

APFNET ALUMNI NETWORK NEWSLETTER

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APFNET CLASS OF 2020 :GRADUATING AMID THE PANDEMIC



MANJIT BISTA

The class of 2020 has been robbed of experiencing a physical graduation ceremony due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. Graduation is something that most students are looking forward to celebrating their achievements for years of studying. It is also an end with a fresh start as they venture into building their respective careers. However, this year has been an extraordinary commencement for students with the lockdown and social distancing.

Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, APFNet Scholarship Students still managed to complete their respective study programs. For this year, a total of 16 students finished their master's degrees from three host universities in China. They came from 13 economies of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. These students earned degrees in forestry, environmental engineering, forestry economics and management, forest protection and soil and water conservation, and desertification control.

Mr. Manjit Bista from Nepal was the representative for the graduation ceremony in Nanjing Forestry University for students batch 2018-2020. He has shared his experience during the pandemic period until he graduated, and he expresses his gratitude to APFNet.

"The pandemic ruined my plans and activities, just like anybody else's. But after a few weeks, I somehow became used to it and started getting into indoor activities. The pandemic did not affect my thesis much other than making me mentally chaotic for some time in the beginning. However, at the end of the entire study period, the thesis defense, convocation, and farewell were not so satisfactory. Everything was virtual. We did not have time to meet before saying a real goodbye, but we did promise online to meet again.

Today, I hold a Masters Degree in Forestry Science from Nanjing Forestry University along with nine other friends from eight economies. This would have never been possible without the support of the APFNet scholarship program. On the auspicious occasion of Graduation, I would like to heartily thank APFNet for believing me and providing the lifetime opportunity to study in China."

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*I am pleased with
gratitude for all the
support and
upliftment from
APFNet*

This program supported us in getting an academic degree and organized visits in different provinces of China to explore the forestry-related panoramas and ensured our participation in several international assemblies.

SAY NARO

Say Naro from Cambodia, he was students batch 2018-2020 at Beijing Forestry University. He embraced the fact that he and his friends will be attending the commencement virtually at the comfort of their homes. Another sad reality is not having the opportunity to formally say goodbye to his classmates before venturing into the employment world.

"Graduation is an important milestone in one's life. It serves as an ending as well as a beginning to a career path. I feel sad not receiving my diploma personally. But I am still thankful for APFNet and Beijing Forestry University in making an effort to give us a deserving ceremony at our safety and comfort".



PH.D. PROGRAM COMPLETION AMID THE PANDEMIC E.M.B.P. EKANAYAKE

Ms. E.M.B.P. Ekanayake from Sri Lanka is an APFNet Alumni Batch 2015, which she obtained her master's degree at Beijing Forestry University in 2017. She is working as a Forest Officer in the Department of Forest Conservation in Sri Lanka. After completing her master's degree, she continued to pursue her doctorate program in forestry economics and management at Beijing Forestry University under the Chinese Government Scholarship.

In July this year, she completed her Ph.D. in forestry economics and management. During her doctorate study, she successfully published seven (7) Science Citation Index (S.C.I.) articles, including three (3) Q1 articles. Also, she won an outstanding student award in B.F.U. for the academic year 2018-2019.



Ms. E.M.B.P. thought that the current pandemic is a very tough situation for students who are engaged in field activities and laboratory works. "Luckily, I completed all field activities and data collection before the pandemic situation. Even the ongoing pandemic restricts meetings with great support and guidance from my supervisor (Prof. Xie Yi) I completed my doctoral degree on time," shared Ekanayake.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

KAPIL DAHAL

My name is Kapil Dahal from Nepal. I graduated from Nanjing University with a master's degree in Forestry in 2019. My intermediate and bachelor's level are both in forestry. Before my master's, I worked with Non-Governmental Organizations (CARE Nepal) to reduce the adverse impacts of climate change and threats to biodiversity. I was eager to pursue my master's after working a couple of years to elevate my skills and knowledge. I came to know about ASP from one of my colleagues. Few scholarships offer full coverage, so I was immediately excited to apply for this scholarship program. The reasonable accommodations for international students and top-notch teaching facilities and laboratories had convinced me to choose to study at Nanjing Forestry University. APFNet Scholarship Program was a great learning experience with upgrading courses, different field internships, and various seminars.

