

# The Important Contribution of Social Knowledge to International Development



Leif E. Christoffersen

This essay has a twofold purpose. I will first reflect on how the contribution of sociology and anthropology enrich the practice of economic development and broader sustainable development aimed at reducing poverty. As a start, I will be reflecting on the context and reasons why in the early 1970s the World Bank decided to create the first in-house position of a professional sociologist within its central staff. The selection process we undertook was quite dramatic.

Further, this essay attempts to describe how from a tentative experiment starting at the individual scale, a process emerged that built a strong and respected community of development sociologists and anthropologists that has become influential in the World Bank.

With the benefit of hindsight, we now see more clearly that over the last 40 years the Bank's expanding community of professionally trained social specialists has collectively pioneered and produced enduring changes in the Bank's thinking, policies, operations, and ethics. They brought a distinct body of social knowledge and methods that they practiced and advocated both in-house and internationally. Under their call for *Putting People First*, they substantially broadened the Bank's development paradigm.

The scope and impacts of these changes, in particular in the formulation of social development policies and in defining many operational guidelines, have benefited not only the World Bank. They spread further into the international development community, as well as into the national policies and legal systems of many developing countries.

---

L. E. Christoffersen (✉)  
Alexandria, VA, USA

## Crossing the Rubicon Towards Social Knowledge

The process of creating this new professional group started in the early 1970s, when the Bank for the first time allocated a regular position to a rural sociologist.

Before discussing the recruitment process, let me just briefly describe the historical and policy context for the poverty-reduction approach of the World Bank (hereafter referred to as the Bank), which included the creation of a Rural Development Division in 1973. At the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference, its founding member governments wanted the Bank to focus on investments for “productive purposes, including the restoration of economies—and the encouragement of the development of productive facilities and resources in less developed countries.” As young professionals at the Bank in the 1960s, we were constantly reminded that the key purpose of the Bank was to further economic development. Economic growth was the key policy objective.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many critical voices, both inside and outside the Bank, were concerned with the inequalities in the sharing of benefits from foreign aid projects and programs. Most of these benefits seemed to accrue to the upper political and business strata in the recipient countries—those among the upper 20% of income groups. This concern coincided with political development in higher income countries, many of which had established programs directly addressing lower income groups, as, for example, the War on Poverty under President Lyndon Johnson in USA.

Inside the Bank, I recall many discussions about whether we could address domestic poverty given our institutional requirement to justify such projects in economic terms. A large number of senior managers and staff, as well as influential members of the board, felt that the Bank’s main purpose was to reduce income disparities **among** countries and not **within** countries.

The Bank’s clients in developing countries felt comfortable with projects emphasizing favorable economic benefits, pointing to the Bank’s Article of Agreement. Many did not think it prudent to accept loans for projects emphasizing social issues, including income redistribution. The economic impact of social issues was difficult to measure. National inequalities were considered primarily a domestic issue; a matter of national budget priorities and hence a matter of national sovereignty.

Despite some opposition, Robert McNamara (Bank president from 1968 to 1981) managed to broaden its policy and operational focus to include distributional aspects of economic growth. McNamara was influenced by Harvard professor Hollis Chenery, who co-authored a seminal study on economic development titled *Redistribution with Growth*. Chenery joined the Bank as Vice President for economic policy and research.

Within the Bank, some policy advisers supported this new direction of operational policy. Among these, Mahbub ul Haq was particularly effective in encouraging McNamara to pay attention to the distributional implications and thereby the social dimensions of economic growth.

Chenery opened up a new perspective for McNamara in that policies promoting economic growth could be pursued in tandem with social concerns about the distribution of economic benefits.

The conclusion of *Redistribution with Growth* noted: “*distributional objectives should be treated as an integral part of development and growth strategy—(one) should concentrate on the definition of relevant socio-economic groups in different types of countries, on their production, savings, and consumption activities, and on the interrelationships among the groups.*” Moreover, “*the effectiveness of policy measures and government investment programs in alleviating poverty is greatly affected by the leakage of benefits to people other than the intended recipients. The mechanism of leakage and the relationships between reducing leakage and efficiency in GNP terms need to be explored.*”<sup>1</sup>

Working in McNamara’s office at that time, I remember his excitement about the ideas associated with a highly respected Harvard economist. Members of his top management team were encouraged to read this book. Poverty alleviation was in many high income countries considered a welfare function that was difficult to justify in terms of economic costs and benefits. How could the Bank get involved? To which extent was it constrained by its Articles of Agreement?

Another outsider also influenced the Bank’s leadership. Robert McNamara had met Montague (Monty) Yudelman earlier at an OECD meeting in Paris where he was presented with Yudelman’s empirical field research on small famers in Africa. It showed that unleashing the productive potential of small and poor farmers could produce significant economic growth and that this objective could be done in parallel with seeking poverty reduction. The idea that small farmers could be economically productive was not generally accepted internationally. McNamara saw the strategic importance of this argument and invited Yudelman to join the Bank, where he soon became Director of its Agriculture and Rural Development Department

Pioneering thinkers such as Mahbub ul Haque, Chenery and Yudelman, opened up new vistas for the Bank. It was possible to address income inequalities and poverty reduction within an economic growth perspective.

This unleashed a lot of dynamic creativity. McNamara’s address to the 1973 Annual Meeting in Nairobi presented a novel framework for a broad involvement in poverty reduction. The Bank was lauded by its members for its pioneering stance. Widening its focus in this way, the Bank began to confront poverty issues, which over time have increasingly become a central objective of international development.

In 1973 the Bank created its first global Rural Development Division mandated to help clients design and experiment with new projects and programs. I was given the task to lead that new Division. We would test how the Bank’s novel poverty-reduction policy could be implemented. The main focus was projects directly benefitting the lower income groups in rural areas of developing countries. Inter alia it would test the merits of wider approaches embracing several sectors such as

---

<sup>1</sup>Chenery, Hollis, Montek Ahluwalia, Clive Bell, John Duloy, Richard Jolly (1979) *Redistribution with Growth*. NY. Oxford University Press, pp 270.

*integrated* rural development projects focusing on *poverty groups*. More generally, by testing and assessing new types of projects we would seek to identify those that were most effective, for later replication throughout the Bank. .

For the Bank these were untraveled roads, exhilarating times and ambitious approaches. Hence, under Yudelman's leadership, the Agriculture and Rural Development Department (AGR) increased considerably its role in the Bank on matters of both policy and operational guidance..

Three challenges arose immediately. First, for reasons already mentioned, there was considerable opposition to this policy, both inside and outside the Bank. The creation of a new operational division was meant to test how this new concept could best be designed and implemented in the Bank's rural development operations, and thereby demonstrate results that might stem such concerns and opposition.

