



## *The Impact of the Sumba Nua Ritual of the Kanganara Indigenous Community on Natural Conservation Efforts*

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### A B S T R A C T

*This article examines the positive impacts of the sumba nua ritual practiced by the Kanganara indigenous community of Detukeli, Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, on environmental conservation. Rooted in the belief that human existence is sustained by nature, the ritual underscores a reciprocal obligation to protect the environment for survival. The study addresses four key issues: the ritual's direct effects on conservation practices, its ceremonial procedures, its cultural significance for the Kanganara people, and the community's strategies for ecological preservation inspired by its values. Using a phenomenological approach, the research highlights the community's lived experiences and perspectives. Findings show that the Sumba nua ritual plays a crucial role in maintaining environmental integrity. This ritual can serve as a cultural framework that contributes to community-based environmental conservation practices. Its primary focus is maintaining the balance of relationships within the Kanganara cosmos: between people, the Divine, and ancestors, and with nature. Its ecological significance lies in promoting custodianship of the environment, an ethic of care, and sustained efforts to preserve natural balance, ensuring cultural and ecological continuity. The practical implications of the Sumba Nua ritual are that the Kanganara indigenous community continues to perform it annually to protect nature and maintain social cohesion.*

### A. INTRODUCTION

Ritual is an integral dimension of social life, commonly understood as rule-governed behavior rooted in custom or religion (Badan Bahasa, 2008: 1786) and as a standardized form of symbolic action embedded in shared conceptions of existence (Schweizer, Klemm, & Schweizer, 1993: 19). Closely tied to tradition, ritual remains a fundamental expression of religious life (Paige & Paige, 1981: 46–48). This article examines these dynamics within the *Kanganara* community, highlighting how ritual practices shape social and religious meaning.

Within traditional indigenous communities, ritual assumes a role of paramount importance. It functions as a critical mechanism for cementing the relationship between

the community and that which is apprehended as the Sacred or the Supreme Being. Furthermore, it serves to resolve conflicts arising among community members and to maintain the fundamental relationship between the community and the cosmos. Nearly all traditional indigenous communities engage in ritual precisely for the sake of this triadic relational framework: with the Sacred (religious), among community members (social), and with the natural environment (ecological). Indeed, to sustain this triadic harmony, rituals are performed and revitalized periodically. These performances constitute a tradition that simultaneously characterizes and distinguishes the community's identity from others, while also functioning as the paramount social glue that binds all community members together.

As a tradition within an indigenous community, ritual is fundamentally bound to customary norms and communally recognized symbols, exerting profound social effects upon the community. This sociological function can be further elucidated, for instance, through the ritual of totemism as studied by Durkheim among Australian Aboriginal societies. Totemic rituals are performed by a tribal or clan group to maintain its relationship with an impersonal force, believed to manifest itself through various entities in the cosmos. Each clan member is obliged to venerate this force, adhere to specific prohibitions, such as the taboo against consuming the totemic animal, and acknowledges a moral responsibility to perform rites of worship directed towards the force (Durkheim, 1995: 127-129). Through such ritual practices, the society reinforces the bonds uniting its members, thereby fostering heightened feelings of allegiance and loyalty to the community to which they belong (Pals, 2015: 95).

This intrinsic link between ritual and its socio-communal impact is similarly observed in Clifford Geertz's study of Javanese religion in Mojokuto. Geertz elucidated how religion permeates every facet and dimension of Javanese social life. He demonstrated that across the three (3) primary variants of Javanese-Islamic society, namely the *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*, religion exerts a powerful influence, serving to impart a distinctive character that simultaneously binds adherents together within a communal identity and differentiates one community from another (Geertz, 1976: 370-371). Sarapang (2023), in his research on taboos within the *Rampanan Kapa'* ritual of Toraja, illustrates that the *Rampanan Kapa'* (wedding ceremony) not only solemnizes the marital union between a woman and a man but also formally establishes a framework of social norms that the married couple is obligated to observe.

Beyond their socio-communal impacts, rituals within most indigenous communities are also intrinsically linked to the natural environment. Within their religious practices (rituals), indigenous peoples consistently incorporate nature, which is conceptualized as a mother, a life-giving and nurturing entity. In his study of the Lamalera indigenous community, Beding (2018) reveals that the people of Lamalera on Lembata Island consistently refer to the sea as 'mother,' a conception manifested both in rituals, such as the *tena vule*, and in the practice of abstinence (refraining from sailing) during specific periods. Furthermore, the Tana Ai people of Sikka Regency, NTT, in their *Gren Mahe* customary ritual, consistently invoke nature as *nian tana wawa* (the mother earth below) that must be protected and preserved (Lamaberah, 2006). This imperative for environmental protection is articulated through a complex system of prohibitions and regulations that the community must fulfill, a phenomenon also documented among the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta, Bali (Rohman et al., 2020), Papua (Sumarsono & Wasa, 2019), and Belu, NTT (Tahu et al., 2018). The personification of nature within the aforementioned religious practices, coupled

with the intricate web of rules and taboos in these societies, clearly demonstrates that the interconnection between ritual and ecology is a lived and deeply cultivated reality within indigenous communities.

