

NATIONAL WORKSHOP

Biodiversity Information Sharing Protocols in the Philippines

► By **REXIE JANE PARREÑO**

The ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) sponsored a Planning Workshop for the Development of a Philippine Biodiversity Information Network early this year to draft a five-year plan for the establishment and operations of a Biodiversity Information Network as well as a framework for biodiversity information sharing among stakeholders.

Some 27 representatives from government, non-government and academic organizations participated in this workshop. They shared their experiences on how information can be used to support decision-making in biodiversity conservation.

This workshop held from February 15-16, 2001 at the Visitors' Center of the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife Nature Center in Quezon City, came about as a result of the regional workshop on the "Standardization of Biodiversity Reporting and Information Sharing" held in Bogor, Indonesia in June 2000 (see story on p.42).

Importance of an Information Network

Acting DENR Secretary Jomari Geroch, in his keynote address read by Assistant Director Theresa Mundita Lim of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB), expressed optimism that the workshop will add another important dimension to the cooperative efforts in biodiversity conservation by exploring ways to improve the sharing of biodiversity information among stakeholders. He added that if the activity paves the way for the development of a system where limited resources could be maximized

by complementing rather than duplicating efforts, then planning and management efforts would be greatly benefitted. Information sharing, he said would allow optimized utilization of data holdings and thus require the development of a framework for data sharing among various partners in biodiversity conservation efforts. He stated however, that a framework agreement should incorporate equity considerations and other safety nets complementary to those already stipulated in the Intellectual Property Rights Act and the National Bioprospecting Law.

Gregorio Texon, ASEAN Co-Director of ARCBC, emphasized the importance of having a network that would facilitate the delivery and exchange of information needed to support decision-making, especially for policy-makers. He also stressed ARCBC's support to efforts like the workshop and other activities that pertain to the country's compliance to the Convention on Biological Diversity and similar regional and international commitments.

Dr. John R. MacKinnon, European Co-Director of ARCBC, likewise discussed the purpose and potential of sharing information for biodiversity conservation and on sharing information using metadatabases and Web-based technologies. He shared the experience and current efforts of ARCBC particularly the development of the Biodiversity Information Management System (BIMS) and other networking activities at the regional level.

Data Presentation and Assessment

During the workshop proper, the participants presented their

organization's data holdings and information needs, current networking memberships and capacity (Is the organization on the Web?), current means of information sharing (Is it for free or with fees/charges?), as well as their concerns on sharing data/information through a network.

The Philippines' National Biodiversity Reference Unit-PAWB, presented the results of the workshop held in December 2000. Facilitated by the Philippine Sustainable Development Network Inc., the workshop assessed and consolidated PAWB's data holdings, identified its data needs and its role in the proposed Biodiversity Information Network.

Establishing a Philippine Biodiversity Information Network

After comparing the level of data management and information sharing, the participants agreed that data needs and efforts could be matched by partner organizations. If an organization is part of a network, it could automatically participate in the generation and validation of the data of other agencies. The generated information could then be used to comply with international commitments, as well as provide inputs to local reporting requirements.

The participants drafted a framework on how biodiversity information would be shared among stakeholders with details on procedures, protocols, ownership, access, regulatory measures, and organizational roles and responsibilities.

Hopefully, the biodiversity information network will be established and made operational with the full support of ARCBC. ●