Ciliwung is Our Life

By : Rudolft Abdul Muiz





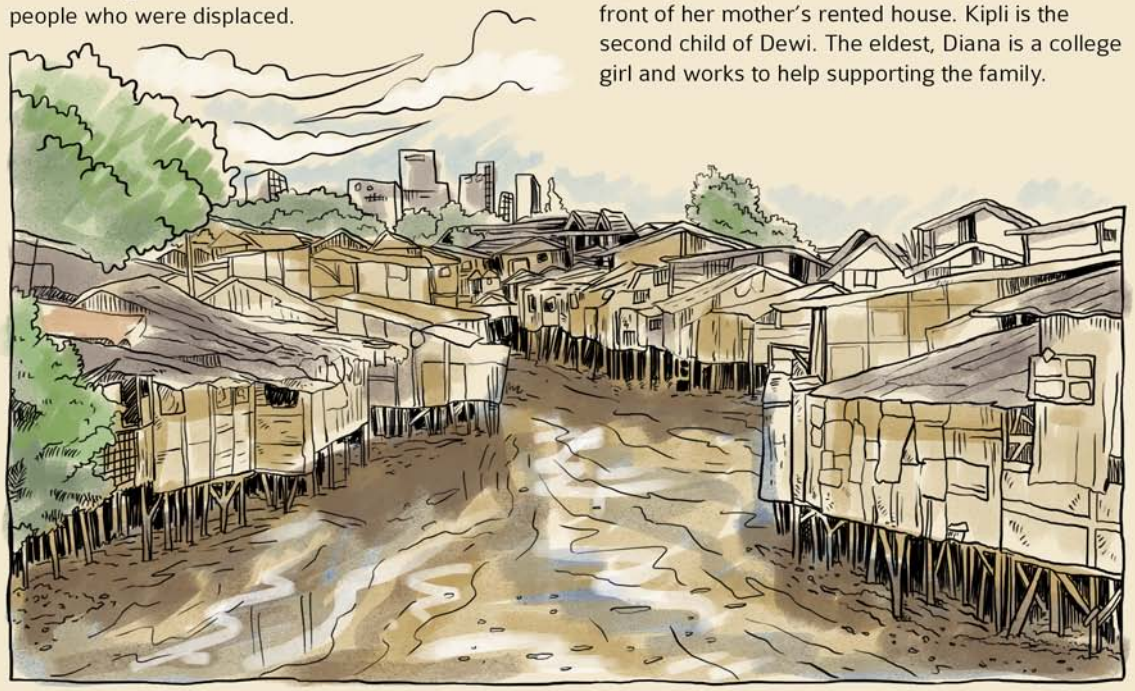
The walls in the alley entering Bukit Duri area are full of eye-catching graffitis.

The graffitis contain messages like "Green Ciliwung", "Mutual aid (*gotong royong*) society area", "Refuse relocation", and many more messages alternating with paintings of human faces, and drawings of plant roots spreading on the wall. The graffitis are almost 500 meters in length providing a different atmosphere to the Ciliwung riverbank, a more colorful atmosphere. It is not evident that the area is prone to flooding.

Like the General Election, the banks of Ciliwung River experience a great flooding every five years such as the great floods in 2002 and 2007. The great flood of 2007 took a death toll of about 48 people, and about 1,500 homes in East Jakarta were damaged not to mention the thousands of people who were displaced.

However no matter how cruel Ciliwung is, it is still the life sustainer of many people, at least for Dewi whose husband had left her since 2003. She works alone to support her four children. They live in a rented house with an area of 6 square meters, with a tin roof-located on the second floor. Every day, Dewi works as the washer of clothes belonging to her neighbors. Her income is not steady depending on how many customers she has. For ten sets of clothes, Dewi can earn up to Rp 20,000. If business was slow, sometimes no one asks her to wash their clothes.

Dewi's rented house is small and crowded and cannot accommodate her four children at once. Arwaldi Saputra, who is a 17-year-old teenager, is forced to sleep in the yard. "Since I am the oldest boy, mother tells me to sleep outside". When the night falls Kipli, his nickname, sets up a mattress in front of her mother's rented house. Kipli is the second child of Dewi. The eldest, Diana is a college girl and works to help supporting the family.





