

Culture for Sustainable Living:

Think Piece for A New Normal

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Globally, the pandemic has exposed longstanding and systemic flaws in our current ways of living, making, educating and working. Dr. Hilmar Farid emphasises the need to prioritise sustainability in our development initiatives and practices worldwide, with locally-specific, culture-based policies that promote economic resilience, cultural diversity, environmental health and social equity.

The Great Reset

As the health pandemic continues into its third year, the whole world seems to be seeking various answers to this question—how do we return to the Old Normal (business as usual)?

The Old Normal saw development led by economic growth, development carried out at the expense of social and environmental health. The consumptive lifestyle has created a heavy ecological burden signified by a metabolic rift between humans and nature: as if the only way humans survive is to destroy nature, consuming it to nothing. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the latest expressions of this rift. The expansion of industry encourages the destruction of ecosystems which eventually forces various wild animals to become refugees in the human settlements, encourages the assimilation of habitats between species and triggers the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19. Therefore, returning to the Old Normal would only mean reproducing the very environment which sustained the pandemic. COVID-19 helped us to see this

reality clearly; it showed us that the Old Normal was an abnormality.

The pandemic has brought to the fore the latent vulnerability in our modern lifestyles. This vulnerability has manifested itself in the systemic disruption to supply chains which has called into question our current way of life. It is increasingly apparent that the current situation has given rise to existential risks which put human existence at stake. What is at stake are no longer lives stricken by poverty, inequality, injustice, but human survival as a species. This crisis, in other words, should be seen as an opportunity to solve the underlying problems of modern life and create a new and better society.

This awareness has not arisen only from those who have long been critical of the global order, but also from the established institutions that represent the global order itself. The World Economic Forum is now talking about “The Great Reset” (Davos Meeting 2021). The state of the world today is conceived as a computer experiencing so many errors that it must be reformatted from scratch. Even the “economic reforms” that have been used as a panacea for every crisis are no longer seen as sufficient. The World Economic Forum has even called for global action for social change that pushes the socio-ecological sustainability agenda. When the institutions that have been representing the mainstream of world economic thought have spoken of “The Great Reset”, there is no plausible reason to keep preserving the “Old Normal”. In order to recover together and recover stronger, a global recovery strategy that seeks to create a “New Normal” rather than reproduce the “Old Normal” is necessary. For this purpose, culture plays a significant role.

The Socio-Economic Benefits of Culture-Led Development

Culture is a product of human interaction with others and the surrounding environment. For generations, humans have produced knowledge and artifacts, and built institutions to manage the relationship between them in relation to nature. In the Tado tribal community in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, for example, the singing of the river cuckoo is a sign of the arrival of the planting season. If this species disappears due to forest encroachment, the community will lose the traditional reference to farming which results in a transformation in the way the community conducts their daily life. Examples of this kind are found in many other places and indicate the existence of a close relationship between biodiversity and cultural diversity. Culture is the way humans survive, respond to daily challenges, in short, adapt. The same is true in nature: each species develops different ways of responding to the challenges of everyday life and adapting. What is important to underline here is that diversity is a way of survival. If we depend on only one way of life, we will have low resilience in the face of life's changing challenges. Diversity, then, is directly related to safety, just as uniformity is related to vulnerability. It is imperative, therefore, to promote cultural diversity as common good.

The economic benefits of culture-based development are clearly seen in recent studies on the creative economy. According to recent UNESCO research, global export of cultural goods doubled in value from 2005 to USD271.7 billion in 2019, whereas global export of cultural services doubled in value

from 2006 to USD117.4 billion in 2019. This value was even higher for developing countries, reaching three times the original export value in 2019. Likewise in terms of job openings, the workforce in the cultural sector currently constitutes 6.2% of the total global workforce, and in developing countries such as Africa, it has even reached 8.2% in 2021.

The social benefits of culture-based development are also apparent in the way culture heals the societal rifts opened by rapid economic growth. People will not prosper physically and mentally if, in the midst of rapid economic growth, they feel alienated from one another, losing their social norms, divided by conflict and prejudice. Only through cultural activities can the societal rift be overcome. By encouraging the diversity of cultural expressions, the preconditions for a more cohesive and harmonious society can be laid.

All these benefits are clearly seen in the development of the creative economy in the past decades.

Indonesian Pathways to A New Normal

Indonesia has taken the lead in advancing the creative economy agenda at a global level. The creative economy is a sector that is built upon cultural resources. In order to create a more sustainable creative economy, therefore, we need to have a more robust cultural ecosystem that can preserve and enrich our cultural resources. To this effect, the Indonesian government has initiated many projects that aim to promote greater sustainability using local cultural resources. These initiatives range from processing natural fibres and



Figure 1. *Wastra Tenun Nusantara*, traditional Indonesian hand-woven and naturally-dyed textiles, from Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Image courtesy of Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

natural dyes for fashion, to utilising a plethora of local food sources, to developing traditional architecture that is environmentally-friendly and which encourages social collaboration and inclusion.

