



# MINIMISING CONFLICT ESCALATION IN IBU KOTA NUSANTARA DEVELOPMENT: WEAVING PEACE THROUGH DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

*The escalating conflict surrounding the development of Indonesia's new capital city, Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN), in North Penajam Paser Regency (PPU), East Kalimantan, has intensified social tensions between indigenous communities and the state. Land and livelihood struggles have rendered the development process precarious, with Paser Balik communities reporting marginalisation and displacement. Drawing on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations with key informants recruited through snowball sampling, this study examines communication dynamics in the IKN core development area (Kawasan Inti Pusat Pemerintahan, KIPP) and its surrounding buffer zones (kawasan penyangga). FGDs with directly affected Paser Balik communities in Sepaku and Pemaluan, as well as Paser communities in Bumi Harapan, were conducted to deepen understanding of these tensions and the pathways through which they escalate. The findings reveal major communication challenges among stakeholders involved in the core area and buffer zones, including unequal participation, information overload, and*

*limited deliberative space for indigenous aspirations. To mitigate conflict escalation, the study proposes dialogic communication that emphasises three elements: activating indigenous community networks based on articulated needs; reducing information overload through an equitable dialogical process; and fostering collaboration among influential actors through a consensual forum.*

**Keywords:** IKN, Conflict, dialogic communication, Indigenous peoples, Paser

## INTRODUCTION

The enactment of Law Number 3 of 2022 marked a milestone in formalising the construction of Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) on the island of Kalimantan. Indonesia's plan to relocate its capital from the Special Capital Region of Jakarta to Penajam Paser Utara Regency (PPU) in East Kalimantan constitutes a monumental national development project. However, IKN development faces significant challenges arising from competing land claims advanced by Indigenous communities. These conflicts are particularly evident within the Kawasan Inti Pusat Pemerintahan (KIPP; Core Capital Area) and the surrounding Kawasan Penyangga Ibu Kota Nusantara (KP IKN; IKN Buffer Zone).

Indigenous land claims frequently collide with the state's authority in the development of IKN, particularly in agrarian disputes where customary land rights are not fully aligned with Indonesian statutory law. Although Article 18B(2) of the 1945 Constitution recognises and respects customary law communities and their traditional rights, and Law No. 5 of 1960 establishes basic agrarian principles, tensions persist in their practical implementation. These legal inconsistencies continue to generate conflict between Indigenous communities and state-led development initiatives (Zakie 2017; Sulasno and Eprilia 2022). Syafi'i (2016) similarly finds that agrarian conflicts in Indonesia reflect how the state, through its authority, can marginalise the cultural and political position of Indigenous Peoples.

The Balik Indigenous people constitute one of the long-established customary communities in coastal and inland parts of PPU Regency, East Kalimantan, areas that have since been incorporated into the IKN development zone. Previous studies document that the Balik have long relied on customary land-tenure systems to sustain livelihoods, cultural practices, and social organisation (Sucipto 2022). In the context of IKN development, members of the Balik community have increasingly positioned themselves as "victims" of state-led land expropriation, as customary territories are appropriated for infrastructure and administrative expansion. These land conflicts are therefore not abstract; they are rooted in the Balik people's lived experiences of dispossession, displacement, and loss of access to ancestral living spaces. Reinforced by asymmetries of state power, this deprivation has generated struggles over living space that often take the form of symbolic resistance and quiet contestation. Over time, such struggles have evolved into latent conflicts driven by unmet social and material needs, a dynamic also observed in other Indigenous land disputes in Indonesia and further examined in the discussion section (Hidayat 2023; Saputra et al. 2023).

Among the Balik Indigenous people, frustration, desperation, and obstructed communication have fuelled resistance and struggle and, in some cases, violence (Zubir 2010; Zubir and Zayzda 2017; Hossain 2024). This pattern reflects a latent conflict between the state and the Balik community during the physical development of IKN, exacerbated by persistent breakdowns in communication. This study examines the complexities of IKN's development, where conflicts extend beyond agrarian and land disputes to encompass broader socio-cultural tensions. These conflicts involve multiple actors and, in some cases, mobilise cultural differences to justify or intensify disputes. By tracing these dynamics, this study identifies the types of conflict at play and

provides a structured analysis of evolving tensions in IKN's development. Moreover, the impact of relocating the state capital to IKN in PPU extends beyond physical displacement, shaping new cultural entities, spatial adjustments, and heightened vulnerability to social conflict (Aldilla and Michael 2022; Afifuddin et al. 2023; Ocsanda et al. 2023; Saputra et al. 2023).

Existing research on IKN broadly falls into four categories. First, several studies emphasise the expected macro-level benefits of capital relocation for more equitable economic growth (Hasibuan and Aisa 2020; Aldilla and Michael 2022; Jauchar et al. 2022). Second, a growing body of work cautions that treating IKN primarily as an economic mega-project, while downplaying socio-cultural and ecological dimensions can generate unintended social and environmental harms that contradict sustainable development principles (Fristikawati et al. 2022; Hidayat 2023; Kalalinggi et al. 2023). Third, a publication argues that the relocation leaves unresolved problems beyond political-economic conflict, including crises of local political legitimacy, limited public participation, and disparities in central–regional power relations that erode democratic decentralisation (Nainggolan et al. 2025). Fourth, studies find that IKN development has damaged the social-ecological order, intensified imbalances in the recognition of customary rights, and increased conflict risks due to the lack of inclusive participation for local communities (Syaban and Appiah-Opoku 2024). Taken together, this research indicates that IKN development remains overshadowed by serious risks to political legitimacy, social-ecological balance, and justice for affected Indigenous communities.

Within this critical field, scholars consistently identify land and indigeneity as central fault lines in IKN's physical development. Hidayat (2023) links the relocation agenda to agrarian conflict and to the displacement of social, historical, and cultural foundations of Indigenous groups in the IKN area. Aulia et al. (2023) similarly highlight concerns over land allocation in PPU, much of which is associated with Indigenous ownership and customary tenure, raising fears of eviction and loss of ancestral lands. Complementing these accounts, Nurahmani and Sihombing (2022) argue that limiting the transfer of land rights and safeguarding *adat*-based (custom-based) tenure are essential to mitigating agrarian conflict. Taken together, these studies establish that land governance and recognition of *adat* rights are pivotal, but they largely focus on conflict drivers and legal-institutional vulnerabilities rather than the interactional processes through which conflicts escalate or are prevented.

A second set of studies foregrounds participation, representation, and rights-based safeguards. Handoko and Rohmah (2023) and Ratib (2023) describe how development can unfold through coercive state practices that undermine local communities' lived foundations and customary claims. Gultom and Syafiqy (2022) further warn of potential human-rights violations linked to limited and unrepresentative participation, which sits uneasily with the principle of free, prior, and informed consent articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, while these works underline the normative importance of participation, they offer less detail on what an equitable and workable communicative process looks like in practice under conditions of asymmetrical power.

Research on political communication and dialogue provides a possible bridge. Hairunnisa and Syaka (2022) stress the need for inclusive political communication that respects cultural nuances, while studies of dialogic and authority-mediated conflict resolution suggest that flexible engagement with traditional actors can help de-escalate customary land disputes (Lehti 2019a; 2019b; Kirst 2020; Achmadi et al. 2021; Joireman and Tchatchoua-Djomo 2023). Yet these approaches have rarely been brought into direct conversation with empirical analyses of IKN's on-the-ground physical development, particularly in relation to how Indigenous marginalisation is produced and can be prevented through dialogic practices.

This article advances the literature by analysing the marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples, particularly the Balik community, during the physical development of IKN. It also conceptualises dialogic communication as a preventative strategy rather than a reactive response to conflict. The central argument is that equitable dialogic communication among conflicting actors, including state authorities, Indigenous communities, and intermediary institutions, is essential to preventing conflict escalation in large-scale development projects. Accordingly, this article aims to (1) examine how communication breakdowns contribute to latent conflict in IKN development, (2) analyse the role of dialogic communication in mitigating power asymmetries, and (3) propose a conflict-prevention framework grounded in culturally responsive and participatory communication practices. This approach positions dialogue not as a post-conflict remedy, but as a practical infrastructure for preventing escalation in contexts where land, recognition, and authority are unevenly distributed.

