There are many research networks in existence but few so grand in ambition as the GDN created by the World Bank. Why has the World Bank devoted so much effort and so many resources to this network? Some of the answers lie in broader objectives of the World Bank to be the ‘knowledge bank’ and to provide access to research, data and analysis as a global public good. Outlined in the first section, the World Bank’s policy discourses of both ‘knowledge for development’ and ‘global public goods’ form the back drop to the discussion of its expanding activities sponsoring networks in the global agora.

The GDN represents one programme to operationalise these policy discourses, and its formation by the World Bank and its subsequent growth are laid out in the second section. As a driver of development, the Network is designed to allow greater scope for ‘home-grown’ policy, information-sharing and enhanced research capacity in and between developing countries for the co-production of local, regional and global knowledge. An important theme in this section is the manner in which the public and private status of the GDN has changed over time and how these shifts in its organisational or network identity contributed to GDNs’ authority and status in the global agora.

The World Bank and other sponsors of the Network are promoting the creation and distribution of a global public good – knowledge. Stimulating the supply of both the quantity and quality of policy-relevant research aids the transmission of international ‘best practices’ which is argued to improve the scope for social and economic development. The role of the GDN as a provider of global public knowledge goods is addressed in the third section along with some of the criticisms the Network faced. Such great expectations behind the design of the GDN were broadly welcomed within the development studies community despite concerns
among some donors about the uncritical view of knowledge and the assumptions about how that knowledge is utilised. There is a rationalist tendency within the GDN that portrays (scientific) research as independent from its social context. Knowledge is utilised as an intellectual tool that allows rational policy actors to reduce and control uncertainty in decision-making and advance social progress.

Frequently, the GDN has been criticised as a mechanism for the spread of the (post-)Washington consensus and neo-liberal ideology. It is evident that GDN research is broadly supportive of open economies and free market research. This does not mean that the GDN is in the hegemonic grasp of neo-liberal economics. Knowledge is contested and debated within the Network and the ideology is diluted by other narratives. Accordingly, the fourth section considers whether the GDN is a particular ‘species’ of network such as an epistemic community or an ideologically oriented ‘embedded knowledge network’.

Creating knowledge and sharing research to promote development has best served the interests of the institutions advocating the knowledge agenda and the researchers in their orbit. ‘Knowledge for Development’ serves a particular kind of interest. The fifth section considers this ‘cognitive interest’ of researchers in their professional regeneration and advancement into new institutional arrangements such as global policy networks. In conclusion, the Network represents an example of the many partnerships and global programmes that the Banks sponsor in conjunction with other donors and decision-making groups.

**Knowledge banking**

There is considerable substance to the notion of the World Bank, predominantly a lending institution, being a knowledge bank. This aspiration has been translated into policies and practices to improve dissemination of knowledge. The Global Development Gateway was the most ambitious initiative for dissemination, aimed at harnessing information and communication technologies to the development process. Other initiatives included the Knowledge Networks for Sustainable Energy in Africa complementing older knowledge-based programmes hosted by the World Bank such as the CGIAR.

Today, the ‘core priorities’ in the World Bank’s evolving ‘Knowledge Agenda’ are ‘global practices, partnerships and knowledge governance’ (Wheeler, 2009: 1). At an individual level the academic credentials of many staff, the adjunct teaching that some staff do in universities and their orientations to research contribute to the culture of the knowledge