



AFoCO Impacts & Best Practices

Summary Report 2022

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AFOCO

Impacts & Best Practices

Summary Report 2022

An evaluation of
seven AFOCO regional projects
in Southeast Asia



CONTENTS

Message from the Executive Director

1	Introduction	7
2	Individual Project Impacts	13
	2.1 Individual Assessment of Projects	
	2.2 Project Scores across Five Impact Criteria	
3	Contributions to Global Goals	21
	3.1 Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	
	3.2 Contributions to Global Forest Goals (GFGs)	
4	AFoCO Program Impacts	27
	4.1 Policy Impacts	
	4.2 Forest Management Impacts	
	4.3 Biodiversity Impacts	
	4.4 Social Impacts	
	4.5 Financial Impacts and the Possibility of Financial Return	
5	Overview and Conclusion	39



Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon at the Fifth Session of the Assembly, Republic of Korea, 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AFoCO has implemented seven multi-country projects since 2013 under the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Forest Cooperation (AFoCo). Valuable learnings and experiences from these projects were uncovered from the evaluation and analysis of AFoCO project impacts and best practices conducted by consultants from Bern University of Applied Sciences. Said evaluation was designed to identify opportunities and lessons for future project development and to promote AFoCO's achievements, thereby establishing and reinforcing existing potential partnerships and networks and encouraging commitments among AFoCO Parties and the global society.

Through its member-driven approaches, the six completed projects and one ongoing project evaluated in this report symbolize AFoCO's efforts to promote and sustain cooperation to achieve key global goals such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Global Forest Goals (GFGs). Together with Party and Observer Countries, AFoCO implements action-oriented practices and facilitates the translation of best practices into national policies and successful experiences into site-specific actions in vulnerable areas and communities where interventions are most needed.

The lessons learned identified through this project evaluation will work as a stepping stone and guidance towards improving project development and management for future and ongoing AFoCO projects. The best practices driven from the project evaluation will be widely disseminated among our Member and Observer Countries as well as the wider global community for possible adoption within the context of respective forest sectors.

AFoCO will continue in its efforts to achieve its mission and vision for a greener Asia for the present and future generations. We can expect that this report will serve as the first of many to come that exemplifies AFoCO's efforts in all types of forests and ecosystems in Asia.



Ricardo L. Calderon
Executive Director
Asian Forest Cooperation Organization

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1. INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

AFoCO's vision is "A greener Asia with resilient forests, landscapes, and communities." Its mission is to strengthen cooperation in the forest sector and promote action-oriented practices of sustainable forest management through policy support, capacity development, and inclusive partnerships to address the adverse impacts of climate change. AFoCO is a treaty-based organization with 16 Member Countries – 13 Parties including Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam as well as 3 Observers, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, and Singapore. From among AFoCO's Member Countries, ROK, through the Korea Forest Service, has been providing 80% of the operational costs of AFoCO, including voluntary contributions (around \$4-5 million/year) since 2013.

AFoCO's work has a particular emphasis on applying advanced technologies in forest management, and its work program includes (i) action-oriented implementation, (ii) regional-based partnerships, (iii) country-driven project development, and (iv) capacity building for forestry staff in AFoCO's Member Countries. With its Member Countries, AFoCO promotes action-oriented cooperation projects on sustainable forest management, generating alternative livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, maintenance and enhancement of ecosystem services, as well as reforestation and forest rehabilitation. There is also an emphasis on climate change mitigation and adaptation activities and supporting REDD+ initiatives to reduce deforestation, degradation, and desertification in order to mitigate the impacts of forest-related disasters.



(AFoCO/011/2016, Singapore)

Visit to Marsiling Park, which focuses on the restoration of its mangrove vegetation and surrounding terrestrial greenery to elevate visitors' experience in a managed landscape, during a Cross-Country Visit in February 2019



Recognizing global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO, the current AFoCO Strategic Plan (2019-2023) was developed following the organization's establishment on 27 April 2018. AFoCO's development and implementation of new projects and programs lie under the framework of strategic priorities over the five years of the Plan. However, the projects implemented before that period were generally guided by relevant/applicable provisions of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Forest Cooperation Agreement.

This report evaluates seven projects conducted through AFoCO, taken together as a program to improve forest management capacity in Southeast Asia, one of which (Project 010) is still ongoing. The report assesses their impacts, evaluates progress, and draws conclusions about lessons learned and best practices. The intent of this review was not as an ex-post review of the individual projects. Rather, it provides an overview of the suite of projects together as a program that contributes to the AFoCO agenda. The objective is to assess the projects with a view towards possible improvements of project delivery for future programs on forest management in Asia.

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AFoCO has guidelines for project reviews, which indicates five principles: impartiality (take into account the views of stakeholders), utility (value to audience), credibility (high professional standards), measurability (use data and indicators as much as possible), and partnership (involving multiple stakeholders). While this program evaluation examines the objectives and outcomes of each project to determine whether and how individual outcomes were achieved, the main contribution of this review is to assess the overall value of the program, and to provide a measure of the AFoCO program's contribution towards improving the status of development in the project areas. The assessment was done to strengthen the effectiveness of the development program, guide and support decision-making and policymaking, guide future project development, and assist in developing an organized system for innovative approaches to sustainable forest management through lessons learned and best practices.

This review consists of three main components — (1) A review of documents to provide project-by-project assessments, which were then summarized into a review of the program. The report also relates to the strategic plan (2019-2023) of AFoCO and took advantage of past evaluations of two of the projects (003 and 011); (2) Based on the initial findings, a validation exercise was completed by interviewing project personnel to ensure that the initial findings were accurate and supplement the report with other useful information derived from the interviews; (3) Following validation, the final report was completed, focusing on lessons learned, best practices, policy impacts, forestry impacts, and financial aspects as a means to improve overall program delivery.

The evaluation of individual project and program impacts utilized AFoCO's internal Guidelines for Project Monitoring and Evaluation, which follows the common methods used by most donors and project implementation agencies, and the OECD Guidelines on Social Impact Investment (SII) (Figure 1).

