

Fifth Session of the Assembly
25-27 October 2021, Hybrid

Agenda Item 11

Updates on communications and partnership activities

I. Background

1. Consistent with the Decision 27-III-19R on Policy on Information Disclosure, the Secretariat is delivering and communicating relevant information internally to the organization, and externally to partners, media, and public. Communication is a critical tool that adds value to all work being carried out by AFoCO and visibility of the organization's works. Outreach activities and collaboration with partners have been initiated at diverse levels to strengthen networks and broaden resources.

II. Communications

2. In order to increase the organizational presence as an international organization representing the Asian region, the Secretariat is constantly strengthening its network among members as well as potential partner countries across and beyond the region. In order to promote high-level support from the Parties, courtesy calls on the Ambassadors of the Parties and relevant institutes in Korea are organized.

	Agency/Embassy	Date
1	Minister of Korea Forest Service	8 February
2	Director General of Sejong National Arboretum	8 February
3	Charge d'Affaires of the Philippines	23 February
4	Ambassador of Thailand	8 March
5	Ambassador of Timor-Leste	5 March
6	Ambassador of Viet Nam	10 March
7	President of the National Institute of Forest Science	23 March
8	Ambassador of Indonesia	30 March
9	Ambassador of Mongolia	31 March

10	Ambassador of Turkmenistan	3 June
11	Ambassador of Finland	14 June
12	Ambassador of Norway	15 June
13	Ambassador of Uzbekistan	16 June
14	Charge d’Affaires of Malaysia	9 July
15	Ambassador of Germany	26 July
16	Ambassador of Tajikistan	10 August

3. Upon invitation by President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea, the AFoCO represented by the Executive Director engaged in the 2021 P4G Seoul Summit. P4G, stands for ‘Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030,’ is a global initiative launched in 2017 to address the most imminent challenges that our planet faces: responding to climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

- The Secretariat organized an official side event of the 2021 P4G Seoul Summit entitled “Forest-based Solution- a Green Path to Building Back Better” on 18 May 2021. The event attracted more than 100 participants.
- On 28 May, AFoCO, represented by the Executive Director, participated at the P4G Seoul Summit Green Future Session on Forests ‘Forests for Global Net-zero and Peace’ as a panel discussant.
- On 30 May, the Executive Director joined the Leader’s Session of the Summit and made an intervention on “Inclusive Green Recovery from COVID-19”

4. In celebration of the 3rd anniversary of the establishment of AFoCO, the Secretariat launched a social media campaign for 30 days featuring the member countries and programs and projects. Regular posts during the campaign reached an average of 800 people daily during the campaign.

5. Two meetings of the Advisory Roundtable for the Executive Director were held on 9 June 2021 and 18 October 2021.

6. AFoCO maintains an official website to communicate with various stakeholders. In accordance with the Workplan and Budget 2021, the Secretariat has started working on the improvement of the website targeting its launch in December 2021.

7. The Secretariat also continued promotional activities through the publication of regular reports and publicity materials, media exposures.

	Category	Title	Release Date
1	Publicity Material	[PR2021-001] AFoCO Project Portfolio (ENGLISH) [PR2021-001] AFoCO Project Portfolio (KOREAN)	April 2021 April 2021
2	Publicity Material	[PR2021-002] AFoCO Green Partnership Brochure	October 2021
3	Report	[AR2021-002-1] 2020 Annual Report [AR2021-002-2] 2020 Financial Report	October 2021 October 2021
4	Special Publication	Exploring the Forests with Tory & Sully (BURMESE) (edited with hard copies printed)	October 2021
5	Videos	AFoCO-World Bank E-Learning Series: Integrated Forest Fire Management and Advanced Technologies • Module 1: Fundamentals of Forest Fire Management • Module 2: Forest Fire Management Approaches • Module 3: Technology for Forest Fire Management used in the Republic of Korea	September 2021
6	Others	AFoCO 3 rd Anniversary Social Media Campaign materials	April 2021

III. Partnership activities

8. Recalling the Decision 12-I-18R on Development and Strengthening External Relations, the Secretariat has strived to build productive partnerships with potential partner organizations active in Asia.

