

WBI Evaluation Briefs

REPORTING ON CLIENT AND STAFF LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Nidhi Khattri, Acting Manager

Institute Evaluation Group

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What Improves the Utility of WBI Activities? Evidence from Five Countries

The Challenge

As the capacity-development arm of the World Bank, WBI has engaged in global and regional knowledge sharing for nearly fifty years. Much of the expertise within the organization has been arranged along sectoral and thematic lines. Sectoral and thematic programs delivered globally or regionally, however, have not always addressed country-specific issues, given that capacity constraints differ widely from country to country according to their stage of development.

The traditional emphasis on thematic knowledge sharing has also constrained WBI from fully aligning its capacity-development activities with Bank operations. In addition, this approach has not provided sufficient focus on local development priorities in order to systematically complement the activities of key regional partners.

World Bank Institute Intervention

In FY02, WBI embarked on a new, country-focused capacity-development strategy. This strategy helped WBI begin to align its knowledge agenda more closely with Bank operations.¹ As part of this effort, WBI created a Country Pillar that is responsible for working with regional and country teams and with WBI thematic teams to develop and deliver sustained programs of capacity development in target countries. The Country Pillar follows a two-pronged approach to carry out its mandate. First, the Pillar works with operational country teams to develop a strategic approach to capacity development in priority countries and to strengthen the knowledge and learning inputs of the Bank country programs. Second, it works with units of WBI's Thematic

Pillar to ensure that thematic programs respond to country priorities and work toward producing measurable results at the country level.

Underlying Assumptions

The assumptions underlying the shift to a country focus include the following:

- The potential for capacity development at the individual, institutional, and policy levels will increase as WBI programs are adapted to address local needs.
- A country focus approach will mitigate the difficulty of producing evidence of cost-effective capacity development stemming from WBI thematic programs that involve many countries in various stages of development.

Evaluation Methods and Instruments

The evaluation summarized in this Brief² is a meta-analysis of data from five country studies,³ supplemented with original data collected from the WBI staff involved in delivering WBI learning activities for participants in those countries. The objective of the evaluation was twofold:

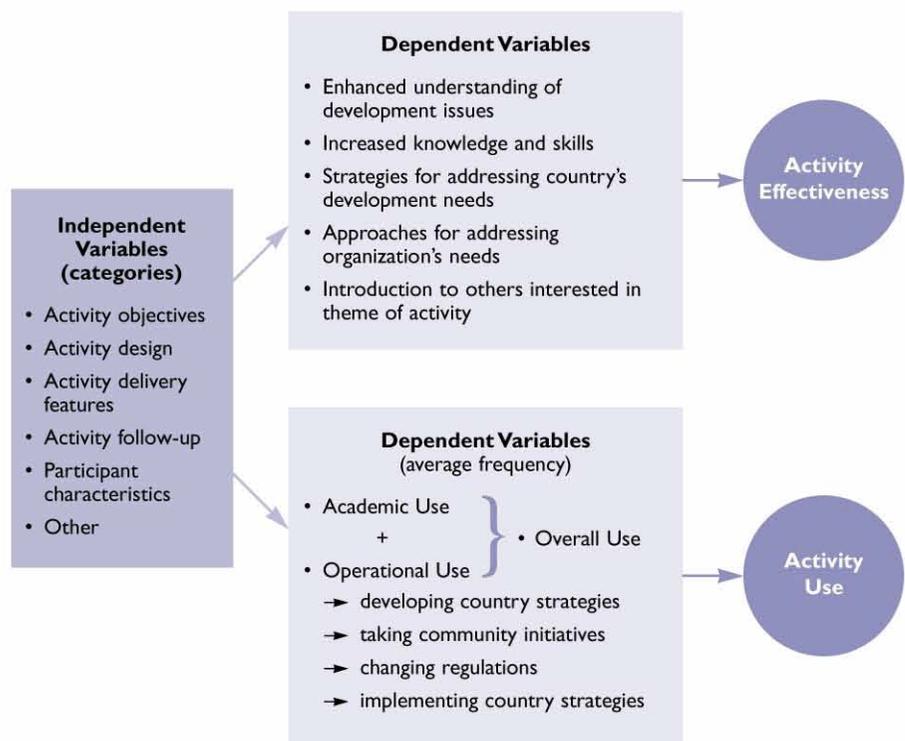
- (a) to develop baseline estimates of the effectiveness and utility of WBI learning activities, against which to measure the effectiveness and utility of the country-focused approach in the future, and
- (b) to address a key research question: *What elements and characteristics of WBI learning activities result in greater effectiveness and desired capacity development impacts at the individual, institutional, and policy/country levels?*

1. This occurs through the alignment of WBI learning activities with the Bank's Country Assistance Strategies, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Community Driven Development approaches, and Comprehensive Development Frameworks.

2. Quizon, J., C. Ling Chard, and M. Lockheed, "The Effectiveness and Use in FY03 of WBI FY01-02 Activities: A Baseline Assessment in Five Countries," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-86, World Bank Institute, May 2004.

