



Photo by Tinh Mau Tu

Introduction

The second edition of the ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook provides an assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the ASEAN region. Through a “Threats, Response, and Way Forward” framework, it discusses the state of major habitats found in the terrestrial and aquatic realms of the ASEAN Member States, how these are affected by drivers of biodiversity loss, and how the AMS have stepped up to address such issues and articulated ways forward to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Looking back

In 2010, the first edition of the ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook provided the baseline for the forthcoming series of ABO reports. ABO 1 reported that the region was losing biodiversity at an alarming rate at the same time that the Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 (GBO 3) reported that the world failed to meet targets to significantly reduce biodiversity loss. The drivers of biodiversity loss in the ASEAN region identified in the course of preparing the ABO 1 include habitat change, overexploitation, pollution, climate change, invasive alien species, and poverty. In recognition of these drivers, ABO 1 highlighted areas in need of immediate actions and discussed numerous possibilities. It emphasized that current efforts were inadequate to curb the negative impacts of such drivers. ABO 2, now guided with the indicators associated with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, will look into how the AMS have responded to these drivers of biodiversity loss.

ASEAN and global environment commitments

AMS are signatories to various multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as

the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The AMS are also in various stages of processing national commitments to other MEAs including the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Ramsar Convention, Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization, and International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resource for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), among others.

Actions in compliance with global environmental commitments are in conjunction with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Biodiversity conservation is particularly relevant to Goals 14 and 15, which encompasses the conservation and management of all ecosystems and the biodiversity within. Goal 14 aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources. Coastal and marine resources provide tremendous resources, including food, water, medicine, and vital ecosystem functions such as climate regulation. The world’s oceans facilitate trade and transportation, and support industries that sustain economies and the survival and well-being of millions of people. Goal 15, on the other hand, aims to sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss. Forests and inland waters provide food security and shelter, habitats for millions of species, and the foundation for agriculture, aquaculture, and other important industries. Strengthening biodiversity conservation initiatives thus contributes to these two goals that are vital to the attainment of a sustainable future.

Regional implementation of MEAs is done through the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNCB), ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC), ASEAN Working Group on Chemicals and Waste Management (AWGCW), and ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment (AWGCME). Activities that promote capacity building and sharing of experiences have been instrumental in building confidence among AMS and synergizing efforts in the collective implementation of MEAs. Addressing global environmental issues is also indicated in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2009–2015, which emphasized the need to strengthen national and regional capacities to address commitments to MEAs, promote synergies in the implementation of related MEAs, promote a common ASEAN understanding and unified position on relevant MEAs, and adopt a holistic approach in fostering regional cooperation on relevant environmental issues with the participation of all stakeholders (ASEAN Cooperation on Global Environmental Issues, n.d).

Progress in the ASEAN economic community

The AMS signed the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2008–2015 in November 2007. This master plan was envisioned to provide a common framework and standards of practice in several aspects of economy and policy where a single market and production base will enable the free flow of goods, services, investments, skilled labor, and capital (ASEAN, 2015a). The elimination of market restrictions, simplification of procedures, and availability of skills where they were needed resulted in a more innovative and business-friendly environment.

ASEAN 2025: A stronger, more resilient ASEAN

The AEC Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Community Vision 2025, ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 that succeeded the AEC Blueprint 2008–2015 were adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015. All these now constitute the ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together.

This new roadmap envisions an empowered, peaceful, stable, and resilient ASEAN community that is able to respond to the needs of its people and enable them to enjoy fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life, and other benefits that accompany a common regional identity, purpose, and principles.

The market opportunities of this integration are in the vicinity of USD 3 trillion annually and will likely influence the lives of over 632 million people in an economy that was, in 2014, identified as collectively the seventh largest economy in the world and the third in Asia (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015a).

The regional challenge

With its vast resources, the ASEAN economy is likely to continue growing in the coming years. Hence, there is no better time than now to commit to ASEAN 2025 and support it with a resilient natural environment that is able to secure and continuously provide necessary resources and ecosystem services. Maintaining the balance of economy and ecology is therefore the challenge before an ASEAN-wide stakeholdership that should adopt the concepts of and implement best practices on sustainability and biodiversity conservation.

The ABO 2 reports on how the region has fared based on the indicators of the agreed Aichi Biodiversity Targets. It discusses the gains in conservation, particularly on the quick rate by which protected areas are being established. It admits the challenges, realities, and shortcomings in achieving the more difficult tasks of dealing with pollution; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and issues related to addressing the needs of a growing regional population.

This publication aims to paint a picture of what the ASEAN Member States have achieved in the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, the challenges ahead towards achieving biodiversity goals by 2020, the state of ecosystems and biodiversity in the region, and the impacts of many issues that cut across the complexity of biodiversity conservation and management. Frameworks, mechanisms, and programs for moving forward, through ASEAN 2025 and in partnership with international and regional partners, such as the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, provide significant support in national and regional efforts to protect the region's globally significant wealth of biodiversity.

The ABO 2 delivers messages through powerful infographics that are supported with data and narratives. It is hoped that the ABO 2 catches the attention of those at the helm of governance, from the local all the way to the global community, to engage their interest and summon their renewed commitments to restore the ASEAN region as the Earth's haven of biodiversity.