

ATTENDANCE:

Dr. Yuji Niino - FAO

Dr. A. Rahman B. Abu Bakar - Malaysia

Dr. Syaiful Anwar - Indonesia

Dr. Prak Cheattho - Cambodia

Engr. Samuel Contreras - Philippines

Mr. Francis Daink - Papua New Guinea

Ms. Karma Dorji - Bhutan

Dr. Jose Nestor Garcia - Philippines

Dr. Pham Quang Ha - Vietnam

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Dr. Rodolfo Ilao - Philippines

Dr. Sudibya Kanti Khisa - Bangladesh

Dr. Romeo Labios - Philippines

Dr. Sovuthy Pheav - Cambodia

Dr. Naik Sinukaban - Indonesia

Dr. Chinapatana Sukvibool - Thailand

Ms. Ying Wang - China

Mr. Victoriano Tagupa - Philippines

Dr. Renato dela Cruz - Philippines

Dr. Nenita dela Cruz - Philippines

The meeting started at about 10:00 a.m. with Engr. Samuel M. Contreras (Philippines) and Dr. Yuji Niino (FAO) as moderators. The following discussion points were opened for ASOCON

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members and other countries representatives to encourage them to provide their comments and suggestions.

- Strengthen the complementation between ASOCON and WOCAT;
- Unification of the ASOCON and WOCAT initiatives in the region;
- Preparation of a program for the unified ASOCON-WOCAT in case the group decided to create another network;
- Formulation of a financing mechanism for the implementation of the program that would be developed;
- Ensure sustainability of the ASOCON-WOCAT network

Firstly, Dr. Nenita dela Cruz (Philippines) suggested that there is a need to review the activities of ASOCON and WOCAT and look at the similarities and how the sharing of experiences and technologies among its members can be facilitated

While ASOCON is a network consists mostly of Asian countries, the idea of creating WOCAT for Southeast Asia was suggested by Dr. Romy Labios (Philippines) and to look on the possibility of renaming ASOCON-WOCAT in accordance with the global WOCAT initiatives say, having ASOCAT to represent Southeast Asia. Dr. Yuji Niino agreed to the idea but he posed a question on whether it should be Southeast Asia or Asia and the Pacific.

Dr. Labios responded that it should be Asia to include countries attending the workshop. Ms Karma Dorji (Bhutan) reminded however that while both are working toward the same goal, it might be difficult to create another network.

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Prof. Naik Sinukaban (Indonesia) emphasized that WOCAT focuses more on information system and methodologies on SLM. Thus, ASOCON can use WOCAT tools and methodologies to trigger its activities and become more active and strengthened. There should be no merging of ASOCON and WOCAT and instead the expansion of ASOCON membership should be encouraged.

Dr. Syaiful Anwar (Indonesia) added that ASOCON is more structured because of its National Coordination Committee.

Dr. J. N. Garcia (Philippines) thus agreed that ASOCON and WOCAT cannot be merged because of the difference in scale. He suggested using the strength of WOCAT to patch up the weaknesses of ASOCON.

Engr. S. Contreras (Philippines) then recalled that during his attendance to the 15th WOCAT workshop and steering meeting, participants from Southeast Asia proposed the creation of SEACAT. In response, the WOCAT Management Group suggested to look at ASOCON being an existing network, so that there is no need to create another network of similar nature.

Dr. Y. Niino noted that while most participants are ASOCON and WOCAT coordinators, similar activities could be hosted by ASOCON-WOCAT (since WOCAT has more resources than ASOCON) which need more commitment and involvement from member-countries.

In this respect, Dr. Prak Cheattho (Cambodia) asked to determine the mechanism how other countries can join because some are not even members of ASOCON or WOCAT.

Dr. Y. Niino emphasized the need to harmonize parallel initiatives existing in the region and invite other countries as observers in ASOCON activities and this will require government approval.

Engr. S. Contreras also agreed that there is no need to create another network, what is needed is to strengthen ASOCON by having member countries adopt WOCAT tools and methodologies on SLM knowledge management.

Dr. S. Anwar (Indonesia) highlighted the need to expand membership of ASOCON to include countries not in the humid tropics zone.

Dr. A. Rahman B. Abu Bakar (Malaysia) supported the call to strengthen the ASOCON by assimilating WOCAT strengths through its methodologies and tools as though “NEW” ASOCON

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moves on ASIACAT.

However, Prof. N. Sinukaban (Indonesia) commented that ASOCON is an organized network while WOCAT is not, it is a repository of tools and methodologies on SLM.

Dr. Pham Quang Ha (Vietnam) pointed out that WOCAT and ASOCON are both working on SLM. He then suggested reviewing the accomplishments of ASOCON (20 years after its creation) and expanding ASOCON membership. According to him, ASOCON is also more stable through the support of FAO. ASOCON's focus is not only on land management but also soil quality.

At this stage Dr. Niino suggested to create an information platform for the ASOCON while Dr. R. Labios proposed to determine the status of implementation of ASOCON activities in each member country.

However, Ms K. Dorji (Bhutan) commented that it is up to the ASOCON member-countries whether to expand the membership or use WOCAT tools and methods.

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Dr. R. Ilao (Philippines) on the other hand, mentioned that he is more in favor of WOCAT because it is a more functional network

With regards to ASOCON, Prof. N. Sinukaban (Indonesia) emphasized the need to consider changes in government leadership and funding of SLM initiatives and network activities which are the current major challenges of ASOCON as a network.

