

Reflection and Learning Report

Participatory Action Research
in Central Halmahera, North
Maluku



Dala Institute

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Note:

This report forms part of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiative aimed at realising long-term social and economic benefits in Central Halmahera Regency amid the development of the nickel downstream industry. The research includes case studies across three village clusters affected by nickel mining and produces two main outputs: (i) a substantive report presenting empirical findings based on research questions jointly developed with the Local Government, and (ii) a reflection and learning report that documents the participatory process and its influence on relationships, trust, and power dynamics.

This report specifically presents the **findings, reflections, and lessons learned** from the first three phases (out of a total of five phases) of the research, which is planned to be conducted over the 2025–2026 period.

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Introduction

Background

The energy transition agenda is bringing significant changes to many regions, including North Maluku. As the holder of Indonesia's largest nickel reserves—a key transition mineral (Bappenas, 2025)—North Maluku, particularly Halmahera Island, has become a focal point of global and national ambitions related to nickel downstream development. Nevertheless, there are clear inequalities in the authority of local governments, as key local stakeholders, to manage strategic mineral resources. Ambitions articulated at the national level often obscure the realities and dynamics at the local level. While policy frameworks frequently emphasise economic growth, the voices and lived experiences of local communities are often not adequately reflected in policy formulation and implementation (Lapaza & Azhar, 2025).

In practice, these inequalities have led to rapid and far-reaching changes in community life. During data collection conducted jointly with local government interlocutors in November 2025, communities reported drastic and previously unforeseen changes to the physical environment, ways of living, and social relations. As widely documented, top-down policy-making processes have limitations in capturing such complexity and often result in policies that are socially misaligned (Prabawati et al., 2020).

For this reason, the project explores a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach as an alternative to conventional research and policy approaches. The project complements existing studies, while positioning local stakeholders—in this case, the local government—as co-producers of knowledge and active participants in shaping problem formulation, priority-setting, and the development of potential policy responses. The PAR approach was deliberately adopted as an effort to bridge knowledge, power relations, and practice.

This report documents reflections and lessons learned from the first three phases of the project. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of all activities, but rather to serve as a learning-oriented narrative that examines how participatory processes unfold in practice, the challenges and trade-offs encountered, and how these processes have begun to influence engagement and policy relevance. By sharing these reflections openly, the report is expected to contribute to broader learning on participatory governance and the equitable management of transition minerals beyond the scope of this project.

Conceptual Framework

This project adopts Participatory Action Research (PAR) as both a research approach and a process of collective learning and capacity building. The approach is grounded not only in participation, but also in iterative and relational processes, in which knowledge is co-produced, power relations are negotiated, and action-oriented learning develops over time (Stringer, 2014). Accordingly, a core element of this approach is continuous reflection at each stage of the process, to understand the actions taken and their impacts, thereby facilitating learning, deepening knowledge, and guiding necessary changes within the research cycle (Hall et al., 2017).



In line with the project design, PAR is implemented collaboratively with local government actors at both provincial and district levels. This process facilitates mutual sharing and learning to jointly surface, understand, and reflect on local challenges related to the governance of transition minerals and the policies that support them. As emphasised by Cornish et al. (2023), PAR involves active participation and leadership by those directly facing the issues under study, through engagement in systematic research as a means of fostering emancipatory social change. Within this framework, Dala acts as a facilitator, supporting the participatory research process to generate outputs that respond to practical needs and emerging policy possibilities arising from the aspirations of government actors and affected communities.

This conceptual framework also challenges conventional approaches by asserting that the purpose of participatory research does not end with data collection, but lies in strengthening local capacity to produce knowledge and use it for development and social change (Fals Borda, 1991). In contrast to conventional social research—which often positions affected communities as passive objects of study and concentrates recognised knowledge in the hands of academics or external institutions—PAR seeks to democratise knowledge production by recognising, in this project, local institutions as legitimate holders of knowledge and as agents of change.

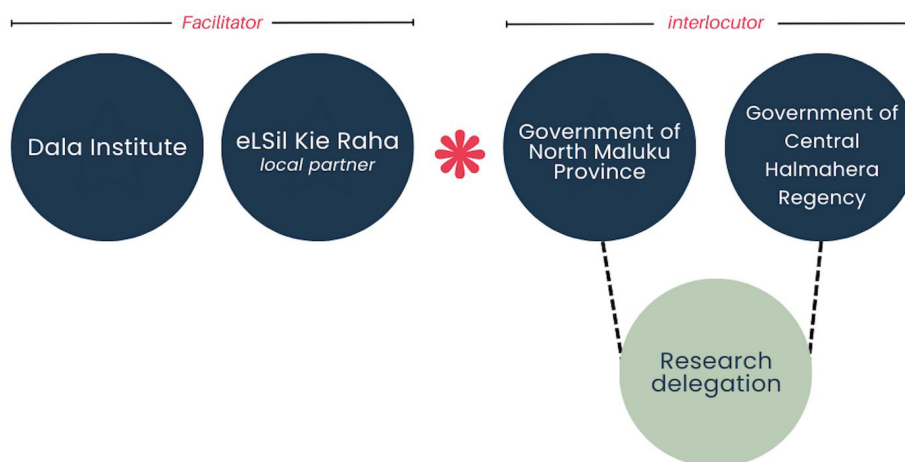
Methodologically, the project employs a range of approaches commonly used in qualitative research, including interviews, focus group discussions, and public dialogues. However, these activities are designed and implemented in a participatory manner to create structured deliberative spaces. The methods are not treated as rigid instruments, but as adaptive mechanisms that respond to contextual dynamics and emerging findings. While specific activities and outputs may evolve over the course of implementation, the project maintains clear objectives, reflective questions, and a defined timeframe to ensure a balance between flexibility and accountability.

Conceptually, the participatory process in this project is understood as creating pathways of influence rather than acting as a direct lever for policy change. In complex policy contexts such as transition mineral governance, change is rarely linear or attributable to a single intervention. Instead, PAR is expected to contribute incrementally through the development of shared understandings of key issues, enhanced mutual comprehension, and strengthened relationships among government actors and between government and communities. These shifts are expected to form the foundation for greater government responsiveness to community voices and for policy formulation that is more closely aligned with local realities.

PAR places learning as a primary outcome in its own right; for this reason, this report is presented separately from the substantive analysis. Learning is understood not only as the accumulation of new knowledge, but also as changes in perspectives, capacities, and practices among the actors involved, as illustrated in Figure 1. This learning-oriented approach directly underpins the reflective questions guiding this report, which examine the challenges of participatory processes, their influence on policy engagement, and the relevance of emerging policy responses to the real needs of communities.



Figure 1. Actors involved in the research



Objectives and Learning Questions

Grounded in a reflection- and learning-oriented approach, this report is structured around the following key questions:

1. How challenging is the participatory process in driving change related to energy issues and the policies that support them?
2. How does the participatory process influence the willingness of government to accommodate or respond to community needs and voices as identified in policies and programmes?
3. How relevant are the resulting policy changes to the actual needs of local communities?

Overall, these learning questions provide a structured lens through which to reflect on the achievements, limitations, and contributions of the participatory process during the first three phases of the project. They also form the basis for adaptive learning and decision-making in the subsequent phases of the action–research cycle.

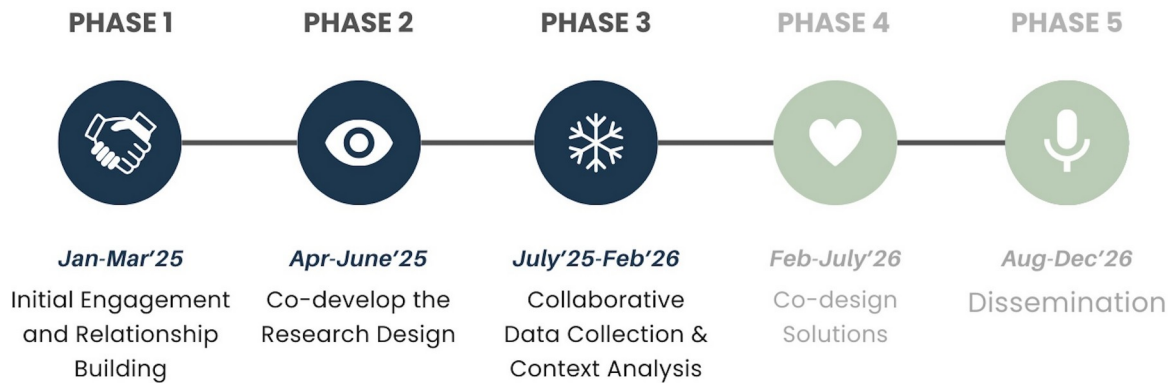
Methodology

This methodology section explains how reflections and learning in this report were collected, analysed, and synthesised. Unlike the methodology of the substantive report, which focuses on empirical findings related to socio-economic conditions, basic services, PPM/CSR programmes, and post-mining issues, the methodology in this report is specifically designed to capture the dynamics of implementing Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a collaborative, reflective, and adaptive process.

Nevertheless, the report acknowledges its limitations, including the fact that some changes in relationships and policies are still at an early stage and have not yet fully materialised within the phases covered in this report (see Figure 2). These limitations are themselves part of the learning process and will be used to adjust the approach in subsequent phases of the action–research cycle.



Figure 2. PAR stages and report scope



Analysis Approach

This reflection and learning report applies qualitative analysis based on thematic coding of multiple sources of process-related data. This approach aims to understand how interactions among the research team, local government, local partners, and communities evolved throughout the action-reflection cycle, as well as how social and political contexts influenced the research process.

The coding is not intended to measure impact quantitatively, but rather to identify patterns, challenges, tensions, and key lessons that emerged during the implementation of the first three phases of PAR, from relationship-building through to the data collection stage.

Data Sources

Reflections and learning in this report are drawn from various forms of process documentation, including:

- regular reflection notes prepared by internal researchers (Dala Institute and eLSiL Kie Raha);
- minutes of meetings and discussions with government interlocutors at provincial and district levels, including Heads of Departments/Agencies, Heads of Divisions, and technical staff;
- reflection forms completed during data collection and participatory activities;
- relevant communications and informal records related to the research process, such as discussions via WhatsApp channels and diaries.

