



From pandemic to endemic: Dynamics in the land border area Indonesia-Malaysia

Casiavera^{1*}, Nikodemus Niko², Rizky Octa Putri Charin³, Khairi Rahmi⁴

^{1,2}Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Indonesia

^{3,4}Department of Government Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of COVID-19 pandemic dynamics in the Entikong land border area between Indonesia and Malaysia, and how they may change as the virus becomes endemic. The Entikong region is highly susceptible to the spread of COVID-19 due to its significant cross-border traffic and trade. The exploratory descriptive method was employed, with primary data (interviews) and secondary data from desk review results related to the COVID-19 situation and its impact on communities in the border areas of the country. This study examines the impact of socio-economic situations on the spread of the virus. The findings suggest that the economic activity of the people in the Entikong region has been disrupted since the implementation of the border access closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This economic activity is regulated by the Border Trade Agreement (BTA), which has been in place since the 1970s, allowing economic activities in both regions of Indonesia and Malaysia. The pandemic has forced the border region to close all access to and from goods and people. However, our results also indicate that the region may be better equipped to manage the virus as it becomes endemic. The implications of our findings for policymakers and public health officials are discussed, emphasizing the need for ongoing monitoring and response efforts in the Entikong land border area. This study contributes to the existing literature on the impact of COVID-19 in border regions and provides insights that can guide policymakers in their efforts to mitigate the pandemic's impact on communities living in border regions.

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Corresponding Author:

Nikodemus Niko,
Department of Sociology Faculty of Social and Political Science,
Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji,
Jl. Raya Dompok, Dompok, Kec. Bukit Bestari, Kota Tanjung Pinang, Kepulauan Riau 29115.
Email: nikodemusn@umrah.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on countries worldwide, and Indonesia and Malaysia are no exception. Both countries have implemented various measures, including travel restrictions and lockdowns, to mitigate the spread of the virus. However, with the pandemic continuing, there is an increasing understanding that the virus may become endemic and a permanent feature of daily life. The pandemic has also led to socio-cultural and economic challenges at all levels of society in various regions worldwide (Carr, 2020; McNeely, 2021). In

Indonesia, the pandemic's effects have exacerbated poverty levels, leaving vulnerable populations at risk of hunger (Niko, 2021).

These circumstances give rise to significant inquiries about the continuing impact of the virus on border regions, specifically the Entikong land border area between Indonesia and Malaysia. This area's susceptibility to COVID-19 is especially concerning, as it experiences high levels of cross-border traffic and trade.

Given the circumstances, it is crucial to comprehend the pandemic's dynamics in the Entikong land border area and how they may change as the virus becomes endemic. This necessitates an investigation into variables such as cross-border travel trends, the efficacy of public health measures, and the impact of socioeconomic variables on the virus's transmission. By gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the Entikong land border area's dynamics, policymakers and public health officials can devise more effective approaches for controlling the pandemic and safeguarding public health over the long haul.

During crisis situations, it is critical to take immediate action to safeguard vulnerable communities and prepare sustainable recovery strategies (World Bank, 2020). To curb the spread of COVID-19, the Indonesian government has implemented various domestic policies, including Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) and changes to education delivery methods. In border regions, the government has closed all land border gates in West Kalimantan as a precautionary measure, recognizing the susceptibility of border areas to becoming hotspots for the virus's transmission.

The vulnerability of the Entikong border area in the Sanggau Regency of West Kalimantan is attributed to the suspension of cross-border activities by the Indonesian and Malaysian authorities. This development has had far-reaching consequences for the local populace, particularly those residing in border communities whose primary source of income originates from the Sarawak region of Malaysia. Atem and Niko (2020) have pointed out that the orientation of these communities towards Malaysia has rendered them susceptible to food insecurity.

The temporary cessation of activities in the Entikong border area has given rise to a fresh set of challenges, with the lower middle-class population facing considerable difficulties in sustaining their livelihoods and meeting daily economic needs. This predicament is further compounded by the fact that border communities are heavily reliant on the Malaysian market economy, which has effectively been closed off to them. As a result, a crucial economic institution has been temporarily lost, as Horton and Hunt (1987) note that economic institutions emerge when groups or individuals regularly engage in the exchange of goods, allocate tasks, and acknowledge the demands of others.

