

ASIA-PACIFIC WORKSHOP

ADB Sponsors Regional Biodiversity Experts' Consultation

► By **ELVIRA C. ABLAZA**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently gathered together biodiversity experts from both the Asia-Pacific region and international non-government organizations for a consultation on biodiversity conservation efforts as well as to share and exchange experiences and lessons learned.

The Regional Experts' Consultation is one among the initial activities under the Small-Scale Technical Assistance (SSTA) grant provided by ADB to the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The SSTA aims to improve the country's capacity to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity by strengthening the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) that will guide the Government and other agencies, donors and non-government organizations (NGOs), in integrating biodiversity conservation activities in their work. The SSTA involves a process approach whereby concerned stakeholders in the Philippines could discuss and agree on how best to integrate biodiversity conservation and development planning efforts to improve the protection of biological resources.

Internationally recognized experts with experiences in formulating and applying biodiversity conservation approaches in the Asia-Pacific region, and selected donor agency representatives discussed several topics ranging from an overview on areas for potential investment in biodiversity conservation in Asia, to the state of biodiversity conservation in the

Philippines and in Southeast Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and the South Pacific. The participants also reviewed the implementation status of the CBD in the sub-regions of Asia-Pacific and identified key issues and concerns as well as priority areas for donor assistance, including those that can be implemented on a regional or sub-regional level.

The Philippine participants shared their experiences in developing proposals and recommendations for consideration by ADB in the development of regional biodiversity conservation projects.

The Regional Consultation, which was held at the ADB headquarters from 20-21 March 2001, hosted some 45 participants representing different sectors of the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region, donor agencies based in Manila, international NGOs, and the Bank. DENR Undersecretary Ramon M. Paje led the Philippine Government delegates that included senior staff from the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, while senior officers from the Office of the Environment and Social Development (OESD) led by its Chief, Mr. R. Zelius represented the Bank. International NGO participants included Dr. Jeffrey McNeely, IUCN Chief Scientist, and Mr. Kirk Talbott, Vice President of Conservation International (CI).

Participants' Recommendations

The Workshop participants, working in four smaller groups, recommended various actions for conserving biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Group 1 proposed several actions under six categories, namely:

- Policies, legislation, and implementation: Develop tools and measures for the effective implementation, compliance, enforcement, and transference of revenues.
- Information management and the creation of public awareness on the value of biodiversity conservation: Use diverse media formats and campaigns in rural and urban areas, exchange environmental education materials, and determine successful strategies for information dissemination.
- Enhanced ASEAN cooperation on biodiversity and natural resources management. Use the Philippine experience in priority-setting as a model and involve local and international NGOs, the academe, and the public and private sectors.
- Effective governance and reduction of corruption. Ensure the rapid and critical allocation of funds for program implementation and establish mechanisms to regulate the transboundary flow of resources. This includes the possibility of setting up a Global Park Management Agency to oversee the management of regional protected areas in different parts of the globe.
- Creative and sustained funding for integrated environmental programs such as environmental trust funds, environmental endowment funds, debt swaps for nature, and local and regional funding.
- Ways in which the ADB can be

more effective and responsive to natural resource management and biodiversity issues: Serve as a Global Environment Facility (GEF) implementing agency. Provide matching funds for the Critical Ecosystem Fund. Be more actively involved in the ASEAN management of biodiversity projects through the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) and the ASEAN Network for Biodiversity Information (ASEANET).

Group 2 focused on the initiatives and/or collaborative programs in biodiversity conservation that have been or are being undertaken or need to be undertaken, including recommendations for Bank consideration. Among such initiatives and collaborative programs are the following:

- Bantay Kalikasan project on the Protection of the La Mesa Dam Watershed
- Community-Based Resource Management Project in Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte
- Leyte Irrigation Project involving the conservation and protection of swamp forests
- Protection of the Tubbataha Marine Protected Area
- Protection of the Heritage Park in Nepal
- Protection of coral reefs in Dumaguete

Areas where collaboration can be optimized or strengthened include the following:

- Documentation of cases illustrating successful community-based approaches to biodiversity conservation
- Development of tools for participation of authentic stakeholders in conservation (such as community mapping)
- Orientation and training of stakeholders directly involved in the management of an area
- Prioritization of protection activities in the allocation of funds

- Study of indigenous systems for law enforcement and their application within communities
- Support for Information, Education and Communication (IEC) components of conservation projects
- Presentation of opportunities for private sector collaboration for biodiversity conservation.

