

REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR IMPROVING CROSS-BORDER AREA IN SEBATIK ISLAND

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Abstract

The proximity of Sebatik Island to Malaysia and its distance from Indonesia have been the causes why Sebatik people tend to perform economic activities with Tawau, Malaysia. Sebatik people have been depending on Tawau to sell their various agricultural commodities and fisheries products. However, informal cross-border trade between Sebatik-Tawau that have been implemented over the past few years has been challenged by some underlying economic problems. Those underlying economic problems are the apparent causes for the lower standard of living of most Sebatik people compared to Tawau inhabitants. As Sebatik people depend on Tawau to fulfill their daily needs, they will have to deal with more hardships since there is a discourse to stop the cross-border trade relations by the government of Tawau. ASEAN Community 2015 which is oriented to establish the regional economic integration in Southeast Asia, may be one solution to the economic problems dealt by the people of Sebatik.

Keywords: ASEAN, regional economic integration, Sebatik, Tawau

Abstrak

Letak Pulau Sebatik yang berada dekat dengan Malaysia dan agak jauh dari Indonesia telah menjadi penyebab mengapa orang-orang Sebatik cenderung melakukan kegiatan ekonomi dengan Tawau, Malaysia. Orang-orang Sebatik telah tergantung pada Tawau untuk menjual berbagai komoditas pertanian dan produk perikanan mereka. Namun, perdagangan informal lintas-perbatasan antara Sebatik-Tawau yang telah dilaksanakan selama beberapa tahun terakhir dihadapkan dengan berbagai masalah ekonomi yang mendasar. Masalah-masalah ekonomi yang mendasarinya adalah standar hidup kebanyakan orang Sebatik yang lebih rendah dibandingkan dengan penduduk Tawau. Karena orang-orang Sebatik bergantung pada Tawau untuk memenuhi kebutuhan sehari-hari mereka, mereka akan menghadapi lebih banyak kesulitan dengan adanya wacana untuk menghentikan hubungan perdagangan lintas batas oleh pemerintah Tawau. Komunitas ASEAN 2015 yang berorientasi untuk membangun integrasi ekonomi regional di Asia Tenggara, mungkin menjadi salah satu solusi untuk masalah ekonomi orang-orang Sebatik.

Kata kunci: ASEAN, integrasi ekonomi kawasan, Sebatik, Tawau

Tulisan ini merupakan pendapat pribadi dan tidak mewakili pandangan institusi.

Introduction

Sebatik Island is an island located in East Kalimantan, Indonesia where the borderline between two ASEAN countries i.e. Indonesia-Malaysia cuts across the middle of this island. As half of this island belongs to Malaysia's territory, it has been the gate to enter Indonesia from Malaysian border and also located nearby the conflicted sea border between Indonesia-Malaysia. Socio-economic life of Sebatik people have long been depended with its nearby cross-border city i.e. Tawau. To travel from Sebatik to Tawau, it takes only approximately 15 minutes using speed boat. Sebatik island is economically dependent to Tawau in terms of access to gain daily needs such as electricity, gasoline, cooking oil, daily meal products and market to sell Sebatik people's products (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). From the social economic life of Sebatik people, it is obvious that Sebatik-Tawau border relation represents the characteristics of Indonesian border in Kalimantan where people in Indonesia border area are less wealthy than Malaysia (Nugroho, 2012).

The proximity to Malaysia and distances from Indonesia has been the causes why Sebatik people tend to perform economic activities with Tawau, Malaysia. In addition, it is much easier

and closer to buy daily needs from Tawau, Malaysia rather than transporting some goods from Makassar or Surabaya, Indonesia due to the long distance as well as the duration needed. The intense relationship economically as well as socially between Sebatik and Tawau has also been ungoing for the decades even before both countries gain their independence from colonial rulers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). However, there is a huge gap of welfare between Sebatik and Tawau as has been the characteristics of Indonesian border in Kalimantan where the people of Sebatik mostly life under the poverty line while the Tawau people life in prosperity. That is why, there were also some people of Sebatik who has been trying to switch citizenship to gain economic benefit from Malaysia. Sebatik's dependence to Tawau has been widely highlighted in Indonesian media resulting in the growing concern about the invasion of Malaysian influence towards the Sebatik economy (Susilo, 2011).

