



## Indonesia in the BIMP-EAGA: Assessing Connectivity Development in Reducing Inequality

Sandy Nur Ikfal Raharjo\* · Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti\*\*

### [ *Abstract* ]

With the enactment of international free trade and economic agreements and cooperation, BIMP-EAGA is an opportunity to accelerate development and economic growth in eastern Indonesia. This subregional cooperation could be used to reduce the development gap or inequality between the western and eastern regions, which are geographically, demographically, and economically different. This cooperation also may accelerate development in the border area. This study analyzes Indonesia's policies related to connectivity in BIMP-EAGA subregional cooperation and its implementation. The study results show that the National Secretariat of Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation has encouraged cooperation clusters ranging from natural resources, transportation, infrastructure, ICT, and tourism to MSMEs. In terms of connectivity, Indonesia is also involved in the development program of three economic corridors, namely West Borneo, East Borneo, and Sulu-Sulawesi. Indonesia's involvement in the three corridors has boosted the connectivity of Indonesia's territory, especially border areas,

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\* Researcher, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN)-Indonesia; Doctoral Student, Universiti Malaya; sand007@brin.go.id.

\*\* Research Professor, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN)-Indonesia; trin001@brin.go.id.

with neighboring countries. Connectivity has covered not only physical but also institutional and people-to-people dimensions. However, there are still several challenges, ranging from the standardization of the Customs, Immigration, and Quarantine (CIQ) mechanisms, improvement of institutional quality, and consistent strong political will among the involved parties. In addition, considering the vulnerability of the BIMP subregion to transnational crimes and acts of radical terrorism, BIMP-EAGA needs to think about solutions to overcome these cross-border security problems so that the momentum of development in the subregion may be sustained.

**Keywords:** BIMP-EAGA, Connectivity, Indonesia, Inequality, Subregional Cooperation

## I . Introduction

Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) is a subregional cooperation established on March 24, 1994. Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos initiated the idea in 1992, which was welcomed by Indonesia and Brunei in 1993, and Malaysia in 1994 (Mindanao Development Authority 2014). This subregional cooperation was formed initially to provide an opportunity for the less-developed southern Philippines region to advance its economy (Dent and Richter 2011: 36). Along the way, this subregional cooperation was also seen as a mechanism to enhance the economic and social development of remote and less-developed areas in Southeast Asia (BIMP-EAGA 2012:1). Cross-border cooperation among member countries was expected to reduce the gap, both between the border area and other regions in the country, as well as the gap between BIMP-EAGA and other ASEAN sub-regions.

As of 2021, BIMP-EAGA covers the entire territory of Brunei Darussalam, the Indonesian provinces in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua Islands, the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the federal territory of Labuan in Malaysia, as well as 26 provinces on the island of Mindanao and Palawan in the Philippines.

<Table 1> Working Areas of BIMP-EAGA

<b>Brunei Darussalam</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>Philippines</b>
Brunei Darussalam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ West Kalimantan</li> <li>○ Central Kalimantan</li> <li>○ South Kalimantan</li> <li>○ East Kalimantan</li> <li>○ North Kalimantan</li> <li>○ North Sulawesi</li> <li>○ Gorontalo</li> <li>○ Central Sulawesi</li> <li>○ West Sulawesi</li> <li>○ South Sulawesi</li> <li>○ Southeast Sulawesi</li> <li>○ Maluku</li> <li>○ North Maluku</li> <li>○ Papua</li> <li>○ West Papua</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sarawak</li> <li>○ Sabah</li> <li>○ Labuan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Region IX</li> <li>○ Region X</li> <li>○ Region XI</li> <li>○ Region XII</li> <li>○ CARAGA</li> <li>○ BARMM</li> <li>○ Palawan (Province)</li> </ul>

Source: BIMP-EAGA 2015; Mindanao Development Authority 2021.

Historically, the existence of BIMP-EAGA has also experienced ups and downs. In the first three years (1994-1996), BIMP-EAGA was geographically an underdeveloped and remote region in Southeast Asia, so it needed extra regulation to be able to capture the development gap between its sub-national regions. BIMP-EAGA succeeded in compiling several cooperation agreements among its members to make national policies and cross-border agreements. For example, BIMP-EAGA reached an agreement to facilitate the liberalization of the transportation sector, which would allow for greater mobilization of people, goods, and services in the region, as well as the telecommunications and tourism sectors (Raharjo 2019: 6).

During the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the development of BIMP-EAGA began to stall. During that period, the member countries were more focused on domestic issues and the recovery of economic conditions in their countries. In addition, the occurrence of El Niño and La Niña in 1998 also harmed the economic development of BIMP-EAGA in several working areas. In general, a way out of the economic crisis at that time was sought by building cooperation, so that sub-regional cooperation, including BIMP-EAGA,

became one to rely on. BIMP-EAGA's performance improved by the end of 2000 when its member countries recovered from the economic crisis. At the 7th ASEAN Summit in 2001, the heads of state of BIMP-EAGA members committed to supporting the revitalization of this subregional cooperation.

