

# **Land Grabbing for Food and Biofuel**

## **Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE)**

### **Case Study**

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### ABOUT PAN AP

Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) is one of the five regional centres of PAN, a global network dedicated to eliminating the harm caused to humans and the environment by pesticides and promoting biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

PAN AP's vision is a society that is truly democratic, equal, just, and culturally diverse; based on the principles of food sovereignty, gender justice and environmental sustainability. It has developed strong partnerships with peasants, agricultural workers and rural women movements in the Asia Pacific region and guided by the strong leadership of these grassroots groups, has grown into a reputable advocacy network with a firm Asian perspective.

PAN AP's mission lies in strengthening people's movements to advance and assert food sovereignty, biodiversity-based ecological agriculture, and the empowerment of rural women; protect people and the environment from highly hazardous pesticides; defend the rice heritage of Asia; and resist the threats of corporate agriculture and neo-liberal globalization.

Currently, PAN AP comprises 108 network partner organizations in the Asia Pacific region and links with about 400 other CSOs and grassroots organizations regionally and globally.

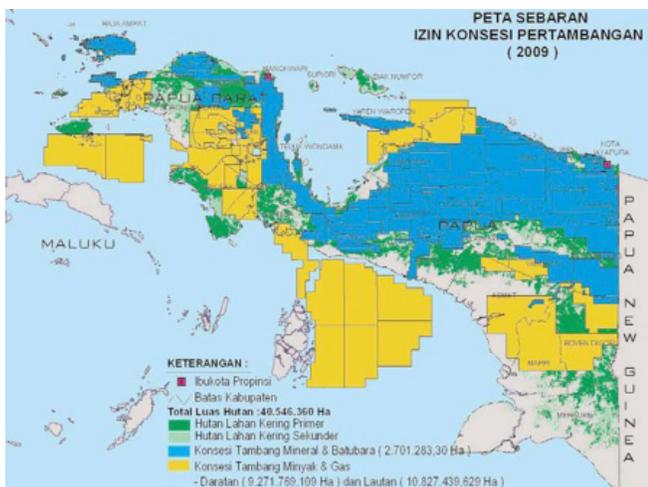
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# Land Grabbing for Food and Biofuel

## Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE)

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Land grabbing round the world has been justified by the two crises – food and energy – which food and agricultural transnational corporations as well as foreign governments have proposed to solve by setting up huge plantations of food and agricultural products for biofuel. Notwithstanding the questions on the validity of the arguments about increasing prices of food and energy and the need therefore to shift to large-scale and mechanised production, the increasing trend of grabbing available lands in the underdeveloped countries such as Indonesia to this end has tremendous impacts on the farmers, indigenous peoples and the entire communities.

In 2009, former Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) General Director Jacques Diouf said that in order to accelerate food production there is no other way for the world except to use technology, reiterating that technology is the key in raising the production

of food crops, in which case the private sector must have a bigger role.<sup>1</sup> Indonesia responded promptly to this statement by offering to be the world's foodbasket. On the other hand, the US is the biggest consumer of bioethanol and Brazilian sugarcane is the biggest source while the European Union (EU) is the biggest consumer of biodiesel with supply coming from palm oil of Indonesia and Malaysia. Thus, the eagerness of the Indonesian government to respond to large-scale production of biofuels is not surprising.

Industrialised countries are citing climate change and their commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as the reason for shifting to biofuels, climate change being caused by burning of fossil fuel. Ironically however, in Kalimantan and Papua, the lands that been used for planting biofuel materials such as oil palm, sugarcane and others are the peatlands and forest lands, which could have been important in trapping emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.

In reality, land grabs are happening on unprecedented scale as the 'back-to-basics' solution of the global capitalists to solve their crisis of overproduction and excess of fictitious capital. From the production of food and bioenergy up to speculation on land values, the imperialists have obviously increased the intensity of plunder in order to surmount their crisis and pass it on to underdeveloped countries such as Indonesia. Land grabs are being done through the development of food estates, infrastructure projects, expansion of new plantations for bioenergy projects, mining, ecotourism, incursions into forest conservations, climate change projects in the guise of expansion of reforestation



and national parks, and the development of infrastructure projects for military purposes.

