



APO *news*

Liaison Officers Meet at Secretariat

During 1–3 August 2006, APO Liaison Officers in member countries attended a consultative meeting at the APO Secretariat in Tokyo. Sixteen Liaison Officers and seven other representatives from member countries were present. The Liaison Officers are the official links between member countries and the Secretariat “to facilitate the expeditious disposal of matters relating to the APO,” as specified by the APO Governing Body in 1962. Among the agenda items was the finalization of a document that spells out in detail for the first time the role of a Liaison Officer. In addition, the three-day meeting also featured: country presentations by Liaison Officers; plenary sessions to consider specific issues relating to project implementation; presentation on Web-based projects/facilities; and dialogue with individual departments of the Secretariat.



Secretary-General Takenaka (center) presenting the welcome address at the Opening Session

APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka, in his welcome address, told the Liaison Officers that they played a key role in enabling the APO to fulfill its mission. He said that the meeting was to give the Secretariat an opportunity to: 1) thank them for their assistance and advice and return their hospitality; 2) understand the situations facing them as they endeavor to carry out their duties as Liaison Officers and the additional support that the Secretariat could provide; and 3) consult them on several important issues to ensure the effectiveness of APO programs.

Although the Secretary-General did not wish to influence the outcome of the discussions on the issues set before the meeting with his remarks, there was one concern he wanted to single out for special mention: the quality of APO projects. While recognizing that this was a multifaceted issue, his particular concern was with the quality of participants: “I have seen participants who have little or no interest in the project they are attending. Some clearly did not meet the qualifications specified in the project notification. Although our projects are always conducted in English, we have participants who can barely speak or understand the language. We also have participants from the public sector attending projects that are intended for

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“To have a harmonious family life, we must spend time with our family. There is no such thing as quality time if we can spend only a little of it with our families. Employees who are happy at home are more productive. In the end, the company profits.”

Carolyn Baytion-Sunaryo

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Liaison Officer interview

After the deliberations of the Liaison Officers Meeting had concluded, four officers participated in an informal interview to give a “human face” to the experience of serving as an APO Liaison Officer and to speak about the perceptions of the productivity movement in their own countries. The four were from different regions, had different backgrounds, and had spent various lengths of time as a Liaison Officer: Abdul Baqui Chowdhury, Bangladesh, and Frank Pai, Republic of China, had both been Liaison Officers for more than 15 years; Sayasith Khamphasith, Lao PDR, had served for almost three years, i.e., since his country had joined the APO; and Mahboubeh Najafi, Iran, had been a Liaison Officer for only five months, although she had worked in the NPO of Iran for more than 11 years before being appointed.

How has your impression of the APO changed over time, and how has membership in the APO benefited your country?

Pai: Since I have been associated with the APO, I’ve seen a lot of changes in member countries with economic growth and development. My view is that the organization has also changed along with its members and their needs. Taking the ROC as an example, we were able to learn a lot from advanced countries outside the region in the early days of membership through attendance in APO projects. Over time, our role in the APO family has changed. Now the ROC is in a position where it wishes to share its knowledge with as many other member countries as possible.

Sayasith: Although Lao PDR’s membership is still of short duration, it has been a happy experience. Individuals who have participated in APO projects are now motivated to read technical publications, especially on 5S and kaizen. This is because the country has benefited most visibly from APO assistance in two model company projects in the private sector in industry, where 5S and kaizen were adopted to upgrade quality management systems. Government officers now understand more clearly how these productivity tools work. Our APO Director has proposed that productivity be put on the national government agenda, and we are interested in making two agro-processing enterprises into model companies as well.

Chowdhury: I have also had a long association with the APO and watched it evolve. Based on my experience, it is a unique organization because it is completely result oriented and tries to follow up on its projects for maximum benefit to its members. It also solicits the involvement and support of its members, so there is an interdependency. More than 1,500 participants from Bangladesh have attended APO projects over the last 14 years, so the country has benefited tremendously through human resources development. The APO is really playing a vital role in the productivity movement in Bangladesh.

