

Extortion Inland Waterway Routes: The Strategic Role of Local Communities in Achieving Sustainable Maritime Security

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ABSTRACT

This study examines illegal levies along the Sungai Putting–Taboneo inland waterway in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, focusing on the strategic role of local communities in promoting sustainable maritime security. Inland waterways are vital to trade in archipelagic nations like Indonesia but are often prone to organized crime, including extortion and collusion between criminal groups and corrupt officials. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study collected data between March and October 2024 through interviews with ship crews and local stakeholders. It mapped key sites and patterns of unofficial levies, revealing that both institutional and community actors demand payments, often in cash or barter (e.g., diesel fuel). The lack of standardized fees creates operational uncertainty and raises logistics costs. The findings show that repressive law enforcement alone is insufficient, as socio-economic vulnerabilities within local communities contribute to their involvement in extortion. As an alternative, the study recommends community empowerment through fishermen’s cooperatives, legal education, and participatory monitoring systems. These approaches, supported by global literature on community-based resource management, have proven effective in enhancing accountability and reducing illegal activity. The research is geographically limited to the Sungai Putting–Taboneo corridor and temporally to March–October 2024. While qualitative in nature and not broadly generalizable, the study contributes a micro-sociological perspective to maritime security, emphasizing the need for integrated, community-based solutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Extortion, maritime security, community empowerment, Sungai Putting–Tabanio Ports, and river routes play an important role in supporting logistics and trade activities, especially in archipelagic countries like Indonesia. However, these areas often become hotspots for illegal practices, extortion,

smuggling, and other criminal activities (Hampton, 2021). The threat to maritime security has evolved from initial piracy into more complex organized crime, including institutional corruption and collusion between criminals and rogue officials (Jasper, 2010; DiDomenico, 2020).

In the context of ports and rivers, extortion is generally carried out in the form of cash payments or barter, such as fuel (diesel), by tugboats towing barges that pass through certain areas. The PwC Indonesia report (2021) states that these illegal extortion practices significantly impact national logistics costs. Additionally, a study by Katsouris and Sayne (2013) also shows that extortion facilitates an organized crime ecosystem within the port logistics chain in various developing countries. The challenges in combating maritime crime do not only stem from weak law enforcement but also from the social conditions of the communities around the ports and rivers. Many cases show that some local communities are involved in extortion practices, either due to economic factors, weak legal literacy, or the lack of alternative income (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019; van Schoor, 2019). The social structure around the port area greatly influences this dynamic (Sage Publications, n.d.). This is consistent with findings in the agricultural sector, where youth disinterest in traditional livelihoods has driven migration and reduced community resilience, leaving gaps filled by informal or illicit economic activities (Fitria et al., 2025).

Therefore, an approach that is purely repressive is not sufficiently effective. Local community empowerment is needed as part of a long-term solution. Research by Cornelis Lay (2014) and Antlöv (2003) emphasizes that community involvement in local governance and community-based empowerment can reduce extortion practices and enhance social accountability. This is also in line with the approach of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which states that strengthening the socio-economic capacity of coastal and riverine communities will narrow the space for the emergence of illegal practices in the maritime sector (UNDP, 2020).

Community empowerment can be realized through programs such as fishermen's cooperatives, coastal creative economy training, and participation in community-based monitoring systems. Research by Ostrom (1990) shows that local communities granted management rights and access to information are more likely to conserve public resources and reject illegal activities (Boelens et al., 2016). This approach has been proven in various case studies in East Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, where community participation in port oversight significantly reduced smuggling and illegal levies (Bavinck et al., 2013; Pomeroy et al., 2007). Thus, the study of illegal levies in ports and rivers cannot be separated from the social dimension and community empowerment (Hartati et al., 2025). This research aims to analyze the dynamics of illegal levies in the socio-maritime context and offers an empowerment model as an alternative approach to crime mitigation in the area.

The focus of previous research has been more dominant on legal or technical security aspects. Most previous research has focused on port security (Hampton, 2021; Jasper, 2010), law enforcement against maritime crime (UNODC, 2019), and transnational organized crime (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013). Not many studies explicitly highlight the local social dimensions of crimes such as extortion, especially in the context of communities around ports or rivers in developing countries (Hasran et al., 2024).

