

Sharing the latest news and activities from the bamboo and rattan sectors



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Cover Image

Yang Changqin seeks out suitable natural materials in a bamboo grove. Credit: UNESCO

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About INBAR

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BRU

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of the Bamboo and Rattan Update for 2024, which details bamboo and rattan's contribution to gender equality.

Around the globe, women are subjected to unfavorable political, economic and societal structures that tend to produce better outcomes for men. However, significant progress has been made in achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, largely a result of comprehensive legislative efforts empowering women to shape their own economic, reproductive and marital destinies, while also positively changing cultural and societal perceptions.

This global movement has been in part facilitated by efforts at the United Nations (UN). Accordingly, issues of the *Bamboo and Rattan Update* (BRU) in 2024 are focusing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a list of goals comprising a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These 17 SDGs intend to end poverty and other deprivations while improving health and education, reducing inequality, spurring economic growth, tackling climate change, and working to preserve our oceans and forests. Ultimately, these goals orient global progress in a direction that is more equitable, responsible, inclusive, greener and cleaner.

The previous issue centered around how bamboo can be used to eradicate poverty. This current issue will focus on SDG 5, aiming to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” While notable progress has been made toward gender equality, it has also stalled in areas. Women still lag far behind men’s participation in public life, particularly in occupying managerial roles, and continue to lack control over determining their own sexual and reproductive health. According to the UN, there is an urgent need to “challenge biased social norms, eliminate harmful practices, and change discriminatory law,” and in particular elevate women’s “leadership roles and investments in gender equality” at all levels. Because of this, the Editorial Board at the BRU wishes to highlight that bamboo can also play a strategic role in accomplishing this noble mission in potentially unexpected but valuable ways.

Is it possible to strengthen women’s associations while also helping safeguard biodiversity? In the Amazon, the answer to this question is a resounding yes, with a surprising tool in mind: Biojewelry. The Tajimat Women’s Association in Peru and the Kichwa Women’s Association AMUKINA in Ecuador are two women-based organizations leveraging bamboo to create unique pieces of art that resonate with indigenous history and culture while strengthening livelihoods and preserving the lush biodiverse ecosystems by which they are surrounded. INBAR’s Bambuzonía

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project is an ambitious project focusing on taking advantage of the potential of bamboo as a natural resource in the Amazonian regions of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, capable of generating ecosystem services to reverse land degradation, deforestation and climate change. The project supports both women's associations as it also seeks to strengthen livelihoods in rural communities, using bamboo to generate income and boost local economies. Through holding trainings on bamboo management and value addition, the project empowers women from the area with the skills to sustainably harness this forest resource for livelihood improvement.

In China, we are also seeing revitalized traditions coming back to life with a modern twist, as women take the lead in building a thriving new industry based on intergenerational connection between mothers and daughters. In April, INBAR joined forces with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to hold a series of courses on the innovative redesign of bamboo weaving products for the Bamboo for Carbon Neutrality in Rural Areas project in Chishui, China. Over the multi-day training, over 60 local women benefited from careful instruction by artisans of bamboo weaving, studying modern design techniques, mastering the ability to design patterns for flat bamboo weaving, and learning about case studies shared by designers and inheritors from across China on how to innovatively apply bamboo-weaving techniques in conjunction with AI tools. The article highlights the journeys of several women, each of whom is making a valuable contribution to Chishui's bamboo weaving sector. They are trailblazers, showing how old traditions can benefit from modern tools to create high-quality artistic products and secure good income for women in rural communities.

The third feature article is distillation of a gender analysis study carried out as part of the Dutch-Sino East Africa Bamboo Development Programme – Phase II, with generous funding from the Netherlands and China. The project is a triangular South-South cooperation arrangement intended to support livelihood development, food security and better environmental management by developing robust bamboo value chains and a sustainable bamboo industry in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Investigators obtained valuable information regarding the gender-specific dynamics at play in these countries, significantly deepening their understanding of common challenges faced for expanding women's involvement in the bamboo value chain. The conclusions and lessons from the study are also applicable for the management of other natural resources with similar socioeconomic backdrops

We hope you enjoy learning about the many ways in which bamboo can elevate women around the world.

THE EDITORS



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES OF THE AMAZON



Yanua Atamain (left), Awajun Woman Leader, meets with Pablo Jácome (right), Director of INBAR’s Latin America and Caribbean Office, during a field visit in Peru.

Bamboo jewelry is helping protect natural forest land while strengthening women’s associations.

Nestled within the lush landscape of the Amazon lies the Río Soritor community in Peru’s Awajún District. Over 1200 kilometers away, the Municipality of Tena in Ecuador’s Napo Province stands as a clear parallel in terms of biodiversity and community resilience. These two communities are part of some of the world’s most crucial biomes and also home to women who are pioneering sustainable economic models

through the use of bamboo, an underutilized resource in the area. Their efforts not only protect the environment but also embody the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Bamboo as a catalyst for change

In Peru, the “Yanua Biojoyería Awajún” initiative led by Yanua Atamain and the Tajimat Women’s Association clearly demonstrates the fusion of tradition with environmental stewardship. Their journey began in 2015 with reforestation efforts, when they first set off to plant over 20,000 native

species, including bamboo. By 2021, they had integrated bamboo into their biojewelry collection, creating unique pieces of art that resonate with history and nature. This initiative was not merely about economic gain but also about re-establishing a lost cultural practice and creating a sustainable future for their community.

Yanua Atamain, the main figure and driving force behind this initiative, collaborates with 14 women from the Awajún area. These women have discovered new ways to intertwine their cultural identity with economic independence, producing a type of biojewelry that appeals not only to aesthetic sensibility but also tells a story of resilience and environmental consciousness.

Similarly, in Ecuador, Mary Sanmartín and the Kichwa Women's Association AMUKINA leverage bamboo's versatility through the "Piensa en Bambú" ("Think in Bamboo") small enterprise. This initiative showcases the diverse ways in which bamboo crafts can boost local economies while preserving cultural heritage and biodiversity. At the age of 53, Sanmartín is part of an association that includes over 400 Kichwa women, all united by the common goal of using bamboo to improve their livelihoods.

