

Young entrepreneurs  
& leaders speaker  
series

# WHAT NEXT?



Australian Government



AAC  
AUSTRALIA-ASEAN COUNCIL



SOCIAL GOOD  
OUTPOST

# Table of Contents

## Contents

3	About the report
3	About the ASEAN young entrepreneurs
6	Meet the entrepreneurs
13	Effect of COVID-19 on their businesses
14	Challenges and opportunities looking ahead
16	What support do they need?
17	What's next? What's the big dream?
21	About Social Good Outpost

*Published by Social Good Outpost June 2021, as part of public diplomacy program the Young Entrepreneurs Leaders & Speakers Series 2019-2021.*

Roundtable video recordings are accessible on-demand at <https://socialgoodoutpost.com/what-next-young-entrepreneurs-leaders-speaker-series/>



## About the report

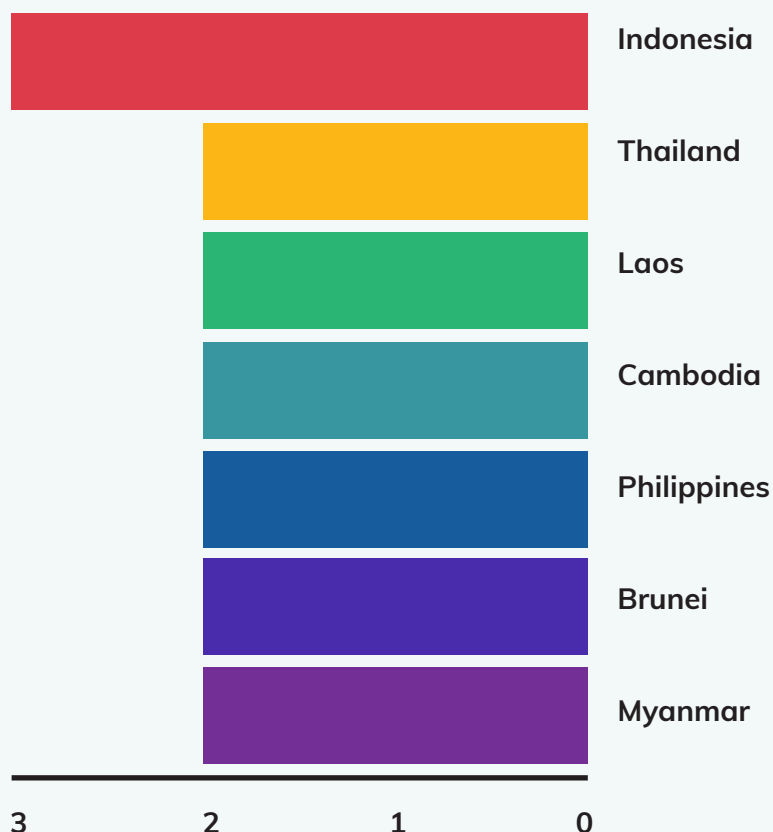
The Young Entrepreneurs & Leaders Speaker Series has now run over 70 events across ASEAN since 2019, connecting with over 5000 individuals in our region. Under the Australia-ASEAN Council 2020-2021 alone, we have run 22 events.

This report summarises findings from a series of 7 roundtables held in May and June 2021 across Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and the Philippines. Given that COVID-19 has caused all kinds of disruption for young entrepreneurs in Australia and ASEAN, and changed the very shape of the programs and public diplomacy events we have run, the roundtables – and report – explores:

*How has COVID-19 changed what young entrepreneurs and leaders in the region do, how have they adapted, what have been the big opportunities and challenges, and **what's next?***

## About the ASEAN young entrepreneurs

Number of young entrepreneurs involved in the roundtables, by location:





*Just under half of the entrepreneurs (6 out of 15) interviewed had started a new business during COVID.*

**< 5 yrs**

*Most had started their business in the last 5 years.*

**58% social enterprise**

*All had some kind of social purpose or drive, with eight (58%) explicitly identifying as social enterprises.*

