

# Indigenous communities eyed to help conserve protected areas

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Candon City, Ilocos Sur – A lawmaker wants indigenous communities be tapped to help in conservation efforts for the country’s protected areas.

Senator Loren Legarda, head of the Senate committee on climate change, said the indigenous communities have an important role in conserving the country’s protected areas and should be utilized by the government.

“Indigenous people’s communities have always played an important role in the conservation and preservation of the country’s protected areas; they employ age-old traditions in caring for our environment and natural resources; we should tap their knowledge to effectively maintain the integrity of our biodiversity and ecosystems,” said Legarda.

As this developed, the senator filed a proposed Senate Bill 1185, the Indigenous People’s and Local Communities Conserved Areas Act.

Legarda said there are indigenous communities conserved areas (ICCA), which are areas within ancestral domains including lakes, coastal seas, forests, and watershed imbued with deep spiritual and cultural values for indigenous peoples (IPs).

“This proposed measure acknowledges the significant contribution of conservation areas managed by IPs in maintaining the country’s biodiversity as well as in climate change mitigation. It is about time that the national government give due importance and role to the indigenous communities as partners in the conservation of protected areas found within their ancestral domains,” Legarda explained.

Under the bill, concerned government agencies should recognize and promote IP rights to their ancestral domains and the ICCAs including their right to maintain, protect and regulate access and prohibit unauthorized intrusion in such areas.

ICCAs should also be considered in the formulation of development plans and the IPs will have priority in the management of their conservation areas and the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of ecological balance and biodiversity therein, with the full and effective assistance of government agencies.

Moreover, IPs will have a fair and equitable share in the commercial profits of users of well-defined and confirmed ecosystem services provided by ICCAs, in recognition and respect of their right to benefit and share in the profits from the allocation and utilization of natural resources found in their ancestral domains.

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