Crafting a sustainable future

The biojewelry from the Tajimat Association reflects a strong commitment to creating an autonomous economy that aligns with environmental conservation. Atamain and her colleagues, with the support of the Bambuzonía project, have rekindled their traditional uses of bamboo, designing and producing intricate jewelry that highlight their cultural identity. This partnership with local authorities and international organizations like the International Fund for Agricultural Development and INBAR has been instrumental for facilitating the transformation.

In Ecuador, the Bambuzonía project similarly transformed Sanmartín's life. The training and support she has received has allowed her to harness her natural creativity, leading to the development of a range of bamboo products. This empowerment has extended beyond pure

economic gains, fostering a sense of pride and environmental responsibility.

Overcoming challenges, building resilience

In rural contexts, there is often a severe lack of economic opportunities. Women tend to be disproportionately impacted by this reality. However, the women of Peru are now overcoming this challenge, building community resilience and fostering innovation. Atamain's team has focused on refining their techniques and adding value to their products, ensuring their crafts stand out in the marketplace. They have sought to perfect their techniques and product finishes, adding iconographic details that distinguish their work and incorporate local raw materials.

Sanmartín, driven by her passion for bamboo, expanded her repertoire from hairbands to intricate bags and hats, proving that sustainable fashion can be both beautiful and planet-friendly. The pandemic greatly complicated our lives, but it also served as a catalyst for these women to explore new markets and opportunities. In this period, they have expanded into local and provincial handcraft fairs, tourist showrooms and are also selling in the capitals of Lima and Quito in handcraft shops. Their actions demonstrate that adversity can be met with creativity and determination, resulting in a thriving artisan community that supports itself through sustainable practices.

Empowerment through unity and innovation

The stories of Atamain and Sanmartín are testaments to the power of community and collective effort. Their ventures embody the principles of SDG 5, demonstrating how gender equality and empowerment can be achieved through sustainable practices. Women's associations have become platforms for skill development, economic independence and environmental defense, delivering tangible benefits to the women they serve. These associations not only generate economic income for families but also act as best practice models and sources of inspiration globally, showcasing the struggle and perseverance of sectors in vulnerable conditions.



Mary Sanmartín's bamboo biojewelry on display during an Amazonia Expo Fair in Napo Province, Ecuador.

Atamain emphasizes that each piece of biojewelry aims to connect the wearer with nature, promoting responsible consumption.

The meticulous craftsmanship and innovative designs have gained national recognition, with prices ranging from USD 10 to USD 50. The diverse designs for their necklaces, earrings, bracelets and piercings combine the use of natural materials such as huayruro seeds, feathers, beeswax – and bamboo. This success of their initiative underscores the viability of a circular, ecological economy that enhances the quality of life in their territories.

Sanmartín's dedication to her craft, despite the technological and logistical hurdles, highlights the importance of perseverance and passion for one's work. Her products, priced between USD 5 and USD 40, distill the essence of her community's identity and heritage, and are the markers through which she is now known as a bamboo artisan. Her entire training process lasted over three years with her colleagues, playing an instrumental role in her success. As they were forced to confront numerous difficulties, they were able to garner

multistakeholder support from other actors in the area, including key decision-makers, who have done much work to promote their work at various events.

Identity and connection with nature

Today, the fashion sector is becoming increasingly greener offering more options for conscious consumption. However, the jewelry sector, due to its harmful methods for extracting raw materials, has struggled to adapt to new consumer demands for responsibly sourced products alongside rising global support for sustainable endeavors. Not-few companies continue their conventional practices, resulting in poor working conditions and worker exploitation. Harmful chemicals such as cyanide and mercury are also often used to extract gold, poisoning water and soils while harming local inhabitants. However, recently there has been a significant shift toward sustainability.

Atamain and her colleagues are playing an important role in fostering this shift toward sustainability. In addition to environmental messaging, their work also involves the need to

continually raise awareness in their communities about the importance of reinventing themselves over the years, as well as spreading the message to the world that the most efficient tools for combating climate change are already in our hands – nature-based resources.

Therefore, each bamboo piece aims to connect the wearer with a slice of nature, creating an environment of beauty and responsible consumption. To optimize their skills, artisans were first given training on the advantages of using bamboo in crafts, alongside exchanging experiences with other artisans from the region. This training expanded their knowledge and introduced other alternative resources. Additionally, they were equipped with new modern tools in their workshops to reduce production time and improve product finishes, boosting their sales capacity.

“When we didn’t have the tools and machinery, it used to take about a week to make a dozen basic design earrings without natural dye. Now with the implementation of our workshop, we will advance with more models and natural dyes in the same time,” Atamain explains. This progress highlights



Local from Tajimat Womens Association wearing biojewelry.

how access to resources and training can significantly enhance productivity and innovation.

For Sanmartín, bamboo has become a trendy material thanks to its versatile applications in design. From a simple hairband, she expanded her technique to create headbands, bags and hats that demonstrate to the world that including bamboo in fashion is a green and planet-friendly option. “At the events I have participated in, I like to wear these accessories so that visitors can see the quality of the crafts we make in our communities, and that we learn to value what we have in our home and the history of our ancestors who have fought to take care of our land,” she says. Among the many customers in Ecuador who have purchased her bamboo biojewelry, these words resonate strongly.

A vision for the future

For both Atamain and Sanmartín, the journey with bamboo is far from over. Their daily motto, “Dreaming and being steadfast,” encapsulates their vision for the future. They aim to continue consolidating their ventures, creating environmentally friendly products that reflect the creativity and soul of their communities. Their work exemplifies how artisans, with their hands, heads and hearts, can be true artists and agents of change.

Finally, the experiences of these women from Peru and Ecuador highlight the transformative power of bamboo in fostering sustainable development and gender equality. Their stories inspire a broader recognition of the potential within local communities to drive economic and environmental progress, ultimately fulfilling the vision of SDG 5.

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WEAVING A BETTER LIFE WITH BAMBOO IN RURAL GUIZHOU



Yang Changqin guides local women in making bamboo covers for porcelain cups. Credit: UNESCO

In an area of China renowned for its unique geologic features and bamboo resources, an ancient tradition is enhancing livelihoods and cultural practices.

