and ends with sociology; with a finality oriented policy perspective, it would begin and end with policy, not disciplinary, concerns. When employing the policy perspective, note Scott and Shore, not only is the order of activities changed but their nature is different too, since the purpose is "to adapt method to problems involving questions and variables outside the ken of the discipline" (1972:2).

While Scott and Shore focused their analysis on applying sociology in the policy-making processes, their observation holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to applying sociology in the planning process, with which the present paper is concerned. The two areas are not identical, since planning is essentially in the realm of policy implementation rather than policy making. The applied sociological work in one is different from the other, despite the existence of certain similarities and overlap. Therefore—if the goal is to use sociological knowledge in projects—it results that this work should start from the needs intrinsic to the project model itself.

The sociologist who decides to use his knowledge and skills in a project-related task is thus facing the need to internalize the process of project making and to tailor his work so as to fit the structure of this process.

This entails the basic question as to the entrance points for sociology into the project making (or planning) process. It also requires the applied sociologist to understand the project cycle, its specific stages (to be discussed in further detail), and to adopt these stages as both the starting points and the intermediary ends of his various activities. Thus, taking the project as a format for applied sociological work implies reorganizing the conduct of the related work tasks. This also has the advantage of enabling the sociologist to interact better with the other project makers who are professional carriers of other disciplines, and to avoid thinking of his partners as "the others." Sociologists can then better perceive the needs of the others and better generate sociological answers (propose solutions) which would be tailored to the project, thus heightening receptivity. Further, this interengagement enables the sociologist in turn to ask his challenging questions, compelling the others to reflect and generate project-related (and project-funded) solutions.

I hasten to add that by internalizing the project model as the framework for conducting his applied sociological work, the sociologist should not, of course, abdicate his critical thinking. He should not surrender any of his tools of trade—conceptual or methodological—or his ability to critique or reject one course of action or another. To the contrary, sociologists can assert their views more effectively by reorganizing the conduct of their sociological applied work and by becoming insiders to the project-making process and group—both intellectually and organizationally. Sociological knowledge can thus aspire to inhabit the project process, rather than being temporarily called in from the cold.

### **FINANCIAL INTERVENTIONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL VARIABLES**

Development projects are vehicles for financing induced growth and change. The very nature of financial interventions challenges development-oriented applied sociology. Often financial resources are a project's single most massive input injected into an area in order to accelerate growth. The investment funds—resulting either from loans or from regular budget allocations, but in both cases from sources exogenous to the project area and to its own capacity for capital formation—are used as the lever which must eliminate constraints and set development in motion.

The sudden, large infusion of external resources into a rural society modifies the natural process by which resources for development are internally created and gradually accumulated. The natural accumulation process does so more or less commensurately with the inherent capability of the socioeconomic structure to absorb and use surplus. However, if

the financial resources alone grow suddenly while the patterns of social organization or the institutional and organizational structures remain the same and no immediate change in the nonfinancial factors of development is sought, serious discrepancies may set in immediately. The production patterns of risk-averse farmers (who long structured their behavior to fit a scarcity of resources) when experiencing abrupt increases in the availability of credit and physical inputs, are faced with new opportunities but also with new risks, costs, and changing demands. Such immediate or long-term effects of financially induced changes are often disruptive, but the disruptions may remain temporarily hidden and often are ignored until they snowball with time.

While the need for financial resources is indisputable, it should be recognized that internationally assisted rural development programs have often languished not because of a lack of external finance but rather because of either the inability of the given rural society to absorb external finance effectively or the planners' inability to define an efficient social strategy for development. Money is not everything, and in certain situations money may be the least important contribution to change processes. The financial levers of development can never soundly substitute for the nonfinancial ones. Frequently, the overlooked variables are the socio-structural and institutional ones. If these are mishandled the project will fail, no matter what national or international agency promotes it.

Sociological knowledge—and the social analyst—can help discover, conceptualize, and address the social and cultural variables involved in financially induced programs. Robert Merton (1949) long ago and insightfully pointed out that the sociologist's contribution in introducing the social variables overlooked in the planner's approach often amounts to a complete reformulation of the problems that require solving and that compete for resources. "Perhaps the most striking role of conceptualization in applied social research is its *transformation of practical problems* by introducing concepts which refer to variables overlooked in the common sense view of the policy makers. At times, the concept leads to a statement of the problem that is diametrically opposed to that of the policy maker" (Merton, 1949:178; emphasis added), or, we can add, to that of the project maker, administrator, or manager.

Specifically, in situations like those discussed here, when development projects are being conceived and designed the development sociologist will usually ask basic sociological questions such as the following: Can the existing social and institutional structures function at the accelerated pace introduced by a large financial influx? How do powerful financial inducements affect the sociocultural mechanisms intrinsic to the processes of change? What structural adjustments are needed in congruence with the other elements of development intervention? The sociologist will point



to the operational steps for making the social arrangements, structural modifications, or institutional changes which are necessary to address the ensuing problems and, most important, to experiment and learn. As a result, the entire course of practical action can be changed. This is a fundamental reason for incorporating sociological knowledge in the design and implementation of financially induced change programs.

