

## **Formal and Informal Communication Strategies for Public Support in Riau Hijau Policy Implementation**

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### **Abstract**

The Riau Hijau policy is a strategic initiative by the Riau Provincial Government to address the environmental crisis and promote sustainable development. However, the success of this policy's implementation largely depends on the effectiveness of the government's communication strategy in building public

support. This study aims to analyze the local government's communication strategies in socializing and internalizing the Riau Hijau policy among the public and bureaucracy. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through document analysis, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews. This study also employed content analysis and bibliometrics using VOSviewer. The findings reveal that Riau Hijau's communication strategy is divided into two main approaches: formal communication through institutional channels, policy publications, and coordination forums, and informal communication through the activation of local communities, visual narrative-based campaigns, and civil society participation. These findings affirm that two-way participatory communication can build social legitimacy and strengthen collective support for environmental policy.

**Keywords:** *Policy Communication, Riau Hijau, Communication Strategy, Environmental Policy, Public Participation, Local Government.*

## **1. Introduction**

Environmental degradation is a critical issue due to its significant impacts across various countries (Buana & Riyanto, 2024). Environmental degradation refers to the decline in ecosystem quality caused by the reduced availability and function of natural resources, both biotic and abiotic, such as air, water, soil, plants, and animals (Chu & Karr, 2013; Kumar et al., 2020). One region currently facing serious environmental degradation is Riau Province. Over the past few decades, the massive exploitation of natural resources has led to severe environmental damage in the region.

According to data on forest and land fires from 2015 to 2020, a total of 418,324.50 hectares were burned, with an annual average of 83,664.89 hectares (Government of Riau Province, 2022). This situation is further reinforced by deforestation data from 2017 to 2022, which recorded a loss of more than 90,000 hectares of forest cover. The year 2017 marked the highest deforestation rate, with 155,796 hectares of forest lost. While in 2022, the figure rose again to 28,781 hectares (Jikalahari, 2022).

The correlation between the increasing number of fire incidents and the extent of deforestation indicates that environmental degradation in Riau is both systemic and persistent. The recurring forest and land fires during each dry season, coupled with ongoing deforestation, emphasize the fragile ecological state of the province. These data serve as strong evidence for the urgent need to reform environmental protection policies and implement a more assertive and integrated approach to sustainable development.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Forest Cover and Deforestation in Riau Over the Past Four Decades (in hectares)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Forest Cover (ha)</b>	<b>Deforestation (ha)</b>
<b>2017</b>	1,489,410	155,796
<b>2018</b>	1,475,741	13,669
<b>2019</b>	1,442,669	33,072
<b>2020</b>	1,427,363	15,306
<b>2022</b>	1,398,582	28,781

Source: Jikalahari Data (2022)

In response to the complexity of these environmental challenges, the Provincial Government of Riau launched a strategic policy known as the *Riau Hijau* policy. This initiative reflects the province’s environmental development vision as outlined in the Riau Province Medium-Term Regional Development Plan 2019–2024 (Government of Riau Province, 2022). The *Riau Hijau* policy also aligns with broader commitments to low-carbon development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It aims to improve environmental quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote the equitable and sustainable management of natural resources for the welfare of the people of Riau (Safitri et al., 2025)

However, the success of *Riau Hijau* relies heavily on the effectiveness of policy communication. This is especially important given that many public policy implementation challenges in Indonesia stem from poor public reception, often due to policy objectives failing to reach their intended audiences (Aristyavani, 2017). As such, policymakers must adopt strategic communication approaches to foster compliance with environmental policies (De Vries, 2020). In this context, strategic communication can shape public opinion and influence policymaking. When carried out effectively, it can build public support, encourage policy alignment, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders to realize sustainable practices and governance (Kannaa & Nivedha, 2024). Without appropriate communication strategies, even well-crafted policies risk being rejected or misinterpreted by segments of the public (Issa, 2021). Policy communication functions as a catalyst between the government’s vision and the socio-ecological realities on the ground. It also serves as a tool to promote public participation and ensure accountability in program implementation.

In the case of *Riau Hijau*, its implementation raises concerns related to how messages are conveyed and received by various actors. The

communication model employed remains predominantly technocratic and top-down, focusing more on institutional procedures than on active community engagement. There are indications that this approach has contributed to challenges in the field. For example, some stakeholders report confusion over the policy's objectives, limited access to actionable information, and a lack of inclusion in planning processes. These issues have led to gaps in participation, weak inter-agency coordination, and unclear operational understanding among implementing actors. While not necessarily documented as full implementation failures, these conditions represent communication breakdowns that can compromise the sustainability and legitimacy of *Riau Hijau* in the long term.

Based on this context, this study addresses the central research problem: how do communication strategies, particularly those that are overly technocratic, top-down, and disconnected from local contexts, affect the *Riau Hijau* policy's ability to engage public support? The significance of this problem lies in the understanding that communication is a central mechanism of environmental governance. Exploring this issue is crucial for contributing to the broader study of policy communication in subnational environmental governance.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the communication strategies employed by local governments to build public support for the *Riau Hijau* policy. This dimension has rarely been examined in depth in environmental policy studies at the subnational level. While most existing research on *Riau Hijau* tends to emphasize the technical aspects of emission mitigation or land governance, while overlooking how policy messages are communicated, received, or negotiated by the public (Huda & Rusadi, 2024; Nugroho & Aryani, 2024; Putri et al., 2025; Safitri et al., 2025). Few studies explore how the success or failure of these technical components hinges on the communication strategies employed.

