

# Local Autonomy, Local Capacity Building and Support for Minority Languages: Field Experiences from Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

The need for capacity building in maintaining and reviving indigenous cultures/languages has been highlighted recently (de Graff and Shiraishi 2004; Dimmendaal 2004; Foley 2004; Lastra 2004, among others). In this paper, I will discuss issues of capacity building that might affect the wellbeing of local cultures/languages in Indonesia. This will be in relation to the rapid political change (decentralization) currently being experienced. I will be addressing the aims, regulations and current implementation of the current drastic decentralization laws. The description is based on field experiences from my current language documentation project of Rongga in Manggarai Flores Indonesia.

In order to give a more detailed appraisal, it is necessary to look at what has happened elsewhere in Indonesia. Comparing Rongga in Manggarai with other local languages across Indonesia is too big of an undertaking for the present paper, therefore in this paper I will focus on the comparison of Rongga in Manggarai, Flores Island, NTT (*Nusa Tenggara Timur*, or East Nusa Tenggara) province with Balinese in Bali. The specific reasons for choosing Balinese are elaborated on in subsection 5.2.

I wish to highlight the following points. Firstly, capacity building is as important as capacity support. Secondly, capacity related variables that support viable indigenous cultures/languages are complex, and capacity building and support must include more than simply developing human resources. It must also include strengthening, reforming, or restoring relevant institutions/organizations. In the Indonesian context, this also means reviving and strengthening the traditional customary *adat* system.

Thirdly, while capacity building and support must be approached from a broad or macro, perspective, with a top-down and bottom up approach at the same time, I argue for the significance of priority given to the capacity building and long term support at the regional/local level, particularly at the village level. It will be shown that the current climate of democracy in Indonesia with the introduction of new laws on regional/local autonomy has provided new promising prospects of revival of local cultures/languages. While this paper is drawn from Rongga and Bali experiences, I believe that the insights and recommendations formulated can be extended to minority cultures/languages in other parts of Indonesia.

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This paper is organized as follows: To provide the background, I will present basic facts about Indonesia's geography, demography, government and political systems in section 2, followed by a brief historical context of the introduction of the new autonomy laws in section 3. After discussing the goals of local autonomy (section 4) and the significant changes in the new law (section 5), I will discuss the implication of the laws in relation to the wellbeing of indigenous cultures and languages on the basis of field experiences in Balinese and Rongga cases (section 5). Section 7 provides the summary and final remarks.

## **2 Basic Facts about Indonesia in Brief**

### **2.1 Geography and Society**

Indonesia is perhaps the largest archipelagic nation in the world with a total of 17,508 islands spreading between Asia and Australia. Among these, about 6,000 have names and around 1,000 are permanently settled. It has the world's fourth largest population after China, India, and the United States, totaling an estimated 225.3 million people in 2005 (UN, 2005).

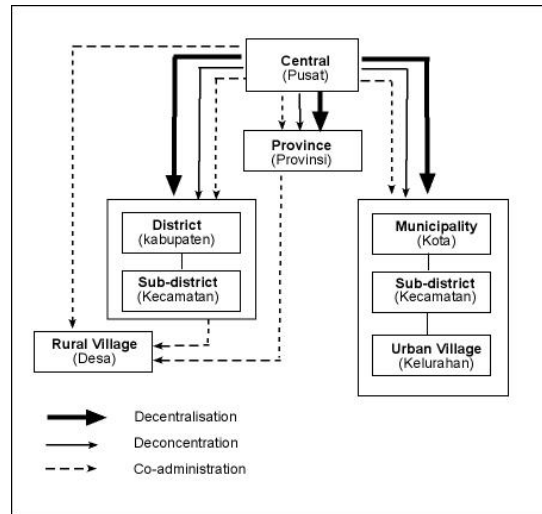
Ethnically, culturally and linguistically, Indonesia is highly diverse. There are over 350 ethnolinguistic groups estimated in Indonesia. There are about 550 local languages in Indonesia, roughly one-tenth of all the languages in the world today (Sneddon 2003:196). Some have large numbers of speakers, e.g. Javanese (75 million), Sundanese (27 million) and Madurese (nearly 14 million)(see, Steinhauer 1994; Sneddon 2003: 198). There are other smaller languages with speakers over 1 million, e.g. Minangkabau (6 million), Buginese (3,6 million), Balinese (3,2 million), and Acehese (2,4 million). However, there are also many small languages with speakers in the thousands, e.g. Rongga (5000 speakers).

The cultural and ethnic diversity has been in the past, and will still be, a challenge for any government to maintain a united Indonesia that is politically stable and economically prosperous across the archipelago. In addition, tension due to religious issues and terrorism further complicates the situation.

### **2.2 Government and Administrative Units**

Figure 1 shows the structural and territorial government of Indonesia within the new framework of regional/local autonomy. Indonesia is divided into autonomous provinces, which consist of districts or regencies (*kabupaten*) and city municipalities (*kota madya* or *kodya*). Districts and municipalities are technically the same level of government but distinguished by the location of government administration: *kota* (municipality) in urban area vs. *kabupaten* (district) in a rural area. Within districts and municipalities there are sub-districts (*kecamatan*) which are smaller administrative government units. Each sub-district is further divided into villages. Villages in rural areas are called *desa*, while in urban areas they are called as *kelurahan*. In Bali, however, there is a dualism of village units: the government administrative unit of *desa dinas* and the traditional village unit of *desa adat*. The retention of *desa adat* has been critically important for the maintenance of Balinese culture/language even though the dualism has sometimes resulted in rivalry between the two (see, Warren 1993).

Currently there are 33 provinces, 370 districts and municipalities, 5,263 sub-districts, 7,113 kelurahan and 62,806 villages in Indonesia. These figures will certainly increase because there has recently been a growing tendency for *pemekaran* (formation of new provinces and districts).



**Figure 1.** Structural government and administration of Indonesia according to the autonomy law 22/1999<sup>2</sup> (adapted from Usman (2002))

The Indonesian constitution of 1945 regulates separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president holds executive power. The President is both Chief of State and Head of Government. The 1945 constitution has been amended in August 2002. One important amendment is a direct presidential election, beginning with the 2004 general election. Prior to the 2004 elections, the People’s Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*—MPR) chose the president and vice president. Under the revised election laws, governors (*gubernur*), mayors (*walikota*), and district heads (*bupati*) are also now directly elected. The *kepala desa* (rural village head) has been traditionally directly elected by the village community. However, the sub-district head (*camat*) and the urban village head (*lurah*) are civil servants appointed by the local district government.

At the regional/local level, the chief executives are Provincial Governors, District Heads, Mayors of cities, and Village Heads. Regional/local legislation is handled by provincial and district parliaments, called DPRD (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*)

<sup>2</sup> The new law for local government (Law 32/2004) was introduced in 2004 to replace Law 22/1999 in response to the amendments to the 1945 constitution, especially with regards to direct elections and the related issues emerging in 1999-2004. The structural hierarchy of administrative units with respect to local autonomy at the district level depicted in Figure 1 basically remains the same. Law 32/2004, however, appears to place the rural village (*desa*) in the same structural dominance as the *kelurahan*. This change is a drawback to the spirit of traditional autonomy of *desa* (see 5.1).