In response to the temporary cessation of border activities in the Entikong area, border communities have developed new, smaller-scale economic institutions within families to meet their daily needs. These institutions serve as a traditional solution to the challenges of subsistence, while regulating socioeconomic patterns. The emergence of such institutions is not new; economic institutions have been created throughout history to meet basic human needs, including the search for life, production, hoarding, and the distribution of property and objects. As Koentjaraningrat noted, these institutions are a fundamental part of economic life (1974).

In accordance with Soekanto's views, the socioeconomic concept is marked by an individual's position in society, which is closely linked to others (Soekanto, 2012). This signifies that individuals rely on one another in social settings and in fulfilling their rights and obligations with respect to resources. In the context of the Entikong border communities, they have joined hands in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The vulnerability of these communities primarily lies in issues related to community security, including the trafficking of humans and illegal goods (Niko, 2017). Nonetheless, we contend that vulnerability also encompasses socioeconomic aspects. According to Santrock, socioeconomic status entails the grouping of people based on similarities in employment and economic education characteristics (2007).

The inhabitants of the Entikong border in Sanggau Regency largely work as farmers, and some are employed as migrant workers in Serawak, Malaysia. However, with the border access closed, migrant workers are unable to continue their work, causing the main source of livelihood to become inaccessible. As a result, migrant workers and their families face challenges in meeting

their basic needs for food and clothing, weakening their ability to survive. Soekanto defines socioeconomics as the position of an individual in society in relation to others in terms of their social environment, achievements, and rights and obligations regarding resources (2012). Similarly, Abdulsyani argues that socioeconomic status is determined by an individual's type of economic activity, income, level of education, type of dwelling, and position in the organization (1994). In light of these perspectives, social status serves to indicate an individual's position in society.

In West Kalimantan, all segments of society, including those residing in urban and rural areas, are at risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Particularly, indigenous people who live in poor conditions in the rural parts of West Kalimantan are highly vulnerable to this disease (Niko, 2021). Similarly, migrant workers who reside in poor border areas face similar challenges. In response to their precarious situation, working families form social networks to ensure their survival (Mahbubah, 2020). Rupita (2020) found that certain vulnerable communities in West Kalimantan work cooperatively to strengthen their resilience during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In reference to the Covid-19 pandemic, the West Kalimantan Province, being a bordering region with Malaysia, has specific policies that are tailored to the unique conditions of the area. The Governor of the West Kalimantan Province issued an official directive, Order Number 193/0868/BPPD-A, dated March 18, 2020, to close the state border. This significant letter of border closure was directed to the regents of areas that have border lines and access to Malaysia, namely Sambas, Bengkayang, Sanggau, Kapuas Hulu, Sintang, as well as to the Administrators of the Entikong Cross-Border Post (PLBN) in Sanggau, the Administrator of PLBN Nanga Badau in Kapuas Hulu, and the Administrator of PLBN Aruk in Sambas (Okezone.com, 2020).

The decision to close the border door was made as a proactive measure to counter the stringent measures imposed by the Malaysian government, specifically the lockdown policy, due to the alarming surge in Covid-19 cases in Sarawak. As a result, this policy prevents entry into West Kalimantan for all individuals. However, exceptions are made for foreign nationals who will be departing the West Kalimantan region, or those who will be entering it.

The combination of the lockdown policy in Malaysia and the border closure policy in West Kalimantan has resulted in the restriction of human access and socio-economic interactions between the two regions. The consequences of these policies have been diverse, including the reduction of the availability of basic living necessities in border areas, which cannot be fulfilled domestically and are reliant on supplies from neighboring countries. This has been observed through the scarcity of some basic needs in shops and minimarkets (AntaraNews Kalbar, 2020).

