



**Sungai Rumanau of Mangkawagu, Tongod  
Community Protocol**

**Practice of Wild Honey Gathering**

**2018**

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# **Sungai Rumanau of Mangkawagu, Tongod Community Protocol**

## Practice of Wild Honey Gathering

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# Contents

<b>Glossary</b> .....	5
<b>Foreword</b> .....	6
<b>Background</b> .....	8
<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	9
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	10
1.1. Identity and History of the Sungai Rumanau Community in Mangkawagu, Tongod .....	10
1.2. Economy and Resources of the Sungai Rumanau Community in Mangkawagu, Tongod .....	10
<b>2. Community Resource Management System</b> .....	12
2.1. Agriculture System .....	12
2.2. Hunting and Forest Resouce Gathering .....	12
<b>3. Wild Honey Harvesting (Menapu Neningot)</b> .....	14
3.1. How a Honey Tree Becomes the Property of a Family/Individual ....	14
3.2. Types of Honey Trees .....	15
3.3. How to Know If a Bee Hive Has Honey and Is Ready for Harvesting .. .....	15
3.4. How to Harvest the Honey .....	15
3.5. Tools in Harvesting Honey.....	16
3.6. Taboos in Harvesting Honey .....	19
3.7. Fine and Sogit .....	19
<b>4. Challenges and Future Plans</b> .....	21
4.1. Challenges .....	21
4.2. Community Plans.....	22

## Glossary

<i>Etusan</i>	A marker indicating that a certain place is owned by someone
<i>Imbaan</i>	Virgin forest/Natural forest
<i>Iningeladan</i>	Customary territory /Protection
<i>Kopio</i>	Fate
<i>Menapu</i>	Honey gathering/Climbing honey tree
<i>Moningot</i>	Bee
<i>Montis</i>	Name of bird, “Montis Bird”
<i>Musikib</i>	Adjacent
<i>Nekakas</i>	Former cultivated land that has restored into forest
<i>Penenepuon</i>	Keruing wood
<i>Pilibuk</i>	Traditional knowledge in taming bees
<i>Ponopok</i>	Selangan Batu wood
<i>Repah</i>	Former cultivated land
<i>Turugan</i>	Rotational farming
<i>Umoh</i>	Hill paddy field

## Foreword

Sabah is blessed with incredible cultural and biological diversity as well as legal pluralism. As the Chief Judge of the High Court of Sabah and Sarawak and the Chairman of the Native Laws, Materials and Cases Committee, respectively, and as proud Indigenous people ourselves, we know first-hand that respect for this diversity requires recognition of the deep connections between Indigenous peoples, our customary laws and the environments upon which we depend. It also requires recognition of the diverse worldviews, rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples, including to protect and maintain our customary territories and ways of life and to define our own development paths.

This community protocol, developed through an intensive participatory process over more than three years, is an embodiment of this cultural, biological and legal diversity. It showcases how closely the community's identity, culture, *adat* and ways of life depend upon their territory and natural resources, and how much they want to sustain them for current and future generations. The protocol also does not shy away from the realities on the ground. The community is facing challenges, but they set out how they would like to address those challenges in a respectful manner, drawing on customary, state and international law.

As lawyers and judges, we know that procedural rights of access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice are also crucial to upholding the rule of law and achieving sustainable development. Under international law, all stakeholders have the responsibility to respect Indigenous peoples' right to provide or withhold free, prior and informed consent before any activities that may affect them or their territories. In any situation of disagreement or conflict, it is incumbent upon all parties to listen respectfully and seek a fair, equitable and culturally appropriate resolution.

Every living being on Earth depends on a healthy environment for survival and well being. Indigenous peoples are often on the frontlines of efforts to protect, conserve and restore the environment. However, they are also increasingly under threat for the same efforts. Everyone has a responsibility to

defend and support those who are defending the environment - for their sake and ours, and for the sake of the planet.

