Political Conflict Over the Construction of a Tower in Menduran Village, Brati District, Grobogan Regency

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Conflicts often arise in village development when communication among stakeholders is lacking transparency and community participation is limited. This situation can hinder the achievement of sustainable and inclusive development.

Aims: This study aims to analyze the dynamics of conflict in the construction of a telecommunication tower in Tower Menduran Village, identify the root causes and forms of conflict, and explore conflict resolution efforts undertaken by the relevant parties.

Methods: This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's thematic method through the stages of familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting.

Results: The results of the study indicate that conflicts arise due to a lack of socialization, differing interests, and community concerns about the negative impacts of tower construction. The forms of conflict that emerge include protests, rejection, and the submission of petitions. Conflict resolution is carried out through mediation involving the village and district governments, using *peace-making*, *peace-keeping*, and *peace-building* strategies.

Conclusion: This study emphasizes the importance of transparent communication, active community participation, and trust-building among parties in conflict resolution. Effective conflict management at the village level not only stops disputes but also transforms social relations toward more inclusive and sustainable development.

Keywords: Conflict resolution; village development; telecommunications tower; mediation; community participation

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in village development are common, especially when infrastructure projects are implemented without adequate transparency and public participation (Erma et al., 2022; Fathurochman & Tutiasri, n.d.; Ismail et al., 2024; Junaeda & Khaerunnisa, 2024; Sarkowi et al., 2022). In the digital era, the demand for telecommunication facilities has increased significantly, yet top–down policies often trigger disputes at the community level. Such conflicts highlight the tension between the government's developmental agenda and the rights of citizens to information, participation, and welfare protection.

Normatively, rural infrastructure development should be based on the principles of participation, transparency, and commitment to community welfare (Aprilya & Fitria, 2020; Ardiany et al., 2023; Bonaldy et al., n.d.; Ismawan & Haryati, 2021; Putra & Mursyidah, 2023) . In practice, the construction of a tower in Menduran Village is contrary to this idealism. The previous village head promised to build a rest area to improve the economy of the residents, but then changed it to leasing village land for a BTS tower without involving the community. This situation has led to distrust, protests, and demonstrations, ultimately resulting in the temporary halt of tower construction. This fact highlights the gap between the ideal practice of community-based development and the actual conditions on the ground.

The case of Menduran Village in Brati Subdistrict, Grobogan Regency, illustrates this phenomenon. The construction of a telecommunication tower, initially intended to solve weak network problems, provoked strong opposition from residents. The village head unilaterally changed the land-use plan—from a promised rest area to a tower project—without consultation. This sparked distrust, protests, and demonstrations, resulting in a temporary suspension of construction. Menduran is unique because, among nine villages with similar signal problems, only this village experienced overt political conflict, reflecting the community's relatively high educational background and strong social networks.

Previous studies on political conflicts in Indonesia have generally focused more on land conflicts, village head elections, and local political elite conflicts (Amri et al., 2022; Falah & Fauzi, 2021; Nawir & Mukramin, 2019; Puri, 2019) . However, research on conflicts over the construction of BTS towers at the village level is still very limited. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the dynamics of political conflict triggered by the need for digital infrastructure in the post-pandemic era. The case in Menduran Village demonstrates how opaque development policies can lead to community rejection while testing mediation-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Thus, this study offers a new perspective on the relationship between village infrastructure development and local political dynamics.

The selection of Menduran Village as the research object was motivated by its unique position compared to other villages in Brati Subdistrict. Of the nine villages in the subdistrict, only Menduran Village experienced conflict over the construction of a tower, although other villages also faced signal problems. Geographical factors, such as weak signal networks, made the construction of a tower seem like an urgent necessity. However, this also sparked resistance from the community due to potential environmental, health, and social impacts. Additionally, this conflict reflects how local political power is exercised and tested when faced with broader public inter.

This study aims to analyze the causes of conflict over tower construction in Menduran Village, identify the actors involved, and examine the strategies of conflict resolution undertaken. Theoretically, it contributes to enriching local political studies by offering insights into the intersection between rural infrastructure and political dynamics. Practically, it provides lessons for village governments and communities to promote participatory, transparent, and equitable development policies.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with *a case study* method. A case study was chosen because the research focuses on a specific event, namely the political conflict surrounding the construction of a BTS tower in Menduran Village, to gain an in-depth understanding of the background of the conflict, the actors involved, and the mechanisms for its resolution.

Participants

The research participants consist of actors directly involved in the conflict, including the Village Head of Menduran, village officials, the Village Assembly (BPD), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), RT/RW Chairpersons, representatives from PT Tower Bersama, and residents living near the tower construction site.

Population and Sampling Methods

The population in this study was all parties involved in the conflict over the construction of the tower in Menduran Village. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on their involvement in the conflict. The researchers selected key informants such as the village head, the head of the village council, and community leaders to obtain relevant and comprehensive data.

Instrument

The research instruments used in this study are the researcher as the human instrument, assisted by unstructured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation studies. The interview guidelines are used to gather information from the actors involved, observations record social dynamics in the field, and documentation (such as meeting minutes and rejection petitions) serve as supplementary data.

Procedures and, if relevant, the time frame

The research procedure was carried out in three stages, namely data collection, data processing, and reporting. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with actors involved in the conflict, and documentation studies in the form of village meeting minutes, agreement letters, and rejection petitions. The research was conducted in Menduran Village, Brati Subdistrict, Grobogan Regency, Central Java, from 2022 to 2023, coinciding with the ongoing political conflict over the construction of a BTS tower.