The borderline cutting across between Indonesia and Malaysia in East Kalimantan which nearly reaches the 1.038 km² has caused almost all area of this province become the gate of entrance for the distribution of goods and people from neighboring country

especially Malaysia. What makes Sebatik island in East Kalimantan a special attention is that because this island geographically and politically is divided into two states region in which each half of this area belongs to Malaysia and Indonesia (Susilo, 2011). Because of this geographical bound, the people of Sebatik from Indonesian side and Malaysian side are interacting to each other in almost every aspect of life especially politically, economically and culturally. Economically, most Sebatik-Tawau economic activities are conducted informally between the local inhabitants even before Indonesia and Malaysia gained their independence from the colonial rules.

However, informal cross-border trade between Sebatik-Tawau that have been implemented over the past decades has been challenged by some underlying economic problems such as illegal trade activities, non-standardized prices for agricultural and fisheries products, lacking of economic infrastructures and informal labor flow. Those underlying economic problems are the apparent causes for the lower standard of living of most Sebatik people compared to Tawau inhabitants.

ASEAN Community 2015 which is oriented to establish the regional economic integration in Southeast Asia,

may be one solution to the economic problems dealt by the people of Sebatik. There are three pillars of ASEAN Community 2015 i.e. ASEAN Political and Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, and ASEAN Social and Cultural Community. According to these instruments, the establishment of the ASEAN Community would lead to greater integration and to move the political and security cooperation to a higher place where the members shall rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of differences and disputes (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012).

The integration on political, economic and socio-cultural fields ideally can be achieved through a better collaboration among the regional community. However, sometimes it is difficult to achieve those three fields at the same time. On this, David Mitrany argued that that successful collaboration in one particular technical field would lead to a further collaboration in other related fields. As states and societies become increasingly integrated due to the expansion of collaboration in technical areas where all parties made absolute gains, the cost of breaking these functional ties would be great (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010: 126). ASEAN is no exception from this theory where the

cooperation in economic activities especially the free-flow of goods, service and capital will ultimately lead to political and socio-cultural integration.

In relation to that goal, the purpose of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is to create a large single market which will boost economic growth and competitiveness of ASEAN, resulting in better living standards (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012). Each pillar in ASEAN Economic Community will be the basis for another, it means that the single market and production based inside the ASEAN region alone will be the trigger for the achievement of competitive economic region leading to the competitive economic region with equitable economic development and at the end, the sound, healthy and strong regional economy can be integrated into the global economy.

From that background, this paper is divided into two main discussions: (1) analyzing the underlying economic problems dealt by the Sebatik people and (2) highlighting the major expected economic impacts of regional economic integration through the formation of ASEAN Community 2015 on various sectors of the economy in border areas including its impact on agriculture and fisheries, infrastructure building, cross-border trade as well as employment in

Sebatik. This research is a qualitative approach research where the data obtained from the literature reviews and field research is analyzed using the descriptive analysis. At the end, this paper will describe how the regional economic integration through the establishment of ASEAN Community 2015 can be a means to improve the economic life of border communities in the region Sebatik.

Theoretical Approach

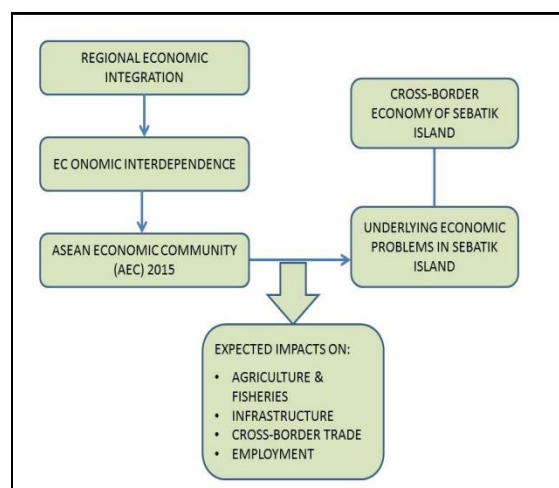
In order to analyze the impact of ASEAN Community towards the improvement of living standard of Sebatik people, it is important to see through perspective of regional economic integration and inter-dependence. Economic integration is the process by which a group of nation-states agree to ignore their national boundaries for at least some economic purposes, creating a larger and more tightly connected system of markets (Balaam and Veseth, 1996: 219). If it is impossible to gain global free trade (first best solution), the open regional economic integration represents an attractive second best solution where regional economic integration sometimes leads to political and social cooperation or integration.

