

Draft Document

AFoCO Climate-Forest Cooperation Framework

Last Draft Date: September 24, 2024

Executive Summary

Since its establishment in 2018, the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) has led regional forest cooperation to combat climate change through sustainable forest management. With the successful execution of 34 projects focusing on reforestation, climate adaptation, and livelihood enhancement under the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2019-2023), the organization adopted the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034).

This Framework, a policy document, serves as a flexible guide for aligning AFoCO's activities with the AFoCO's plans aim for a vision of climate-resilient forests and communities, ensuring that strategic goals translate into effective projects and fostering collaboration and accountability among members and partners.

Chapter 2 outlines the scope of AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation into three phases: Readiness, On-site/In-forest Action, and Valuation & Marketization. This phased approach addresses the full spectrum of forest management from policy development to on-the-ground actions and market engagement. The phases aim to ensure continuity and scalability of projects, tailored to the unique needs of member countries. The scope of this cooperation aligns with AFoCO's strategic goals, focusing on forest restoration, community bioeconomy, and disaster risk management, to support both national and international climate goals.

Chapter 3 details AFoCO's strategies include contributing to the SDGs and global climate goals, scaling up projects for greater impact with their MRV (Measurement, Reporting, and Verification), and commercializing outcomes to attract diverse funding. These approaches ensure that AFoCO's efforts support SDGs and Paris Agreement, and deliver tangible local benefits. Collaboration with member countries, stakeholders, and the private sector is emphasized to maximize effectiveness.

Chapter 4 focuses on how AFoCO will implement the policy and strategies outlined in the previous chapters. Key actions include amending the AFoCO Project Manual, developing new guidelines, and creating mechanisms for project scalability. Investing in organizational capacities, such as staff training and strategic partnerships, is crucial. These actions ensure alignment with the AFoCO's plans and prepare AFoCO to address climate challenges through sustainable forest management.

This document is intended as a living guide, adaptable to changing circumstances, and focused on continuous learning and improvement. This approach ensures that AFoCO remains effective in promoting sustainable forest management and climate resilience in Asia.

1. Background

Since its inauguration in 2018, the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) has enhanced regional forest cooperation by applying proven technologies and policies in practical actions based on the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2019-2023). Since 2018, AFoCO has been dedicated to sustainable forest management and enhancement of carbon removals, including on restoring degraded forests in member countries. Over the past five years (2019-2023), AFoCO has rehabilitated significant forest areas through 19 projects with priority on restoration and reforestation. AFoCO also supports capacity building, providing 91 training courses targeting local communities, SMEs, and government officials to strengthen sustainable forest management. AFoCO strengthened regional cooperation and partnerships through high-level meetings with ministers and senior officials, discussing strategic directions for forestry cooperation in Asia and hosting Annual Thematic Dialogues on climate change and green recovery. The organization has implemented 34 projects valued at USD 77.60 million in areas like reforestation, climate adaptation, and livelihood enhancement, and participated in six research projects to advance technology in forest management..AFoCO has formed partnerships with 25 organizations and engaged in key global forums to promote the role of Asian forests in achieving international goals.

At the Ninth Session of the Assembly in 2023, the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) were adopted. The second strategic framework document of the organization, the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030), delineates the organizational vision of *"A Greener Asia with climate-resilient and sustainable forests, landscapes, and communities"* and the mission to *"Promote action-oriented international cooperation for creating enabling policies, building capacities, and fostering inclusive multi-level partnerships to drive Asian forests onto a climate-resilient and sustainable path."* To fully realize this vision, AFoCO will focus on three Program Priority Areas—Forest Land Restoration and Conservation; Community and Circular Bioeconomy; and Climate–Forest Disaster Risk Management—and cross-cutting themes such as Policy, Capacity, Knowledge, and Technology. The Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) accelerates efforts among AFoCO Member Countries to sequester atmospheric carbon, thereby mitigating global warming while promoting economic prosperity. The plan emphasizes three major climate actions: Forest land restoration and rehabilitation, community solutions, and digital innovations. Following these plans, new projects have been developed to enhance carbon sequestration and reduce emissions from deforestation in collaboration with private corporations.

