Resolving conflict communication of multinational mining companies: PT Vale Indonesia and the local community

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Abstract

The conflict between PT Vale Indonesia and the Kuari community in East Luwu Regency demonstrates the ongoing clash between the company's legal rights to mining land and the community's dependence on the same land for housing and livelihoods. This research investigates the communication dynamics underlying the conflict through a qualitative case study method, using in-depth interview techniques with 12 informants from the company, local government and community. The results showed that formal meetings held through formal and informal dialog facilitated dialog on land access and use. The shift of some community attitudes from protest to limited engagement demonstrates the effectiveness of the dialog. Although, the core contradiction between state-sanctioned legality and community-based recognition remains. Applying Relational Dialectics Theory, this research shows how unequal discourses shape community and company interactions. The research recommends strengthening inclusive dialogue and recognition of community-based land management to promote more stable and equitable company-community relations.

Introduction

The existence of mining activities will often be faced with a difficult situation because there will be environmental and social losses incurred (Fauzi & Nulhaqim, 2024). There are many mining companies spread across Indonesia, one of is PT Vale Indonesia, which is one of the multinational mining companies that has projects in Indonesia located in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. As reported on the website www.vale.com, PT Vale Indonesia has been operating under a contract of work that was amended on October 17, 2014, and is valid until December 28, 2025, with a concession area of approximately 118,017 hectares covering 3 provinces in Sulawesi, namely, South Sulawesi (70,566 hectares), Central Sulawesi (22,699 hectares), and Southeast Sulawesi (24,752 hectares). An overview of PT Vale's concession area is as follows.
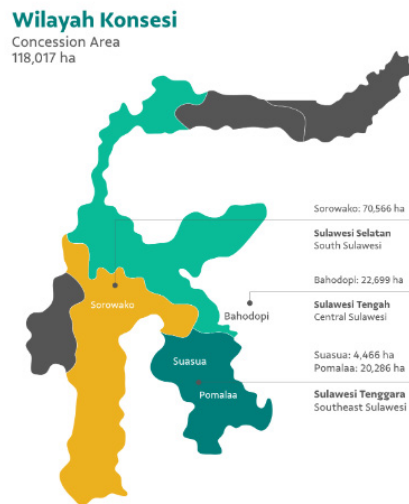
Figure 1. PT Vale Concession Area
Source: www.ptvale.com

Companies involved in extractive projects as mining company such as PT Vale Indonesia, will often face challenges in how companies can interact with local communities related to conflict, environmental impacts, and other social aspects. As we know that mining operations often trigger contradictions with surrounding communities, particularly due to contestation over land rights, environmental degradation, and perceived corporate neglect. However, the core problem addressed in this study lies in the ineffective communication between mining companies and affected communities, which perpetuates distrust and hinders conflict resolution.

Several studies have explored the nature of mining conflicts in other regions. In Abuya (2016), showed that corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts often fail to address the root causes of land disputes in titanium mining, while Libassi (2024), examined how gold mining in Pongkor, Indonesia, shapes the competing identities of large corporations and small-scale miners. Vintr (2021) emphasized stakeholder collaboration but overlooked the interpersonal dimensions of conflict. Rohman et al (2024), highlighted the urgent need for legal and institutional reform in how Indonesia addresses illegal mining, particularly by integrating environmental protection into the criminal justice system.

In contrast to several studies before, this research adopts a communication theory perspective, Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) to examine how conflict between companies and communities unfolds and is managed through communication. RDT conceptualizes relationships as dynamic and shaped by contradictions opposing forces or desires that coexist within communication. These contradictions can't resolve once and for all, but are continually negotiated. In the context of mining conflict, thus this study focuses on external dialectics, particularly tensions such as; 1) Inclusion - Seclusion (community involvement vs exclusion from decision making), 2) Conventionally – Uniqueness (corporate procedure vs local culture expectations), and 3) Revelation – Concealment (transparency vs information control).

The tensions that mention before then communicatively managed through dialogic processes, such as formal dialogue and interpersonal engagement. By highlighting how individuals and institutions respond to these contradictions whether through collaboration, avoidance, or resistance, then RDT provides a difference lens to understand the psychological, relational, and symbolic dimensions of mining conflicts that are often

ignored in legal or policy frameworks. Several studies also say that in general, mining-related conflicts revolve around six issues, namely; 1) Land ownership, 2) Unfair compensation practices, 3) Unequal distribution of resources, 4) Environmental degradation, 5) Poverty, and 6) Human rights violations (Abuya, 2016). One of the most problematic aspects of mining conflicts between local communities is how human rights are affected (Holden, 2005). This is because as we known that mining operations often take place on ancestral or customary lands without adequate consultation or compensation, leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and erosion of cultural right.

