

# THE SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST IN LATIN AMERICAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

JOSEPH A. CAVANAUGH

## THE ROLE AND NEED OF THE SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST

Sociologists, social psychologists, social anthropologists, and other social and behavioral scientists can and should play an increasingly important role in United States assistance programs in Latin America. Many of the basic problems in Latin American countries are social to at least as great an extent as they are economic. Assistance programs in the past have given ample emphasis to economic considerations but relatively little assistance to the solution of social problems (with the exception of illiteracy and education). If one accepts the premise that Latin America's problems are social as well as economic, then it must be concluded that personnel with professional training in the social and behavioral sciences should be utilized to a far greater extent than in the past.<sup>1</sup>

The social and behavioral scientist possesses specialized knowledge to assist various Latin American countries in solving basic social problems peculiar to them, if he is given the opportunity. He knows how social change may be accomplished under general conditions and can adapt theory to practice in specific situations. An excellent

example of the latter is the Cornell University-sponsored Vicos Project in Peru, which has become a laboratory in social and cultural change in a small community in Peru's Callejon de Huaylas. Other examples are community self-help projects carried out in various other Latin American countries in indigenous communities, especially in the area of public health.

Social scientists are trained to gain knowledge with precision in order to predict social phenomena under given conditions. This permits the recommendation of action programs for social change and the prediction of results of these and alternate programs of action. Within limits, most social scientists can predict many aspects of future social phenomena because they are trained in techniques of scientific observation and measurement of these phenomena. Many are trained to analyze the symbiotic and ecological relationships among the components of society in general and the ecological relationships of an isolated social problem in particular.

An example of the latter is the problem of illegitimacy that plagues many Central and South American countries. A sociologist, for example, is trained to study the relationships and "causes" which give rise to high rates of illegitimacy. He investigates not only the overt but also the covert behavior. He "explains" the phenomena in terms of extent, impact on education and economic production, family instability, and delinquency. Out of the explanation arises a recognition of a need for reducing illegitimacy as a social problem. He suggests and assists in implementing solutions. Several years ago, the Republic of Chile recognized illegitimacy as a grave social problem. By means of mutual co-operation between the Civil Registration Service and the National Social Work Agency, a program was developed for reducing illegitimacy. Many social and economic ills arising from this social problem are being negated.<sup>2</sup>

Demographers possessing modern measurement techniques are able to contribute to the reduction of a host of social problems. These include many problems connected with population pressure, migration, unemployment, manpower supply and demand, birth, and causes of death. In communities which traditionally have looked to the central government or to some "outsider" for help, social anthro-

pologists can assist in changing attitudes and can devise methods by which communities may help themselves to solve their problems.

Social scientists are technically equipped to explain resistance to social or cultural change. Once resistance factors are known, recommendations to overcome the resistance may be formulated. They understand the dynamics of societal organization. In summary, the social and behavioral scientist, by reason of his professional training and interests, and with the tools and technical knowledge at his disposal, is adequately prepared to study social phenomena giving rise to social problems in Latin America. He can make recommendations for their solution and predict within specified limits consequences of different courses of action taken toward their solution. The social scientist is a resource that has not been given sufficient status in technical assistance programs, and his skills are underemployed in foreign assistance programs.

A major purpose of this article is to explain to North American social scientists, to the general public, and especially to official assistance agencies how social and behavioral scientists may use their skills in various Latin American countries, in the hope that planning and implementation programs will be stimulated.<sup>3</sup>

#### PATTERNS OF ASSISTANCE IN THE PAST

Traditionally, official assistance to many Latin American countries has been for "economic and social development" and military and emergency assistance. Technical assistance, for the most part, has been tied closely with, and justified as contributory to, economic development. Social development has been treated as a fringe benefit. The technical assistance program is and has been predominantly a "how-to-do-it" type of activity, with a myriad of program planners, directors of technical co-operation, and administrative officers and other personnel telling the "how-to-do-it" personnel what they should do, to what extent it should be done, and how long they should work doing it. The programs have been administered in such diverse areas as control of plant diseases, health education, development of mineral resources, construction of airports, police and traffic control, and

road construction. Agricultural development to increase the food supply, assistance in economic development to increase the Gross National Product, assistance in improving facilities for education, and improving facilities for decreasing the death and illness rates have received the bulk of attention.

