


# CSR in Extractive Industries: Critical Analysis through Social Constructivism, Hegemony, and Political Ecology

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> CSR, Social Constructivism, Hegemony, Political Ecology; Extractive Industries, Pt Berau Coal, Environmental Justice</p>	<p>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the extractive industry is often positioned as a form of corporate concern and an instrument of sustainable development. However, practices in the field are usually paradoxical: on the one hand, they provide social benefits, on the other, they accompany environmental damage and society's dependence on companies. This article critically examines CSR practices in Indonesia's mining sector by highlighting the case of PT Berau Coal in East Kalimantan. The research uses a critical literature review that combines three theoretical lenses: Berger &amp; Luckmann's social constructivism, Gramsci's hegemony, and political ecology. The analysis shows that CSR is a contested socio-political arena: (1) CSR is built as a social reality through externalization-objectification-internalization to normalize the role of corporations; (2) CSR functions as a hegemonic strategy that builds legitimacy, creates consensus, and dampens resistance through symbolic-institutional co-optation; and (3) from a political ecology perspective, CSR tends to depoliticize environmental issues and reproduce ecological injustice. The article concludes that CSR needs to be understood as a governance culture technology that works at a symbolic, ideological, and ecological level. The article's contribution lies in offering a critical integrative framework for assessing CSR in Indonesia's extractive sector and recommending a reorientation towards a community-based participatory model that is environmentally just.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become essential to modern corporate governance, especially in the extractive industry sector, which has significant social and ecological impacts. Initially, CSR was understood as a form of voluntary philanthropy realized through education, health, and infrastructure assistance. However, as public attention to environmental and social justice issues increases, CSR has shifted to become a strategic instrument to obtain a social license to operate. This social legitimacy is informal but strongly determines the sustainability of a company's operations (Prno & Slocombe, 2012).

In the Indonesian context, the coal mining sector occupies a central position. Indonesia is one of the largest coal producers in the world, and the province of East Kalimantan is one of the central producing regions. The presence of companies such as PT Berau Coal shapes

the economic landscape and the social and ecological structure of the area around the mine. On the one hand, the company's CSR program is expected to contribute to regional development, such as the provision of scholarships, the construction of health facilities, and environmental projects. On the other hand, CSR practices often give rise to paradoxes: they coexist with land grabbing, river pollution, loss of customary lands, and community dependence on corporate resources (Li, 2007; Andrews, 2015).

The dominant narrative of the company describes CSR as an instrument of welfare and sustainable development. Sustainability reports, awards, and media publications frame mining companies as responsible actors, aligned with the vision of regional development. However, critical research shows that CSR often serves as a mechanism of symbolic legitimacy, which masks the structural contradiction between the economic interests of the company and the long-term needs of society and the environment (Banerjee, 2008; Blowfield & Frynas, 2005). Thus, CSR cannot be understood only as a managerial or philanthropic mechanism, but as a socio-political practice full of meaning.

Three theoretical frameworks are used to read this phenomenon. First, social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) helps to see how CSR is produced as a social reality through externalization, objectification, and internalization. Values such as "empowerment" and "sustainability" are not neutral, but are built and institutionalized through corporate narratives and internalized by society. Second, Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony shows that CSR is a strategy to gain public approval through symbolic co-optation, institutional relationships, and integration into daily life. Third, political ecology (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Robbins, 2012) highlights how CSR regulates human-environmental relations in a way that often depoliticizes ecological issues and reproduces environmental injustice (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

Various international studies confirm this dynamic. In Ghana, the public often perceives CSR programs in the gold sector as projects irrelevant to local needs, thus triggering resistance (Andrews, 2015). In Colombia, CSR is actually used as a corporate means to cover up the impact of ecological and political violence caused by mining (Hoff, 2020). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, most CSR research emphasizes the success of companies in supporting community development and empowerment (e.g., through scholarships, health, and infrastructure). At the same time, critical studies that highlight CSR as a hegemonic mechanism are still minimal. The only notable study in this direction is Alkatiri & Kiwang (2023), which highlights the relationship between religion, corporations, and social legitimacy in mining CSR practices. This article is here to fill this void by proposing a framework of critical analysis based on social constructivism, hegemony, and political ecology.

This article examines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a social reality that is institutionalized in the lives of the people around the mine. It also analyzes it as a hegemonic strategy that extractive companies use to obtain approval and normalize dominance. Through a political ecology perspective, this article highlights how corporate CSR initiatives have the potential to contribute to environmental justice or exacerbate ecological injustice. Using the case of PT Berau Coal, this article offers a critical integrative framework for

understanding CSR in Indonesia's extractive sector to expand the CSR literature from a purely managerial focus to an analysis of power relations, legitimacy, and ecological justice. Practically, the findings of this research are expected to encourage the reformulation of CSR policies that are more accountable, participatory, and oriented towards community needs and environmental sustainability.