### 2.3 National and Local Politics

Indonesia has enjoyed freedom and democracy in the post-Suharto era, starting in 1998. There is now freedom of speech, including free press. There is no longer controlled political development as in the New Order era. As a result, there has been an explosion in the number of political parties. While there are numerous parties vying for power, none enjoys national majority support. The main parties include the Golkar (Functional Group), Party Crescent Moon and Star Party (PBB), Democratic Party (PD), Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), National Awakening Party (PKB), National Mandate Party (PAN), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and United Development Party (PPP).

At the local/regional levels, especially in non-muslim electorates such as Bali and Manggarai/NTT, Golkar and PDI-P are generally the two most popular parties. In recent development, an independent candidate was allowed in Aceh and won the election for the governor (Aceh is a special case, and an independent candidate is not (yet) permitted in other local electorates in Indonesia).

Money, politics, ethnicity and/or clan base, and religious affiliation often play a role in national and local politics. There are mass campaign rallies as a show of force in the lead up to elections. Speeches by the candidates generally have no clear or fresh proposals to offer addressing national or local issues.

## 3 Historical Context of the New Autonomy Laws

Indonesia's political system was highly centralized under the Soeharto regime. Since the independence from the Dutch in 1945, the central government has been in trouble for decades to contain separatist rebellions. Soeharto, a general in the army himself, believed in, and therefore implemented, a highly centralized powerful system to control the unity of Indonesia, by force if necessary. During his *Orde Baru* (New Order) era, any measure was regarded legitimate in the name of Indonesian nation and development (*pembangunan*).

The negative impact of Indonesianisation to minority cultures/languages under the centralized and autocratic system in Soeharto era has been well documented. Soeharto's style of governance has also produced a highly corrupt system, which in itself is ultimately the cause of his downfall in 1998. The Indonesian economy collapsed following the economic crisis spreading in the east and south-east Asia the preceding year. Soeharto's downfall closed his New Order era, and marked the beginning of the reformation era.

Since the fall of Soeharto 1998, there have been four Presidents elected: B.J. Habibie (1998-1999), Abdurachman Wahid (1999-2001), Megawati Sukarno Putri (2001-2004), and Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (2004-now). In response to public demand and the spirit of reformation, Indonesia has embarked on a decentralization program on a grand scale. Two laws adopted by the Parliament in early 1999 require the government to implement drastic measures for decentralization within two years. The Law on Regional Governance (Law 22, 1999) regulates political and administrative responsibilities for the local government. The Law on Fiscal Balance (Law 25, 1999) delineates, among others, new distribution of revenue sources including sharing of oil and gas revenues between central and local governments. The new policy of regional autonomy became effective

on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001.<sup>3</sup> There were significant changes after then, especially the amendments of the Indonesian constitution of 1945 and the introduction of new laws related to political parties (31/2002), 12/2003 and on (direct) elections, etc. In response to these swift changes, law 32/2004 on local government was introduced as a revision of law 22/1999.

#### 4 Why Local Autonomy for Indonesia?

There are historical, geographical and socio-political reasons for the implementation of local autonomy in Indonesia (cf., Said 2005:78-88). Geographically, as described in §2, Indonesia consists of thousands of islands, and hundreds of ethnic groups with their different languages and cultures. The population of over 220 million people is spreading in vast areas and often on remote islands which demands varying approaches and services in response to quite diverse needs. A decentralized system of governance is naturally a logical system for such a geographic and demographic situation. It is hard to imagine how a centralized system could respond and offer satisfying services to different local needs across Indonesia.

Historically, the founding fathers of Indonesia, when debating the 1945 constitution and considering the geography and demographic diversity just outlined, already came to the conclusion that a decentralized system was considered an ideal system for an independent Indonesia. Hence, article 18 of the 1945 constitution was formulated to recognize local diversity and guarantee that local potential and needs are well taken care of.

While local autonomy was already well conceived, it gained momentum in 1999 when Soeharto was suddenly forced out of power, after the collapse of the national economy. The euphoria of reformation led to the reassessment of Soeharto's system of government, in particular his centralized system of government during his 30 years in power. It was believed that much of the problem was rooted in his centralized and dictatorial style of government. Hence, the new Law on Regional Governance (Law 22, 1999) was hastily passed (formally authorized on 4 May, 1999) with high expectations that the law could fix the problems. The preamble (i.e. the consideration section) of the new law explicitly states:

- That the 1945 constitution guarantees local autonomy, i.e. the freedom of the local government to manage its local affairs;
- That local autonomy needs to be implemented to face new challenges nationally or internationally, with the principles of democracy, community participation and empowerment, equity and justice, recognition of the potentials and diversity within regions;
- That the existing legislatures, namely laws no 5 1974 on *Pokok-pokok Pemerintahan di Daerah* and Laws no 5 1979 on *Pemerintahan Desa* are outdated. The latter in particular imposed a uniformed local system in terms of

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<sup>3</sup> Decentralisation was in fact already initiated when Soeharto was still in power, e.g. decentralisation of education with the introduction of *muatan lokal* (*mulok*), or Local Content Curriculum started in 1994 with discussions already taking place in the 1980s (Bjork 2004). This was encouraged by the International donors. It should be noted that decentralisation during Soeharto time was not of the nature and scale proposed in the reformation era.

name and structure at the village level across Indonesia, against the 1945 constitution, and therefore had to be replaced.

Politically, it is expected that local autonomy can address the long-term and deep regional discontents against the system that is too centralized by Jakarta. The political separatist agenda of those disgruntled regions (mainly outside Java) is expected to be accommodated and the breakup of Indonesia can hopefully be avoided.

In short, there are three aims of the new law of local autonomy. The first one is to correct and replace the past regulations for regional/local government. The second aim is to bring about better delivery of government services to meet the local needs, and to raise the level of local government accountability within the principles of democracy, community participation and empowerment, equity and justice, recognition of the potential and diversity within regions. Finally, related to these two aims, local autonomy is to address political discontent and maintain the unity of Indonesia as a nation.

## **5 What Does Local Autonomy Mean for the Language/Cultural Maintenance?**

Theoretically, the local autonomy would open an opportunity for the local government to take care of its own interests which were often neglected in Soeharto's era. In practice, however, the implementation and progress of this hastily crafted law is slow, due to a range of local and national problems, such as mediocre economic growth and other political concerns of separatism, terrorism and uncertainties of clear future directions (Turner *et al.* 2003: 145). Readiness of local government to exercise new responsibilities with greater autonomy is also a factor. In addition, the decentralization has not been implemented whole-heartedly due to inherent conflicts between the goals of decentralization policies and the interests of competing groups or factions within the (central) government (who then often actively resist the implementation of new autonomy measures) (see Bjork 2004).