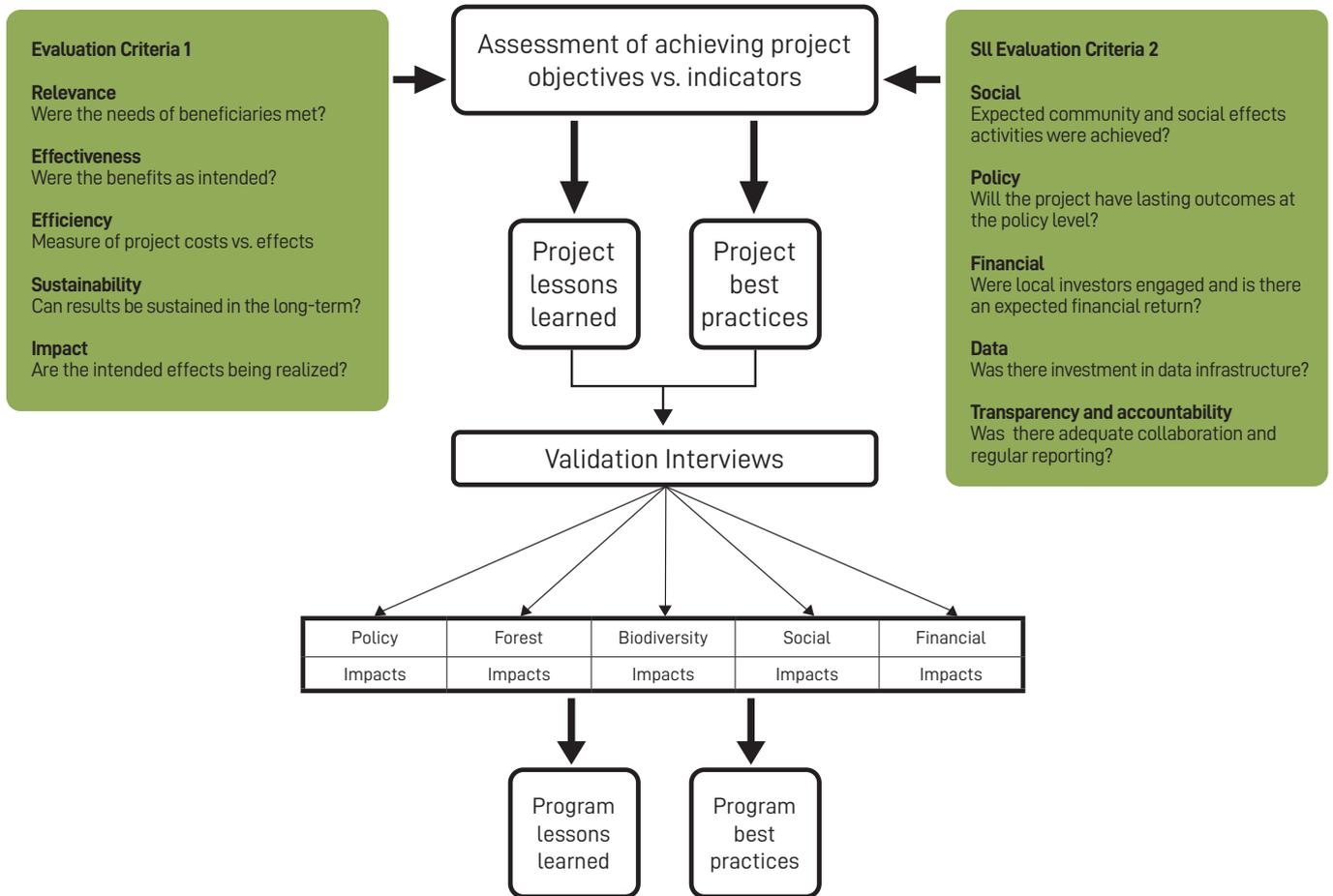


Figure 1. Evaluation criteria and process for projects and the overall program

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2. INDIVIDUAL PROJECT IMPACTS

2.1 Individual Assessment of Projects

2.2 Project Scores across Five Impact Criteria



INDIVIDUAL PROJECT IMPACTS

2.1 Individual Assessment of Projects

A key issue found when assessing the projects was that while there were clear objectives for each with proposed outputs, there were only a few projects that pre-assigned activities within outputs for a project, and the projects generally lacked a set of predetermined indicators against which to assess achievement (Table 2; Annex 2). An exception was Project 003, which provided activities and indicators for each of the expected outputs. Project 010 also provided information on activities with some indicators in the project proposal. The general lack of assigned targets and indicators meant that this assessment primarily determined progress made only towards the proposed outputs. In some cases, survey reports and technical documents were produced, according to the annual reports, but either were not seen or were sometimes in the local language and therefore not available for assessment. A second issue observed when examining the project reports was the large number of activities unrelated to the proposed outputs for several projects (e.g., Projects 001, 004). Nevertheless, all projects accomplished a considerable amount of positive work towards improving the capacity of ASEAN countries to manage, restore, and report on their forests. In particular, the projects involving remote sensing and the supply of new equipment for data analysis, storage and analysis (002, 004, 011) were highly successful in advancing forest management and forest reporting among many countries.

Most or all of the proposed outputs were achieved by the projects. Minor exceptions included Project 001, where there were uncertain results for restoration because only the reports from Myanmar were available; Project 009 that worked with three species (one of which was not a tree) instead of the planned four tree species; and Project 011, where the planned report on a comparative capability of community management capacity was not seen. The two projects that provided indicators at the proposal stage for the activity level (003 and 010) were fully successful in achieving their goals (minor exceptions were reported in the evaluation report commissioned for Project 003).

The findings of the evaluation connote that the following three projects were particularly outstanding in terms of their successes and regional impacts:

AFoCO/002/2013

Provided tools, advanced technologies, and training to improve forest reporting to five ASEAN countries. In addition, the project report provided a good assessment of lessons learned, with tutorial presentations made available for best practices. Importantly, and the project resulted in a new government technical division in Brunei Darussalam for forest reporting.

AFoCO/003/2014

Secured seed sources, established tree nurseries for forest restoration in two countries, and trained over 300 people in seed production and forest restoration while providing motivation for forest recovery.

AFoCO/010/2016

Provided tools, advanced technologies, and training to improve forest reporting to five ASEAN countries. In addition, the project report provided a good assessment of lessons learned, with tutorial presentations made available for best practices. Importantly, and the project resulted in a new government technical division in Brunei Darussalam for forest reporting.

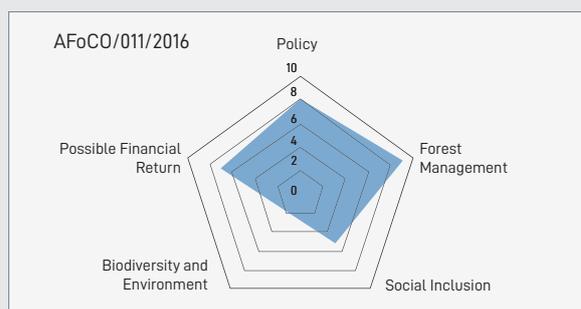
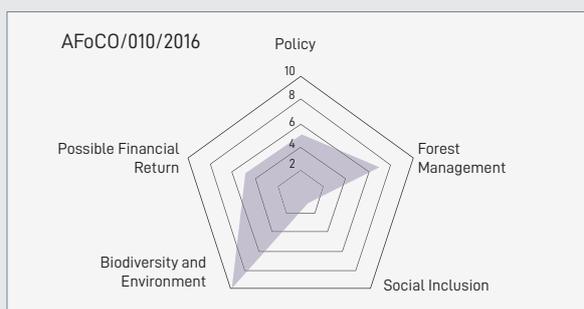
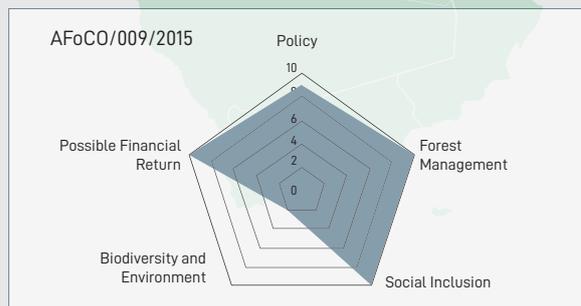
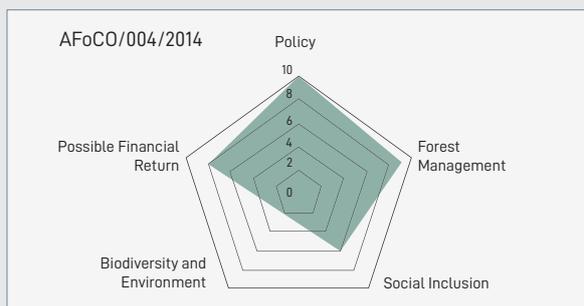
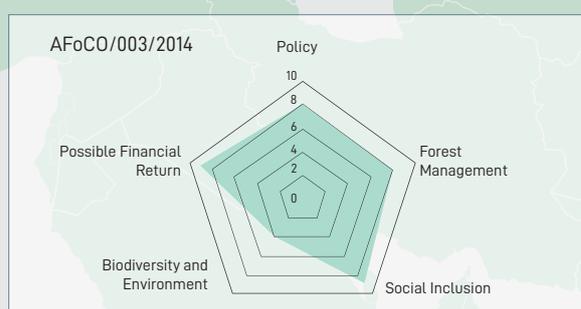
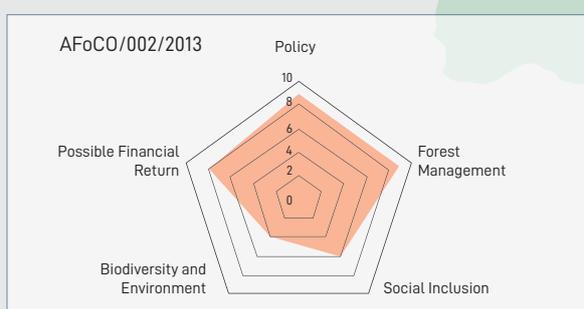
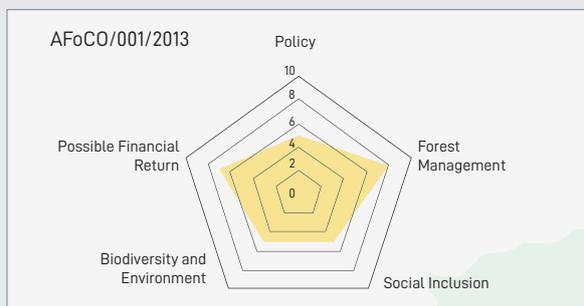
Table 1 Summary of Seven Projects

