Chapter 5

Implementing the Work Programme: The Commissioned Studies

As with other multi-stakeholder processes, the success of the World Commission on Dams rested on its legitimacy with the stakeholders whose actions brought it into being, and to whom it would turn over its findings. Indeed, the final product's authority depended upon a good process that enabled diverse stakeholders to contribute. The implicit benefits of diverse engagement were two-fold: first, such a process would be better informed by integrating diverse subjective viewpoints. Second, inclusion would build constituencies for implementation.

In order to "get the process right to ensure legitimacy,"[1] the Commission committed to a set of guiding principles for its work programme. These included transparency, inclusiveness, independence, and accessibility. This chapter and the following chapter ask: How did the WCD put these principles of good governance into practice? What was the effect of these efforts on stakeholder buy-in to the Commission's work? We also consider the implications of this experience for the design of future processes.

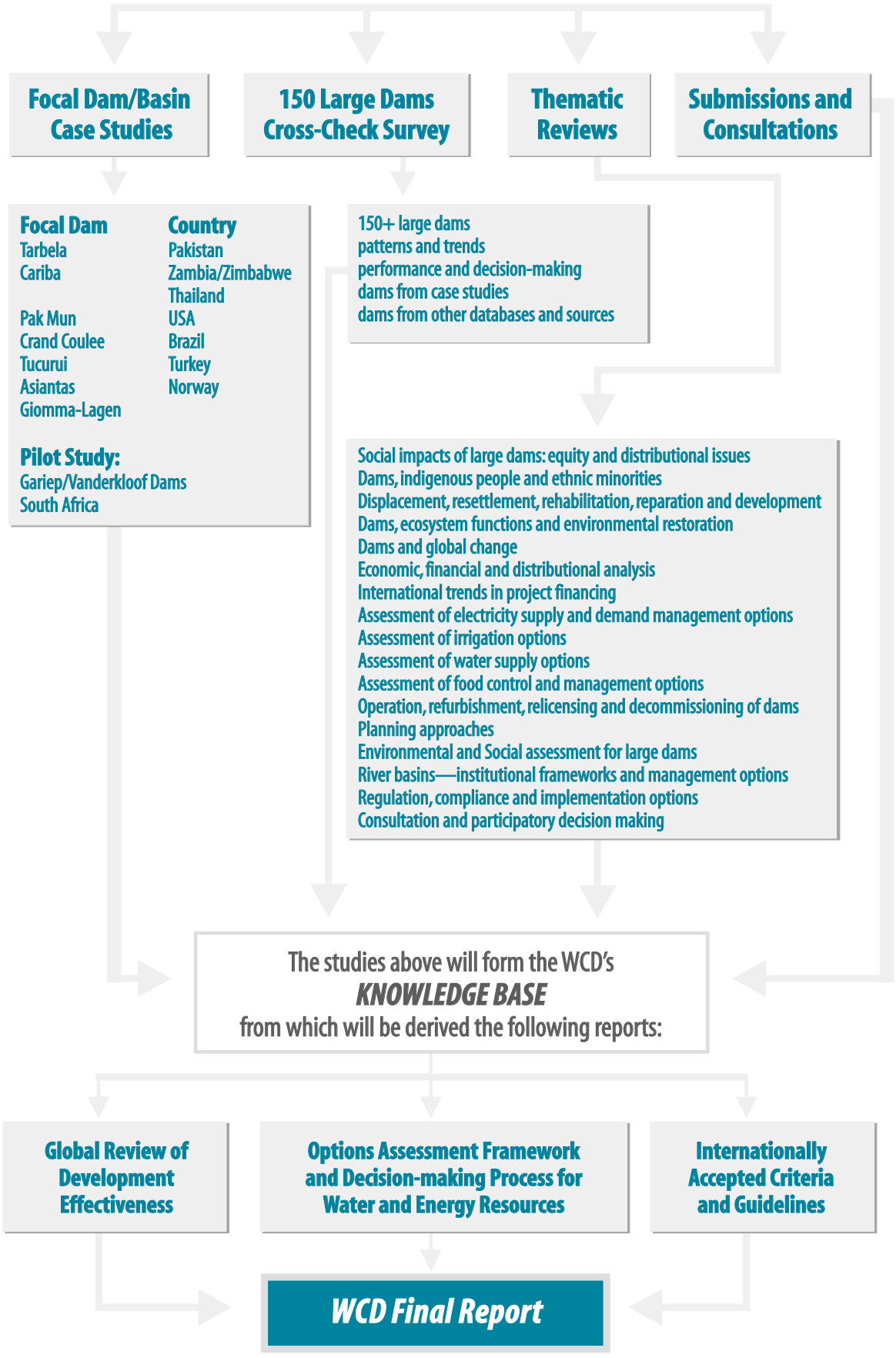
An Inclusive Approach to Knowledge Gathering

Participants at the Gland workshop articulated what the Commission should do, and how to do it. They called for a Commission that would make decision-making on dams more transparent and accountable[2] and that would model these values in its own practice.[3] The challenge of operationalising this mandate rested with a group of very diverse Commissioners, brought together through an acrimonious process. Forging a work programme to the mutual satisfaction of such a group brought greater challenges than if the Commission had been less heterogeneous and less closely tied to the interests in the dams debate.

The Commissioners wisely decided on a flexible work programme that created the political space for diverse views on dam planning and practice to emerge. They used the creation of a global "knowledge base," a central part of their mandate, as an opportunity to engage most major interest groups. The next section of this chapter details aspects of the work programme's design that were intended to capture these diverse views and engage a broad cross section of stakeholders in the knowledge-gathering exercise.

Defining the specific tasks and scope of the knowledge base was a daunting task. Given the huge number of large dams—45,000 in all—the Commission realised it would not be possible to analyse a statistically representative sample. Rather, according to early work documents, the Commission would foster "a structured, transparent, and inclusive dialogue around key issues and major controversies that have proved to be so divisive."[4]

The dialogue would be accomplished through four activities, which became known as the "four pillars" of the Commission's knowledge base and are detailed in Box 5.1.[5] First, in-depth case studies would illuminate large dams' performance. Second, a survey of 150 large dams would capture trends in performance. Third, cross-cutting issues papers ("thematic reviews") would highlight best practices and recurring problems from around the world, as well as alternatives to large dams in providing water supply, energy, and flood control services.[6] Fourth, public consultations would be held in all major world regions to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to share their views directly, and the public would be able to make



Box 5.1 The four pillars of the knowledge base

Source: WCD website, www.dams.org/about/workprog.htm (28 September 2001).

general submissions to the Secretariat, by mail, in person, or through the Commission's website. This framework emerged out of considerable discussion and after several alternative frameworks were considered.

The flexible work programme created political space for diverse stakeholder views.

The Commissioners did not review past dams experience with a specific yardstick for "development effectiveness" (indeed, it would likely have been impossible for the diverse Commissioners to agree on such a yardstick at the start). Instead, they encouraged stakeholders to air their own views on what constitutes development effectiveness, and they promised to weigh convergent and divergent views.[7] Kader Asmal's injunction for people to have their "day in court" in the context of one component of the work programme, the regional consultations, was therefore a suitable allegory for the WCD's work as a whole. Normative judgements about the justice of dam building and distribution of benefits were as welcome as technical cost-benefit calculations when it came to stakeholder consultations and general submissions.

Significantly, this approach gave many groups the hope that their views might prevail. If, by contrast, the Commission had tried to come up with a single yardstick for assessing dams, they might have alienated certain interest groups from the start. The Commission side-stepped the flaw in the World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED) study that had ignited NGO criticism. The OED Review had rated World Bank-funded dams on a scale of unacceptable to acceptable but had run into trouble because NGOs criticised the World Bank's evidence and OED's notion of "acceptable."[8]

"In many other areas, people feel excluded," said one Commissioner from government. "Here we have a unique opportunity, people feel included."[9] A community-based Commissioner rallied an NGO meeting with a similar statement: "I think we can reassure the communities that the WCD is demanded by the people themselves. You can tell them it's up to us, the civil society, as to how we use this process effectively."[10]

In spite of these benefits, it is important to note a discrepancy among stakeholders of what the knowledge base was meant to achieve. According to the Commission and Secretariat, the knowledge base was intended to both contribute to the Commission's learning from the past and to highlight current and future good practice in dam building, operations, and decommissioning. But government and industry actors, on the one hand, and NGO and movement groups, on the other, had fundamental differences about the appropriate orientation of the workplan. Government and industry actors thought the exercise should focus as much as possible on good practice in recent dams history. They were looking for changes that could be adopted relatively easily within given development frameworks. Non-governmental actors were looking for full documentation of bad dams practice that would support their campaigns for compensation for displaced people and their desire for large dams technology to be condemned in the future. This ongoing contestation would colour the next two years' work.[11]

The regional consultations gave people their "day in court."

