



INVISIBLE PEOPLE

POVERTY AND EMPOWERMENT
IN INDONESIA

presented by PNPM Mandiri —
Indonesia's National Program for Community Empowerment

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with an introduction by Scott Guggenheim

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Karang Ploso, Bantul, Jogjakarta

FILMING URBAN / RURAL TRANSITION

Karang Ploso is located some fifty kilometers from the city of Jogjakarta. In the past it was a rural village, with almost the entire population engaged in agriculture, particularly rice farming and market gardening. Over the past couple of decades, however, new and improved roads and transport facilities have brought the village much closer to the city. The younger generation has far greater opportunities than their parents did to attend high school and even receive tertiary education. Television and internet access are also exposing people to life in the cities and beyond in a way that would not have been possible twenty years ago.

Increasingly, the young people of the village are reluctant to work in the rice fields and plantations. Instead, they look to the factories and shops of Jogja and further afield, to Jakarta and Batam, for work. While social and economic changes have made them more ambitious, young people often find that with unexceptional qualifications, the high rate of unemployment, and the intense competition for jobs, opportunities are limited. Young women and men often wait for years before finding a job. Boredom and frustration are rife. There has been a great deal of resentment and misunderstanding between young people and their parents' generation. The older generation often feels that the younger generation is spoiled and lazy. The young people feel that their contributions and aspirations are not recognized.

Karang Ploso is being transformed from a rural village into an urban outskirts. The villagers use video cameras to interview each other and record their daily lives. By discussing the films they make together with the whole village, the younger generation and their elders are learning to understand each other.



In the earthquake on 27 May 2006, Karang Ploso was devastated. Almost every single building was destroyed and twelve people died. In the aftermath, the youth group Taruna Reka played a major role in the reconstruction efforts, guarding and distributing food and emergency supplies, treating the sick and the wounded, and cleaning up and rebuilding the village. However, when the situation began to return to normal, young people again began to feel excluded from the life of the village.

Several months after the earthquake, the youth group made contact with Kampung Halaman, an organization that encourages young people to make films and documentaries about themselves and the communities in which they live. In Karang Ploso, they interviewed each other, recorded the details of their daily lives, and then sat down with the entire community to watch and discuss the videos they had produced.

The documentaries discussed by Zery, Beni, and Pak Kemy include *Andai Ku Tahu (If Only I'd Known)*, *Alon-Alon Waton Kelakon (Slowly but Surely)*, and *Who Are We...???*. These films can be accessed and downloaded from Kampung Halaman's website: <http://kampunghalaman.org/>

Most residents of Karang Ploso earn a living from agriculture; increasingly, young people are looking to the cities yet for more rewarding employment.



Beni

The earthquake killed twelve people from our village. A lot more people were injured. Some people were permanently paralyzed. Everyone was badly affected. Even now, some people are still traumatized. It destroyed almost every house in Karang Ploso. My family's house was one of only three left standing.

During the reconstruction, my house was the base camp for the Taruna Reka youth organization. It's an organization for the young men and women of the village here. After the earthquake, Taruna Reka guarded the emergency supplies and helped clean up the village. On television, we'd seen reports of Aceh after the tsunami. They said that the survivors were fighting over supplies of food and water. Thieves were stealing the wedding rings from dead bodies. We made sure that nothing like that happened here.

We drew up a roster and set up different teams for various tasks. We went from house to house to check and make a record of who was wounded or killed. We contacted the aid organizations to push them to send water, food, and tents. We went around and handed out food and water packages to people who needed them. The girls set up a tent and treated people with light wounds. They made sure that clothes and other supplies were divided fairly. The young people from Taruna Reka did that all by ourselves. The village head and the village administration hardly did anything. They left it all up to us.

A month after the earthquake, we met to conduct an evaluation. We were upset that our contribution hadn't been recognized. The young people pulled the village back on to its feet. But as soon as the village started to return to normal, everybody forgot about that. The village administration didn't respect the contribution that the young people had made.

