



ASIAN PRODUCTIVITY ORGANIZATION

WSM-14

55th Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs
21–23 October 2014, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Statement by the APO Secretary-General

55th Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs
21–23 October 2014, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Statement by APO Secretary-General Mari Amano

Introduction

1. Good morning. I am grateful to the Government of Sri Lanka for its hospitality and generosity in hosting this Workshop Meeting of Heads of National Productivity Organizations (WSM).

Objectives of the WSM

2. We have three primary objectives at this WSM. First, we will reconfirm the lineup of projects for the 2015–2016 biennium including modifications to the existing projects or any other new projects that delegates may wish to include. Second, delegates will share their countries' objectives and plans in key economic sectors that will serve to guide the APO in the development of programs for 2017 and 2018. Third, delegates will discuss the draft APO 2020 road map before endorsing it and proceeding to the next steps leading to its eventual approval by the Governing Body.

Overview of Program Budgets and Lineups for 2015–2016

3. The preliminary 2015–2016 Program Plan was approved by the GBM in Hanoi earlier this year. The GBM approved a 5% increase in the budget without increasing total membership contributions and stipulated that the 5% increase in expenditure was to be met through the use of unappropriated surpluses and other sources of income.
4. The increase in budget will lead to an increase in the number of projects that may be implemented in 2015 and 2016. As expected, the revised lineups for 2015 and 2016 now feature an increase of 10 and 12 more projects, respectively.
5. Delegates at this WSM are expected to reconfirm their hosting of multicountry projects and propose modifications to projects, if any are necessary. Each member country should ideally host at least one multicountry project in the spirit of mutual cooperation. This will also help enhance the relevancy and raise the awareness and visibility of APO activities in host member countries.
6. After the 2015–2016 Program Plan is endorsed by this WSM, the Secretariat will modify it after adjusting the US dollar-to-yen exchange rate toward the end of 2014 before presenting the final lineup of projects for the approval of the Governing Body next year.

Highlights of Projects Implemented in 2014

7. Let me now take you through a couple of interesting projects already implemented this year. The APO's flagship event, the Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) was held in Taipei for the first time. It was very successful, attracting widespread media attention and garnering high-level government support. The EPIF conference drew more than 200 participants from 15 member countries and adopted the Taipei Outcome Document that

has since been accepted by the UN as part of the inputs into the new UN sustainable development goals.

8. There has been another interesting development in APO initiatives to seek mutually beneficial cooperation with other institutions to develop better programs. I would like to report on the official launch of a new three-year cooperative agreement with Cornell University. The 19 participants in the inaugural program were the proud recipients of certificates issued jointly by the APO and Cornell University. The APO is now discussing deepening that cooperation, which will likely include joint research projects in agriculture.
9. With the continued support and generosity of the Japanese government, we were also able to implement four highly visible projects covering diverse topics such as solar energy, wastewater management, and agribusiness.
10. Individual-country programs have seen higher participation rates from member countries with the total number of projects rising to 78 to date compared with 56 in the same period last year. This is a huge 30% increase in APO activities within member countries which should also lead to more learning opportunities as well as higher visibility. Allow me to express the gratitude of APO to some of the NPO Heads present for throwing their support behind programs such as I-OSM and BCBN by agreeing to host more such projects in the APO spirit of mutual cooperation.
11. This year alone, APO's activities have already been covered more than 760 times in media across Asia and in nonmember countries such as the UK and France, compared to the 270 times in the whole of 2013, thanks to the tremendous efforts of member countries which have coordinated so well with the Secretariat to create newsworthy events. You may have also noticed that the APO website was re-launched with a more modern and user friendly format. This is in preparation of creating an APO Portal which will serve as the focal point for Liaison Officers, participants, experts and other stakeholders to collaborate, access project information, browse databases, download e-books and participate in e-learning courses.

Impact and Visibility of APO Programs

12. In summary, during the first three quarters of 2014, the APO has undertaken 118 projects. The number of projects for the full year will exceed the 139 achieved for the whole of last year, with the final number depending largely on the utilization rate of individual-country programs by member countries. These numbers are expected to rise as the Secretariat is committed to implementing all 2014 projects within this year barring unforeseen circumstances as well as to undertake five additional projects approved by the Governing Body about two months ago.
13. For 2015–2016, the number of projects that will be implemented is bound to increase further due to the 5% increase in the budget. How can the APO, which comprises member governments, NPOs, and the Secretariat, significantly raise the visibility and impact of our activities? Will doubling or tripling our annual budget help greatly? Perhaps, perhaps not. What will it take to bridge the gap between the high expectations of member countries and the actual achievements of the APO constrained by its current budget? This has been the dilemma facing me since I assumed the post of the APO Secretary-General just over a year ago.

