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## Interviews and Panel Discussions

*Interviewees should be persons who are important stakeholders for evaluations and those with views of general interest to practicing evaluators. Interviewers and interviewees may be one person or several (i.e., one person may interview one individual or a panel of individuals, a panel of interviewers may interview one or more interviewees, and so on). Paul Johnson, of the U.S. Public Health Service, is coordinating this section. Suggestions for interviewees and interviewers should be sent to Paul at 740-G Humphrey Bldg., 200 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20201.*

# Methodology of the *World Development Report 1992: Development and the Environment*

MICHAEL BAMBERGER AND PAUL L. JOHNSON

Each year the World Bank selects a major development issue as the theme for its World Development Report (WDR). The WDR is intended to make a major contribution to the understanding of critical social, economic, or political issues and to present recommendations on how they can be most effectively tackled by developing countries and international agencies. The WDR attracts considerable attention among the international community, developing country governments, and the international press. Recent WDRs have focused on health (1993), poverty (1990) and the overall international development experience of the past 25 years (1991).

The theme of the 1992 WDR was the environment and development.<sup>1</sup> *Evaluation Practice* decided to examine the methodology selected to prepare the WDR and how effective were the social and economic indicators and other data sources used to support its primary messages. Interviews were conducted with the Director of the WDR, Andrew Steer; Shekhar Singh of the Indian Institute of Public Administration; and Christopher Herman of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. See the Conclusion section for “evaluation” lessons to be drawn from these interviews.

The purpose of the interviews on the WDR was to contrast the perspectives of three environmental experts who sit in very different organizations—the World Bank itself, the government environmental agency of a post-industrial nation, and a leading research and

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policy institute in a developing country. The interviews illustrate some of the key issues which arise when major development and policy issues are presented to different stakeholder groups. The respondents were selected to reflect the diversity of perspectives on the complex issues discussed in the WDR, and it is not claimed that their views are necessarily typical of their countries or organizations. In India, for example, while many researchers and academics share the concerns expressed in the second interview, the Government is adopting many of the suggestions proposed in the WDR and is working closely with the World Bank on pollution control and natural resource management projects.

In brief, the WDR reviews historical trends in the quality of environment, and examines the links between environment and economic and social development. The central message is that the period 1990-2030 will present an unparalleled environmental challenge as the world seeks to nourish an additional 3.7 billion people. It is estimated that during this period world food production will double and industrial output will triple (increasing five times in much of the developing world). The need to achieve high rates of economic growth to improve the conditions of the more than one billion living below the poverty line in 1990 will place tremendous pressures on environmental quality and the quality of life of major segments of the world's population.

While recognizing the enormity of the problem, the WDR argues that it is possible to promote policies of economic growth which will encourage government, private sector and consumers to make economically rational decisions which are at the same time environmentally sound. This can only be achieved, however, if policy makers focus on key issues such as the welfare of the huge population with unacceptable health conditions, and the millions of farmers trying to produce food in environmentally fragile regions.

The report concludes that governments must adopt an active role in controlling and regulating the economy to provide incentives for public enterprises, private enterprises, farmers, and consumers to make environmentally sound decisions. This means, among other things, that subsidies encouraging excessive energy utilization must be eliminated and pricing policies must make it economically rational for entrepreneurs to reduce environmental pollution and to conserve natural resources. Let us now examine the perspectives of our three experts.



**SHEKHAR SINGH—THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Coordinator, Centre for Public Policy, Planning and Environment Studies at the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi, India. Shekhar Singh has specialized in issues relating to the environment, particularly forestry. He has been Advisor on Environment and Forestry to the Indian Planning Commission, similar to a ministry of planning.

**Q:** What do you think were the main messages of the World Development Report?

**Singh:** My first impression was that the report doesn't clearly state what the purpose is. It is difficult for me to assess whether they had done what they had set out to do. I assume, however, that they are doing at least three things. First, the World Bank is putting forward a philosophy that things must be managed more efficiently. Some sections of the report are very good on this point, offering new ideas. Second, I believe the report makes available in one place a cross section of the experiences of different countries. There is a bias of repeating the experiences from those countries which are well documented [such as Mexico, Japan, Brazil, and Poland].

**Q:** What do you think were the main messages for India?

**Singh:** The message, so to speak, of the World Development Report was somewhat confused. Both confused and confusing. To people living in India and working on environmental issues, one of the major concerns is how does one find an alternative path of development which solves the major problems of underdevelopment, things like poverty and injustice, but without replacing a less serious problem with something more serious. This fundamental issue was not addressed in the report.

