

Catama Borneo: Contemporary Craft Development for Indigenous Rural Communities in Borneo

Rural Communities, MalaysiaKuching, Malaysia



Catrina Maddocks



Year Founded:

2014

Organization type:

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Project Stage:

Start-Up

Budget:

\$1,000 - \$10,000

Website:

<http://www.catamaborneo.com>

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/catamaborneo>



- [Social enterprise](#)
- [Community development](#)
- [Cultural preservation](#)
- [Indigenous cultures](#)

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Catama Borneo work with indigenous communities to develop contemporary craft designs using traditional craft practices. We aim for preservation through innovation, empowering communities with pride in their indigenous knowledge and ultimately improving quality of lives.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

What if we could preserve indigenous craft through contemporary design innovation and ensure economic stability for the Artisans

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Rural communities in Borneo are facing economic hardship, their indigenous craft and knowledge is being endangered and are struggling to sustain their cultural identity. Craft production can provide entrepreneurial opportunities but urban migration, deforestation, and knowledge loss jeopardise sustainability of rural communities. A lack of high quality products and imported cheap low-quality tourist craft in turn deny them access to the market.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

Catama Borneo address these issues by working with rural communities to develop contemporary craft products which utilise their traditional skills. The exquisite accessories and luxurious interior design range are targeted at the high-end international commercial market. - Product development: Trend setting, R&D, Introduce new designs, materials, functions - Community Development: Training/skill development, Encourage knowledge transfer, Provide economic incentive. Recognition of artisan status - Market Development: Network with commercial and hospitality industry- generate sales and contract orders Niche market- high-quality, luxurious products, avoid tourist market - Branding and Marketing: Develop brand 'narrative'.

Awards

British Council and Arthur Guinness Projects "Social Entrepreneurs for Good Award, 2014"

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Its early evening and laughter can be heard from the old longhouse- a traditional wooden dwelling home to 13 families. Women sit preparing the natural fibres they collected from the jungle earlier that day. They plait the fibres together, slowly threading and interlacing the strands to make intricate, beautiful craft designs passed down from their mothers and their mothers' mother before them. This craft was endangered but now they make contemporary design products to be sold in boutiques around the world. They laugh and smile, content to know that they can send their children to school, buy books and clothing and one day pass these traditional skills on to their children and ensure that their story continues for many generations to come.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Catama Borneo already has a number of craftmakers working with us and has the potential to positively affect the lives of many more rural communities in Borneo. Already community members say they are happy to be utilising their skills, creating new innovative products and receiving training and skills development. Key indicators to ensure we are making positive change for these communities include number of weavers (before/after), income from craft production (before/after), skill set, number/ scale of products, figure for urban migration/ return to communities Working alongside craft makers we are developing strong, trusting relationships and have seen the positive impact of empowering communities through their cultural heritage. In time we hope to expand our activities to other communities and enable them to enjoy the benefits of utilising traditional crafts for contemporary design.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

There is huge potential within Borneo to develop Artisan crafts. Working with our communities we have developed specialised strategies and methodologies, which we hope to adapt for other rural communities in Borneo. By proving the economic potential and social advantages of developing indigenous crafts we hope to assisting in positively changing local and national policy towards craft development in rural communities. Creating esteem for Borneo arts can encourage knowledge transferal and ultimately the survival of a dying craft, whilst actively discouraging urban migration.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

Our research has identified a niche in market and we are creating prototype accessories and interior design products. Using online platforms, social media and blogs and media we are already B to C selling our first product range. We are also developing our B to B distribution chains in the hospitality industry, specifically for boutique hotels and service apartments as well as high-end Malaysian department stores to get larger sustainable orders.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

There are a number of craft agencies and producers working in Borneo however these companies target the low-to-mid range tourist sector and don't value the importance of trend forecasting or exploiting technical platforms to sell online and build a customer base. Catama has a fashion-forward high-end market focus, understand the importance of the brand 'narrative', customers needs and strategies to maximise reach. We profit share with our Artisans and provide training allowance, materials and skill development to ensure empowerment and support from our most valuable assets our craftmakers.

Team

Founding Story

Trekking through the dense forests of Borneo you come across isolated indigenous communities. Living in sparsely furnished wooden communal dwellings, without access to shops, medical assistance and other infrastructure that many take for granted, the community members continue to create beautiful, intricate plaited crafts. In an era of rapid development these communities are acutely aware that their way of life is changing and yet want to preserve their cultural knowledge. We realised with the right support and development we could provide training to help these communities to upgrade their skills and make contemporary, commercially viable crafts and help them to keep their art alive.

Team

We are a small organisation, our founders work full-time with freelance collaborators. As we grow we hope to recruit more staff who share our passion and vision Catriona Maddocks, Founder: Product & Community Development Amalina Arip, Founder: Business Management, PR & Market Development Kampung Siba, Indigenous Craft Community: 20 female Craftsmakers Freelance: Tailor, Product Development, Travel/Logistics Coordinator, Research/Translator.

Background

Please confirm how you heard about the Unilever Awards:

from Ashoka

Please confirm your role in the initiative (eg Founder/co-Founder) and your organisational title:

Co-founder

Which of the 8 UN Global Goals (Sustainable Development Goals) pre-selected for this competition does your solution relate most closely to? [select all that apply]

No Poverty, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Responsible Consumption and Production.

Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered.

Skill upgrading of indigenous communities is a key element of the work of Catama Borneo. We initiate training programmes which assess the craft makers technical ability, upgrade skills, introduce new materials and processes and build capacity of the craft makers to create products that can be sold in the international market.

In each community we facilitate the set up of a women's initiative, through which the craft makers receive business and entrepreneurial development training, and discuss production, pricing and profit-division through consensus based decision making. The initiatives enable community members to be agents of change in their community and apply these entrepreneurial skills to all aspects of their lives.

Beyond your existing team, who else are you working with to achieve your objectives, eg partners, advisors, mentors?

Within Malaysia Catama Borneo have built a good relationship with organisations within such as the Social Enterprise Alliance, MAGIC the Malaysian Global Initiative and Creativity Centre, AZAM and Sarawak Development Institute, as well as developing networks within regional and national government departments including the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and local university Unimas.

We have a strong relationship with the British Council and its network of mentors and social entrepreneur advisors such as the Arthur Guinness Foundation, Red Ochre and Ashoka's London team.

We are always looking to enhance our network of committed Agents of Change who share our vision of community development through innovation of heritage skills.

Source URL: <https://www.changemakers.com/globalgoals2015/entries/catama-borneo>