Our effort to develop our cultural economy is focused on strengthening the local economy. The more local elements we support and nurture, the better, as this provides avenues for more people to be involved and hence employed. Focusing on empowering the local population with knowledge about the various cultural practices enables more local workers to be involved, starting from indigenous peoples, traditional cultural actors, and various elements of the community at the village level. It also supports economic decentralisation; instead of enabling the accumulation of capital by a single company, this measure will distribute capital evenly throughout the supply chain that connects various regions. This will make society, as a whole, more resilient in the face of economic crises.

One of the challenges of managing the cultural economy is to overcome inequality of access among different segments of society. For this purpose, the Indonesian government has developed a cultural platform called “*Indonesiana*”. This platform plays the role of matchmaker between local governments and artists or cultural workers to create collaborative festivals that help bring diverse cultural expressions to people across Indonesia. This platform was designed to spearhead the improvement of festival management and to multiply similar collaborative efforts between state and civil society in the local cultural context. And to reduce inequality of access in art education, we have launched the “Artists Go To School Movement (GSMS)” in which we deploy 1,500 artists and writers to teach at elementary and high schools across Indonesia. This programme also presents artists with the opportunity to enrich their artistic experience in residency.



Figure 2. Making *Petis Udang* (Shrimp Paste), an Indonesian food of intangible cultural heritage, from East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Image courtesy of Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to accelerate the process of cultural mainstreaming, that is, to create a synergy between cultural policymaking and broader policymaking for development. For this purpose, the Indonesian government has developed a “Cultural Development Index (CDI)”. More than an instrument to measure cultural development, the Indonesian CDI is embedded in a unified policy matrix that allows its implementation not only as a context-sensitive means of measuring cultural mainstreaming performance, but also as an integral part of the development planning process at the local level. Development planning is executed from the ground up, involving the participation of artists, cultural actors, indigenous people, and cultural experts, together with local level planners. The cultural policy planning documents produced through this process serve as a reference for the formulation of general development policies at the local and national levels. If the plan is implemented properly, the result will be an increase in the CDI

score. This ensures that the CDI becomes an integral part of the development cycle from the local to the national level. It has been four years since the implementation of CDI and its policy matrix, and we have found that cultural mainstreaming can be successful if each region develops local cultural resources to respond to local development challenges such as lack of resources, insufficient infrastructures, or inequality of access. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of sustainable development. In fact, more diversity in cultural expression equals more possibilities when seeking solutions to such challenges.

Culture-based policies are the key to creating sustainable development, with tangible benefits not only in the economic field, but also socially and environmentally. Cultural mainstreaming needs to be based on the awareness that there is not one solution that fits all. Cultural and contextual characteristics cannot be ignored when managing

development based on culture. Any attempt to find one solution to all problems only adds to existing problems. Every development challenge arises in a unique geographical context and must be overcome by the strengthening of existing local potential, rather than by the application of general prescriptions that may be considered applicable anywhere and at anytime. The solution to a problem in a particular geo-spatial situation must be found from within the situation itself. Solutions must emerge endogenously, not imposed from a general pattern.

G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting And The Agenda For Global Recovery

The Indonesian government also plans to lead the formation of a new global consensus on culture-led recovery through G20. The third G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting will be hosted by the Republic of Indonesia on 12–13 September 2022 at the Borobudur Temple Compounds in Indonesia. It will be a continuation of previous meetings held by the Saudi Arabia's Presidency (2020) and Italy's Presidency (2021). This meeting will continue the commitment outlined in the Rome Declaration (2021) of the G20 Ministers of Culture to recognise culture as an integral part of a wider policy agenda. It will have as its main theme: "Culture for Sustainable Living". By focusing on this issue, the meeting will explore the possibilities of sustainable recovery

in creating the New Normal, which is a transition from unrestrained development towards a more socio-ecological, justice-oriented development, supported by policies based on the diversity of cultural resources and which acknowledge the role of cultural economics in creating pathways to sustainable lifestyles.

There is global awareness that the arts and culture sector needs support in order to return to life post pandemic. For this reason, Indonesia's Presidency of the 2022 G20 will be marked by a commitment to initiate the development of the Global Arts and Culture Recovery Fund (GACRF). This funding platform is expected to help with the restoring of the cultural economy, especially in developing and less developed countries which have been badly affected by the pandemic, focusing on communities of artists and cultural workers who are working on projects that promote sustainable living practices. With GACRF, the global arts and culture sector can recover more quickly and again play a major role in encouraging the realisation of the ideals of sustainable development. With the support of G20 member countries and UNESCO, it is expected that the GACRF can be launched on 13 September 2022, on the occasion of the third G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting. [Editor-in-Chief's Note: The GACRF was successfully launched at the G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting.]

If all of this is explored and strengthened by public participation made possible by equitable access to technology, we will be able to see a great transformation in our way of life, resulting in a step out of the pandemic, climate crises, and social inequality at the same time. □



Figure 3. The Borobudur Temple Compounds in Magelang Regency, East Java, Indonesia, will be the location of the G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting on 12–13 September 2022. Image courtesy of Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

About the Author



Hilmar Farid is currently the Director General of Culture in Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. He also serves as the President Commissioner of the state-owned publishing company Balai Pustaka (2020-present). He is also a lecturer at the Postgraduate Program at Jakarta Arts Institute (2015-present). He received his PhD from the National University of Singapore (PhD).