

# ENHANCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE FUND MANAGEMENT THROUGH “*MA FIT MA TOUP*” CULTURE IN NORTH CENTRAL TIMOR

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## Abstract

The allocation of village funds in North Central Timor Regency (TTU), which was supposed to be the driver of poverty reduction, did not have a significant effect. The accumulated village funds allocated from 2017 to 2024 reached Rp. 1,084,053,114,000 but could only reduce the poverty rate from 23.52% in 2017 to 20.89% in 2024. One of the factors that is an obstacle in the management of village funds in TTU Regency is that community participation is not ideal. In this context, community participation is still at the level of tokenism, where community involvement is more symbolic and does not influence policy substantially. The main obstacles to increasing community participation include low public literacy towards village fund management, the dominance of local elites in decision-making and the lack of inclusive forums to discuss village policies. On the other hand, there is the cultural value of “*ma fit ma toup*” that develops in the community, which should be empowered in the framework of easing each other’s burdens and building awareness, responsibility and active participation in development activities in the village. The methodology of this research includes observation, document analysis and interviews with key figures. The results of this study provide information that can be used to direct the community to not only become beneficiaries, but also play an active role in the entire cycle of village fund management, starting from planning, implementation, supervision to evaluation. Community involvement in this cycle will have positive implications for the effectiveness of village fund management which can ultimately reduce poverty rates.

**Keywords:** participation; village funds; *ma fit ma toup*

## INTRODUCTION

Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages as amended several times, most recently with Law Number 3 of 2024 mandates that the government allocate village funds to support the implementation of village duties and functions in the implementation of government and village development. Village funds are expected to have an impact on poverty alleviation, advance the economy, overcome development gaps between villages and strengthen the capacity of village communities as development subjects. The allocation of village funds for the period from 2017 to 2023 in North Central Timor Regency (TTU) did not have a significant effect on reducing the poverty rate in TTU Regency as one of the districts in East Nusa Tenggara Province which is directly adjacent to Ambeno District, the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. As a border area, the TTU Regency Government is expected to be able to improve the welfare of the community to show to countries outside the profile or face of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, through village funds, it is hoped that poverty in TTU Regency can be reduced. Processed from various planning documents, the target of reducing the poverty rate in North Central Timor Regency is expected to be reduced starting from 23.52% in 2017 to 20.93% by the end of 2023. Village funds are expected to contribute optimally because the accumulated village funds allocated to TTU Regency from 2017 to 2023 is Rp. 1,084,053,114,000 which if divided into 160

villages that receive it, the average per village has received an allocation of Rp. 6,775,331,960. The situation until the 2023 measurement shows that the poverty rate is still at 21.85% of the target of 20.93% or a deviation (-0.92%). This picture of poverty shows that in TTU Regency, village funds do not have a significant effect on reducing poverty rates.

Suandi et al (2022) explained the results of their research in Lematang Ilir Regency (PALI), South Sumatra that in the period from 2015 to 2018 village funds were only able to reduce the poverty rate by 0.34%. This achievement is not significant with the increase in village funds that continues to increase every year. Sutikno et al (2024) who conducted research in Madura concluded that village funds have not shown satisfactory development performance. Of the 1018 villages on Madura Island, only 28 villages (2.75%) have independent village status. In addition, village funds also do not have a significant influence on rural poverty alleviation in Madura, because of the total village funds disbursed in 2022 of Rp. 1,076,449,864,000, it turns out that it only has an effect of 0.246% on reducing the poverty rate.

Udjianto et al (2021) in their research in Mojomulyo and Tambakromo Villages, Pati Regency, Central Java Province found that one of the obstacles to the implementation of village fund policies is that the level of community participation is still passive, only a handful of village elites take part. Meanwhile, ideally, the community must be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring stages. It is further said that community empowerment is more than the fulfillment of basic needs. Empowerment must reflect the community's efforts to prevent the poverty process. In this regard, community participation is not only seen as limited in its role as actors or implementers of activities but also as beneficiaries or targets of these activities. This study also identifies obstacles to community participation, including: (1) low mastery of literacy in planning and managing village funds. This causes the community to be unable to be actively involved from the planning process to implementation; (2) the internal dominance of the bureaucracy (village elite) in all stages. The community is present only to approve what is prepared by the village government; and (3) the lack of an inclusive forum to discuss village policies. People with limited understanding, low economic conditions, disabilities, women's and marginalized groups tend to feel insecure to express their ideas, ideas or opinions in official forums.

