

Traditional Medicine as a tool for sustainable development: a practical application during Tsunami relief in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India.

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The Alma Ata Declaration highlighted a new social paradigm for health care giving the due importance to Traditional Medicine as a significative tool to reach the goal of Health for All. We cannot forget the great rule of the traditional knowledge of indigenous and rural communities and Ethnobotany and Ethnopharmacology need to be at the service of local communities to document the efficacy of indigenous remedies.

It is believed that only with a network strategy among non governmental organisations, community based organisations and universities this dream can become a reality.

In Tamil Nadu, in Southern India, the onlus Magia Verde is practically involved in the rural areas in revitalising local health traditions through a network with other non governmental organisations, schools and cultural associations in India and Italy. We are giving more importance to prevention by promoting ethnic food and kitchen herbal gardens of useful plants following communities needs and giving importance to their own cosmology, keeping in mind the popular belief 'food is medicine and medicine is food'.

The project is replicated as a tool to help the tsunami affected people of Kanyakumari district with the sponsor of Regione Toscana, Coordinamento provinciale of Pistoia and Traditional Medicine Department of COE, Italy. According to Siddha Medicine, the traditional medical knowledge of Tamil Nadu, seven free medical camps have been established to distribute medicines to about 1270 patients from five different areas of Kanyakumari district. Five eminent herbal doctors manage the camps, coordinated by a local NGO, NARDEP, that is also performing documentation on the efficacy of the camps.

Temporaries diseases like skin diseases, cold diseases and psychosomatic diseases due to the fear and depression caused by tsunami were cured on most cases. The activity economically uplifts about 100 women who belong to the Federation Amudha Surabi as they are producing the herbal medicines that are distributed during the camps. The women got a grant from the Indian government to build a semi-processing unit to improve their business. In the main time the local healers involved in the programme improved their social status and their knowledge got the precious opportunity to be documented and revitalised. Patients are very enthusiastic and ask to organise a camp for month during the coming year. Our programme shows how the local traditional knowledge can be very useful even to face calamities like tsunami. It also states that documentation can not go alone but have to be integrated on rehabilitation activities benefiting the same communities. Using the tool of Siddha medicine health conditions and economical conditions of affected communities start to get some improvement. At the same time, through the awareness campaign and kitchen herbal garden, the environmental conditions and the quality of life of the selected area will be hopefully improved.