Report of the Strategic Planning Workshop for APO Liaison Officers

1. Background

The Strategic Planning Workshop for APO Liaison Officers (LOs) was held in Tokyo, Japan, 27–29 August 2014. It was attended by 19 LOs and two observers from 19 member countries and two experts for the APO projects on Need Assessment of Member Countries and Strengthening of NPO Assistance Program (SNAP). The workshop comprised four sessions, and was facilitated by the APO Secretary-General and department directors at the Secretariat.

2. Session 1: Where We Are: Overview of Activities and Targets of the APO

The Secretariat presented an overview of the APO, current key concerns, and strategic initiatives/activities in relation to the mission and strategic directions of the organization. The objectives of the presentations were to update LOs on the functions and focus of APO activities consisting of the following:

a) Highlights from the APO Convention: the roles of APO directors, LOs, NPO heads, and the Secretariat;
b) Planning process and budgeting based on the sources of revenue and expenditures on operations;
c) Latest initiatives in terms of increasing the visibility and impact of projects, expansion of e-learning, development of the APO Portal (through the APO website), proposed NPO staff attachment program to the Secretariat, development of FAQs about the APO, and recent information and public relations initiatives;
d) Detailed data for I-OSM, TES, BCBN, DMP, DON, COE, and Program Development Fund;
e) Utilization of special cash grants from the Japanese government for special projects;
f) Reports on the e-learning programs of the APO (videoconferencing, web-based online program, and self-e-learning course);
g) Capacity building of member countries in terms of transferring knowledge, best practices, and information to target farmers, food processors, and exporters; and more efficient production and marketing;
h) Highlights from the recent OSM for Myanmar on Innovations in Agriculture in Japan and OSM for media practitioners;
i) APO-Cornell University MOU for the Development of Executive Workshops on Agribusiness;
j) Assessment of needs of member countries, identifying emerging trends in productivity, building a global research network, providing actionable productivity information and knowledge, designing APO plans tied to the needs of member economies, and establishing a thought-leadership position in the region;
k) The APO productivity databook publication; and
l) Achievements of the COE on GP with its plan to expand GPAC to other member countries.

Presentations were made by two experts on the initial results of the Need Assessment of Member Countries project and SNAP. For the first project, the chief expert presented the research objectives, methodology, findings, and analyses of the survey of 18 member countries. The need assessment included analysis of: 1) national development policy priorities; 2) national productivity strategies; 3) identification of mid-term national productivity targets; 4) NPOs' strategies and priorities; and 5) assessment of project needs for productivity improvement. Although the presentation covered the preliminary findings, there were concrete findings such as potential priority subsectors and areas for capacity building of NPOs. The second presentation was made by the chief expert for SNAP highlighting the snapshot findings submitted by the 16 national experts. Because the study was still in a preliminary stage, the presentation emphasized only five categories: country data trends; NPOs' strategies, systems, and services; NPOs' performance results; NPOs' SWOT analysis; and the APO's strategies and assistance.

The following were the key concerns and recommendations raised by the participants:
  a) The non-profit-making character of the APO prohibits it from charging fees to finance its operations/projects, unless it could be viewed as cost recovery.
  b) While the proposal for the staff attachment program to the Secretariat was explained well and accepted by the participants, there is a need to clarify this plan in terms of purpose, functions in the Secretariat office, term, and regulations applicable to his/her tenure in the office.
  c) There was a discussion on the restoration of I-OSM Category C projects for which all costs are borne by the APO. However, this proposal needs further study and commitment of all member countries, especially those advanced economies that frequently host mission visits such as Japan, the Republic of China (ROC), the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Singapore.

3. Session 2: Where We Are Going: The APO Roadmap 2020

The Secretariat summarized the key points of the roadmap in terms of the seven key challenges that it will try to address: setting measurable targets in the APO vision; developing more effective ways to enhance NPOs' technical capacity; developing more effective ways to enhance NPOs' institutional capacity; making productivity enhancement activities in the region more visible; tailoring programs to fit local needs of member countries; taking a thought-leadership/authority position to gain more understanding from governments; and disseminating outcomes and best practices of productivity policies and activities across the region.

