



INDAIÁ PROJECT BRAZIL - A FEMALE CENTURY-OLD TRADITION



AUTHORS

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Indaiá straw handicraft is a significant component of the economic and cultural environment of Antônio Dias, located in the interior of Minas Gerais, in the Doce River Valley, a mountainous region where the Atlantic Forest is the prevailing biome. The region was known as the Green Valley for its extensive forests. There, the tradition of using Indaiá straw in everyday articles emerged.

Extracted from CENIBRA's high conservation value areas (HCVA), Indaiá straw is part of a century-old tradition that has provided work and income for women in the town of Antônio Dias, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. In an initiative supported by CENIBRA Institute since 2005, the Indaiá Project's artisans use a traditional technique, passed down from mother to daughter, to weave straw and produce handicrafts that are sold worldwide via the internet.

More than just decoration, the products have practical uses in everyday life, such as hats that protect workers at local companies from the intense sunlight.



Main objectives

The project provides systematic support to the production of handicrafts using the Indaiá palm straw, a major immaterial heritage of the municipality of Antônio Dias. This project's activities represent the appreciation of an important legacy and the permanence of a tradition. Currently, a group of 40 women work with handicrafts.

The idea behind the project is to develop pieces featuring the town's identity, strengthen and expand the group of craftswomen, and contribute to the local development. By transforming the traditional "making" while maintaining its originality and beauty in a dialogue with the contemporary scene, the artists rescue a trade that has passed down from mother to daughter and preserves a memory that was being lost over time, as the youth have shown little interest in this trade.

Lessons Learned

The Indaiá Project is an important driver of creative economy. It values local handicrafts while rescuing and preserving the cultural memory of a predominantly female activity.

Those who buy a product made from Indaiá straw take home much more than just a beautiful piece of handicraft, but also a little of the history and tradition of artisans to whom braiding is a form of resilience and survival. CENIBRA recognizes the importance of the activity and allows straw to be collected from its forests, thus valuing local handicrafts, encouraging the creative economy, and preserving the cultural memory of a predominantly female craft.

Innovative approach

- A partnership with CENIBRA Institute provided artisans with the necessary professional qualification through training courses, creative workshops, and expert consultancy, thus fostering a sustainable forest-based activity.
- As a result of a Digital Transformation consulting agreement, the Indaiá Project boosted its sales through social networks, having changed its Instagram page (@indaiamei) into a sales tool and using its WhatsApp Business (+55 31 99683 1244) for customer contacts.
- In addition to online sales, the products are currently exhibited in major fairs and sold in handicraft stores. The revenue from handcraft sales is assigned to the craftswomen to enhance their income and foster the creation of new jobs.

The Indaiá palm

The indaiá palm is a small tree with a slow growth cycle. Its scientific name is *Attalea dubia* (Arecaceae) and its original habitats are the Brazilian Midwest, Southeast, and South regions. Its leaves were once used as roofing material.

The Guarany Indians use its fibers as strings for their violins and fiddles when playing their traditional music. They also use its large palm heart (approximately 1.5 meter long) as food, usually consumed with honey. The palm tree stem has a fibrous portion that, when chewed like sugar cane, sheds an abundant watery broth whose taste is very similar to coconut water.

