

ReliefWeb

Briefing Kit for **Indonesia + Integrated Regional Information Networks**

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Contents

1. *Government to relocate volcano survivors*
2. *Tsunami survivors recovering, but challenges remain*
3. *Asia: Earthquakes highlight need for regional preparedness, say experts*
4. *Indonesia: Latrine "contracts" to fight open defecation*
5. *Indonesia: Disaster-prone, but still hungry for nuclear energy*
6. *Asia: Remaining vigilant for Japan aftershock*
7. *Asia: Bracing for Japan tsunami spillover*
8. *Indonesia: Struggling to supply sanitation*
9. *Indonesia: Leptospirosis outbreak prompts emergency action*
10. *MONDE: La nécessité de mieux comprendre l'impact des catastrophes sur les vies humaines*
11. *DISASTERS: Better understanding of disaster impact on lives needed*
12. *INDONESIA: Private aid "needs coordination"*
13. *INDONESIA: Volcanic flooding displaces hundreds*

14. *INDONESIA: Work begins on temporary housing for tsunami victims*
15. *Analysis: Discontent rising in Indonesia's Papua region*
16. *INDONESIA: Lots of food - and malnutrition - in the east*
17. *INDONESIA: NGOs allege government impunity in Papua*
18. *INDONESIA: Land tensions flare for former refugees*
19. *INDONESIA: Tsunami survivors still lack adequate shelter*
20. *INDONESIA: Disaster prevention "still taking a back seat"*
21. *INDONESIA: Java volcano emergency phase extended*
22. *INDONESIA: Farmers lament the impact of La Niña*
23. *INDONESIA: Search and rescue continues for Merapi survivors*
24. *INDONESIA: How to mark out a volcano danger zone*
25. *INDONESIA: Thousands more to be evacuated from Merapi area*
26. *INDONESIA: More camps to house Mt Merapi IDPs*
27. *INDONESIA: Big country, big disasters*
28. *INDONESIA: Tsunami survivors still await assistance*
29. *In Brief: Looking in the past to predict the next tsunami*
30. *GENDER: Give women peacekeepers a chance*
31. *INDONESIA: Volcano-displaced face increased health risks*
32. *INDONESIA: Government readies for possible volcano disaster*
33. *ASIA: Five cities most at risk of natural disasters*
34. *INDONESIA: Disaster workers prepare for more flooding*
35. *INDONESIA: Volcano-displaced return home*
36. *INDONESIA: Eruption spotlights "severe" volcano threat*
37. *INDONESIA: Health concerns in volcano evacuation centres*
38. *INDONESIA/HAITI: Lessons for earthquake recovery*
39. *ASIA: When hospitals become casualties*
40. *ASIA: 10 deadliest quakes*
41. *INDONESIA: Economic marginalization fuelling conflict in Papua*
42. *MONDE: Voyage au cour d'un système humanitaire de plus en plus complexe*
43. *GLOBAL: Could be a busy season for disasters*
44. *INDONESIA: Deforestation leading to fewer resources, more disasters*
45. *INDONESIA: Keeping children out of prison*
46. *INDONESIA: "Help wanted" in reconstructed Aceh*
47. *INDONESIA: Unchaining the mentally ill*
48. *GLOBAL: Asia most at risk from natural disasters*
49. *INDONESIA: NGOs push for stronger child protection laws*
50. *INDONESIA: Anti-malaria efforts focus on pregnant women, children*
51. *GLOBAL: IDP numbers peak at 27 million, says new report*
52. *INDONESIA: Fighting TB stigma*
53. *INDONESIA: Small-scale disasters take their toll*
54. *INDONESIA: Plight of mudflow IDPs continues*
55. *Indonesia: Tsunami early warning system a work in progress*
56. *Indonesia: Waiting for permanent homes*
57. *Indonesia: Khalidan, "The tsunami changed everything"*
58. *Indonesia: Tsunami rebuilding a "success" but challenges remain*
59. *Asia: IFRC urges greater commitment to risk reduction*
60. *Indonesia: Quake survivors start rebuilding as agencies warn of funding gaps*
61. *Indonesia: Focus on earthquake preparedness, not prediction*

62. *Indonesia: Buildings on shaky ground in event of another quake, says survey*
63. *Asia: Breastfeeding more crucial in emergencies*
64. *Indonesia: WASH concerns a month after Sumatra quake*
65. *Indonesia: Quake survivors to receive temporary shelters*
66. *Indonesia: Climate change worsening disasters, says UN*
67. *Indonesia: Diseases strike West Sumatra quake survivors*
68. *Indonesia: Java quake survivors in dire need of shelter*
69. *How to: Rescue people trapped in a collapsed building*
70. *Indonesia: Quake devastation exposes poor building standards*
71. *Indonesia: Quake survivors struggle with trauma*
72. *Indonesia: Disease outbreaks feared as rescue efforts halted*
73. *Indonesia: Aid slow to arrive after quake*
74. *Asia: Disasters underline urgent need for more groundwork*
75. *Indonesia: Medical resources stretched after quake*
76. *Indonesia: Rescuers struggle to reach Sumatra quake victims*
77. *Indonesia: Aid dispatched after hunger-related deaths in Papua*
78. *Indonesia: Ill-prepared for disasters, say experts*
79. *Indonesia: Thousands left seeking shelter after Java quake*
80. *Indonesia: Officials fear rising death toll after Java quake*
81. *Indonesia: Healthcare system failing millions*
82. *Global: Investment key to disaster preparedness*
83. *Asia: Land grabs threaten food security*
84. *Indonesia: East Nusa Tenggara battling malnutrition*
85. *Indonesia: Making health facilities safe in disasters*
86. *Indonesia: Search for 131 missing people continues*
87. *Indonesia: Up to 100 dead and thousands evacuated in dam collapse*
88. *Indonesia: Home-grown Artemisinin to boost malaria fight*
89. *Indonesia: School reconstruction - "building back better"*
90. *Indonesia: Displaced returning home after West Papua earthquakes*
91. *Indonesia: Merri Oviana, "Thirty-three relatives died that day"*
92. *Indonesia: Consolidating a fragile peace in Aceh*
93. *Indonesia: Unending mud flow wreaking havoc*
94. *Indonesia: Tsunami early warning system launched*
95. *Indonesia: Child malnutrition aggravated by food, oil price rises*
96. *Indonesia: Diarrhoea takes deadly toll on toddlers consuming infant formula*
97. *Indonesia: Quakes shake nerves in West Sumatra*
98. *Indonesia: Flooding routine for Jakarta residents*
99. *Indonesia: East Java mudflow held in check by dikes - but for how long?*
100. *Indonesia: Evacuation, rescue efforts under way after landslides, flooding*

Government to relocate volcano survivors

JAKARTA, 2 May 2011 (IRIN) - The Indonesian government looks set to relocate thousands of survivors of last year's deadly Mount Merapi volcano to safer locations, officials say.

Under a two-year project, Jakarta will provide land, housing, and money to more than 2,700 families whose villages were destroyed in the eruptions; build infrastructure and provide jobs, at an estimated cost of US\$158 million, Syamsul Maarif, chairman of the country's National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), told IRIN.

More than 13,000 people will benefit from the scheme, including residents of five villages in badly affected Cangkringan sub-district and one in Klaten District.

"With almost all the displaced having moved to temporary shelters, our focus now is how to rebuild communities affected by the disaster," Maarif said, adding that each household would be entitled to 100 sqm of land and 30 million rupiah (\$3,500) to build a house.

Some residents, however, had objected to the relocation plan so they would be allowed to build houses near their previous neighbourhoods.

"We want to maintain community cohesiveness but at the same time be prepared for a future disaster," Maarif said.

"There must be an agreement that because they live in a place that has the potential to be affected by an eruption, they have to immediately evacuate when ordered to do so."

Thousands displaced

Merapi, one of the country's most active volcanoes, first erupted on 25 October 2010 [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91029>], sending jets of searing gas down its slopes. It continued erupting for a month, killing more than 300 people and driving 200,000 from their homes.

In January, floods caused by rainwater mixing with volcanic rocks and sands displaced hundreds, cut off roads and endangered six villages in Magelang District, 26km from the peak of Merapi [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91599>].

Budi Hermanto, an activist working with Jalin Merapi, a group which helps coordinate aid for Merapi victims, said some 400 families displaced by the floods were still living in tents in three locations in Magelang District, Central Java.

"Even if their houses were not damaged, it's too dangerous for them to return because they live by the river and the land has been eroded," Hermanto said.

The Ministry of Public Works said it would start building 255 permanent houses for volcano survivors in Sleman District this year, while between 2012 and 2013 some residents would be financially assisted to build homes on their own.

"We hope the government will soon determine the danger zones and locations where houses will be built," said Budi Yuwono, a director-general at the ministry.

Maarif said most of the displaced had moved to temporary shelters in 11 locations in Yogyakarta and Central Java provinces.

In addition, as part of the reconstruction plan, the government will convert 1,310 hectares of land along the slopes of the volcano into protected forest or a national park, Maarif said.

Social Affairs Minister Salim Segaf al-Jufri said that the more than 13,000 people living in temporary shelters would also be provided a daily food allowance of 5,000 rupiah (\$0.60) each for the next three to six months until they get back on their feet.

Those relocated will also be given cattle, seeds and saplings so that they can resume farming, said Maarif.

However, said Hermanto: "The government has promised to compensate for cattle killed in the eruptions but so far there has not been a settlement. Some work in the fields but others do odd jobs such as mining sand."

Located within the Pacific Ring of Fire, Indonesia is no stranger to volcanoes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters.

The archipelago nation - the fourth most populated - is home to at least 129 active volcanoes, 68 of which are classified as dangerous.

atp/ds/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

01 May 2011

Tsunami survivors recovering, but challenges remain

JAKARTA, 25 April 2011 (IRIN) - Six months after a devastating tsunami struck Indonesia's southern Mentawai Islands, survivors are slowly rebuilding, but huge challenges remain, say aid workers.

More than 500 people were killed and another 11,000 displaced when the tsunami, triggered by a magnitude 7.7 earthquake off the coast of Western Sumatra, struck the islands (comprising some 70 islands and islets) on 25 October <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=91196>.

The earthquake and tsunami damaged and destroyed hundreds of homes, particularly in South Pagai Island, the most affected area.

Most of the over 2,000 families displaced have since relocated to temporary shelters in 10 separate camps built in safer locations, but concerns over water, sanitation and jobs remain, says SurfAid <http://www.surfaidinternational.org/>, which has worked with the Indonesian government and UN in coordinating response efforts.

"Most of these camps now have a reasonable level of accommodation - proper roofs, floors etc, instead of tarpaulin roofs and mud floors - but there are still issues with many of the necessities of life," Alan Rogerson, the NGO's programme director, told IRIN.

"Food is difficult to find and since everybody has moved to these communities they have left their fields behind," he said. "Water is also difficult [to procure]. It is often trucked in along the logging road from Sikakap, but on many occasions there is not enough."

According to the government, more than 1,000 homes were damaged or destroyed by the 3-5m wave, with losses estimated at 349 billion rupiah (US\$40 million).

A government assessment in December put the estimated cost of rebuilding - including temporary shelters, permanent homes and lost infrastructure, as well as lost livelihoods, at over \$100 million.

Since late last year, the government and aid groups have built 1,600 temporary shelters, each measuring 24 sqm, made of plywood and corrugated iron. Construction of permanent houses will start this year.

Because many areas could not be accessed by road, the government had to extend the emergency response period in more remote areas until 15 April, Ade Edward, head of logistics for the West Sumatra Regional Disaster Management Agency, confirmed.

Progress

"But some things are better than even before the tsunami. For example, there are now water facilities and mobile clinics," Edward said.

Farmers have begun cultivating their land and the government and aid groups are providing seeds of cocoa, patchouli and nutmeg, he said.

The government had recently hired 30 medical workers, including doctors, nurses and trauma counsellors from other parts of Indonesia to work on the Mentawais after most medical workers had left the area, Edward said.

"There has been a serious shortage of medical personnel," he said. "Most medical workers only stayed on the islands for a week and then left."

Rogerson said there had been an increase in cases of malnutrition, diarrhoea and chest infection, which was to be expected after the tsunami.

"The local health department, with support from the Provincial Health office, the central government and a few NGOs, has started to get some level of community healthcare back up and running," he said.

"Again this is slow, because of the difficult access and the relative lack of local resources."

Ready Indonesia, a local NGO, and Mercy Corps <http://www.mercycorps.org/> are focusing on water, sanitation and hygiene promotion, and reviving people's livelihoods in Sipora Selatan, Pagai Utara and Pagai Selatan districts, said Monalisa Satoko, a team leader for Ready Indonesia working on the Mentawai Islands.

"We have tried to identify water sources but it's difficult, especially on [elevated] sites," said Satoko. "Fuel is also extremely scarce and transportation is very limited."

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has helped deliver supplies from Padang, the capital of West Sumatra province, to Mentawai using cargo ships, said operational officer Yuhendra, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name. IOM's operation will wrap up on 27 April, he said.

Habitat for Humanity <http://www.habitat.org/asiapacific/> has built 18 temporary wooden houses, provided building kits and helped build small roads and evacuation routes in Sipora Selatan, said Andreas Hapsoro, Habitat's project coordinator for West Sumatra.

Some 600 families in Sipora Selatan have refused to move to temporary shelters built by the government because the camps were too far from their farms, Hapsoro said.

"Now many families have moved to houses they have built on their own or are still looking for suitable locations," he added.

atp/ds/mw

[END]

Asia: Earthquakes highlight need for regional preparedness, say experts

BANGKOK, 31 March 2011 (IRIN) - Two back-to-back earthquakes in Japan and Myanmar, which left more than 27,000 people dead and thousands more injured, underscore the need for greater disaster preparedness in the region, experts say.

"Natural hazards do not recognize man-made borders, and this in itself is a compelling reason for countries to come together for regional cooperation in disaster-risk reduction," Krasae Chanawongse, chairman of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) [<http://www.adpc.net/2011/>] told IRIN in Bangkok.

According to a recent report [<http://www.unescap.org/idd/pubs/Asia-Pacific-Disaster-Report-2010.pdf>] by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asia-Pacific region accounts for 85 percent of global deaths from natural disasters, and 38 percent of global economic losses.

"Building codes, stronger schools and hospitals, and the location of power plants are all important. We need risk-sensitive land-use planning," said Sanny Jegillos, regional programme coordinator at the UN Development Programme, at an ADPC regional panel discussion earlier this month in Bangkok. Climate change, coupled with rapid economic growth, urbanization, and unregulated construction, make the region particularly vulnerable, he added.

While the region has shown more effective and rapid responses compared with 10-15 years ago, "progress has been regrettably uneven because some countries lack funds, expertise, and technology", Oliver Lacey Hall, regional head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [<http://www.unocha.org/>] in Bangkok, said.

According to the latest figures provided by OCHA on 30 March, the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck Japan [<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MCOI-8FFFP?OpenDocument&cc=jpn>] on 11 March left over 27,000 people dead, 173,000 homeless, and more than 16,000 missing.

Two weeks later, a 6.8 magnitude quake in Myanmar's eastern Shan state [[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/VDUX-8FFFLKY/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/VDUX-8FFFLKY/$File/full_report.pdf)] left 74 dead, 125 injured, and 703 homes damaged or destroyed. More than 3,000 people were left homeless, the Myanmar Red Cross reported.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

31 Mar 2011

Indonesia: Latrine "contracts" to fight open defecation

TIMOR TENGAH SELATAN, 22 March 2011 (IRIN) - Even though eight out of 10 households in a district in Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province, near Timor-Leste, have latrines, less than half of them are used, according to local officials, who are trying out social latrine "contracts".

"Every family should have and use latrines. So we are creating a village regulation, a legal umbrella [to achieve this]," said the village chief of Napa, in the province's Timor Tengah Selatan District.

Diarrhoea is the district's biggest killer, said Cornelis Metta, head of counselling and health promotion in the district Health Ministry office. "People defecate in any place and people just do not realize the importance of washing their hands with soap and water before drinking," he said.

The district has nearly 100,000 households, or 416,876 people, according to the most recent local census.

One afternoon in late February, volunteers went door to door in nearby Lanu village to explain the importance of water conservation and latrines. Five families agreed to build family latrines, signing "contracts" that were then countersigned by representatives of three levels of government.

The "contracts" bind signatories to build and use their latrines.

It matters little the quality of the latrines built, said a village sanitation official who goes by one name, Sabarudin. "The target is not the quality, but awareness of the importance of latrines, the desire to have one and to use it for defecation," he explained.

When asked if there were penalties or fines for people who broke a "contract", officials said shame is a "heavy price to pay in village settings and enforcement was not a concern".

Based on the 2010 nationwide health survey, (RISKESDAS [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=92082>]) 21.6 percent of people in NTT Province practice open defecation, while nationwide the figure is 17.2.

And their rubbish? Four out of 10 people nationally toss it in sewers, 18.9 percent straight on the ground and 14.9 percent in open dumps.

pt/cb

[END]

Indonesia: Disaster-prone, but still hungry for nuclear energy

JAKARTA, 21 March 2011 (IRIN) - In the hope of bringing electricity to some of Indonesia's 90 million people who are currently without it, the country is proceeding with plans to build four nuclear reactors, despite growing opposition sparked by the ongoing nuclear crisis in Japan.

Following a record-setting earthquake and ensuing tsunami that left more than 21,526 people recorded as dead or missing as of 21 March, attempts to cool damaged overheating reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant continue.

For years, Indonesia - the world's fourth most populous country - has grappled with a power crisis, with even cities like the capital Jakarta frequently hit by blackouts, and is turning to nuclear energy as part of the solution.

"Our law states that nuclear is part of Indonesia's energy mix," Ferhat Aziz, a spokesman for the government's National Atomic Energy Agency (BATAN), told IRIN, referring to a national development plan adopted in 2007.

The government estimates Indonesia will need 450,000 megawatts of electricity by 2050; current capacity is 25,000 megawatts. [<http://ei-01.eia.doe.gov/emew/cabs/Indonesia/Full.html>]

"We have to look to the future. Our people need to have access to electricity," he said. "Other than that, nuclear energy is clean because it doesn't produce greenhouse gasses or acid rain, even though the initial cost is high."

In the dark

Despite a national economy that boasted 6.1 percent growth in 2010, only 65 percent of the country has mains electricity, lagging behind most other countries in the region, according to the World Bank.

[
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPASTAE/0,,contentMDK:21042053~menuP>
]

Two-thirds of Indonesians without electricity live in rural areas, mostly outside Java and Bali islands, the Bank said.

This lack of electricity has worsened access to food in the poorest areas, such as Papua and East Nusa Tenggara provinces, [<http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportID=91405>] according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. [

<http://foodsecurityatlas.org/idn/country/fsva-2009/executive-summary>]

A recently published study [

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/rjap/2011/00000016/00000001/art00008>] using data from 2002-2005, found that for every 1 percent increase in the proportion of households with electricity in Indonesia's Java Province, the area's Human Development Index increased by 0.2 percent.

The authors concluded: "Electricity infrastructure has a greater influence on human development than other types of infrastructure, such as clean water, roads or the number of classrooms per student."

Safe?

The National Atomic Energy Agency has proposed Bangka island off the coast of Sumatra island as a possible site for the four nuclear plants it is planning, because the area is not located in an earthquake-prone zone, Aziz said.

The government plans to build them by 2025. Feasibility studies are expected to be completed in two or three years, he added.

An earlier proposal to build a nuclear power plant on the Muria Peninsula on Java island was shelved after protests from environmentalists and the local population.

Japan's nuclear disaster should serve as a warning to Indonesia to abandon its atomic ambitions, said NGOs, scientists and public figures in a joint 16 March statement.

"Even a nation like Japan, known for its strict safety standards, discipline, and disaster preparedness, is struggling to contain the nuclear disaster. How can the public be sure that what will be implemented in Indonesia will be better?"

Nuclear critics say Indonesia should focus, instead, on developing alternative energy sources, such as geothermal and wind. Indonesia estimates it has about 28,000 megawatts of geothermal capacity. It is also the world's second largest coal exporter.

Wind power

A wind power plant is being developed in West Java Province and is expected to generate 10 megawatts of electricity annually, according to the state electricity company.

Aziz dismissed wind power in favour of nuclear energy, saying there was not enough wind velocity in the tropical country.

But Iwan Kurniawan, an independent nuclear physicist who graduated from Japan's University of Tsukuba, said Indonesia lacked the technical capacity to operate a nuclear power plant.

"We only buy the technology. We buy the whole thing. Don't expect us to master the technology because we [were not the ones to] research and develop it," he said.

Like Japan, Indonesia is located within the Pacific Ring of Fire where tectonic plates meet, causing frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

In 2009, 469 earthquakes with a magnitude of five or higher hit Indonesia - more than any other nation, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

It was the country worst hit in the region by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed about 170,000 people (in Aceh Province alone).

Against this backdrop of potential disaster, Aziz said Indonesia's future nuclear power plants will adopt third or fourth generation technology that will be "a lot safer than the damaged reactors in Japan, which are 40 years old."

Aziz added that Indonesia had more than 40 years of experience operating three research reactors that are subject to regular inspections by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency.

"It will be better in terms of design because it adopts a passive safety system," Aziz said. "In the event of an accident, operators will do nothing because the system will take care of itself."

Passive nuclear safety is a safety feature in which a nuclear reactor does not require a human operator or electronic feedback and shuts down automatically following an emergency.

But nuclear physicist Kurniawan said a passive system was not inherently safe and has yet to be tested by a major earthquake in Indonesia.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

21 Mar 2011

Asia: Remaining vigilant for Japan aftershock

PORT MORESBY/JAKARTA, 14 March 2011 (IRIN) - Emergency officials in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia - two countries in the line of a deadly tsunami that has killed nearly 2,000 in Japan, left thousands more missing and wiped out entire coastal towns - remain vigilant, despite thus far being spared any spillover impact.

"We are [staying] alert. The islands on the northern part of the country can be hit any time by the waves generated by earthquakes. These aftershocks can be big, you never know," chairman of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) National Disaster and Emergency Service, Manasupe Zurenuoc, told IRIN.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has predicted aftershocks over the next month from the 11 March 9.0-magnitude earthquake (upgraded following seismic wave analysis that showed stronger intensity than original calculations).

Ongoing rescue and relief operations in Japan have been hampered by continuous aftershocks, tsunami alerts and fires.

Since mobile phone technology arrived in PNG four years ago, 11 March was the first time the disaster SMS warning system was tested, when two local mobile service providers sent tsunami warnings to more than one million of their customers.

Zurenuoc said radio warnings and mobile phones will be used again if needed.

"Had the tsunami occurred in PNG many lives would have been saved as the warnings were well dispersed over most communities in low-lying areas," said former Health Minister Peter Barter.

"All radio stations also played a great role in [disseminating] the warning and to a lesser extent television, due to lower coverage."

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the national deputy for emergency response with the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB), Sutrisno, said the disaster in Japan served as an important lesson.

"Community preparedness is key and we are making efforts to strengthen local preparedness through training and drills," Sutrisno told IRIN.

Indonesia is expected to host an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) disaster relief drill in the capital of North Sulawesi Province, Manado, (one of the provinces identified as at-risk following Japan's tsunami) on 15 March.

He said as soon as BNPB received a warning on 11 March that the tsunami was en route to Indonesia, it contacted local governments in vulnerable provinces to prepare evacuations.

"People panicked but they were prepared. The system worked but there is room for improvement," he said.

He said BNPB will create 12 units across the country to make disaster coordination easier. Unlike the current structure with regional disaster management agencies reporting to provincial governments, the units will fall directly under the BNPB.

BNPB is also working with agencies to develop a nuclear fallout emergency plan, said Sutrisno.

Indonesia, which has three small-scale nuclear reactors for research purposes, is planning to build a major nuclear power station on the north coast of Central Java on the Muria Peninsula, despite objections from environmental activists.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

14 Mar 2011

Asia: Bracing for Japan tsunami spillover

BANGKOK, 11 March 2011 (IRIN) - Following the approximately 8.9-magnitude earthquake that hit the northeast of Japan's capital, Tokyo, a Pacific tsunami alert has been issued for countries with coastlines in and around the Pacific Ocean, including Indonesia and the Philippines.

Tokyo is one of the world's eight most populous cities located on a tectonic fault-line, according to the Belgium-based Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters.

The Japan Meteorological Institute raised alerts for a potential 10m high tsunami, putting officials in Indonesia, who experienced the 2004 tsunami, on high alert.

"We have been informed it will hit us at 6pm [11am GMT], " deputy of emergency management at the National Agency for Disaster Management, Sutrisno, who, like most Indonesians, goes by one name, told IRIN.

Officials in the three provinces expected to be hardest hit - Maluku, North Sulawesi and Papua - are prepared to evacuate residents if needed, he added.

"We have already called them [officials] to give them the warning that we just received from the national climate and meteorology office. We do not know how big the tsunami will be so we have to prepare."

Indonesia is the most disaster-prone country in the world, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; in 2009 alone, it experienced 469 earthquakes with a magnitude of five or higher - more than any other nation.

Philippines

The head of the Philippines National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, Benito Ramos, said a 1m-high tsunami is expected to hit the country's eastern Pacific-facing seaboard between 4:46pm and 7pm local time (8:46am and 11am GMT).

"We have alerted all PNP [Philippine National Police] and military in these areas and advised all seagoing vessels not to set sail, especially the small vessels used by fishermen," he said.

The country is hit by an average of 20 cyclones annually and is still recovering from unseasonal fatal flooding that affected almost two million people earlier this year.

pt/fv/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

11 Mar 2011

Indonesia: Struggling to supply sanitation

JAKARTA, 3 March 2011 (IRIN) - Indonesia's recently released 2010 national basic health survey shows the country is making progress on several health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but is still struggling to provide access to safe drinking water [<http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal7.shtml>] and sanitation. [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=82310>]

"There is a decrease in the level of household access to improved drinking water sources, especially in urban areas," the report states.

In addition, the country needs to bring down the prevalence of underweight children by at least another 2.4 percent by 2015 to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger [<http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal1.shtml>] to 15.5 percent, as measured by the rate of underweight children under the age of five, the report noted.

Below are some highlights from the survey:

- * Households that consumed less than 20 litres of water per day/person - 14%
- * Households (rural and urban) with access to improved drinking water - 45.1% (in the capital Jakarta - 25.9% [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88833>])
- * Households with access to improved sanitation - 55.5%
- * Households nationwide that practised open defecation - at least 17.2%
- * Underweight (weight to age ratio) children under five years - 17.9% (18.4% in 2007)
- * Severely underweight under-five children - 4.9%
- * Eighteen out of the country's 32 provinces had higher rates of underweight children than the national average, with the highest being in Central Kalimantan at 22.3% [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91405>]
- * Chronic malnutrition (as measured by stunting, or height to age ratio) among under-five children - 35.7% (36.7% in 2007)
- * Prevalence of wasting (weight to height ratio, acute malnutrition) - 13.3% (13.6% in 2007)
- * Proportion of Indonesians who consumed less than minimum daily dietary requirement - 40.7%
- * Children aged 12-23 months who received measles vaccinations - 74.5% [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83798>]
- * Rate of deliveries attended by skilled health workers in 2009 - 82.2% (75.4% in 2007; 40.7% in 1990)
- * Pregnant women who received antenatal check-ups by skilled health workers - 83.8%
- * Indonesians aged 15 and above who were aware of HIV/AIDS - 57.5%

* Those who knew HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sex and intravenous drug use - 51.4%
[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=91509>]

* Newly diagnosed cases of malaria - 22.9 per 1,000 people

* Provinces recording the most malaria cases - (Papua 261.5, West Papua 253.4, East Nusa Tenggara 117.5 and North Maluku 103.2)

* Proportion of the population with malaria recorded during the last month of the survey - 10.6% [
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89192>]

* Proportion of the population with tuberculosis diagnosed from 2009-2010 - 725 per 100,000 people [
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87852>]

* Indonesians aged 15 and above who smoked daily - 28.2% [
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91596>]

* Smokers who consumed between one and 10 cigarettes a day - 52.3%

atp/pt/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

03 Mar 2011

Indonesia: Leptospirosis outbreak prompts emergency action

JAKARTA, 19 February 2011 (IRIN) - Bantul regency in Indonesia's central Java region has declared a state of emergency and health agencies nationwide are on alert following an outbreak of leptospirosis, a fatal animal-borne disease that can result in high fever, internal bleeding and organ failure, said the Health Ministry.

Four of 15 people reported to have been infected with the bacterial disease have died since the onset of the outbreak in late January, a case fatality rate of 27 percent.

Indonesia's Director-General of Disease Control and Environmental Health at the Health Ministry, Tjandra Yoga Aditama, said infected rats may have caused the epidemic.

"We have traced the root of the problem. I have asked several farmers in Bantul and they said currently there are a lot of rats in that area. I think that is one of the causes because the rat population is increasing. We are not sure why, and we do not know if the population increase is related to the weather."

Rodents and other mammals carry the disease, and can infect people who come into contact with animal urine-infected water, food or soil. Leptospirosis is spread in urban slums through rats, but also hits rural areas, killing unknown numbers of barefoot rice paddy workers, water buffaloes and sugar cane workers. It is thus known as rice field, mud or dairy-farm fever, as well as cane cutter's and swineherd's disease.

Because of their work conditions, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated nearly one billion agricultural workers in Southeast Asia were at risk of infection as of 2007.

Outbreaks have been reported following flooding [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=86779>] and hurricanes elsewhere in the region.

Changing weather trends, including extreme weather, have increased the threat of severe epidemics worldwide, according to the Leptospirosis Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (LERG) [<http://www.who.int/zoonoses/diseases/lerg/en/>], founded by WHO.

Under-reporting

In 2010 there were 110 infections and one fatality from leptospirosis reported in Indonesia, but this is grossly underreported, said Rudy Hartskeerl, a molecular microbiologist who was involved as consultant following a 2002 outbreak and heads the WHO, Food and Agriculture Organization and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) leptospirosis reference centre of the Royal Tropical Institute in the Netherlands.

"Do not be misled by low [reported] numbers. There is no research or surveillance. Indonesia is a high-endemic country and all its islands are vulnerable. Leptospirosis is a major public health problem there and gathering data is essential."

It is a "poverty disease" that is often overlooked or confused with other diseases, most often as the viral disease dengue because of similar fever, muscle pain and headache symptoms at the onset, he added.

The number of dengue infections governments reported to WHO multiplied four times from nearly 64,000 cases in 2000 to 258,000 in 2009, even when the region's population grew by only 1.2 percent during that period, according to the UN Population Fund. [

http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/swp/2010/swop_2010_eng.pdf]

"Whereas dengue is a mosquito-borne disease - and mosquitoes bite everybody, everywhere - leptospirosis affects mostly poor people such as farmers and those living in slums who [cannot] easily seek medical care in hospitals. Because surveillance and proper laboratory-based diagnosis [are] lacking, health care providers and officials tend to overlook leptospirosis [as a cause of death] because you would have to go looking for it."

In the 1990s, researchers isolated about 80 of 250 total types of bacteria in Indonesia and Malaysia that can result in leptospirosis, indicating a potentially high disease prevalence, said Hartskeerl.

Outbreak response

Indonesia's Health Ministry is coordinating with the animal husbandry office in the central Indonesian province of Yogyakarta to target the rat population, said Aditama.

Experts from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and WHO are expected to investigate further.

"We have also asked the health agency to inform the public about the importance of personal hygiene. Farmers have been asked to wash their feet properly after coming back from their fields and they are also asked to visit the nearest clinic if they have been bitten by rodents."

Beyond emergency control, education and treatment, Hartskeerl said an in-country reference centre capable of research and surveillance of haemorrhagic fevers, including leptospirosis, is "desperately" needed to ward off future epidemics.

pt/atp/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

19 Feb 2011

MONDE: La nécessité de mieux comprendre l'impact des catastrophes sur les vies humaines

JOHANNESBOURG, 26 janvier 2011 (IRIN) - En 2010, cinq des catastrophes les plus désastreuses, en termes de morts, de biens matériels et d'infrastructures, ont eu lieu en Asie. Investir dans la planification en prévision des catastrophes pourrait grandement contribuer à limiter le nombre de victimes, ont dit les experts.

« Les catastrophes en Asie sont principalement dues aux inondations et dans une moindre mesure, aux tempêtes. Je pense qu'une conscience de l'importance de la gestion des inondations est en train d'apparaître, parce que les cultures, ainsi que les infrastructures, sont souvent détruites, mais ce n'est pas assez [systématique], » a dit Debarati Guha-Sapir, directrice du Centre de recherche sur l'épidémiologie des catastrophes (le CRED), basé en Belgique.

On ne connaît pas bien l'impact d'une catastrophe naturelle sur les vies humaines et les moyens de subsistance au niveau micro-économique et c'est l'une des principales raisons pour lesquelles les gouvernements n'ont pas été suffisamment proactifs en termes de réduction des risques de catastrophes, a dit Mme Guha-Sapir. On manquait par exemple d'éléments pour comprendre les conséquences à court terme et à long terme d'une inondation pour un village.

Une récente étude du CRED en Orissa, une province indienne vulnérable aux inondations, a montré que dans les villages affectés par des inondations, les enfants souffraient de taux de malnutrition chronique considérablement plus élevés que les enfants aussi pauvres dans les villages ayant échappé à l'inondation.

La communauté humanitaire internationale, avec son habitude de se concentrer sur les réponses post-catastrophes à court terme, en est responsable en partie, a dit Mme Guha-Sapir.

Elle a suggéré que dans les cas où les pays étaient dans l'incapacité de renforcer la réponse au niveau local, les agences d'aide humanitaire internationales et nationales devraient autonomiser les communautés, de façon à leur permettre de mieux affronter les catastrophes.

« Il est fondamental pour les gouvernements locaux, les représentants des villes et leurs partenaires d'intégrer des stratégies d'adaptation au changement climatique dans la planification urbaine, » a déclaré Margareta Wallström, Représentante spéciale du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies pour la réduction des risques de catastrophes.

« La "réduction des risques de catastrophes", comme nous l'appelons, ou "atténuation des risques" ou encore "gestion des risques", comme certains la désignent, est un outil stratégique et technique mis en place pour aider les gouvernements nationaux et locaux à prendre leurs responsabilités envers les citoyens. » Elle « n'est plus facultative », a-t-elle noté.

Les tremblements de terre, les inondations, une vague de chaleur et une vague de froid ne sont qu'une partie des 373 catastrophes naturelles enregistrées en 2010. Ensemble, celles-ci ont tué plus de 296 800 personnes, en ont affecté près de 208 millions, et ont coûté presque 110 milliards de dollars, a dit le CRED.

Les risques naturels en Chine et au Pakistan ont engendré plus de 27 milliards de dollars de dommages et près de 8 500 victimes

Les tremblements de terre en Chine ont tué 2 968 personnes en avril 2010, et 1 691 personnes sont mortes dans les inondations entre mai et août.

En outre, 1 765 ont trouvé la mort en août dans des coulées de boue, des glissements de terrain ou des chutes de rochers provoqués par les fortes pluies et les inondations.

Au Pakistan, près de 2 000 personnes ont péri dans les inondations qui ont recouvert un cinquième du territoire après les pluies torrentielles qui avaient frappé le nord-ouest, faisant déborder l'Indus et ses affluents de juillet à août 2010.

Un séisme en Haïti a tué plus de 222 500 personnes en janvier et une vague de chaleur pendant l'été russe a provoqué 56 000 décès, faisant de l'année 2010 la plus meurtrière des deux dernières décennies.

Le CRED a également souligné que la mesure des pertes comportaient des incohérences, en raison des énormes différences économiques [entre les pays].

« Haïti, qui était en haut de la liste avec, de loin, le plus grand nombre de victimes, est tombé au quatrième rang sur la liste des dommages économiques, » a dit Mme Guha-Sapir. Mais le Chili, qui a été frappé par un séisme en février 2010 et était au septième rang pour le nombre de morts, s'est retrouvé en tête de liste des pays ayant subi des pertes financières.

« C'est un exemple qui montre combien notre manière de mesurer les pertes est inadéquate, car elle ne prend pas en compte les vies humaines. De plus, comme les valeurs mobilières sont nettement plus élevées au Chili qu'en Haïti et que les assurances y sont plus courantes, les pertes sont aussi plus élevées ».

jk/he[FIN]

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[Http://www.irinnews.org/reportfrench.aspx?ReportID=91739](http://www.irinnews.org/reportfrench.aspx?ReportID=91739)

Integrated Regional Information Networks

26 Jan 2011

MONDE: La nécessité de mieux comprendre l'impact des catastrophes sur les vies humaines



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Elle a suggéré que dans les cas où les pays étaient dans l'incapacité de renforcer la réponse au niveau local, les agences d'aide humanitaire internationales et nationales devraient autonomiser les communautés, de façon à leur permettre de mieux affronter les catastrophes.

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Le CRED a également souligné que la mesure des pertes comportait des incohérences, en raison des énormes différences économiques [entre les pays].

Les catastrophes les plus graves de 2010			
Evénement	Mois	Pays	Morts
Séisme	janvier	Haïti	222 570
Vague de chaleur	juillet-août	Russie	55 736
Séisme	avril	Chine	2 968
Inondations	juillet-août	Pakistan	1 985
Glissement de terrain	août	Chine	1 765
Inondations	mai-août	Chine	1 691
Séisme	février	Chili	562
Séisme	octobre	Indonésie	530
Vague de froid	juillet-décembre	Pérou	409
Glissement de terrain	février-mars	Ouganda	388
Source: CRED			

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jk/he - og/amz

Theme (s): [Economie](#), [Santé et nutrition](#), [Catastrophes naturelles](#), [Politique](#),

[Cet article ne reflète pas nécessairement les vues des Nations Unies]

DISASTERS: Better understanding of disaster impact on lives needed

JOHANNESBURG, 25 January 2011 (IRIN) - In 2010, five of the most devastating disasters, measured in loss of lives, goods and infrastructure, occurred in Asia. Investing in disaster planning could go a long way to keeping the number of casualties down, experts said.

"Disasters in Asia are largely due to floods and, in the second instance, storms. I think there is an awareness building up for flood management, as agricultural crops are frequently destroyed, as well as infrastructure, but not enough," said Debarati Guha-Sapir, director of the Belgium-based Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).

Poor evidence of the impact of a natural disaster on human lives and livelihoods at micro-level on was a major reason why governments were not proactive about disaster risk reduction, said Guha-Sapir. For instance, there was a lack of understanding of the short-term and long-term impacts of a flood on a village.

A recent study by CRED in Orissa, a flood-prone province in India, showed that children in flood-affected villages suffered significantly higher levels of chronic malnutrition compared to similar equally poor children in villages that had escaped flooding.

The international aid community, with their focus on the short-term response to disasters, was partly to blame, Guha-Sapir said.

She suggested that in instances where countries were unable to strengthen the response at a local level, international and national aid agencies should try to empower communities to better cope with disaster.

"It's critical for local governments, city leaders and their partners to incorporate climate change adaptation in urban planning," Margareta Wahlström, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Reduction, said in a statement.

"What we call 'disaster risk reduction' - and what some are calling 'risk mitigation' or 'risk management' - is a strategic and technical tool for helping national and local governments to fulfil their responsibilities to citizens." It was "no longer optional", she noted.

Earthquakes, floods, a heat-wave and cold-wave were among the 373 natural disasters recorded in 2010. Together, they killed over 296,800 people, affected nearly 208 million others, and cost almost US\$110 billion, said CRED.

Natural hazards in China and Pakistan accounted for more than US\$27 billion worth of damage and nearly 8,500 fatalities.

Earthquakes in China killed 2,968 people in April 2010, and 1,691 people died in floods between May and August. A further 1,765 were killed by mudslides, landslides or rock falls, triggered by heavy rains and flooding in August.

In Pakistan nearly 2,000 people died in floodwater that covered one-fifth of the land after torrential rains pelted the northwest, swelling the Indus and its tributaries from July to August in 2010.

