

# **New Tools and Approaches for Implementing Training in Post-conflict Countries**

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## **E-learning in Asia and the Pacific: Reforms for Short Courses**

### **Introduction**

The potential need and demand for education and training across developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including in post-conflict countries, is vast. In addition to the need for resources to support the many millions of primary, secondary, and post-secondary students currently in full-time education, there is a great need to support many other types of education and training as well -- to strengthen life-long learning programs,<sup>1</sup> to provide in-service up-grading courses of all kinds for mid-career employees, to support government extension programs, and so on.

This paper suggests that the needs are so great that unless traditional face-to-face training methods can be greatly augmented with new ICT (information and communication technology) training techniques, it will be many decades before an adequate response to growing needs can be provided across the region. The efficient mechanization of as much training as possible is urgently called for.<sup>2</sup>

### **Education and Training for Development**

In recent centuries, the pace of technological change across most sectors in many countries -- in agriculture, in manufacturing, and in some services -- has been rapid. As a result, in many industries productivity increases have been dramatic. In contrast, across the globe productivity improvements in the education sector in many countries have often been rather slow. To be sure, in rich countries many new techniques have been introduced in recent years. Much more capital is used (better buildings, projectors, sound and TV equipment, and so on) than was the case, say, 50 years ago. But especially in developing countries, the techniques of education and training widely used have changed but little from the techniques used in Europe three or four centuries ago. In many developing countries few books are used, rote learning is still common, schools are equipped with the no more than the most basic facilities, and little attempt is made to encourage an outward-oriented, imaginative and questioning attitude amongst students. The need for reform is urgent.

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<sup>1</sup> "The explosion of new knowledge, accelerating technological progress, and ever-increasing competition make life-long learning more important than ever." World Bank (1998/99: 8).

<sup>2</sup> For information on links between education and ICTs in East Asia, see Chapter 5, "Education for Growth", in Yusuf (2000).

Partly in response to these difficulties in the developing world, in recent decades many multilateral and bilateral development agencies have supported a wide variety of training and education programs. Indeed, the range of forms of delivery used by international agencies to provide education and training assistance in developing countries is almost bewilderingly varied: long-term and short-term formal and informal courses have been used, in-country and overseas training has been provided, all kinds of workshops and seminars and conferences have been used as delivery mechanisms, training has been provided in foreign and local languages and for almost all age groups, and so on. It is hard to avoid the impression that this very large overall effort, sustained over decades, needs more rigorous evaluation than it has so far received and may be in need of substantial reform.

### **Short Courses<sup>3</sup>**

Short courses of various kinds are a form of education and training delivery widely favoured by international organisations. Each year, thousands of short courses are provided by hundreds of different education service providers in dozens of developing countries. In view of the strong emphasis on development effectiveness across the international development community in recent years it is useful to consider a key issue: Are short courses effective?

In fact, it is not easy to reach any firm conclusions. For one thing, the quality of such activities as short courses and workshops varies widely. Furthermore, for a range of reasons they are hard to evaluate. Amongst the difficulties which need to be considered in attempting any wide evaluation are the following:

- Although the objectives of many short course programs are not clear, there often appear to be multiple objectives.
- Outputs are hard to measure.
- Evaluation techniques are often rather unsatisfactory, frequently consisting of the collection of 'happy sheets' from participants.
- Statistics, including costs, are generally not recorded well.
- There is rarely any attempt to monitor long-term impact.
- Institutions providing the courses do not always welcome evaluations of their programs.

However, despite these difficulties it is possible to identify at least four main areas in which the traditional approach to short courses has often had shortcomings: content, costs, and dissemination and sustainability.

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<sup>3</sup> The following section draws on useful observations in Taylor (2000). See also *Teacher Education Guidelines* (UNESCO).

## **Content**

As a general rule, many of the international institutions providing short course have not been subject to market disciplines. Many short courses have been subsidised, either in full or in part, by donor governments or by international agencies. Content has therefore often been supply driven rather than demand responsive. As a result, the content of the material provided has often been inappropriate in various ways.

For one thing, many short courses contain too much material. The consequence is that participants suffer from information overload and have considerable difficulty in sorting out the wheat from the chaff. Faced with a large amount of information -- which is often provided in an unfamiliar language -- there is a risk that some participants become overwhelmed by the mass of material and gain little from the course. A second problem is that in some cases the content of courses is too general or contains too much material (often Western) of little relevance to the practical problems encountered in developing countries. Courses which draw heavily on material from OECD countries and which take for granted the existence of strong supporting institutions (such as strong legal and regulatory systems) are often of limited value to participants from developing countries. Indeed, it is often the case that the sharing of south-south experiences is of more value than drawing on case studies from OECD countries. Similarly, course materials which are too complicated or which assume a significant amount of prior knowledge of a subject may be unsuitable for use in many short courses.

