

## ***From Traditional to Contemporary Craft: Product Improvement in the Craft Industry in Indonesia through the Practice of Design and Sustainability***

The fact of being the second richest origin of the world's biodiversity has given Indonesia an infinite opportunity to develop craft products that are mainly made of natural material resources. Artifacts that were created out of local plantations and animals to fulfil the needs of earlier generations have gradually become objects that have different functions from their original purposes in the recent times. These objects, which were crafted traditionally with handed down skills, are valued no longer for their mere practical functions but also for the levels of craftsmanship. Appreciation for such objects becomes more apparent when they are commercialised and traded as commodities, exposed to foreign cultures.

Craft industries start to appear in rural homes, each operation different from another, depending on the variations of local natural resources and on the specific skills of the local people. As time passes, the home craft industries gradually turn into companies that supply craft goods to a variety of customers, both domestic and foreign markets. The great demands from the increasing markets require the craft companies to constantly innovate and improve their products in order to survive the global market. As a consequence, the growing industries require an ample amount of raw material supplies to be able to fulfil a production quota. They also need technology appropriate to the production process, and a design development for their products. Current issues have brought up a new demand: that the products should be sustainable, or should consider the aspects of ecology, social-culture and economy in its whole life cycle. Not all craft companies are able to cope with these requirements, due to lack of access to information and knowledge concerning the subjects. In West Java, Indonesia, which is known for its abundant natural resources and craft centres, this case is particularly obvious in natural material-based craft industries, such as mendong mats and leather footwear. Problems that occurred before the assistance came include depletion of quality and stagnation in sales. This paper presents a number of product improvement methods that worked as solutions to the problems and which have demonstrated successful results. The methods are presented in key pointers, supplemented with case samples relevant to each point. Among the emphasis of the points are multi-disciplinary approach, capacities of craftsmen and designers, main material resources and a comprehensive design development. As a conclusion, the paper offers suggestions for a sustainable, contemporary craft industry with a competitive value.