

SAGO AND RICE ARE AMBIGUOUS: FOOD SECURITY UNDER THE FOOD HOOD OF DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE IN MENTAWAI ISLANDS

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas polemik pangan yang terjadi di Mentawai akibat program pembangunan. Sejak zaman Orde Baru (Pemerintahan Soeharto) hingga saat sekarang, program-program pembangunan telah menyelubungi kehidupan orang Mentawai sehingga mengganggu keseimbangan, terutama masalah ketahanan pangan. Analisis dari FSV A (Peta Ketahanan dan Kerentanan Pangan) memperlihatkan Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai menjadi satu-satunya daerah yang mengalami kerawanan pangan di provinsi Sumatera Barat. Melalui pendekatan deskriptif dan mengelaborasi hasil penelitian sebelumnya memperlihatkan faktor-faktor program pembangunan yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah yang fatal terhadap ketahanan pangan orang Mentawai, terutama peralihan dari sagu ke beras. Hasilnya menunjukkan ketahanan pangan orang Mentawai terganggu melalui proses pembangunan dengan misi 'memodernisasikan' orang Mentawai. Sehingga, membuat mereka jauh bahkan beralih dari pangan lokal yaitu sagu, keladi dan pisang yang bersumber dari hutan ke beras. Hal ini disebabkan oleh intervensi pemerintah melalui program 'pemukiman kembali (PKMT)', bantuan sosial, akses hutan terbatas/dibatasi dan kemampuann ekonomi yang lemah mengakibatkan mereka berada di bawah tekanan hegemoni pembangunan dan seolah-olah membutuhkan bantuan. Padahal bukan keinginan dan kebutuhan orang Mentawai akan hal itu. Akibatnya, akses pangan mereka selama ini bersumber dari hutan, sudah di ganti dengan program cetak padi sawah. Namun, sebagai suku bangsa yang memiliki kebudayaan meramu dan berburu serta berladang, tidak memiliki kemampuan bercocok tanam (pertanian). Maka dari itu, orang Mentawai masih berada di garis kemiskinan dan dilema antara memakan sagu atau beras yang sama-sama tidak mudah mereka peroleh.

Kata Kunci: Ketahanan Pangan, Beras, Sagu, Hegemoni Pembangunan, Mentawai.

Abstract

This article discusses the food polemic that occurs in Mentawai due to development programs. Since the New Order era until now, development programs have enveloped the lives of Mentawai people, disrupting the balance, especially food security issues. Analysis from FSV A (Food Security and Vulnerability Map) shows that Mentawai Islands regency is the only area that experiences food insecurity in West Sumatra province. Through a descriptive approach and elaborating on the results of previous research, it shows the factors of development programs carried out by the government that are fatal to the food security of the Mentawai people, especially the transition from sago to rice. The result shows that the food security of Mentawai people is disrupted through the development process with the mission of 'modernizing' Mentawai people. Thus, making them far away and even switch from local food, namely sago, taro and banana sourced from the forest to rice. This is due to the government intervention through the 'resettlement program', social assistance, limited forest access and weak economic capabilities that put them under the pressure of development discourse and as if they need help. Whereas it is not what Mentawai people want and need. As a result, their access to food, which has been sourced from the forest, has been replaced by the rice paddy printing program. However, as an ethnic group that has a culture of gathering and hunting and farming, they do not have the ability to grow crops (agriculture). Therefore, the Mentawai people are still in the poverty line and the dilemma between eating sago or rice, both of which are not easy to obtain.

Keywords: Development Discourse, Food Security, Mentawai, Rice, Sago.

INTRODUCTION

"Indonesia is an agricultural country" needs to be questioned. Repeatedly, the Indonesian government has issued opinions that Indonesia is not doing well, especially in food issues. This is exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019

to 2021 which puts Indonesians on the ladder of food insecurity. GFSI (Global Food Security Index) shows that Indonesia's food security level in 2021 has decreased compared to 2020. In 2020 the index score reached a level of 59.5 but in 2021 it weakened to a level of 59.2 and led Indonesia to

rank 69th out of 113 countries in the world food security order (GFSI, 2022). One of the causes is poor natural resource security because it has not been protected by strong political policies, vulnerable to disasters, climate change and environmental pollution. Currently, although the pandemic is over, the level of food insecurity in Indonesia is still haunting.