Najafi: My impression is that the APO touches on issues and problems felt by its members. The organization has a big responsibility, and its performance has been admirable so far. Iran’s productivity movement started only after



Chowdhury (L) listening to Sayasith’s answer during the interview

joining the APO. The major benefits have been receiving TES experts for consultancy, attending various projects in different countries, and joining observational study missions to know what other countries are doing in a certain area and then refining Iran’s own efforts based on what is seen to work elsewhere.

How is the APO perceived in your country?

Sayasith: I must tell you frankly that the APO is still only known in urban areas but not yet in all of Lao PDR’s 17 provinces. A major role for the NPO is increasing that awareness, both of the organization and of the productivity movement. We are contacting various institutions for that purpose and have especially good relations with chambers of commerce. The situation regarding the paperwork necessary for approval to participate in APO projects has recently improved, so that potential private-sector participants can now be contacted directly.

Chowdhury: It’s been well known in government circles for quite a while and now in the private sector too. Many government officials attended APO projects when they were starting their careers, and now five or six of our ministerial secretaries are ex-participants. The NPO is also popular because the APO is popular.

Pai: Most people in the ROC are aware of the APO. Because it was one of the original members, people who attended projects in the early days have now been promoted to positions of seniority in both government and the private sector, as in Bangladesh. Many entrepreneurs who run successful enterprises today received training in APO projects or through CPC channels. So the APO is perceived very positively.

Najafi: In Iran, the APO is well known in both the public and private sectors. This is probably due to networking among government bodies and ministries. Each ministry now has its own productivity committee, and they all maintain close relationships. Iran’s NPO is trying to widen its contacts with the private sector, associations—some of which have hundreds of members—and NGOs. I think that in five years’ time awareness will improve a lot.



Pai speaking enthusiastically of his long APO-related experience

What changes does the APO need to undertake to remain relevant and useful to member countries?

Najafi: I think that the APO will remain relevant and useful if it continues to note new trends in productivity from around the world and incorporates them in its programs.

Pai: Obviously, with 20 members, there are differences in development stage and differences in needs. How to accommodate all those diverse needs with limited resources is a big challenge. The WSM, GBM, and Liaison Officers Meeting offer useful venues for dialogue on how to accomplish this. I know that Secretariat staff work hard, but it may not be possible to make everybody happy all the time. The emphasis on Category B and C projects, rather than Category A, is an example of compensation to satisfy as many as possible.

Sayasith: The Member Country Support Program is relevant and useful to new members, but two years may not be long enough. Also, I would like to suggest training courses specifically for policymakers. Most current training is meant for middle managers and in the private sector.

Chowdhury: The APO is undertaking to change with the times. But of course, as the membership increases, problems will also increase. The dimensional problems will be different. Sometimes, I look at a project notification for a very high-tech project and find that 'This project is not for Bangladesh.'

What was your most memorable APO-related experience?

Pai: Actually, my educational background was in mechanical engineering, and my first work experience was on the job site of the Nuclear Power Project of the Taiwan Power Company. After going to the CPC, I realized that I really preferred to work with living things rather than machines. Meeting people of different cultures and forming human networks is really my most memorable experience. Some APO colleagues have become family friends and we share our personal as well as professional concerns.

Chowdhury: There have been so many interesting stories. I was a social sci-

ence major, so I also enjoy the people aspects of work. When I first started at the NPO in the pre-IT era, all communication with the APO Secretariat and other NPOs was through telex, a system in which users are charged for every word. We had to be very careful and I'll always remember how difficult—but interesting—it was to grasp telex style at first.

Sayasith: I was in the Department of Industry and Handicraft and then the Division of Foreign Relations and Investment, Office of the Cabinet, of the same ministry before joining the NPO, and I agree with the others that the human relations and contacts are the most memorable part of this job. Also, access to e-mail and the Internet has improved my knowledge. Of course, those IT tools also mean that I am expected to work faster now, so I even work on Saturdays. It's an enjoyable job, but there is some pressure.

Najafi: After working for more than 11 years in the NPO, being appointed Liaison Officer and then attending this Liaison Officers Meeting are my most memorable moments. I agree that the friendships within the APO are unusual; a friend pointed that out to me recently when we were talking about our work situations.