Analysis Plan

Data analysis in this study uses Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014, 2019; Byrne, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2014) , which consists of six stages: data familiarization, coding, theme search, theme review, theme naming, and report writing. With this analysis, the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were categorized into several main themes, namely the causes of conflict, the actors involved, and conflict resolution efforts. This analysis was chosen because it provides a systematic overview of the dynamics of political conflict over tower construction in Menduran Village.

Thematic Analysis Process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Aspect	Findings
Causes of Conflict	No public awareness campaign; changes to the village land use plan; concerns about the impact of radiation, lightning, and fires.
Stakeholders	Village Head, Village Council, NGO, RT/RW Chairperson, PT Tower Bersama, Grobogan Regency Government, local community.
Form of Conflict	Resistance from residents; demonstrations; petitions; temporary halt to the tower project.
Resolution Efforts	Mediation by the village and district governments; mutual agreement; peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-building strategies.

This study reveals that the conflict over the construction of communication towers in Tegowanu Kulon Village originated from a lack of socialization with the community. Changes in the plan to use village land for tower construction without the involvement of residents raised concerns about negative impacts such as radiation, lightning strikes, and the potential for fires. This situation highlights a communication gap between the developers and the local community, which has led to mistrust and rejection.

This conflict involves various actors with different interests. From the village government, the village head and the village council (BPD) are important figures who play a role in decision-making and conflict mediation. Meanwhile, the community, represented by the heads of the neighborhood associations (RT and RW) and local NGOs, oppose the development. PT Tower Bersama, as a private company, and the Grobogan district government are also involved as stakeholders with an interest in the continuation of the project. The complexity of these actors indicates that the conflict is not merely a technical issue but also a political and social one.

The conflict in the field was evident through the actions of residents, such as demonstrations, petition signing, and demands for the temporary suspension of tower construction. These forms of resistance reflected the community's dissatisfaction with policies they considered non-transparent. Their rejection was a form of political articulation by the village community in fighting for their rights and security.

In an effort to resolve the conflict, the village and district governments took mediation steps as a middle ground. Through joint deliberations, an agreement was reached between residents, village officials, and the company. The conflict resolution strategy used included three approaches: *peacemaking* to reach an initial agreement, *peacekeeping* to maintain conditions so that the conflict did not escalate, and *peacebuilding* to rebuild community trust through ongoing dialogue.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that infrastructure development conflicts at the village level are not merely technical issues, but also concern the rights of communities to obtain information and participate. By understanding the causes, actors, forms of conflict, and resolution strategies, it can be concluded that information disclosure and public participation are key to preventing similar conflicts in the future.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the conflict over tower construction in Menduran Village arose primarily from a lack of socialization, unilateral changes in land use, and community concerns about health and environmental risks. Residents responded with demonstrations, petitions, and collective resistance, which eventually forced a temporary suspension of the project. Mediation efforts were then initiated by the village and district governments to reach a compromise between the company and the community. These factual results provide a basis for interpreting the conflict through relevant theoretical perspectives (Khaswara & Hambali, 2021; Ziaul Haq & Yudhistira, 2022). From the lens of Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle, the Menduran case reflects an imbalance among attitude, behavior, and contradiction. The residents' suspicion of hidden interests represents the *attitude* component, their protests and demonstrations represent *behavior*, while the contradiction lies in the clash between development goals of the government and company versus the community's demand for transparency and safety. This aligns with Galtung's notion that unresolved contradictions often escalate when accompanied by negative attitudes and confrontational behaviors.

Meanwhile, Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation provides further insight into the conflict. The decision to convert land into a tower site was made without involving residents, placing participation at the lower rungs of the ladder—"informing" or even "manipulation." The resistance from the community demonstrates their demand to move participation upward toward the level of "partnership" or "citizen control," where decisions are shared and reflect local aspirations (Varwell, 2022). This theoretical interpretation highlights that the core issue is not merely technical development but the exclusion of citizens from the policy-making process.

This study has limitations in terms of the scope of the location and duration of the research. The data obtained only represents the dynamics of conflict in one village with specific actors, so generalizations to other contexts are still limited. Additionally, this study focuses on interviews and documentation, so it does not highlight the deeper psychological aspects of the actors involved. This opens opportunities for future research to expand the scope using *mixed methods* or comparative studies in several regions.

Based on the findings and limitations, this study recommends that village and district governments establish a more transparent communication system with the community from the planning stage of development. Referring to John Paul Lederach's conflict resolution theory, a long-term approach is needed that not only resolves conflicts (*conflict settlement)* but also builds trust through dialogue, deliberation, and community empowerment (Burgess et al., n.d.; Tidore, 2022; Varwell, 2022)). For further research, it is recommended to expand the study by incorporating psychological aspects, local culture, and legal mechanisms to make conflict resolution strategies more comprehensive and applicable.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the conflict over the construction of a telecommunications tower in Tegowanu Kulon Village arose due to a lack of socialization, differences in interests, and community concerns about the negative impacts of the construction. The conflict involved various actors, ranging from the community, the village government, the Village Consultative Council (BPD), to the service provider company. The conflict took the form of rejection, demonstrations, and petitions from residents, reflecting an imbalance in communication and public participation.

Conflict resolution efforts were carried out through mediation by the village and district governments, using *peace-making*, *peace-keeping*, and *peace-building* strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of building transparent communication, active community participation, and mutual trust among all parties in every development planning process. Thus, this study highlights that conflict resolution at the village level is not only aimed at stopping problems but also at transforming social relations toward more inclusive and sustainable development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

S.W. played a major role in developing the research framework, collecting data, and writing the manuscript. N.S. contributed to data analysis, methodological guidance, and refinement of the manuscript. Both authors jointly conducted discussions, revisions, and final approval of the manuscript.

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