

The Paradox of Food Sovereignty: Social, Ecological, and Cultural Impacts of the Merauke PSN on the Malind Anim Indigenous Peoples

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the Merauke National Strategic Project (PSN) as a manifestation of the dynamic interplay between state-driven development paradigms oriented toward intensive resource exploitation and the cosmological worldview of the Malind Anim Indigenous peoples, which is rooted in ecological and spiritual relations with the land. Employing a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach embedded within a critical socio-cultural perspective, this research examines the socio-economic, ecological, and cultural impacts of the project. The findings indicate that the Merauke PSN is not merely a food security initiative, but a process entailing social dislocation, ecosystem degradation, and shifts in Indigenous cultural identity. The land-use conversion of customary forests and lands (*ulayat*) has destabilized traditional livelihood systems and transformed collective values into vulnerable transactional market relations. Concurrently, a securitized development approach marked by the active involvement of defense apparatuses and the sub-optimal implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) underscores power asymmetries between the state and local communities. This study advocates for a paradigm shift toward self-determined development that positions Indigenous peoples as central development actors, safeguards ecological sustainability, and upholds cultural rights as an integral component of social justice and human rights.

Keywords: Merauke National Strategic Project, Indigenous peoples, Malind Anim, ecocide, ethnocide, Papuan development, land rights, FPIC.

INTRODUCTION

The National Strategic Project (PSN) in Merauke, envisioned as a solution to Indonesia's food sovereignty, did not emerge in a contextual vacuum. This large-scale project represents the latest iteration of a long-standing state development paradigm in Papua—a paradigm that has consistently prioritized national strategic interests over local socio-cultural realities. The PSN inherits and broadens the targets of its predecessor projects, creating a continuum of massive interventions that spans more than a decade.

This analysis aims to frame the Merauke PSN not merely as an economic or infrastructural endeavor, but as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that forces a confrontation between the state's grand narrative of food security and the existential struggle of Indigenous communities to defend their land, identity, and way of life. The ensuing dynamics transcend mere land disputes; they represent a fundamental clash between two diametrically opposed worldviews. The government perceives this initiative as an urgent and strategic measure to anticipate the threat of a global food crisis and to achieve national energy independence amidst geopolitical uncertainties.

The history of large-scale food development interventions in Merauke reveals a consistent pattern. Long before the PSN was announced, the concept of transforming the southern landscape of Papua into a national food estate had been rolled out through various schemes. This initiative began with the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE) proposed by the local government, which later evolved into a far more ambitious national project: the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), officially launched in 2010 (Ginting & Pye, 2013; Rumbekwan et al., 2021). With a target area of 1.2 million hectares, MIFEE served as the blueprint for corporate-

based development models in Papua—a model that garnered critical scrutiny from its inception due to its adverse implications for Indigenous communities and the environment (McDonnell, 2021; Silubun & Putri, 2018).

The current PSN, officially designated as the Merauke Food and Energy Development Area, is fundamentally a continuation and expansion of MIFEE (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, 2023). Its underlying rationale remains identical: achieving food self-sufficiency, reducing reliance on the import of vital commodities such as rice and sugar, and positioning Indonesia as a key player in the global food supply chain (IndonesiaSatu, 2025; Yudhoyono as cited in Takeshi et al., 2013). Under the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, the project's objectives have been reinforced with a target of achieving food self-sufficiency within the next four to five years, placing Merauke at its epicenter (Pusaka, 2024a). The scale of this project is massive, involving plans to clear over 2 million hectares of land for rice, sugarcane, and bioethanol production (Hutan Hujan, 2024; #SolidaritasMerauke Coalition, 2024). Its implementation involves inter-ministerial synergy, primarily between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Defense, along with the participation of major corporations such as the Jhonlin Group and PT Global Papua Abadi, signaling a mobilization of state and private resources on an unprecedented scale (Pusaka, 2024a; Hutan Hujan, 2024).

