

Eleventh Session of the Assembly
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Agenda Item 10

Evaluation of AFoCO Projects and Development of the Information and Data Platform

I. Background

1. The Secretariat has conducted project evaluations in alignment with the AFoCO Project Manual, adopted at the First Session of the Assembly (Decision 7-I-18R). Following the recommendations made by the Republic of Korea during the Ninth Session of the Assembly (A-23-9-SR), the Secretariat was tasked to develop Best Practices and Impact Stories for projects. It aims to enhance the visibility of AFoCO projects and disseminate their findings within the global community. The significance of project evaluations was further emphasized during the Sixth Donors' Meeting in December 2023, where a comprehensive review of the organization's performance over the past decade was recommended, particularly focusing on its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its evolving role within the global forestry sector.
2. In line with the abovementioned, the Secretariat undertook three types of evaluation activities:
 - (a) A comprehensive 10-year project evaluation
 - (b) Three mid-term evaluations of projects in Cambodia (AFoCO/027/2022), Lao PDR (AFoCO/025/2021), and Viet Nam (AFoCO/031/2022)
 - (c) Six impact briefs development for projects across Cambodia (AFoCO/005/2014), Indonesia (AFoCO/023/2021), Lao PDR (AFoCO/008/2014), the Philippines (AFoCO/016/2020), and Viet Nam (AFoCO/006/2014 and AFoCO/031/2022)
3. To ensure the sustainability of project impacts across the region, the Secretariat has developed an open map-based project dashboard (<https://map.afocosec.org/>) pursuant to the 2024 Work Plan and Budget approved at the Ninth Session of the Assembly (Decision 54-IX-23R). As part of the Information and Data Platform (IDP), this dashboard serves to showcase and promote the achievements of AFoCO projects while also providing a tool to visualize progress towards the AFoCO Strategy 2024–2030 and the 10-year Climate Action Plan.

II. Performance Summary

A. A comprehensive 10-year project evaluation

4. The evaluation aims to assess AFoCO's achievements over the past decade, identify best practices, and offer insights to shape future project strategies. It also seeks to raise awareness of the critical role that forests play by examining the linkages between completed and ongoing

project performance with major global issues.

5. Summary of the 10-years Achievements

a. Leading as a first mover in climate change response and attracting private investment

AFoCO's country-led participation method, incentive sharing, expertise in forest both restoration and conservation for climate change response, as well as transparency in the decision-making processes were decisive factors in attracting USD 70 million in private investment. This amount exceeds AFoCO's budget over the past decade. In addition, AFoCO is playing a bridging role in activating private investment in the forestry sector in climate finance. It is meaningful as an achievement that confirms expertise as a first mover in responding to the climate crisis, one of the biggest issues in the international community recently.

b. Establishing a forestry cooperation model aligned with the SDGs

Over the past decade, AFoCO has been implementing over 40 mid- to long-term projects with the total funds amounting to USD 57 million targeting member countries in the fields of forest restoration and recovery, climate change research and development, forest disaster management such as forest fires and landslides, and livelihood improvement. AFoCO has established 59 forest restoration and carbon absorption models and created approximately 7,000 ha of forests. These efforts have driven significant local changes and strengthened capacity for stable management, positioning AFoCO's forestry cooperation model as one that aligns closely with the SDGs.

c. Strengthening forestry expertise and building a network of experts

AFoCO places a strong emphasis on capacity building and has developed a robust network of forestry experts. It has fostered forestry experts by supporting degree programs (10 doctoral and 20 master's degrees), establishing regional education and training center to build forestry management capacity for member countries (15,921 people), and operating a fellowship program for the Secretariat (33 people) to improve the expertise of member country staff. Each year, AFoCO hosts an Annual Technical Workshop to share key project outcomes and lessons learned during project implementation. This initiative has fostered the development of a pool of experts who can effectively address major issues related to forestry and climate change response, ensuring that member countries are well-equipped to tackle these critical challenges.

d. Enhancing integration with Korean Official Development Assistance (ODA) and disseminating successful models

By strengthening the connection between its projects and Korean ODA from the outset, AFoCO has established a strong foundation for sharing effective models of climate change adaptation and forestry cooperation. Despite being a relatively new organization, AFoCO has steadily gained recognition and influence at the global level. This integration has also facilitated the securing of funding from both public and private sources, further supporting its forestry and climate-related initiatives.

