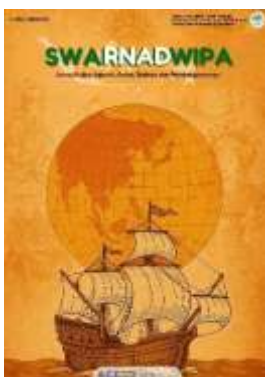


## Revitalization of the Cera Labu Sebagsi Tradition as a Cultural Heritage: Efforts to Preserve and Regenerate the Dompu Coast in an Inclusive and Sustainable Manner

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the Cera Labu tradition, which has not been held for the past five years. This research is qualitative and uses descriptive analysis as the method. The data source for this study is the Soro community, obtained from informants. Data were obtained through observations and interviews with several sources in the field. The research results revealed that the Cera Labu tradition was not held due to Islamic religious beliefs, as the ritual is considered idolatrous and contrary to Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the government's budget efficiency measures have made holding such events increasingly difficult. Another reason is that some residents douse road users with dirty sewer water during the Cera Labu ritual, potentially causing a foul odor.

**Keywords:** revitalization, cera labu, cultural heritage.

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in natural resources, extending from Sabang to Merauke, with diverse ethnicities and races, resulting in a diverse culture. This wealth of Indonesian people extends beyond its natural resources; it also encompasses other riches, such as the rich cultures of ethnic groups spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago. One such region, Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), is renowned for its diversity. However, several cultural issues in Dompu include the loss of cultural identity and the loss of social and cultural values, despite their integral role in human and cultural life (Mahdayeni, 2019).

The existence of culture in the archipelago is a manifestation of the long interaction between humans, nature, and belief systems, institutionalized in oral traditions and symbolic communal rituals. In West Nusa Tenggara, ethnic and cultural diversity forms part of the pillars of a rich national identity, with each region possessing unique ways of life that have been passed down through generations as part of the collective memory of its people. One of the cultural phenomena that represents the syncretism between maritime values, local cosmology, and Islamic spirituality is the 'Cera Labu' tradition carried out by the Bugis people in Soro Village, Kempo District, Dompu Regency (Suhaety & Hayat, 2025).

Historically, the Cera Labu tradition is inextricably linked to the narrative of the Bugis people's great migration from South Sulawesi to various regions across the Indonesian archipelago, including the mainland of Sumbawa Island. The Bugis people arrived in the Soro region around 1930, bringing with them their identity as accomplished sailors, religious believers, and adhering to ancestral values. This maritime identity persists amidst modernization, supported by a social structure that views the sea not merely as a source of livelihood but also as a sacred living space (Mahdani, 2024).

The Cera Labu tradition involves the throwing of offerings (*larung sesajen*) into the sea, carried out according to strict customary protocols by community leaders or tribal chiefs. The main ceremonial item used is the *Tuta Sahe*, or decorated buffalo head, which symbolizes the community's highest sacrifice as an expression of gratitude to the Creator. Local beliefs attribute a sign to the buffalo head: if the offering swirls and then sinks quickly, it is considered a sign of ritual success and a promise of abundant sustenance for the fishermen.

In addition to the buffalo head, the ceremonial equipment also includes other symbolic elements such as a chicken (*janga*), ripe bananas (*kalo ntasa*), an earthenware pot (*roa dana*), and incense (*kamaya*). The use of these five main symbols represents the harmony between humans and the four essential elements of life: earth, water, air, and fire, as well as a vertical relationship with God. The meanings contained in each of these items refer to how humans communicate with the universe through prayers offered for continued prosperity (Mahdani, 2024).

The Bugis people of Dompu are a religious community, so this ritual is interpreted as an expression of gratitude directed to Allah SWT for all the blessings of abundant marine resources. The mantras recited in this ritual explicitly begin with the name of the Creator, as reflected in the mantra *lexia "Ruma mbei ja pu arujiki"* which denotatively means asking for sustenance from Allah SWT. The Cera Labu tradition also strengthens the social system of the Bugis-Dompu people, which is strongly imbued with the spirit of mutual cooperation and concern for others. Through this ritual, residents are reminded of their dependence on one another and on the marine ecosystem that has sustained them for centuries. The triadic dependence between humans and God, fellow humans, and the universe is the main essence of the mantras recited during the procession, creating a harmonious and civilized social order (Ma'bar, 2024).