Economic integration is one way for nations to achieve greater efficiency in their use of scarce resources and higher rates of economic growth (Balaam and Veseth, 1996: 221). Integration produces static efficiency gains (specializing products & creating large-scale integrated markets that promotes large-scale productions) and dynamic efficiency gains (promoting economic growth and competition promotes innovation).

In regional economic integration, each participating country is connected to each other through the economic interdependence relationship. For Nye and Keohane, interdependence is defined as mutual dependence resulting from the types of international transactions catalogues by transnationalists—flows of money, goods, services, people, communications, etc. (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010: 130). In another word of saying, interdependence is a prerequisite for the economic regional integration where the free flow of goods, services and capital investments is possible. As economic interdependence spreads, economic development in the participating countries through trade and foreign investment becomes a self-reinforcing process and an integral part of a state's strategy (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010: 138). Ultimately, if economic

integration is successful, economic growth rate increases which raises living standards.

From the theoretical approach mentioned above, the model of analysis in this paper can be seen from the diagram below:



Underlying Economic Problems in Sebatik

1. Agriculture and Fisheries Problems

Most Sebatik people work as farmers and fishermen. There are countless traditional ports among the inhabitant's place neighborhood where the Sebatik fishermen start to catch sea products such as lobsters, shrimps, fish, crabs and other products. Those ports have also become the gate to conduct economic activities especially in distributing daily needs and gasoline from Tawau to Sebatik and selling sea products from Sebatik to Tawau. Those ports have also become the gate to send

Sebatik farmers' crop i.e. palm oil which has been the highly-demanded commodity. Besides palm oil, other crops from Sebatik consist of cacao, banana and coconut. However, since the palm oil gives more profits than other crops especially in terms of the numbers of harvest time and the relatively simple treatment, most Sebatik farmers prefer to grow palm oil rather than other products.

Even though palm oil has been the highly-demanded commodity in Tawau and the sea products from Sebatik are high qualified products, almost all of the products are sold to the Tawau collector agents who determine a non-standardized price or below the standard price. This happens because the lack of infrastructure linking Sebatik area has caused the difficulties to sell or process the product in Sebatik i.e. the lack of palm oil processing plant, ice factory to supply the fishermen's products and cacao production facility. Because of this dependence, Tawau collector agents set their own price that should be accepted by the Sebatik farmers and fishermen since they have no other choices in order to keep the products quality before it decayed.

2. Lack of Infrastructure

It is a common thing that usually there is a difficult to reach border areas

by public transport from the major cities so that the infrastructure provided there are only minimal. Likewise, this condition also happens in Sebatik where the infrastructures are very limited and usually are not functioning optimally. The lack of infrastructure for example the means of transportation, lack of highways and road, lack of production facilities such as company and factories have been the causes for the cutting-of Sebatik Island from the major cities in Indonesia such as Makassar and Surabaya. Lack of infrastructure which is coupled with the difficult and limited access to transportation to the island of Sebatik from those major cities have resulted in high price of fuel needed to power generators, boats and supply fuel consumption daily. That is why, most Sebatik people have no other choices but to buy fuel and sell their crops as well as fisheries products to Tawau.

In addition, transportation infrastructure connecting the island of Sebatik and Nunukan Island are very limited. The absence of ferry ships and bridges between islands has led to Sebatik's greater reliance on Tawau. Limited access to Nunukan Island also result in difficulty of paperwork, such as driver's license. Inadequate port facilities and access roads are still not evenly distributed, especially the way from and

to plantations. In addition, less electrical installations also lead to frequent blackouts in Sebatik.