The knowledge generation process for the WCD could have taken different paths. Early on, Commissioners discussed whether they could individually supervise independent reviews of dams experience in their regions[12] with light co-ordination by the Chairperson and Secretary-General, but the Commissioners rejected this model on the basis that their credibility rested on a uniformity of approach across case studies. This could only be achieved by having a substantial body of senior advisors in Cape Town to co-ordinate the studies.[13] Considering that individual Commissioners tended to raise suspicion when they appeared alone in the WCD context, it is also possible that such a decentralised model would have alienated key interest groups in the regions. Although rejection of this model implied hiring a larger Secretariat, it probably increased the inclusiveness of the process.

Some development practitioners and Secretariat members favoured a second model that involved undertaking a full-blown assessment of the development effectiveness of energy alternatives to

hydropower.[14] This approach would have placed the future of dams within the framework of global energy forecasts (as well as freshwater needs), and would have illuminated the comparative advantages and disadvantages of dams over other means of obtaining these services. Many industry and governmental participants remain displeased, to this day, that such a comprehensive options assessment was not undertaken. The Commission rejected this model on the basis that global forecasting was a niche occupied by existing think tanks.[15] Moreover, a technocratic approach of this nature would not have supported the commitment to inclusion and participation demanded by the Reference Group at Gland.

Participation in the Framing Process

The earliest expressions of the Commission's mandate called for a body that would undertake its work in a participatory fashion.[16] Yet, the convenors of any multi-stakeholder process must ask: When should we invite stakeholders to participate? Should the process be open to public comment at every step of the way, or does this make the transaction costs too high? This question applied at every stage in the WCD process: from the call for a World Commission on Dams, through the drafting of the final report. As shown in Chapter 3, an open dialogue among core stakeholders on the composition of the Commission proved essential to obtaining their groups' support for the two-year process. In the following process to shape and define the work programme, the newly formed Commission erred toward providing frequent opportunities for public comment.

The catch with the WCD's initial efforts to invite participation is that they were not sufficiently publicised to garner significant input. Because of funding constraints and a small staff in the early days, the WCD's invitations for public comment on the emerging work programme were largely disseminated on its website in 1998. However, this virtual forum was barely used and was consequently removed from the site.[17] Instead, comment came predominantly from networks of NGOs and professional associations who learned of the WCD from colleagues on the Commission and Secretariat and used these contacts as pressure points.[18]

It was not until the first meeting of the WCD's advisory Forum in April 1999 that a broader range of stakeholder inputs—through the Forum members and their networks—developed. During this meeting, the diverse members of the Forum became fully informed about the scope and elements of the work programme. By then, the window of opportunity was closing for comment on the framing of Commission studies. Of this consultation period, one senior Secretariat member noted, "One lesson is, don't assume that if you don't have comments on the work programme that they're happy with it!"[19]

One Forum member from a development bank noted that the process of consolidating the work programme had happened too fast for his colleagues to absorb and respond to the information. "[The WCD] needed time for proper outreach on the methodology, for country studies and finding support from all corners," he said.[20]

In fairness to the WCD, its budget was extremely tight for the first two-thirds of its history, with scarce funds for elaborate outreach. The Secretariat's outreach efforts were challenged by the amount of time that the Commissioners took to settle on the precise elements of the workplan (it took until December 1998 to establish the main cases and questions). Outreach was also slowed by fundraising. Difficulties in fundraising distracted Secretariat staff from their other work and delayed portions of the work programme.[21]

The WCD's experience highlights the importance of publicising the nature and aims of a commission at the outset, extending beyond electronic means as much as possible. The WCD made reasonable efforts to reach out in person. Future commissions should try to do even more to ensure they are reaching those without Internet access, and to ensure they win relevant stakeholders' attention early.

The Commissioned Studies: Case Studies

The Choice of Case Studies: A Political Balancing Act

The WCD's case studies were a key component in the Commission's Global Review of Large Dams. They were intended to give "the first integrated look at dams from the perspective of all interest groups, be it from the point of view of government agencies, local economists, the riparian habitat, or impacts on the diets of indigenous peoples."[22]

The main question facing the Commission in its choice of studies was: How would it access an adequate breadth of experience about large dams and their impacts? It was not simply a question of how to assemble a representative picture of the experience with large dams, but also of how to ensure that the Commission appeared neutral to outside audiences. The Commission did not wish to alienate any major groups with its choice of case studies.

Dam proponents feared the Commission would choose only "failed" dams as a way of tarnishing the whole industry.[23] Dam opponents wanted to make sure that the WCD recognised some of the grossest human rights abuses, dam-related corruption, and questions of ecological and economic viability around which they had mobilised in the first place. Would the Commission demonstrate its neutrality by choosing a balanced set of case studies of "good" and "bad" dams?

The WCD appeared to satisfy most major stakeholder groups who were then monitoring the process—the advocacy NGOs and dams interest groups—by selecting a set of case studies that encompassed diversity in geography, function, age, size, and catchment area.[24] The case studies are listed in Box 5.2.

Dam proponents feared the Commission would look only at failed dams.

An additional criterion for case study selection was diversity in political regimes, so that the Commission could study the differences in decision-making around large dams. *(See Box 5.3.)* However, in the pursuit of such political diversity, the Commission also wanted to avoid regimes so oppressive that it would be unable to consult with communities or raise transparency and accountability issues in the course of its assessment.[25] The WCD case studies did demonstrate political diversity, but restrictions on civil society participation in three of the countries (Turkey, Pakistan, and China) limited the vitality of discussions later on. The Commission faced a trade-off between analysing the diverse political conditions under which dams are built and its desire for a thorough study in each case.

Box 5.2

The WCD case studies[a]

Focal Dams and River Basins:

Brazil Tucurui Dam and Amazon/Tocantins River
Norway Glomma and Lågen River Basin
Pakistan Tarbela Dam and Indus River Basin
Thailand Pak Mun Dam and Mekong/Mun River Basins
Turkey Aslantas Dam and Ceyhan River Basin
United States Grand Coulee Dam and Columbia River Basin
Zambia and Zimbabwe Kariba Dam and Zambezi River Basin

Country Reviews:

China
India
Russia

Pilot Study:

South Africa Gariep and Van der Kloof Dams and Orange River Basin

[a] The Commission intended for the case study dams to be set in a basin-wide context, as explained in the WCD's Work Programme of February 1999, so that they might illustrate the cumulative effects of a cascade of dams or the effects of dams far downstream beyond the project site. This proved difficult to accomplish in practice, and the study of the Glomma and Lågen Basins in Norway was the only study that demonstrated cumulative impacts and decision-making across an entire river basin. (Interviews with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000 and 28 February 2001.)

Source: World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (London: Earthscan, 2000), p. 31.

The only major upset about the choice of case studies occurred when ICOLD, the main dam industry association, learned from an internal WCD document that Turkey's Ataturk Dam was on the shortlist.[26] Ataturk was a primary example of a "problematic" dam that the association feared the WCD would use to cast doubt on the profession as a whole. As some ICOLD members were already suspicious of the Commission, choosing the Ataturk Dam may have caused a serious breach with this group. The Secretariat hurriedly removed the dam from consideration.

Community-based organisations put pressure on the Commission to intervene in the decision-

Box 5.3

Guiding questions for the case studies

1. What were the projected versus actual benefits, costs, and impacts of the dam?
2. What were the unexpected benefits, costs, and impacts?
3. What was the distribution of costs and benefits - who gained and who lost?
4. How were decisions made?
5. Did the project comply with the criteria and guidelines of the day?
6. What were the lessons learned?

Source: World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (London: Earthscan, 2000), p. 30.

making related to controversial dams under planning or construction. This tension first emerged during case study selection but resurfaced many times during the process.

The Controversy over Assessing Current Dam Projects

Two community-based organisations pleaded with the WCD to look at their cases, in the hope that it would have a positive influence on their campaigns. The WCD declined to get involved because the projects were ongoing and the Commission judged their intervention to be politically infeasible. This wise decision enhanced the Commission's wider legitimacy.

The Brazilian Movement of Dam-affected People (MAB) encouraged the Commission to choose a particular dam where intensive civil society engagement had changed the features of the project.[27] They wanted to demonstrate what could be accomplished when decision-making processes were democratised. Meanwhile, the Cree Nation, a native people in Canada, asked the Commission to consider the Churchill Falls Dam in Newfoundland, which was being planned in the face of native people's dissent.

