



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v7i5>  
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## A New Approach to Managing the Development of State Border Areas in the Ex-Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) Area of North Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Since Indonesia's independence, border region development has been neglected, resulting in low welfare for border communities. Prosperity is a national aspiration enshrined in the 1945 Constitution. Therefore, a new approach is needed in managing border region development, particularly in the Ex-Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) region, where Indonesia and Malaysia have agreed on definitive boundaries through the 2019 and 2025 MoUs in Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan. Following the delimitation of national borders, various technical and non-technical issues have emerged, such as welfare inequality, political issues, defense and security, and regional planning that is not in line with the spirit of nationalism and the strengthening of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative descriptive juridical-empirical method with purposive sampling and snowball techniques. The results indicate that border development management must prioritize national strategic interests, have a global perspective, strengthen central-regional relations, develop national strategic activity centers, and implement problem-based and regional management. The recommended approach includes policy reorientation, repositioning the role of border areas, reconsolidation of management support, regulatory reformulation, restructuring of authority, revitalization of border cooperation, and governance reform with an outward-looking orientation through the concepts of Collaborative Border Management (CBM), Integrated Border Management, and transboundary border management.

**Keywords:** New Approach, Management of National Border Development, Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) and Welfare.

### INTRODUCTION

In the general theory of welfare, welfare can be interpreted as a welfare state, as stated by Jeremy Bentham, who stated that the government has a responsibility to ensure the greatest happiness of the greatest number for its citizens (Rettig & Leichtentritt, 1999). Bentham used the term utility to explain the concept of happiness or welfare. Based on the principle of

utilitarianism, something that can produce the greatest happiness is considered good, while something that causes suffering is considered bad. Furthermore, welfare according to the United Nations Development Programme is defined as the ability to expand people's life choices, including participation in public decision-making (Rosni, 2017; Nadiya, 2022).

The government's lack of prioritization and commitment to improving border areas is reflected in development policies that are more focused on urban areas and potential areas, while remote, underdeveloped, isolated, and outermost regions such as border areas still receive less attention (Muta'Ali et al., 2018; Sidiq, 2021). The government's presence in border areas is relatively limited, so communities often rely on neighboring countries with better economic conditions to meet their basic needs and engage in economic activities (Kurniadi, 2009; Dewi et al., 2019). From a political geography perspective, border areas can be divided into two important concepts: boundary and frontier. Boundary refers to the boundary line that separates one country's territory from another as a marker of sovereignty, while frontier is a dynamic area in the frontier of a country that serves as an area of interaction and development (Prescott & Triggs, 2008; Aelenei, 2001). In the 2025–2045 National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) with the vision of a Sovereign, Advanced, and Sustainable Archipelago, border areas are expected to be not only safe, but also economically and socially developed as a competitive gateway for international interaction (Patton et al., 2021; Sentanu et al., 2023).

The process of establishing the land boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia began in 1975 and was generally completed in 2000, although several segments remain unresolved due to differing interpretations of the Dutch-British agreements of 1891, 1915, and 1928, as well as differences in coordinate systems and field survey results (Arifin, 2009; Hadi, 2022). These issues are known as Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP). The existence of OBP hampers border area management because it is directly related to state sovereignty and the welfare of the people in the border area, especially because there are villages that have the potential to cause social conflict and bilateral tensions (Kase, 2020; Putrayasha, 2017). Through peaceful diplomacy and bilateral cooperation, the two countries finally succeeded in agreeing on the settlement of the OBP in the eastern sector, as outlined in Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Number 22 of 2019 concerning the Sumantipal River and C500-C600 areas, and MoU Number 33 concerning Sebatik Island, the Sinapad-Sesai River, and Patok B2700-B3100. However, after the signing of the MoU, various new issues emerged, both technical and non-technical. Technical issues relate to spatial planning and the status of the area, while non-technical issues encompass economic, socio-cultural, political, governmental, defense, and security aspects, which then become strategic issues and require a comprehensive approach to border development management (Sidiq, 2021; Muta'Ali et al., 2018).

