

Stop the Centennial Dams

by Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA)

Big dams have always been hyped to the public as extremely useful. They irrigate farms, provide drinking water and generate electricity. Yet, they also flood vast tracts of forests and agricultural lands, displace thousands of people, especially indigenous communities, and in many instances, violate people's rights.

The New Centennial Water Source Project (NCWSP), popularly called Centennial Dam Project, is a series of dams to be constructed on the Kaliwa-Kanan-Agos River Basin east of Metro Manila that promises to provide several million liters of water per day to the megalopolis. But it is also seen to destroy more than 50,000 hectares of forest and agricultural lands, and evict more than 5,000 indigenous peoples and settlers from their communities and main source of livelihood and culture.

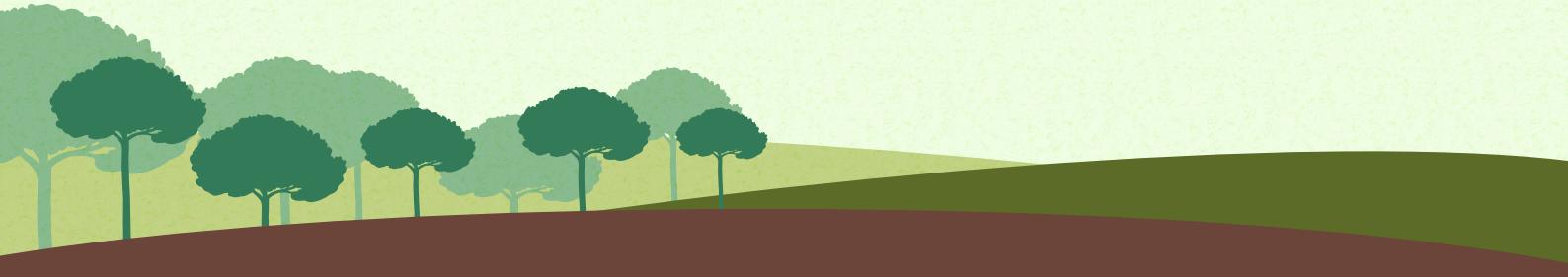
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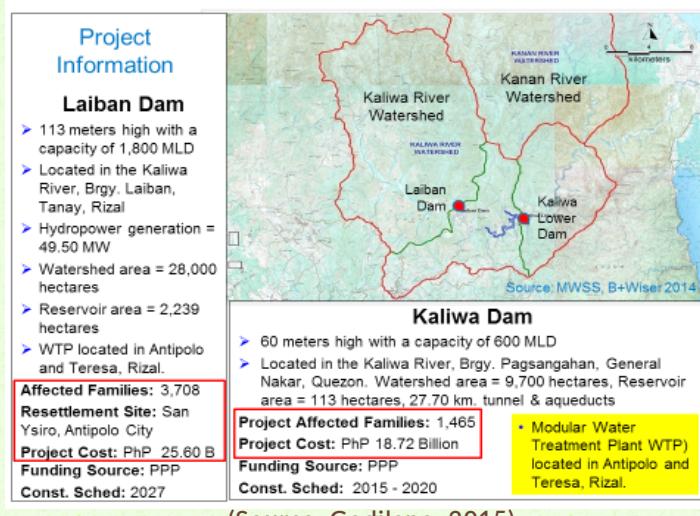
The Centennial Dam Project being undertaken by the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) intends to build the Kaliwa Dam, with a capacity of 600 million liters per day (MLD), by 2020, and the 1,800 MLD Laiban Dam by 2027. The 3,000 MLD Agos Dam and 3,310 MLD Kanan Dam are also being planned.

Impact of the Centennial Dam Project

Some 5,173 families will be affected by the Kaliwa and Laiban Dams. Tens of thousands of other families in the provinces of Quezon, Rizal and Laguna will be affected by the other dams. The Centennial Dam project will submerge 2,352 hectares of the ancestral land of the Agta-Remontado Indigenous Peoples (IP). With the construction of the dams, the affected communities, mostly IPs, will be moved to an area which is not suitable to their way of life. All affected IP chieftains have vowed to challenge the project all the way to the Supreme Court.

The Centennial Dam Project will destroy 37,700 hectares of the country's remaining forest cover, which will increase the threat of flooding in Metro Manila. These forests are also home





Kaliwa Dam

- 60 meters high with a capacity of 600 MLD
- Located in the Kaliwa River, Brgy. Pagsanganan, General Nakar, Quezon. Watershed area = 9,700 hectares, Reservoir area = 113 hectares, 27.70 km. tunnel & aqueducts

Project Affected Families: 1,465
Project Cost: PhP 18.72 Billion
Funding Source: PPP
Const. Sched: 2015 - 2020

(Source: Godilano, 2015)

Stop the Centennial Dams

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to 126 animal species, 67 of which are endemic to the Philippines like the Philippine Brown Deer, and 12 of which are found only in Luzon. The ecosystems of surrounding areas will be altered, putting food security at risk, while the threat of water- and insect-borne diseases will increase.

