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Chiang Mai Hosts NPO Heads

From 19-21 February 2002, the city of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand rolled out the red carpet to welcome the 48 delegates attending the 42nd Workshop Meeting of Heads of National Productivity Organizations (NPOs) of APO member countries. The delegates comprised NPO heads, agriculture delegates, and advisers from 17 countries, including observers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, APO-France Committee, Canadian International Development Agency, International Labour Organization, and Regional Institute of Environmental Technology. The meeting was inaugurated by Mr. Dhawatchai Tangsanga, Executive Director of the Thailand Productivity Institute (FTPI), who also read out a message from Mr. Manu Leopaiprote, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry of Thailand, Vice-Chairman of the APO Governing Body, and the APO Director for Thailand. APO Secretary-General Takashi Tajima presented his statement. Chairman of the meeting was Mr. Dhawatchai, and the Vice Chairman was Mr. Mohammad Kazem Ebrahimi Khorram-Abadi, Managing Director, National Iranian Productivity Organization.

"People never improve unless they look to some standard or example higher and better than themselves."

Tryon Edwards



Mr. Dhawatchai Tangsanga delivering the welcome address

In his message to the workshop delegates, Mr. Manu expressed concern about the uncertain economic situation in the USA, Europe, and Japan, and how the Asia-Pacific economies are being affected by it. This is in addition to grappling with the challenge of globalization. In this task, Mr. Manu pointed out that both the NPOs and the APO have important roles to play, particularly in optimizing the people's potentials for achieving balanced social and economic development.

In the increasingly globalized world where value is created through innovation, nations have to create a niche for themselves, said Mr. Manu. The creation of this value, he added, would depend on working with our unique strengths and traditional know-how, combined with new appropriate modern technology. For Thailand, this means adopting a strategy of grassroots development based on the principles of self-sufficiency, sustainability, and balanced national development.

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The delegates to the 42nd NPO Heads' Meeting

Several programs were initiated in Thailand to revive the village economy and generate domestic demand at the grassroots level. Mr. Manu highlighted two, the Village Investment Fund, under which each village is provided with one million baht to develop its own income-generating activities, and the "One Tambon, One Product" project to expand domestic production and consumption utilizing local resources based on the principle of self-reliance.

Mr. Manu next referred to two other initiatives aimed at strengthening the financial situation of farmers and low-income earners: 1) a temporary suspension of payments on farm debts to allow farmers a respite and enable them to generate more value from their farms; and 2) the creation of a micro-credit program, modeled after the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, to provide small amounts of working capital to the poor.

To support the government's new initiatives, the FTPI launched two new projects to increase productivity at the community level. The first was an in-depth study of local communities and their business activities to identify the factors critical to their success and methods by which the government and business could assist them. The second project was the identification of the best practices in 300 community enterprises in Thailand with the aim of creating model enterprises for communities across the country.

Mr. Manu next spoke on some of the other activities of the FTPI, including the launching of the Thailand Quality Award scheme, and the introduction of the most ambitious scheme to assist SMEs — the Invigorating Thai Business (ITB) scheme — with two billion baht provided by the Ministry of Industry. The scheme aims to ensure the survival of SMEs by strengthening their competitiveness, with the expectation that this would help create jobs and boost domestic spending. Mr. Manu added that with better prospects for efficiency and growth, financial institutions would be more willing to extend credit to them.

Mr. Manu said that in an increasingly globalized economy, competition will become fierce. Productivity enhancement is the key to competitiveness. He lauded APO Secretary-General Takashi Tajima for initiating many new projects, and expanding on the scope of existing ones to meet the needs of member countries better. As examples, he cited the focus on knowledge management, the expansion of the South-South Cooperation Program, the establishment of the APO Best Practices

Network, the shift from a five-year to a two-year plan, the publication of *APO Asia-Pacific Productivity Data and Analysis*, and the adoption of new work procedures for higher efficiency and effectiveness in the Secretariat.

In concluding his message, Mr. Manu reaffirmed Thailand's commitment and support to the APO. He also pointed out that the APO could only be as strong and effective as member countries enable it to be.

The APO Secretary-General, Mr. Takashi Tajima, presented his statement to the delegates in which he reported on the APO activities undertaken in the past year, his perception of the changes taking place that have implications for the productivity movement, and the future thrusts of APO programs. For a fuller report on his statement, please turn to the back page of this issue.

The workshop delegates also received two special presentations: 1) by Dr. Rung Kaewdang, Secretary-General of the Office of the National Education Commission of Thailand, who spoke on "How can education reform help improve Thailand's productivity and competitiveness?"; and 2) by H.S.H. Prince Bhisatej Rajani, Chairman of the Royal Project, whose address on "From the Royal Trip to Remote Highlands Came the Royal Project" was exclusively for the agriculture delegates.

"This Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs is unique in that it was structured to allow for more time for delegates to share their experiences, concerns, ideas,



Mr. Mohammad Kazem Ebrahimi Khorram-Abadi, Vice Chairman; Mr. Dhawatchai Tangsanga, Chairman; and SG Takashi Tajima.

and aspirations. They were also divided into smaller groups to facilitate more thorough, focused, and intensive discussions. All this was for all of us to have a greater understanding of each other's needs and goals, which in turn enabled us to plan for more relevant and useful APO activities," said APO Secretary-General Takashi Tajima at the closing plenary session.

The breadth and depth of the discussions that took place and the wealth of ideas and suggestions generated were indeed impressive. As an example, the more common priority issues faced by the NPOs as identified by the delegates are listed below:

- Build productivity and quality enhancement capacity and capability
- Promote productivity awareness in public- and private-sector organizations, as well as among the citizenry
- Develop productivity programs for emerging areas in the changing global scenario
- Establish benchmarking and best practices networks
- Promote green productivity (GP), knowledge management, information and communication technology, and integrated community development
- Set up quality, productivity, and GP awards
- Expand services beyond the manufacturing sector to include the agriculture, trade, and service sectors
- Strengthen SMEs
- Facilitate alliances among the NPOs, as well as with their stakeholders
- Enhance and upgrade technical support services
- Conduct R&D
- Engage in productivity policy formulation.

Another list worthy of note summarizes the priority issues in the agriculture sector:

- Minimize adverse impacts of trade liberalization on small farmers
- Reform/restructure the agriculture sector for greater competitiveness in the world market
- Develop high-value products
- Improve human resources development
- Harness biotechnology
- Commercialize technology
- Promote greater IT usage
- Promote and strengthen networking among farmers' organizations
- Identify suitable farming models
- Ensure sustainability of farming. 