

On the Ciliwung, an ecotourism project gains wide support

The Officials and environmental groups are set to involve the public and provide them with a wider perspective on the capital's degraded rivers through the Ciliwung ecotourism project. The Jakarta Environmental Management Agency (BPLHD), the city administration and local communities have gathered under the Clean Ciliwung Movement (Komunitas Peduli Ciliwung), which recently introduced the Ciliwung ecotourism project, offering activities on the Ciliwung River.

Residents wishing to get a closer look are invited to take a free boat ride from two gates, Ciliwung-Condut and East Pejaten, before enjoying the green spaces set up by local communities once they disembark. Even though the communities have initiated various — and even similar — programs over the past years, the launch of the program is deemed monumental, as it aims to become a forum through which stakeholders can communicate and find solutions to environmental issues in the capital.

Abdul Kodir, who leads the Clean Ciliwung Movement, which includes smaller local groups, said that the authorities' involvement would make programs to revive the river, whose banks are occupied by squatters, more effective.

"With the authorities onboard, the public's engagement will become more planned and guaranteed [...] There are a lot of problems with the river and through the program we aim to improve the public's ecological awareness in a fun way," Abdul told The Jakarta Post during the launch at the Ciliwung-Condut community center in Balekambang subdistrict, East Jakarta.

Abdul continued. "The general image of tourism is as something fun and clean, but people will see something different to that. This way, we hope we can educate them, and that they will become more aware of and involved in our efforts to revive the river."

The program will emphasize environmental education, with Jakarta students its main targets.

"The Jakarta Education Agency will invite students to come and be involved in the program during the first months of the implementation. The Jakarta Tourism Agency will also help promote it," he said. "We hope people will understand that they can't just rely on local NGOs or the city administration to revive and preserve our rivers. It takes every single resident in the city to reach the goal."

Ten speedboats, owned by local communities and the Jakarta Fire Fighter Agency, will operate on weekends. BPLHD head Tauchid Tjakra Amidjaja said the program was a pilot project that he hoped to see replicated.

"Regular attractions will revive the rivers and I hope the Ciliwung River can be among the main tourist attractions in the capital. I also hope the Ciliwung River ecotourism project will be as popular as the car free day [on the capital's thoroughfares, held on Sundays]," Tauchid said during his speech.

He added that, "I hope people will stop seeing the river as the back of their homes where they can throw garbage. It should be our front lawn, it should contribute to the residents' wellbeing". East Jakarta Mayor R. Krisdianto said that the city would redesign several aspects of the programs to normalize rivers in Jakarta.

"We have received complaints from local communities, so we will redesign the concept. For example, green spaces along the river will be free of sheet piles as the governor [Joko Widodo] himself said that even developed countries didn't use sheet piles [on riverbanks] anymore," he said.

Krisdianto also reiterated the city's commitment to relocating squatters occupying riverbanks to low-cost apartments provided by the city.

"We have faced challenges due to the residents' reluctance. They prefer to be flooded so the progress has been slow. We hope they understand that we want to treat them as human beings by relocating them from the slums to decent vertical housing," he said.