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THE ILLUSION OF EMPOWERMENT: GREEN SOCIAL WORK IN EAST KALIMANTAN'S EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY

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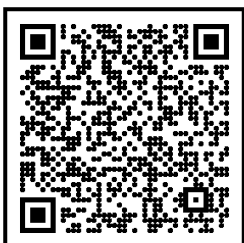
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Abstract. Research examining Green Social Work (GSW) within extractive industries remains limited, particularly in understanding the relationships between Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), and indigenous governance systems. This research analyzes the application of Green Social Work (GSW) within the extractive context of East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach grounded in a critical paradigm, this study employs literature analysis and field-based inquiry involving key informants from affected indigenous communities, village government officials, civil society actors, and extractive industry practitioners with a social work background. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of governance, environmental vulnerability, and community responses. The findings reveal that the implementation of ESG and SIA in extractive governance tends to be procedural and performative, emphasizing compliance and reporting mechanisms rather than substantive community empowerment and ecological justice. Four interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: performative sustainability governance, persistent socio-ecological vulnerability, extractive dependency, and the resilience of indigenous governance systems. Despite increasing sustainability commitments, communities continue to experience environmental degradation, social vulnerability, and limited participation in decision-making processes. At the same time, indigenous governance systems, particularly Umaq and Simpuk, demonstrate important capacities for environmental stewardship and collective accountability. This study further expands Green Social Work scholarship by integrating perspectives from Political Ecology and Indigenous Governance within extractive industry settings. The article offers an analytical framework that connects Green Social Work, ESG governance, and indigenous territorial governance as a basis for advancing ecological justice and community wellbeing in extractive regions.

Keyword: Green Social Work; Extractive Industries; Political Ecology; East Kalimantan; Greenwashing; Indigenous Knowledge.

Abstrak. Penelitian mengenai Green Social Work (GSW) dalam konteks industri ekstraktif masih terbatas, khususnya dalam memahami hubungan antara Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), dan sistem tata kelola masyarakat adat. Penelitian ini menganalisis penerapan Green Social Work (GSW) dalam konteks industri ekstraktif di Kalimantan Timur, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang berlandaskan paradigma kritis, penelitian ini memanfaatkan analisis literatur dan kajian lapangan yang melibatkan informan kunci dari masyarakat adat terdampak, pemerintah desa, aktivis masyarakat sipil, serta praktisi industri ekstraktif berlatar belakang pekerjaan sosial. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola tata kelola, kerentanan lingkungan, dan respons masyarakat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi ESG dan SIA dalam tata kelola industri ekstraktif cenderung bersifat prosedural dan performatif, dengan lebih menekankan pada mekanisme kepatuhan dan pelaporan dibandingkan pemberdayaan masyarakat dan keadilan ekologis yang substantif. Analisis menghasilkan empat tema yang saling berkaitan, yaitu tata kelola keberlanjutan yang performatif, kerentanan sosial-ekologis yang persisten, ketergantungan terhadap industri ekstraktif, dan resiliensi sistem tata kelola masyarakat adat. Meskipun komitmen terhadap keberlanjutan semakin meningkat, masyarakat masih menghadapi degradasi lingkungan, kerentanan sosial, dan keterbatasan partisipasi dalam proses pengambilan keputusan. Di saat yang sama, sistem tata kelola masyarakat adat, khususnya Umaq dan Simpuk, menunjukkan kapasitas penting dalam pengelolaan lingkungan dan akuntabilitas kolektif. Penelitian ini turut memperluas kajian Green Social Work dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif Ekologi Politik dan Tata Kelola Masyarakat Adat dalam konteks industri ekstraktif. Artikel ini menawarkan suatu kerangka analitis yang menghubungkan Green Social Work, tata kelola ESG, dan tata kelola wilayah adat sebagai dasar untuk mendorong keadilan ekologis dan kesejahteraan masyarakat di wilayah-wilayah ekstraktif.

Kata Kunci: Pekerjaan Sosial Hijau; Industri Ekstraktif; Ekologi Politik; Kalimantan Timur; Greenwashing; Pengetahuan Indigenous.



INTRODUCTION

East Kalimantan is one of Indonesia's major coal-producing regions, and the province has contributed significantly to national economic growth and energy production. East Kalimantan remains one of Indonesia's most resource-dependent regions, with coal mining continuing to play a dominant role in regional development. According to the latest regional economic statistics, the Mining and Quarrying sector contributed more than 40 percent of East Kalimantan's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in 2024, indicating the province's persistent dependence on extractive industries (BPS Provinsi Kalimantan Timur, 2026). The long-term implications of this extractive expansion are further reflected in the extensive use of land for mining concessions and the uneven progress of post-mining rehabilitation efforts. Although reclamation programs have increased in recent years, a substantial proportion of former mining areas remains degraded and vulnerable to ecological hazards. Several districts, particularly Kutai Kartanegara, Kutai Timur, and Berau, continue to experience considerable pressures due to the concentration of mining operations and the expansion of extractive infrastructure.

Simultaneously, communities in mining-affected areas continue to face environmental degradation, pressures on traditional livelihood systems, and uncertainty regarding long-term post-extractive futures (Tianur et al., 2022; Toubourou et al., 2020). These multi-layered socio-ecological challenges have become increasingly visible and urgent as Indonesia advances national energy transition mandates and aggressively expands the development of Nusantara, the country's new capital city, within the exact same resource frontier. This intersection of rapid infrastructure development, extractive continuity, and localized risk creates a highly complex crisis that demands institutional responses shifting beyond conventional, technocratic environmental management, thereby opening a vital analytical space for Green Social Work.