Through these collective interactions, individualistic social boundaries are eroded, replaced by a spirit of togetherness and mutual cooperation. Thus, this ritual serves as a means of reproducing social values that strengthen the community structure of coastal communities (Bunyamin, 2018). As such, this tradition remains relevant as a bulwark of national character, grounded in devotion to God, social solidarity, and a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony in community life (Lathifah & Ofianto, 2023).

However, in the current era of globalization, the Cera Labu tradition faces serious existential challenges due to the penetration of foreign cultures and rapid modernization. A shift in values is occurring, where rituals, once sacred and solemn, are threatened with being reduced to mere commercial tourist attractions or entertainment devoid of meaningful depth. The declining awareness of the younger generation regarding the philosophical values inherent in the Cera Labu tradition poses a real threat to the future sustainability of this intangible cultural heritage (Anggreni, 2025).

Therefore, revitalization is necessary as part of efforts to save endangered cultural heritage objects. Revitalization is operationalized by re-examining historical data, studying the symbolic meaning of ceremonial items such as the *tuta sahe* (buffalo head), and reintroducing traditional elements into daily life (Laws of the Republic of Indonesia: 2017; Mahdani: 2024). This revitalization requires intellectual intervention to redefine the

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relevance of old values so that they can be accepted by the younger generation as guidelines for civilized behavior (Deputy Team for Preservation: 2004). This aligns with the concept of collective memory restoration, where the past is not simply preserved but continuously reconstructed based on present needs (Reza A.A. Wattimena, 2016).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Research methods are the means used to achieve research objectives. They are the methods used by researchers to obtain and process data after the research (Firmansyah, 2013). To obtain data and a clear picture of the Cera Labu tradition in Soro village, the research team used quantitative research methods. The data were collected based on observations and interviews with several informants in the field.

Prior to conducting the research, the team collected data using a theoretical framework and several insights from previous researchers regarding the Cera Labu tradition in Soro Village to gain an initial understanding of the tradition. This data collection assisted in formulating the research questions. These questions were then developed into several questionnaires to be posed to informants in the field. Furthermore, the team utilized verification hypothesis logic to conduct field tests and draw conclusions based on concrete, empirical, and objective data.

To obtain data related to the Cera Labu tradition, the team employed qualitative research methods. Other data were also obtained through information sources such as journals and articles from previous researchers on the Cera Labu tradition in Soro Village.

Quantitative research methods are based on positivity (concrete data), where research data consists of numbers that are measured using statistics as a calculation tool (Firmansyah, 2013). Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, are philosophically grounded and used for research under scientific conditions (experiments) where the researcher serves as the instrument. The data collection and analysis techniques were qualitative and emphasized meaning (Sugiyono, 2012) related to the problem being studied to produce results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Cera Labu is a coastal tradition in Soro Village, Kempo District, Dompu Regency, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). Linguistically, "Cera" means "safety" or "celebration," while "Labu" means "sea," "harbor," or "pier." "Labu" itself appears to be a confixation, as is the language of the Dompu Bima people, of the word "port" or "dock." Soro Village was first inhabited by Bugis immigrants around 1930.

Besides Soro, Bugis immigrants inhabit coastal areas on Sumbawa Island, such as Sape and Langgudu Districts (Bima Regency), Sumbawa Regency, and West Sumbawa Regency. Within Dompu Regency, they are spread across several coastal areas, such as Kempo and Menggelewa Districts, as well as Kwangko Village on Bajo Island, which borders Sumbawa Regency. It is not known whether the Cera Labu tradition is found in all coastal areas inhabited by Bugis immigrants. The Bugis people, native to Sulawesi Island, are known as a nomadic people. They live in groups within a region and typically live along the seashore, as Bugis people are primarily seafarers (Tempo.co, 2017).