Steep red cliffs dot the landscapes of China's southeast, southwest and northwest. These landforms are known as "China Danxia," forming over a glacially slow process that involves tectonic movements, weathering and erosion over millions of years. Made up largely of sandstone and minerals, these rock formations are stunning examples of natural beauty.

Guizhou Province is home to the Chishui Danxia landform, an area listed as a World Natural

Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In addition, the area boasts an impressive forest coverage rate of 82.77%, encompassing nearly 88 hectares of bamboo forests home to over 300 bamboo varieties such as "nanzhu" (*Phyllostachys pubescens*) and "cizhu" (*Neosinocalamus affinis*). Recognizing this, Chishui was awarded the title "Hometown of Chinese Bamboo" by the State Forestry Administration of China in 2006.

Chishui bamboo weaving, an intangible cultural heritage, has a long local history in the region. The tradition has changed over time in the hands of different generations of inheritors, used to make daily necessities and decorative artworks, the latter of which are especially popular with domestic and foreign consumers. It has also

provided employment opportunities for local people, especially women. “A bamboo stick, if used as raw material, is worth at most 10 yuan [USD 0.13]. But after going through more than 20 processing steps, such as peeling off the skin, breaking into strips, dyeing and weaving, it can be made into various bamboo handicrafts, fetching a price over 10 or even hundreds of times higher,” said Lu Huaying, a local inheritor. About 200,000 people are engaged in bamboo-related industrial activities in Chishui, with an increasing number of women participating every year.

Women entrepreneur driving the development of bamboo weaving

Yang Changqin is one of the youngest inheritors of Chishui bamboo weaving and the founder of Exquisite Bamboo, a well-known bamboo weaving brand. She has grown from a bamboo craftswoman to an entrepreneur who drives local economic growth. Through her practical experience, she has demonstrated that women have a key role to play in bringing sustainable prosperity to the local community.

In 2007, Yang was 17 years old, studying at a teachers’ college in Tongren, Guizhou. The school arranged a field trip for students to learn about bamboo weaving in Chishui. Yang immediately felt a connection to the craft, preferring it over her original plan of becoming a preschool teacher. With her dexterous hands, she soon displayed remarkable talent in the craft. She fell in love with it and decided to stay in Chishui to focus on honing her skill. “At that time, bamboo weaving was a niche industry without many career prospects,” Yang recalled. Despite her parents’ opposition, she chose to follow her heart, not only diving into bamboo weaving but also pursuing the craft for over a decade, facing numerous hardships alone.

After ten years of rigorous study and practice, Yang has mastered the technique of bamboo weaving. To better promote the inheritance and development of bamboo weaving, Yang studied at fine arts colleges in Shanghai and elsewhere, using her new knowledge and skills to refine her art, launching a series of innovative products such as ceramics with bamboo weave covers, jewelry

and souvenirs. She noted that, “At present, I focus on developing bamboo-woven daily necessities, hoping to enable more people to use bamboo-woven products in daily life.” This shift aligns with the Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic (BASP) Initiative launched by INBAR and the Chinese Government, which seeks to use bamboo to reduce plastic pollution and address climate change, contributing to the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Her actions also play a role in contributing to the empowerment of women and girls all around the globe.

Yang has always believed that helping develop the bamboo weaving industry in Chishui is the best form of inheritance, allowing more people to experience the craft and also meeting local demand for economic development. For this reason, she combined bamboo weaving inheritance with poverty alleviation, establishing the Hand-in-Hand Bamboo Art Development Company in May 2012. The company mainly engages in the design, research, production and processing of bamboo-woven products. She also established the Exquisite Bamboo brand and set up a production, study and research base in Datong Town, Chishui, where she teaches bamboo-weaving techniques to rural women and poor people. Yang quoted an ancient Chinese saying to support this: “Giving someone a skill is better than giving them a thousand pieces of gold.” She went on to mention that she has instructed over 100 women in bamboo weaving, some of whom have gone on to start their own businesses or work from home, allowing them to “truly realize employment right in their own neighborhoods, earning money with their own hands.” This not only strengthens the overall industry but also contributes to household resilience and women employment.

When speaking about the future, Yang brims with confidence. She reflected, “Bamboo weaving is my passion and career. We will train 20,000 people overseas this year. I think in combination with the BASP Initiative this will help grow the bamboo market while also reviving Chinese culture.” From artisan to inheritor to entrepreneur, she is a noble steward of the craft, leading more and more people to learn about and participate in Chishui bamboo weaving.

Mothers and daughters, teachers and students

Heritage is closely intertwined with women, who are oftentimes repositories of intangible cultural heritage. Traditional crafts are typically passed down through the ancestral bloodline. Daughters are influenced by their mothers at a young age, learning to transform their emotions, experiences and insights into patterns through dyeing, embroidering, painting or carving, and also weaving them into works of intangible cultural heritage. This indelible experience inspires other daughters to carry forward their mother's craft.

Lu Huaying was born in a handicraft family in Dongyang, Zhejiang, a city known for its wood carving. As a child, she learned carving skills from her father and bamboo weaving skills from her mother. In the 1990s, Lu brought her excellent handicraft skills to Chishui, joining a local bamboo fan factory, providing technical support and applying the Dongyang wood carving techniques to carving bamboo, producing works with nature scenes, insects, flowers, characters, birds and animals as patterns. "At that time, transportation was inconvenient. I had to take a train from my hometown to Guiyang, then transfer to another vehicle and take a boat to Chishui. Now it only takes 2–3 hours by car, but it used to take 2–3 days," Lu recalled. Despite the difficult conditions, she focused all her energy on her work, even delaying going home. "Building a new industry requires a leader to drive its development. At that time, there was no other leader. If I left, the whole industry in Chishui might suffer, and I didn't want that to happen," she said.

