

Integrating Local Customary Values in Social Welfare Provision: Narratives from Moluccas Island

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Indonesian customary values in shaping localized welfare provision models, using Negeri Morella, Ambon, as a case study. As Indonesia transitions toward a more universal welfare state, the integration of indigenous systems offers insights into sustainable and inclusive policy frameworks. The research investigates how local traditions—rooted in environmental stewardship, communal economic practices, and social security mechanisms—contribute to welfare delivery amidst modernization. By analyzing Negeri Morella’s distinct socio-cultural context, the article highlights how customary values foster social cohesion and community resilience, particularly in multicultural settings. Findings reveal that localized welfare models operate through a “contextual basis”, where traditional governance and collective responsibility complement state-led initiatives. Customary systems emphasize resource-sharing, adaptive livelihood strategies, and kinship-based support, aligning with broader goals of environmental sustainability and equitable development. However, challenges persist in harmonizing these practices with national welfare policies. The study underscores the potential of hybrid approaches that blend indigenous wisdom with formal systems to enhance welfare accessibility and cultural relevance. Ultimately, this research contributes to global discourses on decentralized welfare by demonstrating how local values can inform resilient, context-sensitive provision models. It advocates for policy frameworks that recognize customary institutions as partners in achieving inclusive social protection, particularly in diverse societies like Indonesia.

[Studi ini mengkaji peran nilai-nilai adat di Indonesia dalam membentuk model penyediaan kesejahteraan yang terlokalisasi dengan menjadikan Negeri Morella, Ambon, sebagai studi kasus. Seiring dengan proses transisi Indonesia menuju negara kesejahteraan yang lebih universal, integrasi sistem-sistem lokal berbasis kearifan adat memberikan wawasan penting bagi pengembangan kerangka kebijakan yang berkelanjutan dan inklusif. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tradisi

lokal—yang berakar pada pengelolaan lingkungan, praktik ekonomi komunal, serta mekanisme jaminan sosial berbasis komunitas—berkontribusi terhadap penyelenggaraan kesejahteraan di tengah dinamika modernisasi. Melalui analisis terhadap konteks sosial-budaya Negeri Morella yang khas, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai adat berperan dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial dan ketahanan masyarakat, khususnya dalam lingkungan yang multikultural. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa model kesejahteraan lokal beroperasi melalui suatu “basis kontekstual”, di mana tata kelola adat dan tanggung jawab kolektif melengkapi inisiatif kesejahteraan yang dipimpin oleh negara. Sistem adat menekankan praktik berbagi sumber daya, strategi penghidupan yang adaptif, serta dukungan berbasis kekerabatan yang selaras dengan tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan dan pemerataan kesejahteraan. Namun demikian, tantangan tetap muncul dalam upaya mengharmoniskan praktik-praktik tersebut dengan kebijakan kesejahteraan nasional. Penelitian ini menegaskan potensi pendekatan hibrida yang memadukan kearifan lokal dengan sistem formal guna meningkatkan aksesibilitas dan relevansi kultural dalam penyediaan kesejahteraan. Secara keseluruhan, studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana global mengenai desentralisasi kesejahteraan dengan menunjukkan bagaimana nilai-nilai lokal dapat menjadi landasan bagi model penyediaan kesejahteraan yang tangguh dan kontekstual, serta mendorong kerangka kebijakan yang mengakui institusi adat sebagai mitra strategis dalam mewujudkan perlindungan sosial yang inklusif, khususnya dalam masyarakat yang beragam seperti Indonesia.]

Keywords: Indonesia, Local Customary Values, Moluccas Island, Social Security, Social Welfare Provision.

Introduction

The transformation of Indonesia’s social welfare system towards enhanced inclusivity has sparked academic discourse (Alfitri, 2016; Booth, 2010; Dimiyati et al., 2021), particularly concerning its efficacy in mitigating structural inequalities. Although recent reforms aspire to achieve universal coverage, significant deficiencies remain in the realization of social rights for marginalized groups, notably indigenous populations (Busemeyer et al., 2022; Vlandas & Halikiopoulou, 2022). Current literature predominantly examines the challenges associated with welfare provision, including community resistance, intergroup conflict, and disparities in resource allocation (Dorlach, 2021; Karim, 2023; Nhep, 2024; Sumarto, 2021). while often overlooking systemic solutions that incorporate indigenous values into welfare frameworks. This oversight reveals a critical theoretical and practical gap: the underutilization of indigenous socio-cultural paradigms, which could enhance the sustainability and relevance of welfare programs. Additionally, the influence of robust democratic processes on welfare transitions remains insufficiently investigated, particularly in post-colonial settings such as Indonesia, where historical power relations continue to

shape policy execution (Fadakinte, 2019; Hadiz, 2013). The lack of a cohesive framework that aligns state-driven welfare initiatives with localized customary practices poses a risk of perpetuating exclusion, as top-down strategies frequently conflict with community governance structures. This situation underscores a pressing academic challenge: the need to develop welfare provision models that are both inclusive and contextually relevant, ensuring alignment with Indonesia's multicultural landscape while alleviating potential conflicts. Addressing this challenge necessitates interdisciplinary research that integrates political science and social policy, moving beyond mere critiques of dysfunction to propose viable, culturally sensitive alternatives.

