

Addressing health issues among underserved communities in isolated areas

Indosat Ooredoo assists underserved communities in remote and isolated areas and victims of natural disasters by addressing their health issues through its Mobile Clinic program.

When it comes to healthcare services, communities living in rural and remote areas are not as fortunate as those living in urban areas, where puskesmas (community health centers), health clinics and air-conditioned hospitals are easily accessible.

In most rural and isolated areas, however, it can take one, two or more hours to reach the nearest puskesmas due to poor road condition, topography and a lack of transportation.

Villagers of Papua, for example, have to make an extra effort to get medical services as the region has geographical challenges with low and highland forest areas.

Difficulty in accessing medical services is also experienced by other villagers in other regions as Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands, making access to healthcare services in the country vastly unbalanced. Many isolated areas do not have the standard ratio of puskesmas to people. The standard ratio of puskesmas to people is one puskesmas per 100,000 people.

On top of that, most villagers living in hard-to-access areas are commonly poor and near-poor, leaving them at risk as it is difficult for them to bear the costs of medical treatment and may lead to time off work and a loss of pay to look after ill relatives, paying transportation and medication costs and perhaps even taking out a loan to cover medical expenses.

With inadequate infrastructure coupled with local people's weak financial capability, it is not surprising that only a few people from remote villages go to puskesmas. As a consequence, isolated areas lag behind other easy-to-access areas when it comes to community health, with the maternal and child mortality rate reportedly remaining high as children in particular are vulnerable to diarrhea, malaria and other infectious diseases.

While health services in isolated areas remain one of the pressing health issues, Indonesia also often

experiences volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods and tsunamis given that the country is located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area with a lot of tectonic activity. This means that in the case of a natural disaster such as flood or volcanic eruption, immediate response is vital to assist victims in addressing any medical issues.

This clearly explains why the Mobile Clinic program is considered instrumental in assisting not only underserved communities in isolated areas but also victims of natural disasters in dealing with health issues. Under the Mobile Clinic concept, medical personnel visit targeted villages where they meet villagers' medical needs, instead of passively waiting for patients at a puskesmas.

The number of pregnant women with nutrient deficiencies remains high in Indonesia, with many living in remote and isolated villages. "Pregnant women should pay extra attention to their health so that they can give birth naturally and safely to a healthy newborn. They can have maternity checks at our mobile clinics," said Deva Rachman, Group Head Corporate Communications of Indosat Ooredoo.

Indosat Ooredoo has run the Mobile Clinic program since 2007 as part of the company's CSR activities, with health treatment focusing on children and pregnant women in underserved communities. The company also provides assistance in disaster areas.

According to Deva, each mobile clinic is equipped with an ultra sound machine and printer, minor surgery facilities and centralized oxygen, suction pump, inhalator and general medical and health check equipment.

Deva said it was important to the nation's future that woman gave birth to healthy babies. "Sure, there are puskesmas at the village level, but in isolated areas they are often difficult to reach, making pregnant women reluctant to visit them," she said.

Healthcare issues can greatly impact productivity as well as exacerbate poverty due to the associated costs, such as treatment and funeral costs as well as loss of



Still normal: A Mobile Clinic doctor checks the blood pressure of a resident in Pasir Jambak subdistrict, Koto Tangah district, West Sumatra. The program is part of Indosat Ooredoo's commitment to improving community health services. Courtesy of Indosat Ooredoo

income, she said.

And that's why besides prenatal care for pregnant women and health treatment, the mobile clinics also offers health counseling and education, such as on environmental hygiene, sanitation and nutrition.

"We also provide supplementary nutrition and anti-epidemic measures such as fumigation and natural disaster health support," Deva said.

Sustainable benefits

To date, the company operates 16 mobile clinics.

Deva acknowledged that Indosat Ooredoo, as an initiator of mobile health services, could not work alone to uphold the company's commitment to improving community health. And so the company has teamed up with NGOs that have a national presence and networks.

"In this way, a mobile clinic visits a community ahead of time and is able to effectively lay the groundwork for efficient implementation," she said.

Indosat Ooredoo's operational partners are Rumah Zakat, Pos Keadilan Peduli Umat (PKPU), Bulan Sabit Merah Indonesia and Dompot Dhuafa Republika, with

each having its own target areas.