This finding is also in line with Reginaldis et al (2024) who explained that the biggest challenge in the implementation of village funds is how to ensure that the budget is planned, implemented and accounted for efficiently and effectively to answer the needs of the community. Referring to the village law that mandates the existence of village funds, good management is an effective solution to accelerate village independence towards community welfare. In order for the implementation of village funds to run efficiently and effectively and to be able to achieve its main goal of reducing poverty levels, it is necessary to pay attention to the principles of using village funds, including participatory principles.

Various previous studies have shed light on community participation in village fund management. Tumbel (2017) in his research on community participation in village fund management in Tumulung, South Minahasa Regency, using the participation approach of Cohen and Uphoff, found that in development planning deliberations, the community was present together with the Village Head, Village Secretary, village government staff and the Village Consultative Body (BPD). However, the presence of the community listened more to the presentation of activities that had been planned by the Village Head (Tumbel, 2017). Fachrun et al (2020) found that the highest level of community

participation in village fund management in Kalahunde, Central Pakue District, North Kolaka Regency was at the partnership level, while Wulandari, et al (2022), stated that the participation of the people of Pucanggading Village in the management of village funds is classified as free, individual, voluntary participation and exists at the level of placation in the degree of tokenism or its participation is not clearly visible (pseudo) according to Arnstein's theory of participation levels.

Within the scope of TTU Regency, there has been no research that examines community participation in the management of village funds or in the development process in the village as a whole. There have been several previous studies that have discussed participation in specific areas within the TTU Regency area, but they are not based on Arnstein's theory. Although the participation cannot be used to generalize the entire TTU Regency, it can at least describe the characteristics or level of participation in some areas of TTU Regency. Neonbeni, et al (2022) in their research in Letmaffo Village examined community participation in the form of thoughts, energy, skills, goods and money. The results of the study show that the low participation of the Letmaffo Village community in development, is shown by the lack of community contribution in these forms of participation. Yosep, et al (2024) who conducted research in T'eba Village and East T'eba Village found that the people of East T'eba Village tended to participate less because they felt that development programs did not provide direct benefits to their lives. On the other hand, the community in T'eba Village participates more in development because of the role of the village government in involving the community in development activities.

By paying attention to the results of previous research as described above, it can be identified that this research gap or gap with previous research can be identified. Almost all previous studies have attempted to evaluate to determine how high the level of community participation in the management of village funds. In contrast to previous research, this study is not to determine the level of community participation but rather intended as an effort to realize *citizen power* as the most ideal form of participation according to Arnstein's participation ladder theory.

Sherry Arnstein with the concept of "*a ladder of citizen participation*" stated 8 (eight) levels of participation in the public decision-making process as a form of community power. *Citizen Power* is the most ideal form of participation because it gives the community the authority to exercise control in determining the direction of development and public policies. In the life of people in Indonesia, especially in TTU Regency, the concept of *citizen power* is not always present in formal forms such as focus group discussions, development planning deliberations, public hearings or other formal discussions. Instead, local wisdom has actually provided a mechanism of participation rooted in cultural values. This research provides a new paradigm where citizen power according to Arnstein is actualized through participatory cultural values that have long lived, grown and rooted in the midst of the TTU Regency community.

If the previous research produced a paradigm about how much community participation is, then this research will produce a method to realize ideal participation (*citizen power*) in the management of village funds in North Central Timor Regency through a cultural approach or local wisdom in TTU Regency, namely the culture of *ma fit ma toup*. This culture lives, grows and develops in the life of the Dawan tribe which is the majority tribe in TTU Regency. *Ma fit ma toup* is guided as a spirit of togetherness to ease each other's burdens. If properly lived, this culture can build a common awareness to be responsible and actively participate in development activities in the village. Thus, local culture

and wisdom become more than just a complement to democratic participation. The value of *ma fit ma toup* will be the epistemological foundation that has the ability to find the ideal form of participation that is contextual, inclusive and sustainable.