## ENTRANCE POINTS FOR SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Where are the entrance points located that are most conducive for inserting sociological knowledge into the planning process for rural development?

Past errors and lingering misperceptions have clouded the answers to this question. My argument is that the traditional entrance points used by sociologists—"social impact assessment" or "ex post evaluation"—have not been the most effective ones and must be broadened. The conventionally accepted entrance points have been proven to be few and insufficient. Therefore, such entries should be multiplied and opened up in every important juncture of the planning and execution of projects or programs. Among these points of entrance, I argue that the single most important area where sociological knowledge can contribute is in the design for social action.

Rural development planning in many countries follows the project cycle model. Aside from some local variations and differences in terminology, the essential stages of this cycle, to which sociological contributions conceivably can be matched, are:

1. program or project identification;
2. project preparation and design;
3. appraisal or feasibility assessment (including design correction);
4. implementation (including monitoring); and
5. evaluation.

Each stage requires a substantively different type of sociological contribution (either informational, analytical, or predictive) from sociologists and anthropologists, in much the same way that the specific contributions of economists vary necessarily from one stage to another along the project cycle (Baum, 1982; Partridge, 1984). However, control over this work cycle is generally in the hands of government officials, local politicians, planners, administrators, and technical managers, who decide whether and when to call in sociologists. In real life, such calls may not come at all, or may be sporadic and focus on only one stage, rather than on all of them systematically. Thus, the sociologist's input is determined also by

group of other experts and is asked to assess whether or not it will have positive or adverse social repercussions. Here again the sociologist is not called on to participate constructively in designing and shaping the intimate structure and sequence of actions in development projects; rather, he is used simply to validate or partly modify a given "package."

Sometimes the social impact assessment carried out by the social analyst is genuinely taken into account in modifying the project's plans, and this service is undoubtedly worthwhile. Many sociologists have rendered important contributions this way. My point, however, concerns the need to employ the social analyst not merely for anticipating the effects of plans conceived without him. The issue is to involve the social analyst not only for damage control and mitigation, but for the full-fledged advance planning of development, which is a much broader endeavor than impact assessment itself.

Another, somewhat more promising entrance point is offered to sociologists when they are invited to generate basic social information necessary for a project. Often this can be useful, but the role of supplier of descriptive information allows the sociologist little influence over what is done with the information; whether it is used at all; or whether it is consequentially incorporated into the design for development, the resource allocation decisions, or the sequencing of planned actions.

Thus, none of the entrance points noted above allow sociology to fully participate in the interdisciplinary modeling of planned rural development. First, the narrowness of the assignment—evaluation or data gathering—blocks out the crucial contribution that sociology should make to the actual design of rural development programs, and specifically to their content and strategy. Second, the limitations of these entry points are further compounded when sociological knowledge is used in only one segment of the project cycle. Contrary to this segmented and fragmented incorporation, sociological knowledge is needed at all stages as a continuum, and should make different contributions tailored to the internal logic of each stage.

Additionally, new entrance points for sociological knowledge must be opened outside the planning process itself. At one end is the elaboration of sectoral and subsectoral policies and strategies, which is in dire need of sociological-anthropological theory, social criticism, and overall social analysis. At the opposite end, the actual execution of rural development programs is the broadest area in which sociologists could and should work. If sociologists can bring their knowledge to bear on operational, organizational, and managerial realms, they can move from service as advisors or evaluators to the actual execution of development plans and daily problem solving. They can work with managers and beneficiaries and with technical agencies or farmers' organizations.

the timing of the contribution—that is, the stage at which it is made and the implicit requirements at that stage. A quick look at recent experiences will reveal several fallacies and important lessons.

Historically, the primary entrance point for social scientists came in the evaluation of development results. The sociologist was called in to assess whether a certain program or project had indeed accomplished its overall objectives and triggered the desired consequence or some unanticipated ones. Unfortunately, this was the wrong end of the cycle—it was then too late to affect the project process. While the use of sociologists for this role was encouraging, it was not conducive to interdisciplinary integration in planning activities.

At issue here, of course, is the role of the discipline, not the task given to an individual sociologist. Although an individual expert can correctly perform a segmented role such as evaluation, the (noneconomic) social sciences as disciplines should not be limited to only one segment of the project or planning process. If used only as evaluators, sociological knowledge and sociologists arrive late, long after the other experts have made their contributions. They seem wise after the fact, and are defined as persons who only complain about what others have actually done. Their skills are not brought to bear on ongoing social action; since the social process has taken place prior to the evaluation study, it cannot be improved or redirected in retrospect.