Opponents believe the Centennial Dam Project will violate economic, social, cultural and political rights, especially

of IPs, cause irreversible environmental and bio-diversity destruction, violate international and local laws, like the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1151 (Philippine Environmental Policy), PD 1586 (Establishing an Environmental Impact Statement System), Republic Act No. 7586 (National Integrated Protected Areas System Act), and other laws. The Project may also violate Art.II, Sec.16 of the Philippine Constitution, which enjoins the State to protect the people's right to a balanced and healthful ecology.

The Centennial Dam Project likewise contradicts the framework for sustainable development, which is intergenerational justice and equity, as there are many fault lines across the location of the dams. Additionally, the Project, which will be implemented through public private partnership, will result in bad governance, as the project will be operated by private corporations, which generally function for profit.

Opponents also question the economic viability of the project given data that large dams usually suffer cost overruns and delays, when other economic alternatives appear. The Centennial Dam could cost up to P66 billion, while the rehabilitation of the Pasig-Laguna watershed can produce clean water at a cost of only P14 billion.

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The Centennial Dam project likewise seems unnecessary for Metro Manila's residents. The area's water comes from Angat Dam, which supplies 4,000 MLD to the megalopolis. The MWSS approximates Metro Manila demand at 5,054 MLD as of 2015. However, the UN estimates that a person typically needs 50 liters per day, which would put the requirements of Metro Manila's around 15 million residents at 750 MLD. Angat's supply would therefore be more than enough for residential requirements. The balance of the 4,000 MLD seems to go to malls, water purifying stations, car wash outlets, laundry stations, golf courses, and swimming pools. The additional water from the Centennial Dam would thus go primarily to the many more mega-business entities coming up in Metro Manila.

Campaign Call

The IP groups and other affected stakeholders under the multi-sectoral advocacy group Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance (SSMNA) have presented the following alternative solutions to the government to address any water crisis: Reforestation, not inundation, of forests; genuine restoration of watersheds and forests; enactment of the Forest Resources Bill, which prioritizes the protection of remaining forests; increase of the government budget for forest protection; the repair and improvement of existing dams; and issuance of a water conservation policy.

IPs' Struggle

The struggle of the indigenous peoples (IPs) against the Centennial Dam project was highlighted in 2009 when hundreds of Agta-Remontado tribe members and their supporters from civil society organizations marched 148 km from General Nakar town in Quezon to Metro Manila to dramatize their protest.



(Source: Inquirer, 2009)

The Samahan ng mga Katutubong Agta na Ipinagtatanggol at Binabaka ang Lupaing Ninuno (SAGIBIN), which is the organization of the Agta-Dumagat, together with their support group, SSMNA, which include the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), a national confederation of organizations of

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farmers, fishers and indigenous peoples, of which SAGIBIN is a member, pressed for the registration in the Land Registration Authority of the IPs' Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) as approved by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). These organizations had earlier mobilized marches and other non-violent actions against development projects that threatened IP welfare. The registration of the CADT would strengthen the Agta-Dumagat-Remontado's hold over areas affected by the Centennial Dam Project and protect their ancestral domain rights in those areas.

When the Philippine government under then President Benigno Aquino III approved the resumption of the Centennial Dam Project in 2014, PAKISAMA, with the continued support of We Effect, a development cooperation agency with headquarters in Sweden and an office in the Philippines, intensified its organizing work to include the Agta-Remontados of Daraitan, in Tanay town, Rizal province, leading to the organization of Samahang Uugit sa Karapatang Agta-Remontado sa Tanay Rizal na Lupaing Ninuno (SUKATAN), a 200-strong association. SUKATAN and SAGIBIN have since been exerting pressure on the NCIP to award their CADTs. Both IP groups are also relying on the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act to compel MWSS to go through the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) process. The Centennial Dam Project reportedly lacks FPIC from affected indigenous communities, and an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC).

The groups also find inspiration from the Papal Encyclical Laudato Si published in 2013.

The campaign was boosted with the involvement of geospatial expert and resident scientist of the Climate Change Commission of the Philippines Dr. Esteban Celeste Godilano, who supported the campaign with scientific and technical data.

The campaign continued in earnest under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, as the involved groups intensified community education and strengthened the IPs' claim to their ancestral domain. Conferences among IPs were also organized, such as the SSMNA's Conference of Dumagat and Other Indigenous Peoples in Sierra Madre, which concluded with a declaration that included a call to stop the construction of the Centennial Dam Project.

