

Ore & building materials extraction

Keywords

- > Copper
- > Water Contamination
- > Southern Peru Copper Corporation
- > Communitarian Consultation
- > Environmentalist's Success
- > Assassinated Activists

Introduction

The Tia Maria Project is located in the Islay Province, Arequipa, in southern Peru, within a subtropical and low montane desert ecosystem where there is only one river basin, the Tambo River Basin that spans 2,500 square kilometres (1,553 square miles). It is situated in the Cachuyo Ravine, 90 kilometres (56 miles) from Arequipa City and 9 kilometres (5.6 miles) north of the village of Cocachacra. The ravine stretches for 12 kilometres (7.5 miles), originating in Pampa Cachendo and flowing into Tambo Valley.

The project is owned by the Southern Copper Corporation (part of Grupo Mexico) that also controls, among others, the Cananea field in Mexico. In Islay, the company planned to extract copper through two open pits. The main problem in this case was water use in this dry area, which is also needed for agriculture.

Project

At Tia Maria, the company seeks to exploit a copper porphyritic system (large low grade deposits) with an average of 0.39 percent of copper.

It was projected that the Project would last 21 years; three years to start up, and 18 years, in two phases, for operations. In the first phase, between years three and 15, the company would exploit the La Tapada deposit through an open pit mine, extracting 817.5 million metric tons of materials. In the second phase, between years 15 and 21, the corporation would exploit the Tia Maria deposit, again through an open pit mine, and extract 399.9 million metric tons of materials (Southern Peru Copper Corporation, 2010:RE7).

The transportation of the material was planned in several phases. First, the mineral and the material removed by explosives would be excavated and loaded into dump trucks, then transported to the deposit or the crushing plant located close to the open pit mine. The crushed material would then be transferred to other phases of the process, including the leaching plant,



View from the mine

Source: peruenconflicto.pe/mineria

by an overland conveyor system. According to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the product would be transported to the Matarani port by train.

The company announced it would invest over USD 950 million, USD 400 million of which was already invested in 2008 (Andina, 2008).

Impacts

One of the direct impacts of the project is the use of water sources for the exploitation phase. The EIA predicts massive amount of water will be used, to be obtained through wells drilled in the Tambo River Valley. After intense social protests against water use, the company stated that the Project could just use desalinated seawater.

There was also the problem that mining exploration wastes would contaminate water sources. This would not only cause health problems but also impede its use for agriculture and livestock activities.

Conflict and consequences

The regional population has been saying since the first quarter of 2009 that the Project would affect water availability, thereby directly affecting rice, sugarcane and paprika production in the Tambo River Valley.

In July 2009, the company submitted its EIA. The study was to be presented to the people from the Cocachacra District, at a public meeting in late August. However, on the day of the presentation there was an opposition demonstration and the meeting was cancelled.





The Tia Maria mining protests gathered steam in November. Nine injured, 18 arrested and a bus fire is the balance of the protests against in November 2010 Source: actualidadambiental.pe/?p=7941

| | |
|------|---|
| 2009 | Exploration and protests of the affected inhabitants begins |
| 2009 | The company submits the EIA |
| 2009 | Communitarian consultation. Residents reject company presence |
| 2009 | Local government rejects the results of the consultation |
| 2011 | February, Strike. Three people are killed and several wounded |
| 2011 | April, The central government rejects the EIA and orders the company to leave. The operations of the company are suspended. |
| 2012 | The company initiates a new EIA |

Chronology of Major Events

Later, the municipal governments of the Cocachacra, Islay-Matarani, Mollendo, Punta de Bombón, Dean Valdivia and Mejía Districts called for a communitarian consultation to decide on the Project's execution. The authorities issued a Municipal Ordinance that positioned the consultation as a democratic mechanism to gauge the people's opinions on possible mining activities. On 27 September 2009, the residents of Cocachacra exercised their right to citizen participation, took part in the consultation and rejected the mining project by 93.4 percent of the votes.

In declarations to the media, the company said they would seek the support of the local communities to reschedule the public meeting. However, in early 2010, after tensions climbed

between the company and the local authorities, the project was finally postponed until the end of 2011. The company accused the authorities of illegal actions during this process.

In February 2011, a strike was organised, where three people died and several others were wounded. The government authorised the Army to intervene, and maintain and restore order (Resolución suprema N°113-2011/DE). In response, in April 2011 the Ministry of Energy and Mines rejected the first EIA and ordered the machinery to be removed from the area.

Currently, the company is undertaking a new EIA which—supposedly—will include previous remarks; the communities alone have presented

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Confrontations between demonstrators and the police in Dean Valdivia, Islay.

Source: *El Comercio*, 15 November 2010



Satellite view of the mine

Source: armand953.wordpress.com/2010/03/09/



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3,000 such comments. The company hopes to restart its activities in 2015, once the EIA is submitted and approved.

Among the main organisations that work on this issue in Tia Maria are Coordinadora provincial contra la agresión minera (Provincial Coordination against Mining Aggression); el Movimiento Nueva Izquierda (The New Left Movement); and Frente de Defensa del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Environmental and Natural Resources Defence Front).

More on this case:

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All sources last accessed 10.01.2014