



Interview with Don Koo Lee, Professor Emeritus, Seoul National University, Republic of Korea

Keynote speaker at the IUFRO Regional Congress for Asia and Oceania – *Forests for Sustainable Development: The Role of Research*

Professor Lee, the overarching theme of this IUFRO Regional Congress for Asia and Oceania is “*Forests for Sustainable Development: The Role of Research*”. When you gave your opening speech as President of IUFRO at the XXIII IUFRO World Congress 2010 in Seoul, you stressed the importance of sustainability, equity, growth and development and the need to understand that “*Forest is our life, our hope, and our future.*”

Q: What would you say has been achieved in the quest for sustainable development since the 2010 IUFRO World Congress?-

A: Since then the important role of forests for life, hope and future has been further strengthened internationally by collaborative partnership activities, (e.g. co-research, advanced studies, site visits, trainings, conferences, etc.) especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as nationally by the Forest For Life National Movement in Korea.

Q: What has been the role of forests and forest-related research in this progress?-

A: Seeing is learning: Successful and failed tree plantation sites have been visited; on-site research and workshops/conferences based on research results have taken place. One distinct example in this context is the ASEAN-Korea Environmental Cooperation Project (AKECOP). Another example relates to the forest landscape restoration activities that are being carried out in various regions.

Q: You served as professor at Seoul National University for many years and you still work as professor emeritus and teach forest ecology and silviculture. Forest education and students have always been near to your heart, also as IUFRO President. Is forest education moving into the right direction, in your view? And, what is the right direction?



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A: Today, forest education seems to take up new fashions such as biotechnology, recreation, healing and wildlife management more eagerly. If basic topics including the enhancement and increase of forest resources are strengthened in education and research, new trends can be addressed more easily. In any case, each country or countries with similar climatic regions should develop their own strategic directions of education and training programs.



At IUFRO Division 3 Doctoral Student Conference in Corvallis, Oregon, USA, in 2016: Student participants observing cable logging operations in central Oregon (photo by Woodam Chung)

Q: Is there, in your opinion, a specific educational area that should be emphasized and, conversely, an area that could be de-emphasized?

A: No specific educational area should be emphasized as forestry is a multifaceted science and art. Thus, forestry as a whole, which includes basic sciences, social sciences and forest resources management, must be taught and emphasized. There is no single solution to solving global problems such as combating climate change.

Q: Can you give us an example in the context of Asia and Oceania of how forest education has changed over the past few years?

A: Every two to three years the forum on forest education and research is held in these regions. There are also a couple of successful education projects: rehabilitation with proper timber or plant species at tin-mined sites in Malaysia; agroforestry practice at Gunung Walat Educational Sites in Indonesia; rehabilitation with fast-growing trees at forest fired sites in Thailand; and multiple recreation and agroforestry education at Mt. Makiling areas in the Philippines.

Q: You served as COP 10 president of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification from 2011 – 2013. The IUFRO Regional Congress has identified “Combating desertification, disaster and risk management, and climate change mitigation and adaptation” as one of its major themes. What are the major challenges in this combat? How best can these challenges be overcome?

A: Areas of degraded, arid, semi-arid and desert lands add up to more than 4 billion ha worldwide approximately. These areas are mostly the result of human activities such as illegal logging, over-grazing, conversion of forests into agricultural activities, mining and fire, which are the major challenges. Awareness of how much land is of priceless importance to all living organisms including humans must be raised. Soil and human body are not two separate things. Land provides all the essential elements needed by all fauna and flora.

Land degradation neutrality by 2030 and the Changwon Initiatives (CI) were declared at the UNCCD COP 10 in 2011 to overcome the challenges mentioned above. The implementation of CI includes green partnerships in arid regions and networking for combating desertification in

developing countries through financial supports and promotion of best practices through the Land for Life Awards.

Q: How will people in the countries of the region benefit from research in these fields?

A: They receive green benefits such as eco-tourism, recreation and clean water/air from reforestation activities of degraded lands as well as participation in joint research and training workshops.



Sand dunes in Hustai Park, Mongolia (photo by Alexander Buck)

Q: One of your main publication projects during your IUFRO Presidency was the series “Keep Asia Green” about forest rehabilitation in Asian countries and the need for further forest landscape restoration. Currently FLR is very high on the agenda globally. How do you see the progress of greening Asia today?

A: We have noticed remarkable outcomes of forest landscape restoration in Southeast Asian regions (tree plantation in semi-arid areas in Myanmar and Cambodia), Northeast Asia (poplar plantation in desert areas of China), and Central Asia (green-belt establishment with tree plantation in Mongolia and walnut/juniper/spruce plantations in Kyrgyzstan).

Based on the green partnership of the ASEAN-Korea Environmental Cooperation Project (AKECOP; 11 countries joined), which started in 2000, a new and expanded partnership of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO; 15 countries joined) was proposed by Korea in 2009 and started in 2012 as an inter-governmental organization for sustainable development for a greener Asia.

Q: As minister of the Korea Forest Service from 2011 - 2013, you worked successfully at the science/policy interface and also established important connections with the industry. How can science, policy and industry cooperate more closely towards sustainable development?

A: As a decision maker in the field of forest resources management policies I was open-minded and listened to the voices of scientists, NGOs and industrial sectors for sustainable development.

An excellent example of successful science/policy interfacing is certainly the big and well-known achievement of the President of Korea in the restoration of degraded forests in Korea. This was accomplished through continuous consultation with and recommendations from scientists, especially university professors, regarding the selection of proper trees, and also based on people's willingness to cooperate (Saemaul spirit of cooperation, self-help and diligence) in the 1970s and 1980s.

Q: On a more personal level, what do you see as your major achievement as former IUFRO President?-

A: In my speeches and talks as President elect in 2005 and as President from 2006 – 2010 I used to mention the 5Is - Invite, Inform, Involve, Ignite, and Influence – particularly when addressing young scientists. Since then many young people, especially members of the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA), and many scientists from developing countries have joined IUFRO activities. Also, collaborative partnerships have been strengthened among the regions, countries and individual scientists.



Autumn foliage, Korea (photo by Petr Kratochvil, all-free-download)

Q: As a senior scientist with a rich experience in many fields of forest science and policy, what would your main message to future generations of forest scientists be?

A: Being educated and doing research are not for one's own development and benefit only, but also for others including our neighbours and those who are excluded from society. Forests and forest products sustainably provide us with a large number of goods and services. However, forests and their benefits are not only there to be used by current generations. Therefore, we must not over-use those benefits and services, but rather try to save and protect them. We should pay even more attention to increasing forest resources and keeping forests healthy and strong! Forests and trees have also taught me the values of "LOVE", "SERVICE" and "PARTNERSHIP"!

Thank you very much!