

# MAINSTREAMING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION INTO THE OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION: A PARTIAL HISTORY

ROSALIND EYBEN\*

*Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK*

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**Abstract:** Written by the first Chief Social Development Adviser of the Overseas Development Administration (now called the Department for International Development), this article describes when, why and how an understanding of the social dimension became mainstreamed into the policy and practice of the British aid programme. Exploring the growth within the context of the changing political aid environment of the final quarter of the last century, the history of social development within the British aid programmes is described from its origins in the mid-1970s up to 1997. It asks how it was that a new specialist group of social analysts was established as part of the agency's bureaucratic machinery and compares this with the World Bank's experience. The article concludes by briefly considering the challenges facing social development expertise following 1997. Copyright © 2003 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

I am breaking an academic convention by writing in the first person to make transparent the subjective nature of what follows. My story suffers from an engaged actor's interpretative bias. Joining the British Government Overseas Development Administration in late 1986 as one of two in-house social anthropologists, I subsequently found myself leading a growing group of social scientists known as 'social development advisers (SDAs)'. SDAs are one of a variety of specialist advisers who work in country programme offices and in policy departments. All advisers, including SDAs, are employed on a full time, 'permanent and pensionable' basis as civil servants.

I take this brief history up to 1997. That was the moment when the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) was transformed under an energetic Labour minister into the Department for International Development, with a central focus on global poverty reduction that went well beyond doing development projects. Since 1997 social

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\*Correspondence to: R. Eyben, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK.  
E-mail: R.Eyben@ids.ac.uk

development advisers have remained a strong and committed professional cadre within DFID but so much else has changed that to describe their role today in any detail would require another article.

Rather than an account of the evolution of ideas and approaches to social analysis in British-funded development projects, as, for example, along the lines of Cernea's with regard to the World Bank, my story is more about the politics of organizational change. It builds on Cernea's point that 'To create systemic room for social knowledge, we had to militate for . . . institutional change to mandate for this kind of knowledge' (Cernea, 1995, p. 13).

Without the time to consult the archives, my story is more than likely to be wrong on some of the facts.<sup>1</sup> The view is inevitably framed from where I sat in head office in London. Although, in my early years in ODA, I worked on particular projects in specific countries, I did not have the yet-to-be-tested experience of many subsequent social development advisers who were posted overseas to be part of ODA's regional and country offices. *Their* story would be told differently. Nevertheless, in *this* story I hope to emphasize the effort made at head office to create and maintain the enabling environment that first of all allowed their jobs to be created and then, afterwards provided the space for them to pursue the social development agenda as it best fitted the situation where each one of them was working.

## 2 THE HISTORY: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Development as being about people and institutions, rather than technologies or commodities (Cernea, 1995) is an idea that has taken a long time to come to fruition and still does not prevail in much of international aid. Nevertheless, it was an idea already present at the origins of official development assistance in the 1960's and it then slowly developed as an approach within development theory that emphasised the importance of people as social actors in the development process (Long, 2001). This evolution in the academic community was largely ignored in applied development studies that privileged economic theory and bureaucratic aid practice continued to pursue top down linear planning methods. Although these were critiqued in much the same way as we would today (Goulet, 1977; Clay and Schaffer, 1984), the voices were not heard. Social analysis and participatory approaches remained marginalised. Even in the 1970s, when aid focused on meeting people's basic needs, the approach was essentially technical and/or economic. 'Trickle down' was the dominant scenario at the macro level and technological improvements and manpower [sic.] planning at the micro level.

The few sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists working for development agencies were employed as contracted staff at this micro level, generally in the integrated rural development projects that became fashionable in the 1970s. Their main pre-occupation was to make a case that effective rural development was about putting people first rather than crops or irrigation canals (Cernea, 1991; Chambers *et al.*, 1989; Uphoff, 1986).

<sup>1</sup>Eric Hanley's insight and thoughtful comments on my first draft, and Andrea Cornwall's, Eleanor Fisher and anonymous reviewers' on subsequent versions, were very helpful and much appreciated. I am also grateful to Sean Conlin, Sheila Hipwood, and Sarah Ladbury for their interest in this effort and for suggested changes. The contents and views expressed in this article are however entirely my responsibility.

