



Exploration of Local Wisdom as a Disaster Communication Strategy: Building Resilience of the People

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 27 November 2025

Received in revised form 12

February 2026

Accepted 7 March 2026

Keywords:

Morowali

Local Wisdom

Disaster Mitigation

Cultural Preservation

Abstract

This study aims to identify forms of local wisdom related to disasters and the challenges to their preservation in Morowali Regency. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants from various indigenous communities, community leaders, and traditional practitioners, then analyzed using a qualitative approach using NVivo software. The results indicate that the Morowali local community maintains a number of traditional practices that serve as disaster mitigation and understanding tools, including agricultural rituals to ensure soil fertility, traditional ndengu-ndengu chant used during extraordinary accident or disasters, and legends and stories that mark extreme natural events. However, the preservation of local wisdom faces various challenges, such as lack of interest among the young generation, limited documentation, the influence of modernization, and a lack of support from government institutions. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating local wisdom with modern disaster mitigation programs and cultural preservation efforts to ensure that traditional knowledge remains relevant and beneficial to the community in facing disaster risks.

Introduction

As a region with a geographical location rich in natural resources, Morowali Regency also has a wide variety of natural disasters (Suldani et al., 2023a). Assessment results show a variety of potential disasters ranging from earthquakes, tsunamis, coastal abrasion, to floods that have quite diverse levels of threat (STIRRRD, 2016; Smith et al., 2023; Amalia & Nur, 2023; Zengin, 2023). This causes the community's vulnerability to disaster threats to be quite high. The government and various humanitarian agencies have made disaster mitigation efforts, but have not been able to increase the resilience capacity of local communities, people in Morowali are often less prepared to face disasters due to a low understanding of the disaster communication system implemented by the government (Arifudin et al., 2019; Suldani et al., 2023; Prasetyo et al., 2024; Syahimin, 2023; Maryani & Lestari, 2025). In disaster situations, effective communication and information dissemination are very important (Suldani et al., 2023b). Limited information that is conveyed effectively and the lack of community understanding regarding appropriate procedures and responses in dealing with disasters has an impact on unpreparedness which will create high-risk vulnerabilities (Ahmadi et al., 2022; Fathollahzadeh et al., 2025; Ahmed, 2025).

A communication approach related to potential disasters that is more familiar to the community is necessary, so that the community does not only receive information, but also active in understanding and applying the messages conveyed (Tresnanti et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2023; Fakhriati et al., 2023). The approach that needs to be taken is based on local wisdom (Syuryansyah & Habibi, 2024). Local wisdom that includes traditional knowledge, customs, and nature-based early warning systems can make a significant contribution to improving

disaster preparedness (Mwalwimba et al., 2024). Local wisdom refers to knowledge, practices, and values that develop in a local community and are passed down from generation to generation (Septarini, 2021). This knowledge is often related to ways of living in harmony with nature and is used as an effort or solution to overcome various problems, including natural disaster phenomena (Amatebelle et al., 2023). Local wisdom includes beliefs, traditional ceremonies, and taboos that are believed to protect the community from danger, and have relevant value to strengthen disaster communication strategies that are more inclusive and easily understood by the community (Cuaton & Su, 2020; Lusia et al., 2025; Rafii et al., 2023).

The government as a key actor in handling disaster issues both at the central and regional levels has the responsibility for the preparation, design, execution, and coordination in handling and managing disaster issues in Indonesia (Lestari, 2024; Musdah et al., 2022; Raharjo et al., 2025; Syuaib, 2023). Starting from mitigation efforts, preparedness, emergency response, to post-disaster recovery (Suldani et al., 2023a). In the government's efforts to handle disaster issues, in addition to success in initiating policies, programs, and activities, the government also faces several challenges, such as, a systematic approach, top-down, Equitable access to information and technology for the community (Abdeen et al., 2021; Matharage et al., 2024; Ngulube et al., 2024). A disaster approach based on local wisdom needs to be encouraged, in order to be able to create a disaster-resilient society by upholding local values that are closer to the community (Genova et al., 2020; Syuryansyah & Habibi, 2024; Lusia et al., 2025; Muhamad et al., 2025).

