

Post-Political Governance and the Return of the Political: PROPER-rated Geothermal Enterprise, Environmental Problems, and Civil Resistance in Dieng Plateau

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Abstract

The Industrial Environmental Rating Program (PROPER) from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia has produced various outcomes. Many companies strive to meet the PROPER assessment criteria, earning ratings represented by colors ranging from black to gold. Unfortunately, the indicators set by PROPER, namely compliance and beyond-compliance assessment criteria, are limited to technical and managerial aspects rather than substantial ones. Consequently, the ratings often become a means for environmentally polluting companies to polish their public image and attract investment. PT Geo Dipa Energi (Persero), a state-owned geothermal enterprise, is one of many companies that have obtained a blue PROPER rating. This company's presence in Dieng, Central Java, has faced civil resistance due to the various pollution issues caused by their activities. The company uses the blue PROPER rating label to create a mechanism called “post-political governance” to discipline civil resistance. This mechanism refers to the process of repressing the political dimension in society by introducing apolitical mechanisms. These apolitical mechanisms are found in the values of good governance, such as participation, transparency, fairness, accountability, and public inclusion, which PROPER aims to implement. This research was conducted in Karang Tengah Village, Dieng, and remotely from different locations. The findings show that Dieng residents, whose political dimension is being disciplined, are able to reclaim their political agency through civil and discursive political resistance—a set of conditions that Wilson and Swyngedouw refer to as “the return of the political.” This research aims to present a critical perspective on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices by companies within the framework of PROPER, while also highlighting the role of the community as key actors in challenging the discourse of empowerment constructed by the company and PROPER policy.

Keywords: *post-political governance, environmental governance, case study, PROPER policy, CSR*

INTRODUCTION

On March 12, 2022, a tragic incident shook Karangtengah Village, Banjarnegara, Central Java. While conducting quenching activities (rapid cooling for material property control) at Well Pad 28 of the Geothermal Power Plant (PLTP) Dieng Unit 1, owned by PT Geo Dipa Energi, workers were suddenly exposed to highly concentrated hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) gas when a relief valve unexpectedly opened (Wicaksono, 2022). This toxic gas caused one worker to collapse and later die on the way to the hospital, while eight others were hospitalized. This event has left a deep mark on the community, raising concerns about the safety of their village amidst such hazards.

The release of toxic gas from the PLTP Dieng Unit 1, owned by PT Geo Dipa Energi, is not an isolated incident. In 2016, a similar explosion occurred, causing casualties and disrupting agricultural productivity in Karangtengah Village, as the gas spread to agricultural areas (Darmawan, 2022). This led to prolonged decreases in agricultural output for months, directly impacting the village's economy. Additionally, ongoing environmental pollution from the operation of the Dieng Unit 1 PLTP has been documented. Research conducted by the Central Java Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) and the Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung (2022), highlights three main types of pollution: water, air, and soil pollution.

Water pollution resulting from the Dieng Unit 1 PLTP's operation is evident in the altered taste, color, and temperature of local water sources. Residents report a sour taste, indicative of elevated acidity (pH > 8.5), with contaminants like arsenic, antimony, and boron posing health risks (Aksoy et al., 2009). Suboptimal liquid waste management by PT Geo Dipa Energi contributes to soil contamination with hazardous minerals such as hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, mercury, arsenic, silica, potassium, calcium, and magnesium, impacting agricultural productivity. Drilling activities exacerbate soil destabilization. Additionally, pervasive hydrogen sulfide gas odors in Karangtengah Village compromise air quality, leading to sulfuric acid formation and accelerated corro-

sion of zinc-based roofs.

Despite the environmental disruptions caused by its operations, PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng received a blue PROPER rating from Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry (Table 1) (geodipa.co.id, 2023). PROPER assigns colors from black to gold, indicating environmental performance. The blue rating signals compliance with environmental regulations (Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia, 2019). Despite a gas leak incident at Well Pad 28, Vice President Ma'ruf Amin commended the company during the December 29, 2022, award ceremony. Amin highlighted that achieving a blue PROPER or higher status signifies leadership in addressing climate change and implementing sustainable environmental management.

PROPER, a complementary program for environmental management policies, addresses four key issues: the lack of practical tools for companies to adopt green practices, growing public pressure for transparency, industry's demand for incentives for sustainable practices, and the potential for improvement through public disclosure of environmental performance. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, addresses these challenges by applying good governance principles—transparency, fairness, accountability, and community involvement—which are reflected in PROPER's assessment criteria. The adoption of good governance principles for these management issues is rooted in a specific political and economic context. This context shapes PROPER as a policy that emphasizes good governance.

