

## THE PRESENCE OF THE MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES IN EAST TIMOR

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to find negative impacts of the construction of the modern infrastructure of the toll road and find out a good solution in East Timor.

**Methods:** The research methodology used is descriptive qualitative research methodology, namely, collecting data, interviewing key persons, making data deduction, analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and expressing recommendations, especially for the contractors and for the government.

**Results:** The construction of the toll road infrastructure megaprojects in the new country of Timor-Leste has both positive and negative impacts. The negative impact is huge and this is not taken into account by the contractors and the government in the construction of the Suai-Beasu toll road that connects the city of Suai on the South coast and the town of Dili on the North coast of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. Hence, the recommendations suggested for the contractors and the government are to implement the aspirations of the communities, especially in the fair and just payment for the area used for the projects and building new cross-traffic for the residents alongside the toll road.

**Conclusion:** The presence of the toll road had positive impacts but there are several negative impacts on the lives of the Suai people, therefore, it is better that if the government and the contractors pay serious attention to overcome the negative impacts.

**Keywords:** Infrastructure, Social development, Positive and negative impacts.

### INTRODUCTION

The negative impacts of the construction of the Suai-Beasu toll road infrastructure megaproject that connects the town of Suai on the South coast and the city of Dili on the North coast of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste is huge. Whatever development takes its form, but if the impact is negative on the population, what's the point? Criticism and difficulties experienced by the residents along the toll road were examined by the authors in 2019–2020 and the following are the results of the study.

Timor-Leste is young country in Southeast Asia. Timor-Leste won independence from Indonesia through a referendum process on August 30, 1999. The goal of independence of a new country was to be free from oppression, poverty, and underdevelopment whether it is underdeveloped in the fields of education, infrastructure so on and so forth. As a new country, the Timor-Leste government is currently trying to develop the Suai-Beasu toll road infrastructure megaproject, specifically to distribute oil and natural gas mining products in the southern part of Timor-Leste such as Suai district and Same and Viqueque district.

East Timor, which was destroyed by the civil war that occurred in 1975–1999, is now starting to rise again. In the history of Timor-Leste, this region was colonized by the Portuguese for 450 years, Japan for 3 years, and Indonesia for 24 years. At present, it has begun to develop including the construction of toll road infrastructure megaprojects for land transportation to facilitate the transportation of oil and promote tourism in the southern part of Timor-Leste.

Every development refers to the process, method, and implementation. Therefore, the meaning of the word development can be understood as the process or way in which humans do things in various fields of life for certain purpose. Hence, development in this context can be understood as the whole process in an effort to make a change based on a particular view, plan, and choice to achieve certain goals.

According to Robert [1], the development requires active participation from the community where the development took place. If the development has been carried out, social change will occur. Robert [2] states that social change is a change in the field of social relations or changes to a balance in social relations. According to Roucek and Warren [3], social change is as a change in a social process or in the structure of society. Meanwhile, according to Kingsley Davis, social change is a development that occurs in a structure and function of the society. Max Weber states that sociocultural change is a change in the situation in society as a result of a mismatch between elements in society. Samuel Koenig said that social change is social development which refers to modifications that occur in the patterns of human life.

In the construction of the toll road that took place in Timor-Leste, social change occurred and unfortunately not for the better, but it led to unrest and riots. Communities that were once united and harmonious now stand divided, mutual suspicion and unfamiliarity.

### Research objectives

Two research objectives were set for this study. These are given below:

- I. To examine the positive and negative impacts of the toll road development
- II. To determine the negative impacts affecting the communities.

### METHODS

The research methodology used is descriptive qualitative research methodology, which uses data analysis methods. In analyzing the data, the authors used the Milles and Huberman data analysis model [4]. Namely, there are three types of activities that go hand in hand in relation to the data analysis process: Data deduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification

In qualitative research methods, the process of data analysis has been carried out since before entering the field, while in the field and after

completing surveys in the field. This is based on Nasution thesis [5] which says that the analysis has begun since formulating and explaining the problem, before going into the field and continuing until writing the results of the research.

