

CONSTRUCTING MEANING AND NEGOTIATING POWER IN CSR: AN APPLIED GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FROM PT BERAU COAL, INDONESIA

Rahmatullah¹, Hamka Naping², Safriadi³

rahmatullah@umberau.ac.id¹
hamka_naping@yahoo.com²
safrimku@gmail.com³

Abstract

This article critically examines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices of PT Berau Coal in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork—including participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions—the study explores how CSR is constructed, negotiated, and contested in mining-affected communities. The findings reveal persistent mismatches between corporate interpretations of community needs and the lived realities of local residents. CSR programs are frequently delivered as standardized, top-down interventions that remain largely symbolic, failing to address structural problems such as ecological degradation, livelihood insecurity, and the marginalization of women, youth, and Indigenous groups.

The analysis shows that CSR often functions less as a tool of empowerment and more as a mechanism for reproducing corporate hegemony, while at the same time creating limited spaces for community critique and resistance. To reconfigure CSR as a participatory governance mechanism, the study proposes five strategic directions: strengthening transparency and accountability through independent oversight, institutionalizing inclusive participation, promoting local economic diversification, aligning CSR with regional development plans, and advancing ecological restoration through community-led initiatives.

By situating the Berau case within wider debates on sustainability and extractive governance, the study underscores both the risks of depoliticized CSR and the potential for transformative reform. Ultimately, it argues that CSR in extractive industries must move beyond philanthropy and image-building, serving instead as a collaborative platform for social justice, ecological renewal, and sustainable futures in mining-dependent regions.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, hegemony, social constructivism, political ecology, community participation, extractive industries, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Berau Regency in East Kalimantan stands as one of Indonesia's most significant coal-producing regions, where extractive industries such as PT Berau Coal play a central role in shaping local economic structures and state revenues. On the surface, the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs—ranging from infrastructure provision and educational assistance to environmental initiatives—appear as tangible expressions of corporate commitment to sustainability and social responsibility (Afkarina et al., 2019; Berau Coal, 2023, 2024). Yet, beneath this narrative lies a more complex reality marked by uneven benefits, symbolic participation, and ecological degradation that disproportionately affect local communities (Bebbington et al., 2018; Werner et al., 2024).

From a critical perspective, CSR in extractive zones cannot be reduced to philanthropy or voluntary goodwill. Rather, it must be understood as part of broader political and economic strategies that seek to stabilize corporate operations and secure community legitimacy (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, CSR can be seen as a "green hegemony" project—constructing narratives of sustainability and development that mask structural inequalities and environmental harm (Gramsci, 1971; Alier, 2002; Bebbington & Bury, 2009). These narratives are often reproduced through visible yet depoliticized interventions such as infrastructure projects

or symbolic donations, while more contentious issues—land dispossession, declining water quality, and livelihood vulnerability—remain sidelined.

This analysis also resonates with the insights of social constructivism, which emphasize that social realities—such as “development,” “empowerment,” or even “sustainability”—are not neutral categories, but socially constructed and contested through discourse, everyday practices, and power-laden negotiations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). In Berau, CSR emerges as a site of struggle where companies, governments, and communities compete to define the meaning of development and the distribution of its benefits. While corporate actors deploy CSR as a legitimacy tool, local communities, particularly Indigenous groups, women, and youth, often challenge or reinterpret these programs in ways that reflect their lived realities and ecological concerns (Tsing, 2011; Sillitoe, 2007).

At the same time, political ecology perspectives help uncover how ecological degradation is obscured by CSR’s green discourse. Post-mining reclamation, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction are frequently treated as administrative obligations rather than as substantive commitments to ecological justice (Hilson, 2002; Robbins, 2012). This not only narrows the scope of CSR to compliance-based activities, but also reinforces extractive development trajectories that privilege corporate interests over community resilience and environmental restoration.

