

Taking regional best practices local: National Follow-up Program



(L–R) Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fishery Orm Lim Ser joins Secretary of State Sat Samy and Deputy Secretary of State, Ministry of Industry and Handicraft (APO Alternate Director for Cambodia) Tung Ciny in presiding over the opening ceremony of the National Conference on Enhancing the Roles of Mass Media in Innovation and Knowledge Transfer to Improve Productivity and Competitiveness of the Rice Sector of Cambodia, 7–9 December 2015. Photo courtesy of NPCC.

Background

For decades, APO projects generally fell into two categories: multicountry and individual country. The former type usually involves productivity topics of interest to all or selected members, while the latter targets the needs of an individual country with the style, design, and format catering to specific national needs or interest. Individual-country projects may range from offering direct technical assistance to NPOs by international experts to schemes allowing one APO member to visit another to observe model projects and best practices.

Although the individual-country projects have been enhanced over the years in response to requests of members for greater diversification in approaches, challenges remained. For example, the official language of English used for APO multicountry projects sometimes posed difficulties. Some members simply lacked the resources and know-how to plan initiatives utilizing the APO's existing individual-country programs. Taking such realities into consideration and in the hope of developing a method to provide more flexible opportunities from which all members could benefit, the APO Governing Body at its annual meeting in April 2015 adopted the National Follow-up Program (NFP) allowing multicountry projects to be translated into programs on a national level.

The NFP runs throughout the year, with interested APO members submitting proposals to the Secretariat. In principle, each member country is entitled to hold one NFP project

each year, but depending on the total number of annual applications and budget availability, some APO members may have additional opportunities. The linkage of proposed NFP projects to the original multicountry ones is crucial and is created by participants who attended the original versions then taking the initiative in planning an NFP version tailored to their countries. The linkage is also strengthened by utilizing the same international experts to support the national projects.

Benefits

As soon as the NFP was introduced in June 2015, the interest of APO members was evident. Since September 2015, five APO members have taken advantage of the new scheme, with six NFP projects successfully organized so far. Bangladesh conducted the first, its National Conference on Enhancing the Role of Mass Media Practitioners in Knowledge Transfer to Improve Agricultural Productivity. The project inherited the objectives of its multicountry "parents" held in 2013 and 2014 and localized them to explore the potential role of mass media in facilitating the transfer of productivity information, knowledge, and technology to local small farmers.

Because NPOs take the initiative in organizing NFP projects, and they are very "localized" events, they attract both huge numbers and a very diverse range of participants from various levels involved in a country's productivity efforts. Cambodia and Nepal conducted their versions of national conferences on Enhancing the Role of Mass Media

Practitioners in Knowledge Transfer to Improve Agricultural Productivity in December last year, attracting between 70 to 100 participants representing not only local productivity practitioners but also high-ranking officials such as state secretaries from related ministries, heads of industry associations, and leading private-sector enterprises. The conferences in both countries were widely covered by local television channels and newspapers.

Another benefit of localizing APO projects is the great flexibility in redesigning them to meet specific needs or interests. Cambodia conducted the National Workshop on Agritourism Development in January utilizing the NFP to promote agritourism as a strategy to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the country's booming tourism sector. For Malaysia, the National Workshop on Measurement of Productivity in the Public Sector in January became an important opportunity to raise the awareness of various stakeholders of the concepts and approaches in measuring public-sector productivity while simultaneously beginning a multipartite national discussion on the subject in terms of initiatives to be carried out under the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2016–2010.

Finally, the NFP contributes to extending the APO's reach throughout the region by intensifying the dissemination of knowledge and information to a wide array of professionals at the national level. The Practice-oriented Workshop on Energy Efficiency conducted in India in January synthesized the experiences of the APO and its numerous multicountry projects on the topic to create its own training platform for local officials and professionals in the area of energy auditing and management, raising awareness of energy efficiency while exchanging practical knowledge and experience.



Participants in the National Conference on Enhancing the Role of Mass Media Practitioners in Knowledge Transfer to Improve Agricultural Productivity and Farmers' Welfare in Nepal during a group workshop.

Feedback

Deputy Director-General of Tourism Aing Sovannroath, of the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia, first attended the multicountry workshop on Agritourism Business Development and subsequently initiated the organization of a national workshop on the topic. He expressed deep appreciation to the APO because, "The national workshop was able to share the knowledge and ideas of the experts with a large number of stakeholders. Participants gained a lot of valuable ideas and insights from the presentations and discussions during the three-day workshop. After this, we will organize more meetings with relevant stakeholders and the private sector to move forward with this new tourism product in Cambodia."

Faruque Ahmed from Bangladesh Television experienced both the multicountry project as well as the NFP one targeting mass media practitioners. He commented that the scheme had provided a rare opportunity for local professionals from different sectors to come together to share insights and experiences on a common platform.

The NFP will continue to create more opportunities for APO member countries to participate in multicountry APO projects with a regional focus and then take advantage of the available means and resources to develop and conduct productivity enhancement activities geared toward their own local communities. The NFP is widening the scope of APO influence throughout the Asia-Pacific, recognizing the uniqueness of its members while working toward the same common goal. 🌐



Resource person and NPC Deputy Director General Shri R. Virendra interacting with participants during a theoretical training session during the practice-oriented session of the Workshop on Energy Efficiency, India, 18–22 January. Photo courtesy of NPC.