
Implementation of the SKALA Program in Achieving SDG 17 in North Kalimantan Province: A South-South and Triangular Cooperation Perspective

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pelaksanaan program SKALA di Provinsi Kalimantan Utara melalui kacamata Kerjasama Selatan-Selatan dan Kerjasama Segitiga (SSTC), khususnya dalam menilai kontribusinya terhadap pencapaian Target 17 Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs). Sebagai wilayah perbatasan, Kalimantan Utara menghadapi ketimpangan yang signifikan dalam penyediaan layanan dasar, yang dibuktikan dengan tingkat pemenuhan standar infrastruktur sekolah yang hanya sebesar 31,14% dan konsentrasi yang sangat tinggi dari 143 dokter spesialis di Kota Tarakan, sementara pusat kesehatan di daerah terpencil sering kali melaporkan tidak adanya tenaga spesialis sama sekali. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen komprehensif dan wawancara mendalam dengan personel kunci SKALA, termasuk Pemimpin Provinsi SKALA untuk Kalimantan Utara. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Program SKALA telah berhasil menyelaraskan tiga paradigma inti—prinsip, kekuasaan, dan tujuan—di antara Pemerintah Australia (DFAT), Pemerintah Pusat Indonesia, dan Pemerintah Daerah. Kemitraan multipihak ini memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap Target SDGs 17.16 dan 17.18, terutama melalui integrasi aplikasi SIJOSKU untuk memperbarui data mengenai 39.000 penyandang disabilitas serta perumusan strategis peta jalan PKAA untuk sektor transportasi air. Selain itu, keberlanjutan Kemitraan multipihak ini memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap Target SDGs 17.16 dan 17.18, terutama melalui integrasi aplikasi SIJOSKU untuk memperbarui data mengenai 39.000 penyandang disabilitas serta perumusan strategis peta jalan PKAA untuk sektor transportasi air. Selain itu, keberlanjutan sistem data lokal diperkuat oleh platform SEPAKAT, yang selaras dengan Permendagri No. 5 Tahun 2024 dan instrumen digital Co-Metrics. Pada akhirnya, peningkatan kapasitas kebijakan berbasis data di dalam birokrasi lokal secara resmi dituangkan dalam RPJMD Teknis 2030–2034, memastikan kelangsungan jangka panjang dan mandiri dari pembangunan inklusif.

Kata kunci: Implementasi, Kerjasama Segitiga (SSTC), SDGs 17, Kalimantan Utara

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of the SKALA program in North Kalimantan Province through the lens of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), specifically assessing its contribution to the realization of SDGs Target 17. As a border region, North Kalimantan confronts significant disparities in basic service delivery, evidenced by a school infrastructure standard fulfilment rate of merely 31.14% and a severe concentration of 143 medical specialists in Tarakan City, while remote health centres frequently report a total absence of specialist personnel. Methodologically, this research

employs a qualitative approach, wherein data were gathered through comprehensive document analysis and in-depth interviews with key SKALA personnel, including the SKALA Provincial Lead for North Kalimantan. The findings demonstrate that the SKALA program has successfully harmonized three core paradigms principle, power, and purpose among the Australian Government (DFAT), the Indonesian Central Government, and the Local Government. This multistakeholder partnership provides a substantial contribution to SDGs Targets 17.16 and 17.18, notably through the integration of the SIJOSKU application for updating data on 39,000 persons with disabilities and the strategic formulation of the PKAA roadmap for the water transportation sector. Furthermore, the sustainability of local data systems is bolstered by the SEPAKAT platform, which is aligned with Permendagri 5/2024 and the Co-Metrics digital instrument. Ultimately, the enhancement of data-driven policy capacity within the local bureaucracy is formally codified within the 2030–2034 Technocratic RPJMD, ensuring the long-term, independent continuity of inclusive development.

Keywords: Implementation, Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), SDGs 17, North Kalimantan

PRELIMINARY

Indonesia is classified as one of the developing countries in the Southeast Asian region, characterized by a national development process that continues to face various challenges in achieving optimal and sustainable levels. This classification is reflected through various indicators, such as the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, which remains relatively low compared to developed nations (World Bank Group, 2024). Furthermore, economic and social disparities between regions and societal groups remain a fundamental issue, followed by the unequal distribution of basic infrastructure and access to public services, such as education and healthcare, which are not yet fully equitable across all Indonesian territories. As an archipelagic state encompassing thousands of widely dispersed islands, Indonesia possesses several regions categorized as 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Underdeveloped). These regions face significant geographical, social, and economic barriers, thus requiring special attention within national development planning. One such province included in this category is North Kalimantan, which has held provincial status for approximately 13 years since its formal inauguration through Law Number 20 of 2012 concerning the Establishment of North Kalimantan Province (Undang Undang No 20, 2012). Geographically, North Kalimantan shares a direct land border with Malaysia and holds a highly strategic position in the border region; however, this specific condition also presents unique challenges for equitable development. According to the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, 3T regions are prominently characterized by limited infrastructure, low overall accessibility, lagging human resource quality, and a high dependence on central fiscal transfers (Database Peraturan BPK, 2023).