3. These reports are authored by IEG staff and consultants: Khattri, K., P. Bachrach, T. Jiang, "The Impact of WBI Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Sri Lanka: A Baseline Assessment," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-73, World Bank Institute, October 2003. Zia, H., M. Al-Sayyid, S. Tawila, and V. Gunnarsson, "The Impact of WBI Client Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Egypt: A Baseline Assessment," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-78, World Bank Institute, October 2003. Bardini, M., V. Gunnarsson, E. Manjjeva, and Y. Narozhnaya, "The Impact of WBI Client Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Russia: A Baseline Assessment," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-81, World Bank Institute, January 2004. Eckert, W., V. Gunnarsson, and G. Sousa, "The Impact of WBI Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Brazil, A Baseline Assessment," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-82, World Bank Institute, January 2004. Quizon, J., C. Ling Chard, "The Impact of WBI Client Activities, FY01-02, on Participants from Thailand: A Baseline Assessment," WBI Evaluation Studies No. EG04-87, World Bank Institute, October 2003.

Figure 1. Composite Dependent Variables: Activity Effectiveness and Use



The original studies evaluated the medium-term effects of FY01-02 activities in five WBI focus countries: Brazil, Egypt, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Data in the original five studies came from participant questionnaires (standardized, translated for and pretested in each country), in-country focus groups with WBI activity participants, and interviews with World Bank country operations staff. These data were collected in FY03, nine to 31 months after the activity had been held. New survey data were collected from the task team leaders (TTLs) of the evaluated activities, using a questionnaire with closed-ended questions related to the objectives, design, and delivery of the learning activity, including later follow-up activities with participants.⁴

Data from the participant and TTL surveys were combined and analyzed jointly to explore how WBI learning activity objectives, designs, delivery features and related follow-up activities influence participants' ratings of effectiveness and use. The analysis defined both "activity effectiveness" and "activity use" as composite dependent variables, each composed of several

items (see Figure 1). In both cases, six categories of independent variables were examined related to activities: objectives, design, delivery features, follow-up, participant characteristics, and other. The analysis used a two-stage instrumental regression model, where the first stage explained activity effectiveness and the second stage used the estimates of activity effectiveness and activity features to predict participant use of the learning activity.

Participants and Response Rates

The design and implementation of the participant surveys in each of the five countries were very similar and involved either the full population or a random sample of the FY01-02 learning activity alumni with contact information in WBI's Client Recording System (CRS) database (see Table 1).⁵ Of the 1,268 participants identified by name in the CRS, 1,006 had contact information. Of those 1,006, 793 participants from 131 activities responded. While the overall response rate was 79 percent, response rates by country varied from 52 to 91 percent, with most non-responses due to inaccurate or outdated CRS contact information.

Table 1. Sampling of Participants, by Country

Country	Total Participants*	Total Participants Identified by Name (number sampled)	Total Participants Sampled With Contact Information	Response Rate
Brazil	1,826	300	231	52%
Egypt	882	248	203	84%
Russia	3,046	1,628 (300 sampled)	217	91%
Sri Lanka	258	184	169	80%
Thailand	1,536	768 (236 sampled)	186	86%
Total	7,548	1,268 sampled	1,006	79%

* These totals exclude one-day and World Links activities

4. To minimize burden, TTLs were asked to provide responses for no more than two learning activities that they had conducted; WBI activities were therefore selected for this study based on which ones had the highest number of respondents from the participant surveys.

5. Possible contact information included email address, home/office telephone number, fax number, or home/office address.

The formal survey of TTLs was administered via email to 42 TTLs of 62 WBI learning activities. Questionnaires were completed by 36 task managers of 52 learning activities, for a response rate of 83 percent. All programs were represented in the sample, and TTL data were matched with 405 respondents to the participant survey (52 percent of the full respondent population and 40 percent of the activity population).

Evaluation Results: Effectiveness

1. Participants’ ratings of activity effectiveness were positive across all five countries, particularly for individual benefits. Respondents rated WBI activities above the mid-point rating⁶ of “4” in all five areas of effectiveness: offering networking opportunities (5.17), raising awareness of development needs (5.10), increasing knowledge and skills (5.08), providing strategies for development needs (4.8), and giving approaches for addressing the needs of participant’s organization (4.6). These ratings varied widely across countries with participants in Brazil, Sri Lanka, and Egypt rating activities more highly than participants in Thailand and Russia.

2. Two design features were important for activity effectiveness: designing the activity with a partner and tailoring it to country needs. Activities with these design features were 30 percent more effective than activities lacking both features. Interestingly, ratings of effectiveness were significantly positively associated with activities tailored specifically for the needs of the country, but significantly negatively

associated with activities tailored to meet regional needs.

3. Three activity delivery features contributed to greater effectiveness.

- Activities that involved action plans were 11 percent more effective than those that were not.
- Those learning activities that were part of a series were seven percent more effective than one-time activities.
- Activities in which teams of ten or more colleagues attended were six percent more effective than those in which individuals attended with fewer than ten colleagues.

