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Building Social License through Early Stakeholder Communication

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Abstract *– This study examines how early stakeholder communication contributes to building a Social License to Operate (SLO) through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy of PT DIB in Pelapis Village, North Kayong Regency. Using a qualitative case study approach within a constructivist paradigm, the research explores how stakeholder engagement, social mapping, and participatory communication shape CSR program design before implementation. Data were collected between March and May 2026 through in-depth interviews with six informants and participant observation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that early stakeholder communication transformed initial community resistance into trust and social acceptance. Through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), stakeholder engagement, and the identification of key local actors, the company aligned CSR initiatives with community needs and shifted from short-term compensation to long-term empowerment. The study demonstrates that CSR communication begins with early stakeholder engagement rather than program implementation, positioning communication as the foundation for building SLO. Practically, the findings suggest that companies operating in socially sensitive areas should prioritize participatory and context-based stakeholder communication to strengthen social legitimacy and operational sustainability.*
Keywords: *CSR Communication Strategy; Social License to Operate; Stakeholder Engagement; Community Empowerment; Participatory Communication*

Abstrak *– Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana komunikasi awal dengan pemangku kepentingan berkontribusi dalam membangun Social License to Operate (SLO) melalui strategi Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) PT DIB di Desa Pelapis, Kabupaten Kayong Utara. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dalam paradigma konstruktivis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan, pemetaan sosial, dan komunikasi partisipatif membentuk perancangan program CSR sebelum implementasi. Data dikumpulkan pada Maret–Mei 2026 melalui wawancara mendalam dengan enam informan dan observasi partisipatif, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi awal dengan pemangku kepentingan berhasil mengubah resistensi masyarakat menjadi kepercayaan dan penerimaan sosial. Melalui Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Focus Group Discussion (FGD), keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan, dan identifikasi aktor lokal, perusahaan menyusun program CSR yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan masyarakat serta menggeser pendekatan dari kompensasi jangka pendek menuju pemberdayaan jangka panjang. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi CSR dimulai sejak keterlibatan awal dengan pemangku kepentingan, bukan pada tahap implementasi program, sehingga menjadi fondasi dalam membangun SLO. Secara praktis, perusahaan di wilayah yang sensitif secara sosial perlu memprioritaskan komunikasi partisipatif berbasis konteks untuk memperkuat legitimasi sosial dan keberlanjutan operasional.*
Kata Kunci*: Strategi Komunikasi CSR; Lisensi Sosial untuk Beroperasi; Keterlibatan Pemangku Kepentingan; Pemberdayaan Komunitas; Komunikasi Partisipatif*

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Introduction

Over the past decade, Indonesia's economic development has increasingly focused on industrial downstreaming as a national strategy to enhance the value-added of natural resources and strengthen global competitiveness. This policy is implemented through various National Strategic Projects (*Proyek Strategis Nasional/PSN*; Republik Indonesia, 2020), particularly in the mineral sector and the development of new industrial zones outside Java Island. Downstreaming is positioned not only as a macroeconomic agenda but also as a structural transformation with significant social and environmental implications at the local level. Therefore, its success should be assessed not only by economic performance but also by companies' ability to maintain social sustainability and foster harmonious relationships with affected communities.

Numerous studies indicate that downstreaming projects often encounter social challenges, including inequality, conflicts of interest, and community resistance resulting from limited stakeholder involvement during the early stages of development (Leonard, 2018). These conditions suggest that project success depends not only on technical and economic factors but also on the quality of social relationships established through inclusive and participatory approaches. Accordingly, effective strategies should emphasize systematic, contextual, and community-based communication planning alongside program implementation (Arfan et al., 2022).

In this context, the Pulau Penebang Industrial Area (*Kawasan Industri Pulau Penebang/KIPP*) in North Kayong Regency, West Kalimantan, managed by PT DIB, illustrates the complex dynamics of industrial development in coastal communities. The surrounding population depends heavily on marine resources, making them vulnerable to socio-economic changes resulting from industrialization. Although the project offers economic opportunities, potential inequalities, livelihood uncertainties, and social resistance may emerge if development is not supported by communication planning that is responsive to local conditions (Anna, 2019).

Pelapis Village, the community located closest to KIPP, demonstrates considerable economic vulnerability because of its dependence on seasonal capture fisheries. Fluctuating fish catches contribute to unstable household incomes, compounded by limited access to development resources. The establishment of the industrial area has also generated concerns regarding the sustainability of marine resources and future local livelihoods. Community demands for transparency and clarity regarding project benefits indicate the need for structured, open, and participatory communication from the early stages of industrial development (Acuti et al., 2024; Mulyasari et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that communication failures in industrial projects often result from weak communication strategy planning, limited stakeholder participation, and CSR approaches that are insufficiently grounded in local needs. Therefore, CSR communication should not be understood merely as an information dissemination activity, but as a strategic process initiated during the early stages of project development through stakeholder identification, social needs assessment, message design, and the selection of appropriate communication approaches. This perspective is reinforced by recent studies emphasizing that early stakeholder engagement, continuous dialogue, and trust-building are fundamental to fostering public acceptance and ultimately achieving a Social License to Operate (Mulyasari et al., 2021).

Furthermore, effective CSR planning should integrate local contexts with dialogic and participatory communication approaches to ensure that empowerment programs respond to community needs while strengthening social trust (ElAlfy et al., 2020).

In practice, the CSR programs implemented by PT DIB in Pelapis Village reflect efforts to combine economic interventions with communication approaches through the provision of technology, technical assistance, and freshwater aquaculture development. However, the success of these programs depends not only on implementation but also on systematic, adaptive, and dialogic CSR communication planning developed together with the community. Inadequate planning may result in a mismatch between company-designed programs and actual community needs.

Previous Research and Conceptual Areas

To position the present study, previous research is organized into four interrelated conceptual areas: (1) stakeholder engagement and stakeholder dialogue, (2) CSR communication, (3) community empowerment and participatory communication, and (4) Social License to Operate (SLO). For each area, the main findings of earlier studies are summarized, and the position of this study is stated explicitly.

Stakeholder Engagement and Stakeholder Dialogue

Stakeholder theory, originally developed by Freeman (1984), conceptualizes the firm as an entity accountable not only to shareholders but also to all parties affected by its activities. In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), recent scholarship further emphasizes that stakeholder relationships should be built through ongoing, stakeholder-focused dialogue and genuine responsiveness to stakeholder concerns (Acuti et al., 2024).

Stakeholder theory further emphasizes that companies should manage stakeholder relationships according to their interests and influence, particularly with local communities and government institutions. In this study, the theory explains that PT DIB's CSR communication strategy should be designed by considering the needs, aspirations, and levels of acceptance of the Pelapis Village community as the group most directly affected by industrial development. Accordingly, CSR communication extends beyond information dissemination and functions as a stakeholder engagement mechanism for developing dialogic, participatory, and sustainable relationships.

