Background

Efforts to integrate aspects of genetic conservation in forest policy and management are constrained by the fact that most people who need to understand it respond badly to the term ‘forest genetic resources’. They see it as an overly technical issue that is of little relevance to both policy and practical forest conservation and management. This is reflected in the response of policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region to the Global Plan of Action on Forest Genetic Resources. Prior to 2017, the regional forestry commission had not discussed the Global Plan of Action at any of its regular sessions.

The Global Plan of Action, published in 2014 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), was based on an extensive study of the state of forest genetic resources and was designed specifically to help identify and address genetic considerations throughout the field, from community forestry to tree breeding and forest restoration. It is intended to help countries implement international conventions that have an impact on forestry, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna. Bioversity International and the Chinese Academy of Forestry recognized that policymakers in the region are either unaware of the Global Plan of Action or do not consider it relevant to their work, and agreed to work together with regional partners to strengthen capacity on forest genetic resources.

Our approach

The partners agreed to use a networking approach to achieve their aims. Professor Yongqi Zheng of the Chinese Academy of Forestry is current chair of the Asia Pacific Forest Genetic Resources Programme, APFORGEN, a regional network of 15 Asian countries that receives technical support from Bioversity International.

APFORGEN Objectives 2017–2022

- Mobilize political and financial support for the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Forest Genetic Resources in the Asia-Pacific region
- Make information available about the region’s forest genetic resources
- Develop conservation and sustainable use strategies for regionally important and threatened tree species
- Strengthen tree seed programmes to facilitate ecosystem restoration, support local livelihoods and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
Bioversity International. Together, Bioversity International and the Chinese Academy of Forestry approached policymakers and partners in China and across the region, focusing on strategies, policies and technologies relevant to the management of forest genetic resources. An important element in these efforts was a course to train trainers on the management of forest genetic resources. A private company in China provided financial support to establish a regional collaborative platform.

**Our progress**

**Developing the regional strategy**

With support from Bioversity International, the Chinese Academy of Forestry coordinated APFORGEN members to develop a regional strategy in support of the Global Plan of Action. The strategy has four objectives that are explicitly linked to the Strategic Priorities of the Global Plan of Action (See Box). It also carefully explains the value of regional collaboration for the conservation and sustainable use of forest genetic resources. When informed about the development of this document, FAO invited APFORGEN to present its regional strategy at the 27th Session of the Forestry Commission in October 2017 and to report on the progress of its implementation in future sessions of the Commission.

**Training and capacity development**

In parallel with efforts to get policymakers to recognize the importance of forest genetic resources, the partners began to groom a new generation of decision-makers and foresters. In 2016, with support from a private-sector Chinese company, Bioversity International and the Chinese Academy of Forestry established a regional training centre in China. The centre has already offered training to more than 80 people from countries in the region, many of whom are themselves trainers, thus multiplying the impact of the activities.

**Looking ahead**

Future efforts will build on the initial success of encouraging member countries of APFORGEN to concentrate on forest genetic resources. Activities will include:

- Develop the training course to include areas of policy and invite more policymakers from Asia and Pacific countries to attend training courses
- Strengthen relationships for cooperation, including between Bioversity International and the Chinese Academy of Forestry, for example hosting visiting partner staff for collaborative research efforts.

**Partners**

Chinese Academy of Forestry, Beijing

Government of Binzhou City, Shandong Province

Happy Ecology Company, Binzhou, Shandong Province

Partners from countries of Asia and the Pacific

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**Regional training course**

The course offered four modules:

1. Species conservation strategies
2. Trees outside forests
3. Tree seed supply chains
4. Forest management

Participants were very appreciative. For example, Hazel Consunji, Philippine coordinator of the Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative, said: “I realized how important forest genetic resources are for restoration. We run training programmes for governmental and civil society organizations and research institutes on using native tree species in restoration, but until now we haven’t covered genetic aspects in the training sessions. I can’t wait to go back and incorporate in our training programme what I learned about genetic conservation strategies during this course.”

Participants to the First training course. Credit: Huangping, CAF

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