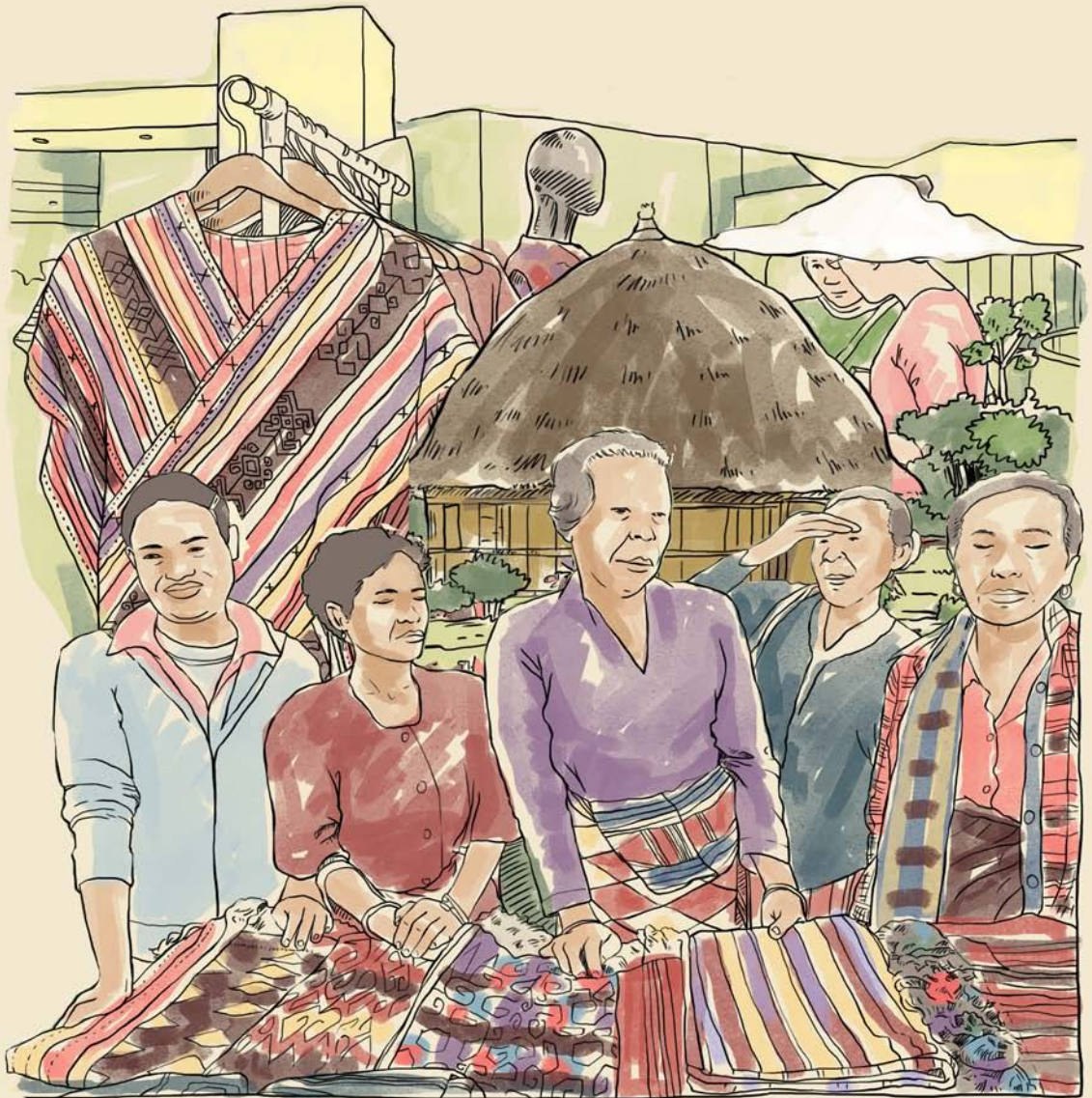


Weaving for Life (Tenun untuk Kehidupan) Movement

By Meinar Sapto Wulan





That July morning the temperature in Mollo was cold even though the sun was so bright. That's because Mollo is situated at the foot of Mt. Nausus in South Central Timor (TTS). Its' altitude is 1,200 meters above sea level. Nonetheless, the cold air does not deter Mama Maria (50) to tell me about the issues with *ikat* woven fabrics production today.

