

## Research Article

# The Batin Sembilan Community in Jambi Province: Socio- Cultural Elements in Enhancing Local Food Security

Yevita Nurti<sup>1\*</sup>, Maskota Delfi<sup>1</sup>, and Adam<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Anthropology Department, Universitas Andalas, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>Director of Operations, PT. REKI Indonesia/Alumnus**Abstract.**

The policy of resettling the Batin Sembilan people, from living in the forest and finding food in the forest to living in housing, has created complex socio-cultural dynamics related to community food security. This article explains the various socio-cultural implications of the Batin Sembilan people in food security and diversification. Orang Batin Sembilan in this paper is a community group that lives in the Bahar River area in Jambi, and is settled in Kelumpang village in the Hutan Harapan area, under the guidance of PT. REKI, a non-profit company engaged in ecosystem conservation by managing forest areas in Jambi. The purpose of this research is to understand how the Orang Batin Sembilan have come from a nomadic way of life to living in a settlement by utilizing limited forest products and starting to plant and have their own fish ponds in the neighborhood. A deep understanding of the process of changing ways of life and changing food culture in various dimensions provides a model for problem solving and lessons learned for the preparation of community food security plans. Using qualitative methods, and an ethnographic approach, the results showed that the long process of changing the nomadic way of life in the forest to the settlement area made Orang Batin Sembilan independent in food and created diversification of food sources.

**Keywords:** food diversification, nomadic to sedentary, Batin Sembilan, food security

Corresponding Author: Yevita Nurti; email: yevita@soc.unand.ac.id

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia has local socio-cultural potential that can support the food security of its people, both in terms of food variety, provision, as well as food management and processing, and natural resource management systems for food. This local socio-cultural potential is also owned by remote communities or communities living in forests, or indigenous peoples. However, this socio-cultural potential in food security is often faded and even disappeared by various government policies. For example, policies on community food security tend to be

defined by the availability of rice as the staple food (1)(2), although not all Indonesians use rice as their staple food. This at least shows that the configuration of food policies made is not in favor of the people.

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In addition, research related to the socio-cultural potential of local communities in food security is often overlooked. Suraj Das & Anindya Jayanta Misher (3) in their literature study found that the existing literature mostly fails to include the socio-ecological beliefs of traditional communities related to eating habits, although it is recognized that the traditional knowledge of the community is very instrumental as a protection in times of emergency in meeting food needs. In a global context, Kuhnlein & Sinee Chotiboriboon (4) also note that these local food systems, which contain extensive and sustainable knowledge, are often not well documented, and thus underutilized by today's malnourished communities and loss of food biodiversity.

This research complements the shortcomings of existing studies by looking at the potential of local socio-culture in food security, how the process of changing eating culture occurs and creates diversification of food sources for the Batin Sembilan community. Diversification of food sources or diversification of food sources in communities originating from hunter-gatherer groups can be done to maintain an independent and sustainable lifestyle, as the Baka Dimgba people do in the Congo valley, in the village of Gribé located in southeastern Cameroon

(5). In particular, this paper answers how people live their lives from nomadic to settled in settlements, still utilizing forest products in a limited way and starting to plant and have their own fish ponds in the neighborhood. An in-depth understanding of this process of lifestyle and food culture change in various dimensions provides a model for problem solving and lessons learned for the development of community food security plans.

This research is based on an argument that changes in eating culture in the Batin Sembilan people are a long process, and its dynamics also have positive implications, namely creating diversification of food sources in people's daily lives. The knowledge possessed during the hunting and gathering period in the forest is utilized as living capital in settlements. The Batin Sembilan people can still utilize forest products on a limited basis, and can take food in the forest, especially sweet potatoes, fish, deer, and fruits. Thus, despite realizing their collective rights to forest resources are very limited, they managed to maintain a food system dominated by the forest and its resources, as well as gardening and having a pond in the settlement. This is an excellent learning process.

