

...by a new...
...Petro SPV. The new company will

Children of Wibong
Elementary School,
Tablasupa.



LIES LMMA

The Water Method

Teachers of six schools in Tanah Merah Bay teach the environment by getting their students to play, swim, and dive in the sea.

THE morning air was still cold. But from afar, one could see a group of grade-5 elementary schoolchildren in boats, about 100 meters from the shore. They were divided into groups of four to five children. Each boat was following the same activity: one of the children stayed in the boat taking notes, the rest were diving. "We swim and dive, and then our teacher asks us questions, depending on the day's task," said Yakub cheerfully. They enjoy it so much that teachers have to carry rattan to assure that they return. Yakub loves to see the colorful fish swimming over the coral reefs. "The ocean belongs to all of us. It's God's creation," noted the 9-year-old. Imelda, another student, added: "The fish here are smart. They hide in the coral reef."

Unfortunately, those children of Wibong elementary school, Tablasupa

can no longer witness the breathtaking beauty of Tanah Merah Bay, Depapre, Papua, as it was in its prime in the 1980s. Some parts of the beach are now littered with garbage. Many coral reefs are damaged. Some fish species can no longer be found. Fisherman, too, must sail farther out to sea to catch fish.

To prevent further damage, the non-governmental organization LMMA (Locally Managed Marine Area) network environmental group initiated an environment study program for children in 2005. Understanding that all children love to play by the beach, swim and dive, they decided to use the children's hobby to teach them about the environment. "That is why we called it learning while diving. But it is more structured than playing," said Elizabeth Holle, LMMA Coordinator for Tanah Merah Bay. There are currently 75 teachers and 900 students involved in

the program, "Parents also participate. They provide boats," she said.

It was not easy convincing parents, at first. They complained that their children got sick after a whole day of swimming. "But then we explained that the program will benefit the children greatly. They will have a broader knowledge of the sea," said Holle. The parents, most of them fishermen, needed little further convincing.

One of the most enthusiastic groups are teachers. Even if they are not paid extra to run the program, they are still excited. "I simply love acquiring new experience," said Agustina Okoseray, a teacher of grade 5. But she stressed that if the program were to succeed, teachers must be fully committed to it: "If teachers always stay in the city and seldom go to school, this program is not going to work. They have to be out in the field and accompany their students."

But it is not all play. Besides getting children more acquainted with the sea life, the main objective of the program is to formulate new textbooks for students. "The students have been learning from Jakarta-issued textbooks that are not necessarily applicable for their situation," explained Holle. So the next step is training local teachers to develop a curriculum based on their local environment. "This program is focused



Wibong Elementary School class.

on how to develop each village's potential," said Holle.

The first project is to develop environment modules for 5th-grade elementary school students. Holle taught the teachers with help from her colleagues in Jakarta. "After making the module, they should teach their colleagues in the village. We call them peer-facilitators," Holle explained.

It took a year to train teachers to write, and draw coral reefs and fish. Although the teachers did not receive any honorarium, this activity will benefit their CV. They wrote modules in the local language so it could be easily understood. "Initially, it was difficult to write an easily comprehensible sentence, but we succeeded eventually," said Omi Apasemada, one of the teachers.

Apasemada and her colleagues' hard work bears fruit. In 2010, the modules created by teachers from six elementary schools in Tanah Merah Bay were approved by the Directorate of Education, in Jayapura district. That year, the teaching materials were used in the final examination for all elementary students in Tanah Merah Bay.

Students also benefited. They now

have good knowledge on the environment. "Fish hide in coral reefs; so we must catch them carefully, not using bombs or poisons. We have to keep the environment clean," said Yakub. Another student, Debora Demena, 11, emphasized that it is important to protect the sea: "Many creatures living in the ocean and are from the ocean—including us," she said.

They also show real enthusiasm. "The students like to tell and share stories about the coral reefs and they are very proud when their drawings are displayed in the class," said Holle. It also motivates other students to learn about the sea and their beach.

Unfortunately, the government does not seem to pay enough attention. Sem B. Yerisetou, Head of the UPTD (Technical Implementation Unit Office) of the Ministry of Education in Jayapura admitted that he did not know much about it, the part that it is an LMMA program. "But there might be some financial support," he mentioned.

But Tablasupa's children may not be affected by this lack of attention. The program is mostly financially supported by parents and teachers, thanks to

the strong influence of the church and the close community of the village. One of the biggest obstacles they face is that teachers are often transferred to other areas. "In addition, many teachers are also church activists, so they are not available on weekends," said Holle.

Nevertheless, the program runs smoothly—so far. Today, 13 students who participated in the initial implementation of the program are currently studying at the Academy of Fishery in Jayapura. There is no significant economic benefit yet, but the impact on children's mindset is the most important thing. "I tell my friends, my parents and priest about the benefit of Papua's ocean. I will chase away people who spoil our ocean," stated Yakub.

In the near future, Holle has a goal to share modules with other villages, in the underdeveloped shores of the southern coast. With no internet access, and not even a mobile phone signal, Holle distributes modules herself from school to school. She hopes that it will make a difference. "The oceans and the beach there are also beautiful. I hope that other schools are willing to cooperate with us," she hoped.