To address these key challenges in drafting the final roadmap, five value propositions were identified: building technical capacity; building institutional capacity; offering high-level advisory services; enhancing visibility; and facilitating mutual learning. Given these propositions, the building blocks for preparing the roadmap include the setting of measurable targets (key performance indicators), developing a subsector program and subject prioritization, establishing a best practice network, putting a review mechanism in place, and enhancing visibility. The presentation also explained the assumption of three layers of the APO: layer one represents the Secretariat; layer two the NPOs; and layer three the entire APO with all of its member economies.

In order to provide more substance in planning for the roadmap, the participants were grouped to discuss and recommend proposals in terms of subsector prioritization, key subjects and

topics to be considered, and the guiding values and principles to achieve its goals. (For details of the group discussion outputs, please refer to Tables 1–3.)

Discussions on the seven key challenges and five value proposition components of the Roadmap 2020 included the following points:

a) For the required resources to develop the roadmap and the proposal to identify common indicators, a matrix, and baseline, the question, "Where are we now?" must be answered. The APO roadmap must be able to reflect the roadmaps of member countries as well, especially the productivity and competitiveness goals of each country, as this will help justify the value of membership contributions and in assessing the impact of projects in relation to the roadmap.

b) Verifiable indicators and assumptions covering outcomes and impact must be defined and aligned with the national productivity and competitiveness performance goals of member countries.

c) There was a suggestion to identify more subsector prioritizations as those presented by the Secretariat did not entirely capture the diverse composition of each subsector and the different levels of economic development which have different priority sectors. LOs suggested drafting another list for their selection and provided their own listings during group work (Table 1).

d) The participants also discussed the subject and topic prioritization that will serve as the basis for project planning under the roadmap (Table 2).

e) For the best practice network, the participants agreed that there should be a best practice portal on the APO website as a source of information on the best practices of other NPOs.

f) Concerning a review mechanism of national productivity enhancement, it was agreed that a concept paper be prepared. Participants discussed norms and principles to determine the common values among diverse member countries (Table 3).

g) In improving the visibility of the APO, the experience and suggestions shared by LOs included: contracts with local mass media; TV talk show appearances; a certification program as part of APO branding; providing news to the Secretariat for publication and uploading on the website; and translation of APO-related news in local languages.

4. Session 3: How We Get There: Project Design and Implementation

The Secretariat explained the process of improving project implementation by citing the types of evaluations: the project evaluation by participants at the end of projects; and the third-party impact evaluation done every two years. This was followed by a report on the planned APO certification system from 2015 for some regular projects. As recommended in the 2013 expert panel meeting, the project to be pilot tested will be the certification of Development of Productivity Practitioners: Basic and Advanced courses. Certification will involve four steps to receive competency-based certificates: enrollment in a self-learning e-course; participating in an APO face-to-face training project; taking an exam; and organizing a project or similar activity in the participant's own country utilizing the knowledge acquired to create multiplier effects.

A presentation was made on the proposed National Follow-up Project Scheme (NFPS) by the Secretariat. After collecting some suggestions on how a particular project could create faster dissemination of knowledge to a larger number of stakeholders at the national level, a national follow-up to the same project appeared to be a good scheme. This type of project is different from Category C projects. Although there are few A-B/C projects that encompass

this proposed methodology, the NFPS scheme aims to create multiplier effects at the national level. The discussion continued on the proposed actions required for the NPOs to comply if this is adopted as a regular program. A short discussion on how to enhance the e-learning programs was followed by a proposal to collect fees as part of revenue generation for cost recovery.

