

INTRODUCTION

Will more money and better policies produce the massive social change that global poverty alleviation by 2030 would require? Highly unlikely. Poverty has not been eliminated in the rich countries and the elimination of global poverty would require nothing short of a worldwide revolution: something very large like the impact of socialism would surely be needed. Global change would need, on a global level, the inspiration and leadership of a Gandhi or a Kemal Atatürk. The cultural change associated with the rise of Islam yielded the logic of mathematics, advances in medical knowledge, and splendid architecture. Islamic expansion in the sixth and seventh centuries, Scandinavian expansion in the ninth and tenth centuries, the rise of capitalism, and the rise of socialism all testify to the importance of cultural and belief factors that cannot easily be harnessed by the World Bank's burgeoning bureaucracy.

This book looks at World Bank poverty alleviation over a fifty-year period in order to try to gain a deeper level of understanding about the factors that have influenced the approach and the results. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), as the World Bank is formally known, was established in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference at the end of World War II by the victorious allies and it is an organ of the United Nations. The World Bank now has 180 member countries; under the Articles of Agreement, which have undergone remarkably little amendment, the business of the World Bank is the making of sound loans for economic development. When it began in 1947 its immediate task was to help overcome the impact of war in Europe. The first loans of the new institution were made to Britain, France, and other European countries; loans to the Republic of Ireland were made until the early 1970s.¹ The Board of Governors of the World Bank comprises civil servants who represent member countries. Decisions about lending and new policies are made using a weighted voting system, one that favors France, the UK, and the US in a manner not unlike that used by the UN Security Council.

In 1973, at the same time that the fight against global poverty began, Ireland started to get money for underdeveloped areas of the country from the European Union (EU). Ireland was at that time also a recipient of World Bank lending. Since 1973 the Irish have received \$28 billion (all dollars are US dollars unless indicated otherwise) from the EU. During that same period the 2 billion poor of the world have received around \$280 billion from the World Bank. This means that the world's 2 billion poor were allocated around \$140 per capita (of course neither World Bank nor EU money is evenly spread) from the World Bank and the Irish were allocated around \$9,000 per capita from the EU. However, Ireland still has poverty in its cities and in the countryside.

By looking at what seem to have been the institution's major intellectual, organizational, and management challenges I hope to show how the World Bank has made use of the relationship skills of anthropology and other disciplines over the course of the past fifty years. Finding a way to explain what has shaped the treatment of social factors in an economic institution such as the World Bank is not easy.² This massive bureaucracy has now completed over 13,000 development projects. In 1968 the World Bank had just under 800 staff in Washington; in September 2017 there were 9,150 US-based staff and 6,900 in country offices of 180 country members. Although this book mentions my early attempt to introduce anthropology to the World Bank my main concern is with the much broader field of poverty alleviation.³ (See appendix A "Engagement Issues for Anthropology.") This includes the idea of social development, the use of social science and technical expertise, and public administration. I also draw on my work in the private sector on the introduction of a systematic approach to social relationships in the community.⁴

World Bank Presidents, from Robert McNamara to the present incumbent, Jim Yong Kim, have all shared a keen interest in expanding the institution's loan portfolio in order to achieve the elimination of global poverty.⁵ In the 1980s World Bank economists concluded that, given enough money, the institution could defeat impoverishment in the poor countries because poverty was a fairly homogenous category for which objective quantifiable cash income/material consumption standards could be developed. Those with incomes below \$1.90 a day were below the poverty line and labeled the poorest on the planet.⁶ The economists saw poverty as the material deprivation of the individual, arising from poor utilization of capital and technology that resulted in low labor productivity; they believed that cash or material consumption standards could be developed and assessed by means of household surveys.⁷ Of course, economic development can raise incomes but not always in any direct and predictable way and as a result there was, and still is, no certainty of ending poverty.

Moreover, those calculating poverty reduction in their Washington offices on the basis of global statistical probabilities based on possibly statistically unreliable household surveys cannot assume what a poor person in some distant society feels about his or her poverty.

The most important source of data on living standards has been household surveys but these have not been regularly or reliably carried out in countries with poor communications and difficult terrain such as Papua New Guinea, the Amazon, or central Africa.⁸ Expenditure data would have been much more useful than income data but it is difficult to collect such data if the poor do not use money. The global enumerators of the World Bank did not pay much attention to these realities—and to be honest it is not something that they pay much attention to in most poor countries—because, as in other poor countries, they assumed that what would be best would be the loans and projects they were dishing out in other countries.

Global assumptions made about income and poverty made little sense in Papua New Guinea or other countries where it was difficult to run around with a clipboard and a handheld calculator. The most common aid agency approach—and it is awesomely complicated and cumbersome—to defining absolute poverty lines is to estimate the cost in each region or at each date of a certain bundle of goods necessary to attain basic consumption needs (this is called the basic needs approach). This might be fine in Michigan or Biarritz but when there was no shop and no market what did one measure? How was one to know who was eating small jungle animals called cus or crocodile or fruit bats or grubs from a rotting sago palm? To measure food energy requirements, agencies needed to make an assumption about food energy levels that could maintain the body's metabolic rate at rest. Once the energy intake had been determined and its cost calculated, an allowance for nonfood spending could be added by finding the total expenditure level at which a person typically reached the level of the poverty line. In the highlands a man might work in his gardens for a while, then he might sit and think for a day or two. He might go to war at the weekend with his neighbors or go walkabout covering long distances and traversing mountain ranges.⁹

The only obvious example of global measurement may be greenhouse gas emissions, as their effects are felt throughout the planet. Looked at closely, homogenized global poverty may make no more sense than would global weather. It is clear when one examines different societies and different cultural contexts that not all poverty is the same; this makes it difficult to compare all poverty as an unbounded set.