In June 2019, the bamboo carving craft of Chishui was listed on the Guizhou Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List. In order to better pass along this craft, Lu started providing free training for locals. Her efforts and hard work over the years made a deep impression on her daughter, Tian Yajia, who admires her mother and also wishes to carry forward the torch of bamboo craftsmanship. "I got into bamboo carving partly because I used to help my mom when she was carving, and partly because I like doing handicrafts and used to sew clothes for Barbie dolls when I was young," Tian recalled. Inspired by her mother and her love for handicrafts, she participated in

a flat bamboo weaving training course hosted by INBAR in Sichuan Province in 2017, and embarked on her own path of helping promote traditional bamboo crafts.

Currently, Tian is a professor of bamboo weaving and bamboo carving at a vocational technical school in the area. Her classes are extremely popular with the students. It is common for them to linger after class to continue working on their projects. In the process of popularizing bamboo-weaving art among the younger generation, Tian has been exploring how to innovate her mother's craft while preserving its essence. She believes that bamboo carving and weaving need to stay abreast of the times to better meet consumers' aesthetic needs, and continually explore new markets to build long-term vitality. When she was younger, she experimented with small bamboo carving and weaving accessories, skillfully meshing bamboo strips and silver wire into rings and earrings. These products sold out immediately at markets in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing, and were especially popular among younger women. She hopes to collaborate with more designers, stating: "I believe that as we launch different styles and designs, wearing bamboo weaving jewelry will become trendier."

Revitalizing bamboo weaving

In order to help the Chishui bamboo weaving industry sustainably expand, UNESCO and INBAR jointly held a series of courses on the innovative redesign of bamboo weaving products for the "Bamboo for Carbon Neutrality in Rural Areas" project at the Jizhu Tang Intangible Cultural Heritage Bamboo Weaving Production, Research and Education Base in Datong Town. The training lasted from 22 to 26 April. This course attracted more than 60 local women. The goal was to teach bamboo craft practitioners and enthusiasts bamboo craft techniques, production, innovative design, social media operation and marketing in order to enhance the technical capabilities and employment opportunities of the community engaged in bamboo intangible heritage industries.

During the course, local women systematically learned modern design techniques and acquired the ability to independently design patterns for



Lu Huaying (left) instructs her daughter, Tian Yajia (right), in the carving of bamboo pen holders. Credit: Lu Huaying

flat bamboo weaving. They also listened to online case studies shared by designers and inheritors from across China on how to innovatively apply bamboo-weaving techniques to create modern products. Additionally, they learned about the process of designing bamboo-weaving products with AI tools. At the end of the course, each participant designed and wove a modern pattern for decorating bags.

Yuan Jinxia is one of the youngest students in this course. She is 25 years old and has just become a mother. She has decided to stay in Chishui to learn bamboo-weaving skills after leaving her job in another province to come home and care for her child. Yuan showed great enthusiasm for the course on product photography. “My husband is also starting a handicraft business by processing bamboo into fishing equipment. By learning photography techniques, I can help him take better photos and upload them to shopping websites,” said Yuan. Another student, Yang Xinyue, is a staff member of the Hand-in-Hand Bamboo Art Development Company. She learned bamboo-weaving skills at an INBAR training course held in 2020 and became a permanent employee of the company afterward. The course unlocked her creativity for unique product design: “In the past,

we used to weave products based on samples, and product variety was also limited. But after taking this course, I can design patterns and products on my own now, and create interesting and novel products that are different from traditional bamboo weaving,” Yang said.

Into the future with bamboo

Traditional bamboo weaving embodies the love and aspirations of women in Chishui for their hometown and forging a better life. More local women are finding their life’s meaning by creating art with bamboo weaving, injecting new vitality into the process. A thriving bamboo-weaving industry means a thriving world for women, with more high-quality products from Chishui reaching the world, ultimately leaving a lasting mark on the movement for women empowerment.

FRIDA LIU

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WOMEN IN EAST AFRICA'S BAMBOO SECTOR



Adapted trainings are building confidence with gender-inclusive enterprises.

Recent gender study helps clarify the contributions of women in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda to building the bamboo value chain.

Many countries in Africa boast rich bamboo resources. This is particularly true in East Africa, home to sub-Saharan Africa's largest natural bamboo forests. These resources have traditionally been utilized for a diverse range of economic and cultural activities. However, these applications have generally been small scale and localized to specific environments.

In fact, the overall potential of bamboo remains largely untapped in the region. Unlocking this potential is limited by a bevy of factors such as

supply chain bottlenecks, low-value products and a lack of capacity to adhere to international standards. Nonetheless, these challenges can be overcome with gender-sensitive, community-based interventions. Holistically developing East Africa's bamboo sector will also generate vital downstream benefits, including reducing cash spent on furniture imports, safeguarding forests from degradation and destruction while also contributing an energy source for low-income households that depend on wood and charcoal for fuel.

Dutch-Sino-East Africa Bamboo Development Programme

One of INBAR's flagship projects is helping East Africans realize the potential of their bamboo

resources. First implemented in 2016, the Dutch-Sino-East Africa Bamboo Development Programme utilizes a unique triangular cooperation arrangement to transfer knowledge, technologies and policy experiences from Europe and Asia to the bamboo sectors of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The project has currently entered Phase II in which implementers are focusing on assisting users and producers in the region tap into bamboo to generate rural income, restore degraded lands and combat climate change. To accomplish this, the project supports the establishment of plantations, skills development, more robust value addition, identification of highly marketable products and connection to competitive markets.

So far, the project has yielded many impressive results. In capacity building alone, nearly 150 trainings have been held on how to diversify bamboo products and improve business development services, reaching 2600 beneficiaries. Over 4900 women have benefited from capacity building on bamboo charcoal and improved cooking stoves. In addition, at least 1400 women are directly involved across the supply chain now through newly established bamboo cooperatives, improving livelihoods and developing important leadership skills.

Basic research has also been done in relevant areas, leading to the publication of three site-species matching studies in peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, critical bamboo species have been tested for natural properties, and five tissue culture protocols have also been developed. Practical measures have also been undertaken on the ground, delivering tangible impacts: 36 bamboo nurseries have been supported and six new bamboo cooperatives registered, helping produce almost 9.6 million bamboo seedlings with nearly 5400 hectares of land restored and 4850 hectares of bamboo forest and farms now implementing sustainable harvesting and management regimes. The aggregate effect of these actions has delivered a suite of positive impacts to approximately 5100 smallholder farmers. Project staff have also promoted bamboo in the public discourse through exhibitions both national and international, radio talk shows and awareness-raising event such as World Environment Day.

