Good to produce, good to share: Food, hunger, and social values in a contemporary Mentawaian community, Indonesia

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4
"We Eat a Lot of Food": The Dynamic and Pattern of Food Consumption

The previous chapter described the availability of food and examined the way in which people use their surrounding environment to obtain and to produce food. This chapter will focus on a description of the consumption of food. The main aim of this chapter is to answer the questions: what kinds of food do people consume? What combination of foodstuffs do they prefer? What are the patterns of the practices of consuming food through the year? To answer these questions, this chapter will present data on the food intake of selected families over a year. The first part of this chapter will present a general picture of the background of the selected families and the general composition of the recorded meals. The subsequent sections will describe the result intakes, which are based on the *emic* category of food: *kat* (plants used as food) and *iba* (animals used as food). The last section details how the selected families explain their own food intake patterns in their own words.

4.1 The Selected Families *(Lalep)*[10]

This research selected three families to record their meals, representing crosscutting identifications and internal variations in the settlement. The three families represent the main social categories in the settlement: a) a *Sasabirut* pioneer who has land around the settlement and a cash-crop oriented livelihood (mainly coconut and cloves); b) a *Sarereiket* family with a more hinterland oriented livelihood (keeping pigs, forest gardening), in combination with cash-crop endeavours; and c) a family from a smaller *uma of Sasabirut* that has no land around Muntei and has a mixed livelihood strategy of growing cash crops and hinterland oriented acivities. An identification process guided the selection of the three families from *uma* Saruruk, Sakukuret, and Sarorougot (Table 14). All the families have a teenage girl who can read and write and has been trained to record the data, which is the key to the method used for the data collection (see Chapter 1). The presentation of the backgrounds of the families here is to help the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data and to provide a thin ethnographic description.

Table 14. The General Comparative Social Identification of Three Selected Families for Food Intake Data

Social Characteristic of the Family	Aman Alfon	Aman Aturan	Aman Santo
Origin	*Sasabirut*, pioneer	*Sasabirut*	*Sarereiket*
Size of *uma*	The largest (three factions, 23 households)	The smallest (three households)	Medium-size (two factions, 13 households)
Number of individuals	Five (two males, three females)	Six (three males, three females)	Six (four males, two females)
Main livelihood	Small trade (a small kiosk) and coconut garden	Cash crops (cacao and clove garden)	Traditional-oriented garden (pig-keeping, nilam and cacao)
Education of parents	Junior High School	Elementary School	Elementary School
Involvement in coconut cultivation in small islets	High	No	No
Relations to introduced institutions (Church, village)	Semi-active	Non-active	Active

Household 1: Aman Alfon

Aman Alfon's family belongs to Saruruk, the largest *uma* in Muntei, consisting of 23 households (Table 2, Chapter 2). *Uma* Saruruk, now living in Muntei, are originally the descendants of the ancestors of *uma* Samailiming, who were adopted (*sinappit*) into *uma* Saruruk six generations ago. Prior to the creation of the agglomerated settlement during the Dutch administration in the early 1900s, both the Saruruk and Samailiming lived together at the mouth of the Silaoinan River. The descendants of Samailiming then took the name of Saruruk and have used it since.

Uma Saruruk have claimed ancestral land in Parakbatu and Sitektek (Figure 8, Chapter 3) in the eastern part of the Katurei Peninsula, where they have cultivated cloves and coconut gardens for more than half a century. The Saruruk also have a contentious claim over a section of land on the banks of the Mara River; the dispute over this land contributed to the splitting of Saruruk into three factions. Aman Alfon's family belongs to a Saruruk faction that reluctantly supports the land claim on the Mara River. After tension over the land escalated in the 1990s, Aman Alfon's faction, which then consisted of four families, decided to abandon their cultivation sites by the Mara River and focus instead on the cultivation of coconuts and cloves in small islets.

Aman Alfon's family represents a family from *Sasabirut* that has abandoned their hinterland-style livelihood and adapted to life on the coast, devoting their time and energy to producing cash crops and integrating into the market. Both parents in this family were born in the old settlement in the early 1970s but were raised in the new settlement, attending the Catholic school in Muara Siberut in the early 1980s. They married in 1997 and had their first child a year later. The family now has three children. The family is also an example of a family that has a steady income from their coconut garden, but has not entirely neglected their other gardens (Table 15). The family has a rather large grove of coconuts on Parakbatu Island. In the hilly area above the coconut garden is a small plot of clove gardens.

Table 15. Sources of Livelihood of Aman Alfon's Family (2014)

Sources of Livelihood	Unit (*Mata*)	Consisting	Locations
Small shop	1	Tobacco, sugar, rice, tea, coffe, kerosene	Muntei Hamlet
Cloves	1 plots	16 productive trees	Muntei Hill
Fruit gardens	1 plots	6 durian, 3 langsat, numerous rambutan, jackfruit, three mango trees	Muntei Hill
Coconut	1 plots	400 productive coconut trees	Parakbatu, Masilok
Taro	1 plots	Hundreds of taro stalks	Jojoet
Sago garden	2 plots	28 mature sago trees Numerous sago sprouts	Ka Silak

After the first child attended junior high school in 2011, Aman Alfon sold half of his coconut trees. This choice was taken in order to spend more time in the settlement and to be closer to his family. Before that, he spent most of his time in his coconut gardens in Masilok and Parakbatu, leaving his wife in the settlement to take care of the children. The money from the sale of the coconut trees was used to open a small shop and to buy a plot of land along the Mara River, while the rest went towards finishing their semi-permanent house. Today, the main activity of the family is managing the small shop. The family collects a small amount of cacao beans and cloves from neighbours and then resells them to a larger collector in Muara Siberut. The kiosk is not particularly bustling but provides a steady income. At the time of this research, it has been running for almost five years and there is no sign of a decline.

Running the shop has prevented the family from undertaking intensive gardening. The family possess a plot of land with fruit trees (*mone*), which also has taro and sago gardens. The taro garden was obtained from *uma* Salakkopak, from the clan of Bai Alfon, while the sago garden was bought from a neighbour in Maileppet. However, the taro garden is only visited and tended occasionally and the palm gardens are not exploited. The fruits trees are largely neglected and visited only when they are about to bear fruit. Aman Alfon does not participate in any of the village politics. Busy with his small venture, he regularly visits coconut gardens on a small islet, which are now taken care of by his parents. Meanwhile, Bai Alfon is rather active in the church and the village women's organisation. She is a teacher at the Sunday school run by the church.

Household 2: Aman Santo

Aman Santo's family belongs to Sakukuret, a medium-sized *uma* from Rereiket that moved to Muntei in 1985. This *uma* lived for generations in Madobak, a settlement upriver. A combination of a dispute with a clan and aspirations to search for a new place for their pigs made them move to Muntei. Most of their sago, taro, and forest gardens in their original settlement were sold to other people in Madobak and just few good durian trees have been retained. Initially, all the housholds forged a single Sakukuret *uma* in the first decade of living in Muntei. However, an internal dispute about inheritance split the *uma* into three factions in the mid-1990s.

All the members of *uma* Sakukuret have retained a hinterland oriented livelihood. They are famous for their pig-keeping skills. Continuing to raise pigs while others have devoted themselves to being cash crop producers has allowed them to become specialists. With the increasing demand for pigs on the island, the members of *uma* Sakukuret have gradually become *simasainak*, people who are experts on, and have lots of, pigs. Cultivating patchouli is another source of livelihood for them.

Aman Santo is the second son of the leader of the Sakukuret faction, which is famous for being the

largest pig owners in the southern part of Siberut. He was born in Madobak in 1975, while *Bai* Santo, three years younger, was born is Siberut Hulu in *uma* Saruruk. The family was established at the end of the 1990s and has four children. The oldest did not finish junior high school and spends much of his time in the gardens and pig hut. The second attends secondary school. The two younger sons are still in elementary school. The family has several gardens consisting of both cash crops and food trees in various places (Table 16). They did not participate in growing coconuts and producing copra in the islets, but have a number of coconut trees around the settlement after exchanging their pigs. The exact number of fruit trees possessed by this family is difficult to calculate, however.

Table 16. Sources of Livelihood of Aman Santo's Family (2014)

Sources of Livelihood	Unit (*Mata*)	Consisting	Locations
Cloves	2 plots	55 productive trees, 14 not-so-good trees	Muntei Hill
Fruits gardens	2 plots	13 durian, 7 langsat, 3 cempedak, five mango	Muntei Hill
Coconut trees		17 trees	Muntei and the Mara River
Taro	3 plots	Hundreds of taro stalks	Toinong Muntei
Sago gardens	5 plots	100 mature sago trees and 500 sago sprouts	Ka Silak
Cacao gardens	1 plot	300 mature trees	The Mara River
Pigs	2 pigs hut	13 mature sows, 2 boars, numerous piglets	Ka Silak, Hulu

The family's main activities are gardening and keeping pigs. Twice a day, Aman Santo crosses the Siberut River to feed the pigs and chickens. He occasionally visits the cacao garden by the Mara River. Aman Santo's son and younger brother sometimes help the family to harvest cacao beans and bananas. With his motorbike, Aman Santo is mobile enough to visit several gardens. The family processes their own sago and intensively exploits their five plots of taro. They extract sago flour for family consumption, but occasionally bring surplus tubers to the local market. The family maintains an inland lifestyle. They live in a wooden house. While they regularly buy fish from the local market, they consume rice infrequently. Bai Santo also continues to fish and gather food. They extract and process their sago palms for domestic consumption. He and his family members bring sago piths to the settlement and extract the flour in the house. At one point, the family had the idea of buying a sago grating machine and venturing into sago production; however, Aman Santo said that the idea was abandoned due to the limited availability of labour.

Not paying higher education costs and the diligence of both the male and female adults in this family has allowed them to accumulate greater wealth. The cash from selling pigs and taro is spent on buying fruit trees, cloves, and sago gardens from fellow residents who need money to pay for their children's education. Aman Santo has been loyal to the Catholic Church but is not really active in the local church's organisation. The family periodically attends Sunday Mass together, hosts a weekly evening prayer meeting, but does not get involved in regular meetings and discussions in the church. The family is a newcomer to the settlement, but a successful one as it has specialised in keeping pigs. It is a stable household with precious possessions, notoriously pigs, and a variety of gardens.

Household 3: Aman Aturan

The third household belongs to Sarorougot, a small *uma* consisting of just three families. The ancestors of the family are from *uma* Sarereake and lived in Taileleu a village in the south of Siberut, who moved to

the Silaoinan River in the early 20th century. As *sitoi* (newcomers), their ancestors had no ancestral land around Siberut Hulu. The ancestors acquired the rights to live on and cultivate a small piece of land near the Rorougot River, from *uma* Sakaliou, then took the name of the river for their *uma*.

Members of Sarorougot moved downstream to Siberut Hulu and later to the settlement. In the early years of the OPKM programme, the *uma* acquired rights to cultivate cloves on Muntei Hill from a group living in Puro. The Sarorougot is one of the pioneer *uma* that participated in coconut cultivation in the *nusa* prior to the establishment of the settlement. However, unlike the two other members of Sarorougot, Aman Aturan's family has no coconut gardens. When he was young, Aman Aturan left the settlement for a temporary job as a carpenter and labourer, and did not inherit a coconut garden from his father.

