

***South Asia Beyond 2000
Policies for Sustained Catch-
up Growth***

***Colombo, Sri Lanka
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The seminar on “South Asia Beyond 2000: Policies for Catch-up Growth” was organized by the World Bank Institute (WBI, formerly known as Economic Development Institute, EDI) of the World Bank in cooperation with the South Asia Region of the World Bank and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. The two day seminar was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on March 19 and 20, 1998. Attended by over 100 participants including key resource persons¹, the seminar’s objective was to explore the regional policy agendas needed to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement in the early decades of the next century. Opening remarks were made by Messrs. A.S. Jayawardene, Governor, Central Bank, Sri Lanka and John Williamson, Chief Economist, South Asia Region, the World Bank. The key note address was delivered by Mr. Joseph Stiglitz, Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank. Six thematic sessions, each consisting of a presentation followed by three or four discussants, were held over the two day period. The closing session focused on distilling the key insights from these six thematic sessions and on consensus building. This report summarizes the results of the seminar evaluation.

Seminar Rationale and Objectives

The South Asia region had not witnessed this type of a forum before and the need for such a consortium was thought to be useful to stimulate and initiate regional integration for economic growth. The rationale for the seminar was that South Asia seems poised to replicate East Asian growth rates over the past several decades. Recognized reasons for initiating this seminar in the South Asia region include the fact that the region has the second highest growth rate in the world, has economic policies similar to East Asia, has high poverty rates, and has geographic proximity to Southeast Asia. The seminar focused on identifying a policy agenda, the implementation of which would fully realize the region’s potential for sustained rapid economic growth and social advancement.

Specifically, the overall stated objective of the seminar was “to explore the policy agenda that the region needs to pursue to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement in the early decades of the next century.” This objective was too broad and encompassed goals that were long-term. Therefore, the evaluation had to identify measurable short-term objectives.

The task manager enumerated six immediate objectives. These were:

- 1) to bring together high-level officials of the region to discuss regional potential;
- 2) to enhance understanding of different paradigms of development in the region;
- 3) to understand further regional characteristics and to look for possibilities of regional integration;
- 4) to look at the sustainability and mutual benefits of a regional strategy;

¹ The names of resource persons are available in the program agenda (Annex A).

- 5) to provide an opportunity for networking; and
 - 6) to agree on the nature of a future policy agenda.
- The evaluation focused on several of these immediate objectives.

Evaluation Objectives and Methods

The evaluation was framed to assess whether the seminar's intended short-term objectives were achieved. The following key evaluation questions were posed to the participants to capture their perceptions:

- 1) What were the participants' expectations for the seminar?
- 2) What were the participants' perceptions about the relevance, focus, and structure of the seminar?
- 3) To what extent did the seminar help the participants in clarifying issues related to policy options?
- 4) To what extent did the participants perceive that the seminar met their expectations?
- 5) To what extent did the seminar promote networking among individuals and institutions?
- 6) What were the participants' assessments of the overall effectiveness of the seminar?

Finally, the evaluation also served the purpose of providing lessons for the future—to learn what worked and what did not. Specifically, the evaluation addressed the aspects of the seminar that strengthened or limited its effectiveness.

A combination of methods and data sources was used to perform this evaluation. This combination included pre-seminar interviews, during-seminar interviews (with participants, organizers, and resource persons), participant observations, a post-seminar questionnaire, and finally, content analysis of the documents prepared regarding the seminar (newspaper articles about the seminar and the back-to-office report of the task manager). The data provided evidence and insight on the relevance, structure and effectiveness of the seminar, participant expectations, lessons learned from the seminar, and the future plans of respondents as a result of the seminar. The main source of data was a structured survey instrument, a post-seminar questionnaire, which contained both closed- and open-ended questions. The evaluator's opportunity to be a participant-observer for all sessions and to interact with participants on site added more to the evaluation than simply using the survey instrument alone.

Evaluation Findings

Pre-seminar interviews, which were semi-structured as well as face-to-face, were conducted with 11 (10%) of the participants. These provided some insights into the participants' expectations for the seminar. Furthermore, they were asked what they thought of the agenda and the resource persons, and whether they felt the seminar would lead to regional integration. In general, respondents had high expectations for the seminar and thought it was timely to organize an event of this nature for South Asia. Those who had not previously been to this type of seminar had higher expectations than those who had been to similar seminars.

With the exception of the resource persons, participants did not receive the seminar program agenda or the reading materials until the evening before the seminar. Therefore, many participants did not have time to go through those documents prior to the seminar. With regard to the program agenda, those who received the program in advance felt that it focused on current interest areas, while others who did not have access to the materials in advance did not know what to expect. There was a consensus of opinion that the seminar attracted high-level resource persons. However, the regional integration aspect was the most questionable topic, judging by the respondents' opinions in the pre-seminar interview.

The post-seminar findings represent the views of 48 respondents out of the 54 who were present at the last session of the seminar. The response rate of 88% is a satisfactory rate compared to the feedback received in similar conferences². Despite the short time period, the opportunity provided to the evaluator to introduce and administer the survey questionnaire during the seminar contributed to the satisfactory response rate. According to the majority of respondents, the seminar's strength was its ability to attract high-level participants and resource persons. These high profile participants provided an excellent forum in which to discuss future economic policy issues and most felt that the seminar was relevant to their respective institutional or organizational needs and future work. In this seminar, the highest ratings³ were received for relevance, timing, promoting the exchange of lessons and ideas, and overall effectiveness. Over 60% of the respondents gave these issues a rating of 4 or 5. The seminar's ability to promote regional initiatives and its ability to identify suitable policy options were given an average rating.

The lowest ratings⁴ were received for adequacy of time for constructive discussion and the depth in which the issues were treated during the seminar. Many felt that there were too many sessions and that the number of discussants per panel restricted time for further discussion. It is apparent that depth of discussion and debate at the seminar suffered at the expense of its breadth of topics and number of presenters.

The seminar intended to enhance the participants' understanding of different paradigms of development in the region and to discuss and understand the region's potential. However, relatively low ratings were awarded for the questions on the extent to which the seminar helped: (1) in learning about suitable policies that the respondent had not previously considered, (2) in assessing the requirements of different policy alternatives, (3) in assessing the consequences of different policy alternatives, and (4) in identifying most suitable policy options.

The question "to what extent did the seminar promote regional initiatives?" was rated positively by about 40% of the respondents. The seminar's role as a catalyst to debate major economic reforms, or to understand future economic potentials and economic

² Allocation of a time slot in the program agenda for evaluation also provides the participants with sufficient time to complete and concentrate on the questions and their responses. The practice of allocating time for participant evaluation also adds to the "evaluation culture" of events and helps improve survey response rates.

³ Ratings were based on a five point Likert scale where 1 denoted minimum and 5 maximum values. In this report, the term "average" is used interchangeably with "midpoint," which is 3 on the Likert scale. "Above average" refers to 4 or 5, while scores of 1 or 2 are classified as "below average."

