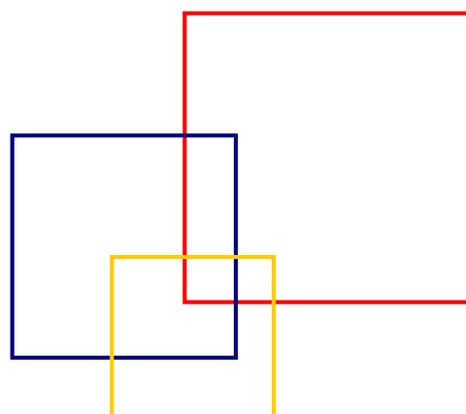


In their own words....

Indonesia: A boy from a mining family

Wanto, 16-year-old, comes from a mining family. His grandparents and his parents were miners, both in the mechanized units and as ngerébo's. Wanto has to work because he is the oldest son, which means he has an obligation to help the family. He can do no other jobs besides mining because his parents never farmed and thus never taught him how to farm. For a while his parents owned their own sedot kering unit but eventually were bankrupted by lack of sufficient gold finds and sold the equipment to repay debts. His father has a mining job in Benggalon and lives in Bontang, around 550 km away. The third of five children and the oldest boy, Wanto finished elementary school despite sometimes being absent in the dry season when he with other classmates would join a mining unit. He currently works with a dry suction mining unit in Nangon, 30 minutes walk from his home. Wanto no longer cares to continue his education to junior high school. He thinks that continuing education will result in losing time to mine gold. Pointing to his long-time friend sitting next to him, Wanto said that his friend is continuing his education and recently entered high school in Samarinda. Wanto said that his friend receives money from his parents. Though he wanted at first to continue with his schooling, Wanto's family couldn't afford it and so he had to find work. Wanto's eldest sister, now 18, was able to complete the third year of junior high school with financial help from an aunt, but then she couldn't afford to let the girl continue to higher school. The sister currently lives with her aunt in Samarinda, 400 km away, helping out with chores in the house. A younger brother was among the 33 miners who

died in the Bilit mining accident in 1997. The boy was 11. Wanto's youngest brother is 5 years old. When his family still owned their unit, Wanto was in the fourth grade and worked only during the school holidays. Although the work is tougher in the gold striking (mopo') period, Wanto acknowledged that workers are happier because of the potential income. Once, when he was 11 and working in his family's unit, Wanto earned between 4 million and 5 million rupiah (US\$460 and US\$575) in the mopo' period. He used a portion to buy new clothes and shoes and gave the remainder to his mother to save. He wants to buy a motorcycle with his savings. No longer in school, Wanto took a full-time job in a sedot selam unit as a diver when he was 12. But when he dived for the first time, his ears and nose bled. He switched to removing the debris. Later though, when a friend asked, he tried diving again so he wouldn't be seen as a coward. His ears and nose did not bleed that time and he remained working as a diver. He lasted less than a year; the work was too hard, he explained. He's been working in a sedot kering unit with six other workers for the past three years. The unit is owned by the uncle of a friend. His duties are to spray and remove stones. He considers these duties lighter than diving.



The unit has changed locations three times in three years. “Many workers have stopped working because the dam keeps breaking. They cannot keep removing water and ambuh, since they would have to work hard, but gain little,” Wanto said. If the dam breaks, the workers have to repair it, otherwise water will enter the pit and has to be removed before gold can be mined. The collected gold is calculated daily. The calculation of how much one worker earns is done at the end of the carpet washing, but the money is paid after the gold is sold, which is done once a week. (Carpet washing can be done two or three times in a day and different people might be involved in the carpet washings.) In one day, the unit can get at least 6-11 grams of gold that sells for up to 68,000 rupiah per gram. In the wet season, however, each worker gets between 30,000 and 50,000 rupiah per day. In mopo’ times, they earn up to 200,000 rupiah (US\$24) per day. In his job, Wanto holds the hose and directs the stream to the wall, similar to a firefighter. The spray will gouge the pit walls, bringing stones and soil down. The workers in a pit might be buried alive if the whole wall falls. The sprayer will be the first one to die because he’s closest to the wall. Wanto is haunted by his brother’s death and has fears of dying. Wanto often suffers from skin and respiratory ailments. The workers in his unit have to pay for their own medical treatment.

Glossary:

Ambuh: brownish-yellow sand and soil from the river bed, containing no gold and usually disposed of.

Mopo’: successful (gold) strike

Ngerébo’: panning gold from sand that has been panned by others before (sand from sedot kering units or washed welkoms from sedot selam and sedot rujak units)

Sedot kering: The method of mining gold on dry land but without tunnelling introduced in 1999. In this system, a 4- to 8-m-deep pit is dug, as far as 50 m from the river. An engine and a pump are located next to the river and used to suck water to the pit to make the soil “suckable”. That watery soil is then pumped to the platform through a second set of engine/pump and then channelled back into the river through a carpet that will catch the gold ore.

Sedot selam: Mechanical devices began to be used by divers in 1984 to suck the sand from the river bed.