The revival of BIMP-EAGA as a subregional cooperation is an interesting phenomenon to investigate. From a regional perspective, BIMP-EAGA can be a platform to support the development of ASEAN Connectivity, which is an essential requirement for achieving the ASEAN Community. BIMP-EAGA can play crucial roles in the eastern part of ASEAN, where its connectivity development is relatively slower than in the western part of ASEAN (Foreign Policy Strategy Agency 2011: 24). Geographically, the eastern part of ASEAN is an insular area dominated by islands and waters, in contrast to the western part of ASEAN which is a continuation of mainland Asia. In general, the disadvantage is that building connectivity between islands requires large amounts of funding, but the advantage is that the region is rich in resources that have not been developed properly.

From an Indonesian perspective, the post-reform government still faces the problem of development gaps, both between the eastern and western parts as well as between the border areas and the capital area. Since 2014, the Government of Indonesia has prioritized the policy of "Building Indonesia from the Periphery" to address this problem under Presidential Regulation No. 2/2015. Indonesia can use BIMP-EAGA to accelerate development in the eastern and border areas to reduce existing inequalities, especially by building cross-border connectivity.

This study analyzes Indonesia's policies related to connectivity in the BIMP-EAGA subregional cooperation, consisting of three aspects: implementation, challenges, and impact. Normatively, the Indonesian government inserts provinces in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua into the cooperation. However, in reality, not all of these provinces are active in BIMP-EAGA meetings. Geographical proximity and cultural similarities with other BIMP-EAGA member countries have made the Indonesian provinces of Kalimantan and

northern Sulawesi more active than Maluku and Papua. Therefore, this study focuses on these active provinces.

## **II. Conceptual framework: Connectivity and subregionalism**

This study focuses on two main concepts to answer research questions: connectivity and subregionalism. According to UNESCAP (2014), connectivity is regarded as the level and effectiveness of networks to facilitate flows of goods, services, people, and knowledge. Meanwhile, Betts (2006) categorizes connectivity into two types: embeddedness, a structural relationship that already exists; and linkages, which is a relationship created through a bargaining process.

In The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (ASEAN 2010), connectivity refers to the various action plans of its member countries through three strategies. First, the development of physical connectivity through improving existing infrastructure, building new logistics infrastructure and facilities, harmonizing the existing regulatory framework, and fostering a culture of innovation. Second, the development of institutional connectivity, namely effective institutions, mechanisms, and processes carried out through the resolution of various obstacles in the movement of goods and people. This strategy also includes facilitation of trade and investment, harmonization of standard or uniform procedures, and operationalization of various agreements to reduce the cost of moving goods across borders. Third, the development of people-to-people connectivity, namely community empowerment to promote deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural interactions through community development efforts, as well as promoting greater intra-ASEAN mobility through progressive relaxation of visa requirements and the development of Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs).

Based on the various opinions about connectivity above, this paper will use the concept of connectivity according to the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, which categorizes connectivity into three strategies/dimensions: physical, institutional, and people-to-people (ASEAN 2010: 2). The author considers this concept to explain

BIMP-EAGA as a subregional cooperation that can become a building block for implementing the Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity programs (ASEAN 2017: 8-10).

The second main concept is Subregionalism. A subregion refers to international cross-border spaces or units in the interior of a certain region, which include multiple states, states and parts of states, or more than two parts of states (Taga and Igarashi 2019: 2). Taga and Igarashi (2019) also argue that subregion or sub-regionalism is not only defined by state actors and international institutions but also by companies and other non-state actors. Meanwhile, the term subregionalism has not only a geographical meaning but also a political context (Gochhayat 2014:12). In this context, the definition of subregionalism can be adapted from Gochhayat (2014: 10), who defines it as a transnational cooperation between countries that are connected geographically, historically, and economically to achieve common goals or to solve common problems.

Subregional cooperation often takes advantage of cross-border cooperation as a concrete form of its work program (Irewati 2020, Raharjo 2019, Takahashi 2019). Perkmann (2003) states that cross-border cooperation is an institutionalized collaboration between subnational authorities that cross national borders. Meanwhile, Usui (2019) defines cross-border cooperation as cooperation between regional and municipal governments and social organizations on a wide range of cross-border socio-economic projects at the local level. There are various forms of cross-border cooperation, such as the construction of demilitarized zones and peace parks (Lee and Forss 2005), border crossing and trade agreements (Raharjo 2018), and cross-border resource management (Guo 2005).

Cottey (2009) indicates that subregional cooperation can play such roles as building bridges of relations, encouraging its member countries' integration into larger regional cooperation, creating a framework to overcome transnational policy challenges, and facilitating political, economic, and institutional reforms within member countries. In the context of cross-border cooperation as a concrete form of subregional cooperation program, it can remove physical and psychological barriers, thereby strengthening the

socio-economic welfare of local communities towards regional integration (Lee and Forss 2011). The effectiveness of this role is determined by several factors, including the existence of a political will and the quality of the institution (Thao 1999), the strategic level of the area of cooperation (Starr and Thomas 2005), the existence of complementary commodities for cross-border trade (Raharjo 2019), differences in the political system, social instability, and gap in economic development (Guo 2005).

Based on the literature review above, this paper highlights BIMP-EAGA as an international collaboration carried out by Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines to achieve their common interests or goals, namely the development of cross-border connectivity consisting of physical, institutional, and people-to-people dimensions.