There was a lot of boredom and frustration among the young people in the village even before the earthquake. Most kids here go to vocational senior high school. Not many go further. Kids choose vocational schools rather than academic schools because they think it's easier to get a job afterwards. Everyone wants to get a job in town, in Jogja. But it's not easy to find work in Jogja if you don't have experience. Some young guys go to Batam or Jakarta on contracts. If they have technical training, they might get a job in a factory, if they are lucky.

There isn't much work in the village. Some guys set up small businesses, raising chickens or rabbits to sell. Some get work as laborers on building sites or in the rice fields. But that's a last resort. Kids want something better than just to work in the fields. A lot of people spend a long time unemployed while they are waiting to find a job. Sometimes it causes tensions with the older generation. Sometimes parents get upset that the young people don't help them in the rice fields. Our parents and grandparents can't understand that we want to achieve different things. We want to take advantage of new opportunities.

At the meeting after the earthquake, we talked about how well we'd worked together during the emergency period. Taruna Reka had been really active. We didn't want to just go back to the way we were before. One guy said that he had some friends who would teach us how to use video cameras. We thought it would be fun. That was how Kampung Halaman first came to the village.

One of the first films we made was called *Who Are We... ???*. It was about Taruna Reka's history and activities. The film crew interviewed other young people and got them to talk about what they had done after the earthquake. We found out that there has always been a youth group called Taruna Reka in the village. It's been running since the early 1960s at least. We talked to some of the older people who were involved in it when they were young. In the 1960s, times were

“There was a lot of boredom and frustration among the young people in the village even before the earthquake. Everyone wants to get a job in town, in Jogja.”

tough. There wasn't much food. Most people were poor. Back then, the village was still isolated. It took a whole day to get to town. Everybody here worked in the rice fields. Some people went to high school, but not nearly as many as now. When we heard the stories of what it was like then, it made us realize how hard life used to be.

A couple of hundred people came to watch the film when we screened it. In the film, one of the old men said that young women were spoiled and delicate these days. He said they were scared of hard work and didn't want to get their hands dirty. Some of the girls in the audience got angry about that. One girl said that girls worked just as hard as the boys, but no one noticed. She was upset that the film crew hadn't interviewed any girls when they made the documentary. Mbak Dian, from Kampung Halaman, suggested that the girls form their own film crew and make their own video. They liked that idea and later on they made a video.

After the film, Taruna Reka began to work more closely with the LPMD [Village Community Development Organization]. One idea that came up was to build a *sanggar*, or clubhouse. The *sanggar* was meant to be a place where Taruna Reka could meet to study and work on video projects, but it could also be used for other activities involving the entire community.

A lot of people helped in the building of the *sanggar*. We used salvaged tin and bricks from houses that had been destroyed by the earthquake as building materials. The village administration let us use a piece of government-owned land. The guys from Taruna Reka provided their labor for free. We were helped by some of the older tradespeople. They provided their labor for free, too. The girls and the housewives prepared food and drink for the workers. The girls also created a garden in front of the *sanggar*. It was their idea. They said they wanted to do something more than just cook and prepare food for the men. There were a lot of meetings and a lot of talking. People argued backwards and forwards for ages, and sometimes it felt like nothing was getting done. But it was worth it in the end. The *sanggar* belongs to the whole village.



Zery

We'd never used video cameras before. We didn't think making a film was something you could do yourself. We thought films were something you sat down and watched. The people on the screen were never like they are in real life. They were always rich and beautiful. They were foreigners with blond hair and white teeth. We enjoyed watching them, but it was just a fantasy world. It was just entertainment.

When Kampung Halaman came to Karang Ploso, we'd already worked hard to rebuild the village. People were starting to live their lives again. A lot of people had already gone a long way toward rebuilding their homes. People who were hurt in the earthquake had gotten out of the hospital. We received some aid and assistance from the government for reconstruction, but people were still traumatized. Some people couldn't even face going out of the house.

Nobody understood what Kampung Halaman was about when they first came. We thought maybe they were psychologists. We thought they had come to treat people who had been traumatized by the earthquake. When they showed us their cameras and asked if we wanted to play with them, we thought it was weird. Of course it was fun to play with fancy equipment, so we were glad they had come. But some people wondered why they didn't send engineers or doctors instead of people with cameras.

