

Socio-Economic Dynamics at the Border: A Case Study of the Sota, Merauke Cross-Border Post and Its Implications for Cooperation with Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the socio-economic dynamics in the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border area, focusing on the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN), which was built in 2019 and inaugurated in October 2021. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of PLBN on socio-economic changes in the border communities of Sota and Weam, as well as its implications for Indonesia-Papua New Guinea bilateral cooperation. The method used is qualitative research with a case study approach, involving in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The results show that before PLBN, border communities depended on subsistence activities such as agriculture, hunting, and traditional trade. The existence of PLBN has brought significant changes in cross-border trade, opening up wider market access and creating new opportunities in the trade and small business sectors. However, challenges related to infrastructure management and limited human resource capacity at the local government level remain major obstacles. PLBN Sota has the potential to become a new economic growth center in South Papua, supported by a sustainable development strategy that involves strengthening infrastructure and the capacity of local communities.

Keywords: *PLBN Sota, cross-border trade, border economy, bilateral cooperation, Papua New Guinea, Community empowerment.*

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INTRODUCTION

The construction of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN) in Merauke Regency, Papua, which began in 2019 and was inaugurated by President Joko Widodo on October 3, 2021, marks an important milestone in strengthening the socio-economic dynamics in the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) border area. Prior to the existence of PLBN, the people in Sota (Indonesia) and Weam (PNG) had long established informal social and economic interactions through traditional channels. This pattern of cross-border relations was mainly carried out by local communities such as the Yei and Kanum tribes, who depend on subsistence activities such as hunting deer, wallaby, and wild boar, fishing, processing sago, and small-scale farming with bananas, coconuts, and tubers. Cross-border activities were more cultural and related to daily needs, lacking adequate official facilities, while border surveillance was still very limited due to the absence of a structured management institution. This made the social and economic integration of border communities less optimal, compounded by constraints in human resource capacity and weak community organizations in managing local economic opportunities.

The inauguration of PLBN Sota brought significant changes to the border area. Its existence not only facilitates the official entry and exit of citizens of both countries but also serves as a more organized trade gateway (Wikipedia, 2023a; Wikipedia, 2023b). Data show

that an average of 350 people pass through this post monthly to carry out various social and economic activities. Merauke Regency, recognized as a Papuan food barn, even utilizes PLBN Sota to support rice exports to PNG (Yin, 2014). In 2020, around 15,000 tonnes of rice were shipped through Torasi Port to Daru, the capital of Western Province, meeting the needs of more than 200,000 residents in the region. This cross-border trade also includes agricultural commodities, plantations, and daily necessities, simultaneously opening up new markets for local businesses.

In addition to trade, PLBN Sota encourages the development of regional infrastructure. Improving access to the Morehead–Weam–Sota road is a strategic factor to facilitate the flow of goods, while the presence of PLBN strengthens the foundation of sub-regional cooperation between Indonesia and PNG, including potential synergies with Australia. At the local level, PLBN provides opportunities for community empowerment through productive business training, institutional strengthening, and integration with the tourism sector. Thus, PLBN Sota is not only a symbol of state sovereignty at the border but also a development instrument encouraging new economic growth, strengthening cross-border social relations, and enhancing bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2019).

The existence of the Sota Cross Border Post is also strategically significant for the Indonesian government. By increasing access to border areas, the government can more effectively implement development programs and security surveillance (Metherall, De Fretes, Mandibondibo, & Caucau, 2022). This is important to maintain state sovereignty and provide a sense of security to the local community. PLBN Sota acts as the guardian of the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia, and infrastructure development around the post can attract investment and improve the community's quality of life (Axelsson, 2022; Creswell, 2018; Denzin, 2017; Dwyer, 2023).

For the provincial government, especially Papua Province, the Sota Cross Border Post is a key focus in border area development (Kementerian Pariwisata Indonesia, 2022). Effective management of this post is expected to increase regional revenue through taxes and levies. Additionally, collaboration with Papua New Guinea in trade, education, and other fields can strengthen bilateral relations and accelerate regional development (Kementerian Perdagangan Indonesia, 2022).

