

Philippine coal plants' impact on host communities

This pioneering study analyzed the impact of 4 major coal plants on a community's environment, health, economy, and quality of life.

QUEZON CITY, METRO-MANILA, PHILIPPINES, August 18, 2015 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Findings from my original, July 2015 study of the societal impact of coal-fired power plants add to the mass of convergent research-based evidence to support the urgent call for less global dependence on coal.

In this research on the community impact of 4 major Philippine coal-fueled power plants in Luzon and Visayas Islands, I tapped respondents' personal beliefs and opinions regarding the effects of coal plant operations on their environment, health, economy, and life satisfaction.

Included in my research were the Calaca Power Plant in Batangas, Luzon (600 megawatts); the Mariveles Power Station in Bataan, Luzon (651.6 megawatts); the La Paz Coal Plant in Iloilo, Visayas (164 megawatts); and the Masinloc Coal Station in Zambales, Luzon (630 megawatts).

I limited my study to residents living within a third of a kilometer from the coal plants and randomly sampled 410 out of 3,000 households. This sampling procedure resulted in a 99 percent confidence level in the research findings with a 6-point margin of error. Personal interviews were guided by a questionnaire tapping perceptions of coal operations' impact on the environment, health, income, and life satisfaction, as well as evaluation of the value and future of coal plants.

Environmentally, an average of 92 percent of respondents felt that they enjoyed cleaner air before the coal plant's establishment in their villages. Sounder sleep, pre-coal plant, was reported by 89 percent of respondents. A sizeable majority of 74 percent observed that overall environmental quality deteriorated post-coal plant; only 16 percent thought otherwise.

Health-wise, an average of 80 percent of the sample believed that they had better health before the coal plant's installation. Fewer illnesses, pre-coal plant, were indicated by 77 percent of the sample. The most frequently cited diseases were lung disease, asthma, primary complex, cough, colds, skin allergies, cardiovascular diseases, fever, infections, headache, and diarrhea. The root cause of these diseases was the coal plant, according to 69 percent of the sample.

As to economic well-being, the average daily income of respondents from Calaca, La Paz, and Mariveles decreased with statistical significance from 199.00 Philippine pesos (PhP) pre-coal plant to PhP 105.00 post-coal plant.

Masinloc's average daily income increased from PhP 285 pre-coal plant to PhP 623.00 post-coal plant. Statistically, however, this increase was a result of chance. In effect, there was no change in income. These results are consistent with 69 percent of interviewees observing that their lives were more economically satisfying, pre-coal plant.

Life satisfaction was negatively impacted by the coal plant. Seventy percent of declared that they were happier, pre-coal plant. Only 14 percent disagreed. Seventy percent said that their quality of life

was better, pre-coal plant. Only 11 percent believed otherwise.

Regarding the usefulness of coal plants, 45 percent opined that these energy sources brought about more costs than benefits. Only 21 percent saw coal plants as more beneficial than detrimental.

Asked about the future of the coal plants, 61 percent preferred a future without coal plants. Only 17 percent desired a future with coal plants. Fifty-seven percent signified that if they had the power, they would shut down coal plants as soon as possible. Only 20 percent expressed support for continued power plant operations.

In conclusion, it is my hope that environmental decision-makers worldwide consider scientifically-derived data before crafting and implementing environmental policies and laws. An integral part of these processes must be grassroots consultation.

My research reveals that only 45 percent of households were consulted by government agencies. Participatory democracy must be ingrained in the political zeitgeist for countries to succeed in their complex search for cleaner but reliable and economically viable renewable energy which benefits the public weal.

Freddie Rabelas Obligacion, PhD
Independent Consultant
09192296248
email us here

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