The group also recommended that the ADB undertake the following:

- Support initiatives for the acquisition of land for development into national parks or diversified agriculture.
- Promote co-management projects of communal forests, as provided in the Local Government Code.
- Assist in the valuation of resources and determining social costs of ADB-supported projects.
- Encourage networking of successful micro-level projects.
- Develop and implement a participatory biodiversity baseline and monitoring system as a condition for investments in infrastructure projects.

The third group discussed issues that may affect financing possibilities in biodiversity conservation and recommended that the ADB should:

- Address short-term problems immediately and develop overall long-term regional and national action plans and projects.
- Develop a new paradigm that would integrate diverse disciplines into a unified approach and take into account the bio-complexity of achieving conservation in the real world.
- Determine the conservation requirements of marine ecosystems as differentiated from terrestrial environments.
- Develop partnerships with various stakeholder organizations.
- Conduct a full review of ADB biodiversity projects, specifically

project design, to identify factors crucial to success or failure.

The last group identified the following key priorities to conserve biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region:

- Biodiversity research, assessment, and monitoring to ensure that all policy and management decisions and actions are founded on basic research.
- Biodiversity indicators and performance monitoring to assess success of interventions and investments for adaptive management.
- Economic valuation of biodiversity goods and services that includes determining credit and alternative income needs for local communities with short-term needs.
- Poverty and biodiversity issues to test the hypotheses that: (i) Improved conservation of biological resources alleviates poverty; and (ii) Alleviation of poverty decreases pressure on biological resources from the local population.
- Community-based biodiversity conservation that would increase pilot activities, and provided with a policy and institutional framework necessary for such projects to flourish.
- Transform the private sector by challenging “mainstream” economic activities (e.g. logging, fisheries, infrastructure) and facilitating greater “green investments”.

The group suggested the following for consideration by ADB and other donors:

- Biodiversity conservation issues should be taken into account in infrastructure, agriculture and other mainstream activities.
- NGOs should not be treated like consulting firms.
- External review of Terms of Reference (TORs) for Technical Assistance work should be integral to ADB processes.

- Greater attention must be paid to transboundary and regional strategies and projects, including the assessment of the efficacy of existing initiatives (e.g. ARCBC, GEF International Waters portfolio, SPREP regional projects, South Pacific Commission regional work on live reef fish trade, ASEAN Haze Project).
- More support for national and area-specific endowed funds, e.g., Foundation for the Philippine Environment, Kehati, Bhutan Trust Fund.
- Engage the Bank's Private Sector Department in biodiversity issues.
- Greater accountability for project outcomes on the part of the individual project designers, and a change in the "culture of project approval" in the Bank.
- Develop measurable indicators of success in biodiversity projects.
- Pool Philippine lessons learned in biodiversity conservation together to inform the Region.
- Increase support for regional centers of excellence and service providers such as ARCBC and SPREP.
- ADB country data, now mostly buried in consultants' reports, should be systematized and made available on the web.

ADB's Response

As a follow-up to the Workshop, ADB prepared and distributed for comment a draft proposal for action by ADB together with other interested donor agencies to support biodiversity conservation in the Asia-Pacific region. The proposal included a Cooperation Fund that would support initiatives such as those proposed at the Regional Consultation. The activities would begin with the preparation of a regional biodiversity strategy that would include broad stakeholder participation, to guide the envisaged five-year program of support.

Other suggested activities may be categorized into four:

- Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) to provide the Bank's developing member countries (DMCs) with support on major issues of common concern, that cross national boundaries, and promote learning between countries of the Region.
- Effective Management of Protected Areas and Other Biologically Important Sites, including, for example, preparation of National Protected Area System Plans in DMCs that currently lack these, followed by support for the preparation and pilot imple-

mentation of frameworks, plans, best practices, and technologies for DMCs.

- Special Implementation Support and Studies.
- Technical Assistance for Project Preparation and Monitoring during implementation of biodiversity projects included in the Country Strategies and Programs of the ADB. ●

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Get to know the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) through **www.arcbc.org.ph.**

The website is a very important tool for students, researchers and scientists who want to know more about biodiversity conservation in the ASEAN. It contains searchable databases, updated information on regional biodiversity-related matters, job opportunities, selected links and a detailed background on the Centre and the National Biodiversity Reference Units operating in the ASEAN member countries. Subscriptions to ASEAN Biodiversity, ARCBC's newsmagazine, can also be sourced through this website.