Ciliwung River is also the source of livelihood for *Mpok* Yayah. Her work is similar to Dewi's. She washes clothes. The difference is that *Mpok* Yayah has regular customers who mostly work in the Mester Jatinegara market. She does all the washing on a small bamboo raft. In the afternoon, *Mpok* Yayah takes the muddy river water and puts it in a large bucket to settle. After the soil and debris settle the water is clearer. "This is used for rinsing," she said. *Mpok* Yayah's work is finished around 5 pm, when the clothes are dry.

Ciliwung River provides a living, especially to low income earners who generally work in the informal sectors. They live from a variety of activities that do not count as a formal work such as *Bang* Kurdi who opens his coffee shop in the morning. Likewise, Ibu Yati, opens her food stall opposite to *Bang* Kurdi's coffee shop.

From dawn to dusk, Ciliwung acts like a beating heart, alive until that unwanted day comes. It is a day that no one looks forward to, when Ciliwung becomes angry, that is when the great flood comes. When that happens, everything changes instantly. A pile of garbage fills the river that crosses behind the houses of the people. The water is murky with unbearable stench of waste.

The wrath of Ciliwung is unpredictable, it can happen at any time with no warning. Often times it happens in the middle of the night when the people are asleep. Suddenly the sound of water rushing is heard, waking up the people. At dawn the water has already flooded the area.







The floods which frequently come in the area make the people more vigilant. Pedro, a small pet monkey of bang Herman has a treehouse made for him, so he is safe from flooding. On the other hand, Mr. Ajud, the owner of a food stall is so used to packing up and securing his belongings, such as the refrigerators and cooking utensils. The empty attic space under the asbestos roof of his rented house can be used as a temporary storage at the time of flooding. He wraps all his belongings with a tarp to keep them safe from rain and flooding.

However such vigilance is often not enough especially if the flood comes unexpectedly.
At one time the flooding lasted up to a week in 2007. Many people were forced to give up their electronic equipments that were damaged and unusable. But that's not comparable to the misery of hearing what happened to *Bang* (*informal way to greet someone older*) Herman who was found dead in the morning. His neck was caught in a rope which he used to tie his own body.
He probably used the rope to try to save himself from the flooding the night before.

Apparently being vigilant alone is not enough. The people need to be ready - alert. They should practice how to deal with the wrath of Ciliwung. That's the reason why they built the Bukit Duri Emergency Response Command Post in 2002.

The command post was built by the people with the spirit of mutual cooperation in the community that is ready to take care of their own village.
Mr. Mulyadi for example, one of the Bukit Duri heads of RT 06 (neighborhood association) is always ready with his handy talky to coordinate regularly with the Katulampa floodgate keeper. Typically, two days before the flood happens, the information is already given to the people through the loudspeakers in the mosques that are announcing an emergency situation and telling them what actions should be done.

Some people evacuate to higher grounds, not far from where they live. Others seek refuge in the mosques, emergency shelters, and some choose to keep staying in their own houses.

Many people are even willing to provide their houses as a place of refuge. This is what happened at RT 11/RW 12. Ibu Ilyas provides part of her yard for Bukit Duri emergency response command post.

The command post works at once after hearing the announcement, not waiting for orders from anyone. The food and drink team: Miss Rina, Rosani, Indah, Mrs.Rum, immediately coordinate the kitchen. Meanwhile the health care team, Melvi, Santi, Mrs. Sadiah are ready with the first aid medicine.

This is a very different attitude compare to the time before year 2000. They used to be passive, just waiting and hoping for help from others. This attitude is now being abandoned. Slowly the stereotype that the marginal are considered criminals is melting way by itself. Now the people of Ciliwung River banks are better prepared and more creative.

Let's take a look at what the young people of Ciliwung did. The colorful graffitis in the narrow streets are the proof. They are the paintings done by the young people and teenagers of Bukit Duri. They wrote, drew, designed, and painted the remaining space in their crowded residential area.

On Bukit Duri alley along the banks of Ciliwung River, the houses on both sides of the street are painted green. Each RT region has a different color.

They also put up pictures, signs and directions which allow the visitors to recognize and find the place that they are looking for in the middle of the crowded residential area of Ciliwung riverbank.

