

# Illegal iron-ore mining in Bellary adds to farmer's woes

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**Rampant illegal mining has degraded the land, rendering it useless for agricultural purposes.**

Rampant mining, including illegal excavation of iron ore in the mineral-rich Bellary district in the last 10 years, has severely dented the agricultural output, causing an annual loss of Rs. 200 crore.

A study conducted by the Hyderabad-based Cerena Foundation and Samaja Parivarthane Samudaya (SPS), the NGO which brought the issue of illegal mining in Bellary to the Supreme Court's notice, reveals drastic decline in the production of maize, jowar, bajra, groundnut and mango in the last 10 years because of pollution and loss of soil fertility in mining areas.

"The loss of income from agricultural produce because of air pollution from iron ore mining is estimated to be Rs. 200 crore per annum. The accumulated loss over 10 years is to the tune of Rs. 2,000 crore.

We arrived at these figures on the basis of scientific study carried out in the district," S. R. Hiremath, convenor of SPS, said.

The average yield of maize near the mining sites has dropped by 67 per cent; jowar by 55 per cent, bajra by 35 per cent and groundnut by 51 per cent when compared to 2001-02. The SPS has submitted these startling findings to the Supreme Court.

"The data collected in this study indicates that maize yields have decreased from 62-74 quintal per hectare 10 years ago to 20-25 quintal per hectare. Mango yields in Sandur taluk have come down from about 500 fruits per tree prior to mining to 150 fruits per tree now," the report noted.

Plant species are susceptible to air pollution to varying degrees and mining generates significant quantities of primary air pollutants—particulate matter, oxides of nitrogen (due to use of a large number of vehicles and diesel generator

sets)â€™ and a secondary air pollutant, ozone.

The Bellary district is one of the most backward regions of the state and the Human Development Indices (HDI) are among the lowest in the country though mine lords made super profits exporting iron ore worth millions of dollars in the last 15 years.

The demand for iron ore had reached an all-time high during 2008-09 prompting farmers to even abandon agriculture and illegally extract iron ore from their fields. The government had even set up mobile squads to check illegal mining in the agricultural fields by the farmers.

"Back then, the farmers had no option but to extract iron ore from their fields because no miner was sharing profits with them. Now, because of pollution and loss of soil fertility, they are unable to recover their investments," Shanta Naika, a local peasant leader, said.

The mining also had a negative impact on the dairy industry in the district. Milk yields on an average have dropped from about three litres to two litres per day for buffaloes and two litres to one litre per day for cows. Milk yield period in a year has also reduced by 25 per cent.