It is often said (with a consoling undertone) that the lessons drawn may, of course, be useful for the next program. However, many sociologists, the present author included, have been in the unenviable position of generating evaluation findings which should have led to the modification of subsequent programs. Instead they have watched the new programs being designed without sociological inputs by planners seemingly oblivious to earlier findings and unavoidably heading toward the same mistakes. Incorporation of past lessons is never automatic. Moreover, required once again at the incorporation design stage are sociological skills similar to those used for identifying the intricate lessons from past programs. Furthermore, even when the sociological evaluation findings are correct and relevant, whether or not they will be aptly considered and whether they will materially affect new programs or policies depends on the decision of others (not on the evaluators' decision, but on the decision of those who actually design the new programs). That is why it is necessary to involve professional sociologists in the initial design-preparation process for the new project. There is no legitimacy in relegating them to the function of ex-post evaluators only.

A second role for the social sciences has emerged in what is called "the social impact assessment" (SIA) or predictive (ex-ante) evaluation. In this role, the sociologist examines a development project prepared by a

Sociologists should become more prescriptive, without discounting the caution dictated by their limited knowledge. Usually sociologists have many "don't's" to only a few "do's." By focusing on the design and execution of social programs as their entrance points, they will force themselves to be more pragmatic, more operationally useful, and more versatile in development work. Sociologists have testified that their efforts to help people solve problems in the field have made them aware of important variables and relationships that otherwise would have escaped their attention, and have enabled them to generate what Whyte (1982) calls social inventions. Multiplying the entrance points would then become a self-propelling process for developing new sociological knowledge, new methodologies for social action, and new operational skills.

## METHODOLOGIES FOR SOCIAL ACTION

It is far easier, however, to claim a continuous and multifaceted role in development projects for sociologists and anthropologists than to bring it about.

The professional rural sociological community is inherently limited in participating in planned rural development by at least four factors. First, most sociologists have little familiarity with the planning process or with the administrative, political, or bureaucratic settings of decision making and resource allocation. They are trained primarily to function in an academic environment, either to teach or do research, and they have difficulty inserting their activities effectively in such planning and administrative machineries; they employ the academic disciplinary perspective, rather than adopting and working within the project planning perspective. Second, many social scientists, in quest of an identity distinct from economics, often tend to ignore economic factors and are sometimes economically illiterate (economic anthropology is the obvious exception, but the very existence of this subdiscipline is somehow seen as excusing other branches from recognizing economic variables). Third, strange as it may seem, rural sociology has long neglected the study of core agricultural production processes, and fourth, sociology has primarily endeavored to explain and describe social structures, past or existing, rather than to look toward the future and project change. In comparison with other areas of interest to rural sociology (e.g., the rural family; education and school; extension; and so on) relatively little effort has gone into cultivating the conceptual and methodological tools for planning rural development.

Although not without theoretical and ethical controversy, it is increasingly accepted that the calling of sociology is not only to analyze and explain the existing social fabric, but also to help transform society and

change the status quo. Findings about the past need to distill into methodologies for further action. Diagnoses should be accompanied by proposals for problem solving. Social engineering is needed to chart the procedural steps for translating objectives into reality. What sociologists and anthropologists can offer for policy formulation and for the planning process *per se* will largely determine the extent to which they will change their current marginal position in development work. The key lies in addressing the core issues head on: showing how to do development and how to accomplish the set goals, rather than endlessly discussing what these goals must be.

Without downgrading the importance of contributions to defining policies and goals, we have to recognize that sociology has an overdue debt: an obligation to provide methodologies for action. Social scientists have long claimed that the results of social research contribute to policy making—and, indeed, sometimes this is the case. However, their claim will remain hollow and unconvincing if their contributions to policy formulation are not supported by operational social strategies to translate these policies into real life.

In my view, developing methodologies for social action is more difficult than contributing to policy making for a variety of historical and epistemological reasons. This is now more important than other tasks precisely because it has been neglected. Sociologists have to face the nuts and bolts of development activities, roll up their sleeves, and deal with the mundane, pragmatic questions of translating plans into realities in a sociologically sound manner. They need to link data generation, action-oriented research, social analysis, design for social action, and evaluation into a continuum, and thus stretch sociology's contributions far beyond simple pronouncements.

To illustrate the functions incumbent upon sociology, it is useful to look at the process of organizing the participation of beneficiaries in planned rural development. Despite the rhetoric present in much of the planning literature, which speaks of "community participation," "bottom-up approaches," and meeting felt needs, the technocratic nonparticipatory method of planning continues to be the rule. Goals are set and choices are made with almost no prior consultation of the intended beneficiaries. Development planning at the local level is also overwhelmingly technocratic. It is dominated by economists, technocrats, and administrators who show little interest in or ability for discovering the priorities of the beneficiaries and the equity implications of official plans. The outcomes of top-down, paternalistic approaches are well known (Uphoff 1985; 1986). We often hear sudden declarations of fashionable support for participatory approaches from politicians, planners, economists, and technocrats. Social scientists, who were among the first to point out the need for participation,

could feel vindicated by these declarations, but they should not confuse them with actual participatory planning, because behind the cloud of rhetoric participation in rural development programs is more myth than reality. The question incisively asked by Gelia Castillo (1983)—how participatory is participatory development?—is fully warranted and should be asked in every development program. What actually happens when people do not come first has been shown convincingly by the analysis of many completed but failed development programs (Kottak, 1985; Cernea, 1987b).