## METHODS

This article uses a critical literature review approach to examine CSR as a managerial practice and a contested social, political, and ecological phenomenon. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is not limited to mapping CSR practices, but to dismantle how CSR is framed, negotiated, and institutionalized in the context of extractive industries. Thus, the analysis is directed to build an integrative conceptual framework through interdisciplinary synthesis, thus providing a more profound understanding than just an inventory of previous findings.

Research data is sourced from academic literature, empirical case studies, institutional documents, and public publications. Academic literature includes books and journal articles that discuss CSR, extractive industries, social constructivism, hegemony theory, and political ecology. Case studies from Indonesia and other countries, such as Ghana, Colombia, and Peru, provide comparisons and enrich the analysis. Meanwhile, institutional documents such as PT Berau Coal's sustainability report, national regulations, and local government reports became formal references. Media publications and NGO reports are also sources because they represent public discourse and public perception of CSR practices in mining areas.

The analysis used a thematic approach and discourse through three main stages. First, identify CSR discourses in various sources, especially narratives about "empowerment" and "sustainable development". Second, mapping the contradictions between the company's narrative and the findings of critical studies, especially related to socio-ecological impacts and power relations. Third, conducting a theoretical synthesis by integrating three analytical frameworks: social constructivism to understand the institutionalization of CSR as a social reality; Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine CSR as a strategy of legitimacy and ideological domination; and political ecology to expose the linkages of CSR to resource conflicts, environmental degradation, and ecological justice.

The validity of the analysis is maintained through the strategy of triangulation of sources, theoretical consistency, and reflexivity of the author. Triangulation is carried out by comparing academic literature, official documents, company reports, NGO, and media publications. Theoretical consistency is maintained by ensuring that the analysis is rooted in the chosen critical framework so that it does not get caught up in technocratic readings. Meanwhile, the author's reflexivity emphasizes the awareness that CSR is not just a technical phenomenon, but a political-ecological field full of interests. With this methodological design, the article is expected to be able to produce an analytical framework that places CSR as an arena of social, political, and ecological contestation involving companies, communities, countries, and the environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### CSR as a Constructed Social Reality

In the dominant discourse, CSR is understood as a set of measurable programs that can be evaluated technically, for example, the number of schools built, houses of worship renovated, or trees planted. This perspective is rooted in a managerial-instrumental approach that places CSR as a problem-solving mechanism for the community's needs. However, this approach tends to ignore the social and symbolic dimensions accompanying CSR practices on the ground. In fact, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain, social reality is always the result of construction: it is formed, institutionalized, and then internalized through social interaction and institutional structures.

From the perspective of social constructivism, CSR can be understood through three dialectical stages. First is externalization, which is when a company projects values, vision, and development narrative through CSR programs. In the context of PT Berau Coal, this is evident in the rhetoric of "community empowerment", "environmental sustainability", or "strategic partnership". These values are packaged in sustainability reports, program brochures, and ceremonial events showcasing the company's community concern.

The second stage is objectification, where the company's values and narrative are institutionalized through repetitive practices and the support of external institutions. For example, cooperation with local governments, publications in the media, or CSR awards given by independent institutions. Over time, the corporate narrative no longer appears to be a communication strategy but rather a "social truth" accepted as common sense. CSR is then seen as a natural part of regional development, no longer a strategic initiative full of interest.

The third stage is internalization, when people begin to accept the value of CSR into their own frame of mind. CSR is considered the only realistic path to social improvement in this stage. For example, the community attributes road infrastructure improvements to corporate generosity, not to state obligations. This internalization process has the potential to create dependency: society expects more of corporations than of fighting for structural rights through the state or democratic mechanisms.

However, the social construction of CSR never runs smoothly. The meaning built by the company is constantly confronted with the real experience of the community. On the one hand, some people feel helped by scholarships, the construction of public facilities, or health programs. However, some groups consider CSR only as symbolic compensation for environmental damage, loss of agricultural land, or declining quality of life due to mining activities.

The study of Hoff (2020) in Colombia and Andrews (2015) in Ghana shows that local communities are not passive in the face of the construction of corporate meaning. They often reinterpret or reject CSR claims based on their daily experiences. The same thing happened in Berau, where communities negotiated the meaning of CSR through citizen forums, protests, and local media. Thus, CSR is not a static entity but a discursive arena where various actors compete to determine the meaning of "development" and "responsibility".

