

Conference Report

Taking the WCD Report to the Next Level



Berlin, Germany, November 15, 2005

International Rivers Network

WORLD COMMISSION ON DAMS
WCD+5
A FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION MAKING
An IRN Report on the Fifth Anniversary
of the World Commission on Dams

IRN
International Rivers Network
Linking Human Rights and Environmental Protection

Convened by: International Rivers Network
In cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation

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I Introduction

Photo: Sebastian Schobbert



Large dams are among the most contentious topics in international development policy. In response to growing protests at dam sites around the world, in 1997 the World Bank and the World Conservation Union – IUCN founded the World Commission on Dams.

Patrick McCully, Executive Director of International Rivers Network, remembers: “We had worked for years to push the World Bank and other dam backers to set up such an independent review body, and then worked even harder to convince the commissioners of the reality of what dams have done to rivers and society, and to disprove the propaganda of the big dam lobby.”

The objective of the commission was to prepare an independent evaluation of the development effectiveness of large dams and to come up with recommendations for international guidelines for dam building.

Peter Bosshard, Policy Director of International Rivers Network, explains: “The WCD managed to find consensus through a process that brought conflicting interests – the dam industry, governments, environmental and social groups – to the table. It was hailed as a new model for resolving international conflicts.”

Published in November 2000, the WCD’s report, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making*, concludes that large dams can have important benefits, but that the price for

those benefits has too often been unacceptably high.

Dams have made an important and significant contribution to human development, and the benefits derived from them have been considerable. In too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment.

World Commission on Dams

The World Commission on Dams’ recommendations have gained widespread acceptance in the five years since the WCD released its final report. Deborah Moore, former WCD Commissioner, says: “The WCD framework has become the *de-facto* international standard for dams. Communities and grassroots organizations around the world are using the WCD report as a tool to change their own situations.” This positive trend was impressively documented at “Taking the WCD Report to the Next Level”, an international conference to mark the fifth anniversary of the WCD report in November 2005 in Berlin, Germany, organized by International Rivers Network in cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation. More than 80 decision-makers, activists, development experts and private sector participants gathered to discuss the progress in the large dams debate in the past five years, and to identify future actions.

II Conference Outcome

The conference sent a clear political signal: the WCD report is alive, being discussed and useful. Many decision-makers are interested in learning more about its adaptation to specific circumstances. The conference demonstrated that the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams are the most important environmental and social guidelines for dam building. The central actors in dam building have realized that large infrastructure projects are high-risk projects. Only the adoption of internationally agreed standards will enable a sustainable and socially acceptable approach to large infrastructure projects.

A new report published by IRN for the conference documents that in recent months, important public and private financial institutions have committed to the principles and recommendations of the WCD. Multi-stakeholder processes in several countries, including Germany, Nepal, South Africa and Sweden, have adapted the recommendations to their national contexts, or are about to do so.

Conference participants applauded these developments inspired by the WCD. However, some participants were disappointed about the lack of fully WCD-compatible projects. To date, hardly any such projects have been identified.

Professor Kader Asmal, former chair of the World Commission on Dams, explained in written remarks for the fifth anniversary of the report: “I believe that the WCD report offers a cookbook of sorts for how to make the right infrastructure choices to meet people’s needs. I say cookbook, because a good cook adapts the recipe to suit her or his tastes, to match the ingredients she or he may have available, to tweak the methods to fit his or her own cultural

or culinary preferences. I have said time and again that the WCD report is not a ‘cookie cutter’ approach that can simply be implanted into national legislation.”

In contrast to the positive developments exemplified by the growing recognition for the WCD recommendations worldwide, the World Bank – one of the original sponsors of the Commission – walked away from the WCD report once it was published, and adopted a new dam-building strategy that contradicts the WCD’s recommendations.

Ann Kathrin Schneider, Policy Analyst at International Rivers Network, said at the conference: “We call on the World Bank to revisit its dam-happy new strategy and follow the standards of the WCD. The World Bank’s new strategy completely disregards the WCD’s findings and the need to respect the risks and rights of affected people. It is at odds with a global consensus on water and energy that promotes decentralized, low-risk solutions.”

