



APO *news*

Agricultural productivity enhancement in LDC members

Agriculture and the rural sector still play an important role in the national economies of both developed and developing countries. The sound development of this sector is indispensable for poverty reduction and better management of resources and the environment. In the developing world, however, a vicious cycle of low productivity and poverty continues to beset the agriculture and rural sector, i.e., low productivity, low growth, low investment and savings, leading to even lower productivity. This problem is the most serious in the least developed countries (LDCs), where innovative means are urgently needed to break the cycle and enhance the productivity of the sector.



The meeting in progress

To address the issue, the APO has long been undertaking unique approaches targeting human resources development through knowledge sharing and networking among its members. Given these unique functions, the APO is expected to continue to tackle the challenges of poverty alleviation and rural development in more novel ways than aid agencies that rely heavily on traditional development approaches.

Considerable variation among NPOs, however, exists, in terms of their interests, experience, and capacity for agriculture-sector activities. Some NPOs of middle-income countries, for example, have frequently been involved in human resources development programs for agro-industries, while others have been successful in launching integrated community development projects. On the other hand, in some least developed member countries, an NPO has yet to be established or if already existing it is unable to take part actively in the promotion of agricultural productivity due to the lack of a clear mandate or expertise in general. In response, the APO has initiated a new project that is being funded by a special cash grant from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Japan. The Special Program for Agricultural Productivity

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"Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things."

Theodore Levitt

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Enhancement in Asian Least Developed Countries (APE-LDC) aims to contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable agricultural/rural development in low-income developing countries in the APO membership through capacity building of NPOs and other related agencies. Such capacity building will be pursued primarily through three core programs: 1) productivity promotion; 2) productivity and quality management training; and 3) demonstration projects in agriculture.

The project will initially target four least developed member countries where the NPOs are relatively inactive in agricultural productivity enhancement: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal. The APE-LDC project is proposed to be implemented over a period of five years from 2004. The national action plans, which are to be formulated by the individual NPOs together with the designation of the “agriculture focal point” of each of the targeted LDCs, will serve as a basis for undertaking specific activities under the project. Rough drafts of the plans were prepared at an Expert Meeting conducted in March 2005 in Bangkok. At that meeting, the experiences of the more advanced NPOs in productivity promotion in the agriculture/rural sector, productivity and quality training, and implementation of demonstration/pilot projects were shared with the participants from the APE-LDC-targeted NPOs. Some of the points stressed during the experience-sharing exercise were: 1) To get off to a quick start, the targeted member countries should focus on simple and easy-to-implement activities. 2) The experiences of the more advanced NPOs should be considered to facilitate early implementation and avoid as many pitfalls as possible. 3) Proposals should be made taking national priorities and comparative advantage into account.

Under the APE-LDC project, assistance to be provided by the APO, at least during the initial stages, will take the following forms: 1) technical expert services; 2) observational study missions; and 3) demonstration projects. However, while agreeing that these assistance modalities would be beneficial, the target member countries strongly suggested at the Bangkok Expert Meeting that greater flexibility should be exercised by considering the specific situation of each of the target LDCs and NPOs. During the remainder of 2005, project activities are expected to focus on the implementation of the individual national action plans. 