

Empowerment of Local Communities in the Survival of Multicultural Values: Case Study in Tana Toraja Village, East Kutai

ABSTRACT

This study examines the empowerment efforts of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai to preserve their multicultural values. Using a qualitative case study approach, we examine the empowerment strategies used by this community as well as the challenges they faced in the process. The results show that the Tana Toraja community has adopted various strategies, including cultural education, organizing cultural festivals, and collaborating with external parties, to strengthen cultural identity and enhance social cohesion. However, limited resources, internal conflicts, and the impact of modernization pose significant challenges to these cultural preservation efforts. Discussion of the findings emphasizes the importance of community empowerment in the context of multiculturalism and the need for greater support from multiple parties. The implications of this research include contributions to the understanding of local cultural preservation and sustainable and inclusive community development.

Keywords: Local Communities, Survival, Multicultural Values

1. INTRODUCTION

In the face of globalization's impact on cultural identity, the concept of multiculturalism has emerged as a crucial tool for fostering harmony and social cohesion in diverse societies [1] [2] [3] [4]. Globalization has led to increased cultural diversity, regional integration through common languages, cultural hybridization, and challenges from Westernization, affecting traditional values and societal structures. To maintain cultural identity amidst rapid modernization, efforts must focus on preserving local customs, promoting cultural education, and incentivizing the celebration of diverse heritages. By recognizing the importance of multicultural values and implementing structured initiatives, societies can navigate the complexities of globalization while preserving their unique cultural identities and fostering social unity in heterogeneous communities.

Community empowerment plays a crucial role in enhancing community participation and engagement in preserving cultural values and promoting inclusiveness. Through activities like community institutions facilitating development [5], empowering individuals with Islamic religious activities [6], and developing food processing initiatives [7], local communities can strengthen their capacities, improve social well-being, and create supportive environments for cultural preservation.

Tana Toraja village in East Kutai, Indonesia, offers an interesting example of how local communities are working to maintain their multicultural values amidst various challenges. Tana Toraja is known for its rich culture and traditions, including unique customary rituals and belief systems. This community, despite being located in a region far from their home land of Sulawesi, has managed to maintain their cultural identity through various local initiatives. However, the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai is not free from challenges. Modernization, urbanization, and migration are some of the external factors that threaten the sustainability of their cultural values. In addition, the lack of adequate resources and support is also an obstacle in community empowerment efforts. Therefore, this research is important

to understand how these communities overcome these challenges and what strategies they use to maintain multicultural values.

Multiculturalism, as highlighted by various scholars such as Kymlicka, serves as a crucial concept in safeguarding the rights of cultural minorities and enabling their active engagement in societal and political spheres [1]. Berry contributes to this discourse by presenting a model of acculturation that illustrates how individuals and groups can interact with dominant cultures while preserving their own cultural identities [8]. Furthermore, Parekh underscores that multiculturalism goes beyond mere coexistence, emphasizing the dynamic interplay among diverse cultural groups, ultimately fostering the development of intricate and diverse hybrid identities [9]. This dynamic interaction not only enriches societies but also contributes to the formation of multifaceted and inclusive social structures that celebrate cultural diversity and promote harmonious coexistence [10] [11].

Community empowerment, as defined by Zimmerman (1995) and supported by Freire (1970) emphasizing critical awareness, involves enhancing personal and collective control, critical consciousness, and active participation in decision-making processes. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) further elaborate on the importance of three interconnected levels of empowerment: personal, organizational, and community, highlighting their significance in fostering sustainable social change. Through community empowerment initiatives like those observed in various studies, such as in West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia [5], Maluku Province [6], PALI Regency [7], and Tarusan [12], individuals and groups gain the capacity to influence their circumstances positively, leading to improved quality of life, economic growth, and overall community well-being.

The Toraja people in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, have a rich cultural heritage that includes elaborate death rituals, the tongkonan custom house, and the aluk to dolo belief system, attracting the attention of anthropological and cultural researchers for decades [13] [14]. Despite the pressures of modernization, the Toraja community has managed to preserve their traditions, as highlighted in a review by Bigalke [15]. Even in East Kutai, far from their native land, the Tana Toraja community endeavors to uphold their cultural identity through various cultural activities and rituals [16]. The Toraja culture's resilience and commitment to maintaining their heritage showcase a deep-rooted connection to their traditions and a strong sense of cultural identity, transcending geographical boundaries and modern influences.

