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### Published

2024

### Book Title

Routledge Handbook of Arts and Global Development

### Version

Accepted Manuscript (AM)

### DOI

[10.4324/9781003289838-9](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003289838-9)

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Lamont, J., Remi, U., Setiawati, R., Jawamara, A.K., & Grant, C. (in press, 2024). Integrating the arts of Indigenous religion adherents into global development initiatives: A case study from Indonesia. In *Routledge Handbook on Arts and Global Development* (eds. Vicki-Ann Ware, Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta, Tim Prentki, Wasim Al-Kurdi and Patrick Kabanda). Oxon, UK: Routledge.

# Integrating the Arts of Indigenous Religion Adherents into Global Development for Education: A Case Study from Indonesia

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## Abstract

Drawing on the growing body of evidence demonstrating the key role the arts play in health and well-being, advancing social equalities, and connecting communities, this chapter considers how the arts are contributing to education and knowledge transmission for the adherents of the *Marapu* Indigenous religion of East Sumba, Indonesia. The local NGO-led project *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets (2019-2021)* empowered Marapu adherents to revitalise their traditional performing arts and oral traditions. The success of this project led into a larger program, *Lii Marapu*, which aims to increase access (especially of young people and women) to social services and inclusive education by fostering political participation. This

chapter explores the implications of this case study for arts-based approaches to the education and knowledge transmission sector of global development. It considers how programs such as these could more deeply integrate the arts within education-based global development initiatives, especially those seeking to improve the life circumstances of minoritised groups, including adherents of Indigenous religions.

## Introduction: Indigenous religions in Indonesia

In 1945, Indonesia became an independent state founded under the national motto 'Unity in Diversity' (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), with 'Five moral principles' (*Pancasila*), the first of which required 'belief in the one supreme God.' Twenty years on, during a period of acute political instability, the government passed an 'Anti-Subversion' law (Anti-Subversion Law 1965) that effectively silenced unorthodox or minority views, including religious ones. Violating the 1948 *UN Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1948), the law framed as 'subversive' any belief system that fell outside of five state-sanctioned 'world religions': Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It thereby oppressed and excluded from a legal framework all Indigenous religions of Indonesia—that is, those historically practised by Indigenous groups throughout Indonesia prior to the arrival of those state-sanctioned religions (Marshall 2018:87). In the early 1970s, over 600 Indigenous religions were practised in Indonesia (Sudarto 2017:11).

A few years later still, in 1973, the Indonesian government passed and began implementing another discriminatory policy (TAP MPR 4/1978) that declared Indigenous religions were not 'religions' at all, but 'culture,' and that all Indonesian citizens must register with the government as adherents of one of the five state-sanctioned religions. Because this policy did not recognise as legal the marriages of Indigenous religions adherents, it made it impossible for these people to secure accurate family registers or birth certificates for their children (Kemendagri 2021:5). Indigenous religion adherents were denied employment as civil servants, soldiers or police officers; they were denied the right to establish places of worship, and even the right to be buried in public cemeteries (Sudarto 2017:34).

Children of Indigenous religion adherents faced difficulties accessing education services (US State Department 2017). Those entering the public school system were forced to enrol as adherents of state-sanctioned religions and to attend compulsory classes in that faith, regardless of their own or their parents' true religious affiliation (Parker 2014:489). Partly as a result of these policies and the attendant social stigma against Indigenous religions, the number of officially-registered Indigenous religions in Indonesia fell from at least 644 in 1972 to 186 in 2016 (Sudarto 2017:11). While this statistic is likely to be influenced by reporting bias, these discriminatory policies have almost certainly resulted in a loss of religious diversity in real terms. Since religion expresses and embodies the culture of a people (Croucher et al. 2017:3), the loss of religious diversity implies a loss of cultural diversity too: entire Indigenous cultures, languages, artistic practices, and belief systems are inextricably bound up with

religion and religious practice. The impact of these policies is far wider, then, than the sustainability of religions or religious practices alone.

