

Summary of Secretary-General's statement

After welcoming all delegates, advisers, and observers to the 49th Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs in Siem Reap, the site of the magnificent Angkor Wat, APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for its generous support and cooperation in hosting this meeting; Dr. Ith Praing, APO Director for Cambodia, for his strong leadership and support; and NPO Head Yea Bunna and his able staff for the excellent arrangements made.

The Secretary-General pointed out that the amount of total membership contributions for 2009–2010 had been decided unanimously at the last Governing Body Meeting (GBM) in Tehran and that the 2009 and 2010 program plans submitted to this WSM took into account suggestions made there, along with revisions by the Secretariat, which would be reviewed in detail at the strategic planning sessions. He therefore confined his statement to issues of particular importance to the APO membership, specifically new initiatives and innovations in program management: e-learning initiatives; in-country programs to strengthen NPOs; and research activities.

e-Learning was by far the most cost-effective way to deliver knowledge to a wide audience in the APO region, said Takenaka. World Bank platform-based e-learning courses conducted by the APO are usually in three stages, with each stage covering about five countries represented by an average 20 participants each. Each course thus covers 15 member countries, training a total of 300 participants. Last year, the APO organized three courses, training over 900 people. This year, three courses had already been completed and two more were ongoing, thus training more than 1,500 participants, Takenaka said. e-Learning courses also reach more participants from the private sector. In 2007, among the more than 900 e-learning participants, close to 40% were from the private sector. In the three completed so far in 2008, about 60% of the participants represented the private sector.

Every World Bank platform-based e-learning course was designed to be followed by one face-to-face project, attended by those who performed well in the e-learning course, explained the Secretary-General. But he acknowledged that as the number of good performers increased, it became more difficult to select only 20, the usual number of participants in regular face-to-face projects. Therefore, Takenaka reported that the APO was contemplating the possibility of adding more face-



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to-face follow-up projects or devising other means to address this issue.

After the successful launch of the first self-learning e-course on the APO Web site in 2006, self-learning activities expanded. Currently, six are offered online. But the Secretary-General found that a shortcoming of this method is that participants cannot be monitored or certificates issued upon successful course completion. "I am happy to inform you that from August this year we started a completely new type of self-learning course that will go a long way to minimize this drawback," he announced. "Moreover, it can accommodate as many as 2,000 participants within two years. It is hoped that this new modality will be exploited fully with the cooperation of NPOs." A presentation on e-learning initiatives was given later by the Secretariat's officer in charge.

The second area was DON Implementation based on the findings of the need assessment survey carried out last year under DON Strategy. In-country training courses had started for productivity and quality practitioners, the Secretary-General reported, as a novel way to strengthen NPO capacity. Three two-week programs had trained 75 practitioners in Pakistan, IR Iran, and India, of whom 50% were NPO staff. The Secretariat was now analyzing the results of the three programs to decide which countries should be covered next, whether to focus on specific topics such as Six Sigma or knowledge management (KM), and whether a two-week duration is sufficient, Takenaka noted, adding that there would be a separate presentation on DON later.

"In terms of research, the APO has been exploring new methods to strengthen its think tank role for the past two years," said Takenaka, mentioning collaboration with renowned academic institutions

or reputable international organizations to deliver high-quality research outcomes, as in the productivity databook project with Keio University, Japan. "One result of that research, for example, revealed that the purchasing power parity-based GNP of APO member countries had recently surpassed that of either the USA or the EU15," he revealed. A presentation on that topic was also given later.

Another example the Secretary-General cited was research on agricultural policies in selected member countries. Based on the recommendations of a working party meeting, a training course was organized in collaboration with the OECD to equip member country participants with knowledge of and skills in agricultural policy analysis. Cooperation with the OECD is continuing, with the aim of producing an accurate picture of the region's agricultural policies by the end of March 2009. "These research projects have some common features," Takenaka pointed out, citing that they are conducted over two years or longer to produce solid results; cooperation is sought from other organizations for complementarity; and they are supported by professionals in the field from member countries.

The Secretary-General then updated the WSM on recent measures to improve training courses, such as the introduction of a test at the final session, not only to check the performance of participants but also to determine the appropriateness of the curriculum, selection of resource persons, and overall effectiveness. "Contrary to the general perception that participants do not like tests, most seem to welcome opportunities to find out how much progress they have made," Takenaka pointed out. He also touched on courses that resulted in internationally recognized certification in collaboration with International Register of Certified Auditors-approved agencies.

Takenaka reiterated that the Secretariat's biggest challenge in ensuring the quality of projects is selecting qualified, willing participants. During the last Liaison Officers' Meeting in Tokyo, this issue was discussed at length. The Secretariat again stressed the need for NPO cooperation in nominating only qualified, suitable participants for APO projects.

The Secretary-General then brought up four significant subjects. After a gestation period of two years, during which several KM-related projects were undertaken, the APO KM framework had

been established and a training manual finalized, he reported. The manual was field-tested in September at a workshop in Fiji, and two demonstration projects on KM were held, one in India and the other in the Philippines. The objective was to show that KM is useful not only for big companies but also for the region's SMEs. The Secretary-General was confident that the demonstration projects would confirm that "the APO was on the right track in its KM efforts."

The next subject was productivity and safety. In increasing productivity, workers and consumers must be protected. Unfortunately, an increasing number of news items report violations of food and other safety regulations. "The APO therefore plans to devote substantial resources to promoting safety in the Asia-Pacific region," the Secretary-General promised, including projects on the GLOBAL-GAP Standard, ISO22000 food safety management system, and ecofarming and organic farming. An Asian Food and Agribusiness Conference was planned for 2010, he stated, to stimulate strategic thinking on regional food supply chains and food safety. A separate presentation on food safety was given later.

The third subject Takenaka mentioned was the Eco-products International Fairs, now recognized as major environmental events in the region. The next fair will be held in Manila, the Philippines, in March 2009, and the *Eco-products Directory 2009* will feature a more reader-friendly format and contain more entries to cover most of the best examples in the region.

Finally, the Secretary-General spoke on the APO African Program funded by a special cash grant from the Government of Japan. To follow up on the basic course for African productivity practitioners held in 2007, the APO organized a three-week advanced course in South Africa this year. In November this year, the second basic course will again be held in South Africa to meet growing demand. The APO also participated in TICAD IV last May in Yokohama, hosted by the Government of Japan. The documents issued after the meeting officially recognized the APO as an organization contributing to the productivity movement in Africa. "The Secretariat is exploring ways to establish partnerships among NPOs and the productivity organizations of some African countries," Takenaka said.

The Secretary-General concluded by saying that, "In the face of unprecedented global challenges the APO must remain committed, relevant, and focused and work in sync with NPOs to raise productivity in member countries. We need to look for more innovative ways to help member countries address ever-present challenges. We should explore expertise beyond the APO network and collaborate with organizations and agencies in other parts of the world to accelerate productivity improvement in the Asia-Pacific region. In other words, we should not be afraid of making changes when changes are needed." 🌀