Project Number	Project Title	Countries	Project Period	Budget (US\$)	Achievements
001	<p>Reclamation, rehabilitation, and restoration of degraded forest ecosystems in Mekong Basin countries (MBCs)</p> <p>5 (Sub)-Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Biodiversity Conservation Linked with Ecotourism for Cambodia; •Participatory Forest Management linked with Certification for Lao PDR; •Ecotourism Linked with Watershed Management for Myanmar; •Ecotourism and Payment for Forest Environmental Services Linked to Biodiversity for Viet Nam; and •Ecotourism Linked with Forest Restoration for Thailand 	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam	2013-2015	<p>AFoCO: \$500,000</p> <p>National: \$302,770</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •5 Pilot sites were delineated in 5 areas •No country reports available for results of reclamation, rehabilitation and restoration of degraded forest ecosystems •Training workshops held in all countries at local and national levels <p>*Note: many activities and results were accomplished and reported, but were not listed as original project outputs nor as activities with indicators (exchange visits, workshops on biodiversity conservation, construction of facilities, travel, etc.). There were biodiversity surveys done, but no outputs were specified and no data were available, except from Myanmar.</p>
002	Capacity building on improving Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and enhancing involvement of local communities to address the impact of climate change	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam	2013-2016	<p>AFoCO: \$1,847,528</p> <p>National: not provided</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Training provided to all countries on remote sensing interpretation with 3 training modules; some equipment provided. •No reports on FRA capacity but training given and all countries prepared an improved 2015 FRA report as a result of training. •Forest reporting frameworks were established. •Lessons learned and recommendations were provided. •Most countries succeeded with climate training and livelihoods work, but reporting of effectiveness was limited <p>*Note: Importantly, equipment and software were provided as well as the training</p>

Project Number	Project Title	Countries	Project Period	Budget (US\$)	Achievements
003	Promotion of forest rehabilitation in Cambodia and Viet Nam through demonstration models and improvement of seed supply system	Cambodia, Viet Nam	2015-2019	AFoCO: \$1,000,000 National: \$200,000	Activities and indicators were specified in the proposal document and the 2020 evaluation report found that the project was implemented as planned, that most targets were met, and the review authors considered that there was high impact of the project within each country. The report noted that most indicators were 100% achieved, with a few exceptions
004	Facilitating the participatory planning of community-based forest management using GIS and RS technologies in forest resource management	Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand	2014-2020	AFoCO: \$1,500,000 National: \$14,640.96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Completed reports for all three countries (not seen) •Completed in all countries and noted that there is a need for more local expertise owing to a lack of computer training for community members •Accomplished for all CF areas •Planning teams established at each CF •Areas formally established in the three countries *Note: Many other activities were reported including training and workshops, which were not specified as outputs in the project proposal
009	Developing high value species in Viet Nam and Thailand as a mechanism for SFM and livelihood improvement for local communities	Thailand, Viet Nam	2016-2018	AFoCO: \$600,000 National: \$120,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •3 species (one of which is not a tree) were used in the project; technical reports were produced. •Technical guidelines reported for the 3 species. •Policy and marketing guidelines were produced. •Demonstration plots established on four 2 ha areas. •Training and models provided to the implicated communities. •All reports completed as required.

