

MOVE BEYOND COAL

THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT IN 2013





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Shenzhen, China	2
Bulga, Australia	5
Sundarbans, Bangladesh	7
Brunsbuettel, Germany	9
Batang, Indonesia	11
Matanuska Valley, Alaska	13
Vidarbha, Maharashtra, India	15
Conclusion	18
References	20

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INTRODUCTION


As the coal industry attempts to expand its presence in the world's largest and fastest-developing economies, one truth has emerged: The tide is turning against coal expansion. In 2013, mounting concern over the economic and environmental risks posed by coal swept through large, publicly funded international financial institutions. In the United States, President Barack Obama unveiled his Climate Action Plan, which included an end to financing for new coal plants overseas with public funds, effectively ending the coal binge at U.S. agencies, such as the U.S. Export-Import Bank.

On the heels of this announcement, the World Bank and the European Investment Bank announced their own restrictions to funding coal plants, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is poised to follow. This dramatic shift is paving new roads for energy efficiency and renewable energy in global markets.

This shift was propelled by mounting concerns and protests from local communities around the world. After years of growing opposition across the globe against the coal industry, the industry's violations on human health, safety, and the environment have generated a groundswell of protest. This opposition is also a direct reaction to the failure of the coal industry to follow through on its central promise: cheap power to fuel development. Instead, local residents sacrifice their health, livelihoods, and land for power they rarely receive.

As communities rise up in protest, the results have been staggering. All around the world, people are standing up, fighting back, and winning. This report chronicles their stories and their victories. It gives hope to the calls for a coal-free future that supports clean air, clean water, and sustainable development for all.





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UNTHINKABLE: ZERO NET (COAL)
IMPORTS IN 2015 AND FALLING
CHINESE DEMAND BY 2016”**

— Bernstein Research

CITIZENS IN INNER MONGOLIA OF HUOLINGUOLE CITY WERE LIVING WITH THE HAZE.



SHENZHEN, CHINA

Story contributed by Shuo Li, Greenpeace

Photos contributed by Lu Guang, Greenpeace and John Novis, Greenpeace

CONTEXT

Consuming half of the world's coal with its nearly 3,000 coal-fired power plants, China really is the kingdom of coal. For decades, it has been assumed that China's coal consumption will continue to grow, with no end in sight. But with catastrophic air pollution making life miserable for residents, things are starting to change, fast.

The cancellation of a coal-fired power project in the city of Shenzhen was the first sign that coal's future in China was uncertain. On the coast of the South China Sea in Guangdong Province, the proposed 2,000 megawatt project was a mere 50 kilometers from the urban cores of Shenzhen and Hong Kong, two megacities with populations of 10 and 7 million, respectively.

The proposal to build new, huge coal-fired plants in one of China's most economically advanced areas immediately hit a nerve with local residents. Greenpeace East Asia estimated that the new power plants would cause 1,700 premature deaths over their operating lives. With air pollution concerns as their rallying cry, locals made history by making the Shenzhen project the first coal plant in China that was cancelled because of environmental concerns.

SOCIAL MEDIA STORM

It all began in May with a weibo (The Chinese equivalent of Twitter) post from one of Shenzhen city's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) representatives. Worried that the location and scale of these coal projects would put the city's environment in peril, the representative took to social media. She was particularly worried about severe risks to the nearby Baguang Wetland

Ecology Reserve, widely recognized as the last "untouched" land in Shenzhen.

Her concerns were well received by fellow citizens, with her weibo post traveling far and wide in a matter of hours. Next, traditional media picked up the story and took it to the next level with requests to interview local authorities, who were asked about the impacts of the proposed project. As media outlets gathered, public scrutiny grew.

As more public attention was focused on the project, other government representatives joined the chorus of concerned voices. In late June, 43 city legislators co-signed a letter requesting that the project be cancelled. But their letter contained a bombshell: the additional prohibition of construction of any new coal-fired power plants within the city's borders, citing environmental concerns as the primary reason.

With mounting public pressure, one month later the Shenzhen government responded officially with a decision to shelve the project. Responsible legislators, new and traditional media, and concerned citizens united to protect the city. Their efforts mark a watershed moment as local communities stood up to demand no new coal—and they won.

WAY AHEAD

With rapid information-sharing and growing public awareness, the Shenzhen case may prove to be only the beginning of China's grassroots driven departure from coal. Opposition is taking shape in many regions in China, as constant and severe air pollution reinforces the growing negative public sentiment about coal.



