

Thirteenth Session of the Assembly
29-30 October 2025, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Agenda Item 9

Evaluation of AFoCO Projects and Updates on the Evaluation Scheme

I. Evaluation of AFoCO Projects

A. Evaluation of Two Projects in Myanmar

a. Final Evaluation of “Model Forest for Livelihood Improvement of Forest Dependent Communities through Development of Community-Based Enterprise and Forest Conservation” (AFoCO/015/2020)

1. Overview of evaluation result

- The evaluation for the project “Model Forest for Livelihood Improvement of Forest Dependent Communities through Development of Community-based Enterprise and Forest Conservation” was conducted on 25 March 2025 in Nay Pyi Taw, accompanied by field visits to demonstration plots in Bago Region. The evaluation was conducted through plenary discussions with the Forest Department and community representatives, as well as direct observation of demonstration sites and nurseries. The project was assessed as highly relevant to Myanmar’s national priorities on forest conservation and community livelihood improvement, directly addressing the challenges of deforestation, land degradation, and rural poverty. Demonstration plots were confirmed to be effective in training farmers, showcasing agroforestry options, and raising awareness about sustainable land management.
- The evaluation highlighted that community participation, initially limited, gradually improved through repeated stakeholder meetings and the incorporation of traditional knowledge. The project also initiated the “Model Forest Village” concept, aiming to create an integrated framework for livelihoods and conservation at the township level. Baseline data for agroforestry and carbon assessments were initiated, laying the foundation for future climate finance opportunities.

2. Identification of potential impact and best practices

- The project demonstrated the importance of the Regional Education and Training Center (RETC) in supporting township-level training, with its involvement ensuring continued capacity-building beyond the project’s closure. The project has strong potential impact

in shaping national policy by piloting the “Model Forest Village” approach, which integrates forest rehabilitation, soil conservation, and livelihood diversification into a replicable model. The participatory design process, which reflected community preferences for species and land-use practices, fostered trust and ownership at the local level and has been recognized as an essential best practice for sustaining results.

- The project also reflects AFoCO’s broader experience in promoting village-driven forest restoration approaches that have been piloted in other Member Countries such as Lao PDR (AFoCO/008/2014). By contextualizing this restoration philosophy into Myanmar’s priorities through the “Model Forest Village” framework, the project demonstrated how AFoCO’s vision of linking forest conservation with community livelihood improvement can be applied across diverse national contexts. Baseline data collection and site identification for potential carbon projects have also been initiated, laying the foundation for new opportunities in climate finance and long-term sustainability. In addition, the involvement of RETC in supporting township-level training has been identified as an important factor in ensuring continued capacity-building beyond the project’s closure.

3. Recommendations

- It is recommended that the successful agroforestry and community-based enterprise models be scaled up into larger, production level plots that can generate measurable income improvements. “The Model Forest Village” framework should be systematically integrated into township work plans and accompanied by RETC training for both local community and the Forest Department. Greater emphasis should be placed on livelihood diversification, including non-timber forest products (NTFP) and community-based tourism, to ensure long-term sustainability. The biodiversity and ecosystem services assessments already conducted should be linked with the carbon readiness process, positioning the project sites as candidates for future performance-based climate finance mechanisms.

b. Mid-term Evaluation of “Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM) in Teak Plantations in Myanmar” (AFoCO/014/2020)

4. Overview of evaluation result

- The evaluation of the project “Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM) in Teak Plantations” was carried out through field inspections in Nay Pyi Taw, confirming the establishment of teak pest and disease demonstration plots and the continuation of systematic monitoring activities. The project documented a comprehensive list of pests, natural enemies, and diseases through monthly surveys using combined methods such as light traps, sticky traps, sweep nets, and field observation, with identification verified by the Forest Research Institute. The evaluation confirmed that the project successfully delivered its intended outputs, including research findings report and technical guidelines for pest and disease management. The relevance of the project was reinforced by its close alignment with the Forest Department’s priorities to maintain healthy teak plantations, which are of national economic and ecological importance.

5. Identification of potential impact and best practices

- The project demonstrated significant potential impact by creating a replicable IPDM toolkit that can be applied across teak plantations in Myanmar and potentially adapted for other forest species. The combination of mechanical, biological, chemical, and cultural control methods represents a balanced and environmentally responsible approach. The technical guidelines produced ensure that knowledge is not only preserved but also accessible for field level application. The key best identified practice is the continuation of demonstration plots as long-term research sites managed by the Forest Protection Section, which guarantees that the outputs will remain relevant and practical beyond the project's lifetime.

