

# Innovation for global competitiveness

The 24th Top Management Forum was held in Kyoto, Japan, 2–6 March, 2008. The forum series brings together executives of public and private enterprises including NPOs of APO member countries and provides a venue for CEOs and managers in the Asia-Pacific region to examine the best practices of leading Japanese companies in a specific area. This year the focus was on how innovative corporate strategy allows businesses to survive and thrive in fierce global competition. APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka kicked off the event with a video message in which he stated that, “In today’s economy, the borders separating different business fields are blurred as a result of technological innovation and deregulation.... Therefore innovative strategies are required to determine the type of superiority which will gain a greater market share and which competitors are most significant in complex, interconnected markets.” The opening ceremony was graced by representatives of the coorganizers such as President Tsuneaki Taniguchi, Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development, and Chairman Kiyoshi Otsubo, Kansai Productivity Center.



*APO Secretary-General Takenaka welcoming forum participants via video*

The 36 participants from 17 member countries plus eight local attendees heard Executive Vice President Keisuke Okada of All Nippon Airways (ANA) outline the strategies that the ANA Group deployed on the flight path to becoming the No. 1 airline in Asia. Division General Manager Atsuyoshi Nakamura, Sharp Corporation, introduced a unique adaptation of *monozukuri*, the art of manufacturing, as a means to succeed in global competition. Chairman and CEO Yoshiharu Kaihara, of the denim producer Kaihara Corporation, explained an international expansion strategy focusing on product and workforce quality with continuous product development. Ajinomoto Co., Inc.’s history of innovation and business diversification was presented by Corporate Vice President Koichi Maeda. After the discovery of the amino acid umami, Ajinomoto developed a wide range of products including fundamental foods, seasonings, pharmaceuticals, and nutritional supplements found in households throughout the region and beyond.

Reflecting the realities of a globalized economy, the APO invited two guest speakers to the 2008 Top Management Forum: Vice President Bhat Harikrishna of Wipro Japan KK, the Japanese headquarters of the Indian IT service provider Wipro; and Visiting Lecturer Tatsuo Tanigawa, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. Harikrishna described Wipro’s innovation-oriented operations and global management strategy. The cutthroat competition in the global auto industry and necessary survival tactics were the topics of Prof. Tanigawa, who stressed the importance of strategic alliances and capability learning. Researchers and government representatives were also invited to share their views with forum participants.

After a group discussion on how Japanese strategies could be adapted to allow businesses in other APO member countries to compete worldwide, a site visit was made to Shimadzu Corporation, a multinational manufacturer of measuring instruments, medical systems, and industrial equipment headquartered in Kyoto. 