

HOPE THROUGH coffee

For three decades, Global Servants Becky and Mike Mann worked to help three hundred hill tribe villages in Thailand benefit by farming coffee.

IM Global Consultant Mike Mann grew up in northern Thailand, watching and learning as his parents, IM missionaries Dick and Marlene Mann, worked among the hill tribes to help families establish sustainable livelihoods. “When they came in 1959, many of the hill tribes were growing opium,” Mike says. “As an agriculturalist, my father tried to introduce crops that would replace the opium trade. In those days, no one ever heard of coffee in Thailand. But when people could see coffee could be good, a coffee ministry was started to replace the opium.”

Though the hill tribes are native to Thailand, they are not considered citizens, unless they have the proper paperwork, which many do not. They don't own their land, or have equal access to medical care or education. In 1991, Mike and his wife, Global Servant Becky Mann, founded Integrated Tribal Development Foundation



(ITDF) to come alongside these communities and seek long-term solutions to their most pressing issues.

ITDF worked to make sure the villages could access clean water. Then they built and established schools and clinics. Next came the need to generate reliable income sources.

“We used the coffee experience we had earlier,” says Mike, who like his father studied agriculture. Dick helped to establish coffee as a viable industry in Thailand, but ITDF has been working for the last thirty years to find ways to give hill tribe farmers more power in selling their coffee, and to ensure a stable market.

The farmers were growing and picking the red cherries of their coffee plants, but they depended on the buyers to pulp, dry, and roast them.

“When you pick coffee, the cherries need to be pulped within twelve hours,” Mike explains. Hill tribe farmers found themselves at the mercy of whatever prices brokers offered, since there was no way to find another buyer in time to pulp the cherries. **“We helped them get the coffee to the stage where they could pulp and dry it themselves—the parchment stage—and then the farmers have up to a year to find a buyer.”**

In addition to this, ITDF formed the first hill tribe coffee cooperative in Thailand so they could sell in larger quantities. More than forty villages have joined this co-op. ITDF worked simultaneously to establish the first Fairtrade Label Organization (FLO) market for the coffee—and to open the first FLO coffee shop in Thailand while beginning to export coffee to the rest of the world.

“We are the only co-op in Thailand to sell coffee to Starbucks, which has standards to follow under the C.A.F.E. practices [Coffee And

Farmers Equity],” Mike says. “And as soon as Starbucks started buying the coffee, everyone wanted to come to Thailand and buy the coffee.”

Yoba, a 63-year-old coffee project staff member who has worked with ITDF for 29 years, says, “Villagers have trust in ITDF and continually join the project. Coffee farmers receive support on coffee-growing knowledge and skills training, coffee seedlings, and a guarantee for a stable market with fair prices. **The coffee cooperative group in each village is well-established and managed by villagers.”** Yoba says the co-op also opens doors for him to share about Jesus.

Since 1991, more than 300 villages and 14,000 families have been positively impacted by ITDF’s work in water, education, clinics, and coffee, as well as Becky’s work to coordinate an economic development initiative specifically for women. Through Hands to Hearts, women produce handcrafts to sell locally

and internationally. Today, Becky and Mike’s son, Richard, is helping to manage the coffee project.

Mike says, **“We’ve evaluated this project, and we can get a family out of poverty in six years if they start to grow coffee.”** It’s a testimony to the ways in which God can use people working together—through the co-op and through donors supporting projects like this one—to bring about transformational change.

6 years

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Becky and Mike Mann’s son, Richard (left), now helps to manage the coffee project.