

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

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The Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Division of The World Bank Institute (WBIEP) conducted a core course on *Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction: Theory, Evidence and Implications for Central Asia* in Istanbul, Turkey, from January 25 to February 5, 1999. As in the previous course offering for South Asia (Sri Lanka, October, 1998), the main objective of the course was to increase participants' awareness about policies that facilitate economic growth and development. Participants were introduced to the latest issues and discussions on the linkages between economic development and poverty alleviation, learning several key issues such as the determinants of economic growth, the role of institutions, the impact of macroeconomic factors, and worldwide income distributions. The course was attended by a total of 30 participants, including 28 (93.3%) academics and researchers from major universities and research institutions in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic), as well as 2 staff (6.7%) from the Bank's Resident Missions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Sixteen participants (53.3%) were women. This course was one of the key components of the WBI's "*Capacity Building for Economic Policy in Central Asia Program*." The Program aims at establishing a critical mass of well-trained policy analysts, academics and researchers in Central Asia, by strengthening their economics education in the field of free market economy. As part of the Program, the course served as one of the training of trainers seminars.

The WBI Evaluation Unit conducted a Level 2 (participant learning) evaluation for the first time for the course using a set of knowledge test questions developed by the Task Manager. At the end of the 2-week course, a questionnaire that consisted of two sections was administered to the participants. The first section asked the extent to which participants were satisfied with course content and delivery. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1=minimum to 5=maximum was used for each question. The second section had a total of 11 multiple-choice questions to assess the respondents' knowledge of specific subjects in the course. At the time of the end-of-course evaluation, the course organizer dropped one of the questions from the questionnaire since the subject of the question was not sufficiently covered in the course. Participants were therefore asked to respond to only 10 questions. The questionnaire for the course was completed by all participants except one, a total of 29 respondents (96.7%), including all 16 women participants. It should be noted that the course had initially planned to administer both pre- and post-tests to assess participant learning. Unfortunately, the course coordinator working on the site failed to administer the pre-test, and therefore, results on the initial knowledge level of participants were not collected.

In the analysis of course results, this course was compared with the previous course offered for South Asia that had the same course objectives and targeted primarily non-Bank participants, that is, government officials and academics/researchers. Since the South Asia course did not assess participants' knowledge of economics through specific test questions, but used a self-reported knowledge assessment by respondents on general themes on economics, the analysis was limited to the comparison of course content and delivery, as well as selected indicators measuring participants' learning of policy issues covered in both course offerings. The South Asia course was attended by 41 participants and had a response rate of 87.8% (36 respondents) on its end-of-course questionnaire.

Respondents' Background

- The course for Central Asia was different from the South Asia course in two key demographic characteristics of respondents. First, the representation of women was significantly higher in the Central Asia course. More than half of the respondents (55.2%) in Central Asia were women, whereas the South Asia course was predominantly represented by men (80.6%) and women accounted for less than 20% of respondents (19.4%).
- Secondly, the course for Central Asia was represented almost entirely by academics and researchers from universities and research institutions (93.1%), with a small proportion of representative from the Bank's Resident Missions (6.9%). In the South Asia course, a majority of respondents were government officials (58.3%), and the remaining respondents consisted of a much smaller proportion of academics/researchers (36.1%) and those from other organizations (5.6%). This resulted in different levels of respondents' backgrounds in economics between the two course offerings. Although the specific question on educational attainment was not available for Central Asia, the list of course participants indicated that all participants in the Central Asia course were either professional economists or had a strong backgrounds in economics with advanced university degrees, such as Master's or Ph.D. By contrast, only 33.3% of the respondents in South Asia reported having taken some economics courses in university but not as a major focus, and one respondent had virtually no formal studies in economics. Those who had the advanced university degrees in economics accounted for less than 60% (58.3%) in the South Asia course.