From the various research gaps described above, it can be formulated that the problem in this study has not been realized, namely the realization of ideal participation in the management of village funds in TTU Regency as an effort to improve community welfare. Although Yosep, et al (2024) stated that the participation of the people of T'eba Village is better than in East T'eba Village, this cannot represent the level of participation of all communities in TTU Regency. Again, there has been no research that measures community participation in TTU Regency as a whole. The difference in the level of community participation in several villages that became the locus of previous research implies that the ideal community participation has not been realized in TTU Regency. Therefore, various approaches are needed to realize ideal participation, including using a cultural approach through *ma fit ma toup*.

This study will show that substantially the culture of *ma fit ma toup* has contained the value of citizen power, but in the form of collective participation rather than confrontational as in societies in western countries. This study also shows that the combination of Arnstein's theory with the value of *ma fit ma toup* will give birth to an ideal cultural-based participation model called the cultural based citizen power model. This is a form of citizen participation that uses cultural values and local wisdom as legitimacy and a way to realize citizen power in public decision-making. Through this approach, the community has the power to regulate, supervise and evaluate its life in accordance with the principles and habits that grow in its community.

This approach also provides an environment that can be used to direct the community to not only become beneficiaries, but also play an active role in the entire cycle of village fund management, from planning, implementation, supervision to evaluation. Community involvement in this cycle will have positive implications for the effectiveness of village fund management, which if implemented properly will be able to reduce the poverty rate. Chamber in Daniati (2019) stated that poverty experts must be more participatory and close to the poor to experience, learn and feel poverty, then act on it all. This shows that it is actually the poor who are able to overcome the problem of poverty, but due to various obstacles, they are unable to voice it, so the role of experts is needed as an extension of the hand that can formulate policies after experiencing and feeling the poverty experienced by the community. The point is that community participation is urgently needed in the problem of poverty alleviation.

In Indonesia, the Government has realized that ideal community participation is the key to poverty alleviation efforts through village funds. Various regulations on village fund management from the beginning of the launch of the village fund program until now explain that the use of village funds is based on several principles, including community participation.

## **METHODS**

The approach used in the research is an inductive approach, as a framework to develop theories or understandings based on empirical data obtained during the research process. The inductive approach allows researchers to start from the observation of concrete phenomena (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021), namely the lack of ideal community participation in the management of village funds in

TTU Regency. This approach is relevant for qualitative research that aims to explore complex and often unstructured social phenomena. The use of an inductive approach allows researchers to explore data without being tied to pre-existing theoretical frameworks. In the context of this research, an inductive approach is used to explore a deep understanding of how society interprets the value of *ma fit ma toup* in daily life.

The research strategy used in this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a research approach that aims to understand the essence of human experience of a phenomenon, as felt and interpreted by the individual who experiences it. The phenomenological strategy was chosen in the context of this study because the objective is to explore how the community at TTU interprets their role in the management of village funds and how their experiences affect the level of participation. This strategy is in line with the philosophical approach of interpretivism, which prioritizes understanding the social world from the perspective of individuals or groups directly involved. In the management of village funds, many complex social dynamics, such as power relations, limited information and community literacy, can only be understood in its entirety through the perspective of those involved. Through phenomenological research, it is possible to obtain an in-depth understanding of the value of *ma fit ma toup* as a form of community participation in the management of village funds, including factors that support or hinder its implementation.

This research uses a qualitative method, namely research using a natural setting with the intention of finding, interpreting and describing narratively a phenomenon that occurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In line with this opinion, Creswell & Creswell (2018) said that qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning given by a person or a group of people regarding social or humanitarian issues. This understanding is carried out through a research process that involves a dynamic process, which is characterized by evolving research procedures and questions. The use of qualitative methods in this study is in line with the purpose of the research which focuses on an in-depth understanding of the role of the value of *ma fit ma toup* as a form of community participation in the management of village funds.

The data collected in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from the results of observations and interviews with informants, while secondary data was taken from documents related to the management of village funds in TTU Regency. The stages of data analysis using the Milles & Huberman (2014) approach, include data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Meanwhile, to ensure that the data collected and the results of the analysis are valid, credible, and accountable, this study uses triangulation methods and transgulation of data sources.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Understanding the value of *ma fit ma toup***

North Central Timor Regency as an autonomous region was formed based on Law Number 69 of 1958 concerning the Establishment of Level II Regions in the Level I Regions of Bali, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara. Based on this provision, the Level I Swatantra area of East Nusa Tenggara is divided into 12 Level II Swatantra Areas including the Level II Region of North Central Timor. The Level II area of North Central Timor includes 3 (three) areas of the former Kingdom/Swapraja, 18 Kefetoran

and 176 Ketemukungan. De jure North Central Timor Regency has existed since the promulgation of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 69 of 1958 on August 9, 1958, but de facto it only began in November 1958 at the same time as the inauguration of the Temporary Regional Head Officer Level II of North Central Timor, D.C. Saudale.

