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## **CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE UNIDENTIFIED (CKDU) IN SRI LANKA: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Starting in the mid 1990s, Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown etiology (CKDu) was discovered among the rice paddy farmers in the North Central Province (NCP) of Sri Lanka in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Districts. The disease has now spread to neighboring districts in the North Western, Eastern, and Uva as well as the Central and Northern Provinces. The CKDu prevalent area covers approximately 17,000 km with a predominantly rural population of 2.5 million. Despite the disease's serious impact and the available response mechanisms the success rate of positive response is still not satisfactory. Therefore this study was conducted with the objective of investigating the responses, gaps and way forward in economic, environmental, socio-legal perspectives with the intention of providing an integrated solution to the issue. Specific objectives were to explore and analyse the processes and measures so far adopted by the national government to handle the issue, to identify the village level organisations and support groups, their capacity, their local knowledge and views in developing a solution to the CKDu issue, to critically analyse the response made by the agro-chemical companies, the legal environment in which they operate and how to establish their responsibilities and accountability in the proposed solution. Qualitative research methods were used to conduct field studies. Semi structured and open-ended question-based interviews were carried out to obtain data. A village Padaviya was selected as the representative sample of the North Central Province and key informant discussions were held with leaders of farmer organisations, Chief Incumbents of the Buddhist temples, School Principals, Grama Niladari, and Medical Officer of Health in Padaviya Hospital were interviewed at village level. The Provincial Director of Health was also interviewed at provincial level. The agro chemical company executives, Registrar of Pesticides, Officers of the Presidential Task Force, environmentalists, and leading lawyers were interviewed in Colombo. According to the findings, the lack of a coordinated effort by the Government authorities to handle the issue in the past (until the Presidential Task Force (PTF) was established in 2015) was very apparent. The approaches made by different ministries were top down and not much concern given to include the views and suggestions of village level organizations. The interventions made in making people aware of the disease and educating people as to proper use of agro chemicals, controlling and banning certain suspected agro chemicals, screening people for early detection have been somewhat successful. However, the hospital facilities, increasing doctors and para medics have been a slow progress. Despite the fact that numerous institutions conducted research on CKDu lack of a standardized procedure posed a debacle in the acceptance. Psycho-social support for patients, families are minimal, and as a result, the families stricken with CKDu are driven to despair. The stigma of the disease had created a social problem among the villages. There were no concerted attempts to harness the available social capital in the villages. Income of farmer families with CKDu is reduced, and the support given by the Government to such families is very inadequate. Although there are developments in supplying clean water to the affected areas, much needs to be done to solve the water issue. Organic agriculture has been proposed to minimize the agro chemical contamination but the ground level proof of organic agriculture and its benefits are lacking and farmers are reluctant to take up to organic agriculture. Huge amounts of money are estimated to improve hospitals, increase the number of doctors and Para medics, dialysis units, water schemes, awareness programs, screening programs etc and finding such funds would be challenging when the current budgetary constraints are considered. Based on these findings recommendations have been provided in the paper to address the aforesaid issues. As an overarching general recommendation the author proposes an integral approach by all the line ministries concerned with CKDu and implemented and monitored by a high level national committee.

**Keywords:** CKDu, Organic agriculture, integrated response