

SPEAK OUT!

COMMUNITIES
ASSERTING
THEIR RIGHTS TO
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

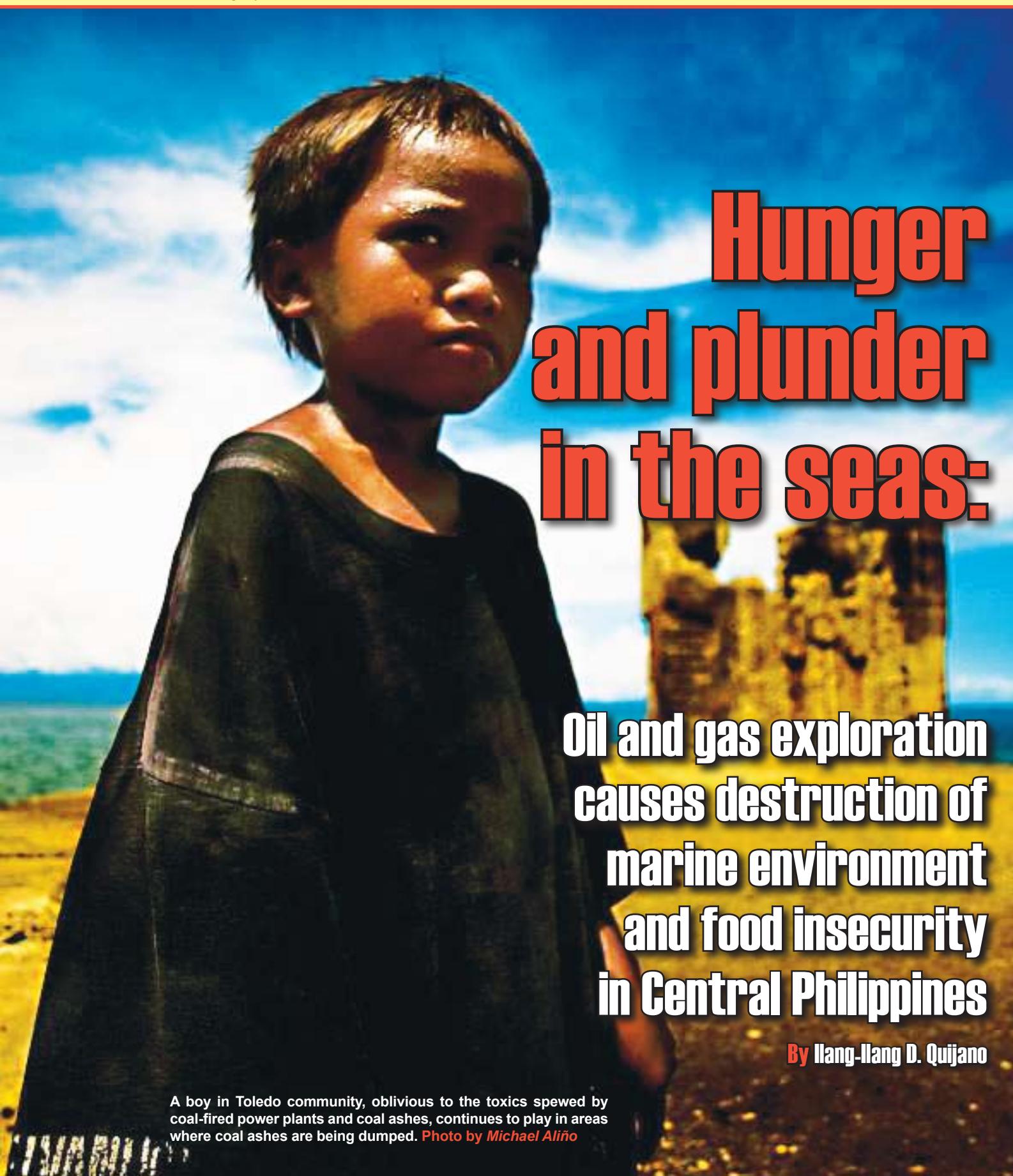
PCFS

People's Coalition on
Food Sovereignty

PAN AP

Pesticide Action Network
Asia and the Pacific

November 2008



Hunger and plunder in the seas:

**Oil and gas exploration
causes destruction of
marine environment
and food insecurity
in Central Philippines**

By Ilang-Ilang D. Quijano

A boy in Toledo community, oblivious to the toxics spewed by coal-fired power plants and coal ashes, continues to play in areas where coal ashes are being dumped. Photo by Michael Aliño

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This publication of PAN AP and PCFS aims to provide in-depth stories from communities asserting their food sovereignty. It is a tool for marginalised communities to speak out on issues that affect their lives and livelihood. It hopes to raise awareness and seek solidarity actions from the readers. If you have comments or have taken solidarity actions as a result of this publication, please share them to us at panap@panap.net or to secretariat@foodsov.org.

More than three years ago, a large vessel arrived without warning at Tañon Strait, one of the richest fishing grounds in Central Philippines and a global center for marine biodiversity.