Against this backdrop, this article critically examines the CSR practices of PT Berau Coal through the combined lenses of Gramscian hegemony, social constructivism, and political ecology. The aim is to move beyond technocratic assessments of CSR as a set of programs or indicators, and instead interrogate it as a socially constructed and contested arena where power, meaning, and resistance intersect. By foregrounding ethnographic evidence from Berau’s mining-affected villages, this study demonstrates how CSR operates simultaneously as a strategy of hegemony and as a potential site of counter-hegemonic contestation. In doing so, it contributes to critical CSR scholarship while proposing an applied governance framework that emphasizes transparency, participatory inclusion, and ecological sustainability as foundations for more just and transformative CSR practices.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the need to decolonize CSR and sustainability discourses (Banerjee, 2022), highlight transformative research for just transitions (Wittmayer et al., 2021), and stress accountability as a cornerstone of sustainability (Sareen & Wolf, 2021). In parallel, research on corporate accountability shows persisting governance gaps in regulating extractive industries (Schilling-Vacaflor & Lenschow, 2021). These insights enrich the Berau case by situating it within global debates on justice and ecological transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study design with a strong ethnographic orientation to capture the social, political, and ecological dynamics surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in mining-affected communities of Berau Regency, East Kalimantan. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of how CSR is experienced, negotiated, and contested by different stakeholders in specific socio-ecological contexts (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995).

Research Design

The research was guided by three interrelated theoretical frameworks:

1. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, to analyze CSR as a strategy for constructing legitimacy and consolidating corporate power (Gramsci, 1971; Cox, 1983).
2. Social constructivism, which views development and sustainability as socially constructed categories, negotiated through discourse, everyday practices, and institutional arrangements (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).
3. Political ecology, which highlights how ecological degradation, resource conflicts, and environmental injustices are embedded in power relations between corporations, states, and communities (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Robbins, 2012).

This combined lens enables a critical reading of CSR not only as a technical instrument, but as a contested arena where meaning, power, and resistance intersect.

Data Collection

Data were collected between 2022 and 2024 in several mining-affected villages, including Tumbit Dayak, Gurimbang, Pegat Bukur, and Sembakungan. Four complementary techniques were employed:

1. In-depth interviews with community leaders, women, youth, village officials, CSR program managers, and company representatives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
2. Focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture collective views, local debates, and diverse perspectives within the community (Morgan, 1996).
3. Participant and non-participant observation, documenting everyday practices, interactions with CSR programs, and changes in social-ecological conditions (Spradley, 1980).
4. Document analysis, including corporate sustainability reports, regional regulations, meeting minutes, and photographic archives.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

To maintain the credibility and reliability of findings, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

1. Credibility was established through methodological and source triangulation, along with member checking.
2. Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the socio-cultural and ecological context.
3. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation and reflexive field notes.
4. Confirmability was strengthened by audit trails and peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic and interpretive strategy, combining inductive coding with theoretically informed interpretation. The process involved:

1. Data reduction and coding of interviews, FGDs, and field notes.
2. Pattern identification across economic, social, and ecological domains.
3. Critical interpretation through the integrated lens of hegemony, constructivism, and political ecology.

This analytic strategy enabled the identification of CSR as both a material practice and a symbolic discourse. It also highlighted how communities reinterpret, contest, and sometimes resist CSR initiatives in ways that reveal the tensions between corporate power, local agency, and ecological justice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Local Context and Stakeholder Roles in the Implementation of CSR by PT Berau Coal in Berau Regency

Mining activities in Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, have left profound imprints not only on the ecological landscape but also on the social fabric of local communities. PT Berau Coal, as one of the region's largest extractive actors, carries significant moral and political responsibility for mitigating these impacts through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Yet, the effectiveness of CSR in Berau depends less on the amount of funds allocated and more on how stakeholder roles are negotiated, represented, and institutionalized.

The social setting of Berau is highly pluralistic, comprising Indigenous groups such as the Dayak, as well as migrant communities including Bugis, Banjar, and Javanese settlers. Each group embodies distinct worldviews regarding land, nature, and development. For Dayak communities, land represents not only a source of livelihood but also an ancestral heritage and spiritual domain. Mining activities, therefore, are often perceived as threats to cultural identity and ecological continuity. In contrast, migrant groups tend to adopt a more pragmatic perspective, valuing CSR programs that directly enhance livelihood opportunities—such as training, business support, or assistance for small-scale enterprises.