Second, a debate soon emerged about the institutional requirements of the wider approach to rural development such as integrated rural development, a concept that rather quickly turned out to be very popular with many other donors. Should poverty oriented projects be pursued in a single sector, such as agriculture, that could be implemented by existing institutions in the country, or could multiple sector objectives be pursued under an overarching project structure that could help assure effectiveness and efficiency? The latter often meant that new institutional structures had to be created or, if already established, the integrated project had to rely on institutional structures that had little operational experience.

Third, as a direct consequence of this new thinking, the question arose as to whether the Bank had expertise beyond engineers, economists, financial analysts and technical specialists, that could put into effect policies and projects that addressed these wider concerns about socio-economic groups and the interrelationships between different income groups in a country. While the Bank had been open to multidisciplinary approaches since its beginning, it had not employed sociologists and anthropologists on its staff. When we planned staffing of the new division, this discrepancy was noted.

After a long and exacting search, we recruited a sociologist in 1974, the Bank's first in-house expertise of such kind. Within a single decade, by 1985, that first step snowballed: the Bank had further recruited and was employing tens of such professionals.

Due largely to its community of social specialists, the World Bank became the first agency in the multilateral development bank community equipped to use and incorporate knowledge and insights from non-economic social sciences in a widening series of its tools and products. These ranged from operational methods, to planning and incorporating a new content in projects, to carrying out social research, to publishing studies and books, and even *crafting innovative social policies new to the Bank*. Cumulatively and gradually, these growing additions helped the Bank broaden its focus on economic development and poverty issues within the larger sustainable development perspective. After a major effort to recruit environmental expertise in the 1980s, the Bank was staffed to address the concept of sustainable development, which remains a guiding principle of the Bank.

The projects in which the Bank invested its massive financing became transfer vehicles not only for financial resources but also, over time, a vehicle for new principles, new domestic social policies, and better approaches to *self*-development in the borrowing countries. We didn't anticipate then that the initiative for incorporating social knowledge and skills would take the impressive extent that non-economic social sciences—and the functional role of social specialists—have played over time. They have proven indispensable for integrating social development with economic development and environmental sustainability.

All this, however, is not to pretend that bringing social science knowledge into the World Bank's operations at large has been a smooth and easy process, with no hurdles, push backs, and sometimes shocking reversals and failures. It was, in reality, an uphill battle all the way: a battle with past routines, a battle with entrenched concepts and narrow theories, a battle with old mind-sets and habits. And that battle was carried out not only at the Bank's headquarters, but also in the makings and the implementations of field projects in our member countries.

However, a fruitful interaction of *economic* and *social expertise* became possible under the pioneering policy for reducing poverty that Robert McNamara institutionalized into the Bank's thinking, financial investments, and ethos. The body of non-economic social science knowledge was germane and became integral to that new goal orientation imprinted on the Bank by its pursuit of poverty reduction. The battle for absorbing and asserting that knowledge in practice has continued subsequently, and seems to continue today as well.

## **A New Orientation and Our Search for New Skills**

The start-up challenge facing the new Rural Development division was to assemble a staff with a skill composition consistent with its novel mandate. We wanted to recruit at least half of the staff from within the Bank. This would get the new division a core of seasoned Bank staff that was well grounded in its operational methodology. The other half would be "new blood," to be recruited from outside.

When I mentioned to McNamara that the new poverty reduction projects would require new skills, and involve new risks, and that some may end in failure, his response was that failures would be acceptable as long as we gained valuable new knowledge and lessons. However, failures without drawing lessons, and thus not gaining new knowledge, would not be accepted.

Our poverty focus on a specific population segment—the 'target group', often defined as the poorest 40% of the population—forced us to question whether we had staff with "people skills", not just the agro-technical and economic skills. We needed people well versed in issues related to rural institutions, community organizations, rural coops, rural credit, marketing groups, farmer behavior and psychology.

During these deliberations, the idea emerged that we should recruit a rural sociologist. The Personnel Department was asked to begin a search and compile a

list of some 10–15 world-level rural sociologists. The recruitment unit responded positively to the task.

One of the candidates was a rural sociologist from Romania. The CV of Michael Cernea was quite interesting and came with strong references from respected scholars outside his country. For his research and scholarly writings, the umbrella organization of European Sociologists had elected him as Vice President of the European Society for Rural Sociology. Moreover, a world-level social science think tank at Stanford University in Palo Alto had previously invited him for a year as fellow in residence in the US—at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS). However, we were hesitating because he lacked work experience in developing countries. His fieldwork was from within his own country. Romania had recently become a World Bank member, and its socialist type of agricultural system was different from most of our member countries. Therefore, his candidacy was not obvious. In the first round we didn't give him priority on our short list for interviews, and I placed his CV file at the bottom of my pile.

We began to interview various candidates. Yet one after the other appeared unfit for our needs. Some were only interested in research limited to their discipline. Multi-disciplinary teamwork was not high among their habits. Others came with an already made up mind about the World Bank and took a rather lecturing posture, seemingly anticipating to instruct the Bank rather than to work cooperatively with its staff. Yet others wanted just short-term engagements before returning to academic life.

One by one, the pile of CVs got smaller. Michael Cernea's name came up again. I took new interest in that candidate. We found his publications and read a couple of his articles on rural cooperatives. He had researched and written on issues similar to some we were facing in African countries, such as Tanzania or Algeria, which were experimenting with socialist agriculture. When interviews with other candidates failed, this candidate became more interesting. At least he warranted an interview. We tried to contact him in Bucharest, where he was a social researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of Romania's Academy of Sciences.

## **The “Present-Absent” Candidate**

Prior to this point, in the fall of 1973, the Personnel Department sent one of its staff to Bucharest to discuss with the Ministry of Finance the recruitment of some Romanian specialists to the Bank, as Romania had become a new member of the World Bank. The Ministry was preparing files, while our recruiter had the name of only one potential candidate, namely Michael Cernea. But we did not know whether or not he would be interested in working for the Bank.

Upon arrival in Bucharest, the Bank's representative phoned Michael Cernea and inquired—on a non-committal basis—whether in principle he might consider working at the Bank in Washington. Cernea's answer was affirmative. The recruiter promised more information and indicated that the Ministry of Finance would arrange

a preliminary interview. He told Cernea to expect a phone call in the next couple of days.

This, however, proved not to be that simple. When our recruiter was told that Cernea was out of town, he was surprised, since he had received Cernea's assurance that he would be waiting for the call. The Bank recruiter asked the Ministry to search again over the next 2–3 days. The Ministry promised, but the recruiter was again told that Cernea "was not in town—he was out of the country", definitely unreachable. Our colleague was puzzled, but had to accept the response.

To his credit, however, our colleague remained skeptical about Cernea's alleged sudden travel. Before departing Bucharest, he placed another call to Cernea to check if he had returned. Cernea responded immediately and said that he had been waiting each day "glued to the phone", but he never got any call. The recruiter, stunned, had his doubts confirmed. He realized that he had been lied to and told Cernea that he was prevented from meeting him. He would report to the Bank what had happened.