Holden (2005), highlights that these conflicts not only disrupt community structures but also violate basic human rights such as the right to land, health, and participation in decision making. Conflict is a social situation in which two or more parties perceive that their goals, interests, or values are incompatible, and thus engage in opposition (Deutsch & Coleman, 2006). This incompatibility can occur between individuals, groups, or institutions, and often involves power imbalances, competing narratives, and limited resources. In mining contexts, such conflicts typically arise from unequal access to land, environmental degradation, and the lack of meaningful engagement with affected communities. Winarni et al (2023) also define conflict as an interaction between actors who have different perceptions, emphasizing the role of communication in shaping and resolving these tensions. Therefore, conflicts involving extractive industries like PT Vale Indonesia must be viewed as multi-actor interactions, involving not only companies and communities but also government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

In line with conflict, actually resolution of a conflict is not only rooted in how a company makes compensation but also the impact of social responsibility provided by the company on the community and the surrounding environment. Issifu (2017) study found that CSR initiatives such as infrastructure development, education, and health services helped reduce tensions between mining companies and local populations in Ghana. Vintr (2021) also concluded that mining companies have realized the negative impact of their activities on the surrounding environment.

These impacts from mining activities usually include deforestation, water and air pollution, land degradation, and disruption of local ecosystems. Recognizing these consequences, mining companies, especially PT Vale Indonesia, realize the importance of collaborating with external stakeholders, such as local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and global and national communities (International Council Mining & Metal, APINDO, Indonesia Mining Association). This collaboration is implemented through ESG (*Environmental, Social, and Governance*) and CSR (*Corporate Social Responsibility*) which is the main principle that drives PT Vale Indonesia's commitment to responsible and sustainable operations. With a focus on environmental, social and governance principles, PT Vale Indonesia actively continues to develop sustainable innovation, ensuring that dedication to ESG is consistently implemented, not only seeking to fulfill obligations, but also seeking to optimize benefits for stakeholders and the wider community.

According to data from PT Vale's press release (2023), throughout 2023 the nickel production that has been produced reached 70,728 metric tons ("t") of nickel matte, which is an 18% increase from production in 2022. As we know that mining activities are very vulnerable to negative effects because the activities and operations carried out are closely related to the surrounding community, therefore the standards and criteria for mining activities can be seen from how the feasibility results in managing the surrounding area both in terms of economy, post-mining planning, and also the impact on the surrounding environment (Issifu, 2017).

As with other mining companies, PT Vale has experienced several conflicts with local communities' that go beyond land disputes, particularly involving economic and social issues. Based on pre-research conducted directly by researcher (2024), Economically, communities have raised concerns about the lack of fair compensation for the use of land and the limited employment opportunities offered to local residents, despite the presence of large-scale mining operations in their area. Some locals feel excluded from the economic benefits promised by the company. Socially, the conflict is marked by a lack of trust toward PT Vale, partly due to perceived insufficient consultation in decision-making processes and the long-term impact of mining activities on their way of life. These tensions have led to several public protests, delayed company operations in certain areas, and strained relations between PT Vale and community stakeholders, ultimately affecting the company's social license to operate and its overall sustainability.

In general, managing corporate community conflicts, communication plays a pivotal role in either escalating or de-escalating tensions. As Servaes (2020) emphasizes, "conflict doesn't always have to end in prolonged confrontation or violence; it can serve as a trigger for positive change if managed appropriately through open and constructive communication." This study adopts this perspective by emphasizing the role of dialogic communication in resolving mining conflicts through the lens of *Relational Dialectics Theory* (RDT). Then, RDT offers a unique contribution by framing conflict not simply as a breakdown in communication, but as a natural and ongoing tension within relationships tensions that must be managed rather than eliminated. In the context of PT Vale and the Kuari community, these tensions manifest in competing discourses; 1) legal legitimacy with land in protected forests claims, 2) corporate responsibility with community expectations, and 3) information disclosure with perceived secrecy. By using RDT, this study explores how communication practices especially dialogue become a space where contradictions are navigated, meanings are negotiated, and relationships are reshaped over time. Therefore, the form and failure in a communication will have a major effect on causing conflict, because communication will involve the process of exchanging messages from communicators and communicants.

