

Report on Project Sharing Workshop 2010



Programme to Conserve the Urban Biodiversity of West Bengal with School Students

*Held at the Seminar Hall, Birla Planetarium, Kolkata
On April 22, 2010*

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Schedule

Time	Activity
10.00 am	Registration
10.30 am	Welcome Address by Ms. Diti Mookherjee, Project Leader and CEO ASED
10.35 am	Inauguration Programme
10.40 am	Address by Chief Guest, Mr. Arijit Banerjee , IFS, Senior Environment Officer, Dept. of Environment, Govt, of West Bengal
10.50am	Address by Special Guest, Dr. S.N. Ghosh , Sr. Research Officer, West Bengal Biodiversity Board, Govt. of West Bengal
11.00 am	Slide Illustrated Talk on “Glimpses of Urban Biodiversity of West Bengal and the ASED Project on Conserving West Bengal’s Urban Biodiversity”. By Mr. Kushal Mookherjee, Member, State Wildlife Advisory Board, West Bengal and Resource Person, ASED
11.15 am	Address by Dr. Ajit Banerjee , EX-IFS and Ex-Senior Forestry Specialist, World Bank. Executive Committee ASED
11.25 am	Project Work Presentation by Schools
1.05pm	Lunch Break
1.45 pm	Project Work Presentations continue
2.05 pm	Interactive Session – Group Discussion & Open Forum on “What we can do together”
2.50 pm	Way Forward & Vote of thanks

Introduction

Another school year has come to a close and with it, students working on their “Biodiversity Projects” have also wound up their work for this phase. It is now time to look back on the year’s activities and evaluate how far objectives have been achieved and chart out the way forward for the coming year.

The project sharing workshop is organized every year as a culmination of the year’s activities. It provides a platform for the various schools under the Programme to share their experiences and learn from each other.

This year 5 out of the 7 schools under the project attended the event. Durgapur T.N. High School sent apologies for their absence.

Welcome Address

Diti Mookherjee, Project Leader and CEO, ASED began the day’s program by welcoming the participants and introducing the special guests. She stressed that one of the main aims of this project was to provide an opportunity for students who love and enjoy nature to find out more about their world and add to their knowledge base.

The three special guests who graced the occasion were *Dr. Ajit Banerjee, Mr. Arijit Banerjee, Senior Environment Officer, Government of West Bengal and Dr. Soumen Ghosh, Senior Research Officer, West Bengal Biodiversity Board, Government of West Bengal* After the welcome address the guests were presented with token gifts by the students.

Inauguration

The programme was inaugurated formally with each participating school contributing to complete a poster entitled “Together We Can”. Each school came up to the podium and stuck a cut-out of a hand to the poster. The cut-outs were marked with the name of the school



Dr. Ajit Banerjee then took the stage and welcomed all the participants. Clarifying that the day's discussions would centre on urban biodiversity, he spoke about effect of agriculture on biodiversity and traced its development from when man practiced shifting agriculture to the introduction of machines and the agricultural revolution. He highlighted how man had eventually realized that clearing forests for cultivation was harmful and how several western countries like Sweden and Canada had incorporated

wooded areas and forests even within their cities.

Unfortunately India has lagged behind in this regard and consequently the richness of its biodiversity has been affected. Dr. Banerjee stressed that there needed to be two areas of focus: first, to preserve the existing biodiversity and second, to find ways to increase it. To illustrate his point he forwarded the example of how there is conclusive proof that Kolkata was once a part of the Sunderbans, whereas now it is far away from the forest.

Address by Chief Guest, Mr. Arijit Banerjee , Sr. Environment Officer, Govt. of West Bengal

Mr. Banerjee urged the participants to take some time out of their busy lives to simply notice their surroundings and thus learn about the biodiversity that surrounds us all every day. He stressed that change was possible only



when good habits were inculcated into daily life and individuals learnt to act every day rather than only on special days designated for the environment.

Mr. Banerjee also encouraged the students to link the subjects they studied in school rather than treated them as isolated topics. In this way they could learn much about their world .He concluded with a wish that all the participants would grow up to be lovers of nature.

Address by Special Guest, Dr. Soumen Ghosh, Sr. Research Officer, West Bengal Biodiversity Board, Govt. of West Bengal

Dr. Ghosh highlighted the importance of action alongside knowledge in the course of preserving biodiversity. It was not enough to know about the biodiversity but also vital to act on that knowledge, he stressed. While looking at the larger issues it is easy to forget that there is much to be done in our immediate surroundings, he pointed out.



