

## **Determinants of Social Interdependence and Interaction Among the Kanum Ethnic Group**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing the social interaction of the Kanum ethnic group as cross-border actors between the Sota area (Indonesia) and Waiber (Papua New Guinea). The Kanum people are indigenous communities residing on both sides of the border, sharing strong historical, cultural, and economic ties. The research was conducted in Kampung Sota, Sota District, Merauke Regency, South Papua Province, using a qualitative method with a descriptive approach and interactive model analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The findings reveal that the key supporting factors for social interaction are mostly located in Sota-Indonesia, including better geographic access, infrastructure availability, border pass policy, favorable security conditions, and active economic and educational activities. On the other hand, the main hindering factors are found in Waiber-PNG, such as difficult geographic access, lack of infrastructure, limited governmental policies, and issues related to civil registration. Culturally and socially, the Kanum people experience no barriers due to shared values, traditions, and language. This study concludes that cross-border interdependence is not solely determined by national boundaries but also shaped by socio-cultural dynamics and inclusive policies.

**Keywords:** *Kanum ethnic, social interaction, cross-border, border, interdependence.*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi interaksi sosial masyarakat Suku Kanum sebagai pelaku pelintas batas antara wilayah Sota (Indonesia) dan Waiber (Papua Nugini). Suku Kanum merupakan masyarakat adat yang tinggal di kedua sisi perbatasan dan memiliki hubungan sosial, budaya, serta ekonomi yang kuat sejak lama. Penelitian dilakukan di Kampung Sota, Distrik Sota, Kabupaten Merauke, Provinsi Papua Selatan, menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif dan teknik analisis model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor-faktor pendorong utama interaksi sosial berada di wilayah Sota-Indonesia, antara lain akses geografis yang lebih baik, dukungan infrastruktur, kebijakan kartu lintas batas, kondisi keamanan yang kondusif, serta aktivitas ekonomi dan pendidikan yang aktif. Sementara itu, faktor-faktor penghambat mayoritas berada di wilayah Waiber-PNG, seperti akses geografis yang sulit, minimnya infrastruktur, keterbatasan kebijakan pemerintah, serta tantangan administrasi kependudukan. Secara kultural dan sosial, masyarakat Suku Kanum tidak mengalami hambatan karena memiliki kesamaan nilai, budaya, dan bahasa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa interaksi interdependensi masyarakat pelintas batas tidak hanya ditentukan oleh garis batas

negara, melainkan juga oleh faktor sosial-budaya dan dukungan kebijakan yang adaptif.

**Kata Kunci:** Suku Kanum, interaksi sosial, pelintas batas, perbatasan, interdependensi.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is a country surrounded by both maritime and land borders, sharing boundaries with several neighboring nations. Border areas are often treated as peripheral phenomena, frequently overlooked and not prioritized in national development agendas. Indonesia's geographical location is highly strategic within Southeast Asia, serving as a transit route between countries.

Problems and conditions in border areas vary greatly (Setiawan, 2010). Several issues commonly found in these regions include economic dependence on neighboring countries, limited transportation access, inadequate infrastructure, and the lower cost of basic necessities in adjacent nations (Rahmawati, 2010).

One of the provinces in Indonesia that shares both land and maritime borders with other countries is South Papua Province, which borders Papua New Guinea (PNG) by land and Australia and Palau by sea. Merauke Regency, now part of South Papua Province, has a land border with PNG and a maritime border with Australia. The districts that share a direct land border with PNG are Ulilin District, Eligobel District, Sota District, and Naukenjerai District. The official Border Crossing Post (Pos Lintas Batas Negara/PLBN) in use is located in Sota District.

