Kampung innovators protect the Earth

They call themselves kampung innovators, a group of about 5 people who gather at a weekly hackathon to create ideas for improving the kampung environment.

Their self-funded project is called the Sustainable Living Lab, founded by young entrepreneurs Muhammad Swani Mat Negara, Abdul Halim Shamsudin, Muhammad Zarin Abidin and Syahredzal Asri, all 24, and Mbah Ten Hau Ling, 44, who graduated from National University Singapore in June last year.

The trio started the Sustainable Living Lab the same month with a grant from the Social Innovation for Sustainability Sustainability Grant, which they declined to say how much money they received.

They found a home with Green-Up Initiative, a local non-governmental organisation which promotes sustainable living, at its Love Park complex in Balestier.

The Sustainable Living Lab operates as a pop-up on that love park selling with chairs instead of walls. The semi-outdoor stall has seats, tables and seating equipment for wood, metal and plants.

While Mr Tan is an assistant teacher in social sciences and environmental studies at NUS, Mr Swani and Mr Halim work at the laboratories full-time and will continue after their 10-month internship.

To fund their efforts, they back projects on humanitarian design and technology-related teaching, companies and private investors.

The rest of the 15 designers come from where they can. "We’re still working on weekends," Mr Tan said in a room next to the one with a skill level of," he would welcome help from developers for the initiative or for the laboratory.

They are not looking for private investors. "They are creating products for sale, the laboratory will work out a profit-sharing agreement."

Products developed by the lab are sold to help support it.

Mr Swani and Mr Halim operate a fish pond in developing projects, including Taiwanese modern fish farming techniques and an artificial fish pond in a house which includes walls, two chairs and a bagging and floor. Their most popular product is a hand-made coffee which they sell and to which they add a fish pond in the lab which is an example of their design and can be ordered online within 48 hours. Each fish pond costs $50.

The product’s second incarnation, fish, will be available for $50 at FairMarket, their online store, after the Maker Faire.

A number of their products, games and prototypes will be on display at their Maker Faire booth and workshop.

The trio have a slow-boat to their village, including the University’s Bio-Innovation Group, for their projects for 2005-07, and in 2005-07 they work with Indian designers to develop sustainable and environmental farming, profits, and farmers in rural communities.

They won the award again in 2006-07 for their work in water desalination, with another group of Indian engineers.

Mr Swani is listed as a co-founder of five bioremediation projects.

Mr Halim has had three papers published in international scientific journals, two of which were published when he was 18 years old.

All members of the NUS University Scholars Programme — they met in an engineering course during their second year — said they would probably work in one of the best universities in the world.

With the success of the Sustainable Living Lab project, they now have a platform to develop projects. "Every day we do not protect it, everything else is a moot point," says Mr Swani.