

## **The role of Mapalus in improving the wealth of farmers in Tomohon sub-district, Tomohon municipality North Sulawesi**

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**Abstract:** *The aims of the study were to find out the role of Mapalus as a form of mutual assistance and mutual help (gotong royong in Indonesian) among the local people of Tomohon as well as to examine the forms of Mapalus existing in Tomohon these days. Data were collected through interviews, surveys, participatory observations, and documentation. Based on the data collected, there were five Mapalus groups existing in the villages in East Tomohon Municipality, North Sulawesi Province. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that Mapalus grows from the awareness of the local people. Mapalus is practiced in many sectors such as farming, economy, grief events, and house construction. Membership is based on neither social status, nor educational background nor religion nor races. Community involvement in Mapalus has two benefits, namely the social and economic benefits. Social benefits are associated with the betterment of the lives of individualism society. Economically, Mapalus involvement could reduce cost to employ people.*

**Keywords:** *local wisdom, Mapalus, cooperation, wealth*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Working together is an activity that people do together and voluntarily. This activity is born from the philosophy that a job can be done more easily and quickly when people cooperate and help each other. Working together brings good impact on the development of the community. Socially, working together will encourage the formation of strong social relationships among the residents. Working together is one of the important social capitals for local development in many developing countries. Such activity is especially important in community mobilization efforts related to the development of public welfare. This is especially crucial for community-based development [1] [2].

Working together is commonly found in traditional communities in developing countries. In Indonesia, working together is a community social activity, which can be found in many regions in the country. There are many forms of working together such as gotong royong, gugur gunung or kerik desa (in Java), guopin (in Bali), alang tulung or meusaraya (in Nangroh Aceh Darusalam, Sumatra) and Mapalus (in Minahasa, North Sulawesi). These forms of working together are the heritage passed down by the older generations, and have been giving so many positive contributions to the development of villages in Indonesia [3]. In this modern era, working together has been paid more attention from the development planners since this system of working together has been found to be very effective in mobilized mass as to achieve the development target in a certain area. Working together is not only beneficial for physical work, but also for non-physical work such as community empowerment, provision of health and education facilities, and so forth.

North Sulawesi is endowed by rich nature and culture which are crucial for regional development programs. Tourism and agriculture sectors grow significantly in north Sulawesi based on the richness of biodiversity and high quality of soil. The majority of local people, called Minahasanese, live in traditional ways by practicing many indigenous knowledge and value, including working together [4]. Locally, working together among local dwellers was called as Mapalus. Mapalus is a system, procedure, method, or technique of mutual assistance and cooperation for the good of all the people involved in it. Mapalus has some principles and rules underlying its existence. Mapalus is one of the economic, social, and cultural assets of the region which has long become part of the people's lives; and this proud tradition must be preserved in line with the preservation of the environment and the natural resources for the welfare of all the people. Mapalus is basically an organization

aiming at achieving welfare and goodness for all the members it has. In North Sulawesi, Mapalus is a form of working together aiming at reducing the workload both physically or economically [5].

The existence of Mapalus is very interesting to investigate, especially under the context of improving local community involvement in development programs. Participation and involvement of the local community is one of the keys for the success of development programs. Mapalus as a form of local wisdom in managing natural resources as well as human resources in order to gain social welfare for the community and nature preservation can be seen as crucial in the development process. Nevertheless, there are studies few studies conducted to examine Mapalus. This present study aimed at finding out the role of Mapalus as a form of mutual assistance and mutual help among the local people of Tomohon as well as to examine the forms of Mapalus existing in Tomohon.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study was conducted in Tomohon, North Sulawesi Province, in which Mapalus is still practiced by the local people as one of the cultural characteristics of the local people. Physically, Tomohon is highland area with intensive agriculture development. The areas also become the significant point of tourism area development target since numerous natural and cultural attraction exist [4]. The study was conducted to five Mapalus groups in the villages in East Tomohon Sub-District. The design of the study was descriptive qualitative. The focus of the study was to understand the condition of the Mapalus groups and the relationship among members, as well as the practice of Mapalus and the challenges it faces in this modern era.

The data of the study was collected through in-depth interviews, survey, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) among the Mapalus members. Informants of this present study consisted of the Mapalus members, the administrators of the Mapalus organizations, the landowners, the government, and the community or Mapalus leaders. In each group, there were ten informants to be involved in the Focus Group Discussion. The group discussion was done based on the availability of informants. The questions in the FGD were mostly related with the role of Mapalus in increasing farmers' income and fulfilling farmers' needs.

Focus Group Discussion was led by the researcher as the moderator in the discussion. The researcher recorded and wrote the important points emerged during the discussion. After the discussion, the researcher collected all the notes and transcribed the audio recording. The data collected was then analyzed using qualitative approach. The data was analyzed in the following steps: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion

## **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Mapalus in the live of the people in North Sulawesi**

In North Sulawesi, Mapalus is the way to empower people to work productively in order to gain social and economy welfare. Socially, Mapalus is believed to be able to raise the live of individuals and communities through the togetherness and cooperation. Economically, Mapalus can help to reduce cost for paying people to do certain work. Mapalus can be classified as spontaneous and organized activities. In spontaneous Mapalus, the people doing it expecting nothing in return. The organized Mapalus is related to the concept that those getting some help must return it in the other time. Returning the help can come in many forms.

At the beginning, Mapalus was done for activities related to farming, such as opening farmland, planting until harvesting. Working together is common in many area in Indonesia [3]. It is commonly found among rural community. In west Papua, a group of people often found working together in farm land to open, prepare and plant crop [6]. In North Sulawesi, wide and fertile farmland is important source for agriculture development. Farmers used to have very wide farmland but with very few workers in the past. Thus, Mapalus came into existence to solve labor constraints communally. As a form of social activity, a leader who must supervise members leads Mapalus [7]. According to informants, in the past there was physical punishment for the members as one way to enforce Mapalus authority. Recently, physical punishment is not implemented. Sanction becomes the important instrument in recent Mapalus practices. Sanction in forms of fine and moral sanction replaces the old system of physical punishment. A wind instrument made of shell or drum is used as the signal to instruct people to start Mapalus activity. In the farmland, a kind of hut is built completed with the instrument named tetengkoren (kentongan, traditional instrument to call people). During harvesting time, there is dancing and singing activity, named as Maengket Dancing, as the symbol of happiness.

In East Tomohon Sub District, there are five Mapalus groups namely Maesa-esaan, Agape, Syalom, Berkat Mapalus and Imanuel. Each group consists of 15-20 people, dominated by male (Table 1).

Table 1. Membership of Mapalus Groups in East Tomohon Sub-District

Group Names	Sex		Number of Members		Age		Occupation		Income	
	Male	Female	<15 people	>15 people	<50 years	>50 years	Farmers	Non Farmers	<2,5 million	>2,5 million
Maesa-esaan	13	3	16		12	4	12	4	2	14
Agape	12	4		16	11	5	9	6	2	14
Syalom	11	4		15	9	6	12	3	3	12
Berkat Mapalus	16			16	12	4	14	2	4	12
Immanuel		14	14		12	2	12	2	2	12

Members in one Mapalus grup usually come from the same sex. Thus, there are male Mapalus grup and female Mapalus grup. From the observation, elderly people dominate female Mapalus groups. Their activity and capability has also decreased. The role of female in Mapalus groups also seems to have decreased. One Mapalus group consists of people from different ages, from 25 until 50 years old. The role of the elderly tends to decrease due to decreasing ability in doing things. If they still need to be the member of the Mapalus group, they will find someone to substitute them and pay this person.

In organized Mapalus groups, the members vote for the leader. The responsibilities and roles of the leader are to lead, guide, and organize the members in doing the Mapalus activities. A leader is chosen spontaneously. Some people help the leader as the Mapalus staff. The staff has to organize the programs and to guide other members in doing the work or activities being done. According to Sendow (2005), democracy is important in Mapalus, particularly in decision making. Democracy become the important characteristics of Mapalus [8].

All the responsibilities are given to the members involved in Mapalus equally. The members are those involved in the activity. In formal Mapalus activities, there are some rules to follow. Sanction will be given for rule breaking.

“If among those who have given helped have something to do, thus it is the turn for those who have been helped to help.”

Mapalus is a harmonious working system, aiming at forming order and control related to working systems, thus it is objected to create stabilization for the social life of the people [9]. With the basic way of life and activity of Minahasa people who are called by fundamental conscience, sincerity, and depth (touching hearts) with full awareness and responsibility as to make the community (teaching mind) to help each other and to create welfare for individuals and groups [7]. Norm and trust in community member is the important social capitals in local development project. It is particularly important in community involvement programs to support development project in rural areas [10] [11].

From the FGD, some information were collected related to the benefits farmers get from Mapalus. The advantages were:

1. Guarantee on the help to cultivate their land. If they help others when they need it, they will also get some help when they need it. Each Mapalus member usually has their own land to cultivate.
2. If they need more help from what they deserve, they can get the extra help without paying.
3. They can use their physical strength to get more income or money. Delay in payment for non-members will result in payment interests.
4. If they can get themselves involved in the Mapalus activities directly, they can have someone to do the job with lower payment than daily workers.
5. Mapalus can help to extend network and territorial. A good Mapalus group can build network and open up more employment opportunities, thus the group can work with other Mapalus groups from other villages or even other sub-districts.

These advantages is crucial among Minahasase in North Sulawesi [12]. Realizing the big advantages of being Mapalus member, it is common for one person to be the member of more than one Mapalus group with different focus of activities. However, the person who are joint with two or more Mapalus should prioritize the main Mapalus group. Mapalus is the organization which is addressed to accommodate society needs. There are no domination in Mapalus systems as a representative of Minahasanese ancestors ways of live to built harmonious society. These positive forms should be preserved to enhance the identity of recent Minahasane.

“We have to interact with each other with the spirit of Mapalus as one of the heritages by our ancestors. The culture has deeply rooted in our lives and must be preserved by all the people in the community.”

### 3.2. Mapalus Forms

From the results of the study, there are four common Mapalus forms, namely farming Mapalus, money Mapalus, grief related and marriage related Mapalus, and community Mapalus. These Mapalus forms reflect the community activities which cannot be done individually.

There are several forms of Mapalus found in the study site:

1. Farming Mapalus: This kind of Mapalus focuses on farming and activities related to farmland cultivation. The number of members is around 10-15 people. There is someone leading the group, and there are also supervisors. The members of the group help each other in cultivating the land. The commodity planted varied, such as carrots, spinach, cabbage, eggplants, potatoes, and other kinds of vegetables. The farmland cultivated is around 1-2 hectares. The work done involves pre-planting activities, planting, weeding, and harvesting. The members of the group go together to the farmland before the work begins. The work can be done in several days in certain hours, or in certain days of the week. Mapalus done in a day can be done by full farmers either as the landowners or as the labors with a profit-sharing system. The work is done in turn for each member of the group. There are rules to follow. Violation will result in sanction. This form of Mapalus is still well preserved due to the economic and social benefits it brings to the members.

“Involvement in Mapalus is seen as an effort to preserve the heritage of the ancestors; and it is morally accepted that if you get a help, you have to return the help someday.”

Another informant states that the involvement of the people in Mapalus is due to the social life of Minahasa people:

“If we are not involved in Mapalus, there will be sanction and fine. Moral sanction is obviously the hardest since it results in shame feeling and excommunication.”

Thus, it is clear that preserving the culture and maintaining social as well as economic benefits have become the main reasons for people to get involved in Mapalus. Culture preservation recently become the crucial aspect in local development issues, particularly to meet sustainable development agendas [13].

2. Money Mapalus refers to the activity of collecting money from the members to be given to a member in turn. The example is arisan and saving and loan activities. The amount of money collected from the members is different. Some people set the limits of the money collected, some others set a maximum limits, while some others leave the amount to be decided entirely by the members based on their capability. There is no interest put on the money. This type of Mapalus is done weekly at a certain day and time agreed, and is done by many groups of people in the community. If someone has once got the money and he or she does not join the activity, he or she will have to pay twice than the amount of money paid by each member. It is important for members to be available in the activity. They can be absent if they have something urgent to do, such as being sick or a family passes away. They have to make it up the other time though. In this Mapalus, all the money collected from non-members will be gathered and kept by the group treasurer. The money collected will be used for social activities, such as helping the children of the poor to pay their school tuition (scholarship), and for supporting the Mapalus activities. From the results of the interviews, there are several motivations for people to join this kind of Mapalus, that are (1) willingness to save money, (2) willingness to gain information related to development, (3) willingness to join counseling, and (4) willingness to listen to Christian spiritual preaches.

“Money Mapalus is interesting since the activities are informal, include the spiritual and religious activities, and punctual. This is different from the programs held by the village government.”

So far, this Mapalus survives because the community needs it. Some informants state that money Mapalus is able to compete with the modern practice of banking since the transaction is easy and simple. Trust among members and the existence of sanction for violation are the other reasons for this Mapalus to survive. Different from the modern systems of savings and loans, which do not take into account the social principles living in the community, this Mapalus system takes so much into consideration the system and the believes living in the society and traditional communities. Among rural areas in developing countries, local bank is important in economic sectors to developed numerous business in rural areas [14].

3. Grief-related and marriage-related Mapalus is a form of Mapalus done by the people spontaneously by giving help in form of money, time, and energy to those whose family members pass away or those whose family members are getting married. The amount of time, energy, and money given is based on the helpers' ability. People in Minahasa do pay attention to those in suffer. The help given is a form of empathy, when it comes to death, and of respect as well.

“Without the help from other people, the grief will be even harder for the family losing their member as they have to do all the things alone.”

The help given and received is recorded by the administrators of the group. Thus, when the time comes from other group members to need the help, the group members who have received help must be available to give help. Violation to this principle will result in sanction [15].

4. Social Mapalus is a kind of Mapalus to facilitate the needs of individual members of the group or the need of the people in the community. The example is the activities to develop the community. The members collect their money, or give other form of contribution, time or energy, to the family need it in building their house. This Mapalus in spontaneous in nature and the members expect nothing in return. The money, time, or energy given is not meant to be returned. As an example, when there is a family building their house, many people will simply come to help. Others, as they see many people are busily working, will spontaneously get

themselves involved in the work. This Mapalus is not done daily, weekly, or monthly or in regular manner, but simply based on the needs of the family building the house [16].

Mapalus is very important to the lives of the people. The economic value it has helps them a lot especially in terms of saving time, energy, and cost so that those things can be saved for other needs, such as sending children to school, paying tuition fee, getting better healthcare, building houses, owning farmland, and fulfilling other family needs [12]. In any forms of Mapalus, there are rules binding the members. Members have to be disciplined and follow all the rules; violation will result in sanction. This represents their tribute to the lives of the community and the needs of the groups. When someone violates the rules, moral sanction will be given. Discipline determines the success of activities done. Mapalus can run well when everybody involved in it follow the rules and be disciplined. Each and every member is bound to rules, responsibilities, and rights. They must also respect each other.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

There were four groups of Mapalus in East Tomohon Sub-District, namely Farming Mapalus, Money Mapalus, Marriage Mapalus, and Social Relationship Mapalus. Mapalus has long become the traditional and precious heritage of the ancestors, thus it needs to be preserved and passed down from one generation to the next. Community involvement in Mapalus has two benefits, namely the social and economic benefits. Social benefits are associated with the betterment of the lives of individualism society. Economically, Mapalus involvement could reduce cost to employ people. Mapalus has many members with the same interests. Mapalus is led by a leader assisted by several other people. Mapalus has its own rules that has to be followed by its members as to make it function properly. The members must follow the rules and violation of the rules will result in sanction.

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