

# Community Development in Indonesia: Contemporary Aspects of Culture

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**Abstract.** The paper analyzes the superiority of collectivist and cultural values in nowadays Indonesia, the impact of a cultural factor on society's success, the possibility, and results of community development projects based on the cultural ground. To conduct the research, two parts of the country were compared: Java Island as a centre of Indonesia's life and growth, economy epicentre, and the Moluccas archipelago, located in Eastern Indonesia, commonly considered as less developed but rich in natural resources. Both are sharing some common cultural values like gotong royong (mutual assistance) and having more specific, endemic customs (sasi). Findings of the study proved that despite the difference in the level of the economy, electronic communication, education development cultural aspect is still significant in community life. Moreover, implementing modernity and introducing bureaucracy reform with social-cultural norms as a basis of it is showing a better result in community development and economic progress. From a perspective to keep the country's unity in diversity, reaching the economic balance between provinces, improving the life of society, and maintaining a smooth transition into modern and new technologies time cultural-value-based community development projects can become a solution.

**Keywords:** *community development, cultural values, principle of gotong royong, sasi management system, Hibua Lamo social consensus*

## INTRODUCTION

The basic concept of community development was coined by the United Nations in 1948. "Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative" as noted in [1]. Among one of the purposes for starting community

development projects, we can name polarization and disintegration of strata due to different factors, which can be related to a rapid change of a homogeneous society being, like the Industrial Revolution, decolonization, namely any political, economic, technological and cultural transformations and breaches leading to internal conflicts and misunderstanding between units.

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country, the largest archipelago in the world consisting of 17,508 islands, with more than 300 ethnic groups that speak over 630 different native languages. At the same time "Indonesia is also the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, as just over 87% of Indonesians declared themselves Muslim on the 2010 census. 9.87% are Christian, 1.69% are Hindu, 0.72% are Buddhist, and 0.56% practise other faiths" [2] (population census is updated every 10 years [3]).

Such a multicultural nation, which is simultaneously diverse and complex, is a great example of different cultures coexisting. Taking into account new technologies development and that there are many remote islands or territories which are particularly hard to reach and are not modern enough the issue of community development is critically urgent for the country's stability and overall progress.

Implementing government programs happens to be ineffective or the process may be difficult taking into account different levels of archipelago islands development, infrastructure, and access to education, technologies, and the Internet, shortly low understanding by a community or weak mutual understanding between the government and citizens. Indigenous peoples and tribes may not get the importance of government politics, which can aim to support their survival. In this case, community development based on cultural aspects may help to pursue reforms.

The purpose of this research is to discover the importance of cultural influence in the introduction of community development projects.

## METHOD

The study originated from an intention to explain the essence of contemporary aspects of culture, such as implementing community development projects based on values, social

consensus systems, and beliefs of Indonesian people. In order to find relevant evidence a qualitative approach was applied, mainly observation and conversational communication within two years (in Indonesia) with local people in Ameth village, Nusalaut Island, Moluccas, in Central and East Java (small cities, villages, and largest urban centres). Then fact-checking, secondary data analysis and content analysis, description and interpretation of textual details of newspapers and postings in social media, Instagram and Twitter (which are famous for sharing the latest and sensation information among Indonesian youth), Facebook accounts (more popular amid older generation). Differences in age, background, and location of interviewers were taken into account, and answers were recorded by note-taking. The comparative method was used to check the relevance of mutual cooperation values in Southeast Asian countries and Europe. From theoretical perspectives, cultural factors, collectivist society nature, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory were considered.

Results gained were complete for qualitative primary research. However, due to practical limitations and in order to gain a better insight more profound study on the topic using additional quantitative methods such as statistical analysis of data collected through polls, and surveys, improving qualitative base by conducting interviews using recording tools and well-designed questionnaires would be required.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

The current study confirmed that Indonesian society keeps strong cultural values. People in remote islands of East Indonesia and in the island of Java both despite different levels of economy, electronic technology, and education progress are following mutual cooperation model, gotong royong. This relationship organization perfectly overlaps with new city planning projects aiming to decrease commuting and make stronger and more developed communities itself.

