THE IMPLICATION OF LAND-GRAB ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: THE CASE OF CAMBODIA

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Abstract- Confronting with the higher food price and distribution bottlenecks due to the global food price crisis, several rich food-importing countries and rising powers such as China, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea are struggling to purchase or lease enormous arable lands in Africa and Asia in attempt to do farming aboard in order to secure their direct food supplies of their local markets. Similarly, Cambodia is also now experiencing the foreign land grabs. Cambodian government has allowed many arable lands to be leased by foreign and local governments and investors looking to finance-poor, resource rich countries to ensure their food security as well as energy needs. While these food-importing countries are able to secure their food supplies, a number of Cambodians are experiencing under-nutrition and displacement. Therefore, the paper argues that land grab may secure direct food supplies of food-importing countries. And yet, it has impacts on food sovereignty in developing countries.

Keywords- Food Sovereignty, Land Grab, Cambodia, Land Concession.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1960s numerous scientific methods such as the use of improved genetic materials for crops have been brought into the production of wheat, rice, and maize. This is the Green Revolution technologies which have contributed to food security at household, national, and global levels as well as the reduction of famines. Nonetheless, agricultural technologies alone are not sufficient given to an increasing competition over scarce resources and climate change.

Confronting with the higher food price and distribution bottlenecks due to the global food price crisis, several rich food-importing countries as well as rising powers are struggling to purchase or lease enormous arable lands in Africa and Asia in attempt to do farming aboard in order to secure their direct food supplies of their local markets. Poor developing countries in Africa and Asia are the key targets of these land grabs.

In Cambodia, without cropping system to provide rice, communities depend on a combination of production systems and local exchange to meet rice shortages. Nevertheless, the privatization of these resources, degradation from commercial overuse, and destruction of traditional land use systems are preventing rural communities from their sources of income, food, and nourishment. Not only foreign companies have been taking lands in Cambodia, but growing domestic middle class has also jumped in the bandwagon. They buy up land from rural families which cannot endure the increasing costs of agricultural production, health care, and food. The Cambodian Government continues to promote rapid economic growth and private investment as preferred development strategies even though World Bank and the Northern donors have warned them about the nontransparent nature of concession agreements.

Therefore, there have been a number of efforts to achieve food security. Land grab is another attempt of food-insecure countries to ensure that there is enough food to feed their people and households. Unfortunately, most land grabs occur in developing countries. Given that these countries have abundant resources, they have become the targets of food-insecure countries. Lands in developing states have been leased either by transnational corporations or foreign governments for agriculture production which will be directly shipped back to their homeland. Foreign land grab takes away local agriculture production from developing countries where poverty and hungers prevail. In this regard, land grab by food-importing states as a mean to achieve food security affects food sovereignty in the targeted countries, especially in developing countries. Thus, although food-insecure states may achieve their goal through land-grabbing for food production, developing countries remain food-insecure and their food sovereignty has been affected.

II. WHAT IS LAND GRAB?

Speaking of land grab, A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi defines contemporary land deals as the large-scale acquisition through buying, leasing or accessing productively used or potentially arable farmland by corporate investors to produce food and non-food crops so as to either increase supply for domestic and global markets or to receive financial return on an investment.

The increasing global food price is a motivation for this sort of action. Such an action is carried out by corporate investors such as states, state-owned enterprises or private capital, who may be involved in agriculture, industry or finance. Saturnino Borras and Jennifer Franco characterize the current wave of land grabs as following:

1. Change in land-use concerns with the conversion of the forest lands or the lands previously used for food production, subsistence and domestic consumption to produce food or biofuels for export.
2. Land deal is transnational. It is also driven mainly by the Gulf states, Chinese and South Korean governments and companies.
3. It is believed that the underlying land deals increasingly concerns with finance capital given that it partly contributes to speculative deals.
4. Such deals are usually shady. It is non-transparent, non-consultative and loaded with corruption concerning national and local governments.
5. Land deals usually contribute to (or have contribute to) dispossession if local communities do not possess any formal, legal, and clear property rights over the contested lands.

