



# INVISIBLE PEOPLE

POVERTY AND EMPOWERMENT  
IN INDONESIA

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

Proklamasi Street, Jakarta

## DRUGS, MUSIC, AND HARM REDUCTION

In June 2000, a riot broke out around Jalan Proklamasi in central Jakarta. More than three hundred youths from at least two warring gangs took to the streets. They began by attacking each other, then turned to smashing car windows at random, throwing Molotov cocktails, and blocking roads with burning tires. By the end of the day, the disturbance had been quelled. Several motorbikes had been set on fire and a police car overturned, its windows smashed. On this occasion, no fatalities occurred. This was not a political protest or demonstration that ended in violence; it was a fight between bored, angry youths from neighboring communities. The specific grievances that sparked the riot were obscure and trivial.

There are plenty of bad excuses to explain the violence. There isn't much work for young people. There isn't much to do. People are poorly educated. There are a lot of drugs and drug dealers in the district. Drug dealers have money and power. When they squabble over territory, gangs of young people who are their customers or underlings get involved.

The young men and women in the poor districts of central Jakarta use heroin, marijuana, methamphetamines, and other drugs. Sometimes these drugs kill them. According to the community health center in Menteng, in a single division around Jalan Proklamasi 158 residents died of heroin overdoses from 1998 to 2007. Other people died after they bought drugs there and used them elsewhere. Even more died from AIDS, septicemia, and hepatitis contracted through drug use.

Drugs, gang violence, unemployment, and crime have not disappeared from Jakarta. However, several districts around the Proklamasi area have transformed themselves dramatically over the past few decades. Not only have they driven out drug dealers, they've also made it possible for young drug users to become productive, useful members of the community.

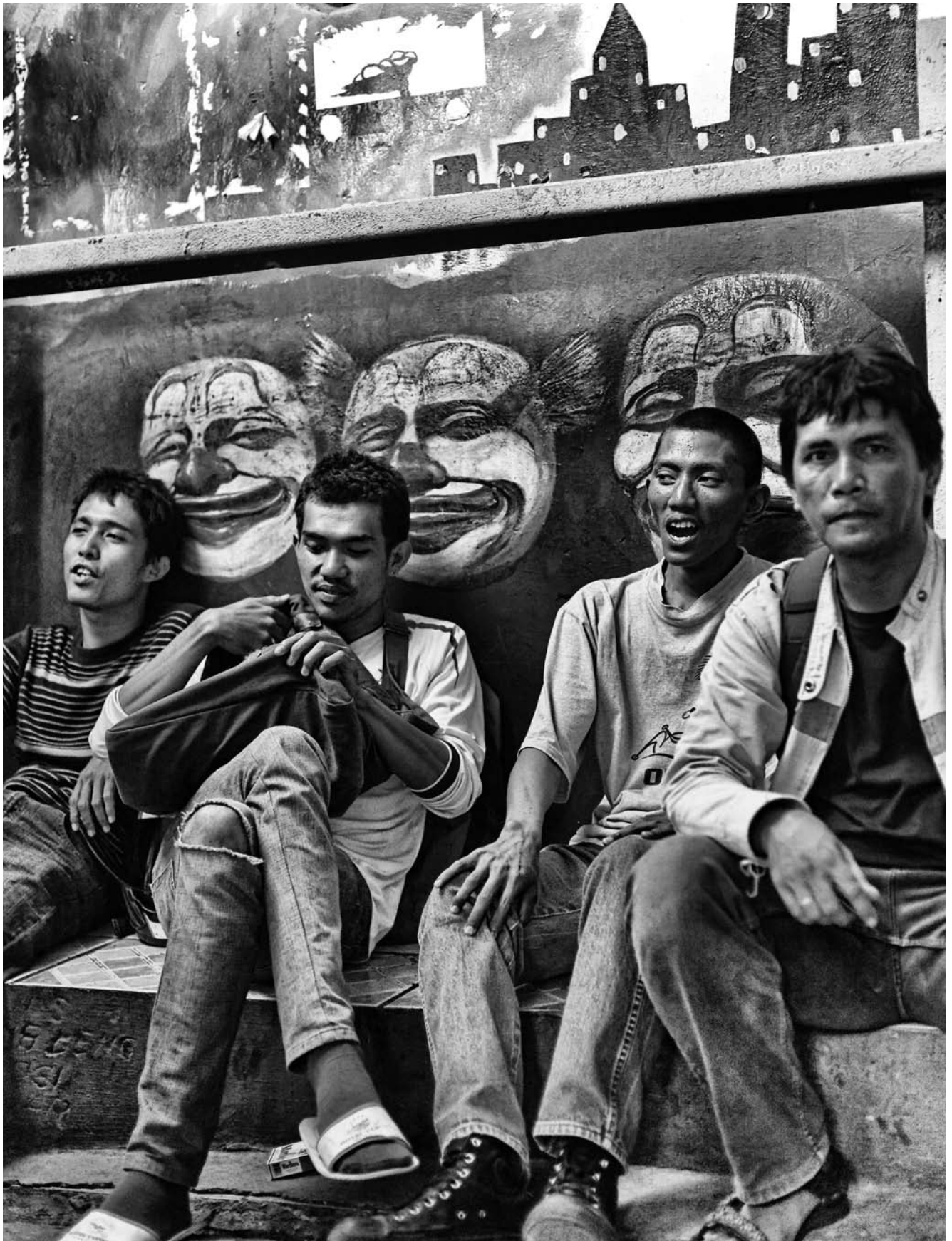
Benk Benk, a young artist from this district, himself a former drug user and one time convicted criminal, serves as a volunteer outreach worker for a harm reduction program administered by the government-operated Cikini community health center for intravenous drug users. Through this program, to prevent the spread of HIV through the community, he actively discourages injecting drug users from sharing needles. To achieve this, and through the health department-sanctioned program, he exchanges new needles for used ones, explaining the risk of sharing to each recipient. He also encourages the youths of the district to understand their legal rights, to engage in rehabilitation programs, and to otherwise take control of their lives and make responsible choices.

