

Challenges in Research Collaboration and Networking in the Asia-Pacific Region – Experiences of FRIM and APAFRI

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ABSTRACT

International forestry research collaboration and networking play a very critical role in the development of an organization, more so for a relatively young research institution like FRIM, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, which was established under the Malaysian Forest Research and Development Board Act in 1985.

Over the years, FRIM has had the opportunities to collaborate with many national agencies such as *JICA*, *JIRCAS* and *NIES* of Japan, *GTZ* of Germany, *IDRC* and *CIDA* of Canada, and more recently *AKECOP* of Korea, as well as a number of international agencies such as *ITTO*, *FAO*, *World Bank*, and *Asian Development Bank*. Impacts of these international collaborations varies from basic research capacity and capability enhancements in the form of building up of research facilities and infrastructures, as well as human resource developments; to support in shaping research strategies and policies and to uplift the overall profile of the institute. During the early days of forestry research in Malaysia, international collaborations were mostly in the form of technology transfer and capacity building. The typical mode of this type of collaborations would involve the provision of acquiring technologies in the form of equipment and technical training, and dispatching of experts to develop and conduct research using such technologies. These also include a number of programs that offered human resource development opportunities in the form of providing scholarships for researchers to pursue higher degrees in many of the well-known universities and colleges in more developed countries.

While the transfer of technologies in the form of equipment and technical trainings to use these technologies still continue till recent years, international collaborations had gradually evolved into those with increased direct participation of FRI/FRIM researchers' in all aspects, starting from their early idea conceptualization through planning and implementation to final completion. This evolution from the state of being more of a 'receiver', to the later state of increasingly being a 'partner', is recognition of the maturing of FRIM's research capacity and capability that had been slowly and steadily built up during the years.

Such evolution and recognition had also prompted the increased participation of FRIM in international and regional collaboration and networking addressing emerging common issues and interests in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. FRIM has been an active member of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (*IUFRO*) for several decades. One of its former Directors General, Salleh Mohd Nor, had served as *IUFRO* President 1995-2000; and FRIM had hosted the *IUFRO* World Congress in Kuala Lumpur in 2000. FRIM's active involvement in *IUFRO* continues with Susee Lee, a senior researcher, who had recently been elected as a Vice President. In the region, FRIM has been very actively involved in Plant Resources of Southeast Asia (*PROSEA*) ever since its initiation in 1985. FRIM had contributed substantially to quite a few of the compilations produced by *PROSEA*. FRIM is also one of the founder members of the Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (*APAFRI*), an association of 65 forestry research institutions and forestry schools from the region. FRIM has been hosting the *APAFRI* Secretariat since 2001. Two of FRIM's former Directors General, and its current Director General, have been elected Chairmen of *APAFRI* over the short 15-year history of *APAFRI*.

Recognizing that one of the effective strategies in research collaboration and extension is through having Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with national and international research institutions, government agencies as well as private companies, FRIM over the years had entered into many such MOUs. A number of these MOUs had led to further developments including specific agreements in research collaboration and commitments towards capacity building. A MOU with the *University Putra Malaysia*, for example, had extended FRIM's Research Assistance Scheme which support graduate studies, to forestry researchers from neighbouring countries.

Many research institutions in the Asia Pacific region are relatively young with insufficient capability and capacity to deal with the complexities of forest ecosystems and crosscutting issues such as climate change and biodiversity conservation. Collaboration and networking would provide the necessary platform to share experiences and knowledge as well as other resources. These could avoid costly duplication and errors further depleting the already scarce resources. The relative young history of most of these institutions had, however, also present some serious challenges towards meaningful and effective collaboration and networking. Many of these institutions are still in the process of building-up and strengthening capability and capacity, often with frequent organizational changes and staff movements which hamper continuity and effectiveness of research collaboration and networking.

Being centrally located geographically in the Asia Pacific region, FRIM will continue to foster research collaboration through proper and appropriate networking contributing to addressing emerging issues related to forest management, biodiversity conservation, forest environment and climate change. The current FRIM management has also pledged to continue the support and cooperation to international and regional networks such as *IUFRO*, *AKECOP* and *APAFRI*, as well as maintaining closer collaboration with the other research agencies in the region and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Research collaboration, networking, capacity building, experience sharing and exchange, forestry extension and education.

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Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)

- Forestry research in Malaysia started in 1918 with emphasis on reforestation.
- Initially a branch under the Forestry Department it was moved to present campus in Kepong in 1929 and was elevated from research branch to institute - the Forest Research Institute (FRI).
- In 1985 FRI became autonomous and renamed as the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM).

FRIM's current research priorities

Sustainable forest management and development

- Climate change and forestry
- Ecotourism and urban forestry

Biodiversity documentation, conservation and management

- Forest health surveillance
- Biotechnology in forestry
- Forest plantation
- Plant improvement

Quality of herbal product development

- Drug discovery

Green technology in timber industry

- Lignocellulosic residues as alternative resources
- High value added downstream products
- Economic and strategic analysis






FRIM has had the opportunities to collaborate with national agencies:

- JICA, JIRCAS and NIES of Japan
- GTZ of Germany
- IDRC and CIDA of Canada
- AKECOP of Korea




International agencies:


- ITTO
- FAO
- World Bank, and
- Asian Development Bank




Evolution thru' the years

Receiver


- Technology transfer
- Capacity building (infra & human)





Partner

- Collaboration
- Sharing & Exchange
- Extension & Training





FRIM is an active member of

- IUFRO
- PROSEA
- APAFRI





PASOH Research Plot


- FRIM involved in long term ecological studies with support from the International Biological Programme (IPB) under UNESCO since 1964.
- 50-ha tree demography plot at Pasoh established in 1984 through a long-term collaborative agreement between FRIM, Harvard University and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI).
- Pasoh is linked to 30 other plots across Asia, Africa, Europe, North and Latin America and coordinated by the Centre for Tropical Forest Science (CTFS).





FRIM & APAFRI

- FRIM is one of the founder members when APAFRI was established in 1995
- Three FRIM DGs served as Chairman of APAFRI over the past 15 years
- FRIM hosted the Secretariat since 2001 with core funding and infrastructure
- Two senior officers served as Executive Secretary




APAFRI Members

65 Institutional Members
International Research Organizations
National/State/Provincial
Research Institutions
Universities
Private Enterprises
Trade Associations





APAFRI Members

8 Individual Members




Publications



Some recent major activities

- International Conference on SFM and Poverty Alleviation-Role of TFK, 17-20 Dec 2007, Kunming, China
- Asia and the Pacific Forest Health Workshop, 1-3 Dec 2008, Kuala Lumpur
- International Symposium on FGR C&M, 5-8 Oct 2009, Kuala Lumpur
- Asia and the Pacific Forest Products Workshop, 14-16 Dec 2009, Marawila, Sri Lanka
- IUFCO World Congress, 13-28 Aug 2010, Seoul,






Challenges to Effective and Meaningful Collaboration and Networking

- Wide variations in capacity and capability
- Frequent organizational changes and staff movements

Thank You

