

Women-Lores from India's Pits

A quarterly e-newsletter



District Mineral Funds – for the Affected Women and Children

In this edition of the newsletter, we bring you stories and experiences of women and children in India's mining-affected regions to highlight their demands and the need for proper utilization of the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds.

DMF Trust funds are built into the Mines and Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act for accountability in extractives operations and for rehabilitation of ecologies and communities affected by the negative impacts of these activities.

However, mining continues to cause widespread damage to forests and water bodies that these communities depend upon, thus damaging their food security, livelihoods, and social systems. Since women and children are the most severely affected, they deserve priority under the DMF.

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Chhattisgarh State Cabinet Passes the PESA Rules, 2022

The new rules give supreme authority to the Gram Sabhas for rights over all land and forest resources and activities within the boundaries of their respective villages, particularly, the granting of prospecting licenses. A salient feature of the rules is the constitution of special sabhas for women, children and other deprived groups (Mahila Sabhas, Bal Sabhas) and specifically their role in decision-making, monitoring and review of state programmes. The Gram Sabhas are now entitled to make their own five-year plans.

Following are the highlights of the Chhattisgarh PESA rules:

Gram Sabha's power to manage minor minerals

1. Prior consent of gram sabha is compulsory for prospecting licenses, giving mining lease or auctioning. Full details of the project should be presented to the Gram Sabha by the company.
2. The first right of use of minor minerals lies with the community members for their traditional needs, before granting licenses to external agencies.
3. Gram Sabha can give suggestions on the terms of granting a mining lease. Gram sabha can report the environmental degradation and give direction to improve the conditions.
4. The peace and dispute settlement committee to take action on illegal mining activities within the boundaries of the Gram Sabha.

Special Sabha (for women and children)

1. All adult women of the village will be part of the Mahila Sabha and the chairperson will be from the Scheduled Tribe only.
2. Gram Sabha to constitute a Mahila Sabha and at least two meetings in a year to be conducted compulsorily.
3. At least one meeting in a year should be organised separately for the disabled, third gender, senior citizens and deprived groups.
4. Bal Sabha should be organised at least once a year in which boys and girls of 14 years and above can be part of this meeting.
5. The decisions made in these special sabhas should be placed before the Gram Sabha and discussed.

In the context of increasing threats being faced by Adivasis in Chhattisgarh with regard to diversion of lands and forests for largescale mining and afforestation programmes, the new PESA rules which provide immense powers to the Gram Sabhas call for state commitments in the realization of this decentralized governance. It provides a new opportunity to bring women's voices within the customary and constitutional processes of justice delivery if the Mahila Sabhas are enabled to take up the serious concerns of their forest rights, inheritance rights and monitoring the environmental violations of their natural resources.

Read the complete rules [here](#).

Ministry of Mines Passes Orders on Five-Year Perspective Plan Under DMF

The orders instruct DMFs to conduct baseline surveys in consultation with the Gram Sabhas for identifying the gaps and come out with a five-year perspective plan for the utilization of DMF funds under the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY).

Read the order [here](#).

Ministry of Mines: Call for consultation on change in calculation of ASP for metallurgical grade bauxite



Representative Image
Credits: Bishnu Sarangi from Pixabay

Supreme Court Gives Nod for Increase in Annual Iron Ore Production and Export in Karnataka

The apex court lifted the ban imposed on export of iron ore from mines of three districts in Karnataka. The top court had earlier banned such exports in 2012 to prevent large-scale environmental degradation and violation. The annual iron ore production limit has been raised from 7 MMT to 15 MMT in Chitradurga and Tumakuru districts and from 28 MMT to 35 MMT in Ballari district.

Read more on the Supreme Court ruling [here](#).

Ministry of Mines Recommends Policy for Beneficiation of Low-Grade Iron

A committee set up by the Ministry of Mines recommended upgrading at least 80 per cent of low-grade iron ore (less than 58% iron content) to high-grade ore (62% iron content). The committee also recommended penalties (fines and termination of mine lease) for failure to adhere to the directive.