The political and economic context that led to the creation of PROPER can be seen historically. In 1995, as Indonesia's New Order government pursued ambitious industrialization projects, international pressure mounted over environmental pollution caused by its industries (Wheeler & Afsah, 1996). To address these concerns and secure crucial foreign funds, the government, led by President Soeharto, strategically introduced the Public Disclosure Program for Environmental Management (PROPER). This program was initially called the PROPER Clean River Program (PROPER PROKASIH)

Table 1. PROPER Rankings

Compliance Levels	Rankings	Compliance Assessment		Compliance Types
		Area	Methods	
Beyond Compliance	Gold	Environment Management System	Process/Effort Oriented	Voluntary
	Green	Waste Utilization and Resource Conservation CSR/Community Development		
Compliance	Blue	Marine Pollution Water Pollution	Result Oriented	Mandatory
Bellow Compliance	Red	Air Pollution Hazardous and Toxic Waste (Limbah B-3) Management		
	Black	Environmental Impact Analysis (AMDAL) Implementation		

Source: Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2021

(Bahruddin, 2020). The Environment Impact Management Agency (BAPEDAL) was tasked with developing and overseeing PROPER.

Under President Soeharto, BAPEDAL wielded equal power to other ministries but rarely penalized companies owned by Soeharto and his family (Situmorang et al., 2010). In operating the PROPER PROKASIH, BAPEDAL aimed for public disclosure to pressure companies with poor environmental management (Bahruddin, 2020). However, this mechanism mainly targeted foreign investors, as public action towards companies with poor environmental impact management was limited. In reality, PROPER's disclosure tools actually attracted investors to Indonesian firms. However, in terms of environmental impact management, it only improved water management, focusing solely on water pollution (Blackman et al., 2004). This marked PROPER's initial shift from state-led to market-based environmental management, influenced by neoliberal ideas of good governance (Wiratraman, 2007).

Neoliberal changes to PROPER began after the policy's implementation was halted

from 1997 to 2001 due to the Asian economic crisis. When it relaunched in 2002, its influence grew significantly. Law No. 23 of 1997 mandated a broader scope, encompassing issues beyond water pollution. Soil contamination, air pollution, hazardous waste management, and peatland management became key areas of focus. PROPER itself shifted towards a voluntary, market-oriented approach, aligning with emerging trends in post-political environmental management. This new system, known as public voluntary regulation, emphasized transparency and complemented existing environmental laws (OECD, 2001). This expansion reflected Indonesia's "Reformasi" era's emphasis on good governance, potentially influenced by pressure from international donors like the World Bank (Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan RI, 2013).

Public Voluntary Regulation as Post-Political Environmental Governance

The post-political aspect of PROPER manifests in its public voluntary regulation scheme. It presupposes that disclosing a company's environmental management performance will prompt stakeholders to collab-

orate in problem-solving (Tietenberg, 1998). This governance approach, influencing both company attitudes and community empowerment, aligns with the concept of Governance-beyond-the-State (Swyngedouw, 2007). Portney (2000) notes the enduring popularity of such policies, rooted in the principles of liberal democracy, foreseeing their continued relevance until 2050 due to the hegemonic idea of liberal democracy, which assumes universal equal rights for everyone in society to receive and respond to information dissemination.

The hegemony of liberal democracy influenced PROPER's assessment mechanism. This policy operates more as a substitute for weak environmental law enforcement rather than a complement to it. This voluntary participation, driven by lax law enforcement, shapes both "obedience" and "beyond compliance" assessments in PROPER (Rohman, 2020). Fiorino (2006) argues that this model favors companies over society, allowing them to evade strict regulations and minimize operational costs (Potoski & Prakash, 2011). With the state's limited involvement, companies gain leverage over dissenting parties such as the public or civil society organizations.

This power imbalance becomes more evident in the incentives driving companies towards sustainable environmental management under the public voluntary regulation scheme. Blackman (2008) identifies two main incentives: market pressure and state bonuses. Market institutions, like investors, push for compliance, as seen historically with the World Bank's influence on Indonesian environmental schemes under the New Order. Contemporary examples include Bank Indonesia's requirement of PROPER for corporate credit, as stipulated in Bank Indonesia Regulation Number 14/15/PBI/2012. State incentives, both material and non-material, further motivate compliance (Rohman, 2020). This reliance on voluntary regulation highlights a state evasion of environmental responsibility, shifting it entirely to private entities. Consequently, the state's political agency and representation of the public's interests are compromised, as policies favor privatization over state oversight.

The elimination of state and people's political agencies and the transfer of environmental management authority to the private sector are further reinforced by PROPER's techno-managerial mechanism. To attain a PROPER color rating, companies must pass through several stages. According to Article 11 Paragraph (2) of Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 2021, companies must meet four conditions to qualify for a PROPER rating: (1) exporting products, (2) being listed on the stock exchange, (3) being a public concern regionally and nationally, and/or (4) having significant activities impacting the environment. Rohman (2020) notes ambiguity in the term "significant" in the regulation, as it lacks a clear definition. This contrasts with previous norms that used "important" instead of "significant" in Indonesian environmental law, highlighting a shift in interpretation and potential implications for PROPER assessment practices. This ambiguity leaves the interpretation of "significant activities impacting the environment" to PROPER Assessment Team technocrats or Ministry of Environment and Forestry experts (Rohman, 2020).

