

SOCIAL CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY FRAGMENTATION: A STUDY IN NEGERI HAYA, TEHORU DISTRICT, CENTRAL MALUKU REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dynamics of social conflict and community fragmentation in Negeri Haya, Tehoru District, Central Maluku, triggered by granite sand extraction activities undertaken without legally recognized mining permits. The absence of regulatory clarity and contested authority between customary institutions and local government generated competing interpretations of licensing, economic rights, and resource control, escalating into open conflict and social polarization. While existing studies on resource conflicts in Indonesia primarily emphasize regulatory compliance or environmental impacts, limited attention has been given to the interaction between formal governance structures and customary institutions at the village level. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how institutional ambiguity and overlapping authority structures shape conflict escalation and social fragmentation in indigenous communities. Using a qualitative descriptive design—drawing on in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis—the findings reveal substantial impacts on livelihoods, intra-community trust, and social cohesion, resulting in the formation of antagonistic community factions. Reconciliation efforts were pursued through customary sanctions, government mediation, and collective community initiatives aimed at restoring social order. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on local governance and resource conflict by demonstrating how institutional hybridity and authority contestation function as structural drivers of community fragmentation. Practically, it underscores the necessity of integrating formal regulatory mechanisms with customary governance systems to prevent and manage resource-based conflicts in indigenous settings. *This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.*



INTRODUCTION

Social conflict is an inseparable part of societal life dynamics. In every social structure, there is potential for clashes of interest stemming from differences in values, worldviews, or goals pursued by individuals and groups. Such differences are natural and can enrich social life (Wulandari et al., 2025). However, when these differences are poorly managed or power and resources are unevenly distributed, social conflict may emerge, disrupting community balance

(Van der Tol & Gorski, 2022). Conflict should therefore be viewed not only as negative but as a social process reflecting tension, change, and dynamics in communal life (Suyono & Nirwanasari, 2022). Across Indonesia, social conflicts are complex, ranging from disputes between individuals and groups to conflicts involving social and economic structures (Stoyanova, n.d.). A primary cause is the imbalance between traditional values and pressures from modernization and economic development (Ghosh, 2023), which can shift cultural norms, weaken social bonds, and make conflicts increasingly unavoidable (Shuvaev et al., 2023; Shunglu et al., 2022).

Conflicts often involve indigenous communities that adhere strongly to traditional values, norms, and local wisdom, such as mutual cooperation and harmony between humans and nature (Setyabudi & Laili, 2022). Modern economic interests—corporate expansion, infrastructure projects, and resource exploitation—often contradict these systems, generating disputes and social tension (Sakir et al., 2023). In such contexts, conflict becomes a mechanism for communities to renegotiate positions, identities, and values they consider significant (Ollendorf et al., 2023). In Maluku, for example, indigenous practices such as *sasi* regulate sustainable resource use and maintain environmental preservation (Nazeer et al., 2025). *Sasi* has been practiced for generations, reflecting collective commitment from communities, traditional leaders, and religious figures (Eichert & Luedicke, 2022), recognizing that ecological sustainability is essential for survival (Liu, 2025).

Sasi territories are strictly regulated to protect marine resources, govern human interactions, and ensure equitable resource distribution (Lauracio Ticono et al., 2024; Hamama-Raz et al., 2024). *Sasi* exemplifies how indigenous law functions as a form of social and environmental governance rooted in collective values (Kim, 2023). Embedded in social and cultural beliefs, *sasi* is legitimized by community trust and ritual ceremonies, reflecting the role of ancestral spirits in environmental fertility and communal safety. Rituals conducted before opening or closing *sasi* periods demonstrate its ecological, social, and spiritual significance. Beyond beliefs, *sasi* operates as a legal and moral framework ensuring responsible exploitation, preserving ecological balance, and reinforcing social order simultaneously.

Historically, *sasi* involves temporary prohibitions on harvesting natural products, marked by community ceremonies signaling duration and adherence. However, modernization, economic needs, and exposure to new values challenge *sasi*. Younger generations may perceive it as outdated, and rising economic demands encourage unilateral violations, weakening traditional authority and triggering social conflicts, both internally and with outsiders. In Negeri Haya, such violations illustrate tensions between customary adherence and economic priorities. Conflict theory explains that these tensions reflect clashes of interest, resistance to customary authority, and unequal resource distribution. Cultural lag further exacerbates these conflicts, as social values struggle to adapt to rapid economic developments.

