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Research Article

Politics, Mining, and the People: Mining Policy Impacts on North Maluku Province's Communities

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Abstract

The mining industry in North Maluku Province makes a substantial contribution to Indonesia's economic growth, particularly through the enhancement of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the increase in nickel exports. Nevertheless, this expansion has given rise to a paradoxical situation in which communities residing in proximity to mining areas experience various forms of economic, social, and ecological marginalization. This study aims to evaluate the impact of mining policy on community well-being. The dynamics of mining policy in North Maluku were examined by employing a qualitative methodology and a case study approach. The data were gathered through interviews, observations, literature reviews, and document analysis. Subsequently, the collected data underwent a rigorous process of reduction, organization, and interpretation to facilitate the drawing of conclusions. The findings reveal that political elites play a significant role in the issuance of Mining Business Permits (IUP), often in alignment with prevailing political agendas. This alignment has contributed to conflicts of interest and weakened governance of natural resources. Furthermore, land tenure disputes, inadequate recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, pollution of water and soil resources, and biodiversity loss further exacerbate adverse environmental and social conditions. Simultaneously, the distribution of economic benefits to local communities remains uneven and insufficiently addressed. In this context, the protection of the rights of communities surrounding mining activities, enhanced community participation, and increased transparency emerge as critical elements of an effective mining policy. The overarching objective of the study's recommendations is to strengthen the policy framework to conform with the principles of sustainable development and social justice.

Keywords

Politics, Mining, Economy, Environment, Mining Communities, North Maluku

1. Introduction

Intensive extractive industry activities, particularly mineral and metal mining, such as nickel, have coexisted with communities surrounding mining areas in North Maluku Province, Indonesia, for a long time. These activities are the foundation of the regional economy [1]. However, they also present a plethora of social, economic, and environmental challenges for the local communities that reside near mining sites [2-4]. This situation results in a paradoxical relationship between the well-being of communities in the vicinity of mining areas and macroeconomic growth. Mining activities frequently exclude these communities from the direct benefits [5-9].

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The ecological sustainability and social inclusiveness of mining operations in North Maluku have received insufficient attention. A substantial body of literature indicates that resource exploitation practices frequently disregard ecosystem balance and social welfare [10, 11]. The negative impacts include environmental pollution, land degradation, the deterioration of water and air quality, and an increased incidence of diseases associated with mining waste. These effects further exacerbate the existing socioeconomic challenges encountered by marginalized and economically vulnerable communities, particularly in their access to essential services such as healthcare and education in mining-affected regions [12-15].

In addressing these challenges, political policies must reconcile the interests of diverse stakeholders to promote sustainable development. However, such policies often suffer from a lack of robustness, attributable to insufficient substantive content, bureaucratic obstacles in implementation, and inadequate mechanisms for oversight and evaluation [16-18]. Furthermore, many policies tend to be sector-specific and fragmented, frequently developed without the meaningful participation of local communities [19-22].

Current policies suffer from inadequate integration of social, economic, and environmental factors, largely due to the absence of a holistic systems thinking approach. An exclusive focus on economic considerations often results in the marginalization of indigenous peoples, minority groups, and local biodiversity [22]. Communities residing adjacent to mining areas depend on more than financial inflows or foreign investment; they require the right to live in a healthy environment, access to decent employment opportunities, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

An in-depth analysis of political policy is essential to evaluate the extent to which political interventions and activities within the mining industry adhere to the principles of social justice and sustainable development. This study aims to examine the impact of recent political actions on the welfare of communities residing in proximity to mining operations in North Maluku, with particular emphasis on two critical dimensions: economic outcomes and public health. Through a comprehensive analysis of the existing policy framework—including key stakeholders and the social and organizational obstacles impeding effective policy implementation—this research aims to identify relevant and actionable recommendations.

The study’s findings are expected to provide not only a comprehensive overview of the current policy landscape but also to contribute actionable recommendations for both central and regional governments in the formulation of equitable and community-centered policies.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative methodology [23, 24], utilizing a case study design to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the political and economic dynamics surrounding mining policy in North Maluku. The case study approach was selected for its capacity to facilitate an in-depth understanding of phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context were indistinct [25].

