

Forum on Development of NPOs

The theme of the 2005 Forum on Development of NPOs (DON), held in Singapore, 28–30 November, was “Renewal and Growth of NPOs,” which was appropriate as APO member countries face daunting tasks in coping with dynamic transformations in the socioeconomic environment. The forum was attended by 17 participants from 16 APO member countries. The genesis of this forum was the 1998 Roundtable Follow-up Conference held in Fiji. A key recommendation at the Fiji conference was the need for member countries to evaluate and improve their productivity movements to meet the challenges of the more competitive environment and increasing societal expectations. It was suggested that an NPO forum be organized on a regular basis to discuss critical issues arising from such changes and to consider their impacts on NPOs. Notable achievements through the series of fora subsequently organized included:

First and foremost, the forum has been instrumental in fostering a strong network among NPOs and forging a sense of camaraderie among NPO top managers. This forum series enables NPO heads, especially the newly appointed ones, to become acquainted with their counterparts in a more informal setting before the annual Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs. Several new faces were seen at the Singapore forum: Umesh Panjiar, Director-General of the National Productivity Council (NPC), India; Dr. Phanit Laosirirat, Executive Director of the Thailand Productivity Institute (FTPI); and Mr. Nguyen Ahn Tanh, Managing Director of the Vietnam Productivity Centre (VPC).

Second, in addition to providing an avenue for networking, collaboration has been developed in the area of expertise sharing and capacity building among NPOs, especially in emerging productivity fields. Some of the specific outcomes that have benefited the NPOs are:

- 1) The DON Forum in Bangkok imparted concepts such as the learning organization and knowledge management (KM). This spurred the VPC to develop training packages on KM and KM applications for Vietnamese industries with assistance from the National Productivity Corporation (NPC), Malaysia, and SPRING Singapore.
- 2) Following the forum in Tehran, where the balanced scorecard (BSC) concept was introduced, BSC training was initiated for companies in Pakistan by the National Productivity Organization (NPO) of that country. The Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and FTPI also introduced their own NPO scorecards.
- 3) At the Fiji forum held in 2004, the e-benchmarking online database initiative presented by the NPC, Malaysia, and the national quality and innovation program shared by SPRING Singapore resulted in a number of visits from NPOs under the APO Bilateral Cooperation Between NPOs Program to both Malaysia and Singapore so that other member countries could adapt and develop similar approaches. The China Productivity Center of the ROC developed its own online benchmarking database known as the “i-bench” to benefit Taiwanese enterprises. The NPO Pakistan also launched a national quality award modeled after the Singapore Quality Award.

The above exchanges and collaborations were possible because NPOs were able to gain a better appreciation of each other’s core competencies and strengths through the regular DON Forum.

Third, the strategic planning exercise in 2000 and reviews in 2001, 2003, and 2004



Senior NPO representatives at the Singapore forum

encouraged NPOs to engage in their own strategic reviews. This is now a regular exercise for most NPOs. Key performance indicators and performance measurement have also been integrated in NPO operations so that they can be more accountable to their stakeholders.

The Singapore DON Forum generated enthusiasm for each NPO to embark upon a renewal and growth strategy to strengthen its role as the apex body of the productivity movement in their country. The meeting emphasized the need for NPOs to engage the private sector as a major stakeholder in the productivity movement and in APO activities so that they can stay relevant now and in the future.

Greater private-sector participation in APO activities was an area of critical concern discussed during the 47th Session of the APO Governing Body and was further emphasized at the Singapore forum. Secretary-General Takenaka in his remarks at the forum urged all NPOs to widen their search for qualified APO project participants, especially from the private sector, and make a deliberate effort to nominate them for all projects. The APO will meanwhile start with a limited number of projects to be targeted exclusively at private-sector participants. He stressed that greater efforts must be made by NPOs to devise an effective outreach program to the public through the circulation of APO and NPO newsletters and APO project notifications directly to industry associations and chambers of commerce in member countries. Only then can the APO truly achieve multiplier effects of its activities to benefit member countries through the dissemination of productivity know-how to the widest possible audience, especially the private sector. 

