

trying to champion changes in consumer values and attitudes, which takes time, and the list goes on and on. It's been tough.

To work so hard and not see that translating into visible results can be incredibly discouraging. What kept me going was the positive feedback from artisans or clients who have been changed by what we do. Seeing the impact of our work has been incredibly rewarding after the sacrifices. Today, Earth Heir supports over a hundred artisans and their families across six states in Malaysia. We support multiple communities directly, while also changing attitudes towards more sustainable and ethical consumer behaviour, which is essential in today's climate emergency.

But Earth Heir does not have an impact only on artisans and their communities. It also has an impact on me. Building Earth Heir has been a journey of discovering my own heritage as a Malaysian. It's been a journey of discovering who I am and how to remain authentic to myself and my heritage.

### Discussion Questions

- 1 What personal challenges did Sasibai Kimis experience when starting and growing her social enterprise?
- 2 What suggestions do you have for coping with the personal challenges of starting and growing a social enterprise?
- 3 Sasibai Kimis is a returnee entrepreneur who had a successful academic and professional career in the USA and the UK before returning to Malaysia. What challenges and benefits might her international experience have brought about when she started Earth Heir?
- 4 Identify three different social enterprises that support refugees and discuss the differences between them in relation to the solution, scale and sustainability of the organizations.

The final case study in this chapter (Case Study 5.4) shares the approach of Biji-biji towards scaling the organization and its impact.

### Case Study 5.4

#### Biji-Biji - Sustainable Living for all

Biji-biji was founded by a group of friends in 2013, bonded together by the desire to live in an eco-village. In the Malay language, the name translates to seeds/seedlings. It is a perfect representation of the social enterprise's purpose to sow the seeds of sustainability by changing perceptions of sustainable living and making sustainable living more accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds. Biji-biji develops products, services and initiatives that enable individuals, organizations and industries to re-think and

re-imagine their consumption. For example, the organization hosts sustainability education workshops, develops fashionable consumer products (e.g. upcycled bags made from discarded safety belts and marketing banners) and develops alternative energy projects and sustainable structures. Biji-biji also supports corporations to adopt sustainable practices aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda on Sustainability (United Nations, 2015).

Each founding member and everyone who has joined since 2013 has a passion for sustainability. However, Biji-biji was also started from a place of dissatisfaction, from working long hours late into the night in capitalist structures that benefit those with privilege without rewarding the hard work of employees. This is why Biji-biji has established transparent work practices to create an inclusive and fair work environment for everyone, from interns to senior leaders. For example, to address income inequality, Biji-biji has a 1:5 salary ratio between the lowest and highest earners in the organization and strives for gender equality in pay and promotion. Recognizing the need for different skills and competencies as the organization grows and develops new initiatives, the salary ratio may be reviewed and adjusted to ensure that appropriate talent is recruited. However, any changes to the salary ratio and principles are openly shared with all Biji-biji members and the public.

The team started with seven core partners (four of whom are the co-founders) and grew to a team of 20 within two years and up to 35 within four years of operation. Currently, the organization has a core team of 23 people and works with a number of project-based freelancers and trainees. Biji-biji was started with a tiny investment from the founding members and earns most of its income from corporate and government projects. As Biji-biji grew, the team learnt to move towards services that provide consistent income and away from the initial guerrilla-style projects from the early days, yet late payments from clients that restrict available resources remain a challenge.

Despite challenges with late payments, Biji-biji has never relied heavily on grants to scale (see more on scaling later on in this chapter). Biji-biji won several grants and competitions in the early days. These awards helped with growth by giving the team the opportunity to build a strong brand and to invest in new initiatives. Indeed, for Biji-biji scale means several different things. On the one hand, for the team, scale refers to growing an organization to develop and deliver new products and initiatives that reach more individuals and organizations. On the other hand, the team also considers how to scale its impact in three main ways. First, it promotes social entrepreneurship as a model for sustainable development and started a new social enterprise called Me.reka. Second, Biji-biji embeds social enterprises and sustainability practices in its supply chains, thus amplifying its impact and the impact of suppliers and collaborators. Third, it adopts an open-source approach and shares designs for others to use and improve. Indeed, Biji-biji strives to act as an authentic role model for other organizations in Malaysia and annually reports on its actions, targets, and indicators towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

*(Continued)*

### Discussion Questions

- 1 Which scaling strategies and routes does Biji-biji use? What are the benefits of each route?
- 2 Using a 1:5 salary ratio is beneficial for equality, but might make it more difficult for social enterprises to recruit the specialist talent they need. Beyond reviewing and adjusting this ratio in special circumstances, what other mechanisms might social enterprises use to recruit and retain talent, while remaining transparent and inclusive?
- 3 Identify a commercial organization and discuss how it reports its actions, targets and indicators towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
- 4 Further examples of social entrepreneurship are discussed in the second part of this chapter. These provide further practical experiences of social entrepreneurs and their enterprises.

## 5.3 THEORIZING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE FIVE Ss

Social enterprises engage in processes that address *social issues* through *solutions* that aim to create *social impact* with different levels of financial and organizational *sustainability* at different levels of *scale*. Thus, we consider social issues, solutions, social impact, sustainability and scale to be the five core dimensions of social entrepreneurship. We use these core elements as an organizing framework to describe and examine the practices and activities in social entrepreneurship.

### Social Issues

Social entrepreneurship is a process that addresses the social issues that exist due to institutional and/or market failures (Mair and Martí, 2009). Social enterprises are active in addressing diverse social issues that have a negative impact on individuals, communities and/or the environment. For example, they work on broad economic, civic engagement, law and rights, environmental, education, health, food, housing, technology, culture and family social issues (Mair et al., 2012). These issues might exist due to resource constraints and systemic inequalities or might be an outcome of natural and man-made disasters and adversity, such as the Haiti earthquake (Williams and Shepherd, 2016).

Within these very broad social issues, social enterprises might narrow down the issue or recognize the multidimensionality of social issues. Some social enterprises aim to address clearly defined social issues and catalyse positive impact at a local level or for a