Spitberg and William R Cupach (in Fajar, 2016) explain that communication failure can stem from the psychological state of communicators and recipients, especially when interactions become emotionally aggressive. In the conflict between PT Vale and the Kuari community, communication breakdowns were not only about misunderstandings over plantation land but also deeper concerns about the community's future livelihood. The conflict began in 2018, when PT Vale planned operations in the *Lembo South 01* work area in Towuti District, East Luwu. The project was delayed due to licensing issues from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. Then, after PT Vale Indonesia got permit's, PT Vale's field verification found that residents were actively gardening and farming within the company's concession, which lies in a protected forest zone. Since activities in such areas require a *Izin Pinjam Pakai Kawasan Hutan* (IPPKH), this situation created legal and existential tension, eventually triggering protests from the community.

Communication and interaction play a central role in shaping then how this conflict unfolded. Berger (in Fajar, 2010) highlights that communication is intrinsically linked to social experience and is often where conflict originates. Bakhtin (in Baxter et al., 2021) explains that tensions emerge through relationships due to competing goals and needs. These tensions are influenced by the psychological states of involved parties, often intensifying misunderstanding. As Issifu (2017) argues, conflict emerges when two or more parties perceive their interests as incompatible and act in ways that may harm others. Therefore, resolving conflict demands active, inclusive communication—both formal and

informal. This is also in line with one of Cosimo Magazzino's studies on mining conflict in Skouries emphasizes the importance of approaching disputes with attention to economic and environmental realities and careful communicative engagement with stakeholders (Magazzino, 2024).

This dynamic nature of interaction is best understood through Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), proposed by Baxter and Montgomery, which positions contradiction as a natural element within human relationships. Rather than resolving or eliminating tensions, RDT suggests they are continuous and must be managed communicatively (Griffin, 2006). In a simple term, Baxter and Bakhtin further expanded this through the dialogic theory of relationships, emphasizing that relational tension does not signify breakdown but is part of meaning-making through mutual recognition and openness (Littlejohn et al., 2017). West and Turner explain the four elements as; 1) *Totality*, 2) *Contradiction*, 3) *Motion*, and 4) *Praxis*, which explain how relationships evolve through ongoing interplay of opposing discourses (West & Turner, 2022).

In this study, will focused placed on external dialectics that structure the relationship between PT Vale and the Kuari community. These include 1) Inclusion–Seclusion (involving stakeholders vs preserving company autonomy), 2) Conventionality–Uniqueness (corporate norms vs local realities), and 3) Revelation–Concealment (openness versus withholding information during conflict). These contradictions are evident in the community's distrust toward company decisions, perceived exclusion from consultation, and the tension between legality and lived experience. Based on Littlejohn et al (2017), dialogic communication rooted in responsiveness and co-construction of meaning provides a more sustainable pathway to conflict resolution. Thus, this study employs RDT to explore how communicative tensions between corporations and communities can be addressed through dialogic practices that respect both structure and lived reality. Therefore, this study looks at how conflicts can be managed and minimized from a communication perspective.

Method

This research is using qualitative research methods which provide in-depth perspectives through more subjective interpretations (Ebekozien et al., 2023). In addition, this research aims to see how a phenomenon that exists in a subject can be processed into words and sentences. Qualitative methods in this study are used to create concepts, although there are some experts who argue that the use of this approach in theory can identify the relationship between concepts (Kyngäs, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (in Aspers & Corte, 2019) also explained that qualitative research uses and collects data in the form of case studies.

Departing from this, this research focuses on a particular case so that it is better able to identify social relationships through a case study approach. Cresswell explains that the case study approach is research in which the researcher explores a particular phenomenon using various data collection over a period of time (Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, this is also in line with how Aspers describes the case study approach, which is one of the effective suggestions for showing the relationship between researchers and subjects or informants in a phenomenon (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

This study uses two data sources, namely; Primary data sources obtained from *non-participant* observation and *in-depth* interviews with an accumulation of 12 informants who have been selected using *purposive sampling* techniques with predetermined informant criteria; 1) PT Vale Indonesia's external relations department staff, which manage company communication and stakeholder engagement, 2) Affected community provide insight into

lived experiences and local resistance, 3) Local government agencies which act as facilitator and mediators, 4) Authorities offer perspectives on law enforcement, and 5) *Non-government organizations*, which contribute independent views on socil and environmental issues. In addition, it was also obtained through *non-participant* observation conducted by researchers to provide a clear description of the behavior or activities of respondents, activities, events, objects, time, and feelings of informants when conducting research (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021).

Furthermore, secondary data sources in this study were obtained through documentation, literature review, and PT Vale Indonesia's internal reports related to the conflict *Lembo South 01*. These data were used in the analysis to complement and validate the primary that found before, particularly by confirming public policy company, social program records, and the documented timeline of events. This research was also conducted for two months, from February to March 2024, at PT Vale Indonesia and in East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi.