GREENPEACE VOLUNTEERS DISPLAY A BANNER AT A COAL FIRED POWER PLANT IN WESTERN BEIJING , CHINA.

Meanwhile, the national air pollution action plan released in September offered the most comprehensive strategy yet to resolve China's most outstanding environmental problem. Coal is front and center in this plan, which includes an ambitious timeline for reducing soot (PM2.5) in key cities, a strong mandate of rapid peak and decline of coal consumption, and a ban on new coal-fired power plants in key regions. In addition to the pushes from the central government, many provinces that suffer most from air pollution either already have, or are expected to have plans to reduce their coal consumption.

China's economic restructuring is well underway, helping to shift the economy to a less energy-intensive path. Combined with strong renewable energy uptake and energy-efficiency measures, the future for coal now looks very different. What a difference a year makes.



BULGA, AUSTRALIA

Story contributed by Georgina Woods, Greenpeace

Photos contributed by John Krey and Abram Powell, Greenpeace, Australia Pacific

BULGA VS. THE GIANT

In the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, there's a backlash brewing against the open-cut coal mining that has scarred the landscape, emptied villages, and put multi-million dollar winemaking, tourism, and thoroughbred-breeding industries under threat. In 2013, a court battle pitted the residents of the small village of Bulga, home to about 400 people, against the Warkworth mine, owned by Rio Tinto. The court battle has captured the story of the Hunter Valley, and how communities are finally starting to win the fight against coal.

Rio Tinto had secured approval from the New South Wales Government to expand the existing Warkworth mine, increasing production by 18 million tons of coal per year and bringing the mine closer to the village of Bulga. As part of the mine expansion, Rio planned to violate a prior agreement and remove a natural woodland buffer that had been set aside to be protected—one of the conditions of the mine's original approval 10 years ago. Home to endangered ecological communities, the woodland buffer protects biodiversity and shields the town against the open-cut pits, just 6 kilometers away.



“THE SUCCESS ALSO SENT AN ENERGIZING JOLT THROUGH THE COMMUNITY... A COURT WIN AGAINST A MINE—ONE THAT FLATLY KNOCKED THE PROJECT DOWN—WAS A FIRST”

A SENSE OF PLACE

For Bulga residents, the closer the coal pits come to the village, the more noise and dust infiltrates their homes. The mine extension would put coal pits less than 3 kilometers from town, removing their woodland buffer, and breaking a deed that Rio Tinto’s mine signed with the New South Wales Planning Minister, promising to protect it.

The Bulga-Milbrodale Progress Association challenged the government’s approval of the mine extension in the New South Wales Land and Environment Court. The case helped dismantle the inflated economic benefits of the project on which the state government and Rio Tinto had relied in claiming the mine extension would be, on the whole, a good idea, despite the damage and the broken deed. More important, in a dramatic first, the Land and Environment Court ruled in favor of the Bulga-Milbrodale Progress Association and overturned the approval, in part because the judge found that the mine could damage Bulga’s “sense of place.”

A HISTORIC FIRST

The residents of Bulga, who feared their town would be utterly destroyed by the mine expansion, were ecstatic with the win, but the success also sent an energizing jolt through the community of people battling the coal industry in Australia. A court win

against a mine—one that flatly knocked the project down—was a first.

Beating the coal industry in the Hunter Valley, however, can’t be accomplished in a single blow. Rio Tinto promptly appealed the judgment, and the New South Wales government has joined them in the appeal. The Warkworth case has unleashed hysteria in the coal industry and its promoters that brought their deep arrogance to the surface. Shrill opinion pieces that the judgment removes “certainty” for the industry have exposed industry expectations that when it comes to the law, coal gets what it wants. Only this time, they didn’t, and the anti-coal movement will be rallying with Bulga to support them when Goliath comes back for round two.





SUNDARBANS, BANGLADESH

Story contributed by Mowdud Rahman, SoutheastAsia Renewable
Photos contributed by Nusrat Khan

Home to rich biodiversity, including the planet's largest mangrove forest, the endangered royal Bengal tigers, and nearly extinct Irrawaddy dolphins, the Sundarbans of Bangladesh was a finalist for the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and remains a UNESCO World Heritage site. More importantly, the forest is the first and last line of defense against rising sea levels, and it saved thousands of lives when cyclones Aila and Sidr slammed into the country in 2009 and 2007, respectively. More than 500,000 local inhabitants rely on the forest for their livelihoods, and they refuse to stand by while their way of life is under attack.

