

While occupying only three per cent of the earth's surface, the ASEAN region boasts of globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity that include an astonishing 18 per cent of all species assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It has the most diverse coral reefs in the world and is home to the mega-diverse countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The region also spans several unique bio-geographical units such as Indo-Burma, Malesia, Sundaland, Wallacea and the Central Pacific.

To protect this richness, the 10 ASEAN Member States, all Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), committed themselves in 2002 to the 2010 Biodiversity Target: "the achievement by 2010 of a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth." This report, the ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook, confirms that the region, like the rest of the world, is increasingly losing biodiversity at an alarming rate within various ecosystems – forest, agro-ecosystems, peatlands, freshwater, mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass. The region's biodiversity report card confirms the findings of the Third Global Biodiversity Outlook that the world failed to meet the target of significantly reducing biodiversity loss by 2010:

- The growing population's dependence on timber, fuel wood, and other forest products, as well the conversion of forests into agricultural and industrial lands, are taking their toll on the region's forests. Already, Southeast Asian countries had lost a total of 555,587 square kilometers of forests between 1980 and 2007.

- While the ASEAN region is gifted with immense mangrove resources, it nonetheless suffers the highest rates of mangrove losses in the world. An area of 628 square kilometers of mangrove got stripped away each year throughout the last couple of decades. In 1980, the estimated regional total mangrove area was 63,850 square kilometers. As of 2005, this whittled down to 46,971 square kilometers for an aggregate decline of about 26 per cent within a 25-year period.

- There has been a general decline in coral reefs in the ASEAN region between 1994 and 2008. Although the region hosts the largest coral reef areas in the world, it also has the highest rate of loss, which today stands at 40 per cent.

- Bottom-trawling, extensive coastline destruction and modification, decline in coastal water quality, and human-induced development have endangered seagrass beds in the ASEAN region. Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have each experienced from 30 up to 50 per cent losses of seagrass habitats, compounded by the fact that the loss figures for other Southeast Asian countries remain largely unknown.

The Outlook underscores that the drivers of biodiversity loss continue to intensify. The key drivers of biodiversity loss in the ASEAN region include ecosystems and habitat change, climate change, invasive alien species, over-exploitation (as a result of deforestation and land-use and water-use change, as well as wildlife hunting and trade for food), pollution and poverty. In terms of addressing the drivers and threats to biodiversity loss, the ASEAN region remains slow in delivering progress, particularly in preventing invasive alien species, addressing the impact of biodiversity to species and ecosystems, and abating pollution and the exploitation of forests and wetlands. But the ASEAN region registered significant pockets of success stories.

Progress has been made in expanding the coverage of terrestrial and marine protected areas. The ASEAN Member States prioritized protecting major ecosystems and habitats through regional initiatives focusing on huge, biologically rich and critical ecosystems. Biodiversity corridors covering transboundary protected areas, for example, have been launched and initiated. Networks of protected areas such as the ASEAN Heritage Parks were given special attention. The countries also shored up efforts to further develop capacities and expand the network of wildlife law enforcers. The Outlook for the ASEAN region is summarized as follows:

- **Terrestrial ecosystems** – The region's forest ecosystems and agro-ecosystems shall continue to play the crucial role of providing ecological stability to the ASEAN countries and globally. Both, however, face numerous pressures. Addressing the pressures on these two ecosystems is critical for ASEAN. It will entail taking multiple measures that should be linked to enhancing the productivity from existing crop and pasture lands, reducing post-harvest losses, sustainable forest management and changing excessive and wasteful consumption.

- **Inland water ecosystems** – Inland water ecosystems in the ASEAN region are considered to be high value areas. These cover wetlands, peatlands and freshwater bodies. Unfortunately, these ecosystem functions are often undervalued, consequently placing the rich biodiversity resources in these areas at imminent risk. As many of these areas are the initial frontiers for conversion for development expansion, there will be an increasing need for an integrated management of the ecosystems. By approaching the development of these areas in such a manner, the potential negative impacts from competing pressures can be minimized or averted.

- **Marine and coastal ecosystems** – Marine and coastal ecosystems are considered as one of the most valuable natural assets of the ASEAN region. They, however, are faced with multiple pressures that may affect their ability to supply food, functional buffer zones for natural weather disturbances, and livelihood for communities. There is an urgent need to establish marine protected areas (MPAs) and MPA networks, as well as promulgate policies that allow marshes, mangroves and other coastal ecosystems to persist and even migrate inland to make these ecosystems more resilient to the impact of sea level rise, and thus help protect the vital services they provide.

The ASEAN region, as with the entire global community, has to move forward in collectively achieving the Biodiversity Target beyond 2010. Clearly, ASEAN Member States have to exert greater effort to inch their way toward achieving the biodiversity targets set for the region. Ways forward have to be explored in order to successfully do this. There is a need to:

- Target efforts to critical areas and ecosystems
- Mainstream biodiversity in the national development process
- Connect biodiversity management with climate change efforts
- Take pride on the current efforts and building on them for designing future efforts
- Support efforts that will lead to the adoption of the access and benefit-sharing regime in the region

ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook

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The ASEAN Member States have already taken numerous steps in addressing biodiversity loss. The challenge is to push the envelope further, mindful that striking a balance between having a healthy life, secured livelihood and prosperity coupled with protected biodiversity resources and ecosystems is achievable if humans put their hearts into it.

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