Border regions serve as sites for cultural and socio-economic exchange (Blum, 2014). According to Hadiwijoyo (2009), communities living in border areas are united through socio-economic and socio-cultural relationships. Although the border is clearly defined on maps and agreed upon politically, many local residents disregard these national boundaries, often because they adjust their movement and activities based on their daily needs (Baud & Van Schendel, 1997). Another reason for this disregard is the presence of traditional and cultural ties, particularly between communities living in the Sota (Papua)–PNG border area (Bandiyono, 2004).

Population mobility in these border areas has become a key issue between Indonesia and PNG (Bandiyono, 2004). Border crossing often includes both legal and illegal activities (Setyawan, 2009). The fact that Papua is divided between two countries has also resulted in the division of traditional territories. In both Indonesia and PNG, members of the same traditional ethnic group — the Kanum people — reside on both sides. As a result, two types of boundaries may apply: administrative and cultural (Bandiyono, 2004). Cultural boundaries in border interactions are shaped by ancestral ties and kinship networks. In line with the views of Djohan and Herry Yogaswara (1996), the Kanum people have long-standing cultural connections, sharing a common language, marital customs, subsistence economy, and mythology. The

Kanum community, living in both Indonesia and PNG, recognizes boundaries that are both artificial (man-made) and natural (Djohan & Yogaswara, 1996).

The local communities on both sides of the border — in PNG and Indonesia — are Kanum people, who hold customary land rights (*hak ulayat*) from Sota to PNG. As mentioned earlier, these communities often do not recognize formal state boundaries. Instead, they follow natural boundaries in accordance with their customs — such as large trees, stones, rivers, and other landmarks with mythological significance.

For the Kanum people living along the border, national borders can be perceived as separating familial ties and collective rights and responsibilities over shared customary land. These different perspectives often cause misunderstandings and actions considered to violate national laws, whereas the socio-cultural relationships that underpin their interactions cannot be constrained by national boundary policies.

Without social interaction, communal life cannot exist (Young & W. Mack in Soekanto, 2007). Social interactions among the Kanum people — as border communities and cross-border actors in the Sota-PNG area — are driven by mobility due to economic, social, political, and geographic factors (Pressat in Bandiyono, 1998).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a descriptive analysis approach, combined with interview guidelines. The object of study focuses on the factors influencing the social interaction of the Kanum ethnic group. The research was conducted in the border crossing area of Sota Village, Sota District, Merauke Regency, South Papua Province. This location was chosen because Sota Village is the only area in Merauke Regency with an official Border Crossing Post (*Pos Lintas Batas Negara/PLBN*), and it is the daily crossing point for local communities, particularly the Kanum people. Additionally, the local communities living in Morehead District (PNG) and Sota Village (Indonesia) have strong kinship ties, as they belong to the same Kanum ethnic group, sharing similar social and cultural lives. The data analysis technique used in this study is the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three main components: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research essentially discusses Social Theory, specifically social interaction, presented through a study of social realities of interdependence occurring in the border area of the Republic of Indonesia (RI), specifically Sota Village, and the PNG border area, namely Morehead District. The residents who cross the border and

reside in both Sota Village (RI) and Morehead District (PNG) are part of the same ethnic group or community known as the Kanum Tribe. It is widely understood that although there are formal rules and agreements about national borders, in traditional or customary terms, there are no boundaries that divide an ethnic group in two.

The Kanum people inhabit both Sota (Indonesia) and Morehead (PNG) simultaneously, despite differences in access to the economy, education, and health services. What unites them is their shared socio-cultural identity, which serves as a powerful bond, allowing them to continue visiting one another across national borders. Among the regular activities conducted by this border-crossing community (the Kanum tribe) are Market Days, which take place every Monday and Wednesday, and the celebration of each nation's Independence Day (August 17th for Indonesia, and September 16th for PNG). Traditional ceremonies, however, are scheduled by customary leaders and thus do not have fixed dates, making them non-routine events, similar to religious ceremonies, which are determined by religious leaders in advance.