To address this gap, the present study adopts two interrelated theoretical frameworks, framing theory and deliberative communication. Framing theory provides analytical tools to examine how the Riau Provincial Government constructs and promotes policy narratives to shape public perception. Meanwhile, deliberative communication theory offers a lens to assess the quality of participatory engagement and two-way dialogue between the government and local communities. These frameworks are directly aligned with the central research question, which investigates how communication strategies, particularly those that are technocratic and top-down, affect public engagement with the *Riau Hijau* policy.

Moreover, broader environmental policy literature has paid limited attention to strategic communication at the subnational level, as revealed through our bibliometric analysis of 168 international studies. Therefore, this study provides critical insights to the wider field of environmental policy communication. Specifically, it bridges the gap in literature that often overlooks how local governments craft and negotiate environmental narratives in contexts of ecological vulnerability and socio-political fragmentation for improving the implementation of *Riau Hijau* and offers theoretical and practical contributions to the wider field of environmental policy communication.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Research Approach*

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of the communication strategies used by the Riau Provincial Government to build public support for the implementation of the *Riau Hijau* policy. The qualitative approach is chosen for its capacity to capture the complexity of communication practices within environmental policymaking, which is often laden with symbolic, political, and social dimensions. It allows the researcher to analyze how policy communication is constructed, conveyed, and negotiated by various actors within specific institutional and cultural contexts. From this perspective, communication strategy is understood as a social process through which shared meaning is created between the state and society.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research design begins with this qualitative foundation, followed by a two-pronged sampling strategy. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify information-rich participants with direct relevance to the research questions. However, recognizing that influential actors often operate beyond formal structures, the study also applied snowball sampling as a complementary strategy. This approach allowed the researcher to access informal communicators such as community leaders, youth activists, or local influencers who may not be visible through official channels but play critical roles in shaping public perception and mobilizing support for the policy. The combination of purposive and snowball sampling was intended to ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive representation of both formal and informal communication actors. Through referrals from initial informants, the researcher was able to capture deeper insights into the informal communication dynamics surrounding the policy.

## 2.2 Data Collection Methods

As depicted in Figure 1, the data collection phase employed multiple methods to ensure contextual richness of the data. The initial stage of data collection involved document analysis focusing on official policy documents issued by the Riau Provincial Government. Key documents examined included Riau Governor Regulation No. 9 of 2021 on the *Riau Hijau* Regional Action Plan (RAD), as well as the Riau Province Medium-Term Regional Development Plan (RPJMD) 2019–2024, which serves as the overarching development framework for the province.

In addition, the researcher conducted direct observation and limited participant observation, particularly in locations where environmental management initiatives were implemented by the local government or its partner institutions. Field notes derived from these observations were used to complement the interpretation of communication strategies, especially those that might not be fully captured in formal policy documents.

This study also employed in-depth semi-structured interviews aimed at eliciting the perspectives, experiences, and narratives of key actors directly involved in designing and implementing communication strategies for the *Riau Hijau* policy. A total of 18 informants were interviewed in this study. They consisted of 6 structural officials from the Environmental and Forestry Agency (DLHK) and Bappeda, four representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), three academic experts in policy communication, and five local community actors and youth environmental activists.

This approach was intended to capture the subjective dimensions of policy communication in building meaningful connections between the state and society on environmental issues. All interviews were recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed for thematic analysis. Additionally, the study analyzes the narratives and visual representations of the policy as disseminated through official online platforms of the provincial government, such as Bappeda Riau.ID, OPD YouTube channels, and institutional social media accounts, including Instagram and Facebook.

## 2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

As summarized in Figure 1, the analysis employed two interrelated methods: content analysis and bibliometric analysis. Content analysis was used to interpret the message structures, policy narratives, and communication strategies embedded in policy documents and media materials. This method emphasized how meanings are constructed, communicated, and interpreted by policy actors. Meanwhile, bibliometric analysis was employed to strengthen the conceptual foundation of the study and to map the thematic positioning of this research within the global

academic discourse on environmental policy. The bibliometric analysis aimed to identify thematic patterns and relevant keyword nodes that could inform the development of communication strategies for the *Riau Hijau* initiative.

