

# International policy processes: experiences and lessons

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## What are WDRs?

- Lack of clarity on WDR purpose. Marketed as "leading contributions to the economic development debate", but are they:
  - Global academic syntheses of knowledge on a topic
  - Bank policy statements
  - Bank institutional thinkpieces
  - Report team thinkpieces
  - Flagship reports for Bank self-promotion?

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## What is the WDR? Critical statements

- “[WDRs are] highly leveraged interventions in the policy markets” (Brendan Martin)
- “By not openly declaring its status, the WDR manages to subversively influence policy by being taken as both independent and objective, yet also mainstream and accepted” (Caroline Harper)

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# World Bank reactions (1)

- "WDRs are one of the Bank's critical instruments for dialogue with the development community at large. I have emphasized that we should not just be reciting generic answers but raising fundamental questions to which there are no easy answers"

James Wolfensohn  
Letter to BWP, August 1998

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## World Bank reactions (2)

- “Since you asked for my views ... first and foremost, I want to stress that I would stand behind any Report that I put my name to, and would not submit to any substantive editing I did not agree with”.

Ravi Kanbur  
Letter to BWP, August 1998

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# World Development Reports

- Over 100,000 copies circulated worldwide, including many for free
- Multi-million dollar budgets
- Significant promotion to and attention from the media, policy-makers and educators

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## WDRs: some lessons

- Questioning existing process and extracting public statements of intent helpful:
  - Power politics hard to remove but easier to reveal when outside stakeholders have clear standing
  - Final report insulated by controversy over resignation
  - Process improvements have not been maintained in subsequent years
  - WDR status still unclear: all things to all people?

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## Voices of the poor study

- 60,000 people consulted
- Synthesis of existing PPAs from 46 countries
- Consultations with poorer people in 23 countries
- Marketed as the unmediated voices of the poor at a global level
- Heavily featured in Poverty WDR and cited by researchers, politicians, etc,

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## Voices: concerns

- “Is *Can Anyone Hear Us?* The institution’s agenda made into global expression, or is it the other way round?”

Raj Patel, Anne Rademacher

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## Multiple filters

- “by the time the ‘voice’ reaches the global synthesis it has been processed through multiple layers of abstraction and mediation through the eyes, powers and agendas of first the field researchers themselves, then the editors of individual reports, then the combined layers of our research team, our coding and analysis, and the further analysis, writing and editing conducted at WB headquarters.”

Rademacher and Patel

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# World Commission on Dams

- Commission initiated in response to strong campaigning by civil society and well-organised networks, negotiations succeeded in removing World Bank control
- Beyond consultative/extractive approach to co-decision making about all aspects of the Commission

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## Types of international policy processes

- World summits or commissions
- Regional summits or commissions
- Development agency strategies
- Research by agencies, academics, thinktanks etc
- Activist organising and independent publishing

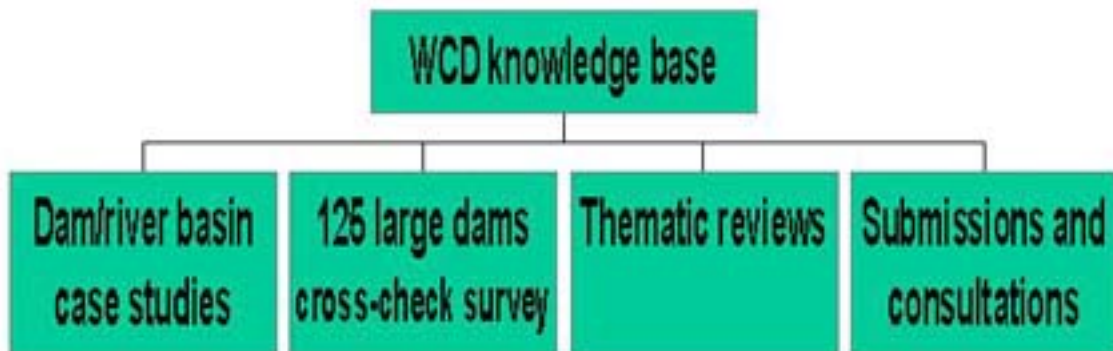
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## WCD: key elements

- Bank did desk-based cross-country number-crunching review
- Negotiations on independent review facilitated by Bank and IUCN
- 12 commissioners appointed: not 'broad middle ground worthies' but people active in networks
- Multiple financial sources

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# WCD information inputs



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## WCD key lessons

- Innovative process providing genuine opportunity for dam-affected people to get voices heard and participate in running a global process
- Resistance by the Bank or other agencies to implementing recommendations, but being used by researchers, progressive elements in agencies, and by campaigners worldwide
- Subsequent reviews under tighter Bank control using Eminent Person model (eg Extractive Industries Review)

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## Dangers of global narratives

- “The urge to capture and tell the ‘global’ story can be as much a process of silencing, selecting and retelling as one of trying to convey ‘local’ realities to centres of power. Ideally our project should not be a re-presentation and transformation of voices, but rather a struggle to construct institutional and political spaces in which the poor and marginalized can speak for themselves. No generalization without representation.”