9. As of 25 October 2021, AFoCO has concluded cooperation arrangements and/or Memorandum of Understanding with five partnership arrangements with six international organizations, two ministries in the Parties, and six relevant institutions domestic to the Host Country.

- The Memorandum of Understanding with the Korea National Arboretum was signed on 25 March 2021.
- The Memorandum of Understanding with the Korea-Mekong Forest Cooperation Center was signed on 12 May 2021.
- The Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan was signed on 17 August 2021.
- The Memorandum of Understanding with the FAO and relevant work plan was communicated to the FAO in May 2021.

10. An initial discussion with the Collaborative Partnership on Forest (CPF) was organized in September 2021 on possible areas of cooperation.

11. Following the courtesy meeting with the Executive Director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) on 24 August 2021, both organizations have recognized that there are common areas of interest and the potential to formalize a partnership. The proposed areas of cooperation are attached in **Annex-1**.

12. In accordance with the MOU concluded on 11 December 2019, the Secretariat has organized a joint working group with the RECOFTC to advance the partnership arrangement with tangible activities. Consistent with Strategic Priority Areas of the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2019-2023), the joint working group has started exploring potential collaboration as attached in **Annex-2**.

13. Based on the Memorandum of Understanding with the Korea Arboreta and Gardens Institute (formerly, Korea Institute of Arboretum Management), the proposed joint program with the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum is attached in **Annex-3**.

IV. Points for consideration

14. The Assembly may wish to:
- take note of the information, and;
 - endorse further development of partnership programs with partners
 - task the Secretariat to take follow up actions
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Proposed Areas of Cooperation for Partnership arrangement between ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

1. Following the courtesy meeting on 24 August 2021 between the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization, both organizations have been recognized that there are common areas of interest and the potential to formalize a partnership.

2. The objectives of formalizing the partnership will be to provide a general framework for cooperation and to facilitate development and implementation of long-term programs on the common areas of interest including biodiversity conservation.

3. The complementary strengths of each organization:

a. ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) is an intergovernmental organization that facilitates cooperation and coordination among the 10 ASEAN Member States and with relevant regional and international organizations on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such natural treasures. The ACB, as the regional hub for the implementation of the biodiversity conservation targets especially on protected areas and endangered species, implements programmes, projects and activities that are in line with the following priority areas: biodiversity conservation; mainstreaming biodiversity; capacity building; knowledge management; communication, education, and public awareness; and resource mobilization.

b. The Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization, with Parties and Observers Asia-wide including the sub-regions of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia, that is committed to strengthening international forest cooperation by transforming proven technologies and policies into concrete actions in the context of sustainable forest management to address the impacts of climate change. Based on its strategic priorities, AFoCO implements a wide range of activities across different forest ecosystems and functions through different technologies and approaches. The strategic priorities include initiating customized restoration & reforestation models, supporting research & development in climate change adaptation approaches, Introducing systematic management on forest-related disasters, local livelihood improvement & community- based small enterprise development, and strengthening institutional capabilities, diversifying resources & promoting regional actions. Granted with the Observer status of the UN General Assembly, the organization makes efforts to translate global policy discussions into tangible regional actions in such international policy discourses while reflecting the priorities and issues of countries in Asia.

4. Potential areas and modalities of cooperation

The organizations will explore potential areas of cooperation for joint actions particularly in:

- Sustainable forest management;
- Biodiversity conservation;
- Ecosystem restoration, including partnership on ASEAN Green Initiative;

- Enhancement of ecosystem services; and
- Climate change adaptation activities, including forests as nature-based solutions.

The joint actions on the mutually identified areas of cooperation may be undertaken through:

- development and implementation of joint research and/or field projects, particularly on AHPs and other priorities of ASEAN and AFoCO
- development and conduct of capacity building programs
- exchange of expertise and knowledge
- enhancing networks through existing platforms and mechanisms

5. Follow-up Action

Based on the mutually agreed areas of cooperation, the organizations may formalize the partnership through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or a memorandum of cooperation (MOC).