North Kalimantan exhibits geographical characteristics that are notoriously difficult to reach and remain largely isolated. Many villages located in remote and border areas, such as Long Pada Village in Malinau Regency, require up to six hours of travel time from the district capital. The vast majority of land routes are unpaved, and the harsh, heavy terrain frequently

impedes mobility, particularly during the rainy season. In addition to geographical obstacles, access to basic infrastructure in North Kalimantan remains extremely limited, encompassing the condition of road networks, educational facilities, and the availability of teaching personnel (Antara Kaltara, 2024). To proactively address this issue, the provincial government aims to drastically enhance connectivity through the extensive construction of road networks and the targeted implementation of the Transport Cost Subsidy (SOA) program designed specifically for remote and border communities (BPK Perwakilan Provinsi Kaltara, 2020). Some isolated areas can only be accessed via pioneer flights due to the severe lack of available land transportation (Antara Kaltara, 2024). Economic challenges and extreme poverty also constitute severe, ongoing issues in several border and coastal regions of North Kalimantan. The contributing factors include difficult geographical terrain, exorbitant logistical costs, highly limited regional budgets, and unequal human resource quality across the area (Antara Kaltara, 2024). These adverse conditions result in the prices of basic commodities in the region being significantly higher than in other parts of Indonesia. Generally, North Kalimantan accurately reflects the typical, complex challenges of a 3T region, where geographical and socio-economic factors act as the primary barriers to achieving equitable development.

In the broader national context, Indonesia still fundamentally requires robust partnership support from external parties, including developed nations and international organizations, to aggressively accelerate development and successfully achieve the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision (Biro Pers, 2025). One highly tangible form of development cooperation between Indonesia and international partners is facilitated through the Synergy and Collaboration for the Acceleration of Basic Services (SKALA) Program. This comprehensive program is a strategic partnership established between the Government of Indonesia and the Government of Australia, implemented through a targeted grant scheme focused on accelerating the improvement of basic service quality in underdeveloped and vulnerable regions. SKALA is meticulously designed to operate for eight years, starting from November 2022, endowed with a total budget of approximately AUD 160 million (equivalent to Rp1.5 trillion). This vital program not only provides critical financial support but also actively strengthens local government governance through intense cooperation with three primary ministries: Bappenas, the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri), and the Ministry of Finance (Kemenkeu). Its primary objective is to decisively reduce poverty and inequality by comprehensively enhancing basic services for poor and vulnerable communities, heavily emphasizing evidence-based planning, social inclusion, and fiscal transparency (SKALA, 2023).

During the specific period of January to June 2025, the intensive implementation of the SKALA Program in North Kalimantan Province focused heavily on strengthening institutional capacity and local government governance, particularly within the crucial realm of Public Financial Management (PFM). The program also steadfastly supports the strict application of Minimum Service Standards (SPM) across the education, health, and social sectors, alongside the active implementation of GEDSI (Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion) principles, which actively encourage the participation of women, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities directly in the development planning process (SKALA, 2025a). The successful execution of the Inclusive ‘Musrenbang’ and the formal establishment of the Mentari Kaltara Aspiration Forum serve as concrete, indisputable evidence of effective GEDSI integration into regional policies. Consequently, this in-depth research focuses intensely on the profound relevance of the SKALA program concerning Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 17 in North Kalimantan Province, utilizing the robust theoretical framework of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), where the Indonesia-Australia collaboration perfectly reflects the principles of mutual benefit, ownership, and knowledge sharing. SKALA functions as a highly concrete form of South-South Triangular Cooperation that substantially supports knowledge transfer, international solidarity, and highly localized, inclusive development (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2016).

Theoretically, this rigorous research is grounded firmly in the concept of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), which represents a highly collaborative form of development involving three or more actors, such as countries, international organizations, civil society institutions, the private sector, or philanthropic entities, working synergistically together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (OECD, 2014). This cooperation is solidly based on the foundational principles of flexibility, absolute cost-efficiency, continuous innovation, and true partnership equality among all parties. SSTC emphatically underscores the spirit of solidarity among developing nations (Global South), consistently bolstered by the crucial support of partners from developed countries or multilateral institutions acting as facilitating partners. In the specific context of this research, Indonesia actively acts as the beneficiary partner requiring essential support to face highly specific development challenges. SKALA powerfully serves as the pivotal partner decisively bridging technical collaboration between Indonesia and Australia to massively strengthen local government governance. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia, alongside the highly capable managing contractor DT Global, acts as the facilitating partner providing critical financial resources and technical support (SKALA, 2023). The SSTC

approach provides massive strategic added value for regional development by fostering immense experience exchange, greatly strengthening institutional capacity, and vastly improving the overall effectiveness of development resource utilization. This framework is deeply aligned with the true spirit of the 17th Sustainable Development Goal, “Partnerships for the Goals,” which highlights the critical, undeniable need for global partnerships involving governments, the private sector, international agencies, and civil society to ensure the successful, holistic achievement of all other SDG targets (United Nations, 2015). Goal 17 explicitly emphasizes mobilizing massive financial resources, accelerating technology transfer, promoting fair international trade, and forging deep multistakeholder partnerships to massively strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration (OECD, 2014).