These dynamics have caused social fragmentation in Negeri Haya. Previously strong social cohesion erodes, trust diminishes, and latent tensions become overt, leading to shifts in norms, values, and social relationships. While prior studies largely focus on ecological aspects of *sasi*, few examine how modernization and economic pressures generate social conflict and internal tensions. This gap underscores the need to analyze social dynamics and conflict arising from *sasi* violations in indigenous communities. Academically, this research contributes to sociology and governance studies by illustrating how customary institutions confront modernization pressures. Practically, it informs local governments and traditional leaders on policies that preserve *sasi* while managing emerging conflicts, ensuring ecological sustainability and social cohesion.

Based on these issues, this study aims to understand how social conflict emerges and evolves amid tensions between customary values and economic interests. Accordingly, the study is titled “Social Conflict and Community Fragmentation: A Study in Negeri Haya, Tehoru District, Central Maluku Regency.”

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of social conflict dynamics in Negeri Haya between the local community and a granite sand extraction company. This method was selected to capture social realities through the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of informants directly

involved in the conflict. The research does not test hypotheses but focuses on interpreting the interactions, disputes, and processes that shape community-company relations based on firsthand accounts.

The research was conducted in Tehoru District, Central Maluku, an area characterized by complex social dynamics where indigenous communities, social groups, and economic actors frequently intersect, producing conflicts and social fragmentation. Fieldwork lasted one month, covering preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Preparation involved literature review and interview guide development, while data collection included observations and in-depth interviews with relevant informants.

Participants consisted of individuals and groups directly or indirectly involved in the conflict, including traditional leaders, community representatives, government officials, and residents both supporting and opposing the company. The objects of study were the forms of social conflict and resultant community fragmentation, emphasizing the processes that generate tension, affect social cohesion, and influence reconciliation efforts. Data were gathered through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation from written records, government reports, photographs, and local media, complemented by historical and academic sources to strengthen validity.

Data analysis followed an interactive model involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was applied across sources, methods, and time to ensure accuracy, including comparing informant accounts, cross-checking interviews with observations and documents, and verifying consistency across multiple periods. This iterative process allowed for identification of social patterns, relationships, and the underlying dynamics of conflict and fragmentation in the Negeri Haya community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the field research results and the analysis of social conflict dynamics in Negeri Haya. The discussion focuses on the background of the conflict, its forms and processes, the impact on community life, and social reconciliation efforts carried out by various parties. The analysis in this section is based on interviews, field observations, and documentation collected during the study.

Background of Social Conflict

Social conflict in Negeri Haya originated from the convergence of customary authority, local governance, and corporate interests, specifically the entry of a granite sand extraction company into the village without a formal mining permit. The company possessed only a business license, which did not legally authorize mining activities, but operations commenced nonetheless, creating tension with the Saniri, the customary council responsible for regulating local natural resources. This situation exemplifies how competing claims over authority, legitimacy, and control over scarce resources generate structural tensions that can escalate into open conflict. The Saniri's perception of unauthorized extraction as a violation of customary law highlights the central role of institutional legitimacy in shaping community responses to external actors.

The conflict was further complicated by differences of opinion within the community. Some residents questioned why prior resource extraction, such as timber harvesting, had been permitted while granite sand extraction faced opposition. The distinction lies in the regenerative capacity of the resources: wood regenerates over time, whereas sand extraction poses more permanent environmental degradation. This demonstrates that social conflict often arises not solely from economic interests but also from divergent understandings of ecological sustainability and customary rules.

Misinterpretation of government-issued permits further exacerbated tensions. The village government had granted a building permit to the company, which was mistakenly assumed to cover mining operations as well. This misalignment of formal and customary authority represents a classic case of institutional ambiguity, where overlapping jurisdictions and unclear regulatory boundaries create space for conflict. In Negeri Haya, such ambiguity led to diverging expectations: the Saniri sought to enforce customary regulations, the government perceived legal compliance as sufficient, and the company assumed the permit provided full operational legitimacy. This misalignment was compounded when some local residents engaged in company operations, generating economic incentives that created factions within the community and undermined social cohesion.