AFoCO's unique action-oriented cooperation with its member countries includes close networks with forestry sector officials, expertise in on-site activities, and the experience necessary to address these significant, interconnected challenges.

However, given their immense scale, it is imperative to refine the cooperation approach. This involves clarifying the objectives and strategic directions of AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation, internally linking project and program development to enable scalable efforts, and realizing strategic partnerships with public and private sector partners who share goals and direction.

This Policy document serves as AFoCO's guiding document, providing the brief background needed to conduct the Climate-Forest Cooperation and achieve its organizational vision. It articulates a collective vision and approaches for forest-based climate actions, translates organizational vision into tangible projects and programs, ensures coherence among these initiatives, and guides the implementation of our strategic efforts. This policy document is a vital resource for AFoCO staff serving as a foundation for strategy, project and program planning, budgeting, and operations. For Members and Partners, it clarifies our objectives and methods for achieving them, fostering collaboration and mutual accountability among AFoCO, our partners, and the forests and communities we serve.

2. Scope of the Cooperation

2.1. Phases of the Cooperation Activities

Aligned with AFoCO's strategic plans (2019-2023; 2024-2030), AFoCO's projects and programs have been developed in response to requests from member countries, focusing on the priority areas outlined in the Strategic Plans. These priority areas include 'reforestation and restoration of degraded forests', 'climate change adaptation', 'forest disaster management', 'enhancement of local livelihoods', and 'strengthening of institutional capacities', including resource mobilization. However, to effectively contribute to global and national objectives related to climate change and forests, a long-term perspective is critical. This requires enhancements in the coherence and continuity among AFoCO projects and programs. Additionally, considering the different in-country circumstances and contexts of each AFoCO member country in addressing and adapting to climate change, there is a need to identify and expand cooperation tailored to the specific demands and capacities of each country. **Therefore, it is proposed to categorize AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation activities into three phases: 'readiness', 'on-site/in-forest Action', and 'valuation & marketization', to address the interconnections and facilitate the expansion of these activities.**

AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation activities will be strategically organized into three interconnected phases. For example, the **Readiness Phase (Phase I)**, support is provided for the development of policies, institutions, and plans essential for implementing national and/or sub-national forest-based climate actions or REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries), which includes Program Priority Areas (PPAs) and Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) of AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030). This phase also focuses on capacity building and research and development to bolster these foundational efforts, alongside forming partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

The **On-site/In-forest Action Phase (Phase II)** involves direct actions to enhance and conserve forest resources and ecosystem services, and to improve livelihoods, including the measurement and monitoring of these actions. It emphasizes capacity building and technology transfer specific to on-site and in-forest activities.

Lastly, the **Valuation & Marketization Phase (Phase III)** aims to enhance knowledge management, including the management of data and information for the valuation and marketization of forest resources and ecosystem services. This phase seeks to increase access to financing from both public and private sectors and includes marketization of ecosystem services, supporting national and international reporting, and publication of accomplishments. These structured phases ensure a comprehensive approach to sustainable forest management and climate action across the AFoCO Member Countries.

Table 1. Phases of the Climate-Forest Cooperation activities

Readiness	On-site/In-forest actions	Valuation & Marketization
• Support development of policies, institutions and plans to implement national and sub-national REDD+, or forest activities, which includes PPAs and CCT • Capacity building and research and development to support the development of policies, institutions, and plans • Partnerships with relevant stakeholders and partners	• On-site/in-forest actions of the PPAs, including measurement and monitoring of the actions • Capacity building and technology transfer for the on-site/in-forest actions	• Enhancing knowledge management including management of data and information • Support national and international reporting and publication of the accomplishments • Increase access to finance from public and private sector, including marketization of ecosystem services

2.2. Scope alignment with AFoCO Strategic Plan and Climate Action Plan

The AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) serve as guiding frameworks for all activities undertaken by AFoCO to realize its vision, and the scope of cooperation outlined in this policy document is based on their contents.

The AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) articulates the organizational vision of "A Greener Asia with climate-resilient and sustainable forests, landscapes, and communities" and sets forth three PPAs —Forest Land Restoration and Conservation; Community and Circular Bioeconomy; and Climate–Forest Disaster Risk Management— that contribute to the goals of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These PPAs are supported by cross-cutting themes, such as Policy, Capacity, Knowledge, and Technology, that permeate each area (Figure 1).

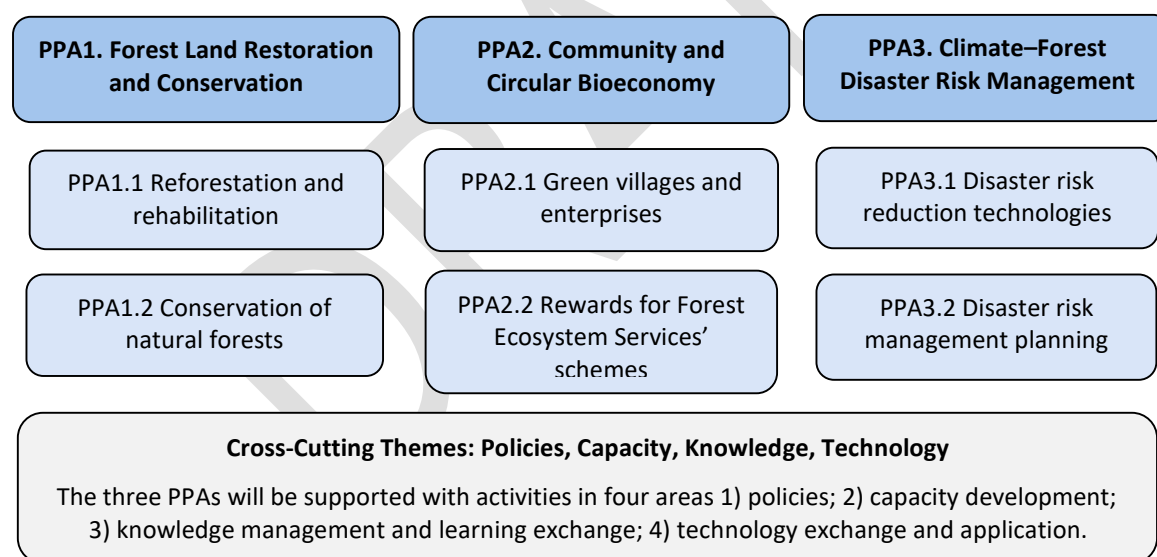


Figure 1. Program Priority Areas and Cross-Cutting Themes of AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030)

The AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) proposes specific Climate Actions linked to each PPA of the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030), including the rehabilitation and restoration of

10,000 hectares of forest land, the establishment of 100 nature-based community forestry businesses and 20 green villages, and the adoption of ICT-based technology exchanges and data management systems for climate-forest disaster risk management.

The scope of the Climate-Forest Cooperation activities is prepared to ensure consistency with the PPAs, cross-cutting themes, and the proposed Climate Actions, applying a phased framework to consider the interconnectivity and expansibility of cooperation efforts.

2.3 Phases and Scope of the Climate-Forest Cooperation

The proposed Climate-Forest Cooperation in this Policy document covers all collaborative efforts that affect the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in AFoCO Member Countries. It is based on the PPAs and CCT detailed in the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the Climate Actions outlined in the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034). By applying the three (3) phases of the Cooperation activities, this scope of the Climate-Forest Cooperation aims to support the identification, development, implementation, and expand the cooperation with AFoCO Member Countries in consideration of their different national circumstances and contexts, and to improve alignment among the cooperative efforts.