The Green Social Work (GSW) approach has emerged as an important framework for understanding the relationship between environmental change, social vulnerability, and justice. (Boetto, 2017; Kleibl et al., 2024; Ramsay

& Boddy, 2017). Rather than treating ecological problems as separate from welfare, green social work highlights how environmental harm disproportionately burdens marginalized populations who lack resources and access to institutional decision-making. Recent literature has explicitly connected GSW to global debates on climate justice, decolonial practice, and environmental governance. However, these existing studies present a significant limitation: they remain heavily focused on community-level resilience, service delivery, or disaster responses, while largely bracketing the structural power dynamics of resource extraction zones in the Global South. Consequently, the contested context of East Kalimantan's mining sector remains a distinct research gap, as conventional frameworks fail to capture how GSW practices operate when embedded within entrenched extraction economies and strong corporate capture. Recent scholarship has further connected GSW to discussions of climate justice, indigenous rights, and environmental governance.

Existing Green Social Work studies have primarily examined climate adaptation, disaster resilience, and community wellbeing, while limited attention has been given to how GSW operates within politically contested extractive governance systems where corporate sustainability mechanisms dominate community engagement. In such resource frontiers, sustainability initiatives are frequently implemented through corporate social responsibility programs, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, and Social Impact Assessments (SIA). Both mechanisms increasingly shape corporate-community relations in Indonesia's mining sector, making them central arenas for evaluating the practical contribution of Green Social Work. Normatively, these corporate instruments are widely presented by industries as objective evidence of responsible development, community participation, and corporate transparency (Ruiz-Blanco et al., 2022). Yet, in practice, affected communities continue to report severe everyday realities, which can be synthesized into two primary structural crises: persistent environmental degradation (such as recurring floods and dangerous abandoned pits) and severe limitations in community decision-

making due to consultation processes that lack free, prior, and informed consent. This profound discrepancy raises vital questions regarding whether corporate sustainability discourse genuinely empowers local populations or merely obscures structural inequalities and accountability deficits.

This study addresses these gaps in three ways. First, it extends Green Social Work scholarship by incorporating the perspective of Political Ecology to explain how environmental vulnerabilities are produced and maintained through unequal power relations and extractive governance arrangements. Second, it introduces performative governance as an analytical lens for understanding the limitations of ESG and SIA implementation in resource-dependent regions. Third, it demonstrates how indigenous governance systems, particularly Umaq and Simpuk, provide alternative approaches to environmental stewardship, collective accountability, and community resilience. By integrating these perspectives, this study contributes to the development of Green Social Work theory and provides empirical insights into environmental justice in extractive regions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in a critical paradigm. The critical paradigm was adopted because the study seeks not only to describe environmental and social impacts but also to examine how power relations, institutional arrangements, and governance structures shape the distribution of environmental risks and social vulnerabilities in extractive regions. By deploying this paradigm, the research explicitly aims to critique the standard mechanisms of resource governance that often mask structural inequalities under the guise of sustainability. Consequently, this critical lens allows the study to evaluate how corporate and state power dynamics directly condition the success or failure of community-level interventions. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the interactions among Green Social Work (GSW), Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), and indigenous governance systems within the extractive context of East Kalimantan. Rather than seeking

statistical representation, the research aims to develop a contextual understanding of the social and ecological dynamics surrounding extraction (Creswell, John W., Mackiewicz, 2018). Consistent with critical social science traditions, the analysis pays attention to how power relations shape both environmental outcomes and the distribution of social risks and benefits (Strier & Binyamin, 2014).

The literature review focused on scholarship related to Green Social Work, political ecology, extractivism, indigenous governance, ESG frameworks, and Social Impact Assessment (SIA). Searches were conducted through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SINTA, and Garuda using combinations of keywords including Green Social Work, extractive industries, East Kalimantan, ESG, SIA, Dayak communities, and political ecology. Priority was given to publications from 2015–2025, while foundational theoretical works were retained where necessary to support the analytical framework. Most references were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles and other scholarly sources.

Data collection was conducted through a combination of literature review and field-based inquiry via semi-structured interviews. The literature review examined scholarly publications, government documents, sustainability reports, and policy documents related to extractive governance, environmental justice, ESG implementation, and Green Social Work. To generate in-depth insights regarding extractive governance and community responses, field inquiry utilized purposive sampling to select key informants whose professional lives and positions directly intersect with the sector. The participants included village government officials (specifically the Village Secretary of Loa Raya), indigenous community representatives knowledgeable in Umaq and Simpuk systems, civil society actors, and social work practitioners from the Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan Chapter. The combination of these distinct perspectives enabled the study to capture both everyday community experiences and formalized institutional practices associated with sustainability governance in extractive

settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions focusing on environmental change, community participation, indigenous governance practices, and perceptions of ESG and SIA implementation. Interviews were complemented by document analysis to facilitate data triangulation and strengthen the interpretation of findings. To protect confidentiality, all participants were anonymized and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following four iterative stages: (1) familiarization with interview transcripts and documentary materials; (2) initial coding of recurring issues and patterns; (3) identification and refinement of themes through continuous, iterative comparison between empirical findings and theoretical concepts derived from Green Social Work, Political Ecology, and ESG governance literature to identify convergence, divergence, and contextual adaptations; and (4) interpretation of themes using the analytical perspectives of Green Social Work, Political Ecology, and indigenous governance. Throughout the analytical process, coding decisions and thematic interpretations were continuously reviewed to improve consistency, auditability, and analytical rigor. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation by comparing interview data with academic literature, policy documents, government statistics, and sustainability reports from extractive companies. Throughout the research process, attention was given to the researchers' position as scholars working within the region under study, recognizing both the contextual knowledge this provided and the need for ongoing critical reflection during data interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework: GSW, the Will to Improve, and Political Ecology

Dominelli foundational articulation of Green Social Work situates environmental crises as inseparable from social injustice, calling upon practitioners to move beyond individual casework toward systemic advocacy that addresses the root causes of ecological degradation and its disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Subsequent scholars

have extended this framework to encompass climate justice (Boetto, 2017), rights-based environmental advocacy (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017), and decolonial critiques of mainstream social work traditions (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019; Nkansa & Knapp, 2020). In theory, GSW offers a robust lens for analyzing extractive-industry-affected communities. The interview findings from East Kalimantan illustrate how participants perceived environmental degradation as inseparable from declining social wellbeing and the erosion of community autonomy. However, empirical evidence from East Kalimantan indicates that this theoretical potential is not consistently translated into practice.