**Potential collaboration between AFoCO and RECOFTC:
Building climate resilient communities through enhanced capacity in forest enterprise
development and improved governance**

These ideas are shared across AFoCO and RECOFTC units that are most relevant, for the best fit and integration to work programs, for example: involve research and development; capacity development; gender and social inclusion; knowledge management and communications.

1. Enhanced capacity for agroforestry and community based forest enterprise

The success of agroforestry and the community based forest enterprise from agroforestry is still progressing very slowly. To increase the economic potential of agroforestry and enhance its potential to contribute to better livelihood development for the long term, professional forestry officers and development intermediaries must have sufficient knowledge and skills on agroforestry and ability to work with local people to establish community based forest enterprises on agroforestry.

Key objectives

- Design appropriate capacity building program on agroforestry (AF) and community based forestry enterprises (CBFE)
- Strengthen institutional capacity to increase readiness and viability of CBFE development enhancing national and international market access
- Strengthen the technological capacity of targeted communities to increase the market competitiveness of CBFE products
- Connect a regional learning network focused on AF and CBFE

2. Systematic knowledge management to support community/social forestry

A limited understanding of effectiveness of community forestry programs as well as an adequate monitoring and evaluation system hinder community forestry (CF) groups from maximising livelihood development, efficiently protecting forests and reducing inequality. One way of addressing this limitation is by establishing a systematic process for knowledge management for CF programs. Current and reliable information relating to CF is needed to inform policy makers, program and project developers and CF groups to enhance social and environmental benefits of CF.

Key objectives

- Improve access to current information on CF in the country to support informed decision making and adapting to new challenges quickly
- Determine the impacts of specific intervention(s) on specific CFs
- Improve access to resources for practitioners working at subnational levels (e.g. guidelines, manuals, standard operating procedures)
- Improve understanding of CF through access to information

3. Social forestry policies and legislation: way forward

Despite recent progress and momentum, such as the strengthening of legal and policy frameworks for social forestry at the national level, a number of challenges of social forestry in the ASEAN region still remain. Such challenges emanate from insecure tenure; inadequate

legislative frameworks and ineffective implementation; poor governance; and weak incentives for community engagement in sustainable forest management.

Key objectives

- Enable favorable policies and legal instruments to maximize use of benefits from social forestry as a nature-based solution to support CBFE development and multi-sectoral national platforms in the member countries
- Practice good forest governance and cross sectoral development
- Explore financing mechanisms and economic incentives to support private sector engagement in social forestry

4. Community-based forest carbon management under Paris Agreement

Forests remove 2.3 GtCO₂e annually which account for one-third of the global emissions from fossil fuel combustion. However, their carbon sequestration potential has been significantly reduced as we lose around 5 million hectares of forests every year, largely attributed to the economic imperatives of the developing countries in the tropics.

Furthermore, forests are becoming more susceptible to climate-induced disasters such as forest fire, landslide, and pest and disease outbreaks. In particular, developing countries in Asia face the greatest risks from climate hazards.

There is a strong call for an inclusive partnership among local communities, governments as well as with private entities to enhance forest carbon sinks in Asia and to cultivate national climate adaptation capacity in forest sectors

Key objectives

- Improved monitoring, reporting, and verification systems for land cover change and forest carbon stocks, including forest reference level, forest carbon emission factors
- Community-based forest carbon management has been practiced at scale to meet NDC targets

Focus	1) Enhanced capacity for agroforestry and community-based forest enterprise
Issues or opportunities	Agroforestry refers to the interaction of agriculture and trees, including the agricultural use of trees. Agroforestry may be perceived as a land use system that comprise of agricultural and forestry that try to balance various needs: 1) to produce products for commercial purposes; 2) to produce a diverse, adequate supply of nutritious foods both to meet global demand and to satisfy the needs of the producers themselves; and 3) to ensure the protection of the natural environment so that it continues to provide resources and environmental services to meet the needs of people. Agroforestry provides ecological and economic incentive for forest landscape restoration in tropical areas. For example, some countries, e.g. Lao PDR , Myanmar, and Viet Nam, have explicitly mentioned agroforestry in their Nationally Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. However, the success of agroforestry and the community-based forest enterprise from agroforestry is still in slow progress. To increase the economic potential from agroforestry and contribute to better livelihood outcomes in the long term, professional forestry officers and development intermediaries must have sufficient knowledge and skills on agroforestry and ability to work with local people to establish community-based forest enterprises on agroforestry.