Civil society groups stressed at the Berlin conference that they look forward to collaborating with institutions from all sectors in implementing the WCD recommendations and finding sustainable solutions for meeting people’s water and power needs.

Barbara Unmuessig, a member of the Board of the Heinrich-Boell-Foundation, reminded the audience that: “The WCD recommendations are as relevant as ever before. However, public awareness and political pressure are needed to ensure that dam projects do not end in social and ecological catastrophes or as economic disasters. Governments and Civil Society Organisations will have the challenging task to remind the World Bank and other donors

“This conference comes at the right time: The last five years have shown that it is possible to implement the recommendations. Recent developments in Europe show very clearly that many decision makers accept that the WCD recommendations are the best global standards to minimise the risk of dam constructions.”

Barbara Unmuessig

Photo: Sebastian Schobbert



to use the recommendations of the WCD as a benchmark for the assessment of projects.”

Conference participants recognized that it will take more effort to motivate institutions to commit to the spirit of the WCD framework and to help them find practical ways of implementing the recommendations. Since the WCD report is not a prescriptive document that can be implemented by simple adoption of the recommendations, the goal is not to push for the absolute adherence to all recommendations included in the report. The discussions and

presentations at the conference suggest that the next step is to encourage project developers, financiers and governments to comply with the spirit and the most important conditions of the WCD framework. In the spirit of the Chinese proverb: “Those who say it can’t be done should not stop those who are already doing it.” Many participants of the conference committed to utilize the report to continue fighting for the interests of project-affected communities and the environment, and to put more effort into promoting water and energy development options that effectively reduce poverty.

III Key Statements

In her opening remarks, **Barbara Unmuessig**, a member of the board of the Heinrich-Boell-Foundation, stressed the importance of the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams and the positive legacy of the report. She pointed toward the advances that have been made in furthering ecological and social aspects of dam building since the launch of the report five years ago. “This conference comes at the right time: The last five years have shown that it is possible to implement the recommendations. Recent developments in Europe show very clearly that many decision

makers accept that the WCD recommendations are the best global standards to minimise the risk of dam constructions.”

Peter Bosshard, Policy Director of International Rivers Network, reminded the audience of the need to implement the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams in actual practice. He stressed that while some important institutions in the water infrastructure sector had adopted the recommendations, others were not willing to improve their practices by adopting WCD-type

social and environmental guidelines for dam building. Bosshard acknowledged the need for more clarity as to what an adoption and implementation of the WCD recommendations entails. He expressed the hope that the conference would clarify outstanding issues related to implementation and thereby help overcome the obstacles and challenges of the implementation process.

In a press event before the conference, **Frank Muramuzi**, Executive Director of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists in Uganda, reported on growing interest in the WCD in his country. He explained that in Uganda, the World Commission on Dams had inspired a national dialogue process on dams and development. Muramuzi said that the collaboration of government, civil society and the private sector in this national dialogue on dams was a remarkable achievement for the country, which has had divisive discussions over dams in the recent past. He added that the quality of the process and the mutual respect displayed thus far in the dialogue gave him great hope for the process to result in the collective identification of the best solutions for the development of the country. Muramuzi said: “We will continue to fight for the interests of project-affected communities and the environment. At the same time, we will cooperate with all parties that commit to the WCD framework to improve the access of Uganda’s poor to electricity and water.”

Deborah Moore, former WCD Commissioner, recognized that today, the challenges and opportunities lie as much with policy adoption as with on-the-ground implementation. Moore stressed the advances made and the difficulties ahead for implementation of the recommendations. “Communities and grassroots organizations around the world are using the WCD report as a tool to change their own situations. On the other hand, the lack of on-the-ground implementation of new non-dam

approaches recommended by the WCD in specific projects is disappointing.”