The World Bank's economists saw the evolution of social security in three stages: The first stage was the provision of relief for the poor by private voluntary groups. Stage two saw the evolution of social insurance

schemes designed to provide compulsory benefits for the poor, the sick, and individuals who are out of work. More recently the aim has been to prevent poverty or to cushion the impact of poverty on target groups. The major nineteenth-century systems of poor relief in Western Europe and North America took a hard line with poverty. They only provided help as a last resort. This policy was intended to discourage idleness. Although many changes in welfare have taken place in response to social and economic changes in the industrialized societies, there is little or no agreement in the industrialized countries that the state should automatically provide relief funds to all who are impoverished.

Trickle Down

Many development professionals had assumed that top-down solutions for poverty had gone out of style when, in 1973, the US Congress adopted the New Directions in Foreign Aid as a result of a realization that constructing dams and building roads helped the economy but the benefits of this growth did not necessarily trickle down to those at the bottom of society.¹⁰ Social scientists such as David Leonard produced books with titles like *Reaching the Peasant Farmer*.¹¹ Had one looked carefully at World Bank lending a few years after global poverty alleviation became popular, it would have become obvious that the World Bank had not given up on infrastructural development and was instead regularly doubling and quadrupling its lending for dams and railways, while telling us that these contributions to economic development were lifting millions out of poverty.

The World Bank's global poverty strategy envisaged that a massive project bombardment would improve health, education, and welfare. In the past, some bombardment has worked and, when there was a failure to properly consider the importance of human factors in technological change, some has not. Early on, the introduction of agricultural practices in Africa resulted in a massive need for resettlement because the change in farming practices caused massive soil erosion in the fragile ecosystems of Africa. Even the introduction of cash cropping, which seemed a good idea at the time, fostered the break-up of traditional forms of agriculture and the breakdown of traditional social organization.¹² While it is true that a rising economic tide can, in theory, raise all ships, that is not the reality for many of the very poorest who remain stuck in the mud of despair because they are unable, or do not wish, to take advantage of uplifting opportunities. For example, some homeless people in big cities would rather face a terribly cold night than take advantage of a shelter provided by city government or a charity.

Nevertheless, Robert McNamara and later World Bank CEOs were persuaded that the homogenous poverty paradigm could drive global poverty elimination in which World Bank economic development could play a major role.¹³ Thereafter, the poverty numbers and their reduction goal were repeated so often it looked as if the World Bank was engaged, and believed, in statistical evangelism. However, the connection between economic growth and ending poverty remains an unproven assumption, one lacking authoritative empirical verification.¹⁴ The World Bank has continued to say that, by doing more of what the institution has been doing, hard-core poverty can be ended. However, using the same economic development approaches that have had an impact on easy-to-reach poverty will not necessarily work with hard-core poverty unless the World Bank has discovered how to ensure that economic growth does not produce increasing inequality in society. Therefore, the promise to eliminate poverty rests on shaky ground though the idea that economic growth could sometimes, and did have, an impact on individual incomes and poverty was essentially correct.

With the use of homogenized poverty and statistical evangelism the World Bank's poverty business boomed. The dreams and aspirations of poor people all over the world could apparently be centralized, understood, and responded to with money and economic advice from Washington. Global poverty elimination became part of the World Bank's DNA, an article of faith encouraging the institution to behave like an "organized charity, scrimped and iced and all in the name of a cautious statistical Christ."¹⁵ The promise to be able to eliminate poverty enabled the World Bank to collect and spend larger and larger amounts of money.

Management by Seclusion

Use of the poverty paradigm generated what one very senior staff member called management by seclusion, because in order to raise and spend more and more money World Bank staff had to spend more and more time in their offices.¹⁶ Homogenized poverty made it look as if the problems of the world's poorest could indeed be addressed by World Bank employees in their offices without the need for close contact with the poorest: If a person has a low income he or she must earn more money. If a person is illiterate he or she needs to learn to read and write in primary schooling. If a person is malnourished he or she needs food. If a person has too many children, then birth control is necessary. The same approach can be seen with poor educationalists who believe you can wrap a whole child up in a test score. The result of describing the problems of the very poor in this manner is that solutions then become a matter of supply without any encouragement

to learn about the poor. The global programs promised progress whose benefits were thought to be so obvious that only corrupt or incompetent or lazy leadership in the poor countries could frustrate their adoption.

The poverty data that were then collected by the World Bank UN agencies reduced poor countries to a series of tables and materialistic progress targets based on the idea that the way of life that was best was that of the industrialized countries.¹⁷ Like the Victorians who used to wonder why savages had not made it to civilization, World Bank economists wondered why the socioeconomic performance of poor countries is so far behind their own. Every country in the world had more or less the same goals and more or less the same problems. If they did not see that, then they had to be helped to see things the right way. Wean them away from separateness! Forward the day when they followed their own progress up and down the paper world! Countries that were unique were statistically unique. They had phenomenal high or low growth rates, high or low capital output ratios, high or low rates of privatization, high or low inflows of foreign investment, high or low debt service ratios. Poor countries do not advance by means of coffee-table league tables, nor does our understanding of those countries' problems.¹⁸

Working for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and posted as an adviser to the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Sir Geoffrey Henry, in Rarotonga in the 1990s I took a special interest in the remote islands of the northern Cook Islands. I found it amazing that the Cook Islands were ranked by UNDP's Human Development Index as number 101 in the world with a 0.829 score similar to that of the US Virgin Islands and American Samoa. This was a tremendous distortion because the northern Cook Islands were like the poor south in Italy, way below the national average that reflected the rich north of Italy. The main islands in the southern Cooks, including Rarotonga, had high income from tourism and even a flourishing offshore banking industry not unlike like that of the Cayman Islands.