This study examines the influence of customary values on welfare provision models in post-conflict societies, specifically focusing on Negeri Morella, Ambon, Indonesia. The research seeks to fill a significant gap in the social policy literature by investigating the role of indigenous institutions in shaping welfare systems within multicultural contexts. Morella was chosen as the research site due to its distinctive characteristics, including a history of communal conflict that has disrupted social stability (Adam, 2010, 2013) and the emergence of innovative, community-driven approaches to social and natural resource management that have promoted sustainable livelihoods. The study has three primary objectives: First, to analyze the integration of local customary values (Adat) into welfare provision, particularly through mechanisms such as the *Pela Gandong* kinship system. Second, to explore the interactions between these traditional systems and state-led welfare programs in a post-conflict environment. Third, to investigate how rural democracy and local political dynamics (Avonius, 2003; Yang, 2018) influence the adaptation of traditional welfare practices to address contemporary needs. By concentrating on Morella, this research provides empirical evidence of how hybrid welfare models—comprising both customary and state systems—can enhance community resilience and well-being. The findings will contribute to broader theoretical discussions regarding welfare regime configurations in post-colonial states, offering valuable insights for policymakers aiming to develop more inclusive and context-sensitive social protection systems in multicultural societies such as Indonesia.

Ambon has made significant strides in conflict resolution through the utilization of customary mechanisms (Qurtuby, 2013); however, the enduring psychological trauma experienced by affected communities continues to impose a stigma, thereby presenting distinct challenges for the provision of welfare. Contemporary research on Indonesian social welfare (Larasati et al., 2023; Yuda & Kühner, 2023) primarily focuses on external factors such as the global political economy, providing macro-level analyses of welfare systems (McCarthy & Sumarto, 2018; McLaren et al., 2022; Sumarto, 2017). This focus, however, tends to neglect essential internal determinants, particularly the influence of local customary values in the development of sustainable livelihoods (Daskon & Binns,

2010; Thwala et al., 2023). This study advocates for a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of the welfare state by prioritizing indigenous institutional frameworks. The case of Ambon illustrates how customary systems, such as *Pela Gandong* (kinship alliances), have historically played a crucial role in mediating conflict and resource allocation, yet these systems remain underutilized in the design of formal welfare programs. Through an analysis of these internal structures, we identify three pivotal intersections: (1) trauma-informed customary approaches to social protection, (2) community-based resource management as a foundation for welfare infrastructure, and (3) the importance of cultural legitimacy in service delivery. The article proposes a “glocalized” welfare framework that harmonizes universal rights with localized values. This approach not only addresses the post-conflict context of Ambon but also presents a transferable model for multicultural societies that are grappling with the balance between standardized welfare regimes and localized systems of well-being.

Literature Review

Over the last three decades, the topic of the concurrence of local customary values and welfare provision has become a complex and controversial issue. Previous studies have focused on the social service-based principle of customary values, which may contradict the perception of a universal welfare state (Brandsen et al., 2017; Edmiston & Nicholls, 2018; Watts-Cobbe & Fitzpatrick, 2023). This leads to social polarization through discussions on poverty and wealth definitions, which can be viewed as a form of exclusion. This may prompt a shift in paradigms and social welfare principles (Abrahamson, 2017; Ansari et al., 2012; Digby, 2006). Furthermore, such discussions are extensively studied in rearranging social relations in safety nets, accommodating the role of civil organizations and the private sector in contributing to shaping social welfare production (Ansari et al., 2012; Etzioni, 2014; Zautra et al., 2008). As a result, previous investigations collectively emphasize the importance of understanding various viewpoints on welfare provision in different contexts, accommodating and spreading local customary values.

The role of private sectors in welfare provision has evolved to include co-creation as a marketing strategy in scholarly works. This evolution highlights the importance of stakeholder collaboration to enhance development initiatives and actively engage in public services (Busemeyer & Sahm, 2022; Saha & Goyal, 2021). Meanwhile, civil society organizations (CSOs) play an essential role in shaping a framework for welfare distribution (Lundberg, 2020). Cases in several countries such as Greece, France, and Germany (Bagavos & Kourachanis, 2022; Gauteplass & Hopland, 2017; Simonet, 2024) illustrate that social welfare is essential for inclusive governance and involves local participation. These works also mentioned the importance of fulfilling arrangements for health services,

social care, economic empowerment, and focusing on helping individuals with social problems. Relatively, the researchers inform that previous literature has focused on insight into collaborations, participative governance, and coherent policies to boost social development initiatives, ensuring fairness and sustainability.

Theoretically, welfare program distribution should promote social integration to accommodate indigenous people, but it is practical approaches that could potentially create social conflict (Goodin et al., 2000). According to Gough et al. (2004), conflict can be seen as a malfunction in the distribution of social services established by community stratification, leading to unfair and mistargeted programs. This situation leads to resistance movements from local communities, as it influences disharmonious patterns. While existing, previous literature from several countries such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Lebanon, Burkina Faso, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, these studies focus on customary justice systems (CJS) and their impact on decision-makers when formulating welfare provision policies (Harper & Colliou, 2023). This exceeds the argument that local customary values in the welfare provision scheme can actually form a framework for resolving social conflicts.

