Long-Term Solutions for a Short-Term World
Canada and Research Development

Ronald N. Harpelle and Bruce Muirhead, editors

The book provides a uniquely insightful account of Canada’s special responsibilities in the global context. It is a story few Canadians know but which needs to be told.

Yesterday’s poorer developing countries, notably China and India, and today’s most rapidly developing economies and are experiencing both the economic growth and the accompanying environmental and social problems. Canada’s role in supporting the research and development that is the key to the success of a knowledge economy. The experiences and needs of the development experts documented in this book demonstrate how Canada’s commitments made a disproportionate contribution to development and underwriting programs and policies of others.”

—The Honourable Maurice P. Strong, PC, C.M.G.,
Honorary Professor, Peking University

Long-Term Solutions for a Short-Term World demonstrates the complexity of the challenges that poor countries face and introduces readers to the concept of participatory research for development. Participatory research allows researchers to work with communities, governments, and other relevant stakeholders to identify and address issues that are specific to their situation in which the issue under investigation exists.

The book contains a collection of essays from development researchers and practitioners, each of whom is an activist who has made significant contributions to the struggles of the poor in their own societies. Together, these essays tell the story of how some of today’s most pressing development challenges are being dealt with through research, demonstrating how interdisciplinary and innovative approaches can be implemented in new and innovative ways.

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CHAPTER TEN

The Role of Private Academic Centres and Foreign Aid in Developing Social Sciences during Military Dictatorship

Diego E. Piñeiro

Until 1973 Uruguay had one of the best records of democracy in Latin America. Then, in February that year, after years of mounting conflict, the Uruguayan military staged a quasi-coup, backing the president, Juan María Bordaberry, and rapidly taking control of the various branches of government. In June, the General Assembly was replaced with a Council of State, and the president empowered the military to take whatever measures they deemed necessary to ensure public services were maintained. The backlash from various sectors of Uruguayan society caused the civilian-military dictatorship to launch attacks on trade unions, political organizations, and all those considered to be dissidents. Supported by the U.S. government, a twelve-year reign of terror ensued. People were assassinated, disappeared, indiscriminately arrested, and tortured, and the country set a record for having the highest per capita number of political prisoners in the world. Also during that time, academics at the Universidad
de la República, an autonomous institution, were forced either to sign a declaration that they were not a communist, or they were fired from their jobs. By the end of the dictatorship in 1985, hundreds of people had been murdered or disappeared by the Uruguayan armed forces and police, and approximately 15,000 people were imprisoned for political crimes. This chapter deals with my personal experience working in rural development and also examines the role of private academic centres and foreign aid during Uruguay’s difficult years of military dictatorship (1973–85).

Let me begin with some brief biographical information to provide context. Born and raised in Argentina, I could not be unaffected by the social and political conditions in which I grew up. I graduated as an agricultural engineer in 1969 from the University of Buenos Aires, and the university during those years was in a state of permanent upheaval, battling for its autonomy against the continuous military coups that considered university students to be at the heart of political unrest. When the military invaded and intervened at the University of Buenos Aires in 1966, I was one of the student leaders who opposed this extreme measure.

Upon finishing my studies I became involved in a Catholic movement working with peasants in the northern provinces of Argentina. When a group of peasants invited me to help them organize a peasant farmers union in a remote northern province, I did not hesitate to accept. I moved north with my family and I lived there for five years working as a counselor for the Formosa Peasant Leagues Union. In Formosa I helped very poor farmers with two of their major concerns, namely, resisting the encroachment of ranchers on peasant land, and seeking better prices for their main crop, cotton.

In 1976, for safety reasons, my family was forced to leave Argentina because of a new military coup and the cruellest dictatorship that the country has suffered. We crossed the border to Uruguay to stay with relatives despite the fact that Uruguay was also under a military regime. I began a new chapter in my life, fleeing one dictatorship only to find myself under the dark shadow of another.

