

Mining firm promises fair projects distribution among communities

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TUBA, Benguet , Philippines – Philex Mining Corp. has reassured the outlying communities at its Padcal operations in this province that it has implemented and will continue to distribute fairly its socioeconomic projects among them.

Both parties agreed to engage the services of an independent expert to look into their other most pressing concerns like water sources.

Officials of LGU or local government units, leaders of the indigenous peoples (IPs), and other residents in the host and neighboring villages recently held a dialogue with Philex Mining officials led by Victor Francisco, VP for environment and community relations, and community relations manager Aurora Dolipas, as well as with some officials of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Held March 10 at the Baguio offices of MGB, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that regulates the mining industry, the discussion focused on Philex Mining's Social Development and Management Program (SDMP) and other concerns including the alleged depletion of water sources in a host village.

"I assure you that we will continue to implement a fair distribution of the projects — just as what we have been doing — that are intended for our host and neighboring communities," Dolipas told IP leaders and other clan representatives from the host barangays of Camp 3, in Tuba, and Ampucao, in Itogon; and the neighboring barangays of Camp 1 and Ansagan (Tuba) and Dalupirip (Itogon).

With a total population of more than 27,000 in 7,896 households, these barangays are collectively called outlying communities.

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Felizardo Gacad, chief of Mining, Environment and Safety Division at MGB-Cordillera Administrative Region who hosted and facilitated the dialogue, vouched for the mining firm's position that almost all SDMP projects are identified by the communities themselves during consultations.

"Questions on the fairness of distribution should be raised at this stage... especially when these projects are already being implemented," Philex Mining said, following complaints of alleged selective implementation of a number of social projects.

The company added that most signatories to the complaints filed before some government agencies late last year have been participating in community consultations.

Asia Gabino, one of the complainants, had reportedly been a recipient or beneficiary of some SDMP-funded projects. From Jan. 28, 2015 to Jan. 1, 2016, she and her husband, Marlon, implemented through contracts with Philex Mining some SDMP projects in their area — Sitio Torre, Barangay Camp 3 — to the tune of P9.34 million, according to documents which however could not be independently confirmed.

In a video posted on Facebook, Gabino appealed to President Duterte to help resolve the problems in their mountain town, including scarce water and cracked roads, which she attributed to "irresponsible mining" activities.

Eddie Amuasen, chairman of Barangay Ampucao, suggested that a third-party expert be engaged to look into complaints about water sources in Camp 3, allegedly owing to the ongoing drilling conducted by Philex Mining's exploration team in Sitio Alang.

Company officials agreed with Amuasen's suggestion, which was in response to some reactions questioning hydrogeologist Mario Sandoval's credibility as he was invited to talk by the MGB alone.

Sandoval, of the Aqua-Dyne Technological Service Inc., had debunked the alleged correlation between the ongoing drilling and water-supply depletion.

The miner's study pointed to an increasing number of households and farmers in the areas concerned: "The population in the communities surrounding the company's Padcal operations continues to increase, a factor contributory to water depletion as more households now share natural resources as compared with the number of households before."

The company also noted a significant rise in the number of farmers in these communities, as well other activities such as *kaingin* (slash-and-burn agriculture) and conversion of forested areas into agricultural lands.

<http://www.philstar.com/science-and-environment/2017/04/27/1694188/mining-firm-promises-fair-projects-distribution-among>