

## Building CSR legitimacy through intercultural communication in Bula's Community

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), has often been viewed along the lines of technocratic compliance in the case of Bula, East Seram, an area of historical neglect and layered cultural diversity region. Technocratic Compliance sees CSR as little more than a box-ticking exercise, whereby the opportunity for real social community empowerment is lost. **Purpose:** The objective of this study is to propose an alternative pathway for CSR, which would involve the reframing of a socially bottomed phenomenon, ethnically and culturally integrated, from a prescriptive imposition to an ethical, cross communicative practice of co-creation. **Methods:** The research poses a qualitative case study design. Data were integrated from the exercise of participant observation, document reviews, and semi-structured interviews with 15 informants, including representatives of the corporation, community leaders, and civil servants. This methodology enables the capturing of CSR phenomena from several perspectives. **Results:** Findings point to the generalized gap existing corporately centralized systems and community demands to be engaged in processes of collaboration and partnership. Interventions implemented in the absence of cultural dialogue are, at best, likely to interact with bureaucratic functions and survive as indifference. In contrast, initiatives designed and implemented in partnership demonstrated prevalence to social support and sustainable change. **Conclusion:** The study states that the legitimacy of CSR is not a function of positive legal prescription, but rather an outcome of meaningful, sustained dialogues across cultures. **Implications:** This research improves the understanding of CSR as a type of “social diplomacy.” It suggests that companies should treat philanthropic acts as more than a transaction, creating and sustaining culturally adaptive communications that respect local knowledge and promote a more just and more balanced industry-society relationship.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility; intercultural communication; community legitimacy; cultural discourse; extractive industry

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 10 years in Indonesia, there have been many changes to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program. The CSR program has become an integral part of the corporate-community relations transformation strategy, especially in the case of the extractive industries (Mardiana & Irawati, 2019; Setyadi, 2024). The changes are due in large part to the “post-reformation” setting with the increasing tide of demands for transparency, accountability, and participatory governance in the management of natural resources (Addison & Roe, 2018). Such requests show significant socio-political shifts in the country, marked by an increasing number of civil society organizations, local communities, and advocates who oppose the centralized control of resource management by corporate and state regimes. Thus, there has been a growing expectation in the corporate world to operate beyond the profit-maximizing paradigm and to engage with the social and cultural contexts of the populations in which they operate (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018; Peddada & Adam, 2019). For organizations, establishing these social relationships is a crucial part of social license to operate and, therefore, of corporate reputation.

In Indonesia, Article 74 of Law No. 40 of 2007 on Limited Liability Companies requires

companies, particularly those engaged in managing natural resources, to implement a CSR program. This means that, by virtue of this legal framework, CSR is no longer considered to be an act of goodwill through voluntary philanthropy, but rather an obligation of a corporation in its activities directed at promoting sustainable development and enhancing the welfare of the community.

Additionally, activities involving CSR are linked to public relations (PR) activities and corporate communications due to their ability to build corporate image, handle stakeholder communications, and obtain legitimacy (Koswara et al., 2023; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). According to Bakti et al. (2025), public relations acts as a communication link in CSR activities, balancing internal communication to company management and employees, and external communication to promote the company's success. In the same way, Koswara et al. (2023) illustrate how the choice and use of communication channels and corporate language will help reduce the potential for misunderstandings in the corporate world, especially when the situation is multicultural. Therefore, CSR cuts across a number of areas, such as compliance, ethics, and strategic communication, which makes it important to the study of communication.

The economic approach of Indonesia,

especially during the New Order era, which was characterized by rapid industrialization and hyper-exploitation of natural resources, can best be understood within the context of an extractivist paradigm. While such an approach may have contributed to economic growth, it also exacerbated the social and environmental inequities associated with being a resource-rich country. According to Addison and Roe (2018), such inequities foster the emergence of a dual society in which a corporate class monopolizes all wealth, while the surrounding community remains socially and environmentally impoverished and excluded. All in all, this is an illustration of a growth paradigm in which social justice and inclusion are not merely absent but entirely absent.

CSR initiatives have been shown to lose their transformative capability when used as tools of corporate social control rather than avenues for community uplift. Rather than fostering participatory development or distributive justice, CSR often reduces to performative acts meant to appease public scrutiny and protect corporate interests. Kos and Gudowski (2022) and Peddada and Adam (2019) highlight how adopting CSR initiatives without local engagement and the framework of local knowledge systems is more likely to reinforce power imbalances, thus eroding trust and legitimacy towards the intended CSR

constituents.

