

## **Empowering Women Weavers to Improve Woven Clothes Products through International Service-Learning Program in Sumba Tengah Regency**

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### **Abstract:**

The study discusses the effort to empower women weavers to improve woven clothes products through International Service-Learning (IS-L) Program in Sumba Tengah Regency. For the Sumbanese culture, woven clothes have a deep philosophical meaning so that they are not only used for everyday wears but also for performing sacred ceremonies. Sumbanese women play a key role in providing the woven clothes, but only small number of women can make woven clothes. Based on the problems, the IS-L program conducted by Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta – Indonesia organized workshops on empowering women weavers to improve their skills in woven clothes making. The program implemented service-learning method integrating community service and academic curriculum. This method consists of four steps, namely: Prepare, Explore, Serve, and Reflect. The results of the study show that empowering women weavers must involve the local community from the beginning of the program. The enthusiasm of the participants plays a key role in sustaining the tradition of woven clothes making in Sumba Tengah Regency. This enthusiasm is increased by the active participation of the local prominent figure.

### **1. Introduction**

Sumba Tengah Regency is one of the developing regencies in Sumba Island, Nusa Tenggara Province - Indonesia. Sumba Tengah Regency is still developing its infrastructure to minimize the development gaps between the regency and the more developed neighboring regencies. One of the development gaps can be recognized from the traditional woven clothes of Sumba Tengah Regency that is less popular than the ones in Sumba Barat and Sumba Timur Regency. The traditional woven clothes are one of the fascinating cultural products of Sumba that attracts interests of tourists. The traditional woven clothes are not only used as an equipment of cultural ceremonies, but also as a souvenir for tourists. The traditional woven clothes are in demand, but there is rare number of weavers in Sumba Tengah Regency. Thus, the existence of the traditional woven clothes of Sumba Tengah Regency is threatened. Based on the problem, empowering women weavers is significant to maintain the existence of the traditional woven clothes.

The empowerment of women weavers was done through workshops on woven clothes making carried out through the IS-L program. The program was conducted by two universities, the local community and government. The program was focused on women weavers because of the key role of women in Sumbanese culture. The women have the tasks as family taker and economic actor as well. One of the economic roles of the women is woven clothes making. However, the women's dual role is not followed with the providing of public infrastructure. To reduce the women's load, a workshop to improve weaving skills of the women was organized through the IS-L program. The workshop is important by considering the tendency of the decreasing of

women weavers' number in Sumba Tengah Regency. By improving weaving skills of the women, the need of woven clothes for cultural ceremonies can be met by their selves. Furthermore, the ability to make woven clothes can give benefits for the women to improve the household income.

To carry out the study, some questions are addressed to guide the work, namely:

- a) Which strategy can be applied to involve women in the workshop of woven clothes making?
- b) How does the workshop facilitate the know-how sharing between facilitators and participants?
- c) Which role do the participants play in sustaining woven clothes making after the workshop?
- d) How can the International Service-Learning method be reflected in the teaching – learning process?

Some challenges that must be faced during conducting the program consist of the lack of weaving skills of the women in Sumba Tengah Regency, the lack of supporting weaving tools and materials, the lack of public infrastructure facilitating access and mobility of the women and time management caused by the dual role of the women. However, the workshop conducted through the IS-L program had limited time, so that not all problems can be solved by the program. It is expected that the IS-L program merely initiates the improvement of woven clothes making as a model of women's empowerment that will be continued by the local community. Thus, through community-based development the woven clothes making will be sustained in Sumba Tengah Regency.

## **2. Theoretical framework/ literature review**

Empowering women weavers to improve woven clothes products is significant to be done in Sumba Tengah Regency. The Sumbanese culture recognizes the concept of gender equality. However, the role and access of the women to resources are unequal. For Sumbanese people, the concept of gender equality is understood through the in pairs concept. Kapita (1976) revealed that Sumbanese people understand the symbol of gender equality concept. The concept is based on the belief of *Marapu*: *Mara* (salvation) and *pu* (the ancestors spirit). The in pairs concept is formed in the language concept about Alkhalik (the Creator) as Mother – Father, the architecture of traditional houses, and wedding ceremony. The role division between men and women in Sumbanese culture does not mean that women have the lower position than men. Men play a role as the head of family and leader of ceremonies, whereas women play a key role in sustaining life and carrying out the sacred ceremonies (Nurdiah, Asri, Hariyanto, 2015). Gender inequality occurs when women in Sumba are required to have the capacity to fulfill the need of woven clothes as ritual equipments. Meanwhile, the women do not have the ability to make woven clothes and have the difficulty to access materials of woven clothes making. Such problems were appointed in the IS-L program done in Sumba Tengah Regency.