Sasi management system of resource distribution and ecosphere preservation can be applied in other parts of the country, especially when decentralization getting more significant. A community development based on cultural aspects, as shown by example when Hibua Lamo principles were merged with bureaucratic reform standards in North Halmahera, plays a critical role in preserving the diversity in Indonesia and at the same time giving benefits and a new understanding of community-state relations.

"Indonesia has more than 300 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups, although the largest and most dominant in terms of politics are the Javanese at over 40% of the population" [2]. Java is also the

world's number one populous island, the most-developed part of Indonesia, which dominates the nation and boasts the economy. However, despite globalization, modernization, and transformation of big cities Javanese cultural values are still evident in the Indonesian public sector and in the daily life of society, especially, in small cities and villages. Mutual cooperation known as gotong royong (or babari in North Moluccas), a state of togetherness, religious, mostly Islamic customs, and Javanism/Kejawen, with its stronghold nowadays in Yogyakarta, defines a daily life of 140 million people.

According to the definition given in Big Indonesian Dictionary KBBI - Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (also known as KBBI) the meaning inherent in gotong royong is to work together [4]. Villagers are helping each other, without having to be asked for. "They do not take into account the material losses incurred to help others. Their principle: "loss sathak, bathisanak". Which is more or less meaningful: it is better to lose material but not relatives" [5]. Following contemporary tendencies, the institution of gotong royong as an economic and cultural form of social existence slowly vanishes. However, the young generation is trying to rethink this concept and make it works in a modern way.

Project Nata Desa, an open platform offering collaboration and cooperation in solving village problems, related to sustainable village planning, uses the motto Gotong Royong Membangun Desa (mutual cooperation is building a village) in the promotion of old values towards community development. On the official website, it is stated that Nata Desa tries to connect rural communities, local governments, experts in regional planning, facilitators, young activists, the general public, investors, villagers, and other stakeholders to work together in designing, planning, and visioning rural areas. Their model of village development can be applied in other settlements. Nata Desa offers an elaboration of Template Masterplan Desa, a detailed program for village development, and gives examples of how to improve life in neighbourhoods [6].

For example, one of the projects mentioned is Kebun Keluarga (Family Garden) in the village of Waitaru, in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. Neighbours made a garden in the yard, so now they don't need to buy vegetables and fruits, they can save electricity expenses as they do not need to use the fridge because they can always pick fresh greenery directly from the garden. Moreover, they can get additional income by selling the crop together [6]. Such projects enhance community relations and help the community economically. One of the largest pulp and paper manufacturers under APRIL Group Companies PT Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (PT RAPP) operating in Riau

Province, Sumatra also uses gotong royong in its public relations activities [7].

Deputy for the Coordination of Community, Village, and Regional Empowerment (Kemenko PMK) Sonny Harry B Harmadi stressed that cooperation of the Indonesian people helped to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been transformed from a health crisis into a socioeconomic crisis [8]. For instance, neighbours constructed and installed disinfectors for transport and kept their streets under self-proclaimed lockdown. During Ramadan, which coincided with the novel Coronavirus outbreak peak, people and organizations, such as Lazismu, were sharing foodstuffs to those who are in need [9]. This is an observation when religious deeds were melting with cultural and neighbourhood values. Quarantine reminded about the importance of keeping tight relations between communities living together because neighbours are closer than family when it is urgent, a phrase, taken from the Bible, Ambonese likes to repeat [10]. A neighbourhood like one of the structural elements, a functional and social unit is important in Islam as well.

However, following modernization and capitalism, community relations are becoming more formal; people prefer buying products instead of borrowing, etc. During stricter rules on social distancing to contain COVID-19 many families lost income, the possibility to go out for purchasing goods, and their relatives could not freely travel to come and help, so distancing revitalized connection with those who are closer.

Furthermore, due to distancing measures have not been taken seriously by many residents' communities in Central Java (Kepuh village in Sukoharjo regency and in Tuk Songo village in the Purworejo regency) applied age-old superstition and employed a cast of 'ghosts' known as "pocong" to guard the street's main entrance and keep people indoors [11]. The village's spokesman explained the "that residents have decided to self-isolate the village as a form of gotong royong — the Indonesian phrase for mutual cooperation — in the fight against the coronavirus, and that no one is allowed in or out until normalcy returns... Together with other residents, the pocongs will check on anyone who passes the gate, including spraying disinfectants [on people]. The pocongs are only on duty at night, while other residents guard the gate during the day" [12].