## **DISCERNING DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION**

Drawing on dialogic communication, Habermas (1992) argues that a dialogic space enables open discussion free from authoritative pressure, allowing diverse discourses to circulate without distortion by power or formal institutions. In this view, dialogic communication supports participation that is not constrained by class, ethnicity, race, or religion. From a critical perspective, Habermas further frames dialogic communication as oriented towards emancipatory collective autonomy: achieving consensus through communication that is not shaped by domination or coercion (Iwan 2014).

Building on this framework, Nurfathiyah (2021) underscores the imperative for Indigenous Peoples to establish dialogic communication channels that operate in an emancipatory manner, free from the hegemony of state power. This aligns with Faedlulloh et al. (2017), who integrate public space and deliberative democracy to describe a shared interaction space that can be collectively managed, fostering an egalitarian environment accessible across social strata. Ruman (2013) similarly argues that public space depends on deliberative democracy, whereby citizens can participate, speak, and deliberate on matters of collective concern.

Hardiman (2009) and Lubenow (2012) further support Habermas' view of dialogic space as a platform capable of mediating the political system, the state, and the private sector. This communicative space is not confined to a single institution; it can emerge wherever discursive discussion of public issues takes place. It enables citizens to voice aspirations and interests without totalising state oversight and demands openness and humility, particularly when listening to marginalised or vulnerable groups (Abugaza 2013; Ruman 2013). Giddens (2009) situates dialogic communication within democratic practice and highlights citizens' active capacity to build trust in the integrity of others. At the same time, he notes that dialogue alone cannot resolve conflicts that produce social isolation, including ethnic, tribal, or religious divisions; trust remains a crucial mechanism for arranging social relations.

In the IKN context, dialogic communication is relevant as an emancipatory means of addressing relations between Indigenous Peoples and the government, the private sector, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Its purpose is not merely to facilitate discussion, but to prevent conflict escalation linked to the concentration and monopoly of land-related power, an imbalance that can intensify unequal economic relations in local systems of need (Hardiman 2010). Understood as an egalitarian form of public space, dialogic communication can amplify the voices of vulnerable and marginalised groups and provide a legitimate arena for articulating collective interests without social restrictions or political bias.

This perspective directly informs the article's objective of analysing how dialogic communication can mitigate conflict escalation arising from the concentration and monopoly of land-related power within IKN development. This article argues that conflict prevention cannot rely solely on legal or technical interventions; it also requires communicative processes that rebalance power between the state and Indigenous communities. Within this framework, dialogic communication functions as an egalitarian public space enabling meaningful participation by marginalised groups, particularly the Balik Indigenous people, whose voices are frequently excluded from formal decision-making arenas. By reducing social hierarchies and political asymmetries in communication, dialogue enables competing interests to be articulated and negotiated more equitably. In this way, dialogic engagement can prevent latent conflict from escalating into overt confrontation.

## **ENTANGLED INTERESTS IN CONFLICT**

As Hardiman (2010) suggests, conflict arises when economic relations within the system of needs become imbalanced. Applied to the IKN context, such imbalances are reflected in asymmetrical land ownership and power relations, reinforcing tensions between the state and Indigenous communities. Conflicting interests emerge when actors do not share a common ground for negotiation, and disappointment, frustration, and negative prejudice can become communication bottlenecks that fuel conflict (Zubir 2010; Zubir and Zayzda 2017; Hossain 2024). Effendy (1981), as cited in Liliweri (2005), further argues that prejudice obstructs communication because prejudiced individuals or groups tend to distrust and resist communicators, thereby undermining meaningful dialogue. Such prejudice can develop through accumulated emotional responses, leading communities to form judgements based on assumptions rather than empirical evidence.

During development initiatives, conflicts often erupt among individuals or groups who perceive injustice and inequality (Syawaludin 2014; Urrahmi and Putri 2020). Such conflicts become open clashes of interest involving actors entangled in a web of relationships and disputes, each advancing claims over contested issues (Wolff 2006). Conflict manifests as opposition and struggle over power, particularly in attempts to dominate resources (Kriesberg 2007). Territorial social conflicts, in this sense, reveal tensions driven by local communities defending territories that sustain everyday life. Indigenous communities, threatened by the authority of the state or corporations, often fear the uprooting and seizure of space, livelihood, and socio-cultural identity (Syawaludin 2014).

Classical conflict theorists such as Lewis Coser, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Randall Collins argue that social conflict is an inherent feature of social systems structured by unequal and contested power relations (Dahrendorf 1959; Collins 1975; Coser 1957). Structural domination, facilitated through institutional and authoritative mechanisms, can direct social outcomes according to the interests of dominant factions (Coser 1957; Szczecińska-Musielak 2016). Conflicts entangling the interests of groups or actors thus function as a means of securing resources and preventing their usurpation by competing actors. From this perspective, conflict becomes tied to survival and to the pursuit of goals and interests among acquisitive actors (Buzan et al. 1998).

Viewed in relation to past conflicts, the IKN development conflict emerges as a clash of interests involving Indigenous communities whose living spaces have been uprooted and seized by state authority. These entangled interests represent a structural friction that makes an emancipatory dialogic space necessary. Without such a space to mediate territorial tensions, conflict is likely to persist as an unresolved feature of the social system.

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore how Indigenous communities perceive and experience conflict risks associated with the development of IKN in PPU, East Kalimantan. Qualitative methods are appropriate because they enable in-depth examination of actors' interpretations, lived experiences, and communicative practices in a context shaped by contested land claims and asymmetrical power relations. This approach supports detailed analysis of (1) the roles of Indigenous community actors, (2) community needs and claims in relation to conflict prevention, (3) communication breakdowns and escalation dynamics, including information overload, and (4) the roles of influential actors in shaping conflict trajectories. A limitation of this design is that it captures conflict dynamics during the research period rather than tracing longer-term developments post IKN construction.

Fieldwork was conducted in Sepaku District, which includes parts of the KIPP and KP IKN area. The KIPP area includes locations from Bumi Harapan Village to Pemaluan Village. The KP IKN includes the Sepaku River intake (*Intake Sungai Sepaku*) and related transmission pipeline infrastructure located in Sepaku Village. Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations. Secondary data were drawn from literature searches and documentation on IKN development. Fieldwork took place from 18–28 June 2023. Given the dynamic nature of the situation, the study recognises that conflict conditions and actor positions may have evolved after the research period. During data collection, some Balik community members in Pemaluan and Sepaku had not reached agreement on compensation for disputed land associated with IKN development.

Interviews and FGDs were guided by an unstructured question guide to enable focused yet flexible conversations that could follow emergent issues raised by participants. Interviews, FGDs, and observations were documented through verbatim transcripts and detailed field notes. Across all interview sessions, the total interview duration was 1,440 minutes. Informants were recruited using snowball sampling. This strategy was selected for three reasons. First, it is suitable for sensitive research settings because it enables access through trust-based networks and allows information to be gathered cautiously. Second, a validated list of relevant actors was not available due to the evolving and contested nature of the IKN conflict landscape. Third, recommendations from early informants supported the identification of additional participants through Indigenous leadership and community networks in PPU (Sarantakos 1998; Dragan and Isaic-Maniu 2022; Khoa et al. 2023).

The recruitment process began with locally connected intermediaries in Penajam and subsequently led to contact with customary leaders (*kepala adat*; customary chiefs) and related organisations. Additional informants included representatives of the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN; Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago) and customary leaders from Balik communities and other Paser customary groups, identified through recommendations from the *dewan adat* (customary council) in PPU and the Forum Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Indonesia (Fordamai; Indonesian Community Empowerment Forum). To deepen and cross-check information from customary leaders, the study also conducted FGDs with Indigenous participants directly affected by development in the KIPP and KP IKN. These FGDs included Balik participants from Sepaku Village and Pemaluan Village, and Paser participants from Bumi Harapan Village.