In the context of culture, eating is a set of practices, habits, norms and techniques, which a group of people apply to food and eating, which includes food production, distribution and consumption (6). Culture will always change and is dynamic. Borofsky (7) borrowed a term that was once conveyed by Keesing (8), that the term 'the cultural'

is considered more appropriate and describes the dynamic aspects of a culture, which is always in formation, re-creation, modification, and adjustment compared to 'a culture' which describes more static aspects. According to Borofsky (7), knowing or knowledge that exists in everyday human life is something that is fluid and flexible, varying from one informant to informant, and from one context to another. According to Alam (9) culture in this sense is not merely a set of knowledge that is inherited or preserved, but is something that is 'shaped', which is a social construction related to the interests and power of the actor. Likewise, changes in eating can occur when humans have new knowledge about production, distribution and consumption.

Orang rimba, like many other ethnic minority groups, often experience similar problems, particularly marginal environments, limited agricultural potential and degradation of surrounding natural resources. According to Sayed Azam-Ali *et al* (10), marginal environments are characterized by limited agricultural potential and resource degradation caused by biophysical and political-social-economic factors. These environments and the indigenous peoples who cultivate them rarely attract academic interest, policy studies or investment. Indigenous peoples' agricultural expertise is often overlooked by decision-makers. Interventions based on major food crops and external technologies are likely to fail for indigenous peoples where a wide variety of crops are cultivated in diverse production systems and in marginal environments.

In the context of traditional society, Li (11) argues that the occurrence of change is the result of creative engagement and as a result of culture. According to Li (11), in the case of Indonesia's hinterland, more recent attention to regional history reveals that the interactions that take place to regional history reveals that centuries of interaction with the lowlands, and with government programs, as well as with national and international markets have been crucial to the the shaping and reshaping of their culture and practices, as well as their identity as a community. and their identity as a people. Unique traditions are the result of change, not its antithesis. Moreover, change is also not a difficulty faced by traditional people who are confronted with the a dichotomous choice between community and government, subsistence and market, past and future. subsistence and market, past and future. Change is also not imposed unilaterally by outsiders, as suggested by the "impact myth", instead change is the result of creative involvement and as a result of a culture. What was conveyed by Li (11) seems to be in line with the Batin Sembilan people, learning from changes in the living environment from nomadic

to sedentary, demanding that they always adapt to the new environment both in terms of planting patterns, obtaining the main food ingredients, as well as food processing

procedures and the technology used. The changes that occur are part of the adaptation of the Batin Sembilan community as well as a response to new things, thus creating food diversification and food sources in their daily lives.

The dimensions of food diversification can basically be distinguished between the dimensions of food production diversification and the dimensions of food consumption diversification (12). In this paper, both dimensions cannot be used, because the dimension of food consumption is not only the diversity of food consumed but is more directed towards improving the quality and quantity of community nutrition. Therefore, what is used in this paper is food verification in the food production dimension only.

## 2. Methods

The Batin Sembilan people group who previously lived in the forest in a nomadic way and then were settled became the focus of this research. The experience of the Batin Sembilan people while living in the forest and then moving in residential areas has direct implications for various changes in their eating culture. Their experiences experienced over time, have created a new culture in the production and consumption of food, including the use of technology in cooking. By studying this social group of Batin Sembilan people, a picture can be built of how the process of changing the culture of eating which then becomes diversification of food production.

The research conducted was qualitative in nature using an ethnographic approach (13). The ethnographic approach allows researchers to interact directly with the community under study. Ethnography as a qualitative method is very important in social and cultural research, especially in exploring social phenomena, with less structured data, few cases or samples, and analyzing data on the meaning of human actions (14). This approach helps researchers gain an in-depth emic perspective.

Informants were selected based on family or group members who had settled in a settlement or house, after being moved from the forest. Informants consisted of husbands and wives, as well as adult children. Such selection of informants is called purposive sampling, with predetermined criteria. Informants who have been resettled still carry out activities in the forest, such as looking for fruits, looking for medicinal plants, or patrolling or keeping watch to see if something happens in the forest. The selection of this informant is a measure of the knowledge of the Batin Sembilan people and their experience.