This multi-source approach enables the triangulation of reflections and provides a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the PAR process.

The three village clusters included in this research are:

1. **Cluster 1:** Lelilef Waibulan Village and Lelilef Sawai Village
2. **Cluster 2:** Kobe Village and Sawai Itepo Village
3. **Cluster 3:** Fidi Jaya Village



Coding Technique and Thematic Analysis

The coding process was conducted in an iterative and reflective manner to capture the key dynamics in the implementation of PAR. Coding categories were developed to represent the core dimensions of the participatory process, including:

Table 1. Coding Description

Code	Description
P1. strategi_engagement	To document the strategies and approaches used to build engagement (e.g. through community leaders, informal approaches, or formal forums) and their effectiveness, including the communication styles applied.
P2. partisipasi_dinamika	To capture patterns of participation throughout the PAR process—who was actively engaged, who was left behind, and how trust and relationships evolved among actors (communities, local government, researchers).
P3. kekuasaan_relasi	To identify power dynamics and influence among actors (e.g. imbalances between local government and communities, CSOs and companies, donors and implementers), including how local government positioned itself within these relationships.
P4. kejutan_pembelajaran	To record unexpected developments (both positive and challenging) that arose during the process, as well as learning gained, such as new awareness of underlying issues or potential solutions, and significant differences in perceptions or knowledge.
P5. refleksi_PAR	To document reflection and learning processes within the research team, partners, and local government related to the methodology, including the strengths and challenges of PAR.
P6. eksternal_pengaruh	To capture the influence of local political, social, and policy contexts on the effectiveness of the participatory process (e.g. support or resistance from local government).

Subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted by examining linkages across coding categories and relating them to the predefined learning questions. This process enables the report not only to describe what was done, but also to explain how and why the process shaped the capacities, relationships, and strategies of the actors involved.

Descriptive coding and thematic coding were carried out manually using Dedoose software to minimise bias and ensure data confidentiality, including the removal of information attribution. However, at the stage of synthesis and refinement of the thematic analysis, the researchers used Artificial Intelligence as an analytical support tool to identify cross-category patterns, test the coherence of findings, and strengthen reflection in relation to the learning questions.



In line with PAR principles, reflections in this report are situated and relational, shaped by the positions and roles of the actors involved in the process. Accordingly, the findings are not intended to be widely generalisable, but rather to provide contextual learning that is relevant for the development of participatory practices and policy engagement in mining regions.



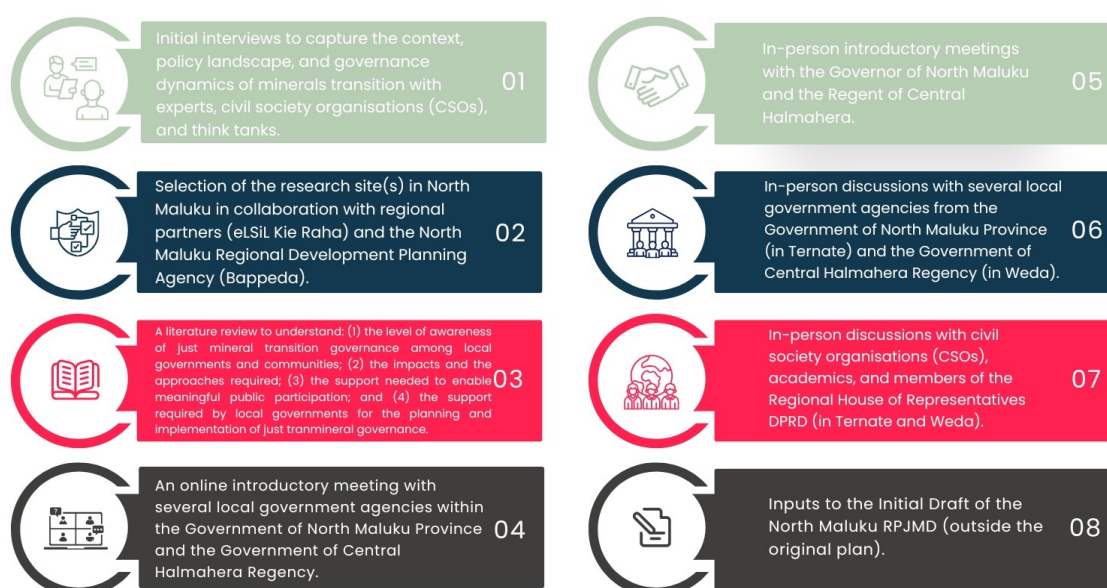
Overview of the Process and Key Findings by Phase

This section outlines the activities undertaken in each of the first three phases of the PAR. It covers the activities conducted, the outputs produced, as well as the findings, reflections, and lessons learned. In this report, findings document what occurred during the implementation of each phase, including emerging patterns and dynamics, without drawing cross-phase conclusions or lessons. Analysis and reflection on these findings are presented separately in the subsequent chapter.

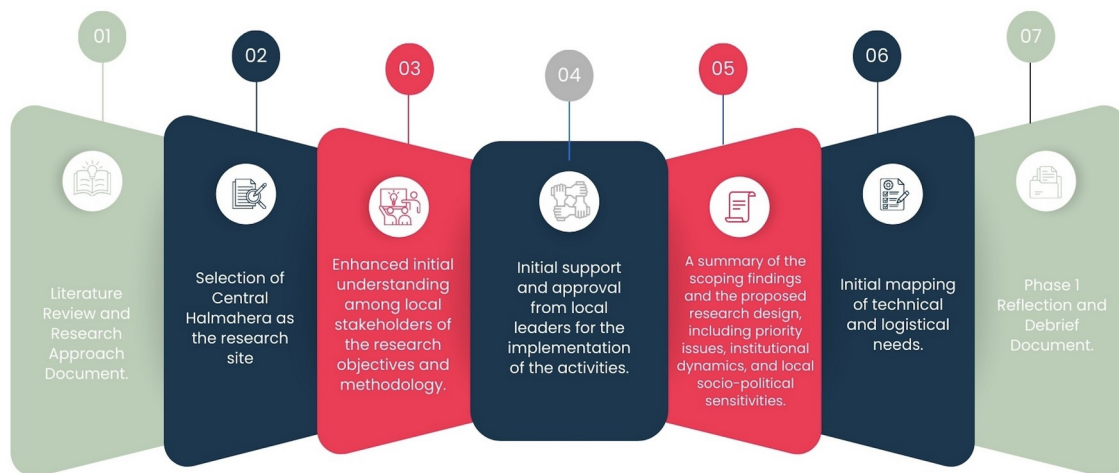
Phase 1: Scoping and Relationship Building

Phase 1 represents the initial stage of the research and focuses on deepening contextual understanding and building relationships with key actors at the local level. This phase aims to establish a shared understanding of the issues to be examined, introduce the research approach, and secure initial support for the implementation of activities in subsequent phases. The main actors involved include regional partners, heads of local government, and leaders of several regional government agencies (OPD) at both the North Maluku Provincial level and Central Halmahera District level.

Activities



Outputs



Findings

Engagement strategies and in the initial context of the participatory process

During the scoping phase, the participatory process began through initial engagement with local government and non-government actors, using a combination of formal and informal approaches. This approach was made possible by the role of regional partner who have strong experience and networks with local stakeholders. Discussions were conducted both online and in person, using a range of formats, levels of formality, and communication flows adapted to bureaucratic structures and the agendas of the actors involved. These adjustments reflect the initial conditions in which energy transition and transition mineral governance were not yet well-established discourses at the local level.

In the course of this process, the project's narrative and issue focus evolved. Early discussions with the provincial government revealed an understanding of the energy transition that remained closely associated with renewable energy, whereas this research was intended to examine impacts and benefit distribution in mineral-producing regions that support the energy transition agenda. In subsequent discussions with the district government, the communication focus shifted to more explicitly include transition mineral governance and post-mining issues. This shift emerged as part of an effort to adapt language and issues to better align with the lived experience of a nickel-producing region, in which the experience of Gebe Island was repeatedly referenced. This narrative served as a catalyst for shared experiences and as an entry point for collective awareness of the importance of cross-sectoral coordination.

Participation dynamics and institutional responses of local government

Local government responses to questions about needs and priority issues showed a strong connection to the organisational structure of regional government agencies (OPD) and



their respective mandates. Early discussions functioned more as spaces for clarifying positions, authorities, and political sensitivities than as forums for cross-sectoral reflection.

At this stage, the fragmentation of responses was not perceived as a problem, but rather as a natural consequence of a tiered bureaucratic structure. The primary focus of local government was on ensuring the relevance of the issues to development agendas, the legitimacy of the process, and the clarity of institutional positioning within the context of central–local government authority.

Local government engagement in discussions was also shaped by formal governance mechanisms. Engagement processes followed hierarchical bureaucratic pathways, including the need for support and direction from senior leadership. Support from local leaders formed part of the context influencing the involvement of technical agencies in the early stages, as well as determining the space and formats available for discussion.

Power relation and distribution authority in energy and mining issues

Interactions during the scoping phase revealed the division of roles and authorities between central, provincial, and district governments, which shaped the initial boundaries of local government action. In discussions with regional government agencies (OPD), there were repeated references to the limited authority of local governments in managing mining and energy issues, particularly in relation to licensing, oversight, and strategic policies that fall under central government jurisdiction.

These conditions formed part of the initial context accompanying the participatory process, in which local governments played roles in coordination, facilitation, and planning, but with decision-making space limited to certain policy areas. This dynamic framed how issues, needs, and aspirations could emerge and be discussed during the early stages of the process.

Initial information and identified issues

The scoping phase generated a range of initial information regarding the environmental and socio-economic impacts of mining, their linkages to regional planning documents, and differences in understanding among actors concerning the governance of transition minerals. Discussions also highlighted limited access to information, both at the local government and community levels, as part of the initial context of mining and energy sector governance.

