

Lean production at work

On Sunday, 4 November 2012, 18 participants from 14 APO member countries and two observers from the Zambian Ministry of Labor and Social Security flew into the clear autumn skies of Tokyo to ready themselves for a two-week training course on Lean Production Systems. From 5 to 16 November, they were involved in learning systematic ways to eliminate all types of waste in production and related processes. The lean production system was originated by Toyota Motor and became widespread with the company's business success. This face-to-face training course was organized as a follow-up to e-learning courses on the topic in July and August 2012, which were taken by 264 participants from 12 APO member countries.

The training course began with a briefing on the philosophy and concept of lean, followed by explanations of practical tools such as 5S, just in time, supply chain management, and value stream mapping. Later, participants visited the Oppama plant of Nissan Motor Co., Ltd. to learn about production synchronization management between assembly lines and the parts supply system. The Yokohama plant of Toyo Seikan Kaisha, Ltd., a producer of beverage containers, allowed them to observe its eco-friendly production. The Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology in Nagoya demonstrated the *monozukuri* (the art of making things) concept and Toyota corporate history. Participants were also hosted by the Takatana plant of Denso Corporation where they examined its practical lean production system.

During the final field visit to the Higashiura plant of auto parts producer Sankyo Kogyo Co., Ltd., the participants were guided by experts over two and a half days in applying their knowledge to analyze current processes and operations. They then presented a kaizen proposal to the company president and management, who acknowledged it gratefully.



A Sankyo Kogyo Co., Ltd. representative demonstrating its kanban operations to control auto parts.

“I have learned real practices of lean production systems and other factors I had not thought of before,” said Sok Hout, general manager of a meat-processing SME in Cambodia. Zohreh Khooban, an Iranian production and material planning manager in a steel-casting plant, was impressed by lean applications in Japan and commented, “I am going to present what I have learned to my colleagues and participants in the e-learning course. I also will implement lean-cum-Toyota production system-related tools in my plant.”