Course Design and Delivery

- Respondents in the Central Asia course reported a high level of satisfaction with the course by rating one of the highest mean scores on the *overall usefulness of the course* (mean=4.57). Over 96% of the respondents rated at least 4 on a 5-point scale for this item. About 86% also strongly felt that the *course achieved its stated objectives* (mean=4.21). The ratings represented much more positive results, compared to those reported in the South Asia course (mean=3.78 for *overall usefulness* and 3.66 for *achievement of course objectives*).
- Respondents in both course offerings reported that the course material would be highly relevant to their *future* career work. The rating on this item had the highest mean score in Central Asia (mean=4.72) and one of the top ratings in South Asia (mean=4.28). When asked about the course's *relevancy to current work or function*, however, the two course offerings showed a different result. Respondents of the Central Asia course who were all professional economists reported a higher degree of course's relevancy to their current work (mean=4.31) than those in South Asia (mean=3.86) who largely consisted of government officials. When the course result for South Asia was further broken down by respondents' work, it was also clearly shown that those from government ministries/agencies did not find the course as relevant as academics/researchers who attended the same course (mean=3.67 and 4.38, respectively). On the *overall usefulness* of the South Asia course, government respondents rated the course much lower than academics/researchers in the course (mean=3.67 vs. 4.0).
- The results of lower perceived levels of course's relevancy and usefulness among

government respondents posed the question of whether the current course material was as appropriate for the government audience as for academics and researchers. Respondents' reactions to course content observed in the two course offerings identified a possible weakness in one major area of course coverage: *policy*. The course description stated that the course's emphasis was placed on presenting various policy issues to help participants analyze and derive sound policy recommendations for their countries. On the 4 policy-related questions asked in the questionnaire, however, respondents' ratings in both course offerings were found among the lowest when compared to other items asked on course content. Moreover, the results in South Asia were less favorable than those found in Central Asia, particularly among government officials. The 4 questions were: 1) respondents' *increase in familiarity with policy issues* (mean=3.93 for Central Asia, and 3.60 for South Asia); 2) the level of *adaptability of the policies presented* (mean=3.68 vs. 3.29); 3) *ability to assess requirements* for various policy options (mean=4.04 vs. 3.46); and 4) *ability to assess consequences* of various policy options (mean=4.07 vs. 3.35). Respondents in both course offerings found difficulty particularly in *adapting presented policies* to their own situations. The course organizer is encouraged to revisit how to approach policy issues in the overall course design, particularly when targeting the government audience, ensuring that a sufficient amount of policy discussion be provided and presenting clear methods of how to apply economic concepts and issues to participants' countries or regions.

Knowledge Test and Respondents' Learning

- On the post-course knowledge test administered in the course for Central Asia, respondents scored 5.9 points on average out of the maximum score of 10 points for the 10 questions. The scores ranged from 3, the lowest score, to 9, the highest score. The percentage of respondents who answered correctly on each question varied significantly across questions. On average, each question was answered correctly by 15 out of the 29 respondents. Among the questions that had the lowest percentage correct were on Question 8 ("*impact of factor expansion on growth in transition economies*"), which was answered correctly only by 10.3% of the respondents, and Question 2 ("*factors influencing income inequality*") with 37.9% correct.
- Three questions were answered correctly by nearly or over 80% of the respondents: Question 3 ("*international empirical regularities on per capita income growth rates*"), Question 6 ("*recent evidence on the transition economies*") and Question 7 ("*impact of structural reforms on long-term growth in transition economies*"). Since the respondents' pre-course knowledge levels on these items were not measured, the results should be interpreted with caution. It was not known whether the respondents were able to answer correctly because they learned from the course or because they were already familiar with the subjects prior to attending the course.
- The course used various instructional methods to facilitate participants' learning. The *training/reading materials* provided by the course were reported highly useful in both Central Asia and South Asia (mean=4.48 and 4.06). While approximately 80% of the respondents in each course offering reported that the amount of *interaction* between participants and instructors was "adequate," a relatively unfavorable reaction was reported on the *extent to which discussions were constructive*, a rating below 4.0 in both course offerings. This may be problematic since the course had expected participants to learn through actively participating in the course. One of the indicators that might explain this result was a relatively low rating on the quality of trainers in *answering participants' questions* (mean=3.66 in Central Asia and 3.83 in South Asia). Approximately 40% of the respondents in each course also reported that the size of

the course was "excessive" or "somewhat excessive" to facilitate good participant interaction. It would be crucial for the course organizer to ensure not only the time for discussion, but that the debate be as effective as possible for participants' learning.