Pilot Distance Learning Course on Controlling Corruption: Towards an Integrated Strategy, Phase II

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The primary goal of the World Bank Institute Governance, Regulation and Finance unit’s (WBIGF) governance program is to help countries to develop effective programs to improve the governance of their public institutions, as well as capacity-building and efficiency in public sector performance and service delivery. This strategy is undertaken with the cooperation of members of the World Bank Group, governments, civil society and other donors. Underlying the interrelated programs is the notion that a functioning public sector should have a client-focus and service-delivery orientation, foster an open, competitive, and transparent business environment, and maintain enhanced levels of accountability and transparency.

WBIGF initiated this pilot core course as part of its governance program that helps countries fight corruption worldwide. The design was based on developing a holistic strategy that emphasized an inclusive and participatory approach in developing and implementing anticorruption programs. The course was divided into three interlinked phases:

1) Phase one (June 14-18, 1999) of the course was convened in Washington, D.C., in a face-to-face learning environment. A diverse group of stakeholders including government officials, independent commissions, civil society and media from Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda attended. In this phase, the participants were provided with the general outline of the anticorruption strategy, as well as the first important steps in the design and implementation of the action plan.

2) The second phase (June 21–September 30, 1999), on which this report focuses, was delivered by distance learning (DL) techniques in 13 weekly modules to 7 sites in Africa: Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda. The course delivery was primarily through biweekly video conference sessions (all sites were linked together), and was complemented by printed materials distributed through on-site facilitators. Building on the initial action plan developed in phase one, phase two of the course described how to go from areas of prioritization to concrete institutional reforms.

3) The goal of phase three (October 10-15, 1999) was to capture participants’ experience and to motivate them to participate actively throughout the course. This was offered as a face-to-face event in Durban, South Africa. In this last phase, participants presented the action programs they developed during the course at the 9th International Anti-Corruption Conference held in Durban.

The pilot DL portion (second phase) of the course had a total of 40 participants enrolled. Target countries were selected based on their willingness to have a participatory program to fight corruption. The video conferences originated in Washington, linking all sites, and were broadcast to the seven sites in Africa, each of which had a facilitator to lead off-line discussions. Participants interacted with instructors during video conference sessions and via e-mail and fax.

An end-of-course, level one evaluation questionnaire was used to evaluate the program. Questionnaires were returned from the mission offices in: Benin, Ethiopia Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda, but not from Kenya since that country lost transmissions during most of the course. Of the 40 participants from the six countries who responded, 20 completed the questionnaire – a response rate of 50 percent. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree) was utilized for the majority of the questions.
However, a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), with a score of 3 being an adequate rating, was also used to rate the respondents' level of knowledge on various course topics before and after the course. Summaries of the major evaluation findings follow.

Closed-Ended Responses

- The mean scores for the course performance indicators such as relevance and usefulness were mostly consistent, as all had means greater than 4. The highest mean score (4.6, 100% giving a rating of 4 or 5) was given to the relevance of the course to the respondents' current work or functions. Additionally, the information acquired by the respondents which they stated as being useful was high (mean=4.5, 85% rating a 4 or 5). These data suggest that the respondents considered the course's relevance and usefulness as its primary strengths.
- The course was noted for its ability in improving partnerships with key participants. Respondents stated that the course strengthened their partnerships both with the World Bank and with other course participants (both had means of 4.3, with 75% and 80% giving a rating of 4 or 5, respectively).
- Respondents varied in their ratings on the course's adaptability. Although the ratings were high for the solutions being adaptable to controlling corruption in their countries (mean=4.1, 80% rating a 4 or 5), the adaptability of the policies discussed in the course were not rated highly (mean=3.7, 65% rating a 4 or 5). This suggests that the course offered better solutions than policies for the respondents' future efforts in controlling corruption in their countries.
- Increases in the respondents' knowledge about other countries' efforts in combating corruption were limited. The respondents stated that the course was not effective in increasing their knowledge of policies that have worked well in other countries (mean=3.8, 50% rating a 4 or 5). These responses indicate that policies from other countries need to be expanded and better explained at the local level for this course. The course managers should address this concern for future courses.
- Participants self-assessed their knowledge gain in relevant course topics both before and after the course. Overall, the course was rated as moderately successful in increasing the respondents' knowledge of these topics. The largest increase in knowledge (a mean gain of 1.35) was given to the topic of financial management and procurement (before course mean=2.9, after course mean=4.25). The smallest mean gain in knowledge (+1.0) was given to the respondents' knowledge of rule of law (mean before course=3.21, after course=4.21). The respondents also noted that their knowledge of other topics such as: customs reform (mean gain of 1.05); civil service reform (mean gain of 1.25); and issues for controlling corruption (mean gain of 1.15) also were increased during the course. These are not uniformly high self-reported mean gains, but do show that the course had, from the respondents' vantage point, generally improved their knowledge in relevant course topics.
- According to the respondents, the content of the course matched its objectives (mean=4.2, 79% rating it a 4 or 5).

