

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Its Implications for Economic Security in the Republic of Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Border Market Area

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## Abstrak

Penyebaran pandemi COVID-19 hingga ke perbatasan Indonesia-Papua Nugini (PNG) menjadi ancaman nyata bagi masyarakat yang tinggal di kawasan tersebut. Akibat pandemi, Pos Lintas Batas Negara (PLBN) dan pasar perbatasan ditutup sementara sejak Januari 2020. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implikasi COVID-19 terhadap keamanan ekonomi masyarakat di perbatasan RI-PNG. Selain itu, untuk menganalisis respons kedua negara, utamanya Indonesia, terhadap ancaman keamanan ekonomi di kawasan perbatasan. Artikel ini dikembangkan dari penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan menggunakan metode penelitian lapangan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dan observasi serta didukung oleh data sekunder. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa implikasi jangka pendek COVID-19 terhadap ketahanan ekonomi berupa penurunan pendapatan, bahkan kehilangan pendapatan, akibat penutupan akses lintas batas. Pengurangan pendapatan dapat menyebabkan munculnya implikasi jangka menengah berupa pengangguran dan hutang. Jika tidak ada solusi, implikasi jangka panjangnya bisa berupa meluasnya kemiskinan di wilayah perbatasan RI-PNG.

**Kata Kunci:** COVID-19, keamanan ekonomi, perbatasan, Papua, Indonesia, Papua Nugini.

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic spread to the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) border poses a real threat to people living in the region. As a consequence of this pandemic, the Transnational Border Post (PLBN) and the border market have been temporarily closed since January 2020. This article aims to analyze the implications of COVID-19 on the economic security of the people at the RI-PNG border and the responses of two countries, particularly Indonesia, toward the economic security threats in the border region. This article was developed from qualitative descriptive research using field research methods. Data were collected through interviews and observations and supported by secondary data. This study revealed that the short-term implications of COVID-19 on economic security existed in the form of income reduction, even income loss, due to the closure of cross-border access. Income reduction may lead to the emergence of medium-term implications in the form of unemployment and debt. If there is no solution, the long-term implications may exist in the form of widespread poverty in the RI-PNG border area.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, economic security, border, Papua, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea.

## INTRODUCTION

As the province with the longest land border, Papua is one of the most isolated regions in Indonesia. The land border between Papua Province and Papua New Guinea (PNG) stretches approximately 780 km along the line 141° 0' 00" east longitude from MM 1 to MM 10 and line 141° 01' 10" east longitude from MM 11 to 14.A. As of

this writing, there are 52 boundary sites (Meridian Monument), 24 of which are under the control of the Republic of Indonesia (RI), and 28 under Papua New Guinean duty. The primary border monuments were constructed between 1966 and 1967, while the minor monuments were built between 1982 and 1990. The

RI-PNG boundary is situated in the Skouw region, Jayapura-Wutung City, Vanimo District, near the northernmost part of the island. While in the southern region, it extends from MM 10 in the Anggamarut/Wairin area of the Boven Digoel Regency, MM 11 in the Domonggi area of the Merauke Regency, to MM 14 in the Bensbach or Torasi River estuary area (Mhuluk, 2010).

Despite their geographical separation, Papua New Guineans and Papuans have a common ancestry with the Melanesians (Lawson, 2013). There are over 852 languages in PNG and 255 in Papua (Papua Provincial Government, 2016); however, ethnically, the people of Papua and PNG are inseparable since they share similar traditions. People from Papua and PNG often cross the border to participate in traditional tribal rites. Since the border between Papua and PNG is heavily militarized, the people living there are exceedingly close-knit.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China, has spread to the easternmost border of Indonesia, namely the border of the Papua-PNG. In Papua and PNG, COVID-19 confirmed cases have affected the closure of border regions between the two nations. This closure has been carried out since January 30, 2020, initially carried out by the Immigration and Citizenship Agency of PNG (Papua New Guinea Immigration and Citizenship Authority-PNGICA) and was followed later by the Indonesian Immigration Office at the northern border crossing post in Jayapura City and the southern border crossing post in Merauke Regency (Giay, 2020). When the study was completed in October 2020, there were 7,377 verified positive cases, according to information from the Papua Province Government's official website, with details on 2,843 still being treated, 4,421 having been certified cures, and 113 deceased (Covid-19 Papua Province, 2020). There were 549 confirmed cases of HIV in PNG, seven of which were still active, 532 of which have been declared cured, and seven have died (Papua New Guinea Joint Agency Task Force National Control Center for COVID-19, 2020).