Many Commissioners feared it would be difficult to appear balanced and that they would risk alienating stakeholder groups. "The whole political space of the Commission would have been destroyed" if stakeholders had understood it to be adjudicating on current dam controversies, noted one senior advisor.[28] "One of the spaces the Commission has is to look at the range of experience of dams worldwide" without judging specific ones. Furthermore, most Commissioners believed that for the purposes of assessing development effectiveness in the case studies, it was necessary to study completed dam projects from which the benefits and costs already flowed, with all their foreseen and unforeseen impacts.[29]

In the case of the Brazilian social movement's and the Cree Nation's interventions, failure of the WCD to pick their choice of case study did not make these actors leave the process. However, the overall issue of whether the WCD would study current dam projects in depth continued to irk community-based and NGO stakeholders. Their dissatisfaction was understandable. Several groups with representatives on the Commission or WCD Forum were active in current struggles to block large dams or seek reparations from past projects. These groups justified their involvement in the WCD process with the hope that their commitments in scarce human and financial resources would bring progress in their specific campaigns.[30]

To satisfy these groups, the Commission had to seek less confrontational ways of allowing them to express concerns about current dam projects. For instance, stakeholders could make submissions to the Secretariat about current dam concerns and, in most cases, had the opportunity to present current issues at regional consultations (although this process was not entirely "free," as described in Chapter 6).

Stakeholders on the pro-dams side complained that the dams studied by the Commission were too old and did not adequately reflect the advances in environmental mitigation technology and compensation practices made in recent years. However, most of these complaints did not surface until after the WCD report was released. Ironically, NGOs' and peoples' movements also wanted the WCD to look at dams under construction in order to demonstrate what they perceived as the inadequacy of current decision-making processes and mitigation measures.

Later events supported the WCD's decision to distance itself from current dam projects. As documented in Chapter 6 *(see Box 6.3)*, the Indian government perceived the WCD to be meddling in the Narmada Valley Dams dispute when the Commission planned a field trip to the Valley. This

conflict damaged relations between the WCD and the Government of India almost irreparably. The Chinese government was initially involved in the WCD but later withdrew from the process. One of the reasons for withdrawal, according to the WCD, was that officials of China's Ministry of Water Resources mistakenly understood the WCD to be passing judgement on the Three Gorges Project.[31]

Future commissions and multi-stakeholder processes are likely to encounter similar tensions around the discussion of controversial current projects. They would do well to learn from the WCD's wisdom and refrain from intervening, or being seen to arbitrate in, specific disputes.

The Country Studies: A Second Best Option

The Commission sought to be as comprehensive in its knowledge base as resources would allow. In some cases, lack of government co-operation limited available data. According to the Commission's final report, the WCD sponsored country-level studies of large dams in India and China because these governments would not agree to in-depth studies of individual dams and river basins.[32] This alternative approach was borne of the political tensions described above. In the case of Russia, another major dam-builder, the Commission could not raise the funds for a case study and settled for a more modest briefing paper.

Click the ** in the text for information added after the release of the study, or see the end of the chapter (p. 71).

Almost nobody was satisfied with the results of the China and India country studies.** The Indian government's Central Water Committee was extremely critical of the study, because it felt its officials were inadequately consulted during the process. Civil society groups criticised the study for its lack of thoroughness and its slim treatment of options to large dams. Those in the international community who were knowledgeable about China's society and environment found little of use in the China study, which failed to address political economy issues in a significant way.[33]

The Commission's difficulty in maintaining the trust of the Indian and Chinese governments, a story in which the country studies play just one part, was to vex the Commission throughout its history. China's and India's distancing from the process held implications for the WCD's inclusiveness and demonstrated the hard reality of the political trade-offs the process faced. We revisit these questions in Chapters 8 and 9, where we explore broad stakeholder reactions to the WCD's final report, and the relation between the process and stakeholder willingness to promote and adopt the recommendations.

Difficulty in engaging the Indian and Chinese governments would vex the Commission throughout its history.

The Role of Case Study Teams in Creating an Inclusive Knowledge Base

The Commission instructed its case study consultants to seek quantitative and qualitative information to "assess and illustrate stakeholders' views."[34] To accomplish this, consultants' ability to seek out diverse views and garner the respect of different stakeholders was critical.

According to the WCD's final report, the Commission decided to employ "national teams of experts rather than using international consultants…while creating greater challenges in terms of independence and neutrality it provided the Commission with a deeper insight into the political, historical and cultural contexts for water and energy resources management."[35] Forum members welcomed the choice of national teams, for many members (especially NGOs) suspected that international consultants would treat local problems superficially. However, as the Commission acknowledged, there were significant practical challenges to assembling study teams that were politically acceptable to most stakeholders.[36]

The Secretariat sought study teams with multidisciplinary expertise and from a range of institutions in the relevant country to provide a multi-stakeholder profile. Most of all, the Secretariat sought consultants who were open-minded and had experience working in different sectors, such as government, NGO, and business.[37] This strategy had mixed success in soliciting information from the broader community of stakeholders. But the strategy was successful enough to suggest that the model is worth trying in future commissions.

Box 5.4

The World Commission on Dams and China

Initial efforts by the WCD and its convening institutions to court the Chinese government reflected China's dam-building status. The only ministry-level representative at the Gland meeting came from China. A representative of the country's Ministry of Water Resources was offered a place on the Commission, and Shen Guoyi accepted. The government agreed to sponsor the WCD.[a] Initial discussions took place between the Commission and the Chinese government about the possibility of undertaking a case study of the Danjiangkou Dam.[b]

It is difficult to find public sources of information about the Chinese government's view of the WCD. However, early articles by Chinese officials indicate that they welcomed these opportunities to summarise past experiences and study the dam-building practices of other countries. A working group of Chinese experts was established to provide opinion on the WCD's studies, write a report on China's position on dams and sustainable development, and prepare materials for members of the Chinese National Committee on Large Dams (CHINCOLD), who intended to participate in WCD activities.[c]

In time, China's engagement with the WCD tapered off. As the WCD's requests for technical data became more detailed, the government became less responsive. Almost one year into the process, China declined permission for the WCD to undertake a full case study of the Danjiangkou Dam.[d] Around the same time, a restructuring occurred in the Ministry of Water Resources that coincided with decreasing political support for WCD activities, including a suspicion that the WCD was against dams and that its discourse was incompatible with Chinese interests.[e] Ms. Shen resigned from the Commission, citing health reasons. The Commission downgraded its assessment of China's dams experience from a case study to a country study, and then to an external review undertaken by foreign consultants.

In the final analysis, of more than 180 consultants hired by the WCD in its work programme, only 3 were Chinese. There was no Chinese national on the Commission, Secretariat, or Forum following Ms. Shen's resignation. The government refused to release basic technical data on its 22,000 large dams, which represent almost half of the global population.[f] China's involvement in the WCD had effectively ended.

According to a senior Secretariat staff member, the WCD continued to send materials to their "many contacts in the [Chinese] system."[g] However, once the Commission lacked official sanction, its outreach to Chinese institutions was cautious and limited. China's representation at the WCD's East Asia regional hearing in Vietnam was extremely modest. In China, media reports came to be dominated by resounding approval of the Three Gorges Project provided by ICOLD engineers during their September 2000 Congress in Beijing. WCD Commissioner Judy Henderson's presentation to the ICOLD Congress at the time received scant attention.

The Chinese government's withdrawal from the process, although difficult to corroborate from direct sources, may be analysed within the complex framework of China's current political situation. There is growing awareness in China that more is at stake in the Three Gorges Project than isolated technical and social issues. Consequently, internal tension over the feasibility and possible impacts of Three Gorges has influenced the Chinese government's approach toward dams issues, both domestically and internationally.[h]

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[a] Meaning that the Chinese government provided an in-kind donation of officials' time to the data gathering process. E-mail correspondence from former WCD Secretariat member, "China and the WCD," 17 April 2001.

[b] Interview with Commissioner, 19 March 2001; WCD website, www.dams.org/about/wp_ov_anx1.htm (28 September 2001).

[c] Zhu Dangsheng, "Daba yu huanjing wenti" (Dams and Environmental Issues), Ministry of Water Resources document. Online at: www.dppr.com/txt/a02.htm (28 September 2001).

[d] E-mail correspondence from former WCD Secretariat staff, "China and the WCD," 17 April 2001.

[e] E-mail correspondence from former WCD Secretariat staff, "China and the WCD," 17 April 2001. Also, interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000; World Bank, internal document.

[f] Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.

[g] Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.

[h] See, for example, "Three Gorges Dam Project," Trade and Environment Database (TED) Case Study no. 264, American University. Online at www.american.edu/ted/THREEDAM.htm (28 September 2000). "Dam politics: How Three Gorges plays in Beijing," Asia Times Online, 5 May 2000. Online at: www.atimes.com/china/BE05Ad01.html (28 September 2001).

Source: Literature review drawn from Fredrich Kahrl, "Under the Shadow of the Three Gorges Dam: The World Commission on Dams and China." Background paper prepared for the WCD Assessment, January 2001.