Following the series of presentations, the following suggestions and recommendations were made by LOs:
a) There were some issues raised about the deadlines for country papers, presentation time (often mismanaged), mechanics of country presentations, etc. Because of the unique circumstances for each project, there was no specific conclusion reached except that all points were considered when planning and implementing projects. Other issues raised were onsite visits, time management, and deadlines for nominations.
b) There was a suggestion that evaluation reports of participants should form part of the postimplementation phase, not just on the onsite phase. In preparing for project evaluation, it was suggested that expert's recommendations also be included and reported as inputs in evaluating overall projects. Some suggestions on the timeframe, mechanics of collection, designing and collecting feedback from participants, and how participants apply the knowledge gained were also given.
c) For a big country like India, having six local participants for a locally implemented project creates almost zero visibility. This must be considered by the Secretariat. In addition, there was a discussion of the impact evaluation being conducted by an external expert, especially the issue of objectivity. It was suggested that other NPOs be involved in the evaluation process.
d) LOs questioned whether it would be possible to request a resource person to extend his/her stay after implementing a multicountry project to give another lecture. Some participants stated that they wanted to take advantage of his/her presence by engaging him/her in a similar local activity.
e) The LOs from the ROK, ROC, Japan, and Singapore explained the reasons for their low participation rate in e-learning courses, primarily language barriers, other available options, and more cutting-edge contents.

The Secretariat responded to the above suggestions and recommendations as follows:
a) In some projects, country papers are required while in others they are not, and since in some projects country presentations are important in sharing best practices and current situations, the time needed for the presentations by participants differs. The Secretariat expressed concerns about the late submission of country papers, late nominations, and proper selection of sites to be visited by the NPOs concerned.
b) As a participant follow-up feedback mechanism, the Secretariat intends to create a quick follow-up channel through its APO Portal.
c) The Secretariat explained that the use of external experts is grounded on impartiality and independence in evaluating the impact of APO projects. The choice of experts follows certain criteria including qualifications and familiarity with and involvement in APO projects so that they can fully understand and analyze the impact.

The LOs from the ROK, Japan, and Singapore presented five proposals for enhancing the BCBN and I-OSM platform to increase understanding between NPOs as follows:

Proposal	Response of the Secretariat
Year-round call for I-OSM and BCBN proposals instead of fixing a deadline in March to avoid visits being concentrated within 6–7 months	This proposal will be taken into consideration in the 2015 and 2016 Program Plan with a more detailed timeline to be indicated in the PN.
Combination of some I-OSM and BCBN applications with multicountry projects on similar topics	The Secretariat will review this proposal since there are differences in the objectives and methodology between I-OSM/BCBN and multicountry projects.
Limit the request of NPOs to a maximum of 5 for both I-OSM and BCBN combined per year	The Secretariat may suggest other member countries to be potential hosts to alleviate the hosting burden on ROC, ROK, Japan and Singapore.
Streamlining certain administrative processes including the APO making direct reimbursements to delegates for per diem allowances and accommodations	The streamlining can be very limited since the Secretariat is not in a position to collect evidence of payment (e.g., receipts) from delegates. In addition, the total number of delegates in combined I-OSM and BCBN projects is difficult to handle on an individual basis. Understanding of host NPOs was sought to continue the practice while other alternatives may be explored.
Limiting the cost to hosting NPOs: translation expenses borne by the APO or the visiting delegation; and the cost arising from cancellations borne by visiting countries	In resolving the interpretation and translation expense for the host country, it was suggested that the requesting NPO cover this part. The Secretariat cannot cover such expenses and requested the NPO sending a mission to include this as its own expense. The understanding among NPOs should be that any penalties and expenses arising from cancellations must be borne by the requesting NPO/member country so that the host NPO does not incur unnecessary expenses.

5. Session 4: Concluding Session

The Secretariat summed up the all sessions and made a final presentation on the agreements/discussion made on the Roadmap 2020 in terms of measurable goals, subsector program, best practice network, review mechanism, and visibility enhancement. It stated that all opinions, suggestions, and agreements/discussions reached during the meeting would be reported to the WSM including the concept paper and additional inputs for the roadmap.