Relevant for our discussion is the implication of the laws in relation to the wellbeing of the indigenous communities, especially the maintenance (and possible revival) of indigenous cultures and languages. The prospect appears to vary across Indonesia, depending on a range of factors at the regional/local level. This is discussed in relation to Balinese and Rongga in subsection 5.2, but significance changes in the autonomy law is first given in 5.1 below.

### **5.1 What changes in the autonomy laws**

The document of Law 22/1999 contains 134 articles, intended to replace the law number 5/1974 on local government. Included in 22/1999 are 19 articles as amendments of law 5/1979 regarding village governance (*Pemerintahan Desa*). In addition to this law, another law (Law 25/1999) which contains 33 articles regulates the fiscal balance between central and local government. Law 32/2004 is the revised version of laws 22/1999 and 25/1999 in response to changes and related issues emerging in 1999-2004.

The first major change in the new laws is the change in the regional hierarchy. Districts (*kabupaten*) and cities (*kota*) hold equivalent autonomous status. Unlike in the previous system where they are hierarchically under the province (*propinsi*), districts and cities are an independent focus of regional governments with direct communication to central agencies in Jakarta. (The province is rather dangling in the current hierarchy, which creates problems in coordinating the district governments within their jurisdiction).

The second change is the acquisition of quite a wide range of autonomous functions awarded to the regional governments at the level of districts and cities, not with provinces. The functions and responsibilities awarded include public work, health, education and culture, agriculture, communication, industry and trade, capital investment, environment, land, cooperatives, and manpower affairs and the management of national resources. (Note that education and culture (with local language included) are now at the hand of the local government to take care of). The management of the wide range of functions needs to be backed up with good (local) financial support, human resources and infrastructure. Unfortunately, the necessary backup is not there (yet). We come back to the issues relevant for language/cultural maintenance below.

It should be noted that local autonomy laws also regulate the structure, autonomy, and democratic governance at the rural village (*desa*) level. The village officials who manage various aspects of rural governance, economic development, and finances consist of a village chief, a secretary, and the board of village representatives. The rural village head is elected directly. The board of village representatives is called BPD or *Badan Perwakilan Desa* (Village Representative Board) according to Law 22/1999. Its members are directly elected by the community, and the village chief must be accountable to the community via the BPD.

In 2004, however, this was changed in Law 32/2004: BPD stands for *Badan Permasyarakatan Desa* (Village Consultative Board); its members are appointed; and the village chief must be held accountable to the district head. This could be regarded as a setback, against the spirit of democracy and local autonomy at the village level because it would mean that *desa* is the extension of the government, could be politicized and controlled by the district government in the same way as in Soeharto's era. In order to assess the implementation and implication of the local autonomy, I now turn to Balinese in Bali and Rongga in Flores.

## 5.2 *Balinese vs. Rongga*

The Balinese language and culture is not in anyway threatened or endangered. However, it is chosen for the comparative discussion of local autonomy and its implication for local cultures/languages for the following reasons. Firstly, Bali can be regarded as a model of a success story of local autonomy that has benefited and further enhanced local capacity for culture and language maintenance/revival. Secondly, Balinese contexts illustrate the complexity of supporting variables at the local level, in particular the significance of retaining *adat* (customary) system at the village level. Third, I am a Balinese and therefore in a unique position for this study. I am familiar with the situation in Bali, and have also been doing fieldwork research on Rongga in Flores. Much can be learned from the Balinese case, and this comparison is expected to lead to a better understanding of the issues involved, and the nature of challenges ahead in the context of new decentralized modern Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.2.1 Balinese in Bali

Balinese enjoys strong *support* from the local communities, local government and local NGOs, and is backed up by good human and financial *resources*. *Traditional social*

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<sup>4</sup> Ideally a comparison is done with a minority language, having similar conditions as Rongga which has benefited and done well under the new autonomy laws. Such a minority language is to my knowledge not (yet) attested to in Indonesia.

*structures* and *traditional leadership* are still mostly in tact, providing good conditions for maintenance of tradition where art and language are a significant part of the Hindu-based cultural practices of the Balinese.

The reasons why Balinese enjoys strong support from the provincial and district governments are that it is spoken in all districts in the province of Bali, and that the governments at these levels are controlled by the Balinese. Hence, programs to promote Balinese can be well coordinated at all levels, from the provincial level to the district, sub-district, and even to village levels.

A deliberate government program of reviving Balinese culture and language was in fact started in the 1980s when a Balinese anthropologist, Ida Bagus Mantra, became the governor of Bali. Among his programs which continue up to now are the annual Bali Art and Culture Festivals, generally for one month from June to July. In these festivals, there are exhibitions, workshops/seminars, competitions, and performances of different kinds of arts and cultural practices across Bali, including *lontar* (palm-leaf) reading or *makakawin/mabebasan*.

The festivals are intended to highlight the richness of Balinese culture, and to revive certain endangered cultural practices. Hence, these are the occasions where rare or unique traditions from different parts of Bali are exhibited or performed. While these festivals are not mainly organized for touristy purposes, they are also good tourist attractions, generating income for the local government.

In the current local autonomy reformation era, support from the provincial and district governments for Balinese culture is continuing, and even improving. The districts of Badung and Gianyar are two rich districts in Indonesia. The revenues mainly come from tourism. The awareness of democracy (i.e. the local government to be elected by the local people to serve the local needs) has led to a change towards a better distribution of government funding and services addressing local needs. In particular, there has been growing awareness of sustainable cultural tourism in Bali: in order to continuously benefit from tourism (and tourism-related industries), unique local cultures must be maintained and revived because these are the main touristy assets. For example, the district government of Gianyar provides extra cash to the traditional village units (*desa adat*) to support custom-related (*adat*) activities.

The provincial and district governments also provide funding for education and other activities to maintain Balinese culture and language. A Congress of the Balinese language which is held every five years also gets government support. Teachers of primary schools are given extra incentives, in addition to their monthly salaries. Teaching materials for Balinese are developed and funded by the local Bali government.

NGOs and wealthy Balinese entrepreneurs also provide important support. There have been local newspapers, radios and televisions – Bali TV in addition to the local government TV- with programs in Balinese, addressing local issues. Balinese gets support from internet technology, e.g. computerization of Balinese scripts in unicode (<http://www.babadbali.com/aksarabali.htm>).

There has also been a new movement called *Ajeg Bali* ‘Bali First, Prosperous Bali’. This movement aims at maintaining and reviving Bali in its original culture by empowering the Balinese people. There are a range of community programs including business training and providing small credit loans for the Balinese so that they can start

up new businesses. The idea is that if the Balinese are economically better off, they would continue practicing, and help to safe guard the Balinese culture.

