

Documentation and Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage “Ada Tana Poma” in Denatana Timur Village, Wolomeze District, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract: *This community service activity aims to. document indigenous cultural practices, strengthen community capacity, and develop a sustainable safeguarding model. A participatory ethnographic approach was employed, involving customary elders (Tua Adat), village authorities, and local youth in documentation, validation, and digital archiving activities. The program produced a 120-page ethnographic report, a 30-minute documentary film, a village-based digital cultural archive, and trained 18 village youths in digital documentation. The initiative also strengthened community ownership, promoted intergenerational knowledge transmission, and enhanced local capacity for long-term cultural safeguarding. A key outcome was the development of a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework, integrating participatory ethnography, digital archiving, and community empowerment into a sustainable model.*

Abstrak : *Kegiatan Pengabdian ini bertujuan mendokumentasikan praktik-praktik budaya masyarakat adat, memperkuat kapasitas masyarakat, serta mengembangkan model pelestarian budaya yang berkelanjutan. Kegiatan dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi partisipatif yang melibatkan tetua adat (Tua Adat), pemerintah desa, dan pemuda desa dalam proses dokumentasi, validasi, serta pengarsipan digital. Program ini menghasilkan laporan etnografi setebal 120 halaman, film dokumenter berdurasi 30 menit, arsip budaya digital berbasis desa, serta pelatihan dokumentasi digital bagi 18 pemuda desa. Selain menghasilkan luaran dokumentasi, program ini juga memperkuat rasa kepemilikan masyarakat terhadap warisan budayanya, mendorong pewarisan pengetahuan antar generasi, serta meningkatkan kapasitas masyarakat dalam pelestarian budaya secara berkelanjutan. Salah satu luaran utama program ini adalah pengembangan Community-Based Safeguarding Framework (Kerangka Pelestarian Berbasis Masyarakat) yang mengintegrasikan etnografi partisipatif, pengarsipan digital, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat sebagai model pelestarian budaya yang berkelanjutan..*

Keywords : *Ada Tana Poma; Community-Based Safeguarding; Community Empowerment; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Participatory Ethnography.*

INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) comprises living traditions, practices, and knowledge transmitted across generations, serving as a foundation of collective identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006). In Indonesia, customary traditions function not only as ritual practices but also as normative systems governing social relations, ecological ethics, and moral

values (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). However, modernization, migration, formal education, and increasing digital media consumption have accelerated the erosion of oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems, particularly in rural communities where cultural knowledge is predominantly transmitted through oral practices (UNESCO, 2003, 2021; Harrison, 2013). These challenges highlight the importance of safeguarding initiatives that combine documentation with active community participation to ensure the continued transmission of living heritage (UNESCO, 2003).

In Denatana Timur Village, Wolomeze District, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, the Poma community preserves a customary system known as *Ada Tana Poma*, encompassing life-cycle rituals such as *Kapu Rago* (birth), *Bu'e Hoga* (initiation), *Bo'a Keka* (family formation), and *Mata* (natural and unnatural death). Beyond ceremonial functions, these rituals express a cosmological worldview that reinforces kinship, moral obligations, and communal identity (Geertz, 1973). Despite their cultural significance, much of this indigenous knowledge remains undocumented and is transmitted primarily through elderly customary leaders (*Tua Adat*), making it increasingly vulnerable to cultural discontinuity (UNESCO, 2021; Harrison, 2013).

Although numerous cultural documentation initiatives have been implemented in Indonesia, many remain project-oriented and emphasize documentation as an end product rather than a sustainable process of community empowerment, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and local ownership (Blake, 2019; Chambers, 2017; Waterton & Smith, 2010). Recent studies further demonstrate that digital technologies and civic participation create new opportunities for community-based safeguarding, particularly by encouraging younger generations to participate actively in documenting and preserving cultural heritage (Yan & Chiou, 2021; Rachman, 2024). Nevertheless, relatively limited attention has been given to integrating participatory ethnography, digital archiving, and youth capacity building into a unified safeguarding framework capable of sustaining indigenous cultural heritage beyond the duration of a community service program.

