

## Cohesiveness Management In Traditional Community Organizations: The Strategic Role Of Women In The Sustainability Of Mapalus Rumah Culture

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### Article Info

Received: 15/01/2026

Revised: 13/05/2026

Accepted: 30/05/2026

Online: xx/xx/2026

### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of cohesiveness on the sustainability of the Mapalus Rumah organization by considering the role of women as key actors in strengthening shared values. Mapalus Rumah is a traditional mutual house-building cooperative rooted in the Minahasan community, historically emerging from a shared spirit of solidarity after a wave of house-burning tragedies affected the villages of Tombatu, Betelen, and Silian in the 1960s, and continuing today as the oldest surviving form of Mapalus after the near-disappearance of the agricultural Mapalus tani. This research applies a qualitative approach using a case study method involving five female respondents who are active members of Mapalus Rumah in Southeast Minahasa. Data were collected through in-depth interviews centered on why members choose to participate, and analyzed thematically to interpret the meaning members attach to cohesiveness and empowerment. The research findings indicate that cohesiveness in an organization built on cooperation, mutual assistance, trust, solidarity, and gender equality can increase member participation and strengthen the organization's sustainability. Women function as communication drivers, guardians of group agreements, and agents of cultural preservation, often exercising influence and responsibility that extends beyond conventional expectations of their role. High cohesiveness has been proven to support the achievement of shared goals, family welfare, and the continuity of Mapalus Rumah culture amid ongoing social transformation, positioning women's empowerment as both a product and a driver of the culture's continued resilience.

**Keywords:** cohesiveness management; women's role; Mapalus Rumah organization; women's empowerment; local Minahasan culture



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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional community organizations built on mutual assistance have long served as informal institutions of resilience across Indonesia, offering members access to labor, materials, and social support that formal markets and financial systems often fail to provide. In Minahasa, North Sulawesi, this tradition takes the form of Mapalus, a cooperative labor-sharing system whose most enduring variant, Mapalus Rumah (house-building Mapalus), continues to thrive even as its older agricultural counterpart, Mapalus tani, has all but disappeared. Mapalus Rumah traces its origins to a wave of house-burning tragedies that struck the villages of Tombatu, Betelen, and Silian in the 1960s, out of which a shared spirit of solidarity emerged to help affected families rebuild. This historical trajectory illustrates a broader pattern documented across Indonesia, in which gotong royong (mutual cooperation) has functioned simultaneously as a grassroots survival mechanism and as a culturally legitimated form of social citizenship shaped by both community initiative and, at times, state discourse (Bowen, 1986; Suwignyo, 2019).

Structurally, Mapalus Rumah shares functional similarities with other Indonesian rotating mutual-aid institutions such as arisan (rotating savings and credit associations), which have been shown to strengthen household economic capacity, expand access to assets, and reduce poverty precisely because they draw on pre-existing community-level social capital rather than formal financial infrastructure (Astuti, 2022; Kharisma, Remi, Hadiyanto, & Dwi Saputra, 2020). In both arisan and Mapalus Rumah, women's participation has been found to carry disproportionate significance: women who participate in rotating mutual-aid institutions have been shown to reduce household poverty more significantly than male participants, underscoring the distinctive economic and social weight women bring to such organizations (Kharisma et al., 2020).

Cohesiveness understood as the extent to which group members are attracted to one another and motivated to remain within the group has been extensively studied as a determinant of both organizational performance and member well-being. Empirical evidence across organizational contexts shows that cohesiveness is more strongly associated with members' social effectiveness, satisfaction, and psychological comfort than with task performance alone, and that cohesion operating at both group and subgroup levels shapes how members experience collective belonging (Sidorenkov & Borokhovski, 2023). Similarly, cohesiveness has been found to significantly and positively influence job satisfaction and, through it, overall organizational performance, suggesting that the affective and relational dimensions of group life are not peripheral but central to sustained collective functioning (Banwo, Du, & Onokala, 2015). These dynamics of cohesion are conceptually inseparable from social capital, defined through the interlocking dimensions of trust, reciprocal networks, and obligations that inhere in the structure of relations among group members and that constitute a resource available to individuals by virtue of that structure (Coleman, 1988). Measurement research on social capital similarly emphasizes trust, reciprocity, and a shared sense of belonging as core cognitive dimensions that must be captured to understand how cohesion operates within communities, particularly in developing-country contexts where such capital substitutes for weaker formal institutions (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002). At the level of small organizations, this same social capital manifested through trust-based relationships and cooperative networks has been shown to meaningfully enhance business performance where formal competitive resources are limited, reinforcing the broader claim that cohesion and social capital jointly determine an organization's capacity to sustain itself over time (Cooke & Wills, 1999).

