

## Casiguran Case Study:

### ***The Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport (APEC) Project***

The Casiguran case revolves around the **Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport (APEC) project located in the municipality of Casiguran.** Casiguran is part of Aurora province which is located in the northeastern part of Luzon. Casiguran is one of the two original towns of Aurora, which is now comprised of eight municipalities including Dilasag and Dinalungan which were previously part of Casiguran before being declared as separate municipalities in 1959 and 1966 respectively.

Prior to the arrival of Spanish missionaries and the formal declaration of Casiguran as a municipality in June 13, 1609, **Casiguran was mainly populated by indigenous peoples', the Dumagats/Agtas referred to in later anthropological studies as the Casiguran Agta or Casiguran Dumagat.** (Headland, 1985) Migrants from different areas would come and settle later in Casiguran with the Dumagats/Aetas. The local dialect "Kasiguranin" in fact evolved out of the different dialects like Ilocano, Visayan, Bicol, Pampango, Gadang, Itawis, Tagalog, etc. spoken by these different migrants.

The word "Casiguran" is accordingly derived from the word "KASIGURUHAN" which means assurance or the Spanish "ceguro" which means safety. With the San Ildefonso cove, Casiguran has accordingly provided galleons plying the Manila-Mexico trade route "safety" or sanctuary against strong typhoons. However, according to local folk legend, "Kasiguruhan" also means "assurance" that if an unmarried stranger comes to Casiguran, the stranger will fall in love, get married with a local lass or man and eventually settle there.

Casiguran is around 353 kilometers from Manila, and 120 kilometers from Baler which is the capital town of Aurora Province. It can be reached by bus (about 5 hours from Baler and 10 to 12 hours from Manila) or boat from the port of Baler. Travelers are warned though to exercise precaution during the rainy season as the road leading to Casiguran is prone to flashfloods, landslides and road washouts. The municipality itself is prone to floods and during extreme weather can be isolated for weeks or even months though it is shielded from Pacific storms by the San Ildefonso Peninsula and by the Sierra Madre Mountain range. (PAFID 2011) Records show that at least 17 percent or 3-4 cyclones affect Aurora directly every year.

Casiguran has a type IV climate where there is a pronounced rainfall derived from the northeast monsoon (November to February) and the southwest monsoon (July to September) resulting in an even distribution of rainfall throughout the year in the municipality, except during a short stint of summer from March to May. (CLUP, 2008)

Casiguran is composed of twenty-four (24) barangays covering a total land area of 71,543 hectares, the greater area of which is lush forests. Eight of the 24 barangays constitute the Poblacion covering 17,336 hectares and all are coastal barangays except for two namely, Tabas and Bianoan.

Agriculture and fishery are the two primary sources of employment of the people of Casiguran though only 10.5 percent or 7,517.05 hectares of the total land area is generally used for agriculture and settlements. Majority of the land area of Casiguran is classified to be above 18 degree slope. Agricultural produce include rice, corn and root crops, and to a lesser degree, cash crops, spices and vegetables. Fishing is mainly done on the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Casiguran Bay and Sound. There are also other livelihood activities like livestock and poultry raising, hat weaving, native vinegar and wine making, hollow block making, charcoal making, wood carving, basketry, etc. These tend to be small scale and involve only a few households.

Casiguran is also rich in forest resources as about 61,620 hectares or 86.14 percent are classified as forest. Of this, 49,507 hectares or 80 percent are old growth dipterocarp forest. There are also other forest cover categories including residual or logged-over areas, sub-marginal forest, mossy forest and mangroves, brushland, grassland and others. The Casiguran Municipal and Planning Development Office (MPDO) estimates that the forest cover inventory might not be the same anymore due to the continuous logging operations of two logging operators holding timber license agreements (TLAS) in the area. The last forest cover inventory was held in 1991 while the operations of the TLAs only stopped in the late 1990s. (Socio-Economic Profile, 2007)

As of 2007, total population of Casiguran was estimated at 25,822 persons. There are 13,146 males, of which 535 or 67.63 percent were employed, 636 or 13.82 percent were unemployed and 3,939 or 86.59 were not in the labor force. There are 12,676 females, of which 256 or 32.36 percent were employed, 4,602 or 17.82 percent were unemployed, and 4,549 or 17.61 percent were not in the labor force. (Socio-Economic Profile, 2007) It is not clear from the MPDO report, whether population count include the Dumagats/Agta families, but there is an estimated 250 Dumagat/Agta families who will be directly affected by the APEC project. (PAFID, 2011)

Population is overwhelmingly rural based with 21,781 or 84.35 percent of the population living in the rural areas of Casiguran. Urban population is 4,041 or 15.65 percent of the population.

The present mayor of Casiguran is Mayor Reynaldo Bitong. The Governor of Aurora is Hon. Bellaflor Angara. The lone Congressional seat for Aurora is held by Hon. Juan Edgardo Angara. Though records for the mayoral seat do not show one or two families predominating, the families of Angara, Esteves, Liwanag, Morales, Moreno and Moral had several turns on the mayoral seat since the Spanish period.

### How APEC came to be

Initially called the Aurora Special Economic Zone or ASEZA, the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport (APEC) project traces its roots to the Special Economic Zone Act of 1995 or RA 7916. In a bid to attract foreign and domestic investments and financial and industrial cooperation between the Philippines and developed countries to generate jobs and improve productivity, the government actively

promoted the establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) and identified Aurora province as one of the 37 initial areas as SEZs.