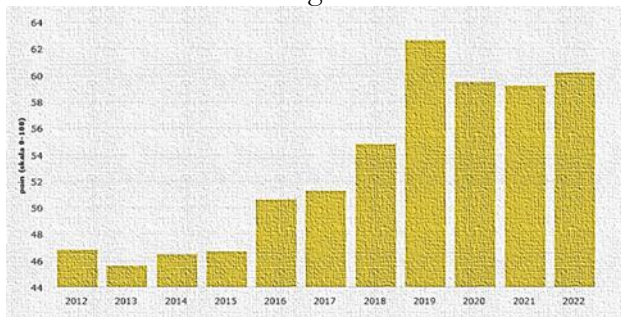


Figure 1. Indonesia's Food Security Index 2012-2022

Source: *databoks.katadata.co.id*

Almost two years after the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, the level of food insecurity in Indonesia has not shown a significant improvement. In some areas, the level of food insecurity continues to increase, especially the need for rice. Sumatra Province is the number 5 rice producing area on the island of Sumatra with an average annual rice production of 850,794 tons. However, West Sumetara based on the size of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) shows that on a global scale the prevalence of the population with food insecurity in 2020 is around 5.91%; in 2021 around 5.38%; in 2022 around 5.24% (BPS, 2022b).

Based on the data above, according to the KKP LAKIN report (2020), it is concluded that West Sumatra is classified as a 'medium food insecure' province with one affected district, namely the Mentawai Islands, which is stated from the results of the FSVA (Food Security and Vulnerability Map). This affects the food supply which is a priority concern by the government, namely the rice commodity. Rice production in West Sumatra only reached 1 373 532.19 tons in 2022 (BPS, 2022c). While in the Mentawai Islands Regency, rice production in 2022 only reached 1 387.33 tons (BPS, 2022a). Therefore, the fulfillment of rice food needs is not sufficient for the needs of the community so that it must be imported from outside Mentawai. Due to the limited access to rice, the community must utilize local non-rice food, where since long time ago the

Mentawai people have the main staple foods, namely sago, taro and bananas. However, most Mentawai people have been dependent on rice for a long time. It can be seen that the policy and program intervention done by the government to the Mentawai people has a significant impact on their food security. This was started since the New Order era (Soeharto's government) until now:

First, the development of bureaucracy and local government is also intervened with the concept of village based on the regional autonomy policy because it is considered an alienated tribe so it must be collected (read: resettled) with the concept of PKMT and resettlement or barasi (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Delfi, 2005, 2013; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Sihombing, 1979; Zakaria, 1996). Not only that, even the forests in Mentawai have become a money-making field for HPH and HTI companies in *Bumi Sikerei* since the 1970s until now (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012).

Second, the "National Food Security Improvement" program in 6 sub-districts (South Pagai, North Pagai, Sikakap, South Sipora, North Sipora and South Siberut) in Mentawai Islands Regency with the aim of agricultural intensification and building 600 ha of new rice fields to produce rice (Erwin, 2017; Erwin et al., 2022, 2023; Irwandi, 2021; Irwandi & Erwin, 2022; Pradipta, 2019). Thus, the rice produced from agricultural land can meet the needs of the Mentawai people for the fulfillment of rice (Erwin et al., 2022; Irwandi, 2022).

The government's focus on food sees rice as the main food for food consumption in Indonesia. In 2017, the RASTRA (Beras Sejahtera) program also emerged to distribute rice to the economically weak (Delfi, 2017). So it can be seen that the government's focus is on 'food self-sufficiency' and conducts a program called RASKIN (Rice for the Poor) which was marked by rejection in the Mentawai Islands and focuses on the 1000 ha rice field printing program which began in 2014. Land clearing and rice planting in Mentawai was not successful and had several obstacles. Rice production only ranges from 1,800-3,500 tons per year and only meets approximately 50% of the needs per year (Erwin, 2017). The results of production per year show that it is still lacking to meet the needs of the community due to constraints and factors of community knowledge about rice farming, natural conditions and access

to land that cannot all be used as rice fields. Influencing factors are pest problems, soil fertility, rice cultivation, farmer behavior and farmer extension (Azhari et al., 2017; Erwin et al., 2023; Irwandi, 2021, 2022; Irwandi & Erwin, 2022; saleleubaja, 2020). Thus, there is a need to revisit this food transition from sago to rice (Mitra & Erwin, 2022).

