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Forest Landscape Restoration in the Asia-Pacific Region

Promoting inclusive and integrated community-based FLR Interventions in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

BACKGROUND

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in March 2019, brings much-needed urgency to the restoration of degraded forests, which is urgently needed worldwide. In the tropics alone, more than 9 million hectares of forests are degraded, threatening the livelihoods and sometimes the lives of millions of forest-dependent people. Degraded forests must be restored urgently to maintain their resilience to climate change and enable them to continue providing their multiple benefits to those who live in and around them. Making significant progress in restoration during this decade is now a global challenge.

In support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the AFoCO-ITTO Capacity Building Workshop on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in the Asia-Pacific Region was organized by the AFoCO and ITTO and conducted virtually from August 30 to September 3, 2021. A total of 72 participants from 15 countries, including Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, and Viet Nam took part in the intensive five-day workshop.

The workshop was intended to enhance the capacities of FLR policy makers and planners in AFoCO and ITTO member countries, and two invited countries from the Central Asian region (Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), to undertake successful FLR interventions. Specifically, the workshop aimed at providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of the six FLR principles and associated guiding elements that form the foundation of the new ITTO Guidelines on Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics. The workshop also aimed at promoting the effective participation of local communities and stakeholders in community-based restoration activities while ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

To achieve this objective, four keynote talks and six lectures by well-known experts in the field were arranged from various organizations, including AFoCO; Asian Institute of Technology (AIT); Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland; The Center for International Forestry Research - World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF); Green Climate Fund (GCF); International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO); International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); and The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC). Each session was followed by detailed discussions which saw participants engaging actively in.

The workshop also provided an excellent opportunity to share national and local restoration cases and lessons and the challenges and opportunities it can present for local people and other stakeholders along the way. To be effective, restoration should be long-term and, therefore, must consider that stakeholders' priorities are likely to change over time as communities evolve in numbers, interrelations, skills, and aspirations. The nature and design of FLR interventions, while tailored to the conditions prevailing at the time of commencement, should be capable of adaptation to evolving circumstances.

Six Principles of FLR

Principle 1: Focus on landscapes
Principle 2: Engage stakeholders and support participatory governance
Principle 3: Restore multiple functions for multiple benefits
Principle 4: Maintain and enhance natural forest ecosystems within landscapes
Principle 5: Tailor to the local context using a variety of approaches
Principle 6: Manage adaptively for long-term resilience

(Source: ITTO Guidelines on Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics, 2020)

AFoCO Asian Forest Cooperation Organization
ITTO ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LAS MADERAS TROPICALES

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

This policy brief highlights key messages from intense discussions among the participants following keynote speeches and other talks by experts for developing and implementing FLR effectively at the country and regional levels.

1. ***FLR is much broader than raising forest plantations, which constitute the main forestry-related activity in many countries.***

   It focuses on restoring landscapes and takes into account the full range of interacting land uses, tenure, and governance arrangements. The aim is to restore multiple socioeconomic and environmental functions in landscapes and to generate a wide range of ecosystem goods and services that benefit all stakeholders equitably. FLR must not cause the loss or conversion of natural forests or other natural habitats. It involves adaptive approaches to creating resilient landscapes in the face of climate change.

2. ***Restoring forest landscapes, planting trees, and sustainably managing and protecting existing forests against degradation constitutes a cost-effective strategy for reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement, including carbon-neutral commitments of countries.***

   It will also help the global community reach the Sustainable Development Goals and several other globally agreed policy instruments, including the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021– 2030), as well as in deciding how we restore and manage our forest landscapes in a post-COVID 19 world. Fully restored forest landscapes are fundamental to low emissions and the climate-resilient development pathways of developing countries, which are important for the development of a bio-based circular economy.

3. ***Creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for local communities and smallholders is crucial for the long-term sustainability of FLR projects.***

   Forest restoration in degraded land takes a long time, but the local communities expect to get quicker returns. Therefore, it is important to analyze the value chains of products and services produced in restoring forest landscapes to ensure their economic viability. Livelihood diversification can be accelerated by integrating FLR activities into agroforestry, production of plants of medicinal value, non-wood forest products, protection of natural forests, and ecotourism. Understanding and accommodating the plurality of local aspirations is key to achieving restoration goals.

