



Proceedings of the AFoCO

ANNUAL TECHNICAL WORKSHOP 2022

FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW

29 April 2022, Seoul, Republic of Korea

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Mr. Ricardo Calderon, Executive Director of AFoCO at the Opening Session of the 2022 ATW, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Introduction

Pursuant to Section 10.3 of the AFoCO Project Manual, the AFoCO Secretariat has been organizing the Annual Technical Workshop (ATW) for Project Management and Performance Review since 2020. The workshop's purpose is to revisit the current year's achievements, and progress while reflecting and sharing the overall experience of projects including the lessons learned from successful cases and practices, and project development ideas among the Implementing Agencies (IAs). The 3rd session of the Annual Technical Workshop was held in person on 29 April 2022, as part of the pre-congress events preludeing the 15th World Forestry Congress that was held from 2 to 6 of May in Seoul, Republic of Korea. The workshop comprised the 2021 performance review of completed and ongoing projects, and included interactive discussions to help build networks and promote exchanges among the participants.

Session I. Project Implementation and Management Concerns

The first session of the workshop comprised of three main topics — (a) project evaluation outcomes of 2 completed regional projects (AFoCO/004/2014 and AFoCO/011/2016), where the Development and Evaluation Team took the lead in presenting the evaluation results of the projects mentioned above; (b) post-project implementation status vis-a-vis findings and recommendations from project evaluation, where regional project managers of the two completed projects gave a brief presentation on the post-project status; and (c) individual project performance review of 14 ongoing projects by each project manager, where lessons learned, noticeable success factors and prospects of sustainability were covered.

The session concluded with a panel-led discussion wherein 4 panelists from forestry-related universities and institutions had fruitful discussions on project issues, concerns, lessons learned, and future recommendations.

Session II. Project Development Concerns

The second session of the workshop was led by the Development and Evaluation team, who presented several important milestones in the development of AFoCO projects. The team introduced a program approach to project development and ways to strengthen AFoCO's country presence among Party countries. Finally, a special session on Korean geospatial technologies using drones and related applications in project monitoring and management was presented by the Forest Aviation Headquarters of the Korea Forest Service.



Discussions among participants during Session II. Project Development Concerns of the 2022 ATW held in Seoul, Republic of Korea

Summary, Conclusion and Way Forward

The presentations and discussions in the 2022 ATW revolved around the wealth of lessons and experiences from a total of 16 projects, comprising 2 completed projects and 14 ongoing projects (4 projects in their first/second year of implementation, 8 projects that have been implemented for more than two years, and 2 projects which are expected to be complete by the year 2022).

On-going	Terminating
AFoCO/005/2014	
AFoCO/006/2014	AFoCO/010/2016
AFoCO/008/2014	AFoCO/012/2019
AFoCO/013/2020	
AFoCO/014/2020	
AFoCO/015/2020	
AFoCO/016/2021	Completed
AFoCO/017/2020	
AFoCO/018/2020	AFoCO/004/2014
AFoCO/023/2021	AFoCO/011/2016
AFoCO/024/2021	
AFoCO/025/2021	

*Detailed project information can be found in the official AFoCO website (www.afocosec.org)

Project Performance

A quantitative analysis of project performances through the Project Implementation Plan (PIP) matrix shows that as of 2021, the overall financial accomplishment is relatively low as compared with its physical accomplishment (Figure 1). Likewise, comparative individual project performance (financial versus physical) ranges from 0.93 to 44.95 as in the case of AFoCO/024/2021 and AFoCO/017/2020 (excluding AFoCO/014/2020 and AFoCO/015/2020). In general, both the physical and financial performances of projects were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at the level of the implementing countries, which prompted the project IAs to implement adaptive measures and/or comply with domestic and international travel restrictions.



Project Success Factors

The attainment of project targets and outputs was reported by the IAs by way of sharing project specific arrangements and strategies across each stages of the project management cycle (project development, inception, implementation, monitoring and closure).

I. Stakeholders' Consultation and Community-based Approach

Stakeholders' involvement in the project development, planning, and implementation stages promotes an inclusive understanding of project objectives, thereby leading to greater commitment, trust, and active participation in project activities. In most projects, stakeholder consultation meetings served as regular platforms for informing project implementation status. In certain projects, they have promoted and facilitated the process of securing Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). Moreover, there was a general consensus that the involvement of communities and stakeholders in project implementation resulted in a higher sense of ownership of the project and its outputs.