The economic condition of the Kanum people living in Sota Village is visibly more advanced than that of their relatives living in Morehead District. This is evident through daily economic activities, where Kanum people from PNG frequently shop for basic needs in Sota Village. Similarly, facilities for education, healthcare, and infrastructure are more developed and accessible in Sota, where the Indonesian Kanum people reside. As a result, it is common to see Kanum people from PNG attending school, seeking medical treatment, and shopping in Sota Village, District of Sota, where their kin live on the Indonesian side. However, in terms of socio-cultural life, the Kanum community remains deeply connected, regularly visiting each other and maintaining strong traditional ties across the border.

The following issues have emerged as a result of activities carried out by border crossers from both Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Sota:

1. Cultural: Limited days permitted for overnight stays when visiting relatives for customary ceremonies, and administrative challenges related to civil registration when there is an exchange of customary property, such as the exchange of daughters between families with different domiciles. Similar issues arise during religious marriage ceremonies in churches, especially when one of the spouses is a PNG citizen, due to lack of legal documentation.
2. Social: Limitations on the length of stay when visiting relatives or participating in Independence Day celebrations for both Indonesia and PNG.
3. Economic: Border crossers from PNG use two payment systems—traditional barter and the Kina currency. However, there is currently no official currency exchange facility available in the border area.
4. Health: Although PNG border crossers receive the same medical treatment as Indonesian citizens at the Sota health center,

referral to higher-level hospitals is complicated due to the requirement of Indonesian national ID data and BPJS (Indonesia's national health insurance) membership.

5. Education: Similar problems occur among PNG children who attend school in Sota. Because they lack Indonesian national identity data, they are not registered in the official education data system (DAPODIK), and thus are not eligible to receive official diplomas upon graduation.

Main Reasons for PNG Border Crossers Visiting Sota Village :

1. Cultural: Visiting relatives to take part in traditional ceremonies such as land clearing rituals, customary weddings, communal land rites, and funeral rites.
2. Social: Visiting sick family members, assisting with land preparation and farming, participating in harvest activities, and attending or celebrating national holidays. On August 17 (Indonesia's Independence Day), the Kanum people in Sota invite their relatives from PNG to join the celebrations. Conversely, on PNG Independence Day (September 16), the Kanum people from Sota travel to nearby districts in PNG to attend national celebrations.
3. Economic: PNG border crossers typically bring hunted game, agricultural produce, or fish to sell directly to buyers or consign to kiosks and stalls. Their earnings are used to purchase daily necessities. Two payment systems are used—barter among Kanum people and Kina for transactions with non-Kanum or newcomers. Besides daily trade in Sota Village, transactions also occur every Sunday at a border market near the Indonesia-PNG monument, where Kanum people sell handmade crafts, honey, and produce. This border market attracts many tourists, boosting income for both Kanum people and migrants. However, in most other PNG-Papua border areas, PNG citizens primarily cross into Indonesia to shop for their basic needs, not vice versa.
4. Health: PNG citizens frequently bring their sick family members to the Sota health center, where they receive the same services as Indonesian citizens.
5. Education: Many PNG children attend school in Sota, while some children from Sota continue their education in PNG.

### **1. Social Interaction**

Social interaction is a relationship between two or more individuals in which the behavior of one individual influences, alters, or improves the behavior of another, and vice versa (Gerungan, 2004). According to Partowisastro (2003), social interaction is a form of social relation that functions to establish various types of dynamic relationships, whether between individuals, between groups, or between an individual and a group. Meanwhile, Dirdjosisworo in Syani (2002:152) defines social interaction as a dynamic reciprocal social relationship, both between individuals, groups, and between individuals

and groups.

Social interaction involves social relations between individuals, between an individual and a group, and between groups (Soerjono Soekanto, 2012). Without social interaction, communal life would not be possible. Social processes are interactions or reciprocal relationships between humans that occur throughout their lives in society.

As is known, humans are social beings who always need others in their daily lives. Therefore, humans inevitably must interact with others. The relationship between humans and other humans, or between a human and a group, or between groups, is what is called social interaction (Sarwono, 2010).

