

Indigenous traditional knowledge should be given proper emphasis in Intellectual Property system: CMFRI webinar experts

Kochi: The Intellectual Property (IP) system needs to be strengthened to fully recognise indigenous people's ownership in their traditional knowledge, according to a webinar conducted by the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). The webinar underscored the role of intellectual property on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 concerning genetic resources and their impact on developing countries.

It highlighted the risks of biopiracy, where genetic resources are exploited without consent or benefit-sharing agreements, leading to the marginalisation of indigenous communities and exacerbating inequalities. Organised by the Institute Technology Management Unit of CMFRI, the webinar focussed on SDG Goal 2 target 2.5 and the importance of retaining the genetic diversity in the context of food security.

“Developing countries, rich in biodiversity and traditional knowledge, often face challenges in benefitting from their genetic resources due to asymmetrical power dynamics and inadequate legal frameworks”, said Dr Kavitha Chalakkal, Assistant Professor at the Inter University Centre for IPR Studies of the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), while speaking at the session. Indigenous people and local communities have a long history of managing genetic resources which are essential to sustain their livelihood. About 75% of the world's population relies upon largely on plant-based traditional treatments for primary healthcare.

In this case, indigenous people, including smallholders, fisherfolk and forest dwellers, should be given fair share in the economic, medical or social benefits earned by the use of their traditional knowledge or practices”, said Dr Chalakkal. She also said that special attention is needed to ensure an inclusive and equitable IPR regime that respects the rights of developing countries and indigenous peoples.

CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan presided over the session. “Utilising intellectual property frameworks effectively allows us to unlock the full potential of innovation, addressing complex global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and healthcare access”, he said. Strategies for enhancing access to genetic resources while ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements were discussed in the webinar. Dr Kajal Chakraborty and Dr Saima Rehman also spoke at the session.