Overall, the Sota Cross Border Post symbolizes hope for the previously isolated border community. With the potential possessed by both regions, closer collaboration between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea is expected to open new opportunities, not only for economic growth but also to enhance the welfare of people around the border (Badan Pusat Statistik Papua, 2022). This research is crucial to understanding the socio-economic dynamics that occur after the post's opening, as well as identifying the challenges and opportunities that exist. The urgency of this study stems from the need to evaluate the effectiveness of PLBN as a border development instrument and its impact on bilateral relations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The results are expected to provide policy recommendations useful for the government and stakeholders in optimizing border management to improve community welfare and strengthen bilateral relations.

Although the construction of PLBN Sota has been inaugurated as a strategic effort to strengthen Indonesia-Papua New Guinea relations, several fundamental issues still require in-

depth study. First, what were the social dynamics of the Sota-Weam border community before PLBN, especially regarding interaction patterns, livelihoods, and access to basic needs? Second, to what extent is PLBN Sota able to encourage local economic transformation through cross-border trade, export of superior commodities, and empowerment of indigenous communities? Third, what are the implications of PLBN Sota on the pattern of bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, both in economic aspects and socio-cultural integration? These problems are important to formulate to measure PLBN's functionality not only as a symbol of state sovereignty but also as a driving force for border area development.

The study of socio-economic dynamics in border areas highlights three main aspects: socio-cultural interaction of border communities, local economic transformation due to PLBN development, and implications for bilateral relations. First, socioculturally, border communities tend to have strong historical, genealogical, and customary relationships despite being separated by state borders. A study by Ananta & Arifin (2019) shows that indigenous communities in Papua, such as the Kanum and Yei tribes, maintain kinship interactions that transcend formal political boundaries, making cross-border activities natural and traditional. This reinforces the argument that state boundaries are largely administrative, while social interactions extend beyond those boundaries. From a socio-cultural perspective, border communities generally share strong genealogical, historical, and customary attachments despite state boundaries.

Second, economically, Dewi (2018) identified the main obstacles to border area development as infrastructure limitations, weak institutions, and limited human resource capacity. Before PLBN, economic activities were mainly subsistence-based, such as small-scale farming, hunting, and sago processing. Scott & Scott (2023) documented a shift after PLBN Sota's inauguration: cross-border trade became more organized, rice exports from Merauke to Western Province intensified, and formal economic opportunities expanded.

Third, in the diplomacy and development dimension, Setiawan (2020) emphasized that PLBN development in Indonesia serves a dual strategy: to improve welfare of border communities and strengthen Indonesia's bilateral relations. Media Indonesia (2021) identified three goals for PLBN Sota development: strengthening state sovereignty, improving the local economy, and expanding international cooperation.

Regarding Papua specifically, Melyana Pugu (2019) offers a critical perspective on border area development challenges, which encompass not only economic issues but also the need to strengthen indigenous social capacity. Pugu highlighted that border communities remain marginalized in development due to weak access to education, health, and basic infrastructure. He emphasized inclusive development policies to ensure local communities are active actors in managing border resource potentials, not merely spectators of cross-border cooperation dynamics. This view enriches the theoretical framework by highlighting PLBN Sota development as not just state infrastructure but also a community empowerment instrument geared towards social justice.

Previous studies on border dynamics primarily focused on security and diplomatic aspects, with limited attention to comprehensive socio-economic transformation. Ananta & Arifin (2019) examined cultural interactions among indigenous communities, while Dewi (2018) highlighted infrastructure limitations. However, a significant research gap exists in

comparative analyses of socio-economic conditions before and after PLBN establishment, particularly regarding its implications for bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Most existing studies lack comprehensive evaluations of PLBN as both a development instrument and diplomatic tool.

