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# Introduction

## TERRY M. REDDING AND CHARLES C. CHENEY

As practitioner anthropologists, we are asked throughout our careers what exactly it is that we do. If you are a student, questions will revolve around what you hope to do someday with *that* degree. These earnest queries will come from acquaintances and strangers alike. You may even find yourself wondering from time to time about what your far-flung peers are doing. This book is designed to help answer these types of questions.

*Profiles of Anthropological Praxis* gives readers firsthand descriptions of applied anthropologists at work. What makes this book different from potentially similar publications about applying anthropology is that all cases presented here have been vetted by a Praxis Award Committee and ranked by a jury of expert practitioners as part of the competitive Praxis Award process. These chapters are based on the original award applications of the author(s). For all awards within the discipline, the Praxis Award receives among the highest number of applications; these cases are the exemplars, representing biennially the best in class.

The book serves as a sequel to *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action* (Wulff and Fiske 1987), described in the foreword. The two volumes differ somewhat in the organization and presentation of their contents, but they share the same applied anthropological orientation and thrust.

This volume draws from successful submissions for Praxis Award competitions between 2009 and 2019; the projects described have occurred in roughly that same timeframe. The volume editors served as competition chairs during all but the last award cycle, and we are pleased to note that all awardees in that span, either Praxis winners or honorable mentions, have contributed chapters to *Profiles*. Their descriptive narratives are about the roles the anthropologist(s) played in projects carried out in a wide variety of settings in the United States, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with scopes of work ranging in dimension from small community efforts to national and multinational endeavors, and which addressed a broad spectrum of human problems.

The chapters focus on the story of how and why the authors applied anthropological approaches and insights to solve these human problems and the strategies and methods they used and actions they took to ensure their projects were beneficial. The chapters for the most part share the same organizational components:

- Project background: The problem or issue to be addressed.
- Project description: The action designed to address the problem.
- Implementation and anthropologist's role: How the anthropologist(s) set about, either alone or as part of a team, to undertake the project and deal with ongoing situations and circumstances.
- Outcomes: What happened as the result of the project, and why.
- The anthropological difference: Why anthropology provided the best tools to apply to the issue or situation.
- Epilogue: When appropriate and available, many authors have included an update on events and results since the initial project was described in their award applications.

Based on the central concerns of the project chapters, they are grouped into six broad, topical sections that comprise the main body of the book: economic development, communities and the environment, cultural preservation, health promotion and management, sociocultural change and adaptation, and policy change. Not all projects fit neatly into a particular category. This reflects the nature of our holistic, multidisciplinary, broad-ranging work and highlights again why it is sometimes challenging to describe our discipline. Some projects involved millions invested by an international donor, while others came about on a shoestring budget by a lone anthropologist, but they share the common thread of being exemplars for the discipline.

The text and highlights of the chapters also reflect the subjectivity that comes into play in our work. The individual experiences and backgrounds, the different preferences and priorities, all shape the project approaches and outcomes that you will read about here. The projects demonstrate that there is no one "right" way to design and undertake a successful project. The multidisciplinary and holistic anthropological toolkit contains many options to deploy, depending on the unique circumstances presented. This is combined with choices anthropologists must make on the occasions for which there are no clear guidelines.

Back to that question of how to describe our work, this book demonstrates that we really do everything; thus, it can be something of a conundrum to adequately answer what it is we actually do. But whether a project is small or large, several months or several years in duration, involving factors that affect dozens or potentially millions of lives, the primary connection is the achievements

made possible through the proper application of anthropology to best address human problems. The "Anthropological Difference" sections of each chapter, which represent the real soul of the book, detail how this application often provides the most insightful and effective solutions to these problems.

You have likely already read the foreword by the creators of the award, Robert M. Wulff and Shirley J. Fiske, which reflects on the award's foundations. Be sure to also read the afterword by Riall W. Nolan, which looks to the future of the discipline. In between, you will find fascinating, insightful, and revealing accounts from anthropologists of how they go about their work. Applied and practicing anthropologists can have a substantial role in making the world a better place for us all. Our authors show you just a few of the possibilities.

Note: For those interested in delving more deeply into the history of the award, or to access the application materials, the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists website (www.wapadc.org) provides abstracts of all awards to date, descriptions of the award and process, and the application forms.

**Terry M. Redding** is currently a strategic communications specialist with a maternal and child health project funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). He received a Master of Arts in anthropology from the University of South Florida in 1998. In 1999, he contributed to and edited *Applied Anthropology and the Internet*, the first-ever, fully online publication of the American Anthropological Association. He joined LTG Associates, Inc. in 2000 on a USAID-funded population project and was then involved in a variety of research and evaluation projects before working for several years as an independent editorial and evaluation consultant. He has served as president of the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists, communications chair for the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, and chair of the Praxis Award competitions of 2013, 2015, and 2017.

**Charles C. Cheney** completed a dissertation on cultural change among the Huave Indians of southern Mexico and received a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1972. He then began what would become a career in applied medical anthropology by taking the job of "culture broker" between a south Texas pediatric hospital and the predominantly Latino population of the Texas-Mexico borderlands. After that, he served as director of sociocultural research in the departments of community medicine and psychiatry of Baylor College of Medicine, and later was director of program development for the National Association of Community Health Centers. Further, as an independent consultant, he has conducted extensive needs assessment and evaluation research into the provision of healthcare services to US low-income minority and immigrant populations for community health centers,

public health departments, and a range of federal health agencies. He has served as president of the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists, member of the board of directors of the Society for Applied Anthropology, and chair of the Praxis Award competitions of 2009 and 2011.

## References

Wulff, R. M., and S. J. Fiske. 1987. *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.