In fact, for centuries, the Balinese have been able to maintain their unique culture, which is based on Hinduism. Bali Hinduism is a type of Hinduism that originated from India, reaching Bali in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It has incorporated lots of local cultures, including the Javanese culture. The Balinese live following long traditions of tight Hindu-based social structures. Hindu-based rituals and other practices are part of the daily life.

The traditional Hindu-based social structure has proven to be quite a resilient shield against the influence or pressure of outside cultures. Java (west of Bali) and Lombok (east of Bali) are now both Moslem islands. While the people in Java, Lombok, and other parts of Indonesia have been either embracing Islam or Christianity, the majority of Balinese are now still embracing local Hinduism. Christian missionaries attempted to spread Christianity in Bali in 20<sup>th</sup> century, but were unsuccessful.

There is world wide evidence that the spread of Christianity and Islam has resulted in the endangerment and ultimate extinction of local beliefs, related ritual practices, and finally local cultures, e.g. the case reported in Trobriand Islands (Senft 1997; to appear). Certain Javanese dances and ritual practices using old Javanese (*Kawi*)—a language already extinct in Java - are now still alive and performed in Bali because they are related to the Hindu-based rituals still practiced in Bali but abandoned in Java. Bali is indeed a living museum of Hindu-Javanese culture (Soedarsono 1974:136).

The strength and resilience against the spread of Islam and Christianity can be attributed to the functional existence of the traditional customary village units (*desa adat*) in Bali. These customary villages are still strong, even in highly developed urban areas like Denpasar and Kuta. The uniqueness of *desa adat* is that it is not simply a territorial unit, but more of socio-religious unit (Warren 1993; Surpha 1995; Imawan 2003). For example, a single *desa adat* is united by the existence of three community temples, known as *kahyangan tiga*, namely Pura Desa, one Pura Puseh, and one Pura Dalem. The socio-religious concept of *kahyangan tiga* introduced in 11<sup>th</sup> century by Mpu Kuturan (a priest from East Java) succeeded in unifying all sects of Hinduism in Bali. Mpu Kuturan also rearranged the structural concept of various shrines at all territorial levels, from the family, the village and to the whole island level.

Customary villages are led by a committee of community elders, headed by a *kelihan desa* or *bendesa adat*. Each *desa adat* has its own *awig-awig* (customary laws), specifying among other things proper conduct and obligations of community members, conflict resolutions and sanctions. The *awig-awig* are in Balinese; the ritual and community meetings are also in Balinese. While the *awig-awig* laws do not specifically stipulate that the language used must be Balinese, Balinese is the language that has been used, and will remain functionally so in these traditional domains for years to come. This will remain the case as long as the Balinese continue living with their traditional social values and structures.

It is indeed a challenge how to live in the modern world without abandoning one's traditional value, culture and language. The local government of Bali has taken initiatives to protect the Balinese customary (*adat*) system. For example, there have been local laws (*peraturan daerah*, or *perda*) issued by the provincial government to regulate co-existence of *desa dinas* (Indonesia administrative village unit) and *desa adat* (custom

village). *Perda* 06/1986, for example, specifies the consultation and coordination between both *dinas* and *adat* leaders at the village level (Figure 1). Note that this legislation, which still applies now, was in fact already in place during Shoharto's era.

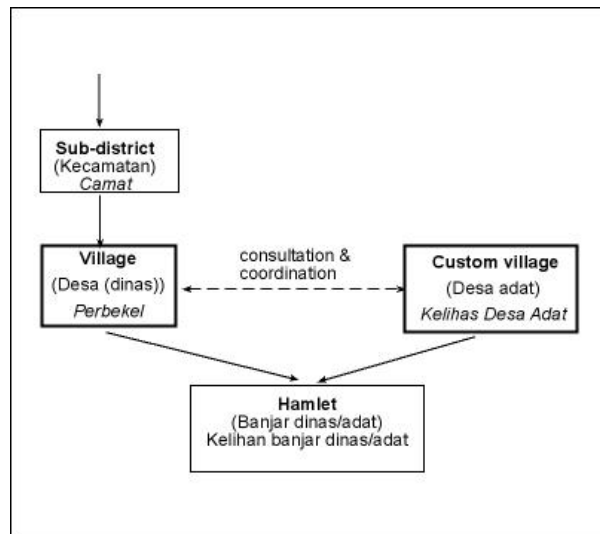


Figure 2. *Dinas* and *adat* village according to the Bali local law (*Perda*) 06 1986

The local community at large is also aware of the challenge to have the right balance between keeping traditions and living prosperous in modern Indonesia. Evidence of this comes from the active participation of the community in the current movement of *Ajeng Bali* and local NGOs, as discussed earlier.

In addition, innovative responses of the traditional *adat* institutions are also observed. The traditional leadership at the level of the village unit appears to be adaptive to modern challenges by extending their responsibilities beyond *adat* matters, but still for the benefit of the *adat* community. While the village head (*kelihan adat*) and the members of the committee (*prajuru*) still exercise their traditional roles, they also take care of the financial support to their local community. For example, many *adat* villages now run LPD (*Lembaga Perkreditan Desa*) or Village Credit Units providing loans and supporting businesses of the *adat* community members. Village cooperatives are also increasingly common now.

Certain villages, especially those in Kuta and Ubud, have done well, as they involve in managing the tourism within their territories. The extension of this *adat* domain has resulted in the creation of jobs for the local *adat* members, and importantly good revenues for the *adat* village. The availability of self and locally generated revenues, autonomously managed by the village, allows the village to support the local *adat* programs such as traditional ritual in temples, and public activities, and even to finance big village construction project such as building community halls and village roads.

Excellent human resources also support Balinese. As mentioned earlier, the Balinese take control of the local government in Bali, from the provincial to village levels. There are tertiary institutions providing advanced studies on the Balinese language, art and culture: the Department of Local languages (Balinese and Old Javanese) at Udayana University, ISI Bali (Bali Institute of Arts), and Universitas Hindu

Bali (Hindu University of Bali). Graduates of these institutions have worked for NGOs, local governments, and even become independent business persons and artists that support and enrich Balinese Arts and culture. As a result, creative arts and dances have blossomed in Bali in the last three decades or so.

There has also been along tradition of literacy in local and modern scripts in Balinese. While traditional *lontar* (palm-leaf) writing and reading are still practiced, commercial books in Balinese in local and modern scripts are exploding in number, and available at local bookshops in Denpasar. In fact, a long time before the independence of Indonesia, the Dutch already set up Gedong Kertya in Singaraja (a town in northern Bali) which collected and documented Balinese *lontars*. Gedong Kertya has become the island's largest repository of *lontars*. In addition, the Faculty of Arts in Denpasar also has a special *lontar* library housing incredible wealth of traditional knowledge.

