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Iran hosts forum on Development of NPOs

The Asia-Pacific network of national productivity organizations (NPOs) is one of the greatest strengths of the APO. Together the APO and NPOs have overcome many obstacles in achieving regional and national productivity enhancement. The success of APO projects relies heavily on NPO capabilities, making the Development of NPOs (DON) Program a key APO thrust area.

A vital DON Program event is an annual forum that has brought together NPO heads and senior officials since 1998. The forums discuss critical issues arising from socioeconomic changes and their impact on national productivity movements. The tenth forum in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 28–30 January 2008, deliberated on NPO plans for capacity building as well as specific member country plans arising from the NPO need assessment survey undertaken by the APO as part of DON Strategy.

APO Research and Planning Department Director Mukesh Bhattarai spoke on the think tank role of the APO and outlined the new two-tiered DON Program comprised of DON Strategy, and DON Implementation. “The DON Strategy objective is to help promote a strategic approach to NPO and member country capacity building, which ensures an allocation of resources that maximizes results,” explained Bhattarai. “The survey employed a cluster approach to analyze NPO needs and determine strategies for the development of NPOs,” he added.



Senior representatives of NPOs discussing the findings of the need survey

Two resource speaker presentations reported the results of a survey of the two clusters. Identified needs were subdivided into common needs shared by countries surveyed and specific needs of each. Common needs were similarly divided into organizational and capacity development needs. Organizational needs consisted of 28 items for the eight countries in cluster A, including NPO restructuring and reorganization, holding roundtable conferences, reviewing and drafting strategic plans and activities, developing incentive plans for NPO staff, and redesigning job descriptions. Capacity development needs were subdivided into productivity and quality, environment, promotion, and others and emphasized the need to develop productivity trainers, consultants, and researchers.

The seven cluster B countries identified both long- and short-term needs, although some were both. Organizational needs included networking with APO members and overseas institutions and developing e-learning materials on benchmarking, energy efficiency, and lean manufacturing. Long- and short-term capacity development needs covered lean manufacturing, knowledge management, intellectual property rights, SME development, public-sector and service-sector productivity enhancement, energy efficiency, Six Sigma, and innovation. Cluster B countries emphasized eight key development areas including more active networks with APO members and other institutions, strengthening of infrastructure and research activities, more effective dissemination of productivity information, and development of better materials for

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training and consultancy, including assistance in case study writing and certification of management consultants.

“Needs are many and varied due to the different stages of development, maturity of the productivity movement, and economic profile. They range from the need to review and restructure the NPO to staff development requiring assistance from the APO,” said Chief Expert Mah Lok Abdullah, in describing the diversity of specific needs. Participants divided into three groups and again listed the priority needs of each country and common needs of each group based on the findings of the survey. “The outcome of the survey was very informative and beneficial. It provided useful feedback and information in formulating the appropriate roadmap for the respective NPOs,” Director Abdul Latif Bin Abu Seman, NPC Malaysia, commented.

The experts recommended that the APO and NPOs utilize individual-country assistance programs such as Technical Expert Services, Bilateral Cooperation Between NPOs, and observational study missions. The experts

explained that one problem was that NPO roles were increasingly complex and divergent while resources and capabilities remained limited. Therefore they suggested that NPOs prioritize their market segment and focus on major areas. “The NPO need assessment survey is a progressive step for the APO. It has given some insights into the issues and given a starting point. It is a major investment of time and resources by the APO to make the regional productivity movement effective,” said Chief Expert S.A. Khader. He also emphasized the APO’s role as an adviser by saying, “The APO should look at each NPO, not only as an implementing partner, but also a fostered younger brother, who needs support and professional inputs.”

The APO will integrate all the input and findings in action plans after consulting with NPOs and national and chief experts. “To benefit fully from the whole exercise, NPOs should follow up with the APO on the proposed programs and roadmap, while the APO should work more closely with the NPOs,” Abdullah advised. 