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Indigenous Knowledge for Classification and Utilisation of Wati (*Piper methysticum* Forst.) in Marind Tribe of Merauke Regency, Southern Papua

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Abstract

Papua Province harbor a very rich biodiversity which is not inexhaustible to be researched and explored. Various plants act as a drug and are traditionally used by the community. Marind tribe is located in the district of Merauke in southern Papua. Based on its geographical conditions, society of Marind tribe is divided into 3 groups in terms of Marind pantai (Marind dufh), Marind rawa (Marind bob), and Marind darat (Marind deg). One of the most important traditionally used plant species is *Piper methysticum*, the so-called Wati. Wati leaves contain active substances which have a sedative effect and cause long sleeps. The pharmacological effects are known by indigenous people of the tribe since the antiquity. The species is used as alternative medicine and in beverages, and hence, it is important for social interaction between individuals and community groups. In addition, Wati growing in the region of Marind show a high diversity in morphology and the indigenous people have specific local names for each variety or cultivar. The people can recognise and classify the different forms traditionally. In order to the importance of Wati, the plant species is a nice example for ethno-botanical studies. These can be carried out based on the knowledge of the three ethnic groups in terms of morphological characterisation, utilisation, cultivation and preservation of Wati. The present study included explorative survey methods and participatory observations. The informants were selected by using a purposive sampling technique, and data were collected mainly by semi-structured and open interviews. The ongoing research shows that Wati is considered as sacred and the species is included in every ritual ceremony. Hence, Wati is strongly linked with the culture of Marind tribe.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, Marind tribe, Merauke, Papua, *Piper methysticum*