The ASP helped me with my current and upcoming professional life. After earning my master's degree, I became more responsible in my field. Most importantly, the study experience has a significant impact on my personal development. Making new international friends, experiencing different cultures and traditions are the most exciting things I have experienced.

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I think it is a great decision to connect the university with alumni and current students to encourage potential students. I hope APFNet Alumni will take further initiative ideas to connect all former students in the future.”

I was impressed with the adaptation of new technology and development works in sustainable forest management initiated in the Asia-Pacific region.

APFNet Scholarship Program was the best medium to pursue my master's, and I am grateful for APFNet and NFU for the opportunity. Although it has been an outstanding experience for me. However, I have a few recommendations for ASP. I want more student engagements in various field-based seminars/workshops and technologies transfer. Second is the revision in the curriculum through making more practical based (lab, fieldwork). I want to encourage all newcomers to learn the primary Chinese language before applying ASP for more accessible communication and living.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

SARDOR KHAMIDOV

"My time at NWAUFU was influential in preparing the foundation as I venture to the competitive employment world. I was one of the fortunate young from my country to study at the NWAUFU campus and, to have been in a safe and secure environment".

Sardor Khamidov is from Uzbekistan. He completed a bachelor's degree in 2017 from the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME), Uzbekistan. While studying his bachelor's degree, he had an opportunity to be an exchange student at Hohenheim University in Germany. After graduating from TIAME, he pursued his master's degree in soil and water conservation and desertification control at Northwest A&F University (NWAUFU) supported by APFNet Scholarship Program. In 2019, he completed his master's program, where his study was focused on the vegetation attribution in Uzbekistan under the supervision of Professor Li Zhi. "My modest success is a great portion, thanks to the all-encompassing experience at the NWAUFU campus and the faculty who helped me along the way. It was fond memories of delightful opportunities which I had a chance to take part in," said Sardor.

From his points of view, the APFNet Scholarship Program has been providing a valuable opportunity for talented young candidates like him to pursue their postgraduate studies in a unique scientific and educational platform. The academic course arrangement are well-planned with practical experience. "I remember passing many hours in our laboratory and field works, reading books and articles to supplement my research and daily studies," said Sardor.



Sardor advice for APFNet Scholarship Students is to elevate their knowledge by pursuing postgraduate studies. Scholarship program like APFNet is good for it covers financial expenditures and a monthly stipend. Also, the opportunity to participate in events organized by APFNet and attended by different economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

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*I encourage everyone never to stop learning and
upgrade their skills
because time will never come back.*

RESEARCH CORNER

INDRA YUDISTIRA



Before I started my master's degree study, I worked at the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Republic of Indonesia, particularly at Directorate General Watershed Management and Forest Protected in Jakarta. My master's thesis focused on the "Land Use Land Cover Change (LULCC) and Vegetation Analysis using Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) in Upper Citarum Watershed in West Java Province, Indonesia."

My research aims to analyze land use changes, land cover, and vegetation within the Upper Citarum Watershed in West Java Province, Indonesia. Using the NDVI method, the driving forces for the land-use changes from 2006 to 2017 will be identified. The result could be used for sustainable watershed management initiatives in the watershed area.

The Citarum Watershed is one of the largest watersheds in Indonesia. It has been severely damaged due to unsustainable land-use changes and deforestation, particularly the upstream portion of the watershed. In addition, the Citarum River has a length of 269 kilometers and is dubbed as one of the dirtiest rivers in the world. Hence, it is a great challenge to take swift actions to revitalize and improve the river's water quality, a critical resource for the local communities in the watershed area.

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I am very passionate about sustainable watershed management, which opted me to choose this research topic.

There were some challenges in conducting my research. My fieldwork to the Upper Citarum Watershed has been limited due to travel restrictions regarding the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. The quick spread and deaths due to coronavirus in my country were unfortunate at the same frightening. Thus, it is necessary to follow the preventive measures implemented by the government to avoid more transmissions.

