

# Perspectives on the Development of Border Regions in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Border regions have long been treated as marginal, being far from the centres of government and economic development. Consequently, there has emerged significant disparity in infrastructure and economic fulfilment between these regions compared and more centralised ones. This article examines the influence of the developmentalist perspective, which has failed to empower border communities in dealing with potential threats. This research finds that problematic perspectives have positioned border communities in detrimental situations and conditions, and as a result national security in border regions is severely threatened. This article urges a shift in how border regions are perceived, positioning them not as isolated hinterlands but as the gateways to Indonesia. A development policy capable of centring the margin is thus necessary to transform the various shortcomings in border regions into strengths.

**Keywords:** border region, marginality, social disparity, national security, development policy

## 1. Introduction

Over the past several years, Indonesia has faced complicated issues related to its border regions, from demands for sovereignty, theft of natural wealth, border crossing, to limited infrastructure, poverty, problematic nationalism, and local identities. Various evaluations have investigated the extent of these issues in Indonesia, including questions of welfare and national security, though even from the beginning Amartya Sen has asked, "*What is the relationship between our wealth and our ability to live as we would like?*". Very few have been able to recommend the best approach to developing border regions. A security and prosperity approach has oriented development in Indonesia. However, the question remains regarding how these issues must be approached and whether they are causal or mutually correlational.

Considerable experience and intelligence is necessary to address this issue, as it remains unclear whether the development of border regions can address Indonesian citizens' exodus to neighbouring countries or improve residents' sense of nationalism. On the one hand, truth may be found in Soedjatmoko's argument that, "economic development is not merely an economic process, but involves social and cultural transformations within the nation... development always involves changing perceptions and attitudes towards life as a whole, rather than in separate parts" (1983:21). As such, a comprehensive-integral approach will require cross-sectoral and cross-discipline coordination, the lack of which remains acute in Indonesia.

As such, it is inexorable that development must show partiality towards the border regions that are affected by development, without focusing on macro-level techniques, methods, or economic indicators. Focus must be given instead to the characteristics of (border) regions and how affects the models used for developing models. At the same time, development is bound by economic and political interests at the global and national level, which have their own values and measurements that are much more quantitative. An awareness of such paradigmatic differences is particularly important given that many experts have reminded us of the need to develop and provide space for alternative perspectives regarding human transformations (in response to transformations in their strategic environments) and how these can be integrated into targeted policies to better realise welfare and security targets in border regions.

For this discussion, two key points will be discussed: first, the philosophical basis of development in border regions and the positioning of the "marginal(ised)" as central to development; such border regions represent the "true" face of Indonesia; second, the technical and practical basis for regional development, as well as its use for addressing problems and thereby guaranteeing the community welfare imagined by Amartya Sen through the exploitation of natural resources. Before, however, this article will explore the infrastructural, structural, and cultural conditions being faced in the development of border regions. Cultural analysis will underscore the discussion of policy formulation in the following sections.

## 2. Objective Reality in Border Regions

Debate over the meaning of development has continued, and it cannot be readily accepted as a directive or generic concept in development as practiced in Indonesia. This is in part to Indonesia being a country of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity. The tendency to identify development as the improvement of economic indicators requires greater consideration, particularly in connection to social and cultural indicators. This problem has emerged not only because development is almost always defined as economic development, but also because development has mobilised diverse forms of resources to achieve this "economic development" despite remaining problematic. To avoid becoming trapped in unending debate, it is best to present a comprehensive portrait of current

conditions in border regions, as well as the desired conditions. Three separate dimensions should be discussed: infrastructural, structural, and cultural.

### **2.1. *Infrastructural Dimensions of Border Regions***

Discussion of the limited infrastructure and facilities appears unending in every debate over border regions, with common subjects including road quality, transportation availability, buildings and physical structures, and the different qualities of life enjoyed by communities, as seen from their homes/settlements. Centres of development cannot be said to have developed well, even though this approach has been argued to offer a means to resolve socio-economic disparities in Indonesia's border regions, particularly compared to neighbouring countries. Problems faced by border regions are evident not only in the lives of the common people, but also in the government facilities available in the region: simple government offices, inadequate security posts (on land and at sea), and poor facilities. In border regions, education facilities—aside from being of poor quality—are often located far from settlements and difficult to access.

One concerning situation is the limited available of communications networks in border communities. Residents in these communities are unable to receive Indonesia's state-run television and radio networks, while at the same time receiving Malaysian television and radio; as a result, their sense of belonging is threatened. Malaysia's presence is felt intensively in various forms, and as such citizens' loyalty to their country may be eroded, particularly as that foreign country's expands spatially through various mechanisms.