Key objectives	In order to respond to the increasing recognition of agroforestry in contributing to national forestry or SDGs targets, the project will work with partners to • Develop capacity building program to support extension and training institutes in selected countries in producing competent staff on agroforestry and CBFE • Strengthen institutional capacity to increase readiness and viability of CBFE development enhancing national and international market access • Strengthen the technological capacity of targeted communities to increase the market competitiveness of CBFE products • Connect a regional learning network focused on AF and CBFE
Expected outputs	• Options for capacity building program to support national level agroforestry • Learning materials that can be adopted to the national context • Regional/national interactive learning network for AF and CBEF
Beneficiaries	• AFoCO Member Countries (e.g., Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam) • Training agencies or institutes • AF and CBEF practitioners
Potential partners	• ICRAF • ASEAN Secretariat
Potential sources of funding	• FAO • GEF

Focus	2) Systematic knowledge management to support community forestry
Issues or opportunities	Community forestry has been growing significantly in ASEAN over the last decades. Government and development agencies perceive it as an effective approach that could complement NDCs, SDGs and national resilience targets. ASEAN countries have set their community forestry targets. However, limited understanding of the community forestry program, potential of its effectiveness as well as lack of an adequate monitoring and evaluation system hinder community forestry (CF) groups from maximising the CF potential to support livelihood development, protecting forests and reducing inequality. One way of addressing this limitation is by establishing systematic knowledge management for developing effective CF programs. Most updated and reliable information of CF is needed to inform policy makers, program and project developers and CF groups themselves. A phased approach will be applied to AFoCO Member Countries by lessons learned from the ASEAN region.
Key objectives	In order to address the limitations of systematic knowledge management to support learning and decision making for the development of community forestry, it is proposed to create a knowledge management system, including a most updated community forestry database • Improve access to current information on CF in the country to support informed decision making • Determine the impacts of specific intervention(s) on specific CFs • Improve access to resources for practitioners working at subnational levels (e.g. guidelines, manuals, standard operating procedures) • Improve understanding of CF through access to information
Expected outputs	• Models for Knowledge Management and Community Forestry database system for AFoCO in a phased approach • Nationally contextualised and adoptable models for CF database

	● Improved CF monitoring and evaluation system
Beneficiaries	● AFoCO Member Countries
Potential partners	● SERVIR Mekong
Potential resources	Exploring different venues for technical and financial resources

Focus	3) Social forestry policies and legislation: way forward
Issues or opportunities	Social forestry provides opportunities to deliver a wide range of benefits relevant beyond forest landscapes, contributing to several SDGs. Governments, civil society, and private sector actors see social forestry as an essential building block for sustainable forest management, as well as for securing environmental services like water regulation, biodiversity conservation, and carbon sequestration. Many countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam have set national targets on the area of forest to be transferred to local communities in the coming decade, while as of mid-2019, 46% of the targeted areas had been transferred to community management. Despite recent progress and momentum, such as the strengthening of legal and policy frameworks for social forestry at the national level, a number of challenges still remain for progression of social forestry in the ASEAN region and beyond. Among these, insecure tenure; inadequate legislative frameworks and ineffective implementation; poor governance; and weak incentives for community engagement in sustainable forest management, are prominent challenges. To meet these ambitious targets, collective efforts must be made.
Key objectives	The proposed program will facilitate opportunities for AFoCO Member Countries and relevant stakeholders at both regional and national levels to accelerate the progress of social forestry contributing to benefits of local people and the SDGs with 4 key objectives: ● Enable favorable policies and legal instruments to maximize use of benefits from social forestry as a nature-based solution to support CBFE development and multi-sectoral national platforms in the member countries ● Practice good forest governance and cross sectoral development ● Explore financing mechanisms and economic incentives to support private sector engagement in social forestry
Expected outputs	● SF supporting policies and legislation in selected countries ● Policy and legislation framework or guiding principles ● Best practices for business partnership on social forestry in the region
Beneficiaries	● AFoCO Member Countries
Potential partners	ASEAN Secretariat
Potential resources	Exploring different venues for technical and financial resources