Gender analysis in East Africa

As part of Phase II, a gender analysis study was deemed necessary to assist with streamlining the project for comprehensive implementation and also attainment of gender-responsive goals. The overall objective of the analysis was to obtain a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics in the beneficiary countries and the ways in which they impact the sustainable development of the bamboo sector. This would facilitate transitioning future project work from being gender-sensitive to gender-responsive, and allow implementers to fine-tune actions within specific gendered contexts to ideally achieve better results.

The analysis focuses on gender-based differences between and among women and men regarding bamboo resource utilization and economic activities. It also presents rich information about the level of participation, inclusion and decision-making by women and men in terms of bamboo resource management within targeted communities. Authors generated a set of country-specific findings that highlight relevant policy and legislative frameworks in agro-based bamboo enterprises and context-specific gender dynamics. These details can inform bamboo development projects to improve the project's gender strategy and adequately address topics such as gender inequality, the different needs of women and men and structural imbalances in access to resources, ideally leading to more meaningful participation and the beneficial engagement of women.

Researchers met with a wide range of stakeholders across Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda for consultation, with a particular emphasis on targeting women to the greatest extent possible. Core areas under investigation in discussions included gender roles, responsibilities and time use; household patterns of power and decision-making; access to and control over assets and resources; meaningful participation in public decision-making and leadership; and gender and power relations. The next section of the article highlights the results and analysis of these conversations.

Clarifying the landscape

In Ethiopia, the bamboo sector is predominantly male-dominated, with women generally involved in low-value bamboo crafts while men focus on higher-value products. Despite this, organized enterprises within the sector employ more women than men, representing an opportunity for the further integration of women within bamboo value chains. However, one traditional viewpoint in rural Ethiopian society is that the bamboo industry is more suitable for men. In order to challenge these broad perceptions widespread in the society, project work has specifically targeted women for various training and other leadership activities. Moving forward, it will be important to tailor future activities toward changing societal perceptions on women's expanded roles in the bamboo sector while also promoting bamboo as a tool for green economic empowerment. In addition, the project will benefit by aiming to increase women's access to land as well as providing technical and financial support to enhance their participation in value addition and decision-making processes. In particular, engaging social and religious institutions could help break stereotypes and promote equality in the bamboo industry with a lasting positive impact on gender perceptions.

Kenya's bamboo sector is still in an early developmental phase, hindered by a ban on access to existing bamboo resources in central forest reserves in addition to limited land availability for forestry. Thus, fully engaging men and women in bamboo cultivation requires confronting more than just negative perceptions. To establish a substantial bamboo resource base, men and women both need support to grow bamboo on private land and integrate it into their farming systems to generate income and employment opportunities, which would also attract investment in bamboo small and medium enterprises and industries. Promoting intercropping and agroforestry schemes can help make bamboo more tenable in the minds of farmers. Tax exemptions for certain bamboo products could also play a role in growing the industry. However, most land in the country remains owned by men, curtailing women's access. Despite the nascence of the industry and real challenges currently existing in the country, by

promoting female enrollment in forestry training courses, advocating for bamboo planting across private land, helping make available high-quality planting material and meeting the demand for preferred bamboo species, the project can amplify its impacts for women. One hopeful sign is that the Government of Kenya has recently declared bamboo an agricultural crop, creating an enabling policy environment to attract more interest and investment in the sector from both men and women.

Similar to Ethiopia and Kenya, Uganda also faces similar problems regarding perceptions of gender roles and asymmetrical access to resources. Men and women both stand to benefit from increased awareness of bamboo's value, access to trainings on topics like bamboo preservation, treatment technologies, sustainable harvesting, and management practices, as well as investment in specific machinery for drying edible bamboo shoots. In some parts of the country, greater efforts should be made to collaborate with other sustainable development partners to strengthen livelihoods and conservation efforts. At the same time, tourism can be a useful tool for increasing women involvement in the production of non-traditional high-value crafts, particularly in western Uganda. Bamboo briquettes, which can be made at home, also offer a unique opportunity to women, who generally spend more time at the homestead, as it is a cheaper alternative source of fuel. Highlighting women champions in certain male-dominated high-end trades like furniture production can help inspire the next generation and change negative perceptions about gender roles. A cluster-based micro-enterprise development approach could be helpful in creating and maintaining gender balance.

Lessons learned

There are unique features across these three East African nations that must be accounted for in developing a gender-responsive strategy that is appropriate to and effective within local contexts. However, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda also face a series of common challenges. These include limited access to, use and control of resources, generally stemming from the patriarchal nature of these societies that promotes male inheritance



Teaching bamboo weaving skills can empower women to generate more income from the home.

over female; women being largely excluded from the decision-making process by land-owning men, despite 65% of women deriving their livelihood from agriculture; and a range of gender-related perceptions framed by social, cultural and religious beliefs, particularly evident in the male domination in the manufacturing of goods with higher economic gains such as furniture and construction. Despite these setbacks, bamboo industries employ more women than men in East Africa, indicating their crucial role in the development of the sector and high degree of willingness to be involved in related bamboo industries.

A similar approach can be used in all three countries to address these setbacks. Nonetheless, it is important to design implementation frameworks with individual situations in mind, using carefully gathered information and consulting with key stakeholders. Such an approach also has useful applications in future phases of project work and in programmatic activities concerning other natural resources with similar socioeconomic backdrops.

Particularly regarding the implementation of the Dutch-Sino-East Africa Bamboo Development Programme, in order to fill in gaps in the project's gender strategy, key recommendations include male involvement in the journey toward women's economic empowerment, championing role models to set examples for women, providing women-friendly tools to address time poverty and promote women's greater engagement in bamboo enterprises, training women leaders at the community level, and partnering with like-minded organizations and networks to enhance women's participation. By engaging with these challenges and dynamics on a case-by-case basis, an adapted approach can start to take shape that necessarily effects a gender-responsive orientation and helps women benefit more from bamboo.

