

## THE ROLE OF SUMBA WOMEN WEAVERS IN FAMILY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF IKAT WEAVING PRESERVATION IN SUMBA, NTT



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### Abstract

This study examines the role of Sumba women weavers in empowering the family economy through the preservation of the ikat weaving culture in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the socio-economic dynamics of weavers' families, women's strategies in managing the ikat weaving business, and its impact on family welfare. The results showed that weaving activities not only functioned as a means of cultural preservation but also became a significant alternative source of income for families. Women weavers play a dual role as custodians of cultural heritage and supporters of the family economy, often making weaving work a 'lifeline' when the family's economic conditions are unstable. However, they still face challenges such as limited access to capital, training, and wider markets. Identified empowerment efforts include improving business management skills, facilitating access to productive resources, and developing marketing networks. This research highlights the importance of integrated support from various stakeholders to optimize the potential of Sumba ikat weaving as an instrument of family economic empowerment while preserving valuable cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Family Economic Empowerment, Sumba Women Weavers, Ikat Weaving, Alternative Income, Cultural Preservation

## INTRODUCTION

Sumba ikat woven fabric is one of the cultural heritages that have invaluable value for the people of Sumba Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). More than just a textile product, Sumba ikat weaving is an integral part of the cultural identity and social life of its people. The beauty of the motifs and the depth of symbolic meaning contained in each piece of fabric reflect the richness of local traditions and wisdom that have been passed down for centuries (Prijosusilo, 2017). Behind the visual beauty and depth of philosophical meaning of Sumba ikat weaving, there is a central role of women who are the backbone of the production process and preservation of this cultural heritage.

Sumbanese women, especially those who act as weavers, are not only the main guardians of cultural heritage but also play a crucial role in the family economy. Weaving activities, which were originally part of traditional rituals and cultural expressions, have now transformed into a significant alternative source of income for many families in Sumba (Laka, 2021). This phenomenon shows how Sumbanese women can adapt their traditional roles to meet modern economic demands, while still maintaining the cultural values they uphold.

However, behind their great potential, Sumba's women weavers still face various challenges that hinder the optimization of their role in both cultural preservation and family economic empowerment. Limited access to capital, lack of business management skills training, lack of product quality standardization, and limited market access are the main obstacles faced (Mansur, 2018). In addition, they also often experience discrimination and lack of recognition for their contribution to the economy and culture of the community (Hunga, 2022).

The phenomenon of Sumbanese women weavers and their role in family economic empowerment is the focus of this study, given its significance both from the perspective of cultural preservation and local economic development. This study aims to deeply analyze the socio-economic dynamics surrounding the lives of Sumbanese women weavers, the strategies they apply in managing their ikat weaving businesses, as well as their impact on family welfare and the preservation of cultural heritage.

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Sumba ikat weaving has a uniqueness that distinguishes it from other traditional textile products in Indonesia. Its complicated and time-consuming manufacturing process reflects the dedication and high skill of its weavers. Each motif and color produced has a deep symbolic meaning, often related to the beliefs, social status, and philosophy of life of the Sumbanese people (Ndima & Wiratmoko, 2007). This uniqueness makes Sumba ikat weaving not only a cultural product but also a medium for conveying local values and wisdom between generations.

In the socio-cultural context of Sumba society, women play a very important role in preserving and passing on weaving skills. The process of learning and transferring knowledge about weaving techniques, material selection, and motif creation usually takes place within the family, from mothers to daughters (Kudu et al., 2005). This process involves not only the transfer of technical skills but also the inheritance of cultural values and the philosophy of life contained in each motif and color of woven fabric. Thus, Sumbanese women weavers play a dual role as custodians of cultural heritage as well as agents of traditional knowledge transmission between generations.

Along with the times and increasingly complex economic demands, the role of Sumbanese women weavers has undergone a significant transformation. Weaving activities, which were originally more ritual in nature and fulfilled customary needs, have now developed into an important alternative source of income for many families in Sumba (Buni et al., 2021). This transformation shows how Sumbanese women can adapt to socio-economic changes without abandoning their cultural roots.

The economic role of Sumba women weavers is increasingly crucial, especially in the context of a family economy that is often unstable. Research conducted by Laka (2021) shows that income from the ikat weaving business contributes significantly to total household

income in several villages in West Sumba Regency. In fact, in many cases, weaving work becomes a kind of 'rescue valve' for the family economy when financial conditions are difficult. This phenomenon emphasizes the importance of women's role not only as cultural guardians but also as pillars of the family economy.