Ahmadi (2002) states that social interaction is a relationship between two or more individuals where the behavior of one individual influences, changes, or improves the behavior of the other, and vice versa. H. Bonner (in Gerungan, 2010) also describes social interaction as a relationship between two or more individuals where one influences or adapts to the other. Such relationships are always reciprocal, forming mutual influence. Social interaction is the key to all social life, because without it, communal living would be impossible. Social life occurs when people or groups work together, talk, and collaborate to achieve shared goals (Anagoro & Widiyanti, 1990).

## **2. Interdependence**

The theory of interdependence was first introduced by Harold Kelley and John Thibaut in 1959 in their book *The Social Psychology of Groups*, and later expanded in *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. Yanuar Ikbar (2007) defines interdependence as a mutually dependent relationship where individuals rely on one another to compensate for each other's shortcomings. The social exchange theory (interdependence theory) conceptualizes interaction as a result of outcomes received and given between people. Interdependence emphasizes cooperation-based relationships that involve mutual effort to achieve shared goals (Persell, 1987). In summary, interdependence is a relationship of mutual dependence between individuals or groups, characterized by social cooperation to achieve collective goals, where outcomes are mutually exchanged.

## **3. The Kanum Tribe**

Malind Anim is one of the tribes along the southern coast of Papua, residing in Merauke Regency. In Dutch and Indonesian literature, they are often referred to as Marind, a term based on psychoanalytical research methods. The term Malind Anim means "Malind people" or "human beings" (Peday Ayub, 2013). Currently, Malind Anim communities are spread across 20 districts in 160 villages (BPS, 2010).

Within the Malind Anim tribe, there are 14 sub-regions, one of which is the Kanum area, located in the border region. Like other Malind Anim sub-groups, the Kanum people strongly believe in their ancestors. During initiation rituals, they connect spiritually with ancestors through their clans. Ancestors are considered supernatural

life forces who give life through spirit forms (wi).

The Kanum tribe, also known as “Kanum,” has customary land rights (hak ulayat) across Wasur National Park (Purba, 1999). Some experts classify Kanum as part of the larger Marind ethnic group due to similarities in language and totemic culture (Hariadi, 1994).

The Kanum people inhabit Sota Village and hold customary land extending into Papua New Guinea (PNG). Culturally, they do not recognize formal borders; instead, natural elements like large trees, rocks, or rivers serve as traditional boundaries, imbued with mythological significance. Government-drawn borders have unintentionally separated their ancestral lands and kinship networks.

There are seven clans in the Kanum tribe: Mbanggu, Ndimar, Ndiken, Sanggra, Mayuwa, Gelambu, and Kul. Kanum settlements in Wasur National Park include Sota, Yanggandur, Rawa Biru, Onggaya, Tomer, Tomerau, and Kondo (BTN Wasur, 1999). Other tribes with customary rights in the park include Marori Men-Gey, Marind, and Yei-nan.

Kanum communities traditionally rely on hunting, gardening, and fishing. Some coastal Kanum in Onggaya and Sota engage in marine fishing. They spend extensive time in the forest and use temporary wooden shelters called bivouacs, contributing to deep ecological knowledge, including for traditional medicine.

One key crop is kumbili (gembili), a local tuber central to Kanum food security and culture. It is used in traditional marriage rituals and must be planted following customary ceremonies like bakar batu (stone cooking rituals), which are mandatory for all families.

Cross-border interaction has existed long before colonial-imposed borders. According to Kanum mythology, the Kanum originated from Galumbu in PNG. They believe they descended from a nibung tree in Gasul (Galumbu Mer). The tree is considered the source of several ethnic groups including Kanum, Yei-Nan, Marind, and Kimaam. Over time, these groups spread across various regions, claiming these lands as their customary territories.