**Among reasons for starting their enterprises was:**

**Desire for the lifestyle it brought**

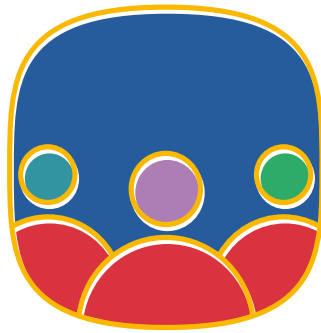
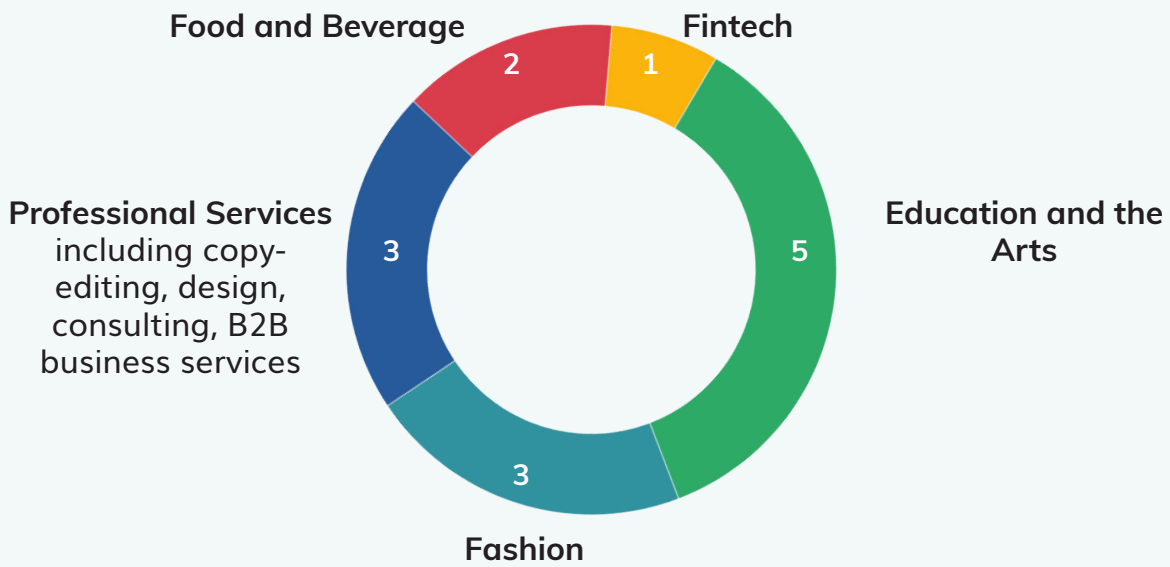
(greater autonomy or freedom, escape the '9-5' work mode or greater earning potential)

**Financial need**

**Emancipatory or empowerment potential for their wider community**

**Time – COVID allowing some time to develop, think and create**

## Industries broadly included:



*A majority of the entrepreneurs work alone or with one other, however a few whom took part had teams of staff (5+).*



*A third (5 out of 15) of entrepreneurs had either started by doing business in Australia, with Australians, or with support of Australian funding.*

# Meet the entrepreneurs



## LAOS

*Toomkham Phoungmachan,*

***Business Development Consultant***

More than 10 years in banking and finance and 5 years as an entrepreneur, former CEO and founder of iCare Benefits Laos involving more than 245 Orgs with 45,000 employees joining the program, currently working with rural agricultural entrepreneurs in Laos.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/toomkham-phoungmachan-58927764/>



## LAOS

*Visouda (Anna) Viravong,*

***CEO and Founder, Wine Haus Laos***

I was born and raised here in Laos and graduated high school from Vientiane International School. After my higher education studies in Melbourne, Australia; I have worked and owned several other businesses of my own in Melbourne before moving back to Vientiane two years ago.

My long-standing passion and love for natural and organic wines has currently led me to becoming the CEO and founder of my own boutique wine store Wine Haus Laos. Starting Wine Haus Laos, has sparked the passion that has been buried deep inside of me for a while until recently when I decided to launch a consultancy company A&G Consultancy Firm - that helps people to build and develop businesses/brands that are memorable, profitable and inspiring.