⁴ For details, please see the section under "Results from the Survey" in the main report.

constraints was rated above average by about half (49-54%) of the respondents. The seminar did promote the exchange of lessons/experiences according to 71% of respondents who awarded this aspect of the seminar with an above average rating.

Despite varying degrees of ratings given to different aspects of the seminar, 60% of the respondents rated the overall effectiveness of the seminar above average. The open-ended responses as well as informal interactions with the respondents revealed that this seminar, being the first of its nature in the region, could serve as the point of departure for many events that may emerge as a result. In this sense, the respondents felt positive about the seminar.

Discussions and interviews with key personnel responsible for organizing the seminar revealed that the seminar also brought about a salutary initiative in partnership building. An internal partnership among entities within the Bank (WBI, South Asia Region, and DEC) was established in the process of organizing the seminar. Externally, a partnership was established between the World Bank and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. These partnerships contributed to the overall effectiveness of the seminar.

Again, key sources revealed that the President of Sri Lanka had been briefed about the objectives of the seminar by a seminar delegation headed by Mr. Stiglitz, and that the idea of regional integration for economic growth had been well received.

Seven specific conclusions can be drawn from this study:

- 1) The seminar was successful as an event which brought together high caliber resource persons and took place at the right time according to the respondents.
- 2) The seminar provided a forum for the exchange of ideas, experience and knowledge.
- 3) Although the seminar as a general learning event received high ratings, learning about specific issues related to policy options received relatively lower ratings.
- 4) Slightly more than half of the respondents felt that their expectations (i.e., issues they hoped would be addressed and objectives that they had in mind when they decided to attend) were met. A majority (61%) said that the seminar achieved the stated objectives⁵.
- 5) The seminar initiated a dialogue for the participants to establish networks of individuals as well as institutions. One major outcome of this seminar was the establishment of South Asian Network of Economic Institutes (SANEI).
- 6) The overall effectiveness of the seminar was rated positively by a majority of the respondents.
- 7) The seminar also brought about a salutary initiative in that an internal and external partnerships became established.

⁵ The stated objective was "to explore the policy agenda that the region needs to pursue to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement in the early decades of the next century."

Recommendations

Four recommendations are offered here for consideration, based on the evaluation.

- 1) While the seminar in general was rated above average by over 60 percent of the respondents for its relevance and timing, treatment of the specific policy related issues in the seminar was rated average or below average by over 60 percent. Adequacy of the depth in which the issues were discussed received the lowest rating in this seminar. Investing time at the front end by means (way) of a needs assessment would help in identifying relevant policy issues and appropriate participants, thereby increasing the impact of the seminar.
- 2) Concerns about the lack of time for discussions, as mentioned by the majority of respondents, could be addressed by implementing a set of guidelines for seminar moderators and paper presenters, helping them to adhere to a given time period. Ensuring more time for discussions and reflection and a closer review of the presentations and discussants' written comments prior to the seminar could help in this regard. Opportunities for group interactions would allow participants to take advantage of the valuable experience and insight of resource persons.
- 3) Finding ways to dispatch seminar materials in advance would allow participants to better familiarize themselves with the presentations prior to the seminar. It should be possible to send executive summaries of all papers via e-mail or fax to the participants⁶.
- 4) Exposure to past evaluation findings and learning from past experience could enhance the achievement of expected outcomes and could provide ideas for innovations and improvements.

⁶ Almost all participants in this seminar had access to e-mail or fax connections.

INTRODUCTION

The seminar on “South Asia Beyond 2000: Policies for Catch-up Growth” was organized by the World Bank Institute (WBI, formerly the Economic Development Institute, or “EDI,” of the World Bank) in cooperation with the South Asia Region of the World Bank and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. The two-day seminar was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from March 19 to 20, 1998 and was conducted in English. The WBI invited leading researchers and policy makers from both the public and private sectors. Together with World Bank staff, the number of participants was 71⁷. Additionally, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka invited 41⁸ local and international bank representatives based in Sri Lanka to participate as observers. Over 100 participants attended the first day of the seminar. Opening remarks were made by Messrs. A.S. Jayawardene, Governor, Central Bank, Sri Lanka and John Williamson, Chief Economist, South Asia Region, the World Bank. The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Joseph Stiglitz, Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank.

The seminar had six thematic sessions followed by a closing session in which an effort was made to synthesize an appropriate policy agenda focused on sustained growth (see Annex A, Program Agenda). The stated objective of the seminar was “to explore the policy agenda that the region needs to pursue to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement in the early decades of the next century⁹.” This evaluation assesses the extent to which the seminar achieved its stated objective.

This report is organized into four parts. The first part details the rationale, objectives, and structure of the seminar. The second deals with evaluation design and methodology, while the third covers the results of the evaluation. The fourth part discusses conclusions and recommendations. While this evaluation is both summative and formative in nature, the purpose of the evaluation is multifarious. Its main purpose is to assess whether the seminar’s intended objectives were achieved. But it also serves the purpose of providing lessons for the future—to see what worked, what did not, and what can be applied to improve similar seminars in the future, and to improve the evaluation process itself.

Rationale for the Seminar

The timing of this seminar coincided with celebrations of Sri Lanka’s “fifty years of independence.” The region had not witnessed this type of a forum before and such an event was thought to be useful. A series of seminars were taking place in Sri Lanka at the same time, prior to and after this regional seminar. One of the seminars in this series was on “Sri Lanka-India Economic Relations” and the other was focused entirely on Sri Lanka, organized by the Central Bank, examining the economic situations and policies over the past fifty years. “South Asia Beyond 2000” was timed in such a way

⁷ Information provided by then EDIPR.

⁸ Information provided by conference organizers, Central Bank, Colombo.

⁹ Program Agenda.

that delegates who attended the WBI seminar would have the opportunity to attend the other two seminars as well.

As stated in the program agenda, there are several rationales behind the seminar. First, South Asia seems poised to replicate East Asian growth rates seen during the period of their "miracle." Over the past decade, the region of South Asia as a whole has had the second highest growth rate in the world. Second, policies similar to those that spurred East Asian economic growth are in place, or at least underway, in the South Asian countries. Third, as South Asia is one of the two poorest regions in the world, there is an implicit assumption that there is room for growth. Recognized reasons for initiating this seminar in the South Asia region include the region's demographic conditions and poverty status, its geographic proximity to Southeast Asia, and the fact that policy reforms are currently in place¹⁰. While the above conditions are favorable to economic growth, they alone are not sufficient to guarantee that South Asia will emerge as a global growth pole. "The seminar focused therefore on the identification of the policy agenda whose implementation would permit realization of the region's potential for sustained rapid economic growth and social advancement."¹¹

Goals and Objectives of the Seminar

The overall goal of the seminar was to explore the policy agenda that the region needs to pursue in order to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement during the early decades of the next century. Although not explicitly stated in the program agenda, discussions with the task manager revealed the following immediate objectives of the seminar:

- ⌚ to bring high-level officials together to discuss and understand South Asian regional potential;
- ⌚ to enhance understanding of the paradigms of development in the region;
- ⌚ to fully understand regional characteristics and to look for possibilities of regional integration;
- ⌚ to look at the sustainability and mutual benefits of a regional strategy;
- ⌚ to provide an opportunity for networking; and
- ⌚ to agree on the nature of the future policy agenda.

