

Press release

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## Weavers chip in to fight COVID-19 pandemic

*- Maybank Women Eco-Weavers produces handwoven masks to combat spread of virus*

Some 250 women weavers in Cambodia under the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme in collaboration with Colorsilk, a social business for Cambodian weavers are aiming to produce over 110,000 handwoven face masks made of pure cotton and silk to help limit the spread of Covid-19 in the region.

The initiative which began early this year is also in support of easing the pressure on the demand for surgical masks which are primarily reserved for medical professionals and health care workers as well as to counter the increase in price of face masks within the region. To date, over 15,000 handwoven masks have been produced by the weavers, whereby 12,000 have been sold and 2,000 were donated to communities in Cambodia.

In Cambodia, a single-use surgical mask could easily cost as high as USD1.00 per piece in a country where a large percentage of people live below the poverty line and earn between USD1.25 to USD2.00 per day.

The three-ply handwoven cotton masks can be cleaned, reused and cost a minimum of USD0.65 and the silk woven masks are priced at USD1.50 per piece. The masks comes in both plain and a striped pattern known as Kroma which is unique to the Cambodian silk-weaving heritage.

CEO of Maybank Foundation, Shahril Azuar Jimin said that he is proud of the programme's effectiveness and the dedication displayed by the weavers.

“Amidst the difficult times we are all going through, it is heartening to see our weavers going the extra mile, doing their part to contain the spread of the virus by producing these handcrafted face masks. This momentous effort by them goes to show that any one be it old, young, rich or poor can do their part to help each other in times of crisis.”

“It is also inspiring to see the impact of our investments in collective solutions for the communities we serve. Given the Foundation's mandate of investing in sustainable programmes regionally for long-term tangible benefits, we are happy that our programme is directly contributing to fighting the biggest threat the world is facing right now.” added Shahril.

Majority of the weavers are graduates and trainees of the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme, a Maybank Foundation flagship programme that promotes traditional textile globally, in a sustainable manner whilst creating economic independence and financial inclusion for women weavers across the ASEAN region.

The face mask initiative also provides supplementary economic opportunities for the weavers and Cambodia's weaving communities in an effort to ensure fair pricing and protect the welfare of the people. From this initiative alone, the weavers are earning between USD200 - USD350 per month. The weavers are also currently receiving orders from countries such as Japan, Indonesia, USA and Taiwan.

Touch Eng, a graduate trainee of the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme said “I used to earn less than USD30 as a farmer while others made more working at factories. Since I participated in the face mask project, I am thankful that I am able to earn between USD250-USD280 and to also support my country in combatting the spread of the virus.”

El Ny, an experienced weaver of the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme said “I am quite lucky to be able to secure my family’s income during this challenging period. Many of the villagers who work in factories are struggling due to the impact of Covid-19. I am thankful that I can earn up to USD320 per month from this face mask project. My husband used to question my decision about working as a weaver but now he has given his full support.”

The face masks are also currently sold online via the ColorSilk Facebook page and at ColorSilk shops in Phnom Penh.

Following the success of this initiative by the Cambodian women weavers, the programme has also inspired Indonesian entrepreneurs under the Maybank “Reach Independence & Sustainable Entrepreneurship” (R.I.S.E.) Programme to produce their very own handwoven face masks for Indonesia.

The Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme is currently running in four ASEAN countries, namely Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia and Laos. The eight training centres in these four countries have trained a total of over 600 women weavers and have also benefited its surrounding communities including more than 500 farmers of mulberry trees.

To date, the programme has positively impacted over 2,500 individuals across the value chain, in line with Maybank’s mission of humanising financial services in ASEAN.

Maybank Foundation is the corporate responsibility arm of the Maybank Group, which seeks to positively impact communities in markets that Maybank operates. The Foundation’s programs are focused on six key pillars which are Education, Community Empowerment, Healthy Living, Arts & Culture and Environmental Diversity.

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