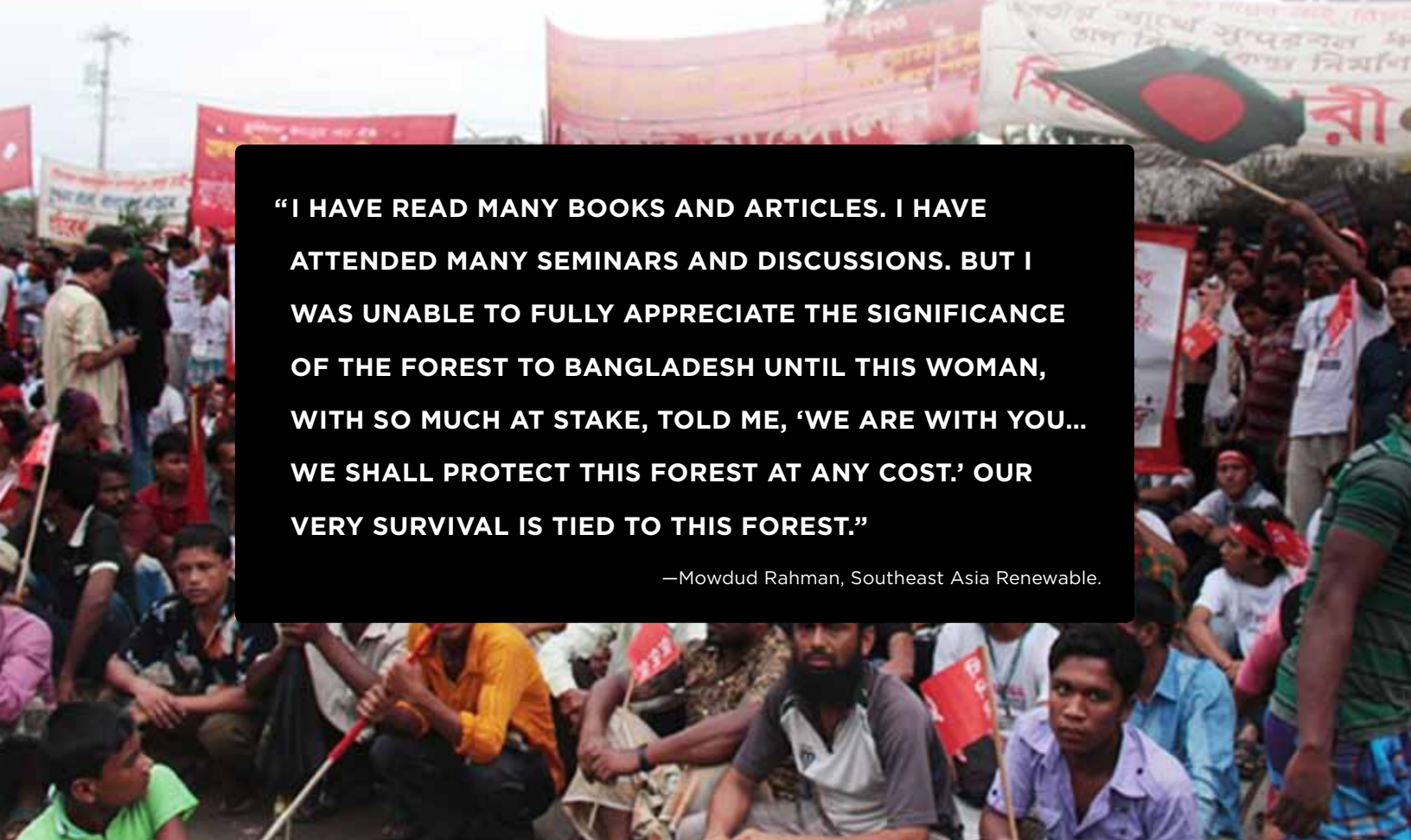
After marching nearly 250 miles in just five days, 20,000 protesters opposed to the construction of a coal-fired power plant in the Sundarbans reached Dighraj, a remote area in the southwest of Bangladesh.

"You look tired," an old lady in a makeshift tea stall told Mowdud Rahman, an activist and member of Southeast Asia Renewable Energy People's Assembly. "Please sit here for a while and have a cup of tea."