Methods

This research paper conducted a qualitative research to examine the expression of local wisdom in disaster matters, as well as to clarify the issues about the maintenance of these within the Morowali Regency. The qualitative design was considered suitable since the exploration went beyond the simple identification of observable cultural practices, the investigation was also interested in deciphering the meanings, experiences, and social values of such practices as these practices exist in the quotidian life of the community. By so doing, the research under the methodological orientation obtained how local knowledge is recalled, exercised, retold, and bargained upon by varying social actors concerning disaster awareness and communication. The data was collected in August 2025 in Morowali Regency.

The qualitative data were acquired by means of in-depth interviews, observation, documentation and focus group discussions. These methods were intentionally used together in a bid to realize methodological triangulation. The sampling of informants was purposely done, which implies that the respondents were not just randomly selected but they were selected based on their positions, knowledge and experiences that were directly related to the study topic. The reason behind such a strategy was that the study was meant to explore culturally entrenched knowledge that does not equally exist within the entire community. People with prolonged exposure to traditional ways, community leadership, cultural performance, or disaster-related experience were thus deemed as especially significant in the generation of meaningful and credible data. With the help of these participants, the study could have reached the narratives and interpretations that were closely intertwined with the local context of Morowali Regency, thus creating more complex and multidimensional insights on the research issue. The interview was employed to gather the in-depth description of a person who had the relevant knowledge and experience related to the local wisdom and practices related to disasters. Some of the informants were the representatives of the Regional Disaster Management Agency and the community leaders of the traditional communities, elders, artists and cultural practitioners and the youth of the region. Their inclusion made the study to possess the institutional views, cultural memory, practical knowledge and general generation

perspectives so that the study was not based on a single voice but aimed at grasping the local wisdom as an existing social resource influenced by various participants within the community.

It was observed to supplement the information of the interview since the researcher could be more involved within the social and cultural context in which local wisdom would be placed. The research conducted through observation was able to discover the ways in which some of the values, symbols, and practices persisted in the community life and the ways in which some forms of local wisdom were diminished, transformed, or eliminated. There was also documentation as a valuable source of information. These were interview recordings, disaster event related-materials, allusions to local wisdom types, and other available documents pertaining to the subject. The application of documentation served to place the accounts of the participants in a more general empirical position and enhanced the depth of interpretation of the research.

The discussions within focus groups were also held to facilitate the enrichment of the data by means of a collective reflection and interaction between the participants. In comparison with individual interviews, where the personal experience and interpretation are anticipated in the future, focus group discussions made it possible to observe how the attitudes toward the local wisdom and disaster-related matters were expressed, negotiated, and in some cases, they opposed each other in a common environment. The participants were chosen between community groups, which were deemed to be conversant with the environmental conditions and issues that relate to disasters including communities that have experience in the nature-based activities. Their participation provided the research with a key communal aspect especially in the comprehension of how local wisdom is socially identified and its persistence is perceived in various sections of the community.

Interviews, observations, and focus group discussions provided all the data which were transcribed and later arranged to analyse using NVivo 12 Plus. The analysis was initiated by how the transcribed materials were imported into the software and how they were organized using case classification. At this point, the data were categorized based on the appropriate categories, such as the informant type and other situational differences that helped to read the material in a more organized manner. This would enable the researcher to handle the complexity of the qualitative data and also be sensitive to the variation in the background and perspective of the participants.

After this step, thematic coding was performed to establish the recurring patterns, relationships, and meanings of the dataset. The coding exercise helped the researcher to follow the local wisdom forms in disaster matters, to visualize issues surrounding the maintenance of the forms, and to analyze the possibilities of the research findings to lead to shaping a more culturally founded disaster communication plan. Instead of perceiving the data as a single statement, the analysis aimed at getting a comprehension of the underlying interrelations between cultural practice, social memory, intergenerational transmission, and community resilience. NVivo, in this sense, played not merely a technical role of organizing data but rather served as an aid to a more rigorous and transparent process of interpretation.