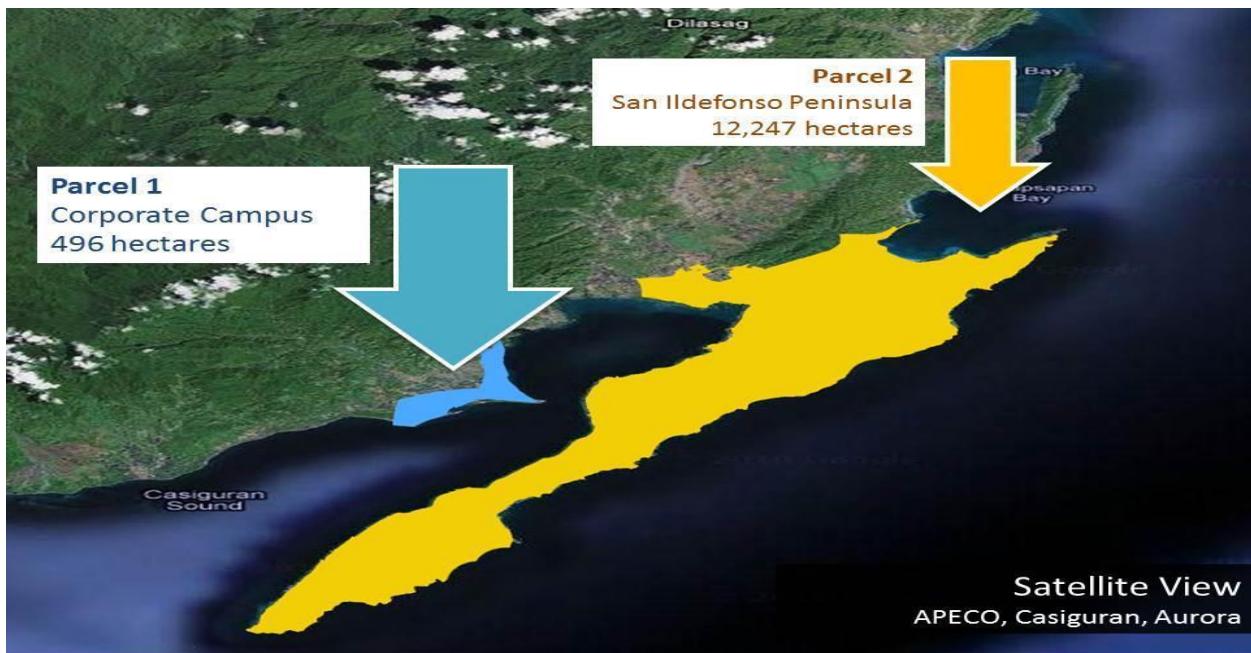
On December 10, 1997, capitalizing on the identification of Aurora as a possible SEZ site, then Aurora Representative Bellaflor Angara-Castillo (now Aurora province governor) and Senator Edgardo Angara filed separate bills at the House of Representatives (HOR) and the Senate for the establishment of ASEZA. The bill was approved in record time by both chambers, passing second reading on December 11 and third reading on December 18—a span of only a week in a legislature notorious for its slow pace. It was ratified on February 4, 1998 despite the opposition and protests raised by the Multi Sectoral Action Group (MSAG), a multistisectoral alliance of people's organizations, non-government groups and church associations in the province concerned with the implications of the ASEZA provisions in Casiguran and the concerns of possible rampant smuggling and tax collection anomalies in SEZs of this scope and size raised by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Finance (DOF). Former President Fidel Ramos, however, did not sign the bill into law, thwarting the establishment of ASEZA in 1998.

In 2006, Representative Juan Eduardo "Sonny" Angara re-filed former House Bill No. 5309 or the ASEZA bill as House Bill No. 10293 in the HOR (spell out HOR or use "Lower House" or "Congress"). Senator Angara also filed a similar proposal in the Senate through Senate Bill No. 2603. Though both the DOF and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) officials again expressed reservations due to the proliferation of smuggling in free ports and its perceived threat to the domestic economy, the proposed bills were consolidated into a joint report and approved in a special session on February 19 and 20, 2007. Despite the lack of discussion among its constituents and ignoring the protests of those who were aware of the proposed SEZ, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan upon the request of current Governor Bellaflor Angara Castillo passed a resolution approving and in the process incorporating the inclusion of "more or less 500 hectares covering Barangays Esteves, Dibet, and Dibacong in Casiguran" under HB 10293. (RA 9490, Chan Robles E-library) In June 2007, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed Republic Act No. 9490 or the ASEZA law.

On August 2008, APEC started its operation with Ambassador Joseph D. Bernardo as its first chairman. An office was opened in Makati on November 2008.

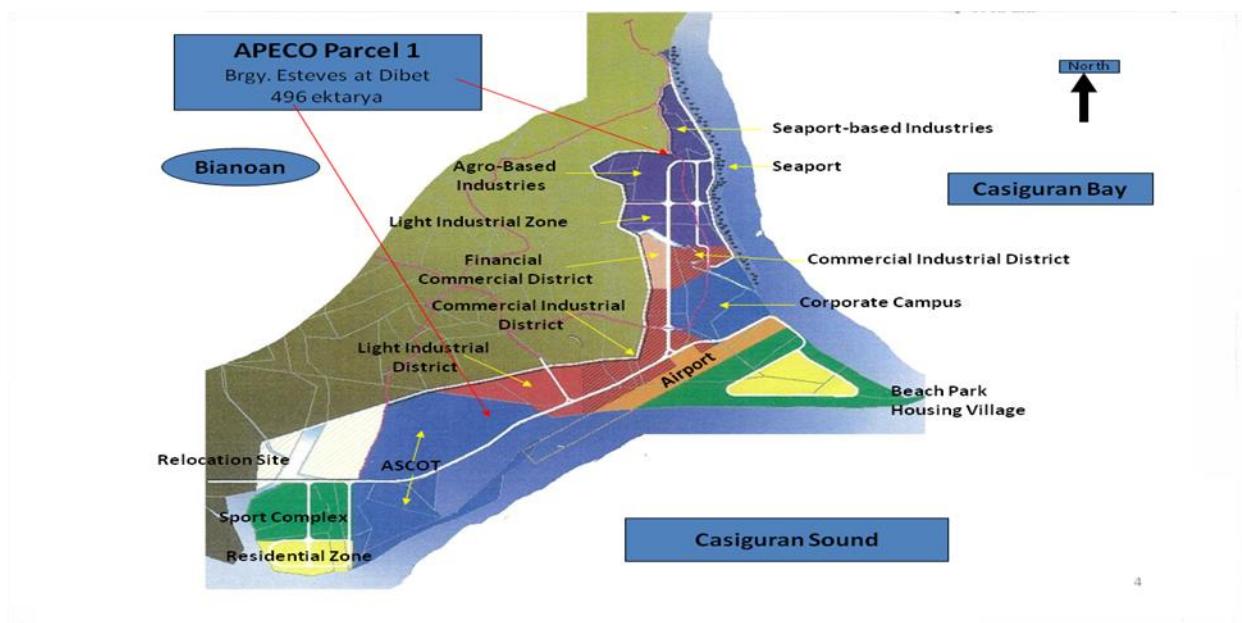
In 2009, Representative Angara again filed HB 6213 and Senators Angara and Miriam Defensor-Santiago SB 3408 and 3430 to amend RA 9490. The proposed bills in both Houses called for the further expansion of the area under ASEZA from 496 hectares (parcel 1) to another 12,427 hectares (parcel 2) to cover three additional Barangays: Culat, Coza, and San Ildefonso. The consolidated bills were approved on 6 October 2009 and lapsed into law on April 22, 2010 as RA 10083, as provided for in the Constitution after former President Arroyo failed to act on the submitted measure within the mandated thirty (30) day period. (RA 10083, Supreme Court E-library)

All in all, APEC now covers 12,923 hectares in six (6) barangays in Casiguran: Esteves, Dibet, Dibacong, Cozo, Culat and San Ildefonso.