<https://www.instagram.com/winehaus.laos/>



## PHILIPPINES

*Wilson Limon Jr,*

***Founder, NIÑOFRANCO***

Bringing our roots and heritage to a societal integration in this modern times through fashion has been NIÑOFRANCO's lifelong vision. We envision of transforming a western-minded Philippines into a culturally-enriched nation that gives livelihood to individuals and communities who safe kept the true art of Philippines.

<https://ninofrancoph.com/>



## PHILIPPINES

*Angel Abellana,*

***Founder, Phenomenal Filipina***

Angel "Ey" Abellana is a Geodetic Engineer, writer, digital marketer, an engineering instructor, and an entrepreneur. She is the Incubation Coordinator of the University of Southeastern Philippines - AGILab Tech&Business Incubator. She also served as the ASEAN Regional Director of ASEAN Abundance Innovation Lab, mentoring and implementing hundreds of campaigns and enterprises with various causes ranging from environmental to civic to business development around ASEAN, USA, Japan and Australia. She specializes in the startup ideation stage and promoting entrepreneurial mindset as drivers for social change.

With no grant fund, a degree in Communications, or networks in the field...Angel started her copywriting and sales business called Phenomenal Filipina in 2019. From a startup with a 200-USD revenue to a 6-figure business, a staff of 5 and a name for herself...Angel managed to grow her remote business even during the pandemic. Her ultimate dream is to provide jobs for Filipinos while continuously adventuring around the world.

<https://www.facebook.com/Phenomenal-Filipina-2099090630126398/>





## THAILAND

**Matcha Phorn-In,**  
***Executive Director and Founder,***  
***Sangsan Anakot Yaowachon***

Matcha is a lesbian Feminist Human Rights Defender, committed with a strong passion to build peoples' movements to advance human rights, Gender and SOGIESC justice. She has over 15 years of experience working to empower young people and those from the most marginalised communities, including LGBTIQ, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, young women and girls, stateless, undocumented refugees, sex workers, disability and migrant workers.

Matcha has been recognised by the United Nations and is the Executive Director of Sangsan Anakot Yaowachon, a civil society organization working with young people from marginalized communities, many of whom are indigenous, in disaster-prone Thai villages at the border with Myanmar.

<https://www.facebook.com/saydpthailand/>



## THAILAND

**Wipaphan Nana Wongsawang,**  
***Thaiconsent and Coconut Empire***

Wipaphan Nana Wongsawang launched Thaiconsent since 2015, in order to make awareness of gender-based violence and consensual sex through art and creative community,

The primary mission of Thaiconsent is to promote the concept of 'consensual sex' and awareness to Thai society. In addition, Thaiconsent is tasked by various education institutions and NGOs to provide leadership in education and mentorship programs to tackle gender injustice and discrimination.

From 2020-2021, we have collaborated with over

30 volunteers in various 5-6 months programs to design education tools and tech-based platforms to provide support on areas, such as healthy relationship, safe sex, positive sex, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence.

In 2021-2022, we would like to expand Thaiconsent group goal to include demographics from the tech and law industries to find a solution on 'how technologies can help achieve better results in tackling gender justice and domestic violence'. Our long-term mission is to create a skillful network of various professionals who care about gender justice and empower them to make appropriate changes that will have sustainable impact in our society. Currently, Thaiconsent is registered as a company limited with over 51,000 followers on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/saydpthailand/>



## CAMBODIA

*Celia Boyd,*

***Co-Founder, SHE Investments***

Celia is a co-founder of SHE Investments, Cambodia's first business incubator and accelerator that applies a gender and cultural lens. Since launching SHE almost 7 years ago, the social enterprise has grown from 3 co-founders to a team of over 35 across 5 provinces, and become a leading organisation supporting women entrepreneurs to scale and create economic, social and environmental impact for communities.

Celia's background is in international development, having worked with projects across gender, health, microfinance, disaster recovery and economic development with communities in Cambodia, Kenya, Australia and Papua New Guinea. She has been based in Cambodia for the past

6.5 years, focusing on building SHE Investments and specialising in women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship. Celia has a Masters degree in Community and International Development, and in 2017 was selected as an Australian-ASEAN Emerging Leader by the Australian Prime Minister's Cabinet.

