

'Biodiversity conservation yet to focus on equity'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mangalore: Thousands of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) have been constituted across the country, but the issue of equity and justice are yet to be the focus of biodiversity governance, said K S Sugara, member secretary, Karnataka Biodiversity Board.

He was delivering the keynote address at a training of trainers on developing linkages on conservation with livelihood actions at BMC level for the representatives of BMC and NGO members from Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand.

He said that mainstreaming conservation of biodiversity in the developmental programmes should be done at the panchayat level. "Rural poverty in general is ecological since poor depend on nature for survival. About 70% earning of poor comes from ecological sources and this is

80% in forested areas. Hence, ecological impoverishment should be one of the poverty indicators, unless, this becomes an agenda in the election system, biodiversity conservation and its valuation will not get justice," he said.

"There is need for vigorous capacity building programmes at the gram panchayat level on BMC as per the guidelines published by the National Biodiversity Authority Model BMCs have to be constituted and should be made functional. A detailed survey of industries using bio-resources must be undertaken and bio-resources should be identified," he said.

Further, he said that biotechnology has directly affected several native varieties of biodiversity resources of the nation. A similar case in Karnataka is regarding Bt cotton. There is a drastic decrease in native varieties of cotton in the state due to biotechnology cotton, Sugara said.

Develop linkage between panchayats and biological conservation: Official

APCCF bats for policy change to make bio-conservation an agenda in panchayat elections

MANGALORE: As the role of panchayats is very significant in conservation of biodiversity, there is a need to bring in policy changes to develop linkage between the process of biological conservation and the role played by panchayats in it, said Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (APCCF) and former member secretary of Karnataka Biodiversity Board K S Sugara.

He was delivering the keynote address at a training programme on developing linkages on conservation with livelihood actions, for Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) members, forest officers and representatives from NGOs, from Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand here on Thursday. The programme was jointly organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Tradition (FRLHT), UNDP and GEF.

Raising questions on why conserving biodiversity has not yet become an agenda in pan-



APCCF and former member secretary of Karnataka Biodiversity Board K S Sugara speaks at a training programme on biodiversity conservation in Mangalore on Thursday. (NCTV)

chayat level, despite the introduction of Biological Diversity Act a decade ago, the senior forest officer said that it was due to the fact that biodiversity has not yet found its place on the electoral agenda of panchayats. At the Biodiversity Management Committees formed in village levels are a part of panchayats, the role of panchayats in conservation process becomes more important. The linkage is not happening between conservation pro-

grammes and panchayats because the central and state panchayat raj secretaries are not the members of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) and State Biodiversity Boards (SBB), Sugara pointed.

Poverty indicator
Emphasising the need for BMCs to follow the guidelines developed by the NBA, the officer said it was also important to consider ecological impoverishment as one of the poverty

indicators, as 70 per cent of the earning of rural poor is based on ecological sources, mainly the forest areas. He also highlighted the lack of valuation of biodiversity as one of the main reasons for loss of biodiversity.

Mangalore Circle Chief Conservator of Forests, Sanjay S Bijur stressed on the necessity to develop link between various government Acts like Forest Rights Act, Indian Forest Act, Village Forest Act, Biodiversity Act and ecological develop-

ment programmes, before developing linkage for biodiversity in village levels. All the Acts and committees should be placed in a hierarchy basis so that all of them come under one umbrella, thus helping to sort out the differences.

To take a cue

As many as 31 participants from the three states have arrived at Mangalore to take cues from coastal districts on preparing action plans for de-

veloping capacity building programmes to conserve biodiversity.

The programme has been organised as a part of the MoEF-GEF-UNDP project 'mainstreaming conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants in three Indian states'. Participants will attend the session on the first day and will visit various PBRs like Honnawar and Belthangady during the next two days.

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267 PBRs completed in Karnataka

Addressing an interactive session, Subhash Chandran from the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, said work on 267 People's Biodiversity Registers (PBR) has been completed in Karnataka, while the total number of villages is 5268. Kerala has completed the highest number of PBRs of 670 as against 978 villages. Gram panchayats should join hands with students and other community members to take up the task of preparing registers.

A register contains comprehensive information on availability and knowledge of local biological sources, their medicinal and other values, which can be patented in later stages, he said.

Local flora gets paper protection

95 p.c. of gram panchayats have no active biodiversity management panels



CARE TO PROTECT: In rural areas, 70 per cent of the earning of the poor comes from ecological sources, and in forest areas, the figure is 80 per cent. — FILE PHOTO: PARINEETA DESHPANDE-DANDEKAR

Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE: Though there are nearly 4,300 Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) functioning at the gram panchayat (GP) level in the State, their functionality is reflected in the fact that just 289 of them have presented reports, said K.F. Sugara, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests here on Thursday.

After the passing of the Biodiversity Act in 2003, each GP is to have a BMC — whose seven members are informally elected — to monitor the conservation of regional biodiversity. Among the first steps is to create a People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) that lists out the local perception of biodiversity.

- 70 p.c. of gram panchayats in Kerala have active Biodiversity Management Committees

- 'People with commercial interests making their way into the board defeats the purpose of BMC'

"With panchayats under the Panchayat Raj Act, how can the state-level biodiversity board ensure they function properly? And, is conservation an electoral issue in the panchayat?" Mr. Sugara said at the conclave on bio-conservation.

It was attended by 31 representatives from three states — members of NGOs, Forest Range officers or BMC members from Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand — were trained on the concept.

Conservation

He believed one of the ways to get conservation to the forefront was to highlight the inextricable link between ecology and livelihood. "In rural areas, 70 per cent of the earning of the poor comes from ecological sources, while in forest areas, the figure is 80 per cent," he said.

While expanding the BMCs to cover all 5,800 GPs in the State, there should be an effort to ensure the members of the committee — who are res-

idents of the area — actually care about the conservation of flora in the area, said Mr. Sugara. "In some cases, influential people with commercial interests have made their way into the board. This defeats the purpose of a conservation committee," he said.

Commenting on the slow progress of the implementation of the BMC across the country, M.D. Subash Chandran, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, said while nearly 70 per cent of the gram panchayats in Kerala have active BMCs, Karnataka comes a distant second with 5 per cent; and the figures are the worst in states such as Gujarat (just one in 13,693 GPs) and Uttar Pradesh (0.008 per cent).

"At this rate, it would take a

century for it to be implemented," he said.

Medicinal plants

The conclave deliberated on the sustainable use of medicinal plants in the three states. The importance of this was elucidated by Sudhir Saxena, from an NGO in Almora in Uttarakhand, who believes that with increasing migration, urbanisation and the floods earlier this year, the quantum of medicinal plants in the mountains around the area has reduced drastically.

During the three-day programme, the participants will be taken to Honnavar to observe eco-tourism and the activities of the BMC there; a visit to SIRI in Belthangady; and Piliakula Nisargadhama here.