To facilitate the credibility of the results, this research incorporated the use of triangulation whereby a comparison and synthesis of information gathered using various data sources and methods were done. Interpretive validity was determined through the analysis of data based on the interviews in parallel with observations and focus group discussions as well as documentary evidence. Another process in the triangulation entailed the comparison of the views of different groups of participants, such as institutional actors, elders in a community, and cultural practitioners, and youth. It is a technique of methodological nature that was not only necessary

in supporting the validity of given findings but also in developing a holistic interpretation of the position of local wisdom in the context of the modern social realities of the Morowali regency. In this regard, using the approach of validation strategy, the study would generate credible, contextually anchored, and analytically sound findings.

Results and Discussion

The diverse potential for disasters in Morowal district has different levels of threat with the variety of existing disasters, data related to risks and types of existing disasters are submitted by government agencies in this case the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) in the Indonesian Disaster Risk Index (IRBI) book in 2024 which shows that Morowali district with a score of 275.20 is included in the high risk class for natural disaster threats with a variety of natural disasters (*IRBI-2024*, n.d.). The approach taken by the government has not shown good result in creating a society that is resilient to the threat of disaster (Suldani et al., 2023a; Bonfanti et al., 2023; Rezvani et al., 2023). This requires special attention and requires a communication approach related to disaster potential that is more familiar to the community, so that the community not only receives information, but is also active in understanding and implementing the messages conveyed (Tresnanti et al., 2024; Muhammadiyah et al., 2023; Shklovski et al., 2008).

This section will describe the findings made in data collection through observation, interviews, FGDs, and literature studies that have been carried out to find out the forms of local wisdom possessed by the Morowali community related to disaster issues, challenges in preserving local wisdom, and how to build a disaster communication strategy based on local wisdom in Morowali district.

Form of local wisdom in Morowali

Related to the form of local wisdom of the Morowali Regency community, several folk tales were found that contain messages to the community related to natural disasters, the story is set in Bahomoahi village, East Bungku sub-district, the disaster referred to in this story is an abrasion disaster that occurred and resulted in the sinking of a village due to the behavior of disrespecting local religious leaders by the community, besides in the form of folk tales, researchers found other forms of local wisdom through myths in the form of a kind of prohibition for the community, in the form of rituals carried out when their village or area is affected by extraordinary events or rituals when starting to plant rice or fruit, local arts in the form of songs or what is called *tindi* which contains certain stories that indicate something (events or messages), and *ndengu-ndengu* which is a series of musical instruments played as a marker of extraordinary events, and cultural products in the form of architecture, namely *raha sampelaa* or a towers which function as a medium of communication for the community, which in ancient times stood on 4 (four) sides of the Bungku Kingdom area which functioned like a surveillance post that would provide information if there was an incident either on land or at sea. The forms of local wisdom found in the analysis of the qualitative data using Nvivo software show several forms of local community wisdom related to disaster issues, as in the image below:

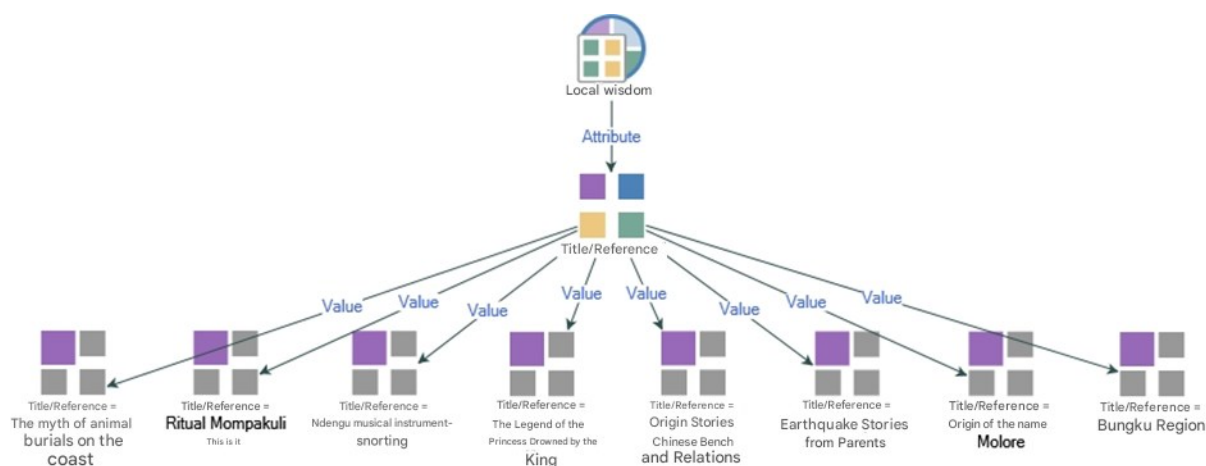


Figure 1. Forms of local wisdom of the Morowali community

Source: research data processing with Nvivo, 2025

Based on observations conducted in research on the local wisdom of the Morowali community, many forms of local wisdom have been eroded or are no longer practiced. These forms of local wisdom are only preserved as stories or fairy tales. Currently, many local wisdoms in Morowali Regency have not been passed down to the younger generation, such as the traditional rituals of *mompakuli iniya*, or the ritual to ward off disasters, which demonstrates local unity in facing disasters or events together, the rituals performed when starting to plant rice, and the tradition of *tindi*, a lullaby containing messages and stories of the Morowali community.

These are just a few of the challenges encountered in the inheritance of local wisdom in Morowali Regency. Form of local wisdom as a finding in this research need to be Integrated into disaster communication strategies that can enhance community resilience by fostering cultural value to empower the local community. This, ultimately leading to more effective disaster preparedness and response initiatives. This approach can facilitate the sharing of crucial information and resources, thereby strengthening the community's ability to withstand and recover from disasters.

Challenge in local wisdom preservation

Besides the diverse forms of local wisdom, another crucial aspect in creating and strengthening community disaster resilience is the challenge of preserving the local wisdom that already exists but is gradually becoming less popular in practice. This condition suggests that local wisdom is not only confronted by social change, but also by the declining transmission of traditional values and practices across generations. As a result, the preservation of local wisdom becomes an important concern, especially in communities where cultural knowledge has long functioned as a guide for living and responding to environmental threats.

This study therefore attempts to map and inventory the challenges faced in preserving local wisdom in Morowali Regency. The data were gathered through in depth interviews with community leaders, youth, and cultural and arts practitioners in Morowali Regency, so that the study could capture different perspectives regarding the sustainability of local values and traditions. The findings were then processed using NVivo 12 software and are presented in the graphic below.