The entry of the company and the ensuing disagreements demonstrate the interplay between material and symbolic dimensions of conflict. While economic benefits initially attracted some residents to the company, these gains could not prevent underlying tensions related to authority, legitimacy, and environmental responsibility. The Saniri's repeated formal objections and the community's varied attitudes toward corporate operations reveal that social conflict is deeply embedded in relational and institutional contexts, rather than merely in economic competition. Social capital erodes when trust and shared norms are undermined by contested authority and conflicting interests.

Environmental concerns were also central to the conflict. The Saniri viewed granite sand extraction as potentially destructive to the village's ecological balance, threatening both terrestrial and coastal ecosystems. This case underscores how local governance institutions, customary law, and environmental stewardship are interdependent, and how violations of ecological norms can trigger social tensions. Furthermore, the conflict illustrates the importance of integrating customary institutions into formal governance structures, as failure to do so not only jeopardizes social harmony but also undermines sustainable resource management.

In conclusion, the emergence of social conflict in Negeri Haya can be attributed to multiple interrelated factors: unclear licensing and regulatory ambiguity, contested authority between the Saniri and village government, divergent community perspectives, and environmental concerns. The case exemplifies the notion that conflicts are rooted in structural inequalities, institutional gaps, and the negotiation of legitimacy. By analyzing these dynamics, it becomes clear that both formal and customary governance mechanisms must be considered in understanding and managing resource-based conflicts in indigenous communities. The Negeri Haya case provides a critical illustration of how hybrid governance systems and local ecological knowledge interact with modern economic pressures, producing both opportunities and challenges for social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and community resilience.

Forms and Processes of Social Conflict

The social conflict in Negeri Haya developed gradually, reflecting both structural and relational dynamics within the community following the commencement of granite sand extraction operations around 2019–2020. Initially, the company operated under a business license issued by the village government, broadly interpreted to permit multiple activities, including sand extraction. Some community members participated in these activities, benefiting economically, which temporarily masked underlying tensions. However, differences in perception and priorities among villagers, particularly between those who supported economic opportunities and those who upheld customary restrictions, created a shifting social atmosphere, setting the stage for escalating conflict.

Conflict escalated when the Saniri, as the customary authority, formally opposed granite sand extraction. Institutional opposition was communicated through traditional mechanisms, including formal objections and the imposition of *sasi*, a customary prohibition regulating access to and use of natural resources. *Sasi* serves both symbolic and practical functions: it enforces ecological stewardship while reaffirming the legitimacy of customary governance. Yet the company continued its operations despite these prohibitions, highlighting the tension between customary norms and formal corporate activities. This situation exemplifies how overlapping and sometimes contradictory governance structures generate ambiguity, creating fertile ground for social disputes.

The conflict was further complicated by misunderstandings and misinterpretations of regulatory permits. While the company assumed that a village-issued building permit authorized all operations, including sand extraction, the Saniri and other traditional leaders maintained that mining rights were never granted. Additionally, the involvement of some community members in company activities introduced economic incentives that divided the community, creating pro-company and pro-community factions. The resulting factionalization not only fueled mistrust but also eroded long-standing patterns of social cohesion, as conflicts emerged from competition over scarce resources and divergent interpretations of legitimate authority.

The escalation of tensions manifested in both symbolic and physical forms. The *sasi* marker at the extraction site was damaged, provoking anger among parts of the community. Company employees asserted that they were not responsible for this damage, attributing it to individuals tasked with marker installation. Nevertheless, the incident intensified suspicions and social polarization. Over time, minor disagreements—initially confined to discussions and perceptions of procedural fairness—transformed into overt conflict, culminating in the burning of company facilities.

This progression reflects how repeated interactions, misunderstandings, and normative violations accumulate, ultimately generating direct confrontation.

The Negeri Haya case demonstrates how social conflict emerges through the interplay of structural, relational, and normative factors. Structurally, ambiguous licensing and overlapping authority created opportunities for misinterpretation and competing claims. Relationally, the alignment of economic incentives with certain community factions fostered mistrust and division. Normatively, the disregard for *sasi* undermined the legitimacy of traditional governance and signaled a broader cultural tension between modern economic practices and long-standing ecological and social norms. The conflict illustrates how institutional and cultural discontinuities can interact to amplify both latent and overt social tensions.