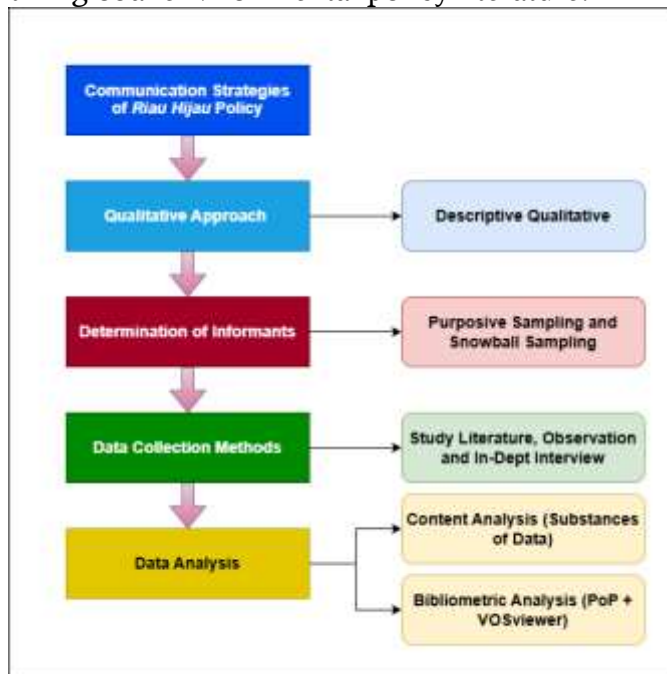
Secondary data were collected using the Publish or Perish (PoP) software, which queries the Google Scholar database. The main keyword used was “*environmental policy*” with publication years limited to the period from 2015 to 2025. From the initial search results, we selected relevant English-language articles, totaling 168 scientific articles for further analysis. The bibliographic data were processed using VOSviewer, a software tool for visualizing scientific landscapes. A co-occurrence analysis was conducted to identify keyword networks, and a keyword co-occurrence map was created to visualize the structure of discourse within the literature on environmental policy. VOSviewer was chosen over alternatives due to its greater usability, capability for visual cluster mapping, and compatibility with Google Scholar datasets.

Through co-occurrence keyword analysis, the bibliometric method revealed key thematic clusters and exposed notable knowledge gaps within the literature. Most importantly, it confirmed that government communication strategies and subnational environmental narratives remain significantly underexplored. By mapping dominant thematic trends in environmental policy scholarship, the analysis highlighted the absence of communication-related themes, particularly those concerning strategic government communication and public support. This finding directly informs and strengthens the rationale of this study, positioning it as a response to an overlooked yet critical dimension of policy implementation. In this way, the bibliometric analysis underscores both the urgency and originality of investigating how communication operates within environmental policy processes, especially at the local level, as exemplified by the *Riau Hijau* initiative.

Furthermore, the integration of content analysis and bibliometric mapping reinforces the study’s methodological coherence and relevance. While content analysis offers grounded insights into real-world communicative practices, bibliometric mapping situates these empirical findings within global academic discourse. Therefore, these approaches establish the novelty and contribution of the study in bridging local case evidence with broader scholarly debates.

Figure 1 below illustrates the methodological steps of the study. It begins with a qualitative research foundation, followed by purposive and snowball sampling strategies. The flowchart also shows the integration of multiple data collection methods (document analysis, interviews,

observation, and media analysis) and dual analysis techniques: content analysis for empirical interpretation and bibliometric mapping for situating the study within global environmental policy literature.



**Figure 1.** Flowchart of Research Methods

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 A Bibliometric Exploration of Environmental Policy Studies

To obtain a preliminary understanding of this study's position within the global academic discourse, a bibliometric analysis was conducted on 168 peer-reviewed articles related to the keyword "*environmental policy*." The data were collected using the Publish or Perish application with Google Scholar as the data source. The analysis was performed using VOSviewer, employing the co-occurrence keyword analysis technique. The resulting visualizations revealed the formation of six main thematic clusters, each representing dominant trends and scholarly emphases in the field of environmental policy. These clusters illustrate the frequency and co-occurrence of key concepts found in the literature.

The first cluster (red) highlights the prominence of discussions surrounding the intersection between environmental policy and economic growth, including issues such as carbon emissions, technology, and environmental degradation (e.g., Adikari et al., 2023; Bilal et al., 2021; Huisingh et al., 2015; Hussain et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021). This suggests



that the global literature still heavily focuses on the eco-economic dimensions of environmental policymaking. The second cluster (blue) centers on environmental regulation and evidence-based approaches with frequently occurring keywords such as environmental regulation, green innovation, and empirical evidence (e.g., Cvitanovic et al., 2016; Kim, 2024; Lamers et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2021; Luján, 2023). Meanwhile, the third cluster (green) reflects an emphasis on governance and environmental justice, as seen in terms such as governance, public policy, and environmental justice (e.g., Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; Chowkwanyun, 2023; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Okereke & Coventry, 2016; Timmons Roberts et al., 2018)

The fourth cluster (yellow) focuses on sustainability and the role of the private sector, featuring keywords such as sustainability and corporate environmental policy (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2021; Barón Dorado et al., 2022; Divan & Rosencranz, 2022; Fiorino, 2023; Haque & Ntim, 2018). This underscores the involvement of businesses as key stakeholders in environmental policy implementation. The fifth cluster (purple) relates to internal organizational practices, particularly environmentally conscious human resource management (e.g. Ahmad, 2015; Arulrajah et al., 2015; Fawehinmi et al., 2020; Y. Kim et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2021). A smaller orange cluster addresses the role of government and the specific environmental impacts of policy decisions (Cvitanovic et al., 2016; Helm, 2020; Hosenuzzaman et al., 2015; Oláh et al., 2020).

