Empowering Local Communities to Preserve their Folklore: A Project in Eastern Sumba

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ABSTRACT
This article presents a project of empowering local communities in eastern Sumba to preserve their folklore. Culture encounters in globalized world encourage local communities to reflect on the dynamics and vitality of their own culture. Given the fact that oral-based communities are marginalized in articulating their cultural identity, this project aimed to involve local communities in eastern Sumba to preserve their folkloric expressions. Activities comprised focus group discussions, folklore research, and digital documentation of folk music and dance. This project is expected to establish collaboration between scholars and local communities to promote the importance of local knowledge preservation and the needs for the digital documentation to support future data preservation.

Keywords: Local community, Sumba, Folklore, Empower

1. INTRODUCTION

Compared to other social sciences, Folklore Studies seems to be unfamiliar to most people. Folklore is known in common parlance as folktale or folksong, and even for some, the term suggests something untrue[1]. Folklore in fact covers a vast array of cultural expressions. Folklorists deal with the materials of expressive cultures (verbal, material, and customary), but what attract them more are the people creating or recreating those materials[1]. In this light, folkloristic confirms itself as a discipline placing high emphasis on humanistic aspects. Folklorists turn their gaze to the group of people and their culture marginalized from the dominant discourses and practices. In other words, their commitment is to take sides with the unnoticeable and "invisible" forms of cultural expression.

In this era of rapid modernization, commitments to community empowerment are imperative since many traditional cultures which have been handed down for generations experience a serious decline[2]. The underprivileged communities need to be supported so that they have the abilities to maintain and develop their cultural assets. Therefore, the heart of community empowerment is community capacity building in which the local communities play the key roles in preserving the traditional expressions. External facilitators, like those from the academia, might contribute to this capacity building by means of sharing knowledge,

organizing workshops or training, or providing technical assistances.

One of the missions in the Faculty of Language and Arts Soegijapranata Catholic University is to pay attention to the local culture. This includes the engagement with folklore studies. So far, our folklore engagement has been focused in Java. As "the centre of Indonesia, Java and its people relatively have the ability to preserve their folklore, unlike Sumba. Considering that the Sumbanese does not enjoy the same privilege as the Javanese in terms of facilities and knowledge, the project chose to focus on Sumba community [3].

1.1. Target Location

Sumba is one of the islands in Nusa Tenggara Province. Lying to the Southeast of Bali, West of Timor and South of Flores, this island covers an area of 12, 297 km sq.[4], Sumba consists of four districts: Sumba Barat Daya, Sumba Barat, Sumba Tengah, and Sumba Timur. This project targeted the local communities living in Sumba Timur (Eastern Sumba). Like those in other districts, the majority of eastern Sumbanese live as farmers with maize as the main staple product. Moreover, Eastern Sumba is well-known for its handicraft. The notably handicraft is the weaving of decorated textiles which used to be entirely in the hands of women. However, now more and more men are involved to accelerate the production of the traditional

clothes. Many "natives" of Sumba have converted into Christianity, but the majority still adhere to their local, ancestral religion called Marapu [5]. Indonesian language is spoken for academic purposes, but in many occasions, the local language, Kambiara is still used.

The target of this project was the local communities living in villages of Lambanapu. This village is located about 7 kilometres from the capital of Eastern Sumba District. The main target of the project is *Sanggar Seni Ori Angu* (Ori Angu Art Group), a group that is mainly organized by young people who are determined to preserve and revitalize the traditional culture of Sumba. The activities of the group include giving dance practices for young Sumbanese children and folksong for young people. The members of the group also give performances in many occasions. There were two reasons why Sumba was single out to be the area of this project. First, Sumba is considered as a marginalized area where researches on culture and folklore are still rare. Folklore activities are still vibrant, and like any other small, traditional communities, the people of Sumba are struggling to maintain their identity through cultural performance and preservation. Preserving cultural performance is important because traditional expressions, including arts, are understood to have a role in empowering the communities, particularly the marginalized ones, to fight against the inequities as well [6]. The second one was that one of the researchers has carried out several researches in the area. He is able to speak the native language of the people, and have made good rapports with the subjects and organizations involved in the project.

1.2. The Purpose of the Project

The purposes of the project were to explore the dynamics and vitality of eastern Sumba local communities that can help to preserve their local culture and to empower local communities by sharing knowledge on how to carry out ethnographic researches, especially on digitalizing folkloric expressions. The project focused on the folkloric expressions of eastern Sumbanese people i.e. folk dance and folk music. The project also intended to give ideas for researches on Folklore, a discipline overlooked in the area of social sciences, for young Sumbanese people, and students of higher education institutions. This project followed the steps of previous projects on sustaining the tradition of the indigenous communities such as National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia[7], [8]. The involvement of young people was aimed to raise their awareness on their own cultures so that they can fight for the ownership to their traditional culture in the case of commercialization or dispute[9].