### **III. Indonesia's policy to build connectivity in BIMP-EAGA**

Indonesia places BIMP-EAGA as one of the essential sub-regional economic cooperation. Based on Presidential Decree No. 184/1998 regarding the Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation Coordination Team, which was updated through Presidential Decree No. 13/2001, five sub-regions are of concern to Indonesia, namely Singapore-Indonesia Tourism Cooperation, Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), BIMP-EAGA, Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT), and Australia-Indonesia Development Area (AIDA). Along the way, BIMP-EAGA and IMT-GT have survived, while the others were terminated or inactive. In November 2001, during the 7th ASEAN Leaders Summit forum, Indonesia gave full support for the change of the BIMP-EAGA commitment to focus on efforts to revitalize development activities in border areas. It shows that the Indonesian government was aware of the importance of development that is not only confined to the capital but is spread out to other regions. The ASEAN Summit Chair asserts back then:

We reaffirmed the importance of our sub-regional growth areas in ASEAN development and integration. We also discussed ways to revitalize these growth areas, including those centered on Brunei,

Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. (Press Statement by the Chairman of the 7th ASEAN Summit 2001).

Indonesia places the eastern region of Indonesia as the BIMP-EAGA working area to enhance its social and economic development, especially trade, investment, and tourism on the islands of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua. Indonesia conceptually prioritizes the private sector as a growth driver, while the government is the facilitating party.

To carry out this role, the Indonesian government participates in various hierarchical meetings as a medium of communication between member countries. The meetings are conducted gradually from the working group level to the senior officials, ministries, and state leaders (Summit). This hierarchical meeting scheme became the forum for BIMP-EAGA stakeholders to achieve BIMP-EAGA's vision of Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable and Economically competitive (RISE) (BIMP-EAGA 2017: xi). Then, Indonesia also formed a National Secretariat that carried out internal coordination among line ministries/institutions and external coordination with other countries' national secretariats, BIMP-Facilitation Center, and external partners such as the Asian Development Bank. Meanwhile, the private actors have the BIMP-EAGA Business Council as their meeting forum. In addition, a private sector representative was also invited to Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) and MM meetings.

At the 14th BIMP-EAGA Ministerial Meeting in Brunei Darussalam on August 08, 2009, Indonesia, represented by the coordinating minister for Economic Affairs, encouraged BIMP-EAGA to restructure and improve its working mechanism to facilitate economic and trade cooperation (Tarakan Chamber of Commerce 2009). This improvement aimed to increase the competitive advantage of BIMP-EAGA countries in the world market, namely through consolidation, complementation, and grouping.

In February 2010, Indonesia began to restructure its mechanism for BIMP-EAGA cooperation after issuing a letter from the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs regarding the implementation of the National Secretariat for BIMP-EAGA and



IMT-GT subregional economic cooperation. Indonesia encouraged the placement of one Investment Coordinating Board staff member at the BIMP Facilitation Center (BIMP-FC) in Kota Kinabalu, which has been under discussion since 2005. This way, Indonesia can consolidate its interests within the framework of sub-regional cooperation.

In the BIMP-EAGA implementation plan, Indonesia and other member countries prioritize the welfare approach over the security approach. Indonesia encouraged the implementation of the agreements reached at technical meetings under the SOM consisting of clusters and task forces, namely: Natural Resources Development, Transport, Infrastructure and Information, Communication, and Technology Development, Joint Tourism Development, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, and Task Force on Customs, Immigration, Quarantine, and Security. BIMP-EAGA rotated the chairmanship of these clusters among member countries (MOFA Republic of Indonesia 2019).

Several economic sectors became BIMP-EAGA's priorities. For the transportation or connectivity sector, BIMP-EAGA agreed on the MoU on Establishing and Promoting Efficient and Integrated Sea Linkages in 2007. The Roll On/Roll Off (RORO) Passenger Ferry program has been operating between Muara, Brunei Darussalam, and Menumbok, Malaysia, since December 2009. BIMP-EAGA has also signed an MoU on the border Movement of Commercial Busses and Coaches, which at the beginning of its implementation in 2009, succeeded in facilitating the traffic of around 40,000 people per year using bus services across the Pontianak-Bandar Seri Begawan area. For the energy sector, BIMP-EAGA leaders established the BIMP-EAGA Infrastructure Project Pipeline in their meeting in Hua Hin on October 28, 2011. For the food security sector, BIMP-EAGA has agreed on a Food Basket Strategic Plan of Action to realize its vision as one of the food storage centers for ASEAN and other regions in Asia.

Regarding connectivity, BIMP-EAGA has also established two economic corridors: West Borneo and Greater Sulu-Sulawesi. Moreover, the member countries also discussed the development of

the third economic corridor in the East Borneo area. The West Borneo economic corridor has a length of about 1,500 kilometers, crossing the territory of three member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. For the Indonesian part, this corridor is located in West Kalimantan Province, spanning about 235 kilometers from Pontianak City to Entikong District. This corridor connects Pontianak with the commercial center of Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, Bandar Seri Begawan in Brunei Darussalam, as well as Labuan and Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia (Lord and Tangtrongjita 2016).

The East Borneo economic corridor is expected to connect Sabah in Malaysia with Indonesia's North, East, South, and Central Kalimantan provinces. Some main cities are Tawau in Malaysia, and Tarakan, Samarinda, Balikpapan, Banjarmasin, and Palangkaraya in Indonesia.

The Sulu-Sulawesi is the widest economic corridor in BIMP-EAGA, which covers Sabah in Malaysia, Palawan and Mindanao in the Philippines, and North Sulawesi in Indonesia. This corridor has been a trade route for a long time, even before Indonesia and the Philippines became independent states. Portuguese and Spanish sailors used the route in search of spices (Ulaen 2003).