Nevertheless, critics have observed that GSW as practiced often retains a technocratic character, referring to an approach that prioritizes technical problem-solving, program implementation, and managerial efficiency while giving limited attention to the structural power relations, political contestation, and institutional inequalities that produce environmental injustice. In practice, this tendency is reflected in an emphasis on service delivery, capacity-building workshops, and stakeholder consultations without meaningfully challenging the political-economic structures that generate harm (Gray & Coates, 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2025). When transplanted uncritically into resource-extraction zones of the Global South, GSW risks becoming a legitimizing instrument for corporate social responsibility rather than a tool for structural transformation. This concern was also reflected in field interviews with local government officials in Loa Raya Village, Kutai Kartanegara City. As one village official explained:

"During the operational period, mining companies created employment opportunities and many local residents depended on these jobs. However, once mining activities ceased, many households struggled to find alternative livelihoods. The land left behind could no longer be used productively because of environmental degradation, making it difficult for communities to return to agriculture" (Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village, interview, May 10, 2026).

This account illustrates that corporate empowerment initiatives generated short-term

economic benefits but did not adequately prepare communities for the long-term social and environmental consequences of mine closure.

A local environmental scholar offered a similar perspective:

"One of the greatest challenges for Green Social Work is that many local people still perceive mining as a source of livelihood and economic opportunity. As long as immediate economic benefits remain the primary concern, awareness of long-term environmental and social impacts tends to receive less attention" (Local environmental scholar, interview, May 10, 2026).

This perspective highlights one of the central challenges for Green Social Work in extractive regions. Ecological justice initiatives cannot rely solely on environmental awareness campaigns when community livelihoods remain deeply embedded in mining-dependent local economies.

While the *Will to Improve* explains how development interventions depoliticize environmental conflicts, Political Ecology extends this analysis by revealing the broader power relations that sustain extractive governance. The concept of the *Will to Improve* is particularly relevant to this study because it explains how development interventions often depoliticize complex socio-environmental conflicts by reframing them as technical and managerial problems rather than as issues of power, land rights, and structural inequality. Li's concept of the "will to improve" illuminates this tendency: the impulse of states, corporations, and NGOs to render social problems technical and solvable systematically brackets political questions about land, sovereignty, and structural inequality. Those who identify "problems" in communities claim authority to define "solutions," often without genuine community participation. Applied to East Kalimantan, this framework reveals how SIA and ESG mechanisms may function as bureaucratic performances satisfying corporate accountability requirements while leaving patterns of dispossession and dependency intact. This interpretation is supported by interviews with village government officials in Loa Raya, who noted that although mining activities initially created employment

opportunities for local residents, these benefits were largely temporary. Interview findings from the Village Secretary of Loa Raya further revealed that employment opportunities generated during mining operations were not accompanied by sustainable livelihood transitions once mining activities ceased. While the *Will to Improve* explains how development interventions depoliticize environmental conflicts, Political Ecology broadens this perspective by examining the power relations, resource control, and governance structures that sustain extractive development.

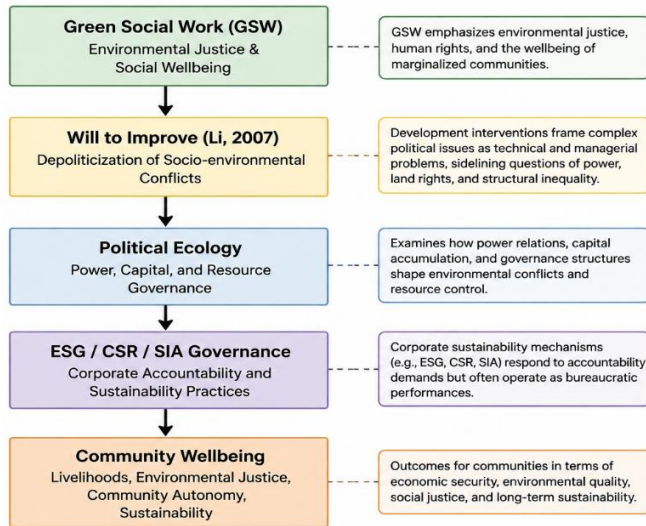
Consequently, corporate sustainability initiatives were perceived as addressing immediate socioeconomic needs without fundamentally altering the structural conditions that perpetuated community dependency on the extractive economy. Political ecology provides a further analytical layer, situating environmental conflicts within broader relations of power, capital, and governance (Bebbington et al., 2018). In East Kalimantan, the political ecology of coal extraction reveals a landscape shaped by decades of centralized resource governance in which community interests have consistently been subordinated to national development imperatives. In East Kalimantan, the political ecology of coal extraction reveals a landscape shaped by decades of centralized resource governance in which community interests have consistently been subordinated to national development imperatives. This dynamic was also reflected in interviews with a local environmental scholar, who observed:

"For many residents, mining is still viewed as a source of livelihood and prosperity. As long as economic survival depends on mining, it becomes difficult for communities to question extractive development or recognize its long-term environmental consequences." (Local environmental scholar, interview, May 10, 2026).

This perspective illustrates how extractive governance not only restructures access to land and natural resources but also shapes community perceptions, making economic dependency a significant barrier to environmental justice and more sustainable development pathways. The concept of "accumulation by dispossession" illuminates how mining operations transform

commons into capital, dispossessing indigenous communities of material resources and the cultural-ecological systems that sustain them (Holden et al., 2016; Monterrubio-Solís et al., 2023; Ninomiya et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Green Social Work Analytical Framework



ESG Frameworks and SIA: Performative Governance

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks have become the dominant governance discourse through which mining corporations communicate their sustainability commitments. In practice, ESG serves not only as a reporting framework but also as a strategic instrument for securing public legitimacy, demonstrating compliance with regulatory expectations, and enhancing investor confidence by signaling corporate responsibility in environmental and social governance. In East Kalimantan, major coal producers have developed elaborate ESG reporting systems, community development programs, and environmental management plans forming the basis of their social license to operate.