The one clear message in the report is the emphasis on achieving efficiency though technological innovation. That is, doing things better. For example, having cars which pollute less and less may be important, but we don't speak about having less and less cars. So if you keep having more and more cars which pollute less and less, in a huge country like India you are still bound to come to a point where even the less polluting cars are going to be too many for the environment and will lead to an environmental disaster. Unless you start designing cars which actually improve air quality. But we don't seem to be talking about that.

It seems that the report wasn't fundamentally relevant to major concerns in India. The World Bank didn't use its vast experience and resources to say there is another way of going down the road to development where you don't repeat the same mistakes made by western countries.

I think one would have liked to see much more on the politics of environment. There is very little on this question which is unfortunate because everybody acknowledges that the environmental debates are more about politics than about technology

**Q:** What do you see as the main strengths and weakness of the methodology used in the World Development Report?

**Singh:** This is difficult to answer because there is no clear statement of the methodology. In fact, telling you very frankly, I am not even sure if it is an evaluation report at all. It appears more to me as a statement of an environmental

development ideology backed by a huge lot of data, statistics, some arguments, and some experience. It doesn't seem to me to be an evaluation process at all.

**Q:** Are there any evaluation approaches used in India or in other Asian countries that the World Development Report should have incorporated?

**Singh:** One thing happening in India regarding these evaluations is that we are trying to argue that cost-benefit analysis is not sufficient. We must have what we like to call "class benefit" analysis. Sometimes the results of a cost-benefit analysis are positive, but the costs are actually born by one social class and the benefits go to another class. Suppose there is a project which costs twice as much as the benefits, but the costs are paid by the rich and the benefits go to the poor—that is what we call a "class benefit" analysis.

The report's methodology doesn't tackle a crucial question: How to incorporate in the planning process, elements such as social well-being and community cultural values? They are often best left without being translated into financial or economic terms. I think the methodology of reducing everything to financial values is an example of the kind of approach we are trying to fight in India. This is the sort of methodology which says: Here is a forest; there are people living in that forest but you could put that forest to more efficient use if you submerge it to build a dam. After all, you can produce so many units of electricity which creates so much new industry. And when you say: What about the tribal peoples? The response is: Somebody has to pay the price for the development.

So I think the report is too efficiency oriented, making environmental conservation economically attractive. My argument is that economic pricing is an artificial function. Assumptions and price estimates can easily be changed to ensure a positive cost-benefit ratio—particularly for social-oriented projects such as those in forestry development. I have seen projects in India where the estimated benefits were simply artificially increased four or five times once it was discovered that the cost estimates were much higher than expected. Economics, I believe, is the science which can only value things which are inputs into, or outputs of, an economic process. It cannot adequately value "goods" and "services" which are independent of the economic process and yet crucial to the well being of the human society or the earth.

**Q:** What would you have liked to see included in the report?

**Singh:** One of the most important issues which is not addressed is forest and wildlife conservation. I think in India the number one problem is seen as deforestation, because it affects the soil, the land, the water regimes, the tribal peoples, and access to fuel and fodder. And therefore I wonder at a report which does not adequately deal with the forests issue.

Another issue which is not adequately addressed is the question of people's participation which is crucial for countries like India.

**Q:** Were there any of the conclusions you would disagree with?

**Singh:** Parts of the report which dealt with global issues are very patronizing. For example (p. 153) "The common good will not be served if international issues that are mainly of concern to rich countries are allowed to divert attention and resources from these pressing problems. In addition, if the poor are to meet the environmental concerns of the rich countries, they may reasonably

expect to be paid for doing so.” The report assumes that only rich countries are concerned about ozone depletion, biodiversity and the future of the globe, and that countries like India must “be paid” to do something. I think it is wrong to make such assumptions.

**Q:** Do you feel that the report helps people to understand the broader issues of sustainability?

**Singh:** One of the major constraints in adopting a model of sustainable development is that nobody has any idea what the concept of “sustainable development” implies, or of what the implications of sustainable development are for a country. For example, if India tomorrow adopted “sustainable development” as a broad policy direction, what are the benefits they could possibly expect and in what time frame could they expect to see benefits and costs? Equally important, what alternative scenarios are possible, because “sustainable development” is not a static but a dynamic notion.

One useful thing that the World Bank could have done with this report would have been to indicate alternative models of sustainable development. What are the possible models for India? If such models could be identified, however, I am not sure if anyone of them would necessarily be accepted by the politicians in India.

In the report’s introduction it should have been explained that there are two parts to this whole thing. One part describes the model of development the whole world is using. How do we make this model less destructive of the environment. This model, however, will only take us so far. The second part of the report should then discuss what is involved to get us to sustainable development?