Read [more](#).

Tribal and Civil Society Groups Ask for Withholding Proposed Amendments to FC Rules

The Forest Conversation Rules 2022 notified by the MoEFCC (the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) brought grave concerns amongst tribal communities and civil society groups on the impending threats to the rights of Adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers. Historically Adivasi women play a vital role in protecting their biodiversity and in practising traditional knowledge systems linked to these resources. The proposed amendments are anticipated to bring negative impacts on women's access and entitlements to forest resources. A collective representation was submitted to the Ministry by several groups highlighting these gendered impacts and the need to withhold the amendments.

Read the representation [here](#).

[Civil society experts conduct fact-finding in mining-affected districts of Chhattisgarh to assess the rice fortification programme of the state's food programme and its implications on the health of tribal communities](#)

Ministry of Mines Calls for Suggestions to Revise its PMKKKY Guidelines

The Ministry of Mines has called for input in revising its guidelines for the PMKKKY programme and the implementation of the District Mineral Funds. Since its initiation under the MMDR Act, the DMF has been a severely abused fund that has neither brought relief to the communities nor to the workers affected or to the eco-systems that have been subjected to extensive destruction by irresponsible mining operations. Civil society groups have responded to the call and submitted recommendations to the Ministry, based on the wide views and grievances shared by affected communities in small and large-scale mines across states that have been blind to illegal mining and actively passive in the several violations of the public and private sector extractive industry.

Read the recommendations [here](#).



STORIES FROM THE GROUND

The DMF objectives are stated to be for rehabilitation of mining-affected areas and complementing the programmes of different departments. The current guidelines instruct that each district prepare five-year plans in consultation with the affected Gram Sabhas and Gram Panchayats, based on which annual plans are to be rolled out. Further, it states that the role of the DMF funds and the many other mine worker welfare funds across the two Ministries of Mines and Labour, for that matter, is not to duplicate the responsibilities of the mining companies under the 'polluters pay' principles. Whereas companies complain that they pay royalties, contribute to the DMF, pay penalties on violations like the KMERC funds of the Karnataka government and also spend money under their CSR programmes for the welfare of mining areas.

On the other hand, mining-affected communities and areas continue to face serious environmental, social and economic challenges without any redress or restoration. That many of their most fundamental rights remain obstructed and violated by their natural resources being diverted legally and illegally for mining operations remains blinded.

In the current list of DMF projects, there are high-priority areas without any effective guidelines on what within these areas comprise state responsibilities on mining impacts. It is well known and reported that the DMF funds have been largely utilized for general or unrelated purposes if utilized at all. What then should be the modalities and strategies for the use of DMF funds and the identification of impacts for proper planning. What also should be the structure of the governance of these funds and accountability mechanisms which are not adequately laid out for bringing about effective public participation and decision-making of affected communities.

We present here some examples from the field from the experiences and stories of women and children across largescale, minor, illegal and abandoned mines, in order to discuss one of the high-priority areas under the DMF- Women and Children. These stories narrate the impacts on their daily quality of life, their demands and needs and how the DMF funds should be better utilized under this category and how decentralizing governance can bring more clarity to the guidelines.

So far, DMF funds are either spent on infrastructure like anganwadis and schools or on minor welfare incentives like seeds, sewing machines or SHG schemes for women. Yet, women have deeper challenges and demands in mining-affected communities. The guidelines should address these.



Community Groups Conduct Gender Impact Assessment of Bauxite and Coal Mines in Chhattisgarh

- *The Guidelines should highlight the priorities of affected women farmers*
- *Women are Farmers and Primary Actors in Adivasi Livelihoods*
- *Mining Impacts them as Farmers, Foragers, Forest Dwellers and Forest Workers*
- *Clean-up and restoration of contaminated lands and water bodies is high priority for women*

'Our kutki and urad are gone':

Adivasi women in the bauxite mining area of Surguja complain that their agriculture is severely affected due to groundwater depletion and dust pollution. In a micro-level field assessment of mining on affected women in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, 61% of the women interviewed reported direct impacts on their agriculture from mining activities. Out of the total who reported the above, 38% are already experiencing severe crop loss and low yields because of which more chemicals are now being used to increase production.