For two months, the M/S Veritas Searcher owned by the Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. Ltd. (Japex) roamed the strait, dragging underwater a 3.5 kilometer-long cable that destroyed everything in its path. Fisherfolk living offshore heard non-stop blasting sounds with an interval of only five to 20 seconds.

Unknown to the people, Japex was already undertaking an extensive geophysical survey, using seismic blasting, to determine the existence of oil and natural gas deposits. Since then, the lives of thousands of subsistence fisherfolk have never been the same.

“Before, we used to catch 10 – 20 kilos of fish daily. Now, we are only able to catch 1 – 2 kilos,” said Adriano Agato, 60, a leader of a local fisherfolks’ organization in Brgy. Tajao, municipality of Pinamungahan, province of Cebu.

An estimated 200,000 fisherfolk in the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, and Negros Occidental in the Central Visayas region are adversely affected by the oil and gas exploration activities of Japex at the Tañon Strait and NorAsia Energy Ltd. at the Cebu-Bohol Strait.

An International Fact-Finding Mission sponsored by the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) and People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS), held last October 20 – 23, confirmed findings that the marine environment and the fisherfolks’ tenure and food security have been destroyed and are continuously being threatened by off-shore oil and gas exploration of foreign companies under service contracts that infringe upon the Philippines’ national patrimony and sovereignty.

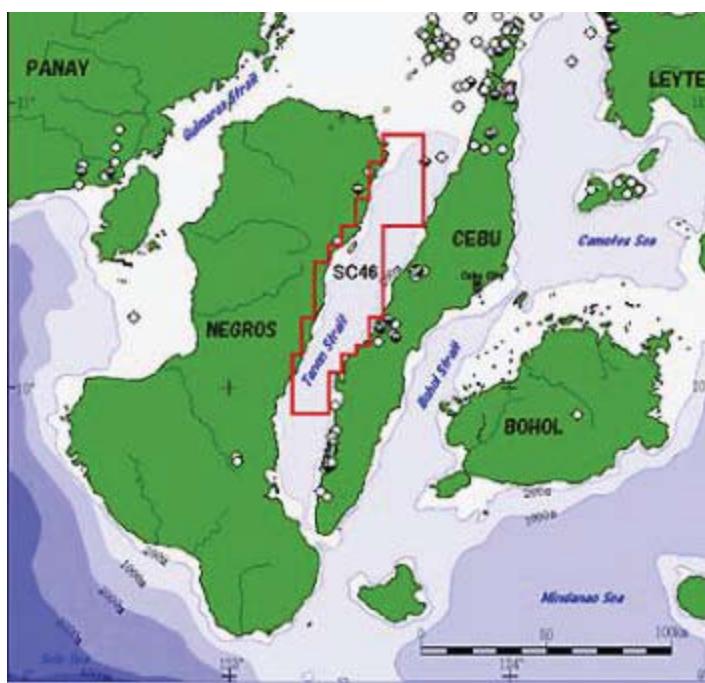
Energy Service Contracts

The Indo-Malay-Philippines Archipelago is acknowledged as an area with one of the highest marine biodiversity in the world. A recent study¹ pointed to the Central Philippines as “the center of marine shore biodiversity in the world.” Central Visayas is situated here. Bounded on the north by the Visayan Sea, on the south by Bohol Sea and the East Sulu Sea, on the west by Negros Island and Tañon Strait, and on the east by the Camotes Sea and Camotes Island, it is one of the top fishing grounds in the country. It has a coastline of 2,029 kilometers.

The Tañon Strait, separating the islands of Cebu and Negros, was declared a protected seascape by former Pres. Fidel V. Ramos in 1998. It is a migration route of whale sharks and home to at least 14 species of cetaceans, the most interesting of which are the dwarf sperm whales and melon-headed whales.

According to Dr. Lemnuel Aragones Ph.D., a marine scientist with the University of the Philippines’ Institute of Environment Science and Meteorology, the Tañon Strait is a “unique and very important part of the marine biodiversity profile of the Philippines, and which is of national, global, and ecological importance. This is shown by the very high diversity of cetaceans in the area and its use as their breeding, nursery, feeding, and resting grounds.” Aragones has been conducting studies in the strait for the past 10 years.

Meanwhile, the Cebu-Bohol Strait, separating the is-



Map of Tañon Strait. Photo credits: Bulatlat.com

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lands of Cebu and Bohol, is near the Danajon Double Barrier Reefs Bank, the only double barrier reef in the country and one of only six in the world. It has one of the largest areas of coral reefs and mangroves in the region.

But the Philippine government under the administration of Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo last 2005 ordered different government agencies to pursue the development of “independent sources of energy.” To date, the Department of Energy (DoE) has awarded 36 service contracts to various oil and gas exploration companies.