**Table 2.** Thematic Clusters of Environmental Policy Research Based on Bibliometric Co-occurrence Analysis

No	Cluster Color	Main Theme	Dominant Keywords	Brief Description
1	Red	Environmental Policy and Economic Growth	<i>carbon emissions, technology, environmental degradation</i>	Highlights the focus on the intersection between environmental policy and economic growth, including issues like emissions and environmental damage.
2	Blue	Environmental Regulation and Evidence-Based Approaches	<i>environmental regulation, green innovation,</i>	Centers on the importance of regulations and data-driven approaches in guiding effective and

No	Cluster Color	Main Theme	Dominant Keywords	Brief Description
3	Green	Governance and Environmental Justice	<i>empirical evidence</i> <i>governance</i> , <i>public policy</i> , <i>environmental justice</i>	innovative environmental policies. Emphasizes the role of governance frameworks and equity considerations in environmental policymaking.
4	Yellow	Sustainability and the Private Sector's Role	<i>sustainability</i> , <i>corporate environmental policy</i>	Reflects the growing involvement of private sector actors in supporting environmental sustainability through corporate policies.
5	Purple	Environmentally-Oriented Organizational Management	<i>environmental human resource management</i> (and related terms)	Focuses on internal organizational practices, particularly green human resource management and sustainability integration in institutions.
6	Orange	Government Role and Policy Impacts	<i>government</i> , <i>environmental impact</i> (and related terms)	Highlights the role of governments in shaping policy impacts, though in a more fragmented and narrowly scoped body of literature.

Source: Primary Data Collection

Across all identified clusters, there were no explicit keywords referencing government communication strategies or public support for environmental policies. This omission suggests that such themes remain underexplored within the broader literature on environmental policy. While the current discourse has extensively examined what environmental policies should address and who the key actors are (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016; Kraft, 2021). It has paid comparatively little attention to how these policies are communicated to the public. The lack of scholarly focus on

communication as a strategic and political instrument signals the need for more nuanced, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate perspectives from communication studies, public administration, and environmental governance. Accordingly, this bibliometric mapping reinforces the novelty and urgency of the present research, which seeks to fill this critical gap by examining the role of strategic communication by local governments in cultivating public support for environmental initiatives, specifically as exemplified by the Riau Hijau policy.

**Figure 2.** *A Bibliometric Mapping of Environmental Policy Research*

The implementation of the *Riau Hijau* policy demonstrates that formal communication plays a vital role in coordinating cross-sectoral execution and establishing administrative legitimacy. The formal communication strategy used to introduce the *Riau Hijau* policy can be categorized into several key forms: (1) dissemination of the policy and regional action plan, (2) publication of official documents and information visualization, (3) engagement of technical agencies to strengthen cross-sector dissemination, and (4) involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) and universities in official forums. The following section outlines the formal communication strategies employed by the Riau Provincial Government to introduce the *Riau Hijau* policy to the public and to build political support.

### *3.2.1 Policy Dissemination and Action Plan of Riau Hijau*

The dissemination of the *Riau Hijau* policy has been carried out through technical meetings, cross-sectoral coordination forums, and direct engagement with district and municipal governments, local government agencies, and development partners. In this process, the Riau Provincial Government has applied both vertical and horizontal communication simultaneously. Vertical communication targets the central government, aiming to align *Riau Hijau* with national strategies such as the National Medium-Term Development Plan, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and the FOLU Net Sink 2030 agenda. Meanwhile, horizontal communication involves various local governments, legislative agencies, business actors, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academia.

### *3.2.2 Policy Publication and Dissemination through Technical Agencies*

One of the key formal communication strategies in the implementation of the *Riau Hijau* policy is the publication of policy documents and the dissemination of information through official channels managed by technical government agencies. Documents such as the *Riau Hijau* Regional Action Plan (RAD), sectoral performance reports, and visual infographics are regularly disseminated by the Department of Environment and Forestry (DLHK), the Regional Planning and Development Agency (Bappedalitbang), and other relevant agencies. This approach serves two main purposes: informing the public and strengthening internal bureaucratic understanding and loyalty.

### *3.2.3 Engagement of Government Agencies*

Engaging technical government agencies is a crucial part of the Riau Provincial Government's political communication strategy to foster internal consensus across institutions. Technical Government Agencies (TGAs) play a dual role. They are instrumental actors in technical implementation and also serve as messengers of political priorities, conveying the Governor's development agenda to the public and development partners. In this context, TGA's involvement in socialization forums serves as a symbolic act to demonstrate that the *Riau Hijau* policy is not merely a personal initiative of the Governor but rather a product of bureaucratic consensus.

### *3.2.4 Engaging Civil Society and CSOs*

The Riau Provincial Government recognizes that the success of policy implementation is closely tied to the extent to which civil society acknowledges, supports, and actively engages with the policy. Therefore, the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs), local communities,

and academics has become a key pillar in promoting a more deliberative and participatory policy communication strategy.

One form of this engagement is reflected in virtual audience sessions with CSOs, where the government provides space for open dialogue concerning the formulation and implementation of the *Riau Hijau* Regional Action Plan (RAD). These sessions serve as strategic forums for cultivating a *sense of ownership* among participants. Through active involvement in the policymaking process, stakeholders are encouraged to feel a personal and collective connection to the policy.

