



# GRAISEA STORIES OF CHANGE

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## Empowering women through the mentorship programme: The case of the Fisherfolk Enterprise



COVER PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GLOWACKI

In many communities in Southeast Asia, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are driving local development and growth. Given that they make up 74 percent of all the jobs in the region, it is not surprising that SMEs contribute 41 percent of the GDP of ASEAN economies.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the impetus to scale up these businesses, including social enterprises (SEs) like the women-led Fisherfolk Enterprise, lies in the recognition of the key roles they play in improving the livelihoods of smallholders, especially women.

However, small businesses are prone to collapse because of lack of access to finance and underdeveloped logistics and management systems.<sup>2</sup> With this as a premise, the Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia (GRAISEA) programme and ChangeFusion launched the Global Impactors Network (GIN) in 2015.<sup>3</sup> GRAISEA is a regional programme funded by the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, while ChangeFusion is a Bangkok-based organization that works with social entrepreneurs to promote sustainable change.

GIN is a mentorship programme that aims to be an empowering platform for early-stage enterprises that employ women, source products from women

producers, and provide benefits for women in the agriculture sector. By providing nonfinancial support and linkage to human resources from volunteer-based business professionals, GIN has pioneered a new social investment mechanism that channels the expertise of businesses to social entrepreneurs. This nonfinancial element can significantly support SE incubators, accelerators, and SE/SME network organizers in the Southeast Asian region.

In less than three years, GIN has created a networked pool of more than 200 mentors—at least 60 of whom have been actively supporting more than 10 enterprises in Thailand and Indonesia. The support ranges from product development to marketing and sales channels, sales strategy, organizational development strategy, and fundraising.

### IN FOCUS: MENTOR INSPIRED TO MAKE LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Suponchai Keeratikajohn served as one of the mentors of the Fisherfolk Enterprise. Prior to joining GIN, he was the client solution manager at Facebook Thailand, where he specialized in online

marketing. Also an entrepreneur, Suponchai runs his own online watch shop.

Suponchai saw GIN as an opportunity to contribute to society, and became interested in participating in volunteer programmes that would allow him to gain new experiences and meet new people. GIN was a perfect match for Suponchai, as he was able to contribute his professional skills to social causes aligned with his interests.

**AS A MENTOR, SUPONCHAI HELPED ANALYZE FISHERFOLK’S CUSTOMER BASE USING SPECIALIZED TOOLS, SUCH AS FACEBOOK ANALYTICS. TOGETHER WITH OTHER MENTORS WITH EXPERTISE IN CONTENT CREATION AND RETAIL CHANNEL CONNECTIONS, THE TEAM PRODUCED A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY COVERING CHANNEL EXPANSION AND NEW DIRECTION FOR ONLINE MARKETING TO RAISE SALES.**

**THE TEAM ALSO HELPED FACILITATE THE PLANNING AND PROVIDED INPUTS FOR THE ENTERPRISE’S MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION MATERIAL PRODUCTION.**

As Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms in Thailand, Suponchai reckoned that his knowledge would be useful for other social enterprises as well. He therefore led a workshop on online marketing catered to the specific needs of social enterprises, which was well-received by the participants.

Even after GIN ended, Suponchai and a few other mentors volunteered to further help Fisherfolk by providing consultations on online marketing. Inspired by the potential of GIN and realizing the need for nonfinancial assistance among social enterprises, Suponchai became a part-time consultant for other social enterprises.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE GLOBAL IMPACTORS NETWORK

### BASIC STRUCTURE



**NETWORK HOLDER AND BROKERING AGENT**  
Designs and facilitates the adoption and expansion of GIN through partnering BDS\* provider



**PARTNERING BDS PROVIDERS (INCUBATORS, ACCELERATOR, SE/SME NETWORK ORGANIZERS)**  
Work with CF\* to source and develop pipelines of women-focused enterprises in agricultural supply chains across the region



**VOLUNTEERS, RECRUITERS, AND MANAGERS**  
Work with CF and/or partnering BDS provider to acquire good quality mentors, organize team building activities, follow up work and progress with mentors, and manage expectations and satisfaction of mentors



