

REDEFINING FOOD SECURITY IN THE FACE OF FOREIGN LAND INVESTORS: THE PHILIPPINE CASE

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Abstract

The Philippines is a country targeted by foreign investors seeking agricultural land. It is promoting itself to them in the hope of securing their business. These investors frequently use food security language to justify their competitive pursuit of scarce agricultural resources in poorer countries on the basis of shoring up their own domestic food supplies. The usual understanding of food security in economic terms of supply, demand and competition largely validates these strategies. Instead, this paper proposes to redefine food security in terms of protecting vulnerable populations from the structural violence of involuntary hunger. By viewing food security in terms of hunger, it becomes clear that the land deals are more likely to worsen than improve the situation for the Filipino rural poor. Rethinking food security this way also offers the opportunity to re-examine the challenges facing Philippine agriculture. This new framing is particularly instructive for thinking about alternative approaches to applying foreign agricultural investment in ways that not only benefit the rural poor and alleviate involuntary hunger but also increase overall food availability, including surpluses for export.

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Biography

Ben Shepherd is a PhD candidate in the Centre for International Security Studies (CISS) at the University of Sydney. His research is examining the trend towards the acquisition of agricultural land in developing countries by wealthier countries seeking to hedge against food scarcity risks. He is focusing on how these land deals are driven by state security concerns at the same time as creating new security and political dilemmas for the states hosting the investments. Ben has a Master's degree in international studies and a Bachelor's degree with honours in industrial design. In 2009, he was awarded the University of Sydney Hedley Bull scholarship in international relations. Prior to embarking on his PhD, Ben spent 15 years as a corporate executive in the high-security technology sector, dealing mainly with government agencies and financial institutions around the world. Ben is an occasional blogger at www.insight-in-security.com and can be contacted by email at ben@insight-in-security.com

This paper seeks to challenge the usual conceptualisation of food security. It proposes to re-frame 'food security' from being primarily an economic problem to being a security problem, not on the basis of international conflicts over food-producing resources – which are rare – but on the basis of protecting vulnerable populations from the structural violence of chronic involuntary hunger – which is common and widespread. This re-framing seeks to shift the focus of food security strategies away from economic actors and mechanisms, and to place the poor and vulnerable at the centre of consideration instead.

The case for redefining food security is made using the example of the Philippines and how it is handling the contemporary wave of foreign investors seeking access to its agricultural land. Despite a prevalent discourse that prioritises the interests of the rural poor, Philippine government policies favour the interests of foreign investors over those of its vulnerable constituents. An assessment of the challenges facing the Filipino agricultural sector suggests that these are not likely to be met by privileging the foreign investors' interests. Redefining food security to place the poor at the centre of analysis proves to be valuable in examining the existing weaknesses as well as considering alternative approaches. Extending the analysis to existing opportunities within the Philippine agricultural sector lends support to this contention.

Conceptual Framework

Food security is generally defined and treated as an economic problem. Despite many definitions, most contemporary uses of the term are consistent with the one used by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the peak international body tasked with the responsibility of overseeing global food security:

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010, p.8)

For the FAO, this is an aspirational mission statement in striving to reduce global hunger, but this definition primarily establishes the concept as an economic one. It defines food security as a problem of supply (of sufficient, nutritious food) and demand (to meet the dietary needs of all people at all times) and making supply available to meet demand (by physical, social and economic means of access). Indeed, the term food security is most frequently used to describe the challenge of providing food for a society – a challenge based on competition for scarce resources in an increasingly resource-constrained world.¹ This definition, and the common conception of food security, are focused on the *availability* of food.

The use of 'food security' language to mean 'food availability' is used by many actors. Food security is referred to in international law, particularly in relation to human rights.² It is spoken of by practitioners of the health sciences in relation to nutrition.³ It is used by agricultural

¹ For example, see *World Investment Report* (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2009) and *Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa* (UNCTAD, 2008) and in the agricultural trade policies of the World Trade Organization (2002).

² The right to food is codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Cultural and Economic Rights.

³ For example, see the strategic objectives of the World Health Organization (2009).

scientists in developing technologies that enhance crop yields or increase resilience to shocks such as drought, flood and plague⁴ and by commercial enterprises in the exploitation of the same.⁵ Used by these actors to suit their own interests, food security becomes political language.⁶ It is especially politicised when it is brandished to justify the pursuit and control of resources, to legitimise actions or policies, and to advance political agendas.

One of the predominant uses of food security language for political purposes has been to justify and promulgate the neoliberal policies of wealthy agricultural producer states arguing for free trade. Such policies benefit their own agricultural sectors often at the expense of poor countries who, by the true logic of free trade, should be the ones best able to compete in (supposedly) low-tech sectors such as agriculture.⁷ As such, the economic concept of food security is used to privilege the interests of certain actors, sometimes at the expense of others – including people whose lives or well-being are at risk due to the inability to access adequate food.

Today, the economic framing of food security is being used to justify another set of policies that privilege political and financial interests of the powerful and wealthy. Food security – or more precisely, food availability – is being positioned as a strategic concern for states, especially by a small number of wealthy states, often with distributive regimes whose own security is predicated on the continuous prosperity of their constituents. To overcome constraints on domestic agriculture and to reduce vulnerability to unpredictable prices and supply from the global market, these states are seeking agricultural land in other countries.

Largely via corporate proxies, these wealthy states are targeting developing countries for cheap, underperforming resources. Their purpose is to export production back to their local market with the dual aim of securing food supplies and generating profits. On one hand, the government policies that facilitate such transactions offer the opportunity for much-needed investment in the agricultural sectors of the Philippines and other developing countries. On the other, they have become widely known and criticised as global 'land grabs'.⁸

One major criticism is that the developing countries targeted by these investors often have domestic food availability problems greater than those experienced (if any at all) by the investors. Whether the outcomes of these deals are ultimately more good than bad for the rural poor in the host country is likely to depend on how the deals are governed and implemented.

The academic exercise of redefining food security is not a substitute for good governance and the implementation of best practices. However, it can help encourage governance and implementation practices to focus on the interests of the poor and chronically hungry. This is especially important when the existing paradigm is widely used to privilege the interests of the

⁴ For example, food security is mentioned in the mission statement of the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutes (2010) and discussed by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (<http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk>).

⁵ For example, see the corporate responsibility statement of the Cargill transnational food corporation (2010).

⁶ The use of the term, 'food security' by agricultural science and chemical corporations is particularly politicised when it is used to seek funding for the development of patentable technologies and to legitimise certain profitable technical solutions over alternative (for example, organic) strategies.

⁷ The Australian government's bipartisan support for developing country food security policies prioritises international free trade over other forms of realising surety in local food supplies. Policy statements under the Rudd (Brown, 2008), Howard (Freeman et al., 2000), Keating (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1996) and Hawke (Mauldon, 1986) governments clearly support Australia's vested interest as a major agricultural exporter.

⁸ For a collection of sources, see <http://www.farmlandgrab.org>.

financially and politically powerful. An alternative security-centric conceptualisation of food security can offer a framework for encouraging pro-poor outcomes from these land deals in particular and better outcomes in the pursuit of national food availability and hunger reduction objectives in general. By placing the actors experiencing, or at risk of, the structural violence of poverty and hunger at the centre of analysis, the locus of food security decision-making can be shifted away from economic institutions to the populations at risk from chronic involuntary hunger.

Food Security Redefined

Food security can be redefined in terms of *protecting vulnerable populations from the structural violence of poverty and hunger*. This definition places the vulnerable at the centre of analysis, and in doing so illuminates the responsibility of political and economic actors – including, but not exclusively, the state – with the power to address sources of hunger and poverty. This definition also provides a basis against which food security strategies can be evaluated and limits the potential for appropriating them in pursuit of other interests, for example, by framing questions such as: ‘does the policy (or contract, or deal, or action) address vulnerability to involuntary hunger prior to addressing any other goal?’