Later, another recruitment mission to Bucharest planned to contact Cernea. The staff member asked to interview Cernea. The next day he got the response he feared: "Sorry, Dr. Cernea is out of the country." But this time he was forewarned; he pressed his counterparts to find out where Cernea could be reached abroad, for the Bank to contact him there. Expecting more misinformation, he was surprised to get a precise answer: "Dr. Cernea is at the World Congress of Sociology in Canada."

## Meeting Cernea for the First Time

The secretariat of the World Congress did indeed confirm that Cernea was a registered participant, invited by the American Sociological Association (ASA) as an international guest. This was my first chance to talk to Michael directly. Most surprised by my call, he said that he wasn't part of Romania's official delegation to the Congress, but came on a tourist visa due to the invitation and ticket sent him as a foreign guest-scholar. I invited him to Washington for an interview, but he said that he didn't have a USA entry visa, only a visa to Canada.

By that time, and after having unsuccessfully interviewed many other candidates, I was determined to meet this candidate in person. I decided to fly there myself and the next day I was in Montreal. My first talk with Cernea was long and interesting. He had in-depth knowledge about agriculture, Romanian peasants, cooperatives, and peasants' economic motivations. He sounded different from many of the candidates I had interviewed. He impressed me with his practical vision on rural sociology. In Romania the tradition of rural sociology, referring to his own village empirical monographs, were partly akin to what in the west was done by anthropologists. Most interesting to me was his description of what he called the "action-and-social-reform" theory and practice. It was used by Romania's rural sociologists aiming at better livelihood at the village level. He regarded such improvements as a worthy purpose of sociology. This part in particular caught my attention because Cernea appeared to conceive sociology's usefulness in an activist perspective, oriented to

practical problem solving, and not merely to describe, analyze, and teach. He was not 'lecturing' me about his knowledge, he appeared driven to seek solutions.

I felt optimistic about his likely "operational value" to development work. In my response, I conveyed my preliminary conclusion that he might indeed be helpful to us. Before coming to a firm conclusion, I wanted my colleagues to meet with him. Would he be agreeable to give a seminar in Washington, so that we could listen to him first hand? He readily agreed.

## **A Seminar, More Interviews, and a Consequential Decision**

Since Cernea didn't have a visa to enter the US. I told him that the Bank would definitely arrange this though the State Department and let him know the border point where the visa would be waiting for him. We agreed, the Bank obtained the visa for Cernea, and he came to our headquarters.

The first day after arriving in Washington Cernea gave a lecture/seminar for the full staff of the Rural Development Division. He presented the paper he had just given at the World Congress, a chapter of the book he had published in Romania earlier that year (1974) on agricultural production cooperatives. His paper was about the "peasant family's private plot in collective farms" in Romania. Reporting his research data, he explained the capacity of the family unit as a structured mini-social-organization able to mobilize even fragmented scraps of the family members' labor resources that were not used by the collective farm: the elderly, the children, the adults' time after returning from the collective farm's work. And he revealed the causes of their success: personal motivation; healthy economic self-interest: what the family produced on the small family plot was allowed to belong to the family, rather than to the collective farm. The family's capacity to self-organize and commit to intense work, he argued, led to much higher productivity per unit of land. He gave empirical data about yields achieved on the tiny family plot per unit of land, which were spectacularly higher than the yields of the collective farm. Cernea offered insights and hard data. All this had the marks of a solid comparative empirical study, with an intriguing causal analysis. We asked challenging questions and the give-and-take discussions were rich.

The next day we prepared a morning schedule with four or five teams, each consisting of two division members, to interview Cernea for some 30–40 min each. I chose not to attend these sessions, since I had talked to Cernea enough myself, and also didn't want my presence to affect the discussions. Thereafter each team gave me its feedback. They were impressed and all supported hiring him

When the last interview was over, I informed Cernea of the outcome of the interviews and offered him the job of rural sociologist in our Division. I explained again that it was a new experiment for us all, not just for him. He would be the first in-house sociologist. He could bring his family to Washington, but he should be prepared to travel a lot to our projects on different continents. Our job offer covered a 3-year period, with the possibility of extensions.



Cernea accepted on the spot; he could barely hide his emotion. We were happy and relieved as our long search had ended. It seemed to all of us that we had finally found the right person. It was such a significant step for us that I informed our President, Mr. McNamara, that we finally found and hired a rural sociologist for our experimental Rural Development Division.<sup>2</sup>

. . . . And yet, this soon turned out to not be the end of our recruitment saga

## Unanticipated Obstacles

Opposition to hiring our hard-found sociologist unexpectedly popped up and threatened our plans. The problem arose when we began to prepare his recruitment papers as a regular staff. This was 1974 and Romania was the only World Bank member-country from the Eastern European bloc. Fortunately the Bank, unlike the UN, has no country quotas for staff recruitment. No country can itself appoint its nationals to the Bank. Rather, the Bank has a statutory right to interview, recruit and hire any national of a member country, except of those working in a Government position (to avoid brain drain). Nonetheless, Romania's Government had submitted a list of persons they would like to see hired for Bank jobs. The Bank was prepared to examine those candidates as well, but had no obligation to hire candidates restricted to that list. Thus, the Bank was fully within its right to hire outstanding professionals outside the Ministry's proposals.

Now that we had found Cernea, and the Personnel Department was ready to hire him outright. But then he told us that he was afraid that the Government might not release his wife and two teenage children to join him in Washington, if he was hired without a nod from Bucharest. Therefore, the Personnel Department telexed to the Ministry of Finance that they had found Cernea in Canada and that the Bank decided to hire him. In parallel, Michael immediately informed his family and the Director of his Institute requesting a leave of absence, and asked friends back home to help arranging for his family to join him.

On our side, we, in fact, were eager to send Cernea right away on an important mission to Tanzania and Mauritius. Tanzania was in the midst of creating a rural village program of a semi-socialist type called *Ujamaas* and we needed Michael

---

<sup>2</sup>We learned that Mr. McNamara was very pleased with our courageous step. One of the Bank's Vice Presidents, Shahid Javed Burki, recalled McNamara's reaction in a note he published later. Burki wrote: "When I was [in 1974] the Secretary of the World Bank Policy Review Committee chaired by Robert McNamara. . . at one of our meetings McNamara entered E-1227, his conference room, sat down, looked at the assembled Vice Presidents, and banged the table—something he always did when he wanted to make an important announcement. He said '*Gentlemen, we have taken an important step. We have just hired the first social scientist. He is a Romanian and his name is Michael Cernea.*'" (Shahid Javed Burki, *One Memory*. In vol: Gloria Davis, Andrew Steer, and Warren van Wicklin III (eds). *Michael Makes His Mark: The Life and Times of a Change Agent in the World Bank*. Social Development Department, World Bank: Washington, DC. August 1998, p. 1.

immediately to help prepare the project where the cooperatives would play an important part. We hadn't yet received the expected support from Bucharest, but we got Cernea a visa and sent him to Tanzania as part of that project mission. We assumed Romania would come around.

