

# Chapter 1

## An Isolated and Behind-the-Scenes Work Called Conservation: Developing Collaboration and Community Engagement of Conservation Practice in Indonesia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Conservation is a type of work which requires specific skills, a lengthy experience, particular infrastructures, and arguably extensive time and money. In fact, preserving collections by managing all the aspects required is an important and mandatory task. However, as a developing country in tropical climate, Indonesia is still in a phase where financial aid, skillful experts, and moral support for preserving the cultural heritage are much less than needed. As a result of complex organizational dynamics, building a formal partnership for frequent collaborative conservation work between archives, libraries, and museums nevertheless is far from simple. On the other hand, engaging the community to participate in the practice is particularly challenging due to the nature of conservation work as an isolated activity within an exclusive ecosystem. This chapter aims to discuss whether developing community engagement and collaboration between LAM can serve as an alternative support to constructively improve current conditions and cope with the aforementioned issues.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Across the archipelago, people in Indonesia are living on a plate that could collapse at any time. Geographically, Indonesia is located between the Eurasian, Pacific, and Indo-Australian plates, with active and inactive volcanoes (Suliyati, 2017). Based on United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), Indonesia is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries (BBC News Indonesia, 2011). The high tectonic activity leads to form a series of volcanoes along the islands of Sumatra, Java, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua (National Disaster Management Agency of Indonesia, 2016). A series of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions, are looming over various areas throughout the years. In addition to being life-threatening and causing infrastructure damage, the risk for large disasters also impacts the collections, such as books, artifacts, and archives—essentially the valuable collections and archives of individuals and institutions, especially the cultural heritage. All these collections are in danger of being lost and damaged, mainly because the information managers are unprepared for natural disasters. In addition to the natural disasters, human-induced disasters such as arson, vandalism, armed conflicts, or epidemics, looting, theft, illegal export and import, illicit trafficking of cultural property, neglect, destruction of or alteration to heritage, pollution, and disappearance are also considered threats for cultural heritage collections (UNESCO, n.d.; WHC & UNESCO, 2010). According to Srirahayu & Triwastuti (2020), although this type of disaster is likely to occur once every three years or more, it can happen in any unprecedented time, with severe impacts to individual archives, as well as for information institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs). Therefore, it is essential to determine the priority assets, and to begin planning practical measures to reduce and eliminate those risks (Pedersoli et al., 2016, p.100).

Financial support and management are fundamental to ensure a successful preservation management. However, as a third world country, Indonesia is still in a phase where financial and moral support for preserving the cultural heritage, especially in the regional level, are much less than needed. According to National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI), this is mainly due to the lack of awareness among the leaders of regional institutions and local governments in recognizing the significance of archives (ANRI, 2017). The same problem occurs in other memory institutions like libraries and museums. Berliana (2017) reported that one of the biggest challenges in preserving the manuscripts in the Regional Museum of North Sumatra Province is the low awareness of the human resources. The same issue also occurs in the library of Sang Nila Utama Museum in Palembang, South Sumatera Province. Most of their collections are severely damaged or lost due to lack of awareness in archives management (Wakhid, 2016). Jaszi (2009, p.30) pointed out that preserving the cultural heritage, especially in Indonesia, requires material and financial support that may not be available locally. With the high cost of equipment and materials, the funding becomes a central issue. Most of the government libraries, archives, and museums in Indonesia still find it a challenge to maintain the financial support to preserve their collections comprehensively (Permana & Rohmiyati, 2019). The budget limitations lead to limited facilities and infrastructure (Elmawati & Ismiyati, 2017; Permana & Rohmiyati, 2019). Even in developing countries, Lyall (1997, cited in Teygeler et al., 2001) mentioned that budgets for libraries and archives are shrinking, and preservation activities frequently are drastically cut because the governments consider libraries as a very low priority.

Unfortunately, the lack of funding is not the only challenge for LAMs in Indonesia. This situation is even more difficult because there was no comprehensive written guidance or standard in procuring conservation tools and materials with the exception of the national institutions' advice or instructions.

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