Restricted cross-border access resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak is undoubtedly a burden for the two nations' border residents. Due to the likeness of clusters

and the prevalence of kinfolk across border villages, individuals from Papua frequently go to PNG to see their families and even cultivate. On the one hand, several PNG residents living on the border own gardens in Papua. On the other hand, the formerly busy border market has been forced to temporarily shut to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the RI-PNG border region, the border market aided the economy of inhabitants, particularly PNG residents who shopped for basic commodities at the Papuan border market due to lower prices. Against this backdrop, this paper examined the impact of COVID-19 on the Indonesian people's economic security in the RI-PNG border market region and the actions of the two nations' governments, particularly Indonesia's, in addressing challenges to economic security in border regions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contemporary security studies focus on three areas based on the object's dimensions: state security, social security, and human security. Traditionally, security studies have focused only on state security, that is, measures to safeguard the state from external military threats. As it develops, there is an increasing concern for community security, defined as a society's capacity to maintain its fundamental identity in the face of changing situations and potential or real dangers. Along with its advancement, security studies place a premium on human security. Human security refers to the protection, liberty, and growth of people within society, and it is inextricably linked to the realization of human rights (Ballin et al., 2020: 13-39).

The increased emphasis on human security, increasingly directed at non-state actors, results from the rising number of non-traditional dangers affecting people and even communities inside a nation. This change has shifted the emphasis of security studies away from states and toward non-state entities such as people, both individually and collectively. Human security is a people-centered concept, meaning that it places the person at the center of examination of many risks, including the challenges to economic security mentioned

in this article (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 202-205; Persaud, 2016: 139-153).

Economic security was first addressed in isolation from the state and the international system in the classic literature on Security Studies. In his book "People, State, and Fear," Barry Buzan discusses that challenges to economic security might emerge from two sources: the capitalist system and the free market. The capitalist system can transform society's culture into consumerist, materialist, and individualist. Free markets may result in economic distress and job loss, preventing individuals from living a regular or conventional life (Buzan, 1983). Contemporary researchers, such as Gary M. Shiffman (2016), have defined economic security as the use of economic analysis to develop security policies to mitigate the economic hazards and repercussions of war, crime, and insurgency.

Apart from the popular view of economic security, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conceptualizes economic security and includes it among the seven categories of human security that must be fulfilled to achieve sustainable human development (UNDP, 1994). Additionally, UNDP and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) have explained that human security is interconnected with six other types of security: food, health, environmental, political, personal, and community (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). According to the UNDP, economic security is a state where individuals have a consistent basic income that enables them to live a good life today and in the future. Economic security is jeopardized by poverty, unemployment, debt, and a lack of income (UNDP, 1994; Jolly & Ray, 2006).

UNDP and UNOCHA highlight the relevance of the following five principles in developing responses to human security concerns, including economic security threats: people-centered, multisectoral, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented. The first principle of people-centered analysis centers the analysis on the person. The process of determining the fundamental causes of security vulnerabilities, which includes data collection, should involve those directly

impacted. The second multisectoral concept underlines the critical nature of examining security risks across several sectors and at multiple levels simultaneously: local, regional, and national. The third comprehensive principle highlights the need to identify security threats and respond to them holistically. The fourth principle is contextual, pointing out the need to conduct a priority scale analysis of threats and responses to these threats while considering the diverse contexts and conditions encountered by people, ensuring that solutions developed are contextual. Meanwhile, the fifth principle is preventive in nature, stressing the need to find long-term solutions by thoroughly assessing the dangers and fundamental causes of issues and concentrating on elements of protection and empowerment (UNOCHA, 2020).

The establishment of COVID-19 in the border region poses a serious danger to the economic security of the people living there, as discussed above. Economic activity in the RI-PNG border communities is likely to be impacted by the closure of the border region and the border market. In addition, the border region has been a source of economic activity for a long time, even before a frontier was established.

Apart from the societal effect, examining the economic security concerns posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as at the Papua-PNG border, is becoming more essential, given that the security study's examination of global illness has so far been limited to the subject of health security. Stefan Elbe's (2016) chapter on health security in "Contemporary Security Research" and Simon Rushton's and Jeremy Youde's (2015) book, "Routledge Handbook of Global Health Security," have both documented several studies on global illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and SARS. However, available research focuses only on global illnesses and their consequences for human security in general and national and international security. Thus, a study of the economic security implications of global illness transmission will add to the corpus of knowledge in security studies.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This article results from a descriptive study undertaken in the latter part of 2020. Descriptive research has been designed to elicit a thorough and accurate account of the topic and the events, surroundings, and circumstances around them (Neumann, 2007). The Indonesian people on the Papua Indonesia-PNG border are this research topic. The subject's scenarios presented in this study are the closure of cross-border posts and border markets in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic security consequences.