The data collection was conducted using multiple techniques. The document analysis was employed to critically examine a range of legal frameworks, regulations, official reports, and publications relevant to mining policies in the region. Furthermore, the content analysis was applied to both documentary materials and interview transcripts to identify key themes, including conflicts of interest, environmental degradation, and the protection of community rights. The primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including local government officials, representatives from the mining industry, and members of the local communities. These interviews provided rich qualitative insights into the perceptions, interests, and conflicts associated with mining activities.

Other approach used included reviewing existing literature to support the theoretical framework and understand the real-world situation, as well as field observations to directly evaluate the social, economic, and environmental conditions around the mining area.

The data and information analysis technique for this study consisted of three steps: data reduction, data processing, and conclusion drawing/verification [26]. In this case, data reduction was done by systematizing interviews, observations, and documents to identify prominent themes such as conflicts of interest, ecological devastation, and community rights. Narrative accounts, as well as thematic matrices that captured the interplay among certain actors, policies, and the consequences thereof, were used to present the data. In addition, conclusions were made in an ongoing manner, using triangulation to validate the findings. This approach facilitated the understanding of the socio-political and economic relations underlying the mining policies in the North Maluku mining area.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. North Maluku's Political and Economic Involvement in Mining

Transparency International Indonesia (TII) conducted an investigative study revealing that numerous political figures and officials in North Maluku—including Governor Abdul Gani Kasuba, Central Halmahera Regent Ali Yasin (also Deputy Governor of North Maluku), Morotai Island Regent Beny Laos, and several other regional leaders—have engaged in collaborations with certain mining companies. Concerns have been raised regarding the involvement of these politicians and officials in mining activities, given the potential conflicts of interest and their implications for the sustainable management of the region’s natural resources. Reports further indicate that the former governor, Abdul Gani Kasuba, was actively affiliated with one of the mining enterprises, prompting critical questions about the influence of such relationships on regional mining policy and governance, as well as the risk of compromised institutional integrity.

Central Halmahera Regent Ali Yasin, concurrently serving as a deputy governor under Governor Abdul Gani Kasuba for a second term and acting governor of North Maluku, is reportedly affiliated with a mining company in his region. This term elicits apprehensions regarding the possible misuse of authority and its impact on the management of natural resources in the area. The Regent Benny Laos, allegedly holding a mining business permit in East Halmahera, is the sole subject of this case. Figure 1 shows a map of the involved actors in North Maluku’s mining companies.

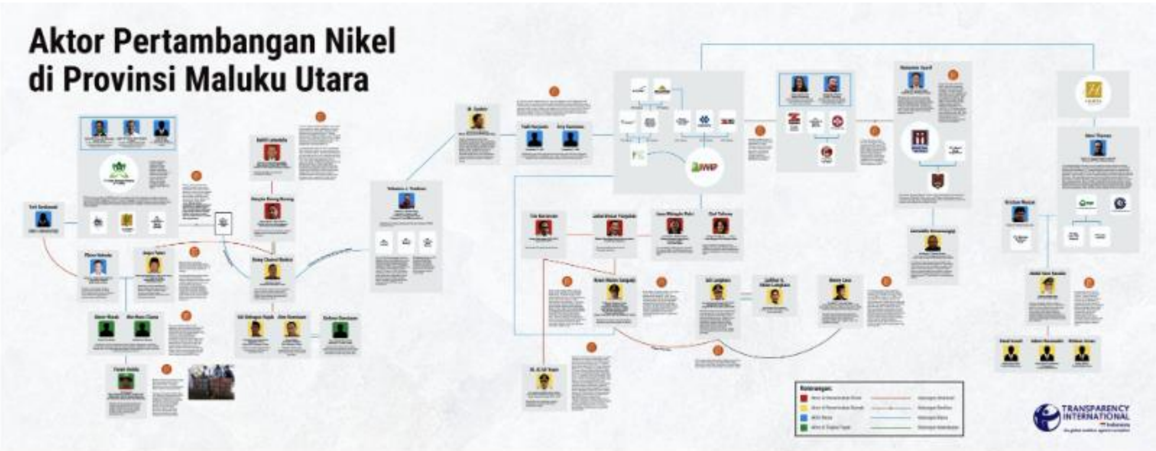

Figure 1. *A Map of Involved Actors in North Maluku Mining Companies.*

Government and political figures' involvement in the mining sector in North Maluku requires careful consideration for sustainable and community-beneficial natural resource management. A study by Transparency International Indonesia found that several government and political figures from North Maluku have ties to mining companies. For instance, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) accuses Abdul Gani Kasuba, the former governor of North Maluku, of alleged mining bribery. During his administration, he issued 54 mining permits, 36 of which had political motivations in 2018.