This article is a summary of an INBAR Working Paper: Gender Analysis of the Bamboo Sector in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (2022).

Collating the latest international news and activities around bamboo and rattan sectors development.



Bamboo Village Uganda employs local villagers in the country's Nakasongola District to cultivate bamboo, empowering them to become eco-entrepreneurs by producing and selling their own bamboo products. Credit: Florist Trends

IKEA introduces a DNA database to protect endangered rattan species

As a partner of this year's 26th World Congress on the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, IKEA is releasing a first-of-its-kind DNA database of rattan species, which it initially launched in 2023 in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in the UK.

Rattan is a versatile and fast-growing renewable material used in many IKEA products such as armchairs, baskets and mirrors. However, over-harvesting of rattan from the natural forests of Viet Nam and Indonesia poses a serious threat to biodiversity and ecosystems.

IKEA's new rattan database includes a new testing protocol to identify and protect threatened species, which will enable IKEA operations to confirm sourcing and ensure no threatened species are sourced in IKEA's products that use rattan. By launching this database and sharing all the tools

publicly, the aim is to inspire other businesses to make use of them as well, ultimately improving the traceability of other rattan supply chains.

Source: IKEA, 24 July

Climate action game changers: The forest story from Indonesia

Indonesia's government is currently implementing the Agrarian Reform Program. This seeks to reduce poverty and promote rural economic development by granting local and Indigenous communities legal access to forest areas. An important part of this was the Social Forestry Program, which was launched in 2015, helping to accelerate progress toward achieving these goals.

The aim of this program is to facilitate communities gaining legal access to nearly 13 million hectares of state forest for sustainable management to bolster livelihoods and safeguard

forests. At the end of last year, almost 10,000 permits had been issued, covering 6.4 million hectares. This means that the initiative has helped empower numerous Indigenous people to achieve sustainable goals while also strengthening their livelihoods.

Social forestry allows for actions that address multiple issues simultaneously. For example, emissions are reduced when forest cover is preserved, and developing green enterprises in conjunction with natural resources, such as cocoa, mushrooms, rubber, coconuts, fruits, rattan, and other non-timber forest products, can help inject new revenue into the local economy. Social forestry can ultimately be a guiding principle for regional green economic development, showing how governments, communities and outside development partners can work together to promote the value of forests with many positive knock-on benefits at environmental, social and economic levels.

The World Bank is supporting Indonesia's efforts in this regard through its Strengthening of Social Forestry Project. This action is making a positive impact on the community-based sustainable management of 300,000 hectares of forests around the country. By 2024, the program is expected to benefit approximately 150,000 people, reduce 9.2 million tons of CO₂ emissions and rehabilitate degraded forests, protecting key biodiversity.

Source: World Bank Group, 5 June

Bamboo Village Uganda is much more than just carbon compensation

Bamboo Village's first certified bamboo plantation is located approximately 150 kilometers outside Kampala, the capital of Uganda. It is maintained with the help of locals and delivers many positive impacts to the community. It accomplishes this by generating meaningful employment, providing bamboo as a valuable resource and greening the landscape.

Bamboo can play a unique role in realizing East Africa's sustainable future. Bamboo Village Uganda

(BVU) seeks to leverage bamboo as a nature-based solution to restore the soil and provide affordable housing materials in the country. In addition, their bamboo nursery directly provides good long-term jobs throughout the entire process of growing and processing bamboo. Given the versatile nature of the plant, BVU has grown into a multifaceted project, capable of addressing many environmental and social issues.

Employing locals from the country's Nakasongola District, the initiative is helping teach farmers how to manage and harvest bamboo as well as how to conduct value addition to sell their own bamboo products, equipping stakeholders with a valuable range of skills. BVU is also promoting international investment in Uganda's economy by offering organizations the chance to offset their carbon footprint through bamboo-planting initiatives. This could be a useful model scalable elsewhere in Uganda and beyond.

BVU also functions as its own small community. It is able to host approximately 200 families, containing facilities for school, church, practicing medicine and more. All of these structures are sourced with local bamboo materials, allowing the people of the Nakasongola District to act as a demonstration site for the products they grow and sell to the outside world. Buildings made from bamboo are not only low-carbon and sustainable, but they are also very safe, even being resilient in the face of earthquakes and flooding.

The chief focus of BVU is utilizing bamboo's role in the carbon cycle. The article points out that all our modern daily activities emit greenhouse gases, from food and transportation to showering and screen consumption. These gases are then absorbed in the atmosphere, leading to an increase in temperatures on Earth and threatening to destabilize the planet's delicate ecosystems. BVU was designed to fight against this global warming through planting bamboo, which acts as a vital carbon sink, trapping emissions before they enter the atmosphere. Given the plant's rapid growth, it is an attractive solution for carbon footprint compensation, with some species even growing up to 121 centimeters a day.

Source: Florist Trends, 18 June

INBAR commissions research, conducts project work and raises awareness about bamboo and rattan across its 50 Member States.



The Fish-Shaped Bamboo Pavilion is located in the west of the INBAR Garden, covering an area of 280 square meters.

INBAR Garden revealed at the International Horticultural Exhibition 2024 Chengdu

The much-anticipated International Horticultural Exhibition 2024 Chengdu launched on 26 April and will last until 28 October. The opening ceremony was attended by high-level VIPs such as Zhang Meiyang, former Vice Chair of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Jiang Zehui, Co-Chair of the INBAR Board of Trustees, and Tim Briercliffe, Secretary General of the International Association of Horticultural Producers. In their speeches, they highlighted the noble qualities of bamboo and its role in the design and sustainable construction of the garden.

The theme of this year's Chengdu Expo is "Park City, Beautiful Habitat," with the concept of "Green and Low Carbon, Conservation and Sustainability,

Sharing and Inclusiveness." Covering an area of 5800 square meters, the INBAR Garden is home to abundant bamboo. The garden maintains the original terrain and vegetation as much as possible, making full use of low-carbon and eco-friendly bamboo to create a modern West Shu Bamboo Culture Exhibition Garden divided into three sections: West, Central and East.