The Lack of Sociological Approaches & Empowerment in Addressing Maritime Extortion Some studies discuss social structure (Sage Publications, n.d.), but there has not been much research directly linking community empowerment with efforts to mitigate illegal levies at ports/rivers (Wiratama & Eka Juarsa, 2022). The handling of illegal levies is more dominantly directed towards repressive (legal) solutions rather than participatory ones. The lack of a bottom-up, community-based approach in analyzing and addressing maritime extortion practices (Safuan & Budiandru, 2019).

Some previous research focuses on major ocean shipping routes, not rivers or domestic waters. Much global research is more focused on maritime piracy (Somalia, Gulf of Guinea) and international trade routes. The lack of research on maritime crime in local river routes, such as those occurring in the Barito, Kapuas, and Mahakam Rivers, and small ports that serve as coal transport and logistics routes.

This article integrates sociological and empowerment approaches in the study of maritime security

(Katsouris & Sayne, 2013). Using a community empowerment perspective (Antlöv, Ostrom, Lay) to explain the role of society in the reproduction or prevention of illegal levies. Not just "recipients of impact," local communities are positioned as potential actors in the informal maritime surveillance system (Barnes, 2023).

The case study of this article is based on river and local port areas in Indonesia. We are highlighting the crucial locations of illegal levies in river and small port areas, which have received less attention in international research. Providing micro-sociological data from domestic river areas as a new contribution to the maritime security literature, which has so far been biased towards the global scale. This article suggests a replicable community-based intervention paradigm for tiny ports. This approach contrasts with the predominance of formal-legal studies that have constituted the mainstream.

2. METHODS

This study employs a **descriptive qualitative analysis method** as the primary approach to examine the dynamics of illegal levies or extortion in the inland maritime transport context. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore social phenomena in depth through the narratives, perceptions, and experiences of actors in the field, particularly in complex settings such as river ports and inland water routes in South Kalimantan.

The analysis focuses on describing and explaining the phenomenon of illegal levies in detail, based on the data collected. The analytical process includes identifying key elements such as:

- a. Patterns of extortion: including frequency and form of the levies,
- b. Actors involved: both from community-based groups and institutional representatives,
- c. Amounts charged: whether fixed or variable,
- d. Locations of extortion incidents: critical points along the Sungai Putting–Taboneo route,
- e. Payment methods: including cash, barter (e.g., diesel fuel), or other informal arrangements.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation involving **ship crews** who regularly navigate the Sungai Putting–Taboneo route. Additional data were gathered from local community members who are directly or indirectly engaged in port and logistics activities. These informants included:

- a. Ship security personnel,
- b. Owners of small boats offering crew transport to and from ships,
- c. Mooring workers operating around the Putting River Port.

All data collected were coded and categorized for thematic analysis. The results are presented in **tables**, summarizing types of levies, incident locations, involved actors, and transaction forms. These tables are available in full in the **Findings** chapter.

Data collection was conducted over a period from March to October 2024, incorporating repeated observations and phased interviews to ensure the validity of findings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings on three discussions, namely, the shipping route, the ship when not loaded, and the ship when loaded. For the shipping route, it is displayed with visualizations in Figure 1, attached with visualizations of the journey from Sungai Putting to Tabanio, which also show the points where illegal levies occur. In Table 1. Unofficial Costs of the Tabanio – Sungai Putting Route when the barge is empty, Tabanio - Sungai Putting Route. This table shows the costs incurred when the ship travels this route. Meanwhile, Table 2. Unofficial costs for the Sungai Putting-Tabanio route when the barge is loaded. The Tabanio - Sungai Putting route is the reverse route.

3.1. Shipping Lane

The shipping lane is the route that connects the port points where ships engage in loading and unloading activities. Ships traverse this shipping route, which functions as a traffic lane for the delivery

