A Brief History of World Bank Institute (WBI)/Economic Development Institute (EDI)

“….The gamble we took in establishing EDI was one of the best things we did to help our member countries over the long run.” World Bank President Eugene R. Black, 1976

In the past fifty years, the Economic Development Institute has grown from a concept, to an institution training 20 high level government officials per year in Washington D.C., into the World Bank Institute distributing knowledge worldwide to 48,000 persons per year. With this growth, the basic concept has remained the same: to spread the knowledge gained by the World Bank in its operations and personnel to officials in developing countries to foster economic and social development and to provide a forum for dialogue between all the parties. Along the way the tools of information transmission have evolved from stencil duplicators to worldwide satellite two-way television.

As the Bank and the world changed, the Institute evolved from the one general development course to a very wide variety of programs through five basic phases as follows; 1. Introduction of project analysis courses by sector, 2. Expansion to overseas courses in partnership with local institutions, 3. Provision of technical assistance to partner institutions, 4. Development of policy dialogue with short, high level seminars, and 5. Introduction of distance learning via electronic technology.

The following timeline lays out the key steps along that path.

The beginning and early years

**1951** The World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) sponsored a ten day seminar on the preparation of an economic development program.

**1952** Paul Rosenstein-Rodin one of the pioneers of economic development studies in a memo of April 3, 1952 proposed the establishment of an “Institute of Advanced Studies in Economic Development”. A bank committee reviewed the proposal and reported favorably for bank sponsorship of an institute and presented its report on July 1, 1952. It would be a Staff College for senior officials of less developed countries who are concerned with the formulation and administration of policies, programs and projects related to economic development.
1953 & 1954 Bank staff and outside advisors considered the possibility of an institute for
government officials “whose daily work involves the making of decisions in the sphere of
economic policy”. The EDI was to be practical and for mid to high level officials.

1955 The Economic Development Institute was organized with initial financial support
from the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The first and only offering
until 1962 was a six-month General Development Course on policy formulation and
economic management with lectures and discussion on a wide variety of topics. The EDI
had a small full-time teaching staff supported with lectures by technical specialists from
the World Bank and International Finance Corporation. Attendees were called
participants and graduates, Fellows.

1956 First course was started in January 1956. When he opened the course, the first
Director, Sir Alec Cairncross said; “the purpose is not to aim at soaring generalities or
universal formulae. (at that time National Planning was in the air) As far as possible we
shall start at the other end, with the problems as they present themselves, and work back
toward the general considerations that may contribute to a solution to these problems. We
shall try to discover what has worked and what has not worked and enlist your help in the
quest. Our objective is to marry experience and analysis, using both as far as time and
human capacity permit”

The EDI’s task was to be primarily the facilitator of the exchange of the participants
experience, the Bank’s experience and the latest academic thought with each other.

1958 Development Banks by William Diamond was the first book published by EDI.

1959 the first overseas course was on development policies and programs with the
University of West Indies in Jamaica in the summer of 1959

Introduction of Project Analysis Courses by Sector

1963 It was becoming clear that despite the rapid growth in educational attention to the
general field of economic development, little training was available on the operational
aspects of the investment process, what has now come to be called “project analysis,” i.e.,
problems and methods of identification, preparation, appraisal and implementation of
development projects. This gap was especially evident to staff of the World Bank Group
since the scarcity of well-prepared projects directly affected lending operations. As a
result, in 1963 the Institute introduced one general project appraisal course, covering
projects in all major economic sectors given in English and in Spanish.

1964-74 Sectoral project courses were introduced in the next two years—an industrial
projects course and an agricultural projects course. The development course in French
was recast to become a general course in project appraisal. The trend towards expanding
the EDI’s curriculum of sector courses continued: an education projects course and a
transportation projects course were added. Courses in urbanization, water supply and
waste disposal projects, development banking, transportation policy and agro-industries
were added in the 70s.

Learning processes

The Institute developed an effective pedagogy of learning by doing, in which participants
worked out exercises and case studies of increasing complexity that simulate the tasks of
project preparation and analysis, sometimes concluding with actual project preparation or
appraisal on a field trip to a developing country. This approach meant that the EDI had to develop its own cases and training materials based sometimes on World Bank project work and often in the field jointly with partner institutions.

