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# Humanitarian and socioeconomic impacts of border protection policies: A juridical perspective

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** This research aims to analyze the humanitarian and security dynamics in Kalimantan border protection policies implemented by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The Kalimantan border region is characterized by complex socio-economic interactions, cross-border mobility, and uneven development, which create both cooperation opportunities and governance challenges. Persistent issues such as transnational crime, illegal logging, drug trafficking, and environmental degradation continue to affect regional stability and require coordinated policy responses. **Methods:** This study employs a normative-dogmatic juridical approach by analyzing relevant legislation and international principles related to border governance. Key legal instruments, including ASEAN frameworks and national regulations of the three countries, are examined to identify normative structures governing cooperation. Secondary data from policy reports, Human Development Index (HDI) documents, and regional security briefs are also synthesized to support the legal analysis. **Findings:** The results indicate that socio-economic inequality and illegal activities significantly worsen border security conditions. These challenges are compounded by limited institutional coordination and development disparities. Therefore, inclusive and sustainable development strategies are needed to reduce conflicts and improve community welfare. **Conclusion:** International instruments play an important role in regulating interstate relations and strengthening regional security, although effective implementation remains a key challenge. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This article proposes a framework for synchronizing trilateral development funding with ASEAN principles to enhance regional stability and security governance.

**KEYWORDS:** ASEAN; humanitarian; Kalimantan; security.

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## 1. Introduction

The border regions of Kalimantan, particularly in Indonesia, are confronted with a multitude of humanitarian and security challenges that must be addressed in order to achieve sustainable peace and development. Issues such as border security, potential conflicts, economic inequality, and environmental concerns are prevalent in this region. Research by Jalli & Sualman (2020) has highlighted the importance of understanding security issues around the Sarawak-Kalimantan border. In particular, it has emphasised the need for updated data on border security and safety issues. Furthermore, Wahyudi et al. (2020) demonstrated the potential for conflict in Indonesia's border regions resulting from underdevelopment, low welfare levels, and restricted access to government resources. These issues give rise to tensions that can disrupt regional stability and impede the advancement of development initiatives.

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Rahim et al. (2022) emphasise that development in the Kalimantan Corridor is multifaceted, encompassing not only physical infrastructure development but also poverty reduction, economic inequality, and improved community welfare. This approach suggests that holistic development is essential to create stability and security in the border region. Furthermore, Imelda (2018) discussed the importance of identifying agricultural sector development strategies to support economic activities in the border region of West Kalimantan. Imelda (2018) emphasised that economic growth in the agricultural sector can contribute significantly to the stability and welfare of local communities. These studies demonstrate that a comprehensive approach to border area development can reduce the potential for conflict and improve community welfare.

The establishment of effective cross-border co-operation is of paramount importance for the promotion of sustainable development and the reduction of economic and social disparities. As evidenced by Kurowska-Pysz (2016) and Kurowska-Pysz & Szczepańska-Woszczyzna (2017), the success of cross-border collaboration is contingent upon a range of factors, including the cultivation of amicable personal relations, the implementation of joint planning strategies, and a history of inter-regional collaboration. The objective of this collaboration is to identify solutions to social and economic issues, expand economic opportunities, and reduce the gap in living standards across borders. Wevers et al. (2020) describe how such cooperation can deepen regional economic integration, while Grad-Rusu (2021) highlights the importance of this collaboration in improving the welfare of people in border regions. The success of this collaboration is contingent upon the capacity of the various parties to surmount the policy differences and administrative obstacles that frequently arise in practice.

Cross-border co-operation plays an important role in the development of the region by facilitating mobility, enhancing exchanges and addressing common challenges in border areas (Brunet-Jailly, 2022; Pinnavaia & Berisha, 2021). According to Šindelář (2023), this contribution is manifested in increased interaction and economic integration between bordering regions. Sohn & Scott (2020) explain that the purpose of such cooperation is to solve problems arising from geographical proximity, reduce barriers created by territorial boundaries, and promote effective cross-border exchanges. In this context, cross-border cooperation is intended to support sustainable development and reduce differences in living standards, thereby contributing to the overall well-being of both internal and external border regions, as outlined by Grad-Rusu (2021). Furthermore, Studzieniecki et al. (2022) emphasise that cross-border cooperation plays a vital role in overcoming barriers and promoting development in border regions. It encompasses the crucial aspect of reducing economic and social inequalities between regions by strengthening cooperation networks and dialogue between local governments. As such, it not only creates economic opportunities but also strengthens regional stability and security. In this regard, cross-border co-operation is regarded as a mechanism that integrates resources, policies and initiatives among bordering countries in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable development goals.