Linking ritual to the natural environment represents a concerted effort to translate a community's lived traditions into concrete actions. This approach is recognized as a form of local community empowerment that leverages their inherent local wisdom for nature conservation. Such practices are believed to possess a high degree of sustainability (Pratama et al., 2024). The integration of local wisdom, cultural values, and environmental conservation is increasingly seen as a nature-based solution that can guide communities toward greater well-being (Luo et al., 2025). Furthermore, local wisdom can be synergized with scientific knowledge to develop holistic strategies to prevent environmental degradation, such as soil erosion, and to improve land management practices to enhance agricultural yields (Maurya et al., 2024). Ultimately, integrating local knowledge systems with environmental conservation aims to foster development that is both sustainable and inclusive (Fernanda et al., 2025). Collectively, this body of research demonstrates that local wisdom contributes significantly to environmental preservation efforts, which in turn yield positive impacts on human welfare.

Cognizant of this established interconnection between ritual practice and environmental conservation efforts, the authors undertook an investigation into the impacts of the *Sumba nua* ritual, as performed by the *Kanganara* indigenous community in North Lio, Detukeli, Ende Regency, NTT Province, on local nature conservation initiatives. This ritual has been transmitted intergenerationally and is enacted annually by the *Kanganara* people to venerate *tana watu* (stony earth) or the universe, which is collectively believed to constitute the primordial womb and sustaining source of their existence.

To date, no dedicated scholarly inquiry has explicitly examined the *Sumba nua* ritual of the *Kanganara* indigenous community. While several anthropologists have identified *Kanganara* as a significant research locus, their contributions remain general in scope. Signe Howell (2000), for instance, conducted an ethnographic study of the Lio people in Detukeli, including extended residence in *Kanganara*, published as *Ata Lio: Institutions, Values and Practices of the Northern Lio People, Flores, Indonesia*. Similarly, Patrizia Wackers (2020), in *Tana watu: Worldview and Concept of Reality*, analyzes the Lio cosmology and its expression in socio-religious practices such as *joka ju*, *tedho pare*, and *keti uta*, yet does not specifically address *Sumba nua*. Mbete (2016) likewise documents aspects of Lio-Ende cultural knowledge, including ritual language and prayers—such as invocations to *Ine Pare* (Mother Rice)—but does not engage this particular ritual.

Building on this literature, the present article not only documents the *Sumba nua* ritual but also advances a specific analytical contribution by situating it within the

framework of environmental anthropology and ritual ecology. It argues that *Sumba nua* functions as a culturally embedded ecological practice that articulates a moral relationship between humans, land, and the cosmos, thereby contributing to local strategies of environmental stewardship. In doing so, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts to demonstrate how ritual practice operates as a form of ecological knowledge and conservation ethics within the *Kanganara* community.

Consequently, this research undertakes a specific examination of the *Sumba nua* ritual as practiced by the *Kanganara* indigenous community. The central research question this study seeks to address is: What is the impact of the *Sumba nua* ritual on local environmental conservation efforts? Several specific research problems will likewise be addressed in this study, including the following: How is the *Sumba nua* ritual enacted in practice? What is the cultural and symbolic significance of the *Sumba nua* ritual for the *Kanganara* indigenous community? What strategic efforts toward environmental conservation are undertaken by the *Kanganara* people as a practical corollary of the *Sumba nua* ritual?

This research aims to elucidate the impacts of the *Sumba nua* ritual on local natural conservation efforts. Furthermore, through an exploration of this central theme, the study intends to accomplish several interrelated objectives: to provide a thick description of the *Sumba nua* ritual's execution; to identify and critically reflect upon the embedded ecological meanings within the ritual complex; and to uncover the strategic measures undertaken by the *Kanganara* indigenous community as a direct consequence and intentional outcome of the ritual's performance.

## B. METHOD

The methodological approach employed in this research is phenomenological inquiry, a well-established paradigm within qualitative research that seeks to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to their lived experiences. A phenomenological study is directed toward the descriptive and interpretive exploration of a particular concept or phenomenon, with the primary aim of uncovering its essential meaning or essence (Creswell, 2015: 105). Beyond merely describing observable practices, phenomenology also seeks to illuminate the intersubjective dimensions of experience, namely the ways in which meanings are collectively constructed, shared, and reproduced among individuals who participate in the same socio-cultural reality (Yusuf, 2014: 351). Accordingly, this approach is particularly relevant for examining ritual practices that are deeply embedded in communal consciousness, cosmology, and everyday ecological relations.

The phenomenon investigated in this study is the performance of the *Sumba nua* ritual by the *Kanganara* indigenous community. The selection of phenomenology as the principal methodological framework is grounded in the understanding that *Sumba nua* cannot be reduced to a merely ceremonial or symbolic act; rather, it constitutes a lived cultural experience through which the *Kanganara* people articulate their worldview and ecological ethics. Within this cosmological framework, nature is conceived as a sacred trust that must be protected, nurtured, and maintained through ritual obligations and collective responsibility. The ritual, therefore, functions not only as a cultural performance but also as a medium through which the community interprets human existence in relation to land, forests, water sources, and the wider natural environment. Through phenomenological inquiry, this study seeks to capture and interpret the lived experiences, meanings, and ecological consciousness embodied in the enactment of the *Sumba nua* ritual, particularly in relation to environmental conservation practices among the *Kanganara* indigenous community.

