

Local situation does not merit international standards

PALANOG. The mere mention of it triggers images of a cement factory, mining and quarrying. Palanog is a barangay in Camalig, Albay where Goodfound Cement Factory is operated by Ibalong Resources Development Corporation (IRDC). It is owned by a Taiwanese, Chuang Teng Ko. In 2003, the plant quarried limestone and clay with a total sales value of P1.91 million and produced 5.7 million bags of cement valued at P291.5 million¹.

Now converted into industrial use, the plant site was once an agricultural land planted with coconuts and other farm crops. There is a limestone quarrying operation in the adjacent barangays of Quibongbongan, Miti and Mauraro, all in Guinobatan town. The ECC granted to IRDC only allows quarrying within the territorial boundaries of Camalig.

Violations of provisions of the ECC have not been corrected until now. The residents have not

gained enough of the benefits promised by the company when it was still seeking clearance from barangay officials. The company promised employment to the local folk, and cheaper cement in the local market. The local government unit may be collecting the revenues², but the proceeds do not directly benefit the affected local residents.

These are the issues raised against the factory:

1. Limestone quarrying has created a 50-to-60-foot deep open pit in the Palanog side of Mountain Quiborgo, contrary to the approved type of quarrying which is limited to single leveling. It poses a threat to the underground water resources. In fact, residents of the adjacent municipality of Guinobatan recently observed an alarming decline in water supply, directly attributable to the continuing open pit mining and quarrying in Palanog.

2. Waste materials and quarry debris have affected the natural drainage system of the area.

3. Coconut trees surrounding the plant are yellowing.

4. Polluted effluents are being disposed. High concentration of oil and grease mix with the waters of Nahologan and Palanog creeks. The firm's oil and water separators are either not efficient enough to treat its wastewater discharges or lack proper maintenance. However, the factory was able to clean up its effluents during an ocular inspection by the Multipartite Monitoring Team (MMT) in which a representative of the firm is a member.

5. There is noise and air pollution from intermittent sounds and fumes of trucks plying the daily quarry route and the constant humming of the plant's machines. Air at the western portion of the plant has exceeded standards set under the Clean Air Act of 1999. The plant's smokestack was observed to have emitted voluminous dust. The EMB reported that the plant meets the ambient noise standard considered for Class D areas though not for school and residential areas.

6. Out of 402 workers, only a small percentage are local residents. Most are Cebuanos because, allegedly, the jobs required skills that most local residents do not possess.

7. An ordinary employee is only allowed five days leave of absence in one year. Salary standards and fringe benefits are not so good. In October



Palanog: then and now

Destroying the sensitive island of Rapu-Rapu¹

The town of Rapu-Rapu is a fourth-class island municipality in the province of Albay, situated north of Lagonoy Gulf, southwest of Pacific Ocean, and east of Albay Gulf. The island provides livelihood in terms of fishery, farming and native crafts. It is the site of the Rapu-rapu Polymetallic Project operated by Lafayette (Phils), Inc., which has already started with the construction of a pier, an access road and accommodation camp. The company expects to produce around 315,000 oz of gold, 3.7 million oz of silver, 57,000 tons of copper, and 83,000 tons of zinc. Total mineral resources in Rapu-rapu are estimated at US\$262 million.

Eleven rural barangays and the town of Rapu-Rapu depend on limited water supply produced by the watershed of the island. At present, some areas of the forest in this watershed are already denuded, thus endangering the availability of water and worsening the present state of the water supply. With mining, competition between the residents and the mining company for the limited water resource becomes even more serious.

Environmental scientist Dr. Emelina Regis of the Inecar (Ateneo de Naga's Institute for Environmental Conservation and Research) strongly



Limestone quarry

2003, the firm suffered from a 2-week strike by the employees' union.

8. Hazardous working conditions are not being addressed. Only a part-time doctor attends to the medical needs of its employees who are exposed to the dust particles and other physical dangers of operating the different machines and equipments. An injured worker, in fact, failed to immediately avail himself of Philhealth benefits because of the doctor's failure to issue a medical certification.

The DENR-MGB, through the Multipartite Monitoring Team, had been conducting inspections of the cement plant. But monitoring reports are hardly accessible to the public, even to some local officials vocal about the problems. The DENR claimed that the company has already gained ISO 14000 certification which means that Goodfound Cement conforms with the international environmental management standard³.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ¹ DENR Environment and Natural Resources Presentation, November 23, 2004. Forum on Bicol State of the Environment. Casablanca Hotel, Legazpi City. Sponsored by Coalition for Bicol Development (CBD).
- ² Interview with Hon. Lerma Camba, Member of the Sangguniang Bayan, Camalig, Albay, February 18, 2005.
- ³ Gilbert Gonzales, DENR presentation, November 23 - 25. Casablanca Hotel, Legazpi City.



Perpetual pollution due to AMD