"Assessment of AFoCO Project Impact and Best Practices"

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A review of 7 AFoCO projects to improve sustainable forest management in Southeast Asia

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Background information

- AFoCO's **vision**: "A greener Asia with resilient forests, landscapes, and communities"

- **Mission**: "to strengthen cooperation in the forest sector and to promote action-oriented practices of sustainable forest management"

- AFoCO is a treaty-based organization with 13 member countries

The AFoCO work programme today

(i) action-oriented implementation

(ii) regional-based partnerships for the projects

(iii) country driven project development, and

(iv) provide training to forestry staff in AFoCO's member countries

Purpose of this programme review

→ A review of AFoCO's first experience on project work, implemented during the inception phase of AFoCO as an organisation

- assess and review 7 regional projects in SE-Asian AFoCO Member countries

- analyze best practices and lessons learned

- examine policy impacts

- indicate broadened possibilities for forest cooperation

- facilitate prioritized knowledge exchange activities

- identify opportunities for future project development
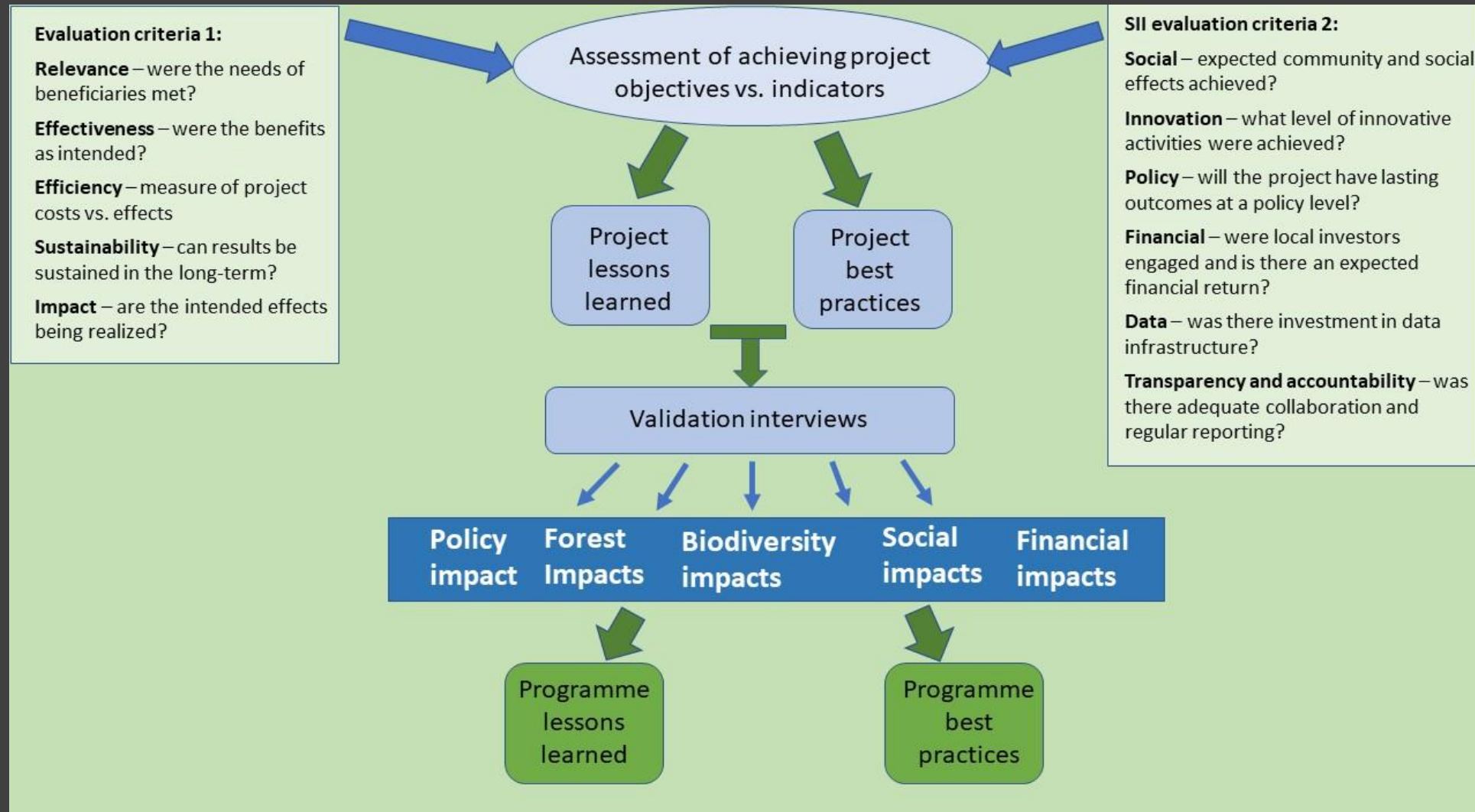
The seven projects reviewed