The empowerment of rural women is called upon by considering the importance of women in playing active roles in reducing poverty and hunger (Hamidon Ali in Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations, 2010). Empowerment derives from the word "power". Rawland (1997) in Rahman 2013 revealed that the term empowerment is based on three meaning

of “power”, namely: power over, power to, power with, power from within. Power over means bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it. Power to and with indicate the processes by which people become aware of their own interests how those relate to the interest of others in order both to participate from a position of a greater strength in decision-making and actually to influence such decisions. Furthermore, Rawland (1997) described that empowerment must involve undoing negative social construction, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions. Rawland's divides three dimensions of empowerment, namely: personal, rational and collective. Based on the understanding, the empowerment of women in Sumba Tengah Regency is an effort to increase the economic capacity of the women weaver through woven clothes making. The capability to produce woven clothes will increase the women's access to resources and infrastructure that may improve their living standard.

Service-learning method is implemented in this program, so that the program can expand knowledge and skills of the local community. Through the program students learn how to face problems in the community and reflect their experiences and knowledge got during the program. The principle of service-learning is appropriate to the definition of service-learning as a teaching and learning approach integrating community service with academic study to enrich learning, to teach civic responsibility, and to strengthen communities (the National Commission on Service-Learning: [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)). National Youth Leadership Council: [www.nycl.org](http://www.nycl.org) (2008) mentioned that service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs. In line with the principle, Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki (2011) asserted that service-learning is defined as a teaching and learning strategy that attempts to integrate community service with an academic curriculum. Knapp/Pittsburgh Cares (2008) expressed that service-learning occurs when service and learning components are fused: structured service is integrated into organized education to provide a hands-on learning experience for the student that simultaneously benefits the community. According to Knapp/Pittsburgh Cares (2008) the stages of service-learning consist of four steps, namely: Prepare, Explore, Serve, and Reflect. Based on the explanation, the most important aspect of the implementation of the IS-L Program in Sumba Tengah Regency is how to reflect the series of IS-L process into the academic curriculum.

### **3. Methods/analysis**

Empowering women in the improvement of woven clothes products was conducted through the International Service-Learning (IS-L) Program. The program involved students, lecturers and assistant lecturers from Duta Wacana Christian University Yogyakarta – Indonesia (UKDW) and Australian National University (ANU). The IS-L program was carried out in Anajiaka Village in Sumba Tengah Regency, Indonesia. The implementation of the IS-L program applied the four stages of service-learning as proposed by Knapp/Pittsburgh Cares (2008) namely: Prepare, Explore, Serve, and Reflect.

The Prepare phase was conducted in two steps that are internal workshop in the campus and at the site. The students were prepared with improving their English skills, so that they can communicate with the foreign partner students. They were also prepared with knowledge about service-learning method and Sumba where the IS-L program is implemented. At the Explore phase the students were divided into some groups consisting of 5 to 6 students in a group. They

conducted observations in the selected kampongs/hamlets and learned from the communities about their daily life. One of the student's groups focused on the traditional woven clothes making. The group found that the traditional woven clothes have a deep philosophical meaning for the Sumbanese community. However, the community tends to discontinue the tradition of woven clothes making. Only a small number of villagers are willing to continue the tradition and work as weaver. The Serve stage is an action step involving a small group of weavers. The Serve process was done through personal approach to the weavers and villagers who are interested in woven clothes making. The small group of weavers was invited to a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to identify problems and potentials of woven clothes and formulate the strategy to empower the weavers. According to Van Eeuwijk & Angehrn (2017), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic or issue in-depth, facilitated by a professional, external moderator. Freitas *et al* (1998) revealed that the general characteristics of the Focus Group are people's involvement, a series of meetings, the homogeneity of participants with respect to research interests, the generation of qualitative data, and discussion focused on a topic, which is determined by the purpose of the research.