Land grabbing has triggered conflicts and only brought to fore that the main issue for the imperialists, their corporations and governments is not only to ensure their own food and energy security but more importantly to arrest the decline of

their profit levels at the expense of ecological well-being and the farmers and indigenous peoples' rights to land and resources. The impacts on the peasantry, agricultural and plantation workers, women, small food producers, and the poor are alarming, which include the eviction of rural society, diminishing of livelihood sources, and increasing hunger and poverty.

Fertile agricultural lands are increasingly being owned by the private sector, which has tremendous implications to smallholder farming and development.

## **Introduction**

In a speech by the Indonesian Vice-President Budiono addressed to the World Conference on Food Security held by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome on 13-17 November 2009, he said that Indonesia was ready to provide food to the world. His speech has become the national policy to produce food on a large scale by shifting the orientation of agricultural development from depending on the small farmers to allowing big investors to have more role in agriculture. The Indonesian government believes that food production can be doubled if foreign and local investors are allowed to invest in agriculture. In the following months, the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) promoted the remote areas of Papua and Kalimantan for a giant food estate integrated with biofuel energy project. President SBY said that Indonesia would like to be the world's foodbasket.<sup>2</sup>

It may also be recalled that the biggest oil palm plantation in the world of 1.8 million hectares is sitting in the border of Indonesia and Malaysia in Kalimantan Island called the Kalimantan Border Oil Pam Mega Project. The country has also made the bid, in a statement made by the Indonesian Minister of Agriculture Anton Apriantono in June 2005, to produce bioenergy for domestic consumption and export.<sup>3</sup>

The Indonesian government thus launched the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), allocating 2.8 million hectares of land<sup>4</sup> of indigenous people in Merauke Regency, Papua Province. The original main investor in this plan was Bin Ladin Group of Arab Saudi Kingdom, which in August 2008 targeted the Merauke land for the production of basmati rice to be exported to Saudi Arabia under its food security programme.

## **Background of MIFEE Project**

MIFEE, located in Merauke Regency, was later on officially inaugurated by the Indonesian Minister of Agriculture, Suswono. According to his senior officer Hilman Manan, "We chose Merauke because it's the ideal place for food crop cultivation, such as rice, corn, soybean and sugarcane. Merauke district has 4.5 million hectares of land; 2.5 million hectares are ideal for cultivation. The area is flat and has a good climate. Its soil is appropriate for those crops. Sumatra is already congested with other plantations, such as palm oil, and Kalimantan (Borneo) is already full of mining areas and many plantation areas also."<sup>5</sup>

The Merauke Regency Government allocated 2 million hectares of land for plantation, agriculture, and production forest.<sup>6</sup> Much of which is still primary forests, savannah, and swamp lands which serve as the areas of hunting and food gathering of the indigenous peoples of Papua in Merauke. Meanwhile, the areas of MIFEE concession are 1.2 million hectares which covers 10 clusters.<sup>7</sup> The government plans to lease the land for about 90 years.<sup>8</sup> (See Table 1)

According to the Indonesian Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Bayu Krisnamurti, Merauke project can be developed as the biggest food estate in Asia with total investment of IDR 60 trillion. For the year 2010, the government was offering 100,000 hectares

**Table 1. Merauke Regency: Land Size and MIFEE Concession Areas**

Merauke Regency	Size (hectares)	Percentage to total land size
Total land size	4,500,000	100
Total arable land	2,500,000	55
Allocated land for plantation, agriculture, and production forest	2,000,000	44
MIFEE concession areas	1,200,000	27