Previous academic studies have extensively explored intimately related themes regarding developmental cooperation and infrastructure, with Rasdi & Kurniawan (2019) indicating that government and private sector partnerships serve as strategic solutions for poverty alleviation, Gusrini (2021) highlighting bilateral relations between Indonesia and Australia via IA-CEPA as vital for economic and security cooperation, and Sonda et al (2017) alongside Gani (2017) meticulously evaluating Minimum Service Standards (SPM) implementation and infrastructure challenges in Kalimantan. Furthermore, Wijanarka & Dewi (2024) explored the Indonesian government’s role in utilizing the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) mechanism to promote clean energy transitions and accomplish Paris Agreement NDCs targets through the CASE Project, emphasizing how collaborative initiatives involving grassroots movement can support national goals. While subsequent literature by Djarwono et al (2025) and Iswardhana (2021) expands this by framing SSTC as a soft power tool for post-pandemic SDGs, and Adjani (2024) maps its potential for regional technology transfers, these previous studies exhibit distinct limitations. They focus primarily on macro-level diplomacy, technical SPM assessments, or centralized clean energy policies, while neglecting how transnational partnerships intersect with complex sub-national socio-legal friction, such as the localized land governance disputes highlighted by Uyun et al (2025) or the public service delivery gaps noted by Subiyakto et al (2021).

To contextualize these sub-national frictions within Indonesia’s broader diplomatic ambitions, it is essential to analyze the theoretical framework driving these initiatives. Grounded in constructivist role theory, Prabowo (2021) argues that Indonesia leverages SSTC as a soft power mechanism to project its identity as an active middle power, a structural positioning that Djarwono et al (2025) view as a vital driver for achieving SDG 17. Within these cross-border development frameworks, Potluka (2020) notes that multi-stakeholder

collaboration enhances output sustainability, though systematic quality evaluations remain scarce-an analytical gap addressed by Berrone et al (2019), whose EASIER model balances economic, social, and planetary value to meet grassroots needs. However, translating such global commitments into practical sub-national action requires navigating a complex global Financing for Development (FfD) architecture. Operationally, Ilham et al (2025) emphasize that the localized success of these frameworks depends heavily on robust collaborative governance and inclusive policy networks that facilitate multi-actor partnerships, mirroring how broader governance effectiveness relies on cross-sectoral integration and global food security partnerships (Fauzia & Mustafa, 2024).

At the sub-national level, private sector partnerships help overcome geographical and digital constraints in public services (Alpionita et al., 2023), while non-profit IT utilization enhances operational transparency and community mobilization (Irfan et al., 2021). Furthering this operational layer, Syafiq (2025) underscores from a developmental state perspective that integrating these non-state actors, such as state-owned enterprises and private entities, is vital for effective resource mobilization to sustain partnerships locally. Bilateral partnerships often suffer from structural friction; asymmetric commercial ties and IA-CEPA tariff eliminations can paradoxically deepen trade deficits due to macroeconomic imbalances (Aulia & Kuncoro, 2025; Hamdani, 2025). While transnational education encounters quality and accreditation constraints (Nugroho et al., 2026). To circumvent these frictions and navigate regulatory variances in Public-Private Partnerships (Iris Mahani et al., 2025), states increasingly leverage trilateral modalities to effectively merge traditional donor funding with Southern capacity-building expertise (Prabhu, 2025). However, broader trans-regional alternatives like the SCO and INSTC remain limited, as full strategic alignment is often constrained by divergent national interests and domestic horizons (Karami, 2024). Ultimately, even non-traditional security diplomacy must balance neorealist state interests with human security (Rachmayanti, 2025).

While these theoretical and operational frameworks underscore the multi-layered dynamics of international cooperation, the existing literature consistently fails to reconcile macro-level diplomacy with the real-world operational friction occurring at the grassroots. Consequently, this analytical oversight creates a significant research gap concerning the practical operationalization of SSTC frameworks within sub-national governance, particularly inside Indonesian border and marginalized regions. To resolve this empirical void, this article positions itself to examine the structural effectiveness of the SKALA Program in supporting the achievement of SDG 17 within the unique geostrategic landscape of North Kalimantan as a 3T (frontier, outermost, and remote) territory. Ultimately, the article's academic contribution

lies in shifting the discourse of international development cooperation away from national-level diplomacy toward a highly localized perspective, providing novel insights into how trilateral partnerships can effectively optimize basic service governance and infrastructure delivery in frontier environments.