An earthquake in Haiti killed over 222,500 people in January, and a heat wave in the Russian summer caused around 56,000 fatalities, making 2010 the deadliest year in at least two decades.

CRED also highlighted the anomalies in measuring losses because of the enormous economic differences.

"Haiti, which led the list with by far the highest numbers of deaths, fell to the fourth place in the rank of the economic damage list," said Guha-Sapir. Chile, which was hit by an earthquake in February 2010 and had the seventh highest number of fatalities, climbed to the top of the list of countries suffering financial losses.

"This is a good example of the inadequacy of how we measure losses, as human lives are not included in this measure. Also, as property values in Chile are much higher than in Haiti and insurance penetration is higher, the losses are also higher."

jk/he

Integrated Regional Information Networks

25 Jan 2011

DISASTERS: Better understanding of disaster impact on lives needed



Photo: Ingmar Zahorsky/Flickr

Floods caused havoc in most instances in Asia
JOHANNESBURG, 25 January 2011 (IRIN) - In 2010, five of the most devastating disasters, measured in loss of lives, goods and infrastructure, occurred in Asia. Investing in disaster planning could go a long way to keeping the number of casualties down, experts said.

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jk/he

Theme (s): [Aid Policy](#), [Environment](#), [Health & Nutrition](#), [Natural Disasters](#),

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

2010's most devastating disasters			
Event	Month	Country	Deaths
Earthquake	January	Haiti	222,570
Heat wave	July-August	Russia	55, 736
Earthquake	April	China	2968
Flood	July-August	Pakistan	1985
Landslide	August	China	1765
Flood	May-August	China	1691
Earthquake	February	Chile	562
Earthquake	October	Indonesia	530
Cold wave	July-December	Peru	409
Landslide	February-March	Uganda	388
Source: CRED			

INDONESIA: Private aid "needs coordination"

JAKARTA, 18 January 2011 (IRIN) - The private sector's growing role in disaster response, including Indonesia's recent Merapi-Mentawai emergencies, is strengthening disaster mitigation in the country, but also creating concerns about coordination.

"There are too many private organizations providing aid to even name," said Indonesia's National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) spokesman Hartje Robert Winerungan, referring to private sector assistance following the twin disasters in October 2010.

More than 300,000 people were displaced and about 300 died after multiple eruptions from Mt Merapi [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90994>] in Central Java, while some 11,500 were displaced and more than 450 died in the tsunami at the Mentawai islands [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90933>], West Sumatra, according to the government.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says the private sector's presence in disaster relief has grown significantly over the past two years, with international contributions to Indonesia increasing, depending on the scale of the disaster.

In 2009 alone, all commitments, contributions and pledges from international donors to Indonesia for the West Sumatra earthquake - the country's biggest emergency for the year - amounted to US\$76.4 million, which is almost six times greater than in 2008.

[http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R10_E15762_asof__1101180205.pdf]

Private-sector donations are not measured separately from overall international disaster relief due to the ad-hoc, informal and in-kind nature of the giving, which often escapes official records.

Coordination

The private sector's growing role raises challenges for national disaster response planning, said Ibu Titi Moekti-jasih, an OCHA humanitarian affairs analyst.

The BNPB leads the disaster mitigation team comprising NGOs, the public and private sectors, government and civil society. But coordination with the increasingly active private sector, which has typically operated independently of the humanitarian community, can be difficult.

"While its efforts are self-funded and it can provide invaluable resources, the private sector is not trained in disaster mitigation. Indonesia's disaster-response team cannot operate to potential if each component works alone," she concluded.

"The coordination effort has the potential to be better organized and led," said Titi.

General manager Sinta Kaniawati with Unilever Indonesia Foundation, which gave its hygiene products to displaced people following the October disasters, agreed.

"We collaborate with many NGOs in our aid efforts, but the government needs to include [the private sector] more in the disaster response programme in Indonesia to enhance its effectiveness."

Despite the tighter coordination now required, companies bring clear advantages to disaster relief, said Titi. "They can work more effectively, being familiar with the area, and their aid is immediate."

At Merapi, for example, telecommunications provider Indostat was a key player in re-connecting the region's internet, enabling the disaster-response team access to the Merapi disaster mitigation database run by a local NGO, Combine [<http://combine.or.id/>], which gives updated information on aid distribution and volcanic activity.

Work in progress

NGO Mercy Corps coordinator Agni Pratama with the Our World Our Family programme said private-sector volunteers helped its new Mother and Child Programme with infant feedings - from food production and preparation to distribution.

Mercy Corps has trained private-sector volunteers to take over programme operations so the NGO can focus on other areas, such as distributing non-food items to displaced people.

"While extreme weather at Mentawai has posed challenges, Mercy Corps' disaster-mitigation efforts at Merapi and Mentawai have been doing better than in previous years, and that in part is owed to its partnership with private companies," Agni said.

ab/pt/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

18 Jan 2011

INDONESIA: Volcanic flooding displaces hundreds

BANGKOK, 11 January 2011 (IRIN) - Floods caused by rainwater mixing with volcanic rocks and sands have forced hundreds from their homes, cut off roads and endangered six villages in Magelang District, 26km from the peak of the still-active volcano, Mt Merapi.

Arief Setyohadi, of the Magelang District resources staff of the International Federation of Red Cross, estimated that more than 3,000 people were living in flooded areas but that no formal assessment had been conducted.

The floods caused the Blongkeng River to overflow and damage houses in the Ngempak village, as well as one primary healthcare centre and elementary schools in Ngluwar sub-district.

Cold lava and mud from the slopes of Mt Merapi began inundating houses and farms in Magelang District on 3 January.

The flooding resumed with more devastating effects on 9 January, when the Red Cross evacuated dozens of people trapped in their homes in Sirihan village.

Some people sought refuge in government offices and schools, Setyohadi said. "The local government had a contingency plan by creating an evacuation route and declaring an area 300m from the [Blongkeng] river banks as dangerous, but the flooding was worse than expected."

The Red Cross and local government have set up a shelter in Ngrajek village hall where they have delivered biscuits and water to 600 people.

While the Red Cross is calling the latest disturbance a "cold lava flood", leading government volcanologist Suwono called it a "lahar flood", which is common when it rains after a volcanic eruption.

Lahar floods carry sand, volcanic ash and rocks at an accelerated rate down a mountain slope into rivers. "Lahar floods are a natural phenomenon that [is] very dangerous for inhabitants and infrastructure," Suwono said.

The flooding has resulted in one reported death and another injury to date.

Volcanic eruptions at Mt Merapi starting in late October have resulted in 386 reported deaths and 131 injuries. While more than 300,000 people have been able to return home, another 11,000 remain displaced, living with family or in camps, according to the government's National Disaster Management Agency.

dm/atp/pt/mw

[END]

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

11 Jan 2011

INDONESIA: Work begins on temporary housing for tsunami victims

JAKARTA, 28 December 2010 (IRIN) - Temporary housing construction for some 11,400 people displaced [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91196>] by an October 2010 tsunami on the Mentawai Islands off the western coast of Sumatra in Indonesia is under way, and the government is also planning to build more permanent housing.

"Our first priority is to build sturdy and safe houses because these are the backbone of their lives," said Bakrie Beck, deputy for disaster mitigation at the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

On 25 October, the islands (comprising some 70 islands and islets) were struck by a 3-5m tsunami triggered by a 7.7 Richter scale earthquake off western Sumatra which destroyed 550 houses and damaged another 200, BNPB said.

Medi Herlianto, BNPB deputy for reconstruction and rehabilitation, said work on hundreds of the some 1,600 temporary shelters required, had begun. The 24-square metre shelters, made of plywood and corrugated iron, are expected to house displaced people for six months.

Half the shelters are being built by the Indonesian Red Cross and half by the government.

Head of the Red Cross in West Sumatra Province Hidayatul Irwan said the construction of temporary houses started on 12 December (after government permission was received to use timber from local forests), and tsunami survivors are involved in the project - from processing timber to building work.

"By involving the residents we hope to empower them so that they can be motivated and get back on their feet."

The Red Cross was helping with the distribution of aid supplies -100,000 hoes for home-building and household items - and providing care for survivors by employing 120 people equipped with mobile clinics and trucks.

However, not all survivors want to live in the temporary shelters or the planned government housing, and have opted to return to their old neighbourhoods to rebuild their damaged houses and continue their livelihoods.

BNPB's Beck said concerns about earning income have been noted and would be addressed. "Houses will be built in areas that are close to people's means of production. In communities where people produce copra [dried coconut kernels from which oil is obtained] we will open coconut plantations using modern growing methods."

Permanent houses

A government assessment has estimated the total cost of building temporary shelters, permanent homes and infrastructure, as well as rebuilding lost livelihoods, at US\$111 million.

Early in 2011 the government plans to start building 1,600 permanent houses at 11 of the most affected sub-districts on the four main islands of North Pagai, Pagai Selatan (South Pagai), South Sipora and Sikakap, BNPB officials said.

The 36-square metre houses will have prefabricated lightweight steel roofing and cost an estimated \$10,000 each, said Bambang Sulistianto, BNPB director for recovery and physical rehabilitation.

He said light steel roofing was chosen because local forests are protected, making it difficult to get processed timber.

atp/pt/cb

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

28 Dec 2010

Analysis: Discontent rising in Indonesia's Papua region

JAKARTA, 23 December 2010 (IRIN) - Activists in Papua continue to voice their discontent with Indonesia's central government, calling for greater autonomy to help improve the region's socio-economic problems.

Health and education indicators in Indonesia's lesser-known province are in dire need of attention, experts say.

The region - an area half the size of Brazil and home to just 1 percent of Indonesia's population - has long been the scene of political discontent.

"There is growing frustration between the government and Papua, and [President Susilo Bambang] Yudhoyono needs to explore potential action policies directly with leaders," International Crisis Group (ICG) Southeast Asia programme director Jim Della-Giacoma told IRIN in Jakarta.

The people of Papua want their political autonomy expanded, affirmative action policies strengthened and fears of migrants from other parts of Indonesia taking jobs allayed, he said, referring to ICG's recent report on the region this year.

"If not, these three issues will lead to an increase in radicalization and remain an obstacle to Papua's Special Autonomy."

Behind these concerns is a perceived need for the government to do more to provide basic services.

Healthcare

Worries about HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria in Papua are exacerbated by a poor healthcare infrastructure, say aid workers.

The 2010 UN Development Programme (UNDP) Report states that Papua has the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases in Indonesia with a prevalence rate of 2.4 percent, against 0.2 percent across Indonesia, according to the National AIDS Commission.

In Papua, HIV has been categorized as a "generalized epidemic", meaning more than 1 percent of the general population is affected by HIV, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Even so, efforts to mitigate the virus's spread have been limited, aid agencies say.

Not enough support is provided for malaria or TB either, said Naomi Sosa, from the local NGO Yasumat, who works in Yahukimo regency in the eastern highlands.

"There is currently an under-reported TB epidemic and it seems to be increasing in intensity," she said.

WHO also classifies it as a generalized epidemic, with 2.5 percent of the population affected.

Policies addressing the needs of this remote province need to be more pro-active, say activists.

"The government's work is largely reactionary rather than preventative," Sosa said.

Education

Despite the fact that Papua is rich in natural resources - including oil, gas, and timber - many worry the region's underperforming education system is also holding back development.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), secondary school enrolment in Papua is only 60 percent compared with a national average of 91 percent.

Sosa says authorities should start by increasing funding, while at the same time expecting more from teachers.

"There is also low capacity in the local government to coordinate education delivery," she said. "Staff members are rarely in their offices and do not show awareness [of educational] programmes."

Compounding matters is an acute teaching shortage, with no functioning teacher monitoring system in place.

"It is impossible for the local education department to ensure teachers are at their posts. And teachers can get away with keeping operational funds for personal reasons," Sosa said.

Political deadlock

Officials, however, say the government is working hard to address all Papua's development needs.

"The government has fulfilled its role in providing assistance at the village level," said Agus Sumule, spokesman for Papua's governor, Barnabas Suebu, citing his Strategic Plan for Village Development, in conjunction with the World Bank, known as RESPEK.

The programme allocates grants of about US\$60,000 per village, providing they design their own development initiatives.

"We are trying hard to address the issues, whether they are social, economic, cultural or political," he said.

Food security

Papua's status as the province most vulnerable to food insecurity in Indonesia, according to the World Food Programme (WFP), is improving, however.

Working with the government, the agency has developed a National Food and Nutrition Action Plan for 2011-2015 in a bid to eradicate poverty and hunger in line with the country's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), WFP Indonesia deputy country director Peter Guest said.

"The government is taking this issue very, very seriously," he said.

Grievances brewing

Conflict prevention experts do not, however, think the longstanding political grievances are being addressed effectively and believe these are even more key to improving Papua's socio-economic condition.

UNDP says about 35 percent of Papua's population lives below the poverty line. This contrasts with a national average of about 13 percent, according to the Central Statistics Agency.

"The central government so far believes there's no problem," said Muridan Widjojo, a Papua expert from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI).

Just this year, Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Djoko Suyanto and officials within the president's office disregarded his research results when he presented the minister with a LIPI study on Papuans' discontent with the government.

But Widjojo is not worried by the setback. "We will not give up on organizing constructive communication with Jakarta," he said.

ad/ds/mw

Theme (s): Conflict, Early Warning, Education, Health & Nutrition,

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

23 Dec 2010

INDONESIA: Lots of food - and malnutrition - in the east

KUPANG, 20 December 2010 (IRIN) - A lack of trained health staff, treatments and health promotion make Indonesia's eastern province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) one of the country's most food insecure, despite the general availability of food.

In the drought-prone mostly rural province of 4.5 million people spread out over 50 islands, the average per capita income is US\$265 a year.

"Food is not the main problem here," said UN Food and Agriculture Organization food security officer, Andrey Damaledo, in Kupang, one of 20 in NTT. "We have pumpkin, cassava, banana here. Locals define food as corn or rice. Diversification [of diets] is what is needed."

Even rice and maize harvests have steadily increased from 2003 to 2007, according to the government's most recent Food Security and Vulnerability Atlas [<http://foodsecurityatlas.org/idn/country/fsva-2009>], leading to surplus production in some districts.

Yet NTT hosted six of the country's most vulnerable districts, second only to the far eastern province of Papua, which had 11, according to the atlas.

To create a composite food security index, researchers evaluated 14 factors nationwide, including female literacy; access to safe water, sanitation, electricity, 4x4 road access and health facilities; exposure to natural disasters; deforestation and food production.

According to Damaledo, NTT's "hunger paradox" goes much deeper than food.

The country's highest rates of under-five children who were diagnosed as chronically malnourished (as measured by height-for-age) or acutely malnourished was in NTT- 46.7 and 20 percent, respectively, as compared to the national average of 36.8 percent and 13.6 percent.

Overall malnutrition is a longstanding problem in NTT that is still being treated with short-term solutions, said Damaledo. "Peanut pastes and rice giveaways do not address underlying problems of feeding practices, low levels of education, and cultural obstacles to good nutrition. There is a tree of causes we are still mapping."

Challenges

Some 1,300 children were recorded as severely acutely malnourished in 2009 in NTT, which was 2 percent of all children surveyed.

The province only had therapeutic foods available to treat 10 percent, according to the Ministry of Health. Severe wasting can be deadly if untreated as the child loses body fat and muscle tissue, say nutrition experts.

Another problem is insufficient health promotion and lack of trained nutritionists willing to work in remote areas, said Messel Ataupah, who heads the Ministry of Health's office in NTT district, Kupang.

"For a long time we [Health Ministry] have ignored health promotion. It is like we are in a jungle with a machete looking for a way out now. People still see health promotion as a waste of time. It is hard to get [staff] to come in for training - some even refuse," said Ataupah.

There are seven trained nutritionists spread over NTT's 286 community health posts.

Untrained village health staff can gather inaccurate malnutrition data, said an assistant with the World Food Programme (WFP) office in Kupang city, Ha'i Raja Lawa. "Data is still a challenge we are struggling with in NTT."

The government is expected to release new malnutrition figures in its 2010 national basic health survey on 20 December.

Interventions

The government recently launched a programme in 11 districts in NTT to target energy-deficient children with 100g of fortified biscuits daily for 90 days.

Another programme distributes "sprinkles" [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74049>] boosted with micronutrients to help children under-two fight lifelong chronic malnutrition - one of the leading causes of preventable disability, according to the World Health Organization.

There are two medical feeding centres in NTT that are supposed to provide nutrient-dense foods to treat emaciated children for severe acute malnutrition.

But these interventions have limited impact, said WFP's Lawa, "Not all parents want to bring their children to a feeding centre. Parents in NTT do not see malnutrition as a problem."

Even Lawa admitted she fell into the trap of other working parents who neglect their children's nutrition. She has an under-five child who is on the border between moderate and severe wasting, diagnosed by a child's too-low weight-for-height or too-small upper arm.

In the district where she lives in Kupang, 23.9 percent of children surveyed for malnutrition in 2009 had signs of wasting.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

20 Dec 2010

INDONESIA: NGOs allege government impunity in Papua

JAKARTA, 14 December 2010 (IRIN) - The right to be free from torture is recognized in Indonesia's constitution, but not its penal code, giving police and security forces little incentive to rein in excessive violence, say activists.

Challenges to long-standing government impunity concerning "gross violations of human rights have been obstructed for political reasons", states a recent report [<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/MUMA-8BY82S?OpenDocument&RSS20=02-P>] by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), a Hong Kong-based NGO.

AHRC released a video in October this year showing the military's apparent torture of indigenous groups in West Papua Province, in the western half of New Guinea island and home to a decades-long separatist movement that has pitted pro-independence fighters against the military.

But it is not clear whether evidence of apparent government-led torture can lead to punishment, according to International Crisis Group (ICG).

"There is a strong sense that the government has been unwilling to punish those who are involved in such cases," said Sidney Jones, ICG's senior adviser for Asia programmes.

While the government's coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, Djoko Suyanto, acknowledged that soldiers acted "excessively" in the beatings, he said the government's priority for Papua Province was to create political stability, which will then bring development.

"We have to remember there have been shootings [by separatists] targeting Freeport [US gold mining company] employees this year and last. So there are still security disturbances. The [military] and police are there in the context of enforcing the law and maintaining security."

A heavy-handed emphasis on security has resulted in other, less publicized, abuses against residents in Papua, said Haris Azhar, coordinator for local human rights NGO, KontraS. "There is no justice for victims of violence. The Papuan indigenous people [are] a minority there. Our fear is that Papuans will be like the [native Americans] of the United States or the aborigines of Australia."

In addition to alleged human rights violations in both Papua and West Papua provinces, the AHRC report highlighted attacks against religious minorities, human rights activists and corruption in the Indonesian judiciary.

Potentially positive human rights developments include the selection of a new attorney general in November, the signing of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance [<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/disappearance-convention.htm>] and the creation of a judicial "mafia" taskforce to fight impunity.

"However, none of these steps [has] as yet resulted in more accountability for perpetrators of serious human rights violations," wrote AHRC.

pt/atp/mw

[END]

INDONESIA: Land tensions flare for former refugees

KUPANG, 9 December 2010 (IRIN) - Tensions between sharecroppers and landowners in Indonesia's half of Timor island over limited cultivable land have led to outbreaks of violence that threaten to escalate, say local officials.

"There just is not enough land for everybody. My 1 sqkm village hosts more [former] refugees than we have [long-term] residents," said acting village director, Esaf Dakabesi, of Tuapukan, home to 3,750 people who fled violence in Timor-Leste in 1999 to West Timor during the independence conflict.

The total village population is less than 6,000.

Most of the hundreds of thousands who fled have since returned to Timor-Leste, according to the UN Refugee Agency, but thousands of farmers remained, working as hired help in West Timor's districts of Belu and Kupang.

Those who chose Indonesian citizenship have a constitutional right to land ownership, but land tenure laws favour long-term residents, said Winston Rondo, executive director of CIS Timor, a local NGO formed in 1999 to respond to refugee needs.

"Land is gold to us and without it, we are nobody," said Gaspar Fernandes, former refugee-turned-Indonesian "new citizen", as he is now classified by the government.

He and a collective of 37 families recently gathered collateral and cash to move into government housing in the village of Merdeka where they will pay the landowner rent until they have 65,000,000 rupiahs, or US\$7,200, when they will own the land.

However, even if they can save money through sharecropping and mostly day labour, at most 20 percent of new citizens have the identity cards required to own a land title, said Rondo.

"People find ways around it. They have married long-time landowners. Or they may be one of the few with identity cards. But that is the exception. Meanwhile, we are looking at a ticking bomb as land pressures grow," he added.

His organization has registered six clashes this past year in Kupang between what he calls "old" and "new" residents, where former refugees are accused of illegal squatting and landowners of extortion.

Torched

In December 1999, Kupang landowner Peat Yan Sinlae came home to a torched home, tractor and land in the village of Oebelo in Indonesia's Kupang district in West Timor. He later learned that people from a nearby government resettlement site for East Timorese were responsible.

He has employed farmers over the past decade - mostly former refugees - on almost all of his 10ha. "They get a third, I get a third and the tractor owners get one-third of the harvest," said Sinlae.

For some, this is barely enough to survive. One farmer still living in a former refugee camp in Tuapukan, who does not work for Sinlae, said his post-harvest share of one-half barely feeds his family once, at most twice, a day.

The Nusa Tenggara Timor province that includes Kupang district has one of the country's highest rates of childhood wasting (too-low weight for height) - 20 percent compared with the national average of 13.6 percent, according to 2008 government data.

Raimundo da Costa Suarez spoke to IRIN at a makeshift community tent clinic where he brought one of his four children to be treated for malnutrition.

When asked why he did not move to a government resettlement site, or try to join a land collective to invest in land and increase his share of the harvest, Suarez replied: "I barely make enough to feed my family. I cannot afford the 200,000 rupiahs [\$22] fee to move into a resettlement site, and land ownership I do not even consider."

Government response

Beyond what it has done in recent years, the national government has "washed their plate of responsibility and is tired of the issue", said Andrey Damaldeo, a former resettlement officer in Kupang's Department of Social Affairs and now food security officer with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The problem is, local officials are not stepping in to ensure smooth integration, he added.

"Local [Kupang] parliamentarians tell me this is not a district issue, but rather central government, that they don't have the money to absorb and integrate landless former refugees."

But Andi Hanindito, director of disaster management at the national Ministry of Social Affairs, which oversaw resettlement issues until 2005, said former refugees were no longer national government responsibility.

"There was an agreement [in 2005] between several ministries that the provincial government is responsible for taking care of former East Timorese... The local government should be creative in addressing these issues because it has been given the freedom to deal with the former East Timorese refugees."

To resolve any integration problems, he said there is a national "social harmony fund" that local governments can tap, but he did not give details on the amount available or procedure.

Meanwhile, land pressures mount, said FAO's Damaldeo.

"The main problem is availability of fertile land here, provincial food security problems and a landless former refugee population. The [former refugees'] livelihoods and land issues must be resolved, or else we face more burning homes."

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INDONESIA: Tsunami survivors still lack adequate shelter

JAKARTA, 26 November 2010 (IRIN) - One month after a deadly tsunami struck Indonesia's southern Mentawai islands, shelter for the more than 11,000 people affected remains a critical challenge, aid workers and officials say.

"The most urgent need for people affected by the tsunami is housing and [restoring] their livelihoods," Andi Hanindito, head of emergency response with the Ministry of Social Affairs, told IRIN.

On 25 October, the islands were struck by a 3m-high tsunami triggered by a 7.7 magnitude earthquake off the coast of western Sumatra, which left 509 people dead, 21 missing, destroyed 550 houses and damaged another 200, the country's National Disaster Management Agency reported.

One month on, more than 11,400 people remain displaced and are living in tents in the North Pagai, South Pagai, South Sipora and Sikakap districts.

Although the post-tsunami emergency phase officially ended on 22 November, the government is planning to build more than 1,000 temporary and 1,600 permanent houses for survivors (217 in North Pagai, 785 in South Pagai, 613 in South Sipora, and 16 in Sikakap), officials said.

With funding from national and provincial budgets as well as donors, the government is spending an estimated US\$40 million on reconstruction, rehabilitation and relocation (expected to be completed by 2012), not only to help those in immediate need, but also to prepare the communities for the next disaster.

"The money will be spent not only on housing but also on infrastructure such as water, sanitation, communication networks and health, and on reviving livelihoods, including farming and fishing," said Indroyono Soesilo, secretary for the People's Welfare Ministry. The government is also relocating people who were not directly affected by the tsunami, but now want to move to higher ground for fear of the next disaster.

Temporary plans under fire

In the meantime, the displaced populations will be kept in temporary houses to be built by the Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah) from wood, with corrugated zinc roofs and wooden floors, said Ade Edward, head of the West Sumatra Disaster Management Agency.

But not everyone is pleased with the plans. Yayasan Citra Mandiri, a Bogor-based child rights NGO, has criticized proposals to move survivors away from their villages.

"The government is making a big mistake. The temporary houses will be built in the middle of woods, far away from people's sources of livelihood. Their food security will be threatened if they all move," said Frans Siahaan, the group's deputy director.

"Some residents have expressed opposition to the move and said they would instead build their own homes because they don't want to abandon their crops," Siahaan said.

In order to provide economic support for those who have lost their livelihoods, the Social Affairs Ministry plans to establish local cooperative networks, and give survivors money for fishing and farming equipment, or help them start a business, Hanindito said. The amount, still being calculated, would likely be released next year.

Additional challenges

Poor communication remains an obstacle to the smooth distribution of aid supplies, said Dendi Pratama, programme director for Mentawai Relief, an aid group set up by West Sumatra university students, which has donated about \$3,000, clothes and toys to the tsunami victims.

"Access to communication is important because there are often discrepancies between what is distributed and what the people need," said Pratama, who has been in Mentawai since last month.

Adam Verdatama, an official at the National Disaster Management Agency, said survivors needed more staple food, blankets, sleeping mats and clean water.

As many volunteers have now left the region, there are concerns the government would not have the resources to distribute aid supplies.

"Food supplies will still be needed as long as the people have not started working in their fields," Pratama said.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

26 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Disaster prevention "still taking a back seat"

JAKARTA, 23 November 2010 (IRIN) - Recent disasters [

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90946>] - including a deadly tsunami [

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90933>] and volcano eruption [

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91029>] - underscore the need for Indonesians to be better prepared for disaster emergencies, experts say.

"Indonesia is not at a stage where people are well prepared for disasters," Wisnu Wijaya, director for disaster preparedness at the National Disaster Management Agency, told IRIN. "Indonesians tend to be risk takers. Disaster preparedness is not considered important, especially for people who are still grappling with poverty and a lack of education."

A 2007 law on disaster mitigation calls for every Indonesian city, district and province to have their own disaster management agency, but only an estimated 20 percent have complied, Wijaya said, citing funding issues.

Although people's awareness of disaster preparedness had improved, thanks to the media, it was still not being implemented on a daily basis, said Avianto Amri, Plan Indonesia's manager for disaster risk reduction. "It seems people begin to think about preparing only after a disaster strikes. Prevention is still taking a back seat."

Amri said Plan conducts earthquake and tsunami drills once a year in vulnerable areas, such as West Sumatra's Pariaman District and Sikka District in East Nusa Tenggara Province.

"We are focusing on children because they are the most vulnerable group, and we see this as an investment as when they grow up they will be able to save people around them," he said.

Preparation

Ade Edward, head of the West Sumatra Disaster Management Agency, said government scientists and charity group SurfAid International had been preparing vulnerable communities on the Mentawai islands for a tsunami since 2005 and were already seeing the dividends.

In areas where communities had conducted tsunami drills regularly, there were few casualties after the 25 October tsunami.

"In some villages that were badly damaged by the tsunami, fewer than 10 people were killed while in other areas more than 80 people were killed," he said, without naming the villages. "That is because in those high-risk villages, there are evacuation routes and people were prepared," he said.

SurfAid said it began Programme Siaga Bencana (disaster alert) in 2006, targeting 55 coastal villages (33 in Nias and 22 in the Mentawai Islands), designed around three key components: awareness-raising, disaster contingency planning and capacity building, and disaster mitigation.

KOGAMI (tsunami alert community), a community-based group, has worked since 2005 to educate people about disaster preparedness in West Sumatra.

"After the Indian Ocean tsunami hit Aceh in 2004, we realized that we too could be hit by a similar disaster," Revanche Jefrizal Kabuik, KOGAMI programme director, said.

KOGAMI conducts tsunami drills and provides lessons in disaster preparedness in schools, as well as operating a radio station to spread its message of disaster awareness, Kabuik said.

Kogami spends close to US\$450,000 a year on its programmes, with funding coming from foreign donors, including Mercy Corps and the Swedish government.

"Our education programmes are very effective. None of the members of our community was killed in the 30 September 2009 earthquake and they helped the government in the rescue effort," Kabuik said.

Risk education

NS Vijaya, the National Education Ministry's head of the curriculum centre, said the ministry in March had sent a memo to regional education officials to request the inclusion of disaster risk reduction as part of the school curriculum.

"We hope that through education, the younger generation will understand more about disaster preparedness because disasters happen and all we can do is prepare ourselves in order to minimize losses," he said. The ministry had sent 1,000 information kits on disaster preparedness to regional education offices and NGOs to be distributed to teachers and students. "The kits will help provide guidelines for coordinating disaster response efforts," he said.

Sutopo Nugroho, director for disaster risk reduction at the National Disaster Management Agency, said the government had allocated 300 billion rupiah (\$33.6 million) to the agency's operations this year, but did not say how much was spent on improving community preparedness.

Earlier this year, agency chief Syamsul Muarif said that around \$1.7 million was allocated for disaster preparedness and requested parliament to allow 10 percent of the country's \$424.5 million disaster reserve funds under the state budget to be used for the purpose.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

23 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Java volcano emergency phase extended

YOGYAKARTA/JAKARTA, 18 November 2010 (IRIN) - Almost 70,000 evacuees from volcanic eruptions on Mt Merapi on the Indonesian island of Java returned to their homes after the government declared some no-go areas safe again, but the emergency response phase of the disaster is still in place.

"We haven't yet declared the emergency response phase over because Merapi is still on highest alert and there are still eruptions," Syamsul Muarif, head of the country's National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), told IRIN.

More than 575 people remain hospitalized following recent eruptions.

"We cannot estimate when it will end. As long as Merapi remains on highest alert the emergency phase will remain in place," he added. When the volcano erupted on 25 October, the government declared an initial 14-day emergency period.

As of 18 November, there are still 296,596 displaced by the volcano, scattered throughout 747 sites in Central Java, according to BNPB. Once the emergency phase is declared over, the authorities will begin assessments to build temporary housing, said BNPB's head of public relations, Hartje Robert.

"The military will build the housing on land made available by different local governments. Only villagers whose houses were destroyed in the eruptions will be entitled to the temporary houses," he said.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

18 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Farmers lament the impact of La Niña

TEGALEGA, 15 November 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesian farmers, who account for 57 percent of the country's poor, are increasingly struggling to deal with the impacts of climate change, as the longer rainy season leads to poorer yields and a shorter harvest.

"Normally one hectare would produce 6MT, now it produces only 2.5MT," says Ujang Majudin of his rice crop.

Majudin heads a farmers' cooperative on the island of Java with more than 300 members. But with such bad weather this year, it is struggling.

"Almost all the crops are destroyed, so production is very low and the price I have to pay for the vegetables is very high," Majudin says, pointing at the piles of rotting vegetables in his storage shed.

Indonesia normally has a six-month wet season (November to March) and a six-month dry season (June to October), but this year it simply kept on raining. The UN World Meteorological Organization blames the weather phenomena La Niña, saying the rains will continue for the next four to six months. As well as vegetable and rice farmers, producers of palm oil, tin, cocoa, coal and rubber also complain about the heavy tropical storms.

The consequences are already being felt at local markets where crop prices have jumped 20 percent.

Farmer Muhamad Subadri has a small plot of land in the fertile hills of Tegalega, a four-hour drive from the capital Jakarta. With nine mouths to feed he is very worried about the enormous rainfall. "The pesticides I use on my crops have been washed away, so caterpillars eat my crops. And for the rice it is a problem because we can't dry it, so it rots."

Rice dependency

In other areas paddy fields are flooded, making it impossible to even harvest the rice, a staple food which Indonesians eat more than any other people on Earth: 136kg per person per year, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

For the first time in three years the Indonesian government announced last month it would import rice, even though it aims to be self-sufficient.

"There could be a very wide impact, on the whole of Asia. We'll know by early next year, because La Niña is predicted to last to early 2011... The problem the Indonesian government faces now is uncertainty, which is why their decision to buy rice has been a wise one," said Benni Sormin, assistant representative with the FAO in Jakarta.

Indonesia's food logistics agency, Bulog [<http://www.bulog.co.id/>], will supplement shrinking stocks for distribution to the poor with bulk imports from Vietnam and Thailand. The agency said it would seek to boost its stockpile to two million MT.

To increase food security for its more than 250 million people, three out of five of whom live in rural areas, the Indonesian government is trying to diversify diet habits to other crops such as corn and wheat. Still, rice is the basis of every meal, a reliance that could make Indonesia vulnerable to price fluctuations on the international markets if shortages continue.

Since 2007, Indonesia has boosted rice production by 15 percent to 36 million tonnes, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, but no official measures have been taken to compensate a possible fall in 2010. Bayu Krisnamurti, the deputy Minister of Agriculture, said government was very aware of the situation.

"We have to be alert and cautious with any of our decisions and look at any opportunity to make the food [situation] secure... But you have to understand that even though the challenge is domestic, the situation is actually global, it is not simply only Indonesia," Krisnamurti said.

Back in the hills of Tegalega, the owner of the cooperative sighs when he sees a pile of just-harvested corn: "Look at the size, so small, that's not normal, not normal at all. It is all because of the rains."

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

15 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Search and rescue continues for Merapi survivors

NGEPRINGAN, 9 November 2010 (IRIN) - Search and rescue workers continue to comb an ash-covered 20km area around Mt Merapi in Indonesia's Central Java region, collecting corpses and transporting survivors to medical care.

Samadi, 37, fled with his family shortly after midnight on 5 November from Ngepringan village, 15km from the summit, when an explosive midnight eruption sent hot ash flowing down the nearby Gendol river.

They left behind his 85-year-old grandmother. "She was too frail to move quickly, so we had to leave. I have been coming back every day to feed her until we could safely remove her," said Samadi, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name.

He guided military search and rescue workers on 8 November to his home to carry her out on a stretcher. "She is not well enough to be in a displaced person's site, so we will look for a home where she can be cared for," said Samadi.

There are more than 90 sites where some 320,000 persons are seeking shelter, mostly in Sleman district, according to the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), which has updates every six hours on its website.

Numbers vary as people register at one site, but then reunite with family in another, according to volunteers staffing the camps.

"We found three other survivors alive today [8 November], but they were older and did not want to leave," said Beny Angga, a soldier who was helping to evacuate people. "We cannot force them to leave so we left them."

"The old people will risk death over displacement," said Antono Prasatanto, the leader of a 250-volunteer government search and rescue team from Yogyakarta, 30km from Mt Merapi.

Ngepringan is located within a 15km ring from the summit that the government had already evacuated on 3 November, two days before the eruption that sent thousands more fleeing.

"The deaths you read about are not caused by the volcano, but are people who did not follow orders to evacuate," said volcanologist and head of the government's Centre for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation, Surono, who issues volcano danger alerts and decides how large an area to evacuate. [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91013>]

There have been at least 150 recorded deaths linked to volcanic eruptions since 25 October as of 9 November, according to the government.

pt/mw

[END]

INDONESIA: How to mark out a volcano danger zone

YOGYAKARTA, 8 November 2010 (IRIN) - Demarcating the danger zone around an active volcano in Indonesia is far from an exact science, says the government volcanologist responsible for issuing alerts since the 25 October eruption of Mt Merapi in Central Java, which led to the evacuation of nearly 200,000 people.

The most recent explosion at midnight on 5 November nearly doubled the number of deaths linked to the eruption, the extent of the no-go zone surrounding the mountain, as well as the number of people displaced.

The evacuation zone expanded from 10km around the summit on 25 October to 15km on 3 November [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=90960>] to the current 20km [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90994>].

"Everyone is an expert when a volcano erupts and I do not want to be swayed by criticism in the media," government volcanologist Surono, who like many Indonesians uses a single name, told IRIN from Yogyakarta, about 30km from Merapi. Yogyakarta is where government disaster officials, regional medical staff, dozens of NGOs and 250 rescue workers are monitoring the volcano.

Below are parameters Surono considers before issuing volcano alerts:

Seismic energy: Excess energy of a volcano is measured through ground motion detection sensors (seismometers) placed throughout Merapi, which transmit continuous real-time data to five field posts near the summit. These readings are transferred to a central tower in Yogyakarta 30km away, which is now the only observatory frequented by scientists after the most recent evacuation. Like a heart-monitor reading, wave amplitude indicates motion. Readings broke 800cm - almost twice the level during three previous eruptions - when Surono upgraded the advisory level on the volcano to the highest level four on 25 October to indicate that an eruption was imminent or under way. Increased seismic activity is one sign of increased likelihood of eruption.

Chemical analysis: As magma - a mixture of liquid rock, crystals, and dissolved gas - nears the surface of a mountain and its pressure decreases, gases escape. Increasing levels of sulphur dioxide and the water level of released gases are other signs of the imminent arrival of magma - and a potentially explosive eruption.

Temperature: Changes in the temperature of groundwater are another clue. As magma enters a volcano it may cause changes in the groundwater system, increasing the water temperature and how much heat rises to the surface.

Ground deformation: Reflectors mounted at the mountain's summit use electric distance measurement and tools to measure the Earth's tilt to assess how the ground swells, which is one sign of how lava mounts. This "inflation rate" indicates the intensity and speed of pressure build-up.

Socio-economic context: After the 5 November eruption, which caught villagers outside the original 10km danger zone unawares and destroyed two villages in the hard-hit Cangkringan area where rescuers are still looking for bodies, criticism mounted that there should have been a 20km danger demarcation from the first signs of volcanic trouble rather than only 10km. Surono, however, defended the gradual expansion: "Yogyakarta is the country's second-leading tourist destination [after Bali]. We have tourists from around the world and many students studying here. A 20km evacuation too early would kill the economy and cause widespread panic."

Psychological impact: "Panic kills, not ash and small rocks," said Surono. Mountain dwellers have been hearing explosive sounds due to the larger-than-usual amount of molten rock stored in magma chambers. In past eruptions, most recently in 2006, there was only one underground pool of magma versus two now. "Widespread panic and fear can be as deadly as physical elements of the volcano and are equal considerations," he added.

When asked when he might shrink the danger zone, allowing residents camped throughout the city to return home, including more than 30,000 people living in a large sports stadium near the closed Yogyakarta airport, Surono replied that only time and science would determine when he would issue the alert. "I am a geologist, not a mystic. We are in a marathon [of volcano monitoring], not a sprint."

pt/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

08 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Thousands more to be evacuated from Merapi area

JAKARTA, 5 November 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesian authorities look set to evacuate thousands more residents near the Mount Merapi volcano on central Java island following fresh eruptions on 5 November, which resulted in about 60 deaths.

At least 265,000 people live in the 20km danger zone and as of 5 November, a total of 160,000 people had been evacuated to government-run emergency shelters in Sleman, Magelang, Klaten and Boyolali districts, the government reported.

"These people are at high risk and we are still trying to force them to move to the shelters," Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, director for disaster risk reduction at the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), told IRIN.

"The government will use force if necessary to protect the safety of the people," he said, noting some residents had ignored earlier government warnings and died.

Since 26 October, 104 people have lost their lives after Merapi erupted several times, the BNPB said.

The latest eruption, the strongest yet, started just after midnight, killing 60 people and seriously injuring another 200, mostly burned by clouds of hot gas and volcanic debris, the agency reported.

