



SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Examining Sorong Special Economic Zone and its Implications for the Region

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia has been establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across the country, with the Sorong SEZ being one of them. The Sorong SEZ is expected to become the first new center of economic growth in the Papua region. Several potential sectors include agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism, creative industries, and other natural resource utilization. This article aims to examine the effectiveness of the Sorong SEZ and to explore its implications for Indonesia and the wider region. It argues that the establishment of the Sorong SEZ is not only effective due to support from both regional and central governments but also offers significant geoeconomic and geostrategic benefits. In terms of geoeconomic advantages, the Sorong SEZ not only fosters regional economic development in eastern Indonesia and serves as a center for natural resource processing in Papua, but also functions as a gateway for trade in the Asia-Pacific region. From a geostrategic perspective, it strengthens Indonesia's sovereignty and cross-border economic diplomacy with Papua New Guinea and is expected to attract increased foreign investment, particularly China, due to its strategic location bridging Asia and Pacific.

KEYWORDS

Geoeconomics; Geostrategy; Sorong; Special Economic Zone

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the Government of Indonesia inaugurated the first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in West Papua Province, located in Sorong City (see [Hornok & Raeskyesa, 2024](#); [Siregar & Utomo, 2021](#); [Fauzi et al., 2022](#)). The SEZ Sorong is part of the government's efforts to develop the economic potential and infrastructure in the resource-rich Papua region, with the expectation of increasing regional revenue. According to Law No. 32/2004 on Regional Government and Law No. 33/2004 on Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and Regional Governments, regional revenue is all regional rights that are recognized as an increase in net worth in the period of the relevant fiscal year. Regional revenue consists of Regional Original Revenue (PAD), Transfer Revenue and Other Legitimate Regional Revenue.

Special Economic Zones in Indonesia are built to attract foreign investment, and China is no exception. China has invested in several special economic zones, including the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone and Morowali Special Economic Zone. Since the beginning of 2019, China has invested USD34.19 billion or equivalent to IDR534.5 trillion (exchange rate of IDR15,634 per USD), making it the second largest investor in Indonesia ([Kurniawan, 2024](#)). These SEZ projects began early in the Joko Widodo presidential term. The main objectives of establishing SEZs are to: (1) stimulate economic growth economic growth through export promotion, (2) attract foreign investment foreign investment and increase foreign exchange earnings, (3) increase employment and (4) create transfer of technology and management. In the case of China, SEZs also serve as an experiment to piloting the implementation of capitalist policies ([Darmastuti, 2018](#)).

Based on Law Number 39 of 2009 concerning Special Economic Zones, the form of facilities contained in SEZs, namely in the form of taxation, customs and excise facilities; local taxes and local retributions; other facilities for investing in SEZs such as in the field of land (land rights); licensing; immigration; investment; and in the field of labor. The provision of these incentives is expected to increase competitiveness, especially in attracting investors to invest in SEZs ([Setyawan & Prihatiningrum, 2024](#)).

The Sorong SEZ is expected to become a new center of economic growth in West Papua with various facilities and incentives offered to investors to attract investment and encourage infrastructure development in the region. Some of the potential sectors emphasized in the Sorong SEZ include agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism, creative industries, and other natural resource utilization.

The purpose of this article is to examine the effectiveness of the Sorong Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and to explore its implications for both geoeconomic and geostrategic advantages. It argues that the establishment of the Sorong SEZ is not only effective due to support from both regional and central governments but also offers significant geoeconomic and geostrategic benefits for Indonesia and the wider region. This article is structured as follows: it begins with an outline of the literature review, followed by an explanation of the

methods used. It then presents the results and discussion before providing a summary in the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political economy is the theory of social-productive development, particularly in the field of economics and human relations (see [Bonefeld, 2014](#)). Political economy seeks to describe the laws governing the production and distribution of material wealth in societies at various stages of development. Political economy theory is also concerned with dynamic fiscal competition through public spending and debt. Unlike history, political economy does not attempt to develop the historical process of society in all its concrete varieties. It provides a basic concept of the initial features of any social economic system (see [Basu, 2000](#); [Wang, & Wang, 2017](#); [Besley, 2007](#)).

