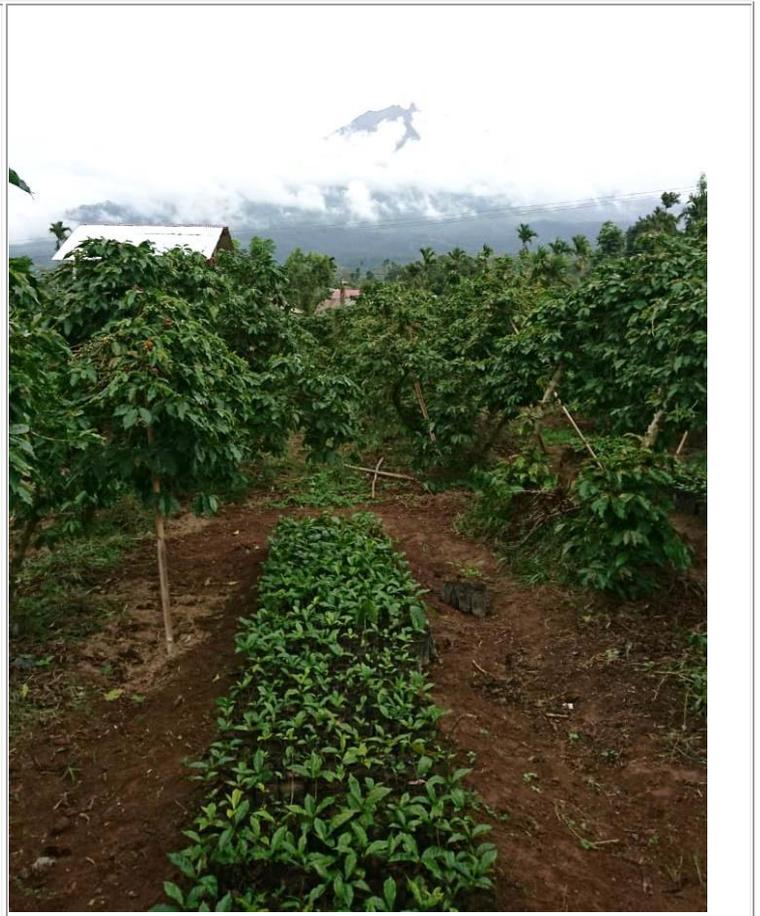


Agricultural Project in Medan, Indonesia

In January 2018, Kristus Raja Conference in Medan, Indonesia submitted a project application for an Onion Growing Project to St Vincent de Paul Australia. The project was kindly funded by Kristus Raja's Australian twin, St Michael's Conference in Thirroul, NSW. The Australian Donor provided 27,120,000 IDR (equivalent to approximately AUD 2,600), and some additional funds for the project were also sourced locally from conference members and friends in the community. The aim of the Onion Project was to assist farmers in the local community to improve their income by growing, harvesting and selling onions.

Phase 1

The onion plant is a quick maturing plant, taking about four months in local conditions from planting to harvesting. Onion seeds were purchased and provided to farmers for them to plant and cultivate. Unfortunately, before the onions were ready to be harvested, Mount Sinabung, which is not far from the cropping fields, erupted and destroyed the onion plants. The local conference members then set about coming up with another idea to expend the remaining funds of the project and to help farmers in the area.



Phase 2



Some research into another more robust crop to try determined that coffee plants are more tolerant of ash and high temperatures associated with volcanic eruptions. Although coffee plants take three years to produce a harvestable crop, the beauty of this crop is that the trees will continue producing harvests for years to come, therefore producing a more sustainable source of income. The conference located a nearby parish with an established coffee plantation that was a bit rundown and needed some work. This local plantation was used as a training facility for farmers who were beneficiaries of the project. Education and training about planting and growing seeds, organic fertilisation, insecticides and pruning trees was given to beneficiary farmers.

In May 2018, the first trial was conducted by buying and distributing 6,500 coffee seedlings to 32 farmers. A second trial involving the distribution of 6,000 seedlings to an additional 30 farmers commenced in September 2018. The seeds to grow the seedlings for the second trial were sourced from the harvest of the existing plantation, which had started to produce coffee beans after the conference worked to maintain the plantation. Additional seeds from this harvest were also sold (unprocessed) at the local market providing a source of income.

In 2019, another 20,000 seedlings are planned to be grown from seeds from the plantation and distributed to around 100 families. So by the end of the year, this project will have benefitted 162 farmers and their families.

Phase 3

On realising that lower prices are paid for unprocessed coffee beans as opposed to processed beans, another phase of the project was initiated. Coffee beans were purchased and dried, roasted and ground to be sold as higher-value coffee powder. The plan was that when the coffee plantation started producing enough fruit, then this value-add process could be added to the project. Unfortunately, the conference member managing this process had an accident and this activity could not continue because of lack of manpower and expertise required for processing the coffee beans.

While waiting for their coffee plants to mature, farmers are planting other quick maturing crops, such as potato, carrot, cabbage and chilli to support themselves. Although there is still small eruptions happening occasionally which can affect the young crops, farmers are able to produce some income to support themselves and their families.



This project is a great example of the work that can be done through the St Vincent de Paul overseas partnership program. Often an initial injection of funding, as provided by the St Michael's conference, is all that is needed to give people a bit of a kick-start. In this case, the Kristus Raja conference met challenges and came up with an alternative sustainable plan, used existing resources at their disposal, and extended the project to benefit the community. This project has the potential to continue to multiply its benefits and make a real and long-lasting difference to the lives of members of the local community.