For Indonesia, connectivity is one of the most important sectors to be developed in BIMP-EAGA. Connectivity, especially at sea, will create new shipping and trade routes, develop regional economic potential, and increase tourism and regional investment. In addition, connectivity development also supports the Indonesian government's national priority program of designating Bitung Port in North Sulawesi as an international hub for the eastern region. This policy aligns with Indonesia's vision to become a global maritime fulcrum.

The various programs outlined in the BIMP-EAGA policy in Indonesia above are expected to positively and significantly impact the economic development of the provinces involved. Therefore, observation in the West Borneo, East Borneo, and Greater Sulu-Sulawesi economic corridors is crucial to evaluating the

policies' effectiveness.

### 3.1. Physical connectivity

In the West Borneo economic corridor, observations made in May 2017 and September 2021 showed that the road from Pontianak to Entikong was in good condition. The road consists of two lanes in opposite directions. When approaching the Entikong Cross-Border Post, the road gets more exhaustive to four lanes. In addition to the main corridor route, the government has also widened access roads to the Aruk Border Post in Sambas Regency and the Nanga Badau Cross-Border Post in Kapuas Hulu Regency. It then facilitates transportation routes between West Kalimantan Province and its neighboring countries. State-owned and private companies operate cross-border bus routes connecting Pontianak with Kuching and Bandar Seri Begawan. It aligns with the Indonesian government's commitment, especially under Joko Widodo, to realizing the mission of building Indonesia from the periphery. The government of Joko Widodo has accelerated the construction of cross-border posts in the West Kalimantan region through Presidential Instruction No. 6 of 2015 for the 2015-2019 development period. In addition to land transportation, West Kalimantan's physical connectivity with neighboring countries is also served by air transportation. In 2017, at least two Indonesian and Malaysian-based aircraft operators were serving the Pontianak-Kuching route. For sea transportation, Pontianak has been designated as a Gateway Node for goods from the BIMP-EAGA subregion to regional and international markets, together with Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan in Malaysia (Lord and Tangtrongjita 2016: 7).

For the East Borneo economic corridor, land transportation routes at several Cross-Border Posts in North Kalimantan still need to be developed. According to the Border Section in North Kalimantan Province, access to the entrance and exit to Malaysia must be taken by road, followed by a river route for about 4 hours. For air transportation, there are direct flights from Tawau to Tarakan. From Tarakan, there are connecting flights to Balikpapan, Jakarta, and Surabaya. As for sea transportation, there is a fast ferry for the Nunukan-Tawau route. However, there are no passenger

ships on the Sebatik-Tawau route, even though Sebatik is the frontier island of Indonesia heading to Tawau, Malaysia. Sei Pancang Cross-Border Post on Sebatik Island has been closed for regular passengers. Malaysian authorities found out that ships did not meet international standards. In addition, the Malaysian government is also concerned with the large number of smugglers who use this route to send Malaysia's subsidized goods into Indonesian territory. As a result, residents of Sebatik Island who wish to travel to Tawau officially have to cross to Tunontaka Harbor in Nunukan.

There is also the Manado-Bitung toll road which cuts travel time from around 4 hours to 1 hour. This route is very strategic for the distribution of goods from areas in northern Sulawesi to the Bitung International Port and vice versa. For air transportation, there have been direct flights from Manado, Indonesia, to Davao, Philippines, since September 2019. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has stopped the operation of this route for an unknown time.

Meanwhile, there are no direct commercial flight routes from Manado to Palawan in the Philippines or Sabah in Malaysia. This is more due to the less profitable commercial side, rather than other social considerations. However, air transportation is more crowded from Manado to several cities in China. For sea transportation, there are no cross-border commercial services for passengers between North Sulawesi and Mindanao. Pioneer ships serving the northern part of the province only reached border islands such as Miangas and Marore. Border residents who will cross to Balut Island or Sarangani and General Santos City in Southern Philippines take small private fishing boats [local people call them pump boats under 1 Gross Ton for about two hours]. For the transportation of goods, Indonesia and the Philippines launched RORO ships for the Davao-General Santos-Bitung route, which departed from Davao on April 29, 2017, and arrived at Bitung on May 2, 2017. Ideally, RORO ships arrive every 2-3 weeks. However, since its inauguration in April 2017, RORO has not operated anymore. There have been no comparative advantage established in the Davao-Bitung trade. The two areas have similar commodities and container prices were too high for local business people.

### 3.2. Institutional connectivity

In West Borneo, the Indonesian government has built three National Cross-Border Posts (PLBN) in West Kalimantan gateway to Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. They are Entikong in Sanggau Regency, Aruk in Sambas Regency, and Nanga Badau in Kapuas Hulu Regency. The President inaugurated the three PLBNs in West Kalimantan at the end of 2016 and early 2017. Residents crossing borders must follow the Immigration and Customs inspection procedures on both sides of Indonesia and Malaysia. The inspection process is not too strict. Some people can go in and out without having their documents checked because they are familiar with officers from both sides. They are usually residents who have businesses in the territory of a neighboring country less than 5 kilometers from the cross-border post. On the one hand, this makes it easier for residents at the border who have high cross-border intensity. However, on the other hand, it increases the potential for transnational crimes such as drug trafficking and the smuggling of undocumented workers.