II. Regional Cooperation and Internal Capacity Building

For both individual and regional (or multi-country) projects, cross-country and regional workshops facilitated exchange and transfer of knowledge between and among implementing countries resulting in the adoption and scaling of specific technologies in countries with similar bio-physical and socio-economic situations as well as strengthened regional level cooperation on transboundary issues and commitments. Internal to the project, sustained coaching and mentoring of front-line implementors and stakeholders were found to be effective especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



AFoCO/012/2019, Cambodia

Internal workshops and trainings were held regularly for direct communication with stakeholders and effective outreach and flexibility

III. Project Baselineing and Data Base

The 2 completed projects highlighted the importance of a project baseline to facilitate the measurement of project outputs and outcomes. Hence, the ATW recognized the value of the project logical framework and PIP matrix as critical tools for measuring project performance and facilitating project management decisions. Similarly, establishing a project database at the community level can be said to be challenging but helps facilitate monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of accomplishments and promote informed decision-making.



AFoCO/004/2014, Philippines
Mapping exercise of Community-Based Forest Management area with members of local communities



AFoCO/013/2020, Viet Nam

Regular Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meetings provide guidance and advice on project progress and implementation

IV. Other Factors

A number of IAs expressed their appreciation for the flexibility given in AFoCO project management processes, which have contributed to the practical and timely resolution of issues and concerns. On one hand, some IAs highlighted that the development of detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) to meet specific project outsourcing requirements facilitated the competitive selection and evaluation of service contracts and providers.

Project Outcomes and Milestones

The ATW provided a venue for individual IAs to elaborate on how a project's outputs contributed to policy and institutional reforms, livelihood improvement, as well technology and capacity-building enhancements.

Most of the projects, including those that are still ongoing, reported the observable translation of project outputs and interventions into policies, guidelines, and knowledge products.

Since the majority of the projects are being implemented by the IAs, they are mainstreamed within the respective forest departments, and institutional and organizational capacity-building and knowledge sharing are being promoted actively. In the process, project outputs have made modest contributions to the achievement of forest-related national, regional, and international commitments and targets. The sharing of project outputs at the national and regional levels (especially at the ASEAN level) will likely promote technology transfer and capacity-building. Through the reports of the IAs, there was a reconfirmation that most, if not all, projects are contributing to local livelihood improvement with some co-benefits in addressing climate change adaptation challenges.



A glimpse of the panel discussion session at the 2022 ATW

Lessons Learned

At the operational and project administration levels, lessons learned from projects have been categorized in terms of facilitating factors and project challenges. The crucial period of project operation was facilitated by technological advancements, which were particularly useful when organizing online meetings, on-site monitoring, and coaching sessions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the IAs expressed the view that such technologies were not only beneficial in adapting to the pandemic, they also offered opportunities to fully explore the utilization of online platforms, applications, and accompanying equipment which are now considered efficient alternatives to actual site visits. Moreover, early engagement of project stakeholders coupled with regular information and knowledge exchange was regarded as a vital factor that ensured the timely and effective accomplishment of project activities. Similarly, project administration and management were facilitated through the implementation of arrangements and mechanisms such as the Project Steering Committee (PSC), Logical Framework (LogFrame), and Project Implementation Plan (PIP) Matrix, in terms of decision-making and results-based project monitoring, respectively. A couple of projects (AFoCO/017/2020 and AFoCO/025/2021) mentioned their experiential learning in using the Project Manual which properly acquainted them with all the project procedures and requirements. Some IAs acknowledge that the strong support and guidance of the Secretariat in project implementation led to systematic and efficient financial management, including the utilization of savings and implementation of COVID-responsive activities.

On the other hand, a number of challenges at the operational level severely affected project implementation. These include disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of detailed overseas and domestic procurement guidelines, and delays in project site selection and assessment. To address these operational concerns, it was recommended that sustained review and enhancements be made to the Project Manual and related guidelines alongside capacity-building of Secretariat staff. Additionally, the following incidents have negatively affected project management and administration — designation of part-time project managers, resignation of trained project staff, limited organizational capacities in operationalizing the Project Management Unit (PMU), institutional/bureaucratic reforms and limitations in inter-office coordination.

Project Sustainability

While most of the feedback came from the 2 completed projects, others provided confirmatory statements on the importance of exit strategies, institutional reforms and policy enhancements associated with project sustainability. Mechanisms to implement exit strategies include the continuous provision of technical assistance, identification and mentoring of second-line leaders, sustained Information and Education Campaign (IEC), and stakeholder engagements. Advance preparation for the maintenance of project equipment, facilities, and demonstration plots were also highlighted as vital in ensuring the utility and gains of the project outcomes. Similarly, project outputs were found to be valuable in the implementation of post-project institutional reforms such as the streamlining of government procedures and enhancing project intervention and strategies through mainstreaming of project activities during project implementation, provision of incentive mechanisms to project management team and utilization of project lessons and knowledge products.



(Top) AFoCO/016/2021, Philippines
Situational and gap analysis workshop with key stakeholders

(Bottom) AFoCO/015/2020, Myanmar
Regular stakeholder consultations on project implementation and management



Discussions at the 2022 ATW

The workshop provided an opportunity for informal discussions among Member Parties on project implementation and management, a resumption of in-person gatherings since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.





