Ilung and the Emerging Handicraft Industry

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Ilung (or water hyacinth) and purun, a plant with a hollow stem, are two types aggressive plants that grow in swamps and river and that clog water channels when they become overgrown. The water hyacinth and purun have long been invasive plants to be managed by farmers, but now with the skills possessed by some of Indonesia’s population, the plants could be a key material for the handicraft industry.

The main goal of this new utilization of water hyacinth and purun is to reduce blockage of waterways by creating an incentive for the handicraft industry to remove these two pests. In addition, it will foster the craft industry and reduce unemployment in Indonesia because this craft does not require capital since it uses readily available materials.

Water hyacinth and purun can be made into various handicrafts such as: natural furniture, bags, wall hangings, baskets, rugs, and pillows, all customized according to customer needs.
The advantage of using water hyacinth for these kinds of crafts is that the strength of the products can last up to several years. The more these handmade products are used, the better the quality becomes. The advantage of products made from the purun plant is that the strength of raw, dry purun, which is processed and woven according to form, weathers the crafting process and lasts a long time.

The main disadvantage is that during the first month of usage, the product is often overgrown by a fungus that grows naturally on water hyacinth. However, the fungus does not damage the products, and after cleaning it actually makes them look more beautiful. A drawback of products made from purun is that if the product is exposed to water, it can easily damage the puran’s natural webbing.
Steps for the manufacture of handmade crafts using water hyacinth and purun materials:

- Collection of raw materials (water hyacinth plants and purun plant)
- Separating the useful materials (base of the stalk)
- Drying of raw materials (base of the stalk)
- Staining (if needed)
- Creation or weaving of handicraft (bags, baskets, wall hangings, chairs, carpets, etc.)
Ilung or water hyacinth is an invasive plant that grows in swamps and rivers in Indonesia.
Ilung or water hyacinth
The useful part of ilung is the base of its stalk, which is separated, dried, and sometimes stained.
Bags made from ilung and purun plants
Chairs made from ilung
Mats made from ilung
Pillows made from purun
Baskets made from purun
Bags made from purun
The process of making these crafts does not produce any waste for the environment; instead it reduces invasive species and helps farmers cultivate their fields.

Within Indonesia, these products can enter the domestic markets for consumers across the economic spectrum. Handicrafts made of water hyacinth and purun can also be marketed throughout the entire Asia-Pacific, because the products can be enjoyed by all consumers.