The nomenclatural shift from MIFEE to PSN is not merely a change in title; it constitutes a strategic escalation with profound legal and political implications. By conferring PSN status, the government grants the highest priority to this project, enabling expedited permitting processes, simplified land acquisition, and the potential minimization of environmental regulatory hurdles as well as local community objections (Moiwend, 2025). This legal framework, bolstered by legislative products such as the Job Creation Law, effectively institutionalizes and accelerates the alienation of customary land. Widely documented evaluations of MIFEE's lack of efficacy appear to have insufficiently altered the state's development model. Conversely, the state has doubled down on its commitment by elevating the project to the highest strategic tier. This decision implies a political calculation that the geopolitical and economic significance of food sovereignty is deemed more pressing than the socio-ecological risks borne by the Indigenous peoples in Merauke. Furthermore, the active involvement of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in securing and facilitating the project under the PSN banner indicates a shift toward a more securitized and less consultative approach, reflecting the militarization of development policy (YLBHI, 2024a; Solidaritas Merauke, 2024).

Metodologi

This study utilizes a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach grounded in a critical socio-cultural framework to explore the dynamic interactions between the policies of the Merauke National Strategic Project (PSN) and the cosmology of the Malind Anim Indigenous peoples. Data collection was conducted through a desk study and a review of secondary literature, encompassing government policy documents, investigative reports from civil society organizations (CSOs), legal texts, reputable scientific publications, and independent media coverage concerning the trajectory of large-scale food development in Merauke.

The gathered data were subsequently analyzed using critical discourse analysis and source triangulation to map state development narratives, socio-ecological conflict dynamics, and the modalities of local resistance. Through the lenses of ontology and political ecology, this research dissects the power asymmetries between the extractive rationality driven by the state/corporations and the relational worldview of the Indigenous communities, thereby producing a holistic interpretation of the ecocidal and ethnocidal crises unfolding in Papua.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Malind Anim Cosmos: Land as the Foundation of Existence

To comprehend the profound impacts of the Merauke PSN, the analysis must not commence with the project itself, but rather be rooted in an understanding of the worldview (cosmology) of the region's inhabitants, the Malind Anim tribe. For them, the loss of land is not merely an economic deficit or a deprivation of productive assets. It represents an existential threat—a fundamental disruption of the foundation that sustains their entire structure of identity, spirituality, and social existence. The conflict between the state and the Malind Anim is essentially a divergence of two irreconcilable ontologies: on one hand, a modern-developmental worldview

that perceives land as an inert resource to be optimized; on the other, a holistic worldview that regards land as a living entity inextricably linked to the self.

Customary Land as an Extension of the Self

In Malind Anim cosmology, there is no rigid dichotomy between humans and nature. Customary land (*tanah ulayat*) is not an external object to be possessed, but a living subject—a "sentient ecology" deeply intertwined with their identity (Chao, 2020). Forests, rivers, swamps, and savannas are considered "family," part of a multispecies community where humans are merely one constituent member (Chao, 2020; Chao, 2019). These kinship ties are institutionalized through the clan (*bawan*) structure. Each clan maintains a totemic relationship with specific plant or animal species, which they address as ancestors (*amai*) or siblings (*namek*) (Chao, 2020; Rumbekwan et al., 2021). The Mahuze clan, for instance, translates to "children of the dog," while the Balaigaze clan means "children of the crocodile" (Kaffah et al., 2020; Chao, 2020).

This worldview cultivates a reciprocal ethical system. Nature provides sustenance for humans, and in return, humans are obligated to care for and revere nature through rituals, taboos, and sustainable practices. Foraging in the forest is not merely an extractive act, but a social interaction with non-human kin that must be conducted with deep respect. Non-compliance with this ethic is believed to invite sanctions, both from nature and ancestral spirits. Thus, the identity of a Malind Anim is literally rooted in their land; to be Malind means to be an integral part of that ecological and spiritual landscape.

The Forest: A "Hypermart" and a Cathedral

The central role of the forest in Malind Anim life can be conceptualized through two powerful metaphors: as a "hypermart" and as a "cathedral." As a "hypermart," the forest is the primary provider of physical sustenance (Susanto, 2021). It supplies sago as a staple food, game animals such as cassowaries, wild boars, and agile wallabies (*saham*), fish from rivers and swamps, alongside various vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants (Susanto, 2021; Chao, 2019). Food availability equates to unrestricted access to the forest; for them, food security is not about stockpiling in granaries, but about the health and sustainability of the forest ecosystem (Zakaria et al. as cited in Arimbi, 2020).

