

# DESTINATION: GOOD



The AirAsia Foundation ([airasiafoundation.com](http://airasiafoundation.com)) team talks shop about the people they meet and the ideas they come across as they travel the Asean region on their unique mission: to meet social entrepreneurs and explore ways to support their growth.

## WOMEN EMPOWERING WOMEN

Social enterprises are now globally recognised for their potential in addressing social challenges sustainably. Significantly, many social enterprises are run by women. According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (the largest international entrepreneurship research programme in the world), there are four women social entrepreneurs for every five men. Not only are women more inclined to get involved in social enterprises, women-led social enterprises are also twice as likely to employ women as men, and reflect fewer gender discrepancies in terms of positions, salaries and growth opportunities, compared to traditional businesses.

By and large, disadvantaged women are attracted to working with social enterprises because these businesses tend to operate in environments that enable them to care for their children while working to provide for their families. Because of inequalities that often exclude them from the formal labour market in communities where



Hapinoy, a neighbourhood retail shop

opportunities for economic growth are scarce, many women become involved in the informal economy through microenterprises, which are often home-based and have flexible work arrangements. Although many come into being by necessity rather than choice, women-led social enterprises have been found to generate more revenue than their male-led counterparts, according to research by the Social Venture Network, a non-profit organisation that supports business leaders and social entrepreneurs worldwide.

A reason to continue supporting this trend is the multiplier effect of

economically-empowered women on socio-economic development. Women tend to reinvest their time and income into their children's education, as well as the nutrition and development of their families and communities. Women social entrepreneurs also tend to focus their work on supporting more women, providing safe and sustainable employment opportunities, and creating women-centred products and services. As women face inequalities in many aspects of their lives, products and services that save them time, improve health and safety, or reduce household chores have the potential to create vast benefits for them and their households.

Across Asean, women are already widely engaged in various forms of social entrepreneurship. The next step would be to elevate them to the formal economy by increasing institutional support through access to finance and networks, business skills training and action that addresses gender-biased cultural norms. As more women become economically engaged, we will see more economies achieve sustainable growth.

## Word Up!



**Yap Mun Ching**, Executive Director of AirAsia Foundation, is always on the lookout for exciting new social enterprises. Write in to [foundation@airasia.com](mailto:foundation@airasia.com)



A silversmith in Indonesia

We are often asked about how we create opportunities for women. A straightforward answer is that women-led social enterprises – which create jobs for women who would otherwise toil below subsistence wages – make up half our grantees to date!

We find that women social entrepreneurs tend to put a strong focus on holistic training. A case in point is Philippines-based Rags2Riches, an eco-ethical fashion social enterprise co-founded by young entrepreneur Reese Fernandez-Ruiz, which trains new weavers and teaches financial literacy, healthcare and nutrition. Reese shares her experiences through blog posts and it is rare to come across an aspiring social entrepreneur in the Philippines whom she has not inspired.

Another way we have addressed the issue of women empowerment is through inclusion of gender perspectives when the roles of women are not evident. When we first started working with Selaka Kotagede, a collective of 17 traditional silversmiths in Indonesia, we had expected only to work with male artisans. However, while researching the history of this ancient trade, we came across old photographs of women silversmiths in Dutch museum collections! This prompted the project team to dig deeper into roles played by women in the trade and include gender perspectives in future training.

Our page this month is dedicated to women, as by sharing their accomplishments, we hope to inspire other women.

**WHAT'S A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE?** A business that tackles social challenges and improves communities or the environment using profits from the sale of goods and services.

## FORCE OF GOOD

Meet three remarkable women who are running platforms and support structures that nurture a burgeoning Asean social enterprise ecosystem.



**SAYAKA WATANABE** Asian Women Social Entrepreneurs Network Sayaka can be found in a different Asean country

almost every week, connecting new members to the Asian Women Social Entrepreneurs Network (AWSEN) she established with the Nippon Foundation in 2014. A learning and sharing platform, AWSEN was inspired by Sayaka's own experiences starting social enterprises in Japan and Cambodia. Her new Global Women Impactors programme gives Japanese businesswomen a channel to help women social entrepreneurs take their businesses global. [awsen.net](http://awsen.net)



**LAINA GREENE** Angels of Impact Greene is an entrepreneur and passionate advocate for applying technology to

transform lives. With a background in telecommunications, she is drawn to finding innovative business and financing models that enable underprivileged communities to bridge the digital divide. A co-founder of Singapore-based Angels of Impact, she mentors and invests in women-run social enterprises in Asean. Greene is also co-author of a new book, *Sustainable Impact: How Women Are Key to Ending Poverty*. [angelsimpact.com](http://angelsimpact.com)



**MI MI MYO WIN** British Council Myanmar Mi Mi is known as Myanmar's lady of social enterprise, leading the British Council's

Skills for Social Entrepreneurs (SfSE) programme since its inception in 2009. Through her role, she connects Myanmar-based social entrepreneurs with relevant experts in the UK for sharing of best practices and collaborative opportunities. Mi Mi is also instrumental in building a cohort of local social enterprise consultants to support development of the sector. [britishcouncil.org.mm](http://britishcouncil.org.mm)