"It's hard to produce woven cloth these days, ma'am. There is hardly any cotton tree. Dye plants are also scarce," said Mama Maria who has been weaving since she was 12 years old while endlessly twisting and rolling up cotton fibers into yarn.

Nowadays, Mama Maria and her friends are forced to use synthetic yarn and dyes purchased from the market. Of course the prices are high. "Actually I do not really like them because the synthetic colors are not durable and fade quickly," said Mama Maria who needs two months to produce a single piece of woven fabric.

This mother from Amanatun also has some concerns about the weaver's group organization in her area.

The group is not growing. There are not many weavers who want to join the group. Most of the weavers choose to sell their their woven fabric themselves. As a result, the prices of woven fabric become unstable or even drop. "They do not want to join the group for fear of financial loss," said Mama Maria who finances her two children by weaving.

The increasing financial need of the family is also the reason for competition between the weavers. When cash is needed for something urgent such as traditional ceremonies or to pay school fees, it is not uncommon for these women weavers to lower the prices of their woven fabrics so that they "sell quickly".

There is another issue of regeneration. Nowadays many young women are not able to weave and they often leave the village to look for a job in the city. They ignore their traditional heritage that has been passed down for many generations. This includes the customary rule that "a woman must be able to weave in order to marry."



The traditional woven cloth seems out-of-date. It will probably be extinct someday. Mama Maria did not say this, but I can read it from her eyes and long sigh, showing the turmoil in her heart. She continued to spin the cotton fibers, rolling it into a yarn, in a blanket of cold air that wouldn't leave.