They just showed us how to turn the cameras on and off and how to load the cassettes. They gave us some hints about how to hold the cameras steady. But they didn't tell us what to shoot. They just gave us the cameras and told us to do whatever we wanted with them. They just said to shoot whatever we thought was interesting. It was good fun. We just clowning around and took pictures of each other. We went around the village to the places where we always went.

When we finished, we took the cameras back and went through the footage we'd shot. It was really funny seeing our faces on the screen and hearing ourselves talk. If you aren't used to it, your voice sounds funny when you hear it for the first time on a video. Everybody was laughing at themselves and each other. Mbak Dian from Kampung Halaman got us to talk about the things we'd shot, like the place down near the river where we used to hang out and play. It was all just normal stuff. We'd never really thought about it before, or talked about it.

As we talked, we came up with some ideas for making a better film, one with more of a story. We'd shot a lot of pictures of the houses that were being rebuilt. Sometimes, we'd talked to the people who were building them. Most of the time they were happy to talk to us and tell us what they were doing. But at the same time, we knew that there were problems with the reconstruction. Some people felt that others were getting more assistance than they were. It was creating difficulties and tensions. So we decided to make a film about the reconstruction.

Mbak Dian helped us to go through the footage we'd made and arrange it so that it told a story. We called it *Alon-Alon Waton Kelakon (Slowly but Surely)*. It consisted mostly of people being interviewed about rebuilding their houses or shots of them working on them. Sometimes people assumed that other people were receiving assistance when they weren't. When we actually spoke to them, we learned that they were using mostly scavenged or recycled materials. Some people had sold land or jewelry to rebuild their houses. Others were being helped by families.

When we invited everyone in the village to sit down together, people began to realize that everyone was affected by the earthquake in the same way. There wasn't as much favoritism as we had thought. People really enjoyed seeing themselves on the screen. It was a good experience for everyone. At the screening,

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the Kampung Halaman people introduced themselves to everyone in the village. They explained what we were doing. They asked permission to go on working with us to teach us how to use cameras and make films. Now that everyone had seen the first film, they had a better idea of what it was about. Kampung Halaman offered to provide a facilitator to live in the village for a year and to coordinate the filmmaking process.

It's strange but it's true: it's often easier to talk about difficult things to a camera than it is to tell someone straight to their face. And people are more likely to listen to someone in a film than they are to listen to that person in real life. We've made more than seventeen films now, and a lot of them have been about things that are quite difficult to talk about in day-to-day life.

One film we made was about business and work opportunities in the village for young people. Many young people here feel that their only choice is to leave the village and look for work in Jogja or the big cities. A lot of people think there aren't any opportunities here. If kids have finished high school, they don't want to work doing agricultural labor. At the same time, their parents are always talking about how they need help. They always say that it's too expensive to hire laborers, but that their own children won't go out and work in the fields.

So the film crew tried to make a film to look at young people who had actually set up some kind of business venture in the village itself. These businesses often took advantage of the area's assets and advantages in innovative ways. With the good road system, the village is quite close to the city these days. That makes it easy for people to sell produce in town. Some young people have managed to breed livestock that they can sell in town. They've done quite well that way. We interviewed young people who were involved in that kind of business.

We called the film *Andai Ku Tahu (If Only I'd Known)*, because it seemed that even though the village is small, a lot of the time we don't really know what other people are doing or thinking. If we'd known more about the potential business possibilities in the village, we might have made different choices. We might have felt differently about leaving the village to look for work in the cities.

We found that there were a lot of things we didn't know about other people, including our parents and friends. For example, we never knew that one of our friends, Joko, managed to earn quite good money using a tractor to plough rice fields. We'd seen him on the tractor, but we'd never thought about it. It was only when we were going around with the camera that we asked him what he was doing. After we made the video, we showed it to everyone who was interested. On December 13, 2006, we showed it to an audience of around one hundred people at the Masjid Al Himmah in the village. A lot of the older people repeated their comments about the younger generation being too spoiled and lazy to work in the fields. Some of the young people said that we would prefer to stay in the village if we could, if there were opportunities for us here. The older people made some constructive suggestions about raising livestock profitably, particularly after they had seen examples of young people who had already started developing that kind of business.