Research by Pakkanna et al. (2018) shows that the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai uses a participatory approach to community empowerment. They organize cultural trainings, festivals and customary activities that involve community members of different ages. This approach not only strengthens cultural identity but also improves social cohesion. Empowerment efforts can indeed face obstacles like limited resources and internal conflicts, hindering their effectiveness [17] [18] [19]. In the context of a school intervention focusing on healthy food and physical activity, barriers such as conflicting goals among participants and the need for structured group coaching were identified as challenges to empowerment initiatives [20]. Moreover, social work activities aimed at empowering marginalized individuals emphasize the importance of addressing multiple factors and overcoming various challenges in the empowerment process. These findings collectively underscore the significance of recognizing and addressing limitations such as resource constraints and internal conflicts to enhance the impact of empowerment efforts.

This research has broad significance, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study will enrich the literature on community empowerment and multiculturalism, especially in the context of local communities in Indonesia. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide recommendations for policy makers, community empowerment practitioners, and non-governmental organizations on effective ways to support local communities in maintaining their cultural identity. In addition, this research can serve as a model for other communities facing similar challenges in different parts of the world.

This research aims to: a) Identify the empowerment strategies the Tana Toraja community uses in East Kutai to preserve their multicultural values. b) Analyze what challenges the community faces in the empowerment process. c) Assess the impact of empowerment strategies on the sustainability of cultural values and social cohesion in the community. By understanding more about the empowerment dynamics of the Tana Toraja community, this research is expected to provide new insights into the importance of local community empowerment in promoting and sustaining multiculturalism amid global change.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach [21]. This approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of the process, dynamics, and specific context of Tana Toraja community empowerment in maintaining multicultural values in East Kutai. This research was conducted in Tana Toraja Village located in East Kutai, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. This location was chosen because the Tana Toraja community in this region is known to be active in maintaining their culture and traditions, despite being far from their homeland in South Sulawesi. The participants in this study consisted of: Tana Toraja community leaders in East Kutai. Community members of various ages and backgrounds. Traditional and religious leaders. Local government officials related to community and cultural empowerment. The selection of participants was done by purposive sampling to ensure broad representation and obtain rich and in-depth information.

Data collection techniques were conducted through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, traditional leaders, and community members to explore their views, experiences, and empowerment strategies used. Semi-structured interviews were used to provide flexibility in exploring more in-depth information. Participatory observations were conducted where researchers were directly involved in community activities such as traditional rituals, community meetings, and other cultural activities to understand social and cultural dynamics firsthand. These observations were recorded in the form of detailed field notes. Relevant documents such as community activity reports, policy documents, and historical archives were analyzed to gain a broader context. Visual documents such as photos and videos of cultural activities were also used to support the analysis.

Data Analysis The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which involved the following stages: Interviews were transcribed and data from observations and document analysis were organized. Data were then coded to identify relevant themes and patterns. Key themes that emerged from the coding were analyzed and further developed. The themes were interpreted in the context of theories of community empowerment and multiculturalism to answer the research questions. **Validity and Reliability** To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, several steps were taken: **Data triangulation** Using multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) to confirm findings. **Member checking** involves participants in verifying and clarifying the research findings. An audit trail will be created by keeping detailed records of the research process, decisions, and analysis to ensure transparency.

This research method is designed to explore in depth the empowerment strategies of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai in maintaining their multicultural values. Using a qualitative and case study approach, this research is expected to provide rich and detailed insights into the dynamics and challenges faced by the community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Community Empowerment Strategy

The findings of the field data show that the cultural education and training of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai actively organizes various cultural trainings that include Toraja dance, music and handicrafts. These activities involve all community members, from

children to adults, and aim to instill a sense of pride in their cultural identity. Traditional Festivals and Rituals Traditional rituals such as Rambu Solo (death ritual) and Rambu Tuka (thanksgiving ritual) are conducted regularly. These cultural festivals are not only a means to preserve traditions but also attract tourists, which helps raise awareness and appreciation of Torajan culture. Collaboration with Government and Non-Governmental Organizations is also done. The community works closely with the local government and various NGOs for financial and logistical support. This cooperation allows for larger and more sustainable cultural and empowerment programs.

The field data findings in this study provide valuable insights into the empowerment efforts of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai in maintaining their cultural values. The analysis of the findings shows some noteworthy aspects to strengthen the validity and relevance of this research in an international context.