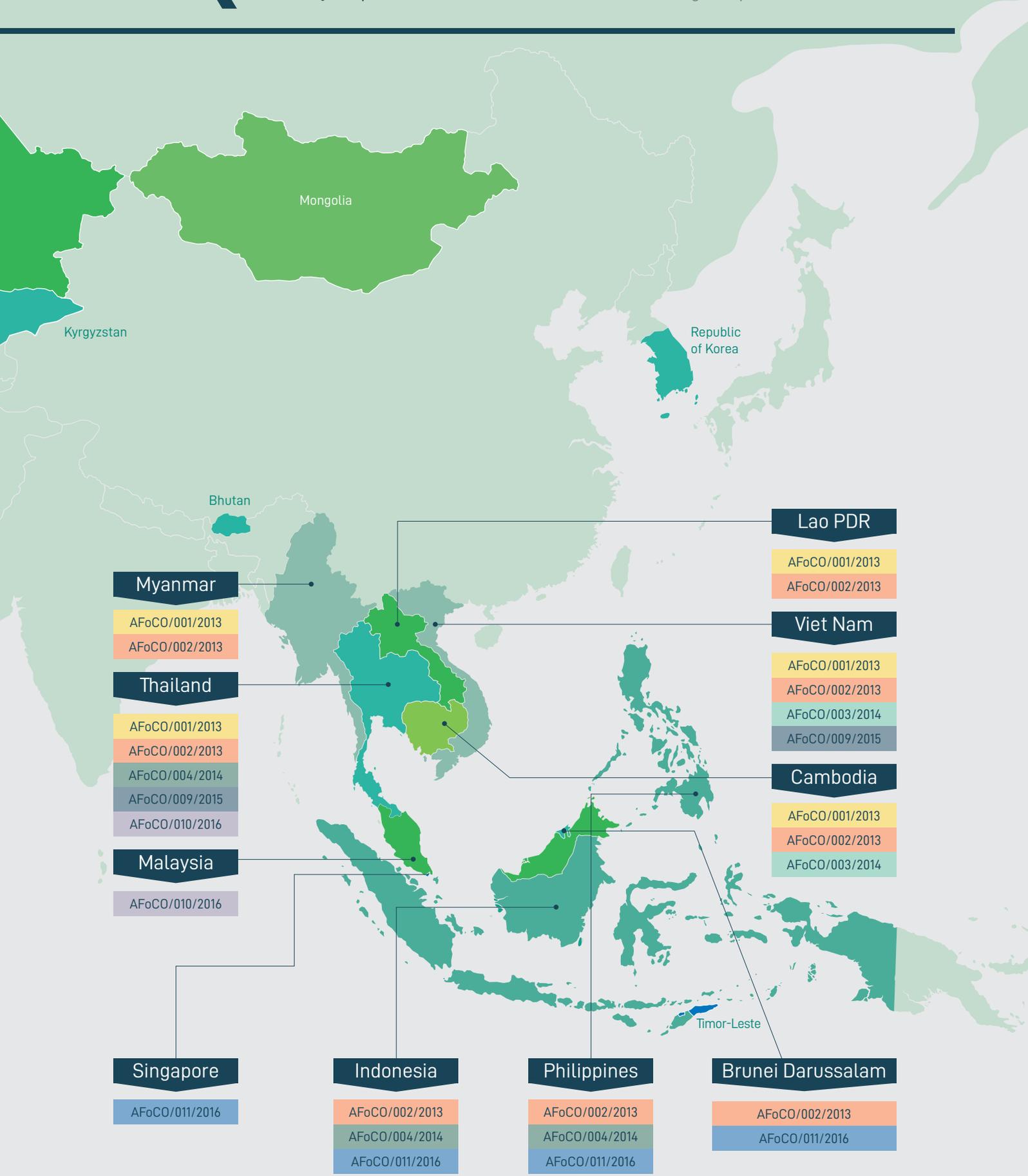
Project Number	Project Title	Countries	Project Period	Budget (US\$)	Achievements
010	Domestication of endangered endemic and threatened plant species in disturbed terrestrial ecosystems	Malaysia, Thailand	2016-2022 (Ongoing)	AFoCO: \$1,200,000 National: \$4,093,919	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A total of 31 species were planted (Malaysia - 18 species; Thailand - 13 species). •Two areas were planted in both countries as demonstration areas (this output was exceeded). •Reports completed as required and multiple workshops conducted. •Multiple publications completed including journal publications, training courses established; internship program done; website established for Thailand.
011	Capacity building for landscape approach to support sustainable natural resources management	Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore	2016-2019	AFoCO: \$539,726 National: \$68,855 Others: not reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Demonstration areas were established in 3 of the 4 countries. •Plots established and were maintained during the project; all plots appear to be significant to governments and so are likely sustainable. •Except for Brunei, capacity building in-country training (9 sessions in 4 countries) was conducted to share the lessons and application of landscape approach to other implementing countries and domestically. •Activities such as a regional workshop, and cross-country visits were completed. •Lessons learned and best practices were reported by the project teams and in the project evaluation that followed. •This activity was not completed although experience from the project allows such an assessment. •Learning modules were produced.

2.2 Project Scores for Five Impact Criteria



How scoring was done:

- Policy impact: 0-3 = little or no impact; 4-5 = limited impact; 6-7 = aligned with current policies; 8-9 = may result in policy change; 10 = new policy or law as a result
- Forest Management and Biodiversity and Environment impacts: 0-3 = little to no impact; 4-5 = short-term impact only; 6-7 = impact if expanded; 8-9 = immediate long-term impact on large area, or as national demonstration; 10 = very high immediate and large area impact
- Social Inclusion Impact: 0-3 = little to no impact; 4-5 = impact during project only; 6-7 short-term impact only; 8-9 = impact if carried on post-project; 10 = high immediate and sustained impact
- Possible Financial Return: 0-3 = no return likely; 4-5 = return only during project; 6-7 = future impact but will require funding; 8-9 = highly likely long-term impact; 10 = immediate and sustainable impact



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3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL GOALS

3.1 Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

3.2 Contributions to Global Forest Goals (GFGs)



CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL GOALS



(AFoCO/011/2016, Philippines) Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) site for restoration of degraded forest lands



(AFoCO/003/2014, Cambodia) Plantation site of *Acacia auri* after 2.5 years for sustainable seed production and forest restoration



(AFoCO/009/2015, Thailand) Making charcoal from bamboos for livelihood improvement of local communities

The entire suite of projects was highly relevant to both the global and regional forest agendas in terms of addressing some of the major contemporary issues in forest management, especially those specifically affecting Southeast Asia. These prominent issues include reforestation and restoration of degraded or deforested areas, recovering endangered forest types, improving the quality of life for forest communities through improved livelihoods, dealing with endangered species, adapting to climate change, improving sustainable forest management, improving forest data, and advancing forest managers' use of technology. Focusing on relevant issues resulted in the high quality of assistance provided. Furthermore, in many cases, the projects assisted countries in meeting their own forest objectives by advancing their technological capacity, understanding of reforestation methods, and the training manuals and videos that can be used across the region for complementary programs, within governments and local communities (e.g., Projects 002 and 011).

