



CASE STUDY

NICKEL MINING AND ITS IMPACTS ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

NARRA, PALAWAN
PHILIPPINES



Background

Rising global demand for critical minerals to fuel the energy transition and electrification of transportation has resulted in increased mining in the Philippines, including in the province of Palawan. International agencies and countries around the world recognize minerals, such as cobalt, copper, nickel, and lithium as critical due to their importance in the energy transition and potential challenges in ramping up their supply to meet global demand. Nickel is used as a primary material for batteries, and its demand is expected to increase exponentially.¹

Nickel is also a primary material for stainless steel, which has historically played a large role in the development of urban infrastructure worldwide. As a result of this nickel consumption, sulfide ores - which were the main source of the mineral - have been greatly depleted. Consequently, miners have increasingly shifted to exploring and expanding the extraction of its alternative, laterite ores, for the energy transition.²

Nickel laterite ores are commonly extracted using surface mining methods, including open-pit and strip mining. These methods are greatly destructive to the environment because they entail removing the entire top layer of soil to access the minerals. This results in a complete loss of structure and function of soil, as well as the forests and vegetation above it.³

Currently, the Philippines is the second-largest supplier of nickel in the world, and its province, Palawan, is experiencing a boom in mining permits.⁴

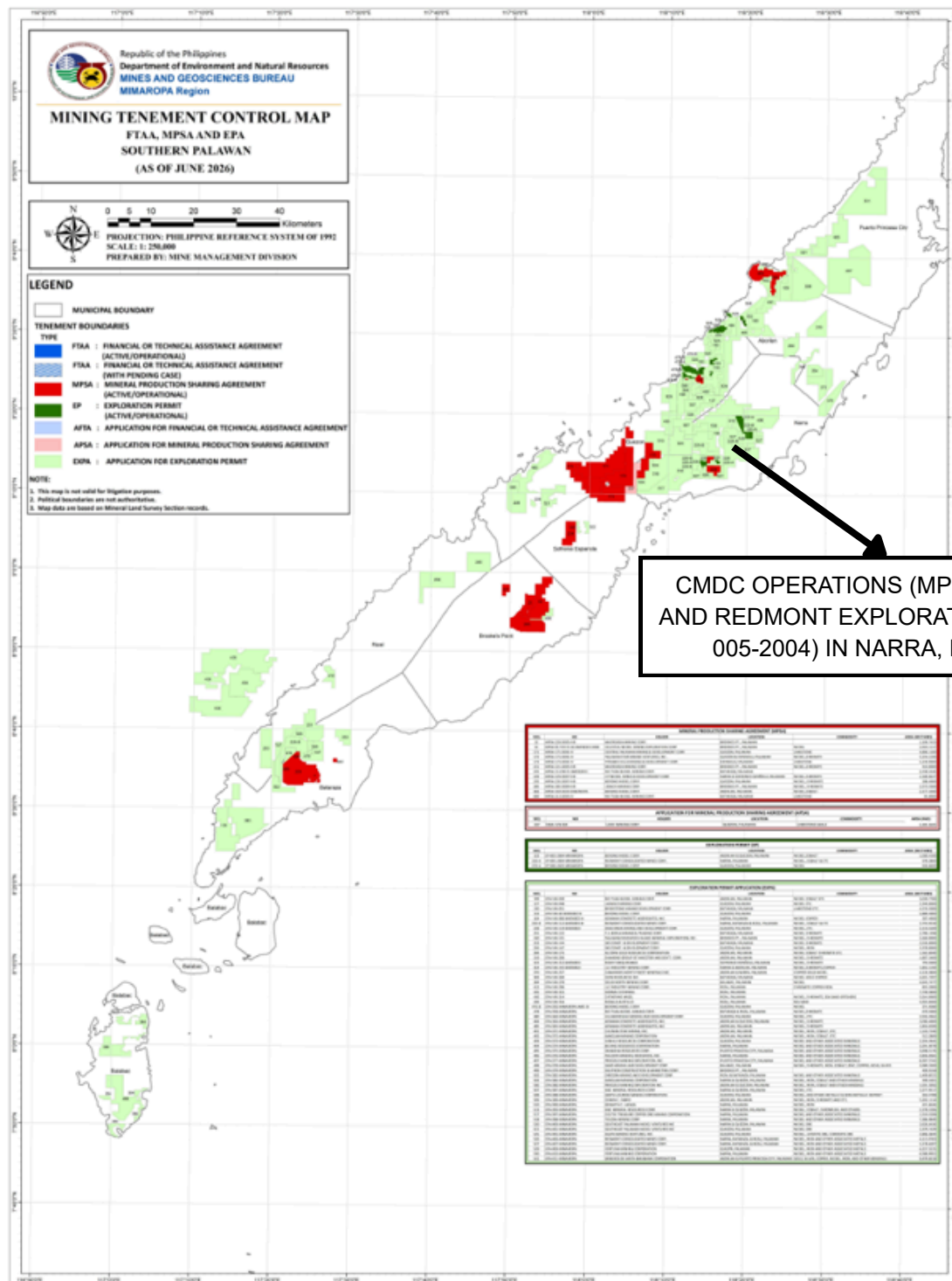
¹ Indra Kusumawardhana and Octavia Adiel Permata, "The Energy Trilemma and the Alignment of Indonesian Nickel Policy," *Journal of Governance* 8, no. 4 (2023): 698, <https://doi.org/10.31506/jog.v8i4.23256>.