However, no response came from Bucharest. Our mission to Tanzania returned and Cernea phoned Bucharest. The answer he got was clear: the authorities were opposed, and his Institute declined giving him leave of absence. He was told to return to Bucharest to "explain why he wanted to work for the World Bank".

## **Personal Support from Robert McNamara**

That sounded bad. It was more than a refusal—it was a threat. Cernea was very worried. He knew that, should he return, he would not be allowed to come back, and he would be punished. We too became concerned. It was ironical that, after so many candidates we declined, we could not hire the one candidate we definitely wanted to have.

We decided to explore the matter with Romania 'diplomatically', through the Bank's Vice President for External Affairs, and in the meantime send Michael on a project identification mission in Algeria. But that exploration also confirmed the opposition of Romania's authorities. When the team returned from Algeria, we informed Cernea about the impasse.

His performance in the field in two different countries, each with different types of agriculture and geography, confirmed our assessment that indeed he could be highly useful as a sociologist to our work. Although these were Cernea's very first steps into Africa and into the Bank's operational work, he performed surprisingly well. In Tanzania, he felt the need for more time to talk to the farmers to decipher and assess the functioning of the *Ujamaa* cooperatives. He offered to remain overnight in a village hut for more interviews. His request was respected, and our team picked him up on its return, after 24 h. It turned out that indeed his night talks with villagers around a fire brought much unanticipated information and useful insights for our project. In short, beyond his good seminar in the Bank, testing him in the field also worked out very well. The Tanzania team leader, Scott McLeod, reported very positively on his professional usefulness.

To overcome the obstacles with Romania's Government and Cernea's research institute in Bucharest, the Bank then tried to break the impasse through an extraordinary step. Cernea informed us that when he had been invited to the US by that high-status Stanford think-tank for social scientists, the Stanford Center for Advanced Behavioral Sciences, as a Resident Fellow for 1970/1971, Romanian authorities also rejected this request. He got permission to go only after the Stanford Center's Director wrote a personal letter to Romania's President, Nicolae Ceausescu.

Deciding to use a similar strategy, I went to see our World Bank President, Mr. McNamara, and asked him whether he would agree to send a letter to Ceausescu. He knew already about Michael Cernea's recruitment, supported it, and readily

accepted. With the approval of the Bank's European Department, I drafted a letter jointly with a colleague from Personnel, John North. McNamara signed it. For this article, I got a copy from the Bank's archive. Here it is:

**International Bank for Reconstruction and Development  
Washington, D.C. 20433**

November 5, 1974

Honorary President of the  
Academy of Social and Political Sciences  
Nicolae Ceausescu  
Bucharest, Romania

Dear Mr. President:

I recall our past meetings in Bucharest and in Washington. . . You may perhaps know, Mr. President, my deep concern that development assistance be directed increasingly at the lower income groups in the developing countries, particularly through integrated rural development programs, in areas of rural poverty. A new Rural Development Division has been established in the Bank and it is staffed with a group of experienced, high-level experts.

I am particularly pleased that we are actively seeking to have a distinguished Romanian scholar, Professor Michael Cernea, Member Correspondent of the Romanian Academy of Social and Political Sciences in Bucharest, join us as the Rural Sociologist in the Rural Development Division.

In this connection, I am writing to you in your capacity as the Honorary President of the Romanian Academy of Social and Political Sciences to consider the release of Mr. Cernea, on a 3-year leave of absence basis, to join our staff. We are convinced that Professor Cernea would contribute to our understanding of rural development problems and would enable us to share with the developing world some of the impressive results which Romania has achieved in its rural progress.

As Honorary President of the Academy, you may be as proud as I am that a Romanian scientist, Professor Cernea, can participate so prominently in our rural development work.

Sincerely,  
Robert S. McNamara  
President

To our astonishment, Ceausescu didn't respond to Mr. McNamara. Romania's Government didn't have a case for opposing the hiring, since the Bank was in its right to employ him. They were blackmailing Michael to return, keeping his family hostage.

We discussed the matter again. It was clear to all of us, as I wrote later for the record in a formal memorandum, that "*Romanian authorities obstructed the Bank's hiring procedures. However, the Bank was committed to prevail over these*

*obstructions.*”<sup>3</sup> Romanian officials were sounded out repeatedly by staff of the Bank’s European Department. There was no give. Stony silence. Meanwhile, Cernea heard from his family that authorities were making their living conditions difficult.

Bank management firmly decided to keep Michael Cernea. He was told that the Bank couldn’t intervene politically to press for his family to be freed. He accepted this and said that he would deal with that himself. He would get legal help to negotiate his children’s way out, and if it became necessary, he would go public with the entire hostage-keeping story. The Bank didn’t need to inflame the conflict further and could afford to let “*the official dispute calm down. But substantively and materially, he was our staff member from the outset.*”<sup>4</sup>

For ‘extracting’ his children, Michael received legal help from several American scholars and academic colleagues he had come to know earlier during his year at Stanford. They succeeded in gaining the support of some of the highest-level US political personalities<sup>5</sup> who intervened officially to get his children out of Romania. It took some 16 months until the happy news arrived that his hostage family was allowed to leave Romania and join him in Washington by end of 1975.

Michael’s work in the Bank and life in Washington had finally normalized.

## Work Across the World’s Meridians

However complex our hiring Cernea had been, the real-life test of what a sociologist could achieve as a newcomer to the complex fabric of the Bank’s daily work was still ahead of him. We hoped for the best, but only practice and time could prove if our hopes would pay off.

During his first year and a half in the Bank Cernea enthusiastically agreed to undertake back-to back project missions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He needed to learn the different segments of the project cycle. He went to Tanzania’s Kigoma, Mwanza and Shenianga provinces for the projects’ preparation and appraisal; to Mauritius for project supervision and for finding training options to integrate jobless people in income generating work; to India’s rice-bowl—West

---

<sup>3</sup>Leif E. Christoffersen. *Hiring of Mr. Michael M. Cernea*, Office memo to Mr. Ian Hume, Director Personnel, Sept. 14, 1989.