## **Costs**

Another significant shortcoming with the traditional approach is that measured in terms of costs per participant day, short courses are often expensive. Relatively high costs arise from factors such as the following:

- Air fares (often business class) for participants
- High hotel and per diem allowances for participants
- Fees and other costs involved in hiring guest lecturers
- Various other incidental costs which often add significantly to total costs.

Some of these costs are overheads. When they can be spread across courses which extend for several weeks or a month, average daily costs generally fall significantly. But when courses run for just three or four days, average daily costs can approach \$1,000 per participant (up to \$4,000 per participant for a four day course). By contrast, in Australia the cost to the official aid program of providing full support (including living costs) to the average student from a developing country undertaking graduate studies is around \$20,000 for a full year.

To be sure, it is arguable difficult to compare the benefits from providing short-term training and long-term graduate study opportunities. In the case of the former, participants are often mid-career public servants who, as well as benefiting from training,

develop useful contacts during a short course overseas. In the case of the latter, benefits flowing to the developing country that the students come from may only accrue over the long term. Whatever judgment is made about the relative benefits of short-term courses compared with long-term training, since short courses and workshops are often a relatively expensive activity there would be considerable advantages in ensuring that materials from the courses are shared as widely as possible. This, in turn, suggests that considerable attention is needed to the way that content from short courses is disseminated, and to ensuring that the content is sustainable.

## **Dissemination**

The traditional approach to the provision of short courses concentrates on the immediate needs of the group participating in the course. In many cases, no special efforts to improve outreach are incorporated as part of course activities because the intention is to use the short courses themselves as the main delivery mechanism. However in other cases specific steps are sometimes taken to develop mechanisms for outreach, two of the most common being the preparation of comprehensive folders of course materials (sometimes printed in book form) for wider dissemination, and a training-the-trainers approach based on the presumption that participants in the initial course might themselves be able to draw course materials later to present similar courses after they return to their home countries.

In practice, the indications are that these two main outreach mechanisms -- the compilation of folders of course materials, and the training-of-trainers approach -- are rarely particularly effective. The logistics of distributing bulky folders and books to an uncertain audience in developing countries are quite difficult. Few international agencies are well-equipped to do the job with any particular degree of success. Rather, the folders and books tend to pile up in warehouses or are sent out largely at random to government agencies and educational institutions in developing countries on the off-chance that somebody will find the material useful. But in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region bulky materials in English tend to go unread so this approach is unlikely to find many readers. The first step to effective distribution of materials of this kind in many countries in the region is the preparation of high-quality translations. But this is rarely done, and even when translations are prepared, quality control is often poor. The consequence is that translated materials are often quite difficult to understand and are sometimes actually misleading.

The training-of-trainers approach rests on the presumptions that after returning to their home countries, course participants will be in a position to use the information that they have acquired to present similar courses, and that they will have the incentive to do so. However local conditions in developing countries often mean that these conditions are not met. Participants often return to onerous work schedules at home which allow little time to present courses, and in any case there is frequently no financial incentive for them to do so.

## **Sustainability**

The indications are that sustainability -- defined in the current context as the process of ensuring that newly-prepared course materials are regularly updated and reused for a reasonable period -- has often been disappointing as well. One main problem is that one-off courses and seminars are common. This means that much material is only used once rather than revised and improved for presentation in follow-up events. Bearing in mind that the initial costs of developing course materials are often expensive, this approach means that the investment costs of preparing courses are not spread as widely as they might be across large numbers of participants.

Sustainability would probably also be improved by more effective dissemination, but as noted above dissemination arrangements are often in need of improvement. A third way in which sustainability might be improved would be for short courses and workshops to be help in close cooperation with partner institutions in developing countries. This approach would hopefully strengthen commitment on the part of local partner institutions to make good and continuing use of the coursework materials as well as help international training providers to identify training needs more precisely.

## **The Way Ahead**

What can be done to improve the way that international agencies share information and knowledge about key development issues across the Asia-Pacific region? What changes are needed to improve traditional methods of providing education and training?

