

Celebrating International Day for Biological Diversity -
Engaging with Remote Himalayan Schools



G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development
Kosi-Katarmal, Almora, Uttarakhand (INDIA)
(<http://gbpihed.gov.in>)

Recognizing the value of biological diversity for sustenance of inhabitants in remote Himalayan areas, and realizing that the developmental agenda of these areas still needs mainstreaming, the G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development (GBPIHED), a dedicated Institute for Research & Development in the Himalaya, took a lead in celebrating this year's International Day for Biological Diversity by way of reaching the school children in remote rural areas. In keeping with this year's theme 'Biodiversity for Sustainable Development' the aim was to sensitize and generate awareness among students and teachers of remote areas on this subject. The approach included three diverse mechanisms: (i) Biodiversity awareness campaign across watersheds; (ii) Preparation of participatory school biodiversity conservation model plans; and (iii) Organization of nature camp.

(i) Biodiversity awareness campaign - three days (20-22 May, 2015) extensive campaign was organized for raising awareness about biodiversity in three watersheds (i.e., Haat-Kalika, Chandak-Aunla Ghat, and Kharangdang-Himkhola) of Pithoragarh District in Uttarakhand State (India). These watersheds, on account of representativeness, richness and uniqueness of bio-physical values, form the pilot sites for detailed investigation under first of its kind trans-boundary cooperation initiative "Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative" of China, India and Nepal.



A total of 10 schools (Higher Secondary and Senior Secondary) of these watershed were visited by a team of researchers and the students from identified schools were orientated through a one day workshop, which focused on knowledge dissemination about biodiversity, specifically focusing on prospects for livelihood generation through effective use of local biodiversity. All together 831 students (388 Male and 453 Female) and 43 teachers were the beneficiaries. Special session for volunteer students (Total 217; 137 Male, 113 Female) formed a basis for engaging them in long term process of information generation, monitoring and conservation of biodiversity. Various competitive events, as integral part of the process, kept student's excitement alive all through the campaign.

(ii) Participatory school conservation model development: three days campaign in all three watersheds culminated in a special event at selected school campus to mark the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May 2015. The event was so designed to help ensuring long-term association of participating students and teachers with the biodiversity. This included participatory exercises conducted for developing action plan for school campus

biodiversity conservation model in identified schools (i.e., GIC Gangolihat – Haat-Kalika Watershed, GIC Gorang Chaur – Chandak-Aunla Ghat watershed and GIC Pangu - Kharangdang-Himkhola watershed). Once properly explained the process, the students enthusiastically participated in the exercise, which ultimately resulted in preparation of plan for the **Participatory School Biodiversity Conservation Model** development in



identified schools of representative watersheds. These plans, fully owned by respective schools, are proposed to be followed for effective implementation under "Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative".



(iii) Organization of Nature camp: as part of Institute's long-term initiative "Himalayan student's nature awareness campaign", a nature camp was organized between 20-22 May 2015. Altogether 55 students and 11 teachers, representing 11 schools of District Almora, Uttarakhand (India), camped at Nature Interpretation and Learning Center of GBPIHED. The 'Nature camps' have been conceptualized for children as an uninterrupted cyclic process of visiting the nature, observing, learning, understanding and teaching so as to facilitate a culture of nature based learning. Broadly the camp attempted to: (i) connect the participants with the nature and develop their affection for it; (ii) make them learn from the nature and understand its complexity and linkages, (ii) sensitize students about life support and protective values of the nature and make the responsive for natural perturbations.



While concluding the camp on 22nd May 2015, as part of IDB celebration, the participants were exposed to various aspects of biological Diversity and its role in Development. Students shared their experiences with the Director GBPIHED, Dr. P.P. Dhyani, and other faculty and researchers of the Institute. To cover the theme of the day, one of the teachers Resource Person, Mr J. P. Tewari, GIC Batulia, delivered an interesting talk on Biodiversity and its Relevance for Humanity. As a token of

appreciation the best performing campers were awarded.

The Institutes' effort is to continue with these events in remote areas so as to create wider awareness among masses using students as the vector for information dissemination.

For Contact: Dr. P.P. Dhyani, Director (psdir@gbpihed.nic.in)
Dr. Ranbeer S. Rawal (ranbeerrawal4@gmail.com)