For example you can see signs and directions that can help you find places such as the chicken slaughterhouse, or the broom maker, the borders between different RTs, mosques, the public bathing washing and toilet facilities (MCK), rafts to cross the river and Sanggar. You can even see the directions to find the head of RT's house.
This creative effort has been done since 2010.







There is also the "Pasukan berani mati (literally translated as Kamikaze Squad)" This is the nickname of a search and rescue team of young people between the ages 15 to 27 years old. Their task is helping the people that are in danger when a flood or other disaster occurs. They will come using rubber boats to help people with no delay.

In addition to distributing instant food, the Squad also monitors the development of the flood. They will come any time if needed to evacuate the neighbors, friends, relatives, or even the people in other residential areas who need help

Do not doubt the skill of this search and rescue team which consists of young people from Ciliwung. Bonar, Cepot, Ucok, Cilonk, Doan, Asep and others have been familiar with Ciliwung River since their childhood. Ciliwung is their playground. If you come to Ciliwung when there is no flooding, you can watch their swimmimg skills. They jump from tall trees, plunge into the river, and effortlessly swim against the river current.

The mutual cooperation between Ciliwung people does not stop when the flood subsides. After the flood, a layer of mud is usually left in the streets and houses. The cleanup is usually done first in each of their own houses. They know the most effective way to clean the mud. *Bang* Kurdi shared his experience: "Do not wait to clean the mud after the water subsides. The mud will become dry and hard that you will need a hoe to clean it up," he said. Similarly, *Bang* Adi, a food stall owner who lives in the area of RT 06 pulled all his furniture and goods out of the house to be cleaned.



After their own houses are cleaned up, they turn to the public places, such as the RT posts, mosques, sewers or culverts and toilets to clean. They work together to clean up these public places in their own neighborhood. Everyone takes part in the clean up process. The women work in the kitchen to provide tea, hot coffee and lunch for the people involved in the community cleanup.

Cleaning up the public places is the men's job. Old and young men work together to clean the public places. They usually use a diesel spray from Sanggar to suck the river water and spray the streets that are full of debris and mud. Coconut brooms, buckets, hoes, dustpans are all used to help the cleanup process. Everyone is involved in the cleanup, including Cepot, a man with tattoos all over his arms and body. He participated in the community work to clean up the public facilities.

The people also learned to read the natural signs before the flood. Usually before the flood comes, insects and rodents come up, especially cockroaches and rats. They come out of the river to avoid water. However, this incident is disliked by Cepot, a former thug who is apparently afraid of cockroaches.

"Scary face who's afraid of cockroaches" joked one of his friends. Even though Cepot has a scary face he has a good sense of humor.

Another challenge faced by the people is garbage. This is the reason for the wrath of Ciliwung River which used to be their friend. The combination of high rainfall, accumulation of garbage, river sedimentation, poor drainage, and lack of soil infiltration, are the causes of flooding in Jakarta, which are known for a long time.

In fact, hundreds of years ago Ciliwung River was praised by many foreign visitors. Ciliwung used to be a beautiful river with clear and clean water, flowing in the middle of the city. It was perceived by traders who docked in the port of Sunda Kelapa. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier who was quoted by Van Gorkom said that Ciliwung had the best and cleanest water in the world (*Persekutuan Aneh*, 1988)



In the past, thanks to the clean Ciliwung River, the city of Batavia was dubbed the Queen of the East. Many foreign visitors were praising the city highly, even comparing it to the famous cities in Europe, such as the Venice in Italy. At the time, Ciliwung was able to accommodate 10 merchant ships with a capacity of up to 100 tons. The ships were able to enter and dock safely at Sunda Kelapa. Now forget about big ships, even a small ship will have a hard time passing Ciliwung because its propeller will usually get stuck due to rubbish.

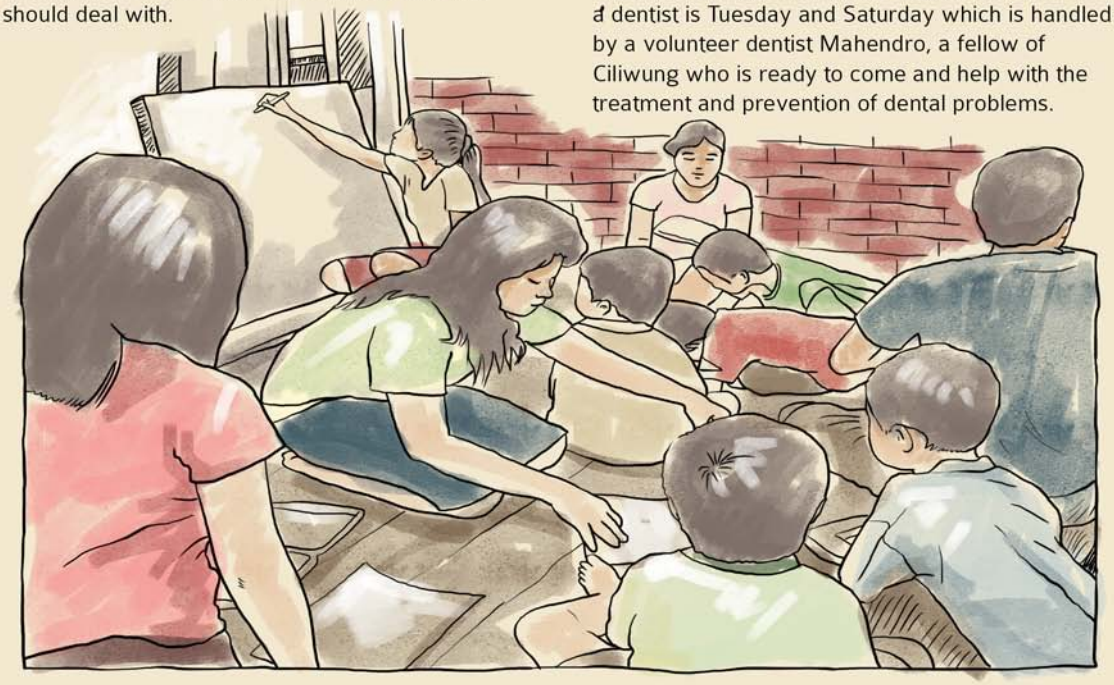
Nowadays Ciliwung receives the waste from various industries and residential areas along its stream. Of all the rivers that flow in Jakarta, the Ciliwung has the most extensive impact on Jakarta during the rainy season as it flows through the center of city and crosses many residential areas, dense housing and slums.

The river flows over a distance of 120 kilometers crossing Bogor, Depok and Jakarta. Ciliwung has the worst damage because its watershed areas (DAS) in the upper part of Puncak and Bogor have been damaged. The watershed areas in Jakarta also have undergone a narrowing and silting which increase the potential of flooding in Jakarta greatly. Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo are the lower squatters of Ciliwung. Regular flooding in the area inevitably becomes a part of their lives that they should deal with.

They are starting to believe that their lifestyle and habits can worsen the condition of Ciliwung which in turn aggravate the condition of their residential area. Therefore the people start to think about the future of their area. They want their area to provide them a sense of comfort, the area which is able to manage their own waste, and deal with the flood problem which visits them each year.

One of the organizations that begins to think about the future of the area is Sanggar (literally translated as studio) Ciliwung. It is a house open to the public which is located in the middle of the densely populated area along the river. Since 2000, this place became the center of learning as well as playing of teenagers and adults from Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo. The house is also a secretariat for Ciliwung Merdeka, a non-governmental organization that was founded in August 13, 2000

The Sanggar house consists of two floors. The first floor is usually used as a place of learning, meetings, gatherings, live in, as well as a reading room, etc.. The second floor is usually for PSKM activity or *Pendidikan Swadaya Kesehatan Masyarakat* (Non-Governmental Public Health Education), or simply called as health clinic by the people. There is a special room for a dentist, a special room for a general practitioner a with medicine storage facility. The regular schedule for a dentist is Tuesday and Saturday which is handled by a volunteer dentist Mahendro, a fellow of Ciliwung who is ready to come and help with the treatment and prevention of dental problems.



Sunday is the day of a general practitioner. Just like the dentist, Doctor Indra comes to the Sanggar on Sundays in the afternoon at 13:00. The place is always packed with patients. In the afternoon, the children and the youth gather to study together in Sanggar. The tutors are those who used to be the student in Sanggar themselves when they were children and now they go to high school. Those who go to junior high school help their younger brothers and sisters who are still in elementary school, while those who are already in senior high school help those who are still in junior high school. This is the process of tutor regeneration that is happening in Sanggar.

