

Submission of the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet) to the Eighth Session of UNFF

Background

The Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet) was officially launched on 25th September 2008 in Beijing. The establishment of the APFNet, proposed by China and co-sponsored by Australia and the United States, was agreed by the 15th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in September 2007 in Sydney, Australia and was incorporated in the Sydney APEC Leaders' Declaration on Climate Change, Energy Security and Clean Development to “enhance capacity building and strengthen information sharing on sustainable forest management in the forestry sector” in the region.

The APFNet was established with recognition of the broader values and benefits of sustainable forest management beyond the role of forests in addressing climate change. It also recognized that while some economies in the Asia-Pacific region have accumulated abundant experiences and expertise in sustainable forest management and rehabilitation, others are in urgent need of useful information and technical assistance to address deforestation and forest degradation. Hence there is a need to bridge the gap and share experiences and expertise among economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

The APFNet aims to promote and improve sustainable forest management and rehabilitation in the Asia-Pacific region through capacity-building, information-sharing, regional policy dialogues and pilot projects. It has the following three main objectives, which are in line with UNFF's Global Objectives on Forests:

- To promote forest rehabilitation, reforestation and afforestation in the region to contribute to the achievement of the aspirational goal of increasing forest cover in the APEC region by at least 20 million hectares of all types of forests by 2020;
- To strengthen sustainable forest management and improve forest quality in the region , including climate change mitigation and adaptation response and to increase carbon sequestration.
- To improve the productive capacity and socio-economic benefits of forest ecosystems and enhance biodiversity conservation in the region.

The APFNet provides an opportunity for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to contribute

collaboratively to sustainable forest development and rehabilitation in the region and beyond. It also provides Asia-Pacific countries with critical links between regional and global policy discussions.

A Multi-stakeholder Approach

The APFNet has an open, participatory and complementary nature. It is open to APEC economies and other interested partners outside of APEC. A consultation process has been established with representatives from China, United States, Australia and other potential partners to facilitate discussions on the operation and development of the Network. The Framework Document for the APFNet, which provides the guideline for the work to be undertaken by the APFNet, was prepared in extensive consultation with the co-sponsors of the initiative (the U.S. Government and the Australian Government) as well as other related stakeholder groups.

The International Symposium on Sustainable Forest Management, held during 25-27 September 2008, was a first step to developing the APFNet as a participatory and collaborative partnership. The Symposium brought together participants from APEC and non-APEC economies, regional and international organizations, scientific institutions, private sector and civil society to share experiences and lessons learned in the development and implementation of sustainable forest management in the Asia Pacific region, jointly explore the potential areas of focus for the APFNet, and identify project activities that can be undertaken by the APFNet. Representatives from the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC), ASEAN forest programs, Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC), and Asia Forest Partnership (AFP) were present at the Symposium to discuss how the APFNet could complement their ongoing activities within the region. It was noted that besides the above-mentioned, there are international organizations that have a regional presence and activities, such as the World Bank, the ITTO, and the CIFOR. Non-governmental organizations also are active in the region. For instance, WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network, which aims to develop and support partnerships with the private sector for responsible forestry, also operates programs in the region. Collaboration could include jointly organized meetings/workshops, shared communication networks, information-sharing and capacity-building. The Framework Document for the APFNet was endorsed at this Symposium.

Due to the number of activities on sustainable forest management at the national, regional and international level, the national focal points in the Asia-Pacific region will be acted as contacts for the APFNet to coordinate regional activities and cooperation in sustainable forest management.

Work Under Way

Priority Areas of Activities

A number of potential areas of activities to be undertaken by APFNet in the early functioning period were identified at the Symposium. These activities encompass the four global objectives identified by UNFF. Potential areas of activities identified by the APFNet are broadly as following:

- The development of forest policy, legal and institutional framework
- Economic incentives for sustainable forest management and forest rehabilitation, including payments for ecosystem services
- Reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), and resilience of forest ecosystems to global warming
- Biodiversity conservation and effective protected area management
- Forest inventory, monitoring and assessment, including use of “criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management”
- Demonstration and pilot projects in key areas of focus and in key countries in the region to demonstrate “best practice” examples of sustainable forest management
- Development and implementation of credible legality verifications and forest management certification
- Participatory, ecosystem-based forest land use planning
- Development of community-based forest enterprises
- Enhancement of private-public partnerships and corporate social responsibility

It was agreed that the APFNet should start with a clear focus and should not try to solve all issues at once. Key areas of project activities under the APFNet will be identified and implemented from 2009 onwards. These project activities can take the form of pilot projects and capacity-building programs.

