A Country Retrospective Study:
The Impact of WBI Activities, FY01-02, on Sri Lankan Participants in FY03

The Challenge
The World Bank has recognized that its development efforts must be integrated with local capacity building. It has committed to meeting the country-specific needs of its clients by building a country business model which is centered on the country's vision, a good diagnosis of the policies proposed, a Bank program to support the vision, and a focus on results. This approach translates into specific plans to support low- and middle-income countries.¹

World Bank Institute Intervention
The World Bank Institute (WBI) seeks to create learning opportunities for developing countries and for people working in the development community. Since FY03, WBI has implemented significant organizational changes. It has been moving from training only individuals to enhancing capacities in countries by customizing content to specific national needs and priorities and designing programs with long-term institutional building in mind. Towards that end, WBI's capacity enhancement offerings are becoming more country-specific, multiyear programs linked to the Bank's country assistance strategy and to the client's own poverty reduction goals.²

Underlying Assumptions
The underlying assumptions of WBI's county-focus approach are the following:

- Clients who receive these WBI tools, product, and services will improve the country's capacity at multiple levels (individual, institution, and country).

Evaluation Methods and Instruments
The research reported in this brief is part of a broader initiative. The Institute Evaluation Group (IEG) launched a retrospective study to assess the impact of WBI activities provided in FY01-02 on their participants 10 to 34 months later. Five countries were chosen to take part in this baseline study (Brazil, Egypt, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand). The findings are meant to serve as baseline data against which future comparisons can be made. The current Brief presents the key findings from Sri Lanka, one of the Bank's middle-income countries.³

The key questions of the Sri Lanka study concerned the WBI's effectiveness in building participants' capacity;

the degree to which the learning activities had an **impact** in the country; **relevance** of WBI learning activities to Sri Lanka's needs; WBI's **comparative advantage** over other training providers; and the **sustainability** of WBI's learning activities in the country. In order to assess these questions a variety of research tools were used: participant questionnaires administered to former participants in WBI-sponsored activities; focus group discussions with selected former participants; interviews held with WBI staff, operational staff working in Washington and in Colombo; and reviews of relevant operational and evaluation documents. A series of multivariate regression models were used to examine the factors associated with the effectiveness and impact of WBI activities with Sri Lankan participants.

### Participants and Response Rate

Participants for the study were identified from WBI's Client Registration System. This procedure yielded a list of 37 learning activities that involved 189 participants from Sri Lanka. From this list, one-day activities were excluded, yielding a final sample of 36 activities with 184 Sri Lankan participants. Excluding invalid entries, the number of total eligible participants was reduced to 153. Among these, 122 provided completed questionnaires, yielding an adjusted response rate of 80 percent. About two-thirds (69 percent) of the respondents were male. Approximately half worked in government at various levels, and more than two-thirds (69 percent) were in positions of management. The questionnaires were distributed either by mail or in person. The data collection was conducted between 10 to 34 months after the learning activity, and spanned a little over a month.

### Evaluation Results

1. **The initial conditions for having significant impact in Sri Lanka were not optimal.** Most (80 percent) of the WBI activities lasted fewer than five days, and two-thirds (68 percent) of them involved only one to two participants from Sri Lanka.

2. **Participants' responses indicated that the effectiveness of the activities was about medium** in regard to three dimensions: refinement of knowledge and skills; development of strategies and approaches to address the needs of participants' organization; and building networks.

   - Nearly half of the respondents (48 percent) reported that activities were highly effective. The activities were most effective with respect to networking (61 percent reported as extremely effective) and least effective in helping develop strategies and approaches for development (48 percent), while effectiveness in boosting knowledge and skills was in the middle (56 percent) (Figure 1). The average rating for all three dimensions was 5.3 on a 7-point scale, where 7 was "extremely effective" and 1 was "not effective at all."

   - Activities that were considered highly relevant to Sri Lanka's needs by the participants were reported as being more effective.

   - Activities that used action plans were perceived as more effective than activities that did not include action plans. This was evident only for strategies and approaches and networking. Moreover, only 40 percent of activities utilized this pedagogical strategy.

---

4. Invalid entries comprised repetitions, participants who were erroneously registered as participants, those who were organizers, or administrative assistants, and participants whose contact information was not available.
Activities that were defined by WBI as country-specific were rated as effective as activities that were not defined as country-specific.