**MENTORS (IMPACTORS)**  
A network of individual volunteer-mentors who are selected to participate in one or more mentorship project



**WOMEN-FOCUSED ENTERPRISES**  
CF and partnering BDS identify potential enterprises that will benefit from support, develop a pipeline, then arrange with partnering BDS provider to initiate a mentorship process



**THE PRACTITIONERS’ HUB**  
GIN is accumulating cases and experiences from the increasing number of Impactors and their projects

### BASIC MENTORSHIP PROCESS



**1 SOURCING OF WOMEN ENTERPRISES**  
Identification of women’s enterprises with potential impact and scale as beneficiaries



**2 MENTORSHIP PROJECT PLANNING AND INITIATION**  
Initiation of mentorship project (which will run from 3 to 6 months)



**3 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF IMPACTORS**  
Recruitment of mentors



**4 ORIENTATION EVENT AND TEAM PLANNING**  
Orientation and team forming



**5 GROUP WORK AND GROUP MEETINGS**  
Team work and meetings



**6 MID-TERM REFLECTION EVENT**  
Sharing of progress and feedback, and refining solutions



**7 CLOSING EVENT**  
Delivery of the solution (analysis, suggestions, plan) to the enterprise



**8 EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT**  
Evaluation and assessment of the impact generated by GIN

ICONS CREATED BY: Кирилл Конох, Kat TP, Stephen Borengasser, Aneeqe Ahmed, Gregor Cresnar, Brennan Novak, Nikita Kozin, Vectors Market, Jellycons, Massupa Kaewgahya, Bharat, Mike Zuidgeest, and Dmitry Podluzny (Project Noun)

\*BDS = business development services; CF = ChangeFusion



### **WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISE AS THE PIONEER OF CHANGE**

Since its inception, GIN has directly reached different enterprises in the agribusiness sector that employ women and their families. One of these enterprises is the Fisherfolk Enterprise, a women-led enterprise that started as a response to the growing environmental and economic challenges of local fishing communities in Prachuap Khirikhan province in Thailand. Ninety-five percent of the workers in its processing division are women. They are regularly trained in skills such as fish slicing, packaging, and handling. The improvement in product quality through these trainings contributes to an increase in sales, which translates to an increase in women's income.

The local business system of fishing in Thailand involves fishers selling their daily catch to businesses that either invest in their fishing boat or provide loans. This arrangement, however, prevents fishers from selling their catch to other vendors, and allows businesses to regulate the price of the catch. Together with Oxfam, the Thai Sea Watch Association, and ChangeFusion, Fisherfolk was able to provide an alternative seafood value chain model and expand the enterprise's market to Bangkok.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to joining GIN, Fisherfolk established a fair price structure, in which they pay fishers 5–20 percent more than the local fish market. With the price structure already in place, GIN helped Fisherfolk establish strategies to expand sales, so that they would be able to purchase their catch in larger amounts, thus raising the fishers' income.

Through GIN, Fisherfolk has been able to create and implement marketing strategies that have been tested in and adapted to changing environments. Currently, the enterprise operates in four areas (Prachuab Khirikhan, Nakorn Srithammarat, Satun, and Patthalung) and supplies products to urban consumers and to Lemon Farm, an organic supermarket chain

■ **CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR WOMEN.** As part of the GRAISEA programme, women members of the Fisherfolk Enterprise are trained in product development and enterprise management, among other skills. (Photo by Michael Glowacki)

### **THROUGH GIN, FISHERFOLK HAS BEEN ABLE TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT MARKETING STRATEGIES THAT HAVE BEEN TESTED IN AND ADAPTED TO CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS.**

that serves as Fisherfolk's major trading partner. GIN also successfully linked Fisherfolk with the BKIND mutual fund that promotes social projects.<sup>5</sup> Fisherfolk was granted working capital of \$14,700 to facilitate purchasing from the community.