Overall, this community protocol illustrates the strength and resolve of Sabah's Indigenous peoples and the importance of supporting them to share in their own voices their plans, priorities and visions for the future. Through the participation of community representatives in meetings of the Native Laws, Materials and Cases Committee, we have heard their story personally and commend them for their efforts. They are leaders not just within their communities but also in Sabah and Malaysia as a whole. We acknowledge and applaud this community and others in Sabah who have taken the time and care to document their *adat* and protocols. They are a source of pride and strength for our people and we encourage all fellow Sabahans and Malaysians to join us in supporting them.



Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Richard Malanjum  
Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak



Datuk Douglas Cristo Primus Sikayun  
Retired High Court Judge of Sabah and Sarawak  
Chairman of Native Laws, Materials and Cases Committee

## Background

This document made in Mangkawagu Village, Tongod is meant to document the traditional knowledge of the Sungai Rumanau on wild honey gathering and conservation.

The Sungai Rumanau can be found around the head of Milian River and the district of Tongod. The distance from the nearest town is about 60 KM from the town of Tongod and 80KM from the town of Telupid.

This documentation aims to promote good practices of our community in resource conservation. Nowadays, resource conservation has become a key topic because of the threat of resource extinction and climate change.

Thus, our Sungai Rumanau community in Mangkawagu have documented our practice that has been passed down from our ancestors, with the purpose of giving insight to the public on our contribution in forest conservation as well as resources in general.

Awang Kasal  
Project Coordinator

## **Acknowledgement**

This documentation on our wild honey gathering practice has taken 2 years to be completed. It was not easy for the community to document this good practice. There were many challenges which we faced especially in writing. However, mutual learning and cooperation with the community, village leaders and external organizations has helped a lot. Hence, our community would like to express our appreciation to;

### **Intim Saulig**

He is the chairman of the Village Development and Safety Committee since 1994 and is also the chairman of the Community Organization. He has helped a lot, especially in explaining the importance of documenting the wild honey gathering practice to the community.

### **Justin Uga - Village Chief**

Thanks is given to Mr. Justin Uga on his advice and insight especially in customs and village rules. The support given has made the documenting process easier and smoother.

### **The Late Uga**

The late Uga was a vital resource person in this documentation. He was one of the honey gatherers in Mangkawagu Village and had given much insight especially on the taboos in honey gathering and its relation to Rumanau culture.

### **PACOS Trust**

PACOS Trust (Partners of Community Organizations in Sabah) has given much technical support and capacity-building to Mangkawagu leaders and community members. The exposure given has given awareness to our community that our practice should be documented as reference for the future generation and also to promote to the public the contribution of our Sungai Rumanau community in natural resource management.

Awang Kasal  
Project Coordinator

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Identity and History of the Sungai Rumanau Community in Mangkawagu, Tongod

With a history of about 300 years, Mangkawagu is a village located in the district of Tongod, Sabah with a population of around 600 villagers whom are mostly of Sungai Rumanau descent. The name Mangkawagu comes from the flower known as Kawawagu that grows abundantly along the Mangkawagu River.

Evidence of our ongoing use and habitation can be seen our ancestral graves, and our fruit trees that have long been planted. Fruit trees have been planted in our old village area because we have a tradition of planting a fruit tree whenever a new house is built.

This is done to signify that the area is inhabited and cultivated by someone. The fruit trees can last longer than houses and can continue to exist as a marker even if the house rots away.

In the past, Mangkawagu villagers used to live around the head of Mangkawagu River, but we have gradually moved downstream.

We have lived in our current area since 1969, because the government had recommended an area nearby where we were told we would be provided with facilities and new housing. However, we still return to our old village area from time to time at the head of Mangkawagu River to take care of our fruit trees and crops there.

## 1.2. Economy and Resources of the Sungai Rumanau Community in Mangkawagu, Tongod

*Turugan* is an agriculture system that has been passed down from our ancestors. The *Turugan* system is practised to ensure the fertility of soil and protect the ecosystem.