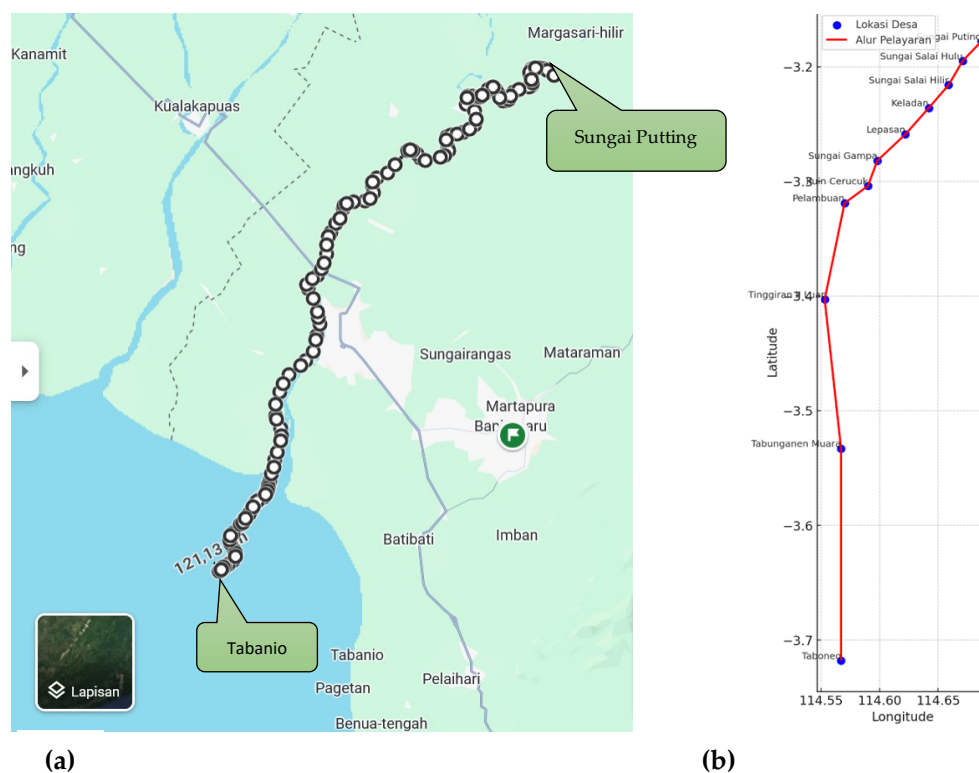
of logistics and passengers. On the shipping route of the Puting River from the north towards the south Tabanio, this route serves as a connector between loading and unloading ports.

It can be said that the shipping route of the Sungai Putting–Tabanio is the traffic of ships that move back and forth between those two points. This route connects Tabanio, which is located in the ocean, with Sungai Putting, which is located in the inland waters. The distance between Sungai Putting and Tabanio is approximately 75 miles. It is estimated that a tugboat pulling a loaded barge through this route from Sungai Putting to Tabaneo will take approximately one and a half days, or 36 hours. If the barge is loaded. If it is not loaded, the tugboat pulling the barge takes a shorter time, around 24 hours.

In the image, Figure 1 shows the shipping route based on the South Kalimantan region map, illustrating the journey starting from the village of Tabanio to Sungai Putting, passing through several other important village points, namely:

- a. Tabanio
- b. Tabunganen Muara
- c. Tinggiran II Luar.
- d. Pelambuan
- e. Kuin Cerucuk
- f. Sungai Gampa
- g. Lepas
- h. Keladan
- i. Sungai Salai Hilir
- j. Sungai Salai Hulu
- k. Sungai Putting

Figure 1. This is a figure 1, visualizations of the journey from Sungai Putting to Tabanio, which also show the points where illegal levies occur.



as: (a) the ship's route from Sungai Putting to Taboneo, the route based on the map from Google Maps marked with white dots; (b) The ship's route from Sungai Putting to Taboneo is determined by its

latitude and longitude coordinates. The red line is the ship's travel route. Meanwhile, the blue dots are the locations where illegal levies occur.

A blue dot marks each village, and a red line indicates the sequential shipping route connecting these points. This image displays geographic coordinates in the form of latitude and longitude, which makes it easier to understand geographic locations and the navigation routes taken.

The ships with the above route pass through several districts. Tabanio is located within the Tanah Laut district, while Tabunganen Muara and Tinggiran II Luar are within the Barito Kuala district. This shipping route divides Barito Kuala from the city of Banjarmasin. The area of Banjarmasin across from Tabunganen Muara is Pelambuan. Meanwhile, Tinggiran II Luar is across from Kuin Cerucuk. The city of Banjarmasin includes Pelambuan and Kuin Cerucuk.

Next, the shipping route passes through the Gampa and Lepas Rivers, which are located within the Barito Kuala Regency (Wahyu Trisno Aji, 2024). The ship proceeds towards the loading port. The ship passes through the Sungai Salai Hilir, Sungai Salai Hulu, and unloading Port as the final loading point, which is the Sungai Putting. Sungai Salai Hilir, Sungai Salai Hulu, and Sungai Putting are included in the Tapin Regency (Amanda et al., 2024).

