

Didi Tarsidi:
My Life Story as a Blind Citizen of Indonesia

Childhood and Education

I was born in Sumedang and had education in Bandung. I was born in 1951 in the town of Sumedang, Indonesia, the third child of five children of a farmer's family. I became blind at age 5 because of an illness and was sent to a special school for the blind in Bandung, about 80 kilometres from home, at age 9. Finishing primary and junior high school education in the special school, I went to a regular high school, then entered the English department at the Indonesia University of Education (UPI) and earned a bachelor's degree in 1979. In 2000, I took a master programme in guidance and counseling for children with special needs at UPI and earned a master's degree in 2002.

Work and Career

Upon graduating from the English department in 1979, my first job was interpreter for Helen Keller International, Inc., a New York-based organization that helped the Indonesian Ministry of Education to establish integrated education for children with visual impairment in Indonesia. In 1980 I began my teaching career at SGPLB Bandung (teachers college for special education) where I taught English. In the meantime, I also had started a profession as a private visiting teacher of Indonesian, giving Indonesian lessons to English-speaking foreigners living in Bandung.

In 1994 I was transferred from SGPLB to the Department of Special Education at UPI to teach ortopedagogics, Braille and basics of orientation and mobility to student teachers for children with visual impairment up until now.

In 1998 I was introduced to Mr. Watterdal, Braillo Norway representative in Indonesia, project manager for the Education Quality Improvement for Children with Special Needs, a project under the Indonesian Ministry of Education with a financial aid from the Norwegian government. Since then I have been travelling to many parts of Indonesia as a resource person for seminars and workshops to promote the idea of inclusive education and to secure the establishment of resource centres for inclusive education.

In early 2002, for three months, I and three colleagues from my university were sent as guest researchers to the University of Oslo in preparation for the establishment of a master programme in special needs education at UPI. With technical assistance from the University of Oslo and financial aid from the Norwegian government, the master programme started in September 2002 with 15 students from different parts of Indonesia.

Organization

In 1994 I was elected President of Pertuni (Indonesian Blind Union) of West Java, and, during the same period, I also took charge of the Bureau of Foreign Relations of the Central Executive Committee of Pertuni, and this position had given me the opportunities to go to a

number of countries for conferences and the like. In January 2003 I was elected President of Pertuni.

In addition, I am also the coordinator of Mitra Netra Foundation services in Bandung. Our main services are Braille and talking book library service and computer skill training for people with visual impairment.

Family

I married Wacih (who is also blind) in 1980. Our first son was born one year later and the second in 1983. Currently both of them are university students. We live in a house that we bought with our own savings plus a bank loan. The marriage was the real start of our lives as members of the society and citizens of Indonesia. We began to actually learn how to be a responsible and independent adult citizen, and very often we had to learn it in a hard way due to societal attitude towards blindness and lack of physical environmental accessibility on the one hand, and lack of our own preparation for the real social life on the other hand (we had been living in a special institution for the blind for so long). We hope that the younger generation of the blind citizens will learn to live socially in a much easier way.

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