<sup>4</sup>Leif E. Christoffersen, *Memorandum to Ian Hume*, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>One of his colleagues-scholars at the Californian think tank was a prominent legal authority and US attorney—the Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz. He and one of his former graduate students, a young lawyer by then, Daniel Segal, did the legal work necessary in Washington DC for extracting Michael’s family from Romania. That legal and political work was carried out independent of the Bank. It was a hard-fought process. The decisive support for Michael’s family reunification came from the United States Senate, with the personal involvement of the former US Vice President, senator Hubert Humphrey and Senator Henry Jackson, who agreed to act in Michael’s split-family case. The US Senate placed Michael’s case on a “list of family unification issues” and became the sponsor and negotiator with Romania’s Government, successfully obtaining release and freedom for Cernea’s family.

Bengal, Bihar and Orissa states—on an agricultural sector-mission to identify the constraints to raising production, tasking him to study farmers use of agricultural credit; in Latin America, to Mexico’s nation-wide innovative PIDER program for helping in setting up its monitoring and evaluation system; and so on.

Cernea immersed himself with passion in activities totally new to him. A defining moment was, for me, when one of our senior agronomists, Peter Nottidge, with decades of experiences in Africa, requested that Cernea be assigned to his forthcoming project mission. When I asked what motivated this request, he said in his gruff way that Cernea “*can solve problems*”. That request told me that Michael and his brand of knowledge had made a break-through.

The RD Division’s experiments with poverty reduction were rewarding in large measure because we had assembled a multidisciplinary group. The “artisans” of our Division’s successes were excellent in their fields, such as David Turnham, Peter Nottidge, Andrew Mercer, Scott McLeod, Olivier Lafourcade, Don Martinusen, Gus Schumacher, Maritta Koch-Weser, Ted Davis, Paulos Abraham, Tudor Kulatilaka, Francois Falloux, Mike Furst, Phyllis Pomerantz, Ben Thoolen, Jim Edgerton, Dan Lindheim, Claes Lindahl, Musa Ahmad, Michael Baxter and others. They brought Cernea into their work programs and he was learning from all of them. Multi-disciplinarity was our hallmark, part of our innovation in staffing. Together we embarked on new pioneering fields for the Bank.

Cernea’s integration in the Bank’s work was advancing well, but this didn’t mean that it was free of obstacles, prejudgments, *résistance*, and clashes with entrenched mind-sets. As a newcomer he had first to get a footing, gain confidence in himself, make sure that his work fitted into the main stream. With each field-mission his conviction was confirmed that social knowledge was indispensable for inducing development. He was in constant search for project ‘niches’ in which sociological knowledge was needed, yet was not being used. However, he also encountered pushbacks. He discovered that there were also institutional and structural limits to what he himself could do.

In our division’s projects he was identifying ‘social issues and recurrent social variables’ that were ignored or underestimated. He was happy that improvements he proposed were seriously discussed in the division, often resulting in changes or additions in project design and implementation. He broadened our understanding of rural development.

## **Decisions to Bring More Social Specialists into the Bank**

Since many other Bank units were interested in work on poverty reduction, it was suggested that they too use sociologists for their projects. Cernea was advocating that social specialists be hired as in-house staff, and that the divisions that were skeptical could start by employing sociologists and anthropologists as consultants for specific projects, missions, seminars, and select those who confirm effectiveness. A few cases followed. The Bank’s Young Professional Program—for the first time in

its history—took the step to allocate a slot to a rural sociologist, and hired Jacomina de Regt, a young rural sociology graduate from the Netherlands. From 1977 a German-Brazilian anthropologist, Maritta Koch-Weser, did outstanding work on short-term assignments for food projects in Brazil; she was first hired as consultant, was also sent to a complex Bank project in Brazil (Polonoroeste), performed very well, was hired full time as staff, and over time advanced to a stellar career in the Bank in both social and environmental work. Another early recruit was an American anthropologist, Gloria Davis, who had considerable field-experience with Indonesian irrigation villages for her PhD. The chief of the Bank's Agricultural Division for Indonesia, Amnon Golan, realized that she knew more than the Division's irrigation engineers about how farmers negotiated their shares of water increments and how irrigation systems and their tertiary canals functioned *at the farm level*. Earlier he doubted the merits of employing such expertise. To his credit, he soon offered her a staff job in his Division.

Cernea thought these steps were good, but too slow, and too few. The vast majority of Bank projects were not subject to social analysis. It was imperative for the Bank to create an in-house *critical mass* of social specialists. The 3–4 sociologists then working in the Bank was a “minuscule” number given the Bank's operational magnitude. They were only applied in the agricultural sector. Instead, an entire “cohort” was needed, not yet as a ‘special unit’ in the Bank's center, but staff spread out in the various operational units Bank-wide. It was important that they constantly interacted with economists and technical specialists and applied the use of social knowledge in our projects.

One of Cernea's most successful institutional initiatives for building a ‘critical mass’ of social specialists in the Bank was taken in 1978. Approaching the Bank's Senior Advisor for Science, Charles Weiss, he asked him to support his plea to bring *social* science knowledge in the Bank, not only knowledge from technical sciences. Weiss, working in our Vice-President's front-office, was asked to help involve such expertise in more sectors than agriculture. It was important to create more social capacity in the Bank for dealing with the major social and cultural dimensions and issues of all the Bank's lending sectors. Weiss was receptive. It led to a meeting convened by Mr. Baum of all Central Policy directors to discuss the Bank's needs for more inputs from other social sciences than economics alone. The content and outcome of that meeting were reflected in a memo widely distributed to senior and middle level managers in the Bank's lending sectors and in Personnel. (The full story on that key meeting is told by Charles Weiss article in this book). It became a turning point in hiring trained social specialists throughout the Bank.

Subsequently Cernea took the initiative to start an internal “*Bank Sociological Group*”. Its main objective was to bring together the Bank's few trained social specialists with other Bank staff to discuss the social architecture of Bank projects deemed as major successes, or projects that were recognized as having failed embarrassingly. Despite its informal status, the Sociological Group had regular meetings advertised throughout the Bank and open to all Bank staff. There were open discussions and a number of outside social scientists were invited to lecture on social issues of specific interest to the Bank.

Over time Cernea was instrumental in helping recruit systematically, one after the other, highly competent social scientists. Among them were both young talents and scholars with established status. To name just a few: Scott Guggenheim, whom Cernea brought into our Division as his research assistant, then over time became one of the Bank's top social scientists; William Partridge, a leading anthropology scholar in USA; the social anthropologist Ashraf Ghani (now President of Afghanistan); Dan Aronson (lured away from teaching at Canada's pre-eminent McGill University); Dan Gross, who left his Professorship at Columbia University to work in the Bank; Warren van Wicklin (trained in political sciences, who created the Bank's first database on people displaced by all Bank projects); Cyprian Fisiy (a young Cameroonian double PhD, who was able to learn his way through various Bank assignments and 15 years later became the director of the Bank's central Social Development Department); and many others.

