
APPROACHING PROBLEMS OF LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGES IN SRI LANKA THROUGH BIOPROSPECTING AND BENEFIT SHARING

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Biodiversity can be defined as variety and variability of living organisms. Conceptually, it can be defined as hierarchically related levels, genetic, species and ecosystems. Culture and related developments also plays a significant role in biodiversity. It is widely accepted that biodiversity is central to the development and evolutionary process without which the sustainability is questionable.

However, Sri Lanka is losing biodiversity is disappearing rapidly at all levels. At gene level, example is loss of wealthy landraces and local cultivars. At species level, extinction, overexploitation and smuggling cause loss of species. Ecosystems also subjected to series of changes due to various reasons. Cultural aspects and indigenous knowledge also loose at a rapid rate.

The challenges for these biodiversity losses cannot be address by simple or single measures. A number of compatible options are essential to address it. However, the use of biodiversity in an appropriate manner is suggested as one of the most effective options in conservation of biodiversity.

Use of biodiversity requires bioprospecting, the search for wild species, genes and their products with actual or potential use to humans. In broadest sense, it is a process dating from the roots of humanity. It has been practiced informally throughout Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The formalisation of this process brings more benefits to the soicity. However, if the benefits of biodiversity utilisation are to be shared fairly and equitable, governments will needs to design specific mechanisms to ensure that these benefits actually reach intended beneficiaries which is termed as benefit sharing. This is an important issue from the article 15 of the Convention of Biodiversity, which Sri Lanka signed and ratified.

Biodiversity prospecting and benefit sharing increase in the recognised value of resources are the most effective pathways to foster conservation and the continued availability of biodiversity. The authors are discussing the above issues with examples from India and Costa Rica and their relevance to Sri Lanka

Key words: biodiversity; conservation; biodiversity prospecting; benfit sharing.