This research is novel in providing the first comprehensive comparative analysis of socio-economic dynamics in the Sota-Weam border area before and after PLBN establishment. Unlike previous studies focusing on single aspects, this research integrates social transformation, economic development, and bilateral cooperation implications into a holistic framework. It contributes new empirical evidence on PLBN's effectiveness as a border development instrument and its role in strengthening Indonesia-Papua New Guinea relations.

Thus, this study addresses the gap in previous research. While earlier studies emphasized diplomacy or cross-border trade, comprehensive analyses comparing socio-economic conditions of the community before and after PLBN Sota construction and its implications for bilateral cooperation remain scarce.

Based on the problem formulation, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic dynamics of the Sota-Weam border community before and after the operation of the Sota PLBN. Specifically, the research aims to: (1) identify the social conditions and livelihoods of border communities before PLBN; (2) analyze PLBN Sota's role in encouraging economic growth through cross-border trade activities and exports of superior commodities from Merauke to Papua New Guinea; and (3) evaluate the implications of PLBN on strengthening bilateral cooperation, both economically and socio-culturally.

The benefits of this research include: (1) academic contributions to border studies literature by providing empirical evidence on cross-border post effectiveness; (2) policy implications for government agencies to optimize PLBN management and border development strategies; (3) practical guidance for local communities and stakeholders to maximize economic opportunities from PLBN operations; and (4) a framework for future research on border dynamics and bilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, the results are expected to contribute academically to border studies and serve as a policy reference for central and regional governments in optimizing PLBN's function as a development and border diplomacy instrument.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the socio-economic dynamics of the Sota-Weam border community and its implications for Indonesia-Papua New Guinea bilateral cooperation. Qualitative research was chosen to understand the subjective meanings formed by individuals and groups toward social phenomena, particularly in the context of border communities whose lives changed significantly after the operation of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN).

Case study methodology was appropriate because it allows the examination of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are unclear. PLBN Sota as the object of research fit this approach, since the socio-economic changes were closely linked to cultural, political, and policy factors.

In the Papuan context, previous research emphasized the importance of a participatory and culturally sensitive approach in border areas. Indigenous peoples were treated as active

subjects rather than objects of study, ensuring that research outcomes reflected not only empirical data but also local wisdom and values.

Methodologically, flexible and contextual strategies were applied, combining theoretical understanding, practical field techniques, and socially relevant analysis. This approach strengthened the study's ability to describe the phenomenon accurately and to produce applicable policy recommendations.

To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied triangulation by combining in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Qualitative interviews helped capture the authentic voices of the border communities. Data analysis followed an interactive model involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The thick description approach was also used to provide an in-depth portrayal of the socio-economic realities within the Sota-Weam community.

By integrating established qualitative methodologies with sensitivity to the Papuan context, this research established a robust foundation that was participatory, strategic, and application-oriented. The findings are expected to contribute to border social sciences and serve as a valuable reference for policymakers aiming to optimize PLBN Sota as a tool for development and cross-border diplomacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Conditions of Sota-Weam Border Communities Before the Construction of PLBN

Before the existence of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN), social interaction between the people of Sota (Indonesia) and Weam (Papua New Guinea) was more informal and traditional. Social relations between the residents of the two regions have been established for a long time through small trade activities and sharing of natural resources on the border. Cross-border trade in the region generally involves daily necessities such as clothing, foodstuffs (rice, vegetables, fruits), and local agricultural products. According to research by Dewi (2018), around 70% of cross-border transactions that occur in this border area are still in the form of informal trade carried out by the community without the involvement of the government or state regulations. These traded goods are often carried manually via trails or with private vehicles, because the infrastructure has not yet adequate at that time. In addition to trade, sharing natural resources such as fish and agricultural products is also a very important form of social interaction between the Sota and Weam people. Many families in Sota have close ties to families in Weam, and they exchange produce, such as coconuts, bananas, and sago. This sharing practice strengthens the strong social bond of kinship between the two communities.