An American team was the most successful study team in eliciting diverse views from the local and national experience and producing a report with substantially new information. The team leaders were civil engineers from two well known universities who were considered politically neutral by stakeholders at the study site. They sought a range of complementary expertise in economic, ecological, and social issues among colleagues in other university departments. Under criticism from at least one Commissioner for not having someone with practical experience on the team, they later added a consultant from Harza Engineering Corporation. The team also took care to survey local communities, including Native American peoples, for data on the demonstrated costs and benefits of the Grand Coulee Dam. Their report represented convergent and divergent areas of stakeholder opinion. A wide range of concerned local parties praised the report.[38]

An ambitious effort to involve a diverse collection of scholars and practitioners in co-authoring the case study in Thailand, including a radical academic, consulting engineers, and government fisheries staff, was difficult to manage in practical terms, perhaps because of the sheer range of perspectives.[39] The team nonetheless succeeded in producing a path-breaking report that documented how the Pak Mun Dam had affected fishing communities' livelihoods on an unforeseen scale and had failed to pay for itself. The World Bank and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT)—the Pak Mun Dam's backers—rejected the findings on the basis that the authors did not use an appropriate model to forecast the dam's rate of return. The Bank and EGAT never shared the relevant models with the WCD or its consultants as proof.[40]

In the Pakistan study, the study team came predominantly from one development consultancy, but local stakeholders disputed the team's political neutrality. Team members from Asianics Agro-Dev International had a variety of expertise, including irrigation, agricultural economics, sociology, and environmental science. One of the chief criteria for choosing the firm was its apparent independence from government.[41] However, civil society groups considered the team to be strongly biased toward the dams establishment.[42] To redress the balance, the WCD invited one of the main critics, a non-governmental advocacy group called the Pakistan Network on Dams, Rivers and People (PNDRP), to contribute staff toward the effort. They declined to join the analysis, but were instrumental in mobilising affected people and others to take part in the review meeting, which had a significant effect on the content of the final draft.

Based on this diverse implementation experience, was there a winning combination of characteristics in a case study team to ensure broad stakeholder acceptance and, hence, credibility for the Commission? The most accepted combination appears to have been an academic/research team that combined interdisciplinary expertise with overall political neutrality. Having some practical experience on the team in managing large dams or their impacts was necessary to gain the trust of practitioners, and having experience with, and appreciation for, project-affected peoples was necessary to gain the confidence of NGOs and social movements.

Review Meetings as a Means to Broaden Participation

A principal design feature for inclusiveness and transparency in the case studies were the multi-stakeholder review meetings. The first stakeholder meeting was intended to gather feedback on the terms of reference prepared by the Secretariat. The second multi-stakeholder meeting was intended to solicit comments on the consultants' draft of the case study and gather participants' oral and written views on the development effectiveness of the dam.

According to a senior Secretariat staff member, the case study meetings were the Commission's chance to get close to dam-affected and other local people. For example, the WCD arranged for Tonga chiefs from Zambia to make a long journey to attend a stakeholder meeting for the Kariba Dam study,[43] and it mobilised tribespeople on the Zimbabwean side and various NGO supporters.[44] The study teams who managed to mobilise credible community participation in these meetings earned the approval of international NGOs and agency personnel who were monitoring the process—and provided good publicity for the Commission. Many Forum members appreciated the WCD's efforts to go beyond the relatively elitist consultations of most regional and international policy processes. *(See, for comparison, Chapter 6, Box 6.1.)*

The inclusiveness of the dialogue at these review meetings depended on several factors outside the Commission's immediate control. It depended on the co-operation of the government and the overall enabling environment for civil society mobilisation and expression. Where the political conditions for NGO mobilisation were constrained, the Commission was unable to elicit a broad range of stakeholder viewpoints. For instance, the case study of the Aslantas Dam and Ceyhan River Basin in Turkey did not probe social and environmental issues in depth and failed to investigate the development benefits or losses to the displaced population. The country meeting to discuss the draft paper was dominated by the State Hydrological Works Department (DSI), whose officials refused to discuss resettlement and ethnic minority issues. Environmental and advocacy NGOs were entirely absent from the meeting, perhaps because of the weakness of the NGO sector in Turkey.[45]

Multi-stakeholder review meetings allowed communities to provide feedback on case studies.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's change from a nominal democracy to a military dictatorship while the WCD was undertaking the Tarbela Dam case study worried Commissioners. "In Pakistan, because of the military regime and the removal of the carpet of democracy and the denial of a healthy social and political process, we were very concerned about the lack of democratic participation in the Karachi [first stakeholder] WCD meeting," said one Commissioner. "Despite that, we decided to go ahead. While some serious problems prevailed, we were able to generate some open debate on a highly secretive and undemocratic process. Even the government and the army conceded that there was need for debate on large water management projects."[46] Similar concerns about participation under authoritarian regimes pervaded some regional hearings as well. These are described in Chapter 6.

The Commissioned Studies: Cross-check Survey of 150 Large Dams[47]

Transparency and Inclusiveness in the Cross-check Survey

The Commission complemented the in-depth case studies with a cross-check survey of the technical, social, environmental, and decision-making characteristics of 150 large dams around the world. The cross-check survey, as it was known, presented an opportunity to "expand on the case study dams and at the same time, to make [the data set] regionally reflective."[48] Although it could not claim to be statistically representative, the sample would "seek to generate broader patterns and trends" than was otherwise possible with the case studies.[49] Survey dams were chosen from the Commission's focal river basins as well as from existing databases (such as the World Bank's). Other dams were added to increase the sample's diversity. Through much of the two-year process, the survey was something of a poor cousin to other elements of the work programme: it had a low public profile and was slow to show results given the tremendous logistical challenges of gathering completed questionnaires.

The survey was an important source of independent data for the WCD's Global Review of Large Dams, as is evident in the Commission's final report. The primary method was a survey about the dam's technical, economic, social, environmental, and decision-making history distributed to dam operators, consultants, and research institutes. The survey did not have multi-stakeholder input built into its design, as with the case studies (resources did not stretch that far), but in the later stages of the work programme, the Secretariat conducted a limited review process to validate data and solicit wider input. The review process pleased NGOs that were monitoring the process, as it gave them a role. The Secretariat chose participants, mostly from local NGOs, to review 17 randomly chosen and 18 controversial dam projects in the total sample.[50] An activist NGO in Cape Town even became involved in contacting local NGOs in various countries and drumming up support for alternative contributions.[51]

Comprehensive responses to the survey were only achieved through an immense logistical effort by the Secretariat—a challenge that holds implications for future processes. Staff created software to help respondents complete the form. However,

many of the respondents had difficulty downloading attachments or were simply too worried about computer viruses to use the programme. In the end, the Secretariat faxed and phoned extensively to gather the data they sought. Language problems also posed a challenge, as few respondents had English as a first language and translation was limited to a Spanish version of the survey. Dam operators' sheer lack of information about the selected dams also challenged the breadth and excellence of the sample. As the Secretariat noted, they could have chosen the "largest most controversial dams, and got a lot of data. (But) the fact is that most large dams are less than 30 meters in height. The interesting thing…was to see the impact of all these smaller dams."[52] Some governments did not even know the co-ordinates of the large dams selected for the Commission's survey.[53]

A cross-check survey of large dams sought to reveal broad patterns and trends.

This large push to gather responses was worth the effort because of the data on trends it generated for the final report. Certainly, no smaller global survey would have passed the credibility test with stakeholders. Reactions to the WCD's final report, given in Chapter 8, include criticisms that the survey was too small. Stakeholders from government, in particular, hoped such a survey could encompass their country's best practices. Such arguments had less to do with the success of the WCD's stakeholder engagement—the focus of this assessment—than with the technical merits of the WCD's methodology, which were in this case constrained by time and funding. The Commission surveyed as many large dams as it had time and money for, given the Gland mandate for a time-limited process, the Commissioners' need to bring closure to the knowledge-gathering exercise, and the fundraising challenges. Future commissions might face similar trade-offs between comprehensiveness and time and funding pressures, depending on whether the issue at hand requires data to be gathered for the first time from diverse original sources. It is not clear that critical stakeholders would have been any happier with the results if the WCD had been more comprehensive in its cross-check survey.

Conflicts over Knowledge

Even if data management had not been an issue, the WCD would have been challenged to nurture relations with the development agencies, professional associations, and technical and research institutes that hold the fragmented and (for the most part) poorly organised data concerning the performance of large dams. Negotiations for data can take time under the most open political and institutional regimes. In the WCD's case, staff and consultants also had to overcome potential contributors' scepticism or disinterest in the Commission's work and persuade them that the WCD was a worthwhile enterprise for the future of the industry.

Among the most important repositories of information about dams and dam-related development were the professional associations: the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) and the International Committee for Irrigation and Drainage (ICID). Although these organisations eventually shared their data with the WCD, members remained sceptical that the WCD had any value to add beyond the professional datasets and standards their organisations had already developed. The contention over validity of datasets and analytic methods was captured by a senior ICID official's remark toward the end of the WCD's knowledge generation process: "We have the best databases on irrigation in the world. The WCD is not helpful, we are only in it [the Forum] for damage control."[54] Dam proponents unhappy with the WCD's findings would later use the issue of data validity and representativeness as a reason to dismiss the final report.

Governments were wary about the WCD's access to and use of dam-related data.