Four FGDs were conducted, with 27 participants in total and a combined duration of 540 minutes. Additional data were also obtained from an informant affiliated with the IKN Authority to corroborate information related to conflict issues and procedures in IKN development. All

interviews and FGDs were conducted in Indonesian, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English.

Data analysis followed an iterative process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing conducted before, during, and after fieldwork (Denzin and Lincoln 2009; Ridder 2014). During and after data collection, field notes and transcripts were reviewed to identify recurring themes and patterns. The materials were then condensed and categorised through coding to organise key findings for analysis and presentation. This coding process supported inductive interpretation and synthesis of participants' accounts.

To strengthen credibility, the study used triangulation across multiple data sources (Rahardjo 2010; Denzin 2012). Triangulation drew on information from key actors, including Indigenous customary leaders, AMAN, and the IKN authority, and was supported by relevant documentation obtained through customary leadership networks. This approach enabled cross-checking of claims and verification of core themes relating to conflict dynamics in IKN development.

## DISCUSSION

### Activating Indigenous Community Networks: Identifying Community Needs as a Conflict-Reduction Strategy

In large-scale development projects, Indigenous Peoples are frequently positioned as marginalised communities whose presence and claims are acknowledged only after key decisions have been made. In the IKN case, the struggle over living space taken through state-led development has generated resistance and, in some instances, open conflict between the state and affected communities. Although Indigenous communities may hold land that has been managed across generations, they often remain disadvantaged in land governance processes, even when some documentation exists. Agrarian conflict commonly emerges where customary rights based on origin and long-term occupation are not fully recognised in statutory procedures. AMAN's records regarding the Sepaku Indigenous territory in PPU indicate that Balik communities, despite being recognised within Indigenous narratives as long-standing managers of *wilayah adat* (customary territory), continue to face limited legal protection (Ayunda 2022).

In PPU, the Kuta Rekan Tatau edict, approved at the Paser Indigenous People's Congress on 1 September 2019, identifies 12 Paser sub-groups organised by watershed affiliations: Paser Luangan; Paser Telake (Tikas and Nyawo); Paser Pematang; Paser Migi; Paser Peteban (Leburan); Paser Bukit (Bukit Bura Mato, Bukit Jondang, and Mandi Angin); Paser Adang; Paser Balik; Paser Pemuken; Paser Tebalung; Paser Aper; and Paser Semunte (Nugroho 2022). These groups are described as descendants of Bansu Tatau Datai Danum, referring to people living along riverbanks, beaches, and lakes. The edict frames this customary network as a collective platform to address major issues affecting Indigenous communities in Paser, including territorial governance, political legitimacy, education, infrastructure, and employment, particularly in the context of PPU's designation as the IKN development area.

The edict also articulates an explicit preventive orientation. Its seventh point commits the customary network to protecting land within customary territories and recognises the risk that IKN development may intensify disputes between the state and Indigenous communities over customary tenure. The provision prohibits the sale of customary land to outsiders and urges stakeholders at both regional and central levels to resolve ongoing agrarian conflicts involving

Paser Indigenous communities and corporate actors. In this context, both IKN development and long-standing corporate encroachment are treated as pressures that threaten Indigenous control over living space within Paser customary territory.

The central tension arises where Indigenous customary claims intersect with state-led land acquisition and spatial planning, producing disputes over land valuation, relocation, and recognition of customary authority (Nasir et al. 2023; Permadi et al. 2024; Syaban and Appiah-Opoku 2024; Bakker 2023). In many cases, these disputes also become entangled with mining and plantation expansion, as communities asserting customary rights confront corporate claims and state-supported development agendas. As Bakker (2023) notes, national law often fails to fully recognise land claims grounded in customary rights, which sustains structural vulnerability for Indigenous communities.

In the areas most directly affected, especially Sepaku and Pemaluan (as shown in Figure 1), contestation centres on customary rights that structure Balik livelihoods and attachments to place. These locations have become focal points in the establishment of KIPP and KP IKN. Although Balik communities are formally part of the broader Paser customary network, field accounts indicate that customary governance is not experienced as equally representative across sub-groups. Balik leaders argued that Balik concerns were not adequately represented in broader Paser customary forums, particularly regarding land acquisition processes in Sepaku and Pemaluan. Sibukdin, the *Kepala Adat* of Paser Balik described IKN development as affecting livelihoods such as fishing, hunting, and farming, and as threatening culturally significant ancestral sites. He also expressed concern that deliberations tended to reflect broader Paser priorities rather than addressing Balik-specific concerns, “The Balik are recognised as part of Paser, but Balik representation in Paser was never properly considered, so we chose to fight on our own” (Sibukdin, *pers. comm.*, 21 June 2023, PPU).

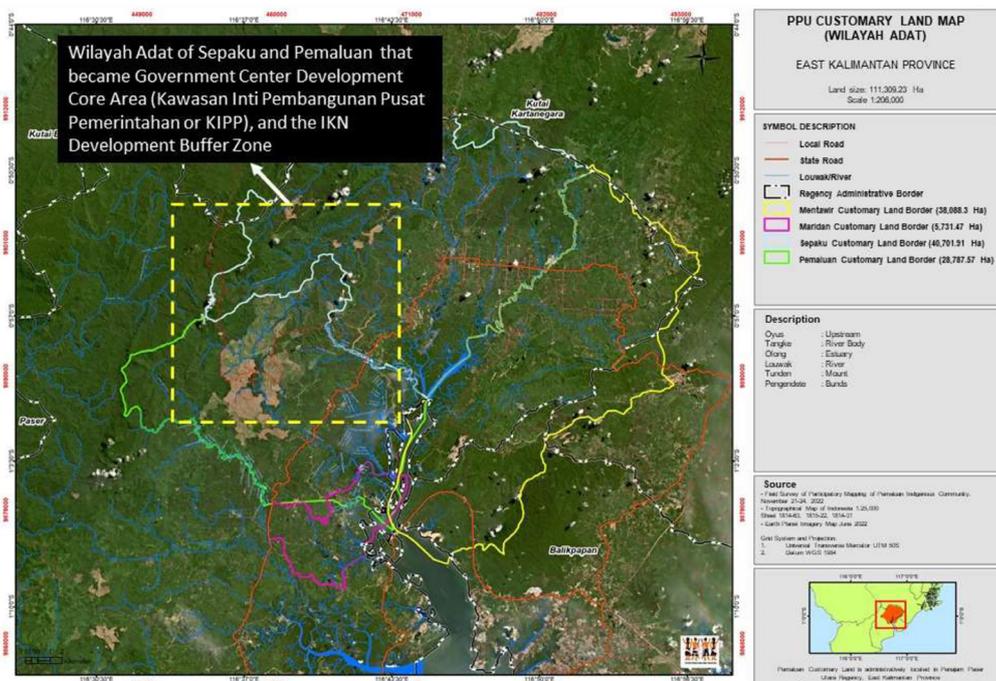


Figure 1: *Wilayah adat* of Sepaku and Pemaluan that became the escalation of the IKN conflict (Sepaku Indigenous Peoples Participatory Mapping Field Survey).

Source: Map by AMAN in Yovanda (2023).

In response to infrastructure construction associated with IKN, including the Sepaku River intake and the transmission pipeline network located within areas claimed as Balik customary territory in Sepaku Village, Sibukdin also articulated a conditional stance towards state decisions. He stated that the Balik community does not want to be evicted or relocated, and that he would support government decisions if they benefit the community but would resist decisions perceived as harmful. He further emphasised that the Balik did not wish to become mere “spectators” on their own land, particularly in areas closest to IKN development. This resistance is echoed in parts of Sepaku, where some residents have opposed land acquisition due to concerns that compensation would be insufficient to secure replacement land nearby (Masbanjar 2023). Such concerns persist despite regulatory provisions, including Article 115 of the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency Regulation No. 19 of 2021, which provides multiple compensation forms, including money, replacement land, resettlement, or other mutually agreed arrangements.