Rahman recounted: "I have read many books and articles. I have attended many seminars and discussions. But I was unable to fully appreciate the significance of the forest to Bangladesh until this woman, with so much at stake, told me, 'we are with you ... we shall protect this forest at any cost.' Our very survival is tied to this forest."

TRAMPLING ON LOCAL RIGHTS

In January 2012, without an environmental impact assessment (EIA) in place, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) signed an investment agreement with India's National Thermal Power



"I HAVE READ MANY BOOKS AND ARTICLES. I HAVE ATTENDED MANY SEMINARS AND DISCUSSIONS. BUT I WAS UNABLE TO FULLY APPRECIATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOREST TO BANGLADESH UNTIL THIS WOMAN, WITH SO MUCH AT STAKE, TOLD ME, 'WE ARE WITH YOU... WE SHALL PROTECT THIS FOREST AT ANY COST.' OUR VERY SURVIVAL IS TIED TO THIS FOREST."

—Mowdud Rahman, Southeast Asia Renewable.



Corporation (NTPC) to build a 1,320-megawatt coal-fired power plant at Rampal. Land acquisition, dredging, and land filling, which had already begun years earlier, continued. When the EIA was finally published in January, it was full of misleading information. Local campaigners complained that the very real danger the mega-project posed was not clearly analyzed, and instead an intense bias for the power plant permeated the document. Despite the rightful protest of the people, the government has already acquired 1,834 acres of agriculture land, and

the construction phase is now in progress.

Throughout this process, the government has disregarded local communities' rights over their land. It has no plans to create alternative livelihoods for the people who have historically cultivated the fertile soil in Sapmari, Katakali, Koigardaskathi, Kapasdanga, and Baserhula. Instead, they were forced off their land and lost their source of income.

ALTERNATIVES EXIST

This coal-fired power plant is far from the only option for Bangladesh. There are 300 bright sunny days a year, which makes solar an enticing sector. In fact, the country is now installing 30,000 to 40,000 solar-home systems in rural areas every single month. The country also has great potential to generate over 1,000 megawatts of power from biomass and biogas, as well as tremendous prospects for micro and mini hydro power in the hilly areas. Coal companies could even improve the existing power plants. With renovations they could generate around 2,500 megawatts of power using the same amount of gas.

The government has pledged that 5 percent of electricity will come from renewable energy by 2015, and 10 percent by 2020. Unfortunately, instead of working to turn these pledges into reality, policy makers seem intent on forswearing innovation in favor of this dangerous and unnecessary project.

THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM OVER

The 20,000 people who participated in the march against the Rampal coal plant showed that Bangladeshis are prepared to fight the long fight to protect their land and their very lives. The EIA has not been approved yet, and there is still time for the government of Bangladesh to consider the countless flaws and concerns expressed by experts, scientists and environmentalists. There is still time for the government to listen to the people and cancel the clearance for the project.



BRUNSBUETTEL, GERMANY

Story contributed by Mona Bricke, Klima Allian
Photos contributed by Klima-Allianz Deutschland

In mid-2012, German and Swiss anti-coal activists celebrated the end of the largest new hard coal power plant project in Germany. The 1.8-gigawatt, 3.2 billion-euro project in Brunsbuettel, in northern Germany, was defeated. Its story is an inspiration for coal campaigners across the European Union.

CHALLENGING THE ENERGIEWENDE

The project was planned by a consortium of more than 60 German and Swiss municipal energy suppliers. The consortium wanted to use the project to gain a better foothold in the German energy sector, which is monopolized by four big utilities. This meant a huge challenge for activists, as they had to fight a battle on multiple fronts and take pains not to antagonize municipalities, many of which are important allies in the Energiewende (Germany's renewable energy revolution). Despite these concerns, it was important to send an unmistakable message that municipal investments in new coal would be fought to the bitter end.

ONLY A MATTER OF TIME

German campaigns united under the motto “make your municipal utility invest in renewables instead of coal” sprung up in Brunsbuettel and in municipalities all over Germany and Switzerland, where the major shareholder, Swiss utility Repower, was based. Over several years, campaigns and referenda forced investors to drop the Brunsbuettel project. The climax of this “investor flight” came when Repower, under pressure from a ferocious campaign in Switzerland against Swiss coal investments, pulled out at the beginning of 2012. This sent a shockwave through the consortium promoting the project, and a realization that the cancellation of the whole project was only a matter of time.

