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Supporting Cultural Revitalization in Indonesia

Over the last several years, the World Bank has supported cultural heritage in Indonesia through the Small Grants Program and investment projects such as the Bali Urban Infrastructure Project. These activities have been stand alone, however, and not part of a larger strategy to incorporate culture into the Bank's programs. In an effort to learn more about the role that culture could play in the Indonesia program the Public Interest Research and Advocacy Center (PIRAC)¹ recently completed two studies that analyzed performing arts groups, the functions they serve in communities, and the constraints they face. The first study focused on the policy environment for cultural groups, while the second consisted of case studies to identify their social and economic functions. This note is designed to summarize the results of the two studies and, based on the findings, provide a starting point for discussion of the significance of culture for the World Bank's Indonesia Country Program and for the ultimate goal of improving quality of life through poverty alleviation.

HISTORY OF OPPRESSION

Indonesia, renowned for its cultural heritage, is a country composed of a rich diversity of ethnic groups with distinct languages, traditions, and artistic expressions. But during the early years of its independence and Soeharto's New Order, local cultural expression and identity were discouraged in favor

of a "national" culture that provided the government with legitimacy as guardian and representative of a common origin and cultural tradition (Kusno, 2000, p. 76). Like political freedoms, artistic expression had to be controlled to create an image of a unified nation and people. As a result, cultural forms were not valued as dynamic expressions of community values and beliefs, but instead were transformed into static curiosities that could be brought out for show. Perhaps the best-known illustration of the attempt at unifying traditions into a national culture is the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah outdoor museum, which consists of selected buildings and artifacts from each province, "mechanically reconstructed to advertise the essence of traditions" (Anderson, 1990, p. 182).

Although small community organizations were generally less restricted than more formal groups or larger performances, specific types of traditional groups were tightly controlled and even co-opted for propaganda purposes. For instance, *dalang*, or shadow puppeteers, were organized into a single association (Pepadi) that issued licenses and recommendations for performances. These restrictions controlled the stories and themes that *dalang* could communicate and ensured that the government could convey political

messages through their performances.

Censorship, highly publicized in 1994 with the closing of the Tempo news magazine and Detik tabloid, also affected cultural expression. For example, Teater Koma, a well-known drama company, was shut down by security forces fifteen times during a ten-year period, without clear reasons stated for any of these closings (PIRAC 2000a, p. 9). The requirement of police-issued licenses for public gatherings allowed the state to routinely restrict groups with a potentially controversial message.

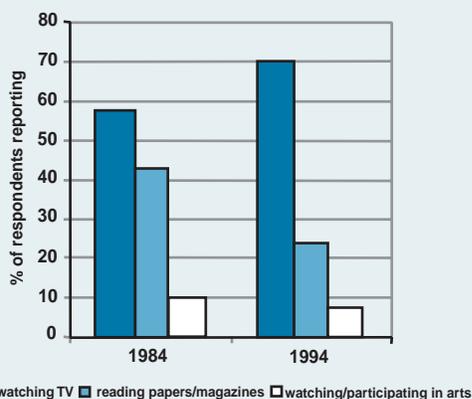
These factors restricted supply of performances, music, and literature, and probably also contributed to the accompanying decline in watching and participating in arts and culture groups and in reading of newspapers and magazines. Another factor is likely to have been the increased access to television, which rose notably from 1984 to 1994 (see Figure 1).

BENEFITS OF CULTURAL REVIVAL

With the coming of the post-Soeharto *reformasi* era and opening up of the political environment, however, there is an opportunity

¹ Started in 1997, PIRAC is an Indonesian NGO based in Jakarta.

FIGURE 1: TV Viewing, reading & participating in arts
(BPS Statistik Sosial Budaya: Hasil Susenas 1984 & 1994)



for local cultural revival. Such a process could provide a constructive outlet for asserting local identity, expression of community needs, and discussion of issues.

Further, revitalizing local culture can constitute an avenue for reinforcing conflict-resolution and decision-making mechanisms that are an integral part of strengthening local governance and laying the foundations for sustainable, holistic development. This is particularly important in the Indonesian context, where the opening of the political environment has also been an occasion for frequently bloody ethnic conflict, exacerbating divisions between certain groups.

Finally, a cultural revival could foster the recognition of and respect for local values that would allow local groups to participate in development on their own terms. Particularly in the context of the homogenization that the forces of globalization can inflict, it is critical to support the re-exploration of local culture in order to foster ownership of local development activities.