The diversity of CSR's meaning shows that a symbolic layer is as important as the material aspect. CSR is not just about "what is given" but also about "how it is interpreted"

and "who has the right to define." In this case, CSR can be understood as a culture of governance technology, where companies seek to shape social norms and public expectations through symbols, language, and institutional practices.

Thus, understanding CSR as a constructed social reality opens up space for more critical analysis. Instead of assessing the effectiveness of CSR from output indicators alone, this analysis emphasizes the importance of reading the process of meaning-production, social negotiation, and the contradictions that come with it. CSR is not just a means of philanthropy, but part of the process that determines how people see their future, on whom they depend, their hopes, and under what conditions they feel empowered or marginalized.

### **CSR as a Hegemonic Strategy and Power Reproduction**

CSR is often described as a manifestation of a company's moral concern to improve the community's welfare. However, when viewed through the perspective of Gramsci's (1971) hegemony, CSR is not just a philanthropic practice, but a strategic mechanism to gain legitimacy and social consensus. Gramsci emphasized that dominance is achieved through coercion and consent built through cultural, ideological, and institutional values. In this framework, CSR functions as a soft power instrument that refines the dominance relationship between the company and society.

In mining areas, including Berau, CSR programs include the provision of scholarships, road construction, and socio-religious activities. This activity provides real benefits and presents companies in almost all aspects of people's lives. This presence builds the company's image as an irreplaceable development actor. Thank-you billboards, media coverage of CSR events, and corporate symbols in traditional events reinforce the image that the company is a generous social partner. At this point, CSR becomes more than just a program: it transforms into a hegemonic strategy that accepts the company's presence as something natural and necessary.

CSR also creates what some researchers call a new "moral economy" (Levy & Egan, 2003). In this logic, the company's giving is not only welcomed as assistance, but also expected and celebrated. The community is encouraged to respond with gratitude, not demand rights or structural criticism. This process smooths the conflict by shifting society's focus from big questions like "who controls the land and resources?" to pragmatic questions like "how many scholarships or basic food assistance will be distributed this year?".

Furthermore, hegemony through CSR is strengthened by institutional co-optation. Companies often partner with civil society organizations, customary institutions, and religious organizations. Alkatiri and Kiwang (2023) show that mining companies establish strategic relationships with large religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to gain moral legitimacy in Indonesia. In this way, the legitimacy of the company relies on development achievements and is also rooted in the moral authority of social institutions that the community trusts. This co-optation process expands the scope of hegemony to the cultural and spiritual realms.

However, as Gramsci reminds us, hegemony is never total. There is always a gap that allows the birth of resistance. In the context of Berau, several community groups, especially

youth, indigenous communities, and women's groups, have shown a critical attitude towards CSR. They questioned the program's suitability with local needs, highlighted the unresolved environmental damage, and criticized the one-sided nature of the formulation of CSR programs. This resistance can be open protests, NGO reports, or counter-narratives in local media.

This fact shows that CSR is a contested hegemonic arena. On the one hand, the company seeks to build consensus through help and symbols of care. On the other hand, the community is trying to seize space to reinterpret, reject, or negotiate the meaning of CSR. The result is an unstable dynamic: the legitimacy of the company must always be renewed, while society's resistance constantly looks for loopholes to emerge.

Thus, CSR can be understood not only as an instrument of social development but also as a technology of cultural governance. It works not only through physical projects but also through the internalization of norms, the regulation of discourse, and the creation of consensus. At this point, CSR serves as a hegemonic strategy: normalizing corporate dominance, suppressing open conflicts, and directing the public's imagination into a company-friendly development framework.

### **CSR, Political Ecology, and Environmental Injustice**

CSR in the extractive industry is often positioned as the answer to sustainability demands. Mining companies display reforestation programs, land rehabilitation, and environmental awareness campaigns as proof of their concern for ecology. The "green mining" narrative is then raised to show that extractive activities align with sustainable development. However, the perspective of political ecology shows that the narrative is never neutral; it is loaded with power relations, domination discourses, and economic-political interests (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Robbins, 2012).

From the political ecology perspective, environmental issues are not purely technical but political: they concern who makes decisions, who benefits, and who bears the impacts. In the case of coal mining, the ecological costs of water pollution, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss are often borne by local communities. At the same time, financial benefits flow to companies and elites at the national and global levels. Martinez-Alier (2002) calls this environmental injustice: the distribution of ecological burdens and benefits is unbalanced and tends to harm vulnerable groups.