After decades of discriminatory policy, in 2016, a landmark constitutional court decision (Putusan MK No 97/PUU-XIV/2016 [2016]) finally legally recognised all Indigenous religions of Indonesia, and began to put into place less discriminatory administrative, educational, and legal policies for their adherents. In broad terms, this was a step forward. However, rather than recognising Indigenous religions as true 'religions' (*agama*), the decision positioned them in a separate catch-all category of 'belief in God Almighty' (*Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*), doing little to assuage social discrimination against Indigenous religion adherents. Moreover, the government's implementation of the new policies at the provincial, regional and village levels has been far from optimal, and the legacy of discrimination caused by past regulations is still visible in government institutions, including the civil registration office and formal education system (Sudarto, 2017:12). As Indigenous religions only officially number 0.05% of the Indonesian population (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2018), they have far less political representation than historically state sanctioned religions, and adherents of majority religions, academic communities, and mainstream media continue to engage in discriminatory actions toward Indigenous religion adherents (Sudarto, 2017:12-13).

In 2017, a well-intentioned national school curriculum, called 'Education in the Belief in God Almighty' was developed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology for adherents of 'beliefs'. However, it attempts to cover all 'beliefs' in Indonesia, meaning that child adherents of Indigenous religions still do not learn about their own religion in any depth in the formal education system. Very few government-certified and government-trained tutors are available to implement the curriculum (and those that exist are provided minimal training and very low remuneration from the Ministry of Education—285.000 IDR or around \$19 USD a month), and the social stigma against such adherents affects hiring and retention of school staff. Since the study of religion is compulsory throughout formal schooling in the public education system, the vast majority of children of Indigenous religion adherents in Indonesia are still forced to attend compulsory religious education classes in a faith that is not their own, despite the new national curriculum (Dominggus E *et al.* 2022).

In this chapter, we present *Lii Marapu* (2021-2023), a collaborative community- and NGO-led development project that involves and serves the adherents of Marapu, one of the Indigenous religions of Indonesia. Focusing on East Sumba, one of Sumba's four administrative districts, *Lii Marapu* aims to increase the accessibility of Marapu adherents (especially youth and women) to social services, inclusive education, and political participation. To achieve these

goals, the project draws on the artistic outcomes generated by an earlier project, *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets* (2019-2020), which aimed to empower Marapu adherents to document and revitalise their traditional performing arts and oral traditions. (A contested term, we use 'traditional' to refer to music, performing arts, and other religio-cultural expressions that have been historically passed down intergenerationally among Marapu adherents. In using the term, we acknowledge that Marapu traditions are dynamic and responsive to the cultural, religious, political, social, and other circumstances of their bearers.)

In this chapter, we frame *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets* as the first phase of *Lii Marapu*, since it has closely informed its social, educational, and political development goals. We begin the chapter by providing a background to the Marapu religion and its adherents in Sumba, and some context around the arts, education, and knowledge transmission in the Marapu context. Next, we present the global development initiative *Lii Marapu*: its design, approach, and those involved, including our own positionings in relation to the project. Although *Lii Marapu* is ongoing at the time of writing (July 2023), we offer some preliminary findings, and consider possible implications for arts-based approaches to education and knowledge transmission more generally. We close the chapter by considering how *Lii Marapu* may assist educators and government and public-sector institutions to more deeply integrate the arts into global development initiatives, especially those initiatives that seek to improve the life circumstances of minoritised groups, particularly religious groups, in Indonesia and elsewhere.

## Marapu religion, arts and culture

Sumba, an island in the East Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia, lies approximately 400 kilometres east of Bali, and covers an area twice the size of Bali (11,007 km<sup>2</sup>). Sumba is inhabited sparsely (in Indonesian terms) by a population of around 780,000 people (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS] 2022). Barring migrants, many of whom come from neighbouring Savu and Java, the Sumbanese people make up the great majority of this population and are considered Indigenous to the island. They speak eight closely related Austronesian languages, which historically were orally transmitted: Kodi, Wejewa, Laura, Lamboya, Wanukaka, Anakalang, Mamboru and Kampera (Eberhard, Simons and Fenning 2023). People from all eight language groups agree that their ancestors first arrived and settled at Tanjung Sasar and the estuaries along the island's eastern coast, spreading west across Sumba's landmass over time, and developing their distinct but related linguistic, religious, and cultural practices (Pura Woha 2013:25). The latter include visual art practices (including architecture, megalithic carved gravestones, textiles, beadwork, wood carving, and

goldsmithing), literary practices (including oral traditions, historical tales and poetry), and performing arts practices (including vocal, instrumental music and dance).