However, the journey of Sumba women weavers in empowering the family economy through the ikat weaving business is not free from various challenges. One of the main obstacles faced is limited access to business capital. Research conducted by Mansur (2018) revealed that many ikat weaving craftsmen in East Sumba experienced difficulties in developing their businesses due to limited capital. This situation often forces them to rely on middlemen or collectors who do not always provide fair prices for their products.

In addition, the lack of access to training and skills development is also an obstacle for weavers in improving product quality and production efficiency. The study conducted by Ate et al. (2020) shows that many weavers in Sumba still use traditional dyeing techniques and materials which, despite their high cultural value, are often less efficient in terms of production time and cost. Training on more modern and environmentally friendly dyeing techniques, as well as better business management, are needed to improve the competitiveness of Sumba ikat weaving products in the wider market.

Another challenge faced by Sumba women weavers is limited market access. Although Sumba ikat weaving has great market potential, both at the national and international levels, many weavers still have difficulties in marketing their products directly to end consumers. Research conducted by Punju and Adindarena (2022) revealed that most weavers in Mauliru Village, East Sumba, still rely on a traditional marketing system limited to the local market and tourists visiting the area. This limitation not only restricts their income potential but also hinders the development of product innovations that are in line with broader market trends.

On the other hand, the development of information and communication technology opens up new opportunities for Sumba women weavers to expand their market reach. Several initiatives have been undertaken to introduce e-commerce platforms as a means of marketing Sumba ikat weaving products. For example, research conducted by Lundung (2020) and Bili (2022) showed an effort to develop a web-based sales information system for Sumba ikat

woven fabrics. This kind of initiative has the potential to open wider market access for weavers while introducing Sumba's cultural heritage to a more global audience.

In addition to economic challenges, Sumba's women weavers also face a dilemma in balancing their roles as guardians of tradition and economic actors. On the one hand, there is a demand to maintain the authenticity and cultural value of Sumba ikat weaving. On the other hand, there is a need to adapt to modern market preferences and improve production efficiency. This dilemma is reflected in a study conducted by Samuel and Rosandini (2021), which explored the processing of Sumba ikat weaving motifs using the Escher technique to be applied to ready-to-wear clothing. This study shows an attempt to adapt traditional motifs into a modern fashion context while maintaining the cultural essence of Sumba.

In facing these challenges, efforts to empower Sumba's women weavers are very important. This empowerment not only aims to improve their economic capacity but also to strengthen their position in society and ensure the sustainability of the cultural heritage of ikat weaving. Several empowerment initiatives have been carried out, by the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

One form of empowerment effort is through the formation of groups of ikat weaving artisans. Research conducted by Babang (2008) in Hambapraing Village, East Sumba, showed that strengthening artisan groups can improve their bargaining position in the ikat weaving production value chain. Through groups, weavers can share knowledge, access training, and even purchase raw materials collectively to obtain better prices.

Another effort made is the integration of Sumba ikat weaving into the tourism sector. Hanja et al. (2023) in their study revealed the marketing strategy of Sumba ikat weaving craft as a creative industry product supporting tourism in East Sumba. This integration not only opens up new market opportunities for the weavers but also allows them to introduce and preserve their cultural heritage through direct interaction with tourists.

The protection of intellectual property rights is also an important aspect of empowering Sumba women weavers. Muchtar and Trisnamasyah (2019) in their research discussed the indication of origin as a form of protection for Sumba ikat weaving to encourage the economy of local communities. This kind of protection is important to ensure

that the economic value of this cultural heritage can be enjoyed fairly by the people of Sumba, especially the women weavers.

In a broader context, the empowerment of Sumbanese women weavers is also closely related to issues of gender equality and sustainable development. Hunga (2022) in her study analyzed the transformation of the local wisdom-based ikat weaving cluster from the perspective of ecofeminism in East Sumba Regency. This research highlights the importance of an approach that considers aspects of gender and environmental sustainability in the development of the ikat weaving industry.

Seeing the complexity of issues surrounding Sumba's women weavers and their role in family economic empowerment, a holistic and multidisciplinary approach is needed in studying this phenomenon. This research aims to deeply analyze the socio-economic dynamics surrounding the lives of Sumbanese women weavers, the strategies they apply in managing the ikat weaving business, as well as its impact on family welfare and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Through a qualitative approach, this research seeks to explore the lived experiences of Sumbanese women weavers, understand the challenges they face, and identify the strategies they apply in empowering themselves and their families. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the dual role of women as custodians of cultural heritage and agents of economic empowerment, as well as provide relevant policy recommendations to support efforts to empower Sumbanese women weavers.