Within the specific context of Minahasan culture, empirical studies confirm that Mapalus continues to shape both individual psychological well-being and collective identity: recent research has found a significant relationship between engagement with Mapalus culture and the psychological welfare of Generation-Z members in West Langowan, suggesting that the culture's cohesive function persists even among younger cohorts often assumed to be disconnected from traditional practice (Memah, Lumapow, & Kaunang, 2025). Mapalus has likewise been documented as a vehicle for building tolerant civic attitudes in Tomohon City, where its emphasis on collaborative labor and shared responsibility for community outcomes has been shown to translate into broader social tolerance beyond the immediate work of house-building or farming (Pangalila, Mantiri, & Umar, 2019). At a deeper level, Minahasan cultural and theological identity has been shown to be closely intertwined with

communal practices such as Mapalus, which function as an embodied expression of contextual faith and mutual obligation within everyday social life (Nendissa, Farneyanan, Sampepadang, Rares, & Senduk, 2025).

Women's empowerment within collectivist and culturally embedded settings has received growing scholarly attention, particularly regarding how women leverage relational and cultural resources that differ from those typically emphasized in individualistic entrepreneurship literature. Contrary to assumptions that weak, bridging ties are most empowering, research on women entrepreneurs in collectivist societies shows that women often rely more heavily on strong, close-knit ties, finding them more conducive to venture success and to gaining empowerment through their economic activity than weaker, more distant connections (Bastian, Wood, & Ng, 2023). Socio-cultural environments have similarly been shown to shape how Indonesian women entrepreneurs navigate opportunity and constraint, with community norms operating as both an enabling and limiting structure for women's economic agency (Anggadwita, Luturlean, Ramadani, & Ratten, 2017). Comparable dynamics have been documented in rural Indonesian communities more broadly, where women's empowerment initiatives combined with the mobilization of social capital particularly trust and reciprocity within women's groups have been found to strengthen family economic resilience and enable collective coping strategies during periods of economic shock (Ishaq, 2025).

The question of whether women's active participation in traditionally communal, labor-intensive organizations reflects genuine empowerment or merely an extension of pre-existing domestic and agricultural burdens remains contested in the literature on gender and rural livelihoods. Research from West Java shows that women's participation in household and agricultural decision-making is powerfully shaped by prevailing social norms, with men's and women's perceptions of women's decision-making capacity diverging even as both groups agree on which activities women are seen to participate in most and least (Qanti, Peralta, & Zeng, 2022). Broader discussions of gender and matrilineal versus patriarchal kinship arrangements in Indonesia further complicate any simple narrative of empowerment, showing that even within kinship systems assumed to privilege women, obligations and rights remain unevenly distributed and continually renegotiated (Meiyenti & Afrida, 2018). Local wisdom traditions across Indonesia, including value systems that govern interpersonal conduct and conflict resolution, have similarly been shown to encode gender-relevant norms of tolerance and reciprocity that shape how community members men and women alike are expected to participate in collective life (Arsal, Setyowati, & Hardati, 2023; Moeis, Febriani, Sandra, & Pabbajah, 2022).

