

Integrating the Social, Economic, and Security Dimensions of Land Border Development Planning in Indonesia

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Abstract

A coordinated approach is necessary for achieving national border-area development goals. However, building a comprehensive framework for addressing the complex issues associated with border governance remains an ongoing challenge. In this context, the international land borders of Indonesia are complicated by large development differences with neighbouring countries. The differences lead to multiple problems, such as transnational crime through many illegal crossing points. The combined effect of the factors increases human vulnerability and intensifies the risks associated with mobility in border regions, which are characterised by ongoing push and pull factors in cross-border travel. The policy measures implemented are influenced by the interplay between central and local government priorities, with a security-oriented focus at the national level and a stronger emphasis on community welfare and prosperity at the local level. Therefore, this study analysed land border governance along Indonesia's borders with Malaysia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea using qualitative methods, including focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and field observations. Data were collected from 125 informants across Jakarta, North Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, and Papua. The results showed that the local needs in Indonesian borderlands are diverse, and that social institutions perform multiple functions in the management of the border. Based on the principles of human development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the findings reinforce the need to improve social services and protection mechanisms for border region issues.

Keywords:

border management; development planning; multi-dimensional gap;
social vulnerability; socioeconomic

Introduction

Indonesia shares borders with three countries, including Malaysia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea. Across these borders, remoteness and underdevelopment are common factors behind socio-economic problems (Ikhwanuddin, 2011; Prasajo, 2013; Pugu et al., 2019; Rachmawati & Djalaludin, 2016). President Joko Widodo's administration sought to change this long-held view, presenting borders as the 'frontline' of the state rather than as the 'outskirts'. During his election campaign, Joko Widodo integrated 'border

development' into the agenda of Nawa Cita ("Indonesia from the fringes"). Under his leadership, more attention has been given to development, especially for 3T areas (*tertinggal, terdepan, terluar*; underdeveloped, forefront, and outermost areas). The National Master Plan for the Development of Border Areas (Peraturan Rencana Induk Pengelolaan Perbatasan Negara Tahun 2015–2019 Nomor 1 Tahun 2015 Tentang Rencana Induk Pengelolaan Perbatasan Negara Tahun 2015–2019, 2015) contained seven priorities, namely border protection, border security, cross-border services, infrastructure

development, spatial planning, local economic growth, border management, and institutional strengthening. Furthermore, the Minister of Finance announced a dedicated budget for border development under the “*Transfer ke Daerah*” (Regional Transfer) and “*Dana Desa*” (Village Fund) programmes. In this context, border development is directly connected to the National Budget.

Ohoiwutun (2023) stated that the concept of border development has been oriented towards security issues rather than the welfare of the community and sustainable development. Yet scholars have reported that sustainable development should be applied universally (Muñoz-Pizza et al., 2023). A security-only strategy is not sufficient to tackle vulnerabilities of border communities (Missbach & Palmer, 2022). Development strategies need to consider sustainability, and border regions should not be omitted from development agendas at the national and global levels (Muñoz-Pizza et al., 2023).

A more active position towards a welfare approach opens new possibilities for border communities, especially in the context of top-down governmental programmes and bottom-up local practices (Karim et al., 2023). These conditions call for policy innovation to accommodate informal social realities within formal institutional frameworks, given the significant contribution to the design of development strategies oriented toward social welfare (Abdullah et al., 2022). The role of local governments is fundamental to border development, especially in ensuring that local perspectives are adequately reflected in policy design and implementation (Rusdiono et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Studies show the complexity of socio-economic processes that influence borderland development, including their function in the context of governance, branding strategies, and

human capital strengthening as prerequisites for integrated border management. The role of universities in promoting collaboration and innovation (Cappellano & Rizzo, 2019; Makkonen & Williams, 2016; Oliveira, 2015; van den Broek et al., 2019) is identified as a key factor in this process. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated the border situation by limiting mobility and increasing socio-economic vulnerability (Aji et al., 2021; Pabali et al., 2021; Salsabila & Dhamanti, 2021). The Indonesian government has attempted to improve the socio-economic condition of border areas in response. These developments take place within a wider struggle for power between central and regional authorities, described by Blair (as cited in Faguet, 2014) as ‘persistent struggles for authority’, within the longer historical arc defined by Eilenberg (2009).

Borders in Indonesia: National versus Global Context

Security and sovereignty are interwoven concepts tightly bound up with nationalism, politics, and the ideology of borders (Atikawati et al., 2024; Eilenberg, 2014; Maharam, 2024). However, the task of maintaining security and sovereignty becomes more complex when they collide with the needs of people and the rights of indigenous communities. In a globalised world, where borders are becoming porous and, in certain instances, ‘borderless’ (Azwar et al., 2025; Long, 2011; Maharam, 2024), this challenge is especially relevant. Based on these considerations, states should not overlook the need to prioritise regulatory frameworks in accordance with the specific needs and characteristics of the areas concerned. In economic activities, modern systems do not replace traditional systems that have been practiced for centuries, as reported by Zein et al. (2020).

Bilateral agreements between Indonesia and its neighbours should be reviewed given

that social issues affect both countries on an ongoing basis, and the design of regulatory frameworks should be directed at improving cross-border cooperation (Zein et al., 2023). In addition to hindering illegal operations, such improvements are needed to improve access to social services, including education, which is a basic right for every child (Husain et al., 2021). State-to-state negotiations alone are not enough to ensure effective cooperation. It requires inclusive dialogue that actively engages local communities and allows for meaningful participation in strengthening border resilience (Atikawati et al., 2024; Rusdiono et al., 2024). Raharjo and Idris (2025) reported that collaborative arrangements are essential to solve the multi-dimensional problems found in border areas.

