



Community Research Report

INDIGENOUS MENTAWAI



Suku Mentawai
Supporting Indigenous Futures

INTRODUCTION

In the depths of Mentawai, a small group of islands located off the west coast of Sumatra, survives an indigenous tribal community who, for thousands of years, have sustained their survival by maintaining practice and preservation of Arat Sabulungan; a complex cultural belief system giving reverence to the spirit of their ancestors, the sky, land, ocean, rivers, and all that is natural within.

At present, besides just a few small clans whom - led by Sikerei (shamans) - have managed to reject modern influence and instead continue to capitalize on their in-depth knowledge of the forest's foods, medicines and building resources, the Mentawai existence remains at the mercy of significant cultural, behavioural and ideological change. A change, brought about by the gradual introduction and influence of foreign practice that, evidently, is having an adverse effect; resulting in a significant decline in health, wellbeing and livelihood across the wider community.

Mentawai is highly rich in resources and one of the most sought after surf tourism destinations in the world, but despite this, a vast majority of the 65,000+ population now living within settlement



villages and coconut-farming communities simply struggle to survive. Issues involving stress and frustration brought about by the growing difficulties to earn an income in an environment where there is limited opportunity for employment is resulting in a desperation leading to instances of theft, violence and development of a dependency on outsiders for support.

Prior to this report there does not appear to have been any attempt made to record qualitative or quantitative data ascertaining what impact foreign influence is having on Mentawai's indigenous peoples; nothing recorded regarding their perspective surrounding these changes, nor what strategies, if any, they would like to implement in order to counteract the potentially dire consequences caused by such a fundamental change to their world.

This meaning that the data presented within this community research report, which has been collated with the explicit goal of identifying these perspectives in order to present back to the community so as to allow fair opportunity for the development of a sustainable community-based solution, is unprecedented.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Mentawai is an archipelago found off the west coast of Sumatra (Indonesia) consisting of approximately 70 islands and islets. The four main islands, shown in map 1.0, are North and South Pagai, Sipora, and Siberut; with Siberut – spanning 4,480 square kilometres and with a population of approximately 29,918¹ (c.2000) – being the largest of the four.

The ancestors of the indigenous Mentawai people are believed to have first migrated to the region somewhere between 2000 – 500 BCE (Reeves, 2000), whereas the first colonialists are stated, in early documentation by John Crisp who landed on the islands in 1792, to have arrived in the mid 1700's in the way of Englishmen whom made an unsuccessful attempt to establish a pepper farming settlement on an island south of South Pagai (Crisp, 1799). For many years prior to this trading was existent between indigenous communities and mainland Sumatran Chinese and Malays (Francis, 1839).

Having established their presence 40 years prior, whilst signing control of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, the Dutch returned in 1864 to claim the Mentawai Islands under the sovereignty of the East Indies (Mess, 1870); a position maintained until the Second World War.

Throughout this period the relationship between the Dutch and indigenous communities was reportedly a satisfactory one, as is documented through account of conversation with Mentawai elders whom labelled this time as 'the good old days' where they 'received fair prices in trading and were free to practice their cultural lifestyle, Arat Sabulungan²' (Bakker, 1999). Aside from a military campaign enforcing the eradication of tribal warfare – a change supposedly welcomed by the Islanders – records show that the Dutch



did not attempt to meddle with the day-to-day lives of Mentawai people. Journals written during this period talk of 'flower-adorned' natives and time being spent 'with the amiable savages' (Maass, 1902) on 'the island of happiness' (Karny, 1925).

In 1901, August Lett, the first missionary to the Mentawai, arrived on the south coast of North Pagai - establishing a view contrary to that of the Dutch and other early 20th century travellers. Lett, and subsequent missionaries sent to the islands, disapproved and looked down upon the indigenous community for their superstitious beliefs, rituals, and cultural behaviours; describing the people as 'lazy, underdeveloped and stupid' and having 'the distress of a poor people trapped in the terror of evil' (Hammons, 2010). By 1915, after some difficulties – including the death of August Lett (Persoon, 1987) – missionaries had gained their first convert, extended their efforts to Sipora and Siberut and, by 1932, had gone on to establish a mission station in Maeleppet (Siberut), (Sihombing, 1979).

¹ (Regional Autonomy Website. c.2000.) Of which about 90% are of Indigenous Mentawai origin, the other 10% are essentially made up of Minangkabau, Javanese, and Batak (Bastide, 2008).

² Arat Sabulungan is a cultural existence by which the indigenous Mentawai people live; held together by a belief system paying reverence to the spirits of their ancestors, the sky, the land, the ocean, rivers, and everything natural within. Led by the shaman (Kerei or Sikerei), ritualistic ceremonies are quite common.



Of the many changes experienced by the people of Siberut throughout this period and the decades ensuing – notably the establishment of a penal colony in Muara Siberut and the arrival and violent rule of Japanese authority during the period of the Second World War – the most significant, in terms of assimilating the people of Mentawai, arrived in 1950 (after declaration of Indonesia’s Independence in 1945) when Mentawai became part of the Indonesian state (Bakker, 1999).

As early as 1954, under Indonesia’s goal of national unity and cultural adaptation, the National Government began introducing development and civilization programmes designed to ‘integrate the tribal groups into the social and cultural mainstream of the country’ (Persoon, 2004).

This, for native Mentawai, meant the eradication of Arat Sabulungan practice; the forced surrender, burning and destruction of possessions used to facilitate cultural or ritual behaviour; and their Sikerei (shamans) being disrobed, beaten, and forced into slave labour and imprisonment.

Under Pancasila³, the five principles for Indonesian state philosophy formulated by the Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno, the Indonesian Government also began to enforce their new nationwide religious policies; issuing a decree declaring that all Indonesian people must belong to one of the five recognized religions⁴. Which, for the Mentawai Islands, resulted in an immediate influx of missionaries and an increase in violence and pressure on the people to adopt change⁵.

At the core of the programmes implementation strategy was the development of a series of resettlement (PKMT⁶) villages (1971); whereby

houses were constructed according to a uniform design in zoned areas alongside the main rivers/ coastline and the people forced to abandon their Uma⁷ and ancestral land to relocate.

After a period of five years these settlements were removed of project status and left in the hands of civil servants and local government authorities to maintain progress and control. This was also the time in which logging companies began to appear throughout the Mentawai Islands.

By the late 1980’s, after loggers had devastated the forests of Sipora, North and South Pagai, and – prior to being challenged by a selection of international organizations⁸ - were also in the process of achieving the same on Siberut, the Government’s pressure on resettlement was somewhat relaxed (primarily due to the steady flow of tourism the indigenous community attracted). With this, the people in the Mentawai found that they were once again free to practice their native cultural activities - in areas away from the villages.

However, by this point, and as it remains today, the number of indigenous people still actively practicing the cultural customs, rituals and ceremonies of Arat Sabulungan had already been limited to a very small population of clans primarily located around the Sarereiket and Sakuddei regions in the south of Siberut Island.

“issues involving stress and frustration brought about by the growing difficulties to earn an income in an environment where there is limited opportunity for employment.”