2. METHODS

The project was done through three stages. Stage one was the identification and listing the inventory of folkloric expressions on the folk song and folk dance in Lambanapu village, Eastern Sumba. The primary data were collected using observations, interviews, and focus group discussion. Focus group discussion as a part of the research benefited all participants to share, interpret, and appreciate their cultural knowledge. The secondary data were collected through library resources both printed and electronic resources. Data collected during observations, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and interviews were assessed and analysed to determine the factors accounted for society empowerment to document their folkloric expressions.

Stage two, along the data collection, training on ethnographic research and folklore digital documentation was done to the local communities. The training was design to include two different trainings. The initial training was the training to do mini folklore research, and the next one was the training to make photo or video documentations of an event using the available gadgets. The training involved the young people from Lambanapu, East Sumba. The goal for this training was to enable the participants to document their folkloric expressions using photos and videos.

Stage three, the training was evaluated using quantitatively using a questionnaire. The quantitative evaluation on the training in the form of survey was needed to obtain the attitudes or opinions of the population[10]. The participants of the evaluation were the Folklore Documentation workshop's participants. There were 75 participants in total who attended the training. The participants consisted of 39 young adults and teenagers whose average age were between 15 to 25 years old, and 36 children whose average age were between 8 to 14 years old. The evaluation was only given to the group of young adults and teenagers group (39 respondents) because this group was considered sufficiently able to evaluate the process of the training. The researchers used closed questionnaire in the evaluation. There were four parts of evaluation. The first part was the evaluation on the training on mini folklore research, the second one was the evaluation on the training on the photo and video documentation of an event, the third one was the evaluation on the practice of doing both the mini folklore research and the photo or video documentation, and the last one was the general evaluation on the training model. In the evaluation, the researchers made use of Likert Scale in the closed questionnaire that included 5 point scales: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree [11].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Observation

The observations done during the course of the project resulted in the three main findings on the

Sumbanese traditions that are still practiced by the people of Sumba. They are the ritual, especially the daily rituals, the folksong, the folkdance, and traditional handcraft.

The first finding is that Sumbanese people, especially the older generation in Lambanapu, Waingapu, Eastern Sumba maintain their tradition well. One of the examples is the daily ritual of providing "*kapur sirih*" or "betel lime" as a welcoming gesture for foreigners. Every household still prepares "*kapur sirih*" in case a guest comes to their house, invited or uninvited. Neglecting this tradition is considered dishonouring the guest that can result in the traditional compensation arrangement such as a pig should be slaughtered as compensation[3].

The second finding is that the Sumbanese community of Lambanapu, Waingapu, Eastern Sumba has rich folksong traditions. It is not uncommon for the older people to gather in the evening in a certain house to talk and sometimes sing together accompanied by the younger people and children. In a gathering, the researchers witnessed a Sumbanese man singing lullaby for the grandson he held in his arms. In another gathering, the researchers were entertained informally by some Sumbanese who sang their folksongs. The Sumbanese sing the folksongs freely, without the strict arrangement of modern performance. The lyrics sung did not follow a strict rule; they can be reversed or modified along the way. They can even fill in the gaps other people leave. The older people's songs are often the reminiscence of their younger years. The researchers were told that the songs were the folksongs that often did not have a title. Some were songs to sing, while some others were songs used to accompanying Sumbanese dance. Those songs often contained strings of sounds for the sake of the musicality that did not have any meanings at all. In singing their folksongs, the researchers observed that the Sumbanese did not always use musical instruments to accompany their singing. If there were musical instruments involved, they usually consisted of one *lamba*, the drum and four *ana mongu*, the gongs. The practice of the Sumbanese people in singing their folksongs is a typical practice of indigenous communities. The same practice can also be found in the indigenous Ilokano in Northwestern Cagayan, Philippines [12].

The third finding is that the Sumbanese people living in Lambanapu, Waingapu, Eastern Sumba, have traditional dances they preserve from the tradition of the past. Unlike folksongs that can be sung without much preparation, during observation the researchers found that the Sumbanese did the folkdance less often. During the length of the project, there was no event that included folkdance so that the researcher did not have the opportunity to see the Sumbanese did the folkdance. Even so the researchers saw one or two Sumbanese did a brief folkdance during the singing of the folksongs a couple of times. It was fortunate that during the project,

the researchers stayed in a place that housed Ori Angu Art Group. Ori Angu is locally famous as this group has won regional competitions and national competitions. The group even participated in the International Festival of Fruit and Flower in Ambato, Ecuador. In one occasion, Ori Angu Art Group spared their time to perform two dances for the researchers. The word "perform" is deliberately used here to highlight the point addressed by Cohen-Stratyner that the contemporary dance tends to be performative instead of social[13] The two dances performed were *Panampangu Mbaru* (Waiting for the Dawn) and *Kadingangu*. The first dance was performed by female dancers, while the second dance was performed by male dancers. Both dances are the new creations, not the original folkdances of Sumbanese. As new creations, the dances contain the combination of movements from several folkdances and movements from apparently the Javanese dance movements. The researchers were told that the Sumbanese dance movements were deliberately mixed with the Javanese dance movements by the creator, Hendrik Pali, who learned Javanese dance from the well-known Indonesia dance choreographer, Bagong Kussudiardja. It was said that the dance creator believed in the idea that folkdance should be dynamic; appropriating itself with the change of time.

