

Summary of Secretary-General's statement

Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka began his statement to the 50th Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs (WSM) by conveying sincere gratitude to the Government of the Philippines for its generous support and cooperation in hosting the meeting, singling out Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita for gracing the inaugural session and delivering the keynote address, APO Director for the Philippines Margarita Songco, and Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) President Antonio D. Kalaw, Jr., for particular appreciation. The Secretary-General remarked that it had been a “hectic year” for the Philippine NPO, since the DAP had also hosted the Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) in March.

Takenaka pointed out that the 50th WSM was expected to finalize the APO Program Plan for 2010, reconfirm the hosting of projects, and report the schedules to enable the Secretariat to start preparations. He warned, however, that “given the persistent yen appreciation, more adjustments, probably by taking a few projects off the list” may be needed. The Secretary-General pledged that the priority would still be to maximize benefits to member countries.

Another important task was reviewing the proposed priority list of 2011 and 2012 projects to assist Directors in determining total membership contributions for the next biennial budget at the Governing Body Meeting (GBM) in Kuala Lumpur. The same procedure was to be followed as at the Hanoi WSM in 2007, when prioritization criteria were new topics, contents, or outreach; proposed at the GBM/WSM; proposed by resource persons and participants; and supported by the survey results received from member countries. The Secretariat had added two additional criteria this year: projects that member countries are committed to hosting; and training courses, explained the Secretary-General. “APO resources are limited, especially with the constraints resulting from the global financial crisis continuing to affect member countries. Therefore, it is gratifying to see member countries volunteer to host APO projects and bear all local implementation costs in a genuine spirit of mutual cooperation. Under the current circumstances, we believe that we should make the most of their generosity,” he added.

The Secretariat emphasizes training courses because of their tangible, measurable contributions to member countries. Takenaka recalled that, “In



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2004, we had a combined total of 64 seminars, symposiums, and workshops on various topics but only 12 training projects. While I do not deny the usefulness of the former three, they were simply too numerous.” He gradually made training courses the main vehicle for imparting skills and knowledge and by 2008, seminars, symposiums, and workshops totaled 24 and training courses, including e-learning, also totaled 24. In quality terms, training courses now include examinations to gauge learning, courses leading to certification are offered, and manuals, which are available on the Web site, are published to accompany many.

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Secretary-General Takenaka then summarized achievements since joining the APO in 2004, focusing on efforts to: 1) enhance the capacity building of NPOs; 2) take advantage of new opportunities provided by IT; and 3) undertake more projects that generate visible, measurable impacts. To enhance the capacity building of NPOs, the emphasis had shifted from Category A to Category B projects, he said. “Delays in achieving this had been criticized either directly or indirectly at both GBMs and WSMs until just a few years ago. I am very glad that the issue has been settled in a way that satisfies the needs of member countries,” Takenaka stated.

Two new initiatives bolster Category C projects: in-country programs for developing productiv-

ity professionals; and two-tiered projects. Three pilot in-country projects were held in IR Iran, India, and Pakistan in 2008, similar ones in Fiji, Indonesia, and Cambodia this year, and others are scheduled toward the end of 2009 for Thailand, Lao PDR, and Bangladesh. Thus, by the end of this year, more than 200 productivity practitioners, 60% from NPOs, will have been trained.

Two-tiered projects combine a multicountry project with follow-up national programs in member countries. The APO first experimented with this in 2006 in a project on energy efficiency and renewable energy for SMEs organized jointly with the ASEAN Foundation, when a regional training workshop was followed by national seminars in five ASEAN members. In 2007, the idea was tested with a One Village, One Product movement project in the Mekong region financed with a special cash grant from the Government of Japan. After those successful experiences, the two-tiered scheme was officially launched in mid-2008 with three multicountry projects followed by nine national-level follow-up programs in 2009, attended by 464 participants. Nine to 12 national-level training courses as follow-ups are planned for 2010, noted the Secretary-General.