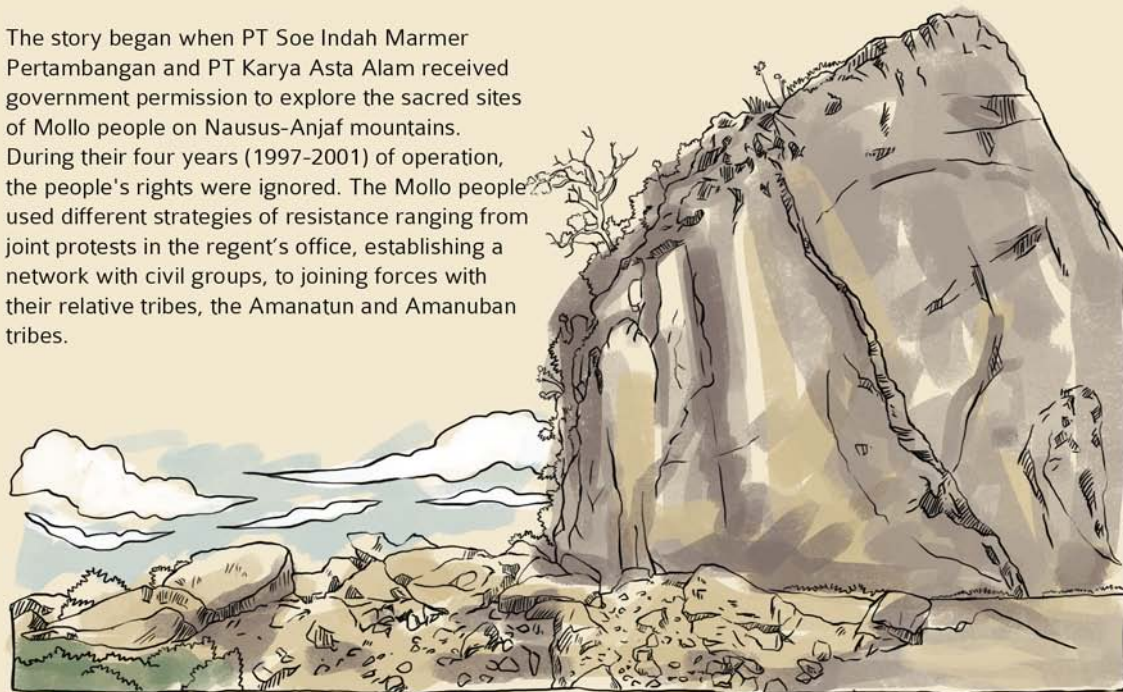
Woven Fabric and Resistance

The people of Mollo, Amanatun and Amanuban in South Central Timor (TTS) are actually inseparable with woven fabrics. For these three tribes who are united in a traditional association called "*Tiga Batu Tungku*", the woven fabrics have a very important significance for customs and they are needed in various ceremonies, such as births, marriages and death. They are also important for the survival of the family. In addition to gardening, the family economy is dependent on the sale of woven fabrics produced by the mothers.

The study of the traditional woven fabric does not necessarily end at the cultural studies of traditional textiles. The woven fabrics from *Tiga Batu Tungku* community actually contain a "present" spirit and are a symbol of resistance as well as a symbol of the power of the Mollo, Amanuban, Amanatun people against external aggression that is damaging their life cosmology.



The story began when PT Soe Indah Marmer Pertambangan and PT Karya Asta Alam received government permission to explore the sacred sites of Mollo people on Nausus-Anjaf mountains. During their four years (1997-2001) of operation, the people's rights were ignored. The Mollo people used different strategies of resistance ranging from joint protests in the regent's office, establishing a network with civil groups, to joining forces with their relative tribes, the Amanatun and Amanuban tribes.



At the climax of their resistance, they have to put their own lives at stake. The *Tiga Batu Tungku* community (association of Mollo, Amanatun and Amanuban tribes) decided to occupy the Nausus and Anjaf area. Hundreds of mothers were also involved in the occupation. They were weaving there under the threats, pressure and gunpoints of soldiers who protect the interests of the companies. They did the occupation for a year and finally managed to drive the marble mining companies away from their sacred land. However they cannot restore the beautiful face of Anjaf that was torn apart by the companies.

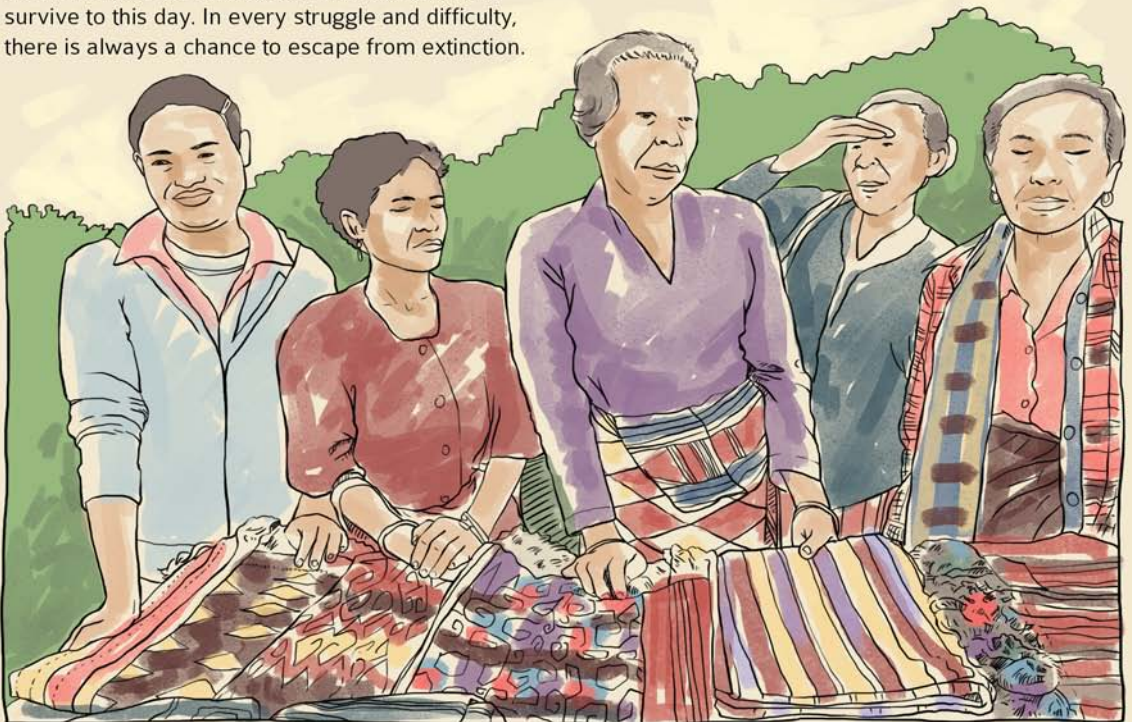
That historical incident is extremely important for *Tiga Batu Tungku* Community. It was a moment of victory which proves that the unity of kinship can defeat the greed of the capitalists. At the same time, it also showed that women and their weaving tradition can play a role as the stronghold of resistance facing the "external" intruders. So, why is the weaving tradition now defeated by the internal problems like what Mama Maria stated above?