In a more structured setting, the government also hosted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on the FOLU Net Sink 2030 initiative, bringing together representatives from TGAs and CSOs. This forum was intended to reaffirm the government's commitment while simultaneously opening space for multi-stakeholder negotiation, evaluation of progress, and formulation of follow-up strategies.

**Table 3.** Formal Communication Strategies of Riau Hijau Policy

<b>Formal Communication Aspect</b>	<b>Strategy Description</b>	<b>Outreach Activities</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Media &amp; Channels</b>
<b>1. Dissemination of RAD</b>	Aligning perceptions among provincial/district government agencies on the <i>Riau Hijau</i> Regional Action Plan (RAD) and low-carbon targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual dissemination of <i>Riau Hijau</i> RAD</li> <li>• Technical meeting to discuss RAD draft (involving TGAs, universities, CSOs, and the media.</li> </ul>	Heads of Provincial & District TGAs, academics, CSOs, media	Zoom/Virtual, in-person meetings, FGDs
<b>2. Policy Document Publication &amp; Visualization</b>	Standardizing policy narratives through official documents, infographics, and legal regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of the Governor Regulation &amp; coordination meeting of the <i>Riau Hijau</i> Forum.</li> </ul>	Technical TGAs, legislators, private sector	Bappeda website, InfoPublik portal, print & online media

Formal Communication Aspect	Strategy Description	Outreach Activities	Target Audience	Media & Channels
3. Involvement of Technical Agencies in Communication	Engaging agencies such as the Department of Environment and Forestry, Energy and Mineral Resources, and Bappeda to convey technical messages to the public and local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of RPJMD &amp; RAD via InfoPublik.</li> <li>• Governor presents <i>Riau Hijau</i> achievements during FOLU Net Sink 2030 socialization</li> <li>• Village-level forest fire response training.</li> </ul>	actors, and the general public Village communities, farmers, and local environmental managers	Seminars, field-based training, and on-site dialogues
4. Engagement with Civil Society & CSOs	Creating dialogue spaces to gather feedback and foster a sense of ownership of environmental policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual audience with CSOs</li> <li>• FOLU Net Sink 2030 FGD involving TGAs &amp; CSOs.</li> </ul>	CSOs, local communities, academics	Virtual meetings, FGDs, consultation sessions

Source: Primary Data Processing

### 3.3 Informal Communication Strategy of Riau Hijau

The Riau Provincial Government has also developed a parallel informal communication approach aimed at reaching a broader segment of the public. Informal communication is carried out through community networks, educational activities, and value-based socio-political mobilization. This form of communication plays a crucial role in fostering ecological awareness among grassroots communities. Based on research findings, there are five primary forms of *Riau Hijau*'s informal communication strategy:

### 3.3.1 *Activation of Community Information Groups*

The Riau Provincial Office of Communication, Informatics, and Statistics (Diskominfo) has reactivated *Community Information Groups* (Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat/KIM) at the village and sub-district level as grassroots communication hubs between citizens and the government. These groups serve as both disseminators of *Riau Hijau* policy information and channels for collecting public feedback from the grassroots. Using informal platforms such as village WhatsApp groups, bulletin boards, and community gatherings, KIM operates as a two-way communication mechanism grounded in social trust. Currently, 19 active KIM groups operate across Riau Province, using local platforms such as village WhatsApp groups, bulletin boards, and in-person gatherings.

### 3.3.2 *Riau Ecosystem Restoration (RER) Campaign*

Peatland conservation is one of the priority programs under the *Riau Hijau* Policy, implemented in collaboration with local partners. The Riau Provincial Government provides guidance to shift the focus of forest land use toward ecosystem restoration. The *Riau Ecosystem Restoration* (RER) program itself is carried out by the private company APRIL and its partners. The RER campaign uses a conservation communication strategy grounded in *visual and experiential narratives*. Activities such as eco-camps, environmental documentaries, and participatory environmental expos are designed to spread peat conservation messages to local communities and youth. These narratives are disseminated via social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook as well as through on-the-ground events. The RER program directly benefits over 40,000 individuals in its surrounding areas, including approximately 17,000 residents on the Kampar Peninsula and 24,000 on Padang Island.

### 3.3.3 *Participatory Action Research in Indigenous Villages*

The *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) initiative in Siak District represents a concrete response to the *Riau Hijau* policy instruments, integrating the province's *Riau Hijau* vision with operational practices at the village level. In this case, the Siak District Government collaborates with civil society organizations (CSOs) such as CIFOR–ICRAF and the Mitra Insani Foundation to facilitate PAR processes in several indigenous villages. Siak was selected for scaling up PAR due to the initial success of a pilot project in Dompas (Bengkalis), with formal support from the Siak District Government. This indicates that PAR in Siak is being prepared as a *blueprint* model for wider regional replication under the *Riau Hijau* framework. Through this process, indigenous forest communities participate in dialogue forums and joint monitoring of fire hotspots and

forest governance. In Siak Regency, the indigenous communities of Kayu Ara Permai and Penyengat villages, managing a combined agricultural area of 8.45 hectares, have been the primary beneficiaries of this initiative.