TTU Regency is one of 6 (six) Regencies/Cities located on the mainland of Timor Island and 22 (twenty-two) Regencies/Cities in East Nusa Tenggara Province. TTU Regency is located between 9° 02' 48" S – 9° 37' 36" S and between 124° 04' 02" E - 124° 46' 00" E, with an area of 2,669.7 Km<sup>2</sup> and has boundaries including: South Central Timor Regency, North with Ambenu (Timor Leste) and Sawu Sea, West with Kupang Regency and South Central Timor, and the East borders the Belu Regency and Malacca Regency. The population of TTU Regency in 2024 will be 276,032, consisting of 137,887 males and 138,145 females.

The TTU Regency Government Institution is not only driven by technical, supporting and staff elements, but also supported by regional apparatus, namely sub-districts, villages and sub-districts. As of December 2024, TTU Regency as a whole has 24 sub-districts with 182 villages and 11 sub-districts.

Historically, the area of North Central Timor was originally called *Onderafdeeling Noord Midden Timor* during the Dutch East Indies Government, based on BS/Governor Number 9-10 of 1915, which was a merger of 3 (three) kingdoms/swaprajas, 18 kefetoran and 176 temukung, including:

- Swapraja Miomaffo has 8 kefetoran each of Tunbaba, Manamas, Bikomi, Noemuti, Nilulat, Noeltoko, Naktimun and Aplal.
- Swapraja Insana has 5 kefetoran each of Oelolok, Ainan, Maubesi, Subun and Fafinesu.
- Swapraja Biboki has 5 kefetoran each of Ustetu, Oetasi, Bukifan, Taitoh and Harneno.

Since ancient times, the people in TTU Regency have been dominated by the Dawan tribe, also known as the Atoni tribe, Atoni Meto or Atoni Pah Meto. This tribe is spread evenly in the western part of Timor Island starting from Kupang Regency, South Central Timor Regency and North Central Timor Regency. Interpretations of this tribe vary. Foreign traders from outside the island of Timor called him Atoni; People from the islands of Rote and Sabu call it Sonnabai (the people of the king of Sonbai); F. J. Ormeling calls it *The Timorese Proper*; while Middelkoop uses the expression *people of the dry land*, in line with the literal translation of atoni pah meto which comes from the words Atoni = person and pah meto = dry land (Silab et al, 1997).

Yohanes Sanak, one of the traditional leaders from the Bikomi area, said that in their daily lives, the Dawan tribe people carry out 3 (three) big agendas, each of which is welfare, politics and rites. Welfare is related to people's behavior to meet their living needs; politics is related to social behavior between communities, including regulating their respective positions, rights and obligations; while rite is related to the belief system of values that frame both activities (welfare and politics). Rite is a form of reverence for the highest substance or form, which atoni meto alone cannot name. The substance is seen through its properties which are described as *apinat aklihat* (source of luminous power), *amoet apakaet* (creator and maintainer of life) and *afinit anesit* (the highest and greatest). From this ritual agenda, the law called *le'u* was born. It is called the law because every violation of *le'u* is believed to bring sanctions for those who violate it, whether it is in the form of disasters, catastrophes, diseases, crop failures or other bad social conditions.

Respect for *le'u* gives rise to social teachings that are adhered to and carried out responsibly, including in the political agenda, including:

1. *Moen ma kuli ma ma naka kit*. This doctrine regulates the structure of government. In this teaching, atoni meto is directed to respect its leader and the leader is directed to regulate and take care of all the people he leads.
2. *Tamolok tabua*. This teaching regulates the need for dialogue or joint discussion in making a decision, especially related to the public interest or common interest.
3. *Tmeup tabua tah tabua*. This teaching regulates living together, including in managing the government. *Tmeup tabua tah tabua* means working together, eating together. This teaching teaches that in every activity cooperation is needed between all parties involved so that whatever is produced will be enjoyed together as a result of joint work.