Financing Sustainable Forest Management

Long-term and sustainable financial support is key to the implementation of sustainable forest management. Funding under the APFNet will have a focus on impacts, outcomes and opportunities. Initial funding for activities under the APFNet will mainly be provided by the Chinese Government, with the support from US and Australia. The APFNet may also seek opportunities to apply for project financing through the appropriate APEC mechanisms. In the long run, the APFNet will attract voluntary contributions from other donors, including corporate entities and international organizations.

Capacity Building and Information Sharing

Capacity building and information dissemination has been conducted under the APFNet through workshops and training courses as well as the website of the APFNet. Noting that forest degradation from unsustainable and illegal logging is a significant problem in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the APFNet jointly hosted the “International Workshop on Policies on Trade in Timber and Timber Products” with the China-US Combating Illegal Logging and Associated Trade Bilateral Forum in December 2008. A training workshop on sustainable forest management was organized for participants in the Asia-Pacific region in October 2008 to address a number of issues including forest policies in a changing environment, international environmental conventions and on-going processes, forest law and governance, forest landscape restoration and forest certification. Two additional workshops are currently scheduled for year 2009. These include a workshop to be jointly hosted with the US Government on forest law enforcement and governance, and a workshop on forest and climate change to be jointly hosted with the Australian Government.

The website of the APFNet, already in operation, provides an effective dissemination instrument in the information age. The website is crucial to fulfill the aim of the APFNet in facilitating information exchange and sharing. The website can be viewed at <http://www.APFNet.cn>.

Showcase China’s Experiences in Afforestation

During the Symposium held in September 2008, the experience of China in reforestation and afforestation programs was highlighted as one opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with other countries in the region. According to FAO data, forest cover continues to decrease worldwide, including in a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region where reported national forest losses amounted to some 18.2 million hectares between 2000 and 2005. This was due to the conversion of natural tropical forests to other land uses. However, for Asia as a whole, there was a net increase of 3 million hectares in forest cover from 2000-2005. This positive trend is the result of the significant reforestation efforts in China. The need and actions for showcasing and transfer of environmentally sound technologies will be identified and implemented under the APFNet in due course.

Major Challenges

Several challenges have been identified for work under the APFNet. First, if the APFNet’s objective of expanding forest cover by 20 million hectares was to be achieved, the current rates of afforestation and forest restoration would need to be maintained and expanded, and that substantial progress would need to be made in reducing rates of forest loss and degradation in most countries in the region,

particularly in those countries with large forest cover and high current rates of deforestation.

Second, there is a need to enhance capacity and the socio-economic benefits derived from forest ecosystems if the potential contributions of forests and forestry to climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and the achievement of the Millennium Development goals are to be realized. In this regard, it is crucial to establish a rigorous forest monitoring system in the Asia-Pacific region for both measuring the success of policies and developing management strategies to respond to forest threats.

Third, there is a need for new and more effective partnerships –in science and technology, and for responsible forestry and trade. The objectives of the APFNet will not be achieved without the active engagement of the people living in and around forests. With participatory planning, local communities can become major allies for forest protection and sustainable use.

Finally, noting that there are a number of ongoing forest-related initiatives, networks and programs active in the Asia-Pacific region, another major challenge for the APFNet is to collaborate with all regional forest initiatives and processes to identify synergies, avoid duplication, identify opportunities and facilitate cooperation. The APFNet aims to complement these ongoing activities, strengthen communication and technical cooperation, and tap into the experience and leadership of countries within the region.

Other Issues

As the APFNet is at its early functioning period, some of the issues outlined in the UNFF Secretariat Note 23.04.08 cannot be scoped in depth or discussed in detail in this submission. For instance, some potential pilot project activities and capacity-building programs relating to forests and climate change, reversing the loss of forest cover, and forest and biodiversity conservation are now just taking shape. Without field implementation and evidence, comments on major developments and challenges in undertaking these works cannot be justified.