



## Mauritius joins the productivity journey

**D**escribed by Australians as “the Fiji of the Indian Ocean,” the Republic of Mauritius has embarked on a mission to improve its productivity and competitiveness. In July this year, the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) of Mauritius, in association with the UK-based Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, invited two technical experts from Australia to Mauritius for three weeks to introduce self-assessment and benchmarking practices to industrial and business organizations in the country. I was one of the invitees. The other was Robert Mann, who is no stranger to the APO since he has served as a resource person in many of its projects.

Established only two years ago, the NPCC has already made its mark on the economy through a series of very focused and thoughtful strategies for raising productivity awareness. All the main industries of Mauritius—textile manufacturing, tourism, and sugar—are under severe international competitive pressures. The productivity movement has the support of the tripartite economic partners of government, labor, and management. A seminar on “The Impact of Productivity on Workers” organized by the National Trade Union Conference in collaboration with the NPCC in 2000 endorsed this statement: “Productivity is a process of continuous improvement in the production/supply of quality outputs/services through the efficient and effective use of inputs, with emphasis on teamwork, for the betterment of all.”

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The NPCC has a simple but purposeful vision: “Better Living for the Nation.” Its mission is “to promote and sustain an enabling environment for Mauritius to thrive in a fast-changing world” and its guiding principles comprise the 4Es: empower-

ment through education for greater employability and entrepreneurship. The objective of the NPCC, as defined in an Act of Parliament (NPCC Act 1999), is “to stimulate and generate productivity and quality consciousness and drive the productivity and quality movement in all sectors of the economy with a view to raising national output and achieving sustained growth and international competitiveness.”

Through a series of comprehensive brainstorming sessions, a problem tree and a complementary objective tree were identified. Ten national tripartite Productivity Committees (PCs) were set up to devise action plans to meet the objectives defined on the objective tree. These PCs were entrusted with the tasks of:

- Advising the NPCC on measures to promote and enlist wide support for productivity, quality, and competitiveness;
- Monitoring the productivity, quality, and competitiveness of specific sectors and industries and providing feedback and advice to the NPCC;
- Enquiring into and reporting back on any matter referred to it by the NPCC;
- Carrying out studies and preparing opinion statements, reports, etc., for the NPCC; and
- Proposing studies and the hiring of expertise or researchers where considered necessary.

The areas of focus of the PCs are: optimizing human resources; developing effective leadership and management; facilitating the development of a national integrated strategy; improving targeted information-education-communications programs; assisting in the establishment of a flexible legal framework; raising awareness of innovation; building institutional synergy; assisting technology transfer and development; promoting infrastructure development; and setting productivity standards.

The PCs presented their findings during the National Productivity Consultative Week, 15–19

January 2001. Productivity Implementation Committees (PICs) were set up after that event to catalyze and facilitate the transformation from intent to action.

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A national 5S campaign was launched, and this was given a huge impetus by the visit of Masaaki Imai, founder of the Kaizen Institute in Japan, which designed a series of *gemba kaizen* (continuous workplace improvement) learning modules for the NPCC. Known as the “Eliminate Muda” campaign, it captured the attention and imagination of Mauritians everywhere. *Muda* is a Japanese concept that refers to waste, an obstruction to the flow of activity, or any element that does not add value. In factories, examples of *muda* were posted prominently to draw attention to what not to do:

- Overproduction;
- Excessive inventory;
- High repair and reject rates;
- Too much wastage;
- Poor layout and organization; and
- Long waiting times and late deliveries.

From the campaign, various productivity improvement impacts were noted in industries: improved cleanliness through daily 10-minute 5S-collective cleaning; greater efficiency in the use of filing cabinets; visual control of shelves to create free space; improved counting and searching; no mess or out-of-place items; improved workplace comfort through preventive maintenance of air-conditioners; and clear labeling of computers to facilitate quick identification of breakdowns.

A National IMAI 5S Excellence Award was initiated and administered by the NPCC as an integral part of the “Eliminate Muda” campaign to recognize outstanding achievements in waste pre-



vention. Another campaign activity was the “Making Mauritius Muda-free Day” with a specific theme, like “Use Electricity Smartly.” This attracted extensive community involvement as everyone wanted to be a *muda* buster.

Interest in the benchmarking project was triple the expectations of the NPCC. Representatives from 30 organizations participated, including a significant group of 80 public-sector senior managers from almost all governmental agencies and departments. Following a similar process used by the Thailand Productivity Institute, two NPCC professional staff were trained to facilitate the self-assessment process using the Malcolm Baldrige criteria as well as develop the management teams of organizations ready to undertake the benchmarking phase. A critical mass of participating organizations has been confirmed.

With a small population of 1.2 million and a per capita GDP of US\$4194 (2001), Mauritius faces serious challenges ahead. However, the desire and enthusiasm to improve productivity are present. And the NPCC is on the move to serve as the key catalyst for change. 🌀

(For more information on the NPCC, visit its Web site at: [npcc.intnet.mu](http://npcc.intnet.mu). Its e-mail address is: [natpro@intnet.mu](mailto:natpro@intnet.mu).)

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