The impact is that the number of poor people in the Mentawai Islands continues to increase since 2019 around 13.22 thousand people until 2021 reaching 14.31 thousand people and the number of people who have decreased since 2019 around 92,021,000 people and in 2021 down to 88,389,000 people with a growth rate ratio of 0.13% (BPS, 2022a). Therefore, it is necessary to reassess food issues and what sago (*sagai*) really means to the Mentawai people. Through food, the duality between sago and rice shows how the Mentawai people's food security doubles under the serving hood of development discourse.

METHOD

In 2020, the government issued a regulation in the form of Presidential Regulation Number 63 of 2020 concerning the Determination of Underdeveloped Regions for 2020-2024. Where in this regulation the Mentawai Islands Regency is the only disadvantaged area in West Sumatra province. Therefore, this research is very relevant to the poverty situation that occurs, especially food problems. Through a descriptive study, it explains the background of the causes of poverty and food problems as a reality determined by various factors. The main factor is caused by development programs that have been going on since the New Order era. This research also elaborates some research results from other researchers who have reviewed food problems in Mentawai. This research focuses on 3 main islands namely Siberut island (South Siberut sub-district), Sipora island (North Sipora sub-district and Goiso oinan sub-district) and Pagai island (Sikakap sub-district and North Pagai sub-district). The reason for location selection is based on the level of paddy rice production where Sipora island and Pagai island are the largest rice producers and Siberut island is the lowest rice producer in Mentawai Islands Regency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Rice [is not] the trigger of food polemic in Mentawai

Bumi Sikerei is the nickname for the Mentawai Islands and is not as beautiful as many people imagine today. The dark period of stigmatizing the Mentawai people as 'alienated', 'simple', 'backward' and at worst as 'primitive' (Bakker, 2007; Coronese, 1986; Delfi, 2005; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Rudito, 2013; Schefold, 1985, 1991; Sihombing, 1979) has made the Mentawai people more cornered and underestimated. It is on the basis of this stigma that Mentawai is increasingly becoming the government's goal to 'build' and 'modernize'. This stipulation can be seen in the process of modernizing the Mentawai people parallel to the 'edge people' (not Mentawai). This view of modernizing has long been done since the New Order era until now.

In the 1970s the Mentawai people were "forced" to choose one of the religions recognized by the government and stop all rituals related to *Arat Sabulungan* (Coronese, 1986; Eindoven, 2009; Glossanto, 2020; Reeves, 2009; Schefold, 1985, 1991). This effort was carried out massively and systematically using the police and military apparatus. The ultimate goal is also to change the development aspect of the bureaucracy and local government through intervention with the village concept based on regional autonomy policies (Delfi, 2005, 2013), because they are considered alienated tribes, they must be gathered (read: resettled) with the concept of PKMT (Resettlement of Alienated Communities) and resettlement or *barasi* (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Delfi, 2005, 2017, 2011; Persoon, 1992; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Ridwan, 2019; Sihombing, 1979; Zakaria, 1996).

What is interesting is that the programs launched by the government aim to change the lifestyle of the Mentawai people. Thus, the biggest impact is to keep them away from their main food source, sago (Delfi & Weintré, 2014b). Sago (besides taro and banana) is the main food for Mentawai people. One sago trunk contains 400-600 kg of starch and one hectare of sago field produces about 15 tons of starch per year if mature sago trees are utilized (Persoon, 1992, p. 92). One hour of sago production produces about 2.6 kg of starch. Sago is not only food for Mentawai people

but also related to the culture that they have been practicing all this time to sustain their socio-cultural life (Delfi, 2011; Delfi & Weintré, 2014b; Erwin, 2017; Erwin et al., 2022, 2023; Irwandi, 2021, 2022; Irwandi & Erwin, 2022; Mitra & Erwin, 2022; Persoon, 1992; Pradipta, 2019; Ridwan, 2019; saleleubaja, 2020). Moreover, ecologically and knowledgeable, Mentawai people do not have agricultural traditions, so the government's efforts to convert sago to rice are also increasingly problematic for their food access (Azhari et al., 2017; Ridwan, 2019).

Siberutans have a habit of farming and gardening and making traditional houses (*uma*) around them. So when there is resettlement (PKMT), it keeps them away from their fields and gardens (Delfi & Weintré, 2014b, 2014a). Coupled with the insistence of TNS (Siberut National Park) forest conservation and HPH (Forest Concession Rights) and HTI (Industrial Plantation Forest) that further degrade the Mentawai living space (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012).