Najafi (R) answering Director Mok, Administration and Finance, APO Secretariat

What do you always read or read first in the APO News? What other types of news or features would you like to see in the newsletter?

Sayasith: I always look first at page 7 to see which projects are being organized where and to find out if there are any changes in other NPOs. Then I read p-Watch because that's always good. The quizzes in December are a favorite of everyone in our office.

Chowdhury: I enjoy the quotations [Common Sense Talk, page 4]. I even memorize some of them. Some are old, some are new, and they're interesting to me. I also like p-Watch. What I'd like to see in addition are letters from readers.

Pai: I always want to read about what other NPOs are doing, on the back page. Then I read about any special issues or events.

Najafi: I like Common Sense Talk, too. Next I read p-Watch and about recent projects.

the private sector.” The Secretary-General said that the Liaison Officers played an active role in the sourcing and shortlisting of candidates for final selection by the Secretariat, adding that he considered that to be one of their most important, if not the most important, responsibilities as Liaison Officers. He emphasized the seriousness of the issue as it ultimately means a waste of resources by providing training to the wrong persons. He appealed to them to take remedial measures as the Secretariat could do little directly on its own.

In their country presentations, at the request of the Secretariat, the Liaison Officers dealt with: 1) issues relating to the hosting and implementation of APO projects, sourcing of qualified and desirable candidates, timely submission of nominations, and recruitment of local resource speakers; 2) innovative measures undertaken by NPOs to strengthen relationships with other productivity stakeholders, in particular the private and agriculture sectors, and their outcome; and 3) NPOs’ expectations of the Secretariat in the planning and implementation of APO projects. The Secretariat is collating the suggestions of the Liaison Officers for follow-up.



Liaison Officers in the meeting

The meeting, which was also attended by Secretariat staff members, discussed a host of issues relating to APO project planning, implementation, and finance. Among those of great concern were: project planning and design; quality of participants; private-sector participation; NPO engagement program on agriculture; last-minute withdrawals and no-shows; field visits; quality of local resource speakers; follow-up on APO projects; monitoring effectiveness of APO projects; local implementation costs; and airfare matters. There was also a session on Web-based programs and the use of APOnet and APO e-Forum. The Secretariat departments also held separate discussions with the delegates on issues other than those covered in the main meeting. The meeting culminated with the adoption of the document “The Role of APO Liaison Officers.”

The longest-serving Liaison Officer, Frank Pai, Republic of China, presented a vote of thanks on behalf of the delegates. He said that the meeting was important in that it was the only forum where all the Liaison Officers could get together with their colleagues in the APO Secretariat to renew old ties, establish new ones, and consult face to face on issues of mutual interest and concern. At this year’s Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs (WSM), only 10 Liaison Officers attended. At the Governing Body Meeting (GBM), there were only seven. Liaison Officers’ attendance at those two key meetings of the APO was even less last year, with eight at the WSM and six at the GBM. This exclusive meeting for Liaison Officers was thus very much appreciated, Pai added, and thanked the Secretary-General for making it possible. He went on to say that the meeting had been fruitful and meaningful and that the next step must be for all parties concerned to carry out what they had committed to do. He concluded with an assurance that the Liaison Officers would do their best to ensure that the APO’s mission and activities are well represented in their countries. 🌀

COMMON SENSE TALK



“Japan is not America; Korea is not America. Global giants like Wal-Mart fail in these countries because they don’t try hard enough to localize their businesses.”

Edwin Merner

“Asian consumers are showing a new form of modernity and sophistication that would challenge even the most experienced brands. The retailers with the local knowledge and distribution network will ultimately emerge as the winners.”

Martin Roll

“Proper etiquette is generally acquired through a combination of upbringing and common sense, augmented by the occasional attention-focusing embarrassing moment in one’s youth.”

Joe Sharkey

“‘Doing your own thing’ is a generous act. Being gifted creates obligations, which means you owe the world your best effort at the work you love. You too are a natural resource.”