There are some gaps in studies of border regions, namely in border management, socio-economic conditions, education, and legal frameworks. Therefore, this study aims to examine the gaps from the perspective of the socio-economic dimensions of development planning in border management. Stronger integration and coordination among the various stakeholders are needed for effective management, which is a complex challenge in Indonesia (Karim, 2019) that becomes more complex when neighbouring states are included (Long, 2011). Socio-economic considerations should occupy a central position in border development, since social, cultural, and political issues are inherently linked with economic and health-related concerns (Klem, 2021; Mee, 2014; Midgley, 2014). What are the specific needs of local communities in Indonesia's land border regions, and how can development planning be made consistent with those needs?

Method

The qualitative study design consisted of a literature review, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). A total of four FGDs were conducted, involving

national and regional policymakers, border studies experts, local leaders, and residents of land border regions. A total of 125 informants participated across the four FGDs. These methods were integrated to allow a thorough analysis of Indonesia's borders with Malaysia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea. Local communities were asked to recount historical experiences, which gave important background for the analysis in the results (B. S. Laksmono et al., 2020). Fieldwork was carried out in four provinces, namely Jakarta, North Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, and East Nusa Tenggara. The composition of primary data is reported below in Table 1:

As shown in Table 1, the informants in each border area represented a range of stakeholders, including national government, local government, non-governmental organisations, local leaders, community representatives, and security forces. The distribution of stakeholder representation across the study areas is summarised in Table 2:

The data collected were analysed using NVivo software to identify the most commonly used terms, among them *border, community, government, development, trade, infrastructure, police, education, transmigration, smuggling, transnational, company, prevention, left behind, empowerment, supervision, institutional, welfare, organising, coordinating, government department, authority, protection, and representative*. In the open-coding phase, several new themes were reported, including challenges of borderlands, prospects for border development, and changes in border management. These terms served as analytical categories for organising the information systematically and identifying the principal themes, among them central government, local government, security, and empowerment. The axial coding process showed several key issues in border studies, especially the diverse needs of local communities and the challenges of integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches to development.

Table 1.
Informants and Data Collection

No.	Province	Area	Data Collection Method	Informants	Number of Informants (n)	Percentage
1.	Jakarta	Capital City	FGD	National government (national boundaries and border areas, policymakers, ministries, state institutions) and non-government organisations	10	8 %
2.	North Kalimantan	Nunukan Regency: Mansalong District, Lumbis Ogong District, and Tulin Onsoi District	Interview, FGD	Local governments, local leaders, community representatives, and non-governmental organisations	45	36 %
3.	West Kalimantan	Sanggau Regency, Entikong Subdistrict	Interview, FGD	Local government, local leaders, and community representatives	32	25,6 %
4.	East Nusa Tenggara	Belu Subdistrict	Interview, FGD	Indonesian National Armed Forces and local government	17	13,6 %
5.	Papua	Merauke Regency (Sota District) and Jayapura Regency (Skow District)	Interview, FGD	Local government, local leaders, and community representatives	21	16,8 %
Total					125	100 %

Source: Primary data (2018–2024)

Table 2.
Stakeholder Representation

No.	Stakeholder	Number of Informants (n)	Percentage
1.	National government	10	8 %
2.	Local governments	70	56 %
3.	Local leaders	6	4,8 %
4.	Community representatives	26	20,8 %
5.	Non-government organisation	6	4,8 %
6.	Security forces	7	5,6 %
Total		125	100 %

Source: Primary data (2018–2024)

This study analyses the varied resources found in the border regions and reports several perspectives on the complexities in development planning in Indonesia's land borders. The results show the significant dimensions of the axial coding and expose the multi-dimensional gap between central and local governments and between empowerment and security strategies. A top-down approach alone is not sufficient, given the historical, cultural, and context-specific features of the Indonesian borderlands. Therefore, including

local government perspectives is essential because their close engagement with border communities provides valuable insights into local socio-economic conditions and the factors contributing to social vulnerability. Data were further analysed through selective coding to identify and elaborate themes. Each of these themes is depicted in a matrix, as shown in Figure 3. The matrix was used to identify relationships and trends in the data, so as to strengthen the analysis of socio-economic issues and strategies for minimising social vulnerability.

Results

The problems experienced in the border regions arise from three interrelated factors, namely intensive cross-border social interactions, the inherent physical conditions of border areas, and limitations in local governmental capacity. These conditions point to the need to address the multiple and complex dimensions of local needs in the process of turning border spaces from ‘backyards’ into ‘front yards’. However, there are still recurring complexities in social policy development at the macro level. According to Rusdiono et al. (2024), local communities still face difficulties in interacting with national policymakers. In response, there is a need to balance the top-down and bottom-up development agenda to realise more inclusive and sustainable development in the borderland.

A Diverse Spectrum of Local Needs

Life in the border regions is especially difficult for local communities because their existence is closely tied to the wider dynamics at the frontiers, whether along the Malaysia–Indonesia, Timor-Leste–Indonesia, or Papua New Guinea–Indonesia border. B1, an informant from North Kalimantan, said:

“The drug problem cannot be confined to one area alone. In this place, there are numerous things that affect law enforcement. There are approximately 1,400 kilometres of the border—essentially infinite. The boundaries extend to land and sea, and there is an arrest post every 5 kilometres. Luckily, the Indonesian National Armed Forces have set up their posts. If an individual is carrying drugs or multiple cell phones, for instance, they can be apprehended. In 2016, we recorded 16 cases, and in 2018, we also processed 16 cases” (interview with B1, August 2018).

