

## Public-sector innovation: Sustainability strategies

**T**he public sector is the single largest body of resources in a country and is chartered by its people to protect and enhance the well-being of its citizens through productive socioeconomic development policies and management. Only an efficient, effective public-sector administration can meet this goal. The APO launched a series of public-sector innovation projects to address the need for innovation, productivity, and the pursuit of excellence. The first project, held in collaboration with the Korea Productivity Center, was a workshop on Sustainability Strategies for the Public Sector in Seoul, 11–14 November 2008. The generally accepted definition of “sustainability” as “the principles of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” was the touchstone of the workshop. The Republic of Korea was chosen as host because of its success in public-sector reforms and provides a model of sustainable management policies at the national level. The enactment of the Framework Act on Sustainable Development in 2000 was the country’s first step toward becoming a sustainable economic model in the long term.

The 17 participants, mostly mid- to senior-level public officials, agreed that present approaches to policy development and management posed a problem in the era of sustainability, especially in public works where social costs are vague and public welfare has strong vested interests. Past solutions that had unforeseen negative side effects due to a lack of understanding of the complex interconnections of various players may pose major problems. With this in mind, two international experts introduced system thinking and the World Café approach. The system thinking session was conducted by Dr. Robert Cavana, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; President Chaiwat Thirapantu, of the Civiconet

Institute, Thailand, conducted the World Café sessions. System thinking uses system dynamic modeling to simulate complex problems in policy management, and the World Café approach involves creating healthy ecosystems through consensus building with inputs from multiple perspectives for policy development and planning. A short site visit was also made to a model public-sector enterprise, the Korean Gas Corporation, which showed how a sustainable management policy is implemented in real life.



*System dynamics modeling exercise*

Participants found the workshop beneficial both in the short and long terms, as the examples it provided could be applied immediately to their own contexts. They hoped that future projects on the public sector would anticipate new developments in sustainable public-sector management. As part of the Secretariat’s capacity building initiative to create a pool of public-sector productivity catalysts in member countries, a continuation of this workshop is planned for IR Iran in early 2009. 🌀