Negative impact on agricultural land due to dumping of fly ash on the roadside and farmers' lands



Respondents are complaining of changes in the taste of vegetables they grow. They say that vegetables, dals and grains like urad, rahar, kurthi and groundnuts cannot be grown since the time mining has started, as the soil texture has changed and the crops are covered with dust. In Tikarapara and Bardanpara villages of Surguja district, 52.7% have reported changes in soil colour and texture due to dust and water pollution, leading to decrease in yields. They also reported that stones strewn in their fields after mine blasts are causing damage to their crops which has forced them to reduce their cultivated area. For the women, this is a direct negative impact on their food security. So far, no assessment has been conducted or compensation received for crop failure or any land restoration work taken up.

The women complained that they had not even given their consent to the mining activities. The DMF guidelines do not recognize women as farmers whereas women's needs are primarily linked to their land-based impacts. With respect to identifying their priorities from DMF, 89.2% of women from Junapara and 61.4% from Tikarapara and Bardanpara villages stated that restoring their agriculture is their primary demand. Levelling of land, cleaning the soil to remove toxins, and cleaning the water bodies that irrigate their fields are the foremost demands of the women. Almost 95% of the respondents complained that dust pollution on their crops and houses is causing grievous loss to crops and the health of the community. There is no information available for women-related projects under the Surguja district DMF as reports are not available for the last two years.

Livelihoods without a forest:

75% of Adivasi women in Saraitola, Raigarh, reported experiencing losses of income and livelihood from the acquisition of their forest lands which are eligible under the individual forest rights (IFR). Approximately 43% of the respondents reported that their individual forest lands having pattas, was taken for mining. Women also reported that they lost livelihoods from non-timber forest products (NTFPs) like mahua, char, behra, har, peepal, bamboo, kosam, tamarind, tendu and sal leaves, drumsticks, sersowa, guava, jamun, sagwan, neem, mangoes, and many other varieties. As the forest near the village has been acquired by the company, 75% of women said they do not feel safe moving freely in the forest, the increase in traffic of mining vehicles being one of the main reasons. They reported at least a 52% decrease in the availability of NTFP and herbs they collect for food and home remedies.

- *Guidelines should focus on further decentralization of DMF from district to Gram Sabha level in fifth schedule areas.*
- *Gram Sabha's right to Environmental Audit of mining projects within their boundaries (also with reference to the new PESA Rules for Chattisgarh that include Mahila Sabhas' role in review of works)*
- *The processes, timelines and reporting modalities to be clearly spelt out in the PMKKKY Guidelines.*

Compensation and Rehabilitation of land acquired:

A total of 61.3 acres of FRA patta land and 470.9 acres of revenue land were acquired from Junapara village of Kesara panchayat and Tikarapara and Bardandpara villages of Barima panchayat in Raigarh. Compensation was partially not paid to 46 families in the three villages. The survey reveals that a total of 33 families directly lost FRA patta land out of which 24 families partially did not receive compensation. Out of 76 families whose revenue land was taken, 22 families have not received compensation so far.

For the people, it is irrelevant whether the money is given from DMF or other sources - that their land was grabbed without consent or compensation remains a loss and a violation. This is a high-priority area for the community. However, the guidelines do not indicate whether PMKKKY extends to at the least, utilization of the DMF funds for periodic review of rehabilitation, livelihoods and fulfilment of the conditions of the EIA and ESIA commitments. If Gram Sabhas especially in the Schedule Five areas where large-scale displacement for mining projects has been witnessed, were to be truly involved, these lapses and violations in the governance of mining-affected areas would be highlighted.

