

Sabah Call for Action
Integrated Biodiversity Conservation: Linking Forests and Wetlands

Asian Wetland Symposium (AWS Sabah 2011)
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The world entered into a new era of biodiversity conservation with the adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 and the “Aichi Biodiversity Targets” at the 10th Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Nagoya, Aichi, Japan in October 2010. These targets are expected to be achieved during the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011-2020). The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) recognizes the significant role that sustainable forest management has in development, poverty reduction and the achievement of international aspirations, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The basic tenet of the Ramsar Convention, the wise use of wetlands and their resources, identifies their importance in supporting human well-being.

Enhancing synergy in the implementation of the CBD, Ramsar Convention and other initiatives such as the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests is critical to achieving the “Aichi Biodiversity Targets” and the MDGs, and a key aim of the AWS Sabah 2011. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of both the Ramsar Convention and UNESCO MAB Programme, and the United Nations International Year of Forests.

Water, through the natural infrastructure provided by wetlands, is one of the main unifying factors for these international initiatives. In the face of the increasing pressures on water quality and quantity caused by the continued degradation and loss of wetlands, and existing and emerging challenges such as climate change, there is a need for better integration of such initiatives at the local, national and regional levels, and to identify innovative approaches for sustainable development, financing, human well-being and biodiversity conservation.

The 322 participants of the AWS Sabah 2011 identified a number of strategies and mechanisms that should be taken to address these challenges, and propose that policy- and decision-makers and wetland user groups give them priority attention.

1. Promote integrated management systems that incorporate socio-economic priorities, the rights and responsibilities of local communities, and innovative technologies and approaches in the restoration and conservation of forests and wetlands. Encourage the application of land and seascape planning tools such as the UNESCO MAB Programme to integrate human dimensions into the conservation of biodiversity in forests and wetlands.
2. Undertake or update national wetland inventories and conduct research on issues related to forests, and use them to guide landscape planning and decision-making processes related to the utilization of wetland and forest resources.
3. Develop more synergy and coordination in the management of forests and wetlands through greater cooperation at the national level, e.g. between the National Focal Points for the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and UNFF.
4. Mainstream forests and wetlands conservation into national and local planning processes, such as poverty reduction strategies, economic development plans, climate change strategies, and disaster management plans. Give priority to ensuring that revisions of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) incorporate conservation and wise use of wetlands.

5. Promote investments in forest and wetland conservation through funding mechanisms and initiatives, such as the regional development banks and the proposed Green Climate Change Fund (GCF) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and encourage investments in applied research programmes to provide sound scientific information and tools.
6. Enhance partnerships with and investments by the private sector in forest and wetland conservation efforts, including the development of sustainable business strategies.
7. Incorporate the values of forest and wetland ecosystem services in financial, economic and investment planning and policies, and the economic costs associated with forest and wetland degradation and loss. Use economic and financial tools, e.g. payments for ecosystem services (PES), biodiversity offsets and environmental-fiscal reforms to provide incentives for the conservation of forests and wetlands.
8. Recognise the natural and cultural capital provided by forests and wetlands to support livelihoods in order to meet the daily needs of local people and rural communities.
9. Strengthen existing Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) programmes to empower specific target groups such as communities, youths, educators, business people, decision-makers and the media to take effective actions for forest and wetland conservation. Recognise the importance and effectiveness of involving the young generation in wetland CEPA activities.
10. Ensure that planning and research processes integrate cultural and heritage values, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), traditional landscape approaches such as the *Satoyama* Initiative, and local initiatives such as the *Tagal* system in Sabah in the conservation and wise use of forests and wetlands.

The AWS Sabah 2011 was hosted by the State Government of Sabah, in cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Malaysia, the JICA-Bornean Biodiversity and Ecosystems Conservation (BBEC) Phase II Programme, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and the Ramsar Center Japan.

The participants of this meeting seek the assistance of the Government of Malaysia and the Ramsar Secretariat to convey the "Sabah Call for Action" to the Asia Regional Ramsar Meeting to be held in Jakarta in November 2011, the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands to be held in Romania in June 2012, and the 11th Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in India in October 2012.