To support this theoretical analysis, researchers confirm that the integration between the customary values and welfare provision is divided into three essential characteristics: cultural influence on welfare systems, policy integration, and welfare outcomes impacted by social cohesion and trust. For instance, in many Asian and African countries (e.g., Devereux, 2001, p. 14; Lin & Chan, 2015; Low, 2006; Mok & Hudson, 2014), traditional values are often more community-oriented than individual-focused, which can both complement and conflict with state welfare systems. Additionally, effective integration requires appropriate legal and institutional frameworks that recognize and respect local customary values while providing adequate resources and support for formal welfare distribution (Kwon, 2009; Midgley, 2011, p. 36). Furthermore, customary values can promote increased social cohesion and trust within communities, which are essential for the effectiveness of welfare programs (Busemeyer et al., 2022; Lundberg, 2020). As a result, local values are often more trusted and better received by communities.

As stated by Sumarto (2017), customary values could contribute to shaping community-based welfare arrangements in local areas of Indonesia. This model plays a significant role in protecting impoverished people as informal aid for resolving social risks. The welfare provision is often applied to cultural practices, such as *Gotong Royong* in Javanese culture. It can be defined as mutual cooperation for helping people (Simarmata et al., 2020; Suwignyo, 2019). This tradition has become a fundamental principle for Indonesian citizens in shaping informal welfare provisions, such as *Arisan* as multi-purpose insurance, *Posyandu* (Integrated Service Post) as health insurance, *Layatan* as death

insurance, *Sambatan* as income maintenance and housing support, *Lumbung Desa* as food security, and *Ronda* as neighborhood security (Burhani, 2017; Irawanto et al., 2011; Santoso, 2012). All cultures and traditions have solidified social cohesion, according to previous literatures, Indonesian communities have demonstrated their ability to withstand various crises, including economic challenges, political turmoil, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Jaya & Izudin, 2023; Sriharini et al., 2023; Yuda et al., 2021).

As the fourth most populous country in the world, Indonesia is characterized by significant ethnic and religious diversity, which presents an opportunity to enhance welfare provision through its rich customary values. This article explores the potential of indigenous systems—such as communal labor practices and kinship-based safety nets—to reshape traditional welfare state models. By highlighting successful local initiatives, such as Morella's *Pela Gandong* networks, we advocate for the institutionalization of these values as integral components of welfare provision. This approach offers three key benefits: (1) legitimacy of programs rooted in cultural context, (2) cost-effective mobilization of community resources, and (3) increased resilience to global economic shocks. The study suggests a decentralized welfare framework in which customary institutions collaborate with state systems, thereby creating hybrid models that not only address Indonesia's diverse needs but also contribute to global discussions on welfare in multicultural contexts.

Research Methodology

The data used in this research focused on exploring local customary values and their contribution to welfare provision. Indonesia, as a state with diverse traditional values, researchers selected Negeri Morella in Ambon as a case study approach (see Figure 1). This is because the location is still considered a region vulnerable to social conflict in Indonesia (Hartimah et al., 2021; Sudjatmiko, 2008), while Morella can be seen as a village that presents social harmony. It is essential for researchers that welfare provision involves social and economic stability, leading to a deeper explanation of specific cases. To understand such distinctiveness, researchers delve into the combination of customary values and modern social policies to achieve holistic and sustainable development (Graff & Vabø, 2023; Lin, 2005; Simarmata et al., 2020). For these reasons, the interpretivist paradigm is suitable for delineating local customary phenomena in creating a new model of welfare production.

The data collection was obtained through documentation, observation, and in-depth interviews. Initially, researchers collected various documents, such as journals, books, policy briefs, Indonesian statistics, historical records of Ambon published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, and village government arrangements. This was carried out from September 2023 to February 2024, with a focus on understanding a specific subject of our

concern. Researchers believe that such documents are essential for collecting initial data to conduct thematic analysis and gain a broader understanding of the Indonesian welfare provision models. For further explanations on this topic, researchers observed the study location using a non-participant technique. This direct observation aims to familiarize researchers with the attitudes and daily activities of informants. We conducted around eight fieldwork visits in May 2024. The team of researchers recorded all observation data, converting it into field notes and observation notes, and additionally took photographs and mapped locations.

Figure 1
Study Area Map



Source: https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkas:Indonesia_location_map.svg

Furthermore, sample criteria were used to select the key informants for in-depth interviews (see Table 1), including Local Governments (LG), Local People (LP), Traditional Figures (TF), Local Academicians (LA), and Local Fishermen (LF) (Silverman & Patterson, 2022, p. 75). Informant selection was confirmed with all participants through consent procedures. It ensures data confidentiality when sharing information. We also ensured the anonymity of the informants to

prevent conflict of interest, allowing them to provide data from an unbiased perspective. Interviews were conducted over 11 days of fieldwork between 12 and 21 May, 2024. This activity is conducted in various locations such as homes, government offices, fish market distributions (*Pelelangan Ikan*), beaches, and cafés. All interviewees sat down and used a tape recorder to interview approximately 34 informants. Lastly, this interview was transcribed verbatim to assist researchers in processing data analysis. Thematic data analysis was applied to interpret qualitative data collected from informant experiences through interviews and observation notes. The key thematic issues focus on local customary values and their contribution to a series of configurations for welfare provision. Direct quotations are used to shape thematic materials, assisting researchers in summarizing findings and drawing conclusions.

