
Peru: Camisea gas project is impacting on community and ecosystem health

At a cost of 1,600 million dollars, the Camisea mega project for natural gas extraction from an area located on the banks of the Camisea River -one of the world's richest areas in biodiversity- has the Inter-American Development Bank as its main public financier. However, it has not brought any benefit to the local communities. As denounced in WRM Bulletin No. 95, the Camisea project will be carried out at the expense of forest destruction, river contamination and noise pollution, soil erosion and the consequent degradation of flora and fauna in the project's area of influence.

The project has had four spills in its 15 months of operation. The negotiations to decide the amount of compensation due to the environmental impact of the spills were still an issue for public complaint considering that they had not respected indigenous rights. An example of this is the following document that states that "Through the present Act of Donation, the Community Relations Coordination office for the TGP Forest Region, on behalf of the Camisea project, delivers the following goods: six bags of rice, four bags of sugar, 30 kgs of salt, 50 litres of oil, 100 kgs of dried pasta, eight boxes of tinned tuna, four boxes of milk, 40 kgs. of dried vegetables, 100 kgs. of onions and 20 kgs of garlic. This donation is part of a gesture of solidarity and good neighbourliness on the part of the company towards the families of the native community as a provision for the damages caused by the spill in KP 50 which took place on 24 November 2005. This delivery is made for five days." This is the document of the supplies delivered to the zones affected by the spill for a community with a population close on half a thousand people.

With this event still fresh in public opinion, on 4 March a further spill took place at kilometre 123, in the sector called Manatarushiato, at some five kilometres to the north of the populated centre of Kepashiato, district of Echarati, in the Province of La Convención, Cusco.

The international company Transportadora de Gas del Perú (TGP) –responsible for the gas pipeline– confirmed the spill –the fifth for the Camisea project– of approximately 750 cubic metres of liquid gas which were consumed by the fire caused by the fault at the breaking point.

The 20 metre high flames burnt Felipe Ticona's house to the ground and caused second and third degree burns to Nancy Rosalvina Ticona and Carlos and Freddy Huaman Ticona, aged 11 and 7 respectively. The fire also destroyed several hectares of crop lands and forests surrounding the zones and caused the death of animals. The mayor, Martín Huamán, asked the population to avoid consuming water or fish from the Cumperuciato River as its waters had been contaminated by toxic material.

The Camisea project is also carried out at the expense of the life and health of the indigenous peoples whose territory overlaps one third of the Camisea gas concession, as denounced by the Inter-Ethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Forest (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana – AIDSEP).

A report by the Defence Office for the People of Peru –"The Camisea Project and its effect on

people's rights"—denounces that the fundamental rights of the native communities settled around the Camisea gas deposits have been affected by the foreign companies operating in the Amazon forest. It also contains devastating accusations on the action of the Peruvian State regarding defence of the life of the population of the Nahua-Kugapakori Territorial Reserve in the south of the country, where the Transportadora de Gas del Perú (TGP) company that won the Camisea gas concession intruded. TGP's partner firms are the Argentine PlusPetrol and Techint, the Texan Hunt Oil, the Algerian State company Sonatrach and the South Korean SK Corporation.

The project affects the native communities in voluntary isolation and in a situation of initial contact such as the Nahua, Matsiguenga (or Machiguengas), Nanti and Yora or Kugapakori. These communities "are particularly vulnerable to respiratory and gastrointestinal infections," furthermore "their cultural identity is being submitted to changes that are undermining their self-esteem" warns the above-mentioned report.

The Defence Office states that between 2001 and 2003, 17 people belonging to native communities in initial contact who had received visits from company workers, died of flu. Additionally, 16 cases of syphilis have been recorded in the native communities of Camisea and Shivacoreni. According to the Defence Office report the native communities consider that the opening of brothels close to the Techint company (in charge of building the gas pipeline) camps is responsible for this.

For its part, AIDSEP denounces the "lack of consultation or prior and informed consent regarding policies, legislative and administrative measures, programmes or projects involving our indigenous peoples. Faced by these oversights, indifference and negligence we, the indigenous peoples have lost confidence in the validity of the democratic system, and in many cases there are already direct reactions to the affection of our collective rights, in the imposition of 'negotiable' grids as concessions on ancestral indigenous territory." "...the State has imposed exploitation of our natural resources inside our ancestral territories. We have been the owners of these territories since before colonization and before the formation of the present national State, and therefore we declare that our territories are as they have always been: inalienable, indefeasible, they cannot be attached or expropriated."

The so-called "modernization" announced by mega projects such as the Camisea gas pipeline, sooner or later end up by showing their true nature of destruction, disease and death.

Article base on information from: "Proyecto Camisea, muestra de improvisación: atenta contra los derechos de pueblos indígenas", Statement by the Asociación Interétnica De Desarrollo De La Selva Peruana, distributed by electronic list PERU & WORLD: Amig@s de l@s Ashaninka; "Piden suspender Camisea luego de quinto derrame ocurrido ayer", Servindi, 5 de marzo de 2006, e-mail: servindi@servindi.org; www.servindi.org; "Derechos indígenas violados por gasoducto de Camisea", Ángel Páez, IPS, distributed by the list [prensaamb-alc]