This example shows that the cultural aspect is substantial in society's persuasion and organization. One of the analytical institutions that analyze the role and scope of culture in an organization's success is Hofstede Insights. They are pioneering the operationalization of academic research into the business area [13]. Geert Hofstede, its founder, defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group

or category of people from others"; shortly "culture is the software of the mind". Hofstede Insights offers a 6-D Model, namely the Hofstede model of national culture (based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory) to inspect six dimensions among which there is individualism versus collectivism (IDV) index [14]. According to their research, Indonesia belongs to a collectivist society. "This means there is a high preference for a strongly defined social framework in which individuals are expected to conform to the ideals of the society and the in-groups to which they belong" [14]. Roughly comparing Indonesia to Western countries, where individualism prevails and old traditions fade, in this South-East Asia state culture factor, religion and collectivist society values can be a basis for successful community development programs.

Another example is the community-based institution, unwritten law, or adat, called sasi, which encompasses ecology-related rights and rules in the Moluccas [15]. Sasi means "spatial and temporal prohibitions on harvesting crops, cutting wood, or gathering other products from the forest, tidal zone or marine territory of a village" [16]. Among sasi purposes are resource distribution, "to avoid misunderstandings and disputes over marine and land resources between people from different villages and districts" and resource management "to define the environmental management of land and marine resources so they could improve the welfare of the community", reforestation. Sasi is usually determined by the village head, in the past by raja [17].

Nowadays, new values of the younger generation emerge and the effectiveness of a community-based natural resource management structure of sasi comes under threat [15]. However, following my own observation this system of prohibition still perfectly works in Ameth village, Nusalaut Island, where people combined sasi and local legends to protect coral reefs from plastic pollution. Coral literally feeds Nusalaut as there is no other significant business developed except as fishing. If compare with other islands around Ambon and beaches there, modern trash signs not to litter and campaigns to clean the beach do not really work or have a long-term effect. In this case, sasi's smart and contemporary revitalization and popularization can improve the co-management system in terms of decentralization.

An example of modernization, which was implemented on the basis of cultural values, is a case of a bureaucracy reform in North Maluku Province, namely in North Halmahera Regency. There the community still preserves and lives according to the cultural system Hibua Lamo. Under Hibua Lamo (means "shared house") is understood Rumah adat, house of law, morality and customs, unity, peace, and social consensus. It is

used for “conflict resolution among the communities by harmonizing interests between conflicting groups as well as binding the groups into a new relationship bond” [18]. The reform in North Halmahera was done by merging the market system, state legislation and social norms institutionalized in Hibua Lamo. For instance, a North Halmahera Regent office-building was constructed in the form of an octagon with four entrances (four cardinal points) reflecting the design of the custom/traditional home of Hibua Lamo. “This suggests that the Regent’s Office as the centre of governmental bureaucracy activities is open to inputs from all layers of society and provides public services without distinguishing people’s background” [19]. The public service system also annexed other main principles of Hibua Lamo social norms. As a result of the cultural-value-based reform, North Halmahera Regent got the position of both the Head of North Halmahera Regency and the Leader of Cultural Institution of Hibua Lamo, which made him able to maintain various projects in the region and reach its economic growth of 6.04%. Such integration of cultural values with the state structures brings new vision, improves institutions, and helps drive community development.

According to the findings as shown in [20], “culture is a necessary factor to consider when selecting the appropriate persuasive strategy to employ in the persuasive technology design.” Culture is among the strongest influences on human behaviour, and its understanding is valuable for state managers and non-governmental organizations to target audience changes [14].

### CONCLUSION

Based on the discoveries of the study implementing community development projects by taking into consideration contemporary cultural values aspects will have a positive impact on multicultural society integration. The research problem of this study needs more contextualizing, analysis of data sources, and improved methodology to get more precise results. Hence, opportunities for extensive future research are open.

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