To conclude, the provincial and district governments of Bali and the local community appear to have shown the capacity and experience needed to manage their own needs, especially in relation to their local culture/language. The initiative of the local government to issue the local law (*perda*) regulating the *adat* village in 1986 is a genius move. Note that this came in the height of Shoehato's power and his campaign of Indonesianisation, dismantling or abolishing the traditional *adat* structures across Indonesia. It appears that, Bali is now one place (if not the only one) where the local community (down to the village level) is ready for, has benefited, and will benefit from new local autonomy granted by the central government Jakarta.

### 5.2.2 Rongga in Flores

In contrast to Balinese, Rongga does not appear to be ready, and would not gain much benefit from new local autonomy for reasons discussed under sub-headings below. The first five (a)-(f) are capacity-related reasons. I find it useful to discuss them with reference to Balinese examples; to help gain insights to, and to have a better understanding of, the issues faced by disadvantaged minorities in modern Indonesia.

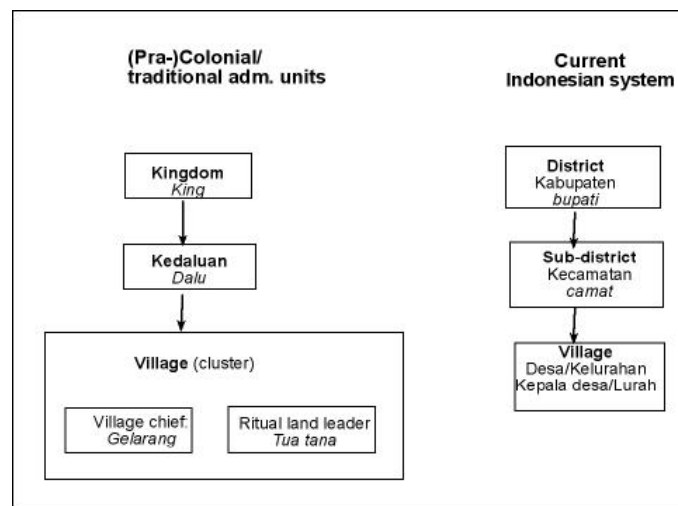
#### *a. Regional/Local Government Support*

Unlike Balinese, Rongga does not receive any support from regional and local governments. This is mainly due to regional/local politics in Manggarai. The fact is that the Rongga people are a powerless minority ethnic group (around 5000 people), even at the district (Kabupaten) level of Manggarai and sub-district (Kecamatan) level of Kotakomba. The local district government of Manggarai and sub-district government of Kotakomba are controlled by non-Rongga people. The Rongga people mainly live in three villages, Kelurahan Tanarata, Desa Komba and Bamo. Kelurahan Tanarata is headed by a *lurah* who is not a Rongga person. Hence, unlike Balinese in Bali, there are no coordinated supporting programs for Rongga - at any level of the administration.

#### *b. Social Structure: the Role of Adat at the Grass Root Level*

Balinese has its traditional *adat* structure in tact, functional and dynamically responsive to new challenges. Rongga's traditional *adat* system, however, was demolished when Manggarai was turned into a district within the Indonesian administrative units in 1970. Subsequent changes at the village level including *pemekaran* (splitting into new villages) have further worsened the situation.

Historically, the district of Manggarai used to be divided into traditional unities incorporating around 39 principalities called *kedaluan*, headed by a *Dalu*. The old structure and its rough equivalence are given in Figure 3. The area of the Rongga community belongs to the traditional *kedaluan* of *Rongga-koe*. When the Dutch colonial government decided to take direct control over Manggarai in early the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch maintained the traditional *kedaluan* system and kept the political subordination of the Rongga people under the King of Todo. The traditional *kedaluan* system continued up to late 1960s, long after the independence of Indonesia in 1945. However, it was completely abolished when the New Order government of Indonesia introduced re-organisation to Manggarai in 1970, where Manggarai became a district. (Manggarai split into two districts in 2004.) There was also a change in the structure of village with the introduction of new Indonesian village administration (*desa gaya baru*).



**Figure 3.** (Pre)colonial and current administrative units in Manggarai

As discussed in §5.2.1, the introduction of new Indonesian village administration in Bali does not result in the total replacement of the traditional *adat* village unit. Rather, it results in a dualism of *desa dinas* (Indonesian village administration unit) and *desa adat* (the traditional village unit). *Desa dinas* manages the official administration of the local government at the village level as an extension of the government structure, whereas *desa adat* manages religious and other Hindu-based community affairs. Hence, the introduction of new village administration does not have a negative impact on the local culture and traditional custom laws.

However, in case of Rongga, the introduction of new village administration turns out to have destroyed the traditional system that appeared to have worked well in the past in maintaining the integrity of the Rongga culture and language. In the past, there was a traditional system integrating or connecting groups of the Rongga that were scattered in the Rongga territories. This still worked under the *kedaluan* system, because Rongga was in one *kedaluan*, namely *kedaluan Rongga Koe*.

In modern Indonesia, however, the introduction of new Indonesian administrative system has resulted in the collapse of this traditional local system. *Kedaluan* was totally removed. A number of *kedaluan* (often used to be along the sub-ethnic grouping) were

collapsed under a single new sub-district (*kecamatan*). An urban village administration system, particularly *kelurahan* (Javanese-based village systems) was introduced in the territory of Rongga. There has been a further split (*pemekaran*) or formation of new village administration units in the territory of Rongga. The traditional *adat* system and internal communication among the clans or groups of the Rongga people to address their own interests as a group has ceased to exist. Gone with the social structure is the traditional leadership, further discussed in (d) below.

### c. Human Resources

The Rongga ethnic group is small (around 5000 people), far much smaller than the Balinese (3 million people). We cannot therefore make a valid comparison. Nevertheless, it provides us with a window to understand how ‘being small’ in modern Indonesia is indeed a real problem.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Rongga people do not control local (sub)-district government, or not even at their own village of Tanarata. Young Rongga people who received higher education, generally undergraduate, are few. Most of them who do receive higher education, do not go back home to their Rongga territory. When they do, they are often unemployed, or have to do small farming.

Few educated young Rongga people are committed to the maintenance, let alone revival, of Rongga. Only three community elders - two are retired teachers and one is former deputy *Dalu* (in their sixties) - appear to have a strong desire to do something for their culture and language. They admit that they cannot do much because of health and economic problems. I already recruited one Rongga person (my research assistant), and trained him to perform language documentation. These few people seem to be motivated to do something for their language and culture. There are certainly not enough skilled people in terms of numbers, for a successful language maintenance program. In addition, it is a challenge to keep their motivation alive (for example my project is now over, and there is no more financial support for these activities).

### d. Leadership

Traditional leadership of *kedaluan* (Figure 3) for the whole Rongga group is totally extinct now. While descendants of *daluh* (chief of *kedaluan*), *glarang* (village chief) and *tua tana* (ritual land leader) are still there, they are not functional. These traditional leaders can no longer exercise power to mobilize people, or resolve local conflicts (particularly land disputes) as in the old days. Customary (*adat*) laws are generally no longer strictly practiced or socially imposed. Note that in Bali *adat* laws are generally still respected, and enforced by the social structure.

