

WORKSHOP ON BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS USING OPEN SOURCE TOOLS

“If you learn spatial analysis, you can live anywhere as a spatial consultant and make a living”, said Prof T V Ramachandra, Professor at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru. He inaugurated the one day workshop on 'Biodiversity Awareness using Open Source Geospatial (FOSS4G) tools' at the Centre for Continuing Education, Indian Institute of Science. The workshop was jointly organised by OSGeo-India, Hyderabad, APN, Indian Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad, and the Energy & Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc.

Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot, is facing huge crisis due to developmental demands. New and innovative methods using geospatial technology can help manage this challenge better, if stakeholders have access not only to the data but also to appropriate tools for informed decision making. The one-day workshop aimed to train participants to convert scientific-questions to an appropriate geospatial query that can provide the right insights/answers drawing upon the data base.

Dr. S N Prasad from OSGeo Foundation, India, spoke about how open source software is creating a level playing field in many areas. Open source tools are freely available, and anybody who has a computer can download and start using them. Moreover, users are also free to add new functionalities, since the source code is also freely available. He mentioned that open source geospatial tools can give a bigger perspective, and help in microlevel management of biodiversity. He called upon the participants to become ambassadors of open source software tools and conduct workshops in their respective institutions.

Prof M D Subhash Chandran, Centre of Ecological Sciences, IISc spoke about the Western Ghats and the conservation issues related to them. He said that make it mandatory for every gram panchayat to form a Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC), to document and take care of the local biodiversity. However, most gram pachayats haven't constituted BMCs, and if constituted, they are not very active. “Instead of creating BMCs indiscriminately, we should focus on the implementation of Biodiversity Act”, he suggested.

Dr R Prabhakar, Director, Strand Life Sciences and Senior Fellow, Ashoka Trust for Research in Environment and Ecology, took the participants on a virtual tour of the India Biodiversity Portal (www.indiabiodiversity.org). India Biodiversity Portal is a participatory system to aggregate and disseminate biodiversity information under open access for India. “Technology is making massive changes to the way we understand and document nature. Today we can document biodiversity with our mobile phones”, he said.

Dr Rajasri Ray from the Centre of Ecological Sciences, IISc, who spoke about 'Sacred Groves', explained how religious and cultural values of a society affect the local biodiversity. She extensively used open source geospatial tools in her study for depicting biodiversity information on maps. According to her , sacred groves are important for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.

Dr R C Prasad and Gowtham Gollapalli from the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad spoke about “Scope and potentiality of open source tools and technology in biodiversity conservation”. Gowtham Gollapalli is also associated with KAIINOS Geospatial Technologies Ltd.

T V Ramachandra, Professor at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, gave a talk on 'Ecologically

Sensitive Regions in Central Western Ghats'. He explained the ecological socio-economic factors considered for grouping the 'ecologically sensitive regions' of Uttara Kannada district. He also demonstrated how his group extensively used open source geospatial tools for conducting research. His talk was followed by a lively interactive session.