There is an important link between these two. You can’t have a transition between the current development model to an alternate development model overnight, it is not a surgical operation. The process of transition obviously has to be as efficient as possible. I would have found the report very useful if it would have classified countries into different groups and said this is the process by which countries in each group can begin looking at their own economies and natural resources. Unfortunately, the report could not fill this need.

## **CONCLUSION**

All three experts agree that the key issue is to understand the linkages between economic development and the environment. While Steer is relatively positive about the potential for modifying current development policies to render them compatible with sound environmental policies, Singh believes that, at least in the case of India, current development models are almost bound to lead to ecological disaster. He argues strongly for the need to develop an alternative development paradigm which is more concerned with environmental sustainability and which would more severely control economic growth. Herman is concerned with using welfare improvement rather than growth conventionally understood as the appropriate yardstick.

The three experts also agree that an important objective must be to understand the relationship between environmental concerns and other social and economic development objectives. However, while Steer feels that the report was successful in demonstrating these trade-offs; Singh feels that the focus on economic efficiency criteria meant that some of the broader social trade-offs were largely ignored. Herman believes that the report made contributions towards understanding these relationships, but considers that some of the long-term issues relating to environmental carrying capacity should have received more attention.

Both Singh and Herman are concerned that conventional cost-benefit approaches to environmental calculus are too narrow and fail to adequately value the quality of life. They both emphasize the need to assess the distributional and political implications of environmental and development policies—what Singh refers to as “class analysis.” Herman reflects a similar concern about the need for more in-depth analysis of the distributional implications of different environmental policies.

All three agree on the importance of assessing the long, as well as the medium term implications of development policies, although they differ with respect to how well the WDR has been able to address the long term impacts. Steer believes that the report made major contributions in this field by systematically demonstrating for the first time, the linkages between stages of economic development and the range of environmental issues needing to be addressed. In his opinion the report showed that while some environmental problems have tended to worsen as a consequence of industrialization, others (such as the quality of the urban environment) may worsen during the early stages of industrialization but then improve as industrialization progresses. Singh, on the other hand, believes that the long-term implications for India of the proposed economic growth strategies have been largely ignored. Herman questions whether the historical relationships described by Steer are “inevitable,” and if not, whether they are relevant.

Those interested in international, as well as national, evaluation of major policy issues, can draw several lessons from these interviews.

1. Carefully collected and presented empirical evidence can make an important contribution to the understanding of a major policy issue. The WDR was able to present for the first time an enormous amount of previously diffuse or inaccessible evidence, which when viewed as a whole provides a more solid base for the understanding of many major issues.
2. The report shows the usefulness of comparative analysis. A major contribution was to compile data from a large number of countries (including industrialized nations) describing past relationships between environmental parameters and the level of economic growth and industrialization. Policy makers in a particular country could not have obtained these insights simply from an analysis of the experience of their own country.
3. The three perspectives reflected in the interviews demonstrate the difficulties familiar to all evaluation researchers, of trying to select and present data on a complex and controversial subject. While the WDR team went to great pains to enlist leading experts to advise on the way data was selected and evaluated, and consultations were held with interested stakeholder groups in many different countries, the report was still criticized for having ignored key issues or for presenting data to support a particular perspective espoused by the World Bank.

4. Although none of the respondents used the term, it is apparent that different stakeholder groups may interpret the report from the perspective of different developmental paradigms. Steer complains, for example, that many critics were unwilling to accept evidence showing that in some areas the environmental situation was not as bad as they believed. Similarly Singh is concerned that the report was written within an economic efficiency paradigm which maintains that a high rate of economic growth is essential to achieve social policy objectives, and that it is the job of economic planners to seek the most environmentally efficient and sound growth path.
5. While a report of this kind can make an important contribution to the debate on a major developmental issue, it can never present an “objective” and impartial review and assessment of the available evidence. It must inevitably operate within a particular developmental paradigm which will guide the selection of data to be collected and the way in which the findings are presented. The value of its contribution will be determined in large part by its success in involving as broad a range of stakeholders as possible, the transparency of its underlying assumptions and of the criteria used for selecting and analyzing data, the clarity of its central message, and the availability of the primary data to interested groups. Success can be evaluated on the basis of the number of new insights and concepts the report is able to introduce into the public debate, its effective dissemination, accessibility and ease of comprehension, and the amount of controversy and debate it generates. A non-controversial report on a major developmental issue has certainly not dug deep enough into the real policy issues.

On all of the above criteria the World Development Report could be considered as a very good model of how to use research and evaluation data to contribute to the understanding of a major international development issue.

#### **NOTE**

1. World Bank. (1992). *World development report 1992: Development and the environment*. New York:Oxford University Press.