² Paweł Harasim, "Nickel Resources and Sources," in *Nickel in Soils and Plants*, 1st ed., by Christos Tsadilas et al. (CRC Press, 2018), 89, 92, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315154664-4>.

³ Ricksy Prematuri et al., "The Impact of Nickel Mining on Soil Properties and Growth of Two Fast-Growing Tropical Trees Species," *International Journal of Forestry Research* 2020 (November 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/8837590>.

⁴ "Indigenous Filipinos Fight to Protect Biodiverse Mountains from Mining," accessed January 28, 2026, <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/03/indigenous-filipinos-fight-to-protect-biodiverse-mountains-from-mining/>.

Mining Tenement Map of Southern Palawan



Source: Mines and Geosciences Bureau⁵

⁵ “MGB MIMAROPA – Mines Geosciences and Bureau,” <https://region4b.mgb.gov.ph/>

Relevant National and Local Policies

Although the country does have legal protections for communities affected by mining, these are unfortunately not implemented consistently. In 1995, former President Fidel V. Ramos enacted the Mining Act of 1995 (Republic Act No. 7942), with the intention of liberalizing the mining industry and encouraging more foreign direct investments to fund mining operations.^{6,7} As a result of this Act and other mining-related legislations, large-scale mining operations increased dramatically, and major mining companies were given preferential treatment from the government at the cost of the rights of local communities, especially Indigenous Peoples.⁸

Under the 1995 Act, the Philippine government can grant mining companies temporary leases in the form of Exploration Permits (EP), Mineral Production Sharing Agreements (MPSA) or Financial or Technical Assistance Agreements (FTAA) to conduct mineral exploration and extraction.⁹ Though the Act and its subsequent revised implementing rules and regulations contain provisions for social and environmental protection,¹⁰ these have been poorly implemented through the years by the concerned government agencies, such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), Local Government Units (LGUs), the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).¹¹

The NCIP is also responsible for implementing the country's Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 (officially known as Republic Act No. 8371), which is meant to recognize, protect, and promote the rights of Indigenous communities in the Philippines. This law stipulates that mining companies seeking a concession, license, lease or production-sharing agreement need to obtain a Certificate of Precondition from the NCIP certifying their compliance of regulations, which include the following:

- The affected area must not overlap with any ancestral domain.
- Concerned Indigenous Peoples have given their free and prior informed consent (FPIC) in writing.
- There is no pending application for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) for the affected area.

⁶ M. V. Cabalda et al., "Sustainable Development in The Philippine Minerals Industry: A Baseline Study," Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development, February 2002, 19.

⁷ "R.A. No. 7942," accessed July 14, 2026, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1995/ra_7942_1995.html.

⁸ Roland G. Simbulan, "Indigenous Communities' Resistance to Corporate Mining in the Philippines," Peace Review 28, no. 1 (2016): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2016.1130373>.

⁹ Jewellord Nem Singh and Alvin Camba, "The Role of Domestic Policy Coalitions in Extractive Industries' Governance: Disentangling the Politics of 'Responsible Mining' in the Philippines," Environmental Policy and Governance 30, no. 5 (2020): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1905>.

