clean Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network

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People Power Zones – Verde Island Passage (VIP)

Communities defending their waters and shaping a different energy future

People Power Zones are places where communities have demonstrated the ability to influence, resist, and resist decisions about how energy is produced, who benefits from it, and who bears its costs.

They are not necessarily places where the energy transition has already been achieved; they are places where collective action is changing what is possible.

Context and history: A biodiversity hotspot at the center of the gas expansion

The Verde Island Passage (VIP) is one of the Philippines' most ecologically important marine corridors. Stretching approximately 1.4 million hectares across five provinces, the passage connects the waters of Batangas, Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque, and Romblon. It is home to extraordinary marine biodiversity, including nearly 60 percent of the world's known shore-fish species and an estimated 300 coral species. Its ecological importance has earned it the distinction of being the "center of the center of shore-fish biodiversity."[1]

Yet this ecological wealth has increasingly been placed at risk by the concentration of fossil fuel infrastructure along its coastline. Batangas, in particular, has become a major hub for the country's gas industry. CEED's *Protect VIP: Three Years of Defending the Amazon of the Oceans* documented five of the country's six existing fossil gas power plants and two commissioned LNG terminals within the VIP. It also identified eight proposed additional gas-fired power plants and seven LNG terminals in Batangas.

The scale of the planned expansion was particularly striking. Of the 40.9 GW of planned gas capacity identified in the Philippines, approximately 14.4 GW was concentrated in the VIP. This positioned the passage at the center of the country's proposed fossil gas buildout, exposing an ecologically sensitive marine environment and the livelihoods dependent on it to the risks associated with expanding gas infrastructure.

This expansion was part of a wider regional push to promote liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a supposed transition fuel. Gas was presented as a cleaner alternative to coal and an enabling technology for the transition to renewable energy. However, communities and energy advocates challenged this narrative, pointing to the risks of locking the Philippines into long-lived fossil fuel infrastructure, continued dependence on imported fuels, volatile global energy markets, and additional environmental pressures on coastal ecosystems.

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[1] Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), *Protect VIP: Three Years of Defending the Amazon of the Oceans*, pp. 1–7. The document supports the VIP biodiversity and fossil gas context, 2022 coalition gathering, water-quality assessments, oil-spill response, legal actions, and finance advocacy.

For the VIP, these were not abstract concerns. The continued development of gas infrastructure threatened marine habitats, fisheries, tourism, food security, and the livelihoods of coastal communities. It also raised questions about the country's energy priorities: whether investments should continue reinforcing fossil fuel dependence or instead support a more affordable, resilient, and community-centered renewable energy system.

How communities and people's movements are shaping the power landscape

The fight for the Verde Island Passage did not begin with the arrival of LNG projects. Batangas and its neighboring communities have a much longer history of confronting fossil fuel development, recognizing that the costs of energy production are often borne by the very people who have the least influence over energy decisions.

The fight against coal: A victory built through collective action

One of the earliest and most significant demonstrations of this collective power was the campaign against JG Summit Holdings' proposed 600 MW coal-fired power plant in Barangay Pinamucan Ibaba, Batangas City.

In 2015 and 2016, the proposed project galvanized opposition from local fisherfolk, environmental organizations, concerned citizens, and the Catholic Church, particularly the Archdiocese of Lipa.[2] The Lipa Archdiocesan Ministry on Environment helped lead the opposition, with Archbishop Ramon Arguelles and hundreds of priests participating in prayer rallies and other activities. In February 2015, a prayer walk drew approximately 3,000 participants.

The campaign reached a major milestone on May 4, 2016, when around 10,000 people marched in Batangas City under the banner *Piglas Batangas! Piglas Pilipinas!* as part of the international Break Free from Fossil Fuels movement. Participants demanded the cancellation of the proposed coal plant and called for a nationwide shift away from coal toward renewable energy. Local fisherfolk were among the most prominent voices, emphasizing the risks the project posed to their health, livelihoods, and fishing grounds.