Water: *A critical concern raised by all women was the toxic condition of water and water bodies since mining operations have either directly or indirectly contaminated, depleted and also changed the courses of some water bodies.*

Not just RO plants and handpumps, women want cleaning up of water sources - both irrigation and drinking.

The issue of water crisis for domestic and other purposes has been red-flagged as 90% of the respondents reported on the direct impacts of mining in their community water sources. Of the community members interviewed, 65.8% have reported drying up of the wells, borewells, springs and ponds, decrease in groundwater level, stagnation of water, scarcity of water, and contamination of water in both Raigarh and Surguja. Community water sources like ponds and streams are polluted by the coal washery.



Polluted water in a village pond



Villagers have to use polluted pond sources for bathing and washing clothes



People are suffering from skin diseases due to bathing in polluted water and working for long hours in their contaminated fields. Women complained that these polluted water sources are unfit for consumption by humans or cattle. Water levels have decreased because of the diversion of water for mine-plants. They observed that many stones are blasted and the earth is broken while digging deep bore wells which have released chemicals into the water. In Saraitola they are suffering from diseases like fluorosis, musculoskeletal problems, fatigue, teeth deformities and brittleness of bones, etc. Respondents from Baljor village reported that water sources are so polluted that local doctors recommend not to use them. There was a water treatment plant set up in Tamnar of Raigarh, but it is dysfunctional as people say there is no groundwater.



A child with damaged teeth due to fluorosis



An RO plant set up
in Saraitola village



Although drinking water is a high-priority area, the nature of DMF implementation is ineffective in most places. The majority of expenditures has been on water treatment RO plants or sometimes, hand pumps. In the majority of places, affected communities complain that these plants are only temporarily functional and forgotten. Hand-pumps are ineffective as groundwater is depleted and communities complain of foul-smelling and discoloured water as contaminated water bodies have not been cleaned up or groundwater aquifers have not been regenerated. This ad hoc implementation of the high-priority area of water is resulting in serious health problems and the added burden of work for women who have to walk further every day in search of cleaner water sources.

A Glimpse into DMF Projects in Surguja and Raigarh for Women and Children from Previous Annual Reports:

It has been difficult to extract accurate and latest data on DMF spending in Chhattisgarh in order to compare affected communities' demands with DMF projects implemented. We provide here an example of funds spent on women and children in Raigarh for 2020-21, and from Surguja for 2019-20 in supposedly directly affected areas.

It is unclear whether any assessment was conducted on identifying and assessing the mining impacts and preparing micro plans for addressing these impacts. In all probability, these are erratic expenditures based on immediate requests from local ICDS centres for implementation of their regular programmes, rather than from local communities.

Expenditures indicate electrification of anganwadi centres and providing nutrition. It appears that multiple programmes have been announced (like PMKKKY, Poshan Abhiyan) and made to appear that they are in addition to existing core programmes. However, it is unclear whether the core ICDS supplementary nutrition programme is further supplemented by PMKKKY and Poshan Abhiyan programmes or whether the same meal is reported under different heads.

It is also not clear whether there exists a plan of intervention for addressing malnutrition caused by loss of food security and livelihoods of affected communities systematically through a convergence of the ICDS and the PMKKKY in consultation with the affected Gram Sabhas. In all likelihood, this is not the case and the guidelines should lay out procedures for planning and transparency in the use of DMF funds.