However, the forest's function far exceeds material needs. It is also their "cathedral"—a sacred space that preserves collective memory, history, and spirituality (Barber & Moiwend, 2011). Specific nodes within the landscape—massive trees, water springs, river bends, or rock formations—serve as spatial markers for mythological narratives, particularly those concerning the Dema, the creator deities or ancestral spirits in Malind mythology (Barber & Moiwend, 2011). These stories are transmitted orally across generations, with the landscape acting as a living "text" that is continuously read and interpreted. The eradication of these sites is tantamount to obliterating their cultural references, severing the connection between present generations and their past and future (Fienieg et al., 2011).

Traditional Governance and Ecological Wisdom

The ecological wisdom of the Malind Anim is manifested in their traditional natural resource management systems, one of which is the practice of *Sasi* (or *sar* in the language of the Marori, a Malind sub-tribe). *Sasi* is a customary prohibition against harvesting natural resources in a specific area for a designated period (Tembuangga et al., 2024). This practice is frequently linked to death rituals, where an area is "closed" as a sign of mourning and respect for the deceased. Yet, beyond its ritualistic function, *Sasi* serves as a highly effective conservation mechanism (Tembuangga et al., 2024).

By imposing harvest bans, for example, for a thousand days (*yarauw onggi*), the community allows the ecosystem (animal populations, sago groves, or aquatic resources) the necessary time to recover and regenerate naturally (Tembuangga et al., 2024). This system demonstrates a profound understanding of ecological dynamics and the imperative of sustainability. *Sasi* reflects a worldview in which human communities and non-human nature are governed by an identical set of sacred laws—an order that maintains balance and harmony. This stands

as the antithesis of the PSN's intensive utilization logic, which operates on the principle of maximizing optimization in the shortest possible timeframe.

The root of the conflict lies in the state's inability to comprehend or even acknowledge the existence of the Malind Anim cosmology. While the government and corporations view millions of hectares of "idle" or "unproductive" land ready to be "optimized" (Gebze, 2024; Pusaka, 2024a), the Malind perceive a living, meaningful landscape that is productive in its own right. The state operates under a Cartesian logic that strictly separates the subject (human) from the object (nature), wherein nature is viewed as a passive resource. Conversely, Malind cosmology is holistic and relational, devoid of such separations. Consequently, state-offered "participation" or "consultation" efforts frequently stall because both parties operate from fundamentally different ontological premises regarding the definition of "land." Nevertheless, the government continues to seek dialogue formats to bridge national development needs with local aspirations, though cross-cultural communication challenges remain a primary obstacle.

Socio-Economic Disruption and Transformation

The implementation of the National Strategic Project in Merauke has triggered deep disparities within the socio-economic fabric of the Malind Indigenous community. The project has not only altered the physical landscape but has fundamentally reconditioned daily life structures, livelihood systems, and social relations forged over centuries. Proponents often frame this transformation as a stride toward progress and modernity. However, for the communities experiencing it directly, the process is predominantly felt as a disruption carrying the risks of alienation, degraded living standards, and social fragmentation. They are pushed from autonomous subsistence into a highly precarious market economy, frequently from a disadvantaged position.

The Collapse of Traditional Livelihoods

The most immediate and keenly felt impact of the PSN is the disruption of traditional livelihood systems predicated on natural resource utilization. The massive clearing of land for sugarcane plantations and new rice fields literally severs the community's access to their "hypermarket," the forest (Susanto, 2021). The conversion of forests, swamps, and savannas into monoculture estates equates to the loss of sago groves—their primary carbohydrate source—diminished game habitats, and the degradation of rivers and water sources critical for fishing (Rumbekwan et al., 2021; Susanto, 2021; Chao, 2019).

This rapid transition generates a state of scarcity previously unknown to the Malind people. Pastor Anselmus Amo, a figure who has long advocated for the community, astutely observed that a project promising food security has paradoxically birthed "resilient destitution" (Susanto, 2021). Prior to the project's arrival, hunger was mitigated simply by entering the forest to forage. Now, they must struggle to secure daily sustenance amid a drastically altered landscape (Susanto, 2021). A life previously sustained by autonomous subsistence has been supplanted by a reliance on unpredictable external sources.