Although institutional connectivity development has made good progress, it still needs to be improved. Referring to the GMS subregional cooperation in mainland Southeast Asia, cross-border procedures can be simplified and shortened through the Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) mechanism, which unites CIQ inspections from two countries under one roof (Awani 2018). Another way is to follow the procedure applied at the Sungai Tujuh Border Check Point, Brunei Darussalam, which borders Miri, Malaysia. In this place, passengers do not need to get out of the vehicle. The officer only scans the passports/other documents of the passengers so that the cross-border process is faster and reduces the potential for queues, as can be seen at PLB Entikong. The two methods above can be considered by Indonesia and BIMP-EAGA to be adapted and standardized for all cross-border posts in this economic corridor.

For East Borneo, based on experience using the Tawau-Tarakan air transportation route, there is a significant difference between the inspection process at Tawau Airport and Juwata airport in Tarakan.

At Tawau Airport, several parallel posts serve to check immigration documents, making it take only a short time. Meanwhile, when landing in Juwata, of the two available posts, only one actively served the immigration process for passengers who had just disembarked. As a result, there have been long queues, and the passport stamping took more than 30 minutes. It can be detrimental especially for passengers who need to transfer their flights to other cities.

Meanwhile, for sea transportation, the opposite situation occurs between the Tunontaka Port in Nunukan and the Tawau Port. In Tunontaka, the immigration process is fast because several posts are open in parallel. Each post serves different types of passengers based on their nationality and travel documents, whether passports or cross-border passes. On the contrary, when arriving at Tawau Port, all passengers are required to weigh their luggage, and there is a long queue. Passenger goods that exceed 10 kilograms will be charged an additional fee per kilogram. This procedure does not apply at Tunontaka Port, Nunukan. According to Malaysian immigration officials at Tawau Port, the private sector manages Tawau Port, not the government. In the future, it is important to standardize and simplify Custom, Immigration, and Quarantine procedures between Tawau and Nunukan and other transboundary ports, which can be discussed and agreed upon within the BIMP-EAGA framework.

In Greater Sulu-Sulawesi, there was an agreement on procedures for cross-border activities between Indonesia and the Philippines, which was signed before BIMP-EAGA was formed, namely the 1956 Border Crossing Agreement. This agreement allows border residents who hold a Cross-Border Pass to carry out business activities, family visits, religious pilgrimages, and recreation to neighboring countries. In addition, both countries also agreed on the 1974 Border Trade Agreement, which provides concessions in the form of exemption from import duties for passenger luggage that does not exceed US\$150 per person per month or US\$1500 per boat for one trip. The Indonesian government then increased the quota to US\$250 based on the Minister of Finance Regulation No. 188/PMK.04/2010. The two countries then built the Miangas and

Marore Cross-Border Posts on the Indonesian side and Mabila on the Philippines side to facilitate these cross-border activities. However, only cross-border pass holders may use the postal service, and not passport holders. The potential for cross-border flows is very high, considering that there are large numbers of Indonesian diaspora communities [people of Sangihe-Talaud descent] living in the Southern Philippines. It is an opportunity for BIMP-EAGA to support and develop strategies to prosper the Indonesian-Philippines border community by facilitating the opening of Cross-Border Posts.

### **3.3. People-to-people connectivity**

As part of ASEAN, BIMP-EAGA member countries also enjoy visa-free arrangements for short stays under the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption (Pinatih 2016). Residents of the Indonesian border in West Borneo can use a Cross-Border Pass to visit the Malaysian territory up to a maximum of five kilometers from the borderline. They can go through three large cross-border posts and smaller traditional posts along the West Kalimantan-Sarawak border. However, this mechanism is based on the 1967 and 2006 bilateral agreements, not under BIMP-EAGA. As for residents outside the border sub-districts, they can use their passports to carry out social visits for up to 30 days.

However, smooth cross-border mobility also has some downside. Organized transnational crimes exploit the openness of cross-border traffic. Based on field observations, many West Kalimantan residents use cross-country buses to Malaysia with the initial purpose of visa-free social visits. However, many of them get off the bus on oil palm plantations. They become illegal workers who are vulnerable before the law.

As a consequence, many undocumented Indonesian migrant workers were repatriated from Malaysia. The flow of repatriation increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, the Entikong-Tebedu cross-border posts have been closed to ordinary border crossers and only serves Indonesian migrant workers' repatriation from Malaysia. In 2017-2019, the average number of Indonesian migrant workers repatriated was less than

2,000 people per year. However, in 2020, the number rose sharply to more than 20,000 people.

<Table 2> Indonesian Migrant Workers’ Repatriation from Malaysia via Entikong Cross-border Post

Year	Number of Indonesian Migrant Workers
2017	3,356
2018	1,764
2019	847
2020 (March-December)	21,354
2021 (January-August)	16,310

Source: BNP2TKI 2020 (data for 2017-2019); Immigration Office of Entikong 2021 (data for 2020-2021).

Table 2 above does not include those that enter through irregular or sea routes. Therefore, BIMP-EAGA needs to discuss serious precautions to avoid misusing cross-border transportation, such as the prohibition of dropping passengers at any place like palm oil plantations, and only allowing passengers to drop off at designated places so their data can be tracked.