METHOD

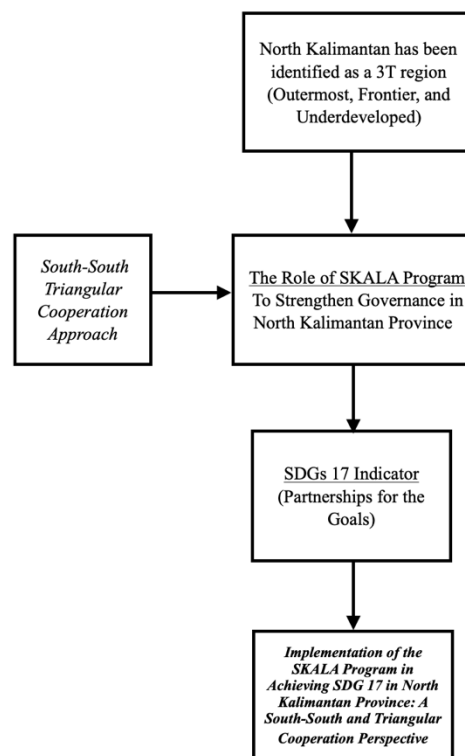
This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to thoroughly investigate the operationalization of the SKALA Program within the framework of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 17. The empirical research was physically conducted over a 2.5 month research period, from May to July 2025, featuring offline fieldwork and data collection at the national SKALA office in Jakarta, combined with a direct regional focus on North Kalimantan Province as a 3T territory. Methodologically, primary data were gathered through structured in-depth interviews with four purposively selected key informants, complemented by an intensive document analysis of SKALA's official programmatic publications, bi-annual progress reports, and regional technocratic planning blueprints from the 2025-2026 period.

A purposive sampling technique was strictly applied as the informant selection technique to ensure that all selected actors possessed critical, specialized expertise directly aligned with the core research questions. The institutional sample size consists of four key informants: the SKALA Team Leader, the Head of Governance Strategy and Quality (GSQ), the Head of Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), and the SKALA Provincial Lead for North Kalimantan. The specific rationale for selecting the Team Leader was to analyze the macro-strategic vision, leadership dynamics, and institutional alignment of SKALA as a trilateral partnership. The Head of GSQ was interviewed to delve deeply into the technical implementation of SSTC instruments within sub-national governance systems, the integration of public service quality within the SDG 17 framework, and the monitoring mechanisms governing multistakeholder collaborations to achieve established performance targets in North Kalimantan. Furthermore, the Head of GEDSI was selected to dissect how the principles of inclusivity are systematically mainstreamed into the core architecture of SSTC projects, and how multistakeholder partnerships ensure that vulnerable groups in North Kalimantan derive sustainable, long-term benefits aligned with the foundational 'leave no one behind' mandate of SDG 17. Lastly, the SKALA Provincial Lead for North Kalimantan was interviewed to evaluate regional execution and territory governance, specifically unpacking how macro-SSTC mechanisms are practically translated into the local context, the overall

effectiveness of tactical coordination within the Multistakeholder Partnership, and the concrete exit strategies designed to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the program's impacts within the province.

For the data analysis technique, this research utilizes qualitative thematic analysis, progressing systematically from data transcription and open coding to category formulation and contextual conceptualization. The analytical process operates through a deductive-inductive loop, mapping the empirical field insights directly against the established parameters of SSTC norms and the specific criteria of SDG 17.16 and 17.18. To ensure rigorous academic validity, a comprehensive triangulation strategy was implemented as the data validation strategy. This involved source triangulation by rigorously cross-verifying the testimonial data from the in-depth interviews across different management levels (national leadership, technical heads, and regional execution), which was then systematically corroborated with data triangulation against official government regulations (such as Permendagri 5/2024), independent policy briefs, and statistical indices published by the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) to eliminate analytical bias and guarantee objective, high-fidelity research findings.

Figure 1. Framework



Source: The Authors

Conceptually, this study operationalizes the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) framework and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 17 as the primary analytical lenses to evaluate the collected qualitative data. The analytical framework is structured by first positioning North Kalimantan's specific geographical and socio-economic status as a 3T (Frontier, Outermost, Underdeveloped) region, which inherently necessitates robust external developmental partnerships. Consequently, the SKALA program is utilized as the primary unit of analysis to observe how trilateral collaboration mechanisms involving the Australian Government, the Indonesian Central Government, and the Local Government operate effectively at the sub-national level.