In the concept of government of the Dawan tribe, these social teachings crystallize in a custom called *ma fit ma toup*. Etymologically, *ma fit ma toup* comes from the dawan language which consists of 2 (two) words, namely *ma fit* which means to lift and *ma toup* which means to join hands. Literally, *ma fit ma toup* can be interpreted as lifting each other up and holding each other together. *Ma fit ma toup* is a community habit based on the spirit of togetherness in completing a job. *Ma fit ma toup* gives a positive meaning as a form of involvement or participation by upholding togetherness. *Ma fit ma toup* also teaches that in the government system, the leaders and the people they lead have a shared obligation to create prosperity.

Long before the establishment of the State of Indonesia, the Dawan tribe has made participation the core of life through the habit of *ma fit ma toup*. From an ontological perspective, *ma fit ma toup* is a manifestation of human nature as a social creature that cannot live alone. As in Aristotle's idea of *zoon politicon*, humans have the desire and instinct to gather and cooperate. The essence of human existence is not merely actualized in practical behavior but more than that it is an existential structure that animates social, cultural and even cosmological structures. *Ma fit ma toup* is a way of life that binds every society in a network of mutual relationships and transcends personal desires or interests. This reciprocal relationship describes what the community provides as a form of participation and what is received as a result of its involvement in the activity. This is also seen as in the indigenous peoples of villages in Java, *nagari* in Minangkabau, *mapalus* in Minahasa, *subak* in Bali to *sambatan* in Madura.

The ontology of *ma fit ma toup* can also be seen in the relationship between humans and nature and God. Cooperation to realize the welfare of the community is also interpreted in the dawan society as an effort to maintain the balance of the cosmos. Everyone is given the task of using the resources provided by nature together with others to create well-being according to God's will (the highest substance). Therefore, *ma fit ma toup* is not just a strategy for survival, but something that actually exists in the collective consciousness as well as reflecting the view of the Dawan tribe that its sustainability can only be realized if everyone is aware of and appreciates the existence of others and the universe. This essence is what makes *ma fit ma toup* the identity of the Dawan tribe community, not just as a tradition or hereditary habit.

If ontology discusses why *ma fit ma toup* exists, then epistemology discusses how we understand the truth of *ma fit ma toup*. On the epistemological side, *ma fit ma toup* shows the peculiarities or

uniqueness of knowledge that is born, grows and develops from the social practices of the life of the Dawan tribe. Initially, knowledge about *ma fit ma toup* was obtained through empirical experience that was passed down orally and practiced from generation to generation. The people of Dawan practice *ma fit ma toup* in their daily lives, seen for example in the habit of cultivating agricultural land. Landowners usually provide food and beverages (resources) and other communities will work together to cultivate the land. This process will be repeated and moved until it reaches the land of all communities. Likewise, such as helping neighbors build houses, helping disaster victims, building traditional houses or *lopo* together.

This custom or tradition is maintained sacredly through oral teachings from the elders to the community in the generation below them so that the truth of *ma fit ma toup* is performative, meaning that it is proven to be true because it is carried out and produces welfare. However, the experience passed down is not the only source of knowledge about *ma fit ma toup*. The experience is also strengthened through a rational framework. From the point of view of social rationality, *ma fit ma toup* as a form of participation can be justified because collective work will be much more effective, safe and sustainable compared to individual work.

In addition, various religious teachings today also teach a life of help, love and brotherhood as contained in the values of Pancasila in Indonesia. This provides moral and cirtual legitimacy for *ma fit ma toup* as an ethical command. The epistemology of *ma fit ma toup* is also supported by the reasoning that deliberation, discussion and cooperation are ways to realize the truth through mutual agreement. Various sociological and anthropological studies even provide scientific justification that societies with a high level of participation in social activities have stronger economic and social resilience. Thus, the truth of the value of *ma fit ma toup* can be tested empirically, morally and scientifically. This value of truth is not a static tradition but is a knowledge that continues to develop through collective practice and rational reflection and can be applied in various aspects of life and development.

