

Experience in Sustainable Development through Textile Material Developing for the Community Enterprises (OTOPs) in Thailand

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I am always interested in developing the textile materials for the community enterprises (OTOP). For over ten years, I have worked closely with these community enterprises and found that they had many problems and obstacles with the textile materials, for examples, color bleed, poor fastness to washing, using AZO dyes which are carcinogenic, the material was uncomfortable for wearing because it was too warm and too heavy for comfort, not suitable for daily usage. The color shades were not matched well with each other. So no buyers for their merchandises, the stocks piled up, incurred huge loss. Many of these OTOPs had to close down, and gone with them the native wisdom and know-how.

The government has seen these problems and their effects, has tried to manage, to support and solve these problems for more than ten years. Many aspects of the problems have been dealt with, and finally they have greatly improved.

I started to get a new idea and inspiration to tackle this challenge from a piece of woven cloth I bought from Japan 4 years ago, for 5,000.-Baht. It has small square design just like typical checkered cloth made by local weavers. The cloth is very thin and lightweight. It is made for a scarf. An idea strike me that these local weavers are good and skilled, no need to make any change. What we should do is to develop new colors and weave more lightweight material.

I approached several OTOP clusters, inviting them to develop the materials along this idea by using new materials, but they were not willing to do it out of fear. They were worried about failure, the newly developed material might be pricey, hard to sell. By producing the same old things is safer. I then presented them with a new possibility. I offered to give them yarn dyed with new kind of dyestuff, free of charge, for weaving sample with the conditions that they give me one third of their production, which I would find a market for them. For the rest two third of

the material they can keep and sell by themselves. There were 7 clusters agreed to join this project.

After a while, I received the report that the one third material they agreed to give me to find them a market was no need anymore, because those newly developed materials became best sellers. They could sell at a very good price, 3-4 times of the former price. Now they barely kept up with the demand and needed to persuade those giving up weaving to come back by offering 2-3 times more salary. Recently we have seen younger persons becoming weavers.

Now a day, I could see a big growth and progress in community enterprises. They keep on thriving. Their products were selling very well at trade fairs. They are enjoying more income and happy with their crafts. More people are attracted to work in this area. I am confident that these communities will have a happy and peaceful living. Their native wisdom and know-how will also be with them for generations to come.

I am proud that my role and perseverance have brought these OTOPs to come out from their mindset. I am thankful for the 7 brave clusters who dared to step out from former mindset and courageous enough to try new ideas and make them happen. When I present their achievement as an inspiration to other OTOPs, they are very excited and eager to start working on new ideas. They are now ready to come out from the old mindset. From my point of view, this is the sustainable development.