These accounts highlight a tension between formal inclusion within a customary network and perceived exclusion from meaningful representation. Sibukdin called for recognition and respect for Indigenous rights, particularly those of the Balik community, and framed unmet needs as an unresolved issue within the broader customary network. The underlying point is that unity within the Paser network depends on whether all sub-groups feel heard and represented. Where a sub-group’s concerns remain persistently unaddressed, internal dissonance can develop within the network, weakening its collective legitimacy and reducing its political and cultural leverage in dialogue with state authorities. This fragmentation can also limit the capacity of customary institutions to function as effective mediators in territorial disputes. In conflict-reduction terms, an emancipatory approach therefore requires impartiality and inclusion, ensuring that minority voices are incorporated into dialogue between the state and society rather than treated as peripheral (Suryawan 2017; Putra 2018).

In practice, the Paser customary community network can function as a mediator in territorial conflicts associated with IKN development. Identifying and recognising community needs can reduce escalation by making claims and priorities explicit and negotiable (Liliweri 2005). Activating this customary network therefore requires engaging directly with the needs and customary expectations of the Balik community, including those who oppose aspects of IKN development. The Balik position, as voiced by Sibukdin, emphasises the need to protect traditions and ways of life and to preserve living space in the context of IKN expansion. At the same time, participants also described material and social needs that should be addressed through inclusive policy guarantees, including access to health and education and opportunities to benefit from IKN-related development.

Across interviews and FGDs, the study identified twelve collective needs that can inform conflict-reduction strategies in IKN development. First, recognition of Balik as a community that contributes to and is affected by IKN development. Second, state recognition and legal protection of ancestral land, particularly for Balik communities. Third, opposition to relocation, with a preference for settlement arrangements that enable communities to remain in or near their customary territory. Fourth, compensation that reflects not only land value but also the social and economic costs of livelihood loss. Fifth, protection of living space in Sepaku and Pemaluan by ensuring that development does not proceed without recognising and accommodating Indigenous interests. Sixth, formal recognition of Indigenous existence and rights in Sepaku and Pemaluan so communities are not reduced to “spectators” on their own land. Seventh, a demand for dignified, equal, and collaborative dialogue between the government and Indigenous communities. Eighth, affirmative opportunities for local youth, including pathways for PPU Indigenous children to participate meaningfully in IKN development. Ninth, training and

capacity-building programmes to strengthen local capabilities. Tenth, facilitation of collaborative and egalitarian communication channels so Indigenous communities can be fully involved in decision-making processes. Eleventh, affirmative and inclusive policies that ensure the state is present in addressing community needs rather than delegating responsibility to intermediaries alone. Twelfth, the establishment of a forum or task force under the IKN Authority, organised through partnership with community representatives, to convene actors and negotiate competing interests linked to IKN development.

Activating Indigenous community networks can therefore foster trust among Indigenous communities in PPU, but this trust becomes practicable only when competing needs and claims are openly discussed and accommodated through equitable dialogue. As Hardiman (2010) argues, unaddressed differentiations within systems of need, including tastes, interests and economic necessities, can become a driver of social conflict.

### **Conflict Escalation and Dialogic Equality: Tackling Information Obesity**

Conflict surrounding IKN development is most pronounced in two areas: KIPP and KP IKN. KIPP, particularly in Peraluan Village, overlaps with areas associated with Balik community settlement and customary claims. KP IKN includes the Sepaku River intake and the transmission pipeline network, which are located within areas claimed as Balik customary territory in Sepaku Village. Within this setting, Balik communities have become prominent voices in expressing opposition to aspects of IKN development, especially where development is experienced as displacement and as a form of “forced” marginalisation that reduces Indigenous communities to peripheral actors on their own land. At the same time, perspectives within the Balik community are not uniform. Some residents in Sepaku and Peraluan have pragmatically accepted compensation for land allocated to IKN development, while others have adopted more provisional positions, temporarily opposing or questioning particular procedures, valuations, or relocation scenarios rather than rejecting IKN in principle. Tensions can escalate when these dissenting or undecided actors perceive that their concerns are not substantively addressed. Although opposition does not represent a unanimous Balik position, the absence of credible accommodation mechanisms can intensify mistrust and deepen polarisation.

A key driver of dispute concerns perceptions of fairness in land valuation and compensation. For many Balik households, land is not only an economic asset but also the basis of livelihood, identity, and intergenerational continuity. Participants expressed concern that compensation would be insufficient to secure replacement land within or near the IKN zone, especially for households with smaller plots. This concern persists even where pricing is determined through an independent appraisal process, as stipulated by the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency Regulation No. 19 of 2021. Conflict risks are further intensified where land legality remains uncertain, or documentation is incomplete (Kurniati et al. 2019; Joireman and Tchatchoua-Djomo 2023). In such cases, households without land certificates described themselves as structurally disadvantaged in negotiations with state institutions. Some claims are grounded in origin narratives and place-based markers, including ancestral graves, yet these are often difficult to validate within formal systems (as shown in Figures 2 and 3). As articulated by Saron and Asmin, Balik customary figures in Peraluan Village, relocation remains unacceptable even when compensation is perceived as attractive. They stressed that residents are determined to remain in the IKN development area in order to stay close to ancestral graves and to maintain continuity with customary history and livelihood practices.

We want recognition of Balik *adat* in the IKN development process, but we do not want to be relocated, and we want the government to pay attention to our lives. The government has never acknowledged the Balik people. We do not want to lose our living space and habitus because of IKN. The construction of IKN should not eliminate our farming way of life. We are afraid we will lose Balik history if we are relocated or moved. The cemeteries here are Balik graves, as our parents told us. This land was cultivated by our parents, so we have the right to cultivate it. (Saron, Pemangku Adat of Balik Pemaluan, and Asmin, *Kepala Adat of Balik Pemaluan, pers. comm.*, 22 June 2023, PPU)

Beyond land valuation and legal uncertainty, the conflict environment is shaped by the circulation of competing narratives and rumours regarding IKN development, particularly in relation to land prices, compensation standards, and relocation. Participants described difficulty distinguishing verified information from speculation, which contributed to heightened anxiety and hardened positions. This condition aligns with the concept of information overload and the “information obesity” described by Baudrillard (1983, as cited in Piliang 2010), where an abundance of information without reliable verification mechanisms produces confusion rather than clarity. In the IKN context, information obesity emerges when multiple narratives circulate rapidly through interpersonal networks and online platforms, while accessible and trusted clarification channels are limited. Some narratives frame IKN primarily through the language of “displacement” and “dispossession”, which can intensify perceptions of existential threat, especially in communities already experiencing insecurity.

Information circulation is also shaped by locally resonant cultural interpretations. Some participants referred to a Paser prophecy predicting that PPU would become a bustling centre of movement, described through imagery of “net-shaped” roads and people moving back and forth. Such narratives do not, in themselves, cause conflict, but they can amplify the sense that transformation is inevitable and that customary lifeworlds are under pressure. Where such interpretations intersect with uncertainty about land and livelihoods, the symbolic weight of development can become a further source of tension.



Figure 2: Balik Indigenous peoples' billboard rejecting transfer and relocation linked to IKN intake development in Sepaku Village.

Source: Ayunda (2023).



Figure 3: Ancestral grave located in the former Hak Pengusahaan Hutan (HPH) area of PT ITCI, included within KIPP in Pemaluan Village.