Up until the end of the 19th century, all Sumbanese people practised Marapu, the Indigenous ancestral religion of the Sumbanese people. Christian proselytisation of Marapu adherents began in earnest in the first half of the twentieth century, and continues today (Vel 2008:32). This proselytisation, combined with the implementation of discriminatory government policies described earlier, has caused many Marapu adherents in Sumba to convert to Christianity, or to falsely identify themselves as Christians in order to access government services and avoid the social stigma of being Marapu in a dominantly Christian society. According to government data the number of people identifying as Marapu adherents in East Sumba continues to decline rapidly: in 2013, Marapu adherents numbered 14.2% of the Sumbanese population; by 2020 this figure had more than halved, dropping to 6.8% (BPS 2014; BPS 2021b; Kemendagri 2021). This decline in recorded population, coupled with the structural discrimination, adversely affected Marapu adherents' ability to participate in the political arena (which is almost entirely dominated by Christians at the regional and provincial levels of government, and by Muslims at the national level). Even with this drastic decline, Marapu remains by far the largest Indigenous religion in Indonesia: its adherents comprise around 32% of documented Indigenous religion adherents across Indonesia (BPS 2021c; BPS 2021a; Kemendagri 2021).

Marapu adherents believe in a creator god who they are unable to communicate with directly (Forth 1981:83). This communicative role is rather the responsibility of the deified founding ancestor or ancestors (*Marapu*) of each Sumbanese clan. Thus, the term Marapu refers to the religion, the adherents of the religion, and the deified founding ancestor or ancestors of a Sumbanese clan bloodline. Sumbanese clans can range in size from a few hundred members to thousands. In 2000, Tunggul estimated that around 230 clans existed in the district of East Sumba alone (a figure unlikely to have changed significantly, as the number of clans remains relatively stable over time). Clan ancestors, though deceased, are considered protectors of their clan and are often called upon—via ritual offerings, liturgical recitations, and song—to assist in this role (Purwadi 2016:13). The guiding principle of the Marapu religion is for humans to strive to maintain balance and harmony within three core domains of relationships, and their intersections and interactions: their vertical relationship with the creator-deity and to the spiritual world, their horizontal relationships with other humans, and their symbiotic relationship to the environment and natural world.

Marapu religious rituals are a foundation of the religion, occurring through a yearly calendar synchronised to biological phenomena, such as the arrival of sea worms to the coast, the harvest of food staples, and the arrival of the rainy and dry season (Purwadi 2016:34). Rituals may also occur outside of this cycle, such as for funerals, marriages or other unforeseen events. Rituals can be held at the home of an immediate family unit, at the designated clan main house, or at various sacred places unique to each clan. Although rituals are officiated by Marapu priests (*ama bokulu hamayangu/mahamayangu/mauratungu* or *ratu*) or ritual speakers (*wunangu*), others present, including women and children, usually participate in some way. If the activities undertaken are deemed successful, it is understood that the benefits will extend to the entire clan or clans that are represented during the ritual, whether or not they are present.

Marapu rituals incorporate visual, performative and literary arts (the three categories of arts identified by Ware and Dunphy 2020). Their visual art components include weaving, carving, beadwork and metalwork; their performing arts aspects include instrumental and vocal music, dance, liturgical recitation of ritual speech, and the performative elements of ritual; and their literary arts components include oral traditions of songs, folklore, parallel speech poetry (*lawiti*), and proverbs that are integrated into the ritual practice. East Sumbanese researcher Nggodu Tunggul (2000:167) describes a range of crucial functions of the arts for Marapu adherents in the context of Marapu ritual, including: to regulate moral and ethical life (for example via marriage ritual songs that advise on moral and ethical matters); to support communal social activities (for example via harvest manual labour songs, rice threshing dances, or gong music performed at group mourning gatherings); to express a sense of aesthetics and beauty, and as entertainment (for example through dance and folk music); to realise community and individual identity, pride, satisfaction and self-esteem (for example via folk music and folk tales); to support the existence and express the unique characteristics of Marapu adherents in the midst of other cultural/religious influence; and to improve economic well being by increasing the income of families and the wider community (for example, by providing commercial opportunities via domestic trade and tourism, as when woven textiles used in ritual are sold for profit). Marapu ritual, however, is more than the sum of these arts, just as the Marapu religion is more than ritual. Although the arts that occur in the context of ritual are typically exclusively performed within that context, secular Marapu art forms exist. Outside of rituals conducted by priests or ritual speakers, individuals can (and do) participate in private religious activity too.