One of these is Service Contract 46 with Japex-Philippines, a 100% Japanese-owned subsidiary, signed by DoE Secretary Angelo Reyes last December 21, 2004. It is a seven-year contract to undertake oil and gas exploration, and another 25-year contract for the extraction and controlling process covering 2,850 square kms. of the Tañon Strait.

According to DoE Undersecretary Guillermo Balce, Tañon Strait has one billion barrels of potential reserve oil, 100 million barrels of which can be recovered.

Meanwhile, on July 8, 2005 the DOE awarded NorAsia Energy Ltd., an Australian-owned oil and gas exploration company, Service Contract 51 that covers 4,420 sq. kms. of the Cebu-Bohol Strait.

Reduction of fish catch

Not even having secured an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) nor the approval of local government units (LGUs), Japex started its seismic survey last May 2005. NorAsia, meanwhile, started its initial exploration in 2005 and its seismic survey in 2007.



HOME AND SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD. The Tañon Strait is the breeding ground of 14 species of dolphins and whales and a source of livelihood for thousands of fisherfolk in Central Philippines. Photo by Ilang-Ilang D. Quijano

A seismic survey uses a vessel with an airgun and hydrophones connected to a cable that it drags underwater. The sonic boom from an airgun array is 255 decibels (dB), way over the human threshold of 80 dB and that of animals which is even lower.

According to different scientific studies, seismic blasting can damage reproductive organs, burst air bladders, and cause physiological stress in marine organisms. It can also cause behavioral modifications and reduce or eliminate available habitat, alter fish distribution by tens of kilometers, and damage planktonic eggs and larvae. Thus, it has been known to drastically reduce fish catch.

Various FFMs conducted by different groups since 2005 documented the fish catch reduction brought about by Japex and NorAsia's operations.

In Tañon Strait, fisherfolk using motorized boats reported that post-oil and gas exploration, their fish catch went down to 3 – 5 kilos from 15 – 20 kilos, while fisherfolk using non-motorized boats reported a fish catch reduction from 4 – 6 kilos to 0 – 2 kilos.

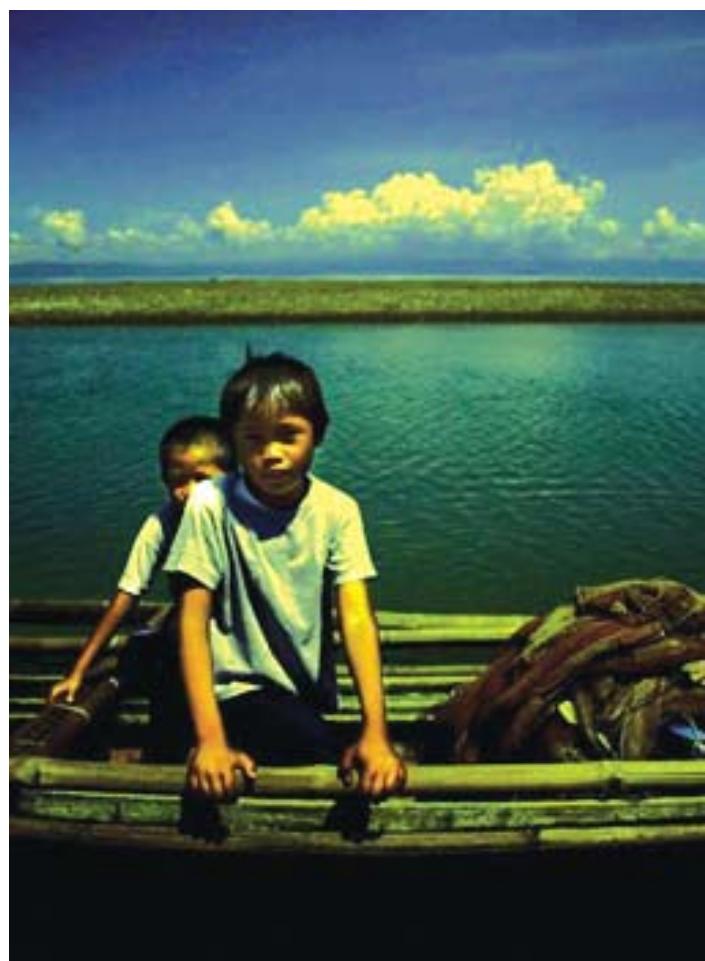
This was the result of the FFM in Toledo City and municipalities on Pinamungahan and Aloguinsan in Cebu last September 2005, conducted by the Central Visayas Fisherfolk Development Center Inc. (Fidec) and Cebu Relief and Rehabilitation Center, together with the fisherfolk organizations Panaghiusa sa Gagmay'ng Mangingisda sa Sugbo (Pamana-Sugbo) or Alliance of Fisherfolk in Cebu and Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamataya sa Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) or Fisherfolk Movement of the Philippines.

Meanwhile, fisherfolk in Guihulngan City and municipality of Vallehermoso, Negros Oriental and San Carlos City and municipality of Calatrava, Negros Occidental, reported that their fish catch was reduced to 2 – 3 kilos from 10 – 15 kilos, according to the results of a FFM conducted by Pamalakaya- Negros, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, and Gabriela last November 2007 in eight coastal communities affected by Japex's seismic survey.