By understanding the complexity of Sumbanese women weavers' roles in the socio-cultural and economic context, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable empowerment strategies. The strategy not only aims to improve the economic welfare of weavers' families but also to ensure the preservation of Sumba's ikat weaving cultural heritage amidst the current modernization and globalization.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Sumba ikat weaving has been the subject of research from various perspectives. Prijosusilo (2017) explored the philosophical values contained in Sumba ikat weaving, emphasizing its cultural significance. Ndima & Wiratmoko (2007) explored the symbolic

meanings behind the motifs of *tenun ikat*, showing the richness of cultural narratives manifested in the fabric.

In an economic context, Laka (2021) and Buni et al. (2021) analyzed the contribution of the ikat weaving business to household income in West Sumba, underlining its important role in the local economy. Mansur (2018) identified challenges in the development of ikat weaving enterprises in East Sumba, highlighting the need for appropriate interventions.

Aspects of gender and women's empowerment were addressed by Hunga (2022), who analyzed the transformation of the *tenun ikat* cluster from an ecofeminism perspective. Samadara (2018) and Pieter & Samadara (2019) examined efforts to empower women ikat weaving artisans in West Sumba.

Innovation and adaptation in the ikat weaving industry were studied by Samuel & Rosandini (2021), who explored the processing of Sumba ikat weaving motifs for contemporary fashion applications. Ate et al. (2020) examined the development of natural dyeing techniques, reflecting efforts to blend tradition with sustainability.

These studies provide a foundation for understanding the social, economic, and cultural complexities surrounding the practice of ikat weaving in Sumba, particularly the central role of women in preserving and developing this cultural heritage.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design to dive deeply into the role of Sumba women weavers in family economic empowerment and the preservation of the ikat weaving culture. The qualitative method was chosen because of its ability to capture the complexity of life experiences, perspectives, and meanings attached by women weavers to their weaving activities. The research locations were spread across several villages in Sumba Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, which is known as the center of ikat weaving production.

The research subjects consisted of 10 women weavers with various age backgrounds and weaving experiences. RR (32), In addition, the research also involved community leaders and cultural observers to provide a broader perspective on the role of women weavers in the socio-cultural context of Sumba. Data collection was conducted through a combination of

several methods, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the women weavers to explore their personal experiences, motivations, challenges, and strategies in managing the ikat weaving business and its contribution to the family economy. Participatory observation involved the researcher directly in the process of making ikat weaving, enabling a deeper understanding of the complexity of skills and cultural values embodied in the weaving activity. FGDs were conducted with groups of weavers to explore the social and economic dynamics that influence their weaving activities. Meanwhile, document analysis included literature studies, government reports, and local documentation related to the development of the Sumba ikat weaving industry.

Data analysis was conducted inductively using a thematic analysis approach. This process included transcription and codification of data from interviews and FGDs, identification of key themes emerging from the data, categorization, and organization of themes into broader patterns, and interpretation of data by considering the socio-cultural context of Sumba. Triangulation of data from various sources was conducted to increase the validity of the findings.

This research upholds ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality of participants' identities, and respect for local culture. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and asked for consent before participating. Participants' identities were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Researchers are also committed to respecting the values and cultural practices of the Sumba community during the research process.

Nonetheless, the researcher realizes some limitations in this study. First, the nature of the case study limits the generalizability of the research results. Secondly, there is potential for bias in data interpretation due to the researcher's different cultural background from the Sumbanese community. Lastly, time constraints may have affected the depth of exploration of some aspects of the research.

Through this qualitative approach, the research aims to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of the role of Sumbanese women weavers in family economic empowerment

and cultural preservation. The research results are expected to provide new insights for the development of more effective policies in supporting women weavers and the Sumba ikat weaving industry as a whole.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research reveals various important aspects related to the role of Sumba women weavers in family economic empowerment and the preservation of the ikat weaving culture. The results of this research are divided into several main themes that reflect the complexity and dynamics of the lives of women weavers in Sumba.

### **Skill Heritage and Cultural Identity**

Sumba ikat weaving is a cultural heritage that has deep roots in community life. Weaving skills are passed down from generation to generation, especially from mothers to their daughters. The process of passing on this skill is not only limited to weaving techniques but also includes cultural values and philosophies contained in each motif and color of woven fabric.