Furthermore, Annelies Zoomers identifies seven factors contributing to the radical changes in landownership and land use in Africa, Asia and Latin America as following:

1. Offshore farming: FDI in food production
The food-insecure governments relying on imported-food to sustain their people are outsourcing their domestic food production, whereby buying or leasing the vast areas of farmland outside their countries for their own offshore food production.
2. FDI in non-food agricultural commodities and biofuels
A second driver behind the current land grab is the global demand for biofuels and non-food agricultural commodities combined with expectations of rising rates of return in agriculture and of rising land values.
3. Development of protected areas, nature reserves, ecotourism and hideaways
Private individuals and international organizations are actively purchasing the large scale of lands in empty regions for the purpose of nature conservation and of ecotourism.
4. SEZs, large-scale infrastructure works, urban extensions
Owing to globalization as well as an increase of international investments, national governments, particularly in Asia, are freeing land for the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and their infrastructure.
5. Large-scale tourist complexes
The rapidly growing investments in large-scale tourist complexes and the attractive investment arrangements in this field result in the global land grabs.
6. Retirement and residential migration
The rapid increase in retirement or residential migration contributes to land grab. Due to the higher cost of living, much of people at the age of fifty-five years old or over are searching for a comfortable life with the lower cost of living as well as the sunny environment.
7. Land purchases by migrants in their countries of origin
Land purchases by migrants in their countries of origin also cause the land grab. International migrants living temporarily or permanently in Europe, the United States of America and other regions are buying lands in their home countries.

Who involved in the process of land grab?
The enabling policies of the international institutions is indeed provoking this current trend. They facilitate the process of land grab, whereby carrying out the extensive purchases of land and promoting rhetoric that the land grab deals could be a win-win situation both for investors and for host countries. One obvious instance is the International Financial Corporation (IFC). IFC is a private sector of the World Bank Group. It aims at financing private investments in developing countries by giving advices to governments and firms as well as promoting the business enabling environments in these countries. Furthermore, policy reforms have been constantly promoted by IFC in developing world so as to eliminate rules that could obstruct foreign direct investment.

In addition to international institutions, land grabs were taken placed in states where governance of the land sector and tenure security are weak. Governments in countries such as Madagascar, Sudan, Ethiopia, Cambodia and Vietnam are seen unable to provide tenure security or formal land markets or even social safety nets which would establish order and protect national territory.

Regarding the role of the nation state in land deals, there are four important arguments. First, states are not simply passive victims in these deals, and that they are not forced to access foreign capital by selling off pieces of their national territory to more powerful economic or political players. In fact, several states are active, that is, they calculate partners in land deals and negotiate costs and benefits of the contemporary moment so as to maximize returns on what are considered marginal lands or marginal communities.

Second, it is argue that states do not divide neatly into those acquiring land and those being acquired. They usually act against each other in order to mediate access to land. According to Madeleine Fairbairn, domestic elites draw on different kinds of authority to provide assistance or obstacles to would-be buyers. Third, it is argues that governments around the world have relatively various responses to land deals. For instance, Brazil restored more strict regulations on foreign land ownership while Mozambique agreed on the large-scale land deals with foreign buyers.

The fourth argument emphasizes on the articulation of different kinds of power within the state. It is

argued that state leaders may use military, police, courts and shadowy elements such as paramilitary forces or narcotics traffickers to conduct implementation and regulation of land deals. Jacobo Grajales points out the multi-faceted expression of state force in Colombia. The President of Colombia established the Victims' Law to grant compensation to victims of the long-lasting armed conflict while simultaneously encouraged a rapid development and an expansion of oil palm plantations, most of which are fostered by the same narcotics traffickers and paramilitary groups who maintain violence on smallholding peasants in the first place.

III. THE CONCEPT OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The concept of food sovereignty was first initiated in the 1990s by La Vía Campesina. It emphasized that any food policy discussion ignoring food producers, particularly its peasant membership, would fail to eradicate poverty and hunger. Furthermore, it stated that "Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security".

Food sovereignty is put forward by La Vía Campesina in order to strategically challenge food security, which is a concept formed neoliberal globalization and corporate food regime. According to McMichael, food sovereignty targets power structures which legitimize elite control over agriculture. Since then, there has been an emergence of a worldwide food sovereignty movement which is active at the local, national, and international levels.