6. Unique Characteristics of AFoCO Projects, Identified by the Evaluators

a. Country-driven, ownership-based project implementation

A key characteristic of AFoCO's projects is their alignment with the core principles of international development cooperation, especially the principle of ownership, as highlighted in the Paris Declaration. In these projects, member countries take the lead, which allows for the development of initiatives that are tailored to each country's specific needs. The strong networks of local human resources built through these projects enhance the stability and effectiveness of implementation, ensuring both sustainability and support for forest-related national policies. Unlike many bilateral and multilateral projects that mainly focus on deploying external personnel, AFoCO adopts a strategic approach where public officials from relevant ministries in the member countries manage the projects. This ensures a high standard of project outputs and ownership, driven by the expertise of local forestry expertise.

b. Collaborative and efficient project implementation structure

AFoCO's project implementation structure emphasizes collaboration between the Secretariat, National Focal Points (NFPs), project managers, coordinators, and local communities. This system ensures that field activities are closely coordinated, enabling swift responses to challenges. The direct involvement of residents and local organizations enhances the efficiency of the projects, allowing AFoCO to overcome the common inefficiencies seen in other international organizations by focusing on practical, field-based solutions. This multi-dimensional approach is expected to enable a flexible response to the complexities of climate change and fosters synergies among different entities in the future.

c. Harmony in capacity-building and infrastructure development

AFoCO not only focuses on infrastructure development but also prioritizes capacity building through training programs, degree programs, and fellowship programs. These initiatives enhance the technical skills of local participants, enabling them to manage forestry and restoration projects sustainably. Education and training programs tailored to local needs, along with opportunities for advanced studies in specialized fields, help build a foundation for long-term project success.

7. Best Practices:

a. Pilot projects driving new forestry policies

Cambodia's development of a private forest registration system, Viet Nam's model for managing drought prone areas, Mongolia's billion-tree planting campaign, and Indonesia's NDC implementation plan for forestry have all provided strong foundations for nationwide expansion, starting from pilot projects. Cambodia's initiative aims to achieve 50% of forest cover by 2030 by introducing a private forest registration system, while Viet Nam's desertification prevention model is applied in four provinces in the northwest. In Mongolia, on-site customized reforestation supports the goal of planting 1 billion trees by 2030, and

Indonesia has enacted the Forestry and Land Use (FOLU) Act as part of its NDC implementation for sustainable forestry practices.

b. Multilateral cooperation for forest strategies

Through multilateral collaboration, a landscape learning method was applied to address natural resource management across four Pacific Island countries. In addition, GIS and RS technologies were utilized to develop forest management plans in communities, creating a national forest resource database in the Philippines and an app-based database system in Indonesia, called FlorHI. These strategies improved data management and informed policy development in forest conservation.

c. Leading forest policy and legislation in Lao PDR

The Lao PDR's village-based forest management project, inspired by the success of Korea's Saemaul Undong movement, is making significant contributions to poverty reduction through forest restoration, capacity building for local stakeholders, and income raising of local communities. To support the nationwide expansion of this project, the Laos Forestry Act was revised to implement a village-level forest management policy. The project was also showcased at the 2024 Land Conference, hosted by the World Bank, where it received positive feedback. This exposure has opened opportunities for further expansion through additional donor support, facilitated by workshops with donor organizations in Lao PDR.

d. Marine forest restoration guidelines in Viet Nam

The project in Viet Nam successfully enhanced its effectiveness and impact by restoring indigenous mangroves and incorporating community participation alongside the government's 'Mangrove Coastal Forest Restoration Policy' for climate change adaptation. This initiative protected local ecosystems, helped prevent desertification, mitigated the effects of typhoons, and increased expected carbon capture. As a result, new planting guidelines for three mangrove species were developed, along with guidelines for community involvement in mangrove management. This initiative was recognized as a model for desertification prevention and was included in Viet Nam's NDC report as an exemplary case.

e. Expanding Cambodian seed orchard success to the Mekong region

Dalbergia species (rosewood) were once abundant in the Mekong region but became endangered due to extensive logging. In response, the rosewood genetic resource restoration project in Cambodia established a framework to reintroduce and expand the cultivation of rosewood across the Mekong region. By utilizing Korea's tree breeding technology, the first clonal seed orchard was created to regenerate and manage this endangered timber species. This project also played a significant role in enhancing the technical capacity of local experts through research and studies. The cultivated rosewood was successfully expanded across Cambodia, laying the groundwork for further expansion into other Mekong countries.