Further, by broadening the focus beyond the economic aspects of the problem, this definition encourages the exploration of alternative strategies, including non-economic interventions. It also enables the legitimate evaluation of protective economic tools, including those which are rejected by conventional economic discourse. To be clear, the definition does not deny, elide or negate the central economic aspects of food availability and distribution, nor the key roles that markets and enterprises play in production and the delivery of supply to meet demand. However, the proposed security-centric approach ensures that powerful economic actors are not prioritised over other stakeholders, especially those vulnerable to the structural violence of poverty and hunger.

Structural Violence

The concept of structural violence as defined by Galtung (1969) is physical harm to humans by other humans but caused by institutional, rather than personal, forces. This distinguishes it from harm consciously directed by humans, such as an attack by a person or persons against others, and from harm caused by non-human forces, such as natural catastrophe or disease. Conventional definitions of security have limited its scope to threats – including ones real, perceived or intentionally articulated for political purposes – that are consciously directed by humans.

Given that so much of security policy, and the vast resources dedicated to it, is invested in addressing the threat – or perceptions thereof – of potential harm from other human actors, it is a lacuna in security thinking that so little capacity is invested in addressing the causes of real, actual and continuing physical harm caused by humans against others but by structural, rather than personal, forces.

The proposal to consider structural violence (especially of poverty and hunger) as a security issue raises an important question: at what point does something become a security, rather than simply a social, problem? The answer lies in the nature of the social contract. According to Hobbes (1651) and Rousseau (1762), security and freedom are opposites that are traded off in the negotiation of the social contract. Individuals renounce freedoms, especially the right to use violence, in return for the collective security of the state. As a result of this bargain, obligations

are placed on the state (or more specifically, the regime that governs it) to provide that security in return. Protection from consciously directed human threats (whether arising from criminals or foreign aggressors) is the common interpretation of the obligations inherent in the social contract. However, since individuals have relinquished freedoms – especially the right to use violence – to achieve, for example, the economic capacity to feed, clothe, shelter, educate and maintain the health of their families, it follows that protection from human-made forces that prevent attainment of those things should also be an obligation of the social contract.⁹

If a state has the capacity to handle problems of poverty and hunger, or indeed other manifestations of structural violence, through normal means (for example, social welfare or judicial processes) then the problems are not failures of the social contract, nor are they security problems. However, if the problems are extensive enough to impinge on the capacity of the state or to challenge the legitimacy of the regime, they are indicative of a substantial failure in meeting obligations of the social contract and should be treated as security issues.

Some are likely to argue that threats to a state from another state actor (or sub-state actors such as terrorists) are more compelling than, say, the threat of chronic involuntary hunger. However, for a state trapped in poverty and underdevelopment, the continued prevalence of poverty and hunger limits its current and future capacity and constrains its ability to increase its resilience against more traditional security threats such as political challenge, internal organised violence or vulnerability to external attack. This is particularly relevant to the Philippines which, despite its democratic institutions, has a government that experiences real legitimacy challenges and lacks convincing sovereignty over some of its territory. Even for stronger states, poverty and hunger in neighbouring states can create more conventional security threats such as the risk of large-scale unregulated population movements or radicalisation. The structural violence of poverty and hunger also has the potential to create risks for the wealthiest states if they are perceived to be complicit in the structures behind that structural violence.

The world currently produces more food than the total global population requires and demands. Regardless of the continued overconsumption in the wealthiest countries, it will continue to do so for the next couple of decades, according to FAO data (2002, 2009b). Thus it is not production capacity but the economic and political paradigms – which are entirely human constructions – that control how food is allocated and mean some people have surplus food while others go hungry.

Widespread, chronic involuntary hunger as an example of structural violence is a theme in many works by Amartya Sen, starting from *Poverty and Famines* (1981). It is an important argument of Davis' revisionist history of British imperialism in India (2001); it is a common case put forward by political economists (for example, Anderson, 2007) and argued by anti-poverty advocates and scholars such as Vandana Shiva (2002).

The inadequacies of the economic-centric framing of food security are evident because widespread, chronic involuntary hunger continues despite at least six decades of global co-operation dedicated to addressing it within the FAO's food availability paradigm.^{10,11}

⁹ This does not oblige the state to provide food, shelter, education or healthcare (although neither does it deny the state from doing so) but it does oblige the state to protect citizens against human actions that prevent them from accessing, achieving and pursuing such.

¹⁰ Another criticism of the FAO's definition is that it is defined in the absolute – 'for all people at all times' – making it an idealistic, if not impossible, goal.

The land deals explored in this paper also tend to be treated largely as an economic concern. For the host country's government, land is a source of foreign investment. For the foreign investor, it is underexploited capital. For both, control over the land is a zero-sum game, to the exclusion of others depending on that land. As such, the land deals have considerable political and social consequences as well. One value of applying the security-centric definition of food security when exploring these land deals is that none of these consequences are ignored, yet the focus remains narrow: the role of empowered and responsible actors in protecting the vulnerable from poverty and involuntary hunger.

The Philippine Case

The Philippines faces a problem of poverty and chronic involuntary hunger.¹² Most recent national figures (as of 2006) place some 27.6 million Filipinos (32.9%) in poverty based on an annual poverty threshold income of PhP15,000 or US\$340 – not even \$1 per day (Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board, 2008). The Australian Agency for International Development (2010) estimates the number of Filipinos living on less than \$1.25 per day at over 40 million, or about 42% of the population of 94 million. A breakdown of the national poverty statistics (using the Philippine poverty line) shows that 16% of urban Filipinos live in poverty compared to 44% of farmers who live in poverty (Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board, 2009).¹³ These statistics speak of the daily struggle for millions of Filipinos to afford essentials and to feed, shelter and clothe their families.

This is also reflected in the statistics of chronic involuntary hunger. The FAO (2009a) estimates some 12.7 million (approximately 15%) of the Philippine population in 2006 were chronically undernourished. In three consecutive national biannual surveys taken by Philippine research institution Social Weather Stations (2010), over 20% experienced moderate involuntary hunger during the preceding quarter. In June 2010, that figure was 21.1%, or an estimated 4 million families. Of this number, 800,000 families experienced 'severe' involuntary hunger; that is, when the lack of enough food to eat happens on a regular basis (Mangahas, 2010). These illustrate the problems of structural violence that exists in the Philippines, as foreign investors come seeking land.

In the context of food availability, one of the problems with the entrance of foreign investors seeking land is that the Philippines is already reliant on foreign staples – primarily rice but also corn – to meet its basic needs. It does not have the capacity to produce enough to bolster another nation's food availability. Despite a large agricultural sector,¹⁴ a third of which is devoted to rice,¹⁵ the Philippines is the world's largest importer of rice. This makes the use of domestic 'food security' as the justification for a wealthy country's pursuit of Philippine rice lands hard to defend: the Philippines is at least as threatened by price and supply shocks in the global market (especially for rice) as the foreign investor.

¹¹ Shaw (2007) provides an excellent history of this global co-operation and an assessment of its inadequacies.

¹² The Philippines is well-off compared to many African countries that are also land deal targets. Its nominal per capita GDP in 2008 of US\$1,847 is higher than countries such as Sudan (\$1,353) and Tanzania (\$496) (World Bank, 2010a). In 2007 Human Development Index rankings, it sits at 105 compared to Sudan and Tanzania which were at 150 and 151 respectively (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Nevertheless, it still struggles with a considerable problem of poverty and food insecurity.

¹³ The absolute number of people living in urban poverty, however, is 6.8 million, which is significantly higher than the 2.1 million farmers living in poverty (Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board, 2009).

¹⁴ It employs over 12 million people, or 34% of the total workforce (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 2010).

¹⁵ Four and a half million hectares (Ha) out of a total of 13 million Ha of agricultural land are devoted to rice production (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 2010).

That said, the discourse around the foreign land deals has become more sophisticated than just using domestic ‘food security’ as the justification. An entire legitimising narrative has arisen that describes the investments as win-win opportunities, where investors achieve food availability by gaining the surety of long-term food supplies while host countries reap developmental benefits of infrastructure, employment, income and markets – and thus, supposedly, food security. Moreover, a discourse community¹⁶ has developed in which divergent interests of states and corporations converge in collective support of this narrative to further their own individual agendas. Intriguingly, the parties in this discourse community include not only investing states, their corporate proxies¹⁷ and other opportunistic investors jumping on the bandwagon in search of speculative profits,¹⁸ but also governments of the host countries, including that of the Philippines.^{19,20} However, the situation in the Philippines is more complex than suggested by this discourse. On one hand, there is the indisputable need for substantial investment in the agricultural sector. But on the other, the investments being promoted by foreign land-seekers and encouraged by the Philippine government are unlikely to deliver on the win-win rhetoric.