The data obtained from in-depth interviews and programmatic documents are critically analysed against the core principles of SSTC, specifically focusing on knowledge sharing, capacity building, and mutual benefit. Furthermore, the outcomes of the SKALA program are measured using the specific indicators of SDG 17, particularly Target 17.16 (multistakeholder partnerships) and Target 17.18 (data availability and capacity building). By employing this analytical framework, the study systematically interprets how international diplomatic cooperation is translated into concrete, evidence-based policy improvements and sustainable basic service governance in border regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contextual Challenges of Basic Services in North Kalimantan

North Kalimantan holds the distinct title of being the youngest province in Indonesia, actively possessing a highly strategic geopolitical position as it shares a direct, expansive land border with the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak (BPK Perwakilan Provinsi Kaltara, 2020). However, it faces deeply complex, often extreme geographical challenges, with its massive 75,000 km² territory predominantly covered by dense, unforgiving forests, towering high mountains, and enormously large river basins that literally serve as the main transportation arteries. This forbidding geography severely and consistently limits inter-regional accessibility, forcing many remote, isolated settlements to rely entirely on highly expensive pioneer flights or slow river transport just to maintain basic connectivity (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Kalimantan Utara, 2023). The province's official status as a 3T region accurately reflects the stark reality on the ground, where massive border districts like Nunukan and Malinau are geographically heavily isolated from both the provincial and national administrative centres.

Table 1. Scores and Components of the Human Development Index (HDI) for North Kalimantan Province, 2024–2025

Components	Unit	Value	
		2024	2025
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB)	Year	73,57	73,68
School Graduation Expectations (SGE)	Year	13,21	13,31
Average Length of Schooling (ALS)	Year	9,35	9,44
Adjusted per capita expenditure	Rp 0	10,197	10,568
Human Development Index (HDI)		73,41	74,04

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Kalimantan Utara, 2026

Socio-demographically, the province features a noticeably low population density coupled with highly uneven distribution. Most residents are heavily concentrated in coastal and rapidly urbanizing areas, while various indigenous communities inhabit the vast, isolated hinterlands facing severely limited access to modern information and technology. This extreme isolation heavily hampers equal opportunities in both education and vital economic development. Consequently, the Human Development Index (HDI) calculated in the 3T areas of North Kalimantan continuously tends to be far lower than the national average directly due to massive barriers in simply accessing basic services.

Table 2. Comparative Data on the Number of Health Facilities in North Kalimantan by Year 2025

Regional Category	Work Unit/Region	Ratio of medical specialist (M+F)	Availability of Advanced Healthcare Facilities	Minimum Services Standards (SPM) Status
Urban Area (Growth Center)	Tarakan City (RSUD dr. H. Jusuf SK, RS Pertamina, RS Bhayangkara, RSAL).	143 Specialist Doctor.	Has 6 general hospitals offering a full range of specialties (surgery, cardiology, pediatrics, etc.).	Meets Standards. Primary referral facilities are available within the city.

Inland Regions (3T Regions)	Regency of Malinau & Nunukan (Long Nawang, Krayang, Pulungan, Long Apari).	0 - 2 Specialist Doctor.	Depends on The Border Healthy Center (Puskesmas Perbatasan/RSP). General hospitals are only located in the regency capital.	Far from the standard. Access to specialist services depends on intervention programs (such as Flying Doctors).
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Source: Data Processed by The Authors from Dinas Kesehatan Provinsi Kalimantan
Utara, 2025

Table 3. Comparative Data on Educational Facilities in North Kalimantan Province by year
2025

Facility Components	Urban Areas (Tarakan & Tanjung Selor)	Inland/3T Regions (Krayan, Long Nawang, & Sebatik)	National Standard Status (SNP)
Internet & Wi-Fi	Digital Transformation: Schools are beginning to actively utilize information technology.	Infrastructure Challenges, Lack of stable internet access	Not Yet Universally Available; hindering the implementation of computer-based exams.
Building & Structures	Conditions are relatively good thanks to the support of the School Revitalization Program.	Many school buildings are in need of urgent repairs.	Low; The percentage of buildings in good condition remains low.
Library & Teaching Aids	Learning support facilities are adequately available in urban schools.	A lack of books, teaching aids, and laboratory equipment.	Left Behind; resulting in below-average literacy and numeracy scores.
Seats & Other Amenities	The classroom atmosphere has become conducive, with all the necessary facilities in place.	Limited classroom space and a shortage of teachers' housing in remote areas.	Not yet optimal; school sanitation facilities are also still very limited.

Source : Data Processed by The Authors from Balai Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan Provinsi
Kalimantan Utara, 2025

The stark disparity is overwhelmingly evident in the critical healthcare sector, where despite highly significant regional budget allocations, the overall ratio of specialist doctors and advanced, capable health facilities in remote areas falls shockingly far below the required minimum service standards. For illustrative instance, Tarakan City densely concentrates an impressive 143 specialist doctors, whereas extremely remote border health centers (Puskesmas) located in Long Nawang, Long Alango, and Krayan possess a devastating ratio of absolutely zero specialist doctors. Similarly, looking at the education sector, while school participation rates have commendably increased, the actual quality of physical infrastructure and teacher competency in 3T areas severely lags behind, heavily compounded by exceedingly poor internet connectivity that effectively hinders the modern implementation of newly

digitalized curricula (Rohmani et al., 2025). Access to fundamental basic population administration (adminduk) is also massively constrained by sheer physical distance, preventing remote, marginalized communities from fully accessing vital social protection programs like PKH or BPJS.