Governments also proved to be wary about the WCD's access to and use of material. Although the WCD emphasised that it was seeking to establish trends for the entire 150-dam sample, governments and utilities opposed public disclosure of raw data on individual dams. "Governments and utilities were worried that opponents would use [the data] against them," said the Secretariat member in charge.[55] In all, the WCD received permission to

make public the individual raw data on only 50 dams out of the eventual 125 in the full survey. These constraints, while representative of the political realities of data disclosure in many countries, nonetheless undermined the Secretariat's commitment to greater transparency.[56] The sheer difficulty of extracting geographically diverse data on large dams suggests that future commissions and multi-stakeholder processes must plan for a time-consuming effort if they are to consolidate even existing data on a sector.

The Commissioned Studies: Thematic Reviews

The Commission's Terms of Reference, as articulated in Gland, said the Commission must respond to a changing global context where there are multiple criteria for decision-making. In addition, the WCD was born of the growing appreciation that past decision-making has emphasised the benefits of dams and ignored or underestimated the costs of dam building. The WCD, then, was to focus on "those key issues around which there is greatest disagreement."[57]

The thematic reviews focussed on issues around which there was greatest disagreement.

To look at issues of disagreement while satisfying all stakeholders of their impartiality was a considerable challenge. The Commission, based on drafts prepared by the Secretariat, agreed to pursue 17 thematic reviews on a range of controversial issues around dams. These reviews were grouped into five clusters of issues: social, environmental, economic and financial, and institutional and governance issues, and options for water and energy generation. In the Secretariat's view, technical organisations, such as ICOLD, had already covered more technical issues related to dams, and focussing on areas of controversy would allow the WCD to pursue its comparative advantage. However, this approach quickly rang alarm bells with some stakeholders. Industry groups active in the WCD process felt that the thematic reviews' focus on controversial issues would be unlikely to capture adequately the full benefits of dams. From their perspective, case studies of individual dams would better allow for a balanced assessment of costs and benefits.[58] For their part, civil society groups were convinced that a truly independent and objective review of experience with large dams—whether on a sectoral or case study basis—would vindicate their views. Hence, the WCD's credibility as a fair and neutral body was at stake in how the thematic reviews were carried out. What quickly became apparent, however, was that a research process of this nature could not be entirely free of negotiation with stakeholder groups. The Commission was tested on how it managed the stakeholder debates that inevitably arose over framing and content of the thematic papers.

Stakeholders' Jostling for Position

The thematic review process was designed to incorporate a substantial measure of transparency and openness. The Secretariat circulated terms of reference to reviewers for comment and placed them on the WCD's website. Drafts of the thematic papers were circulated to Commissioners and external reviewers, including Forum members. The shifting scope and definitions of thematic review studies somewhat hampered these efforts at transparency. For example, the review of Regulation, Compliance, and Implementation was narrowed from a comprehensive review of existing criteria, guidelines, standards, and legal, policy, and institutional frameworks for dams, to a more limited subset of these issues based on discussions within the Secretariat.[59] Reviewers lacked clear and timely signals about the status of the studies because of uncertain budget allocation for thematic review studies.

In addition, achieving agreement on the basic research question for several thematics proved to be a politically charged task. For example, the Economic, Financial, and Distributional Analysis thematic was hamstrung by a debate over the relative merits of a focus on theory, practice, or a review of past performance. *(See Box 5.5.)* Stakeholder groups clashed over the basic methodology of comparing ecosystem impacts of dams against a base scenario of no dam on the same site in the Ecosystems thematic review, with industry representatives rejecting this notion.[60] In one of the most intensive thematic review processes, debate over the appropriate scope and framing question for the Social Impact of Large Dams review continued well into the drafting stage. *(See Box 5.6.)*

Resolution of suspicions of this sort required implicit negotiation, which operated through submissions and comments to the Secretariat on the draft review papers. In the case of the social impact paper *(see Box 5.6)*, a special workshop provided the setting for explicit negotiation. To the Secretariat's credit, there was considerable scope for commenting on the papers overall. A core set of stakeholders from industry and civil society took advantage of these opportunities and were extremely active in scrutinising and commenting on draft papers. The engagement of these core actors enhanced the Commission's continued legitimacy with broader networks.

Some stakeholders from industry and civil society were extremely active in scrutinising papers.

Not all stakeholders were equally well equipped to take advantage of this mechanism for feedback. The Secretariat perceived civil society groups and academics as being better able to network and react quickly than were stakeholders used to functioning in a more bureaucratic manner, such as dam-builders' associations.[61] Governments participated in the review process via individuals from various government departments. They did not establish a collective, organised effort to influence the framing of issues as did civil society and industry groups. As a result, government representatives had a less sustained and influential voice in shaping the thematic papers.

Commissioners reviewed the terms of reference for the studies, but the Secretariat was largely on the frontline and in control of the negotiating process. As a result, the credibility of the Commission as a whole was under-utilised. Had negotiation occurred through the Commissioners, the resultant terms of reference would have had greater credibility and been less subject to question later in the process. In the early stages of the WCD, the Commission intended to organise Programmatic Committees that would have allocated specific reviews to specific Commissioners. Under pressure of time and workload, this evolved into a looser structure in which Commissioners expressed an interest in particular thematics, but without a corresponding, defined set of responsibilities for their chosen areas. In hindsight, a more structured approach might have provided a better vehicle for Commissioner inputs.

Box 5.5

What is the "right" question? Economic, Financial, and Distributional Analysis

The experience of the Economic, Financial, and Distributional Analysis thematic review points to the importance of the research question in framing the final output. It also illustrates the negotiation that occurred over some thematic reviews.

The initial terms of reference called for a review of the capacities and limitations of cost-benefit methodologies. Even at this early stage, there were indications of discontent, mostly from civil society groups, with the phrasing of the question. The first draft of the review paper stuck narrowly to this limited scope. The Commissioners received it poorly, calling for more discussion of actual practice. Civil society reviewers argued for empirical evidence of the accuracy of cost-benefit analyses on dams. Consequently, a practitioner of cost-benefit analysis was asked to prepare a second draft with more discussion of practice. This paper, too, did not meet with the approval of the Commissioners, one of whom dismissed it as "half-naked!"[a] Academic reviewers declared this version a step back from the state of knowledge on the topic, and civil society groups argued it lacked a comparison of performance and projections. Finally, a Secretariat staff member prepared a third paper, drawing on earlier drafts and on submissions to provide empirical detail.

The reviewers' reactions were only in part dictated by the quality of the various drafts. Also at stake was the emphasis of the review and its implications for the various stakeholder positions. Thus, a narrow theoretical analysis of cost-benefit analysis would have illustrated the potential of the technique, but would have failed to reveal flaws in implementation. An assessment of practice alone would have highlighted procedural flaws, but would not have provided details on how past dams have performed. An exclusive focus on empirical experience would have allowed an assessment of past experience, but not shed light on whether the problem lies in flawed implementation or deeper problems with the approach. These alternatives were preferred to different extents by the various stakeholders, each of whom tried to advance their interests in the design of the thematic review.

[a] Interview with Commissioner, April 2000.

Source: Based on a review of the Secretariat's archival material by Luna Ranjit, WRI.

Box 5.6

Negotiation over content: the Social Impact thematic review

The thematic review on Social Impact of Large Dams: Equity and Distributional Issues required explicit negotiation among stakeholders. This thematic was one of three in the social issues category; the other two focussed on indigenous peoples and displacement. From the start, a problem of scope plagued this thematic. Initially, the paper was designed by the Secretariat to fill gaps left by the other thematics, notably downstream social impacts and gender impacts of dams. However, the Commissioners expressed their dissatisfaction with the patchy framework for the paper and sought an expanded paper that would address two concerns. First, some Commissioners argued that there was inadequate attention to the benefits of dams. Second, others suggested that the issue was not simply one of aggregate costs and benefits, but their distribution. Hence, they sought to locate social impacts within a framework of equity analysis.

Reviewers picked up these themes in a more partisan manner. Industry groups and irrigation specialists charged that the Social Impacts thematic paper did not address the social benefits of large dams at all and was flagrantly biased. This view had at least some support on the Commission; one Commissioner bluntly stated that the report's authors were "too far to the left."[a]

Resolution was sought in a special meeting convened by the Secretariat in London for reviewers to work through the outstanding issues. By all accounts, this was a spirited, but productive, meeting. Much of the discussion focussed on an effort to elaborate a framework for an equity analysis of the social impacts of dams. At this point, the scope of the paper had expanded considerably and posed a challenge of synthesis. As a result, the final document was segmented into sections on equity, downstream impacts, and gender impacts. The framework on equity incorporated into the paper was perceived to be a step forward by those who had espoused this argument. Proponents of more attention to the benefits of dams were, however, less satisfied, and this issue continued to be contentious through the life of the Commission.

How do we view such a process? As we have seen, reviews of controversial topics as part of a multi-stakeholder process will invariably entail a measure of negotiation. Indeed, the strength of the process lies in the opportunities for all sides to put forward their views and strive for common ground. As with other thematic reviews, the scope of the initial framing question proved to be central to the product's acceptability to stakeholders.