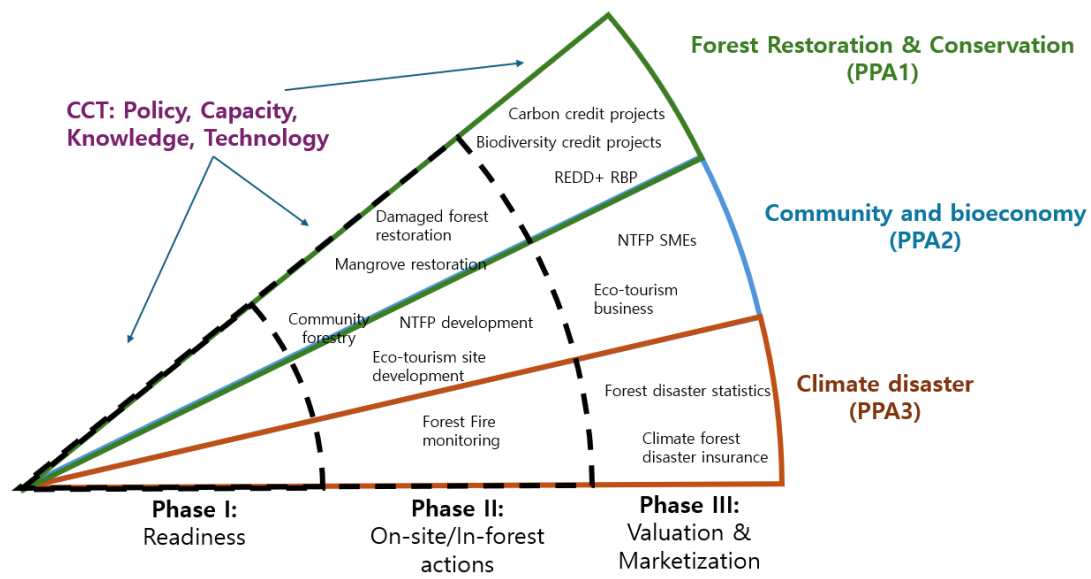


Figure 2. Phase and scope of the Climate-Forest Cooperation with provisional activities

3. Strategic Approaches

3.1. Measurable and Reportable Contribution to SDGs and Climate Goal

AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation aims to promote collaboration that aligns with international norms and can be reported and aggregated at national and international levels to support the achievement of the global common objectives. This includes but is not limited to, the SDGs and the climate goal of the UNFCCC.

The forestry sector notably contributes to several SDGs, and the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) identifies the three most relevant goals as SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). These three goals are proposed as the primary SDG targets of the Climate-Forest Cooperation. Additionally, SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) are considered secondary targets due to their deep relevance to the three PPAs and their expected impact on the primary SDG targets mentioned above.

In the context of the UNFCCC, AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation will contribute to the achievement of Member Countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and support national REDD+ initiatives based on the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework for REDD+. More specifically, this cooperation aims to support to plan, implement, and enhance activities related to forest carbon removals and emissions reduction in the Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) category of national greenhouse gas inventories of the Member Countries, facilitating cooperation for measuring, reporting, and verification (MRV) of these actions. Forest carbon projects in the voluntary international carbon market can be pursued to engage public-private partnerships and utilize private climate finance, following the member countries' requests and adhering to international norms and principles including environmental integrity and safeguards.

The performance of AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation, in supporting the achievement of the related SDGs and UNFCCC objectives, ultimately aims to be utilized and submitted in relevant international reports (e.g., Voluntary National Review, Nationally Determined Contributions, Biannual Transparency Report, Technical Annex on REDD+, etc). This effort includes supporting capacity building for Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) and management of knowledge and information systems (e.g., administrative statistics) to facilitate these processes.