Economic inequality in the Kalimantan border region is evident not only in limited physical infrastructure, but also in significant disparities in the Human Development Index (HDI) between peripheral areas and economic growth centers in the three countries (Noer & Suryahani, 2025; Rahim et al., 2024). Current security policy analysis tends to ignore the gender dimension, even though women dominate the small-scale cross-border trade sector, which is highly vulnerable to regulatory fluctuations and bureaucratic tightening. This social vulnerability is exacerbated by the lack of legal protection for migrant workers who are often trapped in human trafficking networks along non-procedural routes along the land border (Noer & Suryahani, 2025; Rahim et al., 2024). Therefore, integrating a human development perspective is imperative to ensure that border protection policies do not widen the systemic poverty gap for local residents. Economic dynamics in Kalimantan demand a paradigm shift from mere territorial control to community empowerment that includes equal access to health and education services. Without recognition of the economic

role of marginalized groups, regional stability will continue to be threatened by social conflicts rooted in distributive injustice and economic marginalization.

In the context of regional cooperation, the significance of a collaborative approach between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei in addressing issues in the Kalimantan region has been a subject of considerable interest in the academic literature. However, there remains a notable research gap regarding the implementation and efficacy of such cooperation in detail. Previous research has highlighted aspects of security, economic development, and natural resource management. However, there has been little investigation into the concrete mechanisms of cooperation between the three countries in addressing cross-border issues such as illegal trade, deforestation, and social issues between border communities. While there have been mutual agreements at the bilateral and multilateral levels, there is limited research on the effectiveness and challenges of these agreements. Consequently, there is a pressing need for more in-depth studies that not only focus on policy formulation but also on implementation and the tangible results achieved in the field. A study that integrates the perspectives of international law, public policy and field studies in a comprehensive manner would be invaluable in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of this cooperation. The study will provide insights into how these three countries can optimize cross-border cooperation to address crucial issues in the Kalimantan region. Furthermore, it will offer workable recommendations to enhance regional cooperation in the future.

Theoretically, border management in Southeast Asia is now facing demands to shift from the rigid concept of state security to a more comprehensive approach of human security (Indraswari, 2024; Ullah, 2025). The securitization of humanitarian issues on the Kalimantan border often results in repressive social problem handling rather than solutions for long-term community welfare. This study aims to examine the synchronization of domestic regulations between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei in accommodating the basic rights of border residents in accordance with the mandate of the ASEAN Charter. The main focus is on evaluating the trilateral coordination mechanism in balancing the enforcement of state sovereignty and the protection of vulnerable groups from the threat of transnational crime. The fundamental question asked is the extent to which current border protection policies are able to simultaneously mitigate the risks of human trafficking and exploitation of natural resources without sacrificing human rights. By identifying existing legal barriers, this study formulates a more adaptive and empirically-based policy framework to achieve sustainable regional stability.

The main objective of this research is to understand and analyse the humanitarian and security dynamics in Kalimantan's border protection policies implemented by Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. The research will identify and evaluate the effectiveness of existing border protection policies, and explore how they affect stability and security in the border region. Practically, the contribution of this research is expected to assist policymakers in formulating strategies that are more effective and responsive to humanitarian issues while maintaining security in the border region. The results of this research will provide important insights to improve inter-state coordination in addressing cross-border challenges and strengthen regional cooperation in Kalimantan. From a theoretical perspective, this research will contribute to the enrichment of the literature on border security policy by incorporating a comprehensive analysis of humanitarian dynamics. This will expand the theoretical understanding of the influence of border protection policies on social and economic dynamics, as well as interstate interactions in the ASEAN region. The study is also expected to provide a new theoretical framework that can be used to understand the complexity of the relationship between security and humanitarian policies in the context of international borders.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research approach

In this study, the research method chosen is normative-dogmatic juridical, which has a primary focus on analyzing legislation, literature, principles, and doctrines relevant to humanitarian and security issues in the Kalimantan borderlands (Marzuki, 2017). The investigation prioritizes a systematic analysis of the ASEAN Charter and Indonesia's Law No. 37/1999 on Foreign Relations as the primary statutory foundations. By scrutinizing these legal instruments, the study identifies the prescriptive boundaries governing trilateral interactions between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. A statute-based approach is utilized to assess the consistency of border protection protocols against established international humanitarian principles. This methodology facilitates an objective examination of legal doctrines that dictate state behavior in sovereignty-sensitive zones. Furthermore, the dogmatic analysis extends to internal policy documents and bilateral agreements to reveal administrative barriers in policy execution. The resulting data provides a rigorous legal baseline for assessing the current state of regional security cooperation.