It was in the mid 1970s that some few development agencies began to hire socio-cultural analysts as permanent staff to work on rural development issues alongside agricultural economists, agronomists and engineers. Michael Cernea joined the World Bank in that capacity in 1974. Shortly afterwards the British aid programme recruited its first social development adviser<sup>2</sup> to work in head office to consider 'women in development' and sociological issues as crosscutting issues in the aid programme.

## 2.1 The Early Years of Social Development Advice in ODA 1975–1986

British official development assistance, both bilateral aid and support to multilateral agencies, has always been administered through a single government institution since the establishment of a Ministry of Overseas Development in 1964. Continuing a tradition of the former Colonial Office, from which DFID today is a direct lineal descendent, a number of specialist advisers were employed by the Ministry and by the mid-70s these included economists engineers, agriculturalists and health and education advisers.

The first SDA joined this group of specialists and established the template for social development advice. She integrated what was then known as women in development (WID) expertise into a wider job description, thus bucking the more general trend at that time in international development co-operation to establish designated WID posts. She used social analysis as the principal means for advising on the social impact of aid projects at a time when economists made judgements on social impact ('distributional issues') if this were considered relevant (it very often was not so considered).

It could be argued that she was simply reviving a former Colonial Office tradition of hiring social anthropologists to advise on native affairs. These however maintained their principal base in academia (including Raymond Firth and Evans Pritchard) and that tradition had died out by the 1950s. It was only gradually in the 1960s and 1970s that there developed a new generation of applied anthropologists (including me) who, unlike their colonialist forerunners, saw themselves as primarily practitioners rather than as academics. As Grillo (1985) noted most of this new generation worked outside the academy not because of failing to find a job there but 'because they believed that anthropology could and should illuminate the urgent and pressing issues of the day'.

By the early 1980s a second SDA post had been created and its incumbent, Conlin (1985) describes in fairly guarded terms<sup>3</sup> the job of a social development adviser at that time. One SDA was responsible for providing advice to the programme in Africa and the other for Asia, the Oceans and Latin America. Their advice was required, for example, when a project was aimed at the rural poor 'since an understanding of sociological constraints is necessary to make the project effective' (Conlin, 1985, p. 78). Although ODA officially aspired to include social advice at the design stage, it was of course impossible with only two SDAs to cover the whole world. This meant that very often we were only required when things were going badly wrong in projects, as in the following example.

<sup>2</sup>This was Terry Spens. By 1975 the Ministry had already on its books a social welfare adviser based in London, Russ Prosser, and another in the (then) regional office for the Middle East in Beirut. In that year, as a result of the International Decade on Women, a part-time women's affairs adviser, Terry Spens was recruited to participate in the Mexico conference. She was subsequently given a full-time appointment.

<sup>3</sup>At that time, as still is the case today, the British Civil Service tradition was very cautious about allowing staff to publish anything controversial. Because social development advisers were in any case seen very much as an anomaly by most people in the ODA, Conlin's draft text was vetted carefully by his superiors before it was approved.

Soon after I arrived in ODA in late 1986 I was sent to a project in the Sudan designed after the 1984 drought to convert into fishermen pastoralists who had lost their herds. When the ex-pastoralists refused to form themselves into co-operatives and go fishing it was decided that it was because there was no fresh water by the shores of the Red Sea. The solution was a solar still to convert sea water into fresh water. The project had already been running for about three years by then. The reluctant fishermen did not seem very interested in this solar still and my task was to find out what was needed to make the people look after their solar still properly. I reported back that the solar still was not only technically inappropriate because the sands from the desert were constantly blowing across and obscuring the glass, but that furthermore there were many social, economic and political reasons why the 'target' population was not interested in fishing. I was seen as a typical SDA with a negative attitude and the project continued for a further year or two until it was quietly shut down.<sup>4</sup>

Conlin noted that SDAs had to make a case to be allowed to participate in project design and monitoring visits and that the lead adviser, for example the Medical Adviser in a health project, could decide whether or not an SDA was necessary. SDAs were further constrained by much of the aid programme being run by teams based in regional offices known as development divisions. These were staffed by engineers, agriculturalists and economists. When I joined ODA in London as SDA for Africa, I was strongly warned that I had to do what the two African development divisions required of me and nothing else.