Fishkills in San Carlos City and the disappearance of baga, a local type of fish known in Guihulngan City, were reported.

It was also found out that a total of 136 *payao* or fish-aggregating devices were destroyed by the survey vessel. A payao is an artificial reef made of Styrofoam materials, deployed by fisherfolk in strategic areas to increase fish catch. Some of the payao owners were paid Php4,000 or US\$83.33 (based on US\$1=Php48 conversion rate) each through the intercession of the Department of Agriculture, but most were not compensated at all.

In the Cebu-Bohol Strait, the fish catch and income of fisherfolk in the municipalities of Argao and Sibonga in Cebu was reduced by 70 – 80 percent since NorAsia's seismic survey last year, according to initial results of a study conducted by Fidec this August.



In the municipality of Aloguinsan and Pinamungajan, children were forced to go fishing and stop attending school activities because off-shore mining dramatically reduced their daily income.

Photo by Michael Aliño

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Fisherfolk in Pimanunganan meanwhile, told the IFFM team that despite Japex's pull-out from Tañon Strait, their fish catch has not returned to normal. "There has been no significant change, our fish catch continues to decline. Some species like the *lumiagan* (a type of squid) have already disappeared from the sea," said Emilio Elarde Jr., leader of a local multi-sectoral organization in Brgy. Pandacan.

They have also not forgotten nor recovered from the effects of the four-month fishing ban that Japex imposed from November 2007 to February 2008 while it undertook a drilling operation. Japex drilled a well 3,150 meters deep in an area in Tañon Strait three kms. west of Pinamungahan.

The company deployed its Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit, Hakoryu V, in the middle of Tañon Strait and forbade the fisherfolk to enter within a seven-kilometer radius. Armed men guarded the perimeter and threatened the fisherfolk that they would have to pay for the company's equipment should they be damaged.

Fisherfolk were forced to look for alternative sources of income like doing laundry, gathering and selling firewood, and carpentry. Many of their children stopped schooling and got sick since they can no longer afford their education and proper nutrition.

"Our income used to be just enough for transportation, food, and electricity. Now it is barely enough even to put food on the table," said Merla Labid, 53, whose grandson got sick of bronchopneumonia and dropped out of sixth grade.

Agato meanwhile complained that for the four-month fishing ban, "the LGU only gave each family one sack (or 50 kilos) of rice."

With these reports and studies of drastic fish catch reduction without any immediate signs of improvement, Pamalakaya fears that oil and gas exploration activities has long-term impacts not only on the livelihood of subsistence fisherfolk in the region, but on the food security of the whole country as well.

It will result to a "fish crisis" that would cut domestic production by an average of 600,000 metric tons of fish and other marine products annually for the next seven to 10 years, the group said.

It is also feared to reduce per capita fish consumption of every Filipino by not less than 20 percent. Fish is a major diet component, accounting for over 50 percent of the total animal protein consumed in the country.

Cetaceans too have been disturbed, putting into jeopardy the ecological integrity of the Tañon Strait.

During the seismic survey, Dr. Aragones observed very unusual or abnormal surface behavior pattern of spinners (nocturnal mammals). He also noted a drastic decline in the relative abundance of dolphins in Tañon Strait. From measurements of more than a total of 300 animals per survey day a number of times per sampling season during the years 2004 and 2005, the number was nowhere near 300 in the sampling done by Dr. Aragones' research team in 2006, a year after Japex's conduct of the seismic survey.

Mining and toxic waste

Before their seas were destroyed by oil and gas exploration, residents of Toledo City for years have had to grapple with toxic ash released by a 250-megawatt coal-fired power plant. Constructed by the U.S.-owned Atlas Consolidated Mining Development Corporation in the 1960s to provide power to copper and gold mines in the mountains, it was shut down in 1994 due to labor problems.

"However, the ashes containing lead, arsenic, and mercury are still there, destroying our farmlands and rivers. Residents whose livelihood have been affected even scour these heaps of toxic ash to look for scrap metals," Primo

Lamela, Executive Director of Kakasaka-Sugbo, Inc. or Organization for the Development of Western Cebu, told the IFFM team.

The power plant was recently bought by the Filipino-Chinese billionaire Henry Sy and is being rehabilitated and set to be re-opened, posing a new danger to residents who have suffered the adverse economic, environmental, and health effects of mining activities both upland and off-shore.

Meanwhile, off-shore drilling releases a steady stream of pollution and exposes wildlife to the threat of oil spills that would devastate their populations. A single exploratory well for oil and gas can generate 25,000 pounds of toxic metals, such as lead, chromium, and mercury, and potent carcinogens like toluene, benzene, and xylene into the ocean.