Thus, for Marapu adherents, the arts are inseparable and in some ways indistinguishable from Marapu religious practice, Marapu identity, and Marapu culture (N Tunggul, interview with



author J Lamont, May 2020). Whereas in the global West, the arts are often understood as a subcategory of culture, Marapu adherents do not generally conceive of the arts in this way. When in this chapter we explore how the arts are advancing development goals in the Marapu context, we are inevitably simultaneously exploring how religious practice itself is contributing to advancing those goals.

## The *Lii Marapu* project

Economist Amartya Sen conceptualised *development* as processes of 'removing unfreedoms'. That is, development activities are those that aim to reduce social or political exclusion, poverty, and/or other limitations to human freedoms (Sen 1999:3). Development advances are often correlated with higher levels of political and social stability, among other benefits (Deneulin and Shahani 2009:2). In recent years, arts-related development efforts have grown in number and profile, across geographical and social contexts. By 'stimulat[ing] the new thinking and insight that is critical in development contexts' (Ware and Dunphy, 2020:14), arts-based international development programs can effect social transformation: re-humanising the "other," improving educational outcomes, advancing health and wellbeing, increasing social equality, building the capacity and resilience of communities, and advancing human rights. Clammer and Giri (2017) even claim that the arts and culture are the only way that development work has any chance of success.

Taking Sen's conceptualisation of development as starting-point, we explore how the arts are advancing political, social, and educational freedoms for adherents of the Marapu religion in East Sumba, in the context of the ongoing development project *Lii Marapu*. *Lii Marapu* (Ancestors' Way) aims to increase the social, education, and political inclusion of adherents of the Marapu religion in East Sumba district. Drawing centrally on Marapu arts, the project focuses particularly on children aged 15-18 years, youth aged 18-30 years, and women, since these groups face particular challenges in accessing social and educational services (*Lii Marapu* 2023a). In presenting the project, we hope to contribute to understandings of how the arts, culture, education, and development intersect with Indigenous religion, the latter having featured minimally in scholarly studies relating to arts and global development.

Many scholars argue that development work is fundamentally relational (Maguire and Holt 2022), and this is the case for *Lii Marapu*. Recognising the necessity of consultation and collaboration for a successful and ethical project, *Lii Marapu* has engaged and consulted with the Marapu community, government, civil society, and other key stakeholders through all project stages, from conception to implementation and evaluation. Key structures involved in

the project are: (1) the Marapu Governing Body of Sumba, which represents all Marapu adherents in Sumba at all levels of government (from the village, sub-district, district, and provincial to the national); (2) the national Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (hereafter “the Ministry of Education”); (3) East Sumba district-level government departments, including the Departments of Education, Empowerment of the Public and Villages, Tourism and Culture, Region Development Planning and Population, and Civil Registration; (4) public schools and village-level government bodies in the participating villages; and (5) other local and regional civil-society and community-based organisations.

A *Lii Marapu* “task force” was also established to consult with the project team, comprising Marapu members of the Marapu Governing Body, and key non-Marapu government and civil society representatives. Representatives of the Marapu Governing Body (100% Marapu) and Marapu task force (50% Marapu) attend and/or facilitate all program activities. The project implementing team comprises Sumbanese and non-Sumbanese employees of the two implementing NGOs, Marungga Foundation and Sumba Integrated Development. The first phase of the project included a Marapu community representative and facilitator; for the second phase, the Marapu Governing Body elected a Christian adherent as their representative on the project team.

