

Govt vows to improve sanitation and water

The Indonesian government is committed to improving the country's living conditions as part of its efforts to prevent illnesses and death caused by unsanitary conditions, which often affects the poor, a minister says.

Health Minister Endang Rahayu Sedyaningsih said healthier living conditions were required in the country.

"Many people suffer from infectious diseases caused by poor sanitation, lack of access to safe drinking water and other unhealthy living conditions," she said at the launching of the 2010 Basic Health Research (Risikesdas).

Households with healthier living conditions, including adequate sanitation and safe drinking water, will suffer fewer deaths from environment related diseases, especially water-borne illnesses.

Many people in developing countries, including Indonesia, lack access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation.

Social Services Minister Salim Segaf Al Jufri said 2.3 million families lived in substandard homes that required attention and repairs.

According to the United Nations (UN), 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, 2.6 billion lack adequate sanitation and 1.8 billion die every year from diarrhea, of which 90 percent are children under five years old.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says unclean water and poor sanitation and hygiene causes 1.6 million children's deaths a year across the globe.

A scientist from the Eijkman Winkler Center for Microbiology in the Netherlands, Jan Verhoef, said epidemiological research proves that many infectious diseases are poverty related.

He said it would be better if people could prevent infections by developing better and less crowded housing with adequate running water and sewage systems, instead of just trying to cure the illnesses.

"Diarrhea risks will be reduced if you have running water and better sewage systems. It would be easier for us to prevent respiratory infections if we had better housing," he told The Jakarta Post at a three-day seminar on human genetics and infections.

It has been proven that people who live in healthier environments are more resistant to illness.

"They may lower their health costs because they don't need medical treatment. So, better and healthier living conditions are the best way to prevent infections," he said.

Amid globally increasing environment related diseases, the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will hopefully play an important role in developing healthier living conditions that are direly needed to prevent deaths from water-borne illnesses, for example.

Endang said Indonesia, as one of the developing countries with the highest number of water-borne illnesses, would strive to increase people's access to clean drinking water and sanitation, as stipulated by MDGs number 7, which mandates halving by 2015 the number of people without access to clean water and basic sanitation, using 1990 as the baseline.

MDGs achievements ON SANITATION			
INDICATOR	MDGs PROGRESS REPORT 2009		
	1993 (%)	2009 (%)	2015 (%)
People with access to adequate sanitation	24.74	51.02	62.37
• Households in urban areas	56.60	69.55	76.80
• Households in rural areas	11.08	34.00	55.54

MDGs achievements ON DRINKING WATER				
INDICATOR	MDGs PROGRESS REPORT 2009			
	1993 (%)	2007 (%)	2009 (%)	2015 (%)
Public access to safe water resources	37.73	52.10	47.71	68.87
• In urban areas	-	54.10	49.82	78.19
• In rural areas	-	43.90	45.72	61.60
Public access to safe water resources delivered through water pipelines	-	-	25.56	41.03
• In urban areas	-	30.80	43.96	68.32
• In rural areas	-	9.00	11.54	19.76

Source: The Public Works Ministry, 2010

Under the MDGs, the number of households with sustainable access to safe drinking water is projected to reach 68.87 percent of the total population by 2015. The number of households with access to adequate sanitation is projected to reach 62.37 percent of the total population by 2015.

It seems likely that Indonesia will need to work harder to achieve these targets.

According to the Public Works Ministry, Indonesia's rate is only 51.02 percent for adequate sanitation. About 40 million people, or 23.20 percent of the population, have no basic sanitation. That means they do not even have a toilet.

"They live without any sanitation at all. It is worrisome," Cipta Karya director general Budi Yuwono told the Post on Friday.

Indonesia's figure for clean water is 47.71 percent.

Budi said providing safe water supplies remained a challenge because of shortages of water, water leakage problems and water company mismanagement.

In order to meet the MDGs target, the government is allocating Rp 7 trillion (US\$777 million) for five years to provide water for regional water companies, and Rp 11.8 trillion for five years to develop water installations in rural areas.

Budi said many local governments had not shown their commitment to improving the management of local water companies, even though local governments were legally responsible to provide sustainable access to drinking water and adequate sanitation. (ebf)