The activities in Sanggar are diverse. They range from drawing, coloring, English, music, percussion, theater, little doctor, to a composting house. They also plan to study biogas and how to make bricks from Styrofoam.

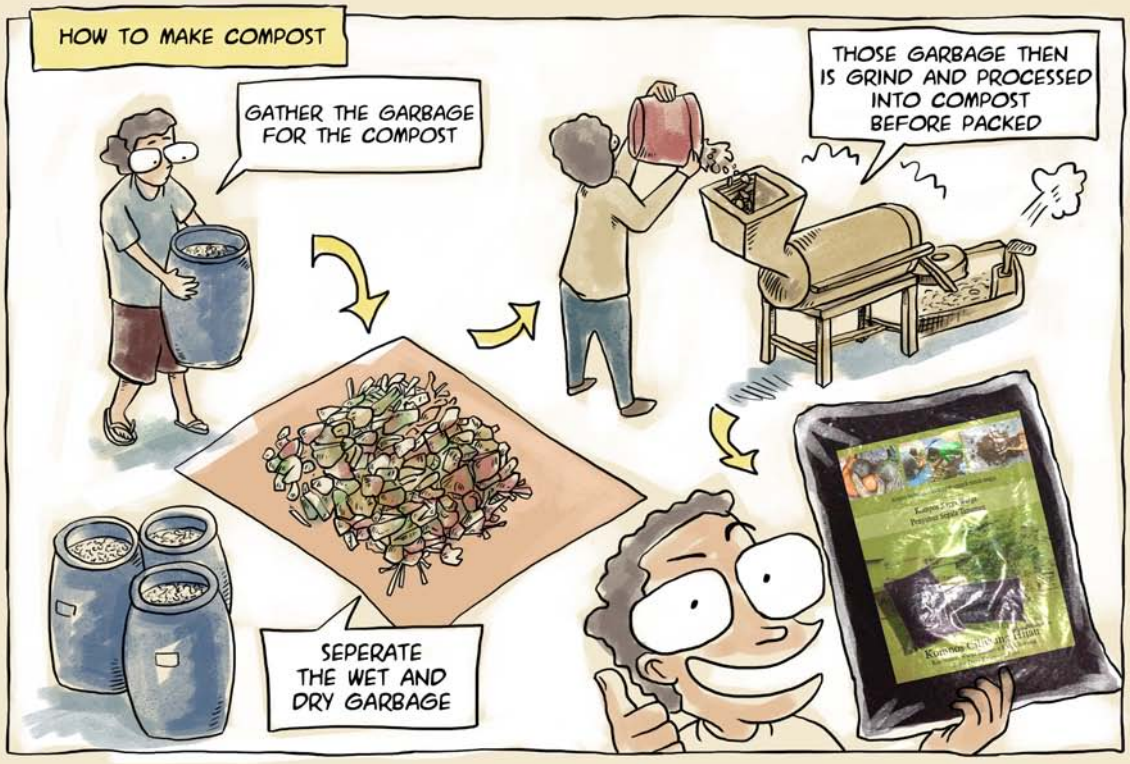
The composting house was initiated in beginning of January 2008. It was formed out of the concern for the condition of the people in Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo. The activity was undertaken as part of the environmental movement of the people from Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo who are involved with the Green Ciliwung Environmental Foundation.

The activity involves the representatives from five regions, community leaders, elders, and the heads of RT, including the people. Four of the RTs are in the Bukit Duri RW 12 area, especially from RT 5 to RT 8, and also from of RT 10 RW 03 of Kampung Pulo, East Jakarta. The advisors for this foundation are the representatives of the people in Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo, so are the facilitators.

The processing of garbage into compost will reduce the volume of garbage and help keep the area clean. Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo work together in the compost processing organization through the Environmental Education Program or PLH.

One of the people who are active in the compost processing is Asep. He actively takes care of composting house and he is actively involved in environmental activities in his area. At the time Asep was only 14 years old. At that point, he was responsible for finding wet garbage in Mester Market, Jatinegara. At 12.00 midnight Asep and his friends aged 14 to 17 years, Kurnia, Kurnia, Uting, Ucok, and Zaky are ready to use push cart to take garbage, which mostly comes from vegetable sellers.





Before putting the garbage in the sacks, Asep and his friends sort between the wet and dry garbage. Every morning they sweep the streets of the area in RT 05.