It looked as if I was already heading for disaster when on my second day in the organization I was told I had to join the 'batting side' in a meeting of the senior management committee that approved all projects above a certain size. The job of the 'batsmen' (the advisers and administrator from the development division that had designed the project) was to argue the case for the project and to hide any defects from the 'bowling' (senior management) side. Already confused as to the rules of cricket, I misunderstood my role and unfortunately volunteered to the meeting that I thought the project design would result in some serious and unintended negative social consequences. I was told by the Chairman of the committee that I had launched an 'Exocet missile' into my own side. The use of sporting and military language was extremely common, putting at a disadvantage women aspiring to senior positions.

Conlin noted however some changes taking place at that time that were creating a more favourable internal environment for social development advice. One of these was placing them under the supervision of the Chief Economist. We had a shared agenda with economists of shifting power away from the technical specialists. It was my economist colleague who was keen that a cost benefit analysis be undertaken of the Red Seas project. It was only later, as we grew more powerful, that we became a challenge.

## 2.2 The Growth of the Group 1987–1991

Between 1987 and 1991 the number of SDAs grew from two to seven during which time we were gradually identifying the key issues that could link to external interests and that could help us promote a people-first agenda. These issues were poverty, participation and gender.

<sup>4</sup>See ODA (1989) synthesis evaluation of its support to fisheries projects for a less idiosyncratic account of this project.

In the late 1980s, following a revived public interest in aid after the Ethiopian famine, there was an increased ODA concern to reach the poor. Many technically focused projects had dubious poverty links and SDAs were seen as able to offer more authentic access to the needs and aspirations of poor people. This revived concern for poor people also opened up opportunities for British development NGOs who gained a stronger voice in the UK policy debate on aid. The small social development group inside ODA sought alliances with staff in NGOs such as Oxfam and Christian Aid.

Meanwhile, UNICEF and others had started to campaign against the negative social impact of structural adjustment policies (Cornia *et al.*, 1987). By 'social' they were meaning the impact on social services as a result of budget cuts. Nevertheless, in ODA language references to the 'social dimensions of structural adjustment' appeared to be something for SDAs, particularly as most Economic Advisers at that time thought that the issue was irrelevant if not actually harmful to establishing 'robust' policies.<sup>5</sup> In due course the UNICEF campaign led to a World Bank response and the publishing in 1990 of its World Development Report on Poverty. This Report strongly influenced ODA and provided openings for a gradual growing commitment to poverty reduction as a central part of its aid programme.

Participation, at that time viewed by ODA with suspicion and as a means, rather than an end, received a boost from the Thatcherite government that was stressing rolling back the state. This could be interpreted by SDAs as giving greater responsibility to local communities. The issue also gained some relative respectability when the World Bank with Sida financing, started a participatory learning group. It stimulated Oxfam to lobby ODA senior management that we should do something likewise. The winds of change were also blowing on our side as global thinking on development shifted with the end of the Cold War and the new emphasis on democracy and civil society.

Finally in 1986–87 the new Minister for Overseas Development, Chris Patten, responded positively to energetic lobbying by a group of women academics protesting about ODA's failure to be present at the 1985 Nairobi Women's Conference and the lack of interest in supporting the implementation of the Conference's action plan, the 'Forward Looking Strategies'. Until then in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the coordinating body for bilateral donor agencies, the UK was regarded by other member countries as one of the major obstacles to mainstreaming WID issues in the work of the DAC. The then Chairperson of the DAC WID working group was an old friend from when we had both been working in Sudan, allowing me to rapidly break down the barriers of distrust and to join in the group's general networking strategy to support each other in changing our respective organizations.

By now a snowball had started and after 1991 the numbers of SDAs within ODA grew very rapidly, while at the same time the environment in which we were working also changed, partly as a result of our own efforts.