Cernea also made social knowledge *more directly and more easily available to all Bank staff*. He invested much of his time in training the Bank staff at large: he initiated training courses for staff on the social issues of projects; invited many outside academics who had done their independent research on Bank-financed projects to present their findings and discuss them with groups of Bank staff working on the same countries and sectors; and kept rosters of potential social consultants and making their names available to managers and project team leaders. One such example was the respected Norwegian sociologist, Gunnar Sørbrø, who specialized on Sudan and the Horn of Africa and who was director of the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway. His services were used repeatedly over several years by the regional agriculture division for that part of Africa.

## **Moving from Individual Projects to Policy Work**

From working initially exclusively on individual projects, Cernea shifted gradually to producing guidelines, methodologies, and to proposing policy norms that would involve the use of social knowledge. This started with an internal paper that outlined an ambitious "model" to explain to Bank operational staff what, when, and where a sociologist or anthropologist could contribute to the Bank's most typical practices and project stages. That model was titled "*Entry Points for Sociological Knowledge in Each Stage of the Project Cycle*". Seminars were offered for the Bank's regional staff. His paper was published outside the Bank. A prolific writer on social issues, many of Cernea's papers were published by the Bank's Publication Department. He edited full-sized books on social issues in Bank projects, such as participation, farmers learning behavior, land tenure changes, etc. He encouraged other members of the Agricultural and Rural Development Department to write papers for these books about their own experiences. Later on he included his "Entry Points" model in his major Bank book, *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*, which came out some years later (1985). This book was a success for the

Bank at large: it highlighted the Bank's pioneering role in addressing the role of people in projects and project's social-cultural variables.

During the mid/late 1970s the Bank decided, as part of its strategy for reducing rural poverty, to finance national agricultural extension systems to increase the productivity of poor farmers in Asia and Africa. Regional staff asked us to develop a comprehensive monitoring system for extension projects, to compare impacts and facilitate transfer of experience. We gave that task to Cernea. Together with a reputed statistician, Dr. Ben Tepping, Cernea went out to field-observe these extension projects, consulted with local researchers, and produced in 1977 the World Bank's first large M&E system on extension, a book-size publication explaining options and methods to assess the impacts of novel agro-information on farmers. We liked this study, published it,<sup>6</sup> and sent it to countries with extension projects. That was Cernea's first Bank publication. Next he initiated and edited two books on spreading research findings to farmers.

This experience convinced us of the value of Bank-wide instruments, able to achieve a multiplied use and social impact. While continuing project-focused field-work, Cernea turned to initiating other Bank-wide guidelines with social content.

The next Bank-wide policy tool arose from an explosive issue that surfaced in a totally different part of the Bank: a social disaster in a dam project in Brazil that forcibly displaced some 65,000 people. The disaster was caused by the project's omission of any social planning for people's resettlement. The dam's construction was completed, the sluices were closed, and water was let to flow into the still populated area of the would-be reservoir. The impending catastrophe in this Bank-supported project made headlines around the world. Cernea sensed the broad relevance of that huge social disaster, as the epitome of overlooking the social content and impact of an infrastructure project. He used to define this syndrome as the typical "original social sin" on projects, that was the pattern that kept exasperating him about many projects, even those of lower profile than a dam. This sin was 'committed' everytime, he said, when crucial issues of a *social nature* inherent in infrastructure projects, were overlooked by Bank staff in the initial project concept. Usually, the Bank's staff had all the requisite *technical* and *economic* competence, but they were neither trained on key social issues, nor required by the Bank to recognize social processes intrinsic and germane to their project. This pattern repeated itself in many projects, allowing social issues to fall between the cracks from the outset. The social "vacuum" either exploded later, such as in Sobradinho Dam, or undermined the project's technical success and people's livelihoods. In the Sobradinho case, the absence of social planning caused a catastrophe for the tens of thousands of people being uprooted. It brought international blame that shook the Bank. The Bank's President was utterly distressed, both because this mega-disaster caused great harm to poor people and also because it produced an international outcry against the World Bank.

---

<sup>6</sup>Michael M. Cernea and Benjamin J. Tepping, (1997) *A System for Monitoring and Evaluating Agricultural Extension Projects*. Washington DC: World Bank.



Cernea sensed the pattern behind this individual project case and talked to me and to Monty Yudelman, volunteering to write a set of social guidelines—not for the Brazil project, it was too late for that—but for all future projects causing similar forced displacements. We encouraged him. Our department took charge of issuing the draft guidelines, circulated them for comments by regional infrastructure staff and also alerted them to create safety nets for poor rural people victimized by displacement. After several months of staff debates, we sent the re-drafted text to Warren Baum, our Vice-President for Bank project policies, fearing his famous “red pen” that marked all papers he read. Yet this time we got few marks. Baum sent the document to McNamara, who promptly approved it and commended our Department for it. He decided that it should be issued not as technical optional guide, but as a Bank Operational Policy on involuntary resettlement.<sup>7</sup>

This was the Bank’s first explicit social policy. It placed a firm check on well-known and repetitive long-term harm, mandatory for all Bank projects involving displacement. It was the world’s first-ever policy instituting rules for providing the social protection justly due to forcibly displaced people. By extension, this policy became mandatory also to all countries seeking Bank funding for projects involving displacement. This was a deep policy breakthrough for the Bank. Until then no multilateral development bank or developing country had any normative system for displacements.

Writing that policy became a turning point also in Cernea’s tenure in the Bank. It made him aware of the *multiplier* impact of involving sociologists in policy work. After having been promoted earlier to “Senior Sociologist,” he was now appointed as the Bank’s “Social Advisor”. This was a new position on the Bank’s job-list that considerably increased his influence; as Senior Adviser he had to clear all draft staff appraisal reports (SARs) with big social implications and risks before financing approval by the Bank’s Loan Committee.

The Bank’s adoption of its resettlement policy gave an impetus to regional Bank divisions to recruit more trained social specialists, in order to carry out the work required by this policy. In turn, Michael involved other Bank anthropologists in policy producing work. An interesting example is the process through which the Bank’s next social policy—on indigenous populations—was prepared and adopted. One of the newcomers to the Bank was the anthropologist Sheldon (Sandy) Davis, hired for his known scholarship on indigenous populations. Davis, together with an environmentalist, Robert Goodland, prepared a draft policy, to which Maritta Koch-Weser and Cernea also contributed. That draft went through internal rounds of Bank staff discussion, and only after being “vetted” (informally) by the Bank’s Sociolog-

---

<sup>7</sup>World Bank, *Operational Manual Statement 2.33. Social Issues Associated with Involuntary Resettlement in Bank-Financed Projects*. February 1980. Washington DC. [OMS (*Operational Manual Statement*) was the acronym used at that time for the Bank’s formal policies guiding operational work.]

ical Group was sent to the Bank management in 1982.<sup>8</sup> It contributed in turn to broadening the Bank's attention to the social issues of development. Thereafter, it was replicated by ADB, IADB, and some bilateral aid agencies, exercising positive influence far beyond the World Bank's own lending.