In this study, the concept of *performative governance* refers to governance arrangements that emphasize the visible performance of accountability, participation, and sustainability without fundamentally altering the underlying power relations or decision-making structures that generate social and environmental inequalities. Rather than producing substantive institutional change, performative governance is characterized by symbolic compliance, procedural fulfilment, and the production of

reports, consultations, and sustainability indicators that demonstrate organizational responsibility while leaving structural problems largely unaddressed. In contrast, substantive governance requires independent accountability, meaningful community participation, transparency, and the capacity to influence decisions affecting environmental justice and long-term community wellbeing. Critical examination of these frameworks, however, reveals their fundamentally performative character. ESG metrics are typically designed to satisfy investor and regulatory requirements by emphasizing measurable inputs—such as expenditure on community development programs, reclamation activities, and stakeholder consultations—rather than long-term social and ecological outcomes. This pattern was reflected in interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, who noted that community assistance was most visible during the operational phase of mining, whereas support declined considerably after mine closure despite the persistence of environmental degradation and limited livelihood opportunities. As a social worker from the Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan Chapter, explained:

"Most community programs were implemented while mining activities were ongoing. After the companies stopped operating, many residents were left without sustainable sources of income, while the land could no longer be productively cultivated" (Social worker practitioner, interview, May 10, 2026).

These findings suggest that corporate sustainability efforts were primarily evaluated through program implementation and expenditure rather than through their capacity to improve long-term community resilience or post-mining recovery.

ESG metrics are typically designed to satisfy investor and regulatory requirements, measuring inputs—funds spent on community programs, reclamation activities, and stakeholder consultations—rather than genuine social and ecological outcomes. Community representatives consistently described a gap between corporate commitments and verifiable implementation. A civil society informant with over a decade of experience monitoring mining

companies described ESG reporting as "a document produced for shareholders, not a commitment made to communities."

Community representatives consistently described a gap between corporate commitments and verifiable implementation. This concern emerged across different participant groups. As a village official explained:

"CSR programs were more visible while mining operations were active, but after production ceased, many communities were left without sustainable livelihood alternatives despite the environmental impacts that remained." (Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village, interview, May 10, 2026).

A social welfare practitioner similarly observed:

"Many corporate social programs focused on meeting administrative requirements and documenting activities. However, long-term community empowerment and post-mining recovery were rarely sustained once the programs ended." (Social worker, Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan, interview, May 5, 2026).

Likewise, a local environmental scholar noted:

"Mining companies often demonstrate compliance through reports and community activities, yet these initiatives seldom address the structural dependence of local communities on extractive industries." (Local environmental scholar, interview, May 10, 2026).

Taken together, these accounts indicate that perceived discrepancies between corporate sustainability commitments and their long-term social outcomes were shared across multiple stakeholder groups rather than representing isolated individual experiences.

Social workers employed within corporate community relations departments may experience structural constraints on professional autonomy because their professional roles are often embedded within organizational priorities that emphasize corporate accountability and regulatory compliance. Their accountability may

be directed more toward to management rather than outward to communities, and the scope of intervention is often shaped by corporate priorities— This can result in forms of social work that are professionally organized but constrained in their capacity to advance broader goals of social justice. This dynamic instantiates Li's "will to improve": corporate social responsibility programs identify community problems and claim authority to address them through technically rationalized interventions, while the structural conditions generating those problems such as land dispossession, wage dependency, inadequate regulatory enforcement remain beyond the scope of intervention by design Social Impact Assessments (SIA), widely recognized in international practice as a mechanism for identifying and mitigating the social consequences of large-scale development projects (Aucamp & Vanclay, 2026; International Finance Corporation., 2012), are reflected in Indonesia through the AMDAL framework mandated under Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management and Government Regulation No. 22 of 2021.

SIA is intended to facilitate meaningful community participation, strengthen corporate accountability, and integrate social considerations into project planning and decision-making (Aucamp & Vanclay, 2026). In practice, however, SIA processes in East Kalimantan's mining sector have frequently prioritized procedural compliance over substantive community participation. As reflected in an interview with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, community consultations were primarily conducted during the early stages of mining operations to fulfill administrative requirements, whereas opportunities for continued dialogue and community involvement became increasingly limited once operations were underway. As the Village Secretary explained:

"Community meetings were usually organized when mining activities were about to begin. However, after operations progressed, communication became much less frequent, and after mine closure, communities were largely left to deal with the social and environmental consequences on their own." (Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village, interview, May 10, 2026).

This finding suggests that community participation was often treated as a procedural requirement within the approval process rather than as an ongoing mechanism through which local communities could influence corporate decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.

Previous studies have shown that consultation processes within Social Impact Assessment (SIA) are often characterized by unequal participation, in which existing power asymmetries may privilege socially and politically influential actors while limiting the meaningful involvement of marginalized groups, including women, Indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable communities (Delabre & Okereke, 2020). SIA findings are rarely shared in accessible formats, and affected communities often have limited access to the complete assessment documents. As reflected in an interview with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, community members were generally informed through meetings or verbal explanations but were not provided with copies of the SIA reports for further review. As the Village Secretary explained:

"The community usually received information through meetings or presentations, but we never received a complete copy of the assessment document. Most residents only knew the main points that were conveyed during the consultation." (Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village, interview, May 10, 2026).

Without access to the full assessment documents, opportunities for affected communities to critically examine, verify, or challenge the findings become inherently limited, reducing public participation to the communication of selected information rather than meaningful engagement throughout the assessment process.