By focusing on performing arts groups as one manifestation of culture, the PIRAC studies point to several types of specific benefits to supporting cultural revitalization

in Indonesia. First, cultural organizations can be important actors in *conflict resolution*. The eruption of social conflicts in the last two years has seen numerous examples of cultural groups using theater and other performing arts to bring communities together after violent incidents. These performances, such as those staged in Solo after the devastating May 1999 riots, have helped to bring out issues such as religious

and ethnic differences in a non-threatening manner. Although the cultural activities themselves do not necessarily provide immediate solutions, pluralistic and often inter-faith support for these efforts can set the stage for constructive follow-up discussions (PIRAC, 2000a).

Other examples show cultural groups playing an active role in mediating disputes. A case study of a music group in Gari village, Yogyakarta explains that the group

acted as a neutral and mediating party when villagers became divided over the election of the new village head. Performances were organized to bring leaders of the different factions together and rebuild a sense of community (PIRAC, 2000b). This type of anecdotal evidence needs to be followed up with more in-depth research on the contexts within which cultural groups can contribute to easing community tensions and resolving conflicts.

Cultural groups can also be important *sources of information and ideas*, in particular as circulation of printed media is small for a country of Indonesia's population.² This is especially important for isolated communities that are less likely to have access to either print or broadcast media. During the lead-up to the 1999 election, for instance, the Lontar Foundation worked with local *pembawa berita* or news-bearers in 18 provinces to ensure that the message of a free and fair election reached voters in remote locations. These *pembawa berita* work in the local language and are able to effectively communicate critical information to

Table 1: Monthly income supplements from participation in performing arts groups

Group name	Campursari Abadi	Karawitan Wiji Laras	Lenong Cagar Budaya	Srimulat	Wayang Orang Sriwedari
Location	Yogyakarta	Jakarta	Jakarta	Surabaya	Solo
Monthly income from performance/person (Rp)*					
low range	75,000	50,000	600,000	200,000	100,000
high range	120,000	100,000	1,500,000	300,000	n.a.
2000 reg. min. wage (Rp/mth)	194,000	286,000	286,000	236,000	185,000
% income supplement					
low range	39%	17%	210%	85%	54%
high range	62%	35%	524%	127%	–

Source: PIRAC, 2000b. Regional minimum wages from <http://www.depaker.go.id/>.

*Amounts shown are for lowest- & highest-paid member in each group, based on skill & experience.

² Newspapers have total daily circulation of 2 million. By 1996, an average of 5,800 titles were published each year, which is minimal compared to the 7,000 titles annually published in Malaysia, a country with 10% of Indonesia's population. The average fell to 1,500 per year in 1997, however, with the declines in real incomes and increases in price of paper. In spite of the seeming explosion in political writing, the 2000 total is only 2,500, less than half the pre-crisis number (IPS, 25/22/00).

minority groups who are not reached by other sources of information (J. McGlynn and Jakarta Post, 3/6/99).

Cultural groups also provide *economic benefits*, both to individuals and to communities. While the case study data available from PIRAC is not representative, these pilot findings point to cultural groups as an often significant source of side-income to the farmers, teachers, craftspeople, traders, and civil servants who invest time in their activities. Cultural activities provided income equivalent to 17–524% of monthly regional minimum wages, depending on the location and level of skill of the performers (see Table 1).

In addition to channeling direct income to performers, these groups also have an economic impact on related up- and down-stream industries. For example, the Cagar Budaya group, which stages *lenong*³ performances twice a month in different Jakarta neighborhoods, raises revenues of Rp 4 million per performance (see Table 2). Each show generates almost as much (an estimated Rp 3.28 million or 80% of group revenues) in revenues for local businesses, such as food stalls, parking attendants, and day-laborers who build the stage. Using the minimum wage for Jakarta as a rough benchmark and an assumption of half the revenues allocated to labor⁴, each performance creates side-income not only for the six performers in the group, but also generates more than five person-months of unskilled labor. Campursari Abadi and Karawitan Wiji Laras also generated significant revenues and labor for the surrounding community (see Table 2⁵). Given that there were an estimated 28,870 performing arts groups in Indonesia in 1998, the total impact on job creation from these groups is likely to be large (PIRAC, 2000a).

CONSTRAINTS TO CULTURAL REVITALIZATION

Although the opening of the political environment and the much greater freedom of expression could support local cultural development, several institutional factors may jeopardize such revitalization.