Table 1
Interviewee Characteristics

Characteristics	Total	N	%
Age	20-30	13	38%
	31-40	7	20%
	41-50	9	26%
	51-60	4	12%
	> 61	1	4%
Gender	Male	19	53%
	Female	15	47%
Education	Primary	2	6%
	High school	22	65%
	University	10	29%
Informants' identification	Local Government [LG]	4	12%
	Local People [LP]	13	40%
	Traditional Figure [TF]	4	12%
	Local Academician [LA]	6	18%
	Local Fishermen [LF]	6	18%

Source: Author' elaboration.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the gender distribution of informants, with around 47% being females and 53% males. The majority of 35- and 65-year-olds are around 21 people, while 13 informants are in their 20s and 30s. Furthermore, thematic analysis is used to explore the informants' experiences that are transcribed into verbatim drafts. Researchers delve into the information provided by all informants to identify key themes, focusing on local customary values and their contributions to the production of welfare provisions.

Traditional Governance and Environmental Protection in Morella

There are several characteristics of informal employment. Around 350 people, or 7% of fishermen; 552 people, or 11% of miners; and 2,100 people, or 42% of

peasants, are involved in informal employment. Meanwhile, formal employment constitutes approximately 985, or 20%, of village officials, civil servants, army personnel, and police officers. Unemployment rates are also around 1,000, or 20% of school children and household mothers. The local population, approximately 3012 out of 4997, or 60%, utilize natural resources for sustainable livelihoods, including the sea, rice fields, and quarries (Negeri Morella, 2024).

Table 2
Types of Local Commodity

Types of Employment	Local Commodities	Explanations
Fishermen	Species such as tuna, snapper, skipjack, and yellowtail are primarily commodities produced by the local people.	The fishermen, who operate individually, have an average daily catch ranging between 25 and 100 kilograms. Approximately 210 individuals are engaged in this occupation, relying on the sea for their livelihood.
Farmer/Gardener	Natural resources such as clove, nutmeg, palm, mango, conarium, and coconut are produced by the inhabitants of Negeri Morella. The agricultural sector also yields other commodities, including papaya, pineapple, and tubers, among others.	On average, the community harvests between 50 and 150 kilograms of nutmeg and from 25 to 75 kilograms of clove per harvest. Their income is not generated daily but depends on agricultural cycles and environmental circumstances.
Miner	The local community engages in gold mining on other islands, such as Seram Island.	Field notes indicate that individuals select mining due to the lack of sustainable employment opportunities necessary to support their families. Approximately 500 people are recorded to be working in this sector.
Employees in <i>Badan Usaha Milik Negeri (BUMNEG)</i> /A Village-Owned Enterprise	Several local products are marketed through enterprise institutions, including souvenirs, packaged nutmeg juice, shredded fish, and others.	These local enterprises are the result of collaborations between regional and central governments to implement economic practices in the form of the Village Development Index.
Other formal employments	Researchers have documented various types of formal employment, such as civil servants, army personnel, police officers, etc.	Some work locally in these formal sectors as part of the government's efforts to accommodate the local population, thereby integrating them into the Indonesian government's workplace dedicated to serving the local community.

Source: Author' elaboration.

To protect against environmental damage, the community of Morella has established a local traditional institution. This institution comprises the *Hosong*, *Pesi*, *Raja*, and *Mariyano*. The *Hosong* and *Pesi* serve as the authoritative bodies that facilitate consensus through deliberation (*Saniri Negeri*). In the government system, this institution closely resembles a legislative body, tasked with formulating local rules. The *Raja*, equivalent to the village head, functions as the executor of development programs, akin to the executive branch in constitutional terms. In the event of disputes and ad hoc conflicts between clans, the *Latupati* (a council of *rajas*) intervenes to mediate. For instance, traditional figure [TF1] illustrates that the *Raja* and traditional leaders opposed the development of tourist attractions lacking official approval from the Morella authorities:

“The Raja acts as the village administrator and upholds traditional values based on inter-clan or tribal deliberations. Specifically, the Raja handles worldly matters. The second functions as Penghulu [religious figure], divided into three roles: Imam, Khotib, and Mudin. These figures are responsible for matters concerning the afterlife. Moreover, Mariyano drives the charity system within the local community. We recognize that harmony between nature and humanity is an initiative that must be maintained to ensure that future generations can sustain life.”

