

Joaquim Fernandes



Lush green paddy fields seen on either side of a tributary of the Khandepar river

## 'We want to ensure farmers have a means of livelihood'

In the Goan summer's sweltering heat, the green paddy fields of Kalsai in Kirlapal-Dabal village panchayat seem like a lush oasis in the dusty mining landscape near Codli.

The Kalsai fields represent the joint corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative of Goa's biggest mining company, Sesa Goa and the Mineral Foundation of Goa (MFG).

MFG, itself, is a CSR initiative of

thirteen Goan mining companies.

Sesa Goa started its first watershed programme in the Kalsai ward of Kirlapal village at the cost of Rs 75 lakh.

The company erected a two-pillar check dam on a tributary of the Khandepar river at a cost of Rs 12 lakh.

The result is a lush green paddy field on either side of the stream. The coconut trees on the edge of the field also seem to be doing well.

"This Kalsai watershed programme benefits 63 farmers. By this monsoon, we are planning eight more watersheds in this village panchayat area," Sesa Goa's CSR officer, wishing not to be named, told TOI. While the Kalsai watershed is a joint project, MFG itself has a variety of its own CSR initiatives in Goa.

MFG senior programme manager, Sachin Tendulkar told TOI that since its

## The mining companies' corporate social responsibility initiatives have evoked a mixed response from the communities affected by the industry, Joaquim Fernandes finds out

inception in 2000, MFG has spent a total of Rs 17.49 crore in Goa.

This includes initiatives in educational support and livelihood generation (including self-help groups), health programmes, environment sustainability, 'Partners for a Cause' and a programme called Gram Nirman. Tendulkar said, "Our focus is on agriculture and irrigation projects." MFG has therefore completed over 70 irrigation projects in Goa.

One such is the rehabilitation of the 10.8 km-long nullah in Surla, Bicholim, of which MFG has desilted 7.5 km. The nullah, a tributary of the Mhadei river, flows through fields and *kullaghars* in several fields.

After consultations with the stakeholders, MFG also built embankments and constructed two *bandharas*. The



nullah, rehabilitated at a cost of Rs 72 lakh, is expected to irrigate around 25 ha of fields. In North Goa, MFG has rehabilitated around 16 waterways, including nullahs, *pois*, *collamb*, etc., in places like Mulgao, Kudnem and parts of Amona.

"But we work beyond CSR," said Tendulkar. "We also work with the Goa State Aids Control Society, the National Aids Control Organization and the agriculture department," he said, adding that MFG also works with the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

Tendulkar also spoke of the Gram Nirman programme under which MFG launched CSR initiatives in the two village panchayat areas of Kirlapal-Dabal and Mayem-Vaiguinim, both mining-affected areas. The Gram Nirman programme is a partnership between MFG, the local mining company, the state government and the village panchayat.

Under this programme, MFG has

taken various projects, such as bus stands, *bandharas*, water channels, *balwadis*, classrooms, playground levelling, library buildings, drinking-water schemes, irrigation channels, boulder-wall fencing, new drinking-water wells and repairs of springs and ponds. Tendulkar said MFG spent a total of Rs 2.13 crore on Gram Nirman alone.

Sesa Goa has its own CSR department. When TOI visited Sesa's CSR office in the Codli mines, their CSR officer told TOI, "Our philosophy is that when mining is over, as it will be, we want to ensure that farmers have a means of livelihood. We don't want to leave them high and dry." Sesa Goa's CSR initiatives encompass health, education, women empowerment, watershed and infrastructure such as constructing *balwadis*, *bandharas*, etc. For example, Sesa Goa has launched agricultural CSR initiatives in 87 ha of fields in Kirlapal-Dabal, Kudnem and Naveli.

The rehabilitation of the 10.6 ha Vagona fields in Kirlapal-Dabal is supposed to be a success.

After mining slurry from Sesa Goa's mines ran into the fields, they lay uncultivated for 14 years.

Sesa's rehab efforts included de-silting the field, construction of a compound wall around the entire field, providing of organic manure, chemical fertilizers, a tractor and high-quality seeds. The field is cultivated by around 70 farmers. Annually, Sesa incurs an average expenditure of around Rs 2.8 lakh on the Vagona field.

On the invitation of Sesa Goa and accompanied by their CSR officer, TOI visited various fields and met some farmers, chosen by Sesa Goa, on April 17, 2010. Saulo Viru Gaonkar, 80, is one such prominent farmer in Vagona.

Talking about the Vagona field, Saulo said, "We have been cultivating the field for the last seven years. But the crop here is not as good as the crop from my other fields (unaffected by mining silt) probably due to some residual mining silt still there."

Yeshwant Bhoma Gaonkar, another farmer from Vagona agrees with Saulo that the crop from the field is not good.

"We have been cultivating the field for the last seven years. But the crop here is not as good as the crop from my other fields (unaffected by mining silt) probably due to some residual mining silt"

Saulo Viru Gaonkar | FARMER

But Yeshwant's other field was also affected by silt which was never removed.

"The company does give free seed, fertilizer and tractor but everyone here is affected due to the silt and we have asked the company to remove it," says Yeshwant.

Even the Kalsai fields are not as prosperous as they look. Some years ago, the mining silt that entered the fields was two feet high. But the company desilted the fields twice and diverted the mining water. The company has been giving seed and fertilizer to the farmers for the last about six years.

Raghuvir Gaonkar, a Kalsai farmer, told TOI, "I think mining silt causes *poll* (chaff). One has to work hard. You can't leave the field to itself. Power-*acher pikounchem podta* [(We need to get the yield on the power (of fertilizers))]. We spend more on fertilizers here, unlike other (unaffected) fields," said Raghuvir.

In the afternoon, Sesa's CSR officer took TOI to the fields of Kolle-Khazan in Kudnem, Bicholim. The party met with a hostile reception from a local farmer who was harvesting his field.

"You are giving us seed and fertilizer, but what is the use. All this is *poll* (chaff). Last year too we got *poll*. Even our coconut trees are affected. The cashew and mango trees are also not giving any yield. It is better you don't give at all," said the farmer.

The farmer was angry because of Sesa's pig iron plant on the hill just beyond the fields. The plant was spewing out white fumes and the local farmers believe that "graphite" in these fumes affects their crops and plants.