The term "food sovereignty" is not commonly used in Asia. Although some of the principles of food sovereignty are not recognized, some of them are deeply rooted in agricultural practices. In South East Asia, the Thai Government promotes and emphasizes a self-reliance philosophy. Land reform and the reconciliation state land structures with customary governance are the key political issue. Food sovereignty is protected land tenure systems which encompass access to water sources, shores, and sea. Social contract is recognized in agriculture and in caring for productive resources such as land and water. Clare Slatter, an academic, argues that customary ownership of land is the one thing that stands between people of the Pacific Islands and hunger. Without land, people will be impoverished and totally dispossessed and will lose sovereignty over food. However, customary ownership of land obstructs economic growth and development.

Harriet Friedmann argues that achieving food sovereignty is complex. Friedmann points out two main problems. On the one hand, sustainable mixed farming regarding food sovereignty confronts many obstacles such as loss of farmland, low farmer incomes, mismatch between crops grown and crops appropriate for an urban market, and the political clout of industrial farmers. On the other hand, a small number of non-farmers have little contact with farming or farmers even though many of them support food sovereignty. Despite these obstacles, Friedmann argues that renewing food and farming depends on bringing all kinds of people such as consumers, growers, and everyone in between into new and increasingly conscious relationships with each other and with land. These relationships must renew agriculture, find a new policy hinge, base green economic renewal on agro-food, promote food literacy and skills through education, and rebuild regional infrastructure.

In Food Sovereignty in Canada: Creating Just and Sustainable Food Systems, Hannah Whittman, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, and Nettie Wiebe argue that achieving food sovereignty in Canada depends on some fundamental changes in domestic and trade policies, diets, food cultures, view of the country in the wider world, and many of relationships to each other and environments. In this regard, they propose that the adoption of a food sovereignty paradigm would contribute to the implementation of four policy pillars: incorporating agricultural policy into a broad and comprehensive national food policy, investing in inclusive and bottom-up policy development, entrenching the right to food in the constitution, and orienting new agricultural policy toward local food systems and environmental sustainability. Under such policy, food chains would give way to healthy, integrated, just and sustainable food webs featuring complexity, connectivity, and interdependence, while recognizing our fundamental dependence on nature.

IV. LAND GRAB IN CAMBODIA

The problem of chronic hunger and malnutrition are more noticeable in Cambodia as the level of affluence and concentration of wealth has increased. Although Cambodia's economic growth has increased due to the booms in the tourism, garment manufacturing, and real estate sectors, not everyone has received benefits from these booms. It is claimed that agriculture and fisheries, which are essentially important for Cambodians, have taken huge blows from free-market policies, privatization, and liberalization. The private sector has been aggressively promoted in every possible area. Most state assets are totally privatized. Practically, there is no public investment in agriculture, support services for small - hold food producers, and regulation regarding production, procurement, and marketing of food. The Cambodian government has merely introduced temporary measures such as control of

rice retail prices and imposition of export bans during emergency time. However, the fate of food producers mostly depends on private traders who command the quantity they buy and the price they purchase it for.

According to a food security and humanitarian assessment by the WFP in 2007, the majority of provinces in Cambodia were found chronically food insecure. It points out that 4.6 million individuals living below the poverty line as chronically food insecure, and that about 2.6 million living in extreme poverty as likely to face food deprivation. It is believed that landlessness, homelessness, and poverty are the resulted of land-grabbing in rural and urban areas facilitated by ruling elites. Foreign corporations receive huge areas of fertile agricultural lands and forests (ranging from 10,000 to 300,000 hectares) as economic land concessions to under long leases for industrial tree plantations, agro-fuel and cash crop production, tourism, golf courses, luxury housing. It is said that South Korean companies are allowed to build entire townships for domestic and foreign business people and wealthy retirees.

Not only foreign companies have been taking lands in Cambodia, but growing domestic middle class has also jumped in the bandwagon. They buy up land from rural families which cannot endure the increasing costs of agricultural production, health care, and food. It is claimed that several Cambodia's bilateral donors such as China, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Australia have also received benefits through exclusive contracts for infrastructure, energy, and mining projects. The Cambodian Government continues to promote rapid economic growth and private investment as preferred development strategies even though World Bank and the Northern donors have warned them about the nontransparent nature of concession agreements.