³ First articulated on June 1, 1945, Sukarno argued that the future Indonesian state should be based on the Five Principles: Indonesian nationalism; internationalism, or humanism; consent, or democracy; social prosperity; and belief in one God. In the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia promulgated in 1945, the Five Principles were listed in a slightly different order and in different words: the belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations, and social justice for all the peoples of Indonesia. (Britannica, viewed 2012)

⁴ Based on the Indonesian notion ‘belief in one God’, there are officially only five religions recognized: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Tropenbos International 2004: The Position of Indigenous Peoples in the Management of Tropical Forests).

⁵ In the end many chose Christianity due to its flexible views on the possession and consumption of pigs, which play an integral role in Mentawai history and culture.

⁶ An abbreviation for ‘Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Terasing’: Development and welfare of the isolated communities.

⁷ The Uma is the central hub for cultural ceremony, ritual, and storage of all items sacred; it’s a type of ‘longhouse’ built to house an entire clan (eight or more nuclear families) at any one time, which is particularly necessary during times of ceremony. ‘Uma’ is also a term used when referencing an entire clan.

⁸ In 1980, WWF (world wildlife fund) published a report entitled ‘Saving Siberut’ which, along with the support of other organizations – primarily UNESCO and Survival International – and other additional international interest, helped persuade the Indonesian government to cancel logging concessions and declare the forests of Siberut a biosphere reserve.

METHOD

The data analysed in this report was collected through a baseline survey made up of both quantitative and qualitative questions, which was conducted over a period of seven days during November 2011. Overseen by Rob Henry and Matt Hannon, the survey was carried out by a small team of trained surveyors within the settlement village of Matotonan in the south of Siberut Island.

The team, lead by Siberut local Augustus Sikatsila¹⁰, consisted of five male and five female members all of Mentawai origin. The team was selected due to their competence in both the local Mentawai dialect and Bahasa Indonesia, thus ensuring adequate comprehension and translation of participant responses.

In order to sufficiently canvas a balanced cross-section of this indigenous community it was necessary to develop five variations of the baseline survey; each designed to specifically target a key demographic – male/female, student/youth, sikerei (shaman), community/group/network leader, and schoolteacher.

After an initial half day of on-site survey training each team member was designated responsibility over a particular demographic. Each survey consisted of between 40-46 questions and required an average of 20-30 minutes per individual; allowing for a total sample of 441 surveys to be collected across the seven days. Each of the surveys was conducted on a one-to-one basis after the team approached (at random) a member of their target demographic.



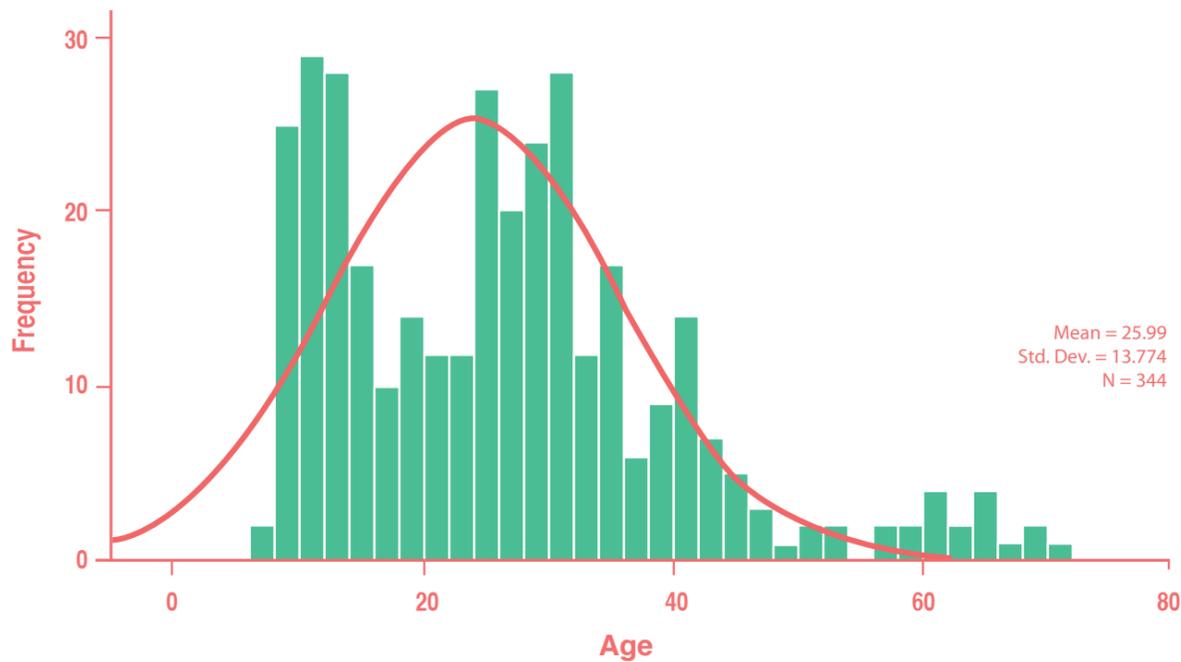
⁹Matotonan is a resettlement (PKMT) village located alongside the Rereiket River, which connects a number of tributaries with the ocean at the port town of Muara Siberut. Travel from Muara takes approximately 8 hours via motorized canoe; with Matotonan being the last of the most commonly visited PKMT settlements found along this route (others include Rogdok, Madobak, Ugai and Butui). Approximately 1500-2000 people currently populate the Matotonan village, however it was discovered that – due to many spending their time tending to family lands, crops/gardens, and livestock in the surrounding forest region – during any given weekday, on average, below 1000 people would be occupying the village. There are approximately 250 houses that have been erected, along with 1 elementary/junior school, 1 church, 1 mosque, and a Puskesmas (a government supplied medical centre) – that, due to the absence of medical staff, has never been in operation. The village has also been allocated a hierarchical structure with the placement and employment of eight civil servants – the Kepala Desa (head of village), the Sekretaris Desa (village secretary), and six variations of Kepala Dusun (head of a division within the village). All of whom have been surveyed and included in this study.

¹⁰Augustus Sikatsila, born in Saibi Samukop (Siberut), speaks, reads and writes in English, Indonesian and Mentawai.



FINDINGS

Fig. 1.0 Age of survey candidates (graph based on 344 responses)



The data presented within this report is the result of a careful analysis of each of the 441 samples obtained during the aforementioned baseline survey. It is important to note that an equal share of male and female (54/46%) candidates were canvassed across an age bracket of between 7-70 years, with the average age equalling approximately 26.

Therefore, taking into consideration that 97 of the elder candidates were unable to account for their precise age – primarily due to a cultural divide whereby the concept of measuring age in terms of years has, until recent times,

been foreign to them – the data presented should provide an accurate reflection of the views expressed by the indigenous Mentawai community located within this region.