The meeting formally ended with a short message from Secretary-General Amano who reiterated his plan for office expansion and NPO staff attachment to the Secretariat to create stronger relationships and better serve the needs of NPOs.

Table 1. Subsector Prioritization Proposals

Group 1: Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Singapore	**Group 2**: India, Fiji, Malaysia, Japan, Philippines
Healthcare (services)	Healthcare
Food and beverage	Tourism/ecotourism
Accommodation for tourism	Service sector (1 level up)
Farming should include plantations	Agricultural sector (1 level up)
Manufacturing (textiles) + garments	Public sector
Transportation and storage should include air, water, land, and warehousing	Water supply/sanitation
Education, split into 2 groups: formal and vocational	Fishery/aquaculture
Traditional industries (e.g., handicrafts)	
Group 3: Cambodia, Mongolia, ROC, Pakistan, Nepal	**Group 4**: Thailand, Bangladesh, IR Iran, Lao PDR, ROK
Food and beverage in service sector	Textiles and garments (in manufacturing)
Healthcare	Healthcare
Energy management and conservation	Tourism
Tourism (and ecotourism in tourism)	Public services (central and local government)
Service to senior citizens (to serve aging trends)	Recycling business

Table 2. Key Topic/Subject Proposals

Group 1: Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Singapore	**Group 3:** India, Fiji, Malaysia, Japan, Philippines
Everything must be SME focused Delete: Basic Productivity Tools, Quality Management, Service Quality and Competitiveness for SMEs, Industrial Parks and Clusters Combine: Entrepreneurship + Social Enterprises; Benchmarking + Productivity Measurement; from Green Supply Chains to GP Technologies. Add: Business Model Innovation	Climate-resilient Agriculture, Productivity Measurement for SMEs, Energy Efficiency, RBMS for the Public Sector, Productivity-linked Wage System (complementing Labor Management), Innovation Measurement, Demographic Change, Diversity Management, Water Management, Agri-eco Innovation
Group 2: Cambodia, Mongolia, ROC, Pakistan, Nepal	**Group 4**: Thailand, Bangladesh, IR Iran, Lao PDR, ROK
Add: Project Management, MFCA, 6 Sigma, International Certification/ Standards, Leadership, Standardization, Food Traceability, Sustainable Livelihoods	Human-centered Productivity, CSI (Service Management), Kaizen, Social Business, Technology Management, Leadership, Innovation Management, Business Model + Restructuring, Telemedicine, Business Continuity Management, Agritourism, Change Management, Disaster Management

Table 3. Guiding Value and Principle Proposals

Group 1: Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka	**Group 2:** Cambodia, Mongolia, ROC, Pakistan, Nepal
1. Adapt to the environment 2. Gains of productivity must be shared with all (gain sharing) 3. Productivity-driven culture 4. Leadership and emphasis on productivity must come from the top 5. Invest in human talent 6. Stay humble, stay hungry	1. Productivity measurement 2. Positive/productivity attitude at work 3. Leadership, vision, and commitment to productivity 4. Promotion of productivity 5. Good labor-management relations 6. Assistance to the organization and building competencies
Group 3: ROK, IR Iran, Thailand, Lao PDR, Bangladesh	**Group 4:** India, Fiji, Malaysia, Japan, Philippines
1. Persuade the government to donate more special grants to the APO 2. Provide special programs to work with policymakers on national productivity improvement and ministerial productivity enhancement 3. Sustainable productivity improvement policies of the government 4. Connecting with political parties: meet with top ranks and explain NPO 5. Suggesting suitable solutions by meetings with key authorities in member countries via NPOs	1. Review mechanism could be in terms of how participants apply the knowledge gained from APO projects 2. Organizational capacity building: report any improvement effect that benefits own organization/country. 3. Connect productivity strategy to national development plan goals 4. Sustained direct buy-in by government