### 2.2 Conceptual framework

To address the increasing complexity of cross-border governance issues in the region, this legal analysis is augmented by a conceptual framework centered on human security and development metrics. This approach facilitates a transition from descriptive legal mapping to a more comprehensive problem-solving analysis of cross-border humanitarian dynamics, particularly in identifying structural vulnerabilities within border communities. As a result, the framework enables a more integrative understanding of how legal instruments interact with socio-economic conditions in shaping regional stability.

### 2.3 Analytical perspective and stakeholder lens

The methodology incorporates a stakeholder-oriented lens to evaluate how legal abstractions translate into community-level impacts, particularly concerning marginalized groups and gender-sensitive trade. This perspective is essential for capturing the multidimensional effects of border governance beyond formal legal structures. By applying these concepts, the research interrogates the efficacy of current border protection strategies in mitigating transnational crime while upholding human rights mandates.

### 2.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Systematic deduction is employed to bridge the gap between high-level diplomatic agreements and tangible field-level outcomes in Kalimantan. This analytical procedure enables a more structured interpretation of policy implementation gaps within border governance contexts. Secondary data from Human Development Index (HDI) reports and regional security briefs are synthesized to provide empirical grounding for the legal arguments, ensuring that the analysis is both conceptually robust and contextually informed.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Humanitarian Issues and social inequality in the Kalimantan borderlands

The border issue in Kalimantan is a crucial and complex topic, given the fact that this region is shared by three countries: Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. This unique condition creates a number of unique dynamics in social, economic and security aspects. In this context, Kalimantan serves not only as a strategic area but also as a zone that is vulnerable

to various cross-border issues that require serious and collaborative handling between countries (Paliwang, 2021; Seman & Sumanto, 2005). Firstly, social and economic inequality at the border is a significant issue that is compounded by inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic public services such as health and education (Paliwang, 2021). Secondly, national resilience is tested by illegal activities such as illegal logging, illegal mining, and drug trafficking, which further exacerbate the security situation in border areas (Paliwang, 2021). Furthermore, sharp economic disparities between border regions and economic growth centers in neighboring countries pose challenges in maintaining social and political stability. This demands an inclusive and sustainable development strategy to promote equitable economic growth and minimize the potential for conflict.

The social and economic inequality present in the Kalimantan border region, which encompasses Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, has a multitude of consequences for these three countries in various aspects. Primarily, it deepens the disparity between the border region and the centre of the country, which in turn can reduce citizens' trust and satisfaction with the government. This has the potential to fuel social instability and increase the risk of localized conflicts that could spill over into transnational issues. Secondly, the lack of adequate infrastructure and limited access to basic public services, such as health and education, places additional burdens on local and national governments in managing inequality and fostering community well-being. These circumstances not only impede local economic growth but also impede the process of healthy regional economic integration between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. Thirdly, this results in a reduction in the effectiveness of governance and public services, an inefficient allocation of resources, and hinders the development of infrastructure and an inclusive economy. The limited ability of border regions to attract investment is further compounded by poor infrastructure and access to services, thereby exacerbating inequality with more developed regions.

The national security of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei is tested by a range of illegal activities in the border region (Anuar & Harun, 2019; Djuyandi et al., 2024). These include illegal logging, illegal mining and drug trafficking. These activities not only challenge legal sovereignty but also threaten the ecological and social integrity of the region. Illegal logging activities, for example, damage forest ecosystems vital to climate balance and biodiversity. Illegal mining often involves environmentally destructive practices, causing erosion, pollution and land degradation. Meanwhile, drug trafficking not only jeopardises social security but also poses serious challenges to public health in border regions. These illegal activities result in significant economic losses, depriving the state of revenue that would otherwise come from legal taxes and royalties. Furthermore, the social impact of these illegal activities creates instability, with increased crime and violence in the region. This significantly affects the perception of security in the border region, affecting foreign direct investment and local economic development. Inadequate security and deterrence policies in border areas can result in broader instability, which in turn affects bilateral relations between the countries concerned. Consequently, a coordinated response and more intensive cross-border cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei is required to address this transnational security issue.

Significant economic disparities between border regions and centres of economic growth in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei often result in challenges in maintaining social and political stability (Brunet-Jailly, 2022; Zein et al., 2020). These sharp economic differences create social discontent and increase the risk of conflict that can undermine national stability. Less developed border regions often experience limited access to basic services, education and employment opportunities, further exacerbating inequalities. The concentration of economic growth in a few central regions results in a lack of resources and investments in border regions, widening the welfare gap between border residents and those living in economic centres. This not only creates inequality in terms of economic well-being, but also in access to quality education and healthcare. As a result, many border residents feel alienated and neglected, which can foster discontent and threaten social harmony. Addressing these issues requires an inclusive and sustainable development strategy capable of promoting equitable economic growth.

