

## Development of SMEs

**S**MEs play an important role in the economies of the Asia-Pacific region not only because of their sheer numbers but also the variety of their activities. However, the lack of knowledge of advanced management practices, weak technical capabilities, and limited access to external assistance are their critical common factors and should be closely examined for the development of SMEs.

After the enthusiastic reception of a similar project in January 2012, the APO in conjunction with the Japan Productivity Center (JPC) organized a multicountry observational study mission on SME Development in Tokyo, 4–8 February, to illustrate best practices in utilizing productivity improvement tools and techniques by SMEs. The 15 participants, including four observers from Myanmar, were NPO trainers/consultants, government officials in charge of SME development, and SME owners. After presentations by two JPC resource persons, the participants had the opportunity to visit three excellent SMEs: Cucire Corporation, a subsidiary of Seiko Corporation, where they were introduced to the Toyota sewing system (TSS); Seiko itself to observe overall corporate management based on the TSS; and Yasui Co. Ltd. for plant practice. After observations at Yasui Co. Ltd., they were requested to make two kaizen suggestions to company management.

The participants also presented action plans for kaizen or 5S activities reflecting the actual situation in their organizations to be shared with their NPOs, or with the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Develop-

ment in the case of the Myanmar observers. Noted APO Secretariat Industry Department Program Officer Muhammad Idham bin Mohd. Zain, “Although most participants were not familiar with production sites, they tried their best to understand productivity improvement activities and the approaches used by Japanese companies.

Overall, they gained an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in developing productivity measures through their action plans.”

Participant Vilivong Phonesavanh from Lao PDR commented, “It would be nice to have a more advanced follow-up activity. I would like to learn more about how to manage and run a successful business. Ideally, that would be a meeting with all the same participants again to follow how each of them has implemented kaizen or 5S.” Chuon Mony from Cambodia concurred, adding that he “very much appreciated the onsite practice in the factory, but the time spent was not quite long enough.” 🌟



*Participants observing the TSS process as explained by Manager Kimihiro Tagawa, Plant Planning, Research & Planning Center of Cucire in Chiba prefecture.*