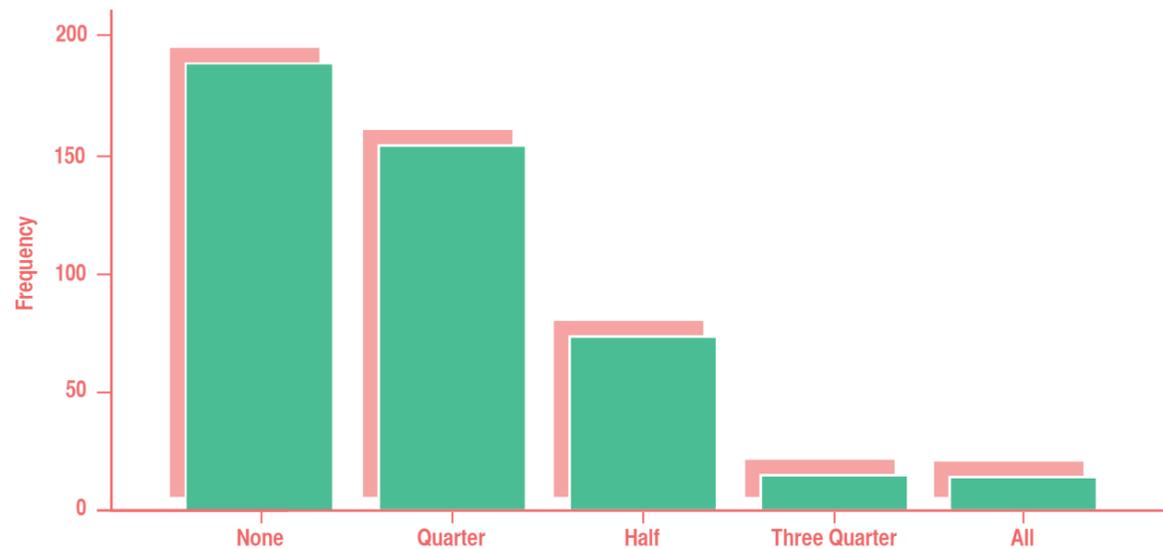
NB: Throughout this report each sample range will be referred to by their demographic, rather than by their age bracket. For example, ‘--% of students...’; whilst the collective sample group shall be referred to as ‘the community’.



“AS EARLY AS 1954, UNDER INDONESIA’S GOAL OF NATIONAL UNITY AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION, THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT BEGAN INTRODUCING DEVELOPEMENT AND CIVILIZATION PROGRAMMES DESIGNED TO ‘INTERGRATE THE TRIBAL GROUPS INTO THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MAINSTREAM OF THE COUNTRY’” PERSOON, 2004

General

Fig. 1.1 How much of your daily food / drink comes from the village?



Literacy levels in Matotonan appear to sit at an average level, with 50.3% of the community competent in both reading and writing skills. Under the guidance of community leaders (92.3%) and teachers (100%), it would appear that progress is being made within the younger generations as findings indicate that 77.7% of students are competent in both.

However, despite the students (56.9%) being taught to use Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesia's national language) at school, findings show that a mere 36.3% of the community are able to communicate effectively using Bahasa and that Mentawai dialect remains the preferred language spoken within the region.

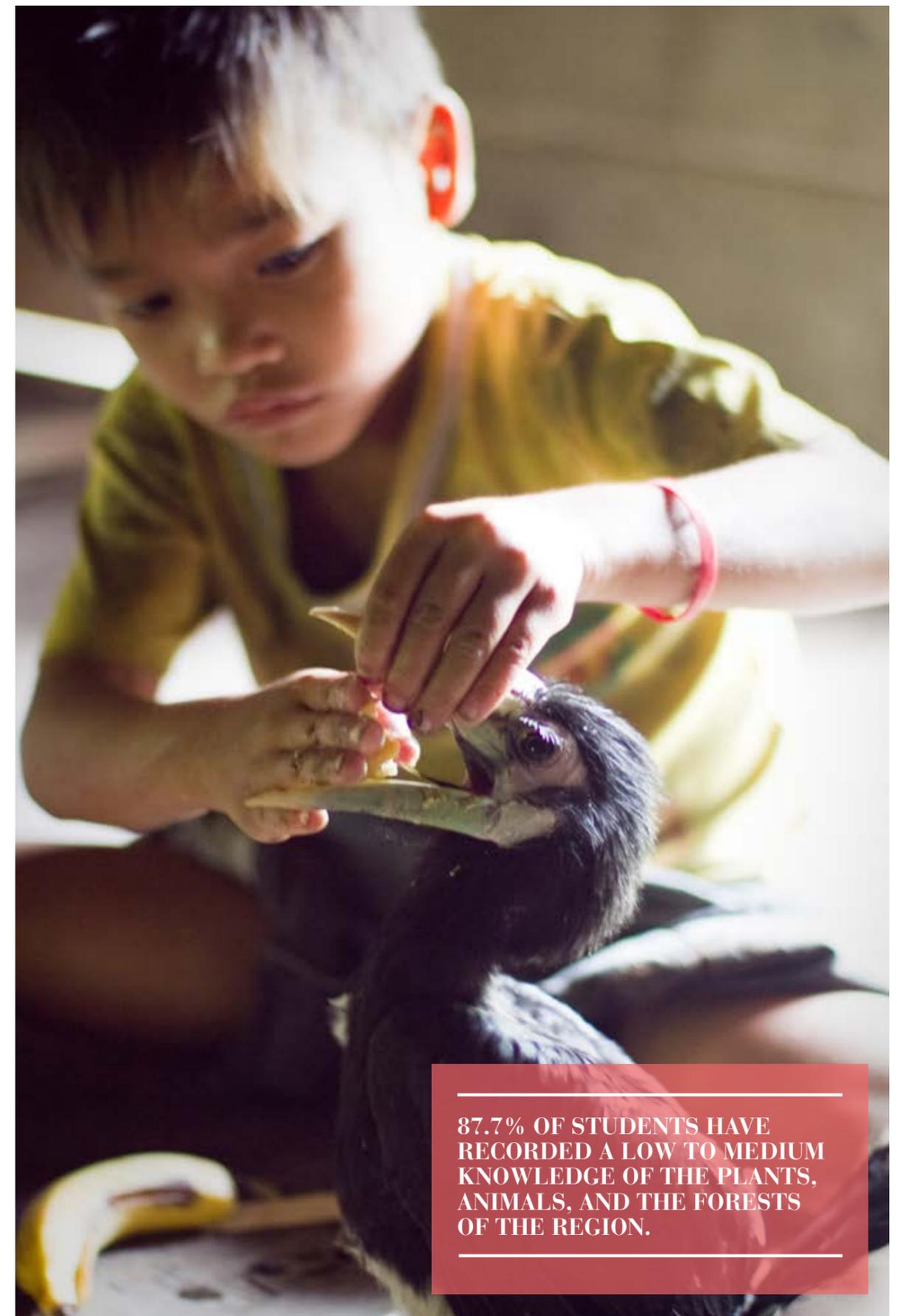
As shown in figure 1.1, findings indicate that - whilst there are currently four general stores (known as toko)¹¹ servicing Matotonan - the community still relies heavily on the surrounding forest and rivers as the predominant source of their daily nutritional needs.

Sago, the staple food of indigenous Mentawai, continues to make up the primary portion of the community's daily food intake; with 93.9% of the community emphasising that they would not be able to survive without having access to the Sago Palm (which is currently found in abundance in their surrounding forests).

Testimony to the importance Matotonan locals place on their native environment, 97.5% of the community state that the availability and access to the natural resources surrounding is the number one factor in ensuring their continued survival.

It was found (qualitatively) that, regardless of the education levels obtained by an individual here, the limited employment prospects within the region mean that it is very difficult to obtain work and, therefore, to afford to purchase food supplies. Discounting students, 65.3% of the community listed economic issues as a considerable barrier to maintaining daily life in Matotonan.