It should not be easily defeated like that. *Ikat* woven fabrics have endured across ages. They have been able to adapt to difficult situations and survive to this day. In every struggle and difficulty, there is always a chance to escape from extinction.

Weaving for Life (Tenun untuk Kehidupan) Movement

The solution for the future survival of *Tiga Batu Tungku* Community *ikat* woven fabrics unravels when a group of women entrepreneurs from Yogyakarta Lawe Association sympathize with the situation. They created a movement called Weaving for Life. With the support of GEF SGP, the movement seeks to enhance the capacity of weaving mother both in terms of weaving, and joining a cooperative so that the prices are stable and their products are appreciated by the customers. In addition they also gave the support for sewing machines to add to the family income. "Weaving for Life presents young Indonesian designer collections so that the women of Mollo, Amanatun, and Amanuban can continue to weave and work," said Adinindyah, chairman of Lawe Association.

The movement which started in 2011 was prepared in stages and began to materialize in early 2012 which was marked by the designs of clothes made from Mollo woven fabric by three young designers from Yogyakarta, such Propercha, Dede Bastam, and Lulu Lutfi Labibi.





The name Weaving for Life for movement comes from an idea that woven fabrics are an important cultural product for the lives and families of women from Tiga Batu Tungku. According to Adinindyah, an architect graduated from the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM), when the lives of those women become stable the lives of their families will in turn get better as well. Women are at the forefront of family survival.

Thus, by placing women as the motor of the movement and making their woven fabrics as a major asset, the hopes of prosperity for Mollo, Amanatun, and Amanuban people will be realized. Of course, the fundraising movement is also aimed to introduce the woven fabrics of Mollo, Amanatun and Amanuban to the public, especially the urban people so they will love the wealth of Indonesian native cultural products.

Weaving for Life products was exhibited for the first time at the South to South Festival (STOS), March 2012, at the Goethe Institute, Jakarta. This is a documentary film festival with an environmental theme. The response of visitors was very enthusiastic and encouraging. Four of the six clothings were successfully sold during the event.

The success of this first appearance encouraged the crew of Weaving for Life. In April 2012, they introduced 50 pieces of clothing made from the woven fabrics which are the works of young designers at INACRAFT Exhibition at the Jakarta Convention Center (JCC), Jakarta. The volunteers did not only display their products, but they also shared stories about the struggle of their movement and interesting stories behind the making of the garments and woven fabric of *Tiga Batu Tungku* traditional people.