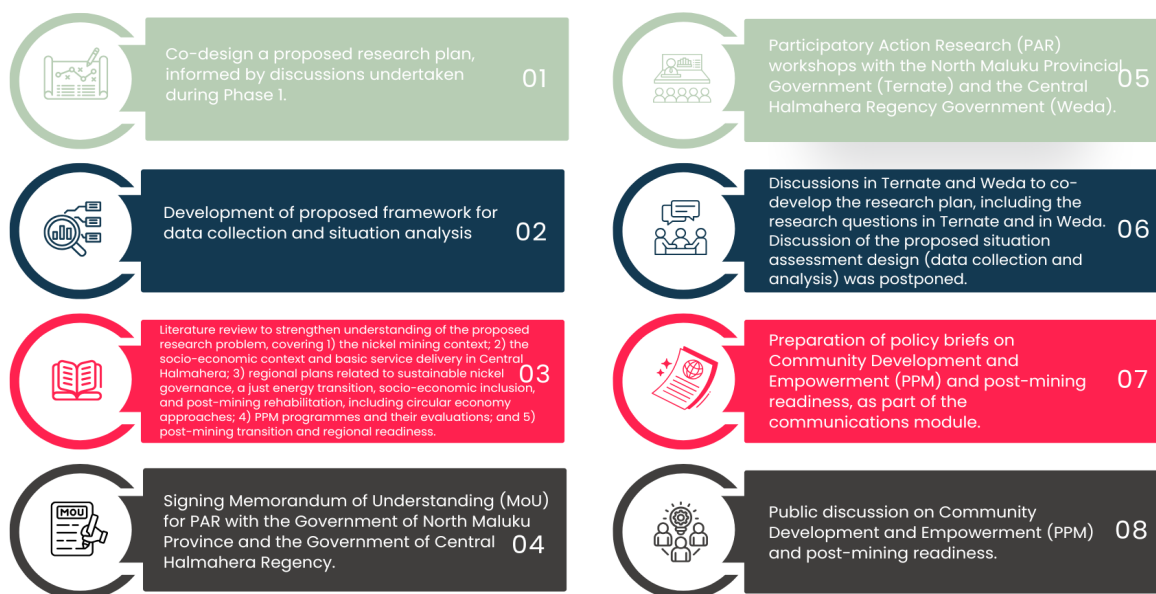
This information did not yet shape policy directions or programme changes, but formed part of an initial picture of existing issues, needs, and challenges at the local level, as well as how these issues were perceived by different actors.



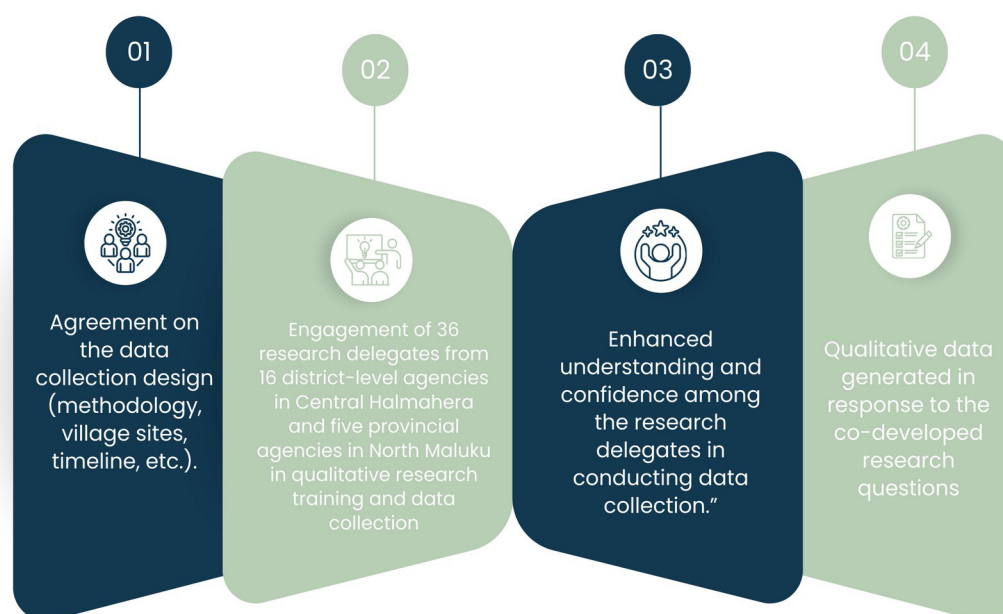
Phase 2: Co-Design Research

Phase 2 involved deepening contextual understanding through a literature review and the development of the research design, as well as initial engagement to build shared understanding, commitment, and trust in the implementation of PAR. The main actors involved in this phase were regional partners and head of regional government agencies (OPD) at both the North Maluku Provincial level and Central Halmahera District level.

Activities



Outputs



Findings

Engagement strategies in the PAR formulation

During the research planning phase, the participatory process was expanded through PAR workshops, follow-up technical discussions, and intensive communication with local government at both provincial and district levels (Heads of Departments and Heads of Divisions). Engagement combined formal approaches—through official workshops, cross-OPD discussions, and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding—with informal approaches through personal communication. This combination was used to accommodate bureaucratic structures, actors' time availability, and the dynamics of local government agendas.

The process of formulating the research plan showed that alignment between the research issues and local government needs occurred gradually. Recognising the limitations of their authority, discussions shifted towards topics considered closer to OPD mandates and interests, such as the Community Development and Empowerment Programme (*Program Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat/PPM*) and post-mining preparedness. In this context, local government did not act merely as a participant in discussions, but also as an actor shaping the issue focus, research scope, and forms of output considered relevant to local planning and policy processes.

Participation dynamics and institutional capacity

Cross-OPD discussions indicated that research issues tended to be addressed through sectoral lenses. The articulation of needs and challenges was largely linked to the respective mandates of each OPD, while cross-sectoral discussions emerged more limitedly and were more prominent in forums involving planning actors. This situation shaped an initial pattern of participation that remained fragmented, although efforts were made to encourage discussion of multidimensional issues. Nevertheless, this fragmentation was partially reduced by shared narratives of experience on Gebe Island and aspirations for improved post-mining preparedness.

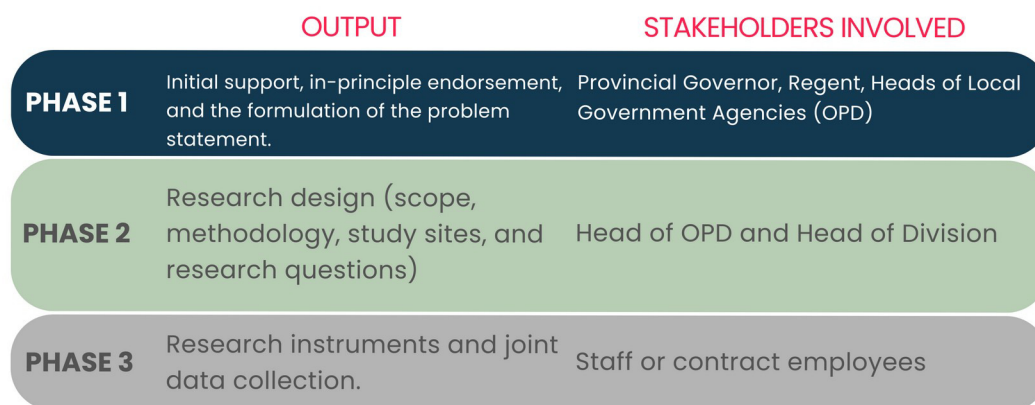
Power relations and ownership of the research process

The formulation of the research plan was also influenced by power relations and differences in hierarchical positions within government structures. The involvement of OPD leadership and senior officials played an important role in opening space for discussion and providing legitimacy to the ongoing process.

This phase also served as preparation for the subsequent data collection phase, during which OPD leaders agreed on the involvement of designated researcher delegates from each OPD. The shift in engagement from leadership levels to implementation levels (staff and contract employees) affected the continuity of information and understanding of the research objectives and approach (see Figure 3). In several cases, this created a gap between problem formulation at the policy level and technical engagement in the subsequent stages of the research.



Figure 3. Levels of engagement



Influence of external contexts on the participatory process

The implementation of the research planning phase took place within the context of local political and bureaucratic dynamics following the inauguration of the Head of the Local Government. Government agendas, staff rotations, and developments in issues at both local and national levels influenced the pace of participation and decision-making. Concerns shaped by past experiences and perceptions of previous research conducted in the region also affected the attitudes of some local government actors. In several early discussions, caution and wariness emerged regarding the direction and implications of the research, particularly when the methodology and focus were perceived as potentially sensitive. In addition, logistical and accessibility factors—including weather conditions, transportation, and infrastructure—also shaped the implementation of activities and the arrangement of meetings during this phase.

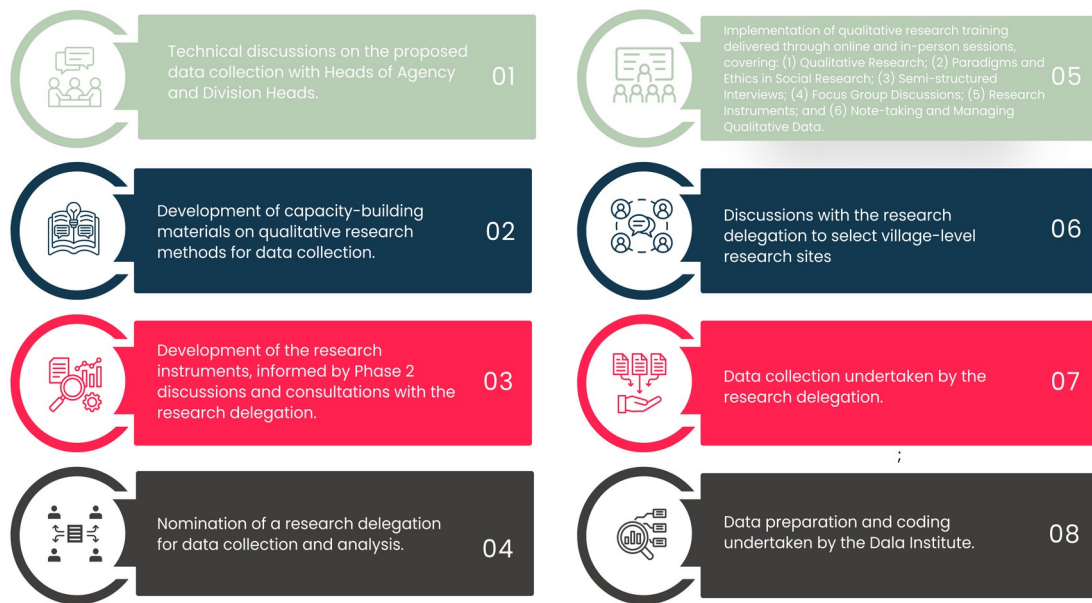
These external contexts formed part of the broader conditions accompanying the participatory process, influencing the continuity of actor engagement and the scope of discussion that could be established during the research planning phase.

