



Vincentian Solidarity Office

February 2022 Bulletin

Credits To Grassroots Communities, Where Credit Is Due

In Kenya, the COVID-19 crisis has left many vulnerable households in even greater peril. Fr. Gary Mueller, C.M. and fellow confreres in Kenya recognized a need in their community for income. They developed a plan to use VSO microproject grant funds to establish a microcredit program. A microcredit is a loan of a small amount of money at a low interest rate to a small business. This program included training for the participants in business management and development. They were particularly focused on helping the women of three parishes: St. Vincent DePaul Giathugu, St. Kizito Matisi, and Our Lady of Assumption Indangalasia. All three parishes are located in rural areas with little infrastructure. The participants were all small-scale farmers with no other income sources, who would not otherwise have access to loans or banking.

Parishioners and local leaders helped with the selection process. While initially their focus was on women, they found a few men who met their criteria. 43 people, 38 women and five men from three parishes were selected. These 43 participated in a training program where they learned how to run their own businesses. After completing the training, all participants received a loan to finance their new businesses. Site visits by development officers assessed progress.

Some of the businesses included the selling of fruit, fish or even fresh-cooked chips. With their loans they have bought fertilizer, animal feed, or inventory. All the business owners continue to meet within their parish groups to share stories of success and overcoming challenges. By sharing these stories, they continue to learn from one



The pastor from St. Vincent DePaul Parish, Fr. John Mburu C.M. witnesses as Mr. Ezekiel (left) receives his supplies for farming business



Group photo of participants from St. Kizito, Matisi Parish

another. They are encouraged to expand their businesses and continue to receive training on money management. Especially popular is the savings component of the loan administration. The participants have become more confident in their business activities and feel they will be more resilient when facing difficult times. They now have hope for the future.



Participant Brigitte describes her chip cooking business

Welcome Fr. Joel

Please join us in welcoming our new Executive Director, Fr. Joel Bernardo, C.M. Fr. Joel Bernardo is a Filipino Vincentian who has served in the international Mission in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the past six years (2015-2021). He worked with the Divine Word Missionaries (SVDs) as the Head of the Research and Education Unit of the Melanesian Institute (MI) in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province. He practices Social Anthropology, with academic studies from the University of the Philippines and University of



London (London School of Economics), and promotes grassroots development alternatives, using Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches, adult learning principles and cultural critique-revaluing processes.

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Our goal: To assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelization and service of the poor.

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Vincentian Solidarity Office

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Bridging the Rural Digital Divide and Access to Employment

The country of Mozambique in southeastern Africa is among the poorest countries in the world. According to the World Bank, two-thirds of the population live and work in rural areas. For most children here, education is only available until age 12. Once they finish school, there are very few opportunities for the children. Because of this, the community of Chirrundzo and the Parish of St. Vincent founded a vocational school in 2014 to serve the adolescents and young adults of their region. It is located in the rural village of Chinhacanine. Because most of the population are subsistence farmers, the school is focused on agriculture.

The Vincentian Community was looking for ways to improve the opportunities for the young people in the area. With the help of the VSO, they were able to add a computer lab to the school. They purchased six computers, a tablet and a printer. A carpenter helped with tables and chairs. They employed an instructor and added computer studies to the curriculum. With their new computer skills, the graduates will have better prospects for employment. While still in the early stages, it is off to a good start and has enriched the curriculum for the 60 participating students.



Computer room already set up with students and the computer teacher, explaining how to take care of computers.



Students and Father Cinema C. Inueiva, C.M. at the Institution's Main Entrance

A Cooperative Response to the 'Chicken and Egg' Cycle of Poverty

The Parish of Alem Tena, Ethiopia, has many women who have been left alone after the frequent natural disasters and civil wars that plague the region. These women have children and elderly people who depend on them. Their prospects for the future and ability to care for others are challenged. Fr. Zecharias Haile, C.M., parish priest of Alem Tena, developed a plan to build a chicken coop where they would raise hens for eggs that could be both distributed and sold for a profit. With their grant, the parish hired a local contractor who in turn employed some of the local youth. After the coop was built, they stocked it with a breed of chicken recommended by a local expert. In addition to

generating income, this project will help improve food security for both the local poor and the local confreres.



Egg laying hens in new chicken coop at the Parish of Alem Tena

Fr. Joel's Solidarity Notes

What can be considered as building blocks of Vincentian solidarity building for and with the poor?

After nearly 20 odd years of solidarity work, the VSO can share a few:

- *Solidarity builds on Subsidiarity* (building local/internal capacity and not external/perpetual dependence)
- *Solidarity builds up Eligibility* (enhancing accountability and not outright entitlement)
- *Solidarity builds on Micro-Projects* (consolidating benefits and transformative impacts for systemic change)

The VSO is grateful to the donors and agencies that make our work possible, including:

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