In qualitative research methodologies, the most appropriate data analysis process is when the data collection process is taking place in the field and after the completion of data collection within a certain period [6]. At the time of the interview, the researchers had to do an analysis of each answer given by the informant being interviewed [7]. If the answers given by the informants are still not valid enough, the researchers must ask new questions to obtain data that are considered valid or credible. To obtain these data, according to Miles and Huberman [8], the activities in this qualitative data analysis must be carried out interactively and take place continuously until they obtain valid data.

### The process of the research

In conducting this entire research process, the researchers conducted research in two different places in the Suai district. First, entire toll road buildings in the Suai district, namely, in the districts of Suai Kota, Beco, and Matai village. Second, the researchers developed the research at Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao airport in the city of Cova Lima. The aim of the research in these two places remains the same, namely, researchers want to see, know, and comprehensively understand the social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of the megaproject on the lives of the local people [9]. The duration of the entire research process was 3 months from January 27, 2019, to April 12, 2019, in the first and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> time, we continued the research from January 2020 to March 2020.

In these two periods of the research, we found many information about the positive and negative impacts of the toll road building and in reality, the negative impacts are more bigger than the positive impacts. Many interviewees explained spontaneously that the toll road construction is a calamity than a fortune for the people [10].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of toll road construction

Suai is a district located in the south of Timor-Leste. Suai district is 138 km from the capital city of Dili. The capital city of Suai is Cova Lima. The population in this district is 23,000. The city is located only a few kilometers from the Timor Sea to the south of the island. The Suai district became famous in 1999 because in this place, there was a massacre of pro-independence people in the Suai Church by pro-Indonesian militias [11]. Suai is currently used by the government of Timor-Leste as a place for processing crude oil that is tapped from the Timor Sea.

After conducting a survey study for 6 months in the field and based on the results obtained, all the results of the research were formulated in two important sections below.

From a sociological perspective, the construction of the toll road project in Suai had a positive impact on the people of Timor-Leste in general and the Suai community in particular. The positive impact felt by the Suai community is that the infrastructure project can facilitate the mobilization of the people in the Suai district itself and with the community in other surrounding areas in interacting in the social, cultural, and economic fields.

According to the recognition of a local community leader named Leonito Amaral that the impact of toll road infrastructure development is very good because it can facilitate the community to distribute their agricultural and livestock production to the national market in the national capital of Dilly. Furthermore, according to Leonito, the long-term plan of the toll road construction by the Timor-Leste government is as preparation for the distribution of petroleum drilling project facilities in Suai. Moreover, of course after the oil drilling project is completed, the toll road will be used as the main route for oil distribution from Suai to the entire territory of Timor-Leste. Concretely, the Suai community

is greatly helped by the presence of the toll road because it smoothenes and accelerates the flow of transportation, business, communication, and tourism in Suai.

The construction of the Suai toll road has had a positive impact on families whose land has been offset by the contractor. According to Leonito Amaral, after the contractor handed over compensation (compensation for land), some families used some of the compensation money to pay for their children either in elementary school, junior high school, senior high school (SMA), and the youths who want to continue their education to the university or who are still in the process of studying at university. Furthermore, according to him, if the landowners that received compensation for the land inherited from a certain family or tribal land, then the community who was a member of the family or the tribe would distribute compensation money among them equally or equal in value. This is done to maintain the kinship and harmony of family life.

In the culture of the people of Timor-Leste, especially in the culture of the Suai people, every large fortune that is obtained can never be enjoyed alone. Every fortune must be distributed also to the community, especially neighbors who are not having blood relation with the family. Because according to the beliefs of the Suai people, in principle, every sustenance will come to each person in turn. Today, it is our turn to get sustenance, but tomorrow, the sustenance will fall into the hands of others. Therefore, every fortune even if it is small must be distributed to others. Encouraged by this belief, the people who are currently receiving a fortune from the compensation received from the toll road contractor are also distributed to the neighboring residents who do not receive compensation because the land is indeed far from the toll road crossing.