The main data collection techniques were interviews and observation. Interviews were conducted in the garden, at the edge of the forest, at home, based on prior

agreements with informants. If they are looking for fruits in the morning, looking for resin, honey bees or looking for medicinal plants in the forest, the interview is conducted after the informants return from the forest. Observation is carried out to see the activities of the Batin Sembilan people in their daily lives. These two data collection techniques are carried out simultaneously or alternately according to context and space.

Data analysis began with coding the data, identifying salient themes or patterns (13). These salient themes or patterns were grouped. Grouping the data based on these themes helped the researcher make precise descriptions and connect one theme to another.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Batin Sembilan community and its dynamics

The term Batin Sembilan implies a community that controls nine tributary streams that flow into the Batang Hari and Batang Tembesi Rivers in Jambi Province, only the Bahar River flows into the Lalan River in South Sumatra Province. Following the characteristics given by Hidayat (15), the Orang Batin Sembilan is included in the criteria of the Remote Indigenous Community (KAT), including a relatively small, closed and homogeneous community, living with a subsistence economic system by hunting and gathering or shifting cultivation), and so on. Some researchers refer to the tribe living in the forest in Jambi Province as orang rimba or orang rimbo (16)(17)(18)(19). In the past, the term Orang Rimba was often referred to as Kubu or The Orang Kubu of Sumatra (17). The term kubu here refers to all people who live in the Jambi forest.

Schematically, the lineage and history of Batin Sembilan can be described as follows:

The schematic chart of history and genealogy above provides an overview of the origins of the Batin Sembilan community. The children of Raden Ontar were given power in each place based on the flow of the tributary called batin. It is from each batin that the descendants of the Batin Sembilan Community have multiplied (Report on the Study Results of the Batin Sembilan Community, KKI-WARSI Tribal Team, August to December 2014).

Currently, the customary territory of the Batin Sembilan community is based on the division of administrative government areas. Batin Sembilan now in the PT Reki Hutan Harapan area is Batin Sembilan Bahar. Batin Sembilan in the PT Reki area is Batin Sembilan whose living area is relatively still very strong in interaction with forest herds, because there is still forest left in the surrounding area, especially the PT Reki concession. The