In some countries, rather elaborate programs were formulated. Technical personnel have given advice and technical know-how in such fields as traffic surveys, hospital construction and administration, vital statistics, water supply and sewage disposal, mineral surveys, urban planning, low-cost housing, credit unions, vocational education, and employment facilities. Past and present programs have undoubtedly had a very beneficial effect in terms of limited objectives.

However, basic problems involving social organization and development, so important to the welfare of a nation, have for the most part received minimum attention, although they have not gone unnoticed. The health and education programs have probably come the closest to studying and contributing solutions to basic social problems, but even here little attention has been paid to improving the social conditions and solving the basic social problems of the ever-increasing numbers of people. Public health assistance programs even now regard their major objectives as preventive health programs of many types, with immunization, malaria control, improved water supply, sewage disposal, and nutrition as typical examples. Consequently, the services of a relatively few social scientists have been utilized, and then usually in vital statistics programs, rural development, census and survey procedures, health education, and other limited programs involving social anthropology, community organization, and social welfare and assistance.<sup>4</sup>

#### BASIC SOCIAL PROBLEMS

It is further argued that many conditions directly related to the economic improvement and well-being of any given Latin nation, such as full employment, high Gross National Product, high literacy levels, adequate housing, and relatively high family income, can be

obtained only if adequate and satisfactory solutions can be found for certain basic problems that have their roots in the social structure. It is not enough to regard a single action program, such as land reform, nationalization of industries, better housing, or even the Peace Corps, as the most necessary one. Social scientists alone cannot solve all the ills of any given Latin American country, but they can contribute substantially toward this end. What is needed is a balanced assistance program which takes fully into account the extremely complex nature of societal organization and the realization that a team approach with full representation by each substantive area is necessary.

What are some of these basic problems that social scientists can assist in solving? Although there are many problems and there is always a risk of oversimplification and generalization, three general areas are evident: The first deals with the general subject of family organization and all this implies, the second has to do with population pressure and movement, and the third with social change and cultural lag. All these areas contain problem dimensions, the recognition of which is basic to the proper functioning of a society.

In many Latin American nations, the family as a control institution for societal stability generally does not function as effectively as it might. Evidence for this is seen in the comparatively high rate of family units without sufficient economic support, especially in urban areas; the number of families in which the parents are not legally married;<sup>5</sup> the high number of desertions by one or both parents; the comparatively high rate of illegitimacy in some Latin American nations; and the comparatively large number of homeless children.<sup>6,7</sup> The lack of more effective familial organization and control gives rise in part to tremendous social problems, some of which are low family income, poor educational level, poor housing and environmental conditions, low purchasing power, low per capita consumption, and low productive standards.<sup>8</sup>

Although the roots of demography and the study of population as a scientific discipline started with Quetelet, Graunt, Halley, and others, only in the last twenty or thirty years have measurement techniques been developed and implemented to a degree of precision

which has given rise to concern about population pressure. This concern has been particularly evident about less developed areas in the majority of countries in Latin America. According to some estimates, Latin America's population, taken as a whole, will triple in the next thirty-five years. Crude rates of natural increase already exceed 3 per cent per year in many areas. This social problem is aggravated by a subsistence living level of millions who must spend all their limited resources merely to survive. Little remains to improve the cultural milieu, and misery tends to perpetuate misery from generation to generation.<sup>9</sup>

The population of most Latin American countries at the present time is made up of a greater proportion in the younger age groups than in the United States and Western Europe.<sup>10</sup> Along with other demographic and social factors, this produces a condition of comparatively high birth rates. Since death rates are falling to unprecedented lows—owing to better distribution of food, improved transportation, improved water supplies, and increased medical facilities, including public health measures—the net effect is an ever-increasing net reproduction rate (i.e., the comparative number of female births from generation to generation to females in the childbearing ages). This is particularly true in large urban areas and also rural, more indigenous ones which are affected socially and economically by these urban areas. Population pressure is aggravated still further in urban areas where considerable migration from smaller cities and rural areas has taken place.

