

ICT and service-sector productivity


Twenty-four information and communication technology (ICT) specialists from 12 member economies gathered for five days in the workshop on ICT Impact on the Productivity of the Service Sector organized by the APO in collaboration with the Ministry of ICT, Government of IR Iran, and National Iranian Productivity Organization, 19–23 January in Tehran. During the opening ceremony, Vice Minister Mohammad Karampour acknowledged that ICT had become vital for achieving higher levels of productivity and improving national economies. ICT Vice Minister Abdolmajid Gharibreza attended both the opening ceremony and site visit and distributed certificates to all participants, indicating the degree of interest by the ministry in this workshop.

The workshop discussed ICT-related policies and development programs; the latest ICT and techniques for the service sector; storage, retrieval, manipulation, transmission, and receipt of digital data; and understanding ICT for continuous innovation and overall productivity growth in the service sector. Recent advances, especially in software, have made the sector a hotbed of innovation and technological progress for service providers. The Internet, interactive platforms/websites, smart phones, etc. have direct/indirect impacts on service-sector productivity. Effective ICT applications in service organizations can heighten productivity significantly, make processes leaner, and result in better quality, cost-effectiveness, and shorter delivery times. ICT and process integration lead to greater customer satisfaction.

Several participating countries also shared their initiatives. In Bangladesh, the health and education sectors have been targeted for the creation of Digital

Bangladesh. To help spread ICT, import taxes on equipment and systems were reduced in Cambodia. Business concessions are offered by Fiji's government for services such as ticketing, telemedicine, call centers, etc. to promote ICT use.

Malaysia initiated an e-procurement project to improve government service, including internal approvals electronically. In Sri Lanka, an e-government policy is being developed to provide more efficient services to citizens. The Smart Thailand 2020 Program includes smart services by improving ICT infrastructure and human resources. In a survey in Vietnam, 77% of healthcare, telecom, and travel service providers agreed that their productivity was boosted by ICT.

The participants also visited the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company that developed a nationwide "smart fuel system" using ICT technology resulting in US\$12 billion in savings while improving service. At the end of the workshop, participants developed steps to implement ICT in education, healthcare, public services in general, and telecoms, with recommendations for their governments to promote ICT in the service sector. 



Vice Minister Gharibreza giving a "best participant" souvenir to a Lao participant. Photo courtesy of Ministry of ICT, IR Iran.