The existing tensions, which are most acute in natural resource-rich areas such as Bula, are no surprise. Bula, located in East Seram Regency, Maluku Province, has been a site of oil and gas exploration since the colonial era, with PT. Kalrez Petroleum Seram Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as Kalrez) operating as the primary extractive company since 1999. The region is characterized by profound socio-cultural complexity: (1) a multi-ethnic population comprising indigenous Bulaese, Javanese transmigrants, and Bugis migrants; (2) religious plurality with Muslim and Christian communities; and (3) layered governance structures involving traditional adat leaders, religious authorities, and formal village administration. This complexity is compounded by a history of marginalization, in which decades of resource extraction have yielded minimal tangible benefits for local communities, leading to deep-seated grievances, social tensions, and periodic conflicts. In 2006, a labor strike involving local workers against Kalrez escalated into violent confrontations, underscoring the fragility of corporate-community relations and the urgent need for more culturally responsive CSR approaches. CSR initiatives in this field, even when depicted as community-oriented, are encountered with skepticism, resistance, and even outright violence. All of these can be traced

back to a lack of communication, specifically to the corporate practice in question, which treats all operational frameworks as homogeneous while ignoring the culture and social context in which the corporation is embedded. Ifanda and Sisdianto (2024) and Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) observe that CSR programs driven by performative motives and corporate public relations objectives frequently alienate the communities whose support is crucial for success.

Understanding the evolution of CSR in Indonesia entails requires analyzing historical disparities, the structural divorce between corporate governance and community agency, and persistent socio-political conflicts over the management of natural resources. For CSR to serve as a catalyst to social justice and sustainable development, it must be reimagined as a culturally responsive, collaborative, and equitable process of engagement. Without this reframing, CSR may reinforce the very injustices it aims to address.

The lack of success of CSR projects in places like Bula, in a more general sense, points to an underdeveloped case of intercultural communication. When programs are designed that completely overlook the sociocultural intricacies of the local communities, such programs are not only likely to be ineffective, but also run the risk of being met with suspicion

and possible hostility (Hanazaki, 2024). This underdeveloped case represents a gap within the CSR field, in that the lack of alignment between overly technocratic, uniform, and pseudo-scientific approaches to CSR and the local cultures that are likely to be more heterogeneous. Accordingly, it is within this context that CSR should be reconceived in terms of a more fluid construct of intercultural communication that engenders greater understanding, trust, and positive engagement between the business actors and local community stakeholders.

Bula is a site historically tied to oil exploration, representing an interesting case to analyze CSR, particularly from a communication perspective. Kalrez, the only oil and gas operator in Bula, offers an interesting case for studying how one corporate actor balances the complexities and variances of CSR in a culturally composite and historically underserved community. The company's CSR activities, which include the provision of some basic infrastructure to the community and the facilitation of activities for the community's self-empowerment, provide an analysis of the critically important factors of the site in the context of the challenges and opportunities provided by the intercultural communication(s) of this extractive industry. The range of sociocultural elements derived from the region's colonial and migratory histories and

the diverse religious traditions, along with the distinct sociocultural communities and their normative religious systems, practices (*adat*), and local governance structures, contribute to a challenging environment of CSR. The diversity in the implementation of CSR in this context presents a need for an approach that is socially adaptive, informed, culturally intelligent, and contextually responsive.

For many reasons, the implementation of CSR at Bula is often complicated, especially from the point of view of structure and communication. It is primarily due to the fact that the corporate headquarters are distant from the local field teams that makes it a challenge to synchronize the various components of the program. Furthermore, CSR initiatives often overlook the real needs of local people due to a lack of local consultation during the planning stages. It is also a result of the staff's lack of knowledge about the local area, which makes initiatives seem culturally inappropriate. All of the above result in the failure of initiatives and sales programs, decreased community trust, and dissatisfaction.

Compounding these internal issues are external pressures stemming from Indonesia's decentralization initiatives, which have transferred governance authority to regional administrations. Despite the fact that the shift sought to improve regional self-government, it

has created severe problems in integrating CSR activities at the corporate level with policies across local governments. Where internal corporate communications are siloed, these additional governance barriers can seriously obstruct the formulation of coherent and effective CSR initiatives.

Although Article 74 of the 2007 Indonesian company law is important for the legal institutionalization of CSR, legal obligations alone do not guarantee genuine CSR. The key challenge is: how can companies, to achieve sustainable and community-centred CSR, transform their CSR policies to better appreciate and embrace local cultural diversity and value systems? Although meeting legal requirements is essential, there is a requirement to shift to CSR policies that are cross-culturally bottom-up and collaborative.

Based on the case study in Bula, the local community is complex, comprising diverse religions and deep-rooted traditions, as well as multiple local administrative systems. These circumstances affect how development is seen, negotiated, and addressed at the local level. In this case, companies must transform from commercial enterprises into reflective, self-aware organizations that routinely align with local wisdom, heritage, and aspirations.

It is clear this change goes beyond simple procedures; it involves a genuine commitment

to relational CSR approaches that shift emphasis to community-centered designs and community-inclusive execution and evaluation of initiatives. The collaborative construction of CSR with local stakeholders is preferable to its imposition. It is important to remember that the trust and legitimacy necessary to create meaningful change socially cannot be achieved through closed, exclusionary, and culturally inappropriate processes.

In this case, culture and intercultural communication should not be peripheral, but the very foundation of a socially responsible CSR strategy. It serves as the means of communication that facilitates understanding, trust, and joint action between the business and the community. Embedding CSR within intercultural praxis offers companies the opportunity to cultivate more equitable and sustainable partnerships that are more likely to advance community development and the enduring operational legitimacy and stability of communities in a variety of cultural settings.