In West Kalimantan, there are challenges related to the access and distribution of food stocks in the border area, as well as the large number of official/legal and unofficial/illegal workers (TKI) who come from this province to the Serawak region of Malaysia. To address these challenges, the West Kalimantan provincial government issued an official circular refusing to allow the province to be used as a transit point for the repatriation of migrant workers from Malaysia who came from outside West Kalimantan. (Pontianak Post, 2020). As such, this study aims to investigate the strategies adopted by border communities to survive amidst the border closure policy, and to improve the welfare of local communities for the sake of national resilience. It should be noted that the concept of sovereignty, which prioritizes state power and control, may have limitations in terms of protecting citizens from security threats both within and outside the country. The concept of responsibility to protect, which emphasizes the humanitarian aspect of protection, may therefore be more effective in ensuring the security and welfare of citizens (Chandler, 2009).

The purpose of social networks is to reinforce connections between groups, which can help mitigate vulnerabilities. As per Rupita's study, these relationships between groups serve as local social capital in managing the COVID-19 situation (2021). From this perspective, an inquiry can be posed: what is the COVID-19 pandemic's progression in the Entikong land border region of Sanggau Regency in West Kalimantan, and what are the underlying dynamics?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to explore the dynamics of the Entikong border community in Indonesia-Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic and its transition to an endemic phase. The research employing a

qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with key informants, including local government officials, community leaders, and members of the Entikong border community. The study also using a document analysis of government policies and data related to the pandemic's impact on the border area.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select informants from the Entikong border of Sanggau Regency. The sample consisted of five individuals, including two men and three women. The selection of informants was based on their proximity to the border area with Malaysia, as well as input from local officials. The characteristics of the informant are as follows:

Table 1. The Informant

No.	Initial name	Age	Sex	Formal Education
1.	KGZ	42	Women	Graduated Elementary School
2.	OJF	49	Men	Graduated Elementary School
3.	ATW	48	Women	Graduated Elementary School
4.	ITE	45	Men	Graduated S1
5.	PKW	39	Women	Graduated in Elementary School

Source: Researcher, 2021

The sampling method using purposive sampling, selecting informants who have relevant knowledge and experience regarding the research topic. The data collection process involved conducting in-person interviews with informants, who provided insights into their socio-economic vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Appropriate safety protocols, such as maintaining physical distance, wearing masks, and providing hand sanitizers, were adhered to during the interviews.

Data analysis using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data collected. The study's ethical considerations will include obtaining informed consent from informants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and conducting the study in accordance with ethical guidelines and principles. The study's limitations including the availability and willingness of informants to participate in the study and the generalizability of the findings due to the qualitative approach's focus on the Entikong border community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Entikong in Time of Pandemic

According to the Central Statistics Agency of Sanggau Regency (2020), the Entikong area is composed of five villages, namely Entikong Village, Suruh Tembawang Village, Pala Asang Village, Nekan Village, and Semangit Village. The region is generally characterized by hilly terrain, which has led to the use of land for agricultural purposes and small-scale plantations by local communities. The products of these activities are commonly sold to Malaysia.

The community of Entikong, residing in an interior and remote region, currently lacks access to roads leading to the city of Entikong District. Consequently, the community continues to engage in trade and commerce with Gun Sapit village (located in the Pedawan District), one of the villages in the Kuching region of Sarawak, Malaysia, which is directly adjacent to Badat Lama Hamlet in Suruh Tembawang Village, Entikong District.

From a historical perspective, the inhabitants of Badat Lama Hamlet, Suruh Tembawang Village, Entikong District, belong to the Dayak Sungkung sub-tribe and maintain a connection with the Dayak sub-tribe in Gun Sapit, Malaysia. This has fostered a strong and long-standing relationship between the two villages, including the exchange of goods and intermarriage between their citizens. Due to high demand for agricultural products from the Entikong community in the

Sarawak region of Malaysia, trade access is primarily oriented towards Malaysia. Access to the trading center in Entikong is limited and prices in Malaysia are relatively higher and more competitive. The agricultural products, such as ginger, lemon, chili, sour eggplant, and pepper, are mainly sold in Gun Sapit village. Notably, the border community market is only open on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

In Gun Sapit (Malaysia), there is a lack of traditional markets to accommodate the sales of the Entikong community, which has led them to take the initiative to sell their produce to community stalls in the area. Consequently, the shops or stalls in Gun Sapit serve as a reservoir for natural products/farmers of the Entikong border community. Additionally, inland border areas such as Suruh Tembawang Village and Pala Asang Village are still isolated, relying solely on river transportation to access the Entikong market. Due to the considerable cost and time required to reach this inland region, these areas are faced with challenges in terms of transportation and access to the market.

