

Foreign wind farms cause uproar in Mexican villages

April 6 2013, by Victor Ruiz



Picture taken on November 29, 2011 of wind turbines in northern Ethiopia. Foreign energy firms have flocked to a narrow region of southern Mexico, known as one of the world's windiest places, to build towering wind turbines, but some projects have angered and torn indigenous villages.

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villages.

The construction of wind farms has soared across Mexico, with the gusty Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca attracting investors from as far as Europe, Japan and Australia.

The projects are a key part of Mexico's efforts to combat [climate change](#), one of the priorities of former president Felipe Calderon that has been picked up by his successor, Enrique Pena Nieto, who took office in December.

This renewable energy had a capacity of just two megawatts nationwide in 2006, according to Mexican Wind Energy Association (Amdee). Today, it has grown to 1,400 megawatts, with a goal of 12,000 megawatts by 2020, representing 15 percent of the nation's energy.

But some [indigenous groups](#) have blocked two projects in Oaxaca, including one that would become [Latin America's](#) biggest wind farm, fearing that they would wreck fishing and farming while dividing people over the rent payments.

"They have upended the life of the villagers in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec by interfering with their daily work," Carlos Beas Torres, head of the Union of Northern Zone Isthmus Communities, told AFP.

"Women and men have been pitted against each other, because the Mexican and multinational companies that have invested here have taken advantage of a lack of information among natives of the area to lease their land for 1,000 pesos (\$82) an hectare per year," he said.

There are 18 wind farms in operation in Mexico, with another nine under construction and a dozen more in development, according to Amdee president Adrian Escofet.

The great majority are in Oaxaca, with its isthmus, flanked by the Pacific Ocean and [Gulf of Mexico](#), providing powerful winds for the turbines to churn out energy.



Wind turbines in northeastern Brazil on December 11, 2012. Foreign energy firms have flocked to a narrow region of southern Mexico, known as one of the world's windiest places, to build towering wind turbines, but some projects have angered and torn indigenous villages.

But their presence has angered some of the Ikoots and Zapoetcos indigenous populations, with some protests turning violent.

Last week, more than 20 people were injured when police clashed with a group of protesters who have been blocking a road leading to the projects.

The blockade, which began on February 25, has been opposed by shopkeepers on a beach that cars can no longer reach, saying it has hurt their sales.

The shop owners back the [wind farms](#), arguing it would benefit the community, including a 117-turbine, 234-megawatt wind farm funded by Spain's Gas Natural Fenosa.

In December, villagers in San Dionisio del Mar clashed with sticks and stones, leaving five injured, over a mega-project by Marena Renovables, a consortium of Mexican, Australian and Japanese investors, including Mitsubishi.

With 132 turbines producing 396 [megawatts](#) of energy, it would become the biggest wind farm in Latin America.

But its construction has been delayed by opponents concerned about the impact of giant turbines popping up on a strip of beach between the Pacific and a lagoon full of fish.

A community assembly voted to back the project in February, but opponents believe the meeting "was manipulated," Beas Torres said.

Fenosa and Marena both deny that their projects would harm fishing or the environment, noting that the environment ministry approved them and that they would plant new trees.

The firms say landowners are being paid to use their land and that they remain open to dialogue, while the projects would help all the communities by producing clean energy and creating jobs.

"We believe that this is an incredible project that will benefit everybody," said Jonathan Davis Arzac, head of the Macquarie Mexican

Infrastructure Fund, an arm of the Australian financial firm Macquarie Group, which is part of the Marena project.

"There are no losers in this cases, there can only be winners," he said in a video posted on the company's website, adding that the consortium had done a bad job of explaining the project to the local population.

In a February statement, Marena Renovables said energy production would bring San Dionisio del Mar between \$1.2 million and \$1.4 million per year in addition to lease payments of 1,000 pesos (\$82) per hectare of land.

The secretary general of the Oaxaca state government, Javier Martinez Alvarez, said discussions were under way to resume construction.

"I think that the conflicts that we have can be resolved by negotiating," Amdee's Escofet told AFP.

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