

Adat Recognition and Land-Grabbing Politics
in Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, Papua, Indonesia

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Place of Fieldwork : Indonesia

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I. Research Background

Papua is the easternmost island of Indonesia, which still faces social, economic, political, and security challenges from prolonged conflict. To address the conflict, the central government established the Special Autonomy for Papua Law (Law No. 21/2001). This law recognizes community land as customary land. However, through this recognition process, the government launched the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) program in a region almost half the area of Merauke Regency. Furthermore, this project involved big companies in the agricultural expansions that led to the seizure of the *adat* (customary) land.

II. Research Purpose and Aim

This research attempts to analyze the relationship among the actors and underlying interests in the MIFEE project as well as the role that legal recognition of the *adat* played in the land-grabbing process of the MIFEE project.

III. Result and Achievement by Fieldwork

From my field research and interviews with many actors (local and central government, NGOs, Marind Anim communities and migrant communities in Merauke, and academics) involved in the MIFEE project in Merauke (Papua), Semarang, Jogjakarta, and Jakarta, I found that the MIFEE project had been implemented quickly. The number of investments in plantation and forestry industries increased.

These plantations opened on the land indigenous people called “*adat* land.” Even though the local government regulation recognized the *adat* (customary) land ownership, companies can still occupy the *adat* land for plantation purposes. I found that the local government did not implement the recognition policy seriously. In fact, I saw this regulation become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is the form by which the *adat* is recognized. On the other hand, it can be an instrument by which the government justifies land-grabbing in this project. This is seen from the fact that the government co-opted the local leader to bridge the negotiations between the Marind Anim communities and company. As a result, the communities were frequently willing to sell their land rights to the company for unfair compensation.

IV. Implications and Impact on Future Research

This research plays a very important role in disseminating information about the implementation of MIFEE in Papua because not much research has been conducted on this issue. Furthermore, it is still difficult for foreign scholars to conduct research in the provinces of Papua and less work

has been done there. On the other hand, I have easier access to the area because I am a researcher from the state-owned research institute.

Picture:

1. Land clearing and plantation in Merauke conducted by Bio Inti Agrindo company



Land-clearing process



Preparation for a palm oil plantation; this plantation will open over more or less all of the 36.000 Ha

2. A picture of daily life of the Marind Anim indigenous people in Merauke. Their economic activities remain gathering, hunting, collecting sago, and fishing





