



## Turning arts into viable business

NATIONAL: Indigenous people can create extremely successful business enterprises out of the craft and textiles of their traditional culture - and as keeping country healthy is part of the equation, when the business works, the environment doesn't suffer.

That's the key message from two forums held in Darwin recently, focusing on Indigenous livelihoods based on nature, culture and traditional practices. The project is a joint initiative of CSIRO and Charles Darwin University.

"When people know their land and their culture, they create an extraordinary rich heritage of art and craft, and then use them as the foundation of successful community-based businesses," according to CSIRO Senior Research Scientist, Dr Bev Sithole.

A Darwin exhibition supporting the forums was launched last week by the Minister for Environment and the Arts, Marion Scrymgour, at CDU's Mal Nairn Auditorium. The exhibition shows textiles and woven fibre forms from three private collections of Indigenous material culture from - northern Australia, Southeast Asia and Africa.

"There is a world wide trend towards encouraging enterprise on country. Here in the NT, this discussion has gained momentum and both land councils and government are encouraging it," says CDU's Prof. Stephen Garnett, School of Environmental Research.

"This is an opportunity to see three outstanding private collections of textiles and crafts from three very different regions, to see what works and why.

"We are looking at internationally successful examples of people working cooperatively in traditional ways, to provide financially for their future," Professor Garnett said.

Linked by the use of natural materials and emphasising woven fibre forms and textiles, the objects in the exhibitions show how Indigenous people relate to and interact with their environments.

"All over the world, we can see contemporary art and craft practices, based on Indigenous knowledge, generating valuable income. They often make the difference between a subsistence lifestyle and a much more stable family and sustainable livelihood outcomes," Dr Sithole said.