There are two important aspects to consider concerning land deals in the country. One is the role the government is playing in promoting the deals, favouring the interests of investors over the interests of its own constituents. The other is the challenges facing its agricultural sector – which include the dire need for investment – and the impacts of land deal investments on agrarian communities in light of those challenges. While foreign land investors are an excellent source of investment funds, a major problem is how these might be best managed to address the challenges facing Philippine agriculture, including the poverty and hunger prevalent in the sector. Rethinking food security in terms of hunger offers a valuable way to approach this problem. Essentially, investment needs to achieve two things. One is the development of rural areas in terms of reducing poverty and improving the opportunities for, and economic options of, the rural poor. The other is to increase productivity and predictability of production. The latter will alleviate vulnerability to price and supply fluctuations of key imported staples, has social and political value in achieving self-sufficiency in rice production, and should develop greater capacity for export earnings from agriculture. Altogether, these strengthen food security by increasing the protection of Filipinos from poverty and the risk of chronic involuntary hunger as well as improving overall food availability.

¹⁶ A discourse community is made up of disparate actors that, finding they share common goals, coalesce around a shared discourse that increases their individual chances of achieving those goals (Swales, 1987).

¹⁷ The Qatari Sovereign Wealth Fund, for example, owns and controls the major food and agricultural firm, Hassad Food (see Hassad Food, 2010).

¹⁸ BKK Australia, which is led by former Australian government treasurer Peter Costello, is reported to be operating an investment programme worth US\$600 million in Cambodian farmlands (Finch, 2010; Socheat, 2010). New York’s Jarch Capital acquired 800,000 Ha in deals with warlords in Southern Sudan in 2009 (Lavalley, 2009; Sudan Tribune, 2009). This is over 4% of Sudan’s total arable land (<http://faostat.fao.org/default.aspx>).

¹⁹ These include Sudan’s Minister of Finance Tarek Shalabi (Kielburger, 2009) and Minister of Agriculture Dr Abdul Halim Ismail Al-Mutaafie (Sudan Tribune, 2010), the Republic of Congo’s President Denis Sassou-Nguesso (Parsons, 2009); Zambia’s Foreign Minister Kabinga Pande (UK Zambia, 2010) and the previous Philippine Secretary for Agriculture, Arthur Yap.

²⁰ This discourse community arose in response to the strident criticisms on the earliest examples of these deals. The deals were originally publicised and criticised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other advocates indignant about the risks of exploitation and the repression of the rights of the host countries’ agrarian poor. With a high risk for the exploitation of the rural poor and the perpetuation of structural violence against them, foreign acquisitions of farmlands were labelled as ‘land grabs’ and condemned as a modern form of colonialism (Madoffe, 2009; Monbiot, 2008; Petras, 2008). A recent, wide-reaching and thoroughly researched investigation of the land grab phenomenon by the World Bank (2010b) has done little to quell the adversarial debate, as it simultaneously acknowledges the risks to the poor while legitimising the deals as an appropriate strategy for investors.

Philippine Government Policy

Mostly, the new wave of foreign investors seeking land is still doing just that: seeking. There are only a handful of operational projects, largely in the fruit export sector. Despite impressions made by the press, most of the large-scale deals are still at the exploratory stage. Nevertheless, the government's dialogue and negotiations with large-scale investors are well-established.

Not only is there bipartisan political support for foreign investors, but both the previous Arroyo administration and the present Aquino government are actively promoting the Philippines to host land-based foreign investments. Arroyo and her Secretary for Agriculture, Arthur Yap, were notable for courting Middle Eastern states to invest in Philippine land. Press coverage during a state visit to the Arabian Gulf region reported that Arroyo was offering 2 million hectares (Ha) of 'new' agricultural land to investors from these countries and offering extended lease terms that are well beyond the maximum possible under existing laws (Estimo, 2010; Stephenson, 2009).

The Arroyo administration established the Philippine Agricultural Development and Commercial Corporation (PADCC), an agency within the Department of Agriculture (DA), specifically to match foreign investors to so-called available agricultural lands (Philippine Agriculture Development and Commercial Corporation, 2010). The Board of Investors (BOI) within the Department of Trade and Industry was tasked with identifying investors and promoting the Philippines to them. The Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) was tasked with establishing agribusiness as one of its priority sectors. In addition, the Biofuels Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2006) and accompanying executive orders (Office of the President, 2008b) were passed into law, proactively facilitating corporate-led cultivation of biofuel crops and production of biofuels by foreign investors.²¹ The push towards biofuels is also evidenced by BOI's (2010a) prioritisation of biofuel crops such as jatropha for foreign investment.^{22,23}

Although aspects of the laws and policies within the legislature have been criticised,²⁴ there has been no change in policy under the Aquino government. Since taking office, the president has made no official policy statements regarding this issue and the agencies continue to work on these projects without any change in policy direction.

Considering the national importance of agriculture and the ad hoc jurisprudence that has developed through periods of colonialism, authoritarianism and democracy, the legal frameworks within which these deals take place are convoluted.²⁵ There are the broad regulations controlling foreign investment which include the Omnibus Investments Code (Office of the President, 1987), the Trade Liberalization Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2000)

²¹ These were further reinforced by Arroyo's 2008 Renewable Energy Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2008) and relevant policy implementation rules such as those published by the Department of Energy (2007, 2009).

²² A key problem with the cultivation of biofuel crops is that it competes with food crops for scarce land and water. Others have written extensively on this issue (Borras, 2010; Tokar, 2007). The question is whether foreigners' exploitation of Philippine land for cultivating jatropha or using sugarcane, corn or cassava crops for biofuel production can help achieve national goals such as hunger and poverty reduction and improved food availability.

²³ The cultivation of renewable energy crops such as jatropha, as well as sugarcane, corn and cassava for bioethanol are classified by BOI separately from agriculture, whose priorities include tropical fruits and juices, but not rice or corn.

²⁴ The criticisms of outspoken agriculturalist and congressman Rafael Mariano are notable (See House of Representatives, 2009).

²⁵ In addition, there are also the usual business regulations such as taxation, trade practices, and competition and labour laws.

and the Foreign Investment Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1991) and its subsequent parliamentary amendments (Republic of the Philippines, 1995a, 1995b). These are further shaped by executive orders such as the regular *Foreign Investment Negative List* (Office of the President, 2008a)²⁶ and by directives from agencies including the BOI, PEZA and others (for example, see Board of Investors, 2010b).

Then there are also various bodies of laws pertaining to agriculture and land control. The responsibility for these is spread across multiple agencies including the Departments of Agriculture; Agrarian Reform (DAR); Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Different sets of legislation are central to each of their functions, for example, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (Republic of the Philippines, 1988) and its subsequent amendments and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1997a). These all work within the paradigm of broader land laws, particularly the Public Lands Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1937) and its myriad amendments,²⁷ as well as the principles for the treatment of lands as laid out in the 1987 post-Marcos Constitution.

The workings of this legal system are further complicated by the roles of the various levels of government. For example, *barangay* (village), municipal and provincial governments all have roles and responsibilities in terms of local agriculture and land use. Similarly, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has the ability to pass its own legislation that overrides national code in a number of relevant areas including land reform, export and agriculture.

Understanding this complex legal environment is crucial for thinking about food security and alleviating hunger in the Philippines because there is substantial divergence – indeed sometimes contradiction – between the spirit, text and practice of the law. This arises from the broad sources of jurisprudence; the disparate agendas of the policy-making and implementing bodies; and the gaps between practice and discourse. An example is Arroyo's ability to offer 75-year leases despite constitutional provisions limiting leases to 25 years (and the possibility of a 25-year extension). This illustrates how the government privileges foreign capital, notwithstanding rhetoric around protection of the rural poor.