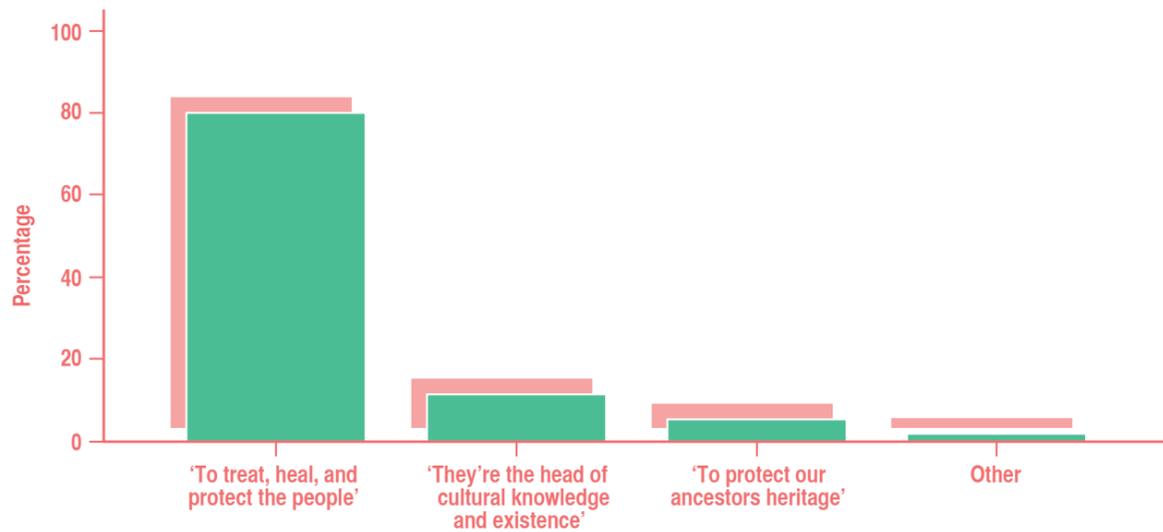
¹¹ These stores - retailing noodles, rice, sugar, chocolate, sweets, tea, coffee, cigarettes, fuel, etc, are all businesses that have been established, and continue to be run, by people of Minangkabau origin.



87.7% OF STUDENTS HAVE RECORDED A LOW TO MEDIUM KNOWLEDGE OF THE PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND THE FORESTS OF THE REGION.

Health

Fig 1.2 What is the role of Sikerei here in the community?



Access to health care on Siberut Island has not altered since 1998 when Cheeseman and Kramer conducted the health research study, *Incidence of Illness Among the Mentawai People of Siberut Island*¹², as their description of the island's modern health care facilities remains valid: 'Currently there's only one (operational) government-run community health clinic (puskesmas) in each of the two district towns, Muara Siberut and Muara Sikabaluan. A Puskesmas has been built in each of the PKMT villages (over 60 settlements) throughout the Island but, with medical staff concentrated solely to the two district towns, none of these have really ever been operational'.

Meaning that, for all residents of communities located in the interior or on the west coast of Siberut – whom due to financial restrictions are seldom able to afford the cost of transportation

to these district towns – are effectively unable to access these modern health care services.

In spite of this, findings show that the general levels of health within the Matotonan community remains high, as not one person canvassed during the baseline survey cited health or access to medical assistance as being a barrier to their existence here.

A possible reason for this finding – as illustrated in figure 1.2 – could be attributed to the presence of Sikerei. Whose role, as confirmed through qualitative data by 80.6% of all other demographics, is 'to treat, heal, and protect the people'. This meaning that, if Sikerei are fulfilling the role as a community doctor, then the Matotonan settlement – where there's found to be around 1 Sikerei per 35 residents – actually possesses Siberut's highest ratio of doctors per capita.

Adding weight to this is the data gathered by Cheeseman and Kramer during their aforementioned health report, which sought statistics on the proliferation of six major illnesses found on Siberut Island - malaria, cholera, measles, tuberculosis, pneumonia and typhoid.

As seen in figure 1.3, when focusing on the region where almost all the last remaining Sikerei actively practicing traditional Arat Sabulungan culture are located, of the 165 people canvassed by the pair in Matotonan there were no apparent cases of illness. Whilst in Madobak, the only other village surveyed for the report within this particular region, a mere 19.2% (of 510 people) reported having been affected.

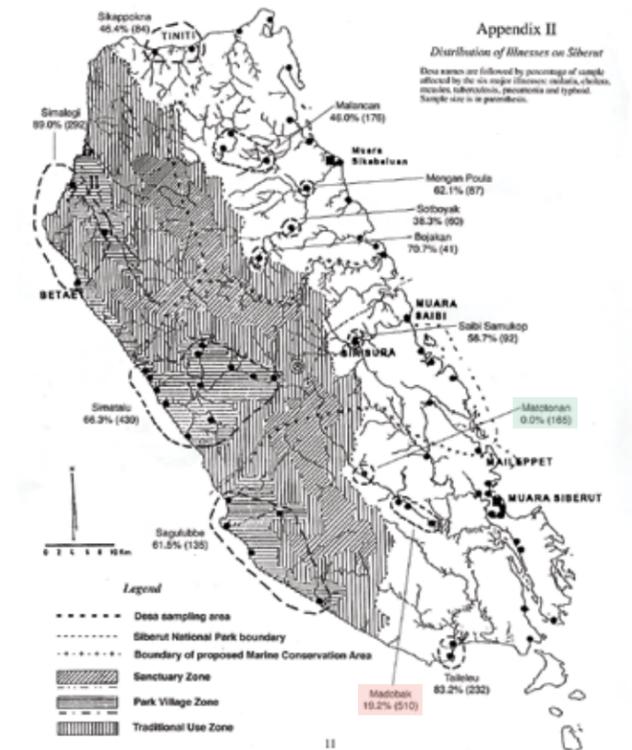
When comparing this against all other settlements throughout Siberut these figures are considerably low. Which, coupled with our findings showing 98.6% of the community would prefer to use traditional medicine administered by Kerei if they were to become ill; and that 77.1% believe that the community would not survive without medical attention provided by Sikerei, strongly suggests that the presence of an adequate number of trained Sikerei¹³ continues to have a significant impact on disease control and overall community health and well-being¹⁴.

In terms of basic hygiene, findings indicate that all of those sampled have clean water for the purposes of drinking and washing; almost all of which is collected from a natural source – boiled from the river (45.8%), a natural spring/well (50.1%) or rainwater (2.7%). There was no mention of health problems related to the use of this water.

The supply of foods in this region¹⁵, which for the majority is grown or gathered from natural sources (see General), is adequate enough for the community to maintain a healthy and nutritious diet.

This finding also matching data gathered on Siberut by Hófler and Pech in 1978; who

Fig 1.3



examined Health Centre charts of children (126) under 5 years of age and reported that of the 423 treatments recorded over a 5 year period there were no reported cases of Clinical Protein-Energy-Malnutrition¹⁶.

It was found that perinatal and infant mortality amongst the community are not uncommon here. Which, considering Matotonan's proximity to the nearest operational medical clinic and the difficulties involved with treating infant illness, is not altogether unexpected.

