

# APO-JICA collaboration on rural life improvement program

On 2–16 February 2004, the APO and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) jointly conducted a participatory training course on “Community Development with the Rural Life Improvement Strategy” held at the JICA Tsukuba International Center, Japan. This was the first collaborative program between the two organizations. The objective of the course was to introduce Japan’s Rural Life Improvement Program (RLIP) to APO member countries as a proven means of improving the quality of rural life and the factors that account for its success. Other similar programs are the Saemaul Undong in the Republic of Korea and 4H Clubs in the Republic of China. Fifteen participants from 12 APO member countries took part in the training course.

In the first part of the program, participants were introduced to the history, philosophy, and principles of the RLIP in Japan, how the concept has evolved over the years, and techniques to improve rural life. Participants were able to interact closely with RLIP extension workers, young women who are sent to villages to implement various rural life improvement activities. They work with village women to solve daily problems by using indigenous wisdom and mobilizing local resources. The approach is similar to the practice of *kaizen* or continuous improvement that has contributed greatly to productivity improvement in Japanese industries.

The participants were taken on a site visit to Daigo, a mountain town situated about 150 km north of Tokyo in Ibaraki Prefecture, to study: The structure



*Participants in Daigo*

of the agriculture extension system at field level; Coordination between local and prefectural governments in implementing the RLIP; Socio-economic results achieved after the RLIP was introduced; Activities of women’s groups working to improve rural life: their challenges and achievements; Role of political leadership in the RLIP; and Application of new technology.

Participants were impressed with the high morale and devotion of the RLIP extension workers; the strong trust and cooperation between them and the village women; and the application of RLIP techniques, including fostering “thinking farmers” who can analyze a situation scientifically and take suitable follow-up/remedial actions regardless of conventions. 🌀