In 2019, SHE Investments was selected as one of 18 top emerging Incubators across 18 countries in SE Asia by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) program, Frontier Incubators. In 2021, Celia is stepping back as Managing Director of SHE in Cambodia, handing over leadership to an amazing Khmer women who will continue to lead the team forwards in Cambodia, whilst Celia will focus on SHE's vision of supporting women-led MSMEs to scale across the region.

<https://www.sheinvestments.com/>



## CAMBODIA

*Kek Soon aka Gechsoun Khun,*

***founder of Fish Island Community Arts Centre***

Khun Gechsoun is founder of the Fish Island Community Arts Centre where she has opened her own hospitality school and offers free training in cuisine, tourism, arts & crafts, and English language classes to youth from surrounded fishing and farming villages on Trey Koh. Soon was born and raised in Kampot and grew in a poor family whom she supported by cleaning fishing boats and selling cakes door to door.

As a teenager she was sent to board in Phnom Penh then Malaysia where she worked as a maid while also learning 4 languages and gaining certificates in baking. Upon returning to Cambodia she opened her own restaurant and in 2014 launched KAMA a popular cafe and arts venue in Kampot.

Soon was quickly recognised for her entrepreneuring ventures including her Kek Soon Cuisine & Culture tours and her work as Cambodian producer of the Kampot Readers &





Writers Festival.

In 2017 she was talent spotted by Canadian chef Christopher Mark of Black Sheep Restaurants and soon travelled to Hong Kong to work with this highly successful restaurant group. The same year Soon was awarded a World Tourism Star award and travelled to Lucerne, Switzerland to accept her award and speak at World Tourism Forum. Soon stayed on in Switzerland and brought together supporters for her new venture, the launch of FICAC, through her own cooking demonstrations. Since 2018, Soon has managed her own cooking school and has continued to build FICAC with plans set to launch a Media Arts school in 2022.

She is also a mother and practising artist with several exhibition of her unique wood block prints and paintings to her credit. Soon continues to work with a passion to share her skills and knowledge and inspire young Cambodians, especially girls and women, to strive and achieve their dreams in life.

<https://www.facebook.com/Fish-Island-Community-Arts-Centre-633877516816332/>



## INDONESIA

*Amanda Vania and Andrea Vania,*  
*founders of Andara*

ANDARA was established in December 2020. The name of this clothing brand, ANDARA, means the light of beauty. We named our business hoping that ANDARA will bring out the shine of women's beauty by providing comfortable and stylish clothes. We targeted women from 17-25 years old.

We connect with our customers online and create a promotional plan that takes advantage of social media to shape the conversation, build loyalty, and attracts new customers or partners.

We always try to make valuable content with high-quality pictures and editorial to give them a good experience and also to add value to our brand. We also observe our customers' interest through our social media to know what they attract these days so we can easily adapt to the new trend.

[https://www.instagram.com/andaraofficial\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/andaraofficial_/)



## INDONESIA

Adrian Sugandhi,

*founder Sonicboom Indonesia*

Adrian Sugandhi is an entrepreneur in the tech industry with experience for more than 15 years in the industry across US and Indonesia. Currently, Adrian is the CEO and Co-Founder of Sonicboom Indonesia, a tech startup based in Jakarta, Indonesia, since 2018.

Adrian has also co-founded 2 other tech companies in various industries including sports and software companies that helps companies to digitize their businesses. Adrian previous experience also includes 7 years of experience as Senior Engineer at Broadcom Corporation in the USA and 3 years helping a team of researchers for DARPA Grand Challenge. He also graduated BS & MS in Computer Science and MS in Financial Engineering.

<https://www.instagram.com/sonicboom.tech/>







## BRUNEI

*Shiny Chia,*

*Co-founder, The Collective Art Events*

I am an entrepreneur and the co-founder of The Collective Art Events, one of Brunei's pioneering forces in the Creative Industries, as well as The Wildflower Cafe and The Makerspace, Brunei's first public creative workspace. I am also one of the founding partners of Community for Brunei, a BIBD CSR platform aimed at uniting and democratising NGO's and charitable causes/ activities across the nation.

I am very passionate about community building, and creativity as a force for change. My areas of interest for community work are primarily surrounding gender equality, animal rights, freedom of expression, and environmentalism.