One of the interviewees, RR (32), a Sumba Ikat weaver, shared her experience of learning to weave since fifth grade. She said, “Yes, it's because for ... for personal use. If we sell it, then we buy it for ourselves. If it's my parents, they weave it themselves too, so it's their own business.” This statement shows that the learning process of weaving starts at an early age and has a strong personal value.

Furthermore, this research revealed that weaving skills are not only seen as technical expertise, but also as an integral part of a Sumbanese woman's identity. PR, (62), a Sumbanese cultural observer and weaving collector, asserted, “There is an assumption that is still alive among traditional Sumbanese people that girls must even know how to weave.” This assumption shows how important weaving skills are in the construction of Sumbanese women's identity.

### **Weaving as Self-Expression and Cultural Symbol**

The results showed that Sumba ikat weaving is not just a textile product, but a medium of self-expression for the women weavers. Each motif produced has a symbolic meaning that reflects the weavers' worldview, values, and aspirations.

CRH (78), mentioned some of the motifs she often uses: “I usually draw houses, horses, diamonds, with crosses. The cross is uh what... what... between man and god.” He adds that these motifs “exactly” represent his feelings. The house motif, for example, represents the importance of family and shelter as a source of comfort and protection.

The use of traditional motifs such as horses, chickens (namoli), and houses also shows the weavers' efforts to preserve elements of Sumbanese culture. As Rika expressed, “In my opinion, for example, horses, houses, that's how the ancestors used to have horses, for example, if there is a picture of a chicken - *ikat ayam* - there is, under the house, there is a horse, there is a chicken.”

PR (62), an observer of Sumbanese culture, emphasized that through weaving, Sumbanese women express themselves “as individuals with dignity or self-esteem and even show their equality with men.” This shows that weaving is not just about producing fabric, but also about asserting women's identity and dignity in the cultural context of Sumba.

#### Economic Role and Empowerment

This research reveals that weaving activities have a significant role in the family economy in Sumba. For many women, weaving is not just a hobby or cultural obligation, but also an important source of income. MD (44), explained that she continues to weave until today to help her parents who are old and often sick. She said, “Hooh now my parents are old, I can repay them hooh, I help them. When else will old people... I don't know what illnesses they have anymore.” This shows how weaving skills become an important economic resource for families, especially in situations of hardship.

PR (62), an observer of Sumbanese culture, also emphasized the economic role of weaving: “A wife's weaving skills can sustain/strengthen the household economy.” Furthermore, she explained that with weaving skills, Sumbanese women “show their position both among the family in particular and the community in general that they have an important share in a better and dignified common life.”

However, the research also revealed complex dynamics in terms of control over income from weaving. Rika recounted, “There are husbands who respect their wives, but yes, respect, respect ... but they demand their needs.

If uh what... the cloth has been sold, they ask for cigarette money and betel nut money.” This shows that although weaving provides a source of income for women, control over that income is not always fully in their hands.

#### Weaving and the Dynamics of Gender Relations

This research reveals that the practice of ikat weaving in Sumba has complex implications for gender relations in society.

On the one hand, weaving skills add value and respect to women. But on the other hand, this practice also reflects and sometimes reinforces traditional gender roles.

PR (62) a Sumba cultural observer explained, “The practice of Sumba ikat weaving is mostly done by women. This is also based on the assumption in Sumba society that weaving is a home-based work done by women.” She adds, “Here there appears to be a division of roles: Women at home with home activities such as weaving, childcare, and so on and men outside the home to farm and raise livestock and so on.” Nonetheless, weaving skills also provide opportunities for women to improve their bargaining position within the family and community. As expressed by PR (55), “Weaving by Sumba women expresses themselves as dignified individuals or have self-esteem and even show their equality with men.”

In the context of marriage, weaving skills are still considered an added value for young women. PR (62) explains, “Young women who are good at weaving are a pre-requisite for marriage, or in other words, they get a mate faster than those who do not have weaving skills.”

However, MD (44) indicates that this view is beginning to shift among the younger generation. She said, “Now that it is modern, people may look at what they are holding, they don't care about weaving anymore.”

In terms of household decision-making, the research found variations. Rika, for example, sees that in her family, her parents have an equal position in decision-making. She said, “I see that my father and mother are equal... in the household, my mother supports me.” However, this may not reflect the situation in all families, given the complex dynamics of gender relations in Sumba society.

