



# A·P·O

# news

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ASIAN PRODUCTIVITY ORGANIZATION


## First APO Web conference

*In its drive to harness the information and communications technologies for developing the human resources of member countries, the APO has undertaken a number of initiatives to exploit these powerful tools. Some earlier examples are the APOnet, a dedicated extranet program; the offering of e-books on the APO Web site; and the videoconferencing seminar on TQM held in February this year. The latest effort of the APO in using ICT for training and development is the launching of a new Internet-based e-forum site at <http://wb.apo-tokyo.org:8080> to host Web conferences. The first such conference was held on 13–25 July 2003 to facilitate discussions on the SIGN<sup>3</sup>-Asia initiative. SIGN<sup>3</sup>-Asia stands for “Sustainable Investment Global Network for Asia.” The “3” in the acronym denotes the need to consider the triple bottom line of development—economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental sustainability—in all investment decisions. Its central aim is the promotion of sustainable investment. The SIGN<sup>3</sup> concept was a proposal of the Asian and Pacific Development Center in Kuala Lumpur, European Partners for the Environment (EPE) in Brussels, Regional Institute of Environmental Technology (RIET) in Singapore, International Institute for Environment and Development, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).*

**T**he Web conference was announced on the home pages of the APO, RIET, and EPE Web sites. Invitations to participate were sent to almost 300 professionals involved in sustainable development, Green Productivity, cleaner production, foreign and domestic investment, venture capital, and academia. The moderator, Ari Huhtala, an adviser to the Finnish government, submitted a discussion paper with eight questions on “What is the challenge?” and five questions on “Where next?” The discussion was clustered around these two main issues. There were 30 written submissions during the conference and they were accessed more than 1,000 times by viewers. The submissions are still available on the e-forum Web site mentioned above. Although most of the conference participants were from APO member countries, there was a significant number from outside the APO region, particularly from Europe, Canada, Peru, and the USA.

This Web conference is the first for the APO and it provides an important learning experience. Moderator Huhtala gave this assessment of the two-week program: “Visits to the conference Web site were numerous, but as with most Internet events, it was difficult to attract substantive participation. The Internet is not sufficiently interactive to provoke real spontaneous dialogue. Yet it exposes the participants’ written contributions to thousands of potential readers. It is also difficult for the participants to position themselves between their personal interpretations and those of the stakeholder groups they belong to.

“Despite these general shortcomings, a core group of over 20 active participants emerged. They came from a refreshing variety of institutions involved in development banking, asset management, the stock market, research, accounting, government, renewable energy technology promotion, and SME development. The power and importance of market forces and the role of individual companies (financiers, traders, and manufacturers) in the investment decision-making processes were clearly established by the participants. Despite an emerging understanding of the importance of the triple bottom line in the investment community, the conference also emphasized the importance of vigorous awareness promotion and training activities on the basic issues of sustainable development and their links to investment.”

The conference solicited commitments for cooperation from some of the key institutions in the region: the Association of Development Finance Institutions, Association of Socially Responsible Investment, and UNEP Finance Initiatives Asia Task Force. 

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**“The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps—we must step up the stairs.”**

**Vance Havner**

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