

Capacity-building in Forest and Forestry for the Central Asian Region

BACKGROUND

Since 2018, the Regional Education and Training Center (RETC) of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) has been providing various training programs and capacity-building activities in forestry with an emphasis on Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). The courses covered a wide range of topics in the forest and forestry sector, including public-private partnerships, forest crimes, project development and management, disaster management and impacts of climate change, biodiversity, forest landscape restoration, and forest-related conflicts to advance forest and landscape restoration.

From the current geographical coverage of AFoCO, it is apparent that the ecosystems and environmental characteristics of countries in the Central Asian region differ from those in other regions of Asia. This uniqueness in the region was in fact highlighted at the “International Virtual Workshop on Integrated Forest Insect-Pest Management and Forest Restoration,” which was co-organized in April 2021 by AFoCO and the Ministry of Tourism of Mongolia. At the Asia Forest Forum organized by AFoCO prelude XV World Forestry Congress on 30 April 2022, heads of national research institutes in Central Asian countries proposed the development of a cooperation network through the AFoCO platform emphasizing the importance of a regional approach.

These developments led to concerted efforts towards capacity-building actions that address critical forest-related issues through the enhancement of relevant skills and knowledge on forest management in the region. With the Kyrgyz Republic joining as a member Party in 2022, AFoCO now has adequate motivations to develop a long-term action plan relevant to Central Asia along with prospective member countries to pursue effective capacity-building cooperation in the region.

A benchmarking effort followed when AFoCO RETC organized the “Consultative Workshop on Capacity Building for the Central Asian Region” from 20 to 21 October 2022, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with four AFoCO member Parties – Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia – and two prospective member countries – Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The workshop facilitated the identification of needs and specific topics for capacity building at the country and regional levels for Central Asia's forest and forestry sector. Situational analyses on capacity-building and potential training topics for the Central Asian region were conducted, and a pool of resource persons and facilities were identified for the development of a collective action plan for capacity-building in the Central Asian region.



AFoCO project on the investigation of the resistance of Black Saxaul (*Haloxylon aphyllum*) forms to gall-forming insects ©AFoCO

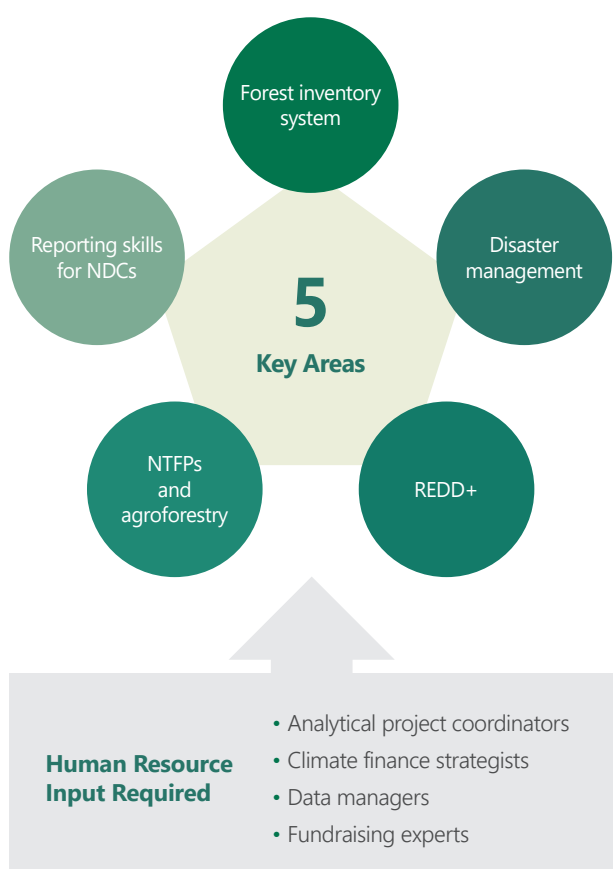
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

This policy brief highlights the key messages from workshop discussions on the development of capacity-building action plans in the Central Asian region.

1. Challenges and needs

One of the main challenges faced by the countries' forestry sector in capacity-building is a lack of high-level recognition and political will to invest in necessary equipment and infrastructure to support capacity-building processes. The workshop was able to realize that human resource development in the sector is deemed critical and important to unlock possibilities to facilitate the comprehensive and sustainable investment of governments in capacity building. The situational analysis identified five key areas for capacity building and expertise needed in the region (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Key areas and human resources needed for regional capacity-building in the forest and forestry sector, identified through situational analysis



2. Thematic areas for capacity-building over the next ten years

The workshop identified the following topics to be addressed through capacity building in the next 10 years:

- Advanced training in the use of GIS technologies
- Automation in forest inventory
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Eco-tourism and use of ecosystem services
- Forest fire management
- Forest harvesting techniques and cable yarding
- Forest pest and disease management
- Nursery management and planting methodologies
- Statistical data analysis

The participating countries also proposed areas for prospective sub-regional collaboration:

- Forest fire management in the borderline areas between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan
- Improving the seed supply system of pine trees in Bhutan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan
- Saxaul plantation and management in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia
- Wildlife conservation and forest protection in Bhutan and Kazakhstan.