The results of the FGD were followed up with a workshop to form an organization and improve the weaving skills of the participants. A mentoring method was implemented through know-how transfer among the participants. The weavers having more skills in weaving were asked to train other participants. The Reflect phase was done by students, lecturers and assistant lectures to get feedbacks concerning their experiences in working with the local community. The results of the reflection will be useful for developing teaching – learning method and academic curriculum. The method and implementation process of the IS-L were collected and formulate as a teaching – learning module. This module will be used as a reference of service learning program for students.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The empowerment of women weavers in Anajiaka Village was started by identifying villagers having skills of woven clothes making. Even though there are only a small number of villagers having interested in weaving, it is reasonable to develop the weaving potential. This is because of the high cultural and economic values of woven clothes for the Sumbanese people.

The weaving activity in the village was initiated by a small group of weavers lead by a weaver from Sumba Barat Regency. The villagers were assisted to form an organization of weaver group named as Paraing Uma Jaga. As shown in Fig. 1, there are 11 villagers joining the weaver's group consisting of 7 people (63.64%) in the age of 25-48 years old and 4 people (36.36%) in the age of 20-24 years old (IFSTS-L, 2018). Only one of 11 participants is male. Looking at the small number of young participants, it is important to encourage young generations to participate in the development of woven clothes products. The involvement of the young generation is significant to keep the sustainability of woven clothes making tradition in Sumba Tengah Regency.

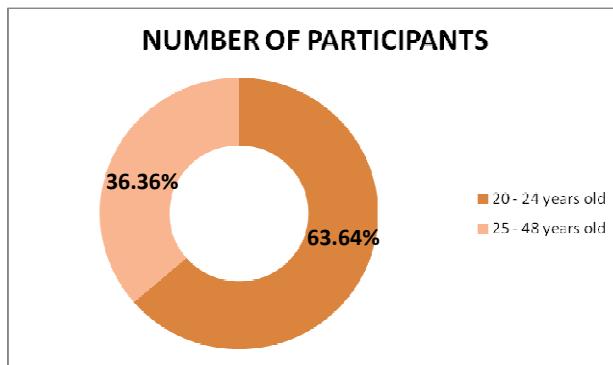


Figure 1. Number of Participants of Weaver's Group according to Age

Source: IFSTS-L, 2018

The Focus Group Discussion organized by students and lecturers was conducted to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the woven clothes products in Anajiaka Village. The results of the FGD shows the SWOT aspects as described in the following table:

Table 1. SWOT Aspects of the Traditional Woven Clothes Making in Anajiaka Village.  
Sumba Tengah Regency

STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. There are still some villagers who are interested in continuing the weaving tradition.</li> <li>b. Willingness of a weaver from another regency to train the villagers.</li> <li>c. The need of woven clothe products for cultural ritual and everyday wears or uniforms for public officers.</li> </ul>
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Weaving is done more by women in adulthood.</li> <li>b. Young people are not interested in weaving.</li> <li>c. The capacity of woven clothes making and managerial skill is low.</li> <li>d. Woven clothes materials are not provided in Sumba Tengah Regency, but in another regency (Sumba Barat Regency).</li> <li>e. Weaving activity is not a continuous work, but rather an activity in free time and depending on the farming calendar.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A weaving group does not exist yet.</li> <li>b. The woven clothes motive of Sumba Tengah does not familiar yet.</li> <li>c. The development of woven clothes as souvenir products for tourism.</li> </ul>
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The machine product of woven clothes is faster and cheaper.</li> <li>b. The natural materials of woven clothes are more expensive than the artificial materials.</li> <li>c. Uncontroled competition caused by the lack of price standard of woven clothes.</li> </ul>

Source: IFSTS-L, 2018



Figure 2. Focus Group Discussion on the Village Hall of Anajiaka

Source: IFSTS-L, 2018

The small number of villagers who are willing to continue the weaving tradition does not obstruct the forming of weaving organization in Anajiaka Village. The existence of the weaving expert as a trainer for the other villagers plays a key role in raising the weavers' interest in woven clothes making. The training process continues informally after the workshop organized by the students through IS-L program. Some weavers practice their weaving skills in the house of Mama Hilda, the weaving expert, everyday after finishing their household chores. This informal training becomes an effective method to involve the women weavers in maintaining sustainability of the woven clothes making tradition.



Figure 3. The Informal Weaving Training in Mama Hilda's House

Source: Field Observation, 2018

The survey shows that most weaving skills are got from parents (44.44%) and Mama Hilda (44.44%). Therefore, encouraging the local weaving expert is significant to increase the participation of women weavers in the improvement of woven clothes products. The involvement of women weavers in the workshop is a strategy to increase the capacity of women in carrying out their cultural and economic tasks. As revealed by (Nurdiah, Asri, Hariyanto, 2015), Sumbanese women have the tasks of carrying out the scared ceremonies. The increasing of women's capability to provide woven clothes may reduce the women's burdens. Thus, the weaving workshop strengthens the concept of gender equality within the context of Sumba as the concept of in pair in Sumbanese culture (Kapita, 1976).

