

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

Summary Record

1. The Fourth Session of the Assembly of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) was held virtually from 25 to 26 November 2020. The Assembly was attended by 12 Parties, 1 Observer, and the AFoCO Secretariat. The session was presided by Mr. Raimundo Mau, the President of the Assembly as per Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.
2. The President commended the tremendous efforts of the Parties, Observers, and the Secretariat for the resilience and adaptability to overcome the pandemic situation of COVID-19. He also highlighted some of the achievements, including welcoming Mongolia as a Party to the Agreement and Malaysia as an Observer, follow-ups to the institutional review 2019, COVID-19 responses to minimize impacts to implementation of core activities, developing new projects and partnerships, membership and accreditations to other international entities, and arrangements on the selection of the succeeding Executive Director.
3. The Assembly adopted seven decisions as listed in document A-IV-20R-INF-1.

Agenda 1. Organizational Matters

Agenda 1.1 Adoption of the Agenda

4. The Assembly deliberated on the provisional agenda and agreed to take up Agenda 6.2 at the closing of the Meeting. The Assembly adopted the proposed agenda as contained in document A-1-IV-20R.

Agenda 1.2 Membership

5. The Assembly took note of the list of Parties and Observers as contained in document A-2-IV-20R and welcomed Mongolia as a Party to the Agreement for the Establishment of AFoCO. The Assembly recalled welcoming Malaysia's intention to become a Party and noted the current status as Observer to AFoCO. The Assembly further noted that 13 countries are now on board as Parties to AFoCO.

Agenda 1.3 Information on the Establishment of Subsidiary Body

6. Recalling the provisions set out in Article 7 of the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO, the Assembly considered the need to establish a subsidiary body and took note of the information on practices in UN conventions and other international organizations. The Assembly supported forming a subsidiary body, however, the functions of the subsidiary body need to be clearly identified. The Republic of Korea requested to consider whether AFoCO should have a committee for review of project implementation or a committee on science and technology. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to develop the work plan of forming a subsidiary body, and the draft terms of reference of the subsidiary body in close consultation with the Parties.

Agenda 2. Implementation of Strategic Plan 2019-2023

Agenda 2.1 Follow-up Actions on the Recommendations of the Institutional Review of AFoCO and Secretariat

7. The Assembly considered and endorsed the report on Follow-up Actions for the 2019 Institutional Review Recommendations contained in A-4-IV-20R. The Republic of Korea enquired if the suggestions from the Executive Director Selection Committee to develop a new methodology to select the Executive Director and the possibility to consider the terms of the Executive Director can be included in the report of the follow-up action. The Secretariat clarified that the report is specifically addressing the recommendations of the Institutional Review reported at the 3rd Session of the Assembly and the directives of the Assembly. The idea of revisiting the Executive Director Selection Committee could be taken in Agenda 3.4. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to make continuous efforts to implement the action plan set forth therein.

Agenda 2.2 Revised Strategic Framework of AFoCO

8. The Assembly considered the provisional statements of vision and mission and a revised set of priority areas contained in A-5-IV-20R. Given the nature of the strategic framework that is far-reaching and long-term, the Assembly advised taking sufficient time for discussion over the concerned matter. Feedbacks from the Assembly on the proposed statements of vision and mission included: a reconsideration of defining the geographical scope of the AFoCO's mission taking into account the potential participation of non-Asian countries in the future; embracing forest-related subjects in a wider scope including the element of biodiversity conservation; and highlighting 'action-oriented' practices as a featured approach of AFoCO. In this regard, the Assembly recommended the Secretariat to circulate the proposed strategic framework and invite inputs from the Parties for the following two to three weeks for further consolidation. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to improve the current Strategic Plan 2019-2023 in close consultation with the Parties when the strategic framework of AFoCO is finalized.

Agenda 2.3 A Plan to Enhance the Policy Relevance of AFoCO's Operation

9. See Decision 34-IV-20R.

10. The Assembly supported enhancing policy relevance of AFoCO's operation through communication platforms which comprise policy archives, consolidation of country profiles and policy updates, and annual thematic dialogues. The Assembly further requested the Secretariat to consider producing significant reports or policy briefs in the coming years through such platforms. The Secretariat underscored the cooperation from the Parties in this process, highlighting the benefits of well-structured baseline data and policy relevance in AFoCO's operation in facilitating the project formulation and resource mobilization process. The Assembly noted that the extensive work and inputs from the member countries required in the process can be optimized by sharing and consolidating data and information that exists in each country.

