

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. 