A research team from Transparency International Indonesia disclosed that AGK granted 54 permits during his tenure as Governor of North Maluku (2014-2019 and 2019-2024). Remarkably, 36 permits were granted in 2018. That year represented a significant political turning point, as he pursued re-election as the governor for a second term, ultimately succeeding in the quinquennial political contest [27].

As noted in the report, Acting Governor Ali Yasin, who has been the Regent of Central Halmahera for two terms, issued mining licenses to several companies, including PT Dharma Rosadi Internasional. These companies, along with the years of IUP issuance by Ali Yasin, are PT. Dharma Rosadi Internasional (2012), PT. Aneka Niaga Prima (2012), PT. Smart Marsindo (2012), PT. Tekindo Energi (2012), PT. Harum Sukses Mining (2009 and 2012), PT. Lopoly Mining CDX (2013), PT. Anugrah Sukses Mining (2013), PT. Bakti Pertiwi Nusantara (2012), and PT. Bartra Putra Mulia (2013) (Sayogyo Institute, 2024).

The Acting Regent of Central Halmahera, Ikram Malan Sangadji, is suspected of simultaneously holding the position of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for PT. IWIP in Central Halmahera Regency. Anjas Taher, the active Deputy Regent of East Halmahera, is concurrently a member of the CSR team for IWIP in East Halmahera Regency and is suspected of acting as a land plot mediator. The current position is held by Ricky Chairul Richfat, the Regional Secretary (Sekda) of East Halmahera, who is also implicated in the PT Forward Matrix IUP bribery case [27].

The involvement of various high-ranking public leaders from North Maluku with the issuance of mining permits and business engagement practices raises the mark of serious concerns with respect to the management of the local natural resources. Ali Yasin, as the acting governor and the former regent of Central Halmahera, is known for issuing mining business permits to numerous companies between 2009 and 2013. The names of such companies indicate extensive mining business permits' issuance during his rule. In addition, many other serving public leaders are believed to hold non-official positions in mining companies, such as Ikram Malan Sangadji and Anjas Taher, who served as members of the PT IWIP CSR team. Moreover, Ricky Chairul Richfat, the Regional Secretary of East Halmahera, has been accused of mining business permits' bribery schemes. This example shows a lack of public service ethical standards alongside minimal boundaries of oversight governance in the competing roles of public office bearers.

North Maluku politician Benny Laos, who served as Regent of Morotai Island for the 2017-2022 period, is on the list of names of mining entrepreneurs. Benny owns the mining business company PT Amazing Tabara, which carries out mining operations on Obi Island, South Halmahera, with a company concession area of 4,655 ha based on the Decree of the Governor of North Maluku Number 502/7/DMPTSP/2018. There is also the name Edy Langkara, Regent of Central Halmahera, for the 2017-2022 period. The Regent has an important role in issuing mining business recommendation permits in Central Halmahera Regency. In addition, another politician named Graal Taliawo, who is an elected member of the the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia representing the North Maluku electoral district, has connections with mining companies, particularly in Central Halmahera. This involvement was because Graal's wife, Jona Widagdo Putri, was a special staff member of the Deputy Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Investment of the Republic of Indonesia and had great influence in mining companies in Central Halmahera and East Halmahera [27].

The participation of North Maluku's political elite in the mining industry illustrates a conflict of interest between public service and private enterprise ownership. Reports indicate that Benny Laos, Edy Langkara, and Graal Taliawo have either direct or indirect connections to mining operations. This fact suggests the possibility of power being misused for personal or familial advantage. This participation also underscores inadequate regulation and supervision of mining licensing practices in the area.

The governor, deputy governor, regent, and various regional officials are pivotal in the oversight and management of natural resources within their jurisdictions. This strategic position is utilized to oversee nickel mines, a valuable natural resource in North Maluku. A research has identified a strong correlation between the disintegration of the democratic system, the bureaucracy it engenders, and the escalation of natural resource corruption [27].

