



Weaving the Calling Birds, MADE51 – Weaving towards aspirations and dreams

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WEAVE – women has been devoted to supporting women living in the camps and surrounding Thai villages since 1990. The goal of Fair Trade branch of WEAVE is to empower marginalized women living in the area and supporting them in making a fair income in a safe working environment. This is done through the art of weaving, sewing and embroidery. By promoting the preservation of ancient traditions and heritage, the women are able to work and practice through their cultural backgrounds. By crafting beautiful pieces, women in their communities are creating the path to better opportunities, for themselves, as well as for their families and next generations.

MADE51 is a branch of the UNHCR devoted to create a market for beautiful, hand-made crafts refugees create around the world. WEAVE – Fair Trade is a proud partner organization. In May, four artisans in camp 1 were working hard on the fabric used for the Calling Birds. The calling birds are part of one of the collections of MADE51, hand-made by eight different artisans, a mix of weavers, sewers and embroiders, together creating beautiful piece.



The calling bird



Baskets filled with the Calling Birds.

This entry is devoted to the four weavers living in camp 1, Karenni site 1, working on the fabric of the order, providing an insight into the life of the artisans and their hopes and dreams. The stories were shared while weaving the fabric.

Taw Meh:

Taw Meh arrived 10 years ago in Thailand after she was forced to flee her home in Burma because the Burmese army infiltrated in her village and because of the fighting happening in her area. She lives in the camp with her three children. Taw Meh is the main source of income in her household. Taw Meh says its can be challenging, to take care of food and supplies as well as for the children and the house.

Weaving is an important part of Taw Meh's life. She learned how to weave from her mother when she was young. Her mother was a weaver next to working in the field, where she used to plant rice and other crops. Taw Meh expresses the culture significance of weaving through their traditions of wearing their own made clothing. Sarongs, or their Karenni red customs is what they used to always wear.



Taw Meh, weaving from her home

Taw Meh was asked to join WEAVE when she was in the school. She happily said yes, as at that point in time she did not have a job or income. WEAVE has supported Taw Meh in the ability to make an income and to provide for her family. She also has the chance to improve her weaving skills when she participates in the trainings through the program. Next to orders from WEAVE, sometimes she sells her hand-made crafts ordered by other people living in the camp.

Taw Meh wishes to improve her weaving skills even further in the future. She wants to learn all about the more complicated and difficult patterns. Her dream is to make and design all kinds of weaving products for selling, so she can have her own hand-made woven clothing shop.

Naw Meh

Naw Meh arrived in Thailand in 1999. She lives here with her four children and her husband. Naw Meh is the 'breadwinner' of the family. She joined WEAVE in 2015/2016 Her husband goes to the jungle sometimes to work, though the main income comes from her. As the income generator, she is self-reliant, which enables Naw Meh to decide where it income goes to.

Naw Meh learned how to weave by observing her mother. She laughs as she expresses that her mother used to tell her not to disturb her, she would then collect the left-over threads from her mother and make her own creations. Weaving is an inherent part of the Karenni culture, she explains. Majority of the Karenni people know how to weave to a certain extend. The traditional Karenni clothing is hand-made woven. She makes the sarongs, the Karenni customs and shirts herself as well.



Naw Meh weaving in her house. You can always catch her with a smile

Naw Meh is positive about the WEAVE program and joining, she mentions that the program encourages preserving the skills of weaving. It is important to learn this through the generation and continue this skills for life. Not only for cultural significance, but also to preserve a stability in being able to provide for the family. In the future, Naw Meh wants to improve her weaving skills, she wants to learn more patterns. She wants to share the skill with her children as well. She expresses the high value of sharing the skill within the community.

Taw Meh

Taw Meh left her village in Burma in 1998. She expresses that it was not safe for them anymore to live there, because of the many cases of exploitation and fighting in the area she lived in. Taw Meh lives in the camp with her three children and her husband. She joined the WEAVE program two to three years ago.

Her husband works for environmental community based organization and makes a monthly income, though it is not enough to support the family so the income from the weaving is essential to be able to buy food for everyone. On occasion, she uses some extra money to buy some snacks for her children.



Taw Meh

Taw Meh already knew how to weave in the village where she was born. She learned it when she was around 17 years old. Her aunt and neighbour taught her. When she joined the program, she was able to get more training and get more skilled in weaving. Taw Meh is happy to work with WEAVE. She explained that it helps the community a lot, the income they can generate, creates a better life for the families. In the future, Taw Meh's biggest wish is for her children to have good education. She wants to earn enough money to be able to send her children to a good school, to better life, generation through generation.

Say Meh

Say Meh arrived in Thailand in 2002, she had to leave her village for exploitation from the Burmese army and unsafe living conditions. She lives in the camp with her three children and husband. Say Meh is the main income generator of the family. Her husband is camp security. Say Meh is glad to be the income generator of the family. She is able to decide where the income goes to, she mainly uses it for food for the family and for the education of her children.

Say Meh learned how to weave when she grew up. Though her mother at first discouraged her to get into weaving, as she believed that other jobs would provide more income. Though when she arrived in Thailand, she needed a blanket for her child. She wanted to make it herself and learned herself how to WEAVE step by step. She joined the WEAVE program to be able to get skilled at weaving.



Say Meh weaving in her house

She is glad that she joined WEAVE. As for now, their family depends on the orders of weaving. In the past, she explained, they were doing pig and chicken raising, though it was not stable enough as there was no food for the animals, sometimes the animals died. The program benefits women and their families in general. Being able to generating your own income, made them to worry less about the near future. Next to income, she also enjoys being able to take part in the training, to become an expert weaver in the future. Her ultimate dream is for her children to get well educated. She wants to see her children have better jobs and eventually become leaders of the community.