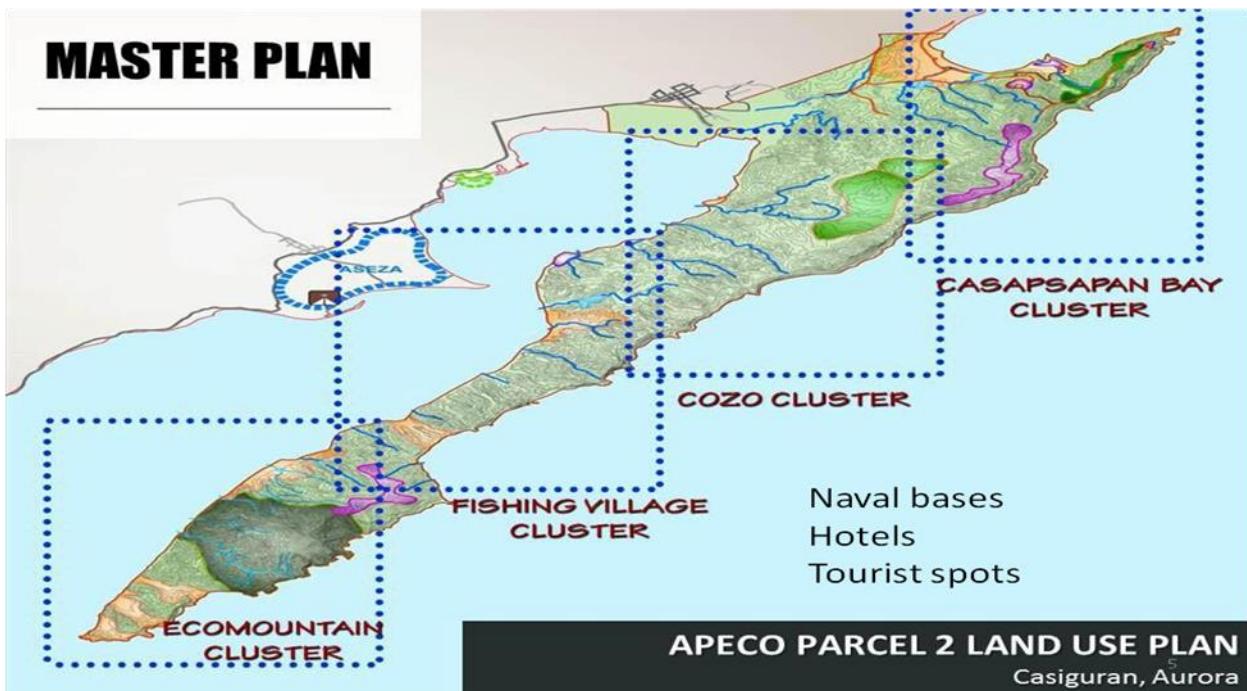


Source: Task Force Anti-APEC PowerPoint presentation on Balitaan Forum held May 2, 2012

To date, APECO have started Phase 1 of the Ecozone development including the launch of the Nayong Kalikasan Housing Project, a joint project with the National Housing Authority (NHA) allegedly to house those that will be displaced by the project; the APECO airport; the construction of a three-star hotel and the administration building. Phase 2 will involve the construction of infirmary building and other infrastructure facilities like Telco and BPO facilities. (Magkilat, 2011)



Source: Task Force Anti-APECO Powerpoint presentation on Balitaan Forum held May 2, 2012



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Recently, President Aquino appointed former labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma and businessman Roberto Mathay as members of the APECO Board of Directors. Vitaliano Sabalo Jr. and Ramon Fernando were appointed APECO administrator and deputy administrator, respectively (APECO website, 2011).

Since, like Subic and Clark, APECO is a government Freeport, government has allocated budget for its development, starting with P1 billion intended for the first and second phases of development, of which PhP800 million have been released.

At the forefront of the APECO development are the Angaras, who not only initiated the establishment and expansion of the APECO through legislation, but who are also in the helm of the APECO development with both Governor Angara-Castillo and Hon. Representative Angara in the APECO Board as ex-oficio members.

### Hype versus Reality

Much hype has been created to promote APECO not only as the ideal Ecozone to invest in but also to promote its supposed potential social and economic benefits to the people of Casiguran. To borrow some quotes from the APECO website and media releases about APECO,

"... only Economic Zone facing the Pacific Ocean, thus an ideal starting point for the inflow of commerce in the Northeastern quadrangle of Luzon." (APECO website)

“The EcoZone is operated as a center for optimized development in industrial, commercial trading, agro-industrial, tourist, banking, outsourcing, financial and investment industries. With suitable residential areas and business centers that boast the best amenities, the EcoZone can work hand-in-hand with the investors to achieve economic stability.” (APECO website)

“It aims to boost social, economic and industrial development in Aurora and nearby provinces by generating jobs for the people, improving the quality of their living conditions, advocating an eco-friendly approach to industrialization and enhancing the potential of the community in productivity.” (APECO website)

For investors, APECO offers a long list of incentives and benefits to entice them to sign up with APECO. These include:

#### ***Incentives to investors of the Aurora Ecozone***

- No local and national taxes imposed to registered enterprise
- Only 5 percent of the gross income will be levied by the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport Authority (APECO) and distributed as follows: 3 percent National government; 1 percent to Municipality and Province; 1 percent to the APECO
- Importation of raw materials and capital equipment are tax- and duty-free
- Reduced tax rates
- Exemption from wharfage dues

Source: Task Force Anti-APECO, 2009

Aside from the above, APECO also offers lower costs of land and property acquisition and allows foreigners **full ownership** of enterprises inside the Aurora Ecozone.

The APECO project is located in six barangays (villages) in Casiguran: barangays Culat, Dibet, Dibacong, Cozo, Esteves and San Ildefonso. Barangays Coso and San Ildefonso are in the San Ildefonso Peninsula and are connected to the mainland by Barangay Culat. Barangays Esteves and Dibet are located at the coastal outskirt of the mainland facing the peninsula.