In 2017 I was nominated by the United States Embassy to represent Brunei for the International Visitors Leadership Program where myself and other young leaders formed a 23 country wide Global Alliance dedicated to creating positive social change in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

I have been nominated twice, and won in 2018 Founder of The Year for the ARBS Awards and The Collective has been nominated as Best Life Helper and Startup Of The Year at the ARBS awards in previous years.

The Collective has worked on numerous events that aim to showcase arts and social causes in Brunei over the last 5 years.

<https://www.instagram.com/thecollectiveartevents/?hl=en>



## BRUNEI

*Nazurah Usop,*

*Artist, doodlesandcolors*

Nazurah Usop who goes by the pseudonym 'doodlesandcolors', is a visual artist and activist who explores expressions through shapes and colourful interpretations. She is also best described as an experimental, processed based abstract artist and enjoys adding a unique perspective to her work in hopes of making each piece memorable. Not only is she passionate in the arts, she also has high interests with human rights issues, specifically on the issues of the LGBT community.

<https://www.instagram.com/doodlesandcolors/?hl=en>



## Effect of COVID-19 on their businesses

For some, COVID-19 brought business closure or the winding down of products and services, whilst for others the pandemic dramatically increased demand for services, or offered the opportunity to pivot and offer new or improved services.

Whilst many took opportunities to transform their businesses to digital platforms, this was not possible in all cases. For instance, SHE Investments relies heavily on working in-person with women micro and small-medium entrepreneurs, often whom are in the informal economy and whom may have limited access to the technology required for online learning or financial help.

*“We had people out in the provinces who were using car batteries to charge their laptops, so that they can deliver business training to women who are trying to get their businesses to survive.” - Celia Boyd, SHE Investments, Cambodia*

For businesses that were already digital, COVID-19 often either brought no tangible change, or a boost in customers. However, the socially isolated nature of lockdowns across the region has taken a toll on employee or team mental health and connectedness. It has also put a strain on resources in the home and affected supply chains that have impacted on local business being able to do and produce what they need to.

## Tools, Techniques and Strategies to Overcome the Difficulties

### Reliance on networks:

- In particular, the entrepreneurs were often heavily reliant on pre-existing networks and contacts to ensure they had financial viability or continued support through COVID.

### Tightening the budget:

- In cases, this also relied on reducing employee income.

### Mentoring programs:

- Access to online programs, particularly supporting women entrepreneurs and women’s leadership, feature for a number of the entrepreneurs. These networks gave them spaces to air their challenges, explore solutions, network and connect with others in a similar situation, and learn new skills.

### **Building new audiences:**

- COVID-19 provided many opportunities for entrepreneurs to reach out to new audiences, either through quickly pivoting their product offering or through giving back to community doing it tough.

### **New financial partnerships and resources:**

- Particularly in the form of major partnerships from international organisations with a desire to support young or women's entrepreneurship, in particular, during COVID-19.

## **Challenges and opportunities looking ahead**

**Challenges are foreseen in growing the talent pool of digital-literate, savvy and exceptional staff.**

- Including developing the skills, capabilities and confidence of existing staff.

**Challenges exist in registering all business operations.**

- This is particularly difficult where country legislation is complex, tax and legal systems are unknown or challenging to navigate, or where legal structures do not support the type of business undertaken (for instance, a social enterprise business model and corresponding legal structure).

**Challenges surrounding accessing finance were common.**

- Including: barriers to accessing finance for business growth or property ownership, or meeting eligibility for grants and other funding schemes.

**Challenges existed in scaling and expansion, particularly around being internationally competitive, navigating export processes, and pricing competitively for international markets.**

- Challenges around being creative enough to meet the social media demand strongly recurred.
- In particular, navigating how businesses stayed relevant, at the top of social media platforms, and across multiple platforms.

**Challenges also exist in having goods or services seen as high quality and internationally desired.**

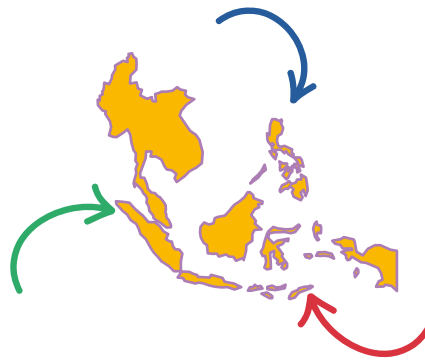
- The lack of a 'nation brand' was particularly evident in some countries, such as Laos, where some products have to be labelled as coming from Vietnam as the Laos national brand is not well-enough developed.





