

Education and Awareness

Objective IV: Education and awareness about plant diversity, its role in sustainable livelihoods and importance to all life on earth is promoted



Target 14: The importance of plant diversity and the need for its conservation incorporated into communication, education and public awareness programmes

Plant blindness is the inability to see or notice the plants in one's own environment, leading to: (a) the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere, and in human affairs; (b) the inability to appreciate the aesthetic and unique biological features of the life forms belonging to the Plant Kingdom; and (c) the misguided, anthropocentric ranking of plants as inferior to animals, leading to the erroneous conclusion that they are unworthy of human consideration. (Wandersee & Schussler, 1998)

Surveys have shown that there is a low level of recognition amongst the general public of the term 'biodiversity' and more specifically, a lack of understanding of the important role that plants play in supporting human well-being.

Plants are often under-represented in the conservation debate and neglected in efforts to engage the public in environmental action. Furthermore, increasing urbanization is resulting in a growing disconnect between people and nature, especially noticeable among young people.

Plant conservation targets, such as those of the GSPC, will only be achieved if changes are made at all levels of society, from policy makers to the general public. For this reason,

communication, education and public awareness programmes are essential in underpinning the Strategy.

A consultation on how well plants are included in education programmes has been carried out by BGCI in six countries (Brazil, China, Indonesia, Russia, UK and USA). Similar issues were identified across the countries, in particular:

- over-emphasis on animals and neglect of plants in environmental education programmes
- the need for increased teacher-training relative to plant diversity
- a lack of opportunity for children to experience nature first-hand



Bian Tan



- plant conservation messages being lost under an overwhelming level of advertising in all media.

Citizen science

Engaging the public in new and innovative ways is key to raising awareness of plant conservation issues. One example is the increasing popularity of citizen-science projects focused around plant monitoring in changing climates (see Box: Project BudBurst).



Timothy Walker

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

Albert Einstein



Brent Stirton / Getty Images/ WWF-UK

Project BudBurst

Project BudBurst, initiated in 2007 by Chicago Botanic Garden, has grown into a network of people across the United States who monitor plants as the seasons change. The project has become a national field campaign designed to engage the public in the collection of important ecological data related to plants. Project BudBurst participants make careful observations of plant events, such as leafing, flowering, and fruiting. The data are collected in a consistent manner across the country so that scientists can learn more about the responsiveness of individual plant species to changes in climate locally, regionally, and nationally. Thousands of people from 50 states across the US participate in the project.



Juan Villa



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