### 2.3 Challenging the Dominant Voice

By the end of 1991 the small social development group had realized that to achieve our objective of mainstreaming social development into the organization we would need to

<sup>5</sup>In my end of year staff appraisal in around 1990 I was warned against giving the impression that I was in favour of 'redistributive' policies.

ensure that all projects would have the benefit of social development advice and that we also had to be involved in the strategic choice of projects through intellectual engagement at the policy level. We would also need a budget to spend on commissioning policy think-pieces, running in-house seminars and maintaining the professional development of the cadre. And, finally we would have to seek changes to the organizational structure so as to have a stronger voice in influencing the way decisions were made in the ODA. By 1995 we had fully realized these aims we had set ourselves four year earlier.

Mainstreaming social development advice into projects required more SDA jobs and this in turn meant stimulating demand. Recently I came across an old copy of Peters' and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982) that I acquired in about 1990. On first reading it I had highlighted some sentences on a page in the chapter on how to innovate in large organizations. These included 'Instead of trying to overcome resistance to what people are *not* ready to do, find out what they *are* ready to do . . .'; 'Select *one* department whose manager seems interested in the issue and is prepared to give it a try' 'Go with the flow: do-able tasks, starting with the easiest and most ready targets, looking for malleable champions rather than recalcitrant naysayers.' 'The process of building momentum by accumulating small successes' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 149). I realized that these were the steps that intuitively I had been taking and this book was validating.

As each additional SDA became appointed, so they discovered a whole gamut of social issues lying waiting to be tackled in the projects in the region to which they had been posted. They rapidly became overwhelmed with work and soon a second and a third one had to be appointed to help. As intelligent customers, SDAs were also able to recruit good short-term consultants with realistic and do-able terms of reference, often not the case when an organization hires consultants without any internal expertise in the matter. Not only did SDAs in regional programmes find issues, they also found allies. Administrative staff and advisers from other disciplines were grateful for someone to articulate concerns they had long held but felt they could do nothing about. SDAs tapped into a deep vein of moral commitment to development within ODA.

Mainstreaming social advice into projects benefited from two changes in ODA's internal organization. The first was growing decentralisation of decision making to the regional offices and to the country departments remaining in London. The heads of these offices had the principal say in deciding the kinds of advisers they wanted in their teams. The second was a change in the rules for funding advisory posts, resulting in loosening the financial constraints on a country programme officer. This meant that the programme officer could include an SDA in his office without having to upset the political applecart by shedding an adviser from another, more established discipline, such as engineering.

Our second objective of moving upstream was more of a challenge. It required us to engage with macroeconomics, a discipline very distant from our roots in anthropology. One way of approaching this was to build on our early encounter with the social dimensions of structural adjustment by seeking to influence the World Bank. From 1990 to 1995 ODA seconded two SDAs in succession to work on the social dimensions of structural adjustment at the World Bank, thus contributing to a change in policy in the Bank including seminal work on Participatory Poverty Assessments starting in Ghana and Zambia (Milimo *et al.*, 1998) which in turn influenced conventional thinking in ODA.

International contacts on the issue of the social dimensions of adjustment led to the establishment of an informal network of like-minded social scientists working in a number of different development agencies, known as the Social Development Advisers Network

(SDAN). We could help each other become, what our Dutch colleague referred to as 'macro-anthropologists.' In 1993 and again in 1996 the SDAN visited Washington to lobby on mainstreaming social development advice and participatory approaches in the World Bank. In our second visit the tide of opinion was turning so far our way that the new President of the Bank, Jim Wolfensohn, received us.

Gaining respectability in the eyes of the World Bank was important because of the Bank's influence on the attitude of ODA's economists who completely dominated the intellectual landscape in ODA. But they also had to be confronted on their own terrain. We had to pick up some economics on the hoof and look for arguments in their language without letting go of our own world view. *The Death of Economics* was carefully studied (Ormerod, 1994). When we had grown in numbers and were beginning to challenge some of their assumptions, some of the younger economists became interested in us and invited us to form a 'brown bag' lunch group named *Forging Ahead*.

A note I still have from one of those meetings records an economist participant stating 'It is striking that neoclassical economics has nothing to say about relations within the household. *Inter alia*, this undermines many of the efficiency postulates (let alone any implicit distributional optimism) of neoclassical economics.' He regrets that most of the work on Gender in Development is not as good as it could be because 'presentation is by women, who are social anthropologists (that is not economists), and come from a fairly militant feminist perspective' and that 'It is not obvious that gender analysts have much predictive or prescriptive ability'. More positively he concludes, 'In ODA tension between economists and social development advisers seems to have arisen in part because of misunderstandings as to what each is doing. The economists make a clear distinction between positive and normative analysis but then forget that their positive analysis is still rooted in value judgements. This annoys the social development advisers. The social development advisers because of tight staffing constraints have collapsed positive and normative analysis into one advice message. This annoys the economists . . . '.