**Table 4.** Informal Communication Strategies of Riau Hijau Policy

<b>Aspects of Informal Communication</b>	<b>Strategy Description</b>	<b>Socialization Activities</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Media &amp; Channels</b>	<b>Target beneficiaries</b>
<b>1. Activation of Community Information Groups (KIM)</b>	Revitalizing village/sub-district communication nodes to disseminate information and absorb public aspirations through two-way interaction.	Village meetings, community forums, bulletin boards, WhatsApp p group updates.	Village residents, community leaders, and local officials.	Village WhatsApp p groups, local bulletin boards, and community gatherings .	19 active KIM groups in Riau Province
<b>2. Riau Ecosystem Restoration (RER) Campaign</b>	Collaboration between the government and the private sector (APRIL) for peatland conservation using effective and	Eco-camps, documentaries, environmental expos, and field activities with local communities.	Students, youth, and communities near restoration areas.	Instagram , YouTube, Facebook, and field events.	The RER region and its surrounding areas are inhabited by over 40,000 individuals, approximately 17,000 residing on the Kampar Peninsula and 24,000 on Padang Island



Aspects of Informal Communication	Strategy Description	Socialization Activities	Audience	Media & Channels	Target beneficiaries
	narrative-based communication.				
<b>3. Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Indigenous Villages</b>	Collaboration between the Siak District Government and CSOs (CIFOR–ICRAF, YMI) to develop participatory forest governance	Customary forums, joint fire hotspot monitoring, and participatory training.	Indigenous communities, customary leaders, environmental NGOs, and academics.	Community meetings, customary assemblies, field documentation, and NGO networks.	The local communities in Kayu Ara Permai and Penyengat villages, Siak Regency, managed a total agricultural area of 8.45 hectares.

Source: Primary Data Processing

### *3.4 Diverse Forms of Political Support for the Riau Hijau Policy as Outcomes of Formal Communication Strategies*

The formal communication strategy implemented by the Riau Provincial Government under the *Riau Hijau* policy has served as a medium for political alliance-building through narrative interpretation, institutional engagement, and technocratic symbolism. Three distinct forms of political support have been successfully mobilized, each rooted in the characteristics of the target audience and the communication channels utilized.

#### *3.4.1 Administrative Support from Bureaucracy and Regional Legislature*

Administrative support for the *Riau Hijau* policy stems primarily from two key actors: Technical Government Agencies (TGAs) and the Riau Provincial Parliament (DPRD). The role of the TGAs is particularly crucial as these institutions are responsible for translating the macro-vision of *Riau Hijau* into sectoral programs that are both operational and

implementable. Involving the TGAs in drafting the Regional Action Plan (RAD) and sectoral action plans has become a key instrument for internal consolidation and fostering institutional ownership of the environmental agenda across sectors.

Through formal communications such as policy briefings, coordination meetings, and technical documentation, the provincial government ensures that each agency understands its role, performance indicators, and alignment with the overarching goals of the *Riau Hijau* initiative. These socialization efforts function as mechanisms for internalizing values, enabling a shift from mere administrative compliance toward institutional commitment. In this sense, well-structured policy communication fosters structural awareness within the bureaucracy, and legitimacy stems from the perception that the policy is rational and evidence-based.

In the legislative domain, the DPRD has also demonstrated substantial support for strengthening the institutional framework of *Riau Hijau*. For instance, DPRD has advocated for the reestablishment of a special committee on spatial planning to ensure that land use planning aligns with environmental sustainability. The DPRD's support is essential within the ecosystem of the *Riau Hijau* policy.

#### 3.4.2 *Social Support from Civil Society and Non-State Actors*

In advancing the *Riau Hijau* policy, the government's communication strategy has also extended to non-state actors such as civil society organizations (CSOs), local communities, academics, and media. These efforts have generated a form of social support built on perception, trust, and active civic engagement. The formation of the *Riau Hijau* Forum through Gubernatorial Decree No. 863 of 2022, bringing together dozens of CSOs and private sector actors, further exemplifies the value-driven support base for this policy. Conversely, specific support has materialized through tangible initiatives. Since August 2021, for example, the "*Riau Tree Adoption*" program has raised over IDR 2 billion and facilitated the planting of more than 10,600 trees. Such outcomes have earned public approval based on measurable impact.

#### 3.4.3 *Diplomatic and Financial Support from International Donors and Global Institutions*

The Riau Provincial Government has also employed formal external communication strategies targeting national and international donor agencies. This is primarily done through transparent and outcome-oriented documents such as the RAD, periodic reports, and performance indicators demonstrating accountability in environmental governance. The concept of *subnational diplomacy* highlights the role of regional governments as

actors in the global arena. By presenting a transparent and professional policy profile, the *Riau Hijau* policy has bolstered Riau's bargaining position in both national and international forums.

## **4. Discussions**

### *4.1 Communication Narratives in the Riau Hijau Policy*

The *Riau Hijau* policy is formally outlined in Riau Governor Regulation No. 9 of 2021, serving as an implementation of the 2019–2024 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan. Within this policy framework, the Riau Provincial Government identifies three core pillars: environmental and climate change management, sustainable natural resource governance, and sustainable economic development. These pillars carry not only technical substance but also symbolic and political meanings intended to resonate with the public and relevant stakeholders. One of the key methods used to communicate this vision is through narrative framing. Terms such as “green” and “collaborative” are deliberately chosen to construct a positive and ethical image of the policy's direction. From a policy communication perspective, this represents a strategic framing approach in which the government actively shapes how the public perceives and responds to strategic issues (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012).