The axiological aspect provides a study in terms of values and goals. In this dimension, *ma fit ma toup* goes beyond its instrumental function as a social means to maintain the unity of society when formal institutions cannot move quickly. It provides the basis for the ethics of national development that opposes capitalism of the ruling elite. Development that is rooted in the value of *ma fit ma toup* views progress and welfare as the common good, not as the accumulation of the interests of a group of groups. At the global level, this spirit is in line with the concept of ecological sustainability because it teaches cross-border participation for the sake of common prosperity which leads to the safety and sustainability of the earth and life in it. Thus, *ma fit ma toup* axiologically directs a moral orientation that encourages the dawon society to build a just, inclusive and consistent social order in accordance with the universe. However, *ma fit ma toup* is not just a means through the development of a social order to achieve goals but *ma fit ma toup* is also the goal itself, namely common prosperity in the framework of a safe, civilized society that is in harmony with universal human values. In this framework, the values of *ma fit ma toup* can be used as the ethical basis of public policy so that actions and policies in the management of village funds are not only measured from participation alone but also from the resulting humanitarian value, namely common welfare.

### **Ma fit ma toup as a form of participation**

The teachings that underlie the habit of *ma fit ma toup* highly uphold the value of togetherness in completing an agenda or in completing a job. The basic philosophy is that in regulating common

interests, it must start from the division of structure and responsibilities between leaders and those who are led, prioritize deliberation and involve all stakeholders in joint decision-making to complete the implementation of work so that the results must be enjoyed or felt together by all communities. This is what is called in modern concepts as participation.

Currently, community participation is one of the key elements in creating effective public policies. The high level of community participation is measured not only by their willingness to make material contributions, but also by the extent to which they have the right to determine the direction and goals of development and their ability to preserve and develop development outcomes independently.

When everyone is given space, access to information and real opportunities to be involved from the planning, implementation to evaluation of a program or policy that touches their lives, then this is the point at which the community has been present as the main actor in the decision-making process. This is the true form of participation, namely the recognition that the community is not just a beneficiary, but more than that they are the subjects of development who have the right to determine the direction of policy.

*Ma fit ma toup* as a characteristic of the dawau community is interpreted as one of the most authentic forms of participation. Historically, *ma fit ma toup* existed long before participatory approaches to development were formally recognized through government policies. For a long time, the Dawau community has worked together to build houses, cultivate land, repair roads and carry out traditional ceremonies. This is due to the full awareness that prosperity can only be produced through common welfare. When entering the era of modern development, *ma fit ma toup* began to be abandoned because it was considered a local tradition that lost its meaning due to the development of the concept of modernization. Now is the time to reorganize the concept of *ma fit ma toup* as a collective participation that is social capital in development.

In the context of national development, *ma fit ma toup* is the active participation of the community in the stages of planning, implementing and supervising development programs. Sometimes, initiatives arise from community groups because of the urgency of needs and desires to realize welfare, so that *ma fit ma toup* also gives birth to a form of participation from the bottom up. *Ma fit ma toup* also has an equality dimension, where all people have the same rights and obligations to participate regardless of social or economic status. In the spirit of *ma fit ma toup*, everyone is considered to have the same abilities and limitations so that cooperation is needed to get maximum results. The consequence is to uphold togetherness and an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation.

From a sociological point of view, *ma fit ma toup* strengthens social relations because it fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual trust. Collective participation will only happen if there is solidarity and trust. These two things are social capital that, if mixed properly, will contribute to the achievement of policy goals. People with a high level of trust tend to be more able to cooperate, have resilience to social resistance and potential conflicts, and are adaptive to various changes. Thus, *ma fit ma toup* as a collective participation will make a positive contribution to the quality of social relations that are the foundation of the sustainability of the policy.

From an economic point of view, *ma fit ma toup* provides strategic value because it will be able to reduce costs by utilizing the collective resources of the community. For example, the maintenance of infrastructure such as roads and irrigation costs relatively large if implemented with a project approach.

However, with the concept of *ma fit ma toup*, the implementation of the work will be carried out in a mutual cooperation way where the community contributes in the form of manpower, local materials and even costs which will of course result in budget efficiency for these activities. This also gives birth to a strong sense of belonging so that it will create concern and responsibility for the success of the activity. In addition, *ma fit ma toup* also has empowerment value. Collective participation requires a good organizational system to be able to achieve satisfactory results. This makes the community learn to plan activities, organize resources, make joint decisions, regulate effective division of labor, supervise implementation in accordance with what is planned, and conduct evaluations to maintain sustainability. This learning process will improve managerial competence in empowerment.

In the context of politics and governance, *ma fit ma toup* is defined as participation in development that will strengthen participatory democratic practices. Participatory democracy implies the active participation of people in decision-making that impacts their own lives. With the teachings of *tamolok tabua*, the implementation plan of *ma fit ma toup* was discussed and agreed upon. Policies that come from community participation tend to be able to meet the real needs of the community and gain strong legitimacy to facilitate their implementation.