In East Borneo, the presence of sea and air transportation has led to intensified community interactions between countries. More Indonesian citizens (WNI) cross Tawau than Malaysians who come to Nunukan. Likewise, more Indonesian-owned vessels are crossing borders than Malaysian-owned vessels (see Table 3 below).

<Table 3> Traffic of Indonesia-Malaysia Cross-border Passengers and Vessels in Nunukan

Year	Number of Passengers				Number of Vessels			
	Indonesian Citizens		Foreign Citizens		Indonesia Registered		Foreign Registered	
	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival
<b>2012</b>	221,241	195,071	14,220	14,508	1,351	1,262	495	464
<b>2013</b>	152,649	140,127	11,918	13,625	1,104	1,102	693	695
<b>2014</b>	124,793	121,102	12,363	13,690	870	865	687	688
<b>2015</b>	154,959	141,898	11,707	12,500	854	854	751	751
<b>2016</b>	127,570	128,102	11,582	11,523	825	824	490	490
<b>2017</b>	92,980	87,425	12,328	12,520	741	741	602	602
<b>2018</b>	86,354	78,788	11,817	12,355	668	665	540	540
<b>2019</b>	99,339	92,490	19,634	19,303	654	652	583	584
<b>2020</b>	19,800	21,024	3,816	3,471	172	170	130	130
<b>2021 (Jan-May)</b>	472	2,089	-	-	29	29	50	51

Source: Immigration Office of Nunukan 2021.



The high traffic of people passing by in the border area has been going on for hundreds of years. It forms a cross-border community. Every day, many Indonesians go to Tawau to sell various commodities such as bananas and fish, buy necessities to resell in Nunukan, and seek medical treatment. In contrast, a small proportion of Malaysians go to Nunukan and Tarakan to do business, namely buying raw materials for their restaurants in Malaysia. Meanwhile, most Malaysians come to Indonesia to “go home” and visit relatives. Many Malaysians living in Tawau are descendants of Indonesians, especially the Bugis, Javanese, and Timorese (Maunati 2019). Therefore, the language used in Sabah is more similar to Indonesian than Peninsular Malay. They have built a cultural pattern for border communities, which is slightly different from the communities of each ethnic group.

For Greater Sulu-Sulawesi, the people of the Sangihe Islands Regency and the Talaud Islands Regency in North Sulawesi have established solid social relations with the people of the Southern Philippines. An Indonesian diaspora community in the Southern Philippines is estimated to be up to 35,000, but only 7,946 are officially recorded (Talampas 2015). In interviews, cross-border residents in Marore admitted that they have family on Balut Island, so they often visit each other. Good relations are established at the community level and between local governments. On the Independence Day of the Philippines, the local government in Balut often invites government officials from the Marore Islands District to visit Balut and celebrate it together.

Moreover, there was once a Balut mayor descended from the Sangir people of Indonesia. People-to-people connectivity can be further improved, considering that in the more northern parts of Balut and Sarangani Islands (such as Marawi), many residents feel that they are descendants of the Sriwijaya Kingdom in South Sumatra. There is even an area in Mindanao called Palimbang, similar to the name of the capital city of South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. In this case, BIMP-EAGA can play a more significant role in building people-to-people connectivity at the Indonesia-Philippines border.

The development of connectivity above implies several determinant factors in the practice of cross-border cooperation under the scheme of subregional cooperation. First, the successful development of cross-border connectivity between West Kalimantan and Sarawak in the West Borneo economic corridor shows the presence of a strong political will from the Indonesian government, referring to Thao (1999) in the conceptual framework section. Then, in the case of the obstruction of Sebatik-Tawau cross-border activities in the East Borneo economic corridor, the absence of a cross-border post that meets international standards implies the low quality of cross-border cooperation institutions as a determining factor, as proposed by Thao (1999). Meanwhile, the absence of goods transported by the Bitung-Davao RORO ship route shows the significance of comparative advantage commodities that can be exchanged to generate a reversible cross-border trade (Raharjo 2019).

Moreover, the application of the different standards of the CIQ mechanism in the three economic corridors above shows that there are still problems in harmonizing regulations between state parties in BIMP-EAGA. This factor hinders the flow of people and goods across countries. Then, the pattern of more intensive cross-border activities by Indonesian residents to Malaysia to sell raw commodities and for medical treatment, while the reverse flow is less, indicates a development gap between Indonesia and Malaysia border areas. This development gap encourages cross-border activities, as previously identified by Guo (2005).

Even though there are still some obstacles, in general, the development of physical, institutional, and people-to-people connectivity in the West Borneo Economic Corridor on the Indonesian side (West Kalimantan) has been relatively good. As a result of this connectivity, development in the Province of West Kalimantan has also been encouraged. According to the Government of the West Kalimantan Province (2017), one of the results is that economic growth in the province has increased by 5.22%, higher than the national economic growth (5.02%) in 2016. In addition, West Kalimantan also enjoyed purchasing contracts for electricity from Sarawak in 2016, which reached 230 MW to meet electricity

needs in the border areas of Sambas and Bengkayang.

Similar to West Borneo, Indonesian Provinces located in the East Borneo Economic Corridor also enjoy the positive impact of connectivity. Regarding welfare, residents of Nunukan and Tarakan in North Kalimantan can enjoy Malaysian-made goods that are relatively cheaper than similar goods produced in the country. Some central government officials in Jakarta worry about the Indonesian border community's dependence on Malaysia. However, when observing the Tawau market, many Indonesian products are also sold there, ranging from home industry products and snacks to herbal medicines. In other words, there is actually an interdependent relationship between the Indonesian and Malaysian border communities.