We authors acknowledge too that our diverse backgrounds, identities, and positionalities affect how we interpret the project in this chapter. We are an international team with varied involvement in *Lii Marapu*, and varied relationships to the Marapu religion and its adherents. Joseph Lamont, Sumba-based consultant for *Lii Marapu*, is an Australian music and film producer working since 2016 with local Sumbanese NGOs on cultural sustainability and advocacy initiatives. Catherine Grant, international consultant on *Lii Marapu*, is an Australian academic with research interests in the intersection of music, social justice, cultural sustainability, and arts education. Umbu Remi Deta is a Sumbanese Marapu adherent, Information Systems graduate and representative of the Marapu Governing Body of Sumba. Rika Setiawati, *Lii Marapu* project designer and consultant, is a community development specialist from West Java. Antonius Jawamara is a Sumbanese law graduate, advocacy specialist and *Lii Marapu* Project Manager. Our diverse positionalities bring diverse perspectives to this topic. We have invited a handful of people involved with the project (Marapu tutors, Marapu students and Marapu Governing Body officials) to share their preliminary perspectives on the project outcomes; their reflections are represented here too.

In the following sections, we outline the two phases of *Lii Marapu*, the second of which is ongoing at the time of writing (July 2023). Noting, as Ware and Dunphy have, that scholarly

reportage on arts-based development work can tend toward “uncritical and unsubstantiated claims around outcomes made by protagonists”, which in turn “potentially reduce the quality of the evidence-base” surrounding this work (2020:2), we are careful not to make pre-emptive assertions about project outcomes. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to share this work even at this stage of its implementation. In this, we take courage from McGuire and Holt, who in their recent edited volume *Arts and Culture in Global Development Practice* encourage their contributing practitioner-scholars to “plac[e] as much value on sharing their methodology and approach [in site-specific examples] as on demonstrating evidence of their impact”. A focus on underpinning values and practice, they reason, “opens opportunities for others to look to the work for inspiration and perhaps solidarity in their own arts-based development” (2022:4). It is in this spirit that we offer this overview of *Lii Marapu* at this stage of the project.

### Phase 1: Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets

The first phase of *Lii Marapu* (2019-2021) was led by NGO Sumba Integrated Development (SID) (see Figure 1). Titled *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets*, this phase aimed to support East Sumbanese Marapu communities to document, archive, revitalise, disseminate and celebrate their intangible cultural assets, including music, songs, ritual practices and oral traditions (Grant *et al.* 2021:4). Although *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets* was self-contained and generated cultural assets and educational outcomes that stand in their own right, these assets and outcomes also formed a necessary resource base for what was to later become the second and larger phase of the project *Lii Marapu*.



Figure 1. Ata Ratu, a well known Marapu folk singer performing at an event facilitated during Phase One of the Lii Marapu project. This activity documented traditional musics and surveyed Marapu intangible cultural assets of Mbatakapidu and its surrounding villages. Photo: Joseph Lamont, Mbatakapidu Village, East Sumba. October, 2019.

For *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets*, a baseline survey among participating communities (based on the “Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework” of author Grant 2017) gathered information on the situation of thirteen genres of traditional music and five types of Marapu ritual. Based on the survey findings, and working with facilitators from the participating Marapu communities, the project team then planned and facilitated a series of nine workshops and 27 performance events in Marapu communities across East Sumba. The performances represented collaborations between Marapu cultural leaders, musicians (including women, typically underrepresented in traditional music practices in Sumba), priests, ritual speakers, youth, and other community members. Their aim was to stimulate intergenerational knowledge-sharing and knowledge-transmission, as well as enable documentation of this knowledge. The project’s workshop activities were varied. They included Marapu musicians teaching traditional folk songs to local primary school children; senior Marapu instrument-makers distributing instruments and teaching their craft to local youth; Sumbanese archivists repairing and digitising their cassette archives of Marapu music and ritual, as well as compiling, printing, and digitising a set of 27 books on Marapu culture written by Sumbanese researchers (13 of them previously unpublished); and transcribing and translating, from the Kamberan language into Indonesian and English, a Marapu song book from the project recordings.