Another traditional value is *Sasi*, which serves as a proactive institution against environmental threats such as those to the sea and plantations, including customary legal provisions that shape social institutions (Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, 2000, p. 94). *Sasi* aims to provide security to the Morella residents, including safety in managing marine resources to be utilized as livelihood sources. This includes developing fish catch production, distributing fish to markets, distributing plantation products, particularly nutmeg and cloves, restricting plantation land use, and regulating fishing range for fishermen. The ultimate goal of *Sasi* is to ensure equitable distribution of natural resources, thereby fostering community resilience. *Sasi* also contributes to security against external disturbances. Local government [LG1] asserts that community strengthens local regulations to prevent exploitation by outsiders.

“The Sasi system acts as a local regulation to patrol the coastline, with a surveillance mechanism extending approximately 1 kilometer from the shoreline to prevent the area from being used for environmentally damaging tourism projects [...]. This consensus aims to protect the environment from exploitation, especially the coastline, which has long attracted external investors interested in developing new tourist attractions. My fellow traditional leaders and I agree that Pernegwis (Local Regulation for Tourism Rules) should be implemented in Morella so that the natural potential can broadly benefit the local residents [...].”

This research demonstrates that Morella’s community maintains sophisticated traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems that enable sustainable natural resource management, ensuring both ecosystem balance and

long-term livelihood security (Støvring, 2012; Thwala et al., 2023). The study identifies three critical intersections between customary systems and environmental welfare: ancestral land-use practices that prevent resource depletion; community-based conservation rituals that reinforce ecological stewardship; and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that mediate resource disputes. These endogenous systems outperform conventional top-down conservation approaches by embedding sustainability within cultural norms and daily practices. Importantly, the findings reveal how integrating these traditional values with formal development policies creates a hybrid welfare model that is both ecologically viable and socially inclusive (Cerisola, 2019; Tag, 2013). Such integration addresses the dual challenge of environmental preservation and economic security, offering a template for sustainable development in resource-dependent communities. The Morella case proves that environmental welfare cannot be achieved through technical solutions alone but requires the institutionalization of cultural values that promote intergenerational responsibility. These insights compel a rethinking of welfare paradigms to recognize traditional ecological knowledge as foundational to sustainable development, particularly in indigenous territories facing climate change pressures and economic globalization.

Economic System: Narratives from Local Practice

In understanding this theme, the researchers discovered a unique local economic system worthy of exploration. *Rureha* represents a traditional value practiced by fishermen in the distribution of their catch. According to one informant [LF2], “This *value system embodies the principle of sharing among fellow humans and brothers.*” For example, “*fishermen who catch fish at sea consistently share their surplus with the Penghulu (religious leader) at the mosque*” [LP1] ... “*the mosque administrators then distribute the fish to the local community...*” [LG2]. The fishermen typically allocate about 10% of their catch; as an illustration, “if a fisherman catches about 50 kilograms of fish, they will donate around 5 kilograms to be distributed among the local people,” stated a traditional leader [TF3]. The distribution model has been passed down through generations and has become an integral part of the identity of the Morella community. They only distribute fish that is ready to be consumed. This practice strengthens the social and fraternal bonds between clans and tribes in Morella.

Secondly, *Sesaji* is a traditional value aimed at encouraging the community to give alms. According to an informant, “*this concept represents a community movement for collecting various types of food to be distributed to all residents ...*” [LF4]. “*... As an indigenous community, local residents gather donations (Gunungan) to be given to those in need...*” [TF2]. The person responsible for collecting donations is called a *Mariyano*, which operates “by collecting funds from the entire village, which are then pooled at the mosque for distribution,”

reveals another traditional leader [TF5]. The *Sesaji* value system fosters a culture of cooperation and mutual assistance among village residents, thereby strengthening the social security net through a community-based support system (CBSS) (Benedetti, 2021; Yuda et al., 2021).

Figure 2
Fisherman Attributes in East Season



Source: Courtesy photograph of author, 2024.

Thirdly, the theme of hybrid survival emerged as a key finding in this research. The community opts for hybrid work due to unpredictable natural conditions. They distinguish two seasonal categories: *West*, indicating the dry season, and *East*, indicating the wet or rainy season. The local fisherman cannot catch fish during the east season due to adverse sea conditions, such as tides, rising sea levels, and high waves (see Figure 2). As a result, they turn to farming or gardening, focusing on commodities like cloves and nutmeg. During the wet season, the local people work as fishermen, using small boats individually. The researchers confirm that around 250 fishermen engage in hybrid work. The main fish commodities include tuna, skipjack, yellowtail, and snapper. On each fishing trip, they catch about 50 to 100 kilograms of fish. Converted to monetary terms, they earn between IDR 200,000 (USD 12.27) and IDR 400,000 (USD 24.53) per trip (Observation Notes, 2024). The story of local fishermen [LF1] offers a new perspective on the meaning of prosperous living:

“My fellow fishermen and I face difficulties when the east season arrives, lasting about three to four months from May to August. I have to find a solution to meet my family’s needs, so turning to farming and gardening is a suitable step for me. I harvest nutmeg and cloves, although the income from this activity is not as optimal as catching fish at sea. I only obtain around 40-60 kilograms of nutmeg and cloves per month, which converts to about IDR 300,000 or USD 18.40 to IDR 500,000 or USD 30.66 per month. Some people also choose to mine gold on Seram Island. They usually earn quite a lot from gold mining, although it is an illegal activity.”