In addition to these structural challenges, weak institutional coordination among border management agencies further complicates effective governance in the Kalimantan border region. Fragmented policy implementation across administrative levels often results in overlapping authorities and inconsistent enforcement of regulations, particularly in addressing transnational crimes and environmental violations. According to border governance studies, effective cross-border management requires not only legal harmonization but also strong inter-agency cooperation and data-sharing mechanisms to ensure timely responses to emerging security threats (Martinez, 1994; Scott, 2012). In the context of Kalimantan, limited synchronization between national and local institutions reduces the effectiveness of surveillance systems and weakens preventive measures against illegal activities. Moreover, the absence of an integrated regional monitoring framework between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei further limits the capacity to respond collectively to cross-border risks. Strengthening institutional coordination through formalized trilateral mechanisms and digital governance systems is therefore essential to improve border efficiency, enhance transparency, and support sustainable regional security management.

### *3.2. International instruments for the protection of border areas*

International instruments addressing border issues play a pivotal role in the management and regulation of interstate interactions in border regions. Bilateral and multilateral agreements designed for border management not only strengthen security, but also open up economic opportunities, thus contributing to regional stability. This approach is particularly effective in tackling illegal activities such as smuggling and human trafficking, as well as in implementing more transparent and accountable security sector reforms. International collaboration through these agreements frequently entails the sharing of information, the pooling of resources, and the implementation of joint patrol operations. These measures are designed to enhance border surveillance and law enforcement capacity. This approach is a response to complex challenges and necessitates cross-sectoral and interstate collaboration. Furthermore, economic diversification in border regions can reduce reliance on illegal activities for livelihoods by providing legal and sustainable alternatives for local populations.

The border management externalisation strategy, which involves working with third countries to control cross-border flows, is another example of this policy implementation. This approach shows how important international agreements are in shaping effective border management practices, while respecting sovereignty and strengthening regional cooperation. Thus, the effectiveness of international agreements in regulating borders not only enhances security, but also supports inclusive and sustainable economic development. This, in turn, contributes to stability and peace in border regions that are often prone to conflict and insecurity. These international instruments, as described by Makki & Iftikhar (2021) and Mumme (2015) provide a much-needed framework to facilitate international cooperation in complex border management.

International instruments governing border issues include regulations that are important in monitoring, preventing the spread of diseases at borders, and during international travel (Gostin & Sridhar, 2014). These regulations are crucial for managing health risks and ensuring public health security across countries. Furthermore, the development of common norms and cooperation frameworks between countries plays a vital role in effectively addressing border issues (Melo et al., 2020; Rocchini, 2016). Such norms direct the actions of various stakeholders in border management, including government agencies, border communities and health professionals. Effective arrangements in border surveillance are essential to identify and control possible risks, such as disease outbreaks, which require rapid and appropriate cooperation and coordination between countries. These instruments not only facilitate the physical security of the territory, but also secure the health of populations moving across borders. Moreover, a common framework of cooperation developed between countries allows for a uniform and coordinated response to public health emergencies.

In addition to security and health dimensions, international border instruments also play a crucial role in addressing environmental governance challenges that arise in transboundary regions. Shared ecosystems such as forests, rivers, and biodiversity corridors in border areas require coordinated management to prevent degradation caused by unsustainable exploitation and weak enforcement mechanisms. Environmental agreements and regional cooperation frameworks encourage joint conservation efforts, sustainable resource management, and the harmonization of environmental standards among neighboring states. According to transboundary environmental governance literature, effective cooperation is essential to mitigate ecological risks that often transcend national jurisdictions and directly affect local livelihoods and regional stability (Balsiger, 2011; Young, 2002). In the context of Kalimantan, where deforestation and resource extraction remain significant concerns, such collaborative instruments provide a foundation for balancing economic development with ecological preservation. Therefore, integrating environmental considerations into border governance not only strengthens regulatory compliance but also enhances long-term resilience of border communities and supports sustainable regional development.

