

## 4. For What and for Whom?

The purpose of this first question—‘*What is the synthesis of disciplinary and stakeholder knowledge aiming to achieve and who is intended to benefit?*’—is to help integrative applied research teams think specifically about their objectives and beneficiaries, so that they target their efforts most effectively. This is important for two reasons. First, teams which undertake integrative applied research have often not thought clearly about what they are trying to achieve and find it very helpful to be pushed to do so. Second, in order for teams to choose the most appropriate options in terms of I2S concepts, methods and case examples, as well as guides to relevant knowledge from outside the discipline, they need to have well-formulated goals.<sup>1</sup>

What the synthesis of disciplinary and stakeholder knowledge is aiming to achieve is more comprehensive insight into the problem by bringing together what is already known, as well as what can be readily ascertained through new research. It sets out to draw on a diverse range of relevant disciplines and stakeholders. The beneficiaries are those whose knowledge is included in the synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

More generally, it is helpful to differentiate between the I2S domains, distinguishing aims and beneficiaries for knowledge synthesis, dealing with diverse unknowns more fully and supporting policy or practice change. This not only enables more effective choices of options within each domain, but also allows independent assessment, for each domain, of how well the goals were met. In this first domain, it enables the success of the knowledge synthesis to be evaluated independently of the rest of the research and its application (see Chapter 8).

In the case of the World Commission on Dams, the aims and beneficiaries form one area that *can* be surmised, to a large extent, from the published reports. The knowledge synthesis set out to ‘[r]eview the development effectiveness of large dams and assess alternatives for water resources and energy development’.<sup>3</sup> Among the beneficiaries—in other words, those whose knowledge was included—were all the major stakeholders, such as those affected by dams, as well as governments, dam builders and funders. The reports do not, however,

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1 It is important to note that clarity does not require rigidity. A degree of vagueness and ambiguity is essential for research to proceed, especially in the early stages, and the team can plainly state which areas are still undetermined.

2 The focus here is not on the policy makers and practitioners to whom the synthesised knowledge is provided (along with a more comprehensive understanding of remaining unknowns). They are the beneficiaries in Domain 3, discussed in Chapter 18.

3 World Commission on Dams (2000, p. 28).

specify which disciplines were drawn on, although from the descriptions of the research conducted it can be deduced that they were numerous and wide ranging, with engineering, ecology, anthropology, economics and law providing examples.

The knowledge synthesis underpinned the overarching purpose of the World Commission on Dams, which sought to '[d]evelop internationally acceptable criteria, guidelines and standards where appropriate, for the planning, design, appraisal, construction, operation, monitoring and decommissioning of dams'.<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, aimed to set in train a process to achieve 'development effectiveness', where 'decision-making on water and energy management will align itself with the emerging global commitment to sustainable human development and on the equitable distribution of costs and benefits'.<sup>5</sup> The Commission saw its work as the first step in a longer-term reconsideration of policy and practice regarding dams—both building new dams and the monitoring and decommissioning of existing ones. The chair described this as follows: 'Through this process a shared understanding and truth began to emerge, and with it the thin thread with which to sew the stitches of reconciliation.'<sup>6</sup>

<b>Task for the I2S Development Drive</b>
Compile case examples demonstrating: a) different ways of describing the knowledge synthesis purpose, b) the contribution to the overarching research aims, and c) the beneficiaries (that is, which perspectives were included).

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4 World Commission on Dams (2000, p. 28).

5 World Commission on Dams (2000, p. xxxiii).

6 World Commission on Dams (2000, p. iii).

This text is taken from *Disciplining Interdisciplinarity: Integration and Implementation Sciences for Researching Complex Real-World Problems*, by Gabriele Bammer, published 2013 by ANU E Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.