Phase 3: Data Collection and Collaborative Analysis

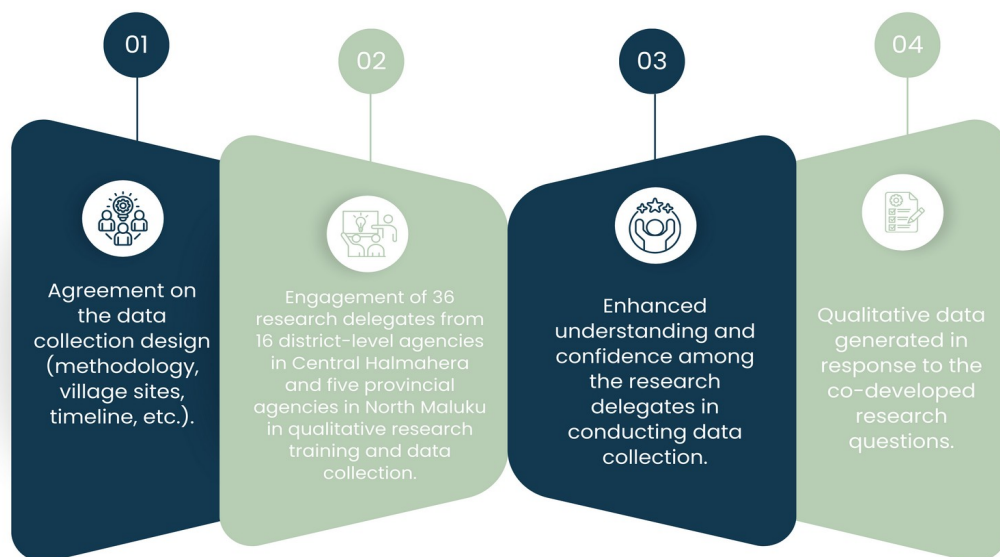
Phase 3 focused on strengthening practical capacity and implementing data collection through a PAR approach. In this phase, the process was directed towards translating the agreed research design into field practice through training, mentoring, and the direct involvement of researcher delegates from local government. The main actors involved in this phase were researcher delegates from regional government agencies at both the North Maluku Provincial level and Central Halmahera District level, with facilitation from regional partners and the Dala Institute research team.



Activities



Outputs



Findings

Sub-phase 3.1. Online Training: Initial readiness, process legitimacy, and the limits of online participation

During the online training sub-phase, the participatory process functioned primarily as an initial mechanism to establish institutional legitimacy and introduce the research objectives and approach to researcher delegates appointed by OPD leadership. Local government engagement at this stage indicated formal recognition of the research agenda; however, the level of substantive participation remained limited. Participant attendance was relatively high, but active interaction, critical discussion, and methodological clarification occurred to a limited extent.

Participation dynamics revealed variations in engagement influenced by hierarchical position, the presence of intrinsic motivation, and access to and ease of participation in virtual spaces (including technology, electricity, and internet access). Participants with intrinsic motivations—such as an interest in learning qualitative approaches, hearing community concerns directly, and gaining exposure to impacts—tended to contribute more actively. Conversely, participants in more junior positions tended to remain passive, particularly when senior officials were present in the same virtual space.

Within the context of power relations and bureaucratic structures, the online training also indicated that participatory research approaches were, for some, still perceived as additional activities beyond core duties. This perception affected time commitment and readiness to engage deeply with the material. Nevertheless, encouragement from leadership influenced participation. These findings suggest that, at the initial stage, participatory processes faced structural challenges in fostering meaningful engagement when online platforms served as the primary channel for learning and coordination.

Sub-phase 3.2. In-person Training: Strengthening Practical Capacity and Internal Participation Dynamics

The in-person training marked an important transition from conceptual introduction to participatory practice. Direct interaction enabled participants to understand PAR methods more concretely, including the roles of facilitator, interviewer, and note-taker. Simulations and group discussions created space for participants to try these roles while revealing variations in individual capacity. While participation during the earlier online training phase faced various constraints, attendance and active interaction during the in-person training were relatively high. Of approximately 40 OPD staff initially delegated, two withdrew during the online phase due to illness and only two requested leave during the in-person training, resulting in 36 participants attending. This level of attendance indicates relatively strong institutional commitment when learning spaces were conducted face to face.

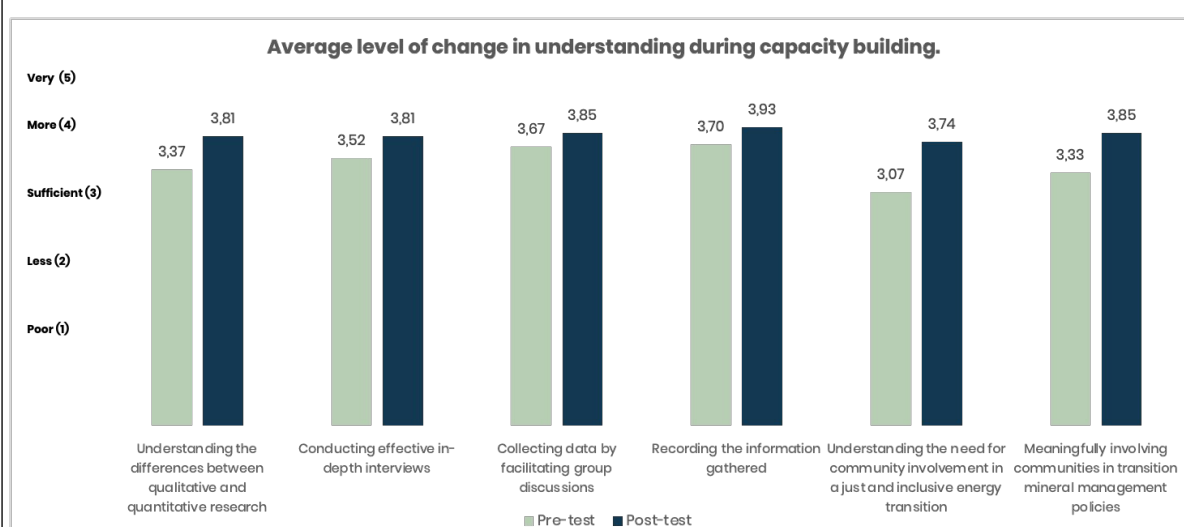
Findings show that participation dynamics during the in-person training were strongly influenced by participants' backgrounds, prior experience with qualitative research, and hierarchical positions. Some participants adapted quickly and began to distinguish between programme clarification and the exploration of community experiences. Others, however, continued to demonstrate rigid approaches, relying heavily on written guidelines and showing limited familiarity with probing or deep listening, which are essential in qualitative research.



Power relations were evident in the allocation of roles during the training. Participants in more senior positions tended to lead simulations, while junior participants more frequently assumed note-taking roles. Efforts were made to rotate roles, but these did not always succeed in balancing contributions. This condition indicates that, although participatory spaces were opened, organisational hierarchies continued to shape participatory practice. Amid structural constraints associated with hierarchical norms, the training methodology—requiring group work, rotating simulations, and collective discussion—gradually encouraged interaction among participants, allowing confidence and openness to begin developing over the course of the sessions.

Overall, the in-person training demonstrated that the participatory process began to build practical capacity and readiness, while simultaneously revealing structural and cultural limitations that may affect the quality of participation during the data collection stage.

Box 1. Changes in Capacity and Perspectives of Researcher Delegates in Qualitative Research



The effects of capacity strengthening were observed by comparing the baseline perceptions of participants' understanding of the training topics with post-training results. Based on this comparison, drawn from a sample of 27 out of a total of 36 participants, there was an increase in confidence levels (perceived understanding) ranging from 0.23 to 0.65 percentage points. The greatest increase was observed in participants' understanding of the need for community involvement in a just and inclusive energy transition.

Several feedbacks drawn from the post-test survey of the capacity-building activities include:

"This was very impactful, because through this activity we gained a better understanding of how to conduct qualitative research."

"There were many things we learned from both the online and offline training, including new materials that we had never encountered before, such as PPM/CSR; cooperative facilitators; active and enjoyable training methods; and a great deal of valuable knowledge gained."



		Following the qualitative research training, how prepared do you feel to undertake future qualitative research?			
Have you previously conducted qualitative research?	N	Not yet ready, but willing to support during the activities.	Not fully prepared, and would need hands-on field practice while observing.	Fairly prepared to conduct the research, but still need guidance	Fully prepared to undertake the research tasks.
Yes, I have, and I am still familiar with the process."	2	0	0	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Unsure (cannot recall / have done so before, but it was a long time ago)	5	0	0	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
No, I have never conducted qualitative research before.	20	0	2 (10%)	9 (45%)	9 (45%)

Beyond the increase in perceived understanding of the training topics, participants' readiness to carry out research practice was closely related to their prior experience with qualitative research. As shown in the table above, all participants who had been exposed to qualitative research (those who had previous experience or were uncertain but had some exposure) stated that they were ready to proceed, although most indicated that they would require guidance. Among participants who had never conducted qualitative research, the training encouraged readiness in the majority (90%), with two participants (10%) indicating that they felt less prepared.

