

The Marginalisation of Border Communities: A Study of Social Inequality in Indonesia

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Abstract

Social inequality in Indonesia remains an ongoing issue, particularly in border regions which often face limited access to development and the distribution of resources. A similar situation is found among the communities in the Indonesia–Malaysia border area of Entikong, Kalimantan, which, despite its strategic position as a cross-border region, still faces various forms of social marginalisation. The aim of this study is to analyse the social inequality occurring within the Entikong border community, identify the forms of marginalisation experienced, and examine the factors influencing them. The research used a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain a deeper understanding of the social conditions of the community. The research subjects were communities residing in the Entikong border region, Kalimantan. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis utilised the Miles and Huberman model, which encompasses data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research results show that the marginalisation of border communities is influenced not only by economic factors, but also by the uneven distribution of development, limited infrastructure, suboptimal access to public services, and the geographical and social conditions of the border region. The forms of inequality identified include limited access to education, economic opportunities, and participation in regional development. The development of border regions needs to be directed towards a more inclusive approach through strengthening community capacity, equitable distribution of basic services, and local economic empowerment so that the well-being of border communities can be achieved in a more sustainable way.

Keywords: Marginalization, Society, Indonesia-Malaysia, Border, Social Inequality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social inequality remains a fundamental issue in Indonesia's development, particularly in regions on the country's periphery. Border communities are a tangible manifestation of this inequality, often facing limited access to various basic services. The situation indicates that development has not yet been fully equitable and that a gap persists between the centre and border regions (Maksum et al., 2023). Consequently, communities in these areas are vulnerable to marginalisation—economically, socially, and in terms of access to public facilities.

The border regions play a strategic role as the nation's frontline, yet in practice they are often the areas that receive the least attention. Borders are not merely geographical boundaries but also social spaces that reflect the quality of development and community well-being (Munir et al., 2023). The disparities in these areas can give rise to various issues, such as a low quality of life, limited social mobility, and even a growing dependence on neighbouring countries.



The phenomenon of inequality is clearly evident in the border region between Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly in the Kalimantan region, namely Entikong (Indonesia) and Tebedu (Malaysia). These two areas are situated in a contiguous region and share fairly intense socio-economic interactions (Khair et al., 2022). However, there is a significant disparity in terms of development, with the Tebedu area demonstrating a more advanced condition compared to Entikong.

Socio-economic inequality in Entikong is evident in the limited infrastructure, lack of educational facilities and healthcare services, and high prices of basic necessities. Communities in this area often face difficulties in accessing adequate basic services (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2025). On the Malaysian side, however, public facilities are more adequate and easily accessible, leading many residents of Entikong to utilise services in Tebedu to meet their daily needs.

Socio-economic inequality reflects the marginalisation of Indonesia's border communities, who have not yet fully experienced the equitable benefits of development. The resulting disparities impact not only economic aspects but also influence the social identity and sense of national belonging among the population (Risal et al., 2022). Reliance on facilities in another country risks weakening the position of border regions as an integral part of the nation, whilst simultaneously posing challenges in maintaining social and cultural sovereignty.

The aim of this study is to analyse the social inequalities occurring among communities in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region, particularly in the Entikong area. Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the forms of marginalisation experienced by these communities and the factors influencing them. Results from this study are expected to contribute to the formulation of development strategies that are more equitable, just, and capable of enhancing the welfare of communities in Indonesia's border regions.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Design Research

Qualitative research methods with a descriptive approach (Brennen, 2025) were employed in this study to analyse the phenomenon of social marginalisation in Indonesia's border regions in depth and within their specific contexts (Fadli, 2021). An approach was chosen to analyse the social conditions, life experiences of the communities, and the various forms of inequality they face in the areas of education, the economy, health, infrastructure and public services. A descriptive design is used to systematically depict the social reality of border communities based on data obtained through interviews and documentation (Rich & Brazys, 2026). The study is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of how the process of marginalisation occurs, the factors influencing it, and its impact on the lives of communities in the border region.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for these studies was conducted through interviews with members of the community living in the border area of Entikong, Kalimantan, which shares a direct border with Malaysia. The interviews were conducted face-to-face to obtain more in-depth information regarding the social conditions of the border community, particularly concerning the forms of marginalisation they experience in their daily lives. The data explored includes access to education, the economy, health, infrastructure, government services, as well as social relations and the community's dependence on the neighbouring country. Researchers conducted these interviews to gain a more contextual understanding of the real-life experiences of the border community, thereby enabling them to describe the social inequalities occurring in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region in Kalimantan. Following is the interview framework used in the study.