Before that, the young people in Taruna Reka never had any kind of discussions with the men from the farmers' cooperative. We always felt that they were just looking after their own interests. When we got talking to them, we realized that they were prepared to help. In the weeks after the video was shown, people from the two groups often got together in smaller groups to discuss ideas and business proposals. That was the first time that had happened.

Young people from Taruna Reka also got involved in trying to find a solution to the irrigation problem. One of the biggest problems here is that the land is very dry, and the water table has been sinking for decades. The older generation always complains that it's much harder to find water than it used to be. Along with the cost of labor, that's one of their most common complaints. After we watched the film together, Taruna Reka formed a group to learn more about irrigation systems. The kids who had been to college had access to libraries, so we set up a group to research different systems, like windmills. Actually, it wasn't a complete success. In the end, the ideas that we came up with were too expensive to implement. Even so, we learned a lot.

By making films, we've met a lot of people from outside the village whom we wouldn't ordinarily have met. We've shown the films we made at cafés and film festivals. At first we were really surprised that outsiders were interested to watch the films we made. It seemed to us that what we were talking about wouldn't make any sense to anyone else. We didn't think the quality of our films was that good. But people were interested in what we did.

The biggest benefit is that people are better able to discuss problems that affect everyone. It doesn't mean that everything always goes smoothly, but there has been a big improvement. Since we started making the films together, we've been able to sit down and talk with our parents much more easily.

Zery is one of the most enthusiastic filmmakers from the Taruna Reka group.



Pak Kemy

Kids these days don't want to work in the rice fields. They think it's easier to make money working at a job in town. They are ashamed to get dirty and work hard the way we did when we were young. I told them that on the film. They asked me my opinion, so I told them. I told them that I'll never sell my rice fields. I inherited this land from my father, and he inherited it from his father. It's my duty to leave it to my children. I can't sell it.

The land around here used to be all rice fields. It used to be much easier to pull water up from the wells. The water table has been sinking over the past twenty years. Some people have rented out their land for sand-mining, for construction work. The trouble is that after it's been used to mine sand, the land is no good for farming. It destroys the land.

After the young guys made the film, they formed a group to find a solution to the irrigation problems. Some of the lads from Taruna Reka came with us to meet some of the officials from the Department of Agriculture to look into various solutions. We talked about some sort of hydro-powered system and a windmill. It was all too expensive.

It's still difficult to get enough water for the fields. In the end, the village organization bought diesel-powered pumps. That helps, but the fuel is very expensive. Fuel prices have gone down, but they could go back up again. Some of the ideas that the lads came up with were actually very good. A windmill would have cost a lot to build, but once it was built, we wouldn't have to spend money on fuel. But the village administration said there were only funds available for the diesel-fueled pumps.

Some things did change a bit after the kids made the film. Some of the kids became more interested in setting up businesses in the village. But that doesn't really solve all the problems we have. We still need the kids to help us in the fields. The younger generation still doesn't want to get out into the rice fields and work hard the way we do.

"Some things did change a bit after the kids made the film. Some of the kids became more interested in setting up businesses in the village. But that doesn't really solve all the problems we have. We still need the kids to help us in the fields."



Youths from Taruna Reka holding a video camera and chatting with Pak Kemy.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND CREDITS

This book was sponsored by the PNPM Mandiri program. The goal of PNPM Mandiri, Indonesia's National Program for Community Empowerment, is to reduce poverty. PNPM Mandiri was established by the Indonesian government in 2007 to act as an umbrella for a number of pre-existing community-driven development programs, including the Urban Poverty Program and the Kecamatan Development Program, as well as a number of other community-based programs that were managed by nineteen technical ministries. By 2009, PNPM Mandiri was operating in every subdistrict in Indonesia.

PNPM Mandiri is committed to increasing the participation of all community members in the development process, including the poor, women's groups, indigenous communities, and other groups that have not been fully involved in the development process. *Invisible People* is one way that PNPM Mandiri can reflect on ways to better include marginalized and excluded groups in development.