No figure was available for the number of emergency posts after the government expanded the exclusion zone from 10km to 20km. Initially there were 16 evacuation centres [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90960>] in the four districts.

"Some shelters have recently been moved farther away from the danger zones so we are still trying to rearrange things," Nugroho said.

About 27,000 people were staying in the new football stadium in Yogyakarta.

"Logistics are adequate but they need more sanitary facilities such as toilets, water and hygiene kits," he said.

Meanwhile, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said he was ordering the BNPB to take over the Merapi emergency response from the governments of Yogyakarta and Central Java provinces.

He also said the Indonesian Armed Forces [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90946>] would deploy health, engineering, infantry, marine and logistics brigades to help evacuate people, as well as build field hospitals, emergency shelters and public kitchens.

"It appears that the eruption will continue and it cannot be predicted when the hot clouds and lava flows will stop," he said.

"Because of that, I have decided to take these extraordinary measures as part of the emergency response," Yudhoyono said in a televised press conference at the Presidential Palace.

Yudhoyono said the government would compensate for livestock left behind by residents fleeing to emergency shelters, given reports that some villagers had returned to their homes fearing for the safety of their cattle and crops, risking their lives in the process.

"The government will buy the livestock for decent prices. We don't want people who have been hit by a disaster to be burdened by concerns about having to endure further losses," he said.

atp/ds/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

05 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: More camps to house Mt Merapi IDPs

JAKARTA, 3 November 2010 (IRIN) - The volcanic eruptions of Mt Merapi that began on 25 October in Indonesia's central Java region and continued on 3 November have displaced some 70,000 people, the government's national disaster management agency reports.

According to a UN multi-agency assessment from 28-30 October, the displaced are now spread out in 75 camps - soon to be 77.

Nine sites are in the city Yogyakarta, within 25km of the mountain; the remainder, housing more than 50,000 people, are farther away in central Java.

The survey noted little structural damage, still-functioning hospitals and food markets and tallied 38 recorded deaths and 28 injuries linked to the latest eruptions.

With the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) outstripping early local government estimates, IDP sites are over-capacity, with many of those fleeing the threat of more eruptions preferring to stay in concrete structures to avoid volcanic ash. The assessment noted an "urgent need" for better living conditions [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90893>] with the expected rains.

Poor rubbish collection, lack of sanitation facilities [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=90777>] and a shortage of water containers and hygiene kits have made waste management a "potential issue", noted the assessment.

Overall, the government's volcano early warning system appears to have worked well, said the deputy director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Knarik Kamalyan.

There are 150 active volcanoes in Indonesia, of which Merapi is one of the most active, according to the government's Centre of Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation.

Merapi is one of 16 volcanoes worldwide chosen in 1995 by the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior [<http://www.iavcei.org/IAVCEI.htm>], an NGO devoted to volcano research and disaster mitigation, as a "decade volcano" to watch due to its volatility and proximity to an urban centre.

"The only thing is if eruptions happen in an unpopulated area, we wouldn't know about it. It all depends where the mountain is," said OCHA's Kamalyan.

Yogyakarta has an estimated population of 396,000 people as of the 2010 census.

On 3 November, Mount Merapi erupted again, spewing huge clouds of ash into the sky.

pt/ds/mw

[END]

INDONESIA: Big country, big disasters

BANGKOK, 2 November 2010 (IRIN) - Concurrent disasters experienced in Indonesia in the week of 25 October - a volcano in central Java [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90893>] and an earthquake and tsunami off the southern coast of Sumatra [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90933>] - underscore the unique challenges this archipelago nation faces.

"Indonesia is a disaster-prone country and it's huge. Logistically there are many challenges when there is a disaster," Knarik Kamalyan, deputy head of office for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Jakarta, told IRIN on 2 November.

With more than 17,000 islands and 30 percent of the country's roads unpaved, moving response teams and relief assistance to where they are needed can be difficult, Kamalyan said.

"You might be able to get to the nearest air- or seaport, but then getting out to the affected area from there can be challenging if there are no roads or if the roads are flooded."

Those challenges were tested on 26 October when Mount Merapi, one of the country's most active volcanoes, erupted, following a tsunami triggered by an earthquake on the remote Mentawai Islands the night before, but 1,300km apart at opposite ends of the country.

"It's been very difficult to get supplies in [to Mentawai] because there are so many small islands. We couldn't get there by boat and had [a] limited time-frame by air because of the poor weather," explained Sri Dewanto, a specialist with the Indonesian National Agency for Disaster Management (BDPB) [<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/contacts/v.php?id=5011>].

Logistical challenges

With difficult weather conditions, limited access also makes obtaining an accurate picture of what is needed on the ground, and levels of displacement, not always possible.

While weather, geography and poor infrastructure pose considerable challenges to relief distribution once they have arrived on the scene, the sheer distance that aid has to travel just to get there in the first place can be a challenge.

"When a disaster happens the logistical supplies and relief aid are pushed out from Jakarta. It takes a long time," Dewanto said. "We have to get the army or the police to give us their helicopters. Sometimes it's difficult because you might be putting the pilot's life at risk."

If a disaster happens in remote Indonesia's western Papua Province, for example, relief assistance may have to travel up to 3,754km from Jakarta to Jayapura, the provincial capital - or almost the same distance between London and Baghdad.

But Indonesian authorities are well aware of the problems and continue to take steps to bolster response efforts.

On 1 November, the Indonesian House of Representatives approved US\$16.8 million in extra funds for natural disaster emergency response for disbursement until the end of this year, local media reported.

To improve relief coordination, the BDPB is planning logistical centres in six different regions throughout Indonesia to reduce the travel distance and improve response time.

Disaster-prone

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country with 250 million people, is also one of the most disaster-prone, being located in the "Pacific Ring of Fire".

According to Maplecroft's Natural Disaster Risk Index 2010 [http://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/natural_disasters.html], of 229 countries surveyed, Indonesia ranked second only to Bangladesh in terms of vulnerability.

On average, more than one million people are affected by disasters annually, the UN World Health Organization's disaster database [<http://www.emdat.be/>] reported.

In 2009 alone, Indonesia experienced 469 earthquakes with a magnitude of five or higher - more than any other nation, although most do not cause significant casualties. Many experts say it is the continuous small-scale tragedies, such as flooding, which accounted for 40 percent of Indonesia's disasters over the past few years, that take the highest toll. [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=88291>]

cm/ds/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

02 Nov 2010

INDONESIA: Tsunami survivors still await assistance

BETU MONGA, 1 November 2010 (IRIN) - Aid agencies are still struggling to reach survivors one week after a tsunami struck Indonesia's southern Mentawai islands.

"It is so difficult to get to these people," Andrew Judge, the head of SurfAid International [<http://www.surfaidinternational.org/>], which is working to assist the Indonesian Government and the UN in coordinating response efforts, told IRIN.

Storms and high seas over the past week have delayed the delivery of relief supplies, including tents, food and medical kits, to remote areas only accessible by boat, he said.

The Mentawais, a chain of about 70 islands and islets and home to some 68,000 inhabitants, was pummelled by a 3m-high tsunami triggered by a 7.7 magnitude earthquake off the coast of western Sumatra on 25 October.

According to the country's National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), at least 450 people are now confirmed dead, with another 96 still missing.

Some 27 villages in coastal areas were destroyed, with widespread damage from waves that struck as far as 600m inland.

More than 700 homes were damaged or destroyed. Six schools, eight places of worship, seven bridges, two resorts, one ship and 8km of roads were damaged.

Almost 15,000 people are now living in emergency shelters, the agency reported on 31 October.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported an urgent need for medical personnel, equipment and supplies.

Health problems

While the number of people left homeless has yet to be properly assessed due to difficulties in communication and transport, survivors have already begun suffering from diarrhoea, asthma and complications from infections.

"In the areas hit by the tsunami, people are dying from infections," Judge said, adding that shelter, food and clean water remained major concerns.

Ade Edward, head of the Regional Disaster Management Agency in West Sumatra, said an assessment was ongoing but was being hampered by the weather.

As part of its response, SurfAid's Emergency Response team, with funding from the New Zealand government, has hired the largest boat in the Mentawai fleet, the Indies Trader IV, to continue operating in the worsening ocean conditions.

On 30 October, the boat travelled to the east coast of Pagai Utara District and the southwest and southeastern tip of Pagai Selatan District, carrying 2,000 large tarpaulins, 3,000 mosquito nets, 1,000 hygiene kits, 1,000 building kits, 1MT of rice, 24,000 packets of noodles and medical supplies, SurfAid said.

The boat will pick up SurfAid staff from Sikakap, the main town in Pagai Utara District from where aid operations are being mobilized, including medical teams.

The Indonesian Red Cross has deployed three helicopters to drop aid supplies and transport seriously injured survivors to Bengkulu and Padang on mainland Sumatra.

"The biggest problem has been a lack of telecommunication links and transport," said Aswi Reksaningtyas, a spokeswoman for the Indonesian Red Cross. Some 21 Red Cross officials were on the ground to conduct an assessment, but had not been able to report back, she said.

The Red Cross has delivered family tents and 500 body bags and was sending 500 baby kits and another 500 family tents.

"Our first priority is to establish clean environments for the survivors," she said.

Reaching the survivors

Edward said seven helicopters, one Hercules military cargo plane and a smaller aircraft airdropped aid supplies in seven areas in Pagai Utara and Sipora districts on 31 October.

"Assistance has reached all areas affected by the tsunami," Edward said, noting, however, that bad weather had been forecast until 4 October, making sea travel too risky.

"We have enough aid workers and supplies but they are confined to Sikakap. Our challenge is to get them delivered," he said.

Edward said he expected food aid would continue for one month.

"Villages have been destroyed and people are still too traumatized to work, so we will continue to deliver food supplies until the economy is back on its feet again," he explained.

Meanwhile, for those affected back on the islands, the wait for assistance continues.

"We have enough supplies of food and medicine, but these people have not changed their clothes for three days," Januar, head of a hamlet in Betu Monga village, one of the worst-affected areas, said. Survivors are in urgent need of clothes and blankets.

At least 100 people are now confirmed dead in Betu Monga, with 77 still missing, local officials say.

atp/ds/mw[END]

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[Http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90933](http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90933)

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

01 Nov 2010

In Brief: Looking in the past to predict the next tsunami

Johannesburg, 29 October 2010 (IRIN) - Undersea earthquakes cause tsunamis which deposit enormous amounts of sediment along coastlines - which could offer scientists a clue as to when the next disaster might occur.

"Giant earthquakes repeat so you can predict future occurrence from past records," writes Kenji Satake of the Earthquake Research Institute at the University of Tokyo in Japan.

Geologists have deciphered layers of sand sheets dating back a few centuries in tsunami-prone Indonesia and Sri Lanka. We now know that the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which left 226,408 dead, has a predicted return period of 520 years, according to Hazmah Latief, a tsunami expert at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Indonesia, whose work is cited in the Asia Pacific Disaster Report.

He has calculated that tsunamis took place in Aceh and Meulaboh in Indonesia between AD 1290 and 1400, and have recurred every 600-1,000 years in Sri Lanka. However, effective earthquake and tsunami prediction appears still to be a long way off: The 7.7 Richter scale earthquake which struck Indonesia's Kepulauan Mentawai region off western Sumatra this week was not predicted: It left more than 400 dead.

jk/cb/oa

Integrated Regional Information Networks

29 Oct 2010

GENDER: Give women peacekeepers a chance

NEW YORK, 29 October 2010 (IRIN) - The consensus was "could do better" as senior government representatives met in New York to commemorate UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a decade-old commitment to strengthen the role of women in peace and security.

Ambassadors and government officials widely endorsed a Security Council decision on 27 October to create indicators to measure progress from now on.

"There's a need for the indicators so the UN can measure how many women are in peacekeeping, are mediators, and are in parliament across the spectrum," Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and co-chair of the UN civil society advisory group for women, peace and security, told IRIN. "Member states are afraid of that because if we start measuring performance you'll see how bad it is."

Two recent events have underlined the failures - as well as the hope: the gang rape of more than 280 women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo in July, and the recent appointment of former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, to head UN Women, to be launched in January 2011.

"Those rapes and our failure as an international community to bring that conflict to an end and to protect women and children in the process stands as a tragic rebuke to our efforts thus far," said US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Part of UN Women's mandate will be scaling-up programming in conflict zones. But gender equality activist Beatrice Aber, a member of Southern Sudan's Legislative Assembly, said its work was needed now.

"There are only two women at the negotiating table for the post-referendum arrangements," Aber said of Sudan's upcoming January referendum, as she marched with 150 other women activists to the Security Council. "Women are not being properly represented. People are not aware of what 1325 means, and if they are not aware it, there is no way to implement it."

Peacekeepers

A *recent report* about Indonesia, Colombia, Israel and Palestine, Liberia, Sri Lanka and Uganda highlights that women remain on the sidelines of peace-building because the resolution is only partially implemented by UN agencies in these conflict and post-conflict countries.

The report, *What the Women Say: Participation and UNSCR 1325*, by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology and the Washington-based International Civil Society Action Network, found that governments had failed to take the necessary steps to boost women's participation at crucial stages in a country's rebuilding.

"I felt that we were going to come here today and have countries tell us how fantastically they are doing," said Sanam Anderlini, the lead author of the report. "When you dig into what they are actually doing you realize that a lot of it, like the training, like the awareness-raising, isn't quite there."

Positive developments in the past 10 years include an increase in the number of women serving as *UN peacekeepers*, including all-female police peacekeeping units; an increase in training for soldiers on gender issues and sexual violence, and a rise in the percentage of women in national parliaments.

Yet the percentage of women in both military and police peacekeeping units remains below 10 percent of overall levels. Only 16 percent of peace agreements specifically address women's rights and needs.

"We have made some progress but not as much as we would have wanted," said UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Alain Le Roy. "The *challenges* ahead remain immense."

Enhanced national action plans, as well as nearly US\$44 million pledged by the US for empowering women in conflict zones, is an "important first step" for addressing some of those challenges, said Carla Koppell, director for the Institute for Inclusive Security, which documents and helps facilitate women's participation in peace-building. "But a plan is just that. It's a first step to implementation."

Full implementation of 1325 will require a "transformation of heart and mind" Koppell said, re-prioritizing peace negotiations to look beyond stopping immediate violence with "very narrow range of military actors ", often male, at the table.

al/oa/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

29 Oct 2010

INDONESIA: Volcano-displaced face increased health risks

JAKARTA, 27 October 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesian health authorities are warning of increased health risks for thousands of people displaced by the volcano eruption in central Java.

The Mount Merapi volcano [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90881>] erupted before dusk on 26 October, spewing clouds of extremely hot ash and covering entire neighbourhoods on its southern slope.

At least 28 people are now confirmed dead and 90 hospitalized for burns, the Health Ministry said in a statement on 27 October.

Local media reported that a three-month-old baby died after experiencing respiratory problems, while at least 26 people are now being treated in hospitals with respiratory problems caused by volcanic dust, Nelis Zulasri, a spokeswoman for the National Disaster Management Agency, said.

According to the World Health Organization, hot ash, gases, rock and magma cause skin and lung burns, asphyxiation, conjunctivitis or corneal abrasion, as well as acute respiratory problems.

In the case of ashfall, particularly with fine particles, bronchial asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions can be aggravated in children as well as in adults, the UN agency says.

Evacuation

As of 27 October, more than 22,000 villagers are staying in 10 government-run shelters in three districts - Magelang, Klaten and Boyolali - outside the 10km danger zone.

"Displaced people are prone to health problems such as upper respiratory infection, coughs and diarrhoea," Bondan Agus Suryanto, a doctor working with the Indonesian Red Cross in the disaster zone, told IRIN. So far, however, they had yet to see widespread cases in 10 of 60 barracks in four districts - Magelang, Klaten and Boyolali and Sleman - housing the displaced.

He said infants especially needed food to supplement breast milk.

The Health Ministry said it had distributed 50,000 face masks, 4MT of medicines, 6MT of baby food and 200 million rupiah (US\$22,000) in cash.

"Our efforts focus on evacuating victims, providing health services and preparing shelters for the displaced," the ministry said.

Evacuation order

The head of the Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation, Surono, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name, said he had ordered a mass evacuation when the volcano showed increased activity early on 26 October, prior to the eruption.

"But villagers refused to be moved. I'm sad that people have to die," he said.

Taslim, a 45-year-old farmer who fled his home in Kinahrejo village when the volcano erupted, said he initially did not want to leave because he was afraid his livestock and crops would be stolen.

"I was feeding my livestock when I heard a siren. Soon I heard a thunderous sound and saw ash raining down," he said. "We ran as fast as we could but some people did not make it," he said.

Accessing tsunami victims

Meanwhile, rescue workers began arriving on 27 October on Mentawai islands, where a tsunami triggered by a 7.5-magnitude earthquake the previous day killed 112 people and left at least 109 others missing, according to the National Disaster Management Agency.

The tsunami displaced 250 families, destroyed 179 homes and damaged 300 more, the agency said in a statement on its website.

Sixteen tons of aid were airlifted on 27 October, comprising 500 tents, 50 family tents, 500 mats, 80 blankets and 650 boxes of food, it said.

Vice-President Boediono visited the Mentawais the same day to oversee the rescue effort.

atp/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Oct 2010

INDONESIA: Government readies for possible volcano disaster

JAKARTA, 26 October 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesian authorities say they are ready to deal with a possible eruption of the Mount Merapi volcano on central Java island, a day after scientists upgraded its status to the highest alert.

Government agencies and aid groups have begun sending personnel and supplies to more than 60 evacuation points in Yogyakarta and Central Java provinces in anticipation of a mass evacuation.

Approximately 40,000 people live in the vicinity of the 2,914m mountain.

"Everybody, including the military and police, is ready to carry out an evacuation and secure the areas," Priyadi Kardono, a spokesman for the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), told IRIN on 26 October.

"The local government is much more prepared to deal with an eruption thanks to past experience and the predictability of the volcano's activity," he said.

One day earlier, volcanologists put areas within a 10km radius on red alert after Merapi showed increased activity, spewing lava down its southern slopes.

Kardono said 800 people living along its slopes and considered most vulnerable - children, elderly people and the disabled, from two villages - Kemiren and Kaliurang - in Magelang District had been moved to temporary shelters.

BNPB has sent a team of six people to conduct an assessment and deliver aid supplies, including 60 platoon tents, masks and 500 million rupiah in cash (US\$56,000).

The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) has distributed 3,000 masks, 750 blankets, 40 rolls of plastic sheeting and 25 family tents, said Ali Masyhar, an official with PMI's Central Java chapter.

Masyhar said four districts - Boyolali and Klaten in Central Java and Magelang and Sleman in Yogyakarta - were at risk in the event of an eruption. However, many residents were reluctant to leave their homes because they do not want to leave their crops and cattle unattended.

"They have gotten used to the situation and believe they know what to do in an event of an eruption," he said.

On 21 October PMI held a drill in Klaten attended by 400 people to prepare for a Merapi eruption, Masyhar said.

Two people were killed in Merapi's last eruption in 2006. A 1994 eruption killed 66 people. Its deadliest eruption on record occurred in 1930 when 1,370 people were killed.

In September this year, the Mount Sinabung volcano [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90379>] in North Sumatra Province, which had been dormant for more than 400 years, also erupted, forcing tens of thousands from their homes.

Meanwhile, news agencies reported that at least 23 people were killed and 167 missing after a tsunami, apparently triggered by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake on 25 October, near the Mentawai

ReliefWeb report — <http://reliefweb.int/node/372296>

islands off the coast of Sumatra, swept away villages.

atp/ds/mw[END]

CLICK ON LINK BELOW TO READ THE REPORT ONLINE

[Http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90881](http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90881)

Integrated Regional Information Networks

26 Oct 2010

ASIA: Five cities most at risk of natural disasters

BANGKOK, 20 October 2010 (IRIN) - Well-run, well-built cities can be among the safest places on earth to be when disaster strikes. However, where physical and social infrastructure is weak, they can be among the worst.

"Physical infrastructure, land-planning and the size of informal settlements are the biggest factors determining the impact of disasters on cities," said N.M.S.I. Arambepola, director of Urban Disaster Risk Management with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok. "With so many people migrating to the cities, many of the most vulnerable urban populations settle in the more disaster-prone areas where no one else wants to live."

The disparity between well-planned and well-built wealthy cities, and poorer ones, - called the "urban risk divide" by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in its *2010 World Disasters Report* [<http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2010/summaries.asp>] - is especially acute in Asia, where someone in the Philippines is up to 17 times more likely to be killed by a natural disaster than someone in Japan, although the likelihood and frequency of disaster in Japan is higher overall.

With seven of the 10 most populous cities in the world, and an urban population expected to double from 1.36 billion to 2.64 billion by 2030, according to the UN Population Fund, the UN's 2010-2011 disaster reduction campaign focusing on making cities more resilient [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90748>] is particularly relevant for Asia.

Tropical storms, [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?reportid=90556>] floods, [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=90690>] earthquakes [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?Reportid=87908>] and melting glaciers [<http://m.irinnews.org/90489.htm>] threaten urban populations in Asia, but where are the most dangerous cities to live if a natural disaster strikes?

Kathmandu, Nepal: Every year, settlements in Kathmandu valley experience floods and landslides but Kathmandu itself (population 1.5 million) is at particular risk. [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=72807>] Records show that an earthquake happens every 75 years in the city. The last one, in 1934, killed almost 20,000. Scientists are expecting another quake of about eight on the Richter scale, which according to the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) would kill at least 50,000 people and leave an estimated 900,000 homeless. The surrounding Himalayan peaks and limited number of roads in and out of the valley would make relief efforts very difficult. [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=90700>]

Manila, Philippines: Eighteen million residents of the Philippines largest city live in a coastal area prone to flooding during the June-November rainy season. Located in the "Pacific Ring of Fire", Manila residents are also at risk of volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and earthquakes, and are exposed to about 20 cyclones a year. The growth of slums, estimated to house almost three million people, according to the UN Human Settlements programme (UN-HABITAT), is particularly at risk of flooding and landslides.

Dhaka, Bangladesh: Almost 30 percent of the 14 million people in this city live in slums along the water's edge, exposing them to flooding. The Stanford-based earthquake disaster risk index [<http://www.geotecnica.unina.it/filipposan/old/1.2.pdf>] lists Dhaka as one of the 20 most vulnerable cities in the world to earthquakes.

Mumbai, India: The fourth largest city in the world with 20 million people, and 6.7 million slum dwellers, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is also one of the top 10 most vulnerable cities in terms of floods, storms and earthquakes. According to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), Mumbai is the most vulnerable in the world in terms of total population exposed to coastal flood hazard; it is among the world's top six cities most vulnerable to storm surges; and it lies on an earthquake fault-line. Like many of Asia's coastal mega-cities, most of the city is less than a metre above sea-level. With Mumbai accounting for almost 40 percent of the India's tax revenue, any serious catastrophe here could have drastic economic consequences for the country. [

http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media_centre/APMC/Mumbais%20quest%20for%20world%20citystatus.pdf
]

Jakarta, Indonesia: Forty percent of the land area of Jakarta is below sea-level. As a result, its 10 million inhabitants are at risk of flash floods, particularly along the 13 river systems which pass through the Jakarta region. Jakarta also has a moderate risk of earthquakes due to the country's location along the Indo-Asia subduction zone. With 60 percent of the nation's money circulating in this city, any serious disaster would have country-wide economic effects. Furthermore, the high population density, averaging 14,000 people per square kilometre, a significant portion of which are slum-dwellers, increases a disaster's potential to cause harm.

Sources: ISDR, Nepalese Red Cross Society, Earthquake Disaster Risk Index, UN-HABITAT, IFRC, WHO, Geoscience Australia

cm/cb

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

20 Oct 2010

INDONESIA: Disaster workers prepare for more flooding

BANGKOK, 6 October 2010 (IRIN) - Relief agencies are bracing for more floods after flash flooding and mudslides in eastern Indonesia killed at least 80 and injured another 90 on 4-5 October.

Indonesia, one of the most flood-prone countries in the world [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=88291>], was struck again on 4 October when heavy rains caused rivers to overflow, triggering landslides in the valleys of the mountainous West Papua province in eastern Indonesia.

"Flashfloods are quick, and instant, with a narrow window for response. We had one hospital damaged but the seriously injured were evacuated to the nearest one in Manokware [the provincial capital]," said an official with the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB), [<http://www.bnpb.go.id/>] who requested anonymity.

He added that with major access roads under water and several bridges destroyed, rescue workers were using helicopters and boats to transport evacuation equipment, medical teams, shelters, bedding, clothes and food.

Experts across Asia are predicting a spike in flooding in the region due to La Niña - the counterpart of El Niño - a weather phenomenon characterized by cooling temperatures in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, which is expected to increase rainfall over the western half of the ocean region, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and northern Australia.

"We will have more rain than in previous years, with the flooding situation peaking in November," said Ignacio Leon, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Indonesia.

Almost 4,000 people have been killed by flooding in Indonesia over the past decade according to the UN World Health Organization's disaster database, EM-DAT [<http://www.emdat.be/>].

Since June 2010, OCHA estimates 65,000 people have been affected by floods in Indonesia and 44ha of rice fields destroyed.

cm/pt/mw[END]

CLICK ON LINK BELOW TO READ THE REPORT ONLINE

[Http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90690](http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90690)

Integrated Regional Information Networks

06 Oct 2010

INDONESIA: Volcano-displaced return home

JAKARTA, 27 September 2010 (IRIN) - Almost one month after the unexpected eruption of the Mount Sinabung volcano in North Sumatra Province, thousands of residents who fled to emergency shelters have begun returning home, officials say.

The National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) declared the emergency period over on 24 September, a day after authorities lowered the alert status one level from the highest.

Residents living beyond the radius of 3km from the volcano were allowed to go home. As of 27 September only 2,000 people remained in two of the 11 government-run shelters, said Chairunsyah Nasution, field coordinator for the Indonesian Red Cross.

"Some of the displaced people were sick [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?Reportid=90332>], but we have enough food and medicine," he told IRIN, adding that the Red Cross would work there until 4 October.

Mount Sinabung erupted for the first time after 400 years on 29 August, forcing 30,000 villagers in Karo District to seek refuge in government-run shelters. Five more major eruptions followed, some bigger than the first.

One of those remaining in one of the shelters, Adi Teo, 41, said he could not wait to get home to tend his cattle and crops.

"It's boring here and we keep thinking about our work. I have a farm, goats and plants, such as tomatoes and chili, which should be taken care of," he said. "We have to make a living," he added.

Paten Sitepu, the head of Sukanalu village, said the shelters were crowded.

"There are too many people in each tent. Sometimes, it's hard for us to breathe," he said. "People are bored as they don't have any activity and children need to go to school," he said.

BNPB spokesman Priyadi Kardono said residents from three villages near the volcano - Bekerah, Sukameriah and Simacem - had not been allowed to go home because they remained at risk.

"[Everybody else has] been allowed to go home because the alert status has been lowered," he said.

"But our workers are still on stand-by on the ground," he added.

In another development, the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation raised the alert status for Karangetang volcano to orange, one level below the highest, on 23 September.

The volcano, located on Siau island, north of Sulawesi island, erupted on 6 August, leaving four people injured and forcing 16 families to flee to safety.

Indonesia [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?Reportid=90379>], situated on a belt of intense seismic activity known as the Pacific Ring of Fire, has the largest number - 129 - of active volcanoes on earth and a history of devastating volcanic disasters.

According to Maplecroft's Natural Disasters Risk Index 2010 [http://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/natural_disasters.html], of 229 countries surveyed, Indonesia ranked second only to Bangladesh in terms of vulnerability to natural disasters.

ReliefWeb report — <http://reliefweb.int/node/369000>

atp/ds/mw

[END]

CLICK ON LINK BELOW TO READ THE REPORT ONLINE

[Http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90591](http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=90591)

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Sep 2010

INDONESIA: Eruption spotlights "severe" volcano threat

JAKARTA, 3 September 2010 (IRIN) - The eruption of Mount Sinabung for the first time in 400 years has highlighted the urgent need for Indonesian authorities to boost disaster preparedness, experts warn.

"This is a challenge. We should study a volcano's pattern of activity so that we can draw up guidelines to anticipate such a disaster," said Wisnu Wijaya, director of disaster risk reduction at the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

Mount Sinabung volcano [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=90332>] in North Sumatra took the country by surprise, bubbling over after 400 dormant years and forcing 30,000 villagers to seek refuge in government-run shelters.

In the early hours of 3 September, Sinabung spewed a column of hot ash 3km into the air in the biggest eruption since 25 and 26 August.

Even though it has the largest number - 129 - of active volcanoes on Earth and a history of devastating volcanic disasters, Indonesia has very few scientists watching these potential hazards.

Disaster risk reduction became more of an issue after the 2004 tsunami, but a lack of official awareness of the importance of volcano monitoring and the potential link between eruptions and earthquakes persists, said Wahyu Triyoso, a geophysicist at Indonesia's Bandung Institute of Technology.

"A major earthquake like in Aceh may have triggered a volcanic surge by waking up dormant volcanoes," Triyoso said, referring to the quake that triggered the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed more than 170,000 in Aceh province.

Indonesia sits on a belt of intense seismic activity known as the "Pacific Ring of Fire".

The Sinabung eruption should serve as a wake-up call for authorities to step up the monitoring of volcanoes around the islands, Wijaya said.

Waiting for warning

BNPB chairman Syamsul Maarif said a 2007 law on disaster mitigation required every region to map its vulnerability to disasters, but only a few have complied.

"We keep pushing the local governments to do it," Maarif said. "When a disaster happens, they can't wait for the Jakarta-based BNPB team to arrive there in a short time and they should be able to help themselves before more help comes."

Before the latest eruption, about 10,000 people who had fled the first eruptions had returned to their villages to tend their crops, despite warnings from volcanologists that Mount Sinabung was still dangerous, said BNPB spokesman Priyadi Kardono.

"Some villagers return to their fields during the day to harvest crops and go back to the shelters at night," Kardono said. "As long as they are in the shelters, they are safe."

Surono, director of the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation, said he had advised local authorities overnight to order villagers who returned to their homes within a 6km radius

of Mount Sinabung to go back to the temporary shelters.

According to the BNPB, two-thirds of the 30,000 who fled the volcano remain in 20 government shelters in Karo as of 3 September.

atp/nb/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

03 Sep 2010

INDONESIA: Health concerns in volcano evacuation centres

JAKARTA, 30 August 2010 (IRIN) - Many of the 30,000 people evacuated after the eruption of Mount Sinabung on the Indonesian island of Sumatra to government emergency centres need urgent medical care, aid workers say.

"They have started suffering diarrhoea and respiratory problems. Many villagers need immediate medical help," said Irsal, field coordinator for the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI).

Irsal, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name, said the Red Cross had already distributed 8,500 masks to protect residents against the volcano's fumes.

"The number of displaced villagers is likely to increase and distribution of humanitarian assistance remains uneven," he said.

Heidi Hasibuan, a 36-year-old civil servant who fled to the provincial capital Medan, complained that help had been slow in coming, with little warning of the impending disaster.

"Many of us have not received assistance from the government, not even a mask, and I'm worried as the smog is very thick," he complained.

He said there had been no warning from the government. "We were not prepared," he said.

Dormant for 400 years, Mount Sinabung first erupted on 29 August; a day later, it erupted again, sending hot ash 2,000m into the air, according to the government-run Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

"Most villagers within the volcano's 6km radius have now been evacuated," Priyadi Kardono, a National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) spokesman, told IRIN on 30 August.

"Under control"

However, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this is a considerably low-impact event compared with other disasters that strike the country.

"At this point, the situation looks under control," Ignacio Leon-Garcia, OCHA head of office, said from Jakarta. "We have been in contact with local and central government and no international assistance has been requested."

Nevertheless, authorities are keeping a close watch on the situation.

"We have to be alert at a time like this," Surono, director of the Volcanology centre, who also goes by only one name, said.

According to Maplecroft's Natural Disasters Risk Index 2010, of 229 countries surveyed, Indonesia ranked second only to Bangladesh in terms of vulnerability to natural disasters.

atp/ds/mw

30 Aug 2010

INDONESIA/HAITI: Lessons for earthquake recovery

JAKARTA, 27 August 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesia's reconstruction

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89501>] after the 2004 tsunami is proving to be a compass for Haiti's efforts to avoid corruption and build back better, [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89831>], specialists say.

Experts attribute much of Indonesia's recovery to the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), [<http://know.brr.go.id/Modules/Home-Accordion/about-brr.html>] a centralized Indonesian government-funded group charged with making Aceh and Nias - the cities hardest hit - more resilient to disaster, while minimizing corruption.

Resemblance between the BRR and the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC)

[<http://www.cirh.ht>] is most apparent in an emerging anti-corruption office and third-party monitoring system in Haiti, but nearly nine months after the earthquake crippled Haiti's nerve centre, it is still a work in progress.

"Those who conceptualized the IHRC... referred to the Indonesian model," said Jean-Claude Lebrun, IHRC union representative. "But while in Indonesia they had to rebuild the economy of one region, here we have to completely rebuild."

To monitor the US\$7.7 billion of relief money that poured into Indonesia's recovery effort, the government imposed rigorous costing standards for project proposals and set up an anti-corruption unit to monitor spending.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87971>]

The benefits of implementing such measures were worth the enormous cost, said William Palitondok Sabandar, former BRR chief of Nias recovery.

Managing corruption

According to Transparency International, the poorest nation in the western Hemisphere is also seen as one of the most corrupt, ranking 168th out of 180 countries surveyed in 2009.

[http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table]

Haiti must focus on accounting for funds spent just as much as Indonesia did, which was ranked 44th at the time of its disaster, said Joe Leitmann, founder of the World Bank affiliated Multi-Donor Fund (MDF) for Aceh and Nias, and now head of the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (HRF),

[www.haitireconstructionfund.org] one of several sources of reconstruction money overseen by the IHRC.

The BRR established a comprehensive database with GPS technology based on the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs online Financial Tracking Service, to allow donors and the public to track assistance.

Haiti is emulating this idea through a "hotline" that will allow anonymous corruption phone-in reports, said Denis Dufresne, an IHRC spokesman.

"The anti-corruption office will fill the gaps in the system of supervision and permit the alignment of development activities with international standards," Dufresne said.

Building back better

The tsunami claimed an estimated 170,000 lives in Aceh province, on Sumatra Island, and around 1,000 more on Nias, a small island off Sumatra's west coast, but did not affect the capital, leaving the government in a position to give \$2 billion in relief aid to Aceh and Nias.

In contrast, Haiti's 7.0 magnitude quake wiped out government offices, including the presidential and justice palaces. It killed 222,570, injured 300,000, and destroyed or damaged 285,000 houses in Port-au-Prince and much of southern Haiti, according to government statistics. HRF estimates \$5.3 billion has been pledged to the recovery effort as of end-March.

There is little physical evidence today of the devastation wrought in Aceh, where infrastructure repair was a government priority.

"In Indonesia, we considered two scenarios. We could build back the way things were, or we could upgrade infrastructure, social services and rebuild with a vision," Leitmann said. "We costed the two, and in the end, the upgrade was pursued."

Haiti's government has applied a similar strategy.

"Because we can't go back to before January 12, we have to create something new," Lebrun said. "We are working on this through our emphasis on anti-duplication of projects, on management of expenses to avoid waste, and our philosophy that reconstruction has to be for the majority - we have to heal the nation as a whole."

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[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Aug 2010

ASIA: When hospitals become casualties

BANGKOK, 26 August 2010 (IRIN) - Governments and donors have responded to increasingly frequent and more deadly disasters by boosting funding for response, but investing in preparation, especially in the health sector, is inadequate, say specialists.

"Emergency preparedness is an afterthought for many hospitals," said Jonathan Abrahams, coordinator of the World Health Organization (WHO) Safe Hospitals initiative [<http://www.safehospitals.info/>], which helps countries reinforce medical centres to withstand disasters.

The Philippines and Indonesia are two of nine countries working with the Bangkok-based Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) that have emergency preparedness plans in place for their health sectors. The others are Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Pakistan.

"Even poor countries can strap their equipment to a wall to decrease the risk of expensive equipment tumbling over and being destroyed in an earthquake," said Frederick John Abo, deputy head of a US-funded programme at ADPC helping to design the programmes.

"Where are the hospital records stored? The water lines and electricity generator? These are questions that can save lives and money," said Abo. "So many countries do not see the importance of those plans and try to use other hospital emergency plans, taking them from the internet, not realizing that the risks and needs are different for each hospital. I have seen plans where the original hospital name was not removed after it was downloaded."

Experts calculate that from the design stage, it costs an additional 4 percent to make a building resilient against disasters.

Budget response

Countries in Asia are most at risk for natural disasters.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89305>] Since January this year - excluding the Pakistan floods [<http://www.irinnews.org/Asia-Country.aspx?Country=PK>] - one million people have been affected and an estimated 321 have died in natural disasters in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka, according to the Belgium-based emergency events database [<http://www.emdat.be/>] run by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. In Pakistan, flooding has destroyed 1.2 million homes, killed at least 1,600 people and affected another 17 million, based on UN estimates. Almost 400 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, according to WHO.

Even for governments that want to prepare their health sectors for the worst, budget traditions steer their focus from preparation to response, said Margareta Wahlström, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

"Indonesia has come a very long way since the tsunami, but [the government] still [has not] yet really decided . how to move some of these [budget] resources from a fund for responses to prevention," Wahlström told IRIN in June.

After hearing an interview with a local official from the Indonesian city of Padang [<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=86480>], rocked by a 7.6 magnitude earthquake in 2009, describing how he had repeatedly asked for help from the central government to reinforce the city against earthquakes, Wahlström put the question to the chairman of the national budgetary and planning committee.

"He said it [was] true. [He told me:] 'We have no allocation in our national budget for prevention. We have not yet decided how to handle prevention investments.' But they are working on it now,'" Wahlström said.

Preparation

The WHO's Abrahams told IRIN that monies coming in after a disaster tended to go to international agencies, doing little to help improve local capacity for the next one. "Mechanisms are well established to respond to a disaster, but we are not sorted out yet on how to reduce risk. Resources go to the international response community - UN organizations, international NGOs. We need to also build community and national capacities [to face disasters]."

Donors are often bound by systems that authorize releasing emergency funds only once disaster hits, said Wahlström. "Part of the challenge is a lot of the resources donors have given to risk reduction [are] from humanitarian budget lines, but really where they need to get the resources from is the developmental side."

As disasters become more frequent and deadly, donors will be forced to find new ways to help countries prepare, Wahlström said.

According to a doctor and health researcher from India, Shisir Ranjan Dash, relief is short-lived. "Usually the donors support the short-term relief and rehabilitation interventions in post-emergency situations, but [the] already over-burdened healthcare system of poor developing countries needs long-term support. in improving its human resources and infrastructure to deal with the disaster recovery process."

pt/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

26 Aug 2010

ASIA: 10 deadliest quakes

BANGKOK, 25 August 2010 (IRIN) - In Asia, the most disaster-prone part of the world, earthquakes are the deadliest natural hazard. Seven of the 10 most earthquake-vulnerable countries in terms of human exposure - China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran - are in the region, according to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) [<http://www.unisdr.org>].

"Most of our Asian cities were not planned. When they were built, there was no way to know they were on fault-lines," N.M.S.I. Arambepola, director of Urban Disaster Risk Management at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center [<http://www.adpc.net/v2007/>] in Bangkok, told IRIN. "So now we are telling people, 'Here's the way to reduce the impact of a disaster so that the city will be prepared.' "

Asia's 10 most recent and deadliest quakes, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) [<http://www.usgs.gov/>], were:

INDONESIA:

A total of 227,898 people died when a 9.1 earthquake shook Sumatra, Indonesia, on 26 December 2004. A subsequent tsunami spread the impact of the earthquake to 14 Asian and East African countries and 1.7 million people. Just three months later another quake, measuring 8.6, killed 1,000 people on 28 March 2005 in Northern Sumatra.

