

## The Secretary-General's annual report (part one)

*Mr. Takashi Tajima, APO Secretary-General, presented his annual report to the APO Governing Body at its meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 18–20 June 2002. His comprehensive report has two parts. The first part deals with the work accomplished by the APO in 2001, and the second part provides his perspective on the future thrust of APO activities. In this report, we bring you the first half of the Secretary-General's presentation. The second half on future perspectives will be featured in the August issue.*

Secretary-General Tajima prefaced his report with an overview of the formidable challenges faced by APO member countries in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks in the USA and the global economic slowdown. He pointed out the need for new dimensions to be added to the productivity movement in the region in the face of growing concerns over globalization, the IT revolution, rapid technological innovations, environmental protection, and social fairness. He emphasized that the APO, as the apex productivity body in the region, should retain its forward-looking identity based on the spirit of mutual cooperation, shared vision, and sense of mission among its members. He further reported that the traditional APO five-year plan had been replaced with a two-year model to allow for greater flexibility in program planning.

The Secretary-General said that the year 2001 had been a milestone for the APO as it marked the 40th anniversary of the organization. Among the events held to commemorate the occasion, he made special reference to the International Productivity Conference (IPC) held in Singapore and the APO Foundation Commemorative Ceremony held in Tokyo. Those events, he continued, offered timely opportunities to formulate a new vision for the productivity movement in the region and to express appreciation to all the stakeholders for their staunch support of the movement in the past four decades. He expressed the hope that the productivity declaration adopted at the IPC would be embraced wholeheartedly by all APO members. He reiterated the following three areas on which the APO should focus its attention and resources: competitiveness, environmental protection, and social fairness.

The revitalization of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) remained a matter of critical concern to the APO in 2001, said Secretary-General Tajima. With special grants from Japan, the APO was able to launch a series of SME-related projects, including those organized under the South-South Cooperation Program for strengthening supporting industries in member countries. He then commented on knowledge management which, he



*Secretary-General Takashi Tajima*

said, was a key factor for the future growth of organizations in a knowledge-based economy.

On the APO Green Productivity (GP) Program, Secretary-General Tajima remarked that the GP Demonstration Program had proven most effectively that the integration of GP and environmental protection could lead to greater competitiveness of business corporations. He then reported on the successful implementation of GP-Integrated Community Development (ICD) demonstration projects in several local communities in Vietnam and the Vietnamese government's intention to implement a similar program in all the communities in the country. The Secretary-General expressed the hope that the other member countries would follow the lead of Vietnam in this matter. He also mentioned that an external evaluation of the ICD Program conducted in 2001 had shown that the economic benefits of the program outweighed the expenses incurred. In light of this, the ICD Program would maintain its focus on capacity building of communities and related agencies.

In response to the need for NPOs to transform themselves into knowledge-driven organizations, Secretary-General Tajima said that the APO had strengthened its Development of NPOs activities,

with particular emphasis on facilitating strategic alliances between NPOs. In this regard, he continued, the APO Best Practice Network set up last year was most timely and should enable the NPOs to position themselves as leaders in knowledge transfer. The Secretary-General added that in order to enhance the NPOs' IT capacities and those for distance learning, the APO had initiated discussions with the Japan International Cooperation Agency to organize programs on IT, especially on e-learning in productivity-related subjects.

In the APO agriculture sector program, as reported by the Secretary-General, priority was given to dealing with growing competition in a globalized and liberalized marketplace, food security, gender issues, resource management, new technologies, sustainable agriculture, and environmental protection. He also mentioned there were two ongoing surveys on 1) the impact of trade liberalization on farmers and the rural poor, and 2) agricultural indices.

Secretary-General Tajima next touched on the book *APO Asia-Pacific Productivity Data and Analysis*. The first edition, published in 2001, was well received by member countries and others, he noted. He thanked the APO Directors and NPO heads, among others, who had made constructive suggestions for its future improvement, adding that they had been taken into account in the preparation of the second edition to be released in December 2002.

The APO Secretariat had undertaken a number of measures to improve its operational systems to serve member countries better and faster. Having said this, the Secretary-General highlighted the progress made in IT renovation in the Secretariat, including the installation of the local area network and the APOnet, an extranet system to link the Secretariat with the NPOs. He emphasized that both are important for establishing closer coordination and communication between the Secretariat and member countries to ensure speedy and effective dissemination of information on APO programs and all other activities.