Gardens or former cultivated land (*Turugan*), fruit orchards, sacred sites and Sungai Rumanau graves can be found near the main river. This is because the river is the main lifeline for our community.

Other than farming, hunting is also a source of daily food to the community and also fulfils our needs during festivals.

Hunting and fishing is needed to provide meat and protein to the community. We hunt in our customary territories and the game we obtain is divided within the community.

When the British came to Borneo (Sabah), honey became one sources of economy apart from rattan and resin.

Nowadays, monetary needs are high so our community has started planting rubber and oil palm as our main source of livelihood. Besides that, we also sell fruits such as banana, pineapple, rambutan and durian.

## 2. Community Resource Management System

### 2.1. Agriculture System

*Iningeladan* is the principle in our resource management. In land clearing, the *Turugan* concept is our practice especially in cultivating hill paddy. The *Turugan* concept is practised to ensure the soil fertility is always protected. A full cycle of *Turugan* takes about 5-10 years to be restored.

In the *Turugan* concept, there are several names according to the cultivation cycle. *Umo* refers to the hill paddy field when paddy is still cultivated while *Repah* is used for when the field is no longer being cultivated with paddy. *Repah* is usually grown into secondary forest and our community will plant tapioca and vegetables. Once a *Repah* reaches five years (5), it will then be called *Nekakas*. The time period for an area to be considered *Nekakas* is between 5 to 10 years.

The *Turugan* area will be monitored (*Mengakap*) by the owner of the that particular *Turugan* area. *Mengakap* is quite important to ensure there is no encroachment and the condition of the plants in the *Turugan* is monitored.

To fulfil daily food needs, mixed agriculture is practised by the community. In the same field, crops such as vegetables, tapioca and fruits area planted together.

Normally the *Turugan* area is *musikib* among the community. Between the areas, there are *lulun* (boundary) that are marked with fruit trees and *Belian* wood (*Eusideroxylon zwageri*) as future reference.

### 2.2. Hunting and Forest Resouce Gathering

In general, when it comes to resource gathering our community only take enough for our daily needs. For example, when fishing in the river, we only take what food we need at that time and the rest will be given to our neighbours.

In hunting activities, we also have rules to control how animals are hunted. Our community has stipulated that only one animal can be hunted at a time

and only when meat is needed. Young animals and mothers cannot be hunted to ensure the continuity of the population.

Villagers also do not hunt in the same place and also when they hear the call of the *Montis* bird because there are worries of safety. If a person has caught an animal, *Etus* will be made as a sign to inform who are the hunters, what type of animal has been hunted and how many has been hunted. If other hunters sees that a certain animal has already been hunted in that area, they will move on to a new area to hunt.

### 3. Wild Honey Harvesting (*Menapu Neningot*)

In harvesting wild honey, our community emphasises protection and continuity of the forest and the natural resources around it. This important because of the relationship between the honey and the ecosystem which are closely related. If the forest or the ecosystem is disturbed, it will have an effect on the quality and quantity of the honey. This is because bees produce honey during spring and fruiting seasons.

Wild honey harvesting is one of the traditional knowledge practised by our Sungai Rumanau community that has been passed down from our ancestors and is still practised to this day.

#### 3.1. How a Honey Tree Becomes the Property of a Family/Individual



*Etusan*

A honey tree becomes someone's property when they find it in the forest and put a marker (*Etusan*) on it according to ancestry.