[<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2005/usweax/>]

5,749 people died in a 6.3 earthquake on 27 May 2006 in Java. It was Indonesia's third major disaster in less than two years. And 1,117 people died on 30 September 2009 in Southern Sumatra after a 7.5 earthquake exposed the area's lack of resilient structures.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86480>]

CHINA:

87,587 people died or went missing after an earthquake measuring 7.9 struck Eastern Sichuan on 12 May 2008. Five million were left homeless and 374,177 were injured.

[<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2008/us2008ryan/>]

2,698 people died or went missing on 13 April 2010 after a 6.9 earthquake hit Qinghai. The biggest quake in world history happened in Shaanxi, where 830,000 people died after an 8.0 earthquake on 1 January 1556.

PAKISTAN:

86,000 people died in Muzaffargarh, 95km northeast of Islamabad, the capital, after a 7.6 earthquake struck on 8 October 2005. [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=134>]

IRAN:

31,000 people died in a 6.6 earthquake in Bam, in the southeast, on 26 December 2003 - the largest in the region in 2,000 years. Reports estimated that 70 percent of the city was devastated.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=41016>] Rebuilding was a slow process.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=40478>]

INDIA:

20,085 people died in Bhuj on 26 January 2001; the quake measured 7.6 on the Richter scale. The Indian government estimated that 15.9 million people, nearly half the population of Gujarat Province, were affected by the disaster.

TURKEY:

17,118 people died in a 7.6 earthquake in Izmit, in Western Turkey [http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eq_depot/1999/eq_990817/], on 17 August 1999. The earthquake also caused considerable damage in Istanbul, the country's largest city, about 70 km away from the earthquake's epicentre. The USGS likens Turkey's North Anatolian fault to the San Andreas in California.

nb/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

25 Aug 2010

INDONESIA: Economic marginalization fuelling conflict in Papua

JAKARTA, 13 August 2010 (IRIN) - INDONESIA: Economic marginalization fuelling conflict in Papua

JAKARTA, 13 August 2010 (IRIN) - Economic marginalization of the indigenous population in Indonesia's easternmost Papua region is fuelling conflict, experts and activists warn.

Papua, home to ethnic Melanesians, has experienced a low-level separatist conflict for decades, while a recent political standoff with the central government over political representation has sparked growing calls for a referendum on the region's status.

"If you go to small towns in highland Papua, every single store will be owned by a non-Papuan. This is the only part of Indonesia [where] every store is owned by a non-Papuan," said Brigham Golden, a Papua scholar from Columbia University in the United States.

There have been several incidents this year when migrants were attacked and killed in Papua. In May, a migrant store owner was killed and another injured when gunmen attacked them in Puncak Jaya Highland District, police said.

Golden said violence interpreted as political resistance was in fact cultural.

"Western Indonesians are perceived as a kind of incursion of a tribe. It's not really separatism per se but it's a kind of cultural resistance to cultural incursions," he told a discussion organized by the Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club on 12 August.

Frederika Korain, an activist with a Papua-based NGO, the Office of Justice and Peace, said the influx of migrants from other parts of Indonesia was causing a population imbalance and warned of "disastrous" consequences.

In some towns migrants were already the majority, she said. "They benefit from economic opportunities. So many new buildings, supermarkets, [but] who are the owners? Where does the money go? Does it go to Papuans?"

Earlier this year, government plans [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88571>] to develop a food estate in Papua came under fire for potentially marginalizing small farmers and threatening the environment.

Korain said in remote areas, indigenous Papuans had no access to health services, education or economic opportunities.

Political impasse

The International Crisis Group (ICG) [<http://www.crisisgroup.org/>] warned that a political impasse - after the government's recent rejection of an initiative that all candidates in district elections be indigenous Papuans - could fuel radicalization.

The initiative, proposed by the Papuan People's Council, stemmed from fears that Melanesian Papuans were being rapidly swamped by non-Papuan Indonesians, the ICG said.

But the government in Jakarta argues such a requirement would violate national laws and be discriminatory.

"The gulf between the two might be reduced by dialogue, but any prospect of serious talks is hampered by an unwillingness of Jakarta to treat the problem as essentially a political, rather than an economic one," the ICG said.

The group urged President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to talk to credible Papuan leaders about how political autonomy could be expanded, affirmative action policies strengthened in all sectors and fears about immigration addressed.

"Unless these three issues are tackled head-on in face-to-face meetings, the impasse is unlikely to be broken and increased radicalization is likely," it said.

Johannes Djonga, a Papuan Catholic priest, said increasing tension between migrants and indigenous Papuans was causing concern.

"So far there have not been major ethnic frictions but everywhere I go, people express similar complaints: that they are helpless because whatever they do is futile because they have to compete with migrants with capital and skills," he told IRIN.

He said local small traders were forced to sell their goods on the streets because they could not afford to rent space in the markets.

According to human rights groups, despite its huge natural resources, the region remains one of the poorest and least developed in Indonesia.

In 2001, Papua, Indonesia's largest province, was granted special autonomy status in an attempt to reduce renewed calls for independence. After its original short-lived independence, the region was temporarily administered by the UN before being officially annexed by Indonesia in 1969.

ap/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

13 Aug 2010

MONDE: Voyage au cour d'un système humanitaire de plus en plus complexe

DAKAR, 30 juillet 2010 (IRIN) - A l'heure où le « système » humanitaire se complique, avec l'arrivée de nouveaux acteurs et le recoupement des mandats, les différentes définitions de l'aide humanitaire, et des objectifs toujours plus ambitieux, Development Initiatives [<http://www.devinit.org/>], organisme de surveillance de l'aide humanitaire, présente certaines tendances observées ces 10 dernières années en matière de besoins, d'interventions et de financements dans son rapport 2010 sur l'Aide humanitaire mondiale (GHA, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/about-gha>).

Voici quelques-unes de ses conclusions :

Les financements privés, l'étoile montante

En 2009, l'organisation non gouvernementale (ONG) Médecins sans frontières a reçu 845 millions de dollars de fonds privés, soit une somme équivalente à celle versée par le quatrième principal pays donateur.

L'aide totale reçue en dehors de l'Appel éclair (Flash appeal) ONG-Nations Unies lancé en faveur des victimes du séisme survenu en Haïti était trois fois supérieure aux financements accordés dans le cadre de cet appel, et excédait la somme totale sollicitée par l'appel.

« Depuis 2005, de nombreuses initiatives ont été menées pour fédérer le système humanitaire ; mais qu'en est-il des acteurs restés en marge du système ? », a demandé Jan Kellett, directeur de programme de la GHA. « Il y a quelques bailleurs très importants hors CAD [Comité d'aide au développement des pays membres de l'OCDE] ; et les fonds privés permettent aux ONG de choisir avec plus de flexibilité à quoi elles les allouent, ce qui peut être problématique pour le système, parce qu'on ne sait pas ce qui a été financé et ce qui ne l'a pas été ».

L'aide humanitaire a augmenté de 3,1 milliards de dollars en 2009, par rapport à 2006, malgré une chute de 11 pour cent de l'aide gouvernementale déclarée en 2009 ; les contributions privées ont augmenté de 50 pour cent depuis 2006, atteignant 4,1 milliards de dollars.

Depuis 2000, année après année, l'aide humanitaire représente en moyenne 8,35 pour cent de l'aide publique au développement accordée par les gouvernements des pays membres du CAD.

Plusieurs catastrophes très médiatisées ont provoqué des pics d'aide humanitaire, à la suite desquels l'aide a chuté de nouveau, sans toutefois revenir aux niveaux précédant le pic. On peut citer parmi ces catastrophes : le Kosovo (1999), l'Irak et l'Afghanistan (2003), le tsunami dans l'océan Indien et le séisme au Cachemire (2005) ; et des pics moins marqués pour l'Afghanistan et l'Ethiopie en 2008.

Les « bailleurs non traditionnels » (hors pays membres du CAD) ont octroyé 224 millions de dollars en 2009, une diminution importante par rapport au 1,1 milliard de dollars accordé en 2008 et constitué en grande partie d'une contribution de l'Arabie saoudite en faveur de la crise alimentaire, versée au Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM).

L'Arabie saoudite était le premier bailleur hors CAD en 2009, avec 51,8 millions de dollars versés ; suivie des Emirats arabes unis, du Koweït et de la Fédération russe : les premiers bénéficiaires étaient les Territoires palestiniens occupés, avec 99,7 millions de dollars reçus ; suivis du Pakistan et de l'Afghanistan.

Les interventions en situation de conflit, une priorité

Environ 71 pour cent de l'aide accordée en 1999-2008 a été consacrée aux pays touchés par les conflits. Les cinq principaux bénéficiaires de l'aide humanitaire publique et privée en 2009 étaient le Soudan, la République démocratique du Congo (RDC), la Somalie, l'Éthiopie et le Zimbabwe.

L'aide accordée par les bailleurs non humanitaires aux activités liées à la résolution des conflits, à la paix et à la sécurité s'est multipliée par 20 entre 1998 et 2008, en particulier dans les domaines de la réforme des secteurs du maintien de la paix et de la sécurité ; l'aide humanitaire a quant à elle doublé sur la même période.

Environ 34 armées nationales ont déployé leurs soldats en Haïti, à la suite du séisme.

Les coûts et les effectifs des opérations de maintien de la paix ont atteint des sommets jamais égalés en 2009 : 7,4 milliards de dollars ont été accordés aux missions de maintien de la paix des Nations Unies, pour permettre de financer les postes de 98 000 employés ; et l'on comptait également 112 000 soldats de maintien de la paix non onusiens, selon le Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Huit missions de maintien de la paix onusiennes visant à protéger les populations civiles sont actuellement opérationnelles ; elles ont l'autorisation d'avoir « recours à la force pour protéger les civils sous la menace imminente de violences physiques ». Les plus importantes missions de maintien de la paix des Nations Unies sont menées au Soudan, en RDC, au Liberia, au Liban et en Haïti.

« Une des conclusions les plus importantes concerne le fait que nous ne pourrions tout simplement pas mettre convenablement en œuvre [l'aide humanitaire] si nous ne parvenons pas à cerner la complexité de tous les acteurs et des fonds », a estimé M. Kellett. « L'aide humanitaire n'évolue pas dans un silo et ne peut pas en soi devenir un élément isolé ».

L'évaluation des besoins, pas encore exacte

Il est très difficile d'estimer dans quelle mesure l'aide humanitaire permet de répondre aux besoins [<http://www.irinnews.org/fr/reportfrench.aspx?Reportid=88724>], car il n'existe pas encore de moyen uniforme, complet et objectif d'évaluer les besoins, a dit la GHA.

À l'heure actuelle, la plupart des évaluations des besoins n'ont pas encore été rendues publiques.

S'il est vrai qu'aujourd'hui encore, le Processus d'appels consolidé (CAP) mené par les Nations Unies est souvent considéré comme un signe de besoins, il « souligne ce que les organismes opérant dans un pays pensent pouvoir accomplir dans le cadre de programmes qu'ils pensent pouvoir entreprendre au profit des populations qu'ils pensent pouvoir aider. L'ampleur et la gravité véritables des besoins restent hors de portée [du CAP] ».

En outre, de nombreux besoins humanitaires ne sont pas pris en compte dans les CAP. En 2009, sept milliards de dollars ont été accordés dans le cadre du processus d'appels des Nations Unies et plus de 4,1 milliards de dollars supplémentaires d'aide humanitaire ont été versés en dehors de ce processus ; 2,7 milliards de dollars, sollicités dans le cadre de l'appel, n'ont pas été accordés.

Qui reçoit quoi ?

L'aide aux victimes du tsunami de 2004 s'élevait en moyenne à 2 670 dollars par habitant ; en Haïti, elle atteignait 993 dollars ; et 58 dollars en RDC (soit un décuplement par rapport à la décennie précédente, dans le cas de la RDC).

Les aides ont augmenté dans tous les secteurs, proportionnellement aux augmentations globales de l'aide humanitaire. L'aide alimentaire a quadruplé ces 10 dernières années ; parmi les secteurs ne bénéficiant que de maigres financements, figurent le secteur du déminage, les services de coordination et de soutien, et la protection.

Si l'aide à la protection a doublé pour atteindre 385 millions de dollars entre 2003 et 2009, les niveaux de financement restent toutefois systématiquement insuffisants dans ce secteur. Les interventions internationales post-catastrophes naturelles restent réactives, et non proactives, et les secteurs de la prévention et de la préparation luttent encore pour recevoir l'attention et les fonds qu'ils méritent ; de même que le secteur de l'éducation.

Ces trois dernières années, 60 pour cent de l'aide accordée par les bailleurs de fonds membres du CAD ont été versés principalement par le biais d'organismes des Nations Unies ; un peu moins de 25 pour cent ont été accordés aux ONG et aux organismes de la société civile ; 0,4 pour cent aux ONG des pays en développement ; et 0,2 pour cent au Mouvement international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge.

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[FIN]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

30 Jul 2010

GLOBAL: Could be a busy season for disasters

JOHANNESBURG, 8 July 2010 (IRIN) - The La Niña phenomenon has officially arrived and disaster response teams around the world might need to brace themselves for heavier monsoons, bigger and more frequent hurricanes, and angrier cyclones.

"There is global consensus that we are at the beginning of a La Niña, but we cannot pronounce the intensity of the event yet - we have to wait for it to evolve," said Rupa Kumar Kolli, Chief of the World Climate Applications and Services Division at the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

La Niña is characterised by unusually cold ocean temperatures in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean; El Niño is characterised by high temperatures, the US government's National Aeronautics and Space Administration says on its website.

The colder-than-normal ocean temperatures prevent rain-producing clouds from forming over the eastern equatorial Pacific region, including the open ocean south of Mexico and Central America, but enhance rainfall over the western equatorial Pacific region of Indonesia, Malaysia and northern Australia.

This in turn affects the jet streams, or strong wind-flows, in the upper levels of the atmosphere and the behaviour of storms outside of the tropics in both the northern and southern hemispheres. In short, La Niña is a global phenomenon.

The National Hurricane Centre at the US government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has been expecting a La Niña to occur, and by May 2010 predicted a 70 percent chance that there would be 14 to 23 named storms, with wind speeds of more than 62km per hour. This is far more than the average of 11 named storms during the hurricane season in the Atlantic region, which began in June.

The first hurricane of the season, Alex, hit Mexico on 30 June. NOAA said it was the first hurricane to be recorded in June in the Atlantic Basin since 1995, and the strongest in that month since 1966.

On the Caribbean side of Central America, La Niña is bad news for vulnerable islands such as Haiti, which is still recovering from the earthquake that struck it in January 2010.

Africa

Cobus Olivier, a scientist in the Prediction Research section of the South African Weather Service, said the possible impact of La Niña on Africa, and particularly southern Africa, was unclear. "At the moment the La Nina event is only starting out and will most probably take a month or two before it's considered a true La Niña event."

He said it was very difficult to predict the impact as this could vary within the African region and from one La Niña event to another. La Niña is usually associated with more rain, but an analysis of rainfall patterns for African countries south of the equator tells a different story.

Olivier and his colleagues used rainfall data collected during La Niña events from 1961 to 2002, for the months of August, September and October, when the event is expected to be more pronounced.

"Uganda and the southern parts of Sudan usually seem to have wetter conditions during La Niña ... but parts of Angola, DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia and Madagascar tend towards drier conditions," he said.

In South Africa the situation is "very variable", but "Generally it looks like we may have spring rains [in September-October], and this is also supported by our latest forecast."

Southeast Asia

Meteorologists in Southeast Asia, where the monsoon season is underway, have predicted a normal monsoon, Kolli said. The region struggled with poor rains caused by an El Niño that affected food production in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand.

"But if the La Niña gets more pronounced, there is a stronger chance of monsoon depressions turning into cyclones that would affect Bangladesh and its surrounding areas [India and Myanmar], with heavier monsoons leading to flooding and mudslides."

July is the time of year when cyclonic storms, known as typhoons in the northwest Pacific, start rolling in, but Kolli said there was not a "very strong association between the La Niña event and typhoons."

jk/he

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

08 Jul 2010

INDONESIA: Deforestation leading to fewer resources, more disasters

MUARA SIAU, 1 July 2010 (IRIN) - Wisnawati used to make three million rupiah (US\$325) a month tapping rubber trees, but now, after years of rampant deforestation, she farms rice and coffee and is lucky to bring in half that each month.

"We used to get everything we needed from the forest - wood for our homes, our daily meals. We can't do that any more because there's just not enough," said Wisnawati, 35, who owns a small farm in Lubuk Birah, a village of about 350 people in Indonesia's Muara Siau City, Jambi Province.

For generations villagers have extracted and sold honey and nilam plant oil - used as cooking oil and to make cosmetics. But most have had to find a secondary source of income as resources run thin, the result of a 20-year selective logging concession held by an Indonesian timber company on 490 sqkm of Merangin District forest surrounding the village.

Home to 10 percent of the world's tropical rainforest, Indonesia is clearing its forests faster than any other country, losing 51 sqkm a day, according to Greenpeace.

Indonesia is now the world's third-biggest emitter of greenhouses gases, mostly thanks to deforestation and degradation, and Jambi has already lost two-thirds of its virgin forest.

Farmers say animals forced out of their natural habitat by deforestation are wreaking havoc in the village. "There are thousands of pigs around now. They destroy our crops," said Dahlan, a 52-year-old farmer.

Last year, 13 people in Merangin were mauled to death by tigers whose habitats had been destroyed, said Arif Munandar, director of the Jambi office of Friends of the Earth Indonesia (Walhi) [<http://www.walhi.or.id/>].

Worsening floods, landslides, drought

In addition to depleting resources for forest-dependent communities, deforestation is contributing to an increase in small-scale natural disasters.

"Flooding has become more common around Merangin in the last five years or so," said Aidil Putra, head of the Jambi Farmers' Union. "The water is getting higher too. Many of our houses have been damaged beyond repair. We've had to rebuild them ourselves, which is hard as all the good wood has been taken."

Reducing deforestation is crucial to preventing small-scale disasters, such as floods, landslides and droughts.

"Forests play an important role in reducing these disasters because they can increase water infiltration," said Bruno Locatelli, leader for climate change adaptation at the Centre for International Forestry Research [<http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/>] in Indonesia. "That means when there's heavy rainfall, forest soil can absorb water underground and disburse it to streams. This is also very important to prevent drought during the dry season."

The number of floods, landslides and droughts in Indonesia has risen significantly in the past decade, according to the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

"As the climate changes, we can expect more heavy rainfall, and that will only mean more floods and landslides if the forests continue to be cleared," said Locatelli.

Floods and landslides caused more than 3,500 deaths and the evacuation of four million people between 2000 and 2009.

A step in the right direction

Last month in Oslo, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared a two-year halt on new concessions on Indonesian peat land and rainforest. In exchange, Norway will give Indonesia \$1 billion, which it can claim as carbon offsets.

But activists say this is not enough and existing commercial activities in forests should be moved to degraded land.

"There are so many existing concessions in Jambi that almost all the forest will be gone if those operations continue," said Walhi's Munandar.

The suspension is part of the president's pledge to cut carbon emissions by 41 percent by 2020.

"As long as we can keep using our forest sustainably, we hope the government protects our forest from companies for ever, so our children and grandchildren can continue to live the way we have for generations," said Wisnawati.

ad/mc/at/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

01 Jul 2010

INDONESIA: Keeping children out of prison

JANTHO, 28 June 2010 (IRIN) - Fifteen-year-old Aisha* was convicted and jailed for four months because she and her boyfriend drove off with her grandfather's motorcycle. Her grandfather, a patriarch in a conservative Muslim society that disapproved of her relationship, charged her with theft.

"I did something wrong, but my grandfather overreacted," she said from the modest cement cell she shares with a few older women.

Thousands of children are behind bars in Indonesia - where the minimum age of criminal responsibility is eight - often for petty crimes. The majority are detained with adults, leaving them vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse.

"This is about the system of law in Indonesia. All state apparatuses - police, prosecutors, professional officers - do not have the skills to deal with children in conflict with the law," said Setiawan Cahyo Nugroho, child rights programme manager for Save the Children in Indonesia. "There is no state response that is based on family-based care, community-based care or promoting restorative justice."

At any one time, some 5,000 children are incarcerated in Indonesia, either awaiting trial or convicted, says the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), citing corrections department figures.

Aceh Province, on the far western tip of Indonesia, is one community trying to fix this problem by bringing together parents, police and communities to keep children out of prison.

"If they commit a crime and go to jail, they become even worse criminals than before - this always happens," said Zubedy Koteng, child protection specialist for UNICEF in Aceh. "Now that there is this diversion process, we have very few children where they commit a second time."

Children jailed with adults

In Aceh alone, there were 66 children behind bars in April, including 29 boys on trial, and 36 boys and a girl - Aisha - already convicted.

Save the Children's Nugroho has met a 10-year-old boy imprisoned for five years on murder charges after a street brawl and a 9-year-old serving nine months for taking a neighbour's fish.

Nine out of 10 children sent to court in 2009 were sentenced to prison, according to the National Commission for Child Protection.

"It's actually common," said Deka Nurbayani, who is one of seven officers handling women and children's cases for the Banda Aceh District Police. "People file police reports because they think this is a place that will scare children from repeat offenses."

The University of Indonesia found that 85 percent of children detained are mixed with adult inmates.

Aisha is the only girl in the Aceh Besar District prison in Jantho - about a one-hour drive along narrow roads east of Banda Aceh. Unable to sit her school exams, she has failed them.

"She should be allowed to go home and go to school," said the prison chief, Fahyudi, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. When children are sent to his prison, Fahyudi gives them tasks to keep them away from the adult inmates.

"They learn from the experts here, and they practice their new-learned skills on the outside," he said. "One already got caught again - he's back in prison. The first time, he was only 17."

Nugroho said child inmates are often sexually abused or used as "slaves" by older prisoners or prison guards.

Diversion through dialogue

In Aceh, the Women and Children Desk Unit, where policewoman Nurbayani works, was set up in 2006 to keep children out of prison through dialogue. The desk handled 133 cases of children in conflict with the law in 2009.

In a recent case in Meunasah Kreung village, two 15-year-old boys stole money from a mosque donation box to play video games. Several men caught the boys, said deputy village chief Anmulyadi Rianto, who brought them to police.

After Rianto, the boys' families, police and a local NGO signed a document ensuring the parents would keep watch over the boys, they were released.

"If there is still a chance to educate them, that is better than putting them in jail because jail will only make them worse," Rianto said.

A new draft of the juvenile delinquency law is being prepared and would raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from eight to 12 - though UNICEF recommends at least 14 years of age. The draft makes diversion mandatory for non-serious cases and detention a last resort.

Nugroho urged the government to train police, prosecutors and judges how to handle and mediate children's cases. Until then, he said, Indonesians will see it as acceptable to press charges against and jail young boys and girls.

"The state is not promoting these types of interventions, so society believes that the best way is to get legal authorities to prosecute children in conflict with the law."

* Not her real name

at/mc/cb

[END]

INDONESIA: "Help wanted" in reconstructed Aceh

BANDA ACEH, 16 June 2010 (IRIN) - If you landed here today and knew nothing about Aceh, you would never know that a devastating tsunami in 2004 had wiped out homes, buildings, roads and more than 167,000 lives in this province.

Thanks to more than US\$7 billion in donations and government funds after the tsunami, Aceh Province - plagued by three decades of civil war before the tsunami struck - boasts a state-of-the-art, 350-bed hospital, modern schools and sleek new roads.

But if you need heart surgery, seek care abroad. And to learn how to use internet, ask the students, not the teachers.

More than five years after the Indian Ocean tsunami, Aceh has indeed built back better, but still lacks the skills - as well as the funds to train people - to take care of all it has been gifted.

"Everyone has raised the question of whether they're capable of managing this, and just maintaining it. The infrastructure has had a lot of attention, but in order to make these things work, you need trained people, commitment and clarity about who's managing it," said John Penny, the European Union representative in Aceh [<http://www.delidn.ec.europa.eu/>].

"It's the soft side that's missing still. 30 years of conflict denied proper education to many, and the tsunami claimed the lives of large numbers of teachers and university personnel," he added.

Furthermore, almost all tsunami projects came to a close at the five-year anniversary last December, and little money remains for training.

"A majority of these funds were for infrastructure. Very little was allocated for software - for training. Today there are very limited funds available for developing the skills of professional workers," said Jean-Ludovic Metenier, head of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Aceh [<http://www.unicef.org/>].

Governor Irwandi Yusuf said the province lost 2,500 teachers and professors, as well as 100 doctors in the tsunami. Most staff vacancies have been filled, but the focus now is on better quality. "It is still insufficient, based on my expectations," Yusuf said.

Lacking skills

The Banda Aceh General Hospital, funded by Germany, has a sparkling interior and state of the art equipment, but still has to refer people to Jakarta or neighbouring Malaysia for specialized care, says the director, Taufik Mahdi.

He said many medical students from Aceh were on scholarships in Jakarta and would join his staff, but the cardiac surgeon will only finish studying in three years, and the two oncologists in two years.

"Quality of care does not depend on the guards. It does not depend on the building. It depends on human resources," Mahdi said. "This building and this equipment, without an increase in public service is nothing, not useful."

There are similar shortfalls in education. Aceh has about one teacher for every nine students, says the governor, but they are not sufficiently trained to teach effectively.

"A lot of teachers are being sent to Malaysia for training," Yusuf said. "We need several more years to cope with this."

UNICEF has partnered with the Department of Education to train 8,000 teachers in new didactic methodology, but the majority of teachers in the province have yet to take this course, Metenier said.

"The governor said he would have to use all his budget [to train all the teachers], so we really need other sources of funding," Metenier said.

At the newly rebuilt Public Elementary School 34 - a complex that once comprised three different elementary schools, two of which were destroyed by the tsunami - students skipped rope, flicked marbles and stirred a playground hum.

In a nearby quieter room for adults, teachers bemoaned their own shortcomings. "We can't even use the internet as well as our students," said Naima, a sixth-grade teacher.

"We don't care about the building. You can only see the outside of a building, but we only care about what's inside. It's useless to provide the children with a good building, but without a good education," she said. "There are so many beautiful things that have been built, but we lack the capacity to keep them well-maintained."

at/mc/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

16 Jun 2010

INDONESIA: Unchaining the mentally ill

BANDA ACEH, 2 June 2010 (IRIN) - Indonesia's most severely mentally ill patients can be so aggressive that their families and communities - desperate in the absence of basic mental healthcare - bind their ankles with chains or keep them in wooden stocks for months or years.

Trapped in restraints or in isolation rooms, many wallow in their own filth and suffer such acute muscular atrophy that they are unable to walk or sit.

Indonesia has an extensive healthcare infrastructure, but mental healthcare remains scarce, especially in rural, remote areas, so families and communities keep the mentally ill under control with physical restraints and confinement - known locally as "pasung" - to prevent the individuals from hurting themselves or others.

"This is a human rights violation problem, but it is because of the scarcity of mental health services," said Hervita Diatri, a psychiatrist at the University of Indonesia's medical school [<http://www.ui.ac.id/en>], who has extensively researched the phenomenon.

Diatri said pasung points to the families' hopelessness. "Hopeless because they don't have the money to bring their family to the mental health services... hopeless because of scarcity of the services."

Experts and the government are now trying to eliminate this practice, and with a mental health training programme in the easternmost province of Aceh - funded in part by international donors after the December 2004 tsunami - nurses and doctors have successfully treated and unchained 120 of 289 known pasung patients.

Diatri estimates 15,000 people are being kept in pasung across Indonesia, though she believes the actual figure is even higher.

Aceh, home to 4.5 million people, has a higher incidence of mental illness than the rest of the country due to three decades of conflict and the tsunami that claimed more than 167,000 lives and left half a million people needing assistance.

Indonesia's National Basic Health Research in 2007 indicates that 14.1 percent of Aceh's population suffers depression and anxiety, compared with 11.6 percent nationally, while 1.9 percent are afflicted by severe mental disorders, more than three times the national rate of 0.5 percent.

Since the tsunami, 534 nurses and 203 doctors have received mental health training, and an additional 5,961 village volunteers have been taught to detect and report people in need of help.

Home care

The training programme has focused on nurses, as most are from Aceh and less likely than doctors to transfer out of the area, and has taught them to give patients medicine and counselling, while also caring for family members who have never understood a patient's condition.

"It is better to treat these mental health patients in their communities, not in the mental health hospital," said Syarifah Yessi Hedyati, coordinator of trauma counselling in the Aceh provincial health office. "This helps to decrease stigma, gives support to the family and to the community."

From 2005 to 2009, the newly trained mental healthcare providers assisted more than 14,000 patients - including 8,355 in home visits. Nurses reached out to the 289 pasung patients, providing home

treatment or admitting them to the Banda Aceh Mental Hospital.

"The community and the family can see that three days ago, he was violent, and after this community mental health nurse came and gave medicine, now he is not aggressive any more and can talk like a normal person," said Albert Maramis, a World Health Organization [<http://www.who.int/en/>] psychiatrist, who helped coordinate the training programme.

If a person is hospitalized for months far from home, the family and community cannot follow their progress or treatment. "They have the image of this person who is violent and dangerous, so when this person comes back, they are afraid," Maramis said. "When they can see the process, they won't be so frightened."

In the mental hospital

Nonetheless, the most severe pasung patients are admitted to the Banda Aceh Mental Hospital for intensive care.

Four men in turquoise hospital uniforms sat sedated in wheelchairs, listless in the sun, in the hospital garden. Their legs were scarred - some swollen, others atrophied.

This year so far, 42 pasung patients have been admitted here, including a 22-year-old man who had been chained up since he was 12.

"Every day the patients get better and better. I can see their progress," said Wahyu Kadri, a nurse, as he kept watch over the men. "When the patients first come here, they cannot walk, they cannot sit. They only sleep. Now we see some of them start to sit and walk."

Kadri made one request: "We need more wheelchairs, and we need more crutches."

at/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

02 Jun 2010

GLOBAL: Asia most at risk from natural disasters

NAIROBI, 31 May 2010 (IRIN) - Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran and Pakistan top a new ranking of countries at "extreme risk" of experiencing natural disasters compiled by a global risk assessment company.

The *Natural Disaster Risk Index* (NDRI) released on 27 May by Maplecroft, ranks 229 countries according to the human impact of natural disasters in terms of deaths per annum and per million of population, plus the frequency of events as well as the likelihood of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, storms, flooding, droughts, landslides, extreme temperatures and epidemics. Asia accounts for most of the disaster-related deaths since 1980.

Ranking countries most vulnerable to natural disasters over the past 30 years could enable businesses and investors to identify risks to international assets while supporting humanitarian efforts to push governments into investing in disaster risk reduction initiatives.

African countries at extreme risk are Ethiopia, Sudan and Mozambique, with 95 percent of casualties due to drought. Since 1980 drought has caused 9,800 deaths in Ethiopia, 5,300 in Sudan (ranked fifth) and over 3,400 in Mozambique (ninth).

According to experts, unlike earthquakes and storms, drought damage is more difficult to detect, both in terms of human lives and economic loss because it is a slow onset disaster.

Whereas France and Italy, respectively ranked 17 and 18, are the most vulnerable countries in Europe because of the 40,000 people who died in heat waves in 2003 and 2006, the US, with more than 8,000 lives lost over 30 years, is highly susceptible to hurricanes and storms and ranked 37th.

Haiti and China are respectively at numbers eight and 12 among the countries at highest risk. The earthquake in Qinghai Province on 13 April 2010, of almost the same magnitude as the one that hit Haiti on 12 January, cost the lives of 2,187 people, against 230,000 who died in Haiti.

The countries least at risk are Andorra, Bahrain, Gibraltar, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Qatar, San Marino and the United Arab Emirates.

In line with the data produced by Maplecroft, a study by the UN Development Programme says that 85 percent of the people exposed to earthquakes, tropical cyclones, floods and droughts in the past 10 years live in countries having either medium or low human development.

Pedro Dabase, head of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (ISDR) regional office for Africa, told IRIN: "In these types of rankings, the variables to look at are the time period of analysed data, types of hazards and vulnerabilities to natural disasters. This is because countries that face similar patterns of natural hazards often experience widely differing impacts when disasters occur, depending in large part on the kind of development choices they have made.

"If one looks at the frequency of earthquakes and cyclones in Haiti in the past 100 years, the situation of the country would not be considered as worrisome, unlike the past 10 years, with great human losses caused by flooding almost every year and hurricanes in 2004, 2005 and 2008.

"In terms of impacts for example, the recent earthquake in Chile, of the same magnitude as Haiti, recorded about 100,000 deaths but in terms of economic losses it registered US\$22 billion, versus the \$8 billion estimated for Haiti. Therefore, the vulnerability of Chile in terms of economic loss is higher than Haiti, which instead caused more losses in terms of human lives," Dabase told IRIN.

Figures produced by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology (CRED) at the beginning of 2010 highlighted that in the past 10 years 3,852 disasters killed more than 780,000 people, affecting more than two billion and causing an economic loss of \$960 billion.

According to ISDR, earthquakes, followed by storms (22 percent) and extreme temperatures (11 percent) are the deadliest natural hazards of the past 10 years and remain a serious threat to millions of people worldwide.

ISDR also ranked the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 as the most deadly disaster of the decade, with 226,408 deaths; followed by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, which killed 138,366 people, and the Sichuan earthquake in China in 2008, causing the deaths of 87,476 people.

"Due to climate change, extreme hydro-meteorological events are predicted to increase and given the impact on the countries not at risk of being directly affected by natural disaster, we advise the need for even the wealthiest countries to focus on disaster risk reduction," said Maplecroft's environmental analyst, Anna Moss.

cp/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

31 May 2010

INDONESIA: NGOs push for stronger child protection laws

JAKARTA, 26 May 2010 (IRIN) - Millions of Indonesian children remain vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and discrimination because the government has not prioritised children's rights, says a coalition of NGOs.

On 25 May, the National NGO Coalition for Child Rights Monitoring launched its review report on the implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) [<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>] between 1997 and 2009, making a number of recommendations to better protect Indonesian children.

"The government has shown a lack of initiative in integrating the CRC with Indonesian law," said Ahmad Taufan Damanik, executive coordinator for the National NGO Coalition for Child Monitoring in Jakarta.

Among the recommendations are for the government to ratify protocols against the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution; to amend the constitution to include all rights of the child; and to develop a mechanism whereby legislation conflicting with the CRC can be overturned or revoked.

Contrary to the convention, Indonesian law allows children aged 12 to consent to sex, while the age for criminal responsibility is eight.

"Children as young as 12 can be tried as adults and be imprisoned with adults," Setiawan Cahyo Nugroho, programme manager for child rights at Save the Children Indonesia, told IRIN.

According to the National Commission for Child Protection, 89.8 percent of children sent to court in 2009 were sentenced to prison. Data from the social welfare department at the University of Indonesia shows that 57 percent of those children were placed in detention with adults.

Indonesia ratified the convention in 1990 and in 2002 issued a presidential decree to protect children. The coalition has dubbed the decree inadequate and is calling for a law to address all children's rights, such as the right to free education, freedom of religion and the guarantee of healthcare.

"The decree criminalises perpetrators, but does not protect victims. A law for the protection of children will ensure victims receive counselling and appropriate compensation," Damanik said.

The report is the result of a two-and-a-half year study that consulted 377 children in 14 provinces across the archipelago nation. Among the children surveyed were school dropouts, children from indigenous and religious minorities, survivors of sexual violence and street children.

The government is obliged to submit a progress report to the Committee of the UN CRC every five years; however, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection did not submit its third or fourth report on time.

"We've merged the two reports and submitted it to the Foreign Affairs Ministry last month," said Wahyu Hartomo, assistant to the child protection deputy at the ministry.

The coalition's report is a stepping stone toward its alternative report, to be submitted to the Committee of the UN CRC for comparison with the government's findings.

"The government will only report the good things," Damanik said. "But our report gives a voice to children. Children should be part of the decision-making process in areas that affect them."

ad/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

26 May 2010

INDONESIA: Anti-malaria efforts focus on pregnant women, children

JAKARTA, 20 May 2010 (IRIN) - Health authorities are successfully battling malaria in remote eastern Indonesia by linking efforts to fight the mosquito-borne disease to maternal and child healthcare.

"Pregnant women and children are especially vulnerable to malaria, and modern malaria diagnosis and prevention can be delivered via existing maternal health and immunisation services in a symbiotic way," said William Hawley, a malaria expert formerly with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) [<http://www.unicef.org/>].

Nurses and midwives help the malaria programme with diagnosis, treatment and bed net distribution, Hawley said. Furthermore, because people want bed nets, more women use antenatal care and bring their children to be immunised.

"The malaria programme, the antenatal care programme, and the expanded programme on immunisation all benefit, but most important - women and kids benefit," Hawley said.

Malaria was once the top health problem in South Halmahera District - 400 islets inhabited by 200,000 people in North Maluku Province, health officials say.

Swamps, poor sanitation, poverty and low levels of immunisation left the population - pregnant women and children in particular - vulnerable to health problems.

By integrating prevention, diagnosis and treatment with antenatal care and child immunisation, the number of malaria deaths in South Halmahera plummeted from 226 in 2003 to four in 2008, and the incidence of malaria dropped by 50 percent, according to the district health office.

Hawley said neighbouring districts in the Maluku Islands are trying to replicate South Halmahera's success, and similar anti-malaria efforts are under way in several other districts in Indonesia.

Free treatment

The head of South Halmahera District, Muhammad Kasuba, stepped up the anti-malaria programme three years ago.

"We have to scrub out this disease altogether, so we can start developing our infrastructure," said Kasuba, who has provided his district with universal healthcare since 2007 to ensure the community receives free malaria treatment as well as other basic health services.

Residents were also taught to prevent mosquito breeding by turning over boats filled with water and digging channels from the sea to lagoons to keep them too salty for mosquitoes, while children learned how to differentiate between malaria mosquitoes and other types.

Authorities also set up the South Halmahera Malaria Centre as a hub for training and coordination.

About half of Indonesians - 158 million of the country's 230 million people - are at risk of malaria infection, according to the University of Oxford's Malaria Atlas Project (MAP) [See: <http://www.map.ox.ac.uk/>] and the Ministry of Health [<http://www.depkes.go.id/en/>].

In 2008, there were 411,979 malaria cases confirmed by lab tests, though an additional 863,213 were tallied as probable cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) [http://www.searo.who.int/en/Section10/Section21/Section340_4022.htm]. It reported that 2.15 million insecticide-treated bed nets were distributed between 2004 and 2008, enough to cover six million people living at high risk of malaria.

Elsewhere in Indonesia, local health authorities, supported by WHO and Care International [<http://www.care.org/>], implemented anti-malaria efforts after the devastating tsunami in Aceh in December 2004.

The island district of Sabang, off the coast of Banda Aceh, had a 4.3 percent malaria prevalence in 2005. That dropped to less than 1 percent prevalence rate in 2009, said Hawley.

at/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

20 May 2010

GLOBAL: IDP numbers peak at 27 million, says new report

LONDON, 18 May 2010 (IRIN) - At least 6.8 million people were displaced last year, mainly by long-running conflicts, pushing the number of those forced to live away from home to 27 million - the highest since the mid-1990s, a new report states.

"The massive population movements and shocking violence are a sad reminder of the price that civilians pay in armed conflict," Elisabeth Rasmusson, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), said while launching the 2009 annual report on displacement at London's Royal Institute of International Affairs. "Millions of people were newly displaced by conflicts in which combatants did not meet their obligations to protect civilians."

The report, published by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (part of the NRC), said that while the number of refugees in the world remained fairly static, that of IDPs was rising steadily.

The distinction between a refugee and an IDP is clear in international law, but for the people who packed up their families and a few possessions and fled their homes to escape conflict it was often a matter of chance whether or not they crossed an international border.