The Philippine Constitution provides another example. It states that:

At the earliest possible time, the Government shall expropriate idle or abandoned agricultural lands as may be defined by law, for distribution to the beneficiaries of the agrarian reform program. (Republic of the Philippines, 1987 Article XVIII, Section 22)

It is explicit that idle and unproductive lands cannot be used for any other purpose other than redistribution to landless farmers. This is in evident contradiction to the programmes of the DENR (2010), BOI (2010a), DA and the PADCC (2010) which offer 'idle' and 'abandoned' lands to foreign investors.

²⁶ The negative list defines activities from which foreign participation is excluded and defines the limits on foreign shareholdings for various sectors.

²⁷ Amendments include Republic Acts 2864, 3164, 3219, 3346 and 3517.

Similar contradictions are apparent from a variety of regulatory documents. The Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 (Republic of the Philippines, 1997b), agrarian reform laws, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act,²⁸ and especially the Constitution all embrace a spirit of social justice for the country's poor.²⁹ Other documents, however, are strongly neoliberal in spirit, prioritising the interests of corporations and capital-holders. The Foreign Investment Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1991 section 2, para. 2) states, 'as a general rule, there are no restrictions on extent of foreign ownership of export enterprises'; while the *Primer on Investment Policies in the Philippines* (Board of Investors, 2010c) grants foreign investors the 'right to repatriation of investment' and 'right to remittance of earnings'. These imply the subordination of other unwritten claims, such as the right of Filipinos to reinvest profits in their country, to the claims of the foreign corporation. They point to a conundrum where neoliberal, pro-corporation, policies are applied in pursuit of pro-poor, pro-social justice outcomes. In practice, this means that hardworking bureaucrats in many government agencies – who, throughout the course of interviews for this paper were working with a genuine desire to deliver the best possible outcomes for their rural compatriots – attempt to do so via tools such as significant tax exemptions for foreign corporations (for example, the fiscal incentives in Board of Investors, 2010a) and a largely unfettered ability to remit profits and production out of the country.

In the course of interviewing stakeholders of the land deals, more contradictions came to light. For example, while legislation consistently limits foreign investors to a 40% equity stake in enterprises owning land (Office of the President, 2008a; Republic of the Philippines, 1987, 1991), one of the agencies explained that in practice, prospective investors are allowed 100% foreign-owned activity on lands deemed idle, unproductive or marginal (Government official, 28 September 2010, interview with author). Similarly, foreign equity participation in an organisation involved in the cultivation, milling, processing and acquiring (for example, for export) of rice and corn or their by-products is limited to 40% by the *Foreign Investment Negative List* (Office of the President, 1973, 2008a). The intention is to protect local production, yet the same agency pointed out that this can be flexible. For example, in the case of a Saudi Arabian investor seeking to produce basmati rice for its domestic market, it would be able to own 100% of the enterprise and export 100% of the production 'because basmati rice is not the rice consumed in the Philippines' (Government official, 28 September 2010, interview with author).³⁰

The privileging of foreign investor interests over those of the rural poor is also borne out by the experience of the early foreign land deals. A peasant advocacy non-governmental organisation (NGO) reported a case in Quezon province where the PADCC granted a foreign investor 2,000 Ha of land that was identified by local authorities as idle and untenured – a claim that was vigorously resisted by the actual occupants when the investors and representatives from the government arrived to commence the project (NGO representative, 1 September, 2010, interview with author).³¹ This example raises the related issue of how the laws are practically applied: that is, the process for determining whether lands are indeed idle. As it was described by one bureaucrat, the process is a physical one. Representatives of an

²⁸ Although sometimes proudly spoken of as a world-leading piece of legislation, this act was also described by an indigenous peoples' rights advocate as 'a second class law: strongly worded, weakly applied' (NGO representative, 17 August 2010, interview with author).

²⁹ The first 18 articles of the Constitution are socially-oriented; the primacy of the pursuit of social justice is specifically laid out in article 10, while management of the economy and the role of the enterprise do not figure until articles 19 and 20, respectively.

³⁰ There is a good reason basmati is not widely consumed in the Philippines: it grows best in Pakistan and India. The Philippines has its own rice varieties, which include the high-quality, long-grain *sinandomeng*, which could potentially compete with basmati rice in foreign markets.

³¹ In the end, the project did not proceed; the reason given by the investor was the global financial crisis.

appropriate agency simply sight the land, and on the basis of visual inspection – ‘whether the vegetation and overgrowth appears to be more than two or three years old’ (Government official, 22 September 2010, interview with author) – the land is determined as being available, even (or especially) for a foreign investor. This process is clearly open to error. It is also prone to corruption.

The confusion between law, policy and practice creates an atmosphere of risk for foreign investors seeking these land deals. Given the Philippines’ strong civil society, a project that goes ahead in breach of laws (or even its principles) and at the expense of local communities might expect to face some form of challenge. While this risk to business could be fortuitously beneficial in deterring bad deals in the first place, it could also hamper other more productive forms of foreign investment in local agriculture. More importantly, the confusion is proof of the power of neoliberal ideas within the system that support the interests of foreign corporate investors, regardless of the constitution and other legislation which espouses the rights of the rural poor.

Prioritising investor interests has implications for both food security and food availability, especially when the country is relying on an economic, neoliberal prescription to address poverty and hunger. There is tension and contradiction between the fulfilment of desired objectives – couched in terms of social justice, rural development, alleviation of poverty and national food security³² – and the privileging of foreign investors, including granting them free reign to the export of produce and repatriation of profits. Redefining food security as proposed offers the opportunity to explore solutions to this challenge by refocusing governance and practice on the needs of the Filipino poor instead of the foreign investors.

The Philippine Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector is one of the country’s largest employers and agriculture the primary source of income and subsistence for a significant part of the population. It is also vital to the social fabric of the country, where most people – even in the dense urban areas – have family back in the provinces and have ties to their own cultural, and agricultural, heritage.

Unfortunately, the agricultural sector suffers from poor productivity and is badly underperforming. Many of its workers live in considerable poverty and are at risk of involuntary hunger, especially in the face of calamity. Agricultural labour is a trap that many people hope to escape by migrating to the cities in search of education and employment. Despite a long-term and largely successful state-led programme of land redistribution, the Philippines has a long history of contestations – sometimes violent and bloody – over agricultural lands. These continue to this day. The rural areas are home to renegade militias³³ and the contestations over land have contributed to the enduring insurgencies which remain a security challenge for the Philippine state.

³² These are the priorities listed in the preamble to the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1997b).

³³ These are primarily the New People’s Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and elements within the Muslim separatist movement in Mindanao. Mindanao is the largest agricultural region of the country and the only area not affected by typhoon, making it a desirable location for foreign investors. The ongoing insurgencies in Mindanao are rooted in centuries-old ethnic and sectarian differences and have been exacerbated by periods when homesteaders arrived from Luzon. The government granted lands in Mindanao to Tagalogs in waves of what became known as ‘land grabs’.

The Challenges

Philippine rice yields are considerably below those of other major rice producers. While Vietnam produces 5.5 metric tonnes (MT) of *palay*³⁴ (unhusked rice) per Ha per year and China over 6.5, the Philippines harvests just 3.7 (FAOSTAT, 2010). Total rice production in the Philippines in 2009 was just over 16 million MT of *palay*, equating to 10.6 million MT of rice (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 2010). In addition to this production, the Philippines purchased 1.8 million MT of rice in 2009, down from 2.4 million MT during the food price crisis in 2008.³⁵ With 4.5 million Ha under cultivation, if yields can be increased to 5.5 MT/Ha³⁶, the country could produce around 25 million MT of *palay* – over 16 million MT of rice – which would leave considerable surplus for export.³⁷ While national food availability may not necessarily be predicated on self-sufficiency, the 2.4 million MT purchased in 2008 cost the Philippine government US\$1.96 billion.³⁸ The rice deficit for the Philippines is a sensitive political issue and self-sufficiency is deeply desired.