The sailing route from Tabanio to Sungai Putting passes through four districts: Tanah Laut District (Tabanio), Pelambuan and Kuin Cerucuk (Banjarmasin City), Barito Kuala District (including Tabungan Muara, Tinggiran II Luar, Sungai Gampa, and Lepas), and Tapin District again (which includes Sungai Salai Hilir, Sungai Salai Hulu, and Sungai Putting).

The visualization of the shipping route above is also very helpful in understanding the spatial relationships between various locations traversed during river shipping activities and is important in identifying potential hotspots related to illegal levies or unofficial fees that have been previously outlined. Planning, risk management, monitoring strategies, and community empowerment can utilize this as a tool to minimize illegal additional costs. These findings align with research on flood-prone riverine areas in South Kalimantan, which found low levels of community preparedness and weak institutional support for early warning and disaster response systems (Saifullah et al., 2023).

3.2. Non-Loaded Barge

A non-loaded barge is a barge that carries no cargo along the route Tabanio, Tabungan Muara, Tinggiran II Luar Pelabuhan Kuin Cerucuk, Sungai Gampa, Lepas, Kelada, Sungai Salai Hilir, Sungai Salai Hulu, and arrives at the loading port at the final point, which is Pelabuhan Sungai Putting. Usually, this barge sets sail once the unloading process in the waters of Tabanio is complete (*Securing Freedom in the Global Commons*, n.d.). The barges that will unload in Tabanio sometimes queue in the waters for several days to wait for other barges to finish unloading (Ihsan et al., 2024).

Unloading activities mean transferring cargo from a barge to a larger ship or mother vessel with a cargo capacity of 45,000–75,000 MT. We refer to this activity as transshipment. A barge itself is a non-motorized vessel that provides cargo space services ranging from 5,500 MT to 10,000 MT. A tugboat with an average gross tonnage of 250 GT tows a barge while it is sailing (Hicks & Childs, 2019). The capacity of the tugboat engine is around 1600 HP–2200 HP (Putro et al., 2024).

At the transshipment barge, the extortion activities on the tugboats pulling the barges have already begun. Here is the Table of Unofficial Costs for the Tabanio – Sungai Putting route (Empty Barge). Based on Table 1, Barge Non-Loaded Barge Tabanio – Sungai Putting shipping route when the barge is empty, several important findings were noted as follows:

Tabel 1. Barge Non-Loaded Barge Tabanio – Sungai Putting Shipping Route

No	Location	Activity/Group	Status	Fee/Value	Additional Notes
1	Tabanio	Transshipment - Lanal	Obligatory	Variable nominal (TBD)	Regular practice, fee not yet determined.
2	Tabunganen Muara	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
3	Tinggiran II Luar	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
4	Pelambuan	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
5	Kuin Cerucuk	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
6	Sungai Gampa	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
7	Lepasan	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
8	Keladan	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
9	Sungai Salai Hilir	Mooring & Unmooring (Customary)	Obligatory	Rp 300,000/day + 3.5 Gallons	- Security by Elang Samudera: Rp 250,000/day - Security while docked - Customary mutual aid required
		NGO / Resident Contributions	Varied	Rp 10,000 – Rp 100,000 / Diesel	- Represented by local NGOs - Includes “dust money” and “cleanliness money”
10	Sungai Salai Hulu	Ship Passing	-	-	No noted transaction.
11	Sungai Putting	Mooring – CV Singa Laut	Mandatory	Rp 650,000	For barge door operation

Source: Processed (2024)

At the Tabanio location, the Lanal (Naval Base) imposes mandatory transshipment fees that vary in amount. The cost amount does not have a definite figure yet. On the route at the Tabunganen Muara location, Tinggiran II Outer Port, Kuin Cerucuk, Sungai Gampa, Lepasan, and Keladan, ships pass smoothly without any obstacles towards the Sungai Salai Hilir. This sailing area is not subject to any fees (Amelia et al., 2025).