3.1 Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

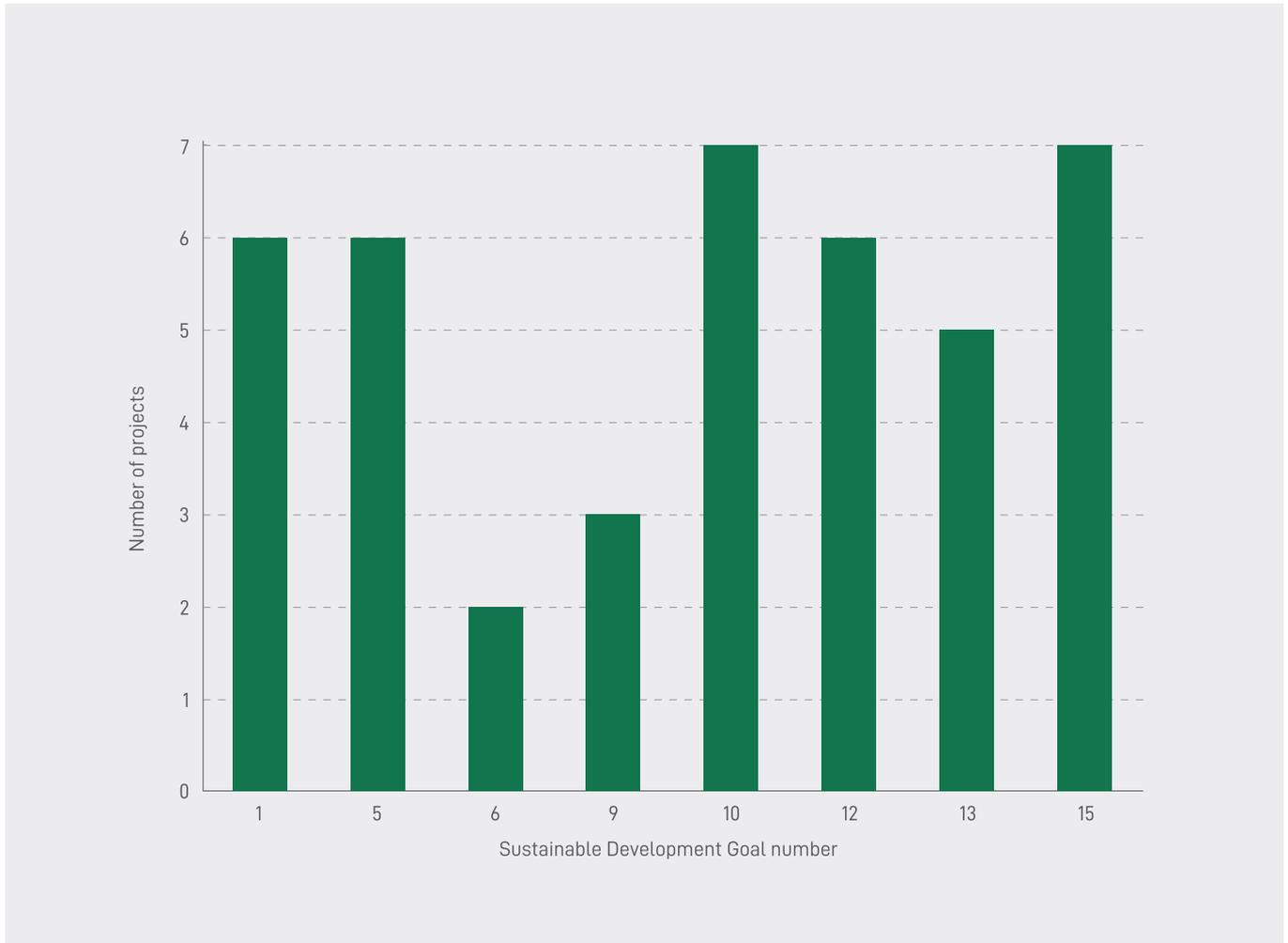


Figure 2. Number of AFoCO projects addressing the UN SDGs

The SDGs were adopted by UN member states in 2015 as a part of the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" to improve global approaches to sustainable development. The projects together contributed to six of the SDGs (Figure 3). By definition, all of the projects contributed to SDG 15, with particular emphasis on Targets 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, and 15.9, and most contributed to 12.2, all dealing with forest ecosystems. Due to the nature of an approach to include two or more countries in the project design and implementation, and the focus of several projects on Community Forestry (CF), all projects contributing to SDG 10 reduced inequality within and among countries. Many of the projects (6 of 7) also worked to reduce poverty (Target 1.1) by developing alternative livelihoods or working towards longer-term forest improvements. Several projects also contributed to climate change mitigation (SDGs 13 and 15) through avoided deforestation (001), better forest management (Projects 001, 003, 004, 009, 011), training (Projects 002 and 011), and forest restoration (Projects 003, 009, 010), or they will contribute in the future as a result of reforestation demonstration (Projects 003, 009, 011). Gender equality appeared to have been a consideration in each of the livelihood projects (SDG 5).

3.2 Contributions to the Global Forest Goals (GFGs)

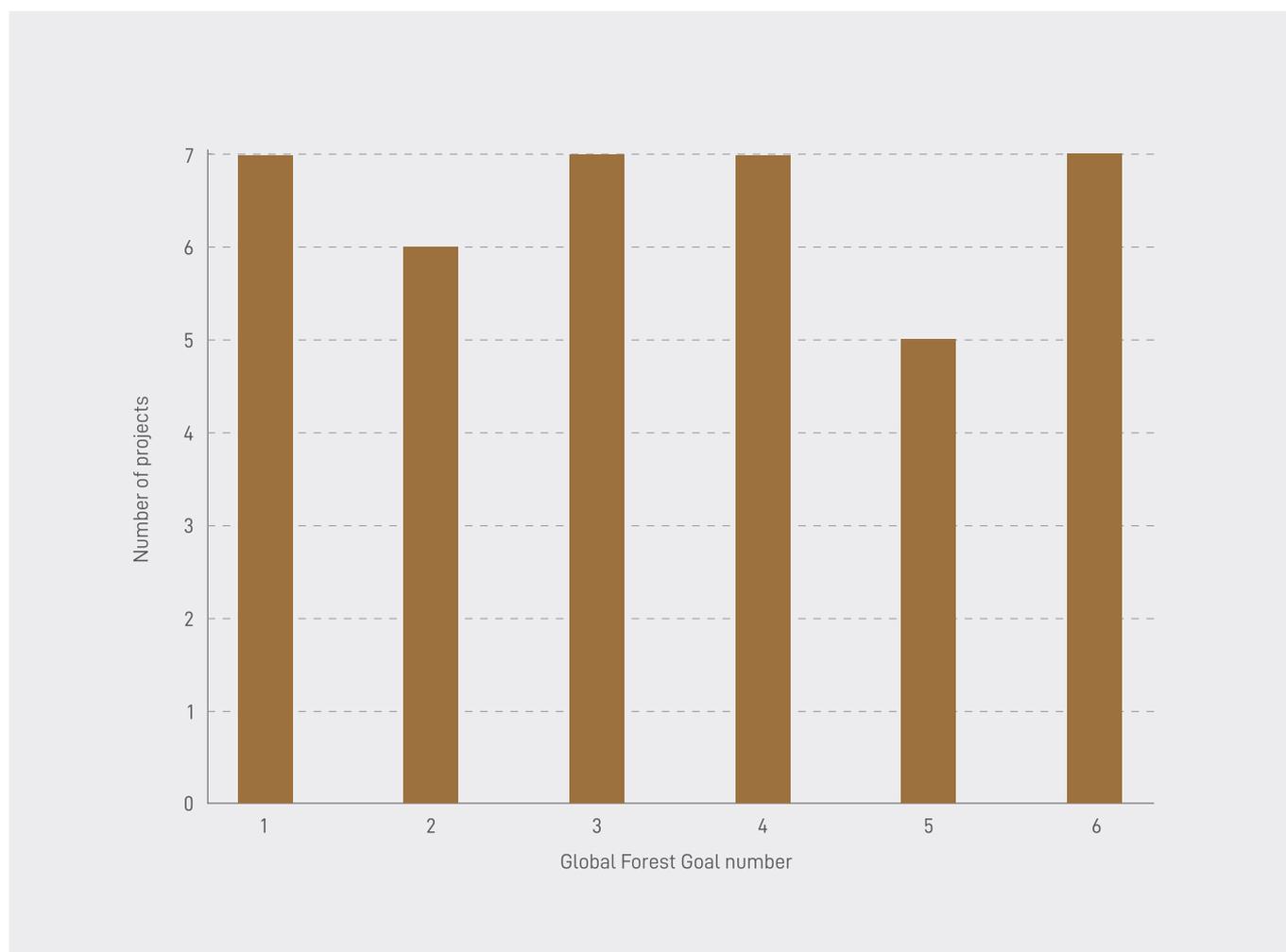


Figure 3. Number of AFoCO projects addressing the UN Global Forest Goals

The GFGs were established under the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 with six goals and 26 targets, most of which mirror the SDGs. As was the case for the GFGs, the seven projects contributed to achieving some of the Global Forest Goals (Figure 4). The closest links across projects were to GFG 1 (Reduce forest loss, 6 of the 7 projects) GFG 2 (enhance benefits from forests, all projects with livelihood components), GFG 6 (increase area under SFM, all projects), and GFG 4 and 6 (increasing resources, technical and scientific support for SFM, all projects). The majority of the projects worked to reverse the loss of forest cover, enhance forest-based economic, social, and environmental benefits from forests for communities, and provide a large amount of infrastructure, technical equipment, and training on advanced technologies (Figure 4).