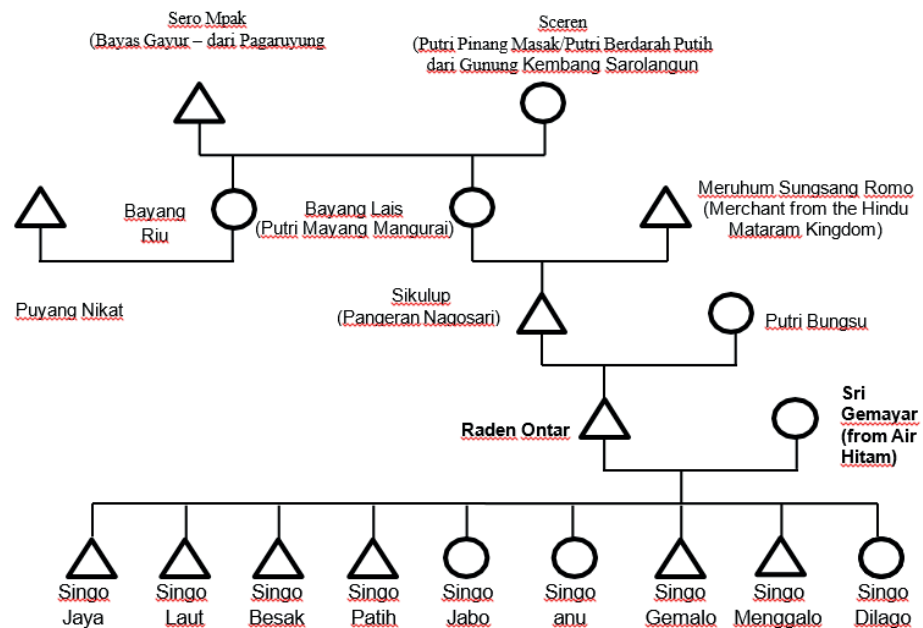


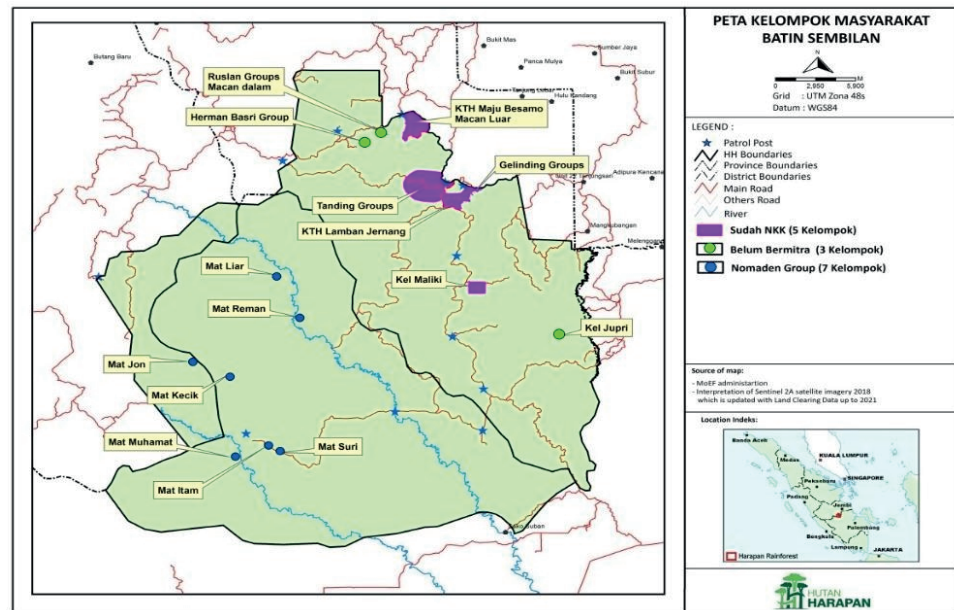
Figure 1:

concession is not exploitative and is managed with a forest ecosystem restoration approach and is the last home or stronghold for the Batin Sembilan community who still depend on their lifestyle with forest products. Batin Bahar in the PT Reki forest area is divided into several small groups, including: Kelompang (KTH Lambang Jernang), Tanding Group, Gelinding Group, Simpang Macan Luar (KTH Maju Besamo), Ruslan Group, Basri

Group, Maliki Group, Jufri Group, and the wild Mat group consisting of Mat Reman, Mat Jon, Mat Kecik, Mat Muhamad, Mat Atam, and Mat Suri.

### 3.2. Map 1.

In general, the fulfillment of Batin Sembilan's food needs in the Hutan Harapan area is currently obtained from (1) hunting and gathering, (2) cultivation on a limited scale, and (3) buying it at stalls / markets or bartering. Fulfillment of needs by hunting and gathering is mostly done by Maliki groups who have not settled down. Needs that are required from outside the forest area are usually met by bartering forest products if they meet outsiders in or around the forest area. These outsiders include illegal loggers, illegal oil miners, seekers of non-timber forest products (especially *Jernang*) and employees of PT Reki. The types of goods bartered include basic necessities (rice, sugar, coffee) and cigarettes/tobacco, lighters, and other objects such as bracelets and necklaces. The medium of exchange from Batin Sembilan Nomads (Mat Liar *et al*) is in the form of



Source: PT. REKI, 2021

**Figure 2:** Batin Sembilan Community Group inside PT Reki Concession.

Non- Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as *Jernang* and deer/kijang meat. *Jernang* is a high-value commodity for the Inner Nine Nomads. However, the determination of the exchange rate is determined by outsiders, so it is very open to the opportunity for Batin Sembilan nomads to be cheated.