Sustaining a culture such as Mapalus Rumah across generations depends not only on present-day cohesion but on the intergenerational transmission of the values that underpin it. Transmission-belt models of cultural continuity emphasize that values are not automatically inherited but are selectively passed on through favorable socioeconomic and relational conditions, including the personal characteristics of those transmitting and receiving cultural content (Schönpflug, 2001). This transmission perspective is directly relevant to Mapalus Rumah, where members explicitly frame their participation as a means of modeling values for their children, suggesting that the culture's sustainability is understood by its own participants as an intergenerational project rather than a purely present-oriented economic arrangement.

Despite this substantial body of literature on cohesion, social capital, gotong royong, and women's empowerment, few studies have examined how these dynamics converge specifically within Mapalus Rumah as a living, house-building cooperative institution, and fewer still have centered women's own interpretive accounts of why they participate and what cohesiveness means to them within this specific cultural setting. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how cohesiveness is constructed and sustained through women's active participation in Mapalus Rumah in Southeast Minahasa, and by examining the strategic role women occupy in ensuring the culture's continuity amid ongoing social transformation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Research Approach*

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore the meaning that female members of Mapalus Rumah attach to their participation and to the cohesiveness of the organization. The qualitative case study design was selected because the research sought an in-depth, contextualized understanding of a specific cultural institution rather than a generalizable statistical relationship, consistent with the interpretive orientation required to capture locally embedded meaning-making around cohesion and empowerment.

### *Research Location and Participants*

The research was conducted among Mapalus Rumah groups in Southeast Minahasa Regency, specifically in the villages of Tombatu, Betelen, and Silian, the historical origin points of the house-building Mapalus tradition. Participants comprised five female respondents, all active members of Mapalus Rumah, selected because of their direct, ongoing involvement in the organization and their capacity to speak to the lived meaning of cohesiveness and participation from a woman's perspective within this cultural setting.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in the local Manado Malay dialect, centered on a guiding question addressed to each respondent: why they enjoy participating in Mapalus Rumah. This open-ended format allowed respondents to articulate, in their own words and cultural idiom, the motivations, values, and meanings underlying their continued participation, rather than constraining responses to predetermined categories.

### *Data Analysis*

Interview transcripts were translated from the local dialect into standard Indonesian and subsequently into English, and were analyzed thematically to identify recurring meanings related to empowerment and cohesiveness. Each respondent's statement was interpreted for its underlying orientation toward cooperation, solidarity, necessity, structure, and forward-looking intent, and these interpretations were then synthesized into a set of thematic categories describing how cohesiveness and women's empowerment manifest within Mapalus Rumah. This interpretive procedure enabled the identification of shared patterns of meaning across otherwise idiosyncratic individual narratives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Women's Empowerment and the Cohesiveness of Mapalus Rumah Culture*

Women play an indispensable role in the continuity of Mapalus Rumah culture in the research area. Evidence consistently shows that women's engagement across all forms of Mapalus practice exerts a substantial influence on the culture's persistence: where that engagement weakens, the practice risks fading altogether. Interviews with active female members reveal that their pre-existing personal agency becomes further strengthened once they enter this cultural organizational environment, and that their commitment to Mapalus Rumah extends beyond individual interest to encompass family welfare and the broader value the culture generates for the community.

One respondent (SK) explained her participation as being driven partly by economic hardship and partly by a forward-looking orientation for her children: she described continuing to join Mapalus so as not to be left behind economically, and so that her children might learn from their parents' example, hoping that the process of building a house together would always point toward a better future for the community and for the next generation. Another respondent (SK, in a separate account) emphasized the cooperative and non-discriminatory character of the group, noting that participation means real cooperation no favoritism, genuine tolerance, and mutual assistance and contrasting this with

other organizations that deal only with money, whereas Mapalus Rumah involves the pooling of materials, funds, and labor alike.