The empirical data for this study were primarily derived from key informants, namely the *mosalaki* (customary leaders, ritual authorities, and community elders) of *Kanganara*. Five *mosalaki* were purposively selected based on their recognized customary authority, direct involvement, and experiential knowledge of the implementation and transmission of the *Sumba nua* ritual. This purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the selected participants possessed both ritual legitimacy and deep cultural knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Although the number of informants is relatively limited, this composition is methodologically justified given the restricted circle of ritual specialists who serve as custodians of *Sumba nua* knowledge and practice. Consequently, the selected informants represent the most authoritative and culturally legitimate voices within the *Kanganara* community.

To enhance the credibility and validity of the interpretive findings, the study employed triangulation through several complementary strategies. First, narratives from one *Mosalaki* were systematically cross-checked against those of other informants to identify convergences and divergences in ritual interpretation and ecological meaning. Second, interview data were corroborated through participatory observation conducted during fieldwork in July 2025, which enabled the researchers to directly observe ritual enactments, spatial arrangements, symbolic actions, and communal participation in their

natural socio-cultural setting. Third, the findings were contextualized and interpreted in relation to relevant ethnographic and anthropological literature concerning Lio cosmology, indigenous ecological knowledge, and ritual practices. This multi-layered triangulation process strengthens the analytical rigor of the study by ensuring that interpretations are not solely dependent upon individual testimony but are instead grounded within broader cultural, observational, and theoretical contexts.

The principal data-collection technique employed in this study was in-depth interviewing, conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines that focused on the meanings, procedures, ecological values, and cultural significance of the *Sumba nua* ritual. This method enabled the researchers to explore the informants' subjective experiences and reflective interpretations in considerable depth while maintaining thematic consistency across interviews. In addition to interviews, participatory observation was used to gain a contextual understanding of the *Kanganara* indigenous community's living conditions, their interactions with the surrounding environment, and the concrete manifestation of ecological values in ritual practices and daily life. Through direct field engagement, the researchers captured dimensions of meaning and social interaction that may not have emerged solely from verbal narratives.

The data obtained from interviews and observations were systematically organized into emergent thematic categories through an iterative process of coding, classification, and interpretation. Analytical procedures subsequently involved constructing thick descriptions and interpretive narratives to reveal the structural meanings embedded in participants' lived experiences. The final stage of analysis employed hermeneutic interpretation, central to phenomenological inquiry because it facilitates a deeper understanding of the symbolic, cultural, and existential meanings embedded in ritual practices (Creswell, 2016: 263–268). Through this interpretive process, the study seeks not only to describe the *Sumba nua* ritual as a socio-cultural phenomenon but also to elucidate how the ritual functions as an indigenous epistemological framework for environmental stewardship, ecological ethics, and the preservation of communal identity.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The *Sumba Nua* Ritual as a Component of the *Nggua Bapu* Ceremony

The *Sumba nua* ritual constitutes an integral component of the broader ceremonial complex known as *nggua bapu*, practiced annually by the *Kanganara* indigenous community. While *nggua bapu* is commonly understood as an expression of veneration toward ancestral spirits, a harvest thanksgiving, and a supplication for future blessings, its significance extends beyond ceremonial observance. In this context, *Sumba nua* can be interpreted as a cultural practice that articulates and sustains the relational balance between humans, ancestors, and the natural environment. It not only reinforces social cohesion and collective identity but also embodies an ecological dimension, functioning as a symbolic and normative mechanism that maintains environmental care and cosmological harmony.

The *Sumba nua* ritual is the culminating rite in the entire *nggua bapu* ceremonial sequence, a cycle performed over seven consecutive days, with one distinct ritual observed each day. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the *Sumba nua* ritual is predicated upon a prior familiarity with the successive stages of the overarching *nggua bapu* ceremony.

The first stage of the *Nggua bapu* ritual complex is the *wari obo*, or the ritual of sun-drying of rice. This ceremony is conducted on the morning of the first day of the *nggua bapu* cycle. A *mosalaki* inaugurates the entire ceremonial sequence by sounding a gong, a performative act that symbolically marks the beginning of the proceedings. The grains subjected to this ritual drying include both the old rice from the previous year's harvest, which is stored in the traditional community house (*sa'o ria*), and the newly harvested rice from the current year. Community members also contribute a portion of their agricultural yield to support the ritual activities. A segment of this collective rice is processed into rice crackers, while another portion is cooked for communal consumption throughout the subsequent days of the *Nggua bapu* ceremonies.

The second stage is the *Joru kamba*, or the ritual of areca nut palm climbing. The principal material in this ceremony is the areca nut, procured directly from the tree. Prior to harvesting, a *Mosalaki* must ascertain the nut's ripeness to determine its fitness for ceremonial use. An appropriately ripe nut is neither too young nor too old, ensuring it can be easily split with the teeth. The nuts are not harvested individually; they are collected while still attached to their branches and clusters. It is imperative that no nut falls to the ground during this process. The newly harvested cluster is then placed upon a specially prepared, ornately decorated litter. That evening, two bearers carry the litter while another individual carries a torch; several *Mosalaki* and community members then form a procession to transport the litter to the *sa'o ria* for the subsequent

ceremony. Concurrently, as the nuts are being harvested, wild yams (*uwu*), betel quid ingredients (betel leaf and areca nut), and cigarettes are prepared within the *sa'o ria*. The yams are roasted, then divided into seven portions, which are distributed to the *mosalaki*. The entire ritual sequence is conducted in solemn silence.