Seminar Participants and Structure

The seminar aimed at bringing together leading researchers, policy makers, economists from academic institutions, governments of the region, the private sector, and international organizations. Altogether there were 71 participants, out of which 32 were resource persons—keynote speakers, paper presenters, discussants and chairpersons. There were six paper presentations; each session containing three or four discussants. The Sri Lankan Central Bank made use of this opportunity to invite 41 additional banking personnel as guest observers. The following table does not include these guest observers.

¹⁰ Program Agenda.

¹¹ Back-to-Office report by the task manager.

Table 1. Conference Participants by Country of their Institutional Affiliation

Country	Participants	Resource Persons	Total Number
Australia	-	1	1
Bangladesh	1	2	3
Chile	-	1	1
India	10 (1)	7	17
Nepal	4 (1)	-	4
Pakistan	6 (1)	4	10
Philippines	2 *	-	2
Sri Lanka	13 (2)	4	17
UK	-	2	2
USA	-	5	5
World Bank HQ/IMF	3	6	9
Total Number	39	32	71

Source: Participants' list provided by training administration team of the then EDIPR.

Note: () numbers given in parenthesis indicate those participating from the World Bank field office of the country indicated.

* indicates Asian Development Bank.

In addition to the above, one evaluator from the WBI Evaluation Unit (WBIES) and three seminar administration personnel from WBI were at the seminar. While Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America reflect the work bases (affiliations) of the resource persons, most of them have their origins in South Asia. About half of the participants represented research and teaching disciplines, while the rest came from policy and financial institutions. Of the 71 participants, seven (10%) were female.

Pedagogical Tools

The seminar was conducted without concurrent sessions, enabling all participants to follow the six thematic sessions. The two-day seminar followed the same format for all sessions: each of the six thematic presentations was followed by three or four discussants and a subsequent opening of the floor for questions and comments. Special speeches were delivered during dinner time. On the second day, there was a panel discussion after the completion of the last session.

All participants were given a binder with the speakers' papers. These presentation materials were distributed to the participants the night before the seminar. Most speakers gave a lecture-style presentation, some with visual aids on overhead projectors, to present their papers. In each of the sessions, the presenter took about 20 to 30 minutes and each discussant spent about 10 to 15 minutes commenting on the paper. When the moderator was not keeping strict time control, some presentations went over their designated time allotments, thus restricting the time originally allocated for discussants. As a result, two sessions suffered from limitations to the time for audience questions. In two other sessions, the questions from the audience turned out to be long comments, which further limited the number of questions from the audience.

Each of the six thematic sessions had between ninety minutes and two hours for the main presentation, comments from the discussants, and questions and comments from the audience. The themes covered, in order of presentation, were (first day) "Regional

Integration” (session I, 10:45-12:45), “What Macroeconomic Policies are Sound?” (session II, 2:30-4:30), and “Social Policies and Economic Success” (session III, 5:00-7:00). At dinner time (8:00 p.m.), Mr. Rolf Luders, a guest speaker from the Institute of Economics in Chile, addressed the participants. The second day’s themes were, “Financial Development” (session IV, 9:00-10:30 a.m.) “Macroeconomic Policy: More Liberalization—or Industrial Policy?” (session V, 10:45-12:20), and “The Evolution of Development Strategy in the First Fifty Years after Independence” (session VI, 2:30-4:00 p.m.). Following the last thematic session was a panel discussion, “The Policy Agenda” (4:30-6:30 p.m.). After dinner, Mr. Mahbub ul Haq, President of Human Development Centre in Pakistan, addressed the participants as a guest speaker. On both days, the informal discussions continued until about midnight.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the evaluation at this stage (Phase I) was to determine the success of the seminar, mainly based on perceptions of the participants. The measurement of learning outcomes was based on level I, and to a limited extent on level II, of the Kirkpatrick model framework¹². Level I measured participants' reactions to the program; level II measured the extent to which participants' attitudes changed, or their knowledge or skills increased as a result of the seminar. In this study, both level I and II measures were based on self-reported perceptions of the respondents. The intended tracer study and follow-up discussions with respective stakeholders will measure behavioral change (level III) as a result of the seminar.

The main purpose of this evaluation, Phase I, is to assess whether the seminar's intended immediate objectives were achieved. The overall objective of the seminar was too broadly framed; it encompassed goals that were long-term in nature and therefore could not be used for this evaluation. Phase II of this evaluation will be a follow-up on the impact of the seminar over the years. As mentioned earlier, the task manager indicated that the immediate objectives of the seminar were to bring high-level officials together to discuss and understand regional potential; to enhance understanding of the paradigms of development in the region; to understand further regional characteristics and to look for possibilities of regional integration; to look at the sustainability and mutual benefits of a regional strategy; to provide an opportunity for networking; and to agree on the nature of the future policy agenda.

Evaluation Objectives and Methods

The evaluation was framed to assess whether the seminar's intended short-term objectives were achieved. Thus the evaluation attempted to address the seminar's relevance to the countries, its timing, urgency of the issues to be addressed, the seminar as a learning event (self-assessment of specific/relevant issues learned, facilitating exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience), and the seminar as a facilitator in network establishment (networking of individuals as well as institutions). The evaluation also sought to assess the format, structure, and overall effectiveness of the seminar, and whether the seminar achieved its stated objectives. While the evaluator was a participant-observer, the main portion of the data was based on the perceptions and assessments of the participants.

In addition, the evaluation sought to gauge participants' expectations before they were exposed to the seminar. The pre-seminar questions focused on the participants' expectations and what they thought about the agenda and seminar objectives. This was done in order to provide some sense of baseline information as to the participants' expectations for the seminar.

¹² "Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels" by Donald L. Kirkpatrick, (Second Edition, 1998)

The following key evaluation questions were posed to the participants to capture their perceptions:

1. What were the participants' expectations for the seminar?
2. What were the participants' perceptions about the relevance, the focus, and the structure of the seminar?
3. To what extent did the seminar help the participants clarify issues related to policy options?
4. To what extent did the participants perceive that the seminar met its objectives?
5. To what extent did the seminar promote networking among individuals and institutions?
6. What were the participants' assessment of the overall effectiveness of the seminar?

Finally, the evaluation also served the purpose of providing lessons for the future—to learn what worked and what did not, specifically the aspects that strengthened or limited the effectiveness of the seminar.