Recent company data shows that more than 770,000 people have been treated since the inception of the program, of which more than 51,000 beneficiaries were treated in 2015 alone.

In 2015, 55 percent of beneficiaries received curative treatment while 45 percent received preventive treatment. "This holistic approach to total health is more effective than only curative treatment," Deva said, referring to an evaluation on the scale of impact.

By treating the young, productive population of Indonesia, including expectant mothers, Indosat Ooredoo is undoubtedly making humanitarian aid under the Mobile Clinic program. They included people affected by flooding in Jakarta, the eruption of Mount Sinabung in Karo regency, North Sumatra, and the eruption of Mt. Kelud in Kediri regency, East Java.

Besides providing free health treatment, the mobile clinics also supplied food, blankets, clothes, masks, schoolbooks and free telecommunication at disaster sites.

To ensure the effectiveness of the Mobile Clinic program, Indosat Ooredoo monitors the program consistently and evaluates it every four months.

the community's settlement," the company said in a press release at the time.

It said the local community could take advantage of its free health services. Mobile clinics were stationed in Kampung Bojong Sudika, Kampung Jayawaras, Kampung Mekar Sari, Kampung Cijambe dan Kampung Sindang Reret.

"Locals can also take advantage of the telecommunication post for free, through which they can telephone, send text messages and use the internet and Wi-Fi to contact relatives," the company said.

Previously, hundreds of people affected by different natural disasters in several areas received humanitarian aid under the Mobile Clinic program. They included people affected by flooding in Jakarta, the eruption of Mount Sinabung in Karo regency, North Sumatra, and the eruption of Mt. Kelud in Kediri regency, East Java.

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"We have to check what needs to be further developed. Our collaboration is running effectively, as indicated by the increasing demand for mobile clinics," Deva said.

Deva expressed concern about poor infrastructure in remote and isolated areas, which hampers the delivery of healthcare services to poverty-stricken communities.

"In 2016, the Mobile Clinic program will move forward by introducing and increasing digital literacy in underserved communities, and introducing health education through health applications.

"The mobile clinics will also be equipped with tablets to demonstrate and introduce health applications to underserved communities."

"We're delighted that this program have been fully supported as well by Ooredoo Group and Leo Messi Foundation. This support has allowed us to widen the service of this Mobile Clinic across Indonesia.

"This program becomes best practices of health improvement community program in other Ooredoo Group operated countries," Deva said. **(Sudibyo M. Wiradji)**

Network crucial in social and humanitarian services

Having a large network plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective running of social and humanitarian services, including the Mobile Clinic program, as they involve various stakeholders with different backgrounds and expertise, according to Indosat Ooredoo's operational partners.

Under the Mobile Clinic program, partners are in charge of implementing programs, starting from finding a medical team that may include doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, educators and volunteers.

"We have many branches across Indonesia, including one in Jayapura, and thousands of volunteers across Indonesia who are ready whenever we need them," said Eva Marhaenis, spokesperson for Rumah Zakat (RZ).

Under Indosat Ooredoo's Mobile Clinic program, RZ focuses on eight locations, namely Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Lampung, Banjarmasin, Pontianak, Makassar and Jayapura.

She referred to the flash flood that hit Garut regency, West Java, recently as an example. She said in dealing with the victims of the flash flood, a team from RZ's Bandung branch handled it by coordinating with Indosat Ooredoo's local office and local volunteers. "That way, we could deliver assistance to victims faster and cheaper," she said, adding that the team spent five days at the disaster site.

In running the Mobile Clinic program in Papua, RZ's branch in Papua coordinates with Indosat Ooredoo's local office and local volunteers.

Sidik of Dompot Dhuafa, another partner, shared Eva's opinion, saying that his organization relied heavily on volunteers when it came to implementation of the



Courtesy of Indosat Ooredoo

Health matters: Medical personnel check on the health of residents in Sidosari Village, Sukaraja district, Seluma regency, Bengkulu, alongside a Mobile Clinic van.

program. "We currently have about 20,000 volunteers scattered across Indonesia," he said, adding that under the Mobile Clinic program, the organization focused on Banten province.

