

LOCAL ECONOMY IN THE NUNUKAN-MALAYSIA BORDER AREA

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Abstract

The economic activities of local communities in border areas have several unique features that distinguish them from other regions. Economic transactions or trade across national borders occur in such a way. On the other hand, the concept and administration of national borders also have implications for viewing economic activities across these national borders. The implication is that economic activities and the necessities of life of the people around the border areas become relatively complex. This research aims to understand and explain this economic phenomenon by taking Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan, as the research context. This study uses qualitative methods with auto ethnography as the primary approach. Data were collected through observation, interaction, natural conversation, and in-depth interviews and complemented by a literature review. The results of this study indicate that cross-border trade is significant and occurs based on kinship and ethnic relations long-term *relationship* thus forming strong social networks and forming border economic integration. The economic interdependence relationship between the people of Nunukan Regency and Malaysians has driven local economic growth in Nunukan Regency as a border area.

Keywords: Local economy, Border region, Auto Ethnography, Nunukan

INTRODUCTION

The border area of a country or between countries has a variety of meanings. The border between them is a national boundary marker between countries, separating what is part of it and what is not part of it (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2017). The border is, therefore, a sign of the sovereignty of a country. The border area is also a point of security relations between bordering countries. However, the border is also a space for community activities around and across national boundaries (Gunay & Witjes, 2017).

Indonesia has several areas with direct land borders with neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Timor Leste, and Papua New Guinea. In addition to land borders, Indonesia also has maritime and air boundaries with other neighboring countries. This is because Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, so the border areas in Indonesia seem to have many "entrances" and are "open." Impressed that it has many entrances and is open, Indonesia stays under the influence of the development of world globalization. The development of world globalization, for example, affects a country's national economy that is increasingly open to cross-border activities. The national economy is increasingly integrated into global or regional markets. This can be seen, for example, in the AFTA or MEA cooperation for countries in the Southeast Asian region that form a free trade zone. The demands of globalization impact the meaning of a country's sovereignty (economy) because the country's boundaries have become relatively vague. The borders of a country should be non-negotiable and inflexible. Indonesia's strategic position on world trade routes also contributed to this condition. This will undoubtedly affect various community activities in border areas, especially cross-border trade activities such

as those in the border areas of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia. Cross-border trade is the flow of goods and services across international land borders within a range of up to thirty kilometers (30 km). This cross-border trade, supported by local economic strength, plays a vital role in supporting the livelihoods of border communities. The distinctive feature of cross-border trade is that individuals or small traders carry it out. The volume of goods traded is usually tiny, with a volume of 100 kilograms, and the value of these goods is less than a few hundred US dollars.

Communities around the border area of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia have long carried out cross-border trade using a barter system. In the past, the people living in the border areas of Nunukan Regency, especially Sebatik Island, and Malaysia, did not know national boundaries like they do today. After the post-cold War world's development, the concept of national boundaries emerged and distinguished one country from another. Administratively, Sebatik Island is owned by two different countries, which are split in a straight line which is the boundary between countries so that the terms Sebatik Indonesia (southern part) and Sebatik Malaysia (northern part) appear. This administrative division of the region originated from the colonial era of the West, which colonized third-world countries. At that time, Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch East Indies, while the United Kingdom colonized Malaysia. The residents of Sebatik and Nunukan Islands come from the same socio-cultural group, Malay (Basundoro, 2013). These socio-cultural similarities make it easier for people to interact with each other and carry out cross-border transactions. According to Rudiati (2018), the economic activities of the Sebatik border community are integrated with markets of other countries influenced by trade networks that have been formed for decades; and the social reality of economic activity in Sebatik also leads to symptoms of economic integration. Furthermore, the emergence of business groups and trading activities will generate employment, create wealth, contribute to tax revenues, and stimulate infrastructure development such as transportation (Christy & Dassie, 2000). Then, state intervention came in with all the rules and regulations governing cross-border trade in the border areas of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia, making cross-border trade more complex.