The impact of this connectivity is not only enjoyed by North Kalimantan. Derawan Island and Maratua Island Tourism Objects in East Kalimantan are also the targets of tourism development cooperation within the BIMP-EAGA framework. Derawan and Maratua become parts of the route for the Trans Borneo Route 4x4 adventure events, which attracts tourists from BIMP-EAGA countries. It means that all working areas of BIMP-EAGA in four countries can enjoy the benefits of connectivity, not only provinces or states that have direct border areas with other member countries. The benefits are anchored not only on connectivity but also on other BIMP-EAGA's strategic pillars: food basket; tourism; environment; and socio-cultural and education (BIMP-EAGA 2017: 11).

In addition, Sepinggan Airport in Balikpapan is also designated as an air traffic gateway for the BIMP-EAGA subregional economic relationship on Kalimantan Island, together with Supadio Airport in Pontianak. It is a follow-up to the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding on Expansion on Air Linkage. In addition, Balikpapan Seaport is also one of 21 ports designated as BIMP-EAGA's main port. Private companies from Indonesia and the Philippines also collaborate in developing a hybrid rice seed production program in Berau Regency covering an area of 1,200 hectares (BIMP-EAGA Secretariat in the East Kalimantan Province 2015: 22). The program reflects the contribution of the BIMP-EAGA Business Council to

economic development in East Kalimantan.

In Greater Sulu-Sulawesi, connectivity development also benefits North Sulawesi Province. The various BIMP-EAGA meetings held in Manado-Meeting the Ministers of Transport in 2008, the Eco-Tourism Meeting in 2008, and the Ministerial Meeting in 2014 have helped stimulate the tourism sector in North Sulawesi. Manado Tua Island is also designated as a Sea-Community Based Eco-Tourism within the BIMP-EAGA framework. In addition, based on the information from the BIMP-EAGA Secretariat of the North Sulawesi Province, there are two projects in North Sulawesi proposed for BIMP-EAGA Vision 2025, namely Integrated Coconut Industry for Small Holder Farmers and Corn Post Harvest Handling, in coordination with the Philippines.

Regarding the role of BIMP-EAGA in overcoming the development gap between western and eastern Indonesia, BPS-Statistics Indonesia's data shows that the contribution of Kalimantan Island to the national gross domestic product at current prices has decreased from 9.40% in 2010, 8.16% in 2015, and 7.95% in 2020. On the contrary, Sulawesi Island experienced an increase, namely 5.19% in 2010, 5.89% in 2015, and 6.67% in 2020. However, if these two islands are combined, the contribution of provinces actively involved in BIMP-EAGA to Indonesia's GDP will increase slightly, from 14.59% in 2010 to 14.62% in 2020. In other words, during the last ten years, BIMP-EAGA has still played a small role in overcoming the development gap in Indonesia.

These findings enrich the discussion between optimistic versus pessimistic views on subregional cooperation. From the optimistic view, this paper supports the opinion that subregional cooperation has played a role in regional integration and community building (Chheang 2013), primarily through the development of connectivity that encourages investment opportunities in value chains (Lord and Tangtrongjita 2016) and becomes part of capacity building to deal with non-traditional security issues (Hashim and Julay 2021). On the other hand, this paper also agrees with the pessimistic view that the role played by subregional cooperation, especially BIMP-EAGA, is still relatively limited (Dent 2017), leaving substantial development

gaps within the region (Kimura 2020). Even though it does not ignore the pessimistic view, this paper tends towards optimism, that subregional cooperation is an essential instrument in building connectivity in regional integration. It applies on condition that improvements continue to be made and challenges continue to be addressed.

#### **IV. Challenges on connectivity development in BIMP-EAGA**

To further develop connectivity in eastern Indonesia through BIMP-EAGA, Indonesia and other countries still face major challenges related to security issues. First, several segments of borders between countries have not been agreed upon. Indonesia and Malaysia still dispute the boundaries of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the Sulawesi Sea. One well-known case is regarding the Ambalat block, following the designation of Sipadan and Ligitan Islands as Malaysian property in 2001. Second, the historical conflict between Malaysia and the Philippines regarding the Philippines' claim to the Sabah area. Third, there are differences of opinion between Malaysia and Brunei regarding the unmarked boundaries of the Sarawak mainland, East Malaysia, and the territorial waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone.

The second security challenge is that the border area between Indonesia and these countries is prone to terrorist threats and piracy, theft of natural resources, and smuggling of prohibited goods, drugs, and people. Many foreign fishermen from neighboring countries still carry out fishing activities without permits because they do not know the maritime boundaries between the two countries or because the boundaries are still being disputed. Moreover, The Maute and Abu Sayyaf terrorist groups based in Mindanao have in recent years kidnapped dozens of tourists, fishermen, and sailors around the Sulu waters. Moreover, Armed clashes also took place in Marawi City between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and hundreds of militants from the Maute and Abu Sayyaf terrorist groups in 2017. These two challenges can create uncertainty and instability, which is one of the inhibiting factors in

cross-border cooperation (Guo 2005) under subregionalism.