The family comprises six individuals. Both adults in the family were born in Siberut Hulu in the mid-1960s. Bai Aturan was born into the Salakkopak family. The older son graduated from a university in Padang in 2013, and is now employed as a temporary teacher in Central Siberut. The older daughter finished secondary school in the summer of 2014. The other two children are both in junior high school. Despite the fact that the children and the mother are churchgoers, Aman Aturan neither attends church regularly, nor is he active in any church-related activities.

Aman Aturan's family represents a household from a smaller clan that is devoted to the production of cash crops, but has no coconut garden in the islets. The *uma* has committed to being commodity producers and has abandoned keeping pigs and traditional forest gardening. The family has taro, sago, cacao, and clove gardens (Table 17). The taro garden is located in *Toinong Onai*, obtained as a part of the bride-price payment from the Salakkopak clan, the clan of Bai Aturan. The sago gardens are rarely exploited. Occasionally, they cut the mature trees to obtain sago grubs but do not extract the starch of the palm. The family prefers to have rice from the sale of cash crops. The lack of time and labour is apparently the main reason why they do not process their own sago.

Table 17. Sources of Livelihood of Aman Aturan's Family (2014)

Sources of Livelihood	Unit (*Mata*)	Content	Locations
Cacao garden	2 ha	700 cacao trees, 500 bananas and plantains, numerous pineapples, numerous cassava, 100 coconut seedling	The Mara River
Cloves	2 plots	28 productive trees; 30 immature trees	Muntei Hill
Fruit gardens	1 plot	2 durian, 2 coconut trees, 3 langsat, 2 rambutan trees	The Mara River
Taro	1 plot	Hundreds of taro stalks	Jojoet
Sago garden	2 plot	28 mature sago trees Numerous sago sprouts	Ka Silak

The main source of cash is a two hectare cacao garden. The family does not practice monoculture in the garden. In addition to cacao, the garden also produces bananas and plantains to be sold at the market. Once every three days, the family brings three bunches of bananas to the settlement and sells them to a local merchant. One bunch of bananas earns the family approximately IDR 30,000. The family also started to put a number of seedlings around the cacao trees in anticipation of declining cacao production. Another major source of cash, even if it is irregular, is two plots of clove gardens. The clove gardens have allowed the family to send the older children to be educated at a university in Padang. This family has fruit trees, but the land where the trees are growing is not yet secured and still belongs to Saruruk.

Prior to sending their son to university, the family had more than 100 mature cloves trees. Seventy of

the productive ones were sold to cover the tuition fees and living costs of their son in Padang, for a period of five years. In the last year of their son's higher education, the family sold another 50 of their productive clove trees to pay the graduation fee and the family's travel to attend the graduation ceremony. The impact of these sales is still being felt. When *rura* season is coming, they complain bitterly about the sale of the trees, which prevents them from repairing their rickety house. The family has tried to recover from this by making a new clove garden alongside the coconut gardens beside the Mara River.

The fruit trees and taro gardens are managed by Bai Aturan. She regularly visits the gardens and gathers vegetables, fruit, and tubers, although she does not sell the tubers. When she has time after gardening, Bai Aturan goes out fishing and gathering. She regularly takes part in collective fishing trips in Katurei Bay. She is famous for her skills at diving into the main river and collecting various *lokan* (mussels). She often brings her daughter to accompany her when fishing. The family has another source of protein; in the back of the house, they have made two small artificial ponds filled with tilapia fish (*Oreochromis niloticus*) after participating in a local government programme.

During the lean period in the gardens, Aman Aturan occasionally works as a carpenter and a house builder. He uses the skills he acquired during his teenage years working outside the settlement to seek a job in government projects. However, he has acute hyperuricemia (gout), which prevents him from travelling outside the settlement. Other than gardening, the family also gets an occasional income from making *tobat*, a traditional type of roof made from sago leaves, which is often requested by the surf industry for surfers' accommodation on the small islets.

4.2 The General Composition of Meals

This research recorded a total of 3,030 family meals over a total of 1,047 days from the three households between the 1 January and 31 December 2013. Table 18 provides an overview of the recorded days and meals. The recorded data, in terms of both days and meals, from each family, is not uniform but generally reveals a regular pattern in which each family has three meals a day.

Table 18. The Number of Recorded Days and Recorded Meals in Three Selected Families in Muntei Settlement, 1 January- 31 December 2013

Number of	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Recorded Days													
Aman Santo	31	28	29	29	28	30	11	27	30	31	30	30	334
Aman Aturan	30	27	30	30	31	30	29	29	30	31	30	31	358
Aman Alfon	26	28	31	30	31	30	31	29	30	28	30	31	355
	87	**83**	**90**	**89**	**90**	**90**	**71**	**85**	**90**	**90**	**90**	**92**	**1047**
Recorded Meals													
Aman Santo	88	84	87	86	80	90	33	81	89	91	90	90	989
Aman Aturan	87	79	89	84	90	85	83	80	86	90	86	86	1025
Aman Alfon	76	81	89	85	86	79	92	80	89	83	86	90	1016
	251	**244**	**265**	**255**	**256**	**254**	**208**	**241**	**264**	**264**	**262**	**266**	**3030**

As the table shows, not all daily meals for every family were recorded. When the families went out of the settlement or spent weekdays processing coconuts for copra in the *nusa*, they had no meals that were attended by all the members. On these occasions, data were not collected despite them certainly having meals in other places. For example, Bai Santo had to be brought to Padang for treatment in early July 2013. Aman Santo and the youngest child accompanied Bai Santo to Padang for two weeks. The other children stayed in the settlement but ate in the house of Aman Santo's brother. For a span of 20 days, the parents and the children did not eat together. This explains why the number of recorded days and meals for Aman Santo's family is lower than those of the others. Another reason why the recorded data is not entirely uniform among the three families (Table 19) is because sometimes both the adults in the families paid a visit to their gardens and stayed for a few days. In this case, the family had two kinds of family meals. The parents eat food together in the garden but the children have meals in the house. The teenage girls may have recorded the children's meals but this data are not included as their meals mostly took place at the house of and were prepared by an uncle or grandparent. However, when only one parent was not present, data were still recorded. This is also the case when the family as a whole attends a ritual feast organised by either their own clan or relatives. In the ritual feast, the participants sit and eat food together but are clustered in their own family groups.

Table 19. Types and Numbers of Meals Consumed in Three Selected Families in Muntei, 1 January-31 December 2013 (n=3,030)

Families and Recorded Days	Actual Meals				Potential Recorded Meals
	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Total Recorded Meals	
Aman Santo (days = 334)	325 (97%)	330 (99%)	334 (100%)	989 (99%)	1002
Aman Aturan (days = 358)	328 (92%)	340 (95%)	357 (99,9%)	1025 (95%)	1074
Aman Alfon (days = 355)	327 (92%)	336 (95%)	353 (99,9%)	1016 (95%)	1065
Total	**980**	**1,006**	**1044**	**3030 (96,4%)**	**3141**

Generally, my data suggest that the selected families rarely skipped meals and share the habit of eating three times a day. They ate about 96.4 per cent of all the potentially recorded meals together and there is hardly a difference between the three families. Table 4.6 above shows that of all the meals, dinner was almost never skipped, while breakfast and lunch have a slighly lower percentage. When the families have just two meals in a day, they combine lunch and breakfast. This commonly happens either when there are no staples available (sago, bananas, or noodles) for breakfast, or if they are having a rather lavish meal on school-free days and then they have an early lunch together before midday.

When the main staples are not available for breakfast, the families prefer to have a cup of tea or coffee with sugar. They might buy biscuits from the local shop. Generally, however, people do not consider biscuits or crackers a proper meal. They are not satisfying (*tak maektek*) and are thought of as children's food (*kat satoga*). Adults usually reserve biscuits for their children and take only sweet drinks when a proper meal is not available. Therefore, this research does not include breakfasts with minor snacks such as crackers or biscuits.

Breakfast, Lunch, and Evening Meals

Breakfast is organised prior to family members leaving the house, normally between 6.00–7.00 am. The

days starts when the family members sit on the veranda and enjoy roasted sago, boiled bananas, or fried taro with sweet tea. Table 20 shows that breakfast is composed mostly of sago and bananas. Typically, a breakfast involves sago flour wrapped in sago leaves, which is roasted on firewood and known as sago *kapurut*. *Kapurut* is a quicker way to cook sago despite it requiring plenty of sago leaves to wrap up the sago flour and nimble fingers to make the sago breadsticks. The women usually prepare the leaves the day before, and they can be used for three days. Grated coconut might be added and sugar can be sprinkled on top of the flour to give a sweeter taste. When roasted at the back of the fireplace, *kapurut* produces a nice crunchy stick when unwrapped. Roasting *kapurut* can be done in about 15 minutes while the women are boiling water for the sweet drinks. *Kapurut* is suitable for breakfast, eaten when the sticks are still hot and crunchy. To have a proper breakfast, four to eight roasted sticks are needed per person. *Kapurut* is a favourite for breakfast because it can be consumed without condiments or meat.

Table 20. Frequency that Various Types of Food Appear for Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner in Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

	Breakfast (n= 980)		**Lunch (n=1006)**		**Evening Meals (n=1044)**		**Total**	
	No	**%***	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Sago	318	32	307	31	630	60	1255	41
Rice	107	11	615	61	422	40	1144	38
Bananas	201	21	62	5.8	146	12	409	13
Taro and yams	117	12	55	5	102	10	274	9
Cassava and sweet potatoes	121	12	31	3	26	2	178	6
Instant noodles	29	3	136	14	93	9	258	9
Meat	93	9	773	77	939	90	1805	60
Vegetables	34	3.5	112	11.03	201	19.2	347	11
Fruit	19	2	105	10	162	16	286	9

** The total percentage is more than 100% as a breakfast, a lunch or a dinner may consist of more than one item.*

Bananas and plantains are also preferable for breakfast for practical reasons. They can be served using various techniques: boiling, frying, roasting, or mashing. Boiling is a simple, fast, and cheap way to process them without losing the taste. Tubers (taro, sweet potatoes, and cassava) are occasionally eaten in the morning while rice, vegetables, or meat are rarely served. Tubers are prepared for breakfast mostly when there is cooking oil for frying. Taro is considered delicious but it requires a more complicated cooking process. The tuber is considered tasty but eaten mostly when there is meat. The families prefer to have fried taro since taro can be sticky when it is boiled. Sweet potatoes and cassava are considered to be less tasty when they are boiled.

The families rarely cook rice for breakfast. This might correspond to the status of rice as an expensive and lavish food. Rice is consumed when there is any left over from last night's meal. Occasionally, to make the leftover rice tasty, the families fry or reheat it with the addition of grated coconut. Meat, vegetables, fruit, and instant noodles are infrequently served; all of these combined only make up 11 per cent of the

food usually eaten for the morning meal, which is less than taro or other tubers. This indicates that a meal with meat and condiments is rarely served for breakfast. Indeed, if meat is served for breakfast it is usually when there is some left over from a ritual feast the day before, or when they have an abundance of meat in certain seasons.