Table 1. Research Interview Guide

No	Aspect Explored	Indicators / Interview Focus
1	Economic Conditions	Main occupations, income conditions, economic difficulties, and dependence on cross-border economic activities with Malaysia
2	Access to Education	Availability of schools, learning facilities, distance to schools, and the overall quality of education in border areas
3	Health Services	Access to healthcare facilities, availability of medical staff, medicines, and transportation to health centers
4	Infrastructure and Transportation	Road conditions, electricity, internet access, clean water supply, and transportation facilities
5	Government Support and Policies	Community perceptions of government attention, development programs, public services, and social assistance
6	Social Interaction and National Identity	Social relationships with Malaysian communities, sense of nationalism, and the use of goods or services from neighboring areas
7	Forms of Marginalization	Experiences of social inequality, feelings of being overlooked, and limited access to public services and development
8	Community Expectations and Solutions	Community hopes, urgent local needs, and suggestions for improving conditions in border regions

Table 1 provides an overview of the interview guide used in this study. The interview guide was designed in line with the research objectives, namely to explore in depth the forms of marginalisation and social inequality experienced by communities in the Indonesia–Malaysia border region of Entikong, Kalimantan. The indicators were developed to collect data on economic conditions, access to education and healthcare, infrastructure, government attention, and the social experiences of border communities in their daily lives.

Data analysis in this study employed the qualitative analysis model by Miles and Huberman, which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Fadli, 2021). The interview data was first selected and simplified in line with the research focus, then systematically organised to identify patterns and relationships between findings, before conclusions were drawn based on the results of the analysis.



Figure 1. Research Data Analysis

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. A Portrait of Social Inequality Among Communities in the Indonesia–Malaysia Border Region of Entikong

Research shows that social inequality in the Entikong border region remains a complex issue and is not solely related to differences in the community's economic conditions. Inequality is also evident in limited access to basic services such as education, healthcare, employment opportunities, infrastructure, and public facilities, which have not been distributed evenly. Despite this, Entikong has a strategic geographical position as a cross-border region between Indonesia and Malaysia that should be capable of serving as a regional growth hub. Conditions on the ground, however, indicate that the existence of the border region has not yet been fully accompanied by

an equitable improvement in the quality of life for the community, resulting in a development divide compared to areas closer to the seat of government.

Community members in the border area indirectly compare their living conditions to those in neighboring countries, where access to services and infrastructure is perceived to be developing more rapidly. The situation fosters a perception of inequality that is not merely material but also affects the community's sense of connection to national development. One resident remarked, *"We live on the border, but sometimes the facilities we need are still limited. When looking at the neighboring region, it seems development is progressing faster there than where we are."* Another informant added, *"Schools and access to services are available, but for some needs, people still have to travel quite a distance, so not everyone experiences the same level of convenience."* The statement indicates that a region's strategic location does not automatically lead to equitable well-being for the local community.

Pierre Bourdieu's perspective explains that social inequality is not formed solely by economic differences but is also influenced by the distribution of access to social capital, cultural capital, and the opportunities available to communities (Robson, 2009). Amartya Sen's thinking emphasizes that development must be understood as an expansion of capabilities, not merely an increase in economic indicators alone (Miletzki & Broten, 2017). The development of the border region in Entikong requires a more contextual approach that takes into account the community's access, opportunities, and real-life experiences so that the border region is not merely a territorial boundary of the state, but also a living space that receives the right to development in a fair and sustainable way.

3.1.2. Various Forms of Marginalization Experienced by the Entikong Border Community

The marginalization faced by the Entikong border community does not manifest in a single form, but unfolds through interrelated economic, social, and policy dimensions. Economically, some residents still rely on the informal sector and small-scale economic activities, which offer little stability. This situation limits income-generating opportunities and social mobility. The strategic location of the cross-border region has not yet been fully accompanied by equitable distribution of the benefits of economic development to local communities, resulting in disparities in development opportunities among different community groups.

Social marginalization is evident through limitations in access to public services and the lack of optimal community participation in determining the development needs of their own region. Community members expressed that educational facilities, social services, and attention to local needs have not yet fully addressed the actual conditions on the ground. One community member stated, *"We live near the border, but sometimes we still feel far from development. Programs exist, but they are not always aligned with the needs of the people here."* Another statement also indicated that, *"We often receive decisions that have already been made, while opportunities to voice our needs remain limited."* Marginalization is not always marked by the isolation of a region, but can also occur when communities have limited access to social processes and decision-making.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that social inequality is influenced not only by economic ownership but also by disparities in access to social capital, cultural capital, and opportunities to participate in social spaces (Ershadi, 2025). Additionally, Johan Galtung's perspective on structural violence shows that inequality can be shaped by structures and policies that indirectly limit certain groups' access to equitable resources and development (Galtung, 2023). The marginalization of the Entikong border community must be viewed as a multidimensional issue that demands development that is more participatory, adaptive, and oriented toward social justice.

