

## Improving local public services through higher productivity

One requirement for enhancing productivity in the public sector is ensuring that productivity exercises at national and local levels are aligned. Local governments are critical in all productivity initiatives because they are on the front line in delivering public services to citizens. This was the main reason why the APO, in collaboration with the National Productivity Secretariat of Sri Lanka, held the multicountry study mission on Local Government Service Delivery and Productivity in Colombo, 9–13 May. The study mission was attended by 25 participants from 14 member economies and guided by three resource persons on local government and government service delivery from Canada, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea.

The resource persons' presentations focused on three main areas critical to the productive delivery of local government services. The first was the relationship between productivity enhancement at national and local levels. Reasons to improve service delivery by local governments were also outlined. Common barriers to and challenges in reform of local public services were the second focus, along with the need for a more people-centered approach. The third area was policy innovations required in a changing environment to allow local authorities to serve citizens better, including discussions on measuring citizen satisfaction and benchmarking service and productivity. The participants, who mainly represented local governments, ministry policymakers, and public service providers, found the presentations on approaches and methodologies to meet local citizens' satisfaction particularly informative and beneficial.

Observational visits were hosted by the Mount Lavinia

Municipal Council, located in Dehiwala, and Department of Local Government, in the Western province. The visits illustrated lessons learned and best practices through presentations by a Sri Lankan local government practitioner and deputy mayor of Mount Lavinia City. A Mount Lavinia council member spoke on the development of a citizen-centered local government and how public services can be improved even with resource constraints. Discussions on the effectiveness of public–private partnerships in managing local waste were a highlight of the visit to the Department of Local Government, Western province. The site visits triggered requests from the participants to follow up this study mission by exploring possible tools and models to overcome challenges faced by local governments in other APO member economies in delivering the best possible local public services amid the resource constraints experienced by most.

Recognizing the valuable exposure to different public service models during the study mission, Phoutsavath Soukkaseum of Lao PDR commented, "For the past five days, I have gained new knowledge on how to improve the productivity of local government, especially from the session on innovation and policy design." A different emphasis on the study mission was given by participant from Malaysia Nur Rafidah Binti Abd. Rashid, who found that, "The modules and presentations really gave me extra knowledge on efficiency and productivity in delivering services to the people." Most participants planned to apply their new knowledge and adapt the tools discussed to solve problems they faced in their own work, as mentioned specifically by Vietnamese participant Doan Manh Chat. 🌐



Participants from Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka sharing insights on addressing local government productivity issues during a facilitated discussion session.