The West Section features the Bamboo & Rattan Expo. Both sides of the main entrance of the area reveal bamboo plaiting walls, welcoming visitors to the garden. After that, visitors will arrive at the Fish-Shaped Bamboo Pavilion. The high-rising interior space is decorated with Baroque architecture, presenting a unique visual feast for visitors.

The Central Section focuses on Bamboo Culture Science Popularization & Experience,

where visitors have the opportunity to enjoy the natural bamboo landscape. The area also hosts rare bamboo species growing around the Green Bamboo Pavilion. The different shapes and colors of the species coalesce to form a unique area for learning about bamboo diversity.

The East Section is home to the Bamboo Culture Exchange & Reception, where a beautiful pond and the Tranquil Bamboo Pavilion can be found. This landscape abounds with flowers, bamboo and flowing water. Throughout the six-month-long event, INBAR will work with worldwide partners to hold bamboo and rattan exhibitions, popular science demonstrations, and other activities to vividly demonstrate the potential of bamboo and rattan as part of greener lifestyles.

After the Expos, INBAR Gardens often remain standing as permanent exhibitions, continuing to showcase bamboo and rattan's charm and inspiring visitors with their low-carbon and green concepts. In the future, together with our partners around the world, INBAR will promote the unique role and great potential of bamboo and rattan in more environmentally friendly lifestyles.

INBAR participates in key committee on plastic pollution

Recently, INBAR participated in the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) in Ottawa, Canada from 23 to 29 April 2024 in the capacity as an observer intergovernmental organization. The overall goal of INC is to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

At the fourth session, delegates emphasized the urgent need for an ambitious treaty, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the plastic pollution problem. Discussions revolved around adopting an integral approach to address plastic pollution, encompassing the entire life cycle of plastics, ensuring a just transition for all stakeholders along the plastic value chain, establishing robust global regulatory frameworks, and implementing effective management and control of hazardous chemicals.

While acknowledging that there is no silver bullet to plastic pollution, and that each context presents its unique challenges, there is enormous potential for bamboo to play an important role in the process. Bamboo offers promising avenues for income generation in rural and Indigenous communities as well as contributes to mitigating environmental issues such as soil erosion, water contamination, and ecosystem degradation. Moreover, bamboo can simultaneously address the triple planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change.

INBAR re-affirms its commitment to assisting its Member States, fostering synergies among key stakeholders, and promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. Leveraging its expertise in bamboo and rattan sustainable management and utilization, INBAR advocates for these resources as integral components for addressing the urgent shifts needed in our development pathways.

Bamboo takes root at UN Forum on Forests

On 7 May 2024, the side event entitled "Together we make a difference: Joint efforts in UNSPF Implementation in China" kicked off as part of the 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF19). Held in New York City, USA, the event showcased the progress made in implementing the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) in China, highlighted the collaborative efforts of various international, national, and local stakeholders who are working in conjunction with China to realize the Global Forest Goals (GFG), and outlined future steps to enhance their achievement.

Li Lan, INBAR Director of External Relations and Partnerships, delivered the opening remarks. In her presentation, she extolled the virtues of bamboo and rattan, noting that they are "precious treasures bestowed upon humanity by nature, with significant ecological, economic, and social benefits." Moreover, they are ubiquitous in the Global South, spanning "50 million hectares worldwide" and with a "global output value that reaches USD 70 billion." Ultimately, they can be nature-based solutions to a range of global challenges, from climate change, land and forest degradation to the biodiversity crisis.



Dr. Johan Gielis (middle) poses with INBAR staff at the European Bamboo Expo 2024 in Dortmund, Germany.

And that's not all. The world also has a critical ally in bamboo in the fight against the scourge of plastic pollution. This is because bamboo is low-carbon, fast-growing, renewable and biodegradable, allowing it to make important contributions to the effective implementation of the UNSPF and GFGs. Bamboo can also be sourced as a sustainable alternative material to non-renewable and energy-intensive materials such as wood, plastics and cement, with applications in energy, fibers, health and food, and building materials.

To that end, INBAR and the Government of China recently launched the Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic (BASP) Initiative and released the BASP Global Action Plan (2023-2030) in November 2023. The BASP Initiative seeks to use bamboo to reduce plastic pollution and address climate change, leveraging INBAR's partnership network to deepen international cooperation and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Bioeconomy, sustainable construction, plastic pollution: Bamboo at IUFRO World Congress

The 26th International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) World Congress was held in Stockholm, Sweden, from 23 to 29 June 2024. Under the theme, "Forests & Society Towards 2050," the Congress hosted 4300 delegates from academia, governments, industry, NGOs and civil society from around the world to discuss technical and societal issues of forest-related research, policy-making and management. INBAR hosted a booth throughout the week-long Congress, attracting many curious visitors to learn more about the potential of bamboo and rattan for contributing to global forestry.

INBAR had a strong presence at the event, co-hosting a side event with the International Centre for Bamboo and Rattan (ICBR) on "Innovative technologies for the development of bamboo and rattan products." René Kaam, INBAR Regional Director for Central Africa, gave a presentation on "The Contribution of Bamboo to Livelihood

Improvement in Cameroon.” INBAR’s Coordinator of the Global Bamboo Construction Programme, Liu Kewei, followed with a related topic: “Life Cycle Assessment of Structural Glued Laminated Bamboo Products.” Next on the agenda was Nellie Oduor, INBAR National Project Coordinator for Kenya and Principal Research Scientist at the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, who gave a presentation on “Nutritional assessment of bamboo shoots from selected species growing in Kenya.” Finally, Fang Changhua, Professor at ICBR, who also moderated the side event gave a talk on “Advancements in Bamboo Products as Sustainable Substitutes for Plastics.”

Li Yanxia, INBAR Senior Programme Officer, facilitated a poster session for the side event with Fang Changhua of ICBR. Separately, Pablo Jácome Estrella, INBAR Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, spoke on how climate-smart practices with bamboo can help Amazonian communities bolster adaptation and resilience. Nellie Oduor presented on the physical, mechanical and anatomical properties of a fast-maturing species that grows in the drylands of Kenya. Dagnew Yebeyen Burru, INBAR East Africa Regional Office Project Coordinator, also discussed modeling habitat suitability for highland bamboo in Ethiopia in a changing climate.