3.1.3. Factors Affecting Inequality and Strategies for Strengthening Development in Border Regions

The research shows that inequality and marginalization among communities in the Entikong border region do not arise as isolated conditions, but are influenced by a combination of interrelated structural and contextual factors. Structural inequality in development, limited basic infrastructure, and suboptimal interregional policy integration have prevented border communities from gaining equal opportunities to access public services and economic empowerment. The geographical location of the border regions, which are relatively distant from service centers, the social characteristics of the communities, and economic dependence on areas outside the region reinforce the communities' vulnerability to inequality. Bordering regions still face development challenges that are not only physical but also social and institutional.

Interviews with the community reinforce these conditions. Part of the community noted that while facilities and economic activities have indeed developed, they have not yet fully and evenly met the community's needs. One informant stated, *"Development is happening, but not all residents have directly felt its impact. For certain jobs and needs, many still rely on areas outside the region."* Another informant also stated, *"Border regions are often seen as strategic, but in daily life, there are still limitations in access and opportunities compared to areas closer to the center."* The community's perception of development is not only measured by the presence of facilities but also by the extent to which development can improve the quality of life and open up fairer opportunities for the local community.

Johan Galtung, using the concept of structural inequality, explains that inequality often arises through social structures and the unequal distribution of resources, resulting in certain groups having more limited access to development opportunities (Galtung et al., 2013). Amartya Sen's perspective emphasizes that development cannot be measured solely by economic growth but must be assessed by the community's ability to secure better living conditions (Miletzki & Broten, 2017). The strategy for strengthening border regions must therefore focus not only on physical infrastructure but also on building community capacity, strengthening the local economy, expanding access to public services, and involving the community in decision-making processes to ensure that development is inclusive and sustainable.

3.2. Discussion

The marginalization of marginalized communities in the Entikong region is a social phenomenon shaped by the interplay of development disparities, limited access, and the geographical location of the border area. Despite Entikong's strategic role as a gateway between Indonesia and Malaysia, these conditions have not yet fully translated into improved well-being for the local community (Gumelar, 2018). The community still faces limitations in access to public services, economic opportunities, and the equitable distribution of facilities supporting social life. The inequalities that arise are reflected not only in economic disparities but also in the community's ability to access opportunities for equitable development (Hastuti, 2022). The border region examined in this study reveals a development paradox: an economically strategic area that still faces challenges in ensuring equitable distribution of development benefits at the community level.

Marginalization in Entikong is influenced by two main groups of factors: structural and contextual factors. Structural factors include uneven distribution of development, limited supporting infrastructure, and suboptimal synchronization of border region development policies (Polii, 2024). Contextual factors relate to the region's geographical characteristics, community social conditions, and patterns of economic dependence that have developed due to proximity to neighboring countries. The conditions have led some residents to adopt survival strategies through informal economic activities and cross-regional mobility (Wasino et al., 2026).

Previously conducted research (Rosyida et al., 2018; Korte, 2021; Wardani et al., 2021) indicates that border communities in Indonesia often still face limited access to basic services

despite their regions receiving administrative attention for development. It also shows that development that focuses too heavily on physical aspects does not necessarily improve quality of life if it is not accompanied by strengthening the social and economic capacity of the community. Research emphasizes that social inequality in border regions cannot be explained by a single factor but is the result of the interaction of various interrelated conditions.

Strategies for strengthening border region development must be directed toward a more inclusive and community-oriented (people-centered) development approach (Murlianti et al., 2021). The approach not only positions the community as recipients of programs but also as active participants in the planning and decision-making processes (Hatta & Sarkawi, 2011). Measures that can be taken include improving the quality of education and health services, strengthening the local economy based on regional potential, expanding employment opportunities, and increasing community participation in regional development. The development of the Entikong area should be understood as a process of expanding opportunities and capabilities for the community to improve their quality of life independently. Border area development is expected not only to strengthen the state's territorial functions but also to reduce marginalization and foster more equitable social welfare.

4. CONCLUSION

The marginalization of border communities in the Entikong region is a consequence of social inequality influenced by limited access to development, the region's geographical conditions, and the lack of optimal policy integration that directly addresses community needs. This inequality is evident not only in economic terms but also in access to educational services, public facilities, and opportunities for participation in regional development. These findings indicate that border area development requires a more adaptive approach focused on strengthening community capacity, rather than merely physical infrastructure development. The implications of this research underscore the importance of formulating more inclusive development policies through improved access to basic services, local economic empowerment, and community involvement in decision-making processes, so that border regions function not merely as national territorial boundaries but as living spaces capable of growing in a fair and sustainable capacity.

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