In practice, technocrats heavily influence PROPER assessments, which consist of "obedience" to environmental laws and "beyond compliance" criteria. Companies hire various experts for environmental law obedience assessment, including water and air pollution and hazardous waste (B3). Similarly, experts and consultants are hired for beyond compliance assessment, such as social empowerment and energy efficiency. Community involvement in the assessment often involves only local elites (Arifin, 2022). This reliance on experts and local elites accentuates the marginalization of people's political agencies. The reduction of community involvement to mere local elites also triggers a quasi-participatory mechanism that complements the techno-managerial style assessment in PROPER.

The techno-managerialism and quasi-participatory nature of public voluntary regulation characterize it as a post-political policy. Post-political theory suggests a shift from the political—marked by contestation and agonistic engagement which underlies

reality—to politics, which emphasizes apolitical mechanisms like techno-managerialism and consensus-building based on quasi-participatory mechanisms (Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2014). This reduction of political conflicts to technical issues undermines democratic participation, potentially leading to explosive conflicts rather than rational consensus (Mouffe, 2005; Ranciere, 2004; Zizek, 2009). This dynamic, known as "the return of the political," is exemplified in the events at the Dieng Plateau.

Post-Political Studies on PROPER

Despite numerous potential issues, many studies on PROPER overlook them, focusing instead on techno-managerial aspects without critically examining underlying issues. For instance, Afsah et al. (2007) assess PROPER's impact on environmental management using panel data analysis, showing its effectiveness in reducing emissions and promoting sustainable practices. However, this study solely evaluates environmental impacts, neglecting social, political, and institutional effects. Participatory elements and information disclosure within PROPER are often taken for granted, overshadowing conflicts with appeals to consensus (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013).

The previous study primarily emphasizes PROPER's environmental impact and neglects its social and political ramifications. This aligns with Swyngedouw's observation of politics yielding to expert administration (2011). Bahruddin (2020) investigates both dimensions, analyzing three oil and gas companies—two state-owned and one private—to reveal factors shaping PROPER's social-environmental effects. These include stakeholder pressure, the company's responsiveness towards pressure related to government discretion in enforcing PROPER, and government-provided incentives. However, Bahruddin's perspective tends to portray civil society, particularly local communities and NGOs, as hurdles to company operations rather than recognizing their concerns. This view obscures the power imbalance between corporations and civil society, sidelining the substantive issues behind community protests and rendering them inconsequential.

Arifin (2022) scrutinizes the socio-

logical structures within the implementation of PROPER, concentrating on a downstream oil and gas company in Sumatra. The study elucidates that PROPER's purported participatory nature is deficient, instead relying on local elites who wield significant political agency as program managers. While Arifin's research dissects power relations, the findings lose significance because the case study employed tends to depict a non-conflict scenario. Although local elites wield power, their actions in conflict resolution in this research remain ambiguous.

Prior investigations on PROPER frequently employ reductionist frameworks that compartmentalize company, community, and environmental issues. Some environmental management studies neglect PROPER's socio-political influence, leading to conclusions that depict it as a purely successful environmental policy. This contrasts with contemporary ecological studies highlighting the nexus between power and environmental management (Bryant, 1998). Moreover, certain social science research constrains PROPER within techno-managerial frameworks, overlooking political conflicts and the agency of affected communities.

This study endeavors to critique and complement various antecedent inquiries on PROPER. By utilizing a post-political theoretical framework, this study endeavors to situate PROPER as an instrument of state power aimed at stifling and substituting political expressions inherent in reality with apolitical techno-managerial mechanisms. In a more specified context, PROPER represents a shift in the state's role from the responsibility of environmental management to the private sector, employing a neoliberal market competition-style mechanism prioritizing the capital accumulation process of the capitalist class while stifling the political expression of various dissenting classes.

This study examines PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng, an Indonesian State-Owned Enterprise (BUMN) in geothermal energy. Despite protests since 2016 over its environmental impact, the company obtained a blue PROPER rating in 2022 from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, indicating regulatory compliance. With 2,031 out of 3,200 companies receiving this rating

(proper.menlhk.go.id, 2022), and ongoing protests from the public, PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng presents a unique case to explore the post-political dynamics of PROPER policies. This study asks two key questions: (1) How does PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng view and implement PROPER in managing its environmental impacts? (2) How does PROPER-based environmental management affect ongoing social conflicts

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the practices and ramifications of implementing the PROPER policy by the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry. A qualitative approach is deemed optimal for acquiring comprehensive insights into the intricacies of PROPER implementation and its socio-political repercussions (Creswell, 2014). The case study method specifically focuses on the implementation of PROPER by PT Geo Dipa Energi, a distinctive case characterized by public protests and environmental apprehensions. This approach is in accordance with John C. Mitchell's (1983) assertion regarding the efficacy of case studies in elucidating the depth and complexity of specific situations. Significantly, this detailed case study addresses a void in the current research landscape, which predominantly relies on generalist quantitative methodologies or multi-case studies when examining environmental management policies.