This is what makes the food security of Mentawai people disrupted. Sago is far away from settlements and rice is increasingly 'tempting' to eat but 'expensive' to obtain. Meanwhile, on the other hand, sago trees in sago fields are dwindling. On the other hand, trucks carrying rice continue to arrive under the name RASKIN (rice for the poor) or RASTRA (rice for the prosperous) and rice is also sold at roadside stalls under various brands. What about the food security of the Mentawai people?

Food security is a condition of food fulfillment for households that is reflected in the availability of sufficient food, both in quantity and quality, safe, equitable and affordable. The mission of food security in the world food policy implemented by the United Nations in 1971 was to free the population from the crisis of production or supply of staple foods. So that a strategy is needed to avoid the population from food insecurity in order to strengthen food security to achieve prosperity and alleviate poverty. Therefore, sago local food is highlighted in the food security of Mentawai people. The sago plant is a biological wealth that is quite widely found throughout Indonesia. At least Indonesian sago forests control about 51.3% of the world's forests (Ernawati et al., 2018). Therefore, sago is one of the staple foods for people in Mentawai.

Sago plays a very important role in efforts to develop food diversity in rural areas to support food security because the raw materials are available sectorally (Ernawati et al., 2018, p. 32). If food security is the key to the beginning of prosperity, why should it be rice instead of sago.

Historically, Mentawai people have had intense interaction with outsiders (*sasareu*) for a long time. The interaction was realized since the discovery of Pagai Island by a British national. Then, the transition of power from British to Dutch colonial, Japanese and after Indonesian independence. After independence and the joining of Mentawai as part of NKRI, the interaction began to be intense and the intervention of the Indonesian government at that time began to be launched. This can be seen with the influx of other ethnicities into Mentawai. These outsiders are referred to as *sasareu*. The word *sasareu* is more aimed at ethnic Minangkabau who come to Mentawai. Both those who live, work, take forest products and even outsiders who come for research purposes (Delfi, 2005; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Reeves, 1999). The arrival of outsiders to Mentawai when it was still under the administration of Padang Pariaman. Thus many Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak and Nias people settled there. By this time they had become indigenous to Mentawai land and controlled several fields, namely trade, natural products and transportation.

The Mentawai people experienced all forms of colonization that occurred in Indonesia, from the Dutch colonial to the Japanese occupation. Until it finally fell to the independent government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945. However, the recognition of the Mentawai Islands became part of Indonesia in the 1950s, where Mentawai was led by a Wedana Coordinator who was directly responsible to the Governor of West Sumatra KDH level I (Delfi, 2005, 2013). It was only in the 1970s that the Mentawai area changed its status to the Mentawai Islands Special Project Authority (OPKM) or the Mentawai Islands Development Authority (nine years later) with the aim of increasing development in the Mentawai Islands.

Since OPKM, government programs began to arrive in Mentawai, one of which was the Mentawai settlement program. In the OPKM project in 1981 to 1982, settlements were made around the east coast where Muntei and Maileppet

became new settlements for Siberut people who were on the Mentawai river (Department of Forestry, 1995). The Mentawai government policy, after 1954, was to create an implementation strategy program by developing a series of settlements by conducting PKMT (Resettlement of Alienated Communities or Resettlement of Isolated Communities).

PKMT is considered by the government as a form of isolation of development and people's welfare (Delfi, 2005). Their houses are built according to a uniform design in zoned areas next to rivers or beaches. They are forced to abandon their *uma* or communal houses. *Uma* is a means for cultural ceremonies, rituals, and storage of all that is sacred. *Uma* is also a term used to refer to the whole group and ancestral land to move to (Hernawati, S, 2007; Roza, 1997; Rudito, 2013).

The Mentawai Community Development Plan through the Intervention of the Mentawai Islands Development Authority (OPKM) and the Department of Social Affairs (PKMT). Has created a 'new' settlement for Mentawai people. So that the terms that refer to the concept of settlement appear. The concept of *barasi* is actually the foundation inherited by the Dutch in Mentawai settlement. At the time, the aim was to combine separate *uma-uma* so that they could be coordinated. So the settlement program that occurred is called *barasi* by the Mentawai people. *Barasi* is derived from the word *barasiah* (in Minangkabau) which was absorbed into the Mentawai language (Budiono et al., 2023; Delfi, 2005). When the settlement was built Mentawai people were forbidden to keep pigs near the house because they were 'dirty'. So with no pigs in the settlement, it will be *barasiah* (clean)-*barasi*.