Previous research shows that the quality, rather than the mere existence, of stakeholder relationships shapes the outcome of engagement. Mitchell et al. (1997) argued that managers prioritize stakeholders according to their power, legitimacy, and urgency, which means that groups with limited power, such as small fishing communities, risk being marginalized unless engagement is deliberately designed. Acuti et al. (2024), in a review of stakeholder dialogue in CSR, clarify the conditions that distinguish genuine dialogue from other forms of corporate communication, namely openness to stakeholder input and responsiveness to stakeholder concerns. Empirical studies point in the same direction. Leonard (2018) links limited involvement of affected communities in mining decisions in South Africa to conflict and environmental injustice. Mulyasari et al. (2021) examine the Gundih carbon capture, utilization and storage pilot project in Indonesia and highlight the potential of public engagement strategies built on early engagement, continuous dialogue, and trust-building to foster public acceptance and a social license to operate. Wamea et al. (2023) found that stakeholder involvement from planning through implementation was a key factor in the effectiveness and sustainability of CSR programs.

Position of this study. These studies establish why engagement and dialogue matter, but they say little about how dialogue is initiated before any CSR program exists and how what is learned in dialogue is carried into program planning. This study therefore treats stakeholder engagement as the first link of the analytical chain examined here and focuses on the pre-implementation phase in a vulnerable coastal community.

CSR Communication

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognized as a strategic component of corporate governance that integrates social and environmental responsibilities into business operations and stakeholder relationships. Rather than being limited to philanthropic initiatives, contemporary CSR emphasizes corporate commitment to sustainability, stakeholder engagement, reputation, and long-term organizational responsibility. This strategic approach positions CSR as an instrument for strengthening corporate legitimacy, enhancing public trust, and maintaining a Social License to Operate through responsible business practices and effective stakeholder communication (Alizadeh, 2022).

From a stakeholder perspective, CSR requires companies to respond to stakeholder needs and expectations through continuous dialogue. Consequently, the effectiveness of CSR depends on stakeholder-focused dialogue, openness to community input, and the ability of organizations to genuinely listen and respond to stakeholder concerns throughout the CSR process (Acuti et al., 2024). In this study, CSR is conceptualized as a strategic approach that generates socio-economic benefits for fishing communities while fostering mutually beneficial relationships between the company and local communities.

CSR communication is a strategic process that shapes stakeholder perceptions, trust, and acceptance through meaningful engagement rather than merely disseminating information. Effective CSR communication extends beyond symbolic messaging by emphasizing dialogue, credible organizational actions, and sustained stakeholder engagement to ensure that corporate narratives remain consistent with the implementation of CSR initiatives. Such alignment strengthens stakeholder relationships, enhances public acceptance, and contributes to the development of a Social License to Operate (Camilleri, 2022; Mulyasari et al., 2021; Song & Tao, 2022).

Song and Wen distinguish CSR communication into two main approaches: the integrative CSR communication strategy and the CSR message strategy. The first approach emphasizes the integration of CSR messages across corporate communication activities, including information dissemination, feedback responsiveness, and stakeholder engagement. The second focuses on the quality of CSR messages in terms of issue relevance, corporate commitment, program impact, stated motives, and alignment with the company's core business. In this study, CSR communication is understood as an early stakeholder engagement process that emphasizes dialogue, participation, and trust-building to foster public acceptance, strengthen relationships with local communities, and contribute to the development of a Social License to Operate (Mulyasari et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, CSR is also framed as a legal obligation. Law No. 40 of 2007 on Limited Liability Companies requires companies whose business activities relate to natural resources to carry out social and environmental responsibility, and Government Regulation No. 47 of 2012 provides the implementing rules (Republik Indonesia, 2007, 2012). This regulatory framing differs from SLO, which is informal and granted by communities rather than by the state, and it explains why CSR communication matters beyond formal compliance.

Research on CSR communication has moved from message delivery toward relationship building. Morsing and Schultz (2006) distinguished stakeholder information, response, and involvement strategies and argued that the involvement strategy, in which stakeholders take part in shaping corporate action, is the most interactive form of CSR communication. Du et al. (2010) reviewed the field and showed that the returns to CSR communication depend on what is communicated, through which channels, and how stakeholders attribute corporate motives. Camilleri (2022) emphasized that communication must be matched by action so that what is said about CSR corresponds to what is done, while Song and Tao (2022) showed that dialogic communication and managerial facilitation are

important in translating internal CSR into relational and behavioral outcomes. Alizadeh (2022) found that the drivers and barriers of CSR differ between regional contexts, which underlines the need for context-sensitive approaches.

Position of this study. Most of this work examines how CSR messages are designed, received, or aligned with corporate action. The present study shifts attention to the earlier planning phase, in which communication consists of listening, mapping, and dialogue before any message about a program is delivered, and it examines how these activities shape the CSR program itself.

Community Empowerment and Participatory Communication

Community empowerment represents a CSR approach aimed at strengthening community capacity, economic independence, and social sustainability. In coastal communities, empowerment is particularly important because fishing households often face economic vulnerability resulting from dependence on natural resources, seasonal fluctuations, and limited access to technology, markets, and basic services.

Empowerment-oriented CSR programs emphasize productive economic activities through training, mentoring, livelihood diversification, and support for local enterprises. Compared with charitable assistance, this approach is considered more sustainable because it strengthens adaptive capacity and economic resilience. Communities experiencing tangible benefits from CSR programs are more likely to develop trust and support for the company. Accordingly, community empowerment is understood not only as the objective of CSR programs but also as a practical communication mechanism that strengthens PT DIB's social acceptance within the local community (Ahwan, 2025)

Studies of participation provide the normative and methodological base for this area. Arnstein (1969) distinguished tokenistic forms of participation, such as informing and consultation, from genuine citizen power, warning that participation without influence over decisions is symbolic. Chambers (1994) described Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a family of approaches that enable local people to share, analyze, and act on their own knowledge, while Servaes (2008) argued that participatory communication for social change replaces the top-down transmission of messages with dialogue and local ownership. Empirical CSR studies in Indonesia link these ideas to empowerment. Gresta et al. (2023) found that CSR partnerships with small enterprises require careful planning, community-based development, and continuous assistance rather than one-time financial support, and Ahwan (2025) proposed a community relations model based on community development CSR. ElAlfy et al. (2020) trace how CSR research has increasingly aligned with the sustainable development goals, which reinforces the expectation that CSR programs deliver community-level development rather than charity.

Position of this study. Earlier work generally evaluates participation and empowerment as program features or outcomes. This study treats PRA, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), and focus group discussions (FGDs) as communication practices and asks how participatory communication shaped the design of the empowerment program before implementation, particularly how community needs were distinguished from wants.