This case study integrates observation, in-depth interviews, and literature review to scrutinize the implementation of the PROPER policy by PT Geo Dipa Energi. Observations were conducted from August to December 2022, a pivotal period marked by escalating conflicts between the company and Dieng Plateau residents subsequent to worker fatalities. This timeframe also encompasses the commencement of a company-resident discussion forum by the Banjarnegara Regional Government. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the case (names changed upon request to ensure informant safety and privacy).

Furthermore, a literature review was conducted on official documents from both

the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry and PT Geo Dipa Energi. Ministry documents analyzed encompass the concept and implementation guidelines for PROPER, spanning from BAPEDAL's 1997 issuance to the most recent regulations. Company documents focused on their profile and official press releases from 2016 to July 2023, a period characterized by heightened conflict necessitating public clarification. Analyzing these press releases is imperative for comprehending not only how the post-political mechanism operates in the practical realm but also in the discursive realm (Swyngedouw, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Situating Dieng

Indonesia's geothermal energy development commenced in 1983 with the successful construction of the 140 MW Kamojang plant in West Java, a collaborative endeavor between state-owned Pertamina and PLN (Dipayana & Ramadhan, 2022). This achievement catalyzed further progress, leading to the establishment of several plants of varying capacities between 1994-1997, including Salak, Wayang Windu, Darajat, and Dieng (Fauzi et al., 2005). The exploitation of Dieng Plateau is emblematic of this early phase of geothermal development. PT Geo Dipa Energi, founded in 2002 as a Pertamina-PLN venture, is specifically tasked with managing the geothermal potential in the Dieng Plateau and Patuha areas.

PT Geo Dipa Energi officially assumed control of the 60 MW PLTP Unit Dieng 1 in 2002, overseeing the Mining Concession Area of the Dieng Plateau (geodipa.co.id, 2018). Their Energy Sales Contract (ESC) with PLN grants them authorization to distribute electricity from generators up to 400 MW (Dencio, 2019). Given this contractual arrangement and the estimated 400 MW geothermal potential in both the Dieng Plateau and Patuha, PT Geo Dipa Energi aims for substantial production expansion (geodipa.co.id, 2018). This aspiration encompasses the imminent construction of PLTP Dieng Units 2 and 3.

PT Geo Dipa Energi's expansion in the Dieng Plateau has significantly impacted the residents of Karangtengah Village, Batur,

Banjarnegara, resulting in persistent protests as a manifestation of ongoing conflict. A seminal event occurred in 2016, marked by a well explosion at PLTP Dieng Unit 1, resulting in casualties and the release of toxic gas (Darmawan, 2022). Furthermore, the emission of hot water vapor containing chemicals led to the degradation of agricultural lands, culminating in crop failures. Although the company provided compensation to 623 affected residents (geodipa.co.id, 2017), this incident served as a turning point, inciting sustained opposition to PT Geo Dipa Energi's presence within the village and underscoring the profound intersection between the company and the lives of nearby residents.

The second moment of conflict, less publicized by the media, occurred in 2019 when PT Geo Dipa Energi began planning the Dieng 2 PLTP Unit (geodipa.co.id, 2019). Karangtengah Villagers initially resisted the project due to a planned well's proximity to homes – less than 1 km away. This proximity, coupled with the memory of a 2016 well explosion, fueled spontaneous opposition. Despite the rejection, construction of the well proceeded. Heavy equipment arrived, high walls were erected around the project, signaling a continuation of work despite objections. This is illustrated by Mawar's (pseudonym), a vocal Karangtengah resident, statement opposing the Dieng 2 PLTP Unit:

Recent news and publications in various media outlets suggest that Dieng residents only began resisting this year (2022) following the leak incident. However, we had already opposed the construction of well pads since 2019. The proposed well pad is in close proximity to residential areas. Previously, during the project's socialization phase, our objections stemmed from a prior leak incident in 2016. Nonetheless, the well pad was still constructed despite our demonstrations at the time. Subsequently, we discovered that an agreement had been reached between the company and select individuals here regarding the construction, without the knowledge of those of us residing near the well pad. This revelation spurred us to protest, albeit without receiving a satisfactory

response thus far (Mawar, resident of Karangtengah Village).

The series of protests in 2019 exhibited inconsistencies, attributable primarily to residents' limited awareness and organization, compounded by the company's lack of responsiveness. In an effort to address these shortcomings, external organizations such as WALHI Central Java intervened from 2021 onwards, bolstering the advocacy efforts of Dieng Plateau residents affected by PT Geo Dipa Energi. WALHI furnishes scientific expertise to substantiate the movement and fortifies community mobilization endeavors.

The resistance peaked after a gas leak on March 12, 2022, drawing national media attention to PT Geo Dipa Energi's environmental impact on the Dieng Plateau. The scale of conflict escalated, often resulting in physical violence near the planned PLTP Dieng Unit 2 well pad. Conflict isn't limited to residents vs. company; the company's disciplinary mechanisms create horizontal tensions among residents. This involves quasi-participation channels – community programs, complaint channels, and outreach – that the company uses to polish its image amidst conflict. PROPER, the state's environmental assessment program, provides a scheme for companies to manage citizen protests. This ultimately creates a post-political configuration between companies and society, with PROPER indirectly encouraging companies to conform to its framework.