Ivor Godfrey-Davies, Head of Group Corporate Relations at HSBC Bank, presented HSBC’s freshwater infrastructure guidelines which are based on the WCD recommendations. Godfrey-Davies explained that the internal guidelines ruled out HSBC lending for dams that did not follow the WCD framework. He explained that after the adoption of the guidelines, the next step for HSBC was the training of its own staff, communication, monitoring, control and reporting of the implementation of the guidelines. Godfrey-Davies pointed out that stricter environmental and social guidelines, such as those promoted by the World Commission on Dams, were not seen as a barrier to business, but “an opportunity to seek out sustainable and profitable transactions.”

Alexander de Roo, former Member of the European Parliament, explained that not only the private sector, but increasingly public institutions had recognized the value of the WCD recommendations. In the case of large hydropower projects, the European Union decided that there was not only a great danger of those projects not contributing to sustainable development, but that there was an even greater danger of those projects causing considerable harm to the environment and affected people. In the framework of a new directive covering Emissions Trading, the European Union in 2004 has adopted the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams to ensure that these projects avoid harm on the local population and contribute to sustainable development. De Roo commented in Berlin “This regulation is a success and spells a dark future for large hydropower projects.”

Joji Carino, former WCD Commissioner and a member of the International Alliance of Indigenous Peoples, told those gathered in Berlin that the WCD recommendations had

“The international network of peoples and communities affected by dams and their allies, formed in 1997 in Curitiba, Brazil, was enormously strengthened by their participation in the WCD process and by ongoing local and national campaigns.”

Joji Carino

Photo: Sebastian Schobbert



strengthened global networks of communities affected by dams and gave weight to their call for a strong civil society role in dam-related decision-making processes. “The international network of peoples and communities affected by dams and their allies, formed in 1997 in Curitiba, Brazil, was enormously strengthened by their participation in the WCD process and by ongoing local and national campaigns,” she said.

Carino reminded the audience that progress on the ground for social and environmental justice in water and energy resource development needed to go hand in hand with progress at the policy front. She mentioned the importance of the WCD’s support for essential policy principles such as free, prior and informed consent for indigenous peoples, and recognition of entitlements and benefit sharing with directly affected communities. She said that the recognition of those principles by the WCD had greatly increased the space for affected groups in decision-making processes and the acceptance of those principles worldwide. Carino stressed that five years after the publication of the report, free prior and informed consent was a feature of national legislation in the Philippines, Australia, India, Colombia, Venezuela and Canada, and had been adopted by a number of UN bodies.

Alberto Calcagno from the Dams and Development Project (a follow-up body to the WCD) presented a new document, the *Compendium on relevant practices for improved decision making, planning and management of dams and their alternatives*. Calcagno explained that the compendium was an information tool consisting of examples of relevant and good practice of key issues related to the planning and management of dams and their alternatives in national and international frameworks. He stressed that benefit sharing and stakeholder participation were the top priorities, while compliance, compensation policies, outstanding social issues, social impact assessment and policies concerning shared river basins would also be addressed in the compendium.

Calcagno explained: „*For each issue, research will be conducted along national and international frameworks to find out whether and how they have been addressed. Positive experiences and lessons learned emerging from their implementation would be further sought and collected when available. The examples will be submitted to multi-stakeholder consultations to determine whether and how they will be compiled into the Compendium.*“

IV Statements by former WCD Commissioners

Comments by Former Commissioners of the WCD On the 5th Anniversary of the WCD Report

November 15, 2005

Prof. KADER ASMAL

former Chairperson of the World Commission on Dams¹
Minister of Water Affairs, 1994 – 1999;
Minister of Education, 1999 – 2004, Government of South Africa

“The WCD urges governments, NGOs, businesses, professional associations, aid agencies, utilities and affected peoples to practise what we preach because we preach only what we have practised ourselves. We listened to all sides. We reviewed alternatives. We balanced ideal against possible and made our decision to sign this report with confidence. We exclude only one development option: inaction. The cost of conflict is too high.”