14. Let me now share with you some of my learning points when I was the Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD. Both the OECD and APO are international organizations, both have similar missions to be achieved through mutual cooperation, and both were established in 1961. That is where the similarities end.
15. In terms of size, the OECD has 34 member countries, almost double that of the APO. More significantly, eight of the world's top 10 economies are OECD members; for the APO, that number is just two. In terms of annual budget, the OECD's US\$0.5 billion is about 40 times that of ours; it also has a staff strength of 2,500 which dwarfs the APO Secretariat's by a factor of more than 60.
16. While it is not realistic to compare the APO with the OECD, we could adapt some of its good ideas in terms of best practices or signature activities and apply them in the context of the APO's budget and programs to help achieve some degree of the level of international recognition that the OECD receives. For example, one notable difference in the way OECD undertakes its mission compared to APO is that it focuses primarily on making policy recommendations that, if formally agreed upon by members, are then implemented by their governments. The progress made by member governments on the recommendations is then tracked through a mutual examination process known as peer reviews, which underpins the OECD monitoring mechanism. APO may perhaps wish to adopt a similar methodology to encourage member governments to implement policies.
17. My hope is that delegates will be able to contribute even more and better ideas during the breakout sessions to discuss the draft road map that will help shape the future of APO programs. This will go a long way to help the APO become the leading international organization in the area of productivity. That can only happen if there is a strategic shift in the way the APO carries out its mission with the unequivocal support of all member countries. I hope to count on your support to achieve this.
18. Now I would like to touch upon low-hanging fruit within the reach of member countries which could have an immediate positive impact on APO projects: the participants. The success of APO projects depends on two main aspects: the ability of Secretariat staff and host country to pull together resources and create a high-quality program led by suitable experts; and the quality of participants nominated by member countries. Without participants who can contribute to the discussions during the project and are committed to applying their knowledge in their home countries, it will be impossible for APO projects to achieve the impact that member countries wish for.
19. I hope that member countries will cooperate by nominating only participants who meet the criteria specified in project notifications. To improve this important aspect of APO projects, the Secretariat will start monitoring the participants carefully and providing feedback to member countries.
20. Later, the Secretariat will be presenting a proposal to enhance the follow-up impact from multicountry projects. If the WSM endorses the proposal, this new individual-country program will effectively allow member countries to conduct national programs directly linked with previous multicountry projects. This is one of the practical initiatives that will have another immediate positive impact on APO programs and was conceived in response to feedback from member countries.

21. At the last GBM held in Hanoi, I briefly outlined the idea of strengthening the working relationship between the Secretariat and NPOs through a one-year staff attachment scheme at the Secretariat. As I mentioned, given the size and scope of the current annual program, it is not yet possible to have at least one officer from each member country working at the Secretariat. This attachment scheme will not only deepen the APO's understanding of the development needs of individual countries and NPOs, but will also pave the way for better-designed, more customized programs.
22. The Secretariat is ready to pilot-test this scheme from 2015 with two NPO staff. Whether it takes off or not will depend on whether NPOs find it useful and relevant.
23. During the last GBM, plans to expand the reach of the e-learning courses including self-e-learning were mentioned. We are now laying the foundations for increasing their scope and scale including translating the course materials into local languages. This is a high-priority area, and I invite delegates to provide suggestions on possible subjects that could be covered in e-learning courses during the breakout sessions. With your support, I will be able to report next year that good progress has been made.
24. About two months ago, I wrote to the Governing Body to seek its understanding of my efforts to acquire additional office space. The main reason is the need to expand the size of the conference room to accommodate larger-scale projects and will also allow us to increase the office seating capacity and possibly equip the Secretariat with videoconference facility.
25. For many months, the Secretariat has been in discussions with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) of the Government of Japan with the objective of securing special cash grants. I am pleased to inform the WSM that METI has approved an annual cash grant of about US\$600,000 for 2015 and 2016. This is on top of the special cash grants provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. On behalf of the APO, I would like to thank the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of China for their generous cash grants.

Conclusions

26. This WSM will be a very important exercise to plan for the future, and I am looking forward to our discussions over the next three days. There is another equally important reason to bring together all our key APO stakeholders, which is to create opportunities for you to build networks and friendships. The strategic objectives of the APO cannot be achieved without the mutual cooperation and strong bonds between everyone involved in the organization. I hope that this WSM will help to cement the already strong relationships that our NPOs enjoy. I once again thank our hosts, the Government of Sri Lanka, the National Productivity Secretariat, and other agencies that have helped make this WSM in Sri Lanka possible.

Thank you.