The tremendous population growth, which shows little tendency to diminish and which affects many facets of organized society, is a social problem of the first order that aggravates still further and makes more serious already precarious social and economic conditions. It must be recognized that merely saving lives, preventing disease, stabilizing the currency, and increasing food production tend to mitigate only certain types of misery and obviously fail to achieve comprehensive assistance objectives. If other problems are not attacked and solved, the saving of lives and the production of sufficient food to maintain life tend to perpetuate a condition in which more people survive at a low level of subsistence. This problem

must be met head-on, with all facilities that responsible officials are able to muster.

However, one must not be so optimistic as to think that a solution to the population pressure problem will be forthcoming as an inevitable process in which reproductive patterns change automatically with recognized or unrecognized needs. A conscious effort by professional experts is needed to study further population pressure patterns, suggest solutions, and begin a pilot program of implementation.

The various United States technical assistance programs during the past fifteen years have had limited programs in the field of demography and population. The United Nations has also maintained programs. These programs have been almost entirely devoted to assistance in techniques for the collection and compilation of data. However, probably because of repeated warnings and urging from international population experts, other social scientists, governments and private foundations, the United Nations General Assembly has recently (1963) voted to take the next logical step—to do something about the population problem. The components of this important action involve a survey of population problems confronting countries, performance of more research on the interrelationship between population growth and economic and social development, and assistance to countries for obtaining improved basic data.<sup>11</sup> Although some assistance has been given to Latin American countries during the last fifteen years, many countries still do not have adequate vital statistics for proper planning because of poor civil registration facilities.<sup>12</sup>

This United Nations General Assembly program is far from the actual implementation of family planning programs but is, nonetheless, important because of the world-wide recognition of a population problem and the necessity for further measuring its dimensions. Representatives from some Latin American countries, however, still remain cool to the premise that there is a grave population problem. This is an area for study in itself.

The United States technical assistance program should use social and behavioral scientists for implementing a program in the field of population problems. This program should, at the outset, include

assistance for obtaining better and more reliable information, especially in vital statistics. It should include intensification of demographic research and the development of new research tools especially adapted to less developed areas, and more research on aspects of value systems that give support to the antithesis of concepts of family planning. Evaluation studies should be performed on family planning experiments at the community level, like those carried out in Puerto Rico several years ago.<sup>13</sup>

A final problem to be discussed here (although this is by no means a complete inventory) is that of social change. The amelioration of societal functioning always implies a greater or lesser degree of social change. Social change, in turn, involves changing value systems. Value systems often prove difficult and slow to change except under conditions of violent social upheaval.

Social change also involves change of attitudes toward established systems and values. Even under the best of conditions, not all components in a given social system change at the same pace. This produces a complex imbalance that disrupts stability of societal functioning. Cultural lag, which is especially evident in developing areas—including most countries in Latin America, gives rise to some of the most pressing socio-economic and political difficulties. An understanding is needed as to what components are in imbalance, among subcomponents as well as among other components, and what conditions are affecting the lag, both internally and externally. This understanding through scientific investigation forms a basis for the social scientist to develop an over-all system and techniques for minimizing cultural lag and effecting orderly social change.

Latin American countries, as well as many other less developed and developed areas, are the unfortunate possessors of many other social problems. These include poverty and low income, prostitution, crime and juvenile delinquency, inadequate housing, lack of medical and related facilities, family desertion, illiteracy, and high infant mortality rates.<sup>14</sup> However, to a greater or lesser extent, it is assumed that these are not unrelated social problems, but in some cases a direct result and manifestation of larger fundamental social problems whose solutions must be sought.