¹⁰ Cabalda et al., "Sustainable Development in The Philippine Minerals Industry: A Baseline Study," 20.

¹¹ Dr Roberto B. Raymundo, The Philippine Mining Act of 1995: Is the Law Sufficient in Achieving, 2014, 10.

In addition, concerned Indigenous Cultural Communities or Indigenous Peoples have the right to stop or suspend any project that has not satisfied the requirements of this consultation process.¹² In reality, the common experience of Indigenous communities is that consultations are not properly conducted. Mining companies often fail to disclose the negative impacts of their projects, highlighting only the supposed benefits instead. Indigenous peoples are not given adequate opportunities to express their concerns, and even when they assertively request that their voices be heard, they are often ignored.

At the local level, the Palawan Provincial Board passed Provincial Ordinance No. 3646 in March 2025. This is a declaration of a 50-year extendable moratorium on the issuance of endorsements for all large and small-scale mining applications, including application for exploration permits, mineral agreements and financial and technical agreements in the Province of Palawan.¹³ Whether this moratorium will be respected is currently being challenged in the municipality of Narra.

¹² “Republic Act No. 8371 | GOVPH,” Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, October 29, 1997, “[MGB MIMAROPA – Mines Geosciences and Bureau](https://region4b.mgb.gov.ph/),” <https://region4b.mgb.gov.ph/>.

¹³ Rachel P. Ganancial, “Palawan Guv Signs 50-Year Mining Moratorium Ordinance,” Philippine Information Agency, March 14, 2025, <https://pia.gov.ph/regions/palawan-guv-signs-50-year-mining-moratorium-ordinance/>.

Mining in Narra

Palawan, known for its rich biodiversity and natural resources, is composed of 23 municipalities and one city, including the municipality of Narra. While Palawan is widely recognized for its environmental importance, some areas have experienced increasing mining activities. Narra sits on rich nickel laterite deposits, making it attractive to mining investments, especially for critical minerals. However, this has sparked environmental, social, and governance concerns among communities, Indigenous Peoples, farmers, and environmental advocates.



*Rice fields in Barangay Princess Urduja, Narra.
Photo by: Renier Albarracin*

The Municipality of Narra (which stands for the **N**ational **R**esettlement and **R**ehabilitation **A**dministration) was created by virtue of Republic Act No. 5642, signed by former President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. on June 21, 1969. Its creation follows a historical pattern of clearing forests in the province for rice cultivation and homesteading while displacing Indigenous communities in the process.¹⁴ Narra is composed of 23 barangays and is known as the ‘Rice Granary of Palawan’¹⁵ because it is the province’s main rice producer – contributing more than a third of Palawan’s annual rice output and playing a crucial part in maintaining the province’s high rice self-sufficiency ratio.¹⁶ Other sources of livelihood in the municipality include livestock and poultry raising, crop production, and fishing.

The municipality’s land use map indicates that substantial land is used in the area for agriculture and fishery as main sources of livelihood. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of Narra’s total land area is agricultural land, while its western region is predominantly covered by forests. Almost 30% of the municipality’s population are self-employed, working in agriculture and fisheries as of 2022. In some barangays - such as Calategas, Princess Urduja and Dumanguena - community-based forest management is practiced.¹⁷ These livelihoods, which depend on Narra’s natural resources, are currently under threat by mining activity and exploration.

¹⁴ Eric D. U. Gutierrez et al., “Hanapbuhay: Coping with Informality, Risk, and Insecurity in a Philippine Rice Farming Village,” *Critical Asian Studies* 58, no. 2 (2026): 239, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2025.2601952>

¹⁵ “History of Narra, Palawan, PDF, Organisms, Plants,” <https://www.scribd.com/document/506933184/History-of-Narra>.

¹⁶ Gutierrez et al., “Hanapbuhay,” 239

¹⁷ Liwayway H. Acero, “Landscape Structure’ Influence on the Source of Livelihood of the Population: The Case of Narra, Palawan Philippines,” *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 987, no. 1 (2022): 1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/987/1/012013>

Mining operations in Narra began in the mid-2000s, with nickel as the main commercially targeted mineral. In 2004, the Platinum Group Metals Corporation (PGMC) started operations in the area, establishing the Toronto Nickel Mine, which covers approximately 768 hectares in barangays Calategas and Bato-bato.¹⁸ PGMC was able to operate this mine after signing a 25-year operating agreement with Olympic Mines and Development Corporation, who held the original mining claim.