Lunch is organised at midday, around the time when the adults are back from working in their gardens and the children have just returned from school. If there is an extracurricular activity in school after normal hours, the children might stay at school and have their lunch later. Occasionally, one parent does not have lunch at the house when there is a lot of work to be done in the gardens, such as processing coconuts or harvesting cacao. If the father is in the gardens around the settlement, a box of rice or a handful of roasted sago is brought to him. He eats the same food as his family in the house do. However, when a member of the family is not yet present, the family would normally wait until 2 pm for lunch to ensure that they eat together.

Table 20 indicates that rice is the most important staple for lunch, served 615 times in a year. All three families confirmed that the practicality of cooking the grain contributes to the high frequency of rice in midday meals. Lunch is prepared by the mother or eldest daughter in a tight schedule between gardening or doing domestic work (washing clothes, cleaning the house). While tubers and sago require hours of preparation—including preparing bamboo tubes or processing the sago flour in the leaves of sago then roasting them on the fire, washing and cleaning the skin of the tubers—processing rice is simple and takes just a few minutes. While rice has high percentage among the staples consumed at lunch, the highest percentage of food present is meat with the families consuming meat for lunch, on average, every two days.

Interestingly, instant noodles are eaten for lunch more frequently than for either breakfast or dinner. Their frequency of use for lunch is much higher than for local foodstuffs such as tubers and bananas, which appear in less than 10 per cent of the total lunch menus. The higher percentage of eating instant noodles for lunch may relate to the consumption of rice. If there is no meat, people prefer to have rice with instant noodles mixed with vegetables, notably cassava leaves, boiled in a hot pan. The practicality of cooking instant noodles might be a consideration.

Dinner features the highest frequency of major categories of food (meat, sago, and vegetables as well as fruit). Sago was present in 60 per cent of the meals, while meat was served 90 times. Sago is rarely cooked as *kapurut* for dinner, but instead is mostly prepared as *siokbuk*. The flour is divided into sections of freshly cut bamboo (*okbuk*) and roasted for about 30 minutes on a fire. Each piece of bamboo is about 30 centimetres long and filled with sago flour. When it is ready, the hot roasted bamboo containers are taken from the fire. It is now easy to open the bamboo with a big knife and take out the hot, bread-like sago from the inside. Unlike *kapurut*, sago *siokbuk* is often consumed with a condiment. Although sago *siokbuk* can be consumed on its own, it is very rare that people eat it without side dishes. As sago *siokbuk* is cooked without salt or sugar and is therefore bland, side dishes containing vegetables and meat cooked with salt, onions, garlic, ginger, and spices, are made to eat with it and give it some taste. Sago *siokbuk* is dipped in spicy or salty *gulai*, a kind of curry with spices and vegetables as well as meat, boiled in coconut milk. When fresh meat is available, sago *siokbuk* is preferred to other staples.

The frequent presence of sago in the families' dinners is certainly related to the presence of meat and vegetables. For dinner, vegetables are served six times more often than at breakfast and almost twice as often as at lunch. These data fit with the general observation that while lunch or breakfast may comprise leftover food, dinner always involves freshly cooked food in which sago, taro, and other staples are served, together with meat and condiments. If there is plenty of meat, other local staples, especially bananas and taro, are also prepared, mostly in the form of *subbet*. It is considered a great meal when sago, *subbet*, and meat are served together. Dinner is rather special as the meal almost always contains meat, either obtained

from the market or from the surrounding environment. This might relate to whether the adult males in the house have time to prepare a desirable meal and the presence of daughters in the family to assist in preparing the dinner. Certainly the availability of young girls to share the burden of preparing evening meals is a big help to the mother.

Table 21. The Modes and Places of Family Meals in Three Selected Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

	Aman Alfon (n= 1016)		Aman Aturan (n=1025)		Aman Santo (n=989)		Total Meals	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Meals in family	954	93.8	989	96.4	873	88.3	2,816	92.9
Ritual feast in *uma*	45	4.4	4	0.4	98	9.9	147	4.9
Non-ritual communal feast	14	1.4	12	1.8	18	1.8	44	1.5
Eating in a local restaurant	3	0.3	20	1.9	0	0	23	0.8
Total	**1016**	**100**	**1025**	**100**	**989**	**100**	**3030**	**100**

All meals are generally prepared and consumed in the household. It is very typical of a Muntei family to eat food that they cultivated or food obtained from their own toil (i.e. rice obtained from the market after selling cash crops) and not to eat outside their home. In very rare cases, the families go to or have take-away food from a restaurant owned by a Minangkabau or a Batak in the neighbouring villages. The families sometimes have communal meals in the church or village during a social event (i.e Independence Day or a social gathering welcoming a new head of a district). Table 21 shows that non-family meals, either in non-traditional institutions (village, hamlet, school, church) or from a restaurant, are a rare occurrence. Cumulatively, non-family meals occurred only 67 times from a total of 3,030 meals during the year.

The preference for having meals at home is not because there is a cultural barrier to eating food outside the house. People do not have a specific problem with consuming food cooked by non-Mentawaians and consider the food in small restaurants sold by migrants to be tasty and delicious. It is primarily a matter of economics. Regular eating out in a restaurant is expensive. However, there is also an idea that a proper family has to cook its own food and eat together at home. This is related to the importance of eating together as a way to maintain family cohesiveness and to sustain kinship relations, a subject that I will discuss at length in Chapter 6.

4.3 Consumption of Staple Food (*Kat*)

Composition of Staples

Staple foods are the most consistent and important foodstuffs in all the meals recorded. Sago, taro, rice, and others are a must in a meal, present in all of the 3,030 recorded meals. The settlements' residents have various sources of staple food that can be processed through various cooking techniques. The native staples are sago, taro, and bananas. Cassava and sweet potatoes might have been introduced later, but can be categorised as local staples.

The imported staples are rice and instant noodles. There are two different types of rice sold and consumed in the settlement. One is 'common rice' and the other is glutinous or sticky rice. The former has a long or round grain shape and is transparent in colour, while the latter has an opaque endosperm and a round or oblong grain shape. For daily meals, the three families ate only common rice, boiled in water. Glutinous rice

is prepared for rice cakes or roasted in a freshly-cut bamboo tube and served for specific occasions, especially for Christmas and New Year festive days. Cooking and preparing glutinous rice is clearly a new practice, influenced by Minangkabau culture. In addition to rice and noodles, wheat flour and mung beans are also recently imported staples. However, these staples are not eaten daily or cooked for proper meals. They are obtained from local markets mainly for cakes or biscuits served on special occasions.

Table 22. Types of Staple Food Present and Consumed by Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

	Number of Meals with	Percentage (%)
Sago	1,401	46
Rice	1,327	44
Bananas and plantains	449	15
Taro and yams	274	9
Instant noodles	258	9
Cassava and sweet potatoes	178	6

Table 22 shows that a large proportion of the core meals are comprised of rice and sago. Both rice and sago are served in more than 90 per cent of the total meals. Traditionally, sago is the main staple and is abundantly available through the year. The three families have their own sago gardens, but only Aman Santo's family processes the sago palm. Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon must obtain sago either from the market or from other family members. The data on how much of their sago is obtained from the market and how much from their family is difficult to assess. Sago is a food that defines Muntei residents as Mentawaian; they identify themselves firstly as sago eaters. Even if they do not possess their own sago gardens, a proper Mentawaian meal must have sago. It is important to note that sago flour is, economically speaking, the cheapest of all the staple foods. In terms of practicality, sago flour can also be stored and cooked in various ways. It can be cooked as *kapurut* in the morning, as *siokbuk* for lunch and dinner, or processed as 'pizza sago', roasted in a hot pan and called *sigajai*.

As previously mentioned, rice is easier to cook and can be consumed as a solitary staple food in a meal. When there is no meat, the three families eat just plain rice or rice with instant noodles and some vegetables. The prominence of rice is also linked to the availability of subsidised rice through the government programmes I have described in a previous chapter. Another factor is the availability of cash, which enables the families to purchase rice. Rice may have been introduced about a century ago to the island but it has only recently been gaining in importance.

The third important staple food is bananas, although they are served three times less than both sago and rice at mealtimes. Taro, cassava, and sweet potatoes are the least significant staples, contributing just under one tenth of all the carbohydrates consumed. The root crops are still cultivated and harvested occasionally by all three families. However, they are not frequently served for meals. They are served for breakfast as an additional staple, or at dinner and lunch mixed with or substituted for sago if there is meat available. Other than rice and instant noodles, all the imported staples, including wheat flour, mung beans and glutinous rice, are eaten once or twice a year, so they are not really significant.

Combination of Staples

While sago and rice are the dominant staples, they are mostly consumed with other staples. Table 23 below shows that the largest proportion of meals has a combination of various staples. Meals with two or more

staples constitute almost a third of the total meals recorded, while meals with a single staple comprise the rest. Mostly, the families eat two different staples in their meals. Meals with three or four staples are less common. This indicates that meals comprising a combination of all the staples are reserved for special occasions and may be a sign of abundance.

Table 23. Combination of Staple Food Consumed in Three Family Meals in Muntei (n=3,030)

Meals with	No	Percentage
1 staple	1,203	40.2
2 staples	1,262	40.8
3 staples	484	16.3
4 staples	81	2.7
Total	**3030**	**100**

When families have only one single staple for the meals, rice is the most frequent staple eaten (Table 24). The grain appears in almost half of all the meals with a single staple. In Muntei, rice is considered to be sweeter than other staples. It can be consumed without a 'fringe' dish, either a condiment or meat, especially by children. It is not uncommon that families with children attending school prepare rice for breakfast, but rice is prepared mostly for lunch. The combination of its sweeter taste and the fact that it is easier to cook makes rice a convenient staple for a quick meal at midday.

Sago is the second staple preferred for single staple meals. Meals comprising only sago are mostly consumed in the morning, together with fresh *kapurut*. Sweeter *kapurut* are rarely eaten with other staples, but it is taken with sweet drinks. In contrast, fresh but bland sago *siokbuk* is rarely eaten alone, but almost always with condiments. Tubers and bananas are rarely served as singular staples for meals. Less than 11 per cent of meals consist only of either taro, banana, or cassava. Instant noodles are the only starchy food that is always consumed together with another staple. This implies that instant noodles are not considered to be a staple on their own.

Table 24. Composition of Meals with Single Staple in Three Families in Muntei (n=1,203)

Meals with Only Staple	No	Percentage
Rice	572	47.3
Sago	501	41.6
Bananas	79	6.7
Tubers	51	4.4
Total	**1203**	**100**

Table 25 presents the number of meals consisting of two staples (n=1,262). The sample families apparently have various combinations of meals with two staples except, again, for instant noodles. The most common meals with a combination of two staples consist of sago and rice while the least common is sago and instant noodles. The other frequent meals with two staples involve the combination of tubers and bananas, rice and instant noodles, and sago and bananas.