In addition, community-based CSR practices rooted in local knowledge systems cannot be supplementary; they are crucial for morally responsible and effective community engagement. Local wisdom, the sum of practical knowledge, normative systems, and culturally evolved survival and progressive systems, which are devised over ages, offers

a flexible structure for communities to define, assess, and manage their own development (Pariani & Sarjan, 2024; Sagajoka & Fatima, 2023). Integrating such expertise into CSR frameworks goes beyond cultural sensitivity; it signifies a deliberate communicative choice that converts communities from passive recipients of corporate aid to active partners in determining their developmental trajectories. This transition enhances the cultural legitimacy of CSR initiatives while fostering greater community ownership, accountability, and sustainability of advantages.

In this research, the Multidimensional Theoretical Framework was used to examine CSR as a communication phenomenon. Max Weber's Theory of Social Action relates to the CSR phenomena as meaning, through some of the various subjective interpretations of a social action, made by some of the community stakeholders (Orsini, 2024), placing Weber's social action in the value sphere, as an action compliant to the community's expectations. Wendt and Onuf's Constructivist view describes social action, in this case, the social action of an individual corporation, to define the personality of the corporation and the community (Agius, 2022; Brummer & Oppermann, 2024). The theories mentioned above are not intended for use in CSR, PR, or communication in general. Nevertheless, they can be used to

analyze CSR as a communicative and socially established phenomenon. The current research draws on aspects of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and social constructivism to explain CSR, define contextual interpretations, socially construct legitimacy, and build the corporate-community relationship through intercultural communication. Applying a phenomenological lens, grounded in the work of Husserl and Schutz (Dreher & Santos, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2024), helps explain how local communities interpret CSR programs. By emphasizing the *Lebenswelt*, —the lived experience, —phenomenology reveals how CSR is manifested, opposed, or assimilated by communities, providing concrete viewpoints on socio-cultural impacts. Mead's symbolic interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Yin, 2022) emphasizes the role of symbols and meaning in the communicative praxis of CSR. In communication, identity, power, and legitimacy are configured on the relational and interactional roles of the participants, whether through speech or other means.

These different frameworks are a powerful combination to understand and interpret the CSR phenomenon as an intercultural communicative process that has a specific context, an ethical dimension, and a socially constructed reality. The analytical emphasis shifts from a purely regulatory view to a comprehensive

understanding of how development, identity, and legitimacy are articulated in various forms in different cultures.

Given the gaps in the existing literature, this study aims to; (1) understand how Kalrez perceives and practices CSR in the context of Bula's culture; (2) assess the impact of intercultural communication on the implementation of CSR and the construction of its legitimacy; and (3) evaluate the responses of local communities to CSR initiatives, as well as the impact of these responses on the welfare of the community and the legitimacy of the corporation.

To address these objectives, this study analyzes the following fundamental questions: How does Kalrez understand CSR in the context of the cultural setting of Bula? How is CSR operationalized through intercultural communication? How do the local people understand and respond to CSR, and what are the implications of this interaction on the welfare of the community and the legitimacy of the corporation?

This study contributes to the gap in the literature on CSR and intercultural communication by challenging the dominant narratives that view CSR primarily as a function of compliance, and instead, considering it as a dialogue, through the lens of culture, reciprocity, and influence. The findings provide

a practical guide for organizations in culturally diverse settings, focusing on cultural sensitivity, inclusive dialogue, and the moral dimensions of CSR. Viewed through the lens of intercultural communication, CSR is more than an economic responsibility; it is a way to build relationships, foster trust, and create opportunities for partnership to achieve community development and improve corporate legitimacy.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper examined the multicultural aspects of CSR in Bula, East Seram Regency, Indonesia, using a qualitative descriptive case study approach. For case study research, which involves multiple data sources and aims to answer 'how' and 'why' questions, the study is appropriate for examining how Kalrez adapts CSR to local cultures (Yin, 2009). When the researcher is closely connected to the research subjects, social phenomena should be studied in their natural environment (Burns, 2019; Khan, 2022).

This study was rooted in the post-positivist paradigm, which views knowledge as a socially and culturally constructed process and appreciates socially and culturally contextualized interpretations. It also disregards the claim that objectivity is absolute (Karupiah, 2022; Tripathi et al., 2024). Therefore, the researchers viewed CSR as a standard that is

never static, continuously shaped by the lived experiences of corporate actors and community members. For CSR to be relevant, it should resonate with the community's socio-cultural context.

To broaden the scope of the study, the authors examined the perspectives of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism. Stakeholder phenomenology examined the lived experiences of people involved in CSR. CSR investigated the construction of meaning through social processes and patterns of communication, whereas social constructionism examined the communicative processes by which knowledge, power, and identity are constructed. All four perspectives examined CSR in the context of Bula and evaluated CSR practices and processes at Kalrez.

The research employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Bracho et al., 2021; Klingebiel et al., 2024). Data was gathered in Bula over a period of one year and from three primary sources: (1) purposive sampling of key informants, consisting of five Kalrez corporate staff members e.g. Administrative Manager Mona Poluan, Safety Manager Ahmad SC, and geologist Nurdi Irianto to represent the corporate perspective of CSR policy and its implementation; (2) a community representative

sample of seven community leaders (e.g., including traditional leader, Wan; religious leader, Abdullah; and women's organization (PKK) representative, Alwiyah) to represent the community and cultural value systems; and (3) a governance perspective, comprising three local government officials at the village administration level.

Interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and local dialects. Each interview was 60-90 minutes long and, with interviewees' consent, was audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews were centered on the questions pertaining to (1) the perception of CSR, (2) the practice of communication, (3) the value of culture, and (4) the needs of the community. The researchers' field notes, along with the recorded audio, were used to determine the result of the interaction. In addition to the interactions, their overt and covert expressions were also analyzed. The interaction notes included pictures and field notes. The interaction notes included pictures and field notes. The company's previous reports, company policies, and the community's historical data also supported the field notes and interaction notes.

Thematic analysis (Kordel & Gruber, 2024; Neale, 2016) was used to analyze the data. Inductive/iterative research was conducted for the purpose stated in the introduction of the CSR. First, the interview transcripts and field notes

were reviewed and analyzed in detail. Then the analysis was summarized, and the analysis and results were recorded in the field and interaction notes. The researchers analyzed the field notes and summarized the analysis. The interaction notes will help guide the researchers in the analysis of the interactions to be recorded and later coded. Observations are also a scheduled plan for data integration.

For this study, various strategies were employed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of findings. To establish reliability and validate multiple sources and the findings, triangulation was used by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documents. Through member checking, the community and corporate representatives had the opportunity to review and confirm that the preliminary findings were matched to their actual experiences. The contributions of the CSR and intercultural communication specialists during peer debriefing helped to reduce the overall bias and skepticism and, in turn, enhanced the credibility of the study.

The research was carried out in Bula, East Seram, an area known for its cultural diversity and complexity, along with its rich history, and unequal power dynamics between the indigenous people and the Kalrez. Bula was chosen as it is vital for the study of intercultural communication, identity, and the

corporate legitimacy. The combination of the region's diverse religious practices, Traditional Authorities and their representatives, along with the dispersed governance systems, meant that there was a need for CSR to adapt differently at each location. The researchers were able to attain genuine insights as a result of the one year of active fieldwork, which meant that they were culturally immersed and had built trust with the participants.

The study utilizes several different frameworks in order to understand contextualized CSR as a process of cultural communication, rather than as a legal or philanthropic duty. In Bula, CSR is seen through the lens of indigenous people's beliefs, creative social constructions, and relational frameworks. This study focused on the local constructions of Kalrez's CSR initiatives, particularly on the dimensions of trust, empowerment, and legitimacy. This study illustrated the importance of local presence and sustains the need to develop a culturally sensitive and socially responsible CSR framework and initiatives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shaping Corporate Identity through Culturally-Responsive CSR in Bula: Kalrez pursued CSR initiatives in Bula to align with the legal requirements of Indonesian Company Law No. 40 of 2007, as well as to contribute to

regional identity and business negotiations. The documentation states that the region's value lies in its community, which is densely populated and rich in culture, religion, and the history of extractive industries. In this community, a company's corporate social responsibility serves as a dual function: both a means to gain 'real' social legitimacy and a community constituent 'placeholder' for member-to-member relationships.

This reflects the existing body of literature that criticizes the CSR generic model in cultures of complex adaptive systems, with particular emphasis on resource-rich and culturally rich systems (Mardiana & Irawati, 2019; Setyadi, 2024). This study is conducted on financial reports published in Indonesia and Malaysia. Methods of data collection are taken from the annual financial statements in Indonesia Stock Exchange of 17 companies and Bursa Malaysia of 22 companies. Data analysis techniques used multiple regressions. The results showed that; 1. Kalrez began operating in 1999, and substantial corporate social responsibility initiatives emerged in the wake of the 2006 labor conflict, which, from the company's perspective, broadened its scope. However, the CSR strategy, in this case, remains reactive, in line with Kowalski's (2016) social reaction, meaning external forces drive, and CSR becomes a mechanistic response to those perceptions.



Source: Research Documentation, 2007

### Figure 1 Neglected Bula Air Bridge

The interviews show that Kalrez lacks an in-house CSR department and coordination between the Jakarta headquarters and the Bula field office, pointing to structural dissonance and a limited understanding of CSR. As Administrative Manager, Mona Poluan, said, “Our CSR efforts are limited by leadership commitment and resources. Decisions are made in Jakarta without sufficient input from the field.” Safety Manager, Ahmad SC, noted, “We focus on providing infrastructure—schools, mosques, facilities—because that’s what we can measure and report.” Such comments point to a lack of internal consensus on CSR, where the corporate

layer views CSR in merely technocratic and, compliance-related terms, completely outside the frame of social involvement and cultural dimensions.