Dr. Ghosh commended the students on their projects and encouraged them to view this experience as more than just a classroom exercise. He stressed that no action was too small and even as students their actions could have far reaching effects, as in the case of Sarangabad and the water monitors. There, the students were successful in bring the plight of the water monitors in their area to the attention of the relevant authorities, resulting in appropriate action being taken and the habitat of the water monitors being preserved. Dr. Ghosh urged the students to follow this example and highlight the problems in their particular areas so that they could be brought the attention of the relevant authorities.

Dr. Ghosh also spoke of the role of the Biodiversity Board in preserving the biodiversity. He promised the students the support of the Board in their endeavors and encouraged them to raise their voices to preserve their futures.

Diti Mookherjee concluded the introductory session by urging the students to act if they came across instances of natural habitats being destroyed. She pointed out that it was not necessary to start a revolution....merely bringing the issue to the notice of relevant authorities was often enough.

Slide Illustrated Talk By Mr. Kushal Mookherjee On “Glimpses Of Urban Biodiversity Of West Bengal And The ASED Project On Conserving West Bengal’s Urban Biodiversity.”

Using beautifully shot slides, Mr. Mookherjee highlighted the diverse terrain of West Bengal and the resulting rich biodiversity. He then gave an overview of the project with illustrations from each of the participating schools.

Project Work Presentations by Schools

Moderated by Indrajit Mullick, Field Coordinator, ASED

Bakshara Surendranath Girls High School (BSGHS)



The students of this school had decided to document the biodiversity seen around their locality. The findings were presented by Bipasha Palit and Sangita Dhara.

The girls began their presentation by defining biodiversity. They then spoke of the flora and fauna they had observed, using charts to illustrate their findings. Among plants they had studied several medicinal plants like tulsi, neem, nayantara, etc. Mosquitoes, flies, kingfishers, butterflies, snakes, fish, cats and dogs were some of the animal life they had catalogued. The students also presented a map of their school compound.

During the question-answer session that followed, the girls were asked for scientific names of some of the living things as well as the commonality between mosquitoes, flies and butterflies. Kushal Mookherjee suggested that the students could enhance their study by finding out the exact names of the butterflies and snakes seen by them. He also advised them to think about a project focusing on the Satraganchi Jheel which is close to their school.

Children's Foundation School (CFS)

The presentation of the Children's Foundation School was divided among the students, with each student speaking on one aspect of the topic. Ria Maity, Jayshree Vyas, Rishita Dewan, Gauri Sharma, Shoumasish Halder, Bikramaditya Naskar, Debayan



Mukherjee, Sayantan Das and Rajanya Chakraborty made up the group of presenters.

After introducing the concept of biodiversity and underlining its importance in the present day, the students spoke of some of the biodiversity that can be seen in and around their school. The gradual destruction of biodiversity, its effect in the long run and conservation strategies were some of the other topics the students touched upon. The presentation concluded with an appeal to the audience to join hands in conserving the existing biodiversity.

On prompting by the audience the students specified that their project had involved collecting data from the school neighborhood and studying the various forms of plant and animal life they had come across. They had also grown potted plants in their school.

Dr. Ghosh suggested that the students focus their attention on preserving the plants they have sown and think about cleaning up dirty ponds in their area. It was important to act continuously rather than undertake isolated efforts, he stressed. Diti Mookherjee added that it was important to go beyond collecting data and focus on studying the accumulated information and thinking about ways in which the different species could be protected. Other suggestions from the audience included identification of problems related to the biodiversity of the locality and starting a medicinal herb garden.

Metropolitan Institution (Main)



The presentation was made by Sourav Pramanick, Pabitra Ghosh, Shuken Das, Debnath Das and Saswata Maity.

Using charts and a scrapbook the students demonstrated how they have listed the various life forms in their area and grown some medicinal plants. They had also conducted experiments to study the beneficial nature of trees. One such experiment involved placing thermometers under a tree and under an umbrella and then coming to the conclusion that the temperature under trees is less and therefore that trees have a cooling effect. The students also presented some herbarium sheets that they had prepared in order to study various leaves.

During the Q&A session it was suggested that the students plant more trees, in pots as they were situated on a busy thoroughfare. On hearing that the students face a problem with watering the plants during school holidays, Dr. Banerjee suggested that students who lived nearby could each take a pot home to tend during the holidays. A staff member of the Sarangabad school reminded the student that it was crucial to dig the soil around the plants in addition to watering them. He pointed out that too much watering could be fatal to the plants.

Sarangabad Jyaneshwari Pathshala Girls High School (SJPGHS)

The students from SJPGHS have continued with the project on water monitors which their seniors had initiated. They thus took this opportunity to present an update on the project to the assembled audience. The presentation was made by Purba Chatterjee, Anuradha Mitra and Rinky.