The proposed plant did not immediately disappear. Despite the opposition, it received zoning clearance in 2016 and continued to undergo permitting activities. However, the project was eventually shelved and was reportedly cancelled in 2021. Global Energy Monitor's updated Coal Plant Tracker now lists all four proposed 150 MW units as cancelled.[3]

This experience established an important precedent for the region: energy development is not inevitable, and communities can challenge even projects backed by powerful corporate interests. It also demonstrated the importance of sustained collective action, particularly

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[2] Maricar Cinco, "Batangas Priests Lead Fight vs Coal-Fired Power Plant," *INQUIRER.net*, May 1, 2015, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/688636/batangas-priests-lead-fight-vs-coal-fired-power-plant.
[3] Global Energy Monitor, "Global Coal Plant Tracker," Global Energy Monitor, July 2026 release, https://globalenergymonitor.org/projects/global-coal-plant-tracker

when local struggles are supported by wider networks of environmental, religious, and climate-justice organizations.

Protect VIP: Organizing against the gas expansion

The experience of the anti-coal movement would inform the subsequent mobilization against fossil gas expansion in the Verde Island Passage.

As the Philippines experienced a surge in proposed LNG infrastructure, communities and environmental advocates recognized that gas expansion threatened to reproduce many of the same problems associated with coal. Under the banner of Protect VIP, a broad coalition of environmental organizations, fisherfolk, faith-based groups, civil society organizations, and concerned citizens came together to challenge the growing fossil gas footprint in the marine corridor.

A key milestone was the August 2022 National Gathering of Fossil-Gas Impacted Communities, themed *Keeping Fossil Gas Off Our Coasts and Oceans: Uniting for a Sustainably Powered Future*. The gathering brought together organizations including Oceana Philippines, NASSA/Caritas Philippines, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, Freedom from Debt Coalition, and Sanlakas.

The coalition sought to unite the voices of communities directly affected by fossil fuel operations with those of national energy advocates, consumer groups, and conservation organizations. Beyond opposing individual projects, it challenged the broader narrative that LNG was a necessary or desirable transition fuel, highlighting the risks of continued fossil fuel dependence, costly electricity, and the environmental degradation of coastal ecosystems.

The campaign has since yielded concrete developments. In November 2025, Ayala-owned ENEX Energy Corp. announced the cancellation of its proposed 1,100 MW Batangas Clean Energy gas-fired power plant. The company cited its inability to secure an electricity offtake contract and a third investor. Protect VIP welcomed the decision as a significant victory for local communities and the protection of the VIP.[4]

Protect VIP subsequently reported another major development: the cancellation of Vires Energy's proposed 900 MW LNG project in Batangas in December 2025. These withdrawals represent approximately 2 GW of proposed gas-fired generation capacity removed from the pipeline in Batangas.

These developments demonstrate how sustained community opposition can contribute to changing the risks and prospects surrounding fossil fuel investments. Although project cancellations can also reflect commercial and financing challenges, the growing scrutiny

[4] Protect VIP / CEED campaign updates on the ENEX Energy Corp. and Vires Energy project cancellations and on the status of the proposed Shell LNG facility in Batangas.

generated by local resistance has made it increasingly difficult to treat the VIP as an unchallenged destination for fossil fuel expansion.

Building evidence, demanding accountability, and protecting livelihoods

Importantly, the work of Protect VIP has extended beyond mobilization against proposed power plants. Communities and their allies have also worked to establish the scientific, legal, and financial basis for protecting the marine corridor.

CEED has undertaken water quality assessments in Batangas Bay and Oriental Mindoro to document the environmental impacts of fossil fuel operations. Its 2022 assessment identified increases in persistent pollutants, including chromium, copper, lead, and mercury. Phosphate concentrations in 2021 were recorded at 66 times their 2019 levels, while total copper concentrations had increased by as much as tenfold compared with 2015 measurements.

The March 2023 sinking of MT Princess Empress further exposed the vulnerability of communities living along the passage to fossil fuel-related hazards. The tanker was travelling from Bataan to Iloilo carrying approximately 825 cubic metres of heavy fuel oil as cargo and 113 cubic metres of marine diesel oil as bunker fuel when it sank off Oriental Mindoro on February 28, 2023. The incident contaminated approximately 100 kilometres of shoreline in Oriental Mindoro, affecting coastal communities dependent on fishing and tourism.