Table 25. Composition of Meals with Two Staples in Three Families in Muntei (n=1,262)

Meals with	No	Percentage
Sago and rice	283	22.4
Tubers and bananas	251	19.9
Rice and instant noodles	221	17.5
Sago and bananas	213	16.9
Sago and taro	119	9.4
Sago and other tubers (cassava, sweet potatoes)	98	7.8
Rice and tubers	61	4.9
Rice and bananas	12	1.0
Sago and instant noodles	2	0.02
Total	**1262**	**100**

The numbers here reveal those meals consisting of two staples. Rice and sago are mostly served for the evening meal when 'fringe' food, either meat or vegetables, are available. Tubers (mainly taro) and bananas are frequently served together, mostly in the morning. On a few occasions, they are processed for *subbet* in ritual meals. The meals with two staples consisting of rice and instant noodles are mostly eaten for the midday meal as these imported foods are quicker and easier to prepare.

Table 26 shows that rice has apparently been succesfully adopted as a staple food in Muntei. This can be seen in the way the grain can be mixed with either native staples or other imported food. Rice with sago and rice with instant noodles are the two combinations that appear in most of the meals with two staples. This is not the case with instant noodles. The latter imported food is never combined with tubers and bananas.

Table 26. Composition of Meals Consisting of Three or More Staples in Three Families in Muntei (n=484)

Meals with	No	Percentage
Sago, tubers and bananas	192	39.70
Sago, rice, instant noodles	121	25.00
Sago, rice and tubers	56	11.57
Rice, tubers and bananas	42	8.68
Sago, rice and bananas	39	8.05
Rice, tubers and instant noodles	34	7.03
Total	**484**	**100**

Meals with three or more staples appear in one fifth of the total number of meals. The combination of sago-taro-banana is the most frequently eaten meal. Other combinations are far less frequent. It is interesting that the highest number of meals with three staples consists only of local staples. The second highest combination of three staples consists of sago, rice, and tubers, four times less than the former combination. The latter combination is also compelling. Meals with instant noodles present in the

combination of three staples occur only when there is rice. Meals consisting of four staples are the rarest occurrence, featuring in less than three per cent of the recorded meals. The most frequent meals with four staples consist of a combination of local and imported food, specially rice.

The numbers and tables above show a tendency that the families prefer to combine different staples in their meals. The data above also support the general ethnographic data on the importance of local food. The families still prefer sago and tubers over rice. People consume rice because it is quicker to prepare. Rice is a delicious and sweeter starch, according to them, but not satisfying. As I have described at the end of the previous chapter, people have ambiguous perceptions towards rice. It is sweeter but people feel hungry again just a few hours after eating the pungent grain. In particular, those who indulge in hard labour (cutting forest trees, climbing fruit trees, slashing bushes) prefer to have sago or taro, rather than rice, before leaving the house for work.

The other reason is obviously the diversity of staple foods and the variety of cooking processes for those foods. People have known more than 25 varieties of taro, six of sweet potatoes, four of cassava, and more than 30 varieties of bananas, identified by the colour of the regenerative stalk and the shape of the tuber or fruit (Appendix 2). Both local and imported staples can be prepared in a variety of ways. Tubers and sago can be served boiled, roasted, mashed, wrapped in leaves, put in a bamboo tube, or rolled in grated coconut. This diversity of processing methods allows people to have different ways of serving staples in their meals.

Patterns of Staple Consumption Between Families

This section discusses the pattern of staples' consumption among the three families. Table 27 shows that the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon consume more rice than any other staple for their meals. For these families, sago is the second most frequent staple eaten. The only family that consumes less rice is Aman Santo's family. For this family, sago is the main staple. The table also shows that bananas and tubers are eaten frequently by Aman Santo's family and less often by those of Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon. The former consumes twice as many bananas and four times more cassava and sweet potatoes than the latter.

The consumption of native foodstuffs is the reverse of the consumption of instant noodles. Aman Santo's family consumes noodles three or four times less than the other sample families. It thus follows that the higher consumption of rice corresponds with the lower consumption of local staples and the higher percentage of instant noodles. In reverse, the lower consumption of rice relates to the lower consumption of instant noodles and the higher consumption of tubers and bananas. This is clear in Aman Santo's case. The consumption of bananas and taro are almost equal to that of rice.

Table 27. Number of Meals Consisting of Staples in Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

	Aman Alfon (n=1016)		Aman Aturan (n=1025)		Aman Santo (n=989)		Total (n=3030)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Sago	403	39.7	340	33.2	512	51.8	1,255	41
Rice	297	29.2	512	50.0	335	33.9	1,144	38
Bananas and plantains	123	12.1	85	8.3	201	20.3	409	13
Taro and yams	102	10.0	55	5.4	117	11.8	274	9
Instant noodles	93	9.2	136	13.3	29	2.9	258	9
Cassava and sweet potatoes	26	2.6	31	3.0	121	12.2	178	6

The specific reason for rice becoming important in Aman Alfon's and Aman Aturan's families is perhaps due to the availability of cash from their commercial activities and the delivery of subsidised rice. The livelihood strategy of the families may also be a key factor. Aman Aturan's and Aman Alfon's families are typical Sasabirut families who have devoted themselves to the production of cash crops and abandoned processing sago for their own consumption. While Aman Alfon's family is involved in coconut farming and copra making, combined with having a small kiosk, Aman Aturan's family relies on cacao and clove cultivation. They spend much of their time in market-oriented production activities. This is rather different in Aman Santo's family. The latter family still harvests their own sago and is focused on a combination of subsistence and cash crops. Of course, the family eats rice regularly as they have cash from selling pigs or cacao beans. However, they retain some subsistence activities, such as processing sago, which contributes to them being less reliant on imported grains.

If we look closely at the pattern of staples' consumption over the year, the consumption fluctuates (Figure 12). Sago and bananas are more frequently eaten in the first six months period, while rice has the highest percentage for the total meals in the second half of the year. This pattern is consistent in all three families. Sago has a higher percentage from January to May while bananas are eaten more often between January and May and less frequently in the second half of the year, especially between August and November. The lowest consumption of bananas occurs in October. Rice has a higher percentage after July, and in particular, in December and is apparently eaten less in January, February, and especially in March and May.

How can we make sense of this pattern? For sago and rice, the answer may be obvious. Sago is still the most important staple. The proportion of rice consumed in the second half of the year is due to the distribution of subsidised rice. At the end of June, the RASKIN (rice for poor people) programme distributes rice (Puailiggoubat 2013). Every single family receives nine sacks of rice, each sack contains 30 kilograms. This means that each family has 270 kilograms from June onwards. The subsidised rice can last until the next subsidised rice is delivered. The fluctuation of sago and rice implies that when rice is not available the families rely on sago, but when there is an opportunity to have rice, either obtained from the local market using cash from commercial crops or acquired from a government programme, people tend to choose rice.

For bananas it is rather different. Bananas are most often consumed in the first half of the year and this may relate to their production cycle. While the production of bananas and plantains is not heavily influenced by the seasons, there tends to be less of them in the rainy months. The plants flower soon after the peak of the wet season. This means that bananas and plantains start to produce their maximum yields in the middle of the dry season, from the end of January to early March. This may explain why the consumption of bananas and plantains is less frequent in October and November, the wettest months in the year.

The presence of other types of foods is relatively stable. Cassava, taro, and instant noodles have an apparently constant percentage. In certain months, one of these types of food is entirely absent from the families' meals. Aman Aturan had no tubers in April, September, and October. Aman Alfon's family had no instant noodles in March and May. Other than these months, all the families had tubers or instant noodles in their meals. All the families have taro gardens and home gardens containing cassava or sweet potatoes. These items are available throughout the year, despite sometimes not being so plentiful. It seems that they constantly extract the tubers and add them to their meals. Obviously, instant noodles are available in the market throughout the year. The consumption of this industrial food is constant but higher in the months when rice is the frequent main staple (August to November).

There are some peculiarities in the figure. The consumption of all staples is relatively high in December.

Sago, rice, bananas, and tubers were frequently served towards the end of 2013. Aman Aturan had the highest consumption of rice (72%) and bananas (14%); Aman Santo had rice (43%) and tubers (16%); Aman Alfon also had a relatively higher consumption of bananas, rice, and sago in this month (December). The higher consumption of staples in all the meals at the end of the year may relate to the festive days during the Christmas and New Year period. The families try to have more lavish meals, especially in the second half of December. Significant amounts of rice, of a higher quality than the subsidised variety, is bought, alongside other imported food items such as biscuits, crackers, and sugar from the shops in Muara Siberut. Consuming rice and other imported food is considered prestigious and a way to celebrate the festive days.

Does the consumption of rice and the pattern of staples' consumption show that the selected families have undergone a major change? It is not clear whether people have fundamentally altered their food preferences, in which they prefer to eat rice rather than local staples. Data for 2013 shows that rice is the most important staple, alongside sago. However, it would be unfair to say that the families have abandoned traditional staples and fully embraced rice. It is important to note that the production and the consumption of rice has come and gone since it was introduced on the island (Persoon 1992). My own observations confirm that rice is still complementary to the traditional staples and has not entirely diminished the importance of sago, bananas, and taro.

Table 28. Combination of Staples in Meals of Each Family in Muntei (n=3,030)

	Aman Alfon		Aman Aturan		Aman Santo	
	No. of Meals	%	No. of Meals	%	No. of Meals	%
1 staple	409	40	489	48	305	31
Combination of 2 staples	399	39	427	42	436	44
Combination of 3 staples	165	16	106	10	213	22
Combination of 4 staples	43	4	3	0	35	4

Table 28 indicates the variations in having more staples in their meals, across the surveyed families. Aman Santo has the highest percentage of meals containing a combination of the staples while Aman Alfon has the lowest percentage of meals with more than a single staple. The fewest meals with a combination of staples were eaten by Aman Aturan's family. Generally, more than half of each family's meals has two or more staples. This implies that a single staple, either sago or rice, does not dominate the meals.

4.4 Consumption of Food from Animal (*Iba*)

Meals with meat (*iba*) makes up 60 per cent of the total meals recorded (Table 29). The composition of *iba* is highly varied, consisting of three main *emic* categories: meat from freshwater animals (*iba-t-oinan*); meat from the sea (*iba-t-koat*); and domestic animals (*iba-t-punen*). Apparently, *iba-t-leleu* is virtually absent from the three families' meals. Birds and terrestrial reptiles (snakes, monitor lizards, tortoise) were also not eaten during the period the data were collected. The decline of ritual hunting is the main reason for the former, while the shame of eating lesser valued food is the reason for the latter. Small mammals and sea turtles were eaten, albeit only on one or two occasions.