The rhetoric of intent is still far ahead of the design for social action to promote participation. Again, however, sociologists should not blame only government officials, managers, or planners for this gap, since they themselves have been more vocal about the need for participation than about the social techniques for achieving it. True, many developing countries have authoritarian regimes that place structural and political restraints on grass-roots participation, but often more participation would be feasible within existing limits. We must feel compelled to ask ourselves some pragmatic questions: Are the social sciences, in prescribing participation, capable of offering a more or less systematic methodology for organizing actual participation in different social contexts? Do social scientists have sets of procedures and methods that could be handed over to planners, managers, and program designers? What should be done during project preparation to design the project so that it would demand and depend on participation? What should be done during project implementation for organizing participation?

Systematic and culturally adjustable answers to such questions are necessary. Obviously, for answering them, the contribution of sociologists needs to go beyond advocacy. It could possibly take the form of proposed sets of procedures that will chart progress in a step-by-step fashion. What is to be done to enable the people to mobilize their own capacities to be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions and control the activities that affect their lives? Answers by the social analyst to the practical questions of fostering participation would represent an articulate sociological know how for building up local capacity for action. Furthermore, such contributions by sociologists would rank in the category that William Foote Whyte has correctly called "social inventions" in the definition of which he included specifically the "new sets of procedures for shaping human interactions and activities and the relations of humans to the natural and social environment" (Whyte, 1982: 1). Indeed, development practitioners expect sociologists who theorize about participation to transform their general advocacy into a social engineering of participation. Otherwise, participation will remain an ideology without a social technology.

The same can be said about the domain of institution- and organization-

building at the grass roots, which badly needs the professional expertise of sociologists and anthropologists. All over the world, the degree of formal organization of rural communities lags far behind that of urban populations (Cernea, 1981). This is a fundamental characteristic of rural underdevelopment that accounts in part for the weakness and vulnerability of rural societies. Many rural programs collapse precisely for want of grass-roots organizations able to sustain group action, yet the same programs have seldom attempted to establish organizations and institutions that structurally enhance the social capacity of individuals. Farmers' organizations, pastoral associations, cooperatives, credit groups, and water users' organizations, for example, are all vital for development. The numerous informal organizations in traditional societies can often be a matrix for structuring stronger formal organizations (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). Even the "efficient delivery of (regular) bureaucratic services to rural communities is very dependent on the effective organization at the community level" (Ruttan, 1984). High-yielding social organizations are no less important for development than high-yielding crop varieties, and intensified agriculture cannot occur without intensified human organization. Here sociologists and anthropologists should recognize another broad area of opportunity for influencing the patterns of social organizations, inducing institutional innovation and making overall problem-solving contributions. Sociological methodologies for building farmers' organizations or revitalizing existing ones are scarce. Such methodologies should be developed, tested, and improved through systematic learning processes, and then offered for use (Cernea, 1983; 1987a).

There are, of course, complex and subtle questions about whether such methodologies are epistemologically conceivable and whether they would be operationally effective or limited across cultures. There are also ethical issues related to action-oriented sociological work, which have been debated at length in the professional sociological community. Although these are not addressed here explicitly, my stand in brief is that action-oriented sociological work is ethically legitimate and that such sociologically informed methodologies for action are epistemologically feasible. The extent of crosscultural regularities in agrarian structures and production patterns sets both the ground for, and the limits of, this feasibility.

The scarcity of such sociological methodologies is an indication of the underdevelopment of applied sociology and anthropology. The idiosyncratic contribution of an individual sociologist or anthropologist to development projects may be very valuable, but if it is mainly the product of this individual alone rather than the translation of a sociological methodology, it remains a piecemeal and particularistic contribution. Development agencies often have to rely excessively on a sociologist's personal aptitudes and strengths, and on the accident of his or her talent and in-

spiration in the field, rather than on the discipline's methodological and conceptual tools. This reflects the infancy of the discipline itself. Although the creativity, intuition, and ad hoc judgment of the sociologist are critical for the project and ultimately help develop the discipline, in the long term it is essential to have a systematic body of sociological know-how that is transferable and usable in operational work by sociologists and nonsociologists both. Unless systematic methodologies are developed, the contribution of behavioral sciences to development will only advance slowly.