The analysis therefore suggests that information obesity contributes to escalation not because “a mastermind” controls narratives, but because the communication environment contains multiple competing claims, overlapping representative organisations, and unequal access to authoritative information (refer to Figure 4). Online communication in particular enables rapid circulation of unverified narratives through forums and organisations that claim to speak on behalf of *masyarakat adat* (customary law communities). In this context, the abundance of claims and counterclaims can become a conflict multiplier. As Baudrillard and Maclean (1985), Whitworth (2009) and Scannell (2020) argue, complex digital media environments can intensify conflict where large volumes of information circulate without reliable validation channels, especially under conditions of political contestation and mistrust.

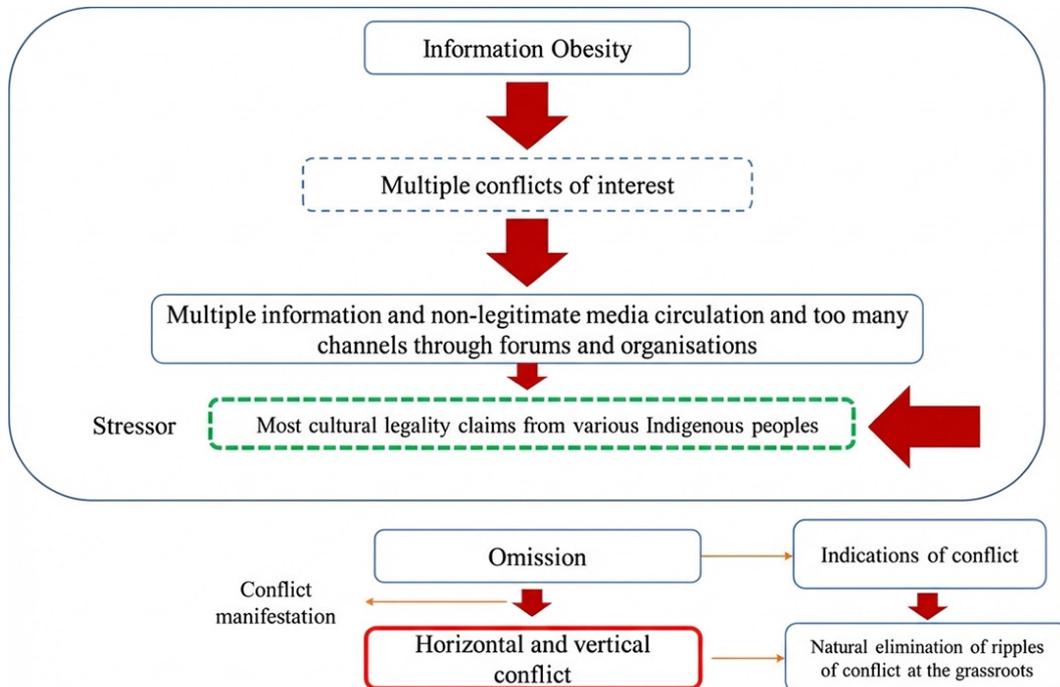


Figure 4: Circulation of information overload (information obesity) in IKN conflict dynamics.

From the perspective of dialogic equality, preventing escalation requires establishing credible mechanisms for verification and inclusive dialogue. One practical option is a communication help desk or jointly recognised information hub that enables communities to confirm procedures, compensation standards, and development plans safely and without intimidation. Such a mechanism should not be treated as one-way “socialisation” but as a deliberative space where concerns can be raised, clarified, and responded to transparently. In addition, dialogue processes should involve relevant actors across customary leadership, representative organisations, and government institutions, with clear rules that protect dissenting voices and prevent domination. Tackling information overload therefore involves not identifying a “mastermind”, but strengthening communication infrastructure that supports verification, accountability, and equitable participation, thereby reducing escalation risks in IKN development (Sholahudin and Sair 2023).

### **Embrace the Mass-Powered and Massive Influential Actors**

The development of IKN, spanning 6,671 hectares, has intensified agrarian conflict between the state and Indigenous communities (Hidayat 2023; Sholahudin and Sair 2023). This conflict is closely linked to the inclusion of areas claimed as Indigenous customary land within KIPP and KP IKN. In this context, engaging influential actors is important for preventing escalation, particularly *kepala adat*, customary councils, community organisations, and intermediary forums in PPU. Public attitudes towards IKN in PPU are not uniform. Many residents support the relocation agenda as a symbol of more balanced development beyond Java, and local government statements also emphasise broad community support for the project. At the same time, opposition persists in some locations, particularly where communities perceive risks to customary land, cultural continuity, and local autonomy. These differences matter because conflict prevention depends not only on formal policy design, but also on whether influential local actors recognise dialogue mechanisms as legitimate and responsive.

PPU has historically been inhabited by Indigenous groups, including Paser communities and Balik communities, which are often described as part of wider Paser customary histories. Over time, migration and social integration have contributed to a pluralistic local population. However, pluralism does not eliminate conflict, particularly where Indigenous interests are perceived to be weakly accommodated in official communication and decision-making processes. Several participants described “stagnation” in communication, meaning that dialogue is experienced as procedural, irregular, or unable to address uprooted interests in an authoritative and trusted forum. In this setting, land earmarked for development becomes culturally contested not only because of economic value, but because it is tied to livelihood practices and intergenerational land use. Participants described land-use traditions that include cultivation and rotation practices grounded in local knowledge of soil fertility and long-term subsistence.

The transformation of PPU as an IKN development area has brought visible physical change, including improved roads and increased mobility. However, participants also described non-physical tensions, particularly concerns that state-led construction is encroaching upon Indigenous living space. Some accounts described land acquisition as abrupt and insufficiently transparent, with uncertainty surrounding valuation processes and compensation arrangements. Participants also raised concerns about the role of the Land Bank and other institutions in shaping land control and access in PPU. In an interview, Helena Samuel Legi, Chairman of the Dayak Customary Council of PPU, emphasised that conflict is likely to persist if actors prioritise sectoral interests over negotiated accommodation of competing needs.

To clarify the actor landscape, this study groups key actors involved in the IKN conflict environment into three broad categories (as shown in Figure 5): (1) proponents who support IKN development, (2) opponents who reject or resist aspects of IKN development, and (3) intermediary actors who seek to navigate between positions through mediation, liaison, or negotiation. Proponents described by participants include the Dayak Customary Council of PPU, the Paser customary chief in Bumi Harapan Village, and the Paser customary council. Fordamai represents a more complex case. Participants described Fordamai as a forum initiated by government that includes local cultural figures, but whose legitimacy is sometimes contested. Accounts suggested that Fordamai's position can shift, supporting IKN in general terms while adopting a more critical stance when members perceive that Indigenous interests are not reflected in policy decisions or implementation. As the Chairman of Fordamai in PPU stated:

Fordamai is an extension of the government (created by the state). This organisation bridges the customary chiefs as the culturally legitimate owners. Communication is ceremonial, messengers from the government, listening to FGDs, our input is not included in every point of the rules we observe. The involvement of local people in the development of IKN still does not exist until now. Oligarchic practices from Jakarta and Java still control IKN. (Eko Supriadi, *pers. comm.*, 19 June 2023, PPU)

Meanwhile, opposing interests are strongly expressed by actors who perceive IKN development as eroding fundamental aspects of the Balik community's way of life, particularly among Balik communities in Sepaku and Pemaluan (as shown in Figure 5). The marginalising effects of IKN development are felt most acutely in KP IKN, especially in the Sepaku intake area (INTAKE Sepaku), which is predominantly inhabited by Balik Indigenous people, and in parts of KIPP that overlap with Pemaluan Village, which is also home to Balik Indigenous communities. In this context, Balik communities are often positioned precariously amid rapid development and contested recognition.

Yosi Samban, the Customary Chief of Paser Sepan and Chair of AMAN in PPU Regency, expressed concern that the Balik Indigenous community faces heightened vulnerability due to the presence of IKN development. He also suggested that Balik cultural preservation may be weakened by limited institutional support for cultural attributes and practices, including traditional houses, dialect or speech forms, language, and rituals. At the same time, AMAN is a prominent opposing actor that advocates strongly for Indigenous communities who, in its view, are marginalised by state or corporate power, and it is vocal in resisting the uprooting of Indigenous rights. In this framing, AMAN's advocacy for recognition of customary living space is presented as essential to preventing further erosion of Balik community continuity.