The third stage of the *Nggua bapu* ritual complex is the *Pu pera*, or communal feast. This ritual is conducted within the *sa'o ria*. The assembled *mosalaki* partake in a shared meal, the constituent elements of which consist of the previously prepared rice crackers and roasted wild yams. The *Mosalaki* are accorded the privilege of consuming the meal first, following a prescribed order of precedence. The remaining portions are subsequently distributed among the other attendees present at the gathering.

The fourth stage is the *jengi soko*, or the ritual burning of the grasslands. The *mosalaki* and community members proceed to a designated area overgrown with grass, reeds, and secondary forest. There, they present offerings of rice crackers and rice cooked in bamboo tubes. This offering constitutes a petition for permission to burn the grassland (*soko*), which is inhabited by wild animals that threaten community crops. Following the offering, participants hunt the animals, which are then brought back to the village. In the event that no game is procured, shrimp are caught from nearby waterways as a symbolic substitute.

Subsequently, the *mosalaki* and members of the *Kanganara* indigenous community conduct the *joru kamba*, or the ritual of treading of the rice. This ceremony centers on the *kanga*, an altar used for presenting animal sacrifices or other ritual offerings. Upon the *kanga*, both the old and new harvest rice are placed. The *mosalaki* and community members then perform a circumambulatory dance and chant around the altar. Following this, the *mosalaki* gather the rice, a portion of which is pounded to produce rice crackers, while another portion is cooked and distributed among the community members.

The fifth stage is the *due pare mori*, signifying the second *pu pera*, or communal feast. The food prepared consists of rice crackers made from grains previously gathered. The provisions are first distributed to the *mosalaki* according to ceremonial precedence, and then to the community members in attendance. This communal meal serves as a performative expression of social cohesion and a rite of honor towards the agricultural yield, which has been ceremonially brought into and stored within the *sa'o ria*. Following this feast, the *mosalaki* convene a council to deliberate on matters pertaining to the community's social life and to formulate directives to be subsequently communicated to the wider indigenous populace.

The sixth stage is the *pai polo ria*, or the ritual of summoning the "great suangi". The *Kanganara* indigenous community conceptualizes *polo ria* as a vast, non-corporeal spiritual entity. It is iconographically depicted with ears as large as taro leaves, teeth like hoe blades, and flaming eyes. While it cannot be perceived physically, its presence is

considered palpable. This entity is believed to be capable of promoting the community's welfare. Consequently, it must be ritually invoked and invited during the ceremony and presented with offerings and sacrifices. Conversely, the failure to issue such an invitation and provide offerings is thought to bring calamity. During this rite, an individual possessing specialized esoteric capabilities performs the invocation, summoning *polo ria* to manifest during the *nggua bapu* proceedings. This ritual of conjuration is conducted in the vicinity of the *kanga*.

The seventh stage is the *lo majo* (communal feast and exhortation by the *mosalaki*). During this phase, the *mosalaki* and the *ana kalo fai walu* (indigenous community members) assemble within the *sa'o ria*. They collectively celebrate their unity through a shared meal (*ka ria*), an inclusive event from which no one is excluded. Following the feast, a senior *mosalaki*, recognized as the *primus inter pares*, delivers a formal exhortation or advisory address (*nau nena*) on behalf of the collective leadership. This discourse encompasses counsel and directives concerning communal life and social relations among villagers, including dynamics within the household unit (*na'o ji'e gare pawe*). The address further delineates codes of conduct, customary statutes, and various customary prescriptions that must be diligently observed and upheld. Additionally, the exhortation emphasizes the imperative of environmental stewardship, proscribing ecological degradation and enjoining the community to preserve the sanctity and sustainability of the sacred forest and water sources. Adherence to these principles is framed as essential for the collective welfare of the village, the maintenance of harmonious relations with the ancestral realm, and the integrity of the natural environment. The proceedings conclude with all participants engaging in the *gawi*, a traditional Lio ethnic group dance, accompanied by a capella singing performed by a designated vocalist (*sodha*). This collective *gawi* expresses gratitude and joy for the harvest, fosters kinship, and embodies the amity intrinsic to communal life. It further serves as a symbol of unity and equality, simultaneously articulating a collective resolve to perpetuate and nurture fraternity and social harmony within the community.

The ensuing ritual is the *rote obo*, a ceremonial practice in which the sacred basket is replenished with newly harvested rice, which is then consecrated for use in the following annual cycle of customary rites. This basket containing the new grain is subsequently installed in the traditional community house. This act serves as a potent symbolic representation of agricultural and ritual continuity, ensuring the harvest's perpetuation throughout the community's collective lifespan.