Despite facing these monumental challenges, North Kalimantan undeniably holds tremendous economic modalities and massive geostrategic potential acting as the actual “Front Porch” of the Republic of Indonesia. Located directly on the highly trafficked international shipping route of the Indonesian Archipelagic Sea Lane (ALKI) II, the province has a massive opportunity to aggressively develop into a major regional logistics and distribution hub (Tarwiyanti, 2025). Future economic potential heavily and increasingly relies on green energy development and the establishment of low-carbon industries, prominently such as the massive Indonesian Green Industrial Area (KIHI) project located in Tanah Kuning-Mangkupadi and incredibly large-scale hydroelectric power plants (PLTA) like PLTA Mentarang Induk and PLTA Kayan. These gigantic megaprojects strategically position North Kalimantan as an absolute pioneer in Indonesia’s massive renewable energy transformation, actively attracting immense global investment while heavily supporting the ambitious national Net Zero Emission 2060 target (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Kalimantan Utara, 2025).

SKALA as a Triangular Cooperation Mechanism

The implementation of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) by the Republic of Indonesia reflects an evolution in development diplomacy, transitioning from transactional assistance toward institutional investment. Within this framework, international cooperation is conceptualized not as an asymmetrical transfer of resources to developing nations, but as a mechanism to establish institutional capacity as an emerging economy. Programs such as SKALA serve as instruments through which domestic development objectives are aligned with international partnership resources, thereby repositioning the state’s engagement within global development structures (BPPK Kemlu RI, 2015). As an application of soft power diplomacy, this model allows for the exchange of sub-national governance practices on an international scale. The trilateral framework involving bilateral partners, such as the Government of Australia, provides a structured environment to assess bureaucratic capabilities in managing structurally and geographically isolated territories. Consequently, this collaborative arrangement between the Government of Indonesia, the Government of Australia, and the North Kalimantan Provincial Government operates on reciprocal institutional learning rather than traditional, hierarchical donor-recipient dynamics.

The SKALA program functions as an empirical case of this trilateral framework, serving as a mechanism to operationalize Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 17. Operationally, managing this trilateral structure requires navigating three distinct administrative paradigms: (1) Canberra's emphasis on fiscal accountability and international development criteria; (2) Jakarta's focus on macro-regulatory compliance and national development targets; and (3) Tanjung Selor's prioritization of localized public service utility to address immediate regional deficits. The program mediates these diverging priorities by embedding its technical interventions within existing sub-national planning systems, specifically the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah/RPJMD) and Strategic Plans (Rencana Strategis/Renstra), Rather than imposing parallel external delivery tracks. This integration ensures that administrative reporting and accountability mechanisms satisfy the compliance standards of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) while concurrently reinforcing local planning and budgetary autonomy.

Regarding the institutional effectiveness of field coordination, the trilateral cooperation within the SKALA program in North Kalimantan is structured through formalized institutional governance mechanisms. These channels encompass an integrated network consisting of a Steering Committee (SC), a Technical Committee (TC), and dedicated program committees. The institutional engagement of the North Kalimantan Provincial Government is established at the baseline stage, wherein sub-national authorities participate in the formulation of the Annual Work Plan (AWP) to align program interventions with localized operational requirements. Although structural constraints persist, particularly regarding national policies on Regional Transfer Funds (Transfer ke Daerah/TKD) that do not fully account for the fiscal burdens inherent in 3T frontier zones cross-sectoral synergy is maintained through structured collaboration between the Regional Development Planning, Research, and Innovation Agency (Bapperida) and Civil Society Networks (Jaringan Masyarakat Sipil/JMS). Furthermore, institutional inclusivity is operationalized through the Mentari Kaltara Inclusive Forum, which establishes a deliberative mechanism for vulnerable demographics including women, persons with disabilities, children, indigenous communities, and the elderly within regional decision-making cycles.

A recent empirical development in data-driven international cooperation governance is evidenced by SKALA's technical assistance to the Ministry of Home Affairs in institutionalizing 'Co-Metrics.' Co-Metrics serves as a digital Monitoring and Evaluation Instrument for Regional Cooperation with Foreign Local Governments and Foreign

Institutions. Within this regulatory framework, the digital platform functions to standardize governance, assess execution efficiency, and evaluate the qualitative outcomes of sub-national foreign partnerships. Through this institutional forum, state ministries, government agencies, and development partners are integrated into a systemized structure that reinforces inter-agency coordination and horizontal knowledge sharing, thereby fulfilling the core normative principles of global triangular cooperation (Kemendagri RI, 2026).