As Social Adviser Cernea critiqued the absence in such reports of a structured social analysis of a project's area population, its needs and its social organization. There was a paradox between the Bank's proclaiming the poorest as its main target group, while the Bank's appraisal rules didn't require either its staff or the borrower to carry out such social analyzes neither during project preparation nor at project appraisal. This 'policy vacuum' made him an ardent spokesman for changing the Bank's *general* appraisal methodology. He elaborated and submitted a 'content outline' and Bank 'procedures' for the new type of analysis he saw as indispensable to the Bank: the *social analysis of the impacted population under each project*.

This was a systemic demand, and a bold one. It asked for modifying the very 'production model' of the Bank's hundreds and hundreds of projects. The effort to persuade management this time took longer than in the case of the resettlement policy. In many professional organizations there is a constant competition for intellectual jurisdiction over issues; hence, the need to build professional alliances for promoting changes in set models and practices. Many staff defended the existing appraisal methods. Cernea was able to find intellectual allies for such reform in unexpected quarters. Some of the Bank's top economists opened up to this idea. The Senior Policy Adviser in our Vice-Presidency, Herman van der Tak<sup>9</sup> took interest. He became a supporter of the proposal for introducing "social analysis" in the Bank's operational policy and also recommended the inclusion of a related analysis—*institutional analysis*—in the model for appraisal work. In turn, the Bank's Sociological Group became a key support tool for reforming appraisal methods. It proved to be effective in challenging old mind-sets, in open discussions. Project team leaders were invited to present their projects, selected either as success cases, or because they failed on social reasons. The debates were exciting, sometimes heated. Bank staff of various specialties became regulars of the brown bag lunch seminars. Cernea also obtained a departmental budget to invite a large number of outside distinguished scholars in anthropology and sociology to give lectures for Bank staff on key social issues and on their own recent research findings.<sup>10</sup> The Sociological

---

<sup>8</sup>World Bank. OMS 2.32 *Tribal Populations in World Bank Financed Projects*. Washington D.C.

<sup>9</sup>Herman van der Tak had earlier tried to change the way the Bank calculated the "rate of return" of projects by proposing the concept and methodology for calculating a "social rate of return"; yet this did not gain traction in the Bank (see Herman G. van der Tak and Lyn Squire, *The Economic Analysis of Projects*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976)

<sup>10</sup>Among the eminent outside academics scholars who were invited to speak on social issues in poverty reduction projects were anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, such as Frederick Barth, Robert Chambers, Neil Smelser, Neville Dyson-Hudson, Michael Horowitz, Conrad Kottak, David Mayburry-Lewis, Theodor Downing, Thayer Scudder, Walter Coward, Norman Uphoff, and Bank Board members, as well as other well-known scholars. Equally, Cernea persuaded many of the World Bank's most senior managers to meet, speak to, and engage in discussion with the

Group's meetings were oriented to project methodology and 'good practices': they discussed participatory approaches, and focused on themes which were then captured in the title of the celebrated book: "*Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*".<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, in 1983, the Bank's management was persuaded to appoint a working group to re-examine the norms for project preparation and appraisal. The result was the full rewriting of the Bank's policy on project appraisal. The new normative Operational Manual Statement nr. 2.20 (January 1984) included two fully new sections: one drafted by Cernea on the "Sociological Appraisal" of projects,<sup>12</sup> the other written by van der Tak and his economic adviser, Arturo Israel, on "institutional analysis", asking for the evaluation and build-up of borrowers' capacity.<sup>13</sup>

The adoption of social analysis as a Bank norm influenced the substantive paradigm of our work by changing the Bank's concept of what a development project should be, how it needs to be built, and what it must accomplish. This adoption itself embodied the success of a robust intellectual in-house debate for change. The conceptual change was accompanied by an operational methodology. Given the decisive role of appraisal, the broadening of the appraisal's scope triggered *content changes* throughout the full project cycle: project design, preparation, implementation, supervision, and evaluation for the Bank's investments.

The normalizing of social analysis had a deep impact beyond the Bank's headquarters.

It sent an important message to borrowing countries on how their own approaches to project preparation and management needed to be improved and conducted. Effects became gradually visible on modifying not only the Bank's but also borrowers' staffing patterns for work on various components of Bank projects: indeed, to carry out the new operational work requirements (e.g., demographic surveys,

---

members of his "Bank Sociological Group." Among them: Ibrahim Shihata, Warren Baum, Ismail Serageldin, Wilfred Thalwitz, V. Rajagopalan,; and Bank's Board's Executive Directors—Hugh Evans (UK), Jean-Daniel Gerber (Switzerland), E.Herfkens (the Netherlands). Such sessions were home for challenging questions raised to the Bank's senior managers by our rank-and-file staff social specialists. This proved also to be an effective in-house social strategy for "staking the social ground": it "voluntarily compelled" some of the highest persons in the Bank's system to pause, think, and look from the perspective of a social specialist at what the Bank was—or was not—doing. The social community was gaining reputation as a solid professional group apt and ready to engage the Bank's senior managers in paradigmatic, theoretical and operational issues of the Bank's work.

<sup>11</sup>Michael M. Cernea (Ed.) *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Development Projects*. New-York-London: Oxford University Press, 1985, 1991, 2nd ed.

<sup>12</sup>World Bank, *Operational Manual Statement 2.20. Project Appraisal- 1984 Jan.* (it replaced the prior OMS 2.20 with same name that was unchanged for a dozen years).

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed description of the long uphill battle inside the Bank to introduce social analysis as a key component of the World Bank's procedures, a much more complete account than I can offer here is given in Michael Cernea's own paper: *A Landmark in Development: The Introduction of Social Analysis* (see the book: S. Price and K. Robinson (Eds.): *Making a Difference*. Berghan Books, 2015.

consultations, resettlement plans, promoting organized local participation, etc.) additional professional staff with trained social knowledge became employed. Overall, mandating the norm of social appraisal became one of the crucial steps in moving the Bank to broader informed and planned *social* development.

Cernea and his colleagues' work for crafting and promoting these and several other World Bank social policies changed the course of the World Bank's work on important recurrent processes inherent in development. There were other social policies that were proposed and developed by the collective effort of these professionals. They are discussed in other chapters of this volume (see for more details Ismail Serageldin's paper). The Bank's social policies were innovations in development work that were replicated also by other MDBs and bilateral aid agencies, and some even by huge private sector banks, that became known as the Equator Principles Banks. The very presence of an expansive and energetic community of sociologists and anthropologists at the World Bank, their activities and publications, became more widely known and publicly recognized.