The terminal phase of the *Nggua Bapu ritual* is the *Sumba Nua* ceremony, performed on the final day. This rite is centrally conducted within the sacred forest (*kambe nua*) of the *Kanganara* indigenous community. The material constituents employed include wood fragments carved to

resemble tusks, gold, machetes, hearth ash, and agricultural produce. These wooden pieces are procured from specific, ritually prescribed tree species. All these materials are consecrated as votive offerings. A central objective of the *nggua bapu* ritual is the invocation of *polo ria* (a major class of spirit, or a great *suanggi*). However, this invocation also attracts malevolent spirits who arrive unbidden. Consequently, the invited *polo ria* is ceremonially escorted back to its place of origin, provisioned with sustenance in the form of the community's harvested offerings. This obligatory act of reciprocity is codified in the ritual maxim: *joka wola sumba walo*, which means "those we have summoned to be with us, we must then accompany on their return." This underscores a principle of balanced exchange and the proper management of spirit relations.

Furthermore, the community engages in a geomantic fortification of the village. This involves strategically placing four wooden fragments, accompanied by offerings, at the four cardinal points to create a protective perimeter. The remaining offerings are deposited on a dedicated sacrificial altar (*kanga*), also located within the prohibited forest. Through these propitiatory offerings, the community establishes a critical covenant with the *polo ria*: the spirit is granted legitimate access only to the sustenance explicitly provided in the offering and is thereby prohibited from preying upon or disturbing the community. Subsequently, the village is further fortified with a symbolic barrier of hearth ash, collected from every household during the *nggua bapu* proceedings. Additional apotropaic materials, such as sugar palm seeds (*fole*) and thorny plants (*ulu bewa*), are integrated into this perimeter. This composite barrier is expressly designed to impede the ingress of maleficent spirits or occult forces, thereby averting the calamities they might bring, namely, natural disasters and crop failure.

Following the conclusion of the *Sumba nua* ritual, the *mosalaki* and participating community members return to the village. From that moment onward, they are obligated to adhere to the counsel and injunctions issued by the *mosalaki* and to observe a series of ritual prohibitions. Among the most significant of these is the strict proscription against the felling of trees, particularly those situated within the demarcated area of the sacred forest. This interdiction is absolute and non-negotiable, serving as the fundamental mechanism for preserving this zone as a perpetually verdant sanctuary, characterized by its untouched and protected arboreal growth. Furthermore, the sacred forest is intended to serve as a vital watershed reserve, as these forests typically encompass water springs that constitute the community's primary source for multifarious needs. Any transgression against these prohibitions incurs the imposition of a customary fine (*poi*). The offender is obliged to fulfill this penalty in its entirety. The *Mosalaki* acknowledge that the *Kanganara* indigenous people obey customary prohibitions after the traditional ceremony has been performed. They refrain from cutting down trees in the customary forest area not out of fear of

customary fines (*poi*), but rather out of an awareness that damaging nature can bring disaster and disrupt the social order. This can be observed in their lives: from the past until now, no natural disasters have struck their village because their village is protected by the lush forest. Furthermore, they have an adequate water supply to irrigate their rice fields and meet their daily needs, and social ties among the indigenous people are growing stronger or maintaining harmony in social relations among humans, the contractual relationship with the ancestors, and the symbiotic relationship with the natural environment.

## 2. The Value and Meaning of the *Sumba Nua* Ritual

Any discourse on the *Sumba nua* ritual must necessarily situate it within the holistic framework of the overarching *nggua bapu* ceremonial cycle, of which it constitutes an integral and culminating segment. Consequently, its hermeneutics are profoundly intertwined with the meanings enacted throughout the preceding rites. Notwithstanding this embeddedness, the *Sumba nua* ritual accrues a distinct and salient signification due to its primary function as a mechanism for environmental conservation and ecological stewardship.

Of the ritual practices observed, several core values and meanings may be abstracted from the *nggua bapu* ceremony and, more specifically, the *Sumba nua* rite. Primarily, these rituals serve to enact and reinforce the principle of existential harmonization. The *Kanganara* indigenous community operates under a fundamental awareness that the perpetuation of their collective existence is contingent upon the maintenance of harmonious relations across multiple ontological spheres, namely, the relationship between the community and the Supreme Being and ancestral spirits, alongside other metaphysical forces; the relations among individuals within the village polity; relations with external human societies; and, critically, the relationship with the natural environment. The active endeavor to preserve this relational equilibrium is ritually indexed through invocatory prayers and propitiatory offerings directed to the Supreme Being, the ancestors, and the *polo ria*. Throughout the performance of the *nggua bapu*, participants are obliged to adhere to a set of proscriptions and to attentively receive the exhortations and didactic instruction delivered by the *mosalaki*. Furthermore, a concrete manifestation of this harmonization is demonstrated through prescribed practices of environmental stewardship and the conscientious custodianship of nature.