Social License to Operate

Social License to Operate (SLO) refers to the level of acceptance, trust, and social legitimacy granted by communities to companies for conducting their operations. Unlike formal legal permits, SLO is informal, dynamic, and shaped by public perceptions of corporate behavior. In industries with significant social and environmental impacts, SLO is critical because it determines the stability of relationships between companies and local communities.

SLO is developed through continuous communication and mutually beneficial interactions between companies and communities. Gehman et al. explains that SLO evolves

through three stages: *acceptance*, *approval*, and *psychological identification* (Gehman et al., 2017). These stages indicate that social acceptance develops gradually through community experiences of a company's presence, commitment, and tangible contributions. In this study, SLO serves as a framework for assessing the extent to which PT DIB's CSR communication strategy builds trust, public acceptance, and social legitimacy in Pelapis Village.

Research on SLO has progressed from defining the concept to explaining how it is earned. Thomson and Boutilier (2011) described SLO as levels of community support, and Prno and Slocombe (2012) traced the concept to governance and sustainability theories, showing that it operates as a socially negotiated arrangement beyond formal regulation. Moffat and Zhang (2014) proposed an integrative model in which the quality of interaction between company and community, procedural fairness, and perceived impacts shape trust, which in turn underpins community acceptance of mining. Dare et al. (2014) concluded from forestry case studies that community engagement is critical to SLO although its capacity to influence the license is not yet well understood and argued that SLO is better conceived as a continuum of licenses achieved at different levels of society than as a single license. Komnitsas (2020) reviewed present views and future trends on SLO in mining.

Position of this study. Much SLO research concerns extractive sectors and tends to explain acceptance once operations are under way. This study offers a qualitative account of how early communication contributes to the conditions for acceptance in a coastal industrial-area setting, and it treats SLO as a socially constructed and evolving outcome rather than a state that can be certified.

Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined the role of CSR in building a Social License to Operate (SLO), most focus on program outcomes rather than the communication strategy planning process underlying those outcomes (Komnitsas, 2020). In coastal communities characterized by high socio-economic vulnerability, communication planning is a critical stage for building trust, acceptance, and social legitimacy from the beginning of project development.

Taken together, the four areas converge on the view that engagement, dialogue, participation, and trust are central to social acceptance. Three gaps remain. First, studies in each area are largely conducted separately, so the line running from early engagement through dialogue and planning to acceptance and SLO has rarely been examined as one process. Second, as Dare et al. (2014) note, the capacity of engagement to shape SLO is not yet well understood, and, as Komnitsas (2020) observes, attention has concentrated on program outcomes rather than on the communication planning that precedes them. Third, evidence from coastal fishing communities adjacent to down streaming industrial areas in Indonesia remains limited. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the pre-implementation of communication planning of PT DIB in Pelapis Village as a single, integrated process.

Research Question and Objective

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the CSR communication strategy planning process of PT DIB in the Fishermen Empowerment Program as an effort to build a Social License to Operate (SLO) in Pelapis Village, North Kayong Regency. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on CSR as a strategic communication process that begins with social assessment, stakeholder dialogue, and the formulation of programs that are adaptive to local needs. Specifically, this study analyzes stakeholder identification, message formulation, and empowerment program design as key elements in building trust and social legitimacy for companies operating in coastal communities.

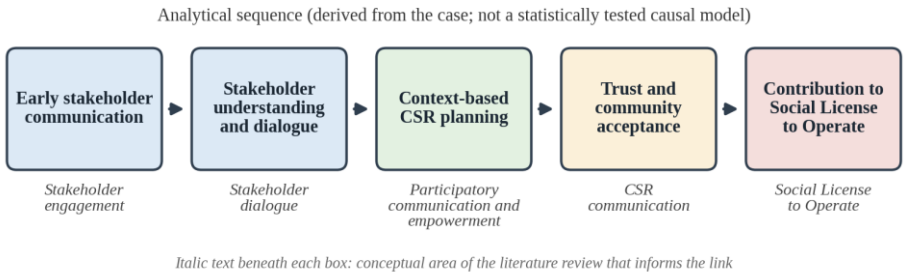
Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: *How does early stakeholder communication in the CSR communication planning of PT DIB contribute to*

building a Social License to Operate in Pelapis Village, North Kayong Regency? The question is addressed through three sub-questions: (1) How did PT DIB initiate early stakeholder communication and dialogue with the Pelapis community before CSR implementation? (2) How did the understanding generated through dialogue inform context-based CSR planning, including the distinction between community needs and wants? (3) How did these communication processes contribute to trust, community acceptance, and the formation of SLO?

Analytical Framework

The reviewed literature suggests a conceptual relationship that guides the analysis (Figure 1). Early stakeholder communication is expected to generate stakeholder understanding and dialogue; understanding and dialogue inform context-based CSR planning; context-based planning, together with consistent implementation, fosters trust and community acceptance; and trust and acceptance contribute to SLO. Each link corresponds to one of the four conceptual areas reviewed above, as shown beneath the boxes in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Analytical Chain Linking Early Stakeholder Communication to Social License to Operate



Source: Developed by the authors based on the literature review (2026)

Based on Figure 1 above, the chain is read from left to right. Stakeholder engagement provides the entry point, stakeholder dialogue and participatory communication translate engagement into shared understanding and context-based CSR programs, and the concepts of CSR communication and SLO explain how consistent action turns those programs into trust and acceptance.

It should be emphasized that Figure 1 is an analytical model derived from literature and interpreted through a single case. It is not a causal model that was tested statistically in this study. The arrows indicate the analytical sequence used to organize and interpret qualitative evidence, and "contribution to SLO" refers to evidence of trust and acceptance reported by informants and noted during field observation, not to a measured level of SLO. The chain is therefore a tool for interpreting the case and a proposition for future testing.

Research Method

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as a product of meaning construction shaped through social interactions and individual interpretations (Erickson, 2024). Within this framework, Social License to Operate (SLO) is understood as a dynamic social construct, formed through processes of communication, negotiation of meaning, and collective experiences between the company and the community. This paradigm enables the researcher to explore how PT DIB's CSR communication strategy is interpreted by fishing

communities and how such interpretations contribute to the formation of social acceptance toward the company.

This research employs a qualitative case study approach. The case study method is selected because the research focuses on "how" and "why" questions related to the implementation of CSR communication strategies in the Fishermen Empowerment Program and their contribution to the development of SLO in Pelapis Village, North Kayong Regency (Fitrah & Luthfiyah, 2017). A qualitative approach is utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life context, emphasizing the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of research subjects (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Erickson, 2024).