The fourth finding is that women in Lambanapu region do not only do the household chores but also have the side work of crafting *tenun ikat Sumba* or Sumbanese weaving textile that contains intricate social and ritual symbols[14]. The making of Sumba weaving textile is a women's world [15]. The Sumbanese women build their own world by doing the weaving and the colouring. The women also establish the rules and regulations like the work division for men and women in doing certain process in weaving as well as the restrictions or taboos for a particular gender in doing certain process. The work division for men and women in crafting the Sumbanese weaving textile is discussed separately by Wibawa as a side project[16].

3.2. Focus Group Discussion

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was done to obtain important information for the project of documenting the folkloric expressions in Sumba. There were two FGDs done for the project. The first FGD was attended by 15 people, while the second FDG was attended by 22 people. In general, the participants of the FGDs could be categorized into three groups: the group of people over 60 years old, the group of people between 25 to 60 years old, and the group of people under 25 years old.

The first group that consisted of people over 60 years old had more than satisfying knowledge of their local traditions. They also practiced the traditions in their past time. This older generation group talked

lengthy about their traditional belief called Merapu[5], their traditional dance and the folksongs. This group was the one who claimed to see the diminishing of their traditions. This group had a concern about the continuity of their traditions. During the FGD, they said that they needed help to document the traditions for the future generation to learn.

The second group was a group of people in their late twenties up to those who were in their fifties. This group consisted of people who had satisfactory knowledge of the local traditions. They claimed that they knew their traditions but did not practice the traditions very often. This group voiced their concern about their almost forgotten traditions and was willing to get involved in preserving their traditions. The problem was that they did not know how to do it. During the FGD, they expressed their willingness to learn how to document their traditions digitally.

The third group contained people in their twenties and under who said that they had been told by the older generation about their traditions but only occasionally practiced the local traditions. They would practice the traditions in the special events only. This group did not really have any concern about what happened to their traditions. This younger generation was more familiar with the popular culture such as popular folksongs or popular dances. This group did not understand the importance of documenting their traditions.

To sum up, the older generation in Lambanapu, Sumba knows well and practices the traditions. They realize that the traditions are starting to fade, yet they do not have any ability to document their traditions. Next, the generation below the older ones does not understand the traditions as well as the older generation. However, they concern about the continuity of their traditions and they are willing to learn how to document their traditions. The last one, the young generation knows the least about their traditions. They are influenced by the popular culture more than their traditional one. They have the ability to do digital documentation, but they do not know that it is an important action to do.

3.3. The Training and its Evaluation

There were two trainings conducted during the project. The first training was with the young adults and the teenagers, while the second one was with the children. The participants of the training were chosen because they were believed to be able to operate the gadget used for the digital documentation such as mobile phone camera and/or DSLR camera.

The training had three sessions. The first session was the training on mini folklore research; the second session was the training on how to use mobile phone camera or digital camera to document an event; and the

last session was the practices to do the mini folklore research and to document an event.

The first session started with an explanation on what folklore research is, and how the folklore research can be done. The session was held because the researchers believed that understanding the idea of a folklore research can help the participants to develop the awareness toward their own traditions and to have a new insight on folklore documentations. In this session, the participants learned the way to ask for the informant's personal data, to find out the description of the event, to narrate the informant's personal data, and to write the description of the event. At the end of the training the participants evaluated the skills they learned in the first session (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' perception of their ability to do mini folklore research (%).

I feel confident I could …	1	2	3	4	5
Find a key informant to interview about the event.	0	0	18	54	28
Get the data about the informant (name, position, role).	0	0	18	54	28
Get the information about the event.	0	0	0	51	49
Write a short description about the informant.	0	0	31	46	23
Write a short narrative about the event.	0	0	31	46	23

Table 1 shows that most respondents felt confident to do mini folklore research. A high number of respondents (51% and 49%) felt confident about their skill to get information about the event. Many respondents also were confident that they had the skill to find a key informant (54% and 28%) and getting the data about the informant (54% and 28%). The tasks that the least participants felt confident to do were writing a short description about the informant and writing a short narrative about the event. The lower confident in writing about the informant and the event is expected because writing is indeed more challenging than speaking.

