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SUCCESS STORY:

Innovative Furniture Business Aims for a Sustainable Future



Mickey working with one of his carpenters at the workshop in Mayangone, Yangon

Mickey (Min Sein) travelled the world as a sailor for more than 20 years. When he resettled in Myanmar with his wife, Thiri, they were determined to make a positive impact on society. The couple came up with the idea to use Mickey's passion for woodworking to help address the alarming deforestation affecting the country.

In May 2017, Mickey and Thiri opened "Mickey's Real Wood Upcycling Furniture" workshop in Mayangone, north of Yangon, and began crafting and selling sustainable furniture. By using reclaimed wood, such as pallet wood and old rubber trees, they engage in a process called 'upcycling' – creating value from waste wood. The business employs local community members as carpenters, using traditional as well as modern woodworking skills.

Mickey's business has been receiving support from the 'Accelerate Inclusiveness in Myanmar' (AIM) project, implemented by ICCO cooperation, One to Watch, and Truvalu. The project, which is supported by the UK aid-funded DaNa Facility, facilitates investment in inclusive businesses in Myanmar. Inclusive businesses are innovative companies that engage with people from poor and disadvantaged communities to provide the support they need to participate in, and benefit from, economic growth.

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AIM supports established inclusive businesses that have ambitions to expand. Entrepreneurs often lack business expertise, networks, and finance; this is where AIM comes in. For Mickey, the project has had a major impact on the business:

"Actually, it's a great project. Although it was challenging to balance managing the business and working with the project, I feel the business is now strong enough to grow."

According to Thiri and Mickey, the project has taught them to plan more systematically so they have a clearer vision for the business. It's also helped them grow their networks – they've been able to connect to design stores, international companies, finance providers, and other likeminded businesses.

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Following their work with the AIM project, CB Bank offered Mickey's a 4-year loan of \$30,000 to expand the workshop and buy new machinery. The loan has led to increased production; they now sell their furniture online as well as through selected shops, and last year Mickey increased the number of employees from 11 to 15, including additional carpenters and a delivery driver.

As Myanmar continues to develop, businesses such as Mickey's are set to play a pivotal role ensuring that economic growth is both sustainable and inclusive, benefitting everyone in society.