Most critically, SIA processes do not incorporate the principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), which are widely recognized as international standards for safeguarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples in development processes (Ebi et al., 2021; Kauffman & Martin, 2017). Communities may be consulted, yet their ability to influence final project decisions remains limited, particularly once licensing and regulatory approval processes have advanced. Consequently,

consultation may function more as a procedural requirement than as a mechanism for shared decision-making, transforming what should serve as an instrument of environmental justice into a process that legitimizes predetermined development outcomes.

Beyond procedural concerns, the governance surrounding SIA in Indonesia reflects broader structural weaknesses that limit its effectiveness as an accountability mechanism. Although SIA is formally integrated into Indonesia's environmental permitting processes, its implementation often depends on company-appointed consultants and regulatory arrangements shaped by unequal access to information, limited public oversight, and inconsistent enforcement. This pattern was also reflected in interviews with local stakeholders. As the Village Secretary of Loa Raya explained:

"The company and its consultants presented the assessment during community meetings, but village representatives were not involved in preparing the document. We received information about the project, yet we had very limited opportunities to review or provide input on the assessment itself before decisions were made." (Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village, interview, May 10, 2026).

This experience suggests that community participation was concentrated on receiving information rather than influencing the preparation or evaluation of the social assessment, thereby limiting public oversight and reinforcing existing information asymmetries. As a result, assessments intended to examine social risks are frequently financed by project proponents and prepared by consultants engaged by the companies seeking environmental approval. This institutional arrangement may create conflicts of interest, as consultants are expected to provide objective assessments while simultaneously working under contractual relationships with project proponents. Such circumstances may reduce the perceived independence and credibility of social assessment processes, particularly when affected communities have limited opportunities to verify findings or challenge assessment conclusions. That weaken the independence and credibility of social assessment processes. This condition reflects broader critiques within impact assessment scholarship that SIA often

becomes procedural rather than transformative, emphasizing compliance and administrative completion over substantive social protection and justice outcomes (Cashmore et al., 2004; Esteves et al., 2012; Vanclay, 2015).

The limitations observed in East Kalimantan are consistent with concerns raised in recent scholarship on ESG and SIA. Sustainability reporting, for example, has been criticized for emphasizing disclosure and corporate reputation without necessarily reflecting stronger environmental performance (Ruiz-Blanco et al., 2022). However, the findings of this study extend these critiques by demonstrating how disclosure-oriented sustainability practices are translated into performative governance within Indonesia's extractive sector. Rather than functioning as mechanisms that redistribute power or strengthen community accountability, ESG reporting and SIA implementation primarily served to demonstrate procedural compliance through documented consultations, sustainability reports, and community development programs. These governance practices projected an appearance of accountability while leaving underlying structural issues—including unequal decision-making, community dependency, and weak post-mining responsibility—largely unchanged. In this respect, the study contributes to the ESG and SIA literature by illustrating how performative governance is produced through the interaction between corporate sustainability discourse, regulatory procedures, and unequal governance relations in the context of coal mining in Indonesia.

Similar tensions also have been identified between corporate sustainability narratives and the experiences of communities directly affected by development projects (Bontempi et al., 2023). These concerns are particularly relevant in extractive industries, where voluntary sustainability frameworks often rely on weak enforcement mechanisms and limited accountability arrangements (Franken & Schütte, 2022). The impact assessment research raises comparable questions. Although consultation is frequently presented as evidence of participation, it may function primarily as a source of legitimacy when communities have little influence over final decisions (Parsons & Luke, 2021). As well as many SIA processes continue to prioritize

procedural fulfilment over substantive participation and social justice outcomes (Das, 2018). Overall, these findings suggest that the central challenge is not the absence of ESG and SIA mechanisms, but their limited capacity to transform the underlying power relations that shape environmental governance and community vulnerability.

Field evidence synthesized from interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, a social worker from the Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan, and a local environmental scholar consistently suggests that affected communities seldom experience SIA as an ongoing social agreement throughout the mining lifecycle. Instead, consultation was commonly described as a process concentrated during project planning and licensing, with considerably fewer opportunities for continued engagement once mining operations commenced. Instead, consultation is often perceived as a temporary process linked primarily to licensing and initial project approval. After permits are obtained, mechanisms intended to support continuous participation, independent oversight, and accessible grievance channels frequently weaken or become fragmented. Such governance deficits reinforce patterns identified within mining governance scholarship in which consultation may secure social licence rhetorically while failing to establish enduring accountability relationships between corporations and communities (Owen & Kemp, 2013).

These governance challenges are closely linked to the wider political and economic dynamics shaping Indonesia's extractive and energy sectors. Although Indonesia has strengthened its sustainability commitments, coal continues to shape governance arrangements and local political economies in regions such as East Kalimantan (Dama et al., 2025). This structural dependence creates significant challenges for Green Social Work and ESG implementation, as sustainability initiatives often operate within governance systems that continue to prioritize extractive development over long-term social and environmental justice. This creates a governance paradox while sustainability and low-carbon development are publicly endorsed, regulatory systems and

economic incentives continue to privilege extractive continuity and coal dependence (Dama et al., 2025; Ilango & Adhiguna, 2025; Wong & Dewayanti, 2024). Studies of Indonesia's energy transition similarly identify fragmented inter-agency coordination, weak regulatory integration, and insufficient public-private collaboration as persistent barriers preventing sustainability ambitions from translating into effective implementation (Aditya et al., 2025).

The limitations of SIA governance are therefore shaped not only by technical problems but also by fragmented responsibilities among government institutions, corporations, and affected communities. Social impacts associated with extractive activities, including displacement, shifting livelihoods, environmental degradation, and post-mining vulnerability, often extend across multiple administrative sectors without adequate coordination or clear mechanisms to ensure accountability. Studies on responsive mining policy in Indonesia demonstrate that policy effectiveness depends not only upon legal instruments but also upon responsiveness to local conditions and the meaningful integration of affected communities into decision-making processes (Andreastuti & Afrianti, 2025). Likewise, research on governance and social capital in East Kalimantan emphasizes that sustainable policy outcomes depend upon collaborative relations, institutional trust, and networks linking state and non-state actors (Mayasari et al., 2025).

