

Empowering Dayaks through eco-fashion



Thriving together: Randi Julian Miranda (*second right*) meets with partners of Handep Haruei, an organization he founded to help empower marginalized Dayak communities in Kalimantan.

A NATIVE DAYAK, RANDI JULIAN MIRANDA, HAS ESTABLISHED A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE, HANDEP HARUEI, TO EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN REMOTE VILLAGES IN KALIMANTAN.

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Born and bred in Kalimantan, Randi Julian Miranda has witnessed how Dayak tribespeople have been left behind in the face of the rapid development attributed to massive palm oil expansion. Another acute issue is rampant illegal logging. Ironically, the development poses threats to local communities.

"The industry destroys the environment and doesn't empower local people," he says. Baffled, Randi always aspired to go beyond Kalimantan to learn.

Randi is a teacher by training. He majored in teaching English at the University of Palangka Raya in Central Kalimantan and he meant to make the best of his English language proficiency. "I had a dream of going and working abroad one day."

After finishing his studies, he landed jobs in various NGOs that advocated forest conservation as well as sustainable farming and fishing for local communities. Randi, a member of the Bakumpai Dayak sub-ethnic group but who speaks several other sub-ethnic dialects, would be posted in the communications departments that allowed him to go villages and interact with local people.

During his years working with NGOs, he observed how the extractive megaprojects spurred economic growth but left the Dayak people in backwardness. They also had to live with the ruined environment.

"Until today local residents have become the object of environmental projects, such as forest conservation and reforestation."

Randi understands that many nonprofit programs come to remote villages in Kalimantan with good intentions. Most of them introduce completely new concepts, like carbon offsets, which local communities find hard to comprehend.

"Besides, there has been no carbon offset program with tangible outputs for locals in Indonesia."

Major NGOs often come with detailed plans that people in villages are supposed to agree to and accept. In other words, the plans are not discussed with the local people who will supposedly benefit from them in the first place. They are mostly short-term programs, which run for two or four years until the NGOs leave.

The locals take longer to understand the unfamiliar concepts, like carbon offsets or e-commerce marketing. By the time they can identify with them, the projects are already done and the organizations gone. That is why many projects have failed to work in the longer term, Randi reckons.

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Go big and go home

Randi spent his childhood in the small town of Puruk Cahu in Central Kalimantan. His parents were farmers and traditional gold miners. Despite growing up in a working class family, he was always passionate about higher education.

After applying for several scholarships to the United States and Europe, he won a scholarship in environmental studies, specializing in rural development in the University of Melbourne in 2017.

During his college years, Randi developed the idea of establishing a social enterprise to help empower local people in Kalimantan. He shared his idea with his college friend from Kalimantan, Liza Apriani, who soon joined the organization. They pulled in more friends to join the project; all of them happen to be Dayak.

"Our team members are Dayak folks who have traveled the world and returned home and got connected with each other," says Randi. "[We] want to thrive together with local communities and find solutions to make the villages sustainable."

After finishing his master's degree in Australia, he returned to his homeland with a commitment to giving back to his community. In December, he officially established Handep Haruei, or "brotherhood collaboration" in Dayak Ngaju dialect.

He envisions the social enterprise as a platform to help local communities in Kalimantan, which enables him to listen, understand and respect them. Once he and the locals are on the same wavelength, they can find common ground on how to advance the communities.

Randi seeks to take a bottom-up approach and let the locals determine the programs. "We want local people to do the projects that they really need. Handep can be an alternative way to work together with locals."

Handep, which has 88 partners in four villages in Central Kalimantan, coordinates local people to harvest wild rattan and weave it into eco-fashion products, like bags or hats, which have long been part of the culture of the local communities. Handep is also aiming to promote fairer trading system for its workers.

Randi, who won a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Academic Fellows Program fellowship in 2018, has been building networks with his friends from Southeast Asian countries to promote Handep. Their products are sold to other countries, like Brunei Darussalam and in big cities, like Denpasar and Jakarta.

