

# Sulu-Sulawesi: Sub-Regional Sea Governance and Good Practices

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The Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion (SSME) is a functional seascape in the Coral Triangle Initiative geography. The tri-national cooperation dates back to 2001, when Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines formulated a common vision of biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and participatory management of this sub-regional sea. In 2003, the countries developed the Ecoregion Conservation Plan (ECP), which was the stakeholders' articulation of the vision. Then the governments signed and ratified a tri-national MOU on ECP implementation that provided the basis for the creation of sub-regional sea governance in 2006.

Since its creation, the Tri-National Committee for SSME has had annual meetings to report progress in implementing the country-level action plans in the ECP, discuss urgent transboundary issues affecting biodiversity conservation, deliberate on emerging opportunities that can help strengthen the SSME program, and agree on a set of coordinated actions. Three sub-committees have been formed. Each one prepared a work plan to pursue joint activities, as provided for in ecoregion-level action plan in the ECP, in the identified priority areas of



cooperation, i.e. sustainable fisheries, marine protected areas and networks, and protection of threatened, charismatic and migratory species.

The Sub-Committee for Sustainable Fisheries provides a first demonstration of the functionality of the SSME governance in developing a three-country project to implement its work plan especially on the aspects of collaborative fisheries management, IUU, research, stakeholder capacity-building, institutional strengthening and sourcing funds. It recently secured GEF support for a 4-year sustainable fisheries management project through collaboration with UNDP and CI, the latter under the purview of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape Project. This is the first joint project of the SSME countries and experience in proposal preparation generates a working model, which can be adopted by the sub-committee for protected areas and sub-committee for species for similar project development.

SSME's experience and lessons learned from vision formulation, conservation plan development and on to governance building are well-documented. Notable good practices in the SSME are the multi-stakeholder participation in processes, strong government-NGO partnership, consensus-building approaches, providing the legal basis for cooperation and governance, adherence to ASEAN practices, and ensuring SSME's relevance in the countries and in larger regional initiatives and frameworks. At the 4th Senior Officials' Meeting of the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI-6 countries) in October 2009, the Tri-National Committee of SSME presented a resolution for the establishment of a functional linkage between SSME and CTI. This resulted in the recognition of the SSME as the first priority seascape in the CTI Regional Plan of Action. Also, through the coordinated efforts of the three governments and partner NGOs, SSME gained recognition of other international bodies, programs and donors, i.e. Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippine East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), Indian Ocean-Southeast Asia (IOSEA) cooperation, PEMSEA, ASEAN, GTZ, USAID and ADB.