In discussing the alternative uses of sociological knowledge, distinctions are often made between "the enlightenment model" and "the engineering model" (Janowitz, 1970). While the differences between the two are generally stressed, their complementarity is often forgotten. Social engineering is rooted in knowledge of the social fabric and dynamics, but it uses this knowledge selectively and purposively to organize new social action and relationships. As Rossi and Whyte wrote,

social engineering consists of attempts to use the body of sociological knowledge in the design of policies or institutions to accomplish some purpose. Social engineering can be accomplished for a mission-oriented agency or for some group opposed to the existing organizational structure, or it may be undertaken separately from either. . . . When conducted close to the policy-making centers, it is often termed social policy analysis. . . . When practiced by groups in opposition to current regimes, social engineering becomes social criticism. (1983:10)

Although social engineering is only one way behavioral sciences can influence social action, it is the one that requires social scientists to produce operationally usable know-how. It also requires sociologists to carefully think through the social consequences of their recommendations and to not assume that they know what is best for the people involved. Social engineering cannot be used to decide the goal of development, but with a clear definition of the meaning of "putting people first," it can be effectively used to elucidate the relationship between means and objectives in projects. Using it in poverty-oriented rural development programs can thus bring about better structured strategies in support of the objective of poverty alleviation.

The overall argument here is that social scientists have to learn to generate new products that are usable by development practitioners. These new products should not be regarded as replacing the traditional products of research (such as taxonomies, explanatory hypotheses, concepts, and theories), but as supplementing them with methodologies for social action, whether they be called social technologies, social engineering, sociotechniques, human engineering, or by any other name (Firth, 1981). The new products fit the points of entrance opened up for social knowledge within development, and will enrich the spectrum of traditional sociological



products and make them more effective. The scope for such contributions is virtually limitless, and the need for them is urgent.

## EMERGING RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

To generate new intellectual products and assume their share of responsibility in guiding operational programs, the noneconomic social disciplines first have to work hard in their own backyards. I will touch briefly on only two aspects: expansion of the research agenda and the dependence of behavioral sciences on interdisciplinary linkages.

Noneconomic social disciplines must substantiate their claim to an increased operational role by expanding their basic and applied research. This claim must also be supported with shifts in the focus of analytical interests and illuminated from new conceptual angles. Promising new areas and orientations are emerging, both within sociology and anthropology and at their borders with other sciences: development anthropology, agricultural sociology, peasant studies, crop sociology, farming systems research, and others. Every one of them holds substantial potential for operational activities in planned rural development.

Considerable research has been done during the previous two or three decades along the two dominant themes in rural sociology: the rural-urban continuum and the diffusion of innovations. Students of these subjects have made empirical and conceptual contributions, but the critique of these orientations and their sharp decline hold important lessons. Both have directed attention away from the characteristics of agrarian social structures. With certain exceptions, the diffusion of technological innovations was conceptualized as a process grounded in individualism, and much research focused primarily on psychological rather than sociostructural variables; naturally, this inadequate conceptualization yielded many one-sided and misguided prescriptions. The crisis and the theoretical vacuum experienced in rural sociology in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the searching self-analysis undertaken in the discipline, have stimulated the revitalization of the field and the gradual emergence of a critical sociology of agriculture (Newby and Buttel, 1982; Newby, 1982).

In rural sociology, the shift toward a new research agenda focusing on the sociology of agriculture is significant. The concentration on the production process in every agricultural subsector—farming, animal husbandry, forestry, and fishing—is a determined move away from the kind of rural sociology that was described as a quiet backwater of shallow empiricism and theoretical conservatism. As Newby defined it,

the sociology of agriculture, sometimes referred to as the new rural sociology, represents not merely a branch of occupational sociology, but a new approach to rural

sociology, one more theoretically informed, holistic, critical and radical than the conventional rural sociology that preceded it. The sociology of agriculture is certainly not coterminous with rural sociology (Newby, 1983) [although its own boundaries are still uncertain].

While many rural sociologists are probably not yet prepared to subscribe to this new approach, from the viewpoint argued here the emergence of agricultural sociology appears to be propitious for development work. It is increasing the professional relevance of sociology to rural change programs and improving the ability of sociologists to address the social and organizational relationships in agriculture and their change under the impact of technology, market forces, industrial development, population pressures, and so on.

In turn, "crop sociology" and "farming systems research" are two other emerging research directions which are partly distinct from and partly overlapping with other areas mentioned. Crop sociology and farming systems research are simultaneously divergent and complementary. In crop sociology the emphasis is on in-depth understanding of how the biological and technical requirements of cultivating one specific crop may structure the overall life and labor process of a family farm (and even large-scale social processes); the farming systems research is a holistic, interdisciplinary approach that captures the overall farm operation, the farmer's adaptive strategy for balancing several crops, livestock, and the mix of on-farm and off-farm income generating activities. Scientific success in both these research directions is critically dependent on interdisciplinary cooperation between social and agricultural sciences. Over the past few years, the farming systems research approach has spread within the network of international agricultural research centers (CIP, CIMMYT, IRRI, CIAT, IFDC, and others) and is likely to penetrate the national research networks. New patterns of cooperation are being molded between biological researchers, behavioral researchers, economists, and agronomists, and some of their joint products have already been absorbed and implemented in development activities (Rhoades, 1983; Collinson, 1985).