Based on the viewpoint of the linear communication model, the approach remains largely one-directional (top-down) (Yang & Bennett, 2021). The government assumes the role of message sender, encoding meanings into policy documents and disseminating them through formal channels. The expectation is that the public will passively receive and interpret the message as intended. This approach inherently limits opportunities for dialogue and the co-construction of meaning, which are vital components of inclusive public policymaking. The language used in the *Riau Hijau* narrative does suggest a participatory intent reflected in expressions such as community involvement and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Yet in practice, meaningful public engagement appears limited. This is partly due to the dominance of formal media and technocratic language, which often fails to connect with local dialects or the lived experiences of the community. In the end, the *Riau Hijau* policy still faces challenges in fostering emotional and political closeness between the state and its citizens. If the ultimate goal is behavioral change and collective support, a shift toward two-way communication is essential. It allows for reciprocal meaning-making, negotiation of values, and shared consensus. Thus, developing a well-thought-out communication strategy

is crucial to ensure that this policy is conveyed in an ethical, strategic, and transformative manner.

#### *4.2 Formal Communication: Building Policy Alignment and Institutional Symbolism*

Through formal communication channels, the provincial government relies on technical agencies as the primary actors responsible for conveying the official policy narrative and coordinating its implementation across sectors. This approach reflects the concept of *policy alignment*, as articulated by Savage & O'Connor (2019) Wherein policy actors share a common understanding and commitment toward specific policy goals and directions. In the case of *Riau Hijau*, such alignment is manifested in the Regional Action Plan (RAD), the integration of programs across sectors, and the allocation of budgetary resources aligned with the policy's three main pillars.

Furthermore, the dissemination of policy through coordination forums and official documentation creates a space for intersectoral consolidation where bureaucratic and technocratic actors are convened to formulate joint strategic actions. In this context, the Governor of Riau positions himself as a leader with a progressive green political vision. This is in line with Beetham's (2012) *The Concept of political legitimacy* building emphasizes a leader's ability to unify political elites and the bureaucracy under a coordinated, shared agenda.

However, this mode of formal communication also exhibits several critical limitations. First, while inter-agency communication may appear synergistic at the level of documents and procedures, the process often remains elitist and disconnected from the lived realities of communities on the ground. Cross-sectoral consolidation tends to occur within closed institutional spaces, offering limited opportunities for open and participatory public deliberation.

Second, the narrative constructed through formal communication is often technocratic in nature, emphasizing measurable outcomes such as the Environmental Quality Index (IKL) or the area of land restored. From the perspective of *symbolic policy communication* (Merelman, 2019) The use of data visualization and success symbols plays a key role in shaping public perceptions. However, when excessively focused on quantitative indicators, policy risks becoming entrapped in symbolic representations, neglecting more complex social dynamics. This can create the impression that communication primarily serves political image-building rather than responding to citizens' aspirations.

Moreover, from the viewpoint of *framing theory* (Putnam & Holmer, 1992) The technical agencies' framing of policy can indeed shape public

perceptions. Yet, state-dominated framing processes risk producing biased information flows. When only favorable aspects are highlighted while alternative narratives or critiques are excluded, the communicative process loses its reflective and deliberative character. In environmental policymaking, the ability to accommodate multiple perspectives and epistemologies is essential.

#### *4.3 Informal Communication: Fostering Social and Emotional Engagement*

Beyond institutionalized formal mechanisms, the Riau Provincial Government also employs informal communication strategies that target the social and cultural dimensions of local communities. This approach aims to strengthen the social legitimacy of the policy by leveraging relational networks and emotional bonds already present within communities. One of the key instruments in this strategy is the activation of Community Information Groups (Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat or KIM) at the village and neighborhood levels. These groups are composed of respected local figures with strong social capital, which enhances the credibility and acceptance of policy messages. This reflects the *communitarian political communication* framework, which posits that the effectiveness of political communication is largely shaped by interpersonal relationships and shared communal values. In such a context, communicative power lies not only in what is said, but in who delivers the message.

In addition, informal communication involves affective dimensions that are highly relevant in shifting public attitudes and behaviors toward environmental issues. Drawing on the *theory of affective politics* (Hoggett & Thompson, 2012), emotions are central to generating empathy and fostering a sense of ownership over change agendas. In Riau, conservation narratives are often framed as integral to local identity, thereby eliciting emotional resonance as communities are invited to protect what is perceived as a collective heritage.

This strategy echoes the environmental communication practices used in Amazon preservation campaigns in Brazil, where activists and Indigenous communities invoke collective knowledge to cultivate public empathy toward deforestation issues (Stephansen, 2013). Messages rooted in lived experiences and community values have proven more effective in eliciting emotional engagement and promoting behavioral change. Nonetheless, informal communication also faces challenges. Public participation through KIM or local forums is often unidirectional, functioning more as a top-down information dissemination tool rather than a space for equitable dialogue. Moreover, emotion-based

communication runs the risk of becoming merely symbolic if not accompanied by concrete policy actions that respond to community needs.

