

Water deficit leads to consumption of dirty water

The current extended drought has forced thousands of people in some areas in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) to use whatever water they can get. Local residents in Kupang, Timor Tengah Selatan and Timor Tengah Utara, are reportedly consuming unhygienic fecal-contaminated water from nearby dikes, as sources of fresh water have dried up in the last few weeks.

“We’re using dirty water from a dike for drinking water. We have no choice,” said Marice Kono, a resident of Sainoni village, South Bikomi district, Timor Tengah Utara regency. The dike, built by the provincial administration in 1998, was originally aimed at providing water for cattle farmers in the region.

But non-cattle farmers in Fenake village and Sainoni village have now taken advantage of the dike, fetching water for their daily consumption during the current dry season. The people in the area, Marice said, usually fetched water at dawn before herds of cattle headed to the dike and defecated in the stream.

“For drinking, we let the water settle overnight. The water will rise to the top and the dirt will sink to the bottom,” said Marice, adding that the water shortage had started in August.

“As for other daily activities, like bathing or washing clothes, we use the water directly without any special treatment.”

According to recent data from the NTT administration, 13 of 21 regencies in the province have suffered severe drought, which has affected food and water supplies. An estimated 10,000 people are at immediate risk due to drought and the number is likely to increase at the peak of the dry season in October.

Marice said that the residents had reported the issue to the administration, but their efforts were to no avail. “So far, the administration has yet to provide us with clean water. We feel neglected,” Marice added. People living along the shoreline in Bena village, also in Timor Tengah Utara regency, even have to consume brackish water, which has an unpleasant taste and smell.

“The brackish water tastes saltier than freshwater, but not as bad as seawater. What can we do? There is no other option,” said Alfret Benu, who works as a colored-pebble sorter in Kolbano Beach.

Meanwhile, residents in Pitay village in Sulamu subdistrict in Kupang regency have to walk more than 3 kilometers to get to a water source.

“I have reported this to officers at the regency office, but they’ve given no clear response. I just worry that the water crisis will soon lead to dehydration problems as many people have to take a long walk to access the water,” said Pitay village chief Jarmud Tulle.

Head of the NTT’s counseling and food security agency, Alexander Sena, said that he would coordinate with the central government to solve the problem.

NTT, along with Java and Bali, are some of the regions hardest hit by the drought, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency reported.

In a number of areas in Yogyakarta, for instance, many people are forced to buy water for their daily needs, while farmers in Central Java and West Java are facing harvest failures.