As Sebatik people depend on Tawau to fulfill their daily needs, they will have to deal with more hardships since there is a discourse to stop the cross-border trade relations by the government of Tawau. The plan to halt this economic activity has been determined by the government of Tawau through the cessation of the use boat below 7 GT (7 Gross Ton) which has been the means of transport for Sebatik people to sell and buy products to Tawau (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The termination has been caused by the fact that there are some smuggling activities of subsidized goods in Malaysia to Sebatik, which are bought cheaply in Tawau and then sold at high prices in Sebatik. Since December 2012, Malaysian police have done high surveillance activities to prevent boat below 7 GT entering Tawau from Sebatik. Although the decision's nature is final, but the Sebatik local government has sent a petition to Tawau government to reopen the access to the boat below 7 GT because Sebatik port facilities are still unable to accommodate large vessels such as boats 7 GT. In addition, the distance of Sebatik from the major cities in Indonesia have caused Sebatik

to rely heavily on Tawau therefore the termination will lead to a serious problem for Sebatik people.

3. Illegal Economic Activities

One of the most prominent illegal economic activities in Sebatik is the transnational forestry-related crime especially illegal timber trading and smuggling. In 2003, for example, the Forestry Ministry reported the loss from these crimes was 10 million cubic meters of logs per year (Yansen, 2010). These forestry-related crimes do not only cause economic losses but also environmental degradation. For the last couple of years, the rate of timber smuggling has decreased significantly to about 3 million cubic meters per year and in 2001 and 2002, East Kalimantan supplied about 2 million cubic meters of logs to Sabah, most of which were illegally traded.

Traced from the historical background, there was a huge timber company namely PT Yamaker established in 1975 by the member of Defense Ministry that operated in East Kalimantan (Widjanarko, 2013). This Company built a highway Logging Road at the border between East Kalimantan and Sabah Malaysia and was responsible for the vast number of smuggled logs from Sebatik to Malaysia through the

river that flows between Sebatik and Malaysia. Along the highway logging roads, there were some sawmill companies that were responsible for the millions of cubic meters of illegal logs smuggled to Malaysia.

Illegal logging has been the result of the two extreme sides of Indonesia and Malaysia's protection efforts. On one side, the Malaysian government implemented an extremely tight protection towards their forests so that the perpetrators of illegal logging will be subject to harsh penalties such as jail sentences and maximum fines. This makes Malaysian protected forest maintained and prevented from illegal logging. Meanwhile, the extremely low protection efforts from the Indonesian government have led to illegal logging in Indonesian areas where there were no harsh punishment and high fines implemented. Most of the illegal logging was transferred through the river between Sebatik and Tawau as well as through the logging road made by some Indonesian and Malaysian forestry businessmen (Widjanarko, 2013).

Other illegal activity is illegal fishing shown by the use of trawls from some Malaysian fishermen in Sebatik areas. The use of trawls is prohibited since it will take all kinds of fish even the smallest fish all at once. Therefore,

there will be no more fish left to grow in the area that causes significant loss for Sebatik fishermen that influence their livelihood.

4. Informal Labor Problems

As a border area, Sebatik and Nunukan are the gateway area for informal workers from Indonesia to enter Malaysia. Based on the data published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2010, the number of Indonesian workers all over the world is about 3,294,565 people and 42% of that number are Indonesians living in Malaysia. The implementation of Border Crossing Arrangement (BCA) for Nunukan and Sebatik in East Kalimantan has facilitated the process of sending informal laborers from Indonesia to Malaysia, whether legally or illegally. BCA has stated the use of Cross-border pass for the local inhabitants of Sebatik and Nunukan to enter Malaysia. The cross-border pass can only be used by the local border inhabitants, but in reality, most informal laborers from Nusa Tenggara Timur, Makassar and Java have been misusing this pass to enter Tawau and Sabah. Supplied with only a cross-border pass, the informal laborers have been entering Malaysia illegally without national passports. As a consequence, they are illegal laborers without trainings and other skills needed

to work professionally (Widjanarko, 2013).