However, operations were disrupted in 2008 when Olympic Mines and Development Corporation cancelled its agreement with PGMC and ceded its rights to another operating company, Citinickel Mines and Development Corporation (CMDC).^{19,20} CMDC – incorporated in 2006 – is the sole subsidiary of Oriental Peninsula Resources Group (ORE), a holding company incorporated in 2007. Aside from Toronto Nickel Mine, ORE and CMDC also own and operate Pulot Mine in neighboring Sofronia Española.²¹ The claims dispute resulted in a compromise agreement between ORE and PGMC, allowing ORE to take possession of the nickel mine sites in Narra and Española, and acknowledging CMDC as the new holder of Toronto Nickel Mine's 25-year MPSA.^{22,23}

Not long after, in November 2012, CMDC's operations in Narra were suspended following a silt spill that contaminated the Pinagdugan River with heavy metals, affecting 6.8 hectares of neighboring farms. The suspension was lifted in July 2014, just a month after CMDC's mine in Española was also suspended due to a similar spill.²⁴ Like other river systems in Narra, the Pinagdugan River is an important freshwater source that nearby communities depend on for domestic water needs, irrigation for agricultural lands, livestock and small-scale farming.

¹⁸ "Mining Rights Dispute," Philstar.Com, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2008/06/11/67132/mining-rights-dispute>.

¹⁹ Philstar.Com, "Mining Rights Dispute".

²⁰ Donnabelle L. Gatdula, "Platinum Questions Profit Potential of Oriental," Philstar.Com, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2008/05/21/63406/platinum-questions-profit-potential-oriental>.

²¹ "Oriental Peninsula," accessed July 14, 2026, https://orientalpeninsula.com/about/company_overview/view.

²² Zinnia B. Dela Peña, "Compromise Deal between Oriental Peninsula and Platinum Group Okayed," Philstar.Com, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2010/10/23/622951/compromise-deal-between-oriental-peninsula-and-platinum-group-okayed>.

²³ "MGB MIMAROPA – Mines Geosciences and Bureau," <https://region4b.mgb.gov.ph/>.

²⁴ "Citinickel Mines Allowed to Resume Operations in Palawan Mine," Philstar.Com, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2015/01/07/1410172/citinickel-mines-allowed-resume-operations-palawan-mine>



Overview of mining activity in Narra

Ten years later, in 2024, Redmont Consolidated Mines Corporation (“Redmont”), entered the area after obtaining Exploration Permit (EP) No. 005-2024-MIMAROPA from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) for exploration activities in barangays Bato-bato, Calategas, Malinao, and Princess Urduja for a total area of 976 hectares.²⁵

During a visit to the exploration site on May 4, 2026, the Indigenous Peoples’ organization NATRIPAL found signs of active exploration by Redmont in Princess Urduja, including areas within the ancestral domain of Indigenous Tagbanua communities. These include test pits spaced every 100 meters apart, debris/trash, and land markers on Mounts Epes Bayoo and Buwaye. Barangay Princess Urduja has not given consent to these exploration activities, and Redmont has denied conducting operations despite the physical evidence.