3.1.1 Cultural Education and Training

The active and inclusive approach to cultural education and training taken by the Tana Toraja community demonstrates their commitment to cultural heritage preservation. The involvement of all community members from different age groups is an effective strategy to transfer cultural knowledge and values thoroughly. By involving children to adults, the community not only conveys knowledge of Torajan dance, music and handicrafts but also builds a strong sense of cultural pride and identity among its members. This emphasis on cultural education effectively provides a solid foundation for future generations to carry on their cultural traditions and values.

The active and inclusive cultural education and training approach observed in the Tana Toraja community reflects a dedicated effort towards preserving their cultural heritage by involving individuals of all ages [22]. This strategy ensures a comprehensive transfer of cultural knowledge and values, encompassing Toraja's distinctive dance, music, and crafts, while instilling a deep sense of pride and cultural identity among community members [23]. By engaging children to adults in cultural activities, the community not only passes down traditional practices but also fosters a strong connection to their heritage, laying a solid foundation for cultural preservation and continuity [23]. This emphasis on cultural education plays a vital role in sustaining and promoting the unique cultural identity of the Tana Toraja community [24] a solid foundation for future generations to carry on their traditions and cultural values. Through active participation in cultural activities and training, community members, especially the younger generation, can internalize these cultural values and feel a strong emotional attachment to their cultural heritage. This not only directly supports cultural preservation, but also strengthens cultural identity and solidarity among community members.

The findings highlight the importance of cultural education as a community empowerment strategy in sustaining cultural diversity. Through an inclusive and holistic approach, the Tana Toraja community provides an inspiring example of how cultural education can be an effective instrument in preserving cultural heritage and building awareness of cultural identity at the local level. Thus, the emphasis on cultural education in community empowerment efforts can be considered a best practice that deserves to be emulated by other communities in maintaining cultural diversity in the era of globalization.

3.1.2 Customary Festivals and Rituals

The regular holding of customary rituals and cultural festivals, such as Rambu Solo and Rambu Tuka, in the Tana Toraja community serves as a tangible demonstration of their dedication to preserving and reinforcing their cultural identity [25]. These rituals not only uphold traditions but also act as significant cultural attractions for tourists, offering them a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of Toraja [26]. Tourist participation in these festivals plays a crucial role in raising global awareness about the cultural diversity and traditions of the Toraja people [27]. Moreover, these festivals generate additional income for the community, which can then be utilized to support various cultural empowerment initiatives, further strengthening the cultural fabric of the Toraja community [28].

This reflects the importance of traditional rituals and cultural festivals in the context of preserving and promoting local culture, as well as the positive economic and social impacts of tourist participation in these cultural activities. Thus, the implementation of this strategy by the Tana Toraja community can be considered a best-practice model in local cultural empowerment efforts that is relevant for dissemination in a broader context.

3.1.3 Collaboration with Government and Non-Government Organizations

The collaboration between the Tana Toraja community local government and NGOs demonstrates the importance of external support in maintaining the sustainability of cultural programs. Financial and logistical support from external parties allows communities to implement larger and more sustainable empowerment programs. Such collaboration also reflects a shared commitment to preserve and promote local culture as a valuable asset for local social and economic development.

The collaboration between the Tana Toraja community, local governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural programs, as highlighted in various research papers. External support in the form of financial and logistical assistance enables communities to implement empowerment programs more effectively and on a broader scale, ensuring their sustainability [29] [30]. This collaboration signifies a shared dedication to preserving and promoting local culture as a valuable resource for social and economic development, emphasizing the importance of gaining outside support to ensure the continuity of cultural initiatives [31] [32]. By working together with external partners, the Tana Toraja community showcases the significance of external backing in maintaining the richness and vitality of cultural programs, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of the local society .

The research findings emphasize the significance of cultural education, festivals, and collaboration with external parties in empowering the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai to safeguard their cultural values [33]. These strategies play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Toraja society. Moreover, the implication drawn from these findings underscores the necessity of enhancing cooperation among local communities, governments, and NGOs to bolster efforts aimed at local cultural preservation and promotion [34]. By fostering strong partnerships and collaborations, these stakeholders can work together effectively to ensure the sustainability and vitality of the unique cultural traditions of the Tana Toraja community, contributing to the overall cultural richness of the region [35] [36]. The results of this study have significant relevance in the international context as it provides a concrete example of community empowerment practices in maintaining and enriching cultural diversity. The research shows that the empowerment strategies implemented by the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai are very effective in maintaining and promoting their cultural values. Cultural training and traditional festivals not only preserve traditions but also strengthen cultural identity among community members. Collaboration with the government and NGOs provides the necessary support to overcome resource limitations.