The baseline survey findings, which show an average of responses provided by both male (118) and female (130) parents, (who were surveyed separately and therefore would present

¹³ Government plans for development of the first 'Five-year Plan of Conservation and Development Activities' (1995-2000) (PHPA 1995, p.200) did in fact incorporate Kerei and their role as a community doctor. It listed in the 'Plans for Improved Health Care on Siberut' an objective as being to 'Establish a local connection through dialogue and training with Kerei'. Which, in detail, stated plans for 'the establishment of dialogue and linkage between modern health care workers and traditional medicine men (shaman/kerei) with regard to frequent diseases, their treatment and prevention; and upgrading effectiveness of Kerei in basic first aid; particularly in areas not frequented by mobile polyclinics.' Unfortunately, this objective was never pursued.

¹⁴ Whilst this current data does provide advancement to speculative theories noted in the 1998 report, the lack of recent reportage suggests that further and more specific studies are required before drawing a definitive conclusion.

¹⁵ Common foods gathered include sago, taro, various fruits, green leaf vegetables, mushrooms and chillies; plus the foods hunted (or farmed) – chicken, pig, deer, cow, fish, eel, sago grubs, fruit bats, and so forth.

¹⁶ The most common illnesses treated were Respiratory tract (38%), Malaria (23%) and Diarrhoea (19%): Hófler, W. and H. Pech. 1978.

¹² Health research study: Incidence of Illness Among the Mentawai People of Siberut Island, Indonesia. 1998 Ted. Cheesman and Randall Kramer.

some crossover data if tallied together), indicate that, of 124 people, 39.5% report having lost a child; with almost all of these (82.5%) occurring within the first 5 years of the child's life.

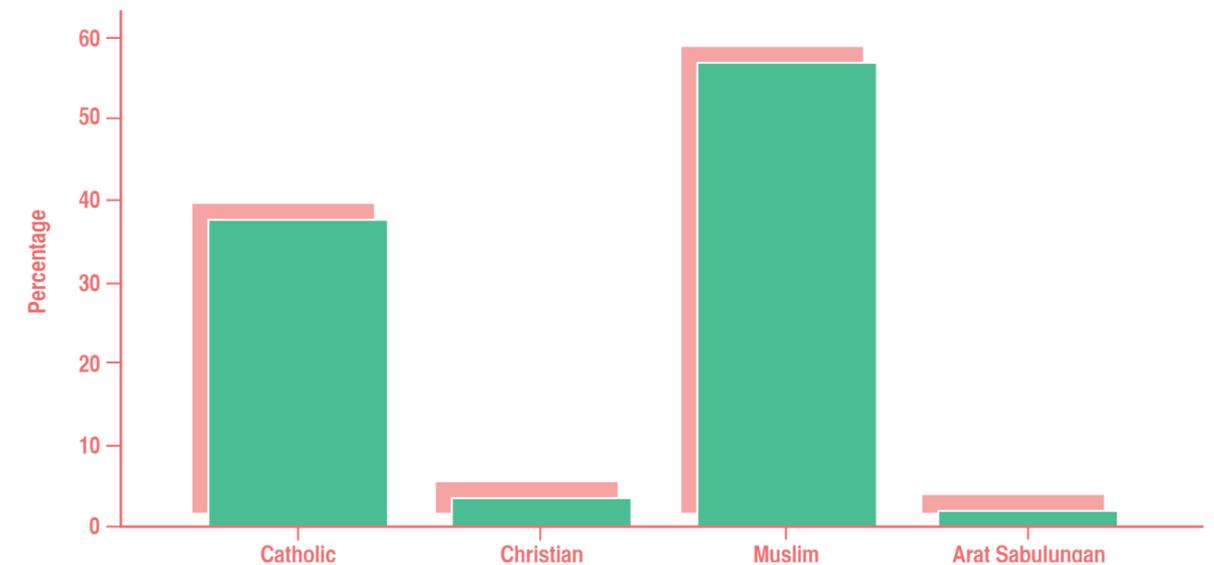
It's worth noting that, whilst the average woman in Matotonan gives birth to approximately eight children, figures show most have only lost one

(59.6%) or two (28.7%). Comparing these findings to the study conducted by Hófler and Pech in 1978 – which reported the perinatal mortality rate at 2.9%, and the rate of mortality during the first 5 years to be between 15 and 24% - it would appear that, over the past 33 years, there has been a 15% increase in the rate of infant mortality here.



Religion

Fig 1.4 Which religion do you practice?



As findings show in figure 1.4, constitutionally recognized religions have successfully been integrated and adopted into the lives of indigenous Mentawai (see Background and History, 1954).

Baseline survey findings show that 98.2% of those surveyed now follow one of the five nationally recognized religions¹⁷ and 72% cite the reason for this as being 'because this is my belief'.

Findings also revealed that people in Matotonan do not consider Arat Sabulungan, their system of cultural practice and belief, a religion. This could be attributed to Indonesian law which defines 'adat' as reference to a system of laws and rules said to have no spiritual, religious, or otherwise occult references that correspond with the term 'agama' (religion).

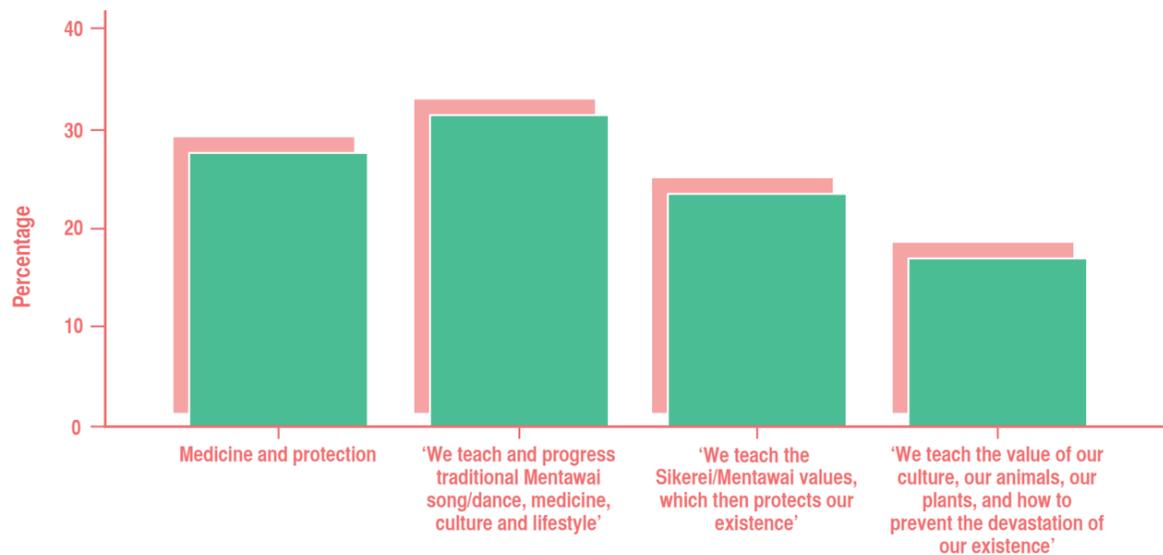
In support of this, as illustrated in fig. 1.4, findings show that only 1.8% of the community claim Arat Sabulungan as their choice of religion. However when the word 'religion' is removed we found that 59.5% of the same sample claim Arat Sabulungan as their most important belief and 98.6% that Arat Sabulungan is in some way a part of their lives. This giving a strong indication that the community here perceive Arat Sabulungan as a way of life rather than a religion and that their recognised faith is adopted in addition to their cultural and spiritual beliefs¹⁸.