That the Philippines is the world's largest importer of rice is a source of national *hiya* (shame, something akin to loss of face). Many Filipinos consider the annual expenditure of more than a billion dollars on rice from other countries as investing in foreign rice farmers at the expense of Filipino peasants and the dearly sought self-sufficiency in rice. Some made allegations of corruption in the rice import dealings as the reason the imports continue instead of the money being invested in Philippine agriculture (NGO representative, 1 September 2010, and academic, 15 September 2010, interviews with author).³⁹ Even rice farmers said that while they would appreciate a guaranteed export market for their crop, they could not sell it to a foreign buyer until the Philippines had enough home-grown rice for its domestic consumption (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 19 and 20 September 2010, interviews with author).

Less politically sensitive is the fact that the Philippines is also an importer of its other major granary staple, corn; despite the fact that it, too, is one of the country's major domestic crops (with over 7 million MT produced on 2.6 million Ha of land per year). The poor productivity in Philippine rice and corn fields has significant effects on food availability in terms of the surety of national supplies, and on food security in terms of poor farmer incomes.

Rice and corn as well as sugar are staples desired by foreign land investors both as food products and biofuel feedstock.⁴⁰ However, most of the new foreign land projects underway are in the long-established fruit sector, mainly for the production of bananas, pineapples, coconuts and its derivatives. It is harder for investors to justify these as 'food security' crops either in terms of their domestic market needs or for improving the availability of staples in the Philippines.

³⁴ It takes about 1 kg of *palay* to produce 0.5 kg of milled rice, but according to data from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (2010), 16.2 MT of *palay* produced 10.6 MT of rice in 2009, equating to a ratio of 1:0.65 which is used here.

³⁵ The difference between domestic production in 2008 and 2009 was insignificant, implying that the stockpiled excess from the 2008 imports allowed less to be imported the following year.

³⁶ The Philippine Rice Research Institute (2010) bullishly estimates an average yield of between 7 and 9 MT/Ha is possible, so 5.5 MT/Ha is a conservative target.

³⁷ Having enough surplus for export assumes that the rapid population growth rate will decline, which is unlikely given the Catholic church's power in discouraging badly needed birth control. The increase in productivity will at least provide a buffer against a continually worsening domestic food production shortfall.

³⁸ The Philippine National Food Authority is the agency responsible for these import transactions and negotiated directly with the governments of Vietnam and Thailand for these purchases.

³⁹ PinoyPress (2010b) published similar allegations.

⁴⁰ For example, these are specified by Saudi Arabia's *King Abdullah Initiative for Agricultural Investment Abroad* (Alshareef, 2009).

The lack of investment in Philippine agriculture, which foreign inflows of financial capital have the potential to address, can account for various factors contributing to low agricultural productivity. For example, in the case of small-scale land holdings, investment in mechanisation is expensive and difficult. Although the desire for local communities to share equipment (tractors, sheltered rice driers, etc.) is often present, the physical and social institutions needed to facilitate the sharing – not to mention the financing for the equipment in the first place – are not (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 19 and 20 September 2010, interviews with author).

Lack of adequate, affordable finance is one of the key issues most frequently identified by NGOs. It was also acknowledged by provincial government representatives, who concurred that this small-scale investment was sorely lacking. This problem is not just limited to capital equipment. Interviews with farmers revealed that their ability to farm their lands is also dependent upon having enough cash to be able to afford to buy inputs – seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, and fuel, if they need it for irrigation pumps or, if they are lucky to have one, a hand-pushed powered tiller. It is not uncommon for the poorest of farmers to become indebted to usurers. According to one farmer in Central Luzon, the going rate from local moneylenders in his district was 10% per month, compounding (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 19 and 20 September 2010, interviews with author). Not only are such practices illegal, but they stifle investment in technology and other inputs which could improve productivity yields.

Another area where lack of financial capacity weakens productivity is irrigation. In rice lands, water is vital. The winners of the rice land redistributions were those who received good-sized parcels of the best, flattest lands with channel irrigation that keeps productivity high, without pumping costs, during both the wet and dry growing seasons. Many land reform beneficiaries were not so lucky. Even in the lowlands, most of the land is not perfectly level. Those on higher ground need to pay to run diesel pumps to keep the land irrigated while those on lower ground are at risk of flooding. This means that even while lands might be identified as irrigated – about 68% of Philippine rice lands are so classified (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 2010) – the reality for many farmers and the productivity of their plot is not so clear-cut. If farmers cannot afford to run pumps during the dry season or lose a crop to a flood in the wet season, then their annual income can be halved. While there will always be lands of variable quality, irrigation infrastructure and affordable financing for its operation are investment opportunities that are crucial for improving productivity.

Many farmers, particularly in typhoon-prone Luzon and the Visayas, are particularly vulnerable to *kalamidad* (calamity). In addition to the threat of pests, the rice crop is vulnerable to water damage in the final stages before harvest. If a typhoon strikes before harvest and brings floodwaters to the paddies, the crop can be ruined. A number of farmers from Central Luzon said that they expected to suffer calamity as frequently as one whole crop every 3 to 5 years (that is, 6–10 harvests) (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 19 and 20 September 2010, interviews with author). The impacts of *kalamidad* are considerably worse than need be because of the lack of financial and other support to face it. Foremost is the inability to afford insurance, then there is the lack of alternative sources of income in the face of loss, as well as the inability to risk trialling alternatives (for example, changing planting practices) in case those options fail. There is also a lack of investment in potential mitigations such as more reliable early warning systems, mechanised equipment for rapid harvesting, flood protection levees, improved flood drainage and, in some very poor areas, even simple things like robust dry storage.⁴¹

⁴¹ The threat of typhoon is driving foreign investors to seek projects in the less typhoon prone region of Mindanao. This

The other important consideration is the land itself. At face value, the Philippines has had a relatively successful programme of state-led agrarian reform which, according to the Department of Agrarian Reform, has redistributed 4.1 million Ha out of 5.1 million Ha of 'within scope' lands (Department of Agrarian Reform, 2010a) to 2.4 million beneficiaries (Department of Agrarian Reform, 2010b).

Initially under the system known as CARP (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program), large-scale rice and corn farmlands were redistributed from the traditional owners of the estates⁴² to tenant farm workers and in the process were largely disaggregated into unitary smallholdings. These smallholdings are mostly between one and four Ha but are sometimes as small as 0.5 Ha; the smaller sized allotments make it difficult for farmers to make an adequate living from the land (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 19 and 20 September 2010, interviews with author).

In the subsequent waves of reforms (largely of sugar, fruit and coconut lands) it became more common for the estates to be distributed in aggregate, sometimes to farmer co-operatives, sometimes as corporatised entities with farmers holding stocks and sometimes on lease-back arrangements with the original *hacienda* (plantation or estate) owners. However, even in collective arrangements, small allotments can mean a very small share of distributed income.

The success of land reforms from the perspective of the farmers has been uneven. While both individual smallholders and members of farmers' co-operatives spoke of how their situation has improved as a result of agrarian reform,⁴³ there were others whose stories are examples of continued near-feudal exploitation (Agrarian NGO representatives in Mindanao, 17 and 18 August 2010; banana farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 16 August 2010, interviews with author). For example, there are cases where agrarian reform came in the form of indenturing lease-back arrangements between the farmers and the *hacienda* owners, or, as in the infamous Hacienda Luisita case, low value stock distribution options were provided in lieu of land. These came with only minority voting rights and hence a limited voice against the dominant shareholders of the old vested interests.⁴⁴ Others spoke of claims that have languished with the DAR for decades.⁴⁵ Some had missed out on their claims entirely; the lands were granted to other farmers, even those who were not working tenants of those lands.⁴⁶ Inevitably, some have been left with no land and sometimes with no work as well.

Lease-back arrangements are a mechanism that has been used in the fruit plantation sector in the execution of foreign land deals. In one typical case, a Middle Eastern investor, via a local Filipino broker, entered a lease arrangement for a banana plantation with a co-operative of Philippine agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) who are paid PhP15,000–20,000 (US\$350–450) per Ha per year. In return for this annual income, the ARBs work the land on behalf of the firm who owns – and takes – 100% of the land's production. The farmers are

concentration of investment raises concerns, if investments with good outcomes end up bypassing other needy regions or if investments with bad outcomes are concentrated in a single area.

