

# The Role of Public Relations in Building a Positive Image and Trust Through PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda's Social and Environmental Responsibility Program

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## Abstract

This study aims to explain the role and obstacles of public relations in building a positive image and increasing the trust of the fostered village community through the Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) program. This study uses a qualitative approach with interviews, observations, and documentation involving informants from the company, fostered village communities, village heads, community leaders, Muspika Dewantara District, and the mass media. The results of the study indicate that the role of PT PIM's public relations is to communicate the company's program for the development and welfare of the fostered village community, be responsible for conveying every information on the TJSL assistance program, manage public opinion and establish communication with the media and stakeholders, manage and promote the TJSL assistance program with positive contributions, and conduct an Environmental Satisfaction Survey to assess the community's response to its performance. The results of the study also explain the obstacles to public relations, namely PIM's financial and human resource limitations, community expectations are too high for TJSL assistance, expected grant assistance (charity), the community's education level being relatively low, and there is still a lack of community trust in PIM.

**Keywords:** Role of Public Relations; Positive Image; Public Trust; Social and Environmental Responsibility; PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (PR) has a strategic role in building a positive image and increasing public trust in the company (Augustin, 2023; Sulma et al., 2023). As a management function in communication, Public Relations plays a role in bridging the relationship between the organization and its public. (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Fatimah et al., 2020). For companies such as PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda, the role of Public Relations is crucial in ensuring harmonious relations with the surrounding community, especially the fostered villages that are the closest circle in the company's operations. The success of Public Relations in carrying out its duties has a direct impact on the company's image, public trust, and business sustainability (Magdina et al., 2018).

A positive corporate image is not just a reputation or good name but a strategic asset that can influence consumer decisions and strengthen their loyalty. Companies with a positive image tend to be more likely to attract public support, both in terms of product marketing and operational sustainability; for PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda, which is a subsidiary of the state-owned company PT Pupuk Indonesia (Persero), a positive image and support from the fostered village community are the main foundations in implementing the Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) program. This program is designed not only to support community welfare but also to create a mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship between the company and the surrounding community.

The presence of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda in North Aceh, especially in Dewantara District, carries a great responsibility towards its social environment. With fostered villages spread across the Ring I, II, and III areas, this company runs various Social and Environmental Responsibility programs that include education, community empowerment, health, and environmental conservation. These programs aim to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a global reference for overcoming social, economic, and environmental challenges.

The Social and Environmental Responsibility implemented by PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda has been developed since 1989 and continues to be evaluated to ensure that its implementation is on target. Based on the Regulation of the Minister of SOEs Number PER-6/MBU/09/2022, the company implements the Social and Environmental Responsibility program with various approaches, including mentoring patterns (stewardship) and grants (charity). Several leading programs include educational scholarships, entrepreneurship training, environmental conservation, and empowerment of micro and small enterprises (MSEs). These programs not only provide direct benefits to the community but also become a form of corporate responsibility in creating shared value (Creating Shared Value/CSV).

However, although many social and environmental responsibility programs have been implemented, challenges remain in building community trust. Some of the assisted village communities feel that the assistance provided is not optimal, even, or adequate. This perception indicates the need to improve communication, distribution of assistance, and community involvement in program preparation (Pakpahan, 2020; Tarigan et al., 2021). This is where the role of Public Relations becomes very important. Public relations not only functions as a conveyor of information but also as a relationship manager who must be able to understand the needs of the community, design effective communication strategies, and build a positive image of the company consistently (Hasibuan et al., 2023; Ismaulidina et al., 2020).

PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda has identified fostered villages in Ring I as priority areas for the implementation of Social and Environmental Responsibility programs. Villages such as Tambon Baroh, Tambon Tunong, Keudee Krueng Geukueh, Paloh Gadeng, and Blang Naleung Mameh are the main targets in the company's efforts to create significant social impact. Programs such as PIMCAREducation, Tani Sejahtera Program, and Youth Entrepreneurship Training are part of the company's strategy to empower communities and improve their welfare.