AFoCO project no.	Project title	Countries	Time period	Budget (US$)	
001	Reclamation, rehabilitation, and restoration of degraded forest ecosystems in Mekong Basin countries (MBCs)	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam	2013-2015	AFoCO 500,000 National 302,770	
002	Capacity building on improving Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and enhancing involvement of local communities to address the impact of climate change	Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	2013-2016	AFoCO 1,847,528 National N.A.	
003	Promotion of forest rehabilitation in Cambodia and Vietnam through demonstration models and improvement of seed supply system	Cambodia, Vietnam	2014-2019	AFoCO 1,000,000 National 200,000	
004	Facilitating the participatory planning of community-based forest management using GIS and RS technologies in forest resource management	Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand	2014-2020	AFoCO 1,500,000 National 14,640	
009	Developing high value species in Vietnam and Thailand as a mechanism for SFM and livelihood improvement for local communities	Vietnam, Thailand	2015-2018	AFoCO 600,000 National 120,000	
010	Domestication of endangered endemic and threatened plant species in disturbed terrestrial ecosystems	Malaysia, Thailand	2016-2022 (Ongoing)	AFoCO 1,200,000 National 4,093,919	
011	Capacity building for landscape approach to support sustainable natural resources management	Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore	2015-2019	AFoCO 539,726 Philippines 68,855 Others N.A.	