Next, the garbage will be delivered to the yard of composting house. There is already *Mak* (the informal way to refer senior lady) Nur, Mr.Rahmat, Raben, Rujit and Irwan there. *Mak* Nur is a member of Kampung Pulo RT 10 East Jakarta.

Irwan one of *Mak* Nur's children is also involved in home composting. At 08.00 in the morning, the garbage that has been put in the dock at the edge of the river which is then carried by Raben and Rujit, from Bukit Duri using bamboo rafts. The bamboo raft or barge was used as a ferry for crossing the river between the two village.

The outsiders who see them, certainly would not think that these young people who collect garbage with stinking smell, are actually actors, theater performers, as well as music players in Sanggar.

They even managed to put the real experience of Ciliwung people at the stage in a single opera show called "CiliwungLarung" at Taman Ismail Marzuki, Juli 2011, which lasted two days which got some warm response.

Big problems come when the river water rises up. All the materials and the finished compost, including all the tools, utensils and the large machine that cuts up the garbage must be taken to second floor or higher grounds. Unfortunately, nobody can predict when a flood will recede. "If the flood comes at dawn we become confused, because all the garbage that our friends have collected before is gone," Asep said. The garbage that has been put in sacks and tied up is carried away by the flood.

"wet-wet trash, plague threatening,
Containing blessing, can be a suffering
or blessing that is overflowing,
It's all up to our choosing.."

Above is the loose translation to the song lyric written by Father Sandyawan Sumardi which inspires the people to process the garbage into compost.



But apparently, it is not only that flooding and garbage that make people wary. They heard the rumor that all the banks of Ciliwung River will be made into a green belt. Later the rumor developed in the media louder and louder. Many are wondering, "Is our house going to be evicted?"

The people's fears are actually grounded because the Jakarta Public Works Department four years earlier had planned a Structuring and Development Project of Ciliwung-Kampung Melayu, Ciliwung-Pangadegan, and Ciliwung-Kalibata-Cawang Watershed Areas, including Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo. This three-year project was to be funded as much as Rp 1.7 trillion by the World Bank and JICA.

A year ago a group of men in brown uniform came to the area with surveying equipments. One of the men who appeared to be the leader, ordered his men to measure the whole area of Bukit Duri. The people began to panic, and asked each other what was going on. Unfortunately, the information was sketchy. There's news coming from the village level which made one of the people who previously did not believe the rumor of eviction to panic.

The people actually have been worried for a long time. At one time a conflict occured due to the unclear information. Some people already started to look for a new place to live. Bang Herman is one of those people. Although he only has a small screen printing business, he is starting to set aside some of his money to buy a modest home in Citayem area. He is worried that his children will be homeless shall eviction happened.

News of eviction heats up the atmosphere. Finally the people who are actively involved in Sanggar organized a meeting between the youth and the people in each RT post. They use the time during a social gathering (*arisan*) at each RT which is held every Sunday night at the RT post.

In this meeting the people received the information on plans and the past experience of eviction that have happened in other areas, such as in BMW Park. The discussion was extremely useful. The people become aware of the situation and are not easily piggybacked by anybody. They agreed to reactivate the night watch and to record more accurately all the new inhabitants, visitors to the area. Guests who stay in the area more than 24 hours are required to report to the head of RT.

Since then, many meetings were done by the people. One of the meetings that deserves a special note is the meeting in front of RT 08 post on October 7, 2012. The meeting place was an area the size of a futsal pitch and the people were sitting on the floor. Everybody wanted to come, both the old and the young people. At that meeting, everyone agreed to form a committee representing the people in the area. All the heads of RT proposed that the committee must include community leaders, and representatives from the women and the elders

The issues affecting the area has now become a common topic of discussion among the people in Bukit Duri area. At least the discussion was heard in coffee shop of Pak Roni, where usually the heads of RT, community leaders, and also the elders gather. The discussion range from small talks to a more serious discussion of eviction issue which is becoming a hot topic. These informal meetings were then followed by more regular meetings.

The people who took the initiative to have regular meetings are those from RT 06. They took the initiative to start the meeting.

The initiative meetings which is called *Sarasehan Warga*, it was quite successful because many people and community leaders were present and active during the discussion.

