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The broad objective of WBI's Macroeconomic and Financial Management (MFM) Program is to help economists from client countries and multilateral organizations integrate the lessons of experience and respond adequately to new policy challenges. To accomplish this goal, the MFM program aims at enhancing capacity in macroeconomic management and financial sector policies through training programs, seminars, and conferences targeted to senior policymakers, policy advisors in government, university professors, and researchers. The themes around which the activities of the MFM program are organized consist of: 1) the formulation of appropriate fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate policies to ensure macroeconomic stability in a volatile economic environment; 2) the role of institutions in macroeconomic management; and 3) the challenges of globalization.

This 12-week pilot Distance Learning (DL) course was organized to provide training in macroeconomic management to mid-level professionals. The target audience was 40 trainers and professionals in academia and in the public and private sectors in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. This audience also included macroeconomists at research and training institutes, universities, central banks and ministries of finance. Target countries were selected on the basis of the availability of video-conferencing facilities. The course was delivered primarily by videoconference and complemented with Learning Space (used on a pilot basis by participants who had connectivity and access to a personal computer with proper capacity), CD-ROM and printed training materials. The videoconferences originated in Washington and were broadcast to the six sites in Africa, each of which had a facilitator to lead off-line discussions. Participants interacted with instructors during videoconference 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 Uganda, Ethiopia and Ghana, but not from Tanzania and Kenya. Of the 40 participants from the five countries, 26 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 65 percent. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) was utilized for the majority of the questions. However, a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (insufficient) to 5 (excessive), with a score of 3 being an adequate rating, was also used to rate the amount of information in the course and both the length of the videoconferences and the length of the course itself. Summaries of the major evaluation findings, organized by country, follow:

**Ethiopia (n=11)**

Closed-Ended Responses

- The mean scores for the course performance indicators such as relevance and worthiness varied. A mean score of 4.5 (91% giving a rating of 4 or 5) was given to both the course being overall worthwhile and the relevance of the course to the respondents’ jobs. Additionally, the Ethiopian respondents indicated that the course improved their understanding of economic policy (mean=4.5) and that the assignments also contributed to understanding the course content (mean=4.4). These data suggest that the respondents considered the relevance, worth, and knowledge gained as the primary strengths of the course.
· The respondents indicated that the course was helpful in improving their ability to assess the consequences of various policy options (mean=3.9, 91% giving a rating of 4 or 5). Also, the group presentations made by the participants were not viewed as being useful in helping the respondents understand the course content (mean=3.5, 65% rating this a 4 or 5). These responses indicate that the consequences of policy options need to be expanded at the local level. Additionally, it is clear that some of the group presentations were not helpful in increasing the respondents' knowledge of the course content. The course managers should address these concerns for future courses.

· Respondents had mixed views regarding the length of both the course itself and of the videoconferences (as explained in the introduction, these criteria were rated on a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 5 (excessive), with 3 being an adequate rating). The responses indicated that the number of weeks of course length were between insufficient and adequate with a mean of 2.5, while the length of the videoconferences was given a mean of 2.8—a rating close to adequate.

· According to the respondents, the content of the course matched its objectives (mean=4.1, 91% rating it a 4 or 5).

DL Aspects of the Activity

· Evaluations of the distance learning components were also mixed. The highest mean score (4.1, 91% giving a rating of 4 or 5) for the DL aspects of the course was the respondents' ability to participate actively during the videoconferences. This aspect had been rated lower in other evaluated World Bank DL courses, but this course evidently was more effective in its openness for participation. Respondents indicated that they would take another DL course (mean=4.0, 73% rating it a 4 or 5). Additionally, the effectiveness of the videoconferencing technology as evident during the course was not rated highly (mean=3.8, 64% rating a 4 or 5). These responses suggest that, in principle, the concept of delivering this course via DL methods was well-received.

· Respondents did not indicate a strong preference toward learning in either a DL mode or a face-to-face mode. When asked if they could learn as well in a DL course as in a face-to-face course, the respondents ratings had a mean of 2.7—close to a "neither agree nor disagree" rating. The same rating was also given to the fact that the respondents would be unable to complete the course if it was not offered in a DL format (mean=3.2). Both of these ratings suggest that the DL method was neither preferred to nor rated more highly than the face-to-face method (they had no specific preference toward either modality).

Open-Ended Responses

· Respondents were asked how the course could be improved for the future. Their responses were diverse. The most common response was that there needed to be more training in the use of technology for courses like this. Other respondents said that they did not receive the course materials in advance and therefore had limited time to read them during the course. Some respondents stated that they would have liked additional presenters who were more experienced in their country-specific issues — emphasizing the importance of strengthening the role of local moderators.

Uganda (n=9)

Closed-ended responses

· Overall, the course was rated as worthwhile and relevant to the respondents' current jobs (both categories had mean ratings of 4.7; 100% rating it a 4 or 5). The course was also rated
highly in improving their understanding of economic policy (mean=4.6, 100% rating a 4 or 5).

- The Ugandan respondents confirmed that the course matched its announced objectives and that the assignments were useful in helping them understand the course content (both had mean scores of 4.4, with the former category receiving a 100% rating of 4 or 5 and the latter an 89% rating of 4 or 5).

- The group presentations made by the participants were rated lower (mean=3.9, 56% rating it a 4 or 5). Additionally, the course received lower ratings for improving the respondents’ ability to assess the consequences of various policy options (mean=3.8).