The environmental CSR program in Berau provides a real example. PT Berau Coal initiated tree planting projects, mine waste management, and environmental education activities in schools. Administratively, this program looks progressive and in accordance with regulatory standards. However, in the field, communities often still face coal dust, reduced river water quality, and limited productive land for agriculture. In other words, CSR serves more as a reframing mechanism: turning ecological damage into a "manageable technical problem" rather than acknowledging the root of the structural problems of the extractive economic model.

Similar phenomena have also been found in other countries. Andrews (2015) notes how people in Ghana perceive the CSR of gold mining companies as more of a lip service

than a real solution. Hoff (2020) in Colombia shows how CSR is used to cover up forms of ecological violence by promoting the image of companies as protectors of the environment, even though their operations continue to damage ecosystems. These findings reinforce that CSR often serves as an instrument of legitimacy, not transformation.

In addition, the perspective of political ecology also highlights how CSR tends to depoliticize environmental issues. Instead of talking about people's rights to clean water or customary land, the discussion shifted to technical indicators: how many trees were planted, how many fish seeds were released, or how many times environmental socialization was carried out. With this logic, ecological conflicts are reduced to project management issues. This not only obscures the structural causes but also weakens the agency. Citizens who criticize environmental damage are often seen as "uncooperative", while companies present themselves as modern and rational problem solvers.

However, society is not always passive. In Berau, there is resistance in the form of reports from local NGOs, youth movements, and indigenous protests that reject water pollution and call for more serious post-mining reclamation. These dynamics show that CSR is not a closed system, but rather an arena of political-ecological contestation where people negotiate their rights to a healthy environment. This resistance proves that the company's narrative can be questioned, sued, and even rejected.

Thus, from a political ecology perspective, CSR in the extractive industry is not only an environmental management effort but also a tool to control the discourse about nature and sustainability. CSR defines who are called "stakeholders," what is considered "environmental restoration," and how sustainability should be managed. This definition often excludes local knowledge, customary practices, and non-economic ecological values that communities possess.

At this point, CSR is more accurately understood as a political instrument that reproduces the structure of environmental injustice than as a sustainability solution. However, the space for contestation left by the gaps of contradiction also opens up opportunities for people to fight for environmental justice through resistance, counter-narratives, and critical participation.

### **Towards a Critical Integrative Framework**

Previous discussions show that CSR in the extractive industry cannot be understood simply as a managerial practice or an instrument of development. CSR is a series of philanthropic programs and a complex socio-political and ecological arena. In it, meaning, legitimacy, and power relations are contested by various actors: companies, governments, local communities, NGOs, and the media. To understand this complexity, an integrative framework is needed that can combine the dimensions of social constructivism, Gramsci hegemony, and political ecology.

### **CSR as a Constructed Reality**

The perspective of social constructivism highlights that the reality of CSR does not just come here, but is built through social processes. The company externalizes the value of

"empowerment" or "sustainability" through sustainability reports, media campaigns, and ceremonial activities. This narrative is then objectified through the support of external institutions such as local governments, award institutions, or partnerships with community leaders. Over time, CSR has internalized the public consciousness, which is considered a natural part of development. However, this construction is not singular. Society has room to resist, renegotiate, or construct alternative meanings. The resistance that has emerged in Berau, whether through protests, NGO reports, or counter-narratives in the local media, shows that the reality of CSR has always been in the tension between domination and resistance.

### **CSR as a Hegemonic Strategy**

The Gramsci framework adds an important dimension: CSR constructs reality and serves as a strategy of soft domination. The company is present in people's lives through scholarships, road construction, and sponsorship of traditional and religious activities. This presence normalizes the company's role as a seemingly irreplaceable development partner. The co-optation process also takes place through partnerships with civil society organizations and religious institutions, giving the company moral legitimacy. Alkatiri and Kiwang (2023) show that this strategic partnership effectively suppresses public resistance. However, as Gramsci emphasized, hegemony is never absolute. Gaps are always open to resistance, such as the indigenous peoples' protests in Berau demanding post-mining reclamation and clean water. CSR, thus, is a fluid hegemonic arena: on the one hand, it normalizes dominance, on the other, it opens up space for resistance.

### **CSR in a Political Ecology Perspective**

Meanwhile, political ecology reveals the structural dimension of CSR in relation to environmental injustice. CSR often frames ecological damage as a technical issue, for example, by calculating the number of trees planted or the volume of waste managed, rather than acknowledging the problem's root in exploitative extractive economic models. Consequently, people lose the space to fight for their ecological rights. The burden of damage, such as water pollution or loss of farmland, is borne by local communities, while profits flow to corporations and elites. Martinez-Alier (2002) calls this phenomenon an economic injustice of environmental injustice, in which the distribution of ecological benefits and burdens is unbalanced. However, political ecology also shows that CSR is a space for political-ecological contestation: society can challenge corporate narratives by asserting land, water, and clean air rights.