→ Projects 001 and 002 evolved from a Korean/ASEAN Workshop in 2010, Project 003, 004, 009, 010, 011 from ASEAN-ROK Forest Cooperation Agreement (2012)
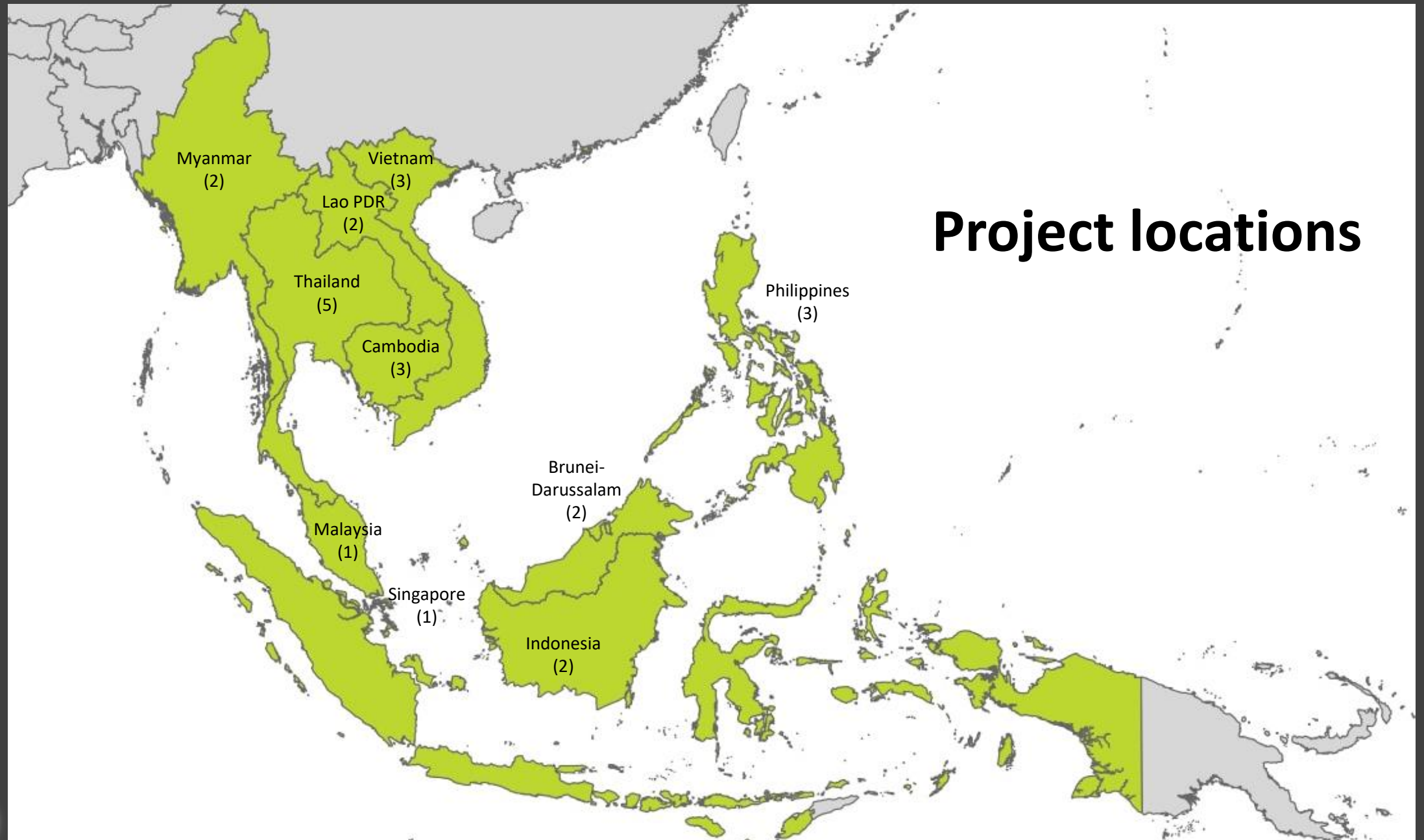
Individual review methods

Evaluation criteria 1:

Relevance – were the needs of beneficiaries met?

Effectiveness – were the benefits as intended?

Efficiency – measure of project costs vs. effects

Sustainability – can results be sustained in the long-term?

Impact – are the intended effects being realized?

Assessment of achieving project objectives vs. indicators

Project lessons learned

Project best practices

Validation interviews

SII evaluation criteria 2:

Social – expected community and social effects achieved?

Innovation – what level of innovative activities were achieved?

Policy – will the project have lasting outcomes at a policy level?

Financial – were local investors engaged and is there an expected financial return?

Data – was there investment in data infrastructure?

Transparency and accountability – was there adequate collaboration and regular reporting?

Policy impact | **Forest Impacts** | **Biodiversity impacts** | **Social impacts** | **Financial impacts**