⁴² In countries such as Papua New Guinea and Australia, 'traditional owner' refers to the indigenous inhabitants of the land. In the Philippines, it usually refers to the land-owning elite.

⁴³ These probably form a quiet majority.

⁴⁴ Flores-Obanil and Manahah (2007) provide a study of such cases.

⁴⁵ One agrarian reform NGO advocate said that the fastest claim he has come across in 30 years is 4 years. Claims normally took closer to 20 years, but the author suspects the average is less (Land rights NGO representative, 1 September 2010, interview with author). Nonetheless, this is consistent with Department of Agrarian Reform figures, which show that only 80% of 'within scope' lands has been reformed since 1972 (Department of Agrarian Reform, 2010a).

⁴⁶ One such sad story ended in the death of the family patriarch from the stress and shame of not being able to feed his family anymore (Unsuccessful agrarian reform claimant, 15 September 2010, interview with author).

responsible for the production input costs (pesticides, fertilisers and debt repayments to the Land Bank for the reformed land), which they pay for out of that lease income. They also have volume and quality obligations to meet (Filipino agent of foreign investor, 15 October 2010, interview with author).

On one hand, for ARBs with a 2-Ha share each, this is an above-poverty line income that makes them slightly better off than before the land reform process (although it is open to debate what role, if any, the foreign investor has played in this improvement). On the other, this arrangement effectively excludes the farmer-owners from the full benefits of owning their land. They have effectively surrendered the ability to use it, its produce and its financial value, for any other purpose.⁴⁷ Moreover, the Middle Eastern investor is making a claimed 300% higher profit margin from this particular venture.⁴⁸ Thus, one of the effects of the foreign corporation's involvement has been to exclude the farmers from additional revenue that they could have earned if they had had the capacity to access the export markets directly and control their own capital and production.

This illuminates that it is not just investment in agriculture which is important, but how that investment is made, which determines how effective the outcomes are likely to be for the Filipino rural poor. It also illustrates the value and importance of rethinking food security to bolster protection of the poor from the structural violence of poverty and hunger.

The foreign investment deals as they currently stand are largely focused on control over the land and its production. This is especially sensitive for local communities since the actual process of land reform has been painful for many, sometimes beset by conflict; occasionally bloody and lethal. Farmers and NGOs working at the coalface of peasant land rights shared stories of intimidation, and sometimes even physical violence, by *hacienda* owners against peasant claimants.⁴⁹ Rutten (2010) has observed long-running physical violence between successful and unsuccessful agrarian reform claimants on the same estate.

⁴⁷ This may include cultivating subsistence crops, growing alternative crops for sale on the open market, mortgaging the land for funds to invest elsewhere or subleasing the land to other producers.

⁴⁸ The previous incarnation of this project was a trading-only business wherein the investor bought the banana crop at market prices from ARB farmers' co-operatives to transport and sell to its export markets (Filipino agent of foreign investor, 15 October 2010, interview with author).

⁴⁹ More than one interviewee told of the formation of 'a devil's alliance' between *hacienda* owners and the New Peoples' Army, which harassed and threatened the peasants to relinquish their claims. (The communist New People's Army is against CARP because it allocates land into private ownership.) (Land rights NGO representative, 1 September 2010; Agrarian NGO representatives, 17 and 18 August 2010, interviews with author.) Another group of peasants was barricaded by the *hacienda* owner out of their claimed lands, including their own homes and the subsistence plots which they relied on for food. After breaking in to get to their own homes, they were shot and evicted by state security forces – a local regiment of the Armed Forces of the Philippines called in by the *hacienda* (Banana farming agrarian reform beneficiaries, 16 August 2010, interviews with author). Others told of *hacienda* owners' use of the criminal justice system to prevent or slow down peasants' claims, holding them against trumped-up charges or infractions forced upon them such as trespass, vandalism and theft (Agrarian NGO representatives, 17 and 18 August 2010, interviews with author). Bonds, bail and legal fees can easily bankrupt these farmers and untried criminal cases can stall the processing of land reform claims for years.

One of the most famous examples of lethal physical violence over land reform occurred in Hacienda Luisita. In 2004, during a picket by 6,000-odd farmers and members of their families who were against the injustices of the stock distribution options, the Arroyo administration sent in the state security forces. It resulted in a pitched battle that left 12 farmers and 2 of their children dead. Bystanders reported soldiers firing indiscriminately into the picket lines. To date, there has been no prosecution of anyone responsible for or involved in the killings. The government inquiry is widely regarded as a whitewash since no one linked to the government or the security forces has been held to account for the deaths. (See Calonzo, Dedace, Pulumbrit, Arquiza, & Severino, 2010; Holt, 2006; Kwok, 2009; Mallari, 2008; PinoyPress, 2010a; Torres, 2010; <http://www.hacienda-luisita.com/>)

There are still 1 million Ha of unsettled claims outstanding under CARP. There are distributed lands – including the Hacienda Luisita – that are being challenged in the courts. The Luisita case is politically charged since the family of the incumbent President, who gained office on a platform of anti-corruption, are the traditional owners and major shareholders in the new corporate entity that replaced the old *hacienda*.

These long-held and ongoing contestations over land show its importance and its value as the ARBs' hard-fought-for capital. Another 1.5 million Ha are to be redistributed under CARP's 2009 successor, CARPER (CARP Extensions with Reforms) (Republic of the Philippines, 2009a).⁵⁰ These issues of land rights and land tenure have implications for the productivity of Filipino farmers, for national food production and rural poverty alleviation.

In addition to the challenges of land rights and land tenure, there are also issues with the availability of land and competition over alternative land uses. Philippine agricultural lands can be broadly classified as lowlands and uplands. Rice, corn and sugar production are best suited to the former. Plantation crops such as coconut, banana or mango are best suited to the latter, with the exception of small areas of traditional terraced farming. The DA states that its primary mission is to 'develop at least 2 million hectares of new land for agribusiness in order to contribute 2 million jobs' (Department of Agriculture, 2010).⁵¹ DENR is responsible for developing this new land, mainly from government-owned (often inaccurately named) 'forest lands' in upland areas which are officially untenured. However, officially untenured land does not mean unutilised land, so the 2-million Ha target vastly overstates the land that is actually available.⁵² Nevertheless, this target and the expected 2 million jobs are used by government departments to justify the participation of foreign land users.⁵³

Of all the already tenured forest lands, only a small proportion have commercial or industrial tenurial instruments, and only a small proportion of these are opportunities suitable for foreign land investors.⁵⁴ On this basis it is bold to assume that the entire amount of remaining untenured forest lands are suitable, and available, for commercial development. Moreover,

⁵⁰ CARPER recognises that there is not enough land to go around, yet it obliges the government to use the agrarian reform programme to improve the situation for farmers who are not ARBs. At the same time, it commits the government to the industrialisation of agriculture and the development of economic-sized farms (Republic of the Philippines, 2009a). While the spirit of this legislation is pro-rural poor, these commitments have the tendency towards the corporatisation of farming. The ill-defined objectives have already set a tone of contention over this extension to the programme, especially in relation to the possible entrance of foreign investors (Dalangin-Fernandez, 2009). This situation is an example of the schizophrenic attitude of Filipino polity towards foreign investment and agriculture. Incidentally, other contentions have arisen from CARPER, one of which was the veto by traditional owners over the ultimate beneficiaries (Bello, 2009).

⁵¹ This in comparison to 13 million Ha of existing agricultural lands out of a total land area of 30 million Ha.

⁵² DENR has jurisdiction over all land designated as inalienable and non-disposable (as defined in the Constitution). These are state-owned lands and cover mostly upland areas. They account for 53% of total land area and are referred to as 'forest lands' even though much of the land is not forested. Although the lands are government owned, there is a push by the DENR to ensure all of the lands have tenurial instruments that regulate the actions of the parties on these lands. This means, for example, that watershed lands are tenured to peasants living on the lands so that the watershed can (in theory) be actively managed by the DENR in conjunction with the tenure holders, rather than using a strategy of prosecution against the residents for watershed damage or pollution. There are a variety of tenure instruments, mostly communal, but also some industrial and commercial titles, allowing corporations sole use of the lands. Although such tenure is supposedly granted in consultation and agreement with the peasants on those lands, there is little evidence in support of an effective process for managing this or of strategies in place to avoid exploitation of the uneducated peasants in these situations by profit-motivated corporations.

