APO launches pilot e-learning project

*T*he APO, in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), launched a pilot e-learning project called "JICA-Net Seminar on Total Quality Management (TQM)" on 18–20 February 2003. This project was another endeavor by the APO to harness the information and communications technologies to provide better and more sophisticated services to its member countries.

The three-day e-learning project included the following: 1) A one-day presentation on the theme of the seminar was given by resource person Tadahiko Taguchi, who has extensive consultancy experience in TQM in Malaysia and Indonesia. His presentation was divided into six sessions of 35 minutes each, followed by Q&A for about 15 minutes. 2) The participants in each center were taken on a company visit on the second day to observe firsthand the actual application of the concepts and techniques expounded by Mr. Taguchi. 3) On the final day, a participant from each of the centers reported on the learning experiences his group had gained from the program. Mr. Taguchi concluded the seminar with his comments on the group reports.

As the timing of the JICA-Net seminar coincided with the APO 43rd Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs in Manila, APO Secretary-General Takashi Tajima and some of the workshop delegates visited the videoconferencing center at the University of the Philippines to observe the seminar sessions. Mr. Tajima spoke live to the participants in all three centers. He mentioned that the seminar was the first collaborative effort between the APO and JICA and the first teleconferencing project to be organized by the APO.

Mr. Taguchi delivering his lecture in Tokyo

The JICA-Net TQM seminar was made possible by the network of videoconferencing centers that JICA has established recently in Jakarta (Indonesia), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Manila (the Philippines), Bangkok (Thailand), and Okinawa (Japan). Future centers are planned for Hanoi (Vietnam) and Vientiane (Laos). This facility is part of the Japanese Government's attempt to bridge the digital divide between developing and developed countries to fulfill a pledge it made at the G-8 summit in Okinawa in 2001. JICA kindly allowed the APO not only to use its facility to organize the e-learning project but also to co-sponsor it. Three APO member countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, participated in this pioneering project.

Participants at the Malaysia videoconferencing center

There were 19 participants each in the videoconferencing centers in Indonesia and the Philippines, and 22 in Malaysia. They came from private-sector corporations, public-sector institutions, academia, and NPOs. In each center, two local technical experts served as moderators. That a single transmission can reach 60 people located in three different countries simultaneously is one of the compelling reasons for using e-learning as a training and information dissemination tool. It is cost-effective and has a great multiplier effect.

As a first attempt at organizing an e-learning project using the teleconferencing facility by both the APO and JICA, it went fairly well. The participants were generally happy with the experience. For the APO and JICA, this pilot project provided important insights on ways to improve future e-learning projects. Having a state-of-the-art facility like JICA-Net in itself is not enough. The effectiveness of a live e-learning project is also dependent on a whole host of other factors, such as good broadband connections in participating countries, data traffic congestion, good and interesting presenters, and a well-thought out program. Despite the initial teething problems, the APO is planning more e-learning projects for its member countries.