Although the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution currently underway across the globe is in its early stages, it is already clear that the revolution is opening up a substantial range of valuable new techniques which can be used to greatly improve the sharing of information and knowledge across developing countries (UNDP 2001: 85). In Asia, in countries such as India and China particularly, the rate of adoption of ICTs is high (Sood 2002: 17). One key challenge for the international development community, therefore, is to identify practical ways in which traditional approaches to teaching and education can be combined with new ICT techniques to provide relevant information and knowledge to much larger numbers of people in developing countries.<sup>4</sup>

As a step towards trying to find practical ways to use the new ICTs, the ADB Institute in Tokyo is currently exploring four ways of using ICT media to improve the delivery of ADBI programs. Although in principle each of these four initiatives can be seen as a stand-alone activity, in practice there are various linkages across the activities which serve to improve the quality of all of them. The four activities are:

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<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of how best to apply web-based education techniques appears to have lagged behind the rapidly-expanding range of tools that the new ICTs have made available. For a useful discussion, see Moore and Cozine (2000). A very substantial literature has developed around the topic of the efficacy of web-based techniques as an education tool. See, for example, Brown and Liedholm, AER, May 2002.

- Production of e-newsline, a daily electronic newsletter.
- Several programs based on the use of CD-ROMs.
- Redesign of the ADBI web site.
- Use of the Global Development Learning Network of videoconference distance learning centres.

### **E-newsline**

[E-newsline](#), which is freely available to all readers who wish to register their interest, provides a daily (weekday) summary of key economic news from developing countries across the Asia-Pacific region. With the aim of keeping the presentation crisp, an editorial decision has been taken to summarise no more than ten main stories each day. Electronic hotlinks are provided in the newsletter so that readers who wish to access the full reports can easily do so. In addition, with the aim of encouraging discussion and promoting the sharing of information, e-newsline provides both brief analytical comment on selected issues and crosslinks to several other sources of information about development issues in the region.

### **CD-ROM programs**

Several CD-ROM programs have been started with the aim of improving the dissemination of both existing material and new material on development issues. One of these programs, the [CD-ROM review project](#), is designed to help improve access to high-quality information and knowledge about development issues in the region that is currently available on the wide range of CD-ROMs issued by various organisations both in the Asia-Pacific region and in other parts of the world. The reviews, seven of which have already been posted on the ADBI web site (a summary list is also posted), provide information on such aspects of the CD-ROMs as content, easy of use, target audience, and how to obtain a copy of the CD-ROM.

A second CD-ROM production project is exploring ways in which both existing material (from past ADBI courses and workshops) and new material (to be developed as an output from future short courses) can be more effectively disseminated using CD-ROMs. The lessons learned that emerge from the CD-ROM review project will be incorporated into the development of ADBI's own CD-ROMs so that, hopefully, the quality of ADBI CD-ROMs can be enhanced.

### **ADBI Web Site**

A recent review of the [ADB Institute's web site](#) has identified a range of ways in which the ADBI can improve the electronic dissemination of information and knowledge. Although it is clear that 'content is king' on web sites because numerous international surveys indicate that web site users generally give high priority to the provision of high-quality content, it is also clear that the underlying technology and organisation of web sites needs to be good as well. The new ADBI web site will be easier to use and will provide an expanding range of interactive ADBI products. The target date for the launch

of the new web site is mid-2004.

### **Network of Videoconference-linked Distance Learning Centres**

The [Global Development Learning Network \(GDLN\)](#), launched in 1997, is a worldwide network of distance learning centres which links suppliers of education, training and knowledge products to users, especially users in developing countries). In early 2004, drawing on support provided by the Government of Japan, an Asian hub of the GDLN will be established in Tokyo. During 2004, building on material developed in ADBI workshops, the ADB Institute will work with the World Bank and other GDLN partners across the Asia-Pacific region to develop appropriate content for widespread use across the region.

### **Conclusion**

The potential need for practical training and information to support development effects across the Asia-Pacific region is very great. Many millions of people across the region are keen to acquire skills and knowledge to help them improve local living standards. It will be very difficult to find adequate resources to respond to this explosion in demand for education and knowledge. However the indications are that new techniques of training and communication currently becoming available from the spread of ICTs can be very helpful in improving the supply of education and information across the region.

The challenge facing the international development community is to identify practical ways in which traditional approaches to teaching and education can be combined with new ICT techniques. The ADB Institute is currently exploring four ways in which ICTs can be used to provide training and knowledge to large numbers of people across the region. As experience is gained, the aim is both to improve the use of these four delivery systems and to explore the use of other delivery systems as the range of options provided through ICTs continues to grow.

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