The company has used the Social Return on Investment (SROI) method to measure the impact of the TJSL program, evaluating its effectiveness in creating sustainable social, economic, and environmental benefits in accordance with the commitment to the SDGs. The success of the program depends not only on its impact but also on community acceptance. Therefore, Public



Relations needs to communicate the TJSL program transparently, provide an easily accessible complaint mechanism, and involve the community in the preparation and evaluation of the program to strengthen the harmonious relationship between the company and the community.

Previous research has shown the important role of Public Relations (PR) in building a positive image and trust through effective communication and social responsibility programs. Studies such as (Alma, 2018; Rondonuwu, 2016) highlight the importance of PR communication strategies in improving corporate image. Research by (Ibrahim & Anna, 2016; Sihombing, 2021) reveals the significant influence of PR on public perception, especially through CSR. PR strategies in media relations and CSR programs, as expressed (Khadijah & others, 2012; YUNUS & RIATNO, 2019) also support the company's image. A study (Mauliza & Wardhana, 2023) about PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda is relevant in highlighting the four-stage CSR strategy, which is an important guide in this study.

Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to analyze the role of Public Relations of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda in building a positive image and increasing the trust of the fostered village community through the Social and Environmental Responsibility program. In addition, this study also seeks to identify the obstacles faced by Public Relations in carrying out its duties. By understanding the roles, strategies, and challenges faced, this study is expected to provide relevant recommendations to improve the effectiveness of Public Relations in supporting company goals.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the deep meaning related to the role of Public Relations (PR) in building a positive image and increasing the trust of the fostered village community through the Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) program of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda. The subjects of the study include PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda as the implementer of TJSL, the TJSL & Public Relations Department as the company's PR, and the fostered village community as the research object. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, involving informants from various parties, including internal companies, fostered village communities, community leaders, and the mass media.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman method, which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity is guaranteed through method triangulation, which compares the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the validity of the findings. The study focuses on how the TJSL program is designed, implemented, and evaluated to create a positive social impact, as well as the role of PR in building harmonious relationships between companies and communities. The research location includes six fostered villages around PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda in North Aceh, with a research period of three months, from April to June 2024.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of Public Relations in Building a Positive Image and Increasing Community Trust in Fostered Villages through the PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda TJSL Program**

Public Relations (Humas) of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda must act quickly in managing good communication with various related parties to avoid negative impacts. Public Relations (Humas) PIM must be capable of designing a crisis response plan, issuing official statements as valid information representing the company, and interacting with the mass media to ensure accurate information and control the public narrative.

Public Relations (Humas) PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda has managed and promoted the company's TJSL assistance programs, which focus on positive contributions to society and the environment. This program demonstrates the company's commitment to social responsibility to build a positive corporate image and good relations with the fostered village community. This is in accordance with the opinion (Pahlevi & Rossy, 2015), which explains that image greatly influences a company's credibility. Company image must be positive because image is the



identity and asset of a company. Public relations (PR) plays a very important role in building a positive company image through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or TJSL program.

Every empowerment program carried out by TJSL ensures that information is conveyed accurately, either directly during meetings with stakeholders, publications through media partners, or internal media such as the Website and Corporate IG as a report on the company's contribution to the surrounding community and related stakeholders, and this is the Company's annual performance achievement that must be met. By implementing these steps in a planned and systematic manner, PIM Public Relations can ensure that TJSL program messages are conveyed clearly and effectively to the fostered village community, thereby increasing their understanding and participation in the program.

Public Relations (Humas) PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda has a very important role in establishing relationships with the community in the fostered villages regarding assistance programs from TJSL, including:

Communication and information on TJSL programs: PIM Public Relations is responsible for conveying all information regarding the TJSL Program to the fostered village community so that the programs are well understood by the community.

Listening to input and feedback from the fostered village community: the community needs to be listened to for their input regarding the TJSL program in order to identify needs and evaluate improvements in program implementation.

