



BAF II Case Study No. 1
October 2020

Her Works

Website:
www.herworks.la



Sector:
Handicrafts and garments
BDS activity:
Marketing
BDS provider:
Black Sheep Studio

An inclusive business approach to tradition-infused Lao fashion

About the company

Her Works has been a journey of discovery for a woman called Tookta. It has evolved into a profit-oriented social enterprise that designs, sources and sells contemporary garments, footwear and other handicraft products. What makes Her Works different is that all their products remain loyal to the traditional production skills and designs of Lao's ethnic minority communities. Most of the garments are hand-woven, manually stitched and embroidered by women, and are made from indigenous materials and use natural dyes.

Her Works uses an inclusive business model, with a mission to conserve and promote the unique artistic textile designs of Laos' ethnic minority groups. In so doing, it is helping to preserve their unique cultural heritage, and provide a means to support the livelihoods of some of the Laos' most disadvantaged communities. The resulting fusion between traditional design and contemporary use has created a distinct market and aesthetic 'space' where Her Works' products are distinct from the offerings of other fashion boutiques in Laos.

Her Works promotes the values and capabilities of Lao women from a wide variety of ethnic minority groups. Their intricate skills, which have been under threat from mass manufacturing, are not only being preserved, but being given a commercial platform that should ensure long-term economic sustainability.



What was the growth challenge ... ?

A large proportion of Her Works' retail customers have been foreign tourists visiting Laos. They would visit the shop and admire the products on sale, without really knowing much about their provenance, and the painstaking work that went into their creation. Used to prices associated with mass manufacture and fast fashion, customers would sometimes feel the prices were too high, not knowing how much work and care had gone into their creation, and how unique the items were.

The assistants in the shop would try to explain, where possible, but the language barrier remained a constraint. Tookta needed to find a way to overcome this barrier, so that customers from Japan, Korea, the US, Europe and elsewhere could appreciate the true value of the products on offer.





Her Works



... and what was the BDS solution ?

Tookta then came across an idea that would allow her to vault over the language barrier. She would generate an integrated series of short videos that could be installed on an interactive console in the shop, which customers could then use to learn about the precise origins of the items they were being invited to buy. The shop assistants could also use the console when needed, and the videos could additionally be used as a marketing device on social media.

But this would require retaining the services of a professional videographer and editor to shoot and create videos across more than a dozen different locations in Laos, including some remote areas. It was at this point that Her Works approached BAF II and applied for a matching grant to help cover the costs of an expert videographer to create these videos. We were happy to oblige.

The end result ...

It took several months for Tookta and the videographer to travel to the various locations, shoot the video, and then edit them. In the meantime, COVID-19 struck, travel restrictions were imposed, and a large proportion of Her Works' clientele disappeared from the shop. Undaunted, Her Works then explored how could they 'pivot' their business model to try and navigate a way around the pandemic.

The solution was to abandon, at least for now, the console in the shop, and focus on the videos as a marketing device, and to think about using the videos as part of an improved on-line shopping experience. By using QR codes to link the videos to the products, prospective customers can still view the items on-line, and watch the videos to understand their provenance, from the comfort of their home.

At the Lao Handicrafts Festival 2020, held in October, Her Works won the prize for best bag design, which incorporated the QR code.

So, what's next ...?

Having completed the videos, Her Works recently returned to BAF II and has applied for a second grant that will help fund the cost of radically improving the functionality of their website, and create a robust e-commerce platform for virtual sales and shipment.

If you would like to see the excellent videos that were produced by Her Works, with BAF II assistance, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoj3izYFSPQTxDIMuqb8pzg>

Want to learn more about BAF II, and explore whether we can help your business to grow ? Go to www.baflaos.com and let's start a conversation.



"With BAF II's matching grant support, I collaborated with the video-maker to create and present professional quality content that showcases the story behind our products. These videos allows my customers to better appreciate how these products are made, and how difficult it can be to hand-produce each item. That in turn helps drive sales, as customers realise the love and care that went into their creation."

Ms Tookta, owner of Her Works



"Tookta is an inspiring young female entrepreneur who is dedicated to the work she is doing. She pays close attention to detail, and works closely with local indigenous communities to ensure that all the products she sells are of the highest quality. We are delighted that BAF II has contributed to 'Her Works' and wish Tookta continued success."

Ms Soudaphone 'Bee' Monesavanh,
BAF II Business Advisor

