

A CULTURAL BROKERAGE APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION: EVIDENCE FROM AN INDONESIAN CASE STUDY

UMA ABORDAGEM DE CORRETAGEM CULTURAL PARA RESOLUÇÃO DE CONFLITOS: EVIDÊNCIAS DE UM ESTUDO DE CASO INDONÉSIO

Article received on :7/4/2025

Article accepted on: 9/5/2025

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Abstract

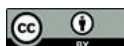
Environmental conflicts stem from competing claims over natural resources among communities, corporations, and the state, often driven by overexploitation, unequal benefit distribution, and weak ecological considerations (Maulana & Hutagalung, 2025). This study focuses on the Customary Forest of Koto Sebelimbing XIII Koto Kampar, Riau, which serves as both a livelihood base and a cultural identity for indigenous people, yet remains contested by multiple actors. Data from the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) show more than 3,000 agrarian conflicts in Indonesia between 2000 and 2025, including 730 cases in Riau, reflecting the persistence of tenure-related disputes. Using a qualitative case study approach with interviews and comparative analysis of conflict episodes (2011–2015 and 2019), the findings reveal that reliance on formal legal procedures tends to delay resolution, while mediation through cultural brokers significantly accelerates settlement. The study contributes to the literature on environmental conflict resolution by empirically demonstrating the strategic role of cultural brokers in reshaping power relations and by evidencing post-2018 acceleration in dispute settlement. It further recommends the institutionalization of cultural brokers within formal agrarian conflict management frameworks to enhance both legitimacy and efficiency.

Keywords: Environmental Conflict. Customary Forest. Mediation. Cultural Broker. Conflict Resolution.

Resumo

Conflitos ambientais decorrem de reivindicações concorrentes sobre recursos naturais entre comunidades, corporações e o Estado, frequentemente motivadas pela superexploração, distribuição desigual de benefícios e considerações ecológicas frágeis (Maulana & Hutagalung, 2025). Este estudo se concentra na Floresta Consuetudinária de Koto Sebelimbing XIII Koto Kampar, Riau, que serve como base de subsistência e identidade cultural para povos indígenas, mas permanece contestada por múltiplos atores. Dados do Consórcio de Reforma Agrária (KPA) mostram mais de 3.000 conflitos agrários na Indonésia entre 2000 e 2025, incluindo 730 casos em Riau, refletindo a persistência de disputas relacionadas à posse. Usando uma abordagem de estudo de caso qualitativo com entrevistas e análise comparativa de episódios de conflito (2011-2015 e 2019), os resultados revelam que a dependência de procedimentos legais formais tende a atrasar a resolução, enquanto a mediação por meio de corretores culturais acelera significativamente a resolução. O estudo contribui para a literatura sobre resolução de conflitos ambientais ao demonstrar empiricamente o papel estratégico dos mediadores culturais na reformulação das relações de poder e ao evidenciar a aceleração da resolução de disputas após 2018. Recomenda ainda a institucionalização dos mediadores culturais em estruturas formais de gestão de conflitos agrários para aumentar tanto a legitimidade quanto a eficiência.

Palavras-chave: Conflito Ambiental. Floresta Consuetudinária. Mediação. Intermediação Cultural. Resolução de Conflitos.



1 BACKGROUND

Since the political reforms of 1998, Indonesia has experienced a significant escalation of conflicts, particularly in the agrarian sector. A report by the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) in 2025 documented more than 3,000 cases of agrarian conflict between 2000 and 2025 (Amady et al., 2025). Amady (2023) argues that the proliferation of these conflicts is largely driven by increased community awareness of land rights, as well as broader access to information facilitated by NGOs, local media, and social media platforms. Conversely, conflict resolution efforts have often stagnated, with many cases requiring extended periods of negotiation and settlement.