Apart from the above belief, this is also done to maintain kinship and harmony relations with neighboring residents who are not included in the family or tribe who are compensated so that there is no social jealousy in a shared life in the community.

Human life always exists in two situations, namely, positive and negative situations. There is never a life that is forever running in a positive path. A positive existence presupposes a negative side. Positive and negative things are normally there at the same time. The same thing happened in the construction of the Suai toll road project.

In general, the presence of the Suai toll road certainly brings positive benefits to all the people of Timor-Leste and of course to the people of the Suai district because the presence of the toll road has brought change and progress which has certainly beautified the face of the Suai district.

Nevertheless, in fact, it cannot be denied that the presence of every major project such as the construction of a toll road in Suai also has some negative impacts on the people of Suai, especially those who live around the toll road. The following are some of the negative impacts of the toll road found by the authors in the fieldwork.

One of the serious problems in developing toll roads for the people of Suai, especially those whose land is used as a toll road, is the cost of compensation for residents' land that is not in accordance with the initial agreement between the landowner and the contractor. According to one resident's opinion that before the toll road measurement process was carried out, the contractor and the landowners sat together to discuss the issue of land acquisition owned by the residents and how much the cost would be compensated to the landowning community.

After going through a thorough discussion process, finally, the two parties reached on an agreement. Therefore, in the memorandum of agreement between the two parties, it was mutually agreed that the price of land owned by residents for 1 m<sup>2</sup> would be paid in the US dollars in the amount of \$ 3 (3 US dollars). Based on the agreement, the community was willing to surrender their land to the contractor.

There is one resident who is willing to give up his land area of 180 m<sup>2</sup> in the hope that he will receive compensation for his land based on the price agreed upon. Therefore, mathematically based on the area of the land the citizen must receive compensation from the contractor in the amount of \$ 54,000.00. However, the facts speak differently. In its realization, the contractor broke the promise. The contractor only paid a portion of the agreed fee, \$ 26,000.00. This is certainly quite disappointing for the landowners. The bitter experience was not only experienced by one of the residents but by all other residents who had surrendered their land to the contractor. Even more disappointing is that until now many residents yet to receive land compensation costs.

Another problem with the construction of the Suai toll road is that the stretch of the toll road section has separated residents who previously lived next door. This of course causes the relationship and communication between residents to be cut off because the community is separated by the toll road. This makes people who used to be free to cross to and fro to visit and communicate with each other are now totally cut off. They no longer visited each other because the toll road had separated them.

Actually, there is no problem if the contractor builds a crossing overpass to make it easier for residents to visit each other. However, in reality, the contractor never built a crossing overpass for the community. This is certainly very difficult for the people to get access to the capital city of Suai, to gardens, fields, and other agricultural areas which are across the toll road. For access to the places mentioned above, the people must go far and pay the transportation costs of motorcycle taxis, which is very expensive.

Long before the existence of the toll road construction project, the social life of the people in Suai and Beco was quite safe. There has never been a conflict whether it is intergroup conflict or conflict within families. However, when the toll road project construction process began and even more so when the government and contractors disbursed land compensation funds to the landowners, at that time social jealousy and conflict in the community began to emerge. Each tribe and families began to claim each other about the right to ownership of land which received compensation costs from the government and the contractor. As a result of these claims, there is disharmony and friction between citizens in living together.

If we investigate from the economic point of view, the construction of the Suai toll road has indeed sustained the economy of the Suai people, especially those who received compensation from the government. From the many testimonies from the community, compensation funds for land have boosted the community's economy. However, not all families who receive compensation from the government have good economic life. One of the families receiving toll road compensation funds has even become a broken household. The family is Alfredo Mendonca's family. After receiving the compensation funds from the government and contractors, Alfredo and his wife Angelina de Jesus Amaral often quarreled and often Alfredo physically abused his wife. The emergence of problems in the Alfredo and Angelina household is due to the issue of compensation money they received. Alfredo and Angelina's household problems were not well-documented until they divorced. Alfredo left his wife and children and then remarried another woman. In fact, long before receiving the toll road compensation funds Alfredo together with his wife and children lived in harmony and peace.