## **METHOD**

This type of research is an empirical legal research using a qualitative descriptive methodology that aims to explore and analyze the factors that influence the implementation of state border development management policies in the Ex Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) area of North Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia. The empirical legal approach is used because this research not only examines the legal norms and regulations governing border area management, but also examines the implementation of these policies in social, political, economic, and governmental practices in the field (Arifin, 2009; Kase, 2020). The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth picture of the empirical conditions, the dynamics of relationships between actors, and the social realities of border communities in a more comprehensive and contextual manner (Muta'Ali et al., 2018; Sentanu et al., 2023). This approach allows researchers to present data in a narrative and exploratory manner, thereby illustrating the complexity of border area development issues influenced by geostrategy, geopolitics, geoeconomics, security, community welfare, and

bilateral relations between Indonesia and Malaysia (Prescott & Triggs, 2008; Sidiq, 2021). Data collection was conducted through various techniques, including in-depth interviews with stakeholders, field observations, documentation, field notes, official government documents, policy archives, and various memos and other supporting data relevant to the research focus. The use of these various data sources is intended to obtain richer, more in-depth, and valid information that can fully explain the implementation of border development management policies in the Ex-OBP area of North Kalimantan (Hadi, 2022; Dewi et al., 2019).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Chronology of the Problems and Determination of State Boundaries of the Sinapad River, Sumantipal River, B2700-B3100, Sebatik Island and C500-C6700**

The Indonesia-Malaysia boundary dispute in Kalimantan began with a dispute between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which was later resolved through the 1891 Convention. This Convention established the principle of boundaries based on watersheds (Adler, 2000; Prescott & Triggs, 2008). Subsequently, a joint Anglo-Dutch survey was conducted in 1912–1913, the results of which were outlined in the 1915 Agreement complete with a boundary map (Arifin, 2009; Hadi, 2022). After Indonesia and Malaysia became independent, boundary reaffirmation was continued through a 1973 MOU with the principle of *Uti Possidetis Juris*, namely using the old colonial boundaries as the legal basis (Payon et al., 2023; Kase, 2020).

The implementation of surveys and demarcation since 1975 refers to the 1891 Convention, the 1915 Agreement, and the 1928 Agreement. However, differences in field conditions and document interpretations gave rise to several disputed segments that were later categorized as Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP), including the Sinapad-Sesai River, Sumantipal River, B2700-B3100, Sebatik Island, and C500-C600 in Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan (Sidiq, 2021; Jati, 2020). In the case of the Sinapad River, Malaysia claimed the river area based on the results of measurements in 1982 that placed the river mouth north of latitude 4°20' N, thus considered it to be part of Malaysian territory. Indonesia rejected the claim because the map attached to the 1915 Agreement showed the area was on the Indonesian side (Arifin, 2009; Adler, 2000). Indonesia also strengthened its position with the existence of boundary markers resulting from a 1978 joint survey, government administration, and *de facto* control of the territory by the Indonesian people (Putrayasha, 2017; Hadi, 2022).

The B2700-B3100 issue is directly related to the resolution of the Sinapad River dispute, while the Sumantipal River dispute arose because Malaysia used the same logic of claim as in Sinapad. However, Indonesia asserted that the 1915 Treaty map and the 1978 survey results had shown the area to be within Indonesian sovereignty (Jati, 2020; Kase, 2020). On Sebatik Island, the dispute arose from differences in the results of re-measurements of the boundary markers at latitude 4°10' N. Indonesia found most of the markers to be south of the line, while Malaysia claimed they were directly on or north of the line. As a result, approximately 137 hectares of territory were potentially disputed (Payon et al., 2023; Arifin, 2009). Meanwhile, in the C500-C600 segment, the use of Malaysian topographic maps in the 1989 survey caused a discrepancy between the boundary lines on the map and field conditions, giving rise to a dispute over approximately 350 hectares (Asmoro, 1980; Bakosurtanal, 2010). Although a resurvey was conducted in 1990, the issue remains unresolved (Hadi, 2022). In general, Indonesia's position in the OBP dispute is considered strong, supported by historical documents, the official map of the 1915 Agreement, and the results of a joint survey, the existence of boundary markers, government administration, and *de facto* control of the territory (Prescott & Triggs, 2008; Sidiq, 2021).

## **Completion of the Affirmation of National Boundaries in the Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) Area Disputed by Indonesia and Malaysia**

The stages of affirming state boundaries in disputed areas (Outstanding Boundary Problems/OBP) are carried out through joint surveys, installation of boundary pillars, interpretation of historical documents, and agreement on the results of demarcation between Indonesia and Malaysia based on the 1891 Convention and its derivative agreements, namely the 1915 and 1928 Agreements. This process not only emphasizes the technical aspects of measuring territorial boundaries, but also considers theoretical approaches, geographical conditions in the field, as well as empirical and historical facts to produce definitive state boundaries recognized by both countries (Adler, 2000; Prescott & Triggs, 2008).