8. Recommendations

a. AFoCO's role in post-SDGs and Paris Agreement response

As 2030 marks the target year for achieving the SDGs, it is crucial for AFoCO to prepare Post-SDGs. The new strategy of AFoCO should explicitly state that it will lead the Post-SDGs for forests and climate change response by establishing a system that can preempt the agenda for climate change crisis response and forestry cooperation and exert positive influence. Furthermore, it is necessary to specify AFoCO's role as an international forestry organization implementing the Paris Agreement.

b. Enhancing AFoCO's visibility through special initiatives and forestry database platform

To increase its visibility, AFoCO may consider launching initiatives that highlight forests' role in carbon capture. In addition, developing a forest database platform to consolidate data on forest restoration, conservation, and community livelihoods can improve information management, transparency, and decision-making. These efforts could help positioning AFoCO as a key player in forestry-related international cooperation.

c. Implementing a Result Based Performance Management System

In line with AFoCO's new Strategic Plan (2024-2030), a Results-Based Performance Management (RBM) system could be introduced across AFoCO projects. This system would focus on transparent procedures, measurable objectives, performance indicators, and clear evaluation criteria to monitor and enhance project outcomes.

B. Mid-term evaluation

9. Mid-term Evaluation of "Integrated Village-Driven Forest Rehabilitation and Livelihood Improvement in Viengthong District, Bolikhamxay Province, Lao PDR" (AFoCO/025/2021)

a. Overview of evaluation result

The mid-term evaluation indicated that the project has made significant progress in achieving its goals, receiving high scores for relevance, effectiveness, and coherence from stakeholders. It has successfully aligned with both local and national targets, completing most planned activities, though some delays were noted due to challenges in consensus-building. Survey results show that district-level officials and villagers rated the project positively, with female respondents providing particularly favorable assessments of its effectiveness. The project has demonstrated strong potential in improving community livelihoods and forest conservation, with notable impacts in areas such as stakeholder capacity building and forest protection.

b. Identification of potential impact and best practices

The project has been recognized for its relevance and success in improving forest management practices, aligning with national goals to increase forest cover. As a succeeding project after the previous one (AFoCO/008/2014), the project has been showcasing the strong impact of village-driven forest restoration modality initiated from AFoCO. Across the level, the participating stakeholders acknowledged the project's positive impact on livelihoods, particularly through knowledge transfer in nursery establishment and

forest protection. In the long-run, this restoration methodology needs to be further approached and proved in the development planning studies to analyze socio-economic impact.

c. Recommendations

The project has made satisfactory progress in its activities and in meeting stakeholder expectations. To increase the effectiveness, it is recommended that the Implementing Agency (IA) communicate with the Secretariat promptly in case of unexpected issues or delays, rather than waiting for the next Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting. At all levels, the Project Management Unit (PMU) should demonstrate strong budget management during the upcoming PSC meetings and, where needed, request reallocating savings from completed activities to support ongoing or future initiatives. A swift response mechanism will enable efficient decision-making and prevent further delays, ensuring alignment with project objectives and improving the quality of life for the communities involved.

Additionally, leveraging successful examples from DAFO and village-level activities should be expanded to other regions. Community participation and tailored activities should be strengthened, and further resource management optimizations are required to ensure efficiency. The PMU may propose reallocating savings from completed outputs to support essential needs such as water supply systems. The project should also utilize the positive evaluations from women to promote broader female participation and encourage gender equality, which will enhance project outcomes through more diverse perspectives.

10. Mid-term Evaluation of “Site Restoration and Sustainable Management of Community Forest in Cambodia” (AFoCO/027/2022)

a. Overview of evaluation result

The mid-term evaluation indicated that the project is well-aligned with both institutional and community needs, addressing key issues such as forest degradation and economic instability through forest restoration, sustainable forest management, and livelihood improvement. The successful establishment of a nursery system, managed by the local Forestry Administration (FA), to supply seedlings for restoration efforts demonstrates significant progress in aligning the project with national and local priorities. While physical and financial progress is evident, and community engagement through voluntary forest patrolling is a positive sign, there is room to further strengthen the project by enhancing immediate financial benefits to local communities. Ongoing support and strategic planning will be crucial to ensuring the long-term success of the project’s community-based forest management goals.

b. Identification of potential impact and best practices

The project highlighted the importance of local community involvement as a key factor in forest conservation efforts. By empowering Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) to take responsibility for restoration and protection activities, the project has

fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among villagers. This bottom-up approach has proven effective in promoting sustainable forest management and presents a model that could be applied to other community forestry initiatives. While the project has not yet fully achieved its livelihood improvement goals, it shows potential through the introduction of agroforestry and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). These strategies aim to provide alternative income sources, reduce dependence on unsustainable practices such as illegal logging and shifting cultivation, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of both the community and the forest.

c. Recommendations

To enhance the long-term sustainability of local livelihoods, it is recommended that the project implement more diverse and systematic training programs on reforestation, nursery management, and NTFPs. Although community forest villagers have previously received support and training from other NGOs, these efforts need to be maximized during the project period. Expanding capacity-building activities within the project will equip the community with the necessary skills to ensure sustained forest management and livelihood improvements. A community-based market analysis could also be beneficial, especially considering the need for stronger marketing strategies for the nursery operations. By increasing demand for seedlings, this approach would not only enhance nursery productivity but also support local livelihoods by providing an additional income source. This would further contribute to the long-term sustainability of both the project and the community's economic well-being.