The complexity of trade networks that have been established for a long time in dealing with globalization and state intervention are also felt by small traders in the Mekong Raya cross-border area in a study conducted by Phadung Heart & Connell (2014) with the title *Social Networks as Livelihood Strategies for Small-scale Traders on Thai-Lao Border*. Cross-border traders, primarily women, are essential in cross-border trade between Thailand and Laos. With the ability to bargain (negotiate) and establish good relations with stakeholders On the other hand, cross-border traders are not only passive recipients but can develop "institutions" that can overcome obstacles and change by forming their own economic and social networks to make ends meet. This social interaction can keep informal cross-border trade ongoing and sustainable for the lives of traders in the Greater Mekong cross-border area. Based on a solid social network, cross-border traders take advantage of the government's need for more attention to small-scale trade and gain certain benefits while the border areas are not experiencing rapid economic growth.

In another study, Cornett (2014), in his article entitled *Economic Integration in Cross-border Perspective: an emerging new system of Production* argued that the eastern Baltic region, which is the dominant partner of foreign trade for the local economy, is one of the processes to increase income in the region. The process of increasing local revenues requires not only political and economic reforms but also rapid economic growth in order to reduce inequality. Trade networks have a considerable impact on local economic transitions. In developing economic relations, trade becomes a link between independent economic units and one of the leading indicators of changes in the economic environment. The strength of the trading network is also found in local economic growth in the Nunukan-Malaysia border area. Thus, trade or barter in border areas can positively impact the socioeconomic development of both Indonesia and Malaysia (Anuar & Harun, 2019).

The complexity of cross-border trade in Nunukan and Malaysia occurs based on economic needs to fulfill the daily life of the people around the border areas. The actors involved in cross-border trade between Sebatik and Malaysia then create various opportunities, arenas, and threats for the development of the local economy of Sebatik Island. Besides that, there is the economic disparity between Nunukan Regency and neighboring Malaysia, which the people in the border areas also feel as a consequence of the condition of the border area, which is marginalized and full of uncertainty from the attention and role of the state. Whereas Nunukan Regency, especially Sebatik Island, is one of Indonesia's border areas which is located in a strategic position and has potential resources because it is directly opposite Malaysia and the Philippines and is located on the ALKI II route. Then, how do people in the border areas of Sebatik and Malaysia develop the local economy to fulfill their daily needs amidst this complexity? Therefore, the phenomenon of cross-border trade between Sebatik Island and Malaysia is one of the unique phenomena that occurs in the border areas of Indonesia and is interesting for further study.

Description of Nunukan Regency as a Research Context

Nunukan Regency is one of 5 regencies in North Kalimantan Province. Geographically, Nunukan is located between 115°33' to 118°03' East Longitude and 3° 15 '00" to 4°24'55" North Latitude; several areas border Nunukan. To the north, it is directly bordered by East Malaysia-Sabah, to the east by the Celebes Sea, to the south by Bulungan and Malinau Regencies, and the west by East Malaysia-Sarawak, the Nunukan area. Is 14,247.50 Km² consisting of 19 sub-districts and 240 villages/wards, and a land border length of ± 1,038 Km with a population of 199,090 people). With a percentage of the poor population in 2021 is 6.83%, and the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) is 4.58%. In the first quarter, economic growth was minus 1.57% (Y-on-Y). Inadequate health facilities, including medical personnel and paramedic located in four hospitals and 16 health centers in Nunukan Regency. This makes people prefer to seek treatment in Tawau City, Malaysia. Likewise, educational facilities, school buildings, teaching staff, and supporting facilities are minimal. However, the trade sector is the second largest contributor to the economic growth of the Nunukan Regency (BPS, Nunukan Regency 2020). In addition to contributing to regional economic growth, this cross-border trading activity increases people's income, absorbs labor, and contributes to foreign exchange. This cross-

border trading activity usually utilizes natural resources owned by Nunukan Regency, such as plantations, fisheries, and tourism. Natural resource products from Nunukan Regency, especially Sebatik Island, are usually sold at higher prices to be marketed to Tawau, Sabah State, Malaysia. As a border area between countries, security issues in Nunukan are very complex. In addition, Nunukan has a fragmentary and highly varied terrain with a land boundary length of $\pm 1,038$ km. 5 border issues have not been resolved between the Government of Indonesia and the Government of Malaysia. The security posts deployed along the border area have not been sufficient, and they have not been able to reach them to secure the border area as a whole because the border is so long and geographically wide that most of the border area is still isolated.

