

Hazardous Sugar Mills Waste Destroying the Coast of Sindh

The deltaic districts on the 350-kilometer long coast of Sindh province have inherited a rich biodiversity, marine and inland ecology. Natural lakes there have been declared Ramsar sites, which being natural habitats of wildlife species, including birds also provide sources of living to the local communities. These waters used to attract flocks of local and migratory waterfowls every year to stay there during the winter season. The area used to be famous for agricultural crops like paddy, sugarcane, vegetables and cotton. Natural green pastures along the wide lakes with livestock always contributed more to the national exchequer through producing dairy products.

But for the last several years the successive governments planned to bring 'sugar revolution' that has put the entire ecology, world-fame Ramsar sites and wetlands at stake. The sufferers include both the ecology and the communities, like fishers, farmers and livestock holders. This development has resulted in degradation of internationally significant wetlands, lagoons, green pastures and the coastland, putting hundreds of people vulnerable to face hardships, displacement and destructions.

The assessments carried out by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum on the subject matter have focused on the disastrous impacts of sugar mills on fishermen, growers and herdsman, who derive their livelihood from these areas, lakes and green pastures. The assessments report that the Karachi's fishermen are particularly disturbed by the waste because their livelihood entails continuous contact with the polluted marine water.

There are over 32 sugar mills in the Sindh province. These sugar mills have grown old and need to be upgraded from environmental point of view. Out of 32, about 17 sugar mills are located in Badin, Tando Mohammed Khan and Mirpurkhas districts and have distillery units, of which three exist in Badin and Thatta. These units produce hundreds of liters of poisonous waste daily, violating several environment laws, the report adds. The discharge ponds near the mills are a major cause of underground water pollution affecting the people living in neighboring villages. Moreover, the water in wells of the area has turned unfit for drinking and domestic use. The distillery units' drainage system spreads to more than 200 kilometers in the Badin district, which discharges the same into the sea.

The hazardous waste affects Nareri Lagoon Lake, a recognized Ramsar site along with 25 other small fresh water lakes. There are around 800 villages near these poisonous drainages and the residents who depend on cultivation, livestock and fishing have been the main victims of this

toxic waste. Furthermore, due to the increasing pollution, the area's wildlife, birds and cattle have suffered a significant drop in population because of the poisonous water, which immediately kills these animals and birds. As a result of this, the area people are finding it hard to sustain their livelihoods.

The PFF demands that the higher authorities must ensure the implementation of environment laws including; Certification of Environmental Laboratories Regulations, 2000, Revised National Environmental Quality Standards, 2000, Provincial Sustainable Development Fund Board Rules, 2001, Environmental Samples Rules, 2001, National Environmental Quality Standards (Self-Monitoring and Reporting by Industry) Rules, 2001, The Pollution Charge for Industry Rules, 2001

A vast majority of area people living there are unaware of adverse effects of contaminated drinking water and the effect on agricultural products when industrial effluents from open drains are used for agricultural purpose. It is common practice in the rural area of Badin that residents prefer to use drinking water from 2009-10 as if they appear to be aware of its relatively better quality.

Recommendations

- The data related to industrial impacts and degradation of environment should be compiled with community input and suggestions for action plan to avoid its impacts.
- There is need of monitoring system by the government and those ecologists who want to save ecology.
- Awareness campaign within local community is the immediate action suggested to avoid loss of life and livelihoods, as local livestock holders complained about the loss of their livestock.
- Regulatory system and institutional capacities should be strengthened to ensure effective monitoring.
- Procedural reforms are needed for implementation of environmental laws with emphasis on increased responsibility, accountability and decentralization of authority.

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