Source: AFP, 21 February 2010; REDD-Monitor, 17 February 2012; and Tempo weekly magazine, 8 April 2012.

out of 500,000 hectares available for medium-term development.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Minister Suswono, in addition to farming, the project will support a wide range of agricultural businesses, including, post-harvest industries such as sorting and grading, packing, storage and processing as well as agri-tourism.<sup>10</sup> One million hectares of lands will be available to produce food crops such as rice, soybeans and corn. The rest will be split between plantations, fisheries and livestock. According to the agriculture ministry, the pilot project will see 1.6 million hectares of land in Merauke transformed into an integrated farming, plantation and livestock zone, where companies will grow, process and package their products in one place. This is why the project is called the integrated food and energy estate project.

Three top conglomerates such as Medco, Bakrie and Wilmar have already expressed their intentions to develop the sugarcane plantation that integrated the sugar and ethanol factories. Their investment is estimated to reach IDR 9 trillion.<sup>11</sup>

## Enabling laws

The MIFEE project has been made possible by the Law No. 41 of 2009 on the Protection of Sustainable Agricultural Land and the Government Regulation No. 18 of 2010 on Cultivation with special attention to MIFEE. Law No. 41 of 2009 allows local and foreign investments and the production and trade of agricultural products both for the domestic and export markets.

It must be emphasized, however, that the Indonesian government had previously produced laws and regulations related to land and natural resources management. For instance the Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry; Law No. 18 of 2004 on Plantation; Law No. 7 of 2004 on Water Resource; 2005 Agricultural Revitalization; Law No. 25 of 2007 on Investment;<sup>12</sup> Law No. 4 of 2009 on Mineral and Coal (Minerba); then the Law No. 41 of 2009 on the Protection of the Sustainable Agricultural Land.

The most recent is the Law on Land Acquisition for Development (2011) and the Masterplan for the Acceleration of the Indonesian Economic Development or MP3EI (2012). All of these laws and regulations related to plantation, mining, forestry, water resource, investment, food and agriculture, and land acquisition favor the interests of foreign and domestic capital.

These laws are providing the flexibility and facility for foreign capital to plunder Indonesian natural richness through the concessions of land use rights in plantation, mining contracts, forest and timber concessions, and other facilities for foreign investors to control the land and natural resources in Indonesia. These laws have practically provided the legal framework for land grabbing in the form of developing big plantations and food estates as what is being done under the current regime of SBY.

This only shows that although the political regime in Indonesia has changed several times since Soeharto was toppled down in 1998, the nature of the government remains – allowing the foreign plunder of natural resources, monopolising the raw materials and processing industries, depending on foreign borrowing, prioritising giant infrastructure projects, giving more and more concessions to foreign investors, cheapening labour, and grabbing the lands of peasants, minority and indigenous peoples.

## Existing criticisms

The MIFEE project has been criticised by organisations of peasants, indigenous peoples, students, and environmental activists for potentially destroying 2 million hectares of primary forests that were previously

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threatened by forest concessions, plantations and mining concessions for many years. The MIFEE project's slogan is "Feed Indonesia, then Feed the World". But the local peasants claim that the project will destroy traditional agriculture and food security in the area.

Merauke is projected to become the national food production centre of Indonesia in the eastern part. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Merauke Regency Government, the people of Merauke will not become the mere spectators of the project. They will collaborate as the contract growers, not selling the agricultural lands to a third party but leasing these to investors.<sup>13</sup> Merauke Regent, Romanus Mbaraka is committed to protect the Marind people and is offering the concept of joint venture. The indigenous lands that shall become company lands will be counted as capital shares.<sup>14</sup> This is short of saying that the project shall re-structure community concepts of land control and stewardship.

