Enhancing Protected Area Management in ASEAN through Pilot Projects

The Southeast Asian region boasts of globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity. Although it occupies only 3% of the earth's surface, its natural habitats contain about 18% of all known species, the most diverse coral reefs in the world and about 35% of the global mangrove forests. However, biodiversity loss remains to be a major challenge. While notable successes were gained on various fronts, many critical issues still need to be addressed.

This provided the impetus for the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), in collaboration with the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) through the Institutional Strengthening of the Biodiversity Sector in ASEAN (ISB) Project to carry out pilot projects in several AMS.

Initially started during the Biodiversity and Climate Change Project (BCCP), wherein 7 pilot initiatives were implemented from 2012 to 2014 in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam, the pilot projects aim to promote protected area management for sustainable development and environment protection. Building upon the experiences from BCCP, the ISB pilot projects are expected to generate best practices and lessons learnt that will be disseminated throughout the ASEAN region to inspire other initiatives and contribute to the development of regional approaches for effective ecosystem management, biodiversity conservation, and valuation of ecosystem services. In their design and implementation, the pilot projects will also address cross-cutting issues such as Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA), knowledge generation and sharing, and capacity building.

In August 2017, the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the AMS, supported ACB and GIZ in the selection of five out of 14 proposals received from three AMS, namely, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam. To be implemented from November 2017 to October 2018, these pilot initiatives will focus on the following topics:

1. **Gender and Protected Area Management.** The nexus between gender and biodiversity is gradually gaining popularity because of the recognition of women’s and men’s roles in conservation and environmental management. As women bear the main responsibility for household operations, food production, and collection of essential resources, women’s perspectives and needs have to be included, equally with men’s, in decision-making processes. It is therefore critical to address gender considerations to advance sustainable biodiversity policies.

   Two pilot projects that aim to mainstream gender in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAP) implementation and monitoring will be supported by the ISB Project. To be implemented by the United Nations Environment and International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) in close coordination with the National Mekong Committee Secretariat of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) in Lao PDR and the Forest Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) in Myanmar, both projects aim to review overall progress with NBSAP implementation and implement selected activities to operationalize gender mainstreaming in the NBSAP. The identified interventions include: (i) review of overall implementation of the NBSAP with specific reference to the role of gender in accelerating (or slowing down) implementation of specific NBSAP targets/actions; (ii) capacity building on gender and NBSAP implementation and monitoring; (iii) development of specific actions to support gender mainstreaming into NBSAP implementation and monitoring; and, (iv) documentation of good practices and success stories on gender mainstreaming for future knowledge product development to be used for regional knowledge exchange and capacity development on gender and biodiversity.
2. **Innovative Approaches for Effective Management of ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs).** The ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs) are “protected areas of high conservation importance, preserving in total a complete spectrum of representative ecosystems of the ASEAN region.” Since the first establishment of 11 AHPs in 1984, the programme has since grown to a total of 40 covering around 8 million hectares throughout the ten AMS. During the last few decades it has been evident that the management of many AHPs is still sub-optimal. The ISB will support 2 pilot projects that will employ innovative strategies and tools to improve the management effectiveness of AHPs.

The Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) in Myanmar together with the Istituto Oikos Onlus, a non-profit organization, and the University of Insubria will jointly implement a pilot project to strengthen the conservation and participatory management of Lampi Marine National Park (LMNP) in Myanmar. The project will focus on conserving biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, management of marine protected areas, environmental education and capacity building for environmental monitoring. The goal is to protect and showcase LMNP as a conservation model by engaging local authorities and communities, especially the Sea-gypsies Moken, in conservation, resource planning and management. This will be achieved through the preparation of a new management plan that will incorporate capacity building programmes for park staff, establishment of a local wildlife conservation group, development of a monitoring system and improved awareness programmes on biodiversity conservation for local schools and villages.

In Viet Nam, the Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA) of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) aims to develop a network of potential AHPs and roadmap to strengthen management and biodiversity conservation in AHPs. This is in support of one of the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2020 to increase the number of internationally recognized protected areas to 10 Ramsar wetlands, 10 biosphere reserves, and 10 AHPs. Currently, there are 6 AHPs in Vietnam and to achieve the target of 10 AHPs by 2020, a network of potential AHPs in Vietnam and actions for strengthening management and biodiversity conservation must be developed as soon as possible. The proposed project will assess potential AHPs in accordance to the criteria and guidelines for nomination of AHP under the ASEAN Declaration on Heritage Parks and then propose and ratify the network of potential AHPs in Viet Nam and roadmap for strengthening the effectiveness of management and biodiversity conservation in AHPs.

3. **Economic Valuation of Ecosystem Services.** The diversity and richness of biodiversity and ecosystems provide significant economic values to the region. Over 600 million people depend on these natural resources for food, health and livelihood. However, the region faces continuous threats of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss that impacts these economic gains. There have been many efforts that aim to bring attention to the economic benefits of biodiversity, highlight the growing cost of ecosystem degradation, and draw together expertise from science, economics and policy to support the mainstreaming of these considerations in policymaking.

The Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA) of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONREC) in Viet Nam will be supported to look into the economic valuation of wetland ecosystems in selected AHPs. In the scope of this project, BCA proposes to: (i) review and assess available tools and methods for rapid economic valuation of wetland ecosystem services; (ii) identify the best tool; (iii) pilot test the tool in selected AHPs in Viet Nam; and, (iv) document results to identify best practise and lessons learnt in rapid economic valuation of wetland ecosystem services for AHPs in Vietnam for replication in other AHPs and possible upscaling in AHPs in the region.