

THREADS OF LIFE

January 2013 Newsletter

[Indonesian Textile Arts](#) | [Our Textiles](#) | [How to Buy](#) | [Other Products](#) | [Field Notes](#) | [Tours & Events](#) | [Blog](#)



Dear William,

December disappeared in a whirlwind of annual reports for Bebali Foundation donors and weeks of planning and budgeting for the 2013 field work season. And so I missed out on writing a newsletter and thus January's edition deals both with the last field trips of 2102 and the planning work for 2013. The Field Notes section discusses some sobering reminders of the state of development in many of the communities we work with, and some exciting progress towards addressing these issues through the weavers cooperatives with which Threads of Life works. The Field Work Review section looks at the issues we are addressing in Kalimantan and Lembata as examples of our 2013 planning process.



New Field Notes

Many men from traditional communities migrate, either permanently or for periods of several years at a time, to find work in construction or on palm oil plantations in Kalimantan and Malaysia. The social impacts of this economically driven migration are considerable, leaving some villages with almost no men. In an effort to address this issue within the villages where we work, both Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation have started working together with the husbands of the textile weavers to explore potential livelihood streams that utilize existing skills and under-utilized plant resources in new ways. Initially, we are researching non-cotton fiber-producing plants and new products using traditional basketry and twining skills. Although this is an apparent digression from our past focus on traditional products, it is clear that culture and community

(Left to right) Shibori indigo dyeing on Rai Jua; the Nek Mese weavers cooperative of Timor; preparing palm fibers for weaving

In This Issue

Ubud Writers Festival



About Threads of Life

Threads of Life is a fair trade business that uses culture and conservation to alleviate poverty in rural Indonesia. The heirloom-quality textiles and baskets we commission are made with local materials and natural dyes. With the proceeds from the [Threads of Life gallery](#), we help weavers to form independent cooperatives and to manage their resources sustainably.



Donate to
The Bebali
Foundation

traditional products, it is clear that culture and community cannot survive without new local income streams. Our first steps in this work have been in [Timor](#), and Werten's Field Notes from September describes this work.

A November trip to [Savu and Rai Jua](#) touched on many of the same issues. Here, the pressures are environmental and governmental. After 13 months without rain, the landscape was parched and plant resources depleted. The weavers on Savu have struggled to keep young Morinda dye trees alive through this drought, so we have introduced them to the weavers we work with on Rai Jua. Here the textiles are blue and the Morinda red dye is little used, so there is opportunity for trade between these weaving communities. A further pressure on the culture of Savu is the establishment of Savu as its own Regency (the tertiary level of the Indonesian government) where it was part of the Kupang Regency on distant Timor. On the face of it, more power to the local government will be good for remote Savu. The downside is that it may continue to erode the customary power structures and the traditions they enforced, traditions such as an 11-month-a-year ban on taking coral off the beaches for building materials. With this traditional control breaking down, and the infrastructure of the new government bureaucracy needing building materials, collection of materials from the beaches is gaining pace and could have significant impacts in terms of erosion and reef destruction.



Field Work Year-End Review

During December we held our annual two-week workshop with all our field staff to assess the situation in each of the 40 weavers' cooperatives we work with across the archipelago. This is always a daunting but necessary process during which we share and document the accumulated experience of the organization over the course of the year. Though field staff write reports for each trip, Bali is largely an oral culture and discussions are always more fruitful than documents.