To enforce and maintain security, several countries conduct joint security cooperation in border areas. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are working together to conduct joint operations in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. The Trilateral Maritime Patrol was inaugurated at a ceremony attended by Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu, Malaysian Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, and Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, at Tarakan Naval Base on June 19, 2017 (Chan and Soeriaatmadja 2017). This initiative is a response to terrorist activities and transnational crimes in the Sulu Sea. Although the joint operation is maritime (navy) based, the Air Force and Army are also expected to be involved in securing the Sulu Sea, which lies northeast of the island of Borneo and southwest of the Philippines. The countries also established Marine Command Centers (MCC) in Tarakan, Tawau in Sabah, Malaysia, and Bongao, the capital of Tawi-Tawi Province in the Philippines (Chan and Soeriaatmadja 2017).

In the end, the security challenges in the BIMP-EAGA subregion remind us that BIMP-EAGA cannot only focus on economic cooperation alone. There needs to be a guarantee of political stability and security so that economic growth in the subregion can run well. BIMP-EAGA can ask ASEAN to help carry out the functions of the defense-security sector through the ASEAN Political-Security Community. However, another alternative BIMP-EAGA may consider is adding defense-security as an area of cooperation and turning it into a separate cluster in addition to the existing fields.

In addition to security challenges, Indonesia, in particular, faces the challenge of sharing authority between the central and sub-national governments in developing the BIMP-EAGA working area. As mentioned earlier, BIMP-EAGA relies on the active roles of subnational governments both in program initiation and implementation. However, in the context of the prevailing governance system in Indonesia, provincial governments do not have the authority they need to facilitate this active role. First is the authority to establish cross-border cooperation. Many of the programs in BIMP-EAGA are

cross-border in nature, for example, the construction of cross-border transportation routes and power grid connectivity. However, local governments cannot directly establish such cross-border cooperation with their foreign partners. According to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 23 of 2014, foreign policy affairs become the absolute authority of the central government, as well as other government affairs in which locations, users, and benefits have a cross-border nature.

Second is the authority to manage border areas. BIMP-EAGA covers many border regions as parts of its working area. According to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 43 of 2008, the border area is part of the country's territory which is located inside along the boundaries of Indonesia's territory with other countries. For land territory, the border area is at the sub-district level. Subnational/provincial governments need to manage border areas for various cross-border activities, such as trade and tourism, that support economic growth. However, referring to Law No. 43 of 2008, the central government has the authority to set policies on the management and utilization of border areas. Meanwhile, the provincial government only has the authority to implement the central government's policies.

The division of authority is increasingly complicated because, based on several experiences, perspectives, and interests between the central government and the provincial government are often different in managing border areas. For example, the central government emphasizes a defense-security approach in developing border areas on the small outermost islands in North Sulawesi, which are in the Greater Sulu-Sulawesi Economic Corridor. In contrast, local governments want to encourage a welfare approach (Alami et al. 2014). Another example is the issue of traditional Indonesia-Philippines and Indonesia-Malaysia cross-border trade. The Provincial Governments of North Sulawesi and North Kalimantan want the threshold value of goods exempted from customs to be increased to improve the welfare of border communities. However, central government agencies such as the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Finance rejected the idea because unscrupulous traders often misuse the threshold value to

seek profit. It then would reduce state revenue. This issue shows that the political system prevailing in a country also affects the success of the subregional cooperation that he participates in, as previously identified by Guo (2005).

To deal with the authority dilemma, stakeholders should consider dialogue as a middle way. The central government may need to listen to the voices of local governments, which are assumed to understand the context and dynamics of the border areas better. Therefore, the management and utilization of border areas as part of the BIMP-EAGA working area can accommodate both parties' perspectives and interests.

## **V. Conclusion**

Indonesia has been involved in BIMP-EAGA subregional economic cooperation since its establishment in 1994. Indonesia's interest in BIMP-EAGA is to accelerate development and economic growth in eastern Indonesia, which lags behind the western region. Therefore, 15 provinces are involved in BIMP-EAGA, which covers all provinces in Kalimantan Island, Sulawesi Island, Maluku Islands, and Papua Island.

Regarding its policy at BIMP-EAGA, Indonesia has established the National Secretariat for Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation under the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs based in Jakarta. This National Secretariat oversees the IMT-GT and BIMP-EAGA. Indonesia plays active roles in various cooperative clusters, ranging from natural resources, transportation, infrastructure-ICT, and tourism to MSMEs. In terms of connectivity, Indonesia has also joined the program to develop three economic corridors, namely West Borneo, East Borneo, and Sulu-Sulawesi.

Indonesia's involvement in the three corridors has boosted the connectivity of Indonesia's territory, especially border areas, with neighboring countries. The connectivity includes physical, institutional, and people-to-people dimensions. However, the existing connectivity is still insufficient to boost Kalimantan and Sulawesi contribution to



Indonesia's GDP. Some obstacles need to be overcome to optimize BIMP-EAGA's role in building connectivity and reducing Indonesia's development gap, such as standardization of the CIQ procedure, an improvement in institutional mechanism, and consistency of strong political will among the involved parties.

In addition, considering the vulnerability of the BIMP subregion to transnational crimes and terrorism, BIMP-EAGA needs to start thinking about security aspects and find solutions to maintain sub-regional stability, which have not been a priority so far. In Indonesia's case, the issue of distributing authority between the central and provincial governments also needs to be considered in establishing and implementing border area management policies. These are important to ensure economic growth and sustained development in the BIMP-EAGA area.

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