In the Batin Sembilan group that has settled, including the Simpang Macan and Kelumpang groups, the fulfillment of food needs is obtained by (1) taking from the forest, (2) farming or fish farming on a limited scale, (3) buying it from the nearest shop or market. The fulfillment of food needs is still partly met from forest products such as fruits and fish from the surrounding lakes in the forest area. A

small and limited number still utilize forest resources for consumption such as fish, bayas, kemang, tayas, forest durian, bamboo shoots, sulai, lekat fruit, forest rambutan, hunting animals such as pigs and deer, and deer.

Farming to meet food needs is still on a limited scale, and is not sufficient to fulfill their own needs. However, they already have knowledge of various commodities (and some have been planted) that can be cultivated to meet their own needs and commodities that can generate cash. In the Batin Sembilan group in the kelumpang, for example, they have understood the various types of plants that can help them for their food needs, both for direct consumption and for sale to the market if the amount is large enough.

Most of their food needs are met by buying from the nearest stall or Sungai Bahar market, which is about one to one and a half hours by motorized vehicle from Kelumpang

TABLE 1: Plant species in the Batin Sembilan Kelompok Group (KTH lamban Jernang).

Crops for own consumption / subsistence	Plants that can make money	Crops that are not disturbed by Pests/ Monkeys
Pineapple, banana, chili, turmeric, ginger, laos, lemongrass, jackfruit, guava, coconut, jengkol, petai, oranges, peanuts, and yams.	Rubber, areca nut, coffee, chili, jengkol, petai, banana, pineapple, ginger, orange and turmeric.	Chili, peanut, vine yam.

Source; Report of Participatory Poverty Assessment FGD Activity of KTH Lambang Jernal PT Reki team, 2023

and Simpang Macan. Except for the Mat Liar group, the majority of Batin Sembilan who live in the PT Reki area have recognized money as a medium of exchange, although not all of them are smart enough to count in buying and selling using money.

To obtain cash for Batin Sembilan Kelompok, they mostly obtain it from

(1) working as employees of PT Reki, (2) collecting palm oil at PT Berkat Sawit Utama (BSU), and (3) collecting NTFPs from the forest in the form of honey, rattan, resin and jernang. Cash from NTFPs is limited and insufficient to buy food throughout the year. A small number of them earn cash from palm oil plantations, rubber stalls, working at PT BSU, and working as household assistants in the families of PT Reki employees.

Almost the same thing was found in the Batin Sembilan group in Simpang Macan, but the number of households with productive rubber and palm oil plantations that can generate cash is higher. Some also work as farm laborers, hunt animals from forest products, and start raising chickens, goats, cows, buffaloes,

and fish farming (20). On certain occasions they can also obtain basic necessities from government assistance and outsiders who are kind through the intermediary of PT Reki staff or others.

### 3.3. Local Wisdom in Food Diversification

The forest is where we live and where we find food, that's what the Batin Sembilan people call it. The Batin Sembilan people live in the forest by shifting cultivation, melangun, and hunting and gathering. The Batin Sembilan people come from Sungai Bahar, as expressed by informants Mang R (57 years old) and Mang M (70 years old):

*“We come from the Bahar River. Our ancestors came from Palembang (Sriwijaya kingdom) and we lived in the rivers in this forest”. Then Mang M (70 years old) also said “I came from Rumah Tinggi, which is near the Kapas river (South Sumatra) then moved and according to the river flow of the Bato river, the snare river and arrived here (Hutan Harapan)”.*



Both Mang R and Mang M are living in settlements now, although they still rely on the forest for food, and in the settlements they have started to plant plants such as chili, eggplant, long beans, peanuts, ginger, turmeric, lemongrass, cayenne pepper, and others where previously these types of plants had not been recognized. During their nomadic life in the forest, they did not recognize the types of spices for cooking food.

TABLE 2: Types of foodstuffs and activities of Batin Sembilan people in 2 different environments.