Each coastal community has its own unique traditions. Cera Labu itself is a form of sea offering, involving the throwing of a buffalo's head into the sea as an expression of gratitude for God's bounty, accompanied by hopes and prayers for abundant marine

produce and safety. This tradition has been around for decades and has been passed down from generation to generation among the Bugis people in Soro. According to Ilham M. Nur, a local figure, Cera Labu originated from a dream in which a Soro village figure, Ua Kuda (a traditional elder), received a message from a Soro village leader and his great-grandfather. In the dream, he was instructed to perform the Cera Labu ritual as an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty and a request for safety for the community. Initially, a male goat was slaughtered for this ritual, with the head and legs taken as offerings. The remaining parts were shared and eaten by the community. Later, the goat was replaced by a buffalo, perhaps to accommodate the growing population. The Pumpkin Cera is usually held at the beginning of April every year.

The ceremony begins with the collaborative construction of a bamboo raft, decorated with several types of offerings, which are essential requirements.

- 1) Buffalo heads
- 2) Four young coconuts, placed in each corner
- 3) Four roasted chickens, placed in each corner
- 4) Rice in four colors: white, yellow, red, and black
- 5) Five ketupat (rice cakes) in each corner
- 6) Frankincense, tobacco wrapped in rattan leaves, betel leaves, and betel lime
- 7) Black rice, fried dry without oil.

The raft is rectangular, 10 meters long and 80 cm high. The offerings are arranged in such a way that the right leg of the buffalo is placed on the right, the left leg on the left, and the buffalo head is placed in front. When the offerings are released, they face west, just as a person praying faces the Qibla, to receive blessings. The main parts of the buffalo offering are the head and legs, while the other parts are distributed among the community. Typically, only one buffalo is needed for the Cera Labu ritual. A buffalo is chosen that is large, healthy, and mature enough to have three younger siblings. The buffalo is slaughtered before the head and legs are taken for the offering. After the bamboo raft and the offering decorations are completed, they are transported by boat to a specific point in the middle of the sea. The delivery process is led by a traditional elder. Based on guidance from the elder's inner eye, he will point to a specific spot as the location for the offering. Typically, the boat carrying the offering will sail around that spot, circling the spot approximately 10 meters in length. At the designated spot, the elder will whip the water point (three times and three times around) using a special whip made of rattan. This whip is not made by humans, but is given directly by a supernatural being. It is said that this whip is mysterious because it is only found in the homes of direct descendants of a particular traditional elder. When leaving the house and heading towards the Cera Labu location, the person carrying the whip will experience a strange inner state, namely being mute.

Supporters of the Cera Labu tradition say that after the seawater is whipped and the buffalo head is set adrift, the water typically slowly swirls around the spot where the head is set adrift. The swirling seawater gradually accelerates until the offerings are swallowed by the whirlpool. They believe that the swirling seawater that engulfs the offerings is a sign that their offerings have been accepted by the sea ruler. The reverse is also true if the offerings are rejected. However, they say it is rare for their offerings to be rejected by the sea ruler, as long as they are made by a traditional elder. Once, a man from West Soro village, not a descendant of an elder, attempted to "take over" the position of offering giver. The result was not only that the seawater at the point where the offerings

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were given did not swirl at all, but also that the person became ill and died shortly thereafter. His wife and child also died. Residents believe that the deaths were caused by, in the words of Ilham M. Nur, "his know-it-all attitude" (interview, March 31, 2026). After the buffalo head is released into the air, the ritual continues with the dousing of seawater by residents and anyone else on land or in the streets.