To give way to the industrial complex, industrial parks, airport, hotels, ship anchorage, and recreational facilities that will be developed for APECO, rice farms, coconut plantations, forests, mangroves and coastal areas, and human settlements in these barangays, including the whole ancestral domain of the Dumagat/Agta people in the San Ildefonso Peninsula, have been targeted for conversion. In fact, conversion has already started in 25 hectares as admitted by APECO Deputy Administrator Tolentino. He even boasts of the jobs being created because of APECO. (Magkilat, 2011)

“APECO has already employed 350 people for the construction projects and once the construction goes into full blast they can easily double the employment, including the native “Dumagats” as forest rangers. By the first quarter, we can easily employ 1,000 people and ramp it up to 2,000 by end this year.” (APECO Deputy Administrator Ramon Tolentino as cited in Magkilat, 2011)

What has often been swept under the rug, however, is how these conversions are trampling over the vested rights of the small farmers, indigenous peoples, and fisherfolk in the affected areas and the resulting displacement the establishment of APECO is now causing at the local level. Equally alarming, it is fast becoming clear that APECO will bring about major environmental changes due to all land use conversions happening in the affected areas. With the conversion of rice lands and coconut lands, the threat to food security is also an imminent reality facing Casiguranins. APECO officials continue to ignore the mounting opposition of various concerned farmers, indigenous peoples, other stakeholders, groups both in and out of Casiguran against the freeport project due to its adverse impacts, some of which are already being felt by the local communities.

### **Trampling Over Farmers Rights**

In the early 1960s, local officials in Casiguran encouraged small farmers to occupy and till part of two reservations in Brgy. Esteves (a 152-hectare Lot A for “Non-Christians” and 110-hectare Lot B for the Agricultural School) created under Proclamation No. 723 issued in 1934 by Governor-General Frank Murphy. The local authorities encouraged the development of the 90-hectare land in Lot B to serve as the rice granary and food source of Northern Aurora.

As early as 1963, small farmers who have migrated and settled in Casiguran have already sent a petition to the Bureau of Lands for the distribution of titles for the land they have been tilling in Lot B. In 1973, the Secretary of Education and Sports endorsed the petition of the farmers and asked the Department of Natural Resources for the exclusion of Lot B in favor of the farmer tillers.

In 1992, the farmers again sent a petition to the DAR for the distribution of the lands as stipulated in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS). This was to be repeated again in 1998 and in 2002. But in 2002, while awaiting the result of their petition to the DAR, the farmers who by then had collectively organized themselves as the Bicolano Casiguran Farmers Association (BICFA), would be informed that the land they have been tilling had been included in the then proposed ASEZA. The inclusion of the land under ASEZA would shed light on the earlier rejection of Board of Regents (which included Senator Angara) of the Aurora State College of Technology (ASCOT), formerly the Aurora National Agricultural School in Maria Aurora and the Aurora National Fishery School in Casiguran, of the DAR and ASCOT MOA to distribute 50 hectares (on a 1 hectare per beneficiary allocation) to all qualified agrarian reform beneficiaries.

As lamented by Nanay Darlin, a farmer-resident in the contested reservation land, “*Masama ang aking loob dahil sa tagal naming paninirahan sa lupang reserbasyon, sa kabilang aming pagsusumikap na mapaunlad ang aming kabuhayan sa pamamagitan ng pagsasaka ay may biglang balita na papaalisin kami dito sa aming lugar. Anung klaseng pag-unlad ang ibibigay nila sa amin. Ang alam namin ay pagsasaka at kung walang lupa ay walang kabuhayan. Ang nakakalungkot pa gobyerno ang nagpapaalis sa amin dito. Pinuntahan kami dito ni PENRO Benjamin Mina noon para sabihin na umalis na kami dito dahil di naman daw sa amin ang lupa. Ang sabi ko naman di kami aalis dahil narito ang aming kabuhayan. Nilinis naming ang lupa tinaniman tapos ibibigay nyo sa ibang tao. Anung klaseng sistema yan. Nagsama pa sya ng mga pulis baka siguro akala nya ay matatakot ako.*” (I really feel bad. We have been residing and farming these lands for a long time and suddenly we are being cast. What kind of development are they offering us? All we know is farming and without land, there can be no livelihood. The saddest part is it is government that is forcing us to leave the land. PENRO Mina came to us to tell us

to leave the land because this is not ours. I told him that we are not leaving since our livelihood is here. We developed this land and then they will just give it to someone else? What kind of system is this, I asked him. He even brought some policemen with her perhaps thinking that it would intimidate me)

Another farmer, Elmer Gonzales, also said that, *"Bago pa dumating ang proyekto ng APECO sa Casiguran inaplayan na namin sa DAR ang lupang reserbasyon. Napakarami nang aplikasyon at petisyon ang aming ginawa hangang sa kasalukuyan ay nakikipag-usap pa rin kami sa DAR para mapabilis na ang paglalabas ng CLOA sa amin. Ngayon biglang dumating ang APECO parang isang kalamidad ito na dumaan sa amin dahil mangangahulugan ito ng pagkawala sa amin ng lupa na aming sinasaka. Sa mahabang panahon naming pagsusumikap na mapasaamin ang mga lupang sinasaka naming, ngayon sinasakop ito ng APECO. Napakabilis ng pagsasabatas ng pang-aagaw ng lupa sa amin. Ilang henerasyon na ang naglilinang ng lupa kaya pala walang ginagawa ang gobyerno para sa aming kahilingan may mga nakatago pala silang plano para dito."* (Even before APECO was enacted, we had already petitioned DAR for the [distribution] of the reservation lands. We have submitted many application and petitions. Until now, we are negotiating with DAR to facilitate the release of our CLOAs. APECO came like a sudden calamity because it will mean the loss of the lands we till. We have been farming these lands for a long time and now APECO is claiming them. The passage of the law dispossessing us of our lands happened ver fast. Several generations have been tilling these lands and apparently the reason why the government was not acting on our petitions was that they had hidden plans for the area.")

Aside from the farmers in the reservation, however, the rights of other farmers in the area who have received their Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs) in 1993 and those potential agrarian reform beneficiaries of the remaining 19 hectares of land whose distribution under Phase 3B of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) will only commence in June 2013 are also now under threat because of APECO. Since APECO covers six (6) barangays, the fate of the agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) in these areas has also become uncertain.