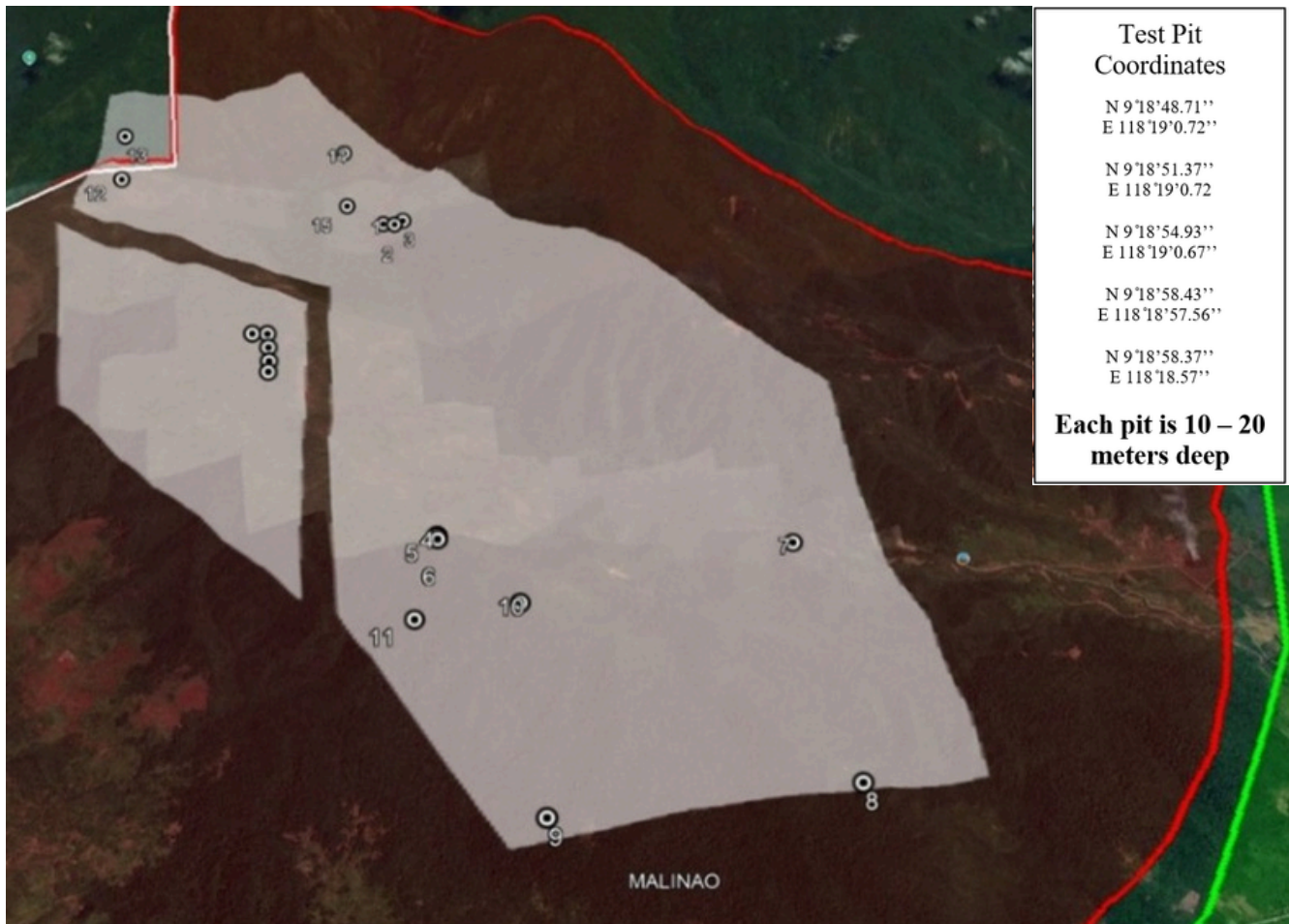


Close-up of one of the pits



Marker installed by Redmont

²⁵ “MGB MIMAROPA Awards Exploration Permit to Redmont Consolidated Mines Corporation,” October 4, 2024, <https://region4b.mgb.gov.ph/archive/press-release/634-mgb-mimaropa-awards-exploration-permit-to-redmont-consolidated-mines-corporation>



Area in Barangay Princess Urduja where Redmont dug test pits during exploration

The mountains in Narra form part of the Victoria-Anepahan Mountain Range. Beyond serving as a vital water source for lowland residents and rice agriculture, the range is a biodiversity hotspot with an endemism rate exceeding 40% for plant and animal species—a third of which are identified as critical species in need of conservation and protection efforts.²⁶ In particular, the municipality of Narra has been a center of new species discoveries: over the past 25 years, the majority of 15 newly identified species have been discovered in its mountains. The forests of the Victoria-Anepahan Mountain Range are ultramafic, making them ecologically vulnerable habitats that should be protected to maintain its unique flora and so local Indigenous Tagbanua can continue relying on its resources for food, medicine, water sources and for their livelihoods.²⁷

²⁶ Jaybie S. Arzaga and Maria Celeste N. Banaticla-Hilario, "Botanical Data for the Conservation of the Victoria-Anepahan Mountain Range, Palawan, Philippines," *The Palawan Scientist* 17, no. 2 (2025): 108, <https://doi.org/10.69721/TPS.J.2025.17.2.12>.