Later, the OPKM resettlement program in Mentawai was called resettlement for the national development program. The construction of these houses refers more to houses that are not at all the same as the *uma* of the Mentawai people. It is only 30m in size and has a tin roof and wooden walls. The house has one bedroom and a terrace, as well as a kitchen space. The program also provides seedlings and agricultural tools initiated by the Department of Social Affairs in West Sumatra at the time.

These resettlement houses (*telemen*) are houses built by the government, so they must follow government rules. This program is in the

mission of PKMT (Resettlement of Alienated Communities) which began in 1972 in Siberut (Delfi, 2005). Siberut people call these houses *telemen*. The designation of *telemen* is to foster Mentawai 'alienated community' with government regulations. After that, in 1979 the village government law No. 5 of 1979 was issued. Thus, villages were formed with official names. There are 50 villages in Siberut and they are located in the administrative area of Padang Pariaman (Delfi, 2005, 2013). Then, after the issuance of Law No. 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Autonomy, the Mentawai Islands became its own district in the province of West Sumatra.

This law authorizes the Mentawai Islands Regency Government to form its own government system using the term Village or Nagari. This is because the West Sumatra region is dominated by Minangkabau so that many districts name village-level areas with the term Nagari (*babaliak ka nagari*). However, in Mentawai, there is a polemic on the meaning of the word "village" in Siberut language is *laggai* or *pulaggajat*. *Laggai* government is a form of government based on *Arat Sabulungan* in Mentawai that refers to ethnic identity, religion, race and origin that are bound by culture to carry out self-regulation (Samaloisa, 2020).

However, the term *laggai* is not suitable for naming villages because in some dialects it has a negative meaning such as in the Sabirut dialect meaning genitals (Budiono et al., 2023). So to harmonize, the village system is used. So that the villages resulting from PKMT and OPKM were called Villages and Hamlets. The development aspect of the bureaucracy and local government through intervention with the village concept based on regional autonomy policy (Delfi, 2005), because it is considered an alienated tribe, it must be collected (read: resettled) with the concept of PKMT and resettlement or *barasi* (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Delfi, 2005, 2013; Persoon, 1992; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Schefold, 1985; Sihombing, 1979; Zakaria, 1996).

Livelihood and Needs Fulfillment of Mentawai People

Mentawai people have several sources of livelihood. Their livelihood is more concerned with fulfilling the need for food and nutrition. The developed sectors include agriculture, plantation, fishery and livestock. In the fisheries sector,

Mentawai has high marine products. In 2022, the production of marine catches reached 10 034 tons and reached a value of Rp. 250,850,000,000 with the main type of capture fish, tuna (*Euthynnus affinis*) reaching 2 483.5 tons. The agricultural sector refers more to the cultivation of food commodities. Food commodities are in the form of paddy rice plants. However, not all areas in Mentawai have rice fields and only in a few spots. The agricultural system is newly recognized by the Mentawai people and ecologically very difficult to develop. The most important thing in the livelihood of the Mentawai people is gardening/farming and raising livestock. All communities in Mentawai have fields filled with food crops in the form of sago (*Metroxylon sago*). Other food crops are also planted in the plantation

such as cassava (*Manihot tesculenta*), sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), taro/keladi (*Colocasia esculenta*) and banana (*Musa acuminata*). These crops are the main source of food for Mentawai people. Other crops grown in fields and gardens are trading commodities, namely areca nut (*Areca catechu*), cacao (*Theobroma cacao*), rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) and coconut (*Cocos nucifera*). Production of field products in 2022 such as coconut reached 16 100.26 tons, cocoa reached 83.53 tons. In the livestock sector, the most important thing is raising pigs (*Sus scrofa domesticus*) and chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*). The number of pigs raised reached 43 483 heads and chickens amounted to 69 789 heads (Mentawai Islands Regency in Figures, 2023).

Table 1. Cassava, Taro, Sweet Potato, Banana and Sago Production in Mentawai.

