

# Laos hosts debut seminar

Since becoming a member of the APO in June 2002, Laos has been actively participating in its programs and activities, eager to learn all there is to know about improving productivity. By joining the APO, it has teamed up with 18 other countries in proclaiming productivity enhancement as a key strategy in socio-economic development and in improving the quality of life of the people. As a newcomer, there is much catching up for Laos to do. At the same time, being a part of the APO is also about sharing with others your know-how and experience. It is this spirit of mutual cooperation that binds this organization together and propels it forward. In response to this obligation, Laos hosted its first seminar for the organization last December 1–5. The subject was “Development of Small Cottage Industry and the Informal Sector.” Eighteen participants from 12 APO member countries took part, with an additional eight deputed by the host country.

**T**he Lao government has set as its vision the alleviation of poverty in the country through economic reforms and sustainable development, said Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Vice Minister for Industry and Handicrafts and APO Director for Laos, at the opening session of the seminar. He pointed out that the agriculture, forestry, industry, and service sectors in Laos need to grow and improve their efficiency. He stressed the importance of social services like education and public health care and the need to strengthen the small and medium enterprises, including the small cottage industry (SCI) and the informal sector (IS), as they account for a large share of production and employment. Dr. Viyaketh expressed the hope that the seminar will bring about a closer understanding among APO member countries and contribute to greater productivity and efficiency in the creation of wealth and employment for society.

In keeping with its objective of deliberating on the new approaches for the promotion, development, and marketing of SCI and IS, the seminar dealt with the following topics: Role and importance of the SCI and IS in national economic development; Major constraints and challenges facing the SCI and IS; Supportive governmental measures; New trends in the promotion and development of the SCI and IS; Requirements of the SCI and IS in the 21st century: logistic management, networking and partnerships, and IT and e-commerce; Role of agencies, associations, and promotional bodies in SCI and IS development; Entrepreneurial skills development; and Enhancing productivity, quality, and customer service.



Dr. Viyaketh (seated fourth from left) joins seminar participants for group picture

A highlight of the seminar was the discussion on the cluster approach in developing the SCI and IS as exemplified by Thailand's “One Tambon One Product” campaign, which in turn was based on a successful Japanese model. The country paper presentations on the status of the SCI and IS in the participating countries and the innovative approaches used for their development were greatly appreciated by seminar attendees.

In small-group syndicates, the participants deliberated on the impact of globalization on the SCI and IS, and recommended the following proactive measures:

1. Train SCI and IS operators in the skills of entrepreneurship, management, and marketing to enhance their potential for success.
2. The government, NGOs, and other concerned agencies in each country should work together to provide integrated logistical support to the

SCI and IS, including skill training, credit facilities, marketing infrastructure, technological development, process improvement, product development, and linkages/partnerships with larger SMEs along the lines of cluster development.

3. NGOs with local offices and a philanthropic outlook should be encouraged to help foster the development of traditional handicraft activities.
4. The APO and NPOs should promote the exchange of experience in cluster development among member countries.

The closing ceremony of the seminar was graced by Vice-Minister Somboun Rasasombath, also from the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts. He presented certificates of attendance to the participants. 📷