#### **Challenges and Adaptation**

This research also uncovered various challenges faced by Sumba women weavers and how they adapt to changing times.

One of the main challenges is the need to balance between preserving tradition and adapting to the demands of the modern market. CRH (78), for example, shows flexibility in choosing the motifs she weaves, combining traditional motifs such as horses and houses with contemporary symbols such as crosses, reflecting the influence of Christianity.

Another challenge is competition with modern textile products and changing consumer preferences. Rika observed that among the younger generation, weaving skills are no longer considered as important as they once were. She says, “Now it's sophisticated, tools can be used for anything.” This suggests the need for new strategies to maintain the relevance of ikat weaving in the modern era.

The economic aspect is also a challenge. Despite *tenun* being an important source of income, many weavers still face difficulties in accessing a wider market and getting a fair price for their products. Rika explains that she continues to weave because “there is no other business, it's the only skill that makes money.”

### **Preservation and Sustainability**

Despite facing various challenges, this research found a strong awareness among Sumba's women weavers about the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of ikat weaving.

YL (48), expressed her hope that the younger generation will continue to preserve the weaving culture. She said, “In the future so that the children will see it from now on so that they also follow the culture.” This shows an awareness of their role not only as fabric producers but also as guardians and successors of cultural heritage.

PR (62), a Sumbanese cultural observer, also emphasized the importance of preserving ikat weaving as part of Sumba's cultural identity. She explained that traditional motifs such as horses, houses, and chickens have meanings rooted in the history and daily lives of the Sumbanese people.

However, this preservation does not mean rejecting change or innovation. This research found that Sumbanese weavers continue to adapt and innovate, both in terms of

motifs and production techniques, while still maintaining the essence of Sumbanese culture in their work.

### **Weaving as a Medium for Learning and Cultural Transmission**

The research revealed that weaving is not only about fabric production but also an important medium for learning and cultural transmission between generations.

YL (48), recounted how she learned to weave from her mother since fifth grade. This learning process involved not only weaving techniques but also an understanding of the meaning behind each motif. She also mentioned the important role of the “big father” (uncle) who taught her the technique of drawing motifs.

PR (62), a Sumba cultural observer, emphasized that the weaving learning process is an integral part of cultural education for Sumba women. She explains, “This practice is passed down sustainably from parents, especially mothers to their daughters to have weaving skills as one of the skills that Sumba women must have.”

This learning process not only transfers technical skills, but also cultural values, philosophy of life, and knowledge of nature and the environment reflected in weaving motifs. Thus, weaving becomes an important medium to maintain the continuity of Sumba culture from one generation to the next.

### **Weaving and Spirituality**

This research also revealed the spiritual dimension of weaving practices in Sumba. The motifs used in ikat weaving often have spiritual or religious meanings.

NN (52), for example, mentioned the cross motif as one that she often uses. She explained, “The cross is what... what... between man and God.” This shows how weaving becomes a medium to express spiritual beliefs and relationships.

PR (62), an observer of Sumbanese culture, also emphasized that traditional motifs such as horses, houses, and chickens have meanings related to the Sumbanese people's beliefs and worldview. Although many Sumbanese have embraced Christianity, elements of traditional beliefs are still reflected in weaving motifs.

This spiritual dimension adds depth of meaning to the practice of weaving, making it not just an economic or cultural activity, but also a form of spiritual expression and a link between humans, nature, and the transcendent.

### **Weaving and Women's Empowerment**

This research found that weaving practices have significant potential to empower women in Sumba, although there are still challenges that need to be overcome.

On the one hand, weaving skills provide Sumbanese women with an independent source of income and improve their bargaining position in the family and community. As expressed by PR (62), a cultural observer, “With the weaving skills that Sumba women have, they show their position both among their families in particular and society in general that they have an important share in a better and dignified common life.”

However, this research also revealed that empowerment through weaving still faces various challenges. One of them is limited access to a wider market. RR (32), for example, indicated that she still relies on weaving as her main source of income because “there is no other business.” This suggests the need for further support in weaving as a means of income generation. This points to the need for further support in terms of business skills development and market access.

Another challenge is the public perception that still views weaving as “women's work.” While this skill adds value to women, it also has the potential to reinforce traditional gender roles that limit women to the domestic sphere.

However, the research also found indications of shifting perceptions, especially among the younger generation. Rika observed that in this modern era, weaving skills are no longer considered a key prerequisite for marriage. This suggests the potential to redefine the meaning and role of weaving in the broader context of women's empowerment.