## IMPLEMENTATION

North American social and behavioral scientists must continue to work with their counterparts in Latin America and to intensify their efforts. The United States AID program should create a separate but co-ordinated program for directly assisting Latin American countries in attacking their individual social problems and co-ordinating its work with other agencies doing research and giving assistance. Private foundations, universities, and quasi-governmental agencies should continue and greatly expand their programs. The United Nations Social and Economic Council, in co-operation with other United Nations agencies, must intensify its efforts not only in the area of population but also in the broader area of basic social problems. The same resources and energy that are applied to the solution of economic problems must also be devoted to the solution of social problems.

Beginnings have been made on which further work can be based. A number of universities in the United States maintain programs, classes, and courses, hold conferences, seminars, and otherwise discuss and study Latin America's social problems. The Vicos Project in Peru, sponsored by Cornell University, has become a well-known experiment in indigenous self-help and social change. The Pan-American Union maintains an Office of Social Affairs. Peru recently has established within the Ministry of Health, an Office of Social Development.<sup>15</sup> Many individuals in universities and governments, both in Latin America and the United States, have contributed research and published reports of studies and conferences on social problems. The Population Council, Inc., the Ford Foundation, the United Nations Population Council and Statistical Office, the Milbank Memorial Fund, the Pan American Health Organization, the United States Bureau of the Census, the Office of Population Studies at Cornell University, the Population Association of America, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, the Inter-American Statistical Institute, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the United States Public Health Service all have made important contributions in social research and assistance, especially in the field of demography.

Although a number of universities and private foundations sponsor research programs on problem areas in various Latin American countries as well as programs for training social scientists in universities in the United States and Latin America, further efforts must be made to train greater numbers. This would equip Latin American social scientists more adequately to assist in solving their own social problems. The training of social scientists is relatively easy, but the professional acceptance by a given country in terms of their ability to contribute is more difficult.

Further and considerable study needs to be undertaken to determine what specific additional types of programs for assistance in the social and behavioral sciences area should be developed by the Federal government, foundations, and universities. Successful programs would necessarily be systematic and co-ordinated among the various participants, and have definite predetermined purposes and goals. A need for programs of assistance in this area must be recognized by the various power structures, and considerable financial and administrative support must be available. The formulation of the program and objectives must be based on accurate data. These are some of the dimensions to be considered in arriving at specific programs.

The establishment of a separate entity in the United States Agency for International Development to implement a program of assistance for alleviating social problems should be seriously considered. Appropriate activities for the program would include the improvement and collection of basic demographic data and social statistics, performance of systematic research studies on social problems, supplying technical assistance to countries requesting it, and an intensification of the training of Latin American social and behavioral scientists. This entity would also maintain a co-ordinating function among other Federal and international agencies, foundations, and universities.<sup>16</sup> An information "focal point" on all studies and research pertaining to Latin America in the field of social problems would likewise be an integral part of the program.

## SUMMARY

Social and behavioral scientists, such as social psychologists, demographers, social anthropologists, and especially sociologists, are vitally needed to serve on teams of experts in assistance programs for Latin America. They are needed to assist in solving basic social problems. The lack of attention given to the solution of these basic social problems prevents, to a great degree, the solution of major economic and political problems. It is, therefore, important to give major parallel emphasis to them now.

The social scientist is well equipped to assist in the solution of these problems because of his professional training which emphasizes techniques for the scientific study of complex interrelationships in depth. He is equipped to make recommendations about such programs and can, within limits, predict their success or failure.