In general, each of the families shares a general pattern, but also has variations in terms of meat consumption. All three families have more than half of their meals with meat. Aman Alfon has the highest

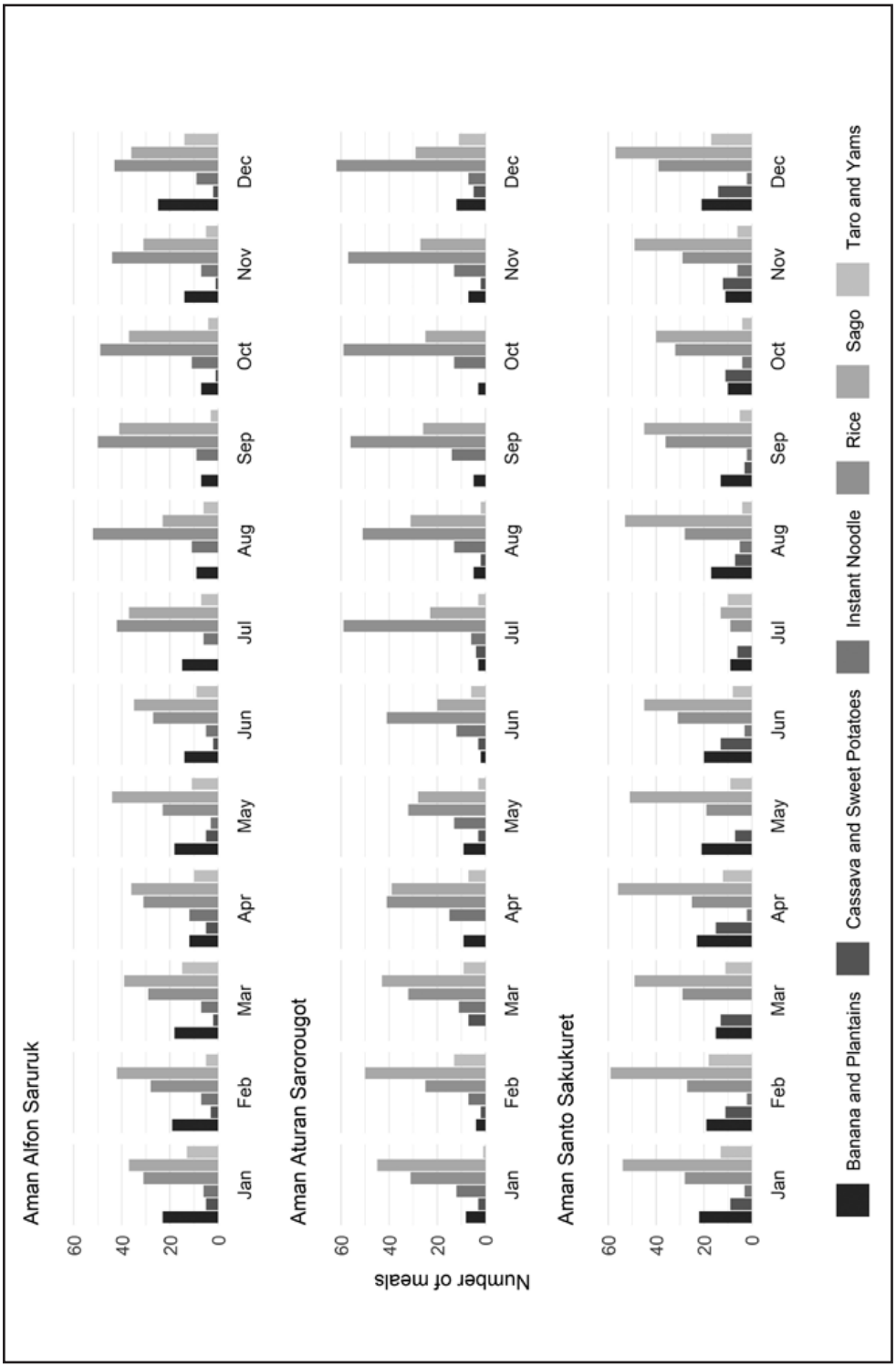


Figure 12. The Consumption of Staples Food among Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

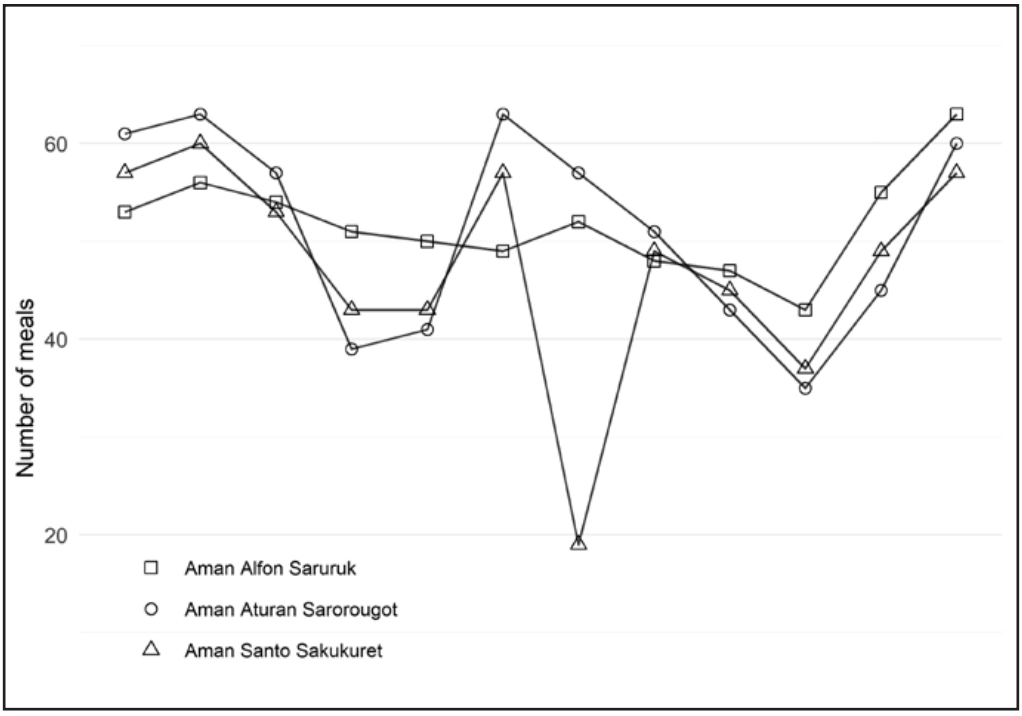
frequency of consuming meat while Aman Santo has the lowest. Figure 13 presents a detailed examination of the meat consumption patterns throughout the year. The figure reveals that the families consumed meat more frequently in January, February, June, and December. In those months, each of the families ate an average of one third of their meals containing meat.

Table 29. The Number of Meals with Meat among Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

Families and Number of Meals	Number of Meals with Meat	Percentage of Meals with Meat
Aman Alfon (n=1,016)	621	61
Aman Aturan (n=1,025)	615	59
Aman Santo (n=989)	569	58
Total meals (n=3,030)	1805	60

In contrast, during April, May, September, and particularly October, the consumption of meat is lower. In these months, each of the families only ate meat 40 times. This pattern is seemingly affected by the seasons. The months when meat is consumed less frequently are the wettest months. Especially October and April, which are the peak of the rainy season (WWF 1980, see Chapter 2). The heavy rainfall causes serious flooding. Fishing for freshwater animals is more difficult, while the supply of saltwater fish from the market might be interrupted. In contrast, January, February, and June are the driest months. Fishing and gathering clams, shrimps, and barnacles, in all water bodies (creeks, rivers, estuaries) are mostly carried out in these periods.

Figure 13. The Number of Meals with Meat among Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)



The exception to this pattern is December. The end of the year is normally wet and rainy but all three families consume meat in two thirds of their meals at this time. Again, this can be explained by the fact that December is a festive month. The Catholic Church organises a series of ceremonies to welcome Christmas and invites people in the settlement to hail the coming events with a lavish meal, which includes pigs being slaughtered for this occasion. The church establishes a committee with the main task of organising its members to buy pigs and distribute the meat. Non-Catholic members can participate as long as they have money to buy the meat. Most of the year, people usually bring home their chickens and ducks from their gardens for meals after Sunday Mass. Furthermore, whenever cash is available, they also buy saltwater fish. Some of the fish is preserved by smoking it (*silakkra*). The smoked fish is stored in anticipation of the supply of fresh fish being interrupted during rainy and stormy days.

Type of Meat

Table 30 shows that each family shares a fondness for saltwater fish. Various types of fish from the sea appear in more that half of the total meals. All three families consume a significant amount of *iba-t-oinan*, collected by the women. *Iba-t-oinan* is the second most important type of meat consumed by the families. Various freshwater fish, mussels, crabs, shrimp, small frogs, and worms are served for one third of the total meals, almost three times higher than the consumption of domestic animals (chickens, ducks, pigs) put together. In particular, worms, as an individual category of meat, are the second most frequently type of served meat. Hunted animals have the lowest presence. The combination of major *iba-t-koat* (turtles, dugong) and small mammals is less than one per cent of the total recorded.

Table 30. Types of Meat Consumed in Meals of Three Families in Muntei (n=1,805)

	Meals with Meat Aman Alfon (n=621)		Meals with Meat Aman Aturan (n=615)		Meals with Meat Aman Santo (n=569)		Total Meals with Meat (n=1805)	
	No	%*	No	%	No	%	No	%
Saltwater fish	456	73.4	338	55	277	48.7	1071	59.3
Freshwater fish	8	1.3	60	9.8	36	6.3	104	5.8
Mussels	17	2.7	59	9.6	59	10.4	135	7.54
Crabs/shrimps/frogs	22	3.5	55	8.9	32	5.6	109	6.03
Worms	44	7.1	115	18.7	111	19.5	270	15
Poultry	39	6.3	18	2.9	55	9.7	112	6.2
Pork	42	6.8	20	3.3	57	10.	119	6.6
Turtles or dugong	6	1	2	0.3	0	0	8	0.4
Small mammals	0	0	3	0.41	5	5.1	8	0.4

** Occasionally, the families consume more than one type of meat. Especially in the dry season when gathering and fishing any form of water bodies is easier, the families enjoy shrimps, crabs, and small fish for their meals. Hence, the total percentage of all these type of meat is more than 100%.*

Table 30 indicates the variation in the consumption of meat by the three families. Aman Alfon's family relies heavily on saltwater fish and consumes less meat from freshwater sources. Almost three quarters of their meals with meat consist of saltwater fish and only a few freshwater fish. The two other families seem

to rely on both saltwater fish and *iba-t-oinan* or animals gathered from freshwater. The general findings presented in the table show that the majority of the meat consumed by the families is composed of saltwater fish and *iba-t-oinan*. About half of the total meals of both Aman Aturan's family and Aman Santo's contain meat that is gathered by the women. The big difference between Aman Santo and Aman Aturan is in their consumption of domestic animals.

Two important types of meat that are associated with male work—hunted game and domestic animals—are far less significant for their diet. The higher frequency of eating saltwater fish and the lower significance of hunted game and domestic animals may correspond with a shift in the priorities of the families' activities, especially for the adults. The absence of *iba-t-leleu* and the consumption of freshwater animals support this point. Aman Alfon's family, despite still retaining their coconut gardens in the *nusa* and having gardens around the settlement, no longer spends time in their gardens or fishing along the nearby coast. Bai Alfon no longer goes fishing in the creek close to the settlement and does not participate in fishing trips to the Katurei River. With cash available almost everyday from their kiosk and from selling dried coconuts, the family prefers to buy fresh saltwater fish from the market. The occasional consumption of worms, shrimps, and frogs might occur after the family asked relatives or neighbours to share or to exchange the catch from their fishing trips for rice, sugar, or money from the kiosk. In contrast, the adults in other families are still gardening and spending some time fishing and gathering. Bai Santo and Bai Aturan still occasionally go to the nearby creeks or rivers to collect freshwater animals. The frequent consumption of *iba-t-sinanalep* indicates that fishing for shrimps, diving for clams in the river, and collecting mussels in the dry season has regained some importance for these families.