Barbara Sher

“To have a very difficult illness does not necessarily mean the end of life. It simply means that this is a break or a pause, the beginning of a new step and the end of a current phase. It is simply one break in a longer life.”

Ken Watanabe

“The objects that really make a difference to our lives are often the least noticeable ones, that don’t try to grab our attention. They’re the things that add something to the atmosphere of our homes and that we’d miss the most if they disappeared.”

Jasper Morrison

“To have a harmonious family life, we must spend time with our family. There is no such thing as quality time if we can spend only a little of it with our families. Employees who are happy at home are more productive. In the end, the company profits.”

Carolyn Baytion-Sumaryo

“You know you’ve read a good book when you turn the last page and feel a little as if you have lost a friend.”

Paul Sweeney

Multiplier effects of the ICD Program in Fiji


The APO Integrated Community Development Program has since 1998 attempted to promote balanced economic development through rural and social development activities in member countries. It is meant to enhance individual and collective initiatives at the local community level through socio-economic activities geared toward sustainable development. To create multiplier effects from APO projects, the Technical Expert Services (TES) Program deputes resource persons to local projects organized as a follow-up to APO international projects. A successful example of this cycle in Fiji is described below.

Rural community development in Fiji has improved infrastructure, agricultural production, and the provision of basic services in health and education. Key institutions involved in supporting community development efforts are the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and Regional Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Education. However, efforts were still not integrated and did not focus sufficiently on increasing the ability of communities to shape their own future. This led to a “recipient” mentality and expectations of government support. The behavior of indigenous communities is also influenced by the abundant availability of natural resources, which ensure an easy livelihood. The relatively short history of planned development efforts means that skills in rural planning are lacking. However, increased competition in the world market, a burgeoning population, and the struggle of the government to provide material support forced the authorities to find ways to resolve community development issues.

In July 2003, the Fijian Cabinet endorsed a new concept of community development revolving around the three components of a community capacity-building strategy: 1) social auditing; 2) community development planning; and 3) institutional support and networking. The participatory project cycle management (PPCM) methodology with the six steps of discovery, dream, direction, design, delivery, and driving (6-D) serves as the methodology for all three components.



Trainees interacting with villagers in the discovery phase of the PPCM cycle

The concept endorsed in 2003 was implemented gradually and is now being scaled up. The Ministry of Provincial Development and National Disaster Management thus organized an 11-day course to train 22 additional individuals in the PPCM methodology and 6-D, to which TES experts Dr. Ulrich Gaertner and Mohan Dhamotharan were dispatched. The training-of-trainers course focused on the community capacity building approach of the government; PPCM and 6-D; practice in using tools for community development planning; and documentation when applying PPCM and 6-D in communities. The 22 participants are expected to work with 20 villages until the end of 2006, and those performing well will become permanent employees from 2007. They will then face the huge task of supporting all 2000 villages and settlements throughout Fiji based on PPCM. 

Workshop on Green Productivity and Solid Waste Management

The Asia-Pacific region currently generates more than 90,000 tons per day of solid waste and will reach more than 1.8 million tons per day by 2025, keeping pace with a 4% urban growth rate. The management of solid waste has become critical issue for cities in Asia and the Pacific, as its indiscriminate disposal poses severe environmental and health hazards. A few countries like Japan, Singapore, India, and the Philippines have enacted regulations and laws specifically to deal with solid waste, while others are examining how to do so. To assess the present status and share success stories and approaches taken by various member countries to tackle solid waste problems, the APO organized a workshop on Green Productivity and Solid Waste Management in the Philippines, 26–30 June. The workshop was attended by 21 participants from 16 member countries.

The focus of the workshop was discussion of the three major issues of 3R (reduce, recycle, and reuse) initiatives; waste collection, storage, and transfer; and waste processing and disposal technologies. The resource persons from Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines elaborated on the latest trends in those

countries from a business and technological perspective, while the APO officer in charge explained how the Green Productivity approach could help 3R initiatives to be more effective. It was noted that various approaches are taken in member countries, including legislation, users' fees levied along with electricity bills or volume-based fees, and conversion of organic elements into compost.