I said those words as Chair of the World Commission on Dams to an illustrious audience gathered to celebrate the launch of our final report, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making*. I am pleased to note, five years later, that there has been much “action.” Indeed, the lifespan of this report has already been longer than most other international commissions, and it is gratifying that the ideas we put forward are still being actively considered, debated, and adopted. But, I fear, inaction and conflict are still our adversaries.

I speak from the perspective of having served in a Southern government, from the perspective of having had the responsibility of trying to meet the needs of millions of poor people with little access to basic water, sanitation, health, or education services. Yes, we need infrastructure of all kinds, which may include dams. But we need the right kind of infrastructure to meet our needs. And we don’t want to repeat the mistakes of the past, with the enormous human suffering, environmental

destruction, and financial indebtedness they have involved. My continent has experienced far too much of that.

I believe that the WCD report offers a cookbook of sorts for how to make the right infrastructure choices to meet people’s needs. I say cookbook, because a good cook adapts the recipe to suit her or his tastes, to match the ingredients she or he may have available, to tweak the methods to fit his or her own cultural or culinary preferences. I have said time and again that the WCD report is not a “cookie cutter” approach that can simply be implanted into national legislation. I have said that the 26 “guidelines for good practice” we recommended are not “Capital G” for written regulations, but rather “small g” for a set of best-practice ideas to follow based on our two-plus years of exhaustive analysis of what has succeeded and failed with regard to the planning, management and operation of large dams and their alternatives. It is a cookbook that can be adapted through consideration, dialogue and experimentation.

The South African multi-stakeholder process to consider the WCD report at a country level has demonstrated that the report provides a useful and practical basis for decision-making in the water and power sectors. More than 100 chefs representing different constituencies have successfully adapted the WCD’s recipes to the South African context, and have created a level of mutual trust that will allow them to resolve future problems in a collaborative spirit.

¹ See www.dams.org/commission/commissioners.htm for biographical information on the WCD Commissioners.

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Kader Asmal

It is positive that an increasing number of governments and international institutions have subscribed to the Core Values and Strategic Priorities put forward in our report. Yet, conflict and polarization remain around the best way to proceed to meet the needs of the billion-plus people who remain without access to basic water services. While we debate, financing and action on the ground stalls, and people suffer and die.

I personally found the process innovative and rigorous. I myself learned the tremendous value of bringing “stakeholders” together, of bringing all affected people and views to the table and crafting priorities and agreements for a better way forward. While my tenure as Chair of the WCD ended five years ago, my invitation still stands: to my colleagues in governments and development agencies, in the private sector and civil society around the world: Take Action!

I invite you to benefit from the collective ideas put forward in the WCD report, initiate your own national dialogues on how best to adapt and implement the ideas to your context, and focus on taking specific action to create truly sustainable human development for all.

Prof. JOSE GOLDEMBERG

Secretary for the Environment of the State of São Paulo
Former Secretary of Science and Technology for the Federal Government of Brazil

The statement I can make about WCD+5 is a personal testimony of something that happened recently which proves that our Report had indeed influenced national/international policies on building new dams. As you know, there is an urgent need to expand electricity production in Brazil and there are several groups pushing

a variety of options: coal, gas, fuel oil, nuclear biomass and HYDRO. All the fossil fuel options have serious environmental shortcomings.

To my great surprise (and satisfaction) I was visited in my office by a group of investors which tried to impress me on the advantages of the HYDRO option over the others as long as the WCD guidelines were followed.

This is a radical change from the posture of such investors in the past and a great recognition of the importance of our work.

Dr. JUDY HENDERSON

Former Chair, Oxfam International, Australia

The impact of the WCD report has been far broader than water and energy projects and has reached out to areas not originally envisaged in the establishment of the Commission. The WCD process of global multi-stakeholder engagement in policy development has provided a model for a number of different processes at an international and national level. For example in my own direct experience, the Global Reporting Initiative, a global process to develop an internationally accepted framework for sustainability reporting, has been modelled on the WCD. In addition, the principles developed through the WCD process of stakeholder identification and engagement, in particular the Risks and Rights approach to implementing stakeholder participation, as well as the principle of benefit-sharing, have been taken forward in the broader field of large infrastructure development and other global processes which have impacts on marginalised communities. I am sure that the influence of the WCD will continue in a very positive way for some years to come.