Bilateral and multilateral assistance for the PNPM Mandiri program has been forthcoming from a number of donor agencies. The PNPM Support Facility (PSF) was established by the Indonesian government as a means of facilitating the contributions of international donors that support PNPM Mandiri. Contributors to the PSF currently include Australia, Denmark, the European Community, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. PSF provided financial and other support for the publication of *Invisible People*, in order to raise awareness of the special needs and aspirations of marginalized and excluded groups.

We would like to thank the people who sat down to tell their stories and put their lives on public display for the publication of this book. Across the country, the people who were approached were amazingly open about the most personal details of their lives, their problems, their hopes, and their aspirations.

When they collected these stories, Irfan Kortschak and Poriaman Sitanggang explained the purpose of the project and sought the consent of all subjects. The subjects told their stories, often over several days and during several meetings, after which Irfan attempted to recreate their words in a first-person account that conveyed the individual's ideas, feelings, and voice. In a few cases, subjects wrote their own stories in their own words, which were then edited with the subject and translated. When possible, Irfan provided a written account to the subject so that he or she could check and reconfirm that the account was an accurate representation. Otherwise, he discussed it with them. Subjects were reminded that their accounts would be published and asked to be certain that they had no objection to this. Irfan apologizes if despite this process, inaccuracies or misrepresentations have slipped into the text.

A vast array of people helped facilitate interviews and

meetings and provided all sorts of other assistance. A partial list of these people includes Marjorie, Mateo, Marwan and all the staff of Handicap International in Banda Aceh and Takengon; Ricco Sinaga from the Puskesmas (Community Health Center) in Cikini, Jakarta; Imam B. Prasadjo and the staff of Yayasan Nurani Dunia; the members of the band Cisleng and the young guys and women who hang out in Proklamasi; Kamala Chandrakirana, sociologist, author and former Chairwoman of Komnas Perempuan (the National Commission on Violence against Women); Kodar Wusana and Nani Zulminarni of PEKKA (the Women Headed Household Empowerment Program) in Jakarta and the PEKKA field facilitator in Lingsar, West Lombok, Sitti Zamraini Alauthi; Fenny Purnawan, writer, editor and mother of Gana, Smita, Anggita and Oorvi. Agas Bene of the Dinas Kesehatan (Health Agency) in Belu, West Timor; Maria K'lau, an outstandingly dedicated midwife in Belu; Antonia Godelpia Lau, the manager of the Panti Rawat Gizi and all the doctors, midwives, staff and workers at the Puskesmas in Belu; Anne Vincent, Fajar, and Anton Susanto of UNICEF in Jakarta; Nelden Djakababa and Vitria Lazzarini, psychologists from Yayasan Pulih; Piet Pattiwaelapia of the Maluku Refugees' Coalition (Koalisi Pengungsi Maluku); Nelke Huliselan, a community worker in Ambon; Enrina Diah, a plastic surgeon; Julia Suryakusuma; Richard Oh, novelist and crewcut; Rebekka Harsono, an activist from LADI (the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination League); Pephy Nengsi Golo Yosep and Adi Yosep, activists for the rights of people affected by leprosy in Jongaya, Makassar; Kerstin Beise of Netherlands Leprosy Relief (NLR); Dede Oetomo and friends from GAYa Nusantara (a gay and transgendered rights organization in Surabaya); Irma Soebechi and friends from Perwakos (transgendered rights organization); Nig and friends from US Community (a gay and lesbian rights organization in Surabaya); Ayi Na, previously at UNICEF in Mangkowari, Papua; the indefatigable Sister Zita Kuswati at Yayasan Saint Augustina in Sorong, Papua; Connie de Vos, a linguist and specialist in sign languages; Thomas J. Conners, a linguist at Max-Planck-Gesellschaft; Josh Estey, photographer and crewcut; Dian Estey, journalist; Maya Satrini, community worker and friend of the sex workers in Singkawang; Rina, Dewi, Adhe and Yuyun and other sex workers in Jakarta; psychologist Jeanette Murad of the University of Indonesia; Alexander Sriwijono, consultant; Mustamin, of the Bajau community in Mola Selatan, Wakatobi; the Forkani environmental protection group on Palau Dupa; Veda and Rili Djohani of The Nature Conservancy; Ani Himawati in Jogja; Ayu Sastrosusilo; all of the people from Humana, an organization advocating for the rights of street children in Jogja; Muhammad Zamzam Fauzanafi, visual anthropologist; Mbak Diah, an activist filmmaker, and all the other people at Kampung Halaman in Jogja.

