



## APAFRI – Gateway to Asia Pacific – Enhancing capacities in sustainable development and poverty alleviation

A paper by

Razak, M.A.A., H.C. Sim and B. Krishnapillay,  
(Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI),  
52109 Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA)

## **Abstract**

APAFRI is a non-governmental organization currently located in Malaysia. Its objective is to promote collaborative exchange among institutions to enhance and increase the forestry research and conservation capacity in the Asia Pacific. Its other role, is to act as a catalyst, facilitator and to become an information hub for dissemination of results on research and activities relating to forestry within the Asia Pacific and to the world at large. In itself, APAFRI does not carry out any research activities. Currently APAFRI is the Asia Pacific Chapter of IUFRO. This paper sets out to describe the current activities of APAFRI in relation to enhancing capacities in sustainable development, poverty alleviation and in particular its present role as an information hub in the Asia Pacific region. The paper also elaborates briefly APAFRI's involvement in the new global initiatives on forestry information collation and exchange called The Global Forestry Information Service (GFIS).

## **1. About APAFRI**

The Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI) is an association of institutions with an active interest in forestry research; conservation; management and other forestry related matters in the Asia Pacific. Its objective is to promote collaborative exchange among institutions to enhance and increase the forestry research and conservation capacity in the Asia Pacific. It is registered as a non-government organization (NGO) in Malaysia. APAFRI's objective is to promote institutional cooperation and collaboration and to enhance the region's research capacity. The Association's role is to act as a catalyst, facilitator, and information hub for research and conservation activities in the Asia Pacific. The organization is not involved in direct research activities. APAFRI's operating principles includes core values such as:

- Respect for national and regional interest, laws, and regulations
- Abides by the statutes and regulations of IUFRO (International Union of Forestry Research Organization) and promotes the objectives of IUFRO in the region
- Adopts a participatory and consultative approach to defining problems and determining priorities
- Provide an independent, non-discriminatory, gender sensitive forum for exchange of ideas, views and information.
- Adopts a cooperative and multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving.

Countries in the region and the donor community wish to develop more self-reliant, sustainable and participatory institutional mechanisms as a logical follow up of Forestry Research Support Programme for the Asia and the Pacific (FORSPA). The feasibility of establishment of an Association was discussed in the FORSPA Pre-implementation seminar held at Kuala Lumpur in January

1992. A draft constitution was prepared and circulated and subsequently a drafting committee prepared a revision. This was discussed, modified and adopted during the meeting of the Heads of Forestry Research Organizations in the Asia Pacific in Bogor on 21 February 1995, and resulted in the establishment of APAFRI.

The Secretariat of the Association was initially based at the FAO Regional Office (from 1995-1998), Bangkok, Thailand. Following the decision of the First General Assembly of the Association held in Ho Chi Minh City in March 1997, the Secretariat was moved to the Faculty of Forestry, University Putra Malaysia. APAFRI was also successfully registered as a NGO in Malaysia in 1998. Following the Second General Assembly, held during the IUFRO World Congress in Kuala Lumpur in 2000, the Secretariat was relocated in July 2001, this time to the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) in Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Third General Assembly in Manila, Philippines, in October 2003, had elected the present Executive Committee for a second term. This committee will oversee the operations of the association till 2006.

## **1.1 Its regional involvement**

Over the years APAFRI has organized several meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences within the region with the view to enhance collaboration between the member countries and also for information exchange. A few of such activities are listed below to show its relevance within the region. In March 1999 APAFRI organized the Asia Pacific Forestry Research—Vision 2010 Seminar to “develop a priority framework” for forestry research in the region. The seminar presented an overview of some of the most pressing issues in the region and the implications these issues may have on forestry research and conservation. The seminar was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and was attended by 87 forestry researchers and managers from 25 different countries. In 2002, APAFRI organized two major conferences:

- The Seventh Round Table Conference on Dipterocarps, October, 7-11, 2002, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Bringing Back The Forest, Policies and Practices for Degraded Lands and Forests, October, 7-10, 2002, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

These two conferences were major events in the region and had attracted about 200 researchers from the region as well as North America and Europe.

In 2003, APAFRI had organized more than half a dozen of events in several countries with the assistance of member institutions. These include a series of three workshops on the theme “Forest for Poverty Reduction” in India, Korea and China. Workshops on Forest Rehabilitation, Forest Genetic Resources and Forest Fire were organized in Malaysia and another one on Climate Change in the Philippines.

APAFRI also organizes training events on current topics or issues in forestry and forestry research. Some of the training events that have been held include:

- "Application of Biotechnology in Forestry", an introductory course on the concept and initial process of biotechnology conducted in Malaysia
- Training courses in "Forest Certification" were held in both Cambodia and Malaysia.