At that time, in the early 1990s, poverty was seen to be a 'welfare' matter for social development advisers to think about while economists worked on growth and rolling back an 'overbearing state'.<sup>6</sup> We learnt to use the language of 'choice.' The Introduction to *A Guide to Social Analysis for Project in Developing Countries* (ODA, 1995)<sup>7</sup> defines development as 'the attainment of sustainable improvements in economic growth and the quality of life that increase the range of choices open to all, achieved by people's own efforts in the private sector or through voluntary activity, supported by governments'. In India I demonstrated my interest in the private sector when I pointed out that most poor people did not make use of public health services.

Meanwhile interest in participation continued to grow and projects became more 'participatory' with all the well-recorded challenges resulting from this (Kothari and Cooke, 2000). By the middle of the decade there was strong enough support among many administrators as well as technical specialists to produce an ODA policy note on participation (ODA, 1995). The final version was the outcome of some hard bargaining with senior management, particularly the references to the possibility of ODA staff changing their own behaviour. Nevertheless the social development advisers were

<sup>6</sup>When the SDAs were introduced by their economist manager to the new Permanent Secretary in 1991 he was told that economists looked after the winners and SDAs looked after the losers.

<sup>7</sup>The Guide was principally written by Sean Conlin and myself but our names do not appear because of the Civil Service tradition of anonymity at that time. Sarah Ladbury did the checklists.

successful in keeping in the text an understanding of power, conflict and contestation as an aspect of participation (Cornwall, 2000).

Our third theme, *women in development* was benefiting from the preparations for the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, as well as from a woman Minister, Lynda Chalker, who in public was cautiously supportive and much more so in private. In 1994, Chalker agreed to make a break-through speech in which she spoke of gender equality as a human right. Gradually, with younger staff coming into ODA and our training courses being rolled out across the organization (Moser, 1993), the concept of gender became routinized. Furthermore we now had access to some small pockets of funds and were able to financially support the UK gender lobby in their own preparations for Beijing, helping them become more effective at putting pressure on us.

International networking was also significant on this issue. The OECD DAC Working Group on Women in Development allowed us collectively to develop monitoring systems that provided an incentive to each one of our organizations to improve performance in mainstreaming gender. ODA began to earn kudos for being good at WID, encouraging administrators to live up to the reputation given them.

In the year of Beijing, the SDAs achieved complete autonomy from the Chief Economist. The post of Chief Social Development Adviser was established with a substantial budget and a seat at the table of senior management.

## 2.4 The Growth of a Professional Cadre

By the time that ODA became the Department for International Development (DFID) in 1997, we had developed a professional cadre of some forty SDAs. The first SDAs were social anthropologists but over time we expanded our recruitment to include sociologists, human geographers and political scientists. Even with our expansion we found that the in-house advisers could not meet the organization's demands. We established contractual agreements with two universities to act as 'Social Development Resource Centres' These were the Centre for Development Studies, Swansea and the Social Anthropology Department, Edinburgh. Swansea had a guaranteed number of days to provide additional social analytical expertise on any topic, either in relation to policy development or in supporting projects. Edinburgh provided social development advice to the NGO Joint Funding Scheme. Both institutions were gateways to alternative perspectives and many of the staff from Swansea and Edinburgh went on to join the growing cadre of SDAs.

We also regularly employed a large number of independent social development consultants for specific pieces of work. By the early 1990s we were finding it difficult to meet ODA's demand for social development consultants from the pool of people we already knew. We therefore advertised widely and selected 30 people whom we did not know for an intensive training programme as SD consultants. While some afterwards started a consultancy career with ODA others joined to become social development advisers. Over time an increasing number of consultants were recruited from the countries where we were working and this trend has increased much more in recent years. The need for such a process indicates the rarity of the skill set. Having created the demand and established the profession it remains a challenge to develop the professional capacity in the countries where today DFID is engaged.