On Sebatik Island, a joint Dutch-British survey in 1912–1913 installed 18 boundary pillars along 23.96 km, but Indonesia assessed that the position of the old pillars was not entirely on the 4°10' North latitude as mandated by the 1891 Convention (Arifin, 2009; Payon et al., 2023). Through a joint survey in 2019, the two countries finally agreed on a new boundary line with the installation of 148 new pillars along 23.83 km so that approximately 127.3 hectares of territory previously in Malaysia became part of Indonesia, while approximately 4.9 hectares of Indonesian territory became part of Malaysia, and 16 old pillars were declared invalid (Jati, 2020). In the Sumantipal River area, the Joint Indonesia Malaysia (JIM)-42 agreement in 2018 and MoU Number 22 in 2019 validated the results of the 1977–1978 survey as the definitive boundary, so that the disputed area of approximately 5,700 hectares officially became part of Indonesia and included a number of villages in Lumbis Pansiangan District, Nunukan Regency (Putrayasha, 2017; Sidiq, 2021). In contrast, in the C500-C600 segment, the results of joint surveys in 1988/1989 and 1989/1990 determined approximately 405 hectares of disputed territory to be part of Malaysia based on the conformity of the field survey results with the boundary line agreed upon by both countries (Asmoro, 1980; Bakosurtanal, 2010).

For the Sinapad River area and the B2700-B3100 segment, the dispute arose due to differences in interpretation of the 1915 Agreement, in which Malaysia stated that the Sinapad River was north of latitude 4°20' N and therefore considered part of Malaysian territory, while Indonesia continued to adhere to the map attached to the 1915 Agreement and the results of previous surveys (Hadi, 2022; Kase, 2020). The results of the 2022–2023 joint survey finally produced a new definitive boundary with the installation of 170 new pillars and a boundary line length of 11,544 km. Of the total 5,986.2 hectares of disputed territory, approximately 5,207.7 hectares were agreed to be Indonesia's share and 778.5 hectares to be Malaysia's share. In addition, 96 old pillars were declared invalid and will be revoked, while 172 new pillars were recognized as official boundary pillars by both parties. This area includes Lipaga Village, Kabungolor Village, and Tetagas Village in Lumbis Hulu District, Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan, which have long been under Indonesian administrative and social management (Muta'Ali et al., 2018; Sentanu et al., 2023).

### **Causes of the gap in welfare of border communities**

In general, border areas are often identified as underdeveloped and left behind compared to other regions (Muta'Ali et al., 2018; Dewi et al., 2019). In fact, the natural resource potential in border areas is quite large and the socio-cultural wealth of the community is also very high (Kurniadi, 2009). However, this potential has largely not been able to be used as an opportunity to improve the dignity, status, and status of border communities through economic and social welfare improvements (Rosni, 2017). This has become a problem in border areas from time to time, namely the persistent stigma of borders as underdeveloped and isolated areas (Sidiq, 2021). This gap must be gradually minimized towards a prosperous border community, so that synergy and collaboration between stakeholders in the management and development of border

areas are needed (Sentanu et al., 2023). Based on the results of field studies and literature studies, the following are various aspects that cause gaps in border areas:

- a. The One Spatial Plan and One Map policy is not yet optimal.
- b. Sustainable environmental management in the National Border Area is suboptimal. Environmental issues in the border area include declining environmental quality and weak governance.
- c. The management and development of local commodity potential is not yet optimal.
- d. The lack of regional effectiveness in increasing collaboration and the competitive capacity of industrial and trade centers in border areas.
- e. The underdevelopment of the utilization of coastal biological and non-biological resources and the lack of prioritization of environmental concerns, this is especially true in the Sebatik Island area.
- f. The role of economic facilities and infrastructure in supporting production, processing and marketing processes in border areas is not yet optimal.
- g. The lack of connectivity infrastructure reflects the major challenges in connecting remote areas with centers of economic activity and public services.
- h. Basic social services have not been fulfilled.
- i. Lack of government capacity at the border.
- j. The role of institutions responsible for border management is not yet optimal.

The weaknesses in the management of the development of the state border above really require an approach that is integrated into one vision to advance the welfare of the community and improve security in the border areas of Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan, including the Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) area.

### **Approach to Managing the Development of State Border Areas in the Ex Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) Area of North Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia**

Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory emphasizes that border management is carried out through international agreements, border area development, and the protection of sovereignty and public welfare (Kase, 2020; Sidiq, 2021). The government is obliged to make border areas the nation's front porch, taking into account defense, security, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects (Muta'Ali et al., 2018). Based on this, the National Border Management Agency (NBMA) was established to coordinate the management of border areas in an integrated manner between central and regional government agencies (Prasukty, 2025).