Managing public opinion, Public Relations must be able to manage public opinion on TJSL programs through communication activities. The role of public relations in general is as a communicator or liaison between organizations or institutions represented by their public. Public Relations plays a role in trying to create an image for the organization or institution.

Responsible for conveying all information regarding the TJSL assistance program to the assisted village community so that the program can be well understood by the community.

Manage and promote TJSL assistance programs, focusing on positive contributions to the assisted village communities.

Conducting intensive communication and coordination regarding environmental issues by discussing and evaluating what PIM has provided to the community, establishing partnerships with related parties in the village community, such as community leaders, village heads, institutions, and academics, and listening to input and feedback from the community.

To see the public response to the role and contribution of public relations, an Environmental Satisfaction Survey is conducted every year.

Efforts that have been made by PIM public relations (Humas) in communicating and interacting with the fostered village community to increase trust and build a positive image of the company related to PIM's TJSL assistance include holding meetings or socialization events in fostered villages to explain in detail about the TJSL Program and attending community events in fostered villages as a form of support and active involvement in the social and cultural life of the local community, as well as opportunities to interact directly with them.

So far, Public Relations (Humas) PIM has made maximum efforts to communicate and coordinate intensively regarding issues in the environment by discussing and evaluating what PIM has given to the community, establishing partnerships with related parties in the village community, such as community leaders, village heads, institutions, and academics. Establishing partnerships can help disseminate information about assistance programs from TJSL PIM and strengthen support from the community.

PT PIM has also involved the fostered village community in various activities, which can be a good opportunity to interact directly with the community. By carrying out these efforts consistently and transparently, PIM Public Relations can build strong relationships with the fostered village community, increase trust, and strengthen the company's positive image related to PIM's TJSL assistance. Trust means confidence; when you trust people, you have confidence in them, in their integrity, and in their abilities; when you don't trust others, you are suspicious of them, in their integrity, in their agenda, and in their abilities.

The mass media's view of the role of PIM public relations (PR) in conveying information about the TJSL assistance program to the fostered village community is very open. Professional public relations must be very aware that the media has an important role in publication activities, and it is important for public relations to establish relationships with the media or what is hereinafter referred to as media relations. Media relations is an activity carried out by a Public Relations person who is related to the mass media, in this case, the company's publication activities. This is important because the main goal is to improve the company's reputation and positive image.

So far, the relationship built by PT PIM Public Relations with the media crew is quite good. Moreover, in the era of sophisticated information technology, almost all information is provided by PT PIM through press releases to the media crew via WhatsApp groups. This condition has helped the media crew in presenting balanced news. PIM Public Relations has also been able to build a very close relationship with the media crew, namely by conducting "Media Gathering" activities for press personnel in North Aceh and Lhokseumawe, as was once carried out in Takengon, Central Aceh, and Medan, North Sumatra. This is to increase familiarity among fellow press personnel as well as with PIM Public Relations personnel themselves. PT PIM's good relationship with the media can also be proven by PT PIM winning the 2024 Serambi Award from Harian Serambi Indonesia in the Go Green Pioneer Category in North Aceh Regency on May 31, 2024, at the AAC Dayan Dawood Building, Banda Aceh. This award was given for PT PIM's consistency in greening and protecting the Environment globally to support the achievement of Proper Gold in 2024.

### **Public Relations Obstacles in Building a Positive Image and Increasing Community Trust in Fostered Villages Through the PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda TJSL Program**

In an effort to build a positive image and increase the trust of the fostered village community through the Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) program, PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda (PIM) faces various obstacles originating from both internal and external aspects. These obstacles arise from limited resources, gaps in community expectations, cultural challenges, and transparency issues. Based on the results of observations and interviews with internal parties of the company and the fostered village community, these obstacles affect the effectiveness of the TJSL program and the community's perception of the company.

One of the main obstacles faced is limited resources, both financial and personnel. PT PIM has limitations in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Social and Environmental Responsibility program. With a limited number of human resources, the company cannot optimally monitor and assess the success of the program. This condition causes several programs to run without adequate evaluation, so their effectiveness and sustainability are difficult to measure. In addition, financial limitations are also a challenge in accommodating the increasing expectations of the community.