Figure 14 gives a more detailed picture of the variations and the dynamics of meat consumption in the families. In general, the consumption of meat by Aman Alfon's family is not affected by the season. The higher and stable consumption of saltwater fish represents their ability to obtain meat from the market. In contrast, the consumption of meat by the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Santo fluctuates and is seemingly affected by the season. In wet months, the consumption of saltwater fish is higher than in other months. Aman Aturan ate more than thirty meals consisting of saltwater fish in April, October, and November. Both the families consume the highest percentage of *iba-t-oinan* in the dry months.

The figure also reveals that there are different patterns for the consumption of domestic animals and hunted game. Aman Santo had a more steady consumption of *iba-t-punen* in 2013 than the other two families. The family ate chicken and pork almost every month. In contrast, Aman Aturan family ate pork and chicken only a handful of times in certain months. Aman Alfon's family meals contained meat more frequently than Aman Aturan's meals, but less so than Aman Alfon's meals. This might be because he has cash to buy pigs and chickens from the market. All these families, however, share a similarity in consuming hunted animals. Aman Alfon's family ate turtle meat after his parents caught a leatherback turtle in their nets in January. This is the only hunted animal the family consumed through the year. Aman Aturan's family purchased turtle meat from Salakkoppak in April. The latter two families ate small mammals (squirrels and flying foxes) in September, October, and November. This may be a peculiarity as flying foxes and small mammals are more often found in gardens when the fruit trees are flowering, which happened in early July that year.

Sources of Meat

All the tables and figures showing the consumption of meat can provide a glimpse of the origins of the meat and the way people obtain it. Much of the saltwater fish is sold by Minangkabau people in the market, or seasonal fishermen from the neighbouring village of Maileppet, or from large vessels from the mainland of Sumatra. The market purchases also include smoked fish obtained from relatives and canned meat acquired from local shops with cash.

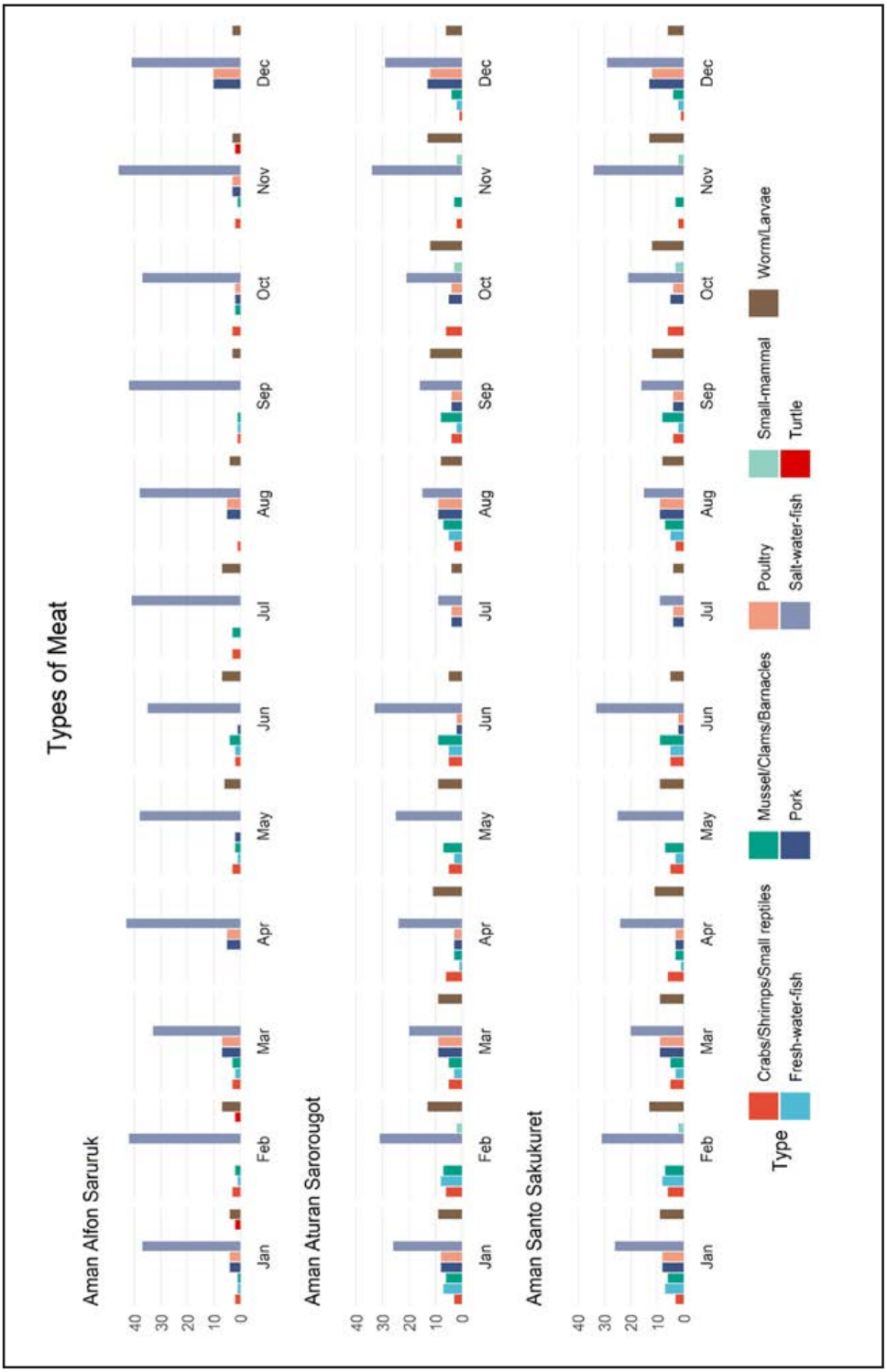


Figure 14. Types of Meat Consumed by Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

Iba-t-oinan mostly comes from gathering and fishing, which the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Santo do (Table 31). The latter family occasionally buys fish, mussels, or shrimps from neighbours with cash from their small shop. Pork and poultry are locally bought from pig farmers around the settlement. This is not the case for Aman Santo, who owns a large number of pigs. Small mammals are from the gardens while turtles are obtained through hunting with nets at sea. The category of 'other' includes meat obtained after collective events organised by the church and hamlet/village institutions to provide meat for the population.

Despite the two other families having a higher amount of meat from the market, they also have a significantly higher percentage of meat from gathering and fishing. Aman Aturan supplies almost half of their meals with meat from animals gathered or collected, while Aman Santo's family has slighlty less. It seems that, again, the livelihood strategy and the input of women influences the origin of the meat consumed by the families. The other significant difference is in the consumption of domestic animals. Aman Santo's family has a larger number of meals containing pork than the two other families. With 103 meals containing pork, the latter family has almost two and five times more than the families of Aman Alfon and Aman Aturan, respectively. The consumption of meat obtained from either church or village meetings or non-ritual feasts (category of Others) is almost identical. Each family has no more than 12 meals with pork or fish, which were eaten together during church or village meetings.

Table 31. Origin of Meat Consumed by Three Families in Muntei (n=1,805)

	Aman Alfon (n= 621)		Aman Aturan (n=615)		Aman Santo (n=569)		Total	
	Meals	%	Meals	%	Meals	%	No	%
Market	473	76.2	338	55	279	49	1,090	60.4
Gathering/fishing	94	15.1	303	49.3	259	45.5	656	36.3
Domestic animals	65	10.5	28	4.6	103	18.1	196	10.9
Hunting	6	0.1	9	1.5	8	1.4	23	1.3
Others	10	1.6	12	2	10	1.8	32	1.8

Figure 15 below presents the monthly pattern of meat consumption based on the origin of the meat. The market is a reliable source of meat almost every month, either in the wet or dry season. This indicates that the families regularly have cash available. Buying meat from the market declines significantly in the dry season, when gathering and fishing regain prominence. This is true for the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Santo. In January, February, May, and July, meat from gathering and fishing is served more frequently than that obtained from the market. In contrast, the period from October to December sees a drastic decline in gathering and fishing. During the wet season, when the water levels in the rivers start to rise and floods are on the way, the families of Aman Santo and Aman Aturan can only occasionally fish for shrimps and frogs in their taro gardens.

The figure shows the three findings that I have frequently described: 1) hunting is not an important way of providing meat; 2) the market is becoming the major source of meat; 3) gathering and fishing are still important ways to procure meat. The first point is shown by the fact that turtle meat was only consumed on six occasions by the families and there was no consumption of large mammals from the forest or the sea. The absence of meat from the forest, either deer, wild boar, or dugong, is further evidence of the decline of ritual hunting. Aman Alfon had turtle meat twice in February and twice in November; Aman Aturan had it twice in May. While the meat was obtained by hunting, Aman Aturan and Aman Santo do not hunt

