



APO *news*

Historic productivity RTC in Africa

The APO, in collaboration with the Pan African Productivity Association (PAPA), organized the first Roundtable Conference (RTC) for the Promotion of the Productivity Movement in Africa, Sandton, South Africa, 28–31 August 2006. It was attended by 26 delegates from Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia. The opening ceremony was graced by about 100 guests, including South African Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana and APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka. The APO deputed seven resource persons from its member countries to share the Asian experience. The RTC was supported by a financial grant from Japan.

APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka, in his opening address, expressed the hope that the RTC would provide timely momentum for enhancing economic development through higher productivity in the participating African countries and an opportunity for PAPA to play an even greater role with renewed support from its members. He said that changing mindsets is what the productivity movement is all about: “To establish the belief that we can change past practices, do better, and compete with the best in the world is an essential ingredient for achieving sustained economic development.” The Secretary-General attributed the successful productivity movements in APO member countries to the role of the national productivity organizations, commitment of government, and involvement of all sectors of society, especially labor and business, noting that the success of the APO as the only regional organization active in the field of productivity was due to: “First, the financial commitment of member countries is a *sine qua non* to make a multilateral organization viable and sustainable. Second, the existence of a core country or countries willing to play a leadership role is crucial to keep momentum for organizational growth. And third, the development of a network of cooperation among member countries, with the more advanced member countries acting as mentors to the less advanced ones, is of particular value to narrow the productivity gap between them.” (See page 2 for a summary of the Secretary-General’s address.)

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RTC attendees

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“Clarity is the preoccupation of the effective leader. If you do nothing else as a leader, be clear.”

Marcus Buckingham

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PAPA President Thembo Lebang, in welcoming delegates and guests to the inaugural session, remarked that the RTC “will go down in the history of Africa as the beginning of a concerted effort by Africa and its allies to journey into competitiveness and the adoption of a culture of excellence.” The challenge, he added, was to ensure that these efforts would bear quality fruits whose sweetness would be tasted in each African household. In appealing to PAPA’s strategic partners to join in this productivity journey, he said that PAPA needed a full-time secretariat to implement its productivity agenda and that a great difference could be made by a grant to sponsor it.

A high point of the opening ceremony was a cameo appearance in a video message by former South African President Nelson Mandela. Mandela described the RTC as a forum of cooperation between institutions and persons from the African and Asian continents providing a springboard for development and advances on both continents and regions. “It is in this taking of hands and working together that humankind shall advance and progress in our century.” He further said that the people and leaders in Africa acknowledge that the progress of the African continent demands that they take responsibility for their fate, including responsibility for the enhancement of productivity. “I have faith in human progress, and productivity in all spheres of human activity is certainly at the heart of that progress,” he added. *(See above for the full text of Mandela’s message.)*

The keynote address was delivered by South African Labour Minister Memebathisi Mdladlana. He recounted that the productivity agenda in the Southern Africa region had been launched in 1998. Since then, South Africa has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the skills of its workforce, workplace productivity, and standard of living of its people. The core concern, he pointed out, was to reduce unemployment and poverty and create a solid foundation for a productive nation. He said that the South African government

wanted to halve unemployment and poverty by 2014. Achieving economic efficiency and greater productivity has acquired a new sense of urgency, and the Labour Ministry, in support of the National Productivity Institute headed by Executive Director Dr. Yvonne Dladla, has taken on this challenge with renewed vigor and excitement.

“We host this conference fully cognizant of the challenges we face as government leaders to uplift the lives of our people and the potential that productivity has in lifting our people out of the abyss of all the many social ills,” Minister Mdladlana said, while expressing the hope that the RTC would enable Africa to learn and share in the productivity gains experienced by most Asian countries, which today are the front-runners in world competitiveness. “Their achievements provide and inspire us with compelling reasons to follow the same model that has seen a change in the economies of these countries. It is our belief that in creating partnerships with our Asian counterparts through sharing their productivity experiences, the productivity movement in Africa will be enhanced.” He concluded that a vibrant productivity movement was essential for the stable growth and development of Africa and declared: “Let us join hands in becoming the champions of productivity.”

The seven resource persons deputed by the APO to share the Asian experience in productivity promotion were Director-General Dato’ Nik Zainiah Nik Abdul Rahman, National Productivity Corporation, Malaysia; Executive Director Dr. Phanit Laosirirat, Thailand Productivity Institute; former Chief Saquib Mohyuddin, National Productivity Organisation, Pakistan; former Managing Director Nguyen Thi Bich Hang, Vietnam Productivity Centre; Director for International Department Yasuhiko Inoue, Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development; Principal Consultant Low Choo Tuck, Eunison Network Pte. Ltd., Singapore; and Prof. Akira Goshi, Nihon University, Japan. 