According to Patowari, SE, the Head of Soro Village, in addition to community donations, the Dompu Regency Government also allocates an annual budget for the Cera Labu cultural event. The budget is approximately IDR 50 million, which is used to purchase a male buffalo (approximately IDR 10 million), provide a raft, provide offerings, and other necessities. The Cera Labu tradition was last held in 2021, during the leadership of Dompu Regent H. Bambang M. Yasin. However, after Regent Abdul Kader Jailani's term, and until the first year of Regent Bambang Firdaus (2026), the Cera Labu tradition was never held again for no clear reason.

However, according to information from several respondents/informants, the village and regional governments' cancellation of the Cera Labu tradition was primarily due to Islamic beliefs, as the ritual was deemed idolatrous and contrary to Islamic teachings. In an interview with the research team (31/3/2026), the village head of East Soro explained that as village head, he was afraid of bearing the consequences if the event were to go ahead. "Shirk is a major sin. If the Cera Labu tradition were to be held, as the village leader, I would bear the consequences, and I don't want that to happen," the village head said. Furthermore, since the government implemented budget efficiency measures, holding such events has become increasingly difficult. Another reason was that some residents doused road users with dirty gutter water as part of the Cera Labu ritual, potentially causing a disturbance.

According to Sulaiman (interview, April 31, 2026), he believes the Soro Village Government's rejection was primarily due to a lack of funds, even though this cultural event is very important to him. If the reason is that it sparks riots due to splashing dirty water, he believes this can be addressed by educating residents. The same goes for the lack of funds. He believes that if the Soro Village Government allows the Cera Labu event to be held, residents will be able to fund it independently. A similar sentiment was confirmed by Andi Syarifuddin (interview, April 31, 2026), a local youth leader. Together with other young people, Andi Syarifuddin even agreed to educate residents and raise funds independently.

Traditional practices like Cera Labu represent invaluable social capital in the face of change. Strong community ties, as reflected in collective practices like "water wars," demonstrate the existence of internal mechanisms capable of maintaining social solidarity amidst external pressures. (Effendy, 2022) In this case, the relevant strategy is not the rejection of modernity, but rather the development of local modernity, namely a process of adaptation that harmoniously integrates technology with traditional values. This approach allows the community to continue to develop without losing its cultural identity (Rivaldi & Yulifar, 2025).

However, on the other hand, many Soro villagers, especially Sulaiman or Ilham M. Nur, as the main supporters of the Cera Labu tradition, hope that the tradition can be revived. Besides maintaining the spirit of togetherness and mutual cooperation among the residents, it will also have an economic impact on the local community. Many other

residents attend the event, including their relatives from Bima Regency. Andi Syarifudin explained that the act of dousing each other with seawater during the Cera Labu ritual actually strengthens relationships, strengthens solidarity, and dissolves existing social barriers. Anyone splashed with seawater should not be angry; instead, this act of dousing each other increases the warmth and sense of community. He assessed that the action actually thawed the personal and social relationships of the residents, which had previously been stiff and they did not greet each other due to differences in political choices or other reasons.

Another, more moderate view was expressed by another community leader, H. Lukman A. Majid, S.Pd., from Padamara Hamlet, Kempo Village. In an interview with the research team at his home on Saturday (April 4, 2026), he considered Cera Labu (a traditional ceremony for the harvest) to have many positive aspects, provided it aligns with Islamic teachings to avoid being perceived as idolatrous. He also expressed regret if the Cera Labu tradition were to disappear and become a mere story for future generations. He explained that Cera Labu is an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty. He explained that in the past, after Cera Labu, the sea was usually emptied for three months. Fishermen were prohibited from going to sea to allow fish habitats to reproduce. He further explained that this "moratorium" practice applies not only to the sea but also to land, where forests are declared closed for six months. During this period, residents are prohibited from harvesting forest products, resulting in abundant honey and deer in the forest.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that Cera Labu should continue to be preserved as it is a unique tradition worthy of being maintained and preserved. The Cera Labu tradition also needs to be modified to avoid causing resistance in Muslim communities, as it is considered contrary to Islamic faith (shirk). On the other hand, Cera Labu has the potential to develop the local economy and promote positive cultural values such as mutual cooperation and togetherness in maintaining social harmony.

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