METHOD

The research method designed for this research uses a qualitative approach that utilizes the empirical experiences of several community elements and local economic activity actors. The data analysis technique used is descriptive qualitative to thoroughly describe and thoroughly analyze the phenomenon of local community economic activities in the border areas of Nunukan Regency, especially Sebatik Island, and Malaysia. This study uses the sustainable livelihood theory from Chambers & Conway (1992). The data collection technique involves interviews with the actors involved in local economic development in Sebatik, observing and studying literature. Testing the validity of the data used includes conducting member *checks* and data triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cross-border activities in the border areas of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia were long before Indonesia was not yet independent. Cross-border activities originate from trade and exchange (barter) to fulfill the people's daily needs in the border areas. Then, opium smuggling stole from Tawau City, Malaysia, still colonized by the United Kingdom, and entered the Sebatik and Nunukan areas during the Dutch colonial era. Therefore, the Nunukan and Sebatik areas came to the attention of the Dutch government at that time. After World War II, people brought raw materials to Sabah and brought smuggled goods home to the Sebatik area using people's boats. The goods smuggled by people in cross-border areas at that time included wood, spices, fishery products, necessities, fuel, electronic equipment, and so on. In addition to goods, the distribution of labor (TKI) also crosses borders to be channeled to Malaysia (Rudiatin, 2012).

The local economic activities of the people in the border areas of Nunukan and Sebatik Regencies have several unique characteristics. The economic behavior of the people in Nunukan and Sebatik also has the characteristics of a business relationship based on kinship and ethnic relations. Border communities are closely related to ethnic strength, which includes the Bugis, Dayak, and Timorese. The majority of ethnic groups in this border area are the Bugis, who are spread both in the Sebatik region of Indonesia and Sebatik Malaysia. Based on these ethnic strengths, trade networks were formed following the commodities the people of the border areas needed. More goods for the daily needs of the Sebatik people are imported

from Malaysia. They are getting more intense, along with the increasing needs of Sebatik and Nunukan. In addition, the long distribution chain from the islands of Java or Sulawesi makes it easier and faster for the people of Sebatik and Nunukan to obtain goods from Tawau, Malaysia.

Groceries, food and beverages, and gas to fuel oil (BBM) for household and shop needs are purchased by wholesalers from Sebatik from Tawau, always at a lower price than the price of goods from Tarakan or other areas. Meanwhile, agricultural products from the Sebatik area, such as cocoa, palm oil, bananas, vegetables, secondary crops, and other agricultural products, are often sold to Tawau. For example, oil palm seeds were purchased by a Malaysian businessman in Aji Kuning Village. Both the seeds and the palm oil are sold to Malaysia because the Sebatik area does not yet have its own palm oil processing factory (CPO), so the palm oil is transported by small boats docked at the Aji Kuning pier. Later, Sebatik residents repurchased these agricultural products after Malaysian entrepreneurs processed them into ready-to-use ingredients such as cooking oil or milk powder. Apart from oil palm, the Sebatik people often have to buy vegetables from Tawau, which the Sebatik people themselves sell. This means that the vegetables grown by Sebatik farmers on Sebatik Island to be consumed by the Sebatik people must buy them in Tawau at a higher price because of added transportation costs. Even though the Nunukan and Sebatik regions are dependent on neighboring countries, by participating in selling agricultural and marine commodities, the community is trying to balance the commodities entering and leaving the area (Rudiatin, 2012)

Local economic activities in the Sebatik area are more developed and dynamic when compared to other areas in Nunukan Regency. The market is the center of community economic power, especially in the Sebatik area. This economic strength is influenced by various economic motives from the community to meet their daily survival needs. The market referred to in the context of this research is all transaction processes that do not have a fixed location and take place anywhere and at any time with various commodities according to the needs of the people of Sebatik and Nunukan as well as the borders of Malaysia, both through legal trade and illegal. This favorable condition is caused by transnational trade that has been going on for a long time in the area and is in a strategic position and is supported by river and sea transportation which facilitates the distribution of goods.