## **1.2 Its international involvement**

APAFRI provides an excellent opportunity for agencies wishing to sponsor projects on forest research, conservation, management, and/or other forest related activities in the Asia–Pacific region. APAFRI's role is to provide a supporting structure for such projects. The philosophy behind the organization is to minimize duplication of time and effort by encouraging cooperation, collaboration, and sharing of information in order to maximize results for all parties.

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) has recognised APAFRI as its Asia Pacific chapter. APAFRI has been collaborating closely with the IUFRO Special Programme for Developing Countries (SPDC) in strengthening research in the Asia Pacific region. APAFRI has also been tasked to coordinate the development of an Asia component in IUFRO's Global Forest Information Service (GFIS).

APAFRI is also the Asian coordinator of the Asia-Europe Forestry Exchange Programme (ASEFOREP). The programme, with its Secretariat currently hosted by the University of Joensuu Finland, promote and arrange student and staff exchanges between several European and Asian forestry academic and research institutions.

APAFRI has participated in several European Union (EU) project proposals working in partnership with organization like Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), IUFRO and European Tropical Forestry Research Network (ETFRN) to source for funds to undertake relevant activities.

To date, APAFRI has teamed up with the International Plant Genetic Resource Institute (IPGRI), Rome to set up an Asia-Pacific Genetic Resource Programme (APFORGEN). This programme has been funded by ITTO for a period of three years. This is a regional programme with a holistic scope to conservation and management of forest genetic resources which can alleviate obstacles and enhance technical and scientific cooperation, training and information exchange. Through networking and joint activities, this programme will avoid duplication of efforts and gain synergy among collaborating countries. A total of 14 partner countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and

China) are participating in this programme. The broad objective of the proposed programme is to manage tropical FGR more equitably, productively and sustainably in the participating countries. The specific objectives of the programme will be to: 1) strengthen national programmes on the management of FGR; 2) enhance regional networking and collaboration; 3) locate and conserve genetic diversity of selected priority forest plant species; and 4) increase sustainable use of FGR in natural and man-made forests. Hence this would be in synchrony with and provide an efficient avenue in information exchange on studies in the conservation of rare and endemic forest tree species diversity. The outcome of this programme will greatly help in, conserving and utilising these valuable genetic resources for present use as well as use by future generations.

### **1.3 Its information sharing and exchange activities**

It has been increasingly recognized that accessibility to relevant information is strongly linked to the effectiveness of policies in achieving desired results. Collecting and disseminating the relevant information to those who need them, or packaging the information in such manner that facilitate easy and fast access would more than assist in promoting sustainable management or enhancing the poverty alleviation role of the forests.

There are currently a number of sources through which forest-related information can be accessed, these include the general ones such as the World Wide Web (WWW), and also many websites set up by forestry related agencies, such as the FAO, EFI and IUFRO. Likewise, many regional organizations, networks and national research and higher learning institutions, have also established their own electronic information storing, cataloguing and retrieval services. However, it would be more time-efficient if information seekers have access to integrated information through a single website.

IUFRO has developed an integrated information service, the Global Forest Information Service (GFIS), which allows users to locate maps, databases, web resources, journal articles, books and other resources relevant to forest information needs. The system currently has over 100,000 catalogued records available from organisations located in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. GFIS is a distributed network of databases that catalogue the information resources of contributing partners using a common metadata standard. The information providers have full control over their information; they only provide a set of descriptive data (metadata) about their information resources which could be read (searchable) within GFIS. GFIS operates through two components, the GFIS centre or information server, and the GFIS nodes or focal points. The centre or server, located at the IUFRO headquarters in Vienna, collects metadata from the nodes thus permitting global search operations. The nodes which function as sub-regional coordinators, identify and select information resources to be included in GFIS, create metadata and motivating relevant agencies and institutions in the sub-region to contribute to GFIS.

The Asia Pacific region is a vast region comprising many countries with different people, different cultures, different religions and different languages. While a few countries in the region are already highly developed, the majority of the countries are still economically and technologically lagging far behind. Information exchange and sharing are therefore still far from achieving any impact on national development among most of these countries. A comprehensive regional information system is urgently needed to promote closer ties and further capacity enhancement of national research institutions in the regions. Availability of suitable information exchange and sharing system will be useful for the national institutions and governments to draw upon for policy planning and decision-making. GFIS could be extended to the region for this very purpose.