This research concludes that Morella's local economic system, which is deeply rooted in traditional values, fosters a distinctive form of social immunity (Calvário et al., 2020; Heryanda et al., 2023) that bolsters community resilience in the face of external shocks. Utilizing the framework established by Cotter and Kilner (2010), the findings illustrate how indigenous welfare mechanisms operate as organic shock absorbers during global crises, effectively maintaining local safety nets that are often inadequately supported by state systems. The initiatives undertaken in Morella—including communal resource pooling, adaptive livelihood strategies, and culturally informed conflict resolution—have cultivated a self-reinforcing cycle of economic stability and social protection. Importantly, these practices capitalize on existing community assets, such as social networks, ecological knowledge, and shared cultural norms, to develop sustainable alternatives to top-down welfare models (Sugitanata & Hakim, 2023). This case presents a paradigm shift: instead of perceiving globalization as an unavoidable threat to local systems, it illustrates how endogenous values can be strategically harnessed to construct hybrid resilience models. These findings challenge traditional welfare state theories by demonstrating that cultural capital, when institutionalized through customary governance, can serve as a foundational infrastructure for crisis-responsive social protection.

Customary Values as Social Security

At the time of this research, local customary values in Morella serve as social security, which is divided into various forms. Firstly, *“atur hena hisai hidupe”* is a traditional value that contributes to the family support system, which can be categorized as social security. The *Raja* plays a crucial role in implementing this customary value. *“If the Raja sees a newly married couple living with their parents for more than three months, they will feel ashamed and must move out to establish their own hut,”* explains a traditional figure [TF4]. Moreover, *“... if the Raja observes that a newly built house is inadequate, they will arrange for the construction of a proper house for the residents using village budgetary or local donations,”* states the local government [LG3]. This customary system also leads as a new form of social capital, providing a mechanism for the distribution of social assistance, especially to fulfill basic needs. A family from the local fishing community [LF2] confirms the contribution of these customary values in their lives:

“The family system in Morella has tribal clans (Basudara) descended from our ancestors. We are very close with other residents and family members, so it is easy to check if they need assistance. If a family needs help, we report to the Raja, who ensures they receive the necessary aid to survive.”

Secondly, *“ale rasa beta rasa”* is an expression and customary value that serves as a social method for self-awareness. *“Ale rasa”* refers to “what I feel,” and *“beta rasa”* means “you feel it too.” In the context of mutual cooperation as

informal welfare provision in Indonesia (Sumarto, 2017). This phrase signifies “shared suffering and shared responsibility.” The community collectively bears hardships and joys, fostering pride in communal progress. Local people [LP4] describe their experience practicing “*ale rasa beta rasa*”:

“I practice this expression in daily life, and it has positive values for social intercourse in Morella. For example, if my neighbor has no food for breakfast, I share my food with them. Daily practices of giving, sharing, and greeting among families in this village have fostered maturity in maintaining harmony and sustainability. Another example is that fishermen distribute about 10% of their catch, or around 5 out of 50 kilograms. The Penghulu (religious leader) collects and distributes this charity to those in need. Mariyano (charity distributor) ensures that poor families receive aid, reinforcing the social security net within local residents. This is the form of informal social security we have and continue to preserve for future generations.”

The third customary value is “*potong di kuku rasa didaging*.” This traditional term, translating to “cutting the nail, feeling the flesh,” embodies the philosophy of Morella’s people, growing and evolving in community life. This value is preserved in various practices, such as sitting together to discuss communal interests, inter-clan cooperation, and direct individual assistance (*Masohi*). In broader terms, this customary value is often referred to as “*Basudara*.” This concept is rooted in genetic blood ties and social relationships that transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. Examples include neighborly living, inter-clan relations abroad (*Pela*), mutual affection and compassion among residents, and a commitment to sharing and solidarity among groups—locally termed “*Tun Teha Usai*.” These values are recounted by a local academician [LA1]:

“The brotherhood fostered in this multicultural village serves as a local practice for creating social harmony and facilitating sustainable development. Although Ambon is generally known as a conflict-prone area, certain local aspects contribute to preventing social conflicts. There is an assumption that implementing welfare is challenging if a community is in conflict. However, Morella’s local experience in mitigating latent conflicts has become a valuable asset for its residents. The community has successfully implemented four patterns to build harmonious living: Arken, Fakaripi, Pela, and Gandong. Arken is a customary value that eases the adaptation of outsiders into existing clans through cultural acceptance. Fakaripi involves the acceptance and adaptation of outsiders to local life and customs. Pela denotes a fraternity agreement between different villages or individuals of different religions. Gandong means ‘sibling’. These four customary principles broadly establish a social security system in Morella.”