Traditional leadership tied to the traditional social structure for the whole ethnic group is important for the survival of the culture and language of the ethnic group against external pressures or influences. This has been evident from the functionality of the *adat* village in Bali. As discussed earlier, the traditional system provides a means or a

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<sup>5</sup> However, it should be noted that ‘small number’ in other socio-geographical and political context may not be a problem and may not constitute a variable contribution to the language marginalisation or endangerment. It has been reported that a small number of 500 speakers may turn out to be healthy, e.g. in the context of Pacific languages (Grimes 1995). Certain other factors such as the speaker’s attitude and external or macro-level variables (i.e. national, regional and local settings) (Grenoble and Whaley 1998) are also crucial.

mechanism for the local community not only to take care of their own traditional internal matters such as community rituals and land disputes, but also to consolidate collective efforts to safeguard their interests against other ethnic groups at the local or broader regional level. Unfortunately, this is lacking with the Rongganese as a result of dismantling of the traditional socio-structural system of *kedaluan*. The Rongga people now appear to have become too occupied in internal conflicts and rivalries among clans, rather than in fighting for their common interests at the district or sub-district levels in modern Indonesia.

In addition, we have observed how the function of *adat* structure in Bali can be innovatively extended to achieve or fulfill common economic benefits. The abolishment of *adat* structure at the village level in Rongga has led to the unavailability of means for the local community elders/leaders in Rongga to do similar maneuvering as the Balinese village leaders. While there are Rongga clan chiefs around, they are not in any way part of *adat* organization at the village level, nor elected by the community members, and therefore have no authority in leading the community at the village level. Unfortunately, the current village chiefs, who are not clan elders, are rather passive (as is the case with civil servants in Indonesia generally). They are in a position to lead in the absence of functional *adat* structure in Rongga, and could play a key role. However, this has not happened (yet).

#### *e. Funding Support, Local Economy and Poverty*

Successful programs need good financial support. Therefore, a strong regional and local economy is an important factor for cultural and language maintenance or revival. It is not cheap to run and support long term language/culture maintenance and revival programs. The provincial and district governments in Bali, particularly the districts of Badung and Gianyar, could provide financial support to a range of local cultural and language programs including cash to *desa adat* because of good local revenues based on local taxes and other locally-generated government revenues or PAD (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah*), under the local autonomy.

The regional/local economy in Flores and NTT (East Nusa Tenggara) province has a different story. NTT is one of the poorest regions in Indonesia. The local district government of Manggarai does not have much of a budget for cultural community programs for ethnic minorities like Rongga. While there is some funding from the central government, it is to support basic needs, e.g. distribution of *raskin* (*beras miskin* or rice for the poor) and cash for the poor. Even in this case, from my experience in Rongga, much of the money often does not reach the ordinary people that so desperately need it, as it is corrupted along the way, even by the village head. The corrupt mentality of the government officials, even down to the village level, is indeed a serious problem.

Recall that there is active community/private participation and support in cultural/language revival program in Bali, e.g. the *ajeg* Bali movement, the launch of private Bali TV, palm-reading/singing groups for show or competition on the local TVs. This active participation and support is made possible because of the fact that indigenous economies of Bali are good. Ordinary people are by and large economically doing well in Bali. Only 6.8 % of Balinese are below the poverty line (base on BPS 2006).

In NTT, in contrast, 77% of the people are living below the poverty line. My fieldwork experience in Rongga villages suggests that the percentage is even higher than

this official statistic. I noticed the widespread poverty where most of the ordinary people struggled to have daily meals. Naturally, they did not enthusiastically participate in cultural programs as getting food was their priority. It is often the case that people expect to get paid for their participation in community programs. This can be perhaps partly blamed to the common practice of the new order government, where if there is a government project, there is money involved from the government and they expect to have a share of it. In Bali, in contrast, people would be generally willing to donate and spend their own money for certain festivals/programs.

Thus, there seems to be a clear link between enthusiasm and motivation for cultural/language maintenance and the state of local economies. Edward (2004) highlights the importance of indigenous economies in language maintenance. He points out that local business initiatives offer local communities opportunities, independence, and power to conduct their affairs in accordance with their traditional values. In addition, the local workplaces created by good local economies are a natural setting for using (minority) local languages. Comparing the local economies where Rongga and Balinese are in, provides an understanding on how minorities are disadvantaged, helpless, and are not enthusiastic in cultural/language programs. In addition, it also points to the difficulty in empowering them, because getting rid of poverty, or alleviating it, is a complex issue that has no easy solution.

#### *f. Literacy, Literary Traditio and, Language Teaching*

Writing provides an extra means by which traditional knowledge and other cultural information can be stored and transmitted across generations. Written medium also allows creative literary work that in turn enriches the culture, and contributes to the viability of the culture and language. Teaching local children the ability to read and write in their local language, in addition to speaking it, is as important a part as the writing tradition because it will ultimately enhance the capacity of the children to help maintain their language and culture.

Balinese also has a long tradition of literacy in local (palm leaf or *lontar*) and modern scripts. There have been short stories, novels and poems published in Balinese since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rongga in contrast has no similar local script. While there has been some work on poems, they are not yet published, but produced in restricted context in church. The closest type could be classified as traditional poems in Rongga is *vera*. However, *vera* is an oral verbal art performed simultaneously with dancing. *Vera* is never written or produced in written form.

Important in literacy programs is the standard orthography of the local language. Balinese has long had an established orthography. Rongga orthography is, however, still in the process of being standardized. I have initiated this as part of Rongga documentation project, however approval from the wider Rongga community is needed.

Including local language in the school curriculum is also an important part of a literacy program. In Bali, Balinese is the local language taught as part of *mulok* (local curriculum content) to all students of primary schools in Bali, even to the non Balinese who happen to attend public schools in Bali. In contrast, Rongga is not taught even at the primary schools in the Rongga territories. The chosen local language selected as *mulok* is Manggarai, the language of the dominant ethnic group of the district. Again this

highlights the problem of how minority languages are disadvantaged even at the district level of local autonomy.

Developing teaching materials also poses a problem for minority languages due to cost and time constraints. Languages selected by the local government as *mulok* such as Balinese and Manggarai receive a special budget for this from the district government. Teaching materials are therefore generally well developed and made available to local teachers for free. In contrast, teaching materials for a minority language like Rongga are not available, and have to be personally developed and produced by the local teacher. It is often the case that he/she has not much time to do this.

Furthermore, there may be problems in teaching the materials at the local school. In collaboration with a local school teacher, I developed teaching materials in Rongga. However, there was a problem of finding the time slot in the already over crowded schedule. In addition, there was another problem: the 'no benefit' problem with respect to student performance in the test of the *mulok*. Since the *mulok* test is in Manggarai, it makes sense to give Manggarai priority, not Rongga; otherwise the students would fail or perform poorly on the test.

