

## Community Relations Silang.id in Creating an Inclusive Ecosystem for Deaf Friends in Jakarta

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### Article Info

**Article History:**

Diterima Oct 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Direvisi Nov 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Diterima Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

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**Keywords:**

Community Relations; inclusive ecosystem; Deaf; equality; Silang.id.

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine how Silang.id implements and acts as a community relations actor in creating an inclusive ecosystem for deaf people. An inclusive ecosystem not only covers physical accessibility but also builds an equal and participatory social space for people with disabilities, especially deaf people. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study method. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with five key informants, consisting of Silang.id managers and deaf participants from the Silang.id program. The results show that Silang.id implements an open system organizational communication model in carrying out community relations. This can be seen from the two-way, participatory information exchange process that is oriented towards the needs of deaf friends. Silang.id also actively manages community concerns by developing needs-based training and empowerment programs, in accordance with the principles of community relations according to Burke & Edmund M (1999). In addition, the Fully Functioning Society (FFS) perspective is also reflected in Silang.id's efforts to build trust and social capital between the organization and the Deaf community, which contributes to the formation of an inclusive and sustainable social system. These efforts are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 on inclusive economic growth. Thus, Silang.id's community relations function not only as an organizational communication strategy but also as a social practice that drives structural change toward a more just and equitable society for the Deaf community.



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## INTRODUCTION

Disability is a condition of physical, intellectual, mental, or sensory limitations that can hinder an individual's full participation in society (Hidayatullah & Noer, 2021). One group of people with disabilities is the deaf, who often face barriers in communication and access to education, employment, and public services (Hakim et al., 2024). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs (2023), 7.03% of people with disabilities in Indonesia are deaf. This group prefers the term "deaf" to "hearing impaired" because it is considered more equal and respects their identity (Nugraheni et al., 2021).

The main obstacle faced by the Deaf community is limited access to communication. When public spaces, education, or public services are not sign language-friendly, this limits their opportunities for development. In fact, social inclusiveness requires equal access, participation, and respect for differences (Buntinx et al., 2010). An inclusive ecosystem can be defined as a friendly, open, and equal environment, so that every individual, including the Deaf, can contribute without discrimination (Runa et al., 2023).

Silang.id is one of Indonesia's social startups focused on empowering deaf people. Founded in 2019, Silang.id provides sign language interpreter services, empowerment training, and the Silang Empowerment program to create an inclusive ecosystem that supports equality. Compared to other startups working on disability issues, such as Hear Me or Tenoon, Silang.id places greater emphasis on inclusive communication based on JBI services and cross-sector collaboration.

From a communication science perspective, Silang.id's efforts can be analyzed through a community relations approach. This concept emphasizes the importance of building harmonious relationships with the community, managing social issues, and creating participatory spaces (Burke & Edmund M, 1999). In addition, the Fully Functioning Society theory (Heath, 2017) is relevant to see how communication can build social capital, legitimacy, and trust between organizations and the Deaf community.

Based on this background, this study focuses on two main problems: (1) how Silang.id implements community relations in creating an inclusive ecosystem for deaf friends, and (2) how Silang.id's community relations actors play a role in achieving these goals.

This study aims to understand the communication strategies and social practices carried out by Silang.id in building an inclusive ecosystem. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the study of communication science, particularly public relations, and to serve as a practical reference for organizations seeking to create a disability-friendly environment.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The type of research used by the researcher is descriptive, which can be described as observing the criteria or characteristics of individuals or groups. Descriptive qualitative research is conducted through intense and/or prolonged interaction with participants in their natural environment, in order to study the daily lives of individuals, groups, communities, and organizations (Miles et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the research method used in this study is the case study method.

The case study method is an approach used in research to analyze a "systemic unit" in the form of a program, activity, event, or group of individuals that are interrelated in terms of place and time (Wekke et al., 2019). The researchers used descriptive research with the case study method to describe the research results in detail, intensively, deeply, and comprehensively related to the reality experienced by deaf friends in Jakarta.

This study used qualitative methods with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with sources involved in Silang.id's community relations practices, observations were made on the organization's activities in creating an inclusive ecosystem, while documentation was obtained from the organization's activity archives and publications. Data analysis followed the stages of condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014), with validity testing through source triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure consistency between findings. The research was conducted at the Silang.id office in South Jakarta.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study produced a number of findings related to the implementation of Silang.id's community relations in creating an inclusive ecosystem for deaf friends. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with Silang.id managers and members of the deaf community, which were then analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach.

In general, the results of the study show that Silang.id not only acts as a provider of sign language interpreter services, but also as an agent of social change that actively builds relationships with the community. The implementation of community relations is carried out through various programs designed according to the needs of deaf friends, involving them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.

To provide a more comprehensive picture, the research results and discussion in this section will be presented in several main themes: the implementation of community relations, the role of community relations actors, and the Fully Functioning Society (FFS) perspective, which is the theoretical framework of the research.