There is little evidence pointing to a shift in government attitude away from the top down, hierarchical paradigm of previous governments toward one that respects local traditions and values. Nor does it appear that the *reformasi* movement has had much impact on censorship or control of cultural organizations. During consultations with arts and cultural practitioners regarding changes in the legal environment during the last several years, concerns were raised that decentralization may actually contribute to limits on expression and the use of performance permits as a means of censorship, in spite of recent regulations supporting greater

freedom of expression.⁶ The root of this worry lies in the fact that the regional administrations that will be strengthened under decentralization were often more zealous than Jakarta officials in restricting expression during the New Order era (PIRAC, 2000a).

Although there have been promising individual laws passed, it is also not yet clear how conducive the overall policy environment will be. In the 1999–2004 State Policy Guidelines (GBHN), it is made clear that freedom of creation and support for cultural values should be encouraged as a means of “foster[ing] the development of more creative and innovative *national arts*, so as to nurture *national pride*.” Although there is admittedly a long way to go between the GBHN and policy enforcement, these guidelines set the tone for cultural policy for the next five years and could be used to censor community expressions of identity and local values (*ibid.*, p.6).

Table 2: Revenues & labor generated for local business (per performance)

Group name	Lenong Cagar Budaya	Campursari Abadi	Karawitan Wiji Laras
Location	Jakarta	Yogyakarta	Jakarta
Revenue for group (Rp)	4,000,000	1,000,000	300,000
Revenue for local business (Rp)	3,275,000	664,667	861,000
Returns to labor*	1,637,500	332,333	430,500
2000 reg. min. wage (Rp/mth)	286,000	194,000	286,000
Labor created (personmonths)	5.7	1.7	1.5

Source: PIRAC, 2000b. Regional minimum wages from <http://www.depaker.go.id/>.

*Calculations assume that 50% of revenues are returns to labor for all related business.

Est. of labor creation are therefore only rough estimates for largely labor-intensive activities.

³ *Lenong* is a kind of folk theater performed in Jakarta.

⁴ These estimates assume 50% of all revenues are spent on labor and that all labor is local, which is not a precise estimate of actual returns to local labor. However, as the activities generated are labor-intensive, these figures give a rough sense of the economic significance of these groups.

⁵ Srimulat & WO Sriwedari not shown because of insufficient data.

⁶ Act No. 9/1998 on Freedom to Express Opinion and Ideas in Public stipulates one year's imprisonment for anyone violently obstructing or threatening a citizen's right to express their opinion.

Combined with fears of continued censorship and oppression, there is also a general lack of constructive attention in terms of direct support from the public sector. Existing subsidies are not allocated in a transparent manner and there are complaints that funding is allocated based on political loyalties (PIRAC, 2000a).

Experience with direct support also shows that wholesale provision of subsidies often hinders rather than helps highly esteemed arts groups. Of the five groups studied by PIRAC, two receive on-going, direct subsidies from local government: Srimulat in Surabaya and Wayang Orang Sriwedari in Solo, well-known groups that had popular followings until they received substantial support from the government. Both organizations now hold scheduled performances at government venues designed to attract both domestic and international tourists, performers are paid monthly salaries from the government payroll, costumes and sets are paid for from state budgets, and tickets are free or sold at an extremely low price. The groups perform six nights a week for meager audiences of 10–50 people, compared to audiences of 300–600 for the other three cases in the study, except on those nights when the show is cancelled for lack of attendance (PIRAC, 2000b, p. 20).

Another group in Surabaya which received similar subsidies was recently disbanded after government support was cut off – audiences were not interested in coming to this group's *ludruk*⁷ shows unless they were free (Kompas, 17/12/99).

These “total” subsidies, especially when based on the assumption that increased commercialization is a necessary and sufficient strategy for supporting culture, have succeeded only in separating performing arts groups from their communities and extinguishing their relevance as mirrors of values

and concerns. They highlight the need for careful consideration of the social impacts before linking culture with tourism, in spite of potential economic gains. One alternative to direct subsidies is tax exemption for arts and culture groups. The legal groundwork for tax exemption actually already exists⁸ but has yet to be operationalized. It is therefore important to build on this legislation to develop fiscal incentives that are clear and accessible. As overall enforcement of the tax code is weak at best, entertainment and income taxes that formally apply to community culture groups are probably not binding in practice. However, with pressure on local governments to raise their own revenues rising, it seems likely that untapped sources such as cultural groups will be targeted.

