

Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN)-Gitnang Luzon Reaffirms its Position against the Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP), Calls for the China Export Import Bank to Withdraw its Plans to Fund the Duplicitous Project

Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN)-Gitnang Luzon (New Patriotic Alliance-Central Luzon) is the regional chapter in Central Luzon of BAYAN (New Patriotic Alliance), a national umbrella organization composed mainly of peasant and workers' organization, and other sectoral organizations from the democratic sections of the Philippine society.

An Overview of the Struggle against the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project (SRMDP)

Since the inception of the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project (SRMP) in 1998 and its completion in 2003, BAYAN-Gitnang Luzon together with Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA), BAYAN-Pangasinan, TIMMAWA (Peasant Movement to Free the Agno) has been in the forefront of the struggle against the onerous project. Along with the said organizations it has initiated or supported protest actions, symposia and fora, cultural activities, petition signing, fact finding missions, and people's dialogues with concerned government and funding institutions.

Despite considerable opposition from different sectors locally and abroad, the San Roque Dam was completed in 2003. This setback, however, did not hamper the different people's organizations from pushing for the recognition, compensation and rehabilitation of the socio-economic rights of the people who suffered socio-economic and cultural displacement from the construction and operation of the dam; opposing and calling for the halting of funds for the grandiose Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP) and pressing for an alternative sustainable irrigation; and eventually for the decommissioning of the San Roque Dam and the rehabilitation of the Agno River.

What can be considered as the "utmost triumph" of the anti-San Roque Dam movement to date is the broad support it gained from different environmental, religious and church-based, socio-civic, grassroots and political organizations within and outside the country.

The acquired strength of the anti-San Roque Dam movement has delayed several times the funding from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) for the San Roque Multipurpose Project-Irrigation Component (SRMP-IC), later repackaged as Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP). It also brought short-term socio-economic relief for the affected people, and put into public scrutiny the socio-economic and environmental effects as well as legal and moral aspects of the construction and operation of the dam.

As a flagship project of three administrations of the Philippine government, from former presidents' Fidel V. Ramos and Joseph Ejercito Estrada to the incumbent Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the government and the project proponents make use of different strategies to stifle and water down dissent for the dam.

From the very start, the Ramos administration has circumvented the right to information, consultation and free prior and informed consent of the farmers, indigenous and local people to be affected by the project. The short-lived administration of his successor, Joseph Estrada, carried on as a flagship project this anomalous project.

Going Against the Repressive Flow

Under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, the anti-San Roque Dam movement suffered the most despicable forms of harassments and repression. Since Arroyo's ascension to power in 2001, a national systematic plan to dismantle the progressive organizations was already in the making.

Local organizations at the forefront of struggle against the SRMDP such as BAYAN-Pangasinan, TIMMAWA and their allied organizations became targets of harassments, vilification, and intimidation from the project proponents, government officials and uniformed personnel of the Philippine government.

These organizations were maliciously tagged as "fronts" of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), even branding their leaders and members as leaders or members of CPP and/or the New People's Army (NPA). The harassment extended even to the supporters of the anti-SRMDP movement who were at a certain time in 2002-2003 prohibited from going to the affected communities as exemplified by a municipal resolution in the municipality of San Nicolas, Pangasinan. On the other hand, the affected people were threatened by the project proponents of withdrawal of compensation and other economic blackmailing if they persist in their activities against the project.

Onwards 2004, the national plan of the Arroyo government embodied under Oplan Bantay Laya (Operational Plan Freedom Watch) has openly materialized purportedly to destroy the perceived political infrastructure of what the government termed as "enemies of the state".

The escalation of human rights violations characterized the succeeding years, as members and leaders of progressive organizations became victims of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations. Central Luzon, labeled as one of the priority regions of the government's Oplan Bantay Laya, suffered one of the highest cases of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances.¹

At the local level, the leaders and members of BAYAN-Pangasinan, TIMMAWA and their allied organizations are victimized by surveillance, threats and harassments by men believed to be operatives of the armed services of the government's security forces.

In February 2006, the Vice-Chair of BAYAN-Pangasinan, Mariano Sepnio, was shot by motorcycle-riding men, causing his death a few weeks after. The organization's secretary-general and TIMMAWA chairperson, Jose Doton, was gunned down on May 16, three months later.

¹ These deplorable situations of human rights violations in the Philippines were strongly condemned internationally, one of which was the investigation of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston.