The disaster prompted the formation of several community and civil society coalitions. These included SOS Stop the Oil Spill, Save Our Seas!, which brought together NGOs, people's organizations, faith-based groups, lawyers, academics, fisherfolk, and youth advocates, and the Koalisyon ng mga Mangingisdang Apektado ng Oil Spill (KMAOS), which amplified the demands of affected fisherfolk for justice and accountability.

Communities also participated directly in response efforts, including the development and deployment of oil spill booms made from coconut husks in affected coastal municipalities. These initiatives demonstrated that communities are not merely victims of environmental disasters; they are also central actors in responding to them and demanding institutional accountability.

The campaign also brought the economic consequences of environmental destruction into sharper focus. In its February 2024 report, *The Big Bill of the Oil Spill in the Verde Island Passage*, CEED estimated at least ₱41.2 billion in ecosystem damages and livelihood losses, substantially higher than the government's estimated ₱5.1 billion.

Beyond documenting damage, the movement has pursued legal and financial accountability. These efforts include:

- **Securing legal protection**: In June 2023, organizations called on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to begin the process of declaring the VIP a protected area under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System

(E-NIPAS) Act.[5] The campaign also launched public education and petition initiatives, including *Kami ang VIP: 100 Portraits on the 100th Day of the Oil Spill*.

- **Holding institutions accountable**: In December 2023, fisherfolk leaders and the Protect VIP Network filed a complaint with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) concerning investments by Atlantic Gulf & Pacific Company and Osaka Gas in fossil gas projects in the Philippines.[6]
- **Pursuing legal remedies against pollution**: The network filed a Petition for Writ of Continuing Mandamus against the DENR, seeking the issuance of guidelines for identifying Non-Attainment Areas with high pollution concentrations. The Court of Appeals subsequently ordered the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau to issue these guidelines.[7]
- **Challenging fossil fuel financing**: Protect VIP and international partners engaged financial institutions in Europe, the United States, and Japan, calling for divestment from projects threatening the passage. The campaign reported that DWS had divested from San Miguel Corporation and that Erste Bank had confirmed its divestment in April 2024.[8]

Taken together, these efforts show that community power operates through more than street mobilization. It is exercised through scientific research, legal action, public engagement, international solidarity, and challenges to the financial institutions that make fossil fuel expansion possible.

From resisting fossil fuels to building an alternative: Mindoro and distributed renewable energy

The story of the VIP is also a story about what communities want to build in place of fossil fuel dependence. This is particularly evident in Mindoro, where the problems associated with oil-based electricity generation have created an urgent case for decentralized and distributed renewable energy (DRE).

The national context: Opening up the power sector to distributed renewables

The Philippines has long faced the challenge of providing reliable and affordable electricity to geographically isolated and underserved communities. Its archipelagic geography makes dependence on centralized power generation and transmission infrastructure particularly challenging for many island and remote communities.

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[5] Gaea Katreena Cabico, "Protected Area Designation, Non-Attainment Area Guidelines for Oil Spill-Hit VIP Sought," *Philstar.com*, June 8, 2023, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/climate-and-environment/2023/06/08/2272428/protected-area-designation-non-attainment-area-guidelines-oil-spill-hit-vip-sought#google_vignette

[6] Protect VIP Network, "Funding gas projects is not kawaii, Japan bank told," December 4, 2023, https://www.protectvip.org/post/funding-gas-projects-is-not-kawaii-japan-bank-told

[7] Jane Bautista, "CA: DENR Failed to Fulfill Clean Water Act Mandate," *INQUIRER.net*, August 12, 2024, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1971746/ca-denr-failed-to-fulfill-clean-water-act-mandate

[8] Protect VIP Network, "Paradise in Peril: Protect VIP from Fossil Fuel Financing," Protect VIP, accessed November 9, 2026, https://www.protectvip.org/paradise-in-peril

Distributed renewable energy presents an opportunity to address these challenges by bringing electricity generation closer to consumers. This includes rooftop solar, community-based renewable energy systems, solar-powered public facilities, battery storage, and renewable-powered microgrids.