These differences illustrate why social mapping and participatory needs assessment are crucial for CSR design. When CSR is delivered in a top-down manner, without adequate recognition of local values and historical grievances, it risks alienating Indigenous stakeholders while simultaneously reinforcing dependency among migrant groups. This echoes Blowfield's (2007) critique that CSR often fails to address the structural roots of inequality, instead producing symbolic gestures framed as development.

Local governments also play a pivotal role, but their position is often ambivalent. On the one hand, district authorities rely heavily on mining revenues, which incentivizes them to endorse corporate-led development narratives. On the other hand, they are mandated to align CSR with the Regional Development Plan (RPJMD). In practice, weak institutional capacity, limited regulatory enforcement, and elite capture frequently hinder this alignment. As a result, CSR forums—though framed as participatory spaces—often privilege corporate and elite voices, leaving women, youth, and Indigenous representatives marginalized (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Hilson, 2002).

PT Berau Coal itself operates within this contested governance arena. While it seeks to frame CSR as evidence of corporate responsibility and partnership, communities interpret these initiatives in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. For some, CSR represents much-needed resources in the absence of state provision. For others, it functions as a hegemonic tool—a way for the company to legitimize its operations while masking deeper socio-ecological disruptions (Gramsci, 1971; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

Thus, stakeholder roles in CSR implementation in Berau are far from neutral. They are embedded in power asymmetries that shape whose voices are heard, whose needs are prioritized, and whose interests are sidelined. Understanding these dynamics is essential for evaluating the potential of CSR not only as a compensatory mechanism, but as a contested space where meaning, legitimacy, and ecological justice are constantly negotiated.

Community Needs Assessment and CSR Challenges

The implementation of CSR by PT Berau Coal in mining-affected villages reveals a deep tension between corporate perceptions of community needs and the lived realities of local residents. From a constructivist perspective, as Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue, community needs are not objective facts but socially constructed—shaped by historical experiences, cultural values, and unequal power relations within local contexts.

In practice, PT Berau Coal frequently conducts community needs assessments through top-down mechanisms, either internally or via third-party consultants unfamiliar with local culture and ecology. This process often generates standardized programs—such as generic training sessions, infrastructure projects, or charitable donations—that may satisfy corporate reporting requirements but fail to address the structural issues identified by residents. Similar critiques have been noted by Blowfield and Frynas (2005), who emphasize the superficiality of such assessments in the extractive sector.

Field evidence shows that affected communities in Berau consistently prioritize ecological restoration, including soil and water quality improvement, reforestation, and biodiversity protection. Residents also demand improved access to health services in areas impacted by environmental degradation, education tailored to rural livelihoods, and economic empowerment initiatives to compensate for the loss of agricultural and fisheries-based livelihoods. Unfortunately, many CSR projects remain symbolic, designed more to demonstrate corporate goodwill than to resolve systemic socio-ecological problems (Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006; Ives, 2015). This reflects Jenkins’ (2005) critique of CSR as a “pseudo social contract,” where community dependence on corporations is reproduced rather than reduced.

The key economic, social, and environmental issues identified in this study are summarized in Table 1, which illustrates the link between empirical findings, field evidence, and implications for CSR design in Berau.

Table 1. Empirical Findings Summary

Domain	Core Issues	Field Evidence	Implications for Design
Economic	Uneven welfare; dependence on mining; elite capture risk	Interviews & FGD: benefits concentrated; traditional livelihoods pressured; skills mismatch	Diversification (MSMEs, agro/eco-tourism), targeted skills, anti-elite-capture safeguards
Social	Symbolic participation; top-down CSR; limited voice for women & youth	Observations & minutes: consultations dominated by elites; PRA/FPIC rarely used	PRA/FPIC, quota for women/youth, community-managed projects
Environment	Green narrative vs degraded ecosystems; reclamation administrative only	Field notes & documents: water/soil quality declining, health impacts under-addressed	Move from compliance to restoration; community biodiversity monitoring; open environment data

These findings reinforce critiques in the critical CSR literature, which suggest that CSR in extractive zones is frequently transactional and depoliticized. Rather than

addressing socio-ecological injustices, companies prioritize performative indicators—such as the number of projects, budget allocations, or awards—over substantive and transformative change (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). As a consequence, communities experience CSR as uneven and exclusionary, with women, youth, and Indigenous groups systematically marginalized in both design and implementation processes (Tsing, 2011; Sillitoe, 2007).

