Project explores resourceful use of hyacinth

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Sudha Nambudiri | TNN | Updated: Sep 9, 2019, 8:04 IST

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KOCHI: In an attempt to convert a menace into a resource, researchers from National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) of Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, have initiated a project on empowering rural women by exploring resourceful use of water hyacinth for bioenergy production and income-generation activities at Kuttanad in Alappuzha.

Hyacinths are a threat across waterbodies in Kerala, leading to stagnation and zero bio-life in the waters as they are aquatic weeds threatening both water and environment, eradication of which is next to impossible.

"It is a perennial problem in all stagnant water bodies. At present, civic agencies spend enormous amounts for removal of water hyacinth, mostly through MNREGA scheme. Currently, it is removed from water and disposed of as waste on land. Plant gets transferred from one medium to another, where it enters the atmosphere as greenhouse gas emissions without safe removal," said Jayasree Vaidyanathan, principal investigator and scientist, NIAS.

She said there is an increasing concern in recent times as eradication of hyacinths are failing because of environmental and financial challenges which call for alternative approach. "There are a lot of proven technologies with regard to hyacinths, but somehow it is not given a productive phase. It can be used for energy production, water pollution abatement, soil reclamation and reversing ecological degradation," she said.

Jayasree said the use of water hyacinth to produce biogas, organic manure for fish and livestock feed, compost, handicrafts items and furniture have great income-generation potential, which could be carried out as small enterprise by rural community. Such projects not only provide environment-friendly cheaper energy solutions, but also are potential micro-economic options in dealing with such invasive species in an environmentally-friendly manner.

"We have been training women groups for potential income-generation activities such as mushroom cultivation, production of fish and cattle feed and handicrafts items in Kuttand for the past few months," she added.

The two-and-a-half-year project aims at providing livelihood by setting up small enterprise for rural women self-help groups in Kuttanad.

"Through awareness campaigns, we plan to make the community understand how each of them can contribute to reversal of ecological degradation and environment protection," said N C Induchoodan of Swadeshi science movement who is associated with the project along with technical support from Nagendra Prabhu, SD College, Alappuzha.

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