



Gulf-State Investments in Indonesia and The Philippines: Gaining Control of Agricultural Land and Foodcrops

by Gerben Nooteboom & Rosanne Rutten

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Abstract

The issue of food security is most acute for Gulf States. Poor in arable land and water resources, rich in capital, and dependent on a huge migrant-labour force, Gulf States rely for their economic development and political stability on capital, migrant labour and cheap food imports. The recent food crises have turned Gulf States into major investors in farmland in Asia and Africa.

In this paper, we explore several state-related dimensions of Gulf-State investments which are relevant to the actual manifestation of the deals: (1) political considerations of power and interdependency; (2) religious-political features of the relations between Gulf investors and 'recipient' states (and local societies); (3); state ideology and frames of legitimation; and (4) legal ambiguity and multiplicity of interest groups. We focus on the recipient countries of Indonesia and the Philippines -- two electoral democracies with a different position vis-a-vis the Middle East. Since we are in the starting phase of a research programme on this theme, the paper is still explorative in nature.

Introduction

The newssite *Qatar Today* posted "Food: The Big Fright" on 23 Febr. 2011, which reiterates the achilles heel of Gulf-State development policies: "Of the region's total land area of approximately 259 million hectares, only 1.7% is currently under cultivation, mainly with groundwater irrigation." The development policy, economy and political stability of Gulf States rest on a secure access to capital, migrant labour, and cheap imported food. Though the region's citizens are "among the world's richest peoples in terms of per capita wealth" given the estimated \$35 trillion oil and gas reserves, the Gulf countries "are the world's most water insecure and food deficient, importing 60-95% of their food requirements," according to a high official of the Qatar National Food Security Programme.¹

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¹ "Food: The Big Fright," *Qatar Today*, 23 Febr 2011