Through these workshops and performances, and observing ethical and religious protocols, the project team filmed and audio-recorded four (unrestricted) Marapu rituals as well as 140 traditional Marapu songs performed by 70 Marapu singers, around 30 of them women. To support the project’s cultural sustainability goals, and in line with the wishes of the Marapu participants to amplify and celebrate Marapu culture, the project materials have been widely shared, both within and beyond Sumba. As of July 2023, the project videos have received over half a million views on its YouTube channel.<sup>1</sup> Two hundred digital copies of the project recordings and other materials have been distributed on flash disks and data cards to Marapu leaders, schools, the village, district, and provincial governments, East Sumbanese cultural organisations, civil society groups, and the performers themselves. In effect, these project materials form a digital and physical archive of Marapu cultural assets.

Upon the completion of this phase, funding body Voice Indonesia invited SID to work in consortium with the NGO Marungga Foundation to consider how this audiovisual and textual archive of Marapu cultural assets might help improve political participation for Marapu adherents, and thereby their social and educational prospects. The two NGOs began to develop the framework for this next project phase, which would become known as *Lii Marapu*.

Their first step was a “rapid assessment” survey across four villages in East Sumba in February 2021, which gauged Marapu adherents' access to health, education, and economic opportunities, as well as the participation of women and youth in village government. From this survey, four development goals emerged, which would become the objectives of *Lii Marapu*. Three of these related directly to increasing the capacity of Marapu adherents to participate in political life (including through policy advocacy, and through growing the political advocacy capacity of the Marapu Governing Body at village and district levels). The remaining goal was to create and implement a curriculum and associated resources about the Marapu religion (including its social and cultural aspects), for use in formal and non-formal education. This goal best illustrates how (Marapu) arts can contribute to development goals through education, and we focus on it in the outline of *Lii Marapu* that follows.

### *Phase 2: Improving Educational and Social Prospects and Political Participation*

Drawing on the cultural archive and other outcomes of Phase 1, the second phase (ongoing at the time of writing) of *Lii Marapu* aims to develop, implement, and evaluate a Marapu-specific religious curriculum for school-aged children in Sumba (see Figure 2). The project focuses on two educational settings: four public high schools (Years 10 to 12) and five non-formal “tradition schools” (*sekolah adat*), based in five different sub-districts of East Sumba with high populations of Marapu adherents (namely, Kahaungu Eti, Umalulu, Rindi, Kanatang, Kota Waingapu). The decision to focus on high schools rather than lower educational levels was primarily due to age-group restrictions arising from the funding body’s child protection policy. The project team and partners are exploring ways to overcome this administrative hurdle in the next phase of the project, allowing its curriculum development and implementation to expand to primary and middle school too.



Figure 2. The Marapu Governing Body, local government representatives and youth of Tamburi village, and members of the Lii Marapu project team distributing infrastructure for the local non formal “tradition schools”. Photo: Joseph Lamont, Tamburi Village, East Sumba. March, 2023.

For the public high school curriculum, the Ministry of Education required that it follow the thematic structure of the current national ‘beliefs’ curriculum, namely: 1) concept of godliness; 2) history; 3) good character and behaviour; and 4) obligations and restrictions. However, on consulting with the Marapu Governing Body, the Ministry of Education agreed that the three key domains of Marapu art practice—performance art, visual art, and literary arts—would be added to the Marapu-specific curriculum too, since these are integral to understandings and practice of the Marapu religion. The Marapu people involved in the project considered it important that not only the content but also the delivery of the new Marapu curriculum reflect Marapu values. Accordingly, the new curriculum integrates non-formal methodologies of Marapu knowledge transmission (which are used as a matter of course in the non-formal local “tradition schools”), including community-based conversations and learning activities.

Following a review of Marapu-specific resources and literature, the project team consulted widely with Marapu stakeholders about the content of, and resources that should accompany, the Marapu religion curriculum in both formal and non-formal school settings. Eight in-depth semi-structured interviews and four semi-structured focus group discussions involving a total of 52 participants were conducted during this stage of the project. Participants included Marapu priests, village-level Marapu authorities, members of Marapu institutions (the Task Force and Governing Bodies), and Marapu community members in the participating villages.

