Developing IT capabilities of NPOs

Globalization is changing the ways in which goods and services are produced and marketed, and the advent of information technology (IT) is dramatically transforming work and business practices. The global market has become extremely competitive, and this is expected to intensify further. IT is an indispensable tool for organizations wishing to become and remain competitive. Globalization and IT are two present-day phenomena that everyone—from individuals to organizations—will have to come to terms with. In the promotion and development of a national IT program, it is generally felt that the NPOs can play a pivotal role as they have extensive experience in human resources development and a vast network of productivity partners in government, industry, and others. For this to be possible, the NPOs themselves must first develop their own IT capabilities

This issue was foremost in mind when 17 IT personnel from the NPOs of 14 APO member countries met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 21 to 27 September, to review: 1) IT applications by NPOs in their operations; 2) the in-house IT capabilities of NPOs; 3) current programs to serve as IT advisers/consultants to governmental agencies and private-sector enterprises; and 4) future roles and developmental needs. The occasion was the APO workshop on "Strengthening IT Capabilities of NPOs" organized under its Development of NPOs Program.

The workshop revolved around the following themes: 1) Strengthening the NPOs' IT capabilities; 2) Strategizing the NPOs' IT promotional program; 3) Helping SMEs to be IT-oriented; 4) Developing IT benchmarks and best practices; and 5) Building networks, including Internet linkages, among NPOs.

The workshop participants were aware that the NPOs are at different stages of development and that a digital divide exists among them. Despite this, most share certain common concerns, foremost among which are the financial constraints that undermine in-house IT capability development and IT applications. The opportunity to learn from each other how the various NPOs are utilizing IT as a productivity and promotional tool was greatly appreciated by the participants. Ms. Ayurzana Odonzaya, participant from Mongolia, found this sharing to be most useful as it enabled those from the younger NPOs, as in her case, to learn from their counterparts from the more advanced NPOs. The par-

Mr. Mah Lok Abdullah, Director-General, NPC Malaysia, presenting certificates to the participants. At far right is Mr. Hamdi Othman, APO Liaison Officer for Malaysia

ticipants also gave high marks to the APOnet recently introduced by the APO Secretariat.

The APOnet is an exclusive Web site based on the extranet platform. It gives the NPOs access to all APO project sites through which they can view or download resource papers, participants' reports, and the reports of the proceedings. Similarly, APO resource persons and participants can use the site to view or download resource/country papers and other documents relating to the program they are attending and upload their own papers for access by others.

One measure suggested by participants to help NPOs develop their IT skills and know-how is to classify them into groups according to the level of IT capabilities. This would make it easier to cater to the different needs of the NPOs. Three levels were suggested: developed; emerging; and developing. Before this could be done, however, it would be desirable for the APO to undertake a study to determine in which category each NPO should be placed. The more developed NPOs in this regard should be prepared to provide assistance to their less-developed counterparts by transferring their skills and know-how. Each NPO should also be willing to allocate sufficient financial and other resources to support its IT capability development. ⚙