The talk that night was opened by Mulyadi, the head of RT. He explained what was going on in the area and developing in Bukit Duri area.
Pak Suryanto, a community leader and former head of RT became the mediator and moderator of the discussion. "When I first time came here there were still a lot of banana trees on the riverside. All I had to do was to stick some stakes into the earth and I owned a piece of land to build my house on. "There were still a few people who built their houses here," said Napi, one of the elders in the area. He found out later that he is an illegal squatter of the area. He doesn't mind if the area is going to be reorganized. "Especially now because we have a clean Jakarta government. Let's trust the government, as long as they don't hurt the people", he added.

At the end of the discussion, they agreed to propose a "A proposal plan for a humane flat". They do not want to be relocated, especially with no compensation. They agreed to start promoting their area in response to the eviction plan.



They relied their hopes on a program of new Jakarta, which was upheld by the elected governor-Jokowi and Ahok. Their hopes were communicated when both Jokowi and Ahok visited Bukit Duri area. The meeting was conducted in Sangar Ciliwung. At the time Jokowi and Ahok were still candidates for governor and vice governor.

Please do not evict our houses sir. We already feel at home here. Where are we supposed to live if our houses are evicted?" said one of the people during the discussion. The proposed reorganization plan for Bukit Duri area is offered as an alternative to the city government. They refuse to be relocated but they are willing to reorganize the area which is inhabited by about 34,000 families.

The government proposed the construction of Rusunawa (low-cost apartment) Berlaan. But people objected, not only to the cost of rent per-month, but also because they will receive no compensation at all from their old houses.

Not to mention the difficulty of getting a new job in Rusunawa Berlaan, and the long distance to schools for children, as well as their health care services that they have now in Bukit Duri.

''This alternative proposal of reorganization of the area is good. I'm going to listen and learn more about river residential areas from friends who have a lot of first-hand experience. Simultaneously I will also speak with Sandyawan for the mapping the area here. And I will not give a lot of promises. If we are elected, on the first day in the office I will come back to this area''. Jokowi said after hearing the complaints and stories of the families of the victims of forced relocation.

Jokowi-Ahok won the governor election for Jakarta. They came back to Bukit Duri.
The meeting was held at the same place, in Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka on October 16, 2012. This time they came with a full team which includes Joko Widodo the Governor and the Head of Public Works Department, the Head of the City Planning Department and of his staff as well as the South Jakarta Mayor and Head Tebet District, along with head of Bukit Duri sub-district.



Both the new leaders this time heard the explanation from Sandyawan, the director of Ciliwung Merdeka on the community development plan for reorganization of Bukit Duri area. "In regard to the construction of a low-cost apartment, we position the front part of the river, we will not litter," said Father Sandyawan. He also showed the design of Bukit Duri Reorganization Plan. The apartment that will be built there will be four stories high and owned by the people (not rented).

After hearing the whole exposition on the reorganization plan for Bukit Duri area, Jokowi promised to study the whole project first ranging from land acquisition, the costs involved, and the people's acceptance to the project.

At the end of the visit Jokowi said, "I'll give a week to Mr. Ery Basworo, Head of Department of Public Works who are in the field to check immediately, plus the approximante cost needed," Jokowi started to give instructions to his team.