Community narratives indicate more complexity and depth. For local actors, the CSR is not a broad act of goodwill, but a moral and just obligation because of the continued siphoning of resources. Senior Wan, an elder, maintains that corporate social responsibility should not just be a nested form of positive, more fittingly corporate social responsibility. Community member Alwiyah, commented, “They build structures, but do we use them? The

**Table 1 CSR Programs Implemented by Kalrez and Their Utilization Levels in Bula**

| No | CSR Program            | Utilization Level | Description                                |
|----|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1  | School Development     | Low               | Poor maintenance and underuse              |
| 2  | Mosque Construction    | Very low          | Low community involvement                  |
| 3  | Village Council Office | Not used          | Abandoned due to lack of social engagement |
| 4  | Sports Facilities      | Moderate          | Inconsistent use                           |
| 5  | Public Health Services | Limited           | Mainly for immunizations                   |
| 6  | Sanitation Systems     | Not used          | Neglected and non-operational              |
| 7  | Scholarship Program    | Limited           | Hampered by administrative hurdles         |

Source: Researchers, 2007

water system doesn't work. The reading center is closed. These projects do not fit our real needs." Alwiyah focuses on the paradox of the investment of resources into certain structures, such as when a reading center with no books is built, while the real needs of the community remain unaddressed and ignored.

An example of this resource diversion with the Bula Air Bridge, built by Kalrez in 2005 as a water distribution system. The bridge offers the community no usable resources. Technical malfunctions and a lack of community involvement during the planning phase of water distribution further alienate the community. The community mockingly dubbed the bridge the "goat bridge" because it is primarily used for livestock crossings. This example demonstrates that when communities are not consulted, bridging projects and other resources lose social legitimacy and are branded as symbols of corporate disconnection rather than as community benefits.

Table 1 presents impact data derived from field observations and community interviews on Kalrez's CSR activities. The table shows that among the various types of infrastructure initiatives (e.g., schools, mosques, village offices, sanitation systems), most, if not all, are underutilized. According to the respondents, it is a result of a lack of maintenance, little to no community stake in the ownership of the initiatives, and, even when combined with other initiatives that didn't seem to address the community's critical issues. On the other hand, community engagement initiatives, to some extent, have moderate levels of utilization (e.g., public health services and sports facilities). The scholarship program was appreciated but was seen as difficult to access, according to the youth interviewed.

These findings underscore a distinct disparity between the company's offerings and the expectations of the local community. Wan asserts that CSR is perceived not as

philanthropy, but as just recompense. Religious leader, Abdullah, emphasized, “What our youth need are skills—tailoring, agriculture, animal husbandry—so they can be self-sufficient. Building structures without building capacity is meaningless.” This perspective reflects the community’s preference for youth vocational training programs that foster lasting empowerment over physical infrastructure.

This disparity arises from Kalrez’s restricted intercultural communication abilities. In the absence of opportunities for reciprocal discussion, CSR devolves into a unilateral display of authority. This study, rooted in phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Dreher & Santos, 2017), conceptualizes CSR as a co-created experience influenced by shared symbols and cultural significance, integral to Bula’s lifestyle.

The social constructivist approach (Wendt & Onuf) offers understanding regarding the dynamism of CSR as a social framework that unfolds through processes of constant engagement with local stakeholders (Agius, 2022; Brummer & Oppermann, 2024). In Bula, interview data reveal that Kalrez’s market-driven approach has come under criticism from community members, who prefer criticism that includes fairness, recognition of local culture, and transparency. This illustrates the tension between a corporate identity of operational

efficiency and a community demand for relational, culture-situated involvement.

Geologist Nurdi Irianto acknowledged this gap, stating, “The community doesn’t feel ownership because they’re never involved in planning. We design programs based on corporate priorities, not community priorities.” This admission points to a structural exclusion that fundamentally undermines the impact of well-resourced CSR activities.

This is worsened by insufficient meaningful communication from Kalrez. While Abdullah’s suggestion to empower local youth through skills development represents community wisdom, Kalrez’s infrastructure-focused approach reflects a fundamental misalignment between corporate CSR philosophy and community development aspirations. This is the opposite of what community members consider meaningful CSR: it should prioritize enduring social value over public relations.

Furthermore, Bula’s history as an oil extraction site since the colonial era, combined with minimal economic benefits accruing to local communities despite decades of resource exploitation, has generated feelings of marginalization and distrust toward extractive companies. Interview data reveal that community members view CSR through the lens of historical grievances, expecting it to serve as compensatory justice rather than

corporate charity. Traditional elder, Wan, stated: , “For decades, oil has been taken from our land. What have we received? CSR is not a gift—it is our right.” This perspective, echoed across community informants, indicates that traditional approaches to corporate social responsibilities (CSR) that focus only on legal compliance, or reputation saving, do not resonate with community expectations. A paradigm shift is needed: from corporate-centric CSR to community-centered, culturally-responsive CSR that recognizes local agency and historical context.

This paper argues that the CSR in Bula, as in many other places, operates in a culturally diverse context, and, as such, it cannot be restricted to simplistic approaches, but instead, must be reframed as a morally substantive, dialogic process. Following the work of Kos and Gudowski (2022) and Nesterova (2024), the purpose of CSR is to serve as an instrument of social diplomacy, a term which we defined as a continuous, interchangeable conversation that enables understanding and promotes the affirmation of one’s culture. Within the context of Bula, this means embracing local knowledge as a heritage that is not merely passive but as a living, interactive agent in the process of building corporate legitimacy. This pivot is necessary in order for CSR to serve as an instrument of cross-border solidarity and respect.