[a] Interview with Commissioner, April 2000.

Source: Based on Secretariat documentation and communication on the Social Impacts thematic; Interviews with Commissioner, 26 February 2001; Secretariat staff, 26 February 2001; and consultant, 2 March 2001.

Public Submissions: A Participation Channel that Needs Resources

The 970 submissions made to the WCD by a range of stakeholders from around the world were arguably the most significant casualties of the time pressure the WCD faced. The submissions were solicited both through the regional consultations and independently, and were intended to be a means of opening up the knowledge generation process. However, the mechanism for ensuring that submissions were incorporated into the thematic reviews was inadequate for two reasons. First, the timing of submissions and thematic reviews was not synchronised. The Commission was still receiving submissions long after drafts of the thematic reviews were completed.[62] Second, consultants were not always amenable to incorporating submissions into their work. Although Secretariat interns were allotted the task of processing the submissions for easy inclusion into thematics, it is not clear this effort met with success. Indeed, none of the consultants contacted in the course of this assessment acknowledged the receipt of submissions to incorporate into their work.

Public submissions were inadequately incorporated into the Commission's work.

In addition, the perspective of at least some of the submission writers and the consultants illustrated a clash in perspectives over the scientific nature of knowledge. The authors of the Ecosystem thematic, for example, sought quantitative knowledge rather than anecdotal inputs.[63] Thus, the Commission's efforts at democratisation of knowledge were affected not only by time pressures but also by opinions in the Secretariat and consultant body over the credibility of different forms of knowledge.

The Power of the Pen: Selection of the Research Team

As in the case studies, the mix of consultants chosen to implement the thematic reviews affected the WCD's ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders. The Secretariat recognised the importance of consultant selection from an early stage and called for a range of disciplinary ap-

proaches, institutional backgrounds, and political perspectives among consultants. In addition, the selection process placed a premium on geographic, racial, and gender balance. In general, the Secretariat strove for impartial writers. Where thematic studies were the outcome of a panel or task force, the Secretariat attempted a balance of perspectives.[64] As one Secretariat member put it, the consultant selection process mirrored the efforts to establish balance in the Secretariat itself. Putting together a consultant team was like establishing "mini-secretariats."[65]

There proved to be a number of barriers in translating policy into practice. First, the short timeframe of the Commission's work placed limits on whom the Commission could call upon. For example, researchers with full-time positions were unable to commit to the deadlines demanded by the Commission's workplan. The result was a smaller available pool of contributors, limited to short-term consultants, which potentially compromised the quality of the knowledge base. Moreover, in the eyes of some civil society Forum members, short-term consultants tend to operate within a mainstream development framework associated with large development bureaucracies, because the bulk of their work is for these bureaucracies.[66] Civil society members felt this perspective was carried over to consultants' work for the WCD and systematically skewed it toward a mainstream orientation.[67]

Given the short time frame, the pool of available consultants was small.

An analysis of consultants' backgrounds partially supports the view that they had a mainstream orientation. *(See Figure 5.1.)* The single largest category of thematic review writers was academic/research (36 percent), and the second largest was consulting (34 percent). However, these are slippery categories and only imperfectly reflect the issue at hand—a perception of mainstream mindset.[68] Moreover, some Secretariat members found that consultants gravitated toward standard research models based on their work for international agencies, and that it was a challenge to force consultants "out of their own little world."[69] In

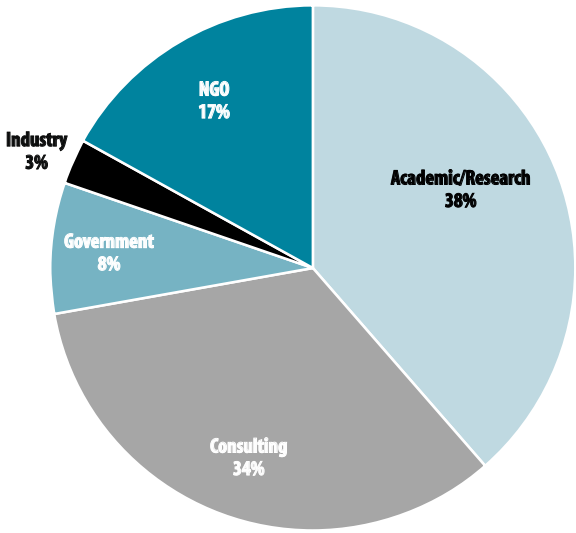

Figure 5.1 Consultant background (thematic review)

Based on information available from 84% of 120 total thematic review consultants.

Source: Data provided by the Secretariat.

summary, the consultants dissatisfied civil society groups engaged in the process and, at the time, tempered many groups' support for the process. Consultants' lack of familiarity with a broad, multi-stakeholder approach imposed an additional supervisory burden on Secretariat staff. Although the WCD's aspirations for consultant use provide a good standard for future processes, its experience demonstrates the practical hurdles involved.

Second, with the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the WCD both from the South, the Commission was finely attuned to the need for adequate representation from Southern countries on the research teams. Yet, this proved difficult to put into practice in the selection process. Researchers from the South were often national or regional experts who would have been hard pressed to conduct a global review. The requirement that work be conducted in English posed a further challenge to recruitment. Thus, 56 percent of the consultants used for the thematic review were from North America and Europe.[70] *(See Figure 5.2.)* Moreover, Commissioners were concerned that lead writers were disproportionately chosen from the North, and particularly from the English-speaking countries.[71]

Women were similarly under-represented in the consultant pool and hence in weaving their

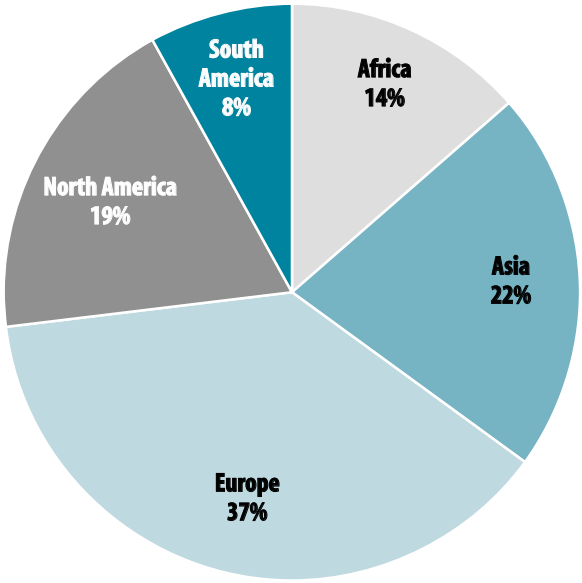

Figure 5.2 Consultant nationality (thematic review)

Based on information available from 61% of 120 total thematic review consultants.

Source: Data provided by the Secretariat.

perspectives into the WCD's formal knowledge base. A cross-cutting analysis of the Commission's consultants shows the low percentage of women consultants—only 25 percent of the total.[72] This is surprising given the Commission's relative emphasis on understanding the environmental and social problems associated with dams, rather than on the technical aspects of dam engineering, a more heavily male-dominated field. The Commission may have been stymied by discrimination (including lack of qualified female analysts) in the particular countries where it chose to work.[73]

Cross-cutting Issues

Assistant, Professor, Editor, and Referee: The Roles of the Secretariat

The work of the WCD, opined a Commissioner, is like cooking vegetables. In this process, the Secretariat and the Commissioners have distinct roles. "Once the vegetables are bought, cleaned, and cut into the necessary pieces, the role of the cook begins. The Secretariat is not the cook. We [the Commission] will decide the taste, the flavour, the aroma and the temperature … "[74] This metaphor appropriately captures the expected division of labour between the Commissioners and the Secretariat. It also, however, captures the ambiguity of the Secretariat's role. The Secretariat was a helper, but in its choice and preparation of the raw materials had considerable influence over the final dish.

In the design of the WCD, Secretariat staff members were the first to phrase the questions and themes that the Commissioners discussed. Secretariat staff wrote overarching background papers, and terms of reference for consultant papers. The Secretariat's work was not accepted unquestioningly. On several occasions, such as the social thematic and the financial thematic, the Commission exercised its right to send the draft back with instructions for a complete re-write. Although the Commissioners were highly dedicated, most also had other ongoing commitments and were unable to devote all their time to the Commission. In the context of limited Commissioner time and attention, the role of the Secretariat in framing issues gave them, as one Commissioner put it, the "power of the professor."[75]

In addition to framing debates, the Secretariat also exercised the power of the editor. The Secretariat bore the enormous burden of synthesising large amounts of carefully worded, and, in some cases, negotiated, text into brief summaries for the Commissioners' consumption. This is not to suggest that Secretariat staff consciously filtered information for the Commissioners' consumption; however, the summarising process inevitably required Secretariat staff to exercise their judgement of the relative weight of arguments and issues raised in thematic papers. Commissioners were acutely aware of the Secretariat's filtering role, and in some cases, sought to read unedited documents.[76]

The Secretariat was also a referee. In the negotiation process through which case studies and thematic reviews were defined, written, and revised, the Secretariat was the gatekeeper of the Commission's neutrality. This was a challenging task. Secretariat members had to ensure that all sides were represented in the review process and had to establish and defend the line between input and undue influence.