A related research area, already recognized for its contribution over the past decades, has developed under the general label of peasant studies. Studying the mode of production and social organization of peasants in various agricultural societies has brought sociologists and anthropologists much closer together, and has given them a better understanding of the political, social, and economic issues of planning for agricultural development in profoundly stratified societies.

Within anthropology proper, development-oriented research and operational work have mushroomed in the past decade, and significant numbers of anthropologists have involved themselves in this area (Partridge, 1984). However, as is the case with sociologists, anthropologists working

in development have not yet created an academic subdiscipline of development anthropology, for their work is not characterized by a coherent or distinctive apparatus.

Development anthropology has, however, become an incipient profession and field of study . . . [and] has produced a body of technically informed, substantive findings on types of development initiatives . . . that crosscut traditional academic functional and ethnographic categories. (Hoben, 1982)

While these and other approaches and research orientations are emerging, what remains essential for generating new social knowledge is the topical agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Some fundamental problems of contemporary agricultural development have been little researched in sociology. Let us consider, for instance, the sociological problems of irrigated agriculture. Global food security will depend largely on the continued expansion of irrigated agriculture until the year 2000 or later, as well as on the improved operation and maintenance of existing irrigation systems. The world's irrigated area almost tripled between 1950 and 1982; although it represents only one-sixth of the world's total cultivated land, it supplied one-third of the world's food crops. The social infrastructure of existing irrigation systems, however, is probably the least studied among their components, and the one most in need of repair, development, and maintenance. The structure and operation of water users' groups, the interaction among irrigated farmers, and their participation (or lack thereof) in managing and operating government-run or private systems make up the social fabric of irrigated agriculture. Valuable advances in the sociological analysis and social engineering of irrigation systems in recent years have indeed produced operationally useful guidance to development planning (Coward, 1980; Belloncle, 1985; Uphoff, 1986b), but the problems are worldwide and the sociological efforts still insufficient.

In forestry and reforestation, the technical experts predict a fuelwood crisis of global magnitude in the not too distant future, unless agroforestry is absorbed into regular farming systems on a large scale. At least 25 countries, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are already suffering from acute shortages of fuelwood. Here again, worldwide, the unresolved issues are more social and behavioral than technical. The key sociological problem revolves around identifying suitable and enduring units of social organization (Cernea, 1985) able to support alternative reforestation strategies and modify age-old behavioral and cultural patterns. Social forestry interventions, a relatively recent area in planned development, have turned out to be almost unexpectedly welcoming of sociological/anthropological contributions.

Vast expanses of the world from Thailand and Indonesia to Brazil are

undergoing changes in land tenure systems through programs in land titling, settlement, and transmigration. The breakdown of customary land rights in much of Africa goes on at a rapid pace, yet is little noticed by social scientists or by others. Experience indicates that many of the problems of land degradation, soil erosion, overgrazing, and deforestation are traceable to forms of land tenure, ownership, and use which demand drastic changes despite political and other difficulties which may stand in the way.

Tens of millions of family farms around the world are in transition from relatively simple to more complex farming systems, moving from subsistence to commercial production and from food crops to cash crops. The patterns of group management and use of collectively owned or "free" (but scarce) natural resources undergo profound changes and often deteriorate, when in fact they need to be strengthened and rationalized. Pure transhumant pastoral systems are declining rapidly while mixed agro-pastoral systems and agro-forestry systems expand. These and other structural changes in the agriculture of the developing world are often accelerated by politically and financially backed government intervention. A clear sociological understanding of the ongoing processes, if woven into the strategy of planned rural development, can help amplify the benefits accessible to small farmers and presumably prevent, or at least mitigate, some adverse consequences of development. This is why such topics, as well as the emerging research approaches outlined above, deserve the support and commitment of development-oriented social scientists.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZING DEVELOPMENT SOCIOLOGY**

The metaphor of entrance points for sociology in the interdisciplinary process of planning development should logically be expanded to the institutional settings in which development sociology and anthropology are practiced and taught. There are three items of crucial importance: first, the position of the sociologist should be institutionalized within the organizational framework of technical, economic, and administrative agencies; second, profound changes have to be made in the training of sociologists and anthropologists oriented to development work; and third, the equivalent of a sociological renaissance is needed in university curricula for training technicians and economists for development work.

As long as professional sociologists remain outside technical and administrative agencies, literally knocking on physical doors to gain intellectual entrance and an audience, the actual use of sociology in planned development will be hampered by many more obstacles than if sociologists were among the insiders. Inclusion of sociologists is necessary to reduce

organizational ethnocentrism on both sides. True, some technical agencies have begun to institutionalize sociological skills, yet these cases are still few and far between. There are, for instance, many livestock development departments in agricultural ministries all over the world which are properly staffed with veterinarians to deal with cattle but lack any professional sociological staff to deal with the cattle-owners, the social organization of animal husbandry, or pastoral populations. Staff sociologists could increase the capacity of these organizations to be socially responsive, to anticipate needs, to adapt, and to learn from errors (Korten, 1980).

