

LGUs urged to adopt local biodiversity action plans

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An official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Thursday urged local government units (LGUs) to adopt and implement the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP) 2016-2028 by integrating it in their respective development agenda.

Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) underscored the need for LGUs to adopt their localize action plans to protect and conserve the country's biological diversity, which she said is key to sustainable growth and development.

"Protecting our natural wealth ensures that everybody will continue to enjoy the ecosystems services provided by a healthy environment," Lim said.

She said by integrating the PBSAP into the local development agenda, LGUs will be a big boost to local economic development. She cited the importance of enhanced protection of areas reserved for conservation, such as protected areas (PAs), which are considered key biodiversity areas (KBAs). PAs are host to critical watersheds and home to unique species of plants and animal wildlife.

Watersheds provide clean and safe freshwater supply for irrigation, for domestic, commercial and industrial use, she said. Protecting the country's biodiversity, Lim said, entails huge cost where LGUs' can play a big role.

Last Monday the DENR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the Localization of PBSAP and Biodiversity Financing Initiative (Biofin) Project at the House of

Representatives. The project will be pilot-tested in Occidental and Oriental Mindoro with the backing of its local officials.

During the project's launch, Rep. Josephine Ramirez Sato of Occidental Mindoro expressed her support to the UNDP-DENR initiative and vowed to champion biodiversity conservation.

A member of the House of Representatives committee on ecology, Sato is the legislative champion of Biofin.

The PBSAP is the country's blueprint to protect and conserve its rich biodiversity.

The plan lists 113 actions that cover nine thematic areas, including forest, coastal and maritime areas, inland waters, cave and cave systems, protected areas, agro-biodiversity, urban biodiversity, invasive alien species and access and benefit-sharing. It lists more than 50 national and attached agencies as responsibility centers supported by other sectors in society, such as academe, local governments and civil society.

While the Philippines is committed to protecting and conserving its rich biodiversity as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), much needs to be desired in terms of financing as reflected in its annual budget allocation.

Implementing the PBSAP will cost the government P24 billion a year from 2017 to 2028. Current spending of the Philippines for biodiversity conservation stands at P5 billion a year, leaving a financing gap of P19 billion.

Biofin has estimated that ecosystem services in the Philippines amount to P2.3 trillion a year. Ecosystem services include timber and fuel-wood production, water provision, ecotourism, carbon offset, flood prevention, soil erosion, fishery production, crop production and benefits derived from coral reefs and mangrove.

Biofin is testing the finance mechanism, such as budget realignment, private-sector engagement and accessing earmarked funds.

“The repercussions of biodiversity loss are much more expensive than the cost of sustaining, protecting and managing biodiversity. Now more than ever, we need to view biodiversity as an investment that can deliver significant economic and social returns. It is an investment that needs to be made by both government and the private sector. We commend the local officials of the province of Mindoro for taking on the challenge and are now leading the efforts to narrow the financing gap in biodiversity protection and conservation, one province at a time,” UNDP Country Director Titon Mitra said in a statement.

Sato, a former governor of Occidental Mindoro, along with Mitra, Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez, Oriental Mindoro First District Rep. Paulino Salvador C. Leachon, Oriental Mindoro Second District Rep. Reynaldo V. Umali, Occidental Mindoro Gov. Mario Gene J. Mendiola and Oriental Mindoro Gov. Alfonso V. Umali Jr., will sign the declaration of cooperation in support of the localization of the PBSAP 2015-2028.

“Being an island endowed with rich natural resources and a host of unique species of plants and animal wildlife, Mindoro and the people living on the island have everything to gain out of this initiative,” Sato said.

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