A meaningful recognition of the impact that social scientists working on development programs came from the world's largest scholarly anthropological society: in 1988, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) gave Cernea the "*Solon T. Kimball Award*" for pioneering work, "*to honor your outstanding contribution to applied anthropology and public policy . . . and to expanding the scope of anthropology in development, advancing the cause of 'Putting People First'*". This was most meaningful for the Bank institutionally, coming from scholars who in their research output tended primarily to see mainly flaws and failures in our projects.

## **A Group Process That Led to Collective Products and Institutional Success**

Michael Cernea and I became close friends, and I remain proud that we brought him into the Bank. His colleagues and Bank managers recognized and honored his leadership as a "change agent" (see the telling publication by Davis, Steer, and van Wicklin<sup>14</sup>). In closing this essay, I would like to single out four characteristics of his and his social specialists group's work that carry wider significance for bringing social knowledge into development practice, namely: the ability to insert new specialized knowledge within a multi-disciplinary institutional framework; the ability required from sociologists to work well within teams and help organize collective efforts towards the pursued goal; activism, the ability for solving, not only lamenting, problems; and a capacity to derive general policy-level conclusions and norms from fieldwork experiences.

---

<sup>14</sup>Gloria Davis, Andrew Steer, and Warren van Wicklin. *Michael Makes His mark: The Life and Times of a Change Agent in the World Bank*. Washington DC: Social Development Dpt., World Bank, 1998.

First, as Cernea did effectively, I think that sociologists must seek to find “*natural entry points for sociological knowledge*” in both projects and policies; it’s important to grasp what a project is able to achieve and, both, to communicate and to listen to the reasoning of colleagues with different expertise and perspectives, be they economists, engineers, agronomists, lawyers.

Second, sociologists must be good team builders and workers, not lone rangers. They must be able to understand the nature and potential of the institution in which one works, not just one’s narrow task. Cernea rightly sensed that the Bank *must* have an in-house critical mass of trained social specialists and worked hard to find and bring-in suitable ones, who would have, as he likes to say, “both good brains and a firm moral spine.” He became the leading architect in building up the size and the functions of the Bank’s staff of social specialists. The Bank’s community became *the world’s largest group of development sociologists and anthropologists working under a single institutional roof*. It was their convergent effort that led to collective products and to collective successes. The Bank’s recently published audit report (2014) counted within Bank staff the highly impressive number of 373 social specialists and environmentalists,<sup>15</sup> among which the number of social specialists forms the majority: 200. In the new post world-war era of post-colonialism and international development-cum-aid, the Bank became, historically and indisputably, the world’s pioneering institution that first built in its midst the distinct capacity of a critical mass of social specialists and absorbed productively a novel body of social science knowledge additional and germane too to economic sciences and economic development. Sooner or later, all other MDBs followed our model incorporating within their own structures groups of trained social and environmental specialists, thus gradually broadening the paradigm of their development interventions.

Third, sociologists must have a problem-solving orientation. They must go beyond reporting weaknesses and criticizing faults to creatively well thought options and problem-solving mechanisms; Cernea called this “finding functional alternatives”. Dissecting past errors provides insights retrospectively, yet the harder challenge is to conceive doable solutions to inherent ongoing risks. Finding solutions calls for social inventiveness, weighing if planned actions “fit”, and for the capacity of anticipating even the famous ‘unanticipated consequences’.

The last and crucial characteristic we must search in social specialists is the ability to think in policy terms, not just local “fixes”—both existing policies and those not yet existing but needed. Cernea *introduced groundbreaking social policies in development*. Their theoretical spring-board was the Bank’s 1970s reorientation to poverty reduction, our broadening of the economic paradigm beyond economic growth alone to include distribution, the crafting of safety measures and participatory methodologies into managed development. These were the areas where the entire social community’s presence and work in the Bank have made transformative and

---

<sup>15</sup>Mouhamadou Diagne. Report on an Advisory Review of the Bank’s Safeguard Risk Management. June 16, 2014; <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/317401425505124162/iad-draft-report-advisory-review-safeguards-risk-management.pdf>

enduring contributions. These policies had a paradigmatic international influence, had effects that rippled and today endure far beyond the Bank, having led to replications in other agencies and in developing countries too. The writings of our Bank social specialists have gained world-wide circulation and international audiences; they enriched and continue to influence research on the social dimensions of development.

In a recent conversation Cernea credited some coincidences that led him to be recruited by the Bank. I disagreed with my good friend. The key point is that he possessed some rare qualities, which we had been hard pressed to find. His professional competence, militancy for change, analytical and writing skills, team-spirit and capacity to lead, explain more than apparent ‘coincidences’. He was the social scientist we were looking for, and we were never disappointed.

We were then, and are now, proud of the pioneering contributions of the Bank’s sociologists in their totality to international *social* development. I’ve recently come across an authoritative confirmation offered by the President of the International Rural Sociology Association, Prof. Joseph Molnar; on behalf of his global scholarly organization. He wrote: “*Sociologists at the World Bank have successfully introduced many theoretical propositions, methods, and action-principles, derived from sociology, in the formulation of development policies, yet not without struggle. Their efforts have influenced countless investment programs aimed at poverty reduction, food production, rural and urban development, environmental protection, and overall—at improving peoples’ livelihoods*”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, they early advocated the broadening of the Bank’s social knowledge and development paradigm and supported also the incorporation of environmental analyses. The Bank’s orientation to *social* development increasingly received other global validations. Soon after the first environmental “Earth Summit”, Rio-1992, the Heads of States of all UN countries re-united in 1995 in Copenhagen to embrace together the common goal and commit their countries in their first “*World Summit For Social Development*”.

**Leif E. Christoffersen** grew up in Norway, pursued undergraduate studies at Edinburgh University in Scotland, and graduate studies in international economics at the Fletcher School at Tufts University in the US. In 1964 he was recruited to the World Bank under its Young Professional Program. Over the following 28 years he served with the World Bank in Washington D.C., mostly in management positions related to agriculture, rural development and the environment. At the time when Michael Cernea was recruited from Romania, Christoffersen served as head of the global Rural Development Division. Since leaving the World Bank he has served as Senior Adviser to the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and led the Norwegian Research Council’s program committee on multilateral development. From 1989 to 2004, Christoffersen chaired the Board of the GRID-Arendal Foundation in Norway, which provides support to the UN Environmental Program on environmental information systems, technology and communications. He has served as chairman of the Board of Scandinavian Seminar College in Denmark and as member of the board of directors of EARTH University in Costa Rica. He was team leader for several independent institutional evaluations for large organizations carrying out global programs, such as IUCN (the

---

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Molnar, in vol. “*Themes for the Third Millennium: The Challenge for Rural Sociology in an Urbanizing World*.” Washington D.C.: World Bank. 2000.

World Conservation Union) in Gland, Switzerland, the Global Environment Facility in Washington D.C., and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome. More recently he served on the International Advisory Panel of RUFORUM, a network organization being owned by and serving African universities.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

