

A Venture with Vision: Sasibai Kimis, W'00, Aims for Social Impact

Budding socio-entrepreneur Sasibai Kimis, W'00, has worked on Wall Street, taken part in the United Nations elections monitoring team in Ghana, and worked on sustainable development investments for the Malaysian government. Here she recounts how she combined two passions to launch Earth Heir, an eco-friendly, ethically minded social venture that sells handmade silk and cashmere scarves from Southeast Asia and around the world.

Hometown:

I was born in Ipoh, Malaysia, and now live in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

What inspired you to found Earth Heir?

Throughout my travels, I've always loved touching beautiful fabrics. I used to wonder why the artisans who made these works of art rarely saw much financial return. Inspired by social enterprises like TOMS, Warby Parker, Acumen Fund, and Kiva, I established Earth Heir. We divide 50 percent of our profits to help weavers find a sustainable livelihood and to support nonprofits for women, children, and the environment.

How did you become interested in doing work that had social impact?

Walking with my father in a village in Tamil Nadu, India, when I was around eight years old, I realized what a privileged life I had in Malaysia: food, clothing, shelter, clean water, and sanitation. When I was 16, I visited my granduncle in India. Approaching his home, I saw a man lying outside who looked like a beggar. He was actually my granduncle. I knelt beside him, and his emaciated state broke me. A few weeks later, he passed away. I decided then that the life I live must have a positive impact on others less fortunate.

What path did you take from Wharton to your current venture?

After a year in investment banking at Lehman Brothers, I decided to pursue an M.Phil in Environment and Development at Cambridge University. If I could try to understand the poverty nexus, perhaps that knowledge would be useful in breaking its cycle.



I later spent two years in Accra, Ghana, working for the United Nations Development Program and a nongovernmental organization, Opportunities Industrialization Centers International. I headed back to London to work with a merchant bank, and eventually joined Khazanah Nasional, the sovereign wealth fund of Malaysia, as a vice president focusing on sustainable development.

Deciding that I wanted to realign my priorities in life, I enrolled in Youth With a Mission, a Christian missionary organization, and spent three months in Kona, Hawaii, and two in Cambodia. Today, marrying my two passions—financial management and working with developing countries—seems the most productive way to make a positive impact.

How did your Wharton degree and undergraduate experiences prepare you for your career?

My years at Penn were filled with a lot of joy and wonder, mostly fueled by the wonderful friends I met. My Wharton degree in finance opened doors, and I cherished studying abroad in Sweden, taking acting and pottery classes, and meeting so many diverse and brilliant minds.



Top: Sasibai Kimis, W'00, visits the Tate Modern in London.

Bottom: Kimis meets children in Kampong Thom, Cambodia, while enrolled in Youth with a Mission.

How do you stay connected with the Penn community, and why is that important to you?

I'm Co-Chair of the Penn Alumni Interview Program and also work on the Penn Alumni Club in Malaysia. I always try to seek out other Penn alumni wherever I travel. When you have Penn in common, it breaks down a lot of walls.

