

# The Internet as a productivity tool for NPOs

**N**ational productivity organizations (NPOs) in APO member countries play a vital role in promoting productivity by launching productivity campaigns, providing training and consultancy services, and conducting research. They also act as the main collaborators in implementing APO activities. Thus, the APO pays serious attention to enhancing the productivity of NPOs to enable them to deliver their services more efficiently and effectively.

The Internet has now become a powerful tool that can be used for most NPO activities. However, information technology (IT) is developing at a rapid pace, leading to continuous widening of Internet applications. The level of Internet utilization in NPOs varies significantly, however, due to the digital divide that should be bridged as quickly as possible. One main constraint is the lack of relevant knowledge and skills of the staff of some NPOs. In this situation, the APO organized the workshop on The Internet as a Productivity Tool for NPOs in Jakarta, Indonesia, 10–14 July 2006, for 18 participants from 13 APO member countries.

The main objective of the workshop was to enhance the capabilities of NPOs to use the Internet as a productivity tool for their advisory, consultancy, and training purposes. The methodology adopted was presentations, interactive classroom training, experience sharing through group discussions, and site visits. Resource speakers from India, Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand gave presentations and were involved in discussions. One presentation was delivered from Tokyo through the Internet which explained how the APO Secretariat uses the Internet in delivering its services. Country presentations revealed the main activities of participating NPOs, how they use the Internet in those activities, expansions planned for implementation in the near future, and constraints they encounter. In addition, the examples of Thailand and India were presented to learn from and benchmark against. It was revealed that a few NPOs do not yet have their own Web sites and broadband connectivity and their IT facilities are limited to several computers and a dial-up connection allowing e-mail communication, whereas some others are fully equipped and utilize the Internet in almost all their activities.

The group of enthusiastic participants developed such close relationships that some from NPOs successfully using the Internet expressed willingness to help weaker NPOs in their future endeavors to expand Internet utilization. The group-



*Participants preparing the group report*

ing for discussions was based on the present level of Internet utilization after the country presentations. The group discussions were facilitated by the resource persons and led to the development of an action plan with deadlines for implementation. Some of the activities identified for implementation were:

- Creation of a Web site. Only a few NPOs do not have their own Web sites. Some of them have already designed a site and are ready to launch it. Since economical options to launch and maintain a Web site were pointed out during the discussions, the participants from NPOs without Web sites became more positive.
- Introduction of instant messaging systems for efficient communication and monitoring projects. The staff of some NPOs are already using such systems and find them efficient.
- Minimizing paperwork to achieve a paperless office. Most NPOs are already moving in this direction, although achievements vary.
- Implementation of e-learning projects. Training programs using various types of e-learning methodologies are currently offered by some. The participants from those NPOs expressed their willingness to share English-language training materials with others on a reciprocal basis.
- Establishment of best practice databases for benchmarking. Some NPOs have already developed those databases and shared their experience with others.
- Introduction of Web-based research. Currently, some NPOs regularly access various databases on the Internet for information gathering in their research activities, while research is not a priority area for others.
- Setting up and maintaining information databases within NPOs for financial and project management. Intranets for process control using management tools such as the balanced scorecard are in use at certain NPOs.
- Setting up of e-libraries. A small collection of e-books is available from a few NPOs. Some have also set up links to access APO e-books.

The deadlines for making full use of the Internet in NPO activities range from six months to two or three years depending on the availability of resources. Most participants indicated financial constraints and lack of government support as barriers to the expansion of Internet utilization. The high cost of and/or unreliable connectivity were also pointed out as problems in some member countries. ☺