In this context, CSR functions less as a tool of empowerment and more as a mechanism for reinforcing hegemonic corporate narratives. Yet, paradoxically, it also creates spaces where communities can articulate critique, challenge corporate authority, and press for more just approaches to development and environmental restoration.

Negotiating Social Legitimacy: Strategic Implementation of CSR by PT Berau Coal

The CSR program implemented by PT Berau Coal in villages surrounding mining sites demonstrates the company's attempt to balance diverse interests, including social demands, regulatory expectations, and pressures for legitimacy. In contexts marked by environmental conflict and deep social inequality (Bebbington et al., 2008; Alier, 2002), CSR is not merely practiced as a moral responsibility, but also as a political strategy to maintain harmonious relations with communities and to prevent conflict (Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006; Blowfield & Frynas, 2005).

To this end, the company has employed participatory mechanisms such as village deliberation forums, social mapping, and partnerships with village and district governments. While these forums ostensibly provide a platform to articulate shared meanings of “development” and “welfare,” they remain constrained by unequal power structures. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note, such spaces are never neutral; instead, they reflect contested processes where dominant actors shape discourse and outcomes.

At the village level, communities do acknowledge tangible benefits from CSR programs, including access to clean water, improved roads, schools, and health services. These initiatives have enhanced everyday living conditions, though they have not necessarily contributed to long-term economic resilience (Afkarina et al., 2019). From a critical perspective, the emphasis on physical infrastructure may also function as a diversion, deflecting attention from unresolved structural issues such as land tenure inequality, agrarian conflicts, and ecological degradation (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; Harvey, 2005).

To enhance sustainability, PT Berau Coal has increasingly engaged with local institutions such as community forums, village councils, and civil society organizations. While this reflects aspirations toward community-based development, these collaborations often risk remaining superficial unless accompanied by deeper shifts in institutional autonomy and capacity. As Blowfield (2007) cautions, without addressing structural imbalances of power, CSR programs risk reproducing dependency rather than fostering empowerment.

The effectiveness of CSR in Berau is frequently assessed across three domains: economic, social, and environmental. Economically, CSR provides alternative livelihoods and skills training, but its reach remains uneven, particularly among groups reliant on traditional farming and fishing. Socially, CSR has facilitated greater interaction between companies and communities, yet participation is often symbolic and dominated by local elites. Environmentally, reclamation and conservation activities remain focused on administrative compliance rather than substantive restoration, leaving unresolved problems of water contamination, declining soil fertility, and public health risks (Bebbington et al., 2018; Ottery, 2014).

Divergences in expectations further complicate implementation. While communities often view CSR as compensation for ecological and livelihood losses, companies approach it as a platform for corporate image-building. This divergence is compounded by elite capture, whereby program benefits are disproportionately accessed by individuals or groups with close ties to local power structures (Hilson, 2002). Moreover, CSR has at times been politicized, with its resources leveraged for electoral advantage in village-level politics, further undermining its legitimacy (Sillitoe, 2007).

Ultimately, CSR in Berau reveals the contradictory nature of corporate-community relations. While providing immediate benefits and limited avenues for dialogue, CSR simultaneously consolidates corporate hegemony by reframing structural inequalities as solvable through technical interventions. This duality illustrates how CSR operates as both a mechanism of negotiation and a site of contestation: communities may welcome its material contributions, yet they also resist its limitations by articulating counter-narratives and demanding transformative approaches that prioritize ecological justice and social equity.

Theoretical Integration and Critical Reflections

The case of PT Berau Coal demonstrates that CSR in extractive industries cannot be reduced to philanthropy or compliance. Instead, it operates within a contested field where power, meaning, and ecological relations are constantly negotiated. Three theoretical lenses illuminate these dynamics in complementary ways.

From a Gramscian perspective, CSR functions as a mechanism of hegemony, embedding corporate narratives of development and sustainability into local governance structures. By funding infrastructure and welfare projects, companies present themselves as indispensable development partners, thereby normalizing extractive practices and masking structural inequalities. Yet, community critiques—voiced through Indigenous leaders, women’s organizations, and youth groups—signal the emergence of counter-hegemonic discourses that challenge corporate dominance and demand ecological justice.