A few months later, activists and local communities prevailed. Their victory sealed the fate for this dirty coal plant, clearly demonstrating how struggles can amplify each other from town to town and across national boundaries. Ultimately, their victory underscores that in Germany, the Energiewende is alive and well.



“THE CLIMAX OF THIS “INVESTOR FLIGHT” CAME WHEN REPOWER, UNDER PRESSURE FROM A FEROCIOUS CAMPAIGN IN SWITZERLAND AGAINST SWISS COAL INVESTMENTS, PULLED OUT AT THE BEGINNING OF 2012.”



BATANG, INDONESIA

BATANG, INDONESIA

Story contributed by Arif Fiyanto, Greenpeace
Photos contributed by Ardiles Rante, Greenpeace

BATANG COMMUNITY VERSUS A MAMMOTH DIRTY COAL POWER PLANT

Indonesia is the world's largest thermal coal exporter. In 2012, Indonesian coal production reached 386 million tons, 85 percent of which was exported to just a few countries in Asia. This mammoth mining and export industry exacts a significant toll on the country's pristine forests and its communities. All across the country, its expansion threatens Indonesians' way of life.

But it's not just exports that threaten local residents. Indonesia relies heavily on dirty and outdated coal for its electricity production, and the government

is on its way to locking in a dark, dangerous energy future for the nation. There are plans to build 117 new coal power plants across the country—this in addition to the existing 42 coal-fired power plants that are already polluting and destroying the livelihood and health of nearby communities. This is the story of one community that stood up, fought back, and is winning.

BATANG: THE RICHEST FISHING AREA AND THE MOST PRODUCTIVE PADDY FIELD ON JAVA ISLAND

Batang regency is located in the heart of Java, the most populous Island in Indonesia. In 2011, the



government announced plans to remove five villages in Batang in order to build Southeast Asia's largest Asia's largest coal plant, turning a regional marine protected area, home to one of central Java's most productive rice paddy areas, into a pollution center. Using dirty tactics, the local government changed the spatial planning rule that named Batang waters as a regional marine protected area to allow construction of the 2,000-megawatt project. The government awarded the contract to build the plant to Bhimasena Power Indonesia (BPI), a consortium of three companies: Japan-based Itochu Corp and J-Power, and Indonesia-based Adaro.

This is the toxic situation that the World Bank and Japan entered when they came out in support of the project. Despite the World Bank's rejection of coal-fired power in its new energy strategy, the World Bank's infrastructure program in Indonesia includes policies and government subsidies to promote more than 40 coal projects, blatantly promoting coal over renewable alternatives. The World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC) created and financially backed the Indonesia Infrastructure Guarantee Fund, which then provided a \$33.9 million guarantee for the central Java coal-fired power station, for which the IFC served as a transitional advisor. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono needs real support for his government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent by 2020 and to develop 25 percent renewable energy in its total energy mix by 2025. Instead, the World Bank is betraying its own standards to promote more dirty and deadly coal.

STRONG LOCAL OPPOSITION

The Batang community knows the damage caused by pollution from coal-fired power. When they learned the government planned to build a giant power station among their villages, they organized a trip to other areas with coal plants, such as Cirebon, Jepara, and Cilacap. There, they talked with communities and learned how coal pollution transformed prosperous farmers and fisherfolks in Jepara into poor peasants and struggling fishermen. They heard that a coal-fired power plant in Cilacap completely altered a beautiful coastal area and turned it into one of the most polluted parts of Java's southern coast. Residents from Cirebon,



Cilacap, and Jepara subsequently traveled to Batang to share their stories, fish with local villagers in, and tell them how how coal-fired power plants harmed their livelihood, environment, and health.

Village by village, Batang communities organized and started to build a movement against the proposed coal power plant. They have led a dozen peaceful protests against almost all state offices related to the power plant. In June 2013, the Batang community staged a protest in front of the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta to protest the Indonesia-Japan consortium. In heavy rain, around 120 villagers from Batang Regency formed a line and carried banners with the message "Reject the Batang Power Plant! Choose a Clean Environment!" They also delivered a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, asking him to halt the 2,000-megawatt power plant project.

These tactics have not been in vain, as strong community opposition has now twice delayed groundbreaking and financial closing for the project—the original deadline for construction to begin was October 2012, but the new date is not until October 2014.