The data collected was then analyzed using the *pattern matching* analysis technique initiated by Yin (2018). This technique then focuses on how to match patterns with theories and concepts used against the results obtained from interviews with informants that researchers have conducted (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, in the process of processing data, to ensure the data obtained is accurate, researchers use *construct validity* techniques that involve collecting concrete evidence from various data sources that have previously been obtained (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this research can form evidence and conclusions that provide a comprehensive picture of PT Vale Indonesia's conflict resolution efforts from a communication perspective.

Results and Discussion

Based on *Relational Dialectic Theory* by Baxter and Montgomery, this study identifies key external contradictions that shape the dynamics of the conflict between PT Vale and the Kuari community. The framework emphasizes inherent tensions in relationships, particularly those marked by asymmetries in power, meaning, and legitimacy. In this context, three prominent tensions emerge that explain by Baxter and Montgomery such as: 1) *inclusion–seclusion*, 2) *conventionality–uniqueness*, and 3) *revelation–concealment* (Littlejohn et al., 2017).

These tensions aren't dynamic but actively produced and negotiated through communication. Dialogic that occur encounters between PT Vale and the community reveal how each party engages in discursive struggles to assert legitimacy and define reality. For instance, PT Vale's formal stakeholder meetings and information-sharing sessions reflect an attempt to perform inclusion, while the community often interprets these as symbolic gestures lacking substantive participation. Similarly, the company adheres to standardized CSR norms and regulatory expectations, the community challenges this with context-specific claims rooted in lived experience and local wisdom.

These contradictions reflect conflicting discourses: one grounded in institutional logic and legal frameworks, the other in cultural identity and survival. Communication, in this sense, becomes the arena where these competing perspectives interact, clash, and occasionally converge. The ongoing dialogic processes through negotiation, rejection, illustrate how relational meaning is co-constructed under tension which reaffirming the utility of RDT in understanding corporate–community relations as below.

Dialectical tensions between PT Vale and Kuari Community

The relationship between PT Vale and the Kuari community represents a clear case of external dialectical tensions, as conceptualized in *Relational Dialectics Theory* (RDT). As two distinct entities—one institutional and the other community based their conflict extends beyond land usage into deeper struggles over identity, legitimacy, and survival. This study reveals that the opposing sides construct competing narratives: PT Vale communicates from a legal-regulatory framework, while the Kuari community draws on lived experience and cultural memory.

These divergent communicative framings produce relational tensions, yet also reflect a state of interdependence. One of the most prominent dialectical contradictions is inclusion vs. exclusion. Although PT Vale initiates formal engagement through stakeholder meetings and socialization programs, community members often experience symbolic exclusion being informed, but not genuinely involved in decision-making. This misalignment between intention and perception generates distrust and perpetuates relational distance. One of the statements that based on the result of an interview with MH

The claim area, the area of PT Vale's mining activity plan, which we call the boundary area, found community activities in that area. Now the position here is that PT Vale will have activities there, while the community also has activities there. That's what I call a conflict because there is a conflict of interest and there are two parties involved (MH, Staff Department External Relations PT Vale, Interview 12 February 2024)

Area klaim, area rencana kegiatan penambangan PT Vale yang kita sebut dengan area boundary, ditemukan aktivitas masyarakat di area itu. Nah posisinya di sini adalah PT Vale akan beraktivitas di situ, sedangkan masyarakat juga beraktivitas di situ. Itulah yang saya sebut sebagai konflik karena sepanjang itu ada pertentangan kepentingan dan ada dua pihak yang terlibat. (MH, Staff Department External Relations PT Vale, Interview, 12 Februari 2024)

From the perspective above, this reflects the contradiction element in RDT, where both parties maintain opposing desires which one to proceed with formalized mining operations, the other to protect informal but deeply rooted land use traditions. This conflict shows that this is not simply about fact or policies, it emerges from relational meaning constructed through communication, where each side sees the other as a threat to their existence. The result of this contradictions as below
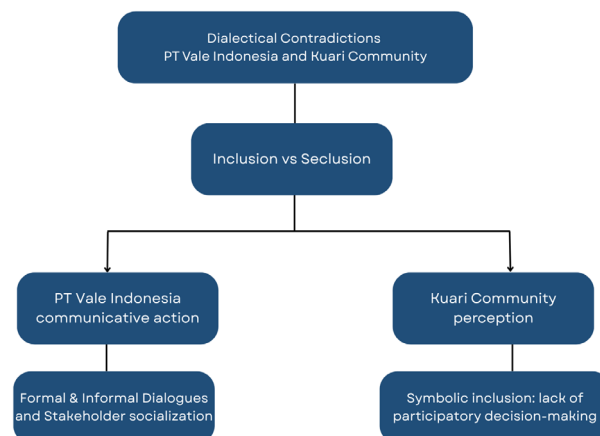

Figure 2. Inclusion vs Seclusion Analysis
Source: Author Analysis (2025)

External Contradictions between PT Vale and Kuari Community

According to framework of *Relational Dialectics Theory* (RDT), external contradictions arise when two distinct entities such as PT Vale and Kuari Community hold opposing interst, values, and also meanings in their relationship. Based on the interviews obtained shows that the efforts to resolve the conflict between PT Vale and the Kuari community are characterized by ongoing external contradictions that have yet to be fully resolved.

