



NATION / PRATCH RUJIVANAROM

A lush plantation is seen growing in the shadow of a big wind turbine at the Theppana wind farm in Chaiphum's Thep Sathit district.

Mixed outcomes as state farmland is given over to energy projects

PRATCH RUJIVANAROM
THE SUNDAY NATION
CHAIYAPHUM 3

DESPITE some good outcomes from renewable-energy investment on Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) land, mining and oil drilling at ALRO sites is still depriving poor farmers of land, academics said.

It has been three months since the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) issued an order to allow wind farms, petroleum drilling and mining operations on areas previously reserved for agriculture.

While it has been found that farmers get benefits from wind farms on their land, others were suffering land loss and pollution related to oil drilling and mining operations.

Around 0.09 percent of ALRO land - or about 3,695 rai (591 hectares) of a total 41 million rai - has already been used for these undertakings as per NCPO order 31/2560. The order has

been criticised by land activists, academics and farmers who see it as an attempt to seize land preserved for landless farmers in order to top up the wealth of energy and mining conglomerates.

EGCO Group's Theppana wind farm at Chaiphum's Thep Sathit district has provided a good example of constructive co-existence between farming and renewable energy. At this site, cassava and corn grow abundantly in the shadow of wind turbines.

Sa-ing Sodploy, a 60-year-old cassava farmer on the wind-farm land, said that her family's livelihood has improved, because there is better infrastructure in her neighbourhood and she has increased income from leasing some of her land to the wind farm.

"I can still grow a crop on my ALRO land as the wind farm is operating. Even better, I get the additional income from the land lease of Bt35,000 per rai per year from the wind farm," she said.

Theppana is a 7.5 megawatt small pilot wind farm on 51 rai of ALRO. The company has leased three rai of land from Sa-ing's family for three of its turbines. "There is no impact at all from the wind-farm operation. We are very happy with it. Moreover, we also have a better road connection and electricity, which improve our livelihood," she said.

EGCO Group Power Plant Business 3 Siwapol Osodsit praised the NCPO order, saying that it solved complications over the land and let the company continue to invest in clean, renewable energy.

Maha Sarakham University lecturer Chainarong Sretthachau pointed out that the good example from Chaiphum was a rare exception. He said that farmers on ALRO land that had been allocated for mining and drilling operations suffered from environmental impacts and land loss.

"The expropriation of ALRO land for businesses other than farming is against the original principle of the ALRO, which was to allow landless farmers to farm on state land," Chainarong pointed out.

He said the NCPO rules allowed the exploitation of natural resources, causing the local people to suffer illnesses from pollution caused by mining.