

Green Schools Network

GobarTimes

ACTIVITY SHEET

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Why talk about Environmental law regarding biodiversity?



We have accelerated the rate of extinction of species by 1000 times the normal rate by our activities. Almost two-third of all bird species, one in every eight plant species, one-fourth of all mammals, one-quarter of all amphibians and one-fifth of all reptiles are endangered or vulnerable. With such serious species loss, don't you think laws are the only ways to regulate the way human beings interact with nature? Isn't it about time that laws enforce conservation activities? Shouldn't the guilty be punished?

Apart from protecting against this rapid loss of biodiversity, biodiversity laws and conventions also govern situations where genetic material is being used for purposes such as agriculture or food production. It is very important that laws safeguard our interests as genetically modified organisms can be dangerous. So these laws not only punish, they also protect. Isn't that important – to be protected from things in the future which you are not entirely sure of?

You must have heard about genetically modified crops such as Bt Cotton. Such developments affect farmers, who may or may not be aware of biodiversity laws such as the Plant Variety Act 2001 that can protect them from big corporations.

Some one has to start talking about biodiversity laws, right? Why not start with us!

Name

School Name

Class Date

Gobar Gyan

Intellectual Property Rights and Biodiversity

Intellectual property refers to property that is the product of mental activity. For example, you write a song as an ode to your cat. This song is your intellectual property.

Would you be angry if some one else claimed your song to be his and became famous?

Sometimes, intellectual property arises out of source organisms such as plants. Like when medicines or food are made from plants or animal parts. In such cases, Intellectual Property Rights give you the power to protect these source organisms using patents.

Activity 1: Seeking help

Intellectual Property Rights include the following instruments that help protect your brain child. Let's start with some simple definitions:

What are patents?

What are trademarks?

What is copyright?



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Consider this scenario –

You are a scientist working in the Western Ghats. Now, you discover a certain flower that is an effective mosquito repellent and even useful in anti-malaria medicine. You take out a patent on this flower.

Did you know that the Western Ghats have over 5000 species of flowering plants?

Let's assume that BS Corporation learns about your plans and starts producing anti-malaria medicine using this flower but a different process.

What would you do?

Would your patent be helpful in stopping BS Corporation from using your flower?

Activity 2: Spot the species

India is one of the 12 mega biodiversity countries in this world. Occupying only 2.5% of land area on earth, our country holds 7 – 8% of all species recorded around the world.

The Western Ghats is one of 25 of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

What are biodiversity hotspots?

Ask your teacher to take you to a local or city forest in or around your city.

If you are in Delhi, our suggestions include Sanjay Van, Chirag Dilli Nursery, Mangerbani forest or Jahanpanah city forest.

Before you go:

Ask your history teacher about how much area was under green cover ten years ago and if that has changed?

Do you know if the forest you went to is threatened by construction, waste dumping or encroachment?

Find out about human settlements around the green area. How many people live around the forest and are dependent on it? What are these people dependent on the forest for – timber, food, fodder etc?

Which environmental law do you think could help protect species of animals in these forests?

Destructive Insects and Pests Act, 1914 – A central government act to regulate the import of plants, movement of pests or insects that may be harmful to crops from one state to another.

Environmental Protection Act, 1986 – An umbrella act to prevent destruction of environmental quality through pollution, loss of vegetal cover and biological diversity. It also seeks to provide compensation for damage from harmful chemicals and environmental accidents.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 – A federal act to prevent unnecessary pain or suffering on animals.

Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 – to prevent the poaching or destruction of habitat of wildlife and make it punishable to possess, purchase and destroy wildlife or their parts or habitats

Are there any books on bird watching, identifying trees and plants that you can find? Ask your school library to source them so that you can look up species on your visit.

Are there any local naturalists/enthusiasts that conduct nature walks in your area? Find out if they'll be willing to take a bunch of eager beaver school kids on a pro bono trip! Who better than experts to point out the biodiversity in your area for you and they'll probably agree to do it for free or for a nominal fee.

Make sure you have everything to be safe and ready for your trip. Sunscreen, check; caps, check; binoculars, check. You get the drift?

Gobar gyan

Traditional knowledge refers to the age old wisdom of regional, indigenous and local communities. Like how your grandmother told you to put turmeric on wounds as it has antiseptic properties. This traditional knowledge has been in use by local communities for centuries. Under local laws, customs and practises this knowledge is passed down from generations.

Article 8J

of the Convention on Biological Diversity directly refers to traditional knowledge and calls for its greater application.

Activity 3: Farmers know best

About 150 crops feed most of the human population, but only 12 provide 80% of the energy from food. Wheat, rice, maize and potato alone provide 60% food energy.



Rice is an important crop. India is the world's largest producer of white rice. Have you ever heard of red rice?

Take help from you biology teacher and find out:

How many rice varieties there used to be? _____

How many rice varieties exist now? _____

Ask your teacher or principal if your school can arrange for a visit from a local farmer or you could go to his farm. Try and find out how biodiversity affects the farmer's life.

Ask him questions like:

What seeds does the farmer save? _____

Does he experiment with different plants and seeds to make an original plant variety? Or has he heard of any one who has?

How do seasons determine what seed he sows? _____

How many varieties of his crop does he grow? _____

Which animals help him with his agriculture? _____



If you found the activity sheet interesting, E-mail us at eeu@cseindia.org or write to:
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