During the workshop, the participants visited Tagaytay to observe its waste management practices. After the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act came into effect in 2001, which mandates diversion of 25% of waste from disposal, material recovery facilities (MRF) have been set up at *barangay* (lowest governing unit) level in Philippines. The participants visited several MRFs and saw innovative methods for waste reuse and recycling in action. On the final day of the workshop, the participants were divided into three groups under the guidance of the resource persons to develop solid waste management plans, which were then presented to Tagaytay municipal officials for their comments.

Management improvement in SMEs

After its phenomenal success in reviving the US economy and individual businesses during the mid-1980s, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) has now been adopted in many countries, from the Pacific coast of Fiji to the highlands of Mongolia. Based on the success stories of US businesses regaining competitiveness vis-à-vis Japan and Europe, the MBQNA is now widely recognized and considered by many to be one of the best management tools available. Like many wishing to emulate the same success, the Japanese government also launched a version of the MBNQA called the Japan Quality Award (JQA) in 1995.




Debate during the study mission

SMEs represent the largest portion (75% or more of registered businesses) of business enterprises in most countries. For example, in the USA, according to 2003 statistics of the US Small Business Administration and US Census Bureau, SMEs (defined as firms with fewer than 500 employees) constituted 99.7% of all registered businesses, employed 50% of the labor force, and generated approximately 40% of overall revenues. SMEs thus play an important role in the socioeconomic context, both as the largest employment generator and usually a country's sole entrepreneurial engine. With globalization, SMEs today are facing new competitive issues from external factors which they are not fully equipped to tackle. In addition, one of the greatest challenges currently faced by most SMEs is remaining original or creative.

To address management issues in the SME context, the APO organized a multi-country study mission on Management Improvement in SMEs in Japan, 10–14 July. It was attended by 19 participants from 16 member countries. The five-day mission showcased selected SMEs that were JQA recipients. This project, which was the second in the series, was originally developed as the Best Practice Program for JQA Winners by the JPC-SED. This year, although retaining its original theme, the study mission was redesigned to focus on management quality issues in SME operations, such as improving competitiveness, sustainability of growth, and good management practices. The Japan Quality Program, which administers the JQA, was developed to address those concerns as well as meeting its primary objective of enhancing organizational self-innovation capabilities to create value and encourage management innovation through its “six stages of growth” framework. The core theme focuses on self-innovation through proactive self-assessment using the JQA criteria. The JQA framework applies to all types of enterprises, regardless of size of operation and nature of business; SMEs may fare better in self-innovation than larger enterprises

since they are usually smaller, more independent, and more flexible in operations.

One aspect of the study mission was learning how the Japan Quality Management Program and the Regional Quality Councils work to complement each other while working in parallel with the JQA. No other model in this region attempts to incorporate the SME context in a quality award system, although a similar system exists in the USA. The first day and one-half of the mission entailed lectures and workshops to familiarize participants with the basic concepts and philosophies of quality management, followed by three and one-half days of observational visits to four SMEs and the Regional Quality Council of Saitama prefecture. Here, participants were shown how a regional quality council operates and promotes SME participation through its quality management program and various services, e.g., customized management training for second-generation SME owners. Of the four company visits, Calsonic Harrison and J. Art Restaurant Systems are JQA winners, while Sanshu Seika and Asociade Daiichi are regional quality award recipients. The latter two companies are located in Nagoya.

The participants stated that the key points they grasped were understanding leadership in action in the context of SMEs as opposed to textbook leadership in large corporations, management quality as opposed to quality management, improvement as opposed to innovation or breakthroughs, and creating uniqueness through niche marketing. There was an acknowledgment by participants of the need to have a more focused quality program system specifically for SMEs. They indicated that one member country had proposed operating its own national quality award while two others had expressed interest in designing an SME framework similar to the JQA in the near future and hoped to seek APO assistance in doing so. Another member country will publish a best practice booklet on key learning from this study mission which will be distributed to the participants after completion. 



p-Experts deputed by the APO

REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Dr. Sakae Shibusawa, Professor, Faculty of Agriculture, Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, and **Dr. Mikio Umeda**, Professor, Laboratory of Field Robotics, Kyoto University Graduate School of Agriculture, Japan, were deputed as resource persons for the study mission on Precision Farming, 17–21 July 2006.