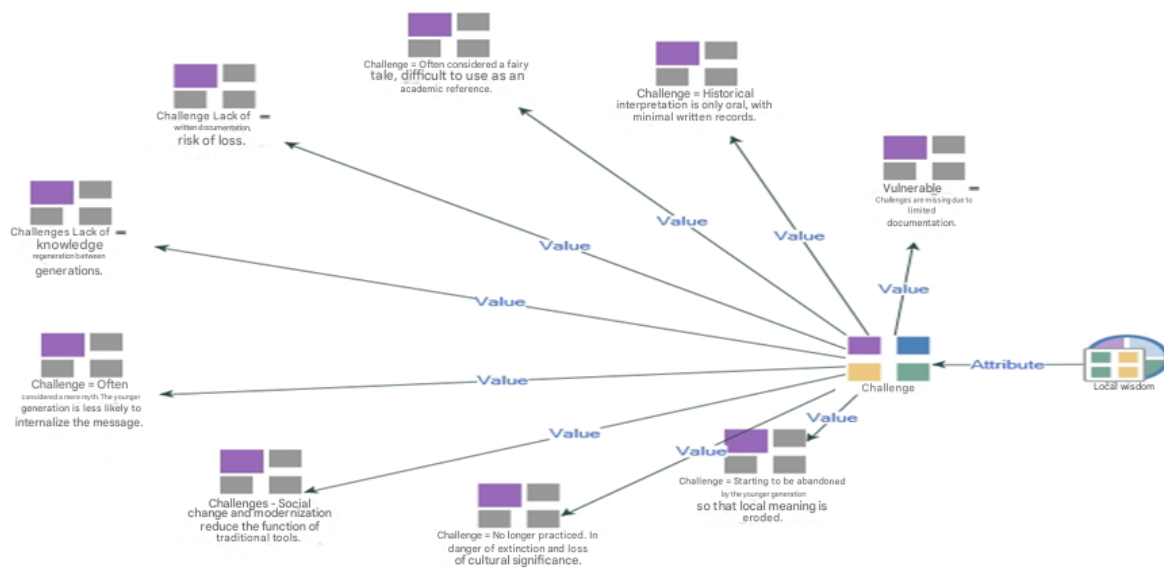


Figure 2. Challenge in local wisdom preservation

Source: research data processing with Nvivo, 2025

The data in the image above shows that there are several challenges found in the interviews and observations conducted, local wisdom is starting to experience subside because it is no longer practiced or the form of preservation is merely a cultural performance that does not touch on the true value contained in the form of local wisdom, there are 9 (nine) challenges that were discovered in this study, 4 (four) of these challenges are in the form of a lack of references or local historical records which are the main challenge in the inventory of local wisdom of the community, other challenges are, the failure of regeneration of local wisdom in young people, the assumption that traditional knowledge is obsolete, and the lack of local wisdom practices due to modernization resulting from the mobilization of people who come to work in Morowali district so that local people are more focused on business activities and focus on economic turnover, such as building boarding houses, opening new businesses, or becoming agents and suppliers for mining company logistics.

Based on the observation, some of the local knowledge form such as *ndengu-ndengu* and *raha sampelaa* not experiencing extinction, but changing in meaning and presentation, these two local wisdoms are currently used as markers for sahur and breaking the fast times, which are only established during Ramadan or fasting month, this is a form of effort to preserve local wisdom, by integrating culture with religion, so the local knowledge can survive despite losing its original meaning, although that there is still a huge challenge in preserve another form of a local knowledge.

The results of the presented research affirm that local wisdom in Morowali is not just a cultural heritage, but a socially integrated system of knowledge by which the communities have traditionally learned about environmental hazards, retained the memory of the past disasters, and coordinated the collective action. Through the above forms, such as folk narratives, myths, agricultural rituals, *tindi*, *ndengu ndengu* and *raha sampelaa*, it is seen that historically the knowledge which is related to disasters has been conveyed in terms of oral, symbolic practices, and space arrangement, and not necessarily via institutional machinery. This aligns with more recent research that has emerged suggesting that local wisdom is significant in disaster mitigation due to its ability to offer culturally significant means by which a community can comprehend and address risk (Cuaton & Su, 2020; Amatebelle et al., 2023; Syuryansyah and

Habibi, 2024). Morowali also tends to strongly connect resilience to cultural memory and ways of understanding danger in a socially shared manner.

These findings are even more important when it is considered that local wisdom is not just a system of beliefs, but also a means of communication. Oral stories and myths not just maintain cultural identity, but also put disaster within the moral and social intelligibility of event, so that ecological menace can be comprehended within the values and ethics that communities already know. The latter is in line with research that oral traditions are the disaster memory storage and the method of local risk communication (Pisa, 2024). Moreover, the functions of *ndengu ndengu* and *raha sampelaa* demonstrate that the local wisdom of Morowali also has some practical roles of warning, observation and coordination between people. It supports the perspective that indigenous knowledge cannot be merely viewed as a symbolic heritage, but as a resource of resilience involved into operational work (Ali et al., 2021).

At the same time, the paper suggests that the fact that cultural forms survive, does not necessarily mean that the meaning they had initially does so as well. The change in the application of *ndengu ndengu* and *raha sampelaa* to those associated with Ramadan shows that local practices might persist by being reformulated, as the former disaster-related meaning is replaced. As a result, it is possible to preserve at the level of form without necessarily maintaining the knowledge within the form. This trend helps to prove the thesis according to which local wisdom can be easily adjusted to new circumstances, but the adjustment of local wisdom can undermine its practical importance in disaster preparedness in case its original meaning is no longer being socially upheld. Continuity in Morowali should not be evaluated according to the presence of a tradition as in the case of other places, but according to its active ecological and social applicability.