Some observers also say that the MIFEE project will destroy the primary forests of Papua. It will threaten the people's access to food, revive the transmigration programme in order to provide the project working force from outside Papua, and develop the huge infrastructure projects (new roadways and harbours, new factories for food and bioenergy processing, etc.). If the working force needed to work on the land of one hectare is two people, then the total working force needed to work on the MIFEE project of 1.2 million hectares will be around 2.4 million people. The working force of this megaproject for sure will be imported from outside Papua. It is predicted that this kind of imported working force will create conflict with the Papuan indigenous tribes in Merauke who depend on food gathering and hunting in the forests and swamp lands for their livelihoods.

### The Marind Tribes

There are several reasons that can cause the indigenous tribes of Papua in Merauke to become spectators amidst the exploitation of their indigenous lands for the interest of MIFEE project. The population of Merauke according to the 2010 population census is 195,176 people, 40% (73,082) of these are the Marind tribes

people.<sup>15</sup> According to Yohanes Petrus Kamalaka, of the Kimaam people (Marind sub-tribes), "From the skill, most of us are lost. The indigenous peoples at hamlets are still gathering food, living from the forests. We usually take sago in the forest and fish in the swamps without maintaining them. If all of that is lost, what can we eat?"

The Marind people have their totem or symbols to describe their ancestors. Mahuze people have *sago* totem, Gebze have their coconut palm, Samsakai have kangaroo totem, Basik-basik have pig totem, and Balaize have their eagle totem. When the MIFEE project is plundering the land of savannahs and the swamps, nature and totem symbols of the indigenous peoples will be lost and the Marind people will eventually lose their identity.

According to Adiwobowo, Faculty Head of the Department of Communication Science and Community Development of Human Ecology Faculty from the Bogor Agricultural Institute, the indigenous peoples of Merauke are still living on hunting and food gathering. Their neighbours from Java meanwhile are already developing the agricultural system.<sup>16</sup> Head of Centre for Marind Community Development Study, Frederikus Gebze explains that beginning in the 1900s, the first outsider wave entered Merauke, mostly Javanese people brought by the Dutch, who are now recognised as *Jamer* (Javanese-Merauke).

They brought in transformation, making the Marind people learning the rice and vegetable cultures. Around 1910, several Marind people started opening paddy fields around the Merauke beach and Kurik District. The introduction of the Marind people to the modern agricultural system continued until the transmigration wave of 1965-1995. In 1985, the government relocated the Marind people families to the transmigration areas and equipped them with modern agriculture, from plowing the land with the plow and tractors, seeding, fertilizer application, to harvesting.<sup>17</sup>

Although they are already practicing agriculture, the system of food gathering, taking the *sago*, netting the fish, hunting, and doing simple gardening like *wambat* (making the series of knee-deep wall to be planted with bananas and cassava and the like) are still prevailing.<sup>18</sup> These practices of food gathering and hunting are still

common for the Marind people who live in the remote forests and swamps. They are the Kanum tribe, the Marind subtribe who live in the hamlets of Yanggandur, Torai, Erambu, Sota, and Rawa Biru in the Sota District. The activity of farming is complementary to daily activity of the indigenous Marind tribe to hunt the deers, pigs, crocodiles, and kangaroos in the forests and swamps. The hunted products are being sold in Merauke without processing. Hunting and food gathering is daily life activity of the Marind people and they have already been occupying the park of 413, 810 hectares long before the Wasur National Park existed.<sup>19</sup> (See Table 2)

According to Jago Bukit, Head of the Agency for the Social and Economic Development of Santo Antonius Foundation, the Marind tribe can no longer survive on food gathering and hunting, because the forests and the savannahs are already delineated by the companies as their lands.<sup>20</sup> As already mentioned, Merauke has potential agricultural land of 2.5 million hectares with around 1.9 million hectares of wet land. In 2010, the Merauke Government issued 46 investment permits that covered 228,000 hectares, including the indigenous lands. Ironically, the indigenous lands are being sold at very cheap prices to the investors. Much of these indigenous lands are being sold at IDR 10 per