Focus	4) Community-based forest carbon management under Paris Agreement
Issues or opportunities	Forests remove 2.3 GtCO₂e annually which account for one-third of the global emissions from fossil fuel combustion. However, their carbon sequestration potential has been significantly reduced as we lose around 5 million hectares of forests every year, largely attributed to the economic imperatives of the developing countries in the tropics. Furthermore, forests are becoming more susceptible to climate-induced disasters such as forest fire, landslide, and pest and disease outbreaks. In particular, developing countries in Asia face the greatest risks from climate hazards. There is a strong call for an inclusive partnership among local communities, governments as well as with private entities to enhance forest carbon sinks in Asia and to cultivate national climate adaptation capacity in forest sector
Key objectives	• Improved monitoring, reporting, and verification systems for land cover change and forest carbon stocks, including forest reference level, forest carbon emission factors • Community-based forest carbon management has been practices at scale to meet NDC targets
Expected outputs	• Effective systems for community forest based carbon monitoring, reporting and verification • Multiple benefits from community forest based carbon management serving biodiversity conservation and societal economic interest
Beneficiaries	• AFoCO Member Countries • Local communities in the region
Potential partners	• FAO • ITTO
Potential resources	• GEF • FCPF World Bank

Proposed Collaboration on International Conference on Conserving Wild Plants

I. Background

1. With the steady decline in biodiversity caused by deforestation and climate change, the international community is being urged to cooperate in mitigating such consequences through climate and biodiversity agreements. In order to contribute to such global efforts, the Korea Forest Service (KFS) has devised a facility for *ex-situ* conservation of wild plant seeds, which are important resources for the restoration of desolate forests, based on its successful reforestation experiences. Seeds are considered the most efficient means for *ex-situ* conservation of plants. The crop plants which are closely related to human life has long been researched, however, the wild plants which could be described as the origin of crops still require much research.

2. The Baekdudaegan National Arboretum (BDNA) established by KFS operates the Baekdudaegan Global Seed Vault (BGSV) for long-term storage and also short and mid-term seed banks for research of wild plant seeds. The Republic of Korea had received aid from many countries including the Asia countries, when the country was devastated in the 1950–60s due to the Korean War and land use change for industrialization. Thanks to the aid and efforts for forest rehabilitation by KFS, Korea's forest has greened at a rapid pace. As remembering kind aids, KFS had constructed the BGSV, the only permanent storage facility for wild plant seeds to stand nature disasters and human made. It is important to underline that even though the facility is owned by the Republic of Korea, the rights to the seeds stored in the BGSV are reserved for the depositing organization and the seeds are not utilized whatsoever. BGSV is an ultimate insurance policy for the world's wild plants supply, offering options for future generations to avoid ecological crises and overcome the challenges of climate change and disasters. It will secure, for centuries, millions of seeds representing wild nature species available in the world today.

II. Objectives and activities

3. The objectives of this program are:

- To raise awareness on the importance of conserving wild plant species in providing potential sources of materials to restore the degraded lands and forests;
- promote international cooperation in Asia and the Pacific for conservation of wild plant species by sharing vision and mission of BGSV that aspires to safeguard forest biodiversity for future generations.

4. The program may include a regular conference at the sideline of the AFoCO events, development and publishing of books and other materials, and semi-workshop between the official conference year.

III. Expected Output

5. The expected outputs are:

- Increased awareness among the participants on the importance of seed storage and wild plant species
 - Discuss feasible cooperation areas on seed conservation and make strengthen the partnerships
-