The cosmological principle underpinning this harmonization is a worldview that situates humanity as an integral and contingent component within the cosmos. Human existence is fundamentally relational and derivative, predicated upon pre-existing and eternal entities, namely, the Supreme Being and the various metaphysical forces or *polo ria*. It is to these primordial

agencies that the *Kanganara* indigenous community directs its votive offerings and sacrifices, acts which constitute both an expression of profound gratitude and a supplication for continued sustenance and protection. This harmonization with the Supreme Being and ancestral spirits must necessarily find its expression within the sphere of social relations with the broader community. Here, a prescribed ethical code becomes paramount for reinforcing extant social cohesion. *Kanganara* indigenous community is structured upon a defined social stratification comprising the *mosalaki* (the ritual elders and customary leaders) and the general community members (*ana kalo fai walu*). The *mosalaki* serve as the custodians of tradition and occupy a critical role in the maintenance of social harmony. While the *ana kalo fai walu* enjoy a state of essential equality amongst themselves, they are collectively bound by customary law, obligated to its performance, and are expected to defer to the counsel and injunctions of the *mosalaki*. The *mosalaki* and the *ana kalo fai walu* reinforce the integrity of their relational harmony through the commensal act of shared meals and the performance of the *gawi* dance. This dance, in which all participants join a single, unbroken circle, serves as a powerful symbol of collective unity and kinship, a single familial body. The synchronized movement of feet and bodies to a shared rhythm, while hands remain linked, physically embodies and generates the very social intimacy and fraternity it represents. Furthermore, their profound symbiosis with the natural world obligates the *Kanganara* indigenous community to actively maintain harmonic relations with the environment. Certain natural materials, such as betel nut and yams, are employed as symbolic representations of fecundity. Similarly, proscriptions, such as the prohibition on felling trees within customary forests, constitute tangible efforts to preserve this symbiotic harmony. Collectively, these practices of harmonization represent a concerted societal endeavor to construct a mode of existence characterized by peacefulness and founded upon a resilient, coherent base.

Secondly, sustainable harvest. As previously intimated, the *nggua bapu* ritual constitutes a ceremony of harvest thanksgiving and a supplication for blessings upon the forthcoming agricultural season. This expression of gratitude and entreaty is materially demonstrated through the ritual of *joru kamba*, in which rice harvested the previous season is ceremonially commingled with the newly harvested grain. This act serves as a potent symbolic expression, articulating the fundamental identity of the *Kanganara* indigenous community as agriculturists whose subsistence and existential continuity depend inextricably on the yield of their harvests. Their aspiration is for a sustainable yield, agricultural perpetuity, and cyclical continuity, ensuring that the provisions secured in the previous year are reproducibly obtained and successfully replicated in the present, and will be perpetually secured and fervently petitioned for in all subsequent years. This

aspiration, moreover, serves as an intergenerational guarantee for future generations of the *Kanganara* indigenous community.

Furthermore, to ritually ensure this agricultural sustainability, the *Kanganara* indigenous community engages in a practice of ecological purification known as the *jengi soko* ceremony (the burning of the fields). This act of burning off dry grassland is not an act of environmental degradation. Rather, it constitutes a symbolic act of purification, designed to cleanse the land of various pests that threaten the community's cultivated crops. Invasive grasses and weeds are disruptive forces that impede the growth of primary cultigens. The fields are also inhabited by malevolent pests, such as rats and locusts. By performing this ritual, the community seeks to ward off rats or locusts from damaging their crops, offering ritual oblations so that these pests may partake of what has already been set aside for them, rather than laying waste to the cultivations.

Thirdly, the protection of the village. The settlement of *Kanganara* is situated upon a hillside, with residential structures built contiguously along the slope. This topographical and architectural configuration renders the community highly susceptible to natural disasters, specifically landslides and floods, a vulnerability exacerbated by the region's characteristically high rainfall. To fortify the village against these threats, the community cultivates candlenut trees (*Aleurites moluccanus*), which serve as both a cash crop and a protective vegetative barrier for the settlement. In recognition of this situation and condition, the *Kanganara* indigenous community fortifies their village through the performance of the *Sumba nua* ritual. They enclose the village by presenting ritual offerings at the four cardinal *points*, while simultaneously encircling it with kitchen ash and thorn-laden wood. This is intended to prevent malevolent forces from entering the village, redirecting them instead to take only that which has been explicitly provided for them in the offerings. This symbolic act engenders a profound sense of security, for they hold that natural disasters such as landslides or floods are calamities brought about by malevolent forces or as manifestations of ancestral wrath. Beyond this, they also enclose themselves within a set of prohibitions that must be observed. Transgressions against these proscriptions are regarded as acts that disrupt and damage the harmony already established.

Fourthly, the preservation of the integrity of creation. A further dimension of the *Sumba nua* ritual is its role in maintaining the integrity of the created order. The *Kanganara* indigenous community seeks to safeguard not only their village from landslides, floods, or crop failure, but is also fundamentally committed to the preservation of the environment in its totality. Consequently, the *Sumba nua* ritual is centrally performed within the sacred forest. This forest is designated as inviolable; its ecosystem is not to be disturbed, and the trees within it are strictly protected

from felling. By situating the core ritual activities in this locale, the community simultaneously reaffirms its collective resolve and commitment to protecting the sacred forest and the surrounding environment. This is also intended to ensure their continued access to an adequate water supply for both agricultural fields and household needs. The determination and commitment to safeguard the integrity of creation is also manifested through the imposition of prohibitions (*pire*), forbidding the felling of trees, the tilling of soil, and the harvesting of crops for the duration of the ceremonial period. Violations of these proscriptions are met with stipulated customary fines, the payment of which is obligatory. The paramount emphasis here is on the fundamental responsibility of the *Kanganara* indigenous community towards the environment and the sustainability of their own existence.

