



Bauxite mine in Jharkhand is nursing mined wasteland back to cultivation

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Bagru (Lohardaga): Mumbai-based Hindalco Industries Limited, which is a subsidiary of the Aditya Birla Group and a leading aluminium rolling company in India, has tasted success in reducing the environmental damage caused by mining by reclaiming the mined land and nursing it back for cultivation.

As a part of its sustainable mining development efforts, the company has reclaimed five hectares (Ha) of land in its bauxite mine in Bagru Hills in Lohardaga in Jharkhand and has built a biodiversity park. The park houses a butterfly garden and has seasonal fruits, vegetables, medicinal plants, herbs, tea and flowers.

Bagru mines, roughly 76km from Ranchi, is one of India's oldest bauxite mines whose operations began in 1933. As much as 3.5 lakh ton of bauxite is mined from here annually for its Alumina Plant in Muri, roughly 65km from the state capital.

"In March 2019, a plan was drawn up to reclaim nearly 5 Ha (12.35 acres) land in Bagru Hills for this pilot project. One of the key features for reclaiming the land was to preserve the topsoil of the land and store it away carefully," Sushant Guru, the head of the company's sustainable mining development wing, told TOI.

Once mining from a patch of land is complete, the top soil is put back after backfilling of the overburden (earth dug out from a spot for mining). A symbiotic fungus named VAM, which has been developed by Hindalco in association with the Coimbatore-based Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, is used to curate the topsoil to nurse its health and fertility back. In Bagru, a little over Rs 1 crore was gone into this project.

Besides backfilling the land and dressing them for cultivation, other ways of livelihood promotion are also being explored. "We also deliberately left voids during the landfill and created a pond through rainwater harvesting. Two years on, the locals here have taken up pisciculture and duck farming to add to their household incomes," Guru said.

Chaiti Oraon, a resident of Bagru, has gained from duck farming. She said, "Last year, we were trained in duck farming by experts in Ranchi as there is an ever growing demand for duck meat and eggs. We now sell ducks at Rs 350 a piece."

Even rainwater stored in these ponds is also being diverted to villages on the foothills of Bagru for agriculture and consumption.

As a part of the landscaping, the reclaimed land has been topped with an environment friendly conference room, auditorium and rest rooms made out of bamboo.

Mining operations in Bagru are spread over 163.5 hectares of land, of which 74 hectare land will be taken up for the second phase of the project, which has been pegged at a little over Rs 10 crore.

Hindalco was named the world's most sustainable aluminum company in the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices this year.

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