Finally, the Secretariat's influence was amplified by their pre-eminent role in consultant selection. As one might reasonably expect, the primary sources of candidate consultants were the staff members' own professional networks.[77] Commissioners and Forum members' suggestions supplemented Secretariat

selections, but primary control rested with the Secretariat. Indeed, some Commissioners made it clear that consultant selection was not their job and even viewed the active role of their colleagues as interference in the work of the Secretariat.[78]

The Importance of Accessibility: Language and the Internet

Although the country meetings provided communities with an opportunity for direct participation in the WCD process, these meetings also revealed one of the greatest stumbling blocks to grassroots participation: inadequate translation of documents from English. Language problems mounted a common challenge to full stakeholder participation in all case studies (except the United States) and limited the scope for meaningful local input. These problems were of sufficient magnitude to undermine the Commission's legitimacy with civil society groups in some case study countries. For example, an Urdu language summary of the draft Tarbela case study only became available to participants on the morning of the second stakeholder meeting, causing discomfort among local civil society participants.[79]

Language problems posed a challenge to full stakeholder participation.

The almost exclusive use of English to conduct Commission business, including negotiating terms of reference for thematic papers, discussing meeting agendas, and so forth, left some non-English speakers feeling that their participation was compromised.

> "Communication between MAB [Brazil's Movement of Dam-affected People] and the WCD's Commissioners and Secretariat was mainly through e-mail and postal mail because these are mediums in which one can think, prepare, and ask someone else to translate before sending the final message. This long process ensured that MAB's participation frequently lagged behind. MAB tried as best they could to keep up with the WCD's timing, but it was nearly impossible.
>
> [There was] another problem characterised by the movement's leaders as 'second hand information.' They were continuously reading documents translated by different people that could be excellent partners, such as NGO activists and academics, but were not dam-affected themselves. 'We were constantly limited in the process because we always had to analyse information from someone else's point of view.'"[80]

The Secretariat argued that these difficulties were both a function of time and budget. To keep their timeline on track, they were not willing to translate long case study drafts into national languages.[81] However, it could be argued that translations should be built in as an integral part of the time line and scope of work from the start. Given the broader historical tendency for global public policymaking processes to be elitist in nature and the thrust of the WCD toward greater inclusion, the problems posed by language issues partly undermined the Commission's larger effort.

For the process as a whole, language barriers, compounded with reliance on the Internet for communications, posed a double bind for participants in the South. On the one hand, electronic mail (e-mail) technology contributed greatly to the participation of certain groups and individuals from Southern countries in the Commission's work. The Southern members of the Commission itself were able to communicate quickly and efficiently with the Secretariat and fellow Commissioners by e-mail. Secretariat members attributed much of their responsiveness to Commissioner and Forum members' concerns—spontaneously and across multiple time zones—to their e-mail connectivity.[82] The technology also helped the Secretariat supervise consultants and elicit results within the ambitious timeframe mandated. On the other hand, the Internet sped up the process so much that, as the Brazilian example above illustrates, groups in the South were challenged to keep up. This experience joins a body of analytic material on multi-stakeholder processes documenting the dangers of relying too much—or exclusively—on Internet communication because of disparities in access.[83]

Conclusions

The investigative process inevitably affects public perceptions of legitimacy in multi-stakeholder

Strategies for building credible multi-stakeholder processes

- Adopt an explicit commitment to good governance in order to create the political space for engagement of diverse voices—this diversity is what demonstrates the value-added of the multi-stakeholder process.
- Adopt a work programme that allows stakeholders to propose diverse approaches and measures in order to foster inclusion.
- Budget sufficient time for concerned interest groups to become informed about the work programme and participate in its shaping.
- Choose local consultants rather than international consultants to engage in fact-finding wherever possible, but check their political acceptability with a range of local stakeholders to avoid disenfranchisement.
- Recognise that perceptions of the relative roles of the commission and secretariat in directing the process can affect stakeholders' trust. The commission should identify and take clear control over decisions that are controversial in stakeholders' eyes.
- Budget sufficient time and money to translate framing documents and synthesis outputs into other languages, especially for countries where significant consultation and data gathering is taking place.
- Do not allow the speed of Internet communication to speed up the pace of the work programme beyond the ability of non-connected, non-English speakers to participate.

processes that study past practice as the basis for forward-looking recommendations. Stakeholders ask whether the process is balanced, inclusive, transparent, and fair; and their reception of the recommendations depends on the answer being "yes."

Several major aspects of the WCD's work programme affected its credibility. First, the explicit effort to design good governance principles into all components of the work programme earned stakeholder trust. This commitment helped to engage interest groups in negotiation over the framing and composition of the work programme. In other words, the WCD's efforts to cast itself as an honest broker and open listener in gathering knowledge about large dams provided the preconditions for the broader stakeholder involvement that followed.

Second, having established that political space, the work programme became a platform for heated contention among interest groups, which vied for influence in shaping the way issues were framed. Did a dam damage an ecosystem irreparably? Did it create new, viable ecosystems of its own? It was over the phrasing and emphasis of such questions that interest groups pressured the WCD—and primarily the Secretariat as mediators—in the course of knowledge gathering.

This ability to influence the work programme was empowering for interest groups that had access to the WCD's work through their networks (contacts with either Secretariat or Commission members), their English language ability, and their access to telecommunications technology. For concerned stakeholders with more limited access to the Internet or English language, events moved too fast for their meaningful participation and they were reliant on information filtered through secondary sources. The process was disempowering for them. Even stakeholders who wanted to participate in the shaping of the work programme and had easy access to Commission publications found the time for digesting material and providing input too short. Their complaints led to time-consuming negotiations later.

The lesson for future processes is that ample time must be budgeted for informing stakeholder groups of the process' aims. For political acceptability, a core group of stakeholders (such as, in the WCD's case, the advisory Forum members) must have the chance to comment on the direction of the work programme. This accomplishes two benefits: groups can then mobilise their own resources to contribute to the work programme; and they can negotiate contested concepts early on, which reduces the need for expensive course corrections later.

Another lesson, arising from the overall negotiation of the work programme as well as the individual country and river basin meetings, is the need for more document translation. Although expensive, time and money for translations and interpretations should form an integral part of budgets and workplans in future processes of this kind. Because it was not practical to translate multiple drafts of working papers for stakeholder dissemination, a reasonable standard may be to translate essential framing documents and interim products into major world languages.

A third major area for consideration in future multi-stakeholder processes relates to the difficult interface of global forums with individual country politics. Future processes will face the same trade-offs as the WCD did, whereby the WCD sought to create the space for multi-stakeholder dialogue in each of its case studies. However, this aspiration limited the choice of countries where it could work. In the semi-authoritarian countries where the WCD chose to work (based on the dams population), civil society input was curtailed. Participants in future processes will have to choose between promoting dialogue and gathering data in countries with open political systems where inclusiveness will not be a challenge versus pushing the envelope on inclusivity in less open political regimes.

The explicit effort to build good governance in the work programme earned stakeholder trust.

Debates over which kinds of data belong in the knowledge base will play a prominent role in any future multi-stakeholder process with a serious fact-finding component. The knowledge gathering process often requires several contributors from one place to provide a range of perspectives and, therefore, ensure credibility. Political tensions around access to and privilege over scientific data posed major problems to both the comprehensiveness of the WCD's knowledge base and its acceptability to various stakeholders. In some cases, project owners were simply unwilling to share data because of security and other concerns. In other cases, the WCD chose local consultants who had access to official data but such consultants typically alienated civil society groups by neglecting qualitative and experiential forms of knowledge.

Finally, future processes will need a carefully negotiated division of labour between the commission and secretariat that takes fully into account interest group sensibilities about bias and dissipates tension with the fullest transparency possible. It may be possible for future commissions to identify the management issues that are especially sensitive to stakeholders and to have a greater say in them. In terms of the WCD, the work programme was so ambitious that the Commission had to delegate most of the direct fact-finding to the Secretariat and consultants, while it took the role of weighing the evidence and reaching final conclusions. Given the contested history of the Commission's formation, based on negotiation by interest groups, this delegation to the Secretariat and consultants (who were *not* chosen through such a shared process) concerned stakeholders who feared the introduction of bias. The neutrality of the Secretariat and consultant body remained a hot issue throughout the process, especially for NGO advocates.

This paragraph updates and corrects important information on p. 59 (Chapter 5) brought to our attention after the release of "A Watershed in Global Governance?"