Amidst heightening suppression by the Arroyo government, the resolute struggle of the Pangasinense and the Filipino people along with their allies abroad has compelled the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to halt funding for the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project-Irrigation Component (SRMDP-IC) in 2000 and 2001 due to the social and environmental issues attached to the project.

Though modified as Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP) covering 34,450 hectares of the original 70,800 hectares of the SRMDP, the project was not funded by the JBIC which took into account the outstanding social and environmental issues caused by SRMDP and the growing human rights violations in the country, particularly the slaying of Jose Doton.

Reaffirming Our Position against the Anti-people and Anti-environment San Roque Dam-Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (SRD-ARIIP)

Failing to acquire the loans for the Php 11.25 billion ARIIP, the Macapagal-Arroyo administration has now turned to the China Export Import Bank. In view of this, BAYAN-Gitnang Luzon reaffirms its position against ARIIP and is now calling the China Export Import Bank to withdraw its plans to fund the project for the following reasons:

1) Outstanding issues from the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project (SRMP) have not been resolved up to the present.

a) Physical, Cultural and Economic Displacement resulting into Deterioration of Economic Conditions and Impoverishment of the Affected People

-A total of around 680 families in the towns of San Manuel and San Nicolas in the province of Pangasinan, and the Ibaloi people in Itogon in the province of Benguet were displaced from their communities as a result of the construction of the dam.

The physical and cultural displacement of the people also resulted in their economic displacement as they were deprived of their source of livelihood which they mainly derive from farming and gold panning in the Agno River.

Though provided with relocation, a significant number of these families have left or sold their units due to the lack of viable livelihood in the resettlement area. This lack of sources of sufficient income has resulted in the greater impoverishment of the affected people.

-Over the past years some of these families have engaged in “illegal” or “irregular” forms of livelihood such as scavenging for scrap materials, charcoal-making and/ or slash and burn agriculture. Others have opted to leave their family and work abroad.

b) Unresolved issues regarding Compensation and Livelihood Projects

-The gold panners in the municipalities of San Nicolas and San Manuel comprising more than 3,000 individuals have yet to receive compensation promised them by the dam proponents after years of arduous struggle and negotiations with the latter.

-More than a decade has passed since the dam's construction in 1998 commenced and 6 years since the power component became operational in 2003, yet 83 cases for the payment for land acquisition still remain to be settled as of November 2008, allegedly due to the defectiveness of necessary documents for compensation process, such as land title, or the dual claims to certain lots.²

-The SRMDP destroyed the communal irrigation system (CIS) or *tanggal* (an indigenous system of irrigation managed and operated by local farmers) of the farmers along the Agno River particularly in the towns of San Manuel and San Nicolas. The destruction resulted in low productivity or no crop production which was never compensated by the project proponents.

-Even as the compensation of farmlands affected by the construction of the SRMDP has remained not fully settled and still undergoing a rigorous process, the projected implementation of the ARIP would even more affect hundreds of farmers, most of whom do not have land titles which the compensation process requires to be produced.

c) Environmental, safety and effectivity issues concerning the dam and its components

-Upstream, the communities of the Ibaloi are being threatened by inundation owing to the siltation of the dam's reservoir. A study commissioned by the San Roque Power Corporation (SRPC) to determine the effect of siltation to the dam's capacity shows that as a consequence of uncontrolled siltation, the dam's life span is reduced from 70 to 50 years.³

-Moreover, the dam is located below mining corporations such as the Itogon-Suyoc Mines, Lepanto Mines, and Benguet Corporation, making it a default mine-tailings dam. This fact undermines the irrigation and quality water components of the SRMDP, which are of great possibility to be contaminated by toxic substances.

-Contrary to government's boasting of reducing flooding in the province of Pangasinan, the dam has actually aggravated flooding in times of typhoons brought by the rainy season or the La Niña phenomenon such as what happened in the years 2001 up to 2005.

-On the other hand, during the occurrence of La Niño phenomenon or prolonged dry spells the dam has deprived the farmers of irrigation water as what happened in the years 2006 to 2007.

-The dam is sandwiched by three major faultlines—the San Jose Fault which is 8 kilometers from the west, the San Manuel Fault 8 kilometers east, and the Digdig Fault, 25 kilometers west which has caused the disastrous 1990 earthquake. This fact puts into question the safety of the dam. The 850 million cubic meters of reservoir-water also creates the possibility of reservoir-induced earthquakes.