Following their feedback, the project team began to design the curriculum, and to create and compile resources to support its delivery. To this end, it video-documented further Marapu rituals, performance art, literary art, visual art, and interviews with Marapu priests and practitioners of the Marapu religion. Organised into YouTube playlists (Lii Marapu 2023b) that linked to the stages of the Marapu-specific curriculum, and supplemented by further learning resources, this documentation was also added to the Marapu archive created during *Revitalising Marapu Cultural Assets*. To date, the Marapu cultural assets archive comprises over 3100 images of Marapu material culture and visual arts collected from museums and online sources, over 260 audio recordings and 130 videos relating to Marapu ritual and culture, over 320 texts (including books and articles, including some previously unpublished) relating to the Marapu religion and culture.

Consistent with the Marapu historical and ongoing practice of religious tolerance and inclusivity, local “tradition schools” offer non-formal education for school-aged children of all religious denominations. These schools aim to address the lack of religious inclusiveness in the formal public school system, and provide children of any belief system with a village arts-based alternative to formal schooling. They are especially valuable for those child Marapu adherents who drop out of the formal school system: school attrition rates are generally high in Sumba, especially among economically or socially disadvantaged children, or those who do not find themselves adequately represented in the formal school curriculum. During *Lii Marapu*, the project team supported the village-level Marapu Governing Bodies in the five participating villages (one village per sub-district) to develop a suitable Marapu curriculum for their tradition school. In addition to teaching children about (and fostering their participation in) Marapu ritual, the Marapu Governing Bodies decided that the curriculum of these tradition schools—like that of the public high school Marapu curriculum—should focus on the arts-based aspects of Marapu religious activities: weaving, dance, traditional music, and *lawiti luluk* (metaphor/traditional language). In addition to supporting the local development and publication of a handbook of guidelines about teaching the new curriculum in (and managing) their traditional school, *Lii Marapu* commissioned for each school a complete set of Sumbanese traditional music instruments, weaving tools, textiles, accessories for dance, and copies of the Marapu Cultural Archive. This infrastructure supports the planned learning activities in the new curriculum.

In these ways, *Lii Marapu* generated resources to assist the delivery of a Marapu-inclusive arts-based education curriculum: three books—one for each grade of formal schooling from Years 10 to 12—and the handbook of guidelines for non-formal traditional schools. Once these resources had undergone several rounds of review (with feedback sought from Marapu

priests, the Marapu Governing Body, Sumbanese researchers, the Ministry of Education, and the Marapu Task Force), the Ministry of Education and Marapu partners trained prospective Marapu tutors in how to implement them. The project team and Marapu Governing Body insisted to the Ministry that the new Marapu curriculum be taught by Marapu adherents, selected by the Marapu Governing Body—a change in practice from an earlier government effort to introduce Marapu religion into schools, where Christian tutors were trained to teach it. The Ministry agreed. Eighteen Marapu tutors were trained and certified to teach the curriculum in the public school system, and the Ministry enacted policy to financially support their teaching activities.

In early 2023, these trained Marapu tutors began to implement the curriculum in both the formal high school system and the non-formal tradition schools across East Sumba. At the time of writing, as a result of the project, over 200 children of the Marapu religion are receiving arts-based religious education in accordance with their beliefs, in the public school system alone. A further approximately 175 children are receiving arts-based religious education in the local tradition schools. Two of the participating public schools are providing income incentives for their Marapu tutors (in addition to those provided by the Ministry of Education), demonstrating their ideological and practical support of the Marapu curriculum and signalling to other schools the perceived value of inclusive religions education. Monitoring and evaluation of both formal and non-formal education programs is ongoing at the time of writing.

## Reflections

Earlier this chapter, we defined *development* (after Sen) as referring to activities that seek to remove human “unfreedoms.” *Lii Marapu* removes education unfreedoms for Marapu adherents, leading to more inclusive practices in both formal and non-formal education. Prior to *Lii Marapu*, nearly all child Marapu adherents in Sumba were forced to attend religious classes and learn a religious curriculum that failed to account for their own beliefs. Umbu Tanga Teul, a Marapu student at Rindi Umalulu high school, reflected on the outcomes of *Lii Marapu* in this way:

As a primary and middle school student I could not receive education about the Marapu religion and culture. Luckily from last year [2022] I received guidance and educational materials from a Marapu teacher. Now there are over 70 students at my high school who are taught about the Marapu religion and culture. (Teul 2023)



Rambu Dai Mami, the head of advocacy for the Marapu Governing Body, believes that the project is making advances toward greater inclusivity in education in Sumba:

Because the Marapu Governing Body and the *Lii Marapu* program stakeholders have worked together to advocate and collaborate with the government, Marapu children's rights to inclusive education in the public system are now being accommodated. (interview with author J Lamont, July 2023).