Rendering Post-Political

A long history of problems with the community has led PT Geo Dipa Energi to seek ways to address community issues, including through PROPER policies. PROPER, a public voluntary regulation, indirectly guides companies in community engagement, creating a post-political configuration that suppresses political conflict, favors techno-managerial and quasi-participatory environmental management. This post-political configuration can be observed through three company attributes that are more or less influenced by PROPER: (1) community empowerment programs, (2) integrated online problem complaint channels,

and (3) company public discussion forums in response to issues.

As stipulated in Law Number 40 of 2007 concerning Limited Liability Companies and Law Number 25 of 2008 concerning Investment, companies engaged in the natural resources sector are required to carry out corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, typically in the form of community empowerment programs. PROPER, as a complementary policy, also serves as the basis for implementing CSR programs. PT Geo Dipa Energi, as a company operating in the natural resources sector, is one of the companies that actively carries out CSR programs. PT Geo Dipa Energi's commitment to implementing community empowerment programs can be observed through the community empowerment pillars they have established as the foundation for their initiatives. There are four pillars of community empowerment that serve as the basis for PT Geo Dipa Energi's programs: (1) GDE Peduli, (2) GDE Maju, (3) GDE Pintar, and (4) GDE Hijau (geodipa.co.id, 2018).

GDE's community empowerment efforts are centered around four pillars. GDE Peduli emphasizes company communication, school outreach, and scholarships for underprivileged students. GDE Maju focuses on meeting general community needs such as infrastructure, holiday celebrations, sponsorships, and the provision of basic necessities. Smart GDE targets economic independence through programs managing coffee, palm fruit, and geotourism development. Finally, Green GDE prioritizes environmental care. These pillars encompass a variety of community empowerment programs, each with its distinct effects and goals.

In 2022, PT Geo Dipa Energi received two awards from Top Business Magazine: the Top CSR and Top Team Work on Implementing CSR 2022 (geodipa.co.id, 2021). A total of around 850 companies participated in this award ceremony, which then specified 160 finalist companies. These accolades, among others received in previous years, symbolize the company's commitment to responsible production and community empowerment. However, at PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng, community empowerment programs seem more focused on con-

trolling community protests than fostering genuine empowerment. Despite symbolic accolades, the implementation often lacks substantial community engagement.

We implement community empowerment programs contextually. The Patuha Unit and the Dieng Unit are different. The Patuha Unit's well pads are not located too close to the community, while the Dieng Unit's well pads are situated very close to the community. Additionally, the characteristics of the communities around the Dieng Unit differ from those around the Patuha Unit. People around the Dieng Unit tend to be less educated and more prone to emotional reactions. Consequently, if outsiders raise concerns about environmental pollution by companies, they immediately protest. Given these regional characteristics, the Dieng Unit usually focuses on providing community empowerment programs that are primarily charitable in nature. The priority is to prevent protests (Melati, Community Development Officer of PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng).

Melati's statement reveals the company's acknowledgment of the conflict, yet they deflect the core issues by framing them as problems of public ignorance and outside agitation. This dismissal is evident in attributing the conflict to a "lack of education" and "'sedition' from outsiders." Blaming NGOs and civil society organizations as "less educated" instigators creates a post-political configuration. It assumes that rational public dialogue is possible despite the power imbalance (Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2014). Thus, true antagonistic conflict between parties with unequal power is reduced to a matter of achieving rational participation.

In a more specific context, PROPER comes with a scheme that guides companies to fulfill indicators of compliance with environmental regulations and create community empowerment programs. Although Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 1 of 2021 concerning the Company Performance Rating Program in Environmental Management stipulates that one of the PROPER assessments is through verification or direct examination of condi-

tions in the field, in reality, this is not always the case. Verification or field checks are generally only carried out when a company is about to rank up from green to gold, which is a rating beyond compliance. Meanwhile, the rating that is still below beyond compliance only needs to be verified through documents that represent the feasibility level of a company's environmental management.

To attain a blue PROPER rating, the PROPER assessment team usually does not need to verify directly in the field. Field verification is usually only for companies that are going to rank from green to gold PROPER or beyond compliance. In fact, documents that comply with environmental laws, such as the AMDAL, are usually heavily manipulated. Real environmental complaints and problems are ultimately not documented. Therefore, there are also many companies that actually have complaints about their environmental impact management but still get a good rating (Anggrek, former Community Development Officer at PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng).

PROPER's assessment methods for ratings below "beyond compliance" reveal its reduction of complex environmental management issues to mere technical calculations. Multidimensional problems are confined to expert-generated documents, a practice identified by Tania Murray Li (2007) as "rendering technical." This prevalent tendency in contemporary Indonesian development projects serves to categorize issues and tailor structural interventions according to specific interests.