Dr. Chinapatana Sukvibool (Thailand) reiterated the need to expand the membership of ASOCON and identify common activities while Mr. Francis Daink (PNG) stressed that ASOCON should focus not only on exchange of information but also extending help or support to other member-countries.

Hence, Dr. J. N. Garcia (Philippines) once again pointed out the importance of sustainability of ASOCON.

In this respect, Engr. Contreras underscored the need to revitalize the ASOCON as a network. There is a need to review and adjust its structure and functions. ASOCON member countries can use WOCAT tools and methods. Create a legal instrument to ensure that member-countries will provide annual funds to ASOCON (to minimize reliance to FAO).

Thus, a renewal of commitment from among ASOCON member countries is necessary.

Relative to this Dr. Labios suggested to review the Memorandum of Understanding signed by ASOCON member-countries while Dr. Niino emphasized a new secretariat that will handle the aforementioned concerns should be nominated and identify external members as observers.

In the ensuing discussion, the need to have a new ASOCON Secretariat was tackled. Some participants proposed that the current ASOCON Secretariat should be retained while others suggested having a new Secretariat with the Philippines as the possible replacement.

Dr. N. dela Cruz requested Engr. Contreras to ask the PHILCAT Chair for the Philippines to be the new ASOCON secretariat. Just in case, Dr. Pham Quang Ha (Vietnam) emphasized that Indonesia should continue acting as Secretariat until the new Secretariat is in place.

On the issue of implementing agreed actions, Dr. Labios put forward the need for a timeframe to revitalize the ASOCON and carry out relevant activities. Bhutan and Bangladesh can discuss the contents of the MOU with their top management official for their possible membership to the ASOCON.

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Dr. Sudibyakanti Khisa (Bangladesh) then inquired the mechanism for other countries in joining the ASOCON.

Dr. Niino responded that the ASOCON secretariat, through the assistance of FAO, can send invitation letter to the government of Bangladesh to be a member of the ASOCON.

In this regard, Dr. Labios mentioned that the conference proceedings (signed by the workshop organizer) together with a letter to a specific institution in Bangladesh could be used to discuss the concern with their top management official.

After the exchange of comments and suggestions, the group agreed that there is no need to neither merge ASOCON and WOCAT nor create another network. Instead, the next critical step identified is the revitalization of ASOCON to address its weaknesses and formulate strategies to strengthen it. In view of this, member-countries will review the Joint Memorandum of Understanding and the network structure and functions to determine the current gaps in network implementation amidst the challenges on climate change and food security and changes in the socio-economic and political environment in each member-country. The group likewise agreed that expansion of membership is necessary to include not only countries in the humid tropics but also other Asian countries (i.e. Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal etc.). To enhance the complementation of WOCAT and ASOCON, the tools and methods developed by WOCAT for documentation, evaluation and monitoring of SLM technologies and approaches could be used by ASOCON member-countries

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for further improvement of the system of information exchange including the updating of materials used in trainings and workshops. To ensure the network's sustainability, the members also recommended that each member-country will contribute annual fund to ASOCON. The creation of legal instrument for this resource mobilization strategy will be explored by member-countries.

Another critical agreement is the transfer of the Coordination Unit (CU) from Jakarta, Indonesia to Manila, Philippines with the BSWM as the host agency. As an initial action, management of ASOCON website would be transferred from Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry to BSWM-ISRIS (Integrated Soil Resources Information Section).

Inasmuch as the group decided not to form another network, discussion points on the preparation of an implementation program and financing strategy for the unified WOCAT-ASOCON network did not push through. The group suggested that the plenary discussion could be considered as the 14th Network Consultative Board. ASOCON members also agreed that a resolution would be signed indicating all the agreements made during the meeting. The timeline for the next activities of ASOCON is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. ASOCON work plan (2012)

Actions to be taken

Member-country responsible

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Timeline

1. Conduct of 14th NCB meeting

Philippines

March 27, 2012

2. Prepare a one-page concept note for submission to FAO (c/o workshop secretariat-Ms. Filipina

All member-countries

April 7, 2012

3. Review and provide feedback on the Memorandum of Understanding signed by ASOCON mem

All member-countries (including Cambodia, Bhutan and Bangladesh)

July 15, 2012

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4. Consolidate the comments, revise the MOU and send back the revised MOU to member-countries

Philippines

August-September, 2012

5. Create a legal instrument to be revised MOU for member-countries as a (through Foreign Affairs Ministry or other relevant authority)

All member-countries (within the concern of each country)

September 2012

6. Signing of the revised MOU

All member-countries

October-December 2012

7. Conduct of 15th NCB meeting (with the assistance of FAO)

Host country (____) and all member countries

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*TBD

8. Set-up an ASOCON account (separate from the government institution's account)

*TBD

9. Invite other countries (through their Foreign Affairs Ministry/Dept. or Agriculture Dept.) who are

Philippines as workshop organizer for the preparation of invitation letter signed by the ____ ; FAC

*TBD

10. Transfer the management of ASOCON website to the new secretariat

Indonesia, Philippines

*TBD

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

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Karen S. Bautista (SGD)

Sharon de Vera (SGD)

Member- Workshop Secretariat

Member – Workshop Secretariat