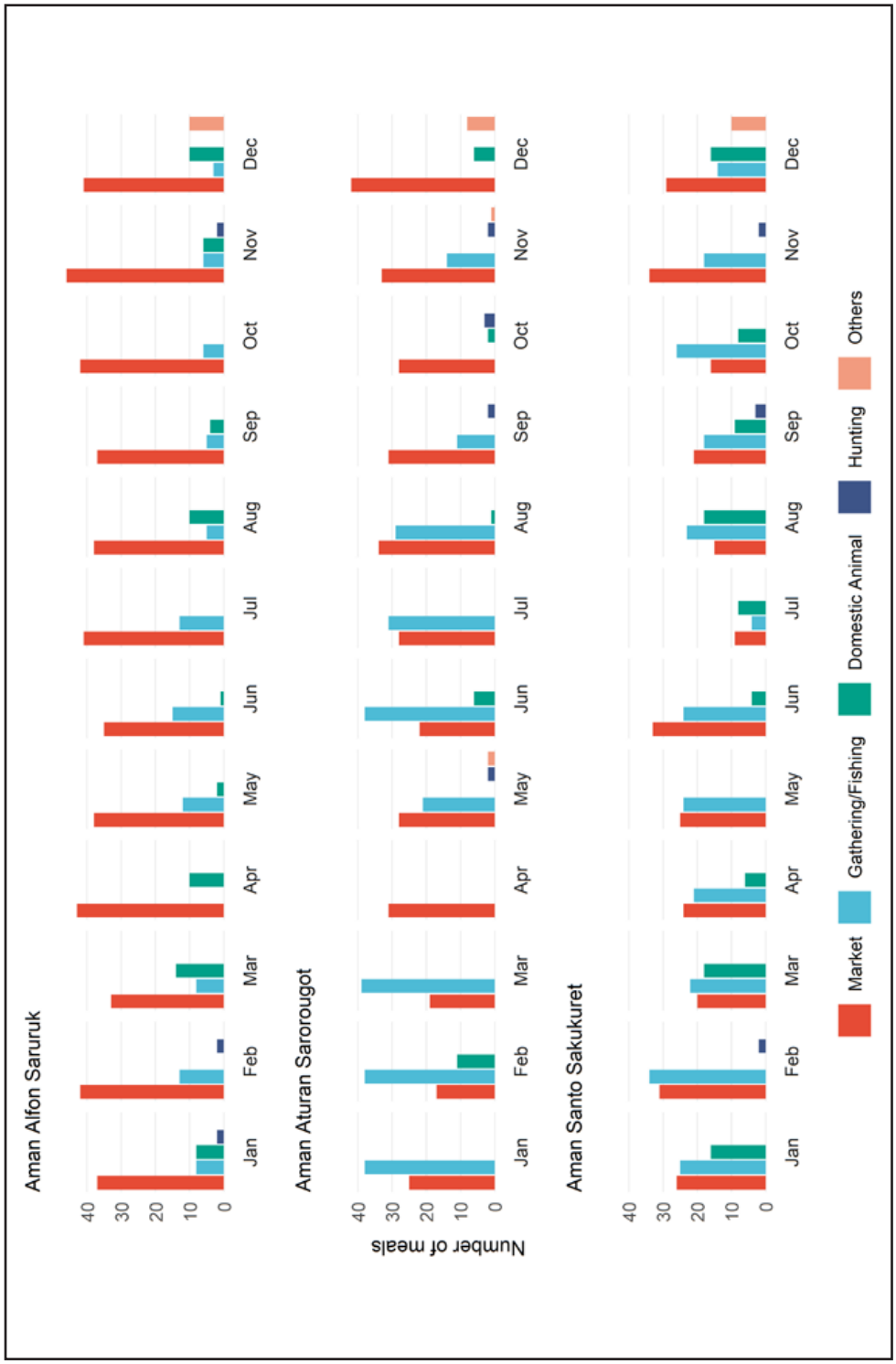


Figure 15. Sources of Meat Consumed by Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

themselves, but obtain it through a sale or as a gift from relatives. Small mammals are rarely consumed. The families of Aman Aturan and Aman Santo do hunt small mammals in their gardens. However, the yield is not particularly significant. They had a few flying foxes and a number of squirrels in the fruit season. The data show that the family that heavily relies on saltwater fish is the family that has focused more on cash crops and market exchanges. Aman Alfon has retained a sago garden and fruit trees, but the family does not have pigs or chickens and does not hunt or fish. In the case of Aman Santo and Aman Aturan, they prefer to have saltwater fish whenever money from their cash crops is available.

4.5 Consumption of Fruits (*Bua*) and Vegetables

Vegetables and fruits are the least important food components in the meals of the three families. On average, the families have non-starch *kat* in a meal every three days. The family of Aman Alfon has the highest percentage of vegetables (Table 32). For the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Santo, the number of meals with vegetables is almost identical. This is interesting as Aman Alfon's family does not cultivate a garden that contains vegetables. It seems that the family acquires vegetables from the market.

Table 32. The Number of Meals with Vegetables and the Consumption of Fruits after/before Meals in Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)

Families	Vegetables		Fruit	
	No	%	No	%
Aman Alfon Saruruk (n=1,016)	146	14.4	102	10.0
Aman Aturan Sarorougot (n=1,025)	103	10.0	75	7.3
Aman Santo Sakukuret (n=989)	98	9.9	109	11.0
Total (n=3,030)	347	11.5	286	9.4

The most common vegetable consumed by the families is cassava leaves. Another familiar vegetable is the young sprouts of wild ferns. These leaves are boiled in a pan with coconut milk and spices. Sometimes, the ferns are cooked with instant noodles and smoked fish (*silakkra*). If there is meat, the leaves are mixed with the meat to make a stew. When meat is not available, the families may cut the stalks of *lotlot*, a variety of taro, and use it as a substitute. The stalk is boiled in coconut milk and spices. This does not mean that other edible leaves and stems are not available. As has been described in the previous chapter, vegetables, both wild and semi-domesticated, grow abundantly all year round in the gardens.

Even though various vegetables are available, the consumption of green leaves is limited. This is perhaps linked to the fact that the people have maintained their pre-Hindu culture, which, in terms of diet, largely depends upon various non-domesticated meats and tubers, but not vegetables. This can be detected from the absence of a local term for vegetable. *Sayur*, the term people used for leaves or greens, is an introduced word from the national language. The consumption of cassava leaves or wild ferns in a spicy coconut cream are probably also a recent phenomena influenced by the Minangkabau.

The percentage of meals in which fruit is consumed is even lower than for vegetables. Commonly, fruit is eaten as a snack in between the main meals. Fruit accompanied a staple in meals only about ten per cent of the time. It is somehow different in *rura* season when some fruits, especially durian and langsat, are used in meals as subtitutes for the staples. Figure 16 presents the monthly consumption pattern of vegetables

Figure 16. ***Consumption of Vegetables among Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)***

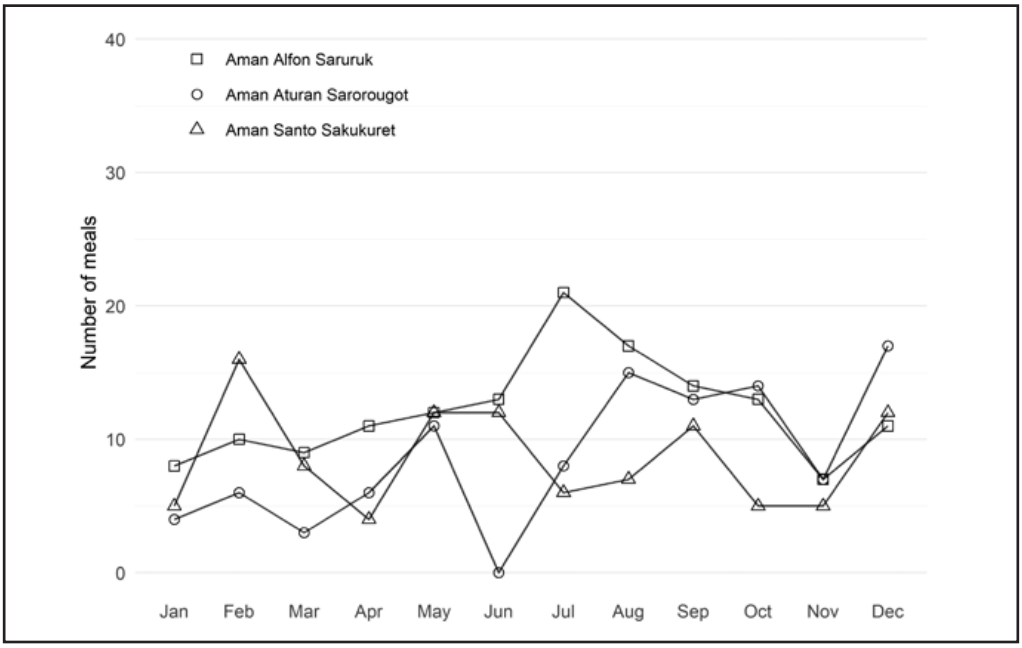
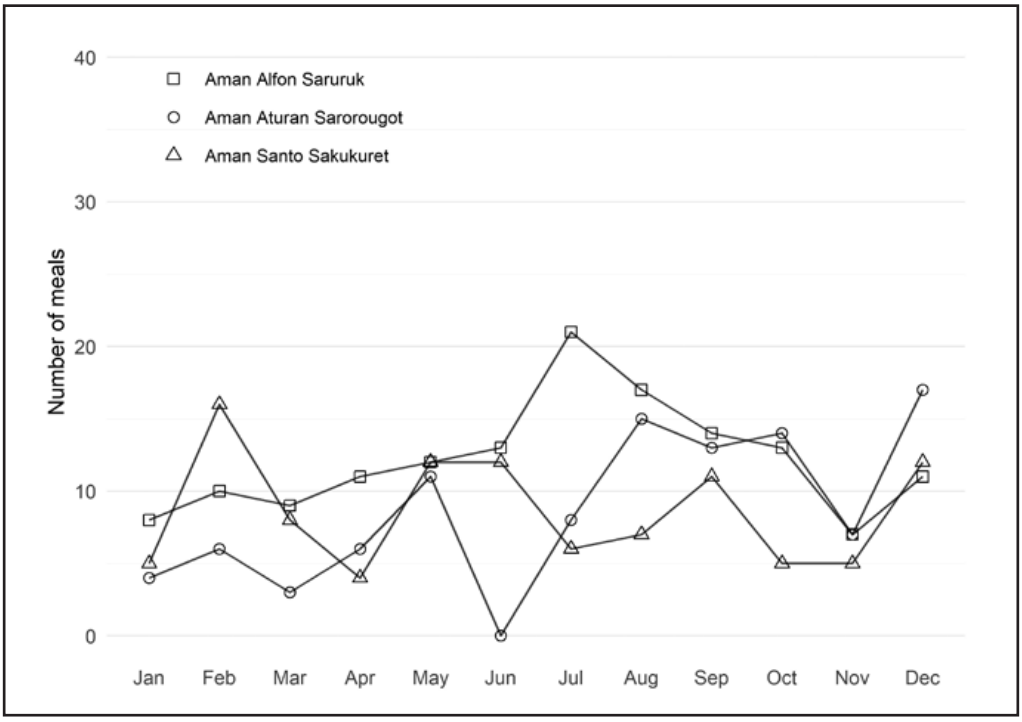


Figure 17. ***Consumption of Fruits among Three Families in Muntei (n=3,030)***



TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 35. A Samekmek family enjoys enormous langsat after harvesting the fruit in their garden (2019)

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 36. A pile of rambutan is collectively harvested and collected by Samekmek men and women in gardens near Koko River (2019)

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 37. Members of *uma* Samekmek are collectively harvesting durian and other fruits (*pananduk*) in a garden near Koko River (2018)

and fruit. Vegetables are consumed each month but not on a daily basis. Apparently, vegetables were served in meals roughly nine times every month in the families. Vegetables are most often eaten in December and July. In these months, vegetables are served every other day, on average. The higher percentage of vegetables' consumption at the end of the year, as with meat consumption, is due to the festive period. The case of the increased consumption of vegetables in June is somewhat of a riddle. June is the month when the subsidised rice arrives in the settlement. I speculate that the consumption of rice generates the consumption of vegetables, because rice is commonly consumed without meat but with instant noodles and vegetables.

Fruit is seasonally available and in limited supply, but is consumed heavily for the short time it is present. Data collection was coincidentally carried out during the *rura* season.[11] As depicted in Figure 17, fruit was only consumed two to three times between January and July 2013 in each of the families. During May to June, Aman Alfon's family did not eat any fruit. There was also an absence of fruit in Aman Santo's family in April, May, and June. Outside of the fruit season, the most commonly eaten fruits are pineapples and papaya from the gardens. Bananas are sometimes served after evening meals, but this is very rare. Mostly, bananas are reserved for breakfast. On a very few occasions, the families might buy one or two oranges, pears, or apples imported from mainland Sumatra in the local market when cash is available. They are normally eaten as snacks shortly after they are purchased.

