

First Class Graduates from Strategic Communication Course

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[Distance learning spreads messages globally](#)

Tomorrow marks the “virtual” graduation of 130 Bank staff members and their government and nongovernment partners in eight countries from an innovative, first-time World Bank course on strategic communication.

Offered jointly by the External Affairs Regional Operations unit and World Bank Institute, the six-week course is designed to help participants develop strategic communication plans to help them in their work on projects, country assistance strategies, and economic and sector work.

“We want participants to have a better understanding of how strategic communication or client-centered communication can promote changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors,” says EXTRO’s Cecilia Verzosa, who designed the course. “We also want them to understand the five management decisions that guide the development of a communication strategy, as well as the principles for building effective teams for communication.”

The course is taught from WBI’s distance learning studios at headquarters through three-hour videoconferencing sessions held once a week, providing staff and partners with quality education without the expense of travel and time away from work. Facilitators in each of the countries, trained in advance, help set up the videoconferences and do their own offline training, usually in the form of case studies. Classes are taught in English for now, but will soon be available in Spanish and French.

Wednesday’s graduates, about 80 percent of whom are non-Bank staff, will receive graduation certificates signed by EXTVP Mats Karlsson and WBI Vinod Thomas.

The Strategic Communication for Development Projects course, piloted last year, covers the core topics of strategic communication—from team building skills, to focusing on clients’ needs, to recognizing barriers and influencing the audience’s voluntary behavior. It aims to:

- Describe the “state-of-the-art” in using strategic communication for development.
- Illustrate how the World Bank and other international agencies have used communication to support developing country projects in various sectors-including health, education, private sector development, and environment.
- Provide hands-on experience in applying a decision-making template to support a Bank project, ESW, and CAS.

The course brings in prominent lecturers such as Alan Andreasen, professor, Georgetown University School of Business, Thomas R. Fiutak, director, Conflict and Change Center, and Gary Orren, professor, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Aside from pioneering partnerships with these institutions, the course is forging relationships with others, including Oxford University, which has agreed to act as a mentor to participants, and the Norwegian government, which provided a scholarship for 60 Africans to take the course.

“The course is definitely an instance of best practice and one of the most ambitious distance learning programs the World Bank Institute’s Distance Learning Unit has delivered,” says WBIDL’s Debra Beattie, who’s had over 10 years experience in distance learning. “It utilizes a wide range of technologies—videoconferencing, Internet, video tapes, audiovisual, and print materials—and innovative instructional methods such as online mentoring sessions with communication and sector specialists from Oxford University and the World Bank.”

“This course is long overdue,” says Obadiah Tohomdet, external affairs officer and facilitator in the Bank’s Nigeria country office. “Operational staff in the Nigerian Country Office who have attended this course are now using what they have learned to judge why some of their projects have not succeeded.”