

## Papua's missing millions in grant aid



When Emanuel Esema's 15-year-old brother developed swollen limbs recently he did not even think of taking him to receive medical attention. Their home in West Papua's Yahukimo district is remote – 800 kms from the provincial capital Jayapura and at least three days on foot to the nearest clinic.

“I decided to find medicines myself in the forest,” said Esema.

His younger brother never recovered. He is among a growing number of Papuans who have died due to lack of medical services in this remote corner of the country amid a growing scandal which has put both the central and regional authorities under severe scrutiny.

In Tambrau, West Papua, alone as many as 95 people have died in the past six months due to a lack of medical facilities, according to Nusantra Traditional Community Alliance (AMAN), an NGO.

There were three community health centers here but they closed down in 2010 due to a lack of personnel, according to AMAN.

Critics of the government say that the budget numbers for this restive corner of Indonesia simply do not add up.

Since Papua became a special autonomous area in the far east of the country in 2001, more than 46.7 trillion rupiah (US\$4.9 billion) has been spent on development projects including hospitals and schools.

This year the central government allocated the same amount again as part of a development acceleration program for Papua and West Papua.

Dorus Wakum, coordinator of the Community of Papuans Against Corruption (Kampak) said that its investigations showed that only about 50 percent of this money is being used as intended.

“The rest is in the hands of local officials,” he says.

In 2010, 43 legislators in West Papua province and 23 in Papua province became suspects of corruption cases involving the special autonomy budget.

But activists who try to investigate and expose these failings face repression and, in some cases, victimization. Yohanis Mambrasar and his father Hans Mambrasar have been compiling a dossier of local deaths due to lack of medical care in the Tambrau district.

On April 8, police in Sausapor sub-district went to their house in Werur village, bundled them into a pickup truck and took them to the police station where they were interrogated separately for hours.

“The two police officers asked Yohanis about organizations in Papua which are against the Indonesian government, as well as the names of the organizations he is working with,” Asian Human Rights Watch said in a statement last week.

Rights activist Father John Djonga of Jayapura diocese who conducts daily visits to remote villages said that health is just the most urgent and apparent problem here.

“Recent deaths show government failure,” he said, adding that most Papuans are trapped in poverty in remote areas with scarcity a normal part of everyday life.

Many people in Papua must rely on what they grow in their immediately locality to survive, which typically means a diet of sweet potatoes, bananas and coconuts.

NGOs have in recent month cited malnutrition as a major factor in the high mortality rates seen in many areas.

The government has blamed the geography of Papua for the recent controversy surrounding the large number of recorded deaths.

“The transportation infrastructure is very limited,” said Minister of Health Nafsiah Mboi.

Activist Zely Ariane, coordinator of NGO National Papuan Solidarity, agreed that at more than 319,000 sq kms Papua represents a huge area. “But don’t make it an excuse not to serve Papuans.”

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