

# POLICY BRIEF

ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING ISSUE 7 • JUNE 2014

SERIES

## Strengthening cooperation towards regional ABS implementation

Southeast Asia, without question, is one of the richest environments on earth. It is home to diverse ecosystems and millions of species that provide invaluable benefits and services to the people of ASEAN. The region's rich biodiversity provides food, medicine, shelter and other products that form the building blocks for national economies, supporting millions of people in the ASEAN region.

The rich resources of the region are magnets for global corporations and many countries have long been exploited because of a lack of understanding of their rights over natural resources. ASEAN thus stands to gain from implementing access and benefit sharing (ABS) mechanisms to ensure that countries and communities benefit from the use of their genetic and other natural resources.

### The ACB ABS Regional Project

Strengthening regional cooperation and learning on the issue of ABS is thus integral to ensuring that the natural resources and the traditional knowledge (TK) systems and practices that have nurtured the environment for centuries are protected and continue to benefit future generations of ASEAN nationals.

Enhanced cooperation and sharing of experiences on ABS among stakeholders was specifically addressed through the ACB-UNEP-GEF project on *Building Capacity for Regionally Harmonized National Processes for Implementing CBD Provisions on Access to Genetic Resources and Sharing of Benefits*, in partnership with the United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies and the ASEAN Secretariat. The project facilitated regional information communication

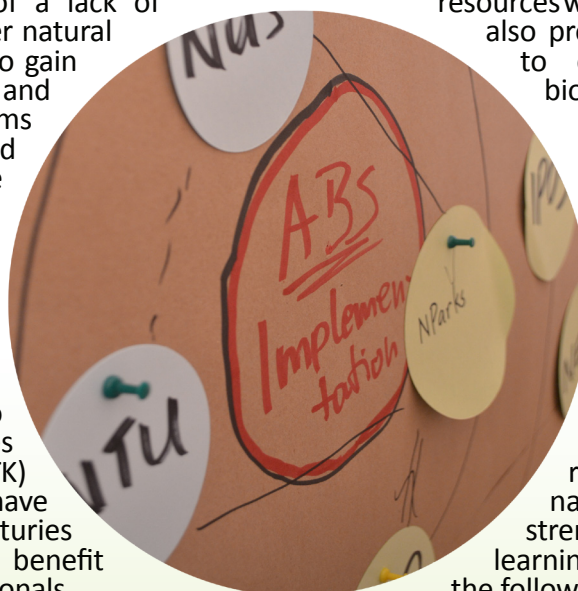
and learning; developed an ABS website to enable communication and information exchange among ABS managers and stakeholders in the ASEAN Member States (AMS); and provided a venue for discussion of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on ABS.

The project is also a step forward in ASEAN Integration. It has helped in measures towards ASEAN Integration as ABS will ensure that the region benefits in the use of genetic resources that are unique in the region and shared among AMS. Shared natural resources will remain protected and ABS will also provide substantial contributions to economic development and biodiversity conservation.

### Project accomplishments in regional cooperation and learning

The ACB ABS regional project provided an opportunity for AMS to implement ABS in accordance with the Nagoya Protocol (NP-ABS), and thus strengthen protection measures for the region's rich but fast dwindling natural resources. Activities that strengthened cooperation and learning on ABS in the region include the following:

Review of ABS-related policies - A number of AMS already have existing legislation in relation to ABS, embodied in laws relating to the conservation of wildlife, protected areas and others. Policy assessments allow governments to take stock of legal instruments, and helps identify stakeholders and gaps in ABS implementation. These assessments further provided a good reference for other AMS as they develop and enhance their ABS policies.



<sup>1</sup> CBD Article 2 defines *in situ* conditions as "conditions where genetic resources exist within ecosystems and natural habitats, and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties", and *ex situ*, in the context of conservation, refers to "the conservation of components of biological diversity outside their natural habitats".

## Integration of ABS into national and cross-sectoral policies and programmes

Mainstreaming ABS into national development plans identifies participating agencies, their specific responsibilities, clarifies relationships with partners, and ensures their participation in ABS implementation. A number of AMS have integrated ABS into their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans, and have reported ABS activities in the 5th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These initiatives are evidence of how ASEAN is committed to prioritizing ABS.

**Documentation of TK** - Various AMS have institutionalized processes to document and protect TK. This serves as a good practice for the other AMS to consider in developing and implementing ABS across the region.

**Public awareness strategies and campaigns** - Information and awareness campaigns were

conducted among various stakeholders to increase understanding of the significance of ABS and the NP-ABS. These campaigns include the conduct of dialogues, meetings, workshops and conferences on ABS; production and dissemination of information materials such as brochures, books and guides; and development of ABS websites. Various information materials were also translated into the local language. These activities and initiatives are valuable practices in information sharing, interaction and exchange of experiences, and in finding solutions for regional issues.

**Lessons learned and good practices on ABS** – Promotion of good practices such as the application of ABS mechanisms provide a substantial opportunity for learning among AMS, such as developing ABS roadmaps, identifying stakeholders and their capacity needs, planning for public awareness strategy and outreach programmes, and establishing networking and learning facilities.

### Call for action

The accomplishments from the project provide the necessary information to make policy makers more aware of ABS. However, challenges remain and gaps need to be addressed to fully realize the implementation of ABS mechanisms and the NP-ABS. Policy makers need to understand these challenges, and to provide support towards the following recommendations/actions:

#### Build capacity to generate information

There is a need to develop a substantial body of information to facilitate networking and learning, such as reporting mechanisms for National Focal Points, Competent National Authorities, and other focal persons/institutions on ABS; stories and case studies from natural resource providers and users, including applications of prior informed consent (PIC), mutually agreed terms (MAT) and other ABS mechanisms; pilot models for ABS, including specific guidance on how to share the benefits and details of regulations on compliance; and good and best practices that support increased cooperation and learning on ABS.

#### Establish national and regional ABS CHM to address information needs of AMS

Pending the establishment of the global ABS Clearing-house Mechanism (CHM), countries can work on a national and regional ABS CHM that should incorporate identified information requirements of AMS, such as an inventory of genetic resources, species and new discoveries; TK; regulations on ABS; ABS reports and case studies; among others. Documents in the CHM are preferably in the local language to generate greater understanding and learning. Policy makers are urged to provide the resources needed to build the CHM infrastructure, and support the required capacity building to enhance data skills organization and management.

#### Promote and encourage the use of network of ABS experts

The ACB ABS regional project has developed a network of ABS experts and this should be utilized to enhance understanding, learning and implementation of ABS and the NP-ABS in the region. The ABS champions are policy makers who will support the passing of ABS laws and legislations, and thus will also be part of this network. The use of this network of ABS experts should be promoted as it can help bridge understanding of ABS and facilitate information sharing at all levels.

#### Capacity building

There is still a tremendous need to facilitate regional cooperation and learning on ABS, as well as local level involvement. Policy makers will be very instrumental in promoting such cooperation, and supporting capacity building programmes geared towards this. This includes training in the development of information materials; conducting meetings and dialogues with communities and organizations to highlight rights to resources; orientations on ABS mechanisms, such as PIC and MAT; and the development of websites on ABS.



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