FIJI

Ms. Janelle Adrain, Principal Consultant, Health and Safety Essentials, Australia, was deputed as technical expert for the training course on Transportation, Handling, and Storage of Dangerous Goods/Materials, 31 July–4 August 2006.

Mr. Bruce Searles, Managing Partner, Benchmarking Partnerships, Australia, was deputed as technical expert for the workshop on Benchmarking, 15–18 August 2006.

MONGOLIA

Mr. Paul Chandran, Principal Consultant, PSB Corporation, Singapore, was deputed as resource person for the project on Strengthening NPO Services: Consultancy Services by PSB (Phase I): “Human Resource Consultancy: Certified Human Resource Practitioners,” 7–18 August 2006.

THAILAND

Mr. Hiroshi Omori, President, TechnoSoft Co., Ltd., Japan, and **Mr. Mah Soo**, Consultant, Trademall Dotcom, Malaysia, were deputed as

resource persons for the regional training workshop on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy for SMEs in the Greater Mekong Subregion of ASEAN: Reusing Biomass Waste in Industrial Boilers for Energy Recovery, 17–21 July 2006.

Mr. Koh Kasuga, Consultant, Japan, **Mr. Saquib Mohyuddin**, Chairman, Pakistan Enterprise Development Facility, and **Prof. Tan Wee Liang**, Singapore Management University, were deputed as resource persons for the forum on Private-sector Partnerships, 25–27 July 2006.

Dr. Serafin D. Talisayon, Professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines, was deputed as chief-cum-national expert, and **Dr. Fen-Hui Lin**, Associate Professor, Department of Management Information Systems, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Republic of China, **Mr. Siddharth Sharma**, Director and Group Head, Economic Services, Information Technology, Productivity Awareness and Awards, National Productivity Council, India, **Mr. Andiral Purnomo**, Chief Knowledge Officer, Dunamis Organization Services, Indonesia, **Dr. Jung Hoon Derick Sohn**, Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, University of Seoul, Republic of Korea, **Ms. Ida Yasin**, Manager, National Productivity Corporation, Malaysia, **Dr. Thomas Menkhoff**, Practice Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior, Singapore Management University, Lee Kong Chian School of Business, **Dr. Boondee Bunyagidj**, Advisor to the Executive Director, Thailand Productivity Institute, and **Ms. Hong Dan Vu**, Head of Productivity Research Division, Vietnam Productivity Centre, were deputed as national experts for the survey on the Status of Knowledge Management in Member Countries, 14–15 August 2006.

VIETNAM

Dr. Mark Goh, Director (Industry Research), Logistics Institute-Asia Pacific, National University of Singapore Business School, was deputed as chief facilitator-cum-resource person, and **Mr. Shigenobu Ohara**, President, Project Research Corporation, Japan, and **Dr. Young-Chul Chang**, Professor, Department of Management, Kyunghee University, Republic of Korea, were deputed as resource persons for the symposium on Management of Change, 7–10 August 2006.

Program calendar

November

Fiji

Training Course on Facilitation for Community Development, 10–17 November 2006.

India

Seminar on Commercial Dispute Processing, 21–24 November 2006.

Indonesia

Seminar on Improving Food Security and Food Safety, 13–17 November 2006.

Japan

Study Meeting on Venture Business Support, 13–16 November 2006.

Study Mission to Japan on Enterprise Innovation, 13–17 November 2006.

Asian Forum on Venture Business, 14–16 November 2006.

Republic of Korea

Multi-country Study Mission on Public sector Productivity Enhancement, 6–9 November 2006.

Study Meeting on Strategic Industries in Member Countries: Electronics Industry, 7–10 November 2006.

Workshop on Sustainable Consumption and Production, 20–24 November 2006.

Malaysia

Symposium on Managing NPOs' Challenges in the 21st Century, 28–30 November 2006.

Pakistan

Training Course on Assessors of Quality Awards, 6–10 November 2006.