The Complex Impacts of the Cash Economy

The PSN has introduced and accelerated the penetration of a cash economy into Malind communities, primarily through land compensation mechanisms. The sudden influx of large sums of cash into villages exerts a powerful allure while simultaneously acting as a disruptive force. A community leader bitterly described this value shift as the worship of "M, M, and M" (Money), usurping the spiritual and communal values previously held steadfast (Muntaza, 2013). Narratives promising a better, modern, and prosperous life serve as the primary persuasive tools utilized by corporations and the government to convince communities to relinquish their lands (Susanto, 2021). The government argues that integration into the modern economy is imperative to prevent local communities from being left behind, enabling them to reap the long-term benefits of infrastructural development.

However, this transition into a cash economy often brings unforeseen consequences. Expectations regarding prosperity, decent employment, and infrastructural developments—such as clean water piping or electricity—frequently remain sub-optimally realized (IndonesiaSatu, 2025; Susanto, 2021). Compensation funds received, absent proper guidance and sustainable alternative livelihood schemes, are often rapidly exhausted on

consumptive needs. Ultimately, communities are at risk of being left in a worse predicament: deprived of their land as a socio-economic safety net and lacking stable income sources. They face the looming threat of poverty and dependency—a bitter irony for a project conceived to elevate welfare.

Social Fragmentation and Conflict

Beyond its economic implications, the land acquisition process driven by the PSN has become a source of polarization within the community. The highly individualized nature of compensation mechanisms directly contradicts the communal land ownership systems upheld by Indigenous peoples. This practice effectively incites tensions among community members, even within the same clan or familial unit (McDonnell, 2021; Muntaza, 2013). Decisions to sell or relinquish customary land are frequently made not through consensus-building (*musyawarah mufakat*), but via negotiations with a handful of individuals, thereby breeding tension and suspicion.

This horizontal conflict constitutes one of the most significant social impacts. The case involving Vincen Kwipalo, a resident of Blandin Kakayo Village who opposed the sugarcane PSN, exemplifies this phenomenon. His residence was attacked by a group he identified as fellow villagers who had surrendered their customary lands to the corporation (Zaki, 2025). This incident illustrates how the project effectively displaces conflict, transmuting vertical tensions (between the community and corporations/the state) into horizontal conflicts (among villagers). Corporate and state actors are thus distanced from direct confrontation, while the community's social cohesion deteriorates from within.

This process fundamentally re-engineers the social structure of the Malind—from one predicated on collective and reciprocal kinship to an atomized society. Traditional systems emphasizing mutual aid (*gotong royong*) and communal responsibility are eroded by the logic of individual competition. The social safety nets inherent in customary structures become fragile. These alterations to the social fabric represent a far more permanent and irrecoverable impact than mere economic losses. The PSN does not merely expropriate land; it permanently alters the social foundation that sustains the Malind community's existence.

Ecocide as Ethnocide

The core argument of this study posits that the impacts of the Merauke National Strategic Project extend far beyond economic and environmental metrics. The massive ecological degradation (*ecocide*) precipitated by this project directly and inevitably induces drastic alterations to the cultural identity, collective memory, and spiritual life of the Malind Anim people (*ethnocide*). The two are interrelated and indivisible processes. For a community whose culture is so intimately interwoven with a specific land and landscape, environmental destruction equates to the enfeeblement of the very foundations of that culture. This concept is crucial for comprehending the true scale of the humanitarian crisis unfolding behind the narrative of a national food estate.

Erasing the Landscape, Erasing Memory

For the Malind people, the landscape is not a passive physical space. It serves as a mnemonic device, a living archive recording and preserving their history, mythology, and genealogy. Every landscape element—an ancient tree, a river bend, a swamp—holds the potential to be a marker for a narrative, an event, or a lineage (Fienieg et al., 2011). The forest is their cultural text. Consequently, when excavators level forests, bulldoze savannas, and drain swamps, the casualties are not solely vegetation and habitats, but also cultural symbols and repositories of collective memory (Barber & Moiwend, 2011).

Specifically, the eradication of sites associated with Dema mythology (creator ancestral spirits) carries profound ramifications. Dema narratives form the bedrock of Malind values and worldviews. These stories are handed down orally, utilizing the landscape as their primary pedagogical tool. When these sacred sites vanish, the link between the present generation and their foundational narratives is severed. The capacity to transmit the core of their culture to future generations is severely compromised (Barber & Moiwend, 2011). This is not unintentional collateral damage; it constitutes a systematic erasure of cultural heritage.