The experience of the NGO *Perkumpulan Scale Up* (SU) between 2007 and 2018 demonstrates that resolving 21 conflict cases required an average of three years per case. For instance, the conflict in Lubuk Jering (2007–2011), the Datuk Rajo Melayu case (2011–2015), and the dispute between the Pangean community and an oil palm company each took more than three years to resolve, while the Teluk Meranti case lasted up to four years (Amady, 2022). This finding is consistent with Mundung's (2025) study, which also reported that prior to 2018, SU faced similar challenges, with most conflicts requiring approximately three years to settle. Similarly, Berenschot et al. (2021) revealed that in out-of-court settlements of 150 oil palm plantation conflicts, only 32% were resolved, with an average duration of 9.5 years. In addition, the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) reported that agrarian conflicts resolved through mediation or negotiation typically take between 16 months and three years (KPA, 2023).

Davis and Lewicki (2023) concluded that the duration of conflict resolution is strongly influenced by the complexity of the dispute, the resolution methods employed, and the extent of party involvement. Building on this, Afrizal (2024), in his study of conflicts in Indonesia, argued that the participation of state actors and corporations often prolongs the resolution process due to competing structural interests and the weak recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. Earlier studies by Afiff and Lowe (2007) and Ginting and Pye (2011) further support this perspective, emphasizing that the lack of reliable spatial data, institutional fragmentation, and the absence of legal certainty contribute to the persistence of agrarian conflicts, many of which remain unresolved for years.

However, between 2018 and 2023, SU demonstrated a markedly faster capacity

for conflict resolution. For example, the Datuk Rajo Melayu conflict was resolved in only two months (December 2019–January 2020), while the disputes involving 14 farmers and the Pulau Muda community were settled within just three weeks (Mundung, 2025). This acceleration is a noteworthy phenomenon, as it reduced the average resolution time from approximately three years to as little as two weeks. Mundung (2025) further observed that SU's success was closely linked to its adoption of a cultural brokerage and agency-based approach, which positioned SU as a facilitator capable of bridging the interests of the disputing parties

This research contributes to the literature by identifying and systematically analyzing an approach to accelerating conflict resolution applied by SU between 2018 and 2023—a phenomenon that empirically reduced the duration of agrarian conflict resolution from several years to only weeks or months. The novelty of this study lies not only in documenting the acceleration process but also in demonstrating that such acceleration results from integrating two domains of theory and practice: (1) cultural brokerage, in which cultural brokers act as intermediaries, symbolic interpreters, and negotiators of meaning between local and external actors; and (2) knowledge brokering through boundary organizations that connect local knowledge, technical expertise, and policymakers, thereby enabling more focused and timely decision-making. By combining an agency-based cultural brokerage framework with recent insights from knowledge brokering and land-use conflict research, this study advances a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding how broker capacities—both cultural and knowledge-based—can bridge communication gaps, enhance the legitimacy of processes, and accelerate negotiation outcomes in agrarian conflicts. This integrated approach has received limited attention in out-of-court conflict resolution studies (Juhola et al., 2024; Karcher et al., 2024; Luig et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Fienitz & Siebert, 2022).

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the approaches employed by SU and their implementation in practice, with particular attention to how these approaches enable significantly shorter conflict resolution processes. The primary objective is to identify and examine both the strategies applied and the ways in which they are operationalized in resolving conflicts.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACH

This study is grounded in the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) approach, or out-of-court mechanisms, which SU has applied since 2007 by incorporating cultural brokerage and agency-based strategies.

2.1 ADR approach

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) emerged as a Western legal concept but has developed significantly in Indonesia since the political reforms of 1998. According to Nolan-Haley (1992), ADR serves as an umbrella framework encompassing mediation, negotiation, arbitration, mini-trials, and summary jury trials. In Indonesia, its rapid expansion is closely linked to the incorporation of cultural foundations, particularly the principle of *musyawarah untuk mufakat* (deliberation to reach consensus). This adaptation enables the involvement of all stakeholders, both directly and indirectly, and provides space for conflict resolution through customary law practices that have long existed in local communities.