3. Majority of respondents used the knowledge and skills gained in the learning activity, but not very often.

- Among those who reported using the knowledge and skills only about half said that they used it very often. This finding was consistent over the three areas of use (Figure 2). The overall index of use was 5.1 on a 7-point scale.

- The more effective the activity was perceived on the knowledge and skills dimension, the more frequently it was used for research and teaching.

- In addition, organizational procedures/work relations and country climate significantly facilitated the use of knowledge and skills, specifically in the areas of research and teaching and policy and practice.

4. Half of the participants (53 percent) reported that the changes brought about due to the learning activity were positive.

- Participants rated most highly the effects of the learning activity on the improvement of their organization’s work practices and least highly on the formulation of legislation and regulations (Figure 3).

5. Participants provided a mean rating of 5.9 on activity relevance to country’s needs on a scale from 1 to 7 (with 1 denoting “extremely irrelevant” and 7 denoting “extremely relevant”).

- Most of the activities (82 percent) were scored as highly relevant to the country’s needs.

- Overall, 53 percent of the participants indicated that the activity they attended had been designed specifically for participants from their country.

6. Both participants and Bank operational staff reported the need for more follow-up by WBI to ensure sustainability of learning activities.
Only one third of the participants were aware of and participated in any follow-up to learning activity. Only 18 percent of the participants received newsletters, but a majority (90 percent) of these participants found them to be useful.

7. WBI does not have much competition from other institutions in Sri Lanka.
- Only 24 percent of the respondents were aware of similar activities being provided by other organizations.
- Participants rated the activities offered by other institutions to be about as effective as the WBI activities they had attended.

8. WBI activities were not strongly aligned with the CAS.
- About 36 percent of the WBI activities with participants from Sri Lanka were aligned with the 1998 Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) recommendations. This is not surprising, given that WBI did not seek to design its activities on the basis of CAS in FY01 and FY02.
- The proportion of Sri Lanka participants exposed to CAS-related content was much higher: 13 activities that were relevant for CAS represented 52 percent of the participants.
- Focus groups conducted with participants and World Bank staff’s interviews revealed that the learning process was perceived as supply-driven and therefore did not encourage taking the learning process forward.
- Operation staff who were interviewed explained that the Bank’s role in Sri Lanka was limited due to civil conflict.

Recommendations for improving effectiveness and impact in Sri Lanka are:
- Assess country’s needs and select relevant institutions and participants for broad-based institutional impact.
- Align with CAS in order to increase WBI’s potential role and activities in the country and help fulfill WBI’s mandate for capacity enhancement.
- Design learning activities that include action plans, are implemented on a sustained basis, and that include follow-up activities (distance learning, electronic discussions and newsletters).

Acknowledgment
The evaluation summarized in this brief was conducted with the financial support of the World Bank Institute. Peer reviewers for the study were Imtiazuddin Ahmad and Christine Helen Allison.

Conclusion and Implication
The purpose of the study was to gather baseline information on Sri Lankan participants before WBI’s country tailored approach was implemented. Although the representation of Sri Lankan participants in the learning activities was not optimal for significant change (short duration and only a few Sri Lankans in each activity), participants rated the learning activities as having a medium effectiveness and impact.

About WBI
The World Bank Institute (WBI) helps people, institutions, and countries to diagnose problems that keep communities poor, to make informed choices to solve those problems, and to share what they learn with others. Through traditional and distance learning methods, WBI and its partners in many countries deliver knowledge-based options to policy makers, technical experts, business and community leaders, and civil society stakeholders; fostering analytical and networking skills to help them make sound decisions; design effective socioeconomic policies and programs; and unleash the productive potential of their societies.

The Institute Evaluation Group (IEG) works with WBI’s Leadership Team and with the World Bank’s Learning Board to design, implement, and report evaluation results for staff, client, and joint learning events. IEG also offers distance learning and face-to-face training in program evaluation. WBI Evaluation Briefs report on these evaluation results.

Contacts
WBI Evaluation Briefs
Fumika Ouchi, Evaluation Analyst
202.458.1437 or Fouchi@worldbank.org

The Impact of WBI Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Sri Lanka: A Baseline Assessment
Nidhi Khatri, Senior Evaluation Officer
202.458.0853 or nkhatri@worldbank.org