The biggest single group of newly displaced people was in Pakistan, where some three million people fled army offensives against the Taliban and other armed groups. Most of the displacement was, however, temporary and they have now been able to go home. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, one million were newly displaced in 2009, as were over half a million in Sudan, and 400,000 each in Somalia and Colombia.

The IDPs, Rasmusson said, were often poorer and more vulnerable than refugees, and unable to travel as far from the conflict zone. The responsibility for their security and welfare should lie with their own governments, but some were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of displaced people within their borders. "They prefer to call them dislocated, or mobile or vulnerable populations," she said.

The report cites Algeria, Myanmar, Indonesia and Zimbabwe as denying internal displacement. "This is arguably an attempt to deny the displaced access to the assistance they are entitled to by international law," she said.

AU convention

Rasmusson and John Holmes, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, paid tribute to the African Union for its adoption last October of a Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. Holmes called the convention "very significant" and "a major step forward".

"It recognises that states have a duty to prevent displacement and a responsibility towards those displaced," he said at the report launch. "But the test will be whether the number of displaced is now reduced."

Asked whether the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, should take responsibility for the welfare of IDPs, or whether a new international body was needed, Holmes said: "I think it is right for the UNHCR to take on more of this role." However, he recognised that there was some resistance within the organization and among donors to a dilution of its mandate.

"We don't want the UNHCR to be confined to the static problem of refugees, while IDPs are a massively expanding problem," he added.

On the implications of displacement, he said: "Displacement creates an unacceptable burden on the communities that host IDPs, many of whom are themselves in need of humanitarian or development assistance...

"Furthermore, protracted displacement, and the marginalization that results, can have serious political, security and financial implications for national governments. As we have seen around the world, failure to resolve displacement inevitably undermines national efforts aimed at long-term peace and stability in post-crisis countries."

Full report available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

eb/eo/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

18 May 2010

INDONESIA: Fighting TB stigma

JAKARTA, 9 April 2010 (IRIN) - "When I was told I had TB, I felt ashamed," Dini Kusumawadini, 28, who makes a living growing ornamental plants, told IRIN. "But after undergoing treatment, I wanted to share my experience and motivate people with TB so that they could recover."

Dini was diagnosed with tuberculosis two years ago. But while undergoing treatment at a community health clinic in the Ciputat area, southwest of Jakarta, she decided to join a support group to help other TB sufferers finish their therapies.

After six months of treatment, she was declared cured.

TB is a leading cause of adult deaths in Indonesia but Dini said people in her community had begun to realize it was curable.

"In the past, people with TB were ashamed because there were stigmas associated with the disease," she said.

Dini is among 30 former TB sufferers, patients and their relatives who have joined the support group at the clinic in Ciputat, a poor area in Tangerang district.

NGOs such as Care Indonesia and the local health officers are facilitating the establishment of such support groups, known locally as paguyuban, to help fight the stigma. They comprise TB patients and their families, health workers, community and religious leaders, and other volunteers.

So far, Care has helped to establish 19 support groups in Banten province on Java island. Nationally, such groups fall under the government-sanctioned Association of Patients and Community Care for Tuberculosis (Pamali), with branches across the country.

"In Indonesia, there are various stigmas and discrimination associated with TB," said Wiwik Widyastuti, a spokeswoman for Care Indonesia. "Many think that TB is an inherited disease; some think it is a curse and therefore, incurable."

The stigma leads to discrimination and isolation of the infected and their families, and a barrier to providing adequate care and preventing further infections in the community, she said.

Reducing TB prevalence

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation of 230 million people, has the third-highest tuberculosis burden in the world after India and China, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

An estimated 528,000 cases of TB are detected yearly, resulting in 91,000 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.

But the ministry said last month that Indonesia's fight against the disease was on track.

The prevalence of TB in Indonesia in 2008 was 253 cases per 100,000 people, not far from its Millennium Development Goals target for 2015 of 222 per 100,000 people, it said.

Of those undergoing treatment, more than 85 percent are cured, said Iwan M Muljono, the ministry's director for communicable disease control, in a statement marking World TB Day on 24 March.

"About 70 percent of TB sufferers are in the productive age bracket and therefore efforts to prevent and eradicate TB are the shared responsibility of the government and members of the public, including the private sector," he said.

Battling multidrug-resistant TB

Muljono said efforts to fight TB were complicated by the increase in the number of people with HIV/AIDS and with multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), which does not respond to first-line drugs.

People with HIV/AIDS are vulnerable to TB owing to their weakened immune system. The health ministry said between 2 and 3 percent of new TB cases were MDR and there were an estimated 6,400 cases of MDR-TB annually.

According to the WHO's Global Tuberculosis Control Report 2009, though the MDR-TB rate is still relatively low, the total number of MDR-TB cases is considerable due to the large numbers of TB patients.

"These new challenges should force all parties concerned to move faster and be innovative in strengthening the network of services for TB patients," Muljono said.

MDR-TB is generated mainly due to the large numbers of TB patients who are inadequately treated.

Members of support groups spread information about TB to their communities and refer TB suspects to the health office for further examination and treatment.

In addition, they also act as treatment observers and ensure patients take their medicine.

"Our experience shows that peer to peer consultation is very effective, especially if it involves an ex-TB patient. After the ex-patients share their experiences, the group tends to be more open and accepting," said Rahmat Setiawan, the project manager for MITRA, a Care Indonesia TB project.

"To achieve greater impact, we also involve the health officers, the community and religious leaders in the area."

Dini told IRIN: "It's a small thing and I do hope that what I'm doing can make a difference to people's well-being."

atp/ey/mw

[ENDS]

INDONESIA: Small-scale disasters take their toll

CIWIDEY, 3 March 2010 (IRIN) - Small-scale disasters affect thousands of Indonesians every year, yet the floods and landslides that constantly hit the country are overshadowed by more devastating events, agencies say.

One such disaster was a landslide in Bandung district in West Java province on 23 February, which buried more than 40 people and displaced about 1,000.

Three hectares of the Dewata tea plantation in Tenjolaya village, Ciwidey, gave way, creating a mudslide around 10m deep. The search and rescue operation ended on 1 March with 33 people killed and 11 still buried under the mud, according to the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

More than 400 displaced people are now living in camps near the site in makeshift tents that they say are boiling during the day and cold at night. They are receiving rice, noodles and biscuits from the government and Red Crescent Indonesia.

"We need more help," said Ajat, who has been living in a 3 sqm tent with his wife and two children since the disaster. "I don't want my family to stay in this tent for too long, but we're too scared to go back."

Disaster-prone

Indonesia is the most disaster-prone country in the world, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); in 2009 alone, it experienced 469 earthquakes with a magnitude of five or higher - more than any other nation.

Some disasters are natural, while others are the result of poor urban planning, a lacklustre enforcement of construction and pollution laws, and environmental degradation.

The most common result is flooding, which has accounted for about 40 percent of Indonesia's disasters in the past few years, according to government data.

Other types of disasters include landslides - often triggered by floods - earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, drought and cyclones.

Amien Widodo, an environmental geologist with the November 10 Institute of Technology in Surabaya city, said heavy rain triggered landslides each year.

"There hasn't been a significant change in rainfall patterns over the past five years. However, floods are lingering for longer, perhaps because of bad infrastructure and clogged drainage," he told IRIN.

Data from the BNPB since 2005 shows dozens killed every year by floods alone, and tens of thousands affected. About five million people were affected by floods, mostly because of incessant flash flooding in South Kalimantan province, in 2008 and 2009.

Limited capacity

Flooding during the wet season, which generally falls between October and March, costs Indonesia millions in aid and reconstruction.

The government's budget for flood management this year is 957.2 billion rupiah (US\$103 million). Despite this, there is limited capacity to respond to small- and medium-scale disasters.

Laksmi Noviera, an OCHA humanitarian affairs analyst, said local governments were shouldering more responsibility for disaster response because of Indonesia's increasingly decentralized government.

There is enough effort from humanitarian actors in the emergency phase of small-scale disasters, she said, "but there is a lack of attention in the transitional and early recovery phases, which are equally important".

Amin Kuats, a relief team coordinator with Red Crescent Indonesia, said the government and NGOs had less cash and resources for small disasters.

"Big disasters attract more money in donations. In smaller disasters, the aid is mostly provided by the government, and that's usually not enough," Amin said.

"Often, if the disaster happens just before local elections, the government will give more aid, but if it happens after, there generally won't be enough," he said.

Be prepared

The government says it will conduct an investigation into the landslide disaster in Bandung district to determine whether it was caused by nature, or decades of deforestation.

Survivors said they did not know what to do when the disaster struck, raising questions about preparedness.

"We didn't know what to do or where to go," said Wiwin, 30, who is living in a large tent with her husband, four children and four other families. "I looked for my children and then just ran," she said.

Amin said NGOs were now better prepared to respond quickly to disasters after lessons learned from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that devastated Indonesia's Aceh province, and last year's earthquake in West Sumatra.

However, more had to be done in terms of preparedness as well as planning, he said.

"There needs to be more training for these disasters, on the government level and for the people. The government should also understand the land and not allow people to run plantations and build houses in such disaster-prone areas."

ad/ey/mw

[END]

INDONESIA: Plight of mudflow IDPs continues

PORONG, 10 February 2010 (IRIN) - Nearly 50,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Indonesia still lack basic services and are awaiting full compensation after a mudflow destroyed homes and farmland almost four years ago.

Originating from a mud volcano in the district of Sidoarjo in East Java Province, the mudflow and toxic gas emissions started in May 2006 and still continue, with the volcano expelling 60,000 cubic metres of watery mud daily, according to the government's Sidoarjo Mudflow Mitigation Agency (BPLS). Some 14,000 houses have been submerged.

In the village of Besuki in Porong sub-district - a five-minute drive from the volcano - IDPs have found refuge alongside a road in bamboo huts they built themselves.

They say they are still awaiting full compensation for losing their land and homes, and cannot afford to move until they receive all the money. Many report only receiving 50 percent of the compensation, which for most is about 100 million rupiah (US\$10,000). They expect the balance in a year.

"Forgotten"

Siti Rochma, 37, has been living in a one-room shelter for two years.

"I share the room with my husband and four children. It gets so hot at night and the rain leaks through the roof. No one can sleep," she told IRIN.

"We used to get a lot of journalists and people writing reports here, but not many come any more," she said. "We think people have forgotten us."

Besides proper shelter, the IDPs still lack basic infrastructure and healthcare.

"We need help with installing toilets and getting access to water, gas and electricity," said Khusnul Hokhtima, 40, a mother of two.

BPLS says the government has plans to install water, gas and electricity infrastructure next year for the IDPs, while healthcare is free - but survivors dispute this.

Atituk, 30, said she had to pay each time she took her one-year-old son to the doctor.

"There's still a lot of gas in the air, so he gets chronic throat infections. We got him some syrup, but he still gets sick all the time," she said.

Compensation delays

There has been much debate about whether the volcanic eruption was caused by energy company PT Lapindo Brantas or a major earthquake two days before in Yogyakarta Province, some 300km away.

The Supreme Court acquitted Lapindo in September 2009, finding insufficient evidence to link its drilling activities to the mudflow.

Despite this, Lapindo is obliged by two presidential decrees to pay compensation to 40,000 people displaced from the immediate disaster zone.

In turn, the government is responsible for paying 9,000 IDPs in affected villages on the fringes of the zone. It has so far spent about \$27 million to cover 50 percent of the payments.

In 2007, Lapindo paid 20 percent of the compensation owed. However, in August last year, it failed to meet the deadline to pay the remaining portion, citing financial difficulties amid the global economic downturn.

Lapindo will instead pay the remaining compensation in instalments, said the deputy head of the BPLS social department, Sutjahjono Soejitno.

"Some will receive their full compensation within the next three months, while those who are owed large amounts will probably have to wait three years," Soejitno told IRIN.

In addition, around 114 households in the disaster zone have yet to receive any compensation, since claimants were unable to prove ownership of their land, says the BPLS.

New eruptions feared

A geyser has been found about 1.5km from the mud volcano in Sidoarjo, sparking fears of further danger to surrounding communities.

"It's a small geyser but it can be just as dangerous as large ones, because they all emit methane gas, which is highly flammable, smelly and can cause headaches," said Amien Widodo, an environmental geologist with the November 10 Institute of Technology in Surabaya city.

There are also concerns over the stability of huge earth dikes - some as high as 18m - which were built to contain the mud.

"Because Sidoarjo experiences high levels of rainfall, the land is vulnerable to subsidence," said Widodo.

The deputy of operations for BPLS, Sofiiian Hadi, added: "The dikes once dropped 3m. They could drop again, but we have people checking for cracks every day."

Geologists are unsure when or how the volcano will stop expelling mud and gas.

"The amount of mud that's coming out now has halved since 2006, so maybe it will halve again in three years," Hadi said. "So it could be over in 10 or so years, but of course, we can't be sure of that."

ad/ey/mw

[END]
Integrated Regional Information Networks

10 Feb 2010

Indonesia: Tsunami early warning system a work in progress

JAKARTA, 31 December 2009 (IRIN) - Five years after the Indian Ocean tsunami, Indonesia's early warning system remains a work in progress, officials and experts say.

Indonesia began setting up an early warning system in 2005, a year after a 9.2 Richter scale earthquake off Sumatra triggered a tsunami which left over 230,000 dead, 1.8 million displaced and 470,000 homes and buildings destroyed in 13 countries.

The Indonesian Tsunami Early Warning System has three levels: an earthquake monitoring system, a sea level monitoring system, and a computer modelling system able to generate different tsunami projections.

It collects data from seismometers, tide gauges, and GPS tracking units mounted on buoys to detect subtle changes in water pressure which could indicate an incoming tsunami, as well as ocean bottom satellite-linked sensors, allowing it theoretically to issue a tsunami warning at a regional level five minutes after an earthquake.

The warning would be relayed to the authorities, the media and communities likely to be affected.

"Right now we have in place what we call Service Level 1 [the earthquake monitoring system]. We use earthquake monitoring equipment to determine earthquake parameters and the potential for tsunami generation," Fauzi (like many Indonesians he goes by only one name), head of the Tsunami and Earthquake Centre in Jakarta, told IRIN.

Service Level 2 - the sea level monitoring system - is expected to be completed in April 2010, while Service Level 3 - tsunami modelling - should be in place by 2011, Fauzi said.

Under the system, a tsunami warning will be issued for any undersea earthquake with a Richter scale magnitude of 7.0 or higher and a depth of less than 70km.

When earthquake data indicate a potential tsunami, computer predictions of the tsunami's height, volume and impact will be generated, as well as its estimated arrival time at different points along the coast.

Fauzi said the sea level monitoring system was expected to be completed in 2010, along with the ability to produce predictive information about any tsunamis which might affect Java and Sumatra.

He said 50 tide gauges had been installed along the coasts of Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi and the Papua region and 20 more tsunami buoys would be installed across the country in 2010.

"We have been facing a lot of problems operating the buoys. They often break down" said Fauzi.

However, Fauzi said he was optimistic the entire system, supported by countries such as Germany, China, France and the USA as well as UN agencies, would be ready by 2011.

Culture of preparedness

Ardito Kodijat, programme officer for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-sponsored Jakarta Tsunami Information Centre (JTIC), said regional capacity and

instilling a culture of preparedness could prove greater challenges than putting in place the warning system.

"The regions [provincial level and lower] remain a weak link in the overall early warning system," he told IRIN, adding: "There's so much to do in terms of education and safety facilities. It's not an easy task and takes a long time."

Kodijat said UNESCO was working with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences to educate people in disaster-prone regions about disaster preparedness.

Fauzi agreed with Kodijat that educating the public was the harder part: "Developing a culture of preparedness is a long process. It involves education from the elementary level on up."

Dissemination of warnings

Danny Hilman Natawidjaja, a geology researcher at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, said relaying a tsunami warning to communities could also be a problem.

"So far the dissemination of tsunami warnings has used telephone and SMS, and I don't know whether sirens are working," Natawidjaja said.

Sirens have been installed in coastal areas on Java, Sumatra and Bali and are tested every month, Fauzi said, adding that more sirens would be installed in Gorontalo, North Sulawesi and the Maluku islands next year.

Natawidjaja and several other scientists who have studied Sumatra's geological fault line predict major earthquake in the West Sumatra area in the next three decades, generating a tsunami equal to that which devastated hit Aceh Province five years ago.

"I don't think any region is ready for a tsunami. If a tsunami happened now, the number of casualties would still be high," he said.

atp/ds/cb

[END]

Indonesia: Waiting for permanent homes

BANDA ACEH, 24 December 2009 (IRIN) - Ani was preparing breakfast on a Sunday morning five years ago when she heard a loud roaring noise after a massive earthquake.

She fled to the hills with her husband and four children, unaware that within minutes their rented home would be swept away.

Nobody else on her street survived the tidal wave that washed inland after the 9.1- magnitude earthquake just off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh Province - one of the worst natural disasters in recorded history.

"That seemed impossible. We lived 5km from the sea," she said, recalling the devastating tsunami that struck Aceh and 13 countries along the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004.

More than 230,000 people died, half in the coastal Indonesian province.

Her family first fled to the nearest mosque, but it was so crowded they drove to the hills.

"The car was flipped by the churning water and all my neighbours died," she said. "Not a day passes that I don't think about it."

Mixed progress

According to the World Bank, the Indonesian government has shown tremendous leadership in coordinating the US\$7 billion reconstruction effort. Thousands of homes, schools, government offices and hospitals were rebuilt by the tsunami reconstruction agency, which wound up its work in April.

Even so, some survivors are still waiting to be relocated - testament to the fact that some people may be falling through the cracks.

Ani, 39, lives in Barak Bakoi, a barracks-like settlement where about 500 people still live in uncertainty, in Banda Aceh, the provincial capital.

"Everybody here is a victim of the tsunami," said Trusli, the centre's official. "They were all promised a house two years ago. Now the local government told us to be patient and wait."

Almost 200,000 houses in Aceh were destroyed by the tsunami, displacing more than half a million people, the UN said.

Indonesia's Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, which oversaw the building of 141,000 houses, said it was unclear how many people were still living in makeshift structures.

According to media reports, several hundred families around Banda Aceh are still without permanent accommodation.

Of the new homes, only 3,000 were built for renters like Ani, resulting in a shortage.

At the same time almost 30,000 houses are unoccupied because of corruption, poor construction and mismanagement, according to reports.

Harsh conditions

Meanwhile, Ani does her best to make their one-room shelter comfortable, lining it with potted plants. "These are mine and I'm going to take all of them to my new house," she said.

However, it is unclear when that may be. Thousands have already moved away, while other renters have been promised homes.

One is Syarwini, 23. Her new house is already finished, she said, "but it is not clear when I can move in. I am afraid other homeless people will take my house."

The keys she was promised have not been handed over.

Even people who once owned land have had to fight to receive aid because they lost ownership documents in the tsunami or missed deadlines to register property.

Conditions in the camp remain harsh, residents say. Row upon row of poorly maintained wooden shacks are interspersed with toilets shared by as many as 30 people. "The sanitation is very bad," says Ani. "And the water supply is not good."

There is no ready access to clean drinking water and the temporary schools have gone, along with international donors, making it too expensive for some parents to provide their children with an education, she complained.

"My house is one of the last houses built. If I don't get it now, I will never get one," mother-of-two Syarwini said.

ej/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

24 Dec 2009

Indonesia: Khalidan, "The tsunami changed everything"

LAMEE, 23 December 2009 (IRIN) - When the tsunami struck the Indonesian province of Aceh on 26 December 2004, killing an estimated 160,000 people, Khalidan, 44, was a fighter with the separatist Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) or Free Aceh Movement.

See tsunami anniversary photo gallery (<http://www.irinnews.org/multimedia/tsunami/index.html>)

Five years on he remembers how Indonesia's worst natural disaster pushed both sides of the conflict together. Khalidan is now the elected head of Lamee village and one of thousands of former separatist fighters working in the government. He told IRIN about that day:

"I joined GAM in 1996. Life during the conflict was hard for us. We often went without food, and fought hungry.

"We fought as guerrillas. We never had a permanent base. We were always on the move so that the enemy could not detect us. If the enemy [the Indonesian military, TNI] detected us, we would immediately move, whether it was day or night.

"After martial law was declared [in May 2003], we had frequent skirmishes with the TNI.

"On the day of the tsunami, we were in a small camp about 11km inland and felt an earthquake around 8am. It wasn't until later that we learned by radio from friends who lived near the ocean that there had been a tsunami.

"We crept quietly down to the coast to check out the situation. When we saw what had happened, we helped to remove bodies. There were so many bodies. The TNI were also helping, but they did not know that we were GAM members, since we weren't wearing any uniforms or markings. We were there to help people, so we didn't have our weapons with us.

"We didn't have any food, so we took some of the aid from NGO workers.

"[When the peace agreement was signed in August 2005] we had no idea such an arrangement would be possible. Those at higher levels of GAM might have known it was coming, but at the lower level, there was no warning. The tsunami changed everything.

"When I have nothing else to do, I often think about the bitterness of living in the woods. There are no sweet memories. We were starving and we had to eat leaves, while today we can live at home with our wives and family.

"Now my duty as head of the village is to serve the people. I delegate administrative tasks to the secretary, and give authority to other officials elected by the people. We receive our budget from the sub-district. If we didn't deliver all of it to the people, and took some for ourselves, people would vote us out.

"The most important thing is justice. When we had disputes - between GAM and the Indonesian government - we were only looking for justice. Since there was no justice, there was conflict.

"My greatest wish is for conditions in Aceh to continue improving. If all the articles of the [peace agreement] are implemented, I don't think there will be a new separatist movement. But if not, it's possible that our descendants will take up arms again."

ReliefWeb report — <http://reliefweb.int/node/338093>

cb/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

23 Dec 2009

Indonesia: Tsunami rebuilding a "success" but challenges remain

JAKARTA, 22 December 2009 (IRIN) - Five years after the tsunami struck Indonesia, reconstruction in the hardest-hit province of Aceh is being hailed as a success story, although officials say key challenges persist.

Many of the tsunami survivors in Aceh, where an estimated 160,000 people died, have regained their livelihoods while houses, roads, bridges and ports have been rebuilt in what the World Bank describes as "the most successful reconstruction effort".

"If you look at the numbers, how many roads and schools have been rebuilt and even rebuilt better than before, it's a big success," Joachim von Amsberg, World Bank country director, told reporters.

But making that progress sustainable, creating jobs, and building capacity for effective public policy were among the challenges faced by the government, Von Amsberg said.

"We will continue to help . but the governments of Indonesia and Aceh have to take the lead in overcoming the challenges," he said.

The Asian tsunami, which struck on 26 December 2004, leaving more than 220,000 people dead in 13 countries, also served as an impetus for a peace agreement in 2005 between the Indonesian government and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), the Free Aceh secessionist movement.

The pact ended decades of conflict that claimed an estimated 15,000 lives.

Training needs

Teungku Nazri, who lost his wife in the tsunami, said life for many survivors had improved, though some still lived in temporary shelters provided by the government.

"There are many kinds of work that we can do now, but we need training so we can have better jobs," said Nazri, 35, who was jailed for being a separatist supporter and now runs a welding workshop in Banda Aceh, the provincial capital.

Mas Amah, 36, who lost her only son and 13 other relatives in the tsunami, said her husband used to sell produce before the disaster but was now left without a regular job.

"Life is more difficult and uncertain now. My husband does odd jobs, sometimes helping people sell their cars or motorcycles," said Amah.

"We need capital to start a small business and it's very difficult to get it," she told IRIN.

The head of the Aceh Reconstruction Sustainability Agency (BKRA), which replaced the Aceh-Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR) after its mandate expired this year, said 94 percent of reconstruction had been completed during the past five years.

"But there's still a lot of work to do in the areas of infrastructure and the economy," Iskandar, who like many Indonesians goes by just one name, told IRIN.

"When the tsunami hit, a lot of rice fields were destroyed and some of these areas can't be used any more, so we still need to [develop] 2,000ha of new fields," he said.

Poverty, healthcare and education are among the most pressing issues for the Aceh government, Iskandar said.

Unresolved issues

Teuku Haikal, a spokesman for the Southwest Aceh Coastal Caucus, an NGO, said BKRA had not been able to resolve issues left over by BRR, including the ownership of multiple houses by some survivors.

Iskandar said more than 130,000 houses had been built, enough to shelter all survivors, but some people received two or three houses because they owned large tracts of land before the tsunami.

"We have reported these problems to the district governments and the police so that they can identify people who are not entitled to some of the houses and give the houses to those who deserve [them]," he said.

Iskandar said no figure was available of how many had still not received houses.

Job creation

With an unemployment rate of 10 percent, job creation is a crucial issue in Aceh, officials said.

"A US\$50 million project will fund various sub-projects designed to support economic development, especially job creation in areas such as agriculture and fisheries," Aceh Deputy Governor Muhammad Nazar said in a speech on 16 December.

Nazar said the Multi-Donor Fund, a partnership of government and international agencies, had contributed \$700 million, which was used to build 19,122 houses, 2,655km of rural roads, 936 bridges and 1,473km of irrigation channels.

Meanwhile, the global relief agency *Mercy Corps* said it had helped close to 900,000 Indonesians restore their livelihoods and build stronger and safer communities.

"Mercy Corps believes that communities are most capable of solving their own problems. Empowering them is the best way to ensure lasting peace and development in Aceh," said Rod Volway, Mercy Corps' Aceh programme director, in a statement.

atp/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

22 Dec 2009

Asia: IFRC urges greater commitment to risk reduction

BANGKOK, 17 December 2009 (IRIN) - More funds and policies are needed for disaster risk reduction to protect vulnerable communities in the Asia Pacific region, says the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The call comes as the IFRC marks the fifth anniversary of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed 226,000 people in 13 countries, including more than 50,000 people whose bodies were never found.

"We're calling for greater awareness, greater commitment, in terms of funding but also in terms of actions on all of our part, because that's really what we believe is going to save lives in the long run," Al Panico, head of the IFRC's tsunami unit, told reporters at a 17 December briefing on lessons learnt after the tsunami.

That means "developing a policy, including it in programmes and . incorporating it into the response areas that are funded by donors, doing what people said they would do, and connecting the early warning systems to the community", he said.

The Asia Pacific region experiences major disasters but the IFRC said the main threat came from localized, small-scale disasters - which have increased from an average of 21 in 2004 to 51 in 2008 - and more risk-reduction activities were needed.

Panico said much had been done to improve early warning systems in the region after the tsunami, but there was a gap in communicating warnings to people potentially affected by disasters.

"Getting [messages] to the people who need to act, the people in the community, the people on the ground who need to . protect themselves in some way, is the challenge. And that's where there is a gap," he said.

Humanitarian reform

The tsunami was caused by a 9.15 magnitude earthquake off Indonesia, which lasted for nearly 10 minutes. It led to destruction on an immense scale, but was matched by an unprecedented outpouring of donations, and the biggest response and recovery operation since World War II, said Panico.

"This disaster touched everyone, everywhere," he said.

The cost of rebuilding damaged infrastructure has been estimated at US\$10.9 billion, according to the IFRC, citing UN and government agencies.

By December 2005, \$14 billion had been pledged, with \$11.6 billion either committed or received by NGOs, the Red Cross movement and UN agencies.

Challenges included a lack of government capacity in the coordination of relief efforts, immense logistical problems with infrastructure destroyed, as well as demands for increased accountability.

However, Panico said the disaster had also sparked reform of humanitarian action by a number of governments. It also helped establish the cluster system - which better coordinates agencies' efforts - and brought in recovery activities as a key element of disaster relief.

Having learnt these lessons, efforts moved from relief to recovery in three months following the earthquake off West Sumatra in Indonesia in September this year, which Panico said was "unheard of in previous disasters".

The tsunami "has changed for ever the way that we respond", he added.

The IFRC, with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, also launched *a multimedia web documentary* on how tsunami survivors have recovered since the disaster.

ey/mw

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

17 Dec 2009

Indonesia: Quake survivors start rebuilding as agencies warn of funding gaps

PADANG, 30 November 2009 (IRIN) - Funding shortfalls and a lag in government grants have left thousands of people without adequate shelter two months after a devastating earthquake hit Indonesia's West Sumatra province, agencies say.

The survivors are still living in makeshift tents and damaged houses after the quake on 30 September, and NGOs are appealing for more funding.

Graham Eastmond, coordinator of the emergency shelter cluster of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), said NGOs needed US\$25 million for transitional shelters in rural and semi-rural areas.

"They need the funding urgently because they are running out of money and because of the urgent need on the ground," Eastmond told IRIN. "It is the monsoon season. People are still under canvas or under tarps or returning to heavily damaged houses which are unsafe and it is raining hard every night."

The 7.9 magnitude earthquake off West Sumatra's coast hit the provincial capital of Padang city and surrounding districts, leaving 1,117 people dead.

Eastmond said National Disaster Management Agency data showed 182,000 houses moderately or severely damaged in the quake.

In rural and semi-urban areas, "around 30,000 transitional shelters are currently planned by NGOs and we've identified a gap of about 80,000 shelters", he said.

Charlie Mason, deputy team leader of Save the Children's West Sumatra earthquake response programme, said funding was so tight that his NGO was now focusing on advocacy to raise more money for a transitional housing cash grant programme.

"There's very little donor interest and funding in transitional shelter at the moment," said Mason.

Funding delays

The government plans to disburse cash grants to assist victims with rebuilding permanent housing, but officials said there would be a wait for the funds to come through.

"That probably won't be at least until March, when the central government revises the budget," said D Nuzul Putra, head of public relations for the West Sumatra government.

Akhi Ruddi, 46, from Koto Buruk in Padang Pariaman, the worst-affected district, said his village was starting to rebuild, but "we need wood, cement and nails. There are some people around here selling the materials, but we can't all afford to buy them."

He said people in his village were not prepared to wait for government help. "The government takes so long to do anything. We are worried that they'll never come. If they do, they'll probably take most of the money for themselves."

Cramped conditions

Along the roads of Padang Pariaman, thousands of houses bear pink signs that read "rusak berat" (severely damaged) and too dangerous to inhabit.

Many residents, however, are still living in these dwellings, while others are camped outside their homes under blue tarpaulins distributed by NGOs. Some have more substantial temporary shelters made of timber.

Many families have no choice but to cram into tents.

"Families living in overcrowded conditions can lead to separation of children, who are often sent to relatives and orphanages," said Mason. "There are health risks and risks of abuse. We've had reports of 20 people living in one tent."

CHF International, which specializes in housing, has begun a temporary shelter pilot project. It has erected 82 so far and plans to offer Pariaman residents 5,000 shelter kits.

"It will be a challenge to reach this target on schedule because of the rain," said CHF construction manager Muhamad Afrianto Fajrin.

Novridayanti, 30, a mother of three, has received a CHF shelter. She has access to electricity in her home and has started up a stall, where she sells rambutan fruit and fried snacks.

"I feel more independent now. I can do everything myself again," she said.

Novridayanti was sceptical of the government's plan to give cash grants next year, and would prefer NGOs to administer shelter aid.

"The government was supposed to give 80,000 rupiah [\$8.50] to each Pariaman resident in a family of five or more. We only got payment for four people. Everyone I know in a family of five says the same," she said.

Novridayanti first lost her home in a 2007 earthquake. "The government was building us another house, but they still hadn't finished it when this one hit. What they had built was completely destroyed anyway," she said.

Instead of waiting for the government, many survivors have built their own temporary shelters or begun reconstructing their homes.

"The self-recovery rate is high, but families require technical assistance to ensure that the homes they are building meet international standards and are earthquake resistant," IFRC's Eastmond said.

ad/ey/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

30 Nov 2009

Indonesia: Focus on earthquake preparedness, not prediction

JAKARTA, 27 November 2009 (IRIN) - Predicting earthquakes is an inexact science - which is why disaster preparedness remains key to saving lives, scientists say.

Experts have forecast that a long undersea faultline along Indonesia's Sumatra Island is due to produce a powerful and devastating earthquake in the next few decades.

Sections of the fault, called the Sunda megathrust, have ruptured a number of times over the past decade, causing several earthquakes in the region.

A major earthquake could trigger a tsunami that could result in casualties and damage equal to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, writes Kerry Sieh, a scientist at the Earth Observatory of Singapore, in an article made available to IRIN.

"To those living in harm's way [on] the coasts of western Sumatra, it should be useful to know that the next great earthquake and tsunami are likely to occur within the next few decades, well within the lifetimes of children and young adults living there now," the article states.

A magnitude 7.9 earthquake that devastated West Sumatra province and killed more than 1,100 people on 30 September originated near that faultline, according to experts.

"We don't know when such a great earthquake will happen. It could be tomorrow, next year or the next five years," said Fauzi, head of the Earthquake Center at the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency in Jakarta, who like many Indonesians only uses one name.

"It will be much more beneficial if we focus on preparedness. Earthquakes don't kill, but collapsed buildings do," he told IRIN.

Fauzi said between 1991 and 2009, Indonesia was hit by 43 major earthquakes, 15 of which generated tsunamis. The 30 September quake in West Sumatra resulted in a tsunami, though it was very small, he said.

Predicting earthquakes is also a sensitive issue in Indonesia and false rumours could create panic, Fauzi warned. "When scientists say an earthquake with a magnitude of 8.8 is likely to occur based on scientific findings, people refuse to go to school or work and SMS relatives," he said. "The public talks about tomorrow, while scientists talk about years."

Forecasting

Wahyu Triyoso, a geologist with the Bandung Institute of Technology, said the magnitude of an earthquake correlates with the size of the fault.

"If we could measure the amount of slip precisely, probably we could make rough estimates and we can make necessary preparations," he told IRIN. "Forecasting means little if we don't know the fault size, the dimension, length and width."

Triyoso said even though knowledge of a potential earthquake was useful for scientists, it would be hard to communicate to the general public.

"If we say a certain place is dangerous and the public panic, it could become a social disaster," he said.
"So at the moment, preparedness is the best course of action," he said.

In West Sumatra, an NGO called the Tsunami Alert Community (Kogami) has been working to instil a culture of preparedness among the population since 2005.

Kogami has been providing training on disaster preparedness in schools and communities in the provincial capital Padang, teaching them what to do should an earthquake and a tsunami hit.

The group has mapped out evacuation routes, with high-risk areas zoned red, while low-risk areas are zoned yellow.

It is introducing similar programmes in other districts in cooperation with other NGOs.

"Many people [live] in fear because they have received little information about earthquakes and what to do when a disaster happens," said Patra Rina Dewi, Kogami's executive director.

"We know we live in an earthquake zone and our job is to equip people with necessary knowledge," she said.

atp/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Nov 2009

Indonesia: Buildings on shaky ground in event of another quake, says survey

BANGKOK, 19 November 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesia's West Sumatra province, recently hit by a deadly 7.9 magnitude earthquake, is likely to experience an even bigger quake, and buildings need to be constructed to withstand this, experts say.

The 30 September earthquake, which struck off West Sumatra's coast, hit the provincial capital of Padang, killing more than 1,100 people and leaving numerous collapsed and damaged buildings.

As a result, 45 engineers from Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, funded by the intergovernmental Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction, undertook a three-week survey of 4,000 buildings in the quake zone.

"Essentially we were looking at factors that have basically either contributed to their failure from the ground shaking, or also the factors that have contributed to . some structures not being impacted," Matthew Hayne from Geoscience Australia and co-leader of the team, told IRIN.

"Some recent studies indicate there is a big [likelihood] of having an 8.5 earthquake in the next decade . Our building codes should consider this potential event," said Wayan Sengara from the Center for Disaster Mitigation at the Institute of Technology Bandung in Indonesia, and co-leader of the survey team.

The survey has identified the need for technical advice and education for home builders, while there are also several engineering recommendations, including the proper use of reinforcement and concrete.

The results, which are being passed to Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency, are intended to help build safer buildings during the reconstruction phase.

"One of the driving factors behind the survey that we're doing here and the recommendations . relate to the fact that there is a high probability that the future event, when it occurs, will be a tsunamigenic event as well as that earthquake," said Hayne.

Preparing for the next disaster

The Indonesian government has put the number of severely and moderately damaged houses at 181,665, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) *latest situation report* on 3 November. Ten hospitals, 272 health facilities and 1,078 schools were damaged.

The survey team, assisted by university engineering students, focused on medical facilities and schools.

Sengara said building codes - which needed to be updated; the extent of compliance of building designs to the codes; and, in turn, the compliance of construction to building designs, were all factors that played into the extent of damage.

"Most of the buildings we surveyed [that] experienced some damage were constructed before 2002. So the construction behind the design of the building, and also the construction quality, seems to be one of the contributors to the damage," he said.

He warned of an "accumulated risk" if the survey's recommendations were not followed through, but also flagged difficulties with enforcing compliance with building codes, even if they were updated.

"This is an issue in many provinces in Indonesia. What happens is that the compliance of the design to the building code is not well enforced by the government," said Sengara.

"Before the building can be constructed, there is supposed to be a building permit and before issuing this building permit, there should be some requirements. The compliance of the design to the building code has to be reviewed. And in the current situation, this process is weak," he said.

Indonesia is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, which is vulnerable to seismic activity because tectonic plates meet there. West Sumatra's low-lying coastline faces the Indian Ocean and the province has been called a "supermarket" for disasters, earthquakes and tsunamis by local officials.

ey/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

19 Nov 2009

Asia: Breastfeeding more crucial in emergencies

BANGKOK, 13 November 2009 (IRIN) - A recent spate of natural disasters in Asia has further underscored the importance of breastfeeding during emergencies, with a need for additional policies to support this.

Hundreds of thousands were displaced and forced into evacuation shelters following a series of deadly typhoons in the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, and an earthquake in Indonesia in the past two months.

But according to experts, during such disasters, support for mothers to breastfeed is often overlooked and not given the priority it needs, despite its life-saving function.

Besides raising awareness of the importance of breastfeeding, aid organizations need to have policies on infant feeding, they say.

"You have to have a strong policy in place, and make sure all the actors and all the staff in that organization know about this policy," Anna Winoto, a nutrition specialist with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Indonesia, told IRIN.

In emergency situations, poor water and sanitation and security situations contribute to a heightened risk of disease among children, who are vulnerable to diarrhoea, malnutrition and pneumonia.

Practices such as using infant formula milk, when water may be contaminated and feeding bottles cannot be sterilized, contributes to the risk and has been shown to lead to an increase in diarrhoeal disease in infants.

"Breastfeeding is actually even more crucial under emergency conditions because children under five, and infants in particular, are at an increased risk of infection, disease and malnutrition," Winoto said.

"Breastfeeding should be seen as a life-saving intervention," she said.

In an emergency situation, establishing private spaces for mothers and infants, one-to-one counselling and mother-to-mother support is needed to encourage breastfeeding, say UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).

"As part of emergency preparedness, hospitals and other healthcare services should have trained health workers who can help mothers establish breastfeeding and overcome difficulties," said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan in a statement to mark World Breastfeeding Week in August.

Both UNICEF and WHO advocate exclusive breastfeeding for children up to six months of age, and continued breastfeeding and complementary feeding until age two.

Dangerous donations

But one obstacle to breastfeeding during emergencies is unsolicited or uncontrolled donations of breast-milk substitutes, which undermine breastfeeding, according to UNICEF and WHO.

Following a 7.9 magnitude earthquake in West Sumatra on 30 September, UNICEF Indonesia, worked with the country's Health Ministry, and contacted local and national radio stations to broadcast requests to stop milk-substitute donations.

"It's a huge problem, and the problem lies in the lack of knowledge among the donors on the potential harm," said Winoto.

Meanwhile, coordination in emergencies also remains a challenge, with little capacity to locate only those children who truly need infant formula and not disrupt breastfeeding practices, she said.

"In our experience, it's gotten better but it's still a huge challenge because there are so many actors when an emergency comes, and so many donations," she said.

Helping with trauma

Besides the health benefits, breastfeeding advocates underline the psycho-social benefit of maintaining the activity during an emergency, which is traumatic for babies and young children, experts say.