### **Implementation of Silang.id Community Relations**

The results of the study show that Silang.id carries out community relations by applying an open system organizational communication model. This approach emphasizes reciprocal interaction between the organization and the Deaf community, thereby creating participatory, responsive communication that is oriented towards real needs. In practice, Silang.id provides application-based

Sign Language Interpreter (JBI) services, develops the Silang Empowerment training program, and provides discussion forums that allow the Deaf community to be involved in the decision-making process.

Through these various programs, Silang.id not only facilitates communication accessibility but also promotes social and economic empowerment for the Deaf. The training program, for example, not only teaches technical skills but also builds confidence and awareness that the Deaf community has an important role in society. Interviews with informants show that the existence of JBI services greatly helps Deaf people access education, public services, and social activities that were previously difficult to reach.

When linked to the theory of Burke & Edmund M (1999), the practices carried out by Silang.id are in line with the three main principles of community relations:

1. Building Relationships of Trust – Silang.id consistently demonstrates transparency in its programs and involves deaf people in every stage. This strengthens emotional bonds and organizational legitimacy in the eyes of the community.
2. Managing Community Issues and Concerns – Silang.id addresses the main obstacle, namely communication limitations, by providing JBI and digital accessibility features.
3. Community Support Programs – Through training, public awareness campaigns, and cross-sector collaboration, Silang.id has successfully built an image as a “neighbor of choice” desired by its community.

### **The Role of Community Relations Actors**

Community relations actors at Silang.id consist of core managers, volunteers, and strategic partners. They not only act as messengers for the organization, but also as mediators and advocates who bridge the interests of the Deaf community with the wider community. From the interviews, it was found that Silang.id managers strive to adapt their communication strategies to the conditions of the community. For example, in developing training programs, Silang.id directly involves Deaf friends to ensure that the material is appropriate for their needs. Volunteers play a role in accompanying Deaf people when they participate in various activities, while external partners provide resource support. Thus, the role of community relations actors is not only oriented towards organizational image, but more broadly as agents of social change.

This role shows a shift in the function of public relations from merely being an organizational communicator to a social facilitator that promotes social justice. This also confirms Grunig & Hunt's (1984) view that community relations should ideally involve symmetrical two-way communication, where the organization and the public influence each other in a balanced manner.

### **Fully Functioning Society (FFS) Perspective**

The concept of Fully Functioning Society (FFS) proposed by Heath (2017) is relevant to explain Silang.id's practices. This organization has succeeded in creating an environment that allows various parties—both Deaf and non-Deaf—to interact equally, build trust, and create beneficial social capital.

The four main principles of FFS are reflected in Silang.id's activities, namely:

1. Rhetoric as Political Economy – Silang.id places the issue of inclusivity as part of an important public agenda to be fought for, in line with SDGs number 4 (inclusive education) and 8 (inclusive economic growth).
2. Enlightened Rhetoric – discussion forums and training provide a space for the Deaf community's voices to be heard in an ethical and constructive manner.
3. Social Capital – the partnership network that has been built strengthens solidarity, collaboration, and support among stakeholders.
4. Language and Power – the use of sign language as the primary medium of communication affirms the linguistic identity of the Deaf, while also strengthening their bargaining position in the social sphere.

These findings confirm that Silang.id's community relations are more than just an organizational communication strategy, but also serve as an instrument of social change. Compared to Praswary's (2021) research, which found that community relations play a role in shaping a company's brand image, this study broadens the understanding that community relations can also be a means of

empowering marginalized communities. The constructivist perspective used in this study further clarifies that the meaning of an inclusive ecosystem is built through continuous social interaction. Silang.id, together with the Deaf community, has built a new understanding of inclusivity that is not only symbolic but also evident in everyday practices. Thus, the success of Silang.id's community relations is not only measured by public perception but also by the extent to which the Deaf community feels recognized, empowered, and has equal opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that Silang.id has successfully implemented community relations with an open system organizational communication approach, characterized by two-way, participatory communication that is responsive to the needs of the Deaf community. Through the Sign Language Interpreter (JBI) program, empowerment training, and cross-sector collaboration, Silang.id has not only improved communication accessibility but also strengthened the social and economic capacity of the Deaf community.

The role of community relations actors at Silang.id has proven to be very important as mediators, facilitators, and advocates. They not only convey organizational messages, but also build trust, manage community issues, and fight for inclusivity in a broader social space.

Furthermore, Silang.id's practices reflect the principles of a Fully Functioning Society (FFS), where communication is used as a means to build social capital, legitimacy, and equal relationships between organizations and the Deaf community. Thus, Silang.id's community relations can be understood not only as an organizational communication strategy but also as a social practice that contributes to structural change toward a more just, equitable, and inclusive society.

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