From this, it can be seen that problems of infrastructure are not caused solely by the limited availability of resources in border regions; more important is the appropriate management of available resources. Without sufficient available infrastructure, as well as appropriate control mechanisms, the effect of development on residents of border regions is quite predictable. Employment, education, healthcare, and social security are limited as a result of poor quality of life.

The limited availability of infrastructure in border regions is not an ahistorical problem. As a result of the government's inability to develop infrastructure, local communities lack access to expected services and facilities. In other words, the infrastructure used by the government to fulfil residents' needs has failed to meet expectations. Ironically, Indonesia has high levels of poverty despite its abundance of natural wealth. As such, natural resources are not sufficient to guarantee the development of the human resources necessary for the competition on the international market place that has become increasingly fierce. We remain limited in our ability to "maintain our sovereignty" over natural resources, including in the forests, at sea, and at home. Rarity and sparsity, thus, are key components of development processes in their various forms.

### **2.2. *Structural Dimension of Border Regions***

Development in Indonesia has faced numerous structural obstacles in terms of power relations between the central and regional governments. These structural relations, as involved in development, affects the partialities in the development process and leads to exploitation and marginalisation (Baswir et al., 2003). Structural obstacles emerge in various forms. For instance, the division of authority between the central and regional governments as regulated by Law No. 32 of 2004 regarding Regional Autonomy and a number of related regulations has yet to be completely resolved. Questions of political commitment and budgeting between the regional and central government, a lack of coordination and overlapping programmes, and inadequate problem resolution, remain key issues that require improvement. These border/sovereignty issues remain crucial in border regions.

In generally, these structural issues are caused by centralised "national policy", which remains within the purview of the central government even after nearly twenty years of decentralisation. It is time for national policy to give greater emphasis to and show consideration of border regions. What is known as "equality" is frequently nothing but discourse, without any actualisation in practice. Communities in Indonesia's border regions continue to live in vulnerability, indicating not only their lack of empowerment but also threatening their human dignity.

### **3. Cultural and Political Perspectives in Border Regions**

Economic and political awareness of border regions in Indonesia has focused on these regions' "outside" character, understood as "margin/marginal" in policymaking and implementation. These regions are not seen, for example, as "bridges" connecting Indonesia and enabling the transfer of knowledge, values, and goods, which rapidly creates similarities between different places connected by the border (regions). "Border" is understood as distinction, with clear differences and inequalities between regions, with variations found along land borders and sea borders.

At the very least, three perspectives offer an understanding of the linguistic and discursive elements of policy attitudes and practices that have developed over the years and had serious consequences. First, border regions can be seen within the context of "borderless society", with the dynamic transformations that occur in

strategic environments being unimportant given that physical boundaries have begun to erode as society has become more open. Not only have traditional bonds pushed local residents to cross borders, but modern communications and new values have promoted openness and increased intensity in international relations, as evidenced by the high rates of migration. Exchange at various levels cannot be avoided, and indeed should be expected. The rise of this borderless society perspective indicates resistance to marginality, with social movements being used to establish networks and create opportunities to improve the positions of local residents. The equal positioning of residents of border regions and residents of other regions is key to these social movements, as well as the borderless society and opportunities they promote.

The increased fluidity of national borders, as evidenced by increased cross-border migration, has direct consequences for citizens' loyalty and obedience. The question of nationalism is important, given that residents of border regions often face conditions in which nationalism is not readily accepted, but rather contested within social relations. Meanwhile, as market facilities and other infrastructure are more readily accessible in neighbouring countries, particularly Malaysia, other currencies (such as the ringgit) are more common than rupiah. Meanwhile, residents receive their radio and television broadcasts from stations in neighbouring countries, again Malaysia in particular; as such, their vocabularies and mind-sets are more strongly influenced by these countries than the Indonesian cultural centre far in Jakarta.

Second, increased migration and communications' intensity (oriented towards neighbouring countries) have created a cultural dislocation of sorts, with cultural sites being oriented more towards foreign cultures than local ones. Cultural dislocation takes several forms: potentially involving physical location, local/national society and culture, (lack of) cultural representation, and the limited or non-existent involvement of the "regional" in policy action. Openness and migration have enabled increased trade of people and objects, the intensity of which has led to socio-cultural "compatibility" as the cultural elements of border regions in both Indonesia and neighbouring countries are exchanged. At the same time, cultural dislocation occurs as a result of limited recognition of local (border) culture; as a result of which, local wisdom and culture is not involved in policymaking. Locality has little meaning in the making of policies related to border regions, and as a result local wisdoms are ignored in policymaking and development.

This cultural dislocation has created a sense of confusion and uncertainty in border regions, where residents are uncertain of which culture to which they belong. As "people on the move", they remain constantly mobile, not only across borders (both legally and illegally), but also socio-culturally as they define themselves with a fluid identity within local and national contexts. At the same time, the self-identification process poses the greatest challenge to these communities, which lack a firm reference system on which their identity can be based.