The use of the term “Political Economy” (PE) occurs in two interrelated contexts. The first context is to denote a research field within a multidisciplinary discipline, in which political scientists, economists, legal scholars, and other social scientists, carry out research on the relationship between the political sphere (especially the “state”) and the economic systems of different societies. The second context is that of social scientists, journalists, and other observers, who often use the term PE to refer to the political and business interactions observed entirely in real world societies.

Economic Liberalization is part of the international political economy environment (see [Simmons & Elkins, 2004](#); [Gilpin, 2016](#); [Lal, 1987](#)). Economic Liberalization itself is part of the realm of international relations. In the context of Economic Liberalization, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are established ([Ge, 1999](#)). Economic Liberalization makes comparative advantage a separate theory in making the market a measure of success. The concept of comparative advantage entails a country's capacity to produce and export a specific product or service not only more efficiently, as Ricardo initially suggested, but also with more distinct product features compared to other countries within a particular trade area ([Danja & Wang, 2024](#)).

The Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is established to generate foreign exchange earnings, create employment, attracting foreign capital and advanced technology, acquiring labor management skills and creating linkages between industries in economic zones and domestic economy ([Chiukira, 2020](#)). The SEZ is a distinct variety of economic zone with a specialized legal regime and institutional environment different from the rest of the economy. Typically, an SEZ is set up for export-oriented enterprises, particularly those with foreign investments, to offer them a special regulatory regime for exporting activity with a separate customs area, duty-free benefits, streamlined procedures, and its own management authority ([Aggarwal, 2022](#)).

The Special Economic Zone management must adhere to a strong regulatory framework as the basis of good governance. This means that the concept of Good Governance should be the basis of SEZ management ([Kryukova et al., 2020](#)). Asset management forms the basis of SEZ management. In this management, Collaborative Governance is required, which comes from stakeholder collaboration. Collaborative Governance as a governing arrangement in which one or more public institutions directly involve non-state stakeholders in formal, consensus oriented. There is plenty of research on SEZs, including studies that assess why some zone managing companies (ZMCs) are more successful in developing their special economic zones (SEZs) than others. For instance, in almost every part of Poland, there are winners and losers among SEZs. It suggests that the advantage of having a better zone location is relative, and other factors may play a role ([Dorożyński et al., 2021](#)). In addition to corporation governance in SEZs, there is research conducted by Shinta on identify the initial conditions, facilitative leadership, institutional design, and analyzing the collaborative process and interim results in the development of SEZ ([Durrety, 2024](#)). Local government is closely related to foreign investment through synchronization of regulations between the central government and local governments ([Emudainohwo et al., 2018](#)). This context aligns with Sorong City's inauguration by the central government as a Special Economic Zone, which is the focus of this study.

METHODS

This article adopts a literature review approach to narrate the effectiveness of the Sorong SEZ and to investigate its implications for Indonesia and the wider region. This approach focuses on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the results of previous research relevant to the chosen topic ([Bogdan & Biklen, 1998](#)). Furthermore, this approach will assist in conducting a review of the relevant literature related to the efforts made by the management of the Sorong Special Economic Zone in attracting foreign investment, including China.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Indonesia are certain areas with special regulations in the fields of customs, taxation, licensing, immigration, and employment supported by detailed business activity arrangements and effective subzone arrangements ([Freisler, 2022](#)). SEZs are also areas supported by modern infrastructure whose management is professionally managed by a management body. Referring to Law Number 39 of 2009 concerning Special Economic Zones, the definition of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is an area with certain boundaries within the jurisdiction of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which is determined to carry out economic functions and obtain certain facilities.

The function of SEZs is to conduct and develop businesses in the fields of trade, services, industry, mining and energy, transportation, maritime and fisheries, post and

telecommunications, tourism, and other fields. In accordance with this, SEZs consist of one or several zones, including export processing, logistics, industry, technology development, tourism, and energy zones whose activities can be aimed at exports and domestically. The basic concept of SEZs is integrated, large-scale, mega zones that can consist of port areas, new towns, industry, tourism, commercial, and utilities. FTZs (Free Trade Zones), EPZs (Export Processing Zones), and BZs (Border Zones) can also be established within these areas. Although general commercial activities are allowed, they are limited in number, type, and size, serving only foreign tourists, company employees, and their families. These activities rely on domestic, SEZ-internal, and export markets with direct access to sea and air transport, benefiting from various fiscal and non-fiscal incentives. The amount and type of fiscal and non-fiscal facilities are tailored to the activities undertaken.