As shown in Figure 5, these actors hold conflicting interests that are often shaped by sectoral priorities, which can intensify the IKN conflict. Communication among actors may become tense and stagnant when positions are framed competitively rather than negotiated openly. Addressing the needs and interests of these actors through dialogic communication may therefore help reduce conflict escalation within the IKN context. A critical step is to include actors with substantial influence, such as AMAN and customary leaders (*Kepala Adat*) from Balik Pemaluan and Sepaku, in dialogue processes that are recognised as legitimate by affected communities.

Moreover, conflicts of interest within and across Indigenous communities can be exacerbated by ambiguous land ownership and overlapping claims (Hidayah et al. 2021; Sangadji et al. 2021). Developers, whether state or corporate, may disregard customary land rights and culturally significant practices, including sacred sites and rituals, contributing to recurrent conflict (Kossay 2022; Komaling et al. 2023). In the IKN context, what initially appeared as disputes between corporations and Indigenous communities can shift into conflicts between Indigenous

communities and the state as state institutions become more directly involved in land governance and development implementation.

Finally, a critical perspective cautions that *adat* can be invoked in multiple ways within conflict. While it can represent legitimate claims to identity and territory, it may also be mobilised strategically within broader political-economic struggles. In such cases, appeals to Indigenous interests can be used to advance personal economic agendas by a minority of actors under the guise of *adat*.

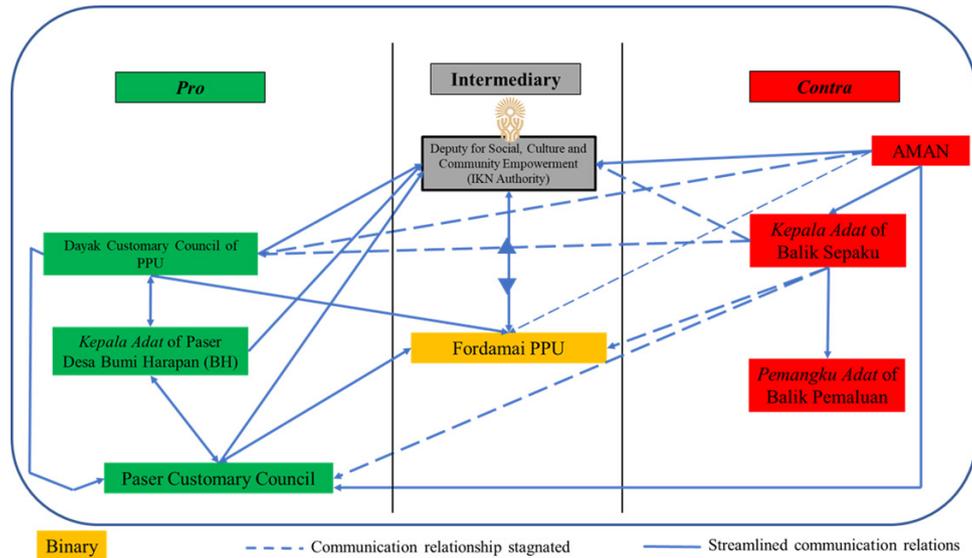


Figure 5: Map of the variety of actors involved in the IKN development conflict vortex.

### Communication Strategy to Reduce the Potential Threat of Conflict: An Examination of Communication Accommodation in IKN

Physical development processes often generate competing interests among involved actors. These tensions frequently originate in agrarian issues, including encroachment on local communities’ living spaces through eviction, contested spatial planning, and state-led construction projects, which can lead to conflict (Amalia and Malihah 2016; Yuliantika 2022; Sukapti and Nanang 2023; Aminuddin and Faishal 2009). Where frustration accumulates and communication breaks down, communities may experience growing dissatisfaction that can manifest as resistance, protest, and, in some cases, violence (Zubir 2010; Zubir and Zayzda 2017; Hossain 2024). Such communication stagnation can sustain latent conflict between the state and Indigenous communities across development policy contexts, including the relocation of Indonesia’s capital to IKN. The social implications of relocation to IKN in Kalimantan extend beyond physical transformation to include shifts in cultural landscapes, spatial planning, and heightened social vulnerability (Aldilla and Michael 2022; Afifuddin et al. 2023; Ocsanda et al. 2023; Saputra et al. 2023). Communication failures associated with agrarian conflict can also undermine IKN’s stated aspirations, including its image as a forest city and a healthy, human-centred city grounded in respect for Indigenous customary rights (Berawi 2022; Carolina 2023; Hidayat 2023; Ibu Kota Negara 2023).

Within the IKN context, research has highlighted how state-led development can encroach on local communities’ living spaces while customary rights (*hak adat*) remain weakly protected in practice (Handoko and Rohmah 2023; Ratib 2023). Related studies also emphasise the

marginalisation of Indigenous rights in IKN development (Aulia et al. 2023), the importance of political communication (Hairunnisa and Syaka 2022), and the urgency of addressing land-rights transfer and protection in order to reduce agrarian conflict (Nurahmani and Sihombing 2022). Recent research further reports displacement pressures in areas affected by the Sepaku IKN intake construction in Sepaku Village. In this setting, Balik Indigenous representatives, including customary leaders (*Kepala Adat*), have expressed concern about the social consequences of land acquisition and the risk of further marginalisation.

As Sibukdin stated, the Balik community perceived limited involvement in the early stages of IKN development and felt that their status as an Indigenous community directly affected by construction was insufficiently recognised:

In the initial process of IKN development, the Balik people were not involved, the state does not seem to consider the existence of the Balik people as an indigenous community affected by IKN development, the current living space of the Balik people seems to be removed, eliminated, and destroyed. The Balik people's land, fields, farms, and homes are completely unprotected. (Sibukdin, *pers. comm.*, 20 June 2023, PPU)

This account reflects dissatisfaction with early communication and consultation processes, particularly in relation to land acquisition. Participants described inadequate consultation prior to land demarcation and perceived unilateral marking of land as coercive. These communication failures contributed to mistrust and heightened conflict risk. From the perspective of the IKN Authority, Alimuddin, Deputy for Social, Cultural, and Community Empowerment, also stressed that early explanation to communities is necessary to reduce friction:

The initial explanation to the community is necessary before the land is pegged. This is to avoid any friction in the community due to the land demarcation for the construction of IKN. The IKN authority is still limited to socialisation and coordination, not yet to policy making. Although in the field, I am directly involved in reducing the turmoil of the conflict. (Alimuddin, *pers. comm.*, 25 June 2023, PPU)

A recurring issue in field accounts concerns dissatisfaction with land valuation and compensation. Under Government Regulation No. 19 of 2021 on the implementation of land acquisition for development in the public interest, valuations are conducted by an independent appraisal team. However, participants described the valuation process as unjust, and some sought recourse through legal channels. Several accounts characterised this as a “communication impasse”, reflecting a sense of powerlessness in contesting state decisions through formal judicial processes. As Balik participants in Pemaluan Village stated:

Only ancestral graves became the “certificate” for our claim to the land seized by the state for IKN. Regarding legality, we lost out by not having a land seal or certificate because we felt that Balik's customary land was not a concern for the state to protect. It is useless for us to fight the state because we are powerless. We want to show IKN that the Balik people want recognition of customary territories in IKN. There has been no recognition of the Balik in IKN. More is known that Paser is accommodated by the government. While Balik has not yet received a position of justification that the Balik people are the owners of the land that is now IKN. (Balik Indigenous participants and Balik leaders, *pers. comm.*, 22 June 2023, PPU)

For some Indigenous communities, ancestral graves function as place-based markers used to substantiate customary land claims in the absence of formal certificates. In Balik communities, reverence for customary sites and practices, including rituals at locations such as Batu Badok and Batu Tukar Tondoi, is described as a way of maintaining and demonstrating continuity

of customary land relations. These practices are linked to claims over areas located within or adjacent to KIPP and to infrastructure development associated with the Sepaku intake and the transmission pipeline network in PPU, which fall within Balik customary territory claims in Sepaku Village (as shown in Figure 6). In Pemaluan Village, Balik customary territory claims also overlap partly with KIPP (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 6: Sepaku River INTAKE design and masterplan for Sepaku River normalisation and affected settlements.