I have no naive illusion that the inclusion of sociologists or anthropologists in technical settings will solve all social problems, but in their absence many programs remain socially underdesigned and register a higher rate of economic, technical, and sociopolitical failure than necessary. Cooperation across disciplinary boundaries is difficult enough, but across additional bureaucratic fences it becomes virtually impracticable. The issue is not just one of philosophical recognition, but also one of resource allocation. The social scientist may have to play second violin to the technical expert (which is perfectly acceptable) but only their well-orchestrated joint efforts can produce harmonious planning. The institutionalization of the social science professions will generate patterned, rather than accidental, interaction with other disciplines and enhance the quality of development planning.

The professional training of sociologists themselves should be profoundly restructured, if producing professionals with an action-oriented outlook is to be addressed responsibly. Enough has been written on this issue to make repetition unnecessary, and it is unfortunate that the social science academic establishment itself reacts so slowly to this imperative. True enough, the textbooks for training such sociologists are not yet on the shelves, but there is no time to wait; even without textbooks much could be done that would take advantage of the pressure of practical demands.

Last but not least, in my own experience at the World Bank and in different countries, an enduring obstacle to the influx of sociological knowledge into development has been that many technical experts lack information on and understanding of what social science and social engineering could bring to their own efforts. The magnitude of this obstacle on a global scale is underestimated. This gap persists, and in fact is being recreated with every class graduating from technical colleges, because of the manner in which technical experts are "grown" in the groves of academe. Biologists and pedologists, agronomists and veterinarians, foresters, irrigation engineers, and other technical experts, who tomorrow will have a strong say in the design and execution of agricultural development programs, are often being trained today as though people did not matter for the solution of technical issues. Thus they remain ignorant of

the sociostructural and cultural dimensions of technical production processes because of outdated training philosophies. The experts produced by this training are being deprived of a crucial lens—the social one—for looking at and understanding their own technical field. They may remain unprepared to cooperate later with the social experts, do not know what to ask from them, and are unaware of what they are entitled, as technical specialists, to receive from the social specialist.

Correcting this situation is not a task for only a year or two, but rather will require at least a generation. If any renaissance is in store for social sciences in their development role, it will not take place unless sociological knowledge (not just introductory general principles, but the sociology of the specific subarea of technical activity) is diffused among technical specialists. I believe that, worldwide, teaching social sciences to students in disciplines other than sociology and anthropology is at least as important and consequential as teaching future sociologists, although this view is not likely to be shared by the majority of the world's universities.

To sum up, putting people first is a formidable work program for social sciences, and not simply a fashionable slogan. It is also a heuristic device demanding always that we identify, in every seemingly "technical," "financial," or "administrative" intervention, the sociological angle and the variables pertinent to the social organization that is affected or targeted by the intervention. The planning models for rural development are far from perfect, and although sociologists should learn to work within existing frameworks they must at the same time change them with their input. Financially induced change programs need sociological knowledge. The range of entrance points for sociological knowledge and skills should be expanded to all segments of development planning, from policy making to execution and evaluation, and from theorizing to social engineering. The challenges of operational work and social engineering should be taken up systematically: it is essential to design for social action.

The conventional range of operationally usable products generated by social scientists is still narrow and insufficient; it should be enriched particularly with forward-looking action methodologies. The support for participation will be more effective if passionate advocacy is accompanied by social methodology. The emerging research orientations are more interdisciplinary than the old; they deserve the support and commitment of development-oriented social scientists. Changing training philosophies in universities is crucial to avoid producing new cohorts of socially incompetent technical experts or technically illiterate sociologists. Such changes and the new orientation toward increasing the relevance of the social sciences will result in a better response to the fundamental calling of sociology: not only to analyze and explain, but also to assist in transforming the fabric of society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is a revised and substantially enlarged version of the keynote address presented by the author to the Fifth World Congress of Rural Sociology in Manila, the Philippines in December 1984. An earlier version was published in the volume *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (1985, New York: Oxford University Press). The author expresses his gratitude for useful comments and assistance in preparing the earlier and present versions to Gloria Davis, T. Downing, W. Falk, Ruth Fredman, W. Partridge, H. Schwarzweller and two anonymous reviewers.

The views and interpretations expressed in this paper do not necessarily express the views and policy of the World Bank and should not be attributed to the World Bank or its affiliated institutions.

## NOTES

1. For the present argument, I use the terms sociology and social anthropology interchangeably. I believe that the substantive overlap between what sociologists and social anthropologists actually do within the framework of development programs justifies this use.