### *3.3. The relationship between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei in resolving the Kalimantan border problem*

The relationship between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei in the context of ASEAN can be understood through the lens of the Charter of The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN Charter), which sets out the basic principles of regional co-operation. In dealing with Kalimantan-related issues, the three countries rely on the principles enshrined in Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter. Firstly, the Charter emphasises the importance of maintaining peace and security in the region, which is relevant in addressing potential border conflicts and transnational security issues in Kalimantan. Secondly, the Charter calls for enhancing regional resilience through broader cooperation, including in economic and socio-cultural areas, which supports infrastructure development and economic growth in Kalimantan. Furthermore, the ASEAN Charter encourages the involvement of all parties in building a stable and integrated market, which is essential in boosting trade and investment in Kalimantan. The Charter also underscores the importance of strengthening democracy and good governance, as well as protecting human rights, which further strengthens the legal and administrative framework in the region. What's more, the Charter recognizes the need to effectively respond to cross-border threats and challenges, which is particularly relevant given Kalimantan's direct borders with other ASEAN countries. In terms of the environment, the Charter advocates sustainable development, which supports nature conservation initiatives in Kalimantan as well as responsible management of natural resources. In addition, the improvement of people's quality of life, human resource development, and empowerment of local communities are focuses included in the Charter's objectives that aim to strengthen the ASEAN community as a whole.

The relationship between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei in the context of resolving the Kalimantan issue is strongly influenced by the legal framework that has been established by each country, including Law Number 37 of 1999 concerning Foreign Relations applicable in Indonesia. This law comprehensively defines 'Foreign Relations' as all activities involving regional and international aspects carried out by various entities within the state, including central and local governments (Article 1 point 1 of Law No 37 of 1999). This confirms that in dealing with Kalimantan issues, not only the central government but also local governments have a significant role, especially in cross-border cooperation that affects social and security dynamics in the region. Furthermore, the Law emphasizes that Foreign Relations and Foreign Policy must be based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, as well as the State Policy Guidelines (Article 2 of Law No 37 of 1999). This indicates that Indonesia's approach to Kalimantan issues should be aligned with national values and broader development goals, including the upholding of human rights and social justice, which are relevant in the context of humanitarian dynamics at the border.

The principle of free and active foreign policy, as stated in Article 3 of Law No 37 of 1999, allows Indonesia to operate independently without favoring a particular power bloc, but remain active in championing national interests. This is particularly important in border diplomacy, where Indonesia must proactively manage security and humanitarian issues without being bound by external interests that may conflict with domestic policies. Furthermore, the creative, active and anticipatory approach to diplomacy required by Article 4 underscores the need for an innovative and flexible approach in addressing border challenges in Kalimantan. This practice involves not only reactions to events, but also proactive planning and initiatives to prevent conflict and facilitate cross-border cooperation, especially in terms of security, trade and humanitarian issues.

In addition to these legal and institutional frameworks, the effectiveness of Indonesia–Malaysia–Brunei relations in addressing border issues in Kalimantan is also influenced by the practical implementation of regional cooperation mechanisms under ASEAN-led initiatives such as the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). These frameworks provide operational platforms for translating normative principles into concrete policy actions, particularly in enhancing cross-border security coordination, facilitating trade connectivity, and promoting socio-economic integration. According to regional integration studies, the gap between normative legal commitments and implementation capacity remains a key challenge in ASEAN cooperation, especially in peripheral border areas with uneven administrative capabilities (Nesadurai, 2003; Acharya, 2014). In the context of Kalimantan, this gap is reflected in limited harmonization of border governance practices and inconsistent enforcement of regional agreements. Therefore, strengthening institutional capacity, improving inter-agency coordination, and enhancing local government participation are essential to ensure that ASEAN principles and national legal frameworks are effectively operationalized at the border level.

### *3.4. Resolving humanitarian and security issues of border protection in Kalimantan*

The utilization of ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies, ASEAN-related entities, and other stakeholders in ASEAN plays an important role in resolving humanitarian and security issues in Kalimantan's borders. Cooperation between these bodies can improve coordination and effectiveness in addressing complex cross-border issues. For example, Sectoral Ministerial Bodies focusing on security and politics can play a key role in facilitating dialog and mediation between member states to improve border security. Furthermore, ASEAN-related entities such as ASEANAPOL (ASEAN police) can provide support in the implementation of uniform and coordinated security strategies across border areas. The importance of intersectoral integration in addressing border issues cannot be overlooked. For example, cooperation between Sectoral Ministries responsible for the economy and Sectoral Ministries managing natural resources can strengthen efforts in addressing illegal activities such as illegal logging and illegal mining that are often at the root of border security issues. By combining resources and expertise from different sectors, ASEAN can more effectively implement sustainable and inclusive policies that address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of security and humanitarian issues.