²⁷ Arzaga and Banaticla-Hilario, "Botanical Data for the Conservation of the Victoria-Anepahan Mountain Range, Palawan, Philippines," 113-118



Drone shots of the mountains of “Epes Bayoo” and “Buwaye” where the test pits were found. These were taken during an actual visit in the area on May 4, 2026.

Photo by: Renier Albarracin

Key Concerns of the Communities

Impacts on the Environment and on Livelihoods

Nickel mining commonly uses open-pit or strip-mining methods that strip away all vegetation and topsoil in the area. This process degrades ecosystems and makes it difficult or impossible to fully restore natural biodiversity after extraction. Additionally, mining operations create laterite runoff that can flow into lowland farms during heavy rains, smothering rice fields and reducing their productivity. These impacts have serious consequences on the livelihoods of the residents, which are primarily rice farming and vegetable gardening. The pollution also washes into rivers, waterways, and eventually the sea, impairing water quality used for irrigation, daily domestic needs and the primary livelihoods in coastal areas, which are fishing and harvesting other marine resources.

After nearly two decades of operation of the Toronto Nickel Mine, a study conducted in Barangay Bato-bato found cobalt levels in topsoil samples from rice farms that were three to seven times higher than normal averages. This is due to metals leaching into the environment surrounding the mine site, which is a major factor that has reduced crop productivity.²⁸ Aside from cobalt contamination, the Municipal Agricultural Office of Narra has identified over 100 hectares of rice fields that have become unproductive from being inundated with nickel laterite. Government agencies have not responded to the petitions of communities that call for an investigation of these losses and for the provision of alternative livelihoods.²⁹

Further, local Indigenous communities have traditionally relied on forest resources—such as almaciga resin (Manila copal), wild forest honey, rattan, pandan leaves (for mat and bag weaving), and "nito" vines—for their living. Mining activities have degraded local forests, leading to a noticeable decline in these resources. Furthermore, physical access to traditional gathering grounds is now restricted because mining companies prohibit community members from entering concession zones.



Wild forest honey



Almaciga resin (Manila copal)



Pandan leaves

²⁸ Liwayway H. Acero, "Cobalt Content in Mine Tailing Areas in Bato-Bato, Narra Palawan, Philippines," Chemical Engineering Transactions (IT) 106 (December 2023): 786, <https://doi.org/10.3303/CET23106131>

²⁹ "Palawan: A Natural Treasure in Peril as the World Scrambles for Critical Minerals | IUCN NL," <https://www.iucn.nl/en/>, n.d., accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.iucn.nl/en/story/palawan-a-natural-treasure-in-peril-as-the-world-scrambles-for-critical-minerals/>.

As one of the tribal elders in Purok Bethlehem, Barangay Princess Urduja said: “We may not have lowland rice fields ourselves, but those who do will have them destroyed once mining begins. What will we eat then? Where will we buy rice? Even if we have sacks or piles of money at home, we cannot eat money—we still need to buy rice. That is why I strongly stand against mining.”³⁰

Recognizing the negative repercussions of mining to the environment, the Barangay Council of Princess Urduja in Narra – together with local residents and Indigenous peoples - firmly oppose Redmont Consolidated Mines Corporation from conducting any mining activity, including exploration activities in their area.

Should mining operations proceed, the community will face severe environmental degradation, loss of fertile land, inundation of rice fields with mud, and laterite runoff flowing directly into the sea, which threatens marine fisheries. Given that Barangay Princess Urduja is situated in the valley between these mountains, residents fear that excavating the surrounding ridges will trigger catastrophic flooding, soil erosion, and landslides. Such disasters threaten to bury homes, destroy local infrastructure and livelihoods, and compromise the well-being of future generations.

Additionally, mining activities risk contaminating the primary watershed that supports local agriculture, livestock, and community domestic needs.

As another tribal leader of Purok 7 said: “I am worried this might happen to us, and nothing is impossible. Even things that seem strong can collapse—what more if there is already damage with water, mud, and everything building up there. Everything has its limits, especially when nature turns against us.”³¹

The Barangay Council of Princess Urduja has also officially passed a Resolution opposing open-pit mining operations, in support of Indigenous Peoples’ rights, protection of ancestral domain, agricultural lands, water, safety, and intergenerational equity.

