

■ Strengthening OVOP movements in Asia ■

The “One Village, One Product” (OVOP) movement had its origin in Japan 25 years ago. Since then, it has been adopted by other countries in Asia, including the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Oita Prefecture in Japan launched this innovative program as a strategy to revitalize rural development. It involves a local community identifying one or a few products the people excel in making, concentrating resources on its production, establishing it as a local brand, and marketing it to the entire country and beyond. An OVOP movement has three guiding principles: 1) think globally, act locally; 2) self-reliance and creativity; and 3) develop human resources. A successful OVOP program has these characteristics: villagers are the main players; profits are returned to the village; the wealth of the village increases with rising production; and the village specializes in the items it produces. However, not all OVOP movements have achieved the desired outcome.

To provide an in-depth study on the role of OVOP programs in sustainable community development and to identify the factors in their successful implementation, the APO organized a seminar on the “One Village, One Product” Movement for Community Development in Thailand, 17–23 August 2004. It was attended by 15 participants from 13 APO member countries and seven observers representing Oita Prefecture, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Japan Bank of International Cooperation, United Nations Center for Regional Development, and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Thailand was chosen as the host of the seminar as it has a thriving OVOP program called “One Tambon, One Product” (OTOP). It was launched in 2001 with a national investment of Bht1.5 billion to create jobs and raise income in local communities, promote local wisdom, use local manpower and materials as the main resources in products created, foster human resources development, and promote creative thinking. OTOP’s more specific targets are: 1) achieve domestic sales value of Bht30 billion and foreign sales value of Bht5 billion; 2) establish standards for 500 items; 3) certify 2,000 groups; and 4) establish four OTOP villages as tourist destinations. Most of these targets will be met by the end of 2004. OTOP products cover the following categories: food, beverages, fabric and textiles, furnishing and decorations, artifacts and souvenirs, and nonedible herbal medicine. For field study, the participants visited an OTOP village, a doll factory, and a mulberry papermaking company.



Participants at an OTOP village

After the visits, they identified the following as strengths in the Thai OTOP program: strong government support, Thai culture, and the people’s belief in and commitment to OTOP. Among weaknesses, they mentioned inadequate markets, a heavy dependency on government-driven initiatives, and possible conflicts of interest between local communities and SMEs. 🌀