The community in Entikong hinterland has established stronger social and economic ties with the people of Gun Sapit (Malaysia) than with the market in Entikong (Indonesia). The longstanding interactions between the locals and Malaysians have fostered socio-economic networks between the two communities. Despite the ongoing pandemic, trade continues to take place between the two regions, ranging from agricultural products to basic needs for the local community. The ease of access between the two regions has contributed to this well-established social interaction. Conversely, the lack of adequate domestic infrastructure has led the people of Entikong to prefer neighboring countries as their economic transaction areas. Consequently, the use of rupiah and ringgit as legal tender has become prevalent.

The Entikong community is composed of individuals from various ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Nonetheless, the Sungkung Dayak sub-tribe constitutes a distinct and integral part of the community, especially in Suruh Tembawang Village. This is evident in the rich cultural traditions observed in the village, such as the long-standing practice of using "gadgets" or harvesting tools to strengthen familial and communal ties among residents. Such customs not only foster closer relationships within the village, but also help to establish connections with neighboring communities across the border in Malaysia.

Furthermore, the Entikong community has preserved unique customs and traditions that are similar to those of the Sarawak region in Malaysia. In cases of social norm violations, the community follows customary law that involves a hierarchical process from customary administrators to customary *temenggung*. If a resolution is still not reached, the case can be escalated to positive law. This indicates that the community values their traditional customs and laws in governing their social interactions.

The Entikong border community is considered to have a middle-class economic status, which is attributed to the geographical conditions that make it isolated and far from the district city of Entikong, and the challenging access due to the hilly terrain. This situation has resulted in difficulties for the locals to access the Entikong sub-district city to conduct commercial activities. As a result, they have opted to sell their agricultural products in Malaysia and purchase food products from the same country. Thus, the closure policy implemented on the border area has had a substantial effect on the economic and social processes of the border communities.

The majority of the population in Suruh Tembawang village earn their livelihood through agriculture, particularly in gardening and farming. The hilly terrain of the region is utilized for planting various crops such as pepper, rubber, mustard, and cucumbers. Pepper, in particular, is a dependable crop that has high demand, along with other plantation products such as sour eggplant, ginger, peanuts, corn, bananas, durian, rambutan, *langsats*, and *cempedak*. These crops are sought after by the Malaysian community, particularly in the Sapit village.

The rural communities in the Entikong area face significant challenges in accessing transportation to the sub-district city. The available routes require traversing hilly terrain, which can become muddy and treacherous during rainy periods, while river pathways present additional dangers such as tidal conditions and waterfalls. This makes it difficult for residents to access essential services and goods from the sub-district city.

3.2 Socio-Economic Situation of Entikong Community During the Pandemic Period

The economic status of the rural population in Entikong, specifically in Suruh Tembawang Village, Nekan Village, Pala Asang Village, and Semangit Village, is categorized as a lower middleclass economy. This is due to the remote location of these villages, which are situated far from the city center of Entikong district, resulting in difficult access and hilly terrain that poses challenges for buying and selling goods. As indicated by Niko (2017), poverty contributes to human trafficking, particularly of women and children, in border areas, underscoring the vulnerability of impoverished individuals in these areas. Niko (2019) further notes that women's poverty is a manifestation of patriarchal cultural norms prevalent in rural communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the socio-economic situation of the Entikong community. This region serves as an essential passageway for cross-border trade and travel, and the resulting disruptions have significantly affected many local businesses and households.

