

Tenth Session of the Assembly
17-18 April 2024, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

Summary Record of the Tenth Session of the Assembly

Introduction

1. The Tenth Session of the Assembly of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic on 17-18 April 2024. The Assembly was attended by Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea (ROK), Thailand, Timor-Leste (virtually), and Viet Nam as Parties, and the Secretariat. The Representative of Bhutan virtually participated in the opening session of the Assembly. Parties are collectively referred to as the Member Countries of AFoCO.

Item 1. Opening of the Session by the President of the Assembly

2. The Session was in quorum with twelve Parties present physically and one Party present virtually in accordance with Rule 10.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

3. In accordance with Rule 7.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, the President presided over the session of the Assembly. The incumbent President is Ms. Noralinda Ibrahim of Brunei Darussalam and the Vice President is Mr. Alriegh J. Adorable of the Philippines.

4. The President, in her opening remarks, expressed gratitude to the host country and the Secretariat for their efforts in organizing the event. The progress and achievements of AFoCO since the last assembly were highlighted, emphasizing sustainable forest management and conservation efforts in the Asian region. The President highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts, regional cooperation, and adherence to AFoCO's guiding principles. Recognition was also extended to Dr. Chongho Park's leadership as the Executive Director. The President highlighted the adoption of the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030), AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034), carbon initiative in efforts for engagement with the private sector in Korea and other countries, and the strengthening of the internal foundation of the Secretariat. The President, in closing, hoped for productive discussions and collaborations to advance AFoCO's mission. The President officially opened the Tenth Session of the Assembly and appointed Dr. Yeongjoo Lee of the Secretariat as the rapporteur for the session.

5. Mr. Mambetov Azamat Muratovich, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyz Republic, extended a warm welcome to all delegates, highlighting the significance of hosting the Assembly. He emphasized Kyrgyz Republic's efforts in the forest sector and wished delegates an enjoyable experience in Kyrgyzstan.

The Deputy Minister emphasized that Kyrgyzstan attaches great importance to the restoration of forests and degraded landscapes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. He briefly gave information about the valuable forests of Kyrgyzstan, which play an environmental role, in particular they are of great importance to water conservation. He noted the amendments and additions to the Forest Code of Kyrgyzstan in order to achieve the goals of preserving forest ecosystems, as well as the annual national campaign “Zashyl Muras”, within the framework of which more than 6 million seedlings are planted throughout the country. He thanked AFoCO for supporting the project for the construction of a seed storage facility in Kyrgyzstan and expressed hope for successful cooperation on the agroforestry project together with AFoCO and Rabobank.

6. The Executive Director, Dr. Chongho Park, extended appreciation to the President and Representatives. He is dedicated to taking the tasks that were entrusted to him by the Assembly, underlining its importance in advancing the Strategic Plan 2024-2030 and AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034). The Executive Director thanked all Member Countries for their commitment and sought continued support in implementing projects for positive change.

7. The Assembly, recognizing the Kyrgyz Republic’s dedication to forestry development, extended gratitude to the Kyrgyz Republic for hosting the Assembly and warm welcome. The Assembly also extended appreciation to the President and the Vice President.

8. The Republic of Korea - extended gratitude to the Kyrgyz Republic for hosting the Assembly and recognized their dedication to forestry development. She commended the Secretariat’s efforts under Mr. Chongho Park’s leadership, particularly in fostering collaboration with the private sector for funding. She highlighted the importance of ongoing private partnerships for AFoCO’s development and hoped for a productive Tenth Session of the Assembly under the guidance of the President and Vice President.

9. Bhutan - expressed regret for Bhutan’s physical absence at the meeting but assured attendees of their unwavering support. He highlighted Bhutan’s current hosting of the Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscape Conference, welcoming 166 international participants. Despite Bhutan’s absence, he looked forward to future opportunities for in-person engagement. He concluded by extending best wishes for productive discussions and expressing gratitude for the invitation.

10. Cambodia - extended his address by extending greetings to everyone and acknowledging the familiar faces present, along with the pleasant ambiance of the city. Reflecting on his first impression in the Kyrgyz Republic, he commented on the lush greenery, which starkly contrasted with the dry-season conditions in his home country. He wished for a successful deliberation during the meeting, hoping for a memorable and fruitful experience and good memory to all participants.

11. Indonesia - expressed anticipation for a smooth and productive Tenth Assembly meeting in the beautiful city of Bishkek, highlighting the importance of meaningful goals and outcomes. Indonesia extended sincere wishes of blessings to all present.