(AFoCO/003/2014, Cambodia) Well standing *Toona sureni* after 3.5 years in plantation sites that have survived insect infections



(AFoCO/010/2016, Thailand)
Mae Moh plantation site in Lamphang Province for domestication of Endangered, Endemic and Threatened Plant Species (EETS)

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4. AFoCO PROGRAM IMPACTS

4.1 Policy Impacts

4.2 Forest Management Impacts

4.3 Biodiversity Impacts

4.4 Social Impacts

4.5 Financial Impacts and the Possibility of Financial Return

AFoCO PROGRAM IMPACTS

Here, we address the impacts of the AFoCO Program based on seven regional projects, in terms of their regional impacts on key areas of forest management and governance.



4.1 Policy Impacts

Most projects were found to have limited policy impact, especially where national demonstration areas were established and adopted by governments as training centers (Projects 001, 011), and Project 010 was apparently influential in at least one country's new law (Thailand). Guidelines developed under Project 009 in Viet Nam have resulted in national-level technical guidelines for Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). Projects were generally aligned with government policies and potentially have been influential in the application of those policies. Policy impacts are often difficult to determine because any impact often occurs gradually and in concert with results from other local or regional programs and projects, as well as ongoing national objectives. What is certain about these seven projects, and the program overall, is that all were instructive and informative to policymakers with respect to the forest issues on which the projects were focused. Further, all projects aligned well with either existing national policies or impending or recent laws for reforestation and environmental/climate change regulation. For example, the reforestation plots in Indonesia peatlands forests and humid tropical forests in the Philippines (Project 011) will serve as national demonstration areas, indicating clear impact at the national policy level for forest restoration programs.

Community Forestry (CF) has become a common theme in forest management across Southeast Asia and the Pacifica over the past decade. Nevertheless, many problems remain with respect to its implementation, including lack of capacity (both within government and in the communities), uncertain land tenure, lack of growing stock, community over-reliance on forest goods and services, and the need to develop alternative livelihoods to reduce pressures on forests. The clear focus of several of the AFoCO projects (002, 003, 004), along with other nationally based projects, e.g., through ITTO or funded through various UN agencies, is resulting in both an accumulation of knowledge within communities and a strong understanding in governments that CFs are a valid mechanism for sustainable forest management. In addition, under Project 004, a Regional Community Forest Management (CFM) Policy Framework was developed that may be adopted by ASEAN, AFoCO itself, and regional governments as guidance for CF planning in the region. Hence, AFoCO, in concert with other agencies, is strongly influencing government policies to make CF a more common tool for managing forests.



(AFoCO/002/2013, Brunei Darussalam) Training of Trainers on Remote Sensing and GIS Applications for Forest Resource Assessment in 2015



(AFoCO/002/2013, Lao PDR) Training of Trainers on Remote Sensing and GIS Applications for Forest Resource Assessment in 2017



(AFoCO/002/2013, Cambodia) Workshop on capacity building to improve forest resource assessment and management



(AFoCO/009/2015, Thailand) Developing technical guidelines for the selected species in Loei Province

Other areas where long-term policy impacts will be observed include Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) (Project 011), which is a relatively new concept among government agencies, and the establishment of national forest inventories, which is lacking in most countries in the region (e.g., Myanmar, Cambodia). While countries have begun to appreciate the need for forest restoration, the idea that entire landscapes need planning and restoring requires capacity-building, training, and demonstration. Project 011, for example, has raised the awareness of governments of the concept of FLR and will result in impacts at the policy level, in part because FLR has also become a global theme, especially under the climate change agenda and REDD+ financing. Similarly, the need for scientific monitoring of forests, including national forest inventories, as forests continue to decline, is highly instructive to policymakers in terms of providing neutral data highlighting the need to restore large areas of forest landscapes in order to work towards sustainability.

Finally, in terms of national climate change policy, two projects (002 and 010) were clearly influential with respect to the coming importance of REDD+ not only to sustain forests, but as a mechanism to mitigate climate change. The successful demonstration of recovering endangered tree species as a part of REDD+ linked forest restoration mechanism will enable governments to meet both the CBD and UNFCCC commitments. In this latter regard, it is likely that more research is needed on species' ecologies to understand reforestation mechanisms better. Here, AFoCO's projects have shown some promising results, such as in Project 010, which aims to recover endangered tree species.

4.2 Forest Management Impacts

The main goal of the AFoCO program is to improve forest management and forest conditions in Southeast Asia, thereby contributing to a global increase in forest area. AFoCO has recognized that deforestation and forest degradation are the two key problems related to current unsustainable forest management in Asia. To improve the situation, the program has focused on the following key areas: technological improvement, improved forest management, alternative livelihoods, and forest restoration. Areas of impacts on forest management among the seven projects included inventory, reporting, community forestry, restoration, and seed and seedling production. The projects elevated capacities within the countries in all these areas through a combination of demonstration, training, provision of infrastructure, development of alternative livelihoods, and policy influence.



(AFoCO/001/2013, Lao PDR) Maintenance and management of village nurseries to improve sustainable forest management practices

An important program component has been the provision of equipment (computers, software, GPS, GIS) and training to improve forest monitoring, reporting, mapping and planning, and the acquisition of imagery to assist the process. Several project countries have, as a result, established full-time divisions within their forest department to conduct forest analyses using GIS and remote sensing (e.g., Cambodia, Philippines, Brunei), with a view towards forest landscape planning (e.g., UNDP is now leading a project to plan landscapes of northern Cambodia). The impact of this program from Project 002 has been more accurate forest reporting to global processes (including for the FAO Forest Resources Assessment), higher-quality forest mapping, and the launching of efforts to conduct or improve national forest inventories.

Efforts towards reforestation in Southeast Asia are hampered by the limited availability of suitable seed and seedling stock. This AFoCO program specifically dealt directly with this issue by establishing nurseries and tissue culture laboratories, and by improving the local capacity for seed harvesting in several countries (Projects 003, 009, 010). This work will have a long-lasting and sustainable impact, not only in terms of forest restoration but also for local incomes through the seed producers and nurseries. Closely-related projects dealt with restoring certain heavily-harvested forest types and the recovery planting of some endangered tree species (Projects 009, 010). The impact of these projects is through, first, improved capacity and understanding of planting techniques and tree survival issues and, second, the establishment of what have become national demonstration areas. The result is a high level of national influence on forest regeneration programs. Linking national demonstration areas into a wider regional network and using them as regional training centers could be an interesting follow-up activity of this important work.



(AFoCO/004/2014, Thailand) Project site mapping during regular monitoring in 2018



(AFoCO/003/2014, Viet Nam) Project site mapping for GIS and RS technologies during regular project monitoring in 2018

Local communities in poor areas depend highly on forests for multiple uses, including revenue, firewood, food, and medicinal plants. Along with commercial harvesting, the added community pressure has a long-term and continuous degrading effect on forests. Most projects (6 of 7) had activities that focused on alternative livelihoods and increasing the capacity of local communities to manage their forests better. These types of activities are essential in order to reduce forest degradation over the long term while at the same time improving the living standards in local communities. The long-term success of these projects can only be ascertained by monitoring progress over time, and possibly through additional training and funding if required.