Although there are many social problems awaiting amelioration, three general areas should be given immediate attention. These are problems connected with family disorganization, population pressure, and aspects of social change. They are dimensions of a program for general social and economic development to which the Agency for International Development should give major emphasis in its assistance program. The assistance should consist of the development of a comprehensive program for attacking basic social problems by establishing an intensified data collection and research activity; supplying assistance to nations requesting it; co-ordinating efforts with other agencies involved in this type of activity; and establishing an information clearinghouse facility.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> The writer does not intend to infer that the countries constituting Latin America, i.e., Central and South America, are homogeneous and may be considered as an entity, especially with reference to the type of social problems and assistance programs needed. In this connection, *see* Stockwell, Edward G., Social, Economic, and Demographic Differences among Underprivileged Areas, *Population Index*, Office of Population Research, Princeton University, Vol. 28, No. 3, July, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Rodriguez Pinto, Fernando, *La Illegitimidad en Chile*, in Final Report of the First Inter American Civil Registration Seminar, Santiago, Chile, 1954, New York, United Nations Statistical Office, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> For other opinions on this subject, *see* Humphrey, Hubert H., An Interim Summary on Co-ordination of International Technical Assistance, *Congressional Record*, April 24, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Quantitative data on the exact number and characteristics of United States social scientists employed by AID are unavailable, according to the Office of Institutional Development, Bureau for Latin America. The director of the office has stated that social scientists have been employed in several ways: university contracts, direct employment, short-term consultantships, and participation in international conferences. Several examples were cited. Social scientists from the University of California have been employed in the development of the Foundation School of Sociology and Political Science at the University of São Paulo. Social scientists from the University of Michigan have been assisting the National Planning Board of the Dominican Republic to develop a program of socio-economic surveys to be used in development programs.

<sup>5</sup> Cavanaugh, Joseph A., *Socio-demographic Characteristics of Lima, Peru*, Institute of Inter-American Affairs, International Cooperation Administration (now Agency for International Development), 1955.

<sup>6</sup> *La Demografía de las Principales Cuidades Peruanas*, 1959, Lima, Peru, Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social, December, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> STATISTICAL YEARBOOK, 1962, New York, United Nations Statistical Office.

<sup>8</sup> América en Cifras, Washington, D.C., Pan American Union, Organization of American States, 1960, Nos. 1-8.

<sup>9</sup> Osborn, Frederick, Population: An International Dilemma (A Summary of the Proceedings of the Conference on Populations Problems, 1956-1957), New York, Population Council, Inc. *See also* Summary of Four-Year Reports on Health Conditions in the Americas, 1957-1960, Washington, D.C., Pan American Health Organization, July, 1962.

<sup>10</sup> *See* references 7 and 8.

<sup>11</sup> Gardner, Richard N., The Politics of Population, *Saturday Review*, September 7, 1963, pp. 10-14.

<sup>12</sup> Cavanaugh, Joseph A., Sample Vital Registration Experiment, in REPORT OF 1961 INTERNATIONAL POPULATION CONFERENCE, London, International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 1963, Vol. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Rice-Wray, Edris, Experiences in Planned Parenthood Clinics in Puerto Rico and Mexico. (Paper presented at the 1962 annual meeting of the Population Association of America, held at the University of Wisconsin.)

<sup>14</sup> Recent Mortality Trends in Chile, Washington, D.C., National Center for Health Statistics, Public Health Service, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, April, 1964. *See also* Population and Vital Statistics Reports, 1961-1963, United Nations Statistical Office, and Summary of Four-Year Reports on Health Conditions in the Americas, 1957-1960, Washington, D.C., Pan American Health Organization, July, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> Morse, John W., Demography, Feedback, and Decision Making for Economic and Social Development, in Demography and Public Health in Latin America, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, Vol. 42, Part 2, 301-327, April 1964.

<sup>16</sup> For general guidelines on co-ordination of international assistance programs, *see* reference 3.

*The ideas expressed in this paper are based in part on the writer's experience when he was employed by a Federal agency in Latin America. The views expressed are the writer's and do not necessarily represent the opinion or reflect the policy of any governmental agency.*