

## CORRESPONDENCE

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mayhem on healthcare caused by such branding.

Faulty dispensing due to the confusing brand names can lead to therapeutic failure or even cause death of a patient. In the United States, it has been estimated that look-alike and sound-alike drug names are responsible for approximately 25% of medication errors<sup>1</sup>. In spite of qualified dispensers, medication errors are large in number in the United States. So one can imagine the status in our country, where dispensing of medicines is done by unqualified personnel many-a-time.

Avoiding confusion by phonetic brands is not a difficult task if adequate care is taken while naming the brands, prescribing and dispensing. Pharmaceutical companies must make an unselfish effort to give a distinct brand name. Physicians

must be careful with their handwriting. It would be appropriate if they can mention the brand name of the drug in capitals and the generic name within parentheses. Chemists and druggists should always refer back to the physician in case of any doubt and should update their knowledge about new brands introduced in the market. It is surprising to know that it is not mandatory to get approval for and register brand names with any central authority in India and there are no legal restrictions on use of old established brand names by firms even after some ingredients are altered<sup>2</sup>. Drugs Controller General, India (DCGI) should take an initiative to set-up a central authority to monitor registration of trade names and create a database of the brand names which should be updated on a regular basis.

1. Edwards, L. and Roden, D. M., In *The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics* (eds Hardman, J. G., Limbird, L. E. and Gilman, A. G.), McGraw-Hill, New York, 2001, 10th edn, pp. 1903–1915.
  2. <http://www.indlawnews.com/3F3F6954E40D8DC880B7583F349B7E20>.
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## Biodiversity loss linked to poverty

The responsibility of mankind for future generations is to leave a world rich in biodiversity, filled with plants, animals, and ecosystem processes on which all living things depend. Unfortunately threats to biodiversity are high, caused by detrimental human activities across the globe. The pressures from urbanization, mass tourism and intensive agriculture have pushed more and more native species towards extinction. One by one, the building blocks of entire ecosystems are disappearing. The 2006 *IUCN Red List* shows that the number of threatened plant species is increasing gradually (<http://www.iucnredlist.org>). The number of threatened plants is 8390, out of which 247 plants are found at different biodiversity hotspots of India. The loss of species is an indication of the degraded state

of our planet. In my opinion, poverty is the root cause of biodiversity loss. Nature conservation programmes can never be successful if poverty plagues the country.

Poor people, especially those living in areas with low agricultural productivity, rely heavily and directly on genetic species and ecosystem biodiversity to support their livelihoods. Poor farmers are not capable of investing in farm improvements to increase yields sustainably. Low farm productivity leads to depletion of soil and water resources, and forces farmers to utilize additional land that serves as wildlife habitat. Thus lack of alternative income drives them to over-exploit natural resources. This overuse of biodiversity cannot be reduced unless efforts are clearly linked to increasing food security for large and growing low-income, food-

insecure populations. Efforts should be made to mobilize and support local people to conserve areas of high biodiversity, and thereby improve the natural resource assets of rural populations. By engaging local people to conserve biodiversity that are critically important to their livelihoods, a broad-based, long-term strategy can be formulated for conservation of globally threatened biodiversity.

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## Plight of botany practicals in universities

Higher education in science, particularly in botany, cannot be accomplished without sound practical knowledge. Teaching theoretical aspects is one thing but creating appreciation in the pupil's mind towards the subject can only be done by

practical work. The scenario of botany practicals in Indian universities is very grim and worth attending to.

Deterioration starts early at 10 + 2 level itself as suggested by Paliwal<sup>1</sup>; lack of interest towards practicals persists in

students from school itself, which they carry on when they come to higher education. It becomes difficult for disinterested and untrained students to sustain rigorous practicals at the undergraduate level. Further, in-depth knowledge and