Data Collection Methods and Sources

A combination of data collection (triangulation) methods and sources was used in evaluating this seminar. The methods included pre-seminar interviews, during-seminar interviews, participant observations, a post-seminar questionnaire, and content analysis of the documents prepared for the seminar. The sources included interviews conducted with several seminar participants, resource persons and organizers; the back-to-office report of the task manager; and newspaper articles about the seminar. The main source of data was the structured evaluation survey which contained both closed- and open-ended questions. This structured evaluation survey form (Annex B) was prepared by the evaluator in consultation with the task manager and was peer reviewed for its content, clarity, and format. The closed and open-ended questions addressed similar issues, thus enabling a validity check on the responses provided to closed-ended questions, as well as providing an opportunity to collect information that may have been missed by the closed-ended questions.

The evaluation form (see Annex B) addressed issues of seminar relevance, timing, time management, expectations, focus, achievement of specific seminar objectives, the seminar as a learning forum and overall effectiveness. The closed-ended questions were rated using a five point Likert type scale ranging from 1=minimum to 5=maximum. The theoretical mean was 3 (an average score) and a “cannot answer” category was included. A set of open-ended questions was also included to provide additional information. While quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, the qualitative responses were analyzed using Ethnograph software.

Although focus group discussions were planned (before and after the seminar), it was not possible to carry them out due to the seminar's tight program, which did not allow for much free time between sessions. Most participants and resource persons arrived the evening prior to the program, allowing only very limited time for interviews to capture their perceptions/expectations of the seminar. Three key questions (which are listed on [page 9](#)) were asked prior to the seminar. However, the only time available for this interaction was during the cocktail reception and at dinner (a few hours). The pre-seminar interviews were done with a “judgmental” sample (i.e. based on availability of participants).

On the last day of the seminar, immediately following the afternoon tea/coffee break, all participants and observers who were present at the last session were asked to complete the structured questionnaire noted above. The task manager and the session moderator provided a few minutes for the evaluator to explain the questionnaire to the participants before starting the closing session of the seminar. However, only about five minutes was allowed for the participants to concentrate on the questionnaire as time constraints forced the closing session to commence.

The program lasted two full days and, since there were no concurrent sessions, it was possible to observe all of the sessions. Informal interactions with participants during meal times and coffee/tea breaks also provided additional information. Anonymity for respondents was guaranteed in all face-to-face interviews.

Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation is limited in its scope.

- ⌚ First, the evaluation design did not attempt to assess knowledge gains in the conventional way, i.e., using pre-post tests, because it was not appropriate for this type of forum (this forum was mainly for exchange of ideas and experiences). However, the questionnaire addressed some aspects of learning as a result of the seminar (e.g., “To what extent did the seminar help you learn about suitable policies that you had not previously considered?”).
- ⌚ Second, the selection of resource persons and participants, as well as any other decisions in the preparatory stage of the seminar, was not evaluated. The evaluator’s involvement in the seminar took place at a later stage after most of the preparatory work was completed.
- ⌚ Third, the evaluation did not address issues related to the quality and content of the six presented papers. It was the responsibility of the panelists to determine the quality, relevance and depth of the papers presented. However, pedagogical methods used in seminar sessions were addressed.

The question sequence and wording of the evaluation form were peer-reviewed, but a pilot study was not done. Open-ended questions were included to validate the closed-ended responses.

The program was “cramped” and discussions continued during and after dinner. It was too burdensome to ask for further input between or after sessions, as participants were already fatigued. Furthermore, since the program lasted only two days, participants had their own agenda for networking with other participants in the group, which further limited the time that the evaluator had to gather their insights. Nor was it possible to systematically select the participants for informal interviews due to the seminar’s tight schedule. For these reasons, interaction with the participants was limited to those who were available during meal time and breaks. Individual interviews were limited to the availability of participants on an ad-hoc basis, and no systematic method was used in sample selection. Therefore, the views expressed in these brief conversations can only be interpreted as suggestive and may not be truly representative of the views of the majority of the participants. Results presented reflect the self-reported perceptions of respondents. However, several factors that were advantageous and contributed positively to this evaluation are described below.

The opportunity to be a participant observer in all sessions and to interact with participants on-site was an advantage as well as a source of data. Thus the presence of

the evaluator was complimentary to the survey instrument. Due to the size of the group, the evaluator was able to establish rapport with most of the participants. This rapport made it easier to obtain open views about the seminar. Most participants came from the South Asia region, and comprised a somewhat homogeneous group in terms of their professional background and seniority. Although a pilot study was not conducted, the evaluation assumes that the survey instrument was clear to all participants and that errors due to misunderstanding were kept to a minimum given the high caliber of the participants.

An evaluation time slot was not included in the initial program agenda and therefore, as mentioned earlier, time was taken from the last session to introduce the evaluation form. Due to time pressure, only about five minutes were available for participants to concentrate on the end-of-seminar evaluation form. However, the participants were supportive of the survey/evaluation despite the limited time available and completed it during the session. It was noteworthy that the forms were completed by a majority of participants and contained extensive responses to open-ended questions. The end-of-seminar survey response rate was 88 percent (N=48)¹³.

¹³ Throughout this document, "N" indicates the number of respondents.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results of the Pre-Seminar Interviews

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 11 participants prior to the seminar. This section presents the views expressed by these eleven participants (about 10% of all participants) regarding their expectations of the seminar. The conversations were generated during cocktails and dinner times. The key issues discussed centered around the following three questions:

- ⌚ What are your expectations for this seminar?
- ⌚ What do you think of the agenda and the resource persons?
- ⌚ Do you feel this seminar will lead to regional integration?

In general, respondents had high expectations for the seminar and thought it was timely to organize an event of this nature for South Asia. Those who had not previously been to this type of seminar had higher expectations than those who had been to similar seminars. For instance, one resource person commented that "... much cannot be expected, but it is a good time to meet people and do the networking." Another respondent felt this was an opportunity to both meet and learn "... as eminent economists are participants," and yet another resource person had reservations about the outcome of the seminar, "... of course economists are theorists—distant from practical situations on ground."

With the exception of the resource persons, participants did not receive the seminar program until the evening before the seminar. Therefore, many participants did not have time to go through the program before it started. With regard to the program agenda, those who received the program in advance felt that it focused on current interest areas, while others who did not have access to the materials in advance did not know what to expect. One participant said "... how can we comment on expectations when we get the program only at the last moment?" Another said, "I had a cursory glance at the program. I expect it to meet my expectations." The resource persons felt that the key areas were covered in the agenda.

The regional integration aspect was the most questionable topic in the respondents' opinions prior to the seminar. A resource person commented, "I do not have much faith in South Asia integration. This seminar has no integration agenda." All those who responded to the issue of South Asia integration had similar reactions prior to the seminar. Comments such as "... though desirable, it appears to be very difficult," "... depends on the people and the private sector there is little hope for integration through government initiative," and "... unrealistic due to political instability," represented some of the common themes on regional integration that emerged during the pre-seminar interviews. Although these are subjective measures of respondents' perceptions, they convey the respondents' beliefs about the seminar.

