DISCUSSION 1

Mr. Karma Wangdi, the delegate from Bhutan, opened the discussions with an interesting question to the resource persons: given that the NIS requires huge investments and a large number of S&T personnel, does a small country like Bhutan with 700,000 people have any scope in pursuing innovation systems?

Mr. Jeong Hyop Lee responded by saying that it is largely a question of approach. A country with 700,000 people is small, but if one thought of it as a company with 700,000 employees, that would make it one of the largest companies in the world. Therefore, in place of country-type strategy, Bhutan could adopt company-type strategy. If a strategy could be devised to foster the skills and innovativeness of the people, then Bhutan could occupy a significant place in the world ranks.

Mr. Shyamal Kumar Chakraborty responded to the same query, saying that Bhutan could focus on a few select economic sectors and the export market.

Ms. Wang Yan said, as a small country, it is important that Bhutan finds out areas of relative advantage and concentrate on the possible industries in those areas. It would also be important to improve the education level of the people.

Maj. Gen. Chainarong Cherdchu pointed out that sustainable development has three pillars – economy, society and environment. As Bhutan is looking to take leadership in forestry and make the country very green, sustainable development would be the basis.

Mr. Preeda Youngsuksathaporn from National Innovation Agency, Thailand, asked about the role of universities in Indian NIS and about the role of triple helix in China and the Republic of Korea. The resource persons explained these points in more detail.

Ms. Kay Thi Lwin, the delegate from Myanmar, said that the concept of NIS is new to her country and therefore, she would like to know how to go about actions for initiating an NIS.

Mr. Lee responded by saying that the starting point would be to determine the country's resources and strengths, which would give an idea about its strategic position in the global economy. Before any action, however, the country needs to take a decision about the development path it wants to travel. Mr. Lee added that such fundamental questions need to be addressed through national brainstorming workshops.

Mr. Chakraborty said Myanmar could determine a few select areas to start with and in those areas initiate projects that require only low level of funding. Incremental innovation – import, absorb, digest and innovate – is an option available to Myanmar, he added.

Ms. Wang agreed with Mr. Lee and said that a basic decision has to be taken about the approach to development based on a very thorough investigation of the country's advantages and disadvantages. She said that while innovation is related to science and technology, it is not limited to them. There could be innovation in socio-economic development, environment protection and sustainable development.

Mr. Ramanathan said his personal view is that a country that wants to start or revitalize an innovation system needs someone influential to champion the cause, as the issue involves decisions at governmental level. Ideally, this champion should be the leader of the country, as demonstrated by many successful countries. Once a positive decision is taken, the next step would be capacity building at senior levels before policy analysis could be done. For this, the country could take the help of ESCAP.

The delegate from Nepal, Mr. Sanu Kaji Desar, asked Mr. Chakraborty about the details of one of the success stories that he had cited in his presentation. Mr. Chakraborty provided the details.

Mr. Xayaveth Vixay, the delegate from Lao People's Democratic Republic, agreed with Mr. Ramanathan on the necessity to have a top leader in the country promote innovation system. However, he said he needed information to present a convincing case to the leadership. He said it is vital to convince the top political leadership.

Mr. Lee remarked that it would be worthwhile to pursue one or two pilot projects that could give successful results, which would contribute towards the competitiveness of Lao People's Democratic Republic, and then use those results to persuade the leadership to invest in furthering the innovation process.

Ms. Wang said that experts could be invited to address policymakers on topics such as S&T development and economic development. Such experts could also interact with the participants to discuss the issues involved.

Mr. Ramanathan cited the experience of the Republic of Korea, and pointed out that the key idea to be conveyed to top leadership is that S&T development is the engine for economic development. Thereafter, a senior expert with experience in S&T development policies could be used to build up the case with the political leadership. This could be followed by demonstration projects, as Mr. Lee suggested, he added.

Mr. Dilip Kumar Basak, the Bangladesh delegate, requested Ms. Wang to elaborate on the role that indigenous innovations have played on China's NIS.

Ms. Wang replied that her country's experience showed that imported technologies will not help a nation like China in the long term. That realization prompted the leadership to promote innovative spirit in the country to develop home-grown technologies.

Mr. Lee observed that NIS is not a panacea or a one-time remedy; it needs to be continuously customized to specific contexts.

Wrapping up the first day's session, Maj. Gen. Chainarong Cherdchu took a moment to inform the participants on some key achievements of Thailand. In 2010, Siam Cement Group, the oldest company in Thailand, became the first company from a developing country to lead the Dow Jones Sustainability Index in the "Construction and Materials Supersector". The Group is a leader in innovation in the country. He said the country is also launching Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programmes in recognition of the importance of the private sector.