

Twelfth Session of the Assembly  
13-14 May 2025, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

## Agenda Item 3.2

### Update on the Initiatives under AFoCO Climate Action Plan

#### I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to the endorsement at the 11th Session of the Assembly on 30-31 October 2024 in Seoul, Republic of Korea (ROK), four initiatives have been started to explore and operationalize AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025–2034) through regionally coordinated actions. These initiatives — the Asian Forest Living Lab, and the REDD+ Readiness Initiative, Forest Fire Management in Asia Initiative, the AFoCO Mangrove Initiative — have been designed to reflect the diverse climate-forest priorities of AFoCO Member Countries. Each initiative is aligned with the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024–2030) and contributes to the overarching vision of building climate-resilient forests and sustainable communities in Asia. Since their introduction, initial activities have been launched, including the formation of technical partnerships, pilot project development, and consultations with national stakeholders.
2. In the initial implementation stage, the Secretariat has facilitated the development of concept notes and engaged with relevant partners to explore funding and technical collaboration opportunities. These preparatory actions have laid the groundwork for each initiative to be further elaborated into scalable programs, aligned with country-specific needs and regional climate priorities. The progress and strategic direction of each initiative are presented below. The overview of each initiative is in **Annex-1**.

#### II. Update on the Initiatives

##### **A. Asian Forest Living Lab Initiative (Research and Development)**

3. The Asian Forest Living Lab Initiative was developed as a strategic response to growing demands from Member Countries for science-based, field-level solutions to address climate change, forest degradation, and ecosystem restoration. A core feature of the Initiative is the utilization of existing and upcoming AFoCO project sites as field demonstration areas—transforming them into “living laboratories” where innovative ideas, technologies, and practices can be tested, refined, and scaled under real-world conditions. This approach not only maximizes the value of ongoing project investments but also fosters continuous learning and knowledge beyond the standard project implementation cycle.
4. In 2024-2025, the Initiative entered its operational phase through close collaboration between AFoCO and the National Institute of Forest Science (NIFoS) of the ROK, pursuant to the approved 2025 Work Plan and Budget. This evolving partnership with NIFoS is laying the scientific and institutional foundation for an inclusive and data-driven Living Lab model across

the AFoCO region. Three initial research themes—climate change impact assessment, forest carbon accounting and market assessment, mangrove restoration, and post-disaster forest rehabilitation—were identified and are currently being developed into pilot projects under the Living Lab framework. To institutionalize collaboration and coordination, AFoCO initiated the formation of thematic working groups, which will serve as key platforms for advancing research, stakeholder engagement, and science-to-policy integration. In addition, the Young Scientist Program was redesigned to offer early-career researchers immersive and hands-on experience in collaborative research and participation in working group activities. In 2025, the Secretariat will officially call for nominations to these thematic working groups. Member Country universities and research institutes will be invited to serve as participating members.

5. In line with the expanding AFoCO–ASEAN partnership, particularly in the area of R&D cooperation welcomed at the 27th ASEAN Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF) held on 18–19 July 2024 in Bogor, Indonesia, the Secretariat is currently developing a 10-year regional program proposal within the framework of the Living Lab Initiative. Further consultations with ASEAN Member States will be pursued in accordance with ASEAN protocols.
6. To further expand the potential of the Living Lab Initiative, the Secretariat is considering the development of a blended financing model that utilizes the Living Lab as a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration. Informed by the concept of regenerative investment, this model is intended to facilitate engagement with private capital and technology partners by linking scientific research with practical applications in forest restoration, climate adaptation, and sustainable livelihoods. In this context, the Living Lab may serve not only as a research platform but also as a space for piloting technologies, testing scalable approaches, and exploring collaborative models with business and finance stakeholders across Member Countries.

## **B. Forest Fire Management in Asia (FFMA) Initiative**

7. The FFMA Initiative was launched to enhance regional capacity to address the growing risks of forest fires through integrated strategies for prevention, response, and recovery. Since its inception, the Initiative has focused on foundational activities, including technical assessments, pilot training programs, and initial partner engagement for resource mobilization.

8. In 2023–2025, the Regional Education and Training Center (RETC), in collaboration with the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, conducted pilot activities to test the initiative's approach. These included: (1) Training of Trainers (ToT) programs on forest fire suppression in Thailand, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan; (2) the Science and Technology Exchange Partnership (STEP) program on forest fire risk and management hosted by the University of Montpellier, France; and (3) a Master's scholarship program focused on forest fire management in France. As of May 2025, the program has produced a total of 71 beneficiaries, including 64 certified trainers and 7 STEP participants.

9. Building on these early successes, the FFMA Initiative is currently shaping a full-scale capacity-building program, to be jointly financed by the ROK and France. The concept was first introduced at the 7th Session of the Assembly on 26–27 October 2022 in Almaty, Kazakhstan and has since been structured into three interlinked components that address operational, academic, and policy-level capacities:

- a. Component 1: Training of Trainers – This component delivers field-based courses adapted to three distinct forest fire environments: mountain forests (Group A – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam), tropical lowland forests and peatlands (Group B – Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste) and seasonal/dry deciduous forests (Group C – Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Tajikistan). Additional

modules on advanced suppression techniques will be conducted in the ROK and France.