In addition, during an FGD, an informant (A1) highlighted that the situation of the border in Kalimantan is still complicated because

of outstanding boundary problems (OBP). Unresolved demarcation issues continue to create uncertainty in border area management:

“We share maritime borders with ten countries and land borders with three, each presenting its own set of challenges. In West Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, and North Kalimantan, unresolved OBPs remain [...]. Negotiations to address these disputes have been ongoing for more than 40 years, yet no final settlement has been reached. In North Kalimantan alone, the OBPs affect approximately 22 villages [...]. The existence of status quo areas has hindered development efforts, leaving communities at these border points in a disadvantaged position” (interview with A1, August 2018).

The complexity of problems in Indonesia’s border regions is determined by the geographical situation with neighbouring countries, in addition to being strongly linked to social, cultural, and historical aspects. D1, from Papua, explained in an interview:

“Looking back historically, the Indonesia–Papua New Guinea border communities often moved across the boundary, with many Indonesians relocating to Papua New Guinea during times of threat, such as the Pepera [*Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*] era. However, communities now observe for themselves the improved conditions in Indonesia, which differ significantly from both the past and the narratives circulated online. It is therefore essential to examine border conditions through cultural, anthropological, and historical lenses. While some traditional customs have become more flexible, other issues remain—for instance, when parents pass away, the younger generation may dispute inheritance. Such social and cultural complexities can hinder development” (interview with D1, August 2018).

The central government’s idea of the ‘front yard’ of Indonesia—that the nation’s

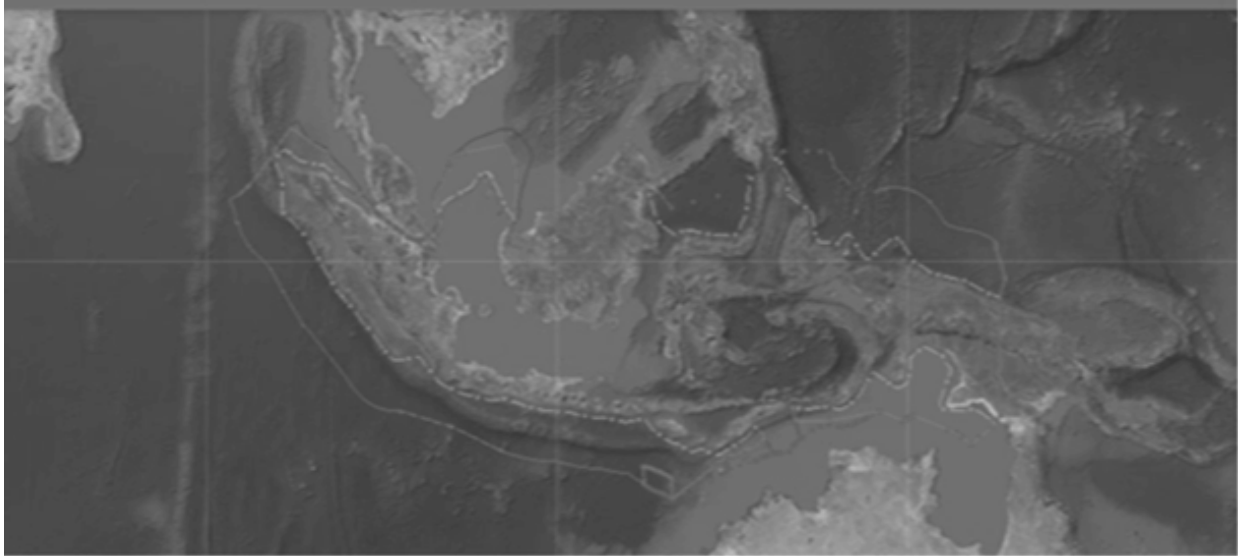


Figure 1. Indonesia's International Borders

Source: <https://portal.ina-sdi.or.id/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=58b672faa80f4b9fb8e25e884fbe41be>

borders are located on the outskirts and still far away from the centre—is what we found in our analysis of the three land borders. This suggests a persistent mismatch between the state's official rhetoric and the lived reality. Border dynamics have evolved with networks, mobility, cosmopolitanism, and globalisation, as reported by Muta'ali et al. (as cited in Daim, 2020). In this framework, the successful advancement of peripheral areas plays an important role in enabling 'front yard' regions to benefit from broader developmental transformations (Figure 1).

The vast extent of Indonesia's geography, influenced by its archipelagic condition, is reflected in land boundaries that include three major islands, namely Kalimantan (with Malaysia), Papua (with Papua New Guinea), and Timor (with Timor-Leste), as shown in Figure 1. The Indonesia–Malaysia border was originally demarcated in accordance with the agreement reached in London in 1824 between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. However, there have been conflicts, especially at five points at the border between North Kalimantan Province in Indonesia and Sabah State in Malaysia and four points between West

Kalimantan Province in Indonesia and Sarawak State in Malaysia, leaving the exact length of the border unclear (Ruhana & Karim, 2024; Susilo et al., 2018). By contrast, Indonesia's borders with Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea were established by the 2005 provisional agreement with Timor-Leste and the 1973 agreement with Australia concerning certain boundary lines with Papua New Guinea, which was formalised as Indonesian Law Number 6 of 1973 (Muta'ali et al., 2018).