Programme lessons learned

Programme best practices

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Project locations

Myanmar (2)
Vietnam (3)
Lao PDR (2)
Thailand (5)
Cambodia (3)
Philippines (3)
Brunei-Darussalam (2)
Malaysia (1)
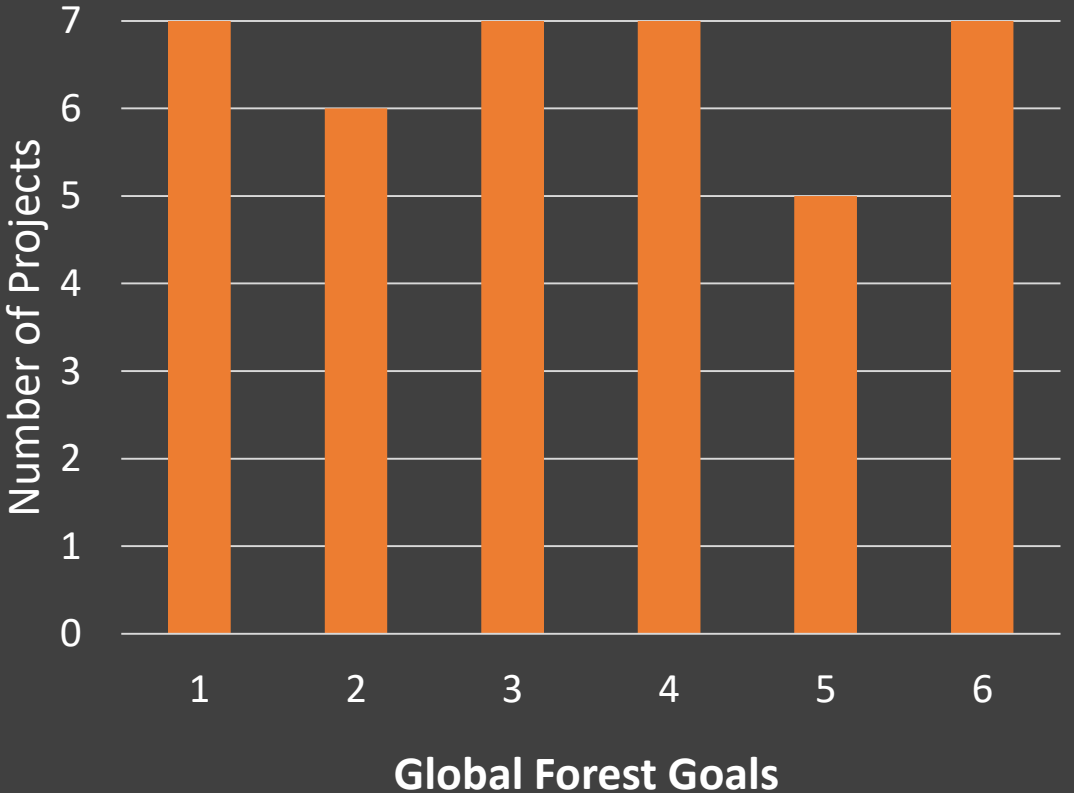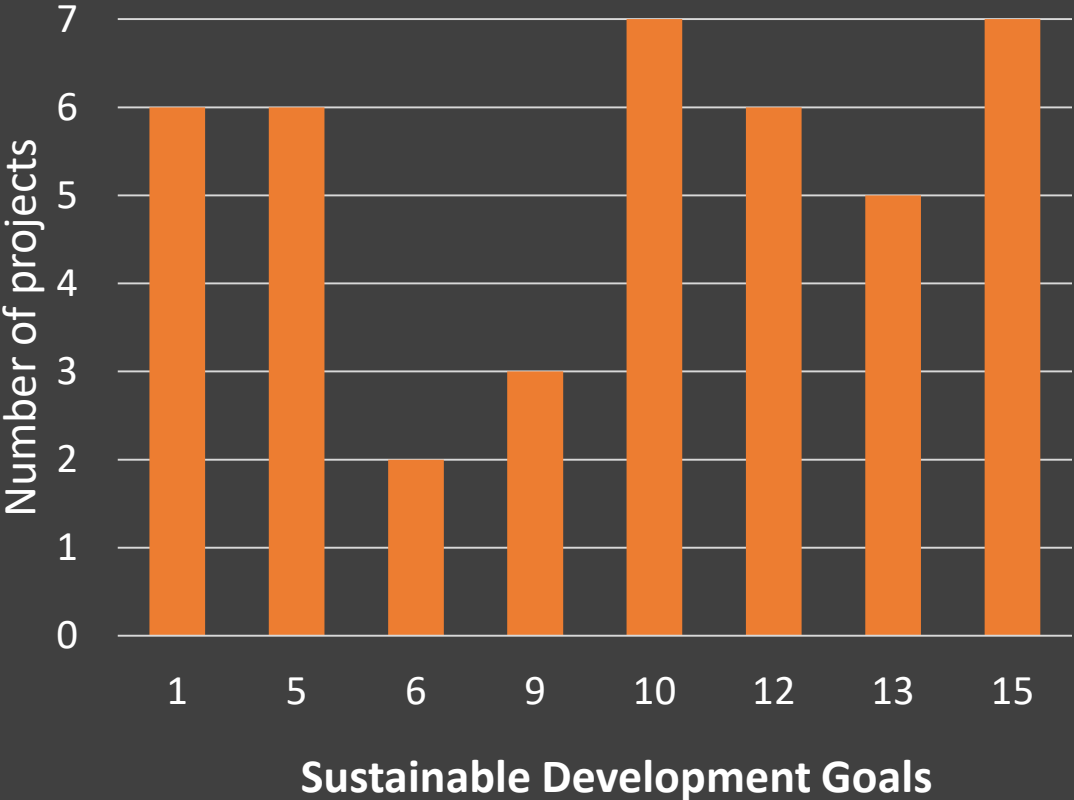Singapore (1)
Indonesia (2)

