

Making a Business out of Clay

Zurenawatte Zaidil is making money from clay. The owner of Heliconia Craft Collection in Kuching, Sarawak, produces beads made from clay and other ceramic products. The beads she produces are used to make chains, bangles, earrings and other ornaments based on customer preference

She said, "My designs are inspired by nature and based on contemporary market designs."

Zurenawatte said she did not know anything about beads previously but was interested to learn about it. That was how she ended up attending the Ceramic Bead Design Course conducted by SIRIM in 2008 and also an INKSEN course on the production of ceramic accessories. Heliconia Craft Collection was set up after she had completed the course in ceramic bead design. However, it was only in 2010 that she finally felt confident enough to introduce her products into the market at the Kuching Waterfront Expo organised by SIRIM. The good reception for her products gave her the impetus to proceed further with her business.

As with the early stage of all business, challenges were many for Zurenawatte, among which was market resistance to some of her products.

The market was not ready to receive ceramic beads. There was a lot of discouraging talk from people but I remain committed and remain determined to make products that will be of such a quality that it would one day be accepted in international markets.

Since then, Zurenawatte has gone to achieve several milestones in her entrepreneurial journey, among which were being included in Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM)'s 400 Successful Entrepreneurs list. Entrepreneurs in the list will be visited by the Finance Minister.





The company was also selected to participate in FashionMATRADE 2016 and featured in the TV3 programme 'Nona'.

She is grateful for the financial and other assistance provided by the Government at the Federal and State levels. She said her initial capital in starting the business was a loan of RM1,000 from AIM. "Later on, I received an Incubator Grant from SIRIM. I started operating from the Ceramics Centre after obtaining additional capital from AIM. It was from here that the business started to develop. As the business was doing well, I obtained more financing from AIM to grow it further.

"I participated in the MIED-SIRIM Programme and also received assistance in the technical and promotional aspects of running my business. I also attended skills upgrading courses every year. The Sarawak branch of Kraftangan Malaysia provided assistance in the form of design enhancement and promotion even up to now.

Other agencies that provided various forms of assistance – financial, training, guidance – included Sarawak Craft Council, INSKEN, MARA, UPUIH, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industries (MOA), KEMAS, SEDC, Sarawak Tourism and SME Corp. Malaysia.

Having travelled thus far in her business, Zurenawatte is still going strong and hopes to realise her dream of seeing her products being recognised in international markets.

What is her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs?

"If you aspire to be an entrepreneur, go ahead, give it a shot but give all your best. There are a lot of twists and turns in business but we must never give up. Challenges are normal in doing business and if we persist, we will succeed."