The strategic neglect of regional leaders, such as governors and regents, who oversee natural resources like nickel mining in North Maluku, is evident. The office is used for selfish or collective financial benefit. As indicated in studies, the disintegration of democracy and bureaucratic systems within regions supports the phenomenon of natural resource corruption. Such disparity showcases the prevalence of low integrity and accountability of government leaders while fostering the unchecked abuse of natural resources for private profit, countering the welfare of the citizens.

3.2. Land Control Conflict

An examination of land tenure disputes in North Maluku from a sociological viewpoint reveals that communities often experience conflicts in mining regions, both among themselves and with authorities, as well as with mine proprietors. These conflicts primarily pertain to land utilization and administration. Land tenure disputes in North Maluku are intricate and multifaceted matters. Conflicts frequently arise between indigenous communities and mining corporations operating in the area. Numerous factors contributing to land tenure disputes include:

1) Overlapping interests:

Economic and political interests often clash with indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources.

2) Lack of recognition of indigenous peoples' rights:

Indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources are often not recognized or ignored by governments and companies.

3) Unclear territorial boundaries:

The boundaries between indigenous communities and companies are often unclear, leading to conflict.

Land tenure conflicts can have significant impacts on indigenous communities and the environment. Some of these impacts include:

1) Loss of Indigenous Peoples' Rights:

Land tenure conflicts can cause indigenous peoples to lose their rights to land and natural resources.

2) Environmental Damage:

Unsustainable mining activities can cause environmental damage and negative impacts on ecosystems.

3) Social Conflict:

Land tenure conflicts can cause social conflicts between indigenous communities and companies, as well as between indigenous communities and the government.

3.3. Protection of Community Rights

The areas affected by mining activities deserve to be heard, like any other society. Rusdin Alauddin’s critical examination concerning the safeguarding of constitutional rights of North Maluku province’s mining community highlights the need to guard societal rights concerning mining. Safeguarding societal rights concerning mining and development in North Maluku is important in order to avoid altering local societal interests. Community involvement is very important because of the comment made by the Secretary of State for Environment and Forestry that “Community involvement during the process of decision-making on mining activity is very important to make sure that the local society’s interests are taken into consideration.”

According to Syarif, "Recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources is critical for guaranteeing that their interests are taken into account in the mining process." (Syarif, 2018). And most importantly, transparency and accountability are crucial. TI, in its Corruption in the Mining Sector report, asserts, "Transparency and accountability in mining management are crucial to ensure that local communities' interests are accounted for and that mining activities are carried out responsibly" [27].

Protection of community rights in the context of mining in North Maluku can have positive impacts, such as:

a) Increasing Public Trust:

Protection of community rights can increase community trust in the government and mining companies.

b) Reducing Conflict:

Protection of community rights can reduce conflicts between local communities and mining companies.

c) Improving Community Welfare:

Protection of community rights can improve the welfare of local communities through fair sharing of benefits from mining activities.

Thus, the protection of community rights is crucial in this mining context. This context is intended to ensure that the interests of local communities are taken into account and that mining activities are carried out responsibly.

3.4. Economic Contribution of the Mining Industry

The mining industry makes a significant economic contribution to Indonesia, particularly to North Maluku Province. One of the most prominent positive impacts is its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the Deputy Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Yuliot Tanjung, the mining sector will contribute approximately 12% to national GDP by 2024. Meanwhile, in 2023, the minerals and coal (minerba) sector recorded a contribution of IDR 2,198 trillion, or approximately 10.5% of total national GDP. Furthermore, the non-tax state revenue from this sector in the same year reached IDR 172.96 trillion, accounting for 58% of the total non-tax state revenue from the energy and mineral resources sectors.

Additional contributions arise from the mining sector's function as a foreign exchange generator via coal, nickel, and copper exports. North Maluku, a prominent nickel producer, achieved the highest national economic growth in 2023. In 2022, national revenue from the mineral and coal sector amounted to IDR 130 trillion. Bank Indonesia anticipates the province's economic growth to attain 18.26-22.26% in 2024.