These various forms of informal communication demonstrate the government's attempt to translate policy messages into more socially resonant and emotionally compelling narratives. The inclusion of initiatives such as the RER campaign strengthens the clarity and contextual grounding of communication strategies by corporate-led conservation aligned with green development. From a governance standpoint, RER reflects the potential for public-private synergies in peatland restoration, offering promising lessons on mobilizing financial, technical, and communication resources. However, it also reveals the risk of policy fragmentation when such initiatives are not formally integrated into provincial planning instruments like the RAD. This highlights the importance of harmonizing narratives and responsibilities across actors to avoid duplicated efforts or conflicting agendas.

#### *4.4 Synergizing Formal and Informal Strategies: Communication as a Tool for Public Support*

The Riau Provincial Government's communication of the *Riau Hijau* policy employs a dual strategy: formal and informal. Formal communication functions to ensure bureaucratic alignment and signal the government's seriousness in implementing the policy. Narratives around sustainability, restoration, and emission reduction are conveyed systematically through infographics, reports, and official platforms. In contrast, informal communication involves local actors such as KIM, civil society organizations, and community networks that translate policy messages into more culturally resonant and emotionally engaging narratives. Such communication seeks to tap into the affective dimensions and communal values that shape local understandings of environmental issues. When citizens perceive environmental stewardship as integral to their daily lives rather than as a government-imposed agenda, public support tends to emerge more organically.

The public support generated from this dual communication strategy can be conceptualized in two layers. *Diffuse support* arises from a general trust in the overarching direction of the policy, while *specific support* emerges from tangible, observable outcomes (Bol et al., 2021) Such as the visible recovery of peatlands or increased access to green economy programs. Both types of support are essential and contribute to the formation of public forums that bring together academics, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens to critically assess the *Riau Hijau* policy. In this way, strong public support is cultivated through participatory spaces that invite civic engagement in policy implementation (Kondolele et al., 2025).

While the strategy appears inclusive, the *Riau Hijau* policy approach remains predominantly top-down. The direction of the policy, including its communicative framing, is still largely controlled by state actors, particularly technical agencies and executive leadership. Community participation is often limited to the stages of implementation or socialization. This indicates that informal communication has yet to be fully integrated into the policy decision-making process and instead functions more as a supplementary tool for garnering public support. This critique is crucial, as the effectiveness of policy communication is shaped by who holds control over narratives and strategic decisions (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016). Without a more balanced distribution of roles between the state and civil society, communication framed as deliberative risks becoming a mere instrument of symbolic legitimacy within an otherwise elitist and closed process.

When compared to Myanmar's implementation of REDD+, Riau's approach is relatively more open and participatory (Oo et al., 2020). However, in contrast to practices in parts of Latin America, such as Colombia and Brazil, where Indigenous communities are involved from the planning and design stages, participation in *Riau Hijau* remains largely consultative and constrained. In this context, the synergy between formal and informal communication strategies has yet to achieve the ideals of democratic *governance communication*. To move toward greater substance, a shift is needed from merely informative communication to truly *deliberative communication*. One that opens shared spaces for negotiating policy direction on equal footing between the state and citizens.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study underscores the importance of strategic communication in the effective implementation of subnational environmental policies. The case of Riau Hijau illustrates that communication is a socio-political mechanism to build public support, foster civic engagement, and consolidate collaboration across diverse actors. The dual strategy employed by the Riau Provincial Government, consisting of formal and informal communication, serves complementary functions. Formal communication channels focus on inter-agency coordination, policy dissemination, and administrative legitimacy. Informal strategies such as village-based information groups (KIM), participatory campaigns like RER, and grassroots engagement through civil society provide emotional and cultural resonance that enhances public receptivity to environmental messages.

However, this study also reveals a persistent limitation. It is about the dominance of top-down communication practices that restrict meaningful

public deliberation. While forums for participation are present, they remain primarily consultative in nature and rarely influence the core of policy decision-making. Informal channels are often used to gain public approval rather than to invite co-creation, reflecting a broader pattern of symbolic rather than substantive inclusion.

Based on these findings, this study offers two key recommendations. First, enhance the function of Community Information Groups (KIM) by transforming them into participatory monitoring units that can channel local feedback into planning and evaluation processes. These units should be equipped with basic reporting tools and be integrated into official coordination mechanisms, such as the Riau Hijau Forum. Second, reposition civil society organizations and academic actors as co-designers of policy narratives. Their early involvement in framing messages, particularly for campaigns like RAD socialization or peatland restoration, can improve the inclusivity of government messaging.

This research contributes to addressing a significant gap in the literature on environmental policy by emphasizing the role of subnational communication strategies, particularly in ecologically vulnerable and institutionally fragmented settings. By employing framing theory and deliberative communication, the study provides a theoretical lens to understand how narrative construction and emotional engagement can legitimize environmental governance at the local level.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how communication strategies influence long-term behavioral change and community trust in government-led environmental initiatives. Comparative studies across other Indonesian provinces or Southeast Asian contexts could also provide insights into the transferability and contextual relevance of the Riau Hijau communication model. Such investigations would strengthen the broader discourse on participatory communication in environmental governance.

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