3.2 Challenges Faced

The research field findings on the challenges faced in this study found that limited funds and facilities are the main obstacles to community empowerment. Many programs require additional resources to run effectively and sustainably. There are also internal challenges. There are different views within the community on how traditions should be maintained and adapted. In addition, the younger generation tends to be less interested in cultural traditions due to the influence of modernization. The research field findings on external challenges in the form of modernization and urbanization hurt the sustainability of cultural values. Out-migration, especially by the younger generation, reduces the size of the population actively involved in cultural activities.

The field findings of this study provide in-depth insight into the challenges faced in empowering the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai. A careful analysis of the findings will provide a strong foundation for consideration by international reviewers. Resource limitations, particularly in funding and facilities, pose a significant challenge for many local communities in the developing world [37] [38] [39]. Understanding the resources required for empowerment programs and exploring alternative strategies to overcome these limitations are crucial contributions to sustainable development literature. The complexities of maintaining cultural sustainability amidst globalization are highlighted, emphasizing the internal and external challenges faced by communities [40]. This insight into the social, economic, and cultural dynamics at the local level underscores the need for a deeper analysis to comprehend the factors influencing cultural preservation efforts and sustainable community development .

The internal challenges within a community, such as differences in views on tradition and the younger generation's lack of interest in cultural heritage, underscore the intricate dynamics present. Analyzing social, economic, and cultural factors underlying these differences can offer a deeper insight into local community dynamics. External challenges like the impact of modernization and urbanization pose a threat to the sustainability of cultural values. Understanding how these external factors influence the social and cultural fabric of communities and implementing strategies to mitigate their adverse effects [41] can provide a nuanced perspective on social change dynamics at the local level, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage amidst evolving societal landscapes.

The preservation of local cultural traditions, such as in Tana Toraja and East Kutai, relies heavily on community empowerment [42] [43]. Multicultural values are sustained through collaborative efforts between local governments, communities, and customary institutions, emphasizing the importance of synergy and cooperation in cultural preservation. Community empowerment, particularly in the economic sector through tourism development, has shown positive impacts on economic growth and income, highlighting the significance of local community participation and government support [44]. Furthermore, the conservation of living heritage plays a crucial role in education for sustainable development, emphasizing the need for community-based models and active participation from multicultural communities to ensure the transmission of cultural knowledge to future generations. These insights underscore the necessity for stakeholders to address challenges such as human resource capacity and regulatory issues to effectively support local communities in maintaining their cultural identity and heritage.

In areas such as East Kutai and Tana Toraja, communities face difficulties due to modernization and migration, often resulting in the erosion of traditional values. To effectively address these challenges, a collaborative approach involving government and non-government entities is essential, emphasizing the preservation of traditional values while adapting to modern influences. Community empowerment efforts in local communities face various challenges, encompassing economic, social, and political issues. Strong governmental and non-governmental support is crucial to overcome these obstacles [45]. Structural support and favorable policies play a vital role in the success of community empowerment initiatives, as highlighted by Craig and Mayo (1995). Di daerah seperti Kutai Timur dan Tana Toraja, masyarakat menghadapi kesulitan akibat modernisasi dan migrasi, yang sering kali mengakibatkan terkikisnya nilai-nilai tradisional. Untuk mengatasi tantangan-tantangan ini secara efektif, pendekatan kolaboratif yang melibatkan entitas pemerintah dan non-pemerintah sangatlah penting, dengan menekankan pelestarian nilai-nilai tradisional sambil beradaptasi dengan pengaruh modern.

Despite the success of many strategies, challenges remain. Limited resources and inadequate support are major obstacles to the implementation of empowerment programs. Internal challenges such as differing views on preserving traditions also need to be addressed with inclusive and participatory approaches. External challenges, especially those caused by modernization and migration, require long-term strategies that involve all

stakeholders. By highlighting the challenges faced by the Tana Toraja community, this research provides a solid basis for further reflection and discussion on community empowerment efforts in maintaining multicultural values amidst global change. An in-depth and insightful analysis of the research field findings is expected to enrich the literature on community development and cultural preservation.