WHAT  
NEXT?

Opportunities include:



The burgeoning Southeast Asian region was seen as a major opportunity for businesses.



Digital native skills were seen as a key opportunity, particularly in developing highly flexible, adaptive and responsive E-Commerce.

US UK AUS

Interconnectivity between the ASEAN region was seen as an opportunity, but often not the end goal (with the US, UK, or Australia seen among desirable expansion/export opportunities).





## What support is needed next?

*"Up until recently, Australia was seen as a bit of a foreign land. I think we're seeing that change more as events like these are happening or more people are coming over... Those cultural exchanges really give people the opportunity to connect with each other and see how yeah, we're the same, but we're different, and I think there's a lot of opportunity for us to go both ways whether in creative industries or different industries here."*

*- Shiny Chia, Co-Founder, The Collective Art Events, Brunei*

- More exchange programs that allow young entrepreneurs in the region to meet, learn more, share and collaborate.
- Digital skills development.
- Financial and legal literacy or support.
- Funding to scale and grow nationally or internationally.
- Creative support to better market goods and services.
- Networking opportunities that allow entrepreneurs to meet other like-minded entrepreneurs.
- Policy structures to support social enterprise.

## Opportunities to engage with Australia

All entrepreneurs valued the link with Australia and most were keen to do business with or in Australia, if they were not already. Challenges included navigating the value of labour and goods and services, however this was also acknowledged as an opportunity. All supported greater Australian efforts to engage with the region, and regional advocacy for marginalised communities, including LGBTIQ+ and ethnic minorities.



## What's next? What's the big dream?

*"Everything starts from digital. Everything starts from there. And it trickles down to everything else. If we can get the right angle to come in, the right story to come in, there's still so much opportunity [for our business]."*

- Adrian Sugandhi, Sonicboom, Indonesia

*"Because we are Hijabis, we want to provide pretty clothes that can unite other Hijabis around the world. That's what I dream of."*

- Amanda Vania and Andrea Vania, Andara, Indonesia

*"We would love to have more artisans. Not just in Manila but all throughout the Philippines. I just started my home accessory line, and eventually be able to launch our furniture line. So we want to empower women by giving them the chance to earn and provide the basic needs of their family. That is why, we need to keep on innovating. And for now we focus on export."*

- Wilson Limon Jr, Founder, NIñOFranco, Philippines

*"Events that help you network and connect with people of other cultures. The ideas you get, one session can spark that idea. I've learned things that were never taught in the Philippines. And going to these countries you can see how people live, and that can really open your mind to so many things that you can do for yourself, for your people, that no matter how hard you try in your home country, in your home town, you would just never have that environment to be able to think of those ideas."*

- Angel Abellana, Phenomenal Filipina, Philippines







*"[What would help us most is] support and funding, or any grant - because even though we have the research, how can we actualise the research? Especially for us, we are working with artisans who need to get paid, we need support to make something that is an alpha base product."*

- Wilson Limon Jr, Founder, NIñOFranco, Philippines

*"In my business I am planning to look for investment. At the same time I work with a local trading company who are interested in buying the products from the farmers after processing and they will be a whole brand with a cooperative group in the North. We want to promote one or two particular products and do the branding and marketing and we aim to export to Vietnam, where we have a very good market.*

*We are looking at Australia as well. I know the quality of passionfruit there is not better than here. I want some Australian partners to promote agriculture in Laos. People trust Australian products, I want the same in Laos. I want to see Laos products in international markets."*

- Toomkham Phoungmachan, Business Development Consultant, Laos

*"What I want is more humans definitely! Recruiting experts - my marketing person, accountant, sales manager, product development person, all the administration work. My assistant is from an ethnic minority group and my kitchen staff are from ethnic minority groups and all women. Once I have the experts to focus on the business side of my companies I can focus on training my assistant because she's amazing, she's a single Mum. And to get mentoring for myself to train to be a better leader and let my leadership skills shine so I can come back to my company and help my employees as well."*