One of the most prominent external contradictions in this case arises from the divergent ways in which PT Vale and the Kuari community frame the meaning and legitimacy of land. PT Vale adopts a legal-administrative stance, viewing the area as a protected forest governed by formal state regulations under the authority of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK). In this view, land access and use are governed by national regulations and formal licensing instruments such as *Izin pinjam Pakai Kawasan Hutan* (IPPKH). MH explained about this problem.

> *Actually, it is clear in the constitution, the applicable laws and regulations. So they should no longer argue about the land issue. So if there is a conflict, law enforcement should be present, but what is in conflict here is how the entity of their life in the area can be seen as a fact that there is life there (MH, PT Vale's staff, Inverview, 12 February 2024).*

> *Sebenarnya sudah clear secara konstitusi, aturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku. Jadi harusnya mereka tidak lagi berdebat persoalan lahan itu. Jadi kalau berkonflik itu kan mestinya hadir penegakan hukum, tetapi yang menjadi konflik di sini itu adalah bagaimana entitas kehidupan mereka di wilayah itu bisa dilirik sebagai sebuah fakta bahwa ada kehidupan di sana (MH, Staff PT Vale, Interview, 12 Februari 2024).*

While, the Kuari community understands the land as a a vital source of economic survival and cultural identity. Their bond with the land is not formalized through documentation, but sustained through daily dependence and environmental risk. As SB, a team leader community, explained

> *Some people here indeed in economic hardship, and it's evident that the people of Kuari rely solely on their gardens. The landslide that happened recently had a major impact people's activities were disrupted, and they lost their income (SB, team leader, Interview, 14 February 2024).*

> *Beberapa masyarakat memang berada pada apa namanya, kesulitan ekonomi seperti yang sudah di liat secara nyata kalau ya masyarakat Kuari hanya mengandalkan kebun. Jadi dengan terjadinya longsor kemarin juga berdampak karena beberapa masyarakat terganggu dan pendapatan masyarakat menghilang (SB, Ketua TIM desa Kuari, Interview, 14 Februari 2024)*

Statement before from MH (PT Vale) and SB (Kuari community) illustrate how the conflict is rooted not only in legal interpretations but also in fundamentally different constructions of reality between institutional authority and lived experience. Based on RDT perspective, this represents the contradiction element, where both parties are caught in opposing discourses, one anchored in regulation, the other in existential experience. Furthermore, in addiction there I friction between the community's need for clarity and sustainability in their lives and the company's efforts, which are deemed insufficient to meet expectations. In the context of external dialectics, the contradictions in this conflict shouldn't be seen merely as barriers, but rather as critical entry points for building mutual understanding.

The role and influence of communication in conflict resolution

Based on the result of this research, this point highlights that communication has a crucial role in overcoming the conflict between PT Vale and the people of Kuari community. Conflicts that occur not only cover social issues but also economics, so an effective communication approach can bring positive changes in responding to existing the tensions. In this case, PT Vale attempted to build two-way interpersonal communication through a series of community engagement forums, including formal socialization meetings and environmental briefings held at the village office in Kuari. In these structured sessions, community members especially the team leader trusted by local residents were given the opportunity to voice concerns without fear of censorship. Issues included restrictions on land access, the lack of formal recognition for cultivated areas, and the absence of sustainable livelihood alternatives.

In addition to these formal dialogues, informal dialogues were also conducted in more relaxed settings, such as at the homes community that not yet accept then engaged in open-ended discussions. These informal spaces allowed the community that not yet accept to express emotional concerns more freely, such as fear of eviction and a sense of exclusion from decision-making. Both of communication reflect an effort to bridge institutional and community perspectives, although asymmetries in authority, participation, and narrative control remained evident throughout. However, challenges in communication remains some communities feel that they don't understand the messages conveyed by the company, while other think that PT Vale's communication efforts tend to only benefit the company. This distrust reflects psychological barriers that slow down conflict resolution.