A significant challenge that has emerged in the Entikong community during the COVID-19 pandemic is the restrictions on cross-border travel, which have resulted in severe economic impacts on local traders and small business owners who rely on cross-border trade. Due to the inability to access markets and suppliers on the other side of the border, there has been a loss of income and increased economic hardship. Moreover, the closure of border checkpoints has also had repercussions on the movement of migrant workers, who hold a vital role in the local economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted the economic conditions of the Entikong community but has also affected the health and well-being of the people. The overwhelmed health systems and the prioritization of COVID-19 prevention and treatment have resulted in limited access to healthcare for the community. The closure of schools and public facilities has also adversely affected education and social activities. The younger generation, especially children and youth, have been the most affected by these changes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant socio-economic challenges to the Entikong community, resulting in many households and businesses experiencing economic difficulties. It is imperative for policymakers and public health officials to take into account the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and to devise strategies that promote the resilience and recovery of local communities.

In essence, the closure of the border area policy has had little impact on the activities of the Entikong community, particularly those who cross over to Malaysia through the "rat road" to obtain food supplies. This practice is mainly due to the absence of alternative means to obtain essential commodities from Indonesian territory. The peaceful resolution of border issues and the development of border areas, as well as the management of problems that arise, can bolster the effectiveness of foreign policy and diplomacy in achieving the objectives set forth in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution.

In essence, the Entikong region serves as the economic hub for the border community due to its strategic location and the presence of a cross-border development center. However, the economic situation has been sluggish due to the continued closure of the border by both governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is corroborated by one of the informants who stated that there has been little activity in the area, and the duration of the border closure remains uncertain. The closure is aimed at preventing the transmission of the virus, thereby contributing to the general economic lull in the area.

According to field observations, there has been rapid development of infrastructure in the Entikong border area, particularly in terms of road infrastructure and community facilities. This development has had a positive impact on the economic progress of the local community, as well as enhancing their competitiveness and business potential. Furthermore, this development has contributed to improving the image and self-esteem of the nation, as well as enhancing the security of the country's territorial borders.

Mariyah et al. conducted a study indicating a positive impact on the agribusiness sector during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the significant increase in demand for agricultural products (2021). Similar observations were made by an informant from the Entikong area who stated that

demand for their agricultural products remains high and has not been affected by the pandemic, as their products have always been sold in the Malaysian region (informant 1).

The management program of state boundaries is interconnected with the development programs of neighboring countries. Among the various challenges faced by the border area, one of the pressing issues that require the attention of the Indonesian government is the delimitation and affirmation of state boundaries (demarcation), as reported by the Lembaga Administrasi Negara (2004). Despite this, the local communities have not taken full advantage of the economic opportunities available due to the inadequate infrastructure connecting remote villages to sub-districts.

In terms of their economic livelihood, the Entikong border communities heavily rely on agricultural resources, including fields and gardens, which have been passed down through generations. As a result, their main assets are typically agricultural land and inherited plantations. Additionally, some individuals work as laborers in Malaysian palm oil companies, commuting back and forth through the border area via the 'rat road' (departing from Indonesia in the morning and returning from Malaysia in the afternoon). However, due to restrictions imposed during the pandemic, many individuals have become unemployed, as highlighted by informant 5.

In the highland area of Entikong border communities, the main sources of livelihood are agriculture, particularly rice farming, rubber plantations, and pepper plantations. These farmers also work as laborers in Serawak, Malaysia, and often sell their produce in the Kuching region market every weekend. Additionally, some members of the community work as day laborers in oil palm plantations in the Serawak area. As such, there is a diverse range of employment opportunities available within the Entikong border communities.

The implementation of social distancing policies through the closure of border areas has affected both local and migrant workers, causing a loss of income. According to Surhayadi, Izzati, and Suryadarma (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in the number of newly impoverished individuals in Indonesia.