INTIMIDATION, CRIMINALIZATION, AND VIOLENT CLASHES

These delays were won despite intimidation, criminalization, and violent clashes between locals and the military, police, and security. In October 2012, five local villagers were arrested because of their opposition to what the Indonesian government called a “national project.” They were held in jail for more than five months before their case was brought to the court, where eventually the judges unanimously found them not guilty and freed them from all charges. Their criminalization was meant to weaken community opposition, but instead the local opposition only grew stronger.

In September 2013, after the company attempted to drill on villagers’ land without giving them any information or advance notice, there was a violent clash between communities and the military and police, which were backed by company security and more. Seventeen community members were injured and beaten by state forces.

One of the biggest obstacles to the construction of the Batang coal power plant is land acquisition. BPI needs approximately 225 hectares to start the groundbreaking and reach financial closing, but community members refuse to sell their productive land. The government claims that only 15 percent of the 225 hectares remains in the hands of local residents, but the community insists that approximately 100 hectares of the land targeted by the government is still on their property. They are refusing to sell their land even though the company has increased the offer, first five and then ten times

“AFTER THE COMPANY ATTEMPTED TO DRILL ON VILLAGERS’ LAND WITHOUT GIVING THEM ANY INFORMATION OR ADVANCE NOTICE, THERE WAS A VIOLENT CLASH BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND THE MILITARY AND POLICE... SEVENTEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS WERE INJURED AND BEATEN BY STATE FORCES.”

higher than the normal price. But the villagers will not sell their land—ever.

COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER

While the fight is far from over, the people of Batang have been supported by other communities across Java that have been harmed by coal, including Cirebon, Jepara, and Cilacap. Villages once stood alone against massive corporate and state interests intent on taking their land for deadly coal projects, but now communities are banding together and forming a broader movement calling for clean, renewable energy that won’t endanger their lives and livelihoods. Already, this broader movement has already helped twice delay the Batang coal-fired power plant, and financiers can expect similar resistance as the movement spreads across Indonesia.



MATANUSKA VALLEY, ALASKA

Story contributed by Sam Weis, AEF

Photos contributed by Damion Brook Kintz, Paul Moinester

Alaska is known for its pristine wilderness, indigenous cultures, abundant wildlife, and prolific salmon streams. But it also holds a little-known secret: A staggering 5.5 trillion tons of coal, one eighth of all of the coal on earth, lies under its surface. With eight new coal mining projects in the state, the coal industry has Alaska in its sights—and the global climate would be imperiled if these projects became a reality.

Beyond opening the floodgates to releasing massive amounts of untapped carbon into the atmosphere, these proposed coal mines would have devastating consequences on the lands, water, and people of Alaska. The coal industry's proposals include drastic plans such as mining directly through 11 miles of wild salmon streams and strip-mining within a quarter-mile of a residential neighborhood. Locals near the proposed coal mines knew this threat had to be stopped.

COAL MINING IN THE BREADBASKET

Nestled between the Chugach and Talkeetna mountain ranges lies the Matanuska River Valley, a fertile land that is Alaska's fastest-growing region and its primary agriculture district. It's also home to 2 billion tons of coal and three proposed coal mines.

When Jamey Duhamel first heard the news that Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. had proposed a coal strip mine in her community, she was shocked. The mother of four had just purchased a home with her high school sweetheart, complete with everything they wanted—a big yard for their sons to play in, a large garden, and a place to raise chickens.

"I had a visceral reaction to the news of the proposed mine," Jamey said. "Coal mining strikes me as something that would change our lives and the future of this valley immeasurably. Our quality of life, day-to-day existence, jobs, schools—even looking out our windows would change with a coal mine around the block. I felt compelled to do something."



THE CHUITNA RIVER AS SEEN FROM ABOVE.



TERRY JORGENSEN HOLDS A KING SALMON CAUGHT AT HIS FISHING SITE NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE CHUITNA RIVER.

Jamey spoke at a public hearing on the proposal, where she learned that there was not one but three proposals to mine coal in her community. In addition to Usibelli, Black Range Minerals, an Australian company, was pursuing a mine in nearby Jonesville; and Riversdale, a company with ties to global mining giant Rio Tinto, had purchased leases in Chickaloon, also in the Matanuska River Valley.