Contribution to SDG 17.16: Multistakeholder Partnership

The primary relevance of the SKALA program to SDG Target 17.16 (Global Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships) is demonstrated by its ability to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support development achievements in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost regions (3T). The key to the success of this partnership lies in the creation of an inclusive negotiation space, where all actors operate on the principles of voluntarism, complementarity, and freedom from coercion. SKALA maintains cohesion and long-term commitment among actors with differing interests and work cycles by upholding governance frameworks, shared guidelines, and an equitable negotiation space. This partnership has succeeded in operating collaboratively due to two key factors: the fulfillment of each actor's interests and the existence of a space for compromise where no party feels forced or compelled.

The SKALA program integrates Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) into its operational framework. This integration aims to ensure that development policies accommodate vulnerable groups in Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged (3T) areas. The participation of these groups in development planning is monitored through the measurement indicators within the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework (Bachtiar et al., 2025). Furthermore, the program emphasizes data governance through the local "Satu Data Indonesia" initiative. In North Kalimantan, this involves standardizing sectoral data to align regional budget allocations for basic services with empirical field evidence (SKALA, 2025b).

At the regulatory level, the program facilitated the drafting and ratification of Regional Regulation (Perda) Number 17 of 2024 concerning the Respect, Protection, and Fulfillment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The implementation of this multisectoral approach is formalized within a bilateral development cooperation framework outlined in the Subsidiary Agreement (SA). This agreement mandates vertical coordination among the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), national ministries (Bappenas, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Home Affairs), and the provincial government. Horizontal coordination is managed

through the Provincial Program Committee (PPC) and Working Groups (Pokja), which operate on the principles of co-creation and equal partnership.

This multistakeholder framework was applied during the formulation of derivative regulations for the Disability Perda. The process involved consultative dialogues among the provincial government, academics, and legal practitioners to bridge theoretical concepts with practical policy applicability (Dinas Komunikasi, 2025). In terms of governance innovation, efforts have been directed toward the digitalization of public administration. A key output is the “Satu Data Kalimantan Utara” portal, which consolidates 1,349 datasets from 21 Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD). This system is designed to transition administrative workflows from manual to digital platforms, thereby supporting evidence-based policymaking. Additionally, an overarching Governor’s Regulation (Peraturan Gubernur Sapu Jagat) was formulated to consolidate 14 technical mandates derived from the Disability Perda, aiming to streamline regional bureaucracy and expedite policy execution (Dinas Komunikasi, 2025).

Contribution to SDG 17.18: Data Governance and Capacity Building

An operational example of this multistakeholder partnership in enhancing data governance is the Data Updating Kick-Off and the Launch of the Disability Service Card in Tarakan City, conducted in May 2026. This initiative required cross-sectoral collaboration involving the National Disability Commission (KDN), regional vertical agencies (Bappeda, Disdukcapil, the Health Office), local apparatus (RT/RW and Village Heads), and Disabled Persons Organizations. The intervention was designed based on the January 2026 DTSEN data, which recorded approximately 39,000 persons with disabilities in North Kalimantan requiring targeted policy interventions (SKALA, 2026f). By consolidating fragmented demographic information across different bureaucratic levels, the local government established a unified baseline for inclusive policy formulation.

This collaboration was technologically facilitated by the SIJOSKU application, aligning with the core objectives of SDG Target 17.18 regarding the availability of high-quality, disaggregated data. Through this integrated data system, local authorities can accurately identify and systematically reach marginalized groups, reducing the margin of error in public service delivery. Consequently, persons with disabilities gained structured access to basic services and state assistance. The resulting data-driven policy outputs included vehicle tax reductions via the Bumi Benuanta program, discounted water transportation fares, and prioritized access to the Kaltara Unggul education program (Dinas KISP Kalimantan Utara, 2026; SKALA, 2026a). The systemic impact of this multi-actor partnership extends beyond the local provision of transport subsidies in Tarakan; it has broader implications at the provincial

and national levels, serving as a replicable model for inclusive development in other 3T regions across Indonesia.

Beyond social inclusion, the improvement of institutional data governance directly contributes to the optimization of regional revenue, which is essential for sustaining independent development financing. This capacity-building outcome is evidenced by the policy intervention regarding the Motor Vehicle Tax on Water (PKAA) for fishing vessels. Previously, an estimated 14,800 active fishing vessels in North Kalimantan were excluded from the local tax system due to regulatory ambiguities and fragmented inter-agency data. Through strategic data integration and cross-sectoral coordination facilitated by the program, a gradual implementation roadmap for 2025–2028 was formulated. By the third quarter of 2025, this data-driven approach successfully registered 57 fishing vessels, generating regional revenue totalling IDR 121.1 million and demonstrating the long-term fiscal utility of robust data governance (SKALA, 2026c).

In addition to inclusive data updating and regional revenue optimization, the success of these cross-sectoral partnerships is concretely manifested through the strengthening of Minimum Service Standards (SPM) in North Kalimantan. Empirical evidence from the field indicates that achieving equitable basic services in 3T regions relies not solely on the magnitude of budget allocations, but heavily depends on governance consistency, cross-sectoral coordination, and sustained collaboration. To institutionalize this commitment, the local government, in collaboration with the SKALA program, established a specialized integrated unit known as ‘The SPM Team.’ This team is tasked with enhancing synergy among Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) while conducting periodic policy evaluations. Through this cross-sectoral mechanism, various best practices have been developed and accelerated, including the expansion of inclusive educational access for children with disabilities and the improvement of equitable and dignified social services for the elderly population across the region (SKALA, 2026b).

