



This submission to the World Commission on Dams
was presented at the Commission's
East / South-East Asia Regional Consultation

Hanoi, Vietnam
26-27 February 2000

Disclaimer - This paper was prepared as a submission to the Fourth Regional Consultation of the World Commission on Dams in Hanoi. The views, conclusions and recommendations are those of the writer and are not intended to represent the views of the Commission or the Government of Vietnam.

The World Commission on Dams
5th floor, Hycastle House
58 Loop Street
PO Box 16002
Vlaeberg
Cape Town
SOUTH AFRICA

Telephone: +27 21 426 4000
Fax: +27 21 426 0036

Website: <http://www.dams.org>

Email: info@dams.org

Arnaldo Gapuz

Shalupirip Santahnay Indigenous Peoples' Movement

What My People Stand To Lose with the Construction Of The San Roque Dam

I come from Ballococ, one of several small villages that comprise the settlement of Dalupirip -- or *Shalupirip* -- in the municipality of Itogon, Benguet province, Philippines. Dalupirip is located along the Agno river. It is the lowest-lying Ibaloy settlement in the mineral-rich and agriculturally fertile Agno river basin. This basin has hosted the small mines, farms, and homes of Benguet's indigenous Ibaloy and Kankanaey peoples for at least five centuries. If the implementation of the San Roque project downstream of Dalupirip continues to completion, ours will become the third Ibaloy settlement along the Agno river to be destroyed by dams. The first was the ancient settlement of Ambuklao in the municipality of Bokod, upstream of Itogon. The second was the younger settlement of Binga, upstream of Dalupirip but also located within Itogon. Two dams were built in these sites, one immediately after the other, in the 1950s.

Most of the people of Ambuklao and Binga had to leave their homes and farms when the dams in these sites were built. Many accepted relocation in areas outside of Benguet province. But some of them found it difficult to make a new life for themselves in these areas. They thus returned to Bokod and Itogon, settling with kindred in different parts of these two municipalities, including Dalupirip. Some of the people living in Binga, Ambuklao, and the surrounding areas did not have to leave right away. Their homes and fields were not immediately affected by dam construction because these were located higher up on the mountains. But over the years, as the dams got silted up, the waters they held gradually rose. Eventually, these reached the higher elevations and inundated the ricefields, orchards, swidden sites, and pasturelands of the people who lived there. So in recent years, these people, too, have had to resettle elsewhere.

I know because these people are my kin. I am a witness to the gradual rise of the dams' waters because my family and I have visited with relatives upstream of Dalupirip year after year, to attend weddings, funerals, and *cañao* -- traditional Benguet ritual feasts. I know that what has happened to Binga, Ambuklao, and the areas surrounding these dam sites will also happen to Dalupirip if the San Roque dam continues to be built. Even now, after much of the silt in Ambuklao and Binga have been dredged, the dams' waters have continued to rise. And when typhoons bring heavy rains, these waters are released. They make the Agno river swell and its current surge. Occasionally, the swollen, surging river sweeps away a house or a pigpen and claims a human life -- usually a child's -- or takes with it the pigs that a family has been raising as part of their livelihood.

The officials of the San Roque Power Corporation, the National Power Corporation, the Philippine government, and the municipal government of Itogon have continually told our people that the new dam site is too far downstream of our settlement to pose any threat to us. But we have seen the plans for the San Roque dam. These plans show us that the tail-end of the dam's reservoir area will reach a part of Dalupirip where, admittedly, few of our people reside, but which many of us frequent for fishing and placer mining.

Concerning our fear that the dam's waters will eventually rise to reach our settlement proper, the officials say there is no basis for this. Their plans, they say, include all of the measures necessary to prevent dam siltation. But those measures themselves pose a threat to our people. These measures include the construction of so-called *sabo* dams, meant to collect silt upstream of San Roque to prevent the siltation of the main dam. One of these *sabo* dams will be built in the village right below my own, in Tabu. The water it will draw in and the silt it will collect are sure to destroy the homes and farms of many villagers. The said measures also include the banning of all forms of small mining from the entirety of the Agno river basin. This is supposed to stop forest destruction and, therefore, soil erosion, and to prevent the accumulation of mine waste in the Agno river system. Yet, large mining will be allowed to continue. Meanwhile, my people will be deprived of the very modest but steady stream of gold placers that come to us as run-off from the small mines of our Ibaloy and Kankanaey brothers and sisters in the higher-lying settlements of Itogon. As to waste from the large mines, this will continue to descend to us sporadically, in the sudden surges which occur when the large mining companies open the gates of their tailings dams, in volumes too big for us to tap with our indigenous methods of small-scale placer mining.

The San Roque dam project will dislocate our people economically and socially, not just physically. The aforementioned measures further include controls on all forms of livelihood in Itogon, including agriculture. One component of the San Roque dam project is the segregation and maintenance of the Lower Agno River Basin as a reservoir watershed under the Philippine government's National Integrated Protected Areas System. Under this system, our people's use of the natural resources within our settlement will be monitored and regulated by government and the operators of the San Roque dam. In all of Itogon, ours is the last remaining settlement where we, indigenous Ibaloy, have been able to manage our natural resources autonomously of government impositions and the encroachments of big business. Ours is the only settlement in Itogon where a healthy balance still exists between the land and the use of its resources by human beings. It is the only settlement where ricefields, swidden fields, vegetable gardens, orchards, and pastures, as well as forests and bodies of water, have remained in a condition healthy enough to support the survival of both people and nature. In all other settlements, the ecological balance has been irreparably destroyed by large mining, large-scale mine-related logging, large-capital farming, housing and other real estate development projects, or government infrastructure projects like the Binga dam. And now, the proponents and implementors of the San Roque dam project are asking our people to surrender the management of our settlement to the very entities responsible for the destruction of the others.

Government and big business have promised to do their all to minimize the negative impact that the San Roque dam project is bound to generate on the people and environment of Itogon. But even if they succeed in limiting this to the displacement of only a few households in our settlement or in others, they will already have effected a break-up of community. Community is precious to us Ibaloy -- to all indigenous peoples of Benguet and, indeed, of the Philippine Cordillera. As communities, we look after each other. As kindred and neighbors, we support one another's material and ritual, economic and social needs. It is only as communities that we know how to live. This is why many among us, Ibaloy, who were relocated from Ambuklao and Binga in the 1950s eventually found it necessary to return home to Benguet. It is why our people

struggle today against all forms and against any degree of dislocation that the San Roque project threatens us with. In the 1970s, we waged a similar struggle. That was when a dam similar in size to those in Binga and Ambuklao would have been built right in Tabu, Dalupirip. People from all over Dalupirip came to help stop the construction of the dam. Women and men, children and adults -- all of us took part in hurling rocks and rolling boulders down the mountain passes to block the entry of the engineers and construction workers of the National Power Corporation. Taking turns at keeping vigil over the mountain passes day and night for many months, we maintained the blockade until the wouldbe builders finally gave up on the dam project.

We have not been able to do the same with the San Roque project because the dam site is not within our people's domain. But we have been reaching out to the people of this new dam site. It has taken a long time, but they have finally begun to move for a stop to the construction of the San Roque dam. Together with them, and with our Ibaloy and Kankanaey brothers and sisters in the other settlements of Itogon -- indeed, with the help of all our Cordilleran and Filipino brothers and sisters, as well as friends in many parts of the world -- we still hope to abort the San Roque dam project.

#