According to data released by BPS Nunukan Regency (2023), trade is the most significant contributor to the growth of GRDP in Nunukan Regency. Nunukan Regency has the second most significant contribution to developing the economy of North Kalimantan Province, with a percentage of 29.13% and economic growth of 5.24%. Thus, the local economy grows through trade that has been going on for generations in Nunukan Regency. It is also supported by the statement by Blatter (2000) that cross-border trade contributes to the economic development of a region. This activity brings them out of the vicious circle of poverty (Damon & Jeuring, 2009; Muzvidziwa, 2001). Apart from boosting economic growth, trade can also increase people's income, generate foreign exchange for the country and absorb labor in areas around cross-borders. Therefore, people in the border areas of Nunukan and Sebatik and residents of the Malaysian border feel that cross-border transactions or trade is standard and

has become a daily habit of supporting the needs of the people around the border areas of the two countries. This cross-border transaction continues to this day because of its uniqueness which relies on ethnic strength and cultural similarities with neighboring countries that are dominated by the Bugis tribe, making it easier to communicate, transact and establish trust. Payments used in cross-border economic activities in the Sebatik area also use two types of currencies, namely the Indonesian rupiah and the Malaysian ringgit. However, payment using the ringgit currency is preferable because it is considered to have a higher difference compared to using the rupiah currency, even though the use of the two currencies is currently balanced. Socially, there is no partition or boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia because the people in the border area mingle regardless of differences in nationality. Cross-border transactions are also facilitated by the geographical conditions of the Sebatik area, which is divided into two countries on one island: Sebatik, Indonesia, and Sebatik, Malaysia. This certainly provides convenience and supports community mobilization to carry out cross-border activities.

The people's increasing living needs and the border zone of Sebatik and Tawau, increasingly integrated with world markets because it is in a very strategic position, are seen as assets for the country. The migration factor also contributes significantly to the growth rate of Sebatik's population. Many Indonesian citizens who were deported from Malaysia settled in Sebatik. Ethnic strength, a long-term relationship between the two countries, and a common interest in building an economic network has made the Sebatik and Nunukan economies stable. Therefore, the state began to regulate cross-border activities in the Sebatik and Nunukan areas. However, the regulations governing cross-border activities have kept the smuggling activities the same. This is because, so far, the people of the Sebatik area feel that they are not being cared for by the Indonesian government and depend on Malaysia for various aspects of life, such as daily needs, health services, employment, and educational facilities to business partners.

“All of us in Sebatik are trying to do it ourselves because there is a lack of attention from the local government, let alone the central one. So indeed the people of Sebatik are independent for their economic problems.” (Herman, January 10, 2023)

After Indonesia's independence, cross-border or transnational trade in the country's border areas became more complex. Cross-border trade often creates conflicts and dynamics with neighboring countries. Therefore, regulations regarding cross-border trade are made and agreed upon by the two countries that share a direct border to avoid conflict between the two countries. The Indonesian and Malaysian governments agreed to the Border Trade Agreement (BTA) in 1970, which is still valid today without any renewal. The agreement stated that goods that cross the Indonesia-Malaysia cross-border area, both land and sea cross-border trade, must report to the Cross-Border Monitoring Post (PPLB). Trade across land borders has conditions of 600 ringgit/person/month.