The data used to create the description were gathered through field research. The researchers were present at the site where the subject was observed and interviewed during this field investigation (Babbie, 2014). In December 2020 and July 2021, PLBN of Skouw and Sota performed security checks and interviews. Visual data (in photographic documentation) and audio recordings were collected following observations at the border market. Nine community members aged 20 to 50 years who resided in the two nations' border regions and two officials at PLBN Skouw and Sota were interviewed using a pre-prepared grid of questions. The snowball method was applied to select the community resource individuals (Babbie, 2014). Cross-border merchants, customers, and community leaders in Papua and PNG using border marketplaces qualify as resource individuals from the community.

Secondary data were gathered through library research to supplement the data collected from field observations and interviews. Documents, archives, research findings pertinent to the subject of study, and media coverage comprise the library resources gathered (Prior, 2003). Additionally, statistical data on border market activity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic were acquired to supplement this library content.

After data were obtained from multiple sources, they were processed and analyzed. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes that developed through observations, interviews, and secondary sources were gathered during this process. These themes were then systematized to create a narrative depiction of the economic security consequences of

shutting cross-border posts and border markets in the RI-PNG border region.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### PROFILE OF THE RI-PNG BORDER MARKET IN SKOUW PLBN AND SOTA PLBN

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional communities used the RI-PNG border market to visit villages in adjacent nations on a daily basis. Additionally, a border market is where economic activity occurs between indigenous and immigrant groups (non-Papuans). The deep brotherhood amongst traditional villages and the RI-PNG border resulted from the Melanesian family's resemblance, producing cultural commonalities. Individuals go to one another's villages to greet their relatives and protect their land (ulayat) rights. Long before a physical and governmental line divided the two nations, individuals had customary land rights in both countries. Due to these customary rights, the Papuan people have families and gardens in PNG on both the northern and southern borders. On the other hand, the people of PNG also live in Indonesian villages and have families and gardens (PN, Interview, December 19, 2020).

Security incidents often occur in the northern and southern border regions due to separatist groups' activity in Papua. The establishment of this organization resulted in turmoil and migration of Papuans, particularly those living on the southern border, to PNG. In 1992, a separatist movement attacked the southern border market in the town of Sota. This incident resulted in an explosion at the Koramil station and the abduction of hostages by a separatist group. Residents of Sota and other villages like Toray and Erambu opted to evacuate to PNG through the Torasi River. Several groups of individuals who fled to PNG in 1993, 1994, and 2000 elected to return to Merauke. In 2000, many transmigrants settled in the Sota region, coexisting alongside indigenous Papuans (MG, Interview, December 19, 2020).

The establishment of the border market has provided a significant boost to the economy in the border region. On the other hand, local communities have cultivated agricultural items to supplement their economies. People

have begun producing vanilla from PNG in the southern border region. Some seeds were also collected from areas other than Merauke, including Jayapura and Java. Since 2018, this agricultural product has been under development.

Additionally, the community has expanded the Bogor Pineapple product. The villages of Sota, Yanggandur, Rawabiru, Erambu, and Torai have been used for sowing the seeds. In Sota Village, a total of 10,000 vanilla seeds have been sown. Independent community finances and help from the government, particularly the Department of Agriculture, have been utilized to generate these better agricultural goods. However, only five farmers were still capable of producing vanilla. Production has not been maximized for the community, but it is believed to meet the aim in 2022. The primary impediment was a lack of seeds. PNG has become the primary source of high-quality seeds. However, they could only be imported small. Occasionally, seeds may be imported from Jayapura and Java, although supply consistency could not be guaranteed (PN, Interview December 19, 2020).

The border market circumstances in Indonesia and PNG have been in stark contrast. The northern border market, operated by the PNG community in Wutung, was mostly a food market selling snack twisties, lamb chops, bananas, and PNG souvenirs. This market has gotten no assistance from the PNG Government, and as a result, it was only a wooden shack. When not aided by the Ministry of Trade, this market was almost identical to the Skouw border market. The selling price at the Wutung border market was fairly high, about double what it was in Indonesia (Observation at the PNG Border Market in Wutung, 2021). However, many people from Jayapura City and even from beyond Papua Province have come to the Wutung market for distinctive goods and traditional PNG cuisine.