No	Forest	Settlement
1	There are approximately 49 species of fish that live in the rivers and swamps in the forest: tomang fish, tapa fish, gabus fish, white fish, puffer fish, barung fish, and so on.	Catfish, a fish pond donated by PT REKI for the Batin Sembilan group that has settled.
2	Seasonal crops such as petai, jengkol, and durian.	Planting bananas, jengkol, chili, cayenne pepper, eggplant, long beans, peanuts, turmeric, lemongrass, etc.
3	Fruits such as <i>meranas</i> , <i>mensiak</i> , <i>durian hutan</i> , <i>tampui</i> , <i>sebangang</i> , <i>kelompang</i> , <i>bantan</i> , <i>petaling</i> , etc.	Planting cempedak or jackfruit trees, avocado, areca nut, cocoa, coffee and salak (all seeds are provided by PT. REKI).
4	Yam as a staple food	Getting to know rice and eating rice
5	Hunting pigs, deer, antelope and porcupine	Raising chickens and fish
6	<i>Bedamar</i> . Taking resin in the forest and then selling it to PT. REKI or to the market and the money to buy rice and other foodstuffs.	Recognizes money but cannot count
7	<i>Berondol sawit</i> . This is the activity of taking palm fruit that falls and escapes from the bunch. Batin Sembilan people collect and sell them to palm oil companies	Money is used to buy food or other necessities
8	Tapping Jelutung sap and Jerenang extracts	Money is used to buy food or other necessities
9	Harvesting <i>Sialang</i> Honey	Honey is sold and the money is used to buy food or other necessities. Honey is also consumed as medicine

Table 2 shows the differences in the types of foodstuffs and activities of the Batin Sembilan people while living in the forest and in settlements. It appears that there are several activities that are still carried out in the forest and the results can be used to meet the needs of life in settlements. Sometimes they plant sweet potatoes and vegetables in the settlement, while waiting for the sweet potatoes and vegetables to be used for food,

they still go to the forest to look for fruits or hunt deer, deer, pigs and porcupines. They also still grow yams upstream in the forest. Utilization of the environment in settlements and forests as a food source for yams, protein sources such as fish, meat. This activity of going back and forth between the forest and residential areas is done every day.

Nomadic life in the forest with life in a residential environment for the Batin Sembilan people looks very different. In the forest, Batin Sembilan people tend to live in groups, move around, depending on the fertility of the land and follow the flow of the river. If the land is considered no longer fertile then they will look for a new river flow and begin to settle down and plant yams.

### 3.4. Food Efficiency with Hot Smoking Method

While living in the forest, the Batin Sembilan people did not know modern technology for cooking. They caught fish by fishing or waiting for the dry season so that the rivers dried up, then caught fish easily. Fish and hunting products such as deer, deer, pigs and porcupines are then smoked (hot smoking) so that they last longer and can be eaten the next few days if there are no fish and no game. They are only familiar with smoking methods for fish or game from deer, elk, pigs and porcupines. Fish and meat are smoked with heat and smoke generated from burning

wood, and not placed too close to the fire so that the fish and meat are not burned or roasted.