There have been several important policy developments supporting this direction. Republic Act No. 11646, or the Microgrid Systems Act of 2022, established a framework for accelerating electrification in unserved and underserved areas, prioritizing low-cost, indigenous, renewable, and environmentally friendly energy sources.[9]

In 2025, the Energy Regulatory Commission amended its net-metering rules to make participation more accessible to qualified renewable energy consumers, including allowing the banking and rollover of net-metering credits[10]. In August 2026, the Department of Energy also streamlined requirements for own-use solar systems, including zero-export solar and micro-solar installations for households, medical facilities, and small businesses.

Further developments include the ERC's adoption of the Rules Governing Microgrid Systems in April 2026, which prioritize renewable and indigenous energy sources, and its proposed Off-Grid Renewable Energy Distributed Energy Resources Rules. The latter seeks to prioritize renewable energy dispatch over diesel generation in missionary and off-grid areas.[11]

The DOE's September 2026 announcement identifying 369 potential unserved and underserved areas across 23 provinces, covering approximately 101,468 unenergized households, further underscores the scale of the opportunity for microgrid development.[12]

These developments provide an important policy environment for expanding community-level renewable energy. However, the challenge remains translating national policies into accessible, affordable, and locally appropriate energy systems.

Mindoro: From fossil fuel dependence to community-centered renewable energy

Mindoro offers a compelling illustration of both the urgency and the potential of this transition.

For years, the island has struggled with an electricity system heavily reliant on diesel and bunker fuel. This dependence has contributed to high generation costs, exposure to fuel price fluctuations, and recurring electricity supply constraints.

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[9] Republic Act No. 11646: An Act Promoting the Use of Microgrid Systems to Accelerate Total Electrification, Otherwise Known as the "Microgrid Systems Act" (2022)

[10] Energy Regulatory Commission rules and Department of Energy issuances on net metering and own-use solar systems (2025–2026).

[11] Energy Regulatory Commission, Rules Governing Microgrid Systems (2026), and proposed Off-Grid Renewable Energy Distributed Energy Resources Rules.

[12] Brix Lelis, "Over 100K Unenergized Homes Targeted in Microgrid Auction," *The Philippine Star*, September 10, 2026, https://www.philstar.com/business/2026/09/10/2555154/over-100k-unenergized-homes-targeted-microgrid-auction#google_vignette

CEED's October 2025 study, *Pandang Gitab ng Mindoro: A Scoping Paper on the Island's Power Landscape*, found that oil-based technologies accounted for approximately 73.17 percent of Mindoro's installed generating capacity and 70.54 percent of its dependable capacity, based on 2024 data. In contrast, solar accounted for only around 2.43 percent of installed capacity.[13]

The implications are particularly evident in Oriental Mindoro. Figures cited by CEED in September 2026 indicate that approximately 91.43 percent of the province's power capacity comes from diesel, with generation rates reaching ₱11.47 per kilowatt-hour, compared with ₱5.74 per kilowatt-hour for hydropower. The province has also experienced supply constraints, including red-alert declarations in 2026.[14]

The oil spill from MT Princess Empress further illustrated the broader risks associated with fossil fuel dependence and transportation. While the tanker was carrying fuel from Bataan to Iloilo rather than to Mindoro's own power plants, its sinking off Oriental Mindoro demonstrated how fossil fuel supply chains can expose coastal communities to environmental disasters even when those communities are not the intended beneficiaries of the fuel being transported.

Against this backdrop, communities in Mindoro are increasingly taking the initiative to develop alternatives.

Through *Pandang Gitab ng Mindoro*, CEED and its partners have sought to reframe the island's energy situation from one of dependence and insecurity into an opportunity for renewable energy development. The study identifies an estimated renewable energy potential of approximately 35,000 MW, representing significant opportunities to harness solar, wind, and hydropower resources.

This vision is now being translated into local initiatives. In 2026, the REnew Mindoro coalition, involving CEED, the Church, civil society organizations, renewable energy providers, and local governments, began advancing a more community-centered approach to renewable energy adoption.