Technical issues such as the damaged lines of the 2006 Landsat 7 ETM + image data was encountered during the processing stage, which a process called "gap fill" was employed to fill the blank lines. Another tough challenge is that I am not familiar with the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) method for calculating vegetation index. However, my friends at the Faculty of Geography, University of Indonesia, taught and helped me calculate the vegetation index using the NDVI method.

Now that I completed my study program, I resumed my work at the Ministry with new knowledge, enthusiasm, and ready to contribute to the pursuit of sustainable forest management in my country.

RESEARCH CORNER

ZHOLA SEBARGAEVA

As the famous saying goes, "Nothing is impossible when you put your mind to it." These words resonate with Zhola Sebargaeva, an APFNet Scholarship student from Tajikistan, in her journey of completing her master's degree at Northwest A&F University (NWAUFU) amid the current pandemic. The on-going Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenge to all the sectors of society, especially in the education sector. In most universities across the globe, distance learning was an optimal strategy to ensure students' safety against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Zhola had successfully defended her master's thesis online and earned her degree in soil and water conservation and desertification control. This was not how she envisioned her defense when she started her study program back in 2018. However, the current pandemic did not stop Zhola from getting her master's degree with flying colors.

Her research was about soil carbon sequestration, which has significant benefits for improved soil and water quality, decreased nutrient loss, reduced soil erosion, and water conservation. The research was conducted under the supervision of Professor An Shaoshan. The on-going pandemic has impacted our lives so many ways opting for us to adapt to the so-called new normal setting. Nevertheless, Zhola has been blessed with the necessary moral and practical support from her supervisor and her teammate, making it possible for her to complete her study program.

Despite the chaos brought by the current health crisis, Zhola still looks positively about her study experience in NWAUFU under the APFNet Scholarship Program.



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Working hard in the experimental station, extra hours, and then having to switch gears back into research has been challenging.

"What I admired about NWAUFU was that you timely got support and guidance from your supervisor. It seems like they had time to dedicate to their students, which I appreciated most. Also, you got to talk to people from other economies who had a various take on other research activities." said Zhola.

Zhola is highly determined to pursue her career and contribute the knowledge she learned in the environment sector in her home country.

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

The pandemic spread of coronavirus has resulted in the temporary closure of universities across the globe. The education sector has shifted from the traditional face to face learning to online learning adopting education technology.

The host universities of the APFNet Scholarship Program has implemented distance learning for international students. The non-traditional learning set-up was made possible using video conferencing tools and online learning software. Currently, a total of 34 APFNet Scholarship Students from nine (9) economies are continuing their respective study programs using online learning platforms.

Life under the new normal setting is challenging, especially for most students. That is why APFNet and the host universities provide the necessary support to students to help them continue and eventually complete their study programs.

Covid-19 has drastically changed the educational landscape across the globe. And international students have their own set of unique challenges in the new learning platform. We spoke to several APFNet Scholarship students to better understand how they cope with their study and personal development during the global health crisis.

ZIN WIN LATT

Sense of Community can go a long way



Zin Win Latt is a first-year master student studying at Nanjing Forestry University. Currently, he is taking his courses online at his home country of Myanmar.

I was shocked when I learned about the pandemic. It has heightened over the economy, finance, relationship, and even physical and mental health. The only thing I'm just worried about was, I won't get back to the normal situation of our life as before".

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Even though I feel uncertain and worry. However, I look at the situation with optimism and confidence that we can get through this as one community.

Zin Win Latt believes that cultivating a sense of community is an essential part of healthy responding to the global health crisis. He also agreed that the shift to e-learning is appropriate for students to continue their studies safely. But he has some concerns about online learning. "The lack of engagement and motivation is one of the struggles I faced in taking my online courses" He further went on, saying, "In the end, I realized that I need to interact with the online world as much as possible. The situation encourages me to take more self-learning and find solutions since the face-face learning is not permitted".

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

SOE SOE NEW

Time management to get things done



Soe Soe New is in the process of finishing her master's thesis when the Covid-19 health crisis is happening globally. She said, "I was excited to finish my master's degree but at the same time worried about my health with the ongoing pandemic. I went back to my home country on vacation, but unfortunately, I couldn't return to my university due to the pandemic". As a government staff in Myanmar, she needed to attend office work while finishing her thesis.