Responding to these challenges, the Government of Denatana Timur Village formally requested academic assistance through Letter No. 145/DENTIM/121/VIII/2025 to document and safeguard *Ada Tana Poma*. Accordingly, this community service initiative was designed as a collaborative safeguarding program involving customary elders, village authorities, and village youths in the co-production, validation, and preservation of cultural knowledge. The program pursued three objectives: (1) to document and digitally archive the intangible cultural heritage of *Ada Tana Poma* through participatory ethnography; (2) to strengthen community awareness, youth participation, and local capacity for sustainable safeguarding; and (3) to develop a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework integrating participatory ethnography, digital archiving, and community empowerment as a practical model for preserving indigenous cultural heritage.

As an implementation of the third pillar of *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, this initiative demonstrates how academic expertise can be integrated with local wisdom through collaborative and sustainable community engagement (Kementerian Riset, Teknologi, dan Pendidikan Tinggi [Kemendikristekdikti], 2017). Beyond producing ethnographic documentation, the article contributes conceptually by proposing a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework that combines documentation, digital innovation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and community empowerment. The framework is expected to serve as a practical reference for universities, local governments, and indigenous communities implementing sustainable safeguarding programs for intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia and comparable cultural contexts (Blake, 2019; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

METHOD

This community service program employed a participatory ethnographic approach (Spradley, 1980), emphasizing collaborative engagement between researchers and community members throughout the documentation and safeguarding process. Rather than treating the community as passive informants, the approach positioned customary elders, village authorities, and local youth as active partners in generating, validating, and preserving cultural knowledge (Chambers, 2017). This methodological orientation is consistent with UNESCO's community-based safeguarding principles, which recognize local communities as the primary actors in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019).

The program was implemented from September 2025 to January 2026 in Denatana Timur Village, Wolomeze District, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, following a formal request from the village government to document and safeguard *Ada Tana Poma*. Besides producing ethnographic documentation, the program sought to strengthen local capacity through participatory learning, digital documentation, and community empowerment (Blake, 2019; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

Community participation constituted the central principle of the program. Participants included two customary elders (*Tua Adat*), one village head and administrative staff, 18 village youths (aged 16–25 years), and 37 community members. Customary elders served as the principal knowledge holders, village authorities facilitated institutional coordination, youths participated in documentation training and digital archiving, while community members contributed to validation and dissemination activities. This multi-stakeholder participation ensured that safeguarding activities reflected community ownership and intergenerational collaboration (UNESCO, 2003; Chambers, 2017).

To facilitate systematic implementation and future replication, the program adopted a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework developed by the authors. The framework integrates five sequential components:

1. Identification of priority rituals and oral traditions;
2. Participatory ethnographic documentation;
3. Digital archiving;
4. Youth capacity building; and
5. Community validation and dissemination.

Together, these components integrate community participation, documentation, knowledge transmission, and long-term safeguarding into a single implementation model (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019).

Table 1. Community-Based Safeguarding Framework of “Ada Tana Poma”

Phase	Core Activity	Community Role	Academic Role	Output	Safeguarding Dimension
1. Identification	Mapping priority rituals & oral narratives	Elders identify sacred knowledge	Facilitate structured inquiry	Ritual inventory list	Recognition of living heritage
2. Documentation	Audio-visual recording & transcription	Provide oral testimony & supervision	Record, transcribe, categorize	120-page ethnographic report	Knowledge preservation
3. Digital Archiving	Creation of structured digital database	Provide access & local storage space	Organize, standardize formats	PDF, MP4, JPEG archive	Digital safeguarding
4. Capacity Building	Youth documentation workshop	Youth participation & practice	Training & mentoring	18 trained youth documentarians	Intergenerational transmission
5. Dissemination	Public screening & dialogue	Community feedback & ownership	Facilitate discussion	Community validation session	Cultural revitalization

Source: Developed by the authors (2026).

The community service program was implemented through five sequential stages.

Stage 1: Preparation and Community Consultation. Initial consultations with the village government and customary elders identified priority cultural elements for documentation, established documentation boundaries, and secured prior informed consent.

Stage 2: Participatory Ethnographic Documentation. Data were collected through non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and participatory documentation. Primary information was provided by customary elders, particularly Yohanes Dema and Fabianus Taghi, while audio-visual recording was conducted under their supervision to ensure cultural accuracy (Spradley, 1980; UNESCO, 2003).