The project would not have been possible without the support of Sujana Royat, the far-sighted Deputy Minister for Poverty Alleviation in the Department of Social Welfare. In addition to being a driving force behind the Indonesian government's involvement in the PNPM Mandiri program, he has worked tirelessly to raise the profile of Indonesia's invisible people and to include them in the development process through his active support of PEKKA and a number of the people, groups, communities, and programs described in this book.

Nor would the publication of *Invisible People* have been possible without the patience, tenacity, and kindness of Threesia Siregar, of the World Bank's PNPM Support Facility. The support of Victor Bottini, Ela Hasanah, Sentot Surya Satria, Inge Tan, Lisa Warouw, Rumiati Aritonang, Nancy Armando Syariff, Juliana Wilson and all other staff at the PNPM Support Facility. In addition to providing his introduction, Scott Guggenheim, of AUSAID, kept the project alive with his wisdom, and sense of humor, editing the English language text, and making sensible suggestions throughout the project. Erick Sulistio used his extraordinary talents as a designer to transform the words and images in this book into a visually impressive final product. Sila Wikaningtyas worked long and hard to produce profound and sensitive Indonesian translations of the text, which was originally written in English, as well as a number of personal accounts written by the subjects. Jamie James played a valuable role tweaking, proofing, and editing the final English-language text, while Dorothea Rosa Herliany performed a similar role with the Indonesian-language text. John McGlynn, of the Lontar Foundation, provided excellent advice regarding the publication and distribution of the book.

and *Picturing Indonesia, Village Views of Development* (2005).

All the photographs in this book were taken by Poriaman, with the exception of those taken by Irfan on the following pages: female students (p. 37); Ai Anti Srimayanti (p. 43); Heri Ridwani (p. 45, p. 47); Pak Inceu (p. 51); Laminah (p. 70); women's literacy group (p. 72, p. 74); Musinah (p. 73); Kolok Getar (p. 81); Kolok Subentar (p. 83); Erni Bajo (p. 113); Mading (p. 129); harm reduction meeting (p. 131); Benk Benk (p. 133); Apay and Harry (p. 134); Megi Budi (p. 137, p. 139); Rifky (p. 138); and Reza (p. 148, p. 149).

Irfan Kortschak studied Indonesian Area Studies at the University of Melbourne, and International and Community Development at Deakin University in Australia. He is a writer, translator, photographer, and long-term resident of Jakarta. His previous publications include *Nineteen: The Lives of Jakarta Street Vendors* (2008) and *In a Jakarta Prison: Life Stories of Women Inmates* (2000). He is currently engaged in writing assignments and consultancy work for NGO's and development agencies in Indonesia.

Poriaman Sitanggang has worked as a freelance photographer since 1985. He has held a number of photo exhibits, including *Indonesia - Famous People* (1993), *Batak Faces* (1994), *Dani: The Forgotten People* (1997), *Manila: The City of Contrasts* (1999), *The Song of Arini: The Eastern Indonesia People* (2001), and *Burning Borneo* (1998-1999). His work has appeared in a number of magazines and books, including *Kain untuk Suami* (A Cloth for My Husband) (2004),

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Published by Godown, an imprint of the Lontar Foundation for
Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (PNPM Mandiri) —
Indonesia's National Program for Community Empowerment
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Jakarta 10210 Indonesia
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PNPM Mandiri supports the sustainable use of Indonesia's forests.
This book is made from recycled paper.

Design and layout by Erick Sulistio
Cover photograph by Poriaman Sitanggang
Printed in Indonesia by PT Jayakarta Printing

ISBN 978-979-25-1002-7