

# Secretary-General's report to the GBM

*This is a summary of the written report submitted to the 56th Governing Body Meeting and appearing in the proceedings of the meeting.*

**A**fter welcoming APO Directors, Advisers, and Observers to the 56th session of the APO Governing Body (GBM) in Hanoi, Secretary-General Mari Amano expressed gratitude to the Government of Vietnam and the Vietnam Productivity Centre for (VPC) hosting the meeting.

He stated that he was honored to serve as the 10th Secretary-General of “a unique international organization.” After meeting several APO Directors and NPO Heads during the past half-year, Secretary-General Amano believed that the challenges they faced were usually classified into two categories: domestically, the key concern was raising awareness of the importance of improving productivity, especially in sectors not performing to expectations; and internationally, the issue was leveraging the APO platform to address productivity issues.

While noting that global economic growth appeared more positive compared with two to three years ago, major emerging economies such as PR China and Brazil had started slowing down, and the Secretary-General warned that factors such as potentially tighter credit conditions, higher trade barriers, and weaker external demand might threaten growth. However, “Regardless of the global economic situation, enhancing productivity will remain at the top of the agenda for all governments that wish to maintain strong economic fundamentals and achieve sustainable growth. From the issues raised with me by APO Directors, together with feedback from NPO Heads and project participants and research findings, I concluded that there is no need to revamp APO programs completely. Instead, I intend to enrich and deepen programs by focusing on specific areas to address emerging issues and create the greatest benefit for member countries.”

Secretary-General Amano acknowledged that APO member economies were diverse and customized approaches were needed to be more effective. A key finding of the ongoing member country need assessment was that core APO in-country programs such as the Technical Expert Services and Center of Excellence (COE) Program remained in high demand. The Secretary-General also referred to the COE Program as “a success story,” calling the COE on Business Excellence (BE) within SPRING Singapore “a catalyst to reignite interest in using the BE framework to recognize productive and competitive enterprises.” He expected the COE on Green Productivity (GP) in the China Productivity Center to be similarly successful in performing research and projects in line with the APO’s GP strategy.

In reporting on the eighth Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) held in Singapore in 2013, Secretary-General Amano noted that was the first time it had focused on a B2B (business-to-business) model and that the *Eco-products Directory* launched during the EPIF had had the most business entries so far. The EPIF would be redesigned in consultation with member countries and the Green Productivity Advisory Committee, he said, after absorbing lessons from the B2B format.



*Secretary-General Mari Amano*

Citing the importance of the visibility of APO programs, the Secretary-General was pleased that in 2013 APO activities had received three times the coverage in 2012 and that research on productivity continued to receive attention from prominent institutions and the media. “Traditional outreach efforts will always play a role in increasing our visibility. In addition, we will also tap newer media,” he pledged. One fresh approach to raising the visibility of APO activities was inviting media representatives to participate in a study mission to Japan.

The Secretary-General then turned to the role of NPOs as catalysts to strengthen enterprises, in particular SMEs, and mentioned specific programs. One was the Member Country Support Program (MCSP) carried out in collaboration with the Japan Productivity Center and Government of Japan (GOJ) since 2002. In the sixth MCSP cycle, the National Productivity Council, India, strengthened its productivity promotion, training, and consultancy capacity on material flow cost accounting. NPOs also played crucial roles in developing country-specific programs, and Secretary-General Amano hoped that they could become more involved in planning APO activities.

In presenting the Program Plan and Financial Estimates for 2014, the Secretary-General explained that 69 multicountry projects were planned and study missions to advanced economies would be restarted. Gratitude was expressed to the GOJ for making special cash grants to fund APO projects through the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the Government of the ROC that had also provided regular cash grants to assign resource persons to projects.

“One of my first priorities when I became Secretary-General was to rejuvenate the Secretariat. My goal was not just to increase the number of staff members but, more importantly, to inject positive energy and boost the morale and restore confidence in the staff ranks,” declared Secretary-General

Amano. He reported that in the past half-year, four professional staff had been hired, with two recruited from NPOs.

Turning to projects proposed for the 2015–2016 biennium, the Secretary-General listed focus areas but commented that, “A paradigm shift will be required to plan programs better. I would like to explore new ideas so that we can respond more quickly to the changing needs of member countries while maintaining relevance to stakeholders.” As an example, he mentioned expanding the APO’s e-learning courses to reach out directly to professionals interested in upgrading their productivity knowledge and even to become a revenue source.

“It has been an interesting and eventful seven months as the APO Secretary-General,” he said in concluding his report. “With your help, we will develop a more comprehensive plan that will unlock the potential of the APO to increase its productivity and impact across the world,” he assured the GBM delegates. 