6. Recommendations

- It is recommended that the technical guidelines be formally adopted into the Forest Department standard operating procedures and that refresher training modules be developed through RETC for local community. To maximize impact, the regular monitoring system should be expanded to additional teak areas, ensuring early detection and response to outbreaks. Linking the pest and disease monitoring datasets with AFoCO's regional knowledge-sharing platforms and national forest health monitoring systems will enhance coherence and support evidence-based management. By integrating IPDM results with broader ecosystem service and carbon assessments, the project's contribution to sustainable forest management and long-term resilience can be further strengthened.

B. Evaluation of a Project in Bhutan

a. Final Evaluation of "Sustainable Community-Based Enterprise Development for Improved Livelihood in Bhutan" (AFoCO/017/2020)

7. Overview of evaluation result

- The evaluation for the project "Sustainable Community-Based Enterprise Development for Improved Livelihood" was convened on 8 July 2025 in Thimphu, Bhutan, with participation from the AFoCO Secretariat, the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), implementing partners, and community representatives. Field validation was conducted in Tsirang on 9–10 July, followed by a wrap-up meeting with senior officials. The evaluation reviewed physical and financial progress, verified achievements against project indicators, and assessed sustainability prospects.
- The project was found to be highly relevant to Bhutan's development priorities by promoting forest-based livelihoods, ecotourism, and Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) through five (5) community-based enterprises and five (5) ecotourism sites. It successfully integrated biodiversity conservation and income generation, with over 1,000 community members and 200 forestry staffs trained. The project also contributed to national publications and knowledge products, including documentation on medicinal plants and community forestry practices.

8. Identification of potential impact and best practices

- The project demonstrated a practical model for integrating community livelihoods with forest conservation. The Sunkosh Ecotourism Enterprise in Tsirang emerged as a flagship demonstration, combining eco-services—such as hot stone baths, nature trails, and guesthouse facilities—with inclusive governance mechanisms. Women and youth participation was especially notable, including the appointment of a female community forest secretary and the formation of women-led groups engaged in value-added processing of local products. These examples illustrate how forest-based enterprises can deliver both social and environmental co-benefits.
- The evaluation identified a number of best practices, including the development of ecotourism standard operating procedures and context-specific business plans; the promotion of NWFP nurseries and value chains linked with tourism; and institutional efforts to align project outcomes with the country's 13th Five-Year Plan priorities, particularly in NWFPs, ecotourism, wood-based technology, and agroforestry. The project's emphasis on community-led governance and seasonal youth employment also strengthened local ownership.
- Furthermore, the initiative served as a testing ground for the AFoCO market-based solutions (MbS) approach. While the enterprises are still in early stages, the identification of scalable models—such as Tsirang Ecotourism, Trashigang Incense, and Haa Youth Ecotourism—presents a clear opportunity to activate the project preparation facility as a structured transition from grant-based support to impact investment.

9. Recommendations

- To scale the project's impact and ensure its long-term sustainability, a set of strategic actions has been recommended. Strengthening enterprise operations is a priority, including the standardization of business records, accounting systems, and branding practices. In areas with low literacy, local governments are encouraged to provide targeted support for financial management. The identification and empowerment of local champions is also essential, as they can serve as key drivers in managing and expanding value chains across production, processing, and marketing stages.
- Efforts to improve market access include leveraging Gelephu Mindfulness City as a prospective national hub for product export and eco-tourism promotion. Organizing regular buyer engagement events and exploring linkages with AFoCO's Living Lab Initiative may further enhance visibility and scale (*refer to Agenda Item 11.1*). Increasing women's participation across all segments of the value chain—especially through the development of women-led specialty products—will also contribute to inclusive growth. Finally, it is recommended that the project's outcomes be formally reflected in Bhutan's National Development Plan and the broader forest-based enterprise development strategy, in alignment with the government's target of reaching BTN 10 billion in forestry sector GDP by 2034.

II. Updates on the Evaluation Scheme

A. Application of Gender Policy at Project Evaluation Scheme

10. The Gender Policy was thoroughly deliberated and endorsed during the Third (3rd) Session of the Assembly in October 2019 (Decision-29-III-19R). The purpose of this Policy is to provide AFoCO with a framework for guiding its efforts to achieve gender equality, and particularly, to support women's diverse roles in the development of policies, plans, programs, projects, activities, and internal functioning intended to enhance the impact and effectiveness of AFoCO's operations.

