

Navigating the Future of Postal Services in Asia-Pacific

- Insights from Deputy Director General of UPU

- *Interviewee: Mr. Marjan Osvald, the Deputy Director General of the UPU*
- *Interviewer: APPU Bureau*

Q1: In the face of rapid technological advancement in the Asia-Pacific region, how can UPU initiatives promote modernization of postal services while also ensuring the retention of traditional values that many Posts hold dear?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: The Asia-Pacific region is undoubtedly the world's biggest generator of mail volumes. At the same time, it is also the largest employer on a global scale. In my view, the UPU's key task is to transfer best practices from this region to other parts of the world, especially in terms of technological advances, while simultaneously providing an appropriate legal framework that will ensure an efficient and sustainable exchange of postal items also in the future. Only in this way, the traditional role of the Posts and the values they hold can also survive in the years to come.

Q2: You've been meeting with many operators in the Asia-Pacific region this week, so I believe you understand the unique challenges and opportunities in the region. Can you share an example of a regional project led by UPU that specifically addresses the needs of this region? What were the outcomes and lessons learned?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: I am very grateful to have met with the representatives of 20 APPU members. It is always a great privilege and pleasure to have the opportunity to listen to members and to talk to them in person. I found these exchanges of views highly productive considering the insight I have gained. If I were to share one example of a successful regional project, then I would highlight the Transport Hub in Fiji. I'm convinced we will increase the performance and the visibility of Leg 2, in addition, we will strengthen cooperation with air carriers. The fact is that we need to establish better transport connections in this region for our members, especially when it comes to island countries in the Pacific.

Q3: The UPU has been actively engaged in capacity-building initiatives, such as the program aimed at helping the postal operators from Asia-Pacific countries, including 19 LDCs, SIDs, LLDCs and select DCs. This program covers diverse subjects, ranging from customs, data compliance to standards and environmental sustainability. How do you evaluate the overall progress of the participating countries and specifically in the AP region? How does UPU plan to support effective implementation to empower postal professionals in the region?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: I am very happy that I was able to visit APPC (Postal College) as part of my participation in the APPU Congress. My colleagues in Bern and I will try to find a way to transfer know-how to the students here in Bangkok even more effectively. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank Thailand and Thailand Post for their contribution to APPC's very successful operations. I sincerely hope this successful model can be replicated elsewhere.

Q4: The APPU plays a significant role in the region. How do you plan to enhance coordination and collaboration between the UPU and APPU to maximize the impact of joint projects?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: It is true that APPU's role is crucial in this region. This is my second time here, and I am amazed how well the ministries and DOs work together in the Asia-Pacific region. I believe that such a successful and respectful cooperation would also help other regions to advance faster in their efforts to modernize postal services. Personally, I wish that we could maintain the growth of postal volumes on an international scale, while at the same time strengthening the role of DOs in the national environment. In light of the above, I believe that in order to maximize the impact of our joint projects, APPU and UPU could map priority areas then use the know-how and the resources UPU has at its disposal to benefit APPU members.

Q5: Can you share your perspective on the complexities of postal regulatory reform worldwide, considering factors such as existing framework, market challenges, and the influence of digitalization and e-commerce? How would you approach developing recommendations that not only promote modernization and efficiency enhancement, as emphasized by the IPDP, but also align with the region's unique economic and social objectives?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: After 27 years of following the postal sector, I can say that we are facing the same challenges as similar sectors as we work to keep pace with the development of technology. We have had better luck in comparison to the others, but we cannot take this for granted. Unfortunately, the rapid uptake of technology raises some concerns, in my opinion. Why? Because I fear that the development may lead us in a direction we may not be able to influence to the benefit of the people we serve – both our employees and our customers. I'm not sure if robotization, automation and artificial intelligence can take over all the functions or tasks in our environment. There are some areas or aspects of postal services that benefit from or require a human touch. We must also consider that UPU members are at completely different stages of development, which means that our less developed members could lag behind even more if we do not act to harness technology carefully. It is hard to predict future trends and developments. In the 1990s, experts predicted that integrators such as DHL, TNT, DPD, GLS, etc. would privatize public postal operators, but what happened was quite the opposite.

The same applies to the development of the regulatory field, where it is difficult to establish a model that would suit all members, especially due to the huge differences in development and the importance and roles given to national DOs. Most of them are focused on their domestic market, but there are also those that operate globally. At the same time, we must not forget the other stakeholders who have and will continue to shape the postal sector.

So, to sum up, regulatory reform will not only have to address technological developments and market changes but also sustainability and social challenges as they are all closely related.

Q6: As you emphasized the importance of the UPU's mission to discover a model of solidarity that can effectively diminish development disparities among member countries, projects like "ORE" and "QSF" are actively contributing to this mission. Do you see these projects serving as models for fostering cooperation and enhancing development across different member countries in the region?

Mr. Marjan Osvald: Yes, I do. But I also know that members (all UPU members) must do more to improve the quality and efficiency of our global postal network. As it stands, the postal network is unique in the world and we must do everything we can to preserve it. And projects such as ORE and QSF were designed to do just that – to reduce development disparities among UPU members.