While directly connecting with customers through online platforms such as Line and Facebook, Fisherfolk has also expanded its market by engaging individual distributors in Bangkok, in continued partnership with Lemon Farm. Through Line, the enterprise was able to incorporate door-to-door delivery as part of its services, which further increases its sales.



■ **FISHERFOLK'S RESPONSIBLE FISHERY PRACTICES.** By advocating for small-scale responsible fishery practice within the network and, at the same time, acting as a fair-trade purchaser of their catch, Fisherfolk aspires to prove that a responsible aquaculture business is viable. (Photo by Michael Glowacki)

## CRITICAL FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF GIN



**COMMITTED MENTORS**  
with diverse expertise and connections to resource networks



**PROJECT PIPELINE THAT PRESENTS INTERESTING CHALLENGES TO MENTORS**, and the entrepreneurs themselves are devoted and responsive to the mentors' advice



**EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT FACILITATION OF THE INTERACTION** among mentors and entrepreneurs to ensure progress and the delivery of targeted results



**EFFECTIVE IMPACT TRACKING** to present solid evidence to engage other organizations and private sector actors



**SHARING OF EXPERIENCE AND INSIGHTS** among different implementers of GIN to facilitate mutual learning and modification of the process for better results

ICONS CREATED BY: Guilherme Furtado, Eucalypt, Gregor Cresnar, Vectors Market, and Vectoriconset10 (Project Noun)

### PROSPECTS AND LESSONS LEARNED IN GIN

ChangeFusion, through GIN, has supported many different SMEs and SEs over the course of the GRAISEA programme. GIN can grow and learn from this experience with enterprises like Fisherfolk and many others. Continuity of the mentorship over time is a primary challenge, as each mentorship project lasts only three months. In order to see sustainable results, enterprises need more time to adapt and make changes based on their strategy.

For Fisherfolk, for instance, any change that might have an impact on the communities, such as the reduction of the cost of a product, needs to be consulted and agreed upon by communities and local fisherfolk associations. Therefore, continuous engagement of mentors over a longer period will be useful to effectively support the development of an enterprise.

GIN can also be a launchpad for enterprises to work with other partners. For Grassroots Innovation Network, another enterprise supported by GIN, leveraging its work through transformational partnerships will enrich its understanding of other innovations, skills, and techniques that will increase women's participation and decision making in economic activities.

GIN continues to assist BDS providers to effectively leverage external professional support, which, in turn, helps enterprises in their networks. This way, BDS providers are able to support more enterprises without the need to significantly expand their internal resources.

As a move forward, GIN will also focus its supporting agenda on women's economic empowerment, which is mostly missing from the BDS provider operating space. By presenting economic opportunities that align women's needs with societal/environmental needs, ChangeFusion and Oxfam aim to empower women and improve the quality of their lives.

<sup>1</sup> Leoncio, L. (2016, May 15). Experts: SMEs largely untapped in ASEAN bloc. *The Market Monitor*. <http://marketmonitor.com.ph/experts-smes-largely-untapped-asean-bloc/>.

<sup>2</sup> Medalla, E.M. and M.C. Mantaring. 2017. Mainstreaming SMEs: Promoting inclusive growth in APEC. Quezon City, Philippines: PIDS. <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1749.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about GIN, please contact Chitpong Kittinaradorn at [chitpong@change fusion.org](mailto:chitpong@change fusion.org).

<sup>4</sup> Karnjana, K. (2015, August 20). Fishing for ethical business. *The Bangkok Post*. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/print/662872/>.

<sup>5</sup> BKIND is a mutual fund that gives a certain percentage of its management fee to social projects and SEs like Fisherfolk. The fund is managed by BBL Asset Management, with the grant-making activities co-managed by ChangeFusion and the Khonthai Foundation.



Meeting of Fisherfolk members. (Photo by Michael Glowacki)

GRAISEA is a regional programme funded by the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok. It aims to improve the livelihoods of women and men small-scale producers in Asia through responsible, gender transformative value chains and private sector investments.

For more information about the programme, contact the GRAISEA Programme Management Unit at [graisea.pmu@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:graisea.pmu@oxfam.org.uk).  
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