

# Poor affected the most by climate

**I**ndonesia, supported by the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), hosted a workshop on climate change vulnerability and adaptation assessments for the Asia and Pacific on March 20-24. On the sidelines of the workshop, the UNFCCC coordinator for sustainable development programs, **Janos Pasztor**, spoke with The Jakarta Post's **Tubagus Arie Rukmantara** about how climate change will impact poor countries.

**Question:** What should people do about climate change?

**Answer:** We know the climate is already changing and will change more in the future. Trying to stop climate change by reducing gas emissions is one thing, but one of the most important things about the change is the impact of it.

That is why we also need to find out what the impact of climate change will be for countries, the vulnerability to climate change in countries, and come up with adaptation

strategies.

In a country like Indonesia, with 17,000 islands, the biggest immediate threat is that you will have sea levels rising, which is very difficult to know how dangerous it will be. But the rise could reach up to one meter in a few decades. That's a lot and will have a big impact. The most important impact of such a change will take place in coastal zones.

Another impact is there can be local climatic changes. You can have an area that usually

## DISCOURSE



JANOS PASZTOR

has a lot of rain and suddenly it doesn't rain anymore, or the other way around. That would cause suffering for the people who live there because the climate change could last for a long period of time.

*What will happen to people in the event of drastic climate change?*

The most difficult thing to measure is what will happen to local people. Why? Because the models for predicting the change look only at the global scale. They will tell you how much the temperature goes up or how high the sea level rises. But to find out what happens to a specific island is very difficult to measure. It is much more difficult to find out exactly what will happen to a particular area.

*Which areas or countries in the world are the most vulnerable to climate change?*

It depends on the countries and their people's ability to absorb the impact. It depends much on their resilience.

For example, look at a big country like the United States. Last year, they dealt

with Hurricane Katrina which happened to hit an area where there are lots of poor people. We all saw the impact was very bad, even in a very rich country.

It has been shown by scientific studies that it tends to be the poor countries and the poor people in them that will be hurt the most by the change.

For example, rich people in Jakarta have everything to avoid the impacts. On the contrary, the poor people who live in the slums would have their houses washed away when there is a flood caused by climate change. Poor farmers will be finished forever indebted for life if there are no crops one year because there is no rain as a result of climate change.

It is clear that the poor countries are affected the most because they have the

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least ability to adapt to climate change.

*What should the communities within these countries do?*

There should be linkages to sustainable development policies. They should link adaptation processes with existing planning processes, such as poverty reduction, health care, energy planning. The idea is to have an integrated plan as part of the overall planning process.

*How do you see the Indonesian government's efforts to develop integrated policies to cope with climate change?*

Indonesia has a huge challenge, because it has tens of thousands of islands. Should there be no other impact besides a rise in sea levels, the country will still be in danger. There are lots of islands that are vulnerable to such a rise. Due to

this fact, a sea level rise alone will be a major problem for the country.

But, at the same time, Indonesia is a big country with a fairly powerful economic sector. You have strong energy, oil and gas sectors. That means that there are also more resources available in terms of money and professionals. These resources will make it easier for the country to tackle problems erupting from climate change.

The other most important thing is to get the population engaged, to understand what is happening so that they are aware of these issues and then they can participate, especially in the adaptation process because adaptation involves everything — agriculture, coastal management, infrastructure planning and other sectors.

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