DEBORAH MOORE

Executive Director of the Green Schools Initiative, U.S.A.

Collaboration is key

Five years later, I am most gratified that the WCD strategic priorities, policy principles and, to some degree, the guidelines have become the de-facto international standard for dams, whether or not they have been formally adopted by all dam-building institutions. In fact, many organizations have adopted the report, are using its recommendations, and are creating national-level processes to consider the report, with more joining them. I have been pleased that communities and grassroots organizations around the world see that the WCD's report, which could be seen as a dry policy document, is relevant to their lives and are using it as a tool to create change in their own situations. And I am excited by several processes that are creating opportunities for the WCD's recommendations to be tested and implemented, including the European Union's law and "Linking Directive" establishing methods for how hydropower dams will be considered to receive "carbon offset credits" and the multi-stakeholder process in South Africa to adapt and integrate the WCD report into national policies.

Since the report's release, I am most disappointed by the lack of on-the-ground implementation of new approaches recommended by the WCD and by how quickly the open-minded spirit during the WCD process returned to polarization, with most of the interests retreating to the "absolutes" of their positions. My hope had been that the WCD's analysis – showing how large dams had not performed as promised and how enormous the potential was for meeting needs by improving the performance of existing dams and implementing non-dam

alternatives – would lead to major global support from NGOs, the private sector, development agencies, and governments for massive increases in investments for small-scale, community-based water, electricity, and agriculture projects and rehabilitation of existing dam projects.

While the U.N. Millennium Development Goals do include important targets for water supply and sanitation, why, for example, has the global water community not adopted specific and proactive goals and timetables for getting 15 million hectares of small farms under low-cost drip irrigation in 15 years, as the NGO International Development Enterprises has called for? And why, for example, does the World Bank rekindle its support for what are now superficially dubbed "high risk, high reward" dams, when the WCD report shows that time and time again these projects are "high risk, low reward" and when so many "low risk, high reward" projects go unfunded?

In my own work during the last five years, I learned from the WCD the deep meaning and value of bringing people together to collaborate on resolving complex conflicts. I helped facilitate the Global Water Scoping Process examining private sector participation (PSP) in water supply and sanitation, which led to the current country-based Global Review of PSP initiative. I am now leading the Green Schools Initiative to bring together parents, teachers, students, and education policymakers to address the environmental health and sustainability problems at schools in the U.S., which consume huge amounts of resources, expose millions of kids and adults to toxics daily, and operate under tight financial constraints. To be honest, the continued fighting about dams seems a waste of precious resources, time, spirit, and personal energy – much less a waste of rivers and people's lives – at a time when we could be collaborating on

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Deborah Moore

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Deborah Moore

bringing to fruition some fantastic, innovative solutions. The WCD process showed me that collaboration can work, that agreement on complex issues can be reached, but it takes hard work, trust, a suspension of cynicism, shared goals, and respect for the different skills people bring to the effort.

I encourage all of us to recognize that “we all live downstream” – that our collective health and livelihoods are inextricably intertwined – and I invite all of us to redouble our efforts to work together on mutually beneficial solutions.

MEDHA PATKAR

Narmada Bachao Andolan, India

Beyond the WCD: Towards a New Political Reality?

Five years have passed since the release of the Report of World Commission on Dams (WCD) at the hands of Nelson Mandela, in London, November 2000. The report also came out within days after the Indian Supreme Court had given a verdict endorsing the controversial giant dam the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP)- on the Narmada river, and allowing it to proceed ahead with some conditions.

The report also came out also within days after the SSP affected people, along with those affected by the mining, social forestry, had come to streets in Delhi to confront the then President of the World Bank, Mr. Wolfensohn on the Bank's role in pushing ahead the SSP. They got a promise that the Bank would not again enter into the project again. He too was present at the London function of realising the WCD report. I remember, at that time I felt that WCD would have little effect or influence to help the ongoing struggles against the unjust development.

