

Livelihood for the Mothers of Endosulfan affected children of Kasaragod

During 1976- 2000, the Plantation Corporation of Kerala aeri ally sprayed endosulfan, a persistent organic pollutant (POP) over an area of about 12000 acres in nine villages in Kasaragod district to eradicate tea mosquitoes in the cashew plantations. More than 3000 people living near, downstream and downwind of the estate were affected by debilitating rare diseases like mental retardation, cerebral palsy, cancer etc. Later the pesticide was banned in 2000. Studies conducted after the ban of the pesticide show significantly higher concentration of endosulfan products in environmental media like water, soil and lake sediments and human blood, even in a village 25 km away from the sprayed area. Even today, the issues caused by the pesticide didn't have come to an end. The endosulfan families were leading a tragic life. Every family in the affected area had an endosulfan affected kid in their homes. All the affected ones were from financially below average families and finding a livelihood was such a huge issue for them. By the launch of Buds Schools, Kudumbashree made a significant intervention for the mental growth of such children. Even then, finding a livelihood for the families of them was a question. Kudumbashree came up with a solution by starting livelihood centres for the mothers of the endosulfan affected kids. Situated near to the Buds Schools/BRC, Kudumbashree Mission has now started livelihood centres for the Mothers of Endosulfan affected kids of Kasaragod. Let's have a look into interventions of Kudumbashree Kasaragod District Mission in detail!

Endosulfan

Endosulfan is an off-patent organo chlorine insecticide and acaricide that is being phased out globally. Endosulfan became a highly controversial agrichemical due to its acute toxicity, potential for bioaccumulation, and role as an endocrine disruptor. Because of its threats to human health and the environment, a global ban on the manufacture and use of endosulfan was negotiated under the Stockholm Convention in April 2011. The ban has taken effect in mid-2012, with certain uses exempted for five additional years. More than 80 countries, including the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and several West African nations, the United States, Brazil, and Canada had already banned it or announced phase-outs by the time the Stockholm Convention ban was agreed upon. It is still used extensively in India, China, and few other countries. It is produced by Makhteshim Agan and several manufacturers in India and China. Although, the Supreme Court had, by an order dated 13 May 2011, put a ban on the production and sale of endosulfan in India till further orders.

Kasaragod and Endosulfan

During 1976-2000, the Plantation Corporation of Kerala aeri ally sprayed endosulfan, a persistent organic pollutant (POP) over an area of about 12000 acres in nine villages in Kasaragod district to eradicate tea mosquitoes in the cashew plantations. The people living inside the plantations and downwind and downstream of the experiment were exposed to this hazardous chemical for 25 years. More than 3000 people living near, downstream and downwind of the

estate were affected by debilitating rare diseases like mental retardation, cerebral palsy, cancer etc.

Studies conducted after the ban of the pesticide show significantly higher concentration of endosulfan products in environmental media like water, soil and lake sediments and human blood, even in a village 25 km away from the sprayed area. In response to the peoples' agitation, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) mandated the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) to investigate the issue in 2001. NIOH observed that "aerial exposure" to endosulfan was responsible for delay in sexual maturity among the adolescents.

The government of Kerala banned Endosulfan in Kerala in 2001. Aerial spraying of endosulfan has been banned since 2000. The claim for compensation by the victims has not been settled so far. The state government has been providing some monetary relief, out of budgetary allocation. A public interest litigation seeking a final decision on the compensation and free medical treatment of the affected people is pending in the High Court of Kerala.

This Persistent Organic Pollutant (POP) is still being applied widely India and is also available in Kerala. Chronic exposure through water and food appears to be the major pathway of getting affected by the persistent organic pollutant. The exposed people may be living very far away from the scene of spray. National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) study found endosulfan in soil samples of a village, some 25 km away from the sprayed village. The mode of transport in this case was few first order streams that originated from the sprayed village.

The pesticide hit the plants and animals of the area besides causing endless human sufferings. The area showed a decline in plant diversity between 40 and 70

per cent, particularly for native species, compared to the natural habitat. Fishes were the worst hit. In general, the area, particularly those close to the forests were rich in wildlife, birds and butterflies as reported by the local communities. A large number of wildlife, including, Nilgiri langur, tiger, jackal, wild boar, Elephants, jungle cat, mouse deer, mongoose, squirrels, flying fox, black naped hare, sparrow, parakeets, crows, frogs, honey bees, snails were present in the Enmakaje panchayat. It could be said that everything else, except the human beings, disappeared during the spray. Death of fishes, frogs, and snakes were noted in the very first year of the spray itself. Abnormalities and deformities were recorded in cattle. Animals such as jackal, porcupine, wild boar, civet cats, and bats, which were once common in the area, completely disappeared during the spray. Dead snakes, squirrels, hares, peacocks, crows were found in the cashew plantations and adjacent areas during the period of spray. However, there are signs of their return during the last two to three years; that is, five to six years after stopping the aerial spray.

Kudumbashree's Interventions

Even after years, the issues caused by the spraying of this persistent organic pollutant didn't come to an end. The families of the affected children had been leading a miserable life till then. Most of them from below average families and life became too difficult for them as they were unable to leave their children alone even for some time.

By the launch of BUDS Schools, the children were offered special care and attention. Kudumbashree is ensuring special care for the endosulfan affected kids.

Livelihood for Mothers of Endosulfan affected Kids

Not only for the welfare of the affected kids, but also to support the families, Kudumbashree Mission of Kasaragod associating with Malayala Manorama had launched livelihood centres for finding livelihood for the Endosulfan affected families at Kasaragod. The livelihood centres was inaugurated by Dr K.T Jaleel, Minister, Local self Government Department, Government of Kerala on 10 March 2018. The programme is named as 'Snehathanal' which means shade of love.

Minister inaugurated the programme by presenting the umbrellas and cloth bags made by the mothers of the endosulfan affected children to the public. The livelihood centres set up at Chirappuram of Neeleshwaram Municipality and Community Hall of Enmakaje Panchayath has already started functioning.

The mothers of the endosulfan affected children would make cloth bags and umbrellas and thereby find their livelihood of their own. The livelihood centres are located near the BUDS Schools/ Buds Rehabilitation Centres, which would enable them to make a livelihood while waiting for their children outside their schools. Mothers from Neeleshwaram and Enmakaje were selected for the same. 18 mothers from Neeleshwaram and 15 mothers from Enmakaje were given training for making umbrellas and cloth bags.

The mothers had already received a work order for making 1000 umbrellas for Kerala State Financial Enterprises (KSFE) out of which the making of 700 pieces had already been completed. The rest would be completed in no time. For these mothers, while waiting for their kids, they are offered an opportunity to find some livelihood while waiting outside the schools for their children. It is also planned to start such livelihood centres will be launched in every districts along with the BUDS institutions which would thereby rehabilitate them.

By launching such programmes for the welfare, Kudumbashree is being a new ray of hope for the mothers of the endosulfan affected families. The intervention made by the District Mission of Kasaragod is indeed a timely and compassionate one!