Subdistrict	Cassava (Ton)	Taro (Ton)	Sweet Potato (Ton)	Banana (Kuintal)	Sago (Ton)
South Pagai	-	39	20	8 075	0,24
Sikakap	91,5	187	71,5	1 940	1,92
North Pagai	37,5	70	30	18 969	-
South Sipora	-	69	-	1 328	6,39
North Sipora	13,5	113	7	1 246	2,77
South Siberut	36	86	7	5 105	276,00
Southwest Siberut	59	106	39,5	813	102,22
Central Siberut	27	49	39,5	1 108	94,50
North Siberut	55,5	158	42	1 648	86,05
West Siberut	49,5	63	35	420	122,47
Mentawai Islands	370	855	291,5	40 652	692,56

Source: *Mentawai Islands Regency in Figures, 2023.*

In addition, the forest area is quite large, the community utilizes Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as rattan (*Calamus spp*) and manau (*Calamus manan*) plants. The production of forest products such as rattan reached 17 800 sticks and manau reached 448 312 sticks in 2022. In addition to farming, gardening and livestock, the Mentawai people also utilize the forest for hunting and gathering activities. The hunting and gathering activities of the Mentawai people in South Siberut are due to the relatively forested natural environment. According to BPS data in 2021, the forest area in Mentawai is around 531,456 ha (84.91% of the area). This allows the community to adapt themselves to the forest and find life with the biological wealth in the forest such as plants and animals. Vegetation in the forest area utilized by Mentawai people are sago (*Metroxylon sago*),

rattan (*Calamus spp*) and medicinal plants where many leaves are used in the treatment ceremony. The utilization of animals in the forest such as primates such as dwarf siamang (*Hylobates klossi*) or billou, snub-nosed monkey (*Simias concolor*) or simakobu, langur (*Presbytis potenziani*) or joja and macaque (*Macaca pegensis*) or bokkoi. Besides these primates, there are also other animals such as deer (*Muntiacus muntjac*), birds (*Aves*), black squirrels (*Callociurus melanogaster*) and wild boar (*Sus barbatus*).

Farming and gardening activities are different for Mentawai people. Farming areas are located in forests that are opened specifically to grow food plants and are also useful for the community's economy. Usually the plants planted in the field are long-term plants. Such as areca nut, banana, durian and jengkol. The Mentawai people's farming system, in one plot of land used

for the field, various plants are planted in it. This is also based on the fact that the fields are inherited property that is passed down from parents to children. So the task of the child who holds the rights to the field is to add plants and pick the results of the plants in the field. Therefore, any crops that can be planted, will be planted in the field for Mentawai people.

In the agricultural sector, since the rice field printing program in Mentawai, many locations have been used as land for planting rice. However,

rice cultivation is still relatively low and production has decreased every year. This is due to several factors, especially the contours of the land and the habits of people who do not recognize the culture of agriculture, especially rice. As a result, rice does grow but the maintenance is inadequate such as handling pests and types of pests that are different from the plains of Sumatra. In essence, human resources, especially Mentawai people, are not qualified to farm rice fields.

Table 2. Planting Area, Harvest and Production of Rice Paddy 2018 in Mentawai

Subdistrict	Planted Area (Ha)	Harvested Area (Ha)	Production (Ton)	Average Production (Ton/Ha)
South Pagai	378,00	296,00	716,02	2,42
Sikakap	398,00	399,00	965,18	2,42
North Pagai	384,00	358,00	866,00	2,42
South Sipora	582,00	490,00	1 185,90	2,42
North Sipora	245,00	263,00	636,20	2,42
South Siberut	90,00	153,00	370,10	2,42
Southwest Siberut	80,00	55,00	133,05	2,42
Central Siberut	12,00	30,00	72,60	2,42
North Siberut	168,00	110,00	266,10	2,42
West Siberut	150,00	202,00	488,64	2,42
Mentawai Islands	2 487,00	2 356,00	5 699,79	2,42

Source: BPS Mentawai Islands Regency

From the table above, it can be seen that in 2018 the production of paddy rice was 5 699.79 tons. The sub-district with the largest rice harvest area is South Sipora and certainly has the highest production of 1 185.90 tons. While the lowest rice production sub-district is Central Siberut 72.60 tons. Compared to rice production in 2018, there was a decrease in 2022 of 1 387.33 tons (West Sumatra in Figures, 2022). This is due to land shrinkage. In 2016 the harvest area was 1 131.10 ha, in 2017 it was 2 161.00 ha, in 2018 it was 296.00 ha and in 2022 it was 603.61 ha (Mentawai Islands Regency in Figures, 2022). When viewed from the data since 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2022 experienced unstable fluctuations and tended to decrease even though in 2017 there was a drastic increase. According to Ridwan (2019) this was due to the fact that from 2017 to 2018 the provincial government carried out a paddy field printing program with a raw land area of 1,594 ha with a production target of 5 tons/ha.