We asked her how she managed to attend both tasks, considering the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic. "On weekdays, I prioritize office works assigned to me by the office. While during night and weekends, I am focused on writing my thesis and discussed with my supervisors to get valuable inputs."

Soe Soe has proven that you can still work and learn amid the pandemic with the proper time management and discipline. "I felt delighted and satisfied with my study program. This was made possible with the help and guidance from my supervisors, my colleagues and staff, and NJFU. And special thanks to APFNet Scholarship Program that paved the way for me to get my master's degree," said Soe Soe.

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I felt delighted and satisfied with my study program. This was made possible with the help and guidance from my supervisors, my colleagues and staff, and NJFU. And special thanks to APFNet Scholarship Program that paved the way for me to get my master's degree,"

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

CHROEK VANNAK

Being resourceful in the middle of the pandemic

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Forestry courses require on-site and practical experience; however, the new learning platform has urged us to be resourceful and go for an extra effort to learn things on our own in the comfort of our homes.



Chroek Vannak from Cambodia just finished his first year studying his master's degree in forestry economics and management at Beijing Forestry University. Vannak shared that the study experience has been life-changing. "I have made a lot of new friends from different countries. The most exciting experience for me is to see snow for the first time," said Vannak.

Although online provide a safe learning environment for students, but some still faced struggles with the new learning platform. The varying timezones and weak internet connection are the most struggles that students are dealing with online learning. "Studying online is a new experience for students like me. In my case, I was forced to my grandparents' house for the whole semester for a robust internet connection". He continued saying that the new learning set-up requires a well-managed time table considering the differences in timezones.

Currently, all courses in BFU are taught online. Professors used online learning app and software such as TencentMeeting and TencentClassroom to teach the lessons. The APFNet Scholarship has provided students to visit places across China to explore sustainable forest management practices and participate in international events. However, these activities have been temporarily postponed due to the ongoing pandemic.

Vannak said: "Forestry courses require on-site and practical experience; however, the new learning platform has urged us to be resourceful and go for an extra effort to learn things on our own in the comfort of our homes." Vannak expressed his gratitude to APFNet Scholarship Program and Beijing Forestry University to support his studies amid the coronavirus pandemic.

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

ANOUSONE SENGTHONG

Self-motivation is vital for the new learning set-up



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I am grateful that our Professors sent the recorded video of each class to review if we miss some points of the discussion

Anousone Sengthong is a master student of forestry at Nanjing Forestry University. She is currently in Lao PDR and attending her courses online. When the coronavirus news came out, the first thing that came to her mind is her friends in Nanjing. "I feel worried about my friends that could not go back to their country. Staying in the dormitory for months must have been depressing".

The situation under Covid-19 has been chaotic; nonetheless, Anousone remains optimistic that everything will be back to normal on due time. "I am still looking at the positive, staying at home would give me comfortable time reading books, gardening, at the same time connect with friends via social media."

In terms of her study, Anousone shared some of her experiences taking her lessons online.

"I think that online learning is a viable alternative to on-campus study amid pandemic. However, there one of the challenges is less interaction with classmates and professors, slow internet connection, and different time zones".

She emphasized that online learning requires greater self-motivation and educational support for students to fully receive the knowledge. "I am grateful that our professors sent the recorded video of each class to review if we miss some points of the discussion," said Anousone. She added that advances in technology now allow students to study entirely while still socializing with classmates.

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

SAJJAD HOSSAIN SHOZIB

Engaging in productive activities

Sajjad Hossain Shozib is a first year master student studying environmental engineering at Nanjing Forestry University. Before the travel restrictions in response to coronavirus, he could fly back to his country of Bangladesh.

"The first time I learn about the pandemic, my initial thought was that it is a critical health issue for the world. At times I feel anxious and stress thinking about it but managed it with the time spent with family".



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I try to keep myself productive by studying, working on my thesis, and reading books.

