

Fourth Session of the Assembly
25-26 November 2020, Virtual

Agenda Item 2.3

DECISION 34-IV-20R

Policy Relevance of AFoCO's Operation

The Assembly of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO),

Recalling Article 3 of the Agreement on the Establishment of the AFoCO regarding the objectives of the organization;

Taking note of the recommendations provided from the External Institutional Review of AFoCO in 2019 and the action plan endorsed by the Assembly to guide the implementation of those recommendations; and

Further taking note of the importance of building policy relevance of future projects of AFoCO to mobilize ultimate and long-lasting impacts to national development and building up interest in the member countries for AFoCO;

Decides to

1. Approve the plan for enhancing policy relevance of the AFoCO's operation as contained in D-34-1 and mandate the Secretariat to establish and manage the 'Communication Platform for Policy Updates and Development';
 2. Task the Secretariat to start the process in constructing 'AFoCO Forest Policy Archive' and developing 'Country Profile and Context' documents in close consultation with the Parties; and
 3. Task the Secretariat to prepare the Annual Thematic Dialogue starting from 2021.
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Plan to Enhance Policy Relevance of AFoCO's Operation

I. Background

1. Policy relevance refers to how an organization effectively informs decisions made by policy-makers of its member countries and for that intention how its programs and operations are designed relevant to policy contexts of the member countries. Report of the External Institutional Review of AFoCO (2019) stressed the importance of building policy relevance of future projects in light of mobilizing ultimate and long-lasting impacts to national development and building up interest in the member countries for AFoCO. In order to be policy-relevant, the review panel suggested AFoCO to be observant of the political agendas in the member countries and **develop a strategy with respect to policy relevance of future projects and activities.**

2. From its launch in 2018, AFoCO has been keen to provide services that meet the needs of its member countries and facilitate cooperation among the members to advance sustainable forest management in different policy contexts. A country-driven approach for identification and development of regionally relevant projects has been one featured strategy taken in formulating policy-relevant actions. In addition, the ministerial meetings held in 2019, AFoCO created an avenue to gather views from its members in setting and aligning future directions with the needs and priorities of its member countries. Furthermore, the 1st Achievement Workshop organized in 2019 has underscored important policy considerations in future programming and policy support by sharing learned lessons from the on-going and completed projects and initiatives.

3. Building upon these previous and on-going efforts to ensure policy relevance of the operation, the Secretariat team collectively formulated and proposes 'a plan to enhance policy relevance of AFoCO's operation', as set forth hereunder.

II. A proposal: Communication Platforms for Policy Updates and Development

4. The key objectives of the proposed plan are to:

- establish an institutional knowledge base on policy contexts of the member countries; and
- create regular channels of communication to keep up with policy dynamics and changes in high-level political agenda and disseminate policy recommendations emanating from project results.

5. To achieve these objectives and as an initial step, the Secretariat proposes to establish a cross-functional knowledge management platform titled: **"Communication Platform for Policy Updates and Development"**.

6. The Communication Platform is comprising three components as below. All components of the Communication Platform are expected to complement with one another to advance further policy relevance.

a. AFoCO Forest Policy Archive

A regularly updating collection of policy documents of member countries, which shall be publicly accessible and searchable through the official website of AFoCO

b. Country Profile and Context (baseline information)

Background reference documents which present country-specific forest data and policy contexts as baselines for designing of future projects and activities. They will be updated periodically when significant changes occur in forest state or in policy.

c. Annual Thematic Dialogue

A dialogue meeting structured at the regular session of the Assembly, to address key substantive areas. Themes, participants (technical or high-level), format of the sessions will vary depending on the situation at which each session is organized.

7. By establishing the Communication Platform, it is expected that:

- the priorities and interests of the member countries can be efficiently harvested;
- the organizational work program can be effectively guided and coordinated by the strategic policy directions formulated through inclusive and consultative process;
- AFoCO’s regional and global perspectives and responsibilities can be fully performed by identifying and developing regional-based projects and activities generating both in-country and cross-border/regional outcomes and impacts;
- policy makers and key stakeholders of the member countries can be rightly engaged to achieve the organizational vision and mission; and
- inform the strategic planning process of the organization.

8. A *Figure* below illustrates pathways how the Communication Platform enhances policy relevance of the AFoCO’s operation.