It can also generate 50 tons of nitrogen oxides, 13 tons of carbon monoxide, six tons of sulfured dioxide, and five tons of volatile organic hydrocarbons, all of which are pollutants that contribute to global warming. Each off-shore oil platform releases approximately 214,000 pounds of air pollutants per year.

Fisherfolk of Aloguinsan confirmed to the IFFM team that Japex, during midnight, transported toxic waste from the sea to a vacant lot owned by a ranking LGU official, who reportedly leased the lot to the company for Php7 million or roughly US\$150,000.

"The smell is bad whenever the waste is transferred. Our deep well has turned bitter, our water source has been polluted. Many of us also developed skin rashes," said Alfreda Alcoz, 67, a resident of Brgy. Poblacion.

In a statement issued by its Tokyo-based parent company Japex Co. Ltd. last May 13, Japex Philippines said it has relinquished the oil drilling project "because of the lack of commercial oil and gas discovery as a result of exploration work including drilling of one exploration well."²

However, DoE Region VII Director Antonio Labios said that Japex has yet to formalize its withdrawal from the project and that the firm "still has obligations to fulfill" based on its contract with the Philippine government. He also said that Tañon Strait will be "opened to other interested oil and gas explorers."³

NorAsia, meanwhile, is preparing to conduct off-shore drilling in the Cebu-Bohol Strait early next year.

"We're scared that when the drilling starts, we would totally have nothing left to eat. Even now all we can afford most of the time is just rice. Some of my fellow fish vendors have migrated to the cities to work as domestic helpers because there is no livelihood left here," said Lucena Sarahena, 41, a resident of Brgy. Langtad, Argao.



Adriano Jugadora, the Chairperson of NAHIGMATA a local fisherfolk organization in Tajao, Pinamungajan, emotionally shared to the IFFM team how the JAPEX operation destroyed their livelihood and affected their health. Photo by Michael Aliño

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ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEM. Mangroves that line the Tañon Strait are indicative of the rich ecosystem now endangered by oil and gas exploration activities. *Photo by Michael Aliño*

No consultations

Last September 22, Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia ordered a halt to the oil exploration surveys and other related works in the municipalities of Sibonga and Argao.

“It is hereby ordered, the Department of Energy Regional Office 7, its officers, agents and all other persons acting for and on behalf, to cease and desist from continuing in the conduct of any and all oil exploration surveys and other related works in the seabed and seawaters of the municipalities of Argao and Sibonga, both of the Province of Cebu, until such time that the required consultations shall be made and all legitimate concerns of the concerned parties shall have been properly addressed,” Executive Order No. 9 said.⁴

E.O. No. 9 also said that the activities violated Section 2 of Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991. Under the law, all national agencies and offices are required “to conduct periodic consultations with appropriate local government units, non-governmental and people’s organizations, and other concerned sectors of the community before any project or program is implemented in their respective jurisdictions.”

After Service Contract 46 was awarded, DoE and Japex officials visited LGUs in the provinces of Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental from July until October 2007. However, their so-called “information drives” were attended by a few people and did not involve the affected fisherfolk. “We only found out accidentally about the project. No public hearings were held,” Editho Namion Jr. of Pamalakaya-Negros told the IFFM team.

Meanwhile, Roberto Amaro, environment and natural resources management officer in the municipality of Bindoy, Negros Oriental, said, “Our mayor and vice-mayor are not in favor of the project in Tañon Strait because it will not uplift people from poverty. It destroyed the efforts that we have started to protect marine resources. Now, the migratory and the predatory fishes are gone.”

Atty. Boyd Arnold Teczon, councilor and Executive Director of the Argao Clean and Green Commission, also told of how NorAsia trespassed upon the LGU's powers twice, during the site exploration in 2005 and seismic survey in 2007. "Before we can even conduct an assessment, they went ahead with the exploration. The next thing we knew, it was finished. They must have very powerful backers because I heard that the Philippine Coast Guard even serves as their escort at sea," he said.

Atty. Teczon revealed that last month, DoE officials and even one general visited to convince them that the project will lead to development because it will boost the LGU's revenues.

Under Philippine Law, the provincial government will receive a 40 percent share of the revenues that oil and gas companies will earn under a contract with the Philippine government.

Meanwhile, NorAsia also promised residents of Argao that the pump prices of gasoline, as well as prices of basic commodities, will go down if the oil and gas exploration goes well.

But the fishermen of Brgy. Langtad are not convinced. "What will we do with low prices if we have no money because there is no fish?" Felisa Albandonido, 60. She also said, "The revenue that will go to the LGU, we don't know how it will trickle down to us."

Last year, officials of Japex and DoE also visited Dr. Angel Alcala, a known marine biologist and director of the Angelo King Center for Research and Environmental Management in Siliman University, to explain that the project was environmentally safe.

However, Dr. Alcala and his team of marine biologists discovered critical lapses in the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) submitted by Japex, the only basis for the ECC issued by DENR-Region VII last March 6, 2007. The environmental and resource survey was found to be "extremely rapid" and the baseline data used "too old and not suitable."