² "Impacts of Large Dams" Hatae, Hozue. Friends of the Earth-Japan, April 2009, powerpoint presentation

³ "Siltation threatens aging power dams", Cabreza Vincent. April 30, 2009, Inquirer.Net.www.inquirer.net

2) Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP) is a duplicitous project aiming to gain the support of the peasantry, but in reality will serve only the flood control and hydropower components of San Roque Dam.

As a multipurpose dam, the components of San Roque Dam consist of -1) hydropower, as the primary component 2) flood control 3) irrigation and, 4) water quality improvement. However, conflict between the components such as between hydropower and irrigation, and flood control and irrigation puts into question the effectiveness of such components.

a) ARIIP as flood control

NIA itself stated in its September 13, 2005 leaflet the so-called significance of ARIIP in flood control, to quote *"Ito rin ay naglalayon na makatulong na mabawasan ang malawakang pagbaha sa lalawigan sa panahon ng malakas na pag-ulan."* (*"It also aims to minimize widespread flooding in the province in times of heavy rainfall."*)

But this would only aggravate flooding since the dispersal of reservoir-water before or during the time of a prolonged and/or massive rainfall whether brought by natural seasonal features or by a typhoon is necessary so as not to cause overtopping of the dam, which in turn, will inundate the farmlands already drenched with rainwater.

On the other hand, during dry season or in the presence of El Niño wherein the farmers need water the most, the dam needs to maintain reservoir-water to produce electricity, thereby defeating the purpose of the irrigation component.

b) The re-regulating pond of ARIIP will serve to augment the water needs of the hydropower.

The construction of the re-regulating pond is provided as the answer by the project proponents to the problem of water shortage during summer. However, its capacity to irrigate a large area of 34,450 hectares of farmlands especially during prolonged dry spells is extremely doubtful.

Besides, the re-regulating pond will primarily serve as a lower elevation reservoir for the San Roque Dam wherein the water will be pumped or siphoned back to the reservoir especially when the reservoir-water reaches critical level.

During the June 2006 dialogue between BAYAN-Pangasinan, TIMMAWA and JBIC representatives held at the JBIC office in Makati City, the JBIC representatives stated that the problem on the contradiction between hydropower and irrigation components depend on how NIA, NPC and SRPC will coordinate with each other.

The people's experience during the past years provides a concrete gauge on how will the SRPC, NPC and NIA will perform once the project is implemented. In the past years such as in 2006⁴ and 2007, people depending on the waters of the Agno River were deprived of its waters resulting to the wilting of their crops and death of fishes in the river.

⁴ Stated in the dialogue between BAYAN-Pangasinan, TIMMAWA and JBIC, June 23,2006, Makati City, Philippines

The SRPC closed the gates of the dam without notifying the people, who were kept in the dark as to the reason why the waters of the Agno River had been gone.

c) Experiences of the people and of farmers from other similar projects such as Angat Dam in Bulacan, Pantabangan in Nueva Ecija and Bohol Irrigation Dam in Bohol province illustrate the failure of large scale irrigation components from dams.

The farmers particularly in Nueva Ecija and Bulacan have suffered the false promises of irrigation components from the Angat and Pantabangan dams, both of which are multipurpose facilities. They have to endure economic losses from water stress to their crops caused by the seasonal water shortage of the two dams during dry season, and inundation of their farmlands during the rainy season.

The contradiction between the components of the dam have resulted in conflicts in water allocation even between government agencies themselves.

Cases of conflicts in water allocation during El Nino phenomenon is illustrated by the National Irrigation Administration itself ⁵ such as the one that took place from November 1997 to June 1998 which brought losses in food production amounting to Php968 million affecting 22,000 farmers and causing NIA to incur losses to the tune of Php29 million.

The water allocation for irrigation in Angat was reallocated for municipal use through the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) resulting to the above stated losses. Although NIA demanded for compensation for the farmers' losses and its own through irrigation service fee (ISF), the MWSS has invoked the Water Code of the Philippines citing that in cases of emergency, municipal use of water has utmost priority.

