

**NOTES ON VISIT OF UNICEF-KSDMA TEAM TO KAVALAPPARA AND PUTHUMALA  
ON 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019**

The following were the team members who visited Kavalappara and Puthumala

1. Dr. K.B.Valsala Kumari, Consultant, DRR, UNICEF
2. Mr. Pradeep G S, Hazard Analyst, KSDMA
3. Dr.Pratheesh C Mammen, Project Coordinator, KSDMA-UNICEF partnership

The team visited Kavalappara landslide area of Nilambur first. It coincided with the visit of Sri M A Yusuff Ali to Kavalappara. There was a crowd of women and men waiting to receive him. We reached there as soon after he left. Therefore we could interact with the crowd that gathered there. Apparently Sri Yusuff Ali had promised to build 20 houses for those affected by landslides under Rebuild Nilambur project. People were of the view that giving money to Rebuild Nilambur will not ensure that the genuinely affected people of Kavalappara will become the beneficiaries. What they wanted was a direct transfer of ₹10 Lakhs directly to their bank account or to the potential sellers of land that these people have identified (Attention: Rebuild Kerala Initiative). They have complained that apart from the ex-gratia payment of ₹10000 they have not received any benefit from Government. There was one lady, Sharada who complained that she had already left Kavalappara prior to incident when she saw turbulent water and restless animals. But she received only ₹3000/-.





Rajesh Dominic who is residing in Kavalappara and who is a witness to the landslide and attendant tragedy informed us that there were indications of impending landslide. The cattle became very restless and started crying loudly, the dogs were also howling severely, turbulent water with small pieces of debris started rolling gradually. These sights made Rajesh un-tether his five cows and all ran to safer places. There were around thirty dogs in Kavalappara; after the landslides only one dead body of dog was recovered. All other dogs rushed to safe havens and all of them returned after the tragic incidents. This indicates that animals have better sensitivity to an impending geological event like landslides and humans have to get cue from them. It also informs us that humans have to be vigilant to minor changes in nature like vibrations of the earth, small landslips, intense rainfall and also the behaviour of animals. Observing and understanding these forewarnings of nature can save the lives of human beings and animals. The local people informed us that prior to the deluge of 2018, a landowner had brought a hitachi, to plant rubber saplings and the slope of the hill was disturbed and earth was destabilised. Kavalappara appears to be at more than 50-60 degrees slope.



We then visited a nearby Bhoodanam-Kavalappara anganwadi no 106. There were about 12 children, there were having noon meal when we visited the children. This was an erstwhile tribal balawadi now converted to anaganwadi. It is located at the foot hills of Kavalappara. There is no proper exit route from this anganwadi to the main road. A very narrow exit connects to the main road. According to a parent they are living in constant fear of another landslide. There is a severe scarcity of drinking water although they have a toilet. Currently they are bringing water from outside from other sources and storing it in a tank. Since the anganwadi is not safe, we recommend shifting of this anganwadi to a safer location ( Action : Department of Women and Child).



Our next visit was to Chembra colony. On our way we found relics of a concrete walkway across the river( Punnappuzha) at Shanthigaramam and now there is a makeshift bridge made of wood and rope. We were also shown innumerable scars of landslides close to this location. A local resident said that they have surveyed the landslides and there are about 381 visible minor landslides and mud slips.



Chembra colony is occupied by tribes known as Kattunaikkars. There are 36 families in the colony. We were told by Raghu, the teacher of the alternative school there, that the children of the colony are not attending schools. There are 15 drop outs from the school; out of this five of them are girls. So we requested the teacher to call the parents over to the alternative school. Two parents, two youngsters and four dropout children also gathered. Children said that they had dropped out because they had no

money to go to their residential schools when the teacher reminded that a Tribal Department vehicle had been arranged for transporting them to schools and parents refused to send the children in that vehicle, one of the mothers stated very vehemently that she was sure that there was no safety and security for their children in that vehicle. One version for the reasons for drop out was , parents were reluctant to send their children to schools fearing that the parents may not be alive when the children returned. This fear was transmitted to the children also and therefore psycho social support may be required to persuade the children to go back to school. We told them that we will explore the possibilities of arranging counsellors for a period of one month. The community will provide free accommodation.