In 2007, Benk Benk set up a *sanggar*, or clubhouse, on land near the railway in the Proklamasi area. The clubhouse is a well-constructed shed decorated with graffiti images of heroes of alienated youth, such as the musicians Iwan Fals and Harry Roesli. The shed contains donated musical instruments, amplifiers, and some recording equipment. It also has a library of scavenged and donated books, and a computer.

A lot of the young, mainly male drug users in the area love music. They are particularly fond of heavy metal, punk, and reggae. Some of the young men who come to the clubhouse have formed a band called Cispleng. Most band members have used drugs. Some still do. At the very least, some are still in methadone programs. The band is quite successful. Their music is sometimes played on the radio. They play at venues around Jakarta. There has even been talk of a recording contract. They play at community events and tutor kids in the neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood look up to them.

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**Youths from the Proklamasi area hanging out on the narrow footpath that runs past their clubhouse. They are here to participate in a peer-supported harm reduction counseling session.**



## Benk Benk

We don't discourage drug users from coming to the clubhouse. They are welcome here. We don't let people hit up here, but if someone needs a syringe, they can get one. I hand out needles as part of the exchange program sponsored by the local community health center. I work with the center as a volunteer outreach worker. If someone asks or wants to know, I tell them about rehab programs or the methadone program operated by the community health center. But you can't force people. We don't try to make them promise to stop using drugs.

All the young guys here have done drugs. Before I was in prison, I tried everything. I was never really into it the way some guys were, but I tried everything. I like painting and drawing. I'm an artist. I used to smoke some spliff and then spend the next few hours painting. Back when I was at school, it was mostly pills and a bit of grass. Smack wasn't really a big thing until the late 1990s. When people here first got into smack, they smoked it on tin foil. Later, people started injecting. These days, I've given it all up. If someone's passing a joint around, I just pretend to take a puff. I don't inhale.

When I was younger, there were always fights between gangs from different neighborhoods. You had to take part. If you didn't want to fight, everyone said you were gutless. At least ten of my close friends were killed fighting. Guys used to drink and take pills before they went out to fight.

I went to prison in 1996. It was nothing to do with drugs. One of the local tough guys disrespected my girlfriend. I'm not into violence, but I couldn't just do nothing. I stabbed him in the belly with a knife. When the police got me, they tortured me at the station. They held me against the wall and hit me. They put my hands under a chair and sat on it. They did all kinds of things. There was no reason for it. That's just what they do when they arrest you. After that, I was sent to jail in Salemba.