Through the lens of social constructivism, the study reveals how “development” and “empowerment” are not neutral categories but are socially constructed through discourse and practice. CSR forums, even when dominated by elites, have become arenas where marginalized groups reinterpret and negotiate the meaning of CSR, asserting agency in shaping local futures. These findings highlight that CSR is not merely delivered to communities but is actively redefined by them in situated contexts.

Finally, political ecology exposes the material contradictions of CSR. Programs framed as environmental responsibility often prioritize administrative compliance—such as reclamation reporting—over substantive ecological restoration. This depoliticization obscures the deeper socio-ecological costs of mining. Yet, when communities engage in participatory monitoring of water quality or biodiversity, CSR can evolve into a platform for advancing ecological justice.

Taken together, these perspectives show that CSR in Berau is both a hegemonic strategy and a site of contestation. It reproduces dependency and legitimizes extractive development, but it also opens spaces for alternative imaginaries rooted in community agency and ecological care. This duality underscores the need for an applied governance framework that transforms CSR from symbolic compliance into a participatory mechanism for social and ecological transformation.

Strategic Recommendations

The dynamics of CSR in Berau underscore that corporate social programs must be reframed from symbolic gestures of legitimacy into mechanisms of participatory governance that genuinely address socio-ecological challenges. The evidence from mining-affected communities demonstrates that current CSR practices remain fragmented, transactional, and often disconnected from the lived realities of residents. Without fundamental reform, CSR risks reinforcing corporate hegemony rather than fostering empowerment.

Reorienting CSR toward justice requires moving beyond compliance-oriented metrics and performative indicators. Instead, companies must embed mechanisms that ensure transparency, inclusivity, ecological sustainability, and alignment with local development priorities. This shift entails recognizing communities not as passive recipients of aid, but as active agents in shaping development trajectories. As emphasized in recent scholarship, decolonizing CSR discourses (Banerjee, 2021), strengthening community participation in sustainability transitions (Pickering et al., 2022), fostering transformative research for just transitions (Wittmayer et al., 2021), and embedding accountability as a cornerstone of sustainability (Sareen & Wolf, 2021) are critical for such reconfiguration. In parallel, strengthening corporate accountability requires mandatory due diligence and independent oversight to prevent CSR from becoming a purely voluntary exercise (Schilling-Vacaflor & Lenschow, 2023).

Building on these insights, Figure 1 presents the CSR Applied Governance Framework, which highlights the interconnected inputs, processes, outcomes, and impacts required for reconfiguring CSR in mining-affected regions. To operationalize this framework, Table 2 details the governance levers, implementation actions, and performance indicators (KPIs) that can guide PT Berau Coal toward more just and sustainable CSR practices.