The northern group of small islands, which have fewer than 1,000 residents, are located 1,000 miles from the capital, Rarotonga. Having lived and worked in Africa and Asia I knew that remote islands had some of the world's poorest people whose lives illustrate some of the misunderstandings that can occur when national statistics are used as an indication of poverty.¹⁹ Incomes in the northern group are about half the national average. Educational and health statistics for the nation are also of little help in understanding low local standards, and quick missions by UN agencies to assess poverty seldom get it right. In the Northern Cook Islands, poverty is not low income: it is the absence of family members through migration, premature death from illness, or accident at sea.²⁰ Aid can't do much

about that, but neighbors can. The wealth of the area is not its beauty or the strength of its people: it is the strength of the community. The local community is solid. It has strong religious beliefs, low rates of crime or deviance, and a limited ambition to join the outside world. In such small communities, poverty has a very local meaning: it depends on local perception, history, personalities, epidemics, and cyclones.²¹

Everything in the Northern Group is below the national average: education is weak, the diet is inadequate, moneymaking opportunities don't exist, and freedom of expression is constrained by kinship ties. Islanders don't seem interested in preserving the environment—they eat any birds they can trap including rare birds, overfish the lagoons, dump rubbish in the lagoons, leave old refrigerators lying around, and heave old batteries into streams. There is not much interest in exploiting solar energy potential, hydroponic gardening, microfinance, or mainstreaming women.

The Social and Cultural Meanings of Poverty

What was missing from World Bank poverty alleviation was information showing what monetary incomes meant to local people in different cultural contexts.²² A hundred years ago Seebohm Rowntree discovered that in Britain to be without shoes in one community in the north of England was to be regarded as poor while in another community only those with no money were considered poor.²³ In Colombo, Sri Lanka, I found poverty associated with the ability to buy female sanitary napkins; in Latin America poorly nourished dogs can be an indication of poverty; in Asia poverty can be gauged by looking at the sizing of goods offered for sale in stores—not a large bag of rice but a small bag, not a packet of cigarettes but a few or even a single cigarette. In other areas poverty can be measured by a downturn in sales of cement or roofing iron, the sale of electrical spares, or motor car spare parts. (See appendix B “The Culture of Poverty Debate.”)²⁴

Is the Salvation Army wrong, and are faith organizations and social workers wrong, when they suppose that it is necessary to establish and maintain a relationship with a poor person in order to provide help that works? Poor people suffer from relationship poverty, the very poorest even more so, and this is also a missing element in the quantitative approach to global poverty alleviation. The more severe the poverty, the greater the degree of social disconnectedness for the individual involved. Social atrophy, which accompanies poverty, can affect speech, food preparation, personal hygiene, and other kinds of behavior whose form and content are derived from social interaction. Poverty occurs in society, but it is often not of society. As with HIV/AIDS, its growth cuts the individual off from society.²⁵ It

has many forms, some controllable, some not, some completely debilitating, some not. In poor communities the social relationships that exist may be strained, fractured, or broken; we need to know what is required for their repair and strengthening.²⁶

Relationships are essential to bring about an active process of give and take between aid personnel and the very poorest so that those in need become fellow workers and are considered to be part of the solution rather than continuing to be seen as the obstacle to progress. The most basic need is for materialism. Though of course materialism is important it is often, as many wars have demonstrated, less of a priority than self-assertion and self-expression within a familiar social and cultural context. The poorest people may want some of the advantages of technology, such as better health and education but, inevitably, they will wish to make use of them in a rhythm of their life and in the society that they have inherited, even if it is a modified society.²⁷

To affect poverty the World Bank has to use the relationships and connections between the well-off as well as relationships between the well-off and the poor. The poor are embedded in society and in its relationships. Some of these relationships involve old people, some involve young people, and some involve those who cannot communicate or who are in institutions. Hoping that a portion of the gains from economic development will reach the very poorest may be optimistic. The successful redistribution of wealth relies on a redistribution of skills and knowledge. The rich are rich because they have the most skills and knowledge and, in most cases, they have little or no intention of passing those advantages on to the poorest people.

Ten years after writing a report on the use of anthropology in World Bank project operations in 1973 I spent a sabbatical year at the World Bank in 1983 looking at the potential use of development administration.²⁸ I remember there was a person who was homeless living on the hot air grate in front of the old "A" building and another who lived on another hot air grill on 23rd Street, right next to the State Department building, which housed US Agency for International Development (USAID).²⁹ Inside these two agencies officials were trying to reach the poor all over the world, while outside was a homeless person we all walked past each day. What was happening in offices inside the building helped poor countries and potential contributors to believe that the aid agencies had cracked the poverty problem and that their World League tables showed the winners and the losers.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has to use relationships to reach needy children since needy children are not all neatly assembled and waiting in a school playground for help to arrive. It is necessary to first reach

families, social groups, faith and political organizations, as well as government ministries in order to be able to gain contact with children. In the case of the World Bank, the poor are no easier to identify and reach than children; the poor of the world are not a discrete, distinct, and visible category. They are not fruit on the lower branches of a tree nor are they ripe fruit lying on the ground, easy to pick up.