Integrating Local Wisdom into CSR: Bridging Corporate Goals and Community Needs: Considering Bula’s multicultural setting, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is based upon the recognition and interaction with the community’s intricate cultural system. These fundamental values, such as *hidop orang basudara* (community solidarity), *tungku tiga* (joint decision making), and the considerable impact of the local and religious authorities, are pivotal in the construction of ethical and developmental relations. However, interview and observational data indicate that Kalrez has not demonstrated evidence of integrating these cultural aspects into CSR planning and implementation.

Field data collected through interviews and observations indicate that the community’s perspective on CSR extends beyond economic and physical infrastructure. It emphasizes empowerment and cultural sustenance. Religious leader, Abdullah, articulated this during an interview: “It’s not just about infrastructure. We need basic education programs in tailoring, agriculture, and animal husbandry to be self-sufficient.” This perspective shows a community desire for CSR to be more socio-culturally oriented and less top-down, or devoid of local context formulation. This perspective shows an important community desire for CSR to be more socio-culturally oriented and less top-down, or

devoid of local context formulation.

The above visions highlight fundamental aspects of intercultural communication, particularly its ‘dialectic’ approach to meaning construction among diverse epistemic systems. This aligns with phenomenological and symbolic interactionist perspectives (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Dreher & Santos, 2017), which characterize CSR as an inevitably cultural, lived, and intersubjectively constructed engagement, rather than a decontextualized, monolithic act. The social constructivist approaches recognize CSR as a relational and participatory endeavor in which identity and value systems are nurtured through sustained engagement with the surrounding sociocultural context.

While these theoretical perspectives provide analytical frameworks, empirical data from Bula indicate that Kalrez continues to implement a largely technocratic, top-down CSR policy. Community informants reported that insufficient community engagement has led to many poorly designed and ineffective actions. For example, the clean water project, as observed during fieldwork and confirmed by multiple informants, failed to function due to technical issues and a lack of consultation with local residents regarding water source locations and distribution needs. Similarly, the Fatila Reading Center, observed to be largely empty during multiple field visits, suffers from minimal

community engagement during its design and planning stages, as reported by youth informants who stated they were never consulted about their reading preferences or facility needs. On the other hand, Posyandu (integrated service post) project, which the informants confirmed was developed through collaborative planning with local women’s organizations, demonstrates significantly higher community utilization and ownership, as evidenced by regular attendance records and positive testimonials from mothers.

The contrast is both operational and communicative. Interview data reveal that Kalrez’s community engagement neglects cultural components, including local dialects, indigenous metaphors, or customary discussion norms. Religious leader, Abdullah, expressed frustration: “We seek minimal demands—merely respect. Please consult with us prior to finalizing any plans, rather than after the project’s completion.” This statement underscores a persistent criticism: CSR in Bula is frequently perceived as a procedural obligation rather than a genuine endeavor in intercultural communication. The lack of culturally sensitive communication, as reflected in community testimonies and observational data, has eroded trust and reinforced the perception that CSR is more concerned with maintaining the corporate facade than with building lasting relationships. Kalrez’s CSR constraints at the institutional

**Table 2 Comparative Effectiveness of Kalrez CSR Initiatives**

| CSR Initiatives            | Top-Down Execution | Community-Based Execution |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Fatila Reading Center      | Underused          | -                         |
| Clean water infrastructure | Malfunctioning     | -                         |
| Integrated service post    | -                  | Fully operational         |
| Vocational training        | -                  | High participation        |
| Scholarship program        | Limited access     | —                         |

Source: Researchers, 2007

level indicate systemic problems within the organization. The company lacks a CSR unit with sociocultural skill sets, resulting in a focus on the physical aspects of growth and neglect of the relational and symbolic dimensions, which are critical for genuine community involvement (Mardiana & Irawati, 2019; Setyadi, 2024).

Addressing these problems requires a shift in how CSRs are viewed in Bula. CSRs should focus on the inclusion of the community in an integrated manner, as opposed to a unidirectional distribution model. Companies must view the community as a participant in all aspects of CSR, including planning, doing, and checking. Establishing a CSR Community Forum with key constituents, such as customary leaders, representatives of women and youth, local government, and other community members, may be a good start. This platform will serve as a collaborative space for and local developmental contexts. The comparative analysis of existing CSR initiatives further demonstrates the effectiveness of participative approaches.

Table 2 integrates empirical results from field records, interviews with community members, and analyses of various documents, which evaluate and compare CSR initiatives with respect to the planning dimension and community engagement outcomes. Initiatives from the top-down approach, which is characterized by corporate planning without any interaction with the community, reveal low rates of community utilization and a high community discontent. Initiatives from the bottom-up approach, which are planning corporately and participatively with the community, are characterized by high rates of community utilization and positive community responses. This trend, observed consistently across various data collection methods, reinforces the notion that participative processes foster the creation of innovative and culturally attuned CSR initiatives.

This study substantiates the notion that including communities in corporate planning results in more productive and ethical outcomes. Local knowledge must be regarded as essential

to corporate understanding of development, legitimacy, and community involvement.

