

- [Features](#)
- [Biodiversity](#)

DENR consults IPs on proposed biodiversity policies

By

[Jonathan L. Mayuga](#)

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB) launched on Thursday the National Stakeholders' Consultation on proposed biodiversity policies to institutionalize Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCA) that kicked off in Quezon City.

The three-day consultation has gathered more than 100 indigenous people leaders and nongovernment organizations to discuss proposed policies. The event is part of the a foreign-assisted project—Strengthening National Programme to Improve Governance and Management of ICCA—that is being implemented by the DENR-BMB and funded by the Global Environment Facility through United Nations Development Programme (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 estate.

The four-year program that started in 2016 is being implemented in 10 sites: namely Mount Taungay in Tinglayan, Kalinga; Mount Polis in Ifugao, Mountain Province; Imugan, Nueva Vizcaya; Kanawan in Morong, Bataan; Engongot, Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title; Balabac in Palawan; Mount Kimangkil in Impasug-ong, Bukidnon; Mount Apo in Magpet, North Cotabato; Dinarawan in San Pablo, Jabonga, Agusan del Norte; and Mount Diwata in Compostela Valley.

Four proposed policies are being deliberated during the three-day event.

These include a policy guideline addressing gaps and inconsistencies toward ICCA recognition; a set of guidelines interfacing the ICCAs into the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Community Development Plan; a guideline on ICCAs overlapping with protected areas; and 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 subconsultations, interviews and fieldworks by the consultants of the project.

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

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

DENR-BMB Director Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez emphasized the need to promulgate government policies on ICCAs. “The recognition of ICCAs is in line with the country’s targets to the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Aichi targets and the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Passage of the ICCA policies will ensure that we will hit these targets,” she said.

Titon Mitra, country director of UNDP 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,” Mitra said.

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