> *In the process of building communication, coordination with the community, we certainly come with good intentions. The same goes for the people who previously had opposing interests with PT Vale. So they are driven by the hope of getting better, so they tell us honestly about their situation. From there, we then find a solution at which point maybe we, in the sense of PT Vale and the community, meet (MH, PT Vale's staff, Interview 12 February 2024).*

> *Dalam proses membangun komunikasi, koordinasi dengan masyarakat kami tentu datang dengan niat baik. Begitu juga dengan masyarakat yang tadinya masih berseberangan kepentingan dengan PT Vale. Jadi mereka di drive oleh harapan untuk kemudian menjadi lebih baik maka mereka mengatakan secara jujur dengan keadaannya. Dari sanalah kemudian kami carikan solusi yang pada titik itu mungkin kami dalam artian PT Vale dan masyarakat ketemu (MH, Staff PT Vale, Wawancara 12 Februari 2024)*

Therefore, communication remains an important bridge in the resolution process. Through dialogues involving various parties, including the government, PT Vale has managed to create several positive results, such as the provision of clean water and other social programs. Communication efforts are not only to convey messages but also to build trust, strengthen relationship and find solutions together. Although there are still obstacles, consistent two-way communication shows that dialogue can be an important step in reducing tensions and increasing understanding between the two parties.

Urgency PT Vale to resolve external contradiction between Kuari Community

Based on interview that has began, this study highlights the pressing need for PT Vale to proactively address the external contradictions that have surfaced in its relationship with the Kuari community. These contradictions, particularly around land legitimacy, community livelihood, and perceived lack of inclusion are not just relational tensions but

which have the potential to escalate into broader social and operational problems if left unmanaged. The urgency lies not only in resolving the current conflict, but in preventing the emergence of deeper systemic issues, such as the community has realized that the land is not private property, but they will still reject the company's operations because they feel the lives are threatened by mining activities.

PT Vale realizes that this conflict is not only related to legal interests, but also involves community life entities that must be respected. Therefore, the company is committed to managing social and environmental impacts through community empowerment programs designed to generate long-term benefits. These efforts include activities such as agricultural training for local farmers, provision of seed capital for micro-enterprises, environmental education in schools, and reforestation initiatives involving community participation. Through these programs, PT Vale aims to mitigate the socioeconomic consequences of land use changes while fostering more sustainable and self-reliant livelihoods among affected residents.

In interviews, PT Vale emphasized that every decision take is not only based on the company's interests but also considers the aspirations of the community and the impact on their lives such as sustainable livelihood alternatives. This reflects the company's urgency to maintain the sustainability of its operations by paying attention to social aspects and building a more harmonious relationship with the surrounding community. One of the statements is becomes PT Vale's urgency in making decisions related to the accountability that will be carried out. DM explained that

The decision that PT Vale make and also the programs that PT Vale does are not just something we decide. However, we also start from and respond to concerns from the community and also internally from PT Vale. So all the responsibilities that will be carried out are truly mature and have not received (DM, PT Vale's staff, interview 16 Februari 2024).

Keputusan yang kami lakukan dan juga program yang PT Vale lakukan itu bukan semata-mata kami memutuskan begitu saja. Akan tetapi kami juga berangkat dari dan menanggapi kekhawatiran dari masyarakat dan juga internal dari PT Vale. Jadi semua tanggung jawab yang akan dilakukan itu benar-benar sudah matang (DM, Staff PT Vale, Wawancara 16 Februari 2024).

Thus, from that statement above indicates that the company is aware of its accountability, yet from a relational communication perspective, perceptions matter as much as action. Even well-intentioned programs can become sources of tension if they aren't perceived as sincere, inclusive, or adequate bt the affected community. This misalignment in meaning and expectations is a key source of communicative tension as described in *Relational Dialectics Theory*. Therefore, PT Vale's urgency is not only operational or regulatory, but it is relational and communicative.

Dialogue-based Conflict Resolution

Based on the interview result obtained, this study reveals that dialogue is one of the main strategies used by PT Vale to manage conflict with the Kuari community. The dialogues took place in both formal and informal forms. Formal dialogue included structured multi-stakeholder meetings involving community representatives, such as traditional leaders (tokoh adat), leader team, local government official, BPD, Security forces, and company staff with the government as mediator. These individuals were recognized locally as spokespersons capable of articulating collective concerns regarding land use, cultural preservation, and livelihood access. Informal dialogue occurs through

interpersonal communication such as personal visits to the homes of people who still reject around 4-5 Family Cards.