Individual project results

Projects dealt with several globally and regionally important forest issues:

- reforestation/restoration of degraded or deforested areas
- recovering of endangered forest types
- improved livelihoods and well-being for forest communities
- endangered species
- climate change adaptation
- improved forest management
- systematic forest data collection and reporting
- advanced use of technology in forest management

Contributions to global processes

Policy impacts (including examples)

- Projects all aligned with national policies
  (Project 004: Brunei now has an GIS and FRA reporting division)

- Projects provided demonstration areas now used now as national reference and training sites
  (Project 011 in Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines)

- Impact through CF guidelines and summary assessments
  (Project 004 – CF guidelines produced were effective at policy level in several countries : Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines)

- Towards forest Landscape restoration
  (Project 011 – especially effective in conveying the message of scaling up)

- Need for endangered tree species recovery – awareness at policy level
  (Project 009 in Malaysia and Thailand worked with 38 tree species)

SFM impacts (including examples)

- Demonstration areas were effective tools
  (Project 009 Vietnam/Thailand, Project 010 (Malaysia, Thailand)

- Improved use of data collection, GIS and remote sensing, computers and analysis software

  (Project 002 - vastly improved FRA reporting in several countries)

- Training modules available from some projects
  (Project 002 modules on remote sensing; Project 011 landscape management)

- Improved planting techniques and control of nuisance species
  (Project 003 and 011 - control of *Imperata* spp., and use of direct seeding)

- Improved seed stock availability
  (Projects 003 and 011 – use of local suppliers and training on improved seed quality)

- Important establishment of tissue culture labs in Cambodia and Vietnam
  (Project 003 – resulting in vastly improved seed selection)

Social impact (including examples)

- Alternative livelihood development in 6 of the 7 projects
  (New industries: bamboo products, seed production, and agroforestry)

- Improved capacity at CFs to manage their forests
  (Projects 001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 011)

- Some CFs learned to use online marketing tools
  (Project 003 provided online marketing training, e.g., Facebook as a tool)

- Most projects believe results will be maintained especially where local market analysis was completed
  (Project 009 provided marketing guidelines)

Long-term impact requires future monitoring and possibly extra funding

Most important and consistently reported lessons (1)

1. Projects need a main focus and provide a logical framework with quantifiable targets [historic: today AFoCO has a project manual].

2. Communication among AFoCO, the regional manager, and the national managers needs to be frequent and regular.

3. Sustainable forest management projects ensure that the three legs of SFM – environment, social, and economic are equally considered.