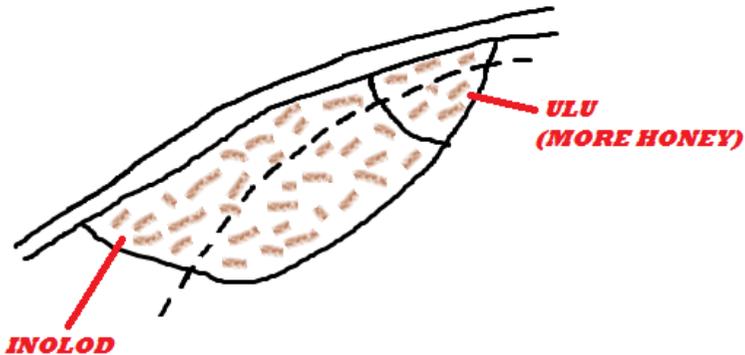
Once marked, that person can then report to the village chief for confirmation of ownership. The village chief will then notify to the community in the village, through a meeting, to ensure that the tree does not have overlaps in ownership.

### 3.2. Types of Honey Trees

Usually the types of trees that will be occupied by bees are those of Keruing wood (*Pononopuon*) and Selangan Batu wood (*Ponopok*). There are other types of trees such as Seraya and Durian but the presence of bees is inconsistent.

### 3.3. How to Know If a Bee Hive Has Honey and Is Ready for Harvesting

According to Sungai Rumanau knowledge, there is honey when there is a upper (*Ulu*) on the bee hive. Other than that, when you go near to the honey tree, you can hear there is a loud buzzing sound and there are a lot of ants around the tree.



Sketch of a bee hive.

### 3.4. How to Harvest the Honey

The owner of the honey tree would not necessarily be able to harvest the honey because gathering honey requires skills that not everybody has. If the

owner does not have the skills, then help must be obtained from those in the community that do. Among the skills needed in gathering wild honey are:

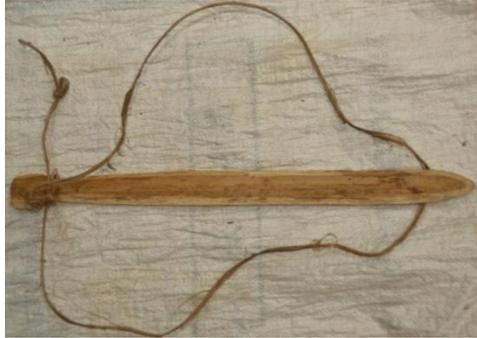
1. Brave in taking risks.
2. Has self confidence.
3. Skilled in climbing.
4. Skilled in *Pilibuk* so that the queen bee will not sting.

### 3.5. Tools in Harvesting Honey

1. **Gogondaa/tetanus** - Made from the bark of *Imberua* (rattan) that has been dried and tied together with a wooden stick to repel the queen bee. A fire will be lit by the climber once he/she is near the honey.



2. **Piris** - A knife made from wood/bamboo to be used in gathering honey.



3. **Lintuang** - Made from tree bark (Gharu or Alas wood) and shaped like a funnel to keep the honey.



4. **Oluan** - Long rope made from rattan (length is according to the height of the tree). Used for lowering the *lintuang* down when it is full with the bee hive.



5. **Popok** - Made from *Tangkungon* bamboo that is old and hard or from *Poring* bamboo and is sharpened at the end. There are about 300-500 pieces and it is used for making stairs up the tree.



6. **Booroan** - Sticks numbering 20-30 pieces that will be tied together with *popok* to support the stairs.



7. **Ramos** - Roots used to bind the pengikat *popok* and *booroan*.



### 3.6. Taboos in Harvesting Honey

1. It cannot be taken when the moon is bright.
2. Light a fire near the honey tree to attract attention and confuse the bees.
3. Wincwing rice (**Mengotap Bilod**) is prohibited as it is said that many bees will attack the honey gatherer.
4. Before the sun rises (4.30am) all group members must leave the area because the bees will chase in the morning, sometimes even all the way to the house.
5. Eating chilli is prohibited including the family of the honey gatherer to reduce the pain when stung.
6. Eating salt is prohibited as it will attract bees to the honey gatherer's body (sweat).
7. Holding a needle is prohibited as it is likened to a bee sting.

### 3.7. Fine and Sogit

In customary law, if a person took honey at will, he can be charged in the Native Court. Usually, the honey tree owner will ask the person to pay for the amount of honey harvested as the fine.