Table 3.1. Synthesis of Empirical Findings and Theoretical Implications

Empirical Findings	Evidence	Analytical Lens	Governance Implications
ESG emphasizes disclosure rather than long-term outcomes.	Interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, a social worker (IPSPI, East Kalimantan), and a local environmental scholar (2026); Ruiz-Blanco et al. (2022).	Performative Governance	Independent monitoring beyond CSR reporting.
SIA remains procedural.	Interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya and a local environmental scholar (2026); Aucamp & Vanclay (2026); International	Will to Improve	Continuous participation across the project lifecycle.

Finance Corporation (2012).			
Limited transparency in SIA.	Interview with the Village Secretary, Loa Raya Village (2026).	Accountability	Public access to assessment documents and grievance mechanisms.
Coal dependency shapes governance.	Dama et al. (2025); interviews.	Political Ecology	Address structural drivers of vulnerability.
Fragmented governance.	Andreastuti & Afrianti (2025); Mayasari et al. (2025).	Collaborative Governance	Integrated governance involving state, corporations, and communities.

Viewed from this perspective, ESG and SIA practices in East Kalimantan can be understood as forms of performative governance, where participation, sustainability, and accountability are formally presented but underlying power inequalities remain largely unchanged. Reports are prepared, consultations are carried out, and procedural requirements are fulfilled, yet communities continue to have limited influence over key decisions, environmental oversight, and long-term post-mining outcomes. The persistence of abandoned pits, recurrent flooding, and ecological degradation across coal-producing landscapes illustrates how environmental and social risks continue to be externalized to local communities while economic gains remain concentrated among corporate and political actors (Dama et al., 2025). Without institutional redesign emphasizing independence, transparency, cross-sector accountability, and meaningful public participation, ESG and SIA risk reproducing extractive governance rather than democratizing it.

Table 3.2. Summary of Socio-Ecological Impacts under Performative ESG and SIA Governance in East Kalimantan

Governance Practice	Observed Socio-Ecological Impacts	Evidence	Implications for Green Social Work
Procedural ESG reporting and sustainability disclosure	Sustainability commitments improve corporate legitimacy but have limited influence on structural environmental	Interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya, a social worker (IPSPI, East Kalimantan), and a local environmental	Promote independent monitoring and evaluate substantive rather than procedural sustainability outcomes.

	and social outcomes.	scholar; Ruiz-Blanco et al. (2022).	
Procedural implementation of SIA	Community participation is concentrated during licensing, with limited involvement during implementation and post-mining phases.	Interviews with the Village Secretary of Loa Raya and a local environmental scholar; Aucamp & Vanclay (2026).	Facilitate continuous community participation throughout the mining lifecycle.
Weak environmental accountability	Abandoned mine pits, flooding, and ecological degradation continue to affect local communities after mining operations.	Interviews with community informants; Dama et al. (2025).	Strengthen advocacy for environmental restoration, accountability, and post-mining justice.
Unequal governance relations	Communities have limited influence over project decisions, environmental monitoring, and grievance mechanisms.	Interviews with village government representatives and civil society informants.	Expand Green Social Work toward rights-based advocacy and participatory governance.
Fragmented institutional coordination	Responsibilities for addressing social and environmental impacts remain dispersed across government agencies and corporations.	Interviews with village government representatives; Andrestuti & Afrianti (2025); Mayasari et al. (2025).	Foster cross-sector collaboration and institutional accountability.

The dominant paradigm of social work engagement with extractive communities in East Kalimantan has been community development: economic empowerment programs, skills training, educational support, and livelihood diversification directed at community members. This limitation also reflects the institutional orientation of social work practice itself. Addressing extractive-industry accountability requires social workers with technical knowledge of environmental law, land rights, corporate governance, and sustainability regulation—competencies not yet widely emphasized within conventional social work education and training frameworks (Strier & Binyamin, 2014). While these programs address real needs, they locate the locus of intervention at the community level while leaving corporate

and regulatory systems that produce underlying conditions largely unchallenged.

While these programs address real needs, they locate the locus of intervention at the community level while leaving corporate and regulatory systems that produce underlying conditions largely unchallenged. This concern was also expressed by a social worker from the Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan, who observed:

"Most community empowerment programs focus on training, small business assistance, or short-term economic support. These initiatives are useful, but they do not address the broader governance issues, such as corporate accountability, environmental restoration, or the protection of community rights. As a result, the same social problems continue to reappear." (Social Worker, Indonesian Association of Independent Social Workers (IPSPI), East Kalimantan, interview, 2026).

Field data from civil society informants and community leaders consistently identified this community-level focus as a structural limitation, suggesting that it redirects attention away from corporate obligations and regulatory failures that ultimately shape the conditions experienced by affected communities.

The empirical findings presented above suggest that incremental improvements in ESG and SIA practices alone are insufficient to address the structural inequalities embedded in extractive governance. Building on these findings, this study argues that a genuinely transformative Green Social Work (GSW) approach requires repositioning social work organizations as independent monitoring and accountability actors rather than service providers complementary to corporate operations. A genuinely transformative GSW approach requires repositioning social work organizations as independent monitoring and accountability actors—not service providers complementary to corporate operations—with the authority and capacity to evaluate extractive companies across the full operational lifecycle. At entry, social work organizations should participate meaningfully in assessment and negotiation processes preceding mining

operations, not merely as recipients of SIA findings but as independent co-assessors capable of evaluating corporate commitments, scrutinizing baseline studies, and advocating for binding community benefit agreements. During operations, independent monitoring functions should track corporate compliance with social and environmental commitments, providing communities with accessible information about corporate performance. At exit, social work organizations must hold corporations accountable to post-closure obligations and connect communities to legal mechanisms for recourse when obligations go unfulfilled (Rudi Subarudi et al., 2016). The 1,700-plus abandoned pits of East Kalimantan are a monument to the absence of such accountability structures.