Third, the residents of border regions and the issues they face are positioned as nothing other than floating masses, indicating that they are disintegrated from existing structures. Culturally, they are not bound by the dominant culture, but at the same time they are not controlled by foreign culture. Meanwhile, their economy does not involve a clear structure of workplace relations, as their employment and livelihoods remain underdeveloped. Likewise, politically, they are free to become whatever they desire, as they are not located within a structure within which they define or identify themselves. These floating masses are historically and sociologically constructed through their lengthy experiences and the continued pressures they face from the general system (Simmel, 1990).

This floating mass is vulnerable to various economic and political interests. It is not uncommon for them to participate in illegal logging in conjunction with foreign entrepreneurs, given that they lack emotional and social bonds with society in general. This floating mass is easily mobilized and exploited for interests that are not its own, and disengaged with the social life of their nation and country. They are mobilized for deviant purposes, even becoming involved in various forms of terrorism, which may pose a serious threat to national life.

Based on these three perspectives of the development of border regions, discussion of these regions means positioning residents within a comprehensive and integrated framework.

#### **4. The State's Challenge in Developing Border Regions**

In Indonesian, the word *development* may refer to three different concepts: *perkembangan*, using the metaphor of a flower in bloom; *pembangunan*, using the metaphor of growing sapling; and *kemajuan*, referring to ideals of politics, liberal economy, and rationality (Hobart, 1993: 7). As such, development is intended to empower communities and individuals to realise the greatest growth and the fulfilment of their intellectual, spiritual, cognitive, and mental potential. This definition, formulated by Mark Hobart, offers considerable space for development to take on various dimensions, including an emphasis on the human capital necessary for process. *Human Development* (UNDP, 2006) emphasises five foundations for the realisation of development, which I hold must serve as the basis for the reformulation of policies regarding border regions and addressing the cultural transformation mentioned above.

First and foremost in the development of border regions is the fulfilment of minimal needs to guarantee the continued survival of local residents and recognition of their citizenship. Where minimal needs, including all

those necessary for survival and security, are met, they will not feel isolated. The government, thus, must work to ensure that these minimal needs are met as its duty to its citizens, as well as to assert its presence in the lives of border communities, something that has long been of concern. Conversely, failure to meet basic food, shelter, and security needs will reduce the credibility of the state and erode citizens' loyalty, thereby creating opposition and resistance in border regions.

Second, equal citizenship for the residents of border regions will offer a means of addressing problems with border communities, where residents have long been positioned as second-class citizens who have been left behind by development. Equal citizenship must apply to opportunities, as well as intellectual capacity, skills, and rights. Followers of structuralism hold that the protection of economic rights, including the right to work, can only be realised when state development processes begin with social conditions that can function conducive as the basis for social change (Budiman, 1993). Equal rights has direct implications for the access enjoyed by communities in border regions. As argued by Friedmann (1991), this is strongly determined by how the state facilitates its people in accessing structural networks, information systems, communication/transportation infrastructure, and business opportunities. Where such access is closed, border communities must look to neighbouring countries to ensure their needs are met. In this, residents' nationalism is seriously threatened.

Third is equal opportunity, which emphasises that a social minimum must be fulfilled and that every member of society should have equal access to nutrition, air, and water, as well as protection from sudden changes in weather, natural disasters, and disease. Materially, every citizen has the right to access six things: economic resources (income and welfare); housing (meeting certain cleanliness and hygiene standards); proper working conditions (including noise, temperature, and hours worked); health (protection from stress and disease, as well as medical treatment); and education (formal learning). This approach offers the basic capital needed for empowering border regions. All people have the right to access education, healthcare, housing, and sanitation. Equal opportunity is key to social justice. However, such equality may be threatened by centralisation, as a result of which residents are far from services and face various forms of structural discrimination and potentially uncontrolled long-term conflict.

Fourth is fair distribution. All members of society have the right to enjoy the fair *distribution* of resources and public wealth. Where reciprocity is horizontal exchange between individuals and groups, distribution is vertical exchange between members of society and those who occupy a higher social status. This is evidenced, for example, in the distribution of collected taxes through cross-subsidies. Distribution also refers to the exchange goods and services through centralised authorities (i.e. *adat* leaders, village chiefs, and religious institutions). In this case, this power and authority are expected to be used to ensure fair distribution of resources to all citizens. The public good distributed include basic, secondary, and tertiary needs, including justice, legal certainty, and security.