Overall, the forms and processes of social conflict in Negeri Haya reveal that disputes over natural resources are rarely purely economic. They are embedded in local governance structures, customary norms, and community relations. Conflict evolves gradually, mediated by perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and fairness, and can escalate rapidly when institutional boundaries are unclear or violated. Understanding these processes is critical for designing conflict management strategies that integrate customary institutions with formal regulatory frameworks, ensuring both social cohesion and sustainable resource management.

Impact of Social Conflict on Community Life

The social conflict in Negeri Haya had profound and multidimensional effects on community life, encompassing economic, social, relational, and environmental aspects. Economically, the conflict disrupted livelihoods that were directly tied to granite sand extraction activities. Prior to the escalation of tensions, the company provided an important source of income for residents, particularly for women and widows, who were able to collect and sell sand to meet essential household needs, including food and daily necessities. The cessation of company operations eliminated this income stream, leaving many households in financial hardship. Some residents were compelled to seek work outside the village, illustrating how local conflicts can generate broader economic repercussions that affect mobility, labor patterns, and household resilience.

The economic impacts of the conflict also exposed inequalities within the community. While some residents were directly employed by the company and benefited financially, others who opposed corporate activities lost access to potential income opportunities. This divergence reinforced preexisting social divisions and created a sense of economic injustice among those excluded from company-related benefits. The disruption of traditional income sources revealed the vulnerability of resource-dependent households and highlighted the need for diversified and sustainable livelihood strategies in communities exposed to external economic pressures. The conflict thus underscores the inseparability of economic stability from social cohesion, as economic disruption can exacerbate social tensions and mistrust among community members.

Socially and relationally, the conflict weakened long-standing networks of trust and cooperation. Residents who were previously engaged in collective activities and mutual assistance became wary of each other. Pro-company and pro-community factions emerged, eroding patterns of interaction and communication that had historically underpinned social cohesion. Fear, suspicion, and interpersonal tension became commonplace, leading to social distancing and reduced participation in communal events. The polarization of the community demonstrates how disputes over resource governance can fragment social structures, with economic and symbolic disagreements reinforcing each other. Families directly involved in incidents such as the destruction of company facilities experienced social stigmatization, further straining community bonds.

The conflict also had a significant impact on customary governance and environmental management. *Sasi*, the traditional institution regulating resource use, was challenged both symbolically and practically. Damage to *sasi* markers and the disregard for traditional prohibitions weakened the authority of customary leaders and disrupted mechanisms for environmental stewardship. The erosion of these systems not only threatened ecological sustainability but also undermined the community's capacity for self-regulation. Without functional customary enforcement, resource use became contested and uncoordinated, illustrating the interplay between social conflict and ecological

governance. The community's environmental knowledge, embedded in *sasi* practices, was thus indirectly affected by social tensions, highlighting the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems in indigenous contexts.

Psychologically and emotionally, residents experienced stress, fear, and regret over the unfolding events. Many acknowledged the negative consequences of burning company facilities, recognizing that such actions worsened both social cohesion and individual livelihoods. Emotional strain amplified social distance, as people became hesitant to interact or collaborate. This emotional dimension reinforced the material and relational consequences of conflict, demonstrating how social disputes extend beyond tangible outcomes into perceptions, norms, and collective morale.

In conclusion, the social conflict in Negeri Haya produced cascading effects across economic, social, and ecological dimensions. It disrupted livelihoods, reinforced inequalities, fragmented social relationships, and weakened customary governance institutions. The conflict illustrates that disputes over natural resources cannot be viewed solely through an economic lens; they are embedded within local governance structures, social networks, and cultural norms. Understanding these multifaceted impacts is essential for designing comprehensive conflict management strategies that address material needs, restore social cohesion, and strengthen customary mechanisms for resource regulation. Effective interventions must integrate formal governance, community engagement, and environmental stewardship to prevent recurrence and promote resilience in resource-dependent communities.