Development of Training Materials
EDI also developed standardized procedures for course administration which facilitated widespread distribution of training packages to overseas providers of similar training. Each morning and afternoon session had a cover sheet listing Session number, Topic, Speaker, Required readings, Optional readings, Assigned homework and sometimes Objectives and/or Outline. At the end of the program these were printed as a curriculum listing all of the training materials and at the end of the year all curricula were printed together and distributed around the world. Thus a professor or lecturer anywhere in the world could see what materials the EDI used on any particular subject. An extensive training materials distribution system was set up to send copies of case studies and other materials out to local institutions on request.

Evaluation forms were completed for each session and at the end of a course. A Seminar X or discussion of the results of the evaluation forms was facilitated by the Director or Assistant Director on the last morning of the course to feed back improvements into future courses.

Development of Overseas courses in partnership with local institutes
1963 A General Development Course was given in Seoul, Korea in the summer in cooperation with the Korean Economic Planning Board and UN Bureau of Technical Assistance.
1964 A regional overseas course on Project Appraisal in Jaipur, India was held in partnership with the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.
1970 Sir Alec Cairncross, the first Director of EDI, was brought back to undertake a review of EDI objectives and programs. He recommended doubling the number of courses in Washington from 6 per year to 12 and to continue an increasing number of overseas courses.
1972 The new Director of EDI proposed to the President of the Bank that, “this means concentrating more on organizing overseas courses in cooperation with entities that could carry on the courses by themselves afterwards, helping other institutions provide such training through training their teachers and by providing teaching materials to them”. The number of courses in Washington would stay the same and all expansion would be in overseas courses. The Washington courses would serve as a “laboratory in which new courses are developed, new teaching materials and methods tested, and where the quality of the courses is continuously revised and upgraded.”
1972 The EDI Review, a newsletter for EDI Fellows was started.
1973 The General Development Course was modified into a shorter National Economic Management Course and the main thrust of EDI’s expansion was in overseas courses with partner institutions.
1977 The first Project Management course and the first Training of Trainers and Case Writing seminars were held.
1978-86 EDI jointly with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research organized short seminars in New York on international economic development for officials of UN diplomatic missions, UNDP Resident Representatives and UN delegates. 

1982 EDI administered the Robert S. McNamara Fellowship Programs for researchers in developing countries on various topics related to development.

**Introduction of high level policy seminars and institution building for project courses**

1982 An internal Bank task force recommended a re-orientation of EDI’s policies with the following three recommendations: 1. Provision of technical assistance and institution building to strengthen training institutions in developing countries, especially in Africa. 2. Emphasis on direct training efforts on shorter policy seminars and exchange of views for high level policy making officials and 3. A major expansion of EDI’s production of training materials.

The task force urged a strong shift towards overseas training and recommended active pursuit of co-financing to support an expanded program. There would be a corresponding decrease in project courses for countries with alternative sources of training.

1981 After China joined the World Bank a series of courses were presented jointly with local training institutions on project planning and national economic management. One of these was Project Management for the Project Managers for the first 9 World Bank financed projects in China. Later an expanded program was supported by the UNDP.

1983 Seminars on policy analysis and reform including structural adjustment, sector management, training of trainers, national economic management, and market economics were offered.

1984 EDI released Multimedia Training Materials for Water Supply and Sanitation, a 20 unit slide/tape set for a two week sector course on project development.

1984 EDI prepared a five year plan aimed at implementing the recommendations of the 1982 Task Force on the Future of EDI. The plan presented regionally differentiated strategies drawn up in light of local needs and EDI capabilities. A formalized system of receiving inputs from the Bank Regional Staffs on priorities and programs was established and regional coordinators were appointed in EDI.

1984-1998 EDI, IFAD, OAU and AfDB carried out a multi-year program, Agricultural Management Training Program for Africa (AMTA) working with management training institutes in Africa.

1984 In cooperation with the East and West Africa Regions of the Bank, EDI carried out reviews of management institutes including the Mananga Agricultural Management Center in Swaziland.

1987 EDI administered the World Bank Graduate Scholarship Program (WBGSP) funded by Japan which supports students from developing countries at Universities worldwide.


1989 EDI prepares a new five year plan with assistance of an Advisory Board headed by the Bank’s Chief Economist. One recommendation was to compare the cost effectiveness
of publishing books versus direct training. Another recommendation was to enlarge the translation program.

**Needs in Eastern Europe bring back project courses**

1990-94 The dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union resulted in a return to a large number of project analysis and project management courses for the new countries of Eastern Europe and Russia and the setting up of the Joint Vienna Institute (JVI) cooperatively with IMF, BIS, EBRD and OECD. EDI also set up an office in Moscow to promote and conduct local training activities in the FSU.