Challenges and Sustainability of SKALA Implementation

In the perspective of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), the primary indicator of triangular cooperation success is the ability of the local system to independently adopt, internalize, and sustain innovations, reflecting true local ownership. Amid regional budget efficiency challenges, ensuring the sustainability of the SKALA program in North Kalimantan Province necessitates building local government ownership over the intervened governance reform agenda. Consequently, the exit strategy is designed progressively, positioning the program as a catalyst that embeds data analytical capacity, institutional

strengthening, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) directly into the routine functions of Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD). To institutionalize these functions, the program applies a Development 2.0/3.0 approach, which emphasizes interventions on system integration and the interconnectedness of bureaucratic macro-processes.

Governance sustainability in North Kalimantan is concretely demonstrated through the optimization of integrated data platforms and regulatory alignment. During the Regional One Data Implementation Reflection Workshop, North Kalimantan demonstrated its compliance with the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation (Permendagri) Number 5 of 2024 concerning One Data for Home Affairs Governance (SDPDN), evidenced by the development of regional data portals and the activation of the cross-OPD Regional One Data Forum (SKALA, 2026e). These governance innovations are further reinforced by optimizing the SEPAKAT platform, which enables the local government to conduct comprehensive socio-economic analyses down to the household level. This integration effectively addresses traditional administrative challenges, such as fragmented data, ensuring that the entire cycle of planning, budgeting, and evaluating basic service programs is precise and oriented toward evidence-based policy (SKALA, 2026d).

To safeguard post-program sustainability, a joint review mechanism is implemented to continuously monitor institutional progress. This measure is realized through the preparation of the SKALA Six-Monthly Report, which transparently outlines program progress, and the formulation of the Joint Supervision Mission instrument, a tripartite monitoring framework involving the central government, donors, and regional authorities. Through this integrated series of activities, the active participation of regional leaders, including the Governor of North Kalimantan, indicates a strong political will. It demonstrates that the governance reform agenda has been fully internalized as an operational requirement for domestic development effectiveness, rather than a mere procedural formality to satisfy foreign partners (SKALA, 2025a).

Ultimately, the primary legacy of the SDG 17-based SSTC implementation through the SKALA program in North Kalimantan is the deep institutionalization of data-responsive analytical capacity within the local bureaucracy. The formal manifestation of this sustainability is secured when basic service data instruments, the optimization of the Motor Vehicle Tax on Water (PKAA), and SIJOSKU-based GEDSI governance are officially adopted into the 2030-2034 Technocratic Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) of North Kalimantan Province. By anchoring these critical elements within the statutory medium-term planning document, the global development partnership's commitment to vulnerable groups in border

regions can be maintained independently, equitably, and permanently through North Kalimantan's domestic bureaucratic and fiscal capacities following the program's conclusion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of the SKALA program in North Kalimantan demonstrates that the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) framework serves as a transformative mechanism for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 17 in geographically challenged 3T regions. By shifting the paradigm from hierarchical donor assistance to an equal, data-driven partnership, the program successfully mainstreams inclusive policies and strengthens local institutional capacities. Through cross-sectoral collaborations and the integration of digital platforms into routine bureaucratic functions, the initiative ensures that equitable basic service delivery and regional fiscal optimization are permanently institutionalized. Ultimately, the true success of this trilateral cooperation lies in fostering genuine local ownership, empowering the regional government to sustain and independently finance these governance innovations long after the international intervention concludes.

The authors acknowledge that this study is primarily limited to document analysis and interviews that heavily reflect the perspectives of SKALA personnel and official program publications. Consequently, the findings predominantly capture a programmatic, top-down viewpoint. Despite this methodological constraint, this research makes a significant academic contribution by establishing a foundational baseline of how South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) mechanisms are operationalized to strengthen data-driven governance and public service delivery in geographically challenging 3T regions. To address this limitation, future research must incorporate bottom-up perspectives by directly involving regional agencies, disability organizations, and the beneficiary communities themselves. Building upon this, future studies should explore the power distance between central and sub-national bureaucracies to understand how structural barriers impact regional feedback loops, particularly concerning Regional Transfer (TKD) allocations. Furthermore, longitudinal post-SKALA studies are needed to evaluate whether digital governance platforms (e.g., Co-Metrics, SIJOSKU, SEPAKAT) are sustainably internalized into local budgets amid potential political shifts. Finally, subsequent research should assess the resilience of grassroots non-state actors such as the Civil Society Network (JMS), to determine if their advocacy for vulnerable groups can autonomously survive and influence public policy after international support concludes.

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