**Table 2. Demography and Economic Activity of Marind Tribe**

Merauke population:	195,176 people (2010) Papua 73,082, Non-Papua 122,634
Spread:	Districts of Kimaam, Tabonji, Waan, Ilwayab, Okaba, Tubang, Ngguti, Kaptel, Kurik, Animha, Merauke, Naukenjerai, Semangga, Tanah Miring, Jagebob, Sota, Muting, Elikobel, and Ulilin.
Hunted animals:	Crocodile, deer, kangaroo, forest pig, and fish.
Hunted tools:	Spear, arrow, small blade, net, and hunting dog.
Agricultural products:	Banana, cassava, and sago.
Agricultural land size (2010):	- Wet: 46,488 ha and idle 3.566 ha. - Dry: 17,373 ha and idle 9.337 ha.
Rice production:	101,161 TON

Source: BPS, Dinas Pertanian Tanaman Pangan Merauke.



Bonafacius Gebze, Papuan indigenous tribe in Merauke.  
Source: Tempo weekly magazine, 8 April 2012, p.60.



Swamp forest in Merauke, the hunting area of the indigenous tribes of Papua. (Photo: Adriana Sri Adhiati).  
Source: Down to Earth (DTE), No.89-90, November 2011, p.5.

one square meter, with the companies' promises to provide the houses, education, and the employment opportunities.

## MIFEE: Land of Conflicts

The MIFEE project was launched to the public on 12 February 2010, which coincided with the 108th anniversary of the Merauke Regency. The idea of "national foodbasket" was first broached by the former Merauke Regent Johannes Gluba Gebze in 2003, and the central government gave the green light in 2012. According to the Indonesian former Minister of Agriculture Anton Apriyantono, "This MIFEE idea is one of ways to achieve the food supply."<sup>21</sup>

According to the regulation made by the Indonesian government, however, the MIFEE is actually not

aimed at providing the food supply for the Indonesian population. Based on Article 24 of the Government Regulation No. 18 of 2010 on Cultivation, the MIFEE is only obliged to provide its products to domestic consumption in times of crisis or harvest failures.<sup>22</sup>

It is also interesting to note how the coverage of the MIFEE project has been reduced in order to make it more viable for offering to investors. The size was originally 2 million hectares. Johannes Gebze even claimed that he could offer 2.5 million hectares of land reserves. The Body for Coordination of the National Spatial Order wanted to be realistic by using only 1.2 million hectares. Later on, according to the Indonesian Minister of Forestry, Zulkifli Hasan, the figures had been revised to 500,000 hectares. Director of the Land Expansion and Maintenance of the Ministry of Agriculture Iman Panudju later clarified that out of 500,000 hectares, around 228,000 hectares have been agreed to be allocated to several companies, which are divided into four concession areas (clusters).

Anton Apriyantono, former Minister of Agriculture, has confirmed that the size is significant for opening the agricultural land. But it seems that reducing the coverage in order to attract investors has not been enough. Anton Apriyantono explained that Merauke land has big potential because it is suitable for sugarcane, rice and corn and eagerly promoted this idea to the private companies even before the project was formally launched. Several big companies like Medco Group owned by Arifin Panigoro and PT Bangun Tjipta Sarana owned by Siswono Yudohusodo, were interested to invest in Merauke.

Bin Ladin Group of Arab Saudi Kingdom was also interested to invest in Merauke, with the fantastic figure of US\$ 4.3 billion to cultivate the rice in the area of 500,000 hectares. Anton Apriyantono even admitted that he flew to the headquarters of Bin Ladin in Jeddah to seduce them in order to realise their plans.<sup>23</sup>

In reality, it is not easy to realise the MIFEE project. Bin Ladin Group resigned, along with Bakrie Group which was also interested to develop the sugar industry but resigned after visiting the field. "Potential investors have to face the complexity of land acquisition because it is related to the land of indigenous tribes and indigenous rights," Anton revealed.