There are a lot of drugs in prison. They are cheaper and better than they are on the outside. It's completely open. The police don't bust anyone for drugs in prison. The guards don't stop you. They are the ones who sell the drugs. It's harder to get a needle in prison than it is to get drugs. You can rent an old one for Rp 2000. People just keep on using the same one over and over again. When the point gets blunt, they sharpen it on the side of a matchbox.

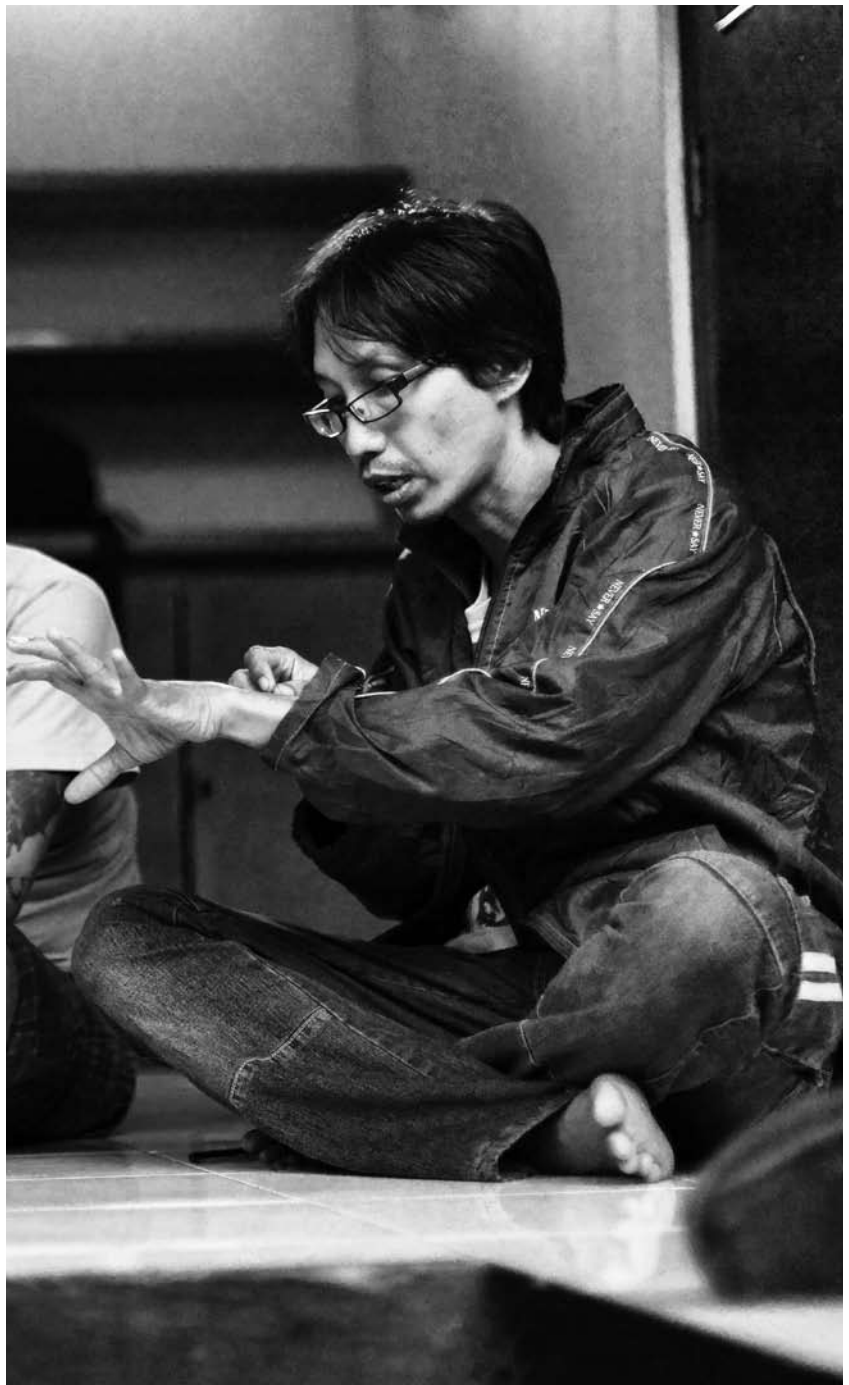
When I got out of prison, I was sick of drugs. I wanted to do something with my life. I wanted to grow as an artist. I wanted to help my community. I started doing some volunteer work with an NGO. I visited prisons to talk about HIV and AIDS as part of a harm reduction program. It was easy for me to talk to the guys in prison. Some of the guys I knew were still in there. We couldn't hand out clean syringes. We just told them about the risks of hitting up and how to avoid them.