"In an emergency, keeping the baby on the breast is not only about nutrition, it is giving the child that security and closeness when it is scared," Elvira Henares-Esguerra, director of the Philippine NGO Children for Breastfeeding, *told IRIN*.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Ketsana, which caused massive flooding in the Philippines in September, Henares-Esguerra and a handful of breastfeeding mothers with their children visited an evacuation centre.

They demonstrated breastfeeding practices, and encouraged displaced mothers to do the same.

"We discovered that infant formula was being given out by the government at evacuation centres," said Henares-Esguerra.

"We wanted to encourage the mothers to breastfeed," she said.

ey/ds/cb[END]

Indonesia: WASH concerns a month after Sumatra quake

JAKARTA, 4 November 2009 (IRIN) - Thousands of survivors of an earthquake that devastated Indonesia's West Sumatra Province are still grappling with a lack of clean water and adequate sanitation more than a month after the disaster, relief workers say.

Aid agencies are delivering clean water to survivors by truck, but it is insufficient unless water sources damaged by the earthquake on 30 September are restored, said Endang Trisna, programme coordinator for *Mercy Corps*.

"Water pumps in many houses have been damaged and wells are contaminated with sand and dirt. Some residents have no access at all to clean water," Trisna told IRIN.

Trisna said Mercy Corps was helping villagers fix their water sources and providing treatment facilities, as well as building latrines and distributing hygiene kits in Padang Pariaman and Agam districts, among the worst hit by the earthquake.

"Our staff are also providing training on hygiene. Our target is to help 10,000 households," she said.

The magnitude 7.6 quake left 1,117 people dead and more than 119,000 houses severely damaged or destroyed, according to the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB).

IDP camps

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its *3 November report* that funding for transitional shelter, water and sanitation, and agriculture activities was still urgently needed to bridge the gap into the recovery phase.

According to the report, 600,000 people in Padang, the provincial capital, will be reliant on water trucks until year-end.

There are also 4,000 displaced people in three camps in Agam and about 4,000 in six camps in Padang Pariaman who are being supported with water and sanitation activities.

The government declared a recovery phase from 1 November in all but Padang Pariaman and Agam, home to the camps, where the emergency phase continues because sanitation is particularly poor. The camps are providing shelter for some of the thousands of people displaced by landslides triggered by the earthquake, said Tanty Pranawisanty, Mercy Corps emergency response team leader.

"The tents are not up to standard. They are close to each other, causing overcrowding," she said.

The government is expected to announce its rehabilitation and reconstruction action plan on 15 November, the OCHA report stated.

Ade Edward, head of West Sumatra's disaster coordinating agency, said piped water had been restored in 60 percent of households in Padang, while about 1,000 temporary shelters had been built by aid groups.

But he admitted that living conditions for people displaced in Agam and Padang Pariaman were still far from normal.

"They live in makeshift shelters and there's a lack of water and toilets," Edward told IRIN. "There are problems with sanitation, but it's being handled by authorities."

Funding gap

The UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, said aid groups have complained they lacked funds to deliver water but stressed that the situation would not threaten the emergency relief effort.

"Aid agencies have been helping with the supply of water bladders and other equipment, but the operational cost is being paid by the local tap water company," said Lely Djuhari, a spokeswoman for UNICEF Indonesia.

"We're confident the government will come up with the cost for water trucking for the next three months, or even beyond," she said.

Meanwhile, the government estimates that reconstruction in West Sumatra will cost more than US\$700 million, while the BNPB says more than \$315 million will be needed for rebuilding damaged houses.

"We are still awaiting the release of the funds by the central government. However, some reconstruction work has begun, even though money from the government has not come," said BNPB spokesman Priyadi Kardono.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

04 Nov 2009

Indonesia: Quake survivors to receive temporary shelters

JAKARTA, 23 October 2009 (IRIN) - The Indonesian government and aid agencies have begun building temporary shelters for hundreds of thousands of people displaced by last month's earthquake in West Sumatra Province.

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake on 30 September left 1,117 people dead, more than 1,200 seriously injured and over 135,000 homes badly damaged or destroyed.

Thousands of temporary homes will be built, some using materials recycled from damaged homes, Priyadi Kardono, a spokesman for the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), announced.

Each shelter will be 18 sqm and cost three million rupiah (US\$318), Kardono said.

"Work on temporary houses has begun in some locations," Kardono told IRIN. "Such buildings can last up to six months and are more comfortable than tents," he said.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its *20 October situation report* that shelter remained the biggest unmet need in West Sumatra.

The BNPB director for reconstruction, Bakri Beck, said the rebuilding of permanent houses and provision of basic necessities over two months would cost an estimated 3.3 trillion rupiah (\$350 million).

But the total cost of reconstruction was still being calculated by an assessment team with the help of the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Beck said.

"We expect the reconstruction period to start in early November," Beck said.

Kardono said the government was considering setting up a special agency tasked with rebuilding West Sumatra, similar to the Aceh Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR), established after the 2004 tsunami.

"It is still being discussed. The president [Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono] wants a body similar to the BRR for the sake of accountability," Kardono said.

Reaching remote areas

According to OCHA, only 20 percent of the population in the provincial capital, Padang, was connected to the water distribution network, while only 50 percent of health facilities were operational.

BNPB has reported that all isolated areas had now been reached but humanitarian organizations were still receiving reports of remote communities needing assistance, OCHA said.

The head of the provincial Public Works Department, Dody Ruswandi, said 85 percent of infrastructure in the province was damaged.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) said it was also planning to distribute 3,500 individual tool kits - one for each family of five - and 700 community demolition and reconstruction tool kits in Padang Pariaman and Agam districts, among the worst-affected by the quake.

The IOM also said its trucks had delivered 2,709 tonnes of food and non-food relief items on behalf of 82 aid agencies.

Kardono said the government had yet to declare the emergency phase in West Sumatra over, although he had earlier said the BNPB wanted to move to the recovery phase as soon as possible, possibly three weeks after the earthquake.

"We still have time, up to two months. We want everything to go smoothly," he said.

He said foreign aid workers would be notified in advance before the government declared the emergency phase over.

Once the recovery phase begins, all NGOs will need to be registered with the government to continue operating.

atp/ds/mw

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

23 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Climate change worsening disasters, says UN

JAKARTA, 16 October 2009 (IRIN) - Climate change is contributing to more frequent and deadlier natural disasters, and governments need to speed up measures to mitigate their impact, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, warns.

Holmes, in Indonesia for a two-day visit after a deadly 30 September earthquake off West Sumatra, warned there would be more intense typhoons, flooding, droughts and forest fires because of climate change.

"Look at the trend. How many [disasters] there are and how bad they are, not only here but also in Central America, and it's perfectly clear what's happening and that's what scientists said would happen," Holmes, also the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, told IRIN in an interview on 15 October.

"To me, that means there's a link between climate change and more frequent disasters," he said.

Given this, governments should be better prepared, and take measures to reduce the impact, he said.

"That means people not living in areas that are flood-[prone]; it means making sure buildings are not in areas that are flood-[prone]," said Holmes.

Holmes also said recent disasters in the Asia-Pacific region made negotiations for a new climate change deal - which are faltering - all the more important.

The Asian region has been hit by several disasters in recent weeks, including devastating floods in the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Nepal, affecting millions.

About 99 percent of those killed by natural disasters were in the Asia Pacific region, said Holmes.

"Obviously it's important to reduce emissions, that's fundamental to stopping climate change in the end. But in the meantime, whatever we do about emissions, the results are already with us for the next 50 years," he said.

Separately, Holmes urged disaster-prone Asian countries to spend one-tenth of their development funds on efforts to reduce disaster risks.

The international community spent US\$12 billion on disaster relief last year. "A 10 percent figure of what you are spending on response or even on development should go into disaster-risk reduction because that is a good investment," he told reporters.

Funding for West Sumatra

Holmes travelled to quake-hit areas in West Sumatra and met the head of the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), as well as humanitarian agencies.

He said the UN would release about \$7 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund for aid efforts in West Sumatra, including 12 projects focusing on emergency shelter, nutrition, reopening schools and health sector support.

The UN on 9 October launched a \$38 million appeal to help the Indonesian government meet the needs of quake survivors.

The BNPB has revised the death toll from the earthquake to 1,117, including those missing and believed buried in landslides.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its *latest situation report* on 15 October that 198,200 households needed emergency shelter.

Lack of access to remote areas remains the major obstacle to providing aid to survivors, but the Indonesian Military (TNI) has agreed to deploy 500 soldiers to rebuild roads or create new access routes to affected areas, OCHA said.

Reconstruction delays

Oxfam Indonesia's humanitarian programme manager, Sébastien Fesneau, said survivors needed tarpaulins, tents and plastic sheeting for shelter - as well as food.

But he said rebuilding houses would prove a greater challenge, because the brick industry in West Sumatra had been paralysed by the quake.

"It will be a problem when we are looking for adequate building materials, and this could possibly delay the reconstruction phase," Fesneau told IRIN.

Some NGOs were considering building transitional shelters using bamboo or coconut trees pending the availability of building materials, he said.

Fesneau also said many survivors had been forced to sell their belongings to meet their basic needs, resulting in what he called "asset erosion".

"We will introduce a cash transfer programme targeting the most vulnerable groups to ensure their belongings will not be sold," he said.

atp/ey/ds/mw

[END]

Indonesia: Diseases strike West Sumatra quake survivors

JAKARTA, 12 October 2009 (IRIN) - Survivors of a severe earthquake that struck Indonesia's West Sumatra province have developed illnesses caused by poor living conditions, say medical workers, while shelter and food remain key concerns almost two weeks after the disaster.

In Padang Pariaman district, one of the areas hardest hit by the 30 September earthquake, survivors have contracted respiratory infections, and suffered diarrhoea and skin problems, said Werrizal Amsir, medical coordinator for the local Ibu Foundation aid group.

And in the Kotobaru village of the Padang Sagoe subdistrict, many residents were infected with conjunctivitis (or pink eye), said Amsir.

"We have treated more than 1,500 with various post-disaster diseases. Many of the survivors slept in the open so they were exposed to dust, heat and poor hygiene," Amsir told IRIN.

Amsir, a doctor, said his team of 14 volunteers was trying to access remote areas that had received little or no aid.

With shelter a priority, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) warned that thousands of people who had lost their homes and belongings needed medical attention.

"Many people now live in the open . in poor hygiene conditions and have little access to clean water," said Loreto Barceló, a doctor with MSF, in a statement on 9 October.

"We can expect many respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea, and other pathologies that result from these poor living conditions," he said.

Shelter issues

However, National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) spokesman Priyadi Kardono said there were no major health issues in quake-affected areas, even though shelter and food remained key problems in more remote villages.

"There were cases of respiratory tract infections and diarrhoea but there has been no major outbreak of infectious disease," he told IRIN.

Kardono also said 80 percent of electricity had been restored, but water pipes in some areas were still damaged.

"Because electricity is running, people can use their electric water pumps. We have been delivering water to households that do not have electric water pumps," he said.

Funding appeal

The BNPB says at least 809 people were killed in the magnitude 7.6 quake. Another 241 are listed as missing, with all but four of them in Padang Pariaman, where landslides triggered by the quake buried entire hamlets.

The quake also left 1,250 people injured and more than 135,300 buildings severely damaged.

The BNPB said on its website on 11 October that relief supplies had reached almost all affected areas, while the number of medical personnel was sufficient to care for survivors.

Mass vaccination and fumigation had also been carried out, while all community clinics were functioning.

The UN on 9 October launched a *US\$38 million appeal* to help the Indonesian government meet the needs of communities affected by the earthquake for the next three months.

Drafted with the government, the appeal covers projects run by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as international NGOs.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its 11 October situation report that 8.025T of hulled rice was needed to feed 133,739 households for one month.

OCHA said the BNPB had indicated that the stock of relief items for the next distribution was limited.

At least 662 school tents were needed to accommodate students returning to school, it said.

Meanwhile, WFP has distributed 800T of rice, and 15T of biscuits for infants as well as blankets and tents, the BNPB said.

UNICEF has delivered more than 100 water storage containers - each with sufficient capacity for 5,000 litres of clean water - 20,000 jerry cans; 2,000 packages of water purification tablets; 40,000 hygiene kits containing buckets, soap, detergent; 250 school tents and 120 sets of school and recreational materials.

atp/ey/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

12 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Java quake survivors in dire need of shelter

JAKARTA, 9 October 2009 (IRIN) - As relief efforts are ramped up following the West Sumatra earthquake on *30 September*, aid groups have warned that thousands of survivors of an earlier quake on the Indonesian island of Java are facing health risks unless they receive adequate shelter.

Aid workers said some of the 196,000 people who have been sheltered in 24 camps for the displaced in West Java province after the 2 September quake have been exposed to extreme heat during the day and cold at night.

People are living in huts, family tents or under tarpaulins. Some are built on open fields, and others are near what remains of survivors' houses, said Tatang Husaini, programme officer for the Foundation for Disaster Control, an NGO that has been helping the displaced.

"It is extremely hot during the day and cold at night," Husaini said. "These extreme conditions make people, especially children, vulnerable to diseases such as respiratory problems."

Husaini said some survivors had begun rebuilding their own houses without waiting for government assistance, but most of the displaced were too poor to do that.

The mood was sombre in the camps when millions in the world's most populous Muslim country celebrated Eid al-Fitr late last month, said Nanang Kurniawan, whose house in the Pangalengan area was destroyed.

"It used to be very festive, with people gathering and families enjoying food," Kurniawan told IRIN by telephone. "But this time we have to live in these sad conditions. I feel sorry for the children."

Reconstruction funds

The *7.3 magnitude* earthquake left 81 people dead, with 1,297 injured and 41 missing. About 100,000 homes, 3,000 schools and 500 office buildings were damaged, according to the latest figures made available by the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB) on 28 September.

Bakri Beck, the deputy in charge of reconstruction and rehabilitation at the BNPB, said a team of government agencies assisted by the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) had completed an assessment of the damage.

They will submit a proposal for 1.5 trillion rupiah (US\$159 million) in reconstruction funds to the finance ministry, he told IRIN on 9 October.

"Tomorrow [10 October] we will submit the result of the assessment. I think the process will be fast. Approval will probably take a day or two," Beck told IRIN.

Beck said the government had not formally requested international assistance in rebuilding West Java's quake-affected areas, but would welcome foreign aid such as tents, school rebuilding and clean water facilities.

BNPB spokesman Priyadi Kardono played down concern about the dire situation in the camps for the displaced, saying the health ministry had taken necessary measures to prevent outbreaks of disease and that aid had been distributed evenly in all affected areas.

"In an emergency situation like this, where there are camps for the displaced, there will always be health problems, but it has been anticipated by the Health Ministry and the Ministry of Social Affairs, so there are no problems," he told IRIN.

Losing out in remote areas

However, Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, a Geneva-based group, has reported that remote areas, which have not been properly assessed by authorities, were still in need of aid, and warned that conditions would deteriorate if nothing was done quickly.

"The risk to lives and health will [gradually increase] as people need to stay longer in tents or huts, especially for children under five, pregnant mothers and the elderly in cold conditions at night, as most of them are in mountainous areas," the Church World Service said in an ACT appeal for funding on 1 October.

In one of the worst-hit areas, the Pengalengan district of West Java, ACT International said it found 1,472 households with 3,436 people still living in the evacuation command post or in tents outside their damaged houses.

Families have been packed into tents at five or six households a tent, leading to conflict, said the group, which has provided blankets, tarpaulins and family tents for the displaced.

"Healthcare for people living in tents and under tarpaulins is inadequate. People who have contracted diseases in unhygienic conditions have to stand in long queues in the hope of receiving any medical care," ACT said in a report released on 22 September.

atp/ey/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

09 Oct 2009

How to: Rescue people trapped in a collapsed building

NAIROBI, 8 October 2009 (IRIN) - When an earthquake strikes a town, or a building is levelled by an explosion, news footage invariably shows search and rescue teams trawling through the rubble looking for survivors. But what does it take to rescue people trapped under tons of concrete?

Step one - coordination

The first thing is to activate search and rescue teams, often highly trained volunteers.

"Most of our members are doctors, ambulance operators, engineers or fire fighters," said John Holland, operations director of Rapid UK [<http://www.rapidsar.org.uk/>], a charitable search and rescue group.

They go through a rigorous two-year training process before they are allowed to assist in disasters.

"We try to deploy within 24 hours because the earlier we are on the ground, the better the chances of rescuing survivors," Holland said. "During the Pakistan earthquake [in 2005], we were able to deploy in 21 hours."

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (*INSARAG*) - a global network of more than 80 countries and disaster response organizations under the UN umbrella - has standardized guidelines for rescue missions.

"Once a government has made that call for international assistance, we alert our members, who begin mobilizing to travel to the area," said INSARAG's Winston Chang, a Singapore Civil Defence Force veteran who coordinated the search and rescue efforts following the recent earthquake in Padang, Indonesia. "We run a portal where once a disaster occurs, we pool information and our various teams can input data on their movements - whether they are on standby, mobilizing or have reached the ground."

INSARAG will usually set up an "on site operations coordination centre" where all search and rescue teams get instructions - depending on their area of specialty - on where to go and how to operate; the desk holds regular meetings to update itself and the teams on the progress being made on the ground.

"These operations can be quite large; just now in Padang, there were a total of 21 teams with 668 personnel and 67 search dogs," Chang said. "They need bases of operation where they will fuel their heavy equipment, coordinate their internal logistics and sleep."

"We also ensure that they follow specific standards of operation and remain culturally sensitive, especially since the teams are from such diverse backgrounds," he added.

Step two - analysis

Once in the disaster area, the first step is to analyze the task at hand, said Julie Ryan, a volunteer with the British NGO, the International Rescue Corps.

In a collapsed building, "you need to analyze the building, assess its history and try to establish where in the building people are most likely to be", she told IRIN. "You also need to determine how badly a building has been damaged and whether it is likely to collapse any further, causing damage to [survivors] and rescue teams."

The assessment also involves checking for hazards such as downed power lines, gas leaks, flooding and hazardous materials. Protective gear includes special suits, gloves, masks, and oxygen and carbon monitoring systems for air quality.

Step three - search mode

At its most basic, this involves trying to spot limbs in the rubble, and calling out to survivors to identify their locations.

Rescuers look for "voids", or pockets where people may be trapped when walls collapse or where survivors may have hidden, such as under desks, in bath tubs or stairwells.

"We feed a camera on the end of a flexible pole into the collapsed building - this shows where people are and how much of the building's structure is left," Ryan said.

"Rescuers also use sound location devices connected to a microphone system; the device bangs on the rubble three times and if people tap back or call out for help, they can be tracked and assisted," she added.

Listening is a crucial part of the operation, and search teams will often stop for several minutes to try to hear any calls, scratches or taps.

Other search tools include a thermal image camera system, which shows areas of body heat, and trained sniffer dogs. "We also use a carbon dioxide analyzer, which helps us detect people who might be unconscious but still breathing," Ryan said.

Buildings that have been searched are marked with INSARAG-recognized signs to avoid duplication of searches.

As survivors are found, rescuers try to get them to keep talking to determine their exact location, and dig towards them - the least dangerous way to do this is by hand.

Step four - the rescue operation

If survivors are trapped under rubble, it may need to be stabilized first; a process called cribbing - the construction of a rectangular wooden framework, a box crib, underneath the debris - may be used.

Survivors who are not able to move usually need to be lifted, dragged or carried out of the rubble using special equipment.

"If people cannot be manually dug out, then we can cut them out - there are specialized tools that can cut through concrete, metal and wood to reach survivors," Ryan said. "There is also a process known as 'slabbing', where heavy slabs of concrete are removed in order to free survivors - this is always a very difficult judgment call, because it risks further collapse, which could injure or kill more people."

Concrete saws, jackhammers, chainsaws, bolt cutters, cranes and bulldozers are all part of the tool kit; chains, cables, anchors and rope-hauling systems are used to remove large pieces of masonry. Other equipment may include flat bags that are inserted under heavy objects and inflated with an air pump, and "shoring" equipment, which ensures passageways are stable and safe.

As survivors are removed, their medical condition is determined; patients are prioritized according to triage - based on the severity of their condition.

Search and rescue teams usually start the most urgent medical procedures on site; the most experienced teams may have defibrillators and endo-tracheal equipment to shock people back to life or perform emergency tracheotomies.

Step five - closure

Deciding when to end a rescue operation is always difficult.

"Obviously, the more time passes the less likely you are to find people alive," said Ryan. "But sometimes - especially if they have water available - people can remain alive for many days. In Pakistan, our team rescued two boys five days after the earthquake; they had survived on trickles of rainwater through the rubble."

According to Ryan, finding bodies - cadaver rescue - after the search for survivors is over is a very important part of any operation.

"Even when people haven't survived the collapse of a building, families find that having a body to bury is an important part of getting closure," she said.

According to INSARAG's Chang, the high octane operations can take their toll on rescuers, especially when they have to pull hundreds of dead people out of buildings.

"Most of them are used to dealing with blood and death in their daily professions, but from time to time it can become very difficult," he said. "Many teams are equipped to deal with trauma - the Swiss government's team, for instance, has a psychologist on hand, while doctors in the Singapore team have been trained to search for signs of trauma in team members."

Once the host government officially calls off the search, INSARAG starts the process of withdrawing the teams. A few remain and become part of the humanitarian relief effort, rebuilding hospitals and schools or shelter for families, but most will head back to their day jobs and await the next call to action

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[END]

Indonesia: Quake devastation exposes poor building standards

PADANG, 7 October 2009 (IRIN) - The damage caused to Indonesia's West Sumatra province by the earthquake last month has exposed what experts say are poor construction standards in the seismically vulnerable region.

In the provincial capital of Padang, schools, shops, hotels and government offices collapsed in the 30 September quake, burying hundreds of people; many of the bodies have yet to be recovered. The official death toll was 704 as of 7 October, with at least 295 listed as missing.

About 200,000 homes and 2,000 other buildings were damaged, with about half destroyed, according to local government data.

"There are problems with construction quality," said Firman Dalil, head of West Sumatra's Building and Environmental Management Department.

"There are rules that buildings must be built by certified entities, but enforcement has been less than strict," Dalil told reporters on 7 October.

He said the provincial government planned to set up a construction council tasked with ensuring that construction plans meet government standards.

"Nationally, there's a regulation on quake-proof construction, but in West Sumatra the bar will be set higher," he said.

West Sumatra Governor Gamawan Fauzi said the province would issue a bylaw on building standards. "Many buildings in Padang, Padang Pariaman and in coastal areas are below standard," he told IRIN. "Many homes do not have steel support, and these buildings collapsed in the quake."

Padang vulnerable

Geologists *say* Padang could suffer a major earthquake that could trigger a tsunami capable of wiping out the entire city.

Padang and nearby Padang Pariaman district were hardest-hit in the 7.6 magnitude quake last month, which struck off the coast of West Sumatra. Since then, 582 aftershocks have been detected, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Nursiah, 52, said her home in the Nanggalo area near Padang collapsed in a previous 6.3 magnitude quake in March 2007, and again in the 30 September quake. "Is there a way to make my house stand in the event of an earthquake?" she asked.

Nursiah received 15 million rupiah (US\$1,500) in compensation from the national government after the 2007 quake, which was not enough to build a sturdy concrete house to withstand a strong tremor.

Emergency Architects, a France-based aid group, said it was assessing the security of buildings in the province with local experts, and was planning to build quake-proof permanent houses for survivors.

"With any future reconstruction, it's important that the fact we're in a seismic area has to be taken into consideration in the design, engineering and construction of buildings," David Rapaport of Emergency

Architects Australia told IRIN.

"The potential for earthquakes will increase rather than decrease in the future," he said.

Emmanuel Moy, head of the Emergency Architects team working in West Sumatra, said his group sought to apply European standards in its projects, which include helping to rebuild schools and permanent housing for survivors.

"The fact is that there are many structures that collapsed, so obviously there are things that need to be improved in that aspect," he said.

Temporary shelters

OCHA said in its 6 October report that more than 100,000 houses in Padang were reported to be severely damaged, while 70 to 100 percent of residential houses were beyond repair in outlying villages in Padang Pariaman.

Villagers have set up temporary shelters in front of their houses and have begun to reclaim and recycle building materials, including roofing sheets, wood and bricks, the report said, adding that it was estimated that between 40 and 70 percent could be reused.

Governor Fauzi said about half the survivors had been sheltered.

"We need at least 100,000 tents. So far we have been able to provide about 50 percent of what is needed," he said.

However not all survivors needed tents, he said. "Many are staying with their relatives, whose homes are not damaged," he said. "People can also use mosques, schools when they're not being used, and meeting halls. So there's no reason for people not to be [looked after]."

Meanwhile, aid workers have been ramping up the distribution of humanitarian assistance. Helicopters and four-wheel drive trucks delivered supplies to remote areas where survivors have complained that aid had been slow to come.

Five ships carrying food, tents and water treatment equipment docked on 7 October at Padang's harbour, said Ade Edward, head of the provincial disaster coordinating agency.

West Sumatra has declared that reconstruction and rehabilitation will begin from 1 November 2009.

atp/ey/mw

[END]

Indonesia: Quake survivors struggle with trauma

PADANG, 6 October 2009 (IRIN) - Daniel Himawan, 11, stood silently on the front porch as his mother swept the floor of their house, which was damaged in the earthquake that devastated Indonesia's West Sumatra province.

"I'm scared that another big earthquake will hit again," said Himawan, a sixth-grader.

His mother, Elisa, said since the 7.6 magnitude earthquake tore down the side wall of their house in the provincial capital, Padang, he was jittery. "Whenever there's an aftershock, he always tries to run out," she said.

The 30 September quake left 625 people dead and 295 missing, presumed dead. With many bodies still trapped under the rubble of buildings, officials said the death toll could be higher.

With relief efforts focusing on survivors after search operations were called off on 5 October, the government and humanitarian groups have deployed workers to help people recover.

In Padang Pariaman district, one of the worst-hit, symptoms of trauma and stress were evident among quake survivors, many of whose homes were destroyed, said Ridwan Gustiana, a doctor working for the local Ibu Foundation Aid group.

"They panic easily. Some of them complained of feeling weak and unable to sleep, but when we checked, there was nothing wrong with their physical condition," Gustiana told IRIN.

"The slow arrival of aid is making things worse for survivors," he added.

Vulnerable children

Experts say children are especially vulnerable to post-disaster trauma, with symptoms such as sleep difficulties, bad dreams and a tendency to get angry easily.

"During the emergency phase, in which saving lives is a priority, children are often neglected," Seto Mulyadi, chairman of Indonesia's Commission on Child Protection, told IRIN.

"Hopefully, now the evacuation phase is over, more attention will be paid to the welfare of children," he added.

A 10-member team dispatched by the commission has been in Padang Pariaman since 2 October to provide psycho-social help to children.

The team has set up a centre called Pondok Anak Ceria (Cheerful Children's House), where children can play, sing and listen to stories.

Christian aid group World Vision said child survivors are at risk of long-term psychological distress or trauma without urgent help.

As part of its relief plan in West Sumatra, it will open 13 child-friendly spaces, where children can play and learn basic skills to cope with the shocks and losses they have experienced, and receive informal education.

"It is very important to give children a safe place where they can play, to provide them with a sense of stability, routine, normalcy, to get them with their friends and away from the distress all around them," Tamara Tutnjevic, child protection adviser for the organisation's Asia Pacific region, said.

Aid groups say schools in particular provide a sense of normalcy for children in times of disaster. Schools in Padang reopened on 5 October, but the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said only 68,000 children, or 40 percent, showed up.

UNICEF has set up the first of 250 classroom tents to provide temporary learning areas in the city.

"This is an important sign that life will return to normal for children affected by this tragedy," said UNICEF Country Representative in Indonesia, Angela Kearney.

"Many children I have met amidst the shattered buildings of Padang expressed their fears for the future - they are worried about more shocks, about losing their homes, and about never going back to school again," Kearney said in a statement.

atp/ey/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

06 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Disease outbreaks feared as rescue efforts halted

PADANG, 5 October 2009 (IRIN) - Health officials said they were trying to keep disease at bay in the aftermath of the powerful quake that hit Indonesia's West Sumatra Province, as search and rescue efforts ground to a halt.

Heavy rain drenched parts of West Sumatra on 5 October, bringing fresh air to some but more misery to thousands of people still living without adequate shelter after the magnitude 7.6 earthquake.

"It's good there's rain because it will wipe out dust and the air will be cleaner. It's a blessing," said Rustam Pakaya, head of the Health Ministry's crisis centre.

Pakaya said the ministry was doing all it could to try to prevent outbreaks of diseases, including fumigation in quake-affected areas.

"We have sent medical teams to quake-hit areas to monitor the survivors and the condition of their environment," he said.

But Ridwan Gustiana of the Ibu Foundation, an Indonesian NGO working in quake-affected Padang Pariaman district to provide mobile clinics and counselling, warned that a lack of clean water and adequate shelter was making quake victims vulnerable to diseases such as diarrhoea.

"Access to clean water remains a problem. Aid supplies such as tents have not arrived, so people are surviving in what's left of their damaged homes," Gustiana told IRIN.

"People don't have adequate shelter and they risk suffering from respiratory problems, especially during the current rainy season," he said.

Rescue efforts largely halted

Rescuers are refocusing their efforts on survivors now that hopes of finding anyone alive under the rubble of destroyed buildings in the capital, Padang, were slim, officials said.

Most people missing in Padang city were buried under heavy concrete and it is unlikely they could survive for five days, said Priyadi Kardono, a spokesman for the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA).

"The search has stopped for survivors in Padang. Rescuers are now removing rubble using heavy equipment to collect bodies," Kardono told IRIN.

"In some more remote areas, the search for survivors is continuing," he added.

Relatives of the missing tried to resign themselves to the fate of their loved ones as the rescue efforts wound down.

"They still haven't found my son," said Nurkhusni, whose son was in Padang's Ambacang hotel attending a seminar held by an insurance company with 80 other people.

"The rescue effort has been slow all along. But I guess it's his fate. I'm letting him go," he said.

Buried in landslides

Meanwhile, the West Sumatra administration said it would not try to find up to 600 people buried when landslides triggered by the earthquake slammed into three hamlets in Padang Pariaman, practically turning the area into a mass grave.

"There is little possibility of finding survivors and we are prioritizing those with a higher chance of survival," said Dede Nuzul Putra, the provincial spokesman.

"The victims have been buried for more than five days, so it is unlikely they will survive," he said.

The official death toll from the 30 September earthquake stood at 608 on 5 October, according to the disaster relief coordination post at the West Sumatra governor's office.

But officials said they feared the number could be higher as many people are believed to be still buried under the rubble of ruined buildings.

At least 343 people were listed as missing. A total of 178,671 homes were damaged and more than 88,300 homes and other buildings were destroyed by the quake, according to the NDMA.

The Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, Aburizal Bakrie, said the government had earmarked six trillion rupiah (US\$625 million) towards rebuilding funds for West Sumatra and 100 billion rupiah in emergency funds.

Half the six trillion rupiah will go towards repairing homes and providing basic necessities for the survivors.

atp/ey/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

05 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Aid slow to arrive after quake

PADANG, 4 October 2009 (IRIN) - Four days after a devastating earthquake hit West Sumatra province in Indonesia, survivors say little or no humanitarian assistance has reached them, leaving some to beg for money.

At least 603 people have been killed and 343 people were missing and believed trapped under collapsed buildings after the 30 September quake, according to data from the disaster relief coordination post at the West Sumatra governor's office.

Residents in the worst-hit district of Padang Pariaman set up barriers on the roads near their damaged houses, begging for donations from motorists. Some survivors also pitched tents outside their damaged houses.

"Since the earthquake, we haven't received anything," said Riswan Zailani, whose family home was flattened in the quake, leaving only its corrugated zinc roof visible.

"I heard there's a lot of assistance coming but where is it?" said Zailani, who stood in the middle of the road waving a can to passing motorists asking for money.

According to the governor's office, around 3,000 people have been injured in the quake, some seriously, while 83,000 homes were badly damaged.

The health ministry's crisis centre estimated the death toll could reach more than 1,000, with another 618 people believed killed when landslides triggered by the earthquake buried three entire hamlets in Padang Pariaman.

Rustam Pakaya, head of the crisis centre, also estimated that 3,000 people were still missing.

Relief slow to come

The Indonesian government is leading emergency response operations, providing search and rescue services, and food and non-food relief items, while neighbouring provinces are also sending food and other assistance.

However, officials admitted that many survivors had not received aid yet.

"We have distributed whatever we have. Many have not received assistance because the stuff is still on its way," Ade Edwar, head of West Sumatra's disaster coordinating agency, told IRIN.

"Relief supplies from Jakarta are expected to arrive as soon as today. What else can we give them?" he said.

Edwar said two ships carrying tents from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) were on their way to Padang, West Sumatra's capital, and that many food warehouses in Padang were damaged by the quake.

"We are not in a supermarket. We are in an emergency situation," he said.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 3 October, access to some places, particularly inland mountainous areas, is difficult as many land routes have been cut by landslides.

Infrastructure damaged

While mobile communications have been restored to many areas, including Padang, quake survivors are also struggling with a lack of electricity and clean water, forcing some to bathe in rivers.

"I know it's not clean, but it's better than not taking a bath for days," said Afrizal, a Padang resident.

Dody Ruswandi, head of the provincial Public Works Department, said one of four water treatment plants supplying West Sumatra was damaged, cutting the water supply to 70,000 homes.

"We need 30 days to fix it. We know this situation is causing a lot of discomfort to people," he said.

Water tanks have been dispatched to several areas and mobile water treatment equipment was on its way from Jakarta, he said.

"Hopefully this will ease the hardship but, of course, it won't be the same as before the earthquake," he said.

International aid efforts

According to OCHA, immediate needs include medical supplies and personnel, hygiene kits, soap, petrol, generators, food and shelter.

WFP Indonesia said it was conducting an assessment of the situation and senior programme assistant Mispan Indarjo said the agency would focus on providing micronutrients for children under five in the form of biscuits.

UNICEF is to distribute relief items such as water pumps and hygiene kits for 50,000 families, while the UN Development Programme has deployed a waste management team.

More than 400 rescuers from countries such as Singapore, Australia, Germany, Turkey, Korea, Switzerland and Japan are helping their Indonesian counterparts search for the missing.

Edwar said search and rescue efforts would last until six days after the quake, around 6 October.

"We are still hopeful of finding more survivors," he said.

atp/ey/ed

[END]

Asia: Disasters underline urgent need for more groundwork

BANGKOK, 2 October 2009 (IRIN) - This week's disasters in Asia underscore the need for greater disaster preparedness, experts say; while countries are making progress, there are still gaps to be filled.

At least 1,100 people have been killed, with thousands more feared dead, in Indonesia after earthquakes struck off Western Sumatra and the city of Padang on 30 September.

On 29 September, the Pacific islands of Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga were battered by a tsunami after an earthquake struck, leaving at least 136 dead.

And just days before, tropical storm Ketsana tore through the Philippines, killing at least 292 people and affecting another three million [<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86331>].

The Philippines is now bracing for Typhoon Parma.
[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86401>]

Terje Skavdal, head of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Bangkok, said there was growing recognition that disaster preparedness is key.

"Thirty years ago, almost none of the Asian countries had a clear, defined disaster management authority in place. Today, nearly all countries in Asia have that. We do see that a number of nations have made a lot of investment in improving their preparedness," Skavdal told IRIN.

"A lot of these countries now have more and more experience in also taking early action to mitigate some of the possible impacts of disasters," he added.

Tsunami lessons

Bhichit Rattakul, executive director of the Bangkok-based Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) [<http://www.adpc.net>], said the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed more than 220,000 in Asia and Africa, was an important milestone in jogging regional governments into action.

"It's very much different from what happened before 2004, in terms of budgets, human resources, capacity-building and national and local community participation," Bhichit told IRIN.

However, Skavdal and other experts noted that there were still gaps in disaster preparedness.

"There are a lot of gaps. There are gaps related to early warnings - that early warnings are, for example, translated into a language people understand, and reach out to each and every creek and corner," he said.

"Early warnings also need somehow to be balanced with resources for people to evacuate, for example, and in some places we see there are little resources for that," he said.

Coordination gaps

Other gaps include weakness in coordination and communication systems between national and provincial levels in countries in times of disaster, and a need to "think more out of the box" as

disasters become more unpredictable, he said.

"We need to maybe have a more multi-hazard approach to look closer into new and unexpected events, especially now with climate change, where we do see more frequent, more severe, but also more unprecedented disasters," he said.

The ADPC works with governments in the region on a number of disaster preparedness and mitigation projects, and Bhitchit underlined the importance of educating local communities and raising their awareness to prepare for and respond to disasters.

"There is a need to mainstream disaster risk reduction into all components of development projects in each country," said Bhichit.

"It's not only education in schools . but also other sectors like road construction and agriculture, because this is related to food production and security," he said.

A disaster hotspot

Officials say Asia Pacific is the world's disaster hotspot - a person living in this region is four times more likely to be affected by natural disasters than someone in Africa, and 25 times more likely than someone in Europe or North America, according to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

"Our region experienced 42 percent of the world's natural disasters between 1999 and 2008," said Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary General and ESCAP Executive Secretary.

"Studies have shown that for every dollar invested in risks associated with disaster, \$4-\$7 can be saved. Investing in disaster risk reduction and prevention measures is not only a moral imperative, it is financially smart," she said in a statement on 1 October.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", the edge of a tectonic plate prone to seismic upheaval, while the Philippines is particularly typhoon-prone.

West Sumatra, especially the city of Padang, has been recognized as being on the frontline in terms of disasters, and has invested substantially in disaster preparedness
[<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76049>].

"Basically, all the natural disasters you can think of can be found in these countries," said Skavdal.

Key pact

Spurred on by the 2004 tsunami, the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have ratified a regional, legally binding disaster pact, which will come into force by December.

The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) promotes regional collaboration and cooperation in reducing disaster losses and strengthening joint emergency responses.

The agreements allows for disaster risk identification, monitoring and early warning, prevention and mitigation, preparedness and response, and technical cooperation and research.

ey/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

02 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Medical resources stretched after quake

PADANG, 2 October 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesian doctors have been left with few resources to treat thousands of injured people after local hospitals were heavily damaged in a powerful earthquake that struck West Sumatra province on 30 September.

At least four major hospitals in the provincial capital of Padang - Mohammad Djamil, Ibnu Sina, Yos Sudarso, and Selasih - were severely damaged in the 7.6 magnitude quake, said West Sumatra provincial police spokesman Besar Kawedar.

"Makeshift tents have been erected to shelter patients for treatment but they're not enough," Kawedar told reporters.

The UN has estimated that at least 1,100 people died in the earthquake that devastated Padang and at least five other districts in West Sumatra, while the government's Social Affairs Ministry said at least 2,100 people had been injured, some seriously.

A widespread power blackout forced hospitals to use generators for lighting and to power equipment, while thousands of people whose houses were damaged were sleeping in the open.

Outside the main Mohammad Djamin hospital, badly damaged by the quake, about 150 patients, mostly with broken bones, were being treated in tents.

There was no clean water and food was scarce, said Ardian Riza, an orthopaedic doctor at the hospital.

"We need more tents. There are too many people in one tent," Riza told IRIN. "There's no sterile equipment and we can't use the operating room to carry out surgery," he said.

"Communications are difficult, so it's hard to coordinate people. It's chaotic here," he said.

Officials fear the death toll may rise sharply as thousands of people are believed to be buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings, including schools, shops and hotels.

However, relief efforts have been hampered by severe damage to infrastructure such as telecommunications, electricity, roads, bridges and water supplies.

The Health Ministry said it had sent emergency tents, 200 medical personnel, 1.5T of medicines, 200 body bags, 5T of baby food and 200 million rupiah in cash to West Sumatra.

Other regions have also sent medical supplies and equipment for field hospitals, the ministry said on its website.

International medical aid group Merlin said it was assembling a surgical team, ready to respond to the aftermath of the quake.