The relevance of ADR in Indonesia stems from structural and socio-economic constraints. Many rural communities lack formal legal documents, with land ownership often recognized only through natural markers or inherited evidence. Pursuing litigation is costly and time-consuming, as courts are located in district capitals and legal procedures require resources beyond villagers' economic and educational capacities. Consequently, ADR offers a more accessible, inclusive, and culturally legitimate pathway for conflict resolution, provided that parties are positioned equally and communication is facilitated effectively.

The Indonesian legal system has formally recognized ADR. Several regulations—such as Law No. 23/1997 on Environmental Management, Law No. 8/1999 on Consumer Protection, Law No. 41/1999 on Forestry, Law No. 2/2004 on Industrial Relations Disputes, and Law No. 30/1999 on Arbitration and ADR—explicitly regulate its application. Furthermore, Supreme Court Regulation No. 1/2016 institutionalizes mediation as part of civil and religious court procedures, demonstrating the increasing institutionalization of ADR in Indonesia's legal landscape

2.2 Cultural broker

The concept of cultural brokerage was first introduced by Wolf (1956) in his study of complex societies in Mexico, and later elaborated by Boissevain (1974), who described cultural brokers as actors bridging differences in values, languages, and systems of meaning across communities. Cultural brokers translate cultural logics to prevent misunderstanding and facilitate dialogue (Pang et al., 2019). Geertz (1960) emphasized their role in generating and regulating values, while Hopkins (1977) highlighted their contribution to building trust, communication, and mutual capacity. More recent studies (Jang, 2014; Baron, 2021) describe cultural brokers as facilitators who help conflicting groups negotiate cultural differences and establish shared understandings.

In environmental conflicts, cultural brokers operate at the intersection of communal ecological values and the capitalist, legalistic, and technocratic logics of corporations or the state (Tsing, 2005). Their role extends beyond technical translation; they are political actors who regulate the flow of information, frame issues, and shape negotiation outcomes (Lewis & Mosse, 2006).

Three central roles can be identified. First, they provide intercultural communication and interpretation by translating meanings within local frameworks (Gavionli & Zirzi, 2008; Veerept & Ciybe, 2016). Second, they design culturally acceptable compromises and mediate symbolic trauma arising from land conflicts (Ruvim, 2006). Third, they engage in advocacy by representing marginalized groups in institutional arenas (Kaufert & Koolage, 1984). These roles illustrate their transformative capacity to reframe power relations, build collaborative norms, and facilitate peaceful conflict resolution.

2.3 Agency theory

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualize agency as a temporally constructed process, in which actors engage reflectively with changing historical and structural contexts. Agency is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic capacity shaped by the interplay of past experiences, present evaluations, and future-oriented projections. Similarly, Ortner (2006) defines agency as a relational capacity, embedded in structures that both constrain and enable intentional action. Together, these perspectives position agency as

an interactive praxis, continuously renegotiated within social, institutional, and cultural boundaries.

In the context of environmental conflicts, cultural brokers exemplify this relational agency. They do not function merely as neutral translators but as strategic actors who mediate values, reframe meanings, and intervene in unequal power relations between communities, corporations, and the state. Their agency unfolds across three interrelated dimensions. First, the *iterational* dimension draws on collective memory and cultural experience to interpret conflicts. Second, the *practical–evaluative* dimension enables adaptive responses to uncertain situations during mediation and negotiation. Third, the *projective* dimension involves envisioning and advocating for more just and culturally legitimate futures.

Thus, cultural brokers act simultaneously as interpreters, negotiators, and advocates. By bridging epistemic and cultural divides, they exercise agency not only to resolve disputes but also to construct new structures of collaboration and more sustainable pathways for conflict transformation

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a rapid ethnographic approach (Amady, 2025), in which the research focus was carefully designed through a comprehensive desk study and direct supervision by the SU director. Prior to fieldwork, the researcher prepared open-ended interview guidelines and established a clear strategy for informant selection. Field research was conducted between June and September 2025 within the Datuk Raja Melayu indigenous community. The process involved socialization, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with the nephews and nieces of Datuk Raja Melayu, as well as consultations in Pekanbaru with company representatives, conflict facilitators, and SU directors. The study specifically examined SU's conflict resolution practices in two periods: 2011–2015 and 2019–2020.