12. Myanmar - expressed appreciation for the opportunity to attend the Assembly for the first time and conveyed gratitude for the cooperation and friendship among attendees. Myanmar also acknowledged AFoCO’s contribution to Myanmar’s conservation and development efforts.

13. Thailand - extended congratulations to the Kyrgyz Republic for hosting the Assembly and expressed gratitude to the AFoCO Secretariat for their support and organizational efforts. Thailand reaffirmed its steadfast support for AFoCO and expressed keen interest in enhancing collaboration with its members.

14. Rabobank - Mr. Harm Haverkort expressed pleasure at attending the Special Session of the Assembly. He looked forward to the session, particularly celebrating successes of a public-private partnership initiated with AFoCO Member Countries and Rabobank. He highlighted the collaboration as a significant example of aligning public and private interests. He also saw an opportunity for collaboration to combat climate change and promote sustainable development, especially in linking rural communities to agricultural transformation through reforestation. He concluded his remarks by expressing his wishes for a fruitful session.

Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda

15. The Assembly discussed and adopted the agenda as contained in document **A-24-10-1**. The Assembly noted that Indonesia requested in advance to include an Agenda item on Indonesia's Initiative on World Mangrove Center.

Item 3. Proposal on the plan for development of human resources management and development guidelines under the Staff Regulations

16. The Secretariat proposed the outline and schedule to develop detailed guidelines on human resources management and development guidelines of the Secretariat. **A-24-10-2**.

17. Plans include assessing the current management system, identifying human resources needs, and reviewing components like guiding principles, organizational structure, and skill analysis. The proposed guidelines are expected to improve efficiency, talent management, and in-house capacity, with implementation targeted for 2024.

18. The President emphasized the need for improved internal systems and specific guidelines due to the organization's evolving activities. Fundamental aspects such as program execution, working conditions, communication, staff requirements, and financial regulations were highlighted.

19. Republic of Korea - expressed the pivotal role of staff competence in organizational development and urged staff to align with organizational goals. It was further proposed to allocate time for staff to engage in capacity-building programs to enhance practical capabilities. The Republic of Korea proposed to seek input from external experts to ensure a comprehensive approach in crafting such guidelines.

20. Indonesia - emphasized the significance of human resources in organizations and expressed support for the Secretariat in providing guidelines for human resources management and development. Highlighting the importance of competencies and work experience not only in the forestry sector but also in the related sector in improving the recruitment system, it was suggested that experience with AFoCO projects or programs be considered in recruitment criteria. Indonesia

further emphasized capacity building as a strategic action to support the Secretariat's duties.

21. The Assembly took note of the information, and the Secretariat was requested to proceed with the development of relevant guidelines.

Item 4. Proposal on the plan for the Amendment of the AFoCO Project Manual

22. The Secretariat presented procedures and schedules for the amendment of the AFoCO Project Manual. **A-24-10-3.**

23. The Secretariat presented the background, procedures, and schedule for amending the project manual. He explained that the AFoCO project manual, approved in 2018, is being amended to address challenges and accommodate diverse donor requirements, particularly for private sector investment in the AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034). Amendments are scheduled for internal review in May 2024 and finalization tentatively set for September 2024.

24. Cambodia - supported the Secretariat's proposal to review and amend the guidelines, acknowledging the need to update outdated parts. After he heard ODA's implementation and application raised by the Republic of Korea, he tasked the Secretariat to share those points.

25. Republic of Korea - emphasized the need to revise AFoCO's project manual due to changing donor landscapes and diversified financial sources. The Representative of the Republic of Korea explained Korea's annual evaluation process for ODA projects, emphasizing transparency and public understanding. The Korea Forest Service (KFS) evaluates projects based on criteria like alignment with international goals, resource efficiency, and impact on beneficiary countries. Korea stressed KFS's commitment to sustainable outcomes in the post-project completion and requested the Secretariat to plan post-evaluations of the completed projects.

26. Viet Nam - acknowledged AFoCO's diversification and mobilization of funding from various international donors. Viet Nam expressed support for amending the AFoCO project manual to enhance procedures and methodologies for project development and management.

27. Myanmar - expressed support for amending the project manual, specifically highlighting the five sections targeted for revision. There is a desire to clarify the enforcement timeline, particularly concerning the financial audit procedure. Given the ongoing implementation of projects, it is suggested to enforce the updated manual starting from the 2025-2026 period.

28. Mongolia - affirmed its support of the amendment to the project manual, believing it will expand the criteria for financial support from donor organizations. Mongolia intends to provide input during the circulation of the draft.

