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ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

Summary of Course Participant Evaluations

International Course on Biodiversity in Mangrove Ecosystems

Annamalai University, India, 1-15 October 2010

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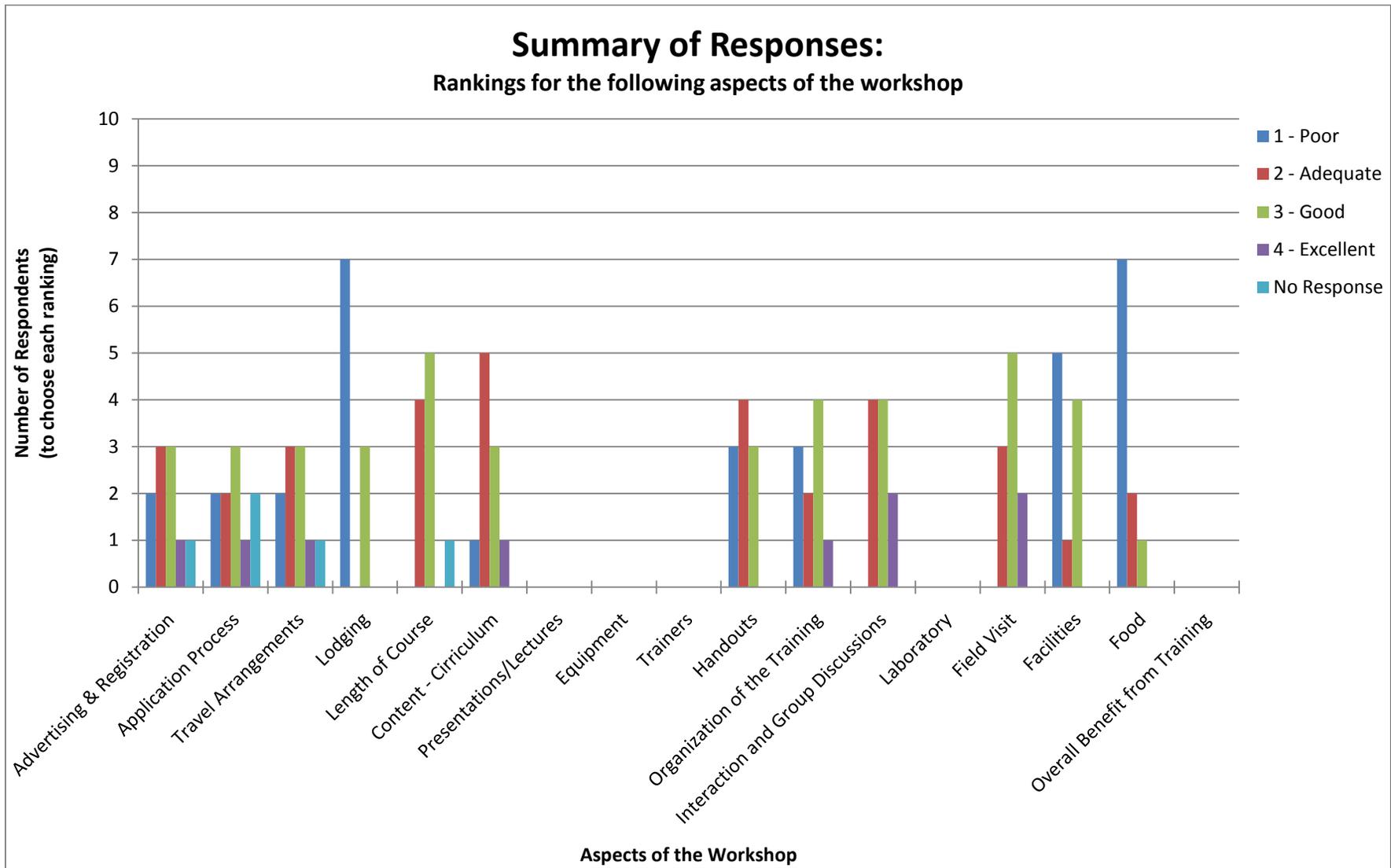
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1. Summary of Responses:



2. Respondent Feedback:

Question 1: *What is your current affiliation and position (e.g. Professor) and what are your work tasks (responsibilities, area of focus, training, research etc.)?*

All respondents identified themselves as researchers, with two respondents stating that they are also trainers on mangrove biodiversity, and three participants stating that they are university or college professors.

Question 2: *Why were you interested in attending this course?*

All respondents were interested in attending the course in order to create and improve their network of professionals dealing with mangrove ecosystems, and to increase their knowledge in the following fields:

- Biology, ecology, and functioning of mangrove ecosystems
- Conservation actions
- Management
- Impacts of climate change

Question 3: *What is your opinion on the following aspects of this training course:*

a. *The application process – the methods for the announcement and advertisement of the course:*

The application process was good and understandable, but respondents would like to receive a letter of acknowledgement that their application was received. Many applicants requested the selection process to be completed two months earlier to allow for sufficient processing time for obtaining a VISA.

b. *The application form for a fellowship and requirements (is it adequate, too lengthy etc.):*

Most participants found that the application form for a fellowship and additional requirements was adequate, but a bit lengthy. This could be improved in the following ways:

- Remove redundant sections
- Offer more space to write (also offer an MS Word version, not just .PDF)
- Explain that the fellowship is not for carrying out projects

Applicants would like to receive a confirmation letter that the application and letter of reference were received.

c. *The length of the course:*

Many participants thought the course should be shortened to 7-10 days, and that it was too lengthy for older students. A few participants found that the course length was okay, but that it should follow a strict schedule and offer a full day or half-day break after one week.