Data Presentation and Evaluation Results

Survey Respondents

Although the total number of participants was 71 (see Table 1), the last session on the second day was attended by only 54 participants. Of these 54 participants that were administered the questionnaire during the last session, 48 (88%) completed the survey. The following results are based on these 48 respondents.

Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Respondents (N=48)

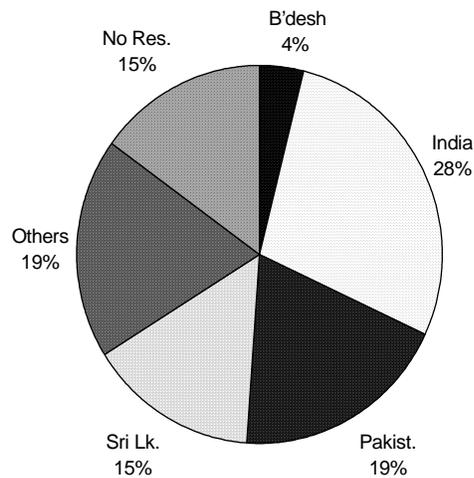


Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents by their country of work. Fifteen percent did not respond to this question. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had the largest percentage participation rates in the seminar. Regional imbalances in panel presentations and overall seminar participation were mentioned by 16 percent of the respondents to the open-ended questions as a limiting factor for seminar effectiveness.

The following Figure (Figure 2) represents the survey respondents' institutional affiliations.

Figure 2: Respondents by Institution (N=48)

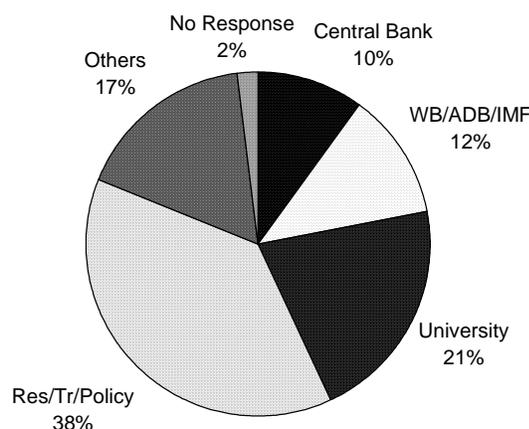


Figure 2 shows that a major portion (38%) of the respondents came from research, training, and policy institutes, while the second largest group (21%) comprised academicians.

Results from the Survey

Almost all issues received some consensus on ratings, based on answers to the questionnaire. The standard deviation for all responses ranged between 0.9 to 1.1. The analysis of data is restricted to descriptive statistics only (a complete table is given in Annex C).

As stated earlier, the responses of participants to a set of questions were measured using a 5 point Likert type scale with a midpoint of 3 (theoretical mean or "average"). Four open-ended questions in the survey related to seminar effectiveness, limitations, outcomes and future plans. Using the software, Ethnograph, the open-ended responses were analyzed to capture emerging common themes.

The following section presents the results of the evaluation questionnaire and includes the closed-ended responses complemented by the themes which emerged from the open-ended responses. Although the total number of respondents was 48, responses received for individual questions varied and most (90%) ranged from 45 to 48.

Seminar relevance

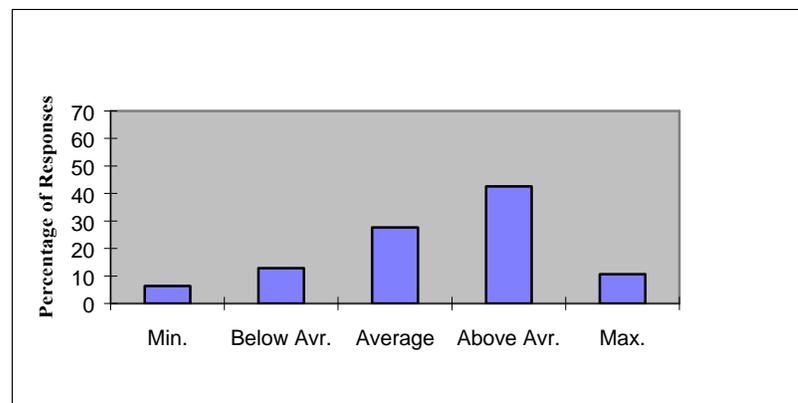
Seventy five percent (N= 35) of the respondents offered ratings above the midpoint (4 or 5 on the Likert type scale) for the relevance of the seminar to their organizational needs, future work and/or their current functions. The mean value was 3.9 with a mode of 4, which is "above average." In terms of timing, one respondent commented "This was

conducted at the most appropriate time. i.e. 50 years since independence for India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Also we are at the threshold of the next millennium. High time to look back and plan.” Sixty two percent of the respondents awarded a 4 or 5 for the “seminar occurring at the right time considering their country’s needs.”

Expectations

Fifty three percent of respondents (N=25) gave ratings above the midpoint for the extent to which the seminar focused on the issues they hoped it would address. Nineteen percent (N=9) of respondents awarded a rating below the midpoint (1 or 2 on the Likert type scale) for the same question. While the mean was 3.4, the modal category was 4. Data are visually presented in Figure 3.

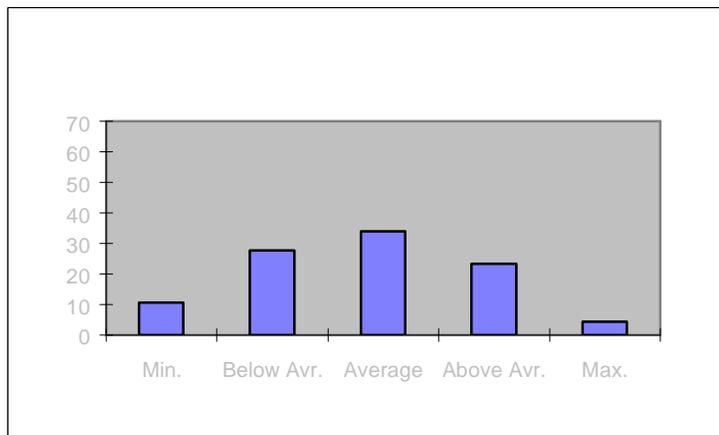
Figure: 3 Focus on Issues Expected (N=47)



Seminar format/ structure

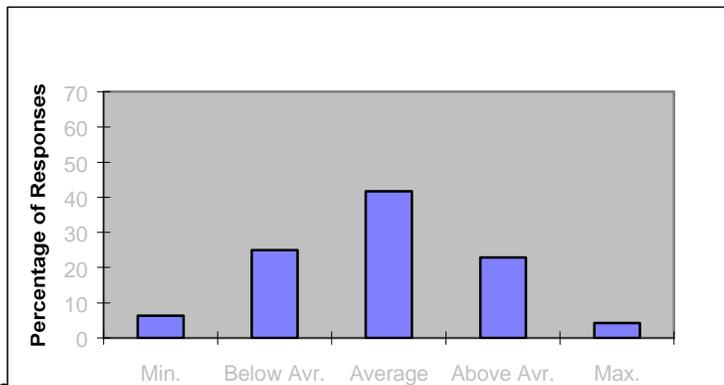
As figure 4 illustrates, a near majority of respondents was not content with the seminar format/structure. Issues of “depth” and “time for discussion” received low ratings in this seminar. Although active participation of all would have maximized the utilization of the high-profile resource persons, the lowest ratings received in the seminar were directed to the question on the time allocated for discussions. Only 28 percent (N= 13) of the respondents offered ratings above the midpoint for the adequacy of time allocated for discussions, while 38 percent of the respondents rated it below average and the rest (34%) rated it as average (midpoint). The mean value for this question was 2.8. “Too many themes. Little time for discussion.”, was one among similar comments made by the respondents.