29. Indonesia - wished to offer suggestions regarding the proposed amendment of the manual. In section two, concerning project management flow, Indonesia recommended clarifying the program support fee as distinct from the total budget. Additionally, in section 15 concerning project closure, Indonesia suggested that the implementing agency should prepare and circulate a draft completion report 60 days before the Final Coordination and Evaluation Meeting.

30. The Secretariat aimed to address challenges in implementing programs funded by the private sector, proposing regulations in the project manual. To effectively handle private sector projects, including those funded by international entities, allocation of budgetary resources for staff support and potential staff increases are suggested. Recognizing the dynamic nature of project management, a flexible approach to amendments is proposed. Member Countries are requested to review the draft manual based on respective unique circumstances and provide detailed feedback. This collaborative effort ensures that the Manual meets operational needs, facilitating private sector engagement.

31. Following the discussion, the Assembly noted the information, and the Secretariat was requested to proceed with further amendment of the Project Manual.

Item 5. Promotion and enhancement of partnership

Item 5.1 Updates on promotion of private sector engagement (for Decision)

32. In accordance with the Work Plan of the Secretariat in 2024, the "Friends of Asia and Asian Forests (FAAF, formerly the 'AFoCO Leaders Forum')" Forum was launched on 6 February 2024 as part of promoting and enhancing private sector engagement. FAAF was initially formed among Korean companies and business leaders to support the work of AFoCO. The next Forum will be organized tentatively in September 2024, with plans to invite global business leaders and Member Countries' ministers. **A-24-10-4**

33. The President commended the progress and invited comments, support, and inputs, noting that this agenda item required a decision regarding the authorization of funds from the Working Capital Reserve.

34. Cambodia - proposed two options for the upcoming 2nd FAAF meeting: holding it back-to-back with the Assembly to save time and costs, or separating the meetings although it might limit participation.

35. Republic of Korea - emphasized the crucial need for collaboration between government policies and private sector engagement in addressing climate challenges. The Republic of Korea addressed the successful inauguration of the FAAF Forum, crediting the Executive Director's leadership and network within the private sector. Further noted that the Minister of Korea Forest Service emphasized the importance of forestry sector cooperation in addressing climate and biodiversity issues, urging private sector involvement in FAAF. Anticipation is expressed for the 2nd FAAF Forum to enhance cooperation, with support for utilizing the Working Capital Reserve for its facilitation.

36. Indonesia - emphasized the importance of AFoCO and the private sector complying with the rules and policies of each Member Country, considering that each country has its own regulations regarding the information access and external experts' field visits for data collection.

37. The Secretariat provided experience with Rabobank, stating that AFoCO respects Member Countries' regulations and security concerns, ensuring projects align with domestic regulations. This philosophy guides project selection and ensures alignment with private sector funding principles. The Secretariat further stressed the importance of action-oriented management, suggesting a focus on real case studies and partnerships. The Secretariat requested the Member Countries to consider ministerial-level attendance to the 2nd FAAF Forum and present their forest carbon policies.

38. Following discussions, the Assembly decided to task the Secretariat with reporting and updating the achievement of the FAAF Initiative in alignment with the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and to authorize the use of funds from the Working Capital Reserve.

39. The Assembly adopted the decision on the reallocation of the Working Capital Reserve for promotion and engagement to the private sector, amount of USD 100,000, as in **Decision 55-X-24S**.

Item 5.2 Updates on engagement with UN and UN Conventions

40. AFoCO is promoting partnerships and engagement in global processes, in order to increase organizational visibility and presence in the international community. The Secretariat is mutually discussing opportunities with UNFF for joint activities in UNFCCC COP **A-24-10-5**.

41. Thailand - supported the idea of integrating AFoCO activities into global platforms, viewing it as an excellent opportunity for both AFoCO and its Member Countries to share information. Thailand highlighted the abundance of side events organized by Member Countries at upcoming UNFF and COP meetings and encouraged countries to invite AFoCO and its Members to share experiences as panelists during these events.

42. Indonesia - proposed that the Secretariat share best practices and lessons learned from various programs of Member Countries at the Forest Pavilion and UNFCCC COP29. Additionally, Indonesia announced its hosting of the Pavilion at UNFCCC COP29 and invited participation.