Sugarcane is considered one of the leading boom crops which drives land grab in Cambodia crazy nowadays. Sugar industry in Cambodia has been rapidly expanded over the last two years given that private companies for industrial sugarcane production have granted more than 80,000 hectares in land concessions. According to rights observers, they have documented serious and widespread human rights abuses and environmental damage caused by these companies affecting more than 12,000 people.

Sugarcane concessions case studies are all related Ly Yong Phat, one of Cambodia's most influential businessmen and a senator from the ruling Cambodian People's Party. It can be said that Ly Yong Phat and his affiliated companies have deliberately disrespected laws given to his connection. The 2001 Land Law restricts the size of land concessions to 10,000 hectares. It also prohibits any single individual from controlling an interest in separate concessions over a surface area greater than 10,000 hectares. Attempting to violate the 2001 Land Law, Ly Yong Phat possesses or has interests at least 60,000 hectares of land in sugar concessions and the additional 14,100 hectares for unspecified agro-industrial development. In this way, it can be said that his companies and affiliates do not respect other key safeguards in the law that regulates Economic Land Concessions, including respecting the land rights of legal landholders; consulting with affected communities; conducting environmental and social impact assessments before beginning operations; avoiding or minimizing harmful impacts; and respecting environmental regulations.

Land grabs in three provinces of Cambodia; Koh Kong province, Kampong Speu province and Oddar Meanchey province, indicate a change in land-use concerns with the conversion of the forest lands or the lands previously used for food production, subsistence and domestic consumption to produce food for export. These case studies in Koh Kong province and Kampong Speu province, describe lands previously devoted to food production are converted to food production for export. This is the land-use change which has been the focus of the current global land grab. Nevertheless, the case of sugar plantation in Oddar Meanchey province is more distinct than the other two case studies mentioned above. Here, the land-use change represents lands previously devoted to forest or other non-food purpose being transformed into food production for export. There were efforts to establish Community Forestry in Bos Village since 2006 but the Angkor Sugar Company plantation, unfortunately, extends over a large part of Community Forestry in the area.

Sugar exports from Cambodia to European Union currently benefits from special status under a preferential trade scheme called "Everything But Arms" (EBA). In this way, goods produced in Cambodia are allowed to be exported to the EU without import duties or quotas, including at a guaranteed minimum price in the case of sugar. It appears that EBA is not benefiting the poor as it is intended. The EBA initiative is fuelling the expansion of an industry involved with gross human rights abuses. Tycoons in Cambodia such asLy Yong Phat and his affiliated companies are benefitting from it where as local communities across Cambodia have been dispossessed and impoverished by them. Although there are human rights safeguard provisions within European trade regulations, the brakes have not been applied in Cambodia where abuses are widespread.

Land concessions have contributed to forced evictions, land seizures, forest clearance and increased militarization in the area. This affects more than 2000 families in two districts. It is reported that

two representatives of the affected communities have been sentenced to jail for two years for criminal offences whereas others have been escaping the arrest. Likewise, two other community representatives were found not guilty. Although they were released, they both served more than 6 months in jail in pre-trial detention.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia stated that economic land concessions, particularly for sugarcane plantations, is relatedly causing forced evictions and other serious human rights abuses.

The abuses contains violations of the right of self-determination, the right to work, the right to food, the right to adequate housing, the right to health, the right to education, the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to privacy of the home, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to equal protection before the law.

CONCLUSION

In several developing countries as in Cambodia, people affected from land grabs were forced by local or foreign investors to leave or sell their lands. Accordingly, many of them became displaced or homeless. Hunger and poverty are the results of land grabs given that their lands were taken.

There are no alternatives for them in order to feed themselves and their families. This has an ultimate impact on food sovereignty. Land grab by food-importing states as a mean to achieve food security affects food sovereignty in the targeted countries, especially in developing countries. Thus, although food-insecure states may achieve their goal through land-grabbing for food production, developing countries remain food-insecure and their food sovereignty has been affected.

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