- *Sogit*

Those who steal and take honey without the permission of the owner of the tree will be fined. The *Sogit* is usually a **pig or buffalo**.

- Fine

The fine imposed will be 500 Ringgit. The fine will be more according to the amount of honey taken.

## 4. Challenges and Future Plans

### 4.1. Challenges

The area surrounding our *Iningeladan* area in Mangkawagu is almost fully planted with oil palm. Only our *Iningeladan* area is still covered in natural forest. This situation has given pressure to the Mangkawagu Village *Iningeladan*, whereby resource dependency is only concentrated in the remaining forest.

A number of honey trees are also located in oil palm plantations nearby. Almost all of the honey trees have been cut down when the oil palm plantations were established. Only one honey tree has not been cut down, but the bees do not go to that tree because the surrounding area is covered in oil palm and there are no other trees for the bees to feed on.

Among the oil palm plantations found around the Mangkawagu Village *Iningeladan* area;

<b>Nama Syarikat/pengusaha</b>	<b>Tahun Pembukaan</b>	<b>Kawasan yang Terlibat</b>	<b>Jumlah Pokok Madu Lebah</b>	<b>Pemilik Pokok Kayu Madu</b>	<b>Nota</b>
Zun Zang Plantation	1997	Kawang-Kawang River	1 tree	Mr. Tangi Bin Duyou	
Pioneer Glow Sdn Bhd	1999-2000	Kurung River	1 tree	Mr. Lumai Bin Duwai	
Tongod Plantation	2007	Nematoi River	1 tree		
Communal Grant	2017	800 acres			JV with Max Land

As is known, the Mangkawagu community *Iningeladan* area is included in the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve. However, the government plan for

Mangkawagu Village is to be involved in a development plan (*pelan terancang*) together with Soguon Village and Tampasak Village. Our community is worried about this plan, because we have never been involved in the planning that is intended.

Pressure on the land development situation in Mangkawagu has raised various questions in the community. The older generation think that the continuity of these customs and traditional knowledge is important and should be passed down to the next generation while the younger generation think about whether it is still relevant in current times when the forest is growing smaller and the honey trees are gradually disappearing.

This situation has become a dilemma for our community whereby we ask ourselves, because of development and the need for money, our community will be forced to leave our practice that has been passed down from generation to generation and our identity and uniqueness as the Mangkawagu community will be lost.

Nowadays, our community has already seen the effects especially on the Mangkawagu River that is a part of our daily needs. During the drought season, our community will experience skin diseases when using the Mangkawagu River. This is because the area around Mangkawagu River and its tributaries (refer to the table above) has been planted with oil palm.

## **4.2. Community Plans**

With the growing pressure on natural resources, our community has made plans for our *Iningeladan* area. The following are our community's plans to protect the Mangkawagu *Iningeladan*:

### **1. Mapping of Existing Resources**

Mapping of natural resources will be conducted in the community *Iningeladan* area. This is for the purpose of identifying the resources that are threatened and the resources that are still available. Besides that, mapping of existing resources is also important for monitoring purposes in the *Iningeladan* area.

## 2. Build huts

Our community will build three huts in the *Iningeladan* area. The establishment of these huts will facilitate monitoring activities. Furthermore, it will be used to control encroachment from outsiders in the Mangkawagu community *Iningeladan* area.

## 3. Cooperation with the Forestry Department

Our community will work together with the Forestry Department to protect the *Iningeladan* area. Through this cooperation, the *Iningeladan* area will be conserved. A good relationship will also be established between the community and the Forestry Department.

## 4. Follow Up on the Development Plan (*Pelan Terancang*)

Mangkawagu village leaders will follow up on the *pelan terancang* in the Tongod District Office. This is because the Tongod District Office is the one who informed them that Mangkawagu, Soguon and Tampasak will be involved in the *pelan terancang*. Our community is very worried that our community *Iningeladan* area will be made into an oil palm plantation.