The management of the Kalimantan border region, which involves Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, must prioritize principles that effectively address humanitarian and security challenges (shown in Fig. 1). First, the principle of sustainability is crucial, ensuring that any border management initiative not only responds to short-term issues but also provides long-term solutions that consider environmental, social and economic aspects. Second, the principle of transnational cooperation should be prioritized, as dynamic border regions require close coordination and collaboration between countries to address cross-border issues such as illegal trade and irregular migration. Third, the principle of inclusiveness is critical in ensuring that all groups of people, including local communities and minority groups, are involved in decision-making processes related to border management. This helps ensure that policies and actions reflect the needs and aspirations of directly affected

communities. Fourth, the principle of transparency must be upheld to build trust and support from the public and ensure accountability in the implementation of border policies. Fifth, the principle of responsiveness should be adopted, ensuring that authorities can respond to fast-changing border dynamics with quick and appropriate policies, in line with current conditions.

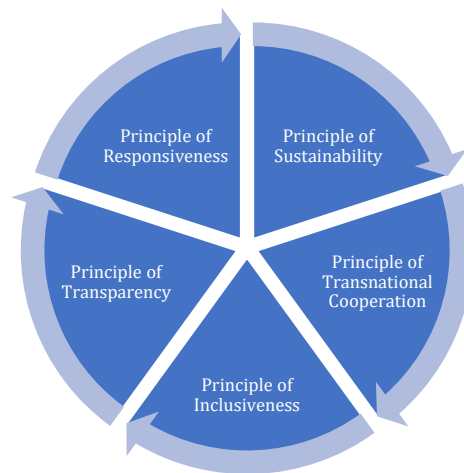


Fig. 1. Principles for resolving the Kalimantan border problem

In the effort to resolve humanitarian and security issues on Kalimantan's borders, ASEAN plays an important role which is framed in Article 2 of the ASEAN Charter. This article affirms ASEAN members' commitment to fundamental principles supporting regional integrity and stability, which is particularly relevant to addressing complex border issues. *First*, the principle of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity emphasizes the importance of mutual recognition of the sovereignty of member states. This helps minimize border conflicts, such as those that may occur in Kalimantan, by ensuring that each country is in control of its territory without unauthorized external intervention. By strengthening sovereignty, ASEAN supports greater political stability and regional security. *Second*, the principle of peaceful dispute resolution is the foundation for addressing tensions and potential conflicts on the Kalimantan border. Through dialog and diplomacy, ASEAN seeks to prevent conflict escalation that could negatively impact regional stability. This principle supports border security efforts that are not only limited to law enforcement, but also address the underlying causes of conflict, such as economic and social inequality.

*Third*, the shared commitment to promote peace, security and prosperity reflects ASEAN's aim to integrate member states' efforts in addressing common challenges. This is particularly relevant in the context of Kalimantan, where security and humanitarian issues often require cross-border coordinated responses. *Fourth*, ASEAN emphasizes the importance of adhering to international law and the United Nations Charter. This principle strengthens the legal basis for ASEAN actions in addressing border issues and provides a framework for operationalizing international legal norms in the foreign policy practices of member states. *Fifth*, the principle of respecting cultural, linguistic and religious differences by emphasizing shared values in the spirit of unity in diversity, supports social harmonization in multicultural border regions such as Kalimantan. This is important to reduce social tensions and strengthen social coherence across national boundaries.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of ASEAN in addressing border issues in Kalimantan is also highly dependent on the strengthening of regional capacity-building programs and cross-border knowledge exchange initiatives. These programs play a crucial role in enhancing the technical and operational capabilities of border management authorities, particularly in areas such as surveillance technology, environmental monitoring, and integrated data systems. Capacity-building efforts also contribute to reducing disparities in institutional readiness among ASEAN member states, thereby improving policy harmonization and implementation consistency across borders. According to regional

governance literature, sustainable border management requires continuous learning processes and adaptive policy frameworks that can respond to evolving security and humanitarian challenges (Jones & Smith, 2013). In the context of Kalimantan, such initiatives are essential to bridge the gap between high-level ASEAN commitments and on-the-ground implementation, ensuring that cooperation is not only normative but also practically effective in addressing real border vulnerabilities.

### 3.5. Gendered socio-economic dimensions and human development disparities in border management

Economic structures in the Kalimantan borderlands signify a critical blind spot in the current trilateral security framework. Women predominantly manage the informal cross-border trade sector, yet they remain disproportionately affected by the securitization of border crossings and bureaucratic rigidity. The lack of gender-specific trade regulations forces these actors into high-risk, non-procedural routes, escalating the probability of exploitation and human trafficking. Current border protection policies fail to distinguish between subsistence-level commerce and organized transnational crime, leading to the systemic marginalization of female traders. A transition toward gender-responsive border governance is mandatory to align security protocols with the economic realities of local communities. The formalization of small-scale trade must be prioritized to prevent the erosion of social stability at the periphery.