To date (as of July 2023), seven public schools in Sumba provide a Marapu-specific arts-based religious curriculum: the four high schools participating in *Lii Marapu*, and three primary and middle schools that employ tutors trained through *Lii Marapu*. These primary and middle schools have adapted the *Lii Marapu* resources and curriculum to suit these lower educational levels—a result of the project's advocacy to the government regarding the importance of an inclusive religious education at all levels.

Evaluation of the project is still in early stages, and (as Amartya Sen has noted) there are 'complex epistemic, ethical, and political issues involved in identifying the ways in which culture may or may not influence development' (2004: 55). Nevertheless, we authors surmise that the specific processes that are contributing to *Lii Marapu's* development outcomes include: 1) the close consultation with government and other authorities, which builds political awareness and understanding of the Marapu religion and its adherents; 2) the collaboration of Marapu with non-Marapu adherents for the arts-based, curricular, and other aspects of the project, again building cross-religious understanding; 3) the wide public dissemination of outcomes from phase 1 of the project, whereby the Marapu arts give visibility to the aesthetic and cultural aspects of the Marapu religion; and 4) the growth of trust and confidence within the Marapu community that efforts at greater political recognition and participation are achievable. In this, *Lii Marapu* has much in common with the multifaceted ways in which many other arts-based international development programs achieve their goals, including through processes of collaboration and dialogue, creativity, self-expression, and "the creation of safe/intermediary space" (Ware and Dunphy 2020:14).

In contrast with many other arts-based international development programs, however, the arts and cultural practices *Lii Marapu* engages are those of the group whose circumstances are sought to be improved through the program: that is, Marapu adherents. Rambu Kahi Ata Minya, a Marapu adherent and tutor at Rindi Umalulu High School, underscores the importance of this characteristic when she refers to *Lii Marapu* fostering cultural identity and pride:

We, the Marapu community, are very proud there are now Marapu education programs. The parents and families of our Marapu students are also more confident to share about the teachings of their ancestors—they no longer feel like they are a guest in their own country. (interview with author J Lamont, July 2023).

Given “the colonial legacy of development” (Ware and Dunphy 2020:18), including the frequency with which arts-based development interventions draw on colonial (especially Western) cultural legacies rather than the rich cultural resources of the communities in question, this is a point of difference for *Lii Marapu*. In this way, we suggest that the project could inspire further arts-based international development programs that are based on local cultural (and religious) practices.

Over time, it is hoped and expected that the project and project outcomes will further support the educational, social, and political participation of Marapu adherents. Further, tutors trained through the project are soon expected to be employed across all three levels of school education in Sumba, continuing to make formal religious education more inclusive, while also supporting the professional development and livelihoods of Marapu educators. In partnership with the *Lii Marapu* project team, the Ministry of Education is presently conducting a scoping study with a view to rolling out the Marapu curriculum in all districts in Sumba from 2024. The educational and social (including employment) outcomes of this roll-out may catalyse further educational, social, and political outcomes for Marapu adherents, including increased self-esteem, a more positive sense of identity among children, tutors, and Marapu adherents more broadly, and a wider social acceptance of the Marapu religion (and of all Indigenous religions across Indonesia). The potential benefit for present and future generations of Marapu adherents is considerable.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Marapu participants in the *Lii Marapu* project for their contribution to this research, as well as the many other government and non-government project stakeholders who have contributed insights. Thank you too to the volume editors and to anonymous peer reviewers for constructive feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter. *Lii Marapu* is funded by Voice, a consortium comprising international development organisations Hivos, Oxfam Novib and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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## End Note

<sup>1</sup> Lii Marapu Youtube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/@liimarapu/videos>