Data collection was conducted through:

1. Reflective accounts from SU, community members, and company actors regarding their interactions with village leaders, customary figures, government officials, and citizens.
2. Informal interviews and everyday conversations documented ethnographically.

3. Interviews with conflict resolution assistants to capture their practical experiences.
4. Interviews with company representatives directly involved in the settlement process.
5. Supporting documents, including conflict maps, local media reports, meeting minutes, and two student theses generated as outputs of this research.

All data were analyzed using the combined framework of cultural brokerage and agency theory to examine how land access is shaped by social, political, economic, and coercive power.

Validation was ensured through three strategies:

- a) **Data triangulation**, including source triangulation (cross-checking narratives from different community actors), document triangulation (comparing field data with archives, certificates, mediation documents, and media reports), and interviewer triangulation (involving two independent student researchers to conduct parallel interviews).
- b) **Limited member checking**, where selected narratives were reconfirmed with key informants such as village leaders to ensure accurate representation.
- c) **Researcher's critical reflexivity**, involving explicit reflection on the researcher's positionality, biases, and emotional involvement in the conflict setting.

Data analysis followed an interpretive approach through three steps: (1) categorizing access mechanisms using cultural brokerage and agency theory, (2) comparing field experiences with theoretical literature to link micro-level experiences with broader agrarian structures, and (3) critically reflecting on the meaning of experiences and the researcher's role in shaping interpretation.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 SU as a Pioneer of ADR in Indonesia

The SU Association (SU) is an independent NGO established on April 13, 2007, in Pekanbaru, Riau, by social observers, academics, and humanitarian activists committed to promoting accountable and sustainable social development. Guided by the motto "*Changing conflict into equitable partnership*", SU has positioned itself as a pioneer in conflict transformation, particularly in addressing natural resource disputes

through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms (Forest Peoples Programme, 2023).

Since its establishment, SU has mediated more than 24 agrarian and tenurial conflicts in Riau and neighboring regions, making it a reference point for ADR-based conflict resolution in Indonesia (International Cities of Peace, 2021). One of its earliest milestones was the settlement of the Lubuk Jering community's dispute with a pulp and paper company, which demonstrated the effectiveness of mediation over litigation. This case not only strengthened SU's legitimacy but also inspired national and international recognition, including acknowledgment from UN agencies (Forest Peoples Programme, 2012).

The emergence of SU was closely linked to post-Reformasi resistance against forestry and plantation industries, where communities and NGOs sought alternatives to the costly and often inaccessible judicial system. By facilitating negotiations and drawing on customary practices of deliberation and consensus, SU offered communities a culturally grounded and economically feasible avenue for conflict resolution. The Lubuk Jering case, mediated with support from local leaders and international NGO networks, resulted in a lasting peace agreement and became a model for similar settlements.

Over time, SU expanded its role beyond direct mediation. At the institutional level, it supported the establishment of conflict management units in farmer associations and government agencies, including the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the National Land Agency (ANTARA News Riau, 2022). By integrating ADR into both community practices and policy frameworks, SU has become a pioneering force in institutionalizing non-judicial conflict resolution in Indonesia.

4.2 Portrait of the Datuk Raja Melayu conflict

The conflict in the customary territory of the Datuk Raja Melayu Kedatukan, a historically rooted institution in Riau Province, illustrates the deep entanglement between cultural authority and land tenure disputes. The Kedatukan is more than a traditional social structure; it embodies cultural legitimacy, collective memory, and territorial integrity. When an industrial plantation forest (HTI) company claimed this area without consultation or recognition of indigenous authority, conflict became inevitable.