In addition, the sending of illegal labors to Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia has exposed them to the high risk for their own safety, well-being and protection assurance. The use of cross-border pass to send informal labor has been one of the *modus operandi* of Indonesian labor sending company in Nunukan and Sebatik (Widjanarko, 2013). Consequently, Indonesian labor in Malaysia has caused a problem such as criminal, abuse and other social problems. This problem sometimes leads to high tension between Indonesian and Malaysian politics. Therefore, Sebatik island as the border area between Malaysia and Indonesia has participated to the increasing number of informal labors in Malaysia.

Impact on Economic Interdependence between Sebatik and Tawau through ASEAN Community 2015

1. Agriculture and Fisheries: Standardized price and eschew the collector agents

One of the goals of the establishment of ASEAN Community 2015 especially in the economic sector is the creation of a free flow of goods and services that will ultimately improve the standard of living. The free flow of

goods in this case related to the trading activities that will provide mutual benefits for all parties involved. In turn, the mutual benefit will arise if the products traded have the same standards and mutually agreed price. This will not open an opportunity for one party to dictate others and make the other party to experience lost.

In the case of Sebatik, the trading activities between Sebatik and Tawau which are not comparable or unequal can be overcome by adapting of the standardized price and demanding similar quality. This can be achieved by setting an agreed price of agricultural and fishery products which are approved by the Tawau-Sebatik through cooperation at the ASEAN level. In addition to overcoming the problem of the price gap, this agreement also paves the way for the formation of several local associations or home industries aiming to process the agricultural products and fisheries managed by the two parties that will eradicate the involvement of any collector agents. Therefore, the agreement at the ASEAN level will raise the position of the parties who used to feel lost in terms of trading activities i.e. Sebatik people.

2. Infrastructure Building

In realizing the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, the main obstacle is the large gap or disparity in Economic development in both the regional and national context. Indonesia's economic growth still has wide gap between the western region of Indonesia and eastern Indonesia. Lack of infrastructure and people to people connectivity in the region has created remote or isolated pockets or the pockets of underdeveloped in Indonesian eastern area. Based on data from Indonesian Statistics Bureau, 75% Indonesian industry is located on Java (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: 9).

Realizing connectivity constraints in the region, ASEAN leaders endorsed the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) at the 17th Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, October 2010. MPAC contains three priority areas of cooperation, namely physical connectivity (transport, energy and ICT), institutional connectivity (facilitation of investment and goods) and people-to-people connectivity (tourism, education and culture). MPAC will be a catalyst in accelerating the process of economic integration in ASEAN through the realization of the various programs and projects in infrastructure, institutional

and community empowerment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: 9).

Some Indonesian interests in the MPAC projects are the West Kalimantan-Sarawak interconnection, undersea power cables in Pekanbaru-Malaka, as well as networking Roll on Roll off (RoRo) and short-sea shipping. Through the interconnection project, it is expected that demand for electricity in West Kalimantan region can be met properly, so as to support the industrialization program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: 9).

In Sebatik case, as one of Indonesian border area, it is important for Indonesian government to improve the development process to support ASEAN connectivity. In relation to this, it is possible for Indonesia to enlarge the projects of interconnection between Sebatik and Tawau by improving the development of the means of transportation between the two areas by providing formal ports, ferries and short-sea shipping facilities in Sebatik. In addition, the infrastructure building such as electricity, roads, mode of transportations, sanitary, health and processing factories should be established in Sebatik so that the real benefit of economic integration in ASEAN can be achieved and felt by the local people as well.

3. Employment Capacity and Capability Building

The free flow of services has been one of ASEAN Community goals in economic pillars. In this case, the services should be represented by the skilled labors who can work professionally in every part of the ASEAN Member States. However, it is difficult for all ASEAN Member States to provide the standardized skilled labors who can work professional beyond borders at the moment. The condition of Indonesian labors is no exception from this fact.