In addition, weak institutional coordination between border enforcement agencies and local economic authorities further intensifies development inequality in the Kalimantan border region. Fragmented governance structures often result in overlapping regulations, inconsistent policy implementation, and limited data integration across jurisdictions. This lack of coordination reduces the effectiveness of targeted development programs and weakens the capacity to respond to socio-economic vulnerabilities in a timely manner. As a result, border communities remain trapped in cycles of low productivity and limited access to state support, which indirectly reinforces their dependence on informal and often illegal economic activities. Strengthening inter-agency collaboration and establishing integrated border management systems are therefore essential to ensure that economic and security policies operate in a mutually reinforcing manner.

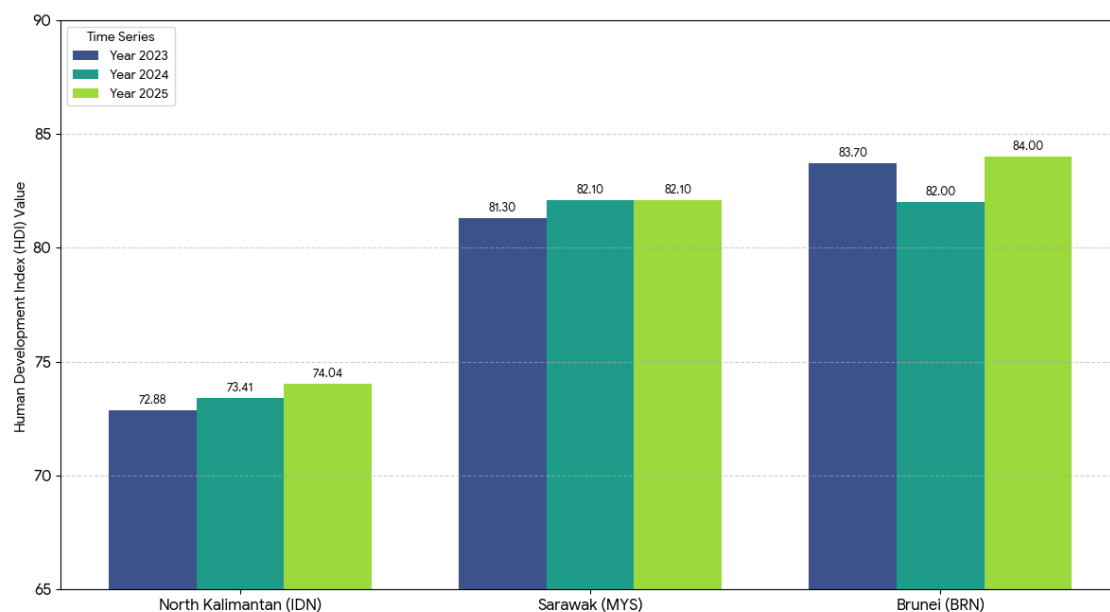


Fig. 2. HDI disparity in Kalimantan border regions (2023-2025)

Sources: (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; Index Simulator for Policymakers, 2025; Malaysia Human Development Index, 2024, 2025)

Significant disparities in the Human Development Index (HDI) between border districts and national economic centers indicate a profound failure in equitable resource distribution. As demonstrated in Fig. 2, a sharp disparity exists between North Kalimantan and neighboring Sarawak and Brunei Darussalam. This "service vacuum" compels local populations to rely on neighboring countries for basic needs, which undermines national allegiance and fosters a dual dependency.

Further analysis in Fig. 3 clarifies the correlation between geographical distance from the national center and lower human development quality. Indonesian districts such as Sambas, Sanggau, and Kapuas Hulu are concentrated in low HDI zones with significant linear distances from the economic hub. Even the most distant regions, such as Nunukan and Malinau, remain stalled at lower-middle development levels. Economic desperation resulting from this structural underdevelopment serves as a primary catalyst for participation in illegal logging and drug trafficking networks. Border management must shift from a paradigm of containment to one of inclusive development to address these root causes.

