

**Irma Hutabarat**

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## **Nyi Santi from Bumi Pohaci**

**Irma Hutabarat is devoted to vetiver to save the ravaged river. Citarum made her fall in love.**



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There is a new nickname for **Irma Hutabarat, the famous television broadcaster in the 2000s** who later plunged into the world of non-governmental organizations: **Nyi Santi**. The nickname is pinned residents around there Cisanti, upstream of the Citarum river in Tarumajaya Village, Kertasari, Bandung Regency, West Java.

Residents called her Nyi Santi because once a week Irma came there to clean up the land that had been piled up with garbage and water hyacinth. In addition to cleaning it, Irma planted vetiver (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*), a type of grass from India that functions to resist erosion, while protecting crops from pests and weeds. Once arrived, Irma stayed 2-3 nights with a group from the Citarum care community. "It happens almost every day there," said the 56-year-old woman.

What Irma was doing was futile. In 2015, she had to face anglers and pilgrims pilgrimage King Siliwangi and the tomb of Dipati Ukur, who stayed overnight and dumped trash in the middle of the lake. They soaked in three Cisanti springs overnight and then threw their clothes in the middle there as a symbol of bad luck.

Every time Irma Hutabarat came there, plastic and styrofoam rubbish littered the edges, former tents of anglers and pilgrims. Until finally the Commander of the Siliwangi Military Region III Command was held by Lieutenant General Doni Monardo in November 2017. To his friend, Irma told the condition of Cisanti and Citarum which were dubbed "the dirtiest river on earth" by international media.

To Doni, Irma said that to improve the Citarum must start from the upstream. Without fixing upstream, he said, Citarum will continue to get dirty because its water source is polluted. Doni agrees. He ordered his men to come to Cisanti to scoop up the garbage and lift the water hyacinth. His initiative was later made a national program by **President Joko Widodo** by forming the Citarum Harum Task Force in February 2018.

Thanks to TNI soldiers, Cisanti has become clean. The reception was arranged more carefully. Irma is more eager to come there to plant vetiver. It is indeed identical with this plant. Irma crossed Indonesia to visit the damaged rivers in Java, Papua and Sumatra to introduce this plant



Irma Hutabarat (Foto: R. Eko Tjahjono)

In Indonesia, vetiver is not really a new plant. We call it the "fragrant root", the basic ingredient of rubbing oil and various herbs for medicine. "If it is called fragrant root, vetiver will be removed because the roots are used," said Irma. "Though vetiver must not be removed because its roots are functioning to protect the environment."

So Irma prefers to call it "vetiver", a name from Tamil which means "coarse grass". Vetiver can grow in all kinds of tropical soils which tend to dry up to 1.50 meters in height. The flowers are purple like wheat, because they are genera with sorghum, rice and lemongrass.

Syahdan, Irma's introduction to vetiver occurred in 2010, when Kevin Ibrahim, his second child, wanted to do catfish business after graduating from Binus University. Apparently making a catfish pond in Cinere, South Jakarta, is too expensive for a business that has just graduated from college. Irma suggested that ponds be more environmentally friendly without having to wall. The advice came from his colleague in Bali, David J. Booth, an environmental activist who led the Ekoturin Foundation.

David suggested Kevin use vetiver as a pool protector. Kevin obeyed. But the business did not continue because he and his friends were tempted by other businesses. They left catfish. Irma, who heard her children and friends did not do catfish business, then looked at the pool. Vetiver at the edge of the pool thrives. "And the water is so clear," said Irma.



**Vetiver root:** as hard as steel (Foto: R. Eko Tjahjono)

She then contacted David to ask the phenomenon. To Irma, David explained that the vetiver root does indeed purify water in addition to strengthening the soil. Because vetiver root absorbs all the poisons that river water carries. That is also the reason David uses vetiver in the East Bali Poverty Project in Karangasem. He wants to alleviate the poverty of the people there by fertilizing agricultural land using vetiver.

Irma was even more amazed. Malang crosses the world of activists and nongovernmental organizations to give birth to the Corruption Eradication Commission, its instincts appear that vetiver can be an environmental savior, especially in polluted rivers. According to Irma, vetiver is suitable for Indonesia because it is cheap, adaptive to all types of land, and is well

known to the whole community. Her search of this plant made her discover The Vetiver Network International.

This organization was founded in 1994 and led by the Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927-2016) who loved botany. The World Bank has indeed been promoting this plant to the developing world in tropical countries since 1990. Thailand is most responsive. As a result, they succeeded in revolutionizing agriculture thanks to vetiver. Its roots which are 1/6 times the equivalent of steel wire and produce molim can be a poison in the soil which kills plants.

Vetiver has become a protective grass for the surrounding agricultural staple crops. The king of Thailand ordered his people to plant vetiver on every 10 corn plants. "In Thailand, vetiver is studied specifically at universities and many lecturers become professors because of vetiver," Irma said.

In 2014, TVNI held an international conference on this plant in Manila, Philippines. Not thinking twice, Irma registered as a participant. At her own expense she flew there for a seminar and met vetiver experts and practitioners from around the world for two days. Returning from there, she increasingly believes that vetiver can save the environment and prevent disaster.

Citarum is an area that she visited after learning many things about vetiver, hydrology, and ecology. In order not to have to go back and forth from Bandung-Kemang, her home with her husband and four children in South Jakarta, Irma bought 800 square meters of land on Citarum Inspection Road in Sangkanhurip Village.