Stop the Centennial Dams

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Organizational consolidation and expansion at the community level was done through continuous community education on the Centennial Dam project and through introducing activities that will strengthen the claim of indigenous peoples to their land such as a local Community Organizing (LCO) training course in January 2016, a seminar on the National Greening Program in February 2016, a seminar on Integrated Diversified Organic Farming System (IDOFs) in July 2016, and initial reforestation activities in one village.

Engagement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which issues ECCs, was likewise enhanced with the entry of a sympathetic head, Secretary Gina Lopez. Sec. Lopez in fact created a multi-stakeholder Sierra Madre Council.

The campaign against the NCWSP is also being brought to the public not only through news reports in regular media, but also in social media with two videos uploaded on YouTube.

IP leaders held dialogues with various government agencies, including one Senator. SUKATAN and PAKISAMA also met with students from various schools and of different grade levels to explain the campaign against the NCWSP.

PAKISAMA facilitated the participation of SAGIBIN and SUKATAN leaders in four major regional and international events highlighting the issue of the Centennial Dams. Last November 2015, Ms. Conching Calzado, represented SAGIBIN and PAKISAMA during the COP 21 Chief of Parties Summit, as well as in the Asia Pacific Forestry Week on February 26, 2016 at Clark, Pampanga, Philippines.

Last June 2016, SUKATAN, through its leader Clara Dillas, brought the issue of the Centennial Dam in the ASEAN Social Forestry Network Conference She engaged the Administrator of the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), USEC Orlan Ravanera, a former CSO environmental activist, and had convinced him to assist them in their campaign versus the Dam. And then last September 2016, PAKISAMA participated in the Asian Land Forum held in Quezon City Philippines, with 51 other representatives of civil society organizations from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand.

Stop the Centennial Dams

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Work with the Academe (Miriam College and Ateneo de Manila) was re-started in 2017. Last February 3, key leaders of SUKATAN and PAKISAMA staff oriented 180 Grade 11 students of Miriam College about the Centennial Dam issue. On February 17, these same students visited the IP community in Daraitan, Tanay, Rizal and planted trees with the Agta-Remontado tribe. The symposium and the field visit allowed the students to understand the issues better and to come up with informed position on the issue. As of this writing, they are currently organizing to help the affected communities in their struggle to stop the construction of the Centennial Dam.

Meanwhile, in partnership with SUKATAN and PAKISAMA, ten college students of Ateneo de Manila University spent three days with the indigenous peoples of Daraitan, Tanay, Rizal to better understand their way of life. The students too are now becoming advocates for the indigenous peoples of Tanay.

On the other hand, SSMNA lawyers have been preparing to file a temporary restraining order against the NCWSP in case it becomes necessary to go to court to stop the project.

Campaign Gains

The actions by the Agta-Remontado IP groups secured support from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) for the IPs of Tanay-Nakar against the Centennial Dam project. The survey results for 24,500 hectares of ancestral domain of Agta-Remontados of Tanay, Rizal have been validated by the NCIP and private non-IP claims on some titled lands therein are being reviewed by the NCIP, Department of Agrarian Reform, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). The grant of the CADT would benefit at least 600 IP households. Meanwhile, the CADT for at least 140,000 hectares of ancestral domain of Agtas in Gen. Nakar has been reviewed by the government agencies concerned and should be awarded soon to some 1,200 IP households.

The campaign of the Agta-Remontado IP groups and the SSMNA has generated public support from various civil society institutions and government agencies. Civil society supporters include various IP federations, peasant federations, labor federations, urban poor federations,

Stop the Centennial Dams

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environmental NGO networks, the Caucus of Development NGO Networks, and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines-National Secretariat of Social Action Centers. Among the government agencies who support the IP groups are the DENR, National Anti Poverty Commission, and the Commission of Human Rights.

Status and the Work Ahead

The MWSS administration remains keen on pursuing the project. As of the end of 2016, the MWSS was still coordinating with the Department of Public Works and Highways for the joint implementation of the Centennial Dam project, and with local government units and regulatory agencies for the issuance of permits. Bidding documents have been completed but the approving authorities have yet to be appointed by the President.

SUKATAN, SAGIBIN and PAKISAMA will continue efforts in claiming ancestral domain titles as well as in organizing, education, mobilization and building alternatives for sustainable forest management and forest-based livelihood. SSMNA, on the other hand, intends to brief officials of the Duterte administration, with support from DENR and NCIP allies, on the campaign against the Centennial Dam Project. It is engaging the National Economic and Development Authority to delist the Centennial Dam Project from the current administration's priorities. SSMNA will also pursue awareness-building activities with its constituencies and the public, prepare for possible anti-dam direct action such as physical blockade by IPs and allies, and recruit more allies from the academe.

PAKISAMA'S work on the ground, with SAGIBIN and SUKATAN, is mainly supported by WE EFFECT

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