11. In accordance with the Gender Policy, the Secretariat and Member Countries have been developing and implementing projects with gender considerations. As gender awareness has recently become a global issue, and evaluations have become essential, the Secretariat is preparing to conduct a gender evaluation.

12. The gender evaluation is founded on the understanding that gender equality and women empowerment are vital for sustainable forest management, climate resilience, and inclusive development. These core principles guide the integration of gender perspectives in the programs and projects of AFoCO. They ensure that both women and men—including those from vulnerable and marginalized groups—have equal opportunities to engage in and benefit from initiatives from AFoCO. The Secretariat requires that both women and men be given equal opportunities to actively participate in stakeholder consultations and decision-making throughout project preparation, implementation, and evaluation.

13. The AFoCO Secretariat integrates gender equality throughout the project cycle, with specific actions and checkpoints embedded in key stages:

- **Project Implementation Stage:** Regular workshops, training sessions, and knowledge-sharing platforms—such as the Annual Technical Workshop (ATW)—are organized to promote participatory gender mainstreaming. Gender-related materials are disseminated to national focal points (NFPs), project partners, and relevant stakeholders to support consistent awareness and capacity across all project sites.
- **Project Completion Stage:** At the Final Consultation and Evaluation Meeting (FCEM), the Secretariat conducts a dedicated gender evaluation to assess the extent to which gender considerations were incorporated into the design, implementation, and results of the project. Findings from the evaluation will inform and strengthen the integration of gender perspectives in future project formulation, execution, and decision-making processes.

14. In 2026, the Secretariat will deliver gender-focused training and share materials through the ATW, and conduct gender evaluations at project completion to assess integration and inform future improvements.

B. Application of Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) at Project Evaluation Scheme

15. AFoCO Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Policy was thoroughly deliberated and endorsed during the Third (3rd) Session of the Assembly in October 2019 (Decision-28-III-19R). Additionally, all the existing Project Manuals and Templates to encompass the ESS Policy.

16. Guided by the AFoCO ESS Policy, the Secretariat has developed a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) Guidelines, including guidelines and a manual, to ensure that all future projects adhere to international best practices for environmental and social (E&S) risk assessment, mitigation, and management. Till date, the Secretariat has primarily implemented projects categorized as low-risk (Category C) under the ESS guidelines. These projects were designed to have minimal or no adverse environmental and social impacts, as defined by the AFoCO ESMS.

17. The ESMS ensures that all projects adhere to eleven (11) key principles—sustainable forestry management; transboundary risks and impacts approach; equality and non-discrimination; mitigation hierarchy; policy coherence within AFoCO; continuous improvement and best practice; stakeholder engagement, information disclosure; gender sensitive approaches; knowledge sharing; compliance with applicable laws; local communities and indigenous peoples—to minimize adverse impacts and maximize positive outcomes.

18. The ESMS Guidelines apply to the entire process of AFoCO project development, implementation, and management. The step-by-step ESS implementation for AFoCO projects consists of four (4) distinct stages:

- **Project Concept Note Stage:** The proponent submits ESS screening checklist and categorization matrix to identify risk level (low, medium, high), based on five (5) ESG standards and exclusion criteria.
- **Project Proposal Preparation Stage:** Risk level determines need for full or partial Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA); Project logframe is drafted with ESS indicators; An Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) is prepared if necessary.
- **Project Appraisal and Approval Stage:** ESS committee and appraisal panels review all ESS documentation; project proposals must meet ESS requirements for final approval before implementation.
- **Project Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation Stage:** Mitigation and monitoring actions in the ESMP are carried out and reported; compliance is verified regularly, and corrective actions are taken as needed under oversight committees.

19. In 2026, the Secretariat will initiate efforts to embed ESS across all project operations by organizing seminars to be held in conjunction with Project Inception Meetings of newly launched projects and/or back-to-back with other annual Secretariat events. In parallel, the Secretariat will adopt a tiered training approach to ensure that all relevant AFoCO staff acquire a foundational understanding of key ESS principles, while progressively cultivating advanced expertise among those assigned to specialized ESS functions.

III. Points for Consideration

20. The Assembly may wish to take note of the information and provide further guidance and recommendations, as appropriate.

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

*Soozin Ryang, Capacity Building and Evaluation Team, Planning and Operations Division
(Phone: +82 2 785 8966; Email: soozin.ryang@afocosec.org)*