STANDING UP, FIGHTING BACK

Jamey promptly joined the Mat Valley Coalition, a group of concerned citizens working to protect their families and their community from coal development. Shortly thereafter, she quit her job in social work to devote herself full-time to organizing her neighbors' fight against the proposed mines.

"The more I got involved, the more I realized this is the most critical issue affecting the future of the valley," said Jamey. "Alaska is my home. My choice was to fight with everything I have, or move away from the place I love."

Jamey joined other members of the Mat Valley Coalition in making phone calls, knocking on doors, talking to their neighbors, tabling at events, and leading the charge to build the movement against coal mines in their community.

THE WORK PAYS OFF

On a blisteringly cold November day, more than 200 people braved wind chills of -26 degrees Celsius (-14.8 degrees Fahrenheit) to speak against the proposed Wishbone Hill mine at a public hearing held in the small community of Sutton. Opponents

of the mine outnumbered supporters two-to-one despite the coal company busing workers to the hearing from the Healy mine, Alaska's only operational coal mine, located 230 miles away.

The Mat Valley Coalition continued to grow and gain strength. When the owner of the local general store displayed signs supporting the new mines, residents boycotted the store and put it out of business. On taking over, the new owners took down the signs, customers returned, and business quickly revived.

In the summer of 2012, the Mat Valley Coalition redoubled its outreach efforts and continued gaining momentum. Despite being known as a pro-resource-development community, over 70 percent of local residents contacted signed a petition opposing coal development in the valley.

Mining companies continue to push their proposals, but concerned residents have teamed up with attorneys and the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, a local tribe that has lived in the valley for thousands of years, to keep shovels out of the ground.

STATEWIDE MOVEMENT

The Matanuska Valley is just one example of a growing anti-coal movement in Alaska. From local fishermen fighting to stop PacRim Coal from destroying 11 miles of salmon stream at the Chuitna River to Alaskan Native Villages in the Arctic working to protect the caribou herd from the impact of a coal road, Alaskans are fighting the coal industry and building a movement that will keep the door shut on coal mines.

Continuing to build this movement will help ensure that Alaska remains known for its pristine wilderness and Native cultures, and at the same time prevent trillions of tons of dirty coal from being mined, exported, and burned.

**"ALASKA IS MY HOME. MY CHOICE
WAS TO FIGHT WITH EVERYTHING
I HAVE, OR MOVE AWAY FROM THE
PLACE I LOVE."**

— Jamey Duhamel



VIDARBHA, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

Story contributed by Grace Boyle, Greenpeace
Photos contributed by Vivek M, Greenpeace

ENDANGERED WATERS

The Indian state of Maharashtra has two very different halves. The western side is comparatively well-off, home to Bollywood stars and billionaires in hectic Mumbai, as well as many rich sugarcane farmers in the lush, well-irrigated fields that surround the megacity. The situation in Vidarbha, the eastern region of Maharashtra, is very different. Years of neglect by the state government have left the farmers there stuck in a vicious cycle of debt and poverty. Yearly crop failure, exacerbated by a changing monsoon, pushes many of these farmers to breaking point, and every summer there is a spate of suicides. This year, nearly 700 farmers have committed suicide in Vidarbha. Most do so by consuming their own pesticides.

In this situation, irrigation can literally be a lifeline. Several big dams built in Vidarbha brought hardship and were decidedly a mixed blessing, as they flooded valleys and displaced villages in their oceanic backwaters, but at least they provided

valuable irrigation. One of them, the Upper Wardha dam, irrigated 80,250 hectares of farmland through a canal network branching out from either side. Farmers in the dam's command area could grow a second or even third crop of cotton each year, and their situation improved accordingly. Dam water not being used for irrigation was mostly piped to villages to be used as drinking water. Demand was high, and by 2008, the reserves of the Upper Wardha dam were already over-allocated.

THIRSTY COAL PLANTS

In early 2008, a committee of Maharashtra ministers granted two private coal power plants the right to draw water from the Upper Wardha Dam. In doing so, the committee diverted water from 32,729 hectares of irrigated farmland—41 percent of the dam's total command area. This prioritizing of private industry over farmers' needs was not a blip: By 2011, this same committee had diverted 1,500 million cubic meters of water away from irrigation





A COAL-FIRED THERMAL POWER PLANT BUILT BY INDIABULLS POWER LTD.

programs across Maharashtra to other uses. Fifty-four percent went to industrial projects, of which 61 percent were coal-fired thermal power plants.