As an example, here are my notes from the discussion about the weavers in Tapobali on the island of Lembata: "Textiles are getting much better. [No natural dyed textiles were being made here before we arrived in 2007] Not yet at historic colors. Oiling process [for the red dye] probably needs improving and they need to double the number of Morinda red dye applications. The weavers are developing a local reputation and have found a local market for the ceremonially important Kreot Nai Juan sarongs they are making. The local price is now higher than the price we offer for our commissioned pieces, so our prices will have to go up accordingly. We should order 40 shoulder cloths and 3 sarongs in 2013. This is still not enough sellable product to cover the cost of traveling to Tapobali, but within two years this should be a profitable trip [for Threads of Life]. They are planting Morinda trees and there are lots in the forest above the village too. The Symplocos trees [used as a mordant for the red

Foundation

Threads of Life's nonprofit partner, the Bebali Foundation, works with the same communities as Threads of Life to support cooperative development and environmental sustainability. The Bebali Foundation trains weavers in the establishment and maintaining of credit unions, and the sustainable cultivation, harvesting and use of dye plants. Its groundbreaking dye plant and dye recipe identification and documentation is the backbone of ongoing work to safeguard endangered indigenous weaving traditions, and the livelihoods they represent, from extinction. To support the Bebali Foundation, please donate at www.bebali.org via Give2Asia, PayPal, or bank transfer.



Umajati Retreat

Surrounded by tranquil rice fields, Umajati is a lush garden property hosting two elegantly converted 100-year-old Javanese teak wooden homes that provide 21st century living in 19th century houses. Each has a kitchen and several private garden spaces around a shared swimming pool. Umajati is just 10 minutes north of Ubud and offers daily, weekly or monthly rentals hosted by Balinese house-keepers and cooks who specialize in healthy and vegetarian food.

www.umajati.com

1-bedroom house,
USD 190 per night.
2-bedroom house,
USD 245 per night.
Weekly and monthly rates are

dye] in the local forest are all on the land of one man, so the weavers don't feel comfortable taking the leaves from his land. They prefer to buy from the Bebali Foundation's supplies [harvested by another community in central Flores]. Bring cotton thread and Symplocos powder on next field visit."

As a second example, having brought our Kalimantan field staff Lius in from West Kalimantan, we spent a lot of time discussing his work along the Kapuas river. An area of concern was the management and use of the dye garden in Ransi near the town of Sintang owned by Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation. This garden was set up to provide Morinda roots for the red dye needs of local weavers where conversion of the forest to rubber and palm oil plantations has reduced the Morinda supply to almost nothing. While the trees grow to a harvestable age over the next five years, Threads of Life is buying dried Morinda from sustainable harvesters on Sumba and shipping it to Kalimantan. Once the garden in Kalimantan is productive, questions will arise as to who gets the right to harvest the three hundred trees, and how to compensate the weavers around the garden who are now tending it. Our discussions exposed the need to anticipate this access issue without actually provoking it when it is not a current concern. Lius pointed out that the expectation when working someone else's land is to get half the harvest as payment, but we could foresee problems if all the weavers started selling independently, competing in the market while trying to collaborate in the shared garden. A possible solution is to set up a quasi-cooperative, with Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation together holding fifty percent and all the weaver-gardeners holding shares of the other fifty percent according to the number of hours they work in the garden. All Morinda sales would be through the cooperative, and the gardeners could take their share of the profits in the form of roots for their own dye needs plus cash at the end of the financial year. Lius said it was premature to suggest such a structure in the village yet, but we agreed that detailed records of who attended each work day should be kept from now on to facilitate the cooperative solution, if that became the way to organize the garden once it became productive.

I'm always impressed at the stamina everyone has for these discussions. After ninety minutes, I'll say, "Let's take a break." But someone else will say, "Let's do one more co-op," and everyone else will agree. When we finally stop, it's been a three hour session, and I realize that everyone's stamina is a reflection of our commitment to do as much as they can to support the livelihoods of the producers we all work with.

Best wishes,



from William, Jean, Pung and everyone at Threads of Life and the YPBB Foundation

available on request.

Threads of Life on TEDx



Weaving a new approach to poverty alleviation

[Join Our Mailing List](#)

[Forward this email](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to lafinduck@concentric.net by info@threadsoflife.com | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Threads of Life | Jalan Kajeng 24 | Ubud, Gianyar | Bali | 80571 | Indonesia