DL Aspects of the Activity

- The respondents indicated that they would take another course offered by distance learning, but not convincingly (mean=4.1, 67% rating this a 4 or 5). Overall, the distance learning aspects of the course were given adequate to average ratings by the respondents from Uganda. Adequate ratings were given to the amount of information in the course (mean=3.1) and to the length of the course (mean=3.3). The length of the videoconferences was rated near somewhat excessive (mean=3.7).

- Again, the respondents did not indicate a strong preference toward learning in either a DL mode or a face-to-face mode. When asked if they could learn as well in a DL course as in a face-to-face course, the respondents ratings had a mean of 3.3—a neither agree nor disagree rating. A similar rating was also given to the fact that the respondents would be unable to complete the course if it was not offered in a DL format (mean=2.7). Both of these ratings suggest that the DL method was neither preferred to nor rated more highly than the face-to-face method (they had no specific preference toward either modality). Additionally, the effectiveness of the videoconferencing technology was not rated highly (mean=3.8, 67% rating a 4 or 5).

Open-Ended Responses

- The most common suggestion for improving the course was to shorten both the length of the seminar and the videoconferences. One respondent stated, “It is possible to study in a compact way whereby we stay 2½ hours in the morning and 2½ hours in the afternoon so that we focus on one thing—study. When we spread out in 12 weeks, one gets fatigued and other interruptions arise.” Both the open-ended and closed-ended data support the fact that the length of the course was too long. Additionally, respondents stated that more country-specific topics and speakers were needed.

Ghana (n=6)

Closed-ended responses

- The scores from Ghana were generally the highest of the three countries. Overall, the course was rated as worthwhile (mean=4.8, 100% rating it a 4 or 5). In addition, the course was considered to be relevant to the respondents’ current jobs and the assignments were rated as helpful in understanding the course content (both had means of 4.7, with 100% rating these a 4 or 5).

- The course was considered to improve the respondents’ understanding of economic policy (mean=4.3) and in its ability to assess various policy options (mean=4.2, both having 83% rating these qualities a 4 or 5).

- The amount of information in the course and the length of the videoconferences were both
considered to be adequate (means of 3.2, and 2.8, respectively). The length of the course, however, was considered to be between somewhat sufficient and adequate (mean=2.5).

DL Aspects of the Activity

· The distance learning aspects of the course were rated more favorably by the respondents from Ghana. This was the only country to rate the videoconferencing technology as effective (mean=4.5, 100% rating a 4 or 5). Additionally, the respondents from Ghana were the only respondents to agree that they could learn as well in a distance learning course as in a face-to-face course (mean=4.5, 83% rating a 4 or 5).

· The respondents said that they would take another course offered via distance learning (mean=4.7, 100% rating a 4 or 5). They also stated that they were able to participate actively during the videoconferences (mean=4.0, 100% rating a 4 or 5). Respondents also did not indicate that they would be unable to complete the course had it not been offered in a DL format (mean=3.0, or neither agree nor disagree).

· The above data indicate that the DL format was regarded highly in Ghana. This suggests that this may be one country which will likely welcome further DL courses from WBI in the future.

Open-Ended Responses

· There was only one response from Ghana. This respondent agreed with the Ugandans in stating that the course should be more consolidated and have two sessions in a week instead of one. This, again, suggests that the length of the course was too long and should be narrowed in the future.

Conclusions

The findings varied across the three sites to which this course was delivered. The relevance and usefulness of the activity for the respondents were some of the higher scores in each country according to the closed-ended responses. Additionally, the respondents stated that the course helped them to improve their understanding of macroeconomic policy and generally that it had met its objectives.

Group presentations made by the participants were not rated as useful in helping the respondents understand the course content, although the assignments were considered to be more helpful in this respect. One possible explanation for this was the fact that the local moderators did not discuss country-specific or relevant policy issues which were applicable to the participants' own situations. This was a consistent view elicited by the respondents in both the closed-ended and open-ended questions. For future courses, the organizers should focus more on the importance of the local moderator’s role in addressing country-specific policy issues.

There were also mixed ratings for the DL aspects of the course. The respondents from all three countries agreed that they would take another DL course, but there was not an overwhelmingly convincing response from Ethiopia or Uganda. In fact, only Ghana stated that the videoconferencing technology was effective. One plausible reason for the lower ratings of the DL modality may be the fact that Ghana was the only country whose respondents stated that they could learn as well in a DL format as in a face-to-face format. This suggests that both Ethiopia and Uganda (and possibly other World Bank member countries) may have reservations about how effective their learning can be in a DL course. A sensible way to overcome this fear may be to provide additional training in DL technologies (e.g., how to
effectively use: computers, the Internet, e-mail, videoconferencing methods) to the
participants beforehand, so that they will feel comfortable with this new instructional method.
Respondents also indicated that they needed further training in technology in order to
participate more actively and knowledgeably during the course.

Most importantly, the respondents did not indicate a strong preference toward learning in
either a DL mode or a face-to-face mode. Their ratings of the DL methods of the course
suggest that this method was neither preferred to nor rated more highly than the face-to-face
method. This is a positive finding because it suggests that the DL modality is being accepted
as a means of course delivery. In turn, this implies that DL could gain further acceptance as
one method of delivering WBI’s courses. Another positive aspect of the course is that it had
ten drop-in participants—an unusual feat since most DL course have significant drop-out
rates.