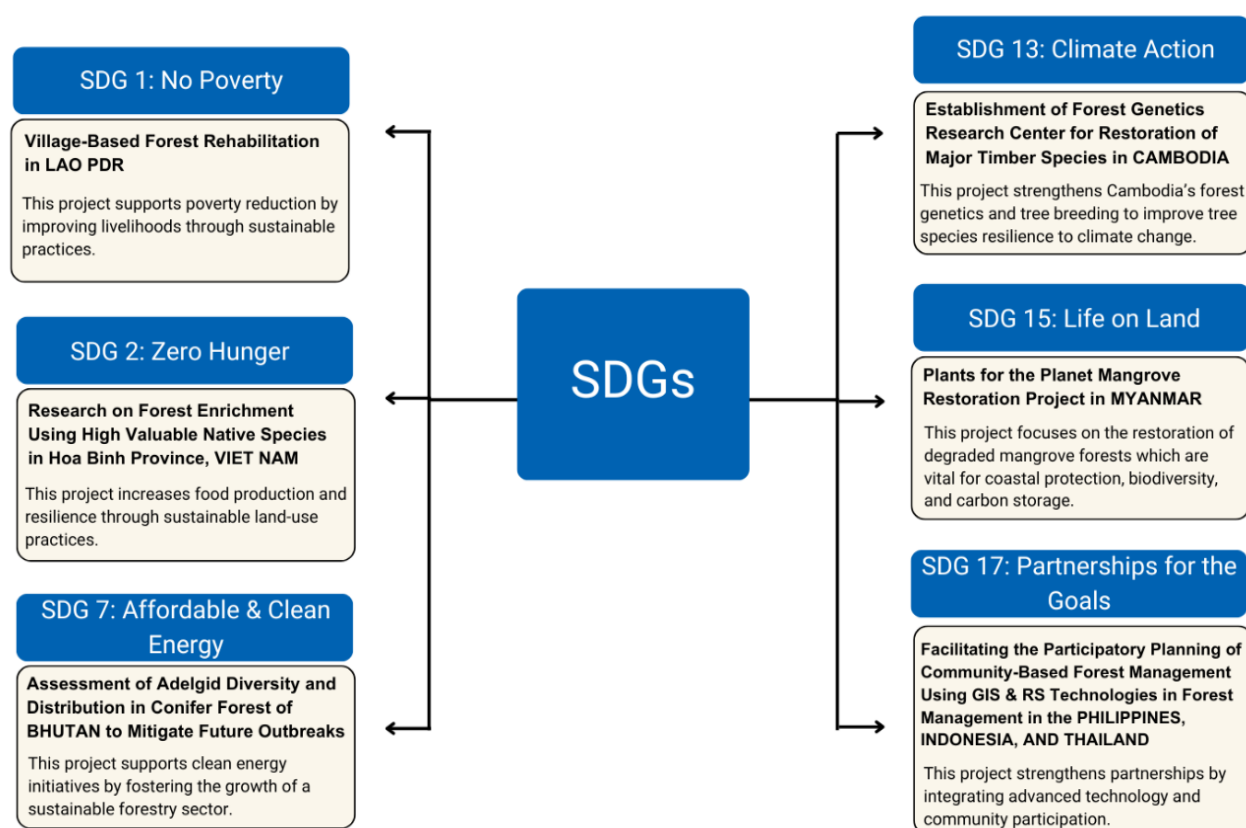


Figure 3. AFoCO's Projects that Align with SDGs

3.2. Scale-up and Integration of the efforts

AFoCO's Climate-Forest Cooperation will actively pursue scaling up and integration to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of its projects and programs. These efforts are crucial from both an environmental-social perspective and a practical standpoint for cooperation. From an environmental-social viewpoint, targeting large areas (such as an administrative jurisdictional unit encompassing a province) is essential for addressing leakage and non-permanence in terms of the effects of forest carbon sequestration and emissions reduction. It is also vital for ensuring the minimum area for wildlife habitats and the minimum viable population for biodiversity conservation. Linked with these efforts to conserve and enhance forest ecosystem services, a virtuous cycle will be possible that contributes to the activation of the local bioeconomy and livelihood improvement.

From a practical perspective, securing project sites and ensuring sustainable operations are critical, as well as achieving a minimum MRV scale that can be reflected in administrative statistics, which are essential for tracking the subsequent impacts and performance of projects at the national level. **This scaling up and integration can be achieved through the linkage or programmatization of projects belonging to different phases and PPAs. For example, a reforestation project funded by grants (PPA1 at Phase II) could be scaled up to a large-scale reforestation carbon credit project using private partner funds (PPA1 at Phase III). Alternatively, integration is achievable through the development of forest ecotourism programs (PPA2 at Phase II & III), themed around post-wildfire ecosystem restoration at project sites (PPA1 at Phase II).**

Such scaling up and integration will require proactive engagement of AFoCO staff and considerate involvement by the responsible parties and will be feasible through close cooperation among internal and external stakeholders.