Figure: 4 Adequacy of Time for Discussions (N=48)



Related to the same issue, as shown in figure 5, “depth of subject matter” received similar ratings. While 42 percent (N=20) rated this aspect average (midpoint), 31 percent (N=15) rated it below average. Only 27 percent (N=13) rated it above average. The mean value was 2.9, while the modal category was 3.

Figure 5: Issues Treated in Sufficient Depth (N=48)



Thirty seven percent of the open-ended responses indicated that a lack of time and inadequate depth of treatment for the issues covered were constraints. Comments such

as, "Breadth of coverage sometimes limited capacity to focus," "Discussants were unfocused at times," "Too large a forum for in-depth discussions," and "Tried to cover too much ground," were common concerns expressed by the respondents. These responses are consistent with the lower ratings given in the questionnaire for these same issues.

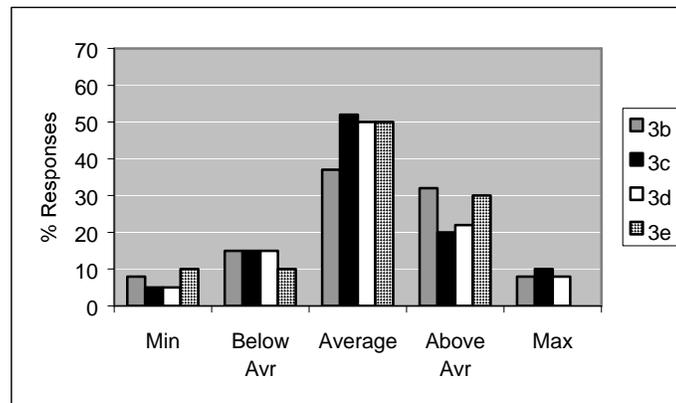
In addition to the responses from open-ended and closed-ended responses, informal conversations with participants revealed a mix of opinions about the seminar's structure. Comments such as discussions being "constructive and frank," or "repetitive," "unfocused," and "lacked details on different countries" were similar to the themes which emerged in the open-ended responses. One person commented that the sessions would have benefited from shorter papers from many, rather than a panel commenting on one person's presentation. Another felt it would not have made any difference, since the discussants were giving their opinions on the same topic. However, four of the sessions were not as well moderated as the other two. The opportunity for questions and discussions were limited in the former. Some commented "poor timekeeping by most speakers and chairmen though not all," "lack of time management in some sessions," and "most of session chairs were not good time managers" in their open responses to the question on "what features limited the seminar's effectiveness?" While some presenters followed the time limit, some went over, limiting discussion time. Interactions were lively and open in those particular sessions where sufficient time was available for discussion.

Usefulness of the seminar as a learning event

Questions on whether the seminar was helpful in assessing policy alternatives or identifying policy options received an average rating (mean 3.1) with a mode of 3. Twenty percent (N=9) rated this less than average while 30 percent (N=14) felt that these issues were dealt with in an above average manner. Half of the respondents offered an average rating (midpoint).

Figure 6 shows ratings awarded by the respondents for the questions on the extent to which the seminar helped them learn about policy-related issues, specifically questions 3b to 3e as indicated on the legend below. The majority of the respondents gave average ratings to these questions. One respondent commented “several papers were not adequately policy oriented and strong.”

Figure 6: Ratings for Policy Related Issues (N=47)



To what extent did the seminar help you:

3b = learn about suitable policies that were not previously considered?

3c = assess the requirements of different policy alternatives?

3d = assess the consequences of different policy alternatives?

3e = identify the most suitable policy options for your country?

(Note: For question 3e, the number of responses under the category “Maximum” was 0)

Promoting regional initiatives was also an important aspect of the seminar. The question, “to what extent did the seminar promote regional initiatives” was rated average or below average by 60 percent of the respondents. On a positive side, 71 percent of the respondents (N=34) rated above average the exchange of lessons and experiences promoted by the seminar. Over half of the respondents felt that the seminar acted as a catalyst to debate major economic reforms.

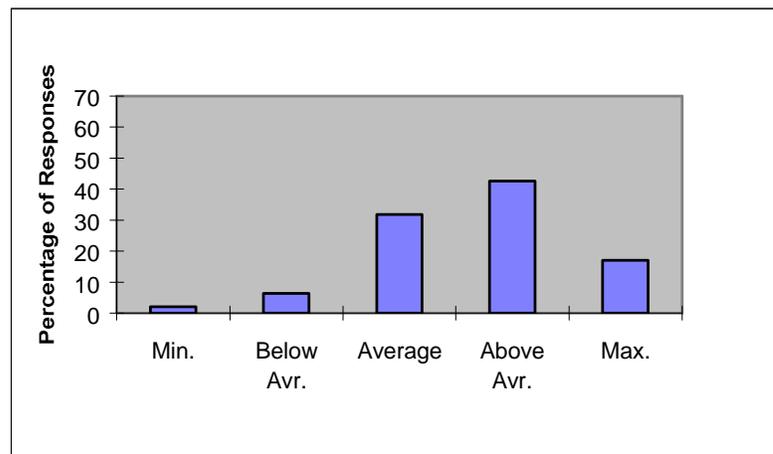
Networks

The seminar evoked high interest among the participants to network with other participants. To the closed-ended questions on, “Networks among individuals” (N=45) and “Networks among institutions,” (N=41), the former was rated higher than the latter. Fifty one percent (N=23) gave an “above average” rating on individual networking fostered by the seminar and the mean was 3.5. Only 13 percent (N=6) offered a rating below the midpoint on the Likert type scale. For the question on institutional networking fostered by the seminar only 44 percent (N=18) gave ratings above midpoint while 27 percent (N=11) gave a below-midpoint rating. The mean was 3.2 while the mode was 4. About 23 percent (N=9) of the respondents mentioned in the open-ended responses that the opportunity to network was one of the strengths of this seminar. Furthermore, networking was one of the most commonly stated responses to the question on future plans.