- b. Component 2: Higher Education Program – This includes a co-degree graduate scholarship program for young forestry professionals, with two semesters each in Korea and France, as well as a six-week intensive short-term education course for senior officers at leading academic and civil protection institutions in France.
- c. Component 3: Research and Governance Program – This component supports forest fire research fellowships in Korean and French institutions, complemented by immersive high-level policy dialogues and colloquia to strengthen inter-agency collaboration and regional governance.

10. The Secretariat supported the preliminary bilateral meeting between the ROK and France, held on 16 April 2025, to discuss the FFMA Initiative's financing mechanism and strategic direction. Both countries reaffirmed their financial commitment over five years (2026–2030) on a 50:50 cost-sharing basis. The meeting agreed to establish a Steering Committee and a Technical Working Group and discussed the potential expansion of partnership countries (e.g., Australia and Canada). Furthermore, the ROK highlighted the relevance of the FFMA Initiative to the ASEAN–ROK Plan of Action 2026–2030 to support the Joint Statement on the Establishment of the ASEAN–ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership issued on 11 October 2024. The Plan of Action includes a provision explicitly calling for enhanced collaboration between FFMA and the AFoCO to support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP).

11. The Secretariat will present an update on the finalized structure of the FFMA capacity-building program at the upcoming Assembly Session in October 2025.

### **C. Mangrove Initiative**

12. The AFoCO Mangrove Initiative is a targeted effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of mangrove ecosystems, advancing progress in forest and coastal rehabilitation across member countries. Specifically aligned with AFoCO's Priority Area 1: Forest Land Restoration and Conservation, this initiative promotes tangible environmental, social, and economic benefits by implementing effective mangrove restoration strategies. It aims to strengthen regional collaboration, build technical capacity, and serve as a knowledge hub for best practices in mangrove management. By fostering knowledge exchange, transferring technology, and integrating existing efforts, the initiative supports global commitments such as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while ensuring measurable outcomes for coastal resilience and biodiversity conservation.

13. To achieve its goals, AFoCO will collaborate closely with Member Countries and regional partners, including the ASEAN Secretariat, to amplify impact and foster shared ownership. In particular, AFoCO is actively engaging in the Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) framework and submitted one (1) proposal entitled: Harnessing AI-Based Satellites for Mangrove Forest Management in Borneo that can be supported through regional funding mechanisms. By adopting a blended financing approach, the initiative promotes public–private partnerships and mobilizes diverse resources to implement scalable and replicable mangrove rehabilitation activities. The initiative not only reaffirms AFoCO's commitment to climate action and sustainable development but also provides a strategic platform for long-term regional cooperation and investment in enhancing the resilience of coastal communities.

## **D. REDD+ Readiness Initiative**

14. Following the introduction of the REDD+ Readiness Initiative at the 11th Session of the AFoCO Assembly, the Secretariat conducted an initial analysis of the status of REDD+ and climate policy implementation across AFoCO Member Countries (AMCs). The assessment focused on AMCs' engagement in the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework for REDD+ and their integration of the Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), including the consideration for international cooperation and international market mechanism.

15. The assessment revealed that 11 AMCs are currently participating in various processes under the Warsaw Framework for REDD+. Among these, 5 countries have submitted REDD+ results to the UNFCCC, and 3 countries have received results-based payments (RBPs) for verified emission reductions. In addition, 15 AMCs have included the LULUCF sector in their NDCs. Of these, 12 AMCs have set conditional targets to pursue enhanced climate ambition through international support and cooperation. Furthermore, 13 AMCs are actively considering the use of the international market mechanism. Further country-level information is provided in **Annex-2**.

- A. To ensure demand-driven support, the Secretariat will explore collaboration opportunities among AFoCO Member Countries and with external partners to deliver technical assistance and institutional capacity support under the Initiative.

16. The findings and inputs will be considered for the development of tailored support programs, to be updated at the 13th Session of the Assembly for further discussion.

## **III. Points for Consideration**

17. The Assembly may wish to:

- a. Take note of the progress made in the implementation of the initiatives under the Climate Action Plan; and
- b. Task the Secretariat with undertaking the necessary follow-up actions in collaboration with Member Countries and relevant partners.

*Queries on the content of the document may be addressed to:*

*Soozin Ryang, Team Leader, Capacity-Building and Evaluation Team, Planning and Operations Division*

(T: +82 2 785 8966; E: [soozin.ryang@afocosec.org](mailto:soozin.ryang@afocosec.org))

*Kikang Bae, Team Leader, Strategic Planning Team, Planning & Operations Division*

(T: +82 2 785 8962; E: [baekikang@afocosec.org](mailto:baekikang@afocosec.org))

*Sungho Choi, Project Team 2, Project & Program Division*

(Phone: +82 2 785 8994; Email: [quercus1@afocosec.org](mailto:quercus1@afocosec.org))