The India Famine Commission of 1880 faced this problem of identifying who should be helped and how they could be identified, saying

We have to consider the manner in which the proper recipients of the public charity can be most effectually ascertained. The problem to be solved is how to avoid the risk of indiscriminate and demoralising profusion on the one hand, and of insufficient and niggardly assistance on the other—how to relieve all who really need relief, and to waste as little public money as possible in the process. Where limited numbers have to be dealt with, and there is a numerous and efficient staff of officials, it may be possible to ascertain by personal inquiry the circumstances of every applicant for relief sufficiently for the purpose of admitting or rejecting his claim. But in an Indian famine the Government has to deal, not with limited numbers, but with millions of people, and the official machinery at its command, however strengthened for the occasion, will inevitably be inadequate to the task of accurately testing the individual necessities of so great a multitude. Nor again is it possible to entrust the administration of public charity to a subordinate agency without providing sufficient checks against dishonesty and neglect on the part of its members. Some safeguards then are essential in the interests of the destitute people no less than of the public treasury, and they are best found in laying down certain broad self-acting tests by which necessity may be proved, and which may, irrespective of any other rule of selection, entitle to relief the person who submits to them. . . . The chief of these tests, and the only one which in our opinion it is ordinarily desirable to enforce, is the demand of labour commensurate in each case with the labourer's powers, in return for a wage sufficient for the purposes of maintenance but not more. This system is applicable, of course, only to those from whom labour can reasonably be required. The great bulk of the applicants for relief being thus provided for, we believe that it will be possible for an efficient staff of officers to control with success the grant of relief, on the basis of personal inquiry and knowledge of the individual circumstances of each applicant, among the comparatively small numbers of destitute persons to whom the test of labour cannot be applied.³⁰

The \$1.90 per day definition of poverty ignores the role of subsistence and kinship, and has little utility for an anthropologist. Some individuals are poor because they are mentally ill, some are poor because they are lazy, some are poor because they are physically handicapped. The more severe the poverty, the greater the likelihood of social isolation. Extreme poverty can affect the ability to speak, to prepare food, or to look after basic hygiene. Many of the things that poor people do not have, besides purchasing power, are those things the rest of society takes completely for granted.

Many matters that affect the well-being of very poor people are not in the market, such as cultural integrity and social or community solidarity, parent–child relationships, or religious attitudes. The performance of traditional rituals can be thought of as income. Similarly, health, nutrition, and education benefits are not materialistic or quantifiable. Individual money incomes may be high or low, a fact not easily or obviously related to the availability of and satisfaction with health, education, or nutrition services. These group sentiments are characteristic of many traditional societies and, once eroded, cannot easily be replaced. Income distribution figures do not usually show how income is distributed with respect to variables such as ethnicity, social class, education, aptitude, geographical location, and so on.

Anthropological fieldwork confirmed the fact that culture provided the essential glue that bound members of society together. Culture animated the social relationships between members of society that persisted through time. Anthropologists celebrated cultural difference—the unique cultural heritage of each society—by showing how each society had unique features. They were able to show that, far from being pre-scientific, magic and witchcraft, and taboos and sacrifices, had their uses. Culture was no longer seen as a constraint, but instead provided an explanation as to how the world started and mankind developed. Culture provided the basis for law and order and governance, hope that danger and threats could be managed, that crops would grow, and that disaster could be kept at bay.

The homogenous poverty paradigm treated social and cultural features as if they were extrinsic variables, something that could be added to the design of a project after the important technical decisions had been made. Anthropologists saw social factors as intrinsic variables that should be a part of the basic analysis. That led them to collect as many facts as possible and to have those facts suggest the appropriateness of any theory. This was a quite different approach to that of the environmentalist or the economist who started with a good hunch that they hoped could quickly be supported by data.³¹

The failure to account for cultural difference was also a defect in Victorian thinking about traditional societies. The fundamental error made by Victorian anthropology, and now World Bank thinking, was the failure to ensure that behavior was first understood in the social and cultural context of which it formed a part.³² In 1890 the anthropologist Sir James Frazer published the first two volumes of his epic book, *The Golden Bough*. When he learned that individuals all over the world jumped over bonfires, Sir James assumed that all bonfire jumping had the same meaning. However, even within continental Europe, the meanings attached to bonfire jumping varied. In Russia, bonfire jumping might signify a man's wish for spiritual

cleansing and good health; in Portugal, it is a woman's wish to find a marriage partner. The Victorian approach could be amusing as, for example, when practitioners went looking for accounts of cures for jaundice that used gold or when they tried to confirm stories of Greek women who ate ravens' eggs as a way of begetting black-haired children.³³

Sir James is known as an armchair anthropologist because he designed questionnaires on the basis of reflection in his study and sent them to reliable travelers and businesses in the hope that, once completed, they would confirm what his original thinking supposed to be the case. When asked by a visitor if he had ever met any of the "savages" he had described so convincingly, Sir James replied, "Good heavens, no!" The discipline improved after anthropologists ventured out of their offices and began to visit and get to know local people. Fieldwork and participant observation methods were developed that required living in a community for several years, and learning the language and customs of the community they were trying to understand.