## 6 Final Notes

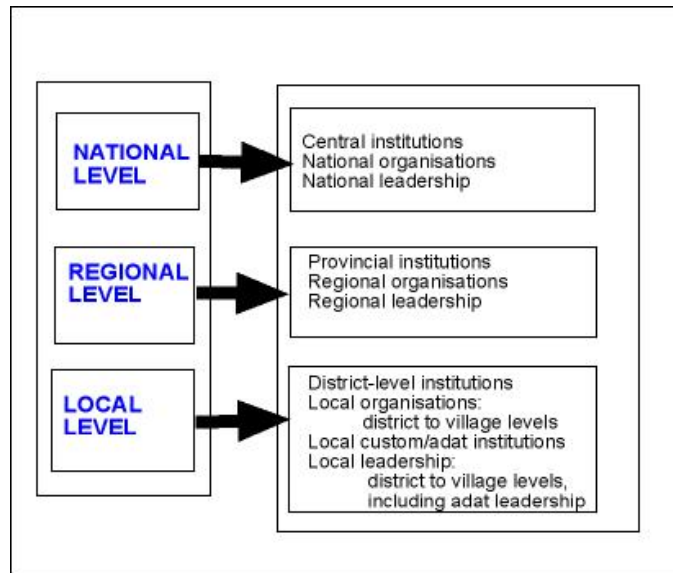
In this final section, I provide a brief summary, followed by discussions of capacity building, long-term support, and future prospects.

### *Summary*

The summary in Table 1 shows how Rongga (column 3) is disadvantaged in all aspects that are enjoyed by Balinese (columns 2). This appears to be a typical picture of a small language of a marginalized minority ethnic group. Rongga lacks institutional, organizational and financial support at the regional/provincial level as well as at the district and sub-district levels. Regional and local politics do not help either. The function of the traditional *adat* structure is diminishing, and totally disconnected from the village (social) structure. This has long crippled the *adat* laws and has not been healthy for the maintenance of culture and language. In addition, widespread poverty is a big problem. This has caused poor human resources and also inability of the local people at the grass roots level to actively participate in programs organized by outsiders and/or to be independently engaged in programs they design themselves.

### *Capacity Building: What, Who, and Where?*

Given the complexity of cultural, socio-political and economic variables involved at the regional/local levels in the maintenance/revival of local languages as discussed earlier, capacity building logically must address issues related to these variables at different levels. To be useful and realistic, it is important to adopt the view that capacity building is more than simply developing human resources. Capacity building must also include strengthening organizations and reforming institutions (cf. Grindle 1997). I suggest that these must be at all levels (national, regional and local levels). This is depicted in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Targeted institutions, organisations, and groups in capacity building programs**

It is clear that the task of capacity building in this view is a huge one. However, there are certain things that a field linguist can or could do to help (discussed shortly below). Of course, there are complex matters that are beyond the capability of an ordinary field linguist, e.g. getting rid of or alleviating poverty (see the cells with a question mark in Row 4 of Table 1 for a complete list).

A linguist can certainly help to develop human resources for language maintenance. Ideally, this must be done at all levels. However, the emphasis must be on developing human resources at the regional, district and village levels as these are the levels that actually matter and could make a difference. The options include short training courses, training of trainers, enrolment to academic programs, and consultant services. The choice of programs to run depends on the available funding. However, it is perhaps realistic that linguists and other faculty members of the regional/local university, e.g. those in Ruteng or Kupang in case of NTT are targeted in this capacity building program. These faculty members are respected and listened to by the locals. They are most likely to be consulted by the local government and are in the position to apply for grants from the regional and/or central government. Such grants then can fund research and community programs that include the local people at the grass-root level.

My experience from Flores suggests that local teachers and *tokoh adat* (customary elders) may play a significant role and therefore must be targeted in capacity building programs. A capacity building program targeting mixed groups of Indonesians (university lectures, teachers, and language workers) from across the archipelago was already initiated in 2006 in the form of language documentation workshop, in which I also took part (see Florey and Himmelman, this volume). As part of Rongga documentation project, I also organized two workshops (2004, 2006) at Udayana University in Bali targeting university lectures from across Indonesia.

For the basis of the discussion in this paper, I would suggest that capacity building must also include reviving the role of traditional customary (*adat*) laws at the village level. New autonomy laws 22/1999 and 32/2004 provides legal basis for reviving and strengthening the customary system. From the foregoing comparative discussion of Balinese and Rongga, it should be clear that strengthening institutions/organizations (including *adat* ones) is as important as developing human resources. We have seen how the traditional social structure at the village level of *desa adat* in Bali is still in tact, functional, and adaptive with new challenges, e.g. revisions of *awig-awig* (*adat* laws) and extending the responsibilities to include managing modern businesses to provide financial support for local community activities.

Reviving indigenous *adat* structures would not be an easy task for Rongga. *Adat* in Rongga is increasingly restricted to ceremonial or ritual affairs (*upacara adat*) in relation to *rumah adat* (the clan house) and the garden. There has been an attempt recently to form a committee of elders in Rongga headed by the former Deputy Dalu, Mr. Anton Gelang. However, this does not appear to go far enough to revive the social structure that used to be functional for the Rongga ethnic group. Modeling on the dualism or co-existence of Balinese *dinas* and *adat* at the village level, and forming another upper layer of structure of *adat* for the whole ethnic group could be an alternative to explore.

The significance of reviving (or maintaining) custom and customary leaders gets empirical support from other parts of Indonesia. In Kei (south-east Maluku), for example, traditional leadership within traditional local autonomy has proven to be able to stop Christian-Moslem fighting spreading from Ambon to the island (in 1999) and brought the community together again (Laksono 2002; Laksono and Topatimasang 2004). While the earlier law on village government (5/1979) had totally destroyed traditional village autonomy, one of the customary King of Waltar Raja JP Rahai, succeeded in retaining custom in his territory which consists of several villages with different religions.

When the conflict broke out, using his traditional authority and prestige, he managed to stop the conflicts, not only within its territory but also in other villages as he succeeded in launching a movement of customary reconciliations with other traditional leaders. He inspired Kei Islanders with the idea that they belonged to one community long before the segregation created by the arrival of world religions (Islam, Catholic and Protestant); which often coincide with current Indonesian administrative units of villages, and that peace depended on the community initiative. This traditional concept of 'one-ness' played a significant role in ending the conflict in Southeast Maluku. Arguably, there always appears to be a similar indigenous concept in other cultures, e.g. the concept of *krama Bali* (roughly, Balinese brotherhood) in Balinese. This traditional concept can be revived, not only to resolve local conflicts, but also to safe-guard local traditions, cultures and languages.

