

Editorial

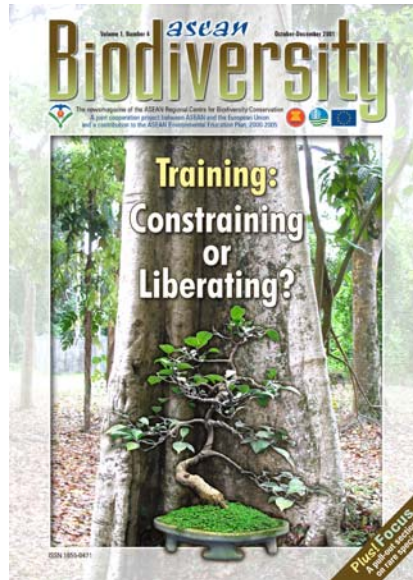
Training: Constraining or Liberating?

► By MIKE APPLETON

Conserving the rich biodiversity of the countries of ASEAN is an imposing challenge, requiring political commitment, adequate resources, widespread awareness, and innovative approaches to reconciling the needs of nature with those of people. It also requires a knowledgeable, skilled and committed workforce and training is generally seen as the major means of reaching this goal; few conservation plans and projects do not involve a training component.

In cultures where education has traditionally been a didactic process and where training programmes have often been designed and delivered by outsiders, training has often been a one-way process of 'show and tell'. However, as the value of participatory approaches becomes more widely recognised, both training providers and beneficiaries are approaching the design and delivery of programmes in a more open and responsive way. This is especially important for protected area staff, who cannot be simply trained to carry out repetitive and predictable tasks, but must be able to adapt and respond to ever-changing circumstances. What then should be the balance between 'constraining' trainees to fit pre-determined training needs, and releasing their potential to increase their skills and knowledge in other ways and to adapt what they have learned to local circumstances and new situations?

Contributions to this issue of ASEAN Biodiversity reflect on the experiences of training in ASEAN. Importantly, they consider the lessons learned from many years of training in the region and highlight many important issues:



- Identifying training needs, priorities and standards should not just be left to outside experts. Beneficiaries, employers and even communities can and should be involved in determining training needs and the content of training programmes.
- Attendance at a training course does not automatically improve performance and effectiveness. Trainee selection and individual motivation are crucial to the success of training; care should be taken to select participants who will be in a position to make the best use of the training.
- Training techniques should be appropriate both to the learning objectives and the culture and experience of the trainees. There is a role for all approaches, from formal classroom learning to on-the-job training, and trainers should identify the mechanism best suited to the training objectives.
- Training should not be seen as an afterthought or 'add-on' to management or research projects, but as a specialism in itself to which dedicated time and resources

should be allocated. The quality and impact of the training is significantly related to the skill and experience of the trainers and to the existence of a clear training strategy or plan.

- Training should be sustainable. Building staff capacity in a sustainable way is a long-term commitment and requires an investment of time, support and evaluation far beyond the time period of any individual training course or donor-aided project. The development of a set of widely recognised occupational standards for conservation could increase the quality and consistency of training programmes. It could also increase the profile of conservation management as a distinct and important occupation, providing encouragement to both employers and staff, present and future.

Training for biodiversity should not be viewed as just an activity; training courses are not just events to be attended; training is not a mechanistic process that simply 'stamps' new skills into a production line of trainees. Releasing the potential of individuals to carry out often difficult and complex work with limited resources requires sponsors, providers and employers to invest not just in fixed term courses or one-off workshops but in developing a 'learning environment' where there is a clear framework for personal development and where individuals are continually encouraged and supported to develop, use and share new skills, knowledge and understanding. ■

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