Ade Shinta Dewi, coordinator of Pos Keadilan Peduli Umat (PKPU), said the organization's highly pivotal volunteers across the country were uncountable. "They are involved in every program depending on the location where the volunteers live. By profession, many are civil servants while many others are entrepreneurs, farmers, etc.," she said.

The PKPU has been engaged in the Mobile Clinic program since 2008, concentrating on Jakarta, Medan, Padang, Bengkulu and Surabaya.

Beneficiary target

Each operational partner has its own target regarding beneficiaries,

which is set based on an agreement with Indosat Ooredoo. Commonly, the number of targeted beneficiaries varies, depending on location.

To achieve the target sometimes requires extra effort and creativity because what is planned does not always match the reality on the field.

"Our target was between 100 and 150 participants per day in one village, but only a few people participate in our program," said Eva, referring to a Mobile Clinic program in a village in Papua.

This encouraged the RZ team to use the door-to-door approach, which has worked because many who were sick were unable to visit to the site.

Dompot Dhuafa takes advantage of its education or school network and so "in every Mobile Clinic program we hold, many enthusiastically attend an event even though we have to cover an

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isolated 100-kilometer area in Banten," said Sidik, adding that his organization's target is more than 4,880 beneficiaries per year.

Ade of the PKPU said a thorough survey of location and prospective beneficiaries was conducted prior to the implementation of an event. "So far we have met the target in every event even though our car once broke down due to the rugged and muddy road leading to the site," she said, referring to emergency response activities related to the January 2015 eruption of Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra.

She disclosed that the PKPU met the target of 23,460 beneficiaries as of the end of 2014 and 22,047 beneficiaries for the 2015-2016 period.

She said one doctor treated 50 patients per day in compliance with a health regulation, but "in emergencies, one doctor is allowed to treat 80 patients per day," she said, referring to emergency case related to the eruption of Mt. Sinabung and of the eruption of Mt. Kelud in East Java that the organization handled.

As part of the regular program focused on preventive measures, the partners educate communities on various health issues as most have low awareness about health.

"We educate them on health issues, such as simple things like the need to wash their hands before eating," said Eva. **(JP)**

Communities' health awareness increases

Targeted low-income communities taking part in the Mobile Clinic program have shown an increased awareness on health issues as indicated by changes in their behavior.

A case in point is residents of Kampung Tengah, a slum and high-density housing area located behind Pasar Induk Kramatjati, a traditional wholesale market in East Jakarta.

Diah, a member of an integrated health post (Posyandu), disclosed that most locals were used to using drains as a place to defecate and also disposed of garbage and trash anywhere they saw fit, leaving them vulnerable to various diseases.

However, thanks to the education and counseling on health issues provided by the Mobile Clinic team, "they have abandoned their unhealthy habits and started to embrace healthy living."

Many are now aware of the importance of using public lavatories. "They also now realize why they should dispose of garbage at a dump site and why they should wash their hands before having a meal, etc.," said the 33-year-old.

Kampung Tengah is located near Kampung Pemulug, a slum area where scavengers reside.

According to her, the Mobile Clinic team visited the site twice in 2015. Besides health education, the team also provided free medical checks and treatment.

"Pregnant women now regularly visit the Puskesmas [community health center] for checkups, even though it is far from their kampung, whereas, in the past they would not go to the effort to do so," said the mother of two.

The change in behavior is also seen in poor residents in Cilincing subdistrict, North Jakarta, who mostly work as fishermen.

"Sure, we have seen behavioral changes, especially following education and counseling on health and family issues provided by the Mobile Clinic team," said Sunarmi, who resides in RW (community unit) 04 of Cilincing Lama, Cilincing subdistrict.

Unlike in the past, most young mothers are now paying attention to their children's nutritional intake because "they care about the future of their children," said the 38-year-old mother of four.

She recalled that many residents enthusiastically flocked to the mobile clinic stationed at the edge of the coast in 2015. "It made the team extra busy because they had to also deal with unregistered residents," said the mother, who was involved in distributing coupons to registered residents.

Both Diah and Sunarmi praised the Mobile Clinic program. "This should not end here. It should continue." **(JP)**

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