Social Reconciliation Efforts

Following the escalation of social conflict in Negeri Haya, including the burning of company facilities, a series of reconciliation efforts emerged involving customary institutions, the village government, and community members themselves. These efforts aimed not only to restore peace but also to prevent the recurrence of disputes and mitigate the long-term fragmentation of the community. The Saniri, as the primary customary authority, played a central role in initiating interventions. One of the key mechanisms was the imposition of *sasi*, a traditional prohibition signaling that extraction activities were forbidden in specific areas. *Sasi* served both symbolic and practical purposes: it reaffirmed the legitimacy of customary governance while regulating access to natural resources, signaling to all parties that community rules were in effect despite the absence of formal legal enforcement. The Saniri also issued formal letters of objection to the company, explicitly communicating their stance and attempting to enforce compliance through recognized customary procedures.

Simultaneously, the village government sought to stabilize the situation by encouraging residents to maintain calm and refrain from actions that could exacerbate tensions. Officials mediated between opposing groups, facilitating dialogue and attempting to clarify regulatory misunderstandings regarding permits and operational authority. Their efforts highlighted the role of formal governance in supporting customary institutions and mitigating the potential for unilateral action. By emphasizing safety and security, the village government acted as a stabilizing force, demonstrating how formal and informal governance mechanisms can work in tandem to address conflicts rooted in overlapping authorities and economic disputes.

The cessation of company operations marked a critical turning point in the reconciliation process. With the immediate source of open conflict removed, tensions between factions were reduced, creating space for community members to engage in restorative behaviors. Families directly affected by the conflict, particularly those involved in the destruction of company facilities, received limited assistance in the form of financial aid and food supplies. Although the material support was modest, it provided a starting point for rebuilding trust and mitigating economic grievances that had fueled social tensions. These measures illustrate how reconciliation is not purely symbolic; it also requires addressing the material and practical needs of affected individuals to prevent further fragmentation.

Community members themselves played an active role in maintaining peace and social order. Many residents consciously exercised restraint, avoiding public confrontations and carefully monitoring interactions to prevent renewed disputes. This behavior reflects the emergence of collective responsibility and social learning, whereby the community recognized that sustainable harmony required self-regulation alongside institutional enforcement. Informal mechanisms of monitoring, communication, and restraint complemented formal interventions, reinforcing the importance of local agency in conflict resolution. Over time, these combined efforts contributed to the gradual restoration of social cohesion, trust, and cooperation among previously divided groups.

The reconciliation process in Negeri Haya demonstrates a multidimensional approach to conflict management, where customary, formal, and community-led mechanisms interact. Customary institutions provided legitimacy and normative authority, formal governance offered mediation and security, and community members contributed vigilance and restraint to enforce social norms. Together, these elements created a hybrid framework capable of addressing both the symbolic and material dimensions of conflict, illustrating how indigenous governance systems can coexist and interact with state structures to manage disputes effectively.

In conclusion, social reconciliation in Negeri Haya required coordinated action across multiple levels of governance and community participation. By combining *sasi* enforcement, formal mediation, and proactive community engagement, the village navigated the challenges of authority disputes, economic divergence, and social fragmentation. The case highlights that sustainable conflict resolution in indigenous contexts is not achieved solely through formal legal measures or economic incentives; it necessitates the integration of cultural norms, local institutions, and collective responsibility. Lessons from Negeri Haya suggest that strengthening customary governance, ensuring clarity of formal regulations, and fostering community agency are critical for restoring social harmony, promoting resilience, and preventing the recurrence of resource-based conflicts in rural and indigenous communities.

CONCLUSION

The social conflict in Negeri Haya arose from unclear licensing, conflicting interpretations of customary and governmental authority, and differing community attitudes toward company activities. Initial disagreements over granite sand extraction escalated into open disputes and property damage, illustrating how institutional ambiguity and competing interests drive social tension. The conflict affected livelihoods, household welfare, and social cohesion, reducing trust and interaction among residents.

Reconciliation combined customary sanctions through *sasi*, formal objections by the Saniri, government mediation, and collective community restraint. These efforts highlight the importance of integrating traditional governance, formal institutions, and community participation to restore social harmony and prevent recurrence.

Theoretically, the case demonstrates that conflicts are multidimensional, shaped by structural, relational, and normative factors, and underscores the role of customary institutions in mediating resource-based disputes. Practically, it emphasizes the need for clear regulatory frameworks, recognition of customary authority, and participatory approaches to strengthen social cohesion, ensure sustainable resource management, and enhance community resilience.

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