Source: Laksono (2022).

Drawing from Liliweri’s (2005) perspective, conflict mitigation involves unravelling conflicting actors’ hidden interests and needs. By accommodating competing interests, reconciliation becomes more feasible where shared or complementary needs can be identified (Miall et al. 2000; Trijono 2009; Prasojo and Pabbajah 2020). Field data indicate that actors involved in IKN-related conflict are not fixed in their positions and may shift depending on situational dynamics. In this study, six key actors were identified across proponent, opponent, and intermediary roles: the *Kepala Adat* of Balik, the Chairman of the Paser Customary Council, the *Kepala Adat* of Paser Bumi Harapan, Fordamai, the Dayak Customary Council of North Penajam Paser, and representatives of the IKN Authority (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Tabulation of actors, positions, interests and needs in conflict resolution

Actor	Position	Dynamics of interest in IKN conflict	Needs that need to be accommodated
<i>Kepala Adat</i> of Balik	Contra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defending the rights of Indigenous peoples to their living space.</li> <li>Advocating for the recognition of customary rights usurped by the state, including ancestral lands inhabited for generations and affected by IKN development.</li> <li>Acting with good intentions to advocate for the rights of Indigenous peoples.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of Balik <i>adat</i> as a contributing community to the development of IKN.</li> <li>Legal recognition of ancestral land belonging to the Balik community by the state, especially for <i>adat</i> communities owning less than one hectare of land.</li> <li>Rejecting relocation or similar measures, preference for coexisting settlements within the IKN area.</li> </ol>

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Table 1: (continued)

Actor	Position	Dynamics of interest in IKN conflict	Needs that need to be accommodated
Chairman of the Paser Customary Council	Pro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A communication forum encompassing all Paser sub-tribes and parent tribes to address the IKN development.</li> <li>2. Solidarity among the Sepaku community in advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples.</li> <li>3. A platform aimed at recognising the collective identity of Indigenous peoples, unifying their voices in the struggle for Indigenous rights in Sepaku.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Compensation for land value aligned with the Balik community's wishes for land annexed by the state for IKN construction, considering the social impact on livelihoods such as farming and hunting.</li> <li>1. Fighting for the living space that Indigenous peoples feel is deprived by the interests of the state without paying attention to and accommodating the interests of Indigenous peoples in Sepaku.</li> <li>2. Speaking out to get state recognition of the existence of Indigenous peoples in Sepaku to not just be spectators in their land.</li> <li>3. Calling for a dignified, equal, and collaborative dialogue between the government and Indigenous peoples.</li> </ol>
Kepala Adat of Paser Desa Bumi Harapan	Pro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Under the leadership of the Paser Indigenous people in Bumi Harapan, especially RT (Neighborhood Unit) 10, there was no turmoil. All are accepted.</li> <li>2. There is an awareness that the state cannot possibly seize the living space of the Indigenous people of Paser Bumi Harapan.</li> <li>3. As good citizens, the Indigenous people of Paser Bumi Harapan fully support the development of IKN.</li> <li>4. The community recognises that the land designated for inclusion in the KIPP represents their contribution to the nation, a belief rooted in ancestral stories and mythology that foretells Paser's emergence as a bustling centre. The arrival of IKN does not come as a cultural shock to the Paser people, as it aligns with longstanding prophecies.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The state facilitates compensation for the land owned by Paser Indigenous people, including houses, gardens, fields, and productive plants. An independent appraisal team has meticulously assessed the value of these properties, providing a fair and reasonable price.</li> <li>2. Residents of Bumi Harapan in Paser express their concerns and grievances regarding the appropriateness of land prices for KIPP. These issues are relayed to the Paser Customary Institution at the sub-district level and are addressed through a facilitated forum by the IKN authority.</li> <li>3. The pricing process conducted by the appraisal team experienced no stagnation or deadlock. Paser Bumi Harapan Indigenous people find the offered price fair and reasonable, with no reservations about the inclusion of land and economic plants in the calculation.</li> </ol>

(continued on next page)

Table 1: (continued)

Actor	Position	Dynamics of interest in IKN conflict	Needs that need to be accommodated
Fordamai	Pro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The relationship between the authority and Fordamai was equally tenuous in the eyes of the state.</li> <li>2. Land banks have claimed customary lands with certificates. Even though a document already recognises the land as customary rights (<i>hak ulayat</i>).</li> <li>3. Communication was limited to government circles (Military District Commander [Dandim], District Police [Polres], prosecutors, and village non-commissioned officer [Babinsa]), with no community involvement.</li> <li>4. Corporations, through concessions, unilaterally claim customary land. There is a struggle for the living space of Indigenous peoples who are deprived by the state through corporations.</li> <li>5. Fordamai is only a sweeper and “fire extinguisher” when there are conflicts in Indigenous communities.</li> <li>6. The IKN issue is inseparable from the political interests of oligarchs.</li> <li>7. Communicating only at the elitist level of government, Indigenous peoples do not have a strong voice and bargaining position in front of the state.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocating for the active participation of local children in Kalimantan’s native communities within the IKN development initiative.</li> <li>2. Urging the government to allocate resources for the comprehensive preparation of local children to thrive in the IKN environment.</li> <li>3. Highlighting the necessity for skill-building programmes aimed at enhancing the capabilities of Paser Indigenous residents in PPU. Current training efforts primarily focus on labour and construction roles, neglecting crucial aspects like contractor management and partnership development.</li> <li>4. Emphasising the importance of collaborative and equitable communication channels to ensure full engagement of Indigenous communities in the IKN development project, along with official recognition of their contributions.</li> <li>5. Advocating for government policies that prioritise the welfare and interests of Indigenous populations.</li> <li>6. Calling for affirmative and inclusive policies to support Indigenous communities within the IKN area, promoting their active involvement and ensuring their needs are addressed by governmental bodies.</li> </ol>
North Penajam Paser Dayak Customary Council	Pro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serving as a mediator to mitigate tensions and conflicts within Indigenous communities.</li> <li>2. Managing crowd dynamics and offering assistance in advancing the IKN development agenda.</li> <li>3. Facilitating communication between the Dayak Indigenous communities and the IKN authority.</li> <li>4. Offering consistent and constructive input on various issues related to IKN, including social conflicts, labour matters, and the relocation of Indigenous peoples.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishment of the legal authority of the Dayak Customary Council in PPU as a key partner in resolving conflicts and advocating for customary rights for communities affected by the core development areas of IKN.</li> <li>2. Advocation for creating a collaborative forum to unite diverse interests involved in the IKN development process, potentially through the formation of a task force under the leadership of the IKN authority.</li> </ol>

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Table 1: (continued)

Actor	Position	Dynamics of interest in IKN conflict	Needs that need to be accommodated
IKN authority	Mediator	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The entity vested with legal authority to authorise IKN faces limitations in bargaining power due to budget constraints, preventing full accommodation of community demands.</li> <li>2. The IKN authority grapples with balancing the interests of Indigenous communities and those of the central government, creating a challenging dilemma.</li> <li>3. A communication impasse exists between the IKN authority, representing the central government, and the community, particularly Indigenous groups.</li> </ol>	Expansion of the authority of the IKN authority, not only as a supervisor of IKN development but also as the authority to intervene in ministries related to land release and multiplication.