In the Salai Hilir River, mooring and unmooring activities are subject to a mandatory fee of Rp300,000 per day based on the tradition of cooperation. There is an additional charge of 3.5 gallons of diesel. The security/guard fee by Elang Samudera is mandatory at Rp250,000 per day plus an extra charge of 3.5 gallons of diesel for ships docked at Sungai Salai Hilir (Krause & Strang, 2016). On the Salai Hulu River, the ships just pass through and go straight to the Putting River (Hampton, n.d.). Community groups that claim to be NGOs impose variable additional charges, which range from Rp. 10,000 to Rp. 100,000 and can be paid in either money or diesel, under the guise of social activities like dust money and cleanliness (Musriana et al., 2024).

Location of Sungai Putting The final destination port location is Sungai Putting. At this location, opening and closing the barge doors incurs a fee charged by CV. Singa Laut (Mooring). The tariff for owned vessels is Rp650,000, and for chartered vessels is Rp. 1,000,000, specifically during loading at Jetty HJI (Nursahid et al., 2024).

The activity supervisor in each village bills the company for the levies, which are usually cash or diesel. The levies only have an informal legal basis in the form of local community customs or certain operational practices (Romero, 2025). The tariffs set vary, reflecting a lack of standardization in the levies and thereby providing opportunities for manipulation or uncertainty in operational costs. The implications of these findings can lead to increased operational expenses for river transportation, negatively impacting economic efficiency. In addition, it can create potential micro-corruption and worsen the image of local investment in the shipping and transportation sector. The evidence indicates the need for policy-based interventions and comprehensive community empowerment to reduce these illegal levies or extortion practices (VILLAGE GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA: THE NEW DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK: *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*: Vol 39, No 2, n.d.).

This data illustrates the importance of transparency and further oversight in the management of waterway transport routes to reduce unnecessary economic costs and create a more conducive business environment.

3.3. Loaded barge

A loaded barge refers to a barge that carries coal. Usually, this occurs after the barge is fully loaded while it is docked at the conveyor. The barge will cast off and head to a specific location around the port to wait for the unloading schedule at Tabanio. The waiting time for the unloading schedule can be three to seven days, or even nearly a month. Their docking places can be around the villages of Keladan and Lepas. The table 2, below presents the unofficial costs associated with loading the barges on the Sungai Puting route to Tabanio.

Table 2 reveals several important points regarding the unofficial levies on the Sungai Puting to Tabanio route when the barges are loaded. At the locations of Sungai Puting, Sungai Salai Hulu, and Sungai Salai Hilir. There are no fees when the barges pass through these three locations. In Keladan, mooring and unmooring activities are subject to a mandatory fee of Rp250,000 per day, based on community customs (Keladan Mooring), plus an extra charge for 3.5 gallons of diesel. Security or guard fees are also imposed by the Elang Samudera group, mandatory at a cost of Rp250,000 per day, along with an additional 3.5 gallons of extra diesel. Meanwhile, at the release locations Sungai Gampa, Kuin Cerucuk, Pelambuan, Tinggiran II Luar, Tabunganen Muara, and Tabanio, there are additional charges known as retribution or security fees, with varying amounts between Rp50,000 and Rp100,000 per point. Officials from Lanal, Polairud, KPLP, and Dishub enforce this levy. Officials from Lanal, Polairud, KPLP, and Dishub conduct the payment pattern using an envelope system, and handover occurs at 22 different points along the shipping route. Unofficial levies typically occur regularly as security fees or additional charges on passing ships, particularly when those ships are carrying cargo. Certain groups or officials are explicitly implicated in this collection, reflecting the direct involvement of official institutions in this illegal practice. The extra diesel cost is converted to cash and charged to the company via the village leader.

Tabel 2. Barge Loaded Sungai Putting – Tabanio Shipping Route

No	Location	Activity	Involved Authorities	Status	Extra Charges	Description
1	Sungai Puting	-	-	-	-	-
2	Sungai Salai Hulu	-	-	-	-	-
3	Sungai Salai Hilir	-	-	-	-	-

4	Keladan	Mooring & Unmooring	Elang Samudera (security)	Required	Rp 250,000/day + 3.5 Gallons	Docking and undocking fees are equal. Mandatory security service while the ship is moored, provided by Elang Samudera.
5	Lepasan	Loose Fees / Security Deposit	Navy Base, Water Police, Sea & Coast Guard (KPLP), Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
6	Sungai Gampa	Levy / Security Fee	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
7	Kuin Cerucuk	Coin Deposit / Security	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
8	Pelambuan	Bribe / Security Fee	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
9	Tinggiran II Luar	Security Fee	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
10	Muara Savings	Levy / Security Deposit	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.
11	Tabanio	Levy / Security Fee	Navy Base, Water Police, KPLP, Transport Agency	None	Rp 50,000 – Rp 100,000	Envelopes are delivered to 22 locations.