3.3. Valuation and Marketization

AFoCO will actively valorize and commercialize the outcomes of the Climate-Forest Cooperation to mobilize financial resources. Forests and the ecosystem services they provide offer significant benefits and are crucial for achieving the SDGs and the overarching global climate goal. The conservation and sustainable management of forests often require substantial effort and cost. However, due to externalities, these efforts and benefits frequently fail to receive proper compensation or remuneration. Furthermore, public funding for the Climate-Forest Cooperation is limited in terms of scaling up its impact and reach. Therefore, it is essential to actively valorize and commercialize the outcomes of the Climate-Forest Cooperation to attract funding from diverse sources of resources.

Enhancing the accessibility of private sector funding requires preliminary efforts such as revising national institutions, policies and developing business models (Phase I & Phase II). These efforts use public funds and set the stage for pilot projects and the commercialization of projects, where private funding can be actively utilized (Phase II & III). Such consideration to mobilize and utilize private finance is becoming increasingly important, reflecting a trend towards including such criteria in attracting grants and other official development assistance (ODA) as funding sources.

This approach necessitates robust partnerships between AFoCO Member Countries and local stakeholders, based on the provision of credible data and information to support private funding decisions.

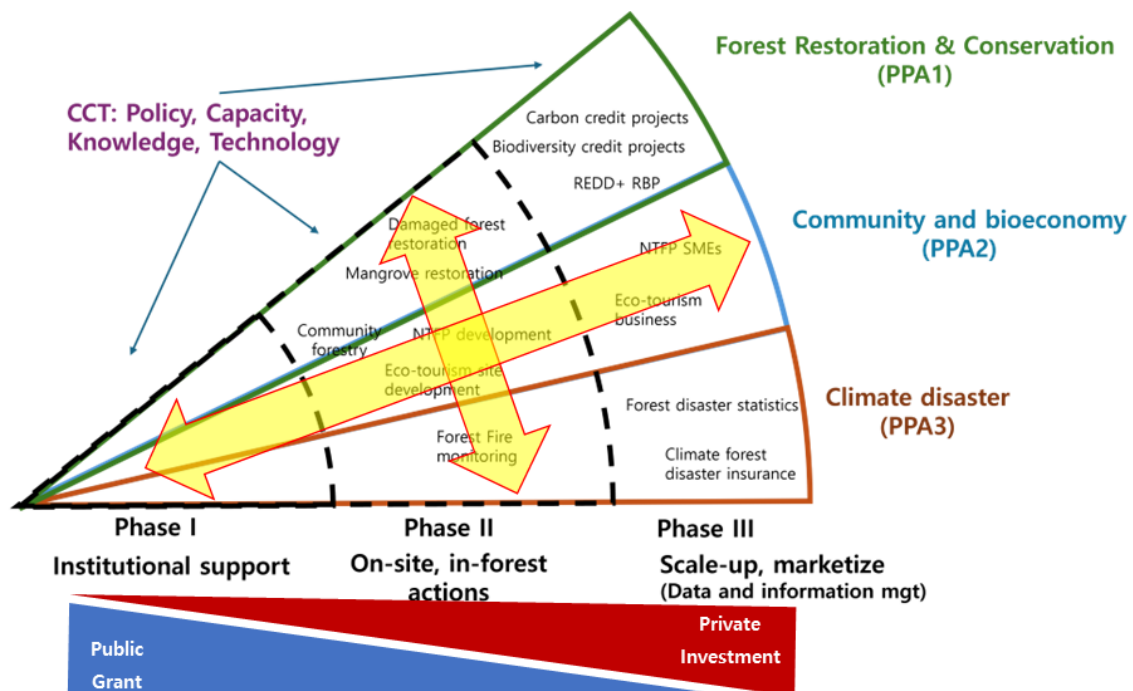


Figure 4. Scale-up and integration of efforts under the Framework

4. Implementing the Framework

4.1. Amendment of AFoCO Project Manual and new Guidelines

At the Tenth Session of the Assembly (2024), the Plan for the Amendment of the AFoCO Project Manual was reported. With the amendment of the AFoCO Project Manual, revisions necessary for the development and operation of actual projects and programs will be provided, taking into consideration each approach outlined in the proposed Scope of Climate Forest Cooperation. Additionally, as tools for conducting feasibility studies, including procedures for valorization and marketization of forest cooperation efforts and cost-benefit analysis, new guidelines for phase III projects, including the Forest Carbon Project Guideline, will be developed. These updates aim to align the manual more closely with the current needs and strategies for effective and sustainable forest management and cooperation.

4.2 Protocol for scale-up and integration of the projects and programs

The core of the AFoCO Climate-Forest Cooperation, as proposed in this document, is to facilitate the alignment and expansion of projects over a long-term horizon. Achieving this requires the identification and matching of cooperation opportunities that reflect the needs and circumstances of Member Countries as well as the interests of partners. To operationalize the approach, a protocol will be developed. This protocol will encompass periodic analyses of the cooperation needs and conditions of both Member Countries and partners, and the identification of opportunities based on these analyses. Additionally, it will involve program design and regular communication among stakeholders. This protocol is intended to serve as rules and procedures to develop programs and sub-projects and mobilize funds from public and private sector by applying the Framework. It aims to ensure effective alignment and expansion of collaborative efforts within the forestry sector to robustly address climate challenges.

4.3 Investment to enhance organizational capacities