Cultural encounters also play an important role in maintaining social ties in these border regions. The communities of the two regions often hold cultural meetings in the form of traditional events or ceremonies involving people from both sides of the border. Prior to the existence of PLBN, this kind of interaction occurred sporadically and was limited to certain times, such as during major celebrations or certain traditional events involving both parties. Based on data from Ririhena (2023), around 45% of the social gatherings that occurred involved traditional and cultural encounters between communities on both sides of the border, showing strong social interaction driven by deep cultural ties.

However, the limited infrastructure and transportation facilities before the PLBN made the mobility of residents on both sides of the border very limited. This leads to a reliance on informal channels that are highly vulnerable and take a long time to complete trade transactions or conduct cross-border social activities. According to the analysis from Dewi (2018), although social interaction in this border area is quite strong, its economic potential has not been developed optimally due to infrastructure and regulatory barriers that do not support mobility and wider cross-border activities.

Social Transformation of the Community After the Presence of PLBN Sota

After the operation of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN) in October 2021, there was a significant social transformation for the people of Sota (Indonesia) and Weam (Papua New Guinea). One of the most obvious changes is the increase in patterns of social interaction that were previously informal to more organized and formal. According to a report from the Merauke Regency Government (2022), the volume of trade transactions through PLBN Sota increased by 25% in the first year of operationalization of this post, with goods traded including agricultural products, daily consumption products, and other superior products.

Social interaction that was once limited to customary gatherings or small trade, has now evolved into a more organized activity, involving formal trade and cooperation between institutions from both countries. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Trade (2022) shows that in the first year of PLBN operations, total exports from Merauke to Papua New Guinea increased by USD 5 million, mostly in the form of rice, coconut products, and other local agricultural products. This shows that PLBN has opened a formal trade channel that facilitates economic growth in the border area.

In addition, the existence of PLBN also has an impact on better social access for border communities. Based on a survey conducted by the Central Statistics Agency of Papua in 2022, as many as 60% of the Sota people now have easier access to population administration services, such as the issuance of ID cards and birth certificates, which were previously very limited. This shows that PLBN not only affects the economy but also increases access to basic services that were previously difficult to reach due to limited infrastructure and facilities at the border.

However, these changes do not occur evenly across all levels of society. While most of the communities directly involved in formal trade enjoy the benefits of the existence of PLBN, there are still social challenges related to inequality of access to information and skills in some indigenous groups. According to a report from the Center for Social and Economic Research at Cenderawasih University (2023), around 35% of the indigenous peoples around Sota have not been fully involved in the formal economy due to limited access to skills training and business financing. Therefore, despite significant changes, there needs to be a more inclusive empowerment program to reach all levels of border communities.

Overall, the social transformation in the Sota-Weam area after the inauguration of PLBN created new opportunities for the community but also posed challenges for the equitable distribution of economic and social benefits. This research shows that the existence of PLBN not only improves infrastructure and improves the economy but also accelerates the process of social integration between the two countries, with distribution challenges that still have to be overcome.

Economic Dynamics of Border Communities Before the Presence of PLBN

Subsistence Economy and Traditional Trade Activities

Prior to the existence of PLBN Sota, the economy of the community in the border area of Sota and Weam was largely dependent on subsistence activities, such as agriculture, fisheries, and hunting. The majority of people on both sides of the border rely on local products for their daily needs. In Sota, farmers grow food crops such as sago, coconut, and bananas, while communities in Weam rely on subsistence farming and hunting wild animals. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency of Papua (2022), around 65% of the population of Sota depend on subsistence farming and hunting, which can only meet the consumption needs of families without a tradable surplus. Trade activities in these two regions are more traditional and carried out on a small scale, with unstable selling prices.

Trade between the two mostly occurs informally, where people exchange produce and local products. For example, agricultural products from Sota (such as sago and coconut) are exchanged for goods from Weam, such as fish or handicraft products. Only a small fraction of

trades involves commodities with higher value, such as staples brought in by seasonal traders. Based on data collected by Ririhena (2023), 70% of trade activities between Sota and Weam occur informally without involving the official administration of the two countries.