During a consultative meeting held in Bogor, Indonesia, in December 2003, representatives from India, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, as well as a number of international and regional agencies including CIFOR, ASEAN Secretariat and APAFRI agreed that GFIS nodes should be established in Asia to facilitate information exchange and sharing, within the region and also between the region and the rest of the world. As APAFRI is the Asia chapter of IUFRO, APAFRI will coordinate GFIS Asia, with the primary objective of promoting GFIS to national research and higher learning institutions in the Asia Pacific, where many of them are members of APAFRI. APAFRI, in collaboration with IUFRO and CIFOR, will also seek funds for establishing GFIS nodes in Asia. It has also been agreed that the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) and the Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF) shall initially be the partners (focal points or GFIS nodes) coordinating activities in the sub-regions of Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia, respectively.

#### **1.4 Its existing information exchange programme**

Sharing information and communicating among members in a geographically dispersed region is now possible through information technology. Over the last few years, APAFRI has developed ATIS – the APAFRI-Tree Link Information System. This is a unique, secure, web-based information exchange service. ATIS include among others, a document exchange service and the E-loan System that currently links four regional libraries. These would include the Kasetsart University in Thailand, University Putra Malaysia and the Forest Research Institute both in Malaysia and the University of Philippines in Los Banos, Philippines. It is however important to note that the system presently in use was designed to accommodate all member libraries in the region. This ATIS system enables APAFRI members to access the journal holdings of these four libraries, including many regional journals not available elsewhere. We hope to supplement this service with machine translation programs in order that knowledge can be shared on a wider scale. The design of the system allows for the inclusion of an infinite number of libraries. This makes it possible to connect all libraries and document centres within the APAFRI network in the foreseeable future. In the future it is possible to add both member and other libraries to the system. ATIS also hosts two Specialist Networks, the Dipterocarps and

Student's Networks. APAFRI's e-journal was launched in 2002; currently it publishes articles mainly on dipterocarps electronically. To further enhance ATIS, the Secretariat under the present Executive Secretary and Executive Director has been continuously seeking funding opportunities.

Publications form part of APAFRI's efforts to bridge the information gap among member institutions and forestry scientists. Under its publishing programme, APAFRI has issued a series on successful applications of research results in forestry practices. It is hoped that some of these researches may act as catalysts in promoting new technologies in the region.

APAFRI has also published proceedings of the workshops and conferences that it has organized over the past years. Members are entitled to one free copy; additional copies can be purchased at discounted prices.

## **2. Enhancing capacities for sustainable development and poverty alleviation activities**

Rural populations are highly dependent on forest related activities. In fact, hundreds millions of people around the world obtain a major share of their subsistence from a large and diverse set of forest products, even though the work to gather them is not their major economic activity. One typically thinks of these people as farmers and not foresters. However, when one adds up the dozens or even hundreds of forest products they use and sell it becomes clear that they depend heavily on these forests. These households harvest, process, transport and sell fuel wood and non-timber forest products because those activities are well suited to their capacities. They typically require a lot of labour and little capital or technical skills. People may get involved in such activities when they have spare time or cannot find work. Some of the natural resources they use are freely available and often occur in the fragile environments where many poor people live.

Even if one agrees that forest and tree based resource are important for the livelihood of rural household, it does not necessarily follow that poverty alleviation strategies or government policies should pay attention to them. One must also demonstrate that governments can do things to maintain or improve those contributions. Various workable solutions have been recommended (Kaimowitz, 2003). These would include:

### **2.1 Communities should be given control over forest resources and encourage their equitable distribution**

Government should give rural communities and poor rural households clear and secure rights over forests and allow them to transport and sell forest products. That can help ensure local people do not lose access to resources they depend on to wealthier or more powerful outside groups. In a wider context this would

lead local people to protect those resources from over-exploitation. Establishing local people's rights over natural resources provide a basis for compensating them for the environmental services their resources provide. Secure tenure encourages tree planting and managing areas for natural regeneration

## **2.2 Avoid policies that encourage forest destruction**

Many macro-economic, trade, agricultural, infrastructure, energy and mining policies negatively affect forest and the rural people that depend on them. Examples of non-forestry policies and programs that often stimulate forest loss and degradation include: currency devaluation, construction of roads near forest, government retrenchment that reduces urban income and stimulate reverse migration towards rural areas, trade policies that restrict agricultural imports or make them more expensive and granting logging concessions. In each case the specific policies that are relevant and their impacts will vary. It can be noted that many policies that seem to have little relation to forest have a large impact on what happens to them. In each case policy makers should explicitly consider the policies' effect on forest and the rural livelihoods that depend on them before adopting them.