The first half of the 1990s produced a series of manuals and guides for the growing group of SDAs and consultants. These included the Guide to Social Analysis, particularly

targeted at academic social scientists seeking to become development practitioners and the Guidance Note on Participation. The Social Development Handbook (ODA, 1993) written by Sarah Ladbury was designed for others in ODA (with a royal blue cover to reassure potential readers that there was nothing too radical) but it proved as well enormously popular with SDAs.

The practical organization required to build the social development group of advisers, resource centres, and consultants was a result of the dedication and energy of one person who joined ODA in 1989 as secretary to the three SDAs at that time and who stayed with the group as it grew into a department.

### 3 THE INTERPRETATION: UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

I have already identified some of the salient factors that allowed a small group of energetic social scientists to mainstream their discipline into the bureaucratic practice of an aid agency. Some of these factors I understood and responded to intuitively at the time. I knew that we had to be not only technically very competent but politically astute. Other factors I have since come to appreciate. I have learnt that seeking to transform an organization is perilous. Bureaucratic structures are very powerful and the would-be agent of change runs the risk of capture.

Pimbert (2002), in his introduction to a study of how the World Wild Fund for Nature became people-centred, summarizes some significant lessons for those seeking to change organizations. These include recognizing organizations as institutionalized structures of power, knowledge and control, appreciating they are not monolithic and knowing that organizational patterns and change are products of an interplay between agency and structure. Equally important is the point he makes concerning competing policy narratives that serve different institutional interests; I have illustrated this with the story of our intellectual combat with economists. Pimbert notes that organizational culture is the most fundamental level at which transformation needs to take place. Thus, for SDAs, the issue was not so much how to do a good social analysis (although that was important for our credibility) but how to change the bureaucracy so that the implications of that analysis would transform its understanding of the world and its role therein.

There are many ways to understand organizations and organizational change. I find that reflecting on the story of social development in ODA I am drawn principally to thinking about organizations as political systems. In 1986, the year I joined ODA, Morgan was writing that 'in recent years organization and management theorists have become increasingly aware of the need to recognise the importance of power in explaining organizational affairs' (Morgan, 1986, p. 158). That the prevalence of power had for so long been ignored in organizational studies may well be an outcome of the class, race and gender of the theorists (Calas and Smircich, 1999). After two decades of living and working in the South, the overwhelming presence of both visible and hidden power in a very hierarchical, yet strangely informal (clubby) organization made on me a very strong impression. It was to me a stereotypical male-dominated and authority based culture. The response was 'guerrilla strategies,' internal and external alliances and networking and harnessing the power of outside pressure (Rao *et al.*, 1999). Ironically, while we thought we were resisting the dominant discourse of sport and war, we found ourselves, perhaps inevitably, interpreting our own efforts within similar discursive frameworks. With hindsight, I wonder whether by using these guerrilla like methods to challenge the

dominant and even repressive paradigm, we were undermining our efforts to transform the organization into one that respected many and different voices?

### **3.1 Why and How was the Social Dimension Mainstreamed in ODA and not in Other Agencies?**

In a survey of project evaluations from a range of official aid agencies in the 1980s, Rew found that a surprising number made reference to socio-cultural (including gender) factors as being insufficiently addressed during project planning and implementation. Problems were identified as such when technical or economic analyses could not explain the problem (Rew, 1997). But why should such conclusions about the need to address social issues in development projects, common to many aid agencies, lead to only two large development agencies (the World Bank and ODA) hiring full-time specialists to work at head office while others, such as USAID and French co-operation, continued to employ social scientists primarily as consultants, in effect separating social development skills/issues from the main activities of these organizations?

In a 1996 talk to the World Bank annual meeting of social scientists I identified some institutional characteristics about ODA at that time which I argued had made ODA more successful at mainstreaming the social dimension than the Bank. Admittedly it is easier to effect change in a smaller organization but even so there were other factors at play. What I did not say in public at that time was that this growth of the cadre was particularly surprising bearing in mind it had taken place during a time when a Conservative government was in power and neo-liberal economics was the dominant paradigm. It was also surprising that we compared very favourably with more 'left wing' aid agencies, such as Swedish Sida whose few in-house social scientists looked enviously at our achievement.