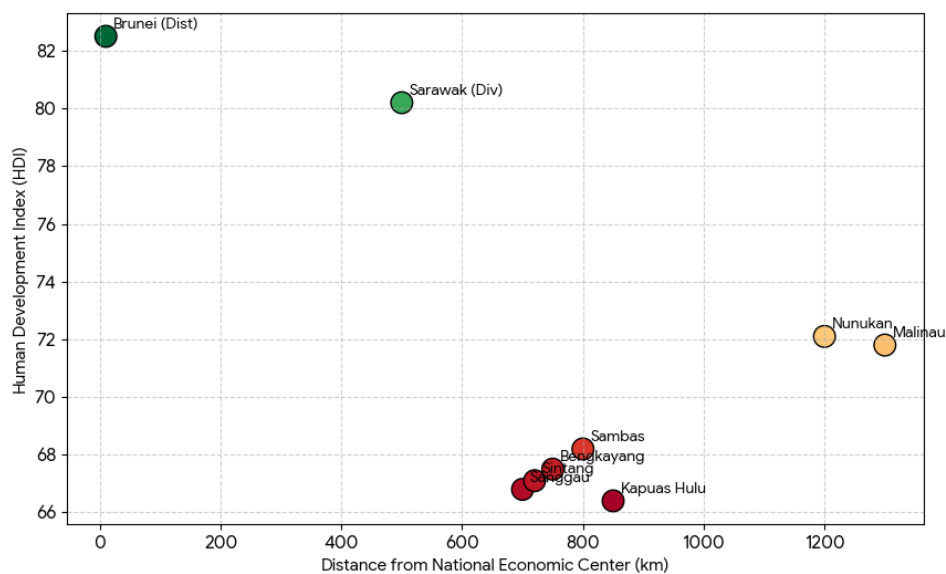


Fig. 3. HDI vs distance from center in border regions

Sources: (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; Index Simulator for Policymakers, 2025; Malaysia Human Development Index, 2024, 2025)

The prevailing state-centric security model in Kalimantan prioritizes territorial integrity at the expense of human security and community well-being. Repressive enforcement mechanisms frequently exacerbate social tensions by criminalizing traditional livelihoods without providing sustainable economic alternatives. This approach fails to address the underlying socio-economic drivers of cross-border crime and instead creates a cycle of poverty and legal non-compliance. Integrating human security metrics into the ASEAN regional framework is essential for transforming these regions from defensive buffers into integrated economic corridors. Policy effectiveness should be measured by improvements in local quality of life rather than the frequency of border seizures or arrests. A holistic strategy must balance sovereignty with the protection of fundamental human rights for border-dwelling populations.

Effective trilateral cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei necessitates the synchronization of social service delivery and legal frameworks for marginalized groups. Joint initiatives should focus on the harmonization of labor laws and the creation of legal protections for cross-border migrant workers. Current administrative barriers prevent the efficient allocation of regional resources and stifle the potential for inclusive economic growth. Establishing a trilateral human development fund dedicated to border zones would mitigate the risks associated with uneven development. Authorities must implement data-driven policies that target systemic inequalities rather than merely

addressing symptomatic security threats. The sustainability of the Kalimantan border is contingent upon the institutionalization of community-based governance and distributive justice.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Humanitarian and security issues on the Kalimantan border require a holistic approach and close cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. The results show that socio-economic inequality and illegal activities such as illegal logging and narcotics trafficking often worsen security conditions at the border. Therefore, an inclusive and sustainable development strategy is needed to minimize the potential for conflict and improve community welfare. International instruments for border protection play an important role in regulating interactions between states and strengthening regional security. This research also underscores the importance of principles affirmed in the ASEAN Charter, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, and enhanced transnational cooperation, all of which are foundational in effectively addressing Kalimantan's border dynamics.

This research makes a significant contribution in both theory and practice to the understanding of humanitarian and security dynamics in Kalimantan's borderlands. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature by integrating social, economic and political aspects in the analysis of border protection policies, thus expanding the understanding of inter-state interactions in the ASEAN context. From a practical perspective, the results of this study are highly relevant for policymakers in formulating more effective strategies to improve security and welfare in border areas. In particular, the research suggests increased cross-border cooperation and the implementation of more inclusive policies that take into account the needs and security of local communities. This includes recommendations for better infrastructure development and wider access to basic services, as well as stronger responses to harmful illegal activities. As such, this research not only offers a new theoretical framework, but also provides valuable guidance for on-the-ground policy implementation that can support stability and inclusive economic growth in Kalimantan's border regions.

However, this study has several limitations, including limited access to more extensive and detailed primary data from each country involved. This affects the depth of analysis related to policy implementation and local dynamics that may not be fully captured. For future research, it is recommended to conduct more comprehensive field studies, involving interviews with local stakeholders in Kalimantan, as well as the development of comparative studies with other border regions in ASEAN. This will allow for a better understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of border policies, as well as the adaptation of strategies that better suit specific local and regional conditions.

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The author used generative AI tools for language editing and clarity improvement. All content remains the author's original work and responsibility.

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