DL and Delivery Aspects of the Activity

- The course received high ratings in most areas for its delivery and distance learning (DL) aspects. The highest mean rating (4.5, 85% rating a 4 or 5) was given to the video conferencing technology as being effective. This is regarded as a positive reaction to the DL aspects of the course. The course materials were also rated as being well prepared by the respondents (mean=4.4, 90% rating a 4 or 5).
- Both the pace of the course and time allotted to ask questions were rated lower. The pace of the presentations being appropriate was rated with a mean of 3.9, even though 75% rated it with a score of 4 or 5. There appears to have been limited time to ask questions during the course. The respondents' rating of this topic had a mean of 4.0, but only 74% rated it a 4 or 5, suggesting that there was not enough time to pose questions during the course. Additionally, the adequacy of time
allowed to participate in the discussions (mean=4.0, 79% rating a 4 or 5) was rated as average. These ratings suggest that the course managers and the DL Unit should work together more closely to improve the pace of the course and to increase both the amount of time allowed to ask questions and for active participation.

Open-Ended Responses

- Respondents were asked two questions on course improvement: How the course could be more effective in the future; and how the distance learning aspects could be improved. Their responses were diverse. For the first question, there were 10 respondents (total percentages may add to more than 100% because many respondents offered more than one suggestion). The most common response (7 respondents) to the first question on course improvement was that there should be more practical issues and identification of key problem areas on corruption for the course topics. Three respondents mentioned that the course should have emphasized how they could remain in contact for follow-ups, for networking and for implementation of actions. An additional three respondents stated that a summary of best practices for other countries was needed.
- Seven respondents offered suggestions on how to improve the DL aspects of the course, although some of their suggestions were not entirely related to the DL course features. Five respondents stated that course materials needed to be delivered in advance. Shortening the delivery time of the course was a suggestion made by three respondents, who said that the course was too lengthy and should be shortened to about 2.5 to 3 hours per day. Two respondents stated that more partnerships and networking with other institutions were vital to continue the learning process.

Conclusions

- Overall, the course received high ratings in many areas. The findings suggest that the relevance and usefulness of the course were its most positive features. Although the respondents noted that the course was valued for its ability in improving partnerships, the open-ended questions suggest that the respondents would like to maintain and broaden these partnerships so that an exchange of ideas and experiences will be sustained. In this sense, the respondents said that the course could have offered more suggestions and ways on how they could continue to build on this networking.
- Respondents varied in their ratings on the course's adaptability. The solutions provided in the course were considered to be adaptable to the respondents' countries, but the policies mentioned in the course were considered to be less adaptable. This suggests that the policies discussed in the course should be more realistic and applicable to the country-specific situations which face the respondents.
- A self-assessment of the respondents' knowledge of the major course topics showed a general, but not overwhelming, gain. This is indicative of a general improvement in knowledge which will hopefully be improved in future courses.
- Additional DL questions should have been posed in the evaluation questionnaire, but WBI's Evaluation Unit did not have the opportunity to analyze the final evaluation questionnaire before it was utilized in the course. The respondents, however, did indicate that they thought the video conferencing technology was effective. This suggests that the major DL delivery method was greeted positively and implies that it is being accepted as a means of course delivery. It should be noted, though, that transmission difficulties occurred frequently in Kenya, which limited the course delivery time to that country. In fact, Kenya missed most of the course due to DL technical difficulties. This is one DL aspect which needs to be investigated more thoroughly so that the problem does not arise again in that country.