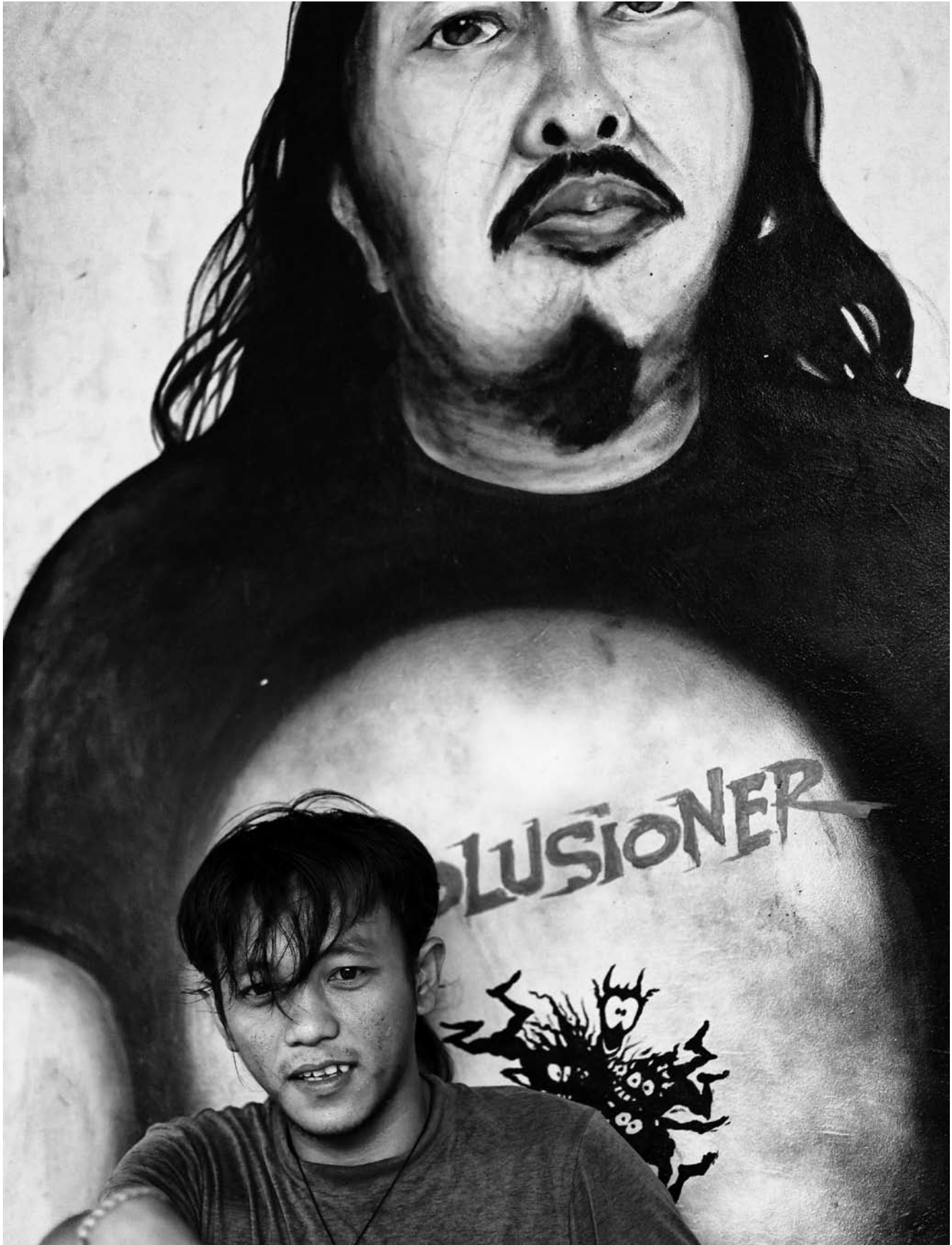
The community had begun to change, too. There weren't so many drugs around. The gang wars had stopped. And the community study center, Rumah Belajar, was running. The community study center changed the community. It gave kids something to do. I respect Pak Megi and the other people who are involved in it. They have helped a lot of people. Sometimes, though, they can be a bit overprotective. They are scared that some of the guys will be a bad influence on the younger kids. The young guys felt that they needed a place of their own. We needed somewhere to relax and play music.