Stage 3: Digital Documentation and Archiving. Ethnographic materials were organized into written reports, photographs, and documentary videos before being stored in a village-based digital archive to enhance long-term accessibility and preservation (UNESCO, 2021; Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017).

Stage 4: Capacity Building. A two-day workshop trained 18 village youths in smartphone-based documentation, interviewing techniques, digital file management, and basic cultural archiving. Practical exercises enabled participants to document cultural activities independently while receiving guidance from the university team (Chambers, 2017; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

Stage 5: Community Validation and Dissemination. Documentation outputs were presented during a public documentary screening attended by 54 community members. The session functioned as a participatory validation process, allowing community members to verify cultural interpretations before the documentation was formally transferred to the village government as communal cultural property (UNESCO, 2003).

To enhance methodological transparency, the implementation process is summarized in Figure 1, illustrating the progression from the initial community request to the development of a sustainability plan. The flow emphasizes that documentation, participation, capacity building, and dissemination were implemented as integrated and mutually reinforcing activities rather than as separate interventions (Blake, 2019).



Figure 1, Illustrating The Progression From The Initial Community Request To The Development Of A Sustainability Plan.

Source: Developed by the authors (2026).

While Figure 1 illustrates the chronological implementation process, Figure 2 conceptualizes safeguarding as a continuous cycle linking identification, documentation, digital archiving, capacity building, dissemination, and community ownership. The model highlights that safeguarding is an ongoing process through which cultural knowledge is continuously preserved, transmitted, revitalized, and enriched across generations (Poulios, 2014; UNESCO, 2021).



Figure 2. Community-Based Safeguarding Cycle Model of “Ada Tana Poma”

Source: Developed by the authors (2026).

The program adhered to ethical principles governing participatory ethnographic research (Spradley, 1980). Documentation respected customary protocols, and culturally restricted ritual elements were represented symbolically rather than visually. Prior informed consent was obtained before field activities commenced. Furthermore, all documentation outputs remain the communal intellectual property of the Denatana Timur Village community, while the university served solely as a facilitating institution responsible for documentation, capacity building, and knowledge dissemination in accordance with community-based safeguarding principles (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program successfully documented five major life-cycle rituals representing the cultural system of *Ada Tana Poma*, namely *Kapu Rago*, *Bu'e Hoga*, *Bo'a Keka*, *Mata Ade*, and *Mata Teka*. The program produced a 120-page ethnographic report, a 30-minute documentary film, and a village-based digital cultural archive containing interview transcripts, photographs, and

audio-visual recordings. These outputs constitute the first systematically organized documentation of *Ada Tana Poma* developed through collaborative participation between the university team and the local community.

Beyond producing documentation outputs, the program contributed to preserving indigenous knowledge that had previously existed primarily in oral form. Continuous involvement of customary elders during documentation and validation ensured that cultural interpretations reflected indigenous perspectives while strengthening the credibility and authenticity of the recorded materials. This finding supports UNESCO's principle that safeguarding should combine documentation with active community participation rather than focusing solely on cultural recording (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019).

The establishment of a structured digital archive further extends the safeguarding process by improving long-term accessibility and preservation of cultural knowledge through digital technologies (UNESCO, 2021; Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017). Consistent with Geertz's (1973) concept of *thick description*, the documentation captured not only ritual procedures but also the symbolic meanings, values, and cosmological perspectives embedded within *Ada Tana Poma*.

An equally important outcome of the program was the strengthening of community capacity for safeguarding cultural heritage. Prior to the program, cultural documentation had never been systematically undertaken, and youth participation remained limited. Through a two-day training workshop, 18 village youths acquired practical competencies in digital documentation, interviewing techniques, digital file management, and basic cultural archiving.

Following the training, participating youths became active contributors by assisting in interviews, documenting cultural activities, organizing digital archives, and participating in community validation sessions. Their involvement shifted the safeguarding process from reliance on elderly customary leaders toward shared intergenerational responsibility, demonstrating that cultural preservation can become a collective community effort rather than an individual responsibility (Chambers, 2017; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

Community participation was further strengthened through a public documentary screening and dialogue attended by 54 community members. The discussion provided opportunities for participants to validate cultural interpretations, contribute additional historical narratives, and reaffirm the importance of preserving *Ada Tana Poma*. These findings support previous studies emphasizing that sustainable safeguarding depends on active community participation, local ownership, and collaborative knowledge production (Blake, 2019; Waterton & Smith, 2010).