Overall, it can be observed that the majority of participants (20 out of 27 in the sample) had never conducted qualitative research at all, which presents both a challenge and an important consideration for the implementation of this research process.

Sub-phase 3.3. Community Data Collection: Field testing of the participatory process and its relevance to local needs

The community data collection stage became the primary arena for testing how participatory processes operate in real-world contexts. Focus group discussions and interviews enabled community members to share first-hand experiences related to the impacts of mining, basic services, land conflicts, and economic dependence. Certain issues—particularly land, access to clean water, and unequal distribution of assistance—emerged as strong and emotionally charged discussion triggers, especially among women and vulnerable groups.

However, the findings indicate that community participation dynamics were strongly influenced by local power relations. The presence of village officials, customary leaders, or specific gatekeepers limited the breadth of community expression. Fear of speaking openly, domination by particular individuals, and tendencies towards self-censorship emerged repeatedly, especially when discussions touched on sensitive issues or involved the responsibilities of village governments and companies.

Participation dynamics were also evident within the interlocutor teams. Differences in capacity, experience, and hierarchical position influenced how interviews and FGDs were facilitated. In some groups, interlocutors continued to focus on clarifying or explaining programmes, while in others there was a noticeable shift towards more consistent listening and probing practices. Over time, some interlocutors demonstrated improved ability to position themselves as facilitators rather than as representatives of institutions.

From a power relations perspective, community members often positioned interlocutors as extensions of government or decision-makers, despite their role having been explained as



researchers. This perception shaped how information was conveyed and reinforced caution in speaking. In this context, the participatory process operated within existing power relations and was not fully neutral.

Data collection also revealed that several policy issues previously assumed by government to be well understood had different experiential dimensions at the community level. Concerns about the post-mining phase began to be articulated when community members were invited to reflect on the sustainability of their livelihoods. This indicates that the participatory process opened space for the articulation of needs that had not previously been fully present within policy discourse.

Box 2. Learning Surprises Experienced by Researcher Delegates

Community-level data collection generated a number of unexpected findings for the researcher delegates directly involved. Hearing and witnessing community conditions first-hand challenged initial assumptions previously formed through administrative data and policy discussions. Several delegates expressed surprise at the gap between regional economic growth and the condition of basic services in mining-adjacent villages. One delegate reflected that *“communities purchase up to 21 gallons of bottled water every two weeks for cooking and drinking, even though this region is known for its high economic growth.”* This finding shifted earlier understandings that community challenges were primarily related to attitudes or behaviour, towards recognition of structural limitations in basic service provision.

Learning surprises also emerged when delegates realised that community concerns about the post-mining phase were not due to apathy, but rather to limited information and a lack of dialogue. One interlocutor noted that *“the government had assumed that communities were not concerned about post-mining issues, but after listening directly, it became clear that people’s confusion stemmed from never having been engaged in discussion or given a clear picture.”* In several discussions, questions about the post-mining phase prompted deep reflection, particularly among mine workers, traders, and homemakers who had never previously imagined that mining activities might one day cease.

In addition, direct field engagement led researcher delegates to recognise that unequal access to assistance and information—especially between groups with closer ties to village authorities and local government staff—constituted a central issue undermining public trust. One delegate stated that *“in the office we were aware that assistance was often unevenly distributed, but in the field it became clear that this was not an isolated case, but a pattern that fuels jealousy and fear among community members about speaking up.”* These findings demonstrate that the participatory process not only generated substantive data, but also prompted shifts in how officials understood the root causes of problems and the relevance of policies that had previously been considered adequate.



Reflection and Learning Across Phase

4.1 Fundamental Challenges and Opportunities in the Participatory Process

The participatory process across the first three phases of this research demonstrates that participation does not emerge automatically when spaces are opened, but is instead a social and political process shaped by context, power relations, and levels of trust among actors. The main challenge in fostering meaningful participation lies not solely in technical capacity or the research methods used, but in the fact that the process operates within established bureaucratic and governance structures, with their accompanying hierarchies, norms, and interests. These challenges are particularly pronounced in mining regions, where multiple interests influence both the available space for participation and the everyday lives of communities.

One fundamental challenge is the initial assumption that actor involvement in forums or training activities already constitutes substantive participation. The findings show that formal attendance—especially in online spaces—does not necessarily translate into reflective engagement, critical discussion, or a sense of ownership over the process. **The medium and mode of engagement play a decisive role in shaping the quality of participation.** Online training and discussions are important as initial mechanisms for building institutional legitimacy and communicating the research framework, but they are relatively limited in creating equal and safe interaction for participants in more junior positions.

By contrast, face-to-face meetings and direct field engagement open up opportunities for more fluid participation. Informal interactions, simulations, and shared experiences enable participants to begin building trust, reducing hierarchical distance, and expressing confusion or personal reflection more openly. In this context, an important reflection emerged: **building “chemistry” among participants requires time, intensity of interaction, and repeated spaces for engagement.** Processes of getting to know one another, joking, and working together form an initial foundation for more substantive cross-sectoral collaboration.

“Personally, I was very pleased. The facilitators were friendly and the methodology was very sound, and the training materials were easy to understand. It just requires some adjustment of the interview narratives to suit the local language of the research area. In my view, the overall sequence of activities was quite extensive and time-consuming, from Zoom sessions to face-to-face meetings, but overall I feel it was good. Thank you.”

(Reflection from a male interlocutor during the in-person training)

“This was also a new experience for us, and it enabled us to ask questions and better understand what communities are concerned about.”

(Reflection from a male interlocutor after the in-person training and field research)

Within hierarchical bureaucratic structures, participatory processes are also strongly influenced by support and signals from local leaders or immediate superiors. The findings



indicate that, even where informal communication has been established, active engagement by regional government agencies (OPD) often remains dependent on direction, legitimacy, or encouragement from leadership. At several points when responses slowed or participation appeared minimal, explicit support from local leaders proved effective in reactivating engagement. This underscores that, within local bureaucratic contexts, **political and administrative legitimacy is not merely supportive, but a critical prerequisite** for the continuity of participatory processes.

Amid these structural challenges, the process also revealed important opportunities that enabled participation to grow, particularly through the role of regional partners. The involvement of eLSiL Kie Raha as a regional partner—with field experience, an understanding of the local socio-political context, and strong networks at the regional level—proved to be a key factor in opening participatory space from the outset. Pre-existing trust between the regional partner and local government, civil society organisations, and local communities meant that the engagement process did not begin from the position of entirely new “outsiders”.

Without the presence of a regional partner trusted by local actors, the participatory process would likely have faced resistance, suspicion, or mere administrative compliance without meaningful engagement. In this context, **trust is not an instant outcome of the research process, but also a prerequisite that enables participatory processes to take place.**

Beyond actors themselves, **local language, dialect, and behavioural norms** also emerged as important factors shaping the quality of engagement. Interlocutors who were able to use local languages, understand social customs, or adapt their communication styles were more readily accepted by both communities and village authorities. These adjustments helped reduce institutional distance and opened space for more honest dialogue, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as mining impacts, land conflicts, or uneven distribution of assistance.

“Because we spoke in the local language, they understood what was being asked.”
(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

“When speaking in the local language and dialect, it makes a difference to both the level of closeness and the quality of responses from informants. Using the local language makes it easier to joke within the local context. Usually, once joking begins, it helps to de-escalate tensions that arise during interviews.”
(Reflection from a male researcher at Dala Institute during data collection in Cluster 2)

In communication with local government, the use of contextual language and approaches also influenced responsiveness and openness. Formal bureaucratic channels, such as official correspondence, remained necessary, but often needed to be complemented by informal and relational communication to sustain participation, including communication via WhatsApp. This illustrates that participation within local bureaucratic contexts is not only procedural in nature, but also highly relational.

Another opportunity that emerged in the participatory process concerned how complex issues—such as the energy transition and mineral governance—were introduced and



framed. The findings indicate that **normative narratives around the energy transition tended to be difficult for local actors to grasp and were perceived as lacking urgency**, particularly because these issues were often seen as lying outside the direct authority of local government. By contrast, the use of empirical evidence and concrete experiences proved more effective in building a shared sense of urgency and engagement.

Narratives grounded in externality costs, economic slowdown, and post-mining risks were more tangible because they drew on realities that had already been, or were currently being, experienced. In the context of North Maluku, collective experiences such as the case of Gebe Island became shared reference points that helped actors better understand long-term risks and the relevance of these issues.

“Post-mining narratives resonate more when framed through examples of families and future generations. No company lasts forever.”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 2)

This process demonstrates that experiential learning is more effective than purely conceptual discussion in building shared understanding. When government actors and interlocutors were directly involved in field activities, listened to community stories, and witnessed socio-economic conditions first-hand, issues that had previously seemed abstract began to be understood as real problems requiring attention.

Accordingly, the reflections in this subsection indicate that participatory processes face genuine structural challenges—ranging from bureaucratic hierarchies and the limitations of online platforms to the complexity of cross-jurisdictional issues. At the same time, however, there are important opportunities that can be leveraged, particularly through the presence of trusted regional partners, the use of local language and approaches, and issue framing grounded in lived experience and empirical evidence. These opportunities enable participation to move beyond formal compliance towards more meaningful engagement.

4.2 Participation and Government Willingness: Between Initial Engagement, Emerging Awareness, and the Limits of Process Ownership

Reflections across the first three phases indicate that the participatory process succeeded in eliciting local government engagement in various forms, albeit with differing levels of willingness and ownership. Government participation was not homogeneous, but shaped by hierarchical position, institutional roles, and direct experience in the research process. Phases 1 and 2 primarily involved senior officials—such as the Regent, Heads of Departments, and Heads of Divisions—in shaping issues and overall direction, while Phase 3 was largely carried out by technical staff from regional government agencies (OPD) acting as researcher delegates. These differences produced dynamics of willingness that were not always linear between early engagement and readiness to respond to findings, and were closely tied to power relations within hierarchical government structures.