Each facilitator played a distinct role in this dialogue process. PT Vale's external relations staff facilitated communication from the company's side. Presenting how corporate plans and policy justifications. Kuari community voiced concerns over land rights, environmental degradation, and threats to livelihood. Local authorities helped moderate discussions and ensured that community demands were heard. One of the statements explained that dialogue carried out in an effort to resolve conflicts is assisted by a third party as a facilitator to be able to assist the mediation and negotiation process. MS explained that

We from the government also participated in the communication process. So we held several dialogues to discuss this. The meetings that were held involved the community, BPD, PEMDES, and also the company, even involving the sub-district head, police, Koramil, and all the government here. So the end of the meeting was that we created a team (MS, Head of Asuli Village, interview February 14, 2024).

Kami dari pihak pemerintah juga ikut serta dalam proses komunikasinya. Jadi kami mengadakan dialog beberapa kali untuk membahas hal tersebut. Pertemuan yang dilakukan itu melibatkan masyarakat, BPD, PEMDES, dan juga pihak perusahaan bahwak melibatkan pak camat, polsek, koramil, dan semua pemerintah disini. Jadi ending dari pertemuan itu kami membuat sebuah tim (MS, Kepala desa asuli, wawancara 14 Februari 2024).

However, despite the inclusion of multiple facilitators, the dialogue process faced several challenges. One major obstacle was the Kuari community distrust toward PT Vale, rooted in past experiences and perceived imbalances in decision making power. Many Kuari community felt that dialogues were more performative that participatory, and that the outcomes primarily favored the company's operational interests.

Related to Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, this communication can be understood not merely as the exchange of information, but as a dynamic and unfinalized interaction between voices that carry different ideologies, experiences, and worldviews. Bakthin emphasizes that true dialogue is responsive, open-ended, and grounded in mutual recognition. Based on interview's that obtained, the dialogue of PT Vale and Kuari community as a site of discursive struggle, where the lived experiences and values of the community confront the public policy of the corporation itself. This was conveyed by MH about explanation PT Vale's communication approach, that

So we're not only building informal communication but also encouraging what we call formal communication. Both administratively and in the form of socialization or what is called open communication that we do. In the socialization process that is carried out openly, periodically, it really provides a complete picture to stakeholders, especially the community, regarding mining plans or activities. So that all concerns from the community can be expressed at the meeting (MH, PT Vale Staff, Interview February 12, 2024).

Jadi kami bukan hanya membangun komunikasi informal tetapi juga mendorong untuk yang kita sebut dengan komunikasi formal. Baik secara administrative maupun seperti dalam bentuk sosialisasi atau yang dikatakan komunikasi terbuka yang kami lakukan. Dalam proses sosialisasi yang dilakukan secara terbuka, secara periodic itu benar-benar memberikan gambaran utuh kepada stakeholder khususnya masyarakat terkait rencana atau aktivitas mining. Agar semua concern dari masyarakat itu dapat diungkap pada pertemuan itu (MH, Staff PT Vale, Wawancara 12 Februari 2024).

From a dialogic perspective, the corporate narrative, shaped by formal regulation and administrative logic, intersects and often clashes with Kuari community lived realities and their claims to land and identity. Thus, dialogue in this conflict, becomes a battleground for meaning making, where each side attempts to assert its truth.

Furthermore, some progress has been made, such as the acceptance of certain social programs, the outcomes remain partial and contested, dialogues that are not grounded in mutual recognition or that fail to distribute communicative power fairly risk becoming monologic, further reinforcing community skepticism. However, if approached dialogically, with openness to contradiction and co-construction of meaning, dialogue can evolve into a transformative tool for long-term conflict resolution.

This research reveals implications for the development of theories, especially *Relational Dialectics Theory* to understand the dynamics of conflict between PT Vale and the Kuari community, with a focus on external contradictions that arise from differences in interested related to land status and the social impact of mining activities. Furthermore, this approach is in line with opinion of Baxter and Montgomery, who state that human relationships are not linier but dynamic, where tensions and contradictions are integral part of every relationship (Baxter et al., 2021). In a simple term, they emphasize that relationships is full of contradictions are not always negative, but can be an opportunity to build better dialogue if that managed effectively.

