

## Ritual Communication in Preservation of Local Wisdom of Medicinal Plants Utilization in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang, West Manggarai Regency

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**ABSTRACT:** Deforestation in Indonesia tends to increase from time to time. In 1970s it had reached 300.000 hectares that increased to 600.000 hectares (1981); and one million hectares in 1990. Since 1996, the deforestation rate climbed to an average of two million hectares per year. The destruction of the tropical forest is due to the loss of local communities around the forest that have traditional ecological knowledge such as the utilization of medicinal plants and spring source. In addition, they also have socio-economic dependence on the forest in fulfilling their needs including food and health. The utilization of medicinal plants and spring source is the local wisdom of the people of Waesano Village, Sanonggoang, West Manggarai Regency. Local wisdom is a form of culture that can be defined as the whole system of ideas, action, and results of human's work in social life that is possessed through learning. Humans create culture as an adaptation to the physical and biological environment. This qualitative research that was carried out in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, uses communication ethnographic method to explain the connection between categories in the research. Ethnography of communication seeks to portray human ways of life. Thus, ethnography refers to the social scientific description of humanity and the foundation of its human culture, and a study of life and culture of a society. Traditional wisdom is one of cultural heritages in a society. It generally contains guidelines to preserve and utilize natural resources in sustainable ways. Therefore, local wisdom requires enculturation process or the process of forwarding culture to an individual that begins immediately after birth. A matter of fact, culture is communication and communication is culture. A local wisdom in form of the utilization of medicinal plants consists of identifying the variant of a medicinal plant, how to pick, how to process, and consumption dose. Inheritance or enculturation of a local wisdom in form of medicinal plant utilization is through ritual communication such as between father and child, parents-in-law and children-in-law, and also *mbekoor* herbalist and the patient. Another form of communication which plays a role in the enculturation process takes place in groups of medicinal plant producers and students that receive medicinal plant lesson from teacher who teaches Local Content subject of Environmental Education and Conservation. A ritual called *taing hang empot* that is employed to treat certain chronic disease also takes part in the enculturation. Various patterns of communication are also used in the enculturation of local wisdom in form of spring source utilization. They consist of interpersonal communication between the father and children, group communication during *nempung cama riang puaror nacaripu* and *laat puar* program, and communication in form of *wau wae* and *nareng waerituals*. Having the variety of communication processes, the two local wisdoms are expected to be able to survive in Waesano Village.

**KEYWORDS:** communication, enculturation, local wisdom

### I. INTRODUCTION

Deforestation in Indonesia tends to increase. In 1970s had reached 300.000 hectares that increased to 600.000 hectares (1981), and one million hectares (1990). Between 1996—2000, the deforestation rate increased to an average of two million hectares per year (Achmaliadi 2001, Sunderlin and Resosudarmo 1997). Deforestation rate slightly decreased to 1.5 million hectares per year in 2001—2010 and 1.1 million hectares per year in 2009—2013 (Barri 2018).

Deforestation, however, does not occur in a Sesok Forest that surrounds Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. It covers an area of 4,000 hectares which is a part of Mbeliling Landscape, an area as wide as 15,000 hectares. The people around the forest have dynamic traditional wisdom in their interaction with nature. Local wisdoms can be used to overcome forest destruction, and in long term it can be an effective and inexpensive form of forest preservation (Prasetyo 2011).

Thus, local wisdom plays a major role in protecting and preserving the environment and the sustainability of asset owned by a community so that the community needs can be met for generations without damaging assets. (Theresia 2014). One of the local wisdoms in Waesano Village is the use of medicinal plants to prevent and treat various diseases.

Local wisdom is a view and science of life as well as various life strategies in the form of activities carried out by local people to overcome problems in meeting their needs. (Fajarini 2014; Permana, Nasution, and Gunawijaya 2011, Prasetyo 2011, Sungkharat, DOUNGCHAN, Tongchiou 2010, Lubis 2005). How do the locals pass on the local wisdoms?

People who care for local wisdom can still live in harmony with the natural environment around them. Local wisdom is a form of knowledge, outlook on life, beliefs, comprehension, insights, customs, norms, or ethics of the local community which are considered good to do, traditional, and the result of reciprocity between the community and the environment.

A research on local wisdom generally focuses on description or general description of the local wisdom in a certain area. Meanwhile, the novelty of this research is to explain enculturation or cultural inheritance through ritual communication.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### Time and Location of Research

The research was carried out in December 11<sup>th</sup>—29<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province.

### Theoretical Basis

It is a qualitative research study. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research is a series of material interpretation practices that make the world visible. It transforms the world into a series of interpretation, which include various field notes, interviews, conversations, photos, recordings, and personal notes. This research uses ethnographic communication method to explain the relationship between categories in this research.

According to Kuswano (2011) ethnography of communication not only discusses the relationship between language and communication, or the connection between language and culture, but all three at once. The method is also able to describe and analyze communication behavior in enculturation. Likewise, Endraswara (2015) states ethnography is a study of the life and culture of a society or ethnicity, for example about customs, habit, law, art, religion, and language.

### Informant

This research obtained informants by snowball technique. The aim was to identify interesting cases from the local people who are aware of information-rich cases. (Creswell 2014). The informants of this research were the people of Waesano Village, Sanonggoang, West Manggarai.

### Data Collection Technique

Data collection of this research made use of several techniques, namely observation, in-depth interview with the informants, and document review. In-depth interview is aimed to obtain information as to communication patterns in enculturation related to local wisdom. It was unstructured and open interview. Recording and making notes were also done during the interview process.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Local Wisdom of the Utilization of Medicinal Plants

The local people of Waesano Village, Sanonggoang, West Manggarai Regency, have been utilizing medicinal plants for so long. Two villagers named Servatius Senaman and Frederikus Janu explained that they have been using medicinal plants for generations. They further said that their grandparents and great-grandparents utilized medicinal plants to overcome certain disease or maintain health.

The local people of Waesano Village call medicinal plants *weri musa*. In Manggarai the word *weri* means plants and *musa* means medicine. "All plants are God's creation. We are blessed with mind and sense so we know how to use it. It'll be our mistake if we don't use it," said the Village Head of Waesano, Yosep Subur.

The locals utilize medicinal plants either as preventive measure for certain disease or as curative measure to treat disease or health problem. According to Yosep Subur, the people make use all parts of plant such as the leaf or *saung*, the bark (*loke*), the stem (*tokor*), the rhizome (*ici*), the fruit (*wua*), the flower (*wela*), the spreading part of plant (*wase*), and also the latex (*nunu*). They are familiar with more than a hundred variants of medicinal plants, some of which are endemic plants or only grow in Waesano Village. They use the plants to treat many kinds of diseases such as hot fever, cold, flu, hypertension, paralyzed, and even cancer.

Prior to pick or take the medicinal plants they must recite *wada* or prayer. It is aimed that the medicinal plant gives good benefits for the health of the individual who consumes it. It is expected that the person will regain health or recover from ill. The *wada* or prayer reads, “*Denge lausong haju, ako haulako porong beti gaku dia lehau* (hear me, O leaves, I pick you so you can heal me).

Another local wisdom in relation to medicinal plants is the dose. The people apply *ca pitu* concept. In Manggarai the word *ca* means one, and the word *pitu* means seven. Thus, *ca pitu* means one seven. The concept of one refers to a variant of medicinal plant, meanwhile the concept of seven refers to a dose of seven leaves. So, *ca pitu* means to make use of seven leaves from a single plant of medicinal benefit.

This concept also applies for the use of root, fruit, or flower. Exceptionally for the dose of the bark, their ancestors taught them the concept of *bibil*. One *bibilis* equivalent to the size of an adult’s palm when the four fingers—minus the thumb—are pressed together. Specifically for medicinal bark, it can be used 2–3 times.

### Ritual Communication of Local Wisdom

According to Koentjaraningrat (2015) enculturation or *institutionalization* is a process when an individual learns and adjusts his mind and attitude with the customs, norm systems, and rules that live in the culture. Meanwhile, socialization is the process when an individual learns and internalizes rules and behavioral pattern required by the culture. It is a lengthy process. It includes learning and mastering social and cultural norms, attitudes, values, and belief systems in that culture. (Gea 2011).

In the case of enculturation of medicinal plants in Waesano, the provision of knowledge of medicinal plants is conveyed through ritual communication. The term ritual communication is coined by James W. Carey (1989). Carey states, “In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith.”

Ritual is a traditional communication means or channel serving as message or information carrier, to educate, and to transmit social heritage. It is also a manifestation of people’s gratitude to the Creator. Furthermore, it can reduce conflict by building a sense of togetherness among the community and using familiar symbols. The result of a ritual implementation provides a contribution to accelerate development in the individual and community. (Maifianti 2014).

Carey (1989) assumes all communications and ritual as one in essence. According to this view, communication as a ritual is able to provide an alternative rationale that in addition to communication as a transmission, it can also be a ritual. Communication as a transmission emphasizes and aims at the transmission process to produce the desired impact, understanding, and attitude changes.

In traditional society, the entire cosmos is open to the holy. The world of traditional society is full of hierophany. The term derives from Greek *hieros*, “sacred,” and *phainein*, “to show”. Thus, a hierophany is a manifestation of the sacred. It may be represented in many forms such as Sun, Moon, Earth, mountain, stone, or tree. That is why certain people “worship” large trees that they believe as a manifestation of the Divine. Daeng (2008) states ritual or rite is a means for religious humans to be able to convert from profane to holy time. During the rite humans imitate the holy acts that overcome their human condition. They come out of chronological time and get into the time of holy beginnings.

Ritual is part of the cycle of human life. It is an activity or series of actions arranged by applicable custom or law in the community in connection to various types of events that usually occur in the related community (Koentjaraningrat 1994).

In Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, ritual communication occurs in several ways inside and outside of the scope of family. The parents take their children to the field, garden, or yard around the house. They sometimes invite their children to look for grass as pig feed. Whenever they encounter plants considered to have important medicinal properties, they will stop by to describe the name and health benefits of the plant to their children. This information was given by an informant in Lempe, Evaritus Batara.

*“My parents utilized medicinal plants all the time and constantly reminded me to use them. I also do the same and have my daughter to know medicinal plants from early age. I usually take her playing around the yard and tell her the name and health benefits of medicinal plants that grow there such as mencok, halia, dan rengau. She also often sees me or my wife making concoction from rengau to treat fever. When I had a fever one time, she initiatively took rengau and made me a rengau concoction.”*

Another ritual communication in the enculturation of medicinal plant is when parents take all parts of a plant that grows at the edge of the forest to be replanted at yard or be used for compounding. Looking at the parent, huge curiosity urges the children to ask about the name of the plant and its uses. The parents take the moment to explain the name of the plant and its benefits.

The parents take leaf, stem, or root of a medicinal plant to be consumed by family or relative who is sick. Their children see firsthand the whole process of the medicinal plant compounding. It is the phase of observation and the time when the parents explain the name and medicinal properties of the plant. In another time, the parents will ask the children's assistance to pick certain medicinal plant that grows in the yard or the edge of the forest. This is the phase to measure children's knowledge and comprehension toward medicinal plant. It is to know whether the children can take the right plant, as conveyed by informant Frederikus Janu, father of 11 children:

*"When one of my children was sick, I asked the other one to get a medicinal plant. 'Get some leaves, please!' or 'Dig that ici (rhizome) out, please!' I have for many times explained and get them familiar with the type and properties of medicinal plants."*

Additionally, parents often make herbal compounding in front of their children so they can see and perform the whole process of making concoction starting from selecting, cleaning, slicing, and boiling the medicinal plants until the concoction is ready for consumption. This kind of socialization is part of the process when a human learns and internalizes rules and behavioral patterns as required by the culture. It is a lengthy process that includes learning and mastering social and cultural norms, attitudes, values and belief systems contained in that culture. This process of socialization has begun from the first days of an individual's life (Gea 2011).

In addition, the enculturation of medicinal plants can also be delivered through formal education. Formal education institutions or schools also need to always use values and behaviors of local culture as a guide to addressing and interacting with differences in daily life (Simatupang 2015). There are three elementary schools in Waesano where students can learn the use of medicinal plants from Local Content subject of Environmental Conservation Education.

A teacher at Public Elementary School, Maximus Taman, explains that the school gives the students assignment to bring various types of medicinal plants. The plants are to be planted at school garden as living pharmacy. It is also aimed to get the students familiar with the types and properties of medicinal plants growing around them.

As the school principal, Maximus also monitors his students' health. He once had some of his students suffered from fungal infection of *Tinea versicolor*. So, he ordered them to bring *saung rengau*. The next day, the students who suffered from fungal infection brought the plant. Maximus then told them to squeeze the leaves of the plant and apply them on top of the skin suffered from fungal infection. He asked them to repeat the treatment at home until the infection was gone.

Another means of enculturation is *taing hang empoceremony*. Literary in Manggarai *taing* means giving, *hang* means eating, and *emp* means grandmother. *Taing hang emp* is a ritual of giving the ancestors' spirits food. The ritual that has been around for generations is related to the use of medicinal plants to cure patient.

A great *taing hang empoceremony* is usually held by a Tuagolo in Nunang, Waesano, whenever *nemba bongotor* an outbreak occurs. A smaller scale one is arranged by head of family whenever there is a family member who is sick and does not heal even after being treated. The community believes that the ancestors' spirit will tell them through the dream of a community figure.

In connection with the practice of *taing hang emp* in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, ritual communication serves as an activity of sharing, participating, gathering, making friendship, and having the same beliefs. The people of Waesano Village have the same belief that *taing hang emp* is a means to get out of the problems they are facing in form of prolonged illness or *nemba bongot* (an outbreak).

The process of ritual communication is not centered on information transfer. A *taing hang emp* ritual communication is more focusing on the effort to share culture rather than the transmission of the message from *tuagolo* who reads *wadato* to the community. The ritual for treating diseases is a shared culture that is passed down from generation to generation.

The ritual communication pattern is like a sacred ceremony. The people of Waesano Village hold a medical ritual called *taing hang emp* whenever there is an outbreak. They pray to *emp* the ancestors and *Mori Karaengor* God Almighty. The language used in ritual communication is artificial and symbolic.

In the ritual of *taing hang emp*, *tuagolo* recites *wada* or prayer. "*Denge dia lehau golo lonto, hami ca beo hena le nemba, tegi lami nemba caho'o porong neka tiba le golo lonto, oke one wae laun.*" In Indonesian, the *wada* says, "Listen carefully, there is an outbreak, we hope it floats away along with the water that runs to the sea and come no more."

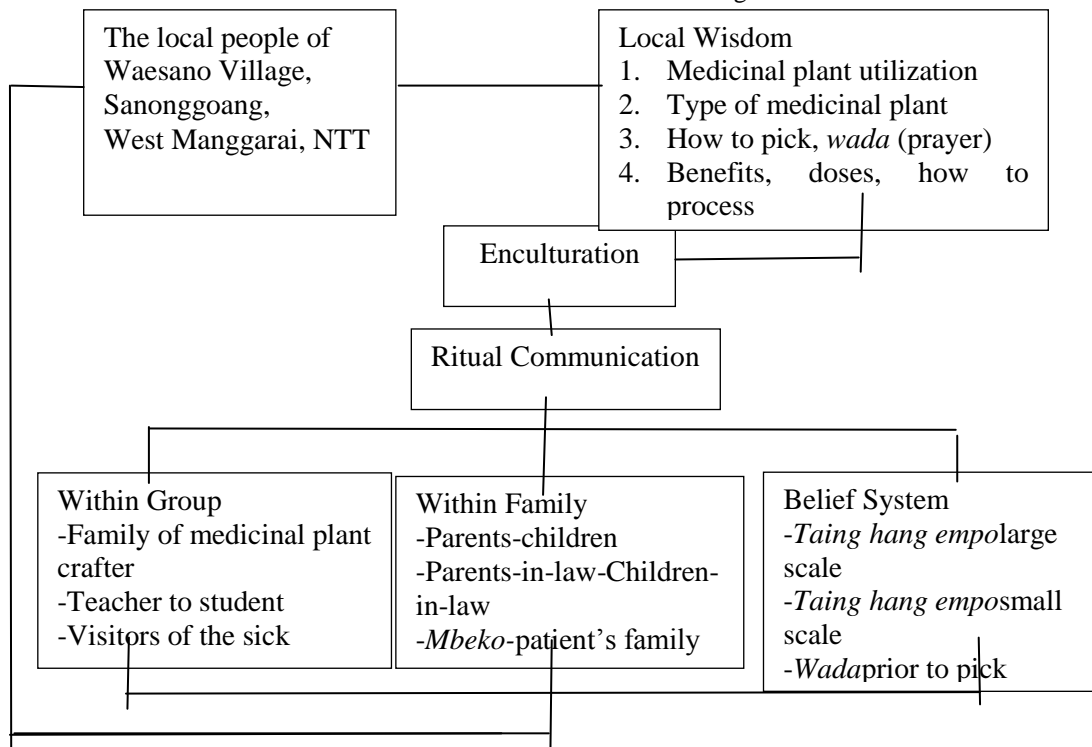
*Tuagolo* serves as communicator in the *taing hang emp* ritual for treating diseases. He leads a prayer to request healing from the *emp* and *Mori Karaengso* that the epidemic or prolonged illness would end soon. The participants in the ritual of *taing hang emp* do not only act as spectator or complement. Instead, they join the prayer. In addition, the selection of communication symbol is one of the prominent features in ritual

communication. The communication symbols used are not chosen by the participants, but have been available for generations based on the cultural traditions concerned.

In a great *taing hang emporitual tuagol* usually slaughter two white and red chickens and also and also *embe ndaudor* brown-haired goat as an offering to the ancestors. The messages conveyed in ritual communication usually have latent ambiguity as reflected in the *wada* or prayer delivered by the *tuagolo*.

Figure 1

The Enculturation of Medicinal Plant Utilization in Waesano Village



#### Description for Figure 1

The people of Waesano Village have a local wisdom of the utilization of medicinal plants. It is passed on to the next generation through ritual communication.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The local wisdom in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, takes the form of medicinal plant utilization covering the types of plants used, determining part of plant, how to process, determining doses, organizing *taing hang empo* to maintain health. The use of medicinal plant is preventive and curative to overcome various diseases or health problems. The inheritance or enculturation of local wisdom is through the process of ritual communication such as communication between parents and children, parents-in-law and children-in-law, members of medicinal plant producers, students and teachers who teach Local Content Subject of Environmental Education and Conservation.

#### V. RECOMMENDATION

1. Ritual communication between family member in Waesano Village, Sanonggoang District, West Manggarai Regency, is highly effective for the acculturation process of local wisdom of medicinal plant and spring source utilization from generation to generation. Therefore, the local community must maintain ritual communication and take their children to involve in the enculturation process of the two local wisdoms.
2. It is necessary to utilize other communication channels such as mass communication including writing a book to convey messages related to local wisdom—the utilization of medicinal plants or spring source—so that the community obtains reliable and valid registered reference.
3. The local government holds a periodical competition to make family medicinal plants on special occasion such as welcoming the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Day or the anniversary of Waesano Village. The government also provides attractive prizes for the participants. It is hoped that the community will enthusiastically welcome the agenda.

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