Table 2. Evaluation of Community-Based Safeguarding Program Outcomes

Indicator	Before the Program	After the Program	Evidence
Systematic documentation of <i>Ada Tana Poma</i>	Cultural knowledge existed primarily in oral form	120-page ethnographic documentation report completed	Documentation report
Digital cultural archive	Not available	Digital archive established at the village office	PDF, MP4, JPEG archive
Youth involvement in documentation	No structured participation	18 youths trained and actively involved	Workshop records
Community validation	Informal discussions only	Public screening and dialogue involving 54 participants	Attendance documentation
Documentation media	Oral transmission	Ethnographic report, documentary film, digital archive	Project outputs

Source: Developed by the authors (2026).

As presented in Table 2, the program generated both tangible and intangible outcomes. Tangible outputs included ethnographic documentation, documentary films, digital archives, and youth training activities, while intangible outcomes comprised stronger community ownership, enhanced intergenerational knowledge transmission, and improved institutional capacity for long-term safeguarding. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the program successfully integrated documentation with sustainable community empowerment (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019).

The principal contribution of this community service initiative lies in the development and implementation of a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework integrating participatory ethnography, digital archiving, youth capacity building, and community dissemination within a single safeguarding model. Unlike conventional documentation projects that often conclude with written reports or audio-visual outputs, this framework emphasizes continuity through community ownership and institutional sustainability.

The establishment of a village-based digital archive, combined with the transfer of documentation skills to local youths, provides mechanisms enabling safeguarding activities to continue beyond the completion of the university program. This approach reflects the concept of living heritage, in which cultural heritage is continuously practiced, transmitted, and revitalized by the community itself (Poulios, 2014; Harrison, 2013).

The safeguarding cycle proposed in this program further demonstrates that preservation should be understood as an iterative process. Documentation generates learning resources, digital archives support wider accessibility, trained youths continue documenting cultural practices, and newly generated knowledge enriches the community archive. Consequently, safeguarding becomes a

continuous cycle of preservation, transmission, and revitalization rather than a one-time documentation activity (UNESCO, 2021; Blake, 2019).

From an academic perspective, the findings illustrate that integrating participatory ethnography with digital safeguarding expands the role of community service beyond knowledge transfer toward collaborative knowledge co-production (Chambers, 2017). From a practical perspective, the proposed Community-Based Safeguarding Framework offers a replicable model for universities, local governments, and indigenous communities implementing sustainable safeguarding programs for intangible cultural heritage in other regions. Overall, the study demonstrates that long-term safeguarding requires the integration of comprehensive documentation, community participation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, institutional support, and local ownership, consistent with internationally recognized safeguarding principles (UNESCO, 2003; Blake, 2019; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This community service program successfully documented and digitally safeguarded the intangible cultural heritage of *Ada Tana Poma* through a participatory ethnographic approach involving customary elders, village authorities, and local youth. The program produced a comprehensive ethnographic report, a documentary film, a village-based digital cultural archive, and strengthened local capacity through youth training and community participation. These outcomes demonstrate that effective safeguarding extends beyond documentation by promoting intergenerational knowledge transmission, community ownership, and the long-term continuity of living heritage (UNESCO, 2003, 2021; Blake, 2019). A major contribution of this initiative is the development of a Community-Based Safeguarding Framework integrating participatory ethnography, digital archiving, youth capacity building, and community empowerment into a sustainable safeguarding model. The framework illustrates how community service can move beyond knowledge transfer toward collaborative knowledge co-production while supporting the implementation of the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*. By positioning local communities as the principal actors in preserving their cultural heritage, the framework reinforces internationally recognized principles of community-based safeguarding (Chambers, 2017; Yan & Chiou, 2021). From both academic and practical perspectives, the proposed framework offers a replicable model for universities, local governments, and indigenous communities implementing safeguarding initiatives in other regions. Future programs are encouraged to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and expand the use of digital technologies to support sustainable documentation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and the revitalization of Indonesia's diverse intangible cultural heritage (Smith, 2006; UNESCO, 2021; Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017).

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