³⁰ Interview with one of the traditional leaders in Purok Bethlehem, Barangay Princess Urduja, March 11, 2026

³¹ Interview with one of the community members in Purok 7, Barangay Princess Urduja, March 11, 2026

Concerns with Consent

The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process for the mining activities has created divisions within Indigenous communities. The historical unity they once had has been weakened and replaced by conflict and fear. Some members of the community who support mining have been used by mining companies to oppose those who are against it. During the actual FPIC process in Indigenous communities to decide on the Redmont exploration permit in Narra, the communities explicitly voted against the project. However, according to community members, irregular measures were reportedly taken—some pro-mining parties conducted house-to-house signature campaigns, gave monetary offers, and misled others to unknowingly sign their support to the mine. In such cases, what is presented as “consultation” becomes consultation in name only, where community voices are not meaningfully heard, and legal safeguards are effectively bypassed. It is hoped that the rights of Indigenous Peoples will be respected and upheld.

“The entry of mining operations has affected and damaged the relationships among Indigenous People, and even families are becoming divided in their stance on mining.” One of the community members said, “once the mining starts operating in our area, we may also lose our homes and lands, leaving us with nowhere to go because we have no other places to relocate, we are originally from this land.”³²

Despite the divide-and-conquer strategies of the mining company, Indigenous communities on the whole remain united in opposing mining expansion in ancestral domains, including Redmont’s exploration activities. They strongly believe that mining threatens their cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods, and forest resources, specifically affecting the Indigenous communities.



Launching of Signature campaign against mining.

Photo by: Renier Albarracin

³² Interview with one of the traditional leaders in Purok 7, Barangay Princess Urduja, March 10, 2026

Conflict with Mining Policies

Currently, local endorsements are challenging and testing the strength of Palawan's moratorium on mining. In July 2025, the Narra Municipal Council passed a resolution endorsing Redmont's application for an Environmentally Critical Areas Network (ECAN) zoning and a Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) clearance. Critics, including provincial board members and local activists, argue that the endorsement may conflict with the moratorium's intent and that it requires careful review.

Board Member Rafael Ortega Jr., Vice Chairman of the Palawan Provincial Board's Environmental Committee, clarified that under the moratorium, any mining application requires formal approval from the Provincial Board alongside municipal and barangay endorsements before it can move forward. When Indigenous leaders in Barangay Princess Urduja inquired in writing with the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) regarding Redmont's status, the PCSD confirmed on March 11, 2026, that no SEP Clearance application had been submitted to their office.³³

Without an SEP Clearance and consent from Barangay Princess Urduja, Redmont's ongoing exploration activities in the barangay violates local and national laws.



*Part of ancestral domain
claims of Tagbanua
Indigenous communities
in Sitio Mariwara,
Barangay Princess
Urduja, Narra.
Photo by: Renier
Albarracin*

³³ "PCSD: No Mining Exploration Application Filed by Redmont in Narra," accessed July 14, 2026, <https://palawan-news.com/pcsd-no-mining-exploration-application-filed-by-redmont-in-narra/>

Community Action

Residents of Narra, including farmers, fisherfolks, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society groups, have organized two “Walk for Nature “ rallies in front of the Narra Municipal Hall. They have also submitted formal petitions opposing mining endorsements, seeking strict enforcement of environmental safeguards under local and provincial laws, and demanding full respect for local consultation processes. Their concerns include potential harm to watersheds and soil quality, lack of thorough and proper consultation, uncertainty about long-term impacts on agriculture and fishing, and protection of ancestral lands and biodiversity.



*Signature campaign in Princess Urduja
Photo by: Renier Albarracin*

The petitions contain opposition to the endorsements of the Redmont exploration permit by Barangay Councils of Malinao, Bato-bato, Calategas, and the Narra Municipal Council. The petitions support full compliance with the existing provincial moratorium on mining in Palawan.

CALL TO ACTION FROM THE COMMUNITIES

Narra residents and communities call for **immediate halt to mining and related operations in Narra and across the entire province of Palawan.**

They call on the concerned agencies and local government units to **respect and enforce the 50-year moratorium on mining in the province of Palawan.**

They also call on the international community for **support through solidarity statements to pressure the Philippine government to protect Palawan's critical ecosystems.**

They seek **assistance to sustain legal aid and capacity-building efforts to the affected communities, corporate tracking research on mining companies Redmont and CMDC, particularly to identify any of their foreign investors they can target for international campaigns.**

Your voice can help amplify their concerns and push for accountability.