Overall effectiveness

It is evident from the results, as illustrated in Figure 7, that the seminar was effective from the respondents' perspective. Sixty percent of the respondents (N=28) rated above the midpoint (4 or 5) the overall effectiveness of the seminar. Thirty two percent rated the seminar as average and 8% rated it below the midpoint. The majority of the respondents (75%) believed that the seminar was relevant and timely. Fifty three percent (N=25) of the respondents gave the seminar ratings above the midpoint for the expectations they had concerning issues to be addressed in the seminar. Here 28% rated it as average (midpoint) and 19% rated it below average.

Figure: 7 Overall Effectiveness of the Seminar (N=47)



The high quality of participants and speakers was a feature that contributed to the effectiveness of the seminar, as it was mentioned in 60% percent of the open-ended responses. "Good institutions,;" "quality speakers,;" "high profile,;" "experienced,;" "high caliber,;" were some of the key words used by many.

Outcome of seminar and action plans

To the question on "when you return to your office, what are the one or two things you will strive to do as a result of the seminar," all respondents had plans except seven (14%). Reading seminar papers, writing research papers based on seminar exposure, sharing and dissemination of seminar materials, comparative studies, and making use of the seminar materials in teaching were mentioned by 56% of the respondents. "To incorporate the learning from the seminar into my research/work immediately," "Write articles about South Asian growth possibilities and constraints," "Circulate papers among colleagues," and "Promote exchange of information with regional institute for research," were some of the predominant responses.

Policy-related work was mentioned by 14%, and the rest had plans to strengthen networks and linkages ("encourage establishment of research linkages," "networking with institutions in other South Asian countries") or to simply reflect back on what was discussed at the seminar. One respondent's (university professor) plan was to "think of why are seminars on economy concentrating on reforms without taking into account the majority of the population—the poor."

Responses to the question, "What do you believe will be the most important outcome you could think of as a result of this seminar," were illuminating and encouraging. Establishing research contacts and networks in the region were mentioned by over a

third of the respondents. Only five out of 48 did not answer this question, but the majority of those who responded (over 50%) believed the seminar outcome to be more collaborative research and exchange of experiences for the future. Some responses to this question were, "Establishment of research networks," "Exchange of intellectual experience," "Some mechanism for linking different research institutions in the region," "Better understanding of what others in the region are doing," "To understand the South Asia better," and "Exchange of ideas, experience of success/failures in each country." Only one respondent had doubts, expressing the view, "Difficult to answer. It depends on how the policy makers are able to convey the message."

Evidently, judging by the open-ended responses, participants showed a sustained interest in and were optimistic about the seminar's outcomes. Success, in the long run, will depend on how many of their intended plans are translated into action. A tracer study following-up on this seminar and continued dialogue with other stakeholders would provide the opportunity to gauge the intended, as well as unintended, outcomes of this seminar.

Post-Seminar Interviews

The Post-Seminar Evaluation interviews were constrained by the fact that the seminar ended late with little time (between the end of the seminar and the entertainment program followed by the dinner) for interaction with participants. Since the participants had already responded to the evaluation questionnaire, it was difficult to involve them further with the evaluation. Many said that what they had to say had already been stated on the questionnaire.

It was possible to generate some discussion over dinner with six participants about the seminar as a whole. Some highlights were that the seminar covered a wide subject area with an equally wide cross section of participants, ranging from academics to policy-makers and bankers. A few thought highly diversified ideas sometimes made the discussions too general in nature. However, they also said that, this being the first seminar of its kind in South Asia, it was useful as a starting point. Some felt that any follow-up seminars should have more specific subject areas with provisions for in-depth analysis, preferably by expert groups and followed up by presentations in plenary. The time constraint, according to the group, was also obvious and not helpful in generating useful discussion. Since quite a number of eminent participants were present, greater opportunity should have been provided for in-depth group discussions on the issues of interest to take advantage of the expertise present. On the positive side, the seminar evoked high interest among the participants to network.

Logistics

This was not evaluated by the formal questionnaire. Evaluator observations and informal discussions with participants revealed that services provided were more than satisfactory. In general, most of the participants could be categorized as "conference goers," and they themselves mentioned, "We go to so many conferences, and this place is fantastic, no shortcomings in terms of comforts." In terms of facilities, participants were satisfied. Several commented on the logistics as a factor that contributed to the seminar effectiveness. One such comment was "very good, indeed excellent, physical arrangements which kept the conference trouble free." The conference support staff, both from WBI and from the Central Bank, worked very well together in making the logistics work to the satisfaction of those who attended the seminar.

Cost of the seminar

This seminar was sponsored jointly by the South Asia Region, DEC, WBI and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. According to the available information, total expenditure was estimated around \$180,000. Staff time and other in-kind expenses are not included in this cost estimation. Due to the mix of the seminar attendees, cost per participant needs to be interpreted with care. The average cost per participant was about \$2,500.00 for the 71 participants. Attendance of the guest-observers (41) may not have increased the cost much, as the only costs incurred by them would have been on meals.

Due to a lack of detailed cost estimations of these similar events, it is neither meaningful nor appropriate to compare costs across similar regional seminars or conferences.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

There were over 100 participants, including resource persons and observers, in the South Asia seminar to address the issues that the South Asia region needs to pursue in order to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advancement over the next decade. As outlined earlier, some of the immediate objectives of the seminar were to bring high level officials together to discuss and understand regional potential, to further enhance their understanding of the paradigm of development in the region, to look for possible regional integration, to create opportunities for networking, and to agree on the nature of the future policy agenda to be followed by these countries.

The response rate for the evaluation of this seminar was 88%; this is a satisfactory rate compared to the feedback received in similar conference evaluations. Despite the short time period, the opportunity provided to the evaluator to introduce and administer the survey questionnaire during the seminar contributed to the satisfactory response rate.¹⁴

The most frequently mentioned (60%) open-ended response was the seminar's ability to attract high-level policy makers, academicians, economists, researchers and bankers as participants and resource persons. The majority felt that the presence of high-profile participants representing South Asia provided an excellent forum to discuss the countries' economic policy issues for the future, and that the seminar was relevant to their respective institutions' or organizations' needs and their future work. The seminar's ability to promote regional initiatives and to identify suitable policy options for respective countries were rated by the respondents as average. However, it is evident from the respondents that the seminar provided fertile ground for networking.

