

In the remote areas of this Indonesian province working children are a common sight and considered a normal part of life. Although there has been progress in combating child labour in Indonesia generally, in these areas the level of awareness on child labour is low. With the increasing commercialization of the local economy and use of cash, traditional livelihoods, based on agrarian subsistence on ancestral lands, are being eroded, leading to increasing child labour.

"Child labour has become a coping mechanism by which indigenous communities adapt to the changing patterns of livelihood," said Ms Joan Carling, a leader of indigenous peoples and Chairperson of the Philippines' Cordillera People's Alliance. She heads an indigenous Papuan university research team looking into the province's child labour problem.

This important research, commissioned by the ILO's Education and Skills Training for Youth Employment (EAST) project, will for the first time shed light on the issue. The results will be used to find ways of preventing child labour through education and training, which will improve the future employment prospects of young Papuans.

The EAST project works to combat child labour by creating education, training and employment opportunities for young people in the most disadvantaged provinces of Eastern Indonesia, including Papua. It aims to prevent working children becoming young people with poor employment prospects who cannot lift their families out of the poverty trap and cannot contribute effectively to national development. Education and training lead to decent work and are crucial in breaking this vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Outside their traditional villages and environments indigenous children are more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation, deep sea fishing and domestic work. Schools are often outside their villages, making it difficult for them to attend. Indigenous children have historically faced discrimination and social exclusion, including within the formal education system. This learning environment is also potentially alienating for them since they are not taught in their mother tongues or using local customs and the traditional knowledge of their ancestors.

"I feel guilty to ask parents to make sure their children come to school since they need the money their children earn to survive," said Ms Rachel Humokwarong, Head of a Community Learning Centre

(PKBM) in Jayapura, which offers a second chance for education to those who dropped out of regular school. PKBM learners are mostly from indigenous communities and many are from the most rural and remote parts of Papua. Since the students tend not to attend class regularly the focus is more on preparing them for certification towards employment rather than on learning through a normal, year-round school programme.

There is no support system for bringing the children who attend these centres back into the regular school system. While the political commitment and resources put into this equivalency or non-formal education in Indonesia has risen in the last decade, the PKBM centres still operate on shorter hours and have fewer resources - both teachers and materials - than regular schools. The centres run only in the afternoon, making it possible for students to combine work and school. This however leads to absenteeism and early school drop-out.

Twelve-year-old Marie is happy that she has the chance to go to the learning centre in the afternoon while she performs her household chores in the mornings. "My favourite subject is mathematics, and I hope to become a nurse when I am older," she said. But sometimes it is difficult for her to make it to class because of the distance from her home in the highlands, where she helps her family grow cassava and sweet potatoes. Many other indigenous children face the same issues as Marie. Although they are fortunate to get the education their parents did not have, they also find themselves too tired to focus in school, or do their home work, and many drop out.

The PKBM centres also offer women and men of any age a second chance for an education. Forty-five old Betty feels lucky to have a chance to learn to read and write like her eldest son, who is now attending university. At the same centre, a mothers' group proudly shows off the purses they made during their training programme, which help them to earn some income and do something productive for themselves and their families.

"There are simply not enough staff, training, and infrastructure to reach indigenous children and youth, especially in the remote areas. I have been pushing for equality between school and community based

education so that non-formal education does not become a second class system of education for the poor," said Mr James Modouw, Director of the Education Department for Papua Province. "We need all the support we can get to ensure education and training reach the most rural and remote areas of Papua".