Today, analysing the process of the Dams and Development Project (DDP) along with the situation regarding the large dams and the water sector planning across the world, I have the same feeling, yet with some difference and a hope. The Report was supposed to be the basis for resolution of conflict between state and its people on the issue of large dams, and laying down the options. But it has not played that major role. However, since the banks, builders, policy makers, planners and their plans have not yet changed, and since the conflict around large dams have further aggravated, this report becomes all the more important and relevant. Issues such as notions about water management, choice of technology, rights to and control over water resources, the unit of planning- river basin or inter-river basin, equity in water use, social and environmental impacts and rehabilitation, as well as the options assessment all are now recognised as critical issues, in the context of the natural disasters today than they were thought to be 5 years back.

In this context, the Report can be and should be much more important guide for the future. Its contribution and value can be two-fold: one, the process of participatory, democratic, multi-stakeholder dialogue in the WCD and after; and this should be advanced further at various levels - national, regional and local. Second, the WCD report that successfully brought together people and organizations at opposite ends of the dams debate, the potential which can be applied, perhaps with an interim process of further operationalization, to ongoing controversial dams and water conflicts in various countries. While in some countries, such as South Africa, Sweden and Nepal, the process of review and multi-stakeholder dialogue based on the WCD report has begun, there seems to be no strong case made as yet for its application to a crisis-situation. This shows a lack of political will on the part of various governments and states. The situation in a 'democratic' country like India, indeed, is very

serious. A nexus of vested interests, which have been pushing the flawed development paradigm, have ignored, criticised, reviled the report and questioned the very purpose of such an exercise! It is imperative that the Commissioners and the famous members join hands to take the Report to the civil society with vigour and urgency.

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Report's release, we must take stock of the situation and carefully counter criticism of the report. We must chart out a future plan of action to carve out the right space for our democratic dialogue and alternative path.

However, the post-WCD process is not fully carried out either at national or international level, which becomes a challenging task ahead. The national level multi-stakeholder dialogue or a similar commission- viz: a National Commission on Dams could go a long way. Some of the participant organizations active during the WCD process seem to be shying away, while some others focus on solely on the strategic priorities (SP) and core values (CV) proposed in the report. However, no stakeholders should be allowed to avoid the holistic framework of the WCD guidelines and recommendations, or hamper the spirit of the WCD. Those who still stand by the WCD process and future process of evolving the best option must take it on themselves to keep the spirit and substance of the report alive.

The World Bank also was a partner in the process since its inception and it could have used the opportunity to review its own policies and practices by using the WCD recommendations. But this has not happened and, in fact, there is further conflict since Bank is assisting projects in violation of the own policies and manuals and the laws of the land. Instead of facilitating dialogue and 'best practices' it has endorsed and strengthened the conventional development politics.

When the WCD was formed, there was already trend towards the overarching corporatisation of water and electricity sectors. The Report recommended further democratisation, options assessment and optimisation of the existing dams, which may lead to sustainable and equitable water utilization and development planning. But, today these are seen as impediments for the market oriented and market-driven policies, which the governments and global agencies propagate. The World Bank is one of the main actors in financing the privatisation, against which the people all over India have been fighting, asserting their rights and refusing merely to bear costs. It is this incongruity, which needs to be questioned and a firm position needs to be taken. Here the WCD Report falls short of realizing its full potential. My dissent note in the Report indicated this gap, which is still to be filled.

All the interest groups, partners, stake-holders, who carried forward the WCD process up to the DDP, must now strive to take the debate forward for the effective intervention to realize the process laid down by the Report. Engaging the civil society and the State, all of them should be equipped to deal with the areas of divergence in such matter, on the basis of principles enunciated through the WCD. The attempts should be not only to harp on the 'good practice' examples; the real test is how to deal with the 'bad practices'- and this question should not be pushed under the carpet. As long as water and water management is caught up in conflicting claims and demands, and the communities bear the impact, the WCD recommendations and vision must provide a way forward.