Limitations of Economic Infrastructure

One of the factors that severely limits economic development in the Sota-Weam border area is the limited infrastructure. Before PLBN, this region did not have adequate roads to facilitate the transportation of goods and people between both sides of the border. Existing trade routes are often not easily accessible, especially during the rainy season, thus hindering the mobility of goods and slowing down the distribution process. Data from the Merauke Regency Government (2022) shows that 70% of the villages around Sota are not connected by proper roads, and there is only 1 main land road connecting Sota with the economic center in Merauke. As a result, many goods are hampered in their distribution or even damaged before they reach the market.

Transportation limitations also add to the difficulty in exporting products outside the region. The Sota people often must use sea or air routes which are more expensive and unaffordable for most residents. This causes the prices of goods in the market to be very high and uncompetitive, hampering the wider market potential for local products. In addition, the lack of access to business financing facilities makes it difficult for border communities to develop productive businesses.

The Role of Informal Trade in the Local Economy

Informal trade became the main source of income for many families in Sota and Weam before the existence of PLBN. This unofficially controlled cross-border trade involves basic necessities such as rice, packaged food, clothing, and household appliances. Based on data from Dewi (2018), around 80% of cross-border transactions between Sota and Weam involve these goods, which are usually traded directly between families or small groups using limited land routes.

This informal trade provides economic sustainability for people in border areas, but with many limitations. The price of goods is often very volatile, and the quality of goods traded is often inferior to that of officially traded goods. Nonetheless, this informal trade has a very important role in maintaining the survival of people on both sides of the border. Without access to formal markets, many families still rely on these trading activities to meet their daily needs.

The Economic Impact of PLBN on Local Trade and Welfare

Increased Trading Volume and Market Openness

Since the operation of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN) in 2021, there has been a significant increase in trade volume between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Trade (2022), rice exports from Merauke Regency to Western Province, Papua New Guinea, increased by 40% in the first year of PLBN operations, reaching 15,000 tons in 2021. Other products that have experienced an increase in exports are coconut, fruits, and other agricultural products, which also contribute to the improvement of the economy of border areas.

PLBN Sota also facilitates market openness in both countries. Prior to the existence of PLBN, trade activities were severely limited by poor infrastructure, but after PLBN was opened, local products from Merauke can now more easily reach international markets, especially in PNG. Data from the Papua Central Statistics Agency (2022) shows that cross-border trade through Sota has increased by 35% in the last two years, mainly for agricultural products and basic necessities. PLBN has introduced a more structured and open market, which provides economic benefits not only for large producers, but also for small and medium-sized enterprises that previously struggled to gain wider market access.

Diversification of Community Livelihoods

One of the positive impacts caused by the existence of PLBN Sota is the creation of new opportunities in the trade and small business sectors. With more open access to wider markets, border communities now have more opportunities to develop small businesses, especially in the agricultural sector and trade in daily necessities. The Papua Central Statistics Agency (2022) notes that about 60% of the people around Sota are now involved in formal trade, which previously only involved about 30% of the total population.

In addition, PLBN also contributes to the diversification of people's livelihoods. Many communities that were previously completely dependent on subsistence agriculture are now starting to turn to trade, both on a small and medium scale. Empowerment programs implemented by local governments through skills and entrepreneurship training have helped increase the capacity of communities to manage their businesses. Data from the Merauke Regency Government (2022) shows that 25% of the people involved in trade now have household industry-based businesses, such as handicraft making, sago processing, and other local products that can be marketed to PNG. Thus, PLBN Sota has created new jobs that are not only related to the trade sector, but also the service sector, such as transportation and logistics, which are growing thanks to access to the formal market.