The shortcomings of the PROPER rating beyond compliance do not negate the existence of issues within it. The PROPER beyond compliance assessment is structured with requirements for companies to establish specific community empowerment programs, as outlined in the General Provisions of the Evaluation Criteria for Community Empowerment in Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 1 of 2021.

PROPER incentivizes companies to contribute to improving the welfare of com-

munities in production areas or designated locales. The guiding principle of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy formulation within PROPER is "empowerment." Thus, the essence of the CSR policy extends beyond merely achieving "harmonization" between companies and society to encompass deliberate efforts to foster community self-sufficiency. The formulation of CSR policy positions harmonious conditions not as an end goal but as a natural outcome of a balanced, functional relationship between the company and society (Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 1 of 2021 concerning the Company Performance Rating Program in Environmental Management).

This statement in the General Provisions for the Assessment of Community Empowerment is actually contrary to the approach of PT Geo Dipa Energi Dieng Unit, which treats community empowerment programs solely as a means of disciplining protests from the community. Because they were unable to meet these general requirements, the company finally tried to meet other assessment criteria. One specific aspect of the assessment is the level of community involvement in planning community empowerment programs. Provisions regarding community involvement in planning community empowerment programs are then specified in the form of a social mapping document.

PROPER regulations mandate a highly structured approach to social mapping, demanding at least nine detailed elements. These include actor identification, social role descriptions, power and interest analysis, problem-solving forums, sustainability assessments, vulnerability analyses, social problem mapping, and empowerment program recommendations. While well-intentioned, this rigid framework risks reducing participation to a checklist exercise. Companies may focus on generating the required documents, potentially losing sight of the dynamic and evolving nature of community needs. The emphasis on a report as the end product can overshadow the importance of continuous dialogue and iterative program

design developed in true partnership with the affected communities.

If asked whether our company is actively involved in implementing community empowerment programs, we can confidently affirm our participation. Prior to initiating any program, we conduct thorough social mapping and engage with stakeholders. This initial step is crucial for fostering community participation. However, it's important to acknowledge that involving every individual in program planning is not feasible. Instead, we engage with local officials as representatives of the broader community. Through them, we identify the community's needs and incorporate them into our programs (Alamanda, former Government Relations and Social Safeguard officer at PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng).

Alamanda's statement overlooks the intricacies of representation, a process characterized by both inclusion and exclusion of interests (Saward, 2006). Even legally recognized representatives may not fully encapsulate their community's needs. They might prioritize certain interests or pursue symbolic goals rather than substantive ones (Pitkin, 1972). This complexity is evident in the Dieng Plateau, where a history of distrust exists between residents affected by PT Geo Dipa Energi and local elites turned officials. Reports indicate that village officials have often failed to represent community interests in company-led forums, leading to their exclusion from resistance efforts. This underscores the limitations of formal representation and the potential for partial, symbolic representation.

The impact of quasi-participatory schemes is apparent in various programs where implementation falls short. For instance, the coffee planting empowerment program, part of the GDE Pintar initiative, faced challenges due to mismatches with the soil and weather conditions of the Dieng Plateau. This disconnect occurred because the company did not engage in comprehensive dialogue with the local community regarding their specific environmental conditions, such as soil structure, weather pat-

terns, and water conditions. Instead of fostering genuine, long-term community economic independence as intended by the PROPER initiative, the program served as a symbolic gesture to maintain company-community relations. Company community development officers acknowledge prioritizing PROPER ratings over transformative empowerment. Consequently, the program functions as a post-political mechanism, suppressing potential conflicts through techno-managerial environmental control and the illusion of community participation in planning.

The second layer of post-political configuration lies in PT Geo Dipa Energi's protest channels, ostensibly designed to address community grievances. These channels include online forums and open discussions, with a focus on the online platform. While seemingly responsive to protests and aligned with environmental regulations (Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation Number 1 of 2021), this channel risks individualizing protests rather than facilitating collective action.

I have personally protested directly to the company several times through online channels. These channels can take the form of complaint forums on the official website or WhatsApp contacts. However, my protests have rarely been taken seriously. For example, when I complained about the excessive noise from a well, I received a photo of the company's workers sleeping instead of a meaningful response. Sometimes, they simply assert that the noise level complies with regulations, which I, lacking formal education, struggle to comprehend. Protesting alone in this manner feels disempowering (Matahari, a resident of Karangtengah Village).

Matahari's statement elucidates the manner in which the company undermines the collective nature of residents' protests, relegating them to individual grievances and thereby weakening the community's position. Although the complaints inherently stem from collective concerns, the discourse of modern representative democracy often conflates public interest with individual in-

terest, presupposing equal freedom of expression for each person (Alford, 2002). This political framework disregards collective politics as antiquated, favoring instead an emphasis on individualism (Beck & Sznaider, 2010). Such a perspective overlooks the power differentials that influence the articulation of democratic interests, ultimately disempowering the community in its conflict with the company.