Like the Victorians, World Bank staff do not think it necessary to establish contact with communities or to leave their offices in Washington, DC, to meet and get to know communities. Like the Victorians, World Bank staff lack knowledge of local languages and cultures and so are forced to construct their survey questionnaires on the basis of armchair reflection without necessarily knowing whether they are taking reports of this or that behavior quite out of their social context. Questionnaire responses are used to produce league tables whose numbers and rankings convey an impression that they have captured community reality. In these league tables, it is assumed that every company (and every community) in the world should have more or less the same goals and should address more or less the same problems. Debate has been influenced by the World Bank's domination of economic thinking and the continued implication that poverty needs a quantitative approach.³⁴

Why Believe in Poverty Elimination?

How is it that sensible citizens in rich countries, citizens who know that poverty has not ended in their own countries, have come to believe that poverty in the poor countries can be ended? There has always seemed to me to be something slightly millenarian about claims to be able to eliminate global poverty, and the pursuit of this dream has not always had the intended results.³⁵ Ending poverty has become an emotion that is lived by its supporters rather than an experience that can be squared with the views of those with hands-on experience of alleviating grassroots poverty

in either poor or rich countries. Economists claim their ambitions are science-based. The industrialized country belief in the omnipotence of science, including the science of economics, has been presented as the antidote to the evils of colonialism and the slow pace of change in the poor countries.

Ask a sensible citizen in any society how many poor people they can help to escape poverty and what resources will be necessary and they will think of poor people in terms of the severity of their affliction. Some of this poverty they will see as God's will, something that neither they nor the suffering can alter. Others they will consider beyond help because of infirmity or addiction to drugs or alcohol. They will see these poor people in terms of their social situation: Are they individuals? in families? heads of households? and so on. They will identify people they know and believe could be helped as well as those who are beyond help. They will see the faces of the poor, remember who they are, be able to judge whether they are physically incapacitated, deranged from some terrible grief, jobless, homeless, prone to fits of anger, landless, idle, untouchable, strong, or mentally retarded. Armed with this information these citizens will know what they as community members, in such and such social positions, with such and such energy and funds, and having such and such neighbors in the community, can actually do to assist. They would know the possibility of making arrangements for individuals to be included within family situations; poor families might need the help of clans or other such bigger groupings. That is to say, the answer will be practical, modest, and based on personal experience with the poor.

Ask World Bank officials in Washington what global poverty alleviation needs and they will not talk about social and cultural factors affecting who is and who is not poor; instead they will speak about the required data infrastructure not yet in place, the effects of wars and natural disasters, the good governance and policy framework, the income or food subsidy safety net that must be put in place and the challenge of combating aid fatigue and raising more money in the rich countries.

The idea that science could solve society's problems and challenges has a long history. The Great Exhibition of 1851, brainchild of Prince Albert, was intended as a celebration of the British Empire and advances in technology. The major transformation that occurred across the Victorian period—with Charles Darwin, Aldous Huxley, and so on—saw a shift from gentlemen amateurs to professional scientists that involved the development and dissemination of natural laws and ongoing progress. Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969. Public investments in research had helped to split the atom, splice the gene, invent the microchip, create the laser, and build the internet. Wasn't smallpox eliminated from the world with the aid

of a global effort, just as piracy and slavery had been eliminated a century before?

Common sense suggests that those who are passionate about aid ending poverty are just as likely to see a flying saucer as have their dream realized. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst, did not say that flying saucers did not exist: he said they were there because people wanted them to be there.³⁶ Obviously, the public wants to believe that poverty, just like disease, can be eliminated. In a world beset by natural and human-made disasters it can be comforting to believe that there are extraterrestrial beings out there who want to help solve the planet's problems.

Why do so many of those who work in the aid business put on Seven League boots when they go overseas? Is there something in the air, or in the water, that we did not know about? So many professionals up their game. This is a more serious affliction than that of the man who can understand all that he needs to know on the taxi ride from the airport to his hotel. What encourages travelers who have neither lived nor worked in the tropics for long periods to say that they can improve the lives of millions of people? How else are we to understand rock stars who, after a few days in the tropics, announce that they know how to make poverty history? Stranger still is the fact that when these good ideas have failed their authors do not seem any the wiser. Agronomists, who find it challenging to take care of a small garden at home, say they can solve the food problems of the tropics; medical people, who have spent their lives with curative medicine, say they can banish disease; engineers, who have never managed to build anything that worked well, say they can give people in the back of beyond in the tropics clean water; credit experts say they can install more accessible rural credit than you find in Europe or the US; economists say they can run entire countries; road engineers promise to build highways and bridges to higher standards than they have used at home; plant quarantine experts wish to impose more rigid safeguards than they have known at home; computer experts prepare to install better systems than they have known at home; charities say "No more crying children if you send money every month."³⁷

We could look to cult thinking for an explanation as to why sensible people believe poverty can be ended. Cargo cults provide an example of the fantasy wish-fulfilment that poverty elimination is all about. Cargo cult adherents believe that a fabulous cargo—whatever you dream of, really—will arrive in the near future by ship, plane, or other heavenly means. Of course, yes, you have guessed it and many do, the cargo does not come and anthropologists are then provided with a chance to come up with new explanations. Having said that, belief in the imminent arrival of cargo did not deter believers of the Jon Frum movement in the New Hebrides (now

Vanuatu). When missionaries warned the people that their belief was silly because their cargo would not come, locals laughed and reminded them that they had waited 2,000 years for the return of Jesus Christ.³⁸

Expansion and Institutional Change

Development assistance has shifted too far away from the modest objectives of faith organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to routinely embracing the millenarian poverty vision. Development assistance has begun to rely more and more on the popular support from the public that aid agencies gained by implying that they could help to build a world overseas that could deliver what the citizens of the industrialized countries hoped for, but did not yet have, at home. Silver bullet solutions in the health field that wipe out scourges to humanity through inoculation have provided a model that many would like to extend to curing poverty. Silver bullet solutions will help if a disease like malaria can be eradicated by the application of determined campaigns to deliver better science and technology, as was the case with polio and smallpox.