An "Ecologically Induced Genocide"

The inextricable linkage between the environment and Malind culture has prompted scholars to employ the concept of "ecologically induced genocide" to analyze the impacts of mega-projects like MIFEE, and presently the PSN (McDonnell, 2021). This concept argues that the environmental degradation of an Indigenous group's habitat—when that group maintains profound cultural ties to their land—can be categorized as an act that threatens cultural existence (Crook & Short as cited in Sirait & Widisantoso, 2023).

The rationale is clear: because Malind culture cannot survive independently of the specific ecosystem in which it was conceived and nurtured, the deliberate transformation of that ecosystem for developmental objectives constitutes an act with culturally genocidal effects. The objective may not be mass physical extermination, but the outcome is a diminished capacity for the group to endure as a distinct cultural entity (McDonnell, 2021). The assertion by a Malind resident that "if the forest is gone, the Malind people will go extinct" is not hyperbole, but a literal articulation of the ontological relationship between humans, culture, and land (Syah as cited in Utami & Prameswari, 2022). The project, therefore, poses an existential challenge to the survival of the Malind Tribe as a people.

Psychological and Spiritual Impacts of Land Dispossession

The repercussions of land dispossession also permeate the psychological and spiritual domains of individuals and communities. The community experiences profound grief, disorientation, and existential anxiety. The massive deployment of military personnel to secure the project engenders a psychologically oppressive atmosphere, curtailing freedom of expression and compounding the community's mental burden (Solidaritas Merauke, 2024; YLBHI, 2024a).

This crisis is inherently a spiritual one. The testimony of a laborer, dismissed after surrendering his land, who interpreted his misfortune as a "punishment from the ancestors," exposes deep moral and spiritual wounds (Muntaza, 2013). The act of relinquishing customary land is viewed not just as an economic transaction, but as an act of disobedience against ancestral mandates—a transgression of the cosmic order that incurs spiritual penalties. The sacred triadic relationship between humans, land, and ancestors is fractured, inducing guilt and spiritual alienation.

Synthesized, these ecological, cultural, and psychological impacts can be understood through the concept of "domicide"—the deliberate destruction of a home. "Home" here does not denote mere physical structures, but the locus of identity, belonging, and existential meaning. For the Malind Tribe, the forest is home in its most profound sense. PSN activities such as leveling forests, enclosing land, and disrupting sacred sites constitute a systematic process that renders the Malind people aliens on their own land. It represents an existential assault on the most fundamental premise of human existence: the sense of security and "being at home" in the world.

Conflict Dynamics: Rights, Resistance, and Securitization

The conflict enveloping the Merauke PSN is an asymmetrical contestation of power. On one side exists a coalition of state and corporate actors wielding legal legitimacy and financial capital. On the opposing side are Indigenous communities and civil society organizations fighting to defend their living spaces and fundamental rights with significantly limited resources. An analysis of these conflict dynamics exposes deficits in the fulfillment of Indigenous rights, the central role of security apparatuses in facilitating the project, and the emergence of varied forms of critical resistance spanning local to international arenas.

The Failure of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

A primary catalyst of conflict is the sub-optimal implementation of the principle of Persetujuan Atas Dasar Informasi Awal Tanpa Paksaan (PADIATAPA), internationally recognized as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). This principle, enshrined in various international and national human rights instruments, mandates that any project potentially impacting the lands and lives of Indigenous peoples must secure their consent through a

coercion-free process, prefaced by comprehensive and transparent information, and conducted prior to project commencement.

However, reports from numerous civil society organizations and community testimonies reveal that this principle is routinely bypassed in the execution of the Merauke PSN (Forum Masyarakat Adat Malind Kondo Digul & SOLIDARITAS Merauke, 2024; Moiwend, 2025; Wakum, 2024). The ensuing processes tend to manifest as unidirectional socialization efforts, frequently characterized by unbalanced information dissemination (Susanto, 2021; Solidaritas Merauke, 2024). Crucial data detailing the project's impacts, such as Environmental Impact Assessments (AMDAL) or Strategic Environmental Assessments (KLHS), have not been transparently disclosed to affected communities (Forum Masyarakat Adat Malind Kondo Digul & SOLIDARITAS Merauke, 2024). Vital decisions are executed with minimal involvement from those whose lives will be permanently altered.