The mining industry contributes to state revenue and foreign exchange while generating numerous jobs, both directly and indirectly. In North Maluku, the mining and processing industries are predominant sectors, employing a substantial workforce, especially in Central and South Halmahera. Simultaneously, emerging sectors like agriculture and trade are beginning to evolve, indicating favorable economic diversification.

The mining industry has driven infrastructure development in many areas. In North Maluku, the mining activities not only accelerated the construction and improvement of the roads and ports in Tapaleo, Wayabula, and Bicoli, but also led to the overhaul of Morotai, Ternate, and Labuha airports. Industrial Estates Teluk Weda and Obi foster downstream mining activities. Investments cover the orderly provision of community assets such as electricity, potable water, and sanitary systems, as well as primary access facilities that host the warehouse logistics and security complex. All these developments need to be framed within the context of the environment and society.

The mining sector also plays a significant role in increasing regional revenue. North Maluku recorded economic growth of 20.49% year-on-year in 2023, with the mining and quarrying sector growing by 49.07%. The manufacturing sector contributed 32.31% to the provincial economic structure, while the mining sector contributed 20.1%. The largest contribution came from Central Halmahera Regency, with nickel production of 14,672,174 tons, followed by South Halmahera with 13,291,607 tons and East Halmahera with 11,978,860 tons. This data demonstrates that the mining sector in North Maluku has a national impact and plays a strategic role in regional economic development.

3.5. Impact on the Environment

Research evaluating environmental management policies for mining on Obi Island, North Maluku, indicates the potential for negative environmental impacts from mining activities. These environmental impacts of mining in North Maluku include:

1) Water Pollution

As seen from various references, there’s a strong association between the military historical period of mining practices and the state of the environment. From his study on the impact of mining on society and the environment, Sudarsono discovered that mining contributes to water pollution. Therefore, it is now well known that mining leads to water pollution owing to chemicals used in mining processes as well as the mining byproducts that are not managed properly. Further, we increasingly share the concern of global bodies like WHO, which, in their report Water Pollution and Human Health, indicates that water pollution has drastic repercussions not only on people’s health but also on the environment, causing death to fish and other water organisms [28].

2) Ecosystem Damage

It is well-founded and proven that mining activities significantly impact ecosystems, including land, sea, and air. In a 2019 release, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry stated, "Mining can cause damage to terrestrial and marine ecosystems due to changes in habitat and land use." (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2019).

The same condition was reaffirmed by environmental NGOs such as the IPCC in Climate Change and Land, they stated firmly that "Ecosystem damage can cause negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem function" [29].

3) Soil Pollution

Another study found significant pollution of the terrestrial environment, specifically soil. Wahyudi's research found that "Mining activities can cause soil pollution due to the use of chemicals and poorly managed mining waste." (Wahyudi, 2020). The study, "Soil Contamination," highlights the dangers of mining activities for the surrounding environment. In 2018, soil damage could lead to environmental pollution. "Soil pollution can have negative impacts on human health and the environment, including contamination of plants and animals," [30].

4) Loss of Biodiversity

Another consequence is habitat loss and alteration. Research by Sari (2022) found that "Mining can cause biodiversity loss due to habitat destruction and ecosystem changes." This will also impact welfare factors. Findings from the IPBES (Indonesian Institute of Environment and Forestry) explain that "Biodiversity loss can have negative impacts on ecosystem function and human well-being." [30].

4. Conclusions

The involvement of political elites in the mining industry in North Maluku is a serious issue with multidimensional impacts. Several regional officials, including former Governor Abdul Gani Kasuba and Regent Ali Yasin, used their strategic positions to issue the mining business permits, often in conjunction with political agendas. This involvement reinforces indications of conflicts of interest and abuse of power, which undermine natural resource governance and the democratic system.

Land tenure conflicts are a significant issue, arising from disputes between indigenous communities and mining companies that stem from overlapping interests, neglect of customary rights, and unclear territorial boundaries. Other impacts include environmental damage, such as water pollution, soil contamination, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem destruction. Although the mining industry makes significant economic contributions—to GDP, foreign exchange, and job creation—these benefits are not commensurate with the resulting social and ecological impacts. Therefore, protection of community rights, public participation, and transparency and accountability in mining management are absolutely necessary to ensure social justice and environmental sustainability.

Abbreviations

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
TII	Transparency International Indonesia
KPK	Corruption Eradication Commission
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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