Agenda 2.4 Update on the Activities Related to Resource Mobilization

11. The Secretariat briefed on updates on the activities related to resource mobilization as in document A-7-IV-20R. The Republic of Korea enquired why the final agenda document omitted data and infographics presented in the earlier version and requested the Secretariat to present detailed information on the expenditure aspects of the Administrative Account. In response, the Secretariat clarified that the meeting document contains the same report on resource mobilization with detailed data and infographics appended to additional summary pages that were provided for better deliberation. The Secretariat further reminded that expenditures of the Administrative Account and all other financial information had already been made available to the Parties through the circulation of the Annual Financial Report.

12. The Assembly took note and acknowledged the briefing and clarifications provided by the Secretariat and tasked the Secretariat to lead and enhance resource mobilization efforts. Taking note of the information provided, the Representatives will enjoin respective National Focal Points to facilitate necessary actions to support mobilizing resources from identified new and diverse sources, including the Green Climate Fund and its Readiness and Preparatory Support Program.

Agenda 2.5 Updates on the On-going Programs/Projects and Final Evaluation of Completed Projects

13. The Assembly reviewed the progress of programs and projects contained in document A-8-IV-20R. Under the uncertainties and challenges of COVID-19 evolving this year, the Republic of Korea raised concerns on the projects that could not complete inception arrangements among the seven projects which are subject to start this year. The Secretariat took note of the concerns and highlighted three approaches that are being undertaken as coping measures: (i) identifying alternative activities that will produce the same results and outcomes (e.g., translating targets into publications instead of workshops, sharing results from project implementation at fora like WFC instead of international seminars), (ii) application of premium communication tools and equipment, and (iii) regular review process to keep people updated on responses. The Secretariat further explained that local situations of certain projects are impacting the inception arrangements. Likewise, the Assembly advised the Secretariat to consider the country-specific conditions. Singapore, as a participating country of a completed project, expressed gratitude to the Secretariat and the project lead country.

Agenda 2.6 Updates on the Capacity Building Activities

14. The Assembly reviewed the progress of capacity building activities contained in document A-9-IV-20R. The Secretariat further informed that it is considering possibilities to introduce blended training programs from 2021 and community training within countries in response to the COVID-19 situation.

Agenda 2.7 Project Development and Project Proposals

Agenda 2.7.1 Status of Projects Approved by the Assembly

15. The Assembly took note of the status report on the projects approved by the Assembly as contained in document A-10-IV-20R. The Secretariat noted that some Parties require a funding commitment letter from AFoCO to start the internal procedure required.

Agenda 2.7.2 Approval of new projects

16. See Decision 35-IV-20R.

17. Upon clarification sought from the Assembly, the Secretariat clarified that the formation and composition of the Project Appraisal Committee (PAC) is consistent with Decision 30-III-19R guided by the procedure set out in the Project Manual. The non-inclusion of KFS or any other donor(s) in the PAC is considered as suitable at this juncture so as not to preempt or prevent untimely confirmation/commitment of project funds by the concerned donor. The PAC decision is limited to delivering a final decision on the project appraisal by confirming projects that will proceed to fund mobilization or identifying potential project donor(s).

Agenda 2.7.3 Information on Annual Project Development Schedule

18. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to facilitate the necessary actions on the project development according to the indicative project development timeline as contained in A-12-IV-20R.

Agenda 2.7.4 Updates on the New and Potential Projects and Programs

19. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to sustain the initiatives summarized in A-13-IV-20R and further consult with the Parties on project development concerns in accordance with potential donors' requirements and timeline. Upon request, the Secretariat clarified that the ASEAN-ROK Garden is proposed to and welcomed at the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit. It is still at the initial stage of receiving intention and concept notes from concerned Parties. In addition, the Republic of Korea informed that although the Republic of Korea was not able to secure a budget for the ASEAN-ROK Garden for 2021, the Republic of Korea views that the project development can still continue, and that the project concept note is under preparation and potential project sites are being explored. The Republic of Korea will continue efforts to secure a budget and also requested the Secretariat to explore funds to support the activities in 2021.

Agenda 2.8 Updates on Communication Activities

20. The Assembly took note of the updates on communication activities as contained in A-14-IV-20R. The Assembly applauded the efforts of the Secretariat to participate in a number of global events to promote organizational visibility.

Agenda 3. Effective operation of the Secretariat

Agenda 3.1 Amendment of the Staff Regulations

21. See Decision 36-IV-20R.

22. The Secretariat noted the suggestion of the Republic of Korea that the Staff Regulations need to be comparable with the standards of other international organizations and clarified that relevant regulations of the UN and other organizations have been referred during the drafting of the Staff Regulations. Upon request of the Republic of Korea, the Secretariat clarified that the scope and method of applicable supported travel of dependents are provided in the Staff Regulations, and the proposed amendment is to have clear provision on travel of dependents from home country to the duty station which is at the initial appointment and separation from service.