"We know two hospitals have been destroyed, so there will undoubtedly be a need for trauma care," Paula Sansom, Merlin's emergency response manager, said in a statement.

Merlin [<http://www.merlin.org.uk/>] was assessing the situation through contacts on the ground, but with the telephone lines down and no electricity, it was difficult, she said.

International Medical Corps [see: <http://www.imcworldwide.org/Page.aspx?pid=183>] said its emergency response teams were in Padang to provide medical and other assistance. It was working closely with its partner in Indonesia, Ambulan 118, a national organization of emergency responders, providing emergency healthcare and distributing much-needed non-food items and hygiene kits to those who had suffered injuries and lost family as well as their homes.

Members of Ambulan 118 were also helping to rescue those trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings, the Corps said in a statement.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) [<http://www.msf.org/>] is sending emergency teams, including three kidney specialists to carry out dialysis for victims at risk of kidney failure caused by severe internal injuries, as well as a surgical team.

Relief material, medical equipment, and first-aid equipment are also being sent, it said in a statement.

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[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

02 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Rescuers struggle to reach Sumatra quake victims

JAKARTA, 1 October 2009 (IRIN) - Rescue workers are battling to save scores of people trapped in collapsed buildings after two earthquakes struck Indonesia's West Sumatra Province, with aid supplies being flown in and NGOs mobilising helpers.

At least 467 people have been killed in the quakes that devastated the provincial capital, Padang, and the nearby coastal town of Pariaman, according to Indonesia's Social Affairs Ministry.

"The death toll is likely to increase as many people are still trapped under collapsed buildings, homes and hotels," Priyadi Kardono, a spokesman for the National Agency for Disaster Management, told IRIN.

A 7.9 magnitude quake struck off the coast of West Sumatra Province in the late afternoon on 30 September, swiftly followed by a 6.2 magnitude quake, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The earthquake occurred along the same fault-line that spawned the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, and was also felt in North Sumatra, Riau and Aceh in Indonesia, as well as Malaysia and Singapore.

OCHA said thousands of people were reported to be displaced after heavy rains and landslides, which followed the quakes, with reports of significant damage to infrastructure, including telecommunications, roads, bridges and water supply systems.

Air Putih, a local NGO, estimated that about 40 percent of buildings in Pariaman were heavily damaged, while television footage from Padang showed buildings in the city's business district in ruins.

Rescuers were shown struggling to remove debris from buildings where scores of people were believed trapped. Rains and crowds blocking the roads were hampering rescue efforts, TV One, a local TV station, reported.

A team of six government ministers led by Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie flew to Padang on 1 October.

At the same time two Hercules C-130 military cargo aircraft left Jakarta carrying doctors and relief supplies, including tents, medicines and food.

"This earthquake is huge. The extent of the damage is likely to be similar to the earthquake in Yogyakarta," Bakrie said, referring to the 2006 quake that hit Yogyakarta province on the island of Java, killing 5,744 people.

Rustam Pakaya, head of the health ministry's crisis centre, said a medical team had been dispatched to Padang to set up field hospitals for survivors.

A team of UN agencies, including OCHA, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has also travelled to the affected areas in West Sumatra to assess the damage and emergency relief needs of the population.

Aid agencies step in

International humanitarian group World Vision said it would send staff on 1 October to assess the damage.

"It is critical that we get people into the quake zone as soon as possible to find out what has happened. If buildings have collapsed, then people are likely to be in urgent need of food, water and especially shelter," Jimmy Nadapdap, World Vision Indonesia's Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs director, said in a statement.

"What typically happens is that people become terrified to go back to their homes, especially if damaged, as there will be numerous aftershocks. Securing alternative shelter will be critical," he said.

Save the Children said it was mobilizing staff to provide aid to children and families in Western Sumatra. The group is providing relief to survivors of a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck West Java province last month, killing 81 people and displacing about 200,000.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", the edge of a tectonic plate prone to seismic upheaval.

Experts said West Sumatra, especially Padang, is at risk of being devastated by a tsunami in the event of an earthquake similar in magnitude to the one that triggered the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed more than 220,000 people across Asian and African countries.

atp/ey/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

01 Oct 2009

Indonesia: Aid dispatched after hunger-related deaths in Papua

JAKARTA, 18 September 2009 (IRIN) - The Indonesian government said it will send a team to a poor district in eastern Papua Province after a rights group reported deaths from hunger and associated diseases there.

Swadiatma, an adviser to the Coordinating Ministry for People's Welfare, said the team of officials would be dispatched this week to the isolated district of Yahukimo in Papua to investigate reports of the deaths, and assess the long-term needs of the population.

"Our team will see for ourselves the situation on the ground, so we can take measures to achieve sustainable food security," Swadiatma, who goes by one name, told IRIN. He said Minister Aburizal Bakrie had asked the provincial government to deliver food supplies such as rice, noodles and sugar to the affected areas.

"Transporting them is not an easy task, given the rugged terrain, and they have to use a helicopter or a small plane," he added.

Yahukimo District chief Ones Pahabol said food shortages had hit 25 areas in the district, and that 80 percent of Yahukimo's population lived in remote highland areas, and their staple food was sweet potato.

Yomes Bomse, chairman of the People's Health Council, a community-based body in Yahukimo, set up by the Health Ministry, said 49 people had died in the past three months. "So far those affected have yet to receive adequate health care," he said.

The Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) NGO on *16 September said* it had received information from local NGOs and civil society groups that 113 villagers had died in Yahukimo since January due to hunger and associated diseases after crop failures.

Harvest failure

"The harvest failure this year caused by climate change resulted in deaths," the AHRC said in a statement. "Yahukimo is remote and isolated. Daily food sources come from home grown produce such as sweet potato or potato. If villagers fail to harvest enough produce to support their families, they immediately face starvation," it said.

The AHRC also accused the Indonesian government of neglect and said the lack of roads or public infrastructure aggravated food insecurity.

The recent food shortage is not the first to hit Yahukimo. In 2005, local media reported that 55 people died of starvation due to harvest failure, prompting the central government to send officials to the region.

Twelve food storage facilities were built in the district in 2006 to help those who had suffered from crop failure, but AHRC said this was ineffective, because the warehouses were not suitable for storing sweet potatoes.

Swadiatma denied that the storage facilities had failed to help villagers, saying that food shortages this time had hit areas where such facilities had not been built.

ReliefWeb report — <http://reliefweb.int/node/324886>

atp/ey/cb/bp

Integrated Regional Information Networks

18 Sep 2009

Indonesia: Ill-prepared for disasters, say experts

JAKARTA, 10 September 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesia remains ill-prepared to deal with major disasters, despite having experienced one calamity after another in recent years, officials and experts say.

The country was again tested on 2 September, when a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck off the heavily populated island of Java, leaving 80 people dead and at least 47 missing.

The quake also displaced 186,637 people and damaged about 150,000 houses and other buildings, according to the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB) on 10 September.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, which is vulnerable to earthquakes and volcanic activity because tectonic plates meet there.

More than 170,000 people were killed in Indonesia by the December 2004 Asian tsunami, while in 2006, over 3,000 people perished after an earthquake near Yogyakarta city in Java.

Quick response needed

Recognizing the need for improved response systems, the Indonesian parliament passed a bill on disaster management in 2007, paving the way for the creation of the BNPB.

The BNPB, which was set up last year, is tasked with preventing disasters, coordinating relief efforts and overseeing post-disaster reconstruction.

The law also calls for a Regional Disaster Management Agency in each of Indonesia's 32 provinces. But so far, only 18 provinces have set up such bodies, BNPB spokesman Priyadi Kardono told IRIN.

"Even in those 18 provinces, the agencies are not necessarily 100 percent functional," Kardono said.

"Money is the problem. New agencies require new rules, new staff and it takes a lot of money," he said.

Kardono said the lack of resources and coordination was highlighted after the 2 September earthquake.

Aid was slow to reach the survivors because local administrations did not have enough manpower to distribute it, he said.

"The amount of aid is adequate, but distribution was uneven because of limited resources, including people and transport," Kardono said.

Early warning systems

Last November, Indonesia launched a tsunami warning system designed to protect coastal residents.

Officials said the complex system of sensors - comprising seismometers, GPS instruments, tide gauges and buoys, as well as ocean bottom pressure sensors - and satellite communications would be ready by 2010.

But Danny Hilman, a tsunami expert at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, said the system was still rudimentary. Of three deep-sea tsunami warning buoys set up after 2004, two were damaged, he said.

"In terms of equipment, so far only seismic sensors are working. The system is still in its very simple form," he said.

Hilman also said very little geological research had been conducted to determine areas prone to earthquakes and tsunamis.

"There's still very little knowledge on earthquake sources, except for Sumatra [the country's largest island]," Hilman said. "The identification of earthquake sources is a pre-condition for an early warning system.

"Should there be a tsunami next week, the casualties would still be high," he warned.

Communication problems

Fauzi, head of the earthquake centre at the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, said his office issued a tsunami warning four minutes after the 2 September earthquake.

"We issued the warning. The question is how to disseminate information to the public and whether the local governments are prepared," said Fauzi.

BNPB's Kardono said the government was negotiating with a South Korean company to install a warning system whereby earthquake information received by the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency would be relayed to government offices, mosques and cellular base stations, which would then transmit the message to millions of mobile-phone users.

The system is expected to be in place by the end of this year, Kardono said.

Jakarta largely protected

The 2 September quake was felt strongly in Jakarta, sending people running from their homes and office towers in panic.

But geologists say the country's largest city is largely protected because it does not sit on a geological faultline.

Hilman said most high-rise buildings in Jakarta were designed to be able to withstand earthquakes measuring up to level eight on the Modified Mercalli Intensity (MMI) scale - but the bar should be set higher.

The 2 September quake was felt in Jakarta at four on the MMI scale.

A 7.5 magnitude quake in the Java Sea on 8 August 2007 was felt strongly in Jakarta and caused some damage, but no casualties.

"The current buildings were built under the 2002 building and construction law, but the 2007 earthquake showed that we need a stronger regulation on buildings," he said.

atp/ey/ds/mw

[END]

Indonesia: Thousands left seeking shelter after Java quake

JAKARTA, 3 September 2009 (IRIN) - Thousands of Indonesians are struggling to find shelter the day after a powerful earthquake, which killed at least 57 people, struck off the coast of the heavily populated Java island.

More than 26,800 houses were damaged and 334 collapsed in West Java, according to government figures provided to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Indonesia.

The latest number of displaced people was estimated at 3,118, although the figure could fluctuate in the next few days as residents and authorities assess the safety of damaged homes, said OCHA's Indonesia head, Ignacio Leon-Garcia.

"We still don't know the severity of the damage. But for the time being, I think the focus of the relief effort will be on shelter," said Leon-Garcia.

"It is still quite difficult to determine the number of IDPs [internally displaced people]," he told IRIN.

The earthquake hit during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and local television showed residents forced to eat their pre-dawn meals outside their homes.

The Indonesian Red Cross said it was distributing 1,500 family tents to those affected by the earthquake in West Java and Cilacap district in Central Java.

It said in a statement that its volunteers had erected eight platoon tents in three affected districts and were distributing clean water, sarongs, blankets, tarpaulins, sleeping mats and hygiene kits.

In the hours following the disaster, more than 100 Red Cross staff and volunteers carried out search and rescue operations, evacuated people to safe areas and provided first aid to the injured in 12 districts.

Aid group World Vision said several thousand families in Pengalengan and neighbouring areas in West Java had spent the night of 2 September sleeping in the open because of damage to their houses.

"They need blankets, tarpaulins and other basic support," Ivan Tagor, a World Vision assessment team leader, said in a statement.

The National Agency for Disaster Management said the death toll had risen to 57 as more bodies were found in Cianjur district, one of the hardest-hit in West Java province.

Rescue workers used bare hands and manual tools to uncover the bodies after the quake triggered a landslide that sent rocks slamming into houses in Cikangkareng village in Cianjur.

The agency has dispatched four trucks carrying tents, kitchen utensils, clothing and blankets to affected people there.

"The number of people killed could be higher because we have yet to get the full picture of the disaster," said Yusuf Effendi, head of the West Java Disaster Relief Coordinating Agency.

The quake was felt strongly in the capital, Jakarta, shaking buildings and sending residents fleeing their homes and high-rise office towers in panic. At least one person was killed and 27 hospitalised in Jakarta.

The Health Ministry said at least 422 were injured, while the West Java agency put the number of injured at 167.

The quake struck 142km southwest of Tasikamalaya, West Java, at a depth of 49.5km, according to geologists. The state-run Antara news agency said on 2 September that a tsunami early-warning system in the coastal town of Pelabuhan Ratu in West Java had not worked properly when the earthquake struck.

The system sounded for 10 seconds but then stopped, Antara said.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation, straddles a chain of fault lines and volcanoes known as the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and is prone to seismic activity.

atp/ey/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

03 Sep 2009

Indonesia: Officials fear rising death toll after Java quake

BANGKOK, 2 September 2009 (IRIN) - At least 15 people died in a powerful earthquake, which struck off Indonesia's populous island of Java on 2 September, officials said.

"At least 15 people are confirmed dead. The death toll could be much higher. The area is quite remote and communication is limited," Health Ministry crisis centre chief Rustam Pakaya told IRIN from Jakarta, the capital.

The mid-afternoon quake, recorded at a 7.0 magnitude by the US Geological Survey, also injured more than 100 people and triggered a local tsunami alert, which was later withdrawn.

The epicentre of the quake was 190km south of Jakarta and 95km south of Bandung city.

Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency said dozens of houses had been flattened in districts in west Java. Buildings shook in Jakarta, sparking panic and evacuations, while thousands fled west Java.

Ignacio Leon-Garcia, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Indonesia, said the 15 casualties were in the sub-districts of Cianjur, Tasikmalaya and Sukabumi in west Java.

He said it was difficult to gauge the extent of the casualties and damage as night fell in Indonesia, but he expected those most affected would be villagers with poor access and communication facilities.

Relief efforts are being conducted by local government authorities, while an inter-agency mission will set out on 3 September to assess the damage, he said.

Indonesia is in the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, a chain of fault lines and volcanoes known for seismic activity.

An earthquake that triggered the 2004 Asian tsunami killed 168,000 people on Indonesia's Sumatra island.

ds-ey/mw[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

02 Sep 2009

Indonesia: Healthcare system failing millions

JAKARTA, 6 August 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesia's health system is failing to provide even the most basic care to vast swathes of the population, say specialists.

Many who cannot afford doctors' fees often receive no treatment at all, while the wealthy fly abroad for a check-up.

The system is plagued by under-funding, decentralization, lack of qualified staff, rising medical costs and outdated medical equipment, say insiders.

"The health system desperately needs improvement," said Kartono Mohammad, a senior doctor and former chairman of the Indonesian Medical Association (IDI), adding that it is hard to even speak of a healthcare system since there is no regulation or quality control.

"There are no laws that protect the patient," he said.

Misdiagnosis

In June, the system's failures were the focus of nationwide debate when a patient was sued by a hospital after her complaints about poor treatment were published on the internet.

In 2008, Prita Mulyasari checked into the Omni International Hospital in Tangerang, a satellite city of the capital Jakarta, where she was misdiagnosed with dengue fever and given injections that made her hands and neck swell and made breathing difficult. Later, it emerged that the mother-of-two had mumps.

Omni sued Mulyasari for damaging its reputation, but after an outpouring of public support, including from parliament, the lawsuit was dropped.

"Doctors are very protective of each other. It is a conspiracy of silence," says Mohammad. "Doctors here don't want to testify against their own colleagues."

And though it is unclear how many patients are misdiagnosed each year, many disputes are believed to be settled under the table.

Those who have a choice fly to Singapore, Australia, Malaysia and even the United States or Europe in search of better care.

According to Fahmi Idris, chairman of the IDI, at least one million Indonesians are estimated to seek medical care overseas each year.

Access and cost

But for most of Indonesia's more than 250 million inhabitants, even the lowest quality healthcare is often inaccessible.

Access to health facilities across Indonesia's 6,000 inhabited islands varies greatly.

While cities usually offer a range of services for most medical problems, in remote areas such as the easternmost province of Papua it can take several days to reach a doctor.

Some islands or remote mountain villages can be inaccessible for months at a time during the monsoon season.

In addition, many low-income earners or the unemployed avoid going to a doctor, explained Ajriani Munthe Salak, from the Legal Aid Institute for Health (LBH). "They stay at home, hoping the illness will disappear. They are afraid of bills and the bureaucratic system."

According to the World Bank, about 100 million Indonesians live on less than US\$2 a day.

Government efforts

Critics say a new health insurance scheme for the poor, Jamkesmas, launched by the government in early 2008 is too complicated, requiring a patient to provide documentation on income, identity, hospital registration, family records and a doctor's referral notice.

The Health Ministry has spent seven years drafting an ambitious new universal healthcare bill, but it has faced delays, budget problems and technical hurdles, such as a lack of a common definition for malpractice, said Mariani Akib Baramuli, a member of parliament.

"The country still faces significant challenges in developing and implementing effective and sustainable health-financing reform," according to Joachim von Amsberg, World Bank country director for Indonesia.

Lawmakers hope the bill will pass during the current term that expires in October, but there is a huge backlog of other work.

Meanwhile, as politicians debate the bill, the problem of affordable care is becoming more entrenched.

Indonesian hospitals are even known to keep patients "hostage" until family members can settle their bills.

Since 1999, Salak's organisation has handled almost 500 cases, mostly in Jakarta.

"But that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are probably millions of people who don't have real access to healthcare," she said.

With the vast distances involved, it is impossible reach everyone, she said. "We get calls from Papua, but we don't have money to fly over there, it is just too costly," she added.

ej/ds/mw

[END]

Global: Investment key to disaster preparedness

GENEVA, 16 June 2009 (IRIN) - Natural disasters may be unavoidable, but human vulnerability to those disasters is not. "What kills, and what destroys, is the vulnerability of the population," said Margareta Wahlström, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The second biennial session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, which opened in Geneva on 16 June, has adopted the slogan, Invest today for a safer tomorrow. The concept is being promoted seriously.

Philippines senator Loren Legarda noted that China managed to save US\$12 billion in rehabilitation costs thanks to its \$3 billion investment in flood control. "We need to look at disaster risk reduction as an investment rather than a cost," says Legarda. "In the long term it will be much more effective."

One of the goals of this year's conference is to secure a commitment of funding for disaster risk reduction from money that has already been approved for humanitarian relief and development aid. "We're not asking for more money," says Brigitte Leoni, head of communications for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), "We're asking to use the money in a different way."

The conference is introducing a dramatically updated mortality risk index (MRI), which uses computer modelling to show which countries are most at risk from earthquakes, floods, tropical cyclones and landslides. A team of 20 scientists worked for two years on the study, based on data from thousands of tropical cyclones, earthquakes, landslides and floods.

Bangladesh, China, India and Indonesia fall into an extreme high-risk category partly because of the size of their populations. Colombia and Myanmar are in the same category because of the relative risk to their smaller populations. When it comes to vulnerability, poverty and poor governance play a major role. Myanmar, which lost more than 130,000 people in tropical Cyclone Nargis, is an example when lack of warning and preparedness combined to raise the casualty level.

More surprisingly, the United States is listed in the same risk group as Haiti, Ethiopia, Nepal and Honduras, partly because the US is especially vulnerable to tropical hurricanes and earthquakes, but also because the US has pockets of poverty, which make some of its population particularly vulnerable. An example was Hurricane Katrina.

No matter what action is taken, some countries will always be at risk, but even if it cannot be completely eliminated, the loss of life can be reduced. Bangladesh lost more than 500,000 people during Cyclone Bhola in 1970. It subsequently built 2,500 cyclone shelters on elevated concrete platforms and trained more than 32,000 volunteers to help in evacuations. When Cyclone Sidr struck in 2007 with an enormous sea surge, the death toll was less than 4,000.

Despite these precautions, Bangladesh continues to lose people because over-population and poverty force people to live in vulnerable areas. Wahlström said that at some point governments need to ask themselves, "Is this viable? Can you continue to grow in these areas?" What is clear is that preparedness can reduce the losses due to natural disasters, and in the long term it is an investment well worth making.

"Our message," says Wahlström, "is that you have a choice."

wd/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

16 Jun 2009

Asia: Land grabs threaten food security

PHNOM PENH, 10 June 2009 (IRIN) - Sam Pov, a rice farmer in Cambodia's western Battambang Province, is very worried that his land will be taken over by a foreign investor.

"I've heard the rumours about [Kuwait and Qatar]. I heard they might get our land because they need food," he said.

"The commune leaders haven't talked to us yet, and I don't think they will if the time comes. This is a good time for them to get paid and get huge benefits."

Last year, delegations from oil-rich Kuwait and Qatar visited the impoverished nation, eyeing leases on land to export food back home - a move that could leave many Cambodians without enough food, say activists and NGOs.

Kuwait has reportedly offered US\$546 million to the Southeast Asian nation in loans for dams and roads, while Qatar will invest \$200 million in agriculture.

And while the government has not yet announced what the Gulf States will get in return, they have publicly expressed interest in the country's farmland.

"Cambodia has plenty of farmland and forests but has been suffering from land grabbing by the government as well as influential people for years," Jin Ju, a food rights activist at the *Asian Human Rights Commission* (AHRC), told IRIN from Hong Kong.

"I doubt that [either] government would consider the villagers and farmers as equal decision-makers," she said.

Evictions

Forced evictions, mostly to build hotels and high-end apartments, have been a problem in Cambodia since the UN peacekeeping force left in 1993.

Adhoc, the Cambodian human rights watchdog, estimates 50,000 people were evicted to make way for development projects in 2006 and 2007 alone.

The problem arose because most land documents were destroyed under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979, making it unclear who owns what.

Yet the practice in Cambodia of leasing land to Gulf States for farming - and the rate at which the land is being siphoned off - is new, say food rights groups.

"The governments [Kuwait and Cambodia] should select appropriate land through discussion with the villagers, and combine the traditional farming in Cambodia and new technology for farming," Ju added.

Food insecurity

The problem of land grabbing by foreign investors and governments, however, extends well beyond the confines of Cambodia.

Elsewhere in Asia similar examples can be seen, as well as in *Africa*. According to the Washington-based *International Food Policy Research Institute* (IFPRI), between 15 and 20 million hectares of farmland in such countries have been subject to transactions or negotiations since 2006.

IFPRI estimates the value of such deals at up to \$30 billion.

Ever since high food prices in 2007 and 2008 raised the prospect of food insecurity for countries without much farmland, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have scoured Asia for land.

China, which has to feed more than one billion people, is also looking to Southeast Asia to sustain its breakneck growth.

"Not only will it displace small farmers as such investments have done in Indonesia," said Amitava Mukherjee, head of the UN Asian and Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery in Beijing, "but it will also have serious environmental consequences . [and] given that UAE and Kuwait are leasing land, not buying it, [they] would have no interest in long-term development of the farmland they are seeking access to".

He added that the comments were his own and did not reflect the views of the UN.

In Kamukhaan village in the Philippines, such environmental effects have become well documented, according to the AHRC.

Since a Filipino company took over 613ha in the village to build a banana plantation in 1981 - to supply US-based fruit company Dole - hundreds of villagers have suffered skin and respiratory ailments from pesticide use, the group claims.

"The farmers had lost their farmland, their children, their natural sources, their health and their future," Ju said.

"Now the Philippines' food sovereignty is absent and the self-sufficiency is almost zero," she claimed.

In the Philippines this year, Bahrain secured 10,000ha for agro-fishery, Qatar leased 100,000ha, and an unknown company from China leased 1.24 million hectares, though the deal has been put on hold, according to an April policy briefing by IFPRI [see: <http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/bp/bp013.asp#read>].

Such deals are often done in secret, it says, stopping civil society groups from overseeing the terms and defending the rights of local farmers.

In Myanmar, Chinese companies have driven farmers off their land to cultivate an oil plant, according to *Welt Hunger Hilfe*, a German NGO.

The farmers already faced seasonal changes that threatened food security, but had their last source of food taken from them by the government, the group says.

gc/ds/mw

Land grabbing in Asia

- CAMBODIA:

Land being leased by Kuwait for rice (in negotiations)

100,000ha rubber plantation secured by Vietnam

- LAOS:

100,000ha rubber plantation secured by Vietnam

- PHILIPPINES:

10,000ha for agro-fishery secured by Bahrain

100,000ha for Qatar

1.24 million hectares for an unknown company in China (on hold)

- INDONESIA:

500,000ha, a \$4.3 billion rice investment, secured by Bin Laden Group of Saudi Arabia (on hold)

- CHINA:

10 poultry farms worth \$300 million purchased by Goldman Sachs of USA and pig farms purchased for \$250-300 million (do we know by whom?)

Source: International Food Policy Research Institute

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

10 Jun 2009

Indonesia: East Nusa Tenggara battling malnutrition

JAKARTA, 27 April 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province continues to grapple with malnutrition, with cases of underweight, stunting and wasting among children exceeding thresholds set by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN and officials say.

East Nusa Tenggara - comprising about 500 islands but dominated by Flores, Sumba and West Timor, the western half of the island of Timor - is one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia, with about 30 percent of the population living below the poverty line, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The Health Ministry's Basic Health Research 2008 (Riskesdas 2008) reveals that the number of underweight children, or low weight for age, in East Nusa Tenggara reached 33.6 percent, exceeding the WHO threshold of 30 percent, which indicates a significant public health problem.

The prevalence of stunting, or low height for age, is 46.7 percent against a WHO threshold of 40 percent, according to Riskesdas, the latest government data available.

Stunting is the chronic restriction of a child's potential growth, reflecting the cumulative effects of inadequate food intake and poor health conditions, according to UNICEF.

The prevalence of wasting is 20 percent, exceeding the WHO threshold of 15 percent.

Wasting, or low weight for height, is a strong predictor of mortality among children under five and is usually the result of acute food shortages and disease, say health experts.

Immunisation factors

The Basic Health Research stated that up to 42 percent of children in the province were not fully immunised partly because of parents' lack of awareness of the importance of immunisation or difficulties in reaching health centres.

The survey also reported that some 10 percent of children in the province had never been vaccinated for any antigen.

"Malnutrition rates in East Nusa Tenggara are very high. Undernourished children are more vulnerable to contracting diseases," Anne Vincent, head of child survival and development at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Indonesia, told IRIN.

"Poor immunisation coverage increases the risk of mortality and morbidity from vaccine preventable diseases," she said.

At the national level, one in every five children in Indonesia suffers from malnutrition and most are younger than two, Riskesdas noted.

The vast majority of severely malnourished children in Indonesia suffer from long-term chronic malnutrition and not from sudden onset, Vincent said. It was difficult to determine the extent of malnutrition-related deaths and UNICEF's field monitoring showed that most children died from multiple infections.

In most hunger-related deaths, the terminal event is an infectious disease, such as pneumonia or diarrhoea, because severe under-nutrition reduces resistance to infections.

"The technical capacity and resources in local government to treat malnutrition are limited. Children come too late to hospitals, making the cases more difficult to treat. In-patient treatment has achieved limited outcomes," she said.

Funding concerns

The head of the provincial health office, Stefanus Bria Seran, said his agency was struggling with a lack of funding and staff. "The extent of the problem is beyond our capacity to handle," he told IRIN.

He said poor sanitation, lack of clean water, and lifestyles were to blame for recent outbreaks of diarrhoea in the provincial capital, Kupang, and South Timor Tengah District. The outbreak killed two people and affected more than 200 within two weeks this month.

UNICEF is working with the Health Ministry, other UN agencies, national and international organisations in East Nusa Tenggara's Sikka and Belu districts to treat and prevent malnutrition by giving children ready-to-use therapeutic foods, promoting infant feeding programmes, such as exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months, and timely introduction of nutrient-rich complementary foods at six months.

Ardhiani Dyah Priamsari, a nutrition expert with Action Contre la Faim, a Paris-based aid group, said in several places in South Timor Tengah District, malnutrition reached more than 50 percent.

"Many factors contribute to malnutrition, including lack of food diversification, lack of clean water, inappropriate feeding practice and local customs," she said.

atp/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Apr 2009

Indonesia: Making health facilities safe in disasters

JAKARTA, 8 April 2009 (IRIN) - When the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Aceh on 26 December 2004, it left about 170,000 dead and thousands more injured.

But along with the houses and bridges washed away by the massive swell, more than half the 240 hospitals and health facilities were destroyed or badly damaged and 700 of the province's 9,800 health workers dead or missing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in Indonesia. As a result, more than 20,000 patients had to wait up to 10 days before being admitted to a hospital.

"These damaged facilities lost their capacity to protect and cater to the needy during those emergency periods as health facilities and health professionals too became victims of the disaster," said Subhash R Salunke, country representative for the world health body in Indonesia, at a seminar in Jakarta on making hospitals safe in emergencies, the global theme of 2009 World Health Day on 7 April.

"The tragedy of a major emergency or disaster is compounded when health facilities fail," WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said in a statement issued to commemorate the day. "When a hospital collapses or its functions are disrupted, lives that depend on emergency care can be lost," she said.

"Emergency Hypermarket"

The vulnerability of Indonesia, which sits on the boundaries of four moving tectonic plates and the "ring of fire" with 126 active volcanoes, to natural disasters makes this global campaign all the more urgent.

From 2004 to 2008, the country suffered 771 different emergencies and disasters that killed about a quarter of a million people, injured almost a million and left more than four million displaced, according to the Ministry of Health.

"On average, Indonesia has five earthquakes a day measuring above five on the Richter scale," Lucky Tjahjono, head of the Ministry of Health's Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit, told the seminar.

"Recently, we also had the dam collapse in Situ Gintung. That is why, as we used to say, Indonesia has an 'emergency hypermarket' - more than a supermarket."

Healthcare structures are not immune. The three major natural disasters in recent years - the tsunami and the earthquakes in Nias and Yogyakarta - left at least 713 hospitals and health facilities badly damaged, according to WHO-Indonesia.

Toward safer health facilities

To address the problem, the WHO campaign is advocating a series of best practices - such as using early warning systems and good site planning - to ensure the healthcare system is better prepared for emergencies.

There are low-cost solutions for ensuring structural integrity, so that health facilities do not collapse during earthquakes or cyclones, WHO Regional Director for Southeast Asia, Samlee Plianbangchang, said in a statement.

He added that lifelines such as water and electricity must be backed up to ensure health facilities remain functional during disasters, and that the workforce should be trained to deal with emergencies

and carry out contingency plans.

Indonesia has nine regional crisis centres designed to reduce the vulnerability of a 230-million population on 17,000 islands, Tjahjono said.

But as Aryono Pusponogoro of 118 Emergency Ambulance Service Foundation told the seminar, it is "impossible to manage disasters and mass casualties properly" as even "day-to-day emergency care in Indonesia is not up to standard".

Nevertheless, SKM Mudjiharto, director of community empowerment for the National Disaster Management Agency, said Indonesia was shifting its focus from disaster response to disaster risk reduction.

"Indonesia is committed to improving its disaster management system," he said.

jd/ds/mw

Integrated Regional Information Networks

08 Apr 2009

Indonesia: Search for 131 missing people continues

JAKARTA, 30 March 2009 (IRIN) - Rescuers continued searching over the weekend for more than 100 people still missing as the death toll from the dam that collapsed outside Jakarta on 27 March climbed to 96, officials said.

"Search and rescue is still ongoing as some bodies were found in the Pesanggrahan River, 3-5km away from the dam," Priyadi Kardono, head of data and information for the National Disaster Management Agency, told IRIN on 29 March. "Some were also found inside the wreckage of houses."

Rescuers were searching for 131 people believed to have been swept away by the deluge that surged through the industrial town of Cirendeui, in the city of Tangerang, Banten Province, outside the capital, after the 10m-high earthen wall of the Situ Gintung reservoir collapsed due to heavy rains.

Local residents compared the surge to a mini tsunami, which caused flooding of up to 2m, destroying houses and upending vehicles in its path.

Search and rescue efforts were easier now, Priyadi said, as the waters had receded, allowing the use of heavy equipment to sort through the rubble.

However, he was not optimistic about the chances of those still missing.

"We don't think we'll find more survivors," he said, as the third day of rescue efforts came to a close.

"But we're not sure if all 131 missing were actually at the site when the disaster occurred. Some of them are students staying in boarding houses who may have gone home for the long weekend," he said.

Priyadi added that 319 houses were now confirmed to have been completely destroyed, in addition to a mosque and a pre-school, out of the almost 500 houses estimated to have been affected.

Inspections

The disaster has prompted the governor of Jakarta, Fauzi Bowo, to call for the inspection of all 26 dams in the capital, as it was revealed that Situ Gintung, built by the Dutch in 1933, showed cracks as early as February last year.

Meanwhile, 368 survivors are still staying at temporary shelters in Muhammadiyah University-Jakarta and local government offices, while more than 1,000 have returned home.

Arifin M. Hadi, head of the disaster management division of Red Cross Indonesia, told IRIN some of the unaffected homes in the area were now hosting 10-15 people each.

Nevertheless, both officials said those affected were doing well and had more than enough supplies of food, blankets and other necessities from local NGOs and politicians. No significant health issues have been reported.

"The only problem now is distribution," Arifin said, adding that political parties campaigning ahead of legislative elections next week had provided most of the donations.

"They cannot be distributed because we lack volunteers," Priyadi added.

Priyadi expects the homeless to stay in the shelters for two more weeks at most.

The government has promised assistance to help rebuild the damaged homes, but Priyadi said a meeting was scheduled for 30 March to assess how many of the homes could be rebuilt, and how many needed to be relocated.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, there has been no request for international assistance.

jd/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

30 Mar 2009

Indonesia: Up to 100 dead and thousands evacuated in dam collapse

JAKARTA, 27 March 2009 (IRIN) - At least 2,000 people are now staying in four evacuation centres, including universities and government offices, after a dam burst outside Jakarta early on 27 March, killing dozens and leaving scores more missing, officials said.

"We have identified 52 casualties already," Rustam Pakya, head of the Ministry of Health's Crisis Centre, told IRIN in the Indonesian capital. "But I expect the death toll to reach about 100 because many more are still missing."

At least 400 houses in the industrial town of Cirendeui in Tangerang, Banten Province, were reportedly affected by the sudden gush of water following the collapse of a section of the 3m high Situ Gintung dam at about 2am.

Priyadi Kardono, head of data and information for the National Disaster Management Agency, told IRIN about eight homes were completely destroyed while the rest were either partially damaged or submerged.

He said the collapse happened after three days of rains in the area.

"With about 400 houses affected and an average of five people per house, there are at least 2,000 victims," *Tia Kurnyawan, a disaster response officer from Red Cross Indonesia*, told IRIN.

The government and NGOs immediately mobilised search and rescue teams.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited the site, while Vice-President Jusuf Kalla and Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie visited the evacuation centres. The government has promised assistance to help rebuild damaged houses.

Rustam said the affected people included some from the capital as the 5 sqkm area involved was on the border of Jakarta and Tangerang, a city of about 1.5 million.

According to the *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)* in Jakarta, the government is so far able to provide all the food, shelter and healthcare needs of the evacuees.

"We have enough food and volunteers and medical doctors," Rustam said. "We are now monitoring to prevent the outbreak of any diseases like diarrhoea."

Red Cross Indonesia has provided food and medical aid. "Volunteers this morning mobilised to evacuate victims, and provide medical aid and distribute food," Tia said. "We have set up a public kitchen and we will maintain this for three days."

Officials did not have an exact numbers of how many people were affected as residents from neighbouring areas flocked to the site to see the collapsed wall.

Footage from local news stations showed a wide swath of water streaming from Lake Situ Gintung, which, according to Priyadi, was used to supply irrigation water.

"The dam is very old, I think it was built by the Dutch," Priyadi told IRIN. "This has never happened before." One local news station reported that it was built in 1933.

The president reportedly said the dam would be rebuilt but different construction methods would be considered.

jd/ds/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

27 Mar 2009

Indonesia: Home-grown Artemisinin to boost malaria fight

AKARTA, 17 March 2009 (IRIN) - Indonesia has been able to successfully grow *Artemisia annua*, the active ingredient in the most effective malaria drug available, and is ready for large-scale cultivation of the herb, government officials said.

Artemisinin is a key ingredient in combination drug therapies recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the treatment of multi-drug-resistant strains of *falciparum* malaria.

The herb is native to China and Vietnam, but is also grown in East Africa.

The plant has been cultivated since 2006 at a field managed by the Health Ministry's Agency for Research in Medicinal Plants and Traditional Medicines in Tawangmangu, Central Java Province, after Indonesia obtained the seed from China, said the agency's director, Indah Yuning Prapti.

"We are ready with the seed once local farmers are ready to replace their crops with *artemisia annua*," Indah told IRIN.

She said farmers in Tawangmangu, where the soil was suitable for *artemisia annua*, traditionally grew vegetables and needed assurances that switching to the herb would bring them more benefit.

She expected Indonesia would be able to produce its own Artemisinin by 2010.

About 45 percent of Indonesia's 230 million people live in areas where malaria is endemic and in the east of the country more than five in 1,000 people had malaria, Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari told a parliamentary hearing on 16 February.

According to the World Malaria Report 2008, more than 2.5 million Indonesians were infected with malaria in 2006, the latest year for which figures are available, with a known death toll of 3,480.

Progress

Under a programme launched in April 2008, Indonesia aims to halve by 2010 the number of villages where more than five in 1,000 people are infected with malaria and eliminate the disease by 2030.

Malaria will be eliminated from Batam and Bali islands by 2010 and Java and Sumatra islands by 2019, said Rita Kusriartuti, director of vector-borne diseases at the Ministry of Health.

In eastern provinces such as Papua, where malaria is highly endemic, Indonesia hopes to eliminate the disease by 2030.

"We are taking serious steps and we can see that cases have declined dramatically. Even in Timika [Papua], our workers said it is now hard to find malaria cases," Rita said.

Steven Bjorge, team leader for malaria and vector-borne communicable diseases at the WHO Indonesia office, told IRIN the country was making headway in the fight against malaria.

However, he said: "Availability of Artemisinin is helpful but not the whole solution." Artemisinin-derivatives had to be combined with a second long-acting drug such as amodiaquine, lumefantrine or piperaquine.

Complex picture

Bjorge said the malaria situation in Indonesia was complex. The disease had been almost eliminated in Java and Bali, with only pockets of malaria risk either in coastal areas of brackish water- or forest-breeding anopheline species, he said. But elsewhere, especially in five provinces in the east, including highly-endemic Papua, incidence was severe, even though cases had been reduced under a programme supported by the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, he said.

"The eastern provinces are the worst areas for malaria, with the highest incidence," Bjorge told IRIN. "Malaria control is a 20-year effort to make real progress, so the work has begun but needs sustained effort to solidify and expand gains made."

In *the 2008 World Malaria Report*, the WHO reported that of an estimated 247 million malaria cases, 881,000 people died in 2006. By June 2008 all except four countries and territories worldwide had adopted Artemisinin-derivative Combination Treatment (ACT) as the first-line treatment for falciparum malaria.

atp/bj/ds/mw

[ENDS]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

17 Mar 2009

Indonesia: School reconstruction - "building back better"

BANDA ACEH, 22 January 2009 (IRIN) - As horrific as the 2004 Asian tsunami was, 11-year-old Iba Rada points to at least one positive aspect. After thousands of schools were destroyed, the effort to "build back better" - former President Bill Clinton's slogan for the recovery process - seems to be succeeding in school reconstruction in Banda Aceh City, Aceh Province.

Rada, a student at Public Primary School 51, delights in the new facility. "It's clean and beautiful and has very good study materials," she told IRIN.

Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, head of Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (BRR), the Indonesian Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, said on 26 December 2008, the fourth anniversary of the tsunami, that 1,450 school buildings had been rebuilt in the province.

School 51 is one of 175 built by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the first one completed in September 2006. Another 171 are under construction, due to be finished in 2009. Twelve completed UNICEF schools are in the former conflict zones between the government and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), the Free Aceh secessionist movement. A memo of understanding was signed in August 2005, leading to a curtailment of the conflict but continuing tensions. Eighty such schools are expected to be built by UNICEF in the former conflict zones.