THE WORLD BANK AND CULTURE IN INDONESIA

The World Bank has done some work on cultural heritage, and it is critical that this experience is shared and built upon for further efforts. Much of the direct support to arts and culture organizations to date has come from the Small Grants Program (SGP). Projects supported by the SGP include conservation of physical structures and community arts in Kotagede, preservation of traditional manuscripts in Solo, and support for the local museum in Nias.

Cultural issues have also been incorporated into operations, notably in urban projects such as the Bali Urban Infrastructure Project (BUIP) which emphasizes conservation of built heritage, development of sustainable economic activities related to cultural sites (such as the Besakih temple), and establishment of a Bali Heritage Trust. There are also plans to place greater emphasis on supporting cultural groups and projects in the follow-up to the Kecamatan Development Program, and a Learning and Innovation

Loan for cultural heritage preservation in the Yogyakarta–Solo–Semarang region is under development.

There are many possibilities for the Bank to incorporate cultural aspects into its future program in Indonesia. This could involve a combination of diverse strategies, such as careful linking of culture with tourism, safeguarding existing traditions and structures, building on dynamic local institutions in fostering improved governance and better gender equality, and supporting artistic expression. Possible activities can be grouped into three general categories:

STRATEGY – *The Bank is well-positioned to work with the government and civil society to (i) explore and develop possible overall directions for the cultural agenda and (ii) collaborate on identifying a constructive mix of policies and programs to support it.*

POLICY – *By engaging with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, as well as other agencies, the Bank could provide assistance in further developing specific policies that create a conducive legal environment for arts and cultural organizations. Possibilities include developing and enforcing well-targeted tax exemptions and subsidies that support investments in culture (including tax breaks for private sector support), as well as advocacy for cultural groups to safeguard freedom of expression, prevent*

⁷ *Ludruk* is a Javanese folk theater where all parts are played by men.

⁸ In Presidential decree No 84/1999 on Utilization of Arts and Culture, Article 7: “Exemptions...shall be applied through tax reduction and services, import tariffs, immigration, license and other field related to the utilization of arts and culture.” The city of Jakarta has already implemented legislation that exempts performances run by the informal sector and traditional performances from the entertainment tax (which can be as much as 35% of the ticket sale price) (PIRAC, 2000a, p. 19). It is unclear how the exemption works in practice.

censorship, and preserve both physical structures and cultural traditions. In addition, the World Bank could facilitate dialogue on cultural revitalization with other ministries (such as education, health, public works & regional development, and environment) and assist in capacity-building for designing and implementing more demand-responsive programs and policies.

INVESTMENTS – Through free-standing projects focusing on culture or through components of regular projects, the Bank has potential to provide direct support to cultural groups. Possible mechanisms include:

- Continuing to support sensitive preservation of physical heritage to prevent further breakdown of communities and cultural practices.
- Including cultural groups as eligible partners or recipients in micro-credit schemes and the increasing number of demand-driven operations that rely on community organizations to participate in planning and implementing development projects.
- Incorporating local mechanisms in project design to support community structures for conflict resolution, information sharing, and operational needs. Building on existing structures, rather than replacing or duplicating their function, is an important step towards empowering communities and supporting local governance.
- Encouraging development of sustainable, demand-driven funding mechanisms to allow for transparent and beneficial support for revitalization of arts and culture.
- Exploring the role that tourism could play in supporting cultural revitalization and poverty alleviation, while avoiding the pitfalls of past commercialization efforts.

Before committing to additional work in this area, however, it is critical to identify the Bank's comparative advantage in supporting cultural revitalization in Indonesia. Only then can a coordinated effort be made to work in areas where the Bank can make an effective contribution. To gain such understanding, the following questions need to be answered:

- > What are the current priorities for supporting culture in Indonesia?
- > What skills and knowledge can the World Bank contribute to these priorities?
- > What aspects of culture can the World Bank support? Should the focus be on built heritage and/or living culture? On culture as a public good and/or as economic development with a direct link to poverty alleviation?
- > Should the Bank be limited to policy work and/or emphasize investments? Should investments be stand-alone or components of other projects?
- > Should additional work be ad hoc in nature or part of a separate culture agenda?

Some of this information can come from review of past work and the theoretical literature on culture and development. However, the critical step is to engage with groups that already work in this area. The Ford Foundation, Yayasan Kelola, UNESCO, and the Lontar Foundation are only a few of the organizations that, along with the government, have been working on culture and with cultural groups. The impressive network built up through the SGP is another source of ideas and information. Discussions with such organizations

about their work and experiences needs to be the starting point for identifying the World Bank's strategic role in supporting cultural revitalization in Indonesia.

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