Processed (2024)

This collection practice increases the logistics and operational expenses that companies have to bear, thereby negatively impacting overall economic efficiency. Such behavior reflects a serious issue regarding the integrity of local government officials and the need for improved governance that is more transparent and accountable. This activity also indicates the urgency of intervention through regulatory approaches, stricter law enforcement, and the empowerment of local communities to create stronger social and economic control over extortion or illegal levies. These findings indicate the need for strategic measures such as improving governance, enhancing transparency, and active community participation in monitoring shipping operations to minimize the negative impact of illegal levies.

3.4. Empowerment Opportunities for Local Communities

The following are findings that present opportunities for local community empowerment:

1. There is an informal organizational structure.

The Gotong Royong Group, Elang Samudera, CV. Singa Laut, and NGOs in Sungai Salai Hilir, as well as the Keladan docking area, demonstrate the presence of an active community that plays a role in informal economic activities. This group can become a formal institution managed transparently, such as a village cooperative or a village-owned enterprise. To ensure transparency and legality of activities, the established formal institutions receive training in financial management, entrepreneurship, and administration.

2. Types of Activities that Generate Fees

Currently, informally managed activities like docking and undocking ships, security/guard services, and cleanliness fees (LSM) present clear business opportunities. These

activities can be restructured into official services that provide real added value to the community, such as official boat docking services, certified security services, and professional and transparent village cleaning services. Local businesses involved in river transportation and port services require guidance from maritime institutions for effective management.

3. Involvement of Officials in Extortion

The levies involving officials in Tabanio, Lepas, Sungai Gampa, Kuin Cerucuk, Pelambuan, Tinggiran II Luar, and Tabunganen Muara indicate issues of transparency and lack of social control. Local communities can establish oversight forums to improve transparency and advocate for policy changes. The community receives legal awareness training to safely and effectively report illegal levies, serving as an active oversight mechanism in sailing activities. Additionally, there is also cooperation with higher law enforcement agencies to provide legal protection to local residents who dare to report.

4. Solar-Based Extortion Payment Scheme

The payment scheme that uses solar (which is then converted into money) can serve as the basis for transparent programs such as the official distribution of solar for community operational needs. Cooperatives or community enterprises can initiate an official fuel distribution system to eliminate illegal conversion practices. Training and technical assistance are necessary for the transparent and accountable management of fuel distribution.

5. Distribution Patterns of Locations and Intensity of Extortion:

Spatial data (map visualization) clearly shows locations prone to illegal levies, facilitating the planning of specific and targeted empowerment programs. The following data can serve as the basis for developing different empowerment programs based on vulnerable locations, with a specific approach tailored to each affected community.

3.5. Analysis of Shipping Routes and the Context of Illegal Toll Collection (Extortion) in the Inland River

The shipping route from Tabanio to Sungai Puting, passing through four districts (Tanah Laut, Barito Kuala, Banjarmasin, and Tapin), represents a vital transportation corridor that connects river communities within the local economic context. Each crossing between villages and districts has the potential to become a hotspot for illegal levies or extortion, especially when shipping operations involve numerous inspections and interventions by authorities or specific groups.

As explained by Bergmann, Bull & Gude (2024), extortion practices in the context of small-scale shipping are closely related to local power dynamics and small business strategies to survive the pressures of illegal levies (Bergmann et al., 2024). In this case, every village point along the shipping route can become a site of extortion that burdens transport entrepreneurs and the community. The guide by Bonello, Reitano & Shaw (2020) provides an overview of community solutions to address illegal levies, which is relevant when applied in the villages along this shipping route, as it can build collective social mechanisms to respond to detrimental external pressures (Bonello et al., 2020).

The study by Barnes (2023) highlights how the connections between victims, offenders, and the government are important in this situation, where the actions of law enforcement and local rules play a big role in how well illegal fees can be reduced (Barnes, 2023). Additionally, Wiratama and Juarsa (2022) highlight the importance of police law enforcement in combating illegal levies in Indonesia, which must be strengthened in the context of inland shipping routes like this (Wiratama & Juarsa, 2022).