A further respondent (OT) described the appeal of Mapalus Rumah as resting on its combination of enjoyment and order: participation is attractive and something one wants to continue precisely because a written constitution requires discipline, while participation itself is framed as a visible demonstration to one's children that their parents are working hard even as the respondent noted that group size must be deliberately capped, since overly large membership eventually breeds complacency among those waiting their turn. Another respondent (RM) stated plainly that a house such as hers would never have been completed without Mapalus, since the practice has become a basic necessity for completing home construction. A fifth respondent (AK) described a clear personal transformation: she had once assumed that building a house independently was simply not possible for her, but joining the rotating construction-assistance group (arisan bangunan/Mapalus) made homeownership achievable, with some support even arriving in fully organized group form. A final respondent (ED) reflected that without Mapalus, she might still be without a home of her own to this day, but that through sustained effort and the existence of Mapalus, homeownership despite insufficient personal funds became possible. Table 1 summarizes the thematic patterns identified across these five accounts.

Table 1. Thematic interpretation of women's empowerment and cohesiveness within Mapalus Rumah culture.

| No. | Theme                                | Interpretation                                                                                                            |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Building for the future              | Participation is framed as forward-looking, ensuring continuity of family life and setting an example for children.       |
| 2   | Cooperation, tolerance, mutual aid   | Members contribute materials, funds, and labor jointly, distinguishing Mapalus Rumah from purely financial associations.  |
| 3   | Structured, rule-bound participation | A written constitution (anggaran dasar) and turn-based order sustain long-term member engagement and prevent free-riding. |
| 4   | Existential necessity                | Members describe Mapalus Rumah as indispensable — house construction would not be completed without it.                   |
| 5   | Enabling homeownership               | Joining the group is described as the pathway that made homeownership possible despite limited individual capital.        |

Taken together, these expressions of meaning demonstrate the strength of cohesiveness within Mapalus Rumah culture and confirm that women's empowerment is intensified through active participation in it. The recurring emphasis on cooperation, tolerance, mutual aid, structured commitment, and the framing of house-building as a family and community-oriented project illustrates that Mapalus Rumah functions as a culture capable of enhancing family welfare, with women's participation constituting a central pillar of the culture's continued preservation.

### ***Women's Empowerment in Southeast Minahasa: Women and the Cohesiveness of Mapalus Rumah Culture***

Mapalus culture continues to be actively maintained in Minahasan social life even as its oldest variant, Mapalus tani (agricultural Mapalus), has nearly disappeared, while Mapalus Rumah has grown correspondingly stronger. The meaning of Mapalus has not only persisted but has expanded into the domain of local governance, where the culture's emphasis on communal construction, collective labor, and shared maintenance aligns closely with principles of civic governance; this cultural inheritance is likewise reflected in initiatives such as Mapalus Kamtibmas, which extend the logic of mutual assistance into the maintenance of community security and order. At its core, however, Mapalus culture as a whole rests on the joint involvement of men and women in pursuit of shared progress, without discrimination in any form particularly against women since women's position is understood as vital not merely for continuing family lineage but for organizing life itself according to their capacities.

Cohesiveness can be understood as the extent to which group members are mutually attracted to one another and motivated to remain within the group. Within Mapalus Rumah, this dynamic is clearly manifested through women's roles: women's empowerment strengthens the cultural resilience of Mapalus Rumah, sustaining its continuity to the present day. The social and emotional bonds between women and Mapalus culture are reinforced by shared goals pursued collectively, generating a strong sense of solidarity among participants. This process cannot be separated from the social contact that occurs between women and men across the group's various activities, generating the social contact that constitutes the first phase of interaction within a community, understood as an awareness of, and orientation toward, the presence of others contact that may be primary, involving direct face-to-face engagement, or secondary, mediated through other channels.

Within Mapalus Rumah, women play a substantial and active role in every communicative exchange among members. Women are able to contribute ideas, proposals, and messages without constraint imposed on the basis of gender, and are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts and preferences within the cultural organization. When communication is delivered and received with mutual understanding between sender and recipient, social interaction occurs both between individuals and between groups, unfolding continuously and consistently in a manner that enables broader social processes to take shape. Women's role in social contact, communication, interaction, and the resulting social processes within Mapalus Rumah culture is considerable, such that the cohesiveness observed between women and Mapalus Rumah reflects their empowerment directly.

