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Awareness on biodiversity conservation among school children in Sri Lanka

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Conservation of biodiversity is of special significance to Sri Lanka (SL) which has now become a hot spot of the world. As recognized by the Convention of Biological Diversity, education, training and awareness play an important role in Biodiversity Conservation (BC). Incorporation of environmental education into National School Curricula has been an ideal way of encouraging positive thoughts of younger generation towards BC. The present study was aimed to identify whether school children were aware of the importance of BC, their first source of information on BC and the extent of participation in biodiversity related programmes. Further, the relationship between biodiversity education with the involvement of environmental activities, membership in environmental societies and students' participation in workshops were also studied. The most effective mass media on biodiversity communication for school children in different districts of SL was also identified. Thirty Eight Sinhalese National Schools (SNS) from 19 districts out of 23 districts in which SNS have been established in SL were randomly selected. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire circulated among 456 school children between age groups 10-11, 12-16 and 17-18. According to a total of 253 responses (91, 86, 76 from age groups respectively) 100% of students were well aware of importance of BC. Students of 10-11 age group selected 'school' as the place from where they first received the message on BC even though only 69% of them learn environmental studies as a subject. Students of other two age groups identified 'home' and 'parents' as the first source of information. Although 80% of the schools had environmental societies, only 23%, 64% and 54% of students of age groups respectively, had participated in biodiversity related programmes. The students were mostly involved in BC programmes in school than home or in other environmental organizations. According to the Pearson's Chi square test for relatedness ($P \leq 5\%$), the relationship between involvement of students on environmental activities did not depend on study of environment as a subject. Contribution for the BC had a significant relationship with students' participation in workshops for the 12-16 age group. Being a member of an environmental society was not a significant reason. The most effective ways of gathering biodiversity information were the print and audio-visual media except in the 10-11 age group who preferred school to be the source. The study revealed that Sri Lankan school children have a good understanding on BC. We need to address and encourage adults especially the parents on conservation of biodiversity as they also provide the basic input of positive attitudes towards protecting our nature.

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