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## **DENR to prioritize IP communities through SEAMS**

The Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) has developed the Socio-Economic Assessment and Monitoring System (SEAMS), a tool that would help assess and monitor the state of protected areas (PAs) and improve the living of indigenous peoples (IPs).

The SEAMS, through data gathered from a survey on demographic, socio-cultural, economic, physical and institutional characterization of PAs, would then be able to provide a guide for future activities on PA management and planning according to the BMB.

Its specific objectives include characterizing the socio-economic condition of IPs in the PAs and nearby areas; identifying and locating sources and values of various ecosystems in PAs; determining the degrees of degradation or improvement in ecosystem services; and identifying ecosystem pressures, threats, and their causes.

SEAMS covers all communities inside and out of the PAs, as well as adjacent communities. A 17-page conventional survey containing the detailed demographic and economic profile of occupants per household would then be encoded, processed, and analysed. The results gathered from the SEAMS would be in conjunction with the results of the Biodiversity Assessment and Management System (BAMS), which would be given to the management board of the DENR to review. Afterwards, a final narrative report is approved by the DENR.

The SEAMS would be conducted every five years. As PAs are never subject to commercial lease, BMB Ecosystem Management Specialist II Babylyn M. Cacao said that the IPs have been occupying the areas even before the implementation of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992, hence reserving the rights of land to them.

“In actuality, the system’s main objective is to maintain and conserve PAs while also giving the IPs livelihood opportunities in ecotourism, for example,” she said.

Cacao said that the BMB will start conducting workshop and orientation of the SEAMS by next week, from May 8, 2017 to May 12, 2017, in various areas as to help communities have a better grasp of the system.

Pursuant to the NIPAS Act, SEAMS is also an effort by the DENR to provide a participative push on area planning.

### **IPs and their rights to land**

According to the BMB, there are approximately 240 PAs in all regions recognized under the NIPAS Act.

Through the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, the government also recognizes the creation of proper boundaries between overlapping PAs and ancestral lands, which are owned by the IPs.

IP Rights advocate Regimer Jannine Duka shared that a constant initiative by the government is needed to preserve that right.

"I believe that it is the responsibility of the government to take care of natural resources and its inhabitants, more specifically the Filipino people," she said.

KATRIBU (Kabataan Para sa Tribung Pilipino)-UP Diliman member Ervic Angeles, a 3rd year student of BS Geography, said that anti-people laws should be invalidated in order to fully support the IPs living in their ancestral lands.

"Peace talks between the national government and the National People's Army (NPA) should happen, as IPs are caught in the middle, and this has been going on for years," he ended. #