She built a 30 square meter house on a roof and floors made from vetiver leaves facing the wide and brown river of Citarum. Irma named the name "Bumi Pohaci" —a Sundanese name for Dewi Sri, the goddess of agriculture and fertility. In this house Irma practices living in harmony with nature: Citarum water is filtered using vetiver root for drinking, there is no detergent, soap and shampoo use lemongrass, in its empty yard she cultivates vetiver and all kinds of fruit and vegetable plants, as well as fish ponds.

Vetiver leaves are scattered as the floor of Bumi Pohaci. According to Irma, vetiver can also protect humans from snakes. These reptiles do not live in the land that has this plant. For lighting, Irma has just planted solar panels as a source of electricity. When the interview was taking place, there was a smell of burning cable. Irma hurriedly turned off the electric switch. But the scent still smelled.

Irma came out looking for the smell direction. Apparently the scent came from a temporary garbage dump 20 meters from Bumi Pohaci. Located on the edge of the Citarum Inspection Road, there is a trash disposal center that puffs smoke. Deden, a scavenger, seemed to rummage through the rest of the trash, sort out, and put it in a sack.

"How come it's burned? This is dangerous. It can be a problem with everyone here," said Irma.

"Or if you don't burn it, will you? Where do you want to dump these rubbish?" Said Deden.

"Who told you to burn?"

"Mr. RW."

Irma shook her head. On the incinerator, a company stamp was seen as a sign of complete donations with a garbage cart. Meanwhile, the arson house, according to information there, was built by students from a state university that had KKN at the end of last year. "This is because people come only to come, not to solve the garbage problem," said Irma.

It was getting dark. When the smoke of the trash began to thin, the flowing water of the Citarum river slowly began to rise. Brown water has now turned black. Plastic and liquid waste floats on its surface. "There are still factories that dispose of waste into Citarum," said Irma. "Especially from abattoirs and upstream markets."

Although Citarum along the 269 kilometers is divided by 23 sectors to Bekasi, which each sector is guarded by the army, waste disposal into Citarum is still difficult to prevent. Bumi Pohaci was in sector 1. Before the army entered there, said Irma, the riverbank became an undocumented settlement. They built gazebo and lived there, by throwing garbage into the river, and not kapok must often be submerged when the river overflowed.



**Vetiver in Situ Cisanti planted by Irma Hutabarat along 5 kilometers (Photo: Firlu A. Dikdayatama)**

After the army entered, they moved. Irma then planted the bank with vetiver. Since there was a vetiver, water did not overflow dampen the farm next to it. Residents planted road and river dividers with various crops and cassava. Thanks to vetiver too, the land there became fertile because of the poison of the factory which was brought to river water filtered first by its roots.

According to Irma, the water quality in Sangkanhurip also improved. Now there are no more children who are itchy. When she first came to the village, Irma was surprised to find a child who had ulcers in her vagina. "Incredible, Citarum pollution has reached the population," he said.

In total since 2014, Irma has planted 10 kilometers of vetiver along the Citarum riverbank. But, presumably, she must have to be patient again to change Citarum which makes her fall in love to be more awake. "Citarum is like getting cancer," she said. "But so far healed it by operating on the nose, given lipstick, so it looks beautiful."

Irma said that she would not stop campaigning to plant vetiver and voiced the importance of protecting Citarum until the river was completely free of pollution. "I think this is my faith, love and saving the environment are part of religious teachings right?"

For Irma, her life is chasing the world and the fun is over. His children have lived independently. She now devotes herself entirely to nature and the environment, like Nyi Pohaci who does not tire of protecting nature by regulating food for the survival of humanity.

### **Citarum Not Fragrant**

Many programs improve the Citarum river, the longest river in West Java, which is dubbed the dirtiest river under the sky. Each governor has his own program with no small budget. There are Vibrating Citarum, Sustainable Citarum, Bestari Citarum. Everything failed. Now comes the Fragrant Citarum. This time the improvement was more massive and resonated because the policy was directly in the hands of the president. The first year of the Citarum Harum river repair that ended at Muara Gembong Bekasi was not too significant, but it was promising. Need a thorough mindset at all levels of society.



### **War Against Citarum Damage**

Citarum improvement from upstream to downstream. Need strong commitment.



### **Look at Mastaka Citarum**

Situ Cisanti, kilometer 0 of the Citarum river, is now clean of rubbish and water hyacinth. Seven springs flowing profusely.



### **Citarum, oh, Citarum**

Citarum in numbers.



### **Damaging the Environment Is Not a Criminal yet**

Interview with Taruna Jaya, Head of the Citarum-Ciliwung River Basin Management Office, Ministry of Environment and Forestry.



### **Overcoming Power Tuna Managing Citarum**

Farmers in the upstream part of the Citarum watershed need to be encouraged in the context of transforming commodities that are more financially profitable, namely replacing horticultural crops into coffee and fruit trees.





### **Social Forestry for Upstream River Repair**

Social forestry is a system of sustainable forest management so that this program can support the recovery of the conditions of the Citarum River Basin through the implementation of social forestry in the Perum Perhutani Work Area in West Java Province.

### **The River Is Like Our Body**

If the watershed region is divided into upstream (top), middle and downstream (bottom) regions, then the human body also consists of the upper, middle and bottom regions.