To effectively implement the Framework described in this document, enhancing AFoCO's organizational capacities is essential. Strengthening these capacities will involve training and mentoring staff to ensure they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage and execute projects and integrated programs effectively. This capacity building will not only increase staff expertise but also enhance their ability to address operational challenges. Moreover, it is critical to expand and diversify the workforce to meet the growing demands and complexities of climate-related forest cooperation. By bringing in professionals with varied backgrounds and specializations, AFoCO can foster more dynamic and innovative ways of cooperation.

Investing in these areas will ensure that the organization is well-prepared to meet the objectives outlined in the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) to address the challenges of climate change through sustainable forest management and cooperation.

4.4 Leveraging Strategic Partnerships for Technology and Resource Acquisition

Leveraging strategic partnerships to attract technology and resources is critical for the achievement of AFoCO's objectives. Engaging with international organizations, academic institutions, private corporations, and indigenous communities will be instrumental in accessing cutting-edge technologies and means that can enhance forest conservation and management practices. This collaboration will also open avenues for additional funding sources that are essential for the extensive and sustained execution of the Climate-Forest Cooperation.

By forging these strategic partnerships, AFoCO will not only gain access to innovative technologies and substantial financial resources but also enhance its credibility and influence

on the global stage. These relationships will facilitate the sharing of best practices, allow for the cross-pollination of ideas, and provide opportunities for capacity building among member countries. Ultimately, these partnerships will empower AFoCO to effectively implement the projects and programs, utilize the operational mechanisms developed for project scaling and integration, and achieve its long-term climate action goals as set forth in the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and Climate Action Plan (2025-2034).

Table 2. Implementing Framework Overview Table

Section	Key Components	Expected Outcomes
4.1 Amendment of AFoCO Project Manual	- Revisions for project development - New guidelines for feasibility studies & Phase III projects	- Enhanced project effectiveness and sustainability
4.2 Protocol for Scale-up and Integration	- Periodic analyses of needs - Program design and stakeholder communication	- Effective long-term alignment of projects - Expanded and sustained cooperative efforts
4.3 Investment in Organizational Capacities	- Staff training and mentoring - Workforce expansion and diversification	- Increased expertise and operational efficiency - Enhanced ability to manage complex climate-related challenges
4.4 Strategic Partnerships for Technology	- Engagement with international bodies, academia, and private sector	- Access to cutting-edge technologies - Additional funding sources - Strengthened global influence and credibility

5. Moving Forward

It is important to recognize that any policy document reflects the current perspectives and strategies. While there is an effort to create a vision that will remain robust despite future changes, the volatile and dynamic nature of this era is acknowledged. Consequently, new challenges and opportunities will undoubtedly emerge that this document does not currently address. Moreover, as the challenges of addressing climate change will be more likely to be complicated and intertwined in the future. AFoCO realize that strengthening policies about cooperation and maintaining close collaboration among forestry stakeholder and across other relevant stakeholder is pivotal to address climate change issue.