But the current pandemic has not slowed down Sajjad to engage in productive activities. "I try to keep myself productive by studying, working on my thesis, and reading books." However, it still needs to have a balance. That is why, during his free time from the online class, he watches movies.

Unlike the normal setting, digital learning is much struggle than the face to face learning. Sajjad experienced challenges with the new learning platform, such as poor internet connection and different time zones.

"Learning in the classroom is much easier than virtual because, with it extra effort is needed to understand the lessons fully."

According to Sajjad, life under the Covid pandemic is hard, but it even scarier and more challenging with the spread of misinformation online. He encourages everyone to be responsible for sharing information online as to avoid causing panic to people. He further emphasized to trust only those reliable news sources and stay calm and vigilant.

STUDENTS' LIFE UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

PRABAL RANA

Isolated but striving to learn

Prabal Rana is a freshman studying his master's degree in forestry at Nanjing Forestry University. He is among the students who could not return to their home country for the spring break. Originally from Nepal, he has been on quarantine at his dormitory for months during the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

He said: "The new aspect of life amid pandemic is depressing. My daily routine has changed. I couldn't go outside and buy things, but it is necessary to follow the protocol and restrictions for our safety".

“

I miss the social interaction between my classmates and Professors. However, I took advantage of the situation to enroll in several online courses to further enrich my knowledge and skills

While in China, he can't stop thinking about his family and his home country's current situation. "Businesses back home have been halted, and my finances are crippled," says Prabal.

Prabal said that his university has now digitalized all lectures and exams using video conferencing tools such as the Tencent Meeting app. To collaborate with group projects, students created WeChat groups for discussion and sharing of ideas. According to him, virtual learning is challenging. "I miss the physical interaction between my classmates and professors. However, I took advantage of the situation to enroll in several online courses to further enrich my knowledge and skills," says Prabal.



ALUMNI'S ACHIEVEMENTS

APFNet Scholarship Student hailed as "Jiangsu Province Outstanding International Student 2019."

ATCHARAPORN DAISAI



"Studying in China has been rewarding in so many ways. China is the most renowned country about bamboo, I came here to study it. Moreover, I joined almost all activities that the school arranged to learn more about Chinese culture and also participate with friends from around the world, and I spent my free time traveling around Nanjing and nearby. This award proves that work hard and play hard is worth it, and I am so grateful for that."

Each year, the Education Department of Jiangsu Province, China, honors "Jiangsu Province Outstanding International Students". This award was given to international students that showcase remarkable study achievements and their contribution to spreading their universities' influence on the world. The award criteria include their significant contribution to sports and involvement in social activities.

The complete list of awardees of Nanjing Forestry University can be accessed at <http://iec.njfu.edu.cn/newsshow.php?cid=1&id=585>.

For Nanjing Forestry University (NFU), one of the host universities of ASP, a total of nine international students had been awarded for 2019. One of the awardees is Ms. Atcharaporn Daisai, an APFNet Scholarship Student Batch 2018 from Thailand. In July 2020, she earned her master's degree in forestry, of which her research was about the effects of management practices on carbon sequestration in bamboo plantations at Palaewluang Sub-District, Thailand.

ALUMNI'S ACHIEVEMENTS

APFNet Alumni appointed as the Chief of Provincial Tourism Development Program Implementation Unit, Sudurpashchim, Nepal

BHOJ RAJ PATHAK



Bhoj Raj Pathak is an APFNet Alumni from Nepal. He finished his master's degree in forestry economics and management at Beijing Forestry University in 2017. Prior to his master's study, he worked at the Department of Forests, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Nepal.

Currently, he is appointed as the chief of the provincial Tourism Development Program Implementation Unit (PTDPIU) in Sudurpashchim Province under the Ministry of Tourism, Industry, Forest, and Environmental. In his opinion, the “unspoiled nature” and “age-old culture” are key attractions and pull factors for Nepal to establish as a potential tourist destination in the world.” Sudurpashchim province is full of such pull factors due to its unique topography, geography, climatic conditions, vegetation, natural environment, appealing attractions, and hospitable people as hosts. as tourism chief he has mainly focused on eco-tourism along with other tourism supporting inclusive ecotourism for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and heritage conservation in the province.