In the context of public policy, *ma fit ma toup* places the community as an actor who has a role and responsibility for the direction of the implementation of a policy, through:

1. The right to know and judge. In the concept of *ma fit ma toup*, the government provides clear, open and easy-to-understand information so that people can assess the impact of policies on their social, economic and environmental lives. For example, in the past, the owner of the land to be cultivated provided information to the entire community about the plan to cultivate the land so that the community would assess whether it was feasible to work together or it was enough to be done by the landowner himself.
2. The right to provide opinions or inputs. The community is given space and opportunity to express their opinions and aspirations, formulate problems and offer appropriate solutions to the implementation of the policy, through mechanisms such as community meetings, village deliberations (*musrenbang*) and public consultation forums or focus group discussions. This makes the community a collective decision-maker by giving them the authority to set priorities and policies. In the past, this mechanism was in line with the teachings of *tamolok tabua* which was a dialogue or joint discussion in making a decision related to the public interest or common interest. This process allows for the birth of decisions based on equal discussions, not from formal meetings to agree on what has been formulated by the elites.
3. The right to be involved in the implementation. *Ma fit ma toup* places common welfare as a goal that every community has the right to obtain. In the spirit of getting welfare rights, every community will be proactive in being involved in the implementation of these policies or activities. The community will work together, hand in hand to complete the work that is a shared responsibility so that they can enjoy the results. Thus, participation in the implementation of activities is not considered an obligation but as a right in an effort to obtain welfare.

Thus, *ma fit ma toup* affirms the principle of participation from the people, by the people and for the people. The community is no longer seen as an object of policy, but instead is positioned as an equal

partner of the government in resource management, determining development goals and monitoring how policies are implemented. Decisions made within the framework of *ma fit ma toup* tend to be fairer, more inclusive and sustainable because they embody various interests and experiences of the community. This is the essence of participatory democracy, which unites political power and decision-making into a shared process, where people have the full right to make decisions that determine their lives.

### **Ma fit ma toup in village fund management**

One of the strategic fiscal policies in the village level government in Indonesia is the village fund, which aims to improve community welfare, strengthen village autonomy and reduce development disparities between regions. Villages receive a direct budget from the central government every year reaching hundreds of trillions of rupiah, which is allocated for various empowerment and development programs. However, large amounts of funds do not guarantee success if they are not managed in a transparent, accountable manner and with the support of community participation. Participation is needed because village communities are not limited to being beneficiaries but they are the main actors who are actively involved in planning, deciding, implementing and supervising the entire cycle of village fund management. At this point, the meaning of *ma fit ma toup* is laid to ensure that every rupiah of village funds is used to meet what is the needs of the community, not just as a complement to the administration of financial management accountability.

In this context, *ma fit ma toup* is defined as an effort to actively involve the community in the decision-making process that affects their lives. The value of the teaching of *ma fit ma toup* can be seen in the entire policy cycle starting from planning, implementation, supervision to evaluation of village fund management. At the planning stage, *ma fit ma toup* directs in village deliberations to determine development themes according to their needs, such as improving road infrastructure, irrigation, providing clean water, economic empowerment and other activities. The value of the teachings of *ma fit ma toup* places the presence of the community in deliberation is not just listening to and agreeing to what has been planned by the village elite, but the presence of the community also means contributing ideas, criticisms and aspirations equally without discriminating between community groups. At the implementation stage, *ma fit ma toup* requires the contribution of manpower, skills and even field supervision to ensure that the work is done correctly and as planned. At the stage of supervision and evaluation, *ma fit ma toup* is present in the control of activities to ensure the achievement of maximum results and sustainability with future improvements. Thus, *ma fit ma toup* sits the community as a subject who has a voice (idea/opinion), has a choice and has control over village funds which essentially belong to the community.

Collective participation in the management of village funds is an important part in realizing village sovereignty and independence. A village is considered a public legal entity that has the authority to regulate and take care of the interests of its own community. This shows that the village has its own government, not being part of the government above it. This is where the role of participation is to bridge village sovereignty with development activities. *Ma fit ma toup* gave birth to a participatory democratic system where every community has the equality to be actively involved in the decision-making process based on collective needs, not the direction of the village elite group. *Ma fit toup* also provides equal space for all elements of society, ranging from marginalized groups such as women, people with disabilities, indigenous groups and the community in general to voice what their needs

are. In other words, *ma fit ma toup* is the actualization of the principle of the village, by the village and for the village.