"We found the IEE document wanting in the critical survey data and information needed for determining the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the proposed drilling operation of Japex," he said.

Unconstitutional, illegal

Service Contract 46 is unconstitutional and illegal, Fidec and several fisherfolk asserted in a class suit filed with the Supreme Court last December 12, 2007.

Article XII, Section 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that "The State shall protect the nation's marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone, and shall reserve its use and enjoyment exclusively for Filipino citizens."

According to the same provision, the State controls the exploration, utilization, and development of natu-



Elusive justice - Fisherfolks in the Municipality of Argao shared with the members of the IFFM team how their rights were violated by the ongoing off-shore oil and gas activity of NorAsian in Cebu-Bohol Strait. Photo by Michael Aliño

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ral resources and may only enter into joint ventures with corporations at least sixty percent of capital is owned by Filipinos.

The constitutionality of Republic Act 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, which allows into the country 100 percent foreign-owned mining companies in cases of needed “financial and technical assistance” (FTAA), has been disputed before the Supreme Court. However, the petitioners, composing of indigenous tribes, environmentalists, and nationalist cause-oriented groups, lost the landmark case.

Fidec’s petition argues that Japex is 100 percent foreign-owned and thus Service Contract 46 unconstitutional, since it cannot be considered under RA 7942 and the FTAA provision that lifts the limits on foreign control.

“There is as yet no general law passed by Congress that sets standards or uniform terms, conditions, or requirements for serviced contracts for the exploration of petroleum or mineral oil resources,” the petition further argues.

With no enabling law, DoE has no authority to enter into such agreements. Such an authority, under the Constitution, is reserved only for the President, which then has to report it to Congress within 30 days.

Fidec also points out that the service contract covering Tañon Strait, a National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) area, violates Section 14 of Republic Act 7586 or the NIPAS Act, which states that “any exploitation and utilization of energy resources found within NIPAS areas shall be allowed only through a law passed by Congress.”

Meanwhile, the fishing ban imposed by Japex infringes on the right “to preferential use of the communal fishing waters” that is granted to marginal fisherfolk by the Constitution, the Local Government Code, and the Philippine Fisheries Code.

Fidec also asked the Supreme Court to revoke the ECC given by DENR-Region VII since it did not strictly comply with the procedural and substantive requirements provided for under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) System.

The ECC should have been based on an EIA, which undertakes multi-stakeholder consultations, and not merely on an IEE that has “reduced details and depth of assessment,” according to the petition.

On December 18, 2007, resident marine mammals of Tañon Strait also filed a petition in the Supreme Court, claiming that their habitat was destroyed by oil and gas exploration activities. It was the first time in the country and in Southeast Asia that a case was filed in behalf of animals as aggrieved parties.

According to the petitioners represented by environmental lawyers Atty. Gloria Estenzo-Ramos and Liza E. Osorio, cetaceans have “more than a right to sue for the faithful performance and enforcement of substantive stipulations in International Environmental Laws and Municipal Environmental Laws created in their favor and for their benefit.”

It argues that Service Contract 46 violates the United Nations Charter for Nature, of which the Philippines is a signatory. The said UN Charter says that governments have a duty to respect nature and not to impair its essential processes; not to compromise the genetic viability on the earth; to safeguard the habitats of all life forms; to give special protection to unique areas and to habitats of rare or endangered species; and to conscientiously manage the earth’s ecosystems and organisms in order to achieve and maintain sustainable productivity that would not endanger the integrity of other ecosystems or species.

It also violates several multi-lateral instruments such as the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, Agenda 21

of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro, and the 1983 Bonn Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, according to the petition.

Harassment and struggle

The Save Tañon Strait Citizens Movement (STSCM) is unconvinced that E.O. No. 9 is meant to permanently stop off-shore mining. It suspects that the provincial government is merely giving NorAsia time to prepare for an EIA so that it will not be questioned before the courts like Japex.

Nonetheless, the STSCM considers E.O. No. 9 a victory for the people of Central Visayas who struggled to defend their livelihoods and the environment. The formation last November 2007 of STSCM—a broad regional alliance of fisherfolk, environmentalists, students, scientists, lawyers, and other professionals—is in itself a result of this struggle.

The STSCM says that their campaign has gone beyond the Tañon Strait, which has become an “icon of the dislocation of communities from their resources,” to encompass the threat against the whole Visayan Sea. It is preparing to file with the Supreme Court a petition against NorAsia’s foray into the Cebu-Bohol Strait.

Atty. Ramos, also a founding member of STSCM, condemned the executive branch of government for continuing the oil and gas explorations without waiting for the decision of the Supreme Court in the two petitions already filed. “We are a biodiversity-rich country. We should take stock of what we have instead of destroying our natural resources. Otherwise, we would be made accountable by the future generations.”

STSCM is also pushing for an on-site congressional investigation of the issue. Resolutions for this have been filed in the 14th Congress of the Philippines by Senators Ana Consuelo Madrigal and Loren Legarda and 11 congressmen led by Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño.