Case Boundaries

The case is bound by place, time, program stage, and type of evidence. In terms of place, it is limited to Pelapis Village, the settlement closest to the Pulau Penebang Industrial Area (KIPP), and to the Fishermen Empowerment Program run by the CSR Department of PT DIB. Other CSR areas of the company (health, education, and infrastructure) and other villages are outside the case. In terms of time, the case covers August 2025 to May 2026, the period in which the program was designed and began to operate and in which the data were collected. The community protest of July 2025 over environmental permitting is treated as the context that preceded the case and not as a unit of analysis. Informants' recollections of consultations held before August 2025 were included only where they concerned the design of the fishermen program.

In terms of program stage, the case spans the five stages of communication planning summarized in Table 5: social mapping, stakeholder dialogue, program formulation, internal coordination, and early implementation with community feedback. The program lines that had reached implementation by May 2026 were the optimization of capture fisheries (for example submersible fishing lights, nets, and coral transplantation), freshwater aquaculture, and the processing of fishery products, supported by training and food-safety and halal certification. The case ends at the first harvests and the entry of products into the market. Long-term program outcomes are outside the boundary.

In terms of evidence, the case rests on primary data only: interviews with six informants and the researcher's field observation. No official company documents, such as CSR reports, work plans, standard operating procedures, or complaint records, were collected or analyzed. Where informants mentioned such documents, the mention is treated as the informant's account and not as documentary evidence.

The object of this study is the CSR communication strategy of PT DIB within the Fishermen Empowerment Program, while the subjects consist of informants selected purposively based on their involvement in and knowledge of the studied phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2021). The informants include internal company representatives (the CSR manager and CSR field staff), an academic expert who advised the program, a village government official, and a fisher from Pelapis Village who benefited from the program. How they were selected and how data saturation was judged are explained below.

Informants and Data Saturation

Informants were selected purposively against three criteria: direct involvement in planning or implementing the Fishermen Empowerment Program, first-hand knowledge of communication between the company and the Pelapis community, and willingness to be interviewed. Selection was progressive and followed an emergent design: the sample developed gradually, partly on the recommendation of earlier informants, until the point of redundancy. Six informants from four stakeholder categories took part (Table 1). To protect anonymity,

informants are cited by code throughout this article. The three CSR Department informants gave the planners' and implementers' accounts of how communication was designed and carried out. The village official and the fisher gave community-side accounts of how this communication was experienced. The academic expert, who coordinated the program's technical advisory team, added a perspective from outside the company's line management.

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

Category (n)	Code	Role	Relevance to the study	Interview(s)
Company, CSR Department (n = 3)	CSR-1	CSR manager	Led program planning and communication strategy; can explain how mapping, dialogue, and program design decisions were made	17 March and 29 April 2026; online
	CSR-2	CSR field staff, capture-fisheries program	In daily contact with fishers; describes how aspirations were gathered and how fishers responded in the field	13 May 2026; online
	CSR-3	CSR field staff, aquaculture program	Describes site mapping, aquaculture planning, and community feedback during implementation	13 May 2026; online
External expert (n = 1)	EXP-1	Academic expert; coordinator of the program's fisheries advisory team	Contributed to technical design and to the early approach to the community; view from outside company line management	13 May 2026; online
Village government (n = 1)	VIL-1	Village government official	Took part in early consultations as an intermediary; community-side view on legitimacy and acceptance	13 May 2026; Pelapis Village
Community (n = 1)	FIS-1	Fisher; beneficiary of the capture-fisheries program	Experience of consultation, program benefits, and early concerns	13 May 2026; face to face, Pelapis Village

Source: Authors' field data (2026). Total: 6 informants in 4 categories; 7 interview sessions.

The number of informants was not fixed in advance. Data saturation was operationalized as thematic redundancy (Guest et al., 2006): interviewing stopped when further accounts repeated patterns that had already been coded and no longer produced new codes or themes relating to the three sub-questions. Two further considerations supported this judgment. First, the informants covered every stakeholder category that took part in the planning chain, from company planners to community beneficiaries. Second, accounts from the company, village, and community sides converged on the main sequence of events (initial doubt, listening-based dialogue, redirection of program content, and gradual acceptance), while differences concerned details such as the durability of assistance. Saturation here refers to this bounded case and to the research questions. With one village official and one fisher, it does not mean that the full range of views within the village was captured, a limitation returned to in the Recommendation section.

Data collection relied on primary data obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore information regarding communication strategies, program planning and implementation processes, community perceptions and experiences related to the company's CSR initiatives (Sugiyono, 2021).

Participant observation was carried out to directly understand the dynamics of interaction between the company and the community during program implementation. No official company documents were collected or analyzed; scholarly literature was used only to build the conceptual framework. The period, number, and context of data collection are described below.

Data Collection Period and Context

Fieldwork took place between March and May 2026, seven to nine months after the program began in August 2025. Seven in-depth interviews were held with the six informants: two with CSR-1 (17 March and 29 April 2026) and one with the other five informants on 13 May 2026 (Table 1). Interviews with company and expert informants were conducted online, and the interview with the fisher was held face to face in Pelapis Village. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted in Indonesian, and focused first on the planning stage: how aspirations were gathered, who was involved, how messages were adapted, what challenges arose, and how the community responded. Interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Field observation complemented the interviews. The visit to Pelapis Village on 13 May 2026 and interactions between CSR staff and fishers. Observation concerned program implementation as it could be seen during fieldwork. The early planning activities (social mapping, PRA and RRA, and FGDs) took place before fieldwork began and were therefore reconstructed from informants' accounts and not observed.

This timing shapes how the evidence should be read. Because data collection began after the early communication activities and while the program was already running (training had started in August 2025, and products had begun to reach the market), the account of early communication is a retrospective reconstruction cross-checked across informant categories, whereas communication during implementation could be observed directly. The design suits a question about how early communication is understood considering later program experience, but the early phase is reported as remembered and not as recorded at the time. In addition, the researcher is employed by PT DIB in a different department (corporate communications) and obtains written research permission from the CSR Manager. This position eased access but may have led company informants to present the company favorably and community informants to temper criticism. To limit this, the researcher explained the academic purpose of the study at the start of the interviews and compared company accounts with those of the village official, the fisher, and the external expert.

Following the data collection process, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and integrated with observation notes into a unified database. The data collected were then reviewed repeatedly to identify meaningful units related to CSR communication planning, stakeholder engagement, community participation, and the development of a Social License to Operate (SLO). Similar statements and field observations were subsequently coded and grouped into thematic categories based on recurring patterns and relationships among the data. These themes were continuously refined by comparing information obtained from different informants and observation notes before being interpreted using Stakeholder Theory, CSR Communication Theory, and the Social License to Operate framework. The interpreted themes then became the basis for the interactive analysis process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles and Huberman, allowing the research findings to emerge through an iterative process of comparison, verification, and theoretical interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages*: data reduction*, *data display*, and *conclusion drawing*. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing data based on key themes, such as CSR communication strategies, stakeholder engagement, and community acceptance dynamics.

Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation of relationships among findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through an iterative verification process by comparing field data, theoretical frameworks, and findings from previous studies.

Illustration of the Analytical Procedure

Analysis moved from transcript to theory in four steps, illustrated with one chain from the data (Table 2). First, each transcript, kept in Indonesian, was read repeatedly and divided into meaningful units. Second, each unit received an initial code, a short descriptive phrase close to the informant's wording. Third, codes with similar meaning were compared across informants, grouped into categories, and consolidated into the five themes reported in Table 4. Fourth, each theme was interpreted against Stakeholder Theory, CSR Communication Theory, and the Social License to Operate framework, and the interpretation was checked against accounts from other informant categories. Excerpts were translated into English by the authors for this article.

Table 2 follows one chain, the theme "dialogue separated community needs from wants" (Finding 2). The two excerpts come from different informant categories. CSR-1 describes how the company approached a community that did not immediately accept the experts' proposals, and VIL-1 describes how the community's initial expectation of compensation changed. The excerpts were coded separately. Their codes were then grouped because they describe two sides of one process: the company's persuasive and participatory approach, and the community's movement from expecting compensation toward accepting the program.

Table 2. Example of the Analytical Process from Interview Excerpt to Theoretical Interpretation

Interview excerpt	Initial codes	Theme	Theoretical interpretation
"The approach to the community was quite intense because the consultants' understanding could not simply be accepted by the community. So we used a more persuasive and participatory approach, for example by giving illustrations, videos, pictures, and examples of similar programs in other areas so that the community could more easily understand the purpose of the program." (CSR-1)	Expert proposal not readily accepted Intensive approach Persuasive and participatory approach Visual and comparative examples	Dialogue separated community needs from wants (Finding 2; Table 4)	Compensation demands were redirected, not rejected, through persuasive dialogue and demonstration. Read with Arnstein (1969), this is dialogic consultation and not a transfer of decision power. Read with Gehman et al. (2017), acceptance followed tangible results, which corresponds to the early stage of the SLO sequence; evidence of approval or psychological identification was not collected.
"There was even a view that the company's presence should immediately bring compensation or cash assistance. But after the program ran and the results began to show, such as a catfish harvest that generated income, the community gradually began to accept it and became enthusiastic." (VIL-1)	Expectation of immediate compensation Acceptance after visible results		

Source: Authors' analysis of interview transcripts (2026)

The interpretation was not drawn from either excerpt alone. FIS-1 also reported that early objections eased after assistance began and communication opened, and CSR-1 reported that visual illustrations and examples from other areas were used to explain the program. Because company, village, and community accounts converged, the pattern was retained as a

theme and not as one informant's opinion. The interpretive step has limits. The excerpts show how informants describe the shift from compensation to empowerment, but they do not show who decided the final program content. For this reason Finding 2 does not claim that decision-making power was transferred to the community.

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing data obtained from the four informant categories (company, external expert, village government, and community) and confirming interview results with findings from field observation (Sugiyono, 2021). This triangulation technique aims to enhance the credibility and consistency of the data, thereby ensuring the scientific rigor and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Research Procedure

The research followed a sequential procedure from site selection to model development, summarized in Table 3 (the case boundaries, informants, and analysis are detailed above). In line with case study logic, which defines a bounded case and draws on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018), and with the interactive analysis model of Miles et al. (2014), the later steps were iterative: coding, triangulation, and interpretation were repeated as data from different sources were compared.

Table 3. Research Procedure Sequence

Step	Activities in This Study	Output / Purpose
1. Site selection	Pelapis Village was selected as the community closest to the Pulau Penebang Industrial Area (KIPP), characterized by dependence on seasonal capture fisheries and by early resistance to the project. The case was bounded to the Fishermen Empowerment Program, August 2025–May 2026.	Bounded case: CSR communication of PT DIB in Pelapis Village
2. Informant identification	Six informants were selected purposively from four categories: CSR Department (3), external expert (1), village government (1), and fisher beneficiary (1) (Table 1). Selection continued progressively until thematic redundancy.	Informants with direct knowledge of the phenomenon
3. Ethical consent	Research written was obtained from the CSR Manager. Informants were informed of the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation, and their consent was obtained before data collection.	Ethically grounded access to informants
4. Interviews	Seven in-depth interviews with six informants (March–May 2026) explored communication strategy, program implementation, and community perceptions.	Primary data on communication planning and perceptions
5. Observation	Participant observation of company–community interaction during program implementation.	Primary data on interaction dynamics
6. Transcription	Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and integrated with observation notes into one database.	Unified database
7. Coding	The data were reviewed repeatedly to identify meaningful units, and similar statements and field observations were coded (example in Table 2).	Coded data units

Step	Activities in This Study	Output / Purpose
8. Thematic analysis	Codes were grouped into themes through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles and Huberman).	Five major themes (Table 4)
9. Triangulation	Source triangulation compared statements across the four informant categories and against field observation.	Credibility and consistency of findings
10. Interpretation	Themes were interpreted using Stakeholder Theory, CSR Communication Theory, and the SLO framework.	Theoretical meaning of the themes
11. Model development	Interpreted themes were synthesized into an analytical model of early stakeholder communication.	Proposed model (Figure 2)

Source: Authors' research design (2026)

Based on Table 3 above, the study moved from defining the case (steps 1–3), through data collection (steps 4–6) and data processing and analysis (steps 7–10), to model development (step 11). Informed consent (step 3) preceded all data collection, and triangulation (step 9) was applied before the themes were interpreted theoretically. The resulting model (step 11) is an analytical model derived from the case; it was not tested statistically.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that the CSR communication strategy planning process of PT DIB represents a strategic response to the social dynamics encountered by the company during its initial entry into Pelapis Village. In the early phase, the company faced community resistance due to a top-down communication approach that failed to establish equitable relationships with local stakeholders. This condition prompted management to reorient its strategy by integrating CSR programs from the outset of the project as a more dialogic and participatory communication instrument. These findings reinforce the literature suggesting that communication failure and limited stakeholder engagement are primary drivers of social conflict in industrial projects (Leonard, 2018). In this context, CSR is positioned not merely as a social program but as a communication strategy to foster engagement and secure social legitimacy.

The findings are first summarized in Table 4 and then discussed one by one. Each major finding is discussed in five steps: the finding itself, the previous theory or research against which it is read, the points of agreement or difference with that literature, an explanation of why the pattern emerged in this case, and the new contribution of the study.