Gender inequality

During his master's program in Australia, Randi delved into gender studies. He started to notice how



Shared dreams: As leader of the Handep Haruei, Randi Julian Miranda (*right*) has the chance of interacting with people in Kalimantan's hinterland who are yet to enjoy the fruits of development.

women in his village didn't have a voice, even within the household. Women rarely participate in decision making; they are bystanders. Seeking to change this situation, he wants Handep to help empower women by teaching them how to make money.

"I am motivated to support and lift up women's dignity so they can participate in the way that they want," Randi says.

One of Handep's many goals is to empower women to be independent financially. The women are also regularly informed about their rights to use and manage their income.

"We tell them, 'This is your income. You can use it for yourself and your children,'" says Randi. "We're applying gender equality values there."

Local women mostly work as weavers and men as rattan harvesters. Some women whose husbands have a disability or who are living as a single parent, do the harvesting, too. Nevertheless, some men have an exceptional talent for weaving.

There is one male worker who can weave really well, but he stopped weaving after being sneered at as *banci* (transvestite). Randi has tried to persuade him not to waste his talent.

"I told him, 'This is a very unique and amazing work of art. You don't need to be ashamed. If other men can only harvest the wild rattan but can't weave, that means you are unique,'" says Randi recalling a conversation with the man.

Across the villages, there are three men who can

weave well, Randi notes, but they are still reluctant to join the weaving team. They prefer to make rattan bags and baskets inside their house where nobody else can see them.

"We want to develop a team of male artisans," says Randi. "We plan to put them into one team so they don't need to feel shy."

He plans to expand the business to include agricultural products like coffee, cacao, herbs, and spices, from plantations in the jungle. He hopes Handep can set an example for those wanting to help other rural areas in Indonesia.

The lifestyle of villagers, which focuses little on technology and wealth, shouldn't be seen as backward, he insists. Just like how the urban life is appreciated, more people should affirm and respect the indigenous culture, which allows locals to live in harmony with nature and value other things than money.

The younger generation, therefore, should carefully examine what development and success actually means, Randi adds.

"In a capitalistic society, we think that money making is the ultimate success but if I can give you a piece of advice: go beyond monetary success. At the end of the day, we don't take our wealth into the grave. It's the impact that you make that shapes how people will remember you."

— PHOTOS COURTESY OF RANDI JULIAN MIRANDA

TALK OF THE WEEK

RI OFFERS 673 DARMASISWA SCHOLARSHIPS TO FOREIGNERS

Jakarta

Indonesia, the most populous country in Southeast Asia, is offering more than 600 scholarships to students from 105 countries to study in Indonesia for the academic year 2019-2020, the Education and Culture Ministry announced recently.

The scholarship is called the DARMASISWA program and is offered to foreign students to study in Indonesia for 10 to 12 months in 71 universities across Indonesia. This year, the government has offered the scholarship to 673 students from 105 countries.

"The main purpose of the DARMASISWA program is to promote and increase interest in the language, art and culture of Indonesia among youth of other countries. It has also been designed to produce stronger cultural links and understanding among participating countries," the Education and Culture Ministry's bureau of planning and international co-

operation head, Suharti, said in a statement posted on the ministry's website.

The recipients of DARMASISWA for the year 2018-2019 attended the closing ceremony in Surakarta, Central Java, earlier this week.

"I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Indonesian government for giving me the DARMASISWA scholarship. I learned the Indonesian language at Atmajaya Catholic University in Jakarta. I enjoyed my stay in Indonesia and the Indonesian people are very friendly," Kadari Nagarjuna, a student from India, told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday.

The scholarship was first offered only to students from ASEAN countries in 1974. In 1976, Indonesia began to offer it to students from any country that has diplomatic relations with Indonesia. — JP



Courtesy of darmasiswa.kemdikbud.go.id

Strong woman: Andrea Rutkowski from Germany, a DARMASISWA Scholarship recipient, performs the *Retno Tinandhing* dance, portraying women fighting for the independence of Indonesia.



Courtesy of Kadari Nagarjuna

Sayonara: Recipients of 2018-2019 DARMASISWA scholarship (*from left*) Aisa Endo (Japan), Kadari Nagarjuna (India), Nozomi Imazeki (Japan) and Minori Sekizawa (*back right also pose*) for a photograph during the closing ceremony of DARMASISWA program in Surakarta, Central Java, recently.