Another significant obstacle is the gap between community expectations and reality on the ground. Community expectations of PIM's Social and Environmental Responsibility program are often too high compared to the company's capabilities. This is exacerbated by the low level of community education, which causes the understanding of the limitations of the Social and Environmental Responsibility program to be less than optimal. The mismatch between expectations and program realization has the potential to damage the company's image, as expressed by Dewantara community figure Dr. Ismadi, who highlighted that the community often expects more than PIM can provide.

The assisted village communities also face challenges in accepting and implementing the Social and Environmental Responsibility program optimally. Although PIM has provided various forms of assistance and programs, some communities tend to expect assistance in direct forms such as cash grants. This dependence on instant assistance reflects the low awareness of the community to become entrepreneurs and utilize the program productively. This condition is a



serious obstacle for PIM in realizing the Social and Environmental Responsibility program that is oriented toward sustainable empowerment.

Another issue is the existence of certain parties who seek personal gain from the Social and Environmental Responsibility program. When their personal desires are not fulfilled, these parties have the potential to provoke the general public, thereby creating a negative perception of the company. This condition adds to the challenges for PIM's Public Relations in building harmonious relationships with the community. In addition, some people consider PIM to be less transparent in distributing the Social and Environmental Responsibility assistance program. This distrust is a major challenge that must be overcome through a more open and accountable communication approach.

The low level of education among the assisted village communities also makes it difficult to implement the Social and Environmental Responsibility program. Many people do not yet understand that this program has certain limitations according to company policy. As a result, people often have unrealistic expectations of the company. In addition, the low level of public awareness of the need to utilize assistance to increase economic independence is an obstacle to optimizing the impact of the Social and Environmental Responsibility program.

To overcome these obstacles, PIM Public Relations needs to continue to take a sustainable approach to the assisted village communities. Transparent and open communication is the key to building trust and better-managing community expectations. PIM also needs to strengthen program monitoring and evaluation and involve the community in the planning and implementation process of the Social and Environmental Responsibility program. Thus, the community can feel like they are part of the program, not just as beneficiaries.

On the other hand, increasing the capacity of internal human resources and educating the fostered village community are strategic steps that must be taken. PIM Public Relations must educate the community about the importance of economic independence through empowerment programs, as well as provide an understanding that the Social and Environmental Responsibility program has limitations. By building community awareness and participation, the Social and Environmental Responsibility program can run more effectively and provide sustainable impacts.

Overall, despite facing various obstacles, PIM has the opportunity to increase the effectiveness of its Social and Environmental Responsibility program and build a positive image in the eyes of the community. With the right approach, effective communication strategy, and strengthening cooperation between the company and the community, existing challenges can be overcome, and public trust in the company can be increased. These obstacles should motivate PIM to continue to innovate and implement social and environmental responsibility programs that have a positive impact on the fostered village community.

## CONCLUSION

The role of Public Relations in Building a Positive Image and Increasing Community Trust in fostered villages through the PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda TJSL Program is to convey the PIM Public Relations program for community development and welfare as a manifestation of the Company's TJSL and sustainable growth; Responsible for conveying every TJSL program information to the Community so that they can understand it; Managing public opinion on the TJSL program, communication and coordination with the media and stakeholders; Managing and promoting the TJSL program, focusing on positive contributions to the fostered village community; Communication and coordination of intent related to issues in the environment, discussion and evaluation of what has been channeled; and conducting an Environmental Satisfaction Survey (SKL) to see the response from the community. Public Relations obstacles in Building a Positive Image and Increasing Community Trust in fostered villages through the PT PIM TJSL Program are financial and human resource limitations to implement, monitor, and evaluate all TJSL programs; the gap between community expectations that are too high and the TJSL program being implemented; still expecting instant grant assistance (charity); the level of community education is relatively low; lack of community trust in PIM.

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