

The Magic of Rotary: Touching Lives in Indonesia

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hen I was a district governor in 2013, there was a Rotary club in my district, in Cilacap, Central Java, that only had a few members. My senior leaders advised me to terminate the club since they were inactive, held no meetings, conducted no projects, and never contributed to The Rotary Foundation. But I was determined not to end it; I knew it was possible to revive it. During a visit, I found out this club was project-oriented, and their members said they were interested in serving their local community. Yet, they were not engaged in any service projects which would help keep members or attract new ones.

Cilacap is a rural area with over 2,000 households in 12 villages, whose residents are dependent on fishing in the Segara Anakan lagoon. The monthly household income is only around \$80.

Over the years, the water started to dry up, turning the area into swampland that also became breeding grounds for mosquitoes that spread diseases such as Malaria and Dengue Fever. With the water dried up, the fishermen became farmers with an assurance of a more regular income. However, this “appeared” land was not productive, so we needed to transform it.

I decided to help the club set a long-term strategic plan for conducting a service project that would use existing members’ skills and expertise in agriculture and engineering. The plan was to build canals from Cimeneng River to reclaim the fertile mud (sediments) brought down by runoff water from the mountains to the river. This mud would act as a fertilizer for the unproductive land. We decided to start with our first global grant in one of the 12 villages.



Farmers smile as they harvest the paddy field converted into productive land by the grant.

I managed to secure enough District Designated Funds from International Partners and with their support, the Rotary Club of Cilacap's first global grant was approved. We worked together with the villagers, local government, and a Catholic foundation. As the club members got involved with building the canals and monitoring the project, they became engaged, active, and vibrant. Eventually, they began to attract new members as well.

The project was a huge success; the land became productive, and the villagers soon turned them into paddy fields. During its first year of harvest, these new-formed paddy fields yielded an income of over \$1 million. As more sediment was reclaimed and the total area of productive land grew, the income also slowly increased and it now yields over \$3 million per year. With this new income, families in the village are now prospering and able to afford basic needs such as education for their children. The value of land has now also increased to 20-times its original price.

This project also enhances Rotary's public image in remotes areas. I love visiting Cilacap and hearing the villagers tell me **"Long-live Rotary!"** Everywhere you go, you can see paddy fields that stretch far and wide. The Cilacap Rotary club is now a **cause-based club** focused on expanding this livelihood project to the remaining villages, and they regularly contribute to the RI Foundation.

So, what happened next?

I made a promise to the local community that I would continue to help all remaining villages in Cilacap. We have since replicated this global grant project in two more villages, with the fourth village's global grant application pending approval.

I am so happy and feel fulfilled that I was able to **transform a dying club into a healthy and vibrant club**. It brings me tears of joy to see all the changes and positive impact we've brought through this project. We should always try and help clubs that are struggling rather than giving up on them.

This is the Magic of Rotary. I hope this story can inspire and motivate you all to do more good in the world.