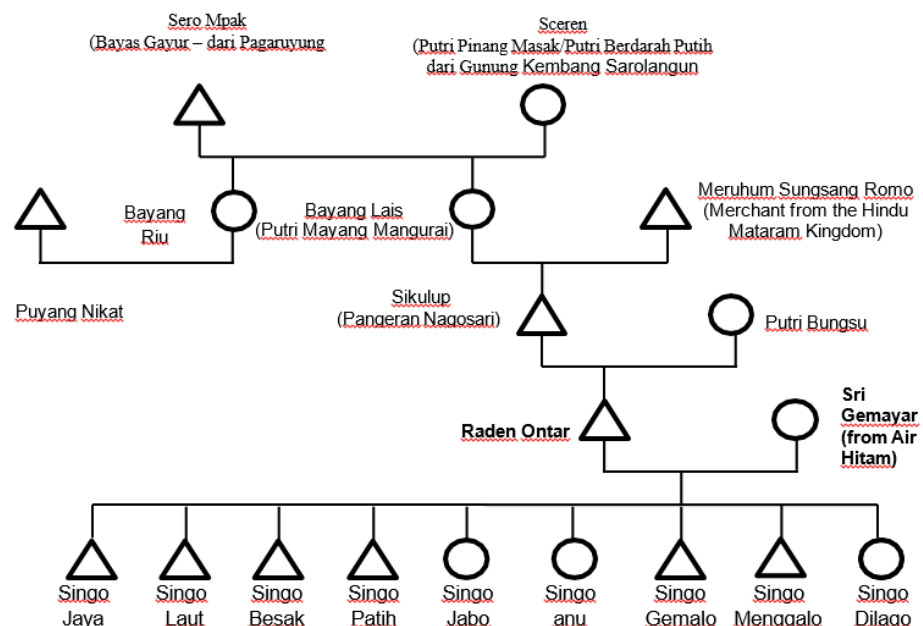
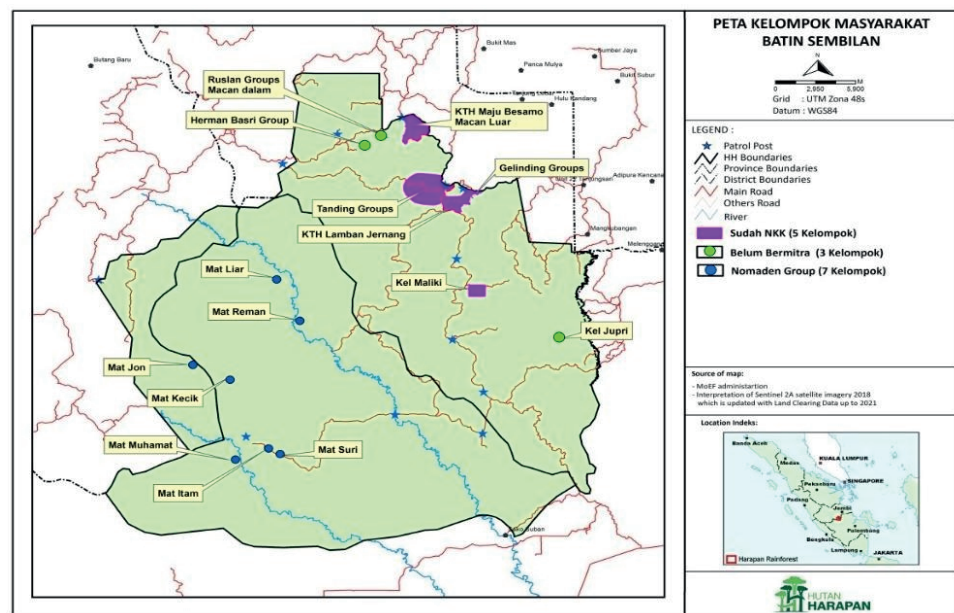


Figure 3: Meat and fish smoking traces.

In addition to smoking, the Batin Sembilan people used to be unfamiliar with cooking spices, game meat and fish were smoked without using spices. They also did not know chili, cooking oil, and other cooking needs. Now, since they live in settlements, they have recognized various cooking spices and even plant chilies, turmeric, lemongrass, and so on which are used for cooking. They are also now familiar with various food processing techniques, such as frying, soup, and even using coconut milk. This change in processing methods has also resulted in changes in the food consumption patterns of the Batin Sembilan people.



Source: PT. REKI, 2021

Figure 4: Kitchen when living in the forest.

Figures 2 and 3 show traces of wood burning to smoke fish and meat in the daily lives of the Batin Sembilan people. Smoked fish and meat are then eaten with sweet potatoes that have been burned. If smoked fish and meat are left over, they store them for the next day. They only recognize smoking as food processing.

At present, Batin Sembilan people who have settled in settlements have changed their pattern of life. They eat rice, and have gas stoves and electric rice cookers (magic com). However, in their kitchen there is still a furnace to smoke fish and meat and cook other foods. The gas stove is only a token because they are already living in settlements. Some of them said they could not use the gas stove. In addition, tubers as their staple food during their nomadic life in the forest are still eaten, and are still planted in the forest and in the yard. For food processing, they are familiar with cooking spices, such as onions, turmeric, ginger, chili, cayenne pepper, and vegetables. They are familiar with

various types of dishes. However, they still smoke fish and meat as a way to preserve food.

