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Asian Productivity Organization

◀ BACK

◀ HOME

## Articles & Commentaries



### p-Leader — Sri Lanka



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#### NPS targeting households in 2010

An historical milestone in productivity promotion was reached in Sri Lanka in 2001 as the government decided to assign all related functions to the Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment (currently the Ministry of Labour Relations and Productivity Promotion). The main challenge for the ministry was to build up a strong mechanism to disseminate productivity throughout the country. Hence, it was decided to formulate a proactive productivity policy, strengthen the National Productivity Secretariat (NPS), and funnel all productivity policy initiatives through the NPS.

In 2002, the Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment completed its productivity policy, which comprises two parts, one for the private and one for the public sector. In the process of formulation of the policy, a tripartite participation (government, employers, and employee representatives) mechanism was adopted and assistance from the APO and World Bank was also obtained. The policy is based on eight initiatives:

- ▶ Establish a supportive economic framework that reduces the budget deficit;
- ▶ Encourage more savings and better investment;
- ▶ Improve labor market flexibility;
- ▶ Invest in developing the workforce;
- ▶ Encourage and facilitate the growth of new businesses and SMEs;
- ▶ Enhance productivity at enterprise level;
- ▶ Change public attitudes to encourage a culture of productivity and quality; and
- ▶ Implement and monitor the policy through strong institutions that have full government and private-sector support.

Of these initiatives, some needed to be worked out with the participation of other main policymaking bodies such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, and other key ministries. The NPS was entrusted with enhancing

productivity at enterprise level, changing public attitudes to encourage a culture of productivity and quality, and implementing the overall productivity policy. Therefore, the NPS concentrated its activities on disseminating productivity in the private sector, public sector, school sector, and at community level.

From 2002 to 2009, there was noticeable progress in disseminating and applying productivity concepts in public organizations, private institutions, schools, and communities. The main strategies adopted to achieve that progress were:

- ▶ Onsite training programs conducted by NPS staff on basic productivity concepts such as 5S, kaizen, quality circles, Green Productivity, and some advanced tools;
- ▶ General training programs (seminar type) to educate the public and persuade them to apply these concepts in their day-to-day activities;
- ▶ Electronic and print media explanation and dissemination of productivity concepts and practices in communities;
- ▶ Publications, leaflets, booklets, CDs, and DVDs made available to the public;
- ▶ The SAPALA monthly magazine in the local language to familiarize the general public with productivity concepts.

Some tasks related to productivity dissemination were also assigned as the major responsibilities of human resources development assistants attached by the Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment to divisional secretariats.

Their activities included:

- ▶ Organizing various competitions related to productivity promotion including annual National and Provincial Productivity Award competitions, quality circle conventions, and productivity art competitions;
- ▶ Developing model organizations that apply productivity tools as demonstration sites;
- ▶ Establishing a Best Practices Network to share experience among various organizations;
- ▶ Identifying coordinating officers for each ministry and encouraging them to apply productivity concepts in all bodies functioning under the ministries;
- ▶ Providing increased local and international training opportunities to excellent achievers in productivity promotion in various organizations;
- ▶ Conducting productivity training courses on a for-fee basis;
- ▶ Contacting top policy bodies including political wings and persuading them of the importance of giving priority to productivity and quality;
- ▶ Creating a pool of productivity resource persons for rapid dissemination of productivity concepts to the grassroots level;
- ▶ Forming a presidential task force to facilitate smooth implementation of productivity policy initiatives; and
- ▶ Obtaining various forms of APO assistance for the capacity building of NPS staff.

In order to reach those achievements, the NPS has been functioning under the vision “to be the center of excellence in productivity promotion in Sri Lanka” and its mission is “to enable Sri Lanka to face international competition through the promotion of productivity and contribute to national development and enhancing the standard of life.”

The great asset in those these achievements was the dedicated staff of the NPS, who comprise one director, three deputy directors, 20 productivity development assistants, and four support staff. Their dedication and untiring efforts made a significant contribution to overcoming the challenges of disseminating productivity throughout the country. The human resources development assistants who were attached to divisional level by the Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment are another set of assets in introducing productivity concepts at village level.

As a result of the remarkable progress shown, the ministry was renamed the Ministry of Labour Relations and Productivity Promotion when the new ministerial cabinet was announced. Currently, the ministry is in the process of restructuring the NPS to transform it into a stronger body that can make other substantial changes in productivity promotion during the next five years.

During the past few years, attention was focused on productivity improvement of the public sector, private sector, and school sector. While not neglecting those three sectors, in 2010 the NPS has focused its attention on improving productivity at household level after successfully completing several pilot projects in selected villages. The long-term objective of this endeavor is to create a more efficient, effective, higherquality workforce that can contribute to the national development of Sri Lanka.



[Back to list](#)

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[To top of page](#)