

PEOPLE'S BIODIVERSITY REGISTER

TEACHER	Panu Halder
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Right from the time he was a young science student to the time he studied Electronics, Panu Halder was curious about science and how it could be utilized for human welfare. He went on to become a lecturer in physics. Currently, he is a teacher at the Bharat Mata School, Bilaspur, and Chhattisgarh and is thankful for the opportunity to be a guide to his students.

Shri Halder was fond of conducting innovative science experiments in science, and his interest led him, in the year, 2000, to network and establish a community of young people with similar interest. He named the community, "Nature Bodies". Over the year, the group has undertaken several community-based projects to address both livelihoods and the depletion of natural resources.

According to Shri Halder, the main problem in today's scenario is that we are losing a huge part of our biodiversity daily and numerous species are getting endangered, threatened or extinct. "We cannot prepare the strategy to protect unless we know the area of concern." He believes

that once people understand the importance of various species in the environment, the problem of destruction of biodiversity can be stopped effectively.

The aim of his project is to conserve different species. Shri Halder has initiated a Public Biodiversity Register (PBR) - a knowledge bank that lists and provides information of all species of animals present in a particular area. In doing this, he strictly followed the rules and regulations laid down by the NBA (National Biodiversity Authority). The register is basically a compilation of the information about and need for a species, and its benefits to all form of life. The register is prepared area-wise and in the local language, and made available to the local people. The PBR primarily focuses on the threatened and endangered species which need immediate attention to protect them from extinction.

Step 1. In Surajpur, Chhattisgarh, this initiative was started on July 18, 2019. Surajpur is a rich bio-diversified region of Chhattisgarh densely covered with forest. The people are mostly dependent on the forest resources and this dependency has led to a conflict between man and animal.

Step 2. Shri Halder's idea to set up a PBR took shape when he visited a village called Bank, in the district, for a school eco-club program. The people, who were mostly from tribal communities, were dependent on the forest and its resources for survival. Unknowingly, they were destroying many species while fulfilling their basic needs.

Step 3. Shri Halder then approached the local government schools to interact with the students and make them aware about the various natural species. However, given their lack of knowledge and interest in the subject, it was difficult to initiate in them the value and importance of conservation. He then decided to



Teacher giving information about Biodiversity Register

use festivals as a means to create a bond between them and the subject. This is because several of the festivals celebrated in the region give deep respect to some plant and animal species, for instance, Hareli, Nagpanchami, Govardhan Puja and and Cher-chera. He noticed a disconnection between knowledge and practice, which he then aimed to fulfil.

He then took the students for nature walks, asking them to keep a look out for various animals, plants and insects they came across, and share any knowledge they had about them with their peers. The students were then asked to discuss their findings with their families and add to their knowledge and awareness.

Step 4. Shri Halder then involved the students in games, based on the conservation of the environment and biodiversity. The students gradually gained interest and were inspired to participate and contribute to the PBR. Shri Halder and the students interacted with many people and started documenting the various species. The elders received first preference in the discussions, since the aim was to help transfer knowledge from one generation to the next.

Step 5. Information about the species, soil type, details of local inhabitants, their occupation, and dependence on biodiversity was collected.

The rules and regulations of NBA served as a guide. The raw data collection process took nearly one week. Many people were not ready to share their knowledge for fear of losing ownership. Their fears were set to rest when they were assured that they would retain ownership of their knowledge.

Step 6. Whatever knowledge was gathered during the day was shared with the local inhabitants giving them a sense of involvement and belonging to the project.

Step 7. After the data was collected, it was factually verified. This process took one month. It was computerized and printed. The students then translated the data into the regional language so it could be of use to the local people. The PRB was thus available in English and the local languages.

Overall, the PBR is representative of the efforts of the people to share their knowledge to help in the conservation of endangered species.

Current Situation

More than 15000 species have been documented, and the work is still in progress. The participating students have now started a new initiative called #ExploreGreenTreasure with the aim to identify commonly found plants offering medicinal properties.



Students going to the village and surveying



Students surveying



Team of students and villagers

Reach of Innovation

From Bank village of Surajpur district, Chhattisgarh the journey has covered other villages like Thargi, Hariharpur, Asura, Mangata, Sadak Chirchari and Bharritola with the active involvement of school students in this region. The teachers have also been greatly motivated with the activity and there are now several conversations that take place about biodiversity conservation.

Behavioral change among the people is evident who are now making an effort to conserve the identified species. Shri Halder is hopeful that the rich biodiversity in the region will get recognition and the attention it deserves. The team's motto is: "If many little people in many little places do many little things, we surely can change the face of our mother earth."

Feedback

The teachers consider this nature activity to be ideal to instill bio-conservational values in the students, helping them recognize how crucial it is to save and respect all species including the endangered ones.

The students found it as an amazing platform activity that allows them to learn by doing. It has helped to develop in them a love for nature, and it is hoped that many among them would take up nature conservation as a career. The children are gradually developing empathy with nature, which is a very affirmative step towards sustainability.

Awards

National Winner of Best Eco-Club at Kevadiya, Gujarat.



QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What activities can be organized to make children aware of sexual protection?
2. How should children be informed about the Biodiversity Register?
3. Which type of points should be given to children for field visit projects?

QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What activities can be undertaken to give children contextual knowledge about the topic in addition to the textbook?
2. How can children be taught the process of documenting different species?
3. How would you explain to children what information they should take when surveying?