This sentiment about Indonesia's extensive land border was echoed by an informant from Papua, who explained:

"In Papua, our border length is about 770 kilometres. The Spatial Information Agency [BIG; Badan Informasi Geospasial] mentioned that it is around 800 kilometres from north to south. There are boundary markers, but we do not have them in the forest" (interview with C1, October 2018)

Even though the border areas have various conditions, many development efforts have been made. C1 said:

"We carry out activities in the border area through BNPP [Badan Nasional Pengelola Perbatasan; National Boundaries and

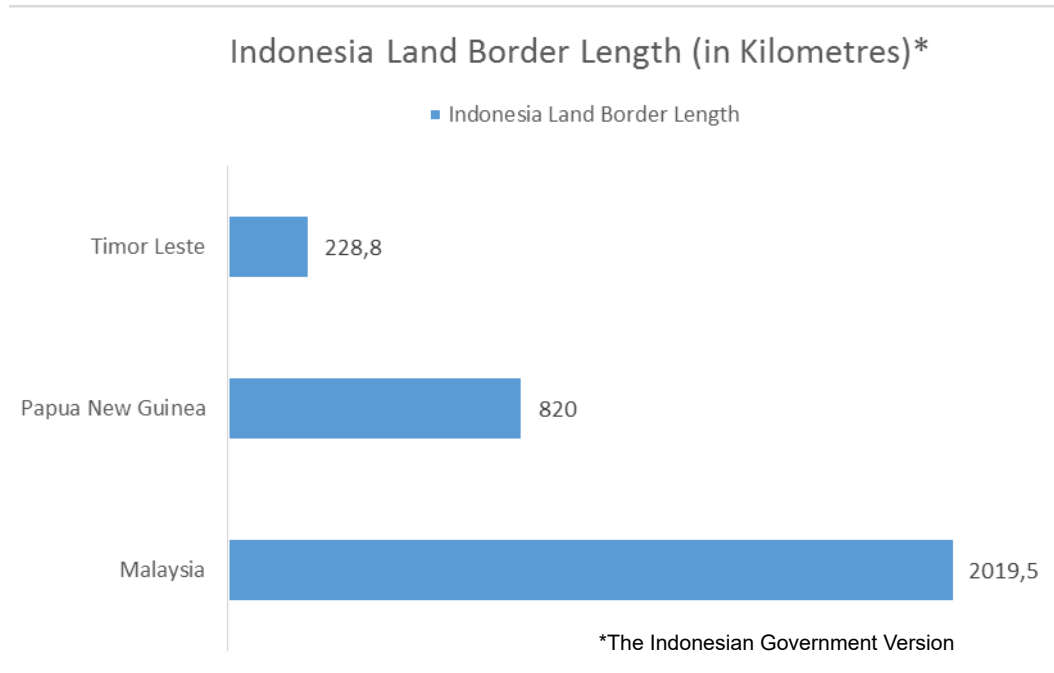


Figure 2. Indonesia's Land Border Length

Source: Adopted from Susilo et al. (2018); Australian Treaty Series (1995); Timor-Leste Maritime Border Office (2021)

Border Areas Agency]. Our efforts focus on strengthening infrastructure, and we aim to implement this in 41 districts bordering other countries. So far, only one district in Belu has been realised, involving Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR]. CSR plays many roles and is largely directed toward border areas. These programmes are also beneficial for companies, supporting both their sales and brand image. CSR involvement is especially evident in programmes such as the development of water infrastructure, since one of the most urgent needs for communities along the East Timor border is access to clean water" (interview with C1, October 2018).

Based on the recurring challenges observed across Indonesia's three land border regions, this study examines the role of social institutions within the framework of social intervention for social welfare policy. These institutions operate horizontally, in a development and security approach based on localities, as well as vertically, as mediators

between the central government and localities. Therefore, negotiation practices in the creation of social interventions can be placed within this dual framework, which allows for social service systems to be restructured. The persistence of the problems, with a lack of continued cooperation among stakeholders, risks reinforcing and aggravating multidimensional inequalities. The summary of the key needs and conceptual approaches for this study is presented in Figure 3.

From a government organisation informant (A1), three interconnected issues contribute to the continued borderland problems in Indonesia. First, there are opportunities and tensions created by the constant cross-border communications of citizens. Second, geopolitical isolation, topography, and insufficient intra-border connectivity render the borders vulnerable. Third, there is a lack of capacity among local governments to deal effectively with the problems. These challenges are connected to several pressing needs in the borderlands, such as human resources,

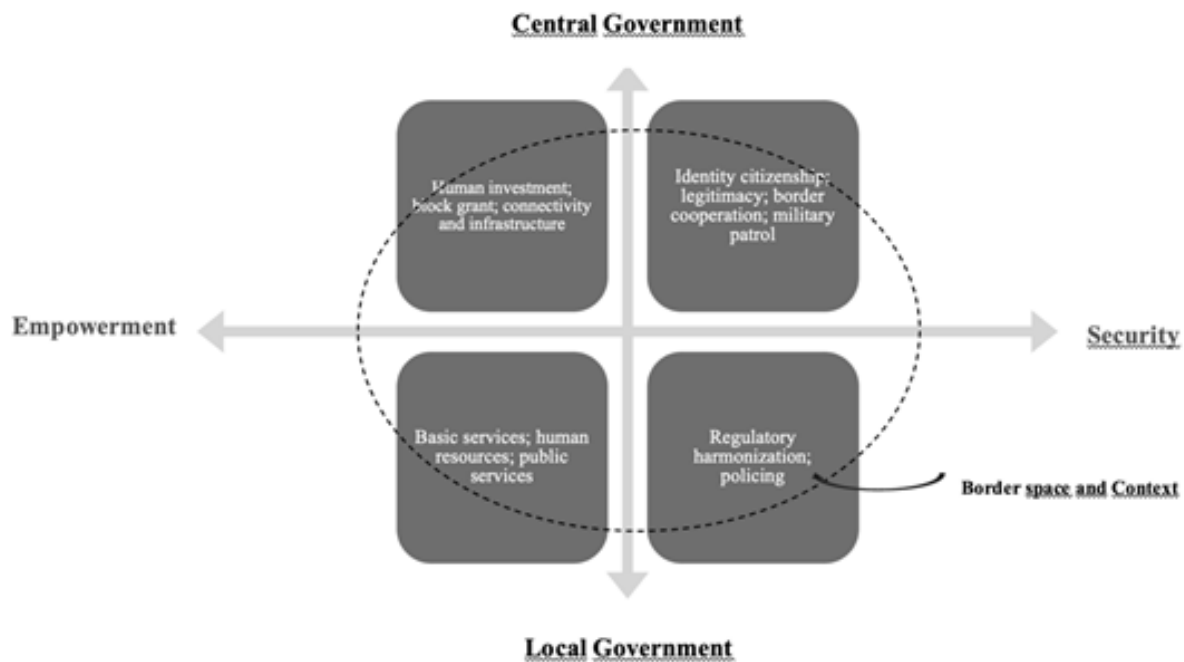


Figure 3. Indonesia's International Land Borders

Source: Primary data (2018-2024)

infrastructural developments, and the creation of regulations that allow citizens to access key public services. The informant from Entikong Subdistrict, C2, also stated:

"I'm also wondering about Indonesia—why not maximise [make the most of] natural resources, human resources, and Indonesian products? Why do we have to fight against each other? How about special subsidies, transportation problems..." (interview with C2, October 2018).

From the data obtained, eight complex problems were identified and synthesised into key dimensions structured along two axes: the central–local government axis (vertical) and the locality development–security approach axis (horizontal), as shown in Figure 3. The focus of border management is on the national security dimension. However, moving away from the security model to a locality-first model will be rife with ongoing challenges. These include limited human resources and investment capacity of local governments, uncertainty over border

authorities due to unharmonised regulations, and problems of identity and legitimacy among border communities. Moreover, a lack of connectivity and infrastructure makes cross-border cooperation more difficult and makes it more challenging to take a development approach that is truly responsive to local needs.

A2 stressed the importance of establishing clear regulations for communities living along the borders, since activities frequently overlap with customs and formal legal borders. In support of this, A3 stressed the need to establish special regulations that could ensure customary practices are compatible with the national regulations, especially in the context of the strong social and economic relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. The vagueness of boundaries in such zones has added urgency for locally specific action in these zones by institutions involved.

The same is true along the Indo–Papua New Guinea border, as A3 pointed out that *de facto* practices and traditional norms pose different challenges. The issue that seems to

rise to the forefront is legal residence, and it is important to note that the perceptions of legal residence may differ. Many people think that they reside on Papua New Guinea land, although that land is technically in Indonesia, and they rely on customary law for this information. The intricacies of such a situation necessitate working with traditional leaders to make sure that policies at the border are contextually appropriate and socially accepted.

The Multifaceted Roles of Social Institutions in Border Management

Indonesia, as a nation, bears the ultimate responsibility to protect its territory and ensure the welfare of its people in the context of securing its borders. The concept of border development is a major issue in policy discussions in recent years, especially with the establishment of BNPP in 2008. As a coordinating entity, BNPP brings together 18 ministries and government institutions under a single coordination system to implement various programmes in the areas of land borders (Raharjo, 2013; Sudiar, 2018). The two closely connected elements of the security and welfare framework are central to the state's approach to the frontier regions.

Security is the foremost issue in the border governance of Indonesia. This is because borders are considered the state's outermost line of defence and must be secured to maintain the national integrity. A security-oriented perspective colours the perception of border regions by the central government. Some areas on the Papua New Guinea border are marked as 'black zones' (*titik hitam*), associated with separatist activities. In the Indonesia–Malaysia border area, transnational crime activities, including human trafficking, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal logging activities, have been affected by weak state capacity (Ikhwanuddin, 2011). The Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI; Tentara Nasional Indonesia) are given primary responsibility for solving the problems. In addition to manning

border posts, TNI's territorial command structure is integrated at various administrative levels, from provinces to wards, for continuous surveillance and enforcement. However, the socio-economic approach in relation to the management of border areas should not be overlooked in the face of concerns for security. Some persistent challenges reported in many border communities are: 1) low-quality human resources, 2) lack of infrastructure, 3) low productivity, and 4) poor utilisation of local natural resources (Ikhwanuddin, 2011). These challenges can create a feeling of detachment among local people, diminishing civic attachment to the nation and strengthening social and economic connections with neighbouring states (Prasojo, 2013).

The welfare approach has been attempted by the Indonesian government to overcome border problems in the long term. The development of this approach is carried out mainly through the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas; Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Nasional) and implemented through BNPP. Several priorities set out in BNPP's 2015 plan show the close linkage of welfare, security, and development in the borderlands. These include making access points to neighbouring states secure and facilitating cross-border interaction, developing infrastructure that meets the needs for welfare while keeping environmental sustainability and national security in mind, and creating local economic centres at the district level. The policy framework prioritises the protection and conservation of natural resources alongside human capital development through expanded access to healthcare, connectivity, and communication infrastructure. In addition, BNPP places considerable emphasis on strengthening cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, including social exchanges, cultural engagement, and security coordination (Raharjo, 2013).

Over the years, debates on infrastructure development in Indonesia's border regions have intensified, particularly after construction works were undertaken on several large border posts in Indonesia's Borneo islands during President Joko Widodo's government. Although new facilities were seen as a long-overdue affirmation of state presence, their construction also brought renewed attention to longstanding criticisms of the government's historical neglect of the borderlands. The absence of significant state investment for decades has left intergenerational effects of social inequality, welfare gaps, and economic disparities between communities on Indonesia's borders and their neighbours (Hadi, 2014).

Limited state funds complicate development in border areas, requiring multi-functional infrastructure projects. Roads, bridges, and posts are expected to promote economic activity as well as mobility, security, and welfare. Even though official programmes do not explicitly use the term 'human security' to describe their aims, infrastructure development can be interpreted as state policy to protect the socio-economic well-being of border communities in terms of everyday life and dignity, as documented in the case of Papua by Pugu et al. (2019). Infrastructure serves as a tool of control and a medium for the state to provide more comprehensive security for those marginalised within the national state.