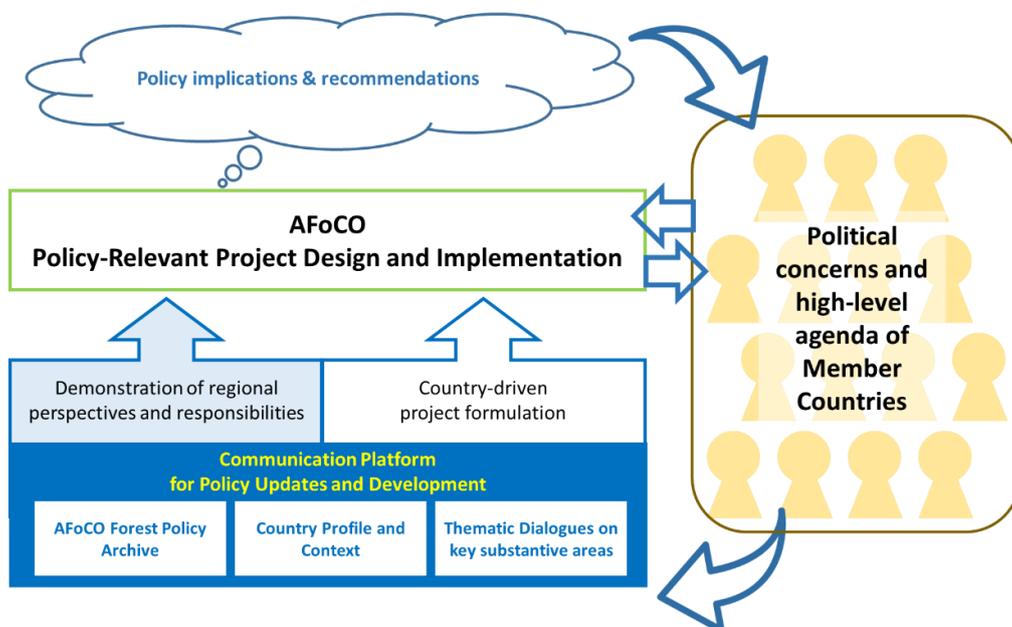


Figure: Illustrated pathways for building policy relevance of the AFoCO’s operation

III. Proposed approaches and resourcing

9. Constructing the Communication Platform, particularly for establishment of the Forest Policy Archive and development of the Country Profile and Context, require extensive collection and analysis of relevant data and information. Led by the Secretariat team, the establishment process will follow a step by step methodology ensuring inclusive, broad input and quality assurance by engaging national stakeholders, policy experts and researchers in a timely manner.

10. **Representatives and National Focal Points (NFPs) of the member countries will be consulted mainly as sources of information and data, validators of the analysis, joint authors to the documents produced in the process** (See a *Table* below for an indicative consultation plan). Alumni of AFoCO Capacity Building Programs (i.e. Landmark Scholarship Program, Fellowship Program, etc.) and previous and current project managers and NFPs may be considered for priority for necessary technical inputting into preparation of the Country Profile and Context documents.

11. The Annual Thematic Dialogue will be prepared as an annual event that is organized as part of the regular session of the Assembly. The identification of the session theme, preparation of the background discussion paper, and the member's discourse during the session will be inclusive and engaging to all the member countries while firmly based on scientific knowledge and evidence. The theme of the 2021 Dialogue session will be identified and determined through a consultative process engaging member countries. In order to assist the discussion during the session, a precursor discussion paper will be developed and provided before the session. After the session, key messages and way forward action among others will be summarized and published into the outcome report.

Table: Indicative Consultation Plan for 2021 (with the member countries)

Timing	Policy Archive	Country Profile & Context (CPC)	Annual Thematic Dialogue
Jan.- Mar.	Provision of policy documents	Provision of data and information (Responses to the questionnaire survey, in matrix)	Identification of the theme
Apr.- Jun.	<i>Secretariat: Organizing and standardizing the collection</i>	<i>Secretariat: Development of zero draft of CPC</i>	<i>Secretariat: Development of background discussion paper</i>
Jul.- Sep.	<i>Secretariat: Development of web pages for the archive</i>	Validation of and inputs to zero draft of CPC documents	Inputs to background discussion paper
Oct.- Dec.	n/a	Validation of and inputs to zero draft of CPC documents (continue)	Discourse at the dialogue