43. Republic of Korea - commended AFoCO's collaboration with UNFF and UNFCCC since achieving Observer status and anticipated its participation in the Forest Pavilion at UNFCCC COP29. The Republic of Korea views this as an opportunity to highlight AFoCO's activities and foster new partnerships. The Republic of Korea further proposed developing a detailed plan for AFoCO'S involvement in the Pavilion in collaboration with the UNFF Secretariat and Member Countries, suggesting the use of the Working Capital Reserve for support.

44. The Secretariat explained that the discussions on the timing for the Forest Pavilion initiative at UNFCCC COP is being considered depending on the availability of funds of concerned partners.

45. The Assembly took note of the information and tasked the Secretariat to communicate closely with the UNFFS regarding the Forest Pavilion. The Assembly supported the use of funds from the Working Capital Reserve for jointly hosting the Pavilion, upon its final approval and adoption of a decision after reviewing the detailed plan.

Item 6. Opportunities for diversifying resource through carbon financing

Item 6.1 Updates on the AFoCO-Rabobank agroforestry carbon project

46. Information on the new AFoCO-Rabobank agroforestry carbon project in LAO PDR was presented as contained in [A-24-10-6](#).

47. The Secretariat provided the details on the AFoCO-Rabobank agroforestry project's progress since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Rabobank, highlighting developments in the Kyrgyz Republic, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, with notable outputs in Kyrgyzstan since November 2023.

48. Lao PDR - highlighted the importance of the agroforestry carbon project and the need for supportive policies especially in balancing agriculture and forestry challenges. The government's encouragement of agroforestry aligns with Rabobank's initiative, offering potential benefits for farmers. However, challenges such as the project's novelty and farmers' readiness require clear government guidance and support. Success stories like those in Kyrgyzstan offer valuable lessons for implementation.

49. Cambodia - supported the AFoCO-Rabobank agroforestry carbon project in the region and suggested financial commitment from AFoCO for the project implementation in Cambodia. Cambodia proposed to include Forestry Administration officials in the project for better alignment with both national forestry and agricultural strategies and emphasized the needs for collaboration under the framework of the agricultural sector for its success.

50. Kyrgyz Republic - welcomed and discussed AFoCO's collaboration with Rabobank on the ACORN project. Committed to the Paris Agreement, the Kyrgyz Republic faces challenges in the CO2 trading mechanism. The Kyrgyz Republic seeks guidance from the Secretariat to develop the Carbon National Roadmap including benefit sharing, access to the voluntary carbon market and carbon related to policy.

51. Viet Nam - appreciated AFoCO and Rabobank's collaboration on the ACORN project. Following a successful feasibility study in January 2024, coordination is underway in Lai Chau Province. Concerns have arisen regarding the 25-year tree protection period and the verification process for participating in the voluntary carbon market. Specifically, clarification is sought on the need for third-party verification under the Plan Vivo standards for UNFCCC credit issuance.

52. The delegate of Rabobank explained that while private sectors can purchase carbon for offsetting their emissions without reporting it to their country, the carbon still remains available for the country's National Determined Contributions (NDCs). However, the taxation aspect presents a dilemma, balancing the need for government schemes and transparency with fair incentives for private landowners to maintain their trees. He further explained that discussion also revolved around the introduction of an investment strategy of the Climate Asset Management, particularly focusing on nature-based carbon strategies and collaborations with partners in carbon financing. This includes exploring sustainable forestry, innovative agriculture, and nature-based carbon projects, as it will be highlighted by the Climate Asset Management.

53. In response to concerns about tree harvesting and carbon-focused projects, Rabobank asserted that they prioritize projects where tree planting is profitable for farmers beyond carbon benefits. He also added that harvesting is possible but may require adjustments to carbon potential. He concluded his remarks by stating that validation is crucial and employs neutral validation bodies alongside Plan Vivo certification to ensure project integrity.

54. The Secretariat acknowledged the Rabobank project as an opportunity for capacity-building in carbon related matters, highlighting ongoing discussions with KOICA to enhance Member Countries' capabilities. The Secretariat remains optimistic about finding solutions through collaborative efforts with Member Countries and Rabobank.

55. The Assembly took note of the information.

Item 6.2 Introduction of Investment Strategies of Climate Asset Management

56. The Secretariat has been exploring opportunities to diversify partnerships through carbon financing. Potential areas of collaborations under the Climate Asset Management's investment strategy were identified. The Assembly invited Climate Asset Management virtually to present on the Investment Strategies of Climate Asset Management (Ms. Caroline Van Tilborg, Senior Carbon Investment Manager and Mr. Oliver Crouch, Investment Manager, Climate Asset Management) as contained in **A-24-10-7**.