Sebatik area as the entrance gate as well as the departure gate from Indonesia to other ASEAN Member States should be developed as the centre of employment training in the border area. The training centre will equip the Indonesian labors with sufficient knowledge, skill, capability, adaptation skill as well as documentation needed to work in Malaysia. Moreover, the establishment of the training center can be done together by intensifying the cooperation between the Centre of Placement Services and Protection of Indonesian Workers (BP3TKI) in Sebatik and Tawau Employment Agency in order to provide the legal migrant workers from Indonesia.

In order to reduce the misuse of cross-border pass held by the local Sebatik people, Indonesian government needs to reinforce the oversight agencies such as the immigration, trade and custom authorities placed in the border areas of Sebatik. Meanwhile, as the infrastructure in Sebatik area grows, the government should encourage the labors to stay in Sebatik and work in the newly established infrastructures as well as the development projects considering that most of them are informal labors that can be absorbed with giant projects such as high ways and factory facilities.

4. Formal Cross Border Trade to Eradicate Illegal Activities

ASEAN Economic Community as one of the pillars of the ASEAN Community is expected to transform ASEAN into a single market and production base where the flow of goods, services and investments are done more current, highly competitive, equitable development, and integrated with the global economy. The point is to improve national competitiveness to cope with the challenges of the global and regional economy and overcome the adverse effects that may be encountered in international trade.

One of the adverse effects of international trade is the existence of

international illegal trade such as illegal logging and illegal fishing. Some efforts to fight against illegal logging and illegal fishing is through the intensifying of ASEAN Sectoral bodies in combating transnational crime (AMMTC) and improving the cooperation in Agriculture and forestry (AMAF). Specifically, in order to overcome the illegal logging it is important to strictly supervise the administration process to gain forestry cultivation permit (*Surat Keterangan Sahnya Hasil Hutan/SKSHH*) and improving the cross-border local inhabitants' living standards to prevent them from illegally cutting off the logs from the forests.

In addition, in ASEAN level, the formal trade through appropriate procedures between Indonesia and Malaysia which is based on formal regulation agreed between the two countries will reduce the number of illegal activities. Therefore, it is required the diplomatic efforts to solve these problems by making talks and agreements to make a formal regulations in terms of trade, surveillance and other aspects. It is important for Indonesian government to talk with the Malaysian government on the issue through the ASEAN forums in order to solve the problems and improve the cooperation

on forestry, security and customs in the border areas.

Conclusion

In simple words, the regional economic integration as the process by which the ASEAN Member States agree to ignore their national boundaries to gain some economic purposes will create economic interdependence between them especially through the formation of ASEAN Community 2015. Since interdependence means mutual relationship, it means that ASEAN Community will be a huge chance to reduce Sebatik dependency to Tawau by improving some the capacity, capability and development standard in Sebatik so that it will gain at least the same position with Tawau. In this case, some noticeable economic aspects in Sebatik that can be improved are the agriculture, infrastructure building, cross border trade and employment.

There are four underlying economic problems in Sebatik i.e. *first*, even though palm oil has been the highly-demanded commodity in Tawau and the sea products from Sebatik are high qualified products, almost all of the products are sold to the Tawau collector agents who determine a non-standardized price or below the standard price due to the lack of infrastructure to

sell or process the product in Sebatik. *Secondly*, the minimal infrastructure provided in border areas since the lack of public transport from the major cities in Indonesia. *Third*, there are some most prominent illegal economic activities in Sebatik i.e illegal logging and illegal fishing using trawls that lower the living standards of the Sebatik people. *Fourth*, Sebatik are the gates area for informal workers from Indonesia to enter Malaysia by misusing the cross-border pass.

ASEAN Community 2015 is expected to be the solution for those economic problems by providing the options to solve the problems. *First*, ASEAN community will open the possibility to set a standardized price and eschew the collector agents in agriculture and fisheries products. *Secondly*, maximizing the benefits of ASEAN connectivity master plan to improve the development process in Sebatik by providing the facilities needed. *Third*, building employment and capacity building in Sebatik as the entrance gate to Indonesian formal labors to other ASEAN Member States. *Last but not least*, enhance the formal trade to solve the illegal trade activities.

To summarize, if all goes well, the ASEAN Community will help the Sebatik people to raise their living

standards and overcome their economic problems.

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