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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

Alert ID	Publication Date	Reporting Date	Place Name	News Source/Publication Language
6130	30.03.2021	31.03.2021	Gariaband Chhattisgarh	www.theprint.in/English <a href="https://theprint.in/india/one-chhattisgarh-village-has-130-kidney-disease-deaths-in-15-yrs-no-one-knows-the-cause/629393/">https://theprint.in/india/one-chhattisgarh-village-has-130-kidney-disease-deaths-in-15-yrs-no-one-knows-the-cause/629393/</a>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>One Chhattisgarh village has 130 kidney disease deaths in 15 yrs. No one knows the cause</b>			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU-Gariaband, SSU-Chhattisgarh			

Over the last 15 years, Supebeda village in Gariaband district of Chhattisgarh has reported 130 deaths due to chronic kidney disease (CKD). In fact, in about 80 per cent of the households in this village of 1,800 people, residents are undergoing treatment for one or more types of kidney diseases. But Supebeda is not alone — nine or ten other villages in the vicinity of the Deobhog diamond mine near the Odisha border, with a combined population of 10,000-15,000, have been reporting kidney diseases for the last decade and a half. But the state government says despite continuous efforts to trace the root cause of the disease, no plausible reason has been found.

The only reason why Supebeda's name is better known than the other villages is that local residents have raised their voices to attract attention to the unknown threat they face. They have repeatedly demanded that water from the nearby Tel river be diverted to them — the river flows into Odisha, and people there are not known to have reported the prevalence of CKD. But so far, not much has been done to alleviate their misery.

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**Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,  
Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India**

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## Govt awaiting report from AIIMS New Delhi & PGI Chandigarh

Chhattisgarh's Health Minister T.S. Singh Deo told ThePrint that symptoms found in the residents of Supebeda and the other villages definitely match those of CKD, but "no single concrete cause" has come to the fore. "The state government has urged experts from AIIMS, New Delhi, and PGIMER, Chandigarh, for a detailed study on the higher prevalence of CKD in Supebeda and other areas. Any plausible cause of the disease can be revealed only after experts submit their reports," Singh Deo said.

"Some water and soil samples from Supebeda were tested in a lab, which revealed the presence of a higher concentration of heavy metals in the water. But that cannot be considered as the primary cause of CKD," he insisted.

The minister added that genetics, the presence of heavy metals in drinking water, consumption of spurious liquor and excessive use of painkillers have so far emerged as possible causes of CKD.

"The experts have also informed us about some unknown causes which are being further studied. We are still waiting for their final report. Last year, the report was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic," he said. "The experts see the patients directly and guide the state government on the mode of treatment and facilities needed."

Before AIIMS New Delhi and PGI Chandigarh, the matter was studied by four institutions in October 2020 — Raipur's AIIMS, Ramakrishna Care Hospital and Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, and New Delhi's George Institute for Global Health. Their report stated that the CKD patients from these villages were found to have higher presence of heavy metals like arsenic, cadmium, mercury and lead in their system.

The report, published by the International Society of Nephrology under the title 'CKD of Unknown Origin in Supebeda, Chhattisgarh, India', stated that urine tests of 10 patients also revealed presence of high amounts of chromium, manganese and nickel. "But the presence of these heavy metals in urine samples cannot be marked as the primary factor of kidney disease. For this reason, serum testing will also be necessary," the report had noted, having examined 12 patients in detail.

"There is a need for further detailed study to determine the actual case-load of CKD, and gather more information about causes in this village and nearby areas," it had stated, adding that genetic history could be a probable cause of kidney disease.

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## Villagers' tales of woe

Trilochan Sonwani, a Supebeda resident whose father died due to CKD, accused the state government of not taking any concrete measures to address the situation, despite the villagers' fight for the cause.

Sonwani and other villagers told ThePrint that to them, the reason for the CKD was clear — the presence of a higher concentration of heavy metals in the water in the borewells. "There will be hardly any household left in Supebeda where either there are no kidney patients or there has not been any death due to this disease in the last decade and a half, since the first death of 45-year-old Nilambar Netam was reported," said Sonwani.

"Till 2016, the villagers used to treat these deaths as normal occurrences, but in May 2017, things turned complicated when as many as 23 villagers died within a month, including persons as young as 22-23 years old," he said.

"We made queries to hospitals in Bhopalpatnam (Chhattisgarh) and Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), where those patients were being treated. They told us every one of them had died of kidney failure. Doctors providing treatment there said the groundwater in the village had been contaminated, and the presence of heavy metals was too high," Sonwani added.

Kuber Andil, a 22-year-old from Supebeda who lost his father and elder brother to CKD, said: "My father passed away 6-7 years ago, and then I also lost my elder brother in 2018. We saw both of them battling the disease and suffering. Now my mother and I...live under constant fear and keep wondering when it will be our turn to catch the disease."

He continued: "Right now, the condition of three patients from the village is extremely critical. They are undergoing treatment in Visakhapatnam. But the overall number of people suffering from kidney disease in Supebeda and the other villages is too high. Many government officials have come to visit here, but till now no concrete reason has been discovered for this epidemic spreading in the village. Most doctors treating the villagers have pointed to water contamination."

Mahendra Mathra, sarpanch of Supebeda, also lost his father to kidney failure in 2015. "According to the 2011 Census, 80 per cent of the 223 families living in the village had kidney patients. Since the announcement of the Covid-19 lockdown on 24 March 2020, 19 people have died in the Supebeda village alone, which is not mentioned even in the government records. Apart from this, there have been a

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number of deaths in other villages too, but people there try to conceal them," Mathra claimed.

"People were dying here for many years, but no one knew anything specific about them. The matter got highlighted only in 2015-16, after various media reports came to light. All the experts or government officials who came here have blamed the contaminated water, but no action has been taken to rectify this problem. The villagers are forced to drink the same contaminated water," he added.

### **'Just give us river water'**

Supebeda residents say CKD has become a social curse for their entire area too. Relatives and people from other villages have turned their backs on these residents. About 50 young men and women between 20 and 23 years of age are waiting for marriage proposals, but they have received none, according to Andil.

Sarpanch Mathra said: "It feels awful when even our relatives refuse to drink water offered at our homes. People visiting from outside bring their own drinking water. We are also facing social and economic harassment, yet we are forced to drink this (borewell) water."

The villagers have been demanding for several years that they should be provided water from the nearby Tel river that flows into Odisha, but the administration has not been able to deliver on this.

About a year ago, some work was being done in this direction under the central Nal Se Jal scheme, but that too has stopped now.

"The government shut down 23 out of the 28 bore wells in Supebeda. However, no alternative source of water was provided. So, now, we are getting meagre amounts of drinking water. For several years, there has been a demand to connect Supebeda and other villages to the Tel river. Changing the source of water can save about 15,000 people from disease and death," Sonwani added.

Mathra pointed out: "Around 70 per cent of the population of Kalahandi district of Odisha living on the other side of the river drinks the water of the Tel river. People are not facing any kidney disease problems on that side."

Anupam Ashish Toppo, the sub-divisional magistrate of Deobhog, the tehsil these villages come under, said work to fulfil this demand is set to begin soon.

"A special project to channelise Tel river water for Supebeda and 9-10 other villages in the cluster has been finalised by the public health engineering department. Tendering and other formalities will be completed soon, so that work can start early," Toppo said.

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“Hopefully, villagers will start getting drinking river water within a year,” he added.

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