The third layer of the post-political configuration manifests in companies' utilization of public discussion mechanisms to address issues with affected communities. However, the frequency of these discussions remains ambiguous, with company sources themselves lacking awareness of any regular schedule. Press releases imply that discussions primarily occur in response to conflicts, serving as reactionary measures to mitigate public outrage rather than proactively addressing concerns. This pattern is discernible in the company's responses to gas leaks in 2016 and 2022, as well as well drilling in 2019. The purportedly participatory nature of these forums, intended to serve as a mode of political engagement, is also dubious. Anggrek's statement is anticipated to provide further elucidation regarding their true dynamics.

The company frequently organizes public discussion forums concerning programs or complaints. However, these forums often devolve into socialization events rather than genuine discussions. Consequently, they become one-sided platforms where only the company addresses the public, with little to no opportunity for reciprocal dialogue. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the company to remunerate certain residents solely to attend these forums. These compensated residents are typically instructed to remain silent or to align with the company's proposals. For instance, community development officers often allocate a portion of their budget, typically 20 million rupiah, to incentivize residents to attend such forums (Anggrek, former Community Development Officer of PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng).

Anggrek's statement exposes how PT Geo Dipa Energi obscures its actions behind

a veneer of participation and representation. The company manipulates participatory processes to legitimize its response to environmental concerns, orchestrating ostensibly representative forums and even compensating supportive "community representatives." Despite the outward appearance of participation, these forums ultimately undermine genuine representation of community interests. This practice aligns with the post-political configuration, wherein representation becomes stagnant rather than a dynamic, contested process (Schmitt, 1993). Such a model stifles the political voice of dissenting groups in order to perpetuate the status quo to the company's advantage.

Community empowerment programs, complaint channels, and public discussions continuously perpetuate a post-political configuration in the company-citizen conflict. This configuration is rooted in PROPER's scheme, with its document-focused assessments and social mapping that favor village elites. Consequently, the political narrative of the Dieng Plateau protests is suppressed, with issues framed as individual and technical. Yet, the political dimension of reality cannot be erased. Despite this post-political configuration, the political will ultimately resurface.

The Return of the Political

As Swyngedouw has illuminated, post-political configurations that suppress the political dimension do not eradicate it, as this dimension is inherent to reality itself. The repression of political antagonism often leads to the emergence of violent conflicts (Mouffe, 1993). In the context of the conflict between the company and residents of the Dieng Plateau, mechanisms such as community empowerment programs, integrated online complaint channels, and public discussion forums—three elements contributing to post-political configurations—serve to suppress the political dimension of citizen protests and catalyze the emergence of violent conflicts. These conflicts manifest in two primary forms: everyday conflicts and monumental conflicts.

Everyday conflicts often stem from two primary sources: social jealousy arising from disparities in Corporate Social Respon-

sibility (CSR) funds, particularly within programs like coffee planting, and tensions between residents and workers. In practice, the allocation of CSR initiatives, guided by the four pillars, is often uneven. According to PT Geo Dipa Energi's community development officer, the primary aim of these CSR efforts is to mitigate protests and foster positive relations with residents to prevent future unrest. This approach, as described by Li and Semedi (2021), can be likened to "headache medicine" employed by extractive companies to quell public dissent over environmental concerns. However, this pragmatic strategy often results in CSR initiatives lacking substantive and sustainable outcomes.

I provide an example, the Coffee Planting and Empowering Program, which derives from GDE Pintar. This initiative is not rooted in concrete issues or potentials within the Dieng Plateau. The cultivation of coffee is incongruent with the soil characteristics of the Dieng Plateau and is not a prevalent agricultural pursuit among local inhabitants. Consequently, many of the coffee plants introduced failed to thrive, with only a minority of growers achieving success through personal investment of capital (Anggrek, former Community Development Officer of PT Geo Dipa Energi).

Anggrek's observation underscores how inadequately aligned CSR initiatives not only neglect genuine challenges but also exacerbate social divisions. Our source from WALHI elucidates how such programs contribute to divisive narratives, casting villages accepting CSR assistance as adversaries. This manufactured animosity manifests through rumors, gossip, and conspiracies, as elucidated by James Scott (1987), with potential political ramifications when originating from external sources targeting a specific group. The result is a fragmented resistance movement, particularly detrimental during critical junctures such as the sudden establishment of the PLTP Unit Dieng 2 well.

Daily conflicts are perpetuated as the company portrays its employment of Dieng Plateau residents as an act of benevolence.

Alamanda, a former Government Relations and Social Safeguard officer at PT Geo Dipa Energi, characterizes this as the company's "humility," citing the low-skilled "blue-collar" nature of the positions offered, positions for which the company could easily source more qualified candidates. This strategy heightens tensions, as it obscures the exploitative nature of these limited job opportunities under the guise of contributing to the local economy.