Compounding this injustice, Vidarbha was not a beneficiary of the power produced by these plants. The region already generates a surplus of electricity through its three coal-fired power stations; the rest is exported to other places. Yet in the last few years, the government has given clearance to more than 71 new power plants in this area, and allocated fresh water to all of them. In water-scarce, suicide-stricken Vidarbha, 400 million cubic metres of fresh water per year has been diverted from dams to thermal power plants.

FIGHTING THE COMPANY

The farmers of the Upper Wardha dam decided to fight back. Let down by the state, they resolved to focus their attention on the companies controlling

the coal plants. “Let the government do what they want to do,” the farmers decided. “We are going to directly attack the company.”

For over a year, farmers waged a fierce protest against the coal-power companies that planned to suck up the diverted water. One of the two planned coal projects quickly melted away. In a letter to the Indian power ministry, the company cited local resistance as the reason it was unable to make progress. The second power plant, backed by a company called Indiabulls, proved harder to shift. This project also had a larger allocation: The water being diverted to Indiabulls could provide irrigation for 25,000 hectares of farmland.

WATER IS LIFE

The farmers rose to meet the challenge. Three hundred stormed the Indiabulls pump house on the banks of the dam and scared the construction workers away for three months. They called press conferences and threw themselves in the dam’s waters: a dramatic demonstration of the intimate connection between the dam water and farmers’ lives. The police dragged them out and charged one with attempted suicide, and the others with unlawful assembly. Undeterred, five of the men climbed to the top of a telecom tower and hung there for eight hours, 250 feet above the ground, until they were granted an appointment with Ajit Pawar, the Minister of Water Resources.

“Ajit Pawar assured us not a single drop of water would be taken from irrigation,” recalled Sanjay Kolhe, one of the leaders of the resistance. “He said he also belongs to a farming family, so how could he hurt the farmers of the state?” When they received the official resolution of their meeting, the farmers were bitterly disappointed to see that it contained merely a promise to try to search out other sources of irrigation, and that they had been lied to. They staged a protest in response.

The resistance movement spread until it had bases in more than 100 locales throughout Vidarbha. The farmers staged sit-ins in Mumbai, drummed up support with a 10-day bus tour across 300 villages, and marched through their district capital with their necks and wrists slung in heavy chains. They paid their way to the demonstrations, and many had court cases brought against them for their activism.



FARMERS WHO FOUGHT AGAINST THE DIVERSION OF IRRIGATION WATER TO THERMAL POWER PLANTS.

The farmers showed tenacity and enterprise, spurred by a belief that their issue was of the utmost importance. “Power is essential for the world,” Sanjay explained. “But it is totally wrong to divert irrigation water to thermal power plants and to let farmers die.”

A PEOPLE’S VICTORY

In May 2011, after 16 months of protest, the farmers achieved an incredible victory: Indiabulls wrote them an official letter, promising to lay only one pipeline from the dam, and for that to be of a limited width. The farmers consulted an engineer and calculated that this was 40 percent of the original allocation of water to the power plant. In addition to the water from the cancelled power project, their resistance had clawed back 60 percent of the irrigation water the government had diverted to Indiabulls.

Today, the villages continue to resist the completion of this single pipeline to Indiabulls, and are currently blocking its final linkage. The power plant has so far been unable to commence operation. Even if the project manages to begin its limited operations, the

farmers have the satisfaction of knowing that they have secured a better future for their children.

“When power is made from farmers’ infrastructure and then used only for urban and industrial areas, the amount of farmer suicides will rise,” Sanjay reflected. “In this sense, the policy of the government is totally negative. If you want power, you can look at non-conventional energy. Otherwise... there will be nothing left for the next generation, and then what will we do? We should leave them something positive.”

**“IT IS TOTALLY WRONG TO DIVERT
IRRIGATION WATER TO THERMAL
POWER PLANTS AND TO LET
FARMERS DIE.”**

— Sanjay Kolhe



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CONCLUSION

These are just a few of the grassroots struggles to stop dangerous coal projects currently underway from Thailand to Chile, Romania to South Africa. Often local communities face violence and intimidation at the hands of corporations or government officials seeking to benefit from the destruction. But with their land, air, and water at

stake, communities are not backing down. They are demanding control of their futures and the clean energy alternatives that can bring electricity today, without deadly pollution or costly grid extensions that may never come. More important, though, they are winning, and in doing so, they are changing not only their own futures, but all our futures.



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