The WCD process, started with much hope, must not be allowed to end in despair due to increasing conflicts, injustice, destruction and despair. The principles and rare convergence of views must be used to usher in more egalitarian, democratic, just social and political reality.

“It is imperative that the Commissioners and the famous members join hands to take the Report to the civil society with vigour and urgency.”

Medha Patkar

“In addressing social and environmental costs, a future requirement should be making affected people project beneficiaries rather than merely trying to restore their pre-project living standards a strategy known to impoverish the majority.”

Thayer Scudder

Prof. THAYER SCUDDER

California Institute of Technology, U.S.A.

The commencement of Phase 2 of the UNEP Dams and Development Project (www.unep-dams.org) in February 2005 shows that the WCD process continues today and will continue into the future. Phase 1 began in November 2001 to promote a „dialogue on improving decision-making, planning and management of dams and their alternatives based on the World Commission on Dams (WCD) core values and strategic priorities“ (DDP website). A 13 member steering committee was formed to represent the various stakeholder groups and over time the original WCD forum was increased to over 100 members, including 55 from the initial 68 member WCD forum.

The UNEP Dams and Development Project is only one of a number of initiatives that have brought together people from all sides of the dams' debate in an effort to correct serious and unacceptable flaws that continue to characterize the planning and implementation of large dams. It is important to emphasize this point in addition to analyzing the difficulties still to be overcome. I would like to mention three initiatives in which I have been personally involved since the release of the WCD Final Report.

The first concerns the Nam Theun 2 dam that is currently under construction in Laos where the key partners are governed by the safety net policies of the World Bank and the ADB „with significant voluntary compliance with the World Commission on Dams guidelines“ (Volume 1 of the March 2003 Project Environmental Assessment and Management Plan). One requirement is that living standards of households undergoing resettlement must be improved; another is the creation of a Watershed Management and Projection Authority responsible for the conservation and development of the 3,445 km² upper catchment.

The second activity involved the World Bank's Dams Planning and Management Action Plan for improving the quality of the Bank's dam-related operations „by building on the core values and strategic priorities of the WCD Report.“ Actions implemented are important not just because of their utility for operations improvement but also because they at least partially offset the Bank management's negative assessment of the WCD report and their serious and unacceptable weakening of the Bank's safety net policies related to people resettled and indigenous people involved in Bank-financed projects.

Especially during 2002 and 2003, Bank task forces completed a number of WCD follow-on studies in two of which I participated. One demonstrated why it is so important for planners to consider the potential multiplier effects of large dams. The other resulted in an important publication on Stakeholder Involvement in Options Assessment: Promoting Dialogue in Meeting Water and Energy Needs: A Source Book which expanded the WCD rights and risks framework to include responsibilities.

The third activity revolves around Asit Biswas, President of the Third World Centre for Water Management and Chief Editor of The International Journal of Water Resources Development. Though a critic of the WCD process, Asit Biswas has been playing a very important role in organizing conferences and workshops for the improved planning and implementation of large dams that are intended to bring together senior officials in such organizations as ICOLD, IHA, and ICID with people like myself who have expertise relating to the ongoing unnecessary and unacceptable environmental and social costs of dams.

Looking to the future, large dams far too often are not only seriously flawed but are also unsustainable. Yet they remain a necessary development option, at least for the immediate

future, to meet certain basic human needs. That is a tragedy but it is also a fact. In addressing social and environmental costs, a future requirement should be making affected people project beneficiaries rather than merely trying to restore their pre-project living standards – a strategy known to impoverish the majority. And the most equitable and responsible way to help them become beneficiaries is to allow them the opportunity to become project shareholders.

In regard to environmental costs, mainstream dams should only be a last resort and where necessary should be designed, as should dams on major tributaries, to release environmental flows. As for civic society and especially national and international NGOs, they have yet to realize their potential for the capacity building that is essential if dam affected people are to become genuine participants in options assessment and should a dam be selected in its planning, implementation, monitoring and especially in its benefits.