In addition, throughout the Congress, the Innovation Stage at the center of the hall continually hosted lectures, discussions and talks on a range of forestry issues. René Kaam was invited to speak on a panel hosted at the Innovation Stage, where he discussed his hope for the future—that bamboo will play an increasingly prominent role in forest discussions as more countries realize its potential, particularly in Africa, which is home to abundant yet underutilized bamboo resources that can be used to address a wide range of challenges. Afterward, he gave a longer presentation on “Bamboo for the Bioeconomy” in which he highlighted INBAR’s Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic Initiative, a comprehensive plan to leverage bamboo to mitigate plastic pollution and address climate change. He also pointed out the wide range of bamboo products that can be strategically substituted for plastics, with an emphasis on single-use plastics.

‘Weaving’ the traditional with the modern in Chishui

In late April 2024, INBAR and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a training workshop in Chishui, China on Capacity Building on Innovative Pattern and Product Design of Bamboo Weaving. The objective was to promote the development of creative bamboo-woven products and the application of bamboo-weaving patterns and innovative design.

Li Yanxia, INBAR Project Leader, Professor Shahbaz Khan, Director and Representative of the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and local government officials spoke at the opening ceremony and led the five-day workshop. The five-day workshop was broken into three thematic sections, including 1) the introduction of relevant tools to modern design; 2) practical exercises of bamboo-weaving innovation and product design; and 3) product marketing and promotion. Lectures and hands-on practice were combined to inspired participants about the unbounded potential of bamboo-woven products.

The workshop was implemented by six professional teachers with backgrounds in modern design. Four local bamboo-weaving practitioners in Chishui were also invited, and in total 36 local women participated in the event. The trainees came from a wide variety of backgrounds, consisting of students, community leaders, bamboo art inheritors, young people and community practitioners with basic related skills and/or knowledge.

After five days of training and practices, the trainees had learned a great deal about the applications of innovative modern design principles in traditional bamboo-weaving. They had also mastered basic bamboo weaving skills and knowledge on modern design and product innovation while also developing products adapted to the needs of the modern life and current market trends. This process injected new vitality into bamboo-weaving techniques and product development.



China's Bamboo-Related Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation in Bamboo Weaving

A new work co-authored by INBAR and UNESCO is helping introduce bamboo weaving to a wider audience in order to spread knowledge of the unique craft, develop a sense of aesthetic appreciation for its charm, and inspire the passing down and innovation of bamboo-weaving techniques.

The booklet emerges as one of the deliverables of the Chishui World Heritage Sustainable Livelihood pilot activity titled “Bamboo for Carbon Neutrality in Rural Areas.” This is implemented by INBAR with support from the Chishui Forestry Bureau. Nested within the framework of the UNESCO-China Youth Development Foundation Mercedes-Benz Star Fund “Conservation and Management of World Heritage Sites in China” Project Phase IV (2021-2024), this pilot activity seeks to strengthen culture-oriented, innovative and inclusive socio-economic development in China. Bamboo-related green products and creative cultural handicrafts are leveraged to boost sustainable production and capacity building through training centers and course development, helping to mainstream bamboo handicrafts as a source of good jobs, and attracting young people to enter the sector, ultimately contributing to rural revitalization and local youth employment.

Given UNESCO's critical role in safeguarding and aiding the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, i.e., traditional knowledge, arts, and skills, bamboo cultural practices such as sustainable bamboo weaving naturally fall under the umbrella of its institutional purview. Accordingly, the booklet was drafted based on broad alignment with INBAR's own sustainable mission. To expand upon the topic more thoroughly, it is divided into six sections focusing on intangible cultural heritage, China's national bamboo related intangible cultural heritage elements, the development of Chinese bamboo weaving, analysis of bamboo-weaving patterns, modern designs and product innovations, and a tutorial series on bamboo-woven products.

Though the first sections that detail the history and various categories of intangible cultural heritage are edifying, the heart and soul of the booklet lies in its second half, where it presents in meticulous detail a variety of traditional patterns and weaving techniques accompanied by clear step-by-step images. These include common weaves such as the two-tone cross pattern weaving, triangle pattern weaving, and three-color spiral pattern weaving. Next, the authors feature a selection of innovative modern examples of bamboo weaving, integrating Midjourney, a powerful AI image generator, to help transform abstract concepts into tangible visual representations. This research tool will play an important role in future design processes as it accelerates drawing, sketching or even final-product rendering, placing power directly in the hands of creative thinkers. In addition, page space is given to highlighting some examples of bamboo weaving from overseas. These include playful light structures, creative toy series, bamboo jewelry and more. Finally, video tutorials have also been uploaded to YouTube to assist with demonstration, which can be accessed by the QR codes located on the final page.

Li, Y., Liu, C., and Wang, R. (2024) *China's Bamboo-Related Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation in Bamboo Weaving*. Beijing, China. INBAR.

EVENTS

22 April - 22 August

INBAR International Bamboo and Rattan Photo Competition 2024

Global

23 - 25 April

Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Abuja, Nigeria

6 - 10 May

19th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

New York, USA

16 - 18 May

European Bamboo Expo 2024

Dortmund, Germany

22 May

Webinar on the Evaluation of Carbon Sequestration Capacity of Bamboo Forests

Online

3 June

Workshop in Construction: Bamboo's Sustainable Footprint

Dpto Cajamarca, Peru

5 June

World Environment Day

Global

31 May - 5 June

Congo Basin Forest Partnership Ministerial Meeting and Annual Meeting

Kinshasha, the Democratic Republic of the Congo

17 - 21 June

FAO 11th Global Bioenergy Partnership Week

Rome, Italy

23 - 29 June

XXVI International Union of Forest Research Organizations World Congress 2024

Stockholm, Sweden



INBAR attended the Opening Ceremony of the XXVI IUFRO World Congress 2024 held in Stockholm, Sweden.



Workshop in Chishui, China taught local women how to design and create bamboo-woven products. Credit: UNESCO



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