This change in eating culture is sometimes perceived as a pressure in life, but indirectly actually creates food diversification in their daily lives. As shown in Table 1 above, they already eat rice with side dishes, and are familiar with a variety of dishes, such as fried fish and fish soup. As one informant, Bik Teguh, said:

*“We sometimes long to eat white fish, toman fish, baung fish from the rivers in the forest. But now it is difficult to find fish in the forest because many rivers have narrowed, and sometimes they are dry. So we eat catfish from our own pond more often now. If we have time to go to the market, we can buy toman and baung fish, but the market is far away and only available at certain times...”*

They are familiar with money to buy food at the market, but not yet able to count. They understand Indonesian, but their ability to speak it is limited. When they go to the market, they always pay with all the money in their hands. If the trader at the market is honest and does not want to cheat then the extra money will be returned to them. However, they are often cheated by traders in the market.

Hunting in the forest cannot be done every day like when they lived and lived in the forest. Once in a while if they miss deer meat then they still hunt in the forest. If they do not go to the forest then they process all the foodstuffs that can be obtained in the settlement, such as catfish, chicken, and vegetables.

Through a long process, between forests and settlements, the Batin Sembilan people have succeeded in meeting their food needs independently, even diversifying their food sources while still relying on the forest in a limited way, farming and growing vegetables and raising fish and chickens in settlements and buying food needs from the results they get from the forest.

This research shows that the lives of Batin Sembilan people in the process from nomadic to settled are very dynamic and fluid. New knowledge of living and living in settlements and still high dependence on forests, makes them go back and forth between forests and settlements. On the one hand they need the forest to find

certain foodstuffs, on the other hand in the settlement they have planted various root crops and raised fish. The high level of dynamics in their daily lives makes them have new knowledge that sometimes they do not understand new things. For example, the use of gas stoves at home. They learned about the gas stove from seeing neighbors in the settlement who already use gas stoves for cooking. However, they do not know how to use it so that in the kitchen of their house there is a gas stove and next to it there is

a stove for cooking. Through a long learning process, the Batin Sembilan people were finally able to independently go through various difficulties and fulfill their food needs.

Basically, humans will take food sources or ingredients from their environment first before going through the purchasing process. Learning from the experience of the Batin Sembilan people has shown that food changes are not too difficult to go through. New knowledge is produced and always produced so that eventually they are able to meet food needs independently, while still relying on forest products and farming in settlements. They succeeded in diversifying the food sources they had in the forest environment and the settlement environment.

Learning from the experience of the Batin Sembilan people, it is very necessary to formulate an action plan that can be applied to other indigenous peoples, or groups of people who still live nomadically in the forest, in order to create food security independently, and can diversify their food sources.

#### 4. Conclusion

Some opinions that say that remote tribes or indigenous groups are very vulnerable to food shortages are not always true. The Batin Sembilan people at least provide a very good lesson that new knowledge is always being produced and trying to combine plants grown in settlements as a complement to food taken from the forest has created diversification of food sources for them.

This study provides another perspective in seeing food security and diversification of food sources as not a static endeavor but a very dynamic one. It is achieved through long experiences, efforts, trials, and willingness to accept new knowledge even though the new knowledge is not yet fully understood. Remote communities or indigenous groups have adopted techniques to prevent food shortages. In the research case of the Batin Sembilan people it shows that new food security knowledge is absorbed by the community. A continuous adaptation with new cooking techniques and planting crops is being applied. A new complementary food intake is observed from forest and diversification of food resources. This study provides another dynamic perspective of food security. Experiences and efforts of trial and error, they are willing to accept new knowledge even it is not yet fully understood at this stage.

This research is still in progress with limited data. It prevents us to use it as a comprehensive basis for formulating policies related to food security and diversification of food sources. It is envisaged to formulate policies that will require extensive data and in-depth interviews with at least several Batin Sembilan groups in settlements as a

robust base for policy formulation. Further studies are needed that can accommodate a wider sample and more sources of information.

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