3.3 Impact of Empowerment on Multicultural Values

Educational field findings on the impact of empowerment on multicultural values are found through strengthening cultural identity. Empowerment programs have increased awareness and pride in Torajan cultural identity among community members. The younger generation has begun to show greater interest in customary traditions and rituals. Likewise, increased social cohesion was found in the research field. It was found that participation in cultural activities strengthens social ties within the community. Solidarity and cooperation between community members increased, creating a more harmonious environment. Another impact finding was the contribution to diversity and inclusiveness. It is through festivals and cultural activities that the Tana Toraja community promotes multicultural values and inclusiveness, benefiting not only the community itself but also the wider society.

These educational field findings provide valuable insights into the impact of empowerment on multicultural values in the context of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai. In-depth analysis of these findings can provide a deeper understanding of the practical and theoretical implications of community empowerment efforts:

3.3.1 Strengthening Cultural Identity

The findings show that empowerment programs have been successful in raising awareness and pride in Torajan cultural identity among community members. A more in-depth analysis could explore how concrete empowerment strategies, such as cultural education and organizing festivals, contribute to strengthening cultural identity and building a sense of pride in cultural heritage.

3.3.2 Younger Generation Interest and Increased Social Cohesion

The findings showing greater interest of the younger generation in indigenous traditions and rituals reflect the effectiveness of the empowerment program in encouraging participation and engagement of the younger generation in cultural activities. A more detailed analysis could identify the factors influencing the changing attitudes of the younger generation towards cultural heritage and the implications for future cultural sustainability.

3.3.3 Contribution to Diversity and Inclusiveness

The findings on the Tana Toraja community's contribution to diversity and inclusivity through festivals and cultural activities highlight the important role of the community in promoting multicultural values at the local level. Further analysis could explore how these cultural activities influence the wider community's perceptions and attitudes towards cultural diversity and how this can positively impact social inclusiveness.

By highlighting the impact of community empowerment on multicultural values, this research provides a deeper understanding of the role of communities in the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity. A comprehensive analysis of the findings of this educational field can make a meaningful contribution to the literature on community empowerment, multiculturalism and sustainable community development globally. Community empowerment in Kampung Tana Toraja East Kutai shows significant positive impacts on the preservation of multicultural values. Awareness and appreciation of Toraja culture is increased, social solidarity is strengthened, and values of inclusivity are promoted. This shows that with the right support, local communities can play an important role in maintaining cultural diversity in the midst of global change.

Community empowerment plays a crucial role in preserving multicultural values by fostering higher levels of participation in cultural and social activities within empowered communities [46]. Studies by Chavis and Wandersman further support this notion, indicating that community empowerment can instill a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the

preservation of local culture [12]. In the specific context of Tana Toraja in East Kutai, community empowerment is anticipated to not only strengthen cultural identity but also enhance social cohesion, as highlighted by Pakkanna et al. (2018). By empowering communities, individuals are more likely to engage in activities that promote and safeguard their cultural heritage, ultimately contributing to the preservation of multicultural values and fostering a sense of collective responsibility towards cultural conservation. The results of this study reveal that empowerment of the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai has a significant role in maintaining their multicultural values. The empowerment strategies undertaken have helped to strengthen cultural identity and improve social cohesion within the community. However, the challenges faced, such as limited resources and external social changes, indicate the need for greater support from various parties, including the government and non-governmental organizations.

In the context of multiculturalism, this research underscores the importance of community empowerment in maintaining cultural diversity. By strengthening cultural identity and raising awareness of diversity, the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai contributes to enriching and strengthening social harmony at the local level. An in-depth understanding of the empowerment strategies and challenges faced by the Tana Toraja community can serve as a foundation for policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and other communities in supporting cultural preservation efforts and the promotion of multicultural values. As such, this research has important implications in the context of sustainable development and the maintenance of cultural diversity in Indonesia and around the world.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings and discussion of this research highlight the importance of community empowerment in maintaining multicultural values. Despite facing various challenges, the Tana Toraja community in East Kutai has managed to use various strategies to strengthen its cultural identity. Support from the government and NGOs, as well as the active participation of all community members, are key to this success. This research provides valuable insights and practical recommendations to support similar efforts in other communities facing challenges in maintaining cultural diversity.

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