The session of mini folklore research is followed by the training on the techniques of photography and videography. In this session, the participants learned to use the camera to make photos and videos. They were refreshed on the skills to take the landscape or portrait photos and videos, to focus, to zoom in and zoom out, and to use flashlight in the camera. Furthermore, the participants learned to find good lighting, to use the grid for help the composition, to take different positions in taking the photos and videos, to apply low and high angle, and to take photos and videos with different shots. The last skill taught was the skill to save and search the photos and the videos in the file manager. In the end of the training, the participants were also asked to evaluate the skills to do digital documentation they obtained during the training (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' perception of their ability to operate the gadget (%)

I feel confident I could …	1	2	3	4	5
Use the camera to take photo/video.	0	0	0	0	100
Take landscape and portrait photo/video.	0	0	0	0	100
Use focus in the camera.	0	8	10	54	28
Zoom in and zoom out the camera.	0	0	13	59	28
Use the flashlight in the camera.	0	8	10	54	28
Find good lighting for the photo/video.	5	8	26	38	23
Use the grid in the camera to take photo.	5	8	26	38	23
Do high level, eye-level, and low level position to take photo/video.	0	5	26	38	31
Apply low and high angle to take	0	5	26	38	31
Do long shot, medium shot and close up with the camera.	0	5	26	38	31
Search for the photo/video in the file manager.	0	0	0	38	62

Table 2 shows that in general the majority of the respondents were confident in their ability to do digital documentation. 100% of the respondents were confident in their ability to use the camera to take photos or videos and to take landscape and portrait photos and videos. 38% and 62% of the respondents were also confident in searching for the photos and videos in their file manager. The result also shows that while 59% and 28% of the respondents were confident in their skill to zoom in and zoom out, only 54% and 28% were confident in using the focus and the flashlight in the camera. There were even 8% of the respondents who claimed that they were not confident in operating the focus and the flashlight. Fewer respondents (38% and 31%) showed their confidence in their ability to take the photos and videos in different position, angle and shot. And even fewer respondents (38% and 23%) stated that they were confident in finding good lighting and to use the grid. It seems that lighting and using grid in the camera are the skills that most respondents found difficult to do.

After the second session, the training on documenting an event, the participants of the training practiced the combination of doing mini folklore research and documenting an event. The result of the evaluation at the end of the training (Table 3) shows that the highest number of respondents (36% and 64%) were confident in taking photos or videos of an event, while fewer (62% and 15%) were confident in doing the mini folklore research. The fewest respondents were the respondents who were confident in doing both mini folklore research and documenting the events. It is possible that the respondents felt overwhelmed to do two tasks when documenting an event because they are not used to do it.

Table 3. Participants' perception of their ability to apply the training model (%)

I feel confident I could …	1	2	3	4	5
Do the mini folklore research.	0	18	5	62	15
Take the photo/video of an event.	0	0	0	36	64
Do both the mini folklore research and take the photo/video of an event.	3	15	5	62	15

On the training model—the combination of mini folklore research and digital documentation— the result of the evaluation (Table 4) shows that in general the respondents perceived this model positively.

Table 4. Participants' perception of the training model (%)

Items	1	2	3	4	5
Learning to do the mini folklore research and the documentation is interesting.	0	0	0	51	49
Learning to do mini the folklore research and the documentation is enjoyable.	0	0	0	51	49
The mini folklore research and the training to take photos and videos of an event is useful to document an event.	0	0	5	56	38
The mini folklore research and the training to take photos and videos of an event is suitable to document local culture.	0	0	8	54	38

51% and 49% of the respondents found the training model interesting and enjoyable. Even so, fewer respondents thought that the model was useful to document an event (56% and 38%) and suitable to document local culture (54% and 38%). The result shows that this model is perceived more positively in terms of enjoyment but less positively in terms of usefulness and suitability.

4. CONCLUSION

The project concludes that eastern Sumba has abundance of folkloric expressions such as Sumbanese folk dance and folk songs that should be preserved. The second conclusion is that empowering local communities to document their own folkloric expressions is the best way to preserve the tradition. Being able to document their own traditions can reduce their dependency on the scholars, both domestic and international scholars, who can only be staying for a limited period of time. Documenting their own traditions can also raise their awareness on the importance of the traditions. The third point in the conclusion is that the training sessions show that the local community of Sumba has an ability to document their tradition using the existing technology such as digital camera in the mobile phone and/or DSLR. During the training, they did not have difficulty in using the technology, especially that in the mobile phone. The

further needs of this local community for the sustainability of this project are the skills to edit the raw footages obtained from documenting an event and the place to archive the documentations.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

AR wrote the manuscript, did observation, led the FGD with the young generation, and provided the data for training evaluation. BRW conducted the observation, led the FGD with the old generation, and gave training on how to do a mini folklore research. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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