Government willingness to engage appeared relatively strong in the early stages, particularly in the form of formal attendance, support for activity implementation, and the appointment of delegates. However, the findings also reveal a **missing link between phases** (notably Phases 2 and 3). Strategic discussions at leadership level focused largely



on the what—priority issues, planning documents, and overarching frameworks—while technical staff in the field were confronted with the why and how without having been fully involved in the earlier stages. This situation limited delegates’ sense of ownership over the overall process and affected their capacity to explore issues deeply and apply probing techniques during fieldwork.

Differences in hierarchical position also shaped how participation was experienced. In data collection discussions where all participants were researcher delegates, technical staff displayed high levels of enthusiasm and curiosity, whereas the presence of more senior staff tended to steer interactions towards greater formality and caution. This was reflected in training and discussion dynamics, where some participants felt more confident to speak and reflect when spaces were perceived as hierarchically safe.

Nevertheless, the participatory process began to generate **positive indications of shifts in perspective among interlocutors**. OPD delegates who were directly involved in data collection experienced first-hand the process of listening to and interacting with communities within a qualitative research context. This experience triggered greater awareness of the gaps between programme design and on-the-ground realities. Several interlocutors began to question programmatic assumptions that had previously been considered sufficient to address community needs.

“I had never gone directly into communities to ask questions before. It turns out to be enjoyable to meet and interact with people. Sometimes we wonder why communities think the way they do, and it turns out it’s because of a lack of socialisation, so we need to be more open.”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 2)

“I was also surprised that when we went to Lukolamu Village, they had not yet received MSME assistance—perhaps because the requirements were not complete. This is a lesson for departmental representatives so that we can adjust our strategies in the future.”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

This emerging awareness was not always easy to translate into practice. The impulse to explain or justify programmes continued to surface, particularly when interlocutors brought their institutional identities into interactions with communities. Power relations between OPD and communities continued to shape field dynamics, creating tension between the role of researcher and that of government representative. Over time, however, some interlocutors demonstrated **shifts in attitude**—from explaining to listening, from directing to exploring.

This suggests that the capacity for active listening develops through **repeated practice and direct mentoring**, rather than solely through short training sessions or written guidelines. Post-interview and post-FGD reflection spaces became important in helping interlocutors recognise their own interaction patterns—when they drew conclusions too quickly, when they failed to allow moments of silence, and when their institutional positions remained overly dominant.

Box 3. Active Listening as a Key Competency in Participatory Action Research



Experiences from the data collection phase indicate that active listening is a key competency that has not yet been fully integrated into the initial training. This competency emerged as a fundamental challenge affecting both data quality and the participatory process in the field.

Listening as a Researcher vs. Explaining as an Official

In qualitative research, active listening refers to the ability to listen deeply with the aim of understanding informants' experiences and perspectives, rather than evaluating, correcting, or providing solutions. This differs from common communication patterns in bureaucratic settings, where officials are accustomed to explaining policies, clarifying programmes, or giving instructions. In the context of PAR, the shift from "explaining" to "listening" is not merely a change in interview technique, but a transformation of role and mindset—from institutional representative to facilitator who creates a safe space for communities to share their stories. This challenge becomes more complex within hierarchical bureaucratic structures, where institutional habits and power relations shape how interlocutors interact with communities.

Patterns Identified in The Field

Field findings reveal several patterns that reflect limitations in active listening:

- **Intervening and directing discussions:**
Some interlocutors tended to intervene when informants provided responses perceived as not meeting expectations. One researcher noted that an interlocutor was "impatient in listening and occasionally intervened or directed the discussion (not neutral). Emotions were also evident when respondents were passive." In another case, when an FGD facilitator was dissatisfied with participants' responses, "he summarised the content himself, resulting in the session ending in less than 10 minutes, with participants not speaking one by one."
- **Providing explanations or programme justifications:**
The tendency to explain programmes emerged repeatedly, particularly when communities raised complaints. One interlocutor in Cluster 1 was noted as having "rather rigid language and providing many additional comments related to the questions," while another "had not yet mastered FGD techniques, where the aim is to listen to participants' views, not to provide socialisation or education."
- **Drawing conclusions too quickly and limited probing:**
In several interviews, interlocutors did not allow sufficient space for informants to develop their responses or reflect on their experiences. "Although generally very good, at certain moments [the interlocutor] as facilitator did not provide enough time for other participants to respond."
- **Emotional tension carried into interactions:**
Some interlocutors experienced difficulty managing emotions, particularly on the first day. "On the first day of the interview process, [the interlocutor] was overly tense, and this emotional tension was carried into interactions with the community." Such tension affected informant comfort and the quality of interaction.

These patterns indicate that role transformation requires not only technical understanding, but also psychological readiness to let go of institutional identities and to open oneself to experiences that may be uncomfortable or challenge prior assumptions.

Lessons for Future Training

These experiences underscore the need for **explicit training on active listening** as a foundational methodological element, rather than assuming that participants already possess this skill. Such training should address both technical dimensions (probing techniques, paraphrasing, managing silence) and relational dimensions (awareness of power positions, empathy without excessive sympathy, and the ability to suspend judgement).

Furthermore, **deeper interventions are needed to address psychological and mindset-related aspects**, including approaches such as **Theory U**, which emphasises the process of "presencing"—the ability to be fully present, to let go of old assumptions and patterns (*letting go*), and to open oneself to new possibilities (*letting come*). This approach is particularly relevant because the core challenge faced by interlocutors lies not in a lack of knowledge about how to ask questions, but in difficulty letting go of their identities as officials and opening



space for voices that may differ from, or even contradict, institutional narratives.

Going forward, training should be designed to include the following elements:

- **Dedicated sessions on active listening**, covering definitions, principles, and its distinction from bureaucratic communication patterns, accompanied by exercises in listening without verbal response.
- **Intensive simulations** with immediate feedback on interaction patterns, including moments when interlocutors draw conclusions too quickly or introduce institutional agendas.
- **Self-reflection and positionality exercises** to help interlocutors recognise how their identities and institutional roles influence how they listen and respond.
- **Emotional regulation sessions**, particularly when listening to criticism of government programmes or engaging with informants who are reluctant to speak.
- **More intensive field mentoring**, especially during the early stages of data collection, to provide real-time feedback and reinforce listening practices.
- **Emphasis on the values of “not knowing” and “curiosity”**, encouraging interlocutors to approach communities with a learning mindset rather than assuming prior understanding.

Active listening is not a skill that can be mastered through a single short training session; it is a competency that develops through repeated practice, critical reflection, and a willingness to let go of institutional habits. This learning forms a crucial foundation for strengthening the quality of participation and the relevance of data in subsequent phases of the research.

The participatory process also opened **space for critical learning regarding programmes and approaches** that have long been implemented by local government, as illustrated in Figure 4. Direct involvement in data collection and interaction with communities revealed gaps between policy assumptions and the realities of implementation on the ground. Several researcher delegates came to realise that issues previously understood as technical and sector-specific in nature in fact have intertwined social, health, economic, and governance dimensions.

Figure 4. Learning Surprises Articulated by Researcher Delegates



Field experience revealed that routine or procedure-based interventions—such as agricultural assistance, environmental management, housing, and basic services—do not always align with the actual needs of communities and may even be ineffective due to mis-targeting. In several cases, the core issue was not the absence of programmes, but rather limitations in **management capacity, understanding of local context, and the suitability of intervention types to the problems faced by communities**. This learning prompted



cross-sectoral reflection that fragmented, assumption-driven development approaches require reconsideration, and reinforced the importance of listening to and understanding community experiences as a foundation for designing interventions that are more relevant, adaptive, and equitable.

"There were many new things that we heard, because at the department we usually go to the field to deal with waste issues. It turns out that there are many problems on the ground related to land and village boundaries."

(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

"Today we obtained new information related to health, particularly HIV/AIDS. We visited the health centre earlier, and one of the impacts of mining here is an increase in HIV/AIDS cases."

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

"I was shocked by the roofing sheets on houses and boarding houses. Usually they last up to ten years, but here after two years they are already leaking—this is a serious issue."

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

"It turns out there is a need to strengthen budget management capacity at the village government level."

(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 2)

"What is needed is growth-stimulating fertiliser, but what is being provided is fertiliser for soil enrichment. There is no productivity—this is more consumptive."

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 3)

In this context, government willingness to respond to community needs and voices appears to be a **gradual process**. The participatory process in the early phases was more effective in **shifting how government actors understood problems, building a shared language, and fostering sensitivity to community experiences** than in directly driving changes in policy or practice. This is consistent with the position of the research at an early stage, where findings are emerging in nature and function primarily as a foundation for adaptive learning.

"During data collection through interviews and FGDs, there was a sense of enthusiasm, concern, empathy, and sadness when witnessing the conditions experienced by communities in mining-affected areas, particularly Lelilef Waibulan, Lelilef Sawai, and Lukolamo. What they conveyed in both interviews and discussions reflected genuine hopes directed towards the Local Government to take action or address issues such as scattered waste, water quality, and flood mitigation—whether through programmes or local government policies—to resolve problems that have long been experienced."



(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

"It turns out that well-being is not always measured by money. There is a longing for peace of mind and body."

(Reflection from a female interlocutor during data collection in Cluster 3)

These reflections indicate that participation does not automatically result in commitments to policy change, but it does open space for shifts in perspectives and knowledge relations within government institutions. **Changes at the level of understanding, empathy, and problem articulation** represent significant early achievements and are also prerequisites for the possibility of more relevant policy responses in subsequent phases.

4.3 Relevance to Communities' Real Needs: From Policy Assumptions to Lived Experience

The participatory process during the data collection phase demonstrates that the **relevance of policies** to community needs cannot be assumed solely from the existence of programmes or the achievement of indicators. Relevance is instead tested when the lived experiences of communities—often not formally documented—are brought into spaces of government reflection. In this context, PAR functions as a mechanism to bridge the gap between macro-level, data-driven planning logics and the micro-level realities experienced by communities in mining-affected areas.

"My first experience of going directly into the field really made me understand community conditions. This is a major lesson."

(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 3)

"...the lack of information from village government to communities."