The Extractive Context: Scale, Legacy, and the Dependency Economy

Coal mining has shaped East Kalimantan for decades, becoming one of Indonesia's most important coal-producing regions and attracting significant investment from both state-owned and private companies. The mining and quarrying sector remains the largest contributor to the provincial economy, accounting for more than half of East Kalimantan's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in recent years, reflecting the province's continued dependence on extractive industries. At the same time, the expansion of coal mining has been accompanied by a rapid increase in mining concessions and substantial land-use transformation. Approximately 40% of the province has been allocated for coal exploration or mining activities, with hundreds of active mining permits contributing to widespread conversion of forest and agricultural landscapes into extractive areas (Nasir et al., 2026; Tempo, 2023). While mining has generated substantial revenues, its environmental footprint is visible across the landscape. More than 1,700 abandoned mine pits are scattered across East Kalimantan, many of them water-filled and posing serious safety and environmental risks. Although post-mining reclamation is legally required, reclamation progress remains uneven. A study of mining reclamation in East Kalimantan reported that reclamation had reached only 41.35% of disturbed forest areas, indicating substantial areas remain unreclaimed

(Kristanti et al., 2019). The greatest concentration of abandoned pits is found in major coal-producing districts such as Kutai Kartanegara, which contains approximately 42% of the province's large water-filled abandoned pits (Rahma, 2020). Interviews with community leaders revealed that local residents perceive these abandoned pits not only as environmental hazards but also as enduring symbols of weak corporate accountability and inadequate post-mining governance. Participants associated the pits with recurring flooding, declining agricultural productivity, safety risks, and the long-term neglect of affected landscapes. They also described broader environmental changes that had unfolded over their lifetimes, including forest conversion, declining water quality and availability, shrinking agricultural land, and the expansion of mining into areas previously used for farming and other livelihood activities. These observations are consistent with studies documenting extensive land-cover change, deforestation, water-related impacts, and broader socio-ecological transformations associated with coal mining in East Kalimantan (Charles Ta'bilangi et al., 2026; Kartikasari et al., 2019; Werner et al., 2024). These accounts align with regional environmental studies documenting the scale of ecological change associated with Kalimantan's coal extraction (Hovani, 2024; Yasminnajla et al., 2023).

The effects of mining extend beyond environmental change. Interview participants frequently described how local livelihoods have become closely tied to the extractive economy. Activities such as farming, fishing, and forest-based resource use continue to exist, but mining and mining-related employment now provide income for many households. One community leader from a coal-producing district summarized this shift by stating: "Our parents still knew the forest. We knew the mine. Our children only know that the mine is closing." Employment linked to extraction has become an important source of livelihood not only through direct mining work, but also through transport services, catering, equipment supply, and other supporting activities.

Similar patterns have been found in Indonesia's extractive mining areas. East Kalimantan presents a particularly distinctive

case because of its long-standing dependence on coal mining, with extractive industries shaping regional economic growth, employment structures, and local livelihoods for several decades. As Indonesia's largest coal-producing province, the region illustrates how prolonged reliance on extractive development can reinforce structural economic dependency and constrain opportunities for livelihood diversification. Previous research have shown that mining development can reshape local economic structures, increasing dependence on extractive industries and reducing the diversity of available livelihood options. (Al Hadis, 2024; Anwar et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2019). Over time, local economies may become reorganized around the opportunities created by extraction activities, making the transition to alternative forms of employment increasingly difficult when production declines or mining operations cease. This dependency creates particular challenges for communities facing an uncertain post-extractive future. Many interview participants expressed concern about employment opportunities beyond the mining sector, especially for younger generations. The issue is not a lack of effort at the individual level, but the long-term effects of a development model in which economic opportunities have been concentrated around extraction for decades. As a result, communities may encounter significant barriers when attempting to diversify livelihoods or adapt to economic transitions.

The expansion of mining has also affected access to customary territories and community-managed resources. Areas previously used for farming, gathering forest products, and other livelihood activities have increasingly been incorporated into mining concessions (Isman et al., 2026). Harvey's concept of accumulation through dispossession provides a useful lens for understanding this process, as economic value is generated through the conversion of communal or customary lands into industrial production spaces. Interviews with Benuaq Dayak representatives indicate that these changes are experienced not only as economic losses, but also as a weakening of social relations, environmental knowledge, and territorial practices historically associated with systems such as Umaq and Simpuk (Rahmawati, 2015).

Harvey's concept of accumulation through dispossession provides a useful lens for understanding this process, as economic value is generated through the conversion of communal or customary lands into industrial production spaces. This experience was clearly articulated by a representative of the Benuaq Dayak community, who explained:

"For us, losing customary land is not only about losing a place to farm. It also means losing the places where our traditions are practiced, where our ancestors are remembered, and where knowledge about the forest is passed from one generation to the next." (Benuaq Dayak community representative, interview, 15 May 2026).

Consistent with this perspective, interviews with Benuaq Dayak representatives indicate that these changes are experienced not only as economic losses but also as a weakening of social relations, environmental knowledge, and territorial practices historically associated with systems such as Umaq and Simpuk (Rahmawati, 2015).

Indigenous Counter-Ontologies: Umaq and Simpuk as Alternative Frameworks

The expansion of extractive industries in East Kalimantan has significantly transformed socio-ecological landscapes and governance arrangements. Nevertheless, the increasing dominance of mining governance has not entirely displaced indigenous systems of environmental management and territorial stewardship. Among different ethnic groups in the region, traditional institutions continue to function as locally embedded mechanisms for regulating relationships between humans, land, forests, and other natural resources. Research has shown that these systems regulate the use of forests, agricultural areas, medicinal plant sites, and other community territories through locally recognized norms and obligations, contributing to environmental stewardship and the preservation of ecological knowledge (Rahmawati, 2016). These indigenous governance systems persist as important sources of social legitimacy and environmental accountability, particularly in communities directly affected by mining activities.