The customary values of Morella have facilitated the establishment of a robust social security network grounded in principles of solidarity, collective

action, and community-based conflict resolution. These indigenous mechanisms serve as both a social adhesive and a welfare system, demonstrating resilience during socioeconomic crises by integrating welfare ethics with local economic practices. Morella's experience illustrates how traditional frameworks can complement formal welfare states, contributing in three significant ways: (1) the provision of culturally informed safety nets that enhance the legitimacy of programs, (2) the implementation of participatory resource distribution models that mitigate exclusion, and (3) the establishment of trauma-informed reconciliation processes that bolster social cohesion. This case study offers transformative insights for global welfare discourse, particularly in post-conflict and multicultural settings where standardized systems frequently fall short. By documenting Morella's hybrid approach—characterized by the interaction of customary institutions, such as *Pela Gandong* kinship networks, with state programs—this research advocates for an alternative paradigm in crisis response that capitalizes on existing social capital rather than imposing external solutions. These findings prompt policymakers to reevaluate the role of endogenous systems in welfare design, positing that sustainable social protection necessitates the harmonization of universal rights with localized cultural infrastructures.

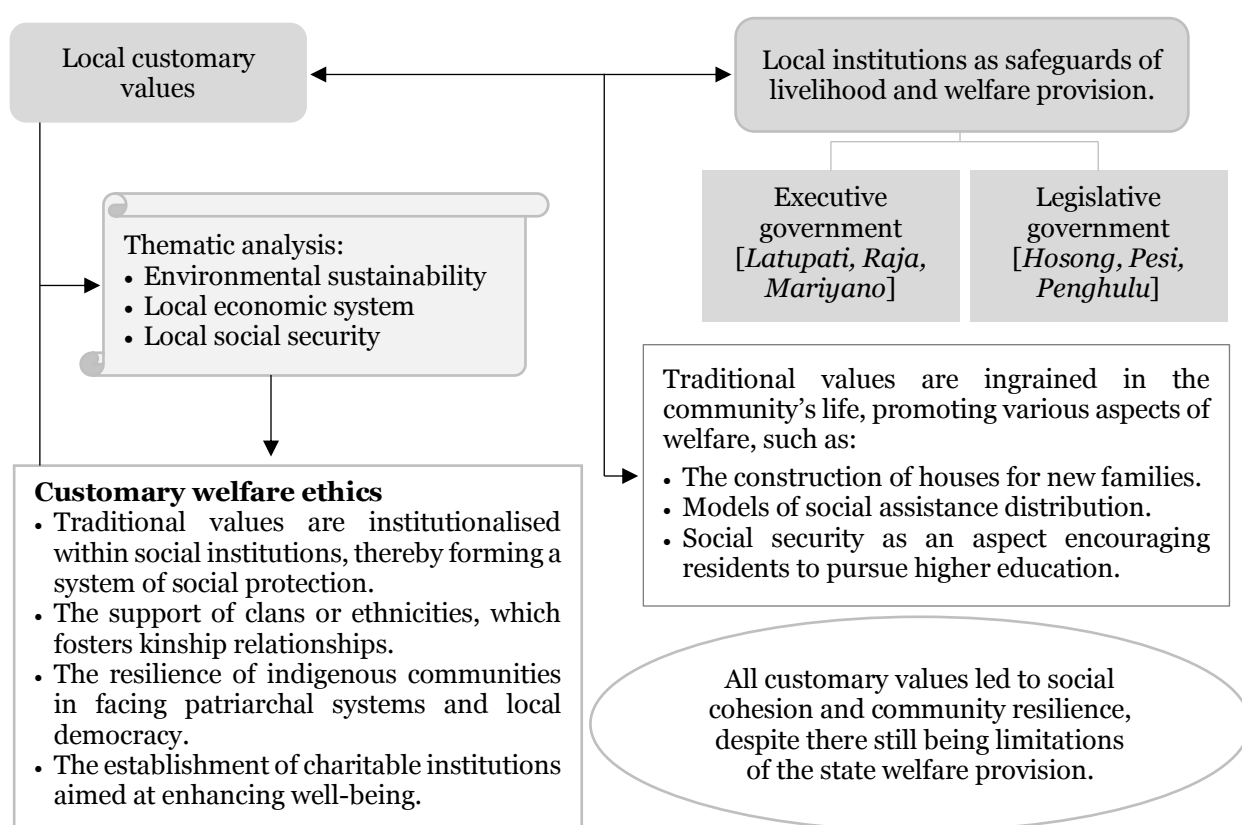
Discussion

These research findings, as mentioned above, could shed light on the welfare provision discourses. The mechanisms of customary institutions such as *Hosong*, *Pesi*, *Raja*, and *Mariyano* aim to shape the protection model of local needs and natural resources, addressing the availability of sustainable livelihoods. *Saniri Negeri*, or deliberation forum, is a local institution aimed at enhancing people's awareness of preserving natural resources. This leads to power distribution in local communities, addressing the challenge of social conflict when the central government provides social assistance. It can also be seen as a form of informal redistribution (Goodin et al., 2000). Therefore, local customs have led to community-based initiatives as a way to prevent failures caused by distortions in social policies (Yuda et al., 2021).

