

Increasing awareness about biodiversity laws a challenge

By Bhavya Khullar

New Delhi, April 10 (India Science Wire): Many companies make commercial products using natural biodiversity of India. Most of them are unaware of the regulations governing the use of local plants for making these commercial products. Local communities are also ignorant about their rights and legal provision that companies have to share profits with them for any commercial product made from plants indigenous to their area.

“Our biggest challenge is to increase awareness. Both the users and the beneficiaries lack clarity about regulations and laws”, said Dr. Meenakumari Singh, Chairperson of National Biodiversity Authority of India (NBA). The authority is tasked with implementation of the Biodiversity Act 2002.

NBA is working on 12 National Biodiversity Targets to be achieved by 2020, with the objective of mainstreaming biodiversity into national and state policies. One of the targets is to make aware a significant proportion of the country’s population, especially the youth, about the value of biodiversity and steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.

With a rich biodiversity constituting 9% of all recorded species of plants and animals in the world, India is a destination for locating newer and better commercial products. This called for laws concerning biodiversity and how local communities have to get their equal share of benefits. The Biodiversity Act deals with how biodiversity of India has to be used for the benefit of its people, maintaining sustainable development as its core value.

Dr Singh emphasized the importance of creating awareness about biodiversity laws by citing the example of Dr. Geeta Pandurang. She practices medicine in Maharashtra. She developed a medicine for snakebites that prolongs the time available for the patient to go to the hospital for treatment. This medicine was made from a local plant and fell under the purview of the Biodiversity Act. “She gave Rs 3500 to the State biodiversity board as the benefit sharing amount. The monetary benefit was not huge, but it is important to create awareness and inculcate the concept of sharing benefits with local communities”, said Dr Singh. (India Science Wire)