Border development management is seen as an integral part of state governance, requiring long-term, comprehensive policy direction oriented toward the welfare of the people and national strategic interests (Patton et al., 2021). This approach encompasses geostrategic, geopolitical, and geoeconomic aspects to strengthen national territorial integration while enhancing the competitiveness of border areas (Prescott & Triggs, 2008; Machmudi, 2021). In its implementation, border area management involves the central government, local governments, communities, and international cooperation as a form of collaborative management aimed at creating sustainable and equitable border development (Sentanu et al., 2023; Sohn & Reitel, 2016). The main strategies for managing border development include:

1. Reorientation of Border Policy Direction  
Shifting the development paradigm from inward-looking to outward-looking, namely making border areas economic and trade gateways with neighboring countries. This strategy is implemented through the development of National Strategic Activity Centers (PKSN) and area-based and problem-focused management.
2. Repositioning the Strategic Role of Border Areas

Changing the position of border areas from the “back porch” to the “front porch of the country” through infrastructure development, development of economic growth centers, strengthening the capacity of local governments and communities, and increasing security and law enforcement.

3. **Reconsolidation of Border Management Support Capacity**  
Reorganizing regional resources and potential through strengthening central-regional synergy, sustainable utilization of human and natural resources, development of special services in the fields of education and health, and strengthening national insight.
4. **Restructuring of Border Management Authority**  
Clarify the division of authority between the central and regional governments and reorganize the institutional structure of border management to make it more permanent and integrated through coordination with the National Disaster Management Agency (NBMA).
5. **Revitalizing Border Partnerships and Cooperation**  
Strengthening economic, defense, and security cooperation with neighboring countries through regional forums such as BIMP-EAGA and Sosek Malindo, as well as encouraging private investment in border areas.
6. **Reform of Border Management Governance**  
Establishing a transparent, participatory and accountable border management system by involving the community and various stakeholders through the following concepts:
  - a. Collaborative Border Management (CBM), namely collaborative management across actors;
  - b. Integrated Border Management (IBM), namely integrated border management between agencies and between countries;
  - c. Transboundary approach, namely a cross-border development perspective that takes into account interactions with neighboring countries;
  - d. Strengthening central and regional institutions so that border area development runs effectively and in an integrated manner.

Border area development is directed towards realizing a safe, advanced, prosperous, and competitive region as an important part in supporting national integration and achieving the Vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. Border areas are no longer viewed as peripheral areas or hinterlands, but rather as the front porch of the country that holds strategic value in the aspects of defense, security, economy, socio-culture, and international diplomacy (Muta'Ali et al., 2018). From a regional management perspective, border development requires an integrated approach through strengthening infrastructure, improving the quality of human resources, developing economic growth centers, and strengthening border management institutions to be able to create equitable development and community welfare (Sidiq, 2021). In addition, border area development must also consider a collaborative and transboundary approach because border areas have characteristics of social, economic, and cultural interactions that are strongly influenced by neighboring countries (Sohn & Reitel, 2016). In the context of Indonesia–Malaysia in North Kalimantan, border area management has become increasingly important after the resolution of the Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP), because it requires spatial planning, certainty of government administration, strengthening regional security, and improving the welfare of communities that have been affected by unclear national borders (Arifin, 2009). Therefore, border area development must be carried out sustainably by prioritizing synergy between the central government, regional governments, communities, and international cooperation to strengthen state sovereignty while increasing the competitiveness of border areas as gateways for economic activities and relations between countries (Prescott & Triggs, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The welfare of border communities remains low, necessitating a paradigm shift in border development that places greater emphasis on community welfare and strengthening state sovereignty. As Indonesia's frontier, border regions must be developed in an integrated and sustainable manner, involving the government, the private sector, and the community. In geopolitical terms, borders are understood as dividing lines between countries (boundaries) and also as areas connecting two countries (frontiers). Therefore, border development cannot be equated with the development of other regions, as it has strategic and international dimensions. The Astacita concept and the Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision serve as the basis for managing border development to achieve community welfare, as mandated by the constitution. Border management must utilize a transboundary perspective and a prosperity approach with an outward-looking paradigm, namely development that is not only oriented domestically but also utilizes the potential and advantages of neighboring countries. The necessary strategies include policy reorientation, repositioning the strategic role of border regions, reconsolidating development support, restructuring authority, revitalizing border cooperation, and reforming governance and institutions. This approach supports the implementation of the Collaborative Border Management (CBM), Integrated Border Management (IBM), and Transboundary concepts to create integrated border development and improve community welfare.

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