In the context of Sorong city, the policy objective of developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) is to attract foreign investment and create jobs. Through the development of SEZs, it is expected that it will stimulate faster economic growth in the regions, among others by increasing investment, the availability of new jobs, exploring regional economic potentials, and ultimately increasing government revenues, both central and regional. Based on the analysis of the Sorong SEZ, it meets ideal requirements: 1) a regional development focus with clear and integrated development priorities that include: (i) top priority on economic development and investment that can be export-oriented and internal domestic, (ii) support for the direction of infrastructure development and other investment support facilities, and (iii) arrangement of other social and non-economic facilities. 2) clear zoning with consistent and integrated designation arrangement. 3) good and adequate access to seaports (containers). 4) located within the customs territory and supported by modern and adequate infrastructure. 5) facilitated by streamlined and efficient investment procedures within customs territory supported by modern and adequate infrastructure. 6) facilitated by streamlined and efficient investment procedures. On top of that, the Sorong SEZ has both geoeconomic and geostrategic advantages (see Figure 1).

In terms of geoeconomic advantages, the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Sorong has several positive consequences. Firstly, it will surely foster regional economic development in the eastern regions of Indonesia, which have been perceived as lagging behind western parts like Java and Sumatra. The implementation of the Sorong SEZ through investment, industrial activities, and job creation is expected to help reduce the economic disparities between Papua and other regions. Secondly, the creation of the Sorong SEZ will also serve as a gateway for trade in the Asia-Pacific region. It positions Indonesia to connect with markets in Australia, Papua New Guinea, East Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Abundant natural resources, such as timber, minerals, and fisheries products, can be exported from Sorong SEZ to these regions. Thirdly, the Sorong SEZ will become a centre for processing natural resources on the island of Papua. Given Papua's richness in natural

resources, including oil, gas, timber, and marine products, the Sorong SEZ will not only attract industries to process these resources locally but also create job opportunities for the local population.

In terms of geostrategic advantages, the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Sorong also offers positive regional impacts. Firstly, it enhances cross-border economic diplomacy between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (PNG), given that the two countries share a long border across the island of West Papua, where Sorong is located. In this sense, Sorong's proximity to PNG presents opportunities for cross-border economic cooperation and trade, fostering regional diplomacy and stability (see [Mandibondibo, et al., 2022](#)). Secondly, the establishment of the Sorong SEZ can strengthen Indonesia's eastern sovereignty near PNG, as well as its sovereignty over Papua in particular. Sorong's strategic location near border areas and maritime routes bolsters Indonesia's ability to maintain territorial sovereignty and secure its eastern borders with neighbouring PNG. More importantly, the development of the Sorong SEZ demonstrates Indonesia's commitment to the prosperity of the Papua region, which may, in turn, help diminish separatist sentiments in the area. Lastly, the Sorong SEZ is expected to attract more foreign investments, including from China, as its location can serve as a bridge connecting Asian trade with the Pacific, thereby supporting China's efforts to enhance its regional and global trade relations.