d. *The trainers/lecturers:*

Most respondents found the trainers and lecturers were quite good, but a couple individuals expressed frustration that training sessions were not catered to training trainers, and that they focused on too many basic things (simple taxonomy, etc.). At least three respondents asked for lecturers to recognize that information should be up-to-date and relevant to the course training.

e. *The structure of the course (start and end time, breaks, daily reporting etc.)*

All respondents thought that the general structure of the course was okay, but that the time management was not good. Lecturers went overtime, and the schedule was not observed. Participants wanted a half-day or full-day break after the first week to help maintain focus. Many respondents wanted the all lectures and training to be completed by 8pm in the evening, no later.

f. *Adherence to planned schedule:*

Adherence to the planned schedule was a problem for the duration of the course. Respondents indicated that following the schedule is important so that they can prepare as students for the presentations and field visits. Furthermore, almost all respondents indicated that a full day break should have been incorporated into the schedule.

g. *The field and lab visits and demonstrations:*

All respondents found most of the field and lab visits/demonstrations to be well executed and interesting, but there were a few specific requests:

- Have hostel closer to field sites to reduce travel time
- Allow students to be present during slide preparation and chemical application
- Eliminate the more irrelevant visits/demonstrations that do not pertain to course training (e.g.: crab fattening, clone fish aquarium, phyto-zooplankton collection identification, etc.)

h. The venue, lodging arrangements, internet access, and food:

All participants felt similar about the venue, lodging arrangements, internet access, and food.

- *Venue:*
 - The venue for teaching and meeting (the training centre) was good.
- *Lodging arrangements:*
 - The lodging arrangements were considered inadequate for an international course. Respondents explained that only some students were given pillows, and many had none. Some took issue with other people moving their luggage from the hostel to the dorm.
- *Internet Access:*
 - Internet access was considered poor – most could not obtain internet access.
- *Food:*
 - All respondents found the lunches to be good meals, but everyone found that the breakfast and dinner could be improved with more variation. Respondents said that breakfast and dinner were mostly late, and that there was very little variety considering the course is intended for international participants.

i. The training course handouts, materials etc.:

The training manual was considered sufficient, but it required editing and seemed a bit large/heavy. Most respondents wanted to see more handouts; they were provided with soft copies CDs during lecture presentations, but would like to see hard-copy handout sheets for every lecture.

j. Interaction and group discussion

All participants explained that the interaction and group discussion was wonderful and very helpful. Some requested more time for group discussion, since it was cut short due to lengthy lectures.

k. Opportunity to exchange knowledge and status of mangroves in your countries:

There was excellent opportunity to exchange knowledge and status of mangroves within the respondents' respective countries.

Question 4: *What was the most useful part(s) of this training course:*

While some found that all parts of the training course were useful, most identified the following aspects as the most helpful:

- Networking aspects & exchanging views
- Field visits
- Lectures

One respondent noted that witnessing the extensive works on mangroves and how it impacts human life was very inspiring.

Question 5: *What was the least useful part(s) of this training course:*

Respondents indicated that the least useful parts of the training course were as follows:

- Repetitious topics
 - Example: discussing mangrove faunal assemblages
 - Respondents would like to see these topics discussed together in one day
- Irrelevant lectures
 - In their opinion, just under half of the lectures were irrelevant to training
- Traditional demonstrations
 - Should have used modern methods and equipment

Many felt that this was a course better suited to undergraduates, not Masters and/or PhD students.

Question 6: *What do you feel was missing or what could have been improved? What did you expect to occur which did not happen?*

Respondents felt that there should be more hands-on practice time, and better lecture sequencing, adherence to the schedule, and time-management.

For lectures, they expected to see more about GIS studies and climate change; detailed lectures at the graduate (not undergraduate) level, discussing very specific fields like mangrove plantation, nursery development, and biodiversity evaluation & monitoring.

Many respondents wanted to hear more about sustainable biodiversity management, management strategies and policy making, and have some lectures from NGOs and governmental organizations on these topics.

A few of the respondents thought there should have been more case studies of the region, not just India alone, including more problem identification and potential solutions, and some felt that other regions (Sunderbans, India) should have been visited.

Question 7: Do you feel you learnt enough about threats to mangroves:

Half of the respondents felt that they learnt enough about threats to mangroves, and half of them felt they did not. Half of the respondents indicating that they learnt enough about mangrove threats also indicated that something was missing, and suggested an analysis of remedial measures is required.

Question 8: Do you feel you learnt enough about different management options and strategies for mangroves:

Half of the respondents felt that they learnt enough about different management options and strategies for mangroves, while the other half felt that they did not. Some argued that the management options presented were too site-specific and not general enough.

Question 9: My overall feelings about this training:

Half of the respondents felt that the training was useful, despite any difficulties encountered with food, lodging, and currency exchange. The remaining half felt that the training was outdated and too generalized, being better-suited for undergraduates or entry-level mangrove trainers. All respondents felt that the scheduling and time management was problematic.

Question 10: Suggestions for future training:

Respondents suggested the following changes for future training:

- Schedule & Time Management:
 - Adhere strictly to schedule
 - Keep venue close to hostel
- Venue & Course Length:
 - Consider shortening the course to 7-10 days instead
 - Consider other venues (Calcutta University, Sunderbans, Bangladesh, etc.)
 - Accommodation and food must be improved
- Field Visits:
 - Offer more time for practice in the lab and field
 - Add more field training activities
- Lectures:
 - Invite multi-national lecturers
 - Keep lectures about mangroves at least 60-80% of the time
 - Exclude irrelevant and repetitious lectures
- Personal Incidental Expenses should be included

Question 11: Other Comments:

Respondents requested that money be allocated for PIEs, and for other countries to be considered as alternative training venues (Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, etc.). Respondents also commented that, despite the difficulties encountered, the trip organizers were very friendly.