4. ***Promoting inclusive and integrated FLR interventions is essential to reverse land degradation, increase carbon storage, help conserve biodiversity, and create sustainable livelihoods for local communities.***

   Local people should feel secure about their rights for livelihood development from forest restoration interventions. Effective forest restoration requires contributions from stakeholders decision-making, including from local communities and indigenous people, women, youth, and marginal people.

5. ***The Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics help stakeholders*** — from policymakers to foresters, community-based organizations, and farmers — in restoring degraded forest landscapes, thereby providing vital goods and services, creating sustainable rural livelihoods and employment, and supplying locally and globally important forest ecosystem benefits.

   The core principles of a landscape approach to FLR are (a) addressing common concerns as entry point activities; (b) continual learning and adaptive management; (c) multiple-scale; (d) multi-functionality; (e) multi-stakeholder; (f) negotiated and transparent change logic; (g) clarification of rights and responsibility; (h) participatory and user-friendly monitoring; (i) resilience; and (j) strengthened stakeholder capability.

6. ***The rules, procedures, and conditionalities for financing under various international mechanisms are in a continuous process of evolving,*** such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and UN-REDD.

   The GCF, and many other funding organizations, consider for financing only those proposals that are in line with the country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, and this is an important reason why financing agencies are not approving many project proposals. There is a need to increase interaction between FLR practitioners, National Designated Authorities (NDAs), and Focal Points under these international agreements and mechanisms to enhance understanding of these evolving rules and procedures. This should be addressed immediately by institutionalizing regular interactions between them as a matter of government policy.

7. ***To increase the chances of success in obtaining co-financing for FLR projects, it is important to approach appropriate financing sources.***

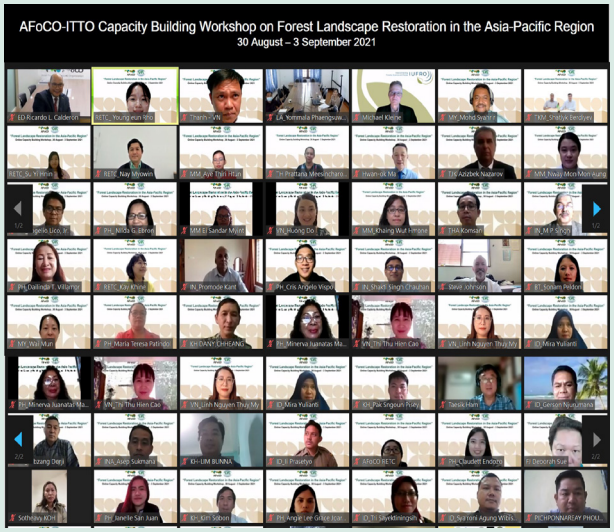
   Potential funding sources are identified as follows:
   - Activities that store carbon and increase resilience: GCF, Adaptation Fund;
   - Activities that are part of government mandate: Public domestic finance;
   - Activities that are transformative: bilateral, multilateral organizations like GCF;
   - Activities that generate income: private finance;
   - Activities that need short-term finance: international public finance; and,
   - Activities that need long-term financing: PES, carbon markets, private finance.

8. ***To increase the chances of success, FLR implementing agencies should prepare high-quality FLR project proposals.***

   To this end, they should consider making use of the funding window of the GCF's Project Preparation Facility, which offers grants of USD 1 million per country per year for the development of proposals.

9. ***Methodologies are now available to identify priority landscapes for restoration and estimate the costs and benefits of different restoration strategies and opportunities,*** such as the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM).

   It is also possible to identify the extent and depth of degradation over vast areas of forests in the tropics using Google Earth Engine — an open-source platform capable of assessing land-cover changes at scale requiring minimal skills, with the source data being free of charge.



*Participants with **Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon**, Executive Director of AFoCO Secretariat, **Mr. Steven Johnson**, Officer-in-Charge of ITTO Secretariat, **Dr. Michael Klein**, Deputy Executive Director of IUFRO, **Mr. Lobzang Dorji**, Director General of Department of Forest and Park Services of Bhutan, **Mr. Chheang Dany**, Deputy Director-General of Forestry Administration of Cambodia, **Mr. Saidzoda Madibron Ikrom**, Head of the Forestry Agency Under the Government of Tajikistan, **Mr. Nury Atamyradov**, Head of National Institute of Deserts, Flora and Fauna under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment Protection of Turkmenistan, **Dr. Ma Hwan-ok**, Project Manager of ITTO, and **Dr. Promode Kant**, Director, Institute of Green Economy, India.*

THE WAY FORWARD

There was tremendous response to this workshop, generating intense discussions throughout the five days of its duration. There was a consensus among the participants, including those from the Central Asian region, that such workshops need to be organized at regular intervals to reach out to and benefit more FLR policymakers and practitioners in these countries. In order to hasten the implementation of FLR to achieve the global targets in time, it would perhaps be best for the ITTO and AFoCO to hold at least four such workshops annually, which should also cover the Central Asian region along with the Asia-Pacific region.Only a limited number of FLR project proposals from the region so far have been successful in accessing finance from multilateral and bilateral international agencies and the private sector. The participants felt the need for capacity building of a larger number of FLR practitioners in the region in preparing good proposals to finance FLR projects.

The participants showed deep interest in wanting to learn from successful FLR efforts in the region. The preparation of a number of case studies of successful FLR interventions from across the region would help policymakers and implementers benefit from practical strategies that were developed in specific circumstances.

Table 1. Forest Losses and Gains in 15 Asia-Pacific Countries

Country	Forest Area[2] (1000 ha)	Forest (% of land area)	Total land area[2] (1000 ha)	Population[3] (Million, 2000)	Annual Forest Change[1,2] (1000 ha/yr) 1990-2020	Annual Forest Change[1,2] (1000 ha/yr) 2015-2020
Bhutan	2,725	71.48	3,812	0.77	7.27 (0.29%)	2.00 (0.07%)
Cambodia	8,068	45.71	17,652	16.72	-97.90 (-0.89%)	-155.80 (-1.76%)
Fiji	1,140	62.39	1,827	0.89	6.67 (0.71%)	6.60 (0.60%)
India	72,160	24.27	297,319	1380	274.07 (0.43%)	266.40 (0.38%)
Indonesia	92,133	49.07	187,752	273.52	-880.40 (-0.74%)	-579.0 (0.61%)
Kazakhstan	3,455	1.28	269,970	18.78	9.77 (0.31%)	29.20 (0.88%)
Lao PDR	16,596	71.91	23,080	7.28	-41.57 (-0.23%)	-34.40 (-0.21%)
Malaysia	19,114	58.65	32,855	32.37	-50.17 (-0.24%)	-70.0 (-0.36%)
Myanmar	28,544	43.71	65,308	54.41	-355.83 (-0.91%)	-289.60 (-0.97%)
Philippines	7,189	24.11	29,817	109.58	-19.67 (-0.25%)	35.00 (0.50%)
Tajikistan	424	3.05	13,879	9.54	0.53 (0.13%)	0.40 (0.09%)
Turkmenistan	4,127	8.78	46,993	6.03	0.00 (0.00%)	0.00 (0.00%)
Thailand	19,873	38.9	51,089	69.8	17.07 (0.09%)	-37.60 (-0.19%)
Timor-Leste	921	61.94	1,487	1.32	-1.40 (-0.15%)	-1.40 (-0.15%)
Viet Nam	14,643	47.22	31,007	97.34	175.57 (1.87%)	116.20 (0.83%)

Source: [1] *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020. Main Report. FAO, Rome. https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9825en*

[2] *FAO. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020. Country Report. https://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/fra-2020/country-reports/en/*

[3] *UN Data-https://data.un.org/en/index.html, Accessed October 2020.*

Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

AFoCO is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization that is committed to strengthening forest cooperation and taking concrete actions to promote sustainable forest management and address the impacts of climate change.

www.afocosec.org

International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

ITTO is an intergovernmental organization promoting the sustainable management and conservation of tropical forests and the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests.

www.itto.int