To date, DAR-Aurora has distributed through CARP a total of 498.3837 hectares to 425 agrarian reform beneficiaries in the areas covered by the APECO:

Barangay	Area (hectares)	Number of beneficiaries
Cozo	47.8896	25
Culat	55.5340	37
Dibacong	67.2284	39
Dibet	127.8077	87
Esteves	116.0185	84
San Ildefonso	<u>110.67</u>	<u>172</u>
Total	525.1528	444

Of the 525.1528 hectares covered by CARP and CARPER, 243.0185 are rice lands while 282.1343 are planted to coconut.

## **Destroying Fisherfolk Livelihood**

Since the coastal areas are also up for development, the livelihood of the small fisherfolks and even the Dumagat/Agtas in the area who rely on fish and other seafood for their protein needs are also in danger. A lot of studies show that when mariculture parks are established, fishing activities in the 15-kilometer municipal fishing grounds normally reserved for small-scale fisherfolks are grossly reduced since these parks occupy these traditional fishing areas. Since mariculture parks normally require big capital for its operation and maintenance, its establishment in the APECOP areas will only benefit corporations interested in engaging in massive fish production normally for export. Lastly, while mariculture parks do employ some fishers as mariculture park employees, this is no guarantee that all small fishers who will be displaced by the operation of the mariculture park will be able to secure jobs or will be absorbed by the mariculture park.

Marlon Angara, a fisherman from Casiguran Sound, succinctly puts his fear about APECOP. “*Sa akin po bilang manginisda, ako po ay nangangamba na di na kami makakapangisda sa katubigan ng Casiguran sound kung matutuloy ang APECOP sa kadahilanang ang aming mga gamit pangisda ay doon po namin inilalatag sa dagat. Kung maipatayo na ang mga port, magiging daanan ng mga barko ang dati naming pinaglalatagan ng gamit pangisda at tiyak masasagasaan yun ng mga barko. Siguro po kaya pinipilit nila na makapagtayo ng mga fish cages sa amin para masabi nila na may alternatibo naman para sa aming mga hanap buhay. Yun pong mga fish cages na yan ay tinutulan na po namin yan bago pa maitayo bilang Barangay FARMC. Kinausap ko ang kasama kong mga manginisda at tinutulan po naming yan. Kaya lang dahil nga sa aming pagtutol hindi na kami sinasama sa mga meeting tungkol sa fish cage. Kaya naipatayo iyan kahit ayaw ng mga tao. Kung maipatayo po ang mga port natural na kukuha yan ng malalaking espasyo para sa mga terminal ng container sa amin pong pagkakaalam hindi lang isa kundi apat na sea port ang gusto nila ipagawa dyan sa Casiguran sound paano pa kami makakapangisda kung ganun. Baka kahit sa daungan lang mga Bangka namin wala nang matira.*” (As a fisherman, I fear that we will not be able to fish in the Casiguran Sound anymore once APECOP is implemented. We normally cast our fishing gear in the ocean but once the port is constructed, this area will become a fishing lane and passing ships might run over our fishing gear. Maybe this is the reason why they are insisting on building fish cages in our area, so that they can claim that they have an alternative source of livelihood. But we have been opposed to the fish cages from the start as Barangay FARMC. I talked to my fellow fishermen and we opposed it. But because of our opposition we were excluded in the meetings about the fish cages. The fish cages were built therefore though the people do not like it. Once the port is constructed it will naturally occupy a bigger space for the container terminal and so far we know that they want to build not just one but four (4) ports in Casiguran sound and how will we fish if this will happen. We will probably lose even the space to dock our boats.)

As of February 18, 2011, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Proceso Alcala led the ceremonial stocking of bangus (milkfish) fingerlings to start a PHP 10-million fish cage project purportedly to benefit the small fisherfolks and the Dumagat/Agta in the Casiguran Cove. This is part of the proposed mariculture park where the DA-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)b already has plans to install a total of thirty-two (32) fish cages. To further support the mariculture project, BFAR Director Malcolm Sarmiento said that they will build a 3-ton capacity mini-ice plant and DA Secretary Alcala also promised to provide a refrigerated truck to transport the harvested fish. (PAFID, 2011)

## Paving the Way for the Casiguran Dumagat/Agtas' Extinction?

In one of the researches conducted by Thomas Headland, an American anthropologist who studied the Casiguran Agtas extensively from the 1960's to the 1980's, the influx of settlers in the Casiguran area is the indirect but primary factor that greatly contributed to the decline of the Dumagat/Agta population. (Headland, 1984)

*"The Agta live in an environment undergoing traumatic change...The variable probably introducing the most change is the Philippine population explosion, which has pushed thousand of landless Filipino homesteaders into the remote Casiguran valley. The Agta who before WWII had roughly 90 percent of the area to themselves...now find themselves viewed as landless squatters in their own ancestral lands, crowded in a population density... and increasing daily."*

With no legal tenure over their ancestral domains, these Dumagat/Agta families face the higher risk of getting displaced as they are expected to simply move and resettle into the remaining portion of the ancestral domain once settlers and even corporations engaged in logging came into the Casiguran area.

According to the last count done by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), **there are 726 Dumagats/Agtas in Casiguran at present.** (Socio-Economic Profile , 2007) This is merely half of the earliest Dumagat/Agta population estimate of 1,600 by Headland based on the count conducted by Vanoverbergh in 1936 of 787 individuals (excluding small children) and excluding several barangays where there were also Dumagat/Agtas. (Headland, 1975)

In the study conducted by PAFID in 2011 assessing the possible impact of Ecozones like the APECO project on indigenous peoples, it estimated that around 250 Dumagat/Agta families in Casiguran, Aurora Province is affected by the APECO project. These Dumagat/Agta families are found in five (5) settlements in the APECO affected villages. These include the Dalugan (25 families) and Disigisaw (47 families) settlements in the San Ildefonso Peninsula; the Dimagipo (13 families) and Dipontian settlements (15 families) in Cozo; and Casapsapan (14 families) in Culat. In addition to those staying in these settlements, around seventy (70) Agta/Dumagat families live in small settlements dispersed within and adjacent to these areas.

In 1984, Headland warned of the ecological stress besetting the Dumagat/Agta people that threatens both their cultural (as semi-nomadic hunters) and biological (high mortality rate caused by malnutrition due to the loss of traditional hunting and fishing ground) survival. Since APECO covers the whole ancestral domain of the Dumagat/Agta in the San Ildefonso Peninsula , PAFID warned that the development that will be carried out by APECO will uproot and cause systematic dislocation of the Dumagat/Agta for good.