3.6. Political Ecology Approach to Shipping Routes and Maritime Control

This shipping route can also be analyzed from the perspective of political ecology, as discussed by Boelens et al. (2016) in the concept of hydrosocial territories. River routes are not only transportation media but also arenas of power struggles over control of water resources and socio-economic spaces, which have implications for illegal toll practices (Ostrom, n.d.).

Childs & Hicks's (2019) study on the political ecology of the blue economy illustrates how control over maritime and aquatic resources serves as a source of power that can influence the dynamics of illegal levies along those waterways (Childs & Hicks, 2019).

Krause & Strang (2016) emphasize the need to pay attention to social dynamics in the context of social and political relationships involving rivers, as these dynamics serve as a medium for effective water resource management. This means that the role of local communities and informal institutions is very important in controlling and suppressing illegal levies that may arise (Krause & Strang, 2016). Sovacool's (2018) study on the context of climate change and social conflict emphasizes the importance of addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities of communities dependent on aquatic ecosystems—reflecting the same risks in South Kalimantan, which is susceptible to illegal levies in critical shipping lanes (Sovacool, 2018).

3.7. Implications of Governance and Maritime Security

In the context of operations and governance, studies by Okon et al. (2023) and Nwaogbe & Ogorode (2024) emphasize that inland waterway transportation faces operational safety challenges, which in turn opens up opportunities for illegal levies by stakeholders who control routes or port infrastructure (Okon et al., 2023; Nwaogbe & Ogorode, 2024). A study at the port by Safuan & Budiandru (2019) found that important distribution centers like Pelambuan, Kuin Cerucuk, and Pelabuhan Muat are essential but at risk of facing unofficial fees (Fitria et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This research discovered systematic extortion practices along the Putting–Tabanio River shipping route, both during the loading and emptying of barges. The main modus operandi involves the collection of cash and diesel, with variations in value and perpetrators depending on the location. This practice involves informal actors such as local community groups (e.g., Elang Samudera, CV. Singa Laut, and NGOs) and is suspected to involve formal authorities such as Lanal, Polairud, KPLP, and Dishub.

Levies occur at specific points, particularly in strategic locations such as berthing areas, loading ports, and informal inspection points. There are also unofficial payment mechanisms through envelopes and the collection of diesel, which are then converted into economic value to be charged to the shipping companies.

The study additionally revealed that informal social groupings engaged in extortion could be bolstered by legitimate economic entities such as village cooperatives or community-based port service units. These empowerment options encompass formal docking services, accredited security, and transparent fuel distribution.

Spatial data shows the geographic distribution of locations prone to extortion, which can serve as a basis for planning community-based interventions. In addition, these findings highlight the urgency of strengthening governance, increasing transparency, and establishing participatory oversight forums to curb illegal logistics costs that harm local economic efficiency.

This research has several limitations, namely its focus on the geography of the Putting–Tabanio River route, which restricts generalization to other river areas in Indonesia with different sociopolitical characteristics. The use of descriptive qualitative methods does not precisely measure the economic impact of illegal levies. The data is sourced from informants directly involved in informal practices; thus, further research is needed to minimize subjective biases. Institutional verification has not yet confirmed the involvement of agencies like Lanal and Polairud in the analysis of formal-informal relations. In addition, the limited time frame of the research (March–October 2024) necessitates more specific studies (Okon et al., 2023).

The legalization of informal groupings like Elang Samudera and CV. Singa Laut into formal legal entities like cooperatives or village-owned businesses (BUMDesa) is advised by this study for local governments and port authorities. We undertake this to reduce unlawful taxes and promote more responsible economic governance within the community. We must establish a digital and community-oriented monitoring system to record extortion practices in susceptible locations. This will facilitate anonymous reporting and promote openness throughout the shipping zones (Bergmann et al., 2024).

We also need to strengthen coordination between districts on shipping routes through an integrated policy framework. Cross-sector and regional integration will prevent and reduce the handling of partial and unsustainable extortion. To strengthen social control over illegal practices, we greatly need to improve legal literacy for the community and provide protection mechanisms for whistleblowers. Education and security guarantees for whistleblowers are key to effective public participation (Saifullah et al., 2023).

We recommend using a longitudinal and quantitative approach for future research to more precisely measure the economic impact. Comparative studies in other river regions such as Kapuas, Mahakam, and Musi are also important to identify broader and more contextual patterns and solutions (Pomeroy et al., 2001).

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