Researchers also highlight that *Rureha* and *Sesaji* have become the immune systems and social resilience mechanisms. This is because several policies focus on social distribution and employment protection in formal sectors (Bekemans, 1985; Bussemeyer & Sahm, 2022), rather than on local resource management. To solve this problem, hybrid survival functional systems are crucial in addressing global economic crises. It challenges the assumption that Ambon in Eastern Indonesia is prone to regional conflict vulnerability, while Morella has exacerbated it with unstable behaviors. Local values such as “*ature hena hisai hidupe*”, “*ale rasa beta rasa*”, and “*potong di kuku rasa didaging*” also play significant roles in creating social security systems (see details in Figure 3). As mentioned in findings, four local values (*Arken*, *Fakaripi*, *Pela*, and *Gandong*)

have bonded the communities. Despite differences in genetic factors and family backgrounds, these phenomena can be viewed as an embodiment of multicultural ethics in various customs. From some evidence in various sources (Loke & Sherraden, 2019; Tian et al., 2018), social stability could indicate the need to promote a sustainable development goal without facing resistance from grassroots movements. It is clear that local security influences the acceleration of building social welfare distribution, addressing challenges related to external roles such as monopolistic practices, conflicts of interest, and legacies of patrimonialism (Boogaard et al., 2023; Midgley, 2011; Yuda, 2019).

Figure 3
Mechanism of Local Customary Values Operates on the Welfare Provision Model



Source: Author' elaboration.

By studying the customary values contributing to environmental conservation, social security networks, and developing local economies, researchers have noted that welfare provision has become integrated into cultural practices. This practical approach can be considered a new perspective for the ongoing discussion of welfare production in Asian countries. As categorized, social policies in many East and Southeast Asian states have led to economic growth, with more budget allocation for both health and education services than for social protections (Holliday, 2000). This is because welfare state models focus

more on industrialization advancements (Gough et al., 2004; Sumarto, 2017). This social policy often fails to adapt to fundamental needs, leading to failures in implementing social work ethics (Busemeyer et al., 2022; Lin, 2005; Tag, 2013). Therefore, local customary values in Morella could become a partial means of connecting the government with local people to prevent the failure of social assistance distribution due to differences in cultural characteristics.

Although the Indonesian welfare provision system has been more inclusive and universal (Yuda, 2019; Yuda & Kühner, 2023), there is a lack of acceleration in implementing social policies to protect regional vulnerability. The universalism paradigm is becoming a practical approach in social assistance, including Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), retirement insurance, healthcare, formal employment protection, home care, food security programs, etc. (McLaren et al., 2022; Slater, 2011; Sumarto, 2021). However, these services still face controversies due to disparities and unequal distributions. Social policies aimed at protecting people with disabilities, addressing homelessness, assisting street children, and supporting women involved in prostitution are also hindered by loopholes in regulations (Izudin, 2023). Unlike many schemes of Indonesian social welfare provision, Morella's experiences in leveraging customary values for implementing well-being are unexpected. The emphasis on blood heritage and *Basudara* ethics helps shape local independence, social participation, socio-cultural coherence, and the utilization of traditional knowledge. This leads to the adaptation of welfare programs in efficient and effective ways. By integrating local traditions into welfare provision, researchers believe that cultural and customary practices lead to improvements in welfare. This not only enhances the effectiveness of social aid distribution but also accommodates cultural and community needs, ultimately leading to an increase in sustainable social welfare programs.

In line with scholars such as Lin and Chan (2015), Lin (2005), and Lundberg (2020), researchers suggest that integrating local customary values into modern policies could help reduce distortions in social welfare provision, particularly in harmonizing national law with international standards. In many cases, customary communities may have an inability to effectively maintain resources for welfare provision without support from external stakeholders (Berkes & Turner, 2006; Hill et al., 2012). Additionally, there are viewpoints suggesting that local figures have played a personal interest in coordinating collective actions for distributing social assistance objectively (Johansson & Panican, 2016; Paarlberg et al., 2023; Reutov et al., 2016). This situation can potentially lead to resistance from both sides of the community among tribal actors in Morella, which could hinder social harmony. All interpretations in findings suggest that researchers believe incorporating a comprehensive approach is essential to solving many problems in welfare distributions. In this case, researchers recommend that

involving local stakeholders in collaboration is necessary to address the fundamental needs of local people.

Conclusion

Negeri Morella has evolved the dynamics of customary value transformation, leading to an understanding of multicultural typologies in local communities across Indonesia. Exploring these phenomena to understand the extent to which they contribute to welfare provision; researchers recognize that customary mechanisms have been constructed for social security and local economic practices. Governance-based local institutions also play a significant role in promoting stability and social harmony. It could accelerate endogenous factors to enhance social immunities in facing global crises, as the Indonesian economic downturn persists. Interesting findings suggest that traditional mechanisms could assist internal communities in recovering from crises caused by a series of external challenges while also fostering communal strength among local people.

Moreover, an intriguing finding from this research is that customary institutions have developed welfare schemes, leading to potential policy overlaps between central and regional governments in managing social assistance distribution. This situation could impede the decommodification of the social welfare system, particularly in the delivery of social assistance, which is expected to be based on principles of justice and equality. As a policy recommendation, the researchers suggest establishing ad hoc institutions across Indonesia, especially in the eastern regions, to facilitate customary institutions through joint social policy innovations that continue to thrive and benefit both central and regional governments, thereby strengthening the agenda for sustainable social welfare administration.

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