Nimal, my Sri Lankan friend and colleague, kept a list of aid agency silver bullet solutions to poverty that were never implemented—land for the landless, jobs for the jobless, homes for the homeless. He predicted the clever men and women in the World Bank would develop a wit for the witless initiative. If we had more historians of aid, but we do not, they could point out, in less amusing fashion than my friend, the other silver bullet solutions that have sunk without a trace. The World Bank's Integrated Rural Development Project was supposed to provide a complete way of gaining a living for rural people. To work it needed hands-on skills and knowledge that the World Bank did not have, and a significant intrusion into local lives that local people did not want. It was succeeded by the Sustainable Livelihoods Project that has raised more or less the same skills and knowledge difficulties. Enthusiasts, usually with limited local knowledge and experience, spend a great deal of time discussing what they think is involved and what their own interpretation is rather than getting down to work.

Intriguingly, when I revisited my early experiences with the World Bank, I found that many of the social challenges experienced by the institution were similar to those faced by a global mining company with 60,000 employees and operations in more than sixty countries.³⁹ In the past twenty years mining companies have, like the World Bank, had to deal with issues that attracted NGO campaigns such as dams, land acquisition, and resettlement in developing countries, as well as the claims and rights of indig-

enous peoples, human rights, environmental protection, labor issues, and the alleviation of poverty. Mining companies had to listen and learn before engaging with issues where NGOs had made it clear that they had strong views. The same process can be seen at the World Bank.

By relying on management by seclusion and fighting poverty in the office, the World Bank has failed to make the best use of economics or anthropology, or of sociology, political science, social psychology, and public administration. Max Weber, who pointed to the inevitability and the limitations of bureaucracy in large-scale organizations like the World Bank, told us that “the modern higher-ranking [German] officer fights battles from the office.”⁴⁰ Today, despite the energetic efforts to increase the numbers working overseas, somewhere between 70 to 90 percent of the World Bank’s staff can expect to spend their working careers toiling away in large office buildings in Washington raising money, generating public support, and processing projects and loans to eliminate homogenized poverty.⁴¹ Consequently, the World Bank’s war on global poverty cannot be expected to do any better than the 1964 US war on poverty that Ronald Reagan said poverty had won.

The book concludes that the World Bank is ill-suited to eliminate poverty or address extreme poverty elimination, though of course all the spending can help improve health, education, and economic opportunities. The World Bank became too large to succeed with poverty at the grassroots level where much may depend on the local ensemble of beliefs, values, and attitudes as well as the creativity and nimbleness of the individual aid worker. If it was a war it was a war that could be won only by hand-to-hand combat rather than with missiles and long-range artillery. Of course, the top-down benefits of economic growth could help, but all too often its effects were dissipated before the really poor experienced the benefits. Despite good intentions, a great deal of money was, and still is, being wasted as it may be in any top-down solution because the wealth created by World Bank–financed economic development flows down a very leaky pipe to the poorest and often fails to address what the poor consider to be their high-priority issues.

Eliminating the poverty of the very poor is a much sterner test than improving the lot of poor people. If we look at those organizations that work with very poor people, then their experience suggests that neither social science disciplines nor money can claim a pivotal role in poverty alleviation for the very poorest; it is the thought that they could that has contributed greatly to the World Bank’s inability to lead this work. I yield to none in my admiration for the ability of anthropologists to help policymakers understand what is important in situations of distress affecting remote peoples in remote areas or the homeless on the next block. But not

all anthropologists or social scientists have the qualities of compassion, the desire to engage, the interpersonal skills, and the stomach required to work in close and continuous contact with very poor people. I know that I did not have what this work needed and I suspect that many aid workers who thought they had may not have had their resolve tested.

In the early 1970s it seemed to me that the World Bank had quite a large number of staff members who had the local hands-on skills and knowledge that reaching the very poorest needed, and that the institution could make good use of anthropologists. Today, and although the institution has recruited upward of a hundred anthropologists, it would be hard to say that they have been deployed in ways that made good use of the discipline's unique fieldwork tradition and ability to throw light on the social and cultural factors linked to extreme poverty. Hands-on local skills and knowledge are in short supply and local government has not been seen to be critically important for poverty alleviation.

Aid has done, and still does, vitally important things in poor countries, but mostly when helpers have had local knowledge and experience as well as relationships with those to be helped, and when small sums of money are involved. The ending poverty movement's overselling threatens to completely distort that performance and also threatens to discredit the entire development assistance enterprise.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Money-Moving

Robert McNamara started the World Bank's war on poverty and an alms race in the industrialized countries to support his vision. He made the case for more money for global poverty alleviation. Client countries were encouraged to take loans, and in Papua New Guinea this earned them a reputation as loan salesmen. We do not yet know if the growing pressure from the US, the World Bank's largest shareholder, for graduation from aid will result in BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) no longer qualifying for World Bank money. That would encourage a focus on smaller countries and new opportunities for hands-on policy alleviation.