The Securitization of Development: The Role of the Military (TNI)

The most prominent and alarming characteristic of the Merauke PSN is the profound and structured involvement of military institutions (TNI). The TNI's role in this project extends far beyond conventional security functions. They are actively engaged across multiple project phases, ranging from facilitating negotiations and land rights transfers to escorting heavy machinery and approaching activists and legal aid organizations (Pusaka, 2024a; Forum Masyarakat Adat Malind Kondo Digul & SOLIDARITAS Merauke, 2024; Hutan Hujan, 2024; Moiwend, 2025).

This involvement effectively metamorphoses an economic development project into a securitized operation. The presence of military personnel in villages fosters an atmosphere of intimidation that deters communities from freely expressing opposition or critique (Forum Masyarakat Adat Malind Kondo Digul & SOLIDARITAS Merauke, 2024; YLBHI, 2024a). From the government's perspective, military engagement is deemed strategic and indispensable for accelerating infrastructural development in remote regions while maintaining the stability and security of national vital objects.

Voices of Resistance: From Local Protests to International Advocacy

Despite confronting intense pressure, the Indigenous communities in Merauke exhibit remarkable resilience. Critical responses against the PSN emerge through various organized avenues. At the local echelon, this manifests via direct actions such as protests and the installation of customary markers as a form of spiritual claim over the territory (Pusaka, 2024a; Moiwend, 2025; Greenpeace Indonesia, 2025).

These efforts are further consolidated through the formation of alliances and advocacy networks. Coalitions such as the #SolidaritasMerauke and the Malind Kondo Digul Indigenous Peoples Forum serve as crucial platforms uniting disparate Indigenous communities with national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), the Indonesian Forum for Environment (WALHI), the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation, and Greenpeace Indonesia (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2025; Forum Masyarakat Adat Malind Kondo Digul & SOLIDARITAS Merauke, 2024). These networks operate to amplify community voices, provide legal assistance, conduct empirical investigations, and campaign on the issue to broader audiences.

At higher echelons, this struggle has ascended to legal and international arenas. Legal challenges have been launched to contest the project's legitimacy, notably through a judicial review of the Job Creation Law at the Constitutional Court (Moiwend, 2025). Additionally, civil society coalitions actively report alleged human rights violations to United Nations (UN) mechanisms, such as Special Rapporteurs, aiming to exert global pressure on the Indonesian government (Moiwend et al., 2025; YLBHI, 2024b). These responses indicate a multifaceted struggle endeavoring to counter the dominant state narrative utilizing facts, testimonies, and assertions of universally recognized rights.

CONCLUSION

The Merauke National Strategic Project (PSN) is not solely an endeavor to augment national food security; rather, it reflects a paradigmatic contestation between a developmental rationality oriented toward resource extraction and the cosmological worldview of the Malind Anim Indigenous peoples, which is deeply anchored in ecological and spiritual bonds with the land. Beneath the developmental narrative promising prosperity lies a trajectory culminating in the constriction of living spaces, the debilitation of social structures, and the erosion of Indigenous cultural identity. Its impacts encompass the destabilization of traditional subsistence systems, diminished access to natural food sources, and an involuntary transition into a volatile cash economy. These conditions engender a profound irony: a project conceived to realize food security is simultaneously manufacturing risks of structural dependency and impoverishment. On a social level, the policy precipitates fragmentation, while on a political dimension, legal legitimacy and security apparatuses are frequently deployed to facilitate land expropriation under the guise of development.

Consequently, the Merauke PSN highlights the moral and structural dilemmas inherent in national development practices. The ambition to secure food sovereignty paradoxically births ecological, social, and spiritual vulnerabilities at the community level. Escaping this cycle of inequality necessitates a paradigm shift towards equitable and sustainable development (self-determined development) that situates Indigenous peoples as principal actors. The rigorous enforcement of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) alongside the restoration of customary land rights and living spaces remain fundamental imperatives for reconciling the mandates of development with the principles of humanity.

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