Informants divulge that these "blue-collar" roles primarily entail security duties at company wellpads. Neighborhood units (RT) collectively receive funds (20 million rupiah/month) to oversee and maintain these sites, with residents taking turns fulfilling these responsibilities. This arrangement engenders significant ethical concerns, as protests at wellpads lead to direct confrontations between protesting residents and fellow residents employed as security personnel. The deliberate cultivation of such divisions by the company serves to undermine unified opposition to its operations, exemplifying its manipulative tactics to maintain control and suppress dissent by fracturing the community to safeguard its interests.

The company attracts individuals to join its workforce, often directing them towards security positions. For instance, during the recent drilling and establishment of Wellpad 9, residents initially protested these activities. However, instead of addressing the residents' concerns, the company recruited individuals from RT 9 as security officers, compensating them with Rp. 20 million per month. This practice frequently leads to conflicts between residents, instigating a sense of betrayal among community members (Matahari, a resident of Karangtengah Village).

The company's CSR endeavors and recruitment of Dieng Plateau residents serve as post-political tactics aimed at quelling dissent and reducing protests to mere requests for participation. However, as argued by Mouffe (2005), the political is an inherent aspect of reality. Attempts at repression inevitably provoke its resurgence, often manifesting in destructive forms. In the con-

text of the Dieng Plateau, this resurgence is evident in everyday conflicts, where narratives of "friend" and "enemy" emerge, fueled by community-based rumors and gossip. Moreover, this tension occasionally escalates into physical altercations between protesting residents and those affiliated with the company.

Apart from everyday conflicts, monumental conflicts arise from post-political configurations that stifle political expression. This is exemplified by the construction of the PLTP Unit Dieng 2 in 2022. Intensified construction led to two major conflicts. In early 2022, conflict erupted at the PLTP Unit Dieng 2 wellpad construction site near Karangtengah Village. Despite a January 12th agreement with the Banjarnegara District Head to cease activity, the company violated the pact. Workers, accompanied by plainclothes police, forced entry to the well site. Villagers attempted to block them, resulting in arguments and physical clashes with minor injuries on both sides.

A second monumental conflict erupted on October 24th, 2022, during a public discussion forum initiated by the Acting District Head of Banjarnegara to bridge resident and PT Geo Dipa Energi interests. The forum turned violent when PT Geo Dipa Energi workers intimidated residents displaying protest posters. The situation escalated further with the arrival of Bakal villagers, sparking physical attacks with protesters punched, beaten, trampled, and struck with chairs. Injuries were sustained by both residents and workers. Company sources interviewed later blamed the violence on the residents' "agitation posters" and the presence of Bakal villagers, whose stake in the project they disputed.

Monumental, violent clashes are the second, more explicit way the political inevitably resurfaces. The two examples described began as forums for reaching agreement. Yet, the pursuit of absolute collective agreement becomes a post-political mechanism, reducing the political agency of certain groups. Since the political is inherent to reality, its repression is futile. The political re-emerges destructively, as physical clashes between companies, the state, and citizens. Ultimately, vulnerable groups – residents

and company workers – suffer most, facing physical harm and the suppression of their political expression.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the Ministry of Environment and Forestry's PROPER program through a post-political lens, suggesting that its neoliberal, techno-managerial indicators and mechanisms contribute to a post-political environmental management framework. This framework seeks to suppress conflict and the inherently political nature of society, yet the political reality inevitably resurfaces, often in destructive and violent forms.

Through the case study of the conflict involving PT Geo Dipa Energi Unit Dieng, this research reveals the emergence of a post-political configuration resulting from the PROPER program. This configuration takes three main forms. Firstly, community empowerment becomes geared towards meeting PROPER assessments and quelling protests rather than fostering long-term sustainability. While companies were already obligated to empower communities, PROPER introduces specific technical indicators—such as participation and protest minimization—that prioritize compliance over genuine engagement.

Secondly, integrated complaint channels undermine collective power by reducing communities to isolated individuals, making it easier for companies to dismiss and deflect collective protests. Individual complaints carry less weight, simplifying the company's ability to counter public narratives. Thirdly, quasi-participatory public discussions further marginalize communities, with the company controlling the agenda and excluding dissenting voices and protest narratives, perpetuating a façade of participation while suppressing genuine dissent.

Ultimately, these post-political mechanisms fail to suppress the political, as it consistently re-emerges, often through violent means. In the conflict between PT Geo Dipa Energi and the Dieng Plateau residents, the political resurfaces in everyday conflicts and monumental clashes. Everyday conflicts arise from the company's focus on short-term, charity-based programs that temporarily

ly placate protests but foster division within the community. Monumental clashes stem from quasi-participatory public discussions, with notable instances occurring in 2022, resulting in both emotional distress and physical harm to vulnerable groups.

This research highlights critical aspects of the PROPER program within Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, suggesting that it can facilitate post-political configurations that harm vulnerable groups—a perspective often overlooked in existing, primarily positive, research on PROPER. These insights can inform the development, evaluation, or reform of environmental policies. While this study offers depth rather than generalizability, further research is necessary to validate these findings across diverse industrial contexts. Expanding the research to companies with "beyond compliance" PROPER rankings (green or gold) could enhance our understanding of post-political dynamics across different contexts.

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