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Published October 18, 2018, 7:57 AM

As part of its continuing efforts to expand the country's protected area system, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB) is currently holding a National Stakeholders' Consultation on its proposed policies that aim to institutionalize "Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs)" in the Philippines.

The consultation is taking place at B Hotel, Quezon City from October 17-19, 2018, and has drawn more than a hundred participants from indigenous peoples (IPs) groups, concerned national and regional government agencies, and civil society organizations.

## ICCA Policies and Platforms

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Four proposed policies are being deliberated during the three-day event. First is a policy guideline addressing gaps and inconsistencies towards ICCA recognition; second is a set of guidelines interfacing the ICCAs into the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) and the Community Development Plan (CDP); third is a guideline on ICCAs overlapping with protected areas; and last is the National ICCA Registry and Policy envisioned to be a centralized information management system on ICCAs.

The policies and platform are the culmination of months of sub-consultations, interviews, and fieldworks by the consultants of the Project.

## ICCA Relevance

Falling under the category of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Methods (OECMs), ICCAs offer government agencies an alternative outlook for biodiversity conservation.

According to Mr. Samson Pedragosa, Project Manager of the Philippine ICCA Project, it is estimated that 75% of areas with remaining forest cover are within ancestral domains, which indicates that the governance by IP communities has been instrumental in conserving what little natural forest cover is left in the Philippines.

Ms. Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez, Director of DENR-BMB, emphasized the need to promulgate government policies on ICCAs by saying, "The recognition of ICCAs is in line with the country's targets to the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Aichi targets and the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP). Passage of the ICCA policies will ensure that we will hit these targets."

Mr. Tiron Mitra, Country Director of United Nations Development Programme Philippines, also noted ICCA's role in reducing inequality alongside boosting safeguards to the environment. "With the huge overlaps between the country's protected areas, key biodiversity areas, and ancestral domains, there is great value in supporting IPs' conservation efforts, thereby producing multiple benefits such as protecting their rights to ancestral lands, poverty reduction, and enhancing ecosystem resilience," Mr. Mitra said.

### **The Philippine ICCA Project**

Implemented by the DENR-BMB and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through UNDP, the Philippine ICCA Project aims to strengthen the conservation, protection, and management of biodiversity sites in the Philippines by institutionalizing ICCAs as a sustainable addition to the national protected areas (PA) estate.

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