Core Course:
Policy and Institutional Reform for Rural Development

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The Environment and Natural Resources Division of The World Bank Institute conducted a core course on Policy and Institutional Reform for Sustainable Development in Washington, D.C., from December 7-11, 1998. The five-day course in Washington was one of the key activities of the parent program, "Policy and Institutional Reform for Sustainable Rural Development." The Washington course will be followed by a series of distance education courses to be piloted in Africa in 1999. The objective of the Washington course was to help participants initiate and manage the process and the substance of policy and institutional reforms in the rural sector. By providing the latest thinking and good practices in rural development, the course aimed at helping participants in the following areas: 1) identifying key institutional issues; 2) diagnosing institutional problems; 3) formulating viable options; and 4) implementing effective institutional solutions to the problems.

The course comprised four major components - the global and national context, the process and substance of policy and institutional reform, cross-cutting issues, and subsector issues. The subsector issues consisted of 11 specific topics that were presented in 4 parallel sessions organized in 2 afternoon periods. The course was attended by a total of 46 participants from 20 countries, representing senior policymakers and managers in developing countries and transition economies, as well as Bank staff, who are responsible for policy and institutional reforms in rural development. Six participants (13%) were women.

The WBI Evaluation Unit conducted a Level 1 (participants' reaction) evaluation using two types of participants' feedback questionnaires. First, participants were asked to assess communication and presentation skills of different instructors who presented the 11 subsector issues. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1=minimum to 5=maximum was used. The questionnaire was completed at the end of each presentation by all participants in each session. Secondly, the end-of-course questionnaire was administered at the completion of the entire course. This questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section asked the extent to which the respondents were satisfied with overall course design and delivery. The second section asked the level of respondents' knowledge about course topics before and after the course, based on self-assessment. A 5-point scale was used for each question in both sections. The third section requested respondents' open-ended comments about the course. The end-of-course questionnaire was completed by 42 respondents, 91.3% of the total participants, including all 6 women (14.3%). Following is a summary of the evaluation findings.

Respondents' Background

- Respondents consisted of 23 attendees from national or local governments (54.8%); 9 from university or research institutions (21.4%); 6 from the World Bank (14.3%); and 4 from other organizations (9.5%). Thirty-two respondents were from the Africa region (76.2%); 3 (7.1%) from Europe and Central Asia; 3 (7.1%) from the Middle East and North Africa; and 4 (9.5%) from other regions.

- A large majority of respondents had advanced academic degrees. Thirty-eight out of the 42 respondents (90.5%) reported to have either masters degrees or equivalent (N=24), or doctorate
degrees (N=14). Four respondents (9.5%) had first university degrees.

- Respondents had substantial professional experience in the field of rural development. Twenty-nine respondents (69.0%) had more than 10 years of work experience, including 21 respondents (50%) with 10-20 years, and 8 (19.0%) with 21 years or more experience. Among the remaining 8 respondents (19%) who reported to have had less than 10 years of experience, 7 respondents had at least 5 years of work experience in the field.

**Course Design and Delivery**

- The *overall usefulness of the course* received a mean score of 4.10 on a 5-point scale. Respondents showed a particularly high degree of satisfaction with the course's *relevancy to their current work* (mean=4.56). This was the highest rating of all performance indicators, with 95% of respondents rating either 4 or 5 on this item. The extent to which the course *focused on high priority issues* was another item that received one of the highest ratings (mean=4.31).

- The course used five different methods of instruction to deliver its messages. When asked about the usefulness of each method at the end of the course, respondents reported the *videos* (mean=4.32) and *background reading and supporting materials* (mean=4.30) as particularly useful, in addition to the *lecture presentations* (mean=4.07). *Case studies* (mean=3.64) and *exercises* (mean=3.66) received relatively lower ratings.

- Each of the 11 subsector issues was presented by a different instructor(s). Results showed respondents' varying views about the effectiveness of the use of *visual presentation materials* and *case studies* across presentations. The extent to which the *visual materials reinforced the messages* was rated as low as 2.60 in one presentation (*Land administration and reform*) and as high as 4.29 in another presentation (*Agricultural extension*). The extent to which the *case studies helped understand the concepts* ranged from 3.0 (*Irrigation*) to 4.07 (*Agricultural extension*).

- The quality of instructors in 11 subsector sessions was also assessed by three additional indicators. Among the 11 instructors, the *clearness of communication* ranged from 3.57 to 4.59, the *depth of treatment of the topic* from 3.08 to 4.25, and the *adequacy in answering questions* from 3.33 to 4.43. Five instructors received particularly positive feedback from respondents, a rating exceeding 4.0 on 2 or all 3 indicators. On the other hand, there were 3 instructors whose ratings fell below 4.0 on all 3 items.

- One aspect of the course design addressed by many respondents was the limited amount of interchange in class during the course. Twenty-four respondents (57.1%) reported the *time allocated for discussion* was either "insufficient" or "somewhat insufficient". Eighteen respondents (42.9%) gave a similar unfavorable response on the *level of interaction between participants and instructors*. In their written comments, many of the respondents mentioned how the course could be improved by allowing more time for sharing different views and experiences of course participants (N=17). Their main suggestions were to facilitate participants' active participation to the course by ensuring time for discussions between instructors and participants, as well as organizing group exercises. For the upcoming distance learning courses, it would be important for the course organizer to ensure an appropriate level of participants' interaction with course instructors, particularly because participants will not be able to see their instructors face-to-face except by videoconference. In designing the distance learning courses, the course organizer is advised to focus on how to create an environment that would be conducive to learning and would encourage participant questions and debate, in order to maintain participant interest and keep them engaged in the course activities throughout the course duration.
Self-Reported Knowledge

- Respondents' largest pre/post gain in reported knowledge level was observed on "how to initiate and manage a process of policy and institutional reform in the rural sector". This item was the stated objective of the course. The mean scores improved from 2.80 before the course to 4.15 after the course, a percentage increase by 48.2%. A majority of respondents (90%) rated either 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale on this indicator, compared to 22.0% at the beginning of the course. This indicated that the course was perceived as successful in achieving its stated objective.

- On the issue covering the general framework of the course, "what institutions are and why they are important for sustainable rural development," respondents reported another high level of gain (45.3%). The pre-course rating of 2.85 improved to 4.15 after the course on this indicator. On the three specific goals of the course, the ratings also had positive increases (38-41%) but the post-course levels fell slightly below 4.0. The mean score on "how to identify key institutional issues in a particular rural sector" rose from 2.85 to 3.95, on "how to diagnose institutional problems" from 2.79 to 3.95, and on "how to formulate viable institutional options" from 2.73 to 3.85.