Even dams built particularly for irrigation fail as is depicted in the case of Bohol Irrigation Dam. The irrigation dam which was built in 1997 targeted to irrigate 4,960 hectares of farmland, yet on average it can only irrigate 2,762.58 hectares from 1997 till 2004.

d) The current issue of global warming will further undermine the boasted hydropower, flood control and irrigation capabilities of the SRD-ARIIP as the Agno River Basin will suffer from High El Nino-High La Nina to High El Nino-Moderate La Nina.⁶

⁵ "Water Allocation Between Irrigation and Municipal Use", Dominador D. Pascua, Corporate Planning Staff, National Irrigation Administration, 4th INWEPF Steering Meeting and Symposium, [http://kromchol.rid.go.th/ffd/papers/Paper-Session%201/p101%20Water Allocation Between Irrigation and Municipal Use.pdf](http://kromchol.rid.go.th/ffd/papers/Paper-Session%201/p101%20Water%20Allocation%20Between%20Irrigation%20and%20Municipal%20Use.pdf)

⁶ "Climate Change Adaptation in Asian River Basins", El Nino-La Nina Vulnerability Map p.24. Vicente B. Tuddao, Jr. Ph, D., Executive Director River Basin Control Office, DENR

3) ARIIP will lead to the monopolization of the waters of Agno River which will result into the greater impoverishment of the people

The construction of the SRMDP has robbed and deprived the people of their livelihood, farmlands, water, natural resources and cultural heritage. Its continued operation and the implementation of its components are draining off the taxpayers money through the monthly Capacity and Operating Fee of US\$10 million allegedly and the loans for its construction.

The operation of SRMDP has ascertained the control of SRPC over the waters of Agno River. The implementation of ARIIP will extend furthermore this control to thousands of peasants in the provinces of Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija and Tarlac who would be compelled to pay to NIA irrigation service fee.

As of 2006, the irrigation fee of NIA is Php 2,500.00 per hectare in a year (Php1, 000.00 or 2 cavans⁷ of palay⁸ on rainy season and Php1, 500.00 or 3 cavans of palay on dry season).

At SRPC's dispensation it can provide water or not to NIA and the farmers depending on the price it is amenable to.

4) Will serve the corrupt ends of the Macapagal-Arroyo administration

The Macapagal-Arroyo administration is tagged as one of the most corrupt government in Asia by Transparency International⁹. It has been involved in a string of corruption issues particularly involving agriculture-related projects such as the fertilizer fund scam, swine fund scam, and the issue on irrigation rehabilitation among others.

It had dragged foreign funding institutions and agencies to its corruption controversies such as the 2nd phase of the Agno River Flood Control Project supposedly to be funded by JBIC, NBN-ZTE deal to be funded supposedly by China, and recently the supposedly misuse of some military officials of Balikatan funds from the US as revealed by a junior military official.

The funding of ARIIP without proper evaluation and consideration of the project's feasibility, its clear benefits to the people and the outstanding unresolved issues attached to it and the SRMDP would be tantamount to funding a project at the Chinese taxpayers' expense as well as directly or indirectly condoning the corrupt ends of the Arroyo government.

⁷ Cavan, a unit of measurement in the Philippines pertaining to grains of 50 kilograms in weight placed in a sack

⁸ Palay, unmilled rice

⁹ "RP still as corrupt as ever-Transparency International", De Leon, Patricia. GMANews.TV May 21, 2008 <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/96545/RP-still-as-corrupt-as-ever---Transparency-International> and "Corruption under GMA the worst since Marcos", Punongbayan, Michael. philstar.com December 2, 2008, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleid=420518>

Our Demands and Recommendations to the China Export-Import Bank, the Philippine Government, National Irrigation Administration, and other agencies of the Philippine Government:

- 1) Withdraw funding for the Agno River Integrated Irrigation Project (ARIIP):
 - a) unless outstanding issues regarding San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project are properly and adequately addressed and resolved by the Arroyo government and the project proponents;
 - b) the stakeholders, in particular the farmers and people to be affected and supposedly catered by the project be properly consulted and the design, implementation and options and risk of the project be thoroughly discussed and accountabilities therefrom clearly delineated;
 - c) the feasibility of the ARIIP be properly evaluated and made clear;
- 2) Stop funding projects that give way to the destruction of the environment, displacement of farmers, indigenous, and poor people such as the ARIIP;
- 3) Support irrigation projects such as the *tanggal* or communal irrigation system, which is more efficient, manageable and flexible to the needs of local farmers, and also promotes cooperation at grassroots-level;
- 4) Support and promote research and projects aiming for sustainable, participatory and efficient use of water resources, holistic energy and water management and flood control mitigation projects;
- 5) Support research and projects aiming for the development of participatory and environment-friendly irrigation and farming such as organic farming, mulching and drip irrigation;
- 6) Support projects aiming to maintain and rehabilitate existing *tanggal* and irrigation systems from heavy siltation and addressing the causes of these problems such as deforestation and destruction of watersheds as a result of unsustainable mining and logging practices.

City of San Fernando, Pampanga, June 18, 2009.

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