### 3. Strategic Efforts for Environmental Conservation as the Concrete Embodiment of the *Sumba Nua* Ritual

The *Sumba nua* ritual serves as a cultural framework that actively supports community-based environmental conservation practices. Its central orientation lies in maintaining the balance of relationships within the *Kanganara* cosmological order: relationships among humans, between humans and the Divine and ancestral spirits, and between humans and nature. Within the worldview of the *Kanganara* indigenous community, these dimensions are inseparable and mutually constitutive. A disruption in one sphere inevitably affects the others, manifesting as social conflict, ritual disorder, declining communal solidarity, or environmentally destructive practices. Consequently, the *nggua bapu* ritual complex, including *Sumba nua*, operates not merely as a ceremonial tradition but as a socio-cultural mechanism for restoring and reaffirming relational harmony within the community's cosmological system. Through ritual enactment, cultural values are continually inherited, internalized, and reproduced across generations, thereby cultivating a collective sense of responsibility toward communal life and environmental stewardship (Koentjaraningrat, 1985; Surya & Satriyati, 2024). In this respect, the *Sumba nua* ritual reflects the profound interconnectedness of the social, spiritual, and ecological dimensions that structure *Kanganara* life.

Furthermore, the *Sumba nua* ritual constitutes a concrete expression of the *Kanganara* indigenous community's fiduciary responsibility toward the natural world that sustains their existence. An abundant harvest, made possible by a balanced, fertile environment, is interpreted not solely as an economic achievement but also as tangible evidence of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Nature is therefore not viewed as an object of unrestricted exploitation, but as a sacred source of life that demands ethical reciprocity and spiritual respect. In return for the sustenance provided by nature, the community is morally and spiritually obliged to

demonstrate gratitude through attentive environmental care and the faithful observance of ritual obligations. This responsibility is materially embodied in the consistent annual performance of customary rituals and in strict adherence to the prohibitions, taboos, and customary laws that regulate communal interactions with the environment during and after the ritual cycle.

The *Kanganara* indigenous community also demonstrates a strong intergenerational consciousness concerning ecological responsibility. Community members recognize that the continuity of communal life and environmental sustainability depends upon the successful transmission of ritual knowledge and ecological ethics to subsequent generations. Consequently, one of the principal strategies for sustaining this responsibility lies in preserving and continuing ritual traditions. Ritual conservation simultaneously becomes cultural conservation, because through ritual practice, younger generations learn the ethical principles, cosmological understandings, and ecological obligations inherited from their ancestors. The perpetuation of *Sumba nua* therefore serves not only a spiritual function, but also an educational and ecological one, ensuring the continuity of indigenous environmental knowledge across generations. This responsibility is further expressed through diligent agricultural labor aimed not merely at maximizing production, but at maintaining sustainable and balanced yields that do not undermine the ecological foundations of communal survival.

The responsibility for environmental preservation is further expressed through an ethos of ecological mindfulness and deep reverence for the natural world. The *Kanganara* indigenous community relies extensively on natural materials in performing customary rituals, thereby reinforcing awareness of human dependence on ecological resources. Consequently, community members are prohibited from engaging in indiscriminate deforestation or environmentally destructive activities. Instead, they are obliged to undertake practices of environmental maintenance, including tree planting and the protection of ancestral forests, all of which are regulated through an elaborate system of customary prohibitions and taboos. These customary restrictions function not only as cultural norms but also as indigenous ecological regulations designed to preserve environmental balance and prevent ecological degradation.

This environmentally mindful disposition exhibited by the *Kanganara* indigenous community demonstrates a significant consonance with the principles of the "deep ecology" movement advanced by Arne Naess. Naess developed the concept of ecosophy as a philosophy centered upon ecological harmony and equilibrium (Naess, 1973). Deep ecology rejects anthropocentric assumptions and instead emphasizes the ontological interconnectedness of all forms of life, positioning humans as integral components within a larger ecological web rather than as dominant masters of nature. In this perspective, humans derive their existence from nature and therefore bear an

ethical obligation to protect and preserve it (Devall, 1991: 248). The worldview embodied in the *Sumba nua* ritual reflects a similar ecological orientation, in which environmental preservation arises not from external regulation alone but from an internalized cosmological consciousness that situates humans within a sacred, reciprocal relationship with the natural world.

Nevertheless, despite this deeply rooted ecological ethos, the *Kanganara* indigenous community acknowledges that tensions and disruptions persist within communal life. Social conflicts among community members persist, and certain individuals occasionally violate customary prescriptions governing communal and ecological conduct. Such violations are understood not merely as social infractions, but as disruptions to the moral and ecological balance that sustains communal life. In response, the *mosalaki* have reaffirmed their commitment to the enforcement of customary law by stipulating that every violation of customary norms (*pire*) must be followed by the imposition of traditional sanctions (*poi*). These sanctions are obligatory and non-negotiable, reflecting the authoritative role of customary law in maintaining communal order. Beyond their juridical function, these sanctions possess profound spiritual and ecological significance, as they serve to restore disrupted relationships among individuals, the community, ancestors, and nature itself.