The social cohesion evident within Mapalus Rumah aligns closely with established characterizations of social cohesion as comprising individual commitment to shared norms and values, interdependence arising from shared interests, and individual identification with a specific group. Cohesiveness in this sense concerns the unification of individuals into a coherent whole, mutually influencing one another such that change in any single element produces corresponding change throughout the system. Social cohesion in this framework encompasses a shared sense of belonging, social trust, generalized reciprocity and cooperation, and social harmony dimensions that, in combination, provide the normative standard by which communal life is organized and by which the strength of a group's capacity to remain unified can be assessed (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002; Sidorenkov & Borokhovski, 2023).

Mapalus, and Mapalus Rumah in particular, has become an ethical foundation of daily life for Minahasan women and men alike, reflecting a moral orientation toward equality among community members between men and women, in mutual solidarity, and in partnership. This ethical orientation resonates with broader accounts of local wisdom traditions elsewhere in Indonesia, where value systems similarly encode expectations of mutual respect, moral obligation to serve others, and conscious solidarity expressed through voluntary assistance during significant communal events, all without expectation of direct payment or compensation (Arsal, Setyowati, & Hardati, 2023; Moeis, Febriani, Sandra, & Pabbajah, 2022).

The cohesiveness of Mapalus Rumah culture and women's role within it constitute a powerful and enduring force. Women's empowerment within Mapalus Rumah grows stronger through the responsibilities entrusted to them without discrimination or subordination, upholding equality between men and women indeed, women's role at times exceeds that of men in certain respects, even though Minahasan society is not organized around a matrilineal kinship system in the way some other Indonesian cultures are. This pattern is consistent with wider evidence that even within kinship arrangements not formally organized around female lineage, women's practical responsibilities and authority within household and community life can nonetheless be substantial and, at times, primary (Meiyenti & Afrida, 2018).

Mapalus Rumah culture reinforces cohesiveness values through the deeply embedded role of women within it a role that combines guiding and nurturing functions for the continuity of family and group life, alongside caregiving responsibilities in raising children while remaining capable of independent action. This dual capacity demonstrates that women's empowerment enables the preservation of Mapalus Rumah culture while sustaining group cohesiveness in pursuit of shared goals

through cooperative effort, echoing broader findings that women's community-based initiatives, particularly those grounded in trust and reciprocity, strengthen both cultural continuity and household economic resilience (Ishaq, 2025), and that intergenerational transmission of such values depends on favorable relational conditions between those who carry the culture forward and those who inherit it (Schönpflug, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the influence of cohesiveness on the sustainability of the Mapalus Rumah organization in Southeast Minahasa, with particular attention to the strategic role of women in sustaining its shared values. The findings show that cohesiveness within Mapalus Rumah built on cooperation, mutual assistance, trust, solidarity, and gender equality directly strengthens member participation and the organization's long-term continuity. Women emerge from this study not as peripheral participants but as central actors: they function as communication drivers who ensure ideas and concerns move freely within the group, as guardians of group agreements who help hold the organization's structure and discipline together, and as agents of cultural preservation who consciously frame their participation as a legacy for their children. High cohesiveness within Mapalus Rumah has been shown to support the achievement of shared community goals, contribute meaningfully to family welfare, and safeguard the continuity of Mapalus Rumah culture even as broader social transformation continues to reshape community life in Minahasa. Ultimately, the sustainability of Mapalus Rumah appears inseparable from the empowerment of the women who sustain it, suggesting that efforts to preserve this and comparable traditional community organizations elsewhere in Indonesia should explicitly recognize and strengthen women's roles as a condition for, rather than a byproduct of, cultural continuity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support and technical assistance provided by STIE Pioner Manado for this research project. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, which greatly improved the quality of this paper.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, T.I., E.N., and H.K.; Methodology, T.I.; Investigation, H.K.; Data Collection, E.N.; Formal Analysis, E.N., and H.K.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, H.K.; Writing-Review & Editing, T.I., and E.N.; Visualization, T.I., and H.K.; Supervision, T.I.; Project Administration, E.N.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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