The dispute between the indigenous community of Melayu Kedatukan III Koto Sebelimbing in Siabu Village, Kampar Regency, and the HTI company unfolded in two major waves. The first emerged in 1998, when the government granted $\pm 1,650$ hectares to the company without involving the community that held historical rights. Eviction, intimidation, and crop destruction soon followed, justified by the concession license (Mongabay, 2012). Initially ignored by local authorities, the community later built alliances with young activists linked to SU, who then mobilized advocacy strategies including participatory mapping, historical studies, and international campaigns. Video documentation screened in Jakarta and Europe generated public pressure, eventually opening negotiation channels.

Between 2011–2015, the conflict was mediated by the National Forestry Council (DKN) with the endorsement of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. SU played a supporting role—training villagers in negotiation, providing advocacy tools, and protecting them from unilateral company pressure. The process culminated in a 2015 peace agreement that provided staged compensation of Rp10,000/m² for 1,000 hectares.

However, by 2019, unresolved payments and the company's failure to renew the agreement reignited tensions. This time, SU directly facilitated negotiations, escalating communications from district offices to central management. Within two months, an agreement was reached: compensation was increased to Rp11,000/m² and payments resumed promptly.

Comparatively, the first resolution (2011–2015) relied heavily on state mediation and international pressure, taking four years. The second (2019–2021) was resolved in just two months, highlighting the strategic agency of SU as a cultural broker capable of bridging relations, mobilizing collective capacity, and engaging companies at multiple levels of authority.

This model is in line with the concept of practical and projective agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), where social actors not only react to the past, but imagine alternative futures through reflective and adaptive deliberative strategies.

A. Conflict Handling in 2011–2015 and 2019–2020

The handling of the Datuk Raja Melayu conflict occurred in two distinct phases: (1) the prolonged resolution process between 2011–2015, facilitated by the National Forestry Council (DKN) at the recommendation of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK); and (2) the accelerated resolution in 2019–2020, which lasted only two

months, with SU playing a more direct and strategic role. Comparing these two periods is important, as it highlights a paradigm shift from formal, state-led mediation toward more responsive, participatory, and agency-based non-litigation approaches (Howson et al., 2020; Sihotang & Barthos, 2025).

Conflict Resolution in 2011–2015: Formal Mediation with SU Assistance

The conflict was first brought to SU in December 2011 when three representatives of the nephews of Datuk Raja Melayu sought assistance in addressing escalating disputes with the HTI company. SU responded by deploying two community assistants, who provided advocacy and technical support. Their interventions included:

1. Assisting the community in clarifying the subject of the conflict based on legitimate customary genealogy.
2. Conducting participatory mapping and verification of land ownership (1,000 hectares).
3. Facilitating dialogue with the Forestry Service as a neutral technical authority.
4. Providing training on negotiation, mediation strategies, and public speaking.
5. Accompanying communities in every mediation session as observers and advisors.
6. Supporting post-mediation evaluation and follow-up planning.

Despite these efforts, the resolution took four years and involved nine mediation sessions. Several obstacles hindered progress: disputes over genealogical legitimacy, conflicting mapping results, company avoidance of mediation, financial interruptions in the mediation process, and even attempts at co-optation through monetary inducements. At one point, negotiations stalled when the company offered personal compensation outside the formal process; however, community leaders—encouraged by SU—returned the benefits and rejoined the formal mediation pathway.

The final agreement in 2015 established one legitimate Datuk and eight nephews as rightful customary representatives, recognized 1,000 hectares of customary land, and set compensation at IDR 10,000 per ton of wood (approximately IDR 1 billion annually), to be paid during Ramadan. This resolution, though successful, underscored the limitations of state-centered mechanisms: bureaucratic delays, susceptibility to company influence, and reliance on international advocacy campaigns initiated by SU and global NGO networks (Colchester & Chao, 2013; Myers et al., 2017).