There were widely differing levels of participant satisfaction with regard to different aspects of this seminar. A high percentage of the respondents, 73% (N=49), 62% (N=43), and 71% (N=48) gave above-midpoint ratings for the seminar relevance, the appropriateness of timing for the event, and for exchange of lessons and experiences, respectively. Overall, effectiveness and achievement of seminar objectives were also rated highly. Aspects such as depth of the coverage of seminar issues (mean=2.94) and time allocated for constructive discussions (mean=2.83) received less than average mean values. This was in part due to the eagerness (ambitious plans) of the organizers to make the maximum use of their high-level resource persons. The number of sessions and the number of discussants per panel restricted time for further comments, questions and discussions. Excessive reliance on lecture-style presentations and a lack of time for discussions, questions and comments from the floor caused some participant dissatisfaction, as discussed earlier. This was further exacerbated by a lack of control over time by the session moderators and/or the chairperson. This issue, whether it is the *number* of sessions or the *depth* to which issues are treated in sessions that is important, needs to be addressed before designing future such seminars. It is apparent

¹⁴ Allocation of a time slot in the program agenda for evaluation provides the participants sufficient time to complete and concentrate on the questions and their responses. It also contributes to the "evaluation culture" of the event and helps improve survey response rates.

that the depth of the seminar discourse suffered. Two opposing views that reflected comments regarding the architecture of the seminar were “Too large a forum for in-depth discussion, very late distribution of papers, and relatively little time devoted to floor discussion,” and “Very elaborate presentations of papers, active contributions of discussants and well organized sessions.”

There were also concerns from some under-represented countries on the panels over not being given more time for expressing their views and to represent their country’s situation. However, in general, participants felt that the topics covered were relevant and reflected current national as well as regional issues. The majority of the respondents (60%) agreed that the seminar was attended by high-level resource persons.

Even though it may be economical to cover a multitude of topics, or it may seem useful to deliver as many sessions as possible in one seminar, the absorption power of the audience is limited. This may defeat the purpose of covering much ground in a short time. Clearly, as mentioned earlier, the lowest two ratings awarded in this seminar were for the “Issues treated with sufficient depth,” and “Adequacy of time for discussion.” Similar reactions were observed in the Global Knowledge ’97 and Marrakech (MDF) ’97 conferences.

Although the seminar was rated as highly relevant to their needs, the rating given to the questions on the seminar applications—questions such as the “Extent the seminar helped in assessing the requirements of different policy options,” “Assessing the consequence of different policy alternatives,” and “identifying the most suitable policy options for the country” were average, with a mean value around 3.0.

The reading materials for the seminar were distributed the evening before the event. It was, on the part of the organizers, unavoidable due to the costs and time involved in delivering the bulky binders to each participant. Also there is a certain amount of risk involved in participants not receiving the materials on time. While the convenient and reliable mode would be to deliver the materials at registration time, the disadvantage is that those who wish to be prepared with readings do not get sufficient time, making their participation and contributions less active, effective and worthwhile. Particularly with a “packed” program like the Sri Lanka seminar, it is often difficult for participants to find the time to read papers before or between sessions.

Despite a few shortcomings mentioned by the respondents, most agreed that the seminar was effective and commended the high-level contributions of the resource persons. The bringing together of high-level resource persons and participants was the feature most frequently mentioned as contributing the seminar’s effectiveness. This being the first seminar of its kind in South Asia region, participants were hopeful that this would create a healthy atmosphere for future networking among institutions. The number of follow-up activities recorded by respondents in this seminar was encouraging. Some felt that any follow-up seminars should have more specific subject areas with provisions for in-depth analysis, preferably by expert groups and followed-up by presentations in plenary. While one of the main objectives of the seminar was regional integration, it was the most doubtful aspect in the minds of many participants. Given the existence of long standing historical and political differences between some countries in South Asia, it is too optimistic to expect regional integration in a one time, stand alone seminar such as this.

In conclusion:

First, the seminar was successful as an event in bringing together high caliber resource persons, and it took place at the right time according to the respondents.

Second, it provided a forum for the exchange of ideas, experience and knowledge. Seventy one percent of respondents rated this above average (4 or 5).

Third, though the seminar as a general learning event received high ratings, learning about specific issues related to policy options received relatively lower ratings (between 60 and 70% of respondents rated this aspect of the seminar average or below average—1,2, or 3 out of 5 on the Likert type scale).

For example, the majority, about 60-70%, of the respondents gave average or below average ratings (1,2 or 3 out of 5 on the Likert type scale) to the extent to which the seminar: (i) helped in learning about suitable policies that respondents had not previously considered (62%), (ii) helped in assessing the requirements of different policy alternatives (72%), (iii) helped in assessing the consequences of different policy alternatives (72%), and, (iv) helped in identifying the most suitable policy options for the country (69%). At a more general level, the question on the extent to which the seminar promoted exchange of lessons and experiences received an above-average rating (4 or 5) by 71% of the respondents.

Fourth, slightly over half of the respondents (53%) offered an above-average rating (4 or 5 on the Likert type scale) for the question on issues they hoped would be addressed and the extent to which the seminar actually achieved the objectives that the respondents had in mind when they decided to attend. A majority (61%) said that the seminar achieved the stated objectives¹⁵.

Fifth, it initiated a dialogue for the participants to establish networks of individuals as well as institutions. One major positive outcome of this seminar can be stated as the establishment of networks between economic and research institutes across the South Asian region (South Asian Network of Economic Institutes – SANEI).

Sixth, the overall effectiveness of the seminar was rated positively by a majority of the respondents. While 32 percent rated it average, 60 percent rated it above average, and only 8 percent rating it below average.

Seventh, the seminar also brought about a salutary initiative in that internal and external partnerships became established. An internal partnership among entities within the Bank (WBI, South Asia Region and DEC) was established in the process of the seminar. Externally, a partnership was established between the World Bank and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. These partnerships contributed to the overall effectiveness of the seminar.

¹⁵ The stated objective was “to explore the policy agenda that the region needs to pursue to achieve high rates of economic growth and social advance in the early decades of the next century.”

Recommendations

Four recommendations are offered here for consideration, based on the evaluation.

- 1) While the seminar in general was rated above average by over 60 percent of the respondents for its relevance and timing, treatment of the specific policy related issues in the seminar was rated average or below average by over 60 percent. Adequacy of the depth in which the issues were discussed received the lowest rating in this seminar. Investing time at the front end by means (way) of a needs assessment would help in identifying relevant policy issues and appropriate participants, thereby increasing the impact of the seminar.
- 2) Concerns about the lack of time for discussions, as mentioned by the majority of respondents, could be addressed by implementing a set of guidelines for seminar moderators and paper presenters, helping them to adhere to a given time period. Ensuring more time for discussions and reflection and a closer review of the presentations and discussants' written comments prior to the seminar could help in this regard. Opportunities for group interactions would allow participants to take advantage of the valuable experience and insight of resource persons.
- 3) Getting seminar materials to all participants in advance could enhance active participation of the attendees. It should be possible to send at least the executive summaries of all the papers via e-mail or fax to the participants¹⁶ in advance. Those who wish to be familiar with the materials would then have the opportunity to be prepared beforehand.
- 4) Evaluation findings of similar events such as Global Knowledge '97 and MDF'97 have identified common difficulties in organizing and conducting such seminars. Similar drawbacks such as lack of time for discussions, overloading the program with sessions, and not receiving reading materials in advance, were common issues in both of these prior events. Exposure to past evaluation work and learning from past experience could enhance the achievement of expected outcomes and could provide ideas for innovations and improvements.

¹⁶ Almost all participants in this seminar had access to e-mail or fax connections.