(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 2)

One of the most salient findings is the existence of an **articulation gap between programme design and community experience**. Many interlocutors came to realise that issues considered "already addressed" at the policy level were still experienced by communities as fundamental problems. Assistance and basic services—particularly access to clean water, housing, health services, and economic support—repeatedly emerged as examples of policies that exist administratively but have not been felt substantively, equitably, or accurately targeted. This experience challenges the assumption that the core problem lies in the absence of programmes, and instead shifts attention towards the quality of implementation, data accuracy, and follow-up at the ground level.

"Regarding waste management, earlier I discussed this with the treasurer, and they said there was no assistance from the government for waste trucks and that the trucks were withdrawn by the local government. I found that surprising—why were they withdrawn by the government?"

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

"The issue of water storage facilities provided by the government, which were supposed to be returned to the water catchment area—why has this not been



realised yet? The promise was for December, but until now nothing has happened. The storage facility already exists. I was shocked to hear this—why is the facility there but not yet operational?”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

Through listening directly to community stories, interlocutors also obtained substantial new information that had previously fallen outside the scope of their respective OPDs. Health impacts such as skin diseases caused by contaminated water, increased risks of HIV/AIDS, and damage to houses and facilities due to mining dust expanded understanding that mining impacts are cross-sectoral and interconnected. These findings prompted **recognition that fragmented, sector-based approaches are inadequate for responding to the complexity of issues in mining regions**, and that policy relevance depends on the government’s ability to integrate these issues across sectors.

“Issues like HIV/AIDS cannot be addressed by a single department. They require cross-sectoral collaboration.”

(Reflection from a female researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 3)

Field experience also revealed dimensions of **procedural justice** that had previously received limited attention in policy discourse. Many community members were unaware of the sources of assistance, distribution mechanisms, or the role of companies in CSR and PPM programmes. Information opacity, biased data collection processes, and perceptions that assistance reached only “insiders” generated feelings of injustice and suspicion. For interlocutors, these findings clarified that the core challenge lies not only in budget size, but in transparency, communication, and participatory mechanisms that enable communities to understand and fairly access their rights.

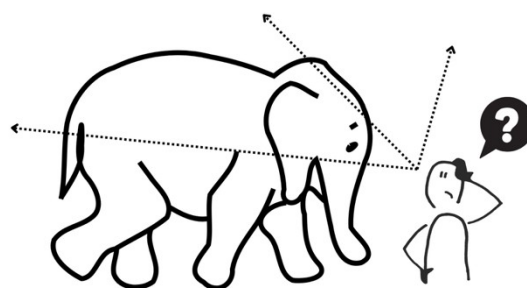
Box 4. The Elephant in the Room: Information Transparency

Based on field data collection experiences, the participatory process faced a fundamental challenge in the form of fear and hesitation among community members to speak openly. In several focused discussions and interviews, community members showed reluctance to engage actively, limited focus during discussions, or offered only normative responses. This situation is reflected in field notes indicating that “*participants appeared to follow directions from more dominant individuals*”, while others were described as “*indifferent, some preoccupied with their phones, others attending to children, and not giving full attention*”. In other contexts, interlocutors noted that “*when someone began to open up and was invited into discussion, ideas and suggestions flowed, but at the outset many were closed and suspicious*”.

Although these findings cannot yet be generalised, field processes indicate the presence of **participation fatigue**, particularly in areas that have long been sites of various programmes and research activities. This fatigue appears to stem not merely from a lack of capacity or interest, but from repeated social experiences in which previous engagement was not followed by tangible change or clear feedback. One informant noted that “*people no longer want to be invited to meetings, even when offered sitting allowances, because they are disappointed that their inputs are never realised by government and companies*”, while another bluntly stated that such discussions are “*pointless, because the impacts of mining have been discussed many times but there are no solutions*”. These attitudes reflect an accumulation of disappointment that fosters caution, apathy, and emotional distance from participatory processes.



Beyond participation fatigue, another deeper-rooted challenge is the **lack of information transparency**, particularly in relation to assistance, village programmes, and the roles of government and corporate actors. Interlocutors noted that “they are aware that the village government is not transparent with the community”, and that village officials interviewed in the morning “were not open during the afternoon FGD forum”. Fear was also evident among aid recipients, who were reluctant to acknowledge having received support due to concerns about triggering social jealousy. In this context, the identification of aid beneficiaries was perceived as unfair and marked by preferential treatment, placing both recipients and non-recipients in similarly unsafe positions when speaking out. Several responses reflected heightened anxiety and excessive caution, particularly because “assistance has not been evenly distributed” and because of concerns about straining social relations at the village level.



These experiences indicate that information opacity functions as an “**elephant in the room**” within participatory processes—present, substantial, and shaping the quality of participation, yet rarely discussed explicitly.

In addition, the participatory process also brought about **shifts in how interlocutors understood the meaning of welfare and development**. Many reflections indicated that increased income resulting from mining does not necessarily correspond with improvements in quality of life. Community members expressed concerns about pollution, limited living space, declining quality of social relations, and the loss of a sense of safety and tranquillity. These experiences broadened interlocutors’ understanding that development cannot be reduced to economic growth alone, but must also consider social, health, and long-term sustainability dimensions.

“In a province said to be the richest and happiest, it turns out that community conditions are like this.”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 1)

Post-mining issues provide an important example of how policy relevance began to be tested through the participatory process. Many community members—including mine workers—acknowledged that they had never previously thought about the future after mining operations cease. When this question was raised during interviews and FGDs, it generated both confusion and new awareness of the high level of economic dependence on mining. For interlocutors, this moment reinforced the understanding that the absence of post-mining issues from public discourse was not due to community apathy, but rather to limited information and a lack of spaces for dialogue.

“Questions about the post-mining phase made community members stop and reflect. They only then realised how dependent their lives are on mining.”

(Reflection from a Dala Institute researcher during data collection in Cluster 3)

“I was interested in the way the FGD was facilitated because it encouraged participants to discuss and allowed more ideas to emerge. Indirectly, participants who initially knew little about mining impacts also came to understand more through conversations with others.”

(Reflection from a male researcher delegate during data collection in Cluster 2)



Overall, the reflections in this subsection indicate that policy relevance does not arise automatically through participation, but develops gradually as community experiences begin to shape how government actors understand problems. At this stage, PAR has not yet produced concrete policy changes, but it has opened an important space for **reframing issues**—from technical and sectoral concerns towards more contextual, cross-sectoral understandings rooted in the lived experiences of communities. Policy relevance, therefore, emerges not as an immediate outcome, but as a process that is being built through practices of listening, reflection, and collective learning.

4.4 Methodological Learning from PAR: Between Research Quality, Participation Quality, and Bureaucratic Realities

The implementation of Participatory Action Research (PAR) during the first three phases of this project generated important methodological learning, particularly regarding the tension between efforts to build participatory capacity and the demands of qualitative research quality. The process demonstrates that PAR is not merely a technical approach, but a social practice operating within bureaucratic structures, power relations, and very real constraints of time and resources.

One key lesson concerns the **trade-off** between participation quality and data quality consistency in the early stages. Involving OPD staff as researcher delegates created meaningful learning opportunities—especially through direct experience of listening to communities—but also resulted in significant variation in capacities for conducting interviews, facilitating FGDs, note-taking, and qualitative probing. Differences in educational backgrounds, research experience, reflective comfort, and adaptation to methods and technologies affected the depth and consistency of the data generated.

This learning underscores that, within local bureaucratic contexts, the role of OPD delegates is more realistically understood as **co-learners and interlocutors, rather than as fully-fledged researchers** with uniform methodological control. Efforts to maintain research quality were pursued through phased training, simulations, field mentoring, and subsequent coding and analysis processes undertaken by the research team. As such, data quality did not depend solely on individual field performance, but on a collective design that combined participatory learning with quality control mechanisms.

Training experiences also demonstrated that the **learning medium plays a critical role in the effectiveness of PAR**. Online training served an important function as an initial mechanism for building process legitimacy and conveying the conceptual framework of the research, but was limited in fostering practical understanding and role transformation. By contrast, face-to-face training proved more effective in building trust, clarifying the roles of facilitators and interviewers, and encouraging collective reflection through simulations and direct discussion. In-person interaction enabled participants to recognise the distinction between programme clarification and the exploration of community experiences—a key shift in participatory qualitative research.

The implementation of PAR also revealed that, for many OPD staff, involvement in research was perceived as an **add-on beyond their primary duties**. This perception affected time commitment and readiness to engage deeply in the process, particularly when activities coincided with departmental agendas and administrative demands. However, field



experience showed that when delegates began to experience direct benefits—both in understanding community conditions and in reflecting on their own work practices—intrinsic motivation could grow and encourage more meaningful engagement.

Another methodological lesson relates to ethics and the **dual roles of interlocutors**. In several situations, OPD delegates continued to carry institutional habits into the interview process, such as tendencies to explain programmes, clarify policies, or insert monitoring agendas. These practices risked constraining the space for community members to freely express their experiences and created role confusion. This condition underscores the importance of repeated emphasis on research ethics, informed consent, and clarity of the interlocutor's position as a listener to community experiences rather than as an institutional representative.

The process also demonstrates that **building participatory capacity requires a longer timeframe** than that envisaged in typical project cycles. The shift in role from “programme implementer” to “dialogue facilitator” does not occur instantaneously, but through repeated practice, reflection, and feedback. In this context, the success of PAR is not measured by the perfection of methodological implementation, but by the process's ability to open learning spaces, recognise limitations, and adapt approaches responsively.

In addition, **technical aspects** that may appear simple—such as the completeness of field notes, easily understandable training materials, and concise practical guidelines—proved to be highly decisive for the success of the process. When materials were overly conceptual or dense, participants tended to revert to procedural work patterns. By contrast, contextual and applied materials helped strengthen interlocutors' confidence in carrying out their roles in the field.

Overall, the methodological learning from the early-phase implementation of PAR affirms that participatory approaches are not a shortcut to producing rapid data or immediate policy change. PAR operates most effectively as a **gradual process** that combines learning, mentoring, and contextual adaptation. Honesty about limitations—both methodological and institutional—becomes a crucial foundation for maintaining process integrity and strengthening the contribution of PAR in subsequent phases.