Access to Formal Markets and Export of Leading Commodities

One of the most significant impacts of the existence of PLBN is the opening of access to formal markets, both for local Indonesian products and for the needs of the Papua New Guinea market. Before the existence of PLBN, many local Merauke products could not be widely marketed and were only limited to traditional or informal markets. With PLBN, superior products such as Merauke rice, coconut, and fresh vegetables can now be exported directly to PNG. Indonesia's Ministry of Trade (2022) reported that Merauke's rice exports have increased by 30% in the last two years, thanks to the convenience provided by a more organized distribution channel through PLBN.

PLBN also provides easier access for the Sota community to access goods from PNG that were previously difficult to obtain. Products such as groceries, electronics, and clothing are now more readily available, which has a positive impact on the quality of life of border communities. This is in line with the findings revealed by the Merauke Regency Government (2022), which states that 75% of Sota people now have easier access to consumer goods from the PNG market at more affordable prices. Secara keseluruhan, PLBN Sota has opened up great opportunities for both countries to improve economic relations through official channels, give people at the border access to wider markets, and encourage more inclusive economic growth. The existence of this cross-border post leads to strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, as well as creating a more transparent and structured trade ecosystem.

Implications of PLBN on Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Cooperation

Strengthening Economic Relations

The Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN) plays a central role in strengthening economic relations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Since the opening of PLBN in 2021, there has been a significant increase in cross-border trade volume. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Trade (2022), exports from Indonesia, especially from Merauke Regency to Papua New Guinea increased by 40% in the first year of PLBN operations. Widely traded products include rice, agricultural products, coconut, and other local commodities. This not only increases state revenue through trade taxes but also provides opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses to access a wider market.

In addition to trade in goods, the cross-border tourism sector is also growing with the existence of PLBN. Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism (2022) noted that the number of tourists crossing Sota to PNG and vice versa has increased by up to 30% in the last two years. The opening of PLBN facilitates easier access for tourists who were previously hampered by limited

transportation infrastructure. With the increasing number of tourists, the tourism sector in the border area has experienced significant development, created new jobs and improving the welfare of local communities.

Border Diplomacy and Social Integration

The existence of PLBN Sota also contributes greatly to strengthening border diplomacy between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. PLBN serves as a bridge of diplomatic cooperation that brings the two countries closer in terms of trade, culture, and security. The opening of PLBN has provided space for the two countries to better regulate cross-border relations in an official and organized manner. As part of Indonesia's policy to increase cooperation between neighboring countries, PLBN also strengthens Indonesia's commitment to managing borders in a peaceful manner that benefits both parties.

In terms of social integration, PLBN Sota facilitates relations between citizens of the two countries, which was previously more done through informal means. For example, indigenous peoples in Sota and Weam now have easier access to interact in more formal economic and social activities, such as cultural gatherings and cross-border community cooperation. According to the Central Statistics Agency of Papua (2022), around 55% of the people around Sota feel more socially connected to the people in PNG after PLBN came into operation, indicating an increase in social integration between the two regions.

Cross-Border Infrastructure and Security Cooperation

PLBN Sota plays a crucial role in increasing infrastructure cooperation between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The infrastructure built to support PLBN operations is not only limited to checkpoints and administrative offices but also includes the construction of the Sota–Weam–Morehead connecting road, which allows for smoother distribution of goods between the two countries. According to the Merauke Regency Government (2022), with better roads, the time needed to transport goods from Merauke to Weam is reduced by almost 40% compared to previous conditions. This development also opens up new access for local communities to develop businesses in the transportation and logistics sectors.

In addition, in the aspect of border security, PLBN Sota helps strengthen supervision and control along the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border. The existence of this post facilitates coordination between the security forces of the two countries, such as joint patrols, exchange of intelligence information, and law enforcement against violations that occur at the border. The Indonesian Ministry of Defense (2022) noted that with PLBN Sota, border security is more guaranteed due to a clear division of duties between the two countries, reducing potential conflicts and increasing regional stability. This is important, given that borders are often areas prone to illegal activities such as human trafficking, drugs, and weapons.