The ongoing success of CSR in Bula depends on Kalrez's readiness to move beyond mere compliance and embrace cultural humility by actively listening to and integrating community perspectives into decision-making. Engaging in authentic discussion is an effective strategy for organizations to establish credibility and enhance operational efficacy.

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility should not be regarded as a series of initiatives to be completed in a checklist-style manner. Instead, it should be regarded as a process of courteous and collaborative communication. In the context of Bula, the concept of local wisdom is regarded as a vital asset that, when acknowledged and valued, leads to more sustainable, substantial, and inclusive CSR outcomes.

**CSR Legitimacy and Community Perception Through Cultural Dialogue:** In Bula, intercultural communication serves as a fundamental basis for establishing ethical and significant interactions between corporations and communities. Effective CSR communication requires public relations to function as a facilitator that bridges corporate objectives with community needs through culturally appropriate channels (Bakti et al., 2025; Koswara et al., 2023). Research data indicate

that the lack of participatory discussion has diminished public confidence in Kalrez's CSR initiatives. Community informants perceive these initiatives as reparation for resource exploitation rather than authentic solidarity. Community leader, Wan, stated: "CSR must embody acknowledgment of local rights and dignity, not just discretionary benevolence."

Intercultural dialogue facilitates the reconciliation of divergent beliefs and objectives between corporations and communities. This corresponds with the social constructivist perspective (Wendt & Onuf), which posits that identity and meaning are formed through communication. In Bula, observational and interview data reveal that the absence of inclusive discourse spaces restricts community members' ability to express their needs and wants. This has been demonstrated the same way Carter and Fuller (2016) and Dreher and Santos (2017) demonstrated where CSR acquires legitimacy from not only formal activities, but also from culturally important activities that shape the perceptions of the stakeholders.

This study applies the constructivist and phenomenological approach to the understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by examining lived experiences, particularly community advocacy and resistance. This method makes it easier to investigate how local communities impact and reshape CSR. To find

out how Bula residents respond to, reinterpret, or oppose Kalrez's CSR programs, the study uses observations, interviews, and analysis.

Research data indicate that CSR initiatives devoid of community engagement frequently falter. The Bula Air Bridge, as documented through field observations and community testimonies, is locally referred to as the "goat bridge," a term reflecting community perception of its irrelevance to their actual needs. Multiple informants expressed that the bridge symbolizes corporate disconnection rather than community benefit. Such activities are seen by individuals as "symbols devoid of essence," signifying their emotional and cultural disconnection.

Despite this, the report mentions some positives. Posyandu, confirmed by the PKK and health workers during the interviews, was built after the composite structuring with the local women's group. This method, as evidenced by documents such as meeting minutes and community accounts, built trust within the community and strengthened ownership. The juxtaposition of such cases strengthens the main argument of this paper. CSR should address issues beyond mechanical objectives to include ethical ones, integrate intercultural and local collaborations, and, in the case of Bula, where intercultural diversity is significant (Mardiana & Irawati, 2019; Setyadi, 2024).

From the viewpoint of social capital theory,

intercultural communication, in this case, is instrumental in building trust, understanding, and consensus, which are pivotal for the social license for CSR and the sustainability of its outcomes in the long term. Communication methods that honor and respect local culture increase the circulation of information and foster a shared vision in CSR. This is exemplified by traditional leader Abdullah, who said, "You should engage with us first, rather than constructing and then providing an explanation." This was an expectation of a mutual and more balanced communication where the objective is achieved through synergy as opposed to a unilateral action.

This report recommends setting up a Community CSR Forum as one example of a participatory communication system. Ideally, this forum would include community representatives such as traditional leaders, women's associations, youth, religious leaders, and local government. This body would support consultation and serve as a tool for ongoing feedback and adaptive learning, thereby improving alignment between the evolving goals and cultural objectives in business and community.

Moreover, Table 3 presents a conceptual framework derived from empirical findings that contrasts monologic (top-down) and dialogic (intercultural) communication structures in

**Table 3 Comparative Structures of CSR Communication: Monologic vs. Dialogic**

| Communication Structure  | Core Features                | Implications for CSR                                |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Monologic (Top-down)     | Unidirectional, exclusionary | Weak legitimacy, heightened community resistance    |
| Dialogic (Intercultural) | Bidirectional, participatory | Strengthened trust, enhanced program sustainability |

Source: Researchers, 2007

CSR. This framework synthesizes patterns observed across case studies and stakeholder testimonies, demonstrating that monologic approaches consistently lead to weak legitimacy and community resistance, whereas dialogic approaches strengthen trust and program sustainability.

The empirical evidence clearly demonstrates the advantages of dialogic communication. It enables participatory development and shifts the distribution by accepting local participants as real players in the corporate game. This shift is crucial for the Bula context considering the historical marginalization and the entrenched scepticism toward extractive industries. Intercultural dialogue is much more than communicating on: it is an symbolic act capable of transforming relationships and shifting the discursive power.

It is crucial for Kalrez to formalize policies that allow for participation. A CSR community forum provides a systematic, culturally relevant way to ensure that CSR planning and assessment are both inclusive and aligned with local values and requirements. This platform enables the

firm to consider diverse viewpoints, anticipate potential discrepancies, and collaboratively develop solutions with the people most affected by its activities.