They also explained that all the profits from the sale of the clothings would be donated to increase the capacity of the people and purchase sewing machines for the weaving mothers. As a result, as many as 15 pieces of clothing with prices ranging from Rp 1,000,000 to Rp 3,500,000, changed hands, purchased by the visitors.



The Weaving for Life movement continues. After INACRAFT, they participated in VOTE Exhibition at FX Sudirman and Femina Bazaar at the Atrium Plaza. Various creative marketing efforts were done such as sending promotional materials, by word of mouth, electronic mail, mailing lists, and social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter. They also include strategies such as mobilizing volunteers and provide discounts.

Many marketing efforts were done by the volunteers of Weaving for Life. However, everything did not necessarily go smoothly and all the products are "sold out". In places where the upper middle-class visitors come, they actually still get basic questions such as "Why so expensive? I can buy the fabric myself for only about Rp 200,000 to Rp 300,000," said one visitor who looked fashionable and trendy with her Guess shoes and Furla handbag.

What Mama Maria said during our conversation in the cold morning at the foot of Mount Nausus is true. The traditional woven fabrics are actually considered cheap by the urban people. This is not only because the weaving mothers sell their two or three month work cheaply, but also because of the invasion of machine-woven fabrics that use synthetic yarn and dyes. The limited knowledge of urban consumers to be able to distinguish between the traditional woven fabrics and factory produced fabrics is one of the reasons.

Lessons and Expansion

The experience in creatively marketing the products based from the traditional woven fabric makes the Weaving for Life activists feel optimistic. There is a bright future for woven fabrics. The keys are in maintaining the quality of woven fabric, consistency of production, product innovation, and the expansion of marketing network particularly abroad. The fact is that foreign consumers have a higher level of appreciation than the urban middle class in Indonesia.

The lack of interest among domestic consumers on the woven fabric is a challenge for the Weaving for Life activists. The knowledge about Indonesian traditional woven fabric is still low among the general public. It is not yet a common knowledge. Therefore it is important to create and distribute communication products that can open the public insight. Equally important, the simplest thing that can be done is to keep telling the stories certainly not just about woven fabric itself, but also the story of the cultural life of the people behind the woven fabric.

The Weaving for Life Movement must not stop on just the innovative products that are based on Mollo, Amanatun and Amanuban woven fabric. Instead, it should continue to expand on other traditional woven fabrics from other areas in Indonesia. "The Mollo woven fabric is the first step for Weaving for Life. We are now also developing crafts made from Wakatobi woven fabric and henceforth we will be working with the weavers in Lombok, Belitung, Palembang and Bugis," said Adinindyah with gusto.

The Weaving for Life activists realize the issues of traditional weavers are not only faced by the Tiga Batu Tungku traditional people, but also almost by all the craftsmen in Indonesian archipelago. The expansion and inclusion of other weavers in Weaving for Life movement will definitely be beneficial. The weavers, who are exclusively women, will get assistance for capacity building, creativity in craft products, support in work equipments, as well as a marketing system with a wide network.

Indeed, there is still a long way to go in order to ensure the future of the traditional weavers in the country to get the appreciation that they deserve. However just like the process of making a woven fabric, every step taken by this movement like the interlacing between one yarn and other yarns. The perseverance and loyalty in weaving the processes will produce a beautiful finished work, which is a better life.



Meinar Sapto Wulan

This friendly lady with a veil is 27 years old. Meinar is an assistant program of GEF / SGP Indonesia who has just joined the board about a year ago. Previously, Meinar is a marketing support officer in Kidzania, a children's playground which introduces different types of jobs to children.

Meinar, a former best artist in high schools' theater festival in Jakarta in 2002 feels delighted to learn that her hobby of travelling is channeled by joining GEF SGP Indonesia. Various visits to SGP partners make her learn a lot about communities who are facing many environmental challenges and how they find creative ways to deal with them.