2. The emerging directions themselves have antecedents, and some of them can be clearly traced to trends in previous decades that have not been widely followed. The knowledge base accumulated through traditional approaches in social sciences and available "on the shelves" is still untapped for operational retranslation, yet it is an important part of the dowry brought by social sciences to their marriage with development work. Conventional ethnographies, for instance, are a rich repository of data for identifying cultural configurations in the social organization of agricultural production and thus can feed (through intermediary steps) into the formulation of change methodologies and subsectoral strategies.

## REFERENCES

- Baum, W.C.  
1982 The Project Cycle. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Belloncle, G.  
1985 Participation paysanne et aménagements hydro-agricoles. Paris: Ed. Karthala.
- Castillo, G.T.  
1983 How participatory is participatory development? A review of the Philippine experience. Manila, The Philippines: Institute for Development Studies.
- Cernea, M.M.  
1981 "Modernization and Development Potential of Traditional Grass Roots Peasant Organizations." Pp. 121-139 in M.O. Attir, B. Holzner and Z. Suda (eds.), *Directions of Change: Modernization Theory, Research and Realities*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- 1983 A Social Methodology for Community Participation in Local Investments. World Bank Staff Working Paper No. 598. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- 1985 Alternative Units of Social Organization Sustaining Afforestation Strategies. Pp. 267-293, in M.M. Cernea (ed.) "Putting People First." New York: Oxford University Press.

- 1987a "The production of a social methodology." Pp. 237-262 in E.M. Eddy and W.L. Partridge (eds.), *Applied Anthropology in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1987b "Farmer Organizations and Institution Building for Sustainable Development." *Regional Development Dialogue*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (summer).
- Collinson, M.
- 1985 "Farming systems research: diagnosing the problems." Pp. 71-86 in M.M. Cernea, J.K. Coulter and J.F.A. Russell (eds.), *Research-Extension-Farmer: A Two-Way Continuum for Agricultural Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Coward, E.W. Jr. (ed.)
- 1980 *Irrigation and Agricultural Development in Asia; Perspectives from the Social Sciences*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Esman, M.J. and N.T. Uphoff
- 1984 *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Firth, R.
- 1981 "Engagement and detachment: reflections on applying social anthropology to social affairs." *Human Organization* 40:193-201.
- Hoben, A.
- 1982 "Anthropologists and development." Pp. 349-350 in B. Sigel (ed.), *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, Inc.
- Honadle, G.H. and J.K. Rosengard
- 1983 "Putting 'Projectized' Development in Perspective." *Public Administration and Development* 3:299-305.
- Janowitz, M.
- 1970 *Political Conflict Essays in Political Sociology*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Korten, D.
- 1980 "Community organization and rural development: a learning process approach." *Public Administration Review* (September-October): 408-511.
- Kottak, C.P.
- 1985 "When people don't come first: some sociological lessons from completed projects." Pp. 325-355 in M.M. Cernea (ed.), *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merton, R.K.
- 1949 "The role of applied social science in the formation of policy: a research memorandum." *Philosophy of Science* 16:(3) Pp. 161-181.
- Newby, H.
- 1982 "Rural sociology and its relevance to agricultural economics." *Journal of Agricultural Economics* 33:(2):125-165.
- 1983 "The sociology of agriculture: towards a new rural sociology." Pp. 67-81 in 1983 (ed.), *Annual Review of Sociology*. Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews Inc.
- Newby, H. and F.H. Buttel
- 1982 "Towards a critical rural sociology." Pp. 1-35 in F.H. Buttel and H. Newby (eds.), *The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies: Cultural Perspectives*. Montclair, NJ: Allanheld Osmun.
- Partridge, W.L. (ed.)
- 1984 *Training Manual in Development Anthropology*. Special Publication Number 17, American Anthropological Association and Society for Applied Anthropology. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- Rhoades, R.E.
- 1983 *Breaking New Ground: Anthropology in Agricultural Research*. Lima, Peru: International Potato Center.



Rossi, P.H. and W.F. Whyte

- 1983 "The applied side of sociology." Pp. 5-31 in H.E. Freeman, R.R. Dynes, P.H. Rossi, and W.F. Whyte (eds.), *Applied Sociology: Roles and Activities of Sociologists in Diverse Settings*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Ruttan, V.W.

- 1984 "Integrated rural development programmes: a historical perspective." *World Development* 12 (4):393-401.

Scott, R.A. and A.R. Shore

- 1979 "Why Sociology Does Not Apply. *Sociology in Public Policy*. NY: Oxford: Elsevier.

Uphoff, N.

- 1985 "Fitting Projects to People." Pp. 359-395 in M.M. Cernea (ed.), *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

1986a *Local Institutional Development: An Analytical Sourcebook with Cases*. Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

1986b *Improving International Irrigation Management with Farmer Participation. Setting the Process Right*. Boulder and London: Westview Press.

Whyte, W.F.

- 1982 "Social inventions for solving human problems." *American Sociological Review* 47:1-13.