

Secretary-General's Statement

At the APO Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs (WSM) held in Kuala Lumpur, 14–16 February, Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka presented his statement after expressing his condolences to the people of Pakistan and India affected by the devastating earthquake last year and congratulating the National Productivity Council, Malaysia, which is marking its 40th anniversary this year, for its achievements.

Takenaka noted that the WSM this year had been restructured in response to the desire expressed by delegates at the previous meeting in New Delhi to allocate more time for substantive discussions and for country presentations, since the primary role of the WSM is to discuss future APO programs and assist the Secretariat in program planning, bringing it in line with the needs of member countries. Also in response to a request at the previous WSM, a survey was conducted and its results, and comments and suggestions given at the WSM and GBM, were reflected in the final 2006 Program. A similar survey exercise was conducted for the planning of the 2007 and 2008 Programs. The Secretary-General emphasized the need for careful consideration and prompt response, institutionalization of this exercise, and further improvement of its usefulness and effectiveness.

Referring to the “selection and concentration strategy” mentioned in his annual report to the GBM last year, Takenaka reiterated the need to be more focused in APO activities to achieve maximum impact. This should be a key principle in future program planning. The APO should continuously review the relevancy of thrust areas, target groups, and nature of programs. The selection and concentration strategy should be intensified to organize more projects meeting the specific needs of member countries, either individually or in groups with similar interests. This essentially means having more Category B and C projects compared with Category A. Takenaka also emphasized the need for longer training courses to impart knowledge and skills that participants can put to immediate use.

The productivity movements in member countries are operating in a socioeconomic milieu that is changing constantly, pointed out Takenaka. New



Takenaka presenting his statement

issues and challenges are emerging rapidly. But they are not always obvious at first glance and their implications are not always clear. To help member countries identify and deal with them effectively, the APO must intensify its think tank role by undertaking more survey and research activities.

Recalling the reference he made at the 2005 GBM on declining private-sector participation in APO projects, the Secretary-General underlined the need to achieve an increase because the private sector is the key to the success of any productivity drive in member countries. Among the main causes of declining private-sector participation, he noted: 1) limited involvement of the private sector in the selection, design, and implementation of APO projects; 2) external influence on NPOs in the nomination of candidates; and 3) financial constraints in paying airfares, particularly on the part of SMEs. The following are possible solutions: 1) offering projects for the exclusive participation of the private sector, which is being done; 2) empowering NPOs with more authority to select and approve candidates for APO projects, which would also help to speed up the selection process; 3) encouraging NPOs to interact closely with the private sector for more effective sourcing of candidates from that sector; and 4) providing airfares for private-sector participants, especially from SMEs.

In 2005, the APO organized 13 e-learning projects involving more than 1,000 participants from APO member countries. It also started the first on-demand e-learning course on total quality management. The APO is endeavoring to increase the e-learning element in projects. However, the survey

results on the 2007 and 2008 Programs appeared to indicate that NPOs have reservations about e-learning. If this is true, said Takenaka, then this matter should be reviewed at the strategic planning sessions and a consensus reached on how the APO should proceed with e-learning in the future.

In 2004, the APO co-sponsored the first Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) outside Japan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The success of that EPIF prompted the APO to organize another in 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand. The 2005 EPIF was bigger in scale, and visitors surpassed the 20,000 mark, almost twice that in 2004. The EPIF is emerging as an annual landmark activity of the APO. Singapore has agreed to host the 2006 EPIF and other members have shown interest in hosting in 2007 and 2008, reported the Secretary-General.

Consumers today put a premium on product safety and reliability. Recognizing this shift in consumer preference, Takenaka stated that the APO has been advocating the importance of continuous quality improvement, with particular emphasis on food safety. The APO will endeavor to play a role in developing supply chains in the region to produce safer, greener products and assist farms, communities, and industries in acquiring the skills and knowledge to produce them.

A unique feature of the APO is the spirit of cooperation that characterizes relationships among member countries. The Secretary-General urged that each member country should host at least one APO project per year, expressed gratitude to those that are hosting more, and thanked the Japanese government for giving special cash grants and ASEAN Foundation for financial support for capacity building in the region.

In the coordination and implementation of APO projects in member countries, the key persons are the liaison officers, Takenaka noted. The APO is therefore planning a third meeting with liaison officers this year.

In 2005, the Technical Expert Service (TES) Program was consolidated and centralized within the Secretariat to ensure that requests from the

industry, service, and agriculture sectors are given equal consideration and importance. TES is a Category C program catering to country-specific needs, but it should be seen as having a direct linkage with multi-country programs as well. Takenaka hoped that, as far as possible, TES projects would be implemented within the framework of Category A and B projects.

Last year's GBM supported the Secretary-General's proposal to initiate a dialogue with Africa with a view to strengthening strategic partnerships at the global level. A fact-finding mission comprising staff from the Secretariat, JPC-SED, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan was deputed to South Africa, Botswana, and Kenya to study

the status of their productivity movements, the activities of their NPOs, and the Pan African Productivity Association. The mission reported that the countries visited recognize the importance of productivity in their economic development and have strong interest in establishing alliances with the APO. The APO could serve as a bridge linking Asia and Africa in a mutually beneficial partnership, depending on special contributions from member countries.

Takenaka finally thanked all the delegates, advisers, and observers who had traveled a long way to attend the WSM and NPC Director-General Dato' Nik Zainiah and NPC staff members for sparing no effort to ensure a smooth meeting. 