There is a need for sustainable livelihood for the residents of Chembra colony. Now they find only seasonal livelihood like collecting minor forest produce like honey. The amount that Kattunaickars get when they collect and bring honey is ₹300/ kg where as in the market it is sold for ₹1500/- per kg. Thus there is great exploitation of the Kattunaickars who do not have bargaining power. As part of providing sustainable livelihood, we recommend marketing facilities so that they can either directly market the minor forest produce or the ST department itself can directly purchase it at a fair price to be fixed by the Department. Some of the youth of the colony expressed the desire to get buffalo calves as a means of sustainable livelihood. They will fatten the buffalo calf and earn a profit out of it. Apparently this is a very profitable business venture. The ST development department may kindly consider giving buffalo calves to the Kattunaickars in Chembra colony (Action: ST Development Department)

We went on to visit the Higher Secondary School at Edakkara. This school was very badly affected in the last flood. Water level had risen two feet above the first floor. The library was completely damaged. No books could be retrieved from the mud. They managed to rebuild better the library with larger number of books using public contribution. The laboratory equipment were badly affected; bottles, and test tubes were also destroyed. But they have made the lab operational although at a reduced level. Chemicals stored in an adjoining room were not damaged since they were stored in a well enclosed room. The computer lab was very badly affected. Six projectors and about seven UPS were all found lying on the floor in a damaged condition. Although the computers were damaged during their guarantee period, Kites have informed the school that they cannot replace them without insurance. The computer lab is not functional now. The emergency need of the school as expressed by the principal and staff is to make the computer lab operational. (Action: Education Department).





On day 2 we met Mr & Mrs Augustine who were the residents of Puthumala in Wayand. They stated that they have lost 8 acres of land with Coffee, Cardamom and Arecanut. They opined that the proposed compensation ( 5 cents of land with a house in it at Kalladi) is too inadequate to make good the loss that they sustained. We then proceeded to Puthumala where a massive landslide occurred which claimed 17 lives; 5 bodies are yet to be recovered. This includes Mr.Avaran and Mr.Aboobacker who were inside their car which was washed away by the flooded river. The main reason for the landslide appears to be that the primary water channels have been obstructed due to construction activities. The land use patterns were detrimental to the stability of landmasses . Exfoliation of rocks were also visible. Initially the water flow was through a culvert and it was a small rivulet, when the landslide occurred coupled with heavy raining the river found its own room bringing along with it huge boulders and debris from uphill.





We met Mr Chandran, the ward member who was full of voluntary spirit . Had it not been for his timely action (i.e. announcing an impending danger and helping the local residents to evacuate quickly) the number of fatalities would have been much higher. Many people have deserted their homes and the vicinity looks more like a ghost town.

According to Mr.Chandran and others, on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2019, the process of landslide had started to happen. Since it was raining heavily and continuously for three days ( In the words of Mr. Chandran, “the precipitation that normally happens within a period of 6 months, happened within a small period of three days”) mud and small particles of rock started rolling down the hill and one huge boulder came and fell on the back side of one of the houses. The house owner rang up ward member Mr. Chandran past midnight and he rushed to the spot to see the condition of the house. The ward member realised that it was no more safe for people to stay back in their houses. Mr.Chandran went from house to house announcing the dangers of continuing there and managed to convince them to move out to a school building at Kashmir. On seeing the water level rise up and at the request of the people, they were shifted again to the forest building at Mundakkai. The anganawadi that is functioning in Puthumala was relocated to Kashmir but due to fear of repetition of landslide, parents do not send their children to that Anganwadi. People have been relocated to various places and the panchayath has arranged monthly rent of ₹3000 per family through sponsors.