In the meantime, the issue has resulted in the creation and strengthening of local fisherfolk groups across the region. Fisherfolk now lead organizing activities, dialogues with LGUs, public fora, pickets, and mass actions.

Elarde told the IFFM team that Brgy. Pandacan in Aloguinsan can mobilize 500 to 700 people three times a week. “We’re learning the need to link with other organizations that have the expertise. If there is only one or two of us, nobody would listen. Now, even the farmers are uniting with us.”

Last October 16, dubbed as “World Foodless Day”, more than 300 fisherfolks, led by Pamana-Sugbo and Pamalakaya, held a fluvial protest aboard 80 pump-boats in the Tañon Strait.

These protest actions have attracted not only public attention, but harassment from state authorities as



A wife of a fisherfolk waits with her daughter, in the coast of Pinamungajan for the return of her husband. Off-shore mining in Central Philippines has dramatically reduced their daily fish catch. Photo by Michael Aliño

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well. Military men bearing long firearms stopped and searched the belongings of fisherfolk who participated in the said fluvial protest. “Armed men in civilian clothing confiscated placards and streamers while uniformed policemen from the Cebu Provincial Police Office and soldiers from the 78th Infantry Battalion looked on,” added Victor Lapaz, chairman of Pamana-Sugbo. Lapaz has also been receiving threatening text messages by unknown senders.

Recently, men in civilian clothing have been arriving in vans in various barangays in Sibonga and Argao, asking people in the community about the whereabouts of leaders of the people’s organizations.

The Cebu Chapter of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, the national organization of lawyers, has hit the harassment and sought a dialogue with the provincial government to resolve the issue.

Myth of development

The IFFM team lauded the strength of the local and regional movement against off-shore oil and gas exploration in Central Visayas, and vowed to step up international pressure on the Philippine government to stop oil and gas exploration in Central Philippines.

It also called for a moratorium on all future oil and gas exploration projects undertaken by foreign companies, saying that these does not lead to economic prosperity, sustainable development or energy independence.

Delegates of the IFFM included Vince Cinches, executive director of Fidec; Meggie Nolasco, public information officer of Kalikasan-People’s Network for the Environment (Philippines); Andry Wijaya of Jatam-Indonesia and the Oil Watch Southeast Asia; Teh Chun Hong of PAN AP; Gilbert Sape of PCFS; and Wichoksak Ronnarong-pairee and Busarin Pandit of the Federation of Southern Fisherfolk (Thailand).

“One striking pattern is that the national government seems to be hell-bent in selling our patrimony and natural resources,” observed Nolasco. She added that the case of off-shore mining in Central Visayas shows how President Arroyo’s so-called energy program only benefits foreign capitalists and corrupt government officials while bringing misery to majority of poor Filipinos.

Kalikasan-PNE, a national alliance of environmental organizations, cited how the Malampaya Gas Project operated by a local consortium controlled by the multinational Royal Dutch Shell, has failed to provide for the Philippine’s energy needs. This is because natural gas, discovered in commercial quantities in 1998 off the province of Palawan, is merely exported abroad.

“Even the promised 40 percent local share of profits has not been actualized because the national government and the provincial government are still battling over it in the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, Royal Dutch Shell continues to make billions of dollars in profit,” Nolasco said.

Meanwhile, Wijaya and Chun Hong debunked the myth that underdeveloped countries will benefit from the entry of foreign oil and mining companies.

“Petroleum is a major income of Malaysia. But the two major states producing it, Sarawak and Terengganu, are also the poorest states. For the past 10 years the income of the people has been stagnant, even if the Gross Domestic Product has increased six to eight percent every year. Petroleum price has also increased a lot,” said Chun Hong.

Wijaya shared that in Indonesia, wherein foreign companies have been “exploiting oil” for 32 years, “fisherfolk can’t enter the sea because there is a pipeline there, and they can’t find fish because the flare is burning 24 hours.” Oil Watch Southeast Asia encourages that oil be “kept underground” in order to reduce oil dependency and mitigate the effects of climate change.



The IFFM Team listens to the community stories. Photo by Michael Aliño

Wijaya also said that developed countries expand off-shore mining operations to countries like the Philippines to be able to extract natural resources it doesn't have and yet dump toxic waste that it doesn't want.

Ronnarongpairee and Pandit, meanwhile, said that "the victorious struggle of the Central Visayan people against off-shore mining is a great inspiration for us who face the same threats at home."

IFFM manifestation and recommendations

In a joint manifestation, the IFFM team said that "Sustainable programs such as sustainable agriculture and authentic eco-tourism participated in by the community should be mainstreamed. Sustainability is the key to full human development, and not-dole outs, which encourage corruption, dependency and political patronage."

It called as "double-speak" the Philippine government "mouthing calls for the people to reduce energy consumption and the use of fossil fuels while heavily promoting off-shore drilling and mining."