Implications Going Forward

Reflections on the first three phases indicate that the primary contribution of the participatory process at this stage lies not in immediately visible policy change, but in shifts in how problems are understood, the language used to discuss them, and the actors who have begun to connect within a shared learning space. Accordingly, future implications should be framed realistically as efforts to **consolidate foundations**, rather than to accelerate outcomes that are not yet institutionally ready.

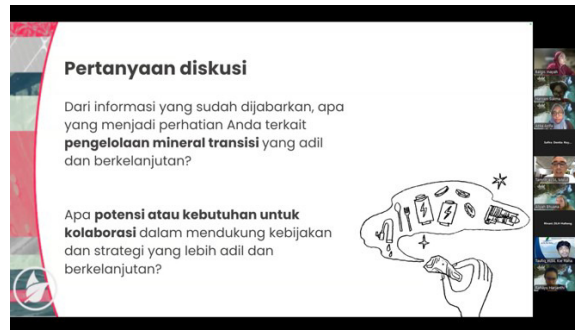
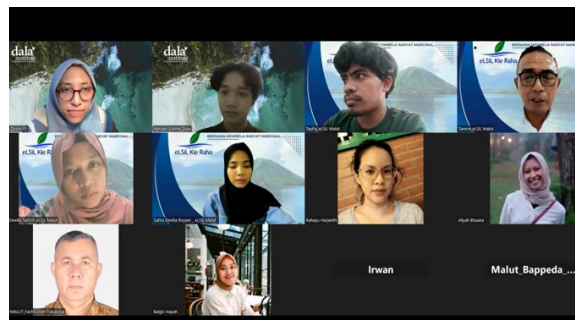
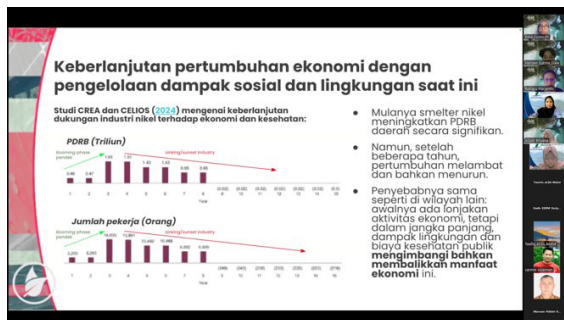
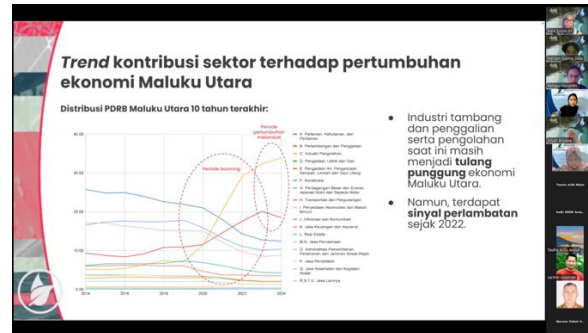
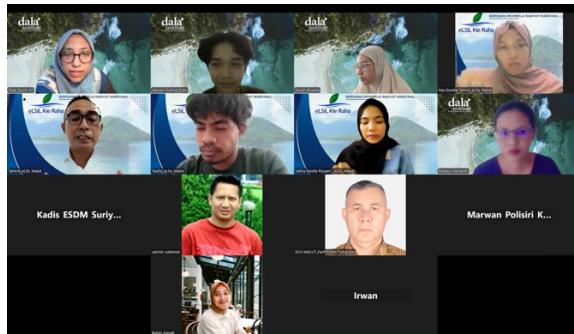
1. **First**, future engagement strategies need to be deliberately designed **across levels of hierarchy**, not only across sectors. The findings reveal a missing link between issue formulation at leadership level and implementation at staff level. Without more systematic bridging mechanisms, staff will continue to face *why* and *how* questions without full ownership of the policy direction discussed at earlier stages. The practical implication is the need for engagement formats that enable repeated interaction between leaders and staff—even in limited forms—to maintain continuity of understanding and expectations.
2. **Second**, future participatory processes need to strategically **combine online and offline modalities**, with clear awareness that each serves different functions. Online engagement is effective for initial legitimacy, coordination, and communicating overarching frameworks, but insufficient for building trust, critical reflection, or shifts in perspective. Conversely, face-to-face meetings and field engagement are more effective for experiential learning, but require greater resources. The implication is not to choose one over the other, but to assign clear and complementary functions to each modality.
3. **Third**, the findings point to the need for **safe and sustained spaces** through which community voices can enter policy discourse, rather than being treated as one-off inputs. The PAR process enabled the articulation of issues that had previously gone unheard—not because they did not exist, but because they lacked safe and trusted channels. Going forward, the implication is not simply to create more forums, but to ensure that participatory mechanisms do not reinforce existing power imbalances, nor burden communities with expectations of instant solutions beyond their control.
4. **Fourth**, expectations regarding policy change need to remain **proportional to the phase and context**. The findings show that the most tangible impacts of the process thus far lie at the level of understanding, policy language, and cross-sectoral awareness—rather than short-term shifts in budgets or regulations. Strategically, this implies positioning subsequent phases as spaces for consolidating evidence, deepening priority issues, and strengthening the capacities of key actors, rather than pushing prematurely for policy outcomes.

Finally, this process affirms that PAR in the context of resource and energy governance is not a rapid intervention, but a **process investment**. Its success depends on the ability to sustain trust, read political momentum, and adapt participatory design to dynamic bureaucratic and social realities. The implication going forward is not to move faster, but to ensure that subsequent steps remain grounded in the learning already generated, with clear direction and realistic expectations.



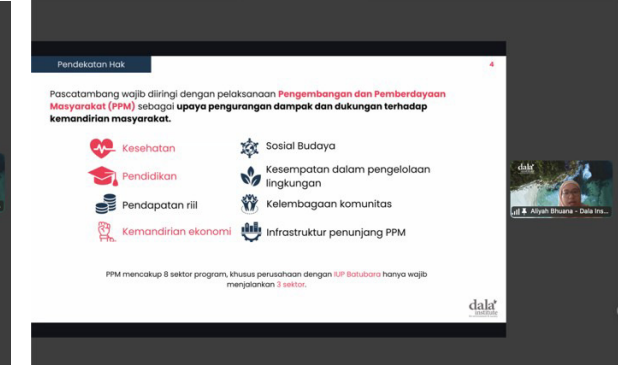
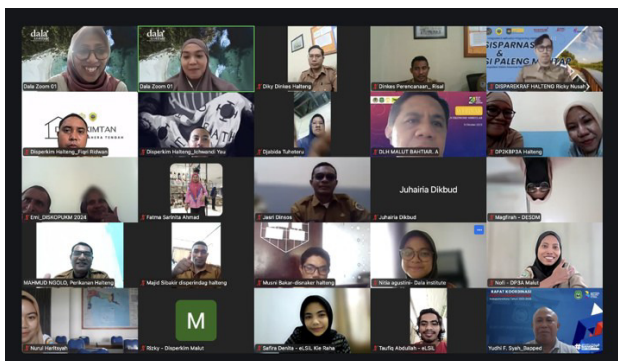
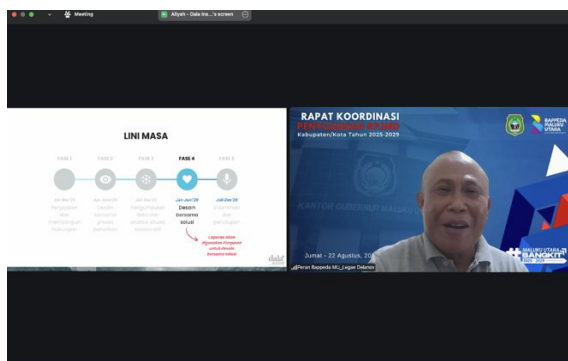
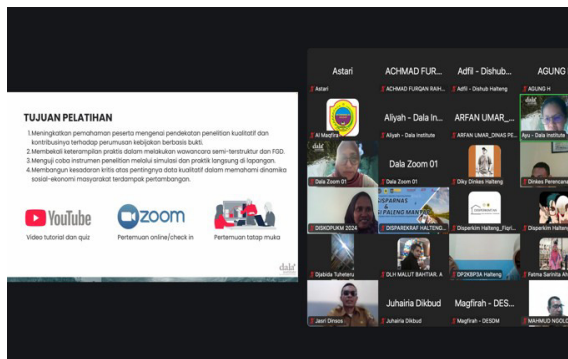
Documentation

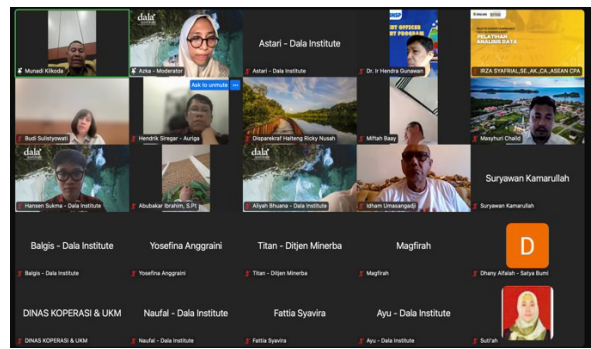
Phase 1: Scoping and Relationship Building



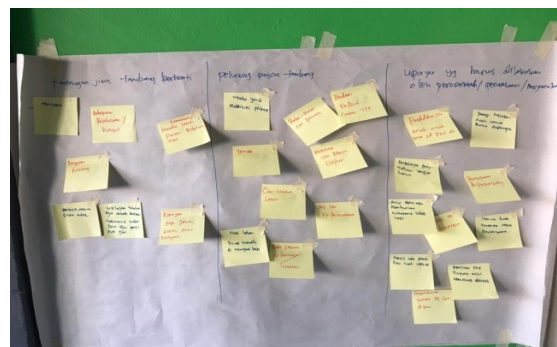
Phase 2: Co-Design Research







Phase 3: Data Collection and Collaborative Analysis





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