The Kanum were divided into three main clans: Ndikwan Galumbu (settled in Galumbu), Ndimar (east of the upper Torasi River), and Mbanggu (in Mbenggu). All of these locations are now within PNG borders. Despite being on opposite sides of the modern border, many Kanum families maintain land use rights and kinship ties across the boundary.

In 1895, the British and Dutch divided the region along the Torasi River. Communities were asked to choose whether to join Australia or the Dutch Indies. Those who chose Australia stayed in Weriaber (PNG), while others joined the Dutch side and moved to Keme and eventually to Sota.

This shared heritage and kinship underlie frequent cross-border activities. Kanum people from Sota travel to Morehead to help farm or use ancestral lands, and vice versa. The nature of these movements—grounded in cultural, familial, and territorial rights—explains the high

frequency of cross-border interaction between Kanum communities in PNG and Indonesia.

#### **4. Research Result and Discussion**

Social interaction between Kanum people residing in both PNG and Indonesia reflects a strong kinship bond, resulting in social interdependence. This study found that the main factors influencing social interaction among Kanum border crossers are predominantly supportive factors located on the Indonesian side (Sota), while inhibiting factors are more prominent on the PNG side (Waiber), as outlined below:

##### **a. Geography**

Supportive: The geographic condition of the Sota border area, though muddy and forested, is accessible by motor vehicles. This accessibility facilitates interdependence among Kanum people in Sota.

Inhibiting: In contrast, the Waiber area in PNG is surrounded by dense forest, lacks road access, and requires crossing the large Torasi River, making it difficult to reach and thus hindering interaction.

##### **b. Government Policy**

Supportive: A written agreement allows the use of border pass cards (red for Indonesia, yellow for PNG) for local residents, enabling cross-border movement without a passport or visa. This supports Kanum people in visiting sick relatives, attending traditional ceremonies, conducting trade, going to school, or seeking medical treatment.

Inhibiting: Each country has separate policies concerning citizenship data, which hampers access to education, health services, and civil registration such as marriage certificates. While informal compromises are made—such as allowing PNG children to attend school in Sota—official diplomas and free healthcare at referral hospitals remain inaccessible without Indonesian citizenship data.

##### **c. Cultural and Social**

Supportive: The Kanum people share the same culture, social values, traditional exchange systems, and communal ceremonies, which facilitate cross-border interaction.

Inhibiting: No inhibiting factors were identified in terms of culture and social ties, due to strong similarities and mutual understanding.

##### **d. Security**

Supportive: A conducive security environment on both sides supports cross-border interaction, as community members comply with legal norms.

Inhibiting: Negative or uncooperative attitudes from PNG security officers sometimes cause Indonesian security forces to feel threatened.

##### **e. Infrastructure**

Supportive: Infrastructure in Sota—such as roads, the PLBN building, health clinics, and schools—supports social interaction and mobility.

Inhibiting: In Waiber (PNG), infrastructure is severely lacking, with no proper roads, healthcare facilities, or schools, and the area is distant from the district capital.

##### **f. Economy**

Supportive: Economic activity is concentrated in Sota, with Kanum

people from PNG bringing goods to sell in Indonesia using barter or Kina currency converted into rupiah. This fulfills daily needs and strengthens interaction.

Inhibiting: Waiber has only one rarely used traditional market, resulting in almost no economic activity on the PNG side.

Based on this research, the most prominent supporting factors for social interdependence among the Kanum border community are found in the Sota (Indonesia) region, while the inhibiting factors are concentrated in Waiber (PNG).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study describes and analyzes the driving and inhibiting factors that influence social interaction within the cross-border Kanum community living in the Republic of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. These factors include geography, culture and social aspects, infrastructure, security, economy, and the role of government as a regulator—both in formal terms and in other forms of governance. The findings reveal that the supporting contributions are predominantly found in the Sota region of Indonesia, while the inhibiting contributions are mainly found in the Waiber region of Papua New Guinea.

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