The staff of AFoCO and diverse partners should consider this Policy document as a flexible guideline intended to steer collective efforts toward meaningful progress. There is a commitment to continuously learn from experiences—identifying which strategies succeed and which do not, and adjusting and refining approaches to meet the evolving demands of the Climate-Forest Cooperation. This adaptive approach will ensure that actions remain effective and relevant, enabling the achievement of the vision of AFoCO effectively.

Annex 1. Principles of the AFoCO Climate Forest Cooperation

1. Forest Climate Cooperation aligns with global and national objectives.

The cooperation is designed to contribute to the achievement of global objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the climate goals of the UNFCCC. It supports member countries in aligning their national strategies with these international commitments, particularly in the areas of forest carbon sequestration and emissions reduction.

2. Forest Climate Cooperation emphasizes action-oriented international collaboration.

The cooperation emphasizes practical and actionable international collaboration, engaging multiple levels of partnerships to implement policies, build capacities, and foster inclusive initiatives. This approach ensures that efforts are grounded in real-world impacts and are adaptable to the varying contexts of member countries.

3. Forest Climate Cooperation prioritizes the sustainability of Asian forests and their communities.

The Forest Climate Cooperation initiative prioritizes the development of climate-resilient and sustainable forests, landscapes, and communities. This principle ensures that all actions are aligned with the overarching vision of a greener Asia, focusing on long-term environmental sustainability and the resilience of ecosystems and human communities to climate change.

4. Forest Climate Cooperation is implemented through phased and strategic approaches.

Activities under the cooperation are organized into three interconnected phases: Readiness, On-site/In-forest Action, and Valuation & Marketization. This phased approach ensures that projects are strategically developed, implemented, and scaled up, with each phase building on the achievements of the previous ones, enhancing coherence and continuity.

5. Forest Climate Cooperation focuses on scaling up and integration for maximum impact.

A key principle is the scaling up and integration of projects to maximize their environmental, social, and economic impacts. By identifying linkage and projects across different phases and priority areas, the cooperation aims to address challenges like leakage, non-permanence, and biodiversity conservation, while also contributing to the local bioeconomy and livelihood improvement.

6. Forest Climate Cooperation promotes valorization and marketization of forest ecosystem services.

The cooperation actively promotes the valorization and commercialization of forest ecosystem services to attract diverse financial resources. This principle recognizes the need to secure funding beyond public sources by engaging the private sector and developing business models that enhance the financial sustainability of forest conservation and management efforts.

7. Forest Climate Cooperation leverages strategic partnerships and resource mobilization.

Leveraging strategic partnerships is critical for accessing technology, expertise, and financial resources. This principle encourages collaboration with international organizations, academic institutions, private corporations, and indigenous communities to enhance the effectiveness and reach of the cooperation.

8. Forest Climate Cooperation emphasizes capacity building and organizational enhancement.

Strengthening the capacities of AFoCO and its partners is essential for the successful implementation of projects. This principle highlights the importance of continuous learning, skill development, and organizational growth to address the increasing complexity and demands of climate-related forest cooperation.

9. Forest Climate Cooperation ensures transparency and accountability in all processes.

Ensuring transparency in processes and accountability in outcomes is fundamental to the cooperation. This principle underscores the importance of clear communication, robust monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems, and the active engagement of stakeholders in decision-making processes.

10. Forest Climate Cooperation adopts an adaptive and flexible approach to address emerging challenges.

Recognizing the dynamic nature of global challenges, the cooperation is guided by an adaptive approach that allows for continuous learning and refinement of strategies. This principle ensures that the initiative remains responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities, maintaining its relevance and effectiveness over time.