Meanwhile, PNG residents sold exclusively on Sundays in traditional border marketplaces in the southern border region. On other days, they brought things to sell and deposited them at kiosks at the Indonesian border market in Sota, Merauke Regency. The PNG community has traded deerskin, deer antler, crocodile skin, cassowary, kangaroo, Arowana fish,

agarwood, vanilla plant, kendaro, and toware at the southern border market. The revenues from the sale of these commodities were commonly used to purchase basic needs like as rice, clothing, sugar, salt, coffee, tea, sago, pandan mats, canned food, and fruits, as well as to cover children's school tuition (A, PN, Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020; Hapsari, 2016).

In contrast to the PNG community market, which was often self-sustaining, the Indonesian Government reinvigorated the Indonesian border market in Papua in 2017 to enhance the economy. President Joko Widodo's project for Nawacita has included building the Skouw and Sota Cross-Border Posts (PLBN). These two posts were constructed by the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing (PUPR). The PLBN in Skouw began construction in 2017, while in Sota, it began in 2019. The border market was also included in this integrated PLBN idea to assist the community's economy (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). The economic stretch in the frontier market was found to be enormous. According to BBC News Indonesia (2020), the Skouw market, for example, had a daily money circulation of IDR 3 billion in 2018, based on statistics from Bank Indonesia officials in Papua Province.

The Skouw border market offered a wide variety of commodities. Local tourists and PNG residents may readily acquire a variety of necessities at this market, including fruits, packaged food and beverages, snacks, apparel, pillows, carpets, and home appliances (Rachman, 2018). Unlike in Skouw, the community was more prominent at the Sota border market, offering agricultural goods, needs, and souvenirs. Taro, pineapple, and banana were the crops exchanged. Rice, sugar, coffee, tea, pop noodles, snacks, and cold beverages were all sold. Meanwhile, souvenirs such as feather bags, arambai, key chains, as well as PNG machetes and honey were marketed. Additionally, there were uniquely Papuan goods, such as ant nests, eucalyptus oil, and red fruit (A, SR, Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020).

Along with tourists from PNG and the border region, the border market has attracted people from other towns and provinces. Numerous tourists have come from Java

(A, Interview, December 19, 2020). Additionally, leaders from the center and regions often paid working trips to the border market. Visits occurred once a week or even once a month. The basic objective of visitors to the border market area was to purchase items exchanged at the border, engage in recreational activities, or see relatives (E, Interview, December 19, 2020). Indonesians used to travel for enjoyment and purchase unique goods or souvenirs at the border. Meanwhile, residents from PNG often visited the border market to purchase goods and connect with family members (Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020).

The RI-PNG border market's payment mechanism was based on barter and money. Generally, traditional villages in PNG's southern border region, notably Sota Village and Galumbu Hamlet, employed the barter system. Frequently used bartering methods included swapping basic items and cultural accouterments. In return for meat or deer antlers from PNG, traditional residents in Sota village often provided sugar or soap. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples in the two border zones operated a currency payment system when interacting with migrant groups. Unusually, the RI-PNG border market allowed buyers and sellers to do transactions in two currencies (Kina and Rupiah). Generally, PNG residents visiting the border market in Indonesia may shop with Kina money. On the other hand, Indonesians visiting the PNG border market may shop in Rupiah. The Rupiah currency was also accepted in Wariaber, Weam, and Daru of PNG's southern region (Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020).

Indonesia and PNG have also been afflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has spread to both countries. Since January 30, 2020, PNGICA has been responsible for implementing the border closure. Indonesia then shut down the border crossing stations of Skouw and Sota in response (Giay, 2020). The closing of the border market on March 26, 2020, was also affected by this border closure. The two nations have yet to reveal their intentions in terms of cross-border access. Traditional communities and border markets were still unable to cross the Skouw-Wutung boundary. There has been no cross-border access along the southern border

(Sota-Wariaber), and the community was not permitted to see their families in neighboring villages. There was a limit to where traditional border crossers may meet their relatives (CHU, Interview, December 19, 2020).