The observance of customary sanctions can therefore be interpreted as a form of spiritual praxis and collective reconciliation. The fulfillment of sanctions does not merely punish wrongdoing but also facilitates the restoration of relational equilibrium disturbed by acts of transgression. Through this process, offenders symbolically and socially reintegrate themselves into the communal body while simultaneously reaffirming their obedience to ancestral values and ecological ethics. In this sense, customary law functions as a mechanism for sustaining both social cohesion and environmental harmony, reinforcing the inseparability of ethical, spiritual, and ecological order within *Kanganara* society.

These strategic efforts toward environmental preservation would become even more effective if situated within a more formalized framework of indigenous-based ecological education. In practice, however, the *Kanganara* indigenous community already possesses an existing model of ecological pedagogy transmitted through the *nggua bapu* ritual cycle. One important phase of this ritual, known as *lo majo*, involves a communal gathering and meal during which participants receive exhortations, moral guidance, and counsel from the *mosalaki*. These exhortations contain teachings concerning virtuous conduct, communal responsibility, and harmonious relations with nature, all of which are considered essential for collective well-being. The ecological values conveyed through these oral teachings are subsequently reinforced and symbolically enacted in the *Sumba nua* ritual, which

invokes spiritual protection for both the community and the natural environment that sustains it.

Collectively, these practices constitute a form of indigenous ecological education functioning as a pedagogy of environmental awareness. This pedagogical process strengthens communal commitment toward environmental conservation by embedding ecological ethics within everyday cultural and ritual life. Indigenous community-based ecological education is particularly significant because it is grounded in the ontological belief that all living beings exist within a single interdependent web of life, thereby requiring a collective ethic of care and mutual responsibility. Such an educational framework becomes increasingly important in counteracting modern exploitative tendencies toward nature pursued in the name of economic development and human welfare (Schinkel, 2025). Moreover, ecological education contributes to the formation of an ecological culture that reinforces relationality both among humans and between humans and the environment. In doing so, it serves as a preventive mechanism against environmental destruction and excessive resource exploitation (Vasileva-Tcankova, 2023).

The counsel, prohibitions, customary rules, and ecologically oriented policies practiced within the *Kanganara* indigenous community, therefore, constitute an integrated system of ecological education grounded in local wisdom. This indigenous framework offers important insights for the development of broader environmental policies, comparable to the application of the African philosophy of ubuntu. The principle of ubuntu, commonly expressed through the maxim "I am because we are," has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in fostering communities characterized by solidarity, care, and ecological sensitivity. Its incorporation into broader environmental policy frameworks has shown significant potential to strengthen communal responsibility for environmental sustainability (Kyei-Nuamah & Peng, 2024). In this context, the preservation of rituals such as *Sumba nua* becomes critically important because they embody a lived, practiced, and enduring form of ecological education that has been transmitted from ancestral generations to the present and remains essential for the future continuity of both the community and the environment.

#### D. CONCLUSIONS

The *Sumba nua* ritual constitutes a cultural expression that comprehensively reflects the value system and social order of the *Kanganara* indigenous people. This ritual is a medium for communication with ancestral spirits and serves as a critical institution for the formation of collective identity, the reinforcement of social solidarity, and the intergenerational transmission of spiritual, moral, and ecological values. The ecological dimension of this ritual is manifested through its role in symbolically protecting the village from malevolent forces and natural

disasters, a function that is further substantiated and enforced through a system of customary prohibitions (*pire*). The ecological values embedded within this rite demonstrate that customary law possesses significant potency as a locally-based mechanism for environmental conservation and sustainability. The *Kanganara* indigenous community is reminded of their fundamental identity as a cohesive collective intrinsically interconnected with the natural world. Consequently, they bear an obligation to protect the environment, maintain an ethos of ecological mindfulness, and actively seek to restore their relationship with nature whenever human behaviors or practices have inflicted harm upon it. All of these are anthropological contributions of the *Sumba nua* ritual to maintaining social cohesion among community members while also paying attention to the preservation of nature and the relationship with the Supreme Being and ancestors. The practical implications are that the *Kanganara* indigenous community continues to perform the *nggua bapu* ritual annually, refrains from cutting down trees in the customary forest, and resolves various social issues within the community by involving the *mosalaki* as guardians of customary traditions.

Considering the multifaceted positive impacts and influences of the *Sumba nua* ritual on environmental conservation, a key recommendation arising from this research is to initiate a collaboration with the local village government. The objective would be to formally codify the ritual's associated customary rules and prohibitions into a binding village regulation. These rules, which are traditionally considered absolute and obligatory for the *Kanganara* indigenous community, would thus be granted contemporary legal standing. By institutionalizing these precepts within a binding village regulation, the community acquires a robust legal foundation to perpetuate its custodianship of environmental sustainability. Consequently, the environmental conservation efforts that emanate from the annual performance of the *Sumba nua* ritual are endowed with greater longevity and resilience through the formal endorsement and structural support of the village government by the enactment of village regulation.

A limitation of this study is its focus on the *Sumba nua* ritual in particular and the *nggua bapu* ritual in general, to examine the contribution of the *Kanganara* indigenous community's traditions to environmental conservation efforts. However, the *Kanganara* indigenous community possesses various other traditions rich in values and meanings related to the relationship between humans, the Supreme Being, ancestors, and nature. Therefore, further research is needed that examines farming practices and related traditional ceremonies, as well as research that specifically examines customary prohibitions and their implications for the lives of the *Kanganara* indigenous community.

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