In direct contrast to the wider demographic, students, who in addition to learning about nationalised religion in school are almost all (89.8%) involved in additional religious activity/groups outside school hours, have adopted the view that Arat Sabulungan is not their most important belief (85.4%) and/or is a low factor within their lives (76.2%).

¹⁷ As Mentawai is thought to be a predominantly catholic society, the findings that show Matotonan to be predominantly Muslim are quite surprising and indicate that updated statistics may be required.

¹⁸ There has been one recent instance where Indonesia has granted an Indigenous religion (adat) to be classified as an Agama (religion), which was the Ngaju Dayak adat 'Hindu Kaharingan'. However, in doing so, it was also heavily regulated to comply with national standards and benefits (Butterworth, D.J.: Lessons of the Ancestors 2008).

Fig 1.5 What do you provide the community in your role as Sikerei?



At the most fundamental level Arat Sabulungan was established as a method of sustaining the Mentawai existence. The Sabulungan culture comprises of a system of behaviours developed with precise relevance to the Mentawai environment and through development of this direct connection, understanding and reverence to their natural habitat they've managed to preserve the sustainability of their survival.

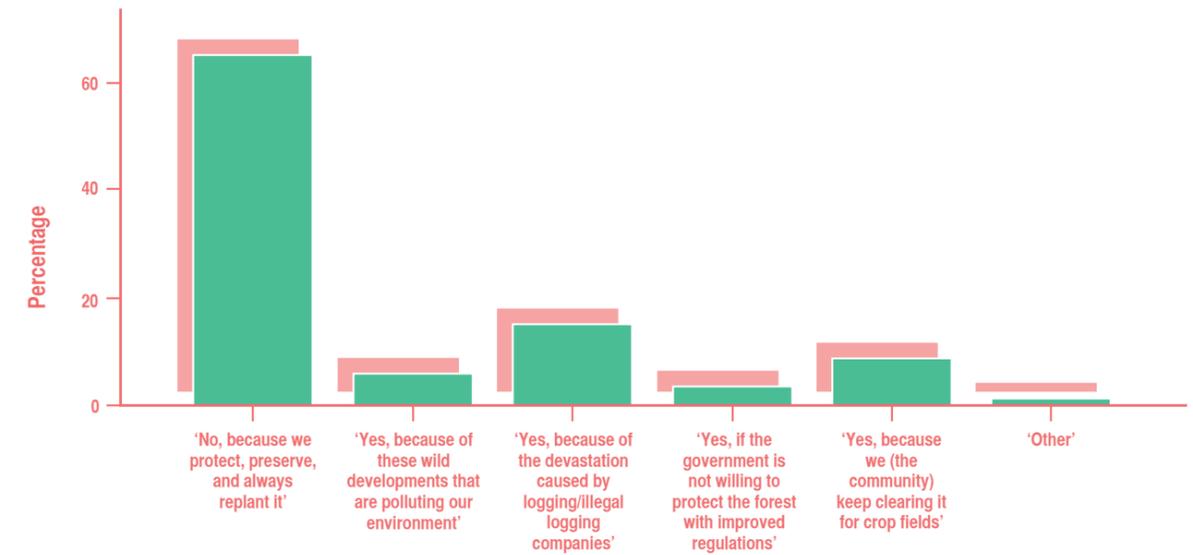
Baseline findings reveal, with 61.7% of the community stating that Arat Sabulungan would not survive without Sikerei – also labelled as the 'head of cultural knowledge and existence' - that these societal figures (through their role) are the backbone of Mentawai culture and its sustainability.

Highlighting this, as shown in figure 1.5, it was found (qualitatively) through consensus of their response to the question 'what do you provide the community in your role as Kerei?' that they do 'teach the value of our culture, our animals, our plants, and how best to protect these and prevent the devastation of our existence' and 'teach them the Sikerei/Mentawai values so as to

protect our existence'. 40.8% of Sikerei questioned state this to be their main responsibility within the community – even more than their role as a doctor.



Fig 1.6 Will the forest here ever run out of food/medicinal/building resources, why?



When the community were asked if they believe the forest would ever run out of food, medicinal or building resources, 65% told us no for reason that they 'protect, preserve, and replant the resources we take'. Which, when combined with 97.5% of the community who believe that they would not survive without being able to gather resources from the forest, does bring to light the significance of Sikerei's role within the Mentawai community.

It's found that the connection to both cultural and environmental knowledge does remain a prominent and important part of daily life in Matotonan but there appears to be a clear shift occurring away from Arat Sabulungan practice towards behaviours conducive to the nationalised systems being practiced throughout Indonesia – schooling, commercial farming, capitalism, consumerism, and so forth.

This made evident by the fact that 71.9% of the community (qualitatively) state that the number of Kerei has slowly declined over the years solely due

to the introduction and influence of foreign cultural, societal, governmental and religious practices.

In further support of this we found that, whilst 79.4% of males claim they're still capable of building an Uma (58.7% including women) and 95% of the community agreeing that the Uma, as the centre of cultural activity and existence, is vital for the future of Mentawai; when asked whether they'd prefer to be living in an Uma rather than living in a settlement village only 36.7% suggested Uma. The most common reason given for both Uma (34.4%) and village (34.3%) being 'to remain close to family and friends'.

In addition to this, 77.1% of the community told us that they could not survive without Sikerei and 59.4% that more Sikerei are needed within the community, yet contrary to this, 64.8% also proclaimed that the role of Sikerei is not a good future for their children; and 77.3% that it is not possible for a child to both attend school and train to become Sikerei.



The most significant finding in relation to this shift is that – despite the community having told us that possessing knowledge of the forest is the most important skill required for their future survival, and that the majority do continue to partake in some form of gathering or agriculture themselves – only 30.6% of the community claim to possess an above average knowledge of the plants, the animals and the forest. Which are all key aspects of Mentawai culture.

In examining the probable cause for these low levels it's worth noting the differences in how the community perceive the role of Sikerei as oppose to how they perceive the role themselves.