Meanwhile, for cross-sea border trade, it also has 600 ringgit/boat/trip provisions. Along with the development of time, the living needs of the people in the Sebatik and Nunukan border areas and the Malaysian border have increased. This makes the BTA agreement used since 1970 as if it has become a barrier for cross-border community activities in border areas. The inequality that occurs due to no adjustment to the BTA agreement that applies to the increase

in the living needs of people in the current cross-border area has caused local economic activities that have been going on for a long time to turn into activities in the underground economy. Activity Underground economy The events that occurred in the Sebatik and Nunukan areas, as well as the Malaysian border, included trade in rare or high-value consumer goods such as groceries, gas, and fuel which were subsidized by the Malaysian government and sold to Indonesia, smuggling of migrant workers, smuggling of electronic goods, smuggling of wood and so on. Malaysians often protest because they are experiencing a shortage of subsidized goods from the Malaysian government which enters the Sebatik area and are enjoyed by Indonesian citizens. Therefore, another uniqueness of the border area of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia is that it is difficult to separate legal and illegal trading. Neither legal nor illegal trade has an essential role in the economy of the border area community. Even though cross-border trade looks profitable for both parties, from the national economic point of view, transnational trade is detrimental to Indonesia. The flow of Indonesian money used to buy goods from Malaysia can be used yearly to build the national economy through state tax revenues.

Integrated Independent City Policy Model in the Border Region of Nunukan Regency

The dependency of the Indonesian people in the border areas in the Nunukan Regency on Malaysia is not a strange thing. Several circles from the Malaysian state are also aware of dependence in several ways on Nunukan Regency, especially Sebatik. This interdependence relationship can change the perspective of Malaysians towards the Indonesian state soto positively impact the sovereignty of the border area itself. From Indonesia's point of view, Malaysia's dependence is also the most significant potential that the government has never looked at, even though this potential can increase Indonesia's position in conducting bilateral relations with Malaysia.

To reduce dependence on goods from Malaysia, the Indonesian government needs to make several efforts to build industries in the border area following the various local potentials of the Nunukan Regency. Therefore, the management of land border areas must consider at least two critical factors: maintaining state sovereignty and meeting the needs of the people living around the border areas. With the potential of natural resources and the geographical location of the border area as a frontline, any activity carried out in the border area should reflect all activities carried out in the country's territory. In the development of border areas at present, where neighboring countries have developed as centers of economic growth, it is necessary to consider other aspects besides security, such as economic, social, and cultural aspects. The welfare approach, believed to increase the welfare of the community and state opinion, needs to be used as a basis for preparing plans for various activities, including forming international agreements relating to cooperation in managing national border areas. Indonesia's diplomatic relations with several neighboring countries are going well. The border area of the country is an area that has the potential to cause conflict with neighboring countries. Of course, this condition is a common condition that occurs because of differences in the national interests of each country that directly borders. Developing the country's border areas also requires synergy from various parties, including the involvement of neighboring countries. As in the context of

this study, the condition of the dependency of the Nunukan Regency border community on Malaysia is economically the main problem in the border area. This problem can be overcome by building constructive dialogue without coercion and threats by building mutual trust, respect, and equality so that problems can be resolved positively.

Win-win solution through soft *diplomacy*. Soft diplomacy can help economic growth and improve people's welfare in the border areas of Nunukan Regency through several efforts, such as establishing export-import cooperation without complicated and long distribution chains, enforcing provisions related to cross-border activities that keep up with developments in community needs, and so on. If soft diplomacy is successful, it will narrow the social gap between Indonesia and Malaysia's border areas. It can suppress activities in the underground *economy* and cross-border crime in border areas.

Therefore, optimizing soft *diplomacy* toward neighboring countries is an essential factor that Indonesia can utilize to develop border areas following national development goals in border areas. Development in border areas can be carried out by increasing regional empowerment and utilizing the potential of national resources in border areas, such as; human resources, natural and manufactured resources, facilities and infrastructure, social conditions, as well as defense and security, which are the essential capital for development in border areas. Utilization of national resources is used and directed towards development targets at the border to realize: (1) Quality human resources that have a quality level of intelligence, excellent health, and a decent life and have a high spirit of nationalism to develop their region, nation, and state; (2) Management of natural and manufactured resources with strategic value to support the development of border areas in the context of national resilience; (3) Improving facilities and infrastructure as well as public facilities that can be used by people living in border areas; (4) Consolidating the social conditions of the border communities aimed at increasing the welfare and independence of the region and (5) Improving the security system in the border areas.