This work advances the theoretical discourse on CSR as a form of social diplomacy. In this context, corporations are not only resource suppliers or benefactors, but engaged collaborators in the joint creation of ethical and sustainable social relationships. By integrating intercultural dialogue into the foundation of their CSR strategy, firms such as Kalrez may effectively address past grievances, reconcile cultural disparities, and cultivate robust, contextually relevant trust-based partnerships.

In conclusion, intercultural dialogue in CSR should be regarded not as a marginal role but as the communicative framework upon which legitimacy is established. This study illustrates that CSR initiatives that neglect the symbolic, cultural, and participative aspects of engagement may perpetuate cycles of distrust, isolation, and social resistance. On the other hand, if a local community possesses knowledge and engages in meaningful dialogue, CSR

becomes a practice of ethical entanglement. It also enables the firm and the community to address shared issues, set common objectives, and jointly shape the desired future.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how Kalrez understands and implements CSR within Bula's cultural framework, analyzed the role of intercultural communication in CSR legitimacy-building, and explored community perceptions and responses to CSR initiatives. The findings address these objectives systematically.

First, regarding Kalrez's CSR comprehension in Bula's cultural context, the study reveals a compliance-oriented, infrastructure-focused approach that lacks integration of local cultural values such as *hidop orang basudara* (communal kinship) and *tungku tiga* (deliberative consensus). Employees view CSR as more of a bureaucratic requirement than a relational concern, resulting in a lack of alignment with community priorities and a cultural disconnect. Such a technocratic mindset points to broader systemic shortcomings, including the absence of a dedicated CSR unit and weak interconnections between the head office and the field offices.

Second, Kalrez's top-down, unilateral

communication style undermines the legitimacy of the company's CSR. Without space for culturally oriented dialogue, the community's role in the planning and evaluation process is severely restricted. In contrast, the Posyandu case, in collaboration with local women's associations, illustrates how participatory communication facilitates community ownership and, therefore, the program's sustainability. This difference illustrates the importance of intercultural dialogue as an element of social capital that improves and strengthens the relationship between the corporation and the community.

Third, in terms of community perception, the local participants view the CSR primarily as compensatory justice, not corporate philanthropy, for the partial social and economic devastation of the community as a result of the prolonged period of extractive activities. The community participation of the women in the Posyandu exemplifies the untapped potential of culturally responsive planning. The fundamental contradiction that the current CSR approach adopted by Kalrez and the other stakeholders presumes, and which ultimately undermines the objective of the integrated and participatory governance model, is that the Paguyuban approach relies on the "hand bridge" concept and, therefore, does not initiate the flow of social capital necessary for sustaining the

relationship.

The study ends with the observation that in Bula, CSR legitimacy cannot stem from mere administrative compliance or symbolic gestures; rather, it demands the integration of intercultural communication, a participatory, dialogical method that includes and values local knowledge systems. If CSR is simply viewed as a legal obligation, then the socio-cultural aspects that define community perceptions are likely to be overlooked, and in this case, the community, in compliance with Indonesia's Company Law No. 40 of 2007, will be neglecting the law. The gap between Kalrez's CSR efforts and the community's expectations is evident in the underutilization of the installed infrastructure, low levels of public involvement, and the lack of culturally appropriate sensitivity in the corporate communication.

Using phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and social constructivism, this study shows that the reality of CSR cannot exist from the corporate side alone. The construction of the reality of CSR, in the case of Bula, is as a result of intersubjective engagement, dialogical exchanges of ideas with the relevant constituents. In the case of Bula, which is culturally diverse, CSR needs to go beyond the physical components; it ought to function as a dialogic space for the restoration of confidence, the closure of historical wounds, and the

fostering of fair relations.

The study recommends a move from technocratic CSR planning to dialogic models for communicating with communities as active co-creators during the entire process of needs assessment, program design, and evaluation. A feasible suggestion would be to form a Community CSR forum that includes local people, such as traditional leaders, women, and youth representatives, and religious and village administrators. This Community CSR Forum would be able to articulate the needs of the community, align the corporate ventures with the focus of the community, and perform an ongoing evaluation of the community's socio-cultural needs..

This study tries to explain CSR beyond the traditional concept of philanthropy or compliance. It also seeks to position CSR as a form of social diplomacy and strategic communication, promoting mutual understanding and cultural recognition. For example, it gives extractive industries the strategic option to realign their CSR by situating it within the community's socio-cultural context. This kind of contextual alignment of CSR can be relational, dignified, and transformative, meeting the community's compliance expectations and providing socio-economic welfare.

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**AI Declaration:** The authors confirm that Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, specifically Large Language Models (LLMs), were utilized during the preparation of this manuscript primarily for language polishing, grammatical refinement, and structural coherence. AI was used to ensure that the nuanced findings from local dialects and qualitative interviews were translated into academic English that maintains the integrity of the original context. The authors emphasize that the core conceptualization, data collection through year-long participant observation, qualitative coding (thematic analysis), and the final interpretation of results were conducted solely by the human researchers. The authors take full responsibility for the content and originality of the final manuscript.

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