One of its significant initiatives is the REnew Mindoro Caravan, launched in September 2026 in Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. The initiative connects households, institutions, and local communities directly with solar energy providers and financing institutions, helping bridge the gap between interest in renewable energy and the practical means to access it.

Mansalay is also being encouraged to become Mindoro's first renewable energy municipality. The local initiative includes efforts to promote solarization of municipal facilities, public

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[13] CEED, *Pandang Gitab ng Mindoro: A Scoping Paper on the Island's Power Landscape* (2025).
[14] CEED materials and relevant Oriental Mindoro power-sector data published in September 2026.

markets, fishing ports, and barangay facilities. The Diocese of Calapan has likewise been advancing solarization across its institutions, with 19 of its 43 parishes and facilities already using solar energy as of September 2026.[15]

These efforts are significant because they move the energy transition beyond utility-scale renewable energy development. They demonstrate how households, religious institutions, local governments, and community facilities can participate directly in changing the way electricity is generated and consumed.

Mindoro is therefore emerging as a potential beacon for community-centered renewable energy in the Philippines: a place where the transition away from fossil fuels is being pursued not only as a climate objective, but also as a response to the everyday realities of expensive electricity, unreliable power supply, and unequal access to energy.

The work ahead: Protecting the VIP and advancing a people-centered energy transition

Despite the significant gains made by communities and movements, the struggle to protect the Verde Island Passage is far from over.

The cancellation of major proposed gas projects represents important progress, but other developments continue to threaten the marine corridor. Shell's proposed LNG import facility in Tabangao, Batangas, for instance, has faced significant delays and opposition but has not been officially withdrawn, according to Protect VIP's reporting. Other proposals also require continued scrutiny.[16]

The proposed designation of the VIP as a protected seascape is another urgent priority. While the campaign has generated considerable momentum, permanent legal protection remains unfinished.

As of September 2026, fisherfolk and advocates were still pressing Congress to enact legislation establishing the passage as a protected seascape under the National Integrated Protected Areas System. At the international level, DENR reaffirmed its commitment to securing stronger legal protection for the VIP during the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 2026.[17]

The future of the passage must also involve a decisive transition away from fossil fuel dependence. This means strengthening the implementation of renewable energy policies, expanding community access to distributed renewable energy, and ensuring that investments in new energy infrastructure prioritize affordability, reliability, ecological integrity, and community participation.

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[15] CEED / REnew Mindoro materials on the REnew Mindoro Caravan, Mansalay renewable energy municipality initiative, and Diocese of Calapan solarization status (2026).
[16] Protect VIP / CEED campaign updates on the ENEX Energy Corp. and Vires Energy project cancellations and on the status of the proposed Shell LNG facility in Batangas.
[17] Protect VIP, CEED, and DENR updates on the proposed protected-seascape designation and statements around CBD COP17 (2026).

For Mindoro, this includes expanding rooftop solar and community-based renewable energy systems, supporting renewable-powered microgrids, making financing accessible to households and local institutions, and strengthening local government capacity to incorporate renewable energy into development planning.

At the national level, it requires ensuring that policies supporting distributed renewables translate into actual access for underserved communities, rather than primarily benefiting consumers and institutions that already have the financial means to invest in solar installations.

Ultimately, the experience of the VIP shows that the energy transition is not simply about replacing one technology with another. It is also about changing who has a voice in energy decisions, who controls energy resources, and who benefits from the systems that power communities.

The Verde Island Passage is a People Power Zone because its communities have demonstrated that they can challenge destructive energy development, hold powerful institutions accountable, and organize around a different vision for their future. Their struggle is not only to prevent the destruction of one of the world's richest marine ecosystems, but also to ensure that the future of power in the Philippines is shaped by the people who depend on it.

The experience of Batangas and Mindoro demonstrates that a people-centered energy transition is possible when communities are empowered not only to resist fossil fuel expansion but also to participate in building renewable energy alternatives.

The fight to protect the VIP is ultimately a fight for the people's power to determine their own energy future.

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