This research can show that tensions between PT Vale and the community are caused by fundamental differences in interest. PT Vale holds on to the legal legitimacy of its contract of work, while the community considers the land an irreplaceable source of livelihood. This is in line with the findings of Putnam et al (2016) who state that contradictions in conflict often arise from conflicting interests that are not properly accommodated (Putnam et al., 2016). Therefore, that is creating obstacles in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, the concept of *Relational Dialectics Theory* can be used through element of this theory itself. The result is shown in figure 3 below:
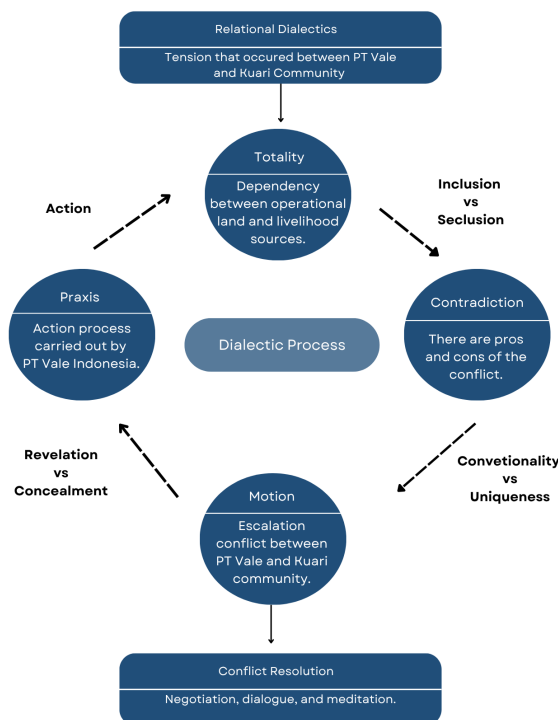

Figure 3. Result analysis
Source: Author Analysis (2024)

The figure above explains that the relational dialectic in this conflict occurs dynamically and interactively because they are related to each other. The nature of the conflict in this study is then complex so that the conflict between PT Vale and the community cannot be seen as something static. The four elements influence each other so that the reality of the conflict changes according to the conditions that occur and potentially can occur repeatedly in different cycles. Each element can occur simultaneously and there is no end to the process but will continue as long as the conflict has not been fully resolved. Furthermore, the four elements in the figure 2, illustrate 3 forms of tension from Baxter and Bakhtin (Griffin, 2006) such as *Inclusion vs Seclusion, Conventionality vs Uniqueness*, and *Revelation vs Concealment* that occur that affect every relationship that occurs between PT Vale and the Kuari Community. This is also in line with how Baxter provides a perspective that the dialectic of how to manage relationships that emphasizes opposition will ultimately create tension in a relationship (Littlejohn et al., 2017).

In addition, the discussion highlighted the importance of communication in managing conflict. In this case, PT Vale has used open dialog and interpersonal approaches to bridge differences with the community. These efforts are line with with the view of Fisher et al (2013), who emphasize that effective communication can help meet basic human needs, which are often the root cause of conflict. However, the main challenge PT Vale faces is the community's lack of trust in the company, which leads to misunderstanding in communication. This is also supported bt the opinion of Spitzberg and Cupach (in Fajar, 2016), who state that communication failures often occur due to the psychological condition of the parties involved, such as distrust or misperceptions.

Furthermore, this research also reveals that this conflict is not only related to administrative issues but also involves social and economic dimensions. This perspective is relevant to Abuya (2016) research, which states that conflicts in the mining industry often involve deep-seated issues such as land tenure, distributional justice and socioeconomic impacts, which can't be resolved solely through legal approaches. This discussion emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics of contradictions in the relationships between PT Vale and the Kuari community.

Therefore, an inclusive and dialogue-based communication approach is need to manage tensions, emphasizing the involvement of all stakeholders. In this way, sustainable solutions can be achieved, as proposed by Magazzino (2024), who found that third-party mediation in mining conflicts can help reconcile the interest of companies and communities more fairly.

Conclusion

This study finds that the conflict between PT Vale and the Kuari community stems from ongoing tensions regarding the legitimacy of land claims and contrasting views on the livelihood that consequences of mining operations. The community faces restrictions in accessing agricultural land, exposure to environmental hazards such as landslides, and minimal participation in decision making processes, all of which have contributed to sustained distrust despite the company's initiatives in dialogue and social engagement. Applying *Relational Dialectics Theory* (RDT), the research highlights that contradictions in the relationship between corporations and local communities are inherent and must be addressed through communication. While PT Vale has pursued dialogue and community empowerment programs, issues of unequal participation and a lack of trust remain evident. Methodologically, the study reinforces the relevance of qualitative case studies for examining complex conflicts in organizational settings. Theoretically, it expands the application of RDT into broader institutional and corporate–community interactions. To avoid a recurrence

of the conflict, the study proposes that PT Vale recognize the community's dependency on the land by implementing solutions that don't rely on legal ownership. One possible approach is to offer conditional land-use rights, enabling residents to maintain access for livelihood activities, or to allocate alternative land in exchange for areas covered under the company's contract. These measures, when supported by transparent agreements and inclusive mechanisms, can help rebuild trust and support a more sustainable and equitable coexistence.

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