4. Unmeasured country-level factors accounted for a large share of the variance in participants’ ratings of effectiveness. Exogenous country-specific attributes affected participant ratings of effectiveness of WBI activities. Participants from Brazil, Egypt and Sri Lanka perceived activities as ten percent more effective than did participants from Thailand and Russia.

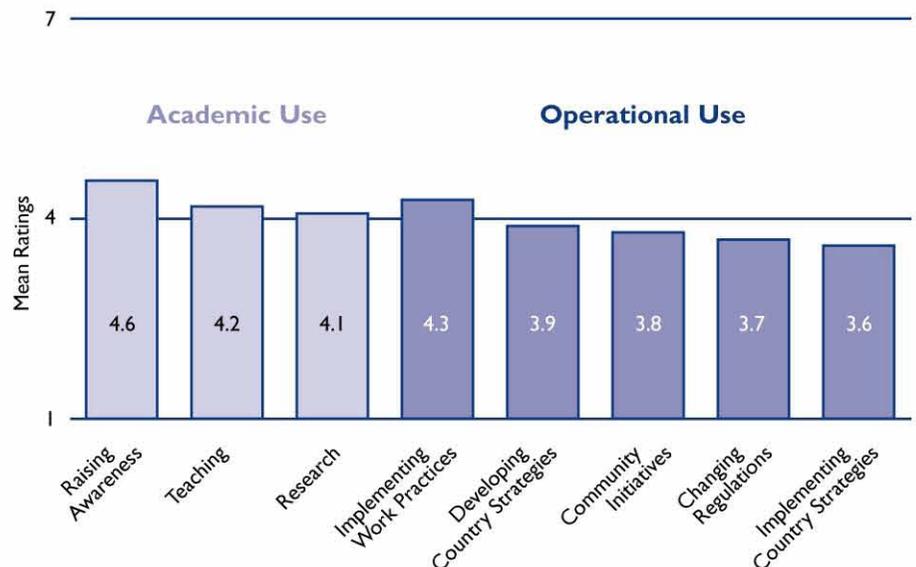
Evaluation Results: Use

5. WBI activities were not often used by participants, particularly for operational purposes—defined as developing country strategies, taking community initiatives, changing regulations or implementing country strategies. Figure 2 illustrates the average frequency of use in operational compared with academic functions. Mean ratings of academic use were slightly above the mid-point, and mean ratings for operational use were at or slightly below the mid-point. The reported frequency of use varied by country, and fewer than half of the participants in all countries but Sri Lanka reported that they frequently used their WBI-acquired knowledge and skills.

6. The academic or operational use of the activity was strongly related to reports of its effectiveness. The participants’ perception of the effectiveness of a WBI activity was a key determinant in whether the knowledge and skills acquired from the WBI activity were used.

Figure 2. Reported Use of WBI-Acquired Knowledge and Skills

(1=not at all; 7=very often)



6. Ratings were from 1 (not effective at all) to 7 (extremely effective), with 4 at the mid-point.

7. The participant's position was significant in predicting overall activity use and operational use but not academic use. Participants in higher level positions appeared to apply more of what they learned from the WBI activity. Focus group discussions revealed that middle-level WBI alumni were less likely to implement new ideas without the agreement of their superiors, while higher level alumni did not face this constraint.

8. Two delivery features had significant impact on activity use.

- Using English⁷ as the language of instruction increased the reported academic and overall use of the learning event but not its operational use.
- Participants were also likely to use more of what they acquired from the learning event when the activity was part of a series. This was true for overall use and operational use, but not for academic use—perhaps because courses do not need to be part of a series to have a significant impact on scholarly activities.

9. Electronic follow-up was the most effective means for raising the use of a learning activity. Contacting participants via electronic means significantly increased participants' ratings of both overall use and academic use.

10. Activity objectives did not influence participants' use of WBI learning events. Activity objectives as defined by WBI TTLs were not significant determinants of participants' actual use of what they acquired from the learning event. This observation may indicate that WBI learning events would benefit from more realistic activity objectives defined in more specific, concrete terms.

Implications and Conclusions

This study establishes some baseline measures of the effectiveness and utility of WBI learning activities. These benchmarks provide useful anchors for future country-focused impact evaluations. In addition, this analysis provides practical guidance for improving the overall effectiveness and utility of WBI activities:

- The effectiveness of WBI activities can be improved through the inclusion of partnerships, country-focused activity designs, action plans and exercises, as well as by targeting activities to teams of participants.

- Delivering activities as part of a series of offerings and following up with participants will increase the degree to which the content of the WBI activity is used locally after the learning activity.
- For programs to follow up with their participants, it is essential that archival data with more accurate participant contact information be available in the CRS. Systems and procedures need to be in place to enable continuous updating of this information.

Acknowledgement

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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

Joy Behrens, Evaluation Analyst
202.458.5053 or jbehrens@worldbank.org

The Effectiveness and Use in FY03 of WBI FY01-02 Activities: A Baseline Assessment in Five Countries

Jaime Quizon, Senior Evaluation Officer
202.458.1916 or [jqquizon@worldbank.org](mailto:jquizon@worldbank.org)

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7. This included English only and English with simultaneous translation to the local language.