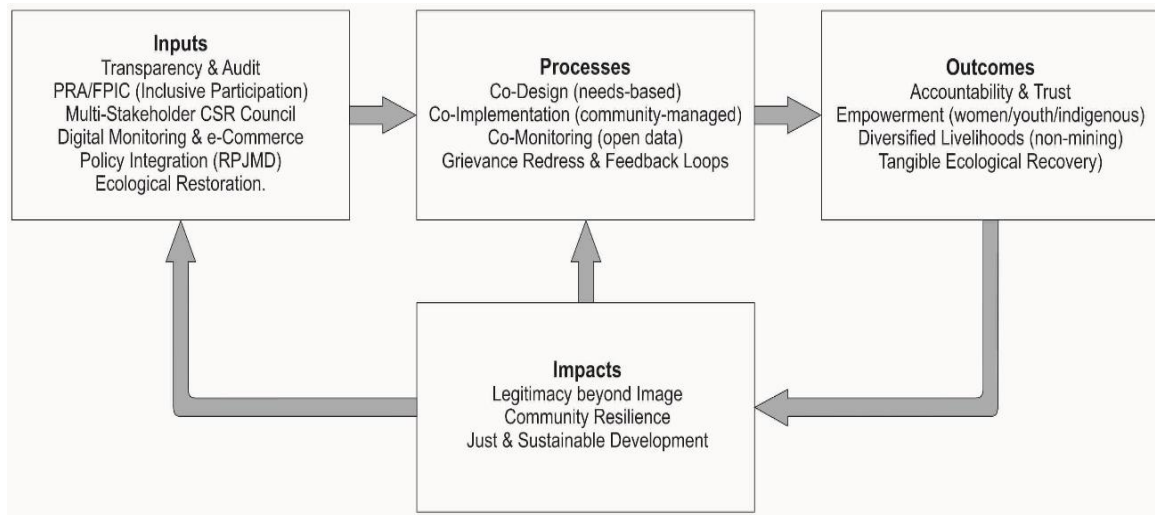


Figure 1. CSR Applied Governance Framework

Table 2. Applied Governance Levers and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for PT Berau Coal's CSR

Governance Lever	Example Implementation Actions	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Transparency & Accountability	Annual independent CSR audits, publicly accessible reports	Number of audited CSR reports; budget disclosure level; public accessibility
Community Participation	Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), inclusive focus group discussions	Proportion of vulnerable groups (women, youth, Indigenous peoples) engaged; number of FGDs per village
Multi-Stakeholder Council	Establishment of CSR council involving community representatives, academics, NGOs, and local government	Number of council meetings per year; diversity of actors involved
Local Economic Diversification	Development of MSMEs, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture	Number of new enterprises created; increase in non-mining household income
Integration with Regional Development Plan (RPJMD)	Aligning CSR programs with local development priorities	Percentage of CSR programs aligned with RPJMD; existence of local CSR regulation
Ecological Sustainability	Post-mining land reclamation, water and forest conservation, eco-friendly waste management	Area of land reclaimed; water/air quality improvement; community participation in conservation
Digital Technology Utilization	E-commerce training, digital monitoring systems, online transparency platforms	Number of MSMEs adopting digital platforms; active public monitoring platforms

From Framework to Action: Five Strategic Directions

The CSR Applied Governance Framework (Figure 1) and the governance levers summarized in Table 2 provide a blueprint for reforming CSR in Berau. However, frameworks and indicators alone are insufficient unless they are translated into actionable strategies that reshape the way CSR is practiced on the ground. To move from concept to implementation, PT Berau Coal's CSR must be guided by a set of strategic directions that institutionalize accountability, expand community participation, diversify livelihoods, align with local governance priorities, and prioritize ecological restoration.

These directions are not abstract principles but practical steps that respond directly to the structural challenges identified in Berau: elite capture, symbolic participation, ecological degradation, and economic dependency on mining. By embedding reforms into five interconnected domains, CSR can transition from a mechanism of corporate image management into a platform for social and ecological justice.

The Five Strategic Directions for CSR Reform are outlined below.

1. Enhance Transparency and Accountability

One of the central weaknesses of CSR in Berau is the lack of transparency and accountability. Reporting tends to highlight budgets spent and awards received, while neglecting substantive evaluation of outcomes and long-term impacts. To overcome this, PT Berau Coal must institutionalize mechanisms such as annual independent

CSR audits, open access reporting platforms, and digital monitoring systems that enable the public to scrutinize corporate claims. Independent oversight is essential to prevent elite capture and ensure that benefits are distributed equitably across communities. As Schilling-Vacaflor and Lenschow (2023) emphasize, strengthening corporate accountability requires not only voluntary disclosure but also mandatory due diligence and external oversight. Embedding these mechanisms in CSR governance will ensure that ecological justice and community rights are not subordinated to corporate interests.

2. Institutionalize Inclusive Participation

CSR in Berau has often been criticized for symbolic participation, where community meetings are dominated by local elites or individuals with close ties to the company. This approach silences women, youth, and Indigenous voices, thereby reinforcing structural inequalities. Genuine inclusivity requires adopting tools such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and the establishment of quotas to guarantee representation of marginalized groups in decision-making forums. By empowering women and youth to play meaningful roles in CSR governance, companies can strengthen social legitimacy and build community ownership of projects. This resonates with global calls for democratizing sustainability transformations (Pickering et al., 2022), where marginalized voices are recognized as central agents of change rather than peripheral stakeholders.

