

February 6, 2002

Dear friends and colleagues,

It has come to our attention that excerpts from our study *A Watershed in Global Governance? An Independent Assessment of the World Commission on Dams* (the Assessment) have been inappropriately used to question the quality of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) Review Paper entitled *Large Dams: India's Experience* (also commonly referred to as the "India Country Study"). We write to clarify our work, and to state unambiguously that it is grossly erroneous to lift elements of it out of context to question or undermine the India Country Study. Indeed, we are deeply distressed that our work would be misused for this purpose.

We recognize, as authors, that it is important to craft language that does not leave open the possibility for misinterpretation. This letter is an attempt to limit any further misinterpretation. In addition, as we describe later in this letter, we have added an addendum to the relevant text in the web version of our report, to minimize the chances that our work could be misinterpreted in the future. In the remainder of this letter we summarize our motivation for assessing the WCD, locate our comments on the India Country Study in context, and then address the concerns over the specific text.

We were motivated to undertake a comprehensive independent assessment of the WCD by its promise as a vehicle for the expression of greater democratization at national and global levels. Our overarching goal was to explore whether the structure and process of the WCD had lessons for constructive and democratic stakeholder engagement in contentious national and global issues, including, but not limited to, large dams. To fulfill this task, we examined the process around various components of the WCD's work, including Commissioner meetings, Forum meetings, regional, national and local consultations, commissioned research, and media outreach. In all cases, our emphasis was on how the Commission and its Secretariat designed and implemented these activities, with particular attention to the scope and process for more democratic stakeholder engagement. At no point was our intent to comment on the merits or demerits of individual comments made at meetings, or substantive research undertaken as part of the Commission, as they related to the debate over large dams.

Our paragraph on the India Country Study (on p. 59) was part of a chapter on "Implementing the Work Programme: The Commissioned Studies." Our primary intent in this chapter was to explain that the choice of what to study, and how to study it were, in themselves, politically charged issues. The decision to conduct country studies in some cases (China and India) was driven by the reluctance of the governments in question to accede to and participate in WCD studies of individual dams. It is in this sense that we refer to country studies as "a second best option"; second best, in the view of many stakeholders, to conducting studies of specific dams, as was carried out in other countries. The question of report authorship was also politically charged. We explored how study teams comprised of host country experts dealt with issues of independence, broad consultation and local knowledge with reference to studies of particular dams in the U.S., Thailand, and Pakistan. We note that Forum members, particularly NGOs, welcomed the choice of national experts, and we conclude that this aspect of the case study model was sufficiently successful to be worth emulating. We summarize these arguments here to demonstrate that the purpose of our work was to elucidate the political importance of decisions on what to study, and how, and the importance of these decisions for the ultimate democratic potential of the WCD. These lessons, we felt, would be useful for future processes.

Our specific text on the India Country Study should be read in this context. This text noted that officials of the Government of India and representatives of some civil society groups had expressed criticism of the India Country Study. These statements have been incorrectly used to call doubt upon the quality of the India Country Study. Specifically, the implication has been that because we cite these criticisms, then we, the authors, and our host organizations, the World Resources Institute, Lokayan, and the Lawyers Environmental Action Team, agree with these criticisms. This is incorrect. Instead, our purpose was to examine and comment on the politics and process of creating a knowledge base for the Commission, not on its content, a task beyond our competence and purpose.

What we sought to show was that the criticisms of the study by the Indian government were one piece of evidence in a larger struggle the WCD faced in keeping the Indian government engaged during the WCD process. That representatives of civil society voiced criticisms as well is best read as an effort to ensure that their concerns were fully heard and reflected in the study. This observation supports our broader point about the political context of knowledge creation in the WCD. If anything, that both government and civil society had critiques of the India Country Study speaks to the India Country Study's balanced viewpoint.

We sincerely regret that our paragraph on the India Country Study left room for misinterpretation. Our error was that we failed to make the above conclusions from the empirical material clear in our published study. This left room for others to form implicit, and incorrect, conclusions on our behalf. In addition, we did not cite our sources for criticisms of the India Country Study as we should have. Further, we relied on information and opinions on the draft version of the Study, and did not go back to update these impressions following release of the final Study.

In an attempt to address these problems, we have added a paragraph correcting the shortcomings listed above in the full version of *A Watershed in Global Governance?* posted on our website (www.wcdassessment.org). We recognize that this measure cannot fully reverse the faulty impressions that have been created. In conjunction with this letter, however, it is our hope that this measure will set the record straight, and minimize future misinterpretations of our work.

We remain proud of the broader body of work that is *A Watershed in Global Governance?* It is our particular hope that, despite the shortcoming discussed here, those who share our desire and commitment to create greater political space for the expression and realization of democratic aspirations will find information and insights in our report that hold value for our common work.

Signed:

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