### **Integrative Framework: Symbolic, Ideological, Ecological**

By integrating these three perspectives, CSR can be understood as a governance culture technology that works on three levels:

- a. Symbolic: forming the meaning of development and responsibility. CSR instills that development results from corporate generosity, not citizens' rights. In Berau,

infrastructure development is often perceived as a corporate contribution, even though it should be a state obligation.

- b. Ideological: building consensus through hegemonic strategies. CSR binds traditional leaders, religious leaders, and local organizations in the company's influence network. Financial aid, event sponsorship, or institutional partnerships create a relationship that blurs the line between actual participation and co-optation.
- c. Ecological: regulating access and control over natural resources. CSR redefines environmental damage as a problem that can be addressed with technical solutions, such as limited reforestation or cosmetic conservation projects. In fact, the root of the structural problem, the exploitative extractive model, is still left unchecked.

This integrative framework opens up a more comprehensive understanding of CSR. He revealed CSR as a dynamic arena where companies, communities, countries, and the environment interact in ever-changing power relations. CSR is not just a series of social projects, but an instrument that shapes norms, regulates meaning, and controls ecology.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

From a theoretical perspective, this framework extends CSR analysis beyond conventional managerial perspectives (Carroll, 1999; Porter & Kramer, 2006), emphasizing corporations' efficiency, legitimacy, and sustainability. By blending social constructivism, hegemony, and political ecology, CSR analysis no longer stops at the question of "Are programs effective?" Rather, it moves to critical questions: who determines the meaning of development, who acquires legitimacy, and who bears the ecological burden?

Practically, this framework demands a reorientation of CSR policies in Indonesia. First, companies must involve the community from the planning stage, not just implementation. Second, indicators of CSR success should be expanded from mere technical outputs to social and ecological justice indicators, such as access to clean water, sustainability of livelihoods, and democratic participation. Third, local governments must play the role of independent supervisors, not just corporate partners, so that CSR does not become a mere instrument of legitimacy.

This critical integrative framework ultimately affirms that true CSR is not one determined by the company from above but one constructed together with society, with social and ecological justice as the primary goal.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that CSR in the extractive industry, especially in the case of PT Berau Coal in East Kalimantan, is a much more complex phenomenon than just a managerial or corporate philanthropic instrument. By combining the perspectives of social constructivism, Gramsci hegemony, and political ecology, CSR can be understood as a socio-political and ecological arena full of contestation. It shapes the meaning of development, normalizes corporate dominance, and regulates the relationship between society and the environment through discursive and symbolic mechanisms. Theoretically, this article presents a critical integrative framework for analyzing CSR. Social constructivism helps explain how the meaning of CSR

is constructed and institutionalized; Gramsci's hegemony shows how CSR functions as a strategy of soft domination; while political ecology reveals how CSR often reproduces environmental injustice. By bringing these three perspectives together, CSR is no longer seen as a static entity, but as a dynamic arena in which power relations, legitimacy, and resistance are constantly being renegotiated. From a practical perspective, the results of this study confirm the need to reorient CSR policies in Indonesia. First, CSR should be an instrument of corporate legitimacy and function as a rights-based social accountability mechanism. Second, the planning and implementation of CSR programs must fully involve the community, so as not to fall into a paternalistic top-down pattern. Third, the indicators of CSR success must be expanded to include the dimensions of social and ecological justice, such as community access to clean water, sustainability of livelihoods, and the protection of customary rights. Fourth, local governments and supervisory agencies must take a more active role in ensuring that CSR is not just an arena for legitimacy but provides substantive benefits to the affected communities. For the research agenda, this article opens up opportunities for further field-based studies that empirically test critical integrative frameworks. Ethnographic research can reveal how local communities interpret and respond to CSR programs daily. Meanwhile, quantitative studies can measure how CSR impacts social and ecological indicators, strengthening the policy evidence base. Cross-case research, for example, comparing CSR in the coal sector with the oil palm plantation or oil and gas sector, is also important to test the extent to which hegemonic patterns and resistance are universal or contextual. In conclusion, CSR in the extractive industry must be understood as a governance culture technology that works at the symbolic, ideological, and ecological levels. Only with this critical understanding can we dismantle the paradox of CSR while formulating a more equitable, participatory, and sustainability-oriented model. Actual CSR is not the CSR reported in the company's annual report. However, CSR that is built with the community addresses structural injustices and brings real socio-ecological transformation.

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