A good example of this systematic dislocation is related by Levy Estevez, the principal Dumagat/Agta claimant of Delepsong ancestral domain. Delepsong is an area occupied by the Dumagat/Agtas by virtue of an exchange agreement forged between the Dumagat/Agtas and Don Juan Angara, then governor of Aurora and the father of Senator Angara, in exchange for the Dumagat/Agtas ancestral lands. The Dumagat/Agtas ancestral lands eventually became the site of Dinalungan. Delepsong however has been taken over by a certain Guererro whose title has only been issued in 2006. There are also rumors that

influential people have titled to their names most of the 62-hectare Agta reservation in Barangay Culat as well as lands adjacent to the beach of Casapsapan. The sudden arrival of people bearing “titles” covering the ancestral domain of the Dumagat/Agtas is certainly an offshoot of all the development rush being created by APECO. (PAFID, 2011)

APECO is likewise sowing disorganization and division among the ranks of Dumagat/Agta people. To counter the mounting opposition of those Dumagat/Agtas who filed to have their ancestral domain titled way back in 1995 to the NCIP, the APECO management has reportedly hired as consultant one of the most influential Dumagat/Agta leaders . The leader who has been interviewed by PAFID admitted to being paid PhP25,000 per month to convince her fellow Dumagat/Agta to consent to the relocation and to abandon their ancestral domain claim.

As Regina an IP leader-member of PIGLASCA or the Pinag-isang Lakas ng mga Magsasaka, Manginisda, at Katutubo sa Casiguran (United Force of Famers, Fishers, and Indigenous Peoples of Casiguran)<sup>1</sup> laments, “sa amin pong mga katutubo hindi namin gusto na magpatuloy ang APECO dahil aakingnin nito ang aming mga lupa na matagal na naming sinasabi na dapat ay isyuhan na kami ng CADT. Sa ngayon pa nga lang po ay nalilimitahan na ang aming pagagala sa kagubatan dahil sa ngayon po ay may mga military na doon. Hindi po namin alam kung ano ang kanilang binabantayan pero hindi na po kami pinapayagan na pumunta doon. Mas lalo na po kung matuloy ang APECO. Baka bakuran na nila ang kabuuang ng kanilang nasasakupan at lalagyan pa nila ng mga bantay. Kamakailan nga lang po ay hinukay na nila ang libingan ng aming mga ninuno doon sa Kasapsapan. Masama po ang aking loob sa mga nangyayari dahil kami ay nawawalan na po ng karapatan sa aming lupang ninuno. Ngayon po nahahati na ang aming mga komunidad dahil sa mga ginagawa nilang pagbibili sa aming mga kapatid na katutubo sa pamamagitan ng mga ibinibigay nilang trabaho. Hindi po namin ito gusto. Ang gusto lang naman namin ay igalang at ibigay ang aming karapatan sa pagmamay-ari ng aming lupang ninuno pati na sa aming karagatang ninuno na mawawala na sa amin kapag naipagpatuloy ang proyekto ng APECO.” (For us, indigenous people, we do not want APECO to continue because it will claim lands which we have long asked [government] to issue give us a CADT for. At present, our movements inside the forest have already been limited because of the presence of the military there. We do not know what exactly they are supposed to be guarding but we have been warned not to go there anymore. Moreso when APECO is implemented. They might fence off the whole area they are covering and post guards. Just recently, they dug out our ancestral burial grounds in Kasapsapan. I feel angry with what's happening since we are losing our right to our ancestral domain. At present, our community has been divided because of their efforts to buy the consent of our fellow Dumagat/Agtas by providing jobs. We don't want this. We only want respect and recognition of our rights over our ancestral domain including our ancestral waters that we stand to lose if projects of APECO will be implemented.)

With APECO now in full swing, the approval of the certificate of ancestral domain title (CADT) application by the Dumagat/Agtas has become more uncertain. The proponents of the APECO will surely counter any stumbling block, the CADT application included, to the continued development happening at APECO.

<sup>1</sup> Pinag-isang Lakas ng mga Magsasaka, Manginisda, at Katutubo sa Casiguran/United Force of Famers, Fishers, and Indigenous Peoples of Casiguran (municipality) is a federation of different organizations opposing APECO. Set up in 2009 and registered in 2012, the federation has five member organizations (SACBIBI-100 dumagats, BICFA, ISF and CLOA Farmers Association, Irrigators Association, MSK (200), Fishers Organization) and a combined 450 individual members.

## Fostering Environmental Damage?

As of 2001, the existing general land use in Casiguran is as follows:

Land Use	Area (in hectares)	% to total
Forest	61,620	86.14
Agriculture	7,184	10.04
Settlements	158	0.22
Other Uses	2,570	3.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>71,542</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MPDO Provincial Physical Framework Plan, Strategic Agriculture and Fisheries Development Zones, as cited in Casiguran CLUP 2008

In sum, forestlands dominate Casiguran. There are lands in the municipality under Integrated Forest Management Agreement (IFMA); Community Based Forest Management (CBFM); Integrated Social Forestry (ISF); Timber Licensing Agreements (TLAs); Tree Plantation; Reservation Area; Proclaimed watersheds; mangroves; timberland; lowland forest; and beach forests and wetlands. Of course, though not officially recognized in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan of the municipality, there is the ancestral domain of the Dumagat/Agta covered by the CADT application they have filed with the NCIP.

These lands are located in the Sierra Madre range and the San Ildefonso Peninsula, the latter is now covered wholly under the APEC. According to the CLUP of Casiguran (2008), the general condition of the forest cover is admirable and the tree species are primary growth or old dipterocarp. About seventy per cent of the San Ildefonso Peninsula is covered by forest dominated by broad-leaf species. Mangrove areas are also found along the low lying areas of Culat, Coso, Dibet, Cataloging, Casiguran, Mining and Callaghan. Though some areas have been logged over by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a logging company which operated in Casiguran until the establishment of APEC, the existing vegetation makes the peninsula environmentally significant. (PAFID, 2011)

Based on the APEC master plan, San Ildefonso Peninsula will be used to host naval bases, hotels and tourists spots probably because of its pristine character and its scenic coasts along the Pacific Ocean. APEC developers will also develop the Peninsula as a wildlife sanctuary and an ecotourism area. The white beach of Kasapsapan and Barangay Diniog in Dilasag are also eyed for tourism. This early, APEC had allegedly already purchased the logging rights of IDC for PHP 120 million and paid PHP 50 million in advance to have the logging concession converted into an Industrial Forest Management Agreement (IFMA). According to PIGLASCA-PAKISAMA ,PENRO Benjamin Mina of the DENR sold lands and was paid PHP 650,000 per hectare by APEC while the farmers who were “convinced” to sell their lands were paid a measly sum of PHP 45,000 per hectare. (open letter to Pres. Aquino which appeared as paid ad in the PDI dated November, 2010).