At the end of 2011, there were 46 private local and foreign companies that were already given permits. The companies that are already operational are PT Medco Papua Industri Lestari, PT Cenderawasih Jaya Mandiri (Rajawali Group), PT Dongin Prabhawa, and PT Hardaya Sugar Papua.<sup>24</sup> PT Medco Papua Industri Lestari is working together with LG, the energy company from South Korea to open the Papuan forests.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, according to a report published by GRAIN in January 2012, Wilmar International, a corporation based in Singapore, which is the biggest palm oil company in the world and a main producer of sugar, already got a permit in September 2009 to convert 200,000 hectares of Papuan forests to sugarcane plantation. The investment was allegedly around US\$2 billion.<sup>26</sup>

One year after the launching of the MIFEE project, the first land conflict emerged in Merauke. In the beginning of 2011, the people from Sanggase Hamlet in Kaptel District, around six-hour travel from Merauke City, conducted a rally at the sawmill of PT Medco Papua Industri Lestari. They demanded the compensation of IDR 65 billion for 2,800 hectares land being used by Medco. Since then, land conflicts have erupted one by one. In Malind District, Domande people are fighting with the Ongari people. In Ulilin District, Kindiki people are fighting over land with the Selil people. Nearly all of plantations and forests in Merauke are now under conflicts. The common problems are that two indigenous groups are fighting over land because delineations have been blurred and that people are complaining about unfair land compensations.

Below is a matrix of MIFEE project concession areas, the companies that already have the permits, and the related land conflicts.

In addition, there is an intense land conflict between the indigenous peoples and foreign investors from South Korea. PT Dongin Prabhawa, which is a subsidiary of Korindo Group of South Korea, will open the oil palm plantation of 25,000 hectares and also develop the crude palm oil (CPO) factory in Merauke with the investment of US\$150 million. "The total working force that will be needed is around 4,000 people," says Rusdy Salima Mahuze, Public Relations Head of PT Dongin Prabhawa in Merauke.<sup>27</sup> PT Dongin Prabhawa

**Land conflicts in the MIFEE project concession areas (2011)**

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>WORKING AREAS</b>	<b>LAND SIZE</b>	<b>BUSINESS TYPE</b>	<b>INVESTMENT</b>	<b>CONFLICT</b>
<b>ANIMHA DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Selaras Inti Semesta, from Medco Group, versus indigenous lands of Hamlets of Zanegi, Wayau, Koa.	301,000 has.	Industrial Forest Plantation.		The people felt the process of collaboration with Medco was according to the procedures and not fair to them. Beside, the land compensation is very unfair.
<b>MALIND DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Karyabumi Papua (Rajawali Group) versus indigenous land of Domande Hamlet.	40,000 has	Sugarcane plantation.	IDR 3 trillion.	People of Domande Hamlet are fighting with people of Ongari Hamlet on the size and delineation of indigenous lands being given to the company. The value of land compensation is also unfair.
<b>KAPTEL DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Medco Papua Industri Lestari and PT Medco Alam Lestari versus indigenous lands of hamlets of Buepe dan Sanggase.	2,800 has. (Medco Papua) and 74,219 has. (Medco Alam)	Wood chips and production forest.	IDR 10 billion for land compensation, timber compensation, and social facility and US\$70 million for operational and infrastructure.	People of Buepe hamlet and Sanggase are fighting for indigenous land delineation and ownership of indigenous lands. Medco finally paid twice for having the rights of the lands.
<b>NGGUTI DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Dongin Prabhawa (Korindo Group) versus indigenous lands of Nakias Hamlet.	39,800 has.	Oil palm plantation.	US\$150 million.	Several clans, like Walinaulik, Dinaulik, Yeimahe, Kaize, Mahuze, Yolmen, and Ndiwaen, reviewed the compensation paid by the companies for their indigenous lands and found that this was not enough and was directed to the wrong beneficiaries.
<b>KURIK DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of Rajawali Group (PT Cenderawasih Jaya Mandiri) versus indigenous lands of Kurik hamlet.	70,000 has.	Sugarcane plantation		There is no indigenous agreement for the land acquisition.
<b>OKABA DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT China Gate Agriculture versus indigenous land of hamlets Alaku and Makaling.	50,000 has.	Sugarcane and cassava plantations.		Internal conflicts among the people regarding the status of the land being given to the companies, how much land is being given and what is the delineation.