Table 4. Major Themes Identified from the Analysis of CSR Communication Strategy Planning

Theme	Empirical Findings	Interpretation	Theoretical Link
Early stakeholder communication	The company-initiated communication before program implementation through PRA, RRA, FGDs, interviews, and informal meetings.	CSR communication began with understanding community conditions rather than delivering corporate messages.	CSR Communication; Stakeholder Dialogue
Community needs assessment	The planning process distinguishes between community *needs* and *wants* through participatory discussions.	Communication functioned as a process of identifying priority issues and formulating relevant CSR programs.	Community Empowerment; Participatory Communication

Theme	Empirical Findings	Interpretation	Theoretical Link
Stakeholder mapping	Community leaders, village officials, and influential local actors were identified as communication intermediaries.	Communication effectiveness depended on recognizing local social structures and trusted actors.	Stakeholder Theory
Organizational integration	CSR planning involved top management, CSR, finance, HSE, and corporate communication divisions.	CSR communication was integrated into organizational decision-making rather than implemented independently.	Strategic CSR Communication
Adaptive communication	The grievance mechanism enabled continuous community feedback and complaint management.	CSR communication continued beyond planning through ongoing dialogue and relationship management.	Social License to Operate (SLO)

Source: Authors' analysis based on interviews and observation (2026)

Based on Table 4 above, the CSR communication planning of PT DIB consisted of five interrelated themes rather than separate activities. Early stakeholder communication was the entry point, needs assessment translated dialogue into program priorities, stakeholder mapping identified trusted local actors, organizational integration secured internal commitment, and the grievance mechanism sustained dialogue after implementation. Together, the themes indicate that CSR communication planning is a continuous and adaptive process that depends on both external engagement and internal commitment.

Finding 1: Communication Began with Listening before Message Delivery

Finding. PT DIB did not open its engagement with message delivery. After the top-down approach of the early phase met resistance, the company reoriented its strategy toward social mapping through PRA and RRA, FGDs, in-depth interviews, direct engagement with community leaders, and informal meetings. This "listening first" strategy meant that understanding community aspirations and perceptions preceded program design, and the information gathered became the basis for identifying local priorities and reducing communication gaps.

Previous theory. In Morsing and Schultz's (2006) typology, an involvement strategy treats stakeholders as participants in shaping corporate action rather than as recipients of messages, and Acuti et al. (2024) emphasize openness and responsiveness as conditions of genuine dialogue. Chambers (1994) presents PRA as a way for local people to share and analyze their own knowledge.

Agreement/difference. The finding agrees with these perspectives and with Mulyasari et al. (2021) and Wamea et al. (2023), who associate early and continuous engagement with acceptance and program effectiveness. It differs in emphasis. Earlier studies describe engagement strategies or evaluate programs in other sectors, whereas the present case shows engagement that began before any program existed, in a community that had initially resisted a one-way approach.

Explanation. The resistance experienced at entry made the limits of one-way information evident: without prior knowledge of local conditions, the company could not communicate credibly. Listening first therefore functioned as a precondition for communication, generating the understanding needed for later dialogue and planning (Table 4, early stakeholder communication).

New contribution. The study shows that, in CSR planning, listening is itself the first communicative act. Social mapping and dialogue are not preliminary administrative tasks but the stage at which communication begins, which extends the involvement strategy to the pre-implementation phase.

Finding 2: Dialogue Separated Community Needs from Wants

Finding. Initially the community demanded short-term economic compensation in response to concerns over livelihood loss. Through participatory discussions and persuasive, reflective communication, the company distinguished community needs from wants and gradually shifted the focus toward long-term empowerment programs, including technology, technical assistance, and freshwater aquaculture development.

Previous theory. Empowerment-based CSR emphasizes capacity building and independence over charity (ElAlfy et al., 2020; Ahwan, 2025), and Gresta et al. (2023) argue that CSR requires careful planning, community-based development, and continuous assistance rather than one-time financial support. Arnstein (1969) cautions that consultation without influence over decisions can be tokenistic, and Servaes (2008) stresses dialogue and local ownership.

Agreement/difference. The finding agrees with the empowerment literature that sustainable CSR moves from compensation to capacity building. It adds nuance on how that move occurred: rather than rejecting community requests or accommodating all of them, the company redirected aspirations through dialogue. In Arnstein's terms, the process went beyond informing to dialogic consultation, but this study does not claim that decision-making power was transferred to the community.

Explanation. Because fishing households face seasonal and unstable income, compensation demands were an understandable response to livelihood uncertainty. Communication allowed community members to weigh short-term expectations against longer-term economic resilience, so that aspirations were redirected rather than denied, which encouraged shared ownership of the program.

New contribution. The study shows that distinguishing needs from wants is a communicative achievement and not only a planning technique. CSR communication operates here as a meaning-making process in which company and community jointly redefine what counts as a priority.

Finding 3: Local Leaders Served as Communication Mediators

Finding. In stakeholder mapping, PT DIB identified community leaders, village officials, and influential local actors and used them as communication mediators rather than addressing the entire community directly. These actors held social legitimacy and understood local cultural values, and they translated corporate objectives into language that the community could understand and accept.

Previous theory. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) holds that firms should manage relationships according to stakeholder interests and influence, and Mitchell et al. (1997) explain stakeholder salience through power, legitimacy, and urgency.

Agreement/difference. The finding agrees that identifying influential and legitimate actors is central to stakeholder management. It differs in purpose: in salience models identification serves the firm's prioritization of stakeholder claims, whereas in this case mapping was used to build culturally appropriate channels for two-way communication.

Explanation. Local leaders had a credibility that the company lacked at entry. Their involvement reduced communication barriers, facilitated the dissemination of information, and encouraged broader participation, which accelerated social acceptance.

New contribution. The study links stakeholder theory to participatory communication by showing stakeholder mapping as the construction of communication channels and not only a ranking of stakeholders. A caution is warranted: this study did not assess whether leader-mediated communication reached all community groups equally, which should be examined in future research.

Finding 4: CSR Communication Was Integrated across Organizational Functions

Finding. CSR communication planning involved top management, CSR, finance, HSE, and corporate communication divisions and, according to informants, was supported by internal planning instruments such as the Work Plan and Budget (*Rencana Kerja dan Budget*/RKB) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); these documents were reported by informants and were not examined in this study.

Previous theory. Alizadeh (2022) positions CSR as a strategic component of corporate governance, Song and Tao (2022) highlight dialogic communication and managerial facilitation, and Camilleri (2022) stresses consistency between what companies communicate and what they do.

Agreement/difference. The finding supports the argument that effective CSR communication requires managerial commitment, organizational facilitation, and coordinated internal communication. Song and Tao's (2022) evidence concerns internal CSR directed at employees, whereas this case shows that community-facing communication also depends on internal coordination.

