

Urban poor face climate change impacts

Despite the robust economic growth, a recent report from Central Statistics Agency (BPS) says there are 10.5 million urban poor in Indonesia, mostly in Java and Sumatra. They live in a very poor state and mostly in overcrowded spaces that lack water, sanitation, drainage and, often, primary healthcare. In his address to the Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) launched in early November in Denmark, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that the world was largely ill-prepared for the risks of a changing climate, especially the poor and most vulnerable who have contributed least to this problem. Scientists agree that in urban areas, climate change is projected to increase risks for people, assets, economies and ecosystems. To the urban poor the situation is an added burden to their already challenging day-to-day life. They will be facing risks from the changing climate of heat stress, storms, extreme precipitation and coastal flooding. Without any doubt the population of urban poor is having firsthand experience related to the changing climate. Taking evidence from the ground, let us meet Mpok Neneng from North Jakarta. She lives with her small family: two teenage daughters and her husband, Toto, who works in a salted/dried-fish factory. Unpredictable seasons in the last decade ruined the family's income. Rainy seasons come way too early. Fish is getting difficult to catch and drying process often fails. The family has to live on less than US\$10 a week, forcing Neneng to open a small stall selling gorengan (fried food). She is not happy with the situation. Frequent flooding has inundated her house and rotted her furniture, while diseases have broken out unchallenged. Asking for aid is almost impossible because her family is not registered at the local subdistrict administration. She found the future would not get any better as her daughter has to drop out of school to help the family earn a living.

Neneng epitomizes the demographic that will be hit hardest by climate change, which places communities like hers on the very front lines of the scramble to adapt to and mitigate its impacts. These people may not call it climate change, but they are suffering the consequences. Nationwide, a communications campaign to raise climate change awareness continues to be promoted. Sadly, from its start in 2009 the communications campaign has mostly used jargon with its well-known "green" movement involving bike-to-work, car-free days and energy-efficient buildings. But then again, could these types of communications reach and benefit the group most in need of the information? Do the urban poor as a vulnerable group understand the aim of this campaign and are they making some changes driven by the current type of message? Communication experts found it is very challenging to make the topic more appealing. Making it important is far easier than making it interesting. They admit that engaging celebrities in the climate change campaign is not enough. Messages on issues about climate change are not reaching everyone, said one media expert. The content about climate change is difficult for them to produce and for ordinary people to understand. Yet, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Article 6 mandates all parties to the convention to communicate the effects and dynamics of climate change at all levels. Parties are called upon to develop and implement public awareness programs, provide public access to information and initiate participatory processes to develop responses to climate change. Consequently, commitment to this article is compulsory for Indonesia. Having explored Climate Asia data (bbc.co.uk/climateasia), which involved almost 5,000 respondents across Indonesia, 63 percent of the urban poor felt that the changes they were experiencing impacted on their ability to earn money.

They felt the high impact of changing climate now (30 percent) and the number would double in the future. They do hear the term climate change (62 percent) but less than 20 percent are prepared for extreme weather events. This may be because the current climate change campaign discourages rather than encourages them. Observing the current climate change communications in Indonesia, we will see a high amount of jargon and scientific language used. Worse, much information in place is irrelevant to people's daily lives. The data also found health was a strong motivation for the urban poor to take action. Actions with tangible health benefits include reducing the number of mosquitoes in the area by maintaining a cleaner neighborhood or cleaning the river. Peer pressure also motivated people to take action. People would feel guilty if they were not involved in environmental protection. The urban poor will get ready for a changing climate if they have awareness, motivation, self-confidence, knowledge and the skills to secure food, water and shelter, improve economic opportunities and security, reduce the risk of disasters and cope with crises. Indeed, the 10.5 million poor people like Neneng may be few in number compared to the country's population of 240 million. A report titled *The Geography of Poverty, Disasters and Climate Extremes in 2030* by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) suggest that climate change and exposure to "natural" disasters threaten to derail efforts to eradicate poverty by 2030. Thus, neglecting the urban poor will hamper the spirit of the welfare society in the making and add to the potential calamities we are facing as a nation. It is an urgent call to make sure the urban poor will be more resilient to the changes. Hence, future effective climate change communications campaigns and programs should be a top priority of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's government.

Syarifah Aini Dalimunthe, The writer is a researcher at the Research Center for Population, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta.