

Building a Cultural-based Village: Case Study of *Oath of Service Ritual* by Village Head of Mangliawan, Malang Regency

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Abstract. To prevent the village fund to be corrupted, the people of Mangliawan Village, Malang Regency assemble a cultural-based corruption prevention mechanism by building a cultural-based village. Ethnography method was employed to collect data and decide as well as conduct in-depth interview with several key resource persons. The separately collected information were verified through focus group discussion and other processes of information maturation. The results of the study document that cultural-based village development face some challenges from the candidate of village head and its apparatus who feel uncomfortable and afraid of the custom consequences from Oath of Service that they declared. For the people, Oath of Service demands the village apparatus to not only responsible for the definite parties such as the government and the people, but also to the indefinite ones such as the ancestral spirits and their late great-grandparents.

Keywords: village fund, village head, oath of service ritual, village development

1 Introduction

Since the reformation era, active village development has grown prosperously. It is caused by the change of orientation in Indonesian development from centralistic development to a decentralized development pattern [1]. The Republic of Indonesia since the reformation era believes in a federalist decentralization system regulated in the Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 22 of 1999¹ and Number 32 of 2004,² and a unitary state with a centralized decentralization system based on the Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2014³.

One of the forms of government decentralization is realized through a village funding program legislated in the Law Number 6 of 2014. Village fund issuance is directed as the nation's commitment to protect and empower villages to become stronger, advanced, independent, and democratic. As a consequence, many of the government policies are legislated for village development. It based on the consideration the many Indonesian people live their lives at villages. In a wider scale, the support for villages is a part of the effort for a more comprehensive social development [2].

The abundance of village fund made many people compete to offer themselves as village heads.

¹ Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Administrations

² Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Administrations

³ Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Administrations

Such phenomena have been followed by many cases of corruption, collusion, and nepotism. As a result, many village heads deal with criminal acts of corruption. News of corruption cases are like daily consumption for the society [3]. According to [4] and [5], one of the reasons causing village fund misappropriation is the lack of society's involvement with the fund management. As a matter of fact, one of the implementations of Law Number 6 of 2014⁴ is the annual issuance of Minister of Villages Regulation in managing the village fund utilization for the following year. All instructions for the use of village funds have been made so rigid⁵, however, cases of misappropriation of village funds are still found.

In the Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2014, villages are also known as traditional villages. This term is intended to emphasize that villages regulated in modern governance still provide some space to tradition as local wisdom capable of being a solution to various social problems. Although physically many new villages were formed, but the people have instilled the character of ancestral cultural heritage. It means that the residents of the village are not just people who have just met and gathered, but they are a collection of people who already have certain cultural and customary heritages.

In the context of governance, the village is seen as a legal community unit that has a certain geographical area with a certain number of residents including certain rights and obligations attached to it [6]. The policy of determining the village model in the governance process so far only refers to the criteria of village typology so there tends to be generalization in the development. This matter needs to be evaluated so village can be built based on its unique potentials and issues.

According to ICW in 2019, there were 271 corruption cases with a total state loss of Rp32.3 billion [7]. In 2020, there was a misappropriation of village funds amounted Rp111 billion [8]. In the first semester of 2021, there was a misappropriation of village funds involving 61 Village Heads and 24 Village Apparatus [9].

These data indicate that the issue of corruption afflicting the village apparatus needs serious attention not only from law enforcement officials, but also from the local community as the closest party to the village head and their apparatus. The involvement of law enforcement officials who are already functioning is still appreciated as an action that has a deterrent effect on perpetrators of corruption with imprisonment.

The death penalty for corruptors needs to be seriously considered because this crime does not only involve unethical actions, but it also harms and hurts others [10]. It is questioned why the law enforcement withhold the implementation of death penalty for corruptors, whereas the Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 31 of 1999 concerning the Eradication of Criminal Act of Corruption, Article 2 paragraph (2)⁶ has been legislated. There seems to be another problem behind the non-implementation of the death penalty for corruptors, namely the indecisiveness of law enforcers. Is it because there has not been a single corruptor who has met the criteria for the death penalty? Or have the legal considerations of law enforcers not touched the nucleus of the law? [11]

Corruption can also be prevented from within as a manifestation of religious and cultural values.

The functioning of values is the influence of the latter on human activity, human behavior, on social life and on the development of culture. Religious values are the most fundamental part of any culture and society and don't change

⁴ Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages

⁵ Regulation of Minister of Villages Number 7 of 2021 concerning the Regulation of Village Fund Utilization

⁶ Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 31 of 1999 concerning the Eradication of Criminal Act of Corruption, Article 2 paragraph (2)

quickly. The change of values is a long process which is determined by social factors and culture of society. Values of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism show different degrees of transformation.[12]

Aware of the importance of religious and cultural values as a filter from within themselves, the people of Mangliawan Village, since 2017 have implemented a local policy that every elected village head who will lead their village apart from being confirmed by the oath of office of the regent, also will take a customary oath. It is known as the village head's oath of service. This shows that corruption can be viewed from various sides including from customs and culture [13]. The goodwill is not only carried out after being elected as village head, but starting from the candidacy process. The phenomena shows that people power can be a collective strength to make a social change [14].

In addition to data on corruption in village funds, there is also a pleasant evaluation of village funds. In Nganjuk Regency, documents that infrastructure development that has not been balanced with community empowerment is documented [15]. In Banten, village funds have had an impact on increasing village status, developing tourist villages, and increasing infrastructure development and community empowerment [16].

Based on the Minister of Villages Regulation Number 13 of 2020, several priorities have been set for the use of village funds to achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which aim to maintain a sustainable improvement in the economic welfare of the community, maintain the sustainability of community social life, maintain environmental quality and inclusive development, and implement governance capable of maintaining life quality improvement from one generation to the next [16]. SDGs can be said to be a continuation of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) which have been declared over [17].

The SDGs for village development [18] contain 18 goals and they are the orientation of development and the use of village funds; 1. Village with No Poverty; 2. Village with Zero Hunger; 3. Village with Good Health and Well-being; 4. Village with Quality Education without Age Barrier; 5. Village Women Involvement and Gender Equality; 6. Village with Clean Water and Sanitation; 7. Village with Affordable, Clean, and Renewable Energy; 8. Village with Equal Decent Work and Economic Growth; 9. Village with Infrastructure and Innovation as Needed; 10. Village with Reduced Inequalities, either within one village or among different villages; 11. Village with Safe and Comfortable Residential Area; 12. Village with Responsible Consumption and Production; 13. Village with Active Climate Change Response; 14. Village with Care For Life Below Water; 15. Village with Care For Life on Land; 16. Village with Peace and Justice; 17. Village with Partnership For Village Development. 18. Village with Dynamic Organization and Adaptive Culture [19].

2 Research Method

This study employed ethnographic qualitative methods through in-depth interviews and observations [20]. The in-depth interview method allowed the researcher explored data from key informants which could be developed in the snowball sampling principle. It means that the next informants were determined by the process with key informants [21].

The informants include government officials and village leaders as the people who know best about the lives of their villagers. Opening interview was done with them to collect initial information. The following informants are the administrators and members of the H3 community (*Hurup, Hurip, Handar Beny*) as the cultural booster and conservationists in this area. The information of Mangliawan Village Head Oath of Service ritual was collected from

them. Other informants are cultural community groups that live and develop in Mangliawan Village. Information or stories of their hopes for their village head could be retrieved from them. The following groups of informants are residents of Mangliawan Village who were randomly selected to collect stories from them about the life of the village head or the candidate of village head. Their stories are needed to see to what extent the elected candidate or village head has integrity in community life. Information could be extracted either individually or collectively through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The next method is observation. This method depends on the observation to collect qualitative data. This method is relied upon to gather information about the dynamics of community life in relation to the relationship with the village head. It aims to provide clarification on community information about the life of the elected village head candidate. The results of this observation can be a tool or method to find new information and clarify existing information. Data processing is done through data classification to determine which data can be used and which data cannot be used. After this process, the report writing begins based on existing and available supporting data.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Culture as Development Capital

Awareness of building culture will never fade in Indonesian villages because it is a development from past villages that are rich with culture. So, it is accurate that the context of village SDGs to put emphasis on the existence of village institutions with dynamic and adaptive culture. On the one hand, it is emphasized that the cultural heritage of the ancestors needs to be preserved. On the other hand, there needs to be adaptive actions to adapt the culture over the times. Without adaptive ability, the people will experience a foreign atmosphere in their own lives that develops from time to time.

As an effort to accommodate this matter, the Directorate General of Culture from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia through the Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning Advancement of Culture has designed several means to advance the regional culture across Indonesia. Advancement of Culture aims to: a. develops noble cultural values of the nation; b. enriches the cultural diversity; c. strengthens the identity of the nation; d. strengthens the unity and integrity of the nation; e. educates the life of the nation; f. enhances the image of the nation; g. realizes a civilized society; h. upgrades the welfare of the society; 1. preserve the nation cultural heritage; and J. influence the direction of world civilization development. The objects of advancement of culture include oral tradition, manuscript, customs, rites, traditional knowledge, arts, languages, folk games, traditional technologies, and traditional sports.⁷

These advancements indicate that culture in Indonesia still become a strong capital to national development. So far, it is suspected that culture exists and lives in society but has not been utilized optimally as one of the important pillars of national development. As a follow-up to this law, each region/city has been encouraged to have a cultural map in their respective regions through the preparation of the Regional Cultural Thoughts (PPKD) document.

The preparation of PPKD in regional/city level automatically will collect or retrieve cultural data from each village. Between one and another traditional village group will complement each other in the process of filling out this PPKD. The type of culture that already exists in one

⁷ Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 5 of 2017 concerning the Advancement of Culture

traditional village will not be recorded again for the next traditional village. This is intended to avoid the accumulation of the same culture in one region. PPKD contains only the types of culture from the ten objects specifically and unrepeatable.

3.2 Cultural Rituals in Village Governance

Almost every village has rituals in carrying out the process of life, including in the process of running the government. In this case, it should be understood that every village government activity always involves the village community. Thus, what belongs to the village community also belongs to the village government. These cultural rituals can be used by the village on various occasions. At that time, the community became the foundation of the village government to carry out these rituals.

There are also various interests and purposes for performing these rituals. For instance, the rituals performed for the people themselves such as rituals for planting season, rituals for harvesting season, rituals, for illness, rituals for wedding celebration, and many others.

At the time this research was conducted, the residents of Mangliawan Village were in the process of ruminating a replacement for their Village Head. The elected Village Head for the 2018-2022 period has left his duties prematurely due to his death. At that time, Mangliawan Village was led by the Acting Village Head (Plt). As Javanese people, most of the people of Mangliawan Village were contemplating about their village. The contemplation was not merely related to the sadness due to the death of the elected Village Head, more importantly it was about the continuity of clean management for the development of Mangliawan Village society.

They were thinking of how to elect a new Village Head who is clean from unscrupulous practices as a Village Head. They were designing how the oath of service as a tradition since 2018 would be carried out before the new Village Head candidates proceed to the Village Head election. In 2018, the oath of service ritual was carried out after the Village Head passed the election process. It means, at that time, there was only one person that performed the oath of service ritual which was the elected village head.

This year, the village residents think that the oath of service should be taken at the beginning of the election process which applies to all candidates. It means that starting this year there will be a change of mechanism in the oath of service ritual. The participants in the oath of service ritual are all candidates for village heads so there will be more than one participant in the Oath of Service. According to Mr. Orin, the pioneer of this idea, the process was particularly difficult.

“In the beginning, it was difficult. All of the candidates refused to perform oath of service in beginning of their candidacy. The refusal is understood because all of the candidates are Mangliawan Village residents who know the process of this ritual from the former late Village Head term. However, the Village Customary Institution continued to struggle through various means so that in the end they (the candidates) agreed to take an oath of service at the beginning of their candidacy. We decided it in the authority of the Village Customary Institution and thankfully the oath of service ritual went well and successful”⁸

Afterwards, Mr. Orin narrated that the effort to actualize the Oath of Service ritual is greatly helped by the philosophical background of this idea.

“We said that the oath of service at the beginning of this candidacy is more noble and dignified. We assure the candidates that their sincerity to serve the

⁸ Results of interview with Mr. Orin as the community leader and pioneer of Oath of Service idea, conducted on 22 July 2022

*community need to be tested and seen from an early stage. One's seriousness in serving the village community needs to be seen and shown from the start. With the struggle to convince all the candidates, finally the ritual was successfully carried out under the command of the Mangliawan Village Customary Institution (LAD)*⁹

3.3 The Rite of Oath of Service Begins the Candidacy Process for the Mangliawan Village Head

After reaching an agreement between the candidates and members of the Village Customary Institution (LAD), various preparations were made to carry out the oath of service ritual. Broadly, the rite is divided into several stages. It started with the Ritual of *Umbul Dungo Memetri Desa*. This ritual serves to send prayers for the safety of prospective village heads and the community. Because this event is included in local wisdom and is metaphysical (a kind of rite) so it is necessary to send prayers and ask permission to the ancestors and the guardians of nature. In addition, offerings are provided called the ritual of averting danger for all communities and village heads who send the prayer to prevent any undesirable desirable things. Those present at this event were the candidates for village heads, village *muspika*, acting official for village head, civil servants, BPD, and community leaders. At this time, candidates for village heads are prohibited from bringing supporters to prevent crowd (restricted meeting), but assistants to the village head are allowed. This ritual is performed with all of Mangliawan Village residents.

*"The procession is divided into two, namely before and after the ritual. The pre-event procession, the night before, the indigenous people (Pak Orin) collect water from three springs. Water is used to wash the face during the rite the next day. When fetching water, indigenous people say prayers in the local language. The two springs are Wendit lanang and Wendit wedok. The next process is that the communities are gathered under the customary authority scheme. The event started at 13.00. The Village Head candidates took the oath by saying, "I, (name), on (date), swear...". The content of the oath can be written by the candidate individually. When they swear, it is witnessed by the universe and the ancestors. So that if in the future they commit a deviant act, then the punishment is not only imprisonment but also punishment by the ancestors and the inhabitants of the universe who listened to their oath of service."*¹⁰

In this context, it can be said that the candidates take an oath and not be sworn in. The candidates themselves that take the oath and write the its contents. Therefore, this phenomenon of Oath of Service becomes matter of pride. If they refuse to take an oath, they will not be forced because the oath contains promises. After the pre-event, the next day each village head candidate will be given a script containing a promise. The script must be read as part of the courage to run for office. When candidates run for office, their intentions are purified to run will be purified by declaring that script.

The message from Oath of Service is that candidates must be genuine and ready to support anyone who's elected as the village head. Oath of Service becomes a control tool to prevent clash. Oath of Service also becomes an endeavor to prevent bribe and deviant political practices such as nepotism or corruption. The declaration of Oath of Service is done consecutively by

⁹ Results of interview with Mr. Orin as the community leader and pioneer of Oath of Service idea, conducted on 22 July 2022

¹⁰ Results of interview with Mr. Ulum as a community leader of Mangliawan Village on 13 August 2022

each of the candidate despite of their candidacy number. The oath is also meant to prepare the candidates to be graceful if later they are not elected as the village head. Declaration of Oath of Service is done in front of the resident representatives which are the village elderlies.

*"After Oath of Service declaration, the event continues to procession of face washing ritual in kenceng (a big wok) which contain water that has been collected the night before. The face washing process is surrounded by white fabric or mori (fabric to cover deceased body). The materials used in the ritual is water, mori fabric, flowers, cok bakal offerings (rice, corn, jenang abang). The water for face washing is given cast and prayers. The majority of the candidates are Muslim, so before taking the water the candidates pray privately. The surrounding community also recite the prayer of repentance (praises). Other than that, the gentong menep song (averting danger) is also played for the good of the procession. The face washing procession is followed by prayer recitation and closed with kembul bejono (hospitality) or a banquet meal. In the banquet, banana leaves will be assembled to show no discrepancy among the society because naturally all humans are equal."*¹¹

In short, the process of Oath of Service for Village Head candidates is the beginning one's goodwill once they are elected by the people to hold the mandate. The intention of a person who is brave enough to run for office needs to be inspected, whether the intention is sincere to work for society or not. The sincerity of being a village head must be seen and tested from the beginning of the candidacy stage.

3.4 Rite of the Oath of Service after Being Elected as Village Head

After the village head election process is complete, the next process is the oath of service for the elected village head. This process is carried out immediately after the official inauguration carried out by the regent. Two days after returning from the inauguration in the regency, the oath of service is pronounced before the village head officially enters the village office. Escorting procession from the house of the new village head to the village office is also done. Pledges are made at the pavilion and after that the community will escort the village head to the village office for further official duties as the head of the Mangliawan Village.

The rite is held at the Mangliawan Village pavilion are divided into the opening and the main events. The opening or pre-event is done the night before. In the night before, the indigenous people will say goodbye or ask permission from visible and invisible creatures so that the next day's event can run smoothly. On D-day or main event, there will be offerings, incense, *udeng* (a Javanese hat), and other things according to Javanese tradition. At the same time, it is intended to build a village with cultural strength. This will only be possible if these steps are designed to make the Mangliawan Village culturally resilient.

The process of escorting the new village head from the house to the pavilion will be carried out by the core committee, while from the pavilion to the village hall it will be carried out by the community. The regent is also invited during the rites and is responsible with pinning the hat to the village head as a symbol that he has just been appointed in the district by bureaucracy and inaugurated by custom in Mangliawan Village.

The concept of traditional inauguration is carried out because the village community is not only the subject of being taken care of by the government but also, they need to be considered as part of the traditional or customary community. There are local wisdom elements that have to

¹¹ Results of interview with Mr. Wibhie as a community leader on 2 September 2022

protected. After performing the Oath of Service ritual, the society is responsible to supervise the performance of the village or run a control role. Thus, it can be understood that the ritual of the Oath of Service itself is a preventive measure so that the elected village head does not carry out deviant activities. This is not only a sensitive budget issue, but also the implementation of various other laws and regulations. By applying village traditions to government affairs, it can be said that custom is one of the pillars of strength that can be used to control government work. When talking about custom, the discussion is not limited to what is visible to the eye, but also the power that is invisible to the eye or the ancestors who have an influence in managing the community. The Oath of Service Ritual has just been implemented in 2018 but the concept has existed for a long time.

“Village Customary Institution (LAD) is one of the strengths that must be empowered to perform a role like this. The Oath of Service by the elected village head has to be followed by all the apparatus. This is intended so that the elected village head together with other village officials have the same work orientation. The Oath of Service is an attempt to build a village from the ground up. By performing the Oath of Service, it is hoped that the work of the village head will not only be supervised by the community, but also by other elements that are not visible. At the time of the candidacy, it was the intention that was sworn in. After taking office, it was the performance that was sworn in. Mangliawan Village is a sacred village. When the governance is run incorrectly, usually people who serve do not reach one term. Humans can be deceived, but invisible creatures cannot. These kinds of things must be lived and realized by the people of Mangliawan Village. People and apparatus who refuse to take an Oath of Service should be suspected. They prevent people from good deeds in work.”¹²

3 Conclusion

The results of this study indicate two important things. First, that the community is looking forward to good practices in managing village governance. It is because many experiences have occurred in many places that the abundant village funds for village development is misappropriately used by irresponsible parties. Even though the perpetrators have been sentenced to prison, it is still necessary that the bad practices of some government officials need to be enforced continuously.

Second, in addition to the methods carried out by the government itself by legislating regulations as a means of government control in order to minimize the misappropriation of village funds, the people of Mangliawan Village choose to make their own means of control through the oath of service to each village head, even from the candidacy stage. This method was on the belief that Mangliawan Village residents still highly value customs. Thus, every Mangliawan Village resident who wants to run for village head, the Oath of Service ritual that he does becomes a means of control from within himself. The basis for their consideration is that in carrying out their duties, they are not only supervised by visible parties, but also by invisible parties, namely their own ancestors. If one breaks their oath to the visible parties, there are many mechanisms for discussion and deliberation but breaking the Oath of Service to ancestors or invisible parties is a violation that can have more fatal consequences for them and their own family.

¹² Result of interview with Mr. Orin as a community leader and pioneer of Oath of Service ritual, conducted on 20 August 2022

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