Given all the plans for Casiguran, there is no guarantee that the current environment which has nourished the Dumagat/Agtas and the settlers of Casiguran will be maintained. In Parcel 1 of APEC, conversions are now being done that has adversely affected the residents in the area. What is unclear is APEC's impact environmentally. It is alleged that to date, APEC hasn't done any feasibility studies that list and assess all the possible impacts of the developments that the APEC management intends to carry out in the APEC covered areas.

## Endangering Food Security

Currently, Casiguran is recognized as Aurora's rice bowl and granary. It has 5,370 hectares of land planted to rice, tilled by 6,169 farmers, and is producing rice almost equal to the combined production of two municipalities, Dinalungan and Dilasag. (PAFID, 2011 as cited in Balitaan, 2012)

Municipality	No. of Farmers	Area Planted (in hectares)
Dilasag	1,414	1,204
Dinalongan	1,681	1,114
<b>Casiguran</b>	<b>3,074</b>	<b>3,052</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,169</b>	<b>5,370</b>

*Source: PAFID, 2011 as cited in Task Force Anti-APEC Power Point presentation on Balitaan Forum held May 2, 2012*

On a per barangay basis, Esteves and Dibet (both covered under APEC) are among the top rice producers for Casiguran.

Baranggay	Average Prod. per Hectare (MT)	Total Production (MT)
Ditinagyan	3.5	192.5
Calabagan	3.75	281.25
<b>Esteves</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>1530</b>
<b>Dibet</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>625.50</b>
<b>Dibacong</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>300</b>
Tinib	3.75	551.25
Calanguasan	3.75	487.50
Marikit	3.75	288.75
Tabas	3.75	450
Calantas	4.25	1551.25
Lual	3.75	520
Esperanza	3.75	1012.50

<b>Culat</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>Cozo</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>San Idelfonso</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8440.50 (x 2 per year)</b>

*Source: Municipal Agriculturist Office, 2010 as cited in Task Force Anti-APECO Power Point presentation on Balitaan Forum held May 2, 2012*

These rice lands have irrigation facilities and are located in plain and level ground, making it susceptible to population encroachment. As observed by the MPDO (2008), there are indications that residential structures are already encroaching into productive rice lands. In the CLUP prepared by the MPDO therefore, they reiterated the need to protect the identified SAFDZs in the area and to make it the center of agricultural development in the area as it embodies the agricultural potentials and opportunities available for the municipality. (CLUP, 2008)

Therefore, the planned conversion of these lands under APECO would immediately damage the agricultural production of these covered lands jeopardizing the food security in the area. Moreover, the spill-over effects and change in the municipality's local economy would further erode the town's agricultural activities over time. (Task Force Anti-APECO, 2012)

### **APEC0: Development for Whom?**

The APEC0 proponents seemingly view the establishment of APEC0 as the answer to the underdevelopment and lack of progress in Aurora province. This has been clearly stated and posted on their website and is part of the message they put across to potential investors clearly being targeted by the website. In the early part of 2011, APEC0 Deputy Administrator Tolentino boasted of at least 10 investors ready to sign up with APEC0, with a job requirement of over 2,000 that could possibly benefit the people of Casiguran and its neighboring municipalities. The projects include the construction of an airport terminal, a coco mill, a biomass plant, a mariculture venture with Gaudi International of Taiwan, and a \$6 million dollars power solar plant. (Magkilat, 2011)

Good intentions aside, however, APEC0's development so far has benefitted only APEC0 and a few residents of Casiguran. The displacement, harassment, division among the community people and Dumagat/Agtas, and worries it is fostering within the Casiguran community, including the Dumagat/Agtas populace, however is more alarming and extensive. In fact the resistance against APEC0 not only consolidated local groups<sup>2</sup> but has attracted a lot of supporters who have banded together and formed Task Force Anti-APEC0. The struggle against APEC0 has therefore not been confined at the local level but has been elevated at the national level.

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<sup>2</sup> BICFA or the Bicolano Casiguran Farmers Association which banded together to petition for the distribution of the reservation lands is now stronger. PIGLAS-CA is also a federation borne out of the APEC0 struggle after the PAKISAMA paralegal training conducted in Casiguran on September 2009. PAKISAMA is the national federation assisting BICFA and now PIGLASCA.

Task Force Anti-APECO is quick to point out that APECO violated and continues to violate at least four (4) existing national laws with its on-going development.

These are Republic Act 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991), Republic Act 8371(Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997), Republic Act 8435 (Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997) and Republic Act 9700 (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension and Reforms Act of 2010).

Since APECO was created without proper consultation, it violated the provisions of RA 7160 mandating consultations on projects such as this. APECO has yet to relocate those displaced by the initial conversions it has spawned. This is another violation of the provisions of RA 7160. A more serious violation is the fact that the APECO law effectively diminishes or abolishes the power and jurisdiction of the LGUS in the areas covered by the Aurora SEZ. APECO is not mandated to be under the LGUs in the area, rather it will merely coordinate its development plan with the LGU like a co-equal LGU unit. Too, APECO has been given eminent domain powers within the areas covered by the SEZ, another power normally vested to LGUs. It even has separate customs and taxation powers. (Fact Sheet 1, Task Force Anti-APECO)

There was also no attempt to secure the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), a requirement under R.A. 8371 or the IPRA, of the Dumagat/Agtas before the inclusion of the San Ildefonso Peninsula in APECO considering that there is a pending CADT application since 1995. The land conversions being undertaken likewise violates RA 8435 which provides identified SAFDZs or prime agricultural lands protection against land conversion.

That APECO as a law has been railroaded is a fact. Stakeholders were not invited to the public hearings and even the opposition of other government agencies has gone unheeded. At the local level, Casiguran residents complain of lack of consultation prior to the passage of the resolution supporting APECO by the local government council. In the absence broad and genuine public of consultations and public hearings, the advantages and disadvantages of APECO have obviously not been discussed thoroughly with all the stakeholders. Ultimately, APECO's "developments" will benefit only a few rich and powerful persons in exchange for the systematic dislocation of the poor, especially the Dumagat/Agtas.