For reasons of caution, my talk implied that social analysis had become a routine part of the agency's way of working because of inevitable organizational characteristics, rather than also because of a small group of change agents worked as 'guerrillas' exploiting the changing policy landscape and the fallibility of the 'enemy.' In reality, the factors I was to mention in my talk, such as the increased emphasis on local ownership and on assessing impact had been an outcome of significant internal organizational struggles. For us these struggles were the means to putting people into the centre of ODA's viewfinder. New procedures could be exploited for that purpose. The logical framework is a case in point. Mainstreaming its use in ODA required project designers to identify the ultimate beneficiaries (people) and to explain how the project inputs and activities would deliver benefits to them. The right hand 'assumptions' column allowed the social analyst to introduce an understanding of the social and political environment which project designers had until then ignored (Chambers and Pettit, 2003).

In 1996 the points I made were as follows. Firstly, I noted that country programme managers had a good deal of delegated financial authority for making commitments. This meant that the socially aware managers who were amenable to our advice had the autonomy to design people-friendly projects up to a certain funding ceiling. Because project evaluations were beginning to show that impact was greater when the social dimension had been addressed at the design stage this provided the programme manager with a good reason to have a social development adviser full-time on the team.

Secondly, I said that the ODA practised interdisciplinary team, working with a focus on outcomes within a full project cycle management system. The generalized use of the

logical framework provided a simple management tool which empowered all disciplines, not just economists, as tended to happen if only cost benefit appraisal were used. It provided a common language that strengthened inter-disciplinary working. There was also an increased emphasis by senior management on impact and outcomes, combined with pressure to enhance local ownership at sector and project level. I noted that this provided the entry point for participatory approaches to designing and monitoring projects.

Finally, I identified a key common factor shared by the World Bank and ODA, the extensive use of in house expertise compared with many other development agencies who, even when they hired people with a development specialization, employed them as generalists on programme management or policy work. I pointed out that this organizational tradition of in-house expertise provided an opening for new disciplines, such as ours, to become more easily accepted. Since then I have reflected that the British civil service as a whole does not have a tradition of employing significant numbers of in-house specialists, presumably on the assumption that a good generalist knows enough to do the main job and can contract in advice on as needs basis. ODA, as the heir of the Colonial Office, was always different: it employed specialists who knew about conditions in the colonies.<sup>8</sup>

In my talk I also noted an important difference from the World Bank. In ODA specialist advice was centrally managed by heads of each disciplinary group who were called Chief Advisers. I believe I rightly stressed the importance of the organizational tradition of centralised professional oversight of the advisory groups. The ODA Chief Advisory model included playing a leading role in selecting new advisers, in supporting them to develop their careers through appropriate postings and in ensuring they received adequate professional training. In my talk I said that this allowed us to promote best practice in social assessment and to integrate the social dimension into policy as well as practice. It had been an enormous strength for us and probably the single most important factor contributing to our success compared with the extent to which social analysis is mainstreamed in other aid agencies.

Although, out of courtesy, I did not mention it in 1996, our focus was on getting involved in the essential design of the project whereas the social scientists in the Bank found themselves in a policing role, lobbying for operational directives on certain important but essentially limited topics such as involuntary resettlement and indigenous peoples. In the Bank social scientists were trying to prevent harm. In ODA (where there was a declining portfolio of large scale infrastructure projects) we endeavoured to make projects positively work for poor people through inter-disciplinary engagement in project design and monitoring.

Another difference that only occurred to me later was that the World Bank had a much stronger research tradition than in ODA. People were employed to write think pieces and publish and disseminate these widely. The Bank in that sense was more closely linked to the academic community than tended to be the case in ODA where there were very few incentives for in-house specialists to publish, even if, as was often the case, they came from a strong academic background. Mainstreaming the social dimension depended much more on building relations with colleagues in the organization rather than on the written word or on maintaining contacts with the academic community.

<sup>8</sup>The last Chief Natural Resources Adviser in the late 1990's still had on his wall a series of photographic portraits of his predecessors dating back to a hundred years earlier—portraits of 'Her Majesty's Principal Agricultural Adviser to the Colonies'.