For students and teachers still waiting, lessons are taking place in emergency tents and prefabricated structures, Anna Stechart, programme communications specialist for UNICEF Banda Aceh, told IRIN.

Safety first

Cut Agi, principal of School 51, which opened in August 2008, told IRIN her brother-in-law, a teacher at the former school, 12 students and the former principal were all killed in the tsunami. "I lost 20 immediate relatives and still feel traumatised when earthquakes hit," said Cut Agi.

"For several years we were in temporary schools which were crowded and hot," she said. "School 51 got under construction in November 2007, and the students were waiting anxiously for its completion ... They thought it would never happen. But today we are all happy ... We never dreamed that we would get a building with strong construction."

"The schools have also been especially designed to be earthquake-resistant and safer than older schools," Stechart told IRIN.

While the former school could accommodate only 100 or so students, the new one has 214 - of whom half are girls. "Many more students long to attend the new school 51, but we simply cannot accommodate them," said the principal.

At Private Primary School 34, which is nearly completed, Subhash Monga, UN Operations Services (UNOPS) field office manager for Banda Aceh, took IRIN around the construction site, which broke ground in December 2007. The facility will include 22 classrooms, a library, teachers' office, two sets of toilets, including ones for the disabled.

"Most of the delay in construction comes from a lack of skilled labour in Aceh," said Monga. "Most of our workers come from Medan [a 45-minute flight away] because there is so much construction in Banda Aceh and skilled workers are hard to find." Monga also decried the rising costs of construction material. "Steel has risen 50 percent in price over the last year and cement 20 percent," he said, "and the decline in the value of the dollar has affected all purchases."

Building capacity

"For UNICEF, it has always been important to not only focus on the 'hardware' and construction but also to increase the capacity of the teachers, particularly as so many were killed in the tsunami," Jean Metenier, chief field officer for UNICEF in Aceh, told IRIN.

Yuliatic, a sixth-grade teacher who has taught at school 51 since 1987, said her students were now eager to attend classes in the new school, as evidenced by Rada: "I find I want to come to school more regularly than at the old one ... There I was lazy about coming to study and the old school leaked with the rain and was constantly wet."

Rada, who wants to be a doctor, added: "It seems like there are better students at this new school. We're getting improved grades and can concentrate better ... and the teachers pay more attention to us."

bj/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

22 Jan 2009

Indonesia: Displaced returning home after West Papua earthquakes

JAKARTA, 9 January 2009 (IRIN) - Thousands of people displaced by powerful earthquakes that killed four people and devastated Indonesia's West Papua province on 4 January have begun returning home. However, fear of disease outbreaks in makeshift camps is increasing and aid has yet to reach some survivors, government officials said.

About 10,000 people remain in camps in the coastal districts of Manokwari and Sorong. They fear further aftershocks and a tsunami, following the quakes that measured 7.2 and 7.6 on the Richter scale on 4 January, Ubaldu Rumlus, secretary of the West Papua Disaster Relief Agency, told IRIN from Manokwari on 9 January.

Since then, several aftershocks, the largest 5.6, according to Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, have rattled the region, sparking renewed fear among the population. Tremors subsided as of 9 January.

"At the beginning there were 23,000 displaced people but they have gradually returned to their homes after officials assured them they were safe," Rumlus told IRIN.

"Those who are still in the camps either lost their homes or are still afraid," he said.

Rumlus said that at least 507 people were injured in the initial quakes, 31 of them seriously. The quakes also damaged or destroyed 6,000 houses, 88 government buildings, 16 hospitals and clinics, 76 places of worship and 67 schools.

Hermus Indou, head of the social affairs department of the provincial Regional Development Planning Agency, said the survivors were at risk of diseases such as malaria and infections due to camp conditions and harsh weather.

"One day it is very hot and the next day it rains. Some people are already suffering from coughs," he told IRIN.

He said aid supplies had not reached some of the survivors, especially those in more remote areas.

"There seems to be an abundance of relief supplies but in some [difficult to reach] areas they have not received aid. These people need food, tents and blankets," he said.

Rains slow aid distribution

Ignacio Leon-Garcia, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said the government and aid agencies had distributed tonnes of relief supplies such as food, medicines, medical equipment and tents. He said rains may have been to blame for the slow distribution of aid.

"It's been raining in the area and aid has not been distributed in villages, especially those that are isolated," he told IRIN on 9 January. "We are expecting the number of people who have not received aid to be very few and the government will allow aid to reach them."

Leon-Garcia said the West Papuan government had approved 2.2 billion rupiah (US\$199,000) while the central government had earmarked 1.2 billion rupiah (\$108,000) for the relief and reconstruction efforts.

He said aid groups HOPE and World Vision had been distributing non-food items such as plastic sheeting.

"Oxfam is still doing the assessment and UN agencies have offered our assistance to the government," he said.

The OCHA head said the government had the capacity to handle the situation without international intervention.

"You need some concrete action to support local authorities, but, in general, I don't see an immediate need for massive international assistance," he said.

Houses devastated

Johnny Noya, an emergency response officer for World Vision, who was conducting an assessment in Manokwari, said many houses were flattened and needed to be rebuilt.

"The general condition is returning to normal and the government is doing well in terms of coordinating the relief effort," he told IRIN.

He said some affected areas could only be reached by helicopter, making relief distribution difficult. The jungle-rich Papua region has limited road networks and relies heavily on air transport.

Leon-Garcia said it appeared the second quake on Sunday resulted in more damage but that traditional houses were able to resist the tremors, resulting in fewer casualties.

"In the second quake many buildings collapsed but people were already outside," he said. "Many public buildings were destroyed but it was Sunday when people were not working ... The density of the population is very low and therefore casualties were minimal."

Indonesia is in the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, a chain of fault lines and volcanoes known for seismic activity.

atp/bj/mw

[END]

Indonesia: Merri Oviana, "Thirty-three relatives died that day"

BANDA ACEH, 7 January 2009 (IRIN) - Merri Oviana, 30, of Lampulo village in Banda Aceh city, Aceh Province, was out of the country, working in Brunei Darussalam to raise money for her family, when the tsunami struck her village four years ago. It would be a year before she could return home and discover the full extent of the damage to her family and to Aceh.

"My father is a carpenter and my mother a school-teacher and both my brothers are in college," Oviana told IRIN. "I was in Brunei as a migrant worker from 2004 to 2005 answering telephones at the state radio and television station." Oviana had studied hotel services but was unable to find a job in Banda Aceh.

"In Brunei, my salary was not much. I sent money home as I could but also had to pay for board and lodging, which didn't leave much."

The day of the 2004 tsunami, which ultimately killed 167,000 people in Aceh Province alone, a friend at work told her what had happened.

"I went to the internet and saw the pictures of the destruction in Aceh. It was so thoroughly broken.

"I cried, I was frantic. I called and called my Papa but could not reach him or any other relatives."

Finally after five days, her aunt answered the phone. "Auntie said, 'So many are dead, and those of us who survived are living in tents, and almost every day there are new earthquakes,'" Oviana recalled.

Fortunately, Oviana's father and mother and two brothers survived. But their house was destroyed and most of her immediate relatives perished in the waves.

"Thirty-three of them died in all, including aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers and all their children," she says. "My favourite aunt, Bemoa, who had been the inspiration for my striking out for Brunei for better opportunities and to help the family, was among them."

After Oviana heard about the extent of the disaster, she went to her boss in Brunei, and told him she had to go home.

"'Your contract is not finished,' he said. 'You have one more year to go on it.' I pleaded, but he said he would take me to the police if I persisted."

For the next year, she saved all her money for the plane trip home at the end of 2005. "So many houses and buildings were still broken and the roads were filled with holes. It was unbelievable to me," she said. "The dust was everywhere and we had to wear masks when we motorbiked."

Today, Oviana works as a waitress in a hotel in Banda Aceh. "I will never leave Aceh and my family again," she said. "I think Aceh is now improving because so many government and international agencies have provided houses and done other rebuilding."

Nevertheless, Oviana says, the new house built for her family is inadequate. "It's okay, but too small and it has no kitchen." Her parents remain traumatised. "They cannot stay in the house or near the sea because of so many bad memories, so they rent the house out."

On 26 December 2008, she travelled to the mass grave at Blang Bintang, where the remains of 200,000-300,000 tsunami victims are buried, including her relatives, and prayed that "God has given them entry into paradise".

bj/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

07 Jan 2009

Indonesia: Consolidating a fragile peace in Aceh

BANDA ACEH, 29 December 2008 (IRIN) - Four years after the December 2004 Asian tsunami which killed some 167,000 people in this west Indonesian province, the recovery and rehabilitation phase is winding down and the government and aid agencies are seeking ways to consolidate a fragile peace.

Peace was established in August 2005 with the signing of a Memo of Understanding (MOU), between the government and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), the Free Aceh secessionist movement, ending three decades of conflict.

Anniversary commemorations for the tsunami victims were more subdued this year, with prayers held at local mosques. At Blang Bintang, the largest of two mass graves in Banda Aceh - which according to local officials contains 20,000-30,000 people - families prayed, many weeping openly.

A young girl, clothed head-to-foot in black, sat alone, quietly crying as she tossed colourful petals onto the grass, while nearby a group of Chinese Acehnese held a formal memorial service.

A formal commemoration was held in West Aceh's capital of Meulaboh, where a speech by Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, the head of Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (BRR), the Indonesian Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, was read in his absence. He praised the fact that more than 120,000 homes, 3,500km of roads, 266 bridges, 20 ports, 12 airports, 954 health facilities, 1,450 school buildings and 979 public offices had been reconstructed.

According to BRR, US\$6.7 billion of the roughly US\$7.2 billion in pledges made by donors has been spent.

Discontent

Nonetheless, complaints still exist of houses and schools and other infrastructure yet to be built, and the fourth anniversary commemoration included a demonstration, in front of the West Aceh Legislative Council, of tsunami survivors who had yet to receive housing.

Addressing such discontent in his speech, Kuntoro said: "We are conscious that handling so many development projects in so short a time could lead to inaccuracies. We seek forgiveness for whatever imperfections there are."

In a December 2008 the Asian Development Bank Institute report entitled *Reconstruction after a Major Disaster: Lessons from the Post-Tsunami Experience in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand*, the BRR is cited as stating that 30,000 houses remained to be built.

[see <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/MUMA-7MG3AR>].

The authors of the report, Sisira Jayasuriya and Peter McCawley, say: "It may be perhaps too early even in late 2008 to make judgments other than to note that it would not be surprising if delays occurred for all the well-known sorts of factors (such as hold-ups in project preparation, difficulties in acquiring land, and negotiations over funding details) that often cause delays in long-term development programmes."

Corruption thwarted?

From the outset there was concern that large-scale corruption might occur. However, BRR, working with international and local agencies, established fairly effective mechanisms for full transparency and accountability, including an award-winning website, RAN [see <http://rand.brr.go.id/RAND/>] in which all project data is posted and beneficiaries can voice their opinions and complaints.

BRR completes its four-year mandate in April 2009, at which time provincial and district governments will take over, but with reduced human and financial resources, according to the UN Office of the Recovery Coordinator for Aceh and Nias (UNORC).

Unemployment

Kuntoro expressed concern about the remaining gaps, saying the massive infusion of financial aid had helped coastal communities bounce back, but unemployment - particularly amongst former GAM fighters and the youth, whose expectations were raised high with the signing of the 2005 MOU - is currently 20 percent and the rural economy in the interior has been neglected.

The transition to provincial and district control is slated to happen in roughly the same time frame as the April parliamentary elections in which the GAM is expected to do well.

Capacity building

"2005 was the emergency relief phase, and 2006-2008 the recovery and reconstruct phase, with lots having been achieved," Fabrice Boussalam, recovery affairs adviser for UNORC, told IRIN. "2009 and 2010 will be the capacity building phase. the time to establish social policies that are sustainable."

In anticipation of the transition, UN agencies and NGOs are working with the provincial authorities in the development of the Aceh Recovery Framework (ARF), a four-year transitional strategy to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity.

"Providing capacity training, education, health and livelihoods, particularly to former GAM fighters and their communities is a high priority," according to Paul Greening, project manager for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Aceh. Most development officials, however, question whether provincial and local authorities have the capacity and training for the task.

"Aceh doesn't have the capacity," one UN official told IRIN. "I'm not sure we are up to the task. We have the resources to build a school in six months, but to train teachers and build livelihoods takes years."

bj/cb

[END]

Indonesia: Unending mud flow wreaking havoc

JAKARTA, 22 December 2008 (IRIN) - Two-and-a-half years after a volcano erupted in the East Java province of Sidoarjo, the mud shows no signs of abating.

One of Indonesia's worst disasters, the eruption on 29 May 2006 displaced more than 75,000 people and destroyed more than 10,000 homes, 35 schools, 31 factories, 65 mosques, a major toll-road and an orphanage.

Many families have lost their farms, while factory and construction workers have been forced to seek work as tour guides, showing people around the muddy plains and selling DVD footage of the ongoing disaster.

Most people have been paid about a fifth of the compensation promised to them as part of a 2007 Presidential Decree, following negotiations between the government and the company that was drilling for gas when the disaster happened. The company, Lapindo Brantas, agreed to pay compensation to locals without accepting liability for the mudflow, which it said was caused by an earthquake 250km away and not a drilling accident. Many scientists and specialists and most afflicted disagree.

A recent settlement on the remaining compensation payments reached on 3 December has left the community divided. People from housing estates who lost their homes and are owed about 100 million rupiah each (US\$9,000) are happy with the settlement as they will be paid in full by early next year.

Others, who co-own houses and land worth a lot more money, are concerned that they will be compensated over a seven-year period as Lapindo Brantas, which is facing debt problems, has agreed to payments of 30 million rupiah (\$2,670) a month.

"In most cases, those houses are owned by several families and the compensation payments end up getting split six ways," a local activist, Winarko, told IRIN.

Some families travelled to Jakarta and covered themselves in mud to demonstrate against the agreement.

On 21 December, the government announced it was prepared to set aside RP82 billion (\$7.5 million) from the 2009 budget to help four additional villages affected by the mudflow.

Winarko, who lives just 2km away from the centre of the mudflow and works with the Civil Alliance for Lapindo Victims, a coalition of NGO groups working to gain fair compensation, said 506 families were still living at a refugee camp in Porong market. They sleep in 6m x 4m tents and share 15 toilets, with deliveries of clean water and food having stopped months ago.

As many as 10,000 people have lived at the market place since the mudflow devastated the area. "It's amazing how these people survive without steady jobs," Winarko said. "Now they work here and there, but before all of this, while they weren't rich, they were wealthy enough in their own way," he said. "It's hardest for the farmers. Even if they get the payment, it's not easy to move somewhere and buy a new rice paddy. Communities are very local."

For others, the mudflow has ironically provided an opportunity for better pay. Iyek used to earn RP750,000 rupiah (\$67) a month at a beverage factory, which was buried in the mudflow. He now works as a guide for tourists, journalists and NGO representatives, ferrying them around the site on his motorbike, pointing out the latest gas leaks or small eruptions and selling DVDs for RP30,000 (\$2.70)

apiece.

The work is more erratic, but he earns between RP30,000-150,000 (\$2.70-13.70) a day. The problem is increasing competition: "It is getting harder every day as more and more people compete for work," he told IRIN

Gas leaks

The number of victims is rising daily as the sinking mud triggers gas leaks. "In my village, several houses have big cracks in the floor and if you put a lighter near the cracks, flames leap up," says Winarko, "and these people have no choice but to live in these dangerous conditions with small children."

While the amount of mud spewing from the volcano has decreased, it is still enough to fill 20 Olympic swimming pools every day. Ahmad Zulkarnaen, spokesman for the disaster response agency, Badan Pelaksana Penanggulangan Lumpur Sidoardgo, said the focus was no longer on stopping the flow after numerous attempts, including plugging the hole with cement balls, failed. Instead, the agency, which is using government funds to rebuild infrastructure and maintain the dam walls containing the disaster site, is focusing on shipping the mud out to sea via the Porong River.

While that has its own problems, in terms of endangering river and sea life and increasing the risk of major flooding in East Java's capital city Surabaya, it is seen as the best option for dealing with the mud crisis.

lm/bj/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

22 Dec 2008

Indonesia: Tsunami early warning system launched

JAKARTA, 12 November 2008 (IRIN) - The 11 November launch in Jakarta of the Indonesia Tsunami Early Warning System (InaTEWS) was welcome news throughout the archipelago, but perhaps most of all in Aceh.

The province hardest hit by the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, in which about 170,000 people died, is still rebuilding homes and livelihoods devastated by the disaster.

"In many places, the situation is better than it originally was, but in some places it is not yet as good as it used to be," Pieter Smidt, head of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) mission in Sumatra, told IRIN.

Smidt heads ADB's tsunami recovery project in Aceh. He said Indonesia's Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, or BRR, would end its mandate in April 2009. About US\$6 billion had been invested in Aceh's reconstruction so far, he said.

"This [InaTEWS] is definitely a very good investment from the international community and the government," Smidt said.

The early warning system can reportedly predict and disseminate news of a possible tsunami within five minutes of an earthquake, according to the National Meteorology and Geophysics Agency.

"This will give people around 30 to 40 minutes to evacuate and save their lives," said Edie Prihanto, assistant to the deputy for technological needs analysis at the Ministry for Technology and Research.

Prihanto told IRIN they began developing InaTEWS in 2005, after the government decided that a warning system had to be developed "at any cost". The meteorology agency said about 57 percent of Indonesia's 81,000km of coastline was vulnerable to tsunamis.

The system, which consists of buoys linked to detectors on the seabed, was developed at a cost of 1.4 trillion rupiahs (\$130 million). Germany contributed 45 million Euros (\$56 million) to the project, while China, Japan, the USA and France contributed equipment and technical assistance.

Since 2005, the government has been conducting tsunami preparedness drills in various parts of the country every year on 26 December - the annual anniversary of the 2004 tsunami.

jd/bj/mw

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

12 Nov 2008

Indonesia: Child malnutrition aggravated by food, oil price rises

JAKARTA, 21 July 2008 (IRIN) - Thirteen toddlers are fighting for their lives in Ba'a hospital in a remote village in Nusa Tenggara Province, eastern Indonesia. All of them are suffering from malnutrition. "They are very weak - only skin and bones and swollen stomachs," Dr Rina Sudjiawati told IRIN. "Because of their condition they are very vulnerable to other serious illnesses."

Dozens of Indonesian children under five died of malnutrition in the first six months of 2008, according to the health authorities, although no accurate figure can be determined.

The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates 13 million children in Indonesia suffer from malnutrition. In some Indonesian districts about 50 percent of infants and young children are underweight.

"Some parts of this country have even worse data than sub-Saharan Africa," said Anne Vincent, head of the UN Children's Fund's (UNICEF's) health and nutrition section in Indonesia. Vincent is "appalled" by eating habits in Indonesia. "Sometimes they give their children only rice with water. Kids don't grow on that."

The poor feeding practices combined with the decline in breastfeeding is the main cause of the high number of child deaths caused by malnutrition, according to Vincent. "The lives of 30,000 children could be saved [annually] if mothers breastfed their babies exclusively for the first six months." That is only currently being done by a little over 7 percent of Indonesian mothers. Most babies get only breast milk for the first two months, according to UNICEF.

The reasons for quitting breastfeeding so early are numerous. Poor knowledge and no facilities to express milk for working mothers are among the most important ones, said Vincent. Another reason why women stop breastfeeding and start using milk formula is the common, but misplaced, belief that formula is better than breast milk.

Vincent blames companies that sell formula. "I have never seen those companies acting so aggressively anywhere in the world."

Health Ministry working on database

The Ministry of Health says it is working on a database to get an overview of public health per district. "Geographical location forms the biggest risk for malnutrition," said Ina Hernawati, responsible for public nutrition in the Health Ministry, adding that some provinces had less fertile land so adequate food was not readily available. East Nusa Tenggara was one of those provinces.

The death of the under-fed toddlers could have been prevented, Oxfam Country Deputy Director Libby Desforges told IRIN. "The root cause of malnutrition is poverty, and that is something that can be addressed."

She pointed out that although the number of starving toddlers was shocking, large numbers of Indonesian grown-ups were also severely underweight.

Impact of rising oil, food prices

The current increase in oil and food prices in Indonesia is of great concern to aid agencies. In the first half of 2008, the cost of protein-rich, soya-based, staple products such as tofu and 'tempe' (fermented soya), rose by about 50 percent, and in May 2008 fuel prices went up by about 30 percent.

In spite of the 6 percent annual growth of the Indonesian economy it is not enough to create jobs for the tens of millions of unemployed. Half of the Indonesian population of 235 million lives on less than US\$2 per day.

Vincent told IRIN the food and fuel crisis would increase the number of malnourished. She said people had recently harvested their corn (for human consumption) and cassava crops in East Nusa Tenggara and no food shortages existed there.

But a 22 May report issued by the humanitarian agency Church World Service (CWS) [<http://www.churchworldservice.org/news/archives/2008/05/897.html>] revealed the extent of the food crisis for many families. It said over 91 percent of households in that region were suffering hunger and alarming levels of malnutrition because of inadequate access to food.

edj/bj/cb

[END]

Integrated Regional Information Networks

21 Jul 2008

Indonesia: Diarrhoea takes deadly toll on toddlers consuming infant formula

JAKARTA, 9 April 2008 (IRIN) - Infants are suffering serious bouts of diarrhoea, and in some cases dying, from infant formula provided in emergency situations, according to a coalition of international aid groups and government agencies that is calling for the promotion of breast-feeding.

"Inappropriate use in emergencies of breast milk substitutes, often received as unsolicited donations, endangers the lives of infants and young children," according to a statement issued after a March meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

The coalition, which includes the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children (UK), Mercy Corps, Care, the World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme, International Organization for Migration, HOPE, Médecins Sans Frontières and health officials from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, is urging all UN agencies, aid groups, and governments to ensure that women are not automatically given infant formula during an emergency and are encouraged to continue breast-feeding.

"A lot of the time the donations are well meant. There's a misconception that in emergency situations women's milk dries up," Kirsty McIvor, UNICEF Indonesia's spokeswoman, told IRIN. She said stress can cause women's milk to temporarily evaporate but it will return.

Giving out infant formula during emergencies is even more dangerous than in normal situations, she said, because survivors often lack access to clean water or do not have the facilities to properly boil the water. Using dirty water in the formula mix can prove fatal, causing debilitating bouts of diarrhoea, a leading cause of death in children under five.

Health risks

A joint survey by UNICEF, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and the University of Gadj Mada in Indonesia after the 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta, central Java, found a six-fold increase in rates of diarrhoea for children under two as increasing numbers were given formula during the emergency.

An additional concern of the coalition is that once mothers of infant children are given the formula during emergencies, they continue to use it. Some 70 percent of households with children in the region of the Yogyakarta earthquake had received formula, and the survey found a two-fold increase in its use, compared with regions unaffected by the quake.

In Central Java province, the most recent available data shows that fewer than 5 percent of children aged five months are still exclusively breastfeeding and that the trend is declining. This is far lower than the national figure of 14 percent of infants exclusively breastfeeding at four-five months.

Formula overwhelms Aceh

Aceh, the province worst hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, was inundated with infant formula in the weeks after the disaster, according to Robin Lim, a midwife with a local NGO, Bumi Sehat.

She said aid workers reported frequent cases of babies being malnourished and failing to gain weight, or die, because dirty water was used to mix the formula. In addition, she said, the formula was usually given out with no instructions on sterilising babies' bottles, the correct ratio of formula to water, and the need to boil the water.

Breast is best

Officially, the Indonesian Ministry of Health, with UNICEF and WHO, recommends breastfeeding but only 14 percent of Indonesian babies are exclusively breast-fed, and then only for the first five months.

UNICEF told IRIN that part of the problem is the aggressive marketing of infant formula, with some companies making misleading claims that infant formula is better for a baby's brain development than breast milk. In response, the Indonesian Ministry of Health is drafting regulations to control the advertising of breast milk substitutes.

The director-general of community health has directed district health offices to only give out donated formula during emergencies to those who have no other option - orphans, children of mothers who cannot feed due to stress or injury, or to children who were already being fed formula before the disaster.

The Ministry of Health, with assistance from UNICEF, also said it would train breast-feeding counsellors to be deployed to disaster areas.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

09 Apr 2008

Indonesia: Quakes shake nerves in West Sumatra

JAKARTA, 12 March 2008 (IRIN) - The Indonesian province of West Sumatra has experienced several earthquakes over the past fortnight since a 7.3 quake on 25 February sparked a tsunami alert, stirring up fears that another massive quake might strike this seismically active region.

The almost daily quakes have centered on Padang, West Sumatra's capital, and the Mentawai islands off the coast. Some scientists fear another devastating disaster such as in December 2004, in which more than 230,000 people across Asia were killed.

But scientists are divided over when the next big one might strike. US-based geologist, Kerry Sieh, from the California Institute of Technology, believes the quakes and tremors since 25 February are signs of increasing stress.

"Significant pieces are starting to break. But whether that means a magnitude nine tomorrow or 20 years from now, we cannot tell," Sieh told a Singapore daily, the Straits Times.

"Still, these earthquakes are clearly driving the Sunda mega-thrust closer to failure, accelerating things," said Sieh, who has been studying the Sumatra fault for more than a decade.

The stress is caused by the Sunda plate, which stretches from Sumatra to eastern Indonesia, pushing into the Indian Oceanic and Australian plates, according to geologists. The cracks along a segment of the Sunda mega-thrust caused the Aceh tsunami of 2004 and the Nias quake of 2005.

"For a quake with a magnitude of at least 8.5 we can say that something like this will occur within 200 years with almost 100 percent accuracy. But to say this might happen in the next 20 years, I think we can only predict that with 10 percent accuracy," Andes Suharjono, a geologist in the disaster unit of the Meteorology and Geophysics Board (BMG), told IRIN. These predictions are based on studying the history of the quakes in this region, he said.

"This is a natural phenomenon. The mega-thrust wants to stabilise and to stabilise it wants to release energy ... so we can expect quakes anywhere along this fault-line, even in eastern Indonesia," said Suharjono.

He admitted the frequent quake warnings and the tsunami alert were making West Sumatrans nervous, and it would be less stressful if the government's meteorology agency could predict more accurately whether a quake would set off a tsunami or not.

In an effort to do this, he said the government was installing tsunami buoys. To date only two buoys have been installed but there are plans for another 19 to be placed in the next few years.

In addition, a network of tide-measuring machines is needed. If they were in place the BMG could more easily predict where on Sumatra's 1,000km coastline a tsunami might strike, said Suharjono.

Disaster preparedness

In Padang, residents admit to feeling edgy. "Every day there is a quake and it feels like the buildings will collapse; everyone is very tense," said Handewi, a hotel employee.

However, they are better equipped than most to deal with a quake, and even a tsunami. Almost 200,000 people have received training on how and where to evacuate, since a local NGO, Tsunami Alert Community (KOGAMI), began disaster preparedness training sessions in 2005.

"Before, if there was a big quake people used to panic, but now they know to check any information about quakes, such as on local radio stations, and they don't panic," says Achmad Ansyari Siregar from KOGAMI.

Nonetheless, although Padang is more quake ready than most other Indonesian cities, it sits on flat, sandy plains and the roads and bridges leading to higher ground are narrow.

Sudi Prayitno, a former UN consultant on disaster management for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), who is head of the Legal Aid Foundation in Padang, told IRIN, "If you look at evacuation routes for the Padang area, they don't have the capacity for people to evacuate the 7-10km into the hills to high ground." In fact, after an earthquake on 12 September, there was a three-hour jam of cars trying to get up into the hills, said authorities.

KOGAMI estimates that some 400,000 people in Padang are at risk in a large-scale tsunami, and is lobbying the government to widen roads and bridges. In response, the government has promised to create another evacuation route, and also nominate several tall buildings to be used in the event of a tsunami.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

12 Mar 2008

Indonesia: Flooding routine for Jakarta residents

JAKARTA, 4 March 2008 (IRIN) - Fifty-year-old Sudarti cannot remember how many times she has had to flee her tiny, rented house as flood waters surged above the banks of the nearby Krukut river in Karet Tengsin village in central Jakarta.

"At least five times a year, maybe more. Every time it rains all night, or all day, we have to run," says the housewife in her two metre-wide home.

In early February, unusually heavy rains meant the water reached up to the first floor of the tiny, two-room row houses in this poor district of Indonesia's capital.

Sudarti (like many Indonesians, she uses a single name) had to swim through neck-high water, dodging benches, motorbikes and other household goods, while remaining vigilant against the risk of electrocution by downed electrical wires.

While the floods caused some illness, particularly cases of diarrhoea, the worst effect is economic. Everyone in this poor community of cleaners, builders, traders and motor-cycle drivers told IRIN they lose precious goods and potential income.

"We lose at least 40,000Rp (about US\$4.20) every day, because my husband can't look for work, he has to help me evacuate," said Ratna Dewi, a housewife in Karet Tengsin.

It was not just the urban poor who have been affected by the torrential rains. The massive floods turned Jakarta's main thoroughfare, Jalan Sudirman, into a river, and blocked the airport toll road, leaving thousands of people stranded in cars and buses.

Authorities claim the flooding was caused by a combination of factors - unusually high rainfall, rapid urbanisation, which has drastically reduced the amount of green space capable of absorbing excess water, tidal waves and an inadequate drainage system.

More floods expected

Flood waters in Jakarta have subsided for the moment, although experts from the government meteorology office warn that more floods could deluge Jakarta, with monsoon rains expected to last for at least a few more weeks. Elsewhere across Indonesia, continued heavy rains and flooding have killed 11 people in the past week alone.

"The intensity of the rain was very extreme in early February; usually we see this kind of rainfall over one month, but this happened in one day," said Andes Sudarhono, head of the Meteorology Agency's natural disaster unit for West Java and Sumatra provinces.

The cause of this exceptionally high rainfall is "climate change; most of our research on this is pointing to climate change", said Andes.

Rapid urbanisation

Andes also blames rapid urbanisation. Too many housing complexes have been built in designated green spaces and catchment basins surrounding dams and rivers. In coastal North Jakarta, a combination of unusually high tides and the sinking of the city, which has dropped 40cm in just less than two decades, as well as heavy rain, has caused intermittent flooding for the past two months, he said.

"Every time there is a high tide now it can flood northern Jakarta," he said, adding that Jakarta's sinking meant the effects of the high tides was magnified.

Government action

In the days after the floods, Jakarta's governor, Fauzi Bowo, announced that his government would complete the construction of the East Flood Canal by 2010. Work on the canal, which would direct water from Jakarta's main rivers out to sea, was begun in the aftermath of the devastating 2002 floods, which killed dozens of people. But a combination of land disputes and lack of funds has delayed the project.

In addition, Fauzi vowed to expand green areas surrounding river basins, as well as increase the capacity of dams that supply the city with water. However, he warned that it would not be cheap, costing an estimated \$182 million, and he has appealed to the central government for funds.

In the interim, serious flooding is expected to continue and the government and humanitarian community have begun educating residents on how best to cope. This includes disaster drills run by the Indonesian Red Cross, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the National Search and Rescue Agency, the police, military and navy, to prepare coastal residents for the next tidal surge.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

04 Mar 2008

Indonesia: East Java mudflow held in check by dikes - but for how long?

SURABAYA, 16 January 2008 (IRIN) - It is fair to say the Sidoargjo mudflow in East Java Province, Indonesia, qualifies as a truly unique disaster, even in a country that is considered by many experts the most disaster-prone in the world, what with its frequent earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and landslides.

According to Sucahyono, an engineer with the Sidoargjo Mudflow Mitigation Agency, a government entity, the mudflow has now inundated some 650 hectares of land formerly replete with fish farms, sugar plantations, rice paddies and factories.

While there is no current estimate of total damage, a November 2006 government assessment reported that 1,810 houses, 18 schools, two government offices, 20 factories and 15 mosques had been engulfed by the mud.

Unlike most other disasters which usually end reasonably quickly, the Sidoargjo mudflow, which is in an area some 30km south of Surabaya City, the capital of East Java Province, just keeps on spouting.

The mud volcano, as some scientists are defining it, has been spewing out as much as 125,000 cubic metres per day for more than a year and a half now, according to the Sidoarjo Mudflow Mitigation Agency. "Some experts are telling us it could continue emitting mud for the next 30 years," said Sucahyono, although he is sceptical that anyone knows for sure.

Conflicting views on the cause

The mud began to flow on 29 May 2006, only two days after a major earthquake occurred in Yogyakarta. Many experts speculated that the earthquake triggered the muddy eruption. But the fact that the hot mud started spewing out only 200 metres from a gas drilling operation of the PT Lapindo Brantas company led others, including angry local residents, to surmise that the drilling operation struck mud - vast reserves of it - not gas.

The dispute over who or what is to blame for the disaster - and whether it is a technological disaster (like Bhopal) or a natural disaster will keep lawyers and observers busy for years.

Since the initial eruption in 2006, a total of 13,000 families, (some 50,000 people) have been relocated, Sofyan Hadi, deputy head of operations for the Sidoarjo Mudflow Mitigation Agency, told IRIN.

A home submerged

Mueslinah, a 37-year-old mother of four, was one of those who had to flee the mud in 2006. "I was born and lived my entire life in Sereng town [in Sidoargjo District]," she told IRIN as we stood on a nine meter levée built to contain the mud, with dozens of trucks arriving with dirt to build it higher. "My husband was a farmer," she said, "and I had an ice-making company... We were only able to salvage a few possessions before our house and land became submerged in the mud," Mueslinah said.

"We lived for five months as IDPs [internally displaced persons] in a tent complex," she said. "The Lapinto Brantas company paid for it." Her family has also received 20 percent compensation - 54 million rupiah - from the company for the loss of their home.

According to Sucahyono of the Mitigation Agency, most displaced families have now received the 20 percent compensation for their losses. He told IRIN that full compensation should be paid to most families by May 2009.

Disaster tourism

Most of the displaced families have found it difficult to establish new livelihoods. "I have to find my own money and it's hard," Mueslinah told IRIN. She, like some others who were displaced, is currently in the disaster tourism business. They charge a fee for visitors to the site, and there appear to be many; and 50,000 rupiah for a CD that chronicles the various stages of the continuing mudflow disaster. It could be a growth industry for sometime to come.

The government has allocated 500 billion rupiah (US\$55 million) from the 2007 national budget for the agency to manage the mudflow and its impact on the community. This includes repairing railway lines, roads and electricity facilities. It has also provided 10 billion rupiah (\$1.1 million) for living allowances to some 10,000 families for community development activities and public facilities.

Dikes

A major component of managing the mudflow has been the building of huge earthen dikes - some as high as 18 metres - to contain the mud and keep it from flowing into other communities. But ultimately, the agency's plan is to drain much of the mud down a nearby river, the Porong. According to Sucahyono, thus far they have had only limited success.

The seasonal floods have caused the dikes to be breached and nearby communities, highways and railway lines have been submerged - with the latest incident on 4 January.

"We are worried about the dikes holding," said Sucahyono, noting that the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency of East Java is forecasting additional heavy rains at the end of January until the beginning of February.

Land subsidence

Land subsidence is an additional problem. Due to the weight of the mud and flooding, the land has been sinking, with one recent government estimate putting the subsidence rate at 6 centimetres per day. The subsidence is diverting the mud in the wrong direction, weakening the dikes even more, said Sucahyono. A further challenge, he said, is pumping the mud into the river and downstream. "The mud is so thick and heavy that the pumps can't handle it," he said.

"All I want is the full compensation I am due," Mueslinah told IRIN. But others who were displaced are not so sanguine. A man standing nearby, who did not give his name, said: "I simply want to submerge whoever is responsible for all of this into that hot mud hole over there."

bj/cb

[END]

Indonesia: Evacuation, rescue efforts under way after landslides, flooding

JAKARTA, 28 December 2007 (IRIN) - Torrential rains throughout Indonesia since mid-December have caused numerous landslides in central Java and extensive flooding in most of Java, West Sumatra and West Nusa Tenggara, and killed over 100 people in all. Rescue efforts are still under way and the final death toll is yet to be determined.

Landslides struck nine villages in Karanganyar District, central Java, on 26 December. The National Coordination Board for Disaster Management (BAKORNAS PB) said 65 people had been killed, with media reports putting the figure as high as 75.

The evacuation and rescue process in all affected areas is being jointly conducted by the military (TNI), the police, the National Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS PB), the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) and international and local agencies and volunteers.

Emergency assistance - including food and drinking water, medical assistance and setting up centres for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and/or emergency tents - is being coordinated by regional and local disaster operational management divisions. PMI has dispatched hygiene kits, tarpaulins, tents and other non-food items to the affected areas.

Heavy equipment arriving

Roads to the Karanganyar area had been cut off and the first heavy duty equipment to assist in the rescue and recovery effort began arriving on 26 December. Villagers and rescuers there had been using their bare hands in a frantic attempt to recover bodies often buried deep beneath the mud.

Mohammad Abdullah, chief of Bencana Alam's district coordination unit for disaster management, told IRIN in a phone interview: "The mud is very thick, but we are working in good spirits." He said heavy equipment arrived there on 27 December and had really helped the recovery effort. He also said that due to continued heavy rain an additional six landslides had occurred in the district.

Landslides also occurred in the adjacent district of Wonogiri, in central Java, where seven people were reported killed and 10 were still missing.

Extensive flooding in central Java

Days of unrelenting rain and the overflow from the Bengawan Solo river have also caused extensive flooding in most part of Surakarta City, known as Solo, in Central Java Province. Some 6,616 homes were inundated and the water level rose as high as two metres in most parts of the city. The flooding also stopped trains from running on the northern route from Jakarta to Surabaya.

"I think this is one of the worst disasters ever to have happened in Solo," Astri, a catering service owner in Surakarta City, who has been helping displaced persons in a field kitchen, told IRIN by phone. "I could actually see the water rise rapidly, especially when two gates of the Gajah Mungkur dam were opened," he said, adding: "We were warned months ago [by experts from the University of Sebelas Maret] of the possibility of flooding because of chronic deforestation in the area." According to Astri, there had not been a major flood in the area since 1966. "Solo never has any floods," he said, "so basically we were caught off-guard."

Flooding since 26 December also inundated over 400 houses in Pekalongan District, central Java, forcing an estimated 15,000 people to evacuate.

Roads, train service cut

In Ngawi, in East Java, flooding has forced thousands of people to evacuate their homes and another 1,000 or so were being evacuated in Jombang, East Java. Many roads and train services from Surabaya to Jogjakarta have been cut off.

On 25 December, unrelenting rains and the overflow of the River Amprong in East Java inundated 111 houses. The water level rose so rapidly, up to two metres, that many people were unable to save their belongings, according to BAKORNAS PB and media reports.

In Madiun District, East Java, about 40 people were swept away during flooding there. "They had gone to the bridge to watch and did not realise the danger," Dedi, who was there helping to recover the victims, told IRIN. "Before they realised it, water from the swollen river underneath them swept them away."

Thousands affected in Padang City

Flooding has also occurred in recent days in Padang City and Pesisir Selatan District in West Sumatra Province. Thousands of people have been affected in Padang City, according to BAKORNAS PB and regional and local disaster officials, and to date one person has been reported killed and two missing.

In West Sumbawa District in West Nusa Tenggara Province, 12,000 people have been affected by flooding although no casualties have been reported.

In terms of international response, various agencies have responded, including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) which has dispatched an assessment team to the Karanganyar area, Church World Service (CWS), Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Hope Worldwide and Oxfam-GB, which have been delivering non-food items. The UN office of the resident and humanitarian coordinator in Indonesia continues to monitor the situation.

According to the Indonesian Meteorological and Geophysical Agency (BMG), heavy rain is expected to continue throughout Indonesia until 30 December.

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Integrated Regional Information Networks

28 Dec 2007