B. Conflict Period 2019–2020: Rapid Negotiations through Cultural Brokerage

The dynamics shifted significantly at the end of 2019 when the company failed to extend the compensation agreement and delayed payments for two years. In December 2019, the community once again approached SU for assistance. Unlike the earlier period, SU took a more active role, positioning itself directly as a negotiation facilitator. SU's first step was to establish communication with the company across multiple levels—from district and provincial offices, through regional Sumatra management, up to the company's central office in Jakarta. Although SU initially faced intimidation from district-level public relations staff, regional and central management responded positively and agreed to open discussions.

“The community asked SU for help because the company broke its promise. We contacted their offices from the district up to central management. The district public relations even threatened us through WhatsApp, but the central office in Jakarta responded quickly.” (SU Assistant Staff, 2025)

The first meeting, facilitated by SU, produced an agreement to conduct joint mapping, with costs borne equally by both parties. The remapping revealed that the company was actually utilizing 1,651 hectares of land—651 hectares more than the original agreement. Recognizing the potential for escalation, SU advised the community to temporarily set aside the expansion issue and instead prioritize resolving overdue compensation and adjusting the payment rate. After negotiations, the company accepted a revised compensation rate of IDR 11,000 per ton (lower than the community's initial demand of IDR 15,000 per ton) and agreed to immediately pay the outstanding arrears.

“The resolution was very quick. Mr. Rawa pushed hard, and within two months the company fulfilled its promises and paid the delayed compensation.” (Interview with nephews of Datuk Raja Melayu, negotiation team, 2025)

The third meeting finalized the draft agreement, which was prepared by SU and signed by both parties. The resolution process, lasting only two months (December 2019–January 2020), stood in stark contrast to the 2011–2015 period that had stretched over four years. The rapid conclusion was largely due to SU's active role as a cultural broker, which combined bureaucratic knowledge with symbolic-cultural authority, enabling direct engagement with top-level company management (Bebbington et al., 2018; Howson et al., 2020).

The final agreement included four main points:

1. Recognition of the disputed land as 1,651 hectares, including an additional 651 hectares compared to the initial agreement.
2. Adjustment of compensation from IDR 10,000 to IDR 11,000 per ton.
3. Immediate settlement of the two-year delayed payments.
4. Postponement of technical discussions on land expansion, to maintain focus on the compensation issue.

This outcome demonstrated the effectiveness of SU's negotiation strategy, particularly the emphasis on **trust-building** as a precondition for meaningful dialogue. In contexts of protracted conflict, where parties often harbor suspicion or hostility, rebuilding mutual trust becomes crucial for enabling productive negotiations and preventing further escalation.

5 DISCUSSION: CONFLICT LAYERS IN THE CUSTOMARY TERRITORY OF KEDATUKAN DATUK RAJA MELAYU

The conflict in the customary territory of Kedatukan Datuk Raja Melayu is not merely a dispute over land access or economic benefits. Rather, it represents a **multi-layered struggle** that exposes deeper dynamics of power, cultural representation, and historical legitimacy. Initial analysis indicates that this conflict has **four interrelated layers**:

1. **Historical Layer.** The contested land is recognized as former customary territory with high symbolic value for the indigenous community. The neglect of local historical narratives by the state and companies is perceived as a form of identity erasure, provoking resistance and collective mobilization (Tsing, 2005; Li, 2014).
2. **Representation Layer.** The HTI company initially approached the area without formally or respectfully involving customary authorities. This omission was interpreted as a delegitimization of adat institutions and a disregard for cultural values underpinning social order. The absence of customary participation in company programs created not only an administrative gap but also a symbolic rupture in communication (Scott, 1998; Bebbington et al., 2008).
3. **Internal Power Layer.** Tensions also emerged within the customary structure regarding legitimate representation in negotiations. This illustrates that adat

institutions are not monolithic or static but contested arenas of authority, shaped by the influence of external actors such as NGOs, corporations, and the state (Brosius, 1999).

4. **External Relations Layer.** Local governments often adopted a passive stance, framing the dispute as “customary and symbolic” rather than an administrative concern with policy implications. Such a perspective reflects institutional bias that privileges state-centric forms of knowledge and authority over customary practices (Agrawal, 2005; Peluso & Lund, 2011).