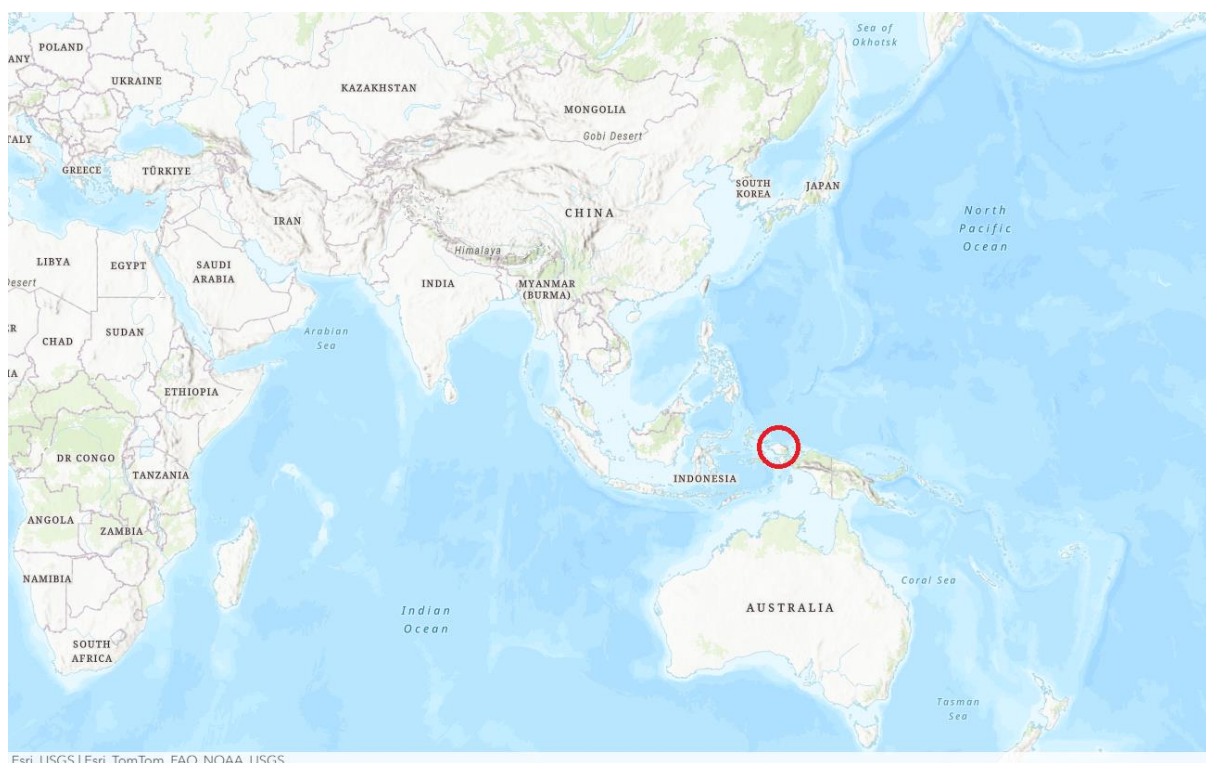


Figure 1. The location of Sorong City, Indonesia, is highlighted in red. *Source:* drawn by the authors using ArcGIS (2025)

In addition, the service factor turns out to have a significant influence on economic growth in the Sorong Special Economic Zone. Services in Sorong City are excellent, supported by well-developed infrastructure that facilitates community activities in western Papua. The strong export sector further supports trade, enabling agricultural products to be exported outside the region ([Syali et al., 2020](#)). The importance of clear regulations, supportive local government, and inclusive planning processes to ensure the successful and sustainable operation of the SEZ ([Sungsuwan & Sonsuphap, 2023](#)). Sorong SEZ is supported by these three aspects, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Supporting Aspects of Sorong SEZ

No	Criteria	Description
1	Regulation	Government Regulation No. 31/2016 as the first Special Economic Zone in the land of Papua
2	Supportive local government	The West Papua Provincial Government has developed a strategy to accelerate the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)
3	Inclusive planning processes	regional development models related to industry, tourism, trade, services, mining and energy, transportation, maritime and fisheries, post and telecommunications sectors

Source: Author's data processing (2024)

In terms of its legal basis, Sorong SEZ is regulated based on Law Number 39 of 2009 concerning Special Economic Zones and Government Regulation Number 31 of 2016 concerning Sorong Special Economic Zone. The main activities of Sorong SEZ include nickel processing industry, palm oil processing industry, forest and plantation products industry (sago), and logistics. Sorong SEZ is supported by regional infrastructure such as a 50 MW PLN power plant, regional Administrator Office, Arar port, 5 liter/second clean water network. In addition, the infrastructure is supported by Sorong port, Arar PLTMG, Waymon PLMTG, Domine Eduard Osok Airport, Oro-Oro Arar Port and Arar port ([INDEF, 2023](#)).