Agenda 3.2 Amendment of the Financial Regulations

23. See Decision 37-IV-20R.

24. The Republic of Korea highlighted that the budget situation is one of the most important issues in international meetings. Noting on the proposed amendment regarding the interest incomes, the Republic of Korea raised the point that there may be some accumulated balance. It may be useful for the Assembly to be informed on the financial status of all accounts for fund management of the Secretariat and the trend over the recent years.

Agenda 3.3 Enhancement of AFoCO Project Manual and related guidelines

25. The Assembly took note of the revision and effective date of the Project Manual as contained in document G-1-20R, the Project Monitoring and Evaluation Guideline as contained in document G-2-20R, and the Procurement Guidelines for Project Goods and Services as contained in document G-3-20R as of 27 November 2020. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to communicate and inform the project staff on the effective manual and guidelines.

Agenda 3.4 Appointment of the Executive Director

26. See Decision 38-IV-20R.

Agenda 3.5 Updates on Operations and Activities of the Secretariat

27. The Assembly considered the updates including the annual report and financial report 2019 as contained in A-19-IV-20R. The Assembly adopted Decision 39-IV-20R for budget reallocation for operational expenditures in FY 2020.

4. Work plan and budget 2021

28. See Decision 40-IV-20R.

29. Upon request for clarification from the Assembly, the Secretariat informed that the training need assessment was conducted to draw out the list of capacity building programs run under the RETC. The Republic of Korea requested the Secretariat to report on the status of funds for projects and final outcomes that AFoCO intends to mobilize through its project activities. The Secretariat clarified that the annual financial report provides financial information relevant to the project matters, however, if required, the Secretariat can further update on the status of voluntary contributions from the Republic of Korea at the donors meeting to be organized early next year. The Republic of Korea has requested that from the next regular session of the AFoCO Assembly, the Secretariat is encouraged to provide both 2022 budget for the administrative account and information on project fund.

5. Procedural Matters of the Assembly

Agenda 5.1 Election of Succeeding Officers

30. The Kingdom of Bhutan and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar were elected as the President and Vice President in accordance with Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

Agenda 5.2 Date and venue of the Sessions of the Assembly (Special Session and Regular Session)

31. The Assembly considered having two sessions of the Assembly in 2021, a special session during the occasion of the World Forestry Congress and a regular session in October in accordance with Decision 16-I-18R. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to keep track of the COVID-19 situation and accordingly inform the Assembly of the date and venue of the sessions of the Assembly.

6. Other matters

6.1 Introduction to the WFC Preparation status - contents for each theme

32. The Republic of Korea shared information on the preparation status of the World Forestry Congress and detailed sub-themes and special events as contained in A-22-IV-20R. The Assembly took note of the information.

Adjournment

33. Prior to the adjournment of the Assembly session, the newly appointed Executive Director, Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon, was invited to deliver a statement.

6.2 Presentation of the appreciation plaque by the Assembly to the Executive Director of AFoCO

34. The Assembly further agreed to take the Agenda item 6.2 before the adjournment. In appreciation and honor of the contributions and leadership, the Assembly presented the appreciation plaque to Mr. Chencho Norbu, as the Executive Director, and he was invited to deliver his statement.

35. Dr. Park Eunsik, Vice Executive Director, was also invited to deliver a statement as he will be completing his term at the Secretariat by January 2021.

7. Summary Record of the Session

36. The Assembly considered and adopted the Summary Record of the Fourth Session of the Assembly.

Closing of the Session

37. In closing, the President extended appreciation to all delegates from the Parties and Observers, and the Secretariat for the extensive virtual meeting for 2 days. The President highlighted that AFoCO will have important role in the region. With hopes for the pandemic to be contained soon, he wished everyone safety and good health. The Session was held in the spirit of cooperation.

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List of Decisions Adopted at the Fourth Session

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|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision-34-IV-20R | Policy Relevance of AFoCO's Operation |
| Decision-35-IV-20R | Approval of New Projects |
| Decision-36-IV-20R | Amendment of Staff Regulations |
| Decision-37-IV-20R | Amendment of Financial Regulations |
| Decision-38-IV-20R | Appointment of the Executive Director |
| Decision-39-IV-20R | Budget Reallocation for Operational Expenditures in FY2020 |
| Decision-40-IV-20R | Work Plan and Budget for 2021 |
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