The source of livelihood and fulfillment of food and nutrition needs of Mentawai people depend on the forest and the sea. Thus, both the

forest and the sea are kept in balance so that they can produce, provide benefits and fertility as well as abundant marine products. In order to maintain the balance between the forest-sea and humans, it is regulated by a cultural system called *Arat Sabulungan*. In *Arat Sabulungan*, it is believed that the forest has a ruler called *Saika Lelau* (Lord of the Forest) and the sea is guarded by *Saika Koat* (Lord of the Sea). From these two ruling spirits, the forest and the sea provide benefits for the Mentawai people. Thus, the issue of food and livelihood sources is not only to fulfill food and nutrition needs but is regulated and related to the Mentawai cultural system. if it is disturbed and changed, it will disrupt the balance and ultimately have a negative impact on the Mentawai people themselves.

Under the Shadow of Development: Between Sago to Rice

During the New Order (Orba) government of Indonesia with the rise of capitalism and the demand for timber exports, Mentawai was affected by the turbulence. The suppression of this new face of capitalism was carried out through

interventions into important elements of Mentawai people's lives. The government began to interfere and prohibit their traditional belief system (Glossanto, 2020; Yulia et al., 2018). Arat Sabulungan which has been practiced for centuries and became the backbone of social, cultural and magical (supernatural) life relationships was shifted and replaced with new beliefs (monotheism). In terms of harmony and living arrangements, those who live in uma (communal houses) are forced to move and gather in a herd (group). In fact, uma is not just a place to live, but a space for Mentawai people to carry out cultural agendas and social relationships. As a result, those who sang the songs of the ancestors were beaten by the police and their cultural ritual tools were burned and tattooing became a taboo. On the ecological side, the forest environment, which is the source of life, is cut down for the commercialization of large companies in Indonesia. Those who protect the forest are imprisoned. In the end, Mentawai people become refugees in their own home (marginalized/alienated from their hometown).

Ultimately, the elimination of traditional beliefs, resettlement, logging, exploitation and conservation led to a shift in the lifestyle of the Mentawai people. The most basic lifestyle is food, from sago to rice is shifted. These efforts are made by stigmatizing sago with 'ancient', 'PKI', and dirty food. So willingly and necessarily, rice replaces the ancestral food that is branding with 'progress', 'civilized' and food that becomes a measure of welfare like a 'weapon' that can keep Mentawai people away from poverty.

As a result of this poverty issue, sago must be replaced with rice. This rice program has made Mentawai people confused or trapped in a complicated liminality. It is like eating a simalakama fruit; 'to eat' or 'not to eat', being two sides where, eating sago or not eating it will have an impact on their socio-culture. For example, in a punen (ritual) sago will not be replaced with other food offerings. On the other hand, eating or not eating rice will impact the Mentawai people's food security and poverty alleviation. Rice that is not suitable to grow in the swampy land, rice whose price is too high to be bought by the financial coffers, rice that is not filling for the Mentawai people. This intertwining will continue to repeat in

the lives of the Mentawai people in food issues, at least until today.

The programs that were born through OPKM by the Indonesian government with the aim to 'build' the Mentawai people. 'Building' here is changing and distancing them from their 'authenticity' to a modern (civilized) form. So these programs are intervened in several ways. The control and restriction of forest for Mentawai people through conservation and logging has destroyed the living space and source of life of Mentawai people. The coercion to choose the official religion has made Mentawai people scared and far away from their ancestors' beliefs that make them exist and recognized as a nation. The mixing and meeting between cultures also gives friction that makes Mentawai people forget themselves either consciously or unconsciously with their 'kementawaian'.

The above forms of intervention refer to the social, cultural, economic and political fields (Delfi, 2017, 2018). These interventions have disrupted the food that is the basis of Mentawai people's lives. They are resettled and far from their food sources. Their forests are destroyed and localized, limiting their access to food sources. They are forced into formal religion and away from traditional rituals where sago is important. They are influenced by the pressures of modernization brought by other ethnicities. So they are insecure about their identity.