1992 Senior policy seminars, sector management seminars, training of trainers seminars, courses in economics of the market, macroeconomics, project analysis, project management, poverty, NGOs, gender, environment were given.

1993 EDI undertook a strategic planning process confirming some earlier policies and introducing changes in EDI’s policies and operations resulting in a mission statement as follows: “EDI invests in people and ideas as the most powerful means of development. It helps the Bank and its member countries achieve the goals of sustainable and equitable development through strengthening national capacities to design and implement development policies and programs. To this end, EDI facilitates a learning dialogue on development through structured exchanges of ideas and experience among people.”

**Introduction of new technology and new subjects**

1994 EDI prepared “Investing in People and Ideas, EDI’s Strategy for the Future” as the result of the planning process. The plans mirrored the Bank’s priorities on equitable development with poverty reduction, gender equality and environmental protection. A teleconference between Washington and Cameroon during a seminar in 1994 was one of the first uses by EDI of new developments in electronic media. The report called for EDI to serve as a center for global learning and the dissemination of knowledge about development.

1995 The Advisory Committee was re-established, Thematic divisions were set up matching the Bank’s organization.

1996 EDI planned expansion of core programs and launch of outreach to civil society including programs for journalists.

1997 Strategic Compact supported expansion of learning and knowledge. The first Global Knowledge Conference was held in Toronto and the first Mediterranean Development Forum in Morocco. An external Advisory Council was formed to help WBI develop long term strategies by building on experiences from academia, government, and the private sector.

1997 EDI started implementation of a report by consultants on Distance Learning and jointly with the Bank started development of a Global Development Learning Network to provide distance learning all around the world. Television studios were established both in the bank and overseas and satellite facilities were set up.

1998, The first Asia Development Forum was held in the Philippines, a distance learning pilot was launched, an evaluation unit was expanded, and regional coordinators reappointed.
1999 EDI and the Learning and Leadership Center merged, combining staff and client learning. EDI renamed as the World Bank Institute at World Bank Learning Forum, New emphasis on learning activities for broader audiences, policy services, and knowledge networks.

2000 WBI became a World Bank Vice Presidency, the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) was launched, the African Virtual University (AVU) moves to WBI, and the World Bank knowledge-sharing function moved to WBI. The AVU uses satellites to deliver high quality courses in science, math, and business to classrooms in 15 African Universities with interaction via E-mail, fax, and telephone. The Knowledge Networks are web sites and discussion forums that support many specific courses and outreach activities.


2002 WBI announced new strategy aimed at:
1. Increasing country focus using country specific Capacity Enhancement Needs Assessment (CENA) as a tool.
2. Aligning thematic programs with Bank priorities.
3. Building the Knowledge Bank with the Knowledge for Development Program.

This will be accomplished via a three pillar organizational matrix as follows:
1. The country pillar – ensures alignment with Bank Operations
2. The thematic pillar – strengthens the content WBI offers
3. The knowledge pillar – ensures global reach

WBI is committed to expanding the reach of its programs through global communications and information technologies such as the INTERNET and satellite transmission to empower communities and connect schools and universities as well as civil society and policy makers from all regions. The Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) is a telecommunications network that connects distance learning centers in cities across the globe. GDLN members are part of a worldwide exchange of learning activities including courses, seminars, and discussion of key development issues.

By the year 2002 the World Bank Institute had grown to a staff of 247 full time presenting 560 programs in 150 countries to an audience of 48,000 with more than 400 partner institutions. EDI/WBI has published more than 100 books and formal publications and hundreds of case studies, working papers, course notes and other...
learning materials. A number of WBI authored books have been some of the World Bank’s best sellers including, *Economic Analysis of Agricultural Projects* by Gittinger; *The Open Economy* by Dornbusch; and *The Quality of Growth* by Thomas. The web sites were being visited by over 100,000 persons per month and over one million pages per month were requested.

References:
This history is based on more than 30 World Bank reports and documents including the history of EDI named “EDI/20” published in 1976 and written by Michael Hoffman, the second Director of EDI and “Some Incomplete and Unsystematic Memories of the Beginnings of the EDI”, by William Diamond in 1999, one of the first staff members of EDI. Compiled by Robert Youker, Bethesda, Md. Jan. 3, 2003