“The second area I would like to report on is our initiative to make full use of IT. Our star performer here is e-learning courses,” said Takenaka. While acknowledging that some member countries had been “caught off-guard” at first as they were unfamiliar with the new mode, acceptance quickly followed because e-learning attracts numerous participants impossible to reach otherwise. In 2008, the APO organized five e-learning courses, each in three phases involving five countries in the same or neighboring time zones. Theoretically 1,500 participants can be trained annually; the figure for 2008 was around 1,450.

Expressing his pride in the contents and delivery of e-learning courses, Secretary-General Takenaka credited APO officers for developing “a successful recipe for interactive, lively e-sessions” blending lectures by experts with observational visits to local facilities, group discussions, and country presentations, followed by face-to-face courses on advanced versions of the topics. A total of 331 participants from 14 member countries enrolled in the e-learning course on energy auditing conducted earlier this year, of whom some 60% were from the private sector. Almost 95% rated the course as

either “as expected” or “more than expected,” despite occasional technological glitches.

The third area addressed by the Secretary-General was efforts to generate visible, measurable impacts. He believed that the EPIFs had contributed more to the visibility of the APO and host NPOs than any other project, with the latest in Manila attracting more than 80,000 visitors. Takenaka cited the *APO Productivity Databook* series as an important breakthrough in providing comparable productivity data on member countries. “We are continuing to make improvements in its methodology and coverage and will soon release the Asian Growth Map on the APO Web site which will give the most updated quarterly growth statistics on member countries’ GDP. We are hoping that the data will provide useful information for analyzing regional growth and identifying potential investment opportunities,” he reported. To strengthen the institutional capacities to compute total factor productivity, the Secretariat is now assisting the Mongolian Statistics Office, with previous such missions sent to Indonesia and Fiji. “When all these efforts bear fruit, their impact on member countries will be significant,” predicted Takenaka.

The Secretary-General was pleased to note that since 2004, the number of projects on food safety and number of participants had increased substantially in response to member countries’ concerns. He expected that participants attending the 50 related projects from 2004 would surpass 1,600 by the end of 2009. After hiring an expert on food safety with five years of experience at the Codex Alimentarius Commission as a Secretariat Agriculture Department program officer this year, he was confident that the APO’s impact on member countries in this area would increase.

Project impact evaluation and the pilot center of excellence (COE) were still very new and the results had not been confirmed, Takenaka granted. However, the evaluation team’s tentative findings show that APO projects generally benefited participants, their departments, and their organizations, as presented in another session. A two-year plan for a pilot COE on business excellence in SPRING Singapore was in place, a database of experts on business excellence

and quality awards was being compiled, and the Secretariat was conducting a survey on the impact of quality awards on business. “With the cooperation of all interested parties, I am sure that we will see good results soon,” the Secretary-General anticipated.

“In my first appearance as Secretary-General at the GBM in Tokyo back in 2005, I emphasized the need to strengthen ties with other international or productivity-related organizations. In line with this thinking and in search of new knowledge and insights, we have increased the number of study missions to North America and selected countries in Europe,” commented Takenaka. He pointed to good working relationships with the OECD and ADB and the new relationship with PAPA and other organizations in Africa, but added that, “Looking back at our record, I cannot help feeling that we could have done more.” He hoped to explore that possibility during the rest of his second term.

Many of the initiatives the Secretary-General described were only two or three years old, partly because under the two-year rotating budget system many new initiatives could not be introduced until projects proposed two years earlier were completed and partly because organizational and administrative reforms took precedence earlier. Takenaka allowed that there was room for improvement in the initiatives and therefore hoped that for another two years or so, the main features of program composition would not change. Those initiatives originated from ideas expressed at WSMs and GBMs, including shifting emphasis from Category A to Category B and C projects and making more use of IT. “The point I want to make,” emphasized the Secretary-General, “is that WSMs as well as GBMs have been a source of good ideas and inspiration for all of us in the APO and particularly for the Secretariat.”

Secretary-General Takenaka concluded his report by reminding all delegates of the 50th anniversary of the APO in 2011: “That means that we must think ahead and explore new actions to make our organization more effective and relevant in the next half-century. I am sure that this WSM will provide a good opportunity to share views among yourselves and with the Secretariat on this issue.” 