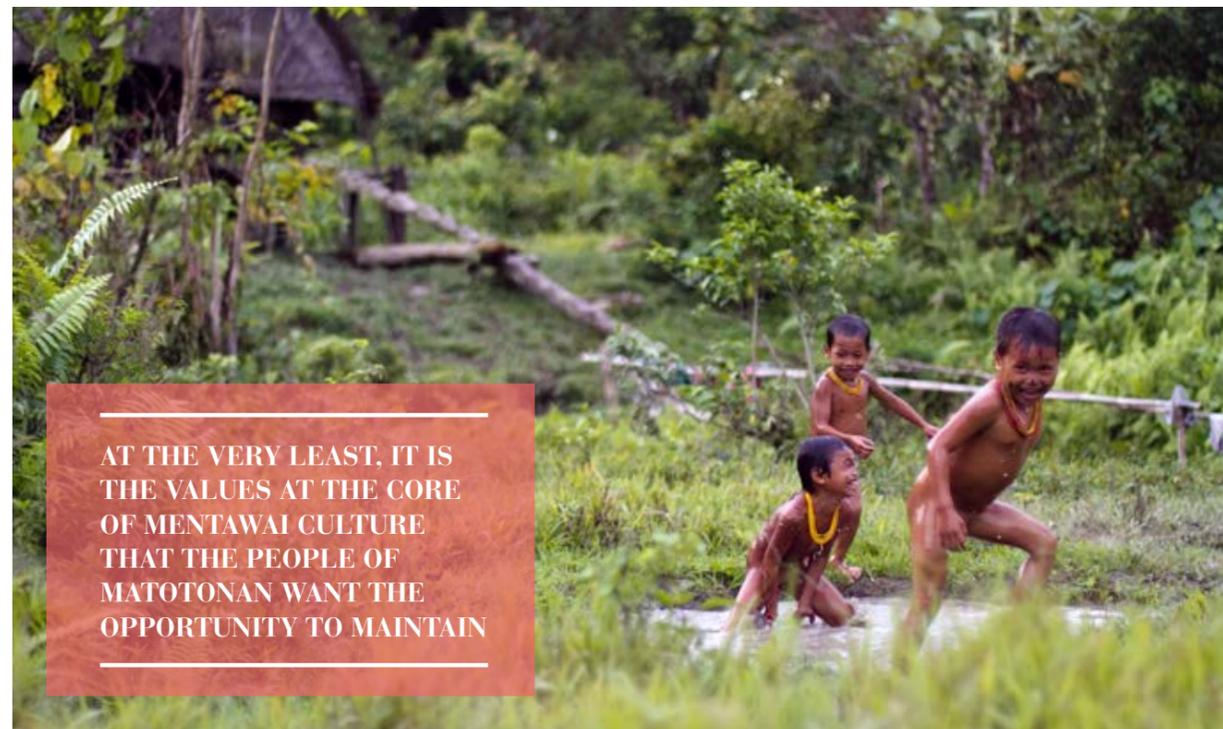
As stated previously, based on qualitative data, 80.6% of all other demographic believe that the role of Sikerei is 'to treat, heal, and protect the people'; with 98.6% also confirming that they would use this service if they become ill. Whereas the response given by 72.5% of Sikerei shows that they see themselves as educators, with all answers outside of 'providing medicine and protection' (27.6%) beginning with the

words 'we teach' (see fig. 1.5). Which, prior to the introduction of foreign schooling systems here, is the role the Mentawai community bestowed upon them.

Furthermore, findings reveal that within these settlement villages the community are now being educated under the guidance of a new system of leaders – the village heads (civil servants), the pastors, and the schoolteachers.

This reiterated by the finding that only one person (a volunteer chairman of youth) out of all the leaders and teachers within the village has endeavoured to include Arat Sabulungan within their role or activity¹⁹.

Matching the finding, as stated by the community, that there is not one community activity in place to help teach aspects of Arat Sabulungan.²⁰ Meaning that, irrespective of preference, the opportunity for the people here to learn about their native culture or environment within the current education system is either extremely limited or simply does not exist.



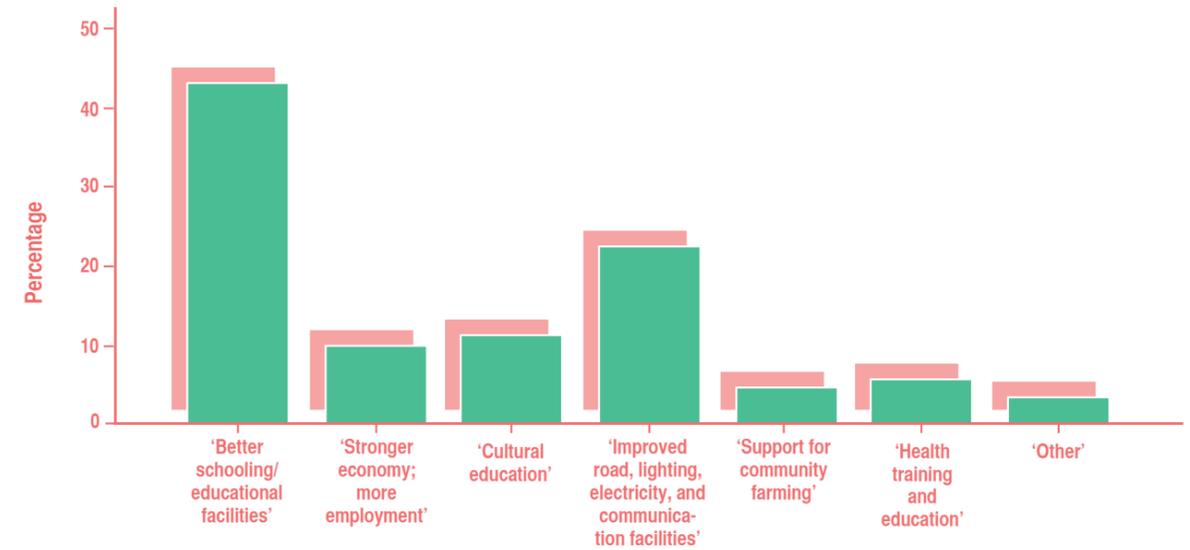
AT THE VERY LEAST, IT IS THE VALUES AT THE CORE OF MENTAWAI CULTURE THAT THE PEOPLE OF MATOTONAN WANT THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN

¹⁹ The response given by the majority of others (84.6%) stated that 'activity related to Arat Sabulungan is not consistent with my role/position, nor the goal of the organization'.

²⁰ Whilst 24.9% of the community responded that 'traditional ceremonies held in the Uma are a great opportunity to teach our culture' – which is not an organized community activity, the remainder either said that 'there are none at all' (30.3%), or suggested that 'we could hold gatherings to teach cultural activity – song, dance, language, plants, medicines, etc. (44%), which implies that there are none currently available.

Education

Fig 1.7 What is the most important development for the future of Matotonan?



Elementary and junior high schools, or SD (Sekolah Dasar) and SMP (Sekolah Menengah Pertama), have been combined and established in all Mentawai settlement villages; providing children an opportunity to attend school from the age of six through to fourteen²¹.

Following this they're encouraged to attend one of the senior schools, SMA (Sekolah Menengah Atas), which have been established in the district towns of Muara Siberut and Muara Sikabuluan. For those having to relocate from regional areas to attend senior school the costs (food, accommodation, fees, etc.) are at times too much and so some do not attend.

Each of these government-run schools teach a national curriculum designed by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Religious Affairs. The junior/elementary school hours run Mon–Fri from 8am–12pm and the rate of attendees is generally extremely high for those living in settlements such as Matotonan (94% of 133 surveyed). It should be noted that parents in Siberut are not required to pay any school fees for this particular program.

Overall, baseline survey findings show that the educational opportunities being provided for the children of Matotonan are well received by the community; with 89.5% of students claiming that they enjoy going to school (with 65.5% suggesting they would like to become teachers themselves).