4.3 Biodiversity Impacts

Only one project (010) had an overall biodiversity theme as a focus, but all projects that work towards reducing human impacts in forests, restoring forests, or that specifically deal with endangered species can contribute directly or indirectly to biodiversity and environmental conservation. For example, improving livelihoods can reduce reliance on bushmeat hunting and indirectly conserve certain species. Similarly, projects that foster forest restoration will also provide habitats for wildlife. Biodiversity conservation, however, is an area where greater impact could be achieved by explicitly linking biodiversity objectives to forest management objectives within projects. Rarely among these projects were associated biodiversity objectives considered, despite the well-known links between biodiversity and forest processes, including regeneration. A wealth of knowledge is now available on the importance of biodiversity to forest functions and the provision of forest ecosystem services that can be drawn upon to improve project outputs. Applying this knowledge will not only enhance the possible outcomes of future projects, both for biodiversity and tree restoration, but also for the production of goods and services from the forest. The concept of recognizing endangered trees species and developing planting techniques for these species under Project 010 was especially relevant (and innovative) owing to so few programs recognizing the need to recover highly valuable tree species that have long been in decline. This concept could readily be applied across Southeast Asia in the future. The only other regional/global project assisting with the recovery of endangered trees is the CITES-ITTO Endangered Tree Species Program (<https://cites-tsp.org/>). Therefore, any project working in this area is important in addressing national and global biodiversity concerns.



(AFoCO/010/2016, Thailand) Planting at Mae Moh site



(AFoCO/010/2016, Malaysia) Site visit to AFoCO planting site in Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) Research Substation in Bidor, 2019

4.4 Social Impacts

With one exception (Project 010), all projects included a livelihoods component or capacity-building activities for local communities. Such activities can enhance capacities at the individual or community level. Several projects (Projects 001, 002, 003, 004, 011) had a particular focus on supporting existing community forestry user groups through demarcation, infrastructure support, nursery establishment, updating management plans, value chain development, ecotourism, and capacity-building on monitoring aspects. This type of support strengthens the effectiveness of collaborative forest management and improves communications within and between communities. In terms of capacity-building, long-term impacts remain to be seen. For alternative livelihood support activities, some seem to have been well-accepted by communities (Projects 002 and 003), while others would require follow-up projects to develop functioning alternatives to forest-based livelihoods (Projects 004 and 009). Supporting communities in using advanced technologies (Project 004), on the other hand, had a somewhat limited impact due to low technical capacity, lack of internet access, and other challenges faced by remote stakeholders. However, these projects were most effective within the governments.



(AFoCO/004/2014, Philippines)

Members of Rang-ay Bantay Association Inc. working on the CBFM area map during the community mapping exercise conducted in 2017



(AFoCO/004/2014, Indonesia) Training of Trainers on RS and GIS Applications for Forest Resource Assessment, 2015



(AFoCO/001/2013, Myanmar) Meeting with community forest users



(AFoCO/001/2013, Myanmar) Meeting with community forest users



(AFoCO/001/2013)
Training course on participatory forest restoration development



(AFoCO/009/2015, Thailand) Visiting model enterprises that produce bamboo products from local varieties in a sustainable manner

A remaining challenge in many countries where AFoCO is working is the lack of trust between communities and governments. Trust-building exercises (e.g., Project 009) have had a positive impact on these relationships and a mutual understanding between different stakeholders.

It is important to note that besides communities, project beneficiaries often consist of government staff of different levels, including forestry technicians, working within the communities or for governments. Government staff benefit both personally and institutionally from capacity-building, technology support, and exchanges and study tours, which broaden horizons, foster mutual learning, and open up opportunities to establish new partnerships. As such, social impacts in the evaluated projects are often achieved through transboundary cooperation and knowledge-sharing. Finally, enhanced capacities and understanding of different realities by forestry technicians and lower-level government staff will eventually also trickle down to have positive impacts on communities.

4.5 Financial Impacts and the Possibility of Financial Return

The actual financial impacts of the projects are mainly expected from alternative livelihood training at the level of communities. While six of the seven projects included a livelihood component, two explicitly mention improved and resilient livelihoods as one of their main objectives (Projects 002 and 004). The strongest financial impact for local communities is expected from Project 002, which successfully carried out livelihood studies and subsequent training in the Philippines, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Since alternative livelihood training programs in this project were tailor-made to the case study sites and based on a product and market analysis, communities will likely continue these practices and obtain financial returns even after the end of the project.





(AFoCO/009/2015, Viet Nam) Harvesting bamboo for the production of Non-timber Forest Products (NTFPs)

For product-based livelihoods, sustainable incomes can only be expected where the entire value chain is considered, including processing and marketing. One example (Project 002) indicated that, even with good results for the production and processing of bamboo, the financial impact remains small if the marketing opportunities are limited (e.g., due to transport difficulties or low customer demand). In another case (Project 003), communities established further online marketing channels themselves in order to continue selling their seeds.

Two projects supported the establishment of ecotourism at a very early stage with demarcations, infrastructure, and capacity-building (Projects 001 and 002). While ecotourism has a high potential for combined biodiversity conservation and local income generation, the process for its establishment takes a long time and also depends on larger-scale factors (such as an end to the current pandemic). Further, consideration needs to be given to who the expected clientele will be in terms of project design and facilities required. For example, in Cambodia, not many older people are interested in hiking a 20 km round trip through a tropical forest, and so thinking more about a range of possible services for older clients, as well as younger ones, should be a consideration. Finally, to attract clientele, a marketing strategy needs to be one of the main components of any ecotourism project. Expecting financial returns is thus beyond the scope of smaller projects, and actual financial impacts are not yet visible, although these initial interventions form a strong baseline for future projects in terms of lessons learned and mechanisms for implementation.

AfoCO Impacts & Best Practices



5. OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION



OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

Key Points and Lessons Learned

Perhaps the strongest aspect of the AFoCO program in Southeast Asia is the intelligent and focused selection of projects, such that each had a clear impact on improving forest management in the region. The project selection shows that AFoCO has clearly understood the main forest and forest management issues facing the region. Following decades of deforestation and forest degradation, projects that result in reforestation and restoration, improve measurement of forest area, work directly with communities, and pay attention to large scales are a necessity. To help accomplish improved forest management, the introduction and enhancement of advanced technologies for inventory and reporting on forests has previously been widely lacking in the region. In particular, the attention to local communities in terms of providing expertise and alternative livelihoods was recognized under these projects as an important avenue by which more sustainable use of forests can be achieved. Clearly, as assessed in the projects, the result of appropriate and forward-thinking project selection has been better forest management.

The box to the right provides an overall summary of the most important lessons learned from these seven projects. Some of these lessons refer to project formulation and formatting the proposals, while others are meant to assist in proposal development and implementation. The final lesson (10) suggests the need for a mechanism by which projects end but attempt to ensure that the project's effects are sustainable over time. This might mean, for example, future monitoring of results and new funding to provide improved marketing or equipment to facilitate production in the case of livelihoods projects. One clear lesson from all projects was the need for bottom-up consultation and project development by working directly with communities. Certainly, the ideas need to come from the countries and AFoCO, but the actual development of the project in terms of what will be, and can be, accomplished on the ground requires consultations with local communities. These consultations are especially important where land tenure may be an issue and becomes a resultant pre-condition prior to project implementation.