## **2.3 Provide financial, marketing and technical services**

Traditionally, most forestry and community based natural resource management projects focus on timber and wildlife. They need to concentrate more on food, medicines, fodder, fertilizer, watershed services and cultural and spiritual benefits forest provide, as well as paying more attention to women. In many contexts the projects organized should prioritize natural regeneration over plantations and support those efforts by providing tenure security, market information and assistance in community organization. Given the low incomes of the households involved and the low unit value of fuel wood and non-timber products, it will be hard to justify technical services that rely predominantly on people with technical degrees. In most cases villagers themselves should have primary responsibility for exchanging information through various channels. Professional and technical staff can facilitate that process. Small scale carpenters, furniture and basket makers, woodcarvers, charcoal makers and traders need market information, financial services, management training and help to improve the quality and presentation of their products. Assistance will also be needed to educate them on natural resource issues and how to ensure a sustainable supply of raw materials, as well as to forestry issues in general.

## **2.4 Improve the knowledge base and raise awareness**

To design and justify specific policies that protect and enhance the contribution of forest resources to rural livelihoods requires more information than currently existing. This include information on: the contribution of forest resources to livelihoods, the effects of environmental degradation, market trends, policy and

project impacts, local institution, the impact of management options on the resource base and farmer innovations. Much of the information now available is either out-of-date or extremely incomplete. In many countries, policymakers, development and conservation professionals and the general public do not realize how important forest and tree resources really are for the rural poor.

### **3. How does APAFRI play its role in addressing in such issues relating to sustainable development and poverty alleviation**

Many an international development agencies have set targets to reduce by half the proportion of the people in extreme poverty by the year 2015. Poverty reduction strategies are thus becoming the framework for development planning and implementation, and are the priorities of many donor agencies. The roles of forests and forestry towards achieving these targets of poverty reduction are gaining more attention. To explore the potential of forests and forestry in poverty alleviation and to create awareness in the region, APAFRI with a number of regional and international agencies had organized a series of three inter-linked workshops in India, South Korea and in China. The themes of the three workshops were: Forests for Poverty Reduction – The changing role for research and Development Institutions, Forest for Poverty Reduction – Opportunities with CDM, Environmental Services and Biodiversity and Forestry for Poverty Reduction – Can Community Forestry make money? The workshops addressed various issues to develop concrete ideas and potential paths where forestry can alleviate poverty. The proceedings from these three workshops are available from the APAFRI secretariat.

### **4. Conclusion**

APAFRI is continuously looking for opportunities to jointly develop programmes and services for its members and alliances. It operates on the principles that programmes and services should be based on the needs of the members. In order to improve the quality of its programmes and services to members and to maintain positive and healthy working relationships with its stakeholders, APAFRI is committed to an ongoing, participatory programme of monitoring and evaluation.

Sustainable development of the natural forest, gender issues and the alleviation of poverty are some of the important agenda on APAFRI's strategic plan. APAFRI will continue to endeavor the facilitation of meetings and workshop within the region to create more awareness and to generate more information on these three issues for decision making and policy formulation by the countries in the region.

While the Secretariat takes on a coordinating role of many activities it engages the services of member institutions to the greatest possible extent in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of programme and services. Projects and programmes can be mobilized quickly through APAFRI's extensive network of

regional contacts. In order to achieve a high success rate of donor programmes, APAFRI in cooperation with regional institutions will work with donors in the design phase to ensure that the planned activities have a high level of relevance to the needs of the region. In the extent possible programmes and services are contracted and delivered through member organizations.

We have called ourselves the *Gateway to Asia Pacific*, as we are capable of connecting up national forestry research and development agencies in the Asia Pacific region with donor agencies planning to implement projects in the region. We also have been working very hard to establish a channel to provide information from our member institutions to international communities and colleagues in other regions, to attract collaboration and cooperation in forestry research and development.

APAFRI gratefully recognizes the generous support from the following agencies which have supported our activities over the years

- Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)
- Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through its Tree-Link Project
- Forest Research Programme for the Asia Pacific (FORSPA)-FAO
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
- South-East Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (SEARCA)
- Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
- International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
- International Plant Genetic Resource Institute (IPGRI)

*APAFRI's belief is "collective self-reliance", by working together and sharing information we will all become stronger. Together we can enhance our human resources, improve our research capacity, and tackle the region's serious environmental issues.*

## **5. References cited**

Anon (2003). Forestry for Poverty Reduction – Exploring the potential. APAFRI Newsletters No.11 &12. APAFRI Secretariat, Kepong 52109 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

Kaimowitz, D. (2003). Not by Bread alone.... Forest and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa. In: Tapani Oksanen, Brita Pajari and Tomi Tuomasjukka (Eds.). Forests in Poverty Reduction Strategies: Capturing the potential. EFI Proceedings No.47, 2003. pp: 45-63