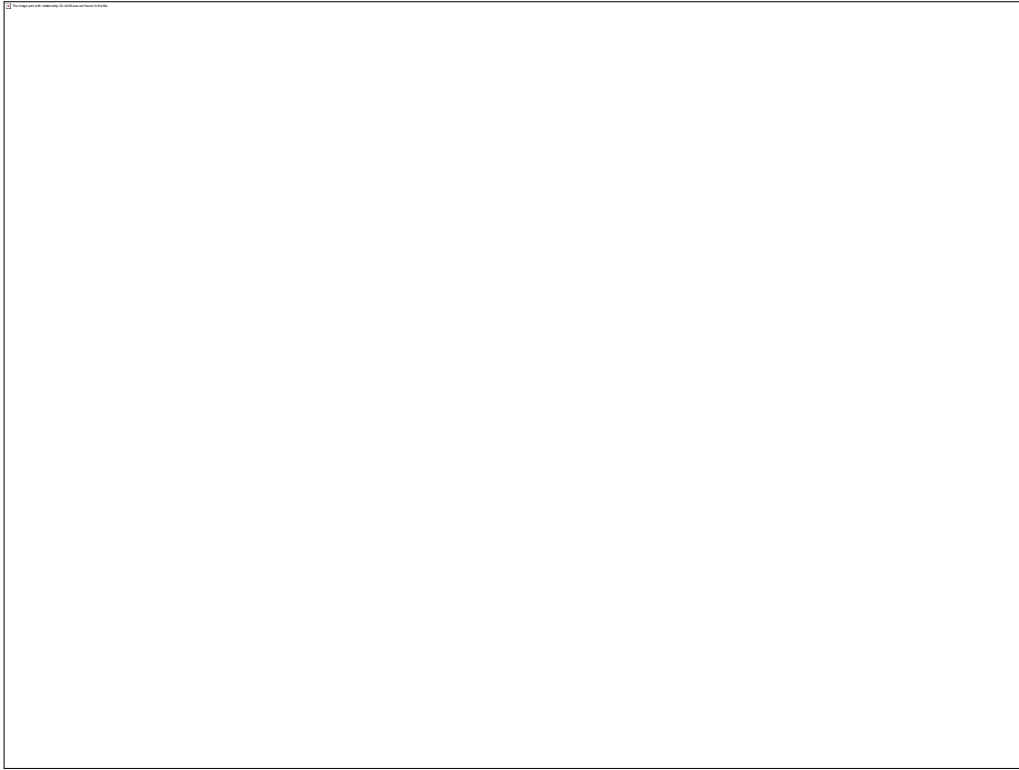




Our next visit was to Varambetta School in the vicinity of Banasurasagar dam. This was a school which was repeatedly affected in 2018 and 2019 by floods. The school is situated by the side of Panamaram river which is a tributary of Kabani river. When the water level in the dam reaches a critical level water is usually released from the dam when it rushes into the school compound and inundates the school building. The building that houses the assembly hall was completely damaged and it is currently standing in a precarious condition. We were told by the PTA president that KIFB has given administrative sanction to the tune of ₹1 crore for the reconstruction of the building but they have not yet received the funds.

It is a coincidence that the day we reached Wayanad, there were huge agitations by students and youth of several political parties against the death of a girl by name

Shehla Sherin due to snake bite inside the classroom. There was a big hole in the floor and this was not repaired and this turned out to be a big disaster claiming the life of an innocent girl child.





We make the following recommendations based on this field experience

1. At the policy level, there is an urgent need to frame a comprehensive policy regarding land use and its enforcement very strictly.
2. When a disaster happens, special focus should be given to children specially by way of providing timely psycho social support through trained counsellors.
3. We need to train people to observe cues from nature for impending disasters and take quick action to reduce the impact of those disasters. These cues from nature for various disasters can be documented in our training materials.
4. We recommend strongly that a memorial wall be erected at the site of the tragedies at Puthumala and Kavalappara with the names of all people who have lost their lives in the recent flood engraved on it. We insist on this because future generations will be reminded of the disaster that happened due to anthropogenic interferences and will be persuaded to take precautionary measures to prevent repetition of disasters and reduce risks.