4. Communities are pre-consulted prior to project implementation.

5. Training for local people, considering local needs, is a key element of success for livelihoods projects.

Most important and consistently reported lessons (2)

6. Exchange visits between countries were very effective learning tools

7. On-site decisions are a collective decision among project stakeholders.

8. Alternative livelihood projects require local consultation, feasibility studies, and market assurance

9. Due diligence and research for tree species selection is required to limit losses from poor ecological understanding, climate vulnerability, wildlife damage

10. A pre-defined exit strategy is needed for each project, and AFoCO should consider a strategy for long-term monitoring of the success of projects, especially for livelihood projects, to help ensure their sustainability

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Most reported lessons at the regional coordination level

- Financing for projects was considered adequate by all projects

- Difficulties in moving funds among governments (lead country/partner countries) often resulting in delays in activities in countries

- There is both a reporting (especially financial) and administration burden on the regional project leaders

- Regional coordinators need management training for regional administration

Best practices (1)

1. Projects have a focus, with a logical framework providing quantifiable targets [all assessed projects were formulated before having an AFoCO project manual].

2. AFoCO, the regional project manager, and the national managers maintain communication.

3. Sustainable forest management projects include all three legs of SFM – environment, social, and economic are considered equally.

4. Communities are pre-consulted during the project development phase to support trust-building and better ownership.

5. Alternative livelihood projects consult local communities and conduct both feasibility studies and market assessments.

6. Training on alternative livelihoods is based on these studies and carried out in a second phase. This improves the adoption rate and long-term social impacts.

Best practices (2)

7. A schedule for regular monitoring, with procedures is built into projects.

8. Project proposals include an exit strategy.

9. A manual of operations will help to systematize actions at project sites .

10. Forest restoration projects select species appropriate to the sites involved, take measures to increase seedling survivorship, and ensure sufficient monitoring occurs to determine success.

11. Alternative livelihood projects include a component that describes how they will be sustainable.

12. On-site decisions are taken as a bottom-up collective process among the main project stakeholders, including women.

➔ **Many of these lessons learned from the initial project work evaluated in this study have already been internalized by AFoCO**

Best practices – forest management

1. For seeding and nursery stock, select high-quality seeds from healthy trees that are growing well, to ensure improved survival and higher quality trees.

2. Recognize problems that can reduce seedling survival, such as invasion by grasses, fire, and wildlife damage; be prepared to mitigate these issues.

3. Direct seeding, where it is appropriate (protection measures), is a suitable method of forest restoration

4. Understand the ecology of the forest ecosystem prior to starting a restoration project, to ensure that the species are selected are suitable to site conditions.

5. Where local communities are involved, select species for which there is community knowledge, local use, and that are well understood by the local people.

6. Establishing local businesses, either as seed suppliers and/or nurseries, can assist forest restoration while providing alternative livelihoods.

Regional coordination: Suggestions to reduce workload for multi-lateral (regional) projects

1. AFoCO establishes a regional office/hub/link for projects involving 2 or more countries to coordinate administration issues

2. Projects with several countries involved might consider linking with an international or local non-governmental entity (NGO) to manage projects

3. A 6-month lead time is built into to projects to enable training of the regional coordinator and for government financial processes to work

Conclusions

- Projects were well-designed, implemented well and were generally successful

- Successful training for use of advanced technologies for inventory and reporting

- Projects were well-positioned to create impact on policy, SFM, local communities, and/or improved sustainability of forest products

- Multi-country (regional) projects can be a valid approach besides bilateral projects

- Small contribution of equipment and training can result in large changes in sustainability of communities and create lasting positive effects on the forest

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Future considerations

- Future areas for work (based on the assessment of the 7 projects):

  - Thematically:

    - Reforestation (a global priority) coupled with alternative livelihoods (as part of an FLR approach)

    - Consider a 'larger landscape approach' to help reverse land degradation

  - Conceptually and organizationally:

    - Continue the application of advanced technologies in SFM as ICT seems to be a special asset AFoCO can promote

    - Consider an applied research component where possible

    - When applying a multi-country approach: consider complementarity with other regional/international forest development programs