**Land conflicts in the MIFEE project concession areas (2011)**

DISTRICT	WORKING AREAS	LAND SIZE	BUSINESS TYPE	INVESTMENT	CONFLICT
<b>ULILIN DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Berkat Citra Abadi versus indigenous land of Kindiki hamlet.	40,000 has.	Oil palm plantation.		Internal conflicts among the people regarding the status of the land being given to the companies, how much land is being given, what is the delineation.
<b>MUTING DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Bio Inti Agrindo versus the indigenous land of the local people.	39,000 has.	Oil palm plantation.		Internal conflicts among the people regarding the status of the land being given to the companies, how much land is being given, and what is the delineation.
<b>JAGEBOB DISTRICT</b>	Working areas of PT Hardaya Sawit Papua and PT Hardaya Sugar Papua versus indigenous land of Nalkin hamlet.	Land size: 62,150 has. for oil palm plantation and 44,812 has. for sugarcane plantation.			Conflict: Internal conflicts among the people regarding the status of the land being given to the companies, how much land is being given, and what is the delineation.
<b>The size of permits given</b>		<b>763,781</b> hectares			

Source: Tempo weekly magazine report on MIFEE, 8 April 2012, pp. 64-65.

got the permit from the Ministry of Forestry to open the forest for oil palm plantation of 34,058 hectares. “Not all of the permits will be planted with oil palm, the land for the oil palm plantation is around 25,000 hectares,” he adds.

PT Dongin Prabhawa, a subsidiary of PT Korindo, a foreign investment company from South Korea, has started entering Ngguti since 2009. In the beginning of 2012, seven clans of indigenous peoples in Ngguti District asked PT Dongin Prabhawa to give the compensation for the indigenous lands that will be used for the oil palm plantation, because apparently the compensation has been given to the wrong people.<sup>28</sup>

Land conflicts are quite expected because as already mentioned the Papuan indigenous peoples who live in Merauke are still depending on hunting and food gathering for their livelihood. Although some of them are familiar with the agricultural system since the transmigration period of 1965-1995, they still depend on savannah forests and swamplands. The forest

areas and swamps for hunting and food gathering of these indigenous peoples are being delineated by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry and Merauke Regent according to the order from the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture as the project holder.

Therefore, the land conflicts in the MIFEE project that often happened are caused by the delineation of the hunting forest and food gathering areas of the indigenous Papuans as the MIFEE project concession areas. This unvoluntarily process of the indigenous land delineation is worsening because the investors are often manipulating the process in getting the permits by neglecting the indigenous peoples’ land rights and giving unfair land compensation.

## Conclusion

At the moment, the land grabs for the interests of food and bioenergy are happening in Merauke, Papua Province in the form of the megaproject Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). Aside

from the criticism and protest towards this project, some companies both domestic and foreign have operated in the concession areas with permits already given.

Since 2010, the landscape of Merauke, especially the 1.2 million hectares of primary forests under the MIFEE concession areas has already changed. The primary forests, savannah, swamp lands which used to be the areas of hunting and food gathering of the Papuan indigenous peoples are now already the areas of the plantations and the food estate of oil palm, sugarcane, and cassava. Some are also converted into the concession areas of production and industrial plantation forests.

The fate of the indigenous Papuans is under threat. Since their very existence is dependent on land, losing control of this resource is tantamount to death for many indigenous peoples. Secondly, the agricultural production system that the MIFEE project depends, using mechanisation and monoculture plantation, is absolutely strange for the indigenous Papuans. The *sago* as main food for instance does not meet much maintenance. Fishes are everywhere and other main sources of food like deer and the crocodiles are easy to be hunted in the forests and swamps.