- Anna Viravong, Wine Haus Laos, Laos

*"You need to apply for the government to allow you to run any activity so I think this [new law] will kill all the work on the ground played by the marginalised groups and this is an early crisis for us but on the other hand we thought this will maybe be the other chance for us - [producing these handwoven textiles and garments] is an opportunity for us to try to make [paid work] possible for the indigenous women [through a non-profit organisation]. I see this as the turning point from inequalities to equalities. "*

- Matcha Phorn-In , Sangsan Anakot Yaowachon, Thailand

## WHAT NEXT?



*"I dream to see the fairer power distribution, power in decision making and in life, at the national level and in the world. I want to see people producing the technology or internet for fairer real distribution [of power], and I dream to see the people accessing the global economy without a middleman. It is important for people no matter where they live, what language they speak, to connect and trust each other and can support each other or exchange resources."*

- Wipaphan Nana Wongsawang, ThaiConsent, Thailand

*We're hoping to be the biggest arts centre in South East Asia so that people can visit us and join in. To bring in artists to share with the young Cambodians. The bigger dream, we want everyone to get success and host all the people coming from different countries to share the dream and create together.*

- Kek Soon, Fish Island Arts Centre, Cambodia

*"We want to continue growing so we can support women like Soon. She's driving so many solutions, looking after so many people and trying to help her community recover. We want to scale up and support as many women as possible to do that. At the end of the day she is the perfect example of people holding up the community and helping the community recover. What we need is people to really recognise the potential of that. [Women's] businesses tend to be smaller, more community focused, but they are literally the ones who are driving any economy and we need to really properly invest in them because in the years to come, they are going to be the ones who are helping us recover from this. It's not going to be the huge companies who are going to make it happen, it will be the micro to small informal economy that employs the majority of people across the region.*

- Celia Boyd, SHE Investments, Cambodia





*"We hope to cross the border and be able to do more work in the Asia Pacific region, including with Australia. Up until recently, Australia was seen as a bit of a foreign land. I think we're seeing that change more as events like these are happening or more people are coming over... Those cultural exchanges really give people the opportunity to connect with each other and see how yeah, we're the same, but we're different, and I think there's a lot of opportunity for us to go both ways whether in creative industries or different industries here."*

- Shiny Chia, Co-Founder, The Collective Art Events, Brunei

*"I'm going to keep creating and I'm going to keep having discussions about the [LGBT] community, and hopefully in 20 or 30 years, there won't be any internal fear anymore around this conversation we'll be having. That will be the dream, basically. Hopefully we'll also be able to have a solid platform that caters to the LGBT people as well.*

*I couldn't see myself having this conversation even online with anyone else in the region even in the past few years, but only now that we get a lot of people within the region having this conversation, it's going, it's going ever so slowly, but it's going."*

- Nazurah Usop, Artist, doodlesandcolors, Brunei





WHAT  
NEXT?



## About Social Good Outpost

Social Good Outpost (SGO) is an Australian strategic and creative communications studio involved in research, strategy and curation of international diplomacy programs and influential communications and creative campaigns. Founded in 2016 by two sisters, Lara Stephenson and Dr Elise Stephenson, Social Good Outpost is a women-led team, and proudly brings a young approach to this diplomacy program. SGO 'Curates' leads our public projects, creative diplomacy, strategy and events implementation. (for more, visit [www.socialgoodoutpost.com/curates](http://www.socialgoodoutpost.com/curates))

We're social entrepreneurs, designers, researchers and strategists who have fallen progressively more in love with the ASEAN region and its people, so we bring a lived commitment to developing Australia-ASEAN enterprise and leadership, with a particular focus on empowering women, LGBTIQ+ and connecting with and supporting Indigenous and ethnic minority communities.

Communications and Design: [www.socialgoodoutpost.com](http://www.socialgoodoutpost.com)

Curation and Public Diplomacy: [www.socialgoodoutpost.com/curates](http://www.socialgoodoutpost.com/curates)



Lara Stephenson



Elise Stephenson





# WHAT NEXT?

Young entrepreneurs  
& leaders speaker  
series