Upon arrival in Uruguay, I was unemployed for several months until I was finally offered an opportunity to work in a private academic centre called the Uruguayan Information and Studies Centre or CIESU (Centro de Informaciones y Estudios del Uruguay). In order to work with the centre, I was required to prepare a project and compete for funding. Based on my past experience, I turned to small farmer’s organizations in Uruguay and worked on a project which was ultimately funded by an international funding agency. In this way I managed to stay on at CIESU and in Uruguay, which leads me to the discussion of Uruguay and academic life in the private research centres during its military dictatorship.

Uruguay’s longstanding democratic tradition was shattered by the military coup of 1973. Up until that time, Uruguay had very strong political parties, a century of uninterrupted democratic government with power rotating between the two traditional parties, an extended welfare state, and a relatively high standard of living. However, political struggle, a fading economy, a strong union movement that opposed strict economic “adjustment” measures, and the appearance of an urban guerrilla (the “Tupamaros”) finally led to a right-wing civilian–military coup.

Uruguay had (and still has) only one public university, the University of the Republic, which is governed by students, professors, and alumni who are democratically elected by faculty, students, and alumni for four-year terms. At the time of the military coup, private universities were prohibited, and even now 80 per cent of all university students attend the University of the Republic. Since the public university was one of the centres of civilian opposition to the right-wing government, soon after the military coup in June 1973, the university was taken over. In October 1973, the democratically elected rector and the deans were displaced; many were jailed, and others managed to leave the country. During the following months, political persecution, tight controls on teaching, budget constraints, and the closure of two departments—Sociology and Psychology—convinced many professors that it was time to leave the university.

The Faculty of Social Sciences in general, and the Department of Sociology in particular, developed relatively late in Uruguay. Sociology as a university specialization was only formally recognized in 1971 within the Faculty of Law, and very few professors were sociologists themselves. At that time, the country had only 11 academics with a background in sociology, and at the time of the military coup in 1973, only 12 sociology students graduated from the program. Clearly, sociology was in jeopardy as an academic field when the military took control of the university, dismissed dozens of faculty members, forcing many into exile and replacing them with individuals who were friendly to the new regime.

In 1975, CIESU was founded by a group of these sociologists who did not want to leave the country (and could stay), some of the new sociologists, and a group of final-year sociology students who had been expelled
from the university. As is the case in many of these endeavours, a leading figure emerged who became an essential reference point for the entire group. In this case it was Carlos Filgueira, former director of the then closed Social Sciences Institute (Instituto de Ciencias Sociales), aided by his wife, Suzana Prates, a well-known gender studies sociologist.

I should also point out that something very similar happened with academics who worked at the Economics Institute in the Faculty of Economic Sciences. Even though this faculty was not closed, many of its professors left the country, while others founded the Centre for Economic Research or CINVE (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas). Two years later, in 1977, another academic centre, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies or CIEDUR (Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios para el Desarrollo) brought together economists, agronomists, and sociologists. These three centres, together with the Latin American Centre for Human Economics or CLAEH (Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana) and the Pedagogical Experimentation and Research Centre or CIEP (Centro de Investigación y Experimentación Pedagógica) from the Catholic sector, formed a community of academic centres that were affiliated with the Latin American Social Science Council or CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales), which played a very important role in obtaining funding for its members during these years.

In 1976, CIESU could finally stand on its own, thanks to an institutional grant from the Ford Foundation. External funding became the norm for social science research funding in the following years and during the military dictatorship, since it was completely impossible to obtain either private or public funds nationally.

These institutions offered the only alternative to academic research, since the University of the Republic was controlled by the dictatorship. They organized critical thought and systematic research, and also became a shelter and a formative environment for both new and older generations of social scientists.