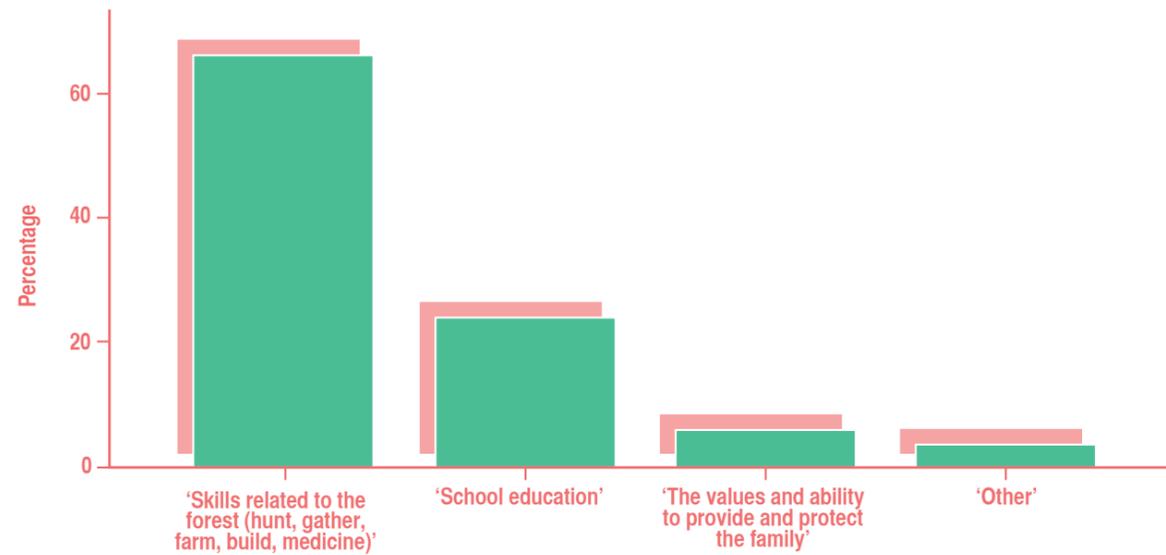
Furthermore, when adults were asked 'what is most important for your children's future?' 76.8% of those surveyed suggested education; and, as shown in figure 1.7, when asked 'what is the most important development for the future of Matotonan', 43.1% of the community told us (qualitatively) that they would like 'better schooling and educational facilities'.

93.8% of students and 89.9% of the community believe they are not learning enough about Arat Sabulungan.

²¹ Under Indonesian law, attending nine years of elementary and junior high school is compulsory.



Fig 1.8 What are the most important skills your children will need for their future?



Baseline data also found that the Matotonan community believe there are important components of their education being overlooked; namely, activity relating to culture and environment.

In addition to figures provided previously in *Culture and Environment*, findings here again confirm that – although literacy/tertiary education is clearly stated as being important – when the exact same sample group (the community) were asked ‘what are the most important skills your children will need for their future?’ (as seen in figure 1.8), 66% told us (qualitatively) that the most important skills were in fact those related to the forest (hunt, gather, cultivate, medicinal and building). Even more so than a ‘school education’ (24.2%).

Notably, this notion is not just held by an older-age demographic. It’s found – quite remarkably when prior data is considered – that 81.5% of the students, and 83.3% of the teachers too, all believe that learning the skills of the forest is of more importance to their lives than learning to read and write; with 63.7% of the overall community believing the same.

In support of this it’s also found that 93.8% of students believe that they’re not learning enough about Arat Sabulungan, whilst the figure is 89.9% for the entire community.

Furthermore, the teachers - who have never received any form of training with relation to teaching Mentawai culture - suggest that the current curriculum needs to be changed; stating ideas such as ‘include Mentawai studies’, ‘update the lesson books’, or even ‘a complete overhaul of the RPP (Implementation Plan for Learning)’.

When considering the baseline findings that show how reliant the community is on the forest and surrounding resources for their survival, the concern for their lack of opportunity to learn about Arat Sabulungan seems relative.

As our findings indicate though it is already having a significant impact on the younger generation; with 87.7% of the students, whom teachers state have never once been taken into the forest for educational purposes, recording a low to medium knowledge of the plants, animals and forests of the region.



IRRESPECTIVE OF PREFERENCE, FOR THE MENTAWAI COMMUNITY HERE TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR NATIVE CULTURE OR ENVIRONMENT WITHIN THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, THE OPORTUNITY IS EITHER LIMITED OR SIMPLY DOES NOT EXIST.

CONCLUSION

For thousands of years the indigenous Mentawai community has been able to sustain a self-sufficient lifestyle through the practice of their native culture, Arat Sabulungan. Despite having little or no money these tribes have provided homes and a constant supply of food for their families.

Over the past century though, rather than seeing improvements to their people's health and wellbeing through the introduction of modern development and material wealth (which, by all intentions, is given to help improve their lifestyle), instead they're seeing communities such as Matotonan slowly lose connection with their native culture and plummet toward a state of impoverishment.

As shown through analysis of our baseline survey data, Indonesia's mainstream practices and ideologies have already been well established within the Matotonan community. People believe in a recognized religion (98.2%); students enjoy attending school (89.5%); parents believe nationalised education is important for their children's future (76.8%); and they agree that important developments for the future of Matotonan include better schooling and educational facilities (43.1%); road, electricity, lighting, and communication improvements (22.4%); better employment opportunities and a stronger economy (9.8%) – see *fig 1.7*.

The consequence of this integration however is that the knowledge and understanding of their native culture and environment is now considerably low and, for the latter, virtually non-existent. A reality made evident by the fact that no members of the Matotonan community were able to identify the establishment of a single community-based cultural or environmental education activity; and by 68.5% of the community admitting to possess a low-med knowledge of the plants, animals, and forest here – even more so the students, with 87.7%.

This coinciding with findings indicating that the Matotonan community's perception of survival is being overcome by concern and urgency for a need to earn money, as shown by 211 of the 332 adults surveyed qualitatively stating financial/economic issues as the number one problem with life in Matotonan.

Based on these findings, for people of whom 97.5% believe they could not survive without the ability to gather resources found in their surrounding forest and who are, as a community, being deprived of an opportunity to develop this knowledge, indigenous Mentawai are headed toward a state of ruin.

Besides the few jobs provided by the government there is currently little to no ongoing employment available in Matotonan and therefore very little money. The knowledge and understanding of how to survive self-sufficiently here without reliance on earning income is, at present, the greatest source of wealth for the indigenous Mentawai community. Therefore the disconnection from their native education and impending loss of their cultural and environmental understanding is indeed the catalyst for what will become severe and long-term poverty.

This is not implying that a standard national education system is not important and cannot or would not lead to fulfilment of the Mentawai people's aspirations. But analysis of this baseline survey data has found that this is not the issue. Of far greater importance to the wider community is that there is no opportunity within their current education system to learn about their history, language, culture and the skills relative to prospering within their current environment.

Which is why, when 83.3% of all teachers state that learning the skills of the forest (hunt, gather, cultivate, medicinal and building) is more important than learning to read and write, alongside 81.5% of students expressing the same

sentiment; and 11 of the 12 community leaders, 5 of the 6 teachers, 93.8% of the students, and 89.9% of the entire community saying that they are not learning enough about Arat Sabulungan; establishes enough evidence to conclude that there is both need, desire and motive within Matotonan to develop a system integrating indigenous education into their day-to-day learning.

At present, as a result of the community awareness raised through extensive research conducted within Mentawai over the past six years, including this baseline survey, key members of the local community engaged

during this period have now taken ownership in the development of a community-based model designed to provide their people opportunity to a cultural and environmental education program.

To be implemented outside the hours of the current school program, the model proposes to re-empower Sikerei in their role as a community-educator; allowing them to pass on their cultural and environmental wisdom to groups during organised gatherings. A role they've said they have both time and interest in fulfilling.

THE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO SURVIVE SELF-SUFFICIENTLY HERE WITHOUT RELIANCE ON EARNING INCOME IS, AT PRESENT, THE GREATEST SOURCE OF WEALTH FOR THE INDIGENOUS MENTAWAI COMMUNITY.





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COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
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