Now, sago is no longer the main thing. Rice may have replaced it. But the realization that "Mentawai is sago" sometimes appears and sometimes forgotten. This is because if Mentawai people force themselves to eat sago they will be considered 'undeveloped' 'uncivilized' and not modern' and access to sago has shifted and is limited. However, if they insist on eating rice, they might be considered advanced and modern. But the power and socio-cultural spaces are not supportive. Rice is expensive, not filling, and cannot replace sago in ritual offerings. So, this simalakama happens in the life of Siberut Mentawai people which makes them have to choose and quibble under the hood of development program.

It goes back to the initial assumption that sago is not just a matter of food (stomach) for the Mentawai people. Instead, it becomes the starting point of infection and spreads to other parts.

Damaged ecosystems, disrupted lifestyles, disturbed natural and human balance and continued exploitation. This is too high a price for Mentawai people to pay in the name of progress (sago to rice). But optimism returns as the burden of the transition is only temporary until rice can be eaten without having to produce it themselves. But here's the rub again, some people act and participate out of fear of 'local authority' due to perceived power relations and expectations of the future (progress). The choice between sago or rice to eat is not based on the characteristics of Siberutans, but rather on power relations that are particularly decisive. This hegemony is what Mentawai people are experiencing for 4 decades.

The intervention of development discourse on sago and its transition (to) rice will make them lose their cultural identity. For the sake of 'progress, modern, and following the flow of globalization' through government-run development, they are increasingly marginalized. So it seems that to reach Mentawai people in a 'civilized' state, identity is also politicized in various ways that confuse the individuals of Mentawai people. Of course, the politicization is under the shadow of the hegemony of power and government that runs the 'civilization building'. Food security in Mentawai is not only about food, culture but also about politicized identity. The process is still running and rolling until now and no one knows when it will end.

CONCLUSION

The homonym 'mendua' is used to explain the exposure of food in Mentawai as a fundamental doubt on the issue of food security. The word mendua indicates a repeated or twofold vagueness according to the origin of the base word 'two'. Thus, between rice (berak) and sago (sagai) which on one hand is interpreted by the government as a vague object (food commodity) for the fulfillment of Mentawai people's food needs. This anthropocentric view towards the food security resources of Mentawai people makes them categorized as a medium that must be 'civilized' (modern). The goal does look sweet, namely 'moving away from poverty and progressing', but it keeps 'parasites' from time to time paralyzing them, especially towards food. The parasite is in the form of government programs that have inhabited Mentawai people's bodies for years. Thus, a

dilemma arises that makes Mentawai people switch from sago (native food) to rice (pseudo food) due to development. People living in Mentawai Islands continuously fight for their body with sago intake. However, the resistance does not go well in consuming sago. The center of the 'dining table' continues to be plagued with the tantalizing 'whiteness of rice' while the 'blackness of sago' remains standing in the corner of the furnace which is occasionally brought to the plate. From another perspective, the dominance of rice is perpetuated and studded with the discourse of 'better food-forward' through development programs. So that Mentawai people are in the simalakama of 'maintaining sago or switching to rice' which has been served in their 'rice hood', namely agricultural lands, rice aid programs and the rampant commercialization of sago. The channels of food development discourse through rice continue to be expanded to pierce the heart of the Mentawai hinterland. Until now, sago continues to be subverted, and rice continues to be sold until it is truly 'advanced' and achieves food security based on the benchmark of 'rice'.

Through the view of postmodernism, the development and modernization movement is an attempt to dominate. This domination is born from the government towards people who are considered 'poor' and 'backward' (Afida, 2022). However, this backwardness was created long ago by a prolonged process of colonization without realizing it. As the government dominates the development of the marginalized community, the more exploited the Mentawai people will be, which leads to their food. Thus, discourse analysis is used to understand the power hidden behind knowledge. The government, on the one hand, has the power and knowledge about progress but forgets the cultural values of the Mentawai people towards their food. Thus, the relationship between knowledge and power strengthens the domination of the marginalized. The problem of food is not a matter of stomach and fulfillment of nutrition. However, food (sago) is an important part of Mentawai culture. The government's shift to rice for the sake of progress has forgotten that. Thus, it creates problems in the form of rational and subjective understanding of modernization (discourse of power and modern knowledge) related to food security. All of that seems given and

natural, however, the reality shows a dominating form of discourse.

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