57. Ms. Caroline Van Tilborg and Mr. Oliver Crouch highlighted their focus on leveraging private sector financing for nature restoration. The Climate Asset Management showcased successful partnerships and discussed their nature-based carbon fund, which targets corporate investors aiming for net zero emissions. They emphasized investment strategies, including grassland and agriculture forest, and blue carbon projects, with a focus on community benefits and commercial returns. They provided case studies and outlined opportunities for collaboration, particularly with AFoCO Member Countries in Asia, to scale proven projects with private sector funding.

58. Ms. Caroline Van Tilborg explained the funding process which involves submitting a project concept note or feasibility study, followed by financial modeling discussions. After agreement, a full due diligence is conducted. Collaboration agreements are drafted and approved internally, taking 4 to 6 months.

59. The Assembly took note of the information and supported the proposal of the Secretariat to conclude the MOU between AFoCO and the Climate Asset Management.

Item 7. Date and venue of the next Sessions of the Assembly

60. In 2024, two sessions of the Assembly are proposed – one as a regular session and the other one as a special session, subject to the decision of the Assembly. In accordance with Decision 16-I-18R, the regular session of the Assembly will be convened in the Republic of Korea in the last week of October, unless otherwise decided.

61. Following discussion, it was noted that the regular session is scheduled on the week of October 28-31. The exact date will be informed in due course.

Item 8. Other matters

Item 8.1 Indonesia's Initiative on World Mangrove Center

62. Indonesia shared information on the World Mangrove Center and sought consideration to engage in collaboration to support global mangrove conservation. With the world's largest mangrove coverage, Indonesia emphasized knowledge sharing and collaboration. The World Mangrove Center aims to integrate existing centers, seek support from partners, and collaborate with other centers globally. Suggestions from AFoCO Member Countries were welcomed to enhance its effectiveness. The presentation is attached **A-24-10-8**.

63. Cambodia clarified that its mangroves are managed by the Fisheries Department. The contact point from the Fisheries Department can facilitate collaboration.

64. The Secretariat highlighted the importance of finding suitable cooperation and collaboration. Given Indonesia's vast mangrove forests, which attract interest from the private sector due to carbon benefits and livelihood support for local communities, finding solutions is crucial for mangrove protection. The Secretariat is eager to explore collaboration opportunities in mangrove conservation efforts.

Item 9. Summary Record of the Session

65. The Assembly considered and adopted the Summary Record by circulation.

Item 10. Closing of the Session

66. Cambodia - commended the President for her leadership, noting the seamless flow of discussions throughout the meeting. He expressed appreciation for the diligent effort of the Secretariat and the dedicated support from Kyrgyzstan, as the host country.

67. Indonesia - extended gratitude to the President, Vice President, Kyrgyzstan, and the AFoCO Secretariat for the successful organization of the meeting. She appreciated the thorough discussion and decision-making process of the Assembly.

68. Lao PDR - heartfelt gratitude is extended to the host country for a productive Assembly. Appreciation is also conveyed to the Secretariat and Member Countries for their contributions to the success of the Tenth Session. Lao PDR is optimistic for continued collaboration to ensure AFoCO's ongoing success.

69. Republic of Korea - expressed appreciation to Kyrgyz Republic and the Secretariat for their diligent efforts, acknowledging the President's excellent chairing. She also appreciated the opportunity to delve into agenda items and share insights, especially the World Mangrove Center from Indonesia.

70. The Executive Director conveyed gratitude to the President, Member Countries, and representatives. He extended special thanks to Kyrgyzstan for its warm hospitality and praised the President for her exceptional chairing. The Executive Director affirmed to conveying Member Countries' perspectives to the Secretariat and project management. He concluded by expressing anticipation for the next Session in Seoul.

71. The Vice President extended gratitude to the President and the host country for their hospitality. He also appreciated the Secretariat's organization of the meetings and expressed support for Member Countries' initiatives. He highlighted plans to develop a national forest carbon policy, invited Rabobank to explore opportunities in the Philippines through AFoCO, and reiterated the country's full support for AFoCO's activities.

72. In closing, the President extended appreciation to the host country, Kyrgyz Republic, the Secretariat, Member Countries, and partners for their active participation and contributions to the meeting. Despite the limited time, the Assembly witnessed fruitful discussions and renewed dedication to AFoCO's principles. The President expressed confidence in the decisions made during the Assembly, emphasizing AFoCO's important role in the region. The Tenth Session of the Assembly was officially closed.

Adopted on 24 May 2024 by circulation.
