

— The APO's Green Productivity journey and achievements —

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Evolution of the APO's Green Productivity concept

Sustainable national development represented the single largest challenge of the 20th century and remains a priority goal for many countries. Among developing countries of Asia and the Pacific, the issue is exemplified in the case of SMEs, which contribute greatly not only to economic growth but also to environmental degradation due to their inherent characteristics. Pollution, which is a form of waste and a symptom of inefficiency in production, signals an opportunity for improvements in the productivity of resource-extractive SMEs.

The concern for environmental degradation and rapid depletion of natural resources brought scientists, administrators, and politicians together at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 that resulted in Agenda 21 on sustainable development for overall socioeconomic development of the world in the 21st century. Inspired by Agenda 21, the APO in 1994, under a special grant from the Government of Japan, created the Special Program for the Environment (SPE). Integrating the issues of environmental protection as the third dimension to productivity along with improvements in quality and efficiency to achieve the goal of sustainable development, the concept of Green Productivity (GP) was introduced. The GP concept under the SPE aimed to help member economies integrate environmental concerns into their productivity enhancement activities.

Green Productivity (GP) is a strategy for enhancing productivity and environmental performance for overall socioeconomic development. GP can be achieved by the application of appropriate productivity and environmental tools, techniques, and technologies to reduce the environmental impact of an organization's activities, goods, and services. GP reconciles two needs that are normally in conflict, i.e., the need for businesses to earn profits and the need for everyone else to protect the environment.



The APO used a multipronged approach to popularize GP among its members: the Green Productivity Promotion Mission, for networking and partnership programs; Green Productivity Demonstration Program (GPDP), for showcasing the applications of GP and developing institutional capacity; and Green Productivity Dissemination Assistance, for widely publicizing the experience gained among APO members.

With the establishment of a Working Group on Productivity and the Environment in 1994, GP was well on its way to wider adoption among APO members. GP research was started in 10 Asian countries. Initially, the focus of study was the application of cleaner production techniques. Research subsequently broadened to incorporate more tools and techniques, including pollution control, and mainly targeted SMEs, which by that decade had become the economic backbone of developing nations. The concept was also extended to farm and community level for the socioeconomic development of villages in members like Vietnam. GP was eventually adopted as an APO strategy under the Manila Declaration at the APO World Conference on Green Productivity on 6 December 1996 in Manila, the Philippines.

A group of productivity and environmental experts was organized by the APO to develop a GP framework with a unique six-step methodology based on Deming's plan-do-check-act cycle, and the *Green Productivity Training Manual* was published. By 2002, GP had achieved global recognition. The Second World Conference on Green Productivity was held that year, and the APO presented its GP achievements and activities at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Recognizing the rich GP-related knowledge base in Japan, the APO founded the GP Advisory Committee (GPAC) in 2003 in cooperation with leading Japanese companies. GP received wider publicity from the series of Eco-products International Fairs (EPIFs), launched in Malaysia in 2004, showcasing eco-friendly products, components, services, and technology documented in the *Eco-products Directory* that

started publication in the same year. The EPIFs are organized with the support of the GPAC and include concurrent international conferences that thematically focus on various dimensions of the environment-economy dualism. All these served to bolster GP's elevation from concept to practice. In 2006, the APO raised the bar on its training activities by launching an e-learning course on GP. This year, the seventh EPIF and conference were held in India in February, and Singapore will host the fair for the second time in 2012. So far, about 400,000 visitors have attended both the EPIF and conference.

Achievements of GP and the way forward

More than 15 years after launching the GP Program, the APO has conducted numerous workshops-cum-seminars, training courses, international conferences, study missions and meetings, and international exhibitions and fairs not only to disseminate the achievements of GP but also to popularize the concept. In addition, the APO has collaborated with many international organizations, such as the UN Environment Programme, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, Colombo Plan, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which have in various ways extended their support to

promote the concept of GP. The APO's GP Program has benefited many businesses, farms, and communities by improving their productivity and efficiency, and they have in turn contributed to the cause of sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.

GP is an umbrella concept covering a broad spectrum of improvement opportunities. It fosters the change process to help businesses cater to customer needs for better, environmentally safe products while improving their bottom lines by conserving natural resources through improved production efficiency and reducing waste. With the growing demand of the general public for green goods and services, the concept of GP can turn the table toward greater competitiveness.

GP has brought substantial, tangible results since 1994. The APO has contributed to achieving the goals of Agenda 21 by promoting the concept of sustainability in the Asia-Pacific region through the application of GP in production processes and at the community level. As the APO pursues its mission in the next decades, it will continue to advocate sustainable development in the Asia and Pacific region and other parts of the world through international collaboration. The message is loud and clear: promote GP as a simple strategy to achieve sustainability for economic, environmental, and social returns, a triple bottom line. 🌱

Highlights of GP accomplishments

- ❖ **Policy and program development:** APO members like Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore have incorporated GP in their national development plans. Malaysia has established an International Green Purchasing Network in collaboration with the Government of Japan.
- ❖ **Capacity building:** GP capacity building programs, through short- and long-term training programs and workshops-cum-seminars that were initiated to develop knowledge bases on various aspects of energy and environment have benefited NPOs, business enterprises, administrators, professionals, regulatory bodies, and other government agencies.
- ❖ **GPDP:** GP demonstration projects have been instrumental in cascading the benefits of environmental protection and productivity enhancement in a number of industries in APO members.
- ❖ **EPIFs:** Producers and consumers alike have attended Ecoproduct International Fairs, which showcase environmentally beneficial products, technologies, and services.



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