3. Available training facilities

During the consultation workshop, each country presented its available training facilities (Table 1) and a list of experts for regional capacity-building efforts. Detailed information can be found in the workshop report.

Table 1. List of potential training facilities

Country	Facility
Bhutan	• Ugyen Wangchuk Institute of Conservation and Environment Research (UWICER)
Kazakhstan	• Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Forestry and Agroforestry (A. Bukeikhan)
Kyrgyzstan	• Forest service under the Ministry of Agriculture
Mongolia	• Environment Training and Research Center • Forest Genetic Resources Center
Uzbekistan	• The Forestry Scientific Research Institute under The State Committee on Forestry



Mr. Lobzang Dorji and Ms. Kinley Dem from Department of Forests and Park Services of Bhutan (from left)



Mr. Khasanov Zafarjon and Mr. Nazirzoda Abduqodir from Forestry Agency of Tajikistan (from left)



Mr. Kutpanbayev Yerlan, Ms. Zhasulanova Ainur, and Ms. Kerimzhanova Dana from Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of Kazakhstan (from left)



Ms. Ibadullaeva Oygul Radjabbaevna and Mr. Charangaev Furkat from State Committee of Uzbekistan for Forestry (from left)



Mr. Yrsaliev Baktybek and Mr. Toktonazarov Ernist from Forest Service of Kyrgyzstan (from left)



Mr. Ulambayar Ganbat and Mr. Altagadas Janchivdorg (not in photo) from Forest Agency of Mongolia



Group photo with the workshop participants

THE WAY FORWARD

For Central Asia, establishing a network of capacitated human resources and institutions at national and sub-regional levels is necessary in order to enhance and sustain exchange best practices in areas of mutual priority. Throughout the sessions, the representatives of the countries expressed their expectations of the catalyzing role that AFoCO in building capacities of the region. In particular, they stressed the importance of establishing a regional platform, which is capable of sharing various information in the forest and forestry sector.

Among the key capacity-building areas identified, priority was given to standardized forest inventory systems, for which the proposed platform may serve as a hub to develop regional templates, and therefore national forest inventory systems will also be improved. The accumulated information and data are expected to finally strengthen the research and development (R&D) activities of the region as well as to help other stakeholders identify opportunities to enhance the infrastructure of the sector. Finally, countries in the region are expecting the AFoCO to establish and develop regional-level training programs in order to reach mutual empowerment. As part of its mandate to advance good forest governance via capacity building in Asia, AFoCO will continue to pursue capacity-building initiatives for the Central Asian region in 2023 and beyond.

BOX 1. Consultation Process

The AFoCO RETC conducted a five-step capacity building consultation with guiding questions and survey questionnaires anchored on the AFoCO Capacity Building Roadmap 2030 (working document).

Step 1. Identification of needs and expectations

- (1) What is the structure of government in the forestry and forestry sector? How are capacity-building activities carried out in the forestry and forestry sector?
- (2) What are the needs for Forestry related capacity building in your country?
- (3) What roles do you expect from the AFoCO for Forestry related capacity building in your country?

Step 2. Identification of topics for training and prioritization in the forest and forestry sector

- (1) What are the top priority areas in your country?
- (2) What are the urgent topics for training in your country?
- (3) Which types of training programs does your country prefer?
- (4) In which priority areas of your country's forestry sector do you require more domestic experts?

Step 3. Identification of available facilities

- (1) Does your country have a permanent training center? Describe the conditions of key training facilities.
- (2) What kind of facilities does your country need for forestry-related capacity-building?
- (3) Do you have a list of potential resource persons? Please introduce/recommend organizations/universities/agencies in your country that have strong expertise in the forestry sector.

Step 4. Identification of needs and expectations at the regional level

- (1) What roles do you expect from the AFoCO for forestry-related capacity-building in the Central Asian region?
- (2) What would be our 2030 target for forestry capacity-building in the Central Asian region?

Step 5. Potential Roles of the ad-hoc Working Group

- (1) What roles would the ad-hoc working group take on with regards to capacity-building in the Central Asian region?
- (2) What is the working group's plan for 2023?



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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