The consumption of fruit drastically alters after the fruit season ends. The figure shows that the consumption of fruit around meals between August and early November is exceptional. This indicates that fruit season occurs during those months. In the span of about three months, wild mango, *langsat*, *rambutan*, three species of durians, and *cempedak* trees simultaneously bear fruit. During these months, all the selected

families have a very high percentage of fruit consumption. Especially in September, the consumption of fruit can be as high as a half of the number of total meals. This is the peak of the fruit season when ripened durians start to drop. All the families enjoyed an enormous consumption of *doriat*, *toktuk*, and *pusinoso* (Picture 35 & 36). On average, they eat durian twice a day. Jackfruit follow durian and close the *rura* season. In December, the consumption of fruit returns to a lower level as the *rura* season finishes.

It seems that the consumption of fruit is also correlated with the possession of a fruit garden. Aman Aturan has the smallest number of fruits trees and consumes less fruit; Aman Santo, the owner of many fruits trees after exchanging pigs, eats more fruit. The latter family consumes twice as much fruit after/before meals than the former. The lower consumption of vegetables and fruit may indicate that mature forest gardens (*pumonean*) consisting of fruit trees are of secondary importance in terms of people's daily diet. Staples are provided by other domesticated zones (sago gardens and taro gardens, while meat is obtained either from the market or non-domesticated zones). Fruit trees in particular are less crucial in terms of the everyday diet because they are only harvested once a year at most.

4.6 'We Eat a Lot of Food'

The numbers in all the tables and figures shows that there are both internal variations and general patterns in the consumption of food between the three households. Each family tends to favour a certain type of staple and types of meat over the others. I assume that this is related to the profile of each family and the livelihood they choose. Aman Alfon's family, with both parents focused on coconut crops and managing a small shop, prefers to have rice and saltwater fish obtained from the market. A regular cash income from their ventures provides an opportunity for this family to neglect their own sago production and to abandon fishing, because they can obtain food from the market or exchange their groceries for various *iba-t-sinanalep* from their neighbours. The parents in Aman Santo's family spend much of their time in their gardens and rely on a combination of pig keeping and traditional forest gardening, they also consume more sago and domestic animals. With a different family profile, Aman Aturan uses rice as a staple and *iba-t-oinan*. The male adult of this family relies solely on cash crops and wage labour while the female adult combines working in the garden and gathering from around the settlement.

While there are variations, the data also indicate general findings which seem to show that food shortages are not a real problem for all three families. Having meals three times a day is a norm rather than an exception. All the families have a variety of staples and meat in their daily meals, despite not eating vegetables all that often. Furthermore, the data indicate that some important sources of meat in the distant past are no longer part of the families diets, i.e. primates or deer. The families now rely on and have a more stable supply of saltwater fish than in the past, while freshwater animals are still important. This indicates that attaining food from the market is increasingly important. It seems that people prefer to spend most of their time and energy producing cash crops and having cash in hand, rather than having to process sago, or fish for saltwater animals. Considering the gardens and other subsistence resources they have, food shortages are not an immediate threat.

When I asked about their perceptions regarding the availibilty and quality of food they consume, all three families explicitly agree that they now have better access to edible items. Far from being romantic about life in the old settlement, the families stress that the variety and the quantity of food they consume are better now. They consider that contemporary life in Muntei provides the opportunity to have a regular supply of fish, fruit, and imported food. Aman Alfon says that now it is difficult to imagine not having *iba-t-laut* (saltwater fish) on their plates. They enjoy the benefits of having cash crops, while their location close to

GERARD PERSOON

Picture 38. A family meal in the early years of the OPKM program (1981)

DARMANTO

Picture 39. A light lunch (*musubuk*) of a Samekmek family in the settlement, consisting of steamed fish, *subbet* and sago (2014)

the coastal zones enables them to access a variety of food from the local market. When Aman Alfon recalls his childhood in Siberut Hulu, he did not eat much saltwater fish. Now, his children consume saltwater fish almost every day. For Aman Santo, living in the settlement allows him to breed pigs and accumulate wealth so he can spend it on rice and fish. He says that moving to Muntei from Madobak Village was the best decision his father took. 'When we were in Madobak, we did not eat saltwater fish. Now, like other people here, we can enjoy a variety of salt-water fish.' In Aman Aturan's case, while he feels they are in a more precarious position, they do not have serious problems getting food. They still have sago and taro gardens. They might not eat meat regularly when their cloves or cacao do not produce a crop, or no-one asks him to repair a house, but they can still eat well with sago, taro, and meat obtained by his wife. 'We do not have much money in our hand every single day, but neither are we suffering from having no food. There is always sago, taro, and bananas in our kitchen. The problem is money for my children's education.'

The perception of the three families regarding the absence of food shortages in the settlement echoes the general sense of Muntei's residents that they have an abundance of food. Compared to non-Mentawaians living around the settlement, the size and number of meals enjoyed by people is considerably greater. This is perfectly captured in the stereotypical view held by non-Mentawaians that Mentawaians are people who eat a lot of food. The Javanese, Batak, or Minangkabau people living around the settlement have long perceived that people in Muntei and other Mentawaians are lazy because they always eat a lot. It is a common grudge among migrants that they cannot employ Muntei residents unless they feed them. These stereotypes are happily accepted.

Muntei people are aware that they are stereotyped by migrants as verocious eaters. The leader of my host *uma*, Aman Reju Samekmek (73-years old) made light of the stereotype and claim that each group of people has its own pleasure. Aman Reju told me that his favourite time is when he is having bountiful taro balls and salt water fish or plenty of roasted sago and pork with his family (Pictures 37, & 38). One day, after enjoying a lunch meal, he made a remark:

Batak people love to sing
Javanese love to plant things
Minangkabau people love trading
Mentawaians love meat and eating

Aman Reju is not an exceptional case. In every family setting, Muntei people have proper meals three times a day, although each meal does not necessarily take place at a specific time. The proper meals mean involve eating a staple foodstuff, either roasted sago, boiled taro, rice, or a combination of them, with condiments, either vegetables boiled in a kind of coconut curry or meat in bamboo. Pork and chicken are rarely served during mundane meals. Small fish, shrimps, or sago grubs are frequently consumed. If there is cash available, saltwater fish is a favourite. The amount of food, especially *kat*, is always more than enough for the expected participants. They do not rigidly calculate how much sago flour they cook or how many kilograms of rice they cook. It is better to have more food and of different types than less for the participants of any meal.

At all the family meals I attended, I never encountered anxiety about there not being enough food. After a rattan mat is spread out on the floor, a bountiful supply of roasted sago, bananas, rice, condiments, and meat are laid out. All family members are expected to sit down and eat together. After a short prayer, the meals are eaten in comfortable, relaxed positions without explicit rules about where people should sit or how the food should be laid out. Everyone sits around the food and eats quietly. They can eat with their fingers using their left or right hand, or a spoon. Small children usually want to take the best position,

closer to the more desirable items, especially rice and meat. They frequently cry before getting what they want. Adults do not say much about boisterous children and usually normalise the noise they generate. Hitting, even scolding, are not part of the culture of disciplining children at mealtimes. '*Aleee, kom simaeruk*' (Please, eat your food properly) is usually the only comment from adults.

Dogs and cats may join in the meal. These domestic animals are normally allowed to sit down behind the participants, waiting for their share. Occasionally, fish bones or skin from the pork or chicken are given. Sometimes, the animals sneak into small gaps between the diners and snap at the best meat when people relax too much. A little commotion occurs in a flash. The animals may get hit if they are not quick enough to escape. Even if they do get hit, they already have good food in their mouths. After this small incident, people concentrate on the meal again while the runaway dogs or cats quietly return to the scene. If the kitchen door is open or the meal is served on the veranda, a hen and her chicks might also join in.

During the meal, talking or joking is not prohibited but people generally focus on their own food rather than talk to each other. When there is a serious conversation, there is always someone reminding everyone that they are eating and that talking too much will disturb their meal. All participants can eat as much as they want, until their stomach is full and are also strongly encouraged to have more portions when they are about to finish their plate. 'We have a lot of sago and rice, please do not worry about it. We can cook again.' It is considered a shame if the participants eat quickly, withdraw from the circle, and leave some food untouched.

When a meal is about to end, the participants encourage each other to put the rest of the food onto their plates. Someone will gradually stand up without asking for anyone's explicit permission and normally say, 'I am full. You all can continue eating. Please, satisfy yourselves' to the others who are still eating. Then he/she moves away from the circle into an empty space, stretching his/her legs. Others are taking a toothpick from the sago leaves and murmur '*enaababai*', which can be roughly translated as 'thanks mother, what a good life.'

There is always leftover food after a meal, especially staple foods. This is not always the case with meat and condiments. Typically, the leftovers, if any, are not stored. Untouched roasted sago, boiled bananas or rice are collected and put in a container made from rattan. If there are hungry dogs and cats around, the food is given directly to them. Much of the leftover food, however, is brought to the pig or chicken huts and given to the animals next morning. It is very rare that a family consumes food that was prepared for the previous meal. People say that cold sago is hard and tasteless (*masepsep*). To keep their body and soul happy, they prefer to have warm food. Even untouched rice or bananas from a previous meal are considered flavorless unless they are fried. Generally, people always have warm food for their meals, especially for *kat*.

No dinner is complete without a sweet drink. Hot coffee or tea is almost always served. Ready-to-make drinks from the local shops are preferrable if there is cash available. If they have ripe fruit in the kitchen, the family would sit together on the veranda, have their drink and enjoy sweet/sour pineapple or *rambutan* as an evening snack. Even though there are plenty of ripe bananas, people rarely eat them as an evening snack, as they are a staple for the morning meal.

There is a palpable enjoyment at having plenty of food during a ritual feast. At such times, the carcass of a pig and chickens occupies the whole of the longhouse's veranda. In the kitchen, women prepare an inexhaustible supply of roasted sago and *subbet*. The carcasses are then chopped into smaller pieces and boiled in three or more large pans, each pan big enough to cook all the meat from two large sows. The boiled meat is then distributed equally to each family, who have prepared their own sago and taro. Like the family meal, all the people sit and squat around the bountiful meat. The participants of the feast can eat as much *kat* and *meat* as they like. Children do not have to fight over desirable items. If they are already full, they stand up and take a seat on a wooden bench on the veranda, and start to pick toothmeat. On

occasions like this, dogs and cats can enjoy much more meat without being afraid of getting hit, as they do at a family meal.

There is no evidence that Muntei residents have a problem with food. Despite there being little indication of food shortages, many people repeatedly told me that they are *sitakiba*, 'those without meat'. Often, this term is followed by the term for being hungry ('*malaje*'). The term *sitakiba* or *malaje*, as I explained at the beginning, was frequently heard during my fieldwork. This is remarkable since the three families I recorded and Muntei residents more generally have more food resources than they need. They always cook much more food than they consume. Having leftover food is a habit. Why, then, do they say they are 'people without meat' or 'being hungry'? This puzzle leads to my analysis that food's production and consumption are intertwined with the creation of a people and society, and are used to create and manipulate the social values that bind them together, all of which will be discussed in the following chapters.