Chapter 2: Reputation Management

In order to accelerate lending the World Bank turned away from social science, technical expertise, and grassroots skills. Staff who were articulate in meetings and good on paper were needed to turn out more loans. As expansion proceeded, technical specialization in areas such as agriculture

and health were abandoned and more and more of the new staff who were hired had limited overseas experience. Over the past forty years Washington's reputational management skills have become more and more important in terms of their contribution to the World Bank's public profile and to money-moving.

Chapter 3: Disciplines

The use of social science disciplines, expertise, and skills has been determined by the contribution they have been able to make to the World Bank's capacity to raise and spend money. In the 1980s NGO campaigns posed a serious threat to the World Bank's reputation and safeguards policies and procedures for resettlement, Indigenous peoples and cultural heritage protection were introduced to ensure that World Bank projects did no harm. But safeguards work was not popular among World Bank staff because it slowed down lending. One result was that anthropology, which had a significant role in safeguards work, was marginalized. What does often seem to be significant is the fact that, as time has passed, the skills of the economist and others working in similar disciplines have become less influential in the World Bank than the skills of the journalist.

Chapter 4: Public Service

Although Max Weber's "Ideal-Type" bureaucracy was not supposed to be found in empirical reality, the World Bank provides a near-perfect example. Today the World Bank behaves like a global corporation that pursues its own self-interest rather than like a publicly accountable institution. As time has passed, the burgeoning World Bank bureaucracy in Washington has become more concerned with its own internal issues such as expansion and market share than with the provision of public service in client countries.

Chapter 5: Social Soundness Analysis

The very poorest people—who were often unwell, uneducated, and on the margins of society—could not necessarily be expected to be able to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement that were presented by development projects. For fifty years the project has been thought to be the most efficient and effective way of getting the right assistance to the poorest. But projects have required above-average resources while the poorest are below-average people. More attention should now be paid to alternative ways of delivering help such as campaign organizations and social movements.

Conclusions

It is highly unlikely that the hands-on field skills and human attributes required for building relationships and rapport with the poorest, and the quantitative office skills required for lending and commercialized economic development, could ever prosper within a single institution like the World Bank. Massive publicity campaigns to persuade the public to support poverty alleviation have produced the global poor who increasingly resemble George Orwell's unpeople. It is time to part the poverty curtain provided by all the statistics to show that the global poor have a country, a culture, a language, and social relationships.⁴²

Notes

1. See Ascher and Mason, *World Bank Since Bretton Woods*; Baum and Tolbert, *Investing in Development*; Please, *Hobbled Giant*. Negative accounts of the World Bank have included Hancock, *Lords of Poverty*; Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth*; Meren, *Road to Hell*; Sharma, *Robert McNamara's Other War*; Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*.

2. See Cochrane, *Anthropology in the Mining Industry*; Cochrane, "What Can Anthropology Do?," 20.

3. Goodenough, "Anthropology in the 20th Century and Beyond"; Heyman, "The Anthropology"; Cochrane, *Max Weber's Vision*.

4. Goodland, "Social & Environmental Assessment to Promote Sustainability"; Cochrane, *Cultural Appraisal of Development Projects*.

5. My book *Festival Elephants* argues that there was no such thing as global poverty for which there is a one-size-fits-all solution.

6. Stern, "Beyond the Transition," gives the history of UN thinking on poverty; UNDP, *Poverty Alleviation in Asia and the Pacific*, gives UNDP's view. I am indebted to Len Joy, an old friend, for discussions around the idea of homogeneity. See also Streeten et al., *First Things First*.

7. This was the moment when qualitative analysis and social development was put in the back seat of the development vehicle. Economists decided the World Bank was an economic institution run by economists; while it might gesture in the direction of social factors or sociological variables, the future thrust of the institution and the measures it would take to implement these ideas would inevitably reflect an economic bias. Nevertheless, the anthropologists continued to hope and continued to write publicly about their hope. See Davis, "Bringing Culture."

8. In the Solomon Islands unemployed young men who had come to town to see the bright lights were regarded with suspicion by expatriates. The visitors learned to avoid difficulties by saying, when asked where they worked, that they were with "Mr. Liu." He was a mythical Chinese trader. The domestic arrangements of Chinese traders were unknown and nobody was much interested in them.

9. For a very readable account see Strathern, *The Rope of Moka*.

10. See Cochrane, *Development Anthropology*; Wilbur, *Political Economy of Underdevelopment*; Aghion and Bolton, "A Theory of Trickle-Down Growth and Development"; Meier and Stiglitz, *Frontiers of Development Economics*, 422.

11. Leonard, *Reaching the Peasant Farmer*.

12. Masfield, *A Short History*. Informative and gives details of how farmyard manure was transported to the West Indies in the seventeenth century.

13. The well-known economist Thomas Balogh doubted that a single solution would suffice. See Balogh, "Failures in the Strategy against Poverty."

14. Vetterlein, "Seeing Like the World Bank on Poverty."

15. O'Reilly, "In Bohemia."

16. Bernard Chadenet suggested this term to me when I was about to talk to a group of his staff. He asked me to try to shake them up and said that they were becoming too office-bound and set in their ways, and that they practiced management by seclusion.