The indigenous Papuans as hunters and food gatherers, will find it difficult if they are forced to work as workers in the MIFEE concession. The indigenous Papuans have limited working skills, and it seems that the plantation managers of MIFEE will prefer working force to come from outside Merauke or even outside Papua.

The new wave of working force from outside Papua to work in the megaproject will surely create the conflict. It is predicted that if the MIFEE project already covered the area of 1.2 million hectares in its real operation, the working force needed to run the project could reach

around 2.4 million. This figure is exceeding the current population of Papua which is only around 2.1 million people.

The potentials of conflict arising between the indigenous Papuans and the outsiders are valid. Outsider population comprises 60% of the total population of Merauke, as a result of the the government transmigration in 1965-1995. Today, people from outer Papua who live in Merauke are interested in working in the MIFEE project while the indigenous Papuans want to stop the MIFEE project because it grabs their lands and threaten their livelihood. The MIFEE project is a ticking bomb, waiting to explode, since holders of the MIFEE concession as well as the local and central governments are likely to depend on the military and police forces to settle disputes.

Trillions of rupiahs have already invested by the corporations such as Medco Group, Wilmar International, Rajawali Groups, Korindo Group, and LG in order to clear the primary forests and swamplands for agriculture. Land grabbing is happening through the issuance of permits by the Merauke Regent and forest delineations by the Ministry of Forestry, which have blurred the land demarcation and control by the indigenous tribes of Papua. So-called compensations for land and timber are also not fair enough.

The indigenous peoples of Papua are getting aware that such “legal mechanisms” are replete with lies and manipulation. This increased consciousness of the indigenous peoples of Papua is the start in raising the issue to the national debate on the global trends in land grabbing and making countries such as Indonesia cover for the food and energy crises of the international corporations and governments at the expense of indigenous peoples’ rights to land, natural resources and livelihood and national food security.

## Endnotes

- 1 See Hermas E Prabowo, “Menyongsong Industrialisasi Pertanian”, in Kompas, Tuesday, 22 December 2009.
- 2 See “Indonesia aims to be world’s breadbasket”, Agence France Presse, 21 February 2010.
- 3 Eric Wakker, “The Kalimantan Border Palm Oil Mega-project,” a report for Friends of the Earth Netherlands and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), April 2006.
- 4 The land available for the project scheme according to data provided by the government of Merauke Regency.
- 5 See “Indonesia aims to be world’s breadbasket”, AFP, *ibid.*
- 6 Investigative report of Tempo weekly magazine on MIFEE Project, 8 April 2012, “Bom Waktu di Hampan Tanah Merauke”, p. 64.
- 7 See Chris Lang, “How Norway and the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate threaten peatland and forest in Papua”, in REDD-Monitor, 17 February 2012.
- 8 See Peter Robson, “West Papua: Land grab to displace locals”, in Green Left online, 10 April 2010.
- 9 See Kompas daily, 6 February 2010, “Investasi di Kawasan.”
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- 11 See the main report of GATRA weekly magazine on food crisis in Indonesia, “Krisis Pangan, Konglomerat Ikut Bercocok Tanam,” No. 21 Tahun XIV, 03-09 April 2008, pp. 16-19.
- 12 The Law No. 25 of 2007 on Investment provides the use rights on plantation (HGU) for both domestic and foreign companies for 90 years.
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- 14 See Erwin Edhi Prasetyo and Timbuktu Harthana, “Suku Marind Hidup di Antara Busur dan Pacul,” in Kompas daily newspaper, 16 April 2011 (a), p. 15.
- 15 See further “Pola Estate Bukan Solusi Ketahanan Pangan”, in Kompas, Saturday, 11 June 2011, p. 13.
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