Considering the small number of villagers who join the weaver's group, all participants are involved in the board of weaver's organization. The involvement of all members motivates them to actively participate both in the routine meetings and informal workshops done in Mama Hilda's house. The formal workshops organized by external institutions like the IS-L program is

merely an initiation to organize other more intensive trainings done by the community itself. It is expected that the community can learn how to organize workshops that facilitate know-how transfer between facilitators and participants. The delivering responsibility of each participant in the workshop on woven clothes making reflects Rawland's concept of empowerment that derives from the term of *power to* and *power with*. This is a process of raising awareness of self interests and the power of each participant in decision making.



Figure 4. The Workshop on Traditional Woven Clothes Making in the Village House  
Source: IFSTS-L, 2018

Economically, the capability to make woven clothes will reduce household expenses and increase income indeed. In line with the ideas of Hamidon Ali (Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations, 2010) that the empowerment of rural women is called upon by considering the importance of women in playing active roles in reducing poverty and hunger, the empowerment of women weavers is significant to be done in Sumba Tengah Regency caused by their key role in providing woven clothes for their family.

The implementation of the IS-L Program in Sumba Tengah Regency has some good impacts for both students and lecturers. According to the term of service-learning as an approach of teaching and learning that integrates community service with academic study (the National Commission on Service-Learning; National Youth Leadership Council; Celio *et al*), the IS-L program in Sumba Tengah Regency resulted reflections as a recommendation for developing the IS-L method. These reflections were collected from the IS-L participants and analyzed to formulate a new strategy of the IS-L method that can be used as a reference for the next IS-L program. Some reflections from the IS-L program in Sumba Tengah Regency consist of among others:

- a. Cultural exchange should be well prepared by introducing the culture of the local community and the partner institution.
- b. Communication skill is important because the students will work together with foreign students and the local community who have different cultural background.
- c. The capability to work efficient and effective is required because of the limitedness of time and facilities at the site of the IS-L program.
- d. Adaptation to the new environment, the local people and other participants from the partner institution.

## 5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

The empowerment of women weavers in Sumba Tengah Regency is a method to raise the awareness of the existence of women and the resources around them. The women must be

encouraged to get access to resources that can improve their living quality standard. Sumbanese women have the same opportunity with men as a decision maker for their family and living environment.

The sustainability of the tradition of woven clothes making in Anajiaka Village cannot be maintained when the villagers are not interested in weaving tradition. The enthusiasm motivates the involvement of women weavers in the forming of weaver's organization facilitated by students through the IS-L Program. Thus, the women weavers are involved in all stages of development, from the initiation to the implementation phase. One of the strategies used for keeping the sustainability of weaving skills of the weaver's organization is done through the collaboration in the marketing of woven clothes products. The workshops conducted through the IS-L Program are an initial step to form the weaver's organization. The further work must be done by the community itself. The encouragement to the local weaver expert who is willing to mentor other weavers constitutes a participatory model of woven clothes development. The method ensures the sustainability of the weaver's organization.

The know-how sharing between facilitators and participants through the workshops becomes a good learning tool for both participants and facilitators (the IS-L participants). The language gap between the facilitators and the participants obstructs the know-how sharing, so that the presence of a community figure as translator is required.

Adaptation plays a key role in the implementation of the IS-L program in Sumba Tengah Regency. The IS-L participants must understand and open to the cultural differences among the IS-L participants and the local community. All processes of the IS-L consisting of Prepare, Explore, Serve, and Reflect are analyzed and arranged to be a learning module implementing service-learning method that may be applied to other cases.

**Keywords:** empowerment, international service-learning, Sumba, women weaver, woven clothes.

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## **Biographical sketch of each presenter**

Please send the biographical sketch of the presenters together with the proposal using the following format:

### **Presenter 1:**

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- iii. Short biography

She started working in Duta Wacana Christian University as lecturer in 1996. She accomplished her graduate degree at Department of Architecture, Gadjah Mada University in 2000. In 2005 – 2010 she studied doctorate program at the Faculty of Architecture, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany. After returning to her home country, she works as lecturer at the Department of Architecture and conducts some community services in different parts of Indonesia.

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