The trio of presenters began by giving an introduction to water monitors, focusing on their nature, diet and habitat. They pointed out some of the threats being faced by this animal with their habitat being taken over by large housing projects. The girls also displayed a chart which illustrated their sightings of water monitors over the last year in relation to their school compound. The girls spoke of the several field trips that they have made and shared their observations about the water monitors made on these trips.

During the Q&A session the students were asked if they were able to identify individual water monitors by their physical characteristics, to which the girls

replied in the affirmative. Someone suggested that they could then name the individuals which would give them greater identity! Questions were also asked about the value of the animal's skin and whether it had any commercial use. The girls pointed out that the skins of these creatures were often used to make items like bags and decorative pieces.

Ananda Ashram Balika Bidyapeeth

The group from Ananda Ashram began their presentation by stressing on the theme for the day: Together We Can. They spoke of how their united efforts had helped the project grow over the years and made it an integral part of their curriculum, rather than an isolated effort. Sangeeta Chowdhury, Rinika Das, Dola Chakraborty and Sunetra Das presented on behalf of the school.

The school trains their Eco-club members to become peer educators. It also works with several organizations other than ASED, to make the most of their experiences. Interestingly, the biodiversity project has been integrated into the school curriculum and the students no longer run it as an individual project.

With no particular project to present, the students thud chose to speak about their recent visit to the Chintamani Kar Bird Sanctuary in Narendrapur. Kushal Mookherjee had been their guide on that occasion. The group had consisted of 53 students and 7 teachers. The trip helped to highlight the importance of such spaces in city planning the group stressed.



Following a break for lunch, Ananda Ashram continued their presentation by speaking of some of the small projects that they had undertaken in the past year. One such project helped them understand how the various parts of the environment are linked and how the impact of damage to any aspect of it will have far reaching effects on the other parts. Another project involved studying the school grounds and listing the various life forms that exist there.

A third project was growing and tending a vegetable garden. The group made particular reference to the pumpkin plants with its male and female flowers. The students had observed its growth and also learnt how to prevent it from being destroyed by insects. They expressed regret that their juniors had not been able to keep up

the garden!

The students had also grown a garden of medicinal plants. The garden included plants like tulsi, kalmegh and neem. They also spoke of their efforts to rescue a jamun tree that fell during Cyclone Aila last year. They have tried to restore the tree and have also created awareness among their peers about the importance of looking after it.

There were no particular questions for Ananda Ashram , though a lively discussion ensued when a student from the audience questioned the necessity of killing so many insects to protect one little pumpkin plant!

Interactive Session

The first half of the interactive session was moderated by Sujit Sinha of Swanirbhar. Before initiating the discussion, Mr. Sinha spoke about an evaluation that he and his team were conducting of the project. He explained the aim of the exercise and the process it would follow, stressing the importance of the views of students and teachers involved in the project.

Mr. Sinha kicked off the interactive session by asking the children to narrate any funny incidents or instances where they had been scolded by their teachers in the course of conducting their projects. This broke the ice effectively and soon stories about getting lost in the forest, monkeys creating pandemonium in the school and disgruntled parents were vying with each other for attention!

Another interesting discussion centered on whether water monitors would make good pets. The conclusion was that the animal is too ferocious and intelligent to be tamed.

Mr. Sinha had several suggestions for interesting ways to liven up the school projects. He wondered whether the students could keep a pet in school. Making up and collecting songs about biodiversity, documenting the changes in the immediate surroundings by speaking to elders in the locality and studying how such changes are affecting the entire environment were some of the suggestions that he offered. The students of CFS did their bit by singing a song about the environment.

The second part of the interactive session was conducted by Shubhadyuti of DRCSC. She prompted the students



to speak about their hands-on experience in watching nature in their school compound. Suhadyuti spoke about making artificial nests for birds to lay eggs in and about identifying and tackling energy conservation within the school. She pointed out that most of the schools had spoken about trees and plants which were common and easily found. She suggested that they add to their lists by looking for unusual plants and trying to identify them

Kushal Mookherjee suggested that the best way to identify plants and animals was to take detailed notes while sighting it. Besides a description such notes could include the time and place of sighting. These notes could then be used for identification by consulting the internet, books on the topic or an expert on the subject.

Diti Mookherjee concluded the day's proceedings with a vote of thanks to all the participating schools, students and teachers and guests. She encouraged the schools to be vocal about their views on the project when they met Mr. Sinha during the evaluation.