Senator Angara has remarked that APECO will not cause evictions nor would it displace the Dumagat/Agtas from their ancestral domain. He vowed that relocation or sale of lands would be voluntary. But this is not entirely true since forced evictions are already happening as attested to by those who have been affected by the land conversions so far. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR), which accompanied an International Solidarity Mission from Swiss and Dutch Catholic Dioceses to visit to the affected Casiguran families in February 2012, released its findings about APECO which show: the displacement in the community, the black propaganda against project critics, the lack of transparency and the abuses perpetrated against the IP community in Aurora. On these grounds, the CHR Chair Loretta Rosales has expressed her intention to seek the support of all the CHR commissioners for the repeal of the APECO law. (Orejas, 2012)

Likewise, though some farmers and even the Dumagat/Agtas may not be evicted as Senator Angara vowed, but this is no guarantee that they will be not be forced to sell or give up their lands because APECO developments will surely crowd them out. There are already rumors that the Angaras now own and are buying various landholdings, the value of which will definitely rise once APECO's planned development pushes through. (PAFID, 2011)

## **Mounting Resistance**

As mentioned above, resistance against APECO has escalated. Aside from the initial local organizations (BICFA, PIGLAS-CA, etc.) which have been organized to oppose APECO, the Task Force Anti-APECO has been established. PAKISAMA has spearheaded some and has been active in all of these campaigns to oppose APECO. It has also actively participated in all of the hearings conducted based on the resolutions sponsored by Akbayan Representatives Kaka Bag-ao and Walden Bello.

A bill has been filed by Anak-Pawis Representative Rafael Mariano which calls for the repeal of the APECO law. No less than the CHR Chair Loretta Rosales stated that she will ask CHR en banc to support the proposed repeal of the APECO law.

The Catholic Church, through the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) has added its voice in opposing APECO. It has denounced the "injustice and human rights violation in the process of pushing through with construction of the projects" highlighting that APECO has resulted to "legalized land grabbing and eviction." It has called for the suspension of its budget and operations due to anomalous transactions. (Orejas, 2012) On the other hand, Bishop Rolando Tria Tirona, Bishop Emeritus Julio Xavier Labayen and 30 priests also appealed to the Aquino administration and the Commission on Audit to review RA 10083 and alleged anomalous infrastructure projects in their statement on July 12. They also condemned the attack against Casiguran parish priest Joefran Talaban, a known advocate against APECO and of the residents' rights to their lands and fishing grounds. (Garcia, 2012)

On February 16 to 21, 2012, an International Solidarity Mission from Swiss and Dutch Catholic Dioceses visited the affected families and together with Task Force Anti-APECO they launched press/media campaigns with the Commission on Human Rights and NCIP. The delegates of the mission were: Bishop Felix Gmür from Switzerland; Bishop Rolando Tirona of the Prelature of Infanta; Fr. Ben Verberne of the Dutch Conference of Religious; Helena Jeppesen of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund; Floor Schuiling of Mensen met een Missie-The Netherlands; Fr. Pete Montallana and Bro. Martin Francisco of the Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance Inc.; Mark Cebreros of the Commission on Human Rights; and Commissioner Conchita Calzado of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. Other groups joining the mission are the Integrated Pastoral Development Initiative, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Focus on the Global South (Focus), Pakisama/Task Force Anti-APECO, Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, Tribal Center for Development, Swiss TV and Radio Veritas. (Orejas, 2012) PAKISAMA hosted a Solidarity Dinner, which included the CHR Chair, NCIP Commissioner, and Swiss Ambassador later. This is when the slogan "It's more fun in Aurora without APECO" a tweak of the Department of Tourism (DOT) slogan "it's more fun in the Philippines" was also coined.

At present, PIGLASCA-PAKISAMA- Task Force Anti-APECO has initiated an indefinite camp-out outside of the DAR to push for the distribution of the remaining lands in Casiguran and to show their continuing opposition against APECO.

Social networking has also been used to further propagate the opposition against APECO. "Ayoko sa APECO" is on Facebook .

## **Providing Alternatives**

Given the adverse effects so far of APECO and the mounting opposition against it, there is a need for the proponents of APECO to step back and rethink the development they want to foster in Casiguran through APECO. That is if they indeed intend APECO to serve first and foremost the needs of the local residents of Casiguran.

Those opposing APECO had pointed to the potentials of agricultural development in Casiguran. In 2010, as part of the struggle against APECO, PAKISAMA with PIGLASCA started organizing commodity clusters in the area under the EU-funded Agriterra-PAKISAMA Philippine Farmers For Food Project. There are now five (5) clusters of organic rice farmers (100 farmers) and two (2) Fish Cluster (40 Fisherfolks). It has embarked on establishing seed banks and learning farms, and as a direct result 500 sacks of organic rice was harvested in 2011 from the areas which have adopted organic rice farming. (Sarmiento, 2012) This is taking advantage of the natural potential of Casiguran as the rice granary and bowl of Aurora.

To contribute to the goals of agricultural development and to safeguard the rights of the small farmers, immediate distribution of lands under CARPER must be undertaken and the needed support services provided.

As one of the most disadvantaged sectors in Philippine society, caution must be exercised in providing support to Casiguran's indigenous population, especially the Dumagat/Agtas. The NCIP should immediately act on the pending CADT application of the Dumagat/Agtas. Since ecological changes, specifically the loss of game in the Casiguran forests, is one of the major reasons for the continuing decline of the Dumagat/Agtas population, efforts to secure the forests to avert this must be done. Headland's studies (1975 and 1984) provide us valuable insights to understand the needs of the Dumagat/Agtas and how these needs can be addressed better.

By securing the rights of the small farmers over the lands they have been tilling and the Dumagat/Agtas' ancestral domain and waters which is crucial to their survival as a people, land grabbing spurred by the developments of APECO so far can be thwarted.

Given the continuing threat of climate change, the forests of Casiguran must be preserved. As one of the remaining extensive forest covers, it can help preserve not only the Dumagat/Agtas peoples and their way of life but also to safeguard the lives of the other residents of Casiguran.

To safeguard the livelihood of small fisherfolks, the municipal waters should be allocated solely to them. There are reasons why they have opposed mariculture and all of these should be addressed and taken into consideration.

Development when based on imposed goals has never succeeded especially in addressing the needs of the poorer sections of the society. A more prudent and relevant development option should begin by respecting, understanding and recognizing the potentials of the place and the people.

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