17. The World Bank sees poverty as related to well-being and command over commodities: "The poor are those who do not have enough income or consumption to put them above some adequate minimum threshold. This view sees poverty largely in monetary terms. Poverty may also be tied to a specific type of consumption; thus, someone might be house-poor or food-poor or health-poor. These dimensions of poverty can often be measured directly, for instance by measuring malnutrition or literacy. The broadest approach to well-being (and poverty) focuses on the 'capability' of the individual to function in society. The poor lack key capabilities, and may have inadequate income or education, or be in poor health, or feel powerless, or lack political freedoms. There are four reasons to measure poverty. First, to keep the poor on the agenda; if poverty were not measured, it would be easy to forget the poor. Second, one needs to be able to identify the poor if one is to be able to target interventions that aim to reduce or alleviate poverty. Third, to monitor and evaluate projects and policy interventions that are geared towards the poor. And finally, to evaluate the effectiveness of institutions whose goal is to help the poor." World Bank Institute, "Introduction to Poverty Analysis."

18. The 1993 UNDP *Human Development Report* gives the number of book titles published per 1,000 of population as well as the number of annual cinema outings. It is hard to see the point of this sort of data unless UNDP intends that countries with low scores be sent copies of Jurassic Park.

19. World Health Organization (WHO) and Cook Islands Ministry of Health, *Health Sector Delivery Performance*.

20. The population of the Cook Islands has dropped to 15,000. However, 61,000 in New Zealand and 30,000 in Australia identify themselves as Cook Islanders and maintain family connections. The problem of how to take the views and feelings of these overseas residents into account is not easy to solve. It is a common problem in Oceania. While living in the Solomon Islands and working as the administrator directly responsible for Tikopia, and just before voter registration and a whispering ballot was introduced, I discovered that there were far more Tikopia living overseas than on the island.

21. Scott, *Years of the Pooh-Bah*; Kücher and Eimke, *Tivaivai*; Hamilton, *Pages from Paradise*.

22. The World Bank accepted that the local meanings of poverty were important but dismissed their use on grounds that they could not be aggregated. Anthropology was said to be too subjective and not suitable for national-level assessment. World Bank Institute, "Introduction to Poverty Analysis," 27. See also appendix B.

23. Rowntree and Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State*.

24. For Africa see Castro, Hakansson, and Brokensha, "Indicators of Rural Inequality."

25. See also the significant contributions by Paul Farmer: *AIDS and Accusation*; *Pathologies of Power*; *Infections and Inequalities*. Farmer's work has echoes of Albert Camus's *La Peste*, the story of a plague in Oran, and Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

26. On relationships see Strathern, *The Relation*.

27. Thurnwald, "Price of White Man's Peace."

28. On this work see Goodland, "Social & Environmental Assessment to Promote Sustainability."

29. I was supposed to be working pro bono publico in return for \$1 and I never got the dollar.

30. Quoted in Drèze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, 31–32. See Raymond Firth's remarks on famine on Tikopia in *The Elements of Social Organization*; and in Horowitz and Salem-Murdock, "Development-induced Food Insecurity."

31. See the classic exchange between an economist and an anthropologist, Knight, "Anthropology and Economics" and Herskovits, "Economics and Anthropology, A rejoinder."

32. Armchair anthropology is covered in Stocking, *After Tylor*, 15–24.

33. Lienhardt, "Frazer's Anthropology."

34. The World Bank now consults, but does not really listen to, NGOs on a range of issues that do not affect the institution's ability to move more and more money. In the safeguards area the most sensitive issues are usually related to the environment. Seeking to keep the critics onside, more and more former campaigners against the World Bank's environmental practices are now flown business class around the world to look at biodiversity issues. Big NGOs like Oxfam have been eager to be seen and to be treated as major players in the aid business.

35. Economist Jeffrey Sachs raised \$120 million for his Millennium Villages idea in Africa that he thought would eliminate poverty. See Clemens and Demonbynas, "When Does Rigorous Impact Evaluation Make a Difference?"

36. Jung, *Flying Saucers*.

37. Clean water and other silver bullet solutions are not just a matter of engineering and handing out kits. Using wells, pumps, and water holes in sustainable ways requires appropriate behavior if results are to be maintained. Getting people to take medicine on a regular basis presents similar challenges.

38. Details are provided by Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*. See also Cochrane, *Big Men and Cargo Cults*.

39. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a World Bank project; the investment is owned by and is the responsibility of the borrower.

40. Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization*, 1393.

41. "National programs to manage economy-wide shocks and effective mechanisms to reduce the risks faced by poor people, as well as helping them cope with adverse shocks when they occur, are necessary: formulating programs to help poor people manage risk. Micro-insurance programs, public work programs, and food transfer programs may be mixed with other mechanisms to deliver more effective risk management: Developing national programs to prevent and respond to macro shocks, financial or natural. Design national systems of social risk management that are also pro-growth. Supporting minority rights and providing the institutional basis for peaceful conflict resolution can help prevent civil conflict and mobilize more resources into productive activities. Tackling health problems including widespread illnesses such as malaria and tuberculosis, as well as moderately common but serious conditions such as HIV/AIDS. There is no simple, universal blueprint for implementing this strategy. Each developing country needs to prepare its own mix of policies to reduce poverty, reflecting national priorities and local realities. Given the important complementarities among these three dimensions, an effective poverty reduction strategy will require action on all three fronts, by all stakeholders in society, government, civil society, the private sector and poor people themselves." World Bank Institute, "Introduction to Poverty Analysis," 95.

42. ul Haq, *Poverty Curtain*.