### **Weaving in the Context of Social Change**

This research reveals that the practice of ikat weaving in Sumba is not static, but rather continues to evolve in response to social, economic, and technological changes.

RR (32), for example, described how she adapts to changing market demands and consumer preferences. She combines traditional motifs with contemporary elements, such as the cross motif, reflecting the influence of Christianity, which is now dominant in Sumba.

Change is also evident in the broader social context. Rika observes that among the younger generation, “Now that it's modern, people might look at what they are holding, they don't care about weaving anymore.” This indicates a shift in values and priorities among the younger generation, which could potentially affect the sustainability of *tenun* practices in the future.

However, amidst these changes, weaving still has an important role in Sumba's economy and cultural identity. The challenge is how to adapt weaving practices to remain relevant and meaningful in a changing social context, without losing its cultural essence.

### **Weaving and Family Economic Resilience**

This research found that weaving plays an important role in the economic resilience of families in Sumba, especially in the face of economic uncertainty and crisis.

RR (32), for example, explained that she continues to weave to help her parents who are old and often sick. She said, “Every month I have to buy medicine.” This shows how weaving skills become a kind of economic “safety net” for families, especially in emergencies or when other sources of income are insufficient.

PR (55), an observer of Sumbanese culture, also emphasized the economic role of weaving, stating that “A wife's weaving skills can sustain/strengthen the household economy.” This suggests that although weaving is often seen as a “side job,” its contribution to the family economy is significant.

However, the study also revealed challenges in maximizing the economic potential of weaving. Limited access to wider markets and difficulties in determining fair prices for woven products are still obstacles for many weavers in Sumba.

### **Weaving and Collective Identity**

This research found that *tenun ikat* is not only important for Sumbanese women's identity, but also plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the collective identity of Sumbanese society.

Traditional motifs such as horses, houses, and chickens that are often used in *tenun ikat*, as explained by RR (32), are not merely decorative ornaments. These motifs represent important elements in the life and history of the Sumbanese people. By weaving these motifs,

the women weavers are not only producing fabric but also preserving and transmitting the collective narrative of the Sumbanese people.

PR (562) a Sumba cultural observer asserts that ikat weaving is an integral part of Sumba's cultural identity. She explained that weaving skills are considered one of the characteristics that define the ideal Sumbanese woman. This shows how weaving practices contribute to the construction and maintenance of social norms and cultural expectations in Sumba society.

Furthermore, this research reveals that amid modernization and globalization, ikat weaving has become a kind of “cultural anchor” that helps Sumbanese people maintain a sense of identity and continuity with their ancestral heritage.

### **Weaving and Environmental Sustainability**

Although not the main focus of the research, the issue of environmental sustainability in Sumba's ikat weaving practices also emerged as an important theme to note.

The use of natural materials in the coloring process of ikat weaving, for example, reflects the close relationship between weaving practices and Sumba's natural environment. Knowledge of dye plants and natural dyeing techniques is an important part of the knowledge heritage transmitted through weaving practices.

However, with the growing scarcity of some natural dye materials and increasing production demands, there are concerns about the sustainability of this traditional practice. Some weavers have begun to turn to synthetic dyes that are easier to obtain and use, although this has the potential to reduce the cultural and ecological value of Sumba ikat weaving.

This issue points to the need for a holistic approach in Sumba ikat weaving preservation and development efforts, which not only considers economic and cultural aspects but also environmental sustainability.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research reveals the complexity and dynamics of the role of women weavers in the social, cultural, and economic context of Sumba society. Ikat weaving is not only a cultural product, but also a medium of self-expression, a source of economic empowerment, and a means to preserve and transmit cultural heritage.

Despite facing various challenges, ranging from changing market preferences to shifting values among the younger generation, the practice of ikat weaving still has a deep significance for the people of Sumba. Women weavers, such as RR (32), CRH (78), MD, YL (48), NN (52), and MD (44), continue to adapt and innovate, bridging tradition with the demands of modernity.

However, the study also underscores the need for further support to maximize the empowerment potential of weaving practices. This includes improved access to wider markets, business skills development, and efforts to redefine the meaning and role of weaving in the broader context of women's empowerment.

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of a holistic approach in Sumba's tenun ikat preservation and development efforts. This approach needs to consider not only economic and cultural aspects but also environmental sustainability and adaptation to broader social changes. Finally, this research confirms that Sumba ikat weaving is not just a cultural artifact or an economic commodity. It is a living expression of identity, creativity, and creativity.

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