In my talk at the World Bank in 1996 I argued that social analysis is one of the essential tools to make aid programmes and projects efficient, effective and sustainable. Social development specialists had proved to be good at being part of interdisciplinary teams working alongside technical specialists, such as in health or education. Our cross-sectoral perspective allowed us to facilitate the dissemination and replication of good practice; our prior grassroots field experience gave us a good feel for what is appropriate and 'do-able'; our research experience allowed us to handle the interface between qualitative and quantitative data, thus identifying the causal links between implementation and impact; we had growing expertise in the design of policies, programmes and projects to reduce vulnerability and poverty and enhance security, at the individual, household and community level; and, finally, we understood the different roles and development potential of the institutions of civil society, including community based organizations and voluntary organizations, with innovative approaches to these institutions.

By implication I was comparing ourselves with economists and making the point that one reason we had become popular with administrators and managers was because we could be very practical and down to earth. What I did not say was the dislike we encountered when we fell into the trap of criticizing without suggesting solutions. This was the challenge that many of our new recruits faced when they joined ODA, particularly when they came to us from a university research background.

#### 4 AFTER WORD

1997 marked a major shift in the policy environment and the social development advisers' agenda became everyone's. The question was no longer whether but how. Poverty reduction and poor people's participation in the decisions that affect their lives was clearly signalled in the 1997 Government White Paper on eliminating global poverty and as a concept it peaked with the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor* study, largely funded from DFID's social development departmental budget. Gender equality was enshrined in the International Development Targets (subsequently the Millennium Development Goals).

Just as social development advisers became mainstreamed into DFID, so DFID in turn has become more integrated into Whitehall, subject to its target-driven management systems and with less collective scope for the innovation that marginality provides. A rapid increase in the size of the British aid budget led managers to become increasingly interested in spending large sums of money. The human effort required for any activity had to be proportional to the size of the financial transfer. It has grown harder to argue that high impact on policy and practice may result from intensive human resource investment, supported in some cases by little or no financial resources. Was there still time for quirky ideas and exploratory relationships?

The existence of powerful Chief Advisory groups had brought DFID much of its intellectual renown in the world of international development co-operation. At its best the internal competition between the groups for budgets and policy influence led to innovation and creativity. The paradigm clash between economists and social development advisers sharpened the organization's ability to respond to the fast changing agenda of international aid. At its worst, this competition led to second-guessing, lack of inter-disciplinarity and duplication of effort. If DFID had set itself very ambitious targets should not everyone be pulling together in the same boat? DFID's integration into Whitehall reminded its top management that other Ministries did not find the need for a powerful cadre of in-house

and influential experts. DFID was also becoming a more diverse and inclusive organization. Some of the descendants of those ruled by the old Colonial Office were now part of DFID's top management. Was there still a need for special expertise in tropical agriculture or social anthropology, disciplines that saw the light of day during Britain's imperial past? The power of the advisory groups began to wane.

Finally, the trend to decentralization already underway before 1997 continued and much of the bilateral programme was now managed by autonomous country offices. Paradoxically, social development advisers, although now living in the country, rather than having to fly in from London or from a regional office, were spending less time out of the capital city than they had previously. SDAs' interest and determination to help shape the macro policy agenda rather than just design projects and programmes down stream meant more time sitting in the Ministry of Finance and less under a tree in a remote village.

One of the great strengths that SDAs had brought to the organization was that of grass roots experience. I remember during my first few weeks in ODA at a meeting when I said 'You know what it is like walking through a Sahelian village at the end of the rainy season and how . . . .' I stopped. No one else knew. Today the question is whether senior managers any longer want to know or learn from that experience (Eyben, 2003). Is social development advice still valued for that reason?

To compare DFID once more with the World Bank, it is the latter institution's close contact with parts of the research world and its respect for the power of knowledge that has led to greater effort to stay intellectually engaged with development issues, including learning about the lives of poor people (McGee, 2002). Many of the early SDAs joined ODA in middle age, some after many years of living and working in developing countries. We brought a certain perspective and passion to the task that much of the cadre today still retains. I do believe that this can only be sustained by serious efforts to stay in touch with that opportunity to experience the reality of the lives of the people for whom our jobs exist.

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