Table 1

(1)	(2) Balinese	(3) Rongga	(4) Notes; what to do?
Institutional/organizational support:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Government &amp; Institutional support</li> </ul>	strong at provincial & district levels	almost no support	?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional social institution/structure: customary (<i>adat</i>) system</li> </ul>	strong at the village level, dualism and co-existence of official ( <i>dinas</i> ) and traditional customary systems	<i>Adat</i> system ceased to be functional at the village level	revive the customary system; local government legislations ( <i>perda</i> ) are needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community support</li> </ul>	strong Bali wide	weak, diminishing fast	complex issues: increase awareness & empowerment of the locals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)</li> </ul>	There are NGOS dealing with language and cultural matters	Available NGOs generally deal with poverty alleviation.	Encourage local NGOs to extend to cultural and language matters
Financial support			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regional/local economy</li> </ul>	good	poor	? (beyond anybody's control)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>government funding for cultural/language programs</li> </ul>	Province & district governments	-	? (possibly improved in future under local autonomy?)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>non-government funding for cultural/language programs</li> </ul>	NGOs, community, individuals	-	talk to NGOs; help the local create NGOs; apply grants for the local project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>average income and poverty</li> </ul>	Bali: 6,8% below poverty line	East Nusa Tenggara: 52% very poor 25% poor (in 2002); 27,86 % below poverty line	? Widespread poverty is a real problem in NTT
Regional and local politics	Provincial and district levels controlled by the Balinese	disadvantaged: not in control of the local government, even at the sub-district (or village) level	? encourage locals to run as candidates for local DPR? Seems not realistic at least now

Literacy and education	Long literacy tradition in local & modern scripts; Balinese taught as <i>Mulok</i> at schools; Dept of local languages at University U; commercial books in / about Balinese at local shops in Bali	no literacy tradition in the local language; Rongga is not taught as <i>mulok</i> (local curriculum content) even at the local primary schools.	help produce books, stories, teaching materials etc.; standardize orthography; lobby and work with the local education department <i>mulok</i> .
Literary tradition	Long literary tradition	Almost no literary tradition	help publish books, stories, literary work by the local writer.
Human resources	good	poor	short training; enrolment at local university; consultancy
Leadership:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traditional leadership</li> </ul>	functional at the village level, and proven to be a crucial factor	traditional system of leadership has ceased to exist at the village level or for the whole ethnic group.	help revive the local customary <i>adat</i> system; adopt the dualism and co-existence of <i>dinas</i> and <i>adat</i> system as in Bali?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• current context of modern democracy and autonomy in Indonesia</li> </ul>	Benefited: The Balinese are majority at the Province and district levels in Bali	disadvantaged: Rongga is a minority even at the district level	? Join the national alliance of <i>adat</i> societies (AMAN)

### *Long-Term Support*

Capacity support is as important as capacity building. Institutions, organizations, legislatures can be reformed, created, or strengthened at a particular point in time. However, long term support is needed to ensure that whatever has been reformed or created, functions well and that the functionality is sustainable. Providing long-term support for local communities highlights the need of developing good human resources at the most local level, because they are agents of change who live with, or are geographically close with, the local community. The geographical proximity would enable them to have regular or constant interaction with the local community. In this way, support to the local needs can be delivered efficiently. This is critical since communication and traveling is generally a problem in eastern Indonesia.

Important for long-term support is the availability of local institutions, infrastructure and incentives for those who have been trained so that they can put their skills and knowledge into practice. At the national level, international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank have been working on the issue of capacity building (for purposes broader than simply for cultural/language maintenance).

However, young Indonesians highly trained overseas in advanced countries are unable to play a role in managing and advancing their own country because of lack of infrastructure, incentives and institutional/organisational support. The same is true at the local level in Flores generally. Young locals educated outside Flores (mainly in Java or Bali) are back home but cannot do what they are supposed to do. There are at least three locals who have been trained for language documentation in my Rongga project. However, the unfortunate fact is that they have not been able to do what they want without my continuous financial support.

Long-term support in terms of infrastructure and incentives is ultimately the responsibility of the (local) government. The officials of the relevant local government institution must therefore be targeted in any local capacity building program. Their awareness of the issues involved and their active involvement and support is crucial.

### *Prospect*

Both capacity building and support involves complex and inter-related variables as seen in Table 1. While there appears to be no easy short cut for solutions, and the desired outcome would not eventuate in the foreseeable future, current political change towards decentralization in Indonesia brings about a good prospect for reviving the local cultures and languages. The challenge now is how to turn it into reality, especially for disadvantaged minority groups like Rongga. It should be noted, however, the national and local politics in the context of fast-changing Indonesia has led to uncertainties, regarding whether the central government and DPR would whole-heartedly implement local autonomy as in the spirit of reformation, and whether priority would be indeed given to local language/cultural maintenance.

Generally speaking, an ethnic group that is big enough to control the entire district government has the opportunity to take full advantage of local autonomy in modern Indonesia because autonomy is given to the district government. Controlling the district government means controlling policies and resources, including those that benefit their local languages/cultures. There is now a growing trend for *pemekaran* (splitting administrative units) across Indonesia. In Flores territorial boundaries of newly formed district units often coincide with the territorial boundaries of ethnic groups. For example, the former district of Ngadha which used to include areas of Ngadha and Nagma-Keo now has been split into new districts of Ngadha and Nagma-Keo. In theory, this trend would benefit local cultures and languages of the controlling ethnic group in the district.

Unfortunately, it appears that small minority groups such as Rongga would be still disadvantaged because they are scattered in a couple of villages, too small in number to control the district government. The district government is, and will always be, controlled by the majority group, e.g. in the case of Rongga in Manggarai, by the Manggaraian. One way of getting around this problem is to revive and strengthen traditional customary (*adat*) autonomy at the village level.

As suggested earlier, the Bali model of dualism and co-existence of village social structure could be used as a model as this co-existence has been proven to benefit local culture/language. However, this requires specific local legislation (*perda*), and therefore good will and cooperation of the dominating ethnic group to pass such legislation. Reviving local customary system would ensure that the minority groups can take care of

their interests, and that there is no return to the Soeharto's style of controlling and politicizing villages for the benefit of certain groups within the district government.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, Indonesia appears to have reached a point of no return in terms of democracy. Ethnic groups (big and small) have formed powerful alliances called AMAN (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* or the National Alliance of Customary Societies) whose goals, among others, are to revive and empower the *adat* customary systems including those of the minority ones. Importantly, they have encouraged *tokoh adat* (prominent *adat* elders) to actively involve the local, regional, and national politics, and to run in the election for the seats in the local legislative assembly (DPRD) and central legislative assembly (DPR). Their active participation within a modern democratic system would hopefully lead to a greater number of members of DPR(D) elected from educated ethnic elders. Then, hopefully bio-cultural diversity of indigenous people of Indonesia with the associated *adat*/customary rights is well taken care of in New Indonesia. There is a downside of this, however. *Adat* could be a political commodity exploited for the personal benefit of the elders rather than the community.

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<sup>6</sup> The return of 'centralisation' of the Soeharto's style under the guise of district autonomy is possible, given the fact that the district government is powerful under the new autonomy.

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