Challenges and Prospects for the Development of PLBN Sota as a New Growth Center

Obstacles to Infrastructure Management and Development

Although PLBN Sota has been operating since 2021 and has had many positive impacts on the economy of the border area, the challenges in managing and developing infrastructure are still quite large. One of the main obstacles is the limitation of supporting infrastructure, both for transportation lines, office facilities, and goods distribution systems. The road infrastructure connecting Sota-Weam still needs improvement to improve the smooth trade and mobility of people. According to the Merauke Regency Government (2022), around 35% of the main road connecting Sota with the economic center in Merauke is still in poor condition, especially during the rainy season, which can hinder the distribution of goods to the market.

In addition, although PLBN already has buildings for government administration and security, the availability of other supporting facilities such as ports, goods storage warehouses, and distribution centers is still very limited. This hinders the efficient distribution process of goods, especially for products with short shelf life, such as agricultural products. The construction of small ports around the PLBN area is also a crucial issue to support a smoother

flow of goods between the two countries, considering the importance of sea connectivity in cross-border trade.

Limited Human Resources and Local Government Capacity

In addition to infrastructure challenges, limited human resources (HR) and institutional capacity are also significant obstacles in the management of PLBN Sota. Local communities, especially those from indigenous areas, are still limited in skills and knowledge regarding business management and the modern economy. Based on a survey conducted by the Central Statistics Agency of Papua (2022), around 60% of the people around Sota do not have enough formal education to be involved directly in formal economic activities, such as international trade or industry-based businesses.

On the local government side, despite efforts to increase capacity, local government institutions in managing and developing the economic potential offered by PLBN still need to be strengthened. The Merauke Regency Government (2022) noted that there is still a shortage of trained staff in cross-border trade management and border policy. This has the potential to lead to a lack of coordination between agencies in the management of PLBN and the empowerment of local communities on a larger scale.

The Prospect of PLBN as a Center for Economic Growth

Despite the challenges, the prospects of PLBN Sota as a new economic growth center in Papua are very promising. PLBN has the potential to become a regional trade hub that connects Indonesia with Papua New Guinea, even with other Pacific countries. According to Indonesia's Ministry of Trade (2022), border areas have shown an increase in exports of up to 40% in the last two years, especially rice and other agricultural products, which shows great potential to further develop this economic sector.

To optimize this potential, a sustainable development strategy needs to be implemented. This involves developing adequate infrastructure, such as improving road networks, building small ports to increase distribution capacity, and strengthening human resource capacity in the trade and logistics sectors. In addition, strengthening the tourism sector through the promotion of tourist destinations around Sota can also be a significant economic development. Increased cooperation between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea in the tourism sector, by utilizing PLBN as an entry point, can provide long-term benefits in strengthening this sector (Walther, 2023).

To ensure that the economic growth that occurs around PLBN can be enjoyed by all levels of society, the development of skills and entrepreneurship training programs for local communities is a very important step. Data from the Merauke Regency Government (2022) shows that 25% of the people around Sota are now involved in household industry-based businesses and MSMEs that grow around PLBN. This shows that the existence of PLBN has created new opportunities in the trade and small business sectors. With the right strategy, PLBN Sota can become a center of economic growth that not only benefits Indonesia, but also Papua New Guinea. Therefore, the development of these border areas should be seen as part of a long-term strategy to strengthen the border economy, create jobs, and support stability and security in the border region.

CONCLUSION

The construction of the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN) significantly transformed the socio-economic dynamics of the Sota-Weam border community by formalizing social interactions, increasing cross-border trade—particularly in agricultural products—and enabling livelihood diversification through small and medium-sized enterprises. PLBN also strengthened bilateral economic relations and social integration between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. However, challenges remain in transportation infrastructure, especially road connectivity, and in limited human resource and institutional capacity, which hinder optimal

PLBN management. Future research should explore strategies to enhance infrastructure development, institutional strengthening, and community empowerment to ensure more inclusive and sustainable benefits from PLBN for border communities.

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