Explanation. Cross-functional involvement allowed proposals to be evaluated from operational, environmental, financial, and communication perspectives at the same time. This minimized inconsistencies between corporate commitments and program implementation and improved readiness to respond to stakeholder expectations, which supports the credibility of what is communicated to the community.

New contribution. The study identifies internal integration as a precondition of external credibility: communication was embedded in organizational decision-making instead of being delegated to a single division.

Finding 5: The Grievance Mechanism Sustained Dialogue after Implementation

Finding. PT DIB developed a grievance mechanism through which community members could express complaints and concerns directly and constructively, reducing the potential for open conflict. Feedback provided updated information on local concerns and program implementation, and the company used complaints as opportunities to improve communication quality rather than as indicators of failure.

Previous theory. Acuti et al. (2024) emphasize ongoing dialogue and genuine responsiveness, Moffat and Zhang (2014) link procedural fairness and the quality of interaction to trust, and Gehman et al. (2017) describe SLO as evolving through acceptance, approval, and psychological identification. Dare et al. (2014) conceive SLO as a continuum of licenses achieved at different levels of society.

Agreement/difference. The finding agrees that SLO is dynamic and must be maintained through continued interaction. The evidence indicates movement from initial resistance toward trust and acceptance, which corresponds to the earlier stages in the sequence described by Gehman et al. (2017). The study did not collect evidence that would show approval or psychological identification, so it makes no claim about those stages.

Explanation. A complaint channel gives community members a voice after programs are delivered, and visible responses signal that the company is responsive. Repeated interaction of this kind allows trust to accumulate gradually, which is consistent with the view that

acceptance develops through communities' experience of a company's presence, commitment, and contributions.

New contribution. The study presents the grievance mechanism as the institutional bridge between planning-stage dialogue and long-term maintenance of SLO. It turns early communication from a one-off preparation into a continuing cycle, which the proposed model in Figure 2 represents.

Taken together, the five findings can be arranged into a sequence of planning stages, shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Stages of CSR Communication Planning Identified in This Study

Stage	Main Activities	Communication Objective	Expected Outcome
Social Mapping	PRA, RRA, preliminary observation, stakeholder identification	Understand local conditions and social dynamics	Initial stakeholder understanding
Stakeholder Dialogue	FGDs, interviews, consultation with community leaders	Identify aspirations, concerns, and community priorities	Mutual understanding and trust
Program Formulation	Prioritizing needs, designing empowerment programs, internal coordination	Align CSR programs with community needs	Context-based CSR program design
Internal Integration	Coordination among CSR, HSE, finance, management, and communication units	Ensure organizational commitment and resource allocation	Integrated CSR communication strategy
Implementation & Feedback	Program implementation and grievance mechanism	Maintain dialogue and respond to community concerns	Community acceptance and strengthened SLO

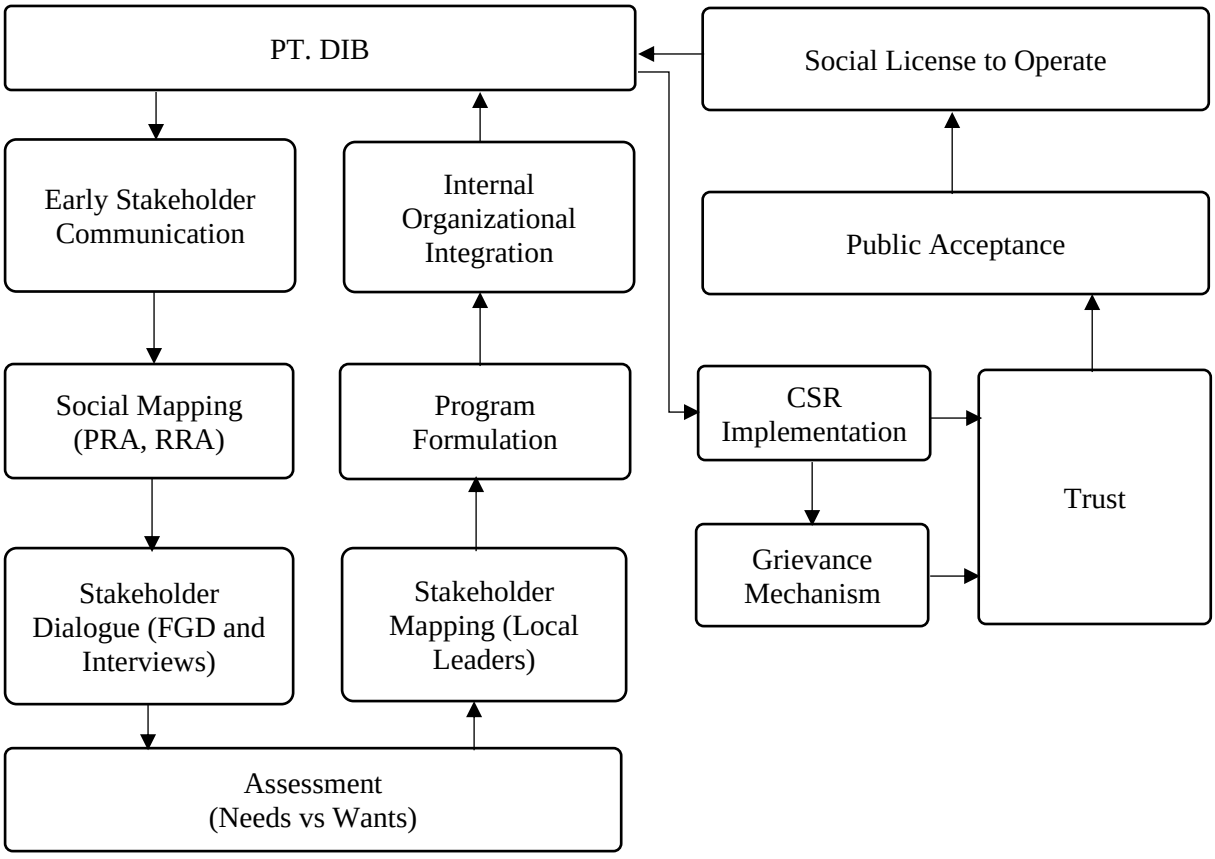
Source: Developed by the authors from the results of thematic analysis (2026)

Based on Table 5 above, the stages presented illustrate that CSR communication planning identified in this study follows a sequential yet adaptive process. Although the planning stages are presented systematically, the findings indicate that communication did not occur in a rigid linear sequence. Information obtained through stakeholder dialogue frequently influenced subsequent program formulation, while feedback received during implementation contributed to continuous refinement of communication strategies and CSR activities. This demonstrates that CSR communication planning should be understood as an iterative learning process in which companies continuously improve their understanding of stakeholder expectations through ongoing interaction. Rather than functioning merely as a mechanism for disseminating information, communication became an instrument for identifying community priorities, negotiating shared objectives, and developing empowerment programs that reflected local realities. Accordingly, CSR communication planning emerged not only as an administrative requirement but also as a strategic process for strengthening stakeholder trust and facilitating the gradual formation of a Social License to Operate.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the understanding of CSR communication by emphasizing that communication does not occur solely at the implementation stage but begins at the strategic planning phase. These findings enrich the concept of integrative CSR communication strategy by demonstrating that needs identification, stakeholder mapping, and program formulation are integral components of CSR communication. Furthermore, this study reinforces the concept of Social License to Operate (SLO) by showing that social legitimacy is built through continuous communication processes from the early stages of a project, rather than merely as an outcome of CSR programs.