The study by Ikhwanuddin (2011), conducted for Bappenas, shows that several problems in border governance are intra-governmental. The country's policies on border development were mentioned in the 1999 Broad Outline of the Nation's Direction (GBHN; Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara). However, Indonesia does not have a comprehensive national border law. Regulation is fragmented across various sectoral laws. Muradi (2015) points out that laws governing borders are distributed in several laws, including Law Number 43 of 2008 on State Territory, Law

Number 6 of 1996 on National Security, Law Number 34 of 2004 on Armed Forces, Law Number 31 of 2004 on Fisheries, Law Number 26 of 2007 on Spatial Development, and Law Number 17 of 2007 on Long-term National Development 2005–2025. The instruments may function in isolation when not coordinated by a single framework, leading to overlaps and gaps. This piecemeal approach reveals the government's difficulty in integrating the institutional framework and confronting the intricate challenges of border governance.

Even though regional autonomy has been introduced since 1998, the decision-making process on border development in Indonesia is still highly centralised. The central government has primary responsibility for border regions, according to the law, which leads to structural delays in project execution and implementation since all proposals must go to Jakarta for approval. This rigid centralisation has become a source of frustration for local governments, as substantial interest from domestic and foreign investors cannot be translated into actual investment due to inadequate infrastructure and supporting facilities (Pemerintah Kabupaten Nunukan, 2002). Local governments are expected to balance community needs with national interests, yet at the national level, some obstacles constrain the ability to conduct the process effectively (Rusdiono et al., 2024). The disconnect between policy objectives and implementation results in a persistent divergence between intended outcomes and actual achievements. These challenges are reflected in the interviews with key informants. For example, A3 asked about the lack of public access to basic services in the borderlands. In the absence of adequate access to education, healthcare, and other essential public services, border residents increasingly depend on actors capable of providing such services, including, in some cases, the neighbouring state. Although BNPP was established to provide an integrated framework for border

development, implementation has been affected by weak interministerial coordination. These challenges are compounded by Indonesia's vast territory, which makes effective coordination and administrative oversight across border regions difficult.

According to A4, the BNPP bases its planning on national-level rather than local-level assessments, which may lead to the implementation of programmes insufficiently responsive to the needs of border communities. A1 strongly agreed that issues of stateless people remain largely neglected:

"This is an important issue, but until now there has never been a specific handling. In addition, Indonesian schools in Malaysia are very lacking, and many children end up becoming criminals and causing social problems" (interview with A1, August 2018).

Discussion

Addressing Security Problems in Land Border Areas

Local norms are important for people and essential for guiding their lives. In this global system, some customary practices may

adversely affect local communities because the contemporary implementation has diverged from the original form and intent. For example, people use traditional alcoholic beverages for rituals surrounding marriage and death, but local people may use other kinds of liquor. Hastuti (2022) described the condition of the border area, especially in North Kalimantan, where state regulations and customs have become overlapping. Border security also becomes looser in relation to social boundaries and local customs (Figure 4).

Figure 4 illustrates an international border where officials face significant limitations in monitoring and controlling the movement of people and goods. In this case, the border is demarcated by a river, which, despite serving as a natural barrier, proves ineffective for security. One of the most sensitive areas is rivers as border controls, which also have the potential for illegal trade with economic and security implications for Indonesia and Malaysia. "If we could get smugglers, where have we imprisoned them?" asked informant B2. The diagram also depicts limited migration areas, which make it challenging to control



Figure 4. Frontier of the Indonesia–Malaysian Border in North Kalimantan (Borneo Island)

Source: Primary data (2018)

them. “They can’t live there on their own—only a few people can cross the river or the cliffs at the border,” B2 continued.

The problem has been widespread throughout West Kalimantan, North Kalimantan, and Papua. Reportedly, narcotics smuggling is not well controlled locally, particularly because the operators or traffickers of these drugs often possess enough economic means to purchase narcotics. The high demand for drugs also encourages other groups to become involved in distribution, making enforcement efforts along these difficult border areas harder (Laksmono et al., 2020). Harisoesyanti et al. (2020) pointed to long-standing issues in the three borderland regions of Indonesia. Although collaborative governance has been a central focus of previous studies, its effectiveness in border governance may be constrained by the distinctive characteristics of land-border regions, which often leave residents in a persistent state of uncertainty. The collaborative governance framework proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008) offers valuable insights into multi-actor decision-making. The applicability is limited in contexts where structural challenges associated with land borders persist. According to Tagliacozzo (2001), obstacles including organised crime networks, official corruption, and political dishonesty continue to undermine effective border governance. The vulnerability due to transnational crime in border regions is unavoidable. In this context, the government needs to provide adequate social services to meet local needs. The disparity between Indonesia’s border regions and the central regions increases when these measures are not taken.

Addressing Local Development Needs and Public Services

The design of social policy is undermined by equality, equity, and adequacy (Gilbert & Terrell, 2013). However, there are large gaps in the provision of social services for the people in Indonesia’s border regions. The needs of

communities in the border areas have not been adequately addressed at the local or national level. Border development remains a complex policy challenge, constrained by persistent structural and institutional barriers affecting effective governance and policy implementation. Informant X1 stated that:

“Imagine a Pustu [Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat Pembantu; Sub-community Health Centre] that has no midwife [...]. Additionally, the schools—both junior high and high school—lack teachers. Most of the educators are honorary teachers. As a result, access to education, health, and wellness is limited. The doctor may be present, but the medicine is not available. Why? The remoteness [...]” (interview with X1, August 2018).

This testimony serves as an example of the systemic shortcomings in public services. The lack of trained health workers and teachers, along with limited availability of medicines and schooling materials, shows how remoteness is connected to restricted access to basic rights of receiving healthcare and education.