The growth of new cities in border areas increases the welfare of its people and security at the border. Building system security at the border must be carried out interoperably; it cannot be carried out according to ego-centricity, which means that each relevant law enforcement agency or apparatus carries out its respective duties and functions without proper integration and coordination with problems at the border. The growth of new regions opens up excellent opportunities for managing and improving the security system by improving existing regulations and working relations mechanisms between agencies. Increasing the security system is not only physical security but also security in various areas, such as; guaranteeing security in the field of trade and the community's economy, creating a sense of security and comfort in carrying out development in border areas, availability of necessities and decent living necessities, safeguarding natural and manufactured resources from criminal acts, maintaining state borders, improving the quality of facilities and infrastructure that can be used to minimize the possibility of accidents, and much more that can utilize to improve the security system at the border as a result of the positive impact of implementing development in an integrated manner which can be realized through the front buffer area (*Buffer Zone*) and

ultimately refers to increasing National Resilience in the border areas of North Kalimantan. Thus, the people can feel the state's role amid various globalization demands that can threaten national sovereignty in all of Indonesia's border areas, specifically the Nunukan District.

With the implementation of the development of the Integrated Independent City in the border area, which is a strong point in encouraging economic growth and sustainable development as well as improving the security system at the border, an area that functions as a Buffer Zone will automatically be formed. The Front Buffer Area can also function as a Resistance Base Area in the border area if, at any time, a conflict occurs with a neighboring country. This area is prepared in terms of defense and security and is an area of strategic value in the national security system in the border region. In addition, the mandate in RI Law Number 17 of 2007 concerning the 2005-2025 National RPJP has been implemented by realizing the border area as the Home Veranda or Home Page of the Republic of Indonesia.

Cross-border trade that relies on ethnic strengths and social networks established for a long time by the people in the border areas of Nunukan Regency has made local economic activities with residents of Tawau City, Malaysia, continue to this day. This socio-economic potential needs to receive serious attention from the state. Because it did not receive attention from the state, the growth of the border area of Nunukan Regency can be slower compared to Tawau City, even though the conditions of these two regions are interdependent in order to meet the necessities of life for the people. With various capitals and potentials, both socially and economically owned by the border areas of Nunukan Regency, the state can use them to support Indonesia's development vision, namely to make the border areas the "front porch of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia." Therefore, this research provided an overview of the strength of social and economic capital owned by the border areas of Nunukan Regency and formed local economic integration in the border areas of Nunukan Regency. This local economic integration can be utilized to develop an appropriate policy model for development in Indonesia's border areas to increase economic sovereignty and the welfare of the people living around Indonesia's border areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Cross-border trade that occurs in the daily lives of people in Nunukan and Malaysia is formed from social networks that are long-term *relationships* and then form a dynamic market economy. The social networks formed in the communities around the border areas are also inseparable from the relationship between the two countries. The level of dependence of the community in the border areas of Nunukan Regency on Malaysia to meet their daily needs is high. Therefore, local economic activities through cross-border trade also have an essential role in the survival strategy of the people in the border areas of Nunukan Regency and Malaysia. However, the state views the border area of Nunukan and Malaysia as not an area that poses a threat. Therefore, the presence of the state in the border area seems only to facilitate the social and cultural aspects of the people around the border area. The state should also consider the strategic position and various potentials of Nunukan Regency to improve the quality of life of people in border areas. Based on these conditions, a strategic border area development policy

model is needed to form an Integrated Independent City that can be implemented in all border areas of Indonesia. The Integrated Independent City development model can also be a serious effort by the state to ensure people's welfare and national security through border areas and to realize the vision of developing border areas as the front porch of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Such a strategic step is urgently needed by all border areas and for national security in Indonesia because, through the border areas, it will be seen how the political life of the state and nation in that country is in the eyes of other countries.

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