3. Promote Local Economic Diversification

Communities in Berau remain highly dependent on the coal economy, which creates vulnerability as mining activities decline or close. CSR must therefore shift from temporary compensations to building resilient, diversified livelihoods. Programs supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), sustainable agriculture, agrotourism, and eco-tourism provide viable pathways for communities to reduce dependency on extractive industries. Initiatives that link local products to wider markets—including digital platforms—can increase income opportunities and enhance community resilience. By investing in diversified local economies, CSR can foster long-term socio-economic transformation, ensuring that livelihoods persist beyond the lifespan of mining operations.

4. Align CSR with Regional Development Plans (RPJMD)

One of the recurring challenges in Berau is the lack of coherence between CSR initiatives and district-level development priorities. Programs are often fragmented, driven by corporate timelines rather than community and government agendas. To enhance impact and accountability, CSR must be explicitly aligned with the Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah (RPJMD). Such alignment prevents duplication of efforts, ensures that CSR contributes to official sustainability goals, and enhances synergy between companies and local governments. Local regulations mandating CSR contributions to public priorities can further institutionalize accountability. This integration repositions CSR not as a parallel system of development, but as a complementary mechanism that reinforces broader sustainability trajectories.

5. Advance Ecological Sustainability

CSR in Berau has historically emphasized compliance-oriented reclamation, with limited attention to genuine ecological restoration. Yet communities consistently prioritize environmental rehabilitation as one of their most urgent needs. To respond, CSR must go beyond administrative reporting and invest in substantive programs for

watershed restoration, biodiversity monitoring, and reforestation in collaboration with local communities. Engaging residents in ecological conservation not only improves outcomes but also strengthens community stewardship of natural resources. In line with political ecology perspectives (Alier, 2002; Bebbington et al., 2018), ecological sustainability requires moving from tokenistic green narratives to transformative restoration that addresses the long-term socio-ecological consequences of mining.

Taken together, these five strategic directions reposition CSR as more than a corporate image strategy. Applied in Berau, they demonstrate that CSR can become a transformative pathway for building resilient livelihoods, restoring ecological systems, and advancing justice in mining-affected communities.

CONCLUSION

The case of PT Berau Coal demonstrates the paradoxical role of CSR in mining-affected regions. On the one hand, CSR delivers tangible benefits such as infrastructure, training, and short-term welfare improvements. On the other hand, it often remains symbolic—dominated by corporate interests, elite capture, and compliance-oriented approaches that fail to address structural socio-ecological challenges. As this study shows, community needs in Berau are shaped by lived realities of ecological degradation, cultural values, and unequal power relations—yet corporate assessments tend to overlook these dimensions in favor of standardized, top-down interventions.

By applying Gramsci's concept of hegemony, CSR can be understood as a mechanism through which companies secure legitimacy and normalize extractive logics in the name of development. Simultaneously, social constructivism reveals how meanings of "needs" and "empowerment" are negotiated and contested between corporations, governments, and communities. Political ecology further highlights the ecological injustices that CSR often obscures through depoliticized narratives of sustainability. Together, these perspectives reveal that CSR in Berau is not a neutral development tool but a contested arena of meaning-making, power struggles, and resistance.

To move beyond symbolic practices, CSR must be reframed as a participatory governance mechanism capable of delivering social and ecological justice. The five strategic directions proposed—enhancing transparency and accountability, institutionalizing inclusive participation, promoting local economic diversification, aligning CSR with regional development plans, and advancing ecological sustainability—provide a practical roadmap for reform. These strategies are not only context-specific to Berau but also resonate with global debates on decolonizing CSR discourses (Banerjee, 2021), democratizing sustainability transformations (Pickering et al., 2022), just sustainability transitions (Wittmayer et al., 2021), and accountability in extractive governance (Schilling-Vacaflor & Lenschow, 2023; Sareen & Wolf, 2021).

In conclusion, CSR in extractive industries must no longer be confined to philanthropy or corporate image-building. Instead, it should function as a collaborative platform where communities, governments, and companies jointly determine development trajectories. Only by embedding transparency, participation, and ecological restoration into CSR design can mining-dependent regions like Berau transition toward more just, democratic, and sustainable socio-ecological futures.

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