The dispute over the central and regional governments’ relationship is reflected in the situation of the border region between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Public services play an important role as a tangible expression of the state’s willingness to help people. Meanwhile, the national government needs to take a more ‘organic’ approach to policy-making and the exercise of control, allowing local governments to build capacity and offer the social services needed by border communities. A key question is whether provincial and district governments possess the willingness and the capacity to exercise these powers effectively. Moreover, the central government envisages the country’s border regions as the nation’s ‘front yard’, reporting the importance of promoting inclusive social development. In the context of globalisation, border regions remain among the most vulnerable territories

because of their exposure to multi-dimensional economic, social, and security challenges. Therefore, reinforcing the conception of border regions as the nation's 'front yard' strengthens public service delivery and addresses persistent multi-dimensional development disparities.

Indonesia's 'front yard' concept faces large challenges that will require the participation of all stakeholders, particularly the national government. In the case of the Timor Leste–Indonesia border, the Belu District government shows that the continued presence of former Timor-Leste refugees is a major source of vulnerability. Many former refugees continue to maintain distinct cultural traditions rather than fully assimilate, creating ongoing challenges for social cohesion.

The provinces and forces, including the military, claim there are no major security concerns along the border. However, some sections of the border remain unresolved. Strong kinship ties, rooted in shared ethnicity and geographical proximity, continue to connect Indonesian and Timorese communities in the area. These shared identities help mitigate the potential for conflict and improve peaceful social and economic interactions. For example, small-scale cross-border trade is regarded by local communities as a legitimate economic activity rather than a security threat, despite technically constituting a violation of customs regulations.

Suharto (2016) reported that one area of the village's unpreparedness was in the aspect of readiness of institutions and officials, especially in terms of human resource capacity and the quality of planning documents. Village planning should build social capital, which has been the basis for resiliency. In this context, the local government has an important role closely related to livelihoods. Itasari (2021) also pointed to critical issues related to local development, such as the large territorial extent, the lack of decision-making power of local governments, human resource limitations,

and low institutional capacity at the local level.

The border areas in Indonesia have a wide range of development gaps compared to neighbouring countries. These limitations cannot be addressed with simple instructions, and the solutions may fail to consider the importance of local knowledge in solving complex and sensitive border problems. Project-based and bottom-up policies (Hall & Midgley, 2004), furthermore, have not been as successful in contributing to sustainable results.

Social policy is drawn up at the national level by the central government, but determining the needs of border areas is difficult, especially the social insecurities related to transnational crime. Although required to deliver social services, central government interventions often include infrastructure elements and fall short in human resources for long-term sustainability. This gap shows the need to improve government and community engagement to realise effective, long-term results from infrastructure.

Weak collaboration has been identified as a key constraint to transformation in adaptation by Leck and Simon (2018), and Previtali and Salvati (2021) showed that the dynamics between structures, processes, and actors were key to sustainability. Similarly, Sjögren Forss et al. (2021) reported that citizen-led processes led to more effective programmes, while organisational rigidity reduced the possibility of participation in 'pentahelix' programmes. For effective border governance, there should be institutional arrangements to uphold stakeholder commitment and community participation.

The government's ongoing approach is inadequate in meeting the socio-economic and political needs of border communities. Human resource development is emphasised as a key determinant for sustainability by stakeholders, especially in improving local human capital in the form of sustainable institutions such as agricultural cooperatives in border regions

(Daim, 2020). The Ministry of Agriculture has a central role in improving the capacities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration (Arsyad et al., 2021). Border areas also have a high natural capital value (Raharjo, 2016), but many communities in North Kalimantan depend directly on natural resources for subsistence and trading. This dependence shows the need for continued institutional support to strengthen agricultural communities.

Development and social planning for land border areas must be based on comprehensive social interventions. Community organising, according to Mayer (1969), is a key method that can raise awareness, develop capacity, and allow people to become active members of the community in seeking to improve the local environment and increase resilience.

Integration of the Socio-economic and Security Approach

In Entikong, (Raharjo, 2013) tested two approaches based on developmental concepts, where security and well-being were reported. However, these two approaches did not capture the social and cultural realities of border communities. Raharjo (2016) further found that the Entikong community had strong potential in terms of natural, social, financial, political, and governmental capital, and emphasised the need for capacity development in line with stakeholders and sustainable development.

Boyer (2007) pointed out that organisational capacity building was essential in implementing cross-sector collaboration. Allison and Kaye (2015) defined organisational capacity as referring to human resources, structure and culture, fiscal management, resource and business development, external communications, information technology, facilities and equipment, and planning and evaluation. Therefore, institutional design should consider these dimensions to enhance

coordination and effective collaboration in borderland governance.

In practice, institutional design must bring about resource mobilisation, power balancing, and leadership in the region. Raišienė et al. (2019) reported three key capacities supporting successful collaboration, namely sharing resources, stakeholders' motivation and commitment, and teamwork between sectors. According to Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (2013) and Koning et al. (2017), political will is a key determinant in the Indonesian context. Co-governance initiatives in border areas do not work when there is a lack of cooperation between the centre and the border regions' authorities.

Border area development is a multi-dimensional process that needs to consider the various points of view (Jones, 2009). The complexity of inland border regions creates several interrelated themes, such as the concept of 'space' comprising public, private, and communal institutional elements. In this context, the state becomes a key player in policy outcomes, discussion, and regulation. Historical legacies, as well as the practical needs and formal authority of populations living at the Malaysia–Indonesia, Timor-Leste–Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea–Indonesia borders, are also factors influencing the government's presence in the regions.

The views on borderlands development (Figure 5) show the strategic and administrative aspects interacting with socio-cultural and economic parts of local communities. These overlapping dimensions show the complexity of border governance and development, as well as the need for context-sensitive policies that balance national objectives with local conditions.

