

Chico River pump irrigation inaugurated

By Vince Jacob Visaya MANILA TIMES

TABUK CITY, Kalinga: The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) and Chinese officials formally inaugurated the P4.373-billion Chico River Pump Irrigation Project at Barangay Katabogon, Pinukpuk, Kalinga on Saturday, June 25.

NIA Administrator Ricardo Visaya, who led the opening, said the Chico River pump project will irrigate 8,700 hectares (ha) in Cagayan (7,539 ha in Tuao and Piat) and part of Kalinga (1,170 ha in Pinukpuk) benefitting 4,992 farmers and their families.

The construction of the project started in 2018 through the China CAMC Engineering Corp.

"Finally, this will enhance the productivity of farms being planted by farmers in Cagayan and Kalinga provinces," he said.

The flagship infrastructure project was financed by the People's Republic of China through the China Export-Import Bank under President Duterte's Build, Build, Build program.

The project encountered opposition that delayed its progress following complaints from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in 2019 that their consent was not obtained.

NCIP officials also complained that the main beneficiaries are residents in Cagayan Valley but the source of water for the irrigation project comes from the Chico River along upstream Kalinga. They had feared that the water stock would be lessened as Kalinga farmers also use the water to irrigate their farms.

The NCIP also complained of earth-moving activities at the pump house site during the construction period. A certification precondition from the NCIP was then asked to be issued as NIA and China contractors had complied with the requirements.

The Regional Project Monitoring Committee (RPMC) of the Cordillera Regional Development Council visited the Chico River Pump Irrigation site implemented by the NIA on Aug. 23, 2018, to validate various claims concerning the project. The RPMC then held a joint meeting with their counterpart in Region 2. This visit was a result of agreements made on July 12, 2018 by the joint task force composed of the Regional Development Council committees on Indigenous Peoples Concerns and Infrastructure Development to gather information and address concerns on the project.

RPMC chairwoman and NEDA-CAR Regional Director Milagros Rimando led the conduct of a meeting with the community elders to validate the various issues such as the lack of consultations and hiring of Chinese workers, among others.

During that meeting, the RPMC was able to confirm that consultations conducted by NIA Region 2 and the Kalinga Provincial Office of the NCIP with the affected communities were done properly. "The elders acknowledged the role of NCIP in helping resolve issues pertaining to the project," Rimando added in a Neda report posted on its website.

The community leaders and elders gave assurance that there were consultations done by the DENR in connection with the issuance of an Environmental Compliance Certificate. The households in the affected community were also paid disturbance compensation for the duration of the project. Other concerns raised by the elders included the suggestion to prioritize locals in employment as there are plenty of skilled

workers from Kalinga, and urged the NIA, as project owner and implementer, to look into the earth spoils being dumped along with adjacent farms and river banks.