The suitability of the plan for the Sorong SEZ with the Sorong Regency Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) has been supported by the stipulation of Government Regulation No.31 of 2016 concerning the establishment of the Sorong SEZ. In addition to this, the determination of the location of the Sorong SEZ before being submitted to the National Council has also been regulated in Law Number 39 of 2009 concerning Procedures for Determining Special Economic Zones must be in accordance with the regional spatial plan. The existence of these two umbrellas has explained the suitability of the location of the Sorong SEZ to the RTRW. Based on Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2012 concerning the Regional Spatial Plan of Sorong Regency, there are 18 types of spatial pattern plans in

Sorong Regency, namely Nature Reserve, Protected Forest, Conversion Production Forest, Limited Production Forest, Permanent Production Forest, IPT Development Area, Plantation Area, Community Plantation Area, Aimas Urban Area, Security Defense Area, Marine Nature Reserve Area and Klamono Nature Tourism Park. The largest spatial pattern plan area in Sorong Regency is Conversion Production Forest with an area of 262,058.31 ha (30.78% of the total area) which is spread in Beraur, Klabot, Klamono, Makbon, Mayamuk, Moisegen, Moraid, Salawati, South Salawati, Sayosa, Seget and Segun Districts ([INDEF, 2023](#)). The Location and Masterplan of SEZ Sorong can be seen below.

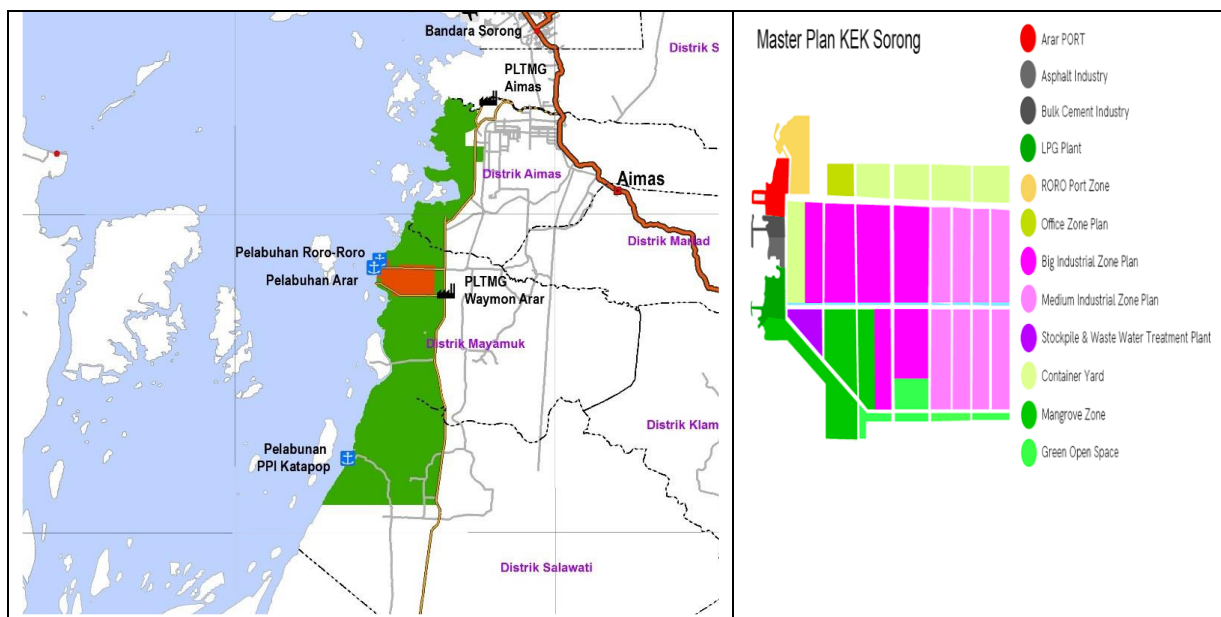


Figure 2. Location and Masterplan SEZ Sorong. *Source:* SEZ Indonesia National Council (2023)

Figure 2 shows the design of the Sorong SEZ by dividing industrial and logistics zoning and integrating the port with raw material supply to support the export of goods. The export factor turns out to have a significant influence on the economic growth of the Special Economic Zone of Sorong, West Papua Province. Export in Sorong city is very good so that it can help them in carrying out trade activities so that agricultural products can be sold out of the region through exports in Sorong city ([Misbahuddin et al., 2023](#)).

