

## Kanika Tests “Tools for Trends”

Last year, the handbook "Tools for Trends" with its training guide for importers, was developed by LVWW, CO OK, Fair Support, Hivos and Kanika together. The goal of “Tools for Trends” is to support importers and help them work in a “durable and market-oriented” way. We as Kanika and importers were invited to contribute to the process and in particular, to test the workshops. This was a very interesting, informative but most of all – necessary, trajectory, for us.

October 13, we (Gieneke & Marieke) left for Thailand to make purchases and to have the workshop. We devoted the first week for preparing it: arranging a location, approaching producers, packing in necessities such as colour pencils – but also for deepening ourselves in the book “Tools for Trends”. That was namely the most exciting: how were we to give a workshop for the producers on a topic that we were not too familiar with?

We were used to always buying traditional products from the producer which we in turn hoped to sell onwards. We worked from the producer and were 'supply-driven'.

Today, products need to be more market conform. It is not always easy and obvious to produce what the market is asking for when it comes to our fair trade products. Both our producers as well as we ourselves had to learn that trade is a matter of both demand and supply. We need to know what the demand is – and therefore we need to know the market. We as importers are therefore very thankful for the trend- information we received from FairSupport. Finally something we could get inspiration from!

But still, not everything went smoothly. We tried to work with the trend-book, but both we and the producers did not know exactly how to apply it. And what was one to do in order to explain for the producers that the European market is much influenced by something called “trends”? And – that those “trends” can change every six months? And - explaining this to producers who themselves live a simple life and have been doing OK working in a supply-driven manner?

The handbook 'Tools for Trends' was born in a working process: a reference book in which important and necessary knowledge for successful product development has been bundled together.

As part of the reference book, there is also a training developed for us, the importers: it's our task to pass on the knowledge to the producers.

**“The design and the quality are important. There is a lot of competition on the Dutch market. In order to continue selling well, a continuous innovation of products is important. Additionally, it is important that the importer and distributor work closely together.” (Royal Orchid)**

We tested this method with some five producer groups in Thailand. 13 people came! Thanks to our assistant, we were able to arrange a nice room at the Chamber of Commerce in Chiangmai. The room was neat and clean, with a beamer and a screen ready for us to use. We were served snacks and drinks throughout the day. Food is naturally part of the Thai culture and so, in addition, we were also served a basic local lunch.

A number of tasks were done during the workshop. The majority of our producers had never taken a critical look at their production-line before. But – when they got the question about which product

had been the bestseller in the previous year, everyone knew the answer. There were also topics for discussion and tasks in which the idea was to give each other feedback. This did not go smoothly. It is not really part of Thai culture to start a discussion.

We had a Filipino and an American in the group and they were not afraid to speak up. This led to some interesting conversations. We were more than happy about the very positive feedback regarding the workshop. The producers were very interested in the information and the workshop actually casted off a few good ideas that we will continue to develop.

**“I now understand more about the European trends and how this differs from our culture. This helps me see the bigger picture. The workshop was very interesting; it motivates me to develop new designs.” – Soap-n-Scent**

We had also brought a pile of interior design magazines with us, such as At Home and VT-wonen. These were of great interest! One thing the producers found difficult, was how to translate their basic product into something that is trendy and “in”, in our country. They also need more similar kind of presentations. And so – this is absolutely something we will continue working on! After this successful pilot, we will move on to introducing this method also for our other producers – with the intention to develop products that will sell even better than the products we have now. We very much look forward to receiving feedback from our customers! This year, we hope to see the first fruits of having used the “Tools for Trends” in our products.

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