Within this context, **cultural brokers** did not simply function as technical facilitators or administrative negotiators. Their role was far more strategic: they acted as **agents of symbolic mediation**, weaving together fragmented social relations, reconciling historical narratives, and creating spaces for recognition even in the absence of formal legality. This work of cultural brokerage manifested in three primary strategies of symbolic agency:

1. **Restitution of Symbolic Dignity.** SU facilitated company–community meetings that began with traditional rituals led by Datuk Raja Melayu. By foregrounding adat protocols, these encounters restored the dignity previously ignored by external actors. Such openings demonstrate that in conflicts rooted in symbols and representation, the initial form of dialogue profoundly shapes subsequent relations (Ortner, 2006; Tsing, 2005).
2. **Re-Mapping Shared History.** SU encouraged a co-constructed historical narrative developed collaboratively between adat leaders and the company’s social team. Rather than privileging one version of the past, this process produced a “shared history” recognized by both parties. This symbolic act of remapping became a foundation for collective legitimacy and future agreements (Peluso & Lund, 2011; Bebbington et al., 2008).
3. **Symbolic Recognition without Formal Legality.** One tangible outcome was the company’s willingness to acknowledge customary authorities in its internal documents and official communications. Although not legally binding, such recognition carried significant cultural weight. For the indigenous community, this constituted affirmation of their symbolic legitimacy within the framework of a modern economic structure (Agrawal, 2005; Martinez-Alier, 2002).

These strategies underscore how **symbolic compromise** can serve as an alternative pathway in conflicts resistant to purely legalistic solutions. Resolution in this sense does not solely rest on monetary compensation or formal contracts but on narratives, gestures, and the recognition of sacred community values. Cultural brokers, therefore, embody **projective and symbolic agency** (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), imagining new social spaces where customary institutions and modern corporations can coexist in a more balanced relationship.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examines strategies to accelerate the resolution of environmental conflicts and evaluates the application of a **cultural brokerage approach** in addressing tenure disputes between local communities and HTI companies in Sebelimbing XIII Koto Kampar Village, Kampar Regency, Riau Province. The study arrives at several key conclusions:

1. **Cultural Broker as a Flexible and Contextual Mediation Instrument.**

The cultural brokerage approach applied by Perkumpulan SU has proven effective in bridging differences in values, interests, and rationalities between local communities and HTI companies.

2. **Effectiveness Before and After 2018.**

A significant contrast was found in the duration of conflict resolution between the pre-2018 period, which was lengthy and bureaucratic, and the post-2018 period, which was notably faster.

3. **Social Context as a Determining Factor.**

The success of cultural brokerage is strongly influenced by the local social structure, the character of the actors involved, and the degree of openness of both parties to dialogue.

4. **SU's Role as an Agency-Based Actor.**

Beyond serving as a technical facilitator, SU played a strategic role as an agency actor, shaping negotiation dynamics and influencing the overall direction of conflict resolution.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutionalizing Cultural Brokerage.** Local governments and civil society organizations should formalize cultural broker mechanisms as part of official frameworks for agrarian and tenure conflict resolution.
2. **Enhancing Culture-Based Mediation Capacity.** Training and mentoring of local facilitators are essential to strengthen their ability to interpret symbols, cultural languages, and social dynamics.
3. **Encouraging Corporate Openness.** HTI concession holders must adopt non-litigation approaches and show greater respect for local wisdom and customary values.
4. **Replication in Other Conflict Areas.** The successful application of cultural brokerage in Teluk Meranti District demonstrates its potential to be replicated and adapted in other conflict-prone regions.
5. **Expanding Academic Engagement.** Further research should deepen the conceptual and practical understanding of cultural brokerage in the context of natural resource governance and environmental conflicts in Indonesia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (Kemendiktireste), Lancang Kuning University (Unilak), and the Postgraduate Program in Environmental Science (SPS).

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