
Mining and indigenous women in the Philippines

There are around 110 ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines and they constitute almost 15% of our population. Most of them live in mountain ranges and coastal areas. (1) Nine million or roughly 30% of our total land area is mineralized including some of the mountains inhabited by those groups.

Meanwhile, the mining industry only contributes an annual average of a mere 1.2% of the Philippine Gross Domestic Products (GDP) while a long list of externalities, including depleted resources, damage to environment and natural habitats, pollution, health impacts and socio-economic costs, pass on communities.(2)

Indigenous communities have long ago realized that mining will affect their means of livelihood and in the end leave their lands useless and their mountains bare and susceptible to disaster. It is for this reason that there is a united struggle against mining here.

Inarguably, the primary concern of indigenous peoples (IPs) in the Philippines is the issue of land tenure. Mining causes massive displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. Development aggression (3) such as mining, has threatened indigenous way of life because of the intrusion in their ancestral domain – their farms, homes, forests, and sacred places of worship. Also the increased migration from other communities seeking work affect negatively local people. Deforestation and flattening of mountains for mining make them susceptible to landslides and other disasters that affect upland and lowland communities.

Impacts on women

IP women and children are greatly affected by mining activities. In 2009, Emi B. Carreon of Innabuyog, a regional alliance of indigenous women's organizations in the Cordillera Region, reported in the Asia Study Session on Women and Mining the different impacts of mining to indigenous men and women.

Occasional disasters such as mine tailing dam failures aggravate the pollution of soils and rivers caused by toxic chemicals and acid mine drainage which have serious impacts on the health of indigenous communities, especially of women. Air, water and land pollution contaminate their food and water intake while mineworkers and communities at the receiving end of toxic mine tailings face a range of serious health threats such as asthma, tuberculosis, skin diseases, gastrointestinal diseases and even cancer. Women also risk to suffer reproductive health problems such as spontaneous abortion and malformed babies.

As homemakers, women are also greatly affected by the disintegration and social disorders caused by mining among which destruction of traditional values and customs, and even family unity, are sought by bribery methods that try to undermine mining communities.

As care givers, women also experience difficulty in gathering food and water for the family since the forests are no longer their homes – they will now need to adjust to the money-based economy which

indigenous peoples are not used to.

Carreon further reported that in many cases there has been an increase in the number of domestic violence against women, and incidents of alcohol and drug addiction, gambling, incest, and even wife swapping and infidelity.

Moreover, militarization impacts indigenous communities with special cruelty on women: there are reports of extrajudicial killings and sexual harassment, rape, physical and psychological torture of women. (4)

Mining is also seen as one of the drivers of prostitution. In Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Sur for example, police reported in 2010 some cases of child labor and prostitution in exchange for money. AJ Jacinto of GMA News.tv reported that “Many have been lured into prostitution in exchange for money — (Philippine Pesos) P1,500 for three hours of sex in thatched houses that serve as dens to miners wanting a good time after putting in a hard day’s work”(5).

Women on the forefront in the struggle against mining

IP women in the Philippines have joined organizations that help them in their advocacy. They play a critical role in educating and disseminating information and resources amongst other women and communities on different issues. They are actively engaged in community campaigns and mobilizations (i.e. human chain, mass arrests, rallies, etc).

The women and children of Barangay Anislagan in Placer, Surigao del Norte, have showed it: the community’s livelihood is mainly farming, planting crops, rice and coconut trees. Women have been aware that mining will impact their livelihood, contaminating their water source and denuding their remaining forest. So they have fought against Anglo-American mining company and Manila Mining Company and are in the forefront of the campaign for food sovereignty and to stop mining in watershed areas.

Led by the people’s organization Anislagan Bantay Kalikasan Task Force (ABAKATAF), they filed a petition and engaged in local elections that led to the Barangay Resolution to not allow mining there.

Convened by the struck of the church bell the whole community, including women and children, organise human barricades. This led Anglo-American to announce its decision in November 2008, to pull out and cited the community opposition as one of their main reasons. (6) Today, they still continue to struggle against Manila Mining Company, which started in the 1980s.

Indigenous communities and support organizations continue to push for their right to self-determination and human rights. They strive to strengthen their position to defend their right to ancestral lands and right to the path to development they opt to pursue.

Here, indigenous communities will not stop fighting to watch miners take their land. It is a difficult struggle but they know that they will not give up their lands without a hard fight.

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(1) Data from Koalisyon ng Katutubong Samahan ng Pilipinas (KASAPI).

(2) Alyansa Tigil Mina publication: A Legacy of Disaster, February 2010.

(3) Development aggression in indigenous communities is defined by the Technical Committee on the Promotion and Action for Equal and Inclusive Development of Ethnic Minorities as activities such as extractive industries, hydropower, mining, oil, gas, land concession, plantation projects, etc. coupled with militarization in some countries resulting to the displacement of communities.

(4) There are reported cases of rape and harassments in Abra and Mindanao.

(5) "Illegal mining breeds child labor, prostitution in Diplahanhttp",

GMA

Network, www.gmanews.tv/story/186685/regions/illegal-mining-breeds-child-labor-prostitution-in-diplahan

(6) Report from Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center – Kasama sa Kalikasan (LRC-KsK/Friends of the Earth-Philippines) and their video documentary that may be viewed in

(6) Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance Against Mining) is an alliance of more than 80 organizations from mining-affected communities and people's organizations all over the country. For the past five years, it has actively engaged in challenging the government's policy of promoting the large-scale mining industry in the Philippines.