At first, the clubhouse was just a patch of ground next to the railway where people hung out and played music. In 2007, we spoke to the Railroad Authority to see if they'd let us use the land to build a place where we play music. After that, we built this shed. About a year ago, General Electric donated some musical instruments and some recording equipment.

**"I hand out needles as part of the exchange program sponsored by the local community health center. If someone asks or wants to know, I talk about rehab programs or the methadone program operated by the community health center."**

There are a few bands now. The most successful is Cisleng. Their music is played on the radio. They play at events around Jakarta. All the guys are from around here. Most of them used to use drugs. I think one or two are still on methadone. They've cleaned up a lot. When the band first started, some people still used, but you can't succeed as a musician or an artist if you use drugs. In the end, you have to make a choice. The guys who were still using didn't turn up at rehearsals. They didn't stick with it.





## Apay

**“My biggest influence is Harry Roesli, may he rest in peace. He was a great musician and a brave activist. Back in the New Order period, only Bung Harry had the guts to talk straight about corruption and fascism.”**

We’ve just been setting up the stage over in Taman Proklamasi. There were four bands on the stage today. We weren’t playing ourselves, we were just helping some of the younger bands. We’ve been jamming with them at the clubhouse, showing them how to use their instruments.

My band is Cisleng. That means “In your face.” That more or less sums us up. I’m the vocalist. I call our music “Nationalist Rock.” We play music to shake people up. We want them to think. We want to fire people up to care for their community. We want our community to stand up for itself. We want people to realize that they don’t have to be scared of the police or of rich, powerful men. We want them to know that this is their country and that they have a right to live here in the way they choose.

My biggest influence is Harry Roesli, may he rest in peace. He was a great musician and a brave activist. Back in the New Order period, only Bung Harry had the guts to talk straight about corruption and fascism. He opened his house to street kids from rough neighborhoods. He taught us all how to use music to channel our energies, to express our aspirations. I stayed at his place for three years after 1998. I was learning and teaching at the same time. I learned from the people who knew more than me and I helped the ones who didn’t know as much.

I don’t know if we’ll get a recording contract. We don’t play the kind of music that goes down well with the people who run the music industry. If you want to get a contract, you have to give them what they want. You have to sing love songs. Our songs are more to do with social issues. But you can’t just change the way you play to win a contract. Maybe our type of music will come back into fashion. We’ll keep on going the same way until it does.

Drugs? Yeah, well, drugs and music have always gone together. But if you really want to do well with music, you can’t take drugs all the time. I’ve used drugs a bit, but I never got in too deep. I always thought I had something that was more important to me than drugs. That was music. The band has been running for almost ten years now, and some members have come and gone. The ones who really get into drugs don’t last that long. You’ve got to work hard at it if you want to get anywhere with your music.

But we aren’t moralistic about it. Some of the guys who turn up here at the Clubhouse are still into drugs. We never turn them away. That isn’t going to help them. We know what it’s like for them. Everyone’s welcome to come here. If they are having trouble at home, then they can come here and talk about it.

Are we good examples for the kids? I don’t know! That depends on who you ask. But yeah, I suppose the younger guys look up to us. We don’t control them, though. They have to find their own path. All we can do is support them and help them to find a way for themselves. They have to do the hard work themselves.

## Megi Budi

People were sick of the fights and violence. They were sick of the drugs and the gangs. Ten years ago, this place was an open drug market. Outsiders streamed in and out at any time of day or night looking for drugs. The drugs fueled the violence. Drugs were only a small part of the problem. Even the violence wasn't really the main problem; it was a sign that something was wrong. The real problem was unemployment. The kids often didn't go to school. There wasn't anything for them to do.

The transformation of the community began with an aerobics class. There were always big fights between the guys from Pegangsaan and the guys from Menteng Jaya. There were two women, Ibu Rosdiana and Ibu Ratih. Ibu Rosdiana was from Pegangsaan, Ibu Ratih was from Menteng Jaya. The guys from those districts fought practically every week, but Ibu Rosdiana and Ibu Ratih were friends. They both liked doing aerobics. They decided to set up a class together. They both invited other women from their neighborhoods, who met to do aerobics once a week. Even though their brothers and sons and boyfriends and husbands were throwing rocks at each other and killing each other, the women became friends. They called themselves the Peace Loving Citizens' Forum.