Singapore

Multi-country Study Mission on Organizational Excellence: SQA Framework and Best Practices of Award Winners, 21–23 November 2006.

Sri Lanka

Workshop on Productivity Showcases and Demonstration Effects, 27–30 November 2006.

Thailand

Training Course on Supply Chain Management for Agribusiness SMEs in the Mekong Region, 20–25 November 2006.

Kindly contact your NPO for details of the above activities, including eligibility for participation. If you need the address of your NPO, it is available from the APO Web site at www.apo-tokyo.org.

APO/NPO update

New APO Liaison Officer for Fiji

Ms. Taina Tagicakibau, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment Opportunities and Productivity, was appointed the new APO Liaison Officer for Fiji, w.e.f. 3 July 2006.

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Productivity concept goes to rural villages in Sri Lanka

The NPO of Sri Lanka, the National Productivity Secretariat (NPS), under the Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment, has launched a program to take the productivity concept to rural villages, where more than 65% of the population live. Previously, productivity-related concepts were mainly confined to the cities and focused on industry and service enterprises, which are mainly located in urban areas. The village-based effort is also an attempt to contribute to the national development plan formulated under the *Mahinda Chinthana* (vision of Mahinda) of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The program focuses on schoolchildren and rural people with the aim of achieving national productivity enhancement that will in turn contribute to higher GDP growth. The target sectors are:

- 1) Government and private schools;
- 2) Government institutions;
- 3) Small and micro enterprises (industrial, agricultural, fisheries, tourism, etc.) in the private sector; and
- 4) Rural and urban communities.

The NPS had conducted 79, 19, 36, one, and 12 productivity awareness programs for the public sector, private sector, school sector, community level, and other groups, respectively, as of 14 August 2006.

In the school sector, the targeted students are between 6 and 17 years of age in 150 selected schools in 24 districts of Sri Lanka. The staff members of the NPS and other external resource persons introduce the basic productivity concepts to the students and teachers. Thereafter, the students under the guidance of teachers form productivity improvement teams. These teams implement basic productivity tools such as 5S, kaizen, and quality circles. A significant improvement has been seen in some schools. Since the NPS gives Productivity Awards for the school sector at the National Productivity Awards Ceremony, most schools utilize productivity tools and techniques in the hopes of winning an award. Some principals and teachers reported at progress review meetings that the attitudes and behavior patterns of students had changed.

The District Secretariat is the center of administration and coordinates all government institutions in a district. Thus, productivity programs are also implemented with district secretariats at the district level and with divisional secretariats at divisional level. Since the productivity program is linked to the president's development agenda, the support and cooperation for it have exceeded expectations. Initial seminars conducted by the NPS with the support of external resource persons who had received training in APO projects introduce the basic concepts and productivity tools and techniques followed by discussions. Thereafter, each institution selects the most suitable productivity tools and techniques and applies them independently under the guidance of the NPS. Service delivery time in some institutions has been significantly shortened, and work environments have become cleaner and more orderly.

Most private-sector enterprises in rural areas are small or micro-level ventures. The number of employees ranges from one to approximately 100. The main approach utilized by the NPS was the organization of seminars and discussions with groups of owners or managers of these enterprises. Most become convinced



Lighting a traditional oil lamp to symbolize launching the productivity program

that using productivity tools is worthwhile when they realize that financial gains can be achieved. They in turn take a leadership role and introduce productivity concepts in their enterprises. On request, NPS staff visit SMEs to assist in their productivity enhancement programs. Some SMEs are now reaping the benefits of speedier production and higher profit margins.

At the village level, with the assistance of divisional secretariats and elected village officers, NPS staff members went from house to house distributing documents containing productivity concepts and explaining the importance of productivity improvement. In addition, group meetings were organized to educate rural people on productivity concepts. Since schoolchildren were also taught about productivity concepts and tools, it is easier to convince parents of their benefit and encourage the use of productivity tools at the household level. However, in rural villages where poverty is rampant, it can be difficult to motivate residents to change their methods of work. The NPS thus still has a major task in spreading productivity awareness and the use of 5S and kaizen nationwide. 