### **ECONOMIC DYNAMICS AND TRADE IN THE RI-PNG BORDER AREA AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The prevalent COVID-19 has threatened economic security in Indonesia and PNG. The border market of Skouw-Wutung (RI-PNG northern border region) was open every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday before the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016). Every day, Sota-Wariaber was open. It was possible to cross the border without a passport during market days by utilizing a Cross-Border Card (KLB) and circling the border area. Designed for those who only travel across international borders, the KLB looks like a passport but has fewer features (Hapsari, 2016). PNG residents often purchased things at the Indonesian border market since the cost of basic commodities in PNG was much higher than in Indonesia. Border crossers from Wutung Village in Vanimo City and even Port Moresby were in the northern border area. Wariaber Village, Weam Village, and Mohear District have become the three most common locations for southern border-crossers (Hapsari, 2016).

The Indonesian and PNG Governments have taken various measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 since its outbreak. People living in traditional villages and migrants working at the border market have been both affected by border closures, influencing their economic activity. Furthermore, in the Skouw-Wutung border area, practically all purchasers were from PNG (Giay, 2020). Traders at Skouw Market, according to Kumparan, the Bank Indonesia Representative for Papua Province, would lose IDR 3-4 billion each month if the market shut (Kumparan, 2020).

As of this writing, the Skouw-Wutung border market was still not allowed to function. Only on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were border markets permitted to operate in the southern border region (Sota-Wariaber).

Increasingly, indigenous people in the southern area were pressing for economic opportunities to help them sustain their families. Despite the fact that the southern border market has been open since July 2020, vendors from both native villages and immigrants were still struggling to sell their goods because of a shortage of consumers at the market. Due to COVID-19, relations between vendors and customers have become highly tense (A, Interview, December 19, 2020). Income was poor because of the low number of visitors (E, Interview, December 19, 2020). The Sota border market, for example, might have 1,000-1,400 people per month on average during regular periods before COVID-19 (Liputan 6, 2016). Border market sellers may make up to USD 1 million a day before the pandemic (Rachman, 2018). Only roughly 20-25 individuals have been expected to attend the Sota border market every day since COVID-19 (Reinhard, 2021). Border market vendors sold for roughly PGK 100 or around IDR 370,000. Up to PGK 300 or IDR 1.1 million may be earned by fortunate dealers (S, Interview, July 23, 2021).

There has been a significant drop in visits from PNG. Due to time and geographical constraints, tourists from PNG were unable to engage in meaningful dialogue. Despite this condition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a favorable effect on the border market. People from PNG may only purchase things at the Sota border market. Therefore, money only circulated there (Y&P, Interview, December 19, 2020). People selling at the Sota border market profited from it.

Traders often complained about the lack of freedom to trade. Trading hours were restricted. The trading process has also gotten more difficult to understand (A, Interview, December 19, 2020). Despite the Sota border market opening, merchants were still unable to sell goods from PNG due to its shutdown. Because of distribution bottlenecks, Sota Market dealers could not get their hands on some of the most sought-after goods in PNG (Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020).

It is migrant merchants who have been most affected by the pandemic's effect on the border markets (SR, Interview, December 19, 2020). Economic growth and efforts to make the border market a hub for selling items

in the community have also felt the impact (PN, Interview, December 19, 2020). Traditional traders had a better chance of surviving in the modern world. Traders from traditional communities finally decided to grow their food instead of selling it at border markets as a means of coping with a pandemic. Families utilized bananas, lesser yam, and cassava from their gardens to meet their daily food requirements (A, Interview, December 19, 2020). Additionally, some merchants sought eucalyptus oil leaves to sell for IDR 1,000 a kg in addition to gardening (Y & P, Interview, December 19, 2020). Some workers at vanilla farms opted to sell souvenirs and natural items to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others elected to sell bananas and pineapples (PN Interview, December 19, 2020).

The Indonesian Government has taken various measures to mitigate the effect of COVID-19 on the RI-PNG border market. The government's focus may be observed in expanding border markets, socializing health procedures, and offering financial aid. Village fund allocations, Social Department, and Bank Rakyat Indonesia have provided financial help in the southern border region since the beginning of the pandemic (A, Interview, December 19, 2020). However, support was only available to local merchants, not migrant dealers (SR, Interview, December 19, 2020).

## **IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON ECONOMIC SECURITY IN THE RI-PNG BORDER AREA**

Following the UNDP's economic security definition, a lack of income, unemployment, debt, and poverty have become risks to economic security. COVID-19 has had short-term effects on the economic security of the people living along the RI-PNG border. Cross-border access and border markets closure have been seen as threatening people's livelihoods. It was possible to cross borders in the southern part of the country for one day, despite being established. There was a lack of efficiency in the economy due to these issues. Traditional communities would not receive a guaranteed basic income as long as economic activity in border markets was not maximized. Traditional people's sole source of income was the daily

sale of vegetables and trinkets at the border market. People beyond the border have also been affected by the closure of the border market. Many PNG residents have found it difficult to get necessities such as food and water from Indonesia's border markets in Wutung and Sota.

