

Core Course:
**Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Theory, Evidence and
 Implications for South Asia**

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Number 28

January 1999

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The Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Division of WBI (WBIEP) conducted a core course on *Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction: Theory, Evidence, and Implications for South Asia* in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from October 19-23, 1998. The purpose of the course was to introduce participants to both theoretical approaches and the most recent developments in the area of the linkage between economic growth and poverty alleviation. The course targeted senior and mid-level government officials of South Asian countries, particularly those from Ministries of Finance and Planning, Central Banks, and academics and researchers from the South Asia region, as well as Bank staff in the South Asia Resident Missions. The course focused on policy and research issues pertinent to South Asia, so that participants could develop policy recommendations for their own countries. The 5-day course was delivered through a series of lectures, including country case presentations, concluding with a panel discussion on the last day. A total of 40 participants from 5 countries attended this course, including 7 (17.5%) women.

The WBI Evaluation Unit (WBIES) conducted a Level 1 (participants' reaction) evaluation using a participants' feedback questionnaire. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to give their views about course design and delivery, as well as their perceived level of knowledge on 10 specific course topics, before and after the course. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1=minimum to 5=maximum was used for each question. Respondents were also asked to write comments or suggestions for the course in an open-ended format. The questionnaire was completed by a total of 36 respondents, 90% of the total participants, including all 7 women (19.4%). Following are some of the evaluation findings.

Course Design and Delivery

- Although not required as pre-requisite, the course organizer had considered an advanced graduate-level degree in economics or related field as a "desirable" level of educational background for the course participants. Among the 36 respondents, 21 (58.3%) had advanced academic degrees in economics or related fields, including masters degrees or equivalent (N=15, or 41.7%), post-graduate diploma (N=1, or 2.8%), or doctorates degrees (N=5, or 13.9%). The remaining 15 respondents had either a bachelors' degree in economics (N=2, or 5.6%), some economic courses at the university level but not as a major (N=12, or 33.3%), or virtually no formal studies in economics (N=1, or 2.8%).
- The *relevance of the course to respondents' current work or function* received a mean score of 3.86 out of 5.0. Respondents indicated high expectations for learning from attending the course, particularly for their *personal learning needs* (mean=4.36). They felt that what they learned from the course would be highly *relevant to their future work* (mean=4.28).

- The *overall usefulness of the course* was 3.78 out of 5.0. The result was slightly higher among respondents with the advanced economics degrees (N=21, mean=3.90) than for those without the degrees (N=15, mean=3.60). There was only a minimal difference in ratings between the 2 groups of varying educational background on indicators measuring the quality of information provided in the course. The extent to which the information was perceived *useful* had a mean score of 3.76 for the group with the advanced degrees, and 3.67 for the non-degree group. The extent to which the information was *new* to respondents was 3.43, and 3.53, respectively, for the 2 groups.
- The course used 3 different instructional means to deliver key messages, *lecture presentations*, *group discussions* and *reading materials*. Results showed that *lecture presentations* and *group discussions* had a similar level of respondents' satisfaction at the 3.7 level. The usefulness of *reading materials* provided during the course had the highest score among the 3 items, a rating exceeding 4.0 out of 5.0 (mean=4.06).
- Instructors' overall effectiveness in communicating their messages (mean=3.97) and the quality of their responses to participants' questions (mean=3.83) were among the highest of all course performance indicators. It should be noted that, while a majority of respondents (N=27) indicated that trainers and participants had an "adequate" level of interaction, a number of respondents also felt that the number of participants in the class was "excessive" or "somewhat excessive" (N=12), and the types of participants were too diverse to have close interaction (N=7).

Self-Reported Knowledge

- Respondents' pre/post self-assessment of their knowledge levels indicated a positive gain of 20% or larger across all 10 course topics. Issues on "*Management of commodity booms and economic growth*" was an area that respondents' perceived understanding improved substantially after the course. The rating increased from 2.85 to 4.10 (gain=43.9%) for the group with the advanced economics degrees, and from 2.27 to 3.33 (gain=46.7%) for the group without the degrees. This item was the least familiar topic before the course for both groups, but had one of the largest percentage gains after the course for both groups.
- Respondents without advanced economics degrees (N=15) came to the course with much lower levels of knowledge than those with the degrees (N=21), and their post-course ratings remained lower than the group with the degrees on all 10 topics. The group with the higher educational degrees had a pre-course knowledge level exceeding 3.0 out of 5.0 on all topics, ranging between 3.20-3.62, except on 2 items that had ratings in the high 2.0 range (2.85 for "*Management of commodity booms*" and 2.71 for "*Polarization, inequality and political violence*"). Their post-course levels were above 4.0 on 7 topics, ranging 4.0-4.24, except for 3 topics (3.36 for "*Polarization, inequality and political violence*," 3.81 for "*Distribution of education*," and 3.83 for "*Impact of growth-promoting policies*"). For the group which did not have advanced economics degrees, the pre-course ratings on the 10 topics were in the 2.27-2.67 level. While they had a substantial percentage gain across all items, ranging from 27.3% (on "*Impact of growth-promoting policies*") to 52.9% ("*Evolution of worldwide income distribution*"), all of their post-course ratings were below 4.0, ranging from 3.22 to 3.73.

Comments from Respondents

- Written comments and suggestions from respondents can be summarized into 3 general areas of course content and delivery. First, 20 respondents commented on the country studies and the types of topics covered in the lecture presentations. They requested more country case examples and presentations relevant to the participants (N=8), more in-depth treatment of poverty alleviation and its specific methods (N=6), more emphasis on analytical techniques (N=3) and on policy implementation and future agenda (N=3). Second, a number of respondents preferred active participation in the course work (N=14), requesting more group discussions or exercises (N=8), chances for presenting their own country experiences (N=4) and hands-on experiences in deriving strategies for some country cases (N=2). Third, there were several comments about the instructors (N=7), including that instructors should present more empirical evidences, discuss their field experiences, and describe both theoretical background and current developments when presenting their issues.