*Ma fit ma toup* in the management of village funds also provides a strong perspective and consequences from the socio-cultural aspect. Mutual cooperation and deliberation have long been the foundation of life together. Village funds with the spirit of *ma fit ma toup* have created an opportunity to revive the tradition of mutual cooperation and community cooperation in development. Mutual cooperation and deliberation in the management of village funds give birth to a fairly high sense of ownership. This sense of ownership will encourage collective responsibility to keep the results of village fund management sustainable.

The large value of the village fund budget often raises the possibility of misuse. *Ma fit ma toup* as a form of active participation will be able to ensure accountability and prevent the development of corruption, collusion and nepotism practices in the management of village funds. Direct involvement in planning and supervision allows the community to evaluate the suitability of the budget with the plan as well as efforts to improve quality and standards. Therefore, *ma fit ma toup* is not only intersecting with democracy but also an effective way to control society.

In addition to ensuring the realization of accountability, the right to work in the management of the Village Fund also has a direct impact on the economic strength of the community. Communities can ensure that development programs actually increase income and well-being through involvement in the planning process. For example, the community can choose to prioritize the development of various economic aspects such as village markets, entrepreneurship training, the establishment of BUMDes (Village-Owned Enterprises), and other productive economic enterprises. In other words, *ma fit ma toup* not only channels people's desire to work but also builds people's ability to control their own development as an important capital for people's economic independence.

The concept of *mafit ma toup* in the management of village funds can be concluded as follows:

1. *Ma fit ma toup* results in participatory budgeting, where the community determines the budget from village funds to finance the things that are considered most important such as health services, education, infrastructure improvement and other productive economic activities.
2. The decision to participate that was born from the *ma fit ma toup* approach not only shows policies that suit needs, but also arouses a strong sense of ownership. This creates a strong responsibility to oversee the implementation of the program, control that it runs as planned, evaluate the success and benefits of the program and maintain its sustainability.

Although it contains strategic value, the implementation of *ma fit ma toup* in village fund management also has several challenges, including:

1. *Ma fit ma toup* grows and develops in a traditional spirit that prioritizes togetherness and solidarity. Today's developments bring pragmatic and individualistic views that are not in line with togetherness and solidarity. There is a tendency for people now to see development in villages as the responsibility of the government. If not anticipated properly, this shift in view will reduce the values in the view of *ma fit ma toup*.
2. The design of planning forums and deliberations today places village leaders as facilitators who often dominate the forum. Village elites or certain figures have power over decisions about the management of village funds, while vulnerable groups such as women, youth groups and the

poor are underrepresented. If this happens, then *ma fit ma toup* no longer has meaning because togetherness only happens to the group in power.

3. Transparency is an absolute requirement so that *ma fit ma toup* can be applied in the management of village funds. Without transparency, the community will tend to be suspicious of the village ruling group and potentially weaken the spirit of participation because the community considers that there is an injustice in the management of village funds.
4. *Ma fit ma toup* purely relies on moral values and solidarity or togetherness. This is a bit contradictory to the life of modern society which is increasingly rational in contributing its energy and time. Without reasonable awards or incentives to the community, it is difficult to maintain the consistency of *ma fit ma toup*.

## CONCLUSION

*Ma fit ma toup* is a custom of the Dawan/Atoni tribe community in TTU Regency which has cultural value to describe the spirit of solidarity, togetherness, mutual cooperation and participation. This value directs the community not only to become beneficiaries, but also to play an important role in the entire cycle of village fund management, starting from planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation. From a socio-cultural point of view, *ma fit ma toup* revives the values of mutual cooperation and deliberation (*tamolok tabua*). This makes the results of development more sustainable because everyone is responsible for taking care of them.

Some things that can be suggested, including:

1. Strengthen transparency and accountability so that the public believes and is encouraged to participate;
2. It is necessary to consider the provision of incentives in the form of awards, programs or policies or materials, so that the values and spirit of *ma fit ma toup* are maintained in today's modern developments;
3. It is necessary to plan (design) a form of forum or deliberation that ensures the involvement of marginalized people and people with disabilities so that the resulting agreement is more fair and representative.

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