⁵³ See for example, *Investment Priorities Plan* (Board of Investors, 2010b) and *Agribusiness Lands & Investments Center* (Philippine Agriculture Development and Commercial Corporation, 2010).

⁵⁴ Based on figures for Region XI (Sampulina, 2010), which indicate 213,516 Ha are available for investment. Of this, 60,425 Ha are tenured with suitable commercial instruments and 153,091 Ha are untenured. The 60,425 Ha is less than 10% of the total 622,053 Ha with tenurial instruments applied, but the 153,091 Ha is 100% of the untenured area, suggesting that 10% of the 153,091 might be a more realistic estimate of 'new' land actually suitable for commercial tenure in this region.

these lands are largely unsuited for the production of staples such as rice and corn, but are better suited for bananas, coconuts, mangoes and pineapples – crops that are less important for guaranteeing the domestic food security of foreign investors. Many of the farmers and NGOs interviewed expressed concerns about the 2-million hectare goal, which has been criticised by media commentators and congressional representatives alike (see for example, House of Representatives, 2009).

Existing agricultural lands are also subject to urban expansion and other competing land uses, which put additional pressure on production capacity. Peri-urban agricultural plots near main roads and utilities are frequently sought by developers for industrial and commercial development.⁵⁵ Loss of these agricultural areas – frequently high quality, flat lowlands – highlights the value of existing productive lands and the importance of improving yields on them.

The challenges outlined above emphasise the problems with the manner in which the government is promoting the country's farmlands to foreign investors. One of the problems is that the proposed foreign rice and corn projects are large-scale; the government hopes to facilitate deals for hundreds of thousands of hectares. For example, the pilot project for a Saudi Arabian deal is 50,000 Ha.⁵⁶ This sits uneasily with the small-scale nature of post-CARP landholdings and the lack of large tracts of unutilised lowland areas. The second problem is that although the need for investment in technology, irrigation, development of capacity against calamity and funding for inputs can be easily met by investors, investment that acquires control of the land will not necessarily benefit the rural poor and the aggregation of farms under foreign corporate command is instead likely to have negative outcomes for them. Instead, the rethinking of food security to place the poor at the centre of consideration is required.

Unless land investment deals expressly prioritise the developmental and food security needs of the rural communities, they are likely to leave farmers without the ability to capitalise the value of the land they farm and become menial employees on large-scale foreign-owned farms or indentured in long-term lease-back arrangements.⁵⁷ Since many of the farmers have little formal education, opportunities for employment advancement in corporate, highly-industrialised agricultural enterprises are likely to be low. Further, large-scale industrialisation will reduce the amount of physical labour needed on the farms, so unless alternative forms of employment are generated, rural unemployment is likely to rise.

⁵⁵ Many ARBs are often more than willing to sell a hectare or two (sometimes their entire plot) in return for what is in effect a small retirement nest egg (although there are some statutory limitations on them doing this as part of their acceptance of the reformed land parcels). The author met a group of farmers in a province three hours from Metro Manila who amalgamated their properties to make them attractive to a developer. At first glance, this looked like an opportunity for land-seeking foreign investors. However, the amalgamated property was only 25 Ha in total and is of most value to commercial developers seeking industrial and residential expansion – especially since it is in the commuter belt of a province outside Manila. The real problem with this example is that urban expansion is consuming some of the most productive rice lands in the country.

⁵⁶ This project is between a consortium of Saudi Arabian investors and agribusinesses known as the Far Eastern Agricultural Investment Company (FAEICO) and the Filipino listed agricultural corporation AgriNurture, Inc (ANI). The deal is currently only at Memorandum of Agreement stage. One of the government agencies explicitly hoped that this project would be a prototype for many similar and larger deals (interview with author). Unfortunately, ANI refused repeated requests for an interview.

⁵⁷ It is worth noting that the high rice yields in Vietnam have been achieved with small-scale land holdings. Kompas (2002) gives a detailed assessment of factors such as market structure, investment and land reform – including plot size.

The Opportunities

Despite these challenges, the Philippines has a moderate but healthy agricultural export sector. Its primary exports are banana, pineapple, coconut and processed coconut products, particularly coconut oil. While large foreign corporations such as Dole and Del Monte have dominated this sector for decades – often to the detriment of Filipino peasants (see for example, Carandang, 2009; Garcia, 1984; Krinks, 1986) – the agrarian reform programme has allowed more beneficial arrangements for farmers, such as co-operatives, to flourish.

The agrarian reform programme, notwithstanding the conflict and contestations over land redistribution, has been widely successful and improved the situations of many beneficiaries. ARBs have gained, usually for the first time in the history of their families, some capital in the form of land. For the rural poor with free access to land, food availability is often not as bad as for the destitute in the urban slums. Despite the very high levels of poverty in the rural areas, subsistence plots provide insurance against hunger.⁵⁸ The Filipino quality of *pakikisama* (good-neighbourliness) continues to be highly valued in the countryside and helps provide a modicum of support for those worse off amongst the community, for instance by providing food in return for labour.

The Philippines is also home to two important scientific innovators in rice cultivation. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) develops improved rice varieties that are able to tolerate marginal conditions such as high-salt, marshland or dry conditions.⁵⁹ Although primarily focused on the physical science of rice cultivation, it has an economics division that conducts research in the social aspects of global rice production. The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), in addition to its technical research and development programmes, runs hands-on educational and support programmes for farmers to help them handle difficult conditions, avoid pest infestations and improve their tilling practices. A security-centric view of food security will allow both organisations to sharpen their focus on the most important beneficiaries of their research activities. Supporting the deployment of scientific advances in ways that prioritise the rural poor may encourage the faster, cheaper and wider dissemination of these institutions' innovations.

Many successful small-scale agricultural development initiatives are also sources of innovation. Combined with evident entrepreneurialism, these offer options for addressing the sector's shortcomings – especially in relation to food security goals – in economically productive, socially meaningful and environmentally sustainable ways. Three things limit the opportunities presented by these initiatives: lack of funding, lack of institutional support structures and the sector's aversion to risk. This last one comes from having such precarious economic certainty. It is hard to gamble with the crop when there is nothing to fall back on. Small-scale initiatives offer alternatives to large-scale foreign-owned farms that can still offer improvements in productivity, reduction of the domestic food production shortfall, increases in rural incomes, reductions in farmer poverty and the creation of surplus for export. Such initiatives do not exclude large-scale farming nor its industrialisation, yet their primary focus is the protection of the rural poor from continued poverty and hunger. This, under a security-centric concept of food security, should be the intention of developmental investments in the agricultural sector.

⁵⁸ Subsistence plots often include a mix of fruit and vegetables, chickens, tilapia ponds, *carabaos*, goats and pigs.

⁵⁹ These developments offer excellent opportunities for increasing the amount of viable agricultural lands. In theory, this would make more lands available for distribution to peasants who are still landless. An important proviso is that the intellectual property rights in these new seeds are not used to further corporate profit at the expense of Filipino farmers. Adopting an approach to food security that puts the poor at the centre of policy-making and practice can help in the pursuit of this goal.