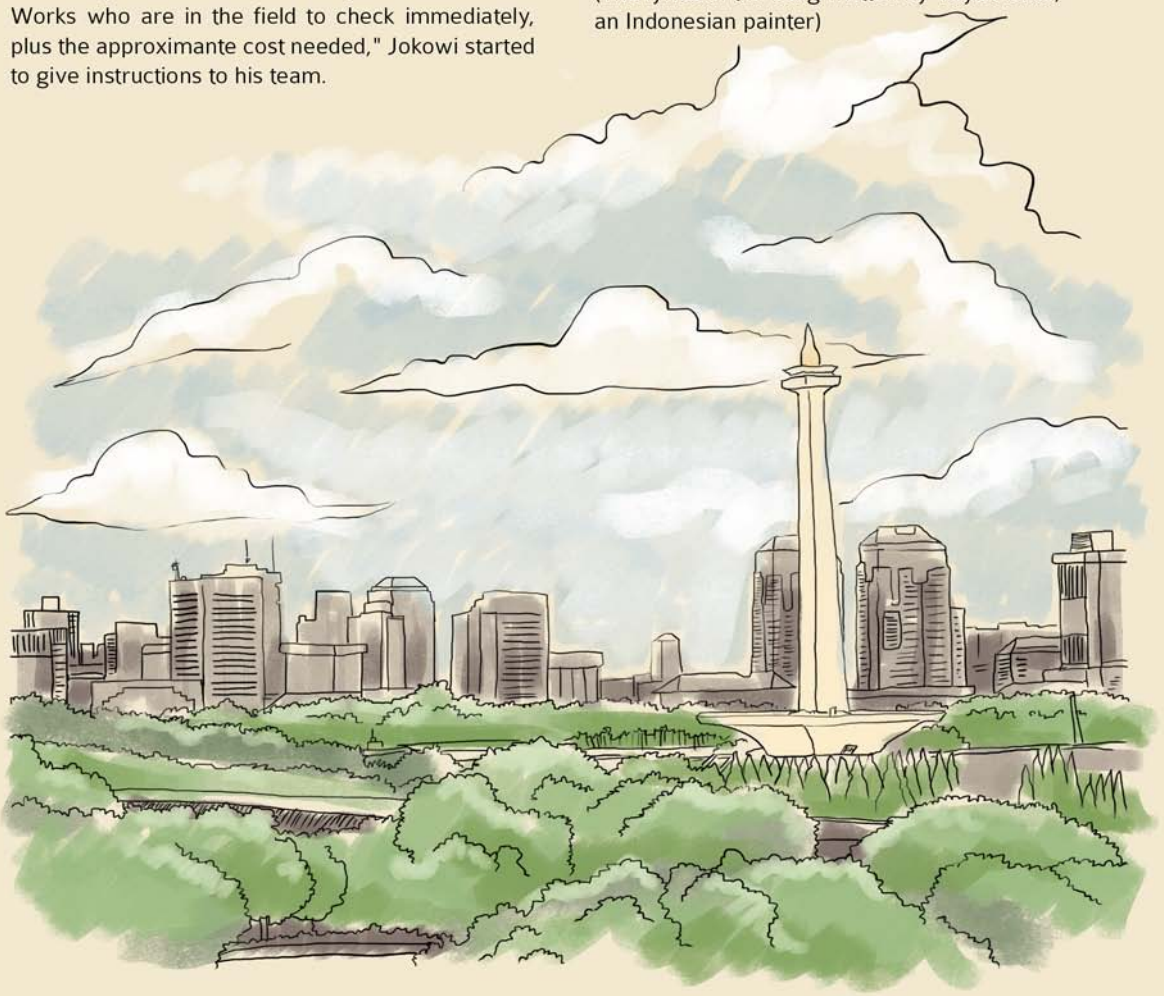
"If the cost is reasonable yes, if it's expensive no,"Jokowi said with his thick Javanese accent.

The meeting ended with soaring expectations, to realize the plan for reorganization of a humane kampong in Bukit Duri area.

"For many decades we have lived in this land.
We were born and raised, until we are able to shout...!!!!!

No matter the amount of money is given,
it can never make us leave,
whatever force you use, it can never make us leave....
ohh our houses are evicted harsly,
we will hold out till death.
Thousands of floods unite our spirit together,
we clench our fists and reinforce our steps..... aaaaaaa,
Thousands of floods, Ciliwung is our Teacher".

(The lyrics of the song written by Yayak Iskra,
an Indonesian painter)



Rudolft Abdul Muis

Abdul Muis is a 27-year-old young man who was born and raised in Jakarta. His love to his home town, encourages Muis, his nickname, to care better for Jakarta. Since 2002, Muis has been involved in community development activities along Ciliwung riverbanks with Ciliwung Merdeka Foundation (YCM).

Muis' early involvement in YCM activity was quite interesting. At that time, Muis was a naughty high school student. His mischiefs making the whole school annoyed and made him to undergo the punishment given by her brother to take part in Ciliwung Merdeka Studio. During undergoing these activities, Muis utilize his craze and musical skills to teach music to children in Kampung Bukit Duri.

Over time, the activities that used to be a mere punishment for him are now part of his life. Despite claiming to have an adventurous spirit and would like to see a lot of new things, Muis remains consistent with his responsibilities as head of household of Ciliwung Merdeka Studio.