Program Approach to Project Development



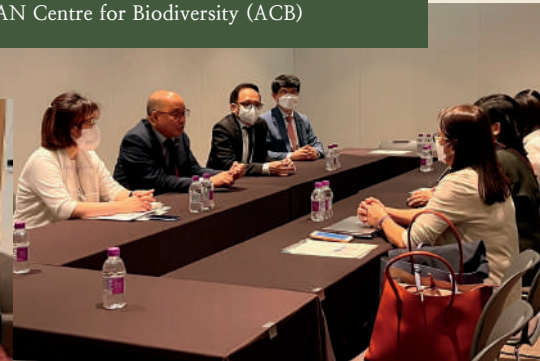
The ATW also served as a venue to have substantial discourse on the inclination project development pathway for AFoCO projects from CY 2022 and onwards. The discussion was premised on the current scale (number and fund requirements) and absorptive capacities of fund inflows from the regular voluntary budget contributions for project development. As the trend of project funds remains at the same level, the workshop underscored an urgent proposition for AFoCO projects to move forward from a project approach to a program approach. Primarily, setting an annual theme vis-a-vis AFoCO Priority Areas was suggested from which regional/sub-regional and/or multi-country projects will be developed aside from in-country proposals. Beyond the regular funding of AFoCO projects, continuous fundraising and fund mobilization will be undertaken and sustained through partnership, fund/resource leveraging, and the active submission of proposals based on demand-driven calls from diverse donors. This approach is envisioned to create a relative increase in project scale and therefore adds up to the credentials of AFoCO in managing larger projects. Towards their end, AFoCO projects will promote greater synergies and work towards complementing purpose and activities with the needs of current and prospective partners, eventually enhancing positive impacts and increasing efficiency.

Enhanced Visibility of AFoCO

As the number and scope of AFoCO programs and projects are envisioned to grow in the coming years, topics on strengthening project performance and country presence of AFoCO at the sub-region and country levels were tackled at the workshop. This is in view of the need to enhance the efficiency in the conduct of Project M&E, capacitating the Secretariat in handling project management as well as in enhancing the credentials of AFoCO to access more resources and harness partnerships. A phased approach in the establishment of country and/or sub-regional offices has been discussed in consideration of the incidental financial and related requirements.



(Left) AFoCO Regional Education and Training Center (RETC) in Myanmar
(Middle) Bilateral Meeting with UK Minister of State (Minister for the Pacific and the International Environment)
(Right) Bilateral Meeting with ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)





AFoCO/008/2014, Lao PDR
Forest fire watch tower in Paksong,
Champasack Province

Conclusion and Way Forward

In summary, the workshop objectives were appropriately met as they reflect on the performance of AFoCO projects, including discussions on how each project utilizes its outcomes, success factors, and lessons learned. There was a collective affirmation of the continuous learning experience for projects to optimize rather than be distracted by the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The workshop participants also arrived at a general consensus on sustaining the utilization of online platforms in project implementation and development.

At the core of project management, it was apparent that building the capacities of project implementers and Secretariat staff is crucial. For this, suggestions were made for the Secretariat to conduct a Project Management training at the regional level. Towards the same disposition, project staff development programs should be sustained at the level of the IA, implementing country and sub-region, while supplementary technical training (GIS, database management, etc.) may be conducted for project-specific purposes. Part of the capacity enhancement is the need to engage full-time regional project managers which are already being started with the 2 new multi-country AFoCO projects. Relative to the strengthening of AFoCO's visibility, the crucial part is the transition period (2023–24) where the establishment of project offices will allow AFoCO to play a bigger role in coordination within the implementing country.

To further improve project management, ensuring a collective understanding of the importance of project site validation and/or feasibility studies during the project inception stage is crucial. In the same way, project sustainability remains a core aspect of project development, implementation, and evaluation. Henceforth, it is relevant to the ATW not only during mid-term and post-project evaluation, but throughout the entire project period, wherein suitable templates should be developed as the basis of communication, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Lastly, the program approach is seen to offer ample basis for the ensuing project development schedule.

OUR SPEAKERS



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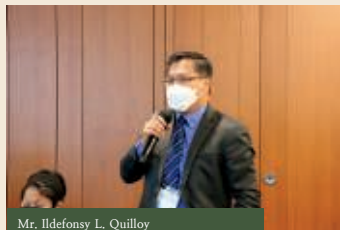
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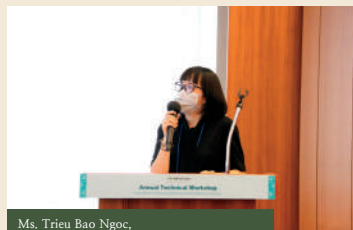
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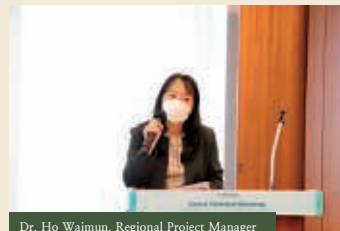
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Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

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.

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