Various sources expressed some criticism of the India country study, the nature of which reveals the political nature of the Commission's knowledge generation process. The Indian government's criticism of the study, in particular that it felt its views had not been incorporated adequately into the study, reinforces the perception of an ongoing contentious relationship between the Indian government and the WCD.* This history of contention illustrates the considerable challenge the WCD faced in maintaining a sufficiently open political space that allowed for all stakeholders to continue participation in the process. The government's view did not go unchallenged, however. In a systematic response, one of the authors of the India country study reacts to these criticisms, explores the context for the government's reaction to the report, and calls on the government to enter into an honest dialogue on the issues.**

Representatives of civil society groups expressed some reservations about the draft version of the India country study, on which a public consultation was held.*** That some members of civil society chose to voice some concerns is best read, in our opinion, as an effort to ensure that these concerns were as fully addressed as possible in the final study. When the final study was released, an umbrella organization of civil society groups in India active on dams issued a press release approvingly quoting the findings of the India country study.**** Once again, this sequence of events suggests that the knowledge creation process of the WCD was a challenging one, and had to of necessity balance strong viewpoints of contending stakeholders.

* Discussions at the Stakeholders meeting organized to discuss the India Country Study. The meeting was held at the Indian Institute for Public Administration on March 3, 2000. Also interviews with government officials December 5-6, 2000 and January 12, 2001. See also, Response to the Final Report: Government of India, Ministry of Water Resources. 1 February 2001. Available at http://www.dams.org/report/reaction/reaction_india.htm.

** Ramaswamy R. Iyer, "World Commission on Dams and India: Analysis of a Relationship." Economic and Political Weekly, June 23, 2001.

*** Discussions at the Stakeholders meeting organized to discuss the India Country Study. The meeting was held at the Indian Institute for Public Administration on March 3, 2000. Also, interviews with civil society activists, March 3, 2000.

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6. Sourced from internal Secretariat documents, "Draft Briefing Note 2, Some Considerations in Developing the Framework for the World Commission on Dams' Work Programme," May 1998; "World Commission on Dams Strategy and Objectives June 1998-June 2000," August 1998.
7. Work Programme of the World Commission on Dams, February 1999.
8. Patrick McCully, "A Critique of 'The World Bank's Experience With Large Dams: A Preliminary Review of Impacts,'" April 1997. Online at: www.irn.org/programs/finance/critique.shtml (28 September 2001).
9. Interview with Commissioner, April 2000.
10. Medha Patkar, speech to NGOs, December 1999.
11. Personal communication from Secretariat staff, 3 July 2001.
12. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, April 2000.
13. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, April 2000.
14. Early iteration of the workplan, thematic reviews, internal Secretariat document, August 1998.
15. Interviews with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
16. World Bank/IUCN, 1997.
17. Interview with WCD webmaster, November 2000.
18. Interview with World Bank official, 22 January 2000.
19. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
20. Interview with World Bank official, 22 January 2001.
21. Interviews with Secretariat staff, December 1999 and April 2000.
22. WCD website, www.dams.org/studies/ (28 September 2001). A comprehensive official version of the case study methodology is given on pages 350-352 of the WCD's final report.
23. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, November 2000.
24. World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (London: Earthscan, 2000), p. 351. Also, interview with and internal documentation from senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
25. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
26. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000. The Ataturk dam on the Euphrates River has been the source of tension between Turkey and its neighbours. The World Bank refused to fund Turkey's dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers due to water rights controversies in the region.
27. Personal communication with Flávia Braga Vieira, January 2001; also Flávia Braga Vieira, "Brazil's Dam Affected People's Movement and the World Commission on Dams." Background paper prepared for the WCD Assessment, January 2001, p. 10.
28. Comments by Secretariat staff during focus group session, 3 November 2000.
29. Comments of senior Secretariat staff to the WCD Forum, 5 April 2000.
30. For example, public plea by dam opponent at April 2000 Forum meeting for Commission to scrutinise Narmada Valley dams more closely. See also Braga Vieira, 2001, p. 8.
31. Public correspondence of Achim Steiner, WCD Secretary General to Jacques LeCornu, ICOLD Secretary-General, 18 April 2000. Online at: http://genepi.louis-jean.com/cigb/steiner.htm (28 September 2001). Steiner wrote: "We particularly regret the misinformation that has led the Ministry of Water Resources to assume that the WCD was going to produce a final report about the Three Gorges project. The WCD is neither a Commission about the Three Gorges Project nor is it a Commission about Chinese dams. Our work programme is intended to assemble as much information as possible about dams that would enable the Commission to develop its own, independent understanding of the key issues and lessons learnt. In that context we attach great value to learning about China's approach to dams in the context of water and energy resources management."
32. World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 351.
33. E-mail correpondence with staff of China human rights organisation, 30 March 2001. Interviews with participants of East and Southeast Asia consultation, Hanoi, 25–27 February 2000.
34. Work Programme of the World Commission on Dams, February 1999.
35. World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 350.
36. World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 350.
37. WCD Secretariat, "WCD Criteria for Selection of Consultants," draft, 14 October 1998.
38. Tundu Lissu, attendance at the second stakeholder meeting for the Grand Coulee Case Study, January 2000.
39. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000; interview with Secretariat staff, 12 February 2001.
40. See Pak Mun Dam case study on www.dams.org/studies/th/ (28 September 2001).
41. Interview with Secretariat staff, 8 December 1999.
42. Interview with private sector representative, 26 February 2001.
43. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
44. They also organised the Tucurui stakeholder meeting to ensure the participation of affected people, according to a senior Secretariat staff member in a November 2000 interview. Melchisedeck Lutema, attendance at the second stakeholder meeting for the Kariba Dam case study, 21-22 February 2000.

45. Elena Petkova, attendance at the second stakeholder meeting for the Aslantas Dam case study, January 2000. The Secretariat briefed Turkish environmental NGOs on the Aslantas case study in the scoping stage, but the NGOs were stretched thin by other commitments and declined to get involved, according to a personal communication from Secretariat staff, August 2001.
46. Interview with Commissioner, 6 April 2000.
47. Eventually, the survey covered only 125 dams because of incomplete survey forms.
48. Interview with Secretariat staff, 4 November 2000.
49. World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 353.
50. World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 354.
51. E-mail correspondence from South African NGO to World Resources Institute, May-June 2000.
52. Interview with Secretariat staff, 4 November 2000.
53. Interview with Secretariat staff, 4 November 2000.
54. Interview with senior ICID official, 6 April 2000.
55. Interview with Secretariat staff, 4 November 2000.
56. Interview with Secretariat staff, 4 November 2000.
57. World Commission on Dams, "Strategy and Objectives: June 1998-June 2000," Cape Town.
58. Interview with industry representative on the Forum, 6 April 2000.
59. Ramananda Wangkheirakpam, "Assessment of the WCD Processes on Thematic V.4." Background Paper prepared for the WCD Assessment.
60. Interview with Secretariat staff, 17 August 2000.
61. Interview with Secretariat staff, 17 August 2000.
62. The exception that proves the case is the "Financial and Distributional Analysis," which did manage to incorporate submissions only because the thematic review was substantially delayed. Interview with Secretariat staff, 8 April 2000.
63. Interviews with Secretariat staff, 3 November 2000 and 6 November, 2000.
64. WCD Secretariat, "WCD Criteria for Selection of Consultants," draft, 14 October 1998.
65. Interview with Secretariat staff, 13 December 2000.
66. This is a difficult charge to fully substantiate since the categories of consultant and researcher are blurred in practice. Thus, 43 percent of WCD consultants were identified by the Secretariat with academic/research, while 28 percent were termed consultants.
67. Interview with civil society representative on the Forum.
68. This was based on a categorisation of WCD consultants by Secretariat staff rather than on a self-reporting basis. These numbers should be read only as a rough indication since categories such as "consulting" and "academic/research" shade into each other at the margins.
69. Interview with Secretariat staff, 17 August 2000.
70. The Secretariat maintained records for consultants based on nationality and "place of work." Of the 65 percent who reported their nationality, 56 percent were European and North American. Of the 91 percent that reported place of work, 63 percent were European or North American.
71. Interview with Commissioner, December, 1998.
72. Based on an analysis of consultant data provided to the assessment team by the Secretariat.
73. Interview with Secretariat staff, April 2000.
74. Interview with Commissioner, August 2000.
75. Interview with Commissioner, 7 April 2000.
76. Interviews with Commissioners, 7 April 2000, November 2000.
77. Interviews with Secretariat staff members, 17 August 2000, April 2000, 7 April 2000.
78. Interview with Commissioner, 7 April 2000.
79. Gopal Siwakoti, attendance at the second stakeholder meeting of the Tarbela case study, January 2000; interview with Commissioner, April 2000.
80. Braga Vieira, 2001, p. 19.
81. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
82. Interview with senior Secretariat staff, 6 November 2000.
83. Anthony Dorcey, *Institutional Design and Operational Modalities for the Proposed Large Dams Commission*, Stockholm Draft, 6 August 1997 (mimeo): Personal communication with UNED Forum, 3 August 2001.