Fifth is the social trust and expectations within a community, i.e. the behaviour expected according to shared norms within a community (Fukuyama, 2002). A lack of social trust may be indicated by compulsory or even coercive involvement of citizens in formal policymaking, such as through taxes that are not expected of communities with high social trust. The philosophy of development involves fundamental questions of not only 'for what' and 'for whom', but also 'from whom' development originates. Human interests, aside from being truly understood, must be considered in the 'realisation' of development. A high degree of trust will position people with the dignity they expect, which in turn will serve to initiate and maintain further development. Communities in border communities may be seen as a source of social order, thereby offering greater political space for the expression of their potential and avoiding the creation of a 'floating mass' severed from collective interests by widespread distrust.

## 5. Development of Border Regions: In Search of New Perspective

Based on the above discussion, it may be argued that social development requires at least four components: (1) recognition of the characteristics of border regions, enabling a developmental approach suited to the character of local society—many cases of failed development are rooted in ignorance of the character of local communities, leading to development being positioned as a form of outside intervention that must be resisted—; (2) involvement of affected communities, which have their own preferences for developmental approaches and forms; (3) protection of marginal groups, particularly from various forms of state and central government dominance that do not benefit border communities—groups and communities experiencing development are frequently lack sufficient resources, dependent on others and lacking equal bargaining power—; and (4) use of resources and internal strengths in the transformation process—this will not only guarantee local communities' involvement in development, but also promote sustained development (Abdullah, 2007: 13).

By doing so, development will become a more participatory process, rather than one of mobilisation as commonly seen in development in Indonesia. Humans, in this case, will be positioned not as objects of development, but as active subjects of development, involved from the beginning in identifying problems and formulating, managing, implementing, and evaluating programmes and their end results. With this, a sense of

belonging will emerge. The key to success lies in social awareness of for whom development is undertaken as well as social support for various development initiatives. Here, participation is to be understood as activity, including in programme development and implementation, as well as the creation of policies for the public good.

A humanist approach to development must recognise border communities as active and creative beings. They are people who must be able to determine their own fates (their needs, activities, and steps taken). Only then can development shed the stigma of being outside intervention that is detrimental and coercive, as well as developing a sense of autonomy and avoiding the creation of dependency. Such development must rely on human capital, including intellectual capital as a means through which households can overcome various challenges and threats (Narayan, 2002: 53). As such, development must be linked to efforts to empower communities and maintain their dignity, and show recognition of human intellectual capacity. Human development should be process-oriented, and often involves many people, although this increases the risk that different opinions and interests may create time-consuming debates. Decision making in development must involve all, allowing development to be positioned as emerging from within.

Using a process-oriented approach towards development, the tendency to uniformly plan development at the central level and implement it in border regions without considering their diverse characteristics could be avoided. Such centralised development programmes tend to lack local relevance and fail to address local priorities. As such, gaps emerge between development programmes and communities' real needs, meaning that programmes' implementation is outside the control of local communities. When border communities receive development as a "done deal", without being involved in problem identification and programme formulation, a number of risks emerge and resistance is unavoidable.

## 6. Conclusion

Development in border regions, in many cases, continues to follow mainstream development policies and plans that are rooted in scientific power and rational management, rather than the wisdom of local communities. As such, the results of these programmes have often diverged from those expected (Race and Long, 2000: 22). As such, two quite different—and even opposite—perspectives exist within development programmes: the perspective of developers and the perspective of those being developed. This has been dilemmatic for development programmes, which face clashes between the scientific perspective of developers and the local wisdom of local peoples. As such, there are two types of theories that position human development as a form of capital. First, ultramodernist theoreticians view human development as beginning with the liberal development of the market economy, which requires the reduction of state policies regarding human affairs. Second, postmodernist theoreticians argue that development is nothing more than a discourse meant to justify the control of institutions of power. This power is associated with the Western "power knowledge" regime, which has the capacity to manipulate human lives and social conditions.

In border regions, which have their own specific needs, development must be realised through the analysis, formulation, and implementation of national policies related to local responses, transformations, struggles, and resistances towards development. This involves several aspects: *value negotiation*, i.e. the creation of a process for negotiating between state and individual values, western knowledge and local knowledge, etc.; *planning and evaluation*, i.e. re-examining the ongoing development plans that have been completed over a certain period; *listen and learn*, using development not to teach lessons to others and positioning those being developed not as students needing lessons. People on both sides need to listen and learn. Individuals should be treated as "personnel for conservation", as people worthy of protection, as they all contain their own positive aspects. In other words, conservation should consider not only forests, oil-producing areas, and energy, but also the humans who serve as the main actors of development. The state, in this situation, must not position individual people as actors affected by development projects, but as partners with whom they are working towards goals that are socially defined and determined. Development must not be an act of alienation, but rather a movement towards social involvement, something that has not been optimally realised even today.

Should this occur, the development process will become a participative activity involving diverse elements of society and accommodating varied views and perspectives in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policy. Partiality towards border communities and respect for their dignity can only be realised if theoretical and political spaces make it possible for members of the public, with all the forms of capital they possess, to become involved in every step of transformation processes.

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