"We call on the government and stakeholders to craft and implement measures to reduce oil dependency and carbon emission, and to mitigate the impact of climate change. Residents of developing nations such as the Philippines are its worst victims. Reducing our carbon imprints is a moral responsibility for all," said the manifestation. Aside from calling for an immediate end to off-shore oil and gas exploration activities, the IFFM team also de-

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manded that militarization in the communities of Argao and Sibonga be stopped, and the Philippine courts make speedy resolutions to cases filed by the fisherfolk and marine mammals that are “aimed at protecting our resources from foreign plunder and dislocation of food producers.”

It also demanded for the accountability of the foreign corporations and the Philippine government for the destruction of local livelihood and global marine life and ecology, as a result of “illegal and unconstitutional” contracts on oil and gas exploration.

“In the era where global warming and climate change is threatening the survival of poor communities, it is irresponsible for corporations and government leaders to profit from the misery of poor Filipinos,” the manifestation stated.

Finally, the IFFM team said that activities related to off-shore mining in Tañon Strait and Cebu-Bohol Strait violates the economic, social, and cultural rights of the Visayan people, foremost of which is the right to food and food sovereignty. It plans to file a case with the United Nations Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

“We have seen in Asia and many parts of the globe that historically, oil doesn’t translate to wealth of the people,” according to Sape.

On the contrary, the experience of fisherfolk in Central Philippines has again proven that potential oil discovery has led to even greater poverty and destruction of the world’s natural wealth.

Endnotes

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PETITION LETTER

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Speak Out! Communities Asserting Their Rights To Food Sovereignty

PETITION LETTER

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To all concerned authorities:

This is to express concern over the findings of a recent International Fact-Finding Mission by the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) and Central Visayas Fisherfolk Development Center (Fidec) on the effects of off-shore oil and gas exploration activities in the protected seascape of Tanon Strait and Cebu-Bohol Strait in Central Philippines.

The Tanon Strait is one of the world's most unique and important centers for marine biodiversity, a breeding ground for 14 species of cetaceans. Cebu-Bohol Strait, meanwhile, hosts nearby the Danajon Double Barrier Reefs Bank, one of only six double barrier reefs in the world.

However, due to service contracts awarded by the Philippine government to the Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. Ltd. (Japex) and the Australia-based NorAsia Energy Ltd., environmentally-destructive seismic surveys and drilling operations have been conducted in the area even without prior consultation with local communities and government officials. As a result, fish catch has declined by 70 to 80 percent, causing hunger and displacement of thousands of small fisherfolk in the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, and Negros Occidental. They have been banned from fishing while exploration activities were ongoing and thus denied of their constitutional rights over municipal waters and their basic right to food and livelihood. A scientific study also indicates that these activities have disturbed the natural habitat of dolphins and whales.

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We are calling on concerned authorities to immediately call for the cancellation of the said service contracts, which are now being questioned before the Philippines' Supreme Court by fisherfolk groups and even the cetaceans themselves, in a landmark case in Southeast Asia. The impact of continued oil and gas exploration is an estimated cut in the domestic fish production in the Philippines by twenty percent for the next 10 to 20 years. It will also starve thousands of fisherfolk families. Already, children have stopped schooling and women have been forced to look for domestic work in the cities.

It is also bothersome that instead of recognizing and responding to the resistance to off-shore mining by fisherfolk communities, environmentalists, students, lawyers and other professionals, the Philippine government seems bent on pursuing the contracts and has even deployed the military in certain areas to harass local leaders.

We call on the Philippine government to instead craft and implement measures to reduce oil dependency and carbon emission. In the era where global warming and climate change is already threatening the survival of poor Filipino communities, it is morally irresponsible for corporations and government leaders to profit from the misery of the marginalized and to rob future generations of sustainable use of a rich and irreplaceable ecosystem.

Signed,

Name

Position/Organization

Country

Speak Out! Communities Asserting Their Rights To Food Sovereignty

People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) is a growing network of various grassroots groups of small food producers particularly of peasant-farmer organisations and their support NGOs, working towards a People's Convention on Food Sovereignty.

Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) is one of five regional centres of PAN, a global network working to eliminate the human and environmental harm caused by pesticides, and to promote biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

“Our vision is a society that is truly democratic, equal, just, culturally diverse, and based on food sovereignty, gender justice and environmental sustainability”. Thus PAN AP asserts people’s food sovereignty based on the right to food for all, founded on the right to land and productive resources and the right of communities to decide on our own food and agriculture policies. We are committed to protect the safety and health of people and the environment from pesticide use, and genetic engineering in food and agriculture. We strive to protect and promote the rights, equality and dignity of women. We will promote and protect biodiversity based ecological agriculture. Our goal is to strengthen people’s movements to eliminate hunger and achieve food sovereignty. We endeavour to achieve these goals by empowering people within effective networks at the Asia and the Pacific, and global levels.

Based in Penang, Malaysia, Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific is linked to more than 150 groups in 18 countries in the Asia Pacific region.



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