Details of projects under women and children welfare implemented in Raigarh and Surguja districts:

Year	Details of the Project	Implementing Agency	Sanctioned Amount
2020-21	Electricity work in 27 Anganwadi centres in Raigarh	Chief executive officer, Janpad panchayat, Raigarh, Chhatisgarh	₹ 14,00,000
	Providing egg to 1 to 3-year-old children and pregnant women for 1 day	District Program Officer, Women and Children Welfare Department, Raigarh (Chhatisgarh)	₹ 1,95,43,368
	Providing meals like sweet porridge, khichdi and egg to malnourished children aged 1-3 years.	District Program Officer, Women and Children Welfare Department, Raigarh (Chhatisgarh)	₹ 9,00,90,000
	Providing hot meals to anaemic women from age of 15-49	District Program Officer, Women and Children Welfare Department, Raigarh (Chhatisgarh)	₹ 70,00,000
2019-2020	Providing meals to pregnant women till March 31, 2020	District Program Officer, Women and Children Welfare Department, Surguja (Chhatisgarh)	₹ 94,08,000
	Providing weekly eggs to anaemic and pregnant women	District Program Officer, Women and Children Welfare Department, Surguja (Chhatisgarh)	₹ 23,41,500

The table above gives some examples of the types of projects implemented in the high priority sector of women and children. The reports indicate expenditures on mainly two areas - infrastructure development/repairs of Anganwadi and primary schools, and, distribution of supplementary nutrition to pregnant and anaemic women, and mid-day meals to children. These clearly indicate an ad hoc nature of DMF implementation with no direct correlation to addressing the problems arising out of mining operations.

The Women and Child Welfare Ministry has asked for convergence of Poshan Abhiyan programme with the DMF funds. However, it is to be noted that Chhattisgarh has been implementing the **distribution of iron-fortified rice scheme** in mining affected areas which has been reported to have high risks on the health of children. Instead, the call has come from affected civil society experts and local communities for investing in strengthening the traditional food crops of tribals that are very rich sources of nutrients to overcome malnutrition and stunting. Further, they are also natural sources of iron for tribals suffering from sickle cell anaemia.

The field assessment conducted lists out village-wise losses and demands from women, none of which are linked to these services of line departments. Women's primary concern is getting back their right to food security from land and forests and not merely appealing for welfare schemes. They are angry that their lands were not only forcibly taken, but continue to be polluted relentlessly by mine tailings and blasting.

Logically, they ask for authorities to clean up and hand over their resources so that women can be self-reliant in their food and nutrition. Now with the National Land Monetisation Corporation being set up, there are fears that their land taken for mining would not be returned to them after the mines are closed. Even where mining activities are halted, these forest and agricultural lands remain as huge pits or reservoirs of stagnant water.

The DMF funds should be utilized to review the status of these lands, with the affected Gram Sabhas in the lead for identification, verification of eligible owners and for handing over of community forest lands under the CFR to the Gram Sabhas. The funds need to be utilized for coal retirement, land restoration and rehabilitation before handing them over to the communities.

The institutionalization of the Mahila Sabhas through not only strengthening the PESA committees but also women's participation in staking their claims in the five-year perspective planning of each mining affected village is urgently required and the DMF funds are adequately resourced to enable this process. Provision of Gram Sabha consultation is suggested under the PMKKKY guidelines and these should be seriously implemented. Only then can women's priorities be visible – women's energy policy within the five year plans of DMF, their water and forest resources planning and protection and their formal rights to their lands would gain significance.

DMF Ka Hissa : Women in Affected Communities Come Forward with their Demands

In Chhattisgarh, a local women's group is conducting awareness campaigns among communities on how to assess the mining impacts and submit their village plans for DMF funds. A community training was conducted on September 02, 2022 on sharing the findings of the gender impact assessment survey and building a dialogue with the women on their demands for DMF funds in Barima panchayat, Surguja which is affected by bauxite mining. GIA highlights contained the losses faced by women and how to bring these losses to the attention of the District Mineral Foundation committee.



Community
training
programme in
Chhattisgarh



This newsletter is primarily intended as an information platform for groups working on the ground to exchange news and stories from mining affected communities. We are currently bringing it out in English, Hindi and Kannada. We invite contributions from communities and local groups. We also encourage young and barefoot researchers to join us in compiling stories and data. You can send your photos and stories in any Indian languages.

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