Another issue that can be developed based on the results is the fact of the decline in intergenerational transmission. The practices like *mompakuli iniya*, planting rituals and *tindi* are increasingly becoming delicate due to the fact that young generations are less engaged in the social context in which these modes of knowledge were previously gathered and practiced. It shows that the loss of local wisdom is not merely the neglect of the culture, but the undermining of daily procedures in which knowledge is represented and replicated. Along those lines, similar research has demonstrated that local wisdom is only effective to the extent of being maintained as a symbol of tradition and not being preserved as such but still being exercised, practiced, and conveyed through the life of a family and. Morowali case thus highlights the fact that preservation without internalization may pose the risk of keeping culture visible and thereby, inactive socially.

The absence of documentation complicates this task. The scarcity of written sources as well as local historical materials makes the continuity of the local wisdom very reliant on the elders and cultural practitioners. When these carriers of the memory go, the knowledge carried by them might also be lost. In recent study, it has been stressed that the process of documentary local and indigenous knowledge must be preserved not only to maintain its continuity, but also to connect it to the existing disaster communication and policy models (Fakhriati et al., 2023; Mwalwimba et al., 2024). In this connection, Morowali evidence indicates that documentation as well is a recognition issue since the knowledge that does not get captured is usually pushed to the periphery of formal government structures.

The results also show that the degradation of local wisdom has a strong relationship with structural change in Morowali. Economic change, free movement of labor and livelihood has made the community focus on the direct economic issues eliminating the social space to maintain cultural practices. This shows that the loss of local wisdom cannot be said to be merely

a cultural problem, but a reestablishment of a greater reconfiguring of local concerns. This meaning is consistent with the existing literature claiming that community participation in resilience is often influenced by socioeconomic demands and shifting development patterns (Parsons et al., 2025). The local wisdom in Morowali is thus threatened not only due to the fact that traditions are being forgotten, but it is also the conditions that nurtured the transmission of the locals that are being altered.

These results have important implications on disaster communication and governance. Disaster messages tend to be formal and technical and administrative and communities perceive risk in the form of stories, rituals, symbols, and cultural practices passed down. This discrepancy could be one of the reasons the governmental based disaster communication has not been the most effective. Research revealed that preparedness communication is more significant when it is delivered via forms acceptable to the local population and culturally understandable. The case of Morowali proves that local wisdom cannot be viewed as a marginal cultural aspect, but as a strategic channel that disaster messages can acquire a higher level of legitimacy and actionability.

Conclusion

The current study illustrates that the local wisdom in Morowali is not only a cultural heritage that is still in existence as a symbolic tradition but also a social embedded system of knowledge in which communities have always counted on in order to evaluate environmental threats, preserve the memory of past disasters and devise collective measures to prevent such risks. The empirical evidence shows that manifestations of local wisdom such as folk stories, myth, rituals, songs, and traditional forms of communicative practices contain semiotic messages that extend beyond cultural identification and serve to establish forms of locally intelligible communication of hazards and to sustain communal vigilance. As a result, the conceptualisation of local wisdom as a core communicative resource in the context of disaster resiliency aims to enable the sharing of disaster-related information based on modalities that can be seen as more related and relevant to the existence, communal recollections, and sociocultural cognitions of the community.

Simultaneously, the research indicates that the role of local wisdom in disaster communication and resiliency is increasingly lost due to such factors as poor intergenerational transfer, a lack of documentation, the dominant expectations about the obsolescence of traditional knowledge, and a general socio-economic change that constrains the range within which the cultural practice can take place. Yet, despite the fact that some traditions are still present, they have modified their semantic and functional aspects, which suggests that the focal point of interest goes beyond the presence of local wisdom to its further social effectiveness and usefulness in assisting the community to react to environmental ambiguities. To this end, disaster resilience in Morowali would require not just an institutional communication approach to issues; it requires a collective action of recognizing, recording, regenerating, and embracing local wisdom into modern disaster communication policies to make sure that preparedness would be built, using knowledge forms that are not only intelligible and reliable but also sustainable to the local people.

Acknowledgment

Describe anyone who directly helps your research such as funders (an institution called non-personal), may be supplemented by the research contract number. Thank you to the intended parties (if any and significant related to the study).

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