People's livelihoods have been cut off due to the border market's shutdown. People starting selling at the border market have soon returned to gardening and even searched for eucalyptus oil leaves to help them make ends meet. Other than working in vanilla farms, some individuals starting in the industry have ended up selling border souvenirs instead. Illegal border-crossers have also been on the rise due to restrictions on cross-border trade and access to cross-border markets (line C). The significant number of illegal border crossers during the COVID-19 pandemic was due to economic considerations and the need to protect their family in adjacent nations (CHU, Interview, December 19, 2020).

The prospect of debt and unemployment might arise due to a decrease and a loss of income. If the pandemic persists, individuals may probably find it more difficult to sell their commodities such that the fear of debt cannot be avoided. A further complication is the growth of joblessness due to abandoning trade activity. People in the RI-PNG border region might face long-term hardship due to COVID-19 if the problem of debt and unemployment is not addressed.

Unfortunately, the two nations have not attempted to resurrect the border market, particularly in the northern border region (Skouw-Wutung), as in normal times. This problem may be raised during the annual bilateral meeting, known as the Joint Border Committee (JBC) and the Border Liaison Meeting (BLM). However, with the cancellation of the JBC and BLM meeting in 2020, the danger to the community's economic security is expected to rise. Due to a lack of political authority near the border, the village has few options other than growing food and selling it at the market to make ends meet.

Since July 2020, only the southern border market (Sota-Wariaber) has been permitted to function as a kind of concern for the inhabitants in the border area. Due to the closure of the southern border area, traditional

villages were requesting operation permission for the market to meet their low-income needs at the border. While it was going on, the northern border market (Skouw-Wutung) was still not permitted to reopen as of the time of this writing. Residents on the southern border were only permitted to congregate in the market area on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to sell and visit relatives. Visits could only be made from early in the evening, and people were not allowed to live in border villages (CHU, Interview, December 19, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Economic and community security in the RI-PNG border region have been threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities, particularly traditional ones, crossing borders daily to trade or get necessities from adjacent countries were affected by the shutdown of cross-border access in January 2020 and border markets in March 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This year's COVID-19 has had short-term economic consequences for those living on the border, such as a drop in income or possibly the loss of revenue owing to cross-border access closures. The prospect of debt and unemployment might arise due to a drop in income. Poverty in the border region between Rhode Island and PNG might result if there is no solution.

Priority measures to address the pandemic's economic effect have not yet been made public except the Sota border market opening. It is time for both nations' governments to recognize and address dangers, particularly economic security. In order to deal with dangers that have happened or may occur shortly, as well as risks that are now happening, both nations will need to set priorities for dealing with threats in the short, medium, and long term.

It is also worth noting how the danger is addressed. The governments of both nations must take a focused effort. The strategy used must be synchronized with and coordinated by national and local governments in terms of data collection and analysis. Because of the potential for strain on traditional communities, the governments of both nations must exercise caution when reacting to economic security risks by taking a security strategy. Also,



the security strategy might be compromised by the pro-Papuan independence movement.

The government is advised to pay more attention to aspects of community empowerment in border areas. The role of empowerment is critical in enhancing the ability of border communities to cope with a variety of dangers. Vanilla and eucalyptus oil may be developed along the border as a priority for the government to provide more money for border residents. Governments from both nations may also assist in promoting products and even cultural crafts in the internet sphere, which can draw in customers from across the world.

Finally, the government needs to ensure that the empowerment carried out must be sustainable. Funding and development programs implemented need to be monitored and evaluated regularly. Through regular program monitoring, the governments of both countries can obtain input and identify future program improvements. The governments can review these four recommendations in bilateral meetings between the two countries: the Joint Border Committee (JBC) and the Border Liaison Meeting (BLM). Given that the JBC and BLM meetings were abolished in 2020, there needs to be an effort by both countries to at least hold a virtual JBC and BLM meeting to discuss human security issues, specifically regarding economic security in the RI-PNG border area. It is crucial that the main target, namely people in border areas, can be truly empowered and finally realized. Hence, the economic threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic does not exist sustainably in the future.

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