ACHIM STEINER

Director General IUCN - The World Conservation Union,
Switzerland

In looking back over the 5 years that have passed since the launch of the WCD report three observations may be worth recalling:

(i) A global report of this nature cannot provide final answers to specific projects and local contexts. It should be judged by whether it has empowered and catalyzed local responses, dialogues and innovations. Judging by the number of countries and processes which use the WCD report even now the WCD clearly achieved its objective.

(ii) While many had hoped that the WCD process and report could resolve the dams debate this has not happened. But it has emerged and remained as a key touchstone for virtually all stakeholders in the debate. Had the World Bank chosen a different response strategy this could have given the report an even greater scope for conflict resolution - but it didn't - and that is an opportunity lost which many regret today.

(iii) The WCD's Rights and Risks approach remains one of the core concepts which merits further attention. The recent work by Bird, Mehta and Haas with IUCN is expanding this concept to include a third "R" - Responsibilities - should be developed further as it is of relevance to many development and infrastructure projects.

The WCD report is very much a "live document" in the fifth year as in this WCD process itself which continues to be cited and studied across the globe as our example for multi-stakeholder based public policy dialogues.

Photo: Sebastian Schobbert



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VI Conference Program

Expert Workshop

- 12:45 p.m. Registration**
- 1:15 p.m. Welcome and Introductory Remarks**
Barbara Unmüßig, Board, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
Peter Bosshard, International Rivers Network
- 1:45 p.m. The Recommendations of the World Commission on Dams: An Overview**
Deborah Moore, Former WCD-Commissioner
- European Emissions Trading and the EU Linking Directive: Implementing the WCD in Europe**
Alexander de Roo, Former Member of the European Parliament
- The WCD Recommendations and Private Banks**
Ivor Godfrey-Davies, HSBC Bank
- Discussion**
Chair: Daniel Mittler, Greenpeace International
- 3:30 p.m. Coffee Break**
- 3:45 p.m. Implementing the WCD Recommendations: Global Experiences**
Joji Carino, Former WCD-Commissioner
- Implications of the WCD Recommendations for German Development Cooperation**
Manfred Konukiewitz, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany
- The DDP Compendium of Best Practice of Dams and Alternatives**
Alberto Calcagno, Dams and Development Project, UNEP
- Discussion**
Chair: Daniel Mittler, Greenpeace International
- 5:30 p.m. Comments and Perspectives**
Barbara Unmüßig, Board, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
- 6:00 p.m. End of the Workshop followed by dinner-buffet**

Panel Discussion (English/German translation)

- 7:30 p.m. Global Standards for Large Dams – Quality Control for High-Risk Projects?**
Alberto Calcagno, Dams and Development Project, UNEP
Manfred Konukiewitz, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany
John Dore, The World Conservation Union
Medha Patkar, Save the Narmada Movement, Former WCD-Commissioner
Peter Bosshard, International Rivers Network
Chair: Christiane Grefe, Die Zeit

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International Rivers Network supports local communities working to protect their rivers and watersheds. We work to halt destructive river development projects, and to encourage equitable and sustainable methods of meeting needs for water, energy and flood management.

Conference Report:

Taking the WCD Report to the Next Level

Berlin, Germany, November 15, 2005

The World Commission on Dams' recommendations have gained widespread acceptance in the five years since the WCD released its final report. Deborah Moore, former WCD Commissioner, says: „The WCD framework has become the *de-facto* international standard for dams. Communities and grassroots organizations around the world are using the WCD report as a tool to change their own situations.” This positive trend was impressively documented at “Taking the WCD Report to the Next Level,” an international conference to mark the fifth anniversary of the WCD report in November 2005 in Berlin, Germany, organized by International Rivers Network in cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation. More than 80 decision-makers, activists, development experts and private sector participants gathered to discuss the progress in the large dams debate in the past five years, and to identify future actions.