MAIN LESSONS LEARNED*

1. Projects should have a main focus and provide a logical framework with a series of quantifiable targets for each activity. (001, 002, 004)
2. Communication among AFoCO, the regional manager, and the national managers needs to be frequent and regular. (002)
3. Sustainable forest management projects must ensure that the three legs of SFM – environment, social, and economic are equally considered. (002, 004, 010)
4. Communities need to be pre-consulted prior to project implementation. (001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 011)
5. Training for local people, considering local needs, is a key element of success. (001, 002, 004, 011)
6. On-site decisions should be a collective decision among project stakeholders. (001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 010, 011)
7. Alternative livelihood projects require local consultation, feasibility studies, and market assurance. (001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 011)
8. Due diligence and research for tree species selection are required to limit losses from wildlife damage and poor ecological understanding. (004, 010, 011)
9. Continuous monitoring procedures should be built into projects. (002, 004)
10. A pre-defined exit strategy is needed for each project, and AFoCO should consider a strategy for long-term monitoring of the success of projects, especially livelihood projects, to help ensure their sustainability. (001, 002, 004)

*In brackets: references to the assessed projects.



(AFoCO/003/2014, Cambodia) Training course on seed handling and seed marketing

The seven projects were all well-positioned to create impact at various levels in terms of policy, forest management, local conditions, and/or improved sustainability of forest products. These impacts, depending on the individual project, occurred within governments, but importantly also within communities. The move towards greater local autonomy in forest management can work well but requires training and overall support through government policy, as well as funding from donors to projects. Value was created through the many training manuals and videos that can be used well into the future, as well as made available to other countries rather than re-creating new training modules of their own. Projects implemented through AFoCO contributed to a trend across Asia towards better community management of forests, and this is an area where considerably more work remains to be done. For example, land tenure is an issue that very often needs to be resolved and assured to communities. In addition, much more training needs to be provided to CFs on proper forest management, including assistance for alternative livelihoods to reduce local impacts on forests.

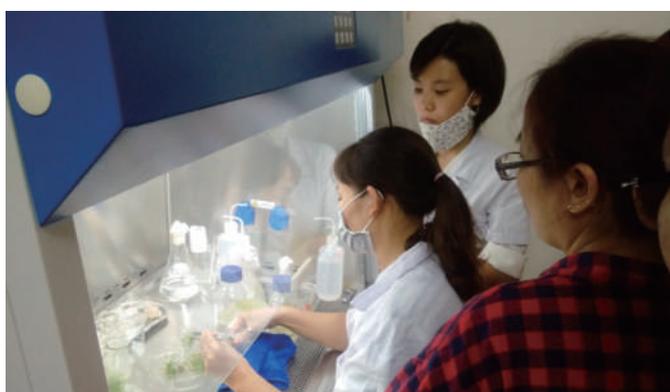
Among the most significant of the impacts under this program was the supply of technological equipment and associated training to several countries and communities. Cambodia (Project 003) specifically noted that large changes can result from a combination of providing equipment and technical training to communities. Advancing the ability of countries and CFs to manage their forests first requires some ability to assess the current state of the forests and landscapes and then to follow changes over time. Absence of that ability to conduct inventory results in a piecemeal approach to management with an area-by-area basis and no overall picture of forest condition within a country. This is a focal area where there is clearly expertise within AFoCO that can be provided/transferred to the region. So, while Projects 002 and 004 provided an excellent start, much more could be accomplished in the area of technological advancement, including, for example, developing and populating forest management models to estimate sustainable harvests. As one local project manager said, during validation: "even small changes as a result of providing some equipment and training can result in large changes within forest communities."



(AFoCO/003/2014, Viet Nam) Seedlings and orchids produced from the established tissue culture laboratory



(AFoCO/003/2014, Cambodia) Established tree seed laboratory



(AFoCO/003/2014, Viet Nam) Tissue culture laboratory established in Hoa Binh Province



(AFoCO/004/2014, Philippines) Regional workshop on Community Resource Management Framework (CRMF) planning using GIS/RS technologies

Best Practices for Future Projects

We note that several of these projects began early on, as AFoCO objectives, processes, and operational guidelines were still being developed. Hence, some of the best practices noted here have already been considered in AFoCO's newly adopted manuals and procedures.

Best practices are often derived as an extension of the lessons learned during a set of projects. While, generally, many best practices come from the considerable volume of published literature on a subject, and from critical thinking, new or revised best practices can be determined by what worked well during ongoing and completed projects within a program. All the projects under this AFoCO forest management program provided an assessment of lessons learned, as well as some implications for improving and revising practices for future project implementation. Best practices should be provided to project proponents, along with lessons learned, to assist countries in developing proposals. The best practices presented here (box to the right) were derived directly from the suggestions in the lessons learned in project reports and represent the common, most important themes presented, as well as general observations of the consultant team. Most of the best practices refer to improving the project proposal procedures and operations at project sites as a mechanism to ultimately improve the capacities of receiver agencies to deliver a project in a manner that improves outcomes of projects by providing a greater level of detail to illustrate more precision around proposed activities. Best practices 10 and 11, along with regular monitoring (6), are meant to improve the on-site operations.

Other best practices, specifically for forest restoration projects that resulted from these seven projects include:

- For seeding and nursery stock, select only high-quality seeds from healthy trees that are growing well. This process will ensure improved survival and higher-quality trees.
- Pay attention to problems that can reduce seedling survival, such as invasion by grasses, fire, and wildlife damage, and be prepared to mitigate these issues with early planning.
- Direct seeding, where it is appropriate, is a highly suitable method of forest restoration.
- Understand the ecology of the forest ecosystem prior to starting a restoration project in order to ensure that the correct species are selected and that suitable site conditions exist. For example, in peat forests, proper site preparation is essential, along with water level control.
- In cases where local communities are directly involved, it may be important to select species for which there is community knowledge, local use, and solid understanding by the local people.
- Establishing local businesses, either as seed suppliers and/or nurseries, can assist forest restoration while providing alternative livelihoods for communities.

The results for best practices and lessons learned from the seven projects have been extensive and provide a valuable framework to improve the already excellent procedures used by AFoCO. Compiling these lessons learned and best practices into a single document for developing future proposals will considerably improve the quality of proposals and the outcomes of future projects.

SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES*

1. Proposals must have a main focus, with a logical framework that provides a clear set of quantifiable targets for each activity. (001, 002, 004)
2. AFoCO, the regional project manager, and the national managers establish a regular communication schedule. (002)
3. Sustainable forest management projects ensure that the three legs of SFM – environment, social, and economic are considered equally. (002, 004, 010)
4. During the project development phase, communities are pre-consulted to support trust-building and better ownership by the communities. (001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 011)
5. At the proposal stage, alternative livelihood projects have consulted affected local communities and conducted both feasibility studies and market assessments for possible investments. Training on alternative livelihoods is based on these studies and carried out in a second phase. This improves the adoption rate and long-term social impacts. (001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 011)
6. A schedule for regular monitoring, with procedures, is built into projects. (002, 004)
7. Project proposals include an exit strategy. (001, 002, 004)
8. A manual of operations is used to systematize actions at project sites. (002, 010)
9. Forest restoration projects take into consideration species selection that is appropriate to the sites involved, take measures to increase seedling survivorship, and ensure that sufficient monitoring occurs to determine long-term success. (004, 010, 011)
10. Alternative livelihood projects include a component that describes how they will be sustainable. (002, 004)
11. On-site decisions are a bottom-up collective decision among the main project stakeholders, including women.

*In brackets: references to the assessed projects.

Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

AFoCO is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization that is committed to strengthening forest cooperation and taking concrete actions to promote sustainable forest management and address the impacts of climate change.

This report is based on a third-party assessment conducted by a review team from Bern University of Applied Sciences. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the decision-making bodies of AFoCO or Member Countries.

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