

Examining Border-Crossers at the Indonesia–PNG Border Post in Skouw, Jayapura, Papua

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In Brief 2017/35

Despite the fact that much has been written about the relationship between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea with an emphasis on border issues, little has been done in terms of examining the movement of everyday people across the border, going about their quotidian life. This In Brief describes a recent, localised pilot study on the Skouw border post in Jayapura, Indonesia. The study, undertaken to shed light on the reasons why residents of Indonesia and PNG cross the border, could be the prelude to a larger study in the future. It aims to give information to the public about the border area of Indonesia–PNG in Skouw, Jayapura, and to contribute to the study of transnationalism. To this end, the researchers made a random selection from the Papua New Guinean and Indonesian people who had crossed the Skouw border post, with 15 respondents from each side. The sample consisted of males and females who had at least attended primary school. The researchers interviewed and observed the border post on market days (Tuesday and Thursday) and weekends in the first week of October 2017.

The development of border regions has been one of the nine priorities, the so-called '*Nawa Cita*', proposed by President Joko Widodo since he took office in 2014. The third of these priorities underlines the importance of building Indonesia from the periphery to fortify these areas and villages within the framework of a unitary state (KPU 2014). To accelerate that program, the Indonesian government provided IDR17,839 trillion in 2017 which was almost double the 2016 budget of only IDR9 trillion (*Kompas* 19/3/2017).

The Skouw Border Post in Jayapura

Jayapura City is the capital of Papua Province, Indonesia, and lies on the north coast of New Guinea. It is bounded on the south by Arso District, Keerom Regency, on the east by PNG, and on the west by Depapre District, Jayapura Regency. Muara Tami subdistrict, whose capital is Skouw Mabo, is adjacent to the PNG border. Muara Tami has six villages (BPS 2017), yet

only four share a border with PNG: Skouw Yambe, Skouw Mabo, Skouw Sae, and Kampung Mosso.

BNPP RI (Badan Nasional Pengelola Perbatasan Republik Indonesia; National Agency for Border Management) is responsible for managing all the border areas in Indonesia. In May 2017, President Widodo opened the PLBN (Pos Lintas Batas Negara; Transnational Border Post) in Skouw, Jayapura, and it soon became a popular tourist destination (Ompusunggu 11/5/2017). To serve the PLBN in Skouw, three different institutions are provided, namely immigration, quarantine, and customs. The PLBN office and the border gate are open each day from 8 am to 4 pm.

The researchers interviewed 30 people from PNG and Indonesia who had crossed the Skouw border post legally, and used qualitative analysis to explain the data. The questions asked were: 'What was the main reason for them to cross the border?', 'How often did they visit the other country?', and 'Did they feel comfortable during their visit?' The researchers interviewed seven females and eight males from PNG, aged 15–45. Four had graduated from high school, three had graduated from junior school, and eight had been to primary school even though three said they did not complete their study. Meanwhile, the age range of the Indonesian respondents (six females and nine males) was 18–50 years. Three held bachelor degrees, nine had graduated from high school, and the other three were completing their undergraduate degrees.

Reasons for Crossing the Border

Through the interviews, it appeared that the main reason for people from PNG to cross the border was to attend the market on Tuesday and Thursday. Of the 15 PNG respondents, 13 said they went to Indonesia for shopping on market days, and the two others said they cross the border to visit relatives. They were interviewed on Tuesday and Thursday. Every respondent added that Indonesian products and services were cheaper than PNG's. For example, one

said that printing a paper in PNG was K5, while it was only K2 in Indonesia. All the respondents also said they felt comfortable while visiting Indonesia. In addition, it was found that roughly 300–400 PNG people crossed the border on each Tuesday and Thursday (market days), while on each of the other days there were just under 50 people.

Even so, one also said that the way they consider shopping in Indonesia also depends on how much money they have. Residents of PNG generally buy Indonesian products such as rice, bread, noodles, olive oil, cooking utensils, electronics, and other goods. There is a motorcycle service called 'ojek' available to carry their products from the Indonesian market to the border gate. We also found that many of Indonesian kiosk owners can speak pidgin to effectively communicate the price of products they sell. Most vendors accept both rupiah and kina. PNG people stated that they found it easy to cross the border with the use of a Traditional Border Card (TBC), but it is only for people who live from Vanimo to the villages along the border.

Meanwhile, thousands of Indonesians, mainly from Jayapura, flood the Skouw border post on public holidays and weekends. They come there because of the view of the border and go shopping at PNG's small kiosks located near to the border, which sell hats, snacks and handmade crafts (bracelets and necklaces). We found that roughly 200–300 people visited the border on the weekend and less than 50 people on each of the other days. They also come to take pictures; not to enter PNG. According to one of the officials at the PLBN, a large number of Indonesians always visit the border on special occasions. For instance, recently there was a church tour consisting of men from Jayapura city who wanted to experience the border area first-hand.

Indonesian citizens should apply for a visa if they want to visit PNG, but an exception is given to those who reside in areas along the border who can use a 'kartu pelintas batas' (border crossing card). Of the 15 respondents, seven said they come to PNG to visit relatives, and the eight others said they went there for shopping. They all were interviewed during the weekends and come from different parts of Indonesia. Once they have entered PNG, they then catch public transport (taxi/minibus) from the border post at Wutung to Vanimo. While three respondents felt uncomfortable, 12 others said they felt happy during the visit in PNG. Those who went there for shopping bought things like bags, bread, cups, clothes, chips, beer, and so on. In addition, four said they visit PNG twice a month while the 11 others said it always depended on their circumstances.

Conclusion

Our research shows that several factors affect PNG and Indonesian cross-border interactions and that this is an area that warrants a larger study. First, people from both countries consider the market as an opportunity. While the majority of Papua New Guineans cross the border on market days, over half of the Indonesian respondents went to shop in PNG on weekends and public holidays. It is also worth noting that many Indonesians came regularly to enjoy the Skouw border post; but not to enter PNG. Second, visiting relatives was also important for them, although not much stated by PNG respondents. The majority of respondents from PNG and Indonesia confirmed that they feel comfortable during their visits. Third, citizens of both countries who live along the border have relatively easy access to enter the region. They only need to have a border crossing card, similar to a second passport. Fourth, a conducive environment at the Skouw border post also contributes to people from each of these two nations to cross their shared border for a visit. Lastly, we notice that the border post has become a unique example of tourism and attracts visitors from both countries.

Notes on Authors

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