According to the West Papua Provincial Treasury Office, investment realization recorded an increase sourced from Domestic Investment (PMDN) worth IDR 792.97 billion in 183 projects, most of which are in the transportation, warehouse and telecommunications sectors and the fisheries sector. Meanwhile, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which is mostly in the tourism sector (hotels and restaurants) in Raja Ampat Regency and industry in the Sorong Special Economic Zone (SEZ), decreased during 2020 to US\$ 5.61 million or smaller than the previous year (US\$ 46.2 million) ([Kanwil Ditjen Perbendaharaan Provinsi Papua Barat, 2019](#)).

Based on data from the 2021 report of the SEZ National Council, it was noted that the total realization in the Sorong SEZ since it was designated as an SEZ on August 1, 2016 until the end of 2021 was IDR 204.76 billion. Then in 2022 there was an increase in investment of IDR 44.2 billion so that it became a realization of IDR 254 billion. The number of tenants in the Sorong SEZ until 2022 amounted to 8 business actors, namely: 1. PT Malamoi Olom Wobok 2. PT Pelabuhan Indonesia 3. PT Semen Indonesia 4. PT Bumi Sarana Utama 5. PT Henrison Inti Persada 6. PT Pertadaya Gas 7. PT Catamaran Papua Boat 8. PT One Tribe Agriculture.

In the development of the Sorong SEZ, however, there are infrastructure obstacles that are not yet maximally complete, including clean water. The Smelter factory needs water not a little. Wash the material with tons of water. Including the port is also still short, land problems, only 200 h are certified, master plan and AMDAL stands for Environmental Impact Analysis already exist ([DPMPTS Papua Barat, 2023](#)). Land and mining license issues as the upstream sector in Sorong SEZ continue to be addressed through the development of solutions in all sectors. Investment Minister/Head of the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM) Bahlil Lahadalia has guaranteed that all these problems will be resolved as an investment package in the nickel downstream ([Fadilah, 2023](#)).

In May 2024, a consortium of PT Sinagi Olom Fagu was formed for the management of the Sorong Special Economic Zone (SEZ). PT Sinagi Olom Fagu consortium was established by three companies, PT Malamoi Olom Wonok, PT Huahe Management Indonesia and PT Sino Consultant Investment Indonesia. The consortium of three companies was formed to build a nickel smelter and steelmaking plant in the Sorong SEZ. Groundbreaking of the nickel smelter and steelmaking plant is planned for June this year and will be the first nickel smelter in Papua. The consortium is tasked with attracting foreign and national investment into the Sorong SEZ. In the development of the Sorong SEZ, there are two Chinese investors who will enter the Sorong SEZ, namely PT Sheng Wei New Energy Technology and Beijing Jianlong Heavy Industry Group. The investment value reached IDR 75 trillion. PT Sheng Wei New Energy Technology will build a nickel smelter, while Beijing Jianlong Heavy Industry Group will build a steelmaking plant ([Prastanto, 2024](#)). In the future, Chinese investors are expected to invest more in the Sorong SEZ for the benefit of the country and the region.

CONCLUSION

Sorong Special Economic Zone is an area that attracts foreign investment to support economic growth in Papua. Based on the results of the literature study and analysis, it can be seen that the regulations and zoning of the area in the Sorong SEZ have been fulfilled in terms of the need to attract foreign investment. As for the conclusions in this study, namely Policies issued by the Regional Government have been aligned with the central Government

in this case the development of the Sorong SEZ, and the development trend of Chinese investment in the processing of mining products (nickel) in accordance with the design of the area supported by Regulation, supportive local government, and inclusive planning processes. It is important to note that the Sorong Special Economic Zone is effective in this context due to its support from both the regional and central governments, but what is more important is that it provides significant geoeconomic and geostrategic benefits to Papua, Indonesia, and the wider region as a whole.

Sorong SEZ has a weakness in terms of connectivity to the market but on the other hand has the advantage of proximity to industrial raw materials. Zoning in the Sorong SEZ is in accordance with industrial designations where this area is an opportunity in the development of the fisheries industry sector. Sorong SEZ whose main industry is mining products processing will be greatly assisted by the fisheries industry sector. The central government should be able to develop Sorong SEZ as one of the centers of foreign investment in Eastern Indonesia through business circulation arrangements with industrial raw material producing areas, especially in Papua and Sulawesi. The minimal number of companies operating in the Sorong SEZ is a special evaluation of how to assess the needs of the international market and diversify global investment.

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