They held their aerobics class near Proklamasi. Dr. Imam Prasodjo lives nearby. He's a sociologist from the University of Indonesia. He's involved in community empowerment and conflict resolution. He talked to the women from the group and liked what they were doing. He donated a tape recorder and started to take an interest in the group. He said he was involved in conflict resolution in places like Aceh and Papua, so it would be interesting to see if he could do something about a conflict that was taking place a couple of hundred meters away from his house. He introduced the group to people and businesses who donated some sports equipment.

People began to work together. It didn't happen overnight. It took a lot of time. The Nurani Dunia organization helped a lot. If people came to them with some good ideas, they'd talk to them about how to make them happen. They helped us meet people who could help us.

I lobbied to set up a community study center. We call it Rumah Belajar, which means "Study House." Most of the problems in the neighborhood were because kids didn't have anything to do. Kids don't finish school. It's not that they don't want to, they just don't have the support they need. I wanted to set up place where students could get help with their homework and learn. Schools in Indonesia often aren't very good. The teachers just stand up and talk. They don't really help the kids learn. I wanted Rumah Belajar to be completely different from that. I wanted Rumah Belajar to be fun. I wanted kids to enjoy coming here. I wanted it to be open for everyone in the community, not just kids.

Dr. Imam and Nurani Dunia helped us to meet GE Consumer Finance. They promised us some money to rent a house in Jalan Bonang. They didn't give cash, but they provided us with computers, books, and other equipment. We began by offering math and religious-studies tutoring programs, as well as computer skills classes. When the classes went well, a lot of other businesses and companies started making donations, too. I like it best when they donate books or equipment rather than money. It's easier for people in the community to see what the donations are being used for. Some companies donate old computers or equipment they can't use. That doesn't cost them much. It's probably easier for them to donate that than cash. Some businesses have donated old magazines and books, paper, and art supplies.

**"I wanted to set up a place where kids could get help with their homework. I wanted the study center to be fun. I wanted kids to enjoy coming here. I wanted it to be open for everyone in the community."**





With the materials that we've been given, we've set up a library. Kids really like reading books if they can get hold of them. Kids even like old magazines with pictures and stories in them. They're naturally curious. We've also run art classes and music classes.

Some businesses have supported us by offering apprenticeships and jobs to kids from the Rumah Belajar. That's great. Kids often say that even if they finish school they won't be able to get a job. It's great if they see that there are opportunities for them. The Astra Group gave a few jobs to kids from the area. So did a few banks, and the Bakmi Gajah Mada restaurant. They've done well. It's also good when the companies see that kids from a district with a bad reputation are prepared to work hard. They see that they can be good employees, so they feel better about giving jobs to other kids later.

The whole community has gotten involved in Rumah Belajar. It's not just for the kids anymore. Housewives have started learning how to turn dried and pressed flowers and leaves into osibana products. They also got involved in growing herbs and medicinal plants on the vacant land next to the railway tracks. Some of the young guys have set up courses in motor mechanics. People here are beginning to realize that if they have a good idea, they can ask for some help and they can make it happen. People are coming up with more and more ideas. We've already shown that we can make it work, so organizations and businesses are prepared to make donations or provide equipment.



Rifky is a musician and a regular participant at harm reduction meetings. His brother in the photograph is doing time for drug offences.

It has changed the way the community works together, too. People here have gotten to know each other better. People work together better. When the women wanted to set up their gardens, they cleaned up the land around the railway first. They made their husbands come along to help. When a fire burned down a section of the district in 2008, everyone worked together to rebuild the houses, without being paid.

The drug problem has gotten a lot better, mostly because young people who used to use drugs have other activities to make use of their time. But it's also because the community is much more united. People here used to be scared of the drug dealers. Even though a lot of people hated what they were doing, nobody was brave enough to say anything. When people got used to working together, they were prepared to stand together against drugs. In the end, Dr. Imam contacted a friend of his, a senior policeman. They agreed to push the dealers out. They concentrated mostly on the dealers and the outsiders who were coming here to buy drugs. They didn't focus so much on the guys from around here who were using. These days, people in the community support the police against drugs. They report dealers who are operating here.



**Megi Budi helping some young people in the community education center who are learning computer skills. These computers were donated by corporate sponsors.**

## 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

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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).

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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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