In general, every toll road in all countries in the world always has traffic cross and overpasses for vehicle owners and local pedestrians. Things like this are not found on the Suai toll road. The absence of cross-traffic or crossing overpasses is certainly a big problem for the surrounding community to cross or visit each other to carry out other activities which happen to be across the toll road.

As a result of the mistake of the government and contractors who have not installed the traffic cross, it certainly makes the community around the toll road have to take another route that is quite far and

transportation expensive. This is certainly a fatal mistake that should not have happened. However, due to the negligence of the government and the contractors, the community were forced to become victims.

One of the negative impacts of the Suai toll road project that has left Suai people in trouble is that the toll road construction has closed the irrigation channel that has been irrigating the rice fields of the community. As a result of the closed irrigation channel, the community's agricultural land which before the arrival of the toll road was very productive to support the farmers is currently not productive because of lack of water. The problem of irrigation channels being blocked by the toll road has caused the income of farmers to decrease dramatically.

Before the presence of the toll road, the residents never experienced water shortages to irrigate their agricultural land. What is even more disappointing is that the contractor has not yet found a solution to overcome this problem.

Another negative impact of the toll road projects experienced by the community is that there are some families who feel deprived of their habitat and displaced from the original environment that has raised them up to now.

They are forced to have a change of residence because their original place of residence was given up for the toll road. People cannot do much because they are forced to leave their original habitat. Even more disappointing is that after being displaced from the original environment, instead of the community getting a better and safer habitat, on the contrary, the community gets a lot of difficulties because the new land provided by the contractor is quite small and narrow and the community is having difficulty getting other basic needs.

The initiative of the Timor-Leste government to adopt a policy to build a toll road in the district of Suai is a brilliant breakthrough to bring Timor-Leste out of the slums and underdevelopment toward a modern state like other countries in Southeast Asia, but in the contrary, the residents left with a big problem, lack of land and water, and social disorder.

## CONCLUSION

The progress of a country is measured by the progress of infrastructure and economic conditions. One of the infrastructures that characterize the progress of modern countries today is the toll road infrastructure. Many countries in the world are competing to build toll roads. For example, countries in North America and Latin America have tried to build toll roads that stretch from Canada to the southern part of Chile. The purpose of the construction of the toll road is to connect, facilitate transportation traffic both between countries and between cities within these countries and the distribution of goods and services between these countries.

Another example is East Timor's neighboring country, namely, Indonesia is aggressively building toll road crossings as an alternative to overcoming traffic congestion, smoothing land transportation routes, and of course as the main route for distributing goods and services that have high economic value. It cannot be denied that the presence of a toll road has very promising economic benefits for a country.

Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries in the world which is in the process of realizing its dream of building a toll road in the district of Suai like the countries mentioned above. In general, the presence of toll roads in the Suai district is certainly very positive because it beautifies the face of Timor-Leste, especially the Suai district, facilitating land transportation from Suai to the surrounding areas or vice versa.

In a sociological perspective, the presence of the toll road has provided a lot of convenience for the community to interact and to socialize with each other in various matters of life. From an economic perspective, the presence of the Suai-Beco toll road has in fact boosted the economic growth of the East Timorese people, especially the Suai people.

Nevertheless, the presence of the toll road has several negative impacts on the lives of the Suai people, especially those who donated their land to the government and the people living around the toll road. Therefore, it is good if the government and the contractor pay serious attention to the negative impacts as described above to be evaluated, corrected, and acted upon. As a final result of this study, the authors recommend the following important things as a solution to overcome the negative impacts of the toll road construction for the community.

1. Take seriously, the initial agreement between the contractor and the government with the community regarding the amount of compensation that should be received by the community. In the sense that providing compensation for residents' land based on the agreement.
2. Building cross-traffic or crossing overpasses to make it easier for the people around the toll road to socialize with each other.
3. Rebuild irrigation channels that have been closed by the toll road crossings.
4. Rebuild houses properly that were displaced.

#### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

The entire authors have contributed equally.

#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No conflicts of interest exist.

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