The proposed model (Figure 2) synthesizes the findings of this study into a conceptual model illustrating how early stakeholder communication contributes to the development of Social License to Operate. The model demonstrates that CSR communication is initiated through early stakeholder communication, followed by social mapping, stakeholder dialogue, and community needs assessment before any CSR program is formally implemented. Information generated during these processes subsequently informs stakeholder mapping, program formulation, and internal organizational integration, ensuring that CSR initiatives are developed based on community aspirations and organizational readiness. This sequence indicates that communication functions not merely as a medium for disseminating corporate information but as a strategic mechanism for generating shared understanding and guiding organizational decision-making.

Figure 2. Proposed Model of Early Stakeholder Communication for Building Social License to Operate



Source: Developed by the authors based on the research findings (2026)

Based on Figure 2 above, the proposed model further illustrates that CSR implementation alone is insufficient to establish sustainable social legitimacy. Following implementation, the grievance mechanism provides an institutional channel through which community members can communicate concerns, provide feedback, and participate in the continuous improvement of CSR activities. The existence of this feedback mechanism demonstrates that communication remains active throughout the project lifecycle rather than ending once the CSR program has been delivered. Consequently, trust is gradually developed through repeated interactions, organizational responsiveness, and the consistency between corporate commitments and actual program implementation. As trust increases, community

acceptance becomes stronger, ultimately contributing to the formation of Social License to Operate.

Another important implication of the model is its cyclical nature. The Social License to Operate achieved through continuous communication and stakeholder engagement does not represent the final stage of the process but instead becomes an organizational asset that supports subsequent communication planning and future CSR initiatives. This finding suggests that communication planning, implementation, evaluation, and stakeholder feedback should be viewed as interconnected components of a continuous management cycle. The model therefore extends previous perspectives on CSR communication by positioning early stakeholder communication as the foundation of corporate legitimacy rather than limiting communication to the promotion or reporting of completed CSR activities.

From a theoretical standpoint, the proposed model also strengthens the relationship between Stakeholder Theory, CSR Communication Theory, and the concept of Social License to Operate. Stakeholder Theory explains the importance of identifying and engaging relevant social actors during the planning process, while CSR Communication Theory emphasizes dialogue, participation, and mutual understanding as the basis of effective corporate communication. These theoretical perspectives converge in explaining how continuous communication enables companies to establish legitimacy within the communities affected by their operations. Consequently, this study argues that Social License to Operate should be understood not merely as a social outcome but as the cumulative result of a structured, participatory, and adaptive communication process that begins long before CSR implementation takes place.

Figure 2 elaborates the analytical chain presented in Figure 1 with the case-specific mechanisms identified in the findings. As with Figure 1, it should be read as an analytical model derived from a single case through interpretive thematic analysis and not as a causal model tested statistically. The arrows represent an analytical sequence supported by informants' accounts and field observation; the contribution to SLO is interpreted from evidence of trust and community acceptance and not from a measured level of SLO; and generalization is analytical (transferability to comparable settings) rather than statistical.

Conclusion

In response to the research question, this study finds that early stakeholder communication contributed to building a Social License to Operate in Pelapis Village through a sequence in which listening and dialogue generated stakeholder understanding, understanding informed context-based CSR planning, and planning, consistent implementation, and responsive grievance handling fostered trust and community acceptance. This sequence is an analytical model derived from a single case; it was not tested statistically and indicates a contribution to SLO rather than a measured level of it.

This study demonstrates that the CSR communication strategy planning process of PT DIB is a key factor in building a Social License to Operate (SLO) in Pelapis Village. CSR communication planning should not be understood merely as an initial administrative stage, but as a strategic process encompassing stakeholder identification, social needs mapping, message formulation, and the design of programs grounded in local context. The company's shift from a one-way communication approach to a dialogic and participatory model represents a critical turning point in addressing social resistance during the early phase of the project.

The findings highlight that the effectiveness of CSR communication is largely determined by the company's ability to develop shared understanding with the community. Processes such as social mapping, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct engagement with community

leaders enable the company to distinguish between community needs and wants, and to design more sustainable interventions. Furthermore, communication strategies that leverage key local figures as mediators, supported by adaptive grievance mechanisms, were found to contribute to strengthening trust and reducing the potential for social conflict.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens and extends the concept of CSR communication by positioning the planning stage as an integral part of the strategic communication process. In addition, it confirms that SLO is not formed instantaneously, but rather through the accumulation of continuous communication processes from the early stages of a project. Accordingly, CSR functions not only as a social program but also as a communication instrument that builds corporate social legitimacy.

From a practical standpoint, this study underscores the importance of integrating communication strategies with community empowerment-based CSR program design. Contextual, participatory, and long-term-oriented approaches have been shown to enhance social acceptance, reduce resistance, and strengthen corporate operational sustainability. Therefore, companies operating in areas with high social vulnerability should position CSR communication planning as a strategic component of project management.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, companies operating in socially sensitive areas are recommended to integrate early stakeholder communication into the initial planning stage of CSR programs rather than limiting communication to program implementation or reporting activities. Participatory approaches, including social mapping, stakeholder dialogue, and continuous grievance mechanisms, should be institutionalized as part of corporate communication strategy to strengthen community trust and support the long-term development of Social License to Operate. Future research is also encouraged to examine the applicability of the proposed communication model across different industrial sectors and geographical contexts using comparative or longitudinal approaches to further validate its contribution to CSR communication and stakeholder engagement studies.

This study has limitations. It is a single qualitative case study, so its findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable, and the proposed model has not been tested causally. The evidence points to trust and acceptance but does not measure the later stages of SLO, and perspectives of community members not reached through the identified local leaders may be underrepresented. The community perspective rests on one village official and one fisher beneficiary. Because data collection began after the early communication activities, the account of the early phase is a retrospective reconstruction from informants' recollections. No company documents were analyzed to corroborate it, and the researcher's position as an employee of PT DIB may have shaped what informants were willing to say.

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