The following are five examples of these initiatives.⁶⁰

1. Provincial administrators in central Luzon have collaboratively proposed a range of regional development programmes that would benefit from targeted investment. These programmes are focused on development and capacity building: increasing yields, access to markets and income growth and diversification for local farmers. The proposals include sharing mechanical equipment (for example, planters, harvesters, and fertiliser and pesticide delivery mechanisms) to industrialise local corn farming without aggregating reformed lands; the construction of agricultural tramlines in the uplands to rapidly transport goods to local distribution centres;⁶¹ and agro-forestry initiatives for cacao and coffee production in sub-canopy forest areas. (Provincial administrators and provincial government representatives, 23 September 2010, interviews with author.)
2. In the province of Nueva Vizcaya, a private tertiary education institution has established a centre for research and development of finance, sales, marketing and IT capacity amongst local farmers. It began with an academic programme researching rural trading posts, which identified problems with poor product quality, low income returns, lack of distribution infrastructure, poor access to finance and absence of marketing knowledge amongst the farmers. The centre has since established a number of practical programmes and sourced funding from international aid agencies for them. These include the development of an agricultural marketing system with a centralised trading organisation; quality control processes; and strategically applied information and communication technologies. Farmer diversification strategies have also been developed to leverage the upland geography and cooler climate in order to grow more profitable produce such as citrus and rattan. Strategies to generate new income streams from the production of wines and vinegars from local sugarcane, and household goods from rattan, hope to offer farmers vertical integration up the supply chain. (Head of institution, 4 September 2010, interview with author.)
3. In Davao del Norte, Mindanao, a banana plantation of approximately 400 Ha has been distributed under CARP to a farmers' co-operative with around 200 families as members. After a 20-year battle for their land rights, the plantation now provides the farmers with diversified income from bananas and coconuts as well as subsistence crops. The farmers have been able to negotiate premium prices with a distributor for their bananas due to the collective bargaining power of the co-operative. They now own and staff its packaging operation, providing employment for other family members. (Banana farmer agrarian reform beneficiaries, 16 August 2010, interviews with author.)
4. In the region around the Banaue rice terraces is a growing anomaly: rice exports. These are the initiative of a local indigenous peoples' group with some foreign aid assistance. It has been built around specialised, high-value, native rice varieties such as the much-prized red rice *Kalinga unoy* which is starting to find niche markets in countries like the United States. These varieties are still farmed in the traditional, organic manner (albeit with low production yields), and are fetching P65–80/kg for the farmers compared to the P10–17/kg the farmer would usually receive for standard rice varieties. (NGO representative, 17 October 2010, interview with author.)⁶²

⁶⁰ These examples represent initiatives in the following areas: local or provincial government, academia, labour co-operatives, indigenous peoples' groups, and individual entrepreneurialism.

⁶¹ Construction of these tramlines is far cheaper than improving road infrastructure. They are easier to repair in case of typhoon damage and use considerably less fuel than trucks (as they are powered by gravity when running downhill).

⁶² This has been featured recently in the Philippine Daily Inquirer (Espiritu, 2010).

5. In the province of Nueva Ecija, an ARB, farmer and entrepreneur put himself through college and found work in a nearby township to reduce the uncertainties of relying on farm income. He is lucky to have access to one of his family members' 4 Ha plot as well as his own parcel of reformed land. On his relative's plot, he has been experimenting with other produce to diversify the family's income. He now raises free-range ducks for sale in Metro Manila which he believes will double the income of the farm.⁶³ He has also planted *Moringa* trees for producing ingredients for pharmaceuticals. He intends to establish a local *Moringa* co-operative to invest in processing capacity so that farmers can move up the supply chain and sell processed output to pharmaceutical companies rather than raw goods to traders.⁶⁴ The farmer believes that typhoon risk to Luzon rice farmers can be mitigated by using the Japanese model of planting and harvesting on a continual basis, instead of in separate growing seasons. This would mean that during typhoon season, only 20% of a crop at most would be close to harvest and thus susceptible to destruction from a typhoon or flooding. He hopes that with improved income security from his other ventures, he will be able to demonstrate this and encourage other local farmers to follow suit. (Rice farming agrarian reform beneficiary, 18 September 2010, interview with author.)

While none of these initiatives alone is a magic bullet for the challenges facing Philippine agriculture, they show a range of opportunities and illustrate viable, alternative approaches to applying investment to the Philippine agricultural sector. These strategies can increase productivity yields, increase rural employment and incomes, and provide paths out of poverty for farmers. To realise their full potential, they all need an injection of financial capital and the development of support structures, including regulatory frameworks.

However, these initiatives are unlikely to work on a larger scale if foreign corporations take control of the land and merely offer farmers unskilled employment while industrialising agriculture. Success is predicated on local control of the farmlands and on farmers being given the capacity to take control over their own productivity. Moreover, most of these initiatives have arisen, or are successful, due to the state-led agrarian reform programmes.⁶⁵ This suggests that investment in Philippine agriculture should aim to leverage the successes of agrarian reform, which the current strategies for engaging with foreign land investors do not, but which the proposed redefinition of food security certainly helps encourage.

Redefining Food Security in Light of the Philippine Situation

In summary, the Philippine government is using neoliberal, pro-corporation mechanisms to facilitate foreign land investments in the country, despite employing language that honours the importance of social justice, rural development and poverty alleviation. Further, it is clear that while substantial investment is essential to address the challenges of Philippine

⁶³ The live ducks fetch P500 per head from a processor or trader who butchers and sells them. With investment in proper shelter, the income from ducks is less susceptible to typhoon damage, and the only input costs are feed and a small amount of labour. Without reducing rice planting, he believes he can support 150 ducks in addition to some breeding pairs. Selling 50 ducks a month when they reach 3 months old will effectively produce an additional monthly income equivalent to P25,000. By comparison, the farm currently earns about P120,000 twice a year from its rice crop, barring calamity.

⁶⁴ The farmer's retirement plan is to find a developer to sell his reformed land plot to. The land is a rice paddy of mediocre quality but well located for access to transport and utilities. His intention is to encourage other farmers to diversify into *Moringa* and invest some of the proceeds of the sale in establishing the co-operative.

⁶⁵ The success of this state-led approach stands in marked contrast to the problems of neoliberal, market-led land reform programmes promoted by the World Bank and industrialised countries (Borras, 2008a ch. 4; 2008b ch. 4; Borras, et al., 2009).

agriculture, the foreign investments structured around land are unlikely to deliver the desired developmental, social and poverty alleviation goals.

Although these foreign land deals are framed as food security strategies, they are less about addressing the problems of the poor's lack of access to food than about corporate interests securing control over the scarce resource of arable land. This suggests that to properly confront hunger and poverty, it is necessary to rethink food security in terms of protecting populations who are vulnerable to those forms of structural violence.

Redefining food security in these terms focuses attention on the poor. As the examples from the Philippines have shown, this reframing is useful firstly in identifying how existing strategies are weak and secondly in developing alternative strategies. The ways in which the Philippine government prioritises corporate and foreign investor interests over those of its poor, rural constituents become clear when thinking about food security in this way. Similarly, this framing of food security helps illuminate alternative, productive approaches to governance and implementation of foreign agricultural investment projects. When food security is thought of as protection of the poor instead of as an economic problem of production, supply and demand, it becomes harder to justify land deals that export the majority of production and whose profits bypass local communities.

The common view of food security as food availability has largely limited discussion on it to a debate over economic mechanisms, specifically between free trade or self-sufficiency and controlled markets.⁶⁶ Similarly, in terms of international land deals, the discourse has been limited to whether foreign investment is 'win-win' (good) or 'a land grab' (bad). Both are flawed arguments; they are not either/or questions. International trade is as important as developing local productivity. Markets and commercial enterprise have a crucial role to play, but they should not be the sole considerations in determining food security policy or other policies that affect the well-being of many Filipinos. Above all, investment is important – indeed essential – but how it is employed is also crucial. So although the investors come offering the potential of substantial investment, the land deals as they are currently structured are likely to have poor outcomes for local communities. Adopting a different approach to food security presents the opportunity to change this.

Redefining food security in a protective frame encourages us to ask, *how can foreign investment be best used to protect vulnerable Filipinos from food insecurity?* As this paper has illustrated, the answer to this question lies not in imprudently making land available to foreign investors and privileging corporate (especially foreign) interests, but in applying foreign investment to leverage existing opportunities. These can increase rural development and farmer incomes to reduce poverty, and increase yields of key staples for domestic consumption while generating considerable surplus capacity for export. This means that such a strategy can also help improve food availability for investors too.

Thus, foreign investment can be effective in increasing food availability and alleviating hunger and poverty, but only if it is applied in ways that prioritise the developmental needs of the rural poor.

⁶⁶ The points of view expressed by Brown (2008) and Kwa (1999) represent the major positions in the debate between free trade and self-sufficiency as strategies for promoting food security.

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