

Stories from the Field

“No matter how many beans we count the traders will always want more. I am happy to pass my learning on to others. This is a win-win situation for everyone.”

- *Mama Maria, coffee farmer & intermediate service provider*



Mama Lina showing off her coffee berries.
(Photo: PRISMA/Nina FitzSimons)

Counting the Beans

Good Agricultural Practices resulting in impressive increases in coffee production in Flores

The mountain air in Sobo village is crisp and the grass wet to the feet. Joni Bhoga, a 35-year-old smallholder farmer, is clearing grass on his 0.5 hectare coffee plantation, which is located in Ngada district on the island of Flores. Flores is becoming well known for its high quality Arabica coffee, which flourishes in the cool highlands.

However, this year Joni's trees are bare of coffee berries. “I don't know what happened, but my trees just didn't flower,” says Joni, as he motions towards the sparse foliage on his plants. Joni says his family of five largely depends on the coffee he sells and will now need to rely on the income he gets from his corn and rice crop for their basic needs this coming year.

Joni's story is not unusual in Flores. Ninety-four percent of farmers in Ngada district are smallholder farmers who farm a mix of corn, rice, cattle, pigs, cloves, and coffee. Most of the coffee plantations are small, between 0.4-0.6 hectares in total. Most farmers, like Joni, plant the coffee trees and let nature take its course. The result is towering, free-growing trees that reduce in productivity over the years

and make berry picking an acrobatic feat.

In the neighbouring village of Radabata it is a very different story. The NGO, Vredeseilanden Country Office (VECO), as part of PRISMA, an Australian and Indonesian supported agricultural development program, is training farmers in good agricultural practices with the aim of improving coffee production.

“The main issues faced by farmers in Flores,” explains Gede Sedana, “is the quality and quantity of coffee does not meet the required buyer standards because farmers continue to follow poor cultivation and processing methods. This results in low productivity and a lower price for their beans. With very simple changes to agricultural and processing practices, productivity and quality can be greatly increased. Simply pruning the coffee trees can make a big difference”, says Gede Sedana.

Some of trees the farmers in Flores have are a variety of Arabica not suited to the local conditions. “We learned that grafting clones of S795 - a better suited Arabica variety - can improve berry quality and production,” states



Mama Maria grafting an unproductive tree.
(Photo: PRISMA/Nina FitzSimons)

Gede Sedana. “The good thing about cloning is that after one year the grafted branch is fully productive whereas newly planted trees take at least three years,” explains Gede Sedana.

Another initiative implemented by VECO through the Indonesian Coffee and Cocoa Research Institute (ICCRI) has been the introduction of a natural pesticide, Hypotan, as part of the cultivation regime. “Farmers have had lots of problems with coffee berry borers,” says Gede Sedana. “You pick the berry and it looks fine but when you process the berry there is no bean inside.” It is estimated that these borers contribute a 15-20% loss in bean production as a result of fruit fall and reduced bean weight. Gede Sedana estimates that the total productivity increase this harvest as a result of improved practices and use Hypotan will be 42.5%. As part of the program, a total of 30 representatives from five of the largest coffee farmer cooperatives in Ngada attended intensive training at ICCRI in good agricultural practices. These trainers have now trained a further 5,000 farmers in grafting, pruning and natural pest management. The cooperatives are also now outsourcing the services to other farmers. Mama Maria is one such service provider.

“Since returning from ICCRI I have provided services to farmers in five villages,” says Mama Maria. I will now begin to charge for these services. For each graft I will charge Rp 2,000 for cooperative members and Rp 4,000 for non-members. I can graft up to 50 trees per day. Part of the earnings will go back to the cooperative.”

In addition to pruning and grafting services, Mama Maria also sells

Hypotan, which is bought by the cooperative from ICCRI and then sold on a commission basis. “We have now set up a demonstration plot at each of the five cooperatives so other farmers can see the positive results of these simple improvements,” says Mama Maria.

The berries being produced by the farmers now meet the quality requirements for the large coffee buyers. PT. Indokom Citra Persada (Indokom), one of Indonesia’s largest coffee exporters, is working with VECO to source the coffee berries from the program beneficiaries. The sale of the coffee berries to Indokom is expected to result in a 50% increase in farmer income per year.

Mama Maria is happy about the future of coffee farmers in Flores. “There is enough demand for coffee beans that all coffee farmers in Flores could benefit from these improved practices,” says Mama Maria.

Joni is also excited by the prospect of improving his coffee productivity. “I would like someone to show me how to prune my trees if that would make them flower,” says Joni. “My family depends on our coffee crop. I will definitely call Mama Maria.”

When she hears this Mama Maria smiles, “No matter how many beans we count the traders will always want more. I am happy to pass my learning on to others. This is a win-win situation for everyone.”

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The Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Promoting Rural Income through Support for Markets in Agriculture (PRISMA) is a multi-year program that is part of the Indonesian Government’s long term strategy to encourage economic growth. With the support of the Australian Government, the program aims to achieve a 30% increase in the net incomes of 300,000 male and female eastern Indonesian farmers by the program’s end by providing innovative solutions to increase productivity and market access.

PRISMA focuses on agriculture sectors that are the main source of income for a large number of smallholder farmers and have strong growth potential in areas of East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua and West Papua. Partnering with key market stakeholders, the program help spur growth along the value chain by reducing barriers and constraints within the agriculture sector.