To understand their operational dynamics, a clear distinction must be made between these two distinct cultural frameworks, which originate from different indigenous traditions in East Kalimantan. Umaq represents the broader customary territorial and residential space traditionally managed by Dayak communities. The concept embodies a holistic socio-cultural geography where land is not merely an economic asset but also a social and cultural space that sustains collective identity, living areas, and intergenerational livelihoods. Conversely, Simpuk originates from the customary practices of the Kutai people, referring more specifically to protected communal forest domains or inherited family lands dedicated to ecological preservation, securing water resources, and ensuring the long-term continuity of communal life. Although conceptually distinct and rooted in different cultural identities—Dayak and Kutai—both systems share a common ontological foundation. They are deeply interconnected through shared norms of reciprocity, collective responsibility, and environmental stewardship, standing in sharp contrast to the commodity-driven logic of corporate land allocation.

These indigenous arrangements may be understood as counter-ontologies because they offer alternative ways of conceptualizing human–nature relationships that fundamentally differ from extractivist and market-oriented forms of environmental governance. Whereas extractive governance tends to frame land and natural resources as economic assets and productive commodities, Umaq and Simpuk conceive territory as a living socio-ecological system that carries moral, cultural, and collective significance. In this perspective, environmental degradation is not solely interpreted as ecological damage but also as a disruption of social relations, cultural continuity, and community identity.

This alternative understanding was reflected in the experiences of indigenous communities affected by mining activities. One indigenous community representative explained:

"For our community, forests and land are not merely sources of income. They are living spaces inherited from our ancestors and must be protected for future generations. When mining damages the forest, it is not only the environment that is

lost, but also our identity and way of life."
(Indigenous Community Representative, May 2026)

The persistence of Umaq and Simpuk demonstrates that indigenous communities possess locally embedded systems of environmental governance that continue to operate despite increasing pressures from extractive expansion. Rather than positioning nature as an object of exploitation, these customary institutions emphasize interdependence between human wellbeing and ecological sustainability. For Green Social Work, the relevance of Umaq and Simpuk lies in their capacity to highlight forms of community accountability, collective decision-making, and environmental responsibility that remain largely overlooked within dominant sustainability frameworks. While Green Social Work continues to draw substantially from Euro-American environmental and social work traditions (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019), practice in extractive regions such as East Kalimantan requires greater engagement with local governance systems, ecological histories, and community-based understandings of sustainability (Boetto, 2017; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017).

The findings further suggest that community resilience in extractive regions is not solely dependent on formal institutions, state regulations, or corporate sustainability programs. Instead, resilience also emerges from culturally rooted knowledge systems and indigenous environmental ethics that have historically governed collective relationships with natural resources. As noted by a community development practitioner working within the extractive industry:

"At the corporate level, sustainability programs are often measured through indicators and reporting mechanisms. However, in practice, communities understand sustainability differently, particularly in terms of protecting their environment and sustaining their livelihoods."
(Community Development Practitioner, interview May 2026)

The existence of these indigenous governance systems therefore challenges dominant assumptions embedded within

contemporary sustainability governance. ESG frameworks and Social Impact Assessment mechanisms often emphasize procedural compliance, measurable indicators, and institutional reporting, while paying comparatively less attention to indigenous epistemologies and community-defined meanings of sustainability. Umaq and Simpuk offer an alternative framework that prioritizes collective wellbeing, ecological integrity, and intergenerational responsibility.

Positioned as indigenous counter-ontologies, these systems allow this study to argue that environmental governance in extractive regions should not be understood solely through the lens of formal institutions, corporate sustainability frameworks, or state regulations. Instead, indigenous governance systems provide alternative epistemological and practical foundations for environmental stewardship, community accountability, and ecological justice. Recognizing these systems expands the analytical scope of Green Social Work and contributes to broader debates concerning decolonial and community-based approaches to sustainability governance in extractive regions.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the application of Green Social Work within East Kalimantan's extractive sector frequently encounters structural limitations that constrain its transformative potential. ESG frameworks and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) processes may expand opportunities for consultation, reporting, and community development programs, yet they often operate within governance arrangements that leave underlying patterns of dispossession, dependency, and unequal power relations largely intact. Under these conditions, sustainability initiatives can create an appearance of empowerment while failing to address the structural factors that continue to shape community vulnerability. The findings of this research suggest that Green Social Work in extractive regions cannot be confined to community-level interventions alone. Currently, approaches still focus on livelihood support, skills training, or community participation, but are inadequate when

corporate accountability, environmental governance, and regulatory enforcement receive only limited attention. The persistence of abandoned mining pits, unresolved post-mining obligations, and continuing livelihood dependence in East Kalimantan illustrates the limitations of governance mechanisms that prioritize procedural compliance over long-term social and ecological responsibility.

At the same time, indigenous governance systems such as Umaq and Simpuk provide important insights for rethinking sustainability beyond technocratic management frameworks. Rather than being viewed solely as cultural traditions, these systems demonstrate alternative ways of understanding territorial stewardship, collective responsibility, and community decision-making. Their continued relevance highlights the importance of grounding Green Social Work within local ecological histories and community-based governance practices. Eventually, the challenge facing Green Social Work in extractive regions is not only simply improving relationships between corporations and communities but strengthening accountability across the wider governance system in which extraction occurs. A more transformative approach requires greater attention to ecological justice, independent oversight, meaningful participation, and long-term responsibility for social and environmental consequences. Without such changes, sustainability initiatives risk remaining mechanisms of legitimacy rather than instruments of substantive social and ecological transformation.

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