1. Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992) highlighted the importance of the conservation of forest biological diversity. Ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity is legally binding, where States have sovereign rights over their own biological resources, and are responsible for conserving their biological diversity and for using their biological resources in a sustainable manner. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) ratified the convention in 1995.

The majority of the rural poor in Cambodia depend upon access to forest products and services. Products include timber, building materials, fuel wood, food, medicine and fodder. Some services are shade, shelter, erosion control, watershed protection and soil improvement. Appropriate management of forest resources including both timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), is therefore, central to sustainable development.

Within the country, several indigenous tree species are listed as vulnerable or endangered, and in particular, many distinct populations are threatened with extinction. In response, the Royal Government of Cambodia embarked on a Forest Gene Conservation Strategy in order to conserve the genetic diversity of useful and economically important tree species. A favoured method is to increase their use in tree planting activities, which will ease the pressure on natural populations and contribute to environmental conservation. A well-managed forest resource may contribute towards economic and social welfare, thus enhancing local and national development.

Ongoing forestry reforms give high priority to reforestation activities by the Forestry Administration, and the military in the coming years, a pre-requisite for the success of which is the supply and use of quality seeds. Although the tree seed sector is in its early stages of development, it has embarked on identification and establishment of tree seed sources, which may also serve as forest genetic conservation stands. The Forest Gene Conservation Strategy provides a systematic approach to conservation of valuable forest genetic resources of Cambodia.