In Indonesia, the complexity of social vulnerability in land border areas is connected with transnational crime. Therefore, a comprehensive framework based on geographical considerations is needed due to such characteristics. According to Moeldoko

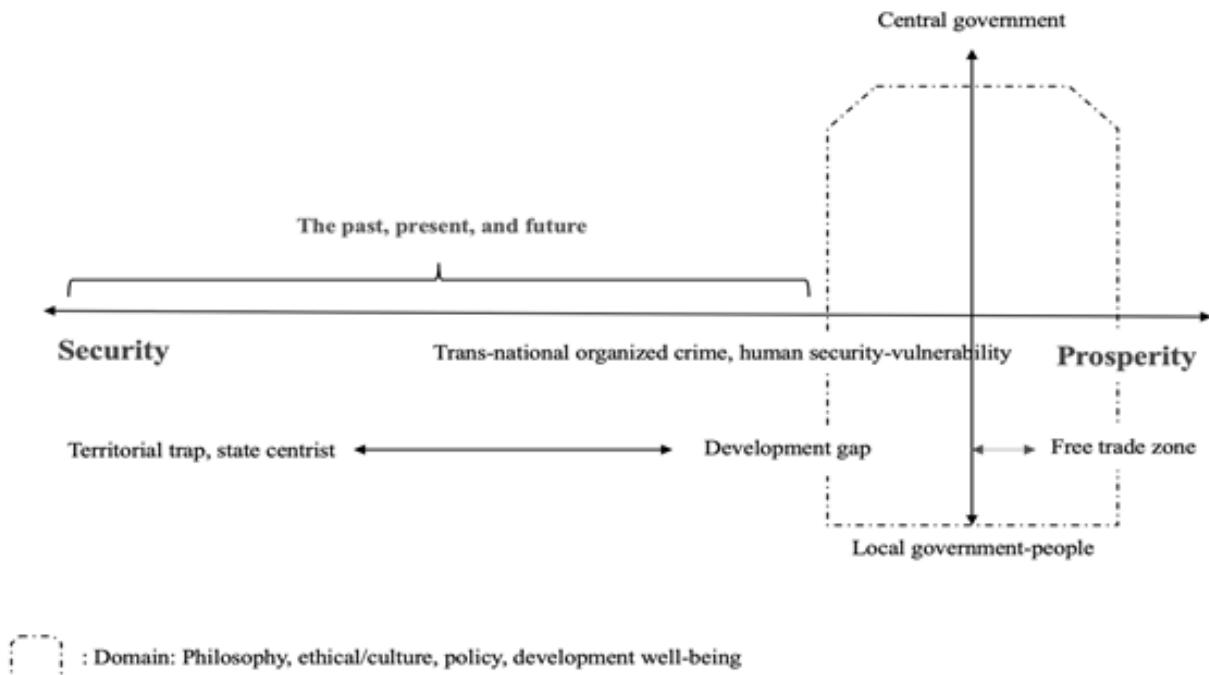


Figure 5. The Land Border and its Management

Source: Adapted from Agnew, 2005; Brunet-Jailly, 2005; Hall & Midgley, 2004; Laksmo et al., 2012; Previtali & Salvati, 2021; Tagliacozzo, 2001; Teff-Seker et al., 2020; Wolff, 2020; Yu & Li, 2020

(as cited in Marwasta, 2016), the land border between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea is particularly difficult since the concept is considered to be in a rugged topography of cliffs and mountainous areas. In a broader context, Indonesia's boundaries cover an estimated area of land and sea of 2,914.1 km with a variety of topography, including mountains, forests, and coasts (Marwasta, 2016). State and national investments in infrastructure must be complemented by strategies that ensure connectivity and accessibility in the areas. Achieving sustainable and inclusive development takes a holistic and integrated approach that engages local stakeholders and potential.

Brunet-Jailly (2005) identified four lenses for analysis of borderland studies, namely market forces and flows, policy activities of multiple levels of government on adjacent borders, political influence of communities, and specific culture. These offer a helpful lens for analysing the complexity of Indonesia's

land borders. The historical process is different in every Indonesian border region, resulting in distinct social dynamics among the people living in each region, which affects the contemporary process of governance (Figure 5).

Agnew (2005) added a typology that emphasised the extent of state sovereignty and the central state's assertion of political territoriality, affecting the lives of populations. Paasi (2009) reported the social construction of the terminology of 'territory'. However, the significance of the 'territorial trap' idea that social and political life can be securely located within a geographically delimited state territory has faded in the age of globalisation. Advances in technology, the growth of cross-border transactions, and increasing digital connectivity are progressively diminishing the significance of physical boundaries, in addition to creating new opportunities for social interaction and economic activity.

According to Leuprecht et al. (2021), the capacity of local organisations is an

important factor in bridging the gap between development and the border region. Insufficient institutional capacity at the local level increases governance challenges and contributes to persistent development disparities between core regions and peripheral border areas. In the case of Indonesia, these theoretical perspectives suggest that border management is an infrastructure project and a state security operation. However, this integrated project must consider economic flows, community agency, cultural identity, and institutional readiness.

Conclusion

Indonesia should place greater emphasis on the existing strengths in borderland development. The results of this study identify several enabling factors that can inform more effective strategic planning and the implementation of social welfare policies in land border regions. Border communities possess significant social and economic potential that can contribute to improving local quality of life and promoting sustainable development when appropriately mobilised. This mobilisation requires co-operation between local government, communities, and stakeholders, including branding strategies for products.

Social policy needs to be sensitive to borderland contexts and must not be based on security alone. Building organisational capacity, especially at the local government level, is necessary to tackle the social vulnerabilities in border areas. Governments and stakeholders must also take a people-centred prosperity perspective, and not an exclusively security-centred one, to solve socio-economic issues. The provision of effective social services and protection can lessen vulnerability and contribute to building community resilience and inclusive development on Indonesia's borders.

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