In the Entikong border region, labor workers are facing deep anxiety due to their vulnerability to poverty as they do not have fixed incomes. Despite the implementation of social assistance policies by the government, the distribution of these funds is not evenly distributed to all workers affected by COVID-19 in the region. According to Niko (2021), social assistance funds (bansos) are only provided to those who have Identity Cards (KTP), which not all workers at the border possess. As a result, many workers in the region are not receiving any help, as mentioned by an informant who stated that there is little help available to those who do not have ID cards. Hence, many workers in the region continue to work as usual during the pandemic without any significant changes in their work.

The closure of borders and the implementation of social distancing policies have consequences beyond affecting migrant workers, including risks of disease outbreaks, food shortages, and unemployment. The threat of disease extends beyond COVID-19 to other illnesses due to limited access to healthcare services. The potential food crisis at the border is due to the lack of access to basic food supplies from Malaysia, as the border area still relies on imported goods from Malaysia. These issues were highlighted by Atem and Niko (2020).

According to the testimony of informant 5, the locals in the border area continue to carry out their daily routines since their area is quite remote, and the influx of outsiders is infrequent. He said:

"We typically work in the forest or fields and remain cautious if someone from outside the village comes. However, outsiders seldom visit our area."

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economic status of the Entikong community are substantial. The community has experienced considerable economic repercussions due to the pandemic, resulting in financial difficulties for many households and businesses. This has led to a rise in poverty rates and a decrease in access to vital necessities like healthcare and education.

In order to mitigate the socio-economic implications of the pandemic on the Entikong community, policymakers and public health officials should devise strategies that promote community resilience and recovery. Such strategies could encompass targeted interventions that

aid local households and businesses, such as financial support, enhanced access to markets and suppliers, and the creation of alternative livelihood opportunities.

Efforts to address the health impacts of COVID-19 must be complemented by strategies to alleviate the wider socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. These measures may encompass initiatives to enhance access to healthcare, education, and social services, along with measures to support community resilience and wellbeing.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the aforementioned discourse indicates that the social and economic conditions of the border communities, particularly in the Entikong border, remain relatively unchanged. The locals continue to farm and sell their produce to Malaysia. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable implications on the cross-border traffic and trade in the Entikong land border region, which has high significance. Hence, our examination underscores the necessity of comprehending the pandemic dynamics in this area as it moves towards an endemic state.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant socio-economic repercussions on the Entikong community, with local businesses and households relying on cross-border trade being the hardest hit. The closure of border checkpoints and restrictions on cross-border travel have disrupted the movement of migrant workers, who play a crucial role in the local economy. In addition, the pandemic has adversely affected healthcare and education accessibility, especially for children and youth. However, these impacts have been more pronounced in the market area of Entikong District. To build resilience in the face of the pandemic, the optimization of all village networks and local social ties are crucial. The local government does not have a dedicated social assistance program, and its emergency response policies do not provide employment guarantees for migrant workers who have lost their source of income.

Our research emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive approach by policymakers and public health officials in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the Entikong land border area, which considers the distinct challenges faced by the community. By adopting such an approach, we can minimize the impacts of the pandemic and ensure that the Entikong community is adequately prepared to manage the virus as it transitions to an endemic phase.

One of our research limitations is related to the sample size, as the study focused on a specific border community in Entikong, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Gun Sapid, Sarawak, Malaysia. Therefore, the results may not be representative of other border communities in the region. Another limitation is related to the data collection method used in the study, which primarily relied on interviews with key informants and community members. This approach may limit the scope of data that can be collected, and additional data collection methods such as surveys or focus group discussions could provide more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, the study only focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the border communities and did not explore other potential factors that could influence their dynamics, such as political, economic, or environmental factors. Future research could consider a broader range of factors to provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics in the land border area between Indonesia and Malaysia.

Based on research limitations, there are several opportunities for future research to explore the dynamics in this land border area. There is a need to investigate the long-term effects of the pandemic on the economy and social structure of the Entikong community. This includes understanding the impacts of border closures on trade and commerce, the shift towards using neighboring countries as economic transaction areas, and the continued reliance on traditional customs and laws. Furthermore, the unique cultural and ethnic diversity of the Entikong community offers opportunities for further research into the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, as well as exploring how this diversity contributes to the community's resilience and adaptation to changing circumstances.

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