In mapping actors, positions, interests, and needs, the data indicate that the *Kepala Adat* of Balik is the main actor articulating a counter-position within the IKN conflict of interest. Representing Balik communities along the Sepaku riverbanks in Sepaku Village (linked to the INTAKE development) and in Pernaluan Village (included in KIPP), efforts to reduce open conflict depend on fostering equal and dignified dialogue and collaboration between pro- and contra-actors in IKN development. Drawing on Giles (2016) and supported by Achmadi et al. (2021) and Diab et al. (2022), communication strategies that emphasise convergence can support negotiation, particularly where dialogue must accommodate Indigenous cultural needs and interests. Social tensions often stem from institutional communication failures, especially where accommodation mechanisms are insufficient to mediate intersecting interests and needs across customary (masyarakat adat/Indigenous communities) and formal legal (state) domains.

In the context of IKN development, communicative accommodation can take three forms. First, it requires ensuring equal participation for all relevant actors. Second, it requires negotiation spaces that prioritise compromise while addressing the needs and interests of opposing actors. Third, pro-IKN actors should adopt convergence-oriented communication strategies that bridge differences with contra-actors rather than intensifying divergence. In addition, establishing a task force under the supervision of the IKN Authority, and agreed upon by conflicting actors, could provide a structured forum to reduce information distortion generated by particular interests or groups who claim to speak in the name of *adat*. This mechanism can function as a procedural safeguard and may help mitigate conflict risks at the community level.

Information distortion surrounding land transfer for IKN development, particularly in KIPP and the Sepaku intake area, is also linked to competing claims made by individuals presenting themselves as customary leaders whose authority is disputed. Such claims, made in the name of *adat*, can influence land-release processes and may reflect the interests of particular individuals or groups. This concern was raised by Yosi Samban, the *Kepala Adat* of Paser Sepan and Chairman of AMAN in PPU District, “Ever since PPU became the centre of IKN development, many people claim to be the *kepala adat* or *ketua adat*, they do this only for personal gain from land acquisition for IKN” (Yosi Samban, *pers. comm.*, 20 June 2023, PPU).

A similar point was raised by the head of RT (neighbourhood association) 10 in Bumi Harapan, an area included in KIPP. She stated that many landholders in Bumi Harapan are not Indigenous to Paser. According to her account, individuals submit their *Kartu Keluarga* (KK; Family Registration Card) to the RT for administrative processing in order to formalise claims over land. She further suggested that some land is owned by outsiders who purchased it cheaply from local residents and later sold it at a higher price to IKN developers. In this view, opportunistic practices can exploit uncertainty and contestation between Indigenous communities and state institutions during land acquisition processes.

At the same time, field accounts also indicate debates about how *adat* is mobilised within the IKN conflict environment. Some participants suggested that, in certain cases, *adat* may be invoked as a symbolic justification within disputes that are driven primarily by personal economic interests. In this framing, the interests of Indigenous communities risk being overshadowed by the agendas of individuals acting in the name of *adat*. Participants also suggested that dissenting voices opposing IKN development can be weakened when other Indigenous community members benefit materially from land compensation, which can shift the balance of influence within local debates. This view was expressed by participants in Bumi Harapan, where compensation related to land acquisition was widely described as economically significant:

We'd never thought that we would receive compensation that exceeds our expectations from the value of the rupiah figures received. We believe that the state will not hurt its people, especially since IKN is for the good of all people. We have never rejected IKN, in fact, with the compensation for land that we are currently getting, we can buy a wider land for future life, and we never thought we could now hold the steering wheel of a car. (Komaruddin, *pers. comm.*, 22 June 2023, PPU)

Compensation in Bumi Harapan (within KIPP) was described by several participants as transformative. Siti Juhariyati, the head of RT 10 Bumi Harapan, stated that community members felt as if they had suddenly become financially secure, and that compensation provided relief after years of hardship. She also added that, “because land was released for what was framed as the state’s benefit, the community should show *legowo* (resigned acceptance) and support IKN development” (Siti Juhariyati, *pers. comm.*, 26 June 2023, PPU).

Despite the ongoing development of IKN, conflict persists among minority groups who seek recognition and accommodation of their needs. If disputes regarding compensation remain unresolved, particularly for contra-actors who have limited bargaining power due to uncertain land legality, addressing their concerns becomes important for preventing further escalation. These concerns often include requests for recognition of cultural presence within IKN’s development narrative. Recognising Balik communities in development processes is therefore significant not only symbolically but also as part of conflict-prevention efforts. Preserving Balik living space without displacement, including through locally acceptable resettlement arrangements where necessary, can provide a potential pathway for negotiation. This approach aligns with the “middle ground” proposed by Alimuddin, Deputy for Social, Cultural, and Community Empowerment of the IKN, as a human-centred strategy to reduce conflict risk.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict escalation in the development of IKN in PPU stems from unaddressed interests and unmet needs within communication processes, which are the focus of this article. When communication overlooks local customary culture embedded in Indigenous lands, it can

generate dispute and contestation. The involvement of actors with divergent interests, combined with the absence of workable mechanisms to reach agreement, further intensifies tensions during IKN development.

This article emphasises the importance of dialogic communication in reducing the risk of escalation. Establishing dialogic communication involves three key steps. First, activating Indigenous community networks requires identifying community needs and strengthening trust among Indigenous groups in PPU. Trust is more likely to develop when the community's system of needs, including livelihood concerns and material security, is acknowledged and discussed with actors involved in IKN development. Addressing competing interests through such processes can encourage meaningful participation and reduce the likelihood that latent tensions escalate.

Second, conflict escalation can be mitigated through consensus-building achieved via equitable dialogue that also reduces information overload. Curbing information overload is crucial to defusing tensions in IKN development, particularly where unverified claims circulate through congested communication channels. Establishing a communication help desk, for example, can provide a safe and accessible space for dialogic engagement, support information verification, and strengthen legitimacy through mutual understanding among conflicting actors. Such efforts are needed to prevent misinformation and uncertainty from amplifying grievances into more open confrontation. Effective IKN development therefore requires spaces for equal dialogue between the state and local communities, in which all actors can voice concerns without undue pressure.

Third, engaging influential actors is essential for strengthening communication ties through a mutually agreed forum. This includes involving organisations and customary authorities with recognised influence, such as AMAN and Balik customary leaders in Pemaluan and Sepaku, alongside state institutions and intermediary bodies, so that negotiation mechanisms are regarded as legitimate by affected communities.

Overall, dialogic communication emerges as a reasoned strategy to prevent escalation in IKN-related development conflicts. While prior studies have often overlooked specific dialogic approaches, this article underscores the importance of dialogue, consensus-building, and a shift from antagonistic positioning towards more workable forms of contestation and negotiation. Strengthening the legitimacy of traditional authorities can also help rebalance power relations in conflict interactions. At the same time, dialogic communication is not a standalone solution. Its effectiveness remains constrained by structural power asymmetries and the broader socio-political landscape. Nevertheless, dialogic communication that is culturally responsive and grounded in local knowledge provides a practical foundation for Indigenous communities seeking recognition and protection of ancestral land rights within large-scale development.

The conflict situation surrounding IKN remains highly dynamic. As observed during this study, tensions continue to evolve, and changing circumstances may reshape actor positions over time. This study also identifies a gap that warrants further exploration, particularly the lack of comparative evidence on Indigenous perspectives regarding IKN development. Future research should examine the experiences of Balik communities by distinguishing between those who have received compensation and those who have not within land acquisition processes in KIPP and KP IKN. Addressing these gaps is important for developing more comprehensive strategies to mitigate conflict in IKN development, to benefit Indigenous communities in PPU, and to inform broader national development policies.

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## COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

This research adhered to the ethical standards set forth by the National Research and Innovation Agency (No: 438/KE.01/SK/07/2023). Informed consent was obtained from all key informants and relevant actors at IKN Penajam Paser Utara (PPU), East Kalimantan.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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