Rademacher and Patel

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# Non-conclusive thoughts (1)

- Purpose and process clarifications and guarantees necessary
  - Co decision-making, not just extraction
  - Insulation from problematic institutional incentives
- Civil society groups concerned about legitimising processes which place their knowledge and experience at a disadvantage

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## Non-conclusive thoughts (2)

- Researchers and civil society groups can collaborate
- Easier for researchers with more of an ethnographic than a number-crunching approach?
- Easier for researchers not worried about reputational risks of allying with 'political' actors?

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# Truth to power?



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# BARGAINING POWER?



Heavily indebted countries have little bargaining power relative to the IMF or World Bank. These governments require a steady stream of grants and/or loans to survive and the IMF controls the stream. As head of the creditor/donor cartel, it turns the stream on or off.

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## Focus on World Bank

- Pre-eminent development knowledge actor
- Under pressure, has innovated in some approaches to policy processes, in particular the:
  - Poverty World Development Report
  - World Commission on Dams

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# Monopolising policy debates...

"[We need to] end the analytic near-monopoly of the World Bank on the details of pension reform, privatization, the ideal bank deposit insurance system, and so many other issues of economic and social reform."

Nancy Birdsall,  
Center for Global  
Development

"Often the inquiry into the present state of knowledge is not broad, or profound, enough to raise fundamental issues"

Prof. Yash Tandon, Director,  
Southern and Eastern African  
Trade, Information and  
Negotiations Initiative

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November/December 2001

 **NEWSLETTER** World Bank Group Staff Association

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## Freedom of Speech, Freedom Of Conscience, & the World Bank

**Ghani said he would resign rather than be silenced**

**T**wo Bank staff members, both intelligent, highly trained, and highly informed, have recently gone on leave without pay or been investigated and charged for publishing opinion pieces in newspapers. Yet the Bank's rules on the topic of external publication are unclear, and their enforcement varies widely. In some ways, External Affairs managers appear to be deciding who may be a bad employee and who not, based simply on their interpretation of heavy wording in management documents that do not even have the force of Staff Rules. The real rules seem hidden from staff, and they seem to run along the lines of: where did you publish your opinion, what's the political climate outside the Bank, how many friends do you have in high places outside the institution?

Neither staff members nor media for the Bank. First let us consider Abdul Ghani, an Afghan national who has devoted much of his life to trying to improve the lot of fellow Afghans. Ironically, he came to the Bank (having a teaching post at Johns Hopkins)

population look back fondly on the Taliban. To read the piece, go to <http://afghanistanarchive.files.com/afghanistanarchive.html?id=0109077002714>.

**Two Hours for Clearance**

When the Financial Times accepted the piece, it gave Ghani two hours to get Bank clearance. He asked EXT and his home unit ESD (Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development) and was advised that he should not publish the item. He then said he would resign rather than be silenced, and he and management agreed to an arrangement of leave without pay. Ghani wanted to comment on the crisis in Afghanistan regardless of the consequences at the Bank, and his opinion was

What rule did Ghani break, and how bad was his offense? Perhaps the official rule would be Staff Rule 5.03, which speaks of partisan political activities: "Staff members who are present in the course of their employment by the Bank Group in a country where they are not citizens may not participate in its political affairs." Even the applicability of this rule is questionable, though, since Ghani's opinion piece in the Financial Times did not mention any U.S. political parties, any officials by name or position, and was a wide appeal without partisan references at all.

**Defensive Interpretation of the 'Rules'**

What Ghani did do was cross External Affairs' "Media Guidelines" (available on

posed by people in EXT and in ways that are very defensive.

A long legal opinion written in 1995 by the Bank's general counsel tried to shed some light on the prohibition against political activities in the Bank's work. The opinion acknowledges, "The Bank's adjustment lending, its realization of the direct advance of many governance issues to the prospects of economic development, and its growing involvement in providing policy advice to its members made it clear [early in the Bank's operations] that the Bank cannot be completely isolated from political forces which affect its work and shape the attitudes of its members." Since 1995, the Bank has come down hard on issues of governance and corruption; certainly Ghani's piece addresses governance, and the corruption issue is implied.

**A Bank for MIT Press**

Let's turn now to the case with the less happy ending, and with even more ambiguity in the Bank's compliance: the case of William Easterly. A senior research officer

**Do staff check their civil rights at the door when they join the Bank Group?**

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## Importance of World Bank research (Survey of high-level policymakers, WB 2000)

- World Bank rated the most important information source out of 17 domestic and international organisations.
- 84 percent of respondents said they use Bank analytical reports
- the Bank's work seen as "technically sound, relevant and objective".

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