In addition, the enrichment plantation sites are located at a considerable distance from the villages and nurseries, which poses challenges for continuous monitoring and patrolling. This issue is particularly evident during the rainy season when heavy flooding hinders access to the area, as identified through on-site verification. The project may consider addressing these accessibility limitations upon budget availability and ensuring effective site management within the project duration.

11. Mid-term Evaluation of “Rehabilitation of degraded and potentially deserted forest land in the Northwest region of Viet Nam through application of integrated technical measures” (AFoCO/031/2022)

a. Overview of evaluation result

The mid-term evaluation indicated significant progress in achieving the project's goals, particularly in forest restoration and climate change mitigation. The project has proven to be highly relevant to both national, provincial, and local objectives and strategies, and contributing to sustainable land management. Although resource management challenges were noted in regions including Lai Chau and Son La, the project has demonstrated positive impacts on forest cover improvement and sustainable land-use practices. While long-term benefits, such as Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) production, are still in the early stages of development, stakeholders remain optimistic about the project's sustainability and its potential long-term impact on livelihoods.

b. Identification of potential impact and best practices

The project enhanced its restoration efforts by combining practical measures such as soil erosion control and the introduction of nitrogen-fixing species with data-driven research. This scientific approach allowed the project to be flexible and adaptive to various geographical conditions, particularly in the steep slopes of the Northwest region. The successful integration of scientific research into restoration and protection efforts helped participating stakeholder groups recognize the strength and effectiveness of aligning practical actions with research-based strategies, ultimately improving the overall impact of the project.

c. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of the project and ensure its long-term sustainability, it is essential to increase training and capacity-building activities. Focus should be placed on key areas such as soil erosion control, nursery management, and sustainable land-use practices. Targeted training programs will provide local communities with the necessary skills to actively participate in and sustain forest restoration efforts. Continuous training on the technical aspects of agroforestry models and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) will further support stakeholders in maintaining and expanding the project's impact. Additionally, adaptive management strategies should be emphasized, particularly in addressing regional challenges such as steep slopes and low soil fertility, which are critical to successful restoration in the Northwest region of Viet Nam.

Establishing participatory M&E systems will involve local stakeholders in data collection and analysis, fostering greater transparency and accountability. Strengthening coordination among government institutions, local authorities, and community groups is vital for the successful implementation of project activities. A clear communication and feedback mechanism will help ensure that project actions stay aligned with national goals and local needs. If the budget allows (e.g., project savings), organizing cross-monitoring among participating villages could further enhance knowledge-sharing and strengthen the overall capacity of communities involved in the project.

C. Map-based Project Dashboard for Long-term Impact Analysis

12. Pursuant to the Work Plan and Budget for 2024 approved in the Ninth Session of the Assembly (Decision 54-IX-23R), the Secretariat is developing the Information and Data Platform (IDP). This initiative aims to propagate and promote the organization's achievements. As its first attempt, the IDP has launched an open map-based project dashboard, which is embedded into the AFoCO website (<https://map.afocosec.org>). The dashboard was introduced to the Implementing Agencies (IAs) at the Annual Technical Workshop in September 2024.
13. The dashboard is designed to enhance access to and utilization of project data across the region by collecting all project information in one easily accessible location. This consolidated platform helps to avoid data fragmentation and simplifies the process of searching and using project information. It will be updated continuously by the Secretariat in collaboration with data submissions by the IAs, ensuring that valuable information is streamlined and available for stakeholders.

III. Follow-ups of the Secretariat

14. The results of the mid-term evaluation will be presented to the respective Project Steering

Committee to ensure that identified issues and recommendations are addressed and followed up effectively. In addition, the anticipated impacts and best practices identified during the evaluation will be open to the public through the publication of the Impact Brief, ensuring broader dissemination and awareness of the project's progress and lessons learned.

15. The Secretariat will set up the regular dashboard update modality in consultation with the IAs, as well as develop the long-term plan for the IDP establishment.

IV. Points for Consideration

16. The Assembly may wish to:

- a. Take note of the information; and
- b. Consider and endorse the establishment of the Information and Data Platform.

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

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