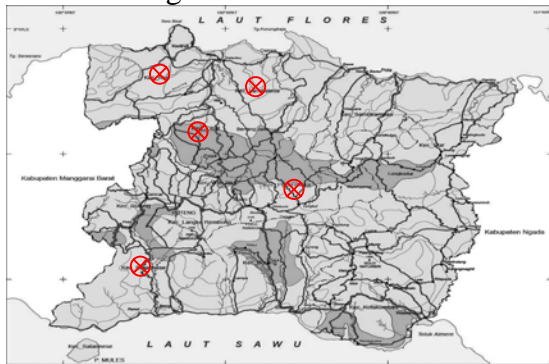


Help still needed after Manggarai disaster

Four days after horrific landslides devastated the mountainous region of Ruteng (Flores, Eastern Indonesia) rescue workers are still struggling to get help to the hundreds of victims and thousands of refugees.

The landslides struck early Saturday morning and most victims were thought to be asleep when the slides struck. Thirty-four people have so far been confirmed dead, including two children. A further 40 are still missing. Co-ordination of the rescue operation has been particularly difficult, as landslides have affected in five separate areas across the region:



The affected areas: Reok, Lamba Leda, Poco Ranaka, Satar Mese, Cibal.

Manggarai Region is one of the poorest areas of Indonesia; 70 per cent of households are classified as living below the poverty line. Poor families build their houses out of wood and bamboo on the cheap, and potentially dangerous, mountain slopes. The families are put further at risk by illegal logging and quarrying on the steep hillsides.

Even at the best of times, many rural villages are inaccessible due to bad roads (a recent World Bank report classified 1030km or 68 per cent of the districts roads as 'bad' or 'very bad'). Following

the recent disaster though, many villages were completely cut off, making the rescue effort all but impossible.



A typical village road in Manggarai during the dry season.

Now, slowly, the rescue operation is taking shape – today 40 people were evacuated from Cibal and donations of food and blankets are getting through to those who need them. But the coming months will be tough for families in the affected areas. They will need to find clean water (illness as a result of poor sanitation is now a huge risk); rebuild their houses and re-establish their crops (food aid may still be needed long after the initial disaster period).

However, disasters like this happen every year in Manggarai. What is really needed in this, one of the poorest regions of one of the world's poorest countries, is long term development aid. The region needs support in terms of infrastructure (roads, sanitation, transport systems) and planning – to help families live in safer homes and to effectively provide help if emergencies do occur.

For more information on you can help, you can contact Yayasan Ayo Indonesia – The Flores Organisation for Rural Development at: ayoindoensia@telkom.net