However, undertaking this kind of research was extremely difficult and required much ingenuity on the part of researchers. Surveys, interviews, and opinion polls had to be submitted to the police for authorization or were directly banned. Access to statistical information produced by official institutions was only available from published sources, and special permission was required to carry out recalculations or comparison of any statistical information. In these cases, researchers were required to explain for what purpose they would use these new calculations and comparisons, and very rarely were these types of analysis allowed. These limitations, combined with the scarcity of published statistical and methodological evidence-based information, oriented research towards theoretical analysis and case studies, which were easier to perform.

Dissemination of the results of social research and its products was also difficult. For the most part, it was done through self-edited working papers, since no publisher wanted (or dared) to publish books of that kind. Public seminars or workshops were seldom allowed. Often, however, researchers were invited to meetings in other countries where their research was published. So paradoxically, social research from private Uruguayan centres was better known outside the country than in it.

The productivity of these five academic centres was impressive. During the first years of the dictatorship many subjects of inquiry had to be avoided for security reasons. However, after the 1980 plebiscite, which rejected the military dictatorship's proposed modifications to the Uruguayan constitution, research restrictions gradually decreased and researchers could diversify their range of subjects. In this way, private academic centres were gradually able to build a network of social sciences researchers inside the country. This, in turn, contributed decisively to ending the personal and institutional isolation characteristic of social environments dominated by fear. With the collaboration of foreign funding agencies, this network established very strong connections and benefited from its participation in several international academic networks.

I would also like to comment on a frequent subject of discussion that arose privately among members of the social research academic centres during this period. The discussion centred on the reasons why both private and public international agencies were funding our centres. Some social scientists rejected this type of funding and directly refused to join the private academic centres. Others felt that it was probably not the ideal source of funding for the centres but realized it was the only means which would allow them to continue their work. They also thought that it was important to maintain a window open to social inquiry during Uruguay's years of darkness. Others had their own particular scale of values and accepted financing from some donors and not from others. To some researchers, funding agencies represented the democratic forces within developed countries, while, to others, this type of financial support was simply the mild face of imperialism. After all, the involvement of the U.S. government in aiding military dictatorships through its agencies had been amply proven and publicized by that time.
Canadian funding, and especially funding from IDRC, was welcomed because of Canada's longstanding commitment to democracy. During the dictatorship, IDRC assisted academic social science research in several ways, namely, by funding research projects, by inviting scholars to seminars and meetings in other countries, by organizing public seminars in Uruguay with the presence of foreign scholars and officials from IDRC, and by aiding in the dissemination of research findings through the publication of working papers and books. The regular visits that IDRC officials made to Uruguay were always welcomed as an opportunity to discuss what we were doing, and to receive information on what was going on in other academic centres. The visit that the former president of IDRC, Dr. Ivan Head, paid to Uruguayan academic centres (circa 1981) was extremely helpful in legitimizing our existence.

In 1980, the military dictatorship committed a gross error. It called a plebiscite to modify the Constitution in order to allow them to stay on in power. The population rejected the modification, which began a slow erosion of the military's political power. Gradually, political restraints began to weaken. At CIESU, this meant that we dared to start a social sciences teaching program. At the University of the Republic, this type of instruction continued to be banned; therefore we requested and obtained external funding to begin a very modest teaching program. We accepted approximately 10 to 12 students into a two-year program, and we managed to teach two groups of this size before the dictatorship ended. As civilian support for the military dictatorship gradually disappeared, elections were finally held in 1985. That same year, the public university was returned to its legal authorities, and social sciences teaching resumed.

In 1980, IDRC funded a project that I proposed through CIESU to study the different ways in which family farmers were resisting the adverse conditions brought about by a neo-liberal economic program designed by the military government. It was through this research that I was ultimately able to obtain a masters degree at the University of Wisconsin in 1984. Upon my return to Uruguay, I continued my research in rural sociology in very close connection with family farming organizations. In 1987, I began teaching in the Faculty of Agronomy; and in 1990, in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Since then, my work has been related to research and teaching in rural development, concentrating on subjects such as family farming, rural organizations, rural workers, and more recently, the environment and sustainable development.

In 1990, the University of the Republic founded the Faculty of Social Sciences of which I have recently been elected dean for a four-year term. With five departments, we teach the specializations of Sociology, Social Work and Political Sciences. Additionally, we have academic groups working in Economics, Demography, Economic History, and International Relations, while other social sciences are taught in the Faculty of Humanities. We also teach 15 programs at the postgraduate level, offering both masters and doctoral degrees. In 2010, we began a totally new specialization in Development that is an interdisciplinary endeavour between several established departments of the faculty. At this time the faculty has 3000 students and 300 professors, approximately 100 of whom are full-time. Each year, we receive approximately 800 new students.

Most of the scholars who found shelter in the private academic centres during dictatorship returned to the university and were the central figures who helped create the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1990. The composition of the Sociology Department in the Faculty of Social Sciences provides an example of how these returning scholars had been spread across the globe. At the university, professors are ranked in five categories from Grade 1 to 5, 5 representing the highest level achievable in one's academic career. At this time, the Sociology Department has seven Grade 5 professors, five of them coming from the private academic centres — three from CIESU and two from CIEDUR. The remaining two returned from exile in 1985. Among the Grade 4 professors, three of the five professors are young academics who were our students in the Social Sciences courses that we held in CIESU during 1984–85, who then went on to do their PhDs in Brazil and France, and then returned to the university. In the Political Science department, of the five Grade 5 professors, three come from the private academic centres. I believe it is safe to say that if it were not for the private academic centres and their contribution to the development of serious academic research even during a harsh military dictatorship, and their modest but crucial role in training new academics, the history of social sciences in Uruguay would be quite different at this moment. Partnership funding from private and public agencies such as IDRC played an important role in recovering social sciences in my country, and we are grateful for this contribution.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that by supporting private academic centres during the Uruguayan dictatorship, IDRC also contributed to the return of political democracy. Some of the academics who stayed in
Uruguay were sheltered in these centres, and later went on to develop high profile academic, business, or political careers. I am one example of an academic who took refuge in an IDRC-supported research centre, and I have achieved significant success at the Universidad de la República once it was restored to its former status. Similarly, I have many colleagues who have also found their way home and into positions of authority. The best example of this development is our former minister of Economics and Finance, Danilo Astori, who, before the coup, was the dean of the Faculty of Economics at the Universidad de la República, and who became the vice-president of Uruguay in 2009. Like I did, Danilo Astori took refuge in a foreign-funded research centre. There are many other academics in Uruguay and throughout the Southern Cone region whose work was disrupted by political events but saved by the farsighted approach taken by IDRC and other funding agencies that sought to maintain research capacity in fields such as sociology and economics.

Notes
1 This information, along with the following examples related to the private academic centres, is taken from Suzana Prates, Los Centros Autónomos en Ciencias Sociales en el Uruguay: Trayectoria y perspectivas (Montevideo: CIESU/EBO, 1987).

CONCLUSION

Long-Term Solutions

The complexity of the challenges of poverty in our rapidly changing world are daunting because solutions to everyday problems often seem to be just beyond the grasp of countries with so many needs and so few resources. Without the dedication of individuals like the researchers in this book, innovation and research into problems of poverty would be the preserve of scientists from industrialized countries of the world. The contributors to this book are people who in most cases have studied abroad but have chosen to return to their home countries where they live and work. In so doing, they have sacrificed the benefits of working with big budgets in state-of-the-art facilities. As researchers who have a profound understanding of the social, political, and cultural backdrop to the problems that are the focus of their attention, they are essential to